Modern Children's Fantasy

Catherine Butler

A survey of the last fifty years in children's fantasy, if it is to be more than a roll-call of those who have distinguished themselves in terms of popularity or critical acclaim, must step back from the fashions for individual books and authors to describe developments at a more general and, as it were, tectonic level. Such a description may be couched in literary terms, of plot, character and narration; or as reflecting changes in the world at large, especially the world as experienced by children; but ideally it should acknowledge and analyse the mutual influence of these factors. Social *mores* have changed greatly since 1960: can the same be said of children's fantasy fiction?

In British children's fantasy of the early 1960s, there was a distinct preference for real-world settings, usually rural or suburban, inner cities being generally the preserve of realist writers. Child protagonists would typically be white and middle-class, often holidaymakers or newcomers to an area. Indeed, a stock way to begin a book was with the train bringing the protagonist (alone, or with family) to the site of the adventure, as in Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) and Susan Cooper's *Over Sea, Under Stone* (1965). And an adventure it generally was, in the sense of being delimited in time, and bracketed by a life marked as recognizably ordinary. The adventure would be undertaken largely without the assistance of adults from the children's own circle and would revolve around, or be precipitated by, contact with a mysterious place, object or person. That contact frequently involved establishing some connection to the past (perhaps through ghosts, time slips, or the awakening of an ancient power), and such fantasies were usually conservative in the sense that they concerned an effort to maintain a rightful *status quo* by repelling some encroaching threat, or else to restore the *status quo ante* – perhaps by returning something lost or stolen. While character development might be complex and moral questions delicately poised, this complexity was ultimately underwritten by a set of universally-agreed values. Much of the above description applies equally well to non-fantasy adventures such as Enid Blyton's Famous Five series, and indeed some books (such as *Over Sea, Under Stone*) straddle the adventure/fantasy genre, with hints of the supernatural adding a numinous element to what might otherwise be a story set in consensus reality.

Fantasies fitting this description are still being published, but some of the factors that allowed them to flourish in the 1950s and '60s are no longer so firmly in place. Normative assumptions about class, race and authority cannot be so lightly made in the more heterogeneous society of the twenty-first century; and opportunities for independent outdoor adventure are, for children up to a certain age (and especially those from middle-class backgrounds), considerably more limited than in the past. The nuclear families of classic children's fantasy can no longer be assumed, and the ubiquity of mobile phones and the internet has radically affected the ways in which young people organize and understand their social world. All this is well known, but it is worth noting the pressure exerted by such real-world considerations on the generic choices made by fantasy writers. Contemporary children's lack of independence militates in favour of fantasies set entirely in secondary

worlds, or in which real-world protagonists are decisively removed from their familiar surroundings and transported to another time or reality, as in N. M. Browne's *Warriors of Alavna* (2000) Gillian Cross's *Lost* trilogy (2003-2006) or Catherine Fisher's *Darkhenge* (2005). The fantasy quest may then become one of *self*-restoration or return. Alternatively, parents and other adults, no longer bastions of authority to the same extent as in previous generations, may be drawn into the adventure as more or less equal participants with the children. Several of Diana Wynne Jones's early books such as *The Ogre Downstairs* (1974) and *Eight Days of Luke* (1975) make this move, which has been continued more recently in Frances Hardinge's *Verdigris Deep* (2007). There has also been a growing interest in the possibilities offered by urban rather than rural landscapes as the setting of fantasy adventure, as seen in Michael de Larrabeiti's Borribles series (1976-86), Diana Wynne Jones's *Archer's Goon* (1984) and China Miéville's *Un Lun Dun* (2007).

It is now less common to find fantasies that are delimited in the sense that the end of the book and the resolution of the plot coincide with a return to non-fantastic "normality". Perhaps under the influence of realist young adult fiction, children's fantasies now usually ensure that encounters with the fantastic precipitate significant emotional growth, if not life-defining change, in their protagonists. Frequently they involve the acquisition of supernatural powers – a move with obvious potential for sequels and series, the proliferation of which has been one of the most striking developments in the field, particularly since the success of Harry Potter.

