7-24-2014

Playful Texts: Play Theory and the Adaptation and Reception of Fantasy Genres

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PLAYFUL TEXTS: PLAY THEORY AND

THE ADAPTATION AND RECEPTION OF FANTASY GENRES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2014

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ii

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This dissertation examines fantasy and its two subgenres horror and science fiction through the theoretical lens of Play Theory to illustrate the role of play rubrics in the plot and social settings in these works as well as explain the reception and adaptation of various franchises by fan communities.

Using close readings of key texts from each identified genre, the study illustrates how the genres follow the basic trajectory of play rubrics outlined in Roger Caillois' *Man, Play, and Games*, mirroring the trajectory of human societies as they move from tribal to industrial forms of governance and social structures. From there the dissertation examines the phenomenon of fan culture and explains the deep affection its members have for various fantasy franchises and the urge to engage with those franchises on an extra-textual level.

The study concludes that fantasy in all its forms appeals to people on a personal, symbolic level in the same way that religious symbols and stories have in the past and that the urge to adapt stories and settings into other forms, such as games, operates on the same level as ritual actions. Fantasy through games provides a sense of personal identity and serves as the superstructure on which community can be built.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

WEEKENDS AT THE DORM

Luke Skywalker once described his home planet, Tatooine, like this: "If there's a bright center in the universe then this is the furthest point from it." Luke could have just as well been describing Alice Lloyd College.

Located in Pippa Passes (named after the poem "Pippa's Song") and nestled in the hollow of the mountains in Southeastern Kentucky, Alice Lloyd was a work-study college that billed itself as "A Light Unto the Mountains." Its stated mission was to provide affordable education to the Appalachian population. It emphasized leadership, service, and Christian values, and it was more or less my home for four years.

I was nineteen and rip-roaring to get away from home and start my life. My childhood was often measured in dosages of Albuterol, Prednisone, and antibiotics, and my health issues made going to school difficult. The general pattern consisted of me going for a while, getting laid low with bronchitis or a sinus infection or a flu, and having to be pulled out mid-semester for missing too many classes. My frustration over the situation grew into clinical depression and set up a cycle of illness, depression, and more illness. It took about three years, but a combination of therapy, better doctors and allergists, and physical maturation put me in a position to move on at last with a life I too often felt had stalled. I applied to a few colleges, but my aunt and uncle worked at Alice Lloyd and it was considered a *fait accompli* that I would attend "The Lloyd," as its students liked to call it.

It was a good setup. My social skills at that time were a bit stunted (although in hindsight I feel I have been too hard on myself on that account), and this was the first time I had been away from home. Alice Lloyd was a four hour drive from Louisville, where my parents and brother

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lived, and it was just far enough that I felt a sense of independence, but still had a safety net of family not too far away. Of course I did not think of those issues at the time. My goals were to get a degree in psychology so I could become a therapist (this did not happen), find a girlfriend (this did not happen, either), and meet new friends (this did happen).

Pippa Passes boasted a population of 900—primarily Alice Lloyd students, faculty, and staff. The closest outposts of civilization were a strip mall fifteen miles away and a small, Mayberry-esque town called Hindman. The closest Wal-Mart was forty miles away in a town called Hazard (when I was a kid I thought that this was the same as the Hazzard County in the television show *The Dukes of Hazzard*). The college rested in a dry county, so one had to either drive to Hazard or buy moonshine from one of the locals. The boys lived in one of two connected dorms and the girls resided in two other freestanding dorms.

One of the realities of living in the mountains is that even if a place is only ten miles away, that is ten miles as the crow flies. What should be only a ten minute drive could take up to thirty because of the twisty roads. Going to the movies and a nice restaurant often required a day trip to Prestonsburg unless one did not care about going to the leaky, uncomfortable theaters in Hazard. There just was not much to do other than study.

The campus became a ghost town come Friday morning. Most students tried to finagle their schedules so that they did not have Friday classes, and even those that did often skipped. If it were a cartoon they would have left little clouds of dust in their wake. There were a few that stayed and those people became some of the best friends I ever had. If not for our isolation and the game *Dungeons & Dragons* my weekends would have been much more boring and I would not have met such great people.

Some people came and went, but the core group consisted of myself, my roommate Aaron, and our friends Jon, Drew, Earl, Chris (nicknamed Cub; his older brother was called Bear), Joe, and Thomas (whom everyone called Flounder after the character from *Animal House*). We all took turns running games, but it was Drew and Flounder that played the role of gamemaster most often. Flounder preferred to run the game *Vampyre: The Masquerade*, where we played vampires living and fighting in Lexington, Kentucky, and Drew's favorite game was *Dungeons & Dragons*. We dabbled in *Star Wars*, *Wraith*, various superhero games (some official and some of our own design), but the game we came back to most often was *D&D*.

We typically began Friday, often right after dinner. Drew appropriated a long table from one of the student common rooms, so we typically played in his room. Drew would sit at the head of the table in a recliner he had rescued from the trash. (A professor who had departed for greener pastures left it behind and it was held together mostly by duct tape and faith.) We would bring snacks and someone would be dubbed "Kool-Aid Bitch"—a title that is hilarious when you are twenty but does not hold up so well when you are in your thirties—whose job was to take the jug to the communal bathroom to fill with water from the sink. Many nights we would pool our money and order pizza from the cheapest place in the area, Heritage Pizza. Heritage always included packets of garlic sauce and if I live to be a hundred I will never forget the sight of Drew shotgunning those packets while we chanted "Ziggy-zaggy, ziggy-zaggy, oi, oi, oi!"

Youth, Kool-Aid, Mountain Dew, and instant coffee kept us playing until five or six in the morning, but we would all experience moments of dozing off. Aaron was particularly good at waking up just long enough to roll his dice for an encounter. We would break, go to bed for five or six hours, and then meet again Saturday evening for another marathon session.

Games formed the warp and woof of our interactions. We played *Magic: The Gathering*, the popular collectible card game. We played other board and card games—especially the satirical *Nuclear War* and its expansion *Nuclear Proliferation*. We played video games on all sorts of systems, but most often on the Nintendo 64. We played *WWF No Mercy*, a wrestling game with an impressive character generator. We made our own characters and played them exclusively, forgetting the rich roster that had been programmed into the game. I made ones based on comic book characters such as Nomad and Starman Jack Knight. Aaron loved the wrestler Sting, so he made Sting and Cybo-Sting, a cyborg from the future who traveled back in time for reasons I cannot remember anymore. Jon made DDT, an ex-Israeli soldier whose move sets consisted only of DDTs[1], and Ensign Campbell—the only redshirt officer from Star Trek to have survived away missions. Ensign Campbell had traveled back in time to drag Cybo-Sting back to the future. Sometimes I wonder if our GPAs would not have been higher if we had spent as much time and effort on our studies as we did on character creation and backstory.

While those games were fun, *D&D* was our first love and it was the rare weekend that we did not play it. Our campaigns went on for semesters, even entire school years, and after a while our adventures became part of our common lexicon. I might see something funny on television and remark "That's the craziest thing I've seen since Flip-Flop turned into a dragon and flew away!"[2] which would make perfect sense to anyone in the group. Those events still come up in our conversations today. After we graduated we tried to hold monthly games, but as we grew older and got jobs and families, those sessions quickly fell on the wayside. However, when I talk

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[1] A DDT is a move where one wrestler will lock his opponent's head against his side and then fall backwards so that the opponent's head hit the mat. There were an amazing number of variations on this move, hence Campbell's rich-yet-singular repertoire of moves.

[2] For the longest time Aaron played a thief with multiple personalities. One of those personalities was Flip-Flop, a great red dragon. After a while Aaron accumulated too many personalities and conducted an audit. One of the personalities to go was Flip-Flop and Drew decided that instead of having the character simply vanish, he would detach from Aaron's character and fly away. This was obviously a moment that stuck with us.

to Jon or Aaron on the phone or visit them on the rare times I'm back in Kentucky, we inevitably relive those stories like soldiers might reminisce about old battles.

I still play games today, but there will never be a time like those weekends at the dorm. This dissertation is as much a love letter to those times and those friends as it is a serious evaluation of the role that games play in the fantasy genres. Our love of the game stemmed in many ways from our love of fantasy. We read J. R. R. Tolkien, David Eddings, Robert Jordan, Robert E. Howard, Michael Moorcock, and countless *Dungeons & Dragons* novelizations. We loved *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* and comics, and those stories and characters seeped into our games. The joke that was Ensign Campbell means nothing unless one knows that the character wearing the red shirt on the original *Star Trek* was always the one to die on away missions. One of the first *D&D* characters I created was a ranger named Roland. In my mind he was a mash-up of Aragorn and Stephen King's gunslinger Roland of Gilead. Later I played a paladin named Alexander, and his character was heavily influenced by David Eddings' knight Sparhawk. Jon created a cleric named Ged after Ursula K. Le Guin's wizard of Earthsea, and I could go on naming examples of our character-adaptations for pages if I did not stop myself.

We belonged to nerd subculture, but we also belonged to our own subculture within that college. Fantasy had not exploded in popular culture at that time, and we wore our nerd badges with a mix of pride and trepidation. Hipsters like to proclaim that they liked something before it "became cool" and that was certainly the case with us. What we did not realize at the time, though, was that our game-playing fulfilled more functions than just passing the time on long, boring weekends. We were building a community with its own rituals, language, and history and it was the realization of those social and psychological functions that stayed with me and made me think that it might be a worthy subject of exploration later on in my career. However, if not

for a serendipitous conversation with one of my professors, I might have written a very different

dissertation.

The idea of this dissertation began with an impromptu conversation after a class on the

Black Arts Movement. I own a tabletop role-playing game (TRPG) called *Solid! The D20*

Blaxploitation Experience and I brought it class to show my professor. What began as me simply

sharing something I thought funny and interesting and related to the class' subject matter turned

into almost an hour-long conversation on the history and purpose of games. I made an offhand

comment about the preponderance of games found within the various fantasy genres, and that

remark ultimately lead to this study. At first I conceived of it as a cultural study, but because the

texts form the basis for these games, it became clear that a textual analysis was warranted as

well. What resulted was a mix of personal narrative, textual study, and cultural analysis.

The dissertation is broken into five chapters. Chapter one introduces the theories that will

be used for the close readings of texts in chapters two, three, and four, and also introduces the

examination of extratextual interactions between readers and various fantasy franchises in

chapter five. Chapter one outlines Johan Huizinga's foundational theory of play and supplements

this with the work of Roger Caillois, who refines and expands upon Huizinga. The chapter also

mentions other play theories, such as the psychological approach pioneered by L.S. Vygotsky,

and the work of Brian Sutton Smith, who categorizes the various interdisciplinary studies of play

and games. It also bolsters Huizinga and Caillois's points with Carl Jung's theories of archetypes

and the collective unconscious. From there the chapter sketches a brief history of fantasy, its

dialectical relationship to literary realism, its power as a method for communicating with the

unconscious, and its inherently subversive nature.

Chapter two continues the historical positioning of fantasy begun in chapter one, as well as the binary established between the genre and literary realism. It also tackles the difficult question of genre, and the problems that arise from classification. From there the chapter examines two epic fantasy series in-depth: George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* and Terry Goodkind's *Sword of Truth*. The chapter examines the role that Caillois's *mimicry* and *ilinx* play in the societal structures presented in the series as well as in the actual mechanics of the book, and explores the role that Caillois's *paidia* serves in the texts. Finally, the chapter positions fantasy at one end of a continuum that reflects the trajectory of societal change as outlined in Huizinga.

Chapter three examines the fantasy subgenre of horror. The chapter stands as the middle of both the dissertation and Huizinga's continuum established in chapter two. In many ways chapter three is the most focused of the three literary analysis chapters because of the uniformity with which the genre employs the game rubrics of *mimicry* and *ilinx*. The chapter begins with a brief history of the genre, starting with its roots in the Gothic tradition. It then outlines the basic elements of the genre, paying special attention to Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. After summaries of two primary texts—Peter Straub's *Ghost Story* and Stephen King's *IT*—the chapter culminates by using the selectedtexts to epitomize the manner in which *mimicry* and *ilinx* are used in horror.

Chapter four is the last of the three chapters of the literary analysis section and focuses on science fiction—representing also the end-point on Huizinga's continuum. Following Huizinga, the chapter illustrates how Caillois's *agôn* and *alea* and Huizinga's *ludus* define the future societies being portrayed. Following summaries of the core texts being examined—Iain M. Banks' *The Player of Games*, Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*, and Philip K. Dick's *Solar*

Lottery, along with a brief history of the genre—the chapter ends by defining science fiction's place in relation to fantasy and horror.

Chapter five shifts focus away from literary to cultural analysis, examining the methods and reasons why fantasy texts are adapted into extra-textual modes. Returning to Jung, the chapter explores the roles of fantasy and festivity in human culture, and makes use of performance theory to explain the importance of fantasy and play in human society and why it almost spontaneously emerges on the fringes of mainstream culture. To accomplish this, the chapter focuses on tabletop roleplaying games, but it also touches on other aspects of popular culture and briefly uses the case of the mainstream reaction to the television show *Game of Thrones* to illustrate the common suspicions of Western culture regarding play and fantasy.

The dissertation primarily focuses on textual analysis to make its points, but also employs personal narrative and cultural analysis. As can be seen in this introduction, it is nearly impossible to separate myself from this study, as its subject matter is imbedded in the fabric of my life. In this spirit I provide at the beginning of each chapter a short scene describing one of the many fantasy characters I have played. I do so for three reasons: one, to highlight the role that rules play in these playful texts and to illustrate how these rules establish the expectations that we use to classify works into specific genres. If not for specific rules and expectations, various fantasy franchises could not be codified into games, as the existence of rules is one of the most important criteria in the definition of games. I consciously and subconsciously employed those rules when making characters—drawing on my knowledge of horror to make a vampire or ghost character, or my knowledge of science fiction to create a character appropriate for that genre. These characters are examples of adaptation in action and serve as illustrative examples of the rules that the chapters will explore. Second, I wanted to add what I felt was a little texture

and flavor to the chapters—a narrative flourish, if you will, that draws upon my history with these works and my background as a creative writer. Third, I wanted to have a little fun with this dissertation. Being as this work is in many ways a celebration of imagination and pleasure, it seemed a wasted opportunity not to try and embody that in some small way in the writing.

The word "play" encompasses several definitions and it fulfills multiple functions within this dissertation: it defines a specific and unique human activity involving well-defined rubrics; it defines the sense of enjoyment and involvement individuals feel when interacting with fantasy texts; and it defines the manner in which individuals interact with these franchises and the desire to adapt them into extra-textual mediums. Ultimately, the dissertation claims that while the rules may differ in these various genres, they all fit together under the classification of "playful texts." They are texts that play with us and that we, in turn, play with as well. These are texts that demand interaction and we do so in figuring out the various rules established in these fictional worlds, how those rules fit or break the rules we have internalized through a steady diet of popular culture, and how these rules can be adapted into mediums that allow for greater interaction on the part of the reader.

CHAPTER 1

THE THEORY OF PLAY

Jack "The Lightning Dancer" Bradybuck stood in the center of the arena. Nobody thought he would make it this far—himself included. The contest would determine who would lead the ruling clan of Reach, and the fact that he happened to be from the neighboring country did not sit well with some people. Well, most of them, if he were being honest.

Honesty was never his strong suit—one of the many reasons why he chose to be a bard. Lies weren't so bad when they came in story form, and if the story happened to be about him, well, that just made them all the more entertaining. This would make for a hell of a song if he survived. He already had been given a legendary-sounding nickname (all right, he had given himself that nickname) when he dodged lightning drawn from the sky by a particularly skilled and grumpy wizard, and if all went well, he would add "and King of the Mizand" to it.

The funny thing was that he had entered the tournament on a lark. His fellow mercenary, Cailin, who happened to be from Reach, entered out of a genuine desire to lead his people, whereas Jack thought of it as a good opportunity for a new song and a little glory. Their mercenary company had traveled to Reach on an entirely different mission, but Cailin and Jack found little to do, and as Jack's mother often said, "Idle hands are the Nameless One's playthings."

Jack thumped his bo staff against his shoulder, already working out the time signatures for his next song, "The Lightning Dancer." The crowd booed and yelled obscenities at him, but he choose to think of them as cheers. The gates opened at one end of the arena and Jack could see the silhouette of his next opponent. He could not make out the man's features, but he was big.

Jack's staff began thumping out a different tempo, faster, harder, and he began humming under his breath, drawing on ancient magicks through song. His heart triple-timed and the world focused itself in unparalleled clarity to the point where he felt like he could dance between the dust motes suspended in the noonday sun. Win or lose, he thought, this was going to be fun.

—Jack Bradybuck

13th Level Bard

The Bard Character Class in *Dungeons & Dragons* and its Importance to this Chapter

The Bard is the Swiss Army Knife of *Dungeons & Dragons* character classes, described in the player's handbook as a "jack-of-all-trades but master of none."[3] The Bard could fight, move stealthily, pick pockets, cast spells, sing and play songs, and became my favorite character class to play (although I also had a soft spot for playing Swashbucklers as well). In *D&D*, a character's attributes are quantified and codified into five categories: strength, dexterity, intelligence, wisdom, and charisma. A player rolls three six-sided dice in order to determine the ability score (with three being abysmal and eighteen being superior), and like all character classes, the Bard required base scores in two attributes: a twelve in dexterity and a 15 in charisma. This speaks to the role that the Bard plays in the game: the agile, charismatic warrior-poet that supports the rests of the group. Along with his fighting skills and modicum of thieving abilities, the Bard's greatest tool was his music, which could inspire his companions to fight harder and press on despite the odds. While Jack certainly supported his team, his goal was always somewhat selfish—he wanted epic stories for his songs.

A reasonable question at this point would be why am I writing about this character? For that matter, why do I begin a brief scene from that character's life? This dissertation's goal is to

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[3] Cook 58.

illuminate the role that play serves in fantasy texts and the manner in which fans approach them. It posits that there is an inherit playfulness to all texts and part of that playfulness resides in the discerning of the rules of the genre that the text has been classified (fantasy, science fiction, or horror) and discovering the places where the text follows those rules and where it breaks them. The importance of rules—of structure—is also present in play, and it provides a nexus whereby play and fantasy meet. Rules also facilitate (perhaps it might be fair to go so far as to say allow) the adaptation of fantasy texts into extra-textual mediums such as tabletop role-playing games such as *Dungeons & Dragons*. While other characters I played, such as my Paladin, Alexander, had a more clear-cut influence, Jack was cobbled together from the archetype of the gentleman thief: the charismatic, self-aggrandizing rogue that played fast and loose with the rules, but followed a very specific moral code. He was Han Solo with a harp, and characters like the famed smuggler provided me with the basic roles for playing him.

This idea of gleaning the rules for playing a character from other texts will be explored in greater detail in the fifth chapter, but the Bard makes for a perfect starting point for this conversation. While all the chapters essentially cover the rules for how we can read these playful texts, this chapter will focus on the societal, psychological, and spiritual forces—the suprastructure—that underlies the rules. Traditionally, historically, the bard acts as the repository and mouthpiece for culture, tradition, and history. He is the sorcerer that weaves the dreams of a community, and it is only fitting that he begin a chapter that examines the origins of culture and the sociological and psychological value of stories. However, to begin with, we must first examine the role of play in Western Society.

Chapter Overview: The Paradox and Importance of Play in Western Society

Play is paradoxical. At heart it is an un-serious activity engaged in with the utmost seriousness. It has had an active, integral role in the formation of culture, society, and identity, and yet today, in Western societies, it has largely been relegated to the playroom and the playground—any designated place tacitly understood to be only for children, and identified by the word *play* as a prefix for some word denoting an enclosed space. In the adult world, play is perceived as belonging only on the stage, the television set, the movie screen, or the sports arena—any clearly defined space and any carefully defined activity considered unserious, and therefore less rooted in reality. Yet play forms the solid basis for many of our most sacred, serious, and "real" institutions, such as the church and the courthouse.

Perhaps, then, it would be more accurate to say that our perception of play is paradoxical, or at least ungenerous. In proper Platonic fashion, we place play on a continuum with reality. The two form a dialectic relationship where reality (and therefore seriousness) is on a higher plane, somehow closer to Truth with a capital "T," and play is on a lower, baser plane, farther away from capital-"T" Truth, and closer to illusions, lies, and fantasy. We tell children and adults acting childishly to "grow up." The word "up" in this case denotes both the movement upward a body makes as it grows, but also the movement from the fantastic-and-inferior "low" world of childhood to the realistic-and-superior "high" world of adulthood, and this metaphorical movement upwards implies a divesting of play. This dialectic of play vs. seriousness and fantasy vs. reality neglects the history of human social development and may possibly be culturally damaging. Although this dissertation's specific goal is to illuminate the play elements within the fantasy genre and within the reaction of its fans, underlying that goal is the belief that play and fantasy are important, healthy aspects of human nature. In her wonderful haunted house story,

13

The Haunting of Hill House, Shirley Jackson begins by stating: "No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality."[4] Jackson spends the rest of the paragraph describing Hill House, standing "by itself against its hills," containing an entity or spirit or vestige of consciousness that "walked alone."[5] Without play we could very well all be Hill Houses, standing by ourselves, walking alone, decidedly not sane.

In order to understand this powerful, cleansing, revitalizing force in human society, we need to explore the sacred and social aspects of games as well as define a clear classificatory system that will allow us to define and group specific types of games.

Play as a Sacred Social Game

The four game categories I will discuss come from Roger Caillois and are called *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx*. For the most part all of the four categories of games I will presently describe can be played alone or with others. While I do not intend to slight the individual aspect of games, for the moment I wish to concentrate solely on the social—partially because the social plays a large role in chapter five, but also because the social function is what Huizinga and Caillois focus on the most. Caillois writes that the four rubrics "presuppose not solitude but company."[6] This really is not surprising given that human beings are famously social creatures—herd animals, even. Certainly there are going to be exceptions to this rule, but on the whole we humans function best when we are part of a community. Countless scientific studies have indicated that our physical and psychological health drastically improves when we feel that we are a part of a group, and that may explain why games have permeated our society in a myriad of ways. *Agôn* (from the Greek for "struggle" or "contest") obviously appears in the form of

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[4] Jackson 3.
[5] Jackson 3.
[6] Caillois, *Man, Play* 40.

sports—football, baseball, basketball games, boxing matches, and so on—but also in games

where skill and chance intersect, such as radio contests and trivia shows like *Jeopardy!* A purer

form of chance or *alea* (from the Latin for "die," i.e., dice) shows up as casinos, state-run

lotteries, and racetracks. Public spectacles, Grand Guignols, theatrical performances, and

carnivals are the manifestations of *mimicry*, and *ilinx* (from a Greek word roughly synonymous

with "vertigo") surfaces in amusement parks and "the annual or cyclical occasions for popular

merry-making and jollity."[7] These manifestations of games have become socially acceptable

because of their "prevalence and stability," and the fact that they all serve as gathering points for

people.[8]

Perhaps the first modern scholar to try to understand the purpose of play was the

developmental psychologist L.S. Vygotsky, who attempted to explain the importance of play for

children. He understood that pleasure was a driving force behind the impetus to play, but he

looked beyond that to the psychological processes that occurred during play and which were, in

turn, developed by the activity. Vygotsky proposed that play fulfills certain needs in children that

they otherwise have no means to satisfy.[9] In his treatise, Vygotsky touched upon several of the

key concepts that other researchers discovered in their own work: the pleasurable nature of play,

the importance of rules and imagination, and the connection between play and abstract thinking.

Vygotsky's work focuses exclusively on the psychiatric view of play, but there are

others. In his book *The Ambiguity of Play,* Brian Sutton-Smith describes the very different

assumptions—or rhetorics, as he calls them—that different disciplines make about play, from

biology (important for growth) and math (a window into probability) to art and literature ("a spur

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[7] Caillois, *Man, Play* 41.
[8] Caillois, *Man, Play* 41.
[9] Vygotsky 93.

to creativity").[10] Sutton-Smith boils these various disciplinary approaches into seven rhetorics: "1) Play as progress; 2) Play as fate; 3) Play as power; 4) Play as identity; 5) Play as the imaginary; 6) Rhetoric of the Self; 7) Play as frivolous."[11] This dissertation will focus primarily on five of these: play as fate, play as power, play as identity, play as the imaginary, and the rhetoric of the self. These rhetorics will be explained in more detail, but the important point to take away at this moment is that there are a vast—often overlapping—number of theories about play. Vygotsky's work falls under the rhetoric of play as progress because it deals with the idea that children, like animals, adapt and develop through play. It was groundbreaking, but too narrowly focused to be of much use to this study.

To begin, we must first define play, and to do that we need to turn to the cultural historian Johan Huizinga and his seminal discussions. Huizinga defines play as:

> a free activity standing quite consciously outside of "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intently and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.[12]

The key characteristics of play are that it takes place within specifically designated borders of time and space, it promotes social groupings, it provides no material profit, and is something outside of so-called ordinary life. (Although I do in passing question the Platonic dialectic set up between play and life, my issue is not with the setting of play outside of the sphere of ordinary

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[10] Sutton-Smith 6-7.
[11] Sutton-Smith 9-11.
[12] Huizinga 13.

16

life, it is with the assumption that this setting aside somehow implies that play is play less important.)

Huizinga's thesis is that "the great archetypal activities of human society are all permeated with play from the start."[13] He lists among these archetypal activities the creation of language, myths, and anything sacred or judicial. These activities began as play, Huizinga believes, but as time went by, the original impulse to play was absorbed into the sacred sphere. What remains is crystallized as "knowledge: folklore, poetry, philosophy," as well as being distilled in "various forms of judicial or social life."[14] Of particular interest to this study is play's relation to ritual, societal identification, and the realm of the sacred.

The sacred—or the world of the spirit—is the world outside of human control. It is the place where Gods, monsters, fairies, and other fantastic creatures roamed the woods, jungles, and any place outside of human settlements, the wilderness where life is less regulated and subject to seemingly capricious forces. It is a space of violence, mystery, and primal truths, and into that space humans project their fears, their dreams, and their violence. The idea of a sacred world ties directly to the ritualistic mindset. Ritual is our way of connecting to and enacting some measure of control over the arbitrary powers of the universe. By enacting on a small scale some rite or practice that mirrors a larger, universal dimension, we hope to recreate that action on a larger scale. We see this in fertility rites, rain dances, and harvest festivals. Huizinga writes that sacred rites, sacrifices, consecrations and mysteries "all…serve to guarantee the well-being of the world, in a spirit of pure play understood."[15] This idea that abstract, cosmological forces have

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[13] Huizinga 4.
[14] Huizinga 46.
[15] Huizinga 5.

identities and personalities is an act of personification, which Huizinga believes to be an innate quality of the human mind.[16]

Huizinga postulates that for personification to exist, the impulse to play must already be present—a biological trait residing in our genes just like the "flight or fight" reflex—because personification itself is a form of play. Personification is, after all, the cousin to metaphor, which is essentially a play on words. If I describe a river as "angry" or the sun as "happy," I do not literally mean that they are experiencing and expressing those emotions, because they obviously do not possess them. Emotions are the purview of consciousness. However, using emotional language to describe impersonal physical entities allows me to express some understanding of their perceived quality: "Behind every abstract expression there lie the boldest of metaphor, and every metaphor is a play on words. Thus in giving expression to life man creates a second, poetic world alongside the world of nature."[17] Metaphor allows for communication because it imparts something we understand passingly well—namely ourselves—to objects, forces, and ideas that are not us or that we do not understand. As a species of metaphor, personification also allows us to defuse forces over which we have no control. The seasons pass without regard for our need for light and food, and the weather pays no mind to our wishes, but if the seasons possess a personality, if they have somewhat human motivations, then we can appeal to them, and in doing so, win some type of favor. They then become less abstract and arbitrary as well as less powerful and frightening. We may not be able to control them, but we might be able to *influence* them under this mindset, and that is where rituals come into play.

There is a similar theory in what Victor Turner calls "comparative symbology." Although related to the larger field of semiotics, comparative symbology deals less with the technical

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[16] Huizinga 141.
[17] Huizinga 4.

aspects of symbols and more with the manner in which people connect emotions and ideas with symbols. Turner examines what he calls "expressive culture" (which includes myths, novels, dramas, and rituals) to find the ways in which people make these emotional and ideological connections.[18] Linking this with Huizinga, comparative symbology can be seen as the study of a given culture's enacting of its personifications through ritual action. As a theoretical model, comparative symbology may work better for a study like this than more traditional forms of semiotics, because it views symbols as part of a living moment invested with meaning and emotion expressing a powerful cultural belief. Symbols that are spoken/enacted in this context—such as through the retelling of an important myth, a prayer, a chant, etc.—are performative utterances. In this case "performative" has a double meaning: the utterance takes place within a ritual space in a stylized, ritualistic manner, and it also performs in the sense that it accomplishes an action.

The Importance of Space to Play and Ritual

Performances need to occur within a special space in both play and ritual. Recalling Huizinga's definition, one of the criterions for play is a "proper" boundary of time and space. For children, this occurs in the playroom, the playground, or the backyard during certain permissible times—after they finish their homework, during recess at school, after dinner or before bedtime, and so on. Rites take place in the ritual circle, the temple, or the hogan. Judicial proceedings—trials, sentencings, and the like—happen in the courtroom. As time passes we move from the relatively unregulated spaces of playgrounds and backyards to the more regulated, formal, and stylized spaces of the church and courtroom. This is not coincidental: "As a rule the play-element gradually recedes into the background, being absorbed for the most part into the sacred

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[18] Turner *From Ritual to Theatre* 21.

sphere."[19] Roger Caillois classifies these two aspects of play as *paidia* and *ludus*. *Paidia* is free, unregulated, potentially destructive play, whereas *ludus* is play that is regulated and structured. Regardless of which end of the spectrum the play act falls under, the act must take place within spaces that are tacitly or explicitly designated as being to the side of everyday life. These are *liminal* spaces, areas that are in-between: neither this world nor the next, but on the threshold between the two (the word originates from the Latin *limen*, "threshold"). To understand play—and subsequently ritual and myth—one must first understand liminality.

The concept of liminality as understood in anthropology first appears in 1908 in Arnold van Gennep's *Rites de Passage*. In the book, van Gennep outlines the three phases of a rite of passage: separation, transition, and incorporation. He alternately calls the transition phase the "margin" or the "limen."[20] This concept proved especially fascinating to Victor Turner, who writes: "Ritual's liminal phase, then, approximates to the 'subjunctive mood' of sociocultural action. It is, quintessentially, a time and place lodged between all times and spaces defined and governed in any specific biocultural ecosystem…by the rules of law, politics and religion, and by economic necessity."[21] Liminal space allows one to step out, so to speak, of everyday life and in this in-between position, a person can be something other than oneself: a child can be a cop, a priest can be the conduit to God, and the shaman the mouthpiece for spirits. This is an essential step in play because it allows and reinforces the sense of make-believe inherent in all play activities, and similarly it is essential in ritual actions because it opens up the physical world to the world of spirits, allowing for the possibility of the existence of supernatural forces and creating the space where they can enter our world.

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[19] Huizinga 46.
[20] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 24.
[21] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 84.

Liminality also allows for a "stepping back" of sorts. It provides the needed space outside of a culture where one can view it from an objective outsider standpoint. Turner writes: "Liminality is both more creative and more destructive than the structural norm. In either case it raises basic problems for social structural man, invites him to speculation and criticism."[22] This invitation to speculation and criticism is not inherently subversive. The liminal phase in tribal rituals may invert the status quo, but it never supplants it with a new model; it simply allows for the viewing of what are considered natural laws in a new light. For example, Turner describes what happens to boys undergoing initiation rites in Australian, Melanesian, and African tribes. In the transitional phase, the boys are separated from the rest of the tribe, "stripped of names and clothing, smeared with the common earth rendered indistinguishable from animals."[23] Because they are undefined at this point, they have no rights within the community, but they also no longer have to subject themselves to its laws, either. The boys are frequently compared to "ghosts, gods ... ancestors … animals or birds."[24] By positioning the boys in this marginal state (not to be confused with marginalized), the community associates them with binary oppositions like life/death and male/female. Turner describes this as a "leveling" process where the "signs of their preliminal status are destroyed and signs of their liminal non-status applied."[25] In the final phase, incorporation, the initiates are allowed to return to the community, divested of their boyhood status and invested with knowledge of the asocial world outside of the community.

Archetypes, the Unconscious, and Play

The association of the boys with ghosts, gods, and ancestors raises another important point about play—its connection to the concept of archetypes. As I have already pointed out, the ritual mind

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[22] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 41.
[23] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 41.
[24] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 27.
[25] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 26.

begins by personifying arbitrary forces in order to understand and find meaning in what would otherwise be a cold, random universe. Huizinga situates this personifying in the creation of language. Personification becomes metaphor when the idea needs to be communicated.[26] To view this process in psychological terms, we can see personification as an act of projection, as Jung argues:

> All the mythologized processes of nature, such as summer and winter, the phases of the moon, the rainy seasons, and so forth, are in no sense allegories of these objective occurrences; rather they are symbolic expressions of the inner, unconscious drama of the psyche which becomes accessible to man's consciousness by way of projection—that is, mirrored in the events of nature. The projection is so fundamental that it has taken several thousand years of civilization to detach it in some measure from its outer object.[27]

To the mind these projections originate within the object and not the observer, giving rise to animistic thinking. In communicating these projections, they become metaphors (although not initially perceived that way), and eventually stories. Seen in this way, myth-making is a gradual, unconscious process that begins with the internal perception of an object or force possessing a spirit of its own; becomes external in its verbal expressing; and gradually changes and gathers greater layers of meaning—not to mention story elements such as plot, setting, and theme—as it is told and retold. Compare this process to the telephone game children play. For anyone unfamiliar with the game, a group of children either line up or gather in a circle. One child whispers to the next a sentence, such as "Baboons have red butts" or "Tammy has cooties." The second child whispers the sentence to the third and the third whispers to the fourth and so on

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[26] Huizinga 136.
[27] Jung *Archetypes* 6.

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until it winds its way back to the first child. What makes this such an interesting game is that invariably the sentence that comes back to that first child is almost unrecognizable. "Baboons have red butts" becomes "Joe's uncle owns a monkey," and "Tammy has cooties" becomes "Cindy smells." However, variation is not the point of the game: veracity is. The changes that occur in the sentence's retelling happen almost inevitably, a result of the unreliability of human language and orality. Similar to the telephone game, myths are told and retold across generations and geographies, and as they are retold they change. Some aspects are added, some deleted, and some warped to the point of unrecognizability. Hence Apollo becomes not just the God of light and music (two concepts whose connections can be rationalized), but also wolves.

Despite these variations, the core of the myths remain the same because they originate within the human psyche: "our unconscious is an acting and suffering subject with an inner drama which primitive man rediscovers, by means of analogy, in the processes of nature both great and small."[28] Although Jun is specifically discussing so-called "primitive man," his points apply just as well to human being today. Jung calls the psychic images that give rise to myths "archetypes": that is, concepts and psychic functions that we perceive as images that can be almost universally apprehended. Archetypes unite opposites: they mediate "between the unconscious substratum and the conscious mind."[29] The unconscious is the resting place of all of our sublimated dreams and desires; it is all that we are, all that we can be, and all that we are not. It houses our instincts and can be a great source of understanding for both our inner lives and the external world. However, whether fortunately or unfortunately, we cannot communicate with it directly. The unconscious is not a separate person, but an aspect of ourselves—the realm of instincts, desires, and emotions. We communicate with it indirectly (and, in fact, it is probably

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[28] Jung, *Archetypes* 7.
[29] Jung, *Archetypes* 174.

more accurate to say that it communicates with us) through archetypes and often the way that we utilize or interact with those archetypes is through play.

Jung divides the unconscious into two distinct entities: the personal unconscious which is built upon our experiences, and the collective unconscious, which is the repository of the accumulated psychic knowledge of humanity: "Man's unconscious likewise contains all the patterns of life and behaviour inherited from his ancestors, so that every human child, prior to consciousness, is possessed of a potential system of adapted psychic functioning."[30] Jung posits that the human unconscious, just as the human body, is a construct of time and evolution, and that traces of primitive humanity can be found in our psyches just as they can in our bodies.[31]The collective unconscious contains a vast store of learned knowledge and the cost of separating from it is neurosis.[32]

The False Distinction between "Modern" and "Primitive" Cultures and the Roles of Fate and Chance

As individuals living in the twenty-first century, we take a certain amount of pride in how far we have come as a species: how modern we are and how different (not to mention superior) we feel to our primitive past. We ascribe to the primitive mind a childish reliance on superstition and a predisposition towards violence. Scientific rationality rules the day and the surviving structures of spiritual life—namely religion, but also beliefs in astrology, ghosts, and the paranormal in general—are often presented at odds with (and, depending on your point of view, inferior to) rationality and empiricism. Jung views this move with no small amount of trepidation, writing: "I

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[30] Jung, *Modern Man* 185.
[31] Jung, *Modern Man* 126.
[32] Jung, *Archetypes* 157.

am convinced that the growing impoverishment of symbols has a meaning."[33] Psychic processes

have been a part of the human condition since the very beginning, ands much as we like to

separate ourselves from what we perceive to be our primitive past and thought processes, the fact

remains that "primitive man is no more logical or illogical than we are."[34] Even this dialectic

created between "primitive" and "modern" is specious and based on Western, European

ideations that are steeped in racism and imperialism. This prejudice leads literates to view people

from oral cultures as unintelligent and childlike, unable to even understand causal relationships.

This is, of course, not true. The presuppositions may be different, as are the modes of relating

information, but primitive, oral cultures are no less logical (or more logical for that matter) than

literate, supposedly civilized ones.

The truth of the matter is that our thought-processes are basically the same and the

insistence on labeling some humans as primitive and others as modern supposes a trajectory of

human development that ends in a very Western, white view of the world. Even anthropologists

that like to make this distinction between modern and primitive, end up admitting this: "We

share with primitive men, he [Levi-Strauss] holds, the same mental habits of thinking in terms of

binary discriminations or oppositions."[35] These binary oppositions create the rule sets that

govern a particular culture, and the difference between cultures labeled as modern or primitive

lies in their respective presuppositions. One of the most distinctive assumptions that these writers

make between modern and primitive cultures is the perception of outright denial of supernatural

forces in modern societies. As Jung writes: "It is a rational presupposition of ours that everything

has a natural and perceptible cause. We are convinced of this. Causality, so understood, is one of

our most sacred dogmas. There is no legitimate place in our world for invisible, arbitrary and so-

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[33] Jung, *Archetypes* 14.
[34] Jung, *Modern Man* 127.
[35] Turner , *Dramas, Fields* 241.

called supernatural forces."[36] We abhor chance occurrences because they contradict an orderly,

Newtonian notion of the universe. And yet, once the sun sets and we enter into the night world,

we often return to an earlier, fantastic mindset, or "collective representation," as Jung calls it.[37]

Chance, fate, divine will—they all may mean the same thing. Play is often tied to chance.

In many ways luck is the great leveler, introducing an element of uncertainty even in contests

where the players are unevenly matched. A superior wrestler may step on uneven or slippery

ground during a bout, giving the inferior wrestler the advantage of better footing, balance, or grip

necessary to complete a takedown. Whether this is blind luck or divine will depends on your

outlook, but, as Huizinga illustrates, the modern distinction between chance and fate is illusory:

> Luck may have a sacred significance; the fall of the dice may signify and
>
> determine the divine workings; by it we may move the gods as efficiently as by
>
> any other form of contest. Indeed, we may go one further and say that for the
>
> human mind the ideas of happiness, luck and fate seem to lie very close to the
>
> realm of the sacred.[38]

Not surprisingly, dice-playing is a ritual practice for many peoples and the word—even the

concept—of dice has many fascinating etymological meanings in different cultures. For

example, the Sanskrit word *dyūtam* signifies both fighting and dicing, and in the *Mahābhārata*

"the world itself is conceived as a game of dice which Siva plays with his queen."[39] In funeral

rites, the Canelos Indians cast dice over the corpse. The spirit of the dead man determines the

outcome of the throws and the winner is awarded one of the dead man's domestic animals which

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[36] Jung, *Modern Man* 130.
[37] Jung, *Modern Man* 137.
[38] Huizinga 56.
[39] Huizinga 57.

is then promptly slaughtered, cooked, and fed to the assembled mourners.[40] Artifacts that were

once sacred ritual items are used today in games of chance; however, some retain their sacred

importance in select cultures. The Chinese still use the *I Ching* to foretell the future, and the

Yoruba employ a similar system, except that the diviner casts palm nuts instead of using yarrow

sticks or coins.[41] In both systems, the outcome of the casting leads the diviner to a particular

passage in a holy text for the *I Ching* or a memorized story in the case of the Yoruba. The story

the casting leads to will be interpreted by the diviner and used to tell the future of the

questioner.[42] Western culture possesses a similar practice with the *sortes Vergilii* and *sortes*

biblicae, where Vergil's *Æneid* or the Bible, respectively, is opened to a random passage to

determine a given course of action.

