

From Water Margins to Borderlands:  
Boundaries and the Fantastic  
in Fantasy, Native American, and Asian American Literatures

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*And to Adam and Zoe, with all my love*

## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines the tropes of boundaries and the fantastic in Asian American, Native American, and fantasy literature, in works by authors ranging from Sherman Alexie and Stephen King to Maxine Hong Kingston and J.K. Rowling. Because both race and the fantastic engage the theme of boundaries, by focusing on the elements of the fantastic in these works of contemporary literature, the theme of race can be brought to the fore as well. The fantastic proves to be particularly valuable in challenging the binary relationship between Self and Other, suggesting new ways to think about the process of identity formation. Furthermore, because of the hesitation and uncertainty inherent in the trope of the fantastic, this same uncertainty is transferred to the discussion of race in these texts, highlighting the way in which many authors simultaneously embrace and reject stereotypical racial fantasies. Additionally, examining the limitations of the fantastic provides another challenge to expected portrayals of race and difference in the way it blurs the line between reader and text and compels the reader to become a more active participant in discussions of race. In this way, reading these works through the lens of the fantastic moves questions of race in popular texts to the center of the discussion, forcing readers to acknowledge the complex, ambiguous, and often contradictory ways in which race is portrayed in contemporary works of fantasy, Asian American, and Native American fiction.

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction: Water Margins, Borderlands, and the Fantastic	1
Chapter 2: Theorizing the In-Between: Power, Borderlands, and the Fantastic	21
Chapter 3: Fantastic Walls, Roads, and Doors: Physical Manifestations of Interstitial Spaces	56
Chapter 4: Characters on the Borders: Negotiating the Boundary between Self and Other	111
I.    Ghosts, Sisters, and China in Amy Tan's <i>The Hundred Secret Senses</i>	117
II.   Interstitial identity and the <i>bildungsroman</i> form in Leslie Marmon Silko's <i>Ceremony</i>	135
III.  Harry Potter, Race, and Identity	157
Chapter 5: "If I Could Turn Back Time": The Limitations and Moral Necessity of the Fantastic	181
Conclusion: Maxine Hong Kingston's <i>The Woman Warrior</i>	215
Works Cited and Consulted	235
Appendix A: A Brief History of Fantasy Literature	255

*But to Sam the evening deepened to darkness as he stood at the Haven; and as he looked at the grey sea he saw only a shadow on the waters that was soon lost in the West. There still he stood far into the night, hearing only the sigh and murmur of the waves on the shores of Middle-earth, and the sound of them sank deep into his heart.—from The Return of the King by J.R.R. Tolkien*

*Cold hit her, and the relentless current, but she stood where she was, still feeling the warmth of Life on her back. This was the very interface between the two realms, where she would normally plunge ahead. This time, she planted her feet against the current, and used her continuing slight contact with Life as an anchor to hold her own against the waters of Death.—from Sabriel by Garth Nix*

## Chapter 1: Introduction: Water Margins, Borderlands, and the Fantastic

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Bordering Middle-earth to the West is the High Sea. This ocean not only marks the borders of Middle-earth, but it also delineates the end of the age. At the end of *The Return of the King*, the fellowship of the ring truly ends on the shores of the ocean, right before Gandalf and Frodo sail with the elves into the West. Gandalf says, “Well, here at last, dear friends, on the shores of the Sea comes the end of our fellowship in Middle-earth. Go in peace! I will not say: do not weep; for not all tears are an evil” (Tolkien *Return* 384). The sea is not only a physical boundary around Middle-earth, but it also carries a symbolic value, for by crossing it, Gandalf and the elves demonstrate that their time in Middle-earth is over and now is the time of humans. As Gandalf tells Aragorn, “The Third Age was my age. I was the Enemy of Sauron; and my work is finished. I shall go soon. The burden must lie now upon you and your kindred” (Tolkien 308). The

water around Middle-earth sets both the physical and symbolic limits around Tolkien's narrative.

Boundaries of water around fantasy worlds are not unique to *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Guy Gavriel Kay's *The Fionavar Tapestry*, Kate Elliott's *Spirit Gate*, Brian Jacques' *Mossflower*, Garth Nix's *Sabriel*, and Patrick Rothfuss's *The Name of the Wind*, to name a few, all contain maps where at least one edge of the fantasy world is bordered by a seemingly endless ocean. Even popular fantasy video games, such as *World of Warcraft*, often create fictional worlds completely surrounded by water. John Clute gives a name to these boundaries of water in his and John Grant's *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, calling them "water margins." He defines this term as

a term taken from the tv series *The Water Margin*, where it describes the unmapped and ultimately unmappable regions which surround a central empire, a vast polder whose rulers attempt to stave off, by the use of magic and treachery, various revolutionary incursions from the heroes who inhabit the unknown regions. Water Margins surround a central land or reality, and fade indefinitely into the distance, beyond the edges of any map. Fantasies set in secondary worlds are commonly supplied with maps whose edges are not borderlands but water margins. (Clute and Grant 997)

As Clute's definition of the term makes clear, water margins set the land they surround apart, limiting the reality of the world to the lands contained within the boundaries of the map. As the examples above show, these boundaries often have a symbolic value as well, setting apart a world that is more innocent or a world of childhood. These philosophical or ideological boundaries reinforce the physical boundaries that exist on the maps, and vice versa, so that their mutual existence creates a boundary that is seemingly impermeable.



This definition of the term *water margin* as an impermeable boundary can serve as a way of thinking about not only a geographical aspect of certain fantasy novels, but also about fantasy literature as a whole. Like the worlds of Narnia and Middle-earth that are set apart from any other continents or worlds, fantasy literature as a whole is often set apart from the rest of literature. Perhaps because of its historical ties to fairy tales and children's stories, as well as the way in which it is categorized as "genre fiction," fantasy literature is often considered escapist and not read in connection with other more literary texts. Like the water margins surrounding the fantasy worlds mentioned above, the boundaries between fantasy literature and "canonical" literature are rarely permeable, with few texts sneaking through these borders into the realms of more respectable literature. In his book *Strategies of Fantasy*, Brian Attebery observes this placement of fantasy literature in relation to other literature, and sees in it a potential advantage to fantasy literature as a whole. He writes,

Because fantasy has generally been excluded from the canon of great literature—and continues to be excluded despite the demonstrable merits of many of its examples—it can provide a place to stand and judge the canon itself. Readers of fantasy have a certain freedom which is denied to readers within the pale. We may roam at will from adult to children's books, from formula fiction to experimental metafiction, finding pleasure in the most abstruse text and hidden complexity in the most conventional. We may find a continuity in literature that is denied to those who must draw lines and enforce standards. (ix)

Attebery agrees that fantasy literature is set apart from canonical literature, but sees an advantageous freedom of movement *within* fantasy literature. His final statement, however, shows that he thinks that this same freedom of movement and connection is not available outside of the realm of fantasy literature. Because of the water margin around

fantasy literature as a whole, Attebery claims, fantasy literature affords its readers a freedom of reading and thinking unavailable to other groups of literature.

The recent explosion in the popularity of fantasy literature, as well as the increase of scholarship on popular texts such as the *Harry Potter* series, call into question Attebery's claim that fantasy literature is excluded from the canon of great literature. In spite, or perhaps because of this popularity, however, fantasy texts are still studied and discussed primarily in relation to themselves; the connection between fantasy texts and the larger field of literary studies remains largely unexplored. A look at the organizational structure of the Modern Language Association, for example, confirms the existence of fantasy literature on the fringes of literary studies. Instead of being considered as part of one of the MLA's major divisions, such as Comparative Studies or Genre Studies, fantastic literature (not even fantasy literature) is lumped together with science fiction and utopian literature in one of the organization's smaller discussion forums. And in a recent issue of the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, Brian Attebery describes an experience he had when applying for a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities. He writes, "In my most recent go-round with the NEH, however, I had a new and decidedly less positive interaction. One reviewer gave the proposal the lowest possible rating. The entire justification was a single phrase: 'More fantasy crap'" (Attebery "More Fantasy Crap" 293). The fact that Brian Attebery, one of fantasy literature's most recognized scholars, as well as the editor of perhaps the foremost journal on fantasy literature, is treated as a second class scholar not just by this one reviewer, but by an entire organization that endorsed this review, demonstrates that in

spite of the popularity of *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and other such texts, fantasy literature remains outside the boundaries of what is considered scholarly, canonical literature.

As a result of this existence on the edges of canonical literature, several of the key tropes related to fantasy literature, namely the fantastic and fantasies, are often thought of *only* in terms of fantasy literature. This is problematic, because although the terms “fantasy,” “fantasy literature,” and “the fantastic” are morphologically very similar and all contain the idea of the anti-mimetic impulse, they present significantly different ways to discuss not only fantasy literature, but also all works of literature. When used on its own as a noun, for example, “fantasy” refers to a product of the imagination, whether an innocent daydream about love or, as is examined in Chapter 2, an image of a race or culture that has more far-reaching implications. “Fantasy literature,” on the other hand, refers to a specific group of literature<sup>1</sup>, one that is often marked by magic and other worlds, but that can encompass a wide range of elements. W.R. Irwin’s definition is helpful here; he describes fantasy literature as “a story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility; it is the narrative result of transforming the condition contrary to fact into ‘fact’ itself” (4).<sup>2</sup> “Fantasy novel,” “fantasy text,” or “fantasy narrative” is used to refer to an individual text from the set of

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, I will avoid the use of the word “genre” when describing fantasy literature for several reasons. First, as this dissertation will show, fantasy literature is too wide-reaching and incorporates too many influences for any one set of literary codes to be completely applicable. Additionally, the use of the word genre has come to mean something along the lines of predictable or generic; “genre fiction” and “genre fantasy” in particular are novels in which the author has merely recycled tired clichés. By rejecting the word “genre,” I am rejecting these limited and often derogatory interpretations of fantasy literature. Instead, Attebery suggests thinking of fantasy literature in terms of a “fuzzy set,” which is defined “not by boundaries but by a center” (*Strategies of Fantasy* 12). Therefore, throughout the dissertation, I will use the term “set” or “group” to refer to encapsulate this idea of a category of literature without boundaries or a limiting formula, but that is brought together by interconnected tropes and concerns.

<sup>2</sup>For a more complete examination of what is meant by “fantasy literature,” please see Appendix A at the end of this dissertation, which provides a brief history of fantasy literature and an exploration of some of the key directions the fantasy set is going today. One key element that this appendix highlights is the way in which boundaries and borders have always been important in discussions of fantasy literature.

fantasy literature; “fantasy author” is used to refer to the author of a fantasy text. Finally, “the fantastic” refers to the literary trope that Tzvetan Todorov’s discusses in his landmark work *The Fantastic*, in which he describes the fantastic as existing in between the uncanny and the marvelous. He writes, “The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature” (Todorov 25). In other words, it is not an element that is strictly marvelous, such as a ghost or a fairy, nor one that is only uncanny, such as an odd coincidence, but the hesitation that exists between these two elements, before its exact nature is resolved. Therefore, these different words to describe the anti-mimetic impulse demonstrate the complex and far-reaching potential of these ideas, and present the fantastic as a means to introduce uncertainty and hesitation into a text.

It is perhaps the isolation of fantasy literature that leads to an incomplete understanding of the ways in which fantasy and the fantastic are used in other texts, specifically those considered part of Asian American and Native American literatures.<sup>3</sup> While Asian American and Native American texts contain elements found in fantasy

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this study, I will use the terms “Asian American” and “Native American.” The omission of the hyphen between the two terms is deliberate, and follows Maxine Hong Kingston’s reasoning: “We ought to leave out the hyphen in ‘Chinese-American’ because the hyphen gives the word on either side equal weight...Without the hyphen, ‘Chinese’ is an adjective and ‘American’ a noun; a Chinese American is a type of American” (“Cultural” 60). The choice to use “Native American” instead of “American Indian” or just “Indian” is also intentional, and speaks to my position outside of the Native American community. Raymond Fogelson writes about the difference between these two terms, noting that “Native American” is the “politically correct, and in many cases official, designation,” but also one which Native Americans rarely use to refer to themselves. Instead, “‘Indians (sometimes with unvoiced *d*) seems the term of choice in local discourse” (Fogelson 43-44). Therefore, my choice to use “Native Americans” reflects my position as a scholar outside of the Native American community, as well as the more formal tone of this study.

literature such as ghosts, dragons, talking animals, and magical visions, these elements are often read very differently than those that appear in fantasy literature. Furthermore, some critics see these elements as problematic for a variety of reasons. In his discussion of Asian American authors such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, for example, Yifen Beus argues that these authors use elements of the fantastic to make their works seem more foreign and exotic. He writes,

Fantastic folklore and legends are often used by Chinese writers or filmmakers [. . .] as tropes or motifs to carve out a space where cultural specificities are displayed, and whereby cultural identity is defined. While these cultural specificities can be used as distinct markers of identity, they can also be used or even exploited by Western popular media to exoticize the Orient in the name of cultural authenticity. (Beus 428)

Instead of examining the way in which the fantastic functions in the fiction of Tan and Kingston, Beus merely sees it as a cultural marker of the exotic, arguing that the fantastic serves as a shorthand for cultural authenticity. Leigh Fabens sees elements of the fantastic in Native American literature as problematic for other reasons—namely, that non-Native readers do not know how to interpret them. In her dissertation discussing dreams in various works, including James Welch’s *Fools Crow*, she writes,

Welch’s modern readers are not disposed to rely on dreams for prognostication, guidance, or conflict resolution. While we have precedents in classical Western literature for the appearance of mythical figures in dreams, and a frame of reference for understanding a spiritual vision, the dreams in this novel and *Fools Crow*’s vision quest are beyond our standard experience. (Fabens 209)

Thinking of novels such as those by Tan, Kingston, and Welch in the context of other novels containing fantastic elements could not only demonstrate that the fantastic functions in ways more complex than simply serving as a marker of the exotic, but it can

also provide a framework for discussing anti-mimetic tendencies in these novels that might otherwise serve as roadblocks to readers.

At this point it is helpful to return to the images of water margins that opened this chapter for inspiration for potential ways to carry out an examination of the trope of the fantastic in fantasy, Native American, and Asian American literature. Clute's definition of water margins is helpful, particularly his suggestion that an alternate way of thinking of the boundaries around fantasy worlds is as "borderlands." Clute explains the difference between a water margin and borderlands:

The difference between borderlands and water margins is a question of edges. A water margin exists at the edge of, or may fully surround, a central polder or land or empire; but it has no further edge. Characters cannot pass through water margins into other regions: if they remain close to the edge they may re-enter the central territory, but if they stray too deep they simply fade from view. A borderland, on the other hand, always boasts at least two edges, and generally serves as a marker, resting place, or toll-gate between two differing kinds of reality (Clute and Grant 128).

Water margins are impermeable boundaries, to the degree where imagining or thinking of what exists beyond these boundaries is an impossibility. The edges of these maps simply trail off, since what is beyond them is inconsequential and perhaps even non-existent. Borderlands, conversely, are areas where the edges are of supreme importance. Rather than being boundaries or barriers, however, these edges are permeable borders, through which ideas and people can move. These are areas of interaction, not areas of limitation.

The difference between water margins and borderlands can be seen in the two quotations that serve as epigraphs to this chapter. The first, a quote from the end of J.R.R. Tolkien's epic trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, describes the High Sea that surrounds Middle-earth, and that, at the end of the trilogy, separates Frodo from Sam, Merry,

Pippin, and the world he knew. As was described earlier in this chapter, this body of water is a space of separation, a space that serves not only as a barrier around Middle-Earth, but also as a conceptual barrier that marks the passing of an age. The second epigraph describes another body of water—the river that serves as the boundary between Life and Death in Garth Nix’s novel *Sabriel*. Although this body of water also functions as a boundary, unlike the High Sea, this river serves to blur the boundary between Life and Death, rather than reinforce such divisions. While standing in the river, Sabriel is able to reach into Death while hanging onto Life, and her easy movement between the two marks the boundary of the river as a space that brings ideas together and blurs the boundaries between, rather than establishing them as completely separate.

While differentiating between these two terms might seem like idle wordplay, the distinction between borderlands and water margins can lead to an alternative way of thinking, not only about categories such as fantasy literature, but also about the ways in which many contemporary popular texts both utilize and attempt to reject stereotypical racial imagery. While thinking in terms of water margins puts the focus on that which separates, often shuffling such things off to the margins of a text, thinking in terms of borderlands shifts the focus to that which connects, and places that space of connection in the center of the text, rather than at the edges. Additionally, the use of the term borderlands calls to mind theories of race and difference that discuss racial boundaries, a trope that is important in theories of fantasy literature as well. Scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Jacques Derrida emphasize the uncertainty, contradictions, and constant flux of border spaces. This uncertainty is, as scholar Tzvetan Todorov describes, also a key element in the trope of the fantastic. Because both race and the fantastic engage the

theme of boundaries, by focusing on the elements of the fantastic in contemporary literature—both in works of fantasy literature as well as in works of Native American and Asian American fiction—the theme of race can be brought to the fore as well. Furthermore, because of the hesitation and uncertainty inherent in the trope of the fantastic, this same uncertainty is transferred to the discussion of race in these texts, highlighting the way in which many authors simultaneously embrace and reject stereotypical racial fantasies. In this way, reading these works through the lens of the fantastic moves questions of race in popular texts to the center of the discussion, forcing readers to acknowledge the contradictory ways in which race is portrayed in contemporary works of fantasy, Asian American, and Native American fiction.

Focusing on the trope of boundaries in these texts is also helpful in clarifying why this dissertation specifically brings together works of Asian American, Native American, and fantasy literature. Many works of ethnic American literature contain elements of the supernatural, and the theme of boundaries is important to many of these works as well, so limiting the scope of this dissertation to only Asian American and Native American literature might seem artificial. As this dissertation demonstrates, however, in many texts from Native American and Asian American literature, the two tropes of boundaries and the fantastic are portrayed as interconnected, with the existence of the fantastic in the narrative being closely tied the themes of boundaries and border spaces. Rather than existing as separate themes or elements, boundaries and the fantastic in many Asian American and Native American texts exist in relation to each other, with each depending on the other for the power that they have in the narrative. Reading these two groups of ethnic literature in conversation with fantasy literature not only highlights the way in



which fantasy literature uses the tropes of boundaries and the fantastic in similar ways, but also serves to draw attention to questions of race and difference in fantasy literature that might otherwise go overlooked.

Furthermore, texts from Asian American and Native American literature are extremely relevant to this study because of the way that they themselves are positioned in between the poles of black and white that have frequently defined discussions of race. This binary model of thinking about race does not reflect the actual demographics of the United States, something that Claire Jean Kim uses as a starting point in her article “The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans.” She writes, “The conventional trope of ‘two nations, Black and White’—crafted and reproduced over the last half-century by Gunnar Myrdal, the Kerner Commission, Andrew Hacker, and others—seems increasingly outdated as unprecedented levels of Asian and Latin American immigration continue to diversify the U.S. population” (C. Kim 105). She then goes on to note, “Asian Americans have not been racialized in a vacuum, isolated from other groups; to the contrary, Asian Americans have been racialized relative to and through interaction with Whites and Blacks” (C. Kim 106). Kim’s words emphasize how race relations extend beyond the binary model of white and black, as well as how images of groups such as Asian Americans and Native Americans have been constructed in relationship to either end of the white/black binary. This suggests that because Asian American and Native American literature exist in the interstitial space between white and black, they

themselves are in a position to bring the uncertainty and hesitation of the fantastic to recycled discussions of race and difference.<sup>4</sup>

Magic realism is another set of literature that might seem like it belongs in this dissertation. Certainly, elements of the supernatural do appear in magic realist literature. These supernatural elements, however, are not presented as the fantastic; they do not cause the reader to hesitate, wondering if what he is seeing is real. In *Magical Realism and the Fantastic*, Amaryll Chanady writes, “In magical realism, the supernatural is not presented as problematic. Although the educated reader considers the rational and the irrational as conflicting world views, he does not react to the supernatural in the text as if it were antinomious with respect to our conventional view of reality, since it is integrated within the norms of perception of the narrator and characters in the fictitious world” (23). Greer Watson argues something similar, saying that magic realism “completely lacks any antimony, or narrative hesitation” (168). Works such as Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) demonstrate this aspect of magic realism; supernatural elements appear, such as a girl floating up to heaven, but everyone treats it as if it were completely normal. Additionally, magic realism describes a literary category with a specific historical and cultural context, rather than a trope, as the fantastic is. Unlike the addition of another literary category, using the trope of the fantastic as the focus of this dissertation provides a way for moving across boundaries between literary genres, rather

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<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the current public understanding of these three groups of literature developed at approximately the same time, what with the embrace of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy by students in the 1960s and 1970s and the subsequent development of the “fantasy genre” by the publishing industry, the invention of the term Asian American in the late 1960s by UCLA historian Yuji Ichioka (V. Cheng 140), and the publication of N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* in 1968, beginning the renaissance of Native American literature.

than establishing new ones. Therefore, because of the lack of the fantastic in magic realism, this group of literature cannot contribute to the main project of this dissertation.

While the main goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate how the fantastic highlights the conflicted way in which race is portrayed in many recent works of Native American, Asian American, and fantasy literature, the implications of this study extend past the tropes of boundaries and the fantastic and can influence how scholars consider these groups of literature on the whole. In his book *Inauthentic: The Anxiety over Culture and Identity*, Vincent Cheng describes how the category of Asian American is a constructed one, “a purely political invention, a political expediency created in response to white racism and Orientalism” (140). Later, Cheng comments on the implications of this category:

Still, I keep going back to that initial reaction I had as an undergraduate at Harvard over thirty years ago—that, as an identity and affiliation, ‘Asian American’ is inherently fabricated, inherently inauthentic, even—as Liu says—‘contrived’ (63). I wonder not only about the cultural vacuousness of such an artifice manufactured out of political expediency but also about the real and inherent dangers in such an identity construction. For the truth is that a pan-Asian identity was not our idea, but the idea of the nativist, racist attitude in the United States, an attitude that lumps us all together and treats us all as the same ‘yellow’ horde. (141-142)

As Cheng’s words make clear, the question of boundaries is not only central when analyzing themes and ideas *within* Asian American texts, but also when considering the very set of Asian American literature itself. Similarly, scholarship of Native American literature also works to address questions of how to define itself. Robert Allen Warrior, in his book *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*, argues that Native American studies “continue to be preoccupied with parochial questions of identity and authenticity. Essentialist categories still reign insofar as more of the focus of

scholarship has been to reduce, constrain, and contain American Indian literature and thought and to establish why something or someone is ‘Indian’ than engage the myriad critical issues crucial to an Indian future” (xix). By examining the treatment of boundaries *within* fantasy, Asian American, and Native American literatures, this study blurs the boundaries *between* these groups of literature as well, encouraging an interconnected understanding of fantasy and ethnic literatures much closer to Barthes’ idea of the Text.

With these goals of examining and negotiating boundaries both within and between these groups of literature in mind, this study acknowledges that addressing all of Asian American, Native American, and fantasy literature from the past fifty years would be an impossible task. Instead, particularly for the works of Asian American and Native American authors included in this study, the focus is primarily on the authors who are best known and most frequently taught in college and high school classrooms, authors such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Leslie Marmon Silko, Sherman Alexie, Frank Chin, Amy Tan, and James Welch. While these texts in no way stand in for an entire group of literature, their prominent place in the study and teaching of these groups of literature is key in seeing how they shaped the formation of such groups, and, consequently, is also important to the effort to challenge the boundaries that have been set up around each of these groups of literature. When dealing with fantasy literature, some of the more “canonical” authors such as Tolkien are included, particularly to examine their treatment of racial imagery, but the bulk of the study will focus on more recent authors of fantasy literature who more consciously engage with either racial imagery or the trope of the fantastic. Although the study as a whole tends toward a focus on more American

literature, the authors of fantasy literature included are not limited to American authors, not only because so many historically important fantasy authors have been British, but also because setting up boundaries based on national borders runs contrary to the overall impetus of this project. Overall, this study engages contemporary popular works of Native American, Asian American, and fantasy literature in a way that forces a more in-depth analysis of their often-contradictory treatment of race and difference.

The theoretical framework for this project is described in Chapter 2, which uses Guy Gavriel Kay's *The Fionavar Tapestry* to examine the various ways in which theories of race and the fantastic intersect. Both racial fantasies and the fantastic involve the anti-mimetic impulse, and they are also both tropes that have power over a text, as is suggested by an Edward Said's *Orientalism*. As is seen in Kay's trilogy, however, the power of the fantastic to subvert racial stereotypes is unutilized, creating a contradictory picture of race that both relies on and rejects racial fantasies. Focusing on the trope of boundaries—a key element in theories of both race and the fantastic—provides a way to center discussions of race on the contradictions that persist in contemporary perceptions of race. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*,<sup>5</sup> which describes boundaries and

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I will primarily be using the terms “interstitial spaces” or “border spaces” to describe in-between spaces. As I discuss in Chapter 2, Anzaldúa's borderlands are extremely useful in thinking about aspects of boundaries and other interstitial spaces, particularly the idea of fluidity as important for the creation of identity, the creative power of the borderlands, and the way in which the borderlands allow for the existence and interaction of opposing ideas. Having established this connection to Anzaldúa's work, however, I choose to use the more neutral term of “interstitial spaces” or “border spaces” rather than “borderlands,” primarily because I do not want to take away from the historical and political significance of Anzaldúa's work by repeatedly using her terminology out of context. I do use “borderlands” in this introduction and conclusion to this dissertation, as well as in the title, both because John Clute's discussion of the relationship between this term and “water margins” so perfectly demonstrates the paradigm shift I argue for, as well as to make the initial connection to Anzaldúa's work. I also choose to use “interstitial” rather than “liminal” because of the way in which “interstitial” emphasizes the continual suspension in-between; “liminal,” on the other hand, implies being on a threshold, about to

border spaces as sites of transition and contradiction, rather than as static barriers that separate people and ideas, as well as Tzvetan Todorov's definition of the fantastic as occupying the boundary between the uncanny and the marvelous, both play a key role in this exploration of theories of borders and boundaries. By examining these connections between race and the fantastic together, we see how boundaries and border spaces function as spaces in which the fantastic can enter the narrative, at which point it can be then used as a tool to highlight contradictory elements in the text and force a discussion of race that engages what actually happens, rather than what we would like to see.

The third chapter of this dissertation takes the theoretical framework established in Chapter 2 and uses it to explore the way in which physical boundaries serve as entry points for the fantastic into the text. By examining works ranging from Neil Gaiman's *Stardust* and Garth Nix's *Sabriel* to Heinz Insu Fenkl's *Memories of My Ghost Brother* and Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues* to Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series, this chapter points to the ways in which the boundaries that appear in these texts serve as physical representations of interstitial spaces, thus functioning not as barriers or sites of separation, but as spaces of movement and coming together that facilitate the entry of the fantastic into the text. Of particular interest to this chapter are the texts in which these boundaries—ranging from walls and rivers to highways and doors—then provide a space that enhances the power of the fantastic, enabling it to highlight the way in which racial fantasies are both utilized and rejected. These texts provide examples for the theoretical

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reach a goal, an implication that runs counter to the anti-teleological paradigm of this project. As Fenkl explains, "There is a major difference between liminality and intersititality. Unlike the liminal, the Interstitial is not implicitly transitory—that is to say, it is not on its way toward becoming something else" ("Introduction" iv). The resolution of being in-between is not something that, for the most part, the texts examined in this dissertation seek—in fact, most embrace the uncertainty of their fantastic, interstitial elements.

discussions provided in Chapter 2, demonstrating the ways in which the fantastic calls attention to complex and contradictory portrayals of race, underscoring its usefulness as a literary trope that is able to bring questions of race and ethnicity to the center of our understanding of a text.

A specific function of the fantastic is examined in Chapter 4, namely, the ways in which the fantastic can be used as a tool to negotiate between the Self and the Other. As the exploration of doors in Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series demonstrates in Chapter 3, boundaries and interstitial spaces provide a site in which the fantastic can interrogate questions of identity. This chapter explores three texts in great detail that address this issue as well—Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. The discussion of each text focuses on how the central character is situated on a border—a border that enables the fantastic to enter the narrative and provide the character with the means to negotiate between the conflicting elements of Self and Other. The chapter then explores how these characters challenge the binary relationships of Self/Other and black/white, as described by theorists such as Fanon, and instead demonstrate a way of understanding identity that in itself is similar to border spaces, drawing in multiple, contradictory elements. Each of these texts, however, also falls back on comfortable, expected ways of thinking about race, a contradiction that is highlighted by reading these texts through the lens of the fantastic.

The final chapter of this dissertation argues that examining the limitations of the fantastic is also a helpful way to destabilize stereotypical understandings of race, particularly in the way that such limitations blur the boundary between fiction and reality

and compel the reader to act. While many of the texts examined in this dissertation provide examples of how the fantastic can provide characters the means to understand or cope with the past, Midori Snyder's "The Armless Maiden" and Ellen Steiber's "In the Night Country" explicitly argue that the fantastic is unable to go back in time and change the past. While this limit initially seems problematic, texts such as Frank Chin's *Donald Duk* demonstrate the need for limits on the fantastic; without them, a narrative seems too comfortable and does not leave any room for the reader to insert herself into the narrative. Charles de Lint's *Memory & Dream* also portrays the inability of the fantastic to turn back time, but it demonstrates why this inability is actually so important to the narrative—it allows the fantastic to remain a useful tool for negotiating meaning within a text, while it also provides readers with spaces in both the text and the real world in which they can make themselves part of the narrative. This function of the fantastic is particularly important in engaging questions of race and difference, as is shown by an examination of James Welch's *Fools Crow*, in which the limitations of the fantastic force the reader to acknowledge the real-world effects of the novel's events. Such limitations, then, turn the fantastic from merely a literary trope into a morally necessary element of these novels, an element that blurs the boundary between fiction and reality and challenges the way the reader engages with images of race.

Overall, this study provides specific examples from Asian American, Native American, and fantasy texts, demonstrating how the boundaries and border spaces within contemporary popular texts provide interstitial spaces in which the fantastic can enter the narrative, thus providing a means for highlighting contradictory portrayals of race and bringing complicated questions of race and difference to the center of our understanding



of a text. As is seen in the conclusion to this study, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* provides an excellent example of a text that contains all of the key points made by this dissertation. Not only does the generational boundary between the narrator and her mother provide a space in which the fantastic can enter the text, both through the mother's dealings with ghosts and the narrator's re-imagining of herself as legendary hero Fa Mu Lan, but the interconnected tropes of boundaries and the fantastic also provide the narrator with the means to negotiate the formation of her own identity. The appearance of an Orientalist fantasy of China in Kingston's text, however, complicates the challenges Kingston poses to racist and sexist stereotypes, demonstrating the persistence of complicated, morally ambiguous understandings of race and difference. Kingston's text also demonstrates the limits of the fantastic, but again, these limits provide a space in which the reader can insert herself into the narrative as well, thus complicating another boundary—that between fictional text and reality. This examination of the multi-faceted portrayal of the fantastic in Kingston's text provides the impetus for a final consideration of the function of the fantastic, leading us to consider whether the fantastic is merely the means for an escape from reality, or if it serves a higher moral function throughout literature. While this study is not a comprehensive survey of entire fields of literature, the examples that it provides, as well as the theoretical framework it develops, provide a structure and entry point for further discussions of the relationships and connections between these groups of literature. This dissertation demonstrates not only how appropriate such readings are, but how necessary they are as well. Exploring boundaries and the fantastic in these groups of literature can offer insight into neglected themes in specific texts, for example, such as the treatment of

racial imagery in fantasy literature. But perhaps more importantly, it can push readers to think about the boundaries they see constructed around these groups of texts, and provide them with the means of challenging such boundaries, changing them from the impermeable barriers of water margins to the creative, interactive spaces of borderlands.

*Boundaries, borders and thresholds are always key concepts for any reading of the fantastic, linking together concepts of the nation and the otherworldly, bodies and the grotesque, housing and hauntings... --Lucie Armitt in Contemporary Women's Fiction and the Fantastic*

*It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.—W.E.B. Du Bois in The Souls of Black Folk*

*Across the border in Mexico*

*Stark silhouette of houses gutted by waves*

*Cliffs crumbling into the sea*

*Silver waves marbled with spume*

*Gashing a hole under the border fence*

*--Gloria Anzaldúa in Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

## Chapter 2: Theorizing the In-Between: Power, Borderlands, and the Fantastic

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Although works of fantasy literature are often set in unfamiliar worlds, the way in which the inhabitants of these worlds are described often depends on racial imagery from our world to create meaning. In Peter Jackson's film adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's novel *The Two Towers* (2002), for example, one of the first images presented to the viewer is that of the Uruk-Hai—a race similar to the orcs, yet with the ability to travel during the daylight without being weakened. In the opening scenes of the film, these Uruk-Hai are running, seemingly without ever stopping to rest, as they take two captured hobbits to Saruman's tower of Isengard. The image of these Uruk-Hai is one clearly intended to represent evil; not only are they fighting against Aragorn and the other members of the fellowship of the ring, but they are also portrayed as unnatural creatures, bred by

Saruman in the mud and darkness near Isengard. Notably, this image of the Uruk-Hai is one embedded with a strong racial subtext. As Sue Kim sums up so concisely, “The Uruk-Hai are tall, black, and muscular with long coarse hair that resembles dreadlocks” (877). This reading of the Uruk-Hai is further strengthened by the words of Legolas the elf, who observes, “They run as if the very whips of their masters were behind them” (P. Jackson). In other words, the *Lord of the Rings* films employ racially coded imagery from our real world in their creation of some of the most dangerous and evil creatures in the films.

There are a number of possible discussions that could result from the portrayal of the Uruk-Hai throughout the *Lord of the Rings* films, not the least of which is a comparison between the films and Tolkien’s original novels,<sup>6</sup> but the purpose of opening this chapter with the image of the Uruk-Hai is to draw attention to the connection between race and the fantastic, both in the way racial fantasies and the fantastic have power, as well as in the importance of boundaries to both concepts. The specific question of whether the images of the Uruk-Hai are racist is a complicated one that many critics have examined at great length.<sup>7</sup> This dissertation, however, does not intend to focus on

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<sup>6</sup> Certainly, as several critics have argued, J.R.R. Tolkien should not be held responsible for choices made by Peter Jackson and the makers of the *Lord of the Rings* movies. Please see Anderson Rearick III’s “Why is the Only Good Orc a Dead Orc? The Dark Face of Racism Examined in Tolkien’s World,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 50.4 (Winter 2004): 861-874 for a more in-depth examination of this question.

<sup>7</sup> A number of studies have been dedicated to the issue of race in Tolkien’s work, many of which argue that Tolkien’s trilogy demonstrates racial inclusivity. Brian McFadden and Jane Chance are two such critics; according to Chance, Tolkien was someone who “dislikes most of all a very modern prejudice, segregation of the Other, and isolation of those who are different, whether by race, nationality, culture, class, age, or gender” (Chance 172). She describes how “throughout his mythology he promotes the intermarriage of races—Maia, Elf, and Man—and the fellowship of species—Elf, Man, Dwarf, and Hobbit—in order to blend their strengths in governance and parliamentary representation” (Chance 173). Both Chance and McFadden, however, tend to ignore Tolkien’s portrayal of Orcs and the Uruk-Hai in their discussion of racism, and McFadden even observes that Tolkien “had a tendency to create oppositions (dark and light, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, Elf and human, and so on) that might be interpreted as racism by readers trained to read against a text” (164). For other discussions of the racial imagery in Tolkien’s work,

either labeling Tolkien a racist or rescuing him from such a label. The images of the Uruk-Hai clearly and intentionally do represent stereotypical characteristics of black people. A more productive question, however, is how to draw attention to the ways in which such imagery continues to be used, as is obvious from Peter Jackson's films. In some ways, Jackson's films employ such imagery even more explicitly than Tolkien's novels do. Legolas's remark about the Uruk-Hai is much more racially charged in the movie, as seen above, than in the book, which reads: "The Orcs have run before us, as if the very whips of Sauron were behind them" (*The Two Towers* 35). The connection between race and fantasy, suggested by Tolkien's trilogy and reinforced by Edward Said's argument in *Orientalism*, points to a way to move such stereotypical images from the sidelines and make them the focus of discussions not only of fantasy literature, but also of Asian American and Native American literature. As this chapter will demonstrate through an in-depth look at Guy Gavriel Kay's trilogy *The Fionavar Tapestry*, racial fantasies such as the "noble savage" or the "environmental Indian" can be simultaneously employed and rejected, thus creating a very conflicted idea of how to think about race. By focusing on the trope of the fantastic, which embodies the uncertainty and hesitation of the borderlands, such questions of racial fantasy are moved to the center of our examination of a text, rather than being tacitly accepted as the norm. The idea that all fictional worlds—in fantasy texts as well as works of multicultural literature—are in some way Secondary fantasy worlds, to use Tolkien's terminology, is brought to the fore through this focus on the fantastic, thus facilitating a critical analysis of the socially constructed nature of race and ethnicity in these worlds. Even more importantly, the

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please see Patrick Curry's *Defending Middle-Earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997) and Humphrey Carpenter's *Tolkien: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton, 1977).

hesitation that is key in understanding the fantastic is then transferred to the discussion of race, thus destabilizing any neatly packaged, tidy ideas of race and difference.

Guy Gavriel Kay's trilogy *The Fionavar Tapestry* (1984-1986) was written several decades after Tolkien's landmark trilogy, and as such, it more consciously engages questions of race and difference, thus providing an excellent framework for the theoretical discussions of this chapter. Kay's trilogy tells the story of five Canadian college students who are brought to the fantasy world of Fionavar by the mage Loren Silvercloak. Upon their arrival in Fionavar, the students become a part of a larger conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil, led by Rakoth Maugrim, the Unraveller. This trilogy demonstrates a number of ways in which race and the fantastic interact. First, as with many works of not only fantasy literature, but also multicultural literature, racial fantasies persist as a way of discussing and describing race and difference. As the power of the racial fantasy suggests, however, the anti-mimetic impulse is a mode that contains a lot of power. The fantastic, then, can be used as a means to challenge the effects of these fantasies. Additionally, Kay's trilogy demonstrates the importance of boundaries and borderlands as sites in which the power of the fantastic can enter the narrative. In other words, Kay both employs racial fantasies as a way to create difference, as well as uses the fantastic to challenge the narratives of inequality created by such racial fantasies. His trilogy demonstrates the continued hesitant relationship between race and the fantastic, a relationship that simultaneously questions stereotypical portrayals of race, while at the same time relying on those very stereotypes to provide readers with a level of comfort and familiarity.

Much of the racial imagery in Kay's trilogy can be seen in his portrayal of Dalrei, a tribal people who live on the plains of Fionavar, who are aligned with the forces of good, and who hunt animals similar to antelope that are called eltor. This imagery immediately brings to mind images of Native American tribes, particularly those of the Great Plains, a portrayal that is reinforced by additional details throughout the series. For example, Torc, one of the Dalrei, is described as looking "like a wolf, with his lean body, his long, straight, black hair, and the dark unrevealing eyes. He never wore a shirt, or moccasins; only his eltor skin leggings, dyed black to be unseen at night" (Kay *ST* 244-245).

Another major element in the first novel of the trilogy—*The Summer Tree*—that brings to mind images of Native American tribes is the dream visions of the young men in the tribe. When Dave Martyniuk, one of the Canadian college students, first arrives in Fionavar, he stumbles across Torc as he is watching over two young Dalrei who are fasting and waiting for a vision of their totem animal. Later, Tabor, the son of Ivor, the Chieftain of the third tribe, also has a dream vision with even more fantastic results—his totem animal is the unicorn Imraith-Nimphais, who flies into battle to defend the Dalrei. In many ways, Kay uses these racial images as shorthand to create a group of people. By associating the Dalrei with Native American tribes, Kay is easily able to convey a group of people that is spiritual and in touch with nature, yet that is also slightly primitive when compared to the races of people that live in urban locations.

Kay's use of racial fantasies of Native American in creating the world of Fionavar calls to mind Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), a work that is central to understanding the function and power of racial fantasies. In this work, Said talks about how in many ways, the Orient was a product of the European imagination. He writes, "The Orient was

almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (Said *Orientalism* 1). The language he uses here is telling—it is the language of fantasy, of imagination, of adventures and quests. Later in his study, Said discusses the Orient in terms of the theater—“the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined” (*Orientalism* 63). Certain images or characters of the Orient stand in as representatives for the whole East on this stage, bringing together in a fictional space a culture and society too large to be contained in one sweep of the Western gaze. Said writes, “Such ‘images’ of the Orient as this are images in that they represent or stand for a very large entity, otherwise impossibly diffuse, which they enable one to grasp or see” (*Orientalism* 66). He lists major Western authors, including Shakespeare, Milton, Cervantes, and Marlowe, who drew on these staged images of the Orient “in ways that sharpened the outlines of imagery, ideas, and figures populating it” (Said *Orientalism* 63). Said’s description of Orientalism in terms of the space of the theater, as well as the way in which authors of fiction perpetuated the imagined images of the Orient, speaks to the way the Western understanding of the East has been shaped by imagination and fantasy. These racial fantasies about the Orient, however, are more than just fantasies; they are, as Said points out, “a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment” (*Orientalism* 6). Not only does the European image of the Orient exist in the imagination, but it has also been institutionalized by decades of legal precedent, academic instruction, and physical and material interactions.

Also key to Said’s concept of Orientalism is the question of knowledge, and, following Baconian logic, power. He quotes Arthur James Balfour’s address regarding



Egypt to the British House of Commons in 1910; Balfour states, “We know the civilization of Egypt better than we know the civilization of any other country. We know it further back; we know it more intimately; we know more about it” (Said *Orientalism* 32). According to Said’s analysis, for Balfour and his colleagues, “to have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it” (*Orientalism* 32). Also troubling is the way in which the object of such knowledge is a “‘fact’ which, if it develops, changes, or otherwise transforms itself in the way that civilizations frequently do, nevertheless is fundamentally, even ontologically stable” (Said *Orientalism* 32). Later Said writes how Orientalist texts “can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe” (*Orientalism* 94). The knowledge held of a culture by the dominant civilization, therefore, takes precedence over what actually exists, and in many cases, defines the reality of culture. Said himself describes this in terms of the West as a creator. He writes, “It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries” (Said *Orientalism* 57). The potential danger of the unknown is a key aspect of Said’s discussion; he describes how many key Orientalist texts reinforced the familiar fantasies already held by their readers. He writes, “For what the Orientalist does is to *confirm* the Orient in his reader’s eyes; he neither tries nor wants to unsettle already firm convictions” (Said *Orientalism* 65). The example of Balfour’s address from Said suggests that not only is knowledge power, as Bacon claims, but fantasy is also power, in that the imagined image of a culture by both authors and readers can shape attitudes, policies, and practices that define how that culture is understood.

Said's discussion of Orientalism is not only helpful in highlighting the role that racial fantasy plays in shaping how a race or culture is understood, but it shares an interesting relationship to fantasy literature because of the way the relationship between the real world and racial fantasies mirrors the relationship in theories of fantasy literature between primary and secondary worlds. In his essay "On Fairy-Stories," J.R.R. Tolkien differentiates between what he calls the Primary World—the real world as we know it—and Secondary Worlds—worlds that are "free from the domination of observed 'fact'" (Tolkien "On Fairy-Stories"139). These Secondary Worlds, which include Lewis' Narnia, Tolkien's Middle-Earth, and Kay's Fionavar, exist as "autonomous world[s] or venue[s] which [are] not bound to mundane reality" (Clute and Grant 847). Said's description of Orientalism and racial fantasies bears striking similarities to Tolkien's description of Secondary Worlds, in that the European idea of the Orient is not based on mundane reality or observable facts, but is instead a product of the imagination, based on fantasies of race and difference. A similar idea can be found in Laurence Stevens' essay on Canadian fantasy authors Charles de Lint and Welwyn Katz. In describing the works of 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Canadian authors who wrote about First Nations culture, Stevens argues that "in all these cases the Indians are in effect exotic beings living in a fantasy land" (58). Later, when describing the works of Canadian author D.C. Scott, he makes the connection between Tolkien's ideas and racial fantasies even clearer, writing that Scott is "a purveyor of the colonial Secondary world fantasy of Indians as noble savages whose 'waning race' needs civilization" (Stevens 58). Therefore, just as Kay uses racial fantasies in the creation of his Secondary World of Fionavar, the Orient that Said describes is also a Secondary World, a fantasy world filled with imaginary

characters, places, and cultural practices, rather than a world filled with the mundane details of our Primary World.

Said's discussion of Orientalism is especially helpful in highlighting the effect of the relationships between these Secondary Worlds of the Orient and Fionavar, and the Primary World of reality, particularly in that it shows how the racial fantasies that appear in these works have an impact on real-world racial relations. As was seen above in Said's claim that Orientalism is "a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment" (*Orientalism* 6), Said's study emphasizes the way in which products of racial fantasy—whether the image of the "exotic" Oriental or the Native American "noble savage"—become entrenched in the practices and institutions of a culture. In *Orientalist*, Robert Lee describes how Said's discussion of Orientalism can be seen in American racial stereotypes as well. He argues, "What produces these stereotypes is not just individual acts of representation, but a historical discourse of race that is embedded in the history of American social crises" (R. Lee 12). And in *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, Robert Warrior writes about how his reading of Said as a nationalist has been immensely helpful in examining Native political structures and Native intellectual history to discover a shared set of values that have been obfuscated by the racial fantasy of Native Americans as "the sort of people who are good with their hands, clever in their crafts, nimble on their feet, and delightful in their imaginations, but not so strong on the heavy lifting of philosophy and other higher order tasks of the mind" (196). He describes the dramatic impacts of such fantasies, ranging from those who dismiss Paula Gunn Allen for being "not much of a critic or thinker" (Warrior *American Indian* 196) to the way in which much of the

existing scholarship on Native American literature is “untrue, ideologically motivated, and racist” (Warrior *American Indian* 198).<sup>8</sup> These examples show how racial fantasies and stereotypical images are not just limited to the imagination, but how they also play a role in shaping governmental policy, social practice, and cultural attitudes. Furthermore, due to the way in which the objects of such fantasies are viewed as unchanging facts, as Said points out, those in the subjugated position in such relationships are deprived of the means to change these practices and attitudes. In other words, racial fantasies play a definite role in shaping the seemingly permanent structures, both *de jure* and *de facto*, that contribute to racial inequality.

Interestingly enough, however, while Said’s description of Orientalism is certainly reflected in Kay’s *The Fionavar Tapestry*, Kay’s treatment of race is more nuanced than Tolkien’s image of the Uruk-Hai that we saw at the beginning of this chapter. Kay is clearly drawing from Native American racial fantasies to create the Dalrei tribes, but his incorporation of the unicorn into Tabor’s dream vision suggests that something more complicated is going on. This is in part due to the fact that his trilogy, rather than being set completely in a fantasy world as *The Lord of the Rings* is, begins in the world as we know it and then transitions back and forth between our world and the world of Fionavar. The trilogy draws much of its narrative power from this interplay between the fantasy world of Fionavar and the world as we know it. Christopher Cobb explains how this interplay affects the development of the plot, arguing, “Characters master history by crossing through time between worlds, using their knowledge of events

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<sup>8</sup> Warrior’s critique of the bulk of Native Studies scholarship as ideologically motivated is an interesting charge, particularly since his own work is ideologically driven as well. That does not take away from his very correct observation, however, of the ways in which racial fantasies have impacted Native American communities today.

in one world to influence the course of events in others” (89). This interplay also affects the treatment of race in the novel, as the characters from our world come to Fionavar with the knowledge of Native American images and customs and are able to make connections between the Dalrei and certain Native American tribes. One such example is when Dave is talking with Tabor, the son of one of the tribal chiefs. Tabor is describing the history of the Dalrei, saying how they used to carry their houses with them. ““They weren’t houses like we have now, of course,” Tabor went on. ‘We made them of eltor skin and poles, so they were easy to carry.’ ‘We have things like that in my world, too,’ Dave said” (Kay *ST* 260). Dave’s response to Tabor both draws the reader’s attention to the fact that Kay is employing Native American imagery, but that to some degree, he is also aware of how he is using it—a self-reflexiveness regarding racial imagery that is not seen in the works Tolkien.

The importance of the movement between Fionavar and our world not only to the plot but also to the way the novel conceptualizes racial difference demonstrates that racial fantasies are not the only aspect of the anti-mimetic impulse to have power. The idea of the fantastic—that is, the moment of hesitation between the uncanny and the marvelous—is a concept related to racial fantasy that holds similar power. Critics such as Mikhail Bakhtin and Rosemary Jackson discuss the power of the fantastic to challenge entrenched ways of thinking. In his *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin writes, “the fantastic here serves not for the positive *embodiment* of truth, but as a mode for searching after truth, provoking it, and most important, *testing* it” (114). His choice of the words “provoking” and “testing” emphasizes the way in which the fantastic is positioned against the status quo, able to put certain assumptions or paradigms to the test.

Rosemary Jackson is another critic who has written about the subversive power of the fantastic in her helpful study *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, looking at the historical evolution of fantasy literature as a set of literature that developed in opposition to the “realist” novel. She writes, “Subverting this unitary vision, the fantastic introduces confusion and alternatives; in the nineteenth century this meant an opposition to bourgeois ideology upheld through the ‘realist’ novel” (R. Jackson 35). Jackson also notes how the fantastic “traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made ‘absent’” (R. Jackson 4). Both Jackson and Bakhtin’s descriptions of the fantastic portray it as an element of literature that is able to give voice to those without power, test the limits of those who *do* have power, and challenge paradigms of inequality.

