Throughout its history, fantasy had been obscured and locked away as inadmissible and shameful, irrational and narcissistic, barbaric and non-human. The ‘other’ expressed through fantasy was categorized as a negative black area as culture’s ‘unseen’. Regarded as mere escapism, silly, and rarely challenging the reader to think, fantasy had been neglected in the canon of great literature until Freud’s less hostile reading of the ‘fantastic’. With Raymond Williams’ challenge of the notion of the sacred texts of ‘high literature’ and the more recent interest in popular forms and texts in their cultural context, far beyond the Leavisite great tradition, fantasy has come into the mainstream as worthy of serious study. The revival of the genre is being enhanced, as fantasy tends to be “popular at times of cultural unease” (Olsen 22). With the works of Tolkien, Rowling, Philip Pullman and others, fantasy, which was not in the ascendant in the mid-nineties, is having a resurgence.

Situated between ‘the realistic’ and ‘the marvellous’, fantasy is a subversive literature existing alongside the real, as its great ‘other’. The delicate balance between fantasy and reality is achieved with “the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun” (“On Fairy Stories” 144). Fantasy acquires for the reader, the potency of the familiar and the commonplace by removing the veil of familiarity and by achieving recovery or “regaining of a clear view” (146), which is viewing the world like a child does. This aspect of fantasy breaks it off from the deriding framework of ‘childish’ and ‘for children’ to a larger canvas which include those readers, both children and adult, with a special and innate taste for the fantastic, “one that does not decrease but increases with age”, according to Tolkien (130).
Healthy escape through fantasy is not a denial of reality or an inability to cope with the real world; rather it is a recreation, restoration and renewal of the spirit to refresh itself, of the mind to play and of the imagination to stretch. Great fantasies redraw or eliminate the boundaries between concepts, nature, culture and the conscious and the unconscious, thus revealing new insights into the world of reality. The experience of fantasy to which a young mind respond to and identify with, is an essential part of growing up and the best way to enlarge from within, putting as flexible a frame as possible around whatever world he will inhabit as an adult.

A well written fantasy endures, whereas modern contemporary and realistic novels may be out of date in a few years, because the ancient truths that a fantasy proclaims makes the reader see his own reality in a new perspective, in his contemporary situation. Fantasy being a flexible genre, can reach out comfortably to the greatest number of readers of all ages than the rest of all literatures put together, which is the reason for the growing cross-over appeal of fantasy novels. The quest for identity and self-knowledge that a fantasy story embarks on, the escape that it allows from the limitations of reality while interconnecting the ordinary and the wonderful, and the fundamental truths of man’s existence that it underlines, all account for its mass appeal. So why people choose to read what they read in their particular social and cultural context becomes an important question. The debate over whether children should read fantasy texts is still alive because adults often underestimate the ability of children to distinguish fact from fiction by arguing that introducing children to fantasy can be potentially damaging. Ursula Le Guin defends fantasy that it “let you think through an alternative without actually having to do it [w]hich… is really one of the functions of all fiction … [-i] t widens the soul” (Justice, “ Steering Her Craft”).
The most common objection to fantasy is that it does not relate to what readers may experience. But the phenomenal success and mass appeal of the texts examined here prove otherwise. It is obvious that *Harry Potter* and the recent renewed focus on *The Lord of the Rings* have done a lot to widen the awareness of fantasy in general. The popular young Hogwarts wizard has transformed children’s fantasy literature into a booming business. More authors are writing fantasy tales, more houses are publishing books in this genre and more adults and more kids are reading and relishing them. The Harry Potter phenomenon has made fantasy less ghettoized, ushering in a new golden age of fantasy. What is ‘hot’ about these fantasies is that they are ‘realistic fantasies’, set in the real world to which the readers can relate to and which makes sense to them; this accounts for their cross-over appeal. This new enthusiasm started with the success of *Harry Potter* has been extended to successful cross-over books like Philip Pullman’s *Dark Materials’* Trilogy, Eoin Colfer’s *Artemis Fowl* series, and Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, to name a few.

This does not mean that adult readers are being infantilized by reading children’s books. As Peter Hollindale points out, adults who read a children’s book are not in fact reading the same book as children are, by virtue of their different reading experiences(9). Adults have always read children’s books and vice versa. Charles Dickens, Charles Kingsley, Walter Scott, R.L. Stevenson, the Bronte sisters and Rudyard Kipling and G.A. Henty in the nineteenth century and John Buchan, Agatha Christie, Alexander Dumas, Jules Verne, George Orwell, Arthur Conan Doyle, Mark Twain, J.D. Salinger, Robert Cormier and Judy Blume in the twentieth century had found for their novels a double voice, delighting both adults and children. The trend still continues and is bound to do so in a popular way. So the cross-over genre of story-writing came by as the acceptance and understanding that certain kinds of narratives
could be made of equal interest to both adult and young readers, especially the
adventure of a young coming-of-age hero’s rites of passage into adulthood. “With such
literature available, it was the readers who did the crossing-over, not the books. The
books provided the bridge so that the transition could be made” (Watson 119). The
child reader is never forgotten; and the adult reader is not asked to become childish or
childlike. Any reader young or old is being invited to become a better reader. It could
be argued that the popularity of the so-called crossover literature today is a continuation
of the norm, and not a new phenomenon as is claimed. But what is new is the sheer
scale of the world-wide enthusiasm for such books which has brought in a change in
reading habits and marketing practices as well as the celebrity culture enjoyed by the
writers.