The Importance of the Contest

Dicing, casting bones or yarrow sticks, or even flipping coins were once means by which

humans communicated with the gods and moved them to perform favorable acts, but there was

another way that people accomplished this: the contest. Huizinga examines in depth Greek and

Chinese rites and uses them as examples of how agonistic and antithetical forces play out in the

form of ritual contests that both divide and unite. The social life of is situated within a dynamic

dualism that structures its mental world: "The tribe is divided into two opposing halves, called

'phratriai' by the anthropologist, which are separated by the strictest exogamy."[43] The phratries

are distinguished by their mutual totems that not only define an individual's social status but also

set up a "whole system of obligations, taboos, customs, objects of veneration" particular to the

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[40] Girard 328-329.
[41] Hyde 110.
[42] Hyde 114.
[43] Huizinga 53.

animal the totem represents.[44] While the tribal halves exist within a mutual relationship of

contest and rivalry, they nevertheless offer friendly service and reciprocal help:

> Together they enact, as it were, the public life of the tribe in a never-ending series
>
> of ceremonies precisely formulated and punctiliously performed. The dualism that
>
> sunders the two halves extends over their whole conceptual and imaginative
>
> world. Every creature, every thing has its place on one side or the other, so that
>
> the entire cosmos is framed in this classification.[45]

The give and take of contest and aid structures the everyday life of the community as well as

providing a mirror on the universe. Because the contestants are avatars of that arbitrary power,

the contests prove which totem is superior, and because the community is a microcosmic

reflection of the macrocosm, these contests ensure the smooth running of the universe: ritual

actions present how we desire the cosmos to be—it is an example that the rest of the universe

follows.[46]

While Huizinga does provide the foundation of the anthropological study of play, *Homo*

Ludens is not without its faults. Perhaps the best revision and expansion of his work was done by

Roger Caillois in his work *Man, Play, and Games*, which the next section will address.

Caillois's Developmental Theory

So far I have focused exclusively on Huizinga when it comes to mapping out play in relation to

culture. I have used the works of Jung, Turner, Girard, and others to illustrate how play

permeates many vital aspects of humanity, in particular psychologically and sociologically.

Huizinga's work is the jumping-off point for any study of play because he was the first to outline

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[44] Huizinga 53.
[45] Huizinga 53.
[46] Huizinga 56.

a solidly anthropological theory of play. That said, it is not without its shortcomings. In his book *Man, Play and Games*, Roger Caillois brilliantly expands, refines, and clarifies what *Homo Ludens* began. Even though Caillois says, "most of [*Homo Ludens'*] premises are debatable," it "is nonetheless capable of opening extremely fruitful avenues to research and reflection.[47]" Caillois finds "strange gaps"[48] in Huizinga's study, specifically in the omission of any kind of description and classification of games. He also finds fault with Huizinga's definition of play, seeing it as paradoxically being too broad and too narrow. Although Caillois goes on to dissect all aspects of Huizinga's definition, the portion most pertinent to this study concerns games:

> [T]he part of Huizinga's definition which views play as action denuded of all material interest, simply excludes bets and games of chance—for example, gambling houses, casinos, racetracks, and lotteries—which, for better or worse, occupy an important part in the economy and daily life of various cultures.… Such an omission is not without consequence… and not to consider them leads to a definition of play which affirms or implies the absence of economic interest.[49]

The importance of gambling, of gaming for material profit, is echoed in the first line of James McManus' foreword to David G. Schwartz's *Roll the Bones*: "Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of earth's citizens needs to understand gambling."[50] Given how there are entire industries built around games, North American cities devoted to gambling, and state-sponsored lotteries, Caillois and McManus' points are well taken. In fact, the central thesis of *Roll the Bones* is that gambling has been the catalyst for many major historical developments, even the creation of mathematics.

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[47] Caillois, *Man, Play* 3.
[48] Caillois, *Man, Play* 4.
[49] Caillois, *Man, Play* 5.
[50] McManus xi.

Man, Play and Games is important because it refines Huizinga's original definition of games and does what *Homo Ludens* failed to do: define and classify games. First of all, Caillois refines Huizinga's definition of play, describing it as an activity that is essentially 1. Free, 2. Separate, 3. Uncertain, 4. Unproductive, 5. Governed by rules, and 6. Make-believe.[51] Most of these criteria align with Huizinga's, but Caillois does make an important distinction when showing how play is *unproductive*: it creates "neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind; and, *except for the exchange of property among players*, ending in a situation identical to that prevailing at the beginning of the game."[52] This proviso allows for the inclusion of lotteries and gambling into Huizinga's world of play. Caillois also significantly enhances the definition of play by adding two new criteria: *uncertainty* and *make-believe*. Uncertainty means that a game's outcome cannot be predicted, creating a sense of tension among the spectators and the participants and allowing for gambling. Make-believe is the quality of imagination necessary in every play situation: as Caillois describes it, make-believe is a "special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life."[53] One could argue that these qualities were already present in Huizinga, but Caillois's refining helps in that it brings them to the surface, raising their importance in the overall understanding of play and opening up new opportunities for the study of play.

Specifically, Caillois devotes his book to the impact of games on culture and their role in the larger play sphere. He develops four rubrics of games: *agôn*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx*. These rubrics fall under the *paidia-ludus* spectrum previously discussed—basically, the urge towards free, unconstructed play on one end, and the desire to mediate and structure play on the other. *Agôn*, roughly, is the spirit of regulated competition, placing it on the *ludus* end of the spectrum.

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[51] Caillois, *Man, Play* 9-10.
[52] Caillois, *Man, Play* 10; emphasis mine.
[53] Caillois, *Man, Play* 10.

Games that fall under this category create an artificial "equality of chances" where "adversaries should confront each other under ideal conditions."[54] Examples of *agôn*-istic games are not limited to purely agonistic ones, like boxing, but include both physical and mental games. Polo, tennis, golf, chess, checkers, and billiards all fall under this rubric. The point of these games "is for each player to have his superiority in a given area recognized."[55] Game players in this rubric are viewed as highly disciplined and perseverant. After all, athletes train for months, even years, to perfect their physical or mental abilities. Like weight classes in boxing and wrestling and classes and divisions in sports leagues, the play field for *agôn* allows for the pretense of absolute equality (Caillois makes it clear that the state of absolute equality is a fiction), paring away every possible distraction or vagary of chance that might influence the game's outcome. The winner achieves victory on his or her own merit and the true prize of the game is the recognition of that person's superiority.[56]

In *alea,* the outcome resides solely in hands of Lady Luck. Caillois takes the name for this rubric from the Latin word for the game of dice, and it designates "all games that are based on a decision independent of the player, an outcome over which he has no control, and in which winning is the result of fate rather than triumphing over adversity."[57] Some examples of *aleatic* games are (obviously) dice, such as craps; roulette; baccara; and various lotteries. If *agôn* strives to eliminate any instance of chance, *alea* opens the door wide to it. This type of game appeals to people because of its capricious nature.[58] It may seem that *alea* is incompatible with *agôn*, being

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[54] Caillois, *Man, Play* 14.
[55] Caillois, *Man, Play* 15.
[56] Caillois, *Man, Play* 15.
[57] Caillois, *Man, Play* 17.
[58] Caillois, *Man, Play* 17.

as "[i]t seems an insolent and sovereign insult to merit,"[59] but actually the two go together

exceedingly well, as we will go into in just a moment.

Thirdly, *mimicry* involves play-acting, and an aspect of this rubric is present in

practically all play situations:

> All play presupposes the temporary acceptance, if not of an illusion (indeed this
> last word means nothing less than beginning a game: *in-lusio*), then at least of a
> closed conventional, and, in certain respects, imaginary universe. Play can consist
> not only of deploying actions or submitting to one's fate in an imaginary milieu,
> but of becoming an illusory character oneself, and of so behaving.[60]

Just as with animals and insects, humans survive and thrive through imitation. This first begins

as "contagion" which takes place entirely on the physical level with actions such as smiling,

yawning, or even running. This contagion spurs imitation—if someone smiles at us, we tend to

smile back—but these two concepts are not, in and of themselves, simulation. However, they do

"give rise to the idea or the taste for mimicry."[61] In this case, *mimicry* is akin to simulation: a re-

creation of a person, persona, animal, situation, and so on. It appears in both children and adults.

Children often pretend to be adults, which is why they often play with "toy weapons and

miniatures which copy the tools, engines, arms, and machines used by adults."[62] When

mimicking adults, children often do so by adopting roles—hence the popularity of toys that

mimic tools. Oftentimes these roles fall under socially-accepted gender norms; boys pretend to

be soldiers, cowboys, builders, and the like, while girls often pretend to be mothers and cooks[63].

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[59] Caillois, *Man, Play* 17.
[60] Caillois, *Man, Play* 19.
[61] Caillois, *Man, Play* 20.
[62] Caillois, *Man, Play* 21.
[63] Most of these examples come from Caillois and it is very telling of the time he wrote this in that he ascribes these very gender-normative roles to children playing *Mimicry* games. That Caillois does not

Mimicry is not limited to simulating human roles, though, as children also pretend to be animals, aliens, and even mechanical objects like airplanes and cars. The pleasure of *mimicry* lies in "being or passing for another,"[64]but this is not the same as deceiving others: "It is only the spy and the fugitive who disguise themselves to really deceive because they are not playing."[65] The joy comes from being, for a time, someone or something else, while at the same time touching some basic part of one's own personality. As Caillois writes, "the mask disguises the conventional self and liberates the true personality."[66] To borrow a phrase from Richard Schechner, a performer occupies a space where he or she is "not themself…not not themself."[67] According to Caillois, sports events are also occasions for *mimicry*, except the simulation occurs on the part of the spectators, and not the players. This is due to the spectacle aspect of sporting events. At their heart, sporting events are an *agôn*, but outwardly they are viewed as exhibitions: "In a word, these are dramas whose vicissitudes keep the public breathless, and lead to denouements which exalt some and depress others."[68] The spectators identify with the players so much that they lose a bit of their sense of individual self in the moment, and they often unconsciously perform gestures to help influence the outcome of the event, like people in the stands of a football game reaching out to catch the pass. This identification helps explain the sense of competition among fans; it is a "competitive *mimicry*" that "doubles the true *agôn* of the field or track."[69] This is not unlike the totemistic competition between phratries that Huizinga

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question these roles suggests he believes that these are gender-normative. The question of how much we pressure children to mimic certain gender roles in play is fascinating and worth mentioning if only in a footnote, but a full investigation of the topic lies outside the purpose of this dissertation.

[64] Caillois, *Man, Play* 21.

[65] Caillois, *Man, Play* 21.

[66] Caillois, *Man, Play* 21. Whether or not there is a *true* personality is infinitely debatable. Regardless, there is a joy in feeling liberated of the strictures of one's society.

[67] Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* 113.

[68] Caillois, *Man, Play* 22.

[69] Caillois, *Man, Play* 22.

described. The spectacle acts as a sort of spell, drawing everyone in and momentarily causing them to identify themselves as a group and not a collection of individuals, but for the spell to work, everyone must play his or her part appropriately—or by the rules, to harken back to the definition of play—once the spell is broken, once the actor performs against type or script, then the moment becomes a soap bubble: fragile, beautiful, and gone: "*Mimicry* is incessant invention. The rule of the game is unique: it consists in the actor's fascinating the spectator, while avoiding an error that might lead the spectator to break the spell."[70]

Finally, we come to *ilinx*. *Ilinx* is the pursuit of vertigo, of "surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality with sovereign brusqueness."[71] In Greek, the word *ilinx* refers to a whirlpool and is related to the Greek word for "vertigo"—*ilingos*.[72] The simplest example of this type of game is when children spin around until they get dizzy. At heart, *ilinx* falls almost entirely under *paidia*; these games allow for the expression (as in a method of communicating and as in a method of releasing) of typically repressed desires for destruction and disorder. Children play leap frog, hot potato, or simply run around like deranged dervishes, while adults find outlets in certain types of dances, or the rush of skiing down a particularly steep slope, or driving a sports car all the way to the red line. An *ilinx* game needs a certain sense of intensity and brutality in order to be effective, and as we grow older, the more we become inured to those feelings. Adults need their games to be bigger, badder, faster, and harder to inspire that sense of intoxicating vertigo, and we often turn to machines to accomplish this, which is why Caillois writes that vertigo might not properly be considered a game until after the Industrial Revolution.[73] Amusement parks are shrines to *ilinx*: the rollercoasters and Tilt-A-Whirls are

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[70] Caillois, *Man, Play* 23.
[71] Caillois, *Man, Play* 23.
[72] Caillois, *Man, Play* 23.
[73] Caillois, *Man, Play* 25.

specifically designed to appeal to the part of us that desires destruction and disorder, and they embody that very well.

However, as already hinted at in discussing them, these four rubrics of games do not stand individually. Caillois outlines six permutations where the four types often overlap: competition – chance (*agôn – alea*); competition – simulation (*agôn – mimicry*); competition – vertigo (*agôn – ilinx*); chance – simulation (*alea – mimicry*); chance – vertigo (*alea – ilinx*); simulation – vertigo (*mimicry – ilinx*).[74] The two fundamental relationships, though, are *agôn – alea* and *mimicry – ilinx*, and these two permutations play an important role in the development of Western civilization. *Agôn* and *alea* require rules to exist, but *mimicry* and *ilinx* do not. These are the two extremes—in the first permutation, players exist in a world of rules and regulations that they must adhere to in order to succeed, but in the second, players live in a world "without rules" where they must constantly improvise, "trusting in a guiding fantasy or a supreme inspiration, neither of which is subject to regulation."[75] Generally, Caillois finds that the second permutation is the more societally primitive, whereas the first is more typical of more developed societies. Caillois suggests this is also why masks are so often found in primitive rituals. Again, this is a fallacy that characterizes much of anthropology during the time of Huizinga and Caillois, but it is important to note in this instance because it is a conceit that informs one particularly important aspect of Caillois theory: that of the trajectory of movement of society from one ruled by *ilinx* and *mimicry* to one ruled by *agôn* and *alea*, which I will go into more detail about now.

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[74] Caillois, *Man, Play* 71.
[75] Caillois, *Man, Play* 75.

The Roles that Mimicry and Vertigo, and Chance and Competition Play in Societal Structures

Community begins with the mask. As a tool it is powerful and ubiquitous—created in secret, often destroyed after use, the mask transforms the wearer into "gods, spirits, animal ancestors, and all types of terrifying and creative supernatural powers."[76] When used in moments of unfettered discord and excitement, masks, according to Caillois, "reinvigorate, renew, and recharged both nature and society."[77] The danger in using masks lies in the possibility of losing yourself in the moment and actually believing that you are the god, animal, or spirit the mask represents. The masked one loses him or herself in the vertigo of the moment and, in turn, inspires fear in the spectators. Masks must be produced in secret in order to retain this sacred power. In many cultures, women and children are forbidden upon pain of death to take part in or witness the production of masks.[78] The secrecy surrounding the production of ritual artifacts allows for both the profane and sacred members of society to believe that the masqueraders actually serve as vessels for abstract powers. The rest of the group believes this because they never witness the mask's production: its mysterious nature allows for them to project their own thoughts, fears, and desires onto it. And the ones who wear the mask believe in their efficacy because the act of production takes place within a liminal space outside of everyday life where the possibility of the existence of such abstractions becomes far more plausible. The sacred performers also augment the experience with the use of artifices such as "fasting, drugs, hypnosis, monotonous or strident music, clatter, paroxysms of noise and movement, intoxication, shouting, and spasms" all in an attempt to "push their *selves* to the final debacle that permits the

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[76] Caillois, *Man, Play* 87.
[77] Caillois, *Man, Play* 87.
[78] Caillois, *Man, Play* 88.

rare intrusion."[79] It would be cynical to believe that the sacred performers are trying to deceive

the spectators, or that the spectators are allowing themselves to be deceived. These types of ritual

actions are both performed and spectated with the utmost sincerity. Whether or not the

masqueraders become possessed by unconscious powers or are simply expressing individual and

communal psychic forces, this communal experience renews and recharges the community. For

this reason Caillois writes that "[m]asks are the true social bond."[80]

Masks serve two functions: to allow the wearer to become something he or she is not and

to allow the viewer to believe that a real transformation has taken place. The wearing of masks is

a theatrical event where the actor and the audience feed off of one another, forming a closed

circuit of spiritual energy. This seems contradictory to Western modes of thinking, which are

based on the Platonic idea of a hierarchy of reality, where fantasy and real life are sharply

divided, and where what is most true is what lies furthest from our embodied senses.[81] We retain

this division to this day in our own views of acting. Often we hear actors discuss how they try to

find the truth of the role, tacitly insinuating that what they are doing is, in fact, lying. However,

in sacred rituals, the lie and the truth are not so easily separable. As Richard Schechner writes:

"from the perspective of Indian theatrical conventions, acting is both false and true because

acting is playful illusion—as is the world itself. The boys who represent/are the gods in Ramilila

are both 'playing at' and 'being' the gods."[82]

Returning to the idea of liminality, we might say that ritual actors exist in a quasi-realm

between themselves and something else. That something else could be Shiva or Coyote or their

ancestors, and that identity superimposed over their own is just as valid and truthful as the one

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[79] Caillois, *Man, Play* 88.
[80] Caillois, *Man, Play* 89.
[81] Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* 96-97.
[82] Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* 96-97.

with which they entered the moment of sacred play. Schechner describes this liminal state as taking place in the "not me…not not me."[83] His wonderful phrase effectively marks the performer in the Jakobsonian sense so that he or she never fully embodies the abstract force or concept, but still exists as something more than him- or herself. What is interesting in this case is that, staying with Jakobson's idea of communicative markedness, the prime mover in this phrase is the performer. The subject is "me," not "it," making it the primary signified, while at the same time never actually mentioning the abstract concept that the performer performs. This could be viewed as a more contemporary attitude towards masks, and marks one of the main differences between theatre and ritual: "Like initiations, performances 'make' one person into another. Unlike initiations, performances usually see to it that the performer gets his own self back."[84] The change brought about by performance is transitory and the performer returns to whoever he or she was before it started. There is no moment of transfiguration because the actor's individual sense of self takes supremacy as the prime signified, "not me…not not me" as it were.

Ilinx, or vertigo, goes hand in hand with *mimicry*. The performative moment of the ritual depends on a connection between the audience and the performer. For the ritual moment to be effective and affective everyone must be involved in some manner. The shaman weaves the spell, but the tribe must believe that he is doing so, that he truly is harnessing some nonhuman, abstract force, otherwise the ritual fails and no one is transformed and nothing is renewed. This event creates what Victor Turner refers to as *communitas*, a moment where societal bonds are broken down while at the same time refreshed. It stands at the opposite spectrum from rigid social structures as it is fluid, inclusive, and holds the potential for change. Social structures, on the other hand, tend to be exclusionary, "even snobbish, relishing the distinction between

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[83] Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* 113.
[84] Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* 20.

we/they and in-group/out-group, higher/lower, betters/menials."[85] Rituals provide for a brief period of time a sacred space wherein everyone is equal, where social status means nothing. It rejuvenates the society and allows for its successful continuation and it is able to accomplish this by being a nowhere place betwixt and between what is seen and unseen: "where it [liminality]… presents, directly or by implication, a model of human society as a homogenous, unstructured communitas, whose boundaries are ideally coterminous with those of the human species."[86] Liminal space releases people from their statuses and allows them to simply be. It also allows for the donning of other statuses and identities that individuals play with during the short time frame in which the liminal space exists.

Rituals entreat and enact the sacred, creating moments of unbridled ecstasy and terror. It is not enough for the shaman to pretend to become Coyote, nor is it enough for the tribe to believe that he is becoming Coyote; the ritual must transcend thought and reason and become fully embodied, fully of the moment. This is accomplished through chanting, drumming, dancing, and the imbibing of narcotics and hallucinogens, swelling in intensity until all thought is obliterated. This is *ilinx*, the sense of vertigo, of being out of control, of being lost in a brutal, intense whirlwind. *Mimicry* invariably leads to *ilinx* and they form the cornerstone of belief, as Caillois writes, "Beliefs doubtless vary infinitely in detail, being countless and almost inconceivable. However, in varying degree almost all of them exhibit an astonishing combination of simulation and vertigo, one leading to the other. There is doubtless an identical explanation for the diversity of myth and ritual, legend and liturgy. The same relationship is continuously revealed."[87] While the shaman is being possessed by the gods, the audience is also possessed, both shaman and audience share in the intensity of the moment, willfully eradicating their sense

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[85] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 51.
[86] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 47.
[87] Caillois, *Man, Play* 89.

of stability of perception and inflicting a kind of "voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind."[88] When the ritual begins, the mask is just a mask, but by the time *ilinx* takes effect the "spectacle borders on the trance" and the "sorcerer's mask becomes a theatre mask."[89] Which is not to say that the sorcerer is intentionally misleading the tribe or that the audience enters the situation with the expectation that they will remain the same after the show ends; rituals bring about lasting transformations, whereas theatre only temporary.

These play elements create a society where the ones that truly hold power are the ones that create and wear the masks: "Masks, always fabricated secretly and destroyed or hidden after use, transform the officiates into gods, spirits, animal ancestors, and all types of terrifying and creative supernatural powers…. [T]he use of masks is supposed to reinvigorate, renew, and recharge both nature and society."[90] However, masks appear to be too fragile (both literally and figuratively) to maintain this revered place. As the axiom says, the truth will always come out. Eventually some intrepid youth or woman will become curious and pull back the curtain obscuring the preparatory process behind the sacred rituals. Once that happens, the mask loses most of its power, although that might not be such a bad thing according to Caillois:

> Wearing of masks permits Dionysian societies to reincarnate (and feel imbued
> with) powers and spirits, special energies and gods. It covers a primitive type of
> culture founded, as has been shown, on the powerful association of pantomime
> with ecstasy. Spread over the entire surface of the planet, it seems to be a false
> solution, obligatory and fascinating, prior to slow, painful, deliberate, and

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[88] Caillois, *Man, Play* 23.
[89] Caillois, *Man, Play* 78.
[90] Caillois, *Man, Play* 87.

decisive social progress. The birth of civilization means the emergence from this impasse.[91]

Caillois's definition of civilization obviously means *Western* civilization. As he sees it, a society gradually exchanges the influence of *mimicry* and *ilinx* in favor of *agôn* and *alea*. This does not mean that *mimicry* and *ilinx* completely disappear from society, just that they get pushed to the peripheries of games and fiction, where they serve as escapes from the stresses of everyday life.[92] As a culture embraces *agôn* and *alea*, it becomes less (or perhaps differently) socially stratified. An individual's worth is determined by the fortune (or mis-fortune) of heredity and skill. As a culture moves away from *mimicry-ilinx*, contests grow in importance. In fact, Caillois writes that, "'national' games are present in nearly all the great civilizations."[93] These national games, for example the Olympics, are especially important to the development of civilization in that they create and reinforce the ideals of loyalty, generosity, and respect for refereeing.[94] In these situations, victory is not the ultimate goal; instead the true winner is the one that "esteems and assists when in need" and follows the rules.[95] How one wins—and loses—is more important than the winning itself.

Of course, competition by itself is not democratizing. Those that won the games or scored the highest on exams often still belonged to some elite caste. This is where *alea* comes in. In ancient Greece, elitism was countered by the institution of lots. Many magistrates were selected by chance, thus implying that everyone had an equal voice in the governing of society. Essentially, *alea* serves as a counterpoint, a regulating force, to *agôn*: "Recourse to chance helps people tolerate competition that is unfair or too rugged. At the same time, it leaves hope in the

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[91] Caillois, *Man, Play* 99.
[92] Caillois, *Man, Play* 97.
[93] Caillois, *Man, Play* 108.
[94] Caillois, *Man, Play* 108.
[95] Caillois, *Man, Play* 109.

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dispossessed that free competition is still possible in the lowly stations in life, which are necessarily numerous."[96] *Agôn* and *alea* work in tandem to structure the social life of a civilized society. *Agôn* provides means for individuals to display their physical, mental, and ethical skills in a safely regulated manner, while *alea* provides the opportunity for individuals that are unfortunate enough not to be blessed by the social advantages provided by the happenstance of birth, a means by which they can still enter into the competition and display their worth.

Regardless of whether a culture is guided by *mimicry* and *ilinx*—or *agôn* and *alea*—what is important is that the games a society plays defines and regulates it:

> a game that is esteemed by a people may at the same time be utilized to define the society's moral or intellectual character, provide proof of its precise meaning, and contribute to its popular acceptance by accentuating the relevant qualities…. In fact, if games are cultural factors and images, it follows that to a certain degree a civilization and its content may be characterized by its games.[97]

If this is true, then play and games are ideological entities subject to, reinforcing, and creating the moral and ethical beliefs of a culture. In contemporary Western civilization—especially in the United States—we tend to think of these activities as *just* play. Play's perceived status as existing outside of everyday life reduces it in our minds, divesting it of its importance. However, this attitude is belied every time we watch a football, baseball, or basketball game. Even a casual observation of the spectators will often reveal a level of passion and engagement akin to sacred ecstasy. Put simply, play matters, and its deep influence on the realm of literature in the form of the various genres of fantasy fiction has often been neglected.

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[96] Caillois, *Man, Play* 115.
[97] Caillois, *Man, Play* 83.

Recapitulation

Before moving on to connecting play with fantasy, I will briefly recapitulate the theory of play

outlined above. In summary, play is an activity that is essentially 1. Free, 2. Separate, 3.

Uncertain, 4. Unproductive, 5. Governed by rules, and 6. involving some sense of Make-

believe.[98] It is a basic human urge that lies at the heart of meaning-making and community-

building. Play begins with the mis-recognition of internal psychic forces as external, personified

powers, and it plays a significant role in the creation of language through the use of metaphor to

explain this mis-recognition to others. Stories accrue concerning these personified powers,

becoming the myths that not only help human beings attribute some sort of meaning to the

universe, but also create and reinforce social structure. At the same time, humans begin to

engage in a kind of oblique conversation with these abstractions in the form of rituals. Rituals—

often in the form of games or competitions—end up serving two distinct purposes: they provide

a means for humans to *feel like* they exert some sort of control over the impersonal universe, and

they also serve as focal points for group identification. The structure of some societies revolve

around rituals that employ *mimicry* and *ilinx* to connect sacred performers to personified abstract

powers, and thereby to cast a spell of sacred ecstasy around both the performer and the audience.

Social structure in these societies is determined by an individual's attunement with those sacred

powers—often determined by birth into the priestly/sacerdotal class. Authority in these societies

is granted to those born to possess this sacred power and is not based on their fitness for the role.

Other societies tend to structure themselves around *agôn* and *alea*. An individual's physical,

mental, and ethical skills are displayed through highly regulated, "safe" competitions, and much

power and prestige are awarded to the victor. *Alea*, or chance, serves as a means of regulating the

inequity of competition and allows for individuals from lower social strata to prove their worth

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[98] Caillois, *Man, Play* 9-10.

(although it should be said that *alea* often works more as an illusion rather than a real opportunity, because often those in power institute measures to ensure that they and their children remain in power). Because play is an originator of community and of various forms of meaning-making in communities, it also stands as an originator of law and religion.

So how does this theory of the social evolution of play relate to the fantasy genre? First, Caillois makes it clear that *mimicry* and *ilinx* do not disappear as a culture changes; they may be pushed to the periphery in the form of fiction and games, but they still retain a significant measure of influence:

> As careful as one may be in discrediting their power, discouraging their use, and
> controlling or neutralizing their effects, mask [or *mimicry*] and possession [or
> *ilinx*] still remain quite menacing. It may therefore be necessary to concede them
> some outlet, no doubt limited and harmless but noisy and at least bordering upon
> their vaguely mysterious and thrilling pleasures, upon panic, stupor, and frenzy.[99]

Fiction is one such outlet, and it does fit Caillois's criteria for play. Reading for pleasure is an entirely free, unproductive act centered on a story with an uncertain ending;[100] it is governed by rules of syntax, grammar, and genre; and is an imaginative act in the sense that any work of fiction is a work of imagination on the part of the writer, a work that also engages the imagination of the reader. These criteria can obviously be applied to both realistic fiction and fantasy, but I would assert that fantasy literature is closer to the original spirit of play than so-

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[99] Caillois, *Man, Play* 129.

[100] One could argue that there is no sense of uncertainty in formula fiction; however, I would argue that there is, at least, the illusion of uncertainty. A lack of uncertainty equates to a lack in tension, and because formula fiction is almost entirely plot-driven, there has to be at least the appearance of uncertainty in order for it to be pleasurable. In order for a story to be engaging, protagonists must face challenges impeding the attainment of their overall goal. Part of the joy of reading formula fiction derives from witnessing the inventive means that protagonists use to overcome obstacles. Heroes invariably triumph at the climax, but how they succeed, the prices they pay to win, and the consequences of attaining their goal are uncertain and highly entertaining.

called realistic works, if only because there is a far greater amount of make-believe involved in fantasy stories. There is a greater sense of play in fantasy texts—a sense that is often subdued in realistic fiction, and this sense of play and this divide between fantasy and realism denotes a larger attitude in Western cultures regarding play, which will be examined in the next section.

Play and Fantasy and Liminoid Space

When the leading British literary critic F. R. Leavis stated that "moralistic realism was the only serious form of fiction,"[101] he vocalized a critical divide that was opening and widening both between fiction and everyday life, and also between "serious" and supposedly "non-serious" literature. As I have already pointed out, all fiction is play, and play is clearly demarcated from everyday life. This demarcation, according to Turner, began with the Industrial Revolution and the clear divisions that society made between work and leisure.[102] In pre-industrial societies, the sacred and the profane were intertwined, but once they were separated, work by itself became sacred—the sphere where "one's salvation may be objectively demonstrated."[103] Leisure, on the other hand, is seen as frivolous, even sinful. It is also in modern industrialized society one of the last refuges of liminality. Turner writes: "Leisure can be conceived of as a betwixt-and-between, a neither-this-nor-that domain between two spells of work or between occupational and familial and civic activity."[104]

Modern leisure may also force us to reconceptualize the nature of liminality. That is, to label the outlets of leisure as liminal may actually be a misnomer: entertainment is more properly termed "liminoid" rather than "liminal." Liminal rituals require participation. Everyone in the community must take part in initiation rites and other ceremonies. Liminoid activities, by

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[101] Qtd. in Moorcock 16.
[102] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 29.
[103] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 38.
[104] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 40.

contrast, are completely voluntary and originate in the desire for entertainment; even modern religious services may be liminoid in this sense. One reads a book for pleasure because one wants to; when a person is required to read, reading becomes a job. We see liminoid activities in the movie theater, the play house, the sports arena, on the television set and the printed page, and we engage in them because of some profound restlessness that lies at the heart of the human condition.[105] Human beings desire entertainment because we tend to get bored, and while the staving off of boredom is a respectable pursuit, it is not that interesting from an academic point of view. What is interesting is the scorn heaped on the pursuit of entertainment. To enjoy fantasy is to escape from the real world, and because the real world (read: the world of labor and business) is now the realm of the sacred, thanks to the Industrial Revolution, escapism is tantamount to disavowing God, work, and salvation. Realistic fiction typically dodges this censure because of its supposed one-to-one relationship with the real world and its educational properties—the old dogma that reading great literature "improves" people. Realism is mimetic, whereas fantasy is metaphoric or metonymic—it is distanced from the real world, standing overtly at a remove position from the world of work.

Like play, fantasy requires a space separate from the everyday world. What we have here is a liminoid object (e.g., a book or a movie) that needs to describe a liminal space in order to operate. Lucie Armitt describes this dimension of fantasy as a "vertical" trajectory, in opposition to realism's flat, "horizontal outlook," and lists the concept of the "horizon" as a key feature of all fantasy.[106] Similarly, Rosemary Jackson uses the optical term "paraxis," which "signifies par-axis, that which lies on either side of the principle axis, that which lies alongside the main

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[105] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 105.
[106] Armitt 1.

body."[107] In physics, the paraxial region is a point where light rays appear to converge at a point after refraction. It is a space where "object and image seem to collide, but in fact neither object nor reconstituted image genuinely reside there: nothing does."[108] The horizon, the sky, and the paraxial region all describe liminal space—an in-between threshold that blurs the line between what is seen and what is unseen. Even etymologically speaking, the word "fantasy" relates to sight. As Jackson notes, the term "fantastic" derives from the Latin *phantasticus*, which, in turn, is derived from the Greek *phantao*, meaning to "make visible" or "make manifest."[109] Typically what becomes manifest in fantasy is something we believe cannot exist in reality, and that is why liminal space is so important to the fantasy genre: it is the only space where dragons, gods, demons, ghosts, monsters, and wizards can exist. Once upon a time, this space existed in the church or the ritual circle (and it may still, for some), but now the fantastical *limen* exists almost solely in the liminoid products of leisure.

According to Le Guin, Moorcock, Armitt, and Jackson, an avowed preoccupation with space (both literally and figuratively, in the case of science fiction) allows fantasy to do something that realistic fiction cannot: allow us to get in touch with ourselves and our desires. Jackson writes that fantasy expresses desire in both senses of the word—it makes it manifest (going back to the etymological root of the word) and it expels.[110] James Twitchell echoes this belief when he writes that one of the Freudian attractions of horror is the "return of the oppressed," meaning the "compulsive projection of objects of sublimated desire."[111] Le Guin and Moorcock, on the other hand, tend to take a more Jungian approach. Le Guin extensively references Jung in her collection of essays about writing *The Language of the Night* and writes

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[107] R. Jackson 19.
[108] R. Jackson 19.
[109] R. Jackson 13.
[110] R. Jackson 3-4.
[111] Le Guin, *Language* 65.

that "[t]he great fantasies, myths and tales are indeed like dreams: they speak from the unconscious to the unconscious, in the language of the unconscious—symbol and archetype."[112] Likewise, Moorcock says that an integral part of epic fantasy (such as Robert E. Howard's Hyborian Age, Fritz Leiber's Newhon, or Tolkien's Middle Earth) is the exotic landscape, and it is this landscape that offers

> a world of metaphor in which to explore the rich, hidden territories deep within us. And this, of course, is why epic romances, romantic poetry, grotesques, fascinated painters and illustrators for centuries, just as fabulous and mythological subjects have always inspired them, as representations of this inner world.[113]

Regardless of whether they follow a Freudian or Jungian approach, these authors all agree that fantasy provides a way for people to communicate with their unconscious. In the past, religion provided the means for this communication through signs and rituals, but with modernity came secularization, effectively cutting off those old avenues for many individuals. This is what Jung speaks of when he frets over the impoverishment of symbols. Without symbols and the actions we perform to interact and activate them, we have no means to access this rich inner life that influences our conscious world. We cannot simply turn back to religion because "theology demands faith, and faith cannot be made."[114] A life bereft of symbols is one of supreme nihilism—a life ultimately unfulfilling and empty.

We fight against this emptiness through the creation of new symbols, except now we create them in liminoid spaces instead of liminal ones. This is an important point because liminoidity is different from liminality. As already mentioned, a liminoid artifact or action implies a free activity (much like play itself) and it functions differently within a culture. The

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[112] Le Guin, *Language* 57.

[113] Moorcock 20.

[114] Jung, *Modern Man* 122.

liminal phase of tribal society inverts the status quo, but it never subverts; liminoid genres of

industrial societies, however, "are often *subversive*, satirizing, lampooning, burlesquing, or

subtly putting down the central values of the basic, work-sphere society, or at least of selected

sectors of that society."[115] The taproots of fantasy—myths, legends, fairy tales, and the like—

were often conservative; they taught and reinforced taboos and mores of a given culture. Hans

Christian Anderson's fairy tales, for example, propagate a highly conservative viewpoint where

the true path to happiness comes when you accept your place in society.[116] However, the fantasy

genre is often highly subversive. Rosemary Jackson writes that fantasy overturns dominant

cultural assumptions, and that this overturning "threatens to subvert (overturn, upset, undermine)

rules and conventions taken to be normative."[117] However, Jackson immediately steps away

from these implications: she adds the caveat that the overturning "is not in itself a socially

subversive activity; it would be naïve to equate fantasy with either anarchic or revolutionary

politics. It does, however, disturb 'rules' of artistic representation and literature's reproduction of

the 'real.'"[118] Here I would respectfully disagree with Jackson. A writer may not intend for his or

her work to be revolutionary, but it certainly can be read that way. Sometimes the mere act of

questioning can be seen as heretical, and the dreams of what can be, as outlined in fantasy

stories, have often inspired people to make those dreams a reality.

And here, then, is the other major way in which fantasy is play: it spurs people to action.

Men and women become scientists and astronauts because they were inspired by *Star Trek* or the

works of Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov. James Herbert inspired a generation of ecologists

with his *Dune* series, and where would the "free love" movement in the sixties have been

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[115] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 41.
[116] Mendlesohn and James 12.
[117] R. Jackson 14.
[118] R. Jackson 14.

without Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*? Some fantasy writers even set out to advocate a particular political agenda. The hero of Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* novels, Ged, has red-brown skin, a choice Le Guin made because she "didn't see why everybody in science fiction had to be a honky named Bob or Joe or Bill."[119] Le Guin makes a practice of writing non-white characters from every race, and that is a political stance. And she is not alone. As we will see in chapter four, science fiction focuses more than the other fantasy subgenres on issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation. Octavia E. Butler, Samuel R. Delany, and Harlan Ellison—just to mention a few—have written poignant, haunting tales about discrimination and bigotry with the express purpose of making their readers aware of social injustices and spurring them to action.

So far, I have focused on the impact fantasy has on its audience. I will go into more detail on this point in chapter five, but the next three chapters will first examine the play elements inside the genre. Play and games abound in the plots of science fiction, fantasy, and horror stories, and what is particularly fascinating is how *agôn*, *alea*, *ilinx*, *mimicry*, *ludus*, and *paidia* play out in specific fantasy texts within these fantasy genres. In many ways, the trajectory of the game rubrics within these fantasy texts matches the trajectory Caillois outlines in his book: stories set in the past or in worlds abundant with the trappings of the past (e.g., "high fantasy" and "swords and sorcery") fall under *ilinx* and *mimicry*, and stories set in the future and referencing "plausible" science fall under *agôn* and *alea*. This is fascinating not only because it mirrors Caillois's thesis but also because it gives us a new rubric for helping us determine into which fantasy genre a given story may fall.

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[119] Le Guin, "A Whitewashed *Earthsea.*"

CHAPTER 2

JEUX DE HAZARD: PLAY IN EPIC FANTASY

If he had to do it all over again, Alexander would have been a farmer.

He only became a Paladin in order to get to know his father. Lucius was the Paladin of Paladins: noble, courageous, pious: perfect in every way save one, fathering a bastard child. Like the great silver dragon his order worshipped, Lucius remained distant, making his presence known through the monthly sacks of gold he sent via courier to Alexander's mother. When he turned sixteen, Alexander left home to join the order, hoping to know his father, to be a part of something greater, to bury the brand of being a bastard under great deeds and heroism.

But he failed. Spectacularly.

Alexander accidentally freed the Dark Lord from his cage of rock, earth, and eons, setting in motion a chain of events that would shake the very pillars of creation. He lost his father to the unnamable evil, and with that whatever faith he had in the goodness of his god.

Now he stood before the void, sword in his hand, thrumming with ancient magicks, his body suffuse with the strength of his God, but more than that his rage: human, childish, and beautiful. If he survived he would throw away the sword and the armor and the holy symbol and take up the plow. The only thing he'd put in the earth would be plants, not bodies.

If he survived.

—Alexander du Lekshire

13th Level Paladin and Duke of Lekshire

The Paladin Character Class in *Dungeons & Dragons* and its Importance to this Chapter

The *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook* describes the Paladin character class as

"a noble and heroic warrior, the symbol of all that is right and true in the world. As such, he has

high ideal that he must maintain at all times."[120] The Paladin is a subsection of the basic

"Fighter" character class and is distinguished by its connection to a deity, the special powers that

connection gives it, and the alignment restrictions that come along with that connection.

Dungeons & Dragons uses an alignment system to help determine and enforce roleplaying.

There are two sets of three "attitudes": the first is law, neutrality, and chaos, and the second is

good, neutrality, and evil. These two sets are combined, so a character can be lawful good—

which means that he or she will follow the law and be empathetic and helpful towards others;

neutral good—which means that the character will break the law, but will not harm others unless

given a good reason, such as defending a weak person against a bully; or chaotic evil—which

means that the character will do whatever he or she pleases with no regard to law, reason, or the

wellbeing of others. There are other combinations as well, but those are the basic three. A

Paladin must be lawful good, as the *Advanced* rule set required that a Paladin serve a lawful and

good deity. My Paladin, Alexander du Lekshire, often chafed under this restriction because the

story put him in a situation where the order to which he belonged—and the society in general—

was corrupt, so the very laws he was duty bound to enforce were being used as tools to keep him

from performing the good acts he needed to in order to save his world.

I modeled Alexander after the character Sparhawk from the David Eddings fantasy series

The Tamuli and *The Elenium*. Sparhawk was a Paladin that firmly believed in the rightness of his

order and his cause. He was strong and brave and just and often referred to people as

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[120] Cook 38.

"neighbor"—an affectation that I used as Alexander when I first began playing him. The irony was that the longer I played Alexander, the more his character changed. He grew more and more unsure of his devotion to his God and to his order and this insecurity expressed itself in violence on the battlefield. Alexander was the first character I played that truly changed as the story progressed and he went from being a one-dimensional shadow of Sparhawk to his own character.

