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Angelamarie Malkoun

*The Johns Hopkins University*, [amalkou1@jhu.edu](mailto:amalkou1@jhu.edu)

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# Sacrifice, Magic, and Age: The Young Adult's Burden

## A Study of YA Fantasy

Angelamarie Malkoun

Woodrow Wilson Fellow, H. Lee Kanter Fellow

*Johns Hopkins University*

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### **Abstract**

“Young adult,” coined in the 1960s by the Young Adult Library Services Association, holds immense meaning though it has had a much shorter lifetime than “child” and “adult.” The young adult (“adolescent” or “teenager”) continues to as a grey area between the duality of child and adult, an area that tends to be disregarded due to stereotypes and clichés. In working extensively on Fantasy/Young Adult Fantasy literature from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, my research has focused on the evolution of the adolescent/adolescence and how magic and temptation are used to argue the human inability to bypass sacrifice. Pamela Gates, Susan Steffel, and Francis Molson have worked to underline humanity’s need for heroes. Richard Mathews and Alan Garner respectively discuss the contours of fantasy as a method to break down social constructs. Greer Watson, Vladimir Propp, and Farah Mendlesohn are some others whose works have been considered, too. This study will try to show that the want of hope, some derision towards fantasy, YA, and YA Fantasy, and the ignorance regarding the deep connection running between the past and magic, in addition to several other factors, stem from both the dichotomy between commercial and literary as well as the very real inability to bypass sacrifice. Some of the directly mentioned and/or analyzed fantasy/YA Fantasy will be less well-known, purposefully directing attention to the fact that generalizations of anything, most of all fiction, are just that—taking the

time to explore a genre is much more enlightening and enjoyable than aligning oneself with real or imaginary, commercial or literary, and well-known or unknown.

*Keywords:* Literature, History, Young Adult, YA, Fantasy, Fiction, Literary, Commercial

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## **Introduction**

*[W]e have to tell stories to unriddle the world.*

*~ Alan Garner*

The world of fantasy has garnered a very particular image around itself, though not entirely by those a part of it, but rather by those surrounding it. On the one hand, David Hartwell argues that “as far as most serious readers of recent decades are concerned—really ever since the mid-nineteenth century, when English culture demoted fantasy to children’s literature—fantasy fiction in English is for kids, even the works widely read by adults...” (Hartwell 367). Indeed, though, there has been an emergence of fantasy specifically for adults, such as Arthur Machen, M. R. James, and Patrick Rothfuss to list a few; however, this does not necessarily make null and void the associations and clichés set against fantasy. Of course, fantasy existed far before the nineteenth century, even prior to *Beowulf*, the Arthurian legends, and more, all of which are widely read pieces within the academic world. Despite the stereotypes and clichés associated with the fantasy genre in the present-day as a result of several factors such as popular novels on the New York Times Bestsellers List and film adaptations (the Twilight Saga, the Harry Potter series, the Chronicles of Narnia, etc.), the main issue that will be addressed lies in potential aversions towards adolescence or “Young Adult” existing in connection with this genre. At times, the contemporary mind might automatically relate certain aspects of fantasy to the Young Adult genre, or YA, and all the stereotypes associated with it, from the romantic plots between a

mortal teenage female and a vampire and werewolf to the “childish” desire of escapism into a fantastical land. And yet, on top of dislike and skepticism, the much larger discussion here might also be one of commercial versus literary.

Historically, the fantasy genre itself has interestingly progressed from being necessary in comforting the nostalgic and keeping alive parts of folklore from around the world, to being used by communities around the world with the goal of enforcing norms and obedience and offering explanations to life as it was known, to being helpful in inducing pleasure and hope; however, it generally tends to preserve magic of the past. To introduce—or “reintroduce” in some cases—this magic and the notion that some things should not be forgotten, authors created worlds with flying creatures and objects, faeries, endless paths, witches and wizards, magical wars, and more; and yet, these aspects appear to be merely disguised bits of reality since these magical details were quite real in folklore and superstitions as well as past and present life. Originally, there were folktales, foreboding myths and legends, and the village witch or faerie. As time unfolded, though, distinctions between age groups (children versus adults) grew within stories. There were stories for children, and then there were stories for adults—the young adult did not exist.

In a brief study of the history of YA literature, one explanation for this distinction was that “The roots of young adult go back to when ‘teenagers’ were given their own distinction as a social demographic: World War II. ‘Seventeenth Summer,’ released by Maureen Daly in 1942, is considered to be the first book written and published explicitly for teenagers” (Strickland). Furthermore, the “term ‘young adult’ was coined by the Young Adult Library Services Association during the 1960s to represent the 12-18 age range” (Strickland). Before this, children usually became adults when they were married—after all, many were married when they were adolescents. Of course, this is not the only way to become an adult, for there were those who

never married. Nonetheless, individuals went from being children to adults. At the same time that the “young adult” distinguishing factor was introduced, there came a reflection on individuality, or the concept that the individual is irreplaceable as a result of him/her having many great things he/she must accomplish for the world—a very real belief and, arguably, an issue to this day.

Literature in general “is inclusive, not exclusive. It embraces; it does not reduce, however simply it is expressed. The purpose of the storyteller is to relate the truth in a manner that is simple: to integrate without reduction; for it is rarely possible to declare the truth as it is, because the universe presents itself as a Mystery. We have to find parables; we have to tell stories to unriddle the world” (Garner 27). The fantastical are the unexplainable, the things that can drive humanity insane, for their existence or lack of existence cannot assuredly be explained and require a certain suspension of disbelief. Fantasy can provide a reflection on reality and an alternative, no matter how much it might be disregarded for its basis in magic; in turn, adolescents will become the next adults, making their actions and feats extremely important to observe. Coincidentally, the rise of the adolescent and the rise of individuality occurred around the same time, establishing a potential underlying connection between the two that can be observed with literature.

In combination, YA Fantasy works to showcase the underappreciated moments embedded within the adolescent years—years where the child has not completely disappeared, and the adult has not completely overpowered the self—while also creating a necessary connection to the past, to the imagination, to magic. YA Fantasy deals with magic and the fantastical as well as with important issues such as abandonment, survival, confidence and belief in oneself, depression, love and the lack of it, and more, providing affirmation that the

imagination and adolescence are not things to be embarrassed of but instead should be celebrated. Ursula K. Le Guin argues well that “The literature of imagination, even when tragic, is reassuring, not necessarily in the sense of offering nostalgic comfort, but because it offers a world large enough to contain alternatives and therefore offers hope” (Le Guin 366). Although everything up to this point warrants much more thorough research and discussion, this study will try to show that the want of hope, some derision towards fantasy, YA, and YA Fantasy, and the ignorance regarding the deep connection running between the past and magic, in addition to several other factors, stem from both the dichotomy between commercial versus literary as well as the very real (human) inability to bypass sacrifice. In looking at literature from the nineteenth century through the twenty-first century, a better understanding of the introduction and evolution of the young adult as an individual and the young adult genre can be attained alongside a basic comprehension of the significance of sacrifice within young adult fantasy literature.