In this way, in addition to using the racial fantasies of the “noble savage” and the “environmental Indian” to create the Dalrei tribe in *The Fionavar Tapestry*, Kay’s trilogy also demonstrates the power of the fantastic. Although the whole trilogy is a series of fantasy novels, the uncertainty and hesitation of the fantastic are confined to only certain elements in the texts, such as the ring known as the Baelrath that surges to power of its own accord, and Tabor and his unicorn, Imraith-Nimphais. These elements of the fantastic in Kay’s trilogy are elements of power. Perhaps most obviously, Kay uses the fantastic to change the course of battles throughout his trilogy and to provide the means for the forces of good to ultimately prevail over the Unraveller and his army. In the first real battle of the war against the Unraveller, the Dalrei are fighting an army of wolves and urgach, frantically looking for reinforcements. But when Tabor looks to the east, he “realized that the Dalrei were not the only ones to be receiving reinforcements. And if he

could see the urgach at such a distance, then there were very many, there were too many, and so” (Kay *WF* 57). And so Tabor and his unicorn fly together, fighting and killing and ultimately turning the tide of the battle: “And the urgach fled before them and they pursued, slaying, and the wolves broke and fled also, southward away, and the Dalrei and the men of Brennín cheered, amazed and exultant to see the shining thing from heaven come to their aid” (Kay *WF* 58). For the Dalrei, the insertion of the fantastic into the narrative provides them with a way to challenge the forces of evil and rewrite certain defeat into a victory.

Kay’s use of the fantastic in his trilogy does more, however, than merely challenge the structures of power within the novel; he also uses the fantastic interaction between our world and the world of Fionavar to address real-world racial fantasies and inequalities. The fantastic interplay in the border space between Fionavar and our world provides Kay with the space to challenge the images created by these fantasies and rewrite the resulting narratives of inequality. As was discussed earlier, the interplay between our world and Fionavar draws attention to the fact that Kay is using Native American imagery in his creation of the Dalrei. But Kay does more than just call attention to his use of Native American imagery. He also uses his portrayal of the Dalrei to challenge racial inequalities in our world and along with the image of Native Americans as a noble, dying race. He does this primarily through the question of land ownership—the Dalrei are the legal owners of the Plain, an area located right in the center of Fionavar. As Tabor explains to Dave, Revor was the Dalrei’s “brightest hero,” and he “saved the High King in battle during the Bael Rangat, by riding through Daniloth, and was rewarded with the land of the Plain for the Dalrei forever” (Kay *ST*

260). By making the Dalrei recognized, celebrated owners of both their land and the eltor in his fantasy novel, Kay uses the fantastic to rewrite the theft of Native American land in our world and establishes them as a central, vital, *living* presence in Fionavar.<sup>9</sup>

But, like Peter Jackson's portrayal of the Uruk-Hai as dark-skinned and evil, Kay's persistent reliance on stereotypical images of Native Americans demonstrates a need on both the part of the author and the reader to see race in terms of comfortable, easily categorized images. In spite of the way the fantastic provides a way to challenge and subvert the images, policies, and even material structures perpetuated by racial fantasies, these fantasies persist as the default way to depict and discuss race in many works of literature—both works of ethnic literature as well as works of fantasy literature. Because of this, the second connection this chapter makes between race and the fantastic is perhaps even more important than the first: in theoretical discussions of each, boundaries and border spaces are key sites where meaning is created, thus moving a critical examination of race and difference to the center of the discussion of texts belonging to these groups of literature. Key theories of race and difference, including Gloria Anzaldúa's work *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Derrida's study of *différance*, discuss boundaries as spaces in which multiple contradictory ideas can exist simultaneously without pushing to resolve their differences in some sort of dialectic synthesis. Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic* contains a strikingly similar description of the fantastic as inhabiting the space in between the uncanny and the marvelous, only maintaining its power when it remains unresolved. By considering these theories

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<sup>9</sup> See Cobb's "Guy Gavriel Kay and the Psychology of History" (*Foundation* vol. 34, num. 94 (Summer 2005): 87-99) for an interesting discussion of the possibility of rewriting history as it pertains to Kay's trilogy.



together, it becomes clear that boundaries and interstitial spaces are key spaces in which the fantastic can appear and have power. The uncertainty and transitions described by both Anzaldúa and Derrida are the very elements that give the fantastic its power, thus making the boundaries created by racial categories key sites for the entry of the fantastic into a narrative. And because these border spaces are the sites in which meaning is created, the questions of difference that they raise are no longer pushed off to the side, but occupy a central space where they are met with a critical eye.

Although Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1977) describes the experience of the Chicana, rather than the Native American or Asian American, it is a logical starting point for this discussion of racial boundaries, primarily because her work was among the first not only to describe a racial borderland, but also to embody it. As Julia Alvarez writes in the introduction to the third edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, "Gloria Anzaldúa was one of the first to crystallize and celebrate the potential of a borderland state of mind" (par. 8). In writing about the U.S.-Mexico border, Anzaldúa distinguishes between a border and a borderland. She explains, "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition" (Anzaldúa 25). Anzaldúa's text, however, is more than just a description or a theorization of the borderland—it is an embodiment of this borderland, bringing together English and Spanish, poetry and prose, history and personal reflection. In describing Chicano Spanish, she freely mixes English and Spanish, a perfect demonstration of the language she is describing: "But Chicano

Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally. Change, *evolución*, *enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción* have created variants of Chicano Spanish, *un Nuevo lenguaje. Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir. Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language*" (Anzaldúa 77).<sup>10</sup> In the borderland, distinguishing "*us* from *them*" is not possible, nor is it something to strive for. The transitional state of the borderland is what is important, and, in fact, what is embraced.

In her book *Between Two Waters: Narratives of Transculturation in Latin America*, Silvia Spitta describes the freeing effect that living in such a borderland has for Anzaldúa: "In living on the borders of two cultures, Anzaldúa experiences not only abuse, but also a certain sense of freedom. This freedom allows her to negotiate her way between the two cultures. In true transculturating fashion, she adopts the role of the mediator, appropriating and discarding from each culture whatever she wants and thus shaping herself as a bricolage" (209). Anzaldúa herself observes that "we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; *mestizo* when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black ancestry); Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S.; *Raza* when referring to Chicanos; *tejanos* when we are Chicanos from Texas" (85). Depending on the context, Anzaldúa is able to choose the element of her identity that she wishes to emphasize. Although, or perhaps because, the borderland is in a constant state of transition, it is also a place of

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<sup>10</sup> "But Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally. Change, *evolution, the enrichment of new words by way of invention or adoption* have created variants of Chicano Spanish, *a new language. A language that corresponds with a way of life. Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language.*" (Translation courtesy of Hannah Pallmeyer)

freedom, a place where its inhabitants are able to shape their identities through their picking and choosing of various cultural influences.

This choice and freedom, however, only extend so far. Although Anzaldúa describes the way in which the borderlands provide her with the freedom to shape her own identity, she also acknowledges the lingering adverse effects of racial prejudice and discrimination. Among her discussion of being able to embrace contradictory elements of her identity come the very real stories of farmers being cheated out of their land, suspected train robbers being lynched, and families being displaced due to war. Furthermore, she writes, “Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating” (Anzaldúa 85). And as Spitta observed above, part of living in the borderlands, in addition to freedom, is also abuse. In other words, although the space of the borderlands is a space where self-creation is possibility, it is also a space marked by inequality. The choices made possible by existing in the borderlands, therefore, are often ambivalent ones, where no real choice is offered. As was seen above, these lingering inequalities emphasize the need to focus on border spaces, moving these sites where meaning is created to the center of discussions about race and difference.

Spitta’s analysis of Anzaldúa’s work brings up an additional term that is helpful in thinking about borderlands and those who inhabit them—the idea of transculturation. Transculturation is the process by which cultures that come into contact with each other exchange ideas, language, religion, and other elements of their respective cultures. The term was developed by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s, in response to the term “acculturation,” which he understood as (and which has widely grown to mean)

“the one-way imposition of the dominant culture” (Spitta 3).<sup>11</sup> Spitta goes on to explain, “Ortiz created the neologism ‘transculturation’ to undermine the homogenizing impact implicit in the term ‘acculturation,’ which in his view obfuscated the true dynamics at work in colonial situations. Instead Ortiz insisted on understanding intercultural dynamics as a two-way *toma y daca* (give and take)” (4). Literary critics such as Ángel Rama then used the term in their own field; Rama uses “transculturation” “to analyze the processes at work in a Latin American literature that consciously situates itself at a cultural intersection; between different ethnicities and linguistic traditions [. . .]; between different geographic areas [. . .]; and between different conceptions of the literary” (Spitta 9). As Robert Young notes in his study *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, however, transculturation must be thought of as a process, not an end result. He argues, “Transculturation does not describe cultural contact as such, nor the cultural synthesis that may be its eventual product, but the moment of passage from one culture to another in which different heterogeneous cultures collide and ferment in a concoction or stew” (Young 202). Two key ideas come through in these descriptions of transculturation, the first being that the cultures are exerting influence on *each other*, rather than merely one culture asserting itself over the other. Additionally, transculturation is an ongoing process rather than a fixed moment in time. Much like Barthes’ idea of the Text, transculturation describes the perpetual meeting of cultures and the way they shape each

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<sup>11</sup> Although, as Spitta points out, “acculturation “ was originally used “to refer to the process of mutual interaction and change in cultures that come into contact with each other” (3), the term is now widely understood to describe a one-way process of dominance of one culture over another.

other. Such a process is an interchange, a give and take, an encounter that moves in multiple directions, rather than merely one culture exerting its influence over another.<sup>12</sup>

Another term helpful in the discussion of the borderlands is Mary Louis Pratt's use of the phrase "contact zone" to describe what is also known, particularly from a European perspective, as the "colonial frontier." In her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Pratt describes the "contact zone" as a term that "shifts the center of gravity and the point of view" away from the colonizer. Instead,

it invokes the space and time where subjects previously separated by geography and history are co-present, the point at which their trajectories now intersect. The term "contact" foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by accounts of conquest and domination told from the invader's perspective. (Pratt 8)<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Several critics, including Spitta, point out that the term "transculturation" was developed within a very specific context—that of Cuba—and that removing the term from that context makes it much less meaningful. This dissertation, however, does not intend to take the term "transculturation" out of its original context. Rather, it functions as a point of reference for understanding how boundaries and borders are key spaces in theories of race and difference. See Diana Taylor's essay "Transculturing Transculturation" (*Performing Arts Journal* 13.2 (May 1991): 90-104) for an interesting study of the evolution of this term from its Cuban roots to her current discussion of Latin American theater.

<sup>13</sup> Amy Kaplan makes a similar argument for the use of the term "borderland" instead of the term "frontier" in American studies. She explains, "Where the frontier implies a model of center and periphery, which confront one another most often in a one-way imposition of power, the borderlands are seen as multidimensional and transterritorial; they not only lie at the geographic and political margins of national identity but as often traverse the center of the metropolis" (Kaplan 16). She goes on to explain how the use of the term borderlands shifts the site of foreign relations from outside the United States to being negotiated at these borders, which in turn, changes them from the periphery of society to the site where meaning is created. She writes, "The borderlands link the study of ethnicity and immigration inextricably to the study of international relations and empire. At these borders, foreign relations do not take place outside the boundaries of America, but instead, constitute American nationality. The borderlands thus transform the traditional notion of the frontier from the primitive margins of civilization to a decentered cosmopolitanism" (Kaplan 16-17). This discussion is very similar to the shift described in the introduction to this work between Clute's terms of water margins and borderlands, a shift that moves boundaries from the edges of where meaning is created to the center. Both Pratt and Kaplan, therefore, challenge the validity of thinking of the site of contact between cultures as a one-way frontier, and instead, substitute terms that imply two-way movement, thus challenging the imperial paradigm.

In his essay “Native and Christian: Religion and Spirituality as Transcultural Negotiation in American Indian Novels of the 1990s,” Karsten Fitz describes the powerful impact the “contact zone” can have on the cultures involved. He writes,

It is exactly in the in-between space of the contact zone—where cultures overlap—that cultural translations and transformations take place; this is the space of consciousness where cultural meaning is continuously in motion. In this new space in which heterogeneous processes of cultural exchange take place, cultural identities, including religious definitions, constantly shift and in their most extreme cases completely dissolve. (Fitz “Native” 13)

In other words, while the colonial frontier is a static boundary, representing the foremost edge of imperialism, the contact zone is a border space in which ideas are mutually exchanged and as a result, cultural identities are altered. While the term certainly does not imply equality between the partners of exchange, it does acknowledge that the process is one of give and take.<sup>14</sup>

Invoking the ideas of transculturation and the contact zone draws attention to the fact that the result of these interactions is not a static thing, but rather a culture that is always changing and never exists in a fixed form, thus calling to mind Derrida’s idea of “différance.” When discussing Ortiz’s original use of the term transculturation to describe culture formation in Cuba, Spitta writes, “Since foreign influences were invariably present, and continue to be so, the ‘new’ culture, however, is never achieved: it is forever in the making, inevitably deferred” (4). Spitta’s use of the term “deferred” to describe how the process of transculturation is a continual one brings to mind the writings of Jacques Derrida in his essay “Différance” (1982). He describes the two aspects of the

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<sup>14</sup> See also Richard White’s *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991) for an historical examination of the concept of the overlapping frontier.

word *différance*: to defer, that is, to temporize, and to differ, “to be not identical” (Derrida “*Différance*” 8). Derrida’s descriptions of *différance*, while indirect, suggest an idea very similar to the key aspects of transculturation and the borderland that have been discussed in this chapter thus far. He describes the interrelatedness of signs and signified concepts, noting that “every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences” (Derrida “*Différance*” 11), which relates to the way cultures are interconnected with each other. The primary point of connection is the idea of movement; as Derrida explains, “What is written as *différance*, then, will be the playing movement that ‘produces’—by means of something that is not simply an activity—these differences, these effects of difference” (“*Différance*” 11). Therefore, although coming from a very different intellectual tradition from the ideas of the borderlands and transculturation, Derrida’s *différance* speaks to several of the same ideas that are key to this project, namely, the interconnectedness of ideas and the movement between these ideas that produces meaning.<sup>15</sup>

While an examination of borderlands, transculturation, contact zones, and *différance* is very helpful in demonstrating the importance of boundaries to theories of race and difference, as well as in exploring some of the possible issues that arise, it is also very important to note that the ideas of boundaries and borders are also specifically useful

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<sup>15</sup> These texts are certainly not the only ones that address the subject of border theory. Renato Rosaldo’s *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) and D. Emily Hicks’s *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) are two other early influential studies in the field. Additionally, there are numerous essay collections that address the subject of the borderlands, including *Criticism in the Borderlands* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), *Borderlands: Negotiating Boundaries in Post-Colonial Writing* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), and also *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), whose introduction by David E. Johnson and Scott Michaelsen provides a helpful overview and analysis of many key works in the field.

when examining Native American and Asian American literatures. One such scholar who employs the idea of boundaries and border spaces in his work is Gerald R. McMaster; in his article “Borderzones: the ‘Injun-uity’ of Aesthetic Tricks,” he explores how Native American identity is negotiated. Of particular interest to this project is his discussion of the existence of Native American artists in multiple communities—both on the reservation and in a more urban environment—which, as he points out, “make them ambiguous” (McMaster 75). He goes on to argue that

between the two (and more) communities—reserve and urban—there exists a socially ambiguous zone, a site of articulation for the contemporary (Native)<sup>16</sup> artist that is frequently crossed, experience, interrogated, and negotiated... That is to say this is a zone of “in between-ness,” and as such it is a socially constructed and politically charged site where sifting allegiances criss-cross permeable grids or boundaries, and where identities are to be understood as “nomadic subjectivities.” (McMaster 75)

Recalling Derrida, McMaster sees the uncertainty of this in-between space in terms of play. He writes, “its ambiguity and indeterminacy creates such interesting ‘playful’ possibilities” (McMaster 90). McMaster also invokes the concept of liminality in his discussion of Native American identity: “Liminality is the threshold between two states of ambiguity, a state of suspension in which the initiate loses rights and obligations” (McMaster 90). Although this study chooses to think of these in-between spaces as “interstitial,” rather than “liminal” because of the teleological implications of the word “liminal,” the idea of the threshold is nonetheless an important one, because again, it suggests a state of transition, not inhabiting a fixed identity, but always on the cusp of

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<sup>16</sup> McMaster’s use of parentheses to enclose the word “Native” can best be explained in his own words: “Although the term ‘Native’ is in common use and has been substituted for many other formal designations, like ‘Indian,’ ‘aboriginal,’ or ‘indigenous,’ I place it in parenthesis to indicate its tenuous application and acceptance. This statement suggests the simultaneous ‘presence/absence’ of identity, which is central to contemporary discourses” (McMaster 88).



resolving the various cultural forces. Later, McMaster describes the border zone as “the liminal zone where everyone is status-less” (91). Here we see some of the equalizing potential of such an approach. Rights are lost, true, but so are obligations, and, perhaps most importantly, they are lost by all the inhabitants of the border zone, thus leveling the playing field. Because of the ambiguity seen in such border zones, linear hierarchies no longer are relevant, and the potential for equality in exchange is greater.

Karsten Fitz is another scholar who has written extensively about transculturation as a way of understanding the formation of Native American identity. As was seen earlier in this chapter, Fitz invokes Pratt’s terms of “transculturation” and “contact zone” to describe the relationship between Native American literature and “mainstream” American literature. In describing the novels he has selected for analysis in *Negotiating History and Culture*, he writes, “What makes these novels especially worth investigating is precisely the fact that they do not simply ignore or ‘write against’ the dominant history and literary interpretation; rather they incorporate these standard American texts as theoretical, literary, and historical components that are always already inscribed into the American project” (Fitz *Negotiating* 5). For Fitz, the boundaries between Native American literature and the “standard American texts” are fluid ones, with Native American authors incorporating elements from canonical American authors into their fiction. Later he expands on the need for two-way interaction between Native American texts and canonical American literature, noting that “the obsession with oppositions [. . .] which lies behind many theoretical concepts with regard to literature and culture [. . .] by implying, more or less, a one-way directionality of influence, cannot do justice to the complexities of American Studies as an academic discipline” (Fitz *Negotiating* 32). In

other words, the relationship between Native American literature and other groups of literature, particularly the Western canon, is too complex and interrelated to be described simply in terms of one-way influence. For Fitz, the interconnectedness of border spaces, with their fluidity and equality, is a better way of understanding such a relationship.

Scholars of Asian American literature have also employed the idea of the borderland in their writings. Some of these critics write generally about ethnic writers existing in between two worlds, including Amy Ling, who in her book *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* explains how Chinese American women exist in this in-between space: “Their facial features proclaim one fact—their Asian ethnicity—but by education, choice, or birth they are American” (20). Other scholars are more specific in their analysis of in-between spaces. One area in which such an idea is particularly helpful is in diaspora studies, such as Benzi Zhang’s essay “Beyond Border Politics: The Problematics of Identity in Asian Diaspora Literature.” Using Edward Casey’s idea of “nonlimited locality” (304), Zhang sees that the location of the diasporic identity exists in “a traveling-back-and-forth that reveals itself as caught up in the space between *here* and *there*, between *now* and *then*” (“Beyond” 78). As will be discussed in greater detail below, Zhang sees several advantages in this interstitial space, namely, a challenge to dualistic ways of thinking, as well as to established categories such as space and place:

However, the temporal and historical dimensions of place, which is closely related to one’s sense of belonging, cannot be confined to the boundaries of binarism such as *now* and *then*. In diaspora discourse, the term ‘belonging’ means cross-relation of cultures and border-crossing in time and space in search for a simultaneous collective—the continuity of a living memory across both spatial and temporal divide. (“Beyond” 77)

Zhang also invokes Edward Said's idea of a "contrapuntal" awareness that allows for the simultaneous awareness of multiple dimensions (Said "Reflections" 172), arguing that "Said's idea of 'contrapuntal' expresses very well the simultaneous dimensions of diasporic identity and, at the same time, provides insight into the transformation of place from a static, singular entity into a shifting and multiple configuration mediated by both inner and outer worlds" (Zhang "Beyond" 82). Here again we see many of the key ideas of the borderlands—the continuous movement, the multiple ideas, the bringing together and co-existence of opposites such as inner and outer. This prevalence of scholarship on boundaries and border theory when examining questions of race and difference in general, and Native American and Asian American literature in particular, demonstrates the usefulness of these tropes in discussing these groups of literature.<sup>17</sup>

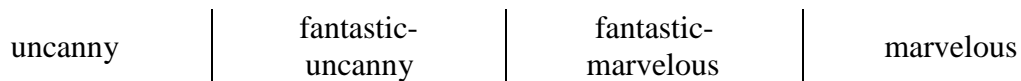
What is particularly important to this study is the way in which many of the same ideas seen in the discussion of boundaries in theories of race and difference can also be seen in some of the key discussions of the fantastic. Lucie Armitt, whose epigraph opened this chapter, is one scholar who sees the trope of boundaries as a key aspect of the fantastic. She argues that "the fantastic functions as a borderline phenomenon," and as such, "becomes a site of hesitancy, uncertainty and disquieting ambivalence" (Armitt *Theorising* 31-32). Armitt uses the idea of borders and frontiers throughout her studies of fantasy literature, leading to many interesting comparisons. For example, in *Theorising*

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<sup>17</sup> These studies are but a sampling of texts in which the idea of boundaries has been used to understand Native American or Asian American literature. Other works in which the ideas of the borderlands, boundary crossing, and fluid boundaries are important include, but are certainly not limited to: Qun Wang's "Border Crossing, Cultural Negotiations, and the Authenticity of Asian American Voices" (*Passages: Journal of Transnational and Transcultural Studies* 1.2 (1999): 278-89); James Stripe's "Beyond the Cameo School: Decolonizing the Academy in a World of Postmodern Multiculturalism" (*Wicazo Sa Review* 11.1 (Spring 1995): 24-32); and Roland Walter's "Notes on Border(land)s and Transculturation in the 'Damp and Hungry Interstices' of the Americas" (*How far is American from here?* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005).

*the Fantastic*, she draws a parallel between the body and the fantasy set, arguing that both are “a crucial space of signification whose precarious limits wrestle with themselves” (Armitt 8). In general, Armitt’s study is extremely useful for those considering the theme of boundaries in fantasy literature, particularly in that she recognizes that our interest in certain fantasy forms “has more to do with the complex way in which an individual tale simultaneously flirts with while overreaching this limiting straitjacket that we know as genre” (20). For Armitt, boundaries are key in understanding not only the trope of the fantastic, but also fantasy literature as a whole.<sup>18</sup>

In Tzvetan Todorov’s landmark study *The Fantastic* (1975), to which Armitt’s work is extremely indebted, it is even clearer that the fantastic is a trope of boundary spaces. To demonstrate his point, he includes the following diagram:



He then explains, “The fantastic in its pure state is represented here by the median line separating the fantastic-uncanny from the fantastic-marvelous. This line corresponds perfectly to the nature of the fantastic, a frontier between two adjacent realms” (Todorov 44). For Todorov, the fantastic is the moment of hesitation that exists in the border space between the uncanny and marvelous, the transitional moment of uncertainty and unknowing. C.N. Manlove, in *The Impulse of Fantasy Literature*, writes about the “creative interplay” that is made possible by bringing together the opposite ideas of fantasy and reality, describing how “this yoking together of apparent opposites in fantasy

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<sup>18</sup> Armitt’s entire study *Theorising the Fantastic* is extremely useful in considering the multiple ways that boundaries are central to the conception of the fantastic and fantasy literature. Rather than quote extensive sections of her work, I would refer you to it directly (London: Arnold, 1996), particularly her second chapter on the uncanny.

is to add new being and wonder to each side of the metaphor: nature becomes 'supernaturalised' or shot through with strangeness, and the supernatural becomes more vivid because infused with the everyday and the familiar" (46). Manlove's ideas of the creativity of interstitial spaces, as well as the benefits of bringing together opposite ideas and allowing them to interact, are both key in understanding the potential of the fantastic to change the way we think about binary relationships, something that is discussed at greater length later in this chapter.

Even more recent scholars of the fantastic, such as Heinz Insu Fenkl, discuss the importance of boundaries and border spaces to this trope. Fenkl, in his introduction to *Interfictions*, writes about the importance of seeing texts as interstitial, rather than trying to pigeon-hole them in predetermined categories. He defines an interstitial space as "a space between things: a chink in the fence, a gap in the clouds, a DMZ between nations at war, the potentially infinite space between two musical notes, a form of writing that defies genre classification" (Fenkl iii). Fenkl argues that interstitial novels provide "a wider range of possibilities for the reader's engagement and transformation" (v). He gives examples such as John Crowley's *Little, Big*, which are "Fantasy but also aware of the fact that they are Fantasy and make the reader awake of that awareness. Readers can lose themselves in the world of the novel, but simultaneously maintain an awareness of the act of reading. This 'bilocation' (more precisely, a 'multilocality') of the reader's awareness produces a form of engagement characteristic of metafiction and altered states of consciousness" (Fenkl vii). For Fenkl, interstitial spaces, such as the boundaries and border spaces, allow for the insertion of the fantastic into the text, a trope marked by

hesitation and being situated between conflicting ideas, through which the reader can become engaged, transformed, and come to a more rewarding understanding of the text.

Kay's trilogy demonstrates the importance of boundaries and border spaces to an understanding of both race and the fantastic, seen by critics from Anzaldúa to Todorov, primarily in the way that border spaces provide a means for the hesitation of the fantastic to enter the text, a hesitation that can then be used to unsettle comfortable ideas about race and difference. Two key borders that are explored throughout the series are the border between our world and the Secondary World of Fionavar, as well as the boundary between dream and reality. As was discussed earlier, the interaction between the world as we know it and the Secondary World of Fionavar drives forward the plot of the trilogy and draws the reader's attention to the differences between the Dalrei and the treatment of Native Americans in our world. The boundary between our world and Fionavar also serves as an entry point for the fantastic into the novel. When the five Canadian students first cross from our world to Fionavar, their crossing is marked by hesitation and uncertainty. Dave Martyniuk is unsure about whether he wants to go, and demands a promise from the mage, Loren Silvercloak, that he will return home. Loren does not promise, and so Dave "violently pulled his hands free from those of Jennifer and the Dwarf" (Kay *ST* 35). Dave's hesitation then destabilizes the rest of the crossing:

Then the cold of the crossing and the darkness of the space between worlds came down and Kevin saw nothing more. In his mind, though, whether for an instant or an age, he thought he heard the sound of mocking laughter. There was a taste in his mouth, like ashes of grief. *Dave*, he thought, *oh, Martyniuk, what have you done?* (Kay *ST* 35).

And it is with these words of doubt and uncertainty that the first section of the novel ends. The boundary between our world and Fionavar serves as a border space in which

the hesitation of the fantastic can enter the text. The reader does not find out what happens to Dave for nearly two hundred pages of the novel, thus extending the hesitation and uncertainty caused by the initial crossing for more than six chapters. Interestingly, the primary cause and focus of that hesitation—Dave Martyniuk—arrives in Fionavar among the Dalrei, apart from his fellow students, thus transferring the uncertainty of the fantastic onto the racial imagery of the Dalrei. In this way, by focusing on the tropes of boundaries and the fantastic in the novel, the uncertainty brought about by the fantastic can affect the reader's understanding of race in the novel as well, as the conflicting ways in which Kay treats race will be brought to the fore.

The boundary between dreams and reality in the novel functions in much the same way, particularly through Tabor's unicorn, Imraith-Nimphais. Imraith-Nimphais not only enters the text in the space between dream and reality, but also embodies the hesitation and uncertainty of the fantastic. When Tabor first returns from his vision quest, he tells Gereint, the shaman, about his vision. Gereint calls upon the powers of the Plain to defend him, but when Ivor asks why, Gereint replies, "This one I would tell you if I could, old friend, but truly I do not know. He went so far the sky was changed" (Kay *ST* 288). Gereint's uncertainty regarding Tabor's fate, as well as his hesitation in calling Tabor's animal "good," aligns Tabor and his unicorn with the fantastic. As with the confusion regarding Dave's crossing into Fionavar, this element of the fantastic is associated with the Dalrei as well. The hesitation surrounding the idea of "good" in the discussion of Imraith-Nimphais is particularly interesting, in that it suggests a lack of moral certainty that applies not only to the unicorn, but to discussions of race and difference as well. This demonstrates not only how border spaces within the text provide

the means for the fantastic to enter the narrative, but also how the uncertainty of the fantastic can then be transferred to the portrayal of racial difference throughout the novel.

The idea that reading the fantastic in conjunction with boundaries and border spaces can highlight a conflicted portrayal of race is supported by many scholars as well. This is primarily due to the fact that border spaces enable someone to embrace all of the elements of his or her identity, even those that contradict each other, instead of just focusing on ones that conform to certain expectations. Sonia Saldívar-Hull, in her introduction to the second edition of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, observes how the borderland has this effect on Anzaldúa herself: "Claiming all parts of her identity, even those that clash, she escapes essentialist categories and envisions one provisional home where she can 'stand and claim my space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture'" (5). Stuart Hall sees the movement found in the interstitial spaces as key in resisting such limiting essentializations. When we think of identity, and by extension, literature, as Hall does, we recognize that "cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised [sic] past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall 225). Because of the constant transformations and contradictions found within the border spaces, developing fixed ideas of race and culture based on "essential" qualities of race is impossible, thus forcing conversations about race and identity that extend past stereotypical expectations and essentialized categories.

In addition to highlighting the uncertainty surrounding questions of race and difference, examining the shared importance of boundaries and border spaces to theories



has the advantage of creating dialogue between texts of Native American, Asian American, and fantasy literature in a way that challenges static literary categories. By reading theories of race alongside theories of the fantastic, it highlights the way in which *all* literature is a result of fantasy. As Lucie Armitt explains in *Theorising the Fantastic*,

The world of the literary fantastic, just like that of classical realism, only exists as a linguistic construct. Literature, more than any other aesthetic medium, reminds us that we understand, create and experience the world around us but also the world of our dreams, desires and fears, in terms of the very language we learn to articulate. Fantasy fictions simply bring this to the fore. (18)

In this way, such a reading calls to attention how all images of race are to some degree racial fantasies, and that all authors are writing their own fantasies. This in turn allows readers to see each text for what it truly is, rather than in terms of which group of literature it belongs to. As Armitt puts it, thinking of “boundaries as limits to interrogate” creates a “paradigm [that] can be used to deconstruct genre” (*Theorising* 55). Seeing the importance of boundaries to both race and the fantastic blurs the line between texts that address these themes, thus destabilizing categories of literature such as “ethnic literature,” “fantasy literature,” and even “canonical literature.”<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, this dialogic reading of theories of boundaries and theories of the fantastic also emphasizes the way in which the fantastic can be used as a tool in interstitial spaces to challenge a dualistic way of thinking, because of the way in which it

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<sup>19</sup> That said, I realize that without the initial development of these categories, Asian American and Native American studies may very well not have emerged in the ways that they did, thus making this project impossible. As Cheung writes, “one must not overlook the interdependence of politics and literature. Without the initial naming, subsequent institutionalizing, and continuous contestation over this literature, the many voices that are now being heard might have remained mute” (5). While Cheung sees the continuing need to “amplify marginalized voices” as reason to continue using these categories, I do not agree that this is the best way to do so, instead thinking that focusing on shared tropes such as boundaries and the fantastic throughout literature is the best way to bring groups of literature on the “water margins” to the “borderlands” of the center.

embodies the space in-between. As we have seen in the examination of Anzaldúa's borderlands, this space provides the means to embrace contradictions. In describing the new *mestiza*, Anzaldúa writes how she develops "a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned" (101). Anzaldúa's new *mestiza* is not *either* Indian or Mexican, or *either* Anglo or Mexican, but everything brought together, even when elements contradict each other. This paradigm confronts the idea that binary oppositions are necessary to provide a framework for thinking about societies. A paradigm that embraces contradictory ideas is especially relevant to the questions of race that this dissertation raises, because of the need to both simultaneously embrace and challenge the idea of an ethnic "identity." R. Radhakrishnan writes, "The constituency of 'the ethnic' occupies quite literally a 'pre-post'-erous space where it has to actualize, enfranchise, and empower its own 'identity' and coextensively engage in the deconstruction of the very logic of 'identity' and its binary and exclusionary politics" (50). The interstitial space of the border thus provides a place in which to challenge constructions of "us versus them," which in turn can lead to a more helpful, inclusive way of understanding identity.<sup>20</sup> The

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<sup>20</sup> Many authors and critics have challenged a binary way of viewing the world. Lisa Lowe's essay "Canon, Institutionalization, and Identity" explores the many contradictions that are at the heart of Asian American studies. In this essay, she also writes of the "impossible binary demand" that many Japanese Americans faced during World War II where they were forced to identify with either Japan or the United States (Lowe "Canon" 57). Another such critic is Donald Goellnicht, who in his essay "Blurring Boundaries" writes, "Rather than thinking in binary terms of inside/outside, we should perhaps think of hybrid positions as a web of multiply intersecting and shifting strands in which the precise location of the subject is extremely difficult to map" (340). He then quotes Maxine Hong Kingston as an excellent example of the resistance to binary thinking in identity formation; in *The Woman Warrior*, she asks, "Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate

fantastic, because of the way in which it is positioned in between the elements of the uncanny and the marvelous, already occupies an interstitial space, making it the perfect narrative tool to use to explore and complicate a binary understanding of identity.

It is important to note, however, that the challenge that the borderlands poses to binary thinking is not aiming for a synthetic resolution between the two, but instead intends to embrace the contradictions and complicating elements in their own right, an aspect of the borderlands that is reinforced by the interstitial position of the fantastic. As Joan Pinkvoss writes in her editor's note to Anzaldúa's text,

Gloria was *not* saying: well here are these two opposites and out of this contradiction comes a new, third way. No, *no*...she was saying that these opposites had to be kicked out from under—they were not a foundation but only got in the way of creating what she was after. There was no linear combination of two contradictions to create a third; rather Gloria saw that between the contradictions was a place of the untethered possibility. (par. 2)

This idea that the borderland is more than just a place where conflicting ideas are neatly resolved into another, new idea can be seen in what Anzaldúa writes about the image of *Coatlicue*, “the Earth Mother,” the “Goddess of birth and death”: “Simultaneously,

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what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?” (Kingston 5-6). Kingston's quote not only highlights how identity is not a matter of either/or choices, but rather is an interconnected web of influences, but it also emphasizes the constructed nature of identity—that Hollywood's racial fantasies can shape the way someone thinks of herself and who she is. Also, in his essay “Border Crossings,” Shantanu DuttaAhmed argues that his discussion “of visibility versus invisibility is not meant to be understood as an oppositional binary” but instead should be seen as “a recognition of fruitful tension—a place of infinite beginnings as opposed to epistemological closure” (338). He goes on to argue that “the border writer is able to accommodate differences within and resist an ontology solely based on binaries” (DuttaAhmed 340). Finally, Rajini Srikanth argues that the trajectories of domestic and diasporic writing that she sees developing within Asian American literature are “not oppositional states of being within Asian American communities.” She argues that we need “a perspective that brings to the surface the interplay in Asian American literature between the global and the local, between the pull of other nations and the pull of the United States...” (Srikanth xviii). While this project does not explicitly deal with all of the tensions these authors are describing, the way in which the fantastic works as a tool within interstitial spaces to challenge the distinction between Self and Other, as is discussed at greater length in Chapter 4, can be useful to authors such as these, who are seeking a paradigm other than binary oppositions.

depending on the person, she represents duality in life, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective—something more than mere duality or a synthesis of duality” (68). As Anzaldúa sees it, the resident of the borderlands is someone who has to reject a teleological approach to life and identity, and instead, embraces more of life. She writes, “*La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes” (Anzaldúa 101). Furthermore, Anzaldúa sees the rejection of dualistic thinking as a paradigm with tremendous potential:

The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war. (102)

The radical approach of the borderlands—rejection of resolution and embrace of opposites—gives such space tremendous power to subvert traditional ideas of government, power, race, and identity. The positioning of the fantastic as a trope of the in-between spaces makes it the perfect tool to analyze the simultaneous embrace and rejection of racial fantasies seen in many texts, which can then lead to new levels of understanding between people and cultures.

Several key ideas emerge from this discussion of race and the fantastic. First, as the discussion of the power of racial fantasies has shown, the fantastic similarly has

power, but it is the power to challenge, to provoke, and to subvert. As Kay's trilogy *The Fionavar Tapestry* demonstrates, however, this power often goes unutilized, leaving the reader with a conflicted portrayal of race that both embraces and challenges racial fantasies. Focusing on the theme of boundaries in theories of race and the fantastic is key in highlighting such conflicted portrayals of race, in that it moves such questions to the center of the discussions of the text, rather than allowing them to fall by the wayside. As critics ranging from Gloria Anzaldúa to Jacques Derrida to Mary Louis Pratt have suggested, border spaces are spaces of transition. They are spaces that embody a give-and-take process. They are spaces of uncertainty, of hesitation, of not belonging. Because of this, they are perfect spaces for the fantastic to inhabit, which is itself a border phenomenon. These boundaries, then, provide an interstitial space in which the fantastic can be used to draw attention to the ambiguous attitude toward racial fantasies found in many works of fantasy, Asian American, and Native American literature. As a result, these theories of boundaries and borderlands provide new ways of thinking about race, identity and literary categories that can be useful once such questions are seen as central to a work.

*“The In-Between,” Jay said, his voice muffled through the metal mask... “It’s the interstitial folds between the various planes of reality. Call it ‘hyperspace’ or a ‘wormhole,’ if you want. Or it’s the dark spaces between the convolutions in your brain or the place where the magician keeps the rabbit before he pulls it out of his hat.”—from InterWorld by Neil Gaiman and Michael Reaves*

*I went to the crossroad  
fell down on my knees  
I went to the crossroad  
fell down on my knees*

*--Robert Johnson, quoted in Reservation Blues by Sherman Alexie*

### Chapter 3: *Fantastic Walls, Roads and Doors: Physical Manifestations of Interstitial Spaces*

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In his work *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha describes the work of Renée Green entitled *Sites of Genealogy*, in which she uses the entire museum building to create meaning, rather than limiting herself to the galleries. Bhabha observes how certain spaces held specific metaphoric function, such as the stairwell being representative of spaces in-between:

The stairwell as a liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. (5)

The stairwells in Green’s art exhibit are interstitial spaces, located in between the polarities of black and white identity. Particularly interesting in this image is how the interstitial space of the stairwell is used to complicate static, comfortable ideas of race.

The idea of physical space as representative of in-betweenness can also be seen in the project *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, described by Lambert Zuidervart in his essay “Creative Border Crossing in New Public Culture.” Perhaps even more interesting is Zuidervart’s description of the project *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, begun in 1976 and directed by Judith Baca. He writes,

hundreds of teenagers have been hired and taught over many summers to create one of the world’s largest murals in a flood control channel of the Los Angeles River. The mural provides an alternative history of California, portraying the struggles and contributions of people who are often left on the margins of official histories: indigenous peoples, immigrant minorities and women. (Zuidervart 211)

Rather than serving as a boundary that has been established to keep people separated, this wall brings together hundreds of people physically and thousands more artistically. Like Green’s artwork, *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* is an interstitial space, existing in between the history told in books and the history of those left out. But these spaces are not simply empty spaces, in which nothing happens. Rather, these are spaces of movement, spaces in which people travel. While this is to be expected in spaces such as stairwells, seeing a wall as a space of movement instead of a boundary is unexpected, and yet, exceedingly important for the works that will be examined in this chapter. Both of these spaces provide for the interaction between ideas and people that are normally separated and often oppositional, so instead of serving as boundaries or barriers, they serve as a means of connecting contradictory elements and dialogically engaging them in search of a more complete understanding of concepts such as identity.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, boundaries and border spaces play an important role in many theoretical discussions of fantasy, Asian American, and Native American

literature, but like Green's artwork and *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, these border spaces serve as spaces of movement and creativity, rather than as barriers that divide. The imagery of physical boundaries, too, often appears as a central theme in works of fiction from these groups of literature. As is to be expected, these physical boundaries often serve to divide two places, such as different countries, but they also frequently represent other non-physical ideas, ideas that add depth to a work. What brings together the works addressed in this chapter, however, is not only the way in which they contain physical boundaries that serve as metaphors for non-physical interstitial spaces, but also the way in which these boundaries provide an entry point for the fantastic into the narrative. As was argued in Chapter 2, because the fantastic itself, as defined by Todorov, is situated on a border, it serves as a useful tool for emphasizing the multiple, often contradictory elements that are brought together in the interstitial spaces of these physical boundaries. This chapter examines examples of physical boundaries in these three groups of literature that provide an entry point for the fantastic, and analyzes the ways in which these boundaries not only separate two physical places, but also function metaphorically, serving as interstitial spaces in which the elements of the fantastic can negotiate the contradictory, hesitant, and even painful elements that make up these border spaces. Neil Gaiman's *Stardust* and Garth Nix's *Sabriel* provide excellent initial examples of how the hesitation of the fantastic can introduce uncertainty into a text, but the majority of the chapter is spent examining how the uncertainty introduced by the fantastic in border spaces can then be transferred to the way that these texts portray race. In Heinz Insu Fenkl's *Memories of My Ghost Brother*, Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues*, and Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series, physical boundaries are not simply a



means of separation or division, but instead, are spaces similar to the stairwell in Green's art exhibit and *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*—these boundaries are spaces of movement and transition that enable the ambiguity of the fantastic to enter the narrative and highlight the contradictory ways in which these texts deal with race. The fantastic then facilitates the dialogic interaction not only between contradictory portrayals of race within each text, leading to a more complete understanding of both that text and the way that race is conceptualized, but also between the texts themselves. In this way, viewing boundaries as sites of movement and creativity, as well a space that allows for the existence of the fantastic, both highlights the ability of the fantastic to highlight contradictory portrayals of race, as well as leads to a more productive way of thinking about ethnicity and identity in general, rather than continuing to view fantasy and ethnic literatures through the lens of expected literary categories.

### **Walls in Neil Gaiman's *Stardust* and Garth Nix's *Sabriel***

To begin our examination of physical boundaries that serve as representations of interstitial spaces, thus providing a space of the fantastic in the narrative, Neil Gaiman's novel *Stardust* and Garth Nix's novel *Sabriel* provide helpful starting points. In both of these novels, walls serve to separate different areas of the country from each other; in both cases, the wall stands between a magical world and the world of the familiar and mundane. Gaiman's *Stardust* (1999) tells the story of Tristran Thorn, a young man who crosses the border between everyday reality and the world of the fairies to bring back a fallen star for the girl that he thinks he loves. The story begins in the city of Wall, which was so named because "immediately to the east of Wall is a high grey rock wall, from

which the town takes its name. This wall is old, built of rough, square lumps of hewn granite, and it comes from the woods and goes back to the woods once more. There is only one break in the wall; an opening about six feet in width, a little to the north of the village” (3). Rather than telling just what takes place in Wall, however, the focus of *Stardust* is what happens when people cross over the wall, that is, what happens when the wall becomes a place of movement rather than an impermeable boundary. The fact that the wall has a gap in it, as well as the several paragraphs dedicated to how the people of Wall guard this gap, shows that this wall is much more than the boundary around the city—it is the site of movement into and out of that city. As Darrell Schweitzer perceptively notes, this theme of crossing boundaries is seen in much of Gaiman’s work. He writes, “So much of what he writes about concerns people crossing boundaries between the everyday and some fantastic realm. In *Neverwhere* it is an alternative London that exists right alongside (or underneath) the familiar city” (Schweitzer 119).<sup>21</sup> In *Stardust*, when Dunstan Thorn crosses the wall to meet the faerie woman a second time, he finds himself “wondering, as his father had before him, what would happen were he to walk along the top of it. Through the gap and into the meadow, and that night, for the first time in his life, Dunstan entertained thoughts of continuing on through the meadow, of crossing the stream and vanishing into the trees on its far side” (Gaiman 34). Rather than inspire in Dunstan thoughts of limitations and places close to home, the wall between Wall and the faerie world inspired in him thoughts of further exploration and movement. And as Marilyn Brahen notes, because of this movement, there is some

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<sup>21</sup> *Neverwhere* (New York: HarperTorch, 2001) is an especially fitting example of another Gaiman text in which the concerns of this chapter can be seen, as it tells the story of a girl named Door who actually functions as a door, creating portals in between distant places.

blurring of the boundary between the two worlds: “the works of Neil Gaiman and of authors like him seem to imply that there is a bit of magic in the mundane, that Elfland can flow into the borders of our own world” (147). The wall around Wall is a boundary, yes, but a boundary that is the place of creativity, inspiration, and movement.

Furthermore, the movement across the wall in *Stardust* facilitates the entry of the fantastic into the novel. To begin with, Dunstan Thorn crosses the wall to go to the Faerie market and then again to meet the faerie girl, a meeting that sets the narrative chain of events in motion. This meeting leads up to the one night “at the end of February, in lambing season, when the world was cold, and a bitter wind howled down the moors and through the leafless forest, when icy rains fell from the leaden skies in continual drizzling showers, at six in the evening, after the sun had set and the sky was dark, that a wicker basket was pushed through the space in the wall” (Gaiman *Stardust* 43). The basket contained Tristran Thorn, Dunstan’s son with the faerie girl; eventually, when Tristran is grown, he himself crosses the wall to look for a fallen star. Gaiman conveys the fantastic significance of these movements across the wall by marking them with the same wind from the east. There is a wind from the east on the day that Dunstan goes to the Faerie market; similarly, when Tristran agrees to fetch Victoria Forester the fallen star from across the wall, “The wind blew from the east, then” (Gaiman *Stardust* 65). All of these movements across the wall lead to the introduction of fantastic elements into the novel, in the form of the Faerie market, the faerie girl, Tristran himself, and perhaps most notably, Yvaine the fallen star.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, although Matthew Vaughn’s film adaptation of *Stardust* (2007) changes many aspects of the plot, the importance of the wall as a place of movement is maintained, particularly in one key scene near the end of the film, in which all of the major characters are seen moving toward the wall as quickly as

Although the fairy tale form of Gaiman's *Stardust* makes characters such as Tristran and Yvaine closer to the supernatural, rather than Todorov's definition of the fantastic, the novel still uses these characters to introduce uncertainty into the text and to negotiate the tension between the contradictory elements of joy and despair. This is seen most prominently in the hesitation that Yvaine feels about crossing the wall upon her and Tristran's return to Wall. When Tristran and Yvaine first return to Wall, Tristran is about to lead Yvaine through the gap in the wall when "the star hesitated. 'Do you really want this?' she asked Tristran. 'For I have misgivings'" (Gaiman *Stardust* 280). Yvaine's hesitation is certainly well founded, because, as both she and the reader find out later, for her to cross the wall would mean her death. In this way, Yvaine's presence at the Wall negotiates between Tristran's outward joy at returning home and her feeling of loss and loneliness—not only loss of her companion and love, but also potentially of her life. Tristran's emotions upon returning to Wall are marked by hesitation and uncertainty as well. Although he has undergone this entire quest for the sake of Victoria Forester, as he prepares to cross the wall, "he realized, with a guilty start, he had forgotten the color of Victoria Forester's eyes" (Gaiman *Stardust* 280). Later, after he releases Victoria from her pledge to him and blesses her upcoming marriage to Mr. Monday, he tells her, "I'm sure that nothing could give me greater pleasure than to be [at the wedding]" although in truth, "he was sure of no such thing" (Gaiman *Stardust* 304). Therefore, the convergence of Tristran and Yvaine at the wall surrounding the town of Wall represents the

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they can. Septimus, prince of Stormholde, Lamia, the witch, and Tristan Thorn are all racing to stop Yvaine, the star, from crossing the wall and turning into a dead hunk of metal, while Yvaine is trying to cross the wall to find Tristan to find out if he loves her. The cutting back and forth between these four characters, the intense focus each has on reaching the wall, and the music that serves as a background for the entire scene shows the importance of the wall as a place of convergence, a place of meaning, a place where the plot will be resolved. Thanks to Kathleen Howard for this insightful observation.

simultaneous presence of the themes of the fantastic and of boundaries as sites of movement in the text. The interaction of these themes serves to create an interstitial space of uncertainty that is heightened by the tension between joy and despair, emphasizing that while *Stardust* may have the form and characters of a fairy tale, it definitely shows, as Gaiman describes, “that fairy stories were for adults, too” (*Stardust* 335).

Garth Nix’s *Sabriel* (1995), as well as the rest of his *Abhorsen* trilogy, is yet another example where a wall figures prominently into a work of fantasy literature as a place of motion that provides the fantastic with a point of entry into the narrative.<sup>23</sup> The first novel in the trilogy tells the story of Sabriel, a teenage girl who possesses the power to walk between life and death. She has learned her skill from her father, whose job it is to travel the countryside, returning undead creatures to the world of the dead. When her father sends her an urgent message for help, Sabriel must leave her school in Ancelstierre and travel north, back to her homeland, the Old Kingdom. A wall separates the magical Old Kingdom from the country of Ancelstierre, a country where magical powers fade the farther one moves away from the Old Kingdom. To return to her home, Sabriel must cross this Wall, which is no small feat, since the Wall is heavily guarded. Upon reaching

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<sup>23</sup> Walls and physical boundaries figure prominently into many works of fantasy literature, including George R. R. Martin’s series *A Song of Fire and Ice*, which begins with *A Game of Thrones* (New York: Bantam, 1996), which is yet another example of a fantasy novel in which a wall serves as a place of movement and coming together, rather than an impermeable boundary. Also, in Susannah Clarke’s *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*, walls serve to demarcate the roads that join together the world of England and the world of Faerie. Mr. Norrell says, “When you and I summon fairies—I mean if we were so ill-advised as to do such a thing—then, providing we cast our spells correctly, the fairies will appear promptly. But where they come from or by what paths they travel is uncertain. In John Uskglass’s day very plain roads were built that led out of England into Faerie—wide green roads between high green hedges or stone walls” (Clarke 394-395). While not as prominent an example as the walls in Gaiman and Nix’s texts, these walls between England and Faerie in Clarke’s novel again mark a site of coming together, rather than an impermeable boundary, as well as a site of hesitation, marking the place where the fantastic can enter the narrative.

the Wall, she speaks with Colonel Horyse, who tells her of the problems that he and his soldiers had when guarding the Wall. He tells her,

This crossing point has seen too many battles, too many dead. Before those idiots down South took things under central command, the crossing point was moved every ten years, up to the next gate on the Wall. But forty years ago some...bureaucrat...decreed that there would be no movement. It was a waste of public money. This was, and is to be, the only crossing point. Never mind the fact that, over time, there would be such a concentration of death, mixed with Free Magic leaking over the Wall, that everything would... (Nix *Sabriel* 44)

Sabriel realizes that he means that things that have died would not stay dead, because of the strong presence of death, magic, and movement at this one point in the Wall. Horyse continues, “When I arrived, the trouble was just beginning. Corpses wouldn’t stay buried—our people or Old Kingdom creatures. Soldiers killed the day before would turn up on parade. Creatures prevented from crossing would rise up and do more damage than they did when they were alive” (Nix *Sabriel* 44). The Wall separating the Old Kingdom and Ancelstierre, therefore, is not a harsh boundary between the two kingdoms, unable to be crossed, but instead, a place of great fluidity, where magic moves freely between the two countries, causing even the boundary with death to become a two-way street.