Chapter Overview: Fate and Chance

Sparhawk—and Alexander—belong to the genre of epic fantasy, a subgenre of literary fantasy that will be focus of this chapter. The chapter will begin by first exploring the difficulty in defining the fantasy genre, and then relate it within a theoretical context to its younger but much better-regarded sibling, realistic fiction. From there the chapter will examine texts from two different series as proof-of-concept models. I must stress from the outset that this chapter is not intended to be all-inclusive; such an approach would only serve to scratch the surface of the wider fantasy genre and not allow for the kind of in-depth analysis required to illustrate this dissertation's thesis. In choosing these texts—George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series and Terry Goodkind's *Sword of Truth* series—I hope to connect in a detailed and meaningful way play concepts to the fantasy genre, providing a framework that can be applied to other works of literary fantasy.

The chapter's title, "Jeux de Hazard," is a play on the French term for card games of chance—*jeux de hasard*. *Hasard*, loosely translated, means chance, fate, coincidence, and randomness. Obviously, the English word "hazard" derives from this word, and if we were to trace the etymology further we would find that both are related to the Turkish *zar*, meaning "dice." Chance and fate are intimately intertwined and often stand for the same idea. Games of chance originated as methods for divining the will of the gods; as David Schwartz writes, "[t]he

first ventures into chance were usually more religious than recreational."[121] Engaging in chance puts one in a liminal state between the world of humanity and the world of the gods, and this can be a very dangerous position. Like the Wonderful Wizard of Oz, gods are both "great and terrible." They can provide incredible boons at one moment and horrible deprivations the next, operating as they do under systems of morality and justice totally their own. It is no wonder then that hazard, a word that denotes caution and danger, should come from a word with alternative meanings of chance and fate. *Hasard* has a particular importance in the fantasy genre because fantasy stories almost exclusively deal with fate, chance, the will of the gods, and those chosen to act as their instruments on earth. This is reflected in the importance that *mimicry* and *ilinx* play in the stories, as these categories of play are the means by which holy people communicate with the gods and relay their wishes to the members of the tribe. The worlds presented in fantasy stories are ruled by these two forces, by vertigo and imitation, and with few exceptions a fantasy protagonist can only truly succeed if he or she is somehow chosen by chance or fate. As in history, the cultural edifices built around *mimicry* and *ilinx* (churches, temples, sacred circles) and the positions awarded to those that represent abstract forces (shaman, priest, medicine man) become incredibly powerful and dictate how a society functions: who can do what, when they can do it, who they can do it with, and so on. Similarly, the protagonists in fantasy stories almost always reinforce the social order, even if they are perennial outsiders, such as Robert E. Howard's barbarian, Conan, who begins life as the son of a blacksmith but who ends up being king of Aquilonia despite his (and Howard's) oft-stated hatred for civilization. This is a position that Alexander often found himself in: upolding and representing a system that he did not necessarily believe in anymore, which was heightened by his role as representative of a deity.

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[121] Schwartz 6.

This chapter will examine the threads of *mimicry* and *ilinx* in texts by Martin and Goodkind in order to illustrate how Epic fantasy reflects pre-rational impulses, to help explain Epic fantasy's popularity, and to place Epic fantasy within a narrative of generic progression that will run through the rest of this dissertation. It will also examine the role of *paidia* (the free, often destructive spirit of spontaneous, unstructured play) serves in these texts. However, we must first examine the problems that lie with the critical conception of the genre.

Defining the Fantasy Genre

Fantasy is notoriously difficult to categorize, even in the simplest terms as being the "opposite" of realism. There is no rubric for imagination: no cheat sheet that one can check off to prove that one work is more imaginative than the other. It is ridiculous to try: story A has three hobbits, whereas story B has none; therefore, can't we say that story A is thirty percent more imaginative than B? A realistic novel may contain a demon or a dragon, but typically does so in a way that makes it clear or even guarantees that these fantastic creatures are not real—i.e., they appear within a dream sequence or a hallucination. There is also the problem of magic realist texts, which do not generally fall under the fantasy rubric, largely because they treat the spectacular as a part of the everyday. At times, fans' reaction to fantasy is much the same as the Supreme Court's to pornography: we may not be able to define it, but we know it when we see it. This attitude may work for the casual reader, but for research such as this, we need to lay out something more concrete and objective.

What we face here is not only a problem with classifying fantasy and its subgenres, but a problem with the very nature of "genre," which by itself is a literary concept with a long and contested history. Briefly, according to Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff, there have been five major movements in the study of genre: the Neoclassical; the structuralist; the Romantic and

post-Romantic; the reader response; and cultural studies. The Neoclassical approach employs a "theoretical, transhistorical set of categories (or taxonomies) in order to classify literary texts."[122] These taxonomies are pre-existing macro-categories that theorists utilize to examine literary texts in terms of their internal thematic and formal relations, and are based on the "literary triad of lyric, epic, and dramatic."[123] The main criticism of this approach is that it attempts to "universalize the ideological character of genres rather than seeing genres as emerging from and responding to socio-historically situated exigencies."[124] This deficiency is addressed, though haltingly, by the structuralist approach.

Also called literary-historical, the structuralist approach "understands genres as organizing and, to some extent, shaping literary texts and activities within a literary reality."[125] Structuralist theorists of genre, such as Frederic Jameson, "are more concerned with how socio-historically localized genres shape specific literary actions, identifications, and representations,"[126] or, as Jameson himself puts it, genres are essentially social contracts between writers and their specific public. Genre, in this approach, creates and articulates specific discursive spaces wherein both writers and readers can operate—and this, in turn, structures how (to put it crudely) a writer writes and a reader reads. When a writer composes for a specific situation, say, a mystery novel, there are certain conventions that he or she must follow, conventions that the reader expects to encounter when reading said mystery novel. The problem many see in this structuralist approach is that it is highly descriptive and restrictive. Genre becomes *imposed on* a work of literature, becoming more a cage than a classification.

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[122] Bawarshi and Reiff 15.
[123] Bawarshi and Reiff 15.
[124] Bawarshi and Reiff 16.
[125] Bawarshi and Reiff 17.
[126] Bawarshi and Reiff 18.

In direct opposition to the structuralist approach, the Romantic and post-Romantic views

of genre see a literary work as being successful only when it *exceeds* the taxonomic restrictions

placed on it by genre conventions. In one of the most famous dismissals of the structuralist

approach, namely *Le Livre à venir*, Maurice Blanchot outlines a formulation of literature where it

"becomes a transcendental domain that exists outside of or beyond genre's ability to classify,

clarify, or structure texts."[127] Blanchot's Romantic view of literature is not without its problems,

mainly in that in order for a text to transcend its genre, it must first be associated *with* a genre,

therefore automatically placing some type of limitation upon it. As Jacques Derrida writes in

"The Law of Genre," "a text cannot belong to no genre, it cannot be without or less a genre.

Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text."[128] Participation,

though, does not equal belonging, "[a]nd not because of an abundant overflowing or a free,

anarchic, and unclassifiable productivity, but because of the *trait* of participation itself, because

of the effect of the code and of the generic mark,"[129] Derrida's idea of genre identification views

a text as some kind of literary social butterfly, flitting from one group to the other, engaging in a

conversation but never becoming bound to any one group. This view rides the line between

Blanchot's Romantic idea and the more prescriptive notions of the structuralists. Genre still

imposes on a text, but that imposition may not be as insidious as the Romantics make it out to

be.[130] In essence, a literary text performs one or more genres.

The reader-response approach to genre shifts the focus from the author to the reader. In

this school of thought, genre becomes a performance of a reader, "particularly the literary critic,

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[127] Bawarshi and Reiff 21.
[128] Derrida 65.
[129] Derrida 65.
[130] Bawarshi and Reiff 21.

upon a text."[131] This approach opens up the possibility of psychologizing the reader and creates a greater understanding of the textual experience *en toto,* because "[g]enres thus function as conventionalized predictions or guesses readers make about texts."[132] The weakness of this view is that it overlooks the way genre influences and is influenced by the broader social sphere in both the production and interpretation of texts. This is where the cultural studies approach comes into play. As Bawarshi and Reiff write:

> Cultural Studies genre approaches seek to examine the dynamic relationship between genres, literary texts, and socio-culture—in particular, the way genres organize, generate, normalize, and help reproduce literary as well as non-literary social actions in dynamic, ongoing, culturally defined and defining ways.[133]

According to this viewpoint, genres act as frames for systems of social relations, where texts become "identifiable, meaningful, and useful in relation to one another."[134] The cultural studies approach expands the sphere of genre to include more than just literary texts; here text becomes a much more fluid phenomenon—open to greater avenues of interpretation that may include oral communications, *gestus* actions,[135] or even the layout of a menu at a fast food restaurant: anything that falls within a culture's genre-systems.

One central genre-systems factor that needs to be taken into consideration when examining fantasy and its subgenres is how it was metamorphosized, under the extreme pressures of modern ideologies, out of its many and varied mythic antecedents in earlier culture. Although fantasy, as Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James point out, has been the "normal mode

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[131] Bawarshi and Reiff 22.
[132] Bawarshi and Reiff 23.
[133] Bawarshi and Reiff 23.
[134] Bawarshi and Reiff 27.
[135] See Kruger.

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for much of the history of Western fiction (and art),"[136] fantasy did not emerge as a recognizable genre until the concomitant establishment of realism as a recognizable genre: "only once there is a notion of intentional realism, so the argument goes, can there by a notion of intentional fantasy."[137] The historical basis for the fantasy genre (what John Clute terms "taproots") lies in myths, legends, sagas, and even some ancient novels, such as the *Alexander Romance*,[138] a text that was immensely popular in the Middle Ages and traces its roots back to as early as the third century BC.[139] Tales of wonders and marvels continued on in romances and fairy tales compiled by people like Hans Christian Anderson and the Brothers Grimm. The Icelandic Sagas, the tales of King Arthur, the *Mabinogion*, among others, are some of the most common Western European taproots of the fantasy genre.

But an equally important factor in the formation of the genre-system of fantasy is the modern institution of literary criticism, which brought famous modern works that study myths and legends. Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*; Andrew Lang's eleven-volume collection of folk and fairytales about elves that began with *The Blue Fairy Book* in 1889 and ended with *The Lilac Fairy Book* in 1910; and Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* have all been cited by Mendlesohn and James, Michael Moorcock, John Clute, and others as being highly influential upon the fantasy genre. One of the most famous examples of the influence critics have exerted on creators of fantasy is the role Campbell's work played in the creation of George Lucas' *Star Wars* movies. In an interview republished in J. W. Rinzler's *The Making of Star Wars*, Lucas recalls: "[a]bout the time I was doing the third draft I read *The Hero*

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[136] Mendlesohn and James 7.
[137] Mendlesohn and James 7.
[138] The popular *Alexander Romances* (there are surviving eighty medieval versions in twenty-four languages) tell the adventures of Alexander the Great as he travels the world, encountering talking trees and five-eyed animals and even voyaging to the bottom of the sea in a glass diving bell.
[139] Mendlesohn and James 9.

with a Thousand Faces, and I started to realize I was following those rules unconsciously. So I said, *I'll make it fit more into that classic mold.*"[140] In subsequent drafts, Campbell's influence becomes more and more apparent: for example, Lucas completely discards Luke's brothers and cousins in order to make him more of a loner; he also makes Luke's father a dead Jedi.[141] Briefly, Campbell's thesis is that every culture told mystical stories about heroes, and that these stories share the same basic structural moments, such as the "call to adventure" or "the road of trials," that create a "monomyth." Not surprisingly, Campbell was greatly influenced by Jung's theories of archetypes and the collective unconscious, and his idea of the monomyth appears again and again in fantasy fiction, perhaps most impressively in Michael Moorcock's stories about the Eternal Champion where, to paraphrase Mendlesohn and James, all of his heroes are aspects of the same figure in a "fantastical mythos."[142]

Although most works of fantasy dip into the same mythical well for inspiration, an ancient well that reaches back to the earliest examples of Western literature, the genre as we know it today did not coalesce into a concrete, and above all *marketable* form until the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Mendlesohn and James partially attribute this to the changes brought about earlier by the Enlightenment,[143] while Moorcock sees it as a result of the rise of the character novel, the novel of manners, and F. R. Leavis's famous dictum that "moralistic realism was the only serious form of fiction."[144] Whatever the reason, the nineteenth century is when the genre really first comes into its own. In Great Britain, fantasy had a strong representation in publications like *Blackwood's Magazine* (1817-1980), *Strand Magazine* (1891-1950), *The Idler* (1892-1911), and *The Pall Mall Magazine* (1893-1937)—although the fantasy here appeared

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[140] Rinzler 46-47.
[141] Rinzler 59.
[142] Mendlesohn and James 79.
[143] Mendlesohn and James 14.
[144] Moorcock 16.

solely in the form of ghost stories—and also in the works of writers like T. H. White, M. R. James, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.[145] In the United States, fantasy took off later, with the rise of the pulp magazines. The first nationally-circulated American pulp magazine was *The Argosy*, which was published under various different names from 1892-1988, and it regularly published fantasy tales. The first magazine dedicated to fantasy in the U.S. was *The Thrill Book*, which only lasted for six months in 1919, but the granddaddy of them all was *Weird Tales* (1923-1954).[146] This is the magazine that first published writers like H. P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, Fritz Leiber, Ray Bradbury, Robert Bloch, and so many others, and it inaugurated fantasy as a publishing "brand name."

The importance of publication (or other forms of cultural dissemination) on genres cannot be overstated, but until the cultural studies approach to genre, none of the critical models addressed it. Regardless of whether the artist or the audience is more a determinant of genre development; or whether a writer seeks to be identified with a genre, or that genre is imposed on his or her work; or whether a genre is fluid and participatory, or rigid and exact; the fact remains that genre is a taxonomic system that the modern publishing industry has utilized extremely well. Chain bookstores divide their space into distinct islands of genre, complete with shelving subsections. The grand division is between fiction and nonfiction, but once you enter either section, you are faced with more divisions. In fiction, you can go to general fiction, classic fiction, mystery, crime, science fiction, fantasy, horror (although, interestingly, this one seems to have been folded into general fiction), and thrillers, and that is only counting some of the basics. You also have Christian fiction, local authors, and graphic novels and manga. Nonfiction also includes many subsections such as self-help, biography, and history.

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[145] Mendlesohn and James 32-33.
[146] Mendlesohn and James 34.

These systematic divisions begin on the level of the publishers and trickle their way down to the stores and the readers. At its basic level, genre systems classification allows for people to make sense of large bodies of information. When faced with even the smallest slice of Western literature,[147] it is nice to have a place to start. However, the taxonomic classification of genres goes beyond simple bookstore navigation. There are implicit and powerful cultural assumptions and identifications that occur within and through systematic genre classification. Leavis's assertion about moralistic, realistic fiction sets the tone for our attitudes towards fiction that remain to this day. To read realistic fiction is laudable, but to read fantasy is, as Gary K. Wolfe puts it in *Evaporating Genres*, "a kind of aberrant indulgence."[148] It is for this reason that Michael Moorcock writes: "I've long held the view that category definitions in the arts are destructive both of the thing they try to describe and of the aspiration of the artist. They produce an unnecessary self-consciousness. They are convenient only to over-formalised stock systems and third rate academic discourse."[149] Here Moorcock falls under the Romantic approach to genre, and I find his concerns over category definitions to be much more relevant and instructive than Blanchot's.

Unfortunately, as Derrida reminds us, we cannot escape the need for some idea of genre, problematic as it may be, so I will approach the concept of genre in two ways. First, in this chapter and the chapters on science fiction and horror to follow, I will employ both a modified structuralist view and a generalized cultural studies view. I take my cue here from John Clute and John Grant who, in their *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, approach the genre as a "fuzzy set." They borrow this term from theorist Brian Attebery, who describes a fuzzy-set genre as one that

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[147] Sadly, American bookstores rarely, if ever, carry translated foreign books, but that is a whole other rant.
[148] Wolfe 8.
[149] Moorcock 141.

"cannot be defined by its boundaries but which *can* be understood through significant examples of what best represents it."[150] Mendlesohn and James take the same approach, although they use the far more poetic metaphor of a braid to express their viewpoint.

Another method for approaching genre will play out in the final chapter, on *Dungeons & Dragons*. Using Bawarshi and Reiff's own model of rhetorical genre studies, I will illustrate how dice and paper role-playing games (or RPGs, which I will call TRPGs, tabletop role-playing games, to distinguish them from their digital counterparts) can be seen as a genre system where multiple participants from different social, political, and economic backgrounds can come together. I will link TRPGs both to game theory and to Victor Turner's conception of *communitas*. By examining that particular game situation through the lens of rhetorical genre studies, my hope is to connect the extra-textual experience to the textual and illustrate how the TRPG is an extension of the reading experience. One of the assumptions of this dissertation is that books still matter. Even though fantasy has come to be more broadly accepted by the mainstream and has dominated the video game industry, there is still something special about the reading experience, about the texts of fantasy themselves, and about the role they play in facilitating identity formation, meaning-making, and community building in individuals.

Addressing the Question "What is Fantasy?" and the Importance of Liminoid Space

For the present, we are left with the same problem we began with at the beginning of this chapter: what is fantasy? Taking a fuzzy-set approach, this chapter will treat fantasy most basically as stories that include magic, gods, and strong mythological and legendary taproots. The two works that will be discussed, *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *The Sword of Truth,* have the added bonus of taking place within a world not our own. They mirror ours in many ways from

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[150] Clute and Grant, "Introduction" viii.

63

the obvious and not-so-obvious taproots that appear in their narratives and in the way that they reflect certain social systems from our past—most pointedly Feudalism—even though they are not this world. Both of these works present a reflection of our own, existing in the par-axial region about which Rosemary Jackson wrote. Partly this is done for purely practical reasons. A fantasy text must have some recognizable elements in order for the reader to understand the story. This is why the citizens of Westeros in Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* speak English (or French, or Italian, or whatever language the book happens to be translated into). Certainly there are imaginary languages, but they function much like spice in a stew: they add flavor but never comprise the bulk of the concoction. It is debatable whether or not a writer could imagine (much less convey) something truly alien. This rooting of the fantastic in the familiar also serves one of fantasy's primary functions: to allow us to communicate with our private and collective unconscious. As Ursula K. Le Guin writes, "[t]he great fantasies, myths and tales are indeed like dreams: they speak *from* the unconscious *to* the unconscious, in the *language* of the unconscious—symbol and archetype."[151] Symbol and archetype is an oblique language at best, requiring a great deal of participation on the part of the reader, and this may partially explain why works of fantasy become so immersive: to get anything out of them, we must invest a great deal of energy and personality. We pour ourselves into the work to create that resonance between the symbols and archetypes the author uses and our own individual and collective archetypal store. On this level, the genre of literary fantasy can be understood as a structuralist exercise.

But there are deeply significant aspects of game and play in literary fantasy, and to this extent I also adhere to the cultural studies approach to this genre. Le Guin also recognizes the various game elements inherent within fantasy:

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[151] Le Guin, *Language* 57.

What is fantasy? On one level, of course, it is a game: a pure pretense with no

ulterior motive whatever…. On another level, it is still a game, but a game played

for very high stakes. Seen thus, as art, not spontaneous play, its affinity is not with

daydream, but with dream. It is a different approach to reality, an alternative

technique for apprehending and coping with existence…. In Freud's terminology,

it employs primary, not secondary process thinking. It employs archetypes, which,

as Jung warned us, are dangerous things. Dragons are more dangerous, and a good

deal commoner, than bears. Fantasy is nearer to poetry, to mysticism, and to

insanity than naturalistic fiction is.[152]

It is not surprising that Le Guin mentions Freud and Jung in this statement as she often refers to

fantasy in psychological terms, but what is truly heartening and important to this dissertation is

that she speaks of fantasy and realism (or naturalistic fiction) in terms of *paidia* and *ludus*

without using those terms. In comparing fantasy to poetry, mysticism, and insanity she places it

firmly in the realm of *paidia*—the urge to free, spontaneous, sometimes dangerous play: creation

in its infant form. There are also shades of *ilinx* and *mimicry* in that she hints at a dangerous, yet

intoxicating, energy inherent in the genre that can transform readers and put them in touch with a

primal part of themselves that we as a species often ignore or project outside of ourselves. This is

the same reaction the medicine man seeks to create within the tribe, and it can be either helpful

or harmful.

We can thus understand the fantasy genre as a vital contemporary precinct of liminality,

or more properly, liminoidity. In contemporary, postindustrial societies, liminality has gotten

pushed to the outskirts of the community, confined to the book, the stage, the carnival, concerts,

and, later, the movie theater. At this point, Victor Turner tells us, liminality becomes liminoid.

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[152] Le Guin, *Language* 79.

For Turner, the distinction between *liminal* and *liminoid* lies in structure. Liminoid products could not exist without the concept of non-sacred work and owe their very existence to the Industrial Revolution. As Turner writes: "In the liminal phases and states of tribal and agrarian cultures—in ritual, myth, and legal processes—work and play are hardly distinguishable in many cases."[153] Liminality lost its role in modern society once work and leisure became separate spheres. Work became sacred and the "*de facto*…arena in which one's salvation might be objectively demonstrated."[154] Using Brian Sutton-Smith's definition of "antistructure," Turner explains that liminoid products inject a sense of flexibility and possibly into our social system because they provide examples of new possibilities, of alternatives to the status quo, of new and innovative forms, becoming, in essence, the bedrock of new culture.[155] Turner also stresses that liminoid products are removed from the "*rite de passage* context" and are individualized. Unlike liminal exercises, which depend upon the entire community, a liminoid product is the work of a single individual and the symbols employed in the work do not become activated, so to speak, until they are experienced by the reader or viewer.[156] In this sense the work becomes the shaman, decreasing the importance of the author.

However, one aspect that liminal and liminoid phenomena do share is that they provide the mechanism for the creation of *communitas*, or the unstructured gathering of people where every individual is counted as an equal.[157] Turner goes on to write that *communitas* is inclusive, whereas traditional social structure tends towards exclusiveness, even outright snobbery. In preindustrial societies, liminal phenomena—particularly in the forms of rituals and feasts— allowed for these moments of *communitas*, but today in postindustrial, post-agrarian societies,

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[153] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 34.
[154] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 38.
[155] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 52.
[156] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 52.
[157] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 51.

where work and the sacred are conflated, where play is downgraded, and where leisure time and individualism have become dominant aspects of life, it is now liminoid phenomenon that create these moments. This is where fantasy comes in (and, by extension, horror and science fiction). Fantasy texts are quintessentially liminoid artifacts. They provide alternative realities to the one in which we exist, and serve as statements about how we live or would like to live our lives, and as models for the different paths we might take. This liminoidity, the space to play, is what attracts fans to the fantasy genre

I will now turn to two contemporary fantasy classics, George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* and Terry Goodkind's *Sword of Truth,* as a basis for exploring the importance of play and games to epic fantasy. Because the plots and casts of characters of these texts are unusually complicated, even for the fantasy genre, my discussion of the theoretical dimensions of fantasy as game will resume following brief summaries of each series.

A Game of Thrones

Cersei Lannister, the wife of king Robert Baratheon, mother of prince Joffrey Baratheon, once told Ned Stark, "When you play the game of thrones, you win or you die. There is no middle ground."[158]Cersei fancied herself a great player in the game, held back only by her sex and the medieval conventions concerning womanhood that ruled her world. Had she been born a man, she often mused, she would have risen to power in her own right, instead of being married into it in an arrangement made by her father, or using her son as a puppet when he became king. When she told this to Ned Stark, the King's Hand, it looked as if her plans stood on the verge of unraveling. Stark had discovered that Joffrey (indeed, all of her children) were fathered by Cersei's twin brother, Jaimie, not Robert, and therefore had no claim to the throne of Westeros.

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[158] Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 429.

Ned believed his discovery of this deception put him in a position of power, and being generally gentle-hearted and bound by the code of chivalry, he offered Cersei a way out of her predicament. He told her of his findings before he told the king because he hoped that she would take the opportunity to flee. He did not count on Cersei's ambition or the lengths she would go to ensure her and her family's position of power. Cersei orchestrates Robert's death on a boar hunt and places Ned under arrest, eventually having him beheaded as a traitor.

Ned died because he never truly realized that he was playing Cercei's game. He was a man of honor and duty and rarely—if ever—thought in terms of positioning or advantage or attack unless on the battlefield. It could be argued that if he transferred the same tactical thinking that kept him alive on the battlefield to court life, he would have survived. Unfortunately, the game he played and the rules he operated under—chivalry—were woefully inadequate compared to the protean, quicksilver rules under which Cersei operated. In essence, he and Cercei were playing the same game under two vastly different rules and he lost because his were inadequate for the game into which he found himself thrust. Ned tended to view the world through a rather narrow corridor of honor and duty and unconsciously assumed that most everyone played by the same rules as he. The all-or-nothing thinking Cersei displayed was alien to him, and his striving for the middle ground resulted in his death. This entire exchange highlights the rules under which the two characters "play" but it also may set up a larger rule that operates throughout the entire series: that no character is safe. Martin has become infamous in this series for killing off beloved characters and the fact that he has reached a level of infamy because of this illustrates that he is, in fact, breaking a common unsaid rule of Epic fantasy: the hero never dies a true death. He or she may, like Gandalf or Harry Potter, die momentarily, but return with power or knowledge (what Joseph Campbell calls "the boon"). Ned, however, does die, never to return. Martin plays

68

with the reader's unconscious acceptance of genre rules and in doing so introduces a sense of uncertainty into his world—a sense that is largely absent in Epic fantasy and may account in part for the popularity of this series.

Returning to the garden, the odd thing about Cersei's statement is that she referred not to the present situation but to the moment when the previous king of Westeros, Areys Targaryen, lost his throne. Cersei's brother, Jaimie, killed the king even though he was a member of the king's guard (forever branding him as Oathbreaker), and without thinking, sat on the Iron Throne (a seat made of hundreds of swords), giving him claim to the country. Ned made Jaimie leave the seat in order for his friend Robert to lay claim. It is this moment that Cersei thinks about in the garden when confronted by Ned: "You should have taken the realm for yourself. It was there for the taking. Jaimie told me how you found him on the Iron Throne the day King's Landing fell, and made him yield it up. That was your moment. All you needed to do was climb those steps and sit. Such a sad mistake."[159] The thought never occurred to Ned because of the code of conduct that he held so dearly, and in response he states that of all the mistakes he has made in his life, he does not count that as one. He viewed power as a responsibility, not a goal, as evidenced at the beginning of the book when he took it upon himself to execute a deserter from the Night's Watch, a group of mostly conscripted defenders that stand between the "civilized" country of Westeros and the lawless barbarians that occupy the cold, frozen North. Ned made his youngest son, Bran, witness the execution and afterwards explains why he had to be the one to carry out the sentence:

> The blood of the First Men still flows in the veins of the Starks, and we hold to
> the belief that the man who passes the sentence should swing the sword. If you
> would take a man's life, you owe it to him to look into his eyes and hear his final

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[159] Martin, *Game of Thrones* 429.

words. And if you cannot bear to do that, then perhaps the man does not deserve to die…. A ruler who hides behind paid executioners soon forgets what death is.[160]

The terrible irony is that this knowledge of "what death is" probably led him to warn Cersei before he told the king of his discovery, and this act of compassion even ended with his own death at the hands of a paid executioner.

This is but one small skirmish in a larger game—the aforementioned "Game of Thrones." This game takes place in the fantasy world, primarily on the continent, Westeros. For reasons as-yet unrevealed in the series, the seasons of this world operate on a larger time scale where summer and winter last many years. The story begins when Robert Baratheon, the current king of the seven kingdoms of Westeros, visits his old friend, Lord Eddard (Ned) Stark, with the offer of making Ned his new Hand. The position of Hand is quite powerful, second only to the king in influence and prominence. The former Hand, John Arryn, has recently died, and Robert wants someone he can trust in the position. Ned has no desire to take it, but not to accept would be tantamount to treason. During his brief time as Hand, Ned discovers the illegitimacy of the queen's children and even though Robert dies before Ned can tell him, the news gets out, sparking a five-sided war for the Iron Throne. Robert's two brothers, Stannis and Renly, lay claim to the throne (Renly's claim openly flouting convention, given he is the youngest brother and the rule of succession which gives Stannis the true claim); Queen Cersei's oldest child, Joffrey (and by extension the entire House Lannister); Robb Stark, Ned's oldest son who becomes crowned "King of the North"; and Balon Greyjoy, the ruler of the harsh Iron Islands. In addition to those players, Daenerys Targaryen, the daughter of King Aerys Targaryen, the ruler whom Robert deposed, begins her rise to power in the eastern continent Essos.

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[160] Martin, *Game of Thrones* 14.

The conflict for the Iron Throne and Daenerys' adventures in the East comprise the first main conflict of the series. At the same time there grows a largely ignored threat from the northern wastes by beings called The Others—cold, inhuman creatures similar to barrow-wights in Tolkien. At the current point in the series, The Others are largely mysterious. What is known is that they are powerful, impervious to practically all weapons except those made from obsidian, and possess the necromantic power to re-animate the dead. By the third book, *A Storm of Swords*, we learn that The Others may be agents of a malevolent entity, an antichrist-like being who embodies darkness, winter, and death, and who stands opposed to R'hllor, the God of flame, light, and life. Once thought long dead, The Others return, and the only ones to stand in their way so far is the Night Watch, a motley collection of volunteers, criminals, and exiles sworn to guard the Wall, a colossal manmade barrier of ice and stone that stands as the barrier between the frozen, lawless North and the civilized South.

Just where these various storylines will go is still up in the air. At the moment, five books comprise the series: *A Game of Thrones*, *A Clash of Kings*, *A Storm of Swords*, *A Feast for Crows*, and *A Dance with Dragons*. The final two are technically two volumes of the same novel: *A Feast for Crows* focuses on events in Westeros, while *A Dance with Dragons* deals with what happens at the same time in Essos and North beyond the Wall. At this point in the story, many of the earlier contenders for the Iron Throne are dead: Renly, Robb, Balon, and even Joffrey. Joffrey's younger brother, Tommen, now sits on the Throne, but is a ruler in name only, as his mother rules from behind the scenes. Stannis is unable to consolidate his power and has fallen under the influence of Melisandre, a priestess of R'hllor. Balon's children fight over his throne, and Daenerys consolidates her power in the East. The main story appears to be shifting towards the conflict between humanity and The Others, but there are still contenders for the

71

kingdom playing a long form of the Game of Thrones, so how it will all end is still very much for debate.

The Sword of Truth

Like *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Terry Goodkind's *The Sword of Truth* series takes place within a fictional world that shares certain characteristics with cultures and social structures from our past, most notably feudal Europe. Magic exists, as do extra-human entities that are alternately viewed as either gods or guiding spirits, and power and position derive from what social strata one is born into, not by merit. The main character of the series is Richard Rahl: war wizard, ruler of D'hara, and Seeker of Truth. When we first meet him, though, he is simply Richard Cypher—a humble, happy woods guide in the magic-free Westland. A chance encounter with Kahlan Amnell, the Mother Confessor of the Midlands, changes his life forever and makes him a key player in the fate of his world.

Richard's world is divided into two primary sectors, the Old World and the New. The New World, where he lives, is further divided into three areas: D'hara in the east, the Midlands in the middle, and Westland in the west. Westland was created as a sanctuary from magic after a terrible war was fought between the Midlands and D'hara. D'hara's ruler, Panis Rahl, attempted to conquer all of the New World and used wizards and magical artifacts to do so. The Midlands countered with its own wizards and artifacts and while it did win, the horrors of a magic war were too much for many, including First Wizard Zeddicus Zu'l Zorander, and they desired to live in a place with no magic. To ensure their separation from magic, Zed erected a barrier between Westland and the rest of the world out of a rupture between the realm of the living and the realm of the dead. The barrier was intended to be impregnable, but Darken Rahl, the son of Panis, managed to breach it, as was Kahlan. Darken Rahl desired a book of magic that Richard's

father, George, managed to steal from D'hara, and killed him when George refused to give it up. Kahlan travels through the border to find the First Wizard, and that is when she meets Richard.

In the first book the main conflict is between Richard, Zed (who we learn is Richard's maternal grandfather), Kahlan, and Darken Rahl. Rahl employs an incredibly powerful and dangerous artifact called the Boxes of Orden which, if used properly, will grant him complete control over life and death. Kahlan seeks out Zed in order for him to name a Seeker of Truth, a position no one has held in generations. The Seeker is an authority unto himself—a natural quester who identifies problems and actively seeks solutions backed by the power of the Sword of Truth, a magical artifact that feeds off of perception and anger. It can cut through anything, even magic, but only if the Seeker perceives the person or object he is attacking to be dangerous or evil or somehow worthy of destruction. In addition, the sword also amplifies the wielder's strength, speed, and skill. Kahlan hopes that a Seeker will be able to discover a way to stop Rahl's plans, which Richard does, but not before discovering that Rahl is his biological father, that he raped Richard's mother—Zed's daughter—who fled to Westland before Richard was born. The discovery of his parentage leads to Richard becoming the ruler of D'hara (and later, the entire New World) and a War Wizard—a type of wizard long thought to be extinct.

The main source of conflict for the rest of the series, though, comes from The Imperial Order, a theocratic empire that invades from the Old World, intent on destroying magic and free will in the name of a monotheistic belief in a God they simply call the Creator. The leader of the Order, Emperor Jagang, is a Dreamwalker—literally a weapon in human form, able to read and control the minds of others. Like the Sword of Truth and other magic artifacts, Jagang is a revenant from previous magical wars and his very existence exemplifies the inherent hypocrisy that lies at the heart of the Order. It is a society that professes to despise magic, but is ruled by a

73

creature of magic and often employs wizards and other magic practitioners to achieve its goals; its core ideology states that all people are equal, yet is ruled by an emperor that enjoys luxuries and powers unavailable to ninety-nine percent of the population. In a way, The Order is an odd mix of Communism, Fascism, and religious zealotry, and over the course of thirteen novels, Richard thwarts their efforts to conqueror their world.

The play elements are evident in the way that magic and religion permeate this world and its social structures; however, there is also a powerful game component as well, this time literally as opposed to figuratively as in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. A major plot point near the end of Goodkind's series (and especially in the final novel, *Confessor*) involves the game Ja'la dh Jin, the Game of Life. As a plot device, the game functions on many different levels: it serves as a means for illustrating the cruelty and hypocrisy in the Imperial Order and its emperor; it acts as a controlling mechanism within the Order to keep its citizens in line; and it provides a way for Richard to escape capture and execution as some prisoners of war are given the chance to play in exchange for their lives. As will become more evident below, the idea of an all-encompassing game serves as both metaphor and plot device in these stories and helps Goodkind accomplish numerous goals, perhaps most significantly to establish the protagonist's power and position within the narrative. Conflict drives plots, and in fantasy those conflicts are often couched in absolute, binary terms that position characters on one side or the other: good and bad; red and white, chaos and order, and so on. Like the contests between phratries that Huizinga describes, these conflicts serve as both symbolic battles and real battles because the characters fight for more than just their survival, but for their way of life, their beliefs, even the continuation of the human race.

Paidia, *Mimicry*, and *Ilinx* in Epic Fantasy

As discussed in chapter one, Caillois plots the trajectory of history as a movement away from ecstasy and sorcery to one based on chance and merit. It is one that is inherently unfair and at the mercy of the whims of fate. Epic fantasy novels, such as those in the two series described, return us to that moment when simulation and ecstasy ruled every aspect of our lives. It is a return to a time when we as a species projected our abstract concepts onto concrete, external objects and phenomenon. In effect, it is a return to the projected.

That does not mean that these stories take place within primitive tribes—although some may (e.g., Martin's Daenerys sequences which take place among the nomadic Dothraki). More typically, the societies presented in these stories are pseudo-medieval-European, with a feudal social structure where *agôn* and *alea* have begun taking over as the primary game modes of society. *Agôn* and *alea*, to briefly recap, are competition and chance. In societies ruled by these rubrics, a person's worth is determined by his or her deeds and abilities, which can be influenced by the chance occurrence of birth, since some people are born into certain socio-economic and ethnic groups that may open more opportunities for them within their society. However, shades of simulation (*mimicry*) and ecstasy (*ilinx*) remain. Kings and queens rule because they are God's emissaries on Earth. They retain some measure of *mimicry* because of their association with the divine, which is reflected in their formal dress, special accessories (such as crowns and scepters), and formal ceremonies that surround them. All of those elements establish and reinforce their divinity. Chance determines who is born into this position, and merit has practically no bearing on this at all.

Richard's rise to power in *The Sword of Truth* exemplifies this beautifully. He begins the series as a woods guide but quickly becomes the lord of D'hara. Although he manipulates the

former lord, Darken Rahl, into choosing the wrong Box of Orden—and consequently dying—he becomes the new Lord Rahl because Darken is his biological father. In this system, this moment where Richard illustrates his superiority over Rhal—and thus his fitness to rule—does not matter. He gains his position only because of his lineage. Richard'sinherited position elevates him to an almost godlike level which his father previously enjoyed. Before his elevation to ruler of D'hara, when he is taken as a prisoner to the People's Palace, the D'haran seat of power, he is forced to take part in the "morning devotions." In these devotions, everyone in the palace gathers in a square, "open to the sky, with pillars supporting arches on all four sides. The center of the square, under the open sky, was white sand, raked in concentric lines around a dark, pitted rock. On the top of the rock was a bell….On the tie floor among the columns were people on their knees, bent forward, with their foreheads touching the tile."[161] There they chant in unison for two hours: "Master Rahl guide us. Master Rahl teach us. Master Rahl protect us. In your light we thrive. In your mercy we are sheltered. In your wisdom we are humbled. We live only to serve. Our lives are yours."[162] It is unclear just how long Richard was held prisoner in the People's Palace, but it was long enough that the chant began to seep into his unconscious to the point where he woke up speaking the words.

Rituals, like play, require a special area in which to take place. This area is clearly cordoned off from everything else, indicating that it and what occurs within it are not of the everyday. A ritual can only be performed within a liminal area, and the garden in the People's Palace fulfills that role. It is open to the sky, which must make it unique among the rooms within the palace since Goodkind felt the need to mention it. It serves no other function than as a meeting place for the morning devotions, and it serves as a space where everyone comes together

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[161] Goodkind, *Wizard's First Rule* 677.
[162] Goodkind, *Wizards First Rule* 677-8.

to worship no matter what his or her rank may be except, of course, for Darken Rahl, which is fitting because the sorcerer always stands outside of the crowd. There Richard worships alongside his torturer, the Mord-Sith Denna, as well as various palace guards, soldiers, sages, and peasants. The morning devotion is a good example of *communitas* in action. It renews and reaffirms, putting it under the rubric of ideological *communitas*, a form of coming together where groups and individuals try to understand and recreate the feeling of spontaneous *communitas*—a state of supreme embodiment and connection, an "intersubjective illumination" as Victor Turner calls it.[163] With ideological *communitas*, people attempt to "look to language and culture to mediate the former immediacies" of a "flow-break," a term coined by M. Csikszentmihalyi and J. MacAloon. A flow-break is "an interruption of that experience of merging action and awareness (and centering of attention) which characterized the supreme 'pay-off' in ritual, art, sport, games and even gambling."[164] When this occurs what matters most is a sense of "being," of existing within the moment with others. There is no other goal and no action to be taken. Turner stresses that this is being, not doing,[165] and that this model is built upon the backs of other previous models, a layering of rituals and incantations and gestures from other times in an attempt to recreate that singular moment of being. This model can be molded into an "utopian" model of society where "all human activities would be carried out on the level of spontaneous communitas."[166] Various types of *communitas* can be built upon the ideological model—even fascist and highly hierarchical ones—often connected with the notion of salvation,[167] which Darken Rahl uses to his advantage, placing himself as both the guide and the path to that salvation: "Master Rahl guide us. Master Rahl teach us."

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[163] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 48.
[164] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 48.
[165] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 48.
[166] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 48.
[167] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 48-9.

The conventions of the epic fantasy genre, though, allow for this ritual to possess actual magical properties. On a purely physical level, it brings the D'harans together, gives them a sense of national identity, and solidifies Darken Rahl's place as their master. When Richard becomes the Lord Rahl he faces many adversaries, especially Emperor Jagang. As already stated, Jagang is a Dream Walker—a magical weapon made human that can control people's minds. At first this ability makes him virtually unstoppable, but Richard discovers that the practice of morning devotion (and more importantly the feeling of love and fealty behind it) protects a person's mind from a Dream Walker attack. Having faith in Richard, loving him and devoting oneself to his rule, is the only means of defense, making him a literal savior. He becomes The Lord Rahl, a title that can only be transferred to others of his bloodline. This makes him more than just Richard, just as the sorcerer is more than the sorcerer during the ritual.

