

# Off Cuts

## Rhetorics of Fantasy (extract)

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*Extract from Rhetorics of Fantasy (the Introduction)*

By Farah Mendlesohn

*Health warning:*

*This book is not intended to create rules.*

*Its categories are not intended to fix anything in stone.*

*This book is merely a portal into fantasy, a tour around the skeletons and exoskeletons of genre.*

*Taxonomy: Theory and practice of classification.*

*Classification: Any method of organizing and systematizing the diversity of organisms, living and extinct, according to a set of rules (Penguin Dictionary of Biology. 9th ed. 1994. 1996).*

*Taxonomy is no longer typological. It's now systematics, consciously based in the axiom "The observer is part of the system" (Richard Erlich, email, 2003).*

*Formal critics all begin with a truth that ideological critics too often neglect; form is in itself interesting, even in the most abstract extreme. Shape, pattern, design carry their own interest-and hence meaning-for all human beings. What some critics have called "human meanings" are not required; nothing is more human than the love of abstract forms." (From Wayne C. Booth's introduction to M.M. Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984. xiii).*

### Introduction

This book is not about defining fantasy. The debate over definition is now longstanding, and a consensus has emerged which has accepted as a viable "fuzzy set", a range of critical definitions of fantasy. It is now rare to find scholars who choose between Kathryn Hume, W.R. Irwin, Rosemary Jackson, or Tzvetan Todorov: it is much more likely they will pick and choose between these and other "definers" of the field according to the area of fantasy fiction, or the ideological filter, in which they are interested.

I want to reach out for an understanding of the construction of the genre, and very specifically to consider its language and rhetoric, in order to provide critical tools for further analysis. During the research for this book I became aware that while there are many single author or single text studies in genre fantasy criticism, there is relatively little comparative criticism beyond the study of metaphorical and thematic elements. There is almost nothing which deals with the language of the fantastic that goes beyond aesthetic preference. My contention is that if we do not have a critical tool which allows us to collate texts in any yielding way (note that I do not insist on "meaningful"), we cannot engage in the comparative research which illuminates a genre.

I believe that the fantastic is an area of literature that is heavily dependent on the dialectic between author and reader for the construction of a sense of wonder, that it is a fiction of consensual construction of belief. This expectation is historical and subject to historical change and is not unique to fantasy. Wayne C. Booth has written that "for experienced readers a sonnet begun calls for a sonnet concluded; an elegy begun in blank verse calls for an elegy completed in blank verse" (Fiction 12). This dialectic is conditioned by very real genre expectations that circle around certain identifiable rhetorical techniques which I will be describing. Intrinsic to my argument is that a fantasy succeeds when the literary techniques employed are most appropriate to the reader expectations of that category of fantasy. Understanding the broad brush strokes of plot or the decoration of device is less fundamental to comprehending the genre; all of these may be tweaked or subverted while still remaining firmly within

the reader's expectation of the text.

I came to this project as a science fiction critic, and that perspective has shaped the way I understand the structures and rhetorics of fantasy. Crucially, it led me to focus on an issue which both W.R. Irwin and Brian Attebery (*Fantasy Tradition*) have raised, the way in which a text becomes fantasy, or alternatively, the way the fantastic enters the text and the reader's relationship to this.

In science fiction, how the reader is brought into the speculative world influences the ways in which that world can be described, so that the incredible invention story rapidly gives way to the completed future, because the incredible invention permits only one level of emotional response, that of ritualized amazement or ritualized horror. In contrast, as Robert A. Heinlein argued and practiced, the completed future—the enclosed world or pocket universe—permits the author to elicit increasingly complex responses but demands much more sophisticated narrative techniques. But the question remains of the precise reader relationship to these futures, and there is a clear difference between the imaginary society which we enter riding on the shoulder of the otherworldly visitor (a construct most common to utopian fiction) and that which we encounter as a hidden observer for whom no allowances are made; the first demands—and usually offers—explanations, while the second requires the reader to unpack the intertext. The consequences of this for science fiction have been explored by John Clute, Samuel R. Delany, John Huntington, Edward James, and Brian Stableford, among others. My approach therefore is not new. I am building on work already done, but work that has primarily been done for science fiction. My intention is to turn the same critical gaze on fantasy, to take up Roger Schlobin's challenge, implicit in his claim that the "key to the fantastic is how its universes work, which is sometimes where they are, but is always why and how they are" (161). Attebery argues that most fantasy writers create clearly defined frames. "Narrative devices that establish a relationship between the fantasy world and our own while at the same time separating the two" (*Strategies* 66). Which is of course what my book is about—how this works and the impact of this.