Colonel Horyse’s descriptions show how the Wall also functions as a way to introduce the hesitation and uncertainty of the fantastic into the narrative. Nix makes it very clear that the hesitation created by the fantastic carries danger with it as well. As Sabriel travels through the Old Kingdom after crossing the Wall, she reflects on what she had been taught about her homeland: “She had always been told that the Old Kingdom was dangerous, and the Borderlands near the Wall particularly so” (Nix *Sabriel* 66). The increased fluidity, both between the Old Kingdom and Ancelstierre, as well as between

death and life, around the Wall, provides a place in which the fantastic can enter the text, bringing with it uncertainty and danger.

The Wall between Ancelstierre and the Old Kingdom is also part of the magic that flows throughout the Old Kingdom, another way in which the Wall functions as a physical representation of the fantastic in the novel. The magic of the Old Kingdom is based on five Great Charters, put into place by the founders of the Old Kingdom. As Touchstone, heir to the throne of the Old Kingdom, tells Sabriel, “The people, or whatever they were who made the Great Charters, put three in bloodlines and two in physical constructions: the Wall and the Great Stones. All the lesser stones draw their power from one or the other” (Nix *Sabriel* 299). Therefore, even though the Wall exists physically in a stationary place, it serves as the basis for something that flows throughout all of the Old Kingdom—Charter magic. And as many descriptions of this magic throughout the course of the novel show, motion is a key aspect. When Sabriel comes across a Charter Stone, she thinks that she “knew they were supposed to be like the Wall, with Charter marks running like quicksilver through the stone, forming and dissolving, only to re-form again, in a never-ending story that told of the making of the world” (Nix *Sabriel* 75-76). But the stone that she finds is broken, its Charter marks still and motionless, “Dead marks, nothing more than meaningless inscriptions, carved into a sculptured stone” (Nix *Sabriel* 76). The motion of the Charter magic is key to its power, and without that motion, the marks themselves are meaningless. By emphasizing movement over static forms, the Wall and the Charter stones make room for the hesitation of the fantastic as part of the Charter Magic. This magic does not function like simple magic spells, and much about the origin of the Charter Magic is unknown,

particularly at the beginning of the novel. This feeling of uncertainty is highlighted by the fact that the novel is told from Sabriel's point of a view—although she has received some formal training in Charter Magic, she has not had the opportunity to put her skills to much practical use. This can be seen when Sabriel uses her magic to find out how one of the soldiers she comes across in the Old Kingdom was killed. Her magic replays the moments of the man's death, and after hearing his words, Sabriel "felt ill, nauseous, and took several deep breaths. She had forgotten that for all her familiarity with death and the dead, she had never seen or heard anyone actually die. The aftermath she had learnt to deal with...but not the event" (Nix *Sabriel* 72). Therefore, even though the Wall itself is a stationary object, it is filled with never-ending motion, creating a fluid, interstitial space in which the fantastic can enter the novel.

The boundary of the Wall in *Sabriel* also serves as a metaphor for the boundary between death and life, and the fluidity of this boundary adds to the feeling of uncertainty and even discomfort created by the fantastic.<sup>24</sup> The fluidity between death and life that is

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<sup>24</sup> Less relevant to this particular discussion but also interesting is the way the Wall also serves as a physical representation of the boundary between childhood and adulthood, a boundary that Sabriel is forced to cross over the course of the novel. When she first comes to the Wall, she is still a schoolgirl, who relies on youthful manners when nervous and defers to her elders. When she meets Colonel Horyse, Sabriel relies on what she learned as a girl: "'Pleased to meet you, sir,' popped out of Sabriel's school-trained mouth, before she could stifle it. A schoolgirl's answer, she knew, and felt a blush rise in her pale cheeks" (Nix *Sabriel* 42). Others, including Colonel Horyse, view her as a schoolgirl as well; when Sabriel tells him she does not exactly know how to reach her father's house, interrupts her. "'You don't seem concerned by your lack of directions,' interrupted the Colonel dryly. For the first time, a hint of doubt, even fatherly condescension, had crept into his voice, as if Sabriel's youth undermined the respect due to her as both a Charter Mage and necromancer" (Nix *Sabriel* 52). But when Sabriel returns to the Wall at the end of the novel, Colonel Horyse treats her quite differently, even though only a short time has passed. When Sabriel tells him that Kerrigor will be attempting to cross the Wall, he asks for her advice, calling her by the title "Abhorsen" (Nix *Sabriel* 422), the title of the binder of the Dead previously held by her father. Additionally, when she turns to her former school, Wyverly College, for help, it is Sabriel who is in command, rather than the headmistress or one of the other teachers. Sabriel silences Mrs. Umbrade, the headmistress, and tells the others, "Now, we need all the girls in the two Senior Magic classes to come down to the Great Hall—with you, Magistrix Greenwood, please" (Nix *Sabriel* 456-457). Unlike the earlier scene by the wall, where Sabriel relies on what her teachers have taught her about etiquette, now, she is the one in control. Many of these scenes take place at the Wall itself, and all of them take place



seen in Colonel Horyse's description of what happens at the Wall is not only representative of the fluidity that both Sabriel and her father, the Abhorsen, have in moving between death and life, but also foreshadows the major conflicts of the novel, conflicts caused by dead creatures returning to life. From the very beginning of the novel, the reader sees that Sabriel is not a normal girl when it comes to death; one of the first things that we see her do is cross over into the realm of death and bring back to life the pet rabbit of one of her fellow students. As she reflects on her actions later, she realizes that she has broken a promise to her father, but the worst part is that

it had been so easy. She had caught the spirit right at the wellspring of the river, and had returned it with barely a gesture of power, patching the body with simple Charter symbols as they stepped from death to life. She hadn't even needed bells, or the other apparatus of a necromancer. Only a whistle and her will. Death and what came after death was not great mystery to Sabriel. She just wished it was. (Nix *Sabriel* 16)

Once Sabriel crosses the Wall, she must find who killed her father and what is causing many dead creatures to return to the world of the living. She finds that a powerful Dead mage named Kerrigor is behind these events, and he is working to undo the system of magic that holds the Old Kingdom together. The source of Kerrigor's power is an excellent example of how the Wall represents the border between death and life; the image of Kerrigor that is functioning in the Old Kingdom is a magical projection of his self from death, while his physical body lies on the other side of the Wall, in Ancelstierre, thus preventing the Abhorsen and others searching to destroy it from finding it. The Abhorsen tells Sabriel, "He could never be made truly dead because his body is preserved by Free Magic, somewhere in Life. It's like an anchor that always brings him back.

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within close proximity to it, thus marking the Wall as a place of transition not only between death and life, but also between childhood and adulthood.

Every Abhorsen since the breaking of the Great Stones has been looking for that body—but none of us has ever found it, including me, because we never suspected it is in Ancelstierre. Obviously, somewhere close to the Wall” (Nix *Sabriel* 368). The Wall, representative of the border between life and death, stands between Kerrigor’s real corpse and the image he projects from Death, the perfect physical manifestation of the complicated nature of Kerrigor’s being. The Wall is not only a place in itself where the border between life and death can be crossed both ways, but it also functions metaphorically, creating the unsettling feeling that the boundary between life and death can be transversed so easily and in both directions.

In addition to the Wall serving as more than just a boundary in *Sabriel*, rivers and water are also examples of physical boundaries that carry great significance throughout the text. Part of Sabriel’s tasks as the Abhorsen is to walk in Death—that is, enter the river that separates the world of the living from ultimate and final death with a series of nine gates.<sup>25</sup> While an Abhorsen walks in Death, her body remains in Life, yet is motionless and frozen, as can be seen in this description of Sabriel’s walk in Death early in the novel:

Sabriel, eyes closed now, felt the boundary between Life and Death appear. On her back, she felt the wind, now curiously warm, and the moonlight, bright and hot like sunshine. On her face, she felt the ultimate cold and, opening her eyes, saw the grey light of Death.

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<sup>25</sup> In her essay “Fixity and Flow in Garth Nix’s *Sabriel*,” Alice Mills notes the use of a river to as a route to death in several key classical literary texts. She writes, “The image of a river of death, explored by a hero, goes back in Western literature via Dante’s vision of the rivers of hell to the ancient Greek Styx and Acheron with the ferryman of the dead, and Apuleius’ story of Psyche whose ordeals, in her descent to the underworld, include denying help to the demanding, pleading people in the waters of death across which she is being transported. Before the Greeks, the image of a river of death goes back to the Egyptian night-sea voyage of the sun-god, conveying the souls of the virtuous dead to a blessed afterlife while the unworthy dead are tormented and eaten along the way” (Mills “Fixity” 15-16). Mills’ statement is helpful in reminding us of the deep roots of fantasy literature, as well as the historical significance of rivers as the boundary between death and life.

With an effort of will, her spirit stepped through, sword and bell prepared. Inside the diamond her body stiffened, and fog blew up in eddies around her feet, twining up her legs. Frost rimed her face and hands and the Charter marks flared at each apex of the diamond. [. . .]

The river ran swiftly, but Sabriel set her feet against the current and ignored both it and the cold, concentrating on looking around, alert for a trap or ambush. (Nix 82-83)

The river that serves as the boundary between life and death in Nix's novels, therefore, is not a harsh border that only serves to separate the two states of being, but a border that is fluid and permeable. Such an image reinforces the idea of death that is represented by the image of the Wall—that it is a boundary marked by movement, rather than a permanent state, thus allowing the uncertainty of the fantastic to enter the narrative.

The role of rivers and water as a site in which the fantastic appears in *Sabriel* is reinforced by Freud's idea of the uncanny, a concept that is situated in the interstitial space between the familiar and the strange. In her essay "The Theme of Premature Burial in Garth Nix's Early Novels," Alice Mills describes the significance of a scene much later in the novel, when Sabriel finds her father in a reservoir near the royal city of Belisaere. She writes,

[Nix] has infused this reservoir's cool expanses with a sense of the Freudian uncanny. Not only does Sabriel inflict temporary premature burial upon herself, standing frozen in the water as she seeks to rescue her dead-yet-alive father whose body stands frozen next to hers, but the reservoir is the site for an uncanny repetition of events that first occurred two hundred years previously. (Mills "Theme" 55)

Mills' invocation of Freud's idea of the uncanny is helpful here, because this idea emphasizes the movement around an object or a boundary. In his essay "The Uncanny," Freud explores the different meanings of the German word *heimlich*, and notes that there are several possible meanings, including "belonging to the house, not strange, familiar,

tame, intimate, comfortable, homely, etc.” (77) and also “concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know about it, withheld from others” (78). He then compares these definitions to the definition of the German word *unheimlich*, which means “uneasy, eerie, blood-curdling” (Freud 78), and as a result, observes, “What interests us most in this long extract is to find that among its different shades of meaning the word *heimlich* exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, *unheimlich*. What is *Heimlich* comes to be *unheimlich*” (Freud 79). The dual meaning of the word *heimlich* perfectly captures the blurring of boundaries in the idea of the uncanny, showing that the feeling of the uncanny comes from the uncertainty between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the comfortable and the secretive.

Sabriel’s ability to be both alive and not-alive is the perfect representation of this idea of the uncanny. Her frozen form as she walks in death carries with it both the sense of the familiar as well as the sense of the unfamiliar, thus blurring the boundaries both between life and death, and the comforting and the strange. As Mills points out in another essay, however, the ability of Sabriel to walk in death is not the only incarnation of the uncanny in the novel—water itself is perhaps the most uncanny thing of all. She writes, “the book’s true horror lies in the close similarity between water that provides safety and life, and water from which issues dread” (Mills “Fixity” 16).<sup>26</sup> This representation of the uncanny at physical boundaries throughout Nix’s texts emphasizes

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<sup>26</sup> One does have to wonder, however, if Mills fully grasps the significance of the water in *Sabriel*, as she writes, “Such juxtaposition raises the question why water successfully bars the dead, in the world of the living, if the dead can travel up the river of death by will-power and are forced to travel down its current by Sabriel’s bells” (Mills “Fixity” 16). This dual nature of water as both barrier and channel is a key thematic element, representing the importance of boundaries as places of coming together, rather than static, impermeable lines. The uncertainty and motion created by this depiction of water is key in creating a sense of the uncanny, as well as in reinforcing the imagery of the Wall—a boundary that both separates and brings together.

the importance of these boundaries in drawing elements of the fantastic into the novel. Just like the Freudian uncanny exists at the border between the familiar and the strange, the fantastic, as was described in chapter 2, exists at the border between the uncanny and the marvelous. The physical boundaries in *Sabriel* as well as in *Stardust*, then, not only serve to draw elements of the fantastic into the text, but also serve as sites in which the fantastic is used to blur the boundaries between binary relationships such as life and death, joy and despair, and love and hate. Such blurring suggests the importance of the fantastic as a tool for rethinking binary relationships, and presents texts that contain the fantastic, including works labeled fantasy literature, as texts equipped to provocatively address and even complicate real-life issues, rather than texts that are simply an escape from reality.

### **The DMZ in Heinz Insu Fenkl's *Memories of My Ghost Brother***

While Gaiman's *Stardust* and Nix's *Sabriel* are both excellent examples of novels in which the fantastic enters the text in border spaces, introducing elements of hesitation and uncertainty into the text, the texts examined in the rest of this chapter are even more relevant to the project of this dissertation because of the way that they use this hesitation to complicate questions of race as well. Heinz Insu Fenkl's autobiographically inspired novel, *Memories of My Ghost Brother*, is another example of a text in which physical boundaries represent an interstitial space in which the fantastic can enter the novel.<sup>27</sup> The

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<sup>27</sup> Perry Dal-nim Miller also extensively analyzes Fenkl's *Memories of My Ghost Brother* in his master's thesis, *The Military Camptown In Retrospect: Multiracial Korean American Subject Formation Along the Black-White Binary*. In this project, Miller also sees this issue of boundary negotiation as important, focusing on consumption habits of characters as representative of their social standing. He argues that "the 'underground' transaction and consumption habits of multiracial characters and families in the *gijichon*

novel is set in Korea during the Vietnam War, and the narrator, Insu, tells of his German-American father serving in the US Army, his Korean mother who trades on the black market, and the multitude of friends and family who come together as a result of the United States' military presence in Korea. Elaine H. Kim, in her essay "Myth, Memory, and Desire," describes how "Insu, the young mixed race protagonist, is positioned at the interstice of American military and economic might and a conquered people who at times try to seize opportunities by abandoning tradition and at other times cling ferociously to patriarchal legacies and familiar class stratifications for a sense of identity in a moment of humiliation" (81). Kim's description does an excellent job at highlighting many of the different forces that are come together to influence Insu—both the American and Korean cultural presences, rather than being single-faceted, are instead themselves a blending of different influences and forces. But the novel also is filled with numerous physical boundaries, perhaps the most prominent being the DMZ separating North Korea from South Korea; lesser physical boundaries, such as walls and rivers, also fill the narrative, portraying a country and a story that is defined by division and separation. These physical boundaries, then, are a complicated image through Fenkl's text, in that they serve as representatives of the contradictory ideas of separation and bringing together. The uncertainty and movement created by this contradiction provides a space in Fenkl's novel for the fantastic, which in turn, blurs the boundaries between such binary distinctions even further.

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geography further reinforce the interstitial class they inhabit among Korean and Black and White American social spheres" (Miller 14). While this chapter focuses primarily on physical boundaries as representative of interstitial spaces, Miller's thesis is helpful in demonstrating how pervasive the theme of boundary negotiation is throughout Fenkl's work.

The novel opens with a description of one such boundary that simultaneously separates and brings together—the wall around the house where Insu and his family live, which formerly belonged to a Japanese colonel:

There was a house where the nameplate had fallen, leaving a rectangle of bright wall, there a gate with red peppers dangling on a straw rope to show a son had been born, and over there, along a stretch of urine-stained wall, fliers carelessly posted, half torn, advertised the movies of last autumn. At the very top of the hill a strangely clean wall began, detached from the other walls that all ran together. If followed the gentle slope of the hill down toward the stone embankment that kept the road from crumbling into the paddies; and here where the other houses ended, the wall turned sharply left and became the great gate of the Japanese Colonel's house. (Fenkl *Memories* 4)

Even within the wall, there are distinctions made between different parts of the wall—the “rectangle of bright wall,” the “urine-stained wall,” and the “strangely clean wall”—suggesting a place so divided that there are borders within borders. Later, this wall around the Japanese Colonel's house is described as being “newly studded with shards of colored glass to keep thieves out” (Fenkl *Memories* 6), again, suggesting that this boundary is definitely a place of division and exclusion. And yet, it is these walls that facilitate the appearance of the fantastic in Fenkl's novel, making it a place of movement and uncertainty as well. At night, Insu would look out at the trees and see the ghosts of both the Japanese Colonel and the refugees who had died there. At night, Insu “would forget about the town beyond the walls” and would hear “whispers which I knew were the lamentations of the refugees who had died during the war. Sometimes when I looked toward the boulders, I would see the ghost of the Japanese Colonel standing quietly under the trees, gazing at me with his sad and lonely eyes” (Fenkl *Memories* 6-7). Even though the walls around Insu's house separate the house from the rest of the town, they also

facilitate the coming together of the world of the living and the ghost world, providing a space in which these hesitant, ghostly figures can enter the novel. The element of hesitation is particularly important here because at this point in the text, the reader is not sure if Insu is dreaming or if he sees something real. By opening with this description of the house, its walls, and the interstitial space it creates, Fenkl sets forth an important theme for the entire novel, the theme of boundaries that simultaneously divide and serve as places of coming together, in a way that creates a space for the hesitation of the fantastic.<sup>28, 29</sup>

Throughout the novel, a wide variety of physical boundaries represent spaces of movement that provide a space for the fantastic in the narrative. Rivers, bridges, gates, and walls all highlight ways in which ideas or people often kept separate are brought

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<sup>28</sup> As was seen in the discussion of Fenkl's participation in the Interstitial Arts Foundation in Chapter 2 of this work, as well as his authoring of the introduction to the short story collection *Interfictions: An Anthology of Interstitial Writing*, the theme of blurring boundaries is important to his thinking about literature in general. Fenkl also sees the theme of intersection as particularly important to Korean American literature. In the introduction to *Kōri: The Beacon Anthology of Korean American Fiction*, Fenkl and Walter K. Lew explain their use of the word *kōri* in the title of the anthology: "A *kōri* embodies the intersecting of one world with the other in ways we find parallel to the nature of Korean American prose fiction from its origins in the 1930s to the end of the twentieth century" (xii). Given the importance of the theme of intersection to Fenkl's overall view of literature, it should come as no surprise, then, that it plays such a key role in *Memories of My Ghost Brother*.

<sup>29</sup> The gate of the house of the Japanese Colonel also marks the coming together of rich and poor, as at several points throughout the novel, Insu describes injured war veterans coming to the gate, begging for charity. This border space of the gate is also a space of creativity, for it inspires Insu to play-act like he saw the veterans do: "I ran and stood under the chestnut tree, pulling my arms through the short sleeves, I hugged myself inside by T-shirt and balanced first on one foot, then the other. 'Please give us some charity,' I chanted in a husky voice" (Fenkl *Memories* 83-84). Furthermore, while the description of the veterans at the gate initially seems to draw a line between rich and poor, setting up a boundary between Insu's family and the veterans based on wealth, in the overall scope of the novel, it actually blurs the lines of class in the mind of the reader. Earlier in the novel, after Gannan dies, her GI client comes to give her family money—something Insu's mother does not want to accept. Eventually, they decide to keep the money, because without Gannan's income, "things would be much harder in the country" (Fenkl *Memories* 30-31). This passage, among others, suggests to the reader that Insu and his family are not financially well off, and that, in fact, they often struggle to make ends meet. Yet the description of the veterans begging for charity at the gate of their house blurs this categorization in the mind of the reader, showing that there are others who are worse off than Insu and his family. The physical boundary of the gate around the Japanese Colonel's house, therefore, not only brings together the rich and poor, but also blurs these categories for the reader, challenging his or her previous categorizations of characters based on wealth.



together in Fenkl's narrative. Rivers and streams are particularly interesting; like in Garth Nix's *Sabriel*, they are representative of the boundary between life and death. When Insu's uncle Hyongbu takes him, Haesuni, and Yongsu on the river in a boat, Haesuni gets nervous because she cannot see the village and so gets out of the boat. The water is too deep for her, and she is forced to hang onto the side of the boat since Hyongbu will not let her back in. She becomes increasingly desperate; once safely back on land, Insu has a flash of insight about what had just happened: "We said nothing about what had just happened, but as we walked, something flashed between us, as if we had all realized, at the same instant, that we had seen Haesuni's spirit on the verge of leaving her body" (Fenkl *Memories* 45). Like the River Styx in Greek mythology and the river of Death in which Sabriel walks, the river in this incident serves as the boundary between death and life, negotiating the movement of people from the world of the living to the world of the dead. The way in which Haesuni's spirit appears demonstrates how the movement associated with the river provides a space for the fantastic, which in turn, further blurs the boundary between life and death.

As the fantastic appearance of Haesuni's spirit, as well as the presence of the many ghosts throughout the narrative demonstrates, the boundary between life and death is a boundary that is fluid, a boundary that can be crossed in both directions. That rivers are two-way boundaries is poignantly illustrated by one of the reflections that a grown-up Insu describes at the beginning of the chapter "Water." He writes, "I began to dream that I was looking down into a beautiful, clear river at faces that looked up at me from under the water. I knew these faces—Gannan, Haesuni, Emo, Mahmi—and sometimes the face would be my own reflection, sometimes a subtle distortion that I took to be myself but

knew, in my heart, was really an older stranger. I would know that stranger soon” (Fenkl *Memories* 35). The river is not just a place that serves as an entry point into death, but also a medium through which the dead interact with the living, specifically Insu. Again, the boundary between life and death is blurred, not only because death is not seen as a permanent state, but also because of the way that Insu sees his reflection and that of his ghost brother blended together in the river.

The physical boundary that most noticeably runs throughout Fenkl’s narrative is the DMZ, the Demilitarized Zone that divides Korea into two parts—“Communists in the north and pro-American governments in the south” (Fenkl *Memories* 132). Although this boundary serves to divide Korea and separate two conflicting ideologies, it also serves as a place of coming together, the place where Insu comes to a greater understanding of his father. Insu’s father takes him to his post at the DMZ, and for the first time, Insu sees where his father lives. Insu is struck by his father’s collection of books; there was “one entire wall of paperback books—murder mysteries and private dick novels with scantily clad women on their covers, but also books whose titles and authors I would never have thought to name in the same breath with my father” (Fenkl *Memories* 255). This visit opens up to Insu a side of his father he had never known; he notes, “Had I walked into this room, and had I not seen the small pictures of my mother, me, and An-na in frames on his desk, I would never have believed this could be his life away from us” (Fenkl *Memories* 255). Insu’s father also talks with his son about his experiences in Vietnam, a rare occurrence in the novel. He tells Insu why he kept two interpreters working for him: “I always kept two interpreters who hated each other’s guts, and that kept them honest” (Fenkl *Memories* 256). Insu is even able to talk with his father almost as a peer; when his

father talks about how the Montagnards “got fucked over by everyone,” Insu asks, “Who fucked ‘em over?” (Fenkl *Memories* 256). Instead of responding violently and spanking Insu, as he did earlier in the novel when Insu used such language, Insu’s father offers him a very mild rebuke: “The French, the South Vietnamese, the VC, us. That’s about everyone. Watch your language” (Fenkl *Memories* 256). At this point, Insu and his father are almost able to see each other as peers, discussing Insu’s father’s work without falling into a strict father/son relationship. That this encounter occurs at the DMZ is significant, for it shows that instead of being a place of division, it can also be a place of coming together and mutual understanding.<sup>30</sup>

Although a complete understanding between the two men is perhaps impossible, a strong enough connection between the two is forged to empower Insu to ask about his ghost brother, whose image has haunted him throughout the narrative. After Insu’s father tells him a story about how humans tricked monkeys into killing their own children, Insu asks himself, “Why had my father told me this? I stared silently down into the chocolate dust that had congealed on the sides of my plastic U.S. Army mug. What did he expect me to say, caught here in the boundary between the two Koreas, caught between North and South and East and West with my own blood mixed from the blood of my enemies?” (Fenkl *Memories* 258). As Insu is struggling with how to respond to his father’s story, he

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<sup>30</sup> There is certainly a limit to how much Insu can understand, for although this trip provides him with insight into his father’s life away from home, he also recognizes that there are some things he will never understand. Once such moment occurs when Insu’s father, along with Private Jones, sing the Angry Alpha song; at that point, Insu realizes that he “could not imagine my voice joining with my father’s the way Jonesy’s did. I could not imagine how I would ever understand their secret language of knowing glances and inside jokes. That was something that only yellow-haired soldiers could do. I would forever be tainted by a Koreanness that would make the words ‘gook’ or ‘dink’ sound strange coming from my lips” (Fenkl *Memories* 253-254). Although the DMZ facilitates the coming together of Insu and his father, there are still boundaries between the two that seem impermeable. The limitation of the fantastic is something that is addressed at greater length in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

finally says to his father, “I had a dream I had a brother. His name was Kuristo and he was a ghost. Why do you think I had that dream?” (Fenkl *Memories* 258). As Elaine Kim describes it, his father has just told him a “fable about hierarchy and the unbridgeable differences between men and monkeys” (“Myth” 81), yet Insu is able to ignore the hierarchy in place—father over son, white over Korean—and ask his father the question he has long wanted to ask. In the border space created at the DMZ, as well as the border space created in himself, Insu finds the courage to ask his father about the brother that represents the fantastic in the novel. Not only do borders in *Memories of My Ghost Brother* create a space in which the fantastic can appear, but they also enable characters to talk about these elements of uncertainty and hesitation. Even though this interstitial encounter at the DMZ solidifies some of the divisions between Insu and his father, it also demonstrates the fantastic power of such encounters, a power that blurs boundaries and, as was argued in the first chapter of this dissertation, challenges systems of authority.

This ability of the fantastic to introduce uncertainty and hesitation into not only Insu and his father’s relationship, but also many other areas throughout the novel serves to highlight one of the most ambiguous elements in the narrative as a whole—the issue of race.<sup>31</sup> Insu tells of his friends, such as James, who, like himself, are the children of

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<sup>31</sup> Interestingly enough, although Fenkl’s novel challenges boundaries drawn around issues of race and class, when it comes to boundaries drawn between religions, these boundaries are impermeable. When describing his father’s Catholic faith, Insu notes that his father’s religion “was one whose miracles were old” and as a result, “it could not heal what happened every day outside the gates of the U.S. Army post” (Fenkl *Memories* 240-241). Insu explains, “My father’s priest could not lead the souls of the restless dead into the other world or heal the man whose arm was paralyzed by his ancestors because he had beaten his wife once too often” (Fenkl *Memories* 241). While the gates around the U.S. army post served to bring some things together, as described above, and blur established boundaries, particularly those regarding race, when it comes to the Christian religion, these gates definitely serve to separate. Although Insu notes how some “Korean Christians often lapsed and called upon a *mudang* to perform healings,” for him, there

mixed relationships. One such friend is Jani, who doesn't know his GI father; in describing a photograph in which he and Jani appear, Insu explains, "The boy on the left [Jani] looks like he might be the GI's cousin—his hair is dirty blond and he grins with the same crooked teeth—but the subtle angles of his face mark him as an Amerasian. The other boy [Insu] is also Amerasian, black-haired and darker skinned, but not as dark as the Koreans" (Fenkl *Memories* 160). In this description, the reader can see the blurring of the boundaries between American and Korean, a process that has created a new category—"Amerasian." Although both Jani and Insu are Amerasian, there is further calling into question of what defines race when the boys play soldiers: "Jani had blond hair, blue eyes, and freckles, so even though he spoke no English, he always got to play the American general because he looked more American and was older than me" (Fenkl *Memories* 145). Because the novel is told from Insu's point of view, the reader identifies with him, and when reading this passage, feels the injustice of Insu not being allowed to play the part of the American general. As a result, the ideas of race and nationality as categories based exclusively on skin color are challenged, and the reader is forced to examine his or her own ideas of what defines these categories.

Elaine Kim examines another way in which boundaries of race are challenged by Fenkl's novel by looking at the expectations that Insu's father has for him. She writes, "[*Memories of My Ghost Brother*] also challenges assumptions about the interchangeability of race and culture. Even though the boy has only lived in Korea and

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is no such blurring—"the American religion I could not understand" (Fenkl *Memories* 240). Later he elaborates further: "And so I could not worship his God or the murdered son—I believed in ghosts and ancestors and portentous dreams of serpents and dragons because these were the things I could touch in my world" (Fenkl *Memories* 241). For Insu, the line between his beliefs and his father's faith is clear-cut and immutable, and so in spite of the crossing back and forth over boundaries such as that of race, the categories created by religion remained unchallenged and unchanged.

only speaks Korean, Insu's American father and his Korean uncle expect him to know certain Western things because Yankee blood flows in his veins" (Kim "Myth" 82). Such examples challenge the idea that race and outward appearance are synonymous, as well as the idea that race provides cultural knowledge; instead, these examples blur the lines around categories of race, appearance, and culture, changing how the reader thinks about such concepts in general. Kim writes that Insu's multiple vantage points allow readers "to apprehend the arbitrary nature of racial categories and hierarchies and the fluidity and constructedness of supposedly 'natural' and 'immutable' racial and cultural differences" ("Myth" 83). In other words, boundaries provide a space for the hesitation of the fantastic throughout Fenkl's narrative, which draws attention to the ambiguous portrayal of race and culture, thus challenging the reader not only to see Insu's identity as something that does not fit comfortably into any single racial category, but also to recognize the constructed nature of categories such as race and culture. Therefore, the movement surrounding the physical borders in *Memories of My Ghost Brother* enables the fantastic to enter the text, blurring the boundaries between reality and fantasy, life and death, and father and son, and also providing Fenkl with the framework to blur the boundary between American and Korean and challenge static notions of race.

### **Roads in Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues***

Sherman Alexie's 1995 novel *Reservation Blues* presents boundaries that are much different than most of the other boundaries examined in this chapter thus far. Rather than portraying walls, rivers, or gates that separate people, Alexie's narrative portrays the empty spaces that have to be crossed between father and son, man and

woman, white and Indian, past and present. As a result, the theme of roads and transportation is a key one for Alexie's novel—in these various depictions of travel, Alexie portrays the movement between very disparate ideas and creates a world in which this movement creates meaning. This theme of transportation is indicative of a larger theme in Alexie's work as a whole; in her doctoral dissertation, Meredeith James observes,

Alexie's work explores the complexity of Indian identity and how it cannot be neatly divided into categories and framed in arbitrary boundaries, which the U.S. government attempts to do when dealing with Indian matters such as land rights and blood quantum. Alexie manipulates the very landscape that creates from novel to novel in order to get across how the 'reservation of the mind' is a dynamic terrain, not a place where one feels boxed in and helpless (6).

Like Green's stairwell artwork examined at the beginning of this chapter, Alexie's highways are physical representations of the interstitial spaces in the novel, and as such, they provide the point of entry for the fantastic into Alexie's narrative, sometimes through dreams, supernatural characters, and the imagination, but also in the form of music and storytelling. These fantastic elements not only enable Alexie's characters to negotiate potentially contradictory ideas, bringing them together in new and creative ways, but they also encourage readers to think of ways in which the fantastic can appear in a text other than through overtly supernatural elements.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the fantastic highlights discussions of race throughout the novel, drawing attention to the

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<sup>32</sup> For further discussion of interstitial spaces in Sherman Alexie's fiction, see Giorgio Mariani's essay "From Atopia to Utopia: Sherman Alexie's Interstitial Indians" (*American Today: Highways and Labyrinths*. Siracusa, Italy: Grafià, 2003. 582-591) and Jerome DeNuccio's article "Slowing Dancing with Skeletons: Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*" (*Critique* 44.1 (Fall 2002): 86-96). For discussions of interstitial spaces in other works of Native American fiction, Karsten Fitz in his essay "Native and Christian: Religion and Spirituality as Transcultural Negotiation in American Indian Novels of the 1990s" and Scott A. Winkler, in his essay "Dreams Like Baseball Cards: Baseball, Bricoleur, and the Gap in Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*" (*Aethlon* 21.2 (Spring 2004): 87-98) provide helpful and provocative readings.

contradictions within these discussions and demonstrating that although Alexie appears to be deconstructing the idea of what it means to be Native American, he relies on the racial fantasy of the disappearing pureblood Indian to make his narrative function.

*Reservation Blues* tells the story of Thomas Builds-the-Fire, a young Spokane Indian who receives an enchanted guitar from blues legend Robert Johnson. With this guitar, Thomas starts a band named Coyote Springs with two other Spokane Indians named Junior and Victor. During one of their concerts, Coyote Springs meets Chess and Checkers Warm Water, two sisters from the Flathead Reservation. Together, these five win the Battle of the Bands in Seattle and are offered the chance to audition for a recording contract in New York City. As is to be expected in a novel with so much traveling, roads and transportation are a key theme throughout the novel. Even more importantly, however, roads serve as an entry point for the fantastic into the novel, something that is clear from the first page of the novel when Robert Johnson, the blues legend, arrives on the Spokane Indian Reservation. When Robert Johnson appears in Wellpinit, the only town on the Spokane Indian Reservation, he “strolled to the crossroads near the softball diamond, with its solitary grave hidden in deep center field. The black man leaned his guitar against a stop sign but stood himself straight and waited” (Alexie *RB* 3). Johnson’s arrival on the reservation is in and of itself an element of the fantastic; his arrival on the reservation is a surprise, since he was presumed to be dead and Wellpinit “did not exist on most maps” (Alexie *RB* 3), and we learn early on that he has made a deal with the devil for his skill in playing guitar. From the early pages of the novel, then, the border space of the crossroads provides a space in which the ghostly figure of Robert Johnson can enter the narrative.



The image of the crossroads is more, however, than just where Johnson appears in Wellpinit—it is an image that Johnson has seen in his dreams, associated with the woman who can help him play the guitar again. When Thomas offers Robert Johnson a ride, he considers whether or not he should accept: “Old and tired, he had walked from crossroads to crossroads in search of the woman in his dreams. That woman might save him. A big woman, she arrived in shadows, riding a horse. She rode into his dreams a shadow on a shadowy horse, with songs that he loved but could not sing because the Gentleman might hear” (Alexie *RB* 6). The woman Robert Johnson is searching for is Big Mama—a supernatural figure on the Spokane Indian Reservation who “had taught all of her horses to sing many generations before” (Alexie *RB* 9). These horses return to her each generation; they “arrived in different forms and with different songs, called themselves Janie Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Marvin Gaye, and so many other names” (Alexie *RB* 10). Again, the crossroads serve as an entry point for the fantastic into the novel, this time in the form of Big Mama, a legendary figure who serves as both a spiritual and musical guide throughout the novel.

The importance of the boundaries of roads as a space in the novel in which the fantastic can appear is reinforced by the image of the Federal Express deliveryman, who appears periodically throughout the novel. The invitations to paying gigs that Coyote Springs receives are all delivered by the “Fed Ex guy,” who has an element of uncertainty about him. When he presents Thomas with the invitation to Coyote Springs’ first paid performance, he asks, “Did you know I was in the war?” Thomas asks, “Which war?” and the Fed Ex guy responds, “All of them” (Alexie *RB* 48). This exchange marks the deliveryman as someone who exists outside of time, a fantastic appearance that is made

possible by the movement and uncertainty of the highways. Later, near the end of the novel, when Thomas hears a scratching on his roof, he “wondered which ghost had come to haunt him” (Alexie *RB* 294), but it turns out to be the Fed Ex guy again. The association of ghosts and the supernatural with the deliveryman reinforces the importance of travel and transportation as a border space in which the fantastic can enter the narrative. A particularly interesting aspect of this connection is the way in which Thomas’s music—in itself, a form of storytelling—is described as what brings the first package to his doorstep. When Victor, the band’s lead singer, challenges Thomas that they should play some “real music,” “Thomas sat again with his bass guitar, wrote the first song, and called it ‘Reservation Blues.’ Soon after that, the Federal Express showed up at his door with an overnight package” (Alexie *RB* 47). The connection between Thomas’s song and the delivery of the package suggests at least a correlation, if not an actual causal relationship between the two, that points to the music of Coyote Springs as a way to summon the fantastic into their lives.

The way in which the delivery of the Federal Express package is connected to Thomas writing his first “real” song draws attention to the way in which the border spaces of the roads provide a space in which characters can tell stories and make music, in effect creating their own versions of the fantastic that hesitate between dream and reality, between memory and imagination. Thomas is the main storyteller in the novel, and the description of his stories hints at its connections to the fantastic:

Thomas repeated his stories constantly. All the other Indians on the reservation heard those stories so often that the words crept into dreams. An Indian telling his friends about a dream he had was halfway through the telling before everyone realized it was actually one of Thomas’s stealth stories. [. . .]

Thomas Builds-the-Fire's stories climbed into your clothes like sand, gave you itches that could not be scratched. If you repeated even a sentence from one of those stories, your throat was never the same again. Those stories hung in your clothes and hair like smoke, and no amount of laundry soap or shampoo washed them out. (Alexie *RB* 15)

The way in which Thomas's stories become part of the dreams of the residents of the reservation marks them as a manifestation of the fantastic. Similarly, the similes that Alexie uses to describe Thomas's stories all describe images that suggest hesitation and an inability to articulate the precise nature of his stories—both of which are hallmarks of the fantastic. In this way, stories and storytelling are portrayed as an element of the fantastic that the characters in the novel can themselves create, thus providing a new way of thinking about what shape the fantastic can take.

The open space of the freeway is particularly important to Thomas's creation of his fantastic stories because it provides a space in which he can hear and create music, a specialized form of storytelling. This connection between music and the open road is apparent from Robert Johnson's appearance on the first page of the novel, but it becomes more explicit as the novel progresses. As Thomas is driving Coyote Springs home from one of their concerts, Chess asks him, "Why do you like freeway driving so much?" Thomas replies, "There's a lot of songs out here, I guess. I can hear them" (Alexie 90). Thomas's words crystallize the connection between the border space of the open road and the creative, fantastic power of music. The idea of music as a fantastic element in the novel is reinforced later in that scene. The Coyote Springs van drives past a hitchhiker, and "the music rose past the hitchhiker up into the sky, banged into the Big Dipper, and bounced off the bright moon. That's exactly what happened. The music howled back into the blue van, kept howling until Coyote Springs became echoes. That's exactly what

happened” (Alexie *RB* 91). The repetition of the phrase “that’s exactly what happened” has a similar rhetorical effect to someone saying, “Well, to be honest with you...” Both phrases introduce doubt as to the actual truth or honesty of what’s being said. In this way, Alexie underscores the uncertain, fantastic nature of music in the novel through the use of rhetorical markers. As with Thomas’s stories, music is presented as a form of the fantastic that is created by the characters themselves, offering readers new possibilities for thinking about the nature, form, and function of the fantastic.

The open space of the highway, which facilitates the entry of the fantastic into the novel, also provides a space for the characters in *Reservation Blues* to engage in conversations about race. On the way back to the Spokane Indian Reservation after winning the thousand dollars of prize money in Seattle’s Battle of the Bands, Thomas and Chess start talking about the existence of God and the purpose of life. Thomas tells Chess this story: “We were both at Wounded Knee when the Ghost Dancers were slaughtered. We were slaughtered at Wounded Knee. I know there were whole different tribes there, no Spokanes or Flatheads, but we were still somehow there. There was a part of every Indian bleeding in the snow. All those soldiers killed in the name of God, enit?” (Alexie *RB* 167). Rather than just portray this one, unitary vision of what it means to be a Native American, the novel uses the border space of the open road to create a dialogue about the complicated, multi-faceted nature of race. Chess rejects Thomas’s efforts to put the blame of the world’s evil on God and white people, saying, “Not every white person wants to kill Indians. You know most any white who joins up with Indians never wants to leave. It’s always been that way. Everybody wants to be an Indian.” Betty, one of the white women who travel with the band, affirms Chess’s words, saying,

“White people want to be Indians. You all have things we don’t have. You live at peace with the earth. You are so wise” (Alexie *RB* 168). Chess and Thomas both reject Betty’s words as naïve, and as a result, the conversation initially seems like a way to challenge overly sentimental, idealized versions of what it means to be Native American. In fact, as Blythe Tellefsen writes, Coyote Springs is able to use the format of rock-and-roll to challenge the stereotypes of Native Americans: “Coyote Springs uses its own mastery of ‘whiteness’ to undermine white expectations of ‘Indianness’” (131). These examples would seem to suggest that Alexie is using the characters in his novel to challenge the popularly held racial fantasies of Native Americans.<sup>33</sup>

This entire conversation after the Battle of the Bands, however, rejects one racial fantasy of Native Americans—of being spiritually in tune with the earth—in favor of another: of being, as David Treuer puts it, “civilization’s ghosts” (24). In his *Native American Fiction: A User’s Manual*, Treuer writes, “Reading Indians as exemplars (of culture, of disappearance, of recovery) or as civilization’s ghosts has been carried forward into what we consider modern Native American fiction. This is, in a large part, what makes Indian fiction work” (24). But, as Treuer points out, “when a story is built on supposition and received ideas it can’t ever rise above those suppositions. The house of text will have the same footprint as the automatic thought” (24). Although Chess challenges Thomas’s assertion that God and white people are all evil, the image of the

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<sup>33</sup> Another example of how *Reservation Blues* critiques popularly held racial fantasies is in the way the record company plans to market first Coyote Springs, and then later, Betty and Veronica. As Blythe Tellefsen writes, “The dominant culture’s insistence that an American Indian conform to the simulation of an Indian that is expected and understood in such culture culminates in *Reservation Blues* in the marketing ploys of the record producers Wright and Sheridan to promote the Indian rock band Coyote Springs” (128). The ridiculously stereotypical way in which both Coyote Springs and later Betty and Veronica are supposed to act, dress, and look in order to be a “Native American band” functions as a critique of such stereotypes, seeming to challenge the idea of a race or culture being defined by essential traits.

vanishing Indian is allowed to persist, and in fact, becomes an important theme throughout the novel. The theme of the vanishing Indian is key in defining the space of the reservation: “The word *gone* echoed all over the reservation. The reservation was gone itself, just a shell of its former self, just a fragment of the whole. But the reservation still possessed power and rage, magic and loss, joys and jealousy. The reservation tugged at the lives of its Indians, stole from them in the middle of the night, watched impassively as the horses and salmon disappeared” (Alexie *RB* 96-97). Although the passage claims that the reservation still has “power and rage,” the way it returns to the idea of the reservation as a shell being emptied out reinforces the image of the vanishing Indian. Therefore, although Alexie seems to reject stereotypical images of Native Americans, his very image of the reservation is itself based on another stereotype—the picture of the Native American as a dying race that is slowly becoming extinct.<sup>34</sup>

The fantastic is key in highlighting places in the novel in which this stereotype becomes particularly important to the narrative. When Coyote Springs flies out to New York City for their audition with the record company, they ending up ruining their chances of getting a record contract. The band members scatter into the city, each doing what he or she needs to do to find feel less like a failure. Checkers returns to her hotel room, where she dreams of Phil Sheridan, one of the record company executives. Checkers dreams that Sheridan is a U.S. soldier responsible for the deaths of Native

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<sup>34</sup> Perhaps the most well-known visual representation of the racial fantasy of the vanishing Indian is James Earle Fraser’s 1915 sculpture “End of the Trail,” which depicts a lone Native American on horseback, slumped over in exhaustion. Originally produced for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, this work of art has been reproduced thousands of times in calendars, wall art, paperweight statues, and belt buckles, thus visually solidifying the stereotype of the Native American as a dying race.

Americans in the late 1800s. Sheridan tells Checkers, “*You Indians always knew how to play dumb. But you were never dumb. You talked like Tonto, but you had brains like fucking Einstein. Had us whites all figured out. But we still kept trying to change you. Tried to make you white. It never worked*” (Alexie RB 237). This statement initially seems like it is a revision of the stereotype of the silent Indian sidekick, yet a closer look at this dream sequence shows that in drawing a parallel between Phil Sheridan and the U.S. soldiers responsible for Indian relocation, Alexie is casting Checkers and her bandmates into another racial fantasy—that of the vanishing Indian. When Sheridan tells Checkers, “*We won the war. We keep winning the war. But you won’t surrender*” (Alexie RB 236), he could be talking about the historical wars on the frontier, or he could be talking about things such as financial and commercial success in the present day. In either case, Phil Sheridan’s words direct the reader to look backwards when considering what it means to be Native American. The way in which he and, as seen above, Thomas both focus on events from the past suggest that the only place for the Native American is in the past; considering Native Americans in the future is an impossible endeavor. Even though Checkers tells Sheridan, “*I don’t believe in you. I’m just dreaming. You’re a ghost, a dream, a piece of dust, a foul-smelling wind. Go away,*” (Alexie RB 238), the image of the dying, exhausted Indian sticks with the reader, undermining any challenge that Alexie might have posed to stereotypes of Native Americans throughout the novel. In this way, the uncertainty and hesitation of the fantastic is transferred to Alexie’s portrayal of race, highlighting how he both rejects racial fantasies of Native Americans while simultaneously embracing and relying on the image of the vanishing Indian to carry his narrative forward.

The fantastic also plays a key role in the narrative after Junior kills himself, when Victor tells the rest of the band that Junior had had a baby with a white woman (a story that is in itself revisionist history: Junior's white girlfriend had had an abortion). At the graveyard, Chess hears Victor's words and looks around,

At all the graves of Indians killed by white people's cars, alcohol, uranium. All those Indians who had killed themselves. She saw the pine trees that surrounded the graveyard and the road that led back to the rest of the reservation. That road was dirt and gravel, had been a trail for a few centuries before. A few years from now, it would be paved, paid for by one more government grant. She looked down the road and thought she saw a car, a mirage shimmering in the distance, a blonde woman and a child standing beside the car, both dressed in black. (Alexie *RB* 282)

In this passage, not only do we see the way in which the space of the road provides an entry point for the fantastic into the narrative, but we also see the way in which the uncertainty of the fantastic is connected to the racial fantasy of the vanishing Indian. The above passage, in addition to being set at a graveyard during a funeral, dwells on the images of Indians who had died, and even more provocatively, Indians who had killed themselves. By recognizing the connection between the fantastic and this racial image, the hesitation and ambiguity of the fantastic highlight the way in which this image is in and of itself conflicted. Alexie's description of the Indians who had died—"killed by white people's cars, alcohol, uranium"—is connected to the image of the Indians who had killed themselves, thus implying that those Indians, too, were killed by white people. What Alexie does not seem to realize, however, is that by relying on the racial fantasy of the vanishing Indian to develop the plot of his novel as well as this specific image, he, too, is contributing to the popular stereotype of Native Americans as dying out. Alexie's



ideological stance positions him as someone who has contributed to the image of the graveyard as well, someone who perpetuates the image of the vanishing Indian.

Chess's fantastic interaction with the mirage of Junior's girlfriend and his son further serves to transfer the hesitation of the fantastic onto the way in which Alexie portrays race in *Reservation Blues*. Chess runs down the road toward the vision of the woman, wanting "to save Indians from the pain that the white woman and her half-Indian son would cause":

*Don't you see? [. . .] Those quarter-blood and eight-blood grandchildren will find out they're Indian and torment the rest of us real Indians. They'll come out to the reservation, come to our powwows, in their nice clothes and nice cars, and remind the real Indians how much we don't have. Those quarter-bloods and eight-bloods will get all the Indian jobs, all the Indian chances, because they look white. Because they're safer. (Alexie RB 283)*

Again, we see Alexie's use of the stereotype of the vanishing Indian in this passage, through the looking to the past to preserve racial purity. Chess's interaction with Junior's girlfriend is marked by elements of the fantastic—not only is the woman described as a mirage, but the text of the dialogue is set off in italics, marking it as something different than the other conversations in the novel. Because of this, Chess's sentiments about race are—for the reader—marked with uncertainty and hesitation as well. Although the reader has seen the way that Alexie challenges stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans, in this passage, the reader sees a sentiment that David Treuer describes as "crude, reductive, uncharitable, ignorant (ignorant of culture, language, ceremony, and community), and essentialist" (180). The sentiment not only plays up the idea of Native Americans as a dying race, but it also draws impermeable lines between white and Native American, leaving no room for communication between the two. Therefore, the fantastic

serves to highlight not only the contradictory way in which Sherman Alexie portrays race in *Reservation Blues*, but also the way in which he advocates that categories of race should be static and unchanging.

Chess's fantastic interaction with Junior's girlfriend also highlights another aspect of the contradictory way in which Alexie portrays what it means to be Native American. Early in the novel, Alexie mocks the way in which Native Americans act how they think they are supposed to act, based on what they have seen on television. When describing how Junior lived his life, Alexie writes,

Junior based all of his decisions on his dreams and visions, which created a lot of problems. When awake, he could never stomach the peanut butter and onion sandwiches that tasted so great in his dreams, but Junior always expected his visions to come true. Indians were *supposed* to have visions and receive messages from their dreams. All the Indians on television had visions that told them exactly what to do. (Alexie *RB* 18)

The flippant tone of this passage, as well as the light humor of Junior's peanut butter and onion sandwiches, clearly marks it as a critique of the stereotype of dreams and visions marking a Native American as authentic. Yet later in the narrative, when Chess has her fantastic encounter with Junior's girlfriend, Alexie's stance on dreams and visions radically shifts. Instead of lightly mocking the importance of these dreams and visions, as he did before, Alexie gives Chess's vision great significance and applauds her for following the advice she receives from this vision. After her experience of seeing the vision of Junior's girlfriend, Chess turns to Thomas and says, "Let's have lots of brown babies. I want my babies to look up and see two brown faces. That's the best thing we can give them, enit?" Thomas smiles and says, "Okay" (Alexie *RB* 284). There is no questioning of Chess's motives, nor is there an exploration of other possible meanings of

her fantastic experience. Rather, as Treuer puts it, “Making brown babies is the logical end point of the novel” (180). Instead of mocking or critiquing the idea of visions guiding the actions of Chess and Thomas, as he did earlier with Junior, Alexie now endorses Chess’s vision-based decision as logical and natural. Here again, the fantastic is key to understanding the portrayal of race in the novel because it draws attention to the contradiction between these two scenes, highlighting how Alexie both critiques and embraces the stereotype of Native American visions.

