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English 112b

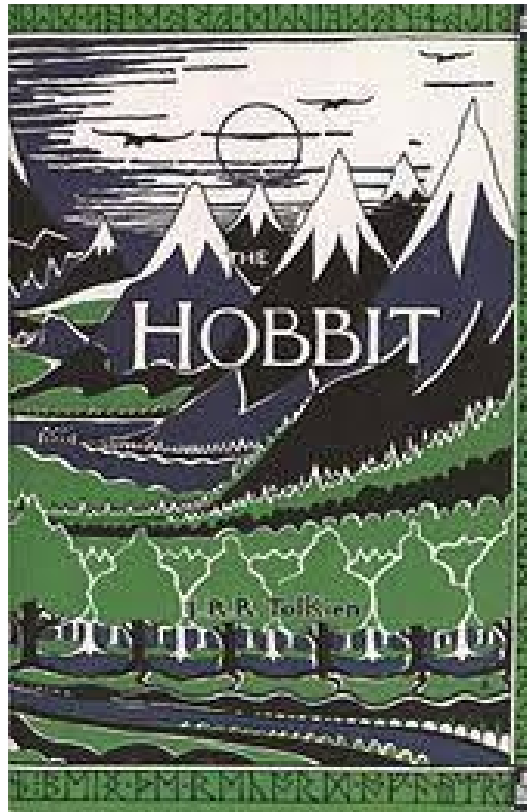
The Benefits of High Fantasy in Young Adult Literature

For this annotated bibliography, I am focusing on the merits of the “high fantasy” genre of literature and how exposing young adult readers to this genre can be beneficial. High fantasy settings have been designed to whisk the reader away to a faraway realm that is unfamiliar to them which allows them to experience situations that would otherwise be impossible under normal circumstances. When I was young, I regarded the action of reading as a leisure activity as being reserved for social outcasts and pariahs. It was not until I had reached the third grade when I picked up a high fantasy novel by the name of *The Hobbit*, by J.R.R. Tolkien, did I truly experience the wonders of fantasy as I was completely drawn into a world that was somewhat familiar to my own yet fantastically different (Tolkien 1937, in this bibliography). In *The Hobbit*, the main character Bilbo is pulled away from his life of comfort and fancy by the call of adventure in during which he finds his true self (Tolkien 1937). In a high fantasy world, the realms of possibility are endless and the author is able to have more creative freedom when crafting their fantasy universe. This semester, as a class we read *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, by J.K. Rowling, a novel in which the main character Harry is thrust into a magical world with which he is unfamiliar and must face the trials and tribulations that are placed before him (Rowling 1999, in this bibliography). Both novels are exemplary in employing the usage of high fantasy in their writing to convey a sense of wonder and excitement to the reader as they encounter a new and unfamiliar world for the first time; both Bilbo and Harry are thrust into magical worlds with which they have never dealt before and must use the knowledge, experience, and confidence

they gain through their adventures to solve the issues that they encounter. High fantasy novels have great potential in the realms of young adult literature because they teach young adults valuable life lessons by presenting said lessons in ways that are unfamiliar, intriguing, and exciting.

The ten selections of novels I made are from a wide variety of sub-genres of fantasy, such as science fiction, dystopian future societies, and medieval fantasy. However, each one of these selections deals with the concept of high fantasy in some way or another. The novels discussed within this annotated bibliography are all books that I have read over the course of my adolescence and what I consider to be the most formative literary works of my young adult life. One of the benefits of high fantasy is the level of detail and freedom an author is able to attain because they are unrestrained by the rules which govern our reality. They are also wonderful tools to open young adult readers up to the idea that age and gender are not defining factors when it comes to pursuing a passion and that everyone is capable of attaining greatness.