Before proceeding, it should be understood that a close-reading of every single story is not entirely possible unless a manuscript for a book (and several volumes at that) were the goal of this study. Do not be under the illusion that this is a perfect study; rather, allow it to offer a sense of the enormity of the scope of history and of literature and all its genres. This said, over one hundred pieces of fantasy were read for and during this study. Hopefully, this study will spark the imaginations of its readers, further discussion on commercial versus literary, and provide its readers with new fiction reading material that forces them to take a chance and suspend their disbelief. Lastly, some of the directly mentioned and/or analyzed fantasy/YA Fantasy will be less well-known, purposefully directing attention to the fact that generalizations of anything, most of all fiction, are just that—taking the time to explore a genre can be much

more enlightening and enjoyable than aligning oneself with real or imaginary, commercial or literary, and well-known or unknown.

### **The 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

*The maps and contours of fantasy are circumscribed only by imagination itself.*

~ *Richard Mathews*

To reiterate, the Young Adult genre heading did not exist in the nineteenth century, and the contemporary notion of the “adolescent” had not been born—there were only children and adults, likely not defined in the same sense as in the present. Fantasy has been around for ages in the form of folklore, wonder/fairy tales, and fables; however, a rise in interest in the fantastic and unexplainable may have found its way back into the spotlight after the introduction of the gothic novel in the late eighteenth century. The modern concept, and even the term, the “...‘fantasy novel’, with its implication of a narrative which combines novelistic characterization and theme with the sort of visionary imagination that Coleridge and Blake described, might well have seemed an oxymoron to literary readers in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (Wolfe 11). As time progressed, very much like the way fantasy-writer Alan Garner interprets the astronomical term “red shift” in his unique novel *Red Shift*, the origins of the odd and unnatural disappeared farther into the past, although their echoes traveled to the present, and the fear and inability to explain some things in a simple manner remained and grew stronger because of the growing ignorance. “Fantasy” understood in the present-day blossomed with the movement away from origins and folklore, thus explaining the distinction between and separation of fantasy, folklore, fairytale, and the like.

Reading through nineteenth century “fantasy” works offers a glimpse into a world where the adolescent did not exist. In theory, an individual went from being a child to being an adult.

As a result, “The prejudice is by no means only against fantasies; any novel accessible to children is suspect,” and this has been an ongoing dilemma (Le Guin 359). During the nineteenth century, we can see the slow growth of stories written for older children between the ages of twelve to when the child was married (potentially eighteen on the older end)—what we now know as adolescents. Consequently, in this establishment, an emphasis is derived from the connection of magic and temptation with self-discovery or the subtle search to better understand the self at the specific age of contemporary teenagers. Still, to fully understand and develop oneself, the self must come to terms with the reality of the (human) inability to bypass sacrifice of all forms. Sacrifice extends from choosing to stay in working every night with the purpose of succeeding in future endeavors, to declining an opportunity in order to remain besides a loved one, to simply deciding to use a colored pen instead of a pencil for notetaking—with every “sacrifice”, something can be learned about the self.

The nineteenth century writer Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué produced the tale of *Undine* in 1811, a tale which blends both fairy tale and fantasy while also depicting the result of pursuing what we might now call “adolescent desires”. Fouqué realizes how fairy tales and fantasy enable “us to enter worlds of infinite possibility. The maps and contours of fantasy are circumscribed only by imagination itself” (Mathews 1). This description of the novel alone may have produced thoughts of unrequited teenage love, or even a love triangle. Although this was in part the purpose, it also allows this study to demolish the stereotype. The character of Undine herself is a teenager, and it is up to her, a water nymph/spirit (resembling what might today be called a mermaid), to save herself by gaining a soul and becoming a true, mortal human. Fouqué grants a supernatural creature mortality through the desire for love and a soul, ultimately using this to indirectly show the inability to move around the sacrifice that surrounds mortality. Undine must



cut herself off from her supernatural origins—though not completely—to marry Sir Huldbrand, a mortal knight, and gain a soul. The caveat, though, stands in the achievement of this very desire—with a soul comes the characteristics of humanity and mortality. An extreme irony exists amongst humanity: Undine, who gains a soul through marriage to a mortal man, also gains the traits of being kind, helpful, and sympathetic in addition to greed, jealousy, and the like. In sacrificing immortality to gain a soul, the adolescent Undine must decide to accept what might appear to be weaknesses as well, things that lead to other issues and further sacrifices.

Undine later opens their home to Bertalda, the original maiden who sought and almost claimed the love of Sir Huldbrand, and while Undine and Sir Huldbrand were happy for a time, Bertalda continuously tempts the knight. The temptation working hand in hand with the magic stresses the fact that these developing problems surround two young women, women who may now be categorized as adults because of marriage, but whom are still truly adolescents, and the consequence of temptation are more sacrifices. To save Sir Huldbrand and those she cares about in her mortal state, Undine sacrifices herself to the world of water, returning to her previous state of existence, after the knight and Bertalda go against her advice and take a trip down the river. Everyone thinks she is dead, and while still a forlorn widower, Sir Huldbrand becomes engaged to Bertalda. Since her husband marries Bertalda while Undine still lives with a soul, Undine must kill her husband to right his wrong—yet another sacrifice committed by a teenager. Amidst the magic and goblins of the dark forest and the water spirits throughout *Undine*, temptation specifically tends to fall upon the human instead of the inhuman. Sir Huldbrand gives in to his temptation (Bertalda), resulting in mortal Undine sacrificing herself to the water. Not only does he pay for this price in grief, but he pays it again for his poor decision to remarry even though

Undine's body was never found; he must allow Undine to kill him and make the final sacrifice, his life, so that the balance of the mortal and immortal worlds could be restored.

There is a similar tension between mortality, immortality, and sacrifice in Frederick Marryat's<sup>1</sup> *The Phantom Ship* (1839), and this tension finds a place in magic, specifically magic from folklore. *The Phantom Ship* deals with the legend of *The Flying Dutchman*, and Marryat's interpretation of it shows the shifting of the origins of this tale, moving from folklore toward fantasy in the contemporary sense. Although Philip Vanderdecken is not an adolescent, he is aged just above those final teenage years. The entirety of his adolescence was filled with sacrifice and unknowingly would lead to more sacrifices as a result of his father's decisions. As Marryat so brilliantly decides, it is Philip's dead father's doom to eternally sail as the captain of the ship of legends, the cursed phantom ship—*The Flying Dutchman*. The supernatural take over the role of the immortals, particularly the spirits sailing *The Flying Dutchman*, and Philip stands for the mortals, the human with the purpose of offering his father salvation at last. Fate and free will come into play, and Philip is faced with the notion that no matter his desire to save his father's soul, it might also simply be his fate to do so. Although Philip goes along with what might be fate, he does so because he wants to. The fate versus free will theme, in the past and present, "is important to YA literature because it teaches adolescents to question authority, to make their own decisions, and to prevent past mistakes such as genocide, slavery, or interment. YA novels personalize this abstraction..." (Pattee 483).