Therefore, although the border spaces of the open road in Alexie’s *Reservation Blues* are slightly different in nature than the walls, rivers, and gullies explored earlier in this chapter, they serve a similar function—namely, to provide a space for the fantastic to enter the narrative, which in turn serves to challenge the existence of fixed categories of race and identity. As we saw with Guy Gavriel Kay’s *The Fionavar Tapestry* in Chapter 2, Sherman Alexie both rejects and utilizes racial fantasies such as the importance of dreams and visions, as well as the image of the vanishing Indian. The appearance of the fantastic throughout the novel serves to highlight these contradictions, demonstrating that even in a text that appears to be aware “that Indian, white, and, by extension, all other ethnicities are all constructs of sorts” (Tellefsen 143), racial fantasies still hold a tremendous amount of unrecognized power. Additionally, the portrayal of the fantastic through storytelling and music introduces a new way to think about the fantastic—that the hesitation Todorov sees between the uncanny and the marvelous can also be found between the sites of reality and dream, as well as between memory and imagination. The stories that occupy these interstitial spaces have the power to make the reader pause, and drive the narrative forward, much in the same way that Todorov sees his version of the

fantastic. This rethinking of the possible locations of the fantastic demonstrates the advantage of reading fantasy literature together with Native American and Asian American literatures: not only does it complicate literary categories and racial boundaries, but it also provides the space for developing established literary tropes, pushing them in new directions and opening up new possibilities for understanding literature.

### **Doors in Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series**

Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series (1982-2004) is another text in which physical boundaries—specifically doors—serve as interstitial spaces in which the fantastic can appear and highlight the contradictory ways in which race is portrayed throughout the narrative. King is best known as an author of popular fiction, and specifically, he is best known for his works of horror, works such as *Carrie* (1974), *It* (1986), *Pet Sematary* (1983), and *The Shining* (1977). King's popularity as a horror writer is reflected in the number of critical studies that focus almost exclusively on his works of horror, including Michael Colling's *The Many Facets of Stephen King* (1985), *Kingdom of Fear: The World of Stephen King* (1986), *The Dark Descent: Essays Defining Stephen King's Horrorscape* (1992), and Harold Bloom's recently published collection *Stephen King* (2007). While many of these studies are quite useful, particularly those that situate King as part of the larger Gothic tradition established by Walpole and then developed in America by Poe and Lovecraft, they overlook one major work in King's oeuvre—his seven-volume epic fantasy series *The Dark Tower*. This omission is particularly glaring as King himself has described this series as his “magnum

opus” (Vincent 313), and it functions as a lynchpin to many of King’s other works, tying them all together.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the series contains many fascinating elements worthy of critical attention—the retelling of the King Arthur legend as a Western, the interweaving of parallel worlds, the non-linear treatment of time, and the significance of elements of pop culture, to name a few.

This chapter attempts to begin to rectify this gap in scholarship on *The Dark Tower* series, focusing on the way that King creates a space for the fantastic in his novels, and specifically, how he uses the physical boundaries of doors to represent the interstitial space of the fantastic. Slightly more space in this chapter is dedicated to King’s novels than the others texts examined so far, not only because his novels are a part of a series, but also because of the way racial identity and the fantastic are so closely connected in them. While the tropes of boundaries and the fantastic could be explored throughout the entire series, the focus of this section will be on specific incidents that occur in the second book of the series, *The Drawing of the Three* (1987), and the third book of the series, *The Waste Lands* (1991). In these two books, King uses images of doors to provide a space for the fantastic, and he uses this space of hesitation and uncertainty to interrogate the relationship between Self and Other.<sup>36</sup> In spite of the ways in which King blurs the boundaries between Self and Other in the interstitial space of the fantastic, however, his use of racial and sexual imagery in these negotiations of identity

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<sup>35</sup> Two works that do address King’s *The Dark Tower* series are Robin Furth’s *Stephen King’s The Dark Tower: The Complete Concordance* (New York: Scribner, 2006) and Bev Vincent’s *The Road to the Dark Tower: Exploring Stephen King’s Magnum Opus* (New York: New American Library, 2004), but they both are styled more as resources for fans of the series, rather than as rigorous literary criticism.

<sup>36</sup> This section is really going to limit itself to the images of doors in the first three books of the series, leaving out many relevant details (such as the existence of Mia) that come into play later in the series. While such details are fascinating and would certainly enrich the analysis here, the limitations of space and time prevent me from engaging the entire series thoroughly.

demonstrate a regression to a Gothic depiction of the Other. Such an exploration not only demonstrates the importance of taking King's *The Dark Tower* series more seriously, but it also establishes the fantastic as a useful tool for negotiating identity, an issue that is explored at greater length later in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

*The Dark Tower* series tells the story of Roland Deschain, a gunslinger from the city of Gilead, who is on a quest to find and protect the Dark Tower. Roland's universe is one in which many parallel worlds exist, including one that is the world as we know it, and the Dark Tower serves as the axis upon which all these worlds rotate. The first book of the series, *The Gunslinger*, tells how Roland pursues a man dressed in black across a desert wasteland. Along the way, Roland comes across a boy named Jake, a boy who lived in a New York City similar to our own, but was drawn into Roland's world when he was killed by a car. Roland and Jake develop a close relationship, although Roland sacrifices Jake to continue his pursuit of the man in black. At the end of the novel, the man in black tells Roland's fortune, telling him of three people that he must meet to continue on his quest for the Dark Tower.

The second book of the series, *The Drawing of the Three*, tells of Roland's journey along a beach after his meeting with the man in black, during which he encounters three doors, each of which has the power of taking him to another place and time. The setting through which Roland travels, apart from being unfamiliar, is fairly normal—it is a beach, populated with vicious lobster-like creatures. After having several fingers bitten off by one of these creatures, a wound that becomes infected, Roland staggers feverishly across the beach, where he eventually sees a large, solid door: "It stood six and a half feet high and appeared to be made of solid ironwood, although the

nearest ironwood tree must grow seven hundred miles or more from here. The doorknob looked as if it were made of gold, and it was filigreed with a design which the gunslinger finally recognized: it was the grinning face of the baboon” (King *Drawing* 35). In spite of the imposing stature and solid physical presence of the door, however, the door also serves as a physical representation of the space in between fantasy and reality, a relationship that is highlighted by Roland’s thoughts about the door. When wondering about how the door stood without a frame, Roland thinks, “*This is a mystery, a most marvelous mystery, but does it really matter? You are dying. Your own mystery—the only one that really matters to any man or woman in the end—approaches*” (King *Drawing* 35). Roland’s thoughts demonstrate hesitation and uncertainty—the key elements of the fantastic—that are also shared by the reader. Furthermore, they connect the physical boundary of the door to interstitial boundaries—the boundary between reality and fantasy, as well as the boundary between life and death.

From this door and the two other doors farther down the beach, Roland draws forth two people into his world—Eddie Dean and a woman who comes to be known as Susannah Dean—and the way in which he does this raises interesting questions about identity. As in the other texts examined in this chapter, the interstitial border space of the door brings together a myriad of contradictory emotions. Eddie, for example, is a drug addict, who is hopeful that Roland’s bringing him into another world will provide him with the means to save his brother, Henry, yet he is overcome with despair when Henry dies from an overdose. The method in which Roland draws forth Eddie and Susannah into his world, however, presents some interesting images that raise questions about identity. When Roland goes through each door, his consciousness enters the mind of the

person he means to draw forth, so that for some time, two consciousnesses exist within the body of one person. When Roland goes through the first door, he does not realize that this is what happens. Eventually, though, he comes to understand, “He was looking through someone’s eyes” (King *Drawing* 41). Roland slowly comes to realize that he is seeing through the eyes of a man named Eddie, and takes stock of what he sees around him that is unfamiliar. Of particular interest to Roland is how other people around Eddie are viewing him, during which he thinks of Eddie as “I/he” (King *Drawing* 73), reflecting the split consciousness that inhabits Eddie’s body. Eventually, Roland makes himself known to Eddie, coming forward into Eddie’s consciousness and making contact with him, saying, “*You’re not going crazy. I AM another person*” (King *Drawing* 76). In this way, King uses the interstitial space of the border to create a way for one person to inhabit the mind of another.

Reading these scenes simply as the appearance of the fantastic in King’s novel is certainly a valid approach, but it is also important to consider other interpretations of the interaction between Roland and Eddie, particularly those that address questions of identity. One connection that King’s language strongly suggests is that with W.E.B. Du Bois’ famous description of double-consciousness:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (11)

Although both Roland and Eddie are white men, Du Bois’ description of the “peculiar” way of looking on the world through the eyes of another is very similar to King’s



description of Roland looking through the eyes of Eddie. This similarity suggests that King's narrative can also be read as a commentary on how the fantastic provides space in which complicated questions of identity—including Du Bois' idea of double consciousness—can be interrogated. In *The Drawing of the Three*, the interstitial space of the door provides Eddie and Roland with the means to divide into two separate bodies upon their return to Roland's world. Roland is then able to help Eddie get rid of the cocaine that he is carrying, so that he is not arrested and charged by Customs agents. While such a model of resolving the tensions created by racial double-consciousness is certainly overly optimistic and perhaps even naïve, King's use of this language and imagery to develop his characters introduces the interstitial space of the fantastic as a way to think about questions of identity and race.

One particularly noteworthy aspect of the relationship between Roland and Eddie is that while it was initially an unwelcome relationship, particularly for Eddie, over time, he comes to recognize the advantages of having this "other" presence within his mind, thus blurring the distinction between the binary relationship of Self and Other. When Eddie is interrogated by Customs agents, although he is quite nervous and jittery, he is able to sit quietly and relaxed. As he tells himself, "The *other* in his mind was the reason why. He had been terrified of the *other* at first. Now he thanked God the *other* was there. The *other* might be sick, dying even, but there was enough steel left in his spine for him to have some left to loan this scared twenty-one-year-old junkie" (King *Drawing* 96). King's repeated use of the italicized phrase "the *other*" initially seems to reinforce the binary nature of the relationship between Self and Other. The fact that this passage describes a transition in Eddie's feelings toward that *other*, however, points to the fact

that the relationship between Eddie and Roland has become more interconnected, with the lines between Self and Other becoming blurred. Additionally, the way in which King has shifted the perspective of narration from Roland to Eddie effectively shifts the antecedents for the terms Self and Other. While the entire novel is narrated in the third person, King begins by privileging Roland's perspective, which positions him as the Self inhabiting the mind of Eddie's Other. But as the language of the above passage demonstrates, King then shifts the narration to be told from Eddie's perspective, thus making *Roland* the Other. In this way, the fantastic interstitial space created by the physical space of the door provides King with a method of challenging a static understanding of identity, as well as with the means to propose a new model for identity that blurs the lines between binary distinctions.

Perhaps the most provocative exploration of race and identity in King's *The Drawing of the Three* can be found in the character who comes to be known as Susannah Dean, but who is initially introduced as a woman inhabited by the split personalities of Odetta Holmes and Detta Walker, neither of whom is aware of the other. Odetta Holmes is a polite, upper class black woman who is confined to a wheelchair because she has lost her legs in a subway accident. Detta Walker inhabits the same body, but her personality is vastly different; she is violent, angry at all white people, and prone to criminal behavior. When Roland draws Odetta/Detta into his world, he realizes that "she wasn't one woman but two" and that "one of them was dangerous" (King *Drawing* 265). Roland realizes that he and Eddie must somehow join these two halves of a person together, if they are to continue forward in his quest for the Dark Tower. To do this, he takes advantage of the fantastic space of the doorway on the beach—a doorway that allows him

to force both Odetta and Detta to look at the Other that is living within the Self. Eddie explained to Roland that when Roland went through the door to draw forth Odetta/Detta, Eddie saw that world through Roland's eyes, until Roland turned to come back onto the beach. Then, Eddie explains, "*I was looking at myself*. It was like...' He groped and could find nothing. 'I dunno. It should have been like looking in a mirror, I guess, but it wasn't because...because it was like looking at another person. It was like being turned inside out. Like being two places at the same time. Shit, *I don't know*'" (King *Drawing* 294). Here again, Eddie is seeing himself through Roland's eyes, which leads again to the "peculiar" sensation of "being turned inside out"—of being forced to recognize himself as simultaneously Self and Other. Near the end of the novel, Roland takes advantage of this knowledge of the power of the doorway, and calls on Odetta/Detta to look through the doorway as he is looking back at her on the beach. Odetta and Detta are forced to see and acknowledge each other, and after an intense struggle of wills, the woman who contains them both realizes that "she was whole" (King *Drawing* 450). The border space of the doorway provides a space in which the fantastic can challenge the binary relationship between Odetta and Detta, and the character can negotiate an identity that lies somewhere between Self and Other.

As a result of being forced to view each other in the interstitial space of the doorway, Detta and Odetta come together to create a whole person—Susannah Dean—but at the same time, the elements that make up Detta and Odetta are maintained as well. Immediately after she recognizes that she is "whole," Susannah realizes that she has to act quickly to save Eddie and Roland from being eaten by the lobster-like creatures. The voice inside her that yells "*Hurry up, bitch!*" is the voice of Detta, "...but it was still her

own voice; she and Detta had merged. She had been one; she had been two; now the gunslinger had drawn a third from her” (King *Drawing* 450). While this initially seems to be a smooth synthesis of the personalities of Detta and Odetta, the text makes it quite clear that the new woman of Susannah Dean houses three women who all exist simultaneously, and even contradictorily, rather than merely housing one comfortable fusion of the best qualities of Detta and Odetta. As she tells Roland, “I am three women [. . .] I who was; I who had no right to be but was; I am the woman who you have saved” (King *Drawing* 452). In this way, the identity of Susannah Dean is reminiscent of Anzaldúa’s discussion of identity formation in the borderlands: “In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness—a *mestiza* consciousness—and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm” (101-102). Susannah’s identity becomes a space like that of the borderlands that acknowledges multiple, even contradictory elements without pushing for any sort of resolution. While the creation of the identity of Susannah Dean is a resolution in a way, it accomplishes this because it resolves the tension created by keeping Self and Other separate, rather than because it seeks to smooth over any contradictions presented by the different identities within this one woman’s body. In this way, King takes the complications he poses to the distinction between Self and Other in the drawing of Eddie and makes them more explicitly about race by placing this discussion within the character of the black Susannah Dean.

While King’s description of Roland and his two companions is notable for the way in which it complicates static ideas of identity and blurs the lines between the

generic Self and Other, it is problematic in the way that it leaves *specific* binary distinctions, most notably, those of race and gender, unexplored. As can be seen in the examples above, the blurring of the boundary between Self and Other only takes place when the Self and the Other are the same race and gender. The line between Roland and Eddie can be comfortably blurred because, although they are described as being in a Self/Other relationship, they are also both white men—in effect, both the Self. And Odetta and Detta are forced to acknowledge the simultaneous existence of another identity that is, in terms of race and gender, just like themselves—black and female. Interestingly enough, the description of Roland’s drawing forth of Odetta/Detta is very brief, particularly when compared to the description of Eddie’s drawing. A scant four pages describe Roland’s existence within Odetta/Detta’s mind, two of which describe the scene from the perspective of a security guard at Macy’s. This is compared to the nearly one hundred fifty pages describing Roland’s existence within Eddie’s mind. The brief description of Roland’s existence within Odetta/Detta’s mind, however, is quite troubling. When Roland comes forward into her consciousness, “she senses the *other*, as if a door had been swung open inside of her head. And she screamed because the invading raping presence was a honky. She could not see but nonetheless *sensed* his whiteness” (King *Drawing* 255). Unlike the description of Roland’s existence within Eddie’s mind, in which Eddie becomes comfortable with Roland’s presence, there is no negotiation of the Self/Other relationship between Roland and Odetta/Detta. Instead, this incredibly sexually violent, invasive description of the Self/Other relationship is left unexamined, as the focus shifts to the split personalities of Odetta and Detta. Therefore, although King blurs the line between the Self and the Other in general terms in *The*

*Drawing of the Three*, his novel lacks a closer examination of the implications of this potentially violent or traumatic blurring for the specific categories of race and gender.

The space created for the fantastic by the physical presence of doorways also plays a key role in the third novel in the series, *The Waste Lands*. In this novel, Roland, Eddie, and Susannah travel across a desolate wasteland to the city of Lud, as they continue on their quest for the Dark Tower. One of the key events in this novel is the addition of Jake Chambers to Roland's *ka-tet*, that is, his group of companions that are drawn together by fate. Although Roland left Jake to die in the first novel of the series, in the second novel, he kills the man responsible for Jake's first death—the one that initially sent him to Roland's world. As a result of these contradictory events brought about by the existence of parallel worlds, both Jake, in the New York City of our world, and Roland, in the desolate wasteland of Mid-World, are hearing voices in their minds, voices that argue that reality as they are experiencing it is impossible. As Roland tells Eddie, "It is a paradox—something that is and isn't at the same time. Until it's resolved, I will continue divided. That's bad enough, but the basic split is widening. I can feel that happening. It is...unspeakable" (King *Waste Lands* 88). Both Jake and Roland feel themselves being split into two separate, contradictory identities—a split that threatens to undermine their very sanity. Here again, we see the presence of contradiction in King's discussion of identity, but in this novel, the contradictory elements in Roland and Jake's selves are not beneficial; instead, they threaten to drive both characters completely insane.

King again uses the image of doorways to introduce the trope of the fantastic into the novel, drawing on the uncertainty and hesitation of Roland and Jake's mental state to

emphasize the interstitial, unstable nature of such a border space. In particular, Jake is fascinated with all sorts of doors:

He must have opened the one between his bedroom and the upstairs hallway five hundred times in just the last week, and the one between his bedroom and the bathroom a thousand. Each time he did it, he felt a tight ball of hope and anticipation in his chest, as if the answer to all his problems lay somewhere behind this door or that one and he would surely find it...eventually. (King *Waste Lands* 138)

Yet Jake does not find the solution to his problems, and the combination of anticipation and dread that he feels is enough to nearly cause him to break down completely.

Eventually, Jake is drawn to an abandoned house that reminds him of a quote from T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*: "I will show you something different from either/Your shadow in the morning striding behind you/Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;/I will show you [fear in a handful of dust]" (King *Waste Lands* 277). These lines from Eliot's modernist epic are interesting, in that they suggest that the key to resolving Jake's crisis of identity comes not necessarily from seeing his shadow, that is, the Other to his Self, but rather, in the "fear in a handful of dust," found in the interstitial space of the fantastic where uncertainty, hesitation, and even madness exist. In other words, the doorway itself is key to the understanding and negotiation of identity, rather than what exists on the other side of the door.

Eventually, both Roland and Jake find/create doors that connect to each other, allowing them to reconnect and silence the voices in their minds. Yet the creation of the door in Roland's Mid-World comes with a price—Susannah Dean has to have sex with the demon that guards the portal between the worlds, allowing Eddie and Roland enough time to bring Jake through. The language used to describe Susannah as she initiates the

encounter with the demon is provocative: “Susannah reared up on her haunches like a snake coming out of a Hindu fakir’s basket” (King *Waste Lands* 274). Although the language of this passage codes Susannah as racially Other, it also blurs the lines between male and female by describing Susannah in the phallic imagery of the snake.

Furthermore, the words she shouts at the demon—“*Come on, big boy! You come on right now! Run like it’s yo birfday!*” (King *Waste Lands* 274)—position her as the sexual aggressor in the encounter, a positioning reinforced by her later efforts “to hold this sobbing, frightened, vicious thing in the snare of its own helpless lust” (King *Waste Lands* 286). These passages also recall the language of sexual violence and trauma that King uses to describe Roland’s drawing forth of Odetta/Detta into Mid-World, although in this novel, the blurring of the lines between male and female, victim and aggressor, provides Susannah with the means to challenge her position as powerless victim.

Nevertheless, the racially coded language the King uses to describe this encounter remains problematic, particularly in the way that it aligns both sexuality and race with being Other. The passage quote above, in which Susannah is described as moving “like a snake coming out of a Hindu fakir’s basket” (King *Waste Lands* 274) is one such example of aligning Susannah’s sexuality with racial Otherness. Similarly, in a description of how Susannah has the demon trapped in the sexual encounter with her, she is described as having “taken *it*, and now it was as if each of them had a finger stuck in one of those fiendish Chinese tubes, where yanking only sticks you tighter” (King *Waste Lands* 286). Furthermore, Eddie’s role in bringing Jake into Mid-World is also described in terms of the racial Other: he “bent forward from the waist like a Muslim saluting Allah, and put his eye to the keyhole he had drawn” (King *Waste Lands* 298). These



ethnic and cultural markers stand out in a series in which, apart from Susannah, the focus is on primarily white characters, and call into question the reason for using such racially coded imagery in describing a scene of intense sexuality and violence. Such images suggest that although King creates a model of identity that blurs the boundaries between Self and Other, he still remains invested in an understanding of the Other as that which is racially and sexually different.

Interestingly, in this model, the fantastic itself—seen here in the demon that guards the portal between worlds—becomes associated with the racial and sexual Other, something that points back to King’s roots in the Gothic tradition. As Ruth Anolik writes in the introduction to *The Gothic Other*, “Traditionally, the Gothic represents the fearful unknown as the inhuman Other: the supernatural or monstrous manifestation, inhabiting mysterious space, that symbolizes all that is irrational, uncontrollable and incomprehensible” (1). Although Anolik sees this model shifting because of the Enlightenment, causing the Gothic fear to be “relocated onto the figure of the racial and social Other” (2), in King’s works, the reverse is true—the fear of the racial and social Other is once again portrayed in terms of the supernatural, the monstrous, and the demonic presence in the interstitial space. Therefore, King’s use of racial and sexual imagery in connection with Susannah’s negotiation of identity in the space of the fantastic demonstrates that although he challenges a static notion of identity with the blurring of boundaries between the Self and the Other, King’s understanding of what constitutes the Other remains firmly rooted in the Gothic tradition.

This examination of the imagery of doorways in King’s *The Dark Tower* series leads us to a number of conclusions. Perhaps most obviously, it demonstrates that like

the other texts examined in this chapter, these novels use the physical boundaries of doorways as an interstitial space in which the fantastic can enter the text, adding elements of uncertainty, hesitation, and even insanity to the narrative. As a result, these fantastic spaces bear notable similarities to Anzaldúa's discussion of the borderlands, in that they provide a space in which contradictory elements of both narrative and identity exist and engage in dialogue. Additionally, the fact that this small cross-section of King's series can be connected to theoretical concepts such as those of Du Bois' double-consciousness and Anzaldúa's borderlands not only demonstrates how the *Dark Tower* series contains a wealth of material for literary analysis, but also shows the importance of taking King's work seriously, instead of just writing it off as popular fiction. The fact that King's works are so popular perhaps make it that much more important to examine the ways in which he addresses questions of race, gender, and identity, as the influence of his ideas can be incredibly far-reaching. And finally, the way in which King uses the space of the fantastic to address questions of identity, specifically the relationship between the Self and the Other, points to the fantastic as a valuable tool in negotiating this boundary between the Self and the Other

This chapter has covered a very wide variety of texts, touching on works of fiction and memoir, fairy tales and epics, fiction marketed toward adults as well as teenagers, and also, works that are categorized as fantasy, Asian American, and Native American literature. In spite of their differences, however, these texts all contain physical boundaries that function as spaces of meeting, rather than solely as methods of division, thus providing the fantastic with a space in which to enter the narrative. These similarities provide text-based support for the theoretical discussions of Chapter 2, which

argues that the uncertainty, creativity, ability to contain contradictory elements, and permanent in-between location seen in the tropes of both boundaries and the fantastic not only make them closely linked, but also create spaces that are ideal for highlighting and interrogating contradictory portrayals of race. And, as was seen in the way that Insu was viewed as neither American nor Korean, the way that Junior's devotion to his visions is mocked while Chess's is embraced, as well as in the way that King describes the fantastic in his series in terms of the racialized and sexualized Other, in spite of way in which he interrogates the Self/Other division, the texts examined in this chapter all demonstrate how the elements of the fantastic in interstitial spaces serve to illuminate instances in which race is discussed in complicated, messy, and often contradictory ways.

As a result, the use of the tropes of boundaries and the fantastic in the texts covered in this chapter also serves to challenge the very categories they inhabit. The pervasiveness of this connection, seen in the multiple examples of other possible texts provided in the footnotes, as well as the broad scope of the texts in which this connection is found, therefore, brings us to a second, perhaps even more important conclusion—that this chapter itself functions as the fantastic in the same way that the doors in *The Dark Tower* series, the DMZ in *Memories of My Ghost Brother*, and the highways in *Reservations Blues* do, in that it brings together very different ideas, works of literature, and even categories of literature, and highlights how in all of them, racial fantasies continue to hold power, often despite an author's stated or conscious stance on race, thus challenging the very idea of categories within literature. And finally, the wide variety of ways in which the fantastic appears and performs within these works—from appearing as the supernatural to being a part of musical performances—suggests that it is an incredibly

versatile tool for negotiating various elements within literature. In particular, as was seen in the discussion of King's *The Dark Tower*, it can be used to facilitate an understanding between the influences of Self and Other on the formation of identity—a trope that is examined in greater detail in texts such as Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series in the next chapter of this dissertation.

*Not that all of Lemuel's work involved both worlds: some was entirely legal or entirely illegal. It was just that crossing the border was his specialty.*  
—from *Perdido Street Station* by China Miéville

*Today, people like myself, Russians by birth and Americans by education, don't need to choose a single, exclusive identity. Equally at home (and equally homeless) in both cultures, we are global citizens of an increasingly borderless world.*  
—Gary Shteyngart in “*The New Two-Way Street*,” from *Reinventing the Melting Pot: The New Immigrants and What It Means to Be American*

## Chapter 4: Characters on the Borders: Negotiating the Boundary between Self and Other

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A young man stands on the border between two worlds. When we first meet him, he feels comfortable in neither world; he is marked as an outsider in each. He is an orphan and has been raised by a family that treats him, at best, with indifference; at worst, he is subjected to emotional or physical abuse. This young man seeks to find his place in the world, and to help him, an older man serves as his mentor, guiding him on his quest to find out who he really is. As the young man embarks on his quest, he experiences various incarnations of the fantastic—magical dreams and visions, otherworldly people, and objects that are imbued with supernatural power—all of which help him negotiate the conflicting elements of his identity. As the young man continues on his quest, he comes to realize that the quest is more than just about his search to find his own identity, but it is ultimately a quest to destroy the evil in the world. As the story comes to a close, the young man fulfills the prophecies and stories told about him, defeating evil and taking his rightful place as a valued member of the community.

Who is this young man? Interestingly, while the characteristics above can easily be read as a description of Harry Potter, from J.K. Rowling's popular series, they can also just as easily be read as a description of Tayo, the protagonist of Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony*. Certainly, some of these shared elements—being an orphan, the older mentor figure, existing outside of society—are common to many quest narratives, but the importance of the fantastic in helping both Tayo and Harry negotiate the conflicting elements of their identity is something that extends past the basic structure of the quest narrative. Indeed, as can be seen in both the Harry Potter series and *Ceremony*, the border existence of Tayo and Harry is what enables the fantastic to enter the narrative. This shared importance of the fantastic in both *Ceremony* and *Harry Potter* is an intriguing one and supports the overall argument of this dissertation that much can be gained by reading fantasy, Native American and Asian American literature as interconnected, rather than as separate genres or categories. These initial connections between Tayo and Harry also suggest a more specific conclusion—namely, that the fantastic can be used as a tool to negotiate and blur the line between conflicting elements of identity, including the divide between Self and Other.

Many scholars have written about the relationship between the Self and the Other, including many who note the interdependence of such constructions. For example, in her work *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Toni Morrison writes about the way in which American authors use the presence of the “Africanist other” as she calls it, to think about what it means to be American. She writes,

For the settlers and for American writers generally, this Africanist other became the means of thinking about body, mind, chaos, kindness, and love; provided the occasion for exercises in the absence of restraint, the presence of restraint, the contemplation of freedom and of aggression; permitted opportunities for the exploration of ethics and morality, for meeting the obligations of the social contract, for bearing the cross of religion and following out the ramifications of power. (Morrison 47-48)

As this passage suggests, the presence of the Africanist other is not a static one; rather, it takes on a wide variety of meanings, some of which even contradict each other, as the (white) American authors use the presence of this other to work out issues of self and national identity. Morrison goes on to argue, “Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny” (52). This second passage is particularly important, as it describes how white American authors used the presence of the Africanist other as something against which they could define themselves. In other words, according to Morrison, the presence of the Africanist other is a necessary part of defining the American self.

Morrison’s discussion of the presence of the Africanist other in American literature reflects other theoretical discussions of the way in which the Self is defined through the racialized Other, including those of Said, Fanon, and Bhabha. As the examination of Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism in Chapter 2 demonstrated, this concept describes the ways in which the racial fantasies of Europe regarding the Orient became entrenched in institutional practices, which then in turn affirmed the reality of such fantasies. But Said’s Orientalism is about more than the way in which the Orient is the product of the Western imagination—he also discusses the ways in which the

presence of this Oriental Other is necessary for the West to define itself. As Said writes, “Along with all other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Oriental was linked thus to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien” (*Orientalism* 207). Said’s use of the word alien here is key, because in invoking this word, he also draws to mind the opposite of alien, namely, that which is similar, familiar, and comfortable. In this way, Said demonstrates that that the Western conception of the Orient was key in imagining and establishing not only what was different, or alien, but also what was the same.

Frantz Fanon’s examination of black identity in *Black Skin, White Masks* demonstrates a similar idea—that the definition of the racialized Other is not only important for its own sake, but also because it is key in defining “I,” or the Self. Fanon writes,

The Negro is comparison. There is the first truth. He is comparison: that is, he is constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation and with the ego-ideal. Whenever he comes into contact with someone else, the question of value, or merit, arises. The Antilleans have no inherent values of their own, they are always contingent on the presence of The Other. The question is always whether he is less intelligent than I, blacker than I, less respectable than I. Every position of one’s own, every effort at security, is based on the relations of dependence, with the diminution of the other. (211)

This excerpt from Fanon describes the definition of the Self in terms of the Other even more explicitly than Said does, particularly through his use of the words “comparison” and “relations of dependence,” both of which suggest that the existence of the Other is necessary for the existence and definition of the Self. Fanon’s rhythmic repetition of the



word “I” is also interesting in the way that it emphasizes this point—the Self does not simply define what the Other is, but in fact, the image of the Other is turned around and reflected back onto “I,” onto the Self, thus defining it as well.

Bhabha contributes to this discussion of the mutual dependence of the Self and the Other as well, but his commentary on the work of both Said and Fanon in *The Location of Culture* emphasizes the interplay between the Self and the Other, rather than seeing each as an independent entity. When discussing the work of Fanon, Bhabha writes, “The place of the Other must not be imaged, as Fanon sometimes suggests, as a fixed phenomenological point opposed to the self, that represents a culturally alien consciousness. The Other must be seen as the necessary negation of a primordial identity—cultural or psychic—that introduces the *system of differentiation* which enables the cultural to be signified as a linguistic, symbolic, historic reality” (74, italics mine). Instead of seeing the concepts of the Self and the Other as static, separate concepts, Bhabha argues that it is necessary to see the interplay between the two as creating a larger system for negotiating difference. For Bhabha, neither the Self nor the Other is the truly important part of the system; rather, it is the interplay in between the two where meaning is created. As he explains, “the very question of identification only emerges *in-between* disavowal and designation” (Bhabha 72). Therefore, Bhabha not only sees the ideas of Self and Other as being mutually dependent on each other, but he identifies the interplay between them as the most important part of the relationship, the part where meaning and identity is created.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> This ties in with the discussion of Bhabha in Chapter 3, in which I discussed how he saw the stairwells and interstitial spaces in Renée Green’s *Sites of Genealogy*, a work of art occupying an entire building, as the spaces in which meaning was created.

The interdependence of the Self and the Other, and particularly Bhabha's argument that the negotiation between the Self and the Other is where meaning is created, provide the framework for the discussion of fantasy, Asian American, and Native American texts in this chapter. As the two epigraphs to this chapter demonstrate, characters who occupy border spaces are common in both ethnic literatures and fantasy literature. Given the many boundaries that such characters negotiate, including racial boundaries as well as the border between reality and fantasy, this shared element is perhaps no surprise. What is noteworthy, however, is what was highlighted by the opening description of both Tayo and Harry Potter—the way in which border characters in many fantasy, Asian American, and Native American works use the fantastic as the means to negotiate the various boundaries that they embody, something that was seen in the last chapter in the examination of the image of doorways in Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series as well. This chapter provides an in-depth exploration of three characters who are all situated on the border between Self and Other: Olivia Laguni from Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Tayo from Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, and Harry Potter from J.K. Rowling's series of the same name. All three of these characters are faced with the need to negotiate between conflicting elements in their identities. In the case of Tan and Silko's characters, the border negotiated is explicitly a racial divide, although other borders, including that between good and evil, are also represented; in the case of Rowling's novel, the border Harry negotiates is one between good and evil, but the way in which it is portrayed speaks to other borders, including racial ones, that are portrayed throughout the text. What all of these characters have in common is that the border identity that they embody provides a space in the narrative in which the

Todorovian concept of the fantastic—that is, elements that hesitate between the real and the supernatural—can appear. The appearance of these elements, in turn, then provides the characters with the means to negotiate the conflicting elements that make up their identity. Although each of the characters discussed in this chapter is unable to completely break away from the portrayal of the racialized Other, all of them demonstrate the importance and even need for the fantastic in occupying and embodying the interstitial space between the Self and the Other. The emphasis that Tan, Silko, and Rowling all place on this interplay between Self and Other then calls into question, as does Bhabha, the validity of separating these concepts, and, with varying degrees of success, proposes a model of identity that is based on movement and dialogue, rather than on static, unchanging ideas. Furthermore, focusing on the fantastic in these works highlights the way in which to some extent, each of these texts continues to rely on stereotypical and essentialist portrayals of race and authority in spite of the challenge that each also poses to the Self/Other binary. As a result, this chapter demonstrates another way in which the fantastic is able to bring complicated and contradictory questions of race to the center of our understanding of a text

### **I. Ghosts, Sisters, and China in Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses***

Amy Tan's novel *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995) tells the story of Olivia Laguni, a Chinese-American woman, and her relationship with her half-sister, Kwan Li. Told from Olivia's perspective, the novel relates how Kwan came to live with Olivia, her mother, and her brothers, and how Kwan was a constant source of irritation for Olivia with all her questions and talk of seeing ghosts. Throughout the novel, Kwan and

Chinese culture are positioned as the Other to Olivia's Self—a positioning that has led many critics to argue that Tan's novel exhibits Orientalist tendencies, something that some scholars associate with Tan's use of ghosts and the fantastic to portray Chinese culture as well. An examination of the fantastic elements in the novel, however, shows how Tan also uses these elements to call into question both the binary relationship between Self and Other that informs Orientalism, as well as the idea of the Self as a fixed, integrated being. In this way, examining the trope of the fantastic throughout Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses* highlights the contradictory way in which the fantastic is used throughout the narrative—as something that reinforces Orientalist racial fantasies while simultaneously creating a world in which the voice of the Other is privileged and given authority in the continuous creation and transformation of Olivia's Self.

Throughout the novel, Kwan is positioned as the Other to Olivia's Self. As E.D. Huntley writes, Kwan “represents ethnicity” for Olivia, “a diaspora culture, and racial origins that comprise the visible half of Olivia's genetic inheritance and almost nothing of her cultural bias,” making her “indelibly Other” (140). This can be seen very early in the novel, when Olivia's mother tells her that “a big sister was a bigger version of myself, sweet and beautiful, only more Chinese, and able to help me do all kinds of fun things. So I imagined not a sister, but another me, an older self who danced and wore slinky clothes, who had a sad but fascinating life, like a slant-eyed version of Natalie Wood in *West Side Story*, which I saw when I was five” (Tan 8-9). Showing similarities to Said's description of Orientalism, Olivia's initial creation of her sister is imaginary, a projection of her desires, wishes, and dreams into an exotic form. These racial fantasies work to position Kwan as the Other, the point of contrast against which Olivia can define herself.

The tension between Self and Other serves as one of the key themes throughout the novel, as Kwan is always claiming similarities to Olivia, while Olivia seems to be looking for almost any excuse to distance herself from Kwan. Olivia seems irritated by Kwan's desire to be close to her, saying, "In spite of all our obvious differences, Kwan thinks she and I are exactly alike. As she sees it, we're connected by a cosmic Chinese umbilical cord that's given us the same inborn traits, personal motives, fate, and luck" (Tan 23). Later, Olivia senses that she has come across too harshly, and explains her reticence to be closer to Kwan: "I'm not saying I don't love Kwan. How can I not love my own sister? In many respects, she's been more like a mother to me than my real one. But I often feel bad that I don't want to be close to her. What I mean is, we're *close* in a manner of speaking. [ . . . ] It's just that I wouldn't want to be closer to her, not the way some sisters are who consider themselves best friends" (Tan 23-24). Such statements show how Olivia is always conscious of Kwan, using her as something against which she can define her own identity, while at the same time, being very careful not to let her get too close. In this relationship between Olivia and Kwan, we see Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong's description of "the Other's presence" as "both mirror and differentiator" ("Sugar" 177), with Kwan serving as someone with whom Olivia can simultaneously identify with and position herself against.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, we see many of the same tensions in the relationship between Olivia and Simon Bishop, her estranged husband. Although she calls him her "male doppelgänger," (Tan 74), noting how "it was eerie how much we had in common" (Tan 75), they are positioned as antagonists through much of the novel. When they reconcile in the marriage bed in Chiangman village, Olivia describes how "we lose all memory of who we were before this moment, because at this moment we are the same" (Tan 318). As with Kwan, Simon provides Olivia with someone she can simultaneously identify with and position herself against. The development of Simon as the male Other to the female Olivia is not as key of a focus in Tan's novel as the elements of the Self/Other relationship seen between Olivia and Kwan, but the similar tensions seen in both relationships demonstrate how Tan uses similar techniques to establish both Simon and Kwan as Other.

It is in this hesitation to have a closer relationship with Kwan that we also see fear on Olivia's part—the fear that the Other will replace the Self, and specifically, the fear that an aspect of her identity over which she has no control will become dominant. Olivia's fear of Kwan is seen early in the novel; Olivia first learns that Kwan is coming to live with them on the day that her father dies and she has flushed her pet turtles down the toilet, and fears that Kwan is a replacement for her, the disobedient child. In Olivia's mind, all these things are connected—"the headless turtles whirling down the toilet, my father abandoning us, the other girl who was coming soon to take my place. I was scared of Kwan before I ever met her" (Tan 5). This fear of being replaced by the Other is so great that when Olivia learns that she gets to stay with her family, she "did jumping jacks like a gung-ho recruit, in part because I was ecstatic to learn Kwan would be *in addition* to me, not *instead of*" (Tan 7). Again, these statements position Kwan as the Other to Olivia's Self, and show the element of fear that can be a key part of the way the Self imagines the Other.

Part of Olivia's fear of Kwan's ethnic otherness comes from the fact that Olivia herself is unsure of her identity. When she begins divorce proceedings against her husband, Simon Bishop, she plans to change her name, but is not sure what she wants to change it to. She debates using her maiden name—Laguni, the name of her stepfather—or Yee, her father's last name.

As I think more about my name, I realize I've never had any sort of identity that suited me, not since I was five at least, when my mother changed our last name to Laguni. [. . .] Olivia Yee. I say the name aloud several times. It sounds alien, as though I'd become totally Chinese, just like Kwan. That bothers me a little. Being forced to grow up with Kwan was probably one of the reasons I never knew who I was or wanted to become. She was a role model for multiple personalities. (Tan 174)

Here, again, we see the fear of the Other in Olivia's words. Her hesitation to have a last name that is ethnically similar to Kwan's demonstrates her fear of being different, of being marked as obviously racially Other. She also uses Kwan as a scapegoat for her own conflicted identity, placing the blame for her uncertainty on Kwan's otherness.

Several other aspects of *The Hundred Secret Senses* serve to position Kwan as the Other as well, including the language that Tan has Kwan use throughout the novel. As Wong points out in her analysis of Tan's first two novels—*The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*—Tan has her characters speak in a specific way that marks them as Other to the reader. She writes,

The preponderance of short, choppy sentences and the frequent omission of sentence subjects are oft-used conventions whereby the Chinese can be recognized as Other. In addition to these, Tan employs subtle, minute dislocations of English syntax and vocabulary—jolting the language out of whack just enough—to create an impression of translation from the Chinese even where no translation has take place. (S. Wong "Sugar" 188-189)

These same linguistic features can be seen throughout *The Hundred Secret Senses* as well; sentences such as Kwan's advice for how not to become addicted to cigarettes, wine, and coffee is an excellent example—"Don't hook on, don't need stop" (Tan 21). Not only does this saying exemplify the short, choppy sentences that Wong observes mark Kwan's language as Other, but it also gives the impression of being a translation from Chinese, passing on Chinese folk wisdom to American readers. Olivia's description of Kwan's name for her is also worth noticing:

Kwan has never been able to correctly pronounce my name, Olivia. To her, I will always be [sic] Libby-ah, not plain Libby, like the tomato juice, but Libby-ah, like the nation of Muammar Qaddafi. [. . .] The 'ah' part especially annoys me. It's the Chinese equivalent of saying 'hey,' as in

‘Hey, Libby, come here.’ I asked Kwan once how she’d like it if I introduced her to everyone as ‘Hey, Kwan.’ She slapped my arm, went breathless with laughter, then said hoarsely, ‘I like, I like.’ So much for cultural parallels, Libby-ah it is, forever and ever. (Tan 23)

While initially it seems that this passage is just another example of what Wong is arguing, the last few lines, where the cultural inaccuracy of reading the name “Libby-ah” as a translation from Chinese is noted, suggest that perhaps something more complicated is going on in this work than a simple positioning of Kwan as the Other—a complication that I will examine in further detail later in this study.

One additional way in which Kwan is positioned as Other in Tan’s novel is through Tan’s construction of time, and the way in which the time of Kwan’s dreams and stories is positioned as both chronologically and ideologically separate from the way the narrator, Olivia, conceives of time. Identifying Johannes Fabian’s term “temporal distancing” as “a means of constructing the Other widely employed in ethnographic discourse,” Wong notes similarities between the way ethnographers write “field notes in the past tense, subsequent generalizations about the culture in the ‘ethnographic present’ tense” and the stylistic treatment of time in Tan’s novels—both are a way to “achieve ‘Othering’” (S. Wong “Sugar” 185). In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Wong’s observations can be seen in the description of Kwan’s memories/dreams. Tan presents these dreams as separate from Olivia’s narration. The narrative voice shifts to that of Kwan, and the dreams are separated from the rest of the story by page breaks. Furthermore, the dreams are both chronologically and geographically removed from the main narration of the novel, taking place in Changmian village in China in 1864, over a century earlier than Olivia’s present life as an adult. Perhaps most importantly, though,



Tan's depiction of Kwan's dreams shows the ideological difference between Olivia's idea of time as marked by seconds, minutes, and hours, and Kwan's idea of time as fluid, changing, and revisitable. In one of the first dreams that Kwan tells to Olivia, she explains, "Of course, I can't say exactly how long ago this happened. Time is not the same between one lifetime and the next. But I think it was during the year 1864. Whether this was the Chinese lunar year or the date according to the Western calendar, I'm not sure..." (Tan 32). Kwan's hesitation about the date of her memory/dream reinforces the idea that she thinks of time differently, that the past and present commingle, influencing her actions in the future. This strategy of "temporal distancing" is yet another way in which Kwan is portrayed as Other, a point of reference against which both Olivia and the reader can position themselves. Additionally, this narrative technique identifies the fantastic—in this case, the blurred line between memories and dreams—as a trope to analyze for further examples of Tan's reliance on Orientalist fantasies in depicting the relationship between Olivia and Kwan.

The use of the fantastic to mark certain aspects of the novel as Other is something that many scholars of Tan's work have identified. Certainly, Frank Chin's criticism of Tan's use of Chinese myth is the most well-known of these critiques, but other scholars see Tan's works as Orientalist as well. As I mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, Yifen Beus is one such critic who sees the use of ghosts, the supernatural, and the fantastic by authors such as Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston as a way to make these works feel more exotic or foreign. He argues,

Fantastic folklore and legends are often used by Chinese writers or filmmakers [. . .] as tropes or motifs to carve out a space where cultural specificities are displayed, and whereby cultural identity is defined. While

these cultural specificities can be used as distinct markers of identity, they can also be used or even exploited by Western popular media to exoticize the Orient in the name of cultural authenticity. (Beus 428)

Beus then goes on to call this use of the fantastic in works by Tan and Kingston a kind of “cultural essentialism” (428), a charge that calls into question both the cultural authenticity of such works as well as their value to an understanding of Chinese American literature. Ruth Maxey is another critic who sees the work of Tan and Kingston as “self-orientalizing,” arguing that this “inclination serves to re-inscribe negative Chinese stereotypes when all the time their work seems to be attempting the opposite. America – the country they really know – is presented as banal and safe, whereas China, the land they do not know, is a place of excitement, danger and tragedy” (2). And Wong argues that it is the Orientalist impulse in Tan’s novels that make them so successful. She writes that Tan appeals to certain ideas that American readers have about China and Chinese stories—that they are “mythic” and “lyrical”—and that by appealing to this “certain image of what China must be like,” (Wong “Sugar” 189), Tan creates novels that resonate with her readers, and therefore, become extremely popular. She notes, “Paradoxical as it may seem, an author with more direct historical knowledge about China than Amy Tan may well be *less* successful in convincing the American reading public of the ‘truthfulness’ of her picture, since, in such a case, the element of cultural mediation would be correspondingly weaker” (Wong “Sugar” 190). Such statements reinforce the idea that Tan’s use of the fantastic throughout the novel serves to mark her novel as Other in a way that is similar to Orientalist racial fantasies.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See also Lina Unali’s examination of Tan’s representation of China as “a strangely *hyperexoticized* country, distant from civilization,” something that she sees as being “‘oriental’ in the old, British Empire manner that Edward Said has highly criticized” (119); as well as Sheng-Mei Ma’s argument that “Tan’s

The way in which the fantastic is used to mark Tan's novel as Other becomes particularly obvious when compared to the way in which Tan describes non-Chinese culture throughout the novel. While the fantastic is associated with Kwan and Chinese culture, non-Chinese culture is portrayed as completely devoid of any racial significance. Early in the novel, Olivia describes her family in a way that not only emphasizes the racial otherness of Kwan, but also marks her and the rest of her "American" family as distinctly *deracialized*. The fantastic elements of Kwan's Chinese heritage serve as a visible marker of her otherness, particularly when compared to the description of Olivia and her family that seems to work hard to eliminate any racial markers at all:

We were a modern American family. We spoke English. Sure, we ate Chinese food, but take-out, like everyone else. And we lived in a ranch-style house in Daly City. My father worked for the Government Accounting Office. My mother went to PTA meetings. She had never heard my father talk about Chinese superstitions before; they attended church and bought life insurance. (Tan 7)

The phrase "Sure, we ate Chinese food, but take-out, like everyone else," is particularly telling, in that it shows the lengths that Olivia is going to remove any racial marker from her and her family. The juxtaposition of this description against Kwan's stories of ghosts reinforce how the fantastic is connected to the exoticized Other, while the quotidian existence of Olivia and her family is tied to the image of the deracialized American.

A closer examination of the relationship between Olivia and Kwan, however, shows that the fantastic does more than just reinforce Orientalist fantasies through the novel; it also provides a means to challenge the Self/Other binary that informs Orientalism. Although the fantastic certainly is used to mark Kwan as Other, it is the

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vision of multicultural America comes with trappings of Orientalism, upgraded by New Age chic, presented by hip San Francisco yuppies" (159).

relationship between Olivia and Kwan that provides the space for the fantastic to appear. When Kwan tells Olivia, early in the novel, “I have yin eyes. I can see yin people”—that is, ghosts, people who have already died—she follows this revelation with the following admonition: “But first you must promise never to tell anyone. Never. Promise, ah?” (Tan 15). It is only in the space between her and Olivia that Kwan feels safe to reveal her secret, the secret that she can see ghosts. This sense of interstitiality surrounding Olivia and Kwan’s relationship is strengthened by Kwan’s description of the hundred secret senses. She tells Olivia that these senses are like instinct, the ability to discern when someone you love is in danger. The focus of the secret senses on the connections between people is what Kwan identifies as the key aspect of these senses. She tells Olivia, “Yes, secret sense always between two people. How you can have secret just you know, ah? You hair raise up, you know someone secret” (Tan 238). The appearance of the fantastic in the form of Kwan’s yin people and Kwan’s description of the secret senses highlight the interstitial space that exists between Olivia and Kwan, suggesting a relationship that is more fluid and complicated than a simple Self/Other binary. Additionally, Tan’s use of the fantastic as a method to blur the boundary between Self and Other challenges Beus’ claim that the fantastic is simply a shortcut to exoticize China and Chinese culture—it is also a tool of subversion, a method of calling into question stereotypes about Chinese people and culture.

These complications Tan presents to the Self/Other binary can be seen in Olivia’s reaction to Kwan’s yin people; although she claims to reject them and shrugs off the stories that Kwan tells her, her actual reaction to these elements of the fantastic is much more ambivalent and conflicted. When Olivia is a child, Kwan is sent to a psychiatric

hospital to receive shock treatment to cure her of seeing ghosts, and when she returns home, Olivia tells her to “pretend she didn’t see ghosts, otherwise the doctors wouldn’t let her out of the hospital” (Tan 55). Olivia then becomes complicit in Kwan’s seeing ghosts:

What she came home, I then had to pretend the ghosts *were* there, as part of our secret of pretending they weren’t. I tried so hard to hold these two contradictory views that soon I started to see what I wasn’t supposed to. How could I not? Most kids, *without* sisters like Kwan, imagine that ghosts are lurking beneath their beds, ready to grab their feet. Kwan’s ghosts, on the other hand, sat *on* the bed, propped against her headboard. I saw them. (Tan 55)

The language of this excerpt, particularly Olivia’s claim that she is holding two contradictory views in her head, evokes the language of Anzaldúa’s borderlands and suggests that the relationship between Olivia and Kwan can not be described as a simple Self/Other binary. Rather, it shows how the negotiation between these two elements exists *within* Olivia herself, making her a physical representation of the blurring of the boundary between Self and Other.