The levels of violence seen in these fantasies speak of an entirely different
conception of childhood from the relative innocence of the children in the fantasies of
the 1940’s and before. The willingness to depict previously taboo themes like sexuality
and violence reflect a change in the uses of fantasy. While the fantasy of the earlier
period depicted the possibility to a better world, these new fantasies grapple more
directly with real problems faced by the young individual at the personal and the social
level. In the ‘new fantasies’ of the fantasy-realism hybrid, fantasy and its off-shoot
violence, are antithetically related since the former takes a reader to a secondary world
of enchantment while the latter stirs him up to the stark reality of a disenchanted world.
With terrorism, potential nuclear holocaust, violence and ecological apocalypse
blighting the real world, the hope for the future is fantastic.

The present study aims to analyze the contemporary relevance of the fantastic in
today’s reality in the light of the current status of fantasy. It addresses the question of
how fantasy re-enchants and recovers the reality for the reader in a disenchanted world
by regaining a clearer view of reality. It also examines the question of evil that fantasy
addresses which is a direct outcome of the struggle between good and evil. Conversely,
this serves a positive function, providing great therapeutic values and coping skills to
the reader in the present day world. While the texts used for review are by two
Caucasian British writers, their fantasy aspects can be widely applied to a variety of
other fantasy works.

The dissertation undertakes this study in the background of the selected
fantasies of two of the most popular fantasists of modern times, namely J.R.R. Tolkien
and J.K. Rowling, both of whom have enjoyed immense popularity, phenomenal
literary success and a cult fan-following in their respective ages. Tolkien was the rage
of the American college campuses of the sixties, while Rowling has become the vogue
half a century later. Tolkien revived the fantasy genre from its ‘sword and sorcery’
status by creating The Hobbit, the ‘prequel’ to his masterpiece The Lord of the Rings-
perhaps the first adult fantasy in English literature. He thus became the father of
modern high fantasy; all later fantasists were either his imitators or followers. Rowling
became its ‘mother’ by rediscovering for the modern cyber-generation the fantasy
world of books, through the immensely successful Harry Potter series. Both are
representative writers of the cross-over fiction as also popular culture; and both were
derided by the intellectual elite and the literati of their times, as ‘juvenile’.

LotR and HP series are typical fantasies of the high fantasy genre. Both are
bildungsroman¹- heroic romances with the themes of a heroic quest, good versus evil
and magic and the supernatural. Both LotR and HP can be considered as Tolkienian
fairy stories also, creating secondary worlds which offer Fantasy, Recovery, Escape and
Consolation or Eucatastrophe (Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories”). Although they share many
similarities, each has a unique approach to fantasy. While LotR is a pure high fantasy,
HP is a mosaic of genres ingeniously mixed in the main stream fantasy. Though typical fantasies, LotR and HP are not escapist, but are contemporary works in their particular cultural contexts, which account for their huge success and mass appeal. The violence portrayed in them is part of all fairy-tale literature and serves some definite psychological purposes while also reflecting a contemporary realistic picture of the age. In a world of pseudo–enchantments and multifaceted challenges resulting in an erosion of childhood and a ‘childification’ of adults, fantasy re-enchants the inner child in us, helping children to have their childhood and prompting adults to rediscover the child in them so that we can view the real world with renewed wonder. LotR and HP are cross-over fiction which ‘maintain’ childhood in the right space and time through re-enchantment and ‘recovery’ and through non-utilitarian open-ended response of wonder by returning to our world and seeing it afresh. Since true fantasy is for all who are ready to be enchanted and since a homogeneity exists in the child-adult dichotomy, the term children’s fantasy to address them stands questionable. These are the argumentations postulated by the dissertation.

The dissertation is entitled *Fantasy and Violence in the Selected Fiction of J. K. Rowling and J.R.R. Tolkien*. The title uses the name ‘J.K.Rowling’ first, owing to the current popularity and literary status of the author. But the thesis introduces J.R.R. Tolkien first, for the reason that chronologically and literally he precedes Rowling, being the father of modern fantasy, and also because the texts are reviewed with reference to Tolkien’s theory on fantasy. The dissertation is divided into five chapters and a preface and a final conclusion. The first chapter traces the evolution of children’s literature high-lighting fantasy fiction. The second chapter consists of two sections: the first part is an overview of fantasy and its evolution; the aspects of a Tolkienian fantasy delineated in Tolkien’s essay “On Fairy Stories” and the different elements of a
traditional fantasy outlined by Timmerman are discussed. The second part of the chapter is an overview of violence in fantasy fiction, focusing on its positive functions. Since fantasy, the key element used to read the selected texts is a broad spectrum encompassing different elements, the fantasy aspects of *LotR* and *HP* are analysed in two separate chapters. The third chapter examines Tolkien’s *LotR* as a traditional fantasy and as a Tolkienian fantasy; the realistic and contemporary aspects of *LotR* are also discussed. The next chapter adopts the same criteria for discussing the Harry Potter series; the remixing of various genres in its mainstream fantasy is also examined.

The multifarious angle in which violence is delineated in *LotR* and *HP* so as to enhance the antithetical relationship between the enchanted secondary world of fantasy and the disenchanted primary world of reality is explored in the fifth chapter. Violence which is the consequence of the struggle between good and evil in fantasy is what allows ‘Recovery’ and re-enchantment to the stories. The cathartic and therapeutic effects of violence and the psychological purposes it serve through the medium of fantasy are discussed with reference to the primary sources. Since Tolkien and Rowling treat violence in totally different ways, the use of violence in each of the texts is analysed separately in this chapter. The last chapter consolidates the observations made in the previous chapters by comparing and contrasting the two authors to focus on the uniqueness of Tolkien and Rowling as popular contemporary cross-over fantasists. The ‘Recovery’ achieved by *LotR* and *HP* through re-enchantment and re-connection is what places them in their respective contemporary and cultural context, postulating that fantasy is not an escape from reality, but rather an escape into a heightened reality.