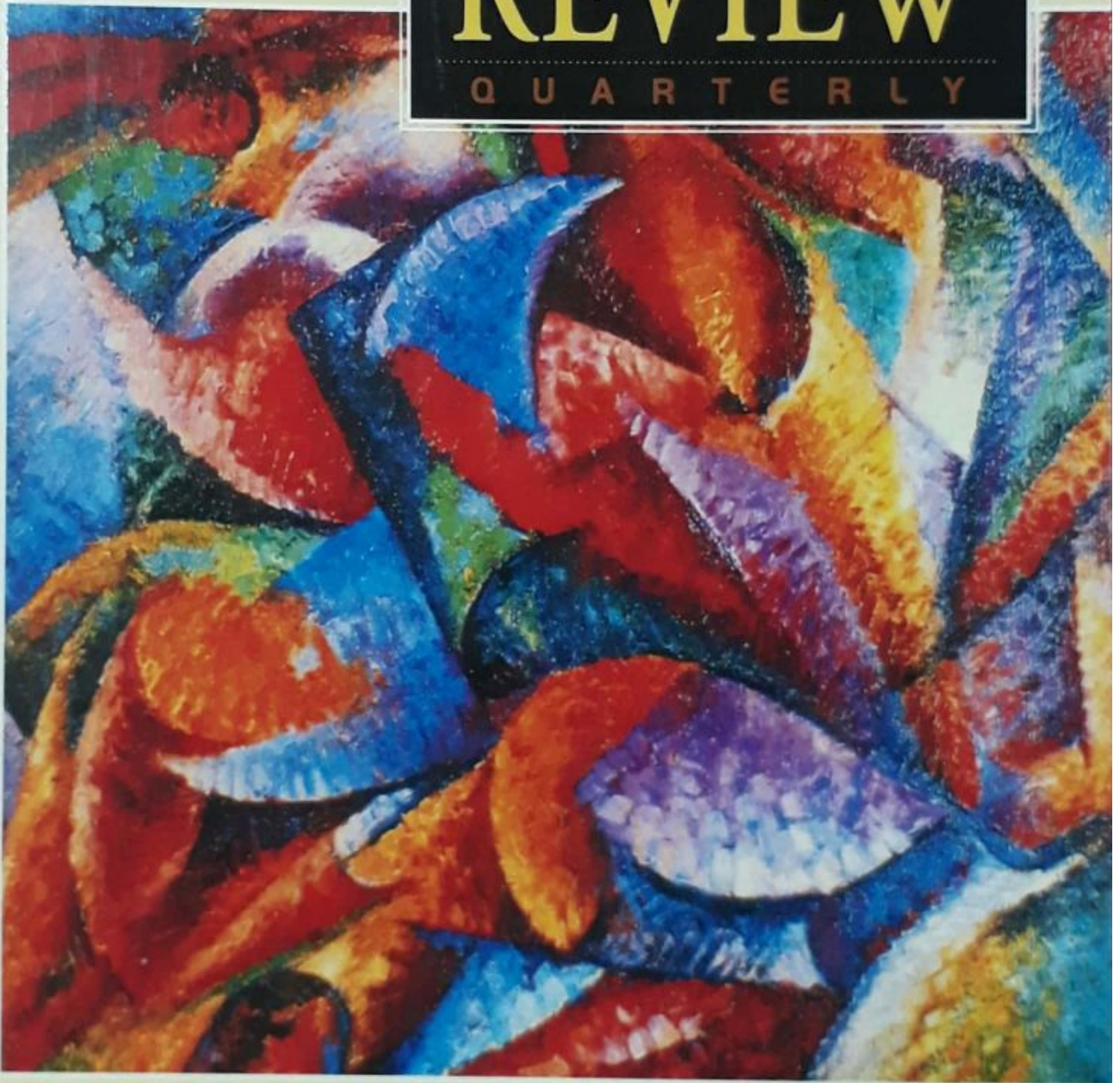


Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India Under No. DELENG/2002/09226

ISSN 0972-6373

# THE ATLANTIC CRITICAL REVIEW

Q U A R T E R L Y



JANUARY – JUNE 2016

VOLUME 15 • NUMBERS 1-2



## **The Atlantic Critical Review** (ISSN 0972-6373)

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Q U A R T E R L Y

A Peer Reviewed Journal Indexed in  
*MLA Directory of Periodicals*

JANUARY – JUNE 2016

VOLUME 15 NUMBERS 1-2

**ATLANTIC**

PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS (P) LTD

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**THE ATLANTIC CRITICAL REVIEW**  
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## Fantasy Literature: A Psychic Journey

