

Do Fantasy Books lead to the Occult? The Challenge of *Harry Potter* and the *Lord of the Rings*¹

Much is being said today about fantasy works of fiction that involve magic. The debate about the juvenile literary works of *Harry Potter* and the *Lord of the Rings* still generates interest. Some people object to magic as an essential element of the enchanting process of these novels. They claim that such usage of magic in these novels is an enticement for young readers to get them interested in the occult. Others argue that magic is used as a means to create an imaginary world that captivates and enthralls young readers. These people argue that adolescents are capable of discerning between reality and fiction and thus are capable of distinguishing the magical in the novels they are reading from the reality in which they live. They also believe that reading such novels does not by itself encourage an interest in the occult. Fantasy has also gained its place as a subject for discussion and research. Of the stories presented to young adults some are praised for their literary merit, others are criticized for the content.

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¹ Article published in German in 2011: "Verleiten Fantasy-Bücher zum Okukulten? Die Herausforderung von *Harry Potter* und *Der Herr der Ringe*, Eine empirisch-religionspsychologische Studie," *Wege Zur Menschen*, 63/1-2 (2011): 36- 51.

Controversy over children's stories is not new. In 360 B.C., in the *Republic*, Plato pointed out that the beginning of children's education must come in the form of stories. Plato believed that stories had a great influence on children. Therefore, he wanted to eliminate those stories that created a false view of reality: "For, a young person cannot judge what is allegorical from what is literal."²

Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his work, *Emile*, takes the example of a popular fable at his time, La Fontaine's *The Fox and the Crow*. The moral lesson it conveys to young children is entirely unlike what is intended, "for the morality of the fables is so mixed and so unsuitable for their age that it would be more likely to incline them to vice than to virtue."³

Literature Review

Coming to contemporary times and in contrast to this, one popular series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*,⁴ by C. S. Lewis, has been praised for its allusions to traditional Christian ideas. On the other hand, the trilogy, *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000), by Philip Pullman, has been praised for its originality and creativity,⁵ but it has been also criticized for its negative presentation of religion and of Christianity in particular.⁶

The epic fantasy-novel, *The Lord of the Rings*, has been hailed as one of "the most important books of the twentieth century."⁷ It is acknowledged as a literary masterpiece by a true literary master. *The Lord of the Rings* is a single novel consisting of six books divided into three volumes: *the Fellowship of the Ring*, *the Two Towers*, and *the Return of the King*. The author, J. R. R. Tolkien,⁸ sets the story in an imaginary world, called

² Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, II, [Accessed June 19, 2006], <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.3.ii.html>.

³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "The Fox and the Crow," in *Emile*, trans. Barbara Foxley, [Accessed June 19, 2006], <http://www.bookrags.com/ebooks/5427/78.html>.

⁴ *The Chronicles of Narnia* is a series of seven books published between 1949 and 1954.

⁵ The first book, *Northern Lights*, won the Carnegie Medal for children's fiction in 1995. *The Amber Spyglass* was awarded the 2001 Whitbread Prize in January 2002, becoming the first children's book to receive the award.

⁶ Philip Pullman, *His Dark Materials: The Amber Spyglass* (London, 2001), 464.

⁷ Ralph C. Wood, *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-earth* (Louisville: Westminster, 2003), 1.

⁸ John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born on 3rd January 1892. He is best known as the author of *The Hobbit*, published in 1936, and its sequel *The Lord of the Rings*, published in 1954 and 1955. He

Middle-earth.⁹ He creates this world “having its own complicated chronology, cosmogony, geography, nomenclature, and multiple languages.”¹⁰ The characters and creatures that populate Tolkien’s world are described to the least detail, having a believable history that makes them credible.¹¹ The story champions values and carries themes such as fellowship, love, sacrifice, mercy and forgiveness, trust in providence and hope. Three film adaptations have been made of the story told by the books.

The story that became a bestseller is a more recent enterprise. It was in 1990 when J. K. Rowling¹² was travelling by train that she first got “the idea for this boy who didn’t know what he was until he was eleven and then got this invitation to go off to wizard school.”¹³ “The character of Harry just popped into my head, fully formed,” she confessed, “I remember being so excited that, as soon as the train reached London’s King’s Cross station, I rushed home to jot down this narrative concept on paper before I could forget anything.”¹⁴ Rowling spent the following years expanding her idea, sketching the plots and planning a seven book series; a book for each year Harry spends at school.