Fantasy is also sensitive to more general shifts in attitude, whether or not directly related to its traditional subject matter. Recent concern about ecological devastation, for example, has meant that pollution and global warming have displaced nuclear fallout as the environmental catastrophe of choice for dystopian fantasy; while Cold War-style totalitarianism is now less likely to feature than a world in which rampant capitalism, technology, political spin and pervasive marketing have reduced humans to oblivious engines of consumption, situations depicted in very different ways in Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993), Susan Cooper's *Green Boy* (2002), M. T. Anderson's *Feed* (2002) and Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* quartet (2005-2007). A different kind of example is provided by the representation of witches and witchcraft. With some exceptions, witches in early children's fantasy were unequivocally evil. However, perhaps influenced by the modern witchcraft movement, evil witches have come to share the stage with more positively-conceived figures such as those in Margaret Mahy's *The Changeover* (1984) and Monica Furlong's *Wise Child* (1987), for whom magic is a benign and natural talent. This, combined with the continuing tradition of comic witchcraft, such as that in Jill Murphy's *Worst Witch* books (1974-), means that "witch" now signifies, not one familiar and identifiable type, but a broad field of semantic possibility that both writers and readers must learn to navigate.

Finally, the politicization of mythology has become an increasingly prominent feature during this period. Myth and folklore have long provided raw material for fantasy writers, with Celtic culture being an especially abundant source, both for writers from Britain and Ireland (Garner, Cooper, Fisher, Pat O'Shea, Jenny Nimmo) and for those who have imported such traditions into the New World, such as Lloyd Alexander, Madeleine L'Engle and, more

recently, Holly Black. Nor have the the Greek and Norse gods been neglected, as Nancy Farmer's *The Sea of Trolls* (2004) and Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series (2005-) demonstrate. While European mythologies have been treated as common property, however, American and Australian writers of European descent have become more reluctant to draw on the mythological traditions of their own lands. Patricia Wrightson's books, *The Nargun and the Stars* (1973) and the Wirrun trilogy (1977-81), won numerous awards when first published, but her use of Aboriginal myth has since been criticized by those who see in it an appropriation of indigenous culture (Bradford 2001, 146-48), and recent Australian writers such as Garth Nix have found themselves warned off from using Aboriginal material (Nix 2006, 167-68). Analogous sensitivities surround the use of Native American myth. It remains to be seen how the political implications of adapting (or appropriating) mythology will affect the genre in the future.

If, as I have suggested, children's fantasy was a generally conservative genre at the start of this period, the last five decades have seen a far more complex picture emerge. In the remainder of this chapter we shall consider the work of four influential writers within the genre, and ask how far it has proved possible to write radical children's fantasy – that is, fantasy that is self-critical, responsive to changes in the world beyond itself, and questioning of literary and political authority.

If any one author can claim to be the founder of modern British fantasy, it is Alan Garner. He is an appropriate figure with which to begin our examination, since his work evinces a continuing fascination with the relationship between the shaping power of tradition (frequently understood in fantastic or magical terms) and the ability of individuals to determine their own destiny. This interest runs alongside a continual and ruthless process of formal and stylistic self-reinvention, and it is on Garner's own engagement with the power of the literary tradition that we will concentrate here.

Garner's first book, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960), was a startling debut, but its originality lay largely in its breathtaking revisioning of the countryside around Alderley Edge in mythic terms. In other respects it and its sequel were stories of the familiar type noted above, featuring middle-class protagonists who arrive in a new place only to find themselves inducted into its magical secrets and given a world-saving quest. For Garner's decisive break with fantasy convention we must look to his third novel. *Elidor* (1965) is a strangely-constructed novel that appears at first to be retreading Narnian territory. As in C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) four siblings find themselves transported unexpectedly to a parallel world in need of redemption – a redemption to be achieved only by fulfilling the terms of an obscure prophecy. Garner reverses the proportions of Lewis's book, however, for only the early chapters are spent in the world of Elidor, and most of the novel concerns the children's attempt to keep hidden the treasures they bring back from that world for safekeeping. At home in Manchester, they find that the treasures take on an unprepossessing appearance, with a sacred spear, for example, becoming an iron railing. The transformation is a disguise, but one that has an ambiguous significance. Positively, it can imply the potential of nondescript objects to be revealed (when viewed rightly) as precious and powerful, like the wardrobe in Lewis's book. Negatively, the treasures' transformation

suggests that even a magical realm may be reduced to dust at the touch of the mundane, and that a preoccupation with forlorn fairy lands may disable one from functioning in one's own world. For much of the book three of the four siblings are sceptical that the events in Elidor even took place, a pattern that simultaneously rehearses and subverts Lewis's example. Although *Elidor* ultimately validates the faith of the youngest child, Roland, it does so with some hesitation.

