

**“Accio Bibliographia”: The Use of Historiographical
Methods in Fiction**

by

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Introduction: The Facts of Fictional Representation

In its long history, history has been considered a form of poetry, a form of philosophy, a form of science and a form of literature.¹ In antiquity, the satirist Lucian's *True History* mocked Herodotus, calling itself the only true history because of its awareness that it was truly fictional.² In the 19th century historians such as Leopold von Ranke claimed to be scientist as well as poet, achieving objective knowledge through penetration of the archives.³ In the 1990s, Anthony Kemp argued that historicism has become an ideology that humans cannot escape and think outside of—even those who claim to dislike history still base their distaste within historiographical traditions.⁴ This thesis explores how historical paradigms have been appropriated and exploited to anchor the worlds of fantasy fiction. It thereby sheds light on the pervasive historicization of an age in which some have argued historical consciousness is increasingly irrelevant.

Postmodern theory, following the ideas of Hayden White, has given considerable attention to narrativization and linguistic devices that are shared by fiction and historical discourse.⁵ It has also highlighted, as argued by Frank Ankersmit, that the past can be represented but cannot be described.⁶ Quite apart from the complexity of events such as the French Revolution, the past is not available for direct observation.⁷ Historical reality can only be

¹ Keith Jenkins, "Historiography and postmodernism." *The Postmodern History Reader* (London and New York: Routledge Publishing, 1997), 1-35.

² Paul Turner, *Lucian's True History and Lucius or the Ass* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958), vii-xi.

³ Leopold von Ranke, "On the Character of the Historical Science," *Theory and Practice of History*, trans. Wilma A. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973), 34-46.

⁴ Anthony Kemp, *The Estrangement of Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 102-104.

⁵ Hayden White, "Introduction: Tropology, Discourse, and the Modes of Human Consciousness," *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 1-26.

⁶ Frank Ankersmit, "The Linguistic Turn: Literary Theory and Historical Theory," *Historical Representation* (2001), 39-49.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 41-44.

a represented reality: the historian can compare his or her account only with other accounts, not with the absent past.⁸ Ankersmit also argues that all history is political history, agreeing with White that language and the representation it enables is not value neutral.⁹ Representation relies in particular on genre and figures of speech (tropical elements) shared by fictional and historical writing which are not themselves true or false.¹⁰ White argues that genre serves as the lens of historical writing no less than it does for literary works and that the choice between tragic, satiric, romantic or epic emplotments has political implications.¹¹ For example, he argues that historical texts written in the tragic mode use mechanistic approaches to the past, examining how events unfold from a deterministic perspective, and tend to have radical political implications.¹² For White, all of this leads to central questions about the literary or “fictional” nature of history.¹³ The questions here are their inverse: how is fiction, specifically fantasy fiction, inescapably historical in its modes and methods.

White argues that the works of the historian and the author of fiction both combine evidentiary claims and literary tropes and devices to create a coherent, and therefore comprehensible, narrative.¹⁴ If either writes an incoherent narrative, he/she has failed to account adequately for evidence and/or emplotted it inconsistently or unconvincingly.¹⁵ In both cases,

⁸ Ankersmit, “The Linguistic Turn,” 43-48; Hayden White, “The Burden of History,” *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 46-50.

⁹ Ankersmit, “The Linguistic Turn: Literary Theory and Historical Theory,” 29-39.

¹⁰ Hayden White, “Interpretation in History,” *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 51-60; Hayden White, “Historicism, History, and the Figurative Imagination,” *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 117-118.

¹¹ White, “Interpretation in History,” 70-75.

¹² *Ibid.*, 70.

¹³ *Ibid.*.

¹⁴ Hayden White, “The Fictions of Factual Representation,” *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978.), 124-130.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*.

White suggests, the writer's goal is to emplot and deploy literary devices that create a reality effect or illusion of wholeness that allows the reader to believe in, and thereby be invested in, the narrative.¹⁶

In *Remaking History* Jerome De Groot takes a pragmatic look at how historical fiction communicates historical “knowledge” (accurate or inaccurate) for a non-academic readership, focusing primarily on how it either upholds or subverts nationalistic narratives, how it draws on the reality of the past (thereby making “the dead rise again”), and how it makes the past literarily accessible, even with “non-historical” material.¹⁷ His book examines many elements of representation within historical fiction, including some fictions one may not typically regard as “historical,” such as how history literally comes to life in *The Walking Dead*, but still calls for more research, concluding that historical fiction as a genre tends to be overlooked by the discipline as a source of historical knowledge, which is problematic when those representations are the ones that present historicity to the widest audience.¹⁸

Aristotle, in his magnum opus on drama and literature *Poetics*, argued that history was inherently inferior to poetry.¹⁹ He saw both as having the goal of teaching the reader life lessons through example and/or counter-example, but histories were limited by what actually occurred.²⁰ This limit was regarded as a fundamental flaw: moral lessons based on history alone would require validation in negative as well as positive practice.²¹ Fiction provides an escape from this problem, since it can speculate and draw on ahistorical truths.²² This notion of a fictional work

¹⁶ Hayden White, “The Fictions of Factual Representation,” 124-130.

¹⁷ Jerome De Groot, *Remaking History* (London and New York: Routledge Publishing, 2016), 1-10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 223-227.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Samuel Butcher (1994), <https://bit.ly/2luGRsB>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*.

²¹ *Ibid.*.

²² Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Samuel Butcher, <https://bit.ly/2luGRsB>.

serving history's "purpose" better than history itself appears in Nietzsche's article "On the Use and Abuse of History."²³ In it, Nietzsche notes the possibility of "historical writing that had no drop of common fact in it and yet could claim to be called in the highest degree objective."²⁴ Nietzsche believed that the historian's pursuit of "objectivity" put the usefulness of history at risk. The past is brought "nearer to fiction" when it serves the purpose of comparison and imitations are truly entirely alike.²⁵ Thus with regard to the question of usefulness, historical and fictional writing share intent and purpose. In this context it is noteworthy that fictional works are commonly regarded as sources of historical knowledge and are assigned as reading in university history courses.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, in her article "Literary Criticism and the politics of the New Historicism," once posited that the historical discipline is approaching an era of two extremes, both of which she considered worrying: either "intellectual totalitarianism," wherein history is completely controlled by academics and is largely divorced from historical thought as present in popular culture, or "intellectual anarchy," wherein every person is able to have their own history and consider it to be "true" for them.²⁶ These processes have, in a sense, occurred simultaneously, as historians both do and do not confront the postmodernist challenges to history, causing them to move away from historical knowledge as it exists in popular culture and to embrace a multiplicity of arguably contradictory histories as "true." Hayden White has laid out a cogent argument about the fictions of factual representation, examining the past as

²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*, trans Adrian Collins, <https://bit.ly/2i49FYu>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*.

²⁶ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Literary Criticism and the politics of the New Historicism," *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. Keith Jenkins (London and New York: Routledge Publishing, 1997), 84-88.

representations in words that use tropical devices shared with fictional writing to make the text comprehensible, but the argument has often been dismissed or ignored by historians.²⁷

White's focus is on how historical texts employ narrativization and tropes recognizable in fiction.²⁸ This thesis will explore how three fictional works set at least partly in fictional worlds, J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-Earth, J.K. Rowling's Wizarding World of Harry Potter, and Rick Riordan's World of Gods and Heroes, exhibit historicity with respect to method and how they make real-world claims to authenticity to gain authority and appeal to historical consciousness. These works are all fantasy novels, which, as discussed by Tolkien, distinguish them from traditional fiction through their use of fantastical elements that transport the reader outside the "primary world" (reality) to an imagined one that, during the reading experience, is taken as factual.²⁹ Tolkien argues that the genre of fantasy recognizes both fact and history, while not enslaved to either, and therefore makes unique claims to truth among fiction: "if you have built your little world, then [what you have built] is true in that world."³⁰ Tolkien considers this from a theological perspective, terming it "subcreation," as the human author is both the creator of the story and the creature of God.³¹ This thesis considers it from a historiographical perspective, examining how the authors create their "little worlds" as historically coherent and historically grounded.³² Attention will be given to both the claims made within the books that convey the primary narratives of each story, and the supplemental stories that educate the reader about the history of the worlds: Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, J. K. Rowling's *Quidditch Through the Ages*

²⁷ White, "The Fictions of Factual Representation," 124-130; Mark Poster, *Cultural History and Postmodernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 47-58.

²⁸ White, "Interpretation in History," 70-75.

²⁹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, 1947, 1-27, <https://bit.ly/1EaGPrd>.

³⁰ Ibid..

³¹ Ibid..

³² Ibid..

and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and Rick Riordan's *Camp Half-Blood Confidential*. The historiographical nature of these works will be explored from four perspectives: the role of sources and how these are handled by the author; the ways in which the author chooses to engage with or abstain from acknowledgement of from real-world history; the ways the authors position themselves subjectively, despite their complete control over events, including use of historical genre and emplotment; and the techniques of historical inquiry that are applied to the fictitious works by the author, characters, and fans.

Tolkien's account of Middle-earth in *The Lord of the Rings* depicts a war that causes the end of the age of magic and allows for the rise of human beings as the dominant species.³³ Tolkien, a University of Oxford medievalist, developed the stories of and world of Middle-earth in the middle of the 20th century.³⁴ After *The Hobbit* appeared in 1937, *The Lord of the Rings* was published in three parts in 1954 and 1955, with additional stories by Tolkien being published posthumously by his son. Tolkien's Middle-earth is widely regarded as one of the most logically-consistent and historically-grounded fictional worlds ever created and his writings fundamentally influenced the development of modern (and later post-modern) fantasy literature.³⁵ Tolkien is especially noted for his linguistic skill at developing languages with clear evolutions and his talent at providing a mythistorical origin for the British Isles.³⁶

Tolkien Studies is a very expansive field, though it gives limited attention to the historicity of the works. Even though Tolkien himself considered his work as within the

³³ J. R. R. Tolkien, *Return of the King* (London: HarperCollins Publishing, 1991/2007).

³⁴ Daniel Grotta-Kurska, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Architect of Middle Earth* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 1976), 7-11.

³⁵ Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth: How J. R. R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 107-149.

³⁶ Sandra Straubhaar, "Myth, Late Roman History, and Multiculturalism in Tolkien's Middle-earth," *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth: A Reader* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 115-118; Edmund Wainwright, *Tolkien's Mythology for England* (Norfolk: Anglon-Saxon Books, 2004), 97-100.

historical genre, much of the scholarship focuses elsewhere, examining his books as allegory for real-world events, literary genre, and numerous other non-historiographical topics.³⁷ These were such a recurring motif that Tolkien openly voiced his distaste for the scholarship on Middle-earth as it existed during his lifetime.³⁸ Tolkien's own thoughts, notably his opinions on fantasy as a genre as expressed in his article *On Fairy-Stories*, are the subject of discussion below.

The Wizarding World depicted in the *Harry Potter* franchise presents a hidden culture of wizards that have lived and continue to live parallel to non-wizards (termed “muggles”) around the world.³⁹ J. K. Rowling, a trained classicist, began writing the franchise in 1995 with the final book in the heptalogy being published in 2007.⁴⁰ The books have since become the best-selling franchise of all time and have spawned numerous adaptations, including a spin-off movie series and a Broadway play.⁴¹ Harry Potter fandom is particularly noted for its passion and its goodwill, as exemplified by groups such as the Harry Potter Alliance, which do charitable work citing the characters and stories from the books as leading them by example.⁴²

Scholarship discussing Harry Potter has covered a variety of topics, much of it focused on characterization and representation.⁴³ How the works are able to provide therapeutic assistance to people with PTSD, especially children, is a major area of research, though literary

³⁷ Verlyn Flieger and Carl Hostetter, *Tolkien's Legendarium: Essays on The History of Middle-earth* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), 1-28.

