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Madhuri Bite

The Fantasy Chronotope in Popular Children's Authors: Enid Blyton and Eoin Colfer

Martha Thindle
Research Scholar
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras.

The paper will focus on locating popular children's authors Enid Blyton and Eoin Colfer within the shifting landscape of the fantastic in children's literature. I will attempt to use Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, which is the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships, to understand how these authors create and represent secondary worlds of fantasy. The study is comparative in nature and is motivated broadly by the need to understand the place of the fantastic in children's literature.

This paper aims to examine how fantasy is expressed in the works of these authors using Tzvetan Todorov definition of fantasy as "hesitation" in the reader, whose instincts for credibility are stretched through narrative events beyond realistic explanation. In other words, the fantastic character of a text resides in a transient state during the reading of it, which causes indecision as to whether the narrative belongs to a natural or a supernatural order of things.

Though Blyton and Colfer may be separated by over half a century, both employ fantasy to create enchanting secondary worlds. But the manner in which they create and sustain these make-believe worlds is unique and distinct. This paper will focus on how the shift in the presentation of fantasy occurs, using the framework of the chronotope.

Introduction
Fantasy and the Concept of the Chronotope: An Overview

The term 'fantastic' derives from the Latin *phantasticus* meaning that which is made visible or unreal. It originated in the structuralist theory of critic Tzvetan Todorov in his work *The Fantastic*. He describes fantasy's departure from realism as "hesitation" in the reader, whose instincts for credibility are stretched through narrative events beyond realistic explanation (Todorov 33). In other words, the fantastic text causes indecision in the reader which makes him unable to decide whether the narrative belongs to the natural or to the super natural realm. The etymology of the word 'fantastic' itself points to an essential ambiguity; it is unreal. Like the ghost which is neither dead nor alive, the fantastic is a spectral presence, suspended between being and nothingness (Jackson 20).

Harold Bloom however argues that the best fantasy involves no hesitation but a sense of being caught up in and swept away by the "agonistic encounter of deep, strong reading"(Mathews 3). Kathryn Hume understands fantasy in terms of its psychological and aesthetic response to mimesis. She defines literature as a product of two impulses – mimesis, "the desire to imitate, to describe events, people, situations, and objects with such verisimilitude that others can share your experience" and fantasy, "the desire to change events and alter reality" (Hume 20). For Rosemary Jackson, fantasy is a literature of desire. She argues that fantasy is innately subversive, in that it offers alternatives to and an escape from the real world. Michael Bakhtin approaches fantasy through the concept of the carnivalesque which upsets the statusquo: overturns or inverts the serious.

Bakhtin, in his essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" introduces the concept of the chronotope to refer to the co-ordinates of time and space invoked by a given narrative; in other words to the 'setting', considered as a spatio-temporal whole. Chronotope

literally means "time space". For Bakhtin it is "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature."(Bakhtin, "Rabelais and His World" 84).

Bakthin's notion of the chronotope offers an inclusive and nuanced perspective on the fantastic in children's fiction, which can encompass both fantastic otherworlds of the Blyton kind, and magical incidents intruding into an otherwise realistic setting of the kind developed by Eion Colfer.

In this paper, I will examine selected works of Blyton and Colfer against the concept of the chronotope to understand how these authors manipulate time and space to create fantastic other worlds for readers to inhabit and explore. The works under study here are Blyton's *Magic of the Faraway Tree* series and Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* series. I anticipate that studying this will reveal how the construct of fantasy is diversified as exhibited by these authors.

Literary Fantasy: An Overview

Although it is difficult to define literary fantasy, critics agree that it is a type of fiction that evokes wonder, mystery and magic, through the elements of the supernatural – a sense of the possible beyond the impossible. Fantasy has been treated as a genre, a style, a mode, or a narrative technique (e.g., Hume; Jackson). Fantasy literature owes its origins mostly to Romanticism with its interest in folk tradition, its rejection of the previous, rational-age view of the world, and its idealization of the child.