This expansion of his identity occurs time and again in the series. Richard's first transformation is into the Seeker of Truth. The Seeker is, as Zed describes it,

> [a] person who answers to no one but himself; he is a law unto himself…. A Seeker does exactly as the name implies; he seeks. He seeks the answers to things. Things of his own choosing. If he is the right person, he will seek the answers that will help others, not just himself. The whole purpose of a Seeker is to be free to quest on his own, to go where he wants, ask what he wants, learn what he wants, find answers to what he wants to know, and if need be, do whatever it is the answers demand.[168]

The wizard Zed confers the title and its symbol of power, the Sword of Truth, onto Richard, but he constantly stresses that this is a position based on merit. Zed had stolen the sword when the wizard's council began appointing the title and sword as a favor to those in power who were

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[168] Goodkind, *Wizard's First Rule* 144.

properly obsequious or accommodating, not realizing that "it wasn't the post that brought the power to the person, it was the person that brought the power to the post."[169] Unlike his identities of War Wizard or Lord Rahl, Richard earns the title of Seeker. This is *alea* in that much of the qualities that earn him the title derive from his personality—his inquisitiveness, his sense of fairness, his drive for justice—and one could say that those are simply elements of his personality, perhaps honed by his experiences, but not dependent upon them. However, Richard must display these qualities and prove himself worthy to Zed, making this one of the most *agonistic* parts of the series.

The identities of Seeker, War Wizard, and Lord Rahl all elevate Richard while at the same time reify him. At times he loses himself in these roles. When facing several swordsmen at the same time, Richard draws deeper from the Sword's magic than he ever has before: "Things he didn't even understand, he was doing without thought…. No blade touched him again. He countered every strike as if he had seen it a thousand times before, as if he had always known what to do. Every attack brought a sure and swift death to the attacker…. Bringer of death."[170] Earlier he had been told that he was prophesized as the "Bringer of death," and that title comes back to him time and again during the fight and several times more in the series. It is yet one more role he takes upon himself, but certainly not the last. After he slays the swordsmen, their high priestess names him "*Caharin,*" meaning "the one who dances with the spirits."[171] Richard understands immediately what she means, thinking, "He had danced with the spirits of those who held the sword before him. He had called the dead forth, danced with their spirits."[172] The priestess's naming him Caharin fulfills a prophecy of her people, the Baka Ban Mana, and

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[169] Goodkind, *Wizard's First Rule* 94.
[170] Goodkind, *Stone of Tears* 699-700.
[171] Goodkind, *Stone of Tears* 701.
[172] Goodkind, *Stone of Tears* 701.

Richard becomes their leader. Once again we see *mimicry* and *ilinx*. Richard becomes the Bringer of Death in a highly ritualized moment—in this case, combat. He loses himself in the intensity of the moment, giving in not only to the magic, but to himself and the situation, and the result is his winning the tribes of the Baka Ban Mana.

Active association with abstract powers reifies the one making the association. The ritual action raises the sorcerer above humanity by lessening his or her humanity and individuality. Perhaps this is why shamans and sorcerers are often thought of as werewolves or other types of shapeshifters.[173] We frequently see this kind of ritual and symbolic association in *Song of Ice and Fire*. Each family is heralded and identified by its sigil: for the Lannisters it is a lion; the Starks, a direwolf; the Baratheon's, a stag; and so on. As the war for the Iron Throne rages, the peasants suffer and the countryside is repeatedly ravished. At one point in *A Storm of Swords*, Jaime Lannister, while traveling through the countryside, is greeted by a boy holding a crossbow, asking, "Lion, fish, or wolf?"[174] The phrasing is a kind of shorthand basically asking if he is a Lannister, a Tully, or a Stark. Heraldry is a prototypical reification, and it is hardly surprising that the members of each house actively epitomize the qualities of the animal with which they are associated. Cersei constantly tries to prove herself the lion she believes her father to be, and Robb Stark has wolf-like qualities projected onto him by his retainers once they elect him to be the King of the North. One commoner, lamenting on the state of the North since Ned died and Robb went off to war, says:

> [w]hen there was a Stark in Winterfell, a maiden girl could walk the kingsroad in
> her name-day gown and still go unmolested, and travelers could find fire, bread,
> and salt at many an inn and holdfast. But the nights are colder now, and the doors

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[173] Jung, *Modern Man* 145.
[174] Martin, *A Storm of Swords* 144.

are closed. There's squids [Iron Islanders] in the wolfswood, and flayed men ride the kingsroad asking after strangers…. It was different when there was a Stark in Winterfell. But the old wolf's dead and young one's gone south to play the game of thrones, and all that's left us is the ghosts.[175]

This lupine association is strengthened by the direwolves the Stark children adopt. Robb and his bastard half-brother John Snow are both thought of as wargs, men able to converse with wolves, and are perhaps even part wolf themselves. However, their youngest brother, Bran, actually is a warg and can slip into the mind of his wolf, Summer. Currently in the story, Bran is being led north past the Wall to learn how to control his gift from a person he has only seen in dreams, represented as a three-eyed crow and called simply "Coldhands." One of Bran's companions, Jojen, has a more limited gift of second sight and tries to train the boy, but the process is difficult and dangerous as Bran constantly threatens to lose himself in his wolf: "[Bran] liked Summer's skin better than his own."[176] Bran's ultimate destiny remains to be seen. Martin introduces magic very selectively into his story—"judiciously," as he describes it[177]— increasing it gradually with each novel. Thus across the series, we the readers witness the rebirth of magic in this world, with the rise of Daenarys Targaryen and her brood of dragons (creatures that have not been seen in thousands of years)' Bran's abilities as a warg; the sorcery of the priestess Melisandre performed in the name of her God, the Lord of Light R'hllor; and the necromantic Others that terrorize the lands north beyond the Wall. The resurgence of magic and otherworldly powers also means the resurgence of the priestly classes in Westeros. Melisandre commands immense power as Stannis Baratheon's counselor and priestess, going so far as to make him renounce his previous faith in the Seven:

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[175] Martin, *A Storm of Swords* 276-77.
[176] Martin, *A Storm of Swords* 104.
[177] George R. R. Martin, Interview with Itzkoff, *The New York Times* Arts Beat.

He had gone so far as to put the fiery heart on his banners, the fiery heart of

R'hllor, Lord of Light and God of Flame and Shadow. At Melisandre's urging, he

had dragged the Seven from their sept at Dragonstone and burned them before the

castle gates, and later he had burned the godswood at Storm's End as well, even

the heart tree, a huge white weirwood with a solemn face.[178]

Another major subplot that arises in the next book, *A Feast for Crows*, involves a once-defunct

and essentially neutered class of warrior priests devoted to the Seven, called the Faith Militant.

Cersei Lannister restores power to the Faith Militant to absolve the crown of its rather prodigious

debt. She then tries to use the Faith to imprison Margaery Tyrell, the wife of Cersei's youngest

son, Tommen. Cersei views Margaery as a threat to her power, taking offense to Margaery's

being called "The Young Queen," and puts into play a Machiavellian scheme to make Margaery

break her marriage vows (which would not be out of the question given that Tommen is only

seven), or at least make it look enough like she has, so that Cersei could have her tried and

executed. Unfortunately, the high Septon of the Faith sees through Cersei's scheme and traps her

within the Faith's stronghold, ironically on the same charges of incest and adultery that Cersei

accused Margaery of—charges that also happen to be true.[179] Cersei's restoration of the Faith

Militant certainly puts her in this dangerous position, but the resurgence of faith in the Seven—

brought about in large part by the deprivations of war—also gives it the manpower and will to

act.

There are other characters that have been similarly touched by the gods, such as Beric

Dondarrion, the Lord of Blackhaven. This "Lightning Lord" has been resurrected several times

by Thoros of Myr, a red priest of R'hllor, who has only recently been granted access to divine

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[178] Martin, *A Storm of Swords* 58-9.
[179] Martin, *A Feast for Crows*.

power. What I am calling the return of the projected also returns the societies of these epic fantasy series to a power structure ruled by *mimicry* and *ilinx*. To be fair, the respective worlds of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *The Sword of Truth* were not terribly far from that system, but before the return of the projected they had begun to make the long, awkward step into a culture ruled by *agôn* and *alea*. The strange aspect to this backwards shift is that *mimicry* and *ilinx* are highly fragile mechanisms, fully dependent upon secrecy to maintain the power of the mask.[180] The sorcerer must appear to hold all of the answers, and those answers must appear permanent and inviolable.[181] The sorcerer must constantly be on guard against "fortuitous discovery, indiscreet questions, and sacrilegious hypotheses or explanations."[182] Doubt is the enemy, but sorcery is powerful enough that it persists, and the cracks in it that questions, theories, and discoveries produce take a long time to shatter the foundations of ecstasy and simulation. Returning to this state is a step backwards because societies based around *mimicry* and *ilinx* are highly stratified, and social mobility is nonexistent. This explains who can play the Game of Thrones and who is exempt from playing Ja'la dh Jin. Those who are the most closely associated with abstract powers are the ones who hold all the power in these societies.

The Movement from *Ilinx* and *Mimicry* to *Agôn* and *Alea*

At the end of *The Sword of Truth*, Richard once again finds himself facing the threat of the Boxes of Orden, only this time the one that puts the boxes into play is the Emperor Jagang, through his captive sorceresses. One of the goals of the Empire is to live in a world free of magic, and at the climax of the series, Richard gives them exactly that. By picking the correct box, Richard gains the power of Orden—the power of life itself. He uses this awesome power to

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[180] Caillois, *Man, Play* 106.
[181] Caillois, *Man, Play* 76.
[182] Caillois, *Man, Play* 106.

create a new world free of magic for the members of the Imperial Order. The Order believes that magic represents an unfair advantage that has allowed a select few to rise above the many, and that individual choice was ruinous to the wellbeing of humankind.[183] Richard's victory, in an odd way, is a victory for *agôn* and *alea*, for merit and chance. When explaining what he did, Richard says, "Celebrating faith over reason is merely a way of denying what is, in favor of embracing any whim that strikes your fancy."[184] It seems odd that Richard, a man that represents sorcery and magic and powers above and beyond humankind, would stand for merit and chance, but the system of magic Goodkind created works more along the lines of a science—it is an application of additive and subtractive energies for specific effects. Spells work much the same as formulas and have nothing to do with personification or projection. Richard may pray to the "good spirits" for aid, but his failure or success is entirely his own, and he not only realizes this, he celebrates it. The people of the Order, as he sees it, blame everyone but themselves for the misery of their lives, and when he sends them to that new, magic-free world, it is more of a condemnation than a reward: "You [the people of the Order] now have what you always claimed to want, a world in which your beliefs rule. A world without magic, without free men and free minds. You can believe as you wish, live as you wish….But you will not have us as the excuse for the misery you create for yourselves. You will not have us as an excuse to fuel your hate."[185] Richard's world, on the other hand, will be "a world in which our lives are our own and our achievements are our own, a world in which man can learn, create, accomplish, and keep the products of his mind and labors…..a world in which people have the right to live their life as they wish, to believe as they wish, as long as they follow reasoned laws."[186] The difference between Richard's

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[183] Goodkind, *Confessor* 81.
[184] Goodkind, *Confessor* 727.
[185] Goodkind, *Confessor* 728.
[186] Goodkind, *Confessor* 729.

worldview and that of the Order highlights each system's predilection: the Order's towards *mimicry* and *ilinx*, and his towards *agôn* and *alea*. The Order views life through its narrow, dogmatic faith, whereas Richard sees it as free, open existence where anyone can strive for and achieve greatness.

It is currently unclear what form the world of Westeros will take by the time *A Song of Ice and Fire* ends. At the moment the center of power is shifting towards the sorcerer, but whether this is a harmful or beneficial shift remains to be seen. Magic and gods still exist, for the most part, on the periphery of Martin's fantasy world, more as relics of an older time than living, breathing powers that invest the rituals and structures built around them with energy and significance. What is clear so far, though, is that magic in Westeros much more closely resembles the kind of magic seen in pre-industrial societies, where the power to perform miraculous feats comes from the invocation of abstract, personified powers, and not a manipulation of energies, as in *The Sword of Truth*. The point, however, is academic. Goodkind's series ends with a powerful condemnation of societies based upon *mimicry* and *ilinx*, but Martin may not have such goals. What matters for this dissertation is that they both epic fantasy series clearly display the roles that *mimicry* and *ilinx* play in the forming and maintaining of cultures and how that pairing clashes with *agôn* and *alea*. If Caillois is correct, and sorcery is a powerful, seductive force, then epic fantasy may be a way for contemporary individuals to play with that dangerous but enrapturing kind of game without having to submit to the vast inequalities in social positioning that it seems to engender. The modern postindustrial world is bereft of powerful, institutionalized sources of spirituality. Turner writes that traditional religions "have not adapted well to modernity" and do not provide access to the kinds of spiritual

transformation and regeneration that humans need.[187] He looks at this need in sociological terms, in how rituals create, communicate, and reinforce social codes of conduct and help individuals to continue living in human communities. Jung, on the other hand, views this trend on the individual level, lamenting how the "growing impoverishment of symbols" deprives us of access to certain sections of their unconsciousness.[188] Either way, personal or collective, this speaks to a powerful human need that epic fantasy fulfills at least in some small way.

Of course this is in no way an argument for a return to some type of preindustrial society, any more than the following chapters on horror and science fiction are an argument for the superiority of postindustrial society. The goal here is simply to illustrate the power that these game rubrics have and continue to exercise on our lives and how different aspects of the fantasy genre purposefully or unintentionally represent them. In chapter five, we will examine in more detail how individuals adapt these fantasy worlds into games, but for now we move on to the horror genre: the pivot-point between the future presented in science fiction and the pseudo-history on display in fantasy.

[187] *Ritual to Theatre* 86.
[188] *Archetypes* 14.

CHAPTER 3

ENFERS: PLAY IN HORROR LITERATURE

Just because you were dead didn't mean you still didn't have a job to do. That's what

Patrick learned. And when you were a cop, that job could be downright nasty.

The only thing that kept him tied to this world was his badge. It sat on the mantle, right

under the triangular case holding the folded up flag the Chief of Police had given Jean at

Patrick's funeral. He got the whole twenty-one gun salute. Died in the line of duty, murdered by

the Blue Rose killer. He watched the whole thing, although at the time he hadn't quite figured

out who he was or what was happening. It was like waking up in the middle of the night with

your brain still half asleep, and it took far too long for the rest of him to wake up.

It would be easy for him to beat himself up over not staying with Jean. For not hovering

over her every second. But how was he to know Blue Rose would come after her? He had to

figure out what had happened to him. He had to learn what it meant to be a ghost. What he could

do. What power he had.

Not enough, it turned out. Blue Rose came for Jean, and it was all Patrick's fault. He

thought that if he took down that monster that killed him then maybe he could move on. As

frustrating as it was to be a ghost, there was a certain sense of invincibility, too. He grew

overconfident, and he paid. But it was worse than he imagined, because Blue Rose was a

monster. A goddamn vampire of all things. None of the tricks Patrick learned mattered a damn

against him.

But no problem was insurmountable as long as you kept your head and thought it

through. That's what his mother had taught him, and that's what he still believed. He heard from

the ghost of a priest that there was a way to come back, but it meant making a deal with

87

something powerful, and traveling to places far beyond (and somehow under) this world. He'd

risk it and gladly pay the price. He'd give his soul to save Jean, and if that's what it took then

that was a fair deal.

       Maybe his death would mean something after all.

<div align="right">

—Patrick Howell

2nd Level Wraith

Soon to be 1st Level Risen

</div>

The Game *Wraith* and its Importance to this Chapter

The game *Wraith: The Oblivion* represents a tonal shift from *Dungeons & Dragons*. Where

D&D was set in a quasi-medieval fantasy world and emphasized action of character

development, *Wraith* took place in a contemporary setting and emphasized character

development over action (although there was a place for it). *Wraith* was one of number of games

published by the company White Wolf and stood as part of its *World of Darkness* line. Other

games in this line included *Vampire: The Masquerade*, *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, and *Hunter:

The Reckoning*. White Wolf's line focused more on atmosphere than *D&D*, using Gothic tropes

and the Goth subculture to create the setting for gamers to play monsters (some good and moral,

some ambivalent, and others gleefully villainous). While my group also played *Vampire: The

Masquerade* quite often and dabbled in *Hunter* and *Werewolf*, I chose my *Wraith* character

because he fits the psychological, sociological, and play themes into which this chapter will

delve.

       A Wraith, according to the rulebook, is "a tortured, passionate creature trapped between

death and life."[189] The players create characters that died with regret so powerful that they were

able to transcend death itself. Often these characters died violent deaths, and that sense of

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[189] Rein-Hagen 26.

violence and danger permeate the game. While this would make the game unique enough, one aspect that set this apart from every other roleplaying game I have played is the Shadow. Treating the works of Jung and Freud as a type of salad bar, the game designers behind *Wraith* divide a character into two aspects: the Psyche and the Shadow: "The Psyche represents the force of will and the source of identity….The Psyche trusts, believes, creates, hopes and dreams…. [the Shadow] is the repressed, hidden side of a wraith….it is the negative image of the psyche....[it] feeds doubt, resistance, antipathy and the subconscious."[190] What makes this particularly interesting from the standpoint of game mechanics is that the player does not play the Shadow—that role is given to one of the other members of the gaming group, physicalizing a psychic divide. The Shadow is an active, intelligent force that actively tries to tempt the Psyche into self-destructive acts and at times attempts to sabotage's your plans. In essence, *Wraith* players guide two different characters: the one they created and the shadow of one of their peers.

So what does that have to do with this chapter? For one, out of all the various TRPGs out there, *Wraith* is the one the most potential for psychological complexity. While any game can lend itself to complex, fully-realized characters, *Wraith* stands apart in that this is a necessary component—even moreso than in other White Wolf titles. The themes of passion, regret, and the allure of self-destruction are central to the horror genre, as is the idea that monsters serve as reflections of our worst traits.

It is in the ghost where these themes truly come together. As Stephen King writes: "What is the ghost, after all, that it should frighten us so, but our own face?...We fear the Ghost for much the same reason we fear the Werewolf: it is the deep part of us that need not be bound by piffling Apollonian restrictions. It can walk through walls, disappear, speak in the voices of

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[190] Rein-Hagen, 175.

strangers. It is the Dionysian part of us…but it is still us."[191] The ghost is to us what the Shadow is the Psyche, illustrating that what we should fear more than death is ourselves.

These themes will be explored in greater detail throughout this chapter, but before delving into them, it would be beneficial to provide a roadmap of the structure and topics we will cover.

Chapter Overview: The Face in the Mirror

The following chapter will explore the horror genre. Whereas fantasy and science fiction are rather nebulous terms used to group together disparate texts with vastly differing purposes, themes, and approaches, horror presents a far more unified front. It is the most focused of the fantasy genres discussed in this dissertation, and it uses play elements in a far more direct, purposeful, and uniform manner. However, the texts discussed in this chapter are not intended to be all-encompassing. Instead, they will serve as proof-of-concept models that will illustrate the manner in which play theory can be applied to the genre. The texts examined are *Ghost Story* by Peter Straub and *IT* by Stephen King. I considered many other texts for this chapter, including Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* and Richard Matheson's *Hell House*, as well as many other works by King and Straub. I chose these two because they speak to each other. This chapter will follow the same pattern as chapters two and four. It will begin with an overview of the genre, provide brief summaries of the main texts discussed, and follow with an examination of how certain play elements (in this case *ilinx* and *mimicry*) are at work in these exemplary texts and how they can be used to explain deeper facets of this fantasy subgenre.

The chapter's title, "Enfers," comes from an old French term for a certain type of gambling house. Translated, it means "Hell." It is an appropriate title for this portion of the study

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[191] King, *Danse Macabre* 258.

because Hell and the ideas of suffering, pain, and supernatural adversaries that it connotes arise again and again in the horror genre. It also speaks to the idea that evil resides in a certain space. Hell is a place much like the haunted house or the haunted town. Its borders contain pain and terror, and whoever or whatever rules that particular space—be it the Devil, a ghost, or a horror from beyond our dimension—rules its kingdom with the pretense of absolute authority. The game that is played between this adversary, this *enfant terrible*, and its prey relates directly to the Lacanian view of language and The Real, to Freud's concept of the uncanny, and to Julia Kristeva's addendum to the uncanny, the abject. Simply put, the adversary in horror represents the real: the state of being that is pre-language, pre-sign, and its victims are put at risk not only for their lives, but for their ego. The texts of horror almost uniformly speak about the peril to the protagonists' souls, but in keeping with the psychological focus of this section, I will refer to this as the ego: the sense of self set apart from everything outside one's self. This is also related to the Lacanian conception of the Oedipal triangle, where The Real is represented by the mother, and the father is represented by language. Language separates us from the mother and keeps our ego intact. Without this ability to distance ourselves from the mother, we would be consumed— annihilated not only in body, but in psyche. All of this is also, as I will show, tied to the concepts of *ilinx* and *mimicry*.

However, before we can delve into the texts and the theory, we must first examine the history of horror and show how it relates to and differs from fantasy. Although both horror and fantasy employ similar figures and concepts, horror does so for a very singular purpose, whereas fantasy can encompass many different drives.

The History and Elements of Horror

Horror's history is rather straightforward. Its roots lie in the Gothic fantasy tradition that arose in the late 1700s. Inspired by both the remains of medieval culture and by contemporary Romantic sensibilities, the Gothic movement was a reaction to classicism, to the order and formality that characterized the earlier eighteenth century. Marked by a boldness, sensuality, and mystery, Gothicism was uncouth, brash, and exciting. As Linda Beyer-Berenbaum puts it, "[t]he child of Romanticism, the Gothic movement in literature exaggerated and intensified its parent's nature."[192] The movement's name comes from the Northern tribes that invaded Europe in the fourth through sixth centuries AD, and in turn from an architectural term first coined by Renaissance critics to mean roughly "not classical," i.e., not Greek or Roman. Gothic architecture of the later medieval period was characterized by an ornate style that often employed spirals, steeples, columns, and extravagant ceilings. Critics considered this a crude and base style and believed it originated with the Gothic tribes. This pejorative connotation "suggest[ed] the uncouth, ugly, barbaric, or archaic. It implied the vast and the gloomy, and subsequently denoted anything medieval."[193] Later, the term came to include any historical period before the mid-seventeenth century, eventually coming to mean "anything old-fashioned or out of date."[194] This low critical opinion has also been transferred to the literary Gothic genre, as it has generally been poorly regarded by the academic community and considered far inferior to works of realism.

The first Gothic novel was *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story*, published anonymously in 1764 (later the author was revealed to be Horace Walpole, an infamous dilettante and the son of a great Prime Minister). In the novel, Prince Manfred's son, Conrad, is

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[192] Bayer-Berenbaum 74.
[193] Bayer-Berenbaum 73.
[194] Bayer-Berenbaum 73.

killed in their castle's courtyard by the fall of a giant helmet. As Conrad was Manfred's sole heir, the Prince almost immediately divorces his wife and marries Conrad's fiancée, Isabella. Manfred traps her in the castle of the title and chases her through its winding corridors and damp dungeons, driven by an incestuous lust that is never fulfilled. Over the course of the novel, Manfred's obsession leads to a series of tragedies that end with the revelation that Manfred's claim to the throne is illegitimate. He joins a monastery, while Isabella marries the true Prince and supposedly lives happily ever after.

As Bayer-Berenbaum points out, *The Castle of Otranto* actually does not fit the generic classification of novel. Conceived in the realistic paradigm, a novel is technically a work of prose fiction that accurately mirrors specific societal and historical conditions. *Otranto* is more accurately a "romance," a "lurid" fiction driven by the "wish-fulfillment dreams, or the nightmares, of author and audience."[195] I make mention of this distinction to illustrate once again the longstanding divide between realistic fiction and fantasy. The novel was still a relatively new invention at this point in history, and much of its definition lies in its subject matter. "Romance" carries its own pejorative connotations, and the refusal by some to label *Otranto* as a novel illustrates its low standing in the literary world. To call it a novel would elevate it to a level higher than it deserves, as it were.

Regardless of its classification, Walpole's tale set a standard that all Gothic stories would follow. It was not the best Gothic novel of its time (that distinction would probably go to Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*), nor the most lurid (M.G. Lewis' *The Monk* probably wins here), but *The Castle of Otranto* established many of the classic Gothic elements, such as:

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[195] Bayer-Berenbaum 64.

> The haunted castle… characters who are types of rather than realistic and sharply individualized people; complex plots full of exciting and violent action; situations derived from the conflict between individual desire and social constraints, such as the necessity of marrying "appropriately"; supernatural or seemingly supernatural events; [and] suspense motivated by family secrets, such as inheritance or kinship.[196]

Anne Williams believes that these elements can be perceived as complex cultural metaphors that illuminate certain societal, historical, and psychological truths, giving the Gothic genre a didactic as well as recreational function.[197]

Published in 1794, Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was the most popular Gothic novel of its time, but it arrived towards the end of the genre's initial burst of popularity. The other great early Gothic text, *Frankenstein*, was published in 1819, right at the beginning of the genre's low period. The Gothic genre experienced a significant slump in popularity for approximately seventy years, from 1820 to 1897, when Bram Stoker's *Dracula* was published. While it would be exhausting and distracting to list the other important works in this genre, what is important to know is that the Gothic movement is the foundation of the modern horror genre. Some scholars go so far as to say that the terms Gothic and horror are synonymous.[198] This is debatable, but what is not is the fact that "the first two generations of Gothic novelists provided English literature with a basic blueprint for horror that for over two centuries proved to be enormously influential."[199] Horror may not be the exact same animal as Gothicism, but it carries the genre's major characteristics in its DNA.

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[196] Williams 66.
[197] Williams 64.
[198] Stuprich, "Evolution" 16.
[199] Stuprich, "Evolution" 16.

Horror and Gothic literature share the same emphasis on emotion. As Stuprich points out, "Gothic… can be seen as the first clearly defined literature of feeling, a literature in which the engagement and elevation of the reader's emotions came to be an end in itself."[200] This emphasis on emotion explains how horror differs from the other two genres discussed in this dissertation. Science fiction and fantasy can encompass any number of disparate emotions (and science fiction is often characterized as a cerebral genre devoid of or actively eschewing emotion and sentiment), but horror's goal is to frighten, and as I will show, the method by which the monsters try to frighten their victims follows a distinct pattern that fits into the play rubrics of *ilinx* and *mimicry*.

First, we must discuss the specific emotions that horror attempts to evoke and the methods by which it attempts to evoke them. Horror is not defined by "any particular form or content, but by the emotion it produces."[201] It begins by seeking to shrink the "aesthetic distance" between the reader and the text, in order to strengthen the emotional impact of horrifying situations and events.[202] This is important because the further away the audience is from the action, the more likely it is that the audience sees the logical gaps in the narrative or the inherent silliness of the genre itself. There is a fine line between horror and humor because both genres deal in exaggeration. Humor is often used as a shield against horror—which is perhaps why so many people laugh at horror movies. By closing this aesthetic distance, horror brings the audience so close that it makes it impossible to see the zipper on the monster suit. They are too caught up in the emotion of the moment to apply any kind of analytical thought.

Both the Gothic and horror genres lend themselves especially well to psychoanalytic interpretation, so much so that this chapter will weld certain psychoanalytic concepts to play

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[200] Stuprich, "Evolution" 16.
[201] Stuprich, "The Art of Horror" 11.
[202] Stuprich, "Evolution" 25.

95

theory. In particular, horror speaks to repressed, unconscious desires through the Freudian

techniques of condensation and displacement. Briefly, condensation occurs when several

repressed desires are represented by one particular idea or image, and displacement occurs when

supposedly dissimilar ideas are linked together.[203] Horror speaks to us through symbolism, which

in and of itself is obviously not a concept unique to the genre. What is unique is the purpose this

symbolism serves, namely the expressing of repressed desires.The representation of these

repressed desires, through condensation or displacement, evokes fear in the reader.

 Fear comes in two flavors: horror and terror. According to Anne Williams, the concepts

of horror and terror derive from eighteenth-century aesthetic theory. Horror is "physical

revulsion at some gruesome object," whereas terror "is imaginative, aroused by contemplation of

the dark, the dangerous, the unknown."[204] Horror relates to nature, and terror to the mind.[205] The

possibilities of terror beyond horror are epitomized in Lovecraft's "The Appeal of the

Unknown," when he writes:

> The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a
>
> sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of
>
> breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and
>
> there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming
>
> its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and
>
> particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only
>
> safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space.[206]

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[203] Stuprich, "Evolution"25.
[204] Williams 67.
[205] Williams 69.
[206] H.P. Lovecraft, "The Appeal of the Unknown," qtd. in Stuprich 32-3.

There is often a cerebral quality to horror tales that lends them terror, and the general consensus is that terror is superior to horror. In his exploration of the genre, *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King writes, "terror on top, horror below it, and lowest of all, the gag reflex of revulsion…. I recognize terror as the finest emotion… and so I will try to terrorize the reader. But if I find I cannot terrify him/her, I will try to horrify; and if I find I cannot horrify, I'll go for the gross-out. I'm not proud."[207] King understands that all forms of horror fulfill certain psychological functions. As Walpole understood back in the eighteenth century, horror is a pleasurable and didactic experience. As readers we enjoy the intellectual terror of the unknown (the oldest and strongest kind of fear, according to Lovecraft,)[208] the squirm of repugnance at bodily horror, and the pang of nausea at being "grossed out." The question is not whether we enjoy horror, but why we enjoy it.

This enjoyment of something that should be repulsive is the paradox of horror, as Noël Carroll calls it. It would be easy to write off horror fans as "abnormal" or "perverse," but considering the number of people that enjoy the genre, that is simply implausible.[209] Various critics point to the allegorical nature of the genre and its escapist dimensions. Douglas Winter writes that "horror fiction is a means of escape, sublimating the very real and often overpowering horrors of everyday life in favor of surreal, exotic, and visionary realms."[210] Stephen King believes that the moment of true, sublime horror derives from the moment when the story is able to create a potent idea that unites the conscious and subconscious mind.[211] And Carroll believes that the driving force behind horror, and the pleasure we take from it, is curiosity.[212] As readers,

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[207] King 25.
[208] Lovecraft 29.
[209] Carroll 47.
[210] Winter 171.
[211] King, *Danse* 6.
[212] Carroll 52.

we are engaged in a series of discoveries in horror stories. We learn that things are not what they seem, and that some force, one that either comes from outside nature or is some sort of perversion of nature, is behind this disruption. In this case, the pleasure we feel comes not from disgust, but from the gradual discovery of new bits of information. We are like individuals putting together a jigsaw puzzle, only we are given pieces slowly, almost haphazardly. Disgust then becomes the "price to be paid for the pleasure" of these puzzle pieces.[213] Carroll calls this process "the play of proof."[214]

I agree with Carroll in that curiosity and discovery play a large part in the joy of horror, but I do think that he discards disgust too quickly. As Winter writes, escapism is not always or necessarily rewarding: "horror fiction's focus upon morbidity and mortality suggests a masochistic or exploitative experience, conjuring subjective fantasies in which our worst fears or darkest desires are brought into tangible existence."[215] This conjuring of subjective fantasies serves a cathartic effect. We displace and condense our repressed fears and desires into monstrous forms in order to release them in a safe manner. King says it best when he writes that "we make up horrors to help us cope with the real ones."[216] It also allows us to indulge in deviant behavior by proxy that we could never exercise in life.[217] In his book *Deadly Pleasures*, James Twitchell breaks down the attraction of horror into three parts: "(1) as counterphobia or the satisfaction of overcoming objects of fear; (2) as 'the return of the repressed' or the compulsive projection of objects of sublimated desire; and (3) as part of a more complicated rite of passage from onanism to reproductive sexuality."[218] The *danse macabre*—to borrow King's metaphor—

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[213] Carroll 52.
[214] Carroll 53.
[215] Winter 171.
[216] King, *Danse* 13.
[217] King, *Danse* 31.
[218] Twitchell 65.

is a waltz between attraction and disgust: with the parts of us we would rather pretend do not exist, and the desire to become the monster. Disgusted, we project it away, make it monstrous, unidentifiable so we can join the mob and destroy it, safe in the knowledge that we destroy a hated-yet-desired part of ourselves, at least for the time being.

Horror transgresses, gleefully at times, and almost always violently. The basic horror story begins in the everyday, orderly, "Apollonian" world, as Stephen King likes to refer to it, but it then introduces "forces of discontinuity and disintegration that work to invert the normal."[219] Horror's main goal is to frighten, and it does so by blurring boundaries that define, separate, and protect us psychologically and culturally, boundaries like "the all-important categories of self and other, male and female, human and animal, sanity and madness, the real and the imagined, the living and the dead."[220] James Twitchell writes that "[t]he art of horror is thus the art of generating breakdown, where signifier and signified no longer can be kept separate, where distinctions can no longer be made, where old masks fall and new masks are not yet made."[221] Rather elegantly, Stephen King describes it as the awareness that "things are in the unmaking."[222] This "unmaking" process serves to unnerve us and provide us the genre's visceral thrill, but it also—when done well—adds an intellectual component to the tales. Too often critics dismiss horror as bodily, grotesque, and macabre, but Walpole was correct when he surmised that Gothic (and, therefore, horror) contained a significant didactic function. For all the scares, the ghosts, the goblins, and the ax murderers, tales of terror can nonetheless raise fundamental ontological questions.[223] Twitchell compares the modern monsters (the vampire, the werewolf, the Frankenstein monster) to ancient monsters such as the minotaur and the sphinx and surmises

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[219] Stuprich, "Evolution" 14.
[220] Stuprich, "Evolution" 14.
[221] Twitchell 16.
[222] King, *Danse*, 9.
[223] Stuprich, "Evolution" 14-15.

that each set (ancient and modern) represent "incomplete systems of signs."[224] Their true horror

lies not in their brutal acts, but in their very existence, which defies our ability to categorize and

classify. The monsters of horror become things, such as the creature Pennywise in Stephen

King's *IT*, unable to be defined or located within language except in the vaguest, most nebulous

of terms, and thus become uncontrollable.[225] This transgression of boundaries often begins

subversively but typically ends conservatively. The inversion of perspective, of closely-held

cultural "truths," may allow for a questioning by the reader of what is traditionally considered

sacrosanct, but the denouement often restores the social and moral order that had been

established pre-monstrous incursion.[226] For this reason Stephen King quips that the horror story

appeals to the three-piece-suit-wearing Republican in all of us: "We love and need the concept of

monstrosity because it is a reaffirmation of the order we all crave as human beings… and let me

further suggest that it is not the physical or mental aberration in itself which horrifies us, but

rather the lack of order which these aberrations seem to imply."[227] To use a cliché, horror allows

us to have our cake and eat it too. We can indulge in our antisocial power fantasies (many of

which are sexual in nature) while at the same time join in the *bacchanal* gestalt of mob action,

denouncing the monster whose actions mirror our darkest, most secret desires.

The monster in horror fulfills the role of social scapegoat. The scapegoat's purpose, as

René Girard outlines in *Violence and the Sacred*, is to restore harmony to a community by

protecting "the entire community from *its own* violence."[228] The act of sacrificing the scapegoat

creates a moment of (re)generative violence. The community looks outside of itself to vent its

violent, destructive desires on an outsider, and this outsider is painted as monstrous, as *other*, in

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[224] Twitchell 23-24.
[225] Twitchell 23-24.
[226] Stuprich, "Evolution" 15.
[227] King, *Danse* 39.
[228] Girard 8.

order to make the moment palatable. Stephen King calls this part of the horror tale the moment

of reintegration, and he writes that it is this feeling that makes horror—a field specializing in

death, fear, and monstrosity[229]—a rewarding experience. This also helps explain why horror is

the most participatory of the genres discussed in this study: "Horror art demands audience

participation or, better yet, conspiracy."[230] Horror requires a personal investment on the part of

the reader that fantasy and science fiction do not, because horror (at least when it is good)

requires an act of identification. When we see our own fears manifested, this cuts through our

psychological defenses, creating that juncture where, recalling King, the conscious and

subconscious meet. These two conflicting forces—otherness and identification—work together

in surprising ways in horror. To futher understand horror, though, we need to delve into the

uncanny and the abject.

The Uncanny and the Abject

I have already mentioned the psychological drives of condensation and displacement that lie

behind horror, but there are two other particular psychoanalytic forces that need to be explained

in order to understand how horror manages to get under our skin: Sigmund Freud's theory of the

uncanny, and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. Freud's theory of the uncanny can be tied to

the idea of terror. His study begins with an etymological study of the German word for uncanny,

unheimlich. This roughly translates to "unhomely," a doubly marked word, in the semiological

sense, that carries both the meaning of home and the meaning of not home. It describes a quasi-

state of familiarity and unfamiliarity that can profoundly disturb its perceiver. Underlying the

unheimlich is an animistic worldview—the idea that the universe is populated by powerful

spiritual beings, that alien beings and objects possess power, and that our own thoughts possess

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[229] King, *Danse* 14.
[230] Twitchell 8.

the power to fundamentally change the physical universe. Freud ties animistic thinking to narcissism and primitive thought-processes, arguing that we pass through an animistic phase during our early development (presumably the narcissistic period of childhood), and that this phase leaves behind certain assumptions and thought processes that can reoccur even in adulthood.[231] Freud adds to animism the ideas of sorcery and magic, unintended repetition, the idea of the omnipotence of thoughts, and the castration complex as factors that "turn the frightening into the uncanny."[232] Briefly, "an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes."[233] This occurs when "repressed childhood complexes are revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs that have been *surmounted* appear to be once again in control."[234] Simply put, the uncanny is a repressed symbol wearing the shape of something familiar, like a monster wearing a mask. The incongruity of the façade and our knowledge of what lies beneath it creates a particular type of fear that threatens our sense of ego identity. It is the disquieting familiar.[235]

Freud's uncanny, like terror, resides in the mind; Kristeva's abject, like horror, resides in the body. In terms of psychosexual stages of development, abjection is "a precondition of narcissism."[236] In Lacanian thought, abjection corresponds to the developmental stage called the

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[231] Freud 147.
[232] Freud 149.
[233] Freud 150.
[234] Freud 155.
[235] It may be rightly brought up at this point why fantasy does not fulfill the criteria for the uncanny. After all, fantasy is rife with animism, magic, sorcery, and fantastical creatures and spirits that do not belong in modern cosmology. Freud does address this, saying that it depends on the effect the writer is trying to produce. A spirit does not have to be regarded as uncanny unless the author treats it as such. This goes back to the driving force behind every horror story: the desire to elicit fear within the reader.
[236] Kristeva 13.

prelingual (4-8 months of age) that straddles the chora stage (0-6 months of age) and the mirror

stage (6-18 months). In the prelingual stage, the infant cannot distinguish itself from its mother

or the world around it. It is at this stage that we are closest to what Jacques Lacan[237] calls the

Real—the pure experienced physical universe unfiltered by language or ego development. Once

we learn language we enter into the Symbolic world and are exiled from the Real because

everything we see, feel, hear, or experience is filtered through language, which classifies and

categorizes. Kristeva calls abjection the precondition for narcissism because in the prelingual

stage there is no separation of self from the external world. We are in the world, of the world, are

the world until language severs us from it. At first the abject may appear to be the same as the

uncanny, but Kristeva writes that it is "essentially different" and more violent: "abjection is

elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a

memory."[238] Where the object belongs to the ego, the abject belongs to the superego. It repulses

and negates, unlike the object which embodies our innermost desires.[239] Kristeva writes:

> And, as in jouissance where the object of desire, known as object *a* [in Lacan's
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> terminology], bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in
>
> order to contemplate itself in the Other, there is nothing either objective or
>
> objectal to the abject. It is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having
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> become *alter ego*, drops so that 'I' does not disappear in it but finds, in that
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> sublime alienation, a forfeited existence. Hence a jouissance in which the subject

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[237] It should be mentioned that Kristeva's theory is an intervention in Lacanian theory. She posits that feeling digust for the mother is a key moment in emergent self-identity.
  [238] Kristeva 5.
  [239] Kristeva 6.

is swallowed up but in which the Other, in return, keeps the subject from foundering by making it repugnant.[240]

It is impossible to identify with the abject because it is nothing, it signifies nothing, it reflects nothing: "A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live."[241] Because signification is a process of language, it is dulled and mediated, never fully experienced. When faced with the abject, all of the pretenses and masks are stripped and we are faced with the Real, with something that doesn't represent anything else, but just *is*. Our reaction to the abject is immediate and violent. We vomit, we scream, we wet ourselves; we bodily reject it and view it in bodily terms and in our societies we attempt to exclude it and purify ourselves of its influence through various coding systems that deal with defilement, food taboos, and the notion of sin.[242]

Ultimately, the abject is the fear of one's identity "sinking irretrievably into the mother."[243] The mother is primarily body to us. Her body grew ours, acted as our portal into this world, and sustained us with food produced from herself. To return to her would mean an extinguishment of one's ego, and because of this the mother must be made into something repulsive. It cannot be an object because an object is something desired, so it must be made abject. It is filthy, defiling, and threatening so it must be expunged from society because it threatens everything. Death, filth, and the mother threaten the Symbolic and bring us too close to the Real, which we are unable to experience without being destroyed. For this reason,

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[240] Kristeva 9.
[241] Kristeva 3.
[242] Kristeva 68.
[243] Kristeva 64.