³⁸ Grotta-Kurska, J. R. R. *Tolkien: Architect of Middle Earth*, 8.

³⁹ J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone: 20th Anniversary Edition* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 1-332.

⁴⁰ Julia Eccleshare, *A Guide to the Harry Potter Novels* (London and New York: Continuum Publishing, 2002), 1-32.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*.

⁴² Siobhan McEvoy-Levy, *Peace and Resistance in Youth Cultures: Reading the Politics of Peacebuilding from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (Manchester: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 132-133.

⁴³ Cynthia Whitney Hallet, “Serious Scholarship and Academic Hocus Pocus: Conjuring Harry Potter into the Canon,” *Scholarly Studies in Harry Potter: Applying Academic Methods to a Popular Text* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), 1-6.

tropes, world-building, and politics have all also been given focus.⁴⁴ The historicity of the works and their connections to the real world have been mentioned in many articles without being explored directly. Significantly, much of the discussion resembles the kind of interpretation one would apply to a historical text. One example is analysis of Rowling as narrator and how she infuses pacifist rhetoric into the work without directly discussing it, which parallels historical discussions of political biases.⁴⁵

The World of Gods and Heroes depicted in *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* is a world of Greco-Roman demigods (“half-bloods”) that do battle with monsters throughout history and into the modern world.⁴⁶ Rick Riordan, a Middle School history teacher, began writing the Percy Jackson franchise in the early 2000s as a series of bedtime stories for his son, who had just been diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia and was struggling to read Greek mythology.⁴⁷ The series has since spawned two direct sequel series (*Heroes of Olympus* in 2010 and *Trials of Apollo* in 2016), in addition to a variety of spin-off novels and an imprint that publishes stories about mythologies Riordan does not feel qualified to write himself.⁴⁸ All of these works are clearly grounded in the eras they were written in, both through a writing style deeply infused with colloquialisms and through progressive post-modernist representations of marginalized groups who take on heroic roles in the narratives.

Scholarship on Percy Jackson is relatively spotty. Lily Glasner, in book chapter “Taking a Zebra to Vegas: Allegorical Reality in the Percy Jackson & the Olympians Series,” discusses

⁴⁴ Hallet, “Serious Scholarship and Academic Hocus Pocus,” 1-20; Kathryn A. Markell and Mare A. Markall, *The Children Who Lived* (New York; Routledge Publishing, 2008), xiii-xxvi.

⁴⁵ McEvoy-Levy, *Peace and Resistance in Youth Cultures*, 1-20.

⁴⁶ Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (New York: Hyperion, 2006), 61-121.

⁴⁷ Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson, “‘A God Buys Us Cheeseburgers’: Rick Riordan’s Percy Jackson Series and America’s Culture Wars,” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 39.3 (2015), 235-245.

⁴⁸ Morey and Nelson, “‘A God Buys Us Cheeseburgers,’” 235-253.

the nature of reality within the series, particularly focusing on the depiction of a Greco-Roman America, using post-modernist theories regarding allegorical realities to shape her approach.⁴⁹ However, most of the analysis of *Percy Jackson* boils down to stating that Riordan succeeded in his objective—making Greek mythology appealing to young readers.⁵⁰ Very little of it focuses on books beyond the first pentology.⁵¹

One: The Citation's Curse

Herodotus is considered the “father of history,” in spite of his frequently dubious claims, not least because of his reliance on sources.⁵² His willingness to explore and access information about the wider world he lived in distinguished his work even though his sources were of very uneven reliability.⁵³ While the historical method has evolved greatly since then, the central notion of exploring the world to uncover sources remains.⁵⁴ With the rise of archival research in the 19th century, the goal remained the same even as the place changed—find sources, analyze sources, and then obtain the historical truth from these sources.⁵⁵ Regardless of nature and time and place, sources have always been a foundational elements of history. The understanding of sources has, however, been complicated by postmodern theory: they are no longer seen as gateways, but as signposts to the past.⁵⁶ As Ankersmit observes, a source does not contain the

⁴⁹ Lily Glasner, “Taking a Zebra to Vegas: Allegorical Reality in the Percy Jackson and the Olympians Series,” *Collision of Realities: Establishing Research on the Fantastic in Europe*, ed. Lars Schmeink and Astrid Böger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 155-174.

⁵⁰ Alexander Leighton, “Re-Discovering Mythology: Adaptation and Appropriation in the Percy Jackson and the Olympians Saga,” *Mousaion* 32.2. (2014), 60-73.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*.

⁵² Ann Curthoys and John Docker, *Is History Fiction?* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 11-20.

⁵³ *Ibid.*.

⁵⁴ Ann Curthoys and John Docker, *Is History Fiction?*.

⁵⁵ Leopold von Ranke, “On the Character of the Historical Science,” *Theory and Practice of History*, trans. Wilma A. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973), 34-46..

⁵⁶ Jerome De Groot, *The Historical Novel* (London and New York: Routledge Publishing, 2010), 111-112.

past any more than an historian's account describes the past as though it were a tangible object.⁵⁷

White suggests that this applies to fictional as well as historical writing, the difference being that fictional works imagine their accounts, whereas historical works claim to discover theirs.⁵⁸

Tolkien's Middle-earth is certainly the most literal example of creating one's own sources for a fictional history.⁵⁹ One source, the Red Book of Westmarch, serves as his source for a majority of the text. By creating sources, Tolkien justifies his world's existence and secures a logical consistency for it by grounding it in relatively consistent narratives told through recognizable historiographical tropes.⁶⁰ He does not, however, shy away from critical evaluation in the the events he recounts.⁶¹ The traditional histories of Middle-earth are oral histories, presumably because elves are practically immortal and have living memory of the history of the world, but Tolkien allows historical inconsistency in the telling of certain events, mimicking the opaqueness of certain real-world historical narratives.⁶² This is especially true of *The Silmarillion*, which has many alternative versions of the same stories within it, all justified as being equally accurate recountings of the same oral history.⁶³ These volumes have been the subject of much debate and scrutiny, both by hobbits and elves within the universe of *The Lord*

⁵⁷ Ankersmit, "The Linguistic Turn: Literary Theory and Historical Theory," 39-48.

