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**Reassessing the Relevance of the Fantasy Genre
Through the Influence of George MacDonald**

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Introduction

The fantasy genre has been delegitimized, belittled, and rejected by the scholarly communities from the second half of the twentieth century. Authors such as Darko Suvin supported and further developed on the superiority of science fiction over fantasy based on the non-empirical arbitrariness of fantastic narratives (Suvin, 1972). Limited to the stereotyped conception of plain character tropes and mere escapism, this genre has been relegated to entertainment, resulting in its forgotten critical functionality and genealogy in favour of genres such as science fiction and speculative fiction.

Despite its academic underestimation it is undeniable that, with the success of different cultural products and the emergence of new authors, the fantasy genre has successfully carved itself out a niche within the literary world and popular culture. Thus, its literary value as part of the collective imagery and its insights on different perceptions of the world are worthy of study. Through this dissertation, I invite the reader on a journey from the present to the past and back again. The first chapter deals with contemporary literary theories on the speculative fiction, fantasy and science fiction genres from the 1970s and 1980s as a starting point. Suvin's hypotheses will be contrasted with other approaches that introduce the idea of the fantastic as a 'mode' and its intersectional relationships with horror and fairy tale (Jackson, 2009) as well as with Atwood's conception of fantasy and speculative fiction (Atwood, 2011). However, these approaches that put genres in pigeonholes and uphold some as superior or 'higher literature' are too restrictive and have been revised over the years. These revisions have given room to more nuanced readings of the potentials of the fantasy genre. Thus, in this first chapter I will redefine fantasy as an inclusive and embracing genre. In the second chapter, in a movement that can be analogous to a fantasy journey to the past, a visit to the Victorian fantasy of the nineteenth century will follow. I will discuss how fantasy departs from myth and legend so as to adopt a more didactic identity in the historical context of Scottish Christian writer George MacDonald, the forefather of fantasy literature, as well as the tremendous influence of this one writer on the fantasy genre as we know it today. MacDonald has been acclaimed for his ability to transmit his revolutionary depiction of Christianity within the pagan imagery of the Germanic folklore. Therefore, I considered his first ever fantasy novel *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women* (originally published in 1858) to be the literary work that best meets the spiritual needs and existential questions of the human being through its many complex themes and character development, transmitting the true essence of the fantasy genre. Once I have established

MacDonald's role as fantasy's precursor, time will accelerate up to the 1950s. In the third chapter, I will analyse the remnants of Victorian Fantasy within the work of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien. As MacDonald's pronounced literary descendants, Tolkien and Lewis were presented as the most important fantasy writers of the twentieth century. I will provide a literary analysis of Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* (1950) compared to MacDonald's *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women* in order to acknowledge the genealogical connection between them. With this comparison, I want to shed light on the evolution of the themes found in MacDonald's work in the twentieth century and prove that 'the fantastic' is to be considered an ever-changing, living literary genre that reflects reality in its own, unique way whilst keeping its essence. I will devote the last chapter to acknowledging fantasy's offspring and its presence in the contemporary world of the twenty-first century. Not only will I analyse fantasy's legacy, but also briefly discuss its new manifestations in the narrative resources of multiverse and multiple narrators as well as its projection into one of the most successful cultural texts of the twenty-first century: the videogame.

With this dissertation I seek to acknowledge the useful, critical, and didactic value of fantasy literature, as well as its rightful place in the scholarly world alongside science fiction and speculative narratives. This dissertation is arranged in a timeline structure that allows the reader to fully experience the maturing process of the genre. I want to prove that, by revisiting fantasy's past, we understand its humanistic value and discover where we came from, spiritually speaking; and that it is by retracing its history up to the present that we realize how much we have changed with it.

Chapter 1. Defining Science Fiction and Fantasy: Critical Approaches from Suvin to Atwood

The difficulty of categorizing fantasy as a 'genre' has blurred the limits of its definition, resulting in a confusing myriad of subgenres. Fantasy is conceived around the idea of imaginative fiction attached to the often-supernatural estrangement of characters and timeless settings. Horror literature and fairy tales have been labelled as fantasy's subcategories by Rosemary Jackson in her book *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981), due to their display of supernatural elements. She analyses the intrinsic features that determine their different psychoanalytical perspectives in an attempt to label fantasy as a subcategory of fiction alongside horror and fairy tale, rather than a genre.

Despite the ambiguity of fantasy as a literary genre, many scholars firmly describe it as science fiction's counterpart in an attempt to establish a 'canonical superiority'. According to this approach, science fiction would be characterised as a fixed literary genre that attains the critical recognition that fantasy fails to accomplish. This premise is based on the 'logic and reason' behind science fiction's imagined scientific and technological advancements of futuristic settings that have undergone some sort of environmental anomalies, and its tendency to explore the outer space. Scholar and writer Darko Suvin advocates for this hypothesis in his article "On the Poetics of Science Fiction" (1972), analysed below. The fact that science fiction enjoys more academic recognition than fantasy may lead to the following conclusion: everyone is allowed to flirt with the 'supernatural' in the process of writing fiction, yet critical recognition will depend on the 'cognitive' background of such supernatural features.

The introduction of speculative fiction has done away with the apparently binary division of science fiction and fantasy. Even though its premises have been present since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, speculative fiction as literary genre was first coined by Robert Heinlein in 1947 in relation to the speculative features of science fiction. In the early twenty-first century Margaret Atwood would broaden its limits in order to best suit her perspective on literary theory. She would argue that both fantasy and science fiction actually share similar features in her essay collection *In Other Worlds* (2011), also discussed below.

The first chapter of this dissertation attempts to describe the fantasy genre as a much deeper and impactful genre by contextualizing these different contemporary perspectives from the 1970s onwards. Generally depicted as the representations of the distant dreams of long-gone times and mystical beings that defy the logics of reality, fantasy stands for part of the individual's understanding of the world; a self-defining characteristic that has been overlooked as mere escapism by the scholarly world (Suvin, 1972).

Jackson supports the principle that defines fantasy as the negation of the real world and argues for the provocative nature of fantasy literature. Fantasy's tendency to question authoritative truths with ambiguity and uncertainty is stated together with its versatility, which allows the genre to play with timeless settings and broken notions of character and language.

Many other interpretations have stemmed from such basic principle. Jackson dwells in fantasy's relevance inside and outside secular communities. She supports Sartre's conception of fantasy as a genre that allows us to transcend the human. In doing so, fantasy

is not meant to create new worlds, but to turn reality upside-down and make that which is 'strange' the norm. Therefore, fantasy's ability to transform the world entails that "without a context of faith in supernaturalism (whether sacred or secular), fantasy is an expression of human forces" (Jackson, 2009: 10). By aligning with this idea, fantasy becomes one of the main representations of faith. Consequently, its relevance in secularized and non-secularized cultures is of prime importance in order to understand its function.

According to Jackson "In a secularized culture, the desire for otherness is not displaced into alternative regions of heaven or hell, but is directed towards the absent areas of the world, transforming it into something 'other' than the familiar" (Jackson, 2009: 11). This statement proves that the predetermined difference between the 'real' and the 'unreal' is behind the human perception of the empirical environment that surrounds it. Consequently, fantasy would exist in the midst of an undefined area within the spectrum of reality and imagination, where their differences shatter. The fact that fantasy needs 'reality' to exist in order to create the disruptive ambiguity that defines it justifies the natural coexistence of the 'real' and the 'imaginary'. We often find this premise embedded in fantasy narratives such as *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (1971), in which fantasy exists as the opposite reflection of reality. According to this theory, other major literary works such as Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915) would be labelled as 'fantasy' because of its inherent contrariety to the real world and its defiant transformations and illusions (Jackson, 2009). By means of these supernatural elements this genre manages to 'disturb' the reader and break absolute truths. Contrastingly, imagination and otherness are already represented in the religious figures of every non-secularized community. The religious fantasies that stem out of this environment entail elements such as heaven and hell, angels, devils etc. These would establish a more conciliatory image with reality than that of secular communities (Jackson, 2009). While religious narratives similar to those of *The Lord of The Rings* (1954) and *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* (fourteenth century) might embody human transcendence in non-secularized societies, secular communities will resort to narratives based on human fears and delusions to evoke their own idea of transcendence. These co-related conceptions of the fantasy genre are to be understood as the 'marvellous' and the 'uncanny'.

The notion of 'the marvellous' and 'the uncanny' as opposites within the fantasy genre is needed in order to introduce Tzvetan Todorov's fantasy diagram. Jackson supported the fact that this literary device attempted to classify the differences between Gothic horror and fairy tales in relation to fantasy. According to Todorov, horror narratives such as Poe's stories would be set in the 'pure uncanny' because of its straightforward use of the

supernatural in the darkest, most real ways possible. Followed by Poe we would find Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), in which the supernatural elements are close to the uncanny, yet the implicit existence of ghosts may display its fantastic qualities. On the opposite extreme of the diagram there is the 'marvellous'. Attached to the utter representation of human transcendence, marvellous narratives are associated with made-up worlds often set in a distant past. This feature would limit the reader's implication in the story. In this extreme we find Tolkien and The Grimm Brothers as some of the most iconic authors. It is at the centre of this diagram that Todorov places 'the fantastic'. Lewis' and MacDonald's literary works break the binary division between the 'marvellous' and 'uncanny' because of the coexistence of 'real' and 'imaginary' worlds within the same narrative. The Pevensie siblings' journey to Narnia in *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* (Lewis, 1950) and Anodos' trip to Fairyland in *Phantastes* (MacDonald, 1858) reflect this literary device that takes the reader into other worlds that are supposed to be as authentic as the 'real' world. Todorov's representation leads Jackson to conceive fantasy as a 'mode' rather than a 'genre', alleging that it was first described as a genre in the nineteenth century, when it developed simultaneously to the novel, "a genre which it undermined" (Jackson, 2009: 20).

Jackson provides an in depth look into the essence and implications of the fantastic. The psychoanalytic division between horror, fantasy and fairy tale help to understand the different ways in which fantasy is able to express human reality. However, their depiction of separate 'modes' based on their inherent differences disregards 'the fantastic' as the common quality of the three, delegitimizing its relevance. The fact that the nineteenth century conventions of the novel went against the principles of fantasy does not necessarily mean that it was less of a genre like realism either. The conception of fantasy as a genre that encompasses horror and fairy tale not as pigeonholed concepts, but as different expressions of itself, is to be considered when looking for a solid definition amongst the blurred boundaries of literary genres.