In this book I argue that there are essentially four categories within the fantastic: the portal-quest, the immersive, the intrusive, and the liminal. These categories are determined by the means by which the fantastic enters the narrated world. In the portal-quest we are invited through into the fantastic, in the intrusive fantasy the fantastic enters the fictional world, in the liminal fantasy the magic hovers in the corner of our eye, while the immersive fantasy allows us no escape. Each category has as profound an influence on the rhetorical structures of the fantastic as does its taproot text or genre. Each category is a mode which is susceptible to the quadripartite template or grammar—WRONGNESS, THINNING, RECOGNITION, and HEALING/RETURN—which John Clute suggests in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (338-9). Each mode places its emphasis on a different note within this four-note bar, and within the mode consistencies exist in the use of these templates which demonstrate coherence in the categories.

The construction of these groups strongly suggests a taxonomy and it would be disingenuous of me to attempt to fudge this issue. However taxonomy needs to be understood as a tool, not as an end in itself, and it needs to be understood in the modern context that taxonomical practices are increasingly polysemic and multiplex, generated by acknowledged questions and capable of existence alongside other configurations. It is not the intention of this book to argue that there is only one possible taxonomic understanding of the genre. The purpose of the book is not to offer a classification per se but to consider the genre in ways which open up new questions. It is a tool kit, not a color chart.

If the taxonomy I suggest is to succeed as the critical tool kit I intend, it must work across the more commercial definitions of fantasy, the categories of children's and adults' fantasy, of dark fantasy, and of light and comic fantasy, and must help to explain some of the more anomalous texts: those which find their genre coat of the wrong cut or color, rough to the touch or tight around the sleeves. In essence, my contention is that the failure to grasp the stylistic needs of a particular category of

fantasy may undermine the effectiveness of an otherwise interesting idea. Eleanor Cameron wrote that fantasy is "a very special category of literature that compares with fiction as a sonnet compares with poetry. Either you have a sonnet if you have written your poem in a certain way, or you don't if you haven't" (165). To use my own terms, which are outlined below, an immersive fantasy told with the voice of portal fantasy will feel leaden; a liminal fantasy written with the naivety of the intrusion fantasy will feel over contrived.

Inevitably, there will be texts which appear to cross categories, but these exceptions test the rule: where authors move from one category to another within the text, they invariably assume new techniques; the cadence shifts, and both metaphor and mimetic writing take on different functions to accommodate the new category. This shift is at times inadvertent and at other times subject to the manipulation of more ambitious and skilled writers. Yet while many books move internally from one category to another very few authors produce a single text which exists simultaneously within multiple categories (although as we shall see, immersive fantasy can host an intrusion). These exceptional few will be discussed in chapter five, and their achievements provide an important caveat for this book: no theory is worth a damn that claims universal applicability. Here I take serious exception with Stanley Fish's argument that "theories always work and they will always produce exactly the results they predict, results that will be immediately compelling to those for whom the theory's assumptions and enabling principles are self-evident. Indeed, the trick would be to find a theory that didn't work" (68). This statement, however amusing, encapsulates much of what is wrong with current "schools" of literary criticism. This observation may seem egregious, but it is essential when reading this book to know that the author is not considered to believe in these structures. They are observations, not diktats and they are powerful only to the degree that they remain arguable.