Elidor also introduces a note of moral ambivalence largely absent from Garner's earlier books, along with a new mistrust of authority. Garner was growing impatient with expository, Gandalf-style mentors and their habit of absenting themselves at the times of danger – a habit to which Cadellin, the wizard in his first two books, had been particularly prone. In *Elidor* this scepticism centres on the figure of Malebron, a mysterious native of Elidor who sends the children into danger, first in his own world and later in theirs, but who provides them with no evidence that his cause is just, and then disappears from the book entirely. If Lewis's Pevensies were potential Kings and Queens of Narnia, the humbler Watsons are never more than foot soldiers in a war whose shape and purpose remain foggy to the last. Their brutal demobbing in the final pages of the book leaves them stranded "alone with the broken windows of a slum" (Garner 1965, 160), with nothing tangible to show for their experience.

As this suggests, with *Elidor* Garner was beginning to deconstruct the unremarked ideological scaffolding of existing British fantasy: by blurring the sharp division implied by portal fantasies between the fantastic and the mundane; by picking away at good-versus-evil dualisms; by interrogating the assumption that child protagonists (and the implied reader) are middle-class and London-based; and by questioning the usual sources of expository authority, whether in the form of prophecies or of mentors such as Cadellin and Malebron. While none of these things is original to *Elidor*, in combining them Garner produced a fantasy that established new rules and boundaries for the genre, even as it evinced a distrust of rules and boundaries.

The fruit of these developments was *The Owl Service* (1967), Garner's most successful book for children. *The Owl Service* does without any obvious portal between the mundane and the fantastic: rather, the fantastic is shown to be immanent in the mundane world. An isolated North Welsh valley becomes a storehouse of mythic power associated with Lleu Llaw Gyffes, Blodeuwedd and Gronw Pebyr, whose tragic love story is related in *The Mabinogion*. This power is always present *in potentia* and is made manifest whenever it finds an appropriate conjunction of young, emotionally-vulnerable people. *The Owl Service* offers a profound view of the relationship between mythological and linear time (Butler 2006, 84-88), but its topos of repetition also suggests a view of myth as compulsive and obsessional, a force to be propitiated or resisted rather than unthinkingly revered. The book thus continues the trend begun in *Elidor* of approaching myth and prophecy with a hermeneutics of suspicion, rather than the faith conventional in earlier fantasies. In a decade that promoted individualism and questioned established structures of authority Garner was one of the first writers for children to expose and challenge the conservatism of high fantasy.

If Garner rewrote the tradition of primary-world children's fantasy, the revolutionary credentials of Ursula K. Le Guin as a writer of secondary-world fantasy are not so immediately apparent. In the first three books of her Earthsea series, beginning in 1968 with *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Le Guin uses many of the motifs given classic fantasy form by J. R. R. Tolkien in *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55). Like Middle-earth, Earthsea is a world (complete with endpaper map) in which medieval technology co-exists with wizardly magic, and humans with dragons. Like Tolkien's Frodo, Le Guin's protagonist, the mage Ged, is a figure born in a backwater but destined to determine his world's fate. And Le Guin's prose, supple and poetic as it is, shares with Tolkien's an archaic quality of cadence and word choice. Moreoever, in Earthsea wizardly power – which derives from an understanding of the language of creation, or True Speech – is understood as an arduous and learned *recuperation* of a magic originally indivisible from nature itself, and in this sense Le Guin's books share with Tolkien's an elegaic sense of being set in a world long decayed from its pristine glory.

Nevertheless, Le Guin's books also diverge significantly from Tolkien's model, particularly in the area of moral dualism. There is no Dark Lord in *A Wizard of Earthsea*: Ged's primary antagonist is an aspect of himself. Both Jungian psychology and Le Guin's commitment to Taoism inform a book in which wisdom and happiness are the products of an achieved balance between opposing impulses, rather than a reward for marching under the right banner. This has implications for the structure of her plots, which eschew battles, and in which quests are often inward rather than outward-focused. In *A Wizard of Earthsea* Ged spends as much time fleeing from his shadow self as he does hunting it; while the quest for the ring of Erreth-Akbe in *The Tombs of Atuan* (1971) is told from the point of view not of the quester but of the treasure's guardian, the young priestess Tenar.