In his article "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre" (1972), Darko Suvin argues that science fiction's success is built around cognitivism. He compares its similitudes with fantasy and fairy tale respectively and, ultimately, concludes that the cognitive nature of science fiction makes it more useful, educational, and relatable than fantasy or fairy tales. Suvin argues that both science fiction and fantasy originate from a non-empiricist depiction of reality, a process of estrangement. The estrangement from which these genres derive is of prime relevance in order to understand Suvin's perspective, and why it should be challenged. He argues that, despite sharing its origin with fantasy, science fiction's non-naturalistic nature

is based on cognitive principles. He also argues that science fiction has many times been labelled as 'non-realistic' because of the subjective implications of 'reality'. As a result, instead of talking about 'reality' Suvin talks about the author's "empirical environment" (Suvin, 1972: 373). He believes that, by reflecting reality, science fiction also finds its roots in the inquisitive nature of the human being, representing a natural quality that is intrinsically embedded in the aspect of the 'greater good'. Consequently, science fiction would base its scientific rigour on the fictional framework that characterizes it. Suvin also identifies estrangement as the fictional background of science fiction. According to him, the notion of estrangement is "one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" (Suvin, 1972: 374). Thus, he proposes that estrangement is both cognitive and creative, and that it should be applied to art as well as science (Suvin, 1972).

The author compares the use of estrangement in myth and science fiction. The main difference between these two literary genres is that the myth's human relations are completely fixed and predetermined by supernatural forces. On the other hand, science fiction's use of estrangement would make it "see the norms of any age, including emphatically its own, as unique, changeable, and therefore subject to *cognitive glance*" (Suvin, 1972: 375, original emphasis). While the myth's main purpose was to provide direct explanations of the essence of natural phenomena, science fiction would seek for an explanation based on the scientific method, in which existential issues are first posited as questions and then explored.

Thus, from all the genres that make use of estrangement, Suvin would conceive science fiction as the most outstanding because its cognitivism would differentiate it from myth, fairy tale and fantasy. His definition of science fiction illustrates his reasoning as follows: "*SF is, then literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the essence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment*" (Suvin, 1972: 375, original emphasis).

Suvin's reflection on fairy tale is that it makes use of estrangement through imagination. He also dwells on the fact that imagination's role is not to make fairy tale's reality more understandable, but to take advantage of its estrangement and defy even more the laws of the real world. Darko Suvin uses a flying carpet to exemplify fairy tale's constant provocation to physical laws. This wish-fulfilling characteristic would be both fairy tales' strength and major weakness because its stories take place on totally alternative worlds ruled by convenient arbitrariness. As the author states: "Anything is possible in a fairy tale, because a fairy tale is manifestly impossible" (Suvin, 1972: 375).

Suvin's attempts to legitimize science fiction as the best of the three literary genres linked by their dependence on estrangement, and his rejection of fairy tale and fantasy because of their lack of cognition are, ultimately, illogical. His efforts to compare different interpretations of estrangement leave behind the positive input that genres such as the fairy tale and fantasy have offered society. Instead of conceiving these related genres as different, valid reflections of reality, Suvin dwells on the idea that "SF retrogressing into fairy tale (e.g. 'space opera' with a her-princess-monster in an astronautic costume) is committing creative suicide" (Suvin, 1972: 375). Simultaneously, the author defines fantasy stories as the cursed offspring of science fiction and fairy tale because of their "grotesque tension between arbitrary supernatural phenomena and the empirical norms they infiltrate" (Suvin, 1972: 376).

Concerning character dynamics, Suvin holds that the fairy tale world is positively oriented towards the protagonist. To him, fairy tale is to heroic myth the same that fantasy is to tragic myth. In terms of character-world relationships he is right about how the fantastic narration builds its protagonist. Not only have many fantasy authors acknowledged the Christian influence when developing their main characters' journeys, but also exploited 'the chosen one' figure as a recurrent archetype alongside the theme of sacrifice for a 'greater good'. These topics have been passed down to us from the creation of *Beowulf* (eleventh century) to, for instance, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* (1997). However, Suvin still recognizes those relations as a major flaw when comparing the archetypal fantasy protagonist to science fiction's. To him, success is as probable as failure in the sci-fi world.

On the other hand, he also establishes major differences on how fairy tale, fantasy and science fiction conceive time. Whereas the time settings of a fairy tale are most probably inspired by a past "which is outside time" (Suvin, 1972: 378), fantasy is located in a disturbed perception of the present. Contrastingly, the author maintains that science fiction is also more mature and analogous to the modern society's philosophy because it can be successfully located in a real and imaginary past, present and future. Science fiction is, therefore, able to revisit a historic past, deal with the issues of the present and reflect on the fears and uncertainties of the future in a didactic way. These features would lead the author to characterize science fiction as the most 'meta-empirical', educational and valuable genre of the three (Suvin, 1972).

According to Suvin, such is science fiction's superiority that it "can thus be used as a hand-maiden of futurological foresight in technology, ecology, sociology etc." (Suvin, 1972: 379). He also builds this genre's quality around its analogous nature by stating that its laws

are allowed to flirt with the fantastic “as long as they are logically, philosophically and mutually consistent” (Suvin, 1972: 379), which comes out as a rather convenient argument to support his thesis. Science fiction’s analogous nature goes to the extent of developing highly sophisticated philosophical concerns in some of its works, such as Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* (1915), which differentiates science fiction from the mainstream writing (Suvin, 1972). Thus, the author reasserts himself stating that science fiction’s cognitivism “eventually contributes to the understanding of the most mundane matters” (Suvin, 1972: 380), and labels it as a “deeper and more lasting sources of enjoyment” (Suvin, 1972: 381), which also “discusses primarily the political, psychological, anthropological *use and effect of sciences, and philosophy of science*” (Suvin, 1972: 381, original emphasis). Consequently, Darko Suvin ends his article stating that science fiction demands its readers of the highest level of cognition in order to be correctly understood. He ultimately depicts this genre as an “educational literature [...] shaped by the pathos of preaching the good word of human curiosity, fear, and hope” (Suvin, 1972: 381).

Despite his attempts to highlight science fiction as the most valuable literary genre against fantasy and fairy tale, his arguments based on cognitivism seem utterly subjective. Not only is Suvin deliberately undermining fantasy and fairy tale’s literary value, but he is also establishing an elitist hierarchy in order to justify the study of science fiction while disregarding fantasy and fairy tale as pure escapism. The author is acknowledging the non-empirical origins based on estrangement of science fiction, fantasy and fairy tale as the primal flaw, while praising science fiction for being built around the concept of cognitivism. If we are to consider estrangement and imagination the least valuable literary resorts, then there is no point in praising one above the others regardless of whether it is based on cognitivism or not.

Contrasting with Suvin’s arguments, we find the inclusive perspective of other renowned authors such as Margaret Atwood. While science fiction defenders praised the genre for its usefulness whilst depicting unrealistic future scenarios, Margaret Atwood pointed at science fiction and fantasy’s speculative nature as the crux of the matter. In her essay book *In Other Worlds* (2011), Atwood is confronted by Ursula Le Guin’s idea of science fiction as “speculative fiction about things that really could happen, whereas things that could not happen she classifies as “fantasy” (Atwood, 2011: 6). Le Guin’s conception of science fiction and fantasy as opposites is partially related to Suvin’s, except she does not attribute canonical superiority to neither. It is true that part of science fiction is inherently speculative, as Atwood maintains “Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* might squeeze into Le Guin’s “science

fiction” because its author had its grounds for believing that electricity actually might be able to reanimate dead flesh” (Atwood, 2011: 6). This is how science fiction’s cognitivism leads readers and authors alike to think of it as fantasy’s natural counterpart. However, once the ‘cognitive’ arguments are outdated, it regresses into the same ‘impossible’ condition of fairy tale and fantasy. Therefore, fantasy and fairy tale are not inferior to science fiction, but equally worthy of study.

Margaret Atwood’s perspective on the differences of fantasy and science fiction when classifying them as literary genres is the following: “dragons would belong in fantasy, as would [...] the film *Star Wars*” (Atwood, 2011: 6). She argued that, if fantasy’s arbitrariness makes the genre dissociate from reality, so does science fiction’s, regardless of how cognitive it may seem. If we consider dragons rationally impossible, so should we consider the birth of Frankenstein’s Creature nowadays, regardless of how ‘logical’ the premise may have seemed in the nineteenth century. As for writing about potentially possible events, both science fiction and fantasy fail to accomplish this goal. To Atwood, speculative fiction rises as the closest definition Darko Suvin attempted to attribute to science fiction. Margaret Atwood takes her novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) as a referent of speculative fiction. As she has many times stated, she depicted the perils that occurred to women in the distant past as well as some of the most shocking references to their present reality in this dystopian narrative.

The fact that the borders of a literary genre are never fixed, but slipping back and forth is crucial to understand that science fiction and fantasy are not as different as Suvin thought. This ambiguity is inherently present in the categorization of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* by Jackson and Suvin as fantasy and science fiction respectively, and it is also relevant when considering Atwood’s premise, for sometimes science fiction and fantasy are also prompt to speculation. Suvin’s definition of science fiction around cognitivism is absolutely valid, yet it should not be used to debunk fantasy and fairy tale’s literary value. Jackson’s limited conception of fantasy as a ‘mode’ separated from horror and fairy tale is also unproductive. The fantasy genre is, one way or another, rooted in science fiction, speculative fiction and horror. The aim of this dissertation is not to glorify the fantasy genre as the ultimate literary manifestation, but to redefine it as an inclusive and embracing genre that counts with its own historical presence and the ability to develop a didactic and useful nature. I will prove these arguments in the next chapter, inviting readers into a time travel to the past, focusing specifically on one of the precursors of the fantasy genre in nineteenth-century Scotland. It

is through George MacDonald's fantasy novel *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women* that the best qualities of this disregarded genre will be explored and rightfully acknowledged.