This book is very much grounded in a love of forms, but form cannot be wholly abstracted from content or ideology. Furthermore, I have come to believe that form may act to constrain ideological possibilities. Consequently consideration is given to interpretation where the issue is how a particular mode of writing helps to generate, intensify, or twist meaning: a great deal of this book will consider how particular rhetorics deliberately or unavoidably support ideological positions and in doing so shape character, or affect the construction and narration of story. But generally speaking this is a book about structure, not about meaning.

When I began this book I believed the issue to be taxonomy. Half way through, I was convinced that I was working within narratology. Later, rhetoric became my principal concern. In the concluding stages I realized I was working within what is described as poetics. Finally, I realized that all the most illuminating metaphors came from the world of landscape painting. This book is the result of an extended thought experiment. It is not intended to fix sub-categories of genre (as I hope chapter five will make clear), or to say, "this is how you do x kind of fantasy." It is intended solely in terms of "This is what I observe over a wide range of texts." It is an exercise in almost pure Reason, a rather old fashioned approach to criticism, I am aware. I have used other critics where I found them helpful, but there is surprisingly little written on the rhetoric or poetics of the fantastic. I am, however, indebted to the work of John Clute and Brian Attebery, whose work has served as compass poles, and to the "How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy" books and blog discussions of many active fantasy authors. Wherever this text fits, I hope very much that it provokes more questions than it answers.

#### A Note on the Selection of Texts

No system of selection has been applied to the choice of texts in this book. At best, the selection builds on Attebery's notion of the fuzzy set-the idea that there are core likenesses around which we can construct ever more distant perimeters-but with the caveat that this book argues that rather than a single fuzzy set, from which fantasy moves from genre to slipstream, we can actually identify several fuzzy sets, linked together by what John Clute has termed taproot texts. Inevitably, some forms of

fantasy appeal to me more than others and I have yet to find a reader who claims to enjoy all of the kinds I have outlined: to give just one example, readers who like portal-quest fantasies rarely seem to enjoy the liminal fantasies, and vice versa. I have not been able to keep this coloration entirely absent from the text, although where I knew my own tastes might pre-determine my analysis, I tackled this in part by asking others (more enthusiastic for the forms) to select my reading. This is particularly the case in chapter one (portal-quest fantasy) and chapter three (intrusion fantasy) where all the texts selected came recommended from friends and from members of the International Association of the Fantastic in the Arts on-line discussion list. In contrast the books selected for chapters four and five are books that I had already read, and which had fascinated me. A consequence is that some writers central to the field do not appear in this book: in each case this is entirely because my personal taste does not extend in their direction. For these reasons, and aware that the passive academic voice has a tendency to reinforce reification, I have chosen to retain the first person.

I am not myself always convinced my assignments are appropriate. Some books have been haggled back and forth between chapters as I have tried to decide in which mode they were written. Dividing between immersive fantasies which just happened to have intrusions as part of their plot but whose rhetoric emphasized the immersive qualities of the text, and those fantasies set in other worlds in which intrusion is the source of the fantastic was not always easy. Whether the choices have been correct or not, the very engagement with them has generated questions about the ways in which the fantastic is written and any disputes as to where I have placed each book will, I hope, generate more.

Finally, where possible-and unless stated otherwise-I have referenced all texts to the first editions. The major exception to this is in chapter three where the classic Gothic novels are all referenced to current Penguin Classics for the ease of both author and reader.