⁵⁸ White, "The Fictions of Factual Representation," 126-129.

⁵⁹ Tolkien found the obsession with source-collection in academia to be distracting from the true literary art of creating histories, yet he still based his created history on created sources (Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, 388).

⁶⁰ Paul Kocher, "Middle-earth: An Imaginary World?," *Tolkien: New Critical Perspectives*, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbaro (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1981), 131.

⁶¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of The Ring* (London: HarperCollins, 1991/2007), 18-21.

⁶² David Day, *An Atlas of Tolkien* (San Diego: Thunder Bay Press, 2015), 194-243; Tolkien, *The Fellowship of The Ring*, 491-493.

⁶³ Wayne Hammond, "'A Continuing and Evolving Creation': Distractions in the Later History of Middle-earth," *Tolkien's Legendarium: Essays on The History of Middle-earth*, ed. Verlyn Flieger and Carl Hostetter (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), 19-24.

of the Rings and by historians and hobbyists interested in the implications of the wider history/mythology.⁶⁴

Rowling's Harry Potter is notably more erratic. Rowling, like Tolkien, situates herself within the narrative, but it is never established how she gained the sources that enabled her to write the Harry Potter series itself. Her only direct in-universe influence on the series is assistance with the composition of the published version of *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*.⁶⁵ While this leaves questions unanswered, it actually parallels conventions in historiographical writing: most historians do not directly state the personal reasons for writing their histories.⁶⁶ Harry Potter himself encounters a variety of sources for historical knowledge throughout the series, which are expanded upon by the narrator.⁶⁷ Perhaps influenced by Rowling's own training as a classicist, Harry experiences a large number of highly political monuments and statues reflecting his world's history, not unlike those of the Greeks and Romans. These range from monuments emblematic of personal microhistories, such as the Potter Family memorial, to large-scale monuments to historical figures, such as the institution of "houses" at Hogwarts, all of which represent the virtues of the four founders of the school (Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Salazar Slytherin) and directly encourage the children to be like the great wizards and witches that lived before them.⁶⁸ Most important, however, are the numerous books and textbooks that Potter is able to read throughout his time at Hogwarts, some of which Rowling later wrote herself and published for readers.

⁶⁴ Paul Kocher, "Middle-earth: An Imaginary World?," 131.

⁶⁵ J. K. Rowling, *Tales of Beedle the Bard* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008), 1-7.

⁶⁶ Jerome De Groot, *Remaking History*.

⁶⁷ Rowling, *The Philosopher's Stone*, 1-332.

⁶⁸ Rowling, *The Philosopher's Stone*, 122-123; J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2007), 264-269.

These books are directly modelled on conventional history textbooks and closely resemble them. *Quidditch Through the Ages* by Kennilworthy Whisp is a book detailing the history of the wizarding sport Quidditch.⁶⁹ Read by Harry during his first year, it provided him reassurance and comfort as he took on the sport.⁷⁰ The book is packed full of analyses of fictional sources and references to non-existent scholarly debates. “Whisp” discusses paintings, travellers’ journals, newspapers, sports records, letters, and more as he outlines the evolution of the fictitious sport.⁷¹ *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* by Newt Scamander, meanwhile, does what the title implies: it lists a variety of magical beasts and their locations across the globe.⁷² While most of this is based on “Scamander’s” own exploits, the introduction cites a considerable historical debate about the definition of what a “beast” is and the types of prejudices that fuel this debate.⁷³ “Scamander” also frequently cites books, most of which are fictional, including directing the reader towards *Quidditch through the Ages* in the entry for the Snidget, which both provides a sense of in-universe contingency and sneaky product placement.⁷⁴ All of these representations of minor details of the world create the sense of a larger world and build a large-scale history.

By contrast with Tolkien and Rowling, Riordan's source is quite simple. He acts as the Camp Scribe, writing down the exploits of the demigods at Camp Half-blood who communicate them to him verbally.⁷⁵ An oral account of the exploits of Percy Jackson by Percy himself makes

⁶⁹ J. K. Rowling, *Quidditch through the Ages* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009), xv-xvii.

⁷⁰ Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, 194.

⁷¹ Rowling, *Quidditch through the Ages*.

⁷² J. K. Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009) xvii-xviii.

⁷³ Ibid..

⁷⁴ Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, 77.

⁷⁵ Rick Riordan, *The Demigod Files* (New York: Hyperion, 2009), 1-2

up most of the works, with very occasional commentary being added by Riordan.⁷⁶ Percy's encounters otherwise parallel those of the hobbits. Here an immortal wise man, in this case the centaur teacher of heroes Chiron, reports history to him, with additional information being found in texts.⁷⁷ The in-universe guidebook, *The Camp Half-Blood Confidential*, skips the middleman entirely by having Percy and his friends write the book themselves, including interviews, anecdotes, and commentaries regarding the camp and camp life.⁷⁸

These sources directly parallel those found in historical scholarship. The oral histories of the Elves and the campers mimic those recorded “for all eternity” by Herodotus; the pastiche of Greek mythology featuring the protagonist as both the historical figure and the historian found in Percy Jackson mimics the parodies of Homer and Herodotus found within Lucian's *True History*; the folk stories of the Hobbits mimic the farcical gossip of Tacitus; the paintings, newspapers, and diaries of “Whisp” echo those items that could be uncovered by Ranke in an archive; and the citations of scholarly works, debates, and (somewhat) questionable governmental categorization of beings by “Scamander” resemble modern real-life scholarship.

No less important than the nature of the sources is how they are cited. In antiquity, the process was quite simple. The historian would list a source in a generic sense within the text, often simply declaring that “it has been said that [this is true]” should the source not merit mentioning directly.⁷⁹ This process became formalized in the modern era. Standards of academic integrity require use of standardized citation systems to communicate clearly both what

⁷⁶ Riordan, *The Demigod Files*, 1-2; Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*, 1-2.