Chapter 2. Rewind to Victorian fantasy: The Legacy of George MacDonald

That most religions around the world are founded on the 'unreal' supports the idea behind the human urge to resort to the supernatural. The outlasting trail of pagan mythology that is still embedded within various social imageries is prime evidence of the spiritual value of these stories. The perpetuation of both 'the religious' and 'the fantastic' seeks to meet the spiritual needs of the human being. When it comes to the written expression of pagan myths, we find that ancient literary works such as the eleventh century epic poem *Beowulf* have set the referents of fantasy and fairy tales. Inspired by Germanic folklore, this anonymous literary milestone set the precedents of 'the hero's journey' as well as that of the 'almighty saviour' on the quest to free the world from all evil. As a result, we find inherent similitudes in the mechanisms of the medieval poetry of *The Arthurian Sagas* of the Middle Ages, which influenced early writers in Victorian times.

During the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century, authors such as George MacDonald and the Grimm brothers allowed pagan folklore to transcend myth, legend, and epic. The spread of education to the lower classes and rural areas favoured the birth of fantasy literature as we know it, as well as the transmission of its spiritual message. George MacDonald (1824-1905) was a Scottish writer, poet, and Christian Congregational minister in the times of Calvinist Scotland. From an early age he was very close with Celtic mythology and literature while growing up in the midst of the fierce protestant Calvinism of his grandmother and the well-read and open-minded environment of his uncle and his father. MacDonald acquired a rich background of folklore, fairy tales, Bible stories and literary history. Therefore, the religious contradiction between the Calvinist belief in predestination and the Scottish tradition of pagan myths, legends and stories was reflected on the author's understanding of his times. MacDonald had to delay his plans to study physics and mathematics in Aberdeen (Scotland) and went to London University to do some tutoring, where he met Preacher Alexander John Scott. A. J. Scott passed down his passion about rediscovering the U. K.'s forgotten folklore and history to MacDonald through his seminars. The fact that the knowledge about ancient cultural folklore and tradition was not only unknown to the common people, but also to the educated spheres of universities such as Oxford and Cambridge was the crux of the matter. Consequently, some of the most relevant

British literary milestones such as *Beowulf*, the *Arthurian Sagas*, and authors such as Shakespeare were once forgotten by the British society.

MacDonald became a writer in his attempt of re-historing the British culture. Some of his most controversial conceptions of faith influenced by the German romantics like the poet, philosopher, and writer Novalis (1772-1801) inspired him to defy the upright concept of religious damnation. MacDonald wrote sermons about a God that predicated a universal love that would prevail after death and sin had disappeared in a redeeming, hopeful Christian message. Ironically, these ‘unspoken’ sermons would have his salary reduced to the point that he could no longer keep his position as Christian Congregational minister. Yet, it is after moving to Hastings with his family that he would start writing the first ever work of fantasy literature that got to deeply dwell in *The Arthurian Sagas’* reminiscence. With A. J. Scott’s doctrines and his own conception of God combined, MacDonald wrote and published *Phantastes, A Faerie Romance for Men and Women* in 1858 (“Works of George MacDonald”).

The protagonist of this novel, Anodos is a twenty-one-year-old young man that is sent from the real world into a journey through Fairyland. During his adventures he comes across some of the most irrational creatures, as well as all kinds of adversities and life lessons. Not only does he experience the marvellous characteristics of the magical world of Fairyland, but also learns about the pleasures, duties and sorrows that growing up into adulthood entail. MacDonald manages to explore the most painful perils of human life such as death and sacrifice within the marvellous imagery of an irrational, pagan world. Contrastingly, it is through Anodos’ bildungsroman that the author succeeds in depicting his optimistic Christian message of personal growth, discovering the true meaning of love and honour, and culminating into one of the most honest celebrations of life that literature has ever conceived. This chapter focuses on three aspects of the novel that give shape to MacDonald’s text as one of the earliest works of modern fantasy. The first section explores the key aspects of estrangement and intertextuality in the construction of Fairyland as a fictional framework. The next section discusses the relevance of ‘the Shadow’ as the main antagonistic force of the novel, which is crucial for the main character’s development. Finally, the third section tackles the completion of Anodos’ bildungsroman through his ultimate sacrifice and redemption. With these analyses I hope to demonstrate that fantasy as a literary genre can convey a strong metaphysical message and deserves careful academic attention ever since its development during the nineteenth century.

2.1. Estrangement and intertextuality in the fictional framework of fairyland

The notion of ‘estrangement’ is deeply rooted within the purpose of this novel. When questioned by his little sister about the way to Fairyland, Anodos cannot give a clear answer. It is not until he inherits the keys of his deceased father’s secretary desk that the reality of his environment is first questioned. The apparition of a fairylike magical being, who claims to be Anodos’ lost ancestor, defies both the main character and the reader’s conception of reality.

Darko Suvin’s attribution of estrangement to science fiction (Suvin, 1972) is challenged by *Phantastes*’ starting point. MacDonald questions the sceptical attitude of the nineteenth-century society throughout the entire novel by means of Anodos’ great grandmother’s statement: “Ah! That is always the way with you men; you believe nothing the first time; and it is foolish enough to let mere repetition convince you of what consider in itself unbelievable.” (MacDonald, 2019: 5). Thereupon, Anodos’ personal, spiritual journey will help him recall some of the blissful times of his childhood as well as the most sorrowful misfortunes of life.

Once in the woods of Fairyland, the main character comes across the human denizens of a cottage, a mother and her child. The pagan imagery of the Scottish tradition bursts with life within MacDonald’s novel. To him, the fairies represent the gatekeepers of ‘fantasy’, for being able to discern them is but a test of faith and disposition. The fact that they are intrinsically linked to childhood by nature reinforces the author’s longing and admiration towards the blind, unquestioning faith in imagination proper of children. While the country fairies embody the childish and immature jokes of children, the garden fairies burst with lively emotions and display a docile temper towards humans in their little flower homes. Their intrinsic relation with mother nature is also part of their complex biology and MacDonald’s industrialist criticism. As Anodos concludes, “there is a strange resemblance, almost oneness, between the flower and the fairy, which you could not describe, but which described itself to you” (MacDonald, 2019: 25). The author conveys the wishful traits of the fairies through ambiguous descriptions that enhance the notion of ‘estrangement’ as well as through language, for they communicate in verse rather than prose.

Surrounded by a halo of uncanny mysticism, the woods are also tainted with a primitive, unconscious fear that exploits the fantasy genre’s ability to reproduce the ‘uncanny’

(Jackson, 2009) in the traditional setting of the dangerous forest, alluding to ancient folklore. MacDonald appeals to this common feeling when describing the savage nature of the Ash Tree. The woman and her child live in constant fear of it, and it is later revealed that this tree is the lethargic form of the ogre: an opportunistic long-clawed, heinous, giant man-eater that will stalk the main character throughout the first part of the story.

The natural laws of Fairyland also seem to take advantage of time's ambiguity. According to MacDonald, most of these creatures do not appear in broad daylight nor in the dead of night, but at dusk. As stated by the cottage woman: "there is no danger in the daytime [...] but there is something unusual going on in the woods; there must be some solemnity among the fairies to-night, for all these trees are restless, and although they cannot come awake, they see and hear in their sleep" (MacDonald, 2019: 18). As the border between day and night, twilight represents the crossroads where absolute opposites such as life and death, time and eternity, and reality and fantasy meet. To MacDonald, its inbetweenness represents the perfect storm in which reality merges with the supernatural. Consequently, 'the fantastic' exists in the midst of 'liminal spaces', and it is within that same 'liminality' that 'estrangement' is included. MacDonald has also exploited this narrative device in his fairy tale *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872), in which the young princess Irene and her nurse are attacked by the underground goblins and their army of creatures in the castle surroundings at twilight.

Intertextuality is also a relevant concept concerning MacDonald's relationship with his inspirations and the way he applied elements of other works into his narrative. Intertextuality in MacDonald's work can be explicit. As a guest, Anodos is allowed to stay in the cottage and read about the adventures of Sir Percival, one of the legendary knights of the *Arthurian Sagas* in a fairy tale. Therefore, references to the *Arthurian Sagas* and other myths such as *Pygmalion* are directly addressed by the main character. The author uses this explicit intertextuality for the reader to lose perception of the limit that separates reality from fiction, for Anodos is reading the story of 'fictional' characters that actually exist in Fairyland. As this limit blurs, MacDonald is questioning the readers' understanding of the real world. Influenced by the German Romantic Novalis, the author of *Phantastes* exploited the didactic value behind the concept of the unreliable perception of reality. Novalis considered the meaning of dreams within reality very relevant, but it was MacDonald who adopted his point of view and took it further, creating narratives in which dreams and reality were not delimited by any boundaries. John Pridmore claims that "MacDonald responds to the summons of Novalis to step across the boundaries of our everyday world and he invites his reader to accompany him" (Pridmore, 2003: 51). Therefore, it is after adopting Novalis' point of view

on reality's uncertainty that MacDonald further develops this concept with the explicit intertextuality of Fairyland. This open-minded perspective enables him to break free from the Calvinist doctrines in his pursuit of a more embracing spirituality. MacDonald succeeded in evoking some of the most 'real' human issues such as death in the irrational world of Fairyland thanks to his faith in imagination and his perfect use of estrangement.

2.2. The role of the Shadow in Anodos' quest for self-identity

The journey Anodos experiences is not limited to an empirical reality. Every setting of Fairyland evokes some kind of spiritual symbolism. The kind-hearted temper of the protective Beech Tree, the mysterious innocence of the Marble Lady and Sir Percival's honourable yet troubled demeanour are but metaphorical allusions to Anodos' coming of age process. MacDonald's ability to transcend the literary and appeal directly to the readers' experiences through his characters reinforces the cathartic power of the novel whilst setting the precedence for future fantasy. The sorrows and existential perils of the human realm are perfectly translated into Fairyland in the form of the Shadow. Hence, the addition of death and trauma as inflection points differentiates *Phantastes* from other traditional fairy tales of its time. It also adds to the allegorical comparison of Anodos' journey to the classical epic and the hero's downfall while retaining the author's hopeful ultimate message.

What begins as a search for the way back to reality ends up being a quest to find oneself. During his journey, Anodos finds a cave in which there is marble statue in the shape of a woman. After remembering the pagan Greek myth of *Pygmalion*, he bursts into song in hopes of giving life to the Marble Lady. Pennington dwells in the nature of the fantastic and metafictional nature of Fairyland. As he points out, "in a world in which "[r]eading and writing [...] represent reality since fiction is fact" (Pennington, 1988: 28), the Christian and pagan myths that the main character evokes become reality. Thus, the Marble Lady comes to life. Enchanted by her beauty, Anodos pursues her through the forest. In his quest to conquer her love, his immature temper leads him right into the Ash Tree's hands, just to be saved at the last moment by Sir Percival, the Christian hero of the Holy Grail myth.