1. *The Hobbit*, by J.R.R. Tolkien



- *The Hobbit*, by J.R.R. Tolkien, follows the adventure of a hobbit named Bilbo Baggins who lives in a hole in the ground. From the very beginning of the novel, Tolkien describes this gentle creature as a member of high class in his society with all the comforts and amenities imaginable. He leads a life of comfort until the fateful day when he meets an old man who turns out to be none other than the Gandalf the Wizard, decked head to toe in grey. Gandalf enlists him in a troupe of dwarves who are on their way to reclaim their homeland which has been taken from them by a vicious breathing dragon. Bilbo must contend with unfamiliar dangers in a wide world as he encounters new and fantastical situations. Bilbo grows in confidence and character as he experiences dangerous situations and eventually evolves into a capable adventurer in his own right. The book does a wonderful job in making each leg of the adventure a unique experience where Bilbo learns how to become more independent as he experiences the trials of the road.

On multiple occasions, he is separated from his party and left to fend for himself where he must use his own guile in order to survive. Young adults would benefit from reading this novel because it shows them that even a small and seemingly insignificant person can enact a great change in their world if they go outside of their comfort zones. Bilbo's craftiness and ingenuity is his strength and he uses these aspects to overcome the obstacles as they are set before him. This tale embodies the 5th Exeter Quality in that Tolkien uses lively and imaginative language to explain a wide and unfamiliar world in order to engage the reader by making them feel connected to the moment. The vibrant descriptions as well as the songs and lore tied into the novel draw the reader into the world (Donelson and Nielson 2001).

2. *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, by J.K. Rowling



- *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, by J.K. Rowling, follows the story of a young wizard named Harry Potter who is thrust into a world that is culturally alien to him because the magical wizarding world from which he hails was hidden from him by his jealous and

wizard-phobic aunt and uncle. Harry must use his magical powers in tandem with the powers of his friends and loved ones to overcome the powers of evil that threaten him and his friends. This book focuses on the importance of friendship and family, as it is revealed that Sirius Black, who is described throughout the novel as a dangerous lunatic and prolific serial killer who has recently escaped the titular maximum-security wizarding prison, Azkaban, which is guarded by magical beings called *dementors* who suck the happiness from their wards. The usage of dementors as prison guards is a surprisingly barbaric and inhumane process that essentially tortures the inmates for as long as they stay in proximity to the dementors. As it turns out, the betrayer of the Potters was not Black but rather the ratlike Peter Pettigrew, who sold the Potters out to Voldemort in order to curry his favor. *The Prisoner of Azkaban* is a useful model for an unfair justice system. Harry and his friends must contend with the unfair sentencing of two innocent individuals, Buckbeak and Sirius Black, and they use magic to accomplish this by going back in time in order to undo the events set into motion. *The Prisoner of Azkaban* shows young adult readers that they have agency over their fates and that they must strive to attain justice for others who cannot defend themselves from evil. This novel embodies Exeter Quality #3 in how Hermione is able to use her intelligence and ingenuity to utilize a magical tool with which she is able to, along with Harry, prevent the executions of both Buckbeak at the hands of the headsman and Sirius at the lips of a dementor. It is empowering to women to see Hermione show both how strong and how brave she is which is inspiring to young adult readers. It also reminds me of Exeter Quality #6 in that the injustice of executing Buckbeak (who was being antagonized by a disrespectful Draco Malfoy and is a majestic magical beast deserving of respect and admiration), as well as Harry and Hermione's just efforts in trying to prevent the dementor's kiss, both serve as wonderful examples of young people taking initiative and fighting for what they believe is right (Donelson and Nielson 2001).

3. *Magyk*, by Angie Sage



- *Magyk*, by Angie Sage, follows the story of a magically inclined boy named Septimus Heap. Septimus is the seventh son of a seventh son, and there is a prophecy which states that anyone who can claim that lineage is promised to become a very powerful wizard. In this magical world, magic is in everything, and the more magically gifted you are, the more opportunities you are given in society. This inequality is apparent from the very beginning of the novel which I believe embodies Exeter Quality #6 because it calls into question the level of inequality in our modern society and how those without power are left to suffer while those with the power are able to thrive (Donelson and Nielson 2001). The magic in *Magyk* is very interesting in nature and follows a clear set of rules which are explained over the course of the series, much unlike the *Harry Potter* series where the magic does not have clearly defined boundaries and spells can simply be said. The book also speaks on the difficulties that impoverished families face and how

there are intelligent children who are bogged down by the inequality and corruption inherent in the social structure of their society.