⁷⁷ Ibid..

⁷⁸ Rick Riordan, *Camp Half-Blood Confidential* (New York: Hyperion, 2017), 8-9.

⁷⁹ Curthoys and Docker, *Is History Fiction?*, 37.

the sources of the writer are and how the reader could find and access these (usually by providing the publication data).

The methods used for citing fictitious sources are quite varied. Unsurprisingly, in-text citations are the most common. The source is simply mentioned with no additional information on how one would access it or even how the author obtained it. Even Tolkien, whose sources have all subsequently been published by his son, did not usually provide additional information beyond the culture of the source. For instance, “young hobbits” are given credit for the folktale of Mad Baggins, a tale about a magical hobbit who gives out gold made by young hobbits based on Bilbo's fantastical disappearance at the end of his birthday party, but it is not established who these hobbits were.⁸⁰ Rowling’s in-universe textbooks, however, take a more pragmatic approach, offering the reader general information on the particular authors they are referencing. *Fantastic Beasts* is the only work to use traditional academic footnotes to cite his fictitious sources, using a format that mimics Chicago style: Name by Author (Publisher, Year).⁸¹ While the reader may not be able to access these sources for their own perusal, the implication of the work is that wizards would be able to, and therefore Scamander is simply doing his due diligence for his wizarding scholar readers.⁸²

Additionally, interpretation of the fictitious sources is also important since it is in the interpretation that the reader experiences the authorial voice. The most common method by which interpretation of sources is established is by authorial indication of uncertainty about the validity of a source that they invented. Rowling notes throughout *Fantastic Beasts* reports of beast sightings that are considered “unconfirmed” and *Quidditch through the Ages* casts doubt

⁸⁰ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of The Ring*, 55.

⁸¹ Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts*, 6.

⁸² Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts*, 6.

about topics as seemingly simple as the origin of the name “Quidditch”: it appears to have an etymological root in the town of Queerditch where the sport is said to have originated, but with the evolution of the word being completely unknown.⁸³ Tolkien, meanwhile, frequently cites folktales that he does not believe, such as the aforementioned story of Mad Baggins.⁸⁴ Most overtly, Riordan opens the Percy Jackson spin-off novel about Egyptian mythology, *The Red Pyramid*, by musing on how the book contains a transcript of allegedly-true events that are, according to Riordan, wholly unbelievable in nature.⁸⁵ This uncertainty about sources demonstrates how a fictional work borrows from the non-fictional by rhetorically adapting the notion of historical uncertainty.⁸⁶ Inclusion of historical dissonance mimics the inconsistency and uncertainty in historical accounts that demonstrates a critical approach to sources to achieve the greatest authenticity.⁸⁷

Lastly, the sources in these works provide the narrator ways to interpret the narrative, but they are also directly engaged with by the protagonists of the work themselves. All three works focus on characters who begin the story unfamiliar with the more fanciful elements of their world. Harry Potter grows up as an abused child in a middle-class British family, only learning of the existence of wizards, and his personal magical abilities, when a letter arrives inviting him to attend Hogwarts.⁸⁸ Percy Jackson grows up as a misjudged child who always seems to get in trouble, only learning about his demigod status once his mother decides that it is safest to tell him after Greek monsters had begun attacking him at school.⁸⁹ Frodo grows up living a

⁸³ Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts*, 4; Rowling, *Quidditch through the Ages*, 17-21.

⁸⁴ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of The Ring*, 55.

⁸⁵ Rick Riordan, *The Red Pyramid* (New York: Hyperion, 2010), vii.

⁸⁶ White, “The Fictions of Factual Representation,” 124-128.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*.

⁸⁸ Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, 50-61.

⁸⁹ Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*, 63-73..

relatively-sheltered life in the Shire. Even though Bilbo had gone on a prior journey, hobbits generally don't get involved with external affairs and don't keep track of the history of Middle-earth with the attention that the dwarves, the men, or especially the elves do.⁹⁰ Therefore, all three works have protagonists who need to learn their own history alongside the audience, meaning that the beginning of the books often have the protagonist exploring historical sources for knowledge. One of Potter's first steps for finding the philosopher's stone is searching through the library to find a book that explains who Nicolas Flamel is.⁹¹ Similarly, one of Jackson's first activities at camp is reading through Homer in Ancient Greek alongside Annabeth (Homer is a historian for the campers, since the Greek gods are real in that universe).⁹² Much historical background is provided at the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings* as Gandalf works to ensure that the ring now in the possession of Frodo is, in fact, one of the rings of which Sauron is the titular lord.⁹³ In each case the character has to participate in historical research. The obligation of historical learning suggests that history provides the key to meaningful action.⁹⁴ Together with the ostensible sources themselves, discovery and interpretation of them by protagonists in the accounts is central to the claim of these fantasies to coherence and 'historicity'.

If the worlds of fantasy allow the imagined to become true so that the reader can enter a second world, as Tolkien contended, then the sources serve to aid this entry.⁹⁵ By providing clear examples of these sources, the authors give their works historical credibility. These works do not, however, aim only to connect to our world by mimicking the aesthetics of historiography

⁹⁰ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of The Ring*, 62-79.

⁹¹ Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, 212-213.

⁹² Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*, 107.

⁹³ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of The Ring*, 1-63.

⁹⁴ This mimics Kemp's understanding of history as the last ideology everyone participates in, as every character has to embark in historical thinking prior to their quests (Kemp, *The Estrangement of Past*, 102-104).

⁹⁵ J. R. R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*.

through invention of sources, but also by integrating themselves directly into the historical narratives of humanity.

Two: The Shaping of Earth, Middle and Otherwise

Hayden White has observed that factual histories use a combination of the real and the imagined, while fanciful histories tend to rely upon the imagined.⁹⁶ While this is true, it should not be discounted how the use of real-world sources and concepts bolsters the comprehensibility and historicism of a fictitious work. Tolkien himself wrote, and many philosophers have since concurred, that fictional works should bring the reader into a second world that needs to be recognizable in order to be fully believable.⁹⁷ Hayden White makes a parallel argument that historical worlds must be recognizable in their presentation to be comprehensible.⁹⁸ Just as works of history often rely on allegories and comparisons to make the time period they are writing about understandable for their readers, fictional works connect themselves to real-world institutions and concepts in order to become relatable through historicity.