Even so, the three books of the original *Earthsea* trilogy culminate in what is a largely conventional form of closure. At the end of *The Farthest Shore* (1972) Ged has attained his own spiritual wholeness, restored the broken ring of Erreth-Akbe, and established the young king Lebannen on the throne, bringing peace to the Earthsea archipelago. These acts embody the achievement of balance between the realms of the spiritual and the political, the personal and the public. While Lebannen must come to terms with his new authority, Ged matches that acceptance with his own act of abnegation, sacrificing his magic in order to stabilize Earthsea's magical ecology. All this is fitting in the terms in which Le Guin had constructed her fantasy, and the Earthsea sequence seemed complete both to its author and to her readers. However, as Le Guin grew more committed to feminism in the 1970s the masculine bias of her trilogy became a source of increasing dissatisfaction. In Ged she had rejected the eurocentricity of high fantasy by creating a hero with red-brown skin, but she had been less vigilant with regard to gender. "Weak as women's magic" and "wicked as women's magic", dismissive formulae quoted in the first book (Le Guin 1971, 15), were only confirmed by subsequent events. *The Tombs of Atuan*, in particular, with its portrayal of a death cult in the care of a female priesthood, tended to underwrite the humane superiority of the male-only wizard school at Roke. More fundamentally, Le Guin came to recognize that in the Western world "heroism has been gendered" as male (Le Guin 1993, 5), and that the kinds of heroic

stories possible within that tradition excluded women as protagonists more or less by definition.

What turned out to be the fourth book in the Earthsea "trilogy", *Tehanu*, was published in 1990. It centres on Tenar, the young woman – now a middle-aged widow – featured in *The Tombs of Atuan*. Ged himself, having foregone his magic, is present, but Le Guin places him somewhat to the side of the action. It becomes clear that he has not found it easy to establish a new role after a lifetime of magehood, and his sense of loss retrospectively complicates his sacrifice of power in *The Farthest Shore*. Instead, Le Guin describes a different kind of magic, learned not in the esoteric surroundings of a wizards' college but bound up with the practical tasks and skills of daily life, particularly the life of women. The lore-based magicians of Roke are represented as arrogantly contemptuous of Tenar, whom they dismiss both for her sex and for her social class. They are perhaps easy targets, but Le Guin was working very consciously against a tradition in which power is the surest path to success, and wished to forge an alternative heroism that did without "quest, contest and conquest as the plot, sacrifice as the key, victory or destruction as the ending" (Le Guin 1993, 13). In the book's conclusion the apparent passivity of women is re-evaluated as a subversive choice of freedom over power. This re-evaluation is personified in Tenar's foster-child Tehanu. Raped, half-blinded, and dreadfully scarred by fire, Tehanu is also a dragon, with all a dragon's untamable ferocity, and a natural ability to speak the True Speech that wizards must painfully learn.

The Earthsea series has now been completed twice. *Tehanu* – "the last book of Earthsea" – has itself been supplemented by two further books, *Tales from Earthsea* (2001) and *The Other Wind* (2001). Meanwhile, Le Guin, now in her eightieth year, is three books into a new children's fantasy series, *The Annals of the Western Shore*, begun in 2004 with *Gifts*. There has been a great deal of secondary-world fantasy in the forty years since *A Wizard of Earthsea*; but few writers have tried more consciously than Le Guin to test the genre's flexibility and potential for reinvention.

Philip Pullman's major fantasy sequence, *His Dark Materials*, has an equally complex relationship with its literary and intellectual heritage. Pullman's immediate fantasy forerunners include C. S. Lewis and Joan Aiken; but he also places himself in a longer tradition of English radicalism going back to Milton and Blake. One way to think about *His Dark Materials* is as a reworking of *Paradise Lost* in Blakean terms, in which a cruel, Urizenic God is defeated by the promethean energy of youth. Blake famously wrote of Milton that he was of the Devil's party without knowing it: Pullman has commented that, by contrast, *he* is of the Devil's party and knows it perfectly well (Pullman 2002).

His Dark Materials, consisting of *Northern Lights* (1995; *The Golden Compass* in the USA), *The Subtle Knife* (1997) and *The Amber Spyglass* (2000), tells the epic story of Lyra Belacqua, a girl who lives in the Oxford of a steampunk universe parallel to our own. Lyra's adventures – and, later, those of her friend and eventual lover Will Parry – take in several worlds and involve encounters with a range of beings including witches, armour-plated bears, harpies and angels. Particularly striking is Pullman's conceit of the daemon – a physical

manifestation of a person's soul, that takes the form of an animal or bird. Daemons are shape-changers prior to puberty, but assume a fixed form thereafter.