### The Categories

This book is constructed as a set of interlocking essays: with the exception of chapter five each of the essays stands alone while leaning against the arguments and definitions of the other chapters. The critical questions in each chapter are: How do we get there? How do we meet the fantastic? In what ways does this meeting affect the narrative and rhetorical choices? How does this affect the choice of language and in what way does the choice of language affect the construction of the fantastic and the position of the reader? What ideological consequences emerge from the rhetorical structures? Perhaps the most crucial question is, Where are we asked to stand in relationship to the fantastic? In this it is important to understand that I am not discussing point of view, or what Gerard Genette labeled focalization. Focalization is a matter internal to the story and there is no common choice within any of the categories (although one cannot help but notice the extensive use of first person in the liminal fantasy). What I am interested in is the reader's relationship to the framework. Bijoy H. Boruah, in trying to rationalize the empathic emotions of the reader, wrote, "To appreciate fictions is, to some extent, also to fictionalize ourselves...." (126), an activity he called "metaphoric participation". His phrase is peculiarly apt for what I'm arguing. That "reader position" to which I will keep pointing, while on the one hand refers to our ideal and implied reader, is also an invitation to construct a fictionalized self who can accept the construction of the rhetoric of a particular fantastic text. But the invitation is not free and open: it is an exercise in which the author continually seeks the upper hand. In his reader's report on this book Brian Attebery wrote, "Characters can be categorized variously as being immersed in, or wandering through, or fighting off invasions of the fantastic; readers, however, can take any or all of these positions at once, since they are constantly mediating between the fantasy world and their own experience" (2006). Yet what this book will argue is that the author seeks to control these choices, even while understanding the polysemous and pro-active position of the reader. For many authors the task is to anticipate readers' strategies as part of their own poetics. The core rhetorical strategy of fantasy remains the same: fantasy is constructed with

precision through point of view. Like a perspective puzzle, if the reader stands in "the wrong place", the image/experience will not resolve.

It is almost impossible to deal discreetly with each category so that there will be constant comparisons between the forms I identify in order to show the differences between their workings and tone.

### The Portal-Quest Fantasy

A portal fantasy is simply a fantastic world entered through a portal. The classic portal fantasy is of course *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950). Crucially, the fantastic is on the other side and does not "leak". Although individuals may cross both ways, the magic does not.

Closest in form to the classic utopian or alien planet story (sometimes, but not always, a first contact tale), portal fantasies require that we learn from a point of entry. They are almost always quest novels and they almost always proceed in a linear fashion with a goal which must be met. Like the computer games they have spawned, they often contain elaborate descriptive elements, but while the intrusion fantasy must be unpacked or defeated, the portal fantasy must be navigated. Frequently, portal fantasies become more mysterious, rather than less. The reliance on destiny in so many portal fantasies may reflect the need to create rational explanation of irrational action without destroying this mystery. The language of the portal fantasy is often elaborate, but it is the elaboration of the anthropologist or the pre-Raphaelite painter, intensely descriptive and exploratory rather than assumptive. It is a rare portal fantasy which achieves the Gothic (although David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus*, 1920, comes to mind, as does Alice's *Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865) and when it does the need to describe and explain remains a driving force behind the narrative and the language used. Most significantly, the portal fantasy allows and relies upon both protagonist and reader gaining experience. Where the stock technique of intrusion is to keep surprising the reader, portal fantasies lead us gradually to the point where the protagonist knows his or her world enough to change it and to enter into that world's destiny. One way to envision this is that we ride alongside the protagonist, hearing only what s/he hears, seeing only what s/he sees; thus our protagonist (even if they are not the narrator) provides us with a guided tour of the landscapes. Diana Wynne Jones's *Tough Guide to Fantasy Land* (1996) both mocks this technique and reduces it to its purest form: the travel guide.

When we think of portal fantasies, we commonly assume that the portal is from "our" world to the fantastic, but the portal fantasy is about entry, transition and negotiation. Much quest fantasy, for all that it builds the full secondary world, fits better with the portal fantasy. Characteristically in quest fantasy the protagonist goes from a mundane life, in which the fantastic, if he or she is aware of it, is very distant and unknown (or at least unavailable to the protagonist) into direct contact with the fantastic, through which he or she transitions, to the point of negotiation with the world via the personal manipulation of the fantastic realm. In chapter one I will trace precisely this process in *The Lord of the Rings*. The discussion in chapter one will, I hope, help to distinguish the creation of a convincing rhetorical secondary world from the techniques of immersive fantasy. In the quest fantasy we see the world through this transitional narrative: for despite the assertion that this world has always existed, the technique remains identical to that of the portal fantasy and the effect on the language of the text is the same, forcing the author to describe and explain what is seen by the point of view character as s/he negotiates the world. The result, when done poorly, is didactic, but as I hope to demonstrate, even the most creative writers find it difficult in this form to avoid impressing upon the reader an authoritative interpretation of their world.