In fact, "Fantasy can be seen as literature's counterpart to pathology; for though in literature fantasy has undergone conscious revision, it retains many characteristics (and, some analysts would maintain, the function) of primitive fantasy. Yet the aim of fantasy...is, like the

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<sup>1</sup> Marryat is more known for being the author of *The Children of the New Forest*.

aim of psychoanalysis, the investigation of human reality. At the outset, then, is the paradox that terms which signal diversion from reality are the means by which reality is revealed” (Apter 130). Though outwardly—like *Undine*—*The Phantom Ship* might appear to be a tale of adventure for the protagonist and unable to ever occur in the reality known to man, this story which falls into the fantasy genre and acts as one predecessor to the contemporary YA Fantasy novel stresses the amount of sacrifices required by young people to survive and fix problems of the past, showcases the internal struggles that young individuals face in trying to understand themselves, and questions the way reality unfolds, all of which has a great likeness to life in nearly every era of human history.

There were many fantastical writers during the nineteenth century but deciding what is officially classified as fantasy is problematic since, much of the time, fantasy of this period could be blurred with fairy tale. With this in mind, many scholars argue that “William Morris and George MacDonald are the pioneers of fantasy as a modern literary genre” (Mathews 16). MacDonald specifically rounded off the nineteenth century and came into the twentieth century with innovative methods of writing for fantasy and promoting adolescence simultaneously.<sup>2</sup> Not only does MacDonald use his fantasies “to show people how to discover the truth which is so often concealed in the outward appearance,” but he also emphasizes the significance of childhood in combination with adulthood, thus indirectly drawing attention to the in-between, the adolescent years (Saintsbury 107). Published in 1895, MacDonald’s *Lilith* acts as yet another predecessor to twenty-first century YA Fantasy literature (such as to the *Mortal Instruments* series by Cassandra Clare) with its reflection on the self quite literally and figuratively through

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<sup>2</sup> It so happens, though, that the reason Morris and MacDonald may have been labeled “pioneers” connects to the fact that Lewis and Tolkien, who dominated the fantasy genre in the middle of the twentieth century and onwards, were heavily influenced by Morris and MacDonald.

the transportation to different realms via mirrors as well as through its hinting at origins through the restructured biblical figures of Adam, Eve, and Lilith.<sup>3</sup> Lilith herself is an extremely captivating character because, on the one hand, MacDonald portrays her as evil and misguided, that no good can come from her confusion and revenge, and so Eve happens to be her opposite—the good; yet, Lilith was cast out of Eden because she went against her husband, and this is the reason that Eve was pointedly made differently from her—taking a part of Adam and using it as a basis for Eve.

Readers reach a dilemma: do they sympathize with Lilith for trying to fight what appears to be the control of a patriarchal figure or do they despise her for her bloodthirst and demonic persona? MacDonald forces readers to question themselves and their own beliefs, in the fantastical otherworld which Mr. Vane, the protagonist, falls into. Though the protagonist is most definitely not an adolescent, all he faces are normally faced during the *adolescent* years, as is skillfully outlined by the story's children versus giants. In this otherworld, the innocence of the children mixed with the idiocy and violence of the giants simply emphasize the way Mr. Vane fits somewhere in the middle, just as adolescence falls between childhood and adulthood. MacDonald develops another reality where he can, one, overtly point toward the slow growth of a "death-loving" ideology (which goes on to pervade a great deal of twentieth century literature); two, show that self-discovery and sacrifice are necessary for a person to truly surpass human constructs of time and life; and three, use fantasy to reveal the proximity of fiction to reality. In considering all of the above, it is easy to understand that *Lilith*, *The Phantom Ship*, and *Undine* are quite particular in the way that they treat and develop concepts of mortality and immortality, childhood and adulthood (as well as the in-between), and magic, temptation, and sacrifice; they

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<sup>3</sup> However, one must also realize that MacDonald's intentions have to do in part with instruction in Christian morality, something foreign to the work of Cassandra Clare.

possess key themes that continue to be reinterpreted and reintroduced into contemporary YA Fantasy literature.

The nineteenth century was rich with the reintroduction of legends and folklore in the form of fantasy, and so, there is a great deal to be gained from these three works. While all are admittedly different except for their containing the supernatural/fantastical, *Undine*, *The Phantom Ship*, and *Lilith* all do suggest that humanity's inability to bypass sacrifice is indirectly connected to the time known now as adolescence as well as to the construct of time, directing readers to think on very real matters in these unreal worlds. Consequently, this brings us back to the dichotomy between commercial and literary, and that "Dreaming and thinking are uncomfortable bedfellows for our intellects, since our own experience of dreaming and myth is likely to be heavily defective because we are trapped in linear time" (Garner 151). In subconsciously and consciously trying to cope with sacrifice, individuals also realize that change must occur because the human construct of time moves forward, and nothing can be found outside of change and time since humanity is defined by change itself and, eventually, death. Fantasy shows that sacrifice comes with change, for change forces choices to be made, choices that can impact the rest of a human life, and, as will be seen in the twentieth century, the choices of adolescents can change life as it is known—for better or for worse.

Something to consider as the study continues is that "[w]hen history falls away from a subject, we are left with Otherness, and all its power to compact enmity, recharge it and recirculate it. An archetype is a hollow thing, but a dangerous one, a figure or image which through usage has been uncoupled from the circumstances which brought it into being, and goes on spreading false consciousness" (Warner 239). Although the above selected literature might have been considered commercial at one point, they now tend to fall into the distinction of

classic and literary, somehow providing them with a greater sense of worth and authenticity. And yet, they incorporate themes still in existence today in YA Fantasy stories, but these modern stories are perceived as much more commercial and sometimes less important on the spectrum of what to and what not to read.

### **The 20<sup>th</sup> Century – From MacDonald to Lewis**

*[F]antasy can challenge the accepted norms of reality through its very structure; and once challenged, those norms can be resisted.*

*~ Alison Waller*

Even with Sigmund Freud's work, which ultimately destroyed the idea of the innocent romantic child, the first half of the twentieth century still considered childhood as "an idyllic time, a period to be prolonged and kept separate from adulthood" (Lynn xxxiii). And to this day, adults can idealize childhood, projecting a very specific notion of childhood onto children themselves, especially via literature—an entirely other discussion for another time. At the turn of the century, George MacDonald continued to blend fantasy and fairy tale constructs in order to produce a more modern and new fantastical genre, one which was so popular and enjoyed since "George MacDonald made goodness attractive because the characters he describes are not goody-goodies or prigs but are rather in the process of becoming good in the seeking of a goal which when it is achieved will make them happy" (Saintsbury 105). Additionally, MacDonald is unafraid to write on adolescents, to bring to life the grey area between childhood and adulthood.

