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Folklore of the New Age: Fantasy and Sci-Fi
Major Paper

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Szeged, 2013

Abstract:

From an anthropological, psychological and philosophical point of view, fantasy and science fiction constitute a significant part of modern mythology, both for individual readers/experiencers and for society as a whole. In an effort to recognize the potential existing within genre fiction, first its roots in fairy tales, mythology, etc. are explored in terms of the functions these serve for society and culture, their psychological impact and their necessity. Secondly, the significance of mythological elements in works of genre fiction is demonstrated by a study of the emotional connection readers/experiencers develop towards non-existent characters, places and events. By gaining an understanding of this process, one can observe not only the evolution of mythologies, etc. into fantasy and science fiction, but also the improvements fantasy and science fiction represent over their precursors as platforms for the exploration of the great questions facing humanity, all the way to the processes of our ever-changing psyche as it persists through time. Though critics of fantasy and science fiction label these genres as escapist, there is ample evidence to justify the view that they embody humanity's heritage of adjusting, through stories, to inner and outer realities, and that by virtue of their contemporary nature and of their ability to peer into the future to speculate on what is to come, they are eternally relevant. By examining the adaptability of fantasy and science fiction through the lens of the themes explored, extending to innovative media that broaden the horizon created by books, movies and video games of substance and worth, it becomes clear that the all-pervasive presence of fantasy and science fiction not only indicates the lively persistence of ancient mythologies, but also underscores the important role they continue to play in the lives of the people and societies of the twenty-first century and beyond.

Kivonat:

Az antropológia, a pszichológia és a filozófia tükrében a fantáziailrodalom és a tudományos-fantasztikus irodalom a modern mitológia jelentős részét képezi, mind az egyéni olvasó/megtapasztaló, mind a társadalom egésze szempontjából. A popirodalomban rejlő lehetőségek elismerésének jegyében első lépésben feltárjuk a tündérmesékben, a mitológiában stb. rejlő gyökereit, mégpedig azoknak a társadalom és a kultúra szempontjából betöltött funkciói, pszichológiai hatása, valamint a rájuk való szükség szemszögéből. Másodsorban az olvasó/megtapasztaló által nemlétező szereplők, helyek és események irányában kialakított

érzelmi kapcsolat vizsgálatán keresztül bemutatásra kerül a popirodalomban fellelhető mitológiai elemek jelentősége. E folyamat megértése révén nemcsak a mitológiák és műfajtaik fantáziailrodalomba és tudományos-fantasztikus irodalomba átváltó evolúciója figyelhető meg, hanem az utóbbiak által elődeikkel szemben képviselt továbbfejlődés is az emberiség előtt álló nagy kérdések, köztük az idő múlásával folyamatosan változó, de ugyanakkor kitartó lelkületünk és szellemünk feltárására szolgáló környezetrendszer mivoltuk révén. Habár a fantáziailrodalom és a tudományos-fantasztikus irodalom kritikusai a „valóságtól menekülő eszkapizmus” bélyegével illetik e műfajokat, bőséges bizonyíték áll rendelkezésre azon nézet alátámasztásához, miszerint nevezett műfajok megtestesítik az emberiség belső és külső valóságokhoz tanító meséken keresztül nyert alkalmazkodóképességét, továbbá a mindig kortárs, s ugyanakkor jövőbe tekintő, a még meg nem történtet fűrkésző örök relevanciát. A fantáziailrodalom és tudományos-fantasztikus irodalom rugalmasságának a felvetett témák lencséjén keresztül végzett vizsgálatával, amely a tartalmas és értékes könyvek, filmek és videójátékok által létrehozott, és újító médiaműfajok által ugrásszerűen kiterjesztett látóhatárokra is kiterjed, világossá válik, hogy a fantáziailrodalom és a tudományos-fantasztikus irodalom mindent átható jelenléte nem csupán az ősi mitológiák élénk túlélésére mutat rá, de aláhúzza folyamatosan játszott fontos szerepüket is a huszonegyedik század emberei és társadalmi számára, sőt mindezeket túl is.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The subject of this thesis is to explore fantasy and science fiction literature, including glimpses of fantasy and science fiction in films, series and video games as having roots in folklore and subsequently having a similar significance in society. In terms of anthropology, psychology and philosophy, “genre fiction” (the collective term for fantasy and science fiction) is a seemingly reluctant participant within these categories, defended and rejected with almost equal fervor by its writers, readers/experiencers and critics; as a result, all three approaches have merit in the quest to gain an understanding of genre fiction’s significance and potential. While genre fiction makes obvious allusions to, and even incorporates, elements from fairy tales, mythologies and legends, it does not inherently *belong* to any of these categories – instead, it engages in the practice of myth-making, or *mythopoesis*. Although by virtue of transference (defined for our purposes as the borrowing and/or reshuffling of folklore material) genre fiction may have solid ties to fairy tales and mythology, the importance of the presence of these elements in genre fiction is best explored through gaining an understanding of what makes *fairy tales* and *mythology* significant to society. Additionally, the connection made between reader/experiencer and fairy tale/mythology/legend or a work of fiction should be analyzed and contrasted.

The first and most important subject to analyze is on what grounds genre fiction is posited to impact readers, for which the scrutiny of folklore is necessary. Folklore, as described by the well-respected late folklorist and professor, Alan Dundes, is a phenomenon of humanity which encompasses history. “Folklore” is meant to signify everything from fairy tales, nursery rhymes, songs and stories, from *Hansel and Gretel* through *Ring Around the Rosy* to *Peter Pan* and an everyday joke – but also, Dundes considers mythology and legends as included in folklore’s corpus, as they occupy the same place in society, albeit using different tools and appropriate for a different age group and psychological state (see Chapter 3).¹ While – in keeping with Dundes’ inclusion of modern social and cultural phenomena as elements of folklore – genre fiction might have a place in folklore by virtue of his anthropological approach, the literary

¹ Alan Dundes. “Folklore as a Mirror of Culture.” Simon J. Bronner ed. *The Meaning of Folklore*. All USU Press Publications. Book 53, 2007, 55.

consideration of *mythopoesis* must be considered. As M. Alan Kazlev summarizes it, referencing J. R. R. Tolkien's definitions:

Mythopoeia was used by the English linguist and fantasy author J. R. R. Tolkien in the 1930s, and by others since, to refer to a genre that integrates traditional mythological themes and archetypes into contemporary fiction. Myth-making could be considered the highest form of that common human pastime, storytelling. Many examples of popular culture, such as genre novels, television, cinema, comic books, and computer games, are able to incorporate classical mythic archetypes, which have been re-shaped according to the understanding and worldview of contemporary authors and readers.²

The process Kazlev refers to, i.e. the usage of mythological and archetypal elements in fiction can be loosely defined as “transference.” Kazlev's inclusion of popular culture gives further grounds on which to analyze the connection between folklore and genre fiction, supporting Dundes' suppositions of folklore's continued ubiquity in different guises (which may include elements of popular culture and fiction). The correlation between genre fiction and mythology – and the difference between what can be called “false myth-making” and true *mythopoesis*, can only be discovered by examining the connection to what Kazlev describes as “Imaginal reality:”

It is suggested that myths and myth-making, rather than being *nothing but* subjective fantasies, are actually anthropomorphic (individual or collective fantasy projection) representations of this Imaginal reality. Just as rationalism (scepticism) allows us to access the material reality (e.g. academic and scientific method), so true imagination enables us to access the Imaginal. Here I must also distinguish between “fantasy” as a narcissistic wish-fulfillment activity of the profane ego, and “fantasy” as a literary genre emphasising magic and over technology, and at its best portraying imaginal realities in anthropomorphic mythopoetic guise. Hopefully the context of the text will show which of these two totally unrelated definitions is meant.³

² M. Alan Kazlev. “Mythopoesis in the Modern World.” *Single Eye Movement*. http://www.academia.edu/506404/Mythopoesis_in_the_Modern_World, 1.

³ *Ibid*, 2.; The term “Imaginal” was coined by professor Henry Corbin. Corbin distinguishes the imaginary world from the Imaginal World, saying that although both use the imagination, they are not synonymous. See: *Ibid*, 7.

In other words, Kazlev posits that in order to understand the true “imaginal reality,” a different approach may be necessary, i.e. the imagination. Examining the recognizable folklore elements in genre fiction – while enabling the examiner to distinguish levels of transference and a true or faked connection to “imaginal reality” – does not yet clarify the *significance* of the presence of those elements in the first place. For that purpose a psychological survey of mythology is necessary – thereby also gaining a clearer understanding of what intrinsically impacts the reader when reading genre fiction; this constitutes the second analytical approach in Chapter 3.

Finally, in Chapter 4 a brief consideration of how fiction achieves its connection to readers gives an interesting perspective on the legitimacy of fiction’s impact – or, from a more objective position, the influence of non-existent places, characters and events having real sway on readers/experiencers. Within that field of study, professor John Timmerman offers explanation as to how and why fantasy and science fiction as genres of books, movies/series and video games specifically satisfy readers/experiencers in a way that other genres do not – the underlying reasons explored by analyzing the importance of folklore in Chapter 3 (and mythology in particular), offer an understanding of what Timmerman observes from a distance. His analysis (adjacent to analyses offered by other authors) also touches upon a few significant differences in perspective where genre fiction changes – and possibly improves – the original formulae laid down by folklore. The question of escapism is also addressed, i.e. whether genre fiction could have a negative or even harmful effect on readers. Lastly, Chapter 4 also offers a brief look at the impact of genre fiction independently of its folkloristic roots as “modern mythology,” as well as a glimpse at the different avenues genre fiction explores by way of using different media, such as movies/television series and video games.

Before beginning an analysis of folklore, first there are a few considerations of fantasy and science fiction that may add weight to the significance of folklore when speaking of genre fiction. In addition, the question of terminology is also addressed.

2 HYPOTHESES

2.1 Fantasy Hypothesis

The fantasy hypothesis is that fantasy represents the best qualities of humanity's past while exploring the dynamics of the psyche. There is however considerable confusion regarding what constitutes "fantasy" exactly. Furthermore, the subjects discussed in fantasy are considered by some as not relevant or as overly simplistic; one such is the battle between good and evil, which Ursula K. Le Guin argues is – although present – the least important aspect of what fantasy has to offer. Finally, the Science Fiction Hypothesis section contains Le Guin's observations about the underlying mythology in genre fiction, which is discussed primarily from the point of view of science fiction, but also is relevant to fantasy.

The first thing that must be tackled is the term "fantasy:" the term both refers to *fantasy* as in the quality of thoughts which engage the imagination, and *fantasy* as in fantasy literature. The question of what difference there is between the two types of fantasy, if any, is a valid one, as they are frequently confused with one another. Maria Nikolajeva provides a succinct overview in her essay "Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archaic to Postmodern"⁴ to clarify this point. *Fantasy*, she writes, is approached as "a genre, a style, a mode, or a narrative technique [...] and it is sometimes regarded as purely formulaic fiction." The distinctions, she goes on to say, are clear: they are "ontological, structural and epistemological."⁵ Yet, as she outlines, there are connections between folklore and fantasy literature: fantasy inherits many traits from fairy tales, for instance, such as the fundamental framework of story development and plot, even character details retain resemblance. This transference is not, however, complete – nor is it intended to be.

The second question to confront is the relevance of subjects explored in fantasy. In Chapter 4, professor John H. Timmerman's article "Fantasy Literature's Evocative Power"⁶ is briefly reviewed and parts of it have special relevance in two subsections; one point, however – the battle between good and evil – I would like to explore in brief here to exemplify some of the distortions in perception surrounding fantasy literature.

⁴ Maria Nikolajeva. "Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archaic to Postmodern." *Marvels & Tales*. 17.1 (2003).