As a literary genre, fantasy is related to the magical stories of myth, legend, fairy tale and folklore. It is also closely associated with gothic horror, science fiction, utopian fiction and satire. While each of these genres incorporates at least one or more contexts or conventions of realism, fantasy marks a radical departure from the real. Fantasy then maybe considered as a generic heading for a variety of narratives, taking place in a fairy-tale realm, depicting travel between different worlds, talking animals, supernatural powers, medieval universe, mythical beings and such like, thus bringing magic into the mundane reality of everyday.

Fantasy formed the mainstream of Western literature until renaissance brought about a rejection of superstition in favour of science and reason. Fantasy as a literary genre emerged through a dialectic with this new literature of realism the rise of which has been documented by Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel*. The presence of magical or impossible elements in a fictional form in which realism and logical causality are expected creates tension between form and content allowing the reader to exercise the "willing suspension of disbelief" (Mathews 3).

The Nutcracker (1816) by E. T. A. Hoffmann, most scholars agree, matches most definitions of fantasy and is therefore acknowledged as a pioneering work. However fantasy became a strong tradition in Britain in the second half of the 19th century due to the work of writers like Lewis Carroll, Charles Kingsley and George MacDonald.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Edith Nesbit, renewed and transformed the fantasy tradition, infusing magic into everyday realistic life. Other writers who explored and used the tradition of fantasy in the 1950s and '60s were J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Philippa Pearce, Mary Norton, and Alan Garner. Contemporary authors such as Terry Pratchett, J. K. Rowling, Ursula Le Guin, Eoin Colfer and such others are responsible for keeping this genre alive and vibrant.

Introduction to the Authors

Enid Blyton (11 August 1897 – 28 November 1968) is considered as the world's most prolific and largest selling children's author, and is believed to have written over 700 books and 4,000 short stories, as well as poetry and educational articles for magazines. Blyton wrote an incredible variety of books for children in the ages of four to fourteen including adventure,

tales school stories, mystery novels and fantasy. In 2008 Blyton was voted Britain's best-loved author in a survey surpassing Roald Dahl and J.K.Rowling. (*The Telegraph*).

David Rudd whose doctoral thesis on Enid Blyton was made into a book, points out that while her influence on culture is immeasurable, Blyton is culturally and critically marginalized. This marginalization is true of children's literature as a whole. Rudd argues that if we do not try to understand her appeal, we are engaging in just the sort of arrogant colonialist discourse of which Blyton stands accused of and that in the very act of doing this we are solidifying the discourse that re-makes children's literature in our own image, one that celebrates the adult as a site of wholeness (Rudd 203).

Eoin Colfer (14 May 1965 -) is an Irish author most famous for his *Artemis Fowl* series. It has a 12 year old anti-hero as the protagonist of the story. Colfer's use of hi-tech, new age gadgetry by his characters reflects the contemporary world children are exposed to and their ability to manipulate and adapt to the technology savvy digital world.

Each of Colfer's seven books has a different plot that deal with stealing gold from the fairies (*Artemis Fowl*) to unveiling the Ice Cube, his invention to stop global warming (*The Atlantis Complex*). Artemis Fowl, in the beginning of the series is seen using his intelligence to build his family fortune through crime. He comes across as a cold and cynical protagonist. But as the series progress the character evolves morally.

Fantasy in Blyton and Colfer

Children accept naturally the possibility of the range of phenomena that fantasy deals with: alternate worlds, nonlinear time, extrasensory perception, time travel and in general all kinds of supernatural events that cannot be logically explained. It is precisely for this reason that fantasy literature is considered appropriate for children because children easily suspend judgement and disbelief. Tolkien remarks that a child does not ask whether the character in a fantasy story is real or whether he/she exists, but is interested in knowing "Was he good or was he wicked?" (Lewis 61).

Blyton popularised the fantasy genre in the twentieth century, besides writing extensively about boarding schools, toys and children and adventures. Colfer, is a representative of the twenty first century and has brought new life to the fantasy genre with his technology savvy anti - hero. Both deal with magical secondary worlds. But the manner in which they create and sustain it is distinct.