Since then all the seven planned books have been published. The first *Harry Potter* novel, *The Philosopher’s Stone*, was published in the United Kingdom on July 1997, by Bloomsbury Press and in America on September 1998 (as *The Sorcerer’s Stone*) by Scholastic. It immediately became a success around the world, and a must for children, making Rowling one of the best-selling authors of all times.¹⁵ Adults also were captivated by the fast moving story, magic and varied adventures of Harry Potter and his friends

was a strongly committed Catholic. Tolkien was a close friend of C. S. Lewis, and a member of the Inklings, a literary discussion group. He died in 1973 at the age of 81.

⁹ See Patrick Grant, “Tolkien: Archetype and Word,” in *Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism*, ed. Rose A. Zimbaro, Neil D. Isaacs (Boston, 2004), 166.

¹⁰ Wood, *Gospel*, 2.

¹¹ See Wystan H. Auden, “The Quest Hero,” in *Understanding The Lord of the Rings*, 41-44.

¹² Joanne (Kathleen) Rowling was born in England, on 31st July 1965.

¹³ Joanne K. Rowling, interview by Larry King, in *Larry King Live CNN*, [Accessed October 28, 2004], <http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/2000/1000-cnn-larryking.htm>.

¹⁴ Joanne K. Rowling, *Exclusive: Writer J.K. Rowling Answers Her Readers’ Questions*, interviewed in *Toronto Star* (3 November 2001), [Accessed October 22, 2005], <http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/2001/1101-torontostar.htm>.

¹⁵ See Edmund M. Kern, *The Wisdom of Harry Potter: What our Favourite Hero Teaches us about Moral Choices* (Amherst, 2003), 22.

at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The phenomenon saw no cultural barriers. “Children are not stupid. They are really clever and more flexible than adults when it comes to cultural differences,” said the translator and publisher of the Japanese version of the books, Yuko Matsuoka.¹⁶

The five other books that followed were *The Chamber of Secrets* (1998), *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), *The Goblet of Fire* (2000), *The Order of the Phoenix* (2003), and *The Half-Blooded Prince* (2005). The seventh and final book was *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, and was published on 21st July 2007.¹⁷ To date, the first four novels have been made into very successful films; *The Philosopher’s Stone* (2001), *The Chamber of Secrets* (2002), *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004), and *The Goblet of Fire* (2005). *The Order of the Phoenix* came out in July 2007, followed by the latest one, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* on July 15, 2009.

Reactions to the *Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* series were quite varied. *The Lord of the Rings* has been almost universally accepted by Christians, “who have long recognized the richness and beauty of Tolkien’s Middle-earth as well as the profound influence of Tolkien’s Christian and Catholic faith upon the shape of his imaginary world.”¹⁸ The only thing they criticize is the film’s frequent and sustained violence.

Since the release of the first novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* in 1997, this series has provoked various kinds of reactions. While, many have praised Rowling’s work for their moral, literary, and entertainment merit, others, particularly in the USA, have criticized it heavily for its content. Many of the objections to the *Harry Potter* books have been on religious grounds.¹⁹ On the other hand, fans of the series see them as merely adventuresome entertainment. They praise them because they are very well-written fantasy, and a pleasure to read for both children and adults. Potter fans feel that the novels are both entertaining and instructive.

¹⁶ Isabel Reynolds, “Japanese Publisher Weaves Magic of Harry Potter,” in *Harry Potter Culture and Religion*, [Accessed January 3, 2006], http://www.cesnur.org/2001/potter/april_06.htm.

¹⁷ See Joanne K. Rowling Official website, <http://www.jkrowling.com/en/index.cfm>.

¹⁸ Steven D. Greydanus, *Harry Potter vs Gandalf: An In-depth Analysis of the Literary Use of Magic in the Works of J. K. Rowling, J. R. R. Tolkien, and C. S. Lewis*, [Accessed November 15, 2006], <http://decentfilms.com/sections/articles/2567>.

¹⁹ See Deborah J. Taub, Heather L. Servaty, *Controversial Content in Children’s Literature. Is Harry Potter Harmful to Children?*, in *Harry Potter’s World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*, ed. Elizabeth E. Heilman (New York, 2002), 54-56.