Nevertheless, these minute details and many more associated with the adolescents defeating magic portrayed as evil tends to be overlooked due to the very clear oppositions which MacDonald does not try to hide. Instead of taking into consideration the ways in which fantasy

and adolescence work hand in hand and the way magic and temptation can propel a story towards a deeper meaning, “Fantasy is often criticized for being too obvious in its oppositions. Light versus dark, good versus evil: such pairings seem glaringly evident, even simple-minded, compared to the intricately intertwined betrayals and benefactions of the great characters of realist fiction” (Attebery 86-87). It does not help that the MacDonald’s *The Day Boy and the Night Girl (The Romance of Photogen and Nycteris)* might outwardly appear to be just another fairy tale where two young people fall in love, survive a great evil together, and marry in the end. Still, readers and scholars are therefore required to read into the novel, establish a connection, and work their minds and imaginations to comprehend all that is being offered. In the contemporary concept of fantasy, magic is either feared or loved, adolescents are prone to saving the day, and adulthood places an end to the brilliance and innocence of childhood. The twentieth century brought an emphasis, a focus even, on sacrifice in a way both new and frighteningly perceptive, so much so that ignorance is truly bliss—though using this excuse in the present no longer works well. Nonetheless, “...sacrifice is all perception. What seems like a sacrifice to one person isn’t to another” (Robins).

C.S. Lewis’s literature—specifically his Narnia series—challenges norms, in the sense that he concocts another realm, an otherworld, run by another unexplainable entity. The otherworld itself lives on and survives with the help of children; this said, the Chronicles of Narnia does not necessarily progress into the newly established young adult genre since it technically came before the date of the official establishment of YA by YALSA. The Narnia books reveal that the process of growing up and moving into and past the adolescent years will inevitably put an end to certain experiences—if the individual did not actively keep the “child” and the “imagination” alive. And thus, Lewis asserts that becoming a young adult is sacrifice in

of itself, though it is inevitable and nowhere near as terrible as becoming an adult unless death reaches a person before adolescence or adulthood. Furthermore, Lewis establishes a sort of death-loving ideology, as Phillip Pullman labels it, particularly with the final book of the series and its end, as well as the ever-present theme of sacrifice, both of which permeate much of the twentieth century via other YA Fantasy literature, literature in general, and nationalistic thought produced by both World Wars. Although something to be expanded on in another study, the Narnia books, as has been argued regarding *Lord of the Rings*, are debatably an encoded and complex response to trauma.<sup>4</sup>

*The Last Battle* (1956), the seventh and final book of Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia, is quite a dark tale. As previously stated, the Chronicles of Narnia shows the progression between childhood to adolescence and onward, most obviously pointed out by the fact that after a certain age, an individual cannot return to Narnia. However, in *The Last Battle*, many older teenagers and adults return as it is ending in a scene that greatly parallels the biblical Day of Judgement. Everyone—those originally in Narnia and the others who randomly appeared—is granted access to Aslan's Country, so lush, fertile, and endlessly beautiful. At first, the reader cannot help but feel some sort of joy since everyone has been reunited. Then, the weight of the situation hits homes. First, Aslan tells Digory, Polly, Peter, Edmund, Lucy, Eustace, Jill, and the Pevensies' parents that they have all died in a train crash, and Susan, who was not on the train, lives on in the real-world. Narnia is technically no more, though Aslan's Country exists. The mixed emotions are not put to rest with the final line, that "All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which

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<sup>4</sup> Something to consider is that Lewis was actually at the front during World War I.



every chapter is better than the one before” (Lewis 228). Narnia may have been popular and seen as a commercial piece of children’s literature, but it truly was a dark series that reflected on mature concepts. Feelings of hope surround this final line, masking the sadness and anger and even shock associated with the realization that Narnia can never be accessed by anyone ever again. Essentially, though, Lewis has succeeded in making his audience support the fact that everyone is dead and that is for the better, hence Philip Pullman’s great dislike for Narnia and Lewis. Although magic, the imagination, temptation, relationships, growing up, and surviving are all explored, Pullman is only partly right to argue that the exploration of these notions is wrong in that the only purpose of exploring these is to ultimately promote the extremes of death and sacrifice.

The Narnia series garnered such a large amount of popularity because not only did it act as an escape for children and teenagers, allowing them to be heroes and heroines and go on adventures to save themselves, their kingdoms, and other kingdoms while always being able to fight for good, but it also acted as a reminder for children and teenagers not to grow up too quickly and not to forget about their childhood—arguably a hangover of the “romantic childhood” with everyone meant to keep their childhood memories in order to stay in touch with the divine or the Other. Becoming an adult is a difficult process, and so, remembering the imagination and childhood during an individual’s teenage years is essential. The first half of the twentieth century proved to be vital in the process of developing the fantasy genre as it is known today. In keeping with eternal and universal themes of light versus dark and good versus evil, writers of this period pursued originality through the concept of adolescence, particularly underlining that “No character is a perfect hero without guilt or temptations,” hence the unending temptations and mortality (Pattee 175). With this realism embedded in the fantastical, sacrifice

could be clearly seen, if only the literature was given a chance. Magic may be unexplainable and fictitious, but temptation and sacrifice are very real and timeless in the tale of humanity.

### **The 20<sup>th</sup> Century – After Lewis**

*Magic isn't good or evil by itself....*

*~ Tamora Pierce*

Generally, though not completely<sup>5</sup>, “So unfashionable did fantastic works for adults become during the early decades of the twentieth century—at the same time that fantasy and fairytales for children underwent a relative renaissance...” (Hartwell 368). With the end of the Second World War, there were obviously many social, economic, and political changes. In the second half of the twentieth century, the concept of having an “other” fantastical world which a human being could control became well-liked by the general population since it offered some form of stability and predictability to a world that had gone through the exact opposite in the most extreme form. Although fantasy for the most part continued to not necessarily be taken seriously or perceived as anything other than commercial works, there was a definite increase in the popularity of fantasy as a result of the control it offered in shaping a better world, even if the world being shaped was simply a fantastical land.

At the same time, “In 1957 the Young Adult Services Division of the American Library Association was established (YASD, known since 1992 as the Young Adult Library Services Association or YALSA). Since then, ‘young adult’ or ‘YA’ has been used as a classification for fiction and other commodities aimed to appeal to a teenage market, although what it actually means in terms of age is not always clear. YALSA’s guidelines specify twelve- to eighteen-year-

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<sup>5</sup> Such as the popular work of Arthur Machen during this era.

olds...” (Waller 9). The formal introduction of the teenager granted people of all ages access to a different manner of understanding themselves, for an individual did not have to be either a child or an adult—a teenager stood as another distinguishing category, another official age group. On the one hand, this benefited an individual in understanding the progression of his/her life; nevertheless, this category also opened doors for the placement of stereotypes and clichés on this age group, from silly romances to love triangles to trivial worries about schooling and friendships, etc. In turn, this “labeling” of the young adult led to the stereotyping of adolescence as a whole as well as the literature written for and about the adolescent.