The beginning of Anodos' journey into Fairyland represents the purest sense of discovery of childhood and adolescence. The curious and inquisitive, yet ignorant and reckless condition of the protagonist eventually leads him to his spiritual downfall in chapter eight. It is in a windowless cottage in the middle of the forest that Anodos is warned about the consequences of his actions. A witch advises him not to open the cottage's closet as her literary description of the human being foreshadows the dark turn Anodos' journey is about

to take: “Truly, man is but a passing flame, moving unquietly amid the surrounding rest of night; without he yet could not be, and whereof he is in part compounded” (MacDonald, 2019: 94). Driven by the temptation born out of prohibition, Anodos opens the door just to be reached by an abstract creature called the Shadow. MacDonald makes use of ‘the uncanny’ to radically change the tone of his novel. Anodos describes his first encounter with the Shadow as being “conscious of the presence of another in a room where he has, for hours, considered himself alone” (MacDonald, 2019: 95). The Shadow is the livid representation of death in Fairyland, as explained by the woman of the cottage: “It is your shadow that has found you’ [...] ‘Everybody’s shadow is ranging up and down looking for him. I believe you call it by a different name in your world: yours has found you, as every person’s is almost certain to do who looks into that closet” (MacDonald, 2019: 97).

Possessed by the Shadow and marked by death, Anodos’ perception of Fairyland changes. The evil spirit’s free will alters the lively nature of Fairyland as “wherever a ray struck that part of earth, or sea, or sky, became void, and desert, and sad to my heart” (MacDonald, 2019: 101). Despite the fact that some of the marvellous locations of the fairy world, such as the Fairy Palace, resisted the Shadow’s influence, the memory of its existence tormented the protagonist until the abrupt end of his journey through the realm of the fairies. It is in chapter seventeen that Anodos begins his journey to the depths after being expelled from the Fairy Palace for breaking the Fairy Queen’s rules. The metaphorical descent into darkness is reflected literally in Fairyland’s imagery. Anodos goes down the catacombs of a mountain range, in which a myriad of goblins and other creatures of the night mock at his failure. It is not until he finds himself sailing in the calm waters of the sea, that the lowest point in his character development is reached. During chapter eighteen, he realizes about his mistakes: to have opened the cottage’s closet and to have assumed rightful property over the Marble Lady he gave life to through his songs, and disobeying the Fairy Queen’s rules sent him to the depths of despair.

In a timeless sea, the weight of the consequences of his childish actions lures him to end his life. Throughout his maturing process, Anodos is determined to end his suffering in an outburst of pride. As he faces the abyss, a sweet feeling of homecoming lures him to the bottom of the sea:

I stood a moment and gazed into the heaving abyss beneath me [...] A blessing, like the kiss of a mother, seemed to alight on my soul; a calm, deeper than that which accompanies the soul of the deferred, bathed my spirit. I sank far in the waters, and sought no return. I felt as if once more the great arms of the beech-

tree were around me, soothing me after the miseries I had passed through, and telling me, like a little sick child, that I should be better tomorrow” (MacDonald, 2019: 221).

MacDonald dwells in the miseries and sorrows that becoming an adult entail. The Shadow that takes possession of the main character is the abstract depiction of trauma. The author exploits the background of the ‘tragic hero’ both at the mythical and metafictional level so that the meaning of his narration transcends the fictional narrative and reflects on the readers’ reality itself throughout the cathartic tone of his writing. Despite the Shadow’s resemblance to the Calvinist conception of predestination and damnation born out of sin, MacDonald’s ground-breaking conception of religious faith during Victorian times and his belief in the redeeming faith that he advocated is deeply rooted within *Phantastes*. After experiencing the *hubris* that almost led him to his downfall, Anodos is mysteriously saved and welcomed by the figure of the almighty Old Woman.

2.3. The end of the journey: Anodos’ sacrifice and redemption

During his recovery process, the Old Woman reflects on Anodos and the reader’s life sorrows alike throughout MacDonald’s brilliant display of verse and poetry.

Alas, how easily things go wrong!
A sight too much or a kiss too long,
And there follows a mist and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again.
Alas, how hardly things go right!
’Tis hard to watch in a summer night,
For the sight will come and the kiss will stay,
And the summer night is a winter day. (MacDonald, 2019: 229)

If the constant depictions of a natural duality that rules over the world of men and women was not clear in the first two thirds of the novel, it is explicitly represented towards the end of this marvellous epic. Only after enduring the worst of descents into darkness is Anodos able to conceive Fairyland’s reflection upon his life properly. These are the moments that allow us to revisit the traumas of our past; not to dwell on them eternally, but to let the suffering heal and teach us how to cope with future experiences. It is in chapter nineteen that MacDonald unveils Anodos’ most horrible sin, hidden deep beneath his own self-guilt. When he was younger, Anodos let his favourite little brother go for a swim in the river by

himself out of a childish dispute. The protagonist narrates how “our last words [...] were not of kindness” (MacDonald, 2019: 236), and that after his little brother had drowned, he had come to a terrible conclusion and regretted his actions: “if we had only gone to sleep as usual, the one with his arm around the other!” (MacDonald, 2019: 273). By making the character come out of his shell, MacDonald is asserting his beliefs in an embracing, redeeming faith that in the end will conquer all evil and lead the individual to happiness.

Anodos' bildungsroman is fully exploited from chapter twenty to twenty-three of the book. After being encouraged by the Old Woman to follow his journey, in these chapters Anodos is confronted by the task of helping two prince brothers of the nearby country to recover their ancient castle, guarded by a feared giant. Once the main character comes out as the only survivor of the fight, the downsides of honour, heroism and pride are exposed. Anodos then feels a growing guilt because he does not consider himself worthy of being the only survivor and taking the credit of the brothers' heroism. This guilt is enhanced by the memory of the cheerful moments he had spent with them whilst preparing for the attack and the return of the Shadow that feeds off his negative emotions. In chapter twenty-two he has already been travelling for three days and is warned by a boy about the enchanted forest ahead. Unconsciously, Anodos enters into the depths of the woods in which the existence of the Shadow that has been tormenting him disappears. Consequently, the young man is filled with pride and seems to forget about the experiences he had lived, as he acknowledged himself as one of “the glorious knights of old [...] side by side with Sir Galahad!” (MacDonald, 2019: 276), only to be humbled after being confronted by a mysterious knight almost identical to him. Again, his childish pride had led him towards despair. MacDonald is, therefore, referring to the flawed nature of the human being that the Calvinist dogmas condemned as unforgivable sin as a natural trait of the soul.

After being deprived of his pride and dignity, the main character is ironically saved by the songs of the beautiful woman that was once the Marble Lady he had given life to. With her curse removed, she is now a human girl whose heart belongs to Sir Percival. Thus, the protagonist is once more humbled not only by the natural flow of Fairyland, but by life itself. Having learned about the hard-hitting truth of reality, the line that separates Fairyland and the ‘real world’ blurs as Anodos reflects upon his mistakes.

“I am what I am, nothing more.” “I have failed,” I said; “I have lost myself—would it had been my shadow.” I looked round: the shadow was nowhere to be seen. Ere long, I learned that it was not myself, but my shadow that I had lost. I learned that it

is better, a thousand fold, for a proud man to fall and be humbled, than to hold up his head in his pride and fancied innocence. I learned that he that will be hero, will barely be a man; that he that will be nothing but a doer of his work, is sure of his manhood. (MacDonald, 2019: 287).

When he finally comes across Sir Percival again, he concludes that his only way towards redemption is for the true hero to accept him as his personal squire. And so, the last part of his journey begins. Sir Percival is described as the kind warrior that protects the innocent, the knight who embodies the chivalric values of humility and servitude. His reflections upon the fairy realm add substantial meaning to the metaphysic characteristics of the novel: “‘Somehow or other,’ said he, ‘notwithstanding the beauty of this country of Faerie, in which we are, there is much that is wrong with it’” (MacDonald, 2019: 296). MacDonald attributed the ability to identify the contradictory dualities of the ‘real world’ to a fictional character in a fictional realm in the sublime attempt to make ‘the fantastic’ transcend reality. As the knight states: “‘If there are great splendours, there are corresponding horrors; heights and depths; beautiful women and awful fiends; noble men and weaklings. All man has to do is better what he can’” (MacDonald, 2019: 296). Anodos’ perplexity towards Sir Percival’s stand on life would make readers relate to the protagonist as they learn about the relevance of one’s good intentions beyond failure. When confronted about the individual’s uncertainty of success, the knight answers the following: “‘Perhaps not, [...] in the individual act; but the result of his lifetime will content him’” (MacDonald, 2019: 296). Hence, MacDonald’s ultimate message of love, optimism and perseverance against all adversity is foreshadowed.

Sir Percival acts as the catalyst that allows Anodos to depart from Fairyland in his own terms after his death. It is in the very same chapter he is embraced by Sir Percival that the protagonist gives his life to protect his mentor and Fairyland. By the end of chapter twenty-three, they come across a chapel in which a ritual is taking place. Anodos’ intuition makes him recognize a horrible evil in the hearts of the priest and his acolytes. While Sir Percival is being fooled, Anodos realizes that the cult is summoning a horrible creature from the depths of the earth in what seems to be a human sacrifice. After all he had gone through, Anodos could not help but to protect his mentor by killing the fiend, losing his life in the process. Thus, Anodos’ journey through Fairyland is abruptly interrupted.

After embracing Sir Percival’s lessons, Anodos was able to die in peace with himself and his actions. As if in distant dream, he was able to see how the once Marble Lady and her

knight mourned his departure as they praised him for having saved the realm from a major evil. The author of the book concludes that “The very fact that something can die, implies the existence of something that cannot die” (MacDonald, 2019: 313) through Anodos’ sacrifice. The passions that dwell deep inside each one of us are to the author of *Phantastes* and its main character the true immortal essence of the self. That essence is the gift that will remain after we are gone, just as Anodos’ sacrifice stayed in the hearts of Fairyland. The author would also conclude that “it is by loving, and not by being loved, that one can come nearest the soul of another; [...] Yet all love will, one day, meet with its return” (MacDonald, 2019: 313) and, as Anodos’ soul cheerfully claimed, “Ah my friends, [...] how will I tend you, and wait upon you, and haunt you with my love” (MacDonald, 2019: 313).