⁵ *Ibid*, 138.

⁶ John H. Timmerman. "Fantasy Literature's Evocative Power." *Christian Century*. (1978).

The battle between good and evil is a classic association to fantasy stories, and as such, Timmerman also cites it as a necessary element of fantasy literature. Ursula K. Le Guin, herself a fantasy and science fiction writer, rejects this perception, mentioning her despair at the “shallow interpretation” of Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy in this respect in her book *Cheek by Jowl*⁷. She goes on to say that the battle between good and evil is by far not the point of a fantasy tale⁸, which may reflect a more modern view: Nikolajeva labels the “relativity of good and evil” as a “postmodern concept of indeterminacy;”⁹ this arguably may color modern perception of even ‘traditionally’ good vs. evil stories, but Le Guin points out that it is not the *presence* of a struggle between good and evil which she questions, rather that it is the *purpose* of the fantasy story – a misconception driven, in part, by an inaccurate assumption of “moral simplicity” regarding fantasy stories, including *The Lord of the Rings*.¹⁰ Timmerman accedes to the point that the distinction between good and evil is blurred within the fantasy character¹¹, thus the focal point becomes not the battle of good and evil, as in a more shallow interpretation, but the driving force:

Often the character does not know for certain whether the action is correct until he or she has acted. Often the choice must be construed from what appears to human perspective as a gray area [...]. In fantasy’s portrayal of such choices is a keen awareness of the terror of life as well as its joy. There is a held forth as one of fantasy’s central tenets the belief that the end of a successful fairy story is joy: not a joy apart from sorrow, however, but a joy distilled from the experience of agonizing choice and a painful awareness of the errors in human decision-making. Only through such decision, and the actions attendant upon them, may the often hazy edges of good and evil be clarified.¹²

Finally, the subject of the underlying mythology – which constitutes one of the major arguments of this thesis – is briefly analyzed by Le Guin from a different perspective (hers is a philosophical approach) than the arguments posited in Chapter 3. Their significance to genre

⁷ Ursula K. Le Guin. *Cheek by Jowl*. Seattle, WA: Aqueduct Press, 2009.

⁸ *Ibid*, 5-7.

⁹ Maria Nikolajeva. “Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archaic to Postmodern,” 150.

¹⁰ Ursula K. Le Guin. *Cheek by Jowl*, 6.

¹¹ John H. Timmerman. “Fantasy Literature’s Evocative Power,” 537.

¹² *Ibid*, 537.

fiction as modern mythology is clearer from the perspective of psychology insofar as the mechanics of myth and genre fiction are concerned, but Le Guin's approach is substantial from an intrinsic perspective of literature.

2.2 Science Fiction Hypothesis

The science fiction hypothesis is that science fiction represents not only what fantasy stands for, but also the present world and even the possible futures. The purpose and role of science fiction is discussed in-depth in Chapter 4; first, however, its roots in fantasy – and beyond that, in fairy tales, mythology and legends – provide an intriguing view of the evolution of folklore into a modern mythology which not only handles issues of current times, but also points readers/experiencers towards the future. In this hypothesis, a brief look at Le Guin's speculation on myth underlying science fiction serves as demonstration for the legitimacy of exploring the connection between folklore and science fiction. Finally, Alan Dundes provides an example of some of the more overt elements of folklore present to this day, by virtue of genre fiction, in modern mythology.

Le Guin specifically addresses the question of whether or not science fiction can be considered as “modern mythology” in her book *The Language of the Night*¹³ and comes to the conclusion that it may be considered as such, although she stresses that the more relevant question is what is defined as *myth*, which science fiction supposedly is the modern progeny of. To begin, she points out that science fiction is not equivalent to a replacement for myth, nor does a science fiction which incorporates elements from myth mean it is myth-making.¹⁴ She differentiates popular perception of mythology, living (“true”) mythology and what she calls “submyths,” the latter of which she describes as such:

Beyond and beneath the great living mythologies of religion and power there is another region into which science fiction enters. I would call it the area of the Submyth: by which I mean those images, figures, and motifs which have no religious or moral resonance and no intellectual or aesthetic value, but which are vigorously alive and powerful, so that they cannot be dismissed as mere stereotypes. Superman is a submyth. His father was Nietzsche and his mother was a funnybook, and he is alive and well in the mind of every ten-year-old—and

¹³ Ursula K. Le Guin. *The Language of the Night*. 2nd Edition. Putnam Adult, 1979.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 63-64.

millions of others. Other science-fictional submyths are the blond heroes of sword and sorcery, with their unusual weapons; insane or self-defying computers; mad scientists; benevolent dictators; detectives who find out who done it; capitalists who buy and sell galaxies; brave starship captains and/or troopers; evil aliens; good aliens, and every pointy-breasted brainless young woman who was ever rescued from monsters, lectured to, patronized, or, in recent years, raped, by one of the aforementioned heroes.¹⁵

In contrast, Le Guin describes “true myth” as follows:

True myth may serve for thousands of years as an inexhaustible source of intellectual speculation, religious joy, ethical inquiry, and artistic renewal. The real mystery is not destroyed by reason. The fake one is. You look and it vanishes. You look at the Blond Hero—really look—and he turns into a gerbil. But you look at Apollo, and he looks back at you.¹⁶

While this description captures the essence of Le Guin’s thoughts on “true myth,” the connection to science fiction still remains to be explored: she addresses this question by further speculating on what “true myth” entails, and comes to the conclusion that what science fiction tries to achieve is a “bridge between the conscious and the unconscious” and find the *connection*. This connection is equated with “true myth,” as she describes it, a journey the writer takes and tries to share with his/her readers.¹⁷ Finally, she makes an interesting observation following along the lines of the Jungian concept of the collective unconscious, which is a more palpable indication of what science fiction touches upon in relation to myth:

The writer who draws not upon the works and thoughts of others, but upon his own thoughts and his own deep being, will inevitably hit upon common material. The more original his work, the more imperiously *recognizable* it will be. “Yes, of course!” says the reader, recognizing himself, his dreams, his nightmares. The characters, figures, images, motifs, plots, events of the story may be obvious

¹⁵ Ursula K. Le Guin. *The Language of the Night*, 66-67.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 67.; Cf. M. Alan Kazlev. “Mythopoesis in the Modern World,” 13-15.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 68.

parallels, even seemingly reproductions, of the material of myth and legend. There will be—openly in fantasy, covertly in naturalism—dragons, heroes, quests, objects of power, voyages at night and under sea, and so forth. In narrative, as in painting, certain familiar patterns will become visible.¹⁸

While Le Guin's approach to the question is tenuous in evidence, though abundant from an artist's point of view, Dundes dispels the questionability of science fiction having roots in folklore by demonstrating an analysis of two popular science fiction stories, namely the *Star Trek* television series and *Star Wars* trilogy. A passage from the analysis follows:

In the motion picture *Star Wars*, we find an interesting combination of folklore and science fiction. The plot is basic fairytale with a hero falling in love with an image of a princess whom he attempts to rescue. His parents dead, Luke Skywalker is raised by foster parents as is required by the heroic formula. From a wise old man, who functions as the traditional donor figure of fairy tales, the hero obtains the inevitable magic sword (the life force) which belonged to his father. [...] If fairy tale and Second World War adventure film were not enough, there is a phallic component in which a boy learns to handle his life force well enough to fly through a long slot and drop a bomb down a virtually inaccessible and closely guarded tube leading to the one weak spot or Achilles' heel of the enemy. It may or may not be relevant that the archvillain's name is Darth Vader which strongly suggests death and father.¹⁹

Finally and most importantly, Le Guin observes that not all science fiction can be considered as artistic or as a great addition to literature. Several authors point out that this is also true of fantasy, as will be shown. However, with regard to fantasy and science fiction, which truly embody what Le Guin, J. R. R. Tolkien, John Timmerman and many others consider as true works of art, understanding their past may illuminate the past of humanity – and by studying modern mythology, the impact and significance of genre fiction crystallize not only for modern times, but also for the future.

¹⁸ Ursula K. Le Guin. *The Language of the Night*, 69.

¹⁹ Alan Dundes. "Grouping Lore: Scientists and Musicians: Science in Folklore? Folklore in Science?" Simon J. Bronner ed. *The Meaning of Folklore*. All USU Press Publications. Book 53, 2007, 235.

3 THE FOLKLORE PHENOMENON

In this chapter, an analysis of folklore and mythology, respectively, will be outlined in order to provide an anthropological and psychological perspective of the place genre fiction occupies in society via transference. To begin, Alan Dundes' essays provide a glimpse into the purpose, uses and misconceptions revolving around folklore – this includes what I shall call the '*holodeck* effect' which serves as a description of an important purpose of not only folklore, but also of genre fiction. Secondly, an analysis of mythology's uses in psychology – and subsequently something lacking in modern times – primarily by Dimitris Anastasopoulos and Eugenia Soumaki will provide as a deeper glance into the connections between the psyche and mythology. As genre fiction frequently (though not exclusively) engages in *mythopoesis*, the pertinence of mythology's impact becomes understandable. More importantly, however, while considering the similarities between genre fiction and folklore, it becomes clear that genre fiction does not merely emulate myths: instead, it touches upon the same archetypes whose only conduit for a very long time was mythology. The evidence for this will be explored throughout this chapter and the next one.

3.1 Fairy Tales, Myths and Legends

Fairy tales, folktales, myths and legends all belong to the corpus of folklore according to Alan Dundes²⁰, thus it is conceivable that what folklore achieves, its progeny, genre fiction, does also to some degree. The most important trait of folklore is the knowledge it embodies both of the psyche and of culture. As a result, the question of transference will become significant: we shall examine how genre fiction performs in this regard compared to fairy tales and myths. This knowledge is approached, however, not with a direct description of either realm. Rather, folklore creates a virtual space of sorts where these concepts may be explored. As with genre fiction itself, however, there are many misconceptions surrounding the nature of folklore in its various forms which must be addressed in order to ascertain whether folklore can be indeed used as a viable source of information regarding the psyche and culture.

²⁰ Alan Dundes. "Folklore as a Mirror of Culture," 55.; It must be said, however, as Dundes points out in his essay "Madness in Method: Plus a Plea for Projective Inversion in Myth" that despite the folklorist's grouping of these elements as belonging to one corpus, they are not to be *confused* with one another, i.e. myth being the equivalent of folk tales and vice versa.

The study of the connection between folklore and the psyche has been a source of fascination in modern times, most notably by the drawing of parallels between behavioral patterns and corresponding myths, or the description of the development of the personality and the ego by making similar connections, as Erich Neumann did, following in the footsteps of Carl G. Jung, for example²¹. The prevalence of folklore motifs in psychoanalysis – derived from the study of their patients – is suggestive of the general role psychologists attribute to folklore (particularly myths) with regard to the individual evolution of the psyche, as well as to collective evolution. This study is detached from both theological and storytelling connotations, rendering the separate elements – or *mythologems* – as individual representations of the psyche and its complexes. The basis for this connection is best described by Edward C. Whitmont in his book, *The Symbolic Quest*:

Thus the nuclear core of a complex characteristically presents itself in the form of mythological representations and images ... We call these images mythological because we are familiar with them through their appearance in myths, stories, fairy tales and traditional religious forms of all ages, locales and epochs, and we refer to these recurring motifs as *mythologems*. They occur in the dreams and fantasies of contemporary men.²²

Therefore, myths and other folklore can be taken to be both metaphorical descriptions of the conditions of the mind and – according to psychologists such as Whitmont, Neumann and Julius Heuscher – as guides to understanding the past, present and future of humankind as the presence of “*mythologems*” is inherited by all. While by itself this methodology does not evoke great confidence in its critics, the supposition of a connection between mythology and the psyche is a logical one. Humankind has always had mythologies in one form or another. As the world became more science-oriented, demanding empirical, rather than spiritual, evidence, it is not surprising that the field of psychology would attempt to tackle the question of what mythology –

²¹ See: Erich Neumann. *The Origins and History of Consciousness*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954.; See also: Julius E. Heuscher, *A Psychiatric Study of Myths and Fairy Tales: Their Origin, Meaning and Usefulness*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1974.

