Chapter II

The Perilous Realm: The Secondary World of Fantasy

Fantasy, today, has become a genre at once respectable as well as fashionable, thanks to the Harry Potter phenomenon. J.R.R. Tolkien made it respectable with his ‘sub-creation’ *The Lord of the Rings*; J.K. Rowling made it fashionable too with her fantasy child Harry Potter. The sudden ‘reinvention’ of the old-fashioned fantasy genre through the ‘Potter craze’ has rekindled a renewed interest, both academic and non-academic, in this modern literary fairy-tale.

“As a literary term a fantasy means any narrative that deals with impossibilities preternaturals” (Lewis, *An Experiment* 50)- an introduction to unconscious material emerging from unconscious beliefs to satisfy unconscious desires. Tzvetan Todorov considers fantasy as the most literary of all forms, as the quintessence of literature, for it makes explicit the problems of establishing ‘reality and meaning’ through a literary text (*The Fantastic: A Structural Approach*). Kathryn Hume famously defines fantasy as “*any departure from consensus reality*, an impulse native to literature and manifested in innumerable variations from monster to metaphor” (3). Dealing with intangibles and abstractions, it brings meaningfully alive the magical and irrational into the world of actuality. In the quickened pace of modern life, fantasy quenches the inherent thirst in human kind for an opportunity for pause. The rejuvenative insight and the renewed awareness of the already known world it offers, while keeping an aesthetic distance from pragmatic affairs, owes to its enormous appeal in literature.
Fantasy has as its essential ingredient, ‘the marvellous’, which is anything outside the normal space-time continuum of the everyday world – what can never exist in the world of empirical existence (which is why pure science fiction is excluded from the realm). More often, the reader is carried into another world where, as Tolkien asserts, he does not undergo any ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ but experience a ‘Secondary Belief’ in the self-consistent ‘Secondary World’ created by the ‘sub-creator’: “Inside it, what he relates is ‘true: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore, believe it, while you are, as it were, inside” (“On Fairy”132). Tolkien believes ‘the sub-creative art’ to be a natural outcome of man’s own creation in the divine image.

Fantasy theorist Rosemary Jackson distinguishes two approaches to the fantastic mode: the otherness that is transcendent, which give rise to religious fantasies of angels, devils, promised lands and pagan fantasies of elves, fairies or ‘faery’ lands and otherness which is a projection of human fears and desires transforming the world through subjective perception. The former produces fiction which are ‘marvellous’, with supernatural qualities ranging from the magical narratives of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight or The Sleeping Beauty to The Lord of the Rings, whilst the latter produces the ‘uncanny’ or ‘strange’ stories of the distorted minds of protagonists like Maupassant’s Horla etc.(22-26).

Todorov, the first to offer a systematic formulation of the poetics of fantasy arrived at a theoretical definition of the genre by an analysis of the text in its own terms. He makes it clear that fantasy moved from the marvellous (supernatural) through the purely fantastic (unnatural) to the uncanny (natural). During the nineteenth century, the fantastic began to hollow out the ‘real’ world making it strange, without providing any explanation for the strangeness; as an opposite version of realistic
narrative, as the inside or underside of realism. Todorov considers the literature of the
fantastic as all that is not said, all that is unsayable, through realistic forms
(169). According to the nineteenth century realism, the fantastic which is predicated on
the ‘real’, introduces areas conceptualized only by negative terms – the im-possible, the
un-real, the un-known, the in-visible, the nameless, formless etc. This “negative
relationality” (Jackson 26) constitute the meaning of the modern fantastic.

Todorov puts the purely fantastic between the purely marvellous and the purely
uncanny. The world of fairy story, romance, magic and supernaturalism represented by
the tales of Grimm brothers, Andersen and the works of Andrew Lang, Tolkien,
Rowling etc. belong to the marvellous narrative, with the traditional formulaic fairy tale
opening- ‘Once upon a time…’. The omniscient, impersonal and authoritative narrator
represents, with absolute confidence and minimal emotional involvement, events which
were completed in the long distant past, the effects of which have long since ceased to
disturb: hence the formulaic ending too- ‘…..and they lived happily ever after’.

Fantastic narratives confound elements of both the marvellous and the mimetic
narratives (which imitate an external reality). They pull the reader from the apparently
familiar everyday world into a strange world of improbabilities of the marvellous; the
‘real’ is constantly in question. The fantastic borrows from the extravagance of the
marvellous and the ordinariness of the mimetic, but belongs to neither.

Rosemary Jackson modifies Todorov’s scheme to suggest a definition of the
fantastic as a mode, which then assumes different generic forms. Nineteenth century
fantasy is one of these forms, with an extremely close relation to the form of the novel,
which became dominated by a secular vision. Subverting the unitary vision of Bhaktin,
that all that is significant and amenable can be collected to a “unified accent” (qtd. in
Jackson 35), the fantastic introduces confusion and alternatives. Lewis Carroll
distinguishes three mental states related to the three fantastic modes – ‘ordinary’ (mimetic) relating to the real world, ‘eerie’ (fantastic) relating to the transitional world and ‘trance-like’ (marvellous) relating to the imaginary world (qtd. 36). The fantastic exists in the hinder-land between the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’ shifting the relation between them through its indeterminacy. Jackson identifies the fantastic as a mode of writing which enters a dialogue with the ‘real’ and incorporates that dialogue as part of its essential structure (36).