In the end, it was through death in Fairyland that Anodos was able to return to his world. After having disappeared from the ‘real world’ for twenty-one days, he was found by his sisters in his family’s country house. It is in the last chapter of *Phantastes*, that Anodos is able to rest under the canopy of a tree near his family’s cottage and remember the tender, loving embrace of the Beech Tree as he remembered his journey through Fairyland as a distant, yet vivid dream. The genius of MacDonald’s storytelling and his ability to make readers transcend reality through fantasy literature allows for Anodos and the readers to come to the final conclusion: “Yet I know that good is coming to me—that good is always coming; though few have at all times the simplicity and the courage to believe it” (MacDonald, 2019: 323). Therefore, MacDonald’s work ends in a glorious, heart-warming celebration of life.

In writing *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women*, MacDonald set the precedents of modern fantasy and advocated for a hopeful Christian message based on unconditional kindness and love. The recurrent religious themes of love, sacrifice, death, and legacy help the human being retain the best force against all adversity, be it personal or collective: hope. Thus, George MacDonald’s fairy tales will pass down his universal, optimistic perception of life to future generations up to the present day, for it is in the lowest moments of life that this message is to be remembered. Sometimes it is through fantasy that we can take a better look into reality.

Chapter 3. From Victorian Fantasy to Modern Fantasy: George MacDonald's Legacy in the Twentieth Century

George MacDonald created long-lasting stories whose message would influence readers' understanding of the world. However, immediately after he passed away in 1905, his name faded in the midst of the new cultural framework the twentieth century introduced in the European society before the Great War.

The twentieth century brought the development of genres such as realism and the rise of literary theory. Modernism would explore new ways of writing and reading literature. Renowned authors such as Virginia Woolf developed new literary techniques, such as the stream of consciousness, capable of shaking the foundations of the pre-established literary canon of previous literary movements in a society that attempted to move on from the shock of the Great War. However, it is not until World War II comes to its end in 1945, that the newly acquired moral values are once again shattered. Hence, post-modernism would give relevance to the exploration of the dormant traumas of society, unexplored expressions of the self, and to new perspectives in the ground-breaking boom of postcolonial literatures, gender studies and literary psychoanalysis that flourished from the 1950s onwards.

This chapter is dedicated to explore the rebirth of fantasy during the 1950s and to analyse the legacy of two of the most well-known fantasy authors that are said to have created modern fantasy as we know it, J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. The analysis of MacDonald's legacy will shed light into the generally unknown past of fantasy as a genre and, therefore, debunk the general conception that it is a 'new' genre whose roots date back to *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) and *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956). For if we are to consider literature as a universal, ever-changing expression of the human being, it is undeniable that each genre's development is attached to a specific genealogy but is also subject to further transformations as time goes by. If an established presence in history and a set of literary and stylistic characteristics justify the academic legitimization of genres such as realism, historical fiction, and science fiction, among others, fantasy's ancestry is also to be reckoned with. After briefly reviewing some relevant connections between MacDonald and the work of J. R. R. Tolkien, especially his theory essay "On Fairy Stories" (1947), I will devote the rest of the chapter to analysing MacDonald's influence on C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* (1950). This analysis will demonstrate that fantasy represents an outlasting, timeless human feature that is able to make a retrospective insight into its own past as well as to project into the future.

3.1. MacDonald's legacy in J. R. R. Tolkien's "On Fairy Stories": giving shape to the fantasy genre in the twentieth century

South African scholar and writer John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892-1973) embraced MacDonald's conception of religion and developed on the mysterious nature of fantasy. From an early age, Tolkien had a passion for history, lost languages and adventure that would lead him to become a worldwide literary referent. After participating in The Great War, he became an Old and Middle English professor at the universities of Leeds (1920-1925) and Oxford (1925-1950), where he would spend most of his adult life. It was during his time as university professor that he wrote one of the most influential, best-selling fantasy sagas for children: *The Lord of The Rings*. In the fantastic realm of elves, dwarfs, ents, orcs, giant eagles, wizards and humans, the complex duality of good and evil, the uplifting hope for a good future and the heart-warming embrace of loyalty and friendship are depicted in Tolkien's work. Divided into three books, *The Fellowship of The Ring* (1954), *The Two Towers* (1954) and *The Return of The King* (1955), this saga continues the story of *The Hobbit* (1937), an adventure fantasy novel that expressed the author's longing for an idealized communion with nature against the spreading industrialization of the twentieth century, whilst introducing Middle Earth to the literary mainstream. *The Lord of The Rings* tells the epic story of Frodo Baggins, a little hobbit that is sent into a legendary journey to destroy the One Ring, the last remnant of the Dark Lord Sauron, whose army of orcs threatens to conquest and destroy the peace of Middle Earth. (Hammond, 2023).

Tolkien's 1947 essay "On Fairy Stories" reveals many of the implications and purposes behind *The Lord of The Rings* in addition to past fantasy and fairy tale. He also dwells on the misunderstood association of this genre with children. His opinion on fantasy's worth and its ability to embrace a broad audience is shared by C.S. Lewis in his saga *The Chronicles of Narnia* as well as by MacDonald's ideology. He also dwells on the nature of belief and faith as he introduces the relevant concepts of the Primary and Secondary World, which state the differences between the general consensus of 'reality' and 'fantasy', as well as the relationship between them and the readers' reactions when crossing the line from one world into another (Tolkien, 2008: 52).

Tolkien developed the notions of estrangement and its literary spatial manifestations represented both in past and contemporary fantasy literature (MacDonald's Fairyland and Lewis' Narnia). He concludes his article demonstrating fantasy's legitimacy with the hidden implications of the desire for consolation in fairy tales and fantasy against the perils of the

real world, and the unconscious desire for the happy ending. These concepts had already been introduced in fairy tale and fantasy through the work of MacDonald back in the nineteenth century. In his 1947 essay “On Fairy Stories”, Tolkien analyses the role of such topics and their impact on the reader.

Recalling the epic heroism of *Beowulf*, the glory of *The Arthurian Sagas* and MacDonald’s faith in imagination, *The Lord of The Rings* succeeded in becoming a literary and cultural referent for fantasy makers. MacDonald’s influence on Tolkien’s narratives have been extensively studied by literary critics. For example, Jason Fisher elaborates on MacDonald’s influence on Tolkien stating that “Tolkien’s childhood affinity for MacDonald clearly found its way into his own writing” (Fisher, 2006: 114). Paul E. Michelson also points out at the similarities and differences between MacDonald and Tolkien on the implications of ‘Faerie’ as the major defining concept of fantasy novel (Michelson, 2014). Many scholars such as Rosemary Jackson, Ruth Berman, and Paul H. Kocher have referred to MacDonald’s fairy tales’ relevance in Tolkien’s childhood. Similarly, MacDonald’s legacy on J. R. R. Tolkien’s literary theory and *The Lord of The Rings* has also been studied in depth. Consequently, I shall centre this chapter’s textual analysis around C.S. Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia*, whose cultural presence seems to have dimmed ever since its film adaptations were released in the early 2000s.

3.2. Past and present influences: C. S. Lewis’ way into *The Chronicles of Narnia*

Clive Staples Lewis (1898-1963) was an Irish scholar and writer specialized in medieval and renaissance literature at the University of Oxford. He centred his studies around the Christian religion and its philosophical questions through the lens of theology. One of his most important religious literary works is *Mere Christianity* (1952), in which the author provides the reader with his own interpretation of religious moral values and the way to understand faith in the aftermath of WWII. However, *The Chronicles of Narnia*’s fame would outlast all his literary works and present him as one of the greatest fantasy writers of the twentieth century (Schakel, 2023).

Lewis’ saga is divided in seven books: *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* (1950), *Prince Caspian* (1951), *The Voyage of The Dawn Treader* (1952), *The Silver Chair* (1953), *The Horse and His Boy* (1954), *The Magician’s Nephew* (1955) and *The Last Battle* (1956). These books tell the stories and adventures that take place in the fantastic, otherworldly framework of Narnia.

The author was able to captivate the illusion and imagination of his readers by embracing the estrangement of the real world and combining it with the fantastic in what is considered to be one of the most relevant examples of children's literature. *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* was published in 1950. It tells the story of the wonderful journey through the magical world of Narnia that the Pevensie siblings- Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy, experience after being sent from London to the countryside because of the German bombings during WWII. It is after going through a mysterious wardrobe inside Professor Kirke's country house that the children find themselves in a frozen realm ruled by the evil White Witch and her everlasting winter. They are part of the prophecy that would bring Aslan, the Golden Lion that embodies absolute goodness and justice, and true ruler of Narnia, back from afar to save the country from the White Witch.

The fact that Lewis had lived as an atheist throughout his entire youth is very relevant to understand the main themes and purposes of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe's* narrative. Inspired by George MacDonald's ideology, Tolkien's association of the Christian religion with myth rather than factual truth was transmitted to Lewis during the 1930s. Tolkien explains this connection as follows: "The Gospel contains a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind that embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels – peculiarly artistic, beautiful and moving: 'mythical' in their perfect, self-contained significance" (Tolkien, 2008: 78). Captivated by this inherited religious thinking, Lewis ended up embracing Christianity. Thus, his most relevant religious values such as faith and redemption are personified by many of the characters of his work. The duality of good and evil, however, presents a bone of contention. Out of superficial assumptions, many critics such as Frederic Jameson and Darko Suvin have taken advantage of this recurrent theme to depict fantasy as a simplistic, reductionist genre. Jameson disregards fantasy literature when he claims that it relies on "the essentially infantile spirit of an opposition between heroes and villains" (2005, 58). However, as the analysis in the following section demonstrates, some characters in the fantasy work of MacDonald and Lewis complicate this opposition. Characters such as Edmund Pevensie (*The Chronicles of Narnia*) and Anodos (*Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women*) demonstrate the inbetweenness of the broad greyscale in which some of the most complex fantasy characters navigate throughout the story. Originally belonging to the heroic protagonist trope, these characters go through an enriching development out of their childish ignorance, arrogance, ill will and the suffering they cause to others. It is true that MacDonald and Lewis established two opposite extremes of good and evil: the Old Woman and Aslan are absolute representations of goodness whereas

Anodos' Shadow and the White Witch are the embodiment of pure evil. However, I consider these symbolic extremes were created for the protagonists and readers to experience the mesmerizing wonders and marvels, devastating loss, and desperation all at once, leading them to a redeeming sacrifice in all its glory within the fantastic frameworks of Fairyland and Narnia. Thus, I will debunk the assumption that fantasy generates plain characters based on the tropes of heroes and villains in order to demonstrate that, despite the heavy religious background of this literary motif, fantasy is able to produce complex characters that move back and forth the spectrum of good and evil. This novel is the perfect example of Lewis' message of unconditional faith over the individual's ambivalent morals. The following analysis draws explicit, direct connections between Lewis' narrative and George MacDonald's fairy tales such as *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) and *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women* (1858).

