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30 April, 2013

Annotated Bibliography: The Importance of Realism in Fantasy

Despite the nature of fantasy to be based on imaginary worlds and alternate realities, it is important that these works reflect the real world, so that readers can relate to them. In order for young adults to identify with the novel, the protagonist must deal with real life issues and respond with real life emotions. Though the novel may contain otherworldly creatures or elements, it is the concept of the human condition that the reader will understand and relate to most of all, which is why, despite the differences in setting and the rules that apply to that world, a fantasy novel should still incorporate the complexities of human relationships and emotions.

The novel *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card is a fantasy/sci-fi novel set in a time where young children are trained in combat to fight future wars. The protagonist, Ender Wiggins has to lead his army through a series of training games, to prepare them for war. The concept of games within the novel is important as it demonstrates the idea that life is full of games. Even though Ender continues to win all his games, he is just a pawn in the game played by the commanders.

When Ender confronts his teacher Maezr Rackham with questions about the enemy, it symbolizes his transition from child to teen, mirroring the period during adolescence when we tend to start asking questions about the universe and the point of existence. The role of the commanders represents the authorities in our lives that demand us to live life in a certain way, that meets certain standards and reaches expectations. *Ender's Game* reveals the fact that a similar power structure exists in the real world and that, just in the same way that the games that Ender played ended up representing real life battles, Card is trying to tell us that *Ender's Game* itself also represents a real life situation.

Card, Orson Scott. *Ender's Game*. New York: Tor Books, 1985. Print.

Summary: *Ender's Game* is a science fiction novel set in the future, about a young boy named Ender who is the leader of an army of children, raised as soldiers to fight an alien race in anticipation of a possible invasion. Ender Wiggin is a very strong willed and talented leader who is driven by an intense need to succeed. He leads the Dragon Army, teaching them tactical strategies that ensures their undefeated record despite the games being stacked against them.

Commentary: The novel deals with classic science fiction elements such as futuristic timeline, space travel and aliens and uses this mode of storytelling to question the concept of social structure and morality. It is a reflection of society and the powers that be. It is a representation of the manipulative tactics that powerful corporations and even governments utilize in order to keep the people in a state of blind submission, a way to continue the cycle of supply and demand and to keep the people in a state of reliance so that these entities continue to remain in power.

Dick, Philip K. *Adjustment Team*. Orbit Science Fiction. 1954.

Summary: While on his way to work one day, a man walks in on a scene that de-rails his whole perception of reality. He later finds out that he witnessed a team who are designated to make 'adjustments' to certain people and things around him in order to cause certain events to be set in motion. He is sworn to secrecy to never reveal this information to anybody.

Commentary: This short story reflects themes of free will and control. It presents the idea that there are outside forces that dictate the future of the world and can even manipulate people to make certain decisions. It allows recognition that we as humans have very little control over our future and it is important to let go of the things we can't control.

Marion, Isaac. *Warm Bodies*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011. Print.

Summary: *Warm Bodies* is written from the perspective of the protagonist, R, who is a zombie that doesn't even remember his full name. R describes the daily life of a zombie and laments in the dullness of being dead, until he rescues a human girl and she teaches her humanity gets his heart beating once again.

Commentary: This novel uses metaphor to illustrate the idea that love keeps us alive. It defies the conventions of a typical zombie story by gaining the readers empathy for the zombies and present them as capable of humanity.

Messenger, Shannon. *Let the Sky Fall*. Simon & Schuster, 2013.

Summary: *Let The Sky Fall* is about a young man named Vane Weston who finds out he is a sylph; a wind walker, by a beautiful girl named Audra who has haunted his dreams since he became an orphan as a child. As Audra trains Vane for an upcoming battle against the Stormers, a group hell bent on destroying the sylphs, Vane finds out the truth about what really happened to his family and who he really is.

Commentary: This novel uses elements of fantasy to bring to light issues that affect young adults such as: difficulty seeing eye to eye with parents, forging a personal identity and choosing between what you want and what you know is right.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. London: Bloomsbury, 1999. Print.

Summary: During Harry Potter's third year at high school there is a lot of hysteria following the break out from Sirius Black, one of the wizarding world's most wanted prisoners, who seems to be planning his next attack on Harry. As Harry progresses through the year at Hogwarts, he struggles with his fear of dementors, Black and the grim, whilst the truth about Harry's past is revealed in a suspenseful climax where nothing is as it appears.

Commentary: Throughout the *Prisoner of Azkaban*, the notion of truth is heavily prevalent. Though it is set in a fantastical setting, Harry still has to deal with the same issues we all face: fear, stress, doubt, deceit. As Harry overcomes his fears he becomes more confident in his abilities and is able to help free an innocent man from a fate worse than death, free a magical creature and solve the mysteries of his past.

Smith, L.J. *The Secret Circle: The Initiation*. New York: Harper Paperback, 1992.

Summary: After the death of Cassie Blake's mother, she moves to Chance Harbor to live with her grandmother where she discovers that she is a witch from a coven who want her to join them so that they can consolidate their powers and become stronger. At first she is resistant and calls them all crazy but when she learns what she is capable of, it is impossible for her to deny her destiny.

Commentary: This story deals with themes relating to Adolescents such as romance, family, loyalty, friendship, power, death, destiny and morality. Though

the Secret Circle incorporates themes of fantasy, it also integrates realism through its complicated web of relationships which causes a lot of tension within the group and sometimes even gets in the way of their missions.

Various Authors. Dragon-Slayer vs Dragon-Sayer. *The Alan Review*, 2009. 36 (3), 13-18.

Summary: This article reflects certain archetypes of female protagonists in fantasy books, specifically books about dragons. It states that often, in order to escape the submissive female role who waits to be rescued or be married, a writer will give her masculine traits such as strength and brutality as a way of giving her hero status. The article goes on to say however, that this is not necessary and that it is important to reflect traditional feminine values such as nurturing and care-taking as heroic in order to connect with the female reader.

Commentary: The topic of heroine traits is an important topic of debate. It raises questions about the concepts of gender. Is it sexist to assume that in order for a female protagonist to become a hero she must fight and assume a masculine demeanor, or is it sexist to project the idea that a female should stick to her more traditional role of nurturing and care-taking? The article does present the idea that the female traits can be considered powerful and heroic in their own right, however it also bastardizes the idea that women should fight because it is against their nature.