In post–Romantic fantasies like Hoggs’ *Confessions* perception becomes increasingly confused, signs are vulnerable to multiple and contradictory interpretation, so that ‘meanings’ recede indefinitely, with ‘truth’ as a mere vanishing point of the text. The gap between sign and meaning, between the signifier and the signified, which has become a dominant concern of modernism, is anticipated by many post–Romantic works in a fantasy mode. The presentation of, and an apprehension of the ‘nameless’ and the un-nameable, the ‘It’, the ‘He’, the ‘thing’ (e.g. Dracula [Stoker], The Dark Lord, The Enemy, [LotR and HP], He–Who–Must–Not–Be–Named [ HP] ) on the one side and the ‘thingless names’, the empty signs, nonsense utterances, language as signifying nothing (e.g.:— ‘snark’, ‘boojum’, ‘uggug’, ‘jabberwocky’ etc of Carroll’s’ *Alice* books, *Sylvia and Bruno, Hunting of the Snark*) on the other side recur in modern fantastic, leaving the gap between the signified and the signifier wide open, and pushing towards an area of non-signification – through articulating the ‘unnamable’ or through a play upon ‘thingless names’ – thus unable to arrive at a definitive meaning or absolute ‘reality’(39-40). The fantastic narrative may be said to be a metonymical process rather than metaphorical since “one object does not stand for another, but literally becomes the other, slides into it, metamorphosing from one shape to another in
a permanent flux and instability” (42); therefore the Eye is Sauron or a Horcrux is Voldemort.

From eighteen hundred onwards, one of the most frequent landscapes of fantasy has been the hollow world—empty, mere absence surrounded by the real and the tangible. Perspective art and three-dimensionality no longer hold as ground rules; parameters of the field of vision tend towards indeterminacy (e.g. Kafka’s *The Burrow*, Borge’s *Labyrinth*); chronological time is exploded, tending towards a suspension, an eternal present (e.g. Mary Shelley’s *Wandering Jew* of *The Mortal Immortal*); the unseen is made visible; the unsaid is articulated; a ‘normal’ commonsense perspective which represents reality as constituted by connected units is violated; the hidden and cast-into-dark spaces are foregrounded by the placing and naming of the ‘real’ through chronological temporal structures and three-dimensional spatial organization. Fantasies of the ‘marvellous’ realm, secondary worlds created through myth, fairy, science fiction, compensatory worlds or other worlds are the ones which have been tolerated and widely disseminated socially. French critics like Charles Nodier, Jean Baptiste Baronian, Caillois, Levy and Vase and English critics like John Batchelor, C.N. Manlove and Stephen Prickett have all made the notion of fantastic as an escapist literature, the centre of their apologies. These traditional defendants of fantasy are echoing Freud’s idea of the cultural function of art as a ‘phantasizing’ activity which provides man with compensation for renouncing instinctive gratification.

As an ‘art’ of unreason and of desire, fantasy has persistently been silenced or rewritten in transcendental terms and the ‘other’ expressed through fantasy classified as evil, demonic, barbaric. Modern fantasy employs structures, motifs and marvellous elements derived from its predecessors in myth, legend, fable, folktale and romance. But the modern fantasist needs to expend much effort than his predecessors of medieval
romances in order to induce ‘secondary belief’ in his scientifically enlightened rational reader of today. In addition, the literal mindedness of the modern reader militates against the writer of fantasy. Hence modern fantasy is, of its nature, a different genre.

II. i. Aspects of a Tolkienian Fairy Story

Fantasy critic Eric Rabkin considers the fantastic as a “direct reversal of ground rules and ... in part determined by those ground rules (14-15). Rabkin echoes Todorovian fantastic, although the real in Rabkin becomes the real established by the fantastic narrative. But fantasy that creates its own independent world, that is, a secondary world with its roots in medieval romance has no place in Todorov. From Samuel Johnson to Edmund Wilson, such fantasy is dismissed as false, idle “juvenile trash” (Todorov 21). The secondary world fantasy remained excluded from critical gazes starting from nineteenth century George MacDonald and William Morris to twentieth century C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien and others who followed them. Tolkien’s essay “On Fairy-Stories”, is a frame work outside Todorovian fantasy to understand the secondary world fantasy or Tolkienian fairy story as Northrup Clyde calls it [23]. Tolkien felt strongly that fairy-stories are not necessarily for children and his Andrew Lang Lecture at the University of St. Andrews on 8, March 1939, in defence of fantasy was to prove this point.

Tolkien defines fantasy as a ‘sub-creative’ art in itself, a specific concept introduced by him as part of his attempt at a Christian aesthetic that will deal with the dominant problem of ex nihilo creativity of modern period (Hunter 44), a different order of creativity with a range of questions of control and power of the external world. Fantasy provides patterns of Escape, Recovery and Consolation through the conscious sub-creation of a world concerned with desirability, rather than possibility (“On Fairy” 134). Sub-creation “makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter” (132)
which is free from the domination of observed ‘fact’ of the Primary World and which maintains its own inner consistency of reality through its image making power. This separation from the primary world makes fantasy a ‘higher form of Art, indeed the most pure form and so ... the most potent (139).

Tolkien distinguishes between the primary and the secondary world. The power of imagination enables man to enter a Secondary World created by the story writer or ‘wordsmith’, free of the concerns of the spatial and temporal existence of the primary world. The artist who creates this other world- consistent within itself, with its own laws and rules implicit in the primary world, fulfilling and often providing meaning to it- becomes a ‘sub-creator’. Every maker of a secondary world hopes that in someway, the “peculiar quality of this secondary world (if not all the details) are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it” (155). The sources for imagined reality “lie near the heart of Faerie”, in man’s “primal desires” (117), including the wish to hold communion with other living things, the desire to live forever etc. The artist makes the “imagined wonder” real to us through the form of fantasy or fairy-story, through the potency of words. Tolkien, the philologist, got his start as a wordsmith through the power of words. He himself says that he began LotR with “primarily linguistic” inspiration, “to provide the necessary background of ‘history’ for Elvish tongues” (Foreword. LotR xv), which he had invented. The word, Tolkien respects, as a beautiful and powerful instrument for “realizing wonder”, giving man the power to form a ‘story’.