The struggles that Olivia has with Kwan’s yin people, that is, the hesitation that is a key element of the fantastic, are central to the blurring of boundaries between imagination and reality, and as a result, other binary constructions such as Self and Other. As E.D. Huntley observes, Tan uses dreams in *The Hundred Secret Senses* to “blur the lines between fantasy and reality, even suggesting that dreams represent memories of other lives in other places” (34). Huntley’s words are an excellent representation of the hesitation that Kwan’s stories produce, since it is clear from his analysis that even he is not sure what to make of them. He calls them “dreams,” but his suggestion that they “represent memories” adds an element of uncertainty into his position. As a result, it is

clear that Huntley, like the reader, has a moment of hesitation when it comes to Kwan's yin people, not being sure whether they belong to the world of the imagination or the world of the supernatural. This hesitation is further reinforced by Olivia's descriptions of her own dreams. When Kwan would ask her what she dreamed, "With my half-awake mind, I'd grab on to the wisps of a fading world and pull myself back in. [. . .] Prodded, I would trace my way back to the previous dream, then the one before that, a dozen lives, and sometimes their deaths. [. . .] For most of my childhood, I thought everyone remembered dreams as other lives, other selves" (Tan 31). Perhaps even more importantly, Olivia recognizes the connection between her dreams and the stories Kwan tells, asking, "So which part was her dream, which part was mine? Where did they intersect?" (Tan 32). The hesitation regarding the nature of Kwan's stories about yin people, seen both in Huntley's comments as well as Olivia's understanding of her own dreams, blurs the line between fantasy and reality, calling into question the static nature of such a binary relationship.

Tan also employs other methods to get her readers to question binary relationships throughout the novel, including several techniques that introduce the possibility of multiple versions of the same story. As Veronica Hendrick points out, many of the things that Olivia tells the reader, such as her apparently loving stepfather's callous treatment of Kwan, call into question her veracity as a narrator (350). Such doubts are further reinforced when Olivia herself tells the reader about her confusion about what was truth and what was imagination. When telling the story of the ghost who stole her Barbie's feather boa, she concludes, "Now I can think of more logical explanations. Maybe Captain [the dog] took it and buried it in the backyard. Or my mom sucked it up into the

vacuum cleaner. It was probably something like that. But when I was a kid, I didn't have strong enough boundaries between imagination and reality. Kwan saw what she believed. I saw what I *didn't* want to believe" (Tan 57). Although Olivia presents several possibilities for what happened to the boa, she does not sound sure of her conclusions, leaving the reader similarly uncertain about what exactly happened. As Hendrick notes, "The fact that the narrator is unreliable throughout the novel provides the reader with the ambiguity necessary to play with various aspects of the novel's supernatural qualities. It allows the stories' magical events to be accepted as possibilities, but does not present them as facts" (352). The ambiguity of what exactly Olivia thinks of Kwan's yin eyes shifts back and forth over the course of the novel, causing readers to "constantly realign their assessment of Kwan and her stories, creating an uncomfortable resonance" (Hendrick 355). Huntley sees this same element in Tan's work, observing how Tan will tell multiple versions of the same story—including that of Olivia's father's decision to come to the United States, as well as that of Miss Banner's life. He argues, "Tan also employs multiple versions of a story to create uncertainty and to describe a world in which no definite answers are possible" (Huntley 120). These narrative elements are another way in which Tan challenges binary relationships in her novel, specifically the divide between truth and fiction. Olivia herself calls attention to these multiple, contradictory stories when wondering about the ages of Du Lili and Kwan. She thinks, "Who and what am I supposed to believe? All the possibilities whirl through my brain, and I feel I am in one of those dreams where the treads of logic between sentences keep disintegrating. Maybe Du Lili is younger than Kwan. Maybe she's seventy-eight. Maybe Big Ma's ghost is here. Maybe she isn't. All these things

are true and false, yin and yang. What does it matter?” (Tan 276). By calling into question the relationships between reality and imagination, truth and fiction, Tan creates a world in which the boundaries between such binary divisions are called into question, further calling into question the binary division between Self and Other.

The fantastic is also key to undermining the traditional Self/Other relationship that contributes to Orientalist thinking because it provides Kwan with a voice to tell not only her own story, but Olivia’s story as well. The stories that Kwan tells throughout the novel of Miss Moo and Miss Banner are, as both Olivia and the reader come to learn, the story of Kwan and Olivia’s friendship in a former life. At the end of the novel, Olivia realizes that as Kwan has been telling her these stories, what Kwan most wanted was for Olivia to say, “Yes, Kwan, of course I remember. I was Miss Banner...” (Tan 358). In this way, the stories that have seemed tangential to the main narrative of Olivia, Kwan, and Simon in fact become extremely important—they are the telling of the story from Kwan’s point of view. Benzi Zhang notices the way in which Kwan and Olivia tell each other’s stories, arguing, “the two main characters ‘create’ each other in their own narratives, interpreting each other’s lives in relation to their previous existences” (“Reading” 13). In other words, Kwan is the narrator of Olivia’s story as much as Olivia is the narrator of Kwan’s, showing that although Tan seems to set Kwan up as the orientalized Other, the authority given to Kwan’s stories challenges the authoritative voice of the Self and blurs the boundary between Self and Other. This is something that Cynthia Wong notes as well; she argues that “China—or the China fictions produced by Kwan—serves as the pervasive presence shaping Olivia’s evolving consciousness,” thus challenging the notion that Tan’s novel “is in line with an Orientalist rejection of the



exotic East” (72). Kwan’s name for Olivia—Libby-ah—which we examined earlier, is another way in which Kwan’s voice is given narrative authority. Since this nickname does not even fit with what the Chinese translation of Olivia’s name would be, it is Kwan’s voice, not the voice of Chinese culture, that gives Olivia this name. By having Olivia call into question Kwan’s choice of her name, Tan attempts to establish Kwan’s narrative authority in the novel as an individual, rather than as merely a stand-in for the entire Chinese culture.

The importance of Kwan’s stories in the creation of Olivia’s narrative becomes extremely clear near the end of the novel, when Olivia comes to recognize the validity of Kwan’s version of her life. While many critics point to the moment where Olivia finds Miss Moo’s pickled eggs as the moment when Olivia realizes the truth of Kwan’s stories, the real turning point comes several chapters earlier. At one point in the novel, Olivia says that she cannot deal with Kwan’s stories because she is “not Chinese like Kwan. To me, yin isn’t yang, and yang isn’t yin. I can’t accept two contradictory stories as the whole truth” (Tan 277). This inability to accept the truth of Kwan’s stories changes when Olivia and Kwan are sitting near the cave in which they think Simon has disappeared and Olivia asks about Miss Banner. Kwan says that maybe she does not really want to know, but Olivia replies, “Then I want to remember” (Tan 362). And then Olivia listens to the story of Miss Moo and Miss Banner, “no longer afraid of Kwan’s secrets. She’s offered me her hand. I’m taking it freely. Together we’re flying to the World of Yin” (Tan 363). The use of the present continuous tense in the phrases “I’m taking it freely” and “Together we’re flying” is a shift from the simple present that Tan has used in Olivia’s narration up until that point; this verb tense indicates that Olivia and Kwan’s narratives

exist together in a continuous, interstitial space in which both can be recognized as truth. This scene demonstrates that even before Olivia finds the pickled eggs that offer physical proof of the truth of Kwan's stories, Olivia comes to realize the shared authority that Kwan has in narrating her life.

This ending of *The Hundred Secrets Senses*, however, brings us back to the way in which Tan uses the fantastic to mark Kwan as Other, except now she is using the fantastic to mark the successful completion of Olivia's quest for her self—a self that she finds in being Chinese. Huntley argues that the trip to China gives Olivia what she has been looking for: “an integrated self” (141). Ma, too, argues that in China, Olivia and also Simon discover their true selves. Ma writes, “In exotic China, presumably their place of origin, Olivia and, to a lesser degree, Simon abandon control and become the Chinese other which is, in Tan's logic, the ‘essence’ of the self” (164). Such readings are troubling, in that they present the ending of the novel, including Olivia's recognition of the truth of Kwan's stories, as equally problematic to the beginning of the novel, in which Kwan is portrayed unequivocally as Other. According to Huntley and Ma, being Chinese in Tan's novel becomes the element necessary to having a “true” self, in a way that makes the very fact of being Chinese a form of ethnic essentialization. These readings then point to the way in which Tan is using the trope of the fantastic in two distinct ways, both to challenge the Self/Other binary as seen in Kwan's as a co-narration of Olivia's life, as well as to depict China and Chinese characters through an Orientalist lens.

In many ways, the internal contradictions inherent to Tan's use of the fantastic throughout *The Hundred Secret Senses* are reflected in the descriptions of Olivia's daughter Samantha and Olivia's relationship with Simon final chapter of the novel. If we

look at Olivia's language in this final chapter, although it at times seem overly sentimental and trite, certain words point to her continued uncertainty in how she views the world. She thinks of layering "memories of what was with what might have been," and believes that "truth lies not in logic but in hope, both past and future." She then goes on to describe how hope can survive "all sorts of contradictions" (Tan 398). While these words do point to Olivia's belief in hope, they also show that this hope exists in an interstitial space in which the contradictory elements of past and future, memory and imagination, reality and fantasy all coexist. The birth of Olivia's daughter, Samantha Li, also speaks to the continued existence of hesitation in Olivia's understanding of her identity. Olivia asks, "How else can I explain why I have a fourteen-month-old baby girl?" Although she says, "Sure, there was a reasonable explanation," she also believes "what [she] wants to believe"—that she has "a gift from Kwan, a baby girl with dimples in her fat cheeks" (Tan 398). Like her description of how she views the world, Olivia's description of how she was able to conceive a daughter hesitates between a rational explanation and a belief in the supernatural. Even the relationships at the end of the novel are unresolved. Although Simon and Olivia are both dedicated to parenting Samantha, they are "still working things out, deciding what's important, what matters, how to be together for more than eight hours at a stretch without disagreeing about which radio station we should put on" (Tan 399). The interstitial state of Simon and Olivia's relationship reflects the overall situation at end of the novel, in which the reader is faced with contradictory ideas of how to think about race. The way in which Olivia describes both Simon and Samantha in many ways reflects the ways in which the novel portrays race as well. Although the reader might want to believe that Tan has moved past

Orientalist tendencies, the novel actually reflects “all sorts of contradictions,” and emphasizes the need to keep “working things out, deciding what’s important, what matters” when it comes to race. Although Tan is not explicitly talking about race in these passages of the novel, the unsettled, ambiguous language of the chapter serves as a metonym for the portrayal of race throughout the novel—a portrayal that both rejects and embraces Orientalist fantasies.

Therefore, although an initial reading of Amy Tan’s *The Hundred Secret Senses* seems to portray Kwan and China in Orientalist terms, recreating the binary between the Self and the racialized Other, Tan is also using her novel, and particularly the elements of the fantastic, to challenge these stereotypical, essentialist ideas of race and ethnicity and portray identity formation as a continual process. By focusing on the elements of the fantastic throughout the novel, we see that Tan uses them in two distinct ways: both to imbue China and Chinese culture with the feeling of exoticness, thus depicting it in terms of Orientalist racial fantasies, as well as a to introduce hesitation into the Self/Other binary. This technique connects Tan to the other authors examined in this study, including Guy Gavriel Kay and Sherman Alexie, who employ similar techniques, rejecting racial fantasies on the one hand while simultaneously employing them to make their narratives function. In the case of Tan and *The Hundred Secret Senses*, however, the fantastic does more than just highlight certain passages in which such contradictions are apparent. Instead, the fantastic is a key part of what makes these contradictions happen, in that it serves both to mark Kwan as Other as well as destabilize the Self/Other binary that exists between Kwan and Olivia. Tan’s incorporation of the fantastic in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, therefore, both validates and challenges Yifen Beus’s description

of the fantastic being used to exoticize the Orient. While Tan does rely on racial fantasies of the exoticized Orient in her depiction of Kwan and China, she also uses the fantastic to create characters with complicated identities, thus causing her readers to question the idea of a static, singular Self and consider the myriad possibilities for identity formation presented in the interstitial spaces between cultures. Through this process, we again see the value of the fantastic not only as a tool to highlight places where conflicted portrayals of race exist, but also as a trope that is itself used in the creation of some of these contradictions.

## **II. Interstitial identity and the *bildungsroman* form in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony***

Leslie Marmon Silko's landmark novel *Ceremony* (1977) tells the story of Tayo, a young Laguna Pueblo who experiences trauma during World War II, and how he embarks on a quest to find a ceremony that will provide him with healing. Like Olivia Laguni in Tan's novel, Tayo is situated between two cultures as well, although for him, this interstitial existence is much more traumatic. Tayo is positioned between white and Native American societies, both because of his mixed-blood heritage, as well as the fact that he is a Native American who fought in a white man's war—World War II. Although Tayo is not able to negotiate his interstitial identity on his own, the elements of the fantastic in the novel—introduced through the ceremony started by Betonie, the medicine man—enable him to negotiate these conflicting elements and find healing. This use of the fantastic in this novel, however, is particularly interesting in that it focuses the reader's attention on the development of Tayo's identity as a kind of *bildungsroman*, a

focus that runs contrary to the themes of circularity and community that many critics and even Silko herself see as central to an understanding of Native American literature. The fantastic, then, highlights the contradictions inherent in Silko's novel, as she both utilizes and rejects these essentialized characteristics of Native American literature, thus marking her novel as part of a larger Native American literary tradition while still making the trajectory of the novel familiar to her mostly white audience. Additionally, by drawing attention to the way in which *Ceremony* fits the structure of the *bildungsroman*, the trope of the fantastic also challenges the very idea of a unified Native American literary tradition that is defined by the racial fantasies of community and circularity.

Early in the novel, it is made clear that Tayo's identity is situated on the boundary between Self and Other. He is of mixed blood; while his mother was Laguna Pueblo, his father was a white man. His Aunt gives this mixed heritage as the reason why calling Ku'oosh, the tribe's medicine man, is not an option for Tayo: "You know what people will say if we ask for a medicine man to help him. Someone will say it's not right. They'll say, 'Don't do it. He's not full blood anyway'" (Silko 33). The debate over the best treatment for Tayo's depression and post-war trauma highlights his interstitial status perfectly. Auntie says, "You know what the Army doctor said: 'No Indian medicine.' Old Ku'oosh will bring his bag of weeds and dust. The doctor won't like it" (Silko 34). This back-and-forth debate about whether white or Native American medicine is the best treatment for Tayo serves as a metaphorical representation of Tayo's identity. Later, Tayo describes the time that he spent in the veterans' hospital to Betonie, the new medicine man. He says, "They sent me to this place after the war. It was white. Everything in that place was white. Except for me. I was invisible. But I wasn't afraid

there. I didn't feel things sneaking up behind me. I didn't cry for Rocky or Josiah. There were no voices and no dreams. Maybe I belong back in that place" (Silko 123). The tension that Tayo feels over deciding where to seek medical treatment mirrors the tension that he feels as someone inhabiting an interstitial space between white and Native American cultures.

In fact, many of the events of the first half of the novel serve to reinforce the tension that Tayo inhabits between white identity and Native American identity. The cows that Josiah buys, for example, are a special breed, ideal for living in "drought or winter blizzards or dry thistles" (Silko 75). The books that Josiah reads on cattle raising, however, do not address these conditions, and as a result, are useless to him. The uselessness of the white people's method of raising cattle on the Native American land filled with hostile conditions demonstrates, like the debate over the best treatment for Tayo's illness, the tension Tayo feels between these racial and cultural influences on his identity. Another excellent example of this tension between white and Native American identity is the description of a scene from Tayo's childhood in which he kills flies in his kitchen at home because his white teacher told him "they are bad and carry disease" (Silko 101). Josiah is disappointed in Tayo, and tells him the story of how the greenbottle fly was the one who interceded on behalf of all living things with the mother of the people, asking her to grant them forgiveness. As Josiah says, "Since that time the people have been grateful for what they fly did for us" (Silko 101). These conflicting accounts of the nature of flies is problematic for Tayo, and when he is in the jungle during the war, he "had not been able to endure the flies that had crawled over Rocky; they had enraged him. He had cursed their sticky feet and wet mouths, and when he

could reach them he had smashed them between his hands” (Silko 102). This last scene in particular shows the helplessness that Tayo feels at his inability to reconcile the white and Native American influences on his life, and he is left feeling angry and alone.

Scenes such as that where Tayo kills the flies in the jungle demonstrate that although Tayo may acknowledge that he inhabits this border identity, he also feels trapped by it, not knowing who or even where he is. Tayo does claim an interstitial position for himself, yelling at his war-buddies Harley and Emo, “I’m half-breed. I’ll be the first to say it. I’ll speak for both sides” (Silko 42). In spite of his recognition of his position in between cultures, this position is not one of his own choosing and in fact, is stressful for him to inhabit. Throughout the novel, Silko describes images of webs, knots, and threads all twined together—images that represent the multiple influences on Tayo and his identity. But in the first half of the novel, these multiple influences contribute to Tayo’s sickness: “He could feel it inside his skull—the tension of little threads being pulled and how it was with tangled things, things tied together, and as he tried to pull them apart and rewind them into their places, they snagged and tangled even more” (Silko 7). The language in this passage is telling, for it shows that Tayo attempts to negotiate the multiple influences on his identity on his own, but he is not able to; in fact, when he attempts to sort them out, he just ends up making the situation more confusing and tangled. Therefore, although Tayo recognizes that he inhabits the interstitial position between white and Native American, between Self and Other, this is not a position that he is able to successfully and comfortably inhabit on his own.

Many critics notice the appearance of characters of mixed-blood heritage in Native American literature in general, as well as in Silko’s fiction specifically. Paula



Gunn Allen, for example, argues that “alienation” is “the dominant theme of literature of and about American Indians,” perhaps because “the writers are one way or another predominantly breeds [mixed-blood, or half-breeds] themselves” (129). This sense of alienation is reflected in the characters of such works as well; “breeds are a bit of both worlds, and the consciousness of this makes them seem alien to traditional Indians while making them feel alien among whites” (Allen 129). As Allen’s discussion of alienation suggests, critics recognize the difficulty inherent in inhabiting the border identity as well as the pervasiveness of this theme. Allen argues that this existence produces a “tragic vision because there is no way to be acceptably Indian (with all the pain that implies) and acceptable to whites at the same time” (136). Rachel Stein notices the appearance and function of the mixed-blood character in Silko’s fiction specifically, arguing,

In Silko’s fiction it is often people at the margins of tribal/dominant culture—people of mixed descent, or of mixed acculturation, those who bear the conflict between cultures in their own persons and who must inevitably negotiate the entanglement of competing cultures—who are driven to create new stories that reframe the relations of native culture and dominant white culture by reaffirming the reciprocal relation of humans to nature. (194)

Stein’s analysis is extremely helpful in articulating what the examples provided above have attempted to show—that Tayo inhabits a border identity, where he must negotiate between the conflicting influences of white and Native American culture. But, as the examples above have also shown, Tayo is unable to conduct this negotiation on his own; his own attempts to reconcile the competing white and Native American cultures leave him with a tangled mess. Louis Owens’ observation that “[a]t the core of *Ceremony* is the author’s attempt to find a particular strength within what has almost universally been treated as the ‘tragic’ fact of mixedblood existence” (167) is also important to note here,

because of the way that he identifies the potential strength to be found in this interstitial existence, a point that will be addressed later in this chapter.

It is only through the appearance of the fantastic in the novel, then, that Tayo is able to comfortably negotiate the boundary between Self and Other that his identity inhabits, and in many ways, the boundary identity is what provides the fantastic with the space in which it has power.<sup>40</sup> When Tayo visits Betonie, the medicine man who teaches him the new ceremony, the narrative of Betonie and Tayo's actions is interrupted by one of the lyrical, mythic interludes that intersperse Silko's text. It speaks of traveling to dangerous places "where whirling darkness started its journey/ along the edges of the rocks/ along the places of the gentle wind/ along the edges of the blue clouds/ along the edges of the clear water" (Silko 142). This passage is key for a number of reasons. First, the language describing the "whirling darkness" is evocative, again, of Todorov's description of the fantastic, particularly the feelings of uncertainty and hesitation that he argues are the key aspects of the fantastic. Furthermore, this appearance of the fantastic occurs along the edges of the rocks, the clouds, and the water—in other words, border spaces. Just like the edges of these natural elements provide the space in which the uncertain power of the whirling darkness can appear, Tayo's border identity between

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<sup>40</sup> James Ruppert, in his essay "No Boundaries, Only Transitions: *Ceremony*," makes a similar argument about the way in which Silko's novel dissolves boundaries and emphasizes mediation and transitions. Ruppert does not address that the fantastic plays in creating this permanent state of transition, but his article is nonetheless very helpful in exploring the many boundaries that are dissolved through the writing and reading of *Ceremony*. Particularly interesting is his argument that Silko attempts to dissolve the boundary between Native and non-Native *reader*, in addition to the boundaries that she dissolves within the frame of the novel. He writes, "Throughout the novel, Silko's goals are truly mediational as she seeks to translate the languages of the Other, but for both Native and non-Native fields of discourse, she must answer what has been asked before, acknowledge previous discourse, and advance cultural conversations. Yet she must also open up a field of access where Native implied reader can mediate their experiences just as the non-Native implied reader must" (Ruppert "Boundaries" 176). Ruppert's observation points to how Silko's blurring of boundaries can have an impact not only in the realm of the novel, as it pertains to Tayo's identity, but also in the real world as well.

white and Laguna Pueblo provides a space in which the fantastic elements of Betonie's ceremony can have power.

Although the fantastic does not appear in *Ceremony* in the form of overtly supernatural elements, the sense of uncertainty and other-worldliness surrounding some of the characters and events establishes the fantastic as a key element in the novel, and in particular, the element that provides Tayo with the means to complete his ceremony and learn to negotiate his own identity. After the initial part of Betonie's ceremony, Tayo falls asleep, dreaming of the speckled cattle. When he wakes up, he knows that finding the cattle is the next part of the ceremony, and when he looks at the landscape around him, what he sees blends together with what he remembers from the previous night's ceremony. As he looks out over the valley, Tayo

remembered the black of the sand paintings on the floor of the Hogan; the hills and mountains were the mountains and hills they had painted in the sand. He took a deep breath of cold mountain air: there were no boundaries; the world below and the sand paintings inside became the same that night. The mountains from all the directions had been gathered there that night. (Silko 145)

Even though this passage does not contain overtly supernatural elements, the subtle blurring between reality and dream creates the feeling of hesitation and uncertainty that indicates the fantastic. Perhaps even more importantly, this passage describes the power held by this interstitial space between reality and fantasy—everything is “gathered together,” providing Tayo with the ability to negotiate various elements of his identity that he previously was unable to do.

The power that the fantastic gives Tayo to negotiate the conflicting and contradictory elements of his identity can be seen quite clearly when he goes to a bar with Harley, Leroy, and Helen Jean. Before beginning the ceremony with Betonie, going to

bars brings back memories for Tayo of when they were in the Army; he realizes that he and his friends are trying to bring back “that old feeling, that feeling they belonged to America the way they felt during the war” (Silko 43). The realization that they have lost this feeling forever causes Tayo to explode with rage, and then later, to break down crying. But after beginning the ceremony, and having the power of the fantastic introduced into his life, Tayo is able to use these fantastic elements to negotiate the feelings of loss and resentment caused by his friends’ drinking ritual. As Tayo is sitting in the bar with his friends, listening to them singing songs,

he remembered old Betonie’s singing; something in his belly stirred faintly; but it was too far away now. He crawled deeper into the black gauzy web where he could rest in the silence, where his coming and going through this world was no more than a star falling across the night sky. He left behind the pain and buzzing in his head; they were shut out by the wide dark distance. (Silko 167)

The last line of this passage is particularly key, in that here again, we see the imagery of darkness to evoke the idea of the fantastic. Additionally, this “wide dark distance” is what allows Tayo to block out the pain and buzzing that usually accompany his friends’ drinking, and instead, enables him to remain comfortable with the image of himself that he has created. Furthermore, Tayo is described as crawling deeper into a “black gauzy web,” an entangled image that, earlier in the novel, would have caused Tayo stress. After beginning the ceremony, however, and being provided with the tools of the fantastic, Tayo is able to negotiate these webs of identity on his own, and is even able to take comfort in them, using them as a place where he can “rest in the silence.” Both drinking with his friends and thinking of weblike images are things that were painful and detrimental to Tayo’s healing in the past, but in this passage, because of the insertion of

the fantastic into the narrative, Tayo is able to negotiate the conflicting elements of his identity and arrive in a place where he is able to rest peacefully.

Ts'eh, the woman who helps Tayo find the cattle and becomes his lover, is another key appearance of the fantastic in the novel, not only in the way that she appears at important times in the novel, but also in the way that she embodies uncertainty and Pueblo mythology. Tayo's first encounter with Ts'eh is not only where he finally finds Old Betonie's stars (Silko 178), but also where he sees the designs of long-searched-for rain woven into her blanket: "patterns of storm clouds in white and gray; black lightning scattered through brown wind" (Silko 177). Her appearance at this key juncture in the novel ties her to the fantastic, as does the uncertainty that surrounds her. Not only is she not given a name for a long time, but the way in which she disappears and then reappears, often without warning, makes her seem more like a ghost or a dream than an actual human being. For example, after she shows Tayo how she is holding his cattle for him in the corral, when "he turned to wave at her, she was gone" (Silko 213). This uncertainty also appears later when she and Tayo camp together by the spring. When Tayo sleeps next to Ts'eh during the day, he "dreamed he made love with her there. He felt the warm sand on his toes and knees; he felt her body, and it was as warm as the sand, and he couldn't feel where her body ended and the sand began. He woke up and she was gone; his fists were full of sand and he was sweating" (Silko 222). This scene blurs the boundaries between fantasy and reality, establishing Ts'eh as a character that, like Tayo, embodies a boundary and, because of the uncertainty created by the blurring of this boundary, aligns her with the elements of the fantastic in Tayo's ceremony. By occupying this interstitial space, Ts'eh reminds Tayo "of his own unique place in this

history. He can be the bridge between the new world and the old,” and this reminder “revitalizes” him in his search for his identity (Rand 27). When she finally is identified, this “mysterious woman named Ts’eh” is “identified as Spider Woman, a supernatural figure in Pueblo legend” (Benediktsson 122). The identification of Ts’eh with the Spider Woman figure from Pueblo mythology not only reinforces her connection to the fantastic, but the imagery of the spider also speaks to Tayo’s improved ability to negotiate multiple threads that influence his identity.

Another important feature of Tayo’s relationship with Ts’eh is that his sexual encounters with her affirm his identity, rather than destroy it. Tayo’s first sexual experience that is described in the novel is with Night Swan, who is also his uncle Josiah’s lover. When Tayo sleeps with Night Swan, it demonstrates the uncertainty that he feels about his own identity: “he was lost somewhere, deep beneath the surface of his own body and consciousness, swimming away from all his life before that hour” (Silko 99). After sleeping with Night Swan, Tayo also could not look her in the eye, which further suggests that Tayo is insecure and that this sexual encounter heightened his insecurity. Tayo’s sexual relationship with Ts’eh, however, is one that enables him to establish his own identity, because of the way in which Ts’eh embodies the fantastic throughout the novel. When Tayo first slept with Ts’eh, he “was afraid of being lost, so he repeated trail marks to himself: this is my mouth tasting the salt of her brown breasts; this is my voice calling out to her. [ . . . ] But he did not get lost, and he smiled at her as she held his hips and pulled him closer” (Silko 180-181). The direct contrast between the description of this sexual experience and that with Night Swan makes it very clear how

sex with Ts'eh, who represents and embodies the fantastic, provides Tayo with the means to negotiate and create his own identity in a way that other sexual encounters do not.

The result of the inclusion of the fantastic as part of Tayo's healing ceremony is that he is able to negotiate the difference influences on his identity, leading to him being able to comfortably inhabit, and even embrace, his interstitial existence between Self and Other.<sup>41</sup> As Tayo nears the end of his ceremony, leaving his idyllic existence with Ts'eh to deal with Emo and the others who think him crazy, several passages describe how he is now able to recognize multiple influences on his identity. As he waits near the road for a car to drive by, he looks at the Enchanted Mesa:

All things seemed to converge there: roads and wagon trails, canyons with springs, cliff paintings and shrines, the memory of Josiah with his cattle [. . .] Yet at that moment in the sunrise, it was all so beautiful, everything, from all directions, evenly, perfectly, balancing day with night, summer months with winter. The valley was enclosing this totality, like the mind holding all thoughts together in a single moment. (Silko 237)

Unlike the passage described earlier, in which the multiple threads in Tayo's mind tangle together and create tension, in this passage, multiple elements come together in perfect, harmonious balance. The way Silko uses dualities such as night and day, summer and winter to describe this balance suggests that the duality of Self and Other, which Tayo embodies, has found balance as a result of the ceremony as well. Therefore, the appearance of the fantastic in *Ceremony*, seen throughout the novel as moments and

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<sup>41</sup>Scott A. Winkler also sees Tayo's ceremony as allowing him to bridge the gap between the various elements in his identity in a way that will allow him function as a member of society. He writes, "In Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, Tayo exists in the gap between his Pueblo community and the Euramerican culture that sent him to fight a war that would send him home as a damaged individual—and it is his ability to bridge the gap between the two (using elements of both his native and non-native cultures) that allows him to construct an identity we may assume will function successfully" (Winkler 91). What Winkler's analysis omits, however, is Tayo's need for something—in this case, the fantastic—that will enable him to negotiate this gap in his identity, something that he is unable to do on his own.

characters of uncertainty, provides Tayo with the means to negotiate between the elements of the Self and the Other that his identity embodies, allowing his healing ceremony to be complete.<sup>42</sup>

The appearance of the fantastic in *Ceremony* is not just important because it provides Tayo with the ability to embrace potentially contradictory elements of his identity, but it is also intriguing in the way that it focuses the novel on the development of an individual's identity, thus aligning the novel with the Western tradition of the *bildungsroman*.<sup>43</sup> Marianne Hirsch, in her essay "The Novel of Formation as Genre," offers a description of the *bildungsroman* that makes it obvious how *Ceremony* can also be read in this way. She writes:

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<sup>42</sup> James Ruppert, in his article "Dialogism and Mediation in Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*," sees this cross-cultural negotiation, as well as the mixture of poetry, prose, and mythology in the novel, as a reflection of Bakhtin's dialogism. This connection not only reinforces the importance of dialogic interaction to understanding works of fantasy, Native American, and Asian American literature as I suggested earlier in this dissertation, but, as Ruppert claims, will also "aid our appreciation of how [*Ceremony*] fits into ongoing cultural conversations, complementing and redirecting the discourse of each sphere" ("Dialogism" 130). The discussion of *Ceremony* as contributing to the *bildungsroman* form is an example of one such conversation that has the potential to redirect our thinking about this traditionally Western form of literature.

<sup>43</sup> My use of the non-capitalized version of the German word *bildungsroman* here is intentional. I recognize that some scholars, such as James Hardin, argue that the "imprecise use" of the word *Bildungsroman* to mean "virtually any work that describes even in the most far-fetched way, a protagonist's formative years" is a "serious problem" (x), and that other scholars, including Marianne Hirsch, choose neutral terms such as "novel of formation" because it is free of "prior critical associations" (295). While these concerns are certainly valid and raise excellent points to note, I believe using the terms *bildungsroman* is the best option available for several reasons. First, many scholars now use the term to refer to a large range of novels dealing with the development of a central protagonist. In effect, the term has evolved to be more inclusive. I do recognize, however, that this new definition strays from the original meaning of Goethe's term of *Bildung*, and for this reason, I use *bildungsroman* rather than the German *Bildungsroman*, to draw attention to the more inclusive meaning of the word. Additionally, part of my goal is to link Native American novels such as *Ceremony* with a larger literary tradition. If another term, such as Marianne Hirsch's "novel of formation," were used, the immediate connection to past Western literary history would be lost. Therefore, I use the adapted form of the word, to simultaneously connect these novels to the Western tradition while setting them apart as slightly different. For further discussion of the term *Bildungsroman* see also Jeffrey L. Sammon's "The Bildungsroman for Nonspecialists: An Attempt at Clarification" (*Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991. 26-45), as well as Hardin's introduction to that same volume (pp. x-xvi), which provides an in-depth examination of the German term *Bildung*.



The novel of formation is a novel that focuses on one central character...It is the story of a representative individual's growth and development within the context of a defined social order. [. . .] Society is the novel's *antagonist* and is viewed as a school of life, a locus for experience. The spirit and values of the social order emerge through the fate of one representative individual...The novel of formation's plot is a version of the quest story; it portrays a search for a meaningful existence within society, for the authentic values which will facilitate the unfolding of inner capacities...It is the development of selfhood that is the primary concern of the novel of formation. (296-298)

As this rather lengthy quotation demonstrates, the primary concerns and themes of the *bildungsroman* are almost identical to those of *Ceremony*—alienation from society, self-education, the search for a vocation and a working philosophy—which suggests that it would indeed be a valid endeavor to develop a dialogue between *Ceremony* and the larger tradition of the *bildungsroman*.

In addition to noting those themes of the *bildungsroman* highlighted above, Jerome Buckley, in his book *Seasons of Youth*, points out several other characteristics that are common to many *bildungsromans*, namely, the conflict between generations and an ordeal of love (18). Both of these characteristics appear in *Ceremony* as well. Right from the beginning of the novel, we see that Tayo is alienated from society because his experiences in war are so different from what older members of his community understand war to be. When Ku'oosh tries to heal Tayo, for example, his ceremonies fail because he does not understand Tayo's experience:

But the old man would not have believed white warfare—killing across great distances without knowing who or how many had died. It was all too alien to comprehend, the mortars and big guns; and even if he could have taken the old man to see the target areas, even if he could have led him through the fallen jungle trees and muddy crates of torn earth to show him the dead, the old man would not have believed anything so monstrous. (Silko 36-37)

Tayo's thoughts suggest that the older generation would not be able to understand the horrors of war even if they could see it with their own eyes, thus implying a generational gap caused not only by disparate experiences, but also by differing mindsets. While this is just one example of many, as the novel continues, it becomes clear that the separation that Tayo feels from his society continues—he is not a part of a traditional community. As is clear from the descriptions of Tayo's sexual encounters with Night Swan and Ts'eh, Tayo also goes through an ordeal of love, which Buckley describes as “two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting” (17). As was examined earlier, the fact that Tayo loses his identity in his encounter with the Night Swan, while Ts'eh provides him with the means to negotiate his interstitial identity, supports this reading of *Ceremony* and provides another reason to consider the novel in line with the *bildungsroman* tradition.<sup>44</sup>

While considering Silko's *Ceremony* as part of the larger *bildungsroman* tradition might seem like simply trying to fit the novel into another literary category, the emphasis placed on the individual and a linear plot in this literary form complicates the idea of community and circularity as essential traits of Native American literature. Many critics argue that an emphasis on community is perhaps the defining characteristic of Native American literature. Jace Weaver, in his book *That the People Might Live*, writes, “I would contend that the single thing that most defines Indian literatures relates to this sense of community and commitment to it” (38). One of the reasons community is seen

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<sup>44</sup> Bernard Selinger is another scholar who has considered the connection between Native American literature and the *bildungsroman* form in his essay “*House Made of Dawn: A Positively Ambivalent Bildungsroman*” (*Modern Fictions Studies* 45.1 (1999): 38-68). Selinger's essay, however, focuses on N. Scott Momaday's novel *House Made of Dawn*, rather than Silko's *Ceremony*, and the focus of the essay is on the *bildungsroman* form itself, rather than the implications of how that form relates to Native American literature.

as so important to Native American literature is that it reflects the importance of community to Native American cultures themselves. Thomas King, author of *Green Grass, Running Water*, declares that “the most important relationship in Native cultures is the relationship which humans share with each other, a relationship that is embodied within the idea of community” (Weaver 38). This quote is used by Weaver to explain that because community is important to Native American cultures, it will also be important in Native American literatures. He writes, “What may distinguish any people’s literature from that of any other group is that to which I have already alluded: worldview [. . .] Thus, it follows that the literatures they produce would reflect such worldviews and values” (Weaver 26-27). Scholars place similar importance on the idea of a circular understanding of time and narrative in Native American literature. Studies such as Paula Gunn Allen's *The Sacred Hoop* have been very influential in their discussions of circularity and non-linear conceptions of time, to the point where the trope of circularity has now become almost inseparable from discussions of the Native American novel. As Louis Owens writes, “virtually every novel written by an American Indian...describes a circular journey toward home and identity” (191). Such statements are problematic, in that they not only encourage readings of Native American literature based on essentialist categories, but they also conflate Native American literature and culture in a way that encourages a reading of novels as cultural artifacts, rather than as literature.

Community and circularity, in addition to being seen as important to Native American literature in general, are also seen as key themes in Silko’s *Ceremony*, one of the most widely read works of Native American literature. For example, William Bevis argues that Silko’s novels are novels in which the community plays an especially

important role. In novels such as *Ceremony*, he writes, “the protagonist seeks an identity that he can find only in his society, past, and place; unlike whites, he feels no meaningful being, alone. Individuality is not even the scene of success or failure; it is nothing” (Bevis 23). Even Silko herself sees community as tremendously important. In a 1980 interview, she stated, “Community is tremendously important. That’s where a person’s identity has to come from, not from racial blood quantum levels” (Weaver 132). Several other critics, in addition to highlighting the importance of the community, also emphasize how the idea of the individual has no meaning in Silko’s work, particularly to Tayo in *Ceremony*. Catherine Rainwater, in her book *Dreams of Fiery Stars*, writes, “For Tayo, to become a Western ‘individual’ is to achieve a form of nonbeing. Getting well means reversing his identity according to relational modes of the subjective, communal self that Betonie and others teach him” (95). Louis Owens also sees Tayo’s individuality in a kind of zero-sum situation with his communal identity, with the communal identity coming out on top. He writes, “Tayo’s individual identity disappears as he journeys toward the communal identity ultimately pronounced by the pueblo elders within the kiva—the center of the world” (Owens 168-169). All in all, it seems to be a generally accepted reading of *Ceremony* that the main themes and ideas of the novel focus on the community, rather than Tayo as an individual.

Circularity is similarly seen as a key element in *Ceremony*, not only in the shape of Tayo’s narrative, but also in the way that Tayo’s narrative is linked with repeated stories and myths. It is often noted that Tayo’s story begins and ends with the word “Sunrise” (Silko 4, 262), linking the narrative to the cyclical rhythms of night and day. As Louis Owens notes, this cycle of night and day is “a cycle suggestive of completion

and wholeness” (173). Tayo’s narrative is also intertwined with myths and legends, suggesting that his story is just another retelling of these larger, mythic narratives. Old Grandma makes this very clear at the end of the novel, when she says, “It seems like I already heard these stories before....only thing is, the names sound different” (Silko 260). Robert Bell is one scholar who has focused specifically on the theme of circularity in *Ceremony*, noting how the hoop ceremony is not only important for Tayo’s healing, but also in establishing the circular structure of the narrative. He writes, “Through repetition and recapitulation, the novel itself describes a circular design going into and out of the hoop ceremony at the center of the book. Linear time—beginning, middle, and end—dissolves into a cycle of recapitulation and repetition” (Bell 25). Bell then goes on to argue that the circular structure of both Tayo’s ceremony and the novel itself are smaller patterns that are part of a larger “picture of cosmic order” (Bell 28). He explains, “So even the hoop ritual, which provided a key to Tayo’s final restoration and the circular narrative structure of the novel, is only a part of the larger ceremonial pattern and accounts only partially for the complexity of the book” (Bell 29). Similar to how Weaver sees community as key to Native American literature because of its importance in Native American society, Bell argues that the importance of circularity in Tayo’s ceremony and Silko’s novel reflects the importance of circularity in Native American, specifically Pueblo, cosmology.

But, as the association of *Ceremony* with the larger tradition of the *bildungsroman* suggests, the individual and a linear plot are just as important in the narrative as the themes of community and circularity. In addition to the focus on Tayo’s identity formation, as examined earlier in the chapter, several additional key passages in the novel

support the idea that *Ceremony* is a novel in which individuality and linearity are equally important to community and circularity. For example, although Betonie helps guide him to the right ceremony, Tayo is the one who must complete the ceremony; he alone is responsible. This can be seen in the text when Tayo is lying on the ground after he is caught by the fence riders, struggling to resist being pulled into the earth:

He knew if he left his skull unguarded, if he let himself sleep, it would happen: the resistance would leak out and take with it all barriers, all boundaries; he would seep into the earth and rest with the center, where the voice of the silence was familiar and the density of the dark earth loved him. He could secure the thresholds with molten pain and remain; or he could let go and flow back. It was up to him. (Silko 201-202)

In the end, Tayo is the one responsible for completing the ceremony; although others can help him along the way, Tayo's strength and willpower are needed for the ceremony to succeed. If his quest were truly communal, the success of it would not hinge on an individual.

Additionally, the ending of *Ceremony* demonstrates the linearity of the novel as well, both in the way that many of the key conflicts of the novel are resolved, but also in the narrative structure of the novel. In the last few pages of the novel, not only does Tayo find healing through his ceremony, but Harley and Leroy's bodies are found and buried, and Tayo and Auntie arrive at a tentative peace as well. Instead of treating him like an outsider, "Auntie talked to him now the way she had talked to Robert and old Grandma all those years, with an edge of accusation about to surface between her words" (Silko 259). Although it would be a stretch to call Tayo and Auntie's relationship friendly, the fact that she speaks to him in the same way that she speaks to Robert and Grandma shows that she accepts him as part of the family in a way that she did not before. These scenes

provide resolution for many of the key conflicts in the novel. Furthermore, the ending of the novel presents the story in a much more linear way than the beginning of the novel, which is interrupted by flashbacks, dreams, and events from the past. Thomas Benedicktsson notes this as well, arguing, “As Tayo begins to heal, the narrative attains linearity until the last eighty pages are told in straightforward chronological order” (124). As Tayo’s comfort with his own individual identity increases, the linear structure of the narrative increases as well. Such examples demonstrate a connection between the importance of a linear plot and the identity of the individual, as well as support the ideas suggested by reading *Ceremony* as a *bildungsroman*, namely, that individuality and a linear plot are key elements of the novel.

The importance of individuality and a linear plot to the overall structure of *Ceremony* demonstrates that Silko is simultaneously invoking the essentialist racial fantasies of community and circularity that are associated with Native American literature, while also creating a narrative structure that is predictable to her white audience. In other words, Silko’s narrative allows her white readers to feel comfortable with both the narrative structure of *Ceremony*, as well as with the images of Native Americans throughout the novel. The result is a novel that is full of contradictions, a novel that emphasizes both community and individuality, both circularity and linearity. But instead of acknowledging the contradictions inherent in her novel, Silko and many critics of her work only focus on the themes of community and circularity. The fact that so many of these critics—both white and Native American— as well as Silko herself are so eager to see these elements in her work is concerning, in that it suggests that they are so invested in the racial fantasies of community and circularity that they are willing to

forgo a more rigorous critical analysis of the text in favor of a reading that fits these fantasies.

The passage describing Tayo's return to his community is an excellent example of how critics are so invested in the racial fantasies of community and circularity that they overlook what the text actually says. When Tayo is able to return to society at the end of the novel, he share the wisdom of his ceremony with the other members of the tribe in the space of the kiva:

It took a long time to tell them the story; the stopped him frequently with questions about the location and the time of day; they asked about the direction she had come from and the color of her eyes. It was while he was sitting there, facing southeast, that he noticed how the four windows along the south wall of the kiva had a particular relationship to this late autumn position of the sun. (257)

As was seen above, Louis Owens sees in this scene the ultimate re-absorption of Tayo into the community. He writes, "Tayo's individual identity disappears as he journeys toward the communal identity ultimately pronounced by the pueblo elders within the kiva—the center of the world" (Owens 168-169). While this passage does tell the story of Tayo's reintegration into the community, it is still aligned with Tayo's perspective and shows how Tayo is conveying wisdom to the elders in the kiva near the end of the novel, rather than engaging in a mutual exchange of knowledge. Instead of being told by a group of elders what his identity should be, Tayo himself is the one "pronouncing" knowledge. The text itself, then, shows that although Tayo does exist within a community, he exists as a strong individual. Additionally, the imagery of the seasons and the sun seen in this passage demonstrates the importance of circularity to the novel, but at the same time, the fact that the season is "late autumn" conveys a feeling of finality and



ending that is more in line with linear thinking. Therefore, the way in which the fantastic highlights Tayo's individual search for identity calls attention to Silko's contradictory embrace of the themes of both community and individuality, as well as circularity and linearity, in an attempt to code her novel as both Native American and part of the Western literary tradition.<sup>45</sup>

The insistence on seeing community and circularity as key themes in all Native American literature is so prevalent that even among scholars who do notice the connection between *Ceremony* and the *bildungsroman* form, they still insist upon the importance of the community in the education of the protagonist. Several critics have argued that the Native American *bildungsroman* differs from the traditional Western form in that the protagonist comes home for his education, rather than going out into society. William Bevis is one such critic; in his article "Native American Novels: Homing In," he writes, "In marked contrast [to the Western *bildungsroman*], most Native American novels are not 'eccentric,' centrifugal, diverging, expanding, but 'incentric,' centripetal, converging, contracting. The hero comes home" (Bevis 16). Michelle Pagni Stewart develops Bevis' idea further: "Contrary to the white American novel whereby a character gains self-identity by leaving home—and would be considered a failure if he were to return to the fold—Native American novels are characterized by protagonists who need to return home and connect with their community in order to begin to

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<sup>45</sup> Bell argues that Tayo's story follows the "design of the legendary hero-quest: myth, legend, and history are thus enclosed within a circle" and as such, there "is no end (a linear concept), but a beginning again (a circular concept)" (30). It seems, however, that Bell's words are an excellent demonstration of how Silko incorporates both linear and circular depictions of time into her narrative. By telling the story of Tayo's quest—a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end—but at the same time, interweaving this narrative with larger myths and legends—which have circular significance—Silko attempts to depict both a linear and a circular conception of time, thus simultaneously invoking essentialist ideas of Native American literature along with the greater Western literary tradition.

understand their identity as Native Americans” (191). Both of these critics, however, completely disregard the fact that it is Tayo leaving home to go to war that sets off his process of maturation. Even when he returns home from the war, Tayo’s drinking is a way in which he emotionally leaves the community, rather than participating in the bar rituals that are so important to men such as Emo and Harley. Additionally, although Tayo’s education/healing does not take place in an urban area, as is typical for many Western *bildungsromans*, neither does it occur in his home community. Much of Tayo’s ceremony involves leaving the community, questing on his own to find the cattle. Such examples demonstrate the persistence of racial fantasies such as the importance of community and circularity to Native American literature and culture, as well as emphasize the importance of reading a text on its own terms, rather than based on expectations set forth by the fantasies of an imaginary unified Native American literary tradition.

Therefore, Silko’s use of the fantastic in *Ceremony*, both through the imagery of darkness and the uncertainty surrounding Ts’eh, leads to a focus on the process of individual identity formation that aligns the novel with the Western *bildungsroman* tradition, thus highlighting the contradictory way that Silko employs the themes of community and circularity throughout the novel. The fantastic allows Tayo to successfully negotiate between the conflicting elements of Self and Other that he embodies, a process that he was unable to accomplish on his own before the introduction of the fantastic through Betonie’s ceremony. By enabling Tayo to comfortably embody his interstitial identity, the fantastic elements in the novel emphasize the importance of the development of the individual, an emphasis that connects the novel to the Western

tradition of the *bildungsroman* and challenges the primacy of both community and circularity as defining characteristics of Native American literature. In doing so, they highlight how Leslie Marmon Silko weaves together contradictory ideas in a way that both draws on essentialist fantasies of Native American race and culture—the ideas of community and circularity—as well as emphasizes the progress of the individual and the linear time structure found in the Western *bildungsroman* tradition. In this way, Silko’s narrative is structurally comfortable for her primarily white audience, while simultaneously being coded as Native American. This deliberate use of the themes of community and circularity as racial markers also draws attention to the constructed and perhaps even imaginary nature of the idea of a unified Native American literary tradition, one based on racial fantasies and essentialist ideas, rather than on the actual examination of hundreds of discrete cultural traditions. By focusing on the elements on the fantastic throughout the text, therefore, we not only see how the fantastic can be used to negotiate the boundary between Self and Other, as we saw in Tan and King’s works, but also how the fantastic draws attention to the problems inherent in relying on racial fantasies to define a literary tradition.

### **III. Harry Potter, Race, and Identity**

J.K. Rowling’s popular *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007) is notably different from both Amy Tan’s *The Hundred Secret Senses* and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* in that Harry does not occupy a racial boundary or even really demonstrate any racial difference at all; in fact, as Jack Zipes points out, “He is white, Anglo-Saxon, bright, athletic, and honest. The only mark of difference he bears is a slight lightning-shaped

scar on his forehead. Otherwise, he is the classic Boy Scout, a little mischievous like Tom Sawyer or one of the Hardy boys” (178). Nevertheless, there is much that can be said about the J.K Rowling’s treatment of race and difference in throughout this series. Many critics see her negative portrayal of the intolerance of Muggles and Muggle-born wizards as critical of racial prejudice and discrimination; in her essay on the connections between *Harry Potter* and traditional fairy tale tropes, Elaine Ostry writes, “The series enacts a great ‘race war,’ in which the heroes fight against those wizards who possess a vision of racial purity” (90). Later, she notes, “Rowling uses the fairy-tale form to protest racism, as the sympathetic characters insist that being a pure-blood wizard does not guarantee success or justify discrimination” (Ostry 92). Many also see the wide cast of characters in the series as embracing tolerance of difference. As Lisa Hopkins writes, “Tolerance for the difference of characters like the slow-witted Neville, the half-giant Hagrid, the werewolf Professor Lupin, and the falsely accused Sirius Black is clearly and warmly advocated by her books. One of the things Harry and his peers must evidently learning is tolerance of difference” (32). Scholars have also written about the appearance of non-white characters such as Cho Chang, whose appearance as Harry’s love interest Karen Manners Smith says “establish[es] Harry’s freedom from race prejudice” (75). Several critics write admiringly about Rowling’s attention to detail when portraying various aspects of race relations, which makes it easier for readers to understand similar subtleties when presented with them in an historical context. Peter Dendle, for example, calls Rowling “nuanced and detailed” in her depictions of the interrelationships of race and power, highlighting how she includes “such historically complicated processes as the internalization of inferiority, the institutionalization of unequal access to power and

participation in the political discourse, and the rewriting of history” (166). And finally, Navajo scholar Hollie Anderson has written about how Rowling’s series “can be a valuable resource in discussions about cross-cultural experiences” (106). Initially, at least, Rowling’s portrayal of race and difference seems to be a fairly socially conscious one, embracing difference, protesting injustice, and fighting against those who are intolerant.