These preconceived notions surrounding the young adult live on today, casting a shadow over the brilliance that can exist within YA literature, specifically YA Fantasy literature. The Young Adult heading itself granted individuals the ability to access a sort of individuality, which parallels much of fantasy since “...the concern of fantasy is not with the minutely faithful record for the sake of fidelity to fact, but with the sense of individuality that comes from making things strange and luminous with independent life in a fantastic setting” (Manlove ix). The combination of YA and fantasy presents another means to understand the self, and why the self may be prone to sacrifice, no matter how an individual chooses to define and interpret the term. In order to gain access to anything thought-provoking, though, it is necessary for the suspension of disbelief. Fantasy requires that readers take things for what they are, unquestioning, though the genre itself is not unchanging. While some argue that the genre’s sophistication did not change during the twentieth century, “it has altered in character: for instance, Victorian fantasy is more overtly moral, and tends to deal with the individual, where the twentieth-century fantasy... has been more ‘epic’ in character, viewing the hero in the context of a larger society...” (Manlove 156). Likewise, individuality, heroism, the fantastical, and the adolescent together produced a

universality which allowed people to cope with change in reality and the inability to bypass sacrifice. Robin McKinley and Tamora Pierce both realized this during the second half of the twentieth century, resulting in their production of works that strongly own stereotypes of adolescents while also tearing them down and promoting the more serious angles of this genre.

Because of her reputation in the area of fairy tale and folklore, most people are unaware of McKinley's skill in fantasy, specifically when it comes to writing quest fantasy. Quest fantasy "is characterized by its protean quality, its ability to subsume and reflect varied purposes and narratives through the medium of Story, as John Clute asserts in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. Its simplest form is the market-driven predictable and redundant formula of commodified fantasy; however, the work of more accomplished writers belies the limitations of such works. In the hands of Ursula K. Le Guin, Robert Holdstock, Ian Irvine, Robin McKinley, Elizabeth Hand, Neil Gaiman, Patricia McKillip and others, the quest fantasy is an ever-changing portal that leads us into the heart of the human condition" (Senior 199). And while the others mentioned are also recognized fantasy authors, McKinley is set apart from them by her ability to place a certain importance on adolescence within her fantasy.<sup>6</sup> Robin McKinley's *The Blue Sword* takes a traditional, high fantasy stance<sup>7</sup> and then proceeds to place an adolescent female protagonist in charge of surviving an adventure and saving the day. Generally, McKinley uses an adventure for the hero/heroine to force characters out of their comfort zones, in turn making young people discover incredible things about themselves.

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<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, it seems essential to point out that Senior's explanation moves away from one part of the world and firmly plants his definition in the USA. Again, although something much larger and worth discussing and investigating in a separate study, the fact is that fantasy branches out quite differently, moving and developing separately, so much so that it is curious what constitutes as "popular fiction" and commercial versus literary in different parts of the world.

<sup>7</sup> High fantasy is a subgenre of fantasy and is also known sometimes as epic fantasy as a result of its epic method of storytelling.

McKinley—with the previous assistance of Lewis, Tolkien, and others—brought back the popularity of using trials to impress self-discovery, bravery, sacrifice, and capabilities of adolescent characters. *The Blue Sword* received the Newbery Honor award when it was published in 1982, though few know it today for its placement in the YA Fantasy genre, existing in the commercial rather than literary distinction, or both. The way magic is depicted within McKinley's story is key in revealing the changes it had undergone over the new century. Not unusually, magic causes fear amongst those who do not understand it and those who do not possess it. And so, through Harry's—the protagonist's—perspective, readers can see the anti-magic beliefs paralleling a very realistic situation where people fear what they do not understand. McKinley, like Tamora Pierce and other late twentieth century and present-day authors, calls magic possessed by characters the "Gift", trying to restructure emotions and associations surrounding the term "magic".

Power never ceases to take up its role as a seductress for most characters, no matter how pious they appear to be. Yet, McKinley is very keen about making sure that readers and characters alike never forget that power always comes with a price—a sacrifice. Thurra's (the demon-wizard's) malice and his ruthlessness—in addition to his bit of "non-human blood"—lead to nothing but failure and downfall in the end, and so, seeking power and the ultimate control never ends well. For Thurra, possessing the strongest magic was his greatest temptation, and he gave into it, making every choice with this in mind. Still, it is a common theme that the greatest magic could be the vilest; hence, it becomes an internal struggle to resist evil in the form of the strongest, most powerful thing. While this does not tempt Harry, she must always remind herself not to give into overusing and abusing the Gift.

Temptation and sacrifice can go hand in hand, as McKinley portrays so craftily, for there are costs to most everything, especially power, and some individuals must die for the sake of good's success. Harry had to become an orphan in order to come to Daria and for the rest of the events to play out. And yet, McKinley also shows that with love and an individual's own strength, anything is possible and not all sacrifice is necessary. At the end of the novel, Corlath and Harry blend their magic and their love to heal and save Harry's mortally wounded friend—and it works, offering some hope to the rather dreary notion that *all* sacrifice is unavoidable. It takes the introduction of Harry into his life to make Corlath's Gift change for the better. It *was* Corlath's Gift that told him Harry was special and to take her with him; and so, fate and magic are representations of not entirely comprehensible knowledge, which are somehow connected to an adolescent. McKinley questions fate, though, in setting up a paradox of giving inhabitants of *The Blue Sword's* land the ability to believe that legendary heroes/heroines have as much power in dealing with fate/destiny while it is also “considered unlucky to...meddle with destiny” (McKinley 161).

Very much like Robin McKinley, Tamora Pierce plays with fate as well as with the gods to create adolescent characters capable of accomplishing what many might deem impossible. Unsurprisingly, fate versus free will is a prevalent discussion as sacrifices are made. An individual cannot help but believe or hope that he/she has a greater purpose in life, that he/she exists for a reason. Though this idea might stem from childhood, it sits in the subconscious and affects nearly every decision being made during the young adult years, likely even after those years, too. Ruth Nadelman Lynn acknowledges that “Fantasist Tamora Pierce has written that the idealism and imagination in fantasy literature are especially appealing to young people, who have the time and emotional energy to devote to social and political causes...” (Lynn xxii).

Understandably, Pierce writes with the goal of not simply producing the stereotypical “strong” female characters, but rather a complex and extremely human character that cannot always be perfectly explained. Pierce strays slightly away from the quest-style fantasy so as to showcase the notion that no matter what is thrown at the characters, they will be prepared as a result of the self-discovery and sacrifices made along the path to accomplishing their goals; however, this is not to say that the characters will not be forever changed (and sometimes traumatized) as a result of the sacrifices made and the challenges face.

Pierce combines the medieval past of kingdoms and knights with fantastical creatures and magic in order to underline the sacrifice necessary for many adolescents to achieve something, anything. Quite particularly in *The Song of the Lioness* quartet, Pierce writes in a manner to make the point that “Magic isn’t good or evil by itself,” that in fiction and in reality, everything has the potential to be both good and bad (Pierce 97). Magic is merely a means to catch the eyes and imaginations of readers in order to continue explaining that a person can be whatever they like, and it comes down to the way in which the self responds to temptation and sacrifice. Similarly, in the final book of *The Song of the Lioness* quartet, *Lioness Rampant*, Pierce hints at the idea that adolescence means change, but it is up to each individual what this change means. Throughout the quartet, readers are welcome to watch Alanna’s evolution from child through teenager (and later on in other books, her life as an adult), and readers can laugh, hurt, and hope along with this individual who becomes a spectacular heroine because of the pursuit of her own desires.