To Tolkien, fantasy provides a freedom which is a ‘virtue not a vice’, a freedom from the routine, the spiritually destructive affairs and unrealizable desires of life in the Primary World. One of these is “the making or glimpsing of Other Worlds” (135), another is to communicate with other created beings (152) and yet another is to achieve
immortality. Thus fantasy fulfils man’s desires by the act of ‘sub-creation’. In this sense, nothing is made-up; rather the ideal nature of man is given reality. Tolkien believes in an ordered and morally meaningful universe which man’s fantasies ‘make effective’. A fantasy world exposes and confirms the ultimate, universal truth, since it is a moral world. Hence, Tolkien describes fantasy “as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth” (155).

Faith in the imagined world is vital to fantasy. The sub-creator creates a meaningful and true world and the readers accept his vision as genuine. Tolkien calls this ‘Secondary Belief’. The imaginative experience satisfies not only our aesthetic sense but some deeper religious element in us as well. According to Northrop Frye, imagination presents us with a vision, “the vision of a decisive act of spiritual freedom, the vision of the recreation of man” (94). Tolkien goes further than Frye that moral acts are dictated by what the imagination knows to be true and that the vision of the “underlying reality or truth” reveals to the poet the greater world which he calls “Joy”.

Tolkien lists the four main qualities of the ‘fairy story’ as Fantasy, Recovery, Escape and Consolation, using the term fantasy in the narrow sense of one of the qualities of the genre. Fantasy, as a quality, consists of “strangeness and wonder in the Expression”, the “desired notions of unreality”, or unlikeness to the primary world and a “freedom from the domination of observed ‘fact’…” (“On Fairy”139):

To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft...[W]hen they are ... accomplished then we have a rare achievement of Art; indeed narrative art, story–making in its primary and most potent mode (140).
Enchantment and magic produce a Secondary World by a technique of alteration of the Primary World, which is artistic in desire and purpose, its desire being “power in this world and domination of things and wills” (143). *LotR* exemplifies this magic.

The second aspect of fantasy which ties a fairy story to the Primary World is what Tolkien calls “the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun” (144), a literal balancing act the sub-creator must perform to create a ‘Secondary World’ that commands ‘Secondary Belief’. Every sub-creator, in some way, wishes to be a real maker drawing on and deriving from reality. The peculiar quality of the ‘joy’ in successful fantasy can thus be explained as “a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth” (155). Tolkien himself was the master of achieving and maintaining this delicate balance between fantasy and reality which leads to the underlying truth.

Recovery or “regaining of a clear view”, another quality of a fairy-story allows us to stay “childish”, viewing the world like a child does: “as things apart from ourselves ... so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity – from possessiveness” (146). The things in the world around us, things that as a child were new and filled with wonder, have become so familiar to us, so common, that they have lost their sense of wonder. Recovery removes this veil of familiarity by acquiring again things locked in our hoards like cage-birds, recovering for us the child-like sense of wonder things used to have: “The gems all turn into flowers or flames, and you will be warned that all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent, not really effectively chained, free and wild; no more yours than they were you” (147). We ‘acquire again’ the potency of the familiar, ordinary, everyday things through the medium of the fairy-story, by the “luminous setting” in the secondary
This recovery of Tolkien is different from the Russian formalist concept of defamiliarization: the fairy-story strives for verisimilitude.

The third quality of a fairy-story is ‘Escape’ which offers two categories of things. The first, escape from pain, sorrow and injustice of Primary World, is to enter a Secondary World where truth and justice actually work in order that we can regroup and face the miseries of ordinary lives. The second escape allows us to momentarily remove the limitations of reality, as in the oldest and deepest desire – “the Escape from Death” (153). The greatest limitations that the fairy-story allows to escape from are the physical natural laws that prevent magic from working. Northrup Clyde feels that the reason there is actually very little magic in Tolkien’s stories is because of the danger of going too far so that we lose sight of the “ordinary”, which will, along with the art, cause our Secondary Belief to fail (829-30). Albert J. Raboteau’s idea of re-enchantment which brings the sense of wonder that leads into stories can be considered as a reflection of Tolkien’s idea of Recovery. “Too much magic causes us to lose sight of the interconnectedness of ordinary and wondrous worlds” warns Raboteau (392-402).

For a fairy-story to be complete, Tolkien says, it must have the “Consolation of the Happy Ending” (“On Fairy” 153), its final quality. Tolkien calls it eucatastrophe, as a counterpart of catastrophe or denouement (for which his coinage is dyscatastrophe), which is the highest function of tragedy. Tolkien explains the term eucatastrophe thus:

The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending: or
more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous
‘turn’ (for there is no true end to any fairy tale): this joy, which is
one of the things which fairy stories can produce supremely well,
is not essentially ‘escapist’, nor ‘fugitive’. In its fairy-tale- or
other-world -setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace;
never counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence
of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these
is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies... universal
final defeat... giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the
walls of the world, poignant as grief (153).

The eucatastrophic tale is the true form of fairy-tale and its highest function, says
Tolkien.

No matter how far the enchantment takes us during the course of the narrative
away from the ordinariness of the Primary World, “it can give to child or man that
hears it, when the turn comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near
to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art”
(154). Great sorrow and suffering always seem to accompany the sudden joyous turn
of the fairy story; in both emotions we shed tears; at the centre of both are tears. This
piercing glimpse of joy at the happy ending, according to Tolkien, is the sudden
glimpsing of the underlying reality or truth tying the consolation directly back to the
‘hard recognition that things are so in the world’, the aspect of fantasy that lays the
foundation for enchantment—“an echo of evangelium in the real world” (155), an echo
of the greatest eucatastrophe in any fairy story, that is, the Incarnation of Christ, in
Tolkien the Catholic’s view (Clyde 832).