The portrayal of race in Rowling’s series, however, is not one that is without problems. The issues that Rowling addresses are quite complicated, and, as several critics have pointed out, readers are presented with conflicting ideas about race and difference. Ostry writes, “Rowling intends to teach children that what matters is one’s character, not color, pedigree, or wealth. However, her radical presentation of social issues is hindered by ‘utter traditionalism’” (89-90) when it comes to the fairy tale form that she uses to create her magical world. And while the student population at Hogwarts is “an amalgam of ethnicities resembling the population of modern-day, multicultural Britain” (Smith 83), as Ostry rightly asks, “how effective is [Rowling’s] use of race? Minorities are mentioned, but they are not heroes; all the major players and Anglo-Saxon” (93). Even when ethnic differences are represented, these differences are often represented “*only* in their names” in such a way that “their visual difference for the reader quickly disappears and their racial identities fade into the background” (Anatol 173). Later, Ostry argues that the way in which Rowling does not discuss race or ethnicity except in passing is “naïve and unintentionally harmful”—“By not specifying exact cultural groups or doing more than casually mentioning race, she shows a color-blind attitude: race does not matter, so the differences should not be noticed, much less

discussed” (94). Rowling’s presentation of the house-elves is similarly ambivalent. While she presents the house-elves using the language and imagery of historical slavery, “only Hermione cares about the house-elves, and the other children—including Harry—mock her efforts to help the elves and raise social awareness all around” (Ostry 96).<sup>46</sup> Gizelle Lisa Anatol’s postcolonial reading of the series highlights further potential problems; she argues that although the magical world of the series initially seems to be positioned as the foreign Other, “Magical Britain, and Hogwarts in particular, thus become the magical metropole” (164), as Harry’s journeys to Hogwarts “are not *away* from the homeland and *to* a symbolic colonial outpost, but rather journeys back to Harry’s true homespace” (167). Similarly, the various magic schools represented in the Triwizard Tournament demonstrate that only European magic matters; “Africa, south and southeast Asia, Australia, North and South America are not merely Other at the tournament—they are invisible” (Anatol 172). Such scholarship calls into question an unequivocally positive reading of race and difference in the *Harry Potter* series, and suggests the need for further discussion of Rowling’s treatment of such issues.

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<sup>46</sup> Brycchan Carey is another scholar who writes about the connection between the house-elves and historical slavery. He argues, “Indeed, it seems clear that Rowling has tried to make connections between the house-elves and historical slaves, both in North America and in the British Caribbean colonies” (Carey 104), citing both the dialect of the house-elves as well as their name as connecting them to historical slavery. Rather than primarily focusing on issues of race, however, Carey sees Rowling’s discussion of slavery in a political light, arguing that “for young people in the real world, denied the opportunity to do head-to-head battle with evil, the model of the political pressure group exemplified by S.P.E.W. (Hermione’s “Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare”) is the most promising route for an apprenticeship in politics” (106). Julia Park also identifies the connection between the house-elves and historical slavery, but she argues that because Rowling “frequently uses the elves for comic effect, she spoils her effort at social commentary” (185). Elizabeth Heilman and Anne Gregory discuss the portrayal of house-elves as well, and argue that Hermione’s S.P.E.W. is as problematic as the racial coding of the house-elves themselves, because “as a member of the dominant culture, Hermione’s articulation of injustice serves only to further infantilize the house elves. Rowling’s portrayal of the worker population suggests that they need someone to speak for them” (245).

What these discussions also show is that issues of race in the *Harry Potter* series are not limited to only one character, book, race, or even ideological position, reflecting in many ways the complexity and intertwined nature of racial relations in the real world. Rather than attempt to address all of these issues, this study looks at the tropes central to this dissertation, specifically, boundaries and the fantastic, and analyzes how these tropes are central to the formulation of the Self and the Other as depicted in the Harry/Voldemort relationship throughout the series. As this chapter demonstrates, the blurred boundaries between Harry as Self and Voldemort as Other create an interstitial space between the two characters in which elements of the fantastic are able to appear, providing Harry with the means to challenge systems of authority. This insertion of the fantastic into the interstitial spaces of the text suggests that Rowling's blurring of the boundary between the Self and the Other can provide the means for a subversion of static ideas of race, ethnicity, nationality, and class. The didactic interludes between Harry and Dumbledore at the end of each novel in the series, however, resolve the uncertainty of the fantastic, thus stripping these elements of their power and firmly reinforcing traditional structures of power and authority. Therefore, although Harry uses the fantastic to negotiate his identity in a way similar to Olivia Laguni and Tayo, the resolution of the conflicting elements of his identity, rather than an embrace of them, sets him apart from these characters. Furthermore, Rowling's need to resolve Harry's interstitial identity leads to a problematic reading of her treatment of race and difference because of the way that she rejects the possibility of subverting authority in favor of remaining within the comfortable confines of the status quo.

Although the difference between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort is not a racial one, the language that Rowling uses to describe their relationship, particularly her descriptions of how Harry thinks of himself, is language and an understanding of identity that clearly draws from discussions of the Self and the Other. As such, the relationship between Harry and Voldemort is one that can inform our understanding of these ideas as they relate to race. Throughout the series, Voldemort is positioned as the Other to Harry's Self; Harry goes to great lengths to define himself in opposition to Voldemort's absolute evil. Perhaps the most helpful example from the series in demonstrating the oppositional relationship between Harry and Voldemort is the prophecy made about Harry before his birth, the prophecy that led Voldemort to try to kill Harry. Harry first hears the prophecy in the fifth book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, after Voldemort has gone to great lengths to hear it himself. The prophecy reads: "The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not...and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives" (Rowling *OP* 841). When discussing this prophecy with Professor Dumbledore, Harry asks, "so does that mean that...that one of us has got to kill the other one...in the end?" (Rowling *OP* 844). Harry's question once again highlights the nature of his relationship with Voldemort—they are positioned in opposition to each other, which, according to the terms of the prophecy, means that only one of them can truly live. Amanda Cockrell makes the connection between the Self/Other relationship and the Harry/Voldemort relationship as well, arguing, "Voldemort must defeat Harry if he is to regain his powers,



if the shadow is to subdue the Self’ (21). Cockrell’s observations highlight both the way in which Harry’s relationship with Voldemort is like that between the Self and the Other, as well as the oppositional nature of that relationship, both of which can be seen in the prophecy made about these two characters.

The oppositional relationship between Harry and Voldemort is one that not only is seen in prophecies, but also is developed by the choices that Harry makes, choices that show how he is consciously positioning himself in relation to Voldemort. Just as the Other is key in providing something against which the Self can define what it is, so Voldemort’s existence provides Harry with a model of what he does *not* want to be. Early in the first novel in the series, Harry is sorted into one of the houses at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry by a magical hat. He has heard that the Slytherin house is the one that Voldemort was in, so when the hat goes to sort him into a house, he thinks, “*Not Slytherin, not Slytherin*” (Rowling SS 121). The hat responds by saying, “Are you sure? You could be great, you know, it’s all here in your head, and Slytherin will help you on the way to greatness, no doubt about that—no? Well, if you’re sure—better be GRYFFINDOR!” (Rowling SS 121). The conscious choice that Harry makes in aligning himself in opposition to Voldemort is made even clearer in the second book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, when Harry is discussing with Professor Dumbledore his concern that he might be like Voldemort. Harry tells Dumbledore that the Sorting Hat only put him in Gryffindor “because I asked not to go in Slytherin.” Dumbledore replies, “*Exactly*. [. . .] Which makes you *very different* from Tom Riddle. It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities” (Rowling CS 333). While Dumbledore’s words speak to one of Rowling’s key

points in the series—namely, that a person’s character matters more than gender, class, or race—they also highlight how Voldemort is serving as an Other against which Harry can define himself.

Just as with Olivia Laguni’s relationship with her half-sister Kwan and Tayo’s embodiment of both white and Native American cultures, however, the relationship between Harry and Voldemort is more complicated than simply a basic opposition between the Self and Other. While the prophecy made about Harry and Voldemort suggests a binary opposition between the two, the series develops in such a way that suggests that the relationship is much more complicated and intertwined. This interconnection between Harry and Voldemort is introduced early in the series, when Harry goes to buy his wand from Mr. Ollivander. When Harry finally finds a wand that is right for him, Mr. Ollivander remarks that his selection is “curious,” telling Harry, “I remember every wand I’ve ever sold, Mr. Potter. Every single wand. It so happens that the phoenix whose tail feather is in your wand gave another feather—just one other. It is very curious indeed that you should be destined for this wand when its brother—why, its brother gave you that scar” (Rowling *SS* 85). This scene sets up a long chain of connections between Harry and Voldemort, including this observation by Tom Riddle, a younger version of Voldemort contained in a magical diary: “There are strange likenesses between us, after all. Even you must have noticed. Both half-bloods, orphans, raised by Muggles. Probably the only two Parselmouths to come to Hogwarts since the great Slytherin himself. We even *look* something alike...” (Rowling *CS* 317). Taija Piippo notices this interconnection between Tom Riddle/Voldemort and Harry in *Chamber of Secrets* as well, writing, “The doppelgänger relation between Tom Riddle and Harry

along these lines can be seen as complementing. Tom as Voldemort completes Harry, having given him a set of traits that he has not acknowledged or even noticed in himself so far” (69). These connections between Harry and Voldemort complicate the idea of a definite separation between the two characters, suggesting that Rowling might be trying to complicate ideas of Self and Other by blurring the boundaries between them.<sup>47</sup>

The blurring of the boundary between Harry’s as Self and Voldemort as Other is further developed in the sixth book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, as Harry learns more about Voldemort’s childhood and youth. When Harry learns the circumstances of Voldemort’s birth—how his mother sold a family heirloom to get money for her baby, yet would not use magic to save her own life—Harry expresses indignation, first that she was cheated by the owner of the magical pawnshop, and then, “She wouldn’t even stay alive for her son?” (Rowling *HBP* 262). Dumbledore is intrigued by Harry’s question: “Dumbledore raised his eyebrows. “Could you possibly be feeling sorry for Lord Voldemort?”” (Rowling *HBP* 262). While Harry denies this, Dumbledore’s question points to how Voldemort is being humanized, and Harry’s sympathy for the orphaned Voldemort shows that Harry is making further connections between Voldemort’s biography and his own life. During another lesson with

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<sup>47</sup>Chantel Lavoie points out how Gryffindor and Slytherin function in a similar way to what I argue happens in the interactions between Harry and Voldemort. She writes, “Gryffindor and Slytherin need one another as worthy rivals. The contrast between the windowed tower in which Gryffindors spend their time and the dungeon where Slytherins meet and sleep on some level suggests the ego and the id” (Lavoie 39). Just like the relationship between Harry and Voldemort, however, this relationship is not a simple binary opposition, but a complex, interconnected relationship. As Lavoie writes, “this kinship between Slytherin and Gryffindor is not as simple as the former playing the bad guys to the latter” (39), and it reflects the complicated relationship between Harry and Voldemort. The similarities between Harry and Voldemort, “together with their profound differences, point to ways in which Slytherin House and Gryffindor House are also ‘brothers,’ much like the two wands in the duel at the conclusion of *Goblet of Fire*” (Lavoie 42). These interactions between Slytherin and Gryffindor reinforce the nature of Harry and Voldemort’s relationship as a relationship that goes beyond a simple binary between Self and Other.

Dumbledore, Harry sees a memory of Voldemort returning to Hogwarts, where he seeks a teaching job at the place “where he had been happiest; the first and only place he had felt at home” (Rowling *HBP* 431). When Dumbledore explains Voldemort’s attachment to Hogwarts, “Harry felt slightly uncomfortable at these words, for this was exactly how he felt about Hogwarts, too” (Rowling *HBP* 431). These connections between Voldemort and Harry complicate the initial opposition between them as suggested by the prophecy, and in fact, blur the line not only between Voldemort and Harry, and the Self and the Other, but also between good and evil, making Rowling’s series more morally interesting and provocative than it initially seems.

The blurring of the line between Harry and Voldemort comes to a head in the final book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, in which Harry sacrifices his own life to save the lives of his friends at Hogwarts by allowing himself to be killed by Voldemort without any resistance. In the chapter “King’s Cross,” however, the reader sees that Harry has not died—he lives on in an interstitial space between life and death in which he can talk with the late Professor Dumbledore. Harry asks Dumbledore how this is possible, why he is not completely dead. Dumbledore’s answer demonstrates how the prophecy made about Harry was more complicated than initially thought. Dumbledore explains that Harry still lives because Voldemort took Harry’s blood to rebuild his physical body (something seen in the fourth book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*): “Your blood in his veins, Harry, Lily’s protection inside both of you! He tethered you to life while he lives!” Harry’s response to Dumbledore’s explanation points back to the prophecy, demonstrating that the connectedness between Harry and Voldemort is more complicated than a simple binary opposition. Harry says, “I

live...while he lives? But I thought...I thought it was the other way round! I thought we both had to die? Or is in the same thing?" (Rowling *DH* 709). This discussion, as well as Dumbledore's later explanation of how Harry functioned as one of Voldemort's Horcruxes, demonstrates how the existence of the Other is necessary for the existence of the Self, and vice versa. Rather than being a relationship in which one character always must prevail, the relationship between Voldemort and Harry is an interconnected one, filled with back-and-forth movement and reciprocal influence that calls to mind the theories of transculturation and borderlands discussed earlier in this study.

As a result of the interconnected nature of Harry and Voldemort's identities, as well as the back and forth movement that exists between them, the space in between them is not a static boundary, but instead is an interstitial space in which the categories of Self and Other, good and evil, life and death are all blurred. Todorov himself notices the connection between the Self/Other relationship and the fantastic as well. When describing the effects of the fantastic, he argues, "Another consequence of the same principle has still greater extension: this is the effacement of the limit between subject and object. The rational schema represents the human being as a subject entering into relations with other persons or with things that remain external to him, and which have the status of objects. The literature of the fantastic disturbs this abrupt separation" (Todorov 116). This study of Rowling's series sees that Todorov's observation works in reverse as well. As Dumbledore himself notes, the creation of "a certain bond" between two wizards is "magic at its deepest, its most impenetrable" (Rowling *PoA* 427). In other words, the blurring of the separation between Harry as Self and Voldemort and Other creates a space of hesitation where the fantastic can make its appearance.

This interstitial space between Harry and Voldemort, then, functions in the novel as the space of uncertainty, the space in which elements of the fantastic are able to appear and subvert the hegemonic structures in the novel. While the entire series is certainly a fantasy series, filled with wizards, dragons, and of course, magic, the appearance of the Todorovian fantastic—that is, a sense of hesitation, of uncertainty, of disquiet without resolution—is not a constant feature throughout the series, and in fact, primarily appears in the interactions between Harry and Voldemort.<sup>48</sup> Although Rowling creates a world in which magic exists, the magic in this world has its own rules and regulations, rules that are enforced and that the reader comes to understand and accept as easily as the rules of gravity, friction, and other natural forces that inform our lives in the real world. Throughout the series, the reader is presented with all sorts of magical spells, objects, and enchantments, and is then immediately provided with an explanation of how that magic functions as the norm in the wizarding world. An excellent example of this is Harry’s discussion with Ron about wizard photographs. When Harry is surprised that Dumbledore is gone from his Chocolate Frog collecting card photograph, Ron matter-of-factly observes, “Well, you can’t expect him to hang around all day [. . .] “He’ll be back” (Rowling SS 103). Later, when Harry tells Ron, “But in, you know, the Muggle world, people just stay put in photos,” Ron replies, “Do they? What, they don’t move at all? [. . .] *Weird!*” (Rowling SS 103). This interchange between Harry and Ron works quickly to

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<sup>48</sup> The elements that I call the fantastic in the Harry Potter series, while very similar to Todorov’s description of the fantastic in the way that they cause hesitation and uncertainty on the part of both the reader and Harry himself, are not identical to Todorov’s definition. Part of Todorov’s definition of the fantastic is that the hesitation the reader experiences is a result of deciding “whether or not what they perceive derives from ‘reality’ as it exists in the common opinion” (41). This is not the cause of the uncertainty in the Harry Potter series; rather, the hesitation on the part of both Harry and the reader stems from an uncertainty about the cause, nature, and effects of certain kinds of magic. In spite of this difference, however, the overall effect of these elements in the series is quite similar to Todorov’s discussion of the fantastic, particularly in their ability to blur boundaries and destabilize existing categories.

establish the moving photographs as a normal part of everyday life in the magical world. Rowling does this time and again throughout the series, presenting the reader with an intriguing, amusing, or amazing magic spell or object, and then providing an explanation for it that puts it firmly within the realm of the everyday experience.

This is not the case, however, for the relationship between Harry and Voldemort, since in almost every book in the series, their interactions are marked by a sense of uncertainty that is made possible by the interstitial space created by the interplay between their identities. This is first seen in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, where at the end of the novel, when Harry is confronted by Voldemort possessing Professor Quirrell, Quirrell is not able to touch Harry's skin without causing himself terrible pain. When Quirrell goes to cast a killing curse on Harry, Harry grabs Quirrell's face, knowing that "his only chance was to keep hold of Quirrell, keep him in enough pain to stop him from doing a curse" (Rowling SS 295). Although Harry figures out what to do to save his life, neither he, nor the reader, understands why his touch is so harmful to Voldemort, and, unlike other instances of magic in the novel, this interaction is not immediately explained. The reader is left in a state of uncertainty that simultaneously reflects the uncertainty of the relationship between Harry and Voldemort, as well as the uncertainty that Todorov sees as central to the idea of the fantastic.

Several other examples of the Todorovian fantastic appear throughout the series, including in the fourth book when Harry sees Voldemort regain a corporeal form. Once he again has a body, Voldemort gives Harry back his wand and challenges him to a duel. When Voldemort casts the killing curse—*Avada Kedavra*—Harry casts the spell to disarm Voldemort—*Expelliarmus*—and instead of either spell landing, "they met in

midair” so that “a narrow beam of light connected the two wands” (Rowling *GF* 663). Harry and Voldemort are lifted from the ground, their wands still linked, and Harry’s wand is eventually able to force Voldemort’s wand to recall the spells that it has cast. The language in the description of this event is telling, as it reflects the uncertainty and hesitation that mark this event: “nothing could have prepared Harry for this”; Voldemort’s red eyes are “wide with astonishment”; as Harry maintains the connection between his wand and Voldemort’s, he “didn’t understand why he was doing it, didn’t know what it might achieve”; and throughout the experience, Voldemort’s “red eyes were still shocked...he had no more expected this than Harry had” (Rowling *GF* 663-666). All of these excerpts again demonstrate how in the interplay between Voldemort and Harry, Rowling injects a sense of uncertainty and hesitation that is not found anywhere else in her magical universe, and this sense of uncertainty is connected to and made possible by the interplay between Harry and Voldemort’s identities.

Another key aspect of the fantastic that is reflected in the interactions between Harry and Voldemort is the suggestion of madness and insanity. When writing about the fantastic and the way in which it enables the collapse of limits, such as those between mind and matter, Todorov observes “that such a collapse of the limits between matter and mind was considered, especially in the nineteenth century, as the first characteristics of madness” (Todorov 115). The question of Harry’s mental state is a central part of the second and fifth novels in the series, although it is important to note that the reader never truly doubts Harry’s sanity. Instead, the trope of insanity is another way for Rowling to introduce the feeling of uncertainty and hesitation into her novels, even if for the reader, it is merely a question of how things are happening, rather than a question of true mental



stability. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Harry keeps hearing voices that no one else can hear, voices that seem to be connected to the students who keep getting paralyzed by a mysterious attacker. When Professor Dumbledore asks Harry if there is anything he would like to tell him, Harry “thought of the disembodied voice he had heard twice and remembered what Ron had said: ‘*Hearing voices no one else can hear isn’t a good sign, even in the wizarding world*’” (Rowling CS 209), and so he tells Dumbledore nothing. Although the reader, who has access to Harry’s thoughts, knows that Harry is not insane, Rowling uses the trope of insanity to create the feeling of uncertainty and disquiet that marks all of Harry’s interactions with Voldemort.

The question of insanity is also central to the fifth book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, in which Harry has dreams in which he sees through Voldemort’s eyes. He wakes up screaming from the first of these dreams, in which he, as Voldemort, attacks Mr. Weasley. When telling Professor McGonagall about the dream, Harry becomes frustrated that she does not understand how he was actually there for the attack against Mr. Weasley: “‘No!’ said Harry angrily. Would none of them understand?” When Professor McGonagall looks at him “as though horrified at what she was seeing,” Harry shouts at her, “I’m not lying, and I’m not mad!” (Rowling OP 465). Again, while none of the Hogwarts’ professors nor the reader actually thinks that Harry is insane, Rowling’s introduction of mental instability alerts the reader to the uncertainty of what is happening to Harry. More clearly than in any other book, this state of uncertainty is made possible by the close, blurred relationship between Harry and Voldemort. In Harry’s dreams, as he tells Dumbledore, “I was the snake. [. . .] I saw it all from the snake’s point of view” (Rowling OP 468). This attack on Mr. Weasley leads both the

reader and the characters in the book to speculate about the reason for this connection between Harry and Voldemort, even, as Mad-Eye Moody does, suggesting that Harry might be a danger to the fight against Voldemort: “The boy’s seeing things from inside You-Know-Who’s snake....Obviously, Potter doesn’t realize what that means, but if You-Know-Who’s possessing him—” (Rowling *OP* 491). Here again, we see the uncertainty of the fantastic brought into the narrative through the close, interconnected relationship between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort.

In each of these cases, the uncertainty of the interstitial space created by the interplay between Harry and Voldemort’s identities provides Harry with the fantastic power that he needs to challenge Voldemort’s power and subvert the systems of authority established by Voldemort and his Death Eaters. At the end of *Goblet of Fire*, for example, when Voldemort tries to kill Harry, their wands link, allowing the uncertainty of the fantastic to enter into this interstitial space as I explained above. Even more importantly, however, the fantastic—embodied by the shadowy visions of those Voldemort has killed—provides Harry with the way to avoid Voldemort’s killing curse and make it back to Hogwarts alive. As the shadowy form of his father tells him, “When the connection is broken, we will linger for only moments...but we will give you time...you must get to the Portkey, it will return you to Hogwarts...do you understand, Harry?” (Rowling *GF* 667). Not only do these fantastic figures make Voldemort “livid with fear” (Rowling *GF* 667), but they also disrupt Voldemort’s plans and provide Harry with a way to challenge his authority. As Sirius tells Harry later, “[Voldemort’s] comeback didn’t come off quite the way he wanted it to, you see. He messed it up.” Remus Lupin corrects Sirius, adding, “Or rather, you messed it up for him. [. . .] the very

last person he wanted alerted to his return the moment he got back was Dumbledore [. . .] and you made sure Dumbledore knew at once” (Rowling *OP* 92). These passages show that the fantastic enables Harry to not only resist Voldemort’s killing curse yet again, but it also provides him with the means to challenge Voldemort’s authority and disrupt his seamless rise to power.

Provocatively, the fantastic not only allows Harry to challenge the power of Voldemort, but also the power of the other authority figures in the novels. Through *Order of the Phoenix*, for example, Harry feels that he is being limited in his knowledge of what is going on regarding Voldemort’s return, something that comes to a head early in the novel when he yells at Ron and Hermione: “BUT WHY SHOULD I KNOW WHAT’S GOING ON? WHY SHOULD ANYONE BOTHER TO TELL ME WHAT’S BEEN HAPPENING?” (Rowling *OP* 66). Such outbursts continue throughout the novel, leading to the complaints by many that Harry is overly whiney; his visions through the eyes of Voldemort, however, provide him with a way to acquire knowledge on his own, without the help of Dumbledore, Sirius, or even Ron and Hermione. At the climactic scene in the Ministry of Magic, Harry uses the knowledge that he has acquired on his own to lead a group of his friends, without any help from adults. As he tells his friends, “In the dreams I went through the door at the end of the corridor from the lifts into a dark room—that’s this one—and then I went through another door into a room that kind of...glitters. We should try a few doors. [. . .] I’ll know the right way when I see it” (Rowling *OP* 771). The fantastic, seen in this novel in Harry’s visions through the eyes of Voldemort, is what enables Harry to sidestep those who have been well-meaningly holding him back throughout the novel, thus allowing him to take an actual leadership

role in fighting Voldemort and his Death Eaters.<sup>49</sup> In this way, the fantastic elements in Rowling's series not only pose a challenge to the authority of Voldemort, but also structures of authority that are usually not viewed as inherently evil—parents, government, teachers, and adults in general.

Particularly interesting in these novels is that Voldemort, who is positioned as the Other, is also portrayed as the one who has power, the one against whom Harry is rebelling. This alignment suggests that perhaps Rowling is trying to call into question static dualities such as good and evil, Self and Other, those in power and those without, by not only creating interplay between the elements of such dualities, but by aligning them with each other in unexpected ways as well.<sup>50</sup> As Kate Behr writes, “[Voldemort and Harry's] clashes become more complicated as Harry's resemblances to Voldemort multiply and his moral awareness becomes more sophisticated. The reader increasingly feels that characters operating on the 'good' side are neither necessarily attractive nor kind” (268). By making Voldemort the Other, but also the one with power, Rowling can be potentially seen as challenging notions of power that are seen in race relations. Even if this is not a conscious choice on her part, the fact that her series blurs the lines between so many binary oppositions—good and evil, magic and ordinary, love and hate, life and death—introduces the idea of blurring other such boundaries, including those of race.

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<sup>49</sup> The Room of Requirement, which plays an important role in *Order of the Phoenix*, is another excellent example of magic that is not fully understood, and therefore can be seen as an element of the fantastic. Significantly, it is in the Room of Requirement that Harry and the other members of Dumbledore's Army meet, thus challenging the authority of Dolores Umbridge and her Inquisitorial Squad.

<sup>50</sup> Veronica L. Schanoes is another scholar who sees Rowling's series as complicating the good/evil binary, writing about how this appears in the figures of Severus Snape and Sirius Black. She writes, “Both Black and Snape complicate a black and white moral schema. Where Snape forces the reader to accept a bad person who chooses the side of good, Black forces us to acknowledge the potential for violence and ruthlessness that can exist in a good person. Despite their mutual revulsion for each other, the two characters have more in common than either would like to admit” (Schanoes 135).

The blurring of the boundary between life and death is particularly important, both as seen in Voldemort's splitting of his soul into seven Horcruxes, as well as in Harry's return from the dead at the end of the seventh book, because, as Wendy Pearson argues, the figure of the immortal, "because of its peculiar existential undecidability [. . .] destabilizes all of our fundamental cultural dichotomies: if the basic distinction between life and death is not operative, then neither are the binarisms of white and black, master and servant, civilized and savage, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual, present and past, history and fiction" (Pearson 187-188). Pearson argues that this immortality can be thought of in terms of Derrida's idea of *différance*, something that exists between life and death, and that can be thought of as "a deferral of death—and, perhaps, of life" (Pearson 188). Pearson's connection of the figure of the immortal to Derrida's *différance* is particularly apt when speaking of Voldemort, who, though he has almost ensured that he can never be killed, in doing so, has taken away the ability to love and relate to other humans, which is necessary to truly live (at least according to Rowling). The interstitial spaces of the fantastic and of uncertainty that Rowling creates between the figures of Harry and Voldemort, then, become spaces in which many different binary oppositions can be called into question.

The problem with such a reading, however, as many critics have noted, is that although Rowling provides the framework for challenging existing systems of power and for reexamining the binary oppositions that define the way much of Western culture views the world, she reverts to traditional systems of power and meaning at the end of each novel, undermining the subversive potential of her novels. This can be clearly seen in the way that Dumbledore provides Harry and the reader with an explanation of any

lingering uncertainties—that is, the true elements of the fantastic—at the end of each novel, “decoding what seemed inexplicable” (Behr 264). As Todorov explains, “The fantastic, we have seen, lasts only as long as a certain hesitation: a hesitation common to reader and character” (41). Dumbledore’s explanations eliminate any uncertainty on the part of either Harry or the reader, returning the world to normal and establishing himself as the site of that normalcy. This can be seen quite clearly at the end of the *Goblet of Fire*, when Harry tells Dumbledore the story of Voldemort’s return. Although Harry is overcome with emotion when he reaches the part of the story where his and Voldemort’s wands meet, Dumbledore knows exactly what happened, providing not only a description of what happened, but also a name for the spell and a reason for how it works. The spell *Priori Incantatem*, as Dumbledore describes, happens when a wand meets its brother; if “the owners of the wands for the wands to do battle...a very rare effect will take place. One of the wands will force the other to regurgitate spells it has performed—in reverse. The most recent first...and then those which preceded it...” (Rowling *GF* 697). The role of the white, elderly, intellectual male as the traditional authority figure is demonstrated in this scene, as Dumbledore is able to provide knowledge that neither the other characters, nor the reader, had access to. This traditional structure of authority is solidified several pages later, when Dumbledore, in describing a course of action to the Minister of Magic, “radiate[s]” an “indefinable sense of power” (Rowling *GF* 705-706). These neat and tidy conclusions to each novel, although they may provide the reader with a sense of comfort and familiarity, counteract the interstitial spaces and elements of the

fantastic introduced throughout the novels, thus undermining the ability of Rowling's series to pose any real challenge to traditional structures of power.<sup>51</sup>

Maria Nikolajeva's discussion of the Harry Potter series in terms of Bakhtin's descriptions of carnival theory is also extremely helpful here, as she demonstrates how throughout the series, although Harry and his compatriots experience danger, adventure, and freedom during the course of each novel, "in the end, an adult will take over," (235), thus reinforcing traditional structures of power and authority. She notes that this is made extremely clear in the final volume of the series, where the reader not only sees that Dumbledore has been using Harry "for the greater good," but that Dumbledore once again summons Harry back "to explain to him everything Harry has not understood, everything the adults have concealed from him 'for his own good,' everything he has not been considered mature enough to grasp, everything they have lied about, everything they have abused him to perform for their benefit" (Nikolajeva 240). And in the epilogue, Harry himself is now an adult, passing on his wisdom to his children, teaching them about right and wrong not only through what he tells them, but in the names he gives them—one of his sons is named after both Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape. This epilogue, while unsatisfying to many readers who wanted to know more about Harry and his friends in the future, demonstrates how "the wheel of power has gone full circle. Adult normativity is irreversibly cemented" (Nikolajeva 240), and traditional structures of power and authority remain firmly in place.

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<sup>51</sup> Farah Mendlesohn identifies this aspect of Rowling's series as well, arguing that "fairness" is the ideological standard through the series, and as a result, "it leads to a rejection of the subversive opportunities available to the fantasist, exemplified in the works of Lewis Carroll and others: if a world is fundamentally fair and rational, subversion is politically unnecessary" (160).

This is problematic, because Rowling has shown that she is capable of writing the fantastic in her texts in a way that can add uncertainty to her narratives, thus destabilizing established structures of power. As Heilman and Gregory note, Rowling's novels have the potential to have extremely far-reaching influence, because "texts help readers to *create* ideas about empire, race, class, gender, and power rather than merely *reflect* relations among groups and nations in the world" (255). Rather than challenge discriminatory ideas about race, "the *Harry Potter* books legitimize numerous forms of social inequality and their related cultural norms, rituals, and traditions" (Heilman and Gregory 242). Similarly, these texts also "serve to normalize who has power in school, especially among peer groups and in sports, and who has power in society, especially related to social class, race, and nationality" (Heilman and Gregory 242-243). Rowling's portrayal of Harry and Voldemort's relationship, although certainly interesting and complicated in its reflection of the discourse of the Self and the Other, rejects the elements of the fantastic created by such a relationship and returns to a traditional structure at the end of each novel, and at the end of the series as a whole, thus reinforcing current hegemonic structures instead of posing a serious challenge to the way that we think about definitions of identity, race, ethnicity, or nationality.

Therefore, although the fantastic is used in each of the three texts examined in this chapter to blur the distinction between Self and Other, it is also extremely useful for highlighting the ways in which each of these texts also relies on or reverts to racial fantasies, essentialist ideas of culture, or traditional structures of identity and authority. Certainly, all three of the authors examined in this chapter use the fantastic as a means for



their characters to negotiate identity, and to some degree, all three also complicate static ideas of identity and the binary relationship between Self and Other. This reinforces the ideas presented by Bhabha, examined at the beginning of this chapter, that suggest that the true site of identity creation is in neither the Self nor the Other, but in the space in-between. Furthermore, as these texts demonstrate, the fantastic plays a key role in this interstitial space, providing characters with the ability to bring together potentially contradictory influences on their identity. But in each of these novels, the author also relies on the comfortable, yet problematic, racial fantasies, essentialist ideas of culture, or structures of authority and identity of the status quo—elements that the inclusion of the fantastic is very helpful in bringing to the reader's attention.

If the reversion to traditional structures of authority and power were limited to Rowling's series, it might be tempting to attribute it to the fact that Rowling's series is characterized as children's fantasy literature. Disregarding all of these texts, however, because of their inclusion of elements of the fantastic, undermines the ways in which they all use the fantastic to destabilize established categories of identity and literary category. A more productive line of thinking would be to examine the effects of such a reliance on traditional hegemonic structures and racial fantasies on the readers of a text. When discussing Harry Potter, for example, Jack Zipes provocatively links Rowling's reinforcement of traditional thinking about identity and authority with the series' popularity. He writes, "What distinguishes the plots of Rowling's novels, however, are their conventionality, predictability, and happy ends despite the clever turns of phrases and surprising twists in the intricate plots. They are easy and delightful to read, carefully manicured and packaged, and they sell extraordinarily well precisely because they are so

cute and ordinary” (Zipes 175). In other words, the way in which Rowling reverts to conventional ways of thinking about identity and authority is, ultimately, what is responsible for the enormous success of her series. Extending this line of thinking to Tan and Silko’s texts as well would suggest that these texts are popular *because* of the way that they rely on racial fantasies and essentialist ideas about race, rather than in spite of it. These texts that champion the ordinary and the conventional above the uncertain and the fantastic are problematic, not only because they shy away from truly addressing complicated questions of race and identity, but also because they rely on what has been done before, rather than pushing the limits of creativity. Such a situation suggests not only the importance of the fantastic in our everyday lives, but the need for it—without its uncertainty and hesitation, thinking about literature, race, and even our own identities would become stagnate.

*Creative fantasy, because it is mainly trying to do something else (make something new), may open your hoard and let all the locked things fly away like cage-birds. The gems all turn into flowers or flames, and you will be warned that all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent, not really effectively chained, free and wild; no more yours than they were you.—from “On Fairy-Stories” by J.R.R. Tolkien*

*If I could turn back time  
If I could find a way  
I'd take back those words that have hurt you  
And you'd stay.  
--from “If I Could Turn Back Time” sung by Cher*

## Chapter 5: “If I Could Turn Back Time”: The Limitations and Moral Necessity of the Fantastic

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In the quote from J.R.R. Tolkien that serves as one of the epigraphs to this chapter, he describes how in fantasy literature, “The gems all turn into flowers or flames” (147). Such a quote creates the image of fantasy literature, and the fantastic, as containing tremendous power to radically transform an object into something else. Given the themes and texts examined thus far in this dissertation, this transformative power is easy to believe. In texts such as Heinz Insu Fenkl’s *Memories of My Ghost Brother* and Stephen King’s *The Dark Tower* series, we have seen physical boundaries provide a space for the fantastic to enter the narrative, where it then uses the uncertainty of the interstitial space to negotiate between contradictory emotions, desires, and even aspects of identity. And in texts such as Amy Tan’s *The Hundred Secret Senses* and J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, we have seen the fantastic as a tool for negotiating between the Self and the Other, challenging this binary relationship and creating a complicated, fluid concept of identity.

But as Tolkien's quote also suggests, the fantastic is not simply a magic wand that can be waved, providing the means to resolve problematic elements in the narrative. If we look closely at what he says, he describes not only the creative power of the fantastic, but also about the inherent uncertainty, uncontrollability, and even danger of the fantastic. He attributes agency to the fantastic, saying that it "may open your hoard and let all the locked things fly away like cage-birds" (Tolkien 147). In other words, the fantastic is not something that an author can completely control, but rather, it can have effects on a text that an author did not expect. Tolkien's claim that the "gems all turn into flowers or flames" is also followed by a warning: "you will be warned that all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent, not really effectively chained, free and wild; no more yours than they were you" (Tolkien 147). These words speak to the unpredictability of the fantastic, of the way in which the uncertainty which is central to what the fantastic then introduces that same level of uncertainty into the texts it inhabits. The fantastic is a powerful tool for negotiating elements within a text, but this power may not always have the effect that the author intended. While this is certainly true for many aspects of all fiction, the fantastic has even greater potential to highlight contradictions within a text because of the uncertainty that is inherent in this literary trope. This, too, is something that we have seen throughout this dissertation. In Guy Gavriel Kay's *The Fionavar Tapestry*, for example, the fantastic is introduced as a way to challenge systems of power in the novel, but it also serves to highlight the way in which Kay both utilizes and rejects stereotypical images of Native Americans. And in Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues*, the fantastic draws to the reader's attention the way in which Alexie contradictorily perpetuates some of the very racial fantasies that he calls into question. In

these texts, the fantastic ends up functioning in a way that the author does not expect or intend, and in fact, in a way that often undermines or contradicts the author's intended meaning for a text.

This potential for the fantastic to create uncertainty, contradictions, and even chaos within a text is important to recognize, since if the fantastic were always predictable and easy to understand, it would cease to be significant. Instead of being a complex, provocative literary trope, it would become something of a *deus ex machina*, an element to introduce into the narrative when nothing else is working. Tolkien's words then, point to the importance of recognizing the limitations of the fantastic as well as its power. The need for such limits can be seen through an examination of Frank Chin's novel *Donald Duk*. In this novel, Chin uses the fantastic to allow his protagonist, Donald Duk, to challenge his racist teacher and negotiate the conflicting Chinese and American aspects of his identity, but the ending is *too* perfect. Things are resolved *too* smoothly, thus making the elements of the fantastic clearly unbelievable. In order for a story to be believable and for the elements of the fantastic to be meaningful, there must be limits on the fantastic within a story. Such limits actually enable the fantastic to maintain its ability to cause uncertainty and highlight the unexpected, making it a complex literary trope rather than a mundane plot device. This chapter examines one specific limit on the fantastic—the restriction on going back in time and changing the past. As an examination of Midori Snyder's "The Armless Maiden," Ellen Steiber's "In the Night Country," James Welch's *Fools Crow* and Charles de Lint's *Memory & Dream* shows, although the fantastic can change the impact of the past on people's lives, it cannot go back and alter the events of the past. In this way, the fantastic maintains its usefulness as

a tool for creating meaning. Even more importantly, the limitations of the fantastic are also another extremely helpful way to destabilize comfortable, expected ideas about race and difference, but in a way that reaches out of the text and puts the burden of this discomfort on the reader, rather than on the text or the author. This is seen in de Lint and Welch's texts, in which the inability of the fantastic to change the past introduces uncertainty into the boundary between the world of the text and the real world, challenging the reader's status as a passive observer, and as a result, making the reader feel compelled to act. In this way, including the fantastic in texts that deal with race is vastly more than just a way to negotiate questions of identity and difference within the text—it is an element that is morally necessary in its ability to unsettle readers and move debates about race from the pages of a text to the actions of the real world.

The need for limits on the fantastic can be seen in Frank Chin's *Donald Duk* (1991), a novel in which the fantastic appears, yet is used to resolve everything too perfectly. Set in San Francisco around 1990, Chin's novel tells the story of a young Chinese American boy named Donald Duk who struggles to resolve the Chinese and American aspects of his identity. Donald does not like to draw attention to his cultural heritage, which is particularly difficult during the Chinese New Year celebrations that take place over the course of the novel. Donald's reluctance to engage with Chinese cultural traditions is exacerbated by his teacher, Mr. Meanwright, who teaches stereotypical ideas about Chinese people to Donald and his class. Early in the novel, Donald is told by Mr. Meanwright how the Chinese were "passive," "timid," "introverted," and "helpless" (Chin 2). This characterization of the Chinese as passive

and timid affects how Donald thinks of himself and his culture. His Dad tells him, “Look at those slouching shoulders, that pouty face. Look at those hands holding onto each other. You look scared!” Donald replies, “I am scared!” (Chin 4). In these initial scenes of the novel, Chin describes the racial fantasy of Chinese people as passive and demonstrates how this fantasy has a real impact on Donald’s life and concept of identity. Donald’s ambivalence toward the Chinese side of his identity can be seen in his hatred of his name: “His own name is driving him crazy! Looking Chinese is driving him crazy!” (Chin 2). On the other hand, Donald is fascinated by American culture, particularly the movies of Fred Astaire. He takes dance lessons from Larry Louie, “who calls himself ‘The Chinese Fred Astaire’” (Chin 1), and in fact, “Donald Duk wants to be Fred Astaire” (Chin 52). These examples early in the novel establish how Donald Duk feels caught between the Chinese and American aspects of his identity.

Over the course of the novel, however, the fantastic enters the narrative in the dreams that Donald has about the Chinese building the transcontinental railroad, thus providing him with the means not only to negotiate his own identity, but also to stand up to the racist assertions of his teacher. Scholars such as Kathleen Brogan and Suzanne Leonard discuss how ghosts and dreams are ways of recovering a lost cultural heritage.<sup>52</sup> Leonard writes, “Frequently underpinning discussions like that of Brogan is the suggestion that that forgotten pasts (and the stories, moments, and peoples which accompany them) may be accessed through acts of the imagination, and that such interventions may help to reconstitute cultural histories which might otherwise be erased”

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<sup>52</sup> See also Anne Cheng’s discussion of ghosts, hypochondria, and racial melancholia in *The Melancholy of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

(181).<sup>53</sup> Donald “wants to dream for a look at his great-great-grandfather,” and when he falls asleep, “the dream comes on like a movie all over his eyes” (Chin 25). In his dream, he is working on building the railroads in the Sierra Nevada mountains. For Donald, the dream was “so real”—“He wants to stay asleep and dream he is a powderboy, taking to prying iron and spiking rail across Nevada, and never wake up” (Chin 29). Late in the novel, when Donald tells his father about his dreams, his father tells him, “But you know the truth. The truth came looking for you in the dreams. You go look for the truth in the library. You know what is true. [. . .] That makes your life hard, kid. You have the choice. If you say Chinese are ching chong, you have to choose to do it and lie about what you know is true” (Chin 338). As Donald’s father tells him, the dreams Donald has provide him with the tools to find out the truth about his identity; now, instead of feeling trapped by his Chinese heritage, the fantastic has enabled him to feel confident about who he is. Donald’s father reinforces this by telling him, “And you remember one thing too: Soong Gong, the Timely Rain, came to you in your dreams and asked you to go to his hideout and join his heroes. Boys and girls don’t dream like that over here. You must be something special. Maybe” (Chin 138). Through the insertion of the fantastic into the narrative in the form of Donald’s dreams, Donald feels more confident about his ability

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<sup>53</sup> Brogan’s argument, which she describes in her informative study *Cultural Hauntings: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), resembles the argument of this dissertation in the way that she focuses on the transformative power of ghosts (i.e., the fantastic). There are a number of significant differences, however, between the argument that Brogan makes and the argument that I make, primarily that Brogan looks at the inward-looking effects of the fantastic, focusing on ghosts and haunting as a way to understand and recreate culture. She writes, “In the literature of cultural haunting, such haunting potentially leads to a valuable awareness of how the group’s past continues to inhabit and inform the living” (Brogan 8). This dissertation is more focused on the outward effects of the fantastic—the ways in which fantastic elements revise, challenge, and even rewrite structures and narratives of oppression and trauma, for example, or the ways in which the fantastic provides the means to negotiate identity.



to learn the truth about who he is, and as a result, no longer feels ashamed of his Chinese heritage.

Donald's increased confidence in the Chinese aspects of his identity pave the way for him to challenge Mr. Meanwright's racist claims of passivity and timidity for the Chinese. Because Donald's dreams blur the lines between imagination and reality, between dreaming and waking, they also blurring the line between the history that is told and the past as it actually happened. In this way, Donald's dreams of Chinese legendary hero Kwan Kung and other heroes from the classic Chinese novel *Water Margin* are also key in providing him with a way to challenge racist stereotypes and structures of power in the present. In Donald's dreams, Kung appears as the foreman of a crew of Chinese laborers, a man who inspires his crew to break the record for laying track in a single day. This insertion of the fantastic into the narrative, in the form of historical dreams, gives Donald the power to stand up to Mr. Meanwright at the end of the novel and tell him,

You are...sir, Mr. Meanwright, not correct about us being passive, noncompetitive. [. . .] We went on strike for back pay and Chinese foremen for Chinese gangs, and won. We set the world's record for miles of track laid in one day. We set our last crosstie at Promontory. And it is badly informed people like you who keep us out of the picture there" (Chin 150).

Donald refers to the picture of the Last Spike ceremony celebrating the completion of the railroad; he then changes the slide to "an old grainy shot of the Chinese in the Sierra Nevadas, in the first year, working above the snowline. [. . .] Everyone in class looks straight into the eyes of a young Chinese boy in the midground, turning toward the camera and smiling. [. . .] The face is Donald Duk's" (Chin 150-151). Donald's dreams give him the authority to challenge the racist assertions of his teacher and rewrite the

historical narrative that ignores the contributions of the Chinese to the building of the transcontinental railroad, substituting in a photograph that shows their/his hard work instead of the photograph that purposefully omits the Chinese.

One of the problems with Chin's novel *Donald Duk*, however, is that the story is resolved too easily, which in turn makes the reader feel comfortable with the way things are in the world as we know it. Suzanne Leonard is one who identifies "the ease with which Donald finds the evidence he needs, and is then able use [sic] it in order to challenge his teacher" (191). She argues, "While such revisionary efforts are both worthwhile and necessary, they nevertheless seem intended to leave Donald (and readers alike) feeling comfortably moralistic" (Leonard 192). The novel ends with Donald Duk and his family, along with his friend Arnold Azalea and his family, all flying the homemade model planes on Angel Island and watching them explode with fireworks in mid-air. This picture of family, community, cultural, and racial unity, all on Angel Island, the site of much of the Asian immigration into the United States in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, does seem a bit too perfect. The tensions between Donald and his sisters, between Donald and Arnold, and even between Donald and the Frog Twins fade away into silence as everyone watches the planes flying—"they are only sounds in the dark, occasionally a silhouette against the lights of San Francisco" (Chin 171). The differences between them fade away into the dark as well, with everyone coming together to answer Donald's father's question "Anybody hungry?" (Chin 172). In some ways, the fantastic seems to have worked *too* well; none of the slight imperfections of the real world remain. Instead of serving to introduce hesitation and uncertainty into the questions of race raised by his novel, Chin instead uses the fantastic to provide easy,

definitive answers. Such answers deny the true complexity and persistent problems that mark discussions of race and difference. And as Leonard argues, this is problematic in that it leaves the reader feeling morally comfortable about the state of racial relations in the United States.

Rosemary Jackson would argue that this comfortable feeling at the end of *Donald Duk* is because the novel fits more into the form of “fairy tale” rather than the fantastic. She notes, “Theorists of fairy tales all stress this consolatory function of the marvellous [sic]” (R. Jackson 154). In other words, because the elements of the fantastic in *Donald Duk* shift toward the marvelous, rather than the uncanny, this leads the text to an ending marked by fulfillment, consolation, and satisfaction. But as Jackson argues, this fairy tale form leaves no room for the reader. She writes,

As narrative forms, fairy tales function differently from fantasies. They are neutral, impersonalized, set apart from the reader. The reader becomes a passive receiver of events, there is no demand that (s)he participate in their interpretation. *Structurally, too, fairy tales discourage belief in the importance or effectiveness of action* for their narratives are ‘closed’. Things ‘happen’, ‘are done to’ protagonists, told *to* the reader, from a position of omniscience and authority, making the reader unquestioningly passive. (R. Jackson 154)

In other words, for the fantastic to remain effective in a text, elements of the narrative must remain open to the reader, demonstrating the importance of participation and interpretation on the part of the reader, as well as on the part of the characters within the narrative.