G. PETRICIA ALPHINE NIRMALA\*

FANTASY DENOTES texture of narratives whether oral or written but does not merely feed the imagination propensity for it incorporates our most passionate hopes and fears, deepest sense of solidarity with other human beings and with cosmic power, most intimate commitments, and most crucial beliefs concerning the value of life. Even though traditionally psychology has seen fantasy as illusory or failed attempt of an individual to fill-in the ontological gap due to it being not objective in a clear sense; fantasy is the basic mode for any understanding and interpretation to come into play because fantasy is rather subjective (not purely objective/subjective) for it belongs to a 'bizarre category' of the objectively subjective way things actually seem to an individual (cf. *Interrogating the Real* 90-91). In a sense, the human mind not only starts its search for exploration of its own identity but also realizes the functioning of the entire community's lifeworld through the medium of fantasy characters (cf. Swinfen 12-13). Moreover, imagination which is an important element in fantasy plays a pivotal role in any individual as being the root cause for all developments whether individuals differ significantly both intellectually and ethically where some have been able to perform deeds that were outstandingly brilliant and some have been unsuited due to suffering from strife and insecurity much evident in the young and old. The child and the aged are two different types of personalities who cannot operate on their own due to lack of physical strength to combat real-life situations and so are driven to seek security in order to reach self-sufficiency, for they express tendencies that are thwarted rather than repressed. In this state of self-abandonment, the

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willingness to be delighted in a story produces the state of enchantment (cf. Jacobs xxii). They concern the replacement of problems with solutions which go far beyond logical coherence and intellectual precision of the family and society which is attributed in the games they play and the enjoyment they derive from their play, which cannot be prolonged to other stages (cf. *Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming* 436-43) and therefore they shift towards reading fantasy literature which is much more healthy than other forms of reliving their childhood pleasures. When fantasy literature is being read one counteracts the situations in their real life world by juxtaposing it to the situations opened up by fantasy narrative; unknowingly undergoing a psychological journey which is self-reflexive as the reader's progress towards self-realization or self-actualization. Sigmund Freud in *Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming* views fantasy as an escape mechanism but the above arguments prove that Freud has read against the run of the text for it cannot be regarded as a mere escape mechanism because fantasy sustains and nourishes the weak in helping them to seek the root causes of their problems and derive a healthy way to encounter it. For example, "[o]ne critic complained to Lewis that fairy tales were not practical, they could not teach a child to build a boat. No, Lewis replied, but they would teach him how to act if he ever found himself on a sinking ship" (Hannay 76) further proves the validity and vitality of fantasy literature.

Psychology, being the youngest of the sciences, has inevitably encountered misoneism in an extreme form because it has been superficially understood that fantasy and reality are separate phenomenon in one's psyche. But deep structures prove that fantasy and reality are interlinked even to the fact that there is no Real without fantasy (cf. *The Function of Fantasy in the Lacanian Real*) which is also substantiated by the findings of neuroscientists who have explored the neural pathways pertaining to both worlds suggest that in the signal flow of information when imagine things slides towards imaginative propensity, the processing is done in the exact reverse order as one sees an object or image which is directly outside the real world, i.e. imagination (cf. Mitrica). In fantasy, one can easily understand one's characteristics by marks of kinship with animals, which catalyze the phylogenetic scale in human beings; so that the child can gradually develop its abilities and understand the world around it as a kitten though fed by its mother, practices pouncing, which will be relatively helpful when it becomes older (cf. Kumar 5). Thus, the fantasy narratives provoke the mysterious creative power of life to



compensate the defeats in one area by striving for success in another since fantasy is “a method of approaching and evaluating the real world” (Swinfen 230). Even if the social relations of the environment develop the psyche of the children, a change of heart is possible through fantasy, which drives them towards “free association by paving the way to reach heights and depths inaccessible to a coerced association” (Caudwell 174-75). The definite innate mental structure (inner world) is created through the interaction of the self with the world of fantasy, which is a bench marker for one to understand and face the traumatic event in one’s life since meaning is thus determined. Unfolding an irrevocable threshold in the evolution of fantasy literature by pronouncing the subject (inner world of juvenile and elderly readers) that is ready to take the substantial step of maturity through projecting oneself out into the world towards an encounter with the unconscious into the future. According to the general understanding in psychoanalysis, ego is the individual’s image (which is largely unconscious) of himself/herself as a self-conscious being defending against feelings of anxiety and unacceptable impulses to maintain one’s self-schema and moreover, the ego recognizes ‘time’ and the ‘setbacks’ and preserves the self by telling it to hold back on its desires and negotiates with reality. When reading the novel *Harry Potter*, for a moment the readers wonder if the spectral figure they see is indeed Harry Potter or the mirror images of themselves—equally though improbable, another bygone figure will emerge in them as Freud’s credo, to make the unconscious conscious. The reader receives the message in inverted form and thus his/her desire can finally become recognized.