The contrasting aspect of the qualities of a Tolkienian fairy-story is ordinariness
that establishes the groundwork for enchantment. This helps the reader to recover
those simple, fundamental things, by placing them into the unfamiliar surroundings of
the Secondary World, thus defamiliarizing them. As we escape the limitations and
cares of our primary world into one of dragons and magic and talking trees, our desires
(to communicate with other creatures) are fulfilled and we are led to the consolation of the sudden joyous turn that moves us to both laughter and tears - *eucatastrophe*.

A Tolkienian fairy story complements the aspects of a traditional fantasy story. According to Timmerman the six traits that characterize fantasy literature are the use of a traditional story, depiction of common characters and heroism, the evocation of Another World, the employment of Magic and the Supernatural, the revelation of a struggle between Good and Evil and the tracing of a Quest (1-4). The centrality of story separate fantasy from several allied genres such as allegory, science fiction, and dystopian literatures, but also locates the genre in relation to them and to literary tradition. By careful constructions of the story, the fantasy author suggests an ‘anagogic insight’ – an immediate apprehension of spiritual patterns which has been stimulated by certain literary figures, symbols or devices, which the author follows and claims as his own.

The fantasy story becomes relevant, applicable to everyday lives through characters, and their everyday experience. The point of fantasy is not to provide tidy morals, but to provide growth by experience, lessons on life’s way. The quest here is one which seeks a centre of value and meaning in life and art. The task is two fold: discovery of a locus of value in the heroic character and revivification of value in others by heroic actions. The hero is called to a wholly other world of magic and the supernatural other to perform his deeds in this frightening quest (29-48). The centrality of the hero/other relation in fantasy is one feature distinguishing the genre from romance, as defined by Northrop Frye, where the central event is the conflict between the hero and his foe, a monster or demoniac figure (189-97). Magic and the presence of supernatural powers in fantasy, are inescapably allied with the problem of good and evil. In high fantasy it provides much of the driving impetus of the story, but the
powers of good and evil are controlled by man. There is equilibrium, a sense of balance between such powers, which man can tip for good or evil. Yet in all fantasy literature, there is a keen recognition of forces of good and evil, a sense of right and wrong and also a driving necessity to act upon it. But at the end is certainty and joy (that he had made the right choice) – a “joy distilled from the experience of agonizing choice and painful awareness of the errors in human decision making” (75), similar to that envisaged by Tolkien.

The right choice of the hero leads him to his Quest, which in fantasy literature is always a spiritual and religious undertaking. The quest, often life-threatening as well as threatening the status quo and marked by a sense of struggle and imminent and immediate danger in which the hero must call upon all of his will and power to push on, is also a quest of his life (and in turn, that of the reader too) – a keener understanding of himself and his world- to find the ‘precious object’, man- and to get a regained clarity of man himself in his present world, which is ‘Recovery’ in Tolkienian terms. But the fantasy hero, unlike the existentialist hero, is not forsaken to a barren world of pointless seeking; he is actively directed by divine, supernatural aids in locating, pursuing and finally reaching out to his goal, towards a joy which transcends individual sacrifice, toward eucatastrophe. Once the quest is accomplished and the status quo restored, the hero returns to reality to resume normal life once again. Thus “[t]he journey in fantasy is a circular one, taking us “There and Back Again”: we lose our way in the wilderness of fantasy so that we may find our way back home” (Sachafsma 70).

Every writer of fantasy poses a ‘what if’ question, that is the theme of his book. *LotR* is Tolkien’s own demonstration to answer this question so as to prove his theories on fantasy at the same time placing his fantasy world in the traditional framework of high fantasy. Through the glimpsing of the Secondary World of Middle-earth and the
story of the hobbits, Tolkien achieves for us escape from the limitations of reality while also regaining for us a clear sense of reality, which leads to the consolation of a happy ending or *eucatastrophe*. Rowling too succeeds in creating a eucatastrophic tale in the mode of the Tolkienian fairy story while placing it in the traditional fantasy frame. The fact that adults read *The Hobbit*, ‘designed for children’, and young readers work their way through *LotR*, an ‘adult fantasy’ or the fact that *Harry Potter* is devoured by readers of all ages, point to a major element of high fantasy; that it appeals to a kind of reader more than a reader of a certain age group, which high-lights its cross-over nature.

The high fantasies of Tolkien and Rowling draw heavily on the past and synthesize their knowledge of the traditional narratives and the cultures in which they were popular. But at the same time their feet is firm on the ground in the very midst of the contemporary world with its wars, violence, desolation and the resultant apocalyptic anxiety. The fight between good and evil in the quest undertaken by the hero, the consequent violence caused thereby and the moral question that it poses becomes problematic because they allude to the antithetical position that the primary world reality violence holds in the imaginary world of fantasy. This conflicting relationship that violence has in fantasy calls for an examination of the delineation of violence in fantasy, particularly for the young.

II. ii. Violence in Children’s Fantasy

Evil is omnipresent as virtue in fantasy, as good and evil are omnipresent in life and the propensities for both are present in every individual. This duality poses the moral problem, and requires the struggle to solve it; hence the use of violence in fantasy, which is an indispensable by-product of the struggle between good and evil. The bad person always loses out because of the conviction that crime does not pay and
virtue wins out at the end, thus promoting morality and bringing out a positive outcome out of the negative theme of violence that is depicted.