In 2003, a writer for *L'Osservatore Romano*, the official newspaper for the Vatican, said that Tolkien's creative work carries "echoes of the Gospel," and shows "a sort of theology."²⁰ Some notice that "Christian fans of Tolkien also tend to be fans of C. S. Lewis." Lewis is the author of the seven-volume series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, a fantasy work that like Tolkien's work and Rowling's *Harry Potter*, involves the use of magic.

Despite their success, Rowland's books have been the subject of much discussion. According to the *American Library Association*, the *Harry Potter* series are one of the most censored books in America. The series are seventh on their list of the 100 most frequently challenged books of 1990-2000.²¹ The author of the books, J. K. Rowling, is fourth on the list of the top ten challenged authors of 1990-2004.²²

Although, the Vatican has never made any official statements on the *Harry Potter* series, some authoritative priests have commented on Rowling's work. In December 2001, Fr Gabriele Amorth, an Italian exorcist, warned parents against the *Harry Potter* book series, suggesting that Satan is behind the works. The Catholic priest, who is also the president of the International Association of Exorcists, believes that the *Harry Potter* books can have a bad influence on some children by getting them interested in the occult. He declared that "behind *Harry Potter* hides the signature of the king of the darkness, the devil."²³ He argued that Rowling's books contain positive references to magic, "the satanic art."²⁴ Fr Amorth contended that the books try to do a distinction between black and white magic, when in fact, the distinction "does not exist, because magic is always a turn to the devil."²⁵ In the same interview, he also criticized the disordered morality presented in Rowling's works, which he believes strongly reinforces moral relativism.

²⁰ "Rave Review for Tolkien in Vatican Newspaper," in *Catholic World News*, [Accessed January 16, 2006], <http://www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=20012>.

²¹ "The 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990–2000," in *American Library Association*, [Accessed May 29, 2006], <http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/bbwlinks/100mostfrequently.htm>.

²² "Top Ten Challenged Authors 1990-2004," in *American Library Association*, [Accessed May 29, 2006], <http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/bbwlinks/authors19902004.htm>.

²³ *World Media Falsely Trumpet Pope's Approval of Harry Potter*, [Accessed October 30, 2004], <http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2003/feb/03020703.html>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

In an interview on Vatican Radio in 14th July 2005, Mgr. Peter Fleetwood, an Englishman who works in the Council for European Bishops' Conferences in Geneva, was asked to comment about Fr Amorth's remarks. He answered, "I'm a priest as well, I'm not as holy as that man, but his is an opinion and mine is an opinion, and neither of us automatically has a right to the opinion being more authoritative. I would say you'd have to prove a thing like that, when you say that evil is behind every sentence. I can't see it."²⁶ He told reporters, "I don't think there's anyone in this room who grew up without fairies, magic and angels in their imaginary world."²⁷

The German Catholic sociologist, Gabriele Kuby, the author of *Harry Potter Gut oder Böse? (Harry Potter Good or Evil?)* has also criticized Rowling's works. She says that these works have negative effects on children. She lists ten arguments against *Harry Potter*. For her, Rowling's work corrupts the hearts of the young, preventing them from developing a properly ordered sense of good and evil, thus harming their relationship with God while that relationship is still in its infancy. It seduces children to witchcraft and sorcery, presenting them with a world "of violence and horror, of cursing and bewitching, of racist ideology, of blood sacrifice, disgust and obsession."²⁸ On February 20, 2003, Kuby wrote a letter to Cardinal Ratzinger, then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, expressing her concern that children can become fascinated with the occult through reading the series.²⁹ Cardinal Ratzinger, however, suggested to her to send a copy of her book to Mgr. Peter Fleetwood, then an official at the Pontifical Council for Culture.

But how true are these claims? Is it true that Harry Potter uses evil to achieve good? Does it really suggest the idea that the end justifies the means? Does it really induce children to the occult? The present study is an investigation of these questions through an empirical research based on notions from literature and those of the psychology of religion.

²⁶ Roderick Vonhögen, "Vatican Radio about the Harry Potter Novels(2005): Speak of the Devil," in *Catholic Insider*, [Accessed January 3, 2006], <http://catholicinsider.com/scripts/hptranscript.php>.