“In art, liberated from the constraints of reason and logic, we conceive and combine new forms that enrich our lives, and which we believe tell us something important and profoundly ‘true’” (Armstrong 10). Since imagination is invoked as locus of our creative impulses of our psychological well-being, playing a pivotal role in an epistemological framework as Gilbert Durand, places soul in a Platonist structure of body-soul-spirit as coterminous with imagination (cf. Joy 104). The Secondary worlds as ‘Middle-Earth’ in *The Hobbit*, ‘Narnia’ in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and ‘Hogwarts’ in *Harry Potter* are not imaginary, but the parallel operations of Reality where readers are given a liminal space, i.e. secondary world, to transcend through living in that space. The readers commence their travel initially with the characters’ primary world and from there they are taken into the secondary world due to the personal

tribulations of the real world. The readers are invited to 'inhabit' and 'play along' the narrative conceit, just as the characters resolve to do after their transposition from the primary to the secondary world since no alternative world is out-of-bounds. Not only children but also the readers of adolescence and manhood who intend to escape from reality are made to suspend their own disbelief and embrace that same magical contrivance as the perfectly reasonable logic to their problems, i.e. poetic faith—"the willing suspension of disbelief for the moment" (Coleridge 191). The new journey is created between the readers' real self (id) and the imaginary self (superego) out of which the readers (ego) are reborn. This process, i.e. the birth of ego is explained by Lacan in the mirror image, and when parallelism is drawn between the child and the reader, the reader is fascinated and identifies oneself with the characters in the narratives, and one can do things one could not do before (cf. Leader, Darian and Judy Groves 21). Thus, he focuses mental identification as a constituent factor in human knowledge. Because the young and the old readers' mastery of one's tribulations and entry into the world of fantasy is at the price of a fundamental alienation out of which the genesis of the ego is assimilated to a series of operations based on the imaginary identification with characters where they lose the original sense of unity with the real world that exists outside the text only for a moment. Besides identifying 'imaginary posts (*postes*) of personality' the 'I' is made out to recognize itself and in this new psychic journey the characters in the narratives act as 'imagos' which is a process of the symbolic identification where the 'ego ideal' gives the reader a place and supplies the point from which he or she is looked at (cf. Rabate 31-32).

Moreover, when the reader is captured by the 'imagos', he/she assumes signifiers from the fantasy narratives as elements of identification and this process of identity formation in the reader depends on how he/she assimilates it. This symbolic identification, which is made possible by the imaginary images, creates alienation through the forgetfulness of the self, thus aiding to ground the subject. This factor has been pungently put forth by Jean-Paul Sartre that the self-consciousness is essentially 'nothing' when compared to the ego as a new object perceived by the reader in the fantasy narratives; because alienation from the real self is an inevitable consequence in the formation of ego and necessary first step towards subjectivity (Homer 20). As Lacan puts it, the subject unfolds in the locus of the big Other since the big Other, i.e. 'imagos' emerges from unconscious desire of the self. To become a subject one must take



a position in relation to the big Other. The reader must differentiate himself or herself from the big Other, which allows the possibility of change beyond the inescapable determination of the symbolic implication to determine its future grounded on the indeterminateness between the unconscious, and desire, which are in the form of unidentified intuitions. These intuitions are the necessary determinants of the psychic process, which is the expression of the interplay between primordial desires and conscious desires of the subject resulting from the identification with the 'imagos' as active imagination. Rather the narratives, which he or she comes across as a reader, will be incorporated, forming a kernel of insignia, which are unconscious. The 'unconscious' consists of the personal unconscious as well as a more global unconscious (racial memories) inherited in our species, is technically termed as the 'Collective Unconscious' by Jung (cf. De Coster 4).