4. *Eragon*, by Christopher Paolini



- *Eragon*, by Christopher Paolini, follows the story of the titular Eragon, a young human man with a destiny to become a dragon rider, a member of a legendary caste of magical warriors that was driven to extinction by the currently reigning king, Galbatorix, along with all of the dragons in the known world. This world operates off of a strict magic system in which any magical spell you cast saps your life force proportional to the amount of energy it would take to accomplish that feat mundanely. For example, lifting a rock; the farther away you are from the rock, the more energy is required to lift it which increases depending on the height to which the rock is lifted. As a dragon rider, Eragon has access to a tremendous level of innate magical power so the presence and usage of magic plays a prominent role in how the plot progresses. Over the course of the novel, Eragon faces the loss of his loved ones one after the other. This reminds me of Exeter Quality # 7 because it introduces young adult readers to difficult concepts like the loss of family and friends (Donelson and Nielson 2001). Eragon experiences the loss of his parents and his uncle during the beginning of the novel, and he loses his mentor in a

tragic encounter which leaves him all alone without any form of parental guidance.

Towards the climax of the novel, Eragon receives a physically debilitating injury on his back during a battle to the death which he must learn to overcome. It is inclusive and validates the feelings of handicapped readers and it can help those who are not handicapped which reminds me of Exeter Quality #6 because these issues are real and possible for young people to experience. Preparing young adult readers to feel empathy for people who are experiencing handicaps is a useful quality that young adult literature is capable of providing (Donelson and Nielson 2001).

5. *Redwall*, by Brian Jacques



- *Redwall* is one of my all-time favorite books and book series. Anthropomorphized animals inhabiting an Abbey named Redwall in the wooded foothills of a wide countryside come under attack by an evil force of rats that want the treasures of the Abbey of Redwall and the young mouse Mathias must rise to the occasion to become the hero Redwall needs to repel the rat menace. Mathias is a mouse, who is one of the smallest of the denizens of Redwall. Other animals featured include badgers (who are characterized as massive barbarians capable of feats of strength) and sparrows (who

are live their own that lives far up above on the walls of Redwall itself and have few dealings with the flightless animals below). This represents Exeter Quality #4 because every character in the story is an anthropomorphized animal which creates a fantastical environment that allows opens the world up to be explored (Donelson and Nielson 2001). It is important for young adult readers to read about other worlds because it opens up their imaginations and allows them to experience new ideas from different perspectives that they never realized existed before.

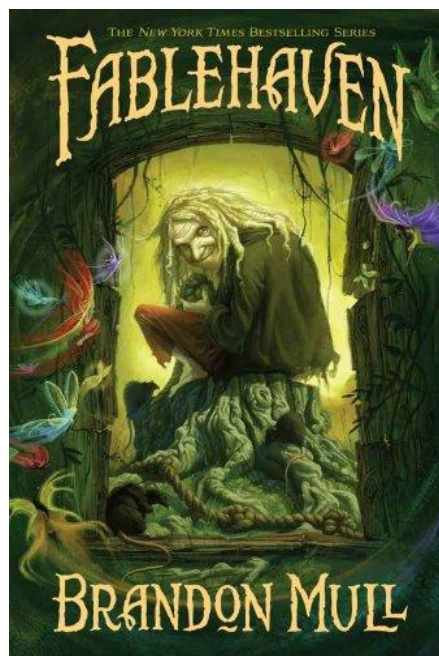
6. *Beowulf*



- *Beowulf* is an epic poem that follows the exploits of Beowulf, a great hero of the Geats, who begins the tale by answering the summons of the great Danish king Hrothgar. The king's mead hall, Heorot, has been under a nightly assault by a horrific monster named Grendel who breaks the door down every night and devours his men in his hall. Blades cannot pierce his hide and he gluts himself freely. Beowulf, learning this, merely laughs and declares that he will fight Grendel without any weapons while completely naked