²⁷ "Vatican Grapples with New Age Beliefs," in *The Tablet*, [Accessed August 8, 2005], <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/cgi-bin/citw.cgi/past-00114>.

²⁸ Gabriele Kuby, *Harry Potter Gut oder Böse? (Harry Potter Good or Evil?)*, [Accessed January 6, 2006], <http://www.gabriele-kuby.de/resonanz.html#Potter>.

²⁹ Ibid.

The Use of Magic as a Literary Device

Contrary to previous opinions, there are many who hold that the use of magic in children's fantasy books has only a literary function and has nothing to do with the occult.³⁰ Magic in literature is used as a way to make the story exciting and expand the possibilities beyond the limits of our real world.³¹ According to Moore, a difference should be made between fantasy books and occult literature. These genres are mistakenly mixed together because in both, magic is centrally important. She points out that while the "surface of traditional fantasy, characteristically, is unreal," in occult literature "the surface is real." Children's reaction to occult literature is different from that to fantasy. In the case of occult literature children "do not suspend disbelief as they spontaneously do when they read fantasy. Rather, they accede to the power of suggestion."³² Both, *The Lord of the Rings*, and the *Harry Potter* series, fall under the category of fantasy literature. "*Harry Potter* series falls almost entirely within the purview of fantasy, not the purview of the occult."³³

Children's responses to literature vary a great deal according to the developmental and psychological contexts in which they are reading.³⁴ The Swiss developmental psychologist, Jean Piaget found out that through their development, children experience a time of "confusion between reality and thought."³⁵ He maintains that young children think that they can modify reality through their thoughts, actions, or desires, and continue to struggle with this confusion until eleven or twelve.³⁶ According to Woolley, most children have the ability to distinguish fantasy from reality by three years of age.³⁷ She found out that around this age children distinguish between what

³⁰ Francis Bridger, *A Charmed Life: The Spirituality of Potterworld* (London, 2001), 17.

³¹ Susan Reibel Moore, *Fantasy and the Occult in Children's Literature*, [Accessed December 29, 2005], <http://www.ignatius.com/magazines/hprweb/moore.htm>.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Elizabeth E. Heilman, "Fostering Critical Insight Through Multidisciplinary Perspectives," in *Harry Potter's World*, 3.

³⁵ Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World* (New York, 1929), 132, cited in Taub, *Controversial Content*, 58.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Josh D. Woolley, "Thinking About Fantasy: Are Children Fundamentally Different Thinkers and Believers from Adults?," *Child Development* 68 (1997): 991-1011 as cited in Taub, *Controversial Content*, 59.

is real and things such as pictures and toys.³⁸ With other researchers, she found out that at the same age children can articulate that a difference exists between a mental representation and the real physical object it represents.³⁹

The “illusionistic world”

This debate has been taken also to the field of psychology of religion. According to Pruyser, literary works of fiction create an “illusionistic world” in which elements of reality and autism are brought together in a creative and playful way. These literary works are mainly “to entertain and fascinate and only secondarily to inform, educate or edify.”⁴⁰ In reading fiction the readers’ imagination is “stimulated by the author’s imaginings in almost complete disregard of reality testing.”⁴¹ Through their imagination readers are able to dwell the “illusionistic world” presented to them in the literary work.

An “illusionistic world” is the creation of “illusion processing.” With the latter term Pruyser refers to a new third mode of human experiencing facilitating the establishment and maintenance of dynamic relationships between the person’s autism and reality. For establishing these concepts, Pruyser states that he is highly indebted to “several ideas first articulated by D. W. Winnicott, notably those of transitional objects, the transitional sphere, and the nature and forms of children’s play.”⁴² He employs Winnicott’s categories of “illusion” and “transitional objects and phenomena” to inquire into the operations of “illusion processing” and its role in literature and other areas of human civilization.

The “illusionistic world” is “beyond or between the autistic and the realistic worlds.”⁴³ It has elements of both autism and reality and yet it belongs to neither one

³⁸ Josh D. Woolley and Henry M. Wellman, “Young Children’s Understanding of Realities, Non-realities, and Appearances,” *Child Development* 61 (1990): 946-961 as quoted in Taub, *Controversial Content*, 59.

³⁹ David Estes, Henry M. Wellman, Josh Woolley, “Children’s Understanding of Mental Phenomena,” in *Advances in Child Development and Behavior*, ed. H. Reese (New York, 1989), 41-86.