²² Edward C. Whitmont. *The Symbolic Quest*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969, 73.

and indeed, folklore in general – is, what functions it serves and how exactly it influences culture, society and the psyche of the individual.

The connections between the psyche and folklore constitute a difficult subject for analysis, however important and ubiquitous folklore is – but a less convoluted approach to the significance of folklore can be gained from a more general, anthropological point of view. The pervasive presence of folklore in society and culture, Dundes points out, can be attributed to the role it plays. Where from a sociological, historical, etc. viewpoint humanity's self-image may be distorted, folklore can offer a contrasting view that, while not replacing or correcting the ostensible truths of history, complements them. The similarity in their purpose makes them similar in nature; as he defines it: "For folklore is autobiographical ethnography—that is, it is a people's own description of themselves."²³

Dundes also goes on to explain that folklore is a mirror to culture. Therefore it is not surprising that the folklore of the age tackles the questions and problems of that age. First, the topicality of folklore is expressed quite clearly: as the term "folk-lore" indicates, the framework of folklore is "an embodiment of the values of the folk;"²⁴ its function as a more or less culture-specific educational tool, however, may be even more indicative. This approach can be best characterized by two observations: as Dundes points out, one advantage of folklore is the difference in the direction of cultural studies – namely, from the inside out – which acts as a complement to the reverse, usually applied by social sciences. The other is a description of one of folklore's functions: a rendering of cultural taboos without actually performing the taboo actions²⁵.

This latter function gives rise to the concept of folklore serving as a space where the consequences of one's actions are only hypothesized, as the taboo action taken by the individual is not realized in its actuality, i.e. it can be viewed as a parallel of virtual reality, or a *holodeck*²⁶. Furthermore, if the significance of folklore's subjects to society is taken as a basis upon which genre fiction is built and the importance of this 'holodeck effect' is *itself* considered as a significant tool of society, the frequent presence of this concept in genre fiction is quite understandable. The use of the *holodeck* in the *Star Trek* universe (as well as its counterparts)

²³ Alan Dundes. "Folklore as a Mirror of Culture," 55.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 59.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 60.

²⁶ A virtual environment used as an environment created for both entertainment and educational purposes in the universe of the television series *Star Trek*.

shows something beyond what might be considered as a ‘folkloristic symbolism,’ however, as it increasingly symbolizes actual equivalents.

Of the many examples of the *holodeck* effect, an incessant development of functionality and capability can be seen in both description and in reality. Of descriptions, the following are a few examples: there is, of course, the holodeck itself from the *Star Trek* universe, a room where virtual realities can be created; the Animus in the *Assassin’s Creed* video game series, where the protagonist experiences the lives of his ancestors as if he was living it himself while ‘plugged in;’ the Macroscope in Piers Anthony’s *Macroscope*, where the protagonist accesses an almost limitless database of knowledge; and so on. The current-day parallel is an increasingly interactive platform of experiencing fantasy and science fiction, as well as other genres, i.e. video games. By literally ‘taking over the controls,’ gamers experience a framework and not merely a story with an interface eerily similar to the context of the work itself.

Finally, the legitimacy of folklore must also be addressed, as it invariably impacts the legitimacy of its progeny, genre fiction. First, there is the inevitable association of the various forms of folklore with falsehoods. Second, the question of contemporariness, as folklore in general is usually associated with the past. Last of all are the implications and impact of folklore as culturally distinguishing and isolating phenomena. With the exploration of these three common misconceptions about folklore (and all its subcategories), there also arises the question of transference, as mentioned earlier: provided that the legitimacy of folklore is conceptually sound, how much of its functionality does genre fiction retain?

The subject of folklore or of fairy tales, or myths, etc. being equated with nonsense and falsehoods is one that is touched upon by almost everyone who explores them to any relevant depth, each giving similar reasons and some of them offering a defense of folklore or of the particular branch relevant to their work. There are many hypotheses as to why this misconception is continually upheld: in “Folklore as a Mirror of Culture,” Dundes provides “mistrust and ambivalence of oral tradition” as the reason underlying this misconception²⁷. Though most folklore is recorded in some form or another in modern times, it is generally agreed upon that it is primarily passed down orally, from generation to generation. It is also suggestive that, as Dundes points out, there is no ‘one true version’ that can be agreed upon, which indicates

²⁷ Alan Dundes. “Folklore as a Mirror of Culture,” 56.

the personal embellishments of the given storyteller, the different priorities of the times in which they were told, etc.²⁸

This lack of agreement and – taking Dundes’ supposition of oral tradition as being a primary source of mistrust – by studying only the more “trustworthy” written versions of folk tales, fairy tales, etc. could give rise to a different type of misconception regarding folklore: its origins and cultural significance. Dundes proposes that where folklore is used by many cultures as a tool for nationalism, it really should give rise to an increased “international understanding,” given the “universal or quasi-universal human experiences” that are described in these stories.²⁹ By analyzing specific examples, he presents a persuasive argument for the universality of folklore; in so doing, he also provides a solid argument for the significance of folklore in general, as these independently occurring patterns of human experiences suggest that their subjects are important to human beings in general.

The third and final misconception regarding folklore is, as Dundes says, that folklore is no longer a current phenomenon, not to mention the claim that it is a “good thing that folklore is increasingly unimportant.”³⁰ This suggests that not only is the function of folklore misunderstood, but also that folklore is equated with outdated stories of little or no consequence. Dundes brings many examples in his essay of what can be called ‘modern folklore,’ from jokes to common references made today to prove that folklore is still very much current.

It is clear from exploring the subject of folklore and its uses – particularly based on Dundes’ essays – that while specific empirical evidence is difficult to compile regarding psychological and cultural significance³¹, the fact remains that the universality and recurrence of the same frameworks is suggestive of their validity. What is more, the methodology of folklore as a tool to discover, analyze and integrate these elements has a clear resemblance to the approach of genre fiction. Genre fiction may have more to offer, however, than sketching acceptable and reprehensible behavioral dichotomies, while offering release. In order to understand the role genre fiction takes, it is important to analyze the place it occupies in society – the place left vacant by folklore.

²⁸ Alan Dundes. “Folklore as a Mirror of Culture,” 58.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 56.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 57.

³¹ Dundes also makes note of the fact that some analyses of folklore can be interpreted as ‘reading into’ the given stories, but by analyzing folklore’s significance not only to children but to adults as well, he argues for the validity of approaching folklore as containing universal concepts that have no single correct interpretation. See: Alan Dundes. “Folklore as a Mirror of Culture,” 61-62, 63-65.

3.2 Mythology and its Vacuum

While Alan Dundes' assertions regarding folklore point to the need to recognize what folklore is, as well as to its enduring presence to this day, mythology requires an altogether separate tier of speculation as it is no longer a (visibly) dominant part of everyday life. As mentioned previously, the ramifications of its absence constitute a subject frequently broached by psychologists. As that is the area where the absence is most felt, evidence of its lack and/or genuine influence can best be addressed from a psychological point of view. For this purpose, Dimitris Anastopoulos' and Eugenia Soumaki's joint publication "Adolescence and Mythology"³² serves as illustration. Yet, despite this void, the issue of whether or not mythology as it was is still applicable today must also be touched upon, an issue presented and demonstrated by Richard Kradin's "The family myth: its deconstruction and replacement with a balanced humanized narrative."³³

In their joint publication, Anastopoulos and Soumaki (for the sake of simplicity, from here on, I shall only refer to Soumaki) present case studies that reinforce the theories primarily associated with Jungian psychology, finding that mythology can be directly linked with – specifically – the healthy growing of an adolescent mind.³⁴ While ancient mythologies cannot be reintegrated into modern society as a whole, Soumaki suggests that the *need* for "mythological thinking"³⁵ is still a necessity. In closing, she also speculates on what presently fills the vacuum left behind by mythology and what problems are posed as a result of what youth attach themselves to in place of the gods, demigods and heroes of mythology.

There are several important functions Soumaki attributes to mythology: first, mythology gives people a *heritage* which acts as a response to humanity's existential anxiety³⁶, although in this regard, her analysis can be challenged to a degree: as Dundes points out in "Madness in Method: Plus a Plea for Projective Inversion in Myth,"³⁷ myth and other types of folklore are often confused, and while their analysis has merit for any folklorist, it does not qualify as

³² Eugenia Soumaki. "Adolescence and mythology." *Journal of Child Psychotherapy*, 36.2 (2010).

³³ Richard Kradin. "The family myth: its deconstruction and replacement with a balanced humanized narrative." *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 54 (2009).

³⁴ In "Adolescence and Mythology" Soumaki suggests that the adolescent phase is where mythological thinking is the most critical.

³⁵ Eugenia Soumaki. "Adolescence and Mythology," 120.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 120.

³⁷ Alan Dundes. "Madness in Method: Plus a Plea for Projective Inversion in Myth" Simon J. Bronner ed. *The Meaning of Folklore*. All USU Press Publications. Book 53, 2007.

“myth.” Soumaki’s argument primarily focuses around actual myth insofar as her case studies go, however, and as Dundes also points out in numerous works, each category of folklore has a definite impact on psychology individually. Secondly, Soumaki explores the potential mythology has in fulfilling a great portion of psychological needs in adolescents, suggesting that “spiritual, mental and moral development can be facilitated by myth.” She argues:

Adolescents need to live their myths. During this transitional phase, myths have a facilitative function making gods, heroes and nymphs, figures who are all-good or all-bad thus creating a spiritual and mental transitional space for growth. Mythical thinking is an integral part of adolescence. It contains phantasies and delusions: the ideals an adolescent has and uses to deal with his new reality.³⁸

Additionally, Soumaki also posits the importance of myth and mythical thinking as critical in the healthy development of the ability to handle emotions and situations of life. Not only is this role important, but within the framework of mythical thinking, Soumaki points out that with the absence of myth, the danger of incorrect, even harmful, myths may manifest. This suggests that whether or not adolescents are exposed to mythology or not, the original place mythology takes in their developing psyche needs to be filled by something. She has the following to say on this subject:

Myths and mythical thinking may be as important as the use of primitive defenses for dealing with powerful feelings of envy and love, desire and reality. When something goes wrong, the adolescent might be caught in perverse, distorted myths that may inhibit him or her. Likewise, he or she may be trapped in a psychic life empty of myths and magic, of passions and feelings, and thus unable to work through said frustrations and losses towards an integrated self-image and identity.³⁹

³⁸ Eugenia Soumaki. “Adolescence and Mythology,” 121.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 121.

From a different perspective, the need for mythology is also expressed, according to Julius Heuscher, by what people are drawn to in modern times, as of 1974, when his book, *A Psychiatric Study of Myths and Fairy Tales*,⁴⁰ was published. The interest expressed in science fiction, for instance, is one such indicator. While Heuscher points out that science fiction stories are not “on par with the fairy tale, myth, legend or epos,” he goes on to say that humankind uses science fiction as a tool to consider modern issues in a much similar way to the function the myth and the fairy tale do.⁴¹ While Heuscher indicates the potentially harmful misuses of such things, he attributes the attraction to science fiction to the following predicament:

The expression of a deep longing of the human soul that has been reduced to molecular or instinctual interactions by modern science and which finds itself in a vast, unfathomable but essentially meaningless universe.⁴²

Soumaki makes her case for the relevance of mythology for the adolescent psyche by pointing out a few pertinent traits. First, there are the attributes of the gods, who show both the best and the worst qualities humanity has to offer.⁴³ Second is the portrayal of adolescents and characteristics associated with adolescence: there are trials and tournaments which youths must go through, from which Soumaki draws a parallel to the pangs of growth. Finally, the most compelling evidence: “The adolescent has to survive his passions and fears and become a hero, someone who is considered half-god, and who often gains a privileged position among men and gods.”⁴⁴

The significance of the hero (which I also discuss in the next chapter) and that of becoming a hero in such a manner as described above are, perhaps, the most tangible of mythology’s elements which leave some sort of void to be filled by something, but it is by far

⁴⁰ Julius Heuscher. *A Psychiatric Study of Myths and Fairy Tales: Their Origin, Meaning and Usefulness*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1974.