Tolkien’s essay “On Fairy-Stories” is helpful here as well, as he describes the process a reader goes through when reading a story that allows the story to be believable. He writes, “[The author] makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it,

what he relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed” (Tolkien 132). For the fantastic to function in a story without any trouble or limitation, leading to a perfectly resolved ending, would break the “spell” as Tolkien calls it that has created the world of the story.<sup>54</sup> While it seems slightly counter-intuitive to talk about “believability” when it comes to the fantastic, within the world of the novel, the fantastic *is* a believable element. The problem of disbelief comes when the fantastic functions in a way that is without problems or complications, making it more of a fix-all for narrative problems, rather than an element that introduces themes of uncertainty and hesitation. Another helpful way to frame this discussion might be in terms of what makes a text meaningful. For the fantastic to fix all the problems of a text, without raising any further complications, leaves the reader with an ending that presents no lingering questions or challenges to her worldview. The text is complete, in and of itself, without challenging the reader to think about what she has read or to engage with the issues of the text after she has finished reading. Tolkien and Jackson’s words then suggest that in order for a text to be meaningful in its use of the fantastic, there must be limitations to the fantastic or complications in the way that it is portrayed, otherwise the spell of the narrative is broken. Therefore, not only is the use of

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<sup>54</sup> Although it is certainly not a formal theoretical approach, the Wachowski brother’s landmark film *The Matrix* (1999) addresses this same point. When talking to Morpheus, Agent Smith describes the process of creating the Matrix, a computer program designed to trick human minds into thinking they are living in reality: “Did you know that the first Matrix was designed to be a perfect human world? Where none suffered, where everyone would be happy. It was a disaster. No one would accept the program. Entire crops were lost. Some believed we lacked the programming language to describe your perfect world. But I believe that, as a species, human beings define their reality through suffering and misery. The perfect world was a dream that your primitive cerebrum kept trying to wake up from” (Wachowski). Just as Agent Smith sees that suffering is necessary for humans to believe reality, this chapter argues that the fantastic cannot be omnipotent if the narrative is going to be meaningful.

the fantastic in Frank Chin's *Donald Duk* problematic in the way that it allows the reader to feel morally comfortable about race relations, as Leonard suggests, but it is also troubling because it creates an unequivocally happy ending that does not challenge the reader to engage with the issues of the novel once he has finished reading.

While there are certainly many ways in which the fantastic could be and is limited, one way that is particularly interesting to the groups of literature examined in this dissertation regards the treatment of time, namely, that you cannot go back in time to change the past. This limitation on the fantastic appears several times in Terri Windling's collection *The Armless Maiden* (1995), an anthology in which Windling collects retellings of traditional fairy tales in both prose and poetic forms. In many of the stories in the anthology, we can see the power of the fantastic to restructure and revise, to challenge inequality and work for justice. Both Midori Snyder's "The Armless Maiden" and Ellen Steiber's "In the Night Country" demonstrate this power particularly effectively, but both also portray the fantastic as something that must move forward, rather than look back to change the past. Snyder's "The Armless Maiden" tells the story of a young woman named Marion whose brother cuts off her arms, encouraged by his own wife's jealous lies and deceit. Marion runs from her home and is rescued by a prince, who falls in love with her and marries her. In time, Marion gives birth to a baby boy, but upon finding out about Marion's happiness and good fortune, her sister-in-law conspires to have her thrown out of the castle. Marion leaves the castle with her baby tied to her back, but without arms, she is able to neither feed her baby nor change his soiled diapers. When Marion comes to a lake, she bends down to take a drink and her baby slips from his bindings, plunging into the depths of the water.

It is at this point in the narrative that the fantastic intervenes—the spirit of the lake, in the form of a fish, offers to save either her or her child. Marion instead says, “Give me my hands and I will save us both!” (Snyder “The Armless Maiden” 26). The fish dives back to the bottom of the lake, and as she once again caught a glimpse of her baby, Marion “reached out and saw a hand—her own hand—plunge through the churning water. She reached again, this time with her other hand, and clutching the baby to her breast, she swam upward” (Snyder “The Armless Maiden” 26). As Marion rests with her son at the edge of the lake, she thanks the spirit of the lake, who tells her, “There is no need of thanks. It was your own courage that reached out and took back that which was once severed from you” (Snyder “The Armless Maiden” 27). Although the spirit of the lake disavows responsibility for Marion’s healing, the fact remains that the regrowth of her arms in her moment of extreme need is a fantastic occurrence, existing in between the possible and impossible and marked by the uncertainty of what exactly caused this to happen. This fantastic intervention changes the path of Marion’s life, allowing her to not only care for her child, but to rewrite the trauma of being incomplete with the comfort of being whole as well.

Interestingly enough, the fantastic in “The Armless Maiden” provides Marion with a way to rewrite the narrative of trauma and loss inflicted on her by her brother and his wife, but it also provides her with the means to challenge the more subtle inequalities throughout the story as well. The most obvious way it changes Marion’s life is that it allows Marion to rewrite the trauma of losing her arms at the hand of her brother, instead writing a story filled with the joy and wonder of being whole. This shift in Marion’s narrative is most noticeable at the end of the story, where we see her surrounded by rose

petals as she “laughed as she caught them in her upturned hands” (Snyder “The Armless Maiden” 30). Snyder’s choice of the word “hands” to end the story leaves the reader with a lingering image of Marion’s transformation, and along with it, the fantastic elements of the narrative that brought it about.

But the fantastic enables Marion to challenge some of the less obvious inequalities in the story as well, specifically those dealing with gender roles. When Marion is first found by the Prince and his servants, one of the servants tells him, “we found a creature in your orchard stealing apples” (Snyder “The Armless Maiden” 21). When the Prince looks at her, Marion realizes that he is looking at her with “kindness, but also pity” (Snyder “The Armless Maiden” 21). The language here speaks to Marion’s second-class position in relation to the Prince—someone described as not fully human, someone to be pitied. Marion’s transformation, however, allows her to rewrite this structure of power, and position herself as equal to the prince. After her arms are restored, Marion stays with an old woodcutter and keeps house for him. When the Prince finds her, he tells her to come home, but she declines, saying, “When I first came to you, I was a creature of the woods. You pitied me and gave me shelter. But now I am a woman and you must court me as a woman.” Rather than objecting, the Prince “nodded, understanding, and though he was reluctant to leave her he mounted his horse and bid her good-bye” (Snyder “The Armless Maiden” 28). The restoration of Marion’s arms also provides her with the self-confidence that she needs to approach the Prince as an equal, and even more importantly, for him to respect her wishes and obey her requests. As Snyder notes in her essay discussing some of the reasons she wrote “The Armless Maiden,” “When he comes to propose marriage this second time, it is a marriage of

equals, based on respect and not pity” (“Hero’s Journey” online). In this way, the appearance of the fantastic in the story not only rewrites the narrative of trauma, but it also restructures the patriarchal systems of authority that cause Marion to initially be viewed as a “creature,” rather than as a woman.

Although the fantastic restores Marion’s arms and enables her to challenge patriarchal structures, the trauma of the past is still not erased. In fact, as the passages above suggest, the process that Marion has undergone has been necessary for her to mature from a girl to a woman. In her essay, Snyder speaks of the transformative power of the fantastic in her narrative as something that changes Marion not only by restoring her arms, but also by marking her passage from childhood into maturity. She writes how in the middle of the story, Marion “has not completed her journey of transformation from adolescence to adulthood. She is not whole, not the girl she was nor the woman she was meant to be. The narrative make it clear that without her arms, she is unable to fulfill her role as an adult” (Snyder “Hero’s Journey” online). Only when Marion returns to the woods and finds the lake is her journey complete: “There the fantastic heals her, purifies her in the waters of the lake and she returns reborn as a woman” (Snyder “Hero’s Journey” online). For Marion to return to the beginning of the narrative and forgo the trauma of losing her arms, she would also lose the experiences of loss and grief that have helped her transform from a child into a woman. Therefore, even though the ending of the story is a joyful one, it is underscored by the lingering memories of her traumatic experience that has enabled her to now live life on the terms that she dictates. Such a relationship between joy and trauma not only emphasizes the way in which the fantastic creates a space for contradictory elements and emotions, but also demonstrates how the



limitations of the fantastic, specifically, the inability to erase the past completely, leads to a more thought-provoking and meaningful narrative.

Another story in *The Armless Maiden* collection in which the fantastic is not able to change the past, in spite of its role in challenging unequal structures of power within the story, is Ellen Steiber's "In the Night Country." Although this story is very different in content and tone than Snyder's—it begins in a dimly lit all-night diner, rather than in the magical world of "once upon a time"—it too tells the story of the way in which the fantastic enables a young woman to confront those tormenting her and take control of her own life. Steiber tells the story of Cilla, a seventeen-year-old girl who is running away from her abusive mother. Cilla meets Devon McKenna, an old classmate, and although she is reluctant to go anywhere with him, eventually accepts a ride in his car that leads to her getting lost in the woods and them both falling off a cliff into the stream. In the stream, Devon is transformed into a deer, and as she follows him through the woods, Cilla comes across a group of ghosts called the Revelers—musicians who strip her of her emotional baggage and provide her with the confidence to confront those who are abusing her. One of the musicians says of her, "She'll have to find her power on her own. [. . .] But we can help her back to her colors" (Steiber 324). Later that night, Cilla encounters a vision of her mother, who comes toward her with a belt, preparing to beat her. In her mind, Cilla heard the voice of one of the ghostly Revelers: "Amazing what a body can do with a little less fear in its bones" (Steiber 332). This recollection of her transformation at the hands of the Revelers enables Cilla to see the world—including herself and her mother—for what they truly are, which in turn, gives her the confidence she needs to stand up to her mother's abuse:

Cilla looked past the strap and saw the deep blue of the night, the green of the trees, the jewel colors of the glass beads against the silver-green tunic. She felt the earth beneath her bare feet, soft and cool, covered with pine needles. She felt her own body, slim and strong and lovely. [. . .]

She studied her mother, a body arrested in attack. She seemed smaller, reduced to fury, cut off from the most basic truths. And no longer frightening.

“Put the strap down,” Cilla told her mother. “You aren’t going to beat me again.” (Steiber 332)

In Steiber’s story, the intervention of the fantastic in Cilla’s life allows her to see her mother for what she truly is, which in turn eliminates her power over Cilla. The connection that Steiber makes between the fantastic, truth, and power seen clearly in her comment that Cilla’s mother is “cut off from the most basic truths,” is an insightful one, and recalls the analysis of Said’s *Orientalism* earlier in this dissertation. In this story, knowledge/truth is certainly power, and it is the fantastic that provides Cilla with the access to this knowledge, further reinforcing the idea of the fantastic as something that has the power to challenge the status quo.

Another noteworthy aspect of “In the Night Country” is the necklace that Cilla wears, as this necklace serves as a physical representation of the power of the fantastic in a similar manner to the way that physical boundaries can function as representations of the interstitial space of the fantastic, as described in chapter three of this project. The necklace Cilla wears is “a long strand of glass beads—amber, red, blue, green, and purple” and when she was a child, she “thought it magic—a gift that could only have come from the fairies” (Steiber 324). The Revelers hold out the necklace for her to take, and when she objects that it is just costume jewelry, “she knew her own words for a lie” (Steiber 325). As she reaches to take the necklace, one of the Revelers smiles at her. “‘Cou-raj,’ he said. He repeated it, a new chant, and she realized it was just the French

pronunciation, ‘*Courage, courage, courage...*’” (Steiber 325). Just like certain physical boundaries—the Wall between Ancelstierre and the Old Kingdom in Garth Nix’s *Abhorsen* trilogy, the DMZ in Fenkl’s *Memories of My Ghost Brother*, and the Wall in Neil Gaiman’s *Stardust*, to name a few—are more than just boundaries, but instead serve as physical representations of interstitial spaces of the fantastic, Cilla’s necklace is also more than just jewelry. Instead, it functions as a talisman, a physical representation of the insertion of the fantastic into Cilla’s real life. In the long passage quoted above in which Cilla confronts her mother, the colors of the necklace are one of the things that she sees the truth of, which is what finally allows her to reject her mother’s control over her. The magic that she thought the necklace held when she was a child has now become a part of her life, and the necklace and its colors serve as a physical representation of both this magic and the new structures of power that it has created.

Cilla also has an encounter with her father while in this otherworldly realm, and this encounter points to the important distinction that this chapter makes about the power of the fantastic—it is the power to change the future, rather than the past. When Cilla sees the ghost of her father, who had died of cancer a year ago, she runs to talk with him, crying, “I have to tell you something. Daddy, please, I have to talk to you!” (Steiber 327). Cilla had seen dark shapes following her father when he was living and knew they marked him for death, but she did not say anything then because she was too afraid. Now, her strongest desire is to change this version of the past; she wants to tell her father about these shapes, to give him a second chance at life. But as Cilla runs toward her father, the ghost Connie stops her, saying, “No, love. That’s not what this is about. You don’t get to rewrite the past. The only things that can be changed are what’s coming up”

(Steiber 327). This incident is very similar to what we have seen in texts ranging from *The Fionavar Tapestry* to *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*<sup>55</sup> to “The Armless Maiden.” In all of these stories, the fantastic does not take the protagonist back in time or allow for the trauma of the past to be erased, but instead, provides a way for coping with the trauma and for moving forward into the future. In this way, these texts all acknowledge that the ability to deal with grief and trauma is a necessary part of life, and that “happily ever after” is only a single part of the story. This inclusion of, and even insistence on, loss in these texts, then, demonstrates how acknowledging the limits of the fantastic enables a text to use this literary trope to make the text more believable, complex, and ultimately, a better tool for addressing complicated issues in the real world, including questions of race and difference.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Windling’s collection comes from what she herself says in the introduction to the work. She writes of her goal to address the trauma and horror that thousands, if not millions, of American children experience growing up,

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<sup>55</sup> Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series is an interesting case, because in the third book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry and Hermione do travel back in time to save the lives of Sirius Black and Buckbeak, the hippogryph. What is interesting about this time travel, however, is that they do not go back in time to change what *did* happen; they go back in time to change what *will* happen if they do not act. The events that they want to change are events that have not happened yet, but that would happen in the future. Also, in perhaps some of the most poignant scenes in the entire series, the reality that Harry and Hermione experience the first time is the same as the reality they experience when they travel through time, just from a different perspective. This allows Harry to see himself perform the Patronus Charm and mistakenly think that he sees his father instead. When Harry tells Hermione that he thinks he has seen his father, she stresses the idea that you cannot turn back time: “Harry, your dad’s—well—*dead*” (Rowling *PoA* 407). Rowling stresses the idea that you cannot erase the past more emphatically as the series progresses, with its themes maturing and becoming darker. At the end of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, after Harry has seen Voldemort return to power, Dumbledore asks Harry to tell him what happened. When Sirius objects, asking if it can wait until morning, Dumbledore replies, “If I thought I could help you [ . . . ] by putting you into an enchanted sleep and allowing you to postpone the moment when you would have to think about what has happened tonight, I would do it. But I know better. Numbing the pain for a while will make it worse when you finally feel it” (Rowling *GF* 695). These examples show that in spite of the inclusion of time travel as an element in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, J.K. Rowling’s view of the fantastic is in line with the other texts in this chapter—specifically, that erasing the past is not possible, and in fact, as Dumbledore suggests, can even be worse in the long run.

whether as a result of abuse, parental alcoholism, or molestation, and argues that traditional fairy tales—not the ones seen in Disney movies, but those told by Grimm, Anderson, Perrault, and the like—provide a way for those who have experienced such abuse to move forward. She writes:

what's important about these stories, from the point of view of any of us who have gone through the deep dark woods in childhood ourselves, is not the expectation of ending "Happily Ever After." Rather, it's the way that ending is achieved through the process of transformation. It is all too easy to get lost in the woods, stuck in the mindset of victimization. These stories urge us to pass on through, to toss off the spells and the donkey-skins, to pick up the sword, the stone, the ring, to transform ourselves and our lives with the old-fashioned strengths of goodness, persistence, and action. (Windling 15)

Windling's words about the importance of transformation in overcoming trauma are directly applicable to the texts examined in this chapter, and point to the way that literature can provide a way to rewrite lives previously defined by abuse, trauma, and racism. Although Windling seems to suggest that the fantastic does not play a central role in this process of transformation, her words later in the introduction speak to the tremendous power of fantasy and the imagination. She writes:

All acts of political change must begin with an act of imagination. I want to re-imagine this country as a place in which no child is left hungry, sick, or cringing alone in terror. Impossible? But I'm a fantasist; I believe in the impossible. I believe in the strength of the imagination, clear sight, persistence, and a steadfast heart. These are the attributes of the heroes and heroines of the old fairy tales, the "magical" virtues with which they transformed themselves, and their perilous worlds. (Windling 16)

Windling's discussion of believing in the impossible speaks directly to the theme of the fantastic providing the means for characters to challenge the structures in their lives that have usurped their power. Although many of the qualities Windling mentions are not actually supernatural, as she herself acknowledges, their presence in a life filled with

trauma and grief is in fact “magical” and fantastic, in that it is positioned between the possible and the impossible. In these passages, Windling articulates what we have seen in the fiction of Snyder and Steiber—that although the insertion of the fantastic into a story provides characters with the means to rewrite narratives of trauma, it does not provide them with the means to go back and erase or change the past. But as Windling suggests, the magic caused by the fantastic in a fictional text, because it has roots in the very real issues of loss and trauma, can then have real-world transformative powers, enabling those who have experienced trauma to break out of the “mindset of victimization.” In other words, the limitation of the fantastic to not be able to go back and change the past is in fact a valuable asset to this literary trope, in that it provides readers with a way to insert themselves into the text.

Windling’s description of the real-world effects of the fantastic can be seen in Charles de Lint’s fantasy novel *Memory & Dream* (1994), in which we see limitations on the power of fantastic that are similar to those presented in the works of Steiber and Snyder, but that also involve the reader directly in the text.<sup>56</sup> *Memory & Dream* tells the story of Isabelle Copley, an artist whose study under a temperamental and often violent famous painter has taught her how to call forth human-like incarnations of the images she paints—what she calls numena. The novel switches back and forth between the early 1970s and 1992, so we see Isabelle at two distinct stages in her life. In both of these stages, Isabelle has to deal with the feelings of responsibility and guilt brought on by

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<sup>56</sup> Charles de Lint is a Canadian author who incorporates Native American and First Nations mythology into many of his works, including *Memory & Dream*, another aspect of his work that is worth examining. Laurence Steven is one critic who has written about the images of race in de Lint’s work, arguing that the way in which many of de Lint’s fantasy novels incorporate the fantastic into the real world give him a new way to talk about race, a way “to shape a new relationship beyond the dyad of colonizer/colonized, which does not simply reinscribe the traditional values thereof” (63).

allowing the numena passage into our world, particularly when many of them are destroyed by her former mentor. In the scenes set in 1992, Isabelle also has to deal with the guilt and trauma of her best friend Kathy's death—a death complicated by the fact that Isabelle refuses to acknowledge that Kathy's death was a suicide, instead convincing herself that Kathy had died in the hospital from cancer. One of the recurring themes in the novel is the question of whether or not humans can change the past, whether they can alter the terms of the world that they live in. Early in the novel, Isabelle and Kathy have a discussion about the power of the imagination and its effect on the real world. Kathy argues that humans have the power to make the world what they want it to be, but Isabelle responds, "That's not something we can do. We can't just imagine things to be different. I mean we can, but it won't really change anything—not in the real world" (de Lint 5). In Kathy's suicide note, which we read a few pages later, even she has come to believe that "the stories are lies. There is no hope, there is no real happiness. At the end, nobody really lives happily ever after, because nobody lives forever and underneath the happiness there's always pain" (de Lint 12). These early discussions of the power of the imagination and the fantastic, as well as the way they are carried throughout the events of the novel, make the reader question the power of the fantastic in much the same way that Isabelle does, thinking of it as something that is fine for novels, but has no real efficacy in the real world.

De Lint's novel also presents the power of the imagination as something that is dangerous and that even can be fatal. Throughout the novel, Isabelle rewrites the narrative of her past to erase any of the trauma that she may have experienced. This is most apparent when she is brutally beaten by her mentor, Victor Rushkin, yet she

convinces herself that she was mugged. When she first tells Kathy what happened, she lies and tells her that she had been mugged, but then wonders, “Now why did she say that? she found herself wondering. Why didn’t she just tell the truth? But what was the truth? The harder she tried, the less she could remember of what had happened” (de Lint 201). Later, when she is recovering in the hospital, she has a splitting headache and pictures little men beating on the inside of her brain: “Then the image changed and it wasn’t little men inside her head, but a gang of teenage boys, surprising her in the lane by Rushkin’s studio, laughing as they knocked her down and then started to kick her....The mugging, she thought. That’s why she was here” (de Lint 202). At this point, Isabelle had managed to convince herself that what she told Kathy was not a lie, but the truth, so that when she thinks of the events of that day, the mugging is all that comes to mind. Later in the novel, Isabelle finally realizes what she has been doing her entire life, telling Alan, “Something bad would happen to me and I’d simply shift the facts around until it was something I could deal with” (de Lint 401). Although Isabelle points out that this allowed her to “have that much less baggage to drag around with you” (de Lint 402), she also recognizes that her tendency to overwrite the trauma of her past was extremely dangerous to those around her, not letting them see the true murderous nature of Rushkin.

The dangers of rewriting the past, and even of ignoring the reality of the present, are also made clear by Kathy’s suicide. When Isabelle reads Kathy’s suicide note, and then later, her journal, she is extremely troubled by the tone of Kathy’s voice. As Isabelle is thinking about the letter, she observes, “The spirit behind this letter was dark and troubled, plainly unhappy, and that hadn’t been Kathy at all. Oh, Kathy could be moody, she could be introspective, but that side of her only came out in her stories, not in



who she was or how she carried herself. The Kathy that Isabelle remembered had been almost relentlessly cheerful” (de Lint 14-15). Later, after Isabelle reads Kathy’s journal entry in which Kathy describes her love for Isabelle, Isabelle reflects on a story that Kathy had written called “Secret Lives.” In this story a woman leaves her lover, leaving behind a journal that shows “an entirely different woman from the one she’d known in the pages of that journal” (de Lint 234). When explaining the story to Isabelle, Kathy had told her, “None of what she read should have come to her as a surprise. It only did because she wasn’t paying attention. Because she’d already defined the boundaries of who Alicia was and anything that didn’t fit inside them had to be discarded” (de Lint 234). These passages make it clear that the Kathy Isabelle thought she knew was quite different from the one who actually existed, one who was troubled, unhappy, and felt trapped in a role forced upon her, which eventually led her to take her own life. As Alan reflects late in the novel, “no one had seen the dark currents that underlaid her life, no one had understood that her stories were as much a cry for help for herself as they were a source of hope for so many of her readers” (de Lint 456). Although this in no way claims that Isabelle and Alan were responsible for Kathy’s suicide, it does point to the importance of seeing someone for who she really is, rather than projecting an image onto her or rewriting her life history. This process of imagination and rewriting history differs slightly from the fantastic, but the link that de Lint makes between the two suggests that he wants to make a point similar to the other authors examined in this chapter, namely, that neither imagination nor the fantastic can or should be used to rewrite the past without risking serious, potentially dangerous results in the future.

Not only are imagination and rewriting the past presented as dangerous in de Lint's novel, but *Memory & Dream* also portrays the fantastic elements in the novel, specifically the numena, as unable to defeat Rushkin, even when he threatens the life of Isabelle, their creator. Isabelle plans to paint a numena who will "protect all of us. If Rushkin ever tries to hurt any of us again, she'll deal with him" (de Lint 379). But John Sweetgrass, the first numena she brought forth from the other realm, tells her that this is impossible: "'We can't touch him,' John explained. 'None of us that you brought across can. He's a maker, and because of that we can't harm him'" (de Lint 379). Although the truth ends up being more complicated than this, the fact does remain that in the real world, Isabelle's fantastic creatures are unable to kill Rushkin, just as she herself remains nearly powerless over the man who was her teacher and mentor for so long, a fact that drives her to attempt suicide herself. As she explains to Alan, "No, this is the only option I've got left. I can't kill another person in cold blood—not even a monster like Rushkin—but I can't let this go on anymore" (de Lint 405). John and Isabelle are eventually able to piece together a way to kill Rushkin, but the focus in so many of the scenes on both Jon and Isabelle's limitations show that in de Lint's novel, the fantastic is limited both in the powers that it *should* have, as well as in the power that it *does* have.

The ending of the novel, however, demonstrates the significant advantage of focusing on the limits of the fantastic throughout the novel. As Windling's introduction to her collection *The Armless Maiden* suggests, the narratives in which the fantastic is limited in some way are perhaps even more important than those in which the fantastic is omnipotent, because they provide a space for the reader to act outside of the world of fiction. In works such as *Donald Duk* where the fantastic is able to successfully

challenge all of the unjust structures of power, rewriting them with narratives of equality and hope, there is no space or reason for the reader to act. The work exists comfortably on its own, with no loose ends that need resolution or action. Works in which the fantastic has limited power and therefore are not able to rewrite all of the trauma in the novel, such as *Memory & Dream*, however, provide a space in which the reader can insert himself into the novel, picking up where the fantastic left off. In *Memory & Dream*, de Lint uses the uncertain and hesitant powers of the fantastic to provide his readers with a more specific course of action, challenging them to pick up the quest against child abuse, homelessness, poverty, and despair that Kathy and later Isabelle so ardently champion in the novel. As Kathy explains in her journal, her childhood was horrific; she was sexually abused not only at the hands of her father, but by her mother and stepfather as well (de Lint 212, 215). The trauma of this abuse is what eventually drives her to commit suicide. As she explains to Isabelle in her suicide note, “There is no hope, there is no real happiness. At the end, nobody really lives happily ever after, because nobody lives forever and underneath the happiness there’s always pain” (de Lint 12). Although Kathy writes that “there is no hope,” she herself establishes the Newford Children’s Foundation, which works to ensure that children like her, who come from abusive and broken homes, have a place to go, a place that they can call home. Kathy’s dedication to this Foundation, along with Isabelle and Alan’s financial support of it as well, is a constant theme throughout the novel, providing the reader with an obvious way that she can rewrite narratives of trauma in the real world. Because the fantastic was not able to stop Kathy from committing suicide, it creates a space in the narrative for the reader to act—and actions such as volunteering at a homeless shelter, becoming a Big Brother or Big

Sister, or donating money to stop child abuse are all actions that have real-world consequences. In this way, the uncertainty and hesitation introduced into the novel by the limitations of the fantastic not only affect the course of the narrative itself, but compel the readers of the novel to recognize these uncertainties and hesitations in the real world as well, thus urging them to action. As a result, we see how the fantastic—along with its limits—is much more than simply another way to tell a story; it is a way to challenge the boundary between reader and text, thus forcing the reader to acknowledge and engage with difficult and complex moral issues.

The importance of this function of the fantastic to this dissertation becomes particularly apparent when we examine the appearance of the fantastic in James Welch's *Fools Crow* (1986). As with the other texts examined in this chapter, this narrative of a young Pikuni man named Fools Crow (White Man's Dog in the first part of the novel) and his tribe demonstrates the limitations of the fantastic, particularly in its inability to change the past. Set in Montana after the U.S. Civil War, the novel depicts the events leading up to the Marias Massacre in 1870, in which several Blackfoot tribes, already weakened by smallpox, were slaughtered by U.S. troops. In the first half of the novel, though, the fantastic seemingly provides a means for the main character to rewrite the narrative of his life. When the novel opens, White Man's Dog is a young man with "little to show for his eighteen winters. [. . .] He himself had three horses and no wives. His animals were puny, not a blackhorn runner among them. He owned a musket and no powder and his animal helper was weak" (Welch 3). As the novel progresses, however, the fantastic intervenes, enabling White Man's Dog to rise in stature and wealth within his tribe. Guided by a dream vision told to him by the medicine man, Mik-api, White

Man's Dog travels to a place where he meets Raven and helps Raven to free Skunk Bear<sup>57</sup> from the trap of a white man. In gratitude for his help, Raven tells White Man's Dog that he "alone will possess the magic of Skunk Bear. You will fear nothing, and you will have many horses and wives" (Welch 58). This insertion of the fantastic into White Man's Dog's life allows him to rewrite the narrative of his life, changing his image from that of someone who has accomplished nothing and is weak to one who has wealth, self-confidence, and strong magic. As Nora Barry writes, "As Fools Crow's dream/visions become more powerful and complex, his abilities are recognized in everyday reality" (12). The power given to White Man's Dog by Skunk Bear also allows him to overcome his lust for his father's third wife, Kills-close-to-the-lake, and redirect his attention and desire toward his own wife: "White Man's Dog didn't know how or why, but Wolverine had cleansed both him and Kills-close-to-the-lake. He had also given White Man's Dog his power, in the white stone and the song" (Welch 125). This use of the fantastic is slightly different from the others examined in this chapter, in that White Man's Dog does not use the fantastic to overcome any one specific act of trauma or abuse, but instead uses his interactions with Raven and Skunk Bear to change the more generally unsatisfactory nature of his life.

As *Fools Crow* progresses, however, a new element is added to the novel that *does* provide the kind of trauma that we have seen in the other texts in this chapter—the presence of white people, called Napikwans in the novel. In the first sections of the novel, the Napikwans are presented as just one enemy to the Lone Eater tribe of the Pikunis. Other Native American tribes, particularly the tribe of Crow led by Bull Shield,

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<sup>57</sup> A wolverine.

pose an immediate threat to the Lone Eaters that is equal to that posed by the Napikwans. Slowly, however, White Man's Dog and the other members of his tribe (as well as the reader) begin to understand that the threat of the Napikwans is much greater than that of another Native American tribe. Rides-at-the-door, White Man's Dog's father, tells him, "These Napikwans are different from us. They would not stop until all the Pikunis have been killed off" (Welch 89). Initially, it seems that White Man's Dog, now called Fools Crow because of his act of bravery in killing the Crow chief Bull Shield, will be able to use elements of the fantastic to fight against the encroaching threat of the Napikwans. When in the mountains with his wife, Red Paint, Fools Crow is again visited by Raven, who this time tells him, "You must kill the Napikwan with your many-shots gun" (Welch 165). Fools Crow's task is to kill the white man who is wantonly killing all of the animals in this area of the mountains, and to do this, he lures the man to his camp by entering his dreams. After his shoulder is grazed by a bullet shot by the white man, "Fools Crow leaned back and breathed deeply and saw a red wall come up behind his eyes. He felt sick and weak. He closed his eyes and called out to Sun Chief, to Wolverine, his power, to give him strength, to let him die with honor. Slowly, almost silently, a sound entered his ears. As the sound increased in volume, the red wall behind his eyes receded" (Welch 171). Not only does the fantastic provide Fools Crow with the task he must complete, but it also provides him with the strength to overcome his wound and watch as his own bullet enters the white man's head, killing him. This incident suggests that certainly to some degree, the fantastic in Welch's novel functions in a

similar way to other works examined in this chapter, providing characters with the means to challenge unequal structures of power and take control of their own lives.<sup>58</sup>

In the later sections of the novel, however, it becomes clear that regardless of how the fantastic intervenes in the lives of Fools Crow and his tribe, nothing will stop the white people from stealing the Pikuni lands, killing off many of their people, and attempting to force them to assimilate into white society. This is seen not only in the continued, and in fact, increasingly powerful presence of the Napikwans in the novel, but also in the way that Fools Crow and his tribe feel powerless to do anything to stop them. One night, as Fools Crow struggles to sleep, “he felt the impotence that had fallen over his people like snow in the night. Before the coming of the Napikwans, decisions had been made. [. . .] Now, each decision meant a change in their way of life” (Welch 314). The fantastic continues to appear in the novel, though, and even seems to offer hope that the Pikunis will be able to change the balance of power with the Napikwans. That night when he finally falls asleep, Fools Crow is visited by Nitsokan, “dream helper,” who “instructs [him] to make a journey” (Welch 314-315). Fools Crow travels for several

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<sup>58</sup> Patricia DiMond’s essay “The Other Side of the Story: The Importance of James Welch’s *Fools Crow* Novel” is another helpful discussion of how *Fools Crow* challenges imperialist attitudes toward Native Americans. Using Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* for support, DiMond argues that “the novel becomes a tool of the empire, validating and promoting its experiences. And for hundreds of years, Euro-Americans kept tight control on their constructed image of the American Indian through the writings that were published and readily accessible to the general public” (71). In Welch’s *Fools Crow*, however, DiMond sees a challenge to the stereotypes that were perpetuated by the imperialist Euro-American novel, noting how Fools Crow’s hesitance to kill and focus on his family and the children of his tribe “helps to debunk the illusory notion of Indians behaving barbarically for sheer pleasure of the kill” (72). Although DiMond does not specifically address the trope of the fantastic in her essay, Fools Crow’s need for the fantastic, both when he kills, as seen in the passage above, as well as when he looks to provide for his children in the future, help to debunk the idea of Native Americans as inherently bloodthirsty and barbaric. Additionally, it is important that Fools Crow turns to the fantastic when looking for help; such a move reinforces the idea of the fantastic as a way to undermine the racial fantasies established by Euro-American novels. These scenes involving the fantastic, therefore, both add to DiMond’s argument, as well as contribute to the idea of the fantastic as a key method of challenging imperialism and stereotypical images of Native Americans.

days and nights without food, and over the course of the journey is aided by the fantastic several times: at one point, dreams of his wife encourage him to continue; Nitsokan creates fog around Fools Crow so that he can pass near white settlements unnoticed; and as he nears the end of his journey, the wolverine appears to him, guiding him through a long tunnel to reach his ultimate destination, a land of seemingly perpetual summer and warmth. In this land, the fantastic makes its strongest appearance in the entire novel when Fools Crow meets Feather Woman, an important figure from Pikuni mythology, and she grants him visions of the future. The fact that Fools Crow has completed his journey, and the very nature of his destination, suggest to the reader that, with the help of the fantastic, Fools Crow does indeed “[possess] the power to help his people” (Welch 324). But the visions he sees of the future are visions of sickness, death, and assimilation, and upon his return to his tribe, Fools Crow sees that his people have been afflicted with smallpox and over thirty of them die. Therefore, even after the fantastic intervenes in the lives of Fools Crow and his people in an extremely powerful and beautiful way, this intervention is not enough to challenge the presence of the white people or upset the balance of power in the status quo.

In this way, we see similarities to the other texts examined in this chapter—that although the fantastic is used in these stories to change the future, it does not allow the characters of the story to go back and rewrite the past. Welch’s *Fools Crow* differs significantly from these other texts in that although it takes place in the world as we know it, it does not take place in the present day. Instead, it takes place in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the future of this novel is our past. To have the fantastic upset the balance of power between Pikuni and Napikwan and rewrite the narrative of history with the Pikuni



regaining control of their land and their lives would be to rewrite the past in a way that the readers of the novel know is unrealistic and untrue.<sup>59</sup> This revision would create a narrative that, as Tolkien would argue, would break the spell of the story, undoing whatever benefits the fantastic had brought to the novel thus far. Such a narrative would not only potentially alienate readers who are aware of the actual progression of history, but it would also make the inclusion of the fantastic in the narrative seem like a cheap trick, a type of *deus ex machina*, rather than as an organic element of the story that stays true to the rest of the narrative. This limited functionality of the fantastic is important to acknowledge, so that when authors do employ the fantastic as a means to challenge authority, it can still be effective, both in terms of the narrative arc as well as in the minds of the readers.

This can be seen in the way that Fools Crow's visions of the future, while not enough to be able to stop the white people from taking over Pikuni land, still provide him with a way to help. As Feather Woman tells him, "There is much good you can do for your people. [. . .] You can prepare them for the times to come. If they make peace within themselves, they will live a good life in the Sand Hills. There they will go on to

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<sup>59</sup> This tension between white-authored historical sources and Blackfeet cultural stories and rewritings of history is an aspect of *Fools Crow* that is central to many critics' discussion of the novel. Louis Owens explores this in his book *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), as does Gerald Vizenor in *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Literature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), in which he writes of the power of the imagination "to transcend time, to transcend us through history" (52). Barbara Cook is another scholar who examines this issue specifically as it pertains to the role of women in the Blackfeet community, and she writes of the dialogic interaction between documented history and imagination as well: "In *Fools Crow*, James Welch relies heavily on documented Blackfeet history and family stories, but he merges those actual events and people with his imagination and thus creates a tension between fiction and history, weaving a tapestry that reflects a vital tribal community under pressure from outside forces" (442). These studies reinforce the idea of the complex relationship between the "real" narrative of history and the fantastic in Welch's text, and speak to the power of the interplay between the two in creating a narrative of survival and hope.

live as they always have. Things will not change” (Welch 359). And although he can prevent neither the smallpox epidemic among his own tribe, nor the massacre of Heavy Runner’s band, Fools Crow has seen a vision of the future and knows that his children and grandchildren will survive. As Feather Woman tells him, while many of the traditional ways of life will be lost to them, “they will know the way it was. The stories will be handed down, and they will see that their people were proud and lived in accordance with the Below Ones, the Underwater People—and the Above Ones” (Welch 359-360). The knowledge, provided to Fools Crow through the fantastic, is what allows him and his people to have hope at the end of the novel, what enables them to sing and dance and pray for “hope and joy this spring” (Welch 390). Although Fools Crow feels burdened by the knowledge of what will happen to his people, he also feels “a peculiar kind of happiness—a happiness that sleeps with sadness” because “he knew they would survive, for they were the chosen ones” (Welch 390). The fantastic allows for limited happiness in the midst of death and loss, what Barry describes as “a survival myth within the historical genre” (3). The ability of the novel to end with these scenes of hope and happiness (albeit qualified happiness) speaks of the persistence of the fantastic to change things on a small scale, even when large-scale disruption of inequality and injustice is impossible. Acknowledging the inability of the fantastic to rewrite the past allows the elements of the fantastic that remain in the novel to still have power, albeit in a limited way.

Even more importantly, however, the inability of the fantastic to change the past draws the reader’s attention to the incredible injustices done to the Blackfeet tribes and to the fact that the story is distinctly *not* a story of hope, comfort, or survival—it is the story

of a massacre and a near-genocide. Although *Fools Crow* has hope and joy for the spring, the more accurate description of the end of the novel is found in the phrase “a happiness that sleeps with sadness” (Welch 390), a phrase that reflects the uncertain future of the Pikuni tribe. Because of the inability of the fantastic to change the past, the uncertainty and hesitation associated with the trope of the fantastic are reflected upon the fate of Fools Crow and his people. In other words, the limitation on the power of the fantastic is what calls attention to the unresolved, comfortless nature of the ending of the novel. Additionally, because of the historical setting of the novel, the inability of the fantastic to alter history draws the reader’s attention to what she knows Fools Crow’s future will be, a future seen by Fools Crow in his vision in the land of Feather Woman: “I grieve for our children and their children, who will not know the life their people once lived. I see them on the yellow skin and they are dressed like the Napikwans, they watch the Napikwans and learn much from them, but they are not happy. They lose their own way” (Welch 359). While this vision does not advocate any particular course of action, it does force the reader to recognize the persistent inequalities against Native Americans in society today. Similar to de Lint’s *Memory & Dream*, the limitation on the power of the fantastic blurs the line between fiction and reality. As a result, the uncertainty and hesitation of the fantastic are transferred to the readers, disrupting their comfortable acceptance of race relations in the status quo and challenging them to be more than just passive readers of the novel.

In this way, the portrayal of the fantastic in novels such as *Fools Crow* and *Memory & Dream* is not only more believable and meaningful than in novel like *Donald*

*Duk*, but it is actually more powerful as well. The inability of the fantastic to change the past calls attention to the problems that still exist in society, and places the responsibility for effecting this change on the shoulders of the reader. As a result, in texts such as Welch's, the fantastic becomes a morally necessary element in discussions of race, because it has the ability to turn a passive reader into an active participant. Furthermore, reading these texts together dialogically places an emphasis on the way the fantastic pushes the narrative forward, thus preventing the text from losing itself in nostalgia for an idealized past or in longing for a world or culture that no longer exists. According to these texts then, a world in which the fantastic enables you to "turn back time," as Cher sings, is a world that is less meaningful, not only because it denies the reader the opportunity to think about the provocative, lingering issues of the text, but also because it is a world that dwells in the past, unwilling to look to the possibilities of the future for action and hope. Therefore, although this dissertation has demonstrated the many ways in which the uncertainty and hesitation of the fantastic can be used productively to rethink questions of race, culture, identity, and literary category, in many ways, examining the *limits* of the fantastic is even more helpful its ability to shift such discussion from the realm of fiction to the policies, attitudes, and actions of the real world.

*Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?—from Maxine Hong Kingston’s The Woman Warrior*

*Not when we were afraid, but when we were wide awake and lucid, my mother funneled China into our ears: Kwangtung Province, New Society Village, the river Kwo, which runs past the village. “Go the way we came so that you will be able to find our house. Don’t forget. Just give your father’s name, and any villager can point out our house.” I am to return to China where I have never been.—from Maxine Hong Kingston’s The Woman Warrior*

## Conclusion: Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*

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This dissertation has covered a wide variety of texts, ranging from Heinz Insu Fenkl’s memoir/novel *Memories of My Ghost Brother* to Stephen King’s seven-volume epic *The Dark Tower*. The examination of these texts has highlighted a number of important ways in which the fantastic brings questions of race and difference to the center of our understanding of a text. As Chapter 2 demonstrated, the trope of the fantastic is closely linked with the trope of boundaries; it is in the interstitiality of border spaces that the fantastic can enter a text, where it then highlights the intertwined and often contradictory ways in which race is portrayed. Chapter 3 explored examples of this connection, analyzing texts in which physical boundaries represented the interstitial space where the fantastic entered the narrative, thus enabling it to bring complex portrayals of race to the center of these texts. A specific aspect of the discussions of race was examined in Chapter 4, namely, the boundary between Self and Other and the way in which the fantastic provides the means to negotiate this boundary. And finally, in

Chapter 5, the importance of limitations for the trope of the fantastic was explored in several texts in which the fantastic was unable to undo the past and completely rewrite history. Many of the texts examined in this dissertation addressed a number of these points. Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series, for example, not only showed how the fantastic entered the narrative through the physical boundary of doorways, but also how the fantastic then was used to explore the relationship between Self and Other.

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is another example of a text that touches on all of the key points made by this dissertation, as well as introduces several openings for further exploration of the function of the fantastic. Like many of the texts analyzed in this dissertation, the fantastic enters the narrative in the interstitial space of boundaries, but in Kingston's text, unlike the texts in Chapter 3, the boundary is not a physical one, but a generational divide between mother and daughter. This generational boundary provides a space in which the fantastic can enter the text, both through the mother's dealings with ghosts and the narrator's re-imagining of herself as legendary hero Fa Mu Lan. Furthermore, as we saw in Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues*, storytelling and stories function as the fantastic, which in turn provides the narrator with the means to negotiate the formation of her own identity. At the same time, however, the fantastic also works to create racial fantasies of the orientalized Other throughout Kingston's text, much like in Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*. In this way, focusing on the tropes of boundaries and the fantastic throughout *The Woman Warrior* highlights the persistence of racial fantasies and stereotypes, even in texts that explicitly reject such images. Kingston's text further complicates questions of race through her portrayal of the limitations of the fantastic, similar to what we saw in James Welch's *Fools Crow*.

Although her text demonstrates the limits and even dangers of the fantastic, such limits are necessary for the text to remain meaningful, as well as important in the way that shift the uncertainty and hesitation inherent in the fantastic to the reader's understanding of race. And finally, the insertion of the fantastic into Kingston's narrative allows the text itself to be situated on the boundary between fiction and autobiography, thus reinforcing the idea of the fantastic as a tool for complicating categories outside of a text such as literary genre and race.

Maxine Hong Kingston's semi-autobiographical memoir *The Woman Warrior* (1976) tells the story of a young Chinese girl growing up in California. Her relationship with her mother is often marked by tension and misunderstanding. When the narrator tells her mother the bad things she has done, hoping to forge a connection with her mother, her mother tells her, "I wish you would stop. Go away and work. Whispering, whispering, making no sense. Madness. I don't feel like hearing your craziness" (Kingston 200). The gap between mother and daughter is particularly noticeable when the narrator's American successes are measured against her mother's traditional Chinese expectations. The narrator tells her mother, "I get straight A's, Mama," while her mother replies, "Let me tell you a true story about a girl who saved her village" (Kingston 45). And when the narrator finally gets angry and yells at her mother, accusing her of calling her ugly all the time, the mother replies, "That's what we're supposed to say. That's what Chinese say. We like to say the opposite" (Kingston 203). Just like the narrator does not understand her mother's traditions and etiquette, the mother does not understand many aspects of life in America as well. The narrator notes that her mother does not

smile for photographs because Chinese people do not smile for photographs: “My mother does not understand Chinese-American snapshots. ‘What are you laughing at?’ she asks” (Kingston 58). The generational boundary between mother and daughter is amplified by the cultural boundary between them as well. Although the image of a physical boundary does not run throughout the text in the same way it does in the texts in Chapter 3, the relationship between the narrator and her mother provides two other boundaries that serve to connect the text—the boundary between generations, and the boundary between cultures.

Just like the DMZ in Heinz Insu Fenkl’s *Memories of My Ghost Brother* or the Wall in Garth Nix’s *Sabriel*, the boundary between the narrator and her mother in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* serves as the point of entry for the fantastic into the narrative. In Kingston’s text, stories themselves function as the fantastic, much like we saw in Sherman Alexie’s *Reservation Blues*. The narrator explains, “At last I saw that I too had been in the presence of great power, my mother talking-story” (Kingston 20). These stories are what introduce hesitation and uncertainty into the text, which leads the narrator to yell at her mother, “I don’t want to listen to any more of your stories; they have no logic. They scramble me up. You lie with stories. You don’t tell me a story and then say, ‘This is a true story,’ or ‘This is just a story.’ I can’t tell the difference” (Kingston 202). The multiple versions of stories introducing hesitation and uncertainty into the text, much like we saw in Amy Tan’s *The Hundred Secret Senses*, is particularly noticeable in the beginning section of the text, in which the narrator speculates about what exactly happened to her aunt who committed suicide. She thinks



Perhaps she had encountered him in the fields or on the mountain where the daughters-in-law collected fuel. Or perhaps he first noticed her in the marketplace. He was not a stranger because the village housed no strangers. She had to have dealings with him other than sex. Perhaps he worked an adjoining field, or he sold her the cloth for the dress she sewed and wore. (Kingston 6).

The speculation of stories, as well as the difficulty in telling the difference between truth and story, links the process of talk-story in *The Woman Warrior* with the trope of the fantastic, particularly since in both cases, it is the interstitial space of boundaries that draws this element into the text. Additionally, many of the stories that are told contain elements that border on or suggest the fantastic—ghosts that may or may not be there, superhuman feats that may just be the imagination, legends come to life in the mind of a young girl. Kingston also makes this connection between the fantastic and story-telling explicit when she writes, “My aunt haunts me—her ghost drawn to me because now, after fifty years of neglect, I alone devote pages of paper to her, though not origami-ed into houses and clothes” (Kingston 16). These words reinforce the way that stories and storytelling function as the fantastic throughout Kingston’s text, and emphasize what was discussed in connection with Alexie’s text—the importance of looking for new ways in which the fantastic can manifest itself in a text.

Perhaps most important is the way in which the fantastic serves to help the narrator and her mother negotiate the generational and cultural boundaries between them. Although there is tension between the two for much of the text, they come together in the final chapter to tell a story together. As the narrator explains, “Here is a story my mother told me, not when I was young, but recently, when I told her I also talk story. The beginning is hers, the ending, mine” (Kingston 206). This passage is incredibly

important, in that it highlights how the fantastic, through the process of storytelling, has enabled the narrator and her mother to negotiate their differences and come together in the space in between them. The way in which the two women combine their efforts to tell one story is also important, in that it demonstrates that they have finally found a way to understand each other in spite of their differences. The final line of the story, as well as the final text, could speak to not only the story the narrator is telling, but also the way in which the story helped the narrator and her mother understand each other: “It translated well” (Kingston 209). The fantastic, through the form of talk-story, enables the narrator and her mother to find a way to translate their own experiences into a form that the other can understand, thus effectively negotiating the boundary between them.

The fantastic in *The Woman Warrior* also provides the means for the narrator to challenge racial fantasies of Chinese women, particularly their stereotypical characterization as passive and submissive. This is seen primarily in the second section of the text, “White Tigers,” in which the narrator remembers the stories her mother told her about Fa Mu Lan, the warrior woman. She remembers, “She [my mother] said I would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up a warrior woman” (Kingston 20). The narrator then goes on to envision herself *as* Fa Mu Lan, enduring strenuous training to prepare her for battle, training that includes many elements of the fantastic, such as superhuman feats of athleticism and dragons. The narrative of Fa Mu Lan gives the narrator the power to reject those who are a racist presence in her current life. She explains, “From the fairy tales, I’ve learned exactly who the enemy are. I easily recognize them—business-suited in their modern American executive guise, each boss two feet taller than I am and

impossible to meet eye to eye” (Kingston 48). The knowledge provided to her by the fairy tales give the narrator the courage to stand up to these bosses, to reject their ways of viewing the world. When her boss tells her that he picked the restaurant for an industry banquet *because* it was being picketed by CORE and the NAACP, the narrator rejects him and his ideals, saying, “I refuse to type these invitations” (Kingston 49). She then describes how she would react to him as a warrior, thinking, “If I took the sword, which my hate must surely have forged out of the air, and gutted him, I would put color and wrinkles into his shirt” (Kingston 49). The narrator’s interactions with the fantastic have given her self-confidence, both when confronting her racist boss as well as when visiting her family. She says, “What I visit the family now, I wrap my American successes around me like a private shawl; I *am* worthy of eating the food” (Kingston 52). Thanks to the power of the fantastic to challenge structures of racism, the narrator of Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* is able to inscribe her own narrative with confidence and assertiveness.

The story of Fa Mu Lan in Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* also demonstrates how the fantastic can be used to challenge sexist structures of power in addition to racist ones. The opening section of the text, “No Name Woman,” tells of the narrator’s aunt, who drowned herself and her illegitimate child in the well, and paints a picture of a culture with a very low tolerance for girls. The narrator of the text reflects that the aunt’s baby was “probably a girl” since “there is some hope of forgiveness for boys” (Kingston 15). The cultural attitudes present in this story are also reflected in the way the narrator’s mother presents them to her. When telling her the story of her aunt, the narrator’s mother says to her, “Don’t let your father know that I told you. He denies her. Now that you

have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The villagers are watchful" (Kingston 5). The implicit suggestion that the narrator will end up like her aunt, along with the cultural assumption that women are worth less than men, lead the narrator to question her own self-worth and come to think of "sexual mannerisms" as "dangerous" (Kingston 12). This initial section of Kingston's work describes a system of patriarchy and oppression that not only leads to the death of the narrator's aunt, but inscribes this trauma on the present-day life of the narrator as well.