Jung posited collective unconscious as archetypes—the unconscious modes of understanding—which regulate the perception and the instincts of a person to determine his/her actions. The collective unconscious represents the recurrent themes or ideas of mankind surpassing the boundaries of time or space and these collective unconscious symbols found in the fantasy narratives pierce through the consciousness of the readers to perceive the archetype for themselves (cf. Hyde, Maggie and Michael McGuinness 59-61). According to Jung, these symbols are passed on through fantasy narratives and "inherited with the structure of the psyche and is to be found in all times and among all peoples" (*Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, "Dream Analysis" 25). The unconscious is more likely to come up with a solution to a deep adjustment problem than one's conscious processes. With the symbolic identification, the reader can get to the stage of perceiving oneself as capable being, a unified Self. Lacan describes it as:

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for all the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopedic—and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the infants entire mental development. (qtd. in Homer 24-26)

Thus, the reader discovers both possibilities and plausibilities to make points about what is probably his/her world (cf. Apter 1).

The various archetypes of collective unconscious are not consciously learned but can be identified in myth, religion, and language as a product of a long, evolutionary process in which man's primitive herd instincts are reconciled with the conflicting situations. As the imagery of myths and legends are the exponents of the collective unconscious, the readers are caught up in the universal patterns contained within the archetypes, which manoeuvres them, combines them and organizes their relations. In them, "the archetypal images are among the highest values of the human psyche, they have peopled the heavens of all races from time immemorial. To discard them as valueless would be a distinct loss." That is why, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Harry Potter* potentially have a huge crossover audience who find the similarities among myth, religions and dreams within and across time and cultures. The greatest of these universal themes is embodied in the archetype of the 'Self', which, for Jung, is the source of the human experience of God and Jung also insists that the human psyche shows "countless archaic traits" (*Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, "Archaic Man" 128). It constitutes a common psychic substrate of a 'suprapersonal' nature present in every one. As Saint Irenaeus says: "The Creator of the world did not fashion these things directly from himself but copied them from archetypes outside himself" (qtd. in Jung 'Introduction' to *Four Archetypes*). They are visual symbols, energetic imprints, or subliminal message to trigger the memory of the reader to find out truths behind the illusion of reality. J.K. Rowling depicts the underage wizard Harry Potter abound with dream experiences that have entered into a realm of ancient symbolism and occultism to which he has no conscious access. From these transformations, he entwines prophetic visions with psychologically astute insights into adolescent feelings of loss, fear, desire and hopes to challenge ghostly version of the Dark Lord, Voldemort.

According to analytical psychology, all human beings retain unconscious memories of their childhood perceptions of "mother" archetype subdivided into "good mother" the anchored idea of giving birth, protection granted woman and "bad mother" the negative ("nefaste") aspects, which the children are unable to integrate images of their mother behaving in ways of caring and punishing them. The "Mother-archetypes" are in particular assimilated in many places as 'Mirror of Erised' and 'Muggle-relatives'.



Other symbols of the mother in a figurative sense appear in School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Hogwarts, and the headmaster of Hogwarts Dumbledore representing Harry Potter's longing goal for redemption. And the nefaste mother-archetypes are all devouring or wrapping around animals like dragons, snakes, werewolf, spiders and mermaid considered further the Dark World, the water depth, the death, dementors and nightmares, young wizard students as well as professors of evil supporters arousing feeling of awe as "the character of a man's anima is as a rule shaped by his mother". The dichotomy between good mother and bad mother archetypes illuminates Jung's suggestion of anima/animus.

Only the painful (but essentially simple) decision to take one's fantasies and feelings seriously can at this stage prevent a complete stagnation of the inner process of individuation, because only in this way can a man discover what this figure means as an inner reality. Thus, the anima becomes again what she originally was—the "woman within" who conveys the vital messages of the Self (C.G. Jung, *Man and His Symbols* 198).

The Self, the outcome of the Mirror Stage, believes like primitive man that everything is explained by unintentional outside force. Nevertheless, with these internalized and repressed ones instead of objectified ideas, the readers are actually less in control of their own psyche, and especially the dark side of the real world. The result is that the readers, now equipped with tremendous magical power, is ever more capable of using it when the unconscious potential within bursts forth and projects itself upon the tribulations. This 'transcendental ego' is, as Heidegger suggests, the only site in which the meaning of being can fundamentally arise and become 'Absolute Being' (cf. Collins, Jeff and Howard Selina 42). The Self-archetype affects the ego beyond conscious control in a God-like way, takes the role of animus or anima, a mediator between the ego and the inner world, and speaks transmitted message. Hence, the readers surmise that Harry Potter is not only working his personal problems, but working age old problems of mankind. Most of Harry Potter's dreams convey his establishment into sacred realm where he encounters various battlefields with his archenemy Voldemort, who seeks to rule or destroy the universe. The archetypal dream has something to do with the life of the protagonist across all seven novels of *Harry Potter* in which dream is regarded as a piece of magic, as a mysterious, potentially dangerous, but extremely valuable source of power, meaning, and guidance in life and thus working out universal themes and problems of the collective unconscious.