### The Immersive Fantasy

The immersive fantasy invites us to share not merely a world, but a set of assumptions. At its best, it presents the fantastic without comment as the norm both for the protagonists and for the reader: we sit on the protagonist's shoulder and while

we have access to their eyes and ears, we are not provided with an explanatory narrative. The immersive fantasy is that which is closest to science fiction, and as such, it makes use of an irony of mimesis, which helps to explain why a sufficiently effective immersive fantasy may be indistinguishable from science fiction: once the fantastic becomes assumed, it acquires a scientific cohesion all of its own. In 2000, this led to endless debates about the status of both Mary Gentle's *Ash* (2000) and China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (2000). But the immersive fantasy depends for its effectiveness on an assumption of realism that denies the need for explication.

The immersive fantasy seems to be described in part by what it is not. We do not enter into the immersive fantasy, we are assumed to be of it: our cognitive estrangement is both entire and negated. The immersive fantasy must be sealed; it cannot, within the confines of the story, be questioned. While an intrusion narrative may drive the plot, as in *Perdido Street Station*, the setting is already fantastic so that the intrusion is not in itself the source of the fantastic. Most important is that the fantasy be immersive for the point of view characters: unlike the characters of quest fantasies, which I have argued above are better fitted to the category of portal fantasy, the point of view character of an immersive fantasy must take for granted the fantastic elements with which he or she is surrounded; he or she must exist as integrated with the magical (or fantastic) even if he or she is not magical; s/he must be "deeply competent with the world they know" (Clute, Strokes 34). As we shall see in chapter two, successful immersive fantasy consciously negates the sense of wonder in favor of an atmosphere of ennui. M. John Harrison's *The Pastel City* both achieves this and uses this trope to mock our expectations.

The use of the immersive mode can undermine the intentions of an author. One might presume that Laurell K. Hamilton's vampire novels (beginning with *Guilty Pleasures*, 1993) were intended as horror. They contain the requisite actors: the vampire, the vampire hunter, several nasty monsters, and later a werewolf. But the fantastic elements are not in themselves frightening, and they are most definitely not horrific. The potential horror of the Anita Blake novels is subverted by the structures and language native to immersive fantasy: although a horror novel is read with expectation, the immersive fantasy places much of that expectation on contextual difference, rather than the intruding event. Immersion, with its ironic realism, normalizes the horrific and prevents the sense of attrition which Clute identifies as essential to Horror. That these novels ended up in chapter 3 (intrusion fantasy) has nothing to do with the accoutrements of the fantastic by which they are usually categorized, but by the trajectory of escalation which shapes both the individual books and the series.

What is perhaps most interesting is that it is most commonly in the immersive fantasies that one finds oneself in a fantasy world in which no magic occurs. Sometimes this is because the magic takes place elsewhere, but there are many immersive fantasy novels which differ only from science fiction in that they are set in apparently archaic worlds which are not connected to ours: in *Titus Groan*, the fantastic is embedded in the linguistic excesses of the text, or in the interaction between the setting and the protagonists. In the immersive fantasy, the plot may be the least fantastical element.

### Intrusion Fantasy

In intrusion fantasy the fantastic is the bringer of chaos. It is the beast in the bottom of the garden, or the elf seeking assistance. It is horror and amazement. It takes us out of safety without taking us from our place. It is recursive. The intrusion fantasy is not necessarily unpleasant, but it has as its base the assumption that normality is organized, and that when the fantastic retreats the world, while not necessarily unchanged, returns to predictability at least until the next element of the fantastic intrudes.