From the time of the unrecorded annals of the past, symbolic violence has held a noble and accepted place in human culture. Violence stood as a symbol of rage, conflict, cataclysm and revenge, which were accepted as elements of the human conditions. The great epics, civic myths, folktales and histories and their collective actions are tales of violent bloodshed, gory carnage, war and martyrdom. For eons, generations were lulled to sleep fed on fairy stories of devouring wolves, horrifying trolls, bloodthirsty vampires and evil witches. Many fairy tales, before their ‘Disneyfication’ of a ‘happily-ever-after’ future, had realistic violent closures of murder, death or tragedy in their original versions. Children heard stories about the unjust and sometimes even the just, being punished or treated badly: the wolf gobbles up Red Riding Hood’s grandmother; Hansel and Gretel pushes the evil witch into the cauldron and their wicked stepmother is cast out; the wolf eats up the two Little Pigs; the Little Mermaid ends up a tragic heroine, and so on. Punishment figured strongly in the didactic stories of the Puritans; violence was made glamorous in the literature of imperialism; woe and violence which revealed courage and self-sacrifice in the heroes were justified even in school stories, romances, fantasies and the ‘penny dreadfuls’.

Plato banned entertainers as they could pollute the minds of the children of his Republic. Aristotle purged the bloody dramatists of their goriness, through his ‘Katharsis’, thus attesting a positive interpretation to the many heads that rolled on the stage at the final curtain of a tragedy. Kyd, Marlowe and Shakespeare strew their plays with violent entertainment making the ‘pit’ as well as the ‘crown’ enthralled, entertained and enlightened. (But the Puritan axe was not far behind). Both Machiavelli
and Milton claimed to be concerned with the road to hell in order to avoid it because one must understand evil in order to embrace good.

In the didactic tradition of writing for children, punishment figured strongly whether the authors were puritans, eighteenth century rationalists or nineteenth century Evangelicals. For centuries, writing for children abounded in stories where the virtuous were rewarded and evildoers punished. Violence, particularly physical violence, was frequently part of punishment. Violence also threaded through the lives of the good, many of whom had to prove their steadfastness by enduring physical affliction or mental intimidation. Sometimes violence was used to admonish, like in Mrs. Sherwood’s History of the Fairchild Family (1818). Thus children were directly confronted with their responsibility for their choices and actions and the likelihood of severe punishments following closely upon wrong-doing.

Apart from its administering, instructive and punishing qualities, violence in children’s literature could be also glamorous as permeated in the stories of expansionist glory and the literature of imperialism. Fighting was “reduced to a code in which reflection was absent, bravery was instinctive, suffering rendered as endurance and death as dignified sacrifice” (MacDonald 43). The enormous popularity of G. Manville Fenn and G.A. Henty whose books were marked by the ‘body count’ approach to determining success, testify to the widespread acceptability of the cult of the heroic figure, in militaristic form.

Other than stories that deal with war, there were the school stories with incidents in which the hero was obliged to fight a larger opponent, either on a matter of honour or to protect the weaker. While girls were not expected to go for war, stories for them did not escape the call to face danger or be ready to sacrifice themselves. The real appeal in scenes of “woe and violence” was the courage and self-sacrifice they
revealed, the acts that demonstrated “forgetfulness of self” (Yonge, qtd. Nimon 93).

Female heroism was portrayed even in the ‘penny dreadfuls’. Being ready to do battle with fate remained the staple of much juvenile literature up to World War II and beyond; Biggles and his female counterpart Worrale, created by C. W. E. Johns, were read by children beyond English-speaking nations.

The first great modern conflict between moral and mass entertainment was seen in the ‘dime novels’, transmitted directly to the masses of young people. The Victorian restraint was sensationalistically rejected; violence and villainy were described with a fervid, detailed, overwritten enthusiasm in the face of middle-class standard of good taste. The dime novels and their hack writers were feared to influence the young dangerously, resulting in an impending social collapse, and legal restrictions were placed on the dime novels. The ‘pulp’ magazines of the early twentieth century were far more lurid; literary offences to good taste were considered old hat. The ‘sword and sorcery’ fantasy novels and the horror novels of authors like Stephen King etc. are replete with violence. The latest in the nexus of conflict between moralists and entertainers are the cut-throat comics and the motion picture.

All this lead us to the recognition that no culture ever fostered a popular belief that violence might be banished through education, scientific knowledge, child rearing or other human efforts. It is only in recent decades that the place of violence in children’s books has been so vigorously questioned. Gerard Jones views abhorrence of violence in entertainment media as a new view to human history which came perhaps, when entertainment started to get commercialized into mass media (Killing Monsters, chap. I). In a world that denounces violence in theory and searches for the means to create a non-violent world, while paradoxically mongering for more war, what is the place of violence in fantasy? In such a situation, we need no justification for re-
examining our position in this regard or for permitting the inclusion of violence only in ways of which we can approve. Conflict and violence are an inherent part of our society so that its portrayal in children’s books is inevitable.

Entertainment violence has undergone the most frightening changes through the years with increasing explicitness, intensity and moral ambiguity in what it portrays. Researches are on trying to prove that this generate increased aggression, fear, desensitization and an appetite for more violence in children, thereby distorting their views of reality. Stripped off the imperial heroic glamour of fame and honour and the Christian retribution in a world beyond, for sacrifice made in this world, the choice of good over evil has to be made in its bleakest form – whatever the cost; so do books that pose the issues for children and young adults in terms meaningful to them in their world. Perhaps what makes the issue of violence in children’s literature more contentious today than in the past is the social context in which we find ourselves. As a sense of lost childhood and fear of violence pervade our society, it is important to re-examine and evaluate the place of violence in children’s books and to ask if honest representations of the human capacity for evil overwhelm the young mind in despair.