⁴¹ Julius Heuscher. *A Psychiatric Study of Myths and Fairy Tales*, 397.

⁴² *Ibid*, 377.

⁴³ The distinctive line between humans and gods (the rendition of which only mythology produces) is, as Soumaki also mentions, that a god has the ability to work around ‘normal human consequences,’ yet remain made in the image of humans, so to speak. As a result, similarly to the *holodeck* effect of folklore discussed earlier, behavioral distinction and the moral compass set down by society gain footing in the adolescent’s psyche without ‘ignoring’ inherent traits, urges and the emotional upheavals of adolescence.

⁴⁴ Eugenia Soumaki. “Adolescents and Mythology,” 121.

not the only element of mythology which has a less-than-adequate modern replacement, according to Soumaki. To this end, she turns her attention to issues of modern times by making the following observations: first, she describes modern society void of mythology as having become fragmented due to the lack of both the ability of adolescents to detach from their parents, and to the lack of “ritual boundaries.” As a result, what she labels as “the search for celebrity” replaces the hero roles. Finally, Soumaki describes how what she calls “magical thinking” is still expressed today, though in modern times it is expressed by mythologizing science.⁴⁵

Without myth, Soumaki says, adolescents do not have adequate guidance and structure, nor emotional fulfillment, but aside from that, there is also a ritual element which is missing from modern society. She points to the significance of “mythological trials” – initiation rituals – as being a necessary part of society’s structure, yet having a diminished role today. Independence and initiation into adulthood takes on the form of being able to finish school and to find economic stability, which lacks an emotional and spiritual transition to match the social transition. She summarizes the problem: “Rituals have been fragmented and de-mythologised and are no longer accepted or perceived by our social environment.”⁴⁶

While adolescents create their own myths to fill this void, the encompassing effect of the lack of a common mythology, Soumaki argues, creates estrangement between individuals – this issue is present on a societal level, as well – perhaps even more so than on the level of the individual, seeing as mythology is also a binding force between groups of people. She points out that people still seek ritual and the kind of structure originally offered by mythology, but without mythical thought, the replacement of “science, national or religious myths” does not adequately prepare people for life’s pervasive questions and truths, such as death or loss.⁴⁷

There is also an argument against what modern society considers as traditional psychological constructs, whether or not a specific myth – or even mythology – comes into question, which points to a different problem facing us in modern times: the old mythologies no longer work. As Kradin’s exploration of a healthy/unhealthy dynamic in “family myths” suggests, myth, in its most basic form of repetitive patterns, must evolve beyond its original concepts. His concern in “The family myth” is primarily to explore how certain types of myths can hinder the healthy development of an individual.

⁴⁵ Eugenia Soumaki. “Adolescents and Mythology,” 125-126.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 125.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 126.

One thought regarding the root cause of unhealthy “family myths,” in particular, seems prevalent in Kradin’s conclusions: the “mythic-inflated parental imago.”⁴⁸ Soumaki’s case studies also involved patients whose problems eventually could be traced to their family background, but unlike Soumaki, who found ‘missing pieces’ in myth, Kradin found unhealthy myths which he deconstructs. Even so, what Kradin presents only emphasizes Soumaki’s argument, as his case studies focus on what, by his own description, a badly applied myth is,⁴⁹ therefore it can be concluded that even as people unconsciously attempt to create mythological constructs, these are no longer viable in modern society. Therefore, in order to retain only what was most useful in mythology, at the same time adjusting for the changes society and humanity has undergone since particular myths originally arose, it is logical to conclude that a bridging is needed – a rekindling of myth and the recognition of what modern mythology is.

3.3 Rekindling Myth

Soumaki’s evidence underlines the absence of mythology on a wider scale, a theory supported by many authors, yet most also agree that mythology cannot be simply ‘resurrected and reinstated’ into society – even if this were desirable, which is doubtful when considering Kradin’s, and others’, work. Yet the problem itself is continually observable: Whitmont, for instance, outlines how without mythology society is doomed to repeat past mistakes, using World War II as illustration.⁵⁰ Another part of the problem, as Heuscher and his colleagues point out, is that fairy tales and myths are a difficult subject to approach to begin with, which poses a problem for integrating Soumaki’s “mythical thought” into modern society – though Heuscher already notes that genre fiction possesses some of the same qualities (and attractions) that its progenitors do. Can genre fiction be a viable replacement then?

The problem of the modern approach to folklore can be considered almost as complex a subject to understand as folklore itself is. As a result, it is no surprise that both psychologists and folklorists alike address this question. Alan Dundes approaches the question in his essay, “Earth-Diver: Creation of the Mythopoeic Male,”⁵¹ as an anthropological failure:

⁴⁸ Richard Kradin. “The family myth,” 222.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 219-220.

⁵⁰ Edward C. Whitmont. *The Symbolic Quest*, 80-81.; Whitmont points out that Jung had foreseen some sort of consequence manifesting if society continued to evade the subject of mythology, which Whitmont, in retrospect, identified the parallel of the events of World War II and the German hero myth.

⁵¹ Alan Dundes. “Earth-Diver: Creation of the Mythopoeic Male.” Simon J. Bronner ed. *The Meaning of Folklore*. All USU Press Publications. Book 53, 2007.

One possible explanation for the failure of anthropologists to make any notable advances in myth studies is the rigid adherence to two fundamental principles: a literal reading of myth and a study of myth in monocultural context [...] as in the case of most all-or-nothing approaches, it does not account for all the data.⁵²

Heuscher's approach is more oriented towards society's general mentality, which he elaborates on in his chapter on the significance of fairy tales and myths in modern society, illuminating a critical reason for society's skepticism regarding folklore and its uses. By virtue of the transference of some of these same qualities to genre fiction, this reason may also shed light on society's reflexive rejection of the possibility of the significance of genre fiction. He writes:

We have become conditioned to the physical, natural-scientific, sensual and sensuous sides of our world than [*sic*] to its ideas, ideals and values. Our ability to think has, therefore, largely limited itself to the natural-scientific exploration and exploitation of the world. This analytic thinking—focusing on measurability and causal relationships—cannot grasp the contents of fairy tales without impairing their beauty as well as their meaningfulness.⁵³

Neumann tackles the question on a much larger scale, viewing modern society – with Western culture at its epicenter – from the perspective of cultural development, beginning with the collective psychology of society in antiquity, followed by the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, up until modern times. The direction society is heading in, in his view, can be best summarized as going “toward the emancipation of man from nature and consciousness from unconscious.”⁵⁴ By applying the observations he makes about the development of the individual to society (going through various stages of myth, including the hero canon), Neumann comes to a conclusion where he concisely lists the four relevant phenomena to consider: the “aggregation

⁵² Alan Dundes. “Earth-Diver,” 327.

⁵³ Julius Heuscher. *A Psychiatric Study of Myths and Fairy Tales*, 98.; Cf. M. Alan Kaznev. “Mythopoesis in the Modern World,” 2-6.

⁵⁴ Erich Neumann. *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, 382.

of masses, decay of the old canon, the schism between conscious and unconscious and the divorce between individual and collective.”⁵⁵

However, Neumann’s most significant observation remains within the bounds of an individual within society and not referring to society as a whole, expressing the essence of the problem Soumaki, Kradin, Whitmont and even Heuscher and Dundes have touched upon:

Rationalization, abstraction, and de-emotionalization are all expressions of the “devouring” tendency of ego consciousness to assimilate the symbols piecemeal. As the symbol is broken down into conscious contents, it loses its compulsive effect, its compelling significance, and becomes poorer in libido. Thus the “gods of Greece” are no longer for us, as they were for the Greeks, living forces and symbols of the unconscious requiring a ritualistic approach; they have been broken down into cultural contents, conscious principles, historical data, religious associations, and so on. They exist as contents of consciousness, and no longer—or only in special cases—as symbols of the unconscious.⁵⁶

This brings the argument to the next phase: what has taken mythology’s place? One consideration, as Ralph Metzner suggests in his book, *The Well of Remembrance: Rediscovering the Earth Wisdom Myths of Northern Europe*,⁵⁷ is the revitalization of what today are considered as pagan religions. His book begins with a survey of the Indo-European and Nordic-Germanic peoples, their culture and society, which offers a glimpse into the mythology involved, but more interesting is the latter half of the book, which gives possible modern interpretations of Nordic-Germanic myths. Yet, as Heuscher points out, there is the question of what he recognizes as transference, which offers an entirely different type of modern approach to mythology – and on that subject, no one is more expert than J. R. R. Tolkien, who broaches the subject of *mythopoesis*.

First, the question of revitalization should be considered: Metzner’s book implies a way of living and perceiving the world rather than a suggestion to follow an old religion, raising an interesting concept. In Neumann’s terms, Metzner’s approach to mythology can be described as

⁵⁵ Erich Neumann. *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, 383.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 328.

⁵⁷ Ralph Metzner. *The Well of Remembrance: Rediscovering the Earth Wisdom Myths of Northern Europe*. Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1994.

a method to reconnect with it in terms of the symbols of the unconscious. For instance, his chapter on the “new berserkers” gives an account of one Norbert J. Mayer, whose experiences, Metzner suggests, are a demonstration of the “mytho-poetic power of the old Germanic deities.”⁵⁸ Mayer’s experience involving the rebirth of berserkerdom is, however, a very literal interpretation of Metzner’s message. Metzner goes on to give his own examples of a modern interpretation which is centered more on perception of the world rather than on a literal understanding thereof: he points out that dwarves, elves, giants and gods are still present in the modern-day world, only known under different names and guises⁵⁹ – names that are also closely associated with fantasy literature. When considering Soumaki’s, Heuscher’s and Neumann’s observations regarding modern society, Metzner’s approach is arguably the most difficult to convey and appreciate, as it requires varying degrees of a specifically spiritual approach, which is not viable or comfortable for many. This is not the only option, however.

Heuscher, as mentioned previously, already begins to broach the subject of genre fiction as “qualitatively akin to folklore,”⁶⁰ and makes the following observations:

Thus the child—as well as some hidden realms that have retained a child-like perceptiveness in us adults—remains responsive to and hungry for the language of the myth which became that of the fairy tale. [...] This applies also to a great extent to the modern art-fairy tales as well as to some science fiction works and existential plays or novels.⁶¹

Even more interesting is his observation regarding a critical difference between fantasy fiction and science fiction in his chapter on the quest for meaningfulness in modern times. Up to this point, we have established the significance of the lack of mythology in the modern world in the mirror of several perspectives, thus Heuscher’s observation of mythology and folklore being ‘rediscovered’ is not surprising – it is this rediscovery that he believes is responsible for modern “art-fairy tales and myths” (among them J. R. R. Tolkien’s) being akin to older fairy tales and

⁵⁸ Ralph Metzner. *The Well of Remembrance*, 133.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 212.

