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Philosophy & Literature – Prof. Tatiana Patrone

Fantasy and Persuasion Variantism

Abstract: In the field of philosophy of literature, there are many theories concerned with *how* readers engage with a work of fiction. A work of fiction, in its most broad terms, concerns matters of make-belief; this is embodied most in the genre of fantasy, which famously deals with stories of other-worlds and magical impossibilities. The reader, therefore, must depend upon the words of the author as the sole guides through these unfamiliar worlds. However, what is the reader to make of moral viewpoints when and if they are encountered in a fantasy fiction? Furthermore, what is the reader to do when those morals conflict with their real-world views and beliefs? At best, the reader must confront the moral differences with an understanding of the work's context and the author's most apparent intent, but what if these understandings are not immanent? Imaginative resistance, one explanation of how readers engage, claims that an opposing moral viewpoint in fiction cannot be made true by the author, not even "true in the fictive world"; the reader's immersion is thus necessarily broken in lieu of moral difference. This view is contrary to the present writer's. The antithesis of imaginative resistance here is persuasion variantism, the theory that the context of a fiction, in immediate relation to genre, varies with the many categories that fiction occupies as an art. A reader begins a book with a real-world perspective; then, in engaging with the text, a make-believe perspective is subconsciously imported from the reading. This make-believe perspective allows for all the components of a text, from character to setting, to be understood as a whole; together, and with the help of a cognitive device called hermeneutic recalibration, a moral framework is formed. The importance of context is further demonstrated by looking at four different types of fantasy literature: portal-quest, immersive, intrusive, and liminal.