Descriptions of violence and horror portrayed in books have not yet been proved to have any frightening or provoking effect on children like visual images which, according to Cantor, have greater capacity to frighten them, because of their added power of movement, sound, pacing and images to further intensify the experience (‘Mummy, I’m Scared’). In reading, a child has a number of options to reassure himself that everything is alright. Besides, adult perceptions of what is ‘too’ scary for children maybe inaccurate or based on flawed reasoning because,

[w]e can never really reexperience the children we were without bringing along the adults we have become; our adult imagined
children often do not judge or respond to books as would real contemporary children or even as our own younger selves would have (Stevenson 310).

However, the fact remains that even many healthy minded, non-violent children love stories that portray violence and horror, as evident from the astounding success of fantasies like J.K. Rowling’s The Harry Potter series and Philip Pullman’s The Dark Trilogies of our own times. Very few studies have been made on the reasons behind this inclination to the ‘dark’, its potential possibilities and advantages, its unrealized negative effects and prospective rectification of the bad effects.

The growing independence of children urges them to delight in stories in which the good and the evil are pit against each other. In a stage of development where they feel from within the necessity to bottle up and control their aggressive impulses in daily life, they have all the more reason to dream of bold adventures and violent battles. Dr. Benjamin Spock thinks that it is a mistake to think that wild stories are put over on children, because those who write and draw them are only turning out what they have found that children want most:

The child first must go through a period of blood-and-thunder adventure, where superhuman might and right always win at the last minute, before he can graduate to more sophisticated reading (393)....

These stories of amazing adventures which sound like trash (to you) may be deeply moving, even character-building experiences for him (395).

Killing monsters, being evil and destructive, taking revenge—all in imagination—are fantasies savoured not only by the young but even by law-abiding, gentle, humane and altruistic adults. It is a vital compensation for the wildness we all have to surrender
on our way to being good people. Literatures of violence possess the power in providing escape from our social reality, thus preventing direct action. A child actively chooses, analyzes, interprets, partakes and shapes media power to weave his own personal narrative out of every story of a superhero or monster he encounters. As he closes the book, he emerges a stronger, more confident and more resilient individual, capable of taking control of his own life and behaviour and coping with his challenges more easily and reliably. This helps him to calm his fears, understand himself and thereby grow. It encourages him to turn the imaginary aggression of the fantasy story into a source of emotional nourishment and developmental support.

Violence, as a force, can be destructive as well as constructive. It can be of two types—external and internal. External violence, whether it occurs in the family or far away in another part of the world, or whether it affects a child deeply or lightly, is something which an individual has to cope with as part of his life experience. Other than this external violence, every person possesses a potential for internal violence where one has to deal with one’s own violent feelings. Only when a person is able to understand and handle his own internal potential for violence, he can explore and deal with the violence outside and perceive the connecting links between the two. Fantasy stories of a conflict between good and evil help make this connection and channelize the violent feelings towards constructive ends.

Today very few subjects are inappropriate in and of themselves; it depends on the author’s treatment of the subject and his insights. A superficially pleasant book may actually do more violence indirectly by covering up issues and thus causing a child reader to bottle up her emotions instead of releasing them in a healthy way. For another “it may do violence to the child’s own intuitive, probably inarticulate sense of reality by in effect denying it” (Giblin30). The prime concern is not the surface reality
but rather the emotional reality of the characters and their actions in the course of the story which provide manuals for personal survival in violent situations. It is the depth of the theme and the honesty with which the author conveys the nuances, patterns and connections of a story of violence which give the reader of a story of violence a textured many levelled experience he cannot get elsewhere. The portrayal of genuine human feeling in fantasy fiction gives an author the opportunity to counteract the prevailing trend of de-humanization of lives, which is one of the chief factors leading to violence in society. Since it is internal human emotions which lead to external acts of violence, the need is imperative to perceive and convey them with genuine feeling so that it broadens the understanding of a young reader. The thoughtfulness with which Tolkien and Rowling does this evinces a spirit that extends beyond their respective texts leaving echoes in the reader’s minds of the subject’s place within the wider frame work of life in general.

Young people, who encounter more violence in reality than ever before, crave for such fantasy violence because they need it to be strong enough to match and master the anxiety and the anger that they actually experience around them. The stories that the young love to read give us a glimpse of the issues they are struggling with, a glimpse of their needs, fears, dreams, visions and an unending thirst to bond to an exotic adult world. Whatever its content, “it can be openly talked about” (Bettelheim, *Uses* 57), because the child does not need to keep his feelings about what goes on in it or feel guilty about enjoying such thoughts. Emotional as well as psychological issues connected with sex, power, gender and violence can be discussed and dealt with in a relevant and constructive way through the fantasy characters since it is truly a sensitive area for parents and teachers to tread into.
Of all their challenges, one of the biggest for children is their powerlessness. Power fantasies can be thrilling antidotes to life’s challenges and fears. It can help a child to address her fears and anxieties and approach life’s scarier aspects in a more realistic way and in a new perspective, where she can manipulate and dispel her most overwhelming emotions in different ways. Gerard Jones, the author of *Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Superheroes and Make-Believe Violence* says that violence in fantasy help “a timid adolescent tap into her own bottled-up emotionality and discover a feeling of personal power” (5). Superheroes, warriors, antiheroes and even villains are symbols of strength and power that would liberate a young mind. It is not Harry Potter’s magic wand that kids want; it is the power that it provides, which makes them powerful enough to vanquish their foes, destroy their opponents and achieve their goals.