In *Harry Potter* series, the archetype of the "Shadow" occurs as the dementors, ghoulish creatures of death and Voldemort the dark wizard, who depict the negative, socially undesirable hostile tendencies of unconscious. From the beginning, J.K. Rowling sets the reader up to find out the cause for Harry's dreams and against the skepticism of his waking mind. In the reader, the primordial images are made visible and the concept of the archetype finds its specific functions through telepathic, clairvoyant, and powerful resource of the protagonist. It is not unusual even for a fight of the dreamer with the figure, which corresponds to the encounter of a man with his shadow. His encounters with whomping willow, werewolf, dragon, etc. are allegorically for the successful confrontation with the shadow. As in many myths of the archetype of the shadow from whose clutches, Harry Potter must free. However, the distinct blend of restrained representation of muggles' atrocity with powerful urge confronted the dreadful circumstances inside Hogwarts by the influential status of Harry Potter epitomizes the manifestation of a fantasy literature for both children and aged to escape reality, the reader relies on a temporal shift that owes more to fancy than to reason. Even the reader starts examining oneself out of the personified archetypal evil characters for the potential for vile and inhuman behavior can be a humbling experience that teaches him/her tolerance, compassion, and empathy (cf. De Coster 6).

The ego of the readers judges the conscious and unconscious decisions of the id and the superego after having gone through the psychic journey. The ego, allied with the world of fantasy, holds the self up to high moral and social standards and lives as part of a community, responding and responsible to others. Hence, all three of Freud's structural concepts, the id, ego, and superego, function in response to fantasy literature. As *The Bible* says, "God created man in his own image" Gen 1: 27, the readers ultimately experience the ideal person, the 'imago dei', (the God-image in man). The readers come to reality after having been subjugated in the narratives where their sojourn in fantasy should have unraveled the past subliminal elements in the real world by breaking down the distinction between fantasy and reality. The psyche of them tells their own stories and the interplay of the archetypes are revealed in the natural setting as "Formation, transformation, the eternal mind's eternal recreation" (*Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster* 113). Bitter at being treated like neglected selves the narratives compel young and old readers to behave as if unlocking an ordinary door, which might unlatch magical powers. It cajoles them into action by unfolding the symbolic significance



of the events. However, instead of seeking out what they evade—a prosaic world devoid of all tribulations—they find a holistic life tinged with mystery. It is true to J.K. Rowling's portrayal of magic as a source of ancient wisdom and a neutral power that can be a source of good or evil, depending on one's choices and actions in life (this thrust of the self makes many to mark J.K. Rowling as an occultist writer).

The Fantasy narrative symbolically unfastens the latch to faithful depiction of the aspects of the psyche common to everyone. It is only applicable to the readers who can experience fantasy realm and not that much to a couch potato who thrills himself by this perverted art form since the experience is imaginatively passive while watching fantasy movies. "Brain movies"—the images that formed in the mind of the reader—are more exciting and memorable than Hollywood films, for fertile imagination allows the readers of any age to dream, visualize, and make the fresh associations that promote inventions or art or literature or technology or new solutions. Moreover, every imagination cannot be turned successfully into a movie, for imagination is acutely particular than universal. Man's psyche is more than any mortal can possess and control for the individual is consummately unique, and can gain self knowledge only through his/her own store of memories, visual images, and mentally-recorded experiences. Today since most of the younger generation have been caught by the media, promoting a culture of reading fantasy will be an attempt to introduce realism; for fantasy is an aid in the development of the reader's psychic and at the same time, however, development is also through '*imramma*'—the spiraling journey of the higher self "Soul"—the journey never ends because the Self dwells within and affects man moving not just individuals but human history itself.

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Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India Under No. DELENG/2002/09226.  
Printed and published by Manish Kumar on behalf of Dr. K.R. Gupta (Owner), B-2, Vishal Enclave, New Delhi-110027,  
Tel.: +91-11-40775300, 40775301; published from 7/22, Ansari Road, Darya Ganj, New Delhi-110002,  
Tel.: +91-11-23273880, 23275880, Fax: +91-11-23285873 and printed at Nice Printing Press, 3-B, Rashid Market  
Extension, Delhi-110051. Editor: Sunita Sinha. RNI No. DELENG/2002/09226.

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Vol. 15 - Nos. 1-2