This entire series tracks a girl growing up, starting from the beginning of her teenage years. As readers are guided through all the sacrifices that have to be made by Alanna to survive, not get caught, and be the best knight, readers are also reminded that the adolescent years will be

difficult, but not impossible. Through the use of complex and very human female heroines, which is now an extremely popular technique in modern young adult fantasy literature, Pierce explores all forms of temptations.<sup>8</sup> Although it is not the focus of this series, lust and love are a minor detail to adolescent years. This realistic temptation draws readers in and holds their attentions, allowing Pierce to truly delve into adventures and growing up within this series. And yet again, power is an insatiable temptation. Duke Roger's desire for power requires evil magic, and he wants to be powerful in the sense of ruling over Tortall and as many other kingdoms as possible. While wanting everyone to follow a specific individual is one thing, caving into the temptation of controlling another individual's will is something else entirely.

Pierce subtly works with this specific temptation in connection to magic with the purpose of revealing that some things are not exactly as they are cut out to be—it may be a very fortunate thing that no one in reality could ever possess such controlling magic. Realizing this and so much more during adolescence provides a means for understanding the self and the reasoning behind an individual's desires as Pierce presents through Alanna and many of her characters. Indeed, an overly discussed fault of fantasy, as critics state, is that the “bad guys” tend to be flat or so “black hat” from the very start, almost always filling the trope of “evil overlord”. Rather than try to argue this, it might be beneficial to notice that although Duke Roger appears to wear this look early on, he could easily have fallen into either stereotype of good or evil. Whether or not he appears to be evil from the very start is up to the reader, a thought which seems extremely applicable to the other “bad guys” of the fantasy and YA Fantasy genres.

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<sup>8</sup> However, although Alanna comes off as special, she is not necessarily fitting into the “chosen one” trope because of the fact that no one has “chosen” her and nothing sets her apart from anyone else other than her motivation to pursue her own dream. The “chosen one” trope in contemporary times might be better aligned with Harry Potter, Katniss Everdeen, etc.



A great deal more could be said on McKinley and Pierce, both of whom have constructed worlds and characters which overlap across their many, *many* books. Pierce's Tortall Universe, for instance, shows the many generations through the eyes of adolescents; readers are thus granted access to Alanna, Alanna's own children in their adolescent years, past teenaged ancestors, and more like so. The world, therefore, feels very real *because* readers get to know many characters in their adolescent forms, allowing for emotional ties to be established to series. This, though, points towards a subject that continues to be under debate: escapism. Many people feel that fantasy like this "advocates or reinforces escapism. ...[They] may not believe that fantasy is well written, serious, and worthwhile" (Gates, Steffel, and Molson 136). Escapism usually is associated with negativity, the concept that people of all ages are running away from life, unwilling or not wanting to face reality although reality alone is a human construct. Arguably and more realistically, fantasy—specifically YA Fantasy—might be appreciated as a means to cope with life, to decide how to act upon reality. If fantasy and YA Fantasy must be given a purpose in order to surpass the usual commerciality placed upon them (whether or not their true purpose and potential is to exist in commercial, literary, neither, or both worlds), YA Fantasy and fantasy allow for people to reflect on their own reality without having to put a pause on it; stepping into another realm now and again makes it possible for people to remain sane enough throughout the inevitable sacrifices in life and the harshness that their reality might pose at times.

### **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

*[Fantasy literature] became a medium to sustain our need for heroes and our perpetual belief that good can overcome evil but without the level of moralizing found in earlier tales.*

~ Pamela Gates, Susan Steffel, Francis Molson

With the turn of the century and J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, a new amount of attention was placed on children's literature, although Rowling's series truly should be classified as young adult literature for it completely tracks the adolescent years of the characters rather than childhood. While the popularity of this series was immense and continues to be quite great, the "Fiction aimed at teenagers is not always deemed the stuff of good literature or high culture. ...[T]he teenager exists primarily within the sphere of popular culture and subculture, and the prevailing interest is in commodities *for* teenagers, rather than art *about* them" (Waller 10). The concept of the teenager grew out of the 1960s, developing into a sort of bubble filled with stereotypes and clichés associated with people of this age group. The latter half of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty-first century boded well for the true understanding of the importance of adolescence, though, with McKinley, Pierce, and Rowling included in this positive forecast.

The rise of "Young Adult Fantasy" in popular fiction and the commercial world brought the realization that, generally, it was up to the younger generation—the new and adolescent generation—to change present viewpoints, not the adults, although adults are the ones who technically wield power in reality as it is known. Fantasy literature, then, "became a medium to sustain our need for heroes and our perpetual belief that good can overcome evil but without the level of moralizing found in earlier tales" (Gates, Steffel, and Molson 4). The issue, though, from the rise in popularity of and the increased scrutiny of the YA genre is the potential ignorance of the international population regarding the genre's origins and its current, deeper meanings. Without an understanding of its past, the genre is bound to lose some of its credulity and brilliance. That said, the very desire to prove YA Fantasy's worth in the world of literature and

align it with a literary perspective more than a commercial one also says a great deal about the different respect given to literary versus that given to commercial literature.

Currently, many people would argue that the young adult novel's popularity mostly derives "from the fact that it explicitly deals with the issues young people confront during adolescence—physical changes, acne, peer relationships, dating, drugs, alcohol, sex, career anxiety and decisions, relations with parents, loneliness, suicide—and suggests that, by and large, the dilemmas associated with them are manageable and solvable" (Gates, Steffel, and Molson 130). And yet, if an individual could understand the history, and even the pre-history, of fantasy and adolescence, there would be a much deeper reading and comprehension of the YA Fantasy genre, which so easily falls into the traps of stereotypes and clichés mentioned above—if only an individual could remember all the sacrifices he/she made as an adolescent rather than simply puberty, for example, then the proximity of YA Fantasy to reality could start to be understood and the genre might not be brushed to the side.

The twenty-first century has brought numerous television and film adaptations of young adult/young adult fantasy literature (Harry Potter, Hunger Games, Divergent, and Twilight films; the Shadowhunters television series). No matter who is producing these adaptations, keeping in mind marketing opportunities and playing off popularity trends, these spin-offs presumably bring even more wanted and unwanted attention to the teenager; however, this attention usually comes in the form of stereotypes and clichés, and many of the actors/actresses are actually adults fitting into what people perceive to be and associate with adolescents. Nonetheless, the works from this century so far, one way or another, emphasize the idea in any fantastical situation, any slightly realistic situation, any fantastical situation which parallels reality, that the adults cannot solve the issues and cannot save the day. Instead, it is up to the young adults to put an end to tyranny, to

bring down the Dark Lord, to convince everyone that people are more similar than different, to sometimes even restate the very things that adults once believed as teenagers themselves; yet, this does not mean characters or readers of this sort of fiction should be squeezed into the modern term of “liberal” as the reasoning for these mindsets.