⁴⁰ Paul W. Pruyser, *The Play of the Imagination: Toward a Psychoanalysis of Culture* (New York, 1983), 123.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 113.

⁴² David W. Winnicott, “The Place Where We Live,” in *idem. Playing and Reality* (New York, 1990), viii.

⁴³ Paul W. Pruyser, “Forms and Functions of the Imagination in Religion,” *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* 49(1985): 353-370, reprinted in *Religion in Psychodynamic Perspective: The Contributions of Paul W. Pruyser*, ed. H. Newton Malony, Bernard Spilka (New York, 1991), 175.

of them. Basic to the description of the “illusionistic world” is Winnicott’s notion of transitional objects.⁴⁴

Similar to Winnicott’s transitional sphere or “potential space,” according to Studzinski, the “illusionistic world” complements and interrelates “the standard two-world vision of psychoanalysis, an inner world of autistic fantasy and an outer world of objective reality.”⁴⁵

For Pruyser, the “illusionistic world” is “tutored fantasy” in that it presents “a collective form of imagining” accepted as “imaginative entities or events,” respected by and shareable among members of a culture. Its presentation is in an orderly fashion (“orderly imagination”). It allows for “adventurous thinking,” “playing,” and can be a source of inspiration for new insights (“inspired connections”) “creativity and inventiveness.” Its images are “verbalizable” and symbolic. It is also an expression of “cultural needs.” Humans express the dynamic relationships between their subjective inner world and objective external reality by creating images in terms of their intentionality, i.e., according to their “motives, . . . adopted style of thought and action, . . . goals, . . . attunement to cultural mandates, . . . chosen language game, and . . . search for meaning.” As “original products of the human mind when it is engaged in imagining”, these images lead to the creation of the elements of civilization, such as, art, literature, music, science and religion. Each of these aspects of civilization forms “a world of its own that transcends” both objective reality and the persons’ “innermost world of ‘wild’ fantasizing.” He also argues that imagination and its products, images, are evocative. They point out, summon or call forth the “world” that they have created. They also affect feelings and emotions.⁴⁶

Pruyser builds this notion of imagination on his previous discussion of imagination in his book, *Dynamic Psychology of Religion* (1968). In this book he states that imagination is the interaction between two types of thinking, namely, “R-type thinking,” i.e., reality testing or what humans perceive, and “A-type thinking” or autistic thinking, viz., what

⁴⁴ Pruyser, *Play of Imagination*, 66-67.

⁴⁵ Raymond Studzinski, “Tutoring the Religious Imagination: Art and Theology as Pedagogues,” *Horizons* 14 (1987): 29.

⁴⁶ Pruyser, *Play of Imagination*, 2-7.

humans conceive of.⁴⁷

Pruyser draws attention to another element of Winnicott's notion of "transitional sphere," namely, "illusion" or "potential space" that is important for "illusion processing." For Winnicott,⁴⁸ "potential space" is a paradoxical intrapsychic phenomenon through which humans relate their autism with reality while at the same time retain the distinction and integrity of these two spheres of human experiencing. Pruyser argues that humans, or in this case readers of a literary work, are to have not only "traffic with each of the three worlds, but [are] to acquire also a sense for the truth, beauty, and goodness that is to be found in another traffic pattern: the elegant moving back and forth between one world and another, at the right time, for the proper purpose, and with legitimate pleasure. It is appropriate to have loyalty to all three worlds, for we need and thrive on all three."⁴⁹

Pruyser points out that literary criticism sometimes approaches a literary work from a realistic perspective; other times from an autistic one. Criticisms of a work of fiction may compare and contrast the "illusionistic world" of the literary work with reality; others try to determine the influence of the author's own autism on his/her work of fiction. Even though such criticisms may be valid, they remain "peripheral to the work as an illusionistic creation and gratuitous to the aesthetic pleasure it affords."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Paul. W. Pruyser, *A Dynamic Psychology of Religion* (New York, 1968), 59-73.

⁴⁸ Donald W. Winnicott, "The Place Where We Live," in *Playing and Reality*, 110.