Fantasy and "reality" are often kept strictly demarcated: in some fictions, those set apart from the protagonist may not be able to perceive the fantastic even while they

experience its effects. These structural characteristics of intrusive fantasy are mimicked by the language we can associate with this form. Because the base level is the normal world, intrusion fantasies maintain stylistic realism and rely heavily on explanation. Because the drive of intrusion fantasy is to be investigated and made transparent, description is intense, and it is assumed that we, the reader are engaged with the ignorance of the point of view character, usually the protagonist. One consequence of this is that the language reflects constant amazement. Unlike the portal fantasy, which it otherwise strongly resembles, the protagonists and the reader are never expected to become accustomed to the fantastic.

The required awestruck or skeptical tone is tricky and may contribute to the preference for stylistic realism in order to maintain the contrast between the normal world and the fantastic intrusion. It also may explain the tendency of the intrusive fantasy to continually introduce new protagonists, and to up the ante on the nature or number of the horrors. Horror, amazement, and surprise are difficult to maintain if the protagonist has become accustomed to them. Escalation-of many kinds-is an important element of the rhetoric.

Intrusion fantasy, although usually associated with "real world" fantasy, can be set within the immersive. If this is the case, the same rules apply: there is a clear line between the constructed "normality" and the intrusion. Protagonists know what is normal even if we do not and express this clearly and forcefully, and the intrusion must be defeated; and the actors remain acted upon. However, the innocence of the protagonist is combined with their competence within the immersive fantasy, and because their negotiation of their own world is fundamentally interesting to the reader, characters become actors within the immersive fantasy as well acted upon by the intrusion. The technique can be seen in Alexander Irvine's *A Scattering of Jades* (2002) in which an Aztec god is reintroduced to 1840s New York. Here, the historical city is our fantasy land.

### The Liminal Fantasy

The liminal fantasy is perhaps the most interesting because it is so rare. M. John Harrison has spoken of the existence of the trans-liminal moment, the point where we are invited to cross the threshold into the fantastic, but choose not. The result is that the fantastic leaks back through the portal. This can be manifested in the leakage of the monster into the narrated world-Philip Pullman uses this motif to create horror in *The Subtle Knife* (1997)-but more subtly, the portal itself may be the intrusion. Harrison notes this motif in Wells's "The Door in the Wall" (1906), in which a man is three times tempted by a green door leading to a garden, and three times refuses the portal. While the metaphorical role of the green door may be significant to the critic, its position as representative of the fantastic is more important here. This seemingly ordinary story feels like fantasy. We somehow know that it is the fantastic. What I would contend is that in this story the fantastic is the temptation framed by the door. The anxiety and the continued maintenance and irresolution of the fantastic becomes the locus of the "fantasy". The liminal moment which maintains the anxiety around this material temptation assists the creation of the tone and mode that we associate with the fantastic: its presence is represented as unnerving, and it is this sense of the unnerving which is at the heart of the category I have termed liminal, which I prefer to Tszvetan Todorov's term, hesitation or uncertainty, because I think that hesitation is only one strategy employed by these writers. Todorov's concern with "the fantastic" as something distinct from fantasy (1973) means that his ideas are encompassed within this section but do not describe the whole. Liminal fantasy as discussed here is very clear that magic, or at least the possibility of magic, is part of the consensus reality, a position rather different from, but not in conflict with, Todorov's more specific interests.

In the liminal fantasy we are given to understand, through cues to the familiar, that this is our world. When the fantastic appears, it should be intrusive, disruptive of expectation, but instead while the events themselves might be noteworthy and they may cause chaos, their magical origins barely raise an eyebrow. We are disoriented.

The enclosed nature of the immersive fantasy is absent: the hints and cues are missing, but as in immersive fantasy, the protagonist demonstrates no surprise. It is the reaction to the fantastic that shapes this category, as well as the context of the fantasy.