For the sake of lengthiness, the Inheritance Cycle series by Christopher Paolini and the Kingkiller Chronicles by Patrick Rothfuss, like so much other literature in the bibliography of this study, will not be directly analyzed, although their content align well with this study and its arguments. Interestingly, contemporary times show that writers tend to go down the path of young adult urban fantasy or young adult experimental/traditional high fantasy, delving into what it truly means to have free will and how it is not mutually exclusive with sacrifice, which exists whether or not people desire it. Recently, there has also been a great production of young adult female protagonists (though this does exclude that there has been a large production of young adult male protagonists as well), and Kristin Cashore introduces Katsa into this mix of complex teenage females.

Cashore’s *Graceling* series technically makes use of the traditional high fantasy atmosphere, with its land of seven kingdoms (Middluns, Nander, Wester, Sunder, Estill, Monsea, and Lienid). Like Robin McKinley and Tamora Pierce, using the eyes to convey magic or inhuman abilities remains essential, and naming these abilities as “Graces” is similar to naming them “Gifts”. A Grace is a certain ability that an individual possesses, an ability that mortals usually do not have; in the case of some, it might be a Grace of endurance (being able to go without sleep for five days straight before feeling even the slightest bit of fatigue) or it may be the Grace of hunting (never missing a killing blow). Graces surface during childhood rather than adolescence, reflecting Cashore’s understanding that while childhood grants keys to unlocking

aspects of growing up, the choices made in the adolescent years are attached more to sacrifice. Self-discovery and romances might appear cliché and stereotypical to the YA genre, but many Gothic works dealt with these very concepts in the nineteenth century and are now deemed high literature; yet, young adult fantasy novels that also work with these concepts are rarely given the acknowledgement they deserve because many assume that there is a lower register and love triangles with no meaning.

In general, “Cashore’s...female characters can hold their own next to other fantasy female protagonists such as Alanna in Tamora Pierce’s four-part series *the Song of the Lioness* (1983-8), among others” (Pattee 175). Katsa herself wants nothing to do with the usual associations made with femininity/females, and fortunately, this teenage girl can break gender constructs due to her Grace since it protects her. She is no stranger to sacrifice, as most Gracelings must sacrifice their freedom to their kings as a result of their possession of a Grace. In this way, although the Grace is meant to enhance humans gifted with it, the Grace feels more like a burden, automatically placing those with Graces under the direct order of kings. Ironically, then, rather than acting as gifts and enhancements, the Graces provide some amount of burden and required sacrifice to the individuals possessing them.

In watching a young adult make sacrifice after sacrifice from simply existing in a society or as a result of actively trying to change said society which present-day readers might consider unrealistic goes to show how close the scenario may be to the current reality—all it takes is one person to start a chain reaction, and Katsa willingly takes charge of this. As a teenager, Katsa heads an underground network called “the Council”, made up of nobles and men and women of all sorts, to instate what they believe to be justice, and this usually means going against the governing bodies—the kings of the kingdoms. Cashore directs readers to self-determination and

seeking what is right (or as “right” as something can be) through a fantastical youthful situation. Likewise, in the Graceling series, less fate is present and more free will—or rather choice—is underlined, revealing that it is in the hands of each individual to change their own situation, be themselves, and stand up to whatever is holding back justice and/or his/her true self, even if it means sacrificing something.

On the other end of the spectrum, in an urban fantasy setting with a young adult male protagonist named Jack, *The Warrior Heir*, the first book in the Heir Chronicles by Cinda Williams Chima, is set in Trinity, Ohio, mimicking the very real city of Oberlin, Ohio. Chima uses the young adult urban genre to retell the Wars of the Roses with different sects of magical beings that are placed into a category based on their Weirstone, something everyone must be born with. The entire series displays the perspectives of multiple young adult characters, but the first book truly sets the tone because it takes two sixteen-year-olds to set in motion changes to the class system, the hierarchy, the unfairness and cruelty, and more—things that should have been changed centuries before, things that adults had been in fact struggling to change for centuries. When interviewed for this study, Chima explained that it is vital in YA in general to include and develop adult characters, not dumbed down adults or adults placed as props in the background, in order to emphasize the differences between the age-groups and the particularities surrounding adolescence as well as to show that no one (including the teenagers themselves) wants teenagers to have free reign and run free—rather, there is a place for every age group in life without one being greater or possessing more worth than the other.

Through both her very developed adult and teenaged characters, Chima is able to underline that “The child and the adult adopt opposing positions: innocent and experience, immature and mature, pure and sexual, free and responsible. However contestable these positions

are, they function successfully as binaries, but those gaps between the two states are more problematic. The teenager resides in the indefinable space between innocence and experience, or asexuality and sexuality, forcing a definition that relies on transitory and unstable signifiers” (Waller 30). While this may be a fairly simple concept, it is essential to remember that the “teenager” was not officially distinguished until the mid-twentieth century. Chima is also quite logical with her use of fantasy, specifically magic. During the same interview, she explains that if an individual possessed magic or magical capabilities, why in the world would their first idea be to use their abilities for others and for good? The same thought-process can be applied to her development of temptation, in turn connected with sacrifice. Greed, money, power, love, security, safety—all are tempting, and all come with some form of sacrifice, an inevitably logical situation, though it remains overlooked due to its existence and portrayal specifically in YA urban fantasy.

Kendare Blake takes the notion of sacrifice to an entirely new level with her *Three Dark Crowns* series. She specializes in young adult dark fantasy, a type of fantasy that usually works with more supernatural details, horror, and a much darker emotional plane. First and foremost, Blake falls into the now common pattern of giving the most difficult decisions to sixteen-year-olds, giving them the power to change the world if they so choose. The well-being of the queendom, the matriarchy, and the island of Fennbirn itself are in the hands of three teenage girls who must kill each other in order for one to survive and be made queen; these girls are no strangers, though—they are triplets. Blake presents such an odd dilemma, forcing readers to question themselves and what they would do in a similar situation, no matter the gender and no matter how unlikely this might be based off of the current human construct of reality. In constructing this situation where sacrifice is *literally* necessary, Blake subtly shows the process

of self-identification as each sister can no longer run away from her fate set into motion via many factors, some of which are the humans themselves; the sisters must confront it head on, either going along with it or questioning it. The first book in the series, *Three Dark Crowns*, begins with the following prophesy/poem: “*Three dark queens / are born in a glen, / sweet triplets will never be friends. Three dark sisters / all fair to be seen, / two to devour / and one to be Queen*” (Blake). Right from the start, there is something so very twisted and dark about the actions that must be undertaken. Blake flips the common understanding of “family” on its head, expanding it and setting it against itself for the “good” and survival of Fennbirn. Very much like *The Blue Sword* and *Graceling*, *Three Dark Crowns* stresses innate magical and extraordinary abilities; the term “Gift” reappears in this work to represent certain characters having unparalleled abilities.