Amongst the fantasy worlds, Middle-earth's relationship to Earth is the most complicated, as Tolkien considered it to be important that his work reflected truths about the real world and the human condition while not explicitly writing about it.⁹⁹ The main connection the world has is the appearance of human beings, who share general human qualities, among the fantasy creatures.¹⁰⁰ According to the creation story of *The Silmarillion*, humans were made

⁹⁶ White, "The Fictions of Factual Representation," 132-134.

⁹⁷ Kind, "Inside *The Hobbit*," 169-172; Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*.

⁹⁸ White, "The Burden of History," 46-50.

⁹⁹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: George and Unwin, 1981), 144.

¹⁰⁰ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of The Ring*, 1-10..

towards the end of creation and were, along with elves, the favourites of the creator—being gifted mortality and ambition as a demonstration of this love.¹⁰¹ This mimics the creation stories found in some real-world religions, but more importantly grounds the humans with real-life human traits—the humans of Middle-earth are recognizably the humans of Earth.¹⁰² The hobbits, who act as the protagonists of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, are also related to humans (“related to us,” as Tolkien phrases it), with their main difference being a relaxed, proto-English lifestyle and a comparative lack of ambition—which has the practical application of them being slow to be corrupted by the One Ring, unlike the humans who became the Nazgûl (ringwraiths) when exposed to one of the weaker nine Rings of Power.¹⁰³ At the end of the War of the Rings, the defining event of *The Lord of the Rings*, the age of magic begins to draw to a close, bringing about the beginnings of the Age of Men, that is, human-dominated and recorded history.¹⁰⁴ This is something the characters themselves realize.¹⁰⁵ The elven prince Legolas and dwarf Gimli directly discuss how men have the potential to outlast them, both in physical presence and in memory.¹⁰⁶ So, although Tolkien’s work writes in the margins of history, it does so by writing a history that occurs before human history, as opposed to an untold history that works alongside ours.

The real-world in Harry Potter, meanwhile, is significantly more direct. While the books are not given chronologies within the texts themselves,¹⁰⁷ they are still grounded within our

¹⁰¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins Publishing, 1999), 36.

¹⁰² Ibid..

¹⁰³ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of The Ring*, 1-10; Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 346; Kocher, “Middle-earth: An Imaginary World?,” 119.

¹⁰⁴ Kocher, “Middle-earth: An Imaginary World?,” 125-129.

¹⁰⁵ Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, 249-250.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid..

¹⁰⁷ Rowling has since claimed that the books were written to take place in the 1990s, which causes chronology issues as it means that characters are doing things after their supposed deaths. For the sake of this thesis, I will focus on claims made by Rowling within the texts themselves, not tweets made years after the publication.

modern world, containing direct representations of real-world occurrences and events.¹⁰⁸ The locations of the story all contain clear allusions to real-world institutions. Hogwarts is essentially a fancy boarding school, accessed via a private train line and with Medieval-era architecture to represent the school's pride in its heritage.¹⁰⁹ Hogsmeade and Diagon Alley are both shopping districts, and the governing system of the Ministry of Magic has clear parallels to the real-life British government, administering the land of Great Britain and sending a delegation to determine international law with the International Confederation of Wizards, a magical equivalent of the United Nations.¹¹⁰ The textbooks also directly represent real-world concepts and ideas. Quidditch, as outlined in its textbook, is played in international tournaments paralleling real-world sports, with teams sparking nationalistic joy in their players.¹¹¹ Personally, I get a sense of satisfaction from learning that Canada excels at Quidditch, in spite of the fact that these accomplishments are fictional and I have little interest in our real-world sporting accomplishments. *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* does not invent a majority of its beasts, with most being direct references to real-world cryptids—such as the Tibetan Yeti, the Greek Chimera, the English Werewolf, and, in recent re-releases of the book, American creatures such as the Hidebehind and the Indigenous Thunderbird.¹¹² All of these serve to make the book appear to represent the real world, as opposed to a fantasy realm, grounding it semi-historically.

¹⁰⁸ Julia Eccleshare, *A Guide to the Harry Potter Novels* (London and New York: Continuum Publishing, 2002), 63-72.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 48-51; Sarah E Maier, "Educating Harry Potter: A Muggle's Perspective on Magic and Knowledge in the Wizard World of J. K. Rowling," *Scholarly Studies in Harry Potter: Applying Academic Methods to a Popular Text*, ed. Cynthia Whitney Hallet (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), 10-17.

¹¹⁰ Eccleshare, *A Guide to the Harry Potter Novels*, 73-89.

¹¹¹ Rowling, *Quidditch through the Ages*, 82.

¹¹² Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts*, 12-85; J. K. Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them: Illustrated Edition* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 56-57 and 120-121.

Percy Jackson mimics Harry Potter in terms of its fictional world-building. It also contains a fantasy world that exists parallel to our real-world. The main location of the books, Camp Half-Blood, is instantly recognizable as a magically-themed summer camp, with a majority of the other major locations being real-world places (for instance, the Gods watch over human society from their Olympian Thrones in the Empire State Building).¹¹³ Everything magical is given relationships to the real world, with monsters and obstacles from Greco-Roman mythology being given modern-day forms and jobs that would not appear to be out-of-place for mortal observers.¹¹⁴ For example, Procrustes, the son of Poseidon known for making people cut off their legs or stretch out their spine as to perfectly fit on his iron beds, runs a Water Mattress Depot under the nickname “Crusty.”¹¹⁵ These choices are done for the purpose of humor, using anachronism to reveal that the traditionally-intimidating Greek monsters are actually absurd, but they are also used for commentary wherein Greco-Roman iconography is assigned new meaning in humorous ways, reflecting the postmodern collapse of category as ancient and modern problems, villains, and figures are all used simultaneously and interchangeably. For example, Roman Emperor Nero as a modern-day war profiteer in *The Trials of Apollo*, for example, draws parallels between the ways that the powerful exploited the weak in the past and in the present, in addition to providing humorous accounts of Nero conducting himself as a cutthroat businessman.¹¹⁶ These details clearly place Percy Jackson within our own time, modernizing Greek myth in ways both comedic and understandable for its young audience.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*, 98-99; Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Last Olympian* (New York: Hyperion, 2009), 301-311; Rick Riordan, *The Heroes of Olympus: The Lost Hero* (New York: Hyperion, 2010), 41-42; Morey and Nelson, “‘A God Buys Us Cheeseburgers,’” 235-245.