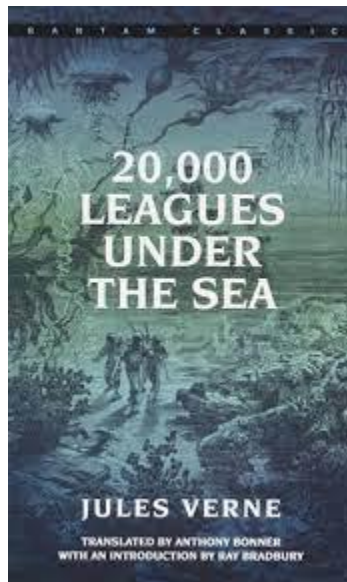
because every warrior that failed before him had always been armed and armored. Beowulf succeeds in overpowering the monster and kills Grendel by tearing his arm off; ironically murdering Grendel while unarmed by “dis-arming” him. Later in life, he becomes a great king and has to defend his kingdom from a dragon whom he slays before succumbing to its venom. *Beowulf* is the most famous epic poem from Europe so I believe that it is incredibly valuable to read and understand because it is regarded by scholars as one of the most significant works of Old English literature. Although it takes place in the “real world,” I believe that it represents a high fantasy setting because the plot is set so far back in the mythic past that anything was in the realm of possibility, with monsters roaming the wilderness preying on helpless travelers on the roads. Students can gain a better understanding of the human experience of that period of time because this story was what people told each other for centuries and, as a piece of early literature, has had a huge impact on the development of storytelling in general (Donelson and Nielson 2001).

7. *Fablehaven*, by Brandon Mull



- *Fablehaven*, written by Brandon Mull, follows the story of Kendra and Seth Sorensen, two young teenagers who are off to visit their grandparents for the summer while their parents go on vacation. The grandparents are in charge of a vast fenced-in park that covers many acres of forest and swamp, yet there is more to the preserve than meets the eye; this fenced-in preserve is home to a plethora of magical creatures who were placed there long ago by a council of wizards in an effort to preserve them from the threat that humanity posed to them as their understanding of technology increased. Five special preserves scattered throughout the world were magically created to house magical creatures of varying alignments, such as the noble yet haughty centaur to the conniving and openly evil demon. Each preserve has a family of caretakers who act as the only point of human contact between the magical creatures of the preserve and the human population of the wider world. There is an accident that occurs that causes Kendra to gain the trait “fairyouched” which means that she now has a special fairy-related status that has not been granted to a human for centuries. This opens up her eyes and she is able to see the world for what it truly is without the magical barriers obscuring her vision any longer. Kendra must now deal with this new condition as forces move against her family in an attempt to wrest control of the preserve from the Sorensens in order to release a demon imprisoned deep below the earth. It is a fantastical tale filled with discovery and adventure which I enjoyed immensely. Exeter Quality #3 fits this novel perfectly as Kendra is a strong and capable female protagonist who grows as a character as the series progresses (Donelson and Nielson 2001).

8. *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, by Jules Verne



- *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, by Jules Verne, is a fantastical science fiction novel set in 1866 about a man who is searching for a massive water-dwelling beast that is sinking ships. The American government organizes a hunt for this beast which results in their frigate becoming damaged in a fight with what turns out to be a massive, futuristic submarine. Pierre Arronax, the main character, finds himself aboard this ship during the accident and becomes fast friends with the vessel's captain, the enigmatic Nemo. Captain Nemo built this ship, which he names the Nautilus, to withstand the pressures of the deepest parts of the ocean, where he and his crew can travel and view the wonders of the ocean from the comfort of their submarine. This novel brings both Arronax and the reader through fantastical settings both real and imagined from Verne's imagination and therefore represents Exeter Quality #2 because as the novel progresses, Captain Nemo begins to become more unhinged and what was once an adventure of wonder and discovery is transformed into a nightmare of terror as the captain's orders bring chaos and ruin to his once-proud vessel (Donelson and Nielson 2001). A young adult reader

would find this fast-paced style of storytelling and would feel more connected to classical literature which may open them up to experiencing more classical literature.