Blyton in all her works provides a secure balance between dangerous adventures and the safety of the children who appear in the stories. Arguably, children who read Blyton never feel threatened by her fantasy-filled stories and enjoy it in much the same manner in which they enjoy a game.

In *The Enchanted Wood*, when Jo, Beth and Frannie along with Moon- Face and Silky land in Dame Snap's School to give their aeroplane some rest, they get into frightful adventures. Naughty children were usually sent to her school to be cured. Dame Snap was known to be a nasty person and the children think it is bad luck to have landed in her garden. When Dame Snap pushes the children into a small room and locks them up, they become angry, miserable and plan to escape from this extraordinary situation. The children are finally saved by Silky's clock who opens the door for them and they run across the garden to their aeroplane followed by the raging Dame Snap.

They crowded quietly out of the room. 'Ssh! said Silky. 'Don't make a sound!'
'We'll try and find our aeroplane' said Joe. Let's try to get out of a door into the garden. We shall soon find it then.'
They tiptoed down a long passage- but just as they got to the end, who should they see coming along but old Dame Snap herself!
'Quick! Hide behind these curtains!' said Joe...

'Find the aeroplane, quick!' cried Joe. They ran down the path and looked for the shining aeroplane...They all ran to it, and squeezed in. Dame Snap picked herself up and ran towards the aeroplane. Joe pressed the 'UP' handle. The aeroplane quivered and shook. It rose gently into the air, and left Dame Snap below looking very angry indeed. (Blyton, "*The Enchanted Wood*" 156-158).

The narratives of Blyton are infused with various kinds of fantasies like talking toys (Noddy series), children playing detectives and solving mysteries, having unimaginable adventures without parent supervision (*The Secret Seven* and *The Famous Five* series) and such like. She weaves a fantasy world that is clearly distinct from the world she lived, that is particularly seen with her preoccupation with food. She wrote during the World Wars when food was scarce, but Blyton's stories are full of gargantuan meals – veal, ham and pork pies, home-made cheese, butter and jam, scones and tarts gingerbread, ginger ale and many such mouth-watering foods. The world wars and food rationing did not have any bearing on her work.

So if Blyton's young readers could relate to the situations she described in her book, then "presumably he is acting out a form of wish fulfilment, a type of vicarious living in which a diet of home-grown food, creamy milk, cakes and ginger-beer, supplemented by ices from the dairy, is the norm" (Barker 13). The importance Blyton gives to minute details of constructing a food narration allows her readers to enter into a pleasant fantasy filled secondary world.

Colfer's world of fantasy, on the other hand, contains all sorts of magical dimensions which are inhabited by fairies, elves, leprechauns and such like characters. They resemble human beings to a large extent, have made greater technological advancement and interact with humans as if it is the most 'normal' thing. However it is accompanied by violence, death and destruction which Blyton takes utmost care to avoid in her books. Blyton's children always live in ideal conditions with no intrusion of prevailing realism.

For example, Domovoi Butler, Artemis' body guard wields a variety of weapons to keep his master safe. These include a nine millimetre SIG Sauer hand gun, throwing-knives in his boots, a two-shot derringer pistol up his sleeve, garrotte wire hidden in his watch and three grenades in his pockets. Root (*The Opal Deception*) dies when villain Opal Koboi straps him to a bomb. In *Artemis Fowl*, there is also an attempt to destroy Fowl Manor by the Lower Elements Police (LEP) Reconnaissance Team.

Fantasy Chronotope

The fantasy chronotope is characteristic of fantasy fiction as a genre. Manipulation of time and space is primary in creating a fantasy world. It is believed that children do not apprehend time and space as abstract notions, but as a concrete phenomena. (Nikolajeva 1989: 128).