The temptations connect nearly perfectly to the inevitable sacrifices. For one, since the priestesses have already given into their temptation, a literal human sacrifice is unavoidable. They move to bring back the old practice of sacrificing a girl to sway the goddesses to help the mortals. Unfortunately, Mirabella, the eldest of the triplets, can do nothing to save the brainwashed girl chosen as the sacrifice in one instance. Furthermore, the priestesses decide to institute a sacrificial year which “refers to a generation in which two of the queens are nearly giftless. So weak that they are viewed less as kills than as sacrifices. . . .The night of the Quickening, in the most sacred of places, the people rise up and feed the others into the fires” (Blake 141). A more romantic view of sacrifice is presented, purposefully overshadowing other characters’ more realistic sacrifices. The island normally looks at the deeds that the sisters must commit as killings, not sacrifices; however, they most definitely appear to be sacrifices. This, though, is completely erased in the horrific situation which Blake constructs to stress the power



that adolescents have, innate or not. What might appear to be common sense is not—killing one’s sisters to survive and be made queen *is* sacrificial, and, as of the end of the first book in the Three Dark Crown series, unavoidable.

These sisters all push against the system in their own ways, questioning their roles in these ritualistic killings. Unsurprisingly, with extremes present in fantastical writing, especially dark fantasy, “Fantastic fiction is often dismissed as overly stylized, guilty of locking characters and readers into binaries of good and evil or masculine and feminine, and remaking existing social inequalities in other worlds or bodies. In addition, fantasy is charged with willfully evading concerns that are central to the everyday world, unacceptably championing the personal apolitical, and offering easy ‘magical’ solutions to complex literary or social narratives” (Waller 99). However, Kendare Blake, and so many writers of the twenty-first century and the late twentieth century, prove these assertions quite wrong, placing the blame (if one must find blame) instead on critics and readers. If a critic cannot see more deeply into a character or if a reader cannot use his/her mind to delve into a piece of literature, to find the true meaning behind what might outwardly appear unrealistic or even extremist or archetypal, then it is not the author’s or a genre’s fault.

An individual might say that if a reader, a scholar, a critic, or a general member of the population cannot use his/her own self to see what an author is addressing in YA Fantasy, then they have lost their imaginations and forgotten their youth, their adolescence, and the sacrifices they subconsciously and consciously had to make. Though an extreme thought, it should be acknowledged that both writer and reader must work together to reflect on the created fantastical lands and situations. It is one thing to prefer some genres over others—everyone has different preferences. Even so, it is another thing entirely to put down different genres without

comprehensive knowledge of the genre's past and present. Seeing past commercial and literary constructs and reading with an open mind that is prepared to work can produce deeper reflections. The heroism pursued in twenty-first century YA Fantasy reflects on the desire for someone to be a solution to all issues; similarly, individuality stems from the belief that an individual cannot be replaced, something that YA Fantasy protagonists of this century present at the surface-level. Looking more closely, though, it might be realized that fully believing in this individuality can be more problematic than placing some sort of belief in the fantastical—for while the fantastical can help more than hurt and underline that sacrifice is inevitable though not mortally detrimental, believing that the self is essential to some part of reality stands to be much more harmful.

But, again, that is yet another discussion for another time.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

*There are different sorts of complexity.*

*~ Brian Attebery*

A great deal of information has been presented and even more has been left out, for this study grew into a much larger discussion touching on a myriad of things. For one, it began with the desire to understand the use of magic and temptation alongside the development of adolescence specifically through Fantasy and YA Fantasy from the nineteenth century to present day (the twenty first century) in order to prove a more philosophical concept: the (human) inability to bypass sacrifice. Diving into the research, reading both critical and creative works, developing ideas on the side, speaking with professionals in both the critical and academic fields as well as the creative fields, starting a more relaxed vlog series titled “The Fiction Around

Fantasy & YA”, and finally getting to the writing and rewriting and editing (and repeat) of this study—all of this acted as a guide to one of the primary points: commercial versus literary. Of course, commercial versus literary is merely one dichotomy under the spotlight in this study, but it is an important one. Deeming something commercial or literary automatically places it under a certain lens for the world to view it, distorting an already constructed reality.

Commercial and literary ties into the discussion of children versus young adult versus adult, hinting at the idea that the former is always less complex than the latter. In connection, then, fantasy is seen as a less complex genre in the sense that it does not grapple with reality as it is known to humans. And yet, in literature, “There are different sorts of complexity. A myth is complex vertically, as it were; it lays out its pairings again and again, piling opposition upon opposition. The same binary pair might show up on one level as eternally battling forces; on another as complementary components of a whole, like the Taoist model of yin and yang. Finding the binaries is only the first step. Then one must look for the way they are bundled, and for the ways the groupings change throughout the narrative” (Attebery 86-87). In primarily selecting what would currently be deemed “commercial” pieces for this study, attention was meant to be directed to the binaries and dualities existing within the commercial.

To brush aside a genre based on stereotypes, clichés, and the preconceived notion that fantasy cannot be complex and that YA Fantasy is dumbed down for the adolescent feels quite ignorant. Complexity itself is the reflection of a person’s perception of the human construct of reality rather than “life”. With regards to the vlogs of “The Fiction Around Fantasy & YA”, many of the authors mentioned and agreed that it is unfortunate to know that there “...are adults who still do not consider the prospect of a good read sufficient reason for accepting or endorsing the value of fantasy in the lives of children and, therefore, do not recommend it to young people,

regardless of what the latter may like or enjoy” (Gates, Steffel, and Molson 136). And so, the discussion of good versus bad literature, good versus bad genres, and the like may never be resolved, especially because every individual defines these things very differently, no matter the norms of the time.

As previously reiterated, much from the nineteenth century to the present day is left out of the discussion, and some of these titles and authors are mentioned in footnotes. Due to lengthiness, incorporating everything or going into extreme analysis on a handful of literature did not seem a wise manner to proceed. Instead, bringing into conversation different aspects of the young adult, fantasy, and YA Fantasy could hopefully lead to more discussion and further study and reflection on this genre. In the majority of YA Fantasy, it comes down to the teenagers, the young adults, the adolescents, to solve the dilemmas that others seem unable to fix or figure out. These teenage heroes and heroines are the ones that must come to terms with the sacrifices that need to be made on their behalf and follow through. Again, if some reasoning must be given to make the fantastical appear worthwhile to “reality” and what the general population calls “logical”, it might be considered that, on the one hand, “All of these fantasy novels are, at their heart, stories of the journey to adulthood. By setting them in previously unknown or unfamiliar worlds and equipping these worlds with creatures and characters that cause the reader to stretch past their assumptions about distinctions of gender, race, or class, the authors help bring readers to a new understanding of themselves” (Pattee 562).

Still, viewing adolescence as simply a steppingstone from one point in life to another seems slightly suffocating. Allowing the adolescent to breathe and allowing the fantastical to thrive in any form it sees fit would in turn present the opportunity for expression and self-understanding to continue to grow in each of our own realities. Hopefully, things may change so

that choosing to align oneself with any genre or age group that is not deemed worthwhile around current norms might no longer potentially affect the way an individual is viewed. In the end, studying the evolution of the “young adult” and fantasy simultaneously can provide another plane to develop solutions as well as another landscape to better comprehend the human being. For, no matter the age, we are all human beings, and only once we start treating all as such (again, no matter the age) can we better ourselves and move forward as an everchanging society.

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