This is not a work of alternative history in any strict sense, but Pullman hints that Lyra's is a world in which the Reformation never happened and an untrammelled Church has acquired hegemonic power. Organized religion is represented (á la Blake) as a force that represses people's true natures, and in *Northern Lights* this is symbolized in the horrific project to prevent children from gaining sexual maturity by surgically "severing" them from their daemons. Lyra thwarts that plan, but her larger role within the sequence is to become a second Eve, one whose "fall" into knowledge is a liberation rather than a curse, heralding the foundation of a Republic of Heaven.

With its narrative power and imaginative richness, *His Dark Materials* puts Pullman in the first rank of storytellers; but the work aspires to far more than entertainment. His polemical depiction of organized religion has been notably controversial, but Pullman has also been engaged in a *literary* rebellion against fantasy fiction itself. He has repeatedly stated that *His Dark Materials* is not in fact fantasy at all but rather "stark realism" – a distinction he explains in terms of his intention to say something true about human psychology and the human condition. The implication that previous writers in the genre had failed to do this, relying instead on "shoot-em-up games", speaks eloquently of Pullman's artistic loyalties and anxieties, although it is hard to acquit of a certain hubris (Pullman 1998b).

Another of Pullman's targets is more specific to children's literature. In *His Dark Materials* the Church's attempt to prevent sexual experience by severing children from their daemons is a barbaric act; but it is also a graphic example of the fetishization of innocence and the horror of "growing up" that is one legacy of the Romantic idealization of childhood. Pullman finds C. S. Lewis to be a particularly grievous offender here, with the deaths of the Pevensie children at the conclusion of the Narnia sequence a definitive form of severance through which they are "saved" from the temptations of teenage sexuality – a move that hasled Pullman to accuse Lewis of writing "propaganda in the service of a life-hating ideology" (Pullman 1998a). Pullman's inversion of the values associated with the transition from childhood is thus an attack not only on the doctrine of original sin, but more generally on the construction of childhood in modern literature and culture.

Having inverted the Christian-Romantic model of human development, however, Pullman surprisingly preserves its structure intact. In *His Dark Materials*, as in the tradition it critiques, puberty is *the* life-defining event, the point at which the form of one's daemon becomes fixed for ever. Prior to the settling of one's daemon one cannot know "the kind of person" one is, while afterwards significant change is not to be expected (Pullman 1995, 167). Coming from a writer whose project is one of liberation from ideological repression this is a highly restricted vision of the human potential for growth and self-determination. There are other indications, too, that Pullman's rebellion is not as wholesale as might first appear. In particular, the conclusion of his story is still in thrall to a moral and aesthetic vision that defines satisfying artistic closure in terms of self-sacrifice and self-denial – exemplified in the deaths of Lyra's parents and in Lyra's and Will's decision to part for ever.

Whether or not Pullman is of C. S. Lewis's party without knowing it, he has not discarded his literary heritage quite as thoroughly as his own comments might suggest, and much of the power of his work comes from his ability to draw profoundly on a fantasy tradition to which he very much belongs.

J. K. Rowling has none of Pullman's iconoclasm, but in her own way she has done no less to reshape the nature of modern children's fantasy. Since the publication of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in 1997 Rowling has been by far the most widely-read writer in the field. Her accessible style, humour, twisty but comprehensible plots, and ability to people her world with vividly-sketched characters, have given her books unprecedented popularity. The Harry Potter series (1997-2007) ranges from social satire to plot-token quest fantasy, although its most pervasive generic debt is to boarding-school fiction, with its friendship groups, its emphasis on food and sport, its misunderstandings and out-of-bounds adventures (Pinsent 2002). Rowling's instinct as a writer is syncretistic rather than subversive, her main generic innovation lying in the marriage of two familiar types of fantasy structure. In the first of these the mundane landscape is secretly peopled with magical beings, who are carrying on the real business of the world under the noses of the general populace. Fantasies about magical elites always involve ideological questions, especially when the elite is a secret one. Such books must negotiate the insidious temptation to imagine oneself an "insider", a feeling that can easily slide into scorn for those outside the secret. This is a recurrent issue within Rowling's series, where, although the contempt felt for non-magical people (Muggles) by some wizards is clearly meant to be deplored, even the sympathetic characters are characterized by attitudes ranging from casual prejudice to benevolent paternalism.