Analysis of time is naturally accepted as being linear because that is how we perceive and experience it. Time for Blyton is linear. In *Magic Faraway Tree* Jo, Bessie and Fanny, climb the Faraway Tree to discover it being inhabited by different magical creatures. They find a ladder taking them to the magical land that keeps changing on each of their visits. Sometimes the spaces are exciting like the Land of Goodies, Land of Birthdays and the Land of Take-What-You-Want. At other times the lands are tiresome like the Roundabout Land and unpleasant like the Land of Dame Slap, an aggressive school teacher. Once they come out of these lands they head back to the comfort of a warm welcoming home.

Time for Colfer is Non-linear. In *The Time Paradox,* Artemis' mother is suffering from Spelltropy, a fairy disease, which can be only cured by a lemur. Since in current time the lemurs are extinct, Artemis pleads with N°1 to open up the time stream in order to travel back in time to save the lemurs and thus his mother. Similarly in *The Lost Colony* Artemis tries to rescue the demons from the island of Hybras when the time-spell goes wrong and they start materializing on the earth. He has solved several temporal equations to understand this mystery and succeeds in his mission just before the time spell completely dissolves.

Time is a very important concept in *The Lost Colony*. While Artemis and Butler wait for their visitor, Butler shows impatience for their 'contact' to make an appearance.

'At least tell me if our contact will be armed.'

'I doubt it,' said Artemis. 'And even if he is, he won't be with us for more than a second.'

'A second? Just beaming down through outer space, is he?'

'Not space, old friend,' said Artemis, checking his wristwatch. 'Time.' (*The Lost Colony*, 5).

When the curious creature actually makes its appearance it is only to take Artemis with it briefly into the twentieth century.

The air buzzed with power and white electrical bolts crackled around the creature, slicing holes in space.

A temporal rent. A hole in time.

... The chances of him being returned to his own time were minuscule.

He tried to call out to Butler, but it was too late. If the word late can be used in a place where time does not exist.

Their surroundings changed in a flash, or maybe a year; it was impossible to tell. (*The Lost Colony*, 10).

Artemis looks down to see a much younger city of Barcelona, meets the legendary architect Gaudi, of the Casa Mila, and gives his opinion on the mosaics of the roof. But this interdimensional travel which usually causes some deterioration or loss however causes some changes in Artemis' fingers – "More accurately, the index finger had swapped places with the second finger." (*The Lost Colony* 16.)

Primary and Secondary Worlds in a Fantasy Space

The concept of the secondary world can be understood in conjunction with the concept of the chronotope. The fantasy chronotope predominantly applies only to secondary worlds as the blurring of time and space dimensions happen only in these worlds. Blyton and Colfer closely integrate the spatial and temporal frame of their narratives to create their secondary worlds. But the manner in which they create and maintain it is what differentiates their expression of fantasy.

Many fantasy authors like Lloyd Alexander, Robert H.Boyer and Kenneth J. Zahorski divide fantasy fiction into high and low fantasy. This distinction rests on the terms J. R. R. Tolkien presented in his collection of essays, *Tree and Leaf*, where he separates the primary world from the secondary worlds. The rules and laws of nature, which dominate the world we know, (primary world) will not hold true in the world (secondary world) we are taken into during our literary journey.

According to Boyer and Zahorski, low fantasy takes place in the primary world, while high fantasy happens in the secondary world. Hence, they prefer the latter to the former. The extraordinary rules and laws of nature in secondary worlds are capable of explaining the supernatural events, while in the primary world they happen for no reason at all.

Maria Nikolajeva divides the secondary worlds into three separate groups: closed, open and implicit worlds. Closed worlds have no entrance to the primary world, while open worlds are the opposite. Implicit worlds do not concretely appear in texts, but hints of their existence can still be found.

The most fundamental difference according to Peter Hunt might seem to be between fantasies set in 'this' world, where there is a tension between the 'normal' and the fantastic elements, and 'other' worlds in which the fantastic is the norm.

Though both Blyton and Colfer create secondary fantasy worlds the manner in which they create is vastly different. Most importantly the structure of fantasy in each of their works is significantly different. Each has used, to varying degrees, elements of realism and manipulated reality in different ways in order to create a secondary world.

