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The Literature of Fantasy

Kramer, Kelly. "A Common Language of Desire: "the Magicians", Narnia, and Contemporary Fantasy." *Mythlore*, vol. 35, no. 2 (130), 2017, pp. 153–169, www.jstor.org/stable/26816090.

Kramer frames fantasy as a "literature of desire" and explores the foundations of traditional fantasy with writers such as Tolkien and C.S Lewis and their influence on modern fantasy authors. More specifically, Kramer makes their argument by framing C.S Lewis' *Narnia* series against Lev Grossman's *The Magicians*. With these two authors in mind, Kramer seeks to answer why fantasy is literature of desire and how the works of contemporaries, even if their ideologies are vastly different, can have a profound effect on the genre.

Kramer uses *The Magicians* as a deconstruction of C.S Lewis' *Narnia*, stating how the works are both alike and yet different all the same. Kramer puts emphasis on the pressure of influence an author may feel and how they all strive to be original in their work, stating that even if Grossman intends to borrow ideas from Lewis he intends to present these ideas in a better way. To elaborate more on this idea, Kramer highlights Grossman's and Lewis' differing concepts on fantasy; whereas Lewis is influenced mostly by medieval literature, myths, religion, and the philosophical, Grossman's concept of fantasy is steeped in realism and the rejection of idealism. Kramer uses this to contrast the two even further; though both novels may be what he describes as an "Portal-Quest Fantasy", Grossman does away with the romanticism of *Narnia* in favor of a more pessimistic, realistic approach. Kramer goes on to further contrast the two authors by comparing their two protagonists and their concepts of "the hero's journey" - with Lewis' work following a more traditional "heroes journey" of stories such as *The Lord of the Ring* and Grossman's story finding itself more engrossed in *why* the hero takes their journey.

To conclude his argument Kramer refers again to his initial purpose of writing this journal - how can fantasy be a literature of desire? Kramer argues that by borrowing so heavily from C.S Lewis despite his many disagreements in terms of romanticism and magic, Grossman acknowledges a literary debt to Lewis; that by his critiques of *Narnia* he also gives the work love. Kramer concludes that ultimately the desire that Grossman feels stems from what Lewis calls "longing" - described by Lewis as the use of fantasy as escapism from the bleak. Kramer goes on to cite Grossman's agreement with this longing, the two contemporaries, despite their differences, seeing fantasy as "art of the most serious kind."

POLLITT, KATHA. "On 'Game of Thrones.'" *Salmagundi*, no. 195/196, 2017, pp. 167–74. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26651231>.

Pollitt begins her journal by establishing her distaste for traditional fantasy, finding it childish, stooped in toxic masculinity, formulaic, and filled with cliché medieval trappings. It wasn't until she read Philip Pullman's "*His Dark Materials*" trilogy that she began to take a liking for fantasy, as this trilogy had an adventurous female protagonist, strong character work, and a well written plot with great twists. For similar reasons, Pollitt found the "*Game of Thrones*" series by George RR Martin just as captivating. Throughout her journal, Pollitt's thesis stems around realism, how this realism coincides with the real world, and progressiveness (such a feminism) in a male dominant society.

Pollitt sees "*Game of Thrones*" as inventive in the sense that it is realistic yet progressive despite its setting, pointing to its real life inspirations (such as the war being based off the real life The War of the Roses) and its similarities to Medieval Europe. As she says, "fantasy meets Earthly reality", pointing at the all too realistic aspects of people killing each other while far greater threats loom over them, comparing the looming years-long winter as a stand-in for the global warming that troubles the real world, stating: "Westerosi, like ourselves, are too preoccupied with immediate concerns to focus on it and also too unimaginative and stuck in their ways".

Pollitt also notes that despite the complexity of the plot, "*Game of Thrones*" society is a lot like our own in the sense that it is all about power and who it resides with. With power as a focal point, Pollitt notes that despite the story taking place in a male dominated society it still subverts expectations by having progressive characters who defy social norms, such as wives of ignoble kings rising to great power and disabled characters being intellectually curious and reading despite it being a social abnormality.

Pollitt also highlights many strong female characters in her journal, noting that despite the violence, criticism from other feminists for glorifying toxic masculinity, and the constant showing of naked women, that women still love "*Game of Thrones*" because the women in the shows and books are still far more interesting than most female fantasy characters that have come before them, some even overshadowing their male contemporaries. She also notes that such characters drive the plot and develop these characters in surprising ways, such as the young Daenerys turning from an aloof girl to possibly the best candidate as ruler of the Iron Throne. Pollitt concludes her journal by stating that despite "*Game of Thrones*" being set in a realistic, male dominant society, it shows women striving to subvert expectations and becoming something more, succeeding to escape the traditional fantasy tropes that has shackled them in the past.