[t]he various means of *purifying* the abject—the various catharses—make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art, both on the far and near side of religion. Seen from that standpoint, the artistic experience, which is rooted in the abject it utters and by the same token purifies, appears as the essential component of religiosity. That is perhaps why it is destined to survive the collapse of the historical forms of religions.[244]

The truth behind these rituals is that the abject can never be eradicated. It can, however, be controlled. We can "repeat" the abject, bring it forth with rhythm and song and bind it thusly until the ritual needs to be repeated.[245]

The abject is fear of the body and everything that the body produces. It is gore, blood (often menstrual blood), excrement, bile, and urine. It is horror. It is something purely alien and *other* that can entice but ultimately destroy one's ego. It is anti-intellectual and anti-Symbolic and this not only makes it horrifying, but very difficult to describe. We contain it in words, mediate it through language so that it is understandable and manageable, just like Kristeva's signified death which she can understand, react, or accept. It is the moment of true horror: the finality of non-existence that underlies the guilty pleasures (as Twitchell calls them) we vicariously experience in horror stories.

This concludes (for now), the section on the uncanny and the abject. We now move to discussing the final element of horror before delving into the primary texts.

The Use of Time and Space and the Importance of Sex in Horror

Also essential to the psychological understanding of the horror genre is observing how the sense of violation is something temporal or historical. Regardless of whether or not the monster

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[244] Kristeva 17.
[245] Kristeva 17.

terrifies or horrifies, it always represents an encroachment of the past on the present. Anne Williams writes that "the Gothic novel evokes the weight of the past."[246] The early English Gothic novels typically took place in the past, often in some European country instead of England.[247] This focus on the past is shared by the American Gothic. In fact, Stuprich states that American Gothic's interest in the past could "border on the pathological,"[248] raising the interesting paradox that the history of White, European North American history is relatively negligible, barely a drop in the bucket compared to the rich history shared by European cultures. Where the two differ, though, is in how the past is used:

> When the English Gothic looks to the past, the effect more often than not is one of a general, atmospheric awe, potentially but not necessarily sinister; when the American Gothic—deeply connected to a heritage of Puritanism and its doctrine of innate depravity—looks to the past, the effect is one of darkness, gloom, and guilt. In English Gothic the past *is* past; it's dead, recoverable only in a limited sense and only temporarily. In American Gothic, to paraphrase William Faulkner, the past isn't dead; it isn't even past.[249]

The past is also used to highlight the other great recurring theme of early horror: the dangers of sex. In outlining the Gothic formula, Stuprich writes that, "Certain plot patterns and themes recur, frequently involving issues of family and marriage complicated by dark secrets from the past and hinting at forbidden sexual longings."[250] Even when the past is used primarily for atmosphere, there appears time and again the idea of something dark and dangerous from the past threatening the polite, orderly present, and typically this also has something sinister to do

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[246] Williams 66.
[247] Stuprich, "Evolution" 17.
[248] Stuprich, "Evolution" 20-1.
[249] Stuprich, "Evolution" 20-1.
[250] Stuprich, "Evolution" 17.

with sex. In *The Castle of Ontrato* the monster is Prince Manfred who continually attempts to rape his daughter-in-law. His undoing comes from the revelation that his parentage (and his nobility) is false.

Consequently, James Twitchell proclaims, "I do not believe there is a horror myth in the West that is not entangled with the theme of procreation."[251] Anne Williams views this pattern from the standpoint of gender criticism:

> "Horror" and "terror" imply contrasting cultural attitudes about the nature of "the female" in the literal and symbolic sense, including the "feminine" nature and materiality….Since ancient Greece, (male) philosophers and theologians have conceived of "the female" as "otherness"—dark and disorderly and dangerous. In this view even woman's quasi-miraculous powers of maternity align her with irrational power and loathsome materiality, since birth is always followed by death.[252]

Kristeva supports this further when she writes that the mother's coding as "abject" indicates how important society believes women to be.[253] The mother-body represents such a danger to self that it must be regarded as base and dirty or else we would gladly succumb to annihilation.

Before concluding this section on the history and elements of horror, there is one more matter that must be addressed: the change of focus the wider horror genre has undergone in the past two hundred years. In *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King likes to talk about the "Bad Place," the liminal space in which evil infects the orderly, everyday world. For the Gothic, the Bad Place represented a "symbolic womb, a symbolic mirror" where fear of sex and sexual interests is

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[251] Twitchell 65.
[252] Williams, 69.
[253] Kristeva 65.

played out allegorically.[254] This changes with so-called modern (and post-modern) horror. Citing Irving Malin's *New American Gothic*, King spends the latter half of his book on how modern horror's main concern is narcissism. He condenses Malin's "ingredients" for modern Gothic to two elements: "A microcosm serves as the arena where universal forces collide" and "the gothic house functions as an image of authoritarianism, of imprisonment, or of 'confining narcissism.'"[255] Delving even further into Malin's work, King writes that the New American Gothic considers the psyche more important than society,[256] that its primary focus is on love, and its characters are weak, grotesque, despondent individuals that try to overcome their anxiety through compulsion: "He 'loves' others because he loves himself: he compels them to mirror his desires. Love for him is an attempt to create order out of chaos, strength out of weakness; however, it simply creates monsters."[257] Ultimately, this narcissistic love "mechanizes people," destroying their humanity and their lives in the process.[258] These dramas practically always take place within the home, because the family is where destructive self-love is first learned:

> Parents see themselves in their children but forget about self-expression on the part of the young; they want to mold unformed personalities. Children, on the other hand, become narcissistic because of their need to find and love themselves in a cold environment. New American Gothic employs the family as a microcosm: the family dramatizes the conflict between private and social worlds, ego and super-ego.[259]

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[254] King, *Danse* 281.
[255] King, *Danse* 281.
[256] Irving Malin, *New American Gothic* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1968), 5.
[257] Malin 5-6.
[258] Malin 48-9.
[259] Malin 8.

This also occurs in horror as well, as the texts selected for this chapter will demonstrate. These stories all focus on characters that are almost cripplingly narcissistic, thrust into conflict with supernatural forces that deliberately mirror their fears and passions, in jeopardy of being destroyed physically and psychically. Universal forces literally collide in these tales, forcing these characters to confront their flaws made manifest. The drama comes from witnessing how these characters deal with that confrontation.

Now we will dive into the primary texts for this chapter, beginning with Peter Straub's *Ghost Story*.

Ghost Story

Peter Straub's *Ghost Story* begins with the question, "What's the worst thing you've ever done?" The answer given by poor, doomed John Jaffery, is, "I won't tell you that, but I'll tell you the worst thing that ever happened to me…the most dreadful thing…."[260] Jaffery tells them a ghost story. At its heart, *Ghost Story* does not just tell one ghost story; it tells them all. Straub is ambitious with this book, and perhaps for that reason it is one of his most popular novels. He seeks to unify every monster, demon, ghost, and night-watcher into one terrifying creature: the Manitou. The story takes place in Milburn, New York and centers on a group of old men calling themselves "The Chowder Society." The four men, John Jaffrey, Lewis Benedikt, Sears James, and Ricky Hawthorne, have been good friends all of their lives, but they do not come together as The Chowder Society until the death of another dear friend of theirs, Edward Wanderly. Wanderly dies at a party he had thrown for a visiting actress, and for a year afterwards the friends experience terrible nightmares. It is at the first meeting of the Society that Ricky asks Jaffrey the all-important question, and Jaffrey's answer—a ghost story—begins a monthly

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[260] Peter Straub, *Ghost Story* (New York: Coward, 1979) 13.

tradition of meeting and telling each other scary stories. Jaffery's answer "saved them all,"[261] and the telling of the stories became a ritual that partially keeps the nightmares at bay, as well as the creature that generated them.

Desperate for an answer, the group decides to write to Edward's nephew, Donald Wanderly, a writer and part-time English instructor. Don has recently published a novel entitled *The Nightwatchers,* and the Chowder Society believes that he can shed some light on their situation because the events in the novel closely mirror their own. As Don writes in his journal, "[m]aybe the oddest part of my being here is that my uncle's friends almost seem to fear that they are caught in some kind of real-life horror story, a story like *The Nightwatcher*…. They saw me as some sort of steel-plated professional, an expert in the supernatural—they saw me as a Van Helsing!"[262] Exemplifying horror's collapsing of aesthetic distance, this idea of slipping into a story recurs often in the novel. At one point Don imagines that one of his books is happening around him,[263] and he asks himself: "What *am* I involved in here? A ghost story? Or something worse, something not just a story?"[264] Later on he no longer questions it and tells the Chowder Society, "I think this is a ghost story."[265]

The author of this ghost story, the central figure tied to the most tragic events in these men's lives, is a creature masquerading as a woman. She changes her form and name each time she encounters them, calling herself Angie Maule, Angie Mitchell, Eva Galli, Anne-Veronica Moore, Alma Mobley, Anna Mostyn, and Amy Monckton, and she desires not just to kill the Chowder Society (and Milburn as well), but to destroy them completely and utterly: partially because it is in her nature, but also because these men have hurt her in the past.

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[261] Straub 137.
[262] Straub 174.
[263] Straub 179.
[264] Straub 179.
[265] Straub 278.

Ricky, Sears, John, Lewis, and Edward first encounter her in the 1929 as Eva Galli, an aspiring actress visiting Milburn for the summer. The boys were smitten with her, but were too shy, too immature, and too sexually inexperienced to do anything more than hover around her like gadflies. As Ricky puts it, "We were in a sort of sexless, pre-Freudian paradise…. In an enchantment. Sometimes we even danced with her, but even holding her, watching her move, we never thought about sex. Not consciously. Not to admit."[266] Events come to a head one day at Edward's apartment. Eva was engaged to a local farmer, Stringer Dedham, but that summer Stringer killed himself by jamming his arm into a thresher. Her new proto-widow status makes her even more alluring to the boys, making her "an emblem of grief—of a fractured heart."[267] However, because of their youth and because of strict rules of etiquette, they are unable to approach her. Instead, she comes to them, making them drink and play jazz music on the gramophone. She then begins to approach them sexually, specifically targeting Lewis, because he loves her the most and her actions are the most painful for him to watch.[268] She begins kissing them and stripping off her clothes until Lewis cannot take it anymore. He jumps up and rushes her, giving her a real "football tackle,"[269] knocking her down and causing her to smash her head against the fireplace. The boys, thinking they have killed her, decide to hide her body. They load Eva into a car and push it into a nearby pond. As it sinks, they see her looking at them through the rear window, "grinning" at them, "jeering."[270] Two other events follow the hiding of the body: first, John Jaffrey sees a lynx on the other end of the pond, and Eva Galli's home catches fire and implodes.

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[266] Straub 353.
[267] Straub 355.
[268] Straub 356.
[269] Straub 357.
[270] Straub 359.

Don meets her when he is working as an adjunct instructor at Berkeley. There he knows her as Alma Mobley. His first impression of her is very telling:

> The first impression I had of Alma Mobley was of a general paleness, a spiritual blurriness suggested by her long expressionless face and hanging straw-colored hair. Her round eyes were a very pale blue. I felt an odd mixture of attraction and revulsion; in the dim light of the staircase, she looked like an attractive girl who'd spent all her life in a cave—she appeared to be the same ghostly shade of white all over.[271]

From the beginning Don and Alma have a very different relationship from the one that the young future members of The Chowder Society had with Eva. There is a sense that Alma is letting Don see just a bit behind her mask—hence the repulsion. This extends beyond her visage to her behavior. Don recognizes early on that Alma lies easily, but instead of disturbing him, he thinks of it as "proof of how lightly her life had touched her."[272] She casually mentions that she knows people active in the Ordo Templi Orientis, a masonic-like organization interested in the occult that counts Aleister Crowley as one of its members, and that she converses with the spirit of her former lover, Tasker Martin. Blinded by the newness of the relationship, Don takes all of this in stride, chalking it up to the aloofness that comes from living a privileged life. However, as the relationship matures, he cannot help but become more and more concerned—and repulsed—by Alma. At one point he realizes that "there was an androgynous quality to her passivity; just as there is, perhaps, an androgynous quality to a prostitute."[273] This comparison has nothing to do with the act of sex or any moral judgment on Alma's sexual mores, but with the performative quality inherent to the prostitute's profession. A prostitute must mirror the desires of the client.

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[271] Straub 183.
[272] Straub 191.
[273] Straub 197.

This could be as elaborate as a role-playing scenario (I am the naughty student, you are the teacher), or simply pretending to enjoy the sex act for which the client has paid. Alma's passivity is the passivity of a mirror. Her reflections all work to confuse and entice Don.

Their relationship effectively ends when he takes her for a weekend trip to his brother's beach house. At this point the veneer has begun to wear thin and the aloofness, the lying, and the general flakiness displayed by Alma annoys instead of delights Don. Their first night there Don awakes to find Alma out of bed, looking out the window at the ocean. She says something to him which he does not understand. At first he thinks she has said, "I saw a ghost," but later he thinks it was, "I am a ghost."[274] Not until later does Don realize what she actually said was, "You are a ghost."[275] She leaves him abruptly not too long afterwards and begins an affair with Don's brother, David. David dies in Amsterdam on a business trip, and Alma disappears once again. Don deals with the events in the only way he knows how—writing. His novel, *The Nightrunners*, is what ultimately causes the Chowder Society to call him.

Once Don joins the ranks, Eva/Alma accelerates her plans. Sears is visited frequently by Gregory and Fenton Bates, two boys he knew when he was a teacher. Don's nebulous idea for a book based around a traveling carnival lead by a trickster-like figure, Dr. Rabbitfoot, begins to seep into the town, first just as calliope music half-heard on the wind, but later as Dr. Rabbitfoot himself. John Jaffrey, Lewis Benedikt, and Sears James die, and Ricky, Don, and a young man named Peter Barnes just barely defeat Eva/Alma for a second time, except again they are unable to kill her outright. Don figures out that the lynx they saw the night they tried to hide Eva's body was Eva in another form. It takes time for her to recoup her strength, so Don remains vigilant. He studies what little they know about her personas, and eventually finds a way to discern her

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[274] Straub. 209.
[275] Straub 368.

identity from that of everyday people. Eva Galli appeared in a small role in a short movie. Don

manages to find a copy and he discovers that

> cameras exposed too much, and what you saw when you looked at Eva Galli on
>
> screen was a young woman who was not likeable. Even Alma had not been
>
> likable; even Anna Mostyn, when truly seen—as at the Barne's party—seemed
>
> coldly perverse, driven by willpower. They could for a time evoke human love,
>
> but nothing in them could return it. What you finally saw was their hollowness.
>
> They could disguise it for a time, but never finally, and that was their greatest
>
> mistake; a mistake in being.[276]

Armed with this knowledge, Don finds Eva, this time in the form of a young girl, and he

manages finally to kill her once and for all.

IT

Like *Ghost Story*, *IT* centers on a group of lost individuals that have banded together to form a

club, only where *Ghost Story* focuses on old men attempting to forget the sins of their youth, *IT'*s

protagonists are middle-aged adults trying to remember their past. The much less dignifiedly

named Losers Club counts as its members Richie Tozier, Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Eddie

Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Stanley Uris, and their leader, Bill Denbrough. As children they all live

together in the small town of Derry, Maine; in the summer of 1957 they fight and nearly kill a

shape-shifting monster that preys on children; and in 1984 they are drawn back to their

hometown to finish the job.

It all begins with a paper sailboat made by Bill for his younger brother Georgie. A storm

has just passed through Derry and Georgie takes out the little boat to float on the rain water. It

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[276] Straub 466.

slips away from him and disappears into the sewer, only to be saved by Pennywise the Clown. Georgie, being only six, never questions the existence of a clown who "looked like a cross between Bozo and Clarabell"[277] in the sewer. He believes Pennywise when he said that the storm just "bleeeew" him and the rest of the circus down the drain.[278] In fact, Georgie could even smell it, the peanuts, vinegar, French fries, and even animal excrement, but under that lay "the smell of flood and decomposing leaves and dark stormdrain shadows."[279] When Georgie reaches for the paper sailboat that Pennywise keeps just out of reach, the clown snatches his arm, tearing it out of the socket, and killing the boy.

Georgie's death devastates the Denbrough family. Bill's family goes through the motions of living, but act more or less like people living in the same boarding house, not as a family. Bill, already suffering from a moderate stutter before Georgie's murder, can barely talk. This stutter, and perhaps something inherent in his personality, marks him as different and isolates him from the rest of the children his age, save for his six close friends. Each member of the Losers Club is marked in some way that sets them apart from their peers—whether it is something physical or just a personality quirk. Ben is overweight, Eddie has asthma and allergies, Richie is a compulsive class clown, Beverly comes from a poor family with an abusive father, Stanley is Jewish (a rarity in predominantly Protestant Maine), and Mike is black (also a rarity in Maine). These differences that put them outside of the socially-accepted norm of the small community make them easy targets for bullies, especially Henry Bowers and his gang. Yet there is more to their outcast status than just the qualities described. They all seem touched by some higher power and at times appear fundamentally different. On three separate occasions Richie, Bill, and Eddie's mothers sense this alien quality within them. Richie's mother thinks while observing

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[277] King, *IT* 13.
[278] King, *IT* 14.
[279] King, *IT* 14.

Richie and Bill, "I don't understand either of them…. Where they go, what they do, what they want… or what will become of them. Sometimes, oh sometimes their eyes are wild, and sometimes I'm afraid for them and sometimes I'm afraid of them."[280] Bill's mother experiences a moment of fear watching the seven children play together: "Amazement turned to something like fear…. There was a feeling in the air, like static electricity, only somehow much more powerful, much more scary. She felt that if she touched any of them, she would receive a walloping shock."[281] And Eddie, when his mother tries to keep him away from the rest of the group, experiences a powerful moment of what could be considered divine intervention: "There had been something working in him, working *through* him, some force…and his mother had felt it too. He had seen it in her eyes and in her trembling lips. He had no sense that this power was an evil one, but its enormous strength was frightening."[282] It is unclear whether the children are marked as different because they are touched by some abstract, supernatural power, or if they are touched by some abstract, supernatural power because they are different. What does matter is that this outcast status causes them to band together, and the strength that comes from being a part of a group is the only thing that saves them from Pennywise. When Mike joins the group he feels a sense of comfort and something else, "something more elemental: a feeling of coming home."[283] Later Richie thinks, "Seven….That's the magic number. There has to be seven of us. That's the way it's supposed to be."[284] This power they hold as a group protects them to an extent, but in no way are they invulnerable. The power weakens when they separate, and Pennywise knows this.

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[280] King, *IT* 366.
[281] King, *IT* 853-4.
[282] King, *IT* 802
[283] King, *IT* 711.
[284] King, *IT* 746.

The clown approaches the children in different forms, alternately trying to entice and terrify them. Ben sees Pennywise as a clown standing on a frozen lake, holding balloons that floated against the wind. Unlike Georgie, Ben is old enough to realize the preposterousness of the situation, but there is enough of the child in him to make him want a balloon:

> And in spite of his fear, Ben found that part of him *did* want a balloon. Who in all the world owned a balloon which would float into the wind? Who had even *heard* of such a thing? Yes… he wanted a balloon, and he wanted to see the clown's face, which was bent down toward the ice, as if to keep it out of that killer wind.[285]

The glamour is broken by a nearby whistle and Ben sees Pennywise's face, only instead of clown makeup he sees ancient bandages covering the face of a corpse. The clown has morphed into the Mummy. Eddie encounters him as a leprous bum, and later as the Creature from the Black Lagoon; Richie first sees him as the Teenage Werewolf (thanks to him seeing the Michael Landon movie earlier that summer); and Mike as an enormous bird. Bill suffers the most personal and terrible encounter through his brother's photo album: the clown pretends to be Georgie, playing on Bill's guilt, grief and loneliness.

As the above incidents demonstrate, Pennywise's most powerful weapon is the children's imagination: they experienced "*exotic terrors and voluptuous fears: they dreamed of nightbeasts and moving muds; against their will they contemplated endless gulphs.*"[286] Fear makes the meat taste all the sweeter, and over time It made Derry into Its own private slaughter house. Of all the sheep (as It thought of them) at Its disposal, children were the tastiest:

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[285] King, *IT* 213.
[286] King, *IT* 1007.

adults had their own terrors, and their glands could be tapped, opened so that all

the chemicals of fear flooded the body and salted the meat. But their fears were

mostly too complex. The fears of children were simpler and usually more

powerful. The fears of children could often be summoned up in a single face…and

if bait were needed, why, what child did not love a clown?[287]

Its ability change Its shape serves as camouflage and as an instrument to entice terror, but the

children learn to turn that asset against the creature. When the children go to confront It at an

abandoned house they believe to be Its lair, they do so armed with silver slugs and a slingshot.

Ben makes the slugs in Bill's father's garage from a collection of silver dollars that belonged to

his father. None of the children question the fact that silver would stop the monster because

"they had the weight of what seemed like a thousand horror movies on their side."[288] That

certainty almost killed Pennywise. When It first appeared in the house on Neibolt Street, Ben

saw It as "a silvery-orange shifting shape. It was not ghostly; It was solid, and he sensed some

other shape, some real and ultimate shape, behind It."[289] Richie screams that It is the Teenage

Werewolf, and that particular shape "locked in reality" for It and the children.[290] Beverly shoots

it with a silver slug and in heat of the moment, even though she is out of ammunition, she draws

the slingshot back again, ready for the kill. At that moment "[t]he uncertainty left the creature's

eyes—It believed"[291] and It fled. Ben realizes afterward that Its glamours were

dreams-made-real. And once dreams became real, they escaped the power of the

dreamer and became their own deadly things, capable of independent action. The

silver slugs had worked because the seven of them had been unified in their belief

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287 King, *IT* 1016 [italics King's].
288 King, *IT* 845.
289 King, *IT* 869.
290 King, *IT* 869.
291 King, *IT* 872.

that they would. But they hadn't killed It. And next time It would approach them in a new shape, one over which silver wielded no power.[292]

They had wounded the monster, but not killed it. The real battle takes place on the psychic plain during the Ritual of Chüd, which will be covered in greater detail in the final section of this chapter.

Out of the Real and into the Symbolic

Horror stands at the midpoint between fantasy and science fiction. While the predominant play aspects it uses are *mimicry* and *ilinx*, it uses them in a very different way than fantasy. Where fantasy employs those two rubrics in order to recapture an idealized past, horror illustrates their dark side. The past exists in tiny pockets of the modern world, occasionally erupting into our everyday lives, violently throwing our peaceful, Apollonian world into disarray, and it does so through the use of *mimicry* and *ilinx*. Monsters, the physical and sometimes ethereal representation of this breach, use *mimicry* to hide and terrorize and *ilinx* to destabilize protagonists' sense of identity, threatening to not only kill them, but to annihilate them.

However, they use imperfect masks, making them uncanny creatures that frighten because they are the unfamiliar masquerading as the familiar. Under the mask, they are abject, the signifier with no signified, a null sign that threatens oblivion. This is why Stringer Dedham puts his arm in the thresher, Edward Wanderly suffers a heart attack, and Bill Denbrough's wife, Audrey, goes insane when she sees what lies behind Pennywise's glamours. The game for the protagonist is to find a way to reenter the Symbolic, and the way he or she does so is through language and violence.

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[292] King, *IT* 877.

David Rudd takes this approach when he analyzes Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, an interesting example of the burgeoning field of young adult horror, and his analysis of the questions of identity, the uncanny, and the abject set the groundwork for many of the major ideas of this chapter. What his analysis misses, though, is an incorporation of play theory. To begin with, Rudd notes that the concept of *doubling* is a key aspect of the uncanny because it violates Aristotle's law of non-contradiction: that something cannot be both A and Not-A at the same time.[293] This law does not fit one of the important states of performativity—Shechner's "not-I, not not-I" continuum, where one can take on the spirit of a character or role and become more and less than oneself. As I will explain later, this not-I, not not-I state is what helps the children survive in *IT*. Rudd writes that the double, or *doppelgänger*, destabilizes a person's sense of individuality and often foretells one's death: "ontology, as Derrida punningly puts it, becomes upset by 'hauntology.'"[294] The double resembles ourselves (or in a broader sense something familiar to us) but is not. This relates to two other aspects of the uncanny that Rudd discusses: the fetish object and the fear of being buried alive. The fetish object is "closely linked to the *unheimlich* nature of the female genitals, seen so because once they were the opposite: home (*Heim*) to us all."[295] This is related to the fear of being buried alive (the most Uncanny of all fears) because a "smothering, threatening environment" constitutes our first experiences in our "intra-uterine existence." It was once home, but is now strange, alien, and potentially dangerous.[296]

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[293] Rudd 161.
[294] Rudd 161.
[295] Rudd 162.
[296] Rudd 162.

To illustrate his points about the uncanny, Freud uses E. T. A. Hoffman's story "The Sandman" as an exemplar, leading to the conclusion that the real fear underlying the story is the threat of castration. Rudd writes that

> it is not necessary to see castration in biological terms. It seems far more plausible to read it symbolically (as do both Lacan and Kristeva), where it is our entry into language that results in the world being chopped up into fragmentary signifiers, denying us access to that wholesome oneness we imagine we once experienced.[297]

The Lacanian view of everyday existence states that we experience everything through perceptions formed by language. We form categories and classifications that frame everything we experience, forming existence into what Lacan terms the Symbolic. There does exist an unfiltered, raw universe divorced from our perceptions but we only experience this in moments of crisis or accident. Lacan calls this raw realm the Real, and it can be very dangerous, as can the Symbolic. There exists a constant danger of falling into one realm or the other, and we forever stand on the razor's edge between these two realms.

In this configuration, the mother represents the Real, the realm where there is no division between self and the environment, and the father represents the Symbolic, the fragmented, solitary world where we stand separate from everything and everyone. As tempting as it would be to return to this harmonious state of the Real and the mother, doing so would entail not just the death of the body, but the death of ego. It would mean total annihilation. For this reason the female body is vilified and made abject. It must be made repulsive or else it will entice all that encounter it: the ultimate honey trap. The shape-shifting performed by monsters and breakdown of physical rules in the Bad Place represent moments when the Real erupts into the Symbolic.

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[297] Rudd 162.

Perhaps this is why the monsters in the two novels selected for this chapter are female. Eva Galli is obviously a female, or at least prefers the female form over the male. Pennywise, however, hides her gender. King does not reveal this until the final third of the book when It captures Audra and drops Its glamours. Audra's last thought before losing her mind (before being violently ripped from the Symbolic into the Real) is "OH DEAR JESUS IT IS FEMALE."[298] This revelation of Its gender somehow makes the situation even more horrible, perhaps because Its lair is little more than a surrogate womb, hidden under the sewers of Derry deep in the earth. This was Its nest, where It slept and where It laid Its eggs.

It does not use sex to entice Its victims, even when the adult Losers return to Derry to finish the job. Eva Galli does, however, and does so quite effectively. Her first attempt to destroy the Chowder Society takes the form of aggressive sexuality with violent kisses and an angry strip tease. As Anne-Veronica Moore, she seduces Edward Wanderly, and as Alma Mobley she begins a sexual relationship with Don, and later becomes engaged to Don's brother, David. She never appears as an ugly woman—although her inner ugliness does show itself on camera—and she uses her attractiveness as bait. A sense of carnival surrounds her and often seeps into the atmosphere. At John Jaffery's party,

> [t]he music was so loud that Ricky wanted to scream. Nobody but Sears had left, and the young people, many of them now drunk, whirled about, hair and arms flying. The little actress cavorted with the editor, Lewis was talking to Christina Barnes on the couch. Both were oblivious to the presence of sleeping Milly Sheehan, not eight inches away. Ricky wished profoundly that he were in his bed. The noise gave him a headache. His old friends, Sears excepted, seemed to have lost their minds. Lewis had his hand on Christina Barnes's bare knee, and his eyes

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[298] King, *IT* 1016.

122

were unfocused. Was he really trying to seduce the banker's wife? In the presence

of her husband and son?[299]

Later, when the Chowder Society tell the story of their apparent murder of Eva Galli, Sears

describes her as coming in "like a typhoon," and Ricky and Sears both quote a line from an

Ernest Dowson poem to impart the feeling of the situation: "Madder music and stronger

wine."[300] Both of these scenes fall under the *ilinx* rubric. They are violent, energetic, and

passionate to the point where logical thought and traditional rules for behavior no longer apply.

Caillois tells us that this vortex of "pantomime and ecstasy" forms the bonds that hold together a

community,[301] but Eva's influence perverts it and makes it destructive.

  Ilinx and *mimicry* intertwine, and what Straub's and King's stories teach us is that the

form the mask takes also shapes the vertiginous experiences that assault the protagonists. Eva

uses sex as a weapon, so her moments of "madder music and stronger wine" take a decidedly

sexual overtone. Pennywise cares nothing for sex. The children constantly refer to it by the

asexual pronoun "It," and while later the monster is identified as female, It reproduces asexually,

therefore ruling out any sexual desire on Its part, or the need for It to be sexually alluring. It

primarily preys on prepubescent children. The novel never makes it clear whether Its obfuscation

of its gender is deliberate or not, but the fact that It always disguises itself in a male glamour

provides a tantalizing clue. Regardless, Its gender plays no role in its use of *ilinx*.

  However, *IT* does contain two powerful scenes of *ilinx*. The first occurs when the

children decide to build a smoke hole—a variation on the Native American sweat lodge. At this

moment the children stand at an impasse, unsure of what to do about the monster that has stalked

their town. Ben gets the idea of smoke hole from a library book. The book describes how some

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[299] Straub 135.
[300] Straub 355.
[301] Caillois, *Man, Play* 87.

tribes used this ritual to experience visions and make important decisions. Even before they

began building the smoke hole, Richie feels a powerful presence guiding them: "Was this

supposed to happen? From the time Ben got the idea for an underground clubhouse instead of a

treehouse, was this supposed to happen? How much of this are we thinking up ourselves, and

how much is being thought up for us?"[302] Whatever the force was that was helping guide them,

Richie thought it a "kind of counterforce" to It, and he understood that the smoke hole was their

way of accessing knowledge beyond their normal ability.[303] The smoke transports the children to

a different plane of consciousness, and Mike and Ritchie find themselves witnessing Its arrival

on Earth. The knowledge the children gain from this ritual helps them decide that they need to be

the ones to stop It.

The other important instance of *ilinx* occurs at the story's climax, when the Losers

engage It in the ritual of *Chüd*. Bill first discovers the ritual in another library book called *The

Night's Truth*. One of the entries in the book deals with a Himalayan monster called the *taelus*.

The ritual involves a Himalayan holy man overlapping tongues with the monster. Then the holy

man and *taelus* bite into each other's tongues in a way that keeps both from moving. They face

each other "eye to eye" and tell each other jokes. If the human laughed then he would be eaten,

but if the *taelus* laughed then he would disappear for a hundred years.[304] The ritual takes place on

a purely mental plane where the threat is not just being physically eaten, but spiritually devoured

as well:

> Suddenly [Bill] thought he understood: It meant to thrust him through some wall
>
> at the end of the universe and into some other place… where It really lived; where
>
> It existed as a titanic, glowing core which might be no more than the smallest

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[302] King, *IT* 743.
[303] King, *IT* 743.
[304] King, *IT* 675.

mote in that Other's mind; he would see It naked, a thing of unshaped destroying

light, and there he would either be mercifully annihilated or live forever, insane

and yet conscious inside Its homicidal endless formless hungry being.[305]

Bill realizes that It exists in two places—in Derry as a physical being, and in that void as

formless energy. He also realizes that the physical is what is vulnerable, that in order to win, he

must make It "laugh," as the ritual described it, and force the monster to return his spiritual self

to his body. Bill breaks the monster's concentration by reciting a simple sentence his mother

made him practice to overcome his stutter, "He thrusts his fists against the posts and still insists

he sees the ghosts."[306] He does this in his father's voice, although King tells us that he never

realizes this and that he was probably better off for it.

The Ritual of Chüd encapsulates the Oedipal triangle as defined by Lacan and Kristeva. It

(which is female, mother, and death dealer) takes Bill (the son) into the Real (that realm beyond

the Symbolic of pure experience), threatening to devour him both physically and psychically,

and the only way that Bill can save himself is through the power of language (the Father in the

triangle), using his father's voice to do it. The words Bill uses are almost nonsensical, a simple

tongue twister, but the ability to speak them clearly makes for a powerful moment of personal

achievement for him, and because of that they hold just as much power as any magic spell.

Bill's use of his father's voice also makes this a performative moment, albeit

unconsciously on his part. Bill must become more than himself in order to survive, and this

theme repeats itself throughout the novel. When Bill and Ritchie first confront It in the house on

Neibolt Street, Ritchie saves his friend by using his Irish Cop voice, except instead of his typical

bad imitation, "It was the Voice of every Irish beat-cop that had ever lived and twirled a billy by

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[305] King, *IT* 1054.
[306] King, *IT* 1056.

its rawhide rope as he tried the doors of closed shops after midnight."[307] The Voice hurt It, and

Ritchie wounded it even more by throwing sneezing powder in Its face. As they escape, Ritchie

has just enough time to think, "Jesus, if I had some itching powder too and maybe a joy buzzer I

might be able to kill it."[308] When the children confront It later in that same house they

unconsciously adopt the role of monster hunters, complete with silver bullets, and in the sewers

under Derry, Eddie saves them by pretending that his asthma inhaler sprayed battery acid and

burning the monster with it. The scene with Eddie's inhaler also illustrates the power of

performative statements within this story (and this genre). Before spraying the monster, he

screams, "BATTERY ACID, FUCKNUTS!"[309] turning the canister's contents into that caustic

fluid. In the novel belief is a transubstantiating power exercised by both It and the Losers. It

turns their beliefs against them (that there is a monster in the closet, that people can turn into

wolves, and soon), but the children's beliefs also serve as weapons against It, and the most

potent weapon of all is language.

This idea that belief and imagination can be used as weapons against monsters occurs in

Ghost Story as well, as does the notion that it can be used by the monster against the

protagonists. Ricky says:

> But what I think is that Don's arrival here was like the fitting of the last piece into
>
> a puzzle—that when all of us were joined by Don, the forces, whatever you want
>
> to call them, were increased. That we invoked them. We by our stories, Don in his
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> book and in his imagination. We see things, but we don't believe in them; we feel

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[307] King, *IT* 377-78.
[308] King, *IT* 378.
[309] King, *IT* 1026.

things—people watching us, sinister things following us—but we dismiss them as fantasies. We dream horrors, but try to forget them.[310]

Later when the Chowder Society begins to arm itself against Eva and her minions, Don looks to stories for inspiration, saying, "Well, in the stories, and I think that means in the past, people found ways to make them die again. Stakes through the heart or silver bullets—remember? The point is that they can be destroyed. And if it takes silver bullets, that's what we'll use."[311] His reasoning is not so far from the Losers when they decide to create silver balls for Bill's slingshot. Alone against this horror, they have no choice but to look to stories for inspiration and comfort, and in doing so they then adopt those personas, becoming monster hunters. Don even remarks that the Chowder Society sees him as some sort of "Van Helsing" that could save them.

Returning to Rudd, he writes that Coraline defeats her monster by adopting the persona of a younger girl, someone who still plays with dolls and who possesses an innocence that Coraline no longer owns. She performs "childhood, using it as a masquerade…. In other words, we could say that by the end of the novel Coraline has realigned herself in the Symbolic, no longer feeling oppressed by her status (which hasn't changed—her parents are much the same). She simply sees the world in different terms, and celebrates her own artifice…. The world is re-enchanted."[312] This masquerade is part of the wager Coraline makes with her monster, the Other Mother. If Coraline wins, the Other Mother leaves her alone and sets free the spirits of the other children she has captured. If she loses, then the Other Mother gets to keep Coraline in her alternate world forever and replace her eyes with buttons (which brings to mind E.T.A. Hoffman's "Sandman.").

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[310] Straub 276.
[311] Straub 345.
[312] Rudd 167.

The Role of *Paidia* and *Ludus* in Horror

Monsters appear to be inveterate game players. While there are no wagers in *Ghost Story* or *IT*, the monsters still display a tenacious spirit for play. They fall on the *paidia* side of play—the urge for destructive, unstructured play, and the way by which the protagonists defeat them is by shifting the scale to *ludus*. They add structure and meaning with rules, symbols, and language, making the game definable, and thus winnable. Don and the Chowder Society note the different ways that Eva plays with them, from the repetition of the initials "A" and "M" to the contrived meeting between Don and Gregory and Fenny Bates in Berkeley, back when he is still dating Alma. As Sears puts it, "Then these—these things you think exist—are even more dangerous. They have wit."[313] Eva and her kind not only want to destroy humans, they want their prey to understand just who and what is attacking them. For example, when Eva (disguised as Anne-Veronica Moore) meets Ricky's wife, she says that Ricky would be a good enemy.

Pennywise's playfulness, on the other hand, stems more from Its choice of target. Its various glamours serve to get close to children, enchant them, and then terrify them in order to make the meat sweeter. As it deals with the Losers, It always seems to revert back to the clown, whether by orange pompoms erupting out of the Teenage Werewolf's fur or the constant appearances of balloons. Richie compares this pattern to villains who always leave a calling card, causing Bill to muse, "It *was* like some comic-book villain. Because they saw it that way? Thought of it that way? Yes, perhaps so. It was kid's stuff, but it seemed that was what this thing thrived on—kid's stuff."[314] As a monster, Pennywise appears much less urbane than Eva Galli and her ilk. Everything It does serves the perpetuation of its existence, but Eva wants entertainment. There exists an interesting socio-economic subtext to these two monsters.

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[313] Straub 363.
[314] King, *IT* 716.

Pennywise seems to be the blue-collar, hard-working middle-class person just trying to make ends meet, while Eva gives the impression of affluence and aristocratic idleness. Simply put, she plays, Pennywise works. This sense of security coupled with her vanity ultimately leads to her undoing, because she underestimates her prey. Near the end of the novel when she confronts Don, Ricky, and Peter for the next-to-last time, she weaves illusions around them in order to confuse them (another example of her use of *ilinx*). She tries to convince them that they are insane or hallucinating and that they should put down their weapons. However, even here she cannot resist gloating. Pretending to be Don's brother, she says:

> Can't you see how puny we'd look to them? We live—what? A miserable sixty-seventy years, maybe. They'd live for centuries—for a century of centuries. Becoming anything they want to become. Our lives are made by accident, by coincidence, by a blind combination of genes—they make themselves by will. They would detest us. And they'd be right. Next to them, we would be detestable.[315]

Although this scene does not carry the same sense of mystery and formality as the Ritual of Chüd, it does contain two important similarities. It takes place in a mental realm, and if the people caught in this illusion do not find a way back to the physical world, they will be destroyed.

Monsters do not play fair, but the very act of playing provides opportunities for their prey to win the game. As play is an enjoyable experience, it is only natural for the players to want to extend the playing time as far as they can. Eva hints at her identity, she flits in and out of the protagonists' lives, sowing small moments of destruction as some sort of preview for the grand guignol to come. However, in doing so, she gives Don, Peter, and the Chowder Society time to

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[315] Straub 454.

learn and prepare, in effect gaining enough power to become legitimate players of, and not just tokens in, her game. The same situation occurs in *IT*. Pennywise craves fear, and everything It does is crafted to maximize fear in It prey. In terms of strategy, It picks the most circuitous and least efficient means for acquiring food, again giving the protagonists time to learn the rules of the game and turn those rules against the monster.

The monster stands at the heart of the horror story. It erupts into the normal, daylight world to destabilize order and bring chaos and ruin. It is also the abject hiding as the uncanny—ultimately a conduit into the Real. The only way individuals can battle against this Dionysian agent is by reintroducing the Symbolic into the situation. Performative statements and ritual and symbolic actions shift power back to the protagonists and allow them to destroy the corrupting invader. They take the monster's most powerful tools—*mimicry* and *ilinx*—and turn them against the creature, effectively shifting the play paradigm from *paidia* to *ludus*, and as in all play situations, once the threat is over (i.e., once playtime is finished) the world returns more or less to the state it was before the eruption (the start of playtime) occurred.

Now we turn to the final form of play and the final literary analysis chapter: science fiction. Where horror looks to the past for inspiration, science fiction looks to the future, and in doing so represents a very different world than those presented in fantasy and horror.

CHAPTER 4

JEUX DE COMMERCE: PLAY IN SCIENCE FICTION

Jackson "Jack" Carson lived for exploring new worlds, except when he happened to be hurtling at them at several hundred feet per second.

He could see out the corner of his eye the burning wreckage of the transport freight he'd hitched a ride on breaking up in the planet's atmosphere. Chunks of plasteel streaked across the sky, heading off to God knows where. Jack had had just enough time to grab his kit and his rifle and get to the escape pod before the ship exploded. Now he sat in the pilot's chair, jabbing the controls, trying to engage the inertial dampeners, re-entry rockets, a damn parachute, anything to slow him down.

This was a long way from the university, a long way from the dusty lectures and the dusty professors. When he left just a year shy of graduating to become a frontier scout, all he could think of was how much he wanted to see all the places he had read about: the tombs of the kings of C'r'Ture, the floating city of Bachti. That was what archaeology was really about. And if he happened to make a little money on the side selling some of his discoveries, well, that was just gravy.