Blyton's books have linear plots, a simple narrative structure and a clear distinction between heroes and villains. The alternate worlds she creates are vivid and one can literally visualize the Magic Faraway Tree with its curious inhabitants like Silky, Moon-face and the Saucepan-man. Also the reader can almost hear the enchanting sound of the trees swaying 'wish-a wish-a wish' as if telling you a secret and experience the childlike thrill of going down the 'slippery slip' the spiral slide that runs from Moon-face's drawing room to the bottom of the tree.

In contrast, Colfer deals with complex plots, advanced concepts like time stop, time reversal, time travel, and technological gadgetry that is thrilling for a child. Colfer locates his story in an entirely self contained secondary world which has its own rules and laws governing it. Both authors provide for a space of fantasy and the idea that it is possible to escape into a different reality that helps soften the rough edges of reality for the children.

Many "foreignisms" are used by both authors in their books. By foreignism, Katrina Lindve refers to the case of *Artemis Fowl* where Colfer is seen promoting Irishness, using Gaelic words without added explanation and using Celtic features naturally as if they were part of everyone's cultural heritage. She also highlights the setting of these novels which is primarily Ireland, with culture-specific Irish playing a significant part for the plot. Lindve concludes that these books could be seen as a Trojan horse bearing hidden foreignism inside the English package.

These foreignisms however they are highly adaptable and suit a global audience as they manage to maintain cultural neutrality of plot and character. Colfer's initial *Artemis Fowl* series seemed to be very culture specific, and focussed on all things Irish. Blyton's description of food and locale is restricted to England and its Countryside. However as they create fantasy worlds that capture popular imagination, this specificity became less exclusive and moved towards universality as they grew more popular.

In building fantasy worlds both Colfer and Blyton rely on 'word play' in the analysis of the names which are mostly Irish and British respectively. The names are not randomly chosen, they tell the reader something about the person. Artemis Fowl is named after the Greek hunting goddess Artemis. This is appropriate as he engages in a wide spectrum of 'hunting' activities whether it is rescuing his father from the Russian mafia (*The Arctic Incident*) or bringing the demon island Hybras back from 'Limbo' (*The Lost Colony*). Blyton too names her characters meaningfully – Dame Slap, who slapped mischievous children, Moonface, whose face was round like the moon, Whatzisname, who could not remember his name and the Saucepanman, who always carried various pans all over himself.

The primary world is a textual world that can be defined as the basic chronotope of the text. Secondary world reflects a literary chronotope that is manifest in the text but differs from the primary world of the text. For example in Colfer, Artemis Fowl lives with his parents in the primary world. He then travels to a secondary world of the demons which is in Limbo (above and below ground – somewhere in between), the Land of Hybras, as seen in *The Lost Colony*. Time displacement occurs when he returns to his dimension and finds that he is three years into the future.

In all the *Artemis Fowl* series, Colfer places an entire species called the Lower Elements below ground, occupying a secondary space - that of the fairies, gnomes, dwarfs, elfins, pixies and such like creatures. They have their own systems in place and are seen constantly trying to protect themselves from the mud-people found above ground level.

Blyton's children Jo, Beth and Frannie, live in the primary world with their parents as seen in The *Magic Faraway Tree* series. They do household chores for their parents and as a reward for their hard-work, the children are allowed to explore the countryside. When suddenly they come across a wood not far from their own backyard, the children are excited and curious to explore it. However the children must cross a ditch signifying a portal entry, every time they cross over to this secondary 'wood' world.

They find magic in the 'Faraway Tree' and this represents a secondary space for the children where impossible becomes possible. Time has no significance here not only for the inhabitants of the tree but also for the children when they come to visit their 'tree' friends. However at the end of every adventure, they return home to the security and comfort of a primary world. Hence the secondary world is able to offer an interpretation of space other than that available in the dominant discourse.