The victory of the hero about which a child reads is not over others but over oneself and over villainy, mainly one’s own, which is projected as the hero’s antagonism (Bettelheim, *Uses* 128). The hero’s action itself, the process of identifying emotionally with a character who is faced with a physical threat and fights back with every resource he can find, transmits some basic life lessons. Fantasy stories can portray these lessons of commitment, choices, taking risks, facing fears, self-assertion, courage, resiliency, of simply being oneself— with a special power and universality, yet without any particular agenda or other narrow propagandist motives, which accounts for much of the appeal of *LotR* and *Harry Potter*. Sonya Dutta Choudhary underlines the positive and constructive aspect of fictional violence:

Safely distant and decidedly vicarious, reading about violence and horror could well be a way for children to not only clarify their stance on moral issues by exploring the alternatives but to
exercise their response to the terrible and be prepared for it in real life. By being one step removed from violence in books in a setting where the violence is mostly framed by a moral context, violence in literature generally has much less of a negative impact on children than disturbingly explicit, more mirror-like images on TV (“The Enticement”).

When children are made to banish or ignore their rage, they tend to identify completely with it. “When violent story telling is not allowed to serve its function, or is connected in young people’s minds with transgression and self-destruction it can begin to churn obsessively inside without catharsis or resolution” (Jones 214). When children feel unsafe or unacknowledged about the most powerful part of themselves, the hidden realm of violent stories can begin to feel like a reality in itself, a reality totally antithetical to that of the adult-world. A child unfed on fantasy stories may conclude that his inner reality is unacceptable to others and so he may estrange himself from his inner life as well as from reality. Life may always be incomplete to him, as he cannot use his unconscious processes to enrich his real life. Bettelheim emphasizes on the vicarious function of fantasy stories:

When all the child’s wishful thinking gets embodied in a good fairy; all his destructive wishes in an evil witch; all his fears in a voracious wolf; … all his jealous anger in some animal that peeks out the eyes of his archrivals – then the child can finally begin to sort out his contradictory tendencies. Once this starts the child will be less and less engulfed by unmanageable chaos (Uses 66).

The only way a child can get hold of his inner pressures is to externalize them. A fantasy depicting elements of conflict, violence and evil, offers figures onto which a
child can externalize what goes on in his mind in controllable ways, by embodying destructive wishes in one figure, gaining desired satisfaction from another, identifying with yet another and so on according to the need of the moment; thereby, he gains control over his unmanageable chaos. Bettleheim is critical that “[t]he deep inner conflicts originating in our premature drives and our violent emotions are all denied in much of modern children’s literature, and so the child is not helped in coping with them (Uses 10). Fantasy stories and fairy tales take very seriously the existential anxieties and dilemmas such as the need to be loved, the fear of rejection and worthlessness, the fear of death and the love of life, and address to them directly.

With regard to violent entertainment, R.L Stine, the creator of the Goosebumps series observes so: “[e]veryone likes a good scare and I think everyone likes to be able to have creepy adventures and face monsters when they know they’re safe at the same time” (qtd. in Choudhary). Being shocked by an image within the safe confines of a fantasy story can actually help young people to cope with such issues in reality and not to be shocked therein. By marking a clear distinction between real and unreal violence, entertainment violence can help them see what just a fear is and what really needs to be dealt with. Scary scenes can help them learn mastery and control of fear since their young heroes are demonstrating the same. Children who are constantly being impacted by reality, often quite stressfully, find entertainment violence as an antidote to reality. Gerard Jones quotes Dr. Jib Fowels who works with children, that if allowed to work incrementally over time, and allowed to remain as fantasy itself, fantasy is therapeutic, better than a parent-led discussion which might be only another anxiety providing intrusion of reality (196). A child purged of its fears and rage through fantasy is at peace; when one is at peace one is best able to love.
In his article “Here Comes the Alpha Pups” John Tierney suggests that violent entertainment is actually associated with a decrease in violence in young people (qtd.in Heilman *Harry Potter’s World* 35). Reading or fantasizing violent scenes help children to be less violent. It allows them the fantasies that permit them to be just the opposite of an ideal of non-violence that the adult world keeps in front of them. Being evil or destructive in imagination is an exploration of the limits of reality and an acceptance of it—an experience which one cannot afford to put to test in reality without paying a heavy moral price. Fantasy stories help children rehearse for what they will be or what they will never be in later life. This, in turn, provides them with the courage to make positive changes that they need to make in the world. Through identification with characters in the stories, children gain insight into their own personal and social problems. Moreover, the characters often do or say things children themselves dare not, even though they would like to; which provide vicarious pleasures for them. The child reader also gets an outlet for his aggressive tendencies through the stories, which serve as a tension-releasing experience and as cathartic for pent-up aggressions. This relieves them from feelings of inadequacy and insecurity and from fear of aggression toward or from others.

Even from pre-literate cultures, narrative has always functioned in multiple ways: preserving accumulated knowledge, articulating meaning, offering cathartic release and pleasure and promoting healing by reassurance. The therapeutic potential of folk-tales and fantasy stories is precisely because they were always there, imparting messages of broad relevance to the collective psyche of the community in general. Bibliotherapy or the idea that reading is a wonder drug with power to ‘transform lives’ is not new. This may occur metaphorically rather than literally as an aspect of our symbol-making nature. Therefore stories which serve to be curative through the
language of symbol and metaphor must be positive in intent. Hugh Cargo finds four such functions for narratives in general. Firstly narratives that literally or symbolically parallel one’s own condition can provide a language in which a child or adult may begin to talk about what has previously been inchoate. Second the reading of books provide the comfort of knowing that one is not alone and thus function as a ‘safer’, more private version of a psychotherapy or self-help group. Third, reading can provide vicarious insight into one’s problems and even a measure of integration of previously disowned feelings: (Reading, being private, is thus a safer method). Fourth, reading can, at a metaphorical level, provide suggestions- for ways of resolving the reader’s problems- which may bypass conscious resistance on the sufferer’s part (“Can Stories Heal?”170-71). Bibliotherapy as a way of affirming and extending an individual personality rather than as a way of ‘curing’ or ‘changing’ a person is found to be more useful. Fantasies like LotR and HP which are stories of the hero’s self development and sublimation therefore have great bibliotherapeutic potential.