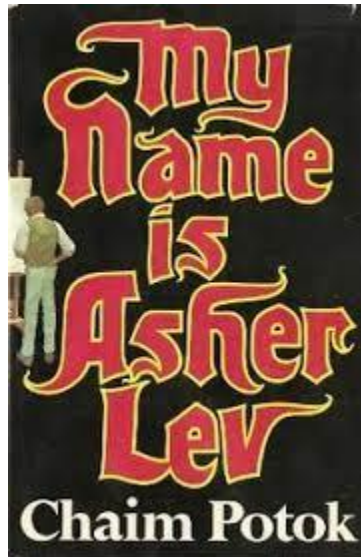
9. *The Odyssey*, written by Homer



- *The Odyssey* is one of the important works of literature from the western world and young adult readers have much to learn in the way of world history and mythology by reading this text. This story follows the adventures of King Odysseus of Ithaca and his crew as they make the arduous journey back to Greece, where his wife awaits him. They are returning from the Trojan War when Odysseus' fleet is blown off course by a storm conjured by Poseidon aimed to punish Odysseus for his hubris and causes him to wander, lost at sea, for ten years. During this time, he experiences the wonders and terrors of the wide and unknown world, because at the time this was written, people believe that the ocean had an end off of which you could fall. During his voyage, Odysseus truly suffers through his loneliness and longs to return to his wife and son who (unbeknownst to him) are beset by hordes of suitors who hover around Penelope hoping to take her hand in marriage while they eat all the food and drink all the wine. *The Odyssey* has stood the test of time because of how interesting the story is. Homer weaves a complex narrative involving gods, monsters,

curses, and fate itself. Exeter Quality #4 fits this novel perfectly as Odysseus must contend with the wrath of literal gods to finally make it home to his family in order to set things right (Donelson and Nielson 2001).

10. *My Name is Asher Lev*, by Chaim Potok



- *My Name is Asher Lev* is the story of a young Hasidic Jewish boy named Asher who is the son of the right-hand man to the influential Rebbe of the community in Brooklyn. The book was written in 1972 and the story begins in 1955. From a very young age, Asher has this weight placed on him of carrying on the family legacy of serving the Rebbe, like his father and his father's father before him. At the same time, Asher is born with a proclivity for painting, which his father regards as simply a waste of time and talent that should be devoted to God and furthering the cause of the Jewish people, who are being heavily persecuted. This sect of people fled the horrors of the Soviet Union and the mistreatment they were receiving there and sought refuge in the United States. It was the mission of this community to rescue Jews from being persecuted by the Stalinist government, which would send them to the wastes of Siberia to be worked to death. Throughout the course of the story, Asher must contend with his Jewish identity clashing with his identity as an artist which drives a wedge between him and his father. After years of attempting to suppress this

in him, Asher's father is instructed by the Rebbe himself to allow Asher to be taught professionally, which opens the door for Asher to dive deeper into his passion for art at the expense of his relationship with his community. This is one of the most profound novels I have ever read in my life and it shook me to my core. It offers insights into the Jewish experience and the horrors that racism and intolerance have brought them over the centuries up until the common era. It also deals with family trauma related to differing beliefs in faith and how sometimes who you truly are cannot be repressed for the sake of your family and faith. As a young adult that read this book, I feel like it is inspiring. Though I am not Jewish, I can relate my personal experiences to Asher's relationship with his father, and the act of reading and internalizing the message of this book really helped me work through relationship issues that I never really knew existed before I was able to recognize them through the text. Exeter Quality #7 would be best used to describe this book. It deals with heavy and emotional topics such as not being accepted by family members because of who you are, which seems to be more common than it should (Donelson and Nielson 2001).

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