¹¹⁴ Morey and Nelson, “‘A God Buys Us Cheeseburgers,’” 235-245.

¹¹⁵ Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*, 277-282.

¹¹⁶ Rick Riordan, *The Trials of Apollo: The Hidden Oracle* (New York: Hyperion, 2016).

¹¹⁷ Morey and Nelson, “‘A God Buys Us Cheeseburgers,’” 235-245.

Historiography is not simply a vehicle for sources about the world; it also brings historical knowledge to life.¹¹⁸ So, in addition to sources and basic concepts, the fictitious histories typically establish some sort of relationship with the real histories.¹¹⁹ This is most common in historical fiction, where it is compulsory, but is also common within fictional works as a whole.¹²⁰ Tolkien discussed how historicism is a part of fantasy in his essay “On Fairy Stories,” arguing that even England can be a fantastical place, as historical England is lost to the past and futuristic England is stuck in the future.¹²¹ This parallels Ankersmit’s ideas about the past as representation; both agree that historical events are communicated through representation in literary texts.¹²² All three fantasies explored in this paper represent the unobtainable past in the fantastical worlds they create.

Tolkien, as mentioned, forms a prehistory of the world—particularly with regards to the creation of pseudo-British people and their culture.¹²³ Middle-earth was a world written with its extinction in mind, and it is made clear how the end of the magic will play out: large-scale geographical change, dwarves dying off due to a slow reproduction rate (leaving behind what humans would consider “natural” stone wonders in the process), elves either returning to their homeland of Eldamar or simply dying out as magic becomes scarce, and the other magical creatures that exist becoming sparse enough that they simply opt to hide from humans (as is the case with hobbits, trolls, ents, etc.).¹²⁴ The languages depicted in Middle-earth are also designed

¹¹⁸ Lubomir Dolezel, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 40-52; De Groot, *Remaking History*, 89-91.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*.

¹²⁰ De Groot, *Remaking History*, 3-8.

¹²¹ Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, <https://bit.ly/1EaGPrd>.

¹²² Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*.

¹²³ Kocher, “Middle-earth: An Imaginary World?,” 125.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*.

to appear as though they would later evolve into human languages after the Age of Magic ended.¹²⁵ This is not, however, depicted as indication of progress. In fact, Tolkien seems to lament the death of other intelligent species since it caused humanity to fall victim to hubris, leading to more wars and more suffering.¹²⁶ He, in a somewhat romantic claim, posits that humankind is subconsciously attracted to the notion of the now-gone magic and that it is what motivates humans to “humanize” animals and appreciate unkempt nature, as a subconscious attempt to recreate the past.¹²⁷ By providing this magic and historical pedigree for real-life human behavior, Tolkien infuses his work with historicity.

Harry Potter, meanwhile, directly builds upon historical events, which are woven throughout the series.¹²⁸ Nicolas Flamel, whose research is elusive to Harry Potter and his friends during the first year, is a historical figure, with his role in the Potter universe drawing on legends about him that claim he achieved immortality through production of the philosopher’s stone.¹²⁹ A series of collectable cards, Chocolate Frog Cards, provides Potter with the name of Flamel in addition to other historical wizarding figures.¹³⁰ For these cards, Rowling draws from a variety of sources: some are entirely fictional (as with Albus Dumbledore, headmaster of Hogwarts and important character to the series), some are entirely historical (such as Cornelius Agrippa, German physician and writer), and some are based on real-world myths and legends (for instance, Circe, Greek villainess who disrupts Odysseus during *The Odyssey*).¹³¹ As prejudice against muggles is a major aspect of wizard culture, it is generally agreed among

¹²⁵ Kocher, “Middle-earth: An Imaginary World?,” 129.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 125.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 125.

¹²⁸ Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*.

¹²⁹ Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, 211-213.

¹³⁰ Ibid..

¹³¹ Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, 108-110.

wizards that it is not worth directly influencing the events of muggle history.¹³² The prejudice and moral implications of this decision will be discussed later, but it enables the narrative to incorporate famous historical figures into wizard history (as is done with Flamel), while not having to worry about the potential of wizards affecting the narrative of muggle history in major ways (i.e., wizards are not involved in muggle wars or conflicts).¹³³

Harry Potter’s textbooks continue this approach to historical narratives. *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* contains references to real-world reports of fantastical beasts, notably the appearance of a Kelpie, a shape-shifting water monster, who lives in Loch Ness, Scotland, and has developed a “thirst for popularity,” an obvious cheeky reference to the Loch Ness Monster.¹³⁴ “Scamander” also comments on muggle fascination with putting certain magical beasts in their art, with some beasts, such as the dragon and the unicorn, having once been known to be real.¹³⁵ *Quidditch through the Ages* notes that Quidditch was slow to gain popularity in America due to the “anti-wizarding feeling” exported from Europe into the colonies—an indirect reference to the witch trials of colonial America.¹³⁶ Again, these works write in the margins of history, as opposed to directly addressing the narrative of history as we know it.

Percy Jackson and the Olympians uses the same approach as Harry Potter, with a key difference: the Greek gods and heroes are directly interventionist in mortal affairs, as they were in Greek mythology.¹³⁷ In fact, the inciting incident of the original pentalogy is World War II, since that event caused such suffering for humankind that the three most powerful Gods—Zeus,

¹³² Eccleshare, *A Guide to the Harry Potter Novels*, 76-78.