3.3. Faith, temptation, and the journey into the fantastic: parallelisms in the works of MacDonald and Lewis

The character of Lucy Pevensie reflects Lewis' attempts to draw a relation between Christian faith and children's innocence. In this case, her own predisposition and intuition leads her to the magic wardrobe. Once in Narnia, her inquisitive nature makes her aware of the dangers of the world that has welcomed her and the exciting adventures that await in it. It is after meeting Mr. Tumnus the Faun and coming back to the real world that she is questioned by her siblings, who do not believe her account of the magical place she has visited because of the unreliable yet powerful imagination associated with children her age that clashes against the cognitive, rational thinking of reality.

Not only is this test of faith imposed on Lucy, but also on the readers. By stating that "[...] Lucy was a very truthful girl and she knew that she was in the right" (Lewis, 2008: 20), the author is inviting the readers to believe Lucy against all odds. However, Lewis takes advantage of doubt to the extent that even Lucy begins "[...] to wonder herself whether Narnia and the Faun had not been a *dream*" (Lewis, 2008: 21, my emphasis). The fact that the story is told through an omniscient third person narrator reinforces the probabilities of truth and falsehood. Later, when Susan and Peter ask their host to advise them about their little sister's story, Professor Kirke arrives to the following conclusion through the use of logic: "Either your sister is telling lies, or she is mad, or is telling the truth. You know she doesn't tell lies and it is obvious that she is not mad. For the moment and unless any further evidence turns up, we must assume she is telling the truth" (Lewis, 2008: 36). When the Pevensie

siblings are forced by chance to enter Narnia and begin their journey, the perils and difficulties that each one undergoes are eventually rewarded, especially Lucy's, with the promise of Aslan's arrival. As they talk about the Golden Lion, the hopeful and uplifting promise of an incoming good blooms within their hearts, except Edmund's:

At the name of Aslan each one of the children felt something jump in tis inside: Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror. Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or the beginning of summer. (Lewis, 2008: 50-51)

It is because of her unbreakable faith in Aslan that, out of all the Pevensie siblings, Lucy will be the one that establishes the closest relationship with the Golden Lion throughout the next instalments of the saga. Similar to Lucy, George MacDonald's protagonist of *The Princess and The Goblin* (1872), Princess Irene, also undergoes a test of faith. Bored of playing with toys in her father's castle, she finds the stairs to an unknown tower in which she meets the entity that sets her on her adventures and the war against the underground goblins that threaten to take over the castle. Despite the fact that this story takes place in a single reality (there is no distinction between the real and the fantastic world), MacDonald manages to convey a division through devices such the depiction of twilight as a liminal space, the contrast between the castle and the underground chambers of the goblins and, most importantly, the heavenly, ephemeral figure of the Old Lady, an entity that embodies goodness in the form of motherly love and a recurrent, yet variable symbol in MacDonald's works that is also portrayed in *Phantastes* as the Old Woman. The first time Irene meets the Old Lady, who claims to be her ancestor, she is enchanted by the woman's delights. Irene is later challenged to meet her again. After failing, the Old Lady's tower appears to the girl once more. In the chapter "The Old Lady's Bedroom", the child confronts her as follows: "Please, I thought you were a *dream*. Why wouldn't I find you before, great-great grandmother?" (MacDonald, 2013: 67, my emphasis). Lucy's resemblance with Princess Irene is obviously demonstrated. Irene's test of faith would determine whether she is able to meet her magical grandmother again, just as Lucy's would determine her return to Narnia. Both characters pass their test successfully, as both are able to reach their fantastic destinations repeatedly throughout their stories.

Edmund, on the other hand, is the most complex of the Pevensie siblings. Conflictive, ignorant, and spiteful, this character starts his journey on his own. Just as Lucy, he is able to enter Narnia by himself; however, as if it was predestined, the first character he meets is the White Witch. Half giant, half genie, the White Witch is the main antagonistic force of the novel. Identified with a never-ending winter, she is depicted as a natural force and an embodiment of evil that is to be overthrown by Aslan, the Golden Lion and allegory of the sun that would bring peace, happiness, and Spring to Narnia and each and every one of the siblings. Lewis decided to reflect MacDonald's duality of good and evil on Aslan and the White Witch respectively for the characters to navigate between these opposite concepts. While Lucy represents the inherent goodness of children, it is very important to remark that Edmund does not represent the opposite, for he is not inherently evil, but a weak, insecure child that takes advantage of those underneath him, specifically of Lucy. This is perfectly exemplified when Peter confronts his brother after letting Lucy down and ridiculing her about the existence of Narnia by stating "You've always liked being beastly to anyone smaller than yourself; we've seen that at school before now" (Lewis, 2008: 34). Lewis has placed Edmund in between good and evil. He is not constructed as an evil character, but as a product of his time, conflictive environment, and experiences. As a result, a character as weak as Edmund ends up being the perfect vessel for temptation as another major theme. Edmund's resemblance to Judas in Aslan's sacrifice plot and the enchanted Turkish delights the Witch offers him in their first encounter, which resemble the 'Forbidden Fruit', are proof of the religious background of the author.

Having abandoned the Narnians' cause and his family and being declared a traitor, Edmund's bildungsroman towards redemption begins. The horrors witnessed by the boy under the White Witch's dominance are the consequences of his pride, as well as the catalyst of his growth. His selfishness begins to crumble once he witnesses a party of amusing, helpless little animals being turned to stone by the Witch. As the narrator states, "Edmund for the first time in this story felt sorry for someone besides himself" (Lewis: 2008, 84). The ultimate realization Edmund experiences comes after Aslan's sacrifice in the Stone Table to save him from the Witch. Despite reaching his rock bottom, Edmund's character gains full circularity when it is revealed that it was him who destroyed the White Witch's wand during the final battle. Edmund's character development hints MacDonald's influence on Lewis, as there are similitudes between him and Anodos, the protagonist of *Phantastes*. With a similar starting point, both undergo similar challenges. The effect the White Witch has on Edmund is similar to that the Shadow has on Anodos in their bildungsroman towards redemption. In

the end, both characters are able to come to terms with their environment, their loved ones, the consequences of their pride, and themselves. They experience the same realization that encourages them to be willing to sacrifice themselves in an attempt to face the consequences of their actions and embrace their fate in peace. The similarities between Edmund and Anodos' character arch are backed up by Tolkien's observations on fantasy and fairy tale's message: "But it is one of the lessons of fairy-stories [...] that on callow, lumpish, and selfish youth peril, sorrow, and the shadow of death can bestow dignity and sometimes wisdom" (Tolkien, 2008: 58). Therefore, there is a genealogical line from MacDonald to Tolkien and Lewis when it comes to redemption through the fantastic journey.

Lewis plays with the readers' expectations of 'reality' and makes them engage with the narrative to the fullest. The use of 'estrangement' and the relevance of the endless possibilities of the liminality hidden beyond dreams, wishes and fantasies is another feature that still characterizes the fantasy genre to this day: "Perhaps it has happened sometimes to you in a *dream* that someone says something which you don't understand but, in the *dream*, it feels as if it had some enormous meaning" (Lewis, 2008: 50, my emphasis). The fantasy genre has taken advantage of this motif ever since it separated from myth and fable in the nineteenth century. Lewis alludes to Narnia's existence out of the real world through the unreliable uncertainty of dreams, as well as MacDonald did with Fairyland in *Phantastes*. According to Tolkien, the advantage fantasy took from thinking of other worlds "has been turned against it and has contributed to its disrepute" (2008: 60), to the extent that critics such as Suvin have used it to delegitimize its academic and literary value basing their arguments on estrangement's lack of cognitivism (Suvin, 1972), as discussed in Chapter 1. In defence of fantasy novels, Tolkien would claim that fantasy and the estrangement included in it are "a natural human activity" that "certainly do not destroy and even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for [...] scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and clearer is the reason, the better the fantasy will it make" (2008: 65). Thus, Tolkien draws a reciprocal relation between the fantasy world and the real world to state that neither of them is better, but that they are equally enriching.

The many similitudes between *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Princess and The Goblin* as well as *Phantastes* state the obvious influence Lewis took from MacDonald. The Old Lady appeared to Princess Irene just when the child was clinging to her last strain of faith in MacDonald's *The Princess and The Goblin*, just as in *Phantastes*, when the Fairy Grandmother takes Anodos to Fairyland in his twenty-first birthday without prior notice. Similarly, Lucy and her siblings enter and abandon Narnia when they least expect it in Lewis' *The Lion, The*

Witch and The Wardrobe. These common characteristics convey a reciprocal conversation between two authors separated by almost a century. All these characters undergo in different, unique ways a growth that would not have been possible had they not been taken to a magical world whilst having their faith in fantasy challenged in an attempt to demonstrate that there is more meaning to life than that we all can see to the naked eye. Thus, the diachronic evolution fantasy has experienced from its early stages in the myths and legends of *Beowulf* and *The Arthurian sagas* in the Middle Ages to the first instances of its development as an art during the nineteenth century is of paramount importance when analysing Tolkien and Lewis' contributions to the modern fantasy of the twentieth century. This chapter has exposed the depth of fantasy genre's history iceberg in order to legitimize its cultural and often denied academic relevance based on binary division of characters and lack of scientific rigour within the fantasy world. MacDonald, Tolkien, and Lewis were well-aware of the introspective qualities of the complex human psyche that this genre could exploit within the alternative realities of magical worlds that reflected and soothed real life's sorrows in its whimsical consolation of a happy ending. The fact that new literary and cultural manifestations are still stemming out of MacDonald's initial premise of fairy tale and fantasy literature as the perfect vessel for human emotion and introspection, proves that this genre has always been alive and relevant.