There may be intrusions of magic into this world from a different world or the transportation of characters into another, parallel world. Artemis Fowl and Jo, Beth and Frannie, enjoy the inter-accessibility of parallel worlds which makes them liminal in that their boundaries are effaced. They portray liminal attributes and are able to pursue adventures across parallel worlds. Fowl and Jo, Beth and Frannie travel across parallel worlds, engage in adventures, and meet fantastic characters. Finally, they return to their own world and there is restoration of order and normalcy.

Time-Out Concept in the Fantasy Narrative

Drawing on Bakhtin's theories, John Stephens (132-139) has further modified the idea of the carnivalesque in relation to children's literature by introducing the concept of "time out" which enhances the fantastic in the narrative. This idea is derived from the Bakhtinian notion of medieval carnival as the celebration of "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" and marking "the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin, "*Rabelais and His World*" 10).

The idea of a carnivalistic time out offers an alternative social space where the child characters enjoy freedom, abundance and experience a temporary empowerment in the alternate world which is explicitly visible in the secondary world fantasies. This enables Artemis, Jo, Beth and Frannie to capture demons, fairies and perform unimaginable feats as seen in Blyton and Colfer.

Stephens' "time out" is frequently employed as a literary strategy in children's literature to grant child characters time away from their everyday selves in order to be able to experience adventures outside the sheltered realm of innocent or uninitiated childhood. This device also provides the author with a means to liberate the fictive child from the constraints of authority. Scholars such as Nikolajeva and others use also use the term 'time out' to describe children's fantastic journeys into an alternate world or more realistic, yet extraordinary events in the primary world, giving them an opportunity to be free from adult supervision. After the time out, the children return to their familiar everyday life. The approach to "time out" in Blyton and Colfer includes carnival plot conventions wherein the setting of adventure is within the frames of magic travelling, whether in time or between alternative worlds.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the conventional fantasy tradition of Blyton has been replaced by the more futuristic fantasy in Colfer. It sheds preconceived notions of the fantasy genre and confirms the growth or change in the fantasy narrative. It enables us to see texts in a fresh light or perspective.

Although Blyton and Colfer are separated by over half a century, both employ fantasy to create enchanting secondary worlds. However, the type of fantasy that was available with Blyton is vastly different from that seen in Colfer. It is not correct to say that one is better

than the other. The relatively simple, uncomplicated magical world which Blyton imagined in her stories now seems antiquated. As Deborah Cogan Thacker suggests, "children's literature both embraces the aesthetics of the time of writing and also anticipates and inspires innovations" (Thacker and Webb 2). This perhaps explains why fantasy is treated so differently by these authors.

The manner in which time and space are manipulated by these authors is also significantly different. The chronotope of Time is continuous and slow paced in Blyton; setting idyllic and the characters are seen in vast expanses of land especially in the countryside. However Colfer who represents contemporary children's literature, show considerable deviations from most of these patterns. For instance, the urban settings of Artemis Fowl are far from idyllic, strongly interrogating the very idea of childhood being a safe and secure place. Time too is portrayed as having lot of short dramatic movement going backwards into the past and forwards into the future in Colfer. Blyton predominantly uses linear time while Colfer experiments with non linear time including time travel, time reversal, time-stop etc.

The alternate spaces in Blyton and Colfer allow the child-protagonists to enter into realms of existence distinguished from mundane reality. The imaginary spaces in children's literature offer an intermediate realm of experience where children can engage with the creative, out of the ordinary spaces which can be translated into enriching and meaningful experience. Furthermore these imaginary spaces and time distortion offered by fiction for children in the fantastic mode provide them with multiple perspectives and readings of the world.

We can thus state that the chronotope of contemporary children's fiction that is represented by Colfer is radically different from the chronotope of the literature of Blyton. This reveals that indeed there is a shift in the landscape of fantasy literature for children as seen through the works of Blyton and Colfer. Blyton and Colfer, I wish to conclude, have significantly shaped the field of children's literature and worked with the fantastic in crucial ways.

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