⁴⁹ Pruyser, *Dynamic Psychology*, 94.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

Figure 1

ILLUSION PROCESSING

AUTISTIC WORLD	ILLUSIONISTIC WORLD	REALISTIC WORLD
<i>Untutored Fantasy</i>	<i>Tutored Fantasy</i>	<i>Sense Perception</i>
<i>Omnipotent Thinking</i>	<i>Adventurous Thinking</i>	<i>Reality Testing</i>
<i>Utter Whimsicality</i>	<i>Orderly Imagination</i>	<i>Hard, Undeniable Facts</i>
<i>Free Associations</i>	<i>Inspired Connections</i>	<i>Logical Connections</i>
<i>Ineffable Images</i>	<i>Verbalizable Images</i>	<i>Look- and-See Referents</i>
<i>Hallucinatory Entities or Events</i>	<i>Imaginative Entities or Events</i>	<i>Actual Entities or Events</i>
<i>Private Needs</i>	<i>Cultural Needs</i>	<i>Factual Needs</i>
<i>Symptoms</i>	<i>Symbols</i>	<i>Signs, Indexes</i>
<i>Dreaming</i>	<i>Playing</i>	<i>Working</i>
<i>Sterility</i>	<i>Creativeness</i>	<i>Resourcefulness</i>
<i>Internal Object (Imago)</i>	<i>Transcendent Objects Prefigured by the Child's Transitional Object</i>	<i>External Objects</i>

PAUL W. PRUYSER'S, "The Tutored Imagination in Religion"

Research Questions

The present study builds on this conceptual framework and investigates whether young adolescents are capable of operating Pruyser's two "traffic patterns" when encountering fantasy works of fiction, namely, those of *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings*. One will try to discover whether teenagers are aware of the possibility that their autism and/or reality may influence their encounter with a literary work. Since this study's cohort is predominantly composed of Christians, the study will try to determine whether active believers have an advantage over non-practicing believers in engaging their "illusion processing."⁵¹ As a matter of fact, any liturgical act demands the employment of the believers' imagination. As a result, active

⁵¹ For a good survey of these positions, see Wayne Azzopardi, "Children's Fantasy Books: A New Challenge to Religion," (MA Dissertation, Faculty of Theology, University of Malta, 2007).

participants in the liturgical life of their Church are engaging constantly their imagination.⁵²

Design

For this study, 465 students from 14 different schools in Malta, both private and public, 225 boys and 240 girls aged between 13 and 14, participated on a voluntary basis. They were given a specifically designed 33 item questionnaire to answer in class together with a demographic information sheet. This was intended to capture details on how many read the *Harry Potter* novels, *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and how many saw the movies. Participants were also asked which they preferred of the four, which novel they read first, how did they get to know about them, and which other fantasy books they had read.

Other questions were meant to investigate any possible interest in occult practices, such as the horoscope, lucky charms, contacting the dead, witchcraft, and the Ouija board. This interest, if any, is distinguished between belief or curiosity. This is captured by questions such as “If you had the opportunity to visit a witch would you do so?” The answers to choose from were: “I would go because I believe”; “I would go out of curiosity”; “I would not go because I am afraid”; and “I would not go because I do not believe in these things.”

Procedure

The questionnaire was filled out in the classroom, and took between 15 to 20 minutes to complete. In order to encourage adolescents to answer the questions honestly, they were told not to write their names anywhere, and that confidentiality would be assured. Although no pilot study was made before the actual questionnaire, a research assistant was present to explain or to answer any difficulties.

The results of the questionnaire were scored and processed through the SPSS software (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). These procedures involved basically determining significant correlations and working out student T-tests.

⁵² Peter E. Fink, “Imagination and Worship,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville/MN, 1990), 19.

Results

There is no doubt that Fantasy books are amongst the most read amongst this sample (209,44.9%), preceded by the Adventure (286,61.5%) and Mystery genre (218,46.9%). Of all the participants, 306 (65.8%) read at least one of the books in the *Harry Potter* series. The first published book was the one read most, with 254 (56.8%) readers; whereas 87 (18.7%) read at least one of the books in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. *The Hobbit* was read by 86 (18.5%) students. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is the most read book in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series. The book was turned into a film at the time.