Chapter 4. Back to The Present and Beyond: The Evolution of the Fantasy Genre in the Twenty-First Century

Influenced by George MacDonald, J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis came out as the pioneer authors that set the framework for future fantasy and fairy tale during the 1950s. The extraordinary selling success of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* gave fantasy the opportunity to create itself a niche inside the mainstream and the literature market. As the prime literature consumer demand, it became a focal point of the writing and the scholarly communities, resulting in different branches of literary criticism and new expressions of fantastic narratives throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. After dominating the genre's hegemony, the structure of Tolkien's fantasy was both recurrently reproduced in an attempt to ensure best-sellers and rejected by some emerging fantasy authors and their ground-breaking perspectives on the fantastic. In the midst of the changing social and cultural breeding ground of the turn of the century, the peak of capitalism and the exhausting pace of the ever-accelerating technological advancements, fantasy has been both praised and belittled.

Back in the nineteenth century, MacDonald had demonstrated the captivating usefulness of imagination. This premise was then embraced by Lewis in the Narnia Chronicles and Tolkien's Middle Earth epics as well as his literary theory. By claiming that "Fantasy remains a human right" (2008, 66), Tolkien stated its humanistic relevance. Despite its ever-changing nature, fantasy has prevailed in different forms and literary expressions. This chapter will give account of the evolution of the fantasy genre during the beginning of the twenty-first century, its implied relationship with speculative fiction and its translation into the dominant cultural texts of the Fourth Industrial Revolution such as the videogame. The remnants of MacDonald's literature in its core will be discussed in order to oppose fantasy's academic demotion, proving that it has always been part of our collective psychology.

4.1. Contemporary fantasy: speculative fiction and time for change

The technological advancements of the second half of the twentieth century as well as the political and economic turmoil western societies underwent made it possible for the audience to accept a broader perception of their reality. With the rise of ground-breaking technology in the fields of electronics, the theory of relativity, the rise of the aerospace industry and the unnerving threat of nuclear conflict in the escalation of the Cold War (1947-1991), society realized the frailty behind the commodities of everyday life and was forced to develop the ability to conceive new, different realities in order to keep up with the terrifyingly accelerated pace of progress.

The social anxiety that spread throughout the western world contributed to the apparition of new perspectives. After having been brought back to life by authors such as J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Philippa Pearce and Lucy M. Boston, fantasy literature was separated from fairy tale to adopt the essence of postmodernism. Maria Nikolajeva develops this premise in her 2003 article "Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archaic to Postmodern". She introduces her premise stating that, from its origins as a succession of myth, fantasy and fairy tale embraced the folklore and tradition of its environment, which contributed to Britain's heavy fantasy tradition (Nikolajeva, 2003). It is after these determinant changes that society moved on from its limited perception of reality and became "sufficiently mature to accept the possibility of the range of phenomena that fantasy deals with alternative worlds, nonlinear time, extrasensory perception, and in general all kinds of supernatural events that so far cannot be explained in terms of science" (Nikolajeva, 2003: 140). As a result, fantasy has

evolved to “reflect the postmodern human being’s split and ambivalent picture of the universe” (Nikolajeva, 2003: 140).

The rise of science fiction is also to be reckoned with as a creative literary answer to the technological advancements of the late twentieth century. The opposition between fantasy’s mere escapism and science fiction’s cognitive estrangement created by Marxist critics such as Darko Suvin in his article “On the Poetics of The Science Fiction Genre” (1972) has already been problematized in this dissertation. The richness of the relation between these intersectional literary genres found a more inclusive perspective of science fiction and fantasy in speculative fiction, as Margaret Atwood claimed in her essay book *In Other Worlds* (2011). With the boundaries that separate these genres blurred and the estrangement and the unreal at the core of their development, speculative fiction, science fiction and fantasy have evolved from the religious tradition that MacDonald passed down to Tolkien and Lewis to a more political, open minded perception of reality. In the introduction of his 2013 collection of articles *Critical Insights: Contemporary Speculative Fiction* Keith Brooker also problematizes Suvin’s rejection of fantasy as a literary genre of critical potential claiming that such perception has changed together with the genre’s evolution (2013, vii). Although the epics and fairy tales of Tolkien and Lewis are still successful, a politically rebellious, nonconformist branch of fantasy has stemmed from tradition in the form of dystopias, new versions of horror and weird fiction.

Therefore, there is a clear thematic division within the fantasy genre’s evolution that departs from the stereotypical fantasy tropes to seek for politically loaded messages with a denouncing tone, such as Suzanne Collins’ ecofeminist traces in *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010). New narrative structures that abandon the limited perception of the hero’s journey through the omniscient narrator have also been introduced to explore the heteroglossia offered by the first-person experiences of all sorts of characters taking part in the same story, such as G. R. R. Martin’s unfinished saga *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-2011) and Brandon Sanderson’s 2009 novel *Warbreaker*. Similarly, there are new epic fantasy works that move from the predominant European Middle Ages setting to seek inspiration from other cultures such as Asian history in Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson’s *The Wheel of Time* (1990-2013) and the representation of other races such as N. K. Jemisin’s *The Broken Earth* (2015-2017). However, one of the examples that best explains fantasy’s evolution since the beginning of the twenty-first century is Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000).

4.2. Multiverses, ambivalence, and multiple perspectives in *His Dark Materials*

Philip Pullman (1946) reflected on Tolkien's perception of estrangement divided in the Primary and the Secondary worlds and took it to the extreme in *His Dark Materials*. Marked by the death of his father as a Royal Air Force Pilot and the numerous journeys around the world he experienced during his childhood, Pullman created the varied and complex narrative of his young adult best-seller that helped to take the fantasy genre into a new age. Divided in three volumes: *Northern Lights* (1995) (also known as *The Golden Compass* in the U.S.), *The Subtle Knife* (1997) and *The Amber Spyglass* (2000), these young adult fantasy novels tell the story of Lyra Belacqua, a young girl that lives in an alternative world Oxford, England, ruled by the religious government of the Magisterium. In a world dominated by the unknown natural laws of the 'Dust', Lyra is set into the quest of discovering the secrets of the Magisterium, the origins of human beings' attachment since birth to animal entities denominated 'daemons', and the existence of other worlds (Dowd, 2023).

The evolution of fantasy from the 1950s onwards is evident. Tolkien developed on the notions of an unreliable reality and nonlinear time as key concepts to understand most fantastic narrative premises in his 1947 article "On Fairy Stories"; where he differentiated "a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is true: it accords with the laws of that world" (Tolkien, 2008: 52) and a Primary World in which when you enter "[t]he moment disbelief arises [...] the magic, or rather the art, has failed" (Tolkien, 2008: 52). Lewis' Narnia Chronicles states the success of Tolkien's theory in practice. However, during the 1970s and 1980s, fantasy literature's structure evolved from Tolkien's duality and the individual introspection of the characters to the pluralized voices of multiple realities within the same narrative such as renowned Brandon Sanderson's Cosmere universe. Thus, the fantasy genre entered a new age. Inspired in a contemporary Europe setting and with a heavy anticlerical premise, *His Dark Material* breaks with Tolkien's fantasy tradition of an idealized communion with nature and Christian background. Pullman also departs from the classic hero's limited point of view and offers different narrators throughout the story. Lyra Belacqua is the female narrator of the first novel and Will Parry is the second narrator introduced in the second volume of the saga. As the possessor of the subtle knife, he is able to cut the fabric of the universe and travel across worlds.

Despite his acknowledgement of the Secondary and Primary worlds' realities, Tolkien established a clear spatial and temporal duality between these worlds. In the Primary world

time's perception may be similar to that of reality, yet in the Secondary world a lifetime could pass by within hours. Philip Pullman takes this duality to the next level thanks to the implications of heterotopia. According to Nikolajeva, "Heterotopia, or a multitude of discordant universes denotes the ambivalent and unstable spatial and temporal conditions in fiction" (2003: 143). This concept enhances the differences between alternative realities. Pullman takes the speculative fiction concept of *uchronia* to build Lyra's original world around history's alternative outcomes such as the presence of the Inquisition in the twentieth century under the rule of the Magisterium. Lyra Belacqua's world includes both historical and fantastic elements. From the depiction of real-life organizations to the existence of talking animals such as the rightful king of the armoured bears and Lyra's friend Iorek Byrnison, Pullman transcended Tolkien's separation of the Primary and the Secondary worlds.

Although contemporary fantasy tends to depart from tradition, the remnants of MacDonald's ultimate purpose are still present. The fact that Pullman's novels are oriented towards a young adult audience is worth reckoning, for the author created this narrative and complex worldbuilding in order to engage with young readers in a way MacDonald, Tolkien and Lewis had not addressed before. By creating a confusing, everchanging story in which it appears not to be an absolute truth nor a guaranteed safety, Pullman attempted to uncover the endless possibilities in the course of a lifetime. Nikolajeva supports this reasoning stating that "childhood and adolescence are not safe and stable places, contrary to the Romantic idealizing view of the innocent child. By exposing the young characters (and thus the young readers) to a variety of other, more harmonious and solid, worlds, the author suggests that harmony can be achieved, perhaps at some later stage in life" (2003: 145). It is this premise that allowed for the remnants of MacDonald's 'incoming good' to fossilize within the harmonic purpose of contemporary fantasy and the multiverses. The existence of hope for future peace and promised happiness somewhere in the universe is still the main catalyst that influences the characters' decisions. Contrary to most traditional fairy tales, the relevance of the multiverse in contemporary fantasy is not relegated to just adventures, but to the "reflection of the young protagonists' split and distorted picture of reality in which they are living [...] Such chaos is hardly possible in the ordered world of fairy tales" (Nikolajeva, 2003: 145).

MacDonald also set the first stages of the fight of good against evil back in the twentieth century. Tolkien and Lewis developed on the concept to show the ambivalent nature of the human being capable of bringing happiness and sorrow alike. Contemporary

authors of the 1990s such as Martin or Pullman took this fight even further. Even the most complex of contemporary fantasy characters are driven by their conception of justice. The fact that contemporary authors developed on the characters' subjective meaning of goodness and justice does not oppose MacDonald's premise but expands it to different perspectives of good and evil. Philip Pullman succeeded in depicting a child female protagonist whose good intentions are challenged by the suffering she causes to others and her free will. If MacDonald and Lewis had already depicted such ambiguities in *Anodos* and Edmund Pevensie, Pullman took these concepts to the extreme. Lyra's assumed innocent and good nature is not denied by the author, but challenged when she causes the death of her friend Roger at the end of *The Golden Compass*. On her perception of Lyra as a main character, Nikolajeva concludes that "morally, she is not as pure and innocent as traditional fantasy prescribes" (2003: 146). This ambiguity contributes to create multiple perspectives in the narrative. The development of secondary characters is also relevant to understand the richness that contemporary fantasy authors have contributed to the genre in the uncertain times of the twenty-first century. According to Nikolajeva, the absence of a single subject as main point of view is realized by the postmodern device of collective voices within the same narrative, which enhances subjectivity and creates a story "assembled by the reader from several individual consciousnesses" (2003: 149). When there are different points of view, the line between good and evil is destroyed, and the choice is left to the characters' and readers' criteria.