In the second section of Kingston's text, however, imagination and the fantastic are presented as ways in which the narrator can empower herself to challenge the sexist structures in the world around her. The narrator/Fa Mu Lan then leads a great army, acknowledging that like Kwan Kung, "the god of war and literature," she "would be told of in fairy tales myself" (Kingston 38). In this combination of dream and fantastic vision, the narrator is able to confront the baron who had taken her brother and the girls from the village. He argues, "Everyone takes the girls when he can. The families are glad to be rid of them. 'Girls are maggots in the rice.' 'It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters'" (Kingston 43). The narrator/Fa Mu Lan then shows the baron her back, on which is carved the names and oaths of revenge of her parents. "'You've done this,' I said, and ripped off my shirt to show him my back. 'You are responsible for this.' When I saw his startled eyes at my breasts, I slashed him across the face and on the second stroke cut off his head" (Kingston 44). As Shin explains, "The woman warrior's scarred body bears the marks of an oppressive history that Kingston rewrites in America, reconceiving the sword as an enabling imagination that can liberate woman from a

culture that understands her as slave” (Shin 86). Diane Simmons is another author who recognizes the transformative function of the fantastic in Kingston’s work, explaining, “Throughout her works, Maxine Hong Kingston looks for ‘ancestral help’ in her project of transforming fear and the paralyzing effects of subjugation into bold, heroic but still humane action” (online).<sup>60</sup> This is particularly true for her aunt, who through Kingston’s retelling, is given “subjectivity and agency” (Simmons online). As these examples show, imagination and the fantastic empower the narrator to confront the sexist assumptions of her culture that have affected her and the women in her family. Although gender is certainly not constructed in the same ways that race is, the way in which Kingston uses the fantastic to challenge the subjugation of women in her texts points to another function of the fantastic, as well as a fruitful area for future inquiry.

Much like we saw in the texts in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, the power of the fantastic also provides the narrator of *The Woman Warrior* with the means of negotiating her own identity formation. Although the language of Self and Other is not as evident in Kingston’s text as in texts such as *The Dark Tower* and *The Hundred Secret Senses*, the narrator still describes herself in a way that demonstrates how she is positioned between the Chinese and American aspects of her identity, unable to negotiate this boundary on her own. As the first epigraph to this chapter suggests, she is unable to determine what is actually Chinese and what is just a fantasy of race. The narrator’s description of her troubles reading out loud further demonstrates her conflicted identity. She explains, “I

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<sup>60</sup> Simmons’s work is also interesting because she draws a connection between Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* and Said’s *Orientalism*. She argues, “One of the ongoing ironies of Kingston’s work is that the Orientalist narratives that have worked to degrade and subjugate Chinese men resemble nothing so much as the feminizing narratives with which Chinese men have subjugated Chinese women” (Simmons online). Not only is Kingston addressing racial fantasies similar to those described by Said, but she is also addressing fantasies of gender, using the fantastic to upset readers’ expectations regarding both of these kinds of images.

could not understand ‘I.’ The Chinese ‘I’ has seven strokes, intricacies. How could the American ‘I,’ assuredly wearing a hat like the Chinese, have only three strokes, the middle so straight? [. . .] I stared at that middle line and waited so long for its black center to resolve into tight strokes and dots that I forgot to pronounce it” (Kingston 166-167). The difficulty that the narrator has in understanding the American word for “I” reflects the difficulty that she has claiming the American aspects of her identity.

Additionally, the antagonism that the narrator shows toward one of her classmates is also a reflection of how she feels toward certain Chinese aspects of her identity. One of the girls in the narrator’s class is quieter than she is, and one day after school, the narrator corners her in a bathroom and tries to force her to talk. In the excruciating exchange that follows, we see that the elements in the quiet girl that the narrator hates are the same elements that she hopes to eliminate in herself. For example, the narrator describes how she hates the quiet girl’s “weak neck, the way it did not support her head but let it droop; her head would fall backward.” This makes the narrator wish that she “was able to see what my own neck looked like from the back and sides. I hoped it did not look like hers; I wanted a stout neck. I grew my hair long to hid it in case it was a flower-stem neck” (Kingston 176). In this section of the narrative, the quiet girl functions as the Other to the narrator’s Self, providing something against which she tries to define herself. But as the words the narrator yells at the quiet girl show, the qualities that she hates in the quiet girl are really fears she has for herself: “What are you going to do for a living? Yea, you’re going to have to work because you can’t be a housewife. Somebody has to marry you before you can be a housewife. And you, you are a plant. Do you know that? That’s all you are if you don’t talk. If you don’t talk, you can’t have

a personality” (Kingston 180). Therefore, the hostile way in which the narrator treats the quiet girl reflects how she feels about the Chinese elements of her identity, as well as her inability to know how to incorporate them into who she is.

The inability of the narrator to negotiate between the Chinese and American aspects of her identity is quite problematic for her, and is something that she is only able to overcome through telling stories—that is, the fantastic. After the narrator torments the quiet girl, she “spent the next eighteen months sick in bed with a mysterious illness. There was no pain and no symptoms, though the middle line in my left palm broke in two” (Kingston 182). Although the narrator describes her illness as “mysterious” and without symptoms, the way in which this illness immediately follows her encounter with the quiet girl suggests that the illness is a result of the narrator’s attempts to rid herself of the undesirable Chinese elements of her identity, and her inability to incorporate both Chinese and American elements into who she is. This reading is reinforced by the way that the line on her palm splits into two—rather than having a complete identity, represented by a connected line on her palm, the narrator has a fragmented identity. Only through talking-story is the narrator able to negotiate the various elements of her identity. As she explains, “I thought talking and not talking made the difference between sanity and insanity” (Kingston 186). Just as the fantastic, seen in the way the narrator and her mother talk-story, allowed the narrator and her mother to negotiate the boundary in between them, the narrator is able to negotiate the various elements of her identity through talking-story, that is, the fantastic, as well. But as the talk-story in the “White Tigers” section of the narrative demonstrates, the identity that the narrator negotiates is not a static, unified identity. Just like Olivia in Tan’s *The Hundred Secret Senses* and

Tayo in *Ceremony*, the narrator “learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes” (Kingston 29). In this way, the entry of the fantastic into the narrative not only enables the narrator to negotiate her own identity formation, but it complicates the idea of a single, static identity as well.

The description of the narrator’s mother in the “Shaman” section of *The Woman Warrior* also reinforces the idea of the fantastic as a tool for negotiating identity formation. Although the text does not describe the narrator’s mother as experience the same difficulty with identity formation that the narrator has, the border space of the fantastic is still portrayed as crystallizing her identity for her. While in medical school, the narrator’s mother was the only one in her dormitory who was brave enough to face the ghost that was haunting one of the rooms. In the space between the natural and the supernatural, between science and superstition, while she was waiting for the ghost to appear, the narrator’s mother’s experience enabled her to feel a heightened sense of who she was:

A new darkness pulled away the room, inked out flesh and outlined bones. My mother was wide awake again. She became sharply herself—bone, wire, antenna—but she was not afraid. She had been pared down like this before, when she had traveled up the mountains into rare snow—alone in white not unlike being alone in black. She had also sailed a boat safely between land and land. (Kingston 68)

The interstitial space of waiting in the darkness helps the narrator’s mother to crystallize her identity, and the other in-between spaces mentioned in the passages, namely, the connection between white and black and the sailing of a boat, emphasize the importance of such border spaces in the formation of identity.



While these examples certainly do show how the fantastic poses many complications to expected treatments of race (and gender) throughout *The Woman Warrior*, these same fantastic elements simultaneously function as a way of reinforcing racial fantasies, including some of the ones that Kingston challenges. Ruth Maxey claims that Kingston, like Amy Tan, exhibits tendencies toward “self-orientalization” in her text, a claim that is particularly interesting given the ways in which Kingston’s text seems to challenge racial stereotypes. Maxey writes, “This tendency emerges with the unalterably Other, historically vague China of each text: a country of dragons, deities, and other mythical forms; extraordinary, vast landscapes; and extreme, often cataclysmic, events. Above all, China is depicted as a realm of magic and the supernatural, where incredible transformations can take place” (Maxey 4). Maxey sees in Kingston (as well as Amy Tan) the same Orientalist impulse described by Said, in that Kingston portrays China as a land of “romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (Said 1). In other words, Kingston imagines China as a land in which “anything can happen” (Maxey 8). According to Maxey, the vague descriptions of China throughout Kingston’s text, along with the way in which these descriptions are linked to elements of the fantastic, portray it more as a product of the Western imagination, rather than as a real country. What Maxey does not acknowledge, however, is the role that these fantastic images from China play in subverting and challenging the racist and sexist paradigms in the narrator’s life. In such a way, Kingston’s work is more complicated than Maxey claims, as she creates these images only to later use them to rewrite fantasies of race and gender. As with the other texts studied in this dissertation, by focusing on the elements of the fantastic throughout the narrative, such contradictory portrayals of race

are brought to the fore, drawing the reader's attention to the persistence of racial fantasies and stereotypes, even in texts that actively challenge them. Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is particularly interesting, because not only does the fantastic highlight these contradictions, but it is also key in creating them.<sup>61</sup>

The hesitation and uncertainty surrounding race and the fantastic in *The Woman Warrior* are further amplified when the limits on the fantastic in the text are examined. As in texts like Ellen Steiber's "In the Night Country," we see moments of weakness in the fantastic in Kingston's text, gaps in what it is capable of accomplishing. While Steiber's text describes the fantastic as being limited by its inability to change the past, Kingston portrays the fantastic as something that also can be very dangerous. This is seen primarily in the section describing the narrator's aunt's journey to the United States. Rather than being a joyful new beginning, the move to the United States led the aunt into mental instability, eventually resulting in her confinement in a mental institution. The interstitial nature of travel is described as what is responsible for the aunt's condition. Brave Orchid, in particular, feels responsible for this: "She had whisked her sister across the ocean by jet and then made her scurry up and down the Pacific coast, back and forth across Los Angeles. Moon Orchid had misplaced herself, her spirit (her 'attention,' Brave Orchid called it) scattered all over the world" (Kingston 156-157). The interstitiality of travel, of always being in-between and never being anywhere, is portrayed as something that can be extremely dangerous, and in the case of Moon Orchid, the narrator's aunt, what eventually leads to her loss of self.

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<sup>61</sup> For another examination of the relationship between Kingston's text and Orientalism, please see Jennie Wang's *The Iron Curtain of Language: Maxine Hong Kingston and American Orientalism* (Shanghai: Fudan da xue chu ban she, 2007).

The limits of the fantastic in *The Woman Warrior* are also seen in what the narrator is able to accomplish as a warrior woman, but because of these limits, the text provides readers with a space in which they can become a part of the narrative as well. The narrator explains: “To avenge my family, I’d have to storm across China to take back our farm from the Communists; I’d have to rage across the United States to take back the laundry in New York and the one in California. Nobody in history has conquered and united both North America and Asia” (Kingston 49). The limitations of the fantastic also extend to the narrator’s own family and villagers, to the point where she thinks, “I refuse to shy my way anymore through our Chinatown, which tasks me with the old sayings and the stories” (Kingston 53). While the fantastic does provide the narrator with a way of inscribing her life with the narrative of the woman warrior, there are limitations to its power. Simmons acknowledges these limitations as well, writing, “Kingston transforms the victimized helplessness of No Name Woman into an avenging woman warrior, a role into which Kingston casts herself, though she must acknowledge that in America the task of saving one’s people is much more complex than it was for Fa Mu Lan in ancient China” (online). Challenging global structures of racism and oppression is simply not possible for the narrator, and even on a smaller scale, the stories and beliefs of the narrator’s own family and village are difficult to supersede. Like in James Welch’s *Fools Crow* and Charles de Lint’s *Memory & Dream*, however, these limitations provide the readers of the text a space in which they can act. Although storming across the United States might be too much for one woman, perhaps it is not too great a challenge for the thousands, if not millions, of readers of *The Woman Warrior*, especially if they act together. In this way, the limitations of the fantastic blur the boundary between text and

reader, making the text's uncertain, hesitant portrayal of race and difference the responsibility of the reader.

In spite of the myriad complications that result from the ability of the fantastic to blur boundaries in *The Woman Warrior*—not the least of which is Kingston's simultaneous inclusion and challenge of racial fantasies—the destabilization of categories within a text does much to blur the lines *between* texts as well, adding to the argument made earlier in this dissertation that focusing on the fantastic in fantasy and ethnic literatures allows for the destabilization of literary categories. In “Engendering Genre”, a study of the forms of Kingston's *China Men* and *The Woman Warrior*, LeiLani Nishime makes a similar point regarding Kingston's use of mythology, arguing, “Looking at the opposition between these two books' genres proves to be no easy matter, as Kingston rarely lets any clear opposition stand. Instead, what was a matter of black and white, autobiography and historiography, slips away into a hazy area where generic boundaries are difficult to define” (68). David Goellnicht describes the effect that this blurring of generic boundaries has already had on literary categories, specifically, how putting a text that was dissimilar to traditional autobiographies challenged the category and expanded its limits. He describes how Kingston's text was described as “autobiography,” even though much of it was fiction, and it was not presented in the traditional, linear, first-person form. He then explains,

Ironically, the overall results of Knopf's ‘misclassification’ has not been the measuring of Kingston's text by the standards of traditional, Eurocentric, male autobiography in order to find it wanting and thus to dismiss it. Rather, the opposite has happened: *The Woman Warrior* has had a profound and lasting effect on our definition of what constitutes the genre of autobiography, especially ethnic and women's autobiography, which is now routinely identified as stressing group or community identity

and as being written in a nonlinear, fluid, fragmented style. (Goellnicht 344-345)

Such examples show the lasting benefits of reading different texts alongside each other—they challenge existing categories and make room for new interactions and ideas. This demonstrates the importance of the fantastic as a literary trope that not only can highlight contradictory portrayals of race within a text, but, as the discussion of the limitations of the fantastic demonstrated, can shape ideas of genre, identity, and race outside the realm of an individual text as well.

But what if the role of the fantastic in these contradictory portrayals of race is a more active one than just drawing such imagery to the reader's attention? The active way in which the fantastic is used throughout *The Woman Warrior* shows that this trope not only *highlights* the contradictory ways in which race is used by authors such as Kingston, but it also *creates* some of these contradictions as well. The fact that many of the works examined in this dissertation are best-sellers is something that should not go unnoticed, since, as was suggested by Zipes' commentary included at the end of Chapter 4, much of what makes a work so popular is its ability to instill a sense of familiarity and comfort in its readers. What if authors like Kingston, Alexie, King, Kay, and Tan were interested challenging expected racial fantasies, yet wanted to do so in a way that still enabled them to appeal to their reader's need for familiarity? How would they go about doing so?

In her book *Playing the Race Card*, Linda Williams discusses another form of popular fiction—the melodrama. Her descriptions of the melodramatic form bear interesting similarities to fantasy literature and the fantastic. Just as fantasy literature is

labeled as “escapist” or “crap,” Williams notes how in many people’s perceptions, “the word melodrama seems to name an archaic form—what vulgar, naïve audiences of yesteryear thrilled to, not what we sophisticated realists and moderns (and postmoderns) enjoy today” (11-12). Williams also points out how melodrama is often positioned against the realist tradition—another way in which melodrama and fantasy literature are similar. When discussing Peter Brooks’ book *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, James, and the Mode of Excess*, Williams notes that his subtitle *The Mode of Excess* “betrays the sense in which it is seen as a deviation from more ‘classical’ realist norms” (18). In other words, both fantasy literature and melodrama are popular forms of literature, often dismissed because they are seen as unsophisticated and not meeting the aesthetic standards for truly literary works.

What is particularly important about Williams’ study, however, is the way that she identifies the melodrama as a way for Americans to think about issues of morality. She writes, “Melodrama can be viewed, then, not as a genre, an excess, or an aberration, but as what most often typifies popular American narrative in literature, stage, film, and television when it seeks to engage with moral questions” (Williams 17). She argues that the form of the melodrama is a way to bring moral certainty to a society that no longer has a moral center, identifying melodramatic characters from Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne to Spielberg’s E.T. as all sharing “the common function of revealing moral good in a world where virtue has become hard to read” (Williams 19). Later, Williams suggests that the form of the melodrama is a way to escape from moral ambiguity; she argues, “the ongoing loss of moral certainty has been compensated for by increasingly sensational, commodified productions of pathos and action” (23). Williams’s study, then, suggests

that melodrama is a way to bring certainty to uncertain situations or moral questions, a way to provide readers with a comfortable feeling of absolute morality when no such thing exists.

The similarities between the fantastic and the melodramatic modes of storytelling, then, raise the question of whether the fantastic has a similar function to what Williams sees in melodrama—is the fantastic a way for authors to raise complicated questions of morality while still providing their readers with a comfortable, safe resolution? This function would alter Rosemary Jackson’s claim that fantasy literature is “the literature of subversion”; in fact, the fantastic would then be what enabled a text to pose provocative challenges to questions of race, gender, and morality, but then slide back into the comfortable zone of popular perception and the status quo by relegating any subversive thoughts to the realm of the imagination. In this way, a text such as Stephen King’s *The Dark Tower* series would be able to call into question formulations of identity such as the Self/Other binary, but by associating such questions with the fantastic, would be able to ask such questions without posing any threat to the reader’s comfort level. In this way, it would seem, the fantastic would be more of an escape for the *author* of a text than its reader, as the author would not have to choose between engaging with moral issues or having broad popular appeal—she would be able to do both.

Such questions, therefore, demonstrate the continued importance of studying the trope of the fantastic, whether it appears in works of fantasy literature, ethnic literature, or some other literary category. Whether the fantastic provides the reader with a means to escape the problems of the real world, or gives the authors of such works a way to

avoid having to choose between engaging complicated issues or having a best-selling book, the fact remains that the fantastic *does* provide a means to raise complicated questions of race and difference, questions that need to be asked and taken seriously. Even if the role of the fantastic *is* to provide an escape back into comfortable racial fantasies, paying closer scholarly attention to this literary trope and not writing it off as “crap” is still extremely important in the way it would enable us to better understand the way that race is being talked about in popular literature today. If we now return to the image that opened this dissertation—that of large bodies of water called water margins, whose function is to keep the fantasy worlds they surround isolated from outside influences—we can see how important the fantastic is in shifting these water margins to the center of the narrative, turning these boundaries into the sites of movement where meaning is created. Focusing on the High Sea in Tolkien’s Middle-earth would be a way to take the uncertainty and hesitation inherent in that space and use it to destabilize the resolution at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, forcing readings to consider what happens next instead of allowing them to settle comfortably into a happy ending. In a similar way, focusing on the appearance of the fantastic in the border spaces throughout this dissertation has provided a way to highlight the complex, interconnected, and often contradictory ways in which race is addressed. And so, regardless of the intent of the author or the hopes of the reader, the fantastic enables us as scholars to move such contradictory portrayals of race and difference from the water margins at the edge of a text to the borderlands at the center, where meaning is created.



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## Appendix A: A Brief History of Fantasy Literature

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In order to write about fantasy literature, it is important to understand the different ways in which the words “fantasy” and “the fantastic” have been used. W.R. Irwin’s definition of fantasy literature is a helpful starting point, but it does not address the complicated transformations that this group of literature has undergone: “a fantasy is a story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility; it is the narrative result of transforming the condition contrary to fact into ‘fact’ itself” (4). If we are going to understand where fantasy literature has come from, we need to have a more specific idea of its history than when Irwin writes, “Late in the nineteenth century various authors turned to writing fantasy. What impulse drove them can better be guessed at than ascertained” (4). As this appendix will describe, although supernatural elements appeared in literature throughout history, with roots going back to medieval romances, the shape of fantasy literature as we now know it first appeared during the Gothic period, with literary movements such as English and German romanticism contributing further to fantasy, making it what we see today—a complex, far-reaching set of literature that is nearly impossible to define. Although some of the ideas here have been touched on in the body of the dissertation, they are included again here to provide the appropriate context and to make the historical development of this literary set as clear as possible.

As Irwin argued, trying to pin down a definite beginning for the tradition of fantasy literature is indeed a difficult task. If fantasy literature is simply defined as that

which contains characters and events that defy natural laws, then much of classical literature, from the Bible to Homer's *Iliad*, should be considered fantasy literature. Indeed, in *Phaedrus* (388-366 B.C.E.), Plato writes what may be the beginnings of the divide between fantasy literature and realistic literature. In discussing the myth of Orythia being carried off by Boreas, Socrates tells Phaedrus, "Now I have certainly not time for [these supernatural tales]; shall I tell you why? I must first know myself, as the Delphian inscription says; and I should be absurd indeed, if while I am still in ignorance of myself I were to be curious about that which is not my business" (Plato 15). Although these comments are by no means a definition of a certain kind of literature, they do set literature containing supernatural elements apart from literature that would help Socrates know himself better, that is, realistic literature.

Similarly, many authors discuss the meaning of or use the word "fantasy" before the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Dante, in *Purgatorio* (ca. 1307 C.E.), writes, "O fantasy, you that at times would snatch us so from outward things—we notice nothing although a thousand trumpets sound around us—who moves you when the senses do not spur you?" (XVII 13-16). As Ann Swinfen explains in *In Defence of Fantasy*, "To Dante *imaginativa* or *fantasia*, and the imaginative faculty, which comprehends the art of prose fantasy, was divinely inspired, offering a dimension of creativity going beyond man's empirical experience" (3). Shakespeare also used the word fantasy; for example, in *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), Mercutio speaks of Queen Mab, the fairies' midwife, and concludes by saying, "True, I talk of dreams, / Which are the children of an idle brain, / Begot of nothing but vain fantasy, / Which is as thin of substance as the air, / And more inconstant than the wind" (Act I, scene iv; 97-100). As can be seen in the previous passage, Stephen

Prickett notes in *Victorian Fantasy* that early uses of the word fantasy often were associated with the words “imagination” and “fancy,” in particular because the latter “shares the same Greek root as ‘fantasy’” (1). The *Oxford English Dictionary* confirms that while the word fantasy has been noted in the English language since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the word is most often used to mean “mental apprehension of an object of perception,” “a spectral apparition, phantom,” “delusive imagination, hallucination,” or “imagination.” This use of the word fantasy continues today, as is seen by its use in discussions of racial fantasy throughout this dissertation. Using fantasy to mean “a genre of literary compositions” does not appear in English until 1949, thus suggesting that thinking of this category of literature as a set, rather than individual texts, or characters or events within certain texts, is a recent critical development. Therefore, while it is tempting to reach back to Shakespeare and other authors as fantasy authors, such a move is not necessarily accurate because of the evolution of the word “fantasy.”

The primary reason for excluding Shakespeare, Dante, and other early authors from the fantasy set as we know it today is that although these texts contain or address fantasy or the fantastic, defining them as or relating them to fantasy literature would be incorrect because their readers did not think of them as forming a group of literature; instead, they can be thought of as taproot texts, that is, texts which contain elements of the fantastic but were thought of by their readers in terms of another category, genre, or set of literature. Using Hans Robert Jauss’s concept of the horizon of expectations, John Clute explains, “Only in the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when (at least in the West) a horizon of expectations emerged among writers and readers, did a delimitable genre now called fantasy appear. Before that, there were writings which included the fantastic—and

such works can be described as taproot texts” (Clute and Grant 921). While I would disagree with Clute’s use of the phrase “delimitable genre” to describe fantasy literature today, his idea on the use of the term “fantasy literature” today is important—namely, that to use it as we understand it today to describe texts from hundreds of years ago is inaccurate, because of the expectations that readers today have when they hear the term “fantasy.” He further develops this idea with a comparison of Shakespeare’s *The*

*Tempest* and Goethe’s *Faust*:

*The Tempest* [1623], however defined generically, may contain elements of the fantastic, but these elements did not govern its audience’s sense of its generic nature: it was, first and foremost, a play. On the other hand, Goethe’s *Faust, Part One* (1808) clearly reveals its author’s consciousness that he is transforming a traditional story containing supernatural elements into a work mediated through—and in a telling sense defined by—those elements. For our purposes, *The Tempest* is best conceived as a [taproot text] and *Faust* as a fantasy. (Clute and Grant 921)

Identifying taproot texts provides a helpful way of mapping the impulse of the fantastic before fantasy literature emerged as a part of the Western literary tradition.

Taproot texts are helpful in a discussion of proto-fantasy texts, but once we reach the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the discussion can turn to the crystallization of the fantasy set itself, beginning in England. The focus during this century on the realistic novel helped to define fantasy literature negatively; while many authors continued to incorporate fantastic elements in their works in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the emergence of the realistic novel helped to bring the ideas of the fantastic into sharper focus as well. As David Sandner writes in his introduction to *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, “Fantastic literature emerges as a site for critical debate in the eighteenth century, partly as a result of an increasing disbelief in but continued fascination with the supernatural, partly as a



negative by-product of arguments for the realistic novel and, perhaps most importantly, as a vital component in the emergent discourse of the sublime” (6). Several critics are more specific in identifying a beginning moment for fantasy literature as we know it today. Rosemary Jackson, in her study *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* writes, “As a perennial literary mode, fantasy can be traced back to ancient myths, legends, folklore, carnival art. But its more immediate roots lie in that literature of unreason and terror which has been designated ‘Gothic’” (95). Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1765) is often given as the starting point of Gothic literature (R. Jackson 95), but works by authors such as Clara Reeves, Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, and Charles Maturin were also key in developing the fantasy set; Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) is perhaps the best-known Gothic fantasy. Later in the United States, the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Washington Irving, Edgar Allen Poe, and H.P. Lovecraft were influenced by Gothic fiction, which is evident in their use of the supernatural to create a mood of edginess and often terror.

Tzvetan Todorov writes about the importance of the Gothic period in his seminal critical study of fantasy literature, entitled *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975). In this work, he identifies hesitation as the key element in creating the fantastic, writing, “The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature” (Todorov 25). In fact, he argues that fantasy literature does not truly exist, but rather can be represented as a line, or a boundary, between the uncanny and the marvelous. He writes, “The fantastic in its pure state is

represented here by the median line separating the fantastic-uncanny from the fantastic-marvelous. This line corresponds perfectly to the nature of the fantastic, a frontier between two adjacent realms” (Todorov 44). He sees Gothic fiction as literature that embodies this line between the uncanny and the marvelous:

The fantastic therefore leads a life full of dangers, and may evaporate at any moment. It seems to be located on the frontier of two genres, the marvelous and the uncanny, rather than to be an autonomous genre. One of the great periods of supernatural literature, that of the Gothic novel, seems to confirm this observation. Indeed, we generally distinguish, within the literary Gothic, two tendencies: that of the supernatural explained (“the uncanny”), as it appears in the novels of Clara Reeves and Ann Radcliffe; and that of the supernatural accepted (“the marvelous”), which is characteristic of the works of Horace Walpole, M.G. Lewis, and Maturin. (Todorov 41)

Todorov’s work is important because it helped to establish what is meant by the fantastic, which, although it differs from how many scholars and readers today think of fantasy literature, provided a foundation for future studies including this dissertation, as well as work by scholars such as Jackson and Lucie Armitt, and gave a name to a common trope that runs throughout many works of fantasy literature.

For Todorov, however, fantasy literature in these terms exists in a very limited scope, because the hesitation he identifies as key to the fantastic was only possible at a particular moment in history, when literature was invested in exploring the idea of “the real.” He explains:

The nineteenth century transpired, it is true, in a metaphysics of the real and the imaginary, and the literature of the fantastic is nothing but the bad conscience of this positivist era. But today, we can no longer believe in an immutable, external reality, nor in a literature which is merely the transcription of such a reality. Words have gained an autonomy which things have lost. The literature which has always asserted this other vision is doubtless one of the agencies of such a development. Fantastic literature itself—which on every page subverts linguistic

categorizations—has received a fatal blow from these very categorizations. (Todorov 168)

In other words, according to Todorov, because readers no longer believe that literature is a word-for-word description of the world as we know it, and instead recognize in literature independent, created worlds, the tension between the uncanny and the marvelous no longer carries such importance.<sup>62</sup> Ironically, as Todorov suggests and Jackson expands upon, fantasy literature is itself responsible for this new way of thinking of literature. Jackson writes,

An uneasy assimilation of Gothic in many Victorian novels suggests that within the main, realistic text, there exists another non-realistic one, camouflaged and concealed, but constantly present. [. . .] A dialogue between fantastic and realistic narrative modes often operates within individual texts, as the second attempts to repress and effuse the subversive thrust of the first” (124).

John Clute identifies authors such as Samuel Coleridge, whose work moves from the more Gothic “Christabel” (1797) to “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1798), which includes the supernatural without all the “Gothic trappings,” as “important[t] in the transition from Gothic fantasy to Romanticism” (Clute and Grant 210). Jackson’s analysis of the dialogue between the fantastic and the realistic, as well as authors like Coleridge, point to the transition of fantasy literature from Gothic literature to Victorian fantasy and English Romanticism.

Before moving to Victorian fantasy literature, however, it is important to look at other literary movements occurring at the same time as Gothic literature but in other

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<sup>62</sup> Todorov may in fact be overstating his claim that readers’ perception of literature drastically shifted from a literal interpretation to a more critical one, and as a result, the tension that he identifies between the uncanny and the marvelous may never have carried the weight that he suggests that it did, a question that is addressed more thoroughly later in this study. Regardless, acknowledging Todorov’s initial assessment of the fantastic is important, not only because it strongly influenced the thinking of later critics of fantasy literature, but also because it sees the study of fantasy literature as a study of boundaries, an issue that is central to this dissertation.

countries, namely Germany. German Romanticism played a role similar to the Gothic in developing literature with a dark, supernatural focus, as well as leading fantasy literature forward into English Romanticism and Victorian fantasy novels. Authors such as E.T.A. Hoffman, Novalis, Clemens Brentano, Eduard Mörike, Ludwig Tieck and Friedrich de la Motte Fouquè wrote literary fairy tales that became very important to German Romanticism. As Gordon Birrell writes in his introduction to *German Literary Fairy Tales*, “Significantly, the endorsement of the folk tale went hand in hand with the creation of a new and far more ambitious variety of literary fairy tale, a narrative invention of such extraordinary appeal that it became, for a brief period, the very centerpiece of Romantic literary theory” (xiii). These authors worked to make the folk tales more than just simple stories for children: “The Romantic strategy was to maintain the naïve harmony of the folk tale while at the same time suffusing the narrative with symbolic or allegorical associations” (Birrell xiv). E.T.A. Hoffman is perhaps the best known of these German Romantics; his story *Der Goldne Topf: Ein Märchen aus der neuen Zeit* (1814) is an excellent example of the blending of a fairytale into everyday life with what John Clute describes as “dreamlike liquidity” (Clute and Grant 472). These authors of the German Romantic movement had a strong influence on what are perhaps the best-known collectors of folk tales—the Grimm brothers. As Clute explains, “their scholarly endeavours were shaped by a desire to provide an intellectual justification for Romantic assumptions about the unique and intertwined relationship between the ‘original’ German tongue and the folktales whose origins were—they felt—coeval with the origins of German culture” (Clute and Grant 439). Together, these German authors did much to revive interest in the folk tale, interest that spread throughout Europe to other

authors, particularly Hans Christian Andersen in Denmark. As with Gothic literature that hesitated between the uncanny and the marvelous, these fairy tales of German Romanticism negotiated the boundary between the folk tale and the mundane, with the distinction between them often made blurry and indistinct.

As the nineteenth century passed, the idea of “reality” shifted, making the tensions between the real and the supernatural of the Gothic movement no longer so important. But the developments of that literary movement as well as that of the German Romantics had set the stage for fantasy literature to move in a different direction—English Romanticism and Victorian fantasy literature. These Victorian fantasies, as Jackson explains, were “not fantasies according to Todorov’s scheme, for they provoke no ambiguity of response in the reader. They are ‘legalized’ by various framing devices such as the mirror, or a chess game, or a dream wonderland: self-contained realms which are neutralized and distanced through a manifestly impossible frame” (144). Instead of producing a hesitation on the part of the reader, Victorian fantasy literature had more transcendental aims, pointing to a greater meaning in life. Jackson explains, “Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (1831) declared Fantasy to be ‘the true Heaven and Hell gate of man’, for it opened on to the infinite, through an understanding of man’s finite nature” (145). This transcendental nature of Victorian fantasy literature is an important aspect of this literature, because it gives it meaning other than merely a desire for escape from reality. As Stephen Prickett writes in his study entitled *Victorian Fantasy*, authors such as Nesbit, Carroll, Kingsley, and MacDonald all show in their fiction a desire for something more, and this desire “transforms fantasy from simple escapism into something much more enduringly rooted in the human psyche” (235). In many cases,

this desire can be fulfilled by religious belief. Using the fiction of George MacDonald as an example, Jackson writes, “MacDonald’s fantasies betray dissatisfaction with the real and seek something other. They fill emptiness with a magical, divine plenitude” (150). Fantasy literature no longer had ambiguous meaning, but instead, distinctly pointed toward something greater, often divine.

In many cases, the impulse of fantasy literature to point toward something greater was developed in the utopian fiction at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>63</sup> In his 1955 study *Utopian Fantasy*, Richard Gerber points out that utopian literature is not limited to only those “skillful descriptions of ideal societies meant to be taken as practical contributions to social reform” (xi), but that imaginary voyages into utopian worlds should be considered as well. His appendix at the end of the volume lists over ten pages of works between 1900 and 1950 that fit into the category of utopian fantasy literature, including works by G. K. Chesterton, H.G. Wells, and Rudyard Kipling. Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of a utopia was frequently developed through the portrayal of utopias gone wrong, or dystopian societies. George Orwell’s *1984* (1949) and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), while perhaps more science-fiction than fantasy literature, are perhaps the best known examples of such dystopian societies. As Clute notes, in fantasy literature, dystopian societies are frequently known to appear in animal fables, such as

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<sup>63</sup> In his discussion of utopias in his *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, John Clute argues that for the most part, utopian fiction and fantasy literature are very separate entities for three reasons. First, while fantasy worlds are often secondary worlds, set apart from the world as we know it, a utopia “must have some rational connection with the normal world” (Clute and Grant 976). Additionally, as both Clute and Attebery, in his essay “Fantasy as an Anti-Utopian Mode,” suggest, the movement of utopian fiction is either forwards towards a better future world, or backward, toward the present day; fantasy literature moves “inwards, towards the healing of the land” (Clute and Grant 977). Finally, Clute points out, “fantasy is impossible by nature; utopias are impossible only if they don’t work (Clute and Grant 977). Although these are certainly valid arguments against the idea that all utopian fiction is fantasy literature by nature, they do not preclude fantasy literature from including utopian elements, nor do they deny the shared impulse of both fantasy and utopian literature to aspire to something greater.

Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) and Richard Adams' *Watership Down* (1972) (Clute and Grant 977). Although utopian fiction is not necessarily the same as fantasy literature, the impulse of these authors to use their works to point toward something greater is key in both sets of literature and is important in the development of fantasy literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This desire of fantasy literature to point toward greater meaning is key in developing what many critics identify as "high fantasy literature," most often identified in the work of twentieth-century authors such as C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Ursula le Guin, and T.H. White. For Tolkien, the transcendental nature of fantasy literature was its most important characteristic. In his essay "On Fairy-Stories" (1939), Tolkien writes of eucatastrophe, which he defines as the consolation of the happy ending of the fairy story. This joy in the happy ending is, for Tolkien, "the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function" (153) as well as "a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth" (155). In many cases, the truth these fantasy texts point toward is a religious one, with "mythical or allegorical significance" (Tolkien "On Fairy-Stories" 156), such as the well-known example of the story of Jesus' death and resurrection found in C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950). When discussing the possibility of a reader finding out a beautiful fairy tale was true, Tolkien writes,

The joy would have exactly the same quality, if not the same degree, as the joy which the 'turn' in a fairy-story gives: such joy has the very taste of primary truth. [. . .] It looks forward [. . .] to the Great Eucatastrophe. The Christian joy, the *Gloria*, is of the same kind; but it is pre-eminently [. . .] high and joyous. Because this story is supreme; and it is true. Art has been verified. God is the Lord, of angels, and of men—and of elves. ("On Fairy-Stories" 156)

The transcendent nature of fantasy literature is important for Tolkien because it mirrors the eucatastrophe of the Christian story. Such texts that deal with secondary worlds, the destiny of the hero, and a joyous ending mark a dramatic shift in the ideas of fantasy literature from the hesitation between the uncanny and the marvelous in the Gothic period.

At this point in the history of fantasy literature, the question of audience was a problematic one. As Manlove points out, “Throughout the nineteenth century most fantasy literature tended to be written in the form of fairy tale for a child” (3); he then lists ten to fifteen texts from the mid-to-late 1800s that were intended for children, such as Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies* (1863), and MacDonald’s *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872). Fantasy literature for adults, he explains, “tended to be a modification of the Gothic novel into ghost and horror story, as in the writings of Edgar Allan Poe or J. Sheridan Le Fanu” (Manlove 4). And indeed, when fantasy literature reached Tolkien and Lewis, these authors had to struggle with their readers’ expectations that fantasy literature and fairy tales in particular were only for children. Tolkien addresses the question in his essay “On Fairy-Stories”; C.S. Lewis discusses it in several of his essays, as well. In “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to Be Said,” he writes, “Professor J.R.R. Tolkien in *The Lord of the Rings* has shown that the connection between fairy tales and children is not nearly so close as publishers and educationalists think. Many children don’t like them and many adults do. The truth is, as he says, that they are now associated with children because they are out of fashion with adults” (47). In “On Three Ways of Writing for Children” he writes,



Of course as all children's literature is not fantastic, so all fantastic books need not be children's books. It is still possible, even in an age so ferociously anti-romantic as our own, to write fantastic stories for adults: though you will usually need to have made a name in some more fashionable kind of literature before anyone will publish them. (36)

Both Tolkien and Lewis argued against the idea that fantasy literature was not serious literature and was only fit for children—an idea that still resurfaces today.

Perhaps this question of audience played into what Rosemary Jackson sees as an important difference between the original Gothic mode of fantasy literature and these works of “high fantasy,” which she calls “modern ‘faery’ literature.” Whereas in the Gothic tales of horror that Todorov examines, the reader is an active participant in determining whether the events narrated in the story are real or madness, the reader of Victorian fantasy literature, and later, similar works, is a passive reader. Jackson differentiates between the two types of fantasy literature, calling the former fantasy and the latter fairy tales. She explains,

As narrative forms, fairy tales function differently from fantasies. They are neutral, impersonalized, set apart from the reader. The reader becomes a passive receiver of events, there is no demand that (s)he participate in their interpretation. *Structurally, too, fairy tales discourage belief in the importance or effectiveness of action* for their narratives are ‘closed’. Things ‘happen’, ‘are done *to*’ protagonists, told *to* the reader, from a position of omniscience and authority, making the reader unquestioningly passive. (R. Jackson 154)

Other studies of fantasy literature help develop this distinction even further. C.N.

Manlove writes of how fantasy literature, which Jackson would call “faery literature,” seeks to preserve the status quo. He explains, “Most fantasies seek to conserve those things in which they take delight: indeed, it is one of their weaknesses that they are tempted not to admit loss. Their frequent looking to the past is conservative in itself: and

the order to which they look and seek to re-create is usually a medieval and hierarchic one, founded on the continuance of the *status quo*” (Manlove 30). Jackson, on the other hand, sees this as problematic, because these conservative tendencies make fantasy literature lose its subversive power to challenge the established social order. She writes, “Whereas fantasies (of dualism) by Mary Shelley, Dickens, Stevenson, etc., interrogate the cost of constructing an ego, thereby challenging the very formation of a symbolic cultural order, romances (of integration) by Le Guin, Lewis, White, etc., leave problems of social order untouched” (R. Jackson 155). These conflicting ideas about what fantasy literature is and/or should be, as well as who the audience is, point to a set of literature that has branched into several different directions, some of which have very little in common with the others.

Readers of fantasy literature at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are faced with the interesting and complicated task of negotiating between these different influences and trends throughout the history of the set, as well as interacting with new categories of literature. For many people, fantasy literature is understood to be simply genre fantasy—works that have adopted the familiar tropes of fantasy literature such as secondary worlds, elves, dragons, and magic. John Grant has harsh words for this branch of fantasy:

In short, genre fantasy is not at heart fantasy at all, but a comforting revisitation of cosy venues, creating an effect that is almost anti-fantasy. An allied point is that genre fantasies cater in large part for unimaginative readers who, through the reading of a genre fantasy, can feel themselves to be, as it were, vicariously imaginative. [. . .] The depressing truth, however, is that genre fantasy is by and large poor and that a very great deal of it is published—to the detriment of full fantasy, which is often presented in an indistinguishable format. Quite how much commercial damage publishers are doing to the fantasy genre as a whole through this

short-termism is hard to establish—and likely will be for years—but there is considerable anecdotal evidence to suggest the wound is deep. (Clute and Grant 396)

Works such as Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman's *Dragonlance* (1984) series, based on the role-playing game *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*, as well as Christopher Paolini's derivative *Inheritance* (2003) trilogy certainly fall into the category of genre fantasy—invoking the images of high fantasy literature without creating anything new or imaginative.

Current fantasy literature, however, is not just limited to books that involve dragons and elves. Modern fantasy authors such as Emma Bull, Charles de Lint, and Neil Gaiman, and their respective novels *War for the Oaks* (1987), *Moonheart* (1984), and *Neverwhere* (1996), among others, all take the fantastic and place it in an urban setting. In these urban fantasy novels, a fantasy world is crosshatched with the city as we know it; for example, in *Neverwhere*, Richard Mayhew finds a girl named Door and is suddenly pulled into London Below—a city that exists and is unseen by the London that he formerly knew. Other authors take traditional stories and tales and tell them from a new perspective or with a different outcome. Gregory Macguire's *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (1995), as well as Guy Gavriel Kay's retelling of the Arthurian legend with some 20<sup>th</sup> century inclusions in his *Fionavar Tapestry* (1984-1986) are both examples of this trend. Certain authors are also focusing on groups not traditionally represented in fantasy literature, particularly women. Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* (1982), for example, is a retelling of the legend of Arthur through the eyes of Morgan Le Fay, with a particular emphasis on the more mystical

elements of the tale. In all of these examples, the fantastic elements are not simply recycled from earlier stories, but changed and woven together in many different ways.

Also important to consider in relation to present day fantasy literature are those groups of literature that border on fantasy literature, but are considered to be in their own category. One such group is magic realism. Although fantastic elements appear in both fantasy and magic realist literature, only in fantasy literature does the fantastic present any sort of challenge to the characters in the narrative. In *Magical Realism and the Fantastic*, Amaryll Chanady writes, “In magical realism, the supernatural is not presented as problematic. Although the educated reader considers the rational and the irrational as conflicting world views, he does not react to the supernatural in the text as if it were antinomious with respect to our conventional view of reality, since it is integrated within the norms of perception of the narrator and characters in the fictitious world” (23). Works such as Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) demonstrate this aspect of magic realism; fantastic elements appear, such as a girl floating up to heaven, but everyone treats it as if it were completely normal. Science fiction is another set of literature that borders on fantasy literature, but differs in that the story of a science fiction text “is explicitly or implicitly extrapolated from scientific or historical premises. In other words, whether or not [a science fiction] story is plausible it can at least be *argued*” (Clute and Grant 844). Notable science fiction authors include, but are certainly not limited to, Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Gene Wolfe, and Orson Scott Card. Supernatural fiction also borders on fantasy literature; in fact, it is a category of fantasy literature that arguably could encompass all texts with supernatural elements, but is used more restrictively to mean literature that has a strong foundation in reality,

where the presence of the supernatural indicates that something is wrong. Along with horror, another group bordering on fantasy literature, supernatural fiction is seen to have more in common with the earliest forms of fantasy literature, such as the Gothic, than with the secondary world tradition associated with Tolkien and Lewis. In such works, the fantastic is primarily seen as a threat to the real world that needs to be expelled, rather than a reality that has a right to exist on its own (Clute and Grant 909-10). Such distinctions are perhaps subtle, but important in providing a framework from which to understand the impulses and themes that exist in contemporary fantasy literature.

Rosemary Jackson identifies yet another group of literature that can be considered a part of or related to modern fantasy literature. She writes, “Literature as manifestly unreal, as fabrication, as lie: this is another branch of the modern fantastic. It is evident in the wonderful linguistic fantasies of Jorge Louis Borges, in his *Extraordinary Tales*, *Labyrinths*, *Fictions*, and *Book of Imaginary Beings*. [. . .] Novels by Barthelme, Coover, Hawkes, Malamud, Vonnegut, have been related to this tradition of fantasy as fabulation, as metafiction” (R. Jackson 164). This idea of modern fantasy literature is important, she explains, because it returns us to the ideas of Todorov in describing the fantastic: “Fantasy, then, has not disappeared, as Todorov’s theory would claim, but it has assumed different forms. With Kafka and Calvino, ‘truth’ remains an evasive, impossible object, as it had been for Mary Shelley, Maturin and Hogg. Their fantasies are equally hollowed out by a consciousness of ‘the sacred’ as something absent” (R. Jackson 165). This more literary aspect of fantasy literature is important, therefore, not only in returning Todorov’s hesitation to the fantastic, but also because it forces the reader to think about the nature of literature itself.

Finally, also important to consider are those authors who are not “fantasy authors” per se, but who have written a novel that is considered a fantasy novel or who include elements in their novel that resemble those in more fantastic works. One such author is A.S. Byatt, whose novel *Possession: A Romance* (1990), while not containing any supernatural events, makes extensive use of doubles in telling the story of two sets of lovers, a technique also important in the writings of E.T.A. Hoffman and other German Romantics. Angela Carter is another author who is not solely known for her fantasy works, but who incorporated surreal and fantastic elements in her fiction, giving it a distinctly postmodern feeling by weaving multiple threads through apparent chaos. Carter leads her readers through these creative, yet chaotic settings in works such as *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) and *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), challenging their conceptions of gender, reality, and time. As Clute explains, “Throughout her career she utilized the language and characteristic motifs of the fantastic to dramatize her sense that the old orders of the Western world were breaking down” (Clute and Grant 170). Authors such as Byatt and Carter are important to consider when examining the history of fantasy literature, not only because their work demonstrates the influence of earlier fantasy impulses, but also because they show the difficulty in trying to categorize many modern authors who write fantasy as “fantasy authors.”

Therefore, while all of these different groups within and next to fantasy literature make it tempting to try to establish categories within the set, the interlocking nature of fantasy literature makes the process complicated and often counterproductive, a situation that led to the founding of the Interstitial Arts Foundation. This group had its roots in the 1990s when fantasy authors such as Heinz Insu Fenkl, Delia Sherman, and Terri

Windling discussed how they were tired of the way the publishing industry required fiction to fit neatly into categories. As Delia Sherman says in an interview, “[We] noticed that more and more of the truly innovative art we were seeing seemed not to fit easily into any traditional artistic category. And we noticed that some very interesting work was being either overlooked or judged by standards that clearly didn’t apply” (Pilinovsky 248). These authors joined together to form a place where any art could be recognized and welcomed on its own terms; as Sherman says, “We are an umbrella for any organization or individual uncomfortable with traditional artistic categories to shelter under, a forum for ideas both abstract and practical, a clearing house for information” (Pilinovsky 248). Although the ideas of the Interstitial Arts Foundation are intriguing, the very broad nature of such a group makes studying the art within it difficult; doing away with categories altogether eliminates the structures that are often helpful in talking about literature. Sherman herself notes this when she says, “The practical effect of taxonomy is to pin things down so that they can be studied” (Pilinovsky 249). The scholarship of fantasy literature needs a framework on which to build its criticism.

Farah Mendlesohn proposes a way around this problem in her essay “Toward a Taxonomy of Fantasy,” in which she looks at the entry point of the fantastic into the narrated world, in an effort not to define fantasy literature, but to provide a way to discuss and compare texts as varied as children’s fantasy literature and magic realism, all which fit under the large umbrella of fantasy literature. She divides fantasy literature into portal fantasy, which is “quite simply a fantastic world entered through a portal” (Mendlesohn 173), the immersive fantasy, which “presents the fantastic as the norm both for the protagonists and for the reader” (Mendlesohn 175), the intrusive fantasy, which is usually

set in the “real world,” where the appearance of the fantastic often brings chaos (Mendlesohn 177), and the estranged fantasy, which is similar to the intrusive fantasy, except that the entrance of the fantastic will “barely raise an eyebrow” (Mendlesohn 179). She sees this last category as particularly important, because it returns to the reader the hesitation and ambiguity that Todorov describes as being key to the fantastic. Although some critics such as Greer Watson (and Chanady, who was quoted above) refuse to think of magic realism as fantastic because “it completely lacks any antimony, or narrative hesitation” (168), Mendlesohn is quick to point out that such estranged fantasy returns hesitation to the *reader*. She writes,

To cross the portal is to confront the illusion, but confrontation, as I have already demonstrated in the section on portal fantasy, reduces, rather than intensifies the fantastic. The transliminal moment, which brings us up to the liminal point then refuses the threshold, has much greater potential to generate fear, awe and confusion, all intensely important emotions in the creation of the fantastic mode. (Mendlesohn 181)

Mendlesohn’s focus on the entry of the fantastic into a work allows her to talk in detailed terms about specific texts without delimiting the fantasy set.

The Interstitial Arts Foundation and Mendlesohn’s approach to fantasy suggests two important aspects of this set of literature today. First, explicitly defining what fantasy literature *is* is an exhausting and fruitless endeavor. The multiplicity of influences on modern fantasy literature, as well as the wide of variety of ways in which these influences have developed, have created such a large set of literature that it very easily could encompass almost anything that is written. Limiting the set to only expected ideas or tropes shuts out authors who may have extremely creative contributions to fantasy literature. Mendlesohn’s idea to look at key tropes or structures within fantasy



literature is a much more helpful approach, in that it allows critics to discuss specific aspects of fantasy literature without setting up limits or boundaries. The other key aspect of their approach can be found in Mendlesohn's statement about the importance of estranged fantasy, how it is the transliminal moment that carries the power in the fantastic mode. This is reflected in the word "interstitial" as well, which the Interstitial Arts Foundation's website describes in the following way: "The dictionary definition of 'interstitial' refers not only to the space between things, but also to that which binds two or more things together. Interstitial literature can fall into the cracks between genres or it can bind two or more genres together. The IAF is here to give support to writers working between or across categories." Both the Interstitial Arts Foundation and Mendlesohn see the transliminal moment as the key moment both within works of fantasy literature, as well as between fantasy literature and other groups of literature. Looking to this transliminal moment throughout fantasy literature, in the boundaries between real and fantasy, self and other, as well as the boundaries between fantasy and other groups of literature, can help provide us with a better understanding of what makes these moments so powerful and also give insight into the ideas that will shape the set of fantasy literature in the future.