⁶⁰ Julius Heuscher. *A Psychiatric Study of Myths and Fairy Tales*, 386.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 37.

myths. He mentions “narrations with epic and fairy tale characteristics that depart considerably from the traditional stories” – which includes, most significantly, science fiction.⁶²

Finally, J. R. R. Tolkien’s “On Fairy Stories”⁶³ introduces the concept, well-known by his readers, of sub-creation into the equation, which is one of the most significant concepts that directly relate to genre fiction. Added to the appearance of *Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit* and *The Silmarillion* in the literary world, Tolkien’s musings on folklore and on the application of sub-creation is constantly referenced as the favorite basis for discussion of the legitimacy of both fantasy literature and folklore. His approach to stories notably draws a dividing line between stories which successfully create a “Secondary World,” as he calls it, the entry into which is a smooth path, and those stories which fall short. Therefore, his definition of a successful sub-creator is someone who facilitates an entry into another world which the listeners truly believe in, not merely, as Tolkien points out, creating circumstances wherein the audience enters a state of a “willing suspension of disbelief.”⁶⁴

In closing, while analyzing genre fiction’s progenitors and the place it inherits from mythology, it is clear that the role it potentially plays in society is an important one (with the right amount of transference), although questions of *how* and *what* still require attention. The psychological groundwork suggests that – while certain forms of folklore are still current – the epidemic of rationalization and impoverishment of the psyche perceived by students of mythology (whether they are folklorists or psychologists) has been a pressing question for many, particularly in and beyond the 20th century, but it is undeniable that the place traditionally occupied by mythology has new occupants, for better or for worse. Genre fiction may provide a solution to the absence of mythology by reorganizing its substance and contents and by reintroducing these into society with the transference of all that has been investigated above, while potentially weeding out frameworks that are obsolete or no longer desirable. And yet, its trustworthiness is still in question. Although the authors quoted have touched upon the reasons for mistrust and dismissal not only of genre fiction, but also of folklore in general, that does not mean that this mistrust is entirely unwarranted – a topic which shall be explored in the next chapter.

⁶² Julius Heuscher. *A Psychiatric Study of Myths and Fairy Tales*, 386-387.

⁶³ J. R. R. Tolkien. “On Fairy Stories.” *The Tolkien Reader*, (1966).

⁶⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *Biographia Literaria: Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*. Taylor & Francis, 1983. quoted by J. R. R. Tolkien. “On Fairy Stories,” 12.

4 ON THE HOLODECK

In order to argue for the legitimacy of genre fiction as an important tool available to modern society, not only does the presumed psychological impact have to be investigated, but so does the method with which folklore achieves that impact in the first place. So far, I have explained the relevance of genre fiction's progenitors, but not how they influence and evoke emotions and experiences. To begin the analysis, the mechanics of this evocation need to be established: what exactly are experiencers connecting to, and how is that connection possible in the first place? Through this study, the importance of the evolution of folklore into modern mythology as fantasy and science fiction is also revealed, for which illustration is provided by the transition from the mythological Hero to the fantasy and science fiction novel's Adventurer. Finally, the depth of the experiencer's involvement in fantasy and science fiction worlds serves as a demonstration both for the importance of this modern mythology, and for the reality of this bond between experiencer and fantasy.

4.1 The Reality of the Unreal

Despite the relevance attributed to mythology and fairy tales by both folklorist and psychologist, as attested to by the previous chapter, the thought of any kind of story at all influencing a person's psyche or personality remains a disputed subject. While the psychological approach may be a deft method to understand the pervasive influence of folklore, the topic of stories evoking emotional reactions and finding meaning within them strays into the jurisdiction of a more philosophical consideration – moreover, this subject is more easily addressed by analyzing genre fiction rather than analyzing its precursors. Additionally, the outlines of the particular qualities of genre fiction that make it significant, not only in terms of mythology and legends enduring right up to modern times but also in terms of its standalone significance to our age, begin to become clear.

To illustrate these considerations, Norman Kreitman, in his thesis entitled "Fantasy, Fiction, and Feelings,"⁶⁵ explores the question of the reality – and the irrationality – of forming emotional attachments to nonexistent characters and places by tackling what he calls the "alleged

⁶⁵ Norman Kreitman. "Fantasy, Fiction, and Feelings." *Metaphilosophy*. 37.5 (2006).

paradox of fiction.”⁶⁶ By this analysis, the transference of elements of folklore to genre fiction becomes particularly significant: by following Kreitman’s logic and by surveying the compelling nature of genre fiction as described by professor John H. Timmerman, the differences between genre fiction and its folkloric origins begin to emerge. This, in turn, allows for speculation as to whether genre fiction may not only have adapted folklore to the modern age, but improved the interaction between audience and folklore’s essence.

Kreitman introduces the “paradox of fiction” as a question that has been debated for quite a long time, but which has no convincing conclusion: the primary error in the analyses he reviews starts with the fact that this so-called paradox is cited as a paradox to begin with. The problem, as Kreitman also cites, is best summarized by E. Gron as follows:

We have emotions, such as sadness, pity, and fear, for fictional characters. We believe that in order to have such emotions the objects of our emotions must exist. For example, my fear of sharks seems to require the existence of at least one shark. But most of us believe there is no sense in which fictional characters actually exist. So how can we have emotions for them?⁶⁷

To begin to formulate how the concept of this supposed paradox came into being, Kreitman formulates a basic definition of emotions extrapolated from what the authors he reviews wrote on this subject, in addition to what can be considered as the conventional attitude:

1. Emotions of the kind under consideration are always directed at something in particular—that is, they are intentional.
2. The intentional object of the emotion must be believed to be real, in the sense of materially existing.
3. The things that become the intentional objects of our emotions are selected on the basis of some pre-existing attitude or orientation, and those that we recognize as relevant to our well-being become the focus of a “garden variety” emotion; we react differently on seeing a snake according to whether we believe it to be a grass

⁶⁶ Norman Kreitman. “Fantasy, Fiction, and Feelings,” 605.

⁶⁷ E. Gron. “Review of *Emotion and the Arts*, edited by Mette Hjort and Sue Laver.” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 39.1 (1999), 81. quoted by Norman Kreitman. “Fantasy, Fiction, and Feelings,” 606.

snake or a viper, since the difference is important for our survival. Obviously not all our beliefs about the world are of this kind.⁶⁸

Yet, Kreitman points out that neither are there real objects in fiction, nor does the reader believe them to be real – what is more, this definition is not clear enough and is “unnecessarily restrictive.”⁶⁹ In fact, approaching the question from Tolkien’s perspective, although he defines what he calls the “realm of Faerie”⁷⁰ as a place entered into (which psychology might argue are real aspects of the psyche, collective and/or individual), he proposes “willing suspension of disbelief”⁷¹ but not *literal* belief. Arguably, in Tolkien’s terms the hallmarks of a truly gifted writer may be the ability to instill literal belief in his/her world and characters, yet the very essence of fiction is to reach beyond what humanity perceives as immediate, rational and tangible reality (regardless of the degree to which it chooses to anchor itself in that reality).

Kreitman’s response to both such a definition of emotion and to the supposed paradox, which he quickly refutes by analyzing the discrepancy between having an emotion about something or someone and the relative existence of that something or someone, can be summarized as variables of recollection and imagination. He uses examples of people who, for instance, have phobias or are paranoid, or alternatively, how they may have an emotional reaction to something or someone not present. Additionally, he also points out that the contemporary definition of the “imagination” is that of “fantasy,” of which he says:

As a species of imagination, fantasy, like memory, concerns that which is non-occurrent but differs from memory in that it operates with intentional objects that are not believed to bear a point-to-point correspondence with mundane reality, and that are frequently, perhaps always, emotionally charged.⁷²

Though the use of the term “fantasy” in this context is not synonymous with fantasy literature as I detailed in my “Fantasy Hypothesis” section, Kreitman’s observation of the

⁶⁸ Norman Kreitman. “Fantasy, Fiction, and Feelings,” 606.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 606.

⁷⁰ J. R. R. Tolkien. “On Fairy Stories,” 4.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 12.

⁷² Norman Kreitman. “Fantasy, Fiction, and Feelings,” 607.

function of this fantasy, namely “synthesis,” is an appealing concept that can, in fact, be applied to the creation of fantasy literature. His definition and examples of “synthesis” can be summarized as taking pieces of past experiences and combining them into something completely new.⁷³ In this sense, fantasy literature could be considered as the “art of synthesis,” as Kreitman himself elaborates by analyzing fiction as a construct which – on a skeletal level – combines certain elements in a way that is not normally (i.e. “in reality”) combined.⁷⁴

Thus far, Kreitman’s analyses rearrange the grounds on which the reality of emotional evocation may be argued for, which clears the way to pinpointing *why* fiction has such an impact. To summarize, based on his observations and arguments, Kreitman reformulates his definition of the conditions in which emotions are triggered as such:

It emerges, then, that the standard definition of emotion, incorporated into the paradox, is too strong. It is more accurate to say that emotions can arise (i) in the presence of a material object, (ii) in relation to a virtual object that is an image or recollection of some real thing, and (iii) under certain conditions when the person is well aware of the “unreal” character of the image, which has no objective referent in any simple sense. Since it is not the case that emotions always entail belief, the “paradox” collapses.⁷⁵

The reason, Kreitman describes, for fiction having an impact on readers does – somewhat paradoxically – rely on the realistic nature of the characters (and, it would follow logically, possibly of the world, as well). He details that while coherence is essential, it is the life-like portrayals of characters (“vivacity”) which draw in the reader; therefore, based on his arguments, a synthesis must be achieved by the author, which has its roots in the essence of experiences in reality. The *key* is to achieve a level where readers’ reactions will be “emotionally toned”⁷⁶ – which concurs with the essence of a successful sub-creator in Tolkien’s description.

Finally, in response to the possible challenges to his thesis, Kreitman highlights a few vital points where the emotions evoked in readers by fictional characters *differ* from those evoked by real people: firstly, the readers’ relationship to the characters is one-sided. While

⁷³ Norman Kreitman. “Fantasy, Fiction, and Feelings,” 608.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 612.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 609.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 614.

readers may develop feelings for, or formulate thoughts about, characters, these are never reciprocated. Secondly, the amount of information we have is much more than we obtain from real people. Lastly, the level of emotional openness as Kreitman describes it is also profoundly different from what a person would normally display.⁷⁷ All of these points are suggestive of both a holodeck-type framework (with a character's mind as a platform – as will be explored in the next point) and the fact that fiction can be considered an excellent medium of influence. Thus, the question turns to what is being conveyed by the means Kreitman described, for which Timmerman sketches an outline.

In Timmerman's essay, he gives an overview of the underlying reasons why fantasy literature, in particular,⁷⁸ has the power to move its readers, supporting not only Kreitman's notions of the unreal having a very real link to readers, but also highlighting similarities in form and function to folklore as described in the previous chapter. His primary purpose is to persuade a Christian audience of the benefits and wonders of fantasy literature by examining the six traits he believes are necessary for a writing to fall into the category of fantasy literature, which are: "story, common characters, evocation of another world, use of magic and the supernatural, a clear sense of good and evil, and the quest,"⁷⁹ several of which will be analyzed in greater detail in later sections. Timmerman's introduction to the subject is, however, more relevant in terms of both Kreitman's observations and those of the authors mentioned in the previous chapter.

Before he expounds on the six traits, Timmerman succinctly summarizes for his readers his opinion about the capacity of fantasy literature to not only evoke powerful emotions from readers, but also to help readers grow from experiences gleaned from reading fantasy literature as follows:

Fantasy literature as a genre has the capacity to move a reader powerfully. And the motions and emotions involved are not simply visceral as is the case with much more modern literature – but spiritual. It affects one's beliefs, one's way of viewing life, one's hopes and dreams and faith. Since I have had all these –

⁷⁷ Norman Kreitman. "Fantasy, Fiction, and Feelings," 615.