Philip Pullman is one of the many authors that introduced fantasy literature to a new age marked by postmodernism. Despite the evolution of the genre and its many interpretations, there is still a common, practical purpose that MacDonald had explored in the nineteenth century: the search for the ultimate good for the self and others. This thematic comparison has given contemporary fantasy the acknowledgement it deserves and explored the projection of its ancient genealogy into the present and the future of the human being.

4.3. Transcending literature: fantasy's reflection on videogame

The advancements of digital media and their contribution to the birth of videogames in the 1970s and 1980s provided the perfect opportunity to exploit the unique qualities of the fantasy genre. In the dawn of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the relevance of computing sciences introduced the videogame as an extraordinarily successful cultural text for the decades to come. The link between this ground-breaking industry and literature as the main

traditional form of entertainment created the perfect breeding ground for one of the most popular videogame genres to date, fantasy videogame.

Inspired by literary classics such as *Beowulf*, *The Arthurian Sagas*, and the best-selling works of Tolkien and Lewis in the 1950s, board games such as *Dungeons and Dragons* sought for the free introspection and immersion into the fantastic that only literature was able to provide. The fascination awoken in the hearts of fantasy and fairy tale readers lived on in literature, but it was also incarnate within the videogame as the ultimate immersion device in the twenty first century. From the release of Shigeru Miyamoto's *The Legend of Zelda* in 1986, the first instalment of adventure videogame series that gives name to the successful saga, the first release of *Final Fantasy* in 1990 and *The Elder Scrolls* (1994); to the release of videogame book adaptation of *The Witcher* in 2007 and the renowned *Skryim* in 2011, fantasy has found a way to outlast most of its literary competitors thanks to the videogame industry. Pierre-Louis Patoine's 2018 article "Inhabiting Fantasy Ecologies: Literature Meets Videogame" states that the core of its success is centred around "Fantasy's aesthetic, narrative, and thematic specificity" which "is the creation and exploration of secondary, imaginary, or virtual universes. These universes encourage immersion in the text, originally in literature, and centrally in video games" (Patoine, 2018: 2). Tolkien's notions about Secondary worlds are crucial when demonstrating that human imagination is able to transcend literary narratives, as it conceived the multiverse as a major improvement on its estrangement abilities. The fact that such imaginative power found the perfect alternative vessel in videogames not only puts into practice Tolkien's ideas of the Primary and Secondary worlds, but also demonstrates fantasy's ability to transcend literature and spread to other cultural texts such as film and videogame. Patoine claims that the goal of fantasy videogames is the same as Tolkien's traditional fantasy narratives: "With Tolkien [...] secondary worlds take precedence, and his works are basically a way of inhabiting them and spending time there" (Patoine, 2018: 5). Therefore, the fantasy genre finds its inherent characteristics and purposes achieved within the videogame by means of different languages such as visual iconography and auditive input.

Not only does the videogame expand fantasy's stylistic horizons, but it also develops on its themes. The fight between good and evil, the desire for communion with nature and its creatures and the tragic realization of sacrifice for the greater good are the centre of most fantasy videogame narratives as it had been for fantasy literature since the times of George MacDonald. One of the latest examples of the perfect marriage between fantasy and videogames is the latest instalment of *The Legend of Zelda's* saga, released in May 2023: *Tears*

of The Kingdom. The postmodernist combination of science fiction technologies and time travel that expand gameplay possibilities and contribute to storytelling, together with the archaic, nostalgic setting of a kingdom in ruins, make for the perfect background for the story of princess Zelda and her loyal guard Link to develop in all its glory. The sequel to *Breath of The Wild* (2017) takes the player into Link's perspective of the mysterious disappearance of the princess that had previously saved the Kingdom from the natural force of evil Calamity Ganon. In the quest to find her, the player experiences the sorrows and fears of life as well as some of the most heart-warming examples of human behaviour ironically in fantastic creature tribes. The videogame story reaches its peak when the player discovers that, after witnessing the power of the Demon King in her no-return time travel to the past and knowing about his prophesised return, princess Zelda is determined to attain immortality at the cost of her essence by transforming into an elder dragon that will help the knight fight against the reborn Demon King in the player's timeline to take peace and prosperity to the realm at last. This videogame represents the latest example of the inherent human need for the fantastic that is successfully satisfied both in literature and videogame. The different approaches both texts take when making the reader/player engage with a narrative are as unique as they are valid. None is to stand out over the other. They are to engage in conversation in order to better the narrative experience. Both videogames and their main target audience are products of the twentieth century. Thus, the fantasy videogame has all the potential to encourage younger generations to revisit fantasy's literary genealogy.

In this chapter I have both demonstrated fantasy's evolution as well as its outlasting presence in time and its kaleidoscopic, multifaceted application in other cultural expressions. The fantasy genre has been able to successfully adapt to the postmodernist turns of the twenty-first century while retaining its essence in a unique way. The ability to engage the individual into suspension of disbelief and provide with enriching, valuable and moving insights on life has lived on ever since fantasy and fairy tale were separated from myth in the nineteenth century. It is thanks to the work of authors such as George MacDonald that faith in imagination was passed down to future generations in alternative means and cultural texts.

Conclusions

Through the revision of the fantasy genre's genealogy as a time travel to the past and back again, I have demonstrated the legitimacy of fantasy as a valuable and relevant literary genre. Set around fantasy's literary criticism developed in the 1970s and 1980s, the first chapter was devoted to discerning the best definition for this unique genre. After analysing Rosemary

Jackson's ambiguous categorization of fantasy, fairy tale and horror as separate 'modes', Darko Suvin's dominance of science fiction over fantasy based on cognitive estrangement as source of prestige and quality, and Margaret Atwood's insights on speculative fiction as the actual crossroads between reality and speculation, I rejected such pigeonholed perspectives and provided a more inclusive, embracing depiction of the fantasy genre. With estrangement at their core, this chapter proposed fantasy as the common denominator of genres such as horror, fairy tale, science fiction and speculative fiction, acknowledging its relevance and multidisciplinary presence. After I redefined the fantasy genre as an inclusive, embracing, and versatile genre, I proposed a revision of its genealogy in order to recognize its history and the value of its philosophical insights on life and didactic nature. Despite the relevance and inspiration Medieval literary milestones such as *Beowulf* and *The Arthurian Sagas* provided the genre, the second chapter of this dissertation took us back to the point when fantasy and fairy tale departed from myth and legend. It is in the breeding ground of nineteenth-century Romanticism that the fantasy genre appeared in the work of authors such as George MacDonald. The analysis of MacDonald's *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women* contributed to prove the main points of this dissertation. The thematic richness of the fantasy genre's versatility in the magical framework of Fairyland demonstrated the critical potential of estrangement as a narrative device. The superficial assumptions towards the role of the plain fantasy hero trope were opposed by the depth of Anodos' character arch throughout the story and the personal challenges presented by his Shadow. The fantasy genre's ability to relate to its readers and to transmit deep human values and ideas through the irrationality of estrangement was acknowledged by MacDonald's ultimate message of redemption, sacrifice, and the promise of a greater good, which demonstrated its useful application to reality. Thus, the origins of the fantasy genre in George MacDonald inspired the main authors of fantasy's golden age.

The third chapter accelerated time up to the 1950s and focused on discussing MacDonald's influence on two of the most relevant fantasy authors of the twentieth century. J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis inherited MacDonald's perception of a positive, embracing Christianity and reflected it on their works. Through the analysis of Tolkien's critical essay "On Fairy Stories" and Lewis' first volume of his opus magnum *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, this chapter dwelled on the separation of reality and fantasy into adjacent worlds as the perfect depiction of unconditional faith and temptation. The thematic similarities between Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* and MacDonald's *Phantastes* and *The Princess and The Goblin* in the fight between good and evil as the main theme

of the fantasy narrative, whilst depicting the character ambivalence caused by transcendental conflict in Edmund Pevensie and Anodos, successfully demonstrated the depth this genre is able to achieve. Hence, this chapter succeeded in drawing a clear timeline of the fantasy genre and the development of MacDonald's premises in its quest to acknowledge fantasy's genealogy, as well as proving its literary value. The last chapter of this dissertation brought the reader back to the present and developed on the evolution and changes the fantasy genre underwent during the late twentieth century and the early twenty first century as well as its projection into new, rising cultural manifestations such as the videogame. The conception of multiple realities and alternative worlds that appeared in the social, political, and economic turmoil of the turn of the century were analysed. If MacDonald, Tolkien, and Lewis captivated the imagination of readers and writers alike whilst transmitting a Christian message, so do emergent authors with different messages oriented to contemporary audiences. With Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* as front-runner example of change in the literary context, and the success of *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of The Kingdom* representing the videogame, the kaleidoscopic nature of the fantasy genre was demonstrated. Its ability to depart from traditional fantasy whilst keeping its humanistic, uplifting essence reiterates the relevance and the endless possibilities of fantasy.

While writing this dissertation, the study of such broad a topic as fantasy literature had to be limited due to format requirements. The direct connection between Medieval literature and the first Victorian fantasies as well as the symbolic imagery of mythological creatures were of utter interest to me as well as a deeper introspection into fantasy's representations in videogame, film and illustrated novel. The endless possibilities fantasy conveys have contributed to its outlasting presence in many forms of art. The new horizons of the fantasy genre provide it with the critical potential to create and analyse new narratives that deal with social issues such as feminism, gender, ecocriticism, and race and many other concerning topics for generations to come. No matter how much we progress as a species, we are still going to craft all sorts of imaginary creatures and worlds that belong to the realm of the fairies. The fact that fantasy has been present throughout the entirety of human history ever since the Stone Age supports the idea that there is a natural drive within us that craves the fantastic.

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