Jack smiled and laughed. Collision alarms rang through the pod and the ground raced up to meet him. The dampeners kicked in and the sensation of speed abruptly vanished. Jack's smile shrank just a bit as he released the pod's parachute. His heart slowed and now he had the luxury to notice the cold sweat plastering his shirt to his body and the shivering in his hands. Looking out the view screen, all he could see were miles and miles of farmland covered with huge stalks of what looked like wheat. That was good. Farms meant people, and people meant civilization. Where those people were and what kind of civilization they had remained to be seen.

All that was certain was that Jack had a long walk ahead of him. His smile broadened just a little.

—Jackson "Jack" Carson

3rd Level Scout

The Scout Character Class and its Importance to this Chapter

The scout character class comes from the *Star Wars D20* game world. As it is described in the book: "Scouts are natural explorers and adventurers, full of curiosity and trained to handle the out-of-the-way locations where they operate…. The scout seeks knowledge, tries to solve mysteries, and wants to be the first to see something new."[316] I designed the character after my childhood hero, Indiana Jones, and gave him the surname of the great frontier scout, Kit Carson (Jack happens to be my favorite name). Looking back, I find it interesting that Jack left school just a year shy of graduating. I played the character when I was in graduate school and now I wonder if some unconscious feelings were not bubbling up in my character design.

I wanted Jack to be always on the move and only happy when he had something new and exotic to explore. He lived for living the rough life in jungles and deserts, making him an oddity in a universe that is so developed, and putting him at odds with my own basic temperament given that a lifetime of health issues have made me an almost pathological homebody. As a character, Jack looked to the horizon, pushing his limits to discover new things about himself and his universe. This is why he makes for a solid epigraph for this chapter, much more so than the fact that he comes from a *Star Wars* game. I am of the mind that *Star Wars* is a fantasy wrapped in the trappings of science fiction, and in some ways Jack was me playing a science fiction character in this non-science fiction world. The themes of looking to the future, pushing the boundaries of what is known and believed, and calling into question what it means to be human

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[316] Slavicsek, Collins, and Wiker 47.

are all elements of science fiction, and are elements within this character (although, admittedly not so much the last one).

While Indiana Jones is certainly not science fiction, there were other influences as well, such as Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon—the men perennially out of time and place who use that to their advantage. There is also an overlap in the decidedly Western tone I gave Jack and that is also present in a great many works of science fiction. The genres of the Western and science fiction go surprisingly well together if handled correctly—Joss Whedon's *Firefly* being an excellent example. The nexus where *Star Wars*, Westerns, and science fiction collide is rooted in the notion of the frontier. We see this overtly in pulp science fiction stories, including the original *Star Trek*, but metaphorically in works of so-called "hard" science fiction as well. Jack was a scientist, an explorer, and an adventurer in a frontier that spanned light years.

As is probably already evident, science fiction comes in a variety of different flavors, and the issue of classifying a work as science fiction can be rather difficult. This chapter will tackle it briefly, but first we should outline exactly what this chapter will accomplish.

Chapter Overview: Celestial Games

This chapter will cover science fiction. Like the chapters on fantasy and horror, it will move from the description of certain key texts to the discussion of the specific play elements in this genre and the purposes behind science fiction's employing of overt game elements. As before, the idea is to provide a proof-of-concept model that can be applied to other science fiction works that may not have such striking uses of games and play. In particular, this chapter will focus on *The Player of Games* by Iain M. Banks, *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card, and *The Solar Lottery* by Philip K. Dick. In the process of discussing these texts, I will also occasionally bring up examples from other science fiction texts, movies, and television to bolster my assertions. I

133

wish to stress that in no way is this chapter an exhaustive examination of this fantasy subgenre; its purpose is to provide support for my claims about play and fantasy as well as a jumping-off point for future conversations.

The chapter's title, "Jeux de Commerce," comes from an old French name for a certain card game that relies more on skill than luck. Science fiction, unlike fantasy and horror (although more like the former than like the latter), presents worlds governed by *agôn*, *alea*, and *ludus*, where individuals succeed in society through talent, training, and only occasionally through luck. They display their merit by pitting their skills against societal institutions created and maintained by those in charge. In many science fiction stories, the players discover that the games represent something far more important and sometimes insidious than they were lead to believe. They are "corrupted," as Roger Caillois would call them, and the corruption involves a type of super-game that the protagonists play without realizing it. As was the case in worlds shown in the earlier chapters, games can and do become means for social control by the powers that be, and this often serves as a topic of exploration in science fiction.

Before moving on, one minor note should be made: as science fiction presents unique issues regarding classification in relation to the other two genres discussed in this work, the order of information in this chapter will be modified with the history of the genre and the question of classification occurring at the end, not the beginning.

The Player of Games

Iain M. Banks' *The Player of Games* takes place in humanity's far distant future, in a vast human-robot collective known as the Culture. In this series, humanity has taken to the stars and our civilization, our mores, even our bodies have become radically different. Humans have adopted a standard language called Marain, a synthetic language designed, much like the ill-fated

Esperanto, to "be phonetically and philosophically as expressive as the pan-human speech apparatus and the pan-human brain would allow."[317] Like their language, humans have become just as synthetic, able to undergo a procedure to change their gender any time they wish. Men can become women capable of being impregnated and carrying a baby to full term, and women can become capable of fathering a child. Humans also possess several synthetic glands able to produce any number of curative, sensory-enhancing, narcotic, or hallucinogenic effects. Almost paradoxically, this transhuman society engenders an incredibly permissive and peaceful culture that is remarkably free of almost all war, prejudice, and strife. In this world, machine intelligence has advanced to the point where it is indistinguishable (perhaps even superior to) human intelligence, and machines and humans coexist in a seemingly idyllic existence. For all intents and purposes, the Culture might as well be Heaven.

Of course, the problem with Heaven, as Mark Twain has told us, is that it can be so very boring. In the Culture people have careers, raise families, play games, and generally live lives of quiet fulfillment. Those desiring adventure join Contact, the branch of the Culture devoted to discovering, parlaying with, and—should the need arise—dealing with alien cultures. Still, some seem destined to wallow in the *ennui* that such a stable society can create, and one such person is Jernau Morat Gurgeh. Known as The Player of Games, Gurgeh is the Culture's supreme game player: a scholar-player who divides his time between writing academic papers on game theory and playing those games he discusses. He has reached the pinnacle of his career, but as the novel begins we find him dissatisfied, experiencing a vague but pervasive boredom. His friend, the drone Chamlis Amalk-ney, suggests that some of his dissatisfaction stems from a lack of danger in the games: "You enjoy your life in the Culture, but it can't provide you with sufficient threats;

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[317] Banks 311-312.

the true gambler needs the excitement of potential loss, even ruin, to feel wholly alive."[318]

Money and possessions are nonexistent in the Culture, and with those gone, the excitement of

losing or winning is significantly dulled.

Gurgeh's depression leads him to make a serious mistake, one that forces him to accept a

dangerous offer from Contact. Not too long after his conversation with Chamlis Amalk-ney,

Gurgeh attends a party where he meets a new game prodigy, Olz Hap. They play a game called

Stricken. Stricken is based on a mixture of strategy and chance. The board is a web and each

player has a number of beads and globes. Beads are hidden in the globes and each player must

devise a strategy for identifying which globes hold beads, how to acquire those globes, and how

to prevent one's own globes from being taken. Olz plays very well, and she even goes for a "Full

Web": "the simultaneous capture of every remaining point in the game-space."[319] If she pulls it

off, she would be the first person in the Culture to do so, surpassing even Gurgeh. However,

Olz's audacity leaves her open for an easy win by Gurgeh, but he sees an opportunity for himself

to pull off the Full Web. It is in this moment of weakness that Gurgeh is tempted by another

drone of his acquaintance, Mawhrin-Skel, a bitter machine that was kicked out of Contact

because of its emotional instability. Skel tells Gurgeh that it can use its sensors to peek into the

globes and let him know which ones contained the beads, giving Gurgeh the Full Web. Gurgeh

agrees, but Skel later uses this moment to blackmail him to help it get back into Contact. Gurgeh

has already been approached by Contact before to be an ambassador of sorts to the empire

Azad—a galactic civilization defined and ruled by an incredibly intricate game. The game is

such an integral part of Azadian culture that it takes its name from the game: Azad is the game

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[318] Banks 23.
[319] Banks 58.

and the empire. Gurgeh refuses at first, but Skel blackmails him into accepting with the condition that Contact reinstate Skel. Faced with having his reputation irrevocably ruined, Gurgeh accepts.

The central conceit of *The Player of Games* is that life itself can be seen as a game. On his trip to the ill-fated party, Gurgeh encounters a young game designer eager to show off his idea for a new game. The idea is fairly simplistic and it prompts Gurgeh to give his philosophy of life and games:

> All reality is a game. Physics at its most fundamental, the very fabric of our universe, results directly from the interaction of certain fairly simple rules, and chance; the same description may be applied to the best, most elegant and both intellectually and aesthetically satisfying games. By being unknowable, by resulting from events which, at the sub-atomic level, cannot be fully predicted, the future remains malleable, and retains the possibility of change, the hope of coming to prevail; victory, to use an unfashionable word. In this, the future is a game; time is one of the rules. Generally, all the best mechanistic games—those which can be played in any sense "perfectly," such as grid, Prallian scope, 'nkraytle, chess, Farnic dimensions—can be traced to civilizations lacking a relativistic view of the universe (let alone the reality). They are also, I might add, invariably pre-machine-sentience societies.[320]

There is quite a bit to unpack with this statement, but for the moment the key ideas I want to emphasize are the roles *agôn* and *alea* play in Gurgeh's idea of how the universe runs. Gurgeh voices a truly macroscopic view of the universe, and we see a dark, stochastic take on this viewpoint with the Azadians. The main difference between the Culture's point of view and the Azadians' is foreshadowed in Gurgeh's statement. The Azadians see an almost purely

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[320] Banks 48.

mechanistic universe. Chance plays a role in life and games, but there is the sense that one can master chance, or at least negate some of its effects by playing the game well.

The name "Azad" roughly translates to "machine" or "system," and it is the concept around which the empire structures its entire existence from the most basic level of language to who will become emperor:

> The idea… is that Azad is so complex, so subtle, so flexible and so demanding that it is as precise and comprehensive a model of life as it is possible to construct. Whoever succeeds at the game succeeds in life; the same qualities are required in each to ensure dominance… the set-up assumes that the game and life are the same thing….[321]

The idea of universe-as-game that Gurgeh tells the young game designer is radically different from the one the Azadians believe. Gurgeh accepts, and perhaps even enjoys, a certain level of uncertainty in life and games. Skill is important, as is gamespersonship, but one must accept at some point that some situations in games and in life are uncontrollable. This is nowhere apparent in Azad. The people believe that to master the game is to master life so much so that it becomes a type of self-fulfilling prophecy to the Azadians. A sense of rigid will permeates the idea of Azad, and because the entirety of its society is built upon the game, the idea of any real change is abhorrent. The emperor will change, as well as which governmental faction will win power, but those changes are like the swinging of a pendulum: it can go right or left, but never any other direction. This would not be a problem *per se* except the Azadian culture is extremely stratified based on economic, gender, and species lines (there are three sexes, male, female, and "apex"), and the ones at the bottom are horribly abused. Encrypted television channels exist only for the elites, depicting depraved, violent sexual acts forced on females, males, and even children.

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[321] Banks 93-94.

Conquered species are subjugated to the same treatment as the poor and powerless in Azadian society, and even though some Azadians want to abolish the system, it is so ingrained in their lives and society that it is nearly impossible for change to occur from the inside.

Change is the real reason why Gurgeh is sent by Contact to Azad. From the beginning he is told that he will have no chance of winning: that he will be lucky to survive his first match. Of course, Gurgeh not only survives, but thrives in the game. He becomes such a threat that some individuals in power make assassination attempts on him. Gurgeh survives those, too, and eventually faces the emperor in the final match. At this point, Gurgeh becomes so enmeshed in the game that he picks up many of the mannerisms and thought-processes of the Azadians. He stops speaking Marain and communicates only through the Azadian language, Eächic. This language shift worries the drone Contact had sent to protect Gurgeh, Flere-Imsaho:

> it had been briefed that when Culture people didn't speak Marain for a long time and did speak another language, they were liable to change; they acted differently, they started to think in that other language, they lost the carefully balanced interpretive structure of the Culture language, left its subtle shifts of cadence, tone and rhythm behind for, in virtually every case, something much cruder.[322]

Unlike Marain, Eächic was an "ordinary, evolved language, with rooted assumptions which substituted sentimentality for compassion and aggression for cooperation."[323] Partially due to this language shift, Gurgeh finds himself losing to the emperor. To help him, Flere-Imsaho begins speaking to the human only in Marain. At first this annoys Gurgeh, but he gradually begins to enjoy hearing his native tongue and he returns to the game with a renewed sense of optimism and purpose.

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[322] Banks 311.
[323] Banks 311-12.

The final game between Gurgeh and the emperor literally becomes a representation of the conflict between their two cultures. The thought-processes behind the game philosophies each culture employs are so ingrained in Gurgeh that he did not notice them until he began speaking Marain again: "The Emperor had set out to beat not just Gurgeh, but the whole Culture… he had set up his whole side of the match as an Empire, the very image of Azad… the way [Gurgeh]'d always played was that he played as the Culture. He'd habitually set up something like the society itself when he constructed his positions and deployed his pieces."[324] Once Gurgeh realized this, he began to play with renewed strength and vigor. He enjoys the game so much that he grows sad when he realizes he has won. Nicosar the Emperor, however, takes it quite a bit differently. He has his guards kill the spectators, sets off a series of bombs to destroy the palace, and attempts to kill Gurgeh. When Gurgeh asks him what he is doing, Nicosar replies, "[I] [m]ade the game real."[325] Flere-Imsaho saves Gurgeh, and as the palace burns and Contact ships enter the solar system to restore order, the drone informs him of the first of three major revelations:

> You've been used, Jernau Gurgeh…. The truth is, you *were* playing for the
> Culture, and Nicosar *was* playing for the Empire. I personally told the Emperor
> the night before the start of the last match that you really were our champion; if
> you won, we were coming in; we'd smash the Empire and impose our own order.
> If he won, we'd keep out for as long as he was Emperor and for the next ten Great
> Years anyway…. That's why Nicosar did all he did. He wasn't just a sore loser;

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[324] Banks 340-41.
[325] Banks 366-67.

he'd lost his Empire. He had nothing else to live for, so why not go in a blaze of

glory?[326]

Flere-Imsaho goes on to say that the Empire has been poised to fall for quite some time; it just

needed that final push over the edge. However, to go in with "all guns blazing" would have been

the wrong move; instead, Contact needs to discredit Azad—the foundation of the entire

Empire—and it uses Gurgeh to do that.

The second revelation comes at the end of the novel, after Gurgeh has returned home.

Hanging on a plaque on his wall is the lifeless husk of Mawhrin-Skel, and inside that husk

Gurgeh finds a small cavity just large enough to fit a drone the size of Flere-Imsaho. The third

revelation relates directly to this. The story is presented by an unknown narrator who reveals

itself at the end as Flere-Imsaho, who cheekily signs in parenthesis and quotation marks under

his name "Mawhrin-Skel." Gurgeh has been right all along in suspecting that Contact is lying to

him, but up until the end neither he nor the reader knew the extent of its manipulations. Thus

Gurgeh has ended up playing several games during the course of the novel: first there was Azad,

and then there was the game he played with the Azadian culture, and finally the game he was

playing for and with Contact. He turned out to be a small yet integral part of the super-game

going on between Contact and the Empire.

I will return to this work later, but now we will move on to discuss *Ender's Game*.

Ender's Game

Even though he is only six years old, Andrew "Ender" Wiggin may be humanity's only hope for

survival in an intergalactic war. The youngest of three children, Ender is classified as a "Third":

a child whose existence was specially commissioned by the government, suspending the standard

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[326] Banks 376.

rule that families can have no more than two children. Like his brother, Peter, and his sister, Valentine, Ender is a genius, able to think at a level so far beyond what he should be capable of at the age of six that he only qualifies as a child in the most academic sense. At this age the government takes him away to join the military with the express purpose of molding him into a new Napoleon or Alexander. If they fail to do so, then humanity itself will fall. Like *The Player of Games*, *Ender's Game* uses the concept of games in multiple ways. On the surface there are the various war games and recreational games that Ender and his classmates play to hone their skills, but underlying that are the games that the school administrators play with Ender—the constant manipulation of his rank, grade, and living situation, and the perpetual attempts to isolate him from his fellow students and the staff—and, finally, the last game Ender plays turns out to be anything but.

The two most important games Ender plays while in Battle School fall under two fuzzy categories: mind games and physical games. Even though the school provides an arcade in the student lounge, Ender soon grows bored with the games provided and turns to his "desk," an electronic tablet much like today's iPad. When he plays games on the tablet, he controls an avatar of himself and guides it through a fairytale world full of Jungian symbols such as the primeval forest and the giant's castle, all of which are populated with archetypal characters like wolves, snakes, giants, and even Ender's shadow self, in the form of his older brother Peter. The game is exploratory in nature, with Ender's only goal to discern the limits of the game world. Along the way he encounters obstacles and must discern how to overcome them in order to move on: "It was a shifting, crazy kind of game in which the school computer kept bringing up new things, building a maze that you could explore…. Sometimes they were funny things. Sometimes exciting ones, and he had to be quick to stay alive. He had lots of deaths, but that was OK, games

were like that, you died a lot until you got the hang of it."[327] One particular section of the tablet game becomes very important to the story. In this section Ender's avatar becomes a mouse. He guides his mouse self to a giant's castle and there meets its owner. The giant gives the Ender mouse an option. He places two cups in front of him; one is filled with poison and the other with something harmless. If Ender chooses the correct cup, he can pass to the next area, but if he refuses to play, the giant will eat him. Ender soon learns that the game is rigged: the drink he chooses will always kill him. Frustrated, Ender changes the game. He kicks over one of the glasses and scrambles his way to the giant's face where he burrows into the monster's eye, killing it. With the giant dead, Ender now finds himself free to go to the next area, Fairyland; however, instead of proceeding, he turns off his tablet and goes to bed: "He hadn't meant to kill the Giant. This was supposed to be a game. Not a choice between his own grisly death and an even worse murder. I'm a murderer, even when I play. Peter would be proud of me."[328] This is a telling moment for Ender. He unconsciously assumes that a game should not feature death and murder; at least not on the "grisly" level that he experiences with the giant. Ender has no problem with dying. As he states earlier, dying is part of games. What disturbs him about this particular situation is that the explicit parameters of the game situation do not allow him to find a nonviolent solution. The game is rigged and the only way he can win, to advance to the next area, is by ignoring the established game—the guessing game the Giant sets up—and murdering the gamemaster. This scene illustrates two important points about Ender's character: his ability to empathize with his enemy, and his fear of becoming like his sociopathic brother, Peter.

The other important game takes place in the battleroom: a zero-g area of the school where the students engage in war games. The students are divided into different armies designated by

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[327] Card 45.
[328] Card 47.

animal names both real and mythical, such as Rat, Rabbit, and Phoenix. Just like a regular army, the school armies are lead by a commander who has platoon leaders under him or her. Each child wears a flash suit, a garment that covers him or her from head to toe, and wields a mock laser pistol. Whenever the light from a laser pistol hits a combatant, his or her flash suit seizes in whatever position he or she is in at the moment. This is to simulate what would happen in a real fight with weaponized lasers, as well as a way to keep score. The battleroom scenarios allow for the students to learn how to work together as a team, develop tactics, and learn how to fight, but it also serves as a way to help the students learn how to navigate zero gravity. Ender excels at the battleroom bouts because of his tactical genius, but also because of his understanding of how soldiers need to readjust their thinking about spatial orientation in zero gravity: "In nullo, there was no reason to stay oriented the way he had left the corridor. It was impossible to tell, looking at the perfectly square doors, which way had been up. And it didn't matter. For now Ender had found the orientation that made sense. The enemy's gate was down. The object of the game was to fall toward the enemy's home."[329] This is the first lesson Ender teaches his own squad once he is given command, and that plus his unconventional strategies ensure that his army runs undefeated, even though the school administrators constantly change the game to make each confrontation as hard as possible on Ender's Dragon Army. The students fight two battles a day, often without warning, sometimes against more than one army. Ender consistently voices his outrage at the unfairness of the administrators, but he still wins each time.

Part of Ender's genius lies in his near constant evaluation of every situation in terms of games. Everything he does or says is measured against his own internal cost-benefit ratio. At the beginning of the novel, before Ender goes off to Battle School, a group of bullies corner him in his school. Ender kicks the ring leader, sending him to the ground. The others back away, not

[329] Card 64.

144

sure what to do, but Ender, even though he is only six, is already thinking ahead: "Ender… was trying to figure out a way to forestall vengeance. To keep them from taking him in a pack tomorrow. I have to win this now, and for all time, or I'll fight it every day and it will get worse and worse." [330] To win, Ender decides to break the rules of "manly warfare" and proceeds to kick the boy even though he is on the ground, helpless. Afterwards he turns to the rest of the group and says, "You might be having some idea of ganging up on me. You could probably beat me up pretty bad. But just remember what I do to people who try to hurt me. From then on you'd be wondering when I'd get you, and how bad it would be."[331] This moment of calculated and cautionary violence is what finally convinces the Battle School administration that Ender is the boy they are looking for, not because he acted violently, but because of the level of strategic thinking and ruthlessness that motivates the action.

The administrators of the Battle School immediately set Ender apart from the others. On the shuttle leaving for the school, Ender's recruiter, Graff, immediately begins praising Ender as the hope for humanity, a claim that does not sit well with Ender's peers. This plus Ender's obvious superiority in tactical thinking make him an instant pariah. The situation grows worse once Ender gains command of his own army and begins defeating the other commanders despite being far younger than all of them: "There were many, too, who hated him. Hated him for being young, for being excellent, for having made their victories look paltry and weak."[332] The situation comes to a head when a group of commanders, lead by Ender's former commander, Bonzo Madrid, confront Ender. Just like before, Ender finds himself alone, facing a group of older boys out to hurt him; only this time Bonzo wants to kill him. Ender manages to knock down the older boy, and just like before, he attacks with a ruthless, calculated brutality. The

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[330] Card 5.
[331] Card 5.
[332] Card 132.

145

teachers arrive only after the fight ends, and Ender thinks, "There was no help for him. Whatever he faced, now and forever, no one would save him from it."[333] The audience, however, knows that the situation is more complicated than Ender suspects. Ender has an inkling that the teachers allow these situations because they want him to toughen up, but he remains enough of a child to view his relationship with them as purely antagonistic. What he does not realize is how difficult these decisions are for the teachers, or how dire Earth's situation actually is. We the readers know because each chapter begins with a fragment of conversation between the two heads of the Battle School, Anderson and Graff. We see the pain they feel for Ender, and the knowledge that what they are doing is unconscionable. Of course, this does not stop them.

The final deception occurs at Command School. There Ender meets the hero of the first and second wars against the Buggers: Mazer Rackham, a man who turns out to be Ender's intellectual superior. Rackham tells Ender that he will be playing a simulation game where he commands an entire star fleet and that he will be Ender's opponent. The games push Ender to the brink of exhaustion. He begins experiencing terrible nightmares and he refuses to eat unless ordered. Ender becomes so desperate to end the games that he does something unforgivable in what he believes to be his final test: he destroys a planet. Once this happens the room full of military brass erupts in cheers, much to Ender's confusion: "Had he passed the test after all? It was *his* victory, not theirs, and a hollow one at that, a cheat; why did they act as if he had won with honor?"[334] Rackham then reveals the truth: Ender had never been playing against him, he had actually been commanding the Third Invasion—the invasion of the Bugger's homeworld. Later Graff explains:

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[333] Card 149.
[334] Card 207.

It had to be a trick or you couldn't have done it. It's the bind we were in. We had

to have a commander with so much empathy that he would think like the buggers,

understand them and anticipate them. So much compassion that he could win the

love of his underlings and work with them like a perfect machine, as perfect as the

buggers. But somebody with that much compassion could never be the killer we

needed. Could never go into battle willing to win at all costs. If you knew, you

couldn't do it. It you were the kind of person who would do it even if you knew,

you could never have understood the buggers well enough.[335]

Rackham then explains why it had to be a child, saying, "You were faster than me. Better than

me. I was too old and cautious. Any decent person who knows what warfare is can never go into

battle with a whole heart. But you didn't know. We made sure you didn't know. You were

reckless and brilliant and young. It's what you were born for."[336] One of the basic conditions of

play requires that the results hold no meaning outside of the play experience, and the military use

that presupposition to trick Ender into being deadly and ruthless in ways that he never would

have been had he known real people were fighting and dying. The novel is like a matryoshka

doll—games hidden within games that hide within games. The more the novel strips away the

outer shells the closer the reader approaches the super-game lying at the heart of everything: the

war between the humans and the Buggers. The super-game corrupts every other game Ender

plays and it leaves an indelible mark on the boy. At the tender age of twelve, Ender Wiggin

becomes the savior of humanity and the destroyer of an entire alien species. The other novels in

the series cover how Ender deals with this terrible burden, but the first novel makes it clear that

he is broken, perhaps irrevocably.

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[335] Card 208.
[336] Card 208-09.

The Solar Lottery

Jernau Gurgeh and Ender Wiggin rise to such high, respected positions in their respective

societies on the strength of their skill at playing games. Other the sheer chance of genetics that

combined to produce these two extraordinary individuals, luck plays an almost insignificant role

in their successes and failures. But in Philip K. Dick's *The Solar Lottery*, chance reigns supreme,

and an individual's skills, education, and determination matter for very little. In the novel, every

human in the solar system plays the lottery. Everyone is issued a unique power card, much like

U.S. social security cards. Each power card number is inputted into the master quiz computer

located in Geneva, and the owner of whichever card the computer randomly picks becomes the

Quizmaster, the most powerful person in the solar system. Dick never goes into the actual

mechanics of the quiz other than saying that it has something to do with minimax game strategy

and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. When and how the computer picks the next Quizmaster

depends entirely on the random, unpredictable movement of subatomic particles. To make

matters more interesting, the new Quizmaster will face the Challenge: the recently ousted

Quizmaster will contract an assassin who will have a certain amount of time to kill the new ruler.

If the assassin succeeds, then the former Quizmaster will return to his or her post. As the

character Moore explains:

> The whole bottle system [i.e., the lottery] is to protect us; it elevates and deprives
>
> at random, chooses random individuals at random intervals. Nobody can gain
>
> power and hold it; nobody knows what his status will be next year, next week.
>
> Nobody can plan to be a dictator: it comes and goes according to subatomic
>
> random particles. The Challenge protects us from something else. It protects us

from incompetents, from fools and madmen. We're completely safe: no despots and no crackpots.[337]

The Challenge serves three functions: it acts as a failsafe to protect society from dangerous or insane individuals raised to this supreme position; it cements the leadership of the new Quizmaster (should he or she succeed in surviving) by demonstrating a certain amount of competency and skill; and it provides a form of entertainment for the general public. The protection of the Quizmasters new and old falls to a group of highly-trained telepaths loyal to the position, not the individual, and they prove a formidable obstacle to deposed Quizmasters.

Supposedly the "bottle system" works as a great equalizer, but the majority of individuals exist in perpetual servitude to huge corporations. People are graded based on their intelligence and aptitude in mathematics and the sciences. They swear loyalty oaths to companies, and breaking those oaths brings severe punishment, including death. And these are the lucky ones. Individuals with physical skill sets—mechanics and farmers, for example—occupy the bottom rung of the social ladder: "These were people with skill in their hands—not their heads. Their abilities had come from years of practice and work, from direct contact with objects. They could grow plants, sink foundations, repair leaking pipes, maintain machinery, weave clothing, cook meals. According to the Classification system they were failures."[338] The protagonist, Ted Bentley, has held a high 8-8 position at the Oiseau-Lyre Hill conglomerate, but finds himself laid off at the novel's beginning. Instead of despairing, Bentley is overjoyed, because joblessness provides him with an opportunity to work for the office of the Quizmaster. Throughout the novel, Bentley expresses a vague but powerful dissatisfaction with the system and a desire to work for something greater than himself—greater than humanity. He quickly becomes

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[337] Dick 37.
[338] Dick 19.

149

disappointed when the Quizmaster hires him. Instead of serving the office, Bentley discovers he must take a loyalty oath to the current Quizmaster, Reese Verrick, and to make matters worse, Verrick has just lost his position.

With the telepaths acting as bodyguards, the chances of an assassin's succeeding are extremely low. Assassins in the past found ways to randomize their strategies to keep the mind readers from knowing what was going on, but even that has only worked rarely. One of Verrick's employees, Moore, concocts a plan to bend the Challenge's rules and create a more effective assassin. Moore constructs an android he names Keith Pellig. The android possesses no intelligence or operating system of any kind; instead it acts as a vehicle for another person's consciousness. Moore keeps a group of people on standby and randomly switches who pilots Pellig to confuse the telepaths. The strategy works, but during the course of the operation Bentley discovers that Moore not only controls when and who pilots Pellig, but plans on transporting Bentley into the machine just before a nuclear device stored in its thorax detonates. Bentley manages to survive, and he then switches sides to work for the new Quizmaster, Leon Cartwright. He then learns Cartwright tampered with the machine and orchestrated his rise to power: "I played the game for years…. Most people go on playing the game all their lives. Then I began to realize the rules were set up so I couldn't win. Who wants to play that kind of game? We're betting against the house and the house always wins."[339] Cartwright had belonged to the lowest class of society, the manual laborers. Specifically, he worked in electronics, and the office of the Quizmaster hired him when he was younger to make routine repairs. He used the opportunity to introduce a bias into the machine, just enough that he could influence and predict the outcome. The book ends with Cartwright selling Bentley the power card the machine will pick next because he knows that Bentley will try to change the system.

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[339] Dick 189.

Despite being written by Philip K. Dick, who is known for his surreal and complex plots, *The Solar Lottery* is a rather straightforward story lacking the complexity of the other two texts above. However, *The Solar Lottery* provides an important contrast to them because of the importance it gives to chance. The novel provides a window to a world where chance matters more than skill, where *alea* trumps *agôn*, and what makes that so fascinating is the level of neuroticism the system engenders. The very first paragraph of *The Solar Lottery* describes the importance of portents and omens:

> There had been harbingers. Early in May of 2203, news-machines were excited by a flight of white crows over Sweden. A series of unexplained fires demolished half the Oiseau-Lyre Hill, a basic industrial pivot of the system. Small round stones fell near work-camp installations on Mars. At Batavia, the Directorate of the nine-planet Federation, a two-headed Jersey calf was born: a certain sign that something of incredible magnitude was brewing…. Everybody interpreted these signs according to his own formula; speculation on what the random forces of nature intended was a favorite pastime. Everybody guessed, consulted, and argued about the bottle—the socialized instrument of chance. Directorate fortunetellers were booked up weeks in advance.[340]

The importance of signs, the government-sanctioned augers, and sheer impact these random events have on the entire populace of the solar system harken back to modes of thinking when fate and luck were essentially one and the same and could somehow be discerned, quantified, and influenced. Also, again in contrast with the other two texts, there is no super-game occurring here. The game system stands as the antagonist, and none of the characters discover that their

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[340] Dick 1.

game represents anything larger, nor that they played for any larger stakes than they realized. The corruption of the game lies in its players, not in the game itself.

This concludes the summary portion of the chapter. Now we will move on to discussing in more detail the play elements within these works and how they are emblematic of the science fiction genre.

Ludus, *Paidia*, *Agôn*, and *Alea* in Science Fiction

Briefly to review, if Caillois is correct, then the historical trajectory human societies follow goes like this: it begins with *ilinx* and *mimicry*, where certain members of the society represent vague, abstract powers and lead their group in communal rituals that appeal to the gods for healing, wealth, and prosperity. This phase relies heavily on the use of masks, secrecy, and the transforming of *paidia*, the spirit of free, uncontrollable, destructive play, to *ludus*: structured, systematic play. The reliance on masks and secrecy make this period unsustainable, but powerful; at some point, some member of the group will peek behind the curtain and see the old man running the machinery, so to speak, taking away the majority of his power. However, the emotions behind *ilinx* and *mimicry* and their thought-processes still hold great sway over us today, so much so that elements of these categories still exist and influence us. Regardless of this incredible staying power, *ilinx* and *mimicry* eventually fall to the wayside and make way for *agôn* and *alea*. Caillois writes:

> Some primitive societies, which I prefer to call "Dionysian," be they [Aboriginal] Australian, [Native] American, or [precolonial] African, are societies ruled equally by masks and possession, i.e. by *mimicry* and *ilinx*. Conversely, the Incas, Assyrians, Chinese, or Romans are orderly societies with offices, careers, codes, and ready-reckoners, with fixed and hierarchical privileges in which *agôn* and

alea, i.e. merit and hereditary, seem to be the chief complementary elements of the game of living. In contrast to the primitive societies, these are "rational." In the first type there are simulation and vertigo or pantomime and ecstasy which assure the intensity and, as a consequence, the cohesion of social life. In the second type, the social nexus consists of compromise, of an implied reckoning between hereditary, which is a kind of chance, and capacity, which presupposes evaluation and competition.[341]

The movement from fantasy to science fiction follows this trajectory. Even when science fiction follows Arthur C. Clarke's famous dictum that any suitably advanced technology will seem like magic to less advanced minds, it has no effect on the social structure in the story. If fantasy is Dionysian, science fiction is Apollonian.

Let us look again at the two poles of play: *paidia* and *ludus*. As mentioned above in chapter one, *paidia* is the urge for free, unregulated play, play that often takes a destructive form. *Ludus*, on the other hand, is the urge to structure and build. It "disciplines and enriches" *paidia*, often leading to training and the acquisition and mastery of special skills.[342] To give an example, think of the of the difference between two children play fighting in the school yard compared to the fighting of professional boxers or mixed martial artists. Play fighting often erupts spontaneously and typically takes place with little to no skill displayed by the fighters other than whatever natural athletic ability they may possess. A boxing match, on the other hand, looks quite different. It takes place in an agreed upon space at an agreed upon time; it follows preset rules, such as strictures against hitting "below the belt"; and each bout takes place in three minute rounds punctuated by brief, but also precisely timed rest periods. A referee enforces the

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[341] Caillois, *Man, Play* 87.
[342] Caillois, *Man, Play* 29.

rules, and judges score each round. The fighters display a high amount of technical skill in how they move, how they throw punches, and how they avoid punches.

Ludus shares many characteristics with *agôn*, or the spirit of competition. The difference between the two, as Caillois points out, lies in the fact that "in *ludus* the tension and skill of the player are not related to any explicit feeling of emulation or rivalry: the conflict is with the obstacle, not with one or several competitors."[343] Of all the different permutations of play (*agôn*, *alea*, *ilinx*, and *mimicry*), *ludus* pairs most closely with *agôn*. Games that fall at the farthest end of the *ludus* pole include solitaire, kite flying, and crossword puzzles;[344] however, other good examples of *ludus*, such as chess, also fall under *agôn*. This dual desire for competition and structure constitutes the core conflict in both *The Player of Games* and *Ender's Game.* Ender's main opponent is not the buggers, nor his classmates, but the game system that the teachers impose on them, just as Jernau Gurgeh's opponent is not the Azadians, but the game Azad. In both novels, it is nearly impossible to separate the system from the individuals that run it. *The Solar Lottery* differs significantly in this respect, as in others.

Even though Ender must deal with the hatred and envy of his classmates, his true enemies are the teachers. They control practically every aspect of his life: his army assignments; his grade level; his curriculum; and the time, opponents, and conditions of his battleroom skirmishes. Graff outlines what the School needs to do in order to create in Ender the Alexander they so sorely need: "we have to strike a delicate balance. Isolate him enough that he remains creative—otherwise he'll adopt the system here and we'll lose him. At the same time we need to make sure he keeps a strong ability to lead."[345] Ender realizes what Graff is doing almost immediately when Graff begins praising the boy after the shuttle to Battle School is launched: "When the sergeant

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[343] Caillois, *Man, Play* 29.
[344] Caillois, *Man, Play* 29-30.
[345] Card 20.

154

picked on you, the others liked you better. But when the officer prefers you, the others hate you."[346] Despite the praise he receives, Ender does not gain preferential treatment from the teachers, and he finds himself at odds with both the administrators and the students. To survive, he learns to navigate the various social and academic systems in place: he carefully and methodically cultivates friends and neutralizes enemies. When one group of bullies led by a student named Bernard harasses Ender, he cleverly undermines the boy's authority by sending anonymous messages implying that Bernard is a homosexual. The content of the accusation mattered little compared to its effect on Bernard. Like most bullies, Bernard cannot stand to have his authority questioned, and he despises being laughed at. Ender manages to upset Bernard so much that the boy mouths off to one of the administrators. At that moment Bernard loses practically all authority and not a little bit of dignity: "Bernard was contained, and all the boys who had some quality were free of him. Best of all, Ender had done it without sending him to the hospital. Much better this way."[347] Again, Ender's innate ability to think strategically, to view situations in terms of power dynamics and cost-benefit ratios, has helped him survive a potentially harmful situation. But it is not the boys he is truly fighting against, it is the system: the social norms and mores that dictate who holds what position within the cloistered hierarchy of Battle School that Graff immediately uses against him in order to incite enmity between the rest of the students and Ender.

That enmity forces Ender to be constantly on guard, and consequently he never truly adapts to the social systems set in place, other than following the demands of military protocol that even he cannot defy. However, the system that Graff wants Ender to break is not social, but tactical. In Ender's first battleroom skirmish, he serves under Commander Bonzo Madrid, the

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[346] Card 22.
[347] Card 38.

boy that will later try to kill him. The teachers transfer Ender to Bonzo's Army (called

Salamander) far too early and with no warning for either Ender or Bonzo, and thus Bonzo views

Ender's forced inclusion in his Army as an insult, leading him to order Ender not to participate in

the battleroom sessions. From the sidelines, Ender sees both Bonzo's weakness as a commander

and the inherent weakness in the traditional battle strategies that all the commanders use, which

are almost like choreographed dance routines:

> The well-rehearsed formations were a mistake. It allowed soldiers to obey shouted
>
> orders instantly, but it also meant they were predictable. Also, the individual
>
> soldiers were given little initiative. Once a pattern was set, they were to follow it
>
> through. There was no room for adjustment to what the enemy did against the
>
> formation. Ender studied Bonzo's formations like an enemy commander would,
>
> noting ways to disrupt his formation.[348]

When he finally gains command of his own army, Ender takes what he learns from observing

Bonzo and employs a completely different strategy. Although exhausting and frustrating, the

administration's constant changing of the rules keeps a constant sense of pressure on Ender, and

prompts him to improvise continually. This pressure, coupled with his natural tactical genius and

his inability to become tied to the established system, make Ender unstoppable on the battlefield.

The form of *ludus* and *agôn* change when Ender enters Command School. At first Ender

plays solely against the computer, as he learns the intricacies of commanding a fleet. This

moment is almost pure *ludus*: Ender's only opponent is the machine, and playing against it

teaches him valuable skills that will translate to a real command. Once Ender masters the game,

he requests a harder challenge. Enter Mazer Rackham. Mazer tells him that from now on, he will

be the boy's opponent, thereby introducing *agôn* into the equation. However, as we already have

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[348] Card 61.

found out, it is all a lie. By cloaking the battles in the guise of *ludus*, the military brass allow Ender to play free of concern for morality or humanity. Like chess, the ships Ender uses in his game matter only in terms of their usefulness. Sacrificing a pawn is easy; sacrificing a human being is another matter entirely.

Ender's importance to the war colors everything he does and experiences. The pressure to excel, at times, nearly crushes the boy. He has to be outstanding to survive Battle School, and he has to be outstanding because the very survival of humanity may very well be up to him. Jernau Gurgeh, on the other hand, feels no such pressure. Gurgeh has no idea what his playing actually stands for until the very end of the novel, and despite the fact that Flere-Imshao in the guise of Mawhrin-Skel blackmails him into working for Contact, Gurgeh quickly becomes immersed in Azad. He never fully recognizes what he represents to the Azadians and only plays because the game thrills him so thoroughly. He loves playing the game so much that he despairs when he sees that he has won: "He looked back at the board, hoping desperately that he might have missed something Nicosar could do, that the perfect dance might last a little longer…. Over over over. His—their—beautiful game over; dead."[349] For Gurgeh the game's conclusion represents the end of a highly pleasurable, near transcendental moment, but for Nicosar the game's ending means the loss of his empire. Gurgeh knows that he has represented the Culture in the game, but he cares nothing about that; all that matters to him is pitting his skill against other players in this fantastically elaborate, almost byzantine game. In fact, Gurgeh displays an almost willful ignorance of what he represents, almost as if he desires to keep the game in the realm of purest *ludus*. Before the final match, the Emperor Nicosar meets with Gurgeh privately and asks him if he is proud of his Culture. At first Gurgeh does not understand, prompting Nicosar to explain: "Don't be simple, Gurgeh. I mean the pride of being part of something. The pride of representing

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[349] Banks 350.

157

your people. Are you going to tell me you don't feel that?" To which Gurgeh replies, "I… some,

perhaps yes… but I'm not here as a champion, Nicosar. I'm not representing anything except

myself. I'm here to play the game, that's all."[350] Gurgeh, of course, deludes himself there. Even

though he does play with no goal other than the enjoyment of the game, he cannot help but carry

a whole host of meaning and emotion with him just by representing another civilization. He

views the competition in terms of *ludus*, but Nicosar (and the rest of the Azadians) think of it

almost entirely as *agôn*.