Childhood is the time to learn bridging the immense gap between inner experiences and the real world. An adult who was deprived of fantasy in his own childhood and so has not achieved an integration of the two worlds of reality and imagination may consider them as senseless, fantastic, scary and totally unbelievable. To a child who is able to integrate the world of reality and the world of imagination, fantasy reveals truths about mankind and oneself by juxtaposing complex and ambiguous characters of great polarity. The sudden replacement of the kindly grandmother in ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ by the rapacious wolf, or the transformation of Professor Lupin in HP into a ferocious werewolf is not anymore scary to a child than the sudden transformation of his own mother into a threatening ogre when she is angry. By splitting up her personality, the child can preserve the good image, uncontaminated,
while the temporary evil manifestation passes over (Bettelheim, *Uses* 66). Such fantastic violence permits the child to unleash his feelings without guilt, while keeping the good image of the ideal person intact, since the true grandma or parent is viewed as a different person. Thus the story suggests how the child may manage the contradictory feelings which would otherwise overwhelm him. A child, when in emotional need, may split even himself into two people. He is Frodo is Gollum; he is Harry is Voldemort, as the emotional need demands. This provides him with a basis for understanding that there are great differences between people and that, therefore, one has to make choices about who one wants to be – the villain or the good guy – Frodo or Gollum, Gandalf or Saruman, Harry or Malfoy, Dumbledore or Voldemort.

It is through the structure of fantasy that a child acts out not only real or imagined damage, but also the desire for reparation. Melanie Klein saw the menacing figures of myths and fairytales as parent displacements exerting unconscious influences on the child by making it feel threatened and persecuted; but such emotions “can clear our feelings to some extend towards our parents of grievances, we can forgive them for the frustrations we had to bear, become at peace with ourselves… [whereby] we are able to love others in the true sense of the word (343). Every story has its lessons, as does every emotional experience. Even if the child comes out of it with no lesson that he can articulate, the experience itself teaches him something about life and himself, thus turning him into someone else.

Children the world over are frightened by the violence of evil, which is why they are fascinated by stories which overcome this fear. When good triumphs and evil is vanquished, they gain control over their terror of “learned helplessness” 6. By gaining control of himself and the ‘baddies’ within himself, by knowing that he is not helpless, the world becomes less scary for him. Good and evil are concepts that represent the
essential rules of behaviour without which no society or an individual can survive. An adolescent reader gains comfort, reassurance and security by identifying with the good guy and also from knowing that there are standards that all of us are expected to live up to, which are what fantasy stories about good and evil offer. Renee Fuller cites research that shows that this can produce strikingly positive personality changes, even in delinquents (“Understanding Good and Evil”). For the child, the victory of the hero is not over his opponents, but over oneself and over villainy, mainly one’s own, which is projected as the hero’s aggressiveness. Through this, a reading child will be able to adjust better to life than one denied of such release of negative energy. The more realistically and courageously a person can face violence and suffering, the more effective he will be against them. Children can use their fantasies to master their fears by viewing them fully as fantasy, by having their fantasy as fantasy. Understanding the difference between what violent entertainment means to children and what it means to adults alone will help make sense of children’s love for imaginative aggression.

Studies have shown that actual acting out of aggression by arousal occurs only in about ten percent of people who are already inclined to be aggressive owing to factors like family, upbringing, environment and personality. A great majority of child psychiatrists believe that serious delinquency is a manifestation of a fundamental defect in a child’s character, caused by parents with delinquent tendencies or no real love. “It is the result of genes interacting with upbringing and environment in reality”, comments child psychiatrist Dr. Philip John (Personal Interview). The child ends up with hostile feelings that are too strong and a conscience that is too weak. In the rest of the vast majority, as the arousal ebbs out, so do the tensions, anger and rage, leaving them more relaxed and in control of themselves. By killing their monsters through fantasy, they can take hold of their difficult reality, and can channelize their aggression
into self-assertion, healthy competition, positive energy, renewed motivation and moral strength. To help usher in an adult world of non-violence it is imperative that children be blessed with a childhood world of fantasy and a guilt-free space of well-modulated aggression.

The best approach is to portray violence and conflict in ways that show the suffering caused and that offer solutions other than retaliatory violence. J. Webb argues for the literary value of the disturbing: “The necessary monster, is at the heart of heroic literature, providing it with an imaginative definition by antithesis: whatever the boundaries of the ‘normal’ may be the monster exists in violation of them” (1). As the monstrousness of the monster is a measure of the hero’s daring; so the challenge faced by children in learning constructive responses to aggression will determine their achievement of maturity. In books of graphic descriptions on physical and mental violence, good triumphs in an ethical and spiritual sense and those who remain true to themselves and to their principles, even in defeat or in death, remain admirable: good is its own reward and there is no escaping the responsibility for the choice one makes—either one acts or one does not.

Fantasy stories like LotR and HP uphold these values; while at the same time tell a good story in a traditional way. What Rowling has accomplished in a phenomenal way in our own times was achieved by Tolkien in a less global reading culture fifty years back. Tolkien has been exemplary in successfully combining the traditional narratives of a high fantasy with a universally relevant contemporary world, thus setting the standard by which all future texts would be judged and also creating a popular market for fantasy in general, through his classics The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings.