Werewolves, Wings, and Other Weird Transformations: Fantastic Metamorphosis in Children's and Young Adult Fantasy Literature

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ABSTRACT

My central thesis is that fantastic motifs work on a metaphorical level to encapsulate and express ideologies that have frequently been naturalised as 'truths'. I develop a theory of motif metaphors in order to examine the ideologies generated by the fantastic motif of metamorphosis in a range of contemporary children's and young adult fantasy texts. Although fantastic metamorphosis is an exceptionally prevalent and powerful motif in children's and young adult fantasy literature, symbolising important ideas about change and otherness in relation to childhood, adolescence, and maturation, and conveying important ideologies about the world in which we live, it has been little analysed in children's literature criticism. The detailed analyses of particular metamorphosis motif metaphors in this study expand and refine our academic understanding of the metamorphosis figure and consequently provide insight into the underlying principles and particular forms of a variety of significant ideologies.

By examining several principal metamorphosis motif metaphors, I investigate how a number of specific cultural beliefs are constructed and represented in contemporary children's and young adult fantasy literature. I particularly focus upon metamorphosis as a metaphor for childhood otherness; adolescent hybridity and deviant development; maturation as a process of self-change and physical empowerment; racial and ethnic difference and otherness; and desire and *jouissance*. I apply a range of pertinent cultural theories to explore these motif metaphors fully, drawing on the interpretive frameworks most appropriate to the concepts under consideration. I thus employ general psychoanalytic theories of embodiment, development, language, subjectivity, projection, and abjection; poststructuralist, social constructionist, and sociological theories; and wide-ranging literary theories, philosophical theories, gender and feminist theories, race and ethnicity theories, developmental theories, and theories of fantasy and animality. The use of such theories allows for incisive explorations of the explicit and implicit ideologies metaphorically conveyed by the motif of metamorphosis in different fantasy texts.

In this study, I present a number of specific analyses that enhance our knowledge of the motif of fantastic metamorphosis and of significant cultural ideologies. In doing so, I provide a model for a new and precise approach to the analysis of fantasy literature.

Declaration

I certify that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Shelley Chappell

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