The second fantasy structure is that of the portal fantasy. In being taken to the wizarding school of Hogwarts, a place impenetrable to Muggles, Harry is effectively transported to another world, with its own customs and history. In the series's early books portal fantasy is the dominant mode, and the chapters set outside Hogwarts (generally dealing in Dahl-esque fashion with Harry's repressive foster-family) serve primarily as the school's unattractive foil. As the series progresses, Rowling emphasizes the ways in which magical and Muggle communities interpenetrate, and the exent to which events in one have important effects on the other.

The transition between these structures creates some problems of consistency. For example, it is entirely appropriate in a portal fantasy that a magical family such as the Weasleys should be ignorant of Muggle ways. Mr Weasley's fascination with non-magic users is comparable with that of C. S. Lewis's Mr Tumnus, whose Narnian bookshelf contains such volumes as *Is Man a Myth?* (Lewis 1950, 19). However, the Weasleys live in modern Britain, where Muggle/wizard interaction and even intermarriage is commonplace, to the point where "pure blood" wizards have become a rarity. Given this, and the fact that Mr Weasley is employed as an expert in Muggle technology, their lack of knowledge comes to seem quite implausible.

At Hogwarts Rowling shows us a wizarding world at once excitingly different from our own and reassuringly similar to it. She is exuberantly imaginative in combining fantasy ingredients, but does so by grounding the wizarding world in familiar literary models and in

the mundane world itself, rather than by making it radically alien. Just as in mathematics a shape can be transformed by such operations as reflection and rotation, so Rowling applies a limited and systematic set of transformations to the mundane in order to produce her brand of the fantastic. These include:

- *Realization.* The most common fantasy transformation, this involves taking things that in our world exist only as myth or folklore – magic wands, unicorns, dragons – and making them real.
- *Substitution*. Substitution occurs when something in the magical world exhibits a structural correspondence with something in the mundane world. *The Daily Prophet* is the equivalent of any real-world newspaper, while the wizarding examinations O.W.L.S. recall GCSEs. Much of Rowling's humour – like that of her comic predecessors, such as Jill Murphy – comes from using substitution in order to normalize the exotic.
- *Exaggeration* works by reproducing something from the mundane world in a more extreme form. Ordinary sweets come in many flavours; but Bertie Bott's come in *every* flavour. Some people keep dangerous pets; but Hagrid keeps *extremely* dangerous pets. In combination with substitution, exaggeration is Rowling's prime mechanism for satire – as in the regime of Dolores Umbridge at Hogwarts in *The Order of the Phoenix*, which caricatures the over-involvement of the government in regulating British state schools.
- *Animation* involves giving movement and/or sentience to inanimate objects. At Hogwarts the figures in portraits can move and speak; and angry letters shout at their recipients. In Rowling's hands, this technique is generally comic; elsewhere, as in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (2002), it can be an effective horror technique.
- Finally there is *antiquation*. Rowling's magical world is old-fashioned in many ways that have nothing to do with magic: the Hogwarts train runs on steam; the children write with quills; the Minister for Magic wears a bowler hat. All these belong to non-magical history, but are used here to distinguish the magical world from the mundane present.

Using these techniques Rowling is, as noted above, able to portray a world both exotic and cosily familiar – a combination that underlies much of her popular appeal. By contrast with Le Guin's Earthsea, which is a world with its own history, ecology and culture, Rowling's wizarding world is always recognizable as a version of the mundane – ironized, inverted, exaggerated or otherwise transformed as it may be. Even wizardly puns such as "Knockturn Alley" and "pensieve" are built firmly on the foundations of ordinary language.

Garner, Le Guin, Pullman and Rowling all approach fantasy with very different intentions and expectations of what the genre can and should be. One justification for discussing these four, apart from their undoubted importance and influence, is precisely the fact of their generic and stylistic diversity, which gives some impression of the range of modern

children's fantasy. This concentration has necessarily involved neglecting other authors and aspects of children's fantasy, however. There has not been space to do more than allude to the healthy continuance of ghost and time-travel stories, to comic fantasy, or to the anti-hero protagonists of such writers as Eoin Colfer and Jonathan Stroud. A more comprehensive study would also have considered the various texts in which fantasy borders realist, gothic, horror and science fiction, which have all been influential in shaping what fantasy can be in the current age. What I hope to have shown is that, while not every fantasy writer is consciously engaged in iconoclasm and subversion, the redefinition of fantasy is a constant process, driven by the intelligent engagement of writers with the changing world around them. The next fifty years have already begun.