The tone of the liminal fantasy could be described as blasé. An excellent example may be found in Joan Aiken's Armitage family stories, in which the family all remain remarkably calm when unicorns appear on their lawn ("Yes, But Today is Tuesday", 1953). The tone of Aiken's work is matter of fact, casual, and, unlike James Thurber's "The Unicorn in the Garden" (1940), it is not trying to trick anyone. The protagonist in M. John Harrison's story, "I Did It" (2001) spends a great deal of time discussing why he put an axe in his head, and whether it looks good, but neither he, nor anyone else, questions the viability of its presence. While liminal fantasy casualizes the fantastic within the experience of the protagonist, it estranges the reader. The situation is odd, and it is our reaction to oddness which is being exploited. Whereas in the portal fantasy we ride with the protagonist, in the liminal fantasy we sit in the subconscious of the point of view character, quietly screaming, "But something is wrong", a dream on the point of becoming lucid. While the intrusion fantasy is fascinated with the monster, the liminal fantasy wallows in ennui. To cross the portal is to confront the illusion, but confrontation (as we shall see in chapter one) reduces rather than intensifies the fantastic. The transliminal moment, which brings us up to the liminal point and then refuses to cross the threshold, has much greater potential to generate fear, awe, and confusion, all intensely important emotions in the creation of the fantastic mode.

Liminal fantasy may rely on conscious exaggeration of the mimetic style, in defiance of the conventional understanding of the fantastic as straight-faced; the effectiveness of this category may rest with its adoption of the ironic mode. It seems clear that this category is shaped as much by doubts and questions as by assertions. It is perhaps the most interesting, though also the most elusive, of the categories for which I am arguing. The liminal fantasy relies on a number of different techniques, but central to its construction of the Absurd are irony and equipoise, the twisting of the metonymic/metaphorical structures of fantasy, and a construction of a point of balance right at the edge of belief.

This kind of fantasy may be the most demanding of the four categories which I have outlined, and the one which most depends for its effectiveness on the understanding and subversion of our expectations of the fantastic. Of all the categories it is the one which depends most on my notion of multiple fuzzy sets. Far from being at the edge of genre, the least fantastical of texts, liminal fantasy is the fuzzy set supported by and between the other modes that I am discussing. Liminal fantasies distill the essence of the fantastic.

### The Irregulars

Chapter five, considering as it does texts which warp and distort the patterns I've sought to identify, and which may well have produced patterns which I cannot yet see, is essential to this book. This book is about rhetorics, not taxonomic phyla. Genre markers (whether tropes or patterns) are useful analytical tools but they are constructions imposed on a literary landscape. The same landscape may be susceptible to quite a different cartography. The books discussed in this chapter may point the way to that other cartography.

I have no category title for the books in chapter five. "Hybrid forms" would both reify the categories in a way which I find uncomfortable and which would suggest these texts are "between" things. I am also wary of terminology which implies a link between non-formulaic fantasy and quality. First because quality is to be found in every one of the rhetorics I outline and much of this quality is to do with how formula are exploited, and second because these texts are, if anything, hyper-aware of formula. The texts considered in chapter five straddle the forms I have outlined, folding, twisting, and re-weaving the material of the fantastic in order to produce texts that depend on our understanding of these forms, but yet do something "other".

Each of the books in chapter five demonstrates the incredible potential which exists in the genre.

*Introduction Endnotes*

*A cursory consideration of the contents of the Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts will confirm this impression.*

*Karen Hellekson made the same decision when she constructed her taxonomy of Alternate History fictions (Hellekson, 251).*

*This is itself ideologically revealing. How many guests in utopia are shown the sewers?*

*Clute and I have had a number of discussions over which formulation of the grammar of Full Fantasy to use here. Clute being Clute, it has gone through several revisions, rethinking, and renamings. In the end, and knowing this is not his preference, I have chosen to go for the most physically accessible formula, i.e. the version in the Encyclopedia.*

*For the importance and critical power of accepting the limits of individual theories, see my article, "Surpassing the Love of Vampires: Or Why (and How) a Queer Reading of the Buffy/ Willow Relationship is Denied", in David Lavery and Rhonda Wilcox, ed., Fighting the Forces: Essays on the Meaning of Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Lanham MD and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001: 45-60. At the end of The Lord of the Rings magic (in the form of grey dust from the Elves) is taken back to the Shire. It is made clear that magic is not normal to the Shire, that it is in fact an intrusion, made acceptable only because it smoothes the return to "normality".*

*In conversation over lunch in 2003.*