There also exist strong strains of *mimicry* in the Azadian view of the game. In a fit of

rage, Nicosar lashes out at Gurgeh, saying:

> "Repulsed" is barely adequate for what I feel for your precious Culture, Gurgeh.
>
> I'm not sure I possess the words to explain to you what I feel for your… Culture.
>
> You know no glory, no pride, no worship. You have power; I've seen that; I know
>
> what you can do… but you're still impotent. You always will be. The meek, the
>
> pathetic, the frightened and cowed… they can only last so long, no matter how
>
> terrible and awesome the machines they crawl around within. In the end you will
>
> fall; all your glittering machinery won't save you. The strong survive. That's what
>
> life teaches us, Gurgeh, that's what the game shows us. Struggle to prevail; fight
>
> to prove worth. These are no hollow phrases; they are truth![351]

Caillois writes that *mimicry* survives in the modern world in the diluted form of *identification*[352].

Identification leads to celebrity and hero worship in contemporary societies, because even

though the majority of individuals no longer believe in people anointed by fate or the gods, there

are still those who rise above the average and seem to touch something greater than ourselves.

[350] Banks 357.
[351] Banks 358.
[352] Caillois 120.

Jung writes that these people become invested with *mana,* or magical power, by the community. In societies where *mimicry* and *ilinx* reign supreme, these people would be considered otherworldly creatures such as sorcerers, witches, and werewolves,[353] but in societies ruled by *agôn* and *alea* they become movie stars or professional athletes or politicians. In the Azadian Empire, they become Emperors and other government officials. Gurgeh possesses no little measure of *mana* within the Culture, but he either does not realize it, or simply does not care. Nicosar, however, understands his position and its importance as well as what he and the game represent to him and his people, both in general and specifically against Gurgeh. It cannot be overstated how much the game means to Nicosar and his culture, and his speech indicates the importance of *identification* to him and his anger at Gurgeh's apparent apathy towards the *agôn*-istic properties of Azad.

Gurgeh's attitude is decidedly ironic because he well understands on an academic level the importance of games to a culture: "Gurgeh never ceased to be fascinated by the way a society's games revealed so much about its ethos, its philosophy, its very soul."[354] He views games as socially revelatory or descriptive, but appears unable or unwilling to understand how a game can also be prescriptive for or dangerous to a society. Contact understands this, and that is why they send him to play the game. The game of Azad needs to be discredited in order for the Empire to fall. Gurgeh's beating of the Emperor shakes the self-aggrandizing Azadian philosophy to its core. He displays superior skill in Azad, and to the Azadians that translates to his and his culture's being just plain superior. Despite his dogged insistence that he has only been playing against the game, Gurgeh is in an *agôn*-istic conflict with the entire Empire.

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[353] Jung, *Modern Man* 145.
[354] Banks 34.

The Solar Lottery acts as a counterweight to *Ender's Game* and *The Player of Games* because the system in and of itself is the enemy. Before Leon Cartwright introduces the mathematical bias into the machine, he had searched for years for the "right" strategy to beat the system, until he finally comes to the realization that the lottery system is perfect: "I realized I couldn't predict it. Nobody could. The Uncertainty Principle is on the level; the movement of sub-atomic particles on which the twitches are based is beyond human calculation."[355] As stated before, the world Bentley, Verrick, and Cartwright live in is ruled entirely by chance. Personal skill matters less than having the right numbered power card. Typically *alea* acts as a regulatory system against *agôn*; indeed, Caillois links *agôn* and *alea* together as one of two fundamental pairings of game types. He writes: "Recourse to chance helps people tolerate competition that is unfair or too rugged. At the same time, it leaves hope in the dispossessed that free competition is still possible in the lowly stations in life, which are the most numerous."[356] The concept of *agôn* presupposes a fair and equal field of play, but perfectly matched competition never happens. Institutions like lotteries allow for at least the illusion of change, but they work in conjunction or as a prop for *agôn*-istic institutions like sports arenas and schools where individuals can acquire and display skill sets and attributes that their society deems important. The world established in *The Solar Lottery* works backward, and while the system may be perfect, its results absolutely are not.

The solar lottery breeds mass neuroticism in the population and spurs a troubling regression in social thinking. At one time chance and fate were practically interchangeable; recalling David Schwartz: "The First ventures into chance were usually more religious than

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[355] Dick 189.
[356] Caillois 115.

recreational."[357] The casting of lots, the precursors of odds and evens games, even dicing, all originated in religious activities meant to divine the will of the gods. In *The Solar Lottery,* people futilely look to natural signs and portents and book meetings with government-supported augers to try to find any way to discern, and control, the outcome of the lottery. The society Dick depicts strongly resembles that of ancient China, where oracles called *shih* became the "respected scholar gentry" because of their ability to understand divine will,[358] as well as that of America near the end of the nineteenth century, when citizens were obsessed with lotteries; whole cottage industries of soothsayers and fortunetellers emerged, as did dream books that instructed people on how to discern the numerological significance of their dreams.[359] As noted in chapter one, Jung wrote that humans in societies ruled by *agôn* and *alea* despise the notion of luck and actively discount the significance of synchronicitous events, unless something comes along that frightens or disturbs them out of their socially-molded thought patterns. Attributing cosmic importance to random or coincidental events is a hallmark of mimetic cultures, and yet even though *The Solar Lottery* takes place in the nebulous future, the majority of the populace exhibit highly *mimetic* thinking—with one exception: Reese Verrick, who complains, "[s]o we're all a bunch of superstitious fools…. Everybody's trying to read signs and harbingers. Everybody's trying to explain two-headed calves and flocks of white crows. We're all depended on random chance; we're losing control because we can't plan."[360] Verrick is one of the few characters who does not invest in charms or soothsayers. Even though he has benefitted from the system, he expresses a very *agôn*-istic view. He puts faith in plans and intelligence and for this reason surrounds himself with intelligent people he can use with rational purpose.

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[357] Schwartz 6.
[358] Schwartz 16.
[359] Schwartz 151.
[360] Dick 59.

Caillois writes that the pairing *agôn-alea*, or merit and chance, works to augment the "role of justice to the detriment of that of chance."[361] The mindset of *agôn* holds fairness and equality as the highest ideals. Even though complete equality is unattainable, the pursuit of it works to benefit the of all. *Alea*, on the other hand, never plays fair. Whether scientifically random or divinely driven, chance falls on whomever it wishes, and as Dick shows us, basing an entire society around it results in supreme unhappiness and neuroticism. Tellingly, all four main characters in the novel all try to cheat the system. Moore creates the Pellig android for Verrick so he can cheat the Challenge system in order to regain power; Cartwright manipulates the machine so it will pick him to be Quizmaster, while he secretly sends a ship of so-called "undesirables" to the outer edge of the solar system for a mythical tenth planet that would be outside of the lottery's jurisdiction; and Bentley buys the power card from Cartwright in order to become the next Quizmaster and dismantle the system. They all feel that a healthy degree of *agôn* needs to be introduced into the equation in order to balance out the unfairness of a system based solely on *alea*.

And with that we end the conversation directly concerning these specific texts. Now we will move to the broader issue of situating science fiction in relation to fantasy and horror.

Science Fiction vs. Fantasy and Horror

In the above analysis of three classic science fiction novels, I have tried to show how play theory illuminates these imagined futures of this fantasy subgenre, particularly in the drive towards *ludus* and in seeking a proper balancing of the socially advanced game pairing of *agôn -alea*. Before the three chapters of literary analysis come to a close here, I will take a step back to attempt to redefine science fiction from the perspective of play and games, and will recapitulate

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[361] Caillois 78.

how science fiction fits into the wider generic patterns of fantasy relative to the subgenres of epic fantasy (chapter two) and horror (chapter three). While I foregrounded the definitions of the subgenres within those chapters, I have made the tactical decision to wait until the end of this chapter to explore defining science fiction because this is particularly fraught critical problem.

The idea of science fiction as a separate category first appeared in 1930 in Hugo Gernsback's editorial for issue one of *Science Wonder Stories*. There Gernsback referred to the genre as "scientifiction," but his term never quite took. Science fiction emerged from a number of distinct genres including fantasy, utopian fiction, and space operas,[362] and perhaps that is one reason why it has been notoriously difficult to classify. Damon Knight famously said that "Science fiction is what we point to when we say it," and Norman Spinrad once stated that "Science fiction is anything published as science fiction."[363] Although not helpful for any kind of academic classifying of the genre, Knight and Spinrad illustrate an important point about this genre: what we label "science fiction" often results from very subjective decisions.

In trying to define science fiction I enter into a rather distinguished group; among those that have tried to define this genre are:

> Edgar Fawcett, Edgar Allan Poe, William Wilson, John W. Campbell Jr., J.O. Bailey (*Pilgrims through Space and Time* 1947), James Blish, Reginald Bretnor, Robert A. Heinlein, Damon Knight, Theodore Sturgeon, Kingsley Amis, Sam Moskowitz, Judith Merril, Brian W. Aldiss, J.G. Ballard, Darko Suvin, Peter Nicholls, John Clute, Robert Scholes, Leslie Fiedler, David Ketterer, Alvin Toffler, Kim Stanley Robinson, Norman Spinrad, and Gary K. Wolfe.[364]

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[362] Clute and Nichols.
[363] Clute and Nichols.
[364] Clute and Nichols.

The fact that so many learned individuals—many of whom were also giants in the field they attempted to define—tried and failed to conjure a definitive definition of the genre speaks to its ephemeral, amorphous nature. Dick, acknowledged as one of the genre's premiere writers, boiled it down to two parts: *dysrecognition* and plausibility. In his essay "My Definition of Science Fiction," Dick writes "*this* is the essence of science fiction, the conceptual dislocation within the society so that as a result a new society is generated in the author's mind, transferred to paper, and from paper it occurs as a convulsive shock in the reader's mind, *the shock of dysrecognition*."[365] For my purposes in this dissertation, I would particularly like to point out that the importance of *dysrecognition* for Dick sounds very similar to the sense of hesitation that Tvetzan Todorov identifies as the key to fantastic literature: "Either total faith or total incredulity would lead us beyond the fantastic: it is hesitation which sustains its life."[366] The ambiguity readers feel when reading a fantastic work sustains their attention, and the hesitation they experience, the questioning of whether the events are true or the result of an unreliable narrator, makes the experience more pleasurable. Robert Scholes and Eric Rabkin echo this when they write that "[t]he mark of the fantastic is the thrill of seeing the *believed* unreal become real."[367]

This also aligns with Dick's method for separating science fiction from fantasy, although he admits that the separation is almost completely subjective: "[f]antasy involves that which general opinion regards as impossible; science fiction involves that which general opinion regards as possible under the right circumstances. This is in essence a judgment call, since what is possible and what is not [cannot be] objectively known but is, rather, a subjective belief on the part of the reader."[368] Dick uses Theodore Sturgeon's novel *More Than Human* as an example.

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[365] Dick, "My Definition of Science Fiction" 99.
[366] Todorov 31.
[367] Scholes and Rabkin 169-170.
[368] Dick, "My Definition of Science Fiction" 100.

The novel features a race of mutated human beings with psionic powers, and it could be considered science fiction or fantasy depending on the reader's belief in the plausibility of psionic powers in the first place, and whether or not a genetic mutation could actually occur that might produce those powers. If so, a reader considers it science fiction; if not, then fantasy. The idea of what is plausible and implausible in many ways depends on when and where the text was written. In his *Lensman* books, E. E. "Doc" Smith writes about spaceships traveling through a vacuumless outer space filled with a substance he described as "ether." The idea that the Earth travelled through a light-bearing ether (sometimes spelled aether) was a well-regarded theory in physics until Albert Einstein disputed it with his theory of relativity, so at the time he wrote it, Smith's ether-filled space was plausible, and thus could be viewed as science fiction, whereas today we might consider it fantasy.

For Dick, the worth of science fiction lies in the strength of its idea. Citing Willis McNelly from the California State University at Fullerton, Dick writes that "the true protagonist of an SF story or novel is an idea and not a person."[369] The idea must be new, intellectually stimulating, and spark a moment of reflective thinking within readers in order to make them consider the world in which they live. Fantasy, Dick implies, does not feature new ideas, and by contrast is defined more by the strength of its plot and characters. Scholes and Rabkin seem to agree, writing that "one defines science fiction by what it has in it, by its elements; one defines fantasy by how it presents what it has in it, by its structure. Hence… it is possible to have a work which, by its elements, is science fiction, and which, by its structure, is fantasy."[370] This set of assumptions allows us to classify futuristic movies like *Star Wars* and novel series like Edgar Rice Burrough's *Barsoom* and John Norman's *Gor* series as fantasy, even though they possess

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[369] Dick, "My Definition of Science Fiction" 100.
[370] Scholes and Rabkin 170.

165

many of the trappings of science fiction, such as robots, alien planets, teleportation devices, and space ships that can travel faster than the speed of light.

The one point where all of these theorists seem to agree is that locating the exact divide between science fiction and fantasy is a nearly impossible task. Dick's idea of *dysrecognition* could be applied just as easily to fantasy as it could to science fiction, as its relation to Todorov's theory of hesitation illustrates. And by the same token, science fiction seems to operate under same idea of par-axis that Rosemary Jackson wrote about: that empty space where object and reconstituted image appear to reside. Like fantasy, science fiction offers a vision of a world parallel to ours, and even though I feel that Dick is partly right when he says that quality science fiction relies on the strength of its idea (after all what is *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* than merely an extended tour of life under the sea driven by the then fantastic concept of the submarine?). But there is no reason why this strength of idea should be unique to science fiction. And as interesting as Scholes and Rabkin's assertion is that the difference between science fiction and fantasy lies in their uses of elements and structure, this distinction still relies primarily on the reader's judgment. I consider *Star Wars* to be a work of fantasy because of the classic story it tells: it is based on Joseph Campbell's interpretation of the archetypal hero's journey from early world literature; on the quasi-mystical magic Force that Jedi call upon to perform miraculous feats; and on the medievalesque social structures that dominates the galaxy, with its emperors, princesses, lords, and knights. However, many consider *Star Wars* to be a work of science fiction because it takes place in a "galaxy far, far away" and not in fairyland or some place over the rainbow, and because it features robots, space ships, and laser guns—all traditional hallmarks of science fiction. Thus the precise ratio between element and structure in

fantasy vs. science fiction largely depends on one's own interpretation. Cutting the difference and calling some hard-to-categorize works "science fantasy" is hardly a critical solution either.

This is why applying play theory can be helpful. At the start, I should stress that it does not provide a foolproof system for identification anymore than do the ideas presented by Dick or Scholes and Rabkin. What it does provide is a different way of viewing and classifying works in the wider fantasy genre, one that may help when other methods of classification fail. As illustrated by my analysis of *The Player of Games*, *Ender's Game*, and *The Solar Lottery*, science fiction presents worlds ruled by *agôn* and *alea* where the impulse to play is fully mitigated by *ludus*, and where the protagonists often find themselves at odds with the systems established. Those three texts served as model examples because therein the game motifs make unusually explicit how the play elements of merit and chance function on practically every level of post-industrial societies. But the rubric used to analyze these three texts can be just as well applied to works that do not feature games. Take, for example, Walter M. Miller Jr.'s early science fiction gem, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959). The events of the novel unfold over the course of several thousand years as humanity brings itself back from, and then right up again, to the brink of nuclear apocalypse. The initial phase of the story is set in the aftermath of a devastating nuclear war and focuses on a small Roman Catholic monastery in the American Southwest. After the war, many of the survivors destroy anything that has to do with knowledge or technology, believing them to be the cause of humanity's near destruction. Similar to events that occurred in the Middle Ages in Ireland, the monks devote themselves to preserving what little knowledge survived by rescuing machines, circuit boards, books, basically anything they can find that is pre-apocalypse. During this reactionary phase that the monks bravely fight against, the broader society reverts to its preliterate roots: literacy becomes a sin, literates are

lynched by mobs that proudly label themselves "Simpletons," books are burned, and knowledge and progress are halted. The mobs of Simpletons resemble the phratries that Huizinga writes about, except instead of expressing their differences of identification with a certain totem—or in this case ideology—in a regulated, *agôn*-istic game, they give in to *paidia* and *ilinx*, in the vertigo of mob movement and the urge to destroy and destabilize, ending in terrifying results. Fittingly, the ones who try to salvage the pre-apocalyptic society belong to a religious order, just as priests and shamans were the original custodians of knowledge. They represent connections to a higher power, in this case the knowledge that was lost, and their goal is the betterment of humankind, just as the goal of ancient shamans was to better the lives of their tribe. As the story progresses the forces of *ilinx* and *mimicry* fade, and *agôn* and *alea* reassume their former position of authority. In fact, the entire novel could be viewed as the gradual return of *agôn* to an unfair, dangerous, chaotic world.

Harlan Ellison's classic short story "'Repent, Harlequin!' Said the Ticktockman" provides another example of how science fiction can, by the same token, show that a world of perfectly regulated *ludus* and *agôn -alea* is impossible, since the power and creativity inherent in *mimicry* and *ilinx* cannot and should not ever be completely eliminated from society. Set in humanity's nebulous future, Ellison's story presents a world utterly ruled by time. Run by the bureaucratic Master Timekeeper (called the Ticktockman behind his back), being late is considered a crime. Every time a person runs late, that time is deducted from one's life. People who are habitually tardy eventually find their life "revoked." The only person to stand against this system calls himself Harlequin, and he stages minor and elaborate pranks to cause people to be late, such as dumping millions of jellybeans onto the expressway during peak traffic hours, all in an effort to illuminate the draconian unfairness of the clock system. His actions jam the

bureaucracy and disrupt the system, making him an enemy of the government and the feared Ticktockman. Interestingly, by adopting the Harlequin persona, the protagonist employs *mimicry* and *ilinx* to achieve his goal. He represents something larger than himself, as the Ticktockman realizes: "But down below…where the people always needed their saints and sinners, their bread and circuses, their heroes and villains, he was considered a Bolivar; a Napoleon; a Robin Hood; a Dick Bong (Ace of Aces); a Jesus; a Jomo Kenyatta."[371] The Ticktockman might as well add Coyote, Eshu, Loki, or Raven to that list, as the Harlequin acts like any classic trickster god, disrupting the system, sowing vertigo in order to create change, and thereby being intimately associated with gambling and gaming. In fact, the name "Harlequin" originates from the French *Herlequin* or *Hellequin*, the name of a legendary troop of demon horsemen. The word may perhaps also be related to the Old English *Herla cyning*, or King Herla, a godlike figure often associated with the Norse Allfather Woden, another liminal character.

As already discussed in chapter one, play occurs in liminal areas—spaces outside of everyday life. As play does, fantasy inverts the natural order, allowing for changes that are nearly impossible in the mundane world, and allowing people a glimpse of life outside their own skin. Science fiction takes this par-axial method of fantasy and operates it as a mirror, illuminating truths and trends occurring in society at the time, often warning us of how the world might look should certain trends continue unchecked or without challenge. Margaret Atwood's dystopian science fiction classic *A Handmaid's Tale* serves as another perfect example of this, even though Atwood despises being associated with science fiction. As the Western, post-Industrial Revolution world runs on *agôn* and *alea*, it is only fitting that science fiction, which almost exclusively takes place in the near or distant quasi-future, should reflect this in the societies and systems it represents. Fantasy looks to a past, in both real and imaginary and worlds, that is ruled

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[371] Ellison 878.

by *mimicry* and *ilinx,* and which contrasts markedly in this regard from our own; horror illustrates a present, with dark tinges of the past, where protagonists struggle to temper *mimicry* and *ilinx* with *agôn* and *alea*; and science fiction shows us a future, where, in worlds of properly regulated *agôn* and *alea*, one can succeed and even triumph, based on skill, training, and more than a little luck.

This concludes the section of the dissertation devoted to close readings of text. In these chapters I have outlined how various play rubrics appear in specific fantasy genres and can be used as a means to classify them. The next chapter will remove us from the text and explore the reasons and methods behind individuals and groups adapt these fantasy franchises into extratextual modes.

CHAPTER 5

PERFORMING PLAY: FANTASY TRPG'S

There was an old saying: "A dwarf without a mine isn't a dwarf at all." That thought haunted Olin Hammerfist. As the oldest, it was his responsibility to take care of the family, and while he couldn't help it if the mine ran dry, so to speak, he could help where the family went from there.

He never had a head for numbers—that was his younger brother's forte. Olin could fight, he could dig, and he could drink, but those were the limits of his talents. Knowing this, he left the family to look for work, selling his hammer to whomever paid the best and whose needs were the noblest. A Hammerfist had honor—even if he was a sellsword.

"A dwarf without a mine," he mumbled into his ale. He sat at the bar, nursing his drink and going through the sack of money he had just earned for a minor escort job. He counted out enough silver to pay for the night's drinks and returned the rest to the sack. Tomorrow he would send it home to his brother.

Olin finished his drink and slammed the mug down on the bar. "Another!"

The bartended—a fat, bald, beady-eyed human—waddled over to him. "No."

"What do you mean, no?" Olin held out his silver. "I got this much left to drink and I'm not leaving till I do."

"We don't like your kind around here," the bartender said, resting his knuckles on the bar and leaning forward. "Tio's a soft touch, and if I was the one on duty when you came in I'd have sent you packing."

"My money's good as anyone else's." Olin squeezed his fist. The coins dug into his palm.

"No it ain't." The bartended leaned even closer. Olin could smell his rotting teeth. "Why

don't you go back to your hole like a good dwarf?"

Olin flicked his head forward. The human's nose shattered against the dwarf's forehead.

The bartender screamed and slapped his hands over his face and Olin reached over the bar and

grabbed a bottle of wine. It wasn't ale, but it would do.

—Olin Hammerfist

5th Level Dwarven Fighter

The Dwarf Racial Option in *Dungeons & Dragons* and Its Importance to this Chapter

When players create a character in *Dungeons & Dragons* they have a variety of steps and options

to go through: they must roll to discover the character's ability scores, they must choose an

alignment, they must choose a class, and they must choose a race. There are six different races in

the basic 2nd edition game manual: Dwarves, Elves, Gnomes, Half-Elves, Haflings, and Humans.

Other races, such as Orcs, can be chosen at the dungeonmaster's discretion, but it is unusual.

Choosing a race affects a character's history, how s/he is perceived by the world at large, and

his/her ability scores. Dwarves, for example, are a hardy race and because of that players add an

additional point to their character's constitution score, which affects their health, endurance, and

resistance to poison and toxins. The trade off to this is that Dwarves are typically gruff and

rough-looking, so the character's charisma score suffers a one point penalty. As the handbook

describes them, "Dwarves tend to be dour and taciturn. They are given to hard work and care

little for most humor. They are strong and brave. They enjoy beer, ale, mead, and even stronger

drink. Their chief love, however, is precious metal, particularly gold."[372]   When I played Olin, I

had to take these character traits into consideration and fold them into the history I had created

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[372] Cook 27.

for him. I wanted to give him a reason for adventuring beyond the typical "love of excitement" that drove most characters, so I gave him the goal of keeping his family afloat financially. And while he possessed average intelligence, he was a very linear thinker, which made him ill-suited to solving problems unless the solution happened to need a hammer. In addition to that, I emphasized the "dour, taciturn" nature described in the manual, along with his love of ale. He was loyal to a fault, but short-tempered, which occasionally caused problems. After the event described in the epigraph, Olin and the rest of his adventuring party had to leave the tavern before the local constabulary arrived. Not surprisingly, my friends were not happy about my actions.

One of the more interesting aspects about creating Olin is that I took inspiration from him not from Tolkien, but from Margaret Weiss and Tracy Hickman's *Dragonlance Chronicles*. My favorite character in that series was Flint Fireforge—a curmudgeonly old Dwarf that griped and grumbled at every chance he got, but looked after his friends in an almost paternalistic way. He was markedly different in my mind from the Dwarves in Tolkien—especially the group in *The Hobbit* who whined and complained and would have died a good dozen times if not for Bilbo. Although the current movies by Peter Jackson have turned them into a more formidable fighting force, they were played in the book more like comic relief and they did not match the stoic warrior I had in mind when creating Olin. The character Gimli from *Lord of the Rings* was a little better, but it seems that Tolkien viewed Dwarves as rather foolish creatures overall, and this appears often in his work.

While Flint did complain, it was more like the half-serious gripes of one's favorite grandfather—more entertaining than anything else. I liked that part of his personality, as I did the paternalistic side he displayed to his comrades. I incorporated those aspects into Olin and they

173

formed the bedrock for the foundation of his character. Oddly enough, like Alexander, Olin turned into a rather violent character, which stunned my friends. I always just considered him to be direct and unable to suffer fools, but I do wonder what it says about myself that two of my characters displayed a great amount of anger at the injustices in the world.

While any of the characters I played could have fit as the epigraph of this chapter, I chose Olin specifically because he was one of the few non-human characters I played and because of the clear taproots I drew upon when creating him. As I will explore further in this chapter, characters and TRPG games depend a great deal on pop culture and the level to which individuals have immersed themselves in their favored genres. Olin, in some ways, was a refutation of the Tolkien Dwarf and an embracing of the *D&D* Dwarf—which, while based on Tolkien, differed from his work in significant ways. Oddly enough, I also pulled in Scottish influences when I played him. For some reason my gaming group and I always liked to play our Dwarves as if they were Scottish (or at least our very stereotypical view of the Scots). This meant that we often talked like Shrek the Ogre for half the game before we got tired and slipped into our more regular voice. Even John Rhys Davies, the actor that portrayed Gimli in the movies, affected a vaguely Scottish accent. It is almost like collectively fandom decided that all Dwarves talk like this, which speaks to the power of memes and the alacrity with which they spread through the community.

Olin turned into one of my favorite characters, and I still think of him and his adventures fondly. Now we turn from him to examine the forces that were at play in his creation.

The Adaptation of Fantasy Texts into Extratextual Modes

One of the more fascinating ways that the fantasy genres differ from realistic fiction is the tendency for its fans to adapt fantasy texts into extratextual modes. They play tabletop role-

playing games (TRPGs), video games, collectible card games, and board games based on their favorite franchises. They attend comic book, fantasy, science fiction, and gaming conventions where they participate in tournaments and demo games; meet actors, writers, and directors from their favorite shows and series; and dress up as their favorite characters. They attend Renaissance Faires, live action role-playing events (LARPs), and engage in historical reenactments of famous moments in medieval European history. They find countless and inventive ways to participate, on an embodied level, with the stories that have touched them. While it is true that some works of realistic fiction (as well as authors) have occasionally become translated into extratextual modes—such as Bloomsday, when the events of James Joyce's *Ulysses* are reenacted to commemorate the author—the multiplicity of extratextual modes and arenas open to fantasy fans overshadows those by a huge margin.

The obvious question then is why, and to understand this phenomenon, one must understand play and the functions it serves in human society. Up to this point, this dissertation has focused on illuminating how play rubrics underlie the structure of specific fantasy genres, but now I will look outside of the text to the final part of the equation, so to speak: readers. While the process of writing may be a solitary endeavor, no work of fiction is ever produced in a vacuum. Its very nature necessitates a reader, and therefore we must look at how these play elements affect their audiences. In doing this my hope is to delve, albeit briefly, into the fascinating but largely neglected world of extratextual fantasy adaptation, and thereby to provide a rationale as to why fantasy genres are so well loved and so often adapted extratextually.

Exploring just some of the ways fans adapt fantasy text into extratextual genres would be a dissertation in and of itself, so for the sake of brevity and clarity, I will restrict my focus to TRPGs. As outlined earlier in chapter one, the basic assumption of this chapter is that fantasy

genres fulfill deep psychological and sociological functions in human beings that were once the

purview of organized religion, and because these genres touch such important human needs and

identities, we desire to interact with these texts in a more embodied, participatory and social way.

To explicate this, I will look at the roles of fantasy and festivity in human culture, return briefly

to Jung, and bring in several important concepts from performance theory. This will also provide

an opportunity to discuss briefly the contentious relationship between mainstream American

culture and fantasy subcultures and explore how the American, Western attitude towards play

speaks to the American, Western attitude towards fantasy.

Although the subject of this chapter represents a deviation from the bulk of this

dissertation, it is important to look at the wider fantasy genre from all angles, and the cultural

study of the extratextual life and reception of fantasy provides a highly illustrative view. Fantasy,

it seems, cannot be tied solely to text. It lends itself to embodiment (it may even be that it

demands it), and it flourishes in ways that other literary genres do not. It does this because it is,

at heart, a quintessentially playful genre.

TRPGs and Their Connections to Fantasy

I choose to focus this chapter primarily on TRPGs because one of the underlying conceits of this

dissertation is the importance of text. This may seem an odd statement given that TRPGs are

theatrical in nature ; however, TRPGs always begin with a text: the rulebook or rulebooks (and

many other associated player guides, game manuals, adventure modules, ad infinitum) and, in

many cases, the literature that inspired said rulebooks, particularly the works of Tolkien,

Howard, and Leiber. The rulebooks provide the framework around which the role-players weave

their story. In a personal interview with Gary Alan Fine, Gary Gygax—the co-creator of

Dungeons & Dragons—compared the rulebooks to Aristotle's *Poetics*, saying that "[t]hey tell

me how to put together a good play. And a [referee] is the playwright who reads these things and puts his play together."[373] As Daniel Mackay argues, *Dungeons & Dragons* in particular possesses a recursive relationship with text in that the company that owns it (initially TSR—or Tactical Studies Rules—and subsequently Wizards of the Coast) has an entire publishing branch devoted to fiction based on the worlds, mythologies, and characters created for these rulebooks.[374] One series in particular, *Dragonlance*, was created to capitalize on fantasy gamers' love of dragons and role-playing in familiar fantasy worlds.[375] In addition, MacKay also asserts that *Dungeons & Dragons* created a particular style and brand that influenced the slew of sword-and-sorcery movies that appeared in the early and mid-1980s, such as *Clash of the Titans* (1981), *Conan the Barbarian* (1982), *Krull* (1983), and *Highlander* (1986).[376] This recursiveness among TRPGs and other forms of popular culture illustrate a stunning level of adaptation being pursued on a cultural level. However, before delving into the realm of contemporary adaptation of fantasy games, it would first be good to outline a brief history of this particular game type and define it

Defining and Historicizing Role-Playing Games

Role-playing games evolved out of simulated war games. The first such war game, War Chess, was created in 1780 in the German duchy of Brunswick. This game was later refined in 1811 as *Kriegspeil*, or the War Game, by the Prussian Herr von Reiswitz and his son. In 1915, the writer H. G. Wells created the first set of rules for amateur war gamers with his pamphlet, *Little Wars*, and in 1953 the commercial board game based on simulated conflict, *Tactics*, was created by Charles Roberts. While these games were popular, they were limited. The rules were rigid,[377]

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[373] Fine 88.
[374] Mackay 18.
[375] Mackay 18.
[376] Mackay 22.
[377] Fine 10.

the setting was limited to historical battles,[378] and there were no opportunities for player involvement other than moving the pieces on the board.[379] Those looking for a more Romanticized version of Medieval Europe, or those looking for a touch of fantasy were out of luck until Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson decided to make their own fantasy-oriented games that took a perpendicular turn from miniature-based war games. Arneson created Blackmoor, a fantasy game played with miniature figures representing the players on a tabletop. One of the innovations Arneson introduced was the concept of character advancement, which fostered feelings of attachment in the players for their characters. What the game missed, however, was a set of concrete rules, and this is where Gary Gygax enters the picture. Gygax was coauthor of a medieval miniature game called *Chainmail*. Like the other war simulation games on the market, *Chainmail* was firmly fixed in the real world; however, Gygax, a fan of J. R. R. Tolkien, Robert E. Howard, and Fritz Leiber, desired to incorporate fantasy into the game. He wrote a set of additional rules, the famous "Fantasy Supplement," that allowed for introducing fantasy elements into the game—mainly in the inclusion of monsters, fantasy creatures, spells, and magical abilities—along with now-familiar rules and mechanics (like armor class) for resolving individual, as opposed to war games' unit-based, combat. Another vital development in *Chainmail* was the concept that the game could be played entirely with pencil and paper, dispensing entirely with the war game miniatures and dioramas if desired.[380] Eventually, Arneson and Gygax collaborated and created the company Tactical Studies Rules (TSR), and the result was the game we know as *Dungeons & Dragons*.

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[378] Fine 9.
[379] Fine 10.
[380] This stemmed from *Chainmail*'s discussion of mines and countermines during castle siege operations, which would be happening at a level that was essentially impossible to represent on a war game table (especially because such mining was meant to happen out of view and in secrecy). Thus was prefigured the classic subterranean dungeon setting and multi-level maps that are now the *sine qua non* of the fantasy TRPG.

Although there would be many rivals, imitators, parodies, and spinoffs, *Dungeons &*
Dragons, now in the fourth iteration of its "advanced" edition, was the first and still remains the
most influential TRPG. Part of the beauty of the game lied in its flexibility and simplicity. All
one needed to play was a group of friends, pencils, paper, dice, and a rulebook (preprinted
character sheets and predrawn maps were nice, but ultimately optional). It was entirely up to the
group as to how slavishly they would adhere to the rules (which could become quite byzantine—
especially in the early incarnations of *AD&D*). This leads into what Fine outlines as the two
major elements that differentiate fantasy TRPGs from the tactical war games that birthed them:
"While game rules provide some structure, flexibility is considerable, and referees pride
themselves on being able to react to any decision by their players," and "because players *create*
individual characters or personae, they develop strong identification with these game figures."[381]
Fine thus describes TRPGs as "a hybrid of war games, educational simulation games, and *folie à*
deux."[382] TRPGs are part game and part theater, and to define them fully I will rely on Daniel
Mackay, who enumerates all of the key elements of the classic system:

> I define the role-playing game as an *episodic* and *participatory* story-creation
> *system* that includes a set of quantified *rules* that assist a group of *players* and a
> *gamemaster* in determining how their fictional *characters'* spontaneous
> interactions are resolved. These performed interactions between the players' and
> the gamemaster's characters take place during individual *sessions* that, together,
> form *episodes* or adventures in the lives of the fictional characters.[383]

For my purposes here, the two most important aspects of this definition are the participatory

aspect and the story-creation system. TRPGs provide the opportunity for participating in creating

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[381] Fine 10.
[382] Fine 6.
[383] Mackay 4-5.

a story and the system by which individuals can come together as a group to weave that communal story. All group members occupy three roles: player, actor, and spectator, and during a gaming session they move from each role with remarkable fluidity, up- and down-keying these frames, to use Irving Goffman's terminology. While that is fascinating enough, what makes it particularly interesting to this study is the role that the adaptation of popular culture plays in the stories that players create, the details they add to their characters, and the manner in which they communicate. Fine writes:

> While players can, in theory, create anything, they in fact create only those things that are engrossing and emotionally satisfying. Fantasy is constrained by the social expectations of players and of their world. The game fantasy, then, is an integration of twentieth-century American reality and the players' understanding of the medieval or futuristic setting in which their characters are placed…. Because gaming fantasy is based in shared experiences, it must be constructed through communication. This communication is possible only when a shared set of references exist for the key images and a clear set of expectations exist for which actions are legitimate.[384]

The references that Fine cites come primarily from popular culture, especially fantasy literature. In fact, Daniel Mackay reduces the origin of the role-playing game to a simple equation: Fantasy Literature + Wargames = Role-Playing Games.[385] The influence of popular culture does not begin with the players, but with the game creators who purposefully made games based on works of literature: "The worlds of Jules Verne, J.R.R. Tolkien, or Michael Moorcock ceased to function as a generic fantasy model and became the very thing that the TRPG intended to

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[384] Fine 3.
[385] Mackay 17.

180

simulate. This trend also applies to the comic-book influence in role-playing."[386] *Dungeons &*

Dragons openly owes a great deal to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, Howard's

tales of Conan the barbarian, and Leiber's adventures of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser. While

D&D is not a strict adaptation of any of those texts, it liberally purloined themes, mythologies,

character types, and attitudes from them. On the very first page of the first issue of *Dragon*

Magazine, the official organ of *Dungeons & Dragons*, there is a full page ad for a war game

based on the Battle of Five Armies that takes place near the end of *The Hobbit*. The text of the ad

reads "Now you can determine the outcome of this fantastic battle!"[387] This places the player

within the story and speaks to a level of participation that was lacking in reading the book.

Similar advertisements abound in this and later issues. In issue 3 of *Dragon,* the first page is an

ad for a war game based on Leiber's Lankhmar series, and in the "Dragon Rumbles" editor's

corner, Timothy Kask defends the inclusion of fiction in the magazine, writing: "Subconsciously

or consciously, every bit of fantasy, s-f or S&S [swords and sorcery] you have read has

contributed to how you perceive and deal with fantasy gaming…. The more concepts you

explore, regardless of whether you agree with/accept them, or not, the more raw material you

have for your own imagining process."[388] While *Dungeons & Dragons* may not directly copy

famous works of fantasy literature, it wears its debt to and love of them proudly.

Other TRPGs are direct adaptations of fantasy, science fiction, and horror franchises.

Call of Cthulu stems from the works of H. P. Lovecraft, and the *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* TRPGs

are obviously self-explanatory. Even Joss Whedon's semi-successful science-fiction/western

hybrid *Serenity* has a TRPG based on it which includes information both from the movie and the

television show that preceded it, *Firefly*. The blurb on the back of the manual proclaims that

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[386] Mackay 17.
[387] "Battle of the Five Armies." *Dragon Magazine* 1.1 (June 1976): 2.
[388] Kask, "Dragon Rumbles" *Dragon Magazine* 3.1 (Oct. 1976): 3.

"The *Serenity Role Playing Game* lets you re-create the action of the 'Verse, the unique and exciting science-fiction setting created by writer/director Joss Whedon. Everything you need to get started is in this book. Add dice, friends, and your imagination. Fly a ship out into the Black, take jobs as they come, and make sure you get paid!"[389] Even movie genres become the fodder for TRPGs, as is the case with *Solid! The D20 Blaxploitation Experience,* where one can play either basic character classes such as Strong, Fast, Tough, Smart, Dedicated, or Charismatic, or advanced classes that fulfill certain Blaxploitation archetypes, such as Hoodlum, Police Detective, Black Belt, Private Dick, Foxy Lady, Preacher, Hustler, or Politician.[390] The book, which devotes long passages to analyzing the Blaxploitation film genre, also includes a bibliography of movies to help players get the right feel for the game as well as a short slang dictionary.

Comic books, movies, and book series form the source material for countless TRPG adventures and for the players' interactions with the game and each other. The first time I created a ranger in *Dungeons & Dragons,* I consciously patterned him after Aragorn from *Lord of the Rings*(the inspiration for this character class), and I named him Roland after Stephen King's gunslinger from his *Dark Tower* series. After I watched the movie *Gladiator,* I decided that my paladin, Alexander du Lekshire, secretly desired to be a farmer, and before every battle (time permitting) I would have him grab a handful of dirt and rub it between his fingers. If I were to say during a game session, "What is best in life?" I could count on all of my friends to respond: "Crush your enemies, see them driven before you, and hear the lamentations of the women"—a famous line from *Conan the Barbarian* which is apparently a quote from the historical Genghis Khan. My group and I played Jedis, smugglers, Ewok scouts, paladins, thieves, and anything else

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[389] Chambers, *Serenity Role Playing Game*.
[390] Webb and Savage 25.

we could think of, and there was always some trace of pop culture in our play. Although we did

not know it, we—just like the game designers—were engaging in the myriad cultural process of

adaptation, which we will explore next

Fantasy as a Form of Adaptation

Adaptation walks the creative tight rope between innovating and repeating. Linda Hutcheon

defines it as "repetition, but repetition without replication."[391] The joy we take from the

experience of adaptation stems from recognizing familiar plot points, themes, or characters while

delighting in the surprise of experiencing them in new and different ways.[392] It might be

witnessing how artists negotiate the differences in modes—moving from movies (which can

switch scenes abruptly thanks to editing, or use special effects to create characters that do not

exist in real life) to the stage, which is cemented in a particular time and space—or gender-

swapping characters that have been traditionally associated with one particular sex, such as

Helen Mirren's performance as Prospero in Julie Taymor's version of *The Tempest*. The

possibilities of adaptation are endless.