As to the movies seen by these students, 396 (85.2%) saw *The Chamber of Secrets*; 394 (84.7%) watched *The Philosopher's Stone*; 336 (72.3%) *The Prisoner of Azkaban*; and 253 (54.4%) *The Goblet of Fire* of the *Harry Potter* series. Of *The Lord of the Rings* series, 249 (53.5%) saw *The Fellowship of the Ring*; 221 (47.5%) *The Two Towers*; and 197 (42.4%) *The Return of the King*. Of *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, 194 (41.7%) saw *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Do religion and magic go together? Why? To the first question only 49 (11%) answered in the affirmative. The rest, 409 (88%) disagreed. As to the reasons, 132 (21%) stated that the two are completely opposite to each other; 60 (14%) held that religion is true, whereas magic is fantasy; 45 (10%) that only God knows the future and that one must leave it in God's hands.

As to the questions related to their interest in the occult, the majority 281 (60%) said they were not interested in the Horoscope. The rate of those not interested grows higher as more intriguing questions are asked, such as, interest in Lucky Charms, 298 (64%); Contacting the Dead, 367 (79%); Witchcraft, 392 (84%); Fortune Telling, 397 (85%); and the Ouija Board, 411 (88%). Furthermore, when asked to specify their interest in the horoscope, only few said that they believe in it (16, 3%), while the majority followed it only out of curiosity (268,58%). Similarly, when asked if they would ever go to a witch, the majority said they would not (294, 63%). However, from those who would go, 167, or 36%, said they would do it out of curiosity.

The next stage was to see whether it is possible to discriminate between those who are interested in the occult from those who are not and on what basis. Do those who

practice their religion show a different attitude to the occult than those who are not religious? To answer this question, “Church Attendance” was chosen as a hypothetical discriminating variable. The reason was that there could be an affinity between familiarity with Liturgy and Fantasy as both fall under the same “Illusionistic” middle ground in Pruyser’s tripartite schema.

From the analysis of the data, it was seen that 407 participants (88%) go to Church from every day to once a month. These were considered to be regular Church goers or practicing. The remaining 58 (13%) were considered as non practicing. Table 1 shows the results of the comparison between the two groups after a student T-test was performed.

Table 1

**Two sample two-tailed T-Test for independent groups,
Church-goers and non Church-goers on items 1-11.**

Item	T-value (df=463)
1. Magic in story cannot be done in reality	2.65 **
2. See Religion as distinct from Magic	1.88 *
3. Wish that magic in story be done in reality	2.62 **
4. Interested in Going to a Witch	4.71 ***
5. Interested in the Horoscope	2.77 **
6. Think there are people who read the future	2.70 **
7. Believe in Fortune Telling	- 4.93 ***
8. Follow the Ouija Board	- 5.01 ***
9. Follow the Horoscope	- 3.20 **
10. Believe in Witchcraft	- 3.07 **
11. Contact the Dead	- 3.34 ***

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, two-tailed

Results show that Church-goers differ significantly from the others in distinguishing magic from reality, and in distinguishing religion from magic as captured by the first two statements in the table. They also differ significantly when it comes to wishing that the magic in the story becomes true. This suggests an “Illusionary” potential superior to

their counterparts, notwithstanding the fact that Church-goers showed a significantly higher interest in the occult than the other group, such as in going to a witch, looking at the horoscope, or fortune telling.

This interest, however, does not seem to imply believing. As a matter of fact, things change radically when it comes to believing, following, or actually practicing the occult. The scores captured by items 7 to 11 show that the non practicing participants differ significantly from the other group. The Non-Church goers seem to go beyond mere curiosity or interest in the occult and actually follow it.

The next question was to inquire what messages emerge from the stories from the *Harry Potter* series in particular, and what values are conveyed by this literary genre. Table 2 shows the results of messages and values conveyed.

Table 2

Messages conveyed by *Harry Potter*

At the end the good always prevails	352 (76%)
You must do everything to win	37 (8%)
Good must use the same means as evil	35 (7.5%)
The strongest always wins	23 (5%)

Preferred Values in *Harry Potter*

Courage	170 (37%)
Friendship	142 (31%)
Sense of Sacrifice	34 (7%)
Loyalty	31 (6.7%)
Tolerance	23 (5%)

Preferred Values in *Lord of the Rings*

Courage	112 (24%)
Friendship	69 (15%)
Sense of Sacrifice	36 (8%)
Loyalty	29 (6%)
Being of Principle	12 (3%)

As the results suggest, the message conveyed by the *Harry Potter* series is a positive one, in that 76% of respondents hold that at the end the good always prevails. Similarly, as regards the values (or virtues), Courage and Friendship take the majority of the preferences both in the *Harry Potter* and the *Lord of the Rings* series.