⁷⁸ It should be noted that Timmerman speaks of fantasy literature; however, his arguments may be extended at several points to include science fiction as well.

⁷⁹ John H. Timmerman. "Fantasy Literature's Evocative Power," 534.

beliefs, hopes, dreams, faith – affected by such literature, I feel compelled to ask somewhat uncomfortable questions about the experience.⁸⁰

This shows a remarkable resemblance to the functions of folklore as described by both folklorists and psychologists. This is written in a modern, Christian, sentiment, yet the effects Timmerman posits are more akin to archaic beliefs than to conventional Christianity. Furthermore, his elaboration of what fantasy offers is comparable to Soumaki's description of what an adolescent undergoes and the direction of his/her development when introducing "mythological thinking:"

Here is the invitation fantasy holds out to the reader: to recover a belief beclouded by knowledge, to reaffirm a faith shattered by fact. We know there are no ogres in the next country, yet we may well believe there are. The lure of this recovery has attracted thousands to Tolkien's writings, has sent readers tumbling through the enchantment of his literary kingdoms, has in fact delivered what it promised: a recovery of being, a refreshment, a keener realization of the importance of our spiritual nature. The lure of great literature has long been precisely this which fantasy holds forth in a new way: the lure of losing self in order to rediscover or recover one's self in a fresher, revitalizing perspective.⁸¹

While Timmerman's descriptions of what constitutes fantasy fiction may seem inadequate measured against the complexity of the anthropological and psychological study of the impact of folklore and genre fiction on humans and humanity in general – as seen in the previous chapter – it nevertheless describes some important elements which are, in fact, quite simple. He summarizes the essence of fantasy fiction, and although some points may be contested⁸², Le Guin's reminder to her readers of the dangers of overanalyzing while misunderstanding what "myth" and "symbol" mean, which also misses the point of genre fiction as she sees it, ought to be remembered.⁸³ Assuming these to be things of the past is also a fallacy against which Dundes argues persuasively. Some of Timmerman's observations, however, provide more profound insight into what, exactly, is so compelling about fantasy literature – one

⁸⁰ John H. Timmerman. "Fantasy Literature's Evocative Power," 533.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 334.

⁸² See good vs. evil in the Hypotheses chapter, subsection *Fantasy* of this paper.

⁸³ Ursula K. Le Guin. "The Language of the Night," 65-66.; See: Le Guin's arguments on myth and true myth quoted in the Hypotheses chapter of this paper.

of these is “the common character” trait, in other words: the difference between the Hero and the Adventurer.

4.2 The Hero and the Adventurer

There are many significant changes observable when analyzing genre fiction in comparison to folklore, the development of which is dependent on the place in society it is able to take, such as the closeness of characters and the different approaches to reaching goals. To analyze some of these changes and speculate on the potency of the differences between genre fiction and its folklore heritage, Maria Nikolajeva writes an overview of the transference that takes place between folklore and genre fiction, pointing out changes. Secondly, as mentioned in the previous section, two of Timmerman’s six traits come into play which shed light on the posited improvement that genre fiction brings above and beyond folklore. Finally, a contrast between the Hero and the Adventurer is drawn by analyzing W. H. Auden’s piece entitled “The Quest Hero”⁸⁴ and Timmerman’s “common character” to demonstrate the evolution from the intrinsic Hero discussed by Soumaki and Neumann into the protagonist of a fantasy and/or science fiction story.

Nikolajeva makes some important observations regarding the transference of folklore material (fairy tales) to fantasy which also highlight an important evolution in storytelling – that is, the freedom of the author to randomize transferred elements. By this process, genre fiction breaks away from folklore (the elements are the same, but the outcome and contents differ), yet – as the previous chapter demonstrates – by the use of these familiar (or, as Dundes suggests, “quasi-universal”) elements, it can be posited that a similar reaction can be evoked in readers when they read genre fiction as when they experience folklore. A few examples of transference Nikolajeva brings up:

Further, fantasy has inherited many superficial attributes of fairy tales: wizards, witches, genies, dragons, talking animals, flying horses and flying carpets, invisibility mantles, magic wands, swords, lanterns, magic food and drink. However, the writers’ imagination allows them to transform and modernize these elements: a genie may live in a beer can rather than a bottle; flying carpets give way to flying rocking-chairs, and supernatural characters without fairy-tale

⁸⁴ W. H. Auden. “The Quest Hero.” *The Texas Quarterly*, 4 (1962).

origins are introduced, for instance animated toys [...]. Nevertheless, their function in the story is essentially the same.⁸⁵

Yet, there is more than elements which are transferred from folklore to genre fiction – there are also structural similarities and directional ones, which Timmerman also references. In his essay, he suggests that possibly the most important of his six traits is the “quest” – which he distinguishes from “mere adventure”⁸⁶ – the most important characteristic of which is that it always progresses towards some sort of goal which has trials and obstacles to hinder the protagonist. He also quotes Auden, whose primary focus is that of the Quest and the hero types that go on those quests. The draw of fantasy literature is easily defined when examining it from the perspective of incorporating the Quest, of which Auden writes:

The Quest is one of the oldest, hardest, and most popular of all literary genres. In some instances it may be founded on historical fact—the Quest of the Golden Fleece may have its origin in the search of seafaring traders for amber—and certain themes, like the theme of the enchanted cruel Princess whose heart can be melted only by the predestined lover, may be distorted recollections of religious rites, but the persistent appeal of the Quest as a literary form is due, I believe, to its validity as a symbolic description of our subjective personal experience of existence as historical.⁸⁷

Auden defines a typical Quest story as having the following six traits (which Timmerman also quotes in his essay) and points out yet another quality of the Quest story which again readers can identify with, and therefore be drawn to. As can be seen by his initial analysis of the qualities of a Quest story, they correlate to what he calls the “subjective experience of life:”

- 1) A precious Object and/or Person to be found and possessed or married.
- 2) A long journey to find it, for its whereabouts are not originally known to the seekers.

⁸⁵ Maria Nikolajeva. “Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archaic to Postmodern,” 140.

⁸⁶ John H. Timmerman. “Fantasy Literature’s Evocative Power,” 537.

⁸⁷ W. H. Auden. “The Quest Hero,” 42.

- 3) A hero. The precious Object cannot be found by anybody, but only by the one person who possesses the right qualities of breeding or character.
- 4) A Test or series of Tests by which the unworthy are screened out, and the hero revealed.
- 5) The Guardians of the Object who must be overcome before it can be won. They may be simply a further test of the hero's *arete*, or they may be malignant in themselves.
- 6) The Helpers who with their knowledge and magical powers assist the hero and but for whom he would never succeed. They may appear in human or in animal form.⁸⁸

Finally, the evolution of the Adventurer as an important counterpart to the archetypal Hero can be a prominent example, as Timmerman suggests, of the lure of genre fiction – moreover, based on Kreitman's analysis of the emotional connection that can be established between the reader and the protagonist and his/her world, the significant impact genre fiction may have on readers is illuminated. As Soumaki's research suggests, the Hero is an important figure who influences the development of adolescents, and Neumann's intrinsic approach details the significance of the Hero's birth, using the language of mythology to describe that developmental phase⁸⁹. From a literary angle, Auden also explores the significance of the Hero in his essay, establishing two categories of heroes and what their functions are, explaining the subjective link between reader and Hero. This connection supports not only Soumaki's and Neumann's assertions of the underlying psychology, but also points out the importance of the unlikely heroes common to fairy tales, which gives rise to the Adventurer of genre fiction, whose significance is pointed out by Timmerman. On this subject, Nikolajeva writes:

The essential difference between the fairy-tale hero and the fantasy protagonist is that the latter often lacks heroic features, can be scared and even reluctant to perform the task, and can sometimes fail. Unlike fairy tale, the final goal of fantasy is seldom marriage and entronement; in contemporary philosophical and ethical fantasy it is usually a matter of spiritual maturation. Fantasy also allows much freedom and experimentation with gender transgression.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ W. H. Auden. "The Quest Hero," 44.

⁸⁹ See: Erich Neumann. *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, 131-151.

⁹⁰ Maria Nikolajeva. "Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archaic to Postmodern," 140.

In contrast, Auden's approach already studies a different kind of hero than the heroes of mythology, but the legendary quality is still prevalent in the analysis: he distinguishes two types of Quest Hero, one being the "hero of Epic" (that is, what can be defined as the hero of legends and myth) and the other, which he cites as common to fairy tales, the concealed hero (e.g. "the youngest son, the weakest, the least clever, the one whom everybody would judge as least likely to succeed")⁹¹. Auden does not delve too deeply into the significance of these heroes, nor their position, but Timmerman makes a few important observations more in correlation with Nikolajeva's remarks. He explains that – again a powerful draw of fantasy literature – how the appeal of fantasy characters differs from that of the Hero of myth, who is archetypally significant and can be emulated as Soumaki describes, presenting instead a "skin to slip into" (which previously I referred to as a "platform" of sorts to enter the *holodeck*), whose journey to become a hero becomes that of the reader as well. Timmerman labels this character – and his/her function – as follows:

By virtue of the common character it thereby becomes easier for readers to see themselves in the action. Even though we may all like to play Superman, in literature it seems that we stand outside the larger-than-life hero. He is ably equipped, after all, to fight his own battles. In fact, we usually know at the outset who will win; we're just not certain how. But with common characters we recognize their shortcomings (they are our own), and want to come to their aid. When a character gets knocked down, which occurs frequently, we would like to help – from the safety of our easy chair.⁹²

In contrast to the Hero of myth, Timmerman continues:

The second reason for the use of a common character has to do with heroism. In literary history the hero has often been a figure who acts for us, who stands in our place in the face of danger and by superhuman powers overcomes on our behalf. The theme in fantasy literature is that anyone may be called on to become a hero. Each person may be summoned to tasks which seem beyond his or her capability – tasks such as a sojourn through sorrow, a struggle to define the nature of good

⁹¹ W. H. Auden. "The Quest Hero," 46.

⁹² John H. Timmerman. "Fantasy Literature's Evocative Power," 535.

[sic] and evil, the quest for joy. Each person has to act in these instances, has to rely on his or her own insights, cunning, or in some cases strength. Even in tales which clearly envision a supernatural presence, a ruling God, the individual is forced to act on his own strength.⁹³

This brief look at some of the significant differences between folklore and genre fiction merely serves as illustration, but there are many more differences and similarities that merit a deeper study. However, Timmerman's observations on what makes fantasy literature evocative not only support Kreitman's assertions that fictional characters, places and events have an impact on readers, but also points to some of the intrinsic connections to folklore which satisfy the vacuum left behind mythology. By reusing mythological elements and including other branches of folklore, it is clear that good, artistic genre fiction (which Le Guin, Timmerman and others differentiate from 'mainstream' fantasy and science fiction) has the potential and ability to satisfy a need that – as the previous chapter's psychological analysis shows – is more pressing in modern times than ever before.

4.3 Is Genre Fiction Escapist?

One of the most notable concerns regarding genre fiction is the concept that it is escapist, i.e. an unhealthy abandonment of reality for a non-existent world. In some cases, this can be considered a real threat which several authors discuss. From a different perspective, however, genre fiction can be considered as anything *but* escapist, as it deals with real problems in the real world. However, as Le Guin, and Tolkien before her, formulate, the threat does not lie within genre fiction itself, rather, it lies in the attitude and approach of the reader/experiencer him- or herself.

Stephen R. Donaldson, a genre fiction author, posits the problem in his essay "Epic Fantasy in the Modern World,"⁹⁴ by saying that the critics who believe fantasy to be "oversimplified escapist fiction" miss the point of fantasy entirely.⁹⁵ The same accusation is leveled against science fiction, of which Le Guin speaks – more importantly, she poses an interesting question regarding escapism:

⁹³ John H. Timmerman. "Fantasy Literature's Evocative Power," 535.