One could even make the argument that every work of fiction—be it written, performed

live, filmed, or recorded for audio broadcast—is an adaptation. Hutcheon quotes from Walter

Benjamin's "The Storyteller" where he says, "storytelling is always the art of repeating

stories."[393] Hutcheon also borrows Michael Alexander's term "palimpsestuous" to describe the

recursive nature of literature.[394] This idea of rewriting and revisiting past stories plays into her

formal, three-part definition of adaptation: "An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable

other work or works; A creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging; An extended

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[391] Hutcheon 7.
[392] Hutcheon 4.
[393] Hutcheon 2.
[394] Hutcheon 6.

intertextual engagement with the adapted work."[395] This definition makes an adaptation both a "process" and a "product."[396] What this definition speaks to is the fact that certain stories—sometimes just specific aspects of them—gain a life of their own and become detached from their original source. They become what Andrew MacKay calls "Fictive Blocks," or "self-contained, decontextualized tropes" that are "embodied in the real world before they are stored in the players' memory."[397] Fictive blocks appear everywhere, from "Movie posters, billboards, radio jingles, and television ads" and even works of fiction (which can become fictive blocks) may be considered a collection of hundreds of thousands of fictive blocks right down to the sentence-level.[398] Hutcheon echoes this thought when she writes that "texts are said to be mosaics of citations that are visible and read,"[399] as does Fine, in the context of TRPGs, who states: "Each gaming group interprets, defines, and transforms cultural elements in its sphere of knowledge into the cultural framework of an imagined society."[400] The difference between fictive blocks and adaptation is that adaptations work from specific texts.[401] Adaptation is an active process where one consciously performs the translating of cultural works instead of passively having cultural works performed on oneself.[402]

Fictive blocks form the basis for character creation and in-game acting in TRPGs. They are, in effect, adaptation in action. Like the ranger character class, inspired by but now removed from Aragorn, fictive blocks serve as the starting point for adaptation in game situations once

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[395] Hutcheon 8.
[396] Hutcheon 9.
[397] Mackay 77.
[398] Mackay 78.
[399] Hutcheon 21.
[400] Fine 2.
[401] Hutcheon 21.
[402] Mackay 78-79.

they become divorced from their "original material context."[403] When this happens, they become stored in the player's memory as "strips of imaginary behavior," or "nonreal behavior that takes place in an imaginary environment"; they then form a type of lexicon that the player relies on to provide examples of how certain character types should act in certain expectations.[404] As Mackay puts it, strips of imaginary behavior "are the substance of play."[405] Role-players are avid consumers of popular culture, so much so that TRPG's are a "restoration of an internalized score of popular culture" that pretends not to recognize the origins of the stories and behaviors performed by the players.[406] Players believe that they are fleeing to a fantasy world, but in actuality they are engaging in "a restoration, recapitulation, (sometimes) critical evaluation, and even recuperation of the buried social potential embedded in the forms of popular culture."[407] The only term missing from Mackay's insightful evaluation of the role-playing session is adaptation, although he hints at it in numerous ways. His description could most certainly be classified as palimpsestuous. When actively examined, the sheer volume of buried, half-recognized strips of imaginary behavior required to engage in a TRPG is nearly overwhelming; however, the majority of this process occurs subconsciously, speaking to the level of immersion role-players experience with popular culture. Thus the role-playing session is both process and product of popular culture.

Adaptation also brings us back to our old friends *mimicry* and *ilinx,* thanks to the performative and communal aspects of TRPGs. Mackay writes that "Each of the successive spheres of the role-playing game performance is an activity of imitation."[408] Players and

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[403] Mackay 79.
[404] Mackay 79.
[405] Mackay 79.
[406] Mackay 83.
[407] Mackay 82.
[408] Mackay 65.

gamemasters take on numerous roles within the game, operating on one of three different levels (player, actor, or spectator) based on "interrelated systems of meaning" composed of "commonsense reality," "the gaming rules," and "the game's content."[409] The players control their character (although sometimes they are tasked with playing multiple characters, either to fill in for a friend or because the gamemaster assigns a non-player character, or NPC, to them), and the gamemaster controls all of the other NPCs, except in the cases already mentioned. They occupy Schechner's not-I, not-not-I space in the same way of actors and shamans.

However, there are two aspects that help differentiate the TRPG performance from other traditional dramatic performances. First, there is no script. The gamemaster has a loose plan for the story, but the plot is fluid and determined by consensus between the gamemaster and the player. The story is a collaborative event, and everyone involved is in a constant state of improvisation and negotiation.[410] The closest elements to a script in this situation are the "strips of imaginative behavior" and the game manuals (and perhaps an adventure module with a detailed story for the gamemaster to follow); however, the strips simply provide models for behavior in given situations, and the manual's purpose is to provide a general framework of rules to govern the events that happen. Character stats, dice rolls, and—at times—the *largesse* of the gamemaster determine how well a player succeeds in a given task. The strips and the manual help contain the collaborative energies at play in the session, but do not rigidly direct them.

The second way that TRPG situations differ from traditional theater is that there is no clear distinction between audience and player. Players display an astonishing capacity for frame up- and down-keying during a session, and one of the frames that they move in and out of is that of spectator or audience: "the roles of performer and audience are played by a single group at

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[409] Fine 3.
[410] Fine 8.

186

different times rather than by distinct groups at the same time."[411] During a game session I may be playing as Alexander the Paladin, but I am also myself observing the story as I am imagining it, and observing my friends playing their characters and the gamemaster weaving the scenario. I move through those frames, and at times I occupy more than one of them at once.

There also exists a strong element of *ilinx* during these sessions in the form of festivity. Mackay writes that "Role-playing games are a continuation of the carnivalesque into contemporary times,"[412] and two of the hallmarks of the carnival are feasting and gluttony. Gluttony, as Bakhtin points out in *Rabelais and His World*, plays an important role in feasts.[413] During a typical game the play table will be covered with not only dice, character sheets, pencils, paper, and books, but also bowls or bags full of chips, soft drinks, snack cakes, pizza boxes, or whatever else the players happen to be eating. Food and the excessive ingesting of it play such a large role in the *mise en scène* that in college we dubbed our gaming group "The Fellowship of the Fudgeround" after the Little Debbie snack cake of which we were especially fond. In the early days of our games, we would take a break around two in the morning to sing songs like "Friends in Low Places" for no other reason than that we enjoyed to do so. For a time it became a ritual moment, although not one that had any specific spiritual meaning attached to it. It was a communal pause, where we stepped back from the game and engaged in some sugar-fueled silliness. It was a mini Feast of Fools, and the gamemaster was the *de facto* Lord of Misrule.

The festive aspect took place on the fringes of the game, but there were also in-game moments of *ilinx* as well. There were times when I would lose myself in a role. I was especially good at giving pious speeches when I played the Alexander. It did help that our gamemaster gave bonus experience for roleplaying, but after a while playing the character well became an end in

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[411] Mackay 58.
[412] Mackay 72.
[413] Bakhtin 235.

187

and of itself. There is a joy in losing oneself in a performance, and even though I am fully aware of the boundary between my ego and that of my characters, I cannot help but feel pride or anger or happiness when I look back on my performative accomplishments while playing that character. Even in that previous sentence, I write that the accomplishments were mine, and not belonging to Alexander or Jack or Olin or whomever I was playing at that time. This speaks to a level of immersion in fantasy gaming that can be intoxicating, and while there were no overt or conscious spirituality in our game playing or Little Debbie and Garth Brooks fueled rituals, spirituality and play are often equated with each other, which we will now discuss

The Spiritual Aspect of Play

There exists among scholars a divide about how to distinguish between play and the sacred. On the one hand, both are typically positioned in opposition to the profane, especially within contemporary Western culture. The three spheres of work, play, and sacred do not overlap. They exist as separate bubbles, with the profane occupying the most space. In a Platonic dialectic, the sacred presides over all unearthly matters, while the profane rules the material world. Play typically is placed to the side and considered a dirty indulgence. It is the place we escape to when reality becomes too much to handle. One can even see in my initial, unconscious choice of words the Platonic ideal at play. The profane is "reality," meaning that everything physical, material, quantified and qualifiable is the most important. Play, like the sacred, pertains to everything intangible—the soul, the afterlife, enjoyment, and so on—and because intangibles are inherently nonproductive in a physical sense, they occupy a place of lesser importance in Western culture.

But this is not to say that play and the sacred are synonymous. Although they appeal to similar aspects of human nature, there is a distinct difference. In his book *Man and the Sacred*,

Roger Caillois devotes an appendix to the relationship between play and the sacred. Once again writing in reference to Huizinga, Caillois states that a "*sacred-profane play*" hierarchy needs to be established in order to balance the assertions made in *Homo Ludens*.[414] The difference, according to Caillois, between the two has to do with content. The sacred is the realm of pure content, while play is pure activity: "In this sense, play, free activity par excellence, is the pure profane, has no content, does not connote on other levels any result that was not permissible to avoid."[415] There exists no taboo in play. Every rule is agreed upon beforehand and the players are masters of their own destiny,[416] whereas in the sacred there are rules that have existed since time immemorial, and the breaking of those rules bears penalties that extend beyond the liminal play sphere. Play and the sacred do resemble each other, however, in that they are "both opposed to practical life."[417]

That Caillois needs to devote an entire appendix to addressing the differences between the play and sacred illustrates how truly similar they are, and how they can become conflated with one another. Perhaps it is possible that in our increasingly secular world people turn towards non-religious fiction for meaning and solace, and in the same way that people enact religious stories for ritual action, some individuals now take that same urge to adapt, recreate, and ritualize their favorite fictional franchises. This is not to say that being an avid *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* fan or *Dungeons & Dragons* player means that one associates oneself with those franchises in any consciously religious manner. What it is saying is that this fandom fulfills many of the same needs that religion has done in the past, and could likewise be an outlet for a powerful need to find symbols that speak specifically to us in order to connect with our

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[414] Caillois, *Man and the Sacred* 160.
[415] Caillois, *Man and the Sacred* 160.
[416] Caillois, *Man and the Sacred* 159.
[417] Caillois, *Man and the Sacred* 160.

unconscious. The comic book writer Grant Morrison says just that in the introduction to his book *Supergods*:

> We live in the stories we tell ourselves. In a secular, scientific, rational culture lacking in any convincing spiritual leadership, superhero stories speak loudly and boldly to our greatest fears, deepest longings, and highest aspirations. They're not afraid to be hopeful, not embarrassed to be optimistic, and utterly fearless in the dark.[418]

We need stories not because they speak to us, but because they allow us to speak to ourselves. At one time this job was given to religion, as Jung writes: "I attribute a positive value to all religions. In their symbolism I recognize those figures which I have met with in the dreams and fantasies of my patients. In their moral teachings I see efforts that are the same as or similar to those made by my patients, when, guided by their own insight or inspiration, they seek the right way of dealing with the forces of the inner life."[419]

Elsewhere, in *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Jung speaks of the "growing impoverishment of symbols" and what we lose because of it.[420] Jung's larger concern about such impoverishment is that we risk being unable to communicate with our unconscious selves. This fear is echoed in Caillois, who describes the modern world as a world that is largely

> not sacred, without festivals, without play, therefore, without fixed moorings, without devotional principles, without creative license, a world in which immediate interest, cynicism, and the negation of every norm not only exist, but

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[418] Morrison xvii.
[419] Jung, *Modern Man* 119.
[420] Jung, *Archetypes* 14.

are elevated into absolutes in place of the rules that underlie all play, all noble

activity, and honorable competition.[421]

He concludes by saying, "[o]ne should not be surprised to meet there few things that do not lead

to war."[422] In his examination of festivity and fantasy in Western culture, Harvey Cox takes an

even harsher approach, writing that

> whatever forms of festivity and fantasy remain to us are shrunken and insulated.
> Our celebrations do not relate us, as they once did, to the parade of cosmic history
> or to the great stories of man's spiritual quest. Our fantasies tend to be cautious,
> eccentric, and secretive…. Our feasting is sporadic or obsessive, our fantasies
> predictable and politically impotent. Neither provides the inspiration for genuine
> social transformation.[423]

What humanity loses with the decline in festivity and fantasy is our ability to relate ourselves to

our past and our future in both the social and personal levels.[424]

More specifically, Cox relates festivity to memory and fantasy to hope.[425] Moments of

festivity allow us to look back on where we came from, and the ability to fantasize gives us the

ability to envision where we are going: "Together they help make man a creature who sees

himself with an origin and a destiny, not just as an ephemeral bubble."[426] What Cox does is

detail what Jung feared about the increasing impoverishment of symbols: "The potency has

drained from the religious symbols that once kept us in touch with our forebears. The images that

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[421] Caillois, *Man and the Sacred* 161.
[422] Caillois, *Man and the Sacred* 161.
[423] Cox 3.
[424] Cox 6.
[425] Cox 7.
[426] Cox 7.

fired our hopes for the future have lost their glow."[427] Symbolism abounds in both festivity and fantasy. A festival is a symbolic act commemorating the end of something, typically the end of a natural cycle, such as the end of the year, or in moments of "death and revival, of change and renewal,"[428] as Bakhtin points out in *Rabelais and His World*. As with Cox, Bakhtin views the feast (and, by extension, festivity) as important, writing that "The feast (every feast) is an important primary form of human culture."[429] It is a period of rest that carries with it a "spiritual and ideological dimension."[430]

In fantasy, symbolism occurs through the metaphors and allusions used to tell a story. Stephen King likes to call this the truth within the lie, a sentiment echoed by Ursula K. Le Guin: "For fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it is true."[431] This is why fantasy relies on caricature, as Ole Ertløv Hansen points out: "What we see on the screen is not, then a specific hero but a representation of the essence of heroism. The ugly witch is always a sample of amplified imperfections."[432] Hansen's cognitive approach to fantasy lines up well with Jung's ideas of archetypes and the Collective Unconscious as it deals with representations (caricatures) of human ideals. Fantasy allows us to dream of a future. Its symbols, such as superheroes in Morrison's example, give us ideals to which we can live up to, and the hope for a different destiny.

There is no direct hotline to the unconscious—we can only speak to it through metaphor. A lack of powerful, unifying symbols takes away the only language we have for uniting ourselves into a whole being. In the course of this dissertation, I have come across many

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[427] Cox 16.
[428] Bakhtin 9.
[429] Bakhtin 8.
[430] Bakhtin 8.
[431] Le Guin, *Language* 40.
[432] Hansen 228.

192

different ways of classifying human beings from *homo ludens,* to *homo fantasia,* to *homo festivus.* I would add to these, *homo sententia.* The human animal constantly strives to make sense of its world. Our brains are pattern-making machines. We create fictions, ask questions, and quest the darkest regions of the physical world and our souls in order to find reason and meaning. Perhaps the type of fantasy adaptation we see in TRPGs is just one other way.

This leads us into one of the most important aspects of play and fantasy—which is, perhaps not coincidentally, the trait it is most criticized for: escapism.

Moving Fantasy from Escapism to Revivalism

No matter what form it takes, play is a cultural phenomenon, and because of this it is important to examine—albeit briefly—how it is received within society. Unfortunately, play in contemporary Western culture has not fared well. It is an activity that practically everyone engages in in one form or another, but it suffers from constant derision and suspicion. As Ursula K. Le Guin writes, "[i]n wondering why Americans are afraid of dragons, I began to realize that a great many Americans are not only antifantasy, but altogether antifiction. We tend, as a people, to look up on all works of the imagination either as suspect or as contemptible."[433] To play, and by extension to indulge in fantasy, is implicitly to deny reality, and because reality is equated with productivity, with capitalism, and godliness, this is also a denial of core Western values.

This attitude appears time and again. I have already cited F. R. Leavis's famous dictum about realism being the only literature worth reading, but there are numerous other examples. Fantasy is often relegated to the realm of children, and adults who publicly enjoy fantasy and other non-sport forms of play are often perceived as strange and even sick. For instance, Ethan Gilsdorf's *Fantasy Freaks and Gaming Geeks* is essentially two hundred pages of the author's

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[433] Le Guin, *Language* 35.

193

halting coming to grips with the things he has difficulty admitting he loves, and moving past his

fears that these interests might be putting him in a state of perpetually arrested development.

Since the early 1980s, *Dungeons & Dragons* has been the target of conservative religious

movements in the United States, on the grounds that it is dangerous and that it leads children to

Satanism at worst and a fragile sense of reality at best. This divide can also be seen in the

institutional conflicts between so-called literary fiction and popular fiction. In 2011 a *New York*

Times review of the HBO series *Game of Thrones* sparked a debate on the internet because it

dismissed the show as juvenile fantasy designed for adolescent boys. The outrage came not from

its harsh stance on the show but from its tone, its implication that its story and subject matter

were unworthy of attention on the most basic level, and that by extension anyone that enjoyed

the show had to be immature and unsophisticated. The author, Ginia Bellafante, writes: "What is

'Game of Thrones' doing on HBO? The series claims as one of its executive producers the

screenwriter and best-selling author David Benioff, whose excellent script for Spike Lee's post-

9/11 meditation, '25th Hour,' did not suggest a writer with Middle Earth proclivities."[434]

Bellafante's question clearly implies that working on a story set in a "quasi-medieval

somewhereland"[435] is beneath a writer of Benioff's ability, and the line about having "Middle

Earth proclivities" makes it sound as if Benioff is indulging in a shameful pastime. Bellafante

also takes issue with the nudity and "costume drama sexual hopscotch"[436] in the show. While the

criticism of the amped-up sexuality and gratuitous nudity in the series is a valid point, one that

could be leveled at many original shows on both HBO and "Skinemax," her reasoning behind its

inclusion is insulting:

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[434] Bellefante paragraph 4.
[435] Bellefante paragraph 1.
[436] Bellefante paragraph 5.

194

The true perversion, though, is the sense you get that all of this illicitness has been tossed in as a little something for the ladies, out of a justifiable fear, perhaps, that no woman alive would watch otherwise. While I do not doubt that there are women in the world who read books like Mr. Martin's, I can honestly say that I have never met a single woman who has stood up in indignation at her book club and refused to read the latest from Lorrie Moore unless everyone agreed to "The Hobbit" [sic] first. "Game of Thrones" is a boy fiction patronizingly turned out to reach the population's other half.[437]

Bellefante makes other biting remarks about the show's "Dungeons & Dragons aesthetic"[438] and the fact that the show's creators hired linguists to create the Dothraki language: "If you are nearly everyone else, you will hunger for HBO to go back to the business of languages for which we already have a dictionary."[439] Her message is clear: *Game of Thrones* and fantasy in general is masturbatory adolescent male power tales that appeal to a sad, pathetic subculture in America.

While Bellefante's review of *Game of Thrones* is insulting enough to fantasy fans, Troy Patterson's wears its dismissal right on its headline: "Quasi-Medieval, Dragon-Ridden Fantasy Crap." Patterson tries to soften the blow by saying that his description is "not a comment on its quality, but a definition of its type."[440] There is actually very little in the way of honest criticism in Patterson's article. Instead he waxes about how the fantasy genre does not appeal to him to the point where, referring to himself in the third person, "he was horribly unchivalrous in canceling a date at the last minute. Word was going around that the lady in question made like a serving wench at many a Renaissance Festival, and he called off the plans for their Olive Garden

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[437] Bellefante paragraph 6.
[438] Bellefante paragraph 7.
[439] Bellefante paragraph 7.
[440] Patterson paragraph 3.

rendezvous."[441] To go through the rest of the digs at the genre would require a recitation of the entire review—although I will repeat one more line: "I was making a note that a nubile noble—whose goofy name I will not risk misspelling and whose nipples are destined for immortality."[442]

The condescending tone Patterson adopts is disproportionate to the subject matter of which he writes, for which many took him and Bellefante to task. In Matt Zoller Seitz's answer to these two reviews, he points out that both Patterson and Bellefante manage to get "through a whole review without mentioning a single character or scene in detail. [Bellefante's] piece is mainly interested in blasting TV for sexing-up the costume drama while de-carnalizing scripted shows set in modern times."[443] Seitz also takes to task Bellefante's assumption that the nudity and sex were aimed at women, baldly contradicting "conventional industry wisdom about what women want from film and television,"[444] and the notion that fantasy is boy fiction. Seitz points that Martin would not have written about the "trysts, affairs, and marriages if he didn't find them personally interesting" and that "Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ursula K. Le Guin, Carol Berg, Holly Phillips, Juliet Marillier, Lynn Flewelling, Jacqueline Carey and Sharon Shinn would be surprised to learn that they've been writing 'boy fiction' all this time."[445] Alan Kistler also takes Bellefante to task on her gender assumptions, writing:

> You're not a fan of *The Hobbit* or anything that you mentally associate with an unrelated role-playing game involving dragons? Fine. But don't imply that we should all agree with you because you speak for all women…. Your experience tells you that no women will demand Tolkien? Okay. Let's talk about my experience. I saw many women in movie audiences thrilled to see Orlando Bloom

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[441] Patterson paragraph 3.
[442] Patterson paragraph 5.
[443] Seitz paragraph 9.
[444] Paragraph 14.
[445] Paragraph 15.

kick butt as an elf, not just because he has a pretty face but because he was a great character in an epic tale. I saw a lot of women in line to have their photo taken with the *Game of Thrones* display at Wondercon in San Francisco recently. I regularly read online pieces by geek girls such as Amy Ratcliffe, Teresa Jusino, Janna O'Shea and Jill Pantozzi.[446]

Both Kistler and Seitz rightly expose the misguided assumptions behind these two pieces by Bellafante and Patterson. Seitz ends his response by asking the reader to imagine how unthinkable it would be for any review of a western show to mock "the very idea of a Western series telling morally complex adult stories, or if a review of 'The Sopranos' proceeded from the assumption that gangster tales are inherently worthless as popular art."[447]

This illogical kneejerk tendency of dismissing fantasy also exists within academia. Luci Armitt writes that "'Fantasy' is a word commonly disparaged by literary and nonliterary voices alike."[448] Her statement is supported by Rosemary Jackson, who writes, "English literary criticism has been notoriously untheoretical in its approach to works of fantasy."[449] Gary Wolfe describes the genres horror, science fiction, and fantasy as "unstable literary isotopes,"[450] and tells the story of how the book *Salem's Lot* came up for discussion during a literature class and was immediately dismissed as "meaningless pleasure" by the students, who had "more or less agreed that the book's genre origins, along with its manifest intent to entertain, all but precluded any further discussion of it in aesthetic terms."[451] This attitude extends to the field of play studies as well, as Gary Alan Fine points out:

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[446] Kistler paragraph 6-7.
[447] Seitz paragraph 16.
[448] Armitt 1.
[449] R. Jackson 2.
[450] Wolfe 3.
[451] Wolfe 4-5.

Sociologists who study leisure typically find themselves attacked on two fronts. First, they are accused of not being sufficiently serious about their scholarly pursuits. Second, they are accused of alchemically transforming that which is inherently fascinating into something as dull as survey research computer tapes.[452]

I noticed many times during the course of my research the almost shy, hesitant manner in which scholars of play tend to justify their research, as if they believed others will automatically think that what they were studying is somehow not worth their time. It was not the justifications that stood out—after all, every work of scholarship needs to establish why it is important—but the invariably apologetic tone. Fine wrote one of the first, and most important, studies on TRPG culture, and yet he too is highly apologetic in his introduction and marginalizes his own subject matter:

By any standards the fantasy gaming world is a rather small, perhaps trivial, social world. It doesn't have a massive economic impact, it isn't a representative sample of American life and culture, and it does not exemplify any particular social problem. It certainly is not the most important subsegment of American society on which one might choose to do research.[453]

But I would argue even in 2002, when Fine is writing, and never mind a decade later, that the gaming world was hardly small, hardly of no economic importance, and hardly unrepresentative of deep social realities.

This self-apologetic attitude of fantasy apologists is also reflected in Ethan Gilsdorf. Even though his work was not academic, Gilsdorf regularly vacillates between his deep love of fantasy and games and his fear and shame about what that loves says about him: "How healthy

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[452] Fine vi.
[453] Fine 1.

was it to have devoted so much mental energy to a world that didn't exist? Had we checked out of real life? What were the long-term effects? Did fantasy escapism explain why the person I'd become at forty now felt unsatisfying, and unsatisfied?"[454] Even his title, *Fantasy Freaks and Gaming Geeks,* is self-effacing and derogatory, although he may mean to co-opt those pejorative labels and turn them into something empowering.

This negative attitude towards play and fantasy stems from two different yet powerful sources: Puritanism and capitalism. Both ideologies stress the value and importance of work and reject the intangible and imaginary. This may be ironic in regards to Puritanism, given that it is a religious school of thought concerned with spiritual intangibles such as the soul, but Puritanism has inculcated a strong cultural belief in the goodness of hard work and productivity as paths to (or at least markers of) salvation, and while its main concern is where the soul goes after one dies (an intangible), it holds that what we do here in the physical (tangible) world is what determines the soul's path. Cox writes: "As the true heirs of our Puritan forebears, we're taught to turn our backs on the world of fantasy—along with such accompaniments as mirth, intemperance, and unseemly speculation—to labor diligently in the world of facts."[455] As for capitalism, its basic ideology holds that nothing contains any worth unless it can be quantified and commoditized. Ursula K. Le Guin puts it succinctly, using an economics-like formula: "There is an inverse correlation between fantasy and money."[456] The point of work is to produce something that can be commoditized, and any activity that does not produce a commoditized material is considered wasteful and unimportant: "This technocratic consciousness finds little use for the imaginative faculty. Imagination and fantasy are considered nonproductive and, like games, play, and ritual,

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[454] Gilsdorf 20.
[455] Cox 70.
[456] Le Guin, *Language* 39.

are considered expendable."[457] This attitude is particularly prevalent in the United States, and

one of the ways it exhibits itself is through Americans' deep-seated distrust of anything fanciful

or playful.

Play does not produce, and neither (at least in the minds of literary elites) does fantasy.

As activities, play and fantasy exist in and of and for themselves. Once players leave the liminal

(or liminoid) space of the gaming session, they bring nothing back with them that is tangible

from a Western point of view. I would argue that this is actually untrue, but seeing the value of

play and fantasy requires a different mindset. First of all, the negative concept of "escape" needs

to be jettisoned. Escape means to leave a bad situation with no intention of returning, and that is

not what play and fantasy do relative to the everyday world. It would be more accurate, if a little

awkward, to label this "revivalism," because that is the goal. The echo of this term with the

religious kind of revival is also meaningful, given the historical developments of play and the

sacred. One leaves the profane to gain distance and perspective, just as in Van Gennep's rites of

passage. One also leaves the profane to gain surcease from the pressures of everyday

contemporary life. There is nothing unhealthy about any of those motivations. As Shirley

Jackson teaches us, no sane creature can live under conditions of absolute reality. One leaves,

gains perspective, and then purposefully returns, revitalized and reborn—not dragged back like

an escapee.

Our avenues for achieving this revitalization have shrunk over the past few centuries and

because of that, we turn to other means. For Mackay, one of these is through role-playing:

> In a world of manifest meaninglessness, devoid of any sense of otherworldliness
>
> or metanarrative by which to understand the events around us, it is only through
>
> relishing the role one plays that a person can find any sense of satisfaction. When

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[457] Mackay 147.

that role seems old and no longer entertaining, simply slip into a new role, like

one would a jump-suit, and get off on the reactions of friends, relatives, and

strangers.[458]

Mackay's point is that through role-playing we reactivate art that was produced before and make

it living again. We turn it from the archive, which, according to Diana Taylor, "stand[s] in for

and against embodiment"[459] to the repertoire, which represents embodied knowledge transmitted

through "corporeal behaviors such as gestures, attitudes, and tones not reducible to language."[460]

The dangers of the archive are that it is too rigid and limited, and that it takes the place of the

object or idea that it should represent. Without using the same terminology, Mackay refers to this

too when he writes that "[t]oday, the work of art and the imaginary-entertainment environment to

which it refers has been divorced from its original use."[461] Mackay goes on to say that the idea of

art shifted from referring to "the imaginative world of a piece… to the artifice of the object, how

it was assembled or orchestrated…. The language now loses its ability to communicate ideas.

Ideas and consciousness are simply regarded as machined fabrications of language… and

language is manipulated as if it were the play material of a game, which it clearly has

become."[462] The only way to combat this tendency is through theater, because it is the art that

specializes in the restoration of behavior through performance, and in the same way, the TRPG is

"the entertaining restoration of behavior for play."[463] Going back to Taylor, what is striking to

me is that the text for a TRPG functions similarly to the texts by the Aztecs, Mayas, and Incas:

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[458] Mackay 155.
[459] Taylor 16.
[460] Taylor 28.
[461] Mackay 145.
[462] Mackay 146.
[463] Mackay 117.

"as a prompt for performance, a mnemonic aid."[464] Like Mackay's strips of imaginative

behavior, TRPG texts provide the basis of a performance, but the fantasy of the TRPG is not

really born, our sense of play not revitalized or restored, until fantasy role-players perform

through embodied action.

This is perhaps also the contemporary way of saying "ritual." Cox writes that "Ritual is

'embodied fantasy'"[465] and that it is "that form of human action which both nourishes fantasy

and embodies it in society and history."[466] The fantasies that truly matter to us become part of the

zeitgeist, often touching on archetypes within the collective unconscious. As we have seen time

and again, when faced with resonations of these archetypes, we try to find ways of interacting

with them on a bodily and social level, and perhaps this is why the means by which we do so are

practically always theatrical in nature. Turner, Schechner, Taylor and many others have

illustrated the deep connections between ritual, theatricality, and play. I posit that it is no great

step to add the source material and contemporary mode that spurs, guides, and illuminates that

will to fantasy is play.

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[464] Taylor 17.
[465] Cox 87.
[466] Cox 89.

CONCLUSION

IN WHICH MY STUDENTS DEFEAT MECHA HITLER

"The doors to the building explode outward and stepping through the smoke is a nine foot tall robot, armed to the teeth for war. On top of the robot where the head should be is a jar. You look closely at it and discover that in the jar is the head of Adolf Hitler."

One of the aspects I love the most about teaching is the spontaneity. I begin with a plan layed out in ten and fifteen minute intervals outlining what we will be doing for the day along with a list of talking points, but the experiences I love the most are when a student comes up with an idea or angle on the subject I never really considered and we take off as a class in an in-depth conversation. It is kind of like the great jazz riffs where we improvise along a core melody, and there are times when we will have conversations that I never expected. Of course, of all the avenues a class could take, I never in my wildest dreams thought that I would be talking about Mecha Hitler.

Currently I teach a creative writing course as Full Sail University—a for-profit institution that focuses on the entertainment industry. Full Sail operates on the trade school model, so the semesters last only one month, and in order to keep us kosher with various accrediting bodies, we are required to have sixty contact hours with our students. The university boasts a rich online presence, so I typically teach two courses every month: one on campus and one online. The sixty contact hours do not necessarily apply to the online courses, but they do for the campus, which means that I teach on average three days out of the week for four-to-eight hour sessions that can run from nine to five, five to nine, or even five to one in the morning.

This schedule poses problems for both me and my students. I find that I have to walk a fine line between giving them too much new information and lapsing into repetition just for the

sake of filling time. The students have to find a way to latch onto the opportunities I provide for engagement and not become overwhelmed at the length of the class or the speed at which the semesters pass. Thankfully the subject matter and the fact that this course is part of a degree program helps because the majority of the students want to be in class and are hungry to learn the concepts and skills I teach them.

Specifically, those concepts and skills relate to world building. The class I teach is called Symbolic Communication and Cartography and it covers the importance of maps and culture in stories. I like to broaden it into discussions on setting, description, and society and I use quite a bit of what I learned researching this dissertation. I inherited this class from another instructor, and given the turnaround and time constraints with grading and class time, I have had to make piecemeal changes to the course over time. One of the major changes I wish to make is in how the importance of setting and culture is emphasized, because currently the materials are geared towards video games and many of my students are not interested in writing for them or even have a great deal of experience playing them—a fact I find fascinating, but somewhat beyond the point I am trying to make here—and because of that I would like to shift the focus to world building in a broader sense. Those curriculum issues aside, the basic conceit of the course is that video games fail 90% of the time in terms of telling powerful, dramatic, emotionally-driven stories (I should note that both my students and myself don't quite agree with this percentage). We begin the month by talking about interactivity and storytelling and when I first started teaching the course I was surprised that TRPGs were never mentioned in the course materials.

Which brings us to Mecha Hitler.

More specifically, it brings us to TRPGs and world building. Games like *Dungeons and Dragons* are all about world building and interactivity and playing a short, four hour session

204

seemed like a great storytelling exercise for my students because it would allow them to experience writing in a different, more embodied and performative manner, and would give them exercise in collaborative storytelling—a skill that will be highly important to the students that choose to write for television and video games, where the stories are constantly reviewed and revised by other writers, producers, and developers.

I decided to forgo the typical practice of the gamemaster creating the setting and had the students take an active role in creating the world. I should take a step back for a moment to mention that their first assignment for the course is to create a character and basic story. We build the world around that and in the process see how story, setting, and character are interrelated. The basic idea of the game was that these characters they created were going to be whisked away to this world and had to find their way home (much like the plot of the *Dungeons & Dragons* cartoon that played Saturday mornings back in the '80s). We spent class time creating this world and it turned into a great exercise in problem solving because the students knew that their characters came from different worlds and different stories. There was a spaceship captain who was more than human, an humanoid dragon martial artist, a young werewolf hunter, a stoner surf shop owner, and a painfully shy comic book store owner. We decided that the game world needed to be a neutral area separate from the worlds they were creating, and that since their characters were being pulled from different planets, time frames, and dimensions this world should be in a state of constant flux. After that we discussed what it would be like to live on a world like that and how different cultures pulled other places and times would interact with one another.

I took all of this and created the basic story (borrowing heavily from Harlan Ellison's comic *Seven Against Chaos*). They were brought to this world by General Garl Vaneese—a

human general from a time in humanity's far future when we become a powerful spacefaring race. Using the calculations of a "seventh generation computer"—a computer that was built by other computers and thus had computational abilities to the point where it could analyze variables and effectively predict the future—Garl brought these five characters to "The Hub," as he called the world, to basically save the universe. A giant, floating obelisk exists on this planet, but the computer says that it was not from this world. The obelisk is the source of reality-distorting energies that are destabilizing the universe. Each character has a specific skill set that maximizes the group's chances for success, and that's why Garl kidnapped them from their respective spaces and times. Garl gives them equipment, including a tablet device called a "Mother Box" (a name and concept I stole from Jack Kirby), which could only be used by the comic store owner, and a flying surfboard that would help them carry supplies and facilitate travel, which was of course used by the surf shop owner. The group travelled through a shifting landscape plagued by reality storms and villains from different places and times, including Mecha Hitler and his Rocket Nazis. They eventually find and enter the Obelisk (after solving a passcode based on a simple Fibonacci Sequence) and discover that the source of the universe-destroying energies is a wizened old alien from another dimension. He is the last survivor of his people and is now trying to remake history and reality to bring them back. The group defeated him, of course, and returned to their respective worlds with specifically-tailored boons.

What was interesting about this game experience was that none of the students had played a TRPG before, but they immediately fell into specific player types. Two of them took the game seriously and engaged in excellent roleplaying; two of them took it all as a big joke, but had fun with it anyway; and one of them fell in the middle and often did not say or do anything until prompted. They all enjoyed the experience and felt like it helped them see their characters

in a new light. They also enjoyed being able to interact with the world they built in a different way than they were accustomed to.

I found the experience very gratifying in that it allowed me to interact with my students in a different way, and it gave me a chance to witness them add to their characters in a new and unique manner. It also gave me an opportunity to actually use the research and the theories I employed in this dissertation. Certainly we played and enjoyed ourselves, but we were also writing, world building, and exploring the core concepts of the class in a relatable, hands-on way that was beneficial for everyone involved.

Which brings me back to this dissertation. It has been a long, interesting road to this point. Overall, this dissertation's purpose was to introduce and illustrate the usefulness of play theory in analyzing fantasy and its various subgenres and to explain why and how we translate texts into embodied actions. It has been a definite labor of love, but one at times fraught with self-doubt. Often to others I have referred to this work as my own Frankensteinian monster: a patchwork creation drawing from various sources to create something new. I felt that, like the doctor's creature, mine at times shambled, stumbled, walked on mismatching legs, and seemed to move without going anywhere. My analogy speaks to a basic fear I possessed that what made sense to me would not translate into something communicable to others. While I imagine that most scholars go through moments like that when writing their dissertations, what I did not realize until later was that I was unconsciously mirroring the trepidation and even downright shame exhibited by many of the researchers I used in this work. This illustrates the power the cultural assumptions about play and fantasy hold over individuals—even those that should know better. Although I never referred to myself or others as "fantasy freaks" or "gaming geeks," that underlying drive to apologize for writing about something I love and think important did seep its

way into the work. I have since removed those moments, but they bear discussion here at the end because they (again) speak to the power of culture and how it unconsciously shapes us, and because they serve as a warning, of sorts, to any one that chooses to study play and fantasy. While it is perfectly acceptable—if a little sad—for Ethan Gilsdorf to spend 299 pages fretting over the genres and products that give him joy, such an attitude only undermines the strength of an academic discourse and takes away from an essential element of a study like this: a sense of celebration. As Cox wrote, celebration allows us to look back at where we were, and fantasy allows us to look forward and dream of a better world. Nothing should be inherently shameful in either urge.

Of course, this is not to say in any way that this dissertation is perfect. The sections on mimicry should have included Judith Butler and Louis Althusser, to name a few, and Kristeva's theory of abjection should have been more strongly contextualized as an intervention in Lacanian theory. However, those issues just mean that there are as-yet unmined areas for further investigation, and I find that far more exciting than embarrassing. I lived with this work for nearly four years and I still feel like there are areas that I want to explore. The element of adaptation could easily be expanded upon and sections on television, theater, music, conventions, and costume play (or cosplay as it is commonly referred) could be included. I also wish to study the masculanist, phallocentric focus of fantasy creators and readers. In addition to that fantasy appears in some amazing places in music, such as the works of Led Zeppelin or Blue Oyster Cult, or in the album art of bands like Metallica. One fascinating possible area of study would be applying play theory to the intersection of fantasy and rock and roll. Rosemary Jackson's thesis that fantasy is an inherently subversive genre would make for an interesting theoretical point of entry into such a study.

Moving from music, I already touched upon television with my brief discussion of the critical reception of *Game of Thrones*, the HBO television show based on Martin's novels, but there is so much more that can be said about this show, never mind television itself as a liminoid fantasy medium. As of June 24, 2013, 146 American girls were named Khaleesi—the title of Daenerys Targaryen in *Game of Thrones*. According to the web site *The Mary Sue*, this is a 450% jump since 2011,[467] and certainly the popularity of the television series has played a role in this increase. Similarly, the name Arya (as in Arya Stark) jumped from number 413 to 298 on the Social Security Administration's list of popular baby names between 2011 and 2012.[468] Television has been a powerful medium because of its ubiquity, and would also make for a fascinating realm of future study of fantasy. As would movies. Recently a movie adaptation of *Ender's Game* was released, and while I wanted to include it in this work, I ultimately was unable to do so in a way that felt natural and pertinent to the work. That will either have to be a study by itself or an inclusion in future revisions of this work.

It would also be fruitful to examine Asian cultures in terms of their works of fantasy— both in what they produce and how fantasy is consumed and performed in their cultures. Japan would make for an obvious starting point, as *otaku* society, characterized by a love of video games, anime, and manga, makes for a significant subsection of the population. Many *otaku* engage in cosplay, and the attending of conventions in order to show off their costumes (an activity that is becoming more and more popular in the United States as well) would make for a fascinating study of play theory and practice. Moreover, it would be interesting to see how well Huizinga and Caillois's theories may apply to non-Western cultures.

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[467] Pahle, "At this Very Moment There Are Over 100 Babies in the U.S. Named 'Khaleesi.'"
[468] Pahle, "Which *Game of Thrones* Character Inspired Last Year's Fastest-Rising Baby Name for Girls?"

Underlying many of the points made in this work is the theory of adaptation. Adaptation speaks to popularity—the desire to engage with a work of fiction in another medium—and while popularity by no means equates to quality, it does speak to the level with which a particular work of fiction has resonated with a portion of society. Good art is socially reflective on some level, either showing us the way the world is now, or the way we wish it to be. In times of strife and tension we see works of horror and dystopian romances rise, but we also see works featuring heroes—people that stand outside of society, who are superior in some way or another, and who use their superior skills to better their world. We see the worst and the best through fantasy and in doing so we experience catharsis and inspiration. Currently we are seeing many of the characters and worlds created in Marvel comics being adapted into blockbuster movies, television shows, and on the Broadway stage, and one of the reasons many point to their success is the sense of humor and delight present in these stories, in contrast the darker contemporary adaptations of DC comics characters (the most recent example being *Man of Steel*). Marvel retains a sense of play and invention in their works, while DC does not, at least on the level of story and characterization, and this contrast between the Big Two could make for another avenue of study.

As is obvious, this work has only whetted my appetite to explore the concepts of play, fantasy, and adaptation even further, and my respect in regards to the roles they serve in our lives has only grown. Play and fantasy are important and unique elements of the human condition. They allow us to dream of new, better worlds; step out of our lives for a moment to be someone or something better, happier, stronger, or smarter and return to our lives renewed and revitalized; and they allow us to see where we have been so we can better see where we want to go. At times they have been regarded as frivolous, nonproductive, and even dangerous, but denying these

basic human urges leads to neurosis, despair, and a disassociation with our identity. We can only

understand our world through context. In order to grasp a concept we must know what it is not.

Fantasy allows us to dream of places, people, and objects that never were and could never be,

and in turn gives us a better understanding of who we are and the world in which we live. The

urge behind that will to dream is play: that willful desire to shed one's identity and world, to

embrace our bodies and our emotions, to live and experience joy. To deny these urges is to deny

a fundamental part of ourselves, and that is why they must be researched, so we can better

understand them and better understand how we can make ourselves whole human beings.

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