Significant Correlations

Further statistical computations on these results, have revealed some interesting and significant correlations. These values intercorrelated positively and quite strongly with each other in both sets of participants who read or saw the two novels. This suggests a strong consistency or congruence between all the variables at stake. In the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, for instance, Friendship correlated very strongly with Loyalty ($r = 0.66, p < 0.01$); with Sense of Sacrifice ($r = 0.65, p < 0.01$), with Being of Principle ($r = 0.65, p < 0.01$) and with Courage ($r = 0.46, p < 0.01$).

On the inverse side, it appears that those who showed an interest in Fortune Telling, tend to be interested also in other forms of magic, such as, the Ouija Board ($r = 0.45, p < 0.01$), Witchcraft ($r = 0.38, p < 0.01$), Contacting the Dead ($r = 0.36, p < 0.01$), Lucky Charms ($r = 0.26, p < 0.01$), and the Horoscope ($r = 0.26, p < 0.01$). Interest in the Ouija board seems to be a very strong indicator of interest in other occult practices as it correlates very significantly with most of the occult practices, such as, Witchcraft ($r = 0.508, p < 0.01$), Contacting the Dead ($r = 0.46, p < 0.01$), and Fortune Telling ($r = 0.45, p < 0.01$).

On the other hand, the negative significant correlations between some of these practices, such as Fortune Telling and believing there are persons able to Read the Future ($r = -0.31, p < 0.01$), or actually taking the Opportunity to go to a Witch ($r = -0.37, p < 0.01$), suggest that interest in the occult does not necessarily imply belief and, less so, practicing it.

Conclusion

The data from the previous section leads to one very clear and sure conclusion: fantasy stories are very important for adolescents. This leads to the main question of sifting the real issues from the perceived ones, very often more the result of prejudice and fear.

Is interest in Fantasy a Healthy Thing? This study has shown that not only fantasy is not dangerous for children, but that it could be a healthy and important exercise in their development. Fantasy could actually convey important messages, values and virtues. This conclusion supports Fleetwood's belief that the *Harry Potter* books were moral stories that taught children about the importance of making sacrifices to overcome evil.⁵³

Are children capable of distinguishing between fact and fiction? This study shows that the majority of participants could stay in this "Illusion" middle ground as suggested by Pruyser, confirming also the validity of his tripartite distinction. Furthermore, it seems that a religious background is a good predisposition and is a strong discriminating factor, as it shares many of those characteristics of the "Illusionistic World" as, *Tutored Fantasy, Adventurous Thinking, Orderly Imagination, Symbols, Playing, Creativeness*, etc. Participants who practiced their religion were seen to discriminate better between magic and reality. Such a formation seems to facilitate a safe experimentation with magic and the occult. The others, loosely defined as Non-church goers, seem to have missed this healthy and rich middle ground and to have adopted a more primitive and primordial conception of reality typical of primitive societies prior to the emergence of both religion and science. Could it be the case that magic is having a comeback, presumably with the demise of the traditional religions and the disenchantment with science?

Is showing an interest in the Occult necessarily a dangerous thing? These results distinguish clearly between curiosity and involvement with the occult. While for religiously oriented participants this is just an excursion into fantasy, for the others it could be more a realisation of their private needs, or the filling of an inner void. The risk of taking it seriously is higher for the latter.

Choosing between good and bad media is no easy task for parents and educators alike when children want to read books of the kind of *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* series. A good portion of the media today presents extreme violent content or glorifies explicit immoral behavior with little or no redeeming value at all. Avoid everything that is not completely consistent with Christian beliefs in today's

⁵³ See footnote 23.

media-saturated world is an impossible task. A good start would be to know your children, create a healthy environment, and discuss the issues raised by the stories. A sound religious education, as this study suggests, can help develop better their ability to distinguish fantasy from reality.

From an epistemological perspective, the tripartite distinction between Reality, Delusion and Illusion could be an important paradigm. It helps understand better the difference between Science, Magic and Religion. This should also lead to a healthy interaction between Science and Religion, as well as the clear distinction between Science and Magic and between Religion and Magic.

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