⁹⁴ Stephen R. Donaldson. "Epic Fantasy in the Modern World: A Few Observations by Stephen R. Donaldson." *Occasional Papers*, Kent State University Press, 2 (1986).

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 4.

There is an area where SF has most often failed to judge itself, and where it has been most harshly judged by its non-partisans. It is an area where we badly need intelligent criticism and discussion. The oldest argument against SF is both the shallowest and the profoundest: the assertion that SF, like all fantasy, is escapist. [...] The question, after all, must be asked: From what is one escaping, and to what?⁹⁶

Le Guin asserts that “escaping” into a “Secondary World” is *not* an escape, since it deals with reality, which she points out is the reason why science fiction garnered a reputation as being “relevant,” being “socially and ethnically speculative.”⁹⁷ George P. Landow, in his exhaustive analysis of literary fantasy, entitled “And the World Became Strange: Realms of Literary Fantasy,”⁹⁸ also points out that writers of the twentieth century include many new “societal or religious structures” and with “entire cultures filled with legends and mythology,” and concludes:

Such movements of fantasy literature into the realm of speculative anthropology and theology make it clear that fantasy and romance create their imagined worlds as a means of exploring this one. It is important to emphasize once more the essential seriousness and potential humanistic contributions of such genres, since until recently their claims have been consistently scanted by academic critics and other advocates of ‘high’ culture.⁹⁹

Yet Le Guin makes a distinction in the differing quality of science fiction stories in question, and answers her own challenge by determining a type of science fiction that is truly escapist, while simultaneously enabling a simple, eloquent contrast to speak for the virtues of science fiction which makes the genre *significant* to readers rather being than “escapist:”

⁹⁶ Ursula K. Le Guin. *The Language of the Night*, 196.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 197.

⁹⁸ George P. Landow. “And the World Became Strange: Realms of Literary Fantasy.” *The Georgia Review* 33.1 *Focus on the Imagination*, (1979).

⁹⁹ George P. Landow. “And the World Became Strange,” 33.

But what worries me is that so many of these stories and books have been written in a savagely self-righteous tone, a tone that implies that there's an answer, a simple answer, and why can't all you damn fools out there see it? Well, I call this escapism: a sensationalist raising of a real question, followed by a quick evasion of the weight and pain and complexity involved in reality, experientially, trying to understand and cope with that question. [...] If science fiction has a major gift to offer literature, I think it is just this: the capacity to face an open universe. Physically open, psychically open. No doors shut.

What science, from physics and astronomy to history and psychology, has given us in the open universe: a cosmos that is not a simple, fixed hierarchy, but an immensely complex process in time. [...] And science fiction seems to be the modern literary art which is capable of living in that very huge and drafty house, and feeling at home there, and playing games up and down the stairs, from the basement to the attic.¹⁰⁰

With regard to fantasy literature, John Timmerman simply states: "Too many people, it seems, want to leave our world for a fictive one."¹⁰¹ Further on in his essay however, by analyzing what constitutes the "Secondary World" of genre fiction (as defined by Tolkien) he observes that reading fantasy literature *cannot* be defined as an escapist world (this is comparable to Dundes' remarks on folklore¹⁰²):

First, the world of fantasy is not a dream world, a never-never land, but a world that matches ours in reality. The characters confront the same terrors, choices and dilemmas that we do. Why, then, create a fantasy world at all? The reason is to make it possible to confront more openly and daringly a spiritual reality too often ignored in our world of system and fact [...]. Perhaps it is the case that when these realities of the human heart are devalued in daily life, one must look to another world where such realities can be restructured and given credence and value. It follows, then, that the world of fantasy is not an escapist world but one through which we begin to see our own world more clearly.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Ursula K. Le Guin. *The Language of the Night*, 197-198.

¹⁰¹ John H. Timmerman. "Fantasy Literature's Evocative Power," 534.

¹⁰² Cf. Alan Dundes. "Folklore as a Mirror of Culture."

¹⁰³ John H. Timmerman. "Fantasy Literature's Evocative Power," 536.

Finally, the eloquent defense of escapism itself must be considered, as Tolkien puts it in “On Fairy Stories,” in which he differentiates two types of escape that Le Guin also quotes and bases her observations on:

I have claimed that Escape is one of the main functions of fairy-stories, and since I do not disapprove of them, it is plain that I do not accept the tone of scorn or pity with which “Escape” is now so often used: a tone for which the uses of the word outside literary criticism give no warrant at all. In what the misusers are fond of calling Real Life, Escape is evidently as a rule very practical, and may even be heroic. In real life it is difficult to blame it, unless it fails; in criticism it would seem to be the worse the better it succeeds. Evidently we are faced by a misuse of words, and also by a confusion of thought. Why should a man be scorned if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it. In using escape in this way the critics have chosen the wrong word, and, what is more, they are confusing, not always by sincere error, the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter.¹⁰⁴

With this description, Tolkien summarizes the essence of what genre fiction stands for: it has legitimate significance as Le Guin, Landow, Timmerman and Tolkien himself all sought to prove through their analyses of genre fiction and how it is viewed in the modern world, regardless of its persistent presence in society and culture – however, as Tolkien puts it, is it not the “duty of a prisoner to escape?”¹⁰⁵

4.4 Form and Function: Modern Mythology

The last subject of this chapter entails a brief glimpse at the different forms in which fantasy and science fiction can be experienced, with all the benefits outlined in this and the previous chapter, as well as their general function. In order to formulate a comprehensive view of what constitutes modern mythology, it is important to take into account some of the similarities between folklore and genre fiction while indicating some of the signs of development of, or improvement on, e.g. traditional mythology’s role in society, as several authors have done

¹⁰⁴ J. R. R. Tolkien. “On Fairy Stories,” 20.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 20.

extensively, though here they are only quoted briefly. In addition, the changes different media bring to genre fiction and to its role will also be addressed.

To begin, I will return briefly to Kazlev's paper on *mythopoesis* in modern times to express the role genre fiction contends with as a mythopoeic branch of art:

Myths therefore are not static representations of changeless Platonic truths, but dynamic anthropomorphic socio-cultural representations of those aspects of the Imaginal world that impact on human life and society. And just as culture, society, and worldviews evolve, so does myth and myth-making. When they were composed, the creation stories of animistic, henotheistic and monotheistic religions (Magical, Mythic and Axial stages) were totally legitimate explanations. But as knowledge has advanced (Mental-Perspectival/Modern period), their "scientific" value evaporated, so unless one resorts to fundamentalism, they can only be justified either as fables or as symbolic accounts using archaic belief systems. This is why Imaginal truths have to be recreated with each new age and advancement in human understanding. The mythopeticist [*sic*] therefore is someone who will always have things to do.¹⁰⁶

The next subject to consider is that of some actual distinctions made by both fantasy and science fiction, the former of which Maria Nikolajeva provides an overview of by demonstrating a simple change fantasy brings into the literary world compared, as to its folkloric origins. This also serves as an indication of the progression genre fiction indicates, such as the expansion of the scope of subjects which folklore can no longer provide adequate answers to. She writes:

From a limited, positivistic view of the world humankind has turned to a wider, more open view of life. We have thus become sufficiently mature to accept the possibility of the range of phenomena that fantasy deals with: alternative worlds, nonlinear time, extrasensoric [*sic*] perceptivity, and in general all kinds of supernatural events which so far cannot be explained in terms of science, but which we are not willing to ascribe to the traditional fairy-tale magic.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ M. Alan Kazlev. "Mythopoesis in the Modern World," 16.

¹⁰⁷ Maria Nikolajeva. "Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archaic to Postmodern," 140.

In a more extensive review, James E. Beichler, author of “Muggles, Matrix and Silmaril: The Pride of Modern Mythology,”¹⁰⁸ makes the following case for the function of mythology and for the fact that in the modern world, fantasy and science fiction occupy the same place:

Mythologies offer both cultures and individuals a way to explore humanity’s deepest emotional and ethical questions without political, social or philosophical complications. [...] Yet this description of mythologies also applies to modern science fiction and fantasy fiction stories. Science fiction also allows us to explore the universe and possible futures beyond the normal scientific boundaries and laws of nature as prescribed by the present paradigms of science. [...] Within this context, science fiction stories can be considered modern mythologies in that they play the same role in modern culture that traditional mythologies played in older cultures. Quite frankly, science fiction allows the extrapolation and explorations of questions that science can neither ask nor answer due to the strict limits of science under present worldviews and paradigms, a role that traditional mythologies generally play with regard to religion, spirituality and morality.¹⁰⁹

Beichler’s arguments, more lengthily detailed in his handling of what he considers modern mythologies (*The Matrix*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* and *Star Trek*), support not just mythology’s role in handling concepts pertinent to anthropology, psychology and philosophy as discussed in the previous chapter, but also how these dilemmas are further explored in science fiction. For instance, he reasons that science fiction has the potential to further the merging of dualities in human thinking, which mythology already begins to broach, stating that “science fiction is already testing the waters and exploring the merging of science and religion, objective and subjective, matter and mind.”¹¹⁰ Furthermore, he goes on to contrast modern mythology as “metaphors for subjective reality,” citing the increase in the presence of choices in genre fiction.¹¹¹

Darko Suvin, a science fiction critic praised by Le Guin in *The Language of the Night*,¹¹² provides in his essay, “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre,”¹¹³ a different argument for

¹⁰⁸ James E. Beichler. “Muggles, Matrix and Silmaril: The Pride of Modern Mythology.” *The Journal of Spirituality and Paranormal Studies*, 30.3 (2007).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 127.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 128.

¹¹¹ James E. Beichler. “Muggles, Matrix and Silmaril,” 143.

¹¹² Ursula K. Le Guin. *The Language of the Night*, 196.

the importance of science fiction in modern times, calling it “the *literature of cognitive estrangement*.”¹¹⁴ While making his case, he also points out how it differs from both its folkloric roots and fantasy literature, as well, although both fantasy and science fiction are elements of “modern mythology.” He writes:

The importance of science fiction (SF) in our time is on the increase. First, there are strong indications that its popularity in the leading industrial nations [...]. SF has particularly affected some key strata of modern society such as the college graduates, young writers, and general readers appreciative of new sets of values. This is a significant cultural effect which goes beyond any merely quantitative census. Secondly, if one takes as differentiae of SF either *radically different figures* (dramatis personae) or a *radically different context* of the story, it will be found to have an interesting and close kinship with other literary sub-genres, which flourished at different times and places of literary history [...]. Moreover, although SF shares with myth, fantasy, fairy tale and pastoral an opposition to naturalistic or empiricist literary genres, it differs very significantly in approach and social function from such adjoining non-naturalistic or meta-empirical genres. Both of these complementary aspects, the sociological and the methodological, are being vigorously debated among writers and critics in several countries; both testify to the relevance of this genre and the need of scholarly discussion too.¹¹⁵

Finally, as Beichler observes in his essay, the quality of making choices is a significant indication of genre fiction’s purpose in society, which is significant in the next question, that of different media: in the modern world’s *holodeck*, the video game, Beichler’s evidence connecting genre fiction to subjective reality takes on an entirely new dimension. The qualities of video games can be approached both in terms of content, as Lars Konzack does in his essay “Subcreation of Secondary Game Worlds,”¹¹⁶ but also in terms of impact, as J. Cameron Moore describes in his essay “Making Moral Choices in Video Games.”¹¹⁷ Finally, to examine the potential significance of a game, Kyle Munkittrick’s article about the video game trilogy, *Mass Effect*, serves as an example.

¹¹³ Darko Suvin. “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre.” *College English*, 34.3 (1972).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 372.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 372.

¹¹⁶ Lars Konzack. “Subcreation of Secondary Game Worlds.” Portalegre. Portugal. (2006).

¹¹⁷ Moore, J. Cameron. “Making Moral Choices in Video Games.” in *Virtual Lives*. The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, (2011).

Lars Konzack, who analyzes both Tolkien's sub-creation and Jung's archetypes in connection with games in his essay, describes the phenomenon simply: "the secondary game world exploits the computer as media with its own special advantages."¹¹⁸ In Konzack's view – just as with books and film – there are games which have true value, and there are those which lack substance, have no more merit than feeding escapism and which "lack poetics," as he criticizes – but these are by no means the only types of game, as many follow a Tolkienian streak and pass the basic requirement he sees as fundamental, i.e. the creation of "an internal consistent reality."¹¹⁹ His advice to game designers is also very suggestive of what he feels can be defined as a game of quality and substance:

In order to subcreate a vivid world, I suggest that the game designers need to focus more on the philosophical, mythological, and religious cultural aspects of their world, rather than focusing on naïve quests. Not neglecting quests though, a believable game world requires naïve and epic adventures as well as philosophical inter-linkage. The game designer as subcreators must want to say something with their world, and these messages are the basis of the philosophical level of the game world. They do not have to be didactic or moralizing, but the content ought to move the players emotionally as well as sensibly or rationally.¹²⁰

Moore, in his essay on moral choices and video games, writes that video games "may provide not only new artistic possibilities as a form, but also a medium for exploring important ideas."¹²¹ Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, he makes a study of the changes wrought on the mode of participation in genre fiction by the video game, which enables the player to literally *enter* (with limitations) into the Secondary World:

Yet they make possible a different mode of participation, by offering players the opportunity to manipulate elements of secondary worlds that are already fully represented on the screen. Let me explain. When we read "tree" in a fantasy story, we must imaginatively construct a tree in our minds, drawing not only on the

¹¹⁸ Moore, J. Cameron. "Making Moral Choices in Video Games," 7.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 8.

¹²⁰ Lars Konzack. "Subcreation of Secondary Game Worlds," 8.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 69.

author's descriptions, but also on our own experiences. [...] Other than fleshing out fantastic landscapes, characters, and events in this way (or, by contrast, refusing to imagine them more richly than their author has sketched them), we have little agency over the development of the secondary world. [...] In a video game, on the other hand, we encounter a fully imagined tree on the screen. We do not co-imagine the tree, but we must choose whether to cut it down. This requires a fundamentally different sort of participation.¹²²

Moore's observations suggest a potential for video games¹²³ not only to provide "immersive experiences in fantasy stories of good and evil" but also to help players develop "skills of moral perception and decision-making."¹²⁴ However, he notes, many role-playing video games do not do this potential justice. He makes a final suggestion in his essay that the simplest scale to measure the worth of a game on is how deeply players' moral choices impact the game.

An example of the potential and significance of genre fiction video games is the *Mass Effect* trilogy developed by BioWare (a studio of Electronic Arts), which Kyle Munkittrick analyzes in his article "Why Mass Effect is the Most Important Science Fiction Universe of Our Generation."¹²⁵ He splits his argument into three main categories, namely "the medium," "the message" and "the philosophy."¹²⁶

In the first section, Munkittrick observes that "the medium of action-adventure game affords three immediate advantages – setting, casting, and emotional involvement."¹²⁷ Munkittrick points out that while film's visualization of fantasy and science fiction is already a significant change from fiction's long descriptions, it still struggles to manifest variety in casting and setting (e.g. predominantly "humanoid aliens"), Video games, however, eliminate these

¹²² J. Cameron Moore. "Making Moral Choices in Video Games," 72-73.

¹²³ Moore speaks primarily about role-playing video games, which constitute most – though not all – fantasy and science fiction based games, which features the differentiation between good and evil, the ability for the player to make moral choices, etc.

¹²⁴ J. Cameron Moore. "Making Moral Choices in Video Games," 74.

¹²⁵ Kyle Munkittrick. "Why Mass Effect is the Most Important Science Fiction Universe of Our Generation." *Popbioethics*, (2012). <http://www.popbioethics.com/2012/02/why-mass-effect-is-the-most-important-science-fiction-universe-of-our-generation/>

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 1, 4, 5.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 1-2.

problems – as he points out, it takes as much effort for video game developers to create a human as it is to create an alien.¹²⁸

The second advantage is even more significant, however: the ability to customize the main character. Considering Timmerman’s convictions regarding the improvement that the “common character” of genre fiction is compared to a traditional Hero character, the video game’s ability to customize characters, without losing the advantage of a set protagonist, represents an apex to the ability to connect with characters and learn through their experience, as Munkittrick suggests in the third advantage he sees in the medium of the video game: emotional involvement. He also points out the modern significance of being able to create a character who may be “a non-white, non-male, non-straight person as the main character of a blockbuster action science fiction story.”¹²⁹

The third advantage Munkittrick explores is both “emotional investment” and “moral decision-making,” which, as Moore explores in his essay, are very significant features of video games. Regarding decision-making, there are three qualities of decisions made in *Mass Effect* which set it apart from other role-playing video games:

First, decisions are not a function of gameplay but of narrative. Mission difficulty will often remain unaffected by choices, where as [*sic*] character reactions, relationships, and entire narrative arcs will be altered significantly by every choice. Second, decisions are persistent through each installment in the series. The combined decisions in *Mass Effect 1* and *Mass Effect 2* create over 1,000 variables to be imported into *Mass Effect 3*. The third element of decisions in *Mass Effect* is the scale of decisions. Choices to not research a given technology or to seek retribution against a helpless foe might result in the death of a major character or the addition of a new one. Further, each decision is clouded by an insufficient amount of information. Players often act in the dark, evaluating and analyzing the he-said-she-said of characters whose motivations are rarely selfless or noble.¹³⁰

Furthermore, as Munkittrick observes, this decision-making process is essential for the players’ emotional investment:

¹²⁸ Kyle Munkittrick. “Why Mass Effect is the Most Important,” 2.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 3.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 3.

Mass Effect's deep decision-making system is finely tuned to draw out realistic responses from players. During an interview I had with Daniel Erickson, lead writer for *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, he revealed two key elements of BioWare's process that makes their games ideal for ethical exploration. The first is that quality voice acting triggers complex emotional responses in players. The second is that allowing players to choose their next line in conversation based on emotion, not the precise words written down, creates a huge level of investment by the player in the main character. Erickson mentioned that *Mass Effect* was the first time players had overwhelmingly identified the *main* character, Shepard, as their favorite character in an RPG. Caring about your character means you care how your character is perceived by others, you care how that character interacts with the world in relation to your value system, and you care about the same things and individuals as your character does.¹³¹

In exploring the message and the philosophy of *Mass Effect*, Munkittrick highlights significant subjects of modern times above and beyond not only other video games, but also beyond science fiction as a whole. As evidence he gives the presence of several important questions, that were posited by science fiction authors in the past, all within the same story (such as “the creation of intelligent machines and subsequent war,” “the effects of catastrophic climate change and overpopulation,” “uplifting and sterilization of a species,” etc.¹³²) and placing humanity's perceptions onto a different scale: “human beings are delusional about their importance in the grand scheme of things.”¹³³ Within this perspective, Munkittrick lists three indications of this main message:

First, the actions of many major human characters almost always have a subtle undercurrent of petulance or entitlement. [...] Second, the lowering of human status diffuses any xenophobic urges a player might have. [...] Third, by undermining the player's sense of pride in being human, *Mass Effect* also opens doors to what would likely be highly controversial discussions were humanity 'in charge.'¹³⁴

¹³¹ Kyle Munkittrick. “Why Mass Effect is the Most Important,” 3.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

In closing, Munkittrick poses the final question of why this subject – and why *Mass Effect* in particular – is significant in terms of the issues it covers:

Mass Effect is the first blockbuster franchise in the postmodern era to directly confront a godless, meaningless universe indifferent to humanity. Amid the entertaining game play, the interspecies romance, and entertaining characters, cosmological questions about the value of existence influence every decision. The game is about justifying *survival*, not of mere intelligent life in the universe, the Reapers are that, but of a *kind* of intelligence. Therein the triple layered question – What value does galactic civilization bring to the universe; What value does humanity bring to galactic civilization, and What value do I bring to humanity – forces the player to recontextualize [*sic*] his or her participation in the experiment of existence.¹³⁵

Munkittrick's analysis of *Mass Effect* not only demonstrates the effectiveness of genre fiction, but also that of its expression through video games. While, as Konzack points out, not all video games are created with care and have substance worth exploring, the new dimensions Moore talks about, and which Munkittrick's analysis of the *Mass Effect* trilogy exemplifies, bring a new dynamic to the considerations Beichler, Le Guin, Suvin and others pose with regard to the role genre fiction plays.

¹³⁵ Kyle Munkittrick. "Why Mass Effect is the Most Important," 8.

5 CONCLUSION

In the hypotheses put forth by this thesis, it has been suggested that fantasy may offer a reconnection between past and present by the transference of folklore elements into it, and that science fiction offers a bridge between past, present and future. In order to determine the validity of these claims, anthropological, psychological and philosophical considerations have been deemed as the most revealing approaches. By exploring the past and present of genre fiction, it becomes clear that it does, indeed, assume a role in society that in the past was occupied by mythology. Furthermore, upon consideration of how mythology affects people, it can be said that its role is an important one. Finally, by examining the legitimacy of the connection between reader/experiencer and non-existent characters, places and events, speculating on the possible negative effects and by briefly exploring what subjects genre fiction touches upon in its role as modern mythology, it is also clearly demonstrated that not only is mythology – in this new, modern form – present today, but that it continually develops towards the future and molds itself over time to the changes humanity undergoes.

In the first chapter, the pervasive and significant nature of folklore has been analyzed primarily by examining the works of Alan Dundes, who suggests that folklore is very much alive today, despite common beliefs to the contrary. Not only that, but it also serves as a kind of virtual framework, a *holodeck*, within which society's current issues, questions and taboos may be explored. As the following chapter reveals, possibly the most effective expression of folklore as a *holodeck* is genre fiction, which shares many of the traits outlined by Dundes. Secondly, the essay cited by Eugenia Soumaki and Dimitris Anagnostopoulos offers a glimpse into Jungian psychology, wherein mythology is shown to still have relevance for the psyches of young people and to society in general. In this regard, genre fiction's *mythopoesis* may be considered in a more literal fashion as being "modern mythology," the full depth of its importance revealing itself through Soumaki's – and other psychologists' – studies.

Through the work of Norman Kreitman, the second chapter introduces the concept of the mechanics of how readers/experiencers are able to absorb the mythical, fairy tale, and ultimately fantasy and science fiction material, and experience them almost as reality. Furthermore, the changes and adaptations of transferred folklore material within genre fiction is explored through the thoughts of John Timmerman and others, offering evidence of both an evolution and the

adaptability of the joint phenomena of folklore and genre fiction. By examining these changes, Ursula K. Le Guin's "true myth" begins to show itself for what it is: a living, pervasive element of human society and culture, as well as a balancing factor to modern times, which Le Guin, Tolkien and others give significance to in the form of what may be called "legitimate escapism." Finally, by exploring the continually growing phenomenon of genre fiction, the new dimensions different media, especially video games, bring to the exploration of the human psyche and society's issues, the true potential of fantasy and science fiction is revealed.

As a final point, fantasy and science fiction truly show themselves to be the folklore of the new age. Through the connections to past, present and future, humanity's evolution – whether on an individual or collective level –, genre fiction offers the support of a *holodeck* wherein life's questions and problems may be fully explored.

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