¹³³ Ibid..

¹³⁴ Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts*, xxviii.

¹³⁵ Ibid., xxiv.

¹³⁶ Rowling, *Quidditch through the Ages*, 82.

¹³⁷ Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*.

Hades, and Poseidon—vowed to stop having demigod children so as to prevent a conflict of such a scale from ever happening again (which implies that some of the participants of World War II were demigods, though it is never directly explained who these were).¹³⁸ Percy Jackson, a son of Poseidon, breaks this pattern and ends up sparking the Second War of the Titans in consequence, the main event of the first pentalogy.¹³⁹ Percy is also constantly comparing himself to other historical heroes, some from mythology and some not.¹⁴⁰ For example, he notes that the only heroes prior to him to come back alive from the Underworld are Odysseus, Herakles, and Harry Houdini.¹⁴¹ *The Camp Half-Blood Confidential* has perhaps the darkest example of making history into Greek myth—describing the death of James Dean, said to be a son of Aphrodite, and blaming it on a fictitious daughter of Hephaestus, Heloise, as an obvious inversion of the myth of Hephaestus' Net.¹⁴²

In addition to this Greek mythologizing of history, there is also a counter-push that historicizes Greek mythology. For example, the Judges of the Underworld have upgraded their efficiency since antiquity, now forming a committee of wise people who rotate in and out depending on the day.¹⁴³ When Percy first visits the underworld it is being operated by Aeacus, Greek King and traditional Judge of the Dead; Thomas Jefferson, American statesman; and William Shakespeare, British playwright.¹⁴⁴ Chiron, in *The Camp Half-Blood Confidential*, discusses the legacy of his students beginning with famous Greeks he taught—Atlanta, Jason, Achilles, Aeneas, and Perseus—and then continues to list names from the histories and

¹³⁸ Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*, 126-138..

¹³⁹ Riordan, *The Last Olympian*.

¹⁴⁰ Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*.

¹⁴¹ Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*.

¹⁴² Riordan, *Camp Half-Blood Confidential*, 110-111.

¹⁴³ Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*, 291-292.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid; Leighton, "Re-Discovering Mythology," 66.

mythologies of post-antiquity—Merlin, Charlemagne, Joan of Arc, George Washington, Harriet Tubman, and Madame Curie.¹⁴⁵ All of these connections to history reflect how Riordan uses anachronism, intermixing historical periods for ironic and comic effect, but nonetheless serve to make the world feel significantly more real.¹⁴⁶ Riordan does not simply claim Percy was a demigod, but establishes a precedent for his existence based on our own knowledge of historical figures who accomplished impressive, if not wholly morally, things.

Significantly, all of the works participate in the historical practice of nation-building. Middle-earth's parallels to Britain have been discussed at length by others.¹⁴⁷ Tolkien largely depicts a world of dueling pseudo-British nationalities.¹⁴⁸ Harry Potter also presents itself with Britain in the foreground.¹⁴⁹ Professors at Hogwarts are depicted as rather ignorant of non-British cultures. For instance, Severus Snape incorrectly calls a kappa Mongolian in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, when they are Japanese.¹⁵⁰ The textbooks do, however, shine a light on other corners of the magical world, culturally and practically. *Quidditch through the Ages*, while primarily about a sport that originated in the British town of Queerditch and spread alongside British imperialism, does acknowledge the multicultural nature of the Quidditch World Cup, though it is stipulated that it originated in 1473 as a primarily European event, with Asian and African countries being reportedly invited, but unable to attend for practical reasons.¹⁵¹ *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* likewise guides readers where to find beasts around the world. It is

¹⁴⁵ Riordan, *Camp Half-Blood Confidential*, 17-22.

¹⁴⁶ Leighton, "Re-Discovering Mythology," 60-72.

¹⁴⁷ Kocher, "Middle-earth: An Imaginary World?," 117-119; Curry, *Defending Middle-earth*, 37.

¹⁴⁸ Kocher, "Middle-earth: An Imaginary World?," 117-119; Curry, *Defending Middle-earth*, 37.

¹⁴⁹ Eccleshare, *A Guide to the Harry Potter Novels*, 76-78.

¹⁵⁰ J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2000), 129; Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts*, 43.

¹⁵¹ Rowling, *Quidditch through the Ages*, 17-21 and 77.

certainly focused on Britain, while also being slanted towards Greece (likely as a result of Rowling's education), but covers a multitude of wizarding cultures.¹⁵² Percy Jackson begins even more unambiguously with nation-building. The Greek Gods move to whatever country is the cultural powerhouse of "Western Civilization", hence their current residence in America.¹⁵³ However, this notion of "Civilization" is complicated throughout the series as different characters critique American culture, especially for its disrespect for the environment (which leads to the death of Pan, the God of Nature) and mistreatment and oppression of marginalized groups (a cause notably championed by Piper McLean, the half-Cherokee half-Greek daughter of Aphrodite).¹⁵⁴ The effect these themes have on the nature of their works will be explored shortly, but it is worth noting that the presence of such national and political themes directly ties the work to real histories.

All of this demonstrates how these fantasies have borrowed the historical—quite literally taking historical events/concepts and putting them inside their fictional work.¹⁵⁵ Noteworthy too is that like all histories, fantasies cannot include everything. The author must decide what information to include and exclude, sometimes quite literally, as is evident in the twelve volumes of background information found in Tolkien's notes that Christopher Tolkien published after his father's passing.¹⁵⁶ Subjective decisions for what information is and is not important must be made. The books connect to the real world in varying ways, but they only connect to the parts of the world they choose to acknowledge. Rowling says that wizards went to Africa to learn

¹⁵² Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts*.

¹⁵³ Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*, 72-73.

¹⁵⁴ Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Battle of the Labyrinth* (New York: Hyperion, 2006), 312-317; Rick Riordan, *The Lost Hero*, 56-57.

¹⁵⁵ White, "The Fictions of Factual Representation," 121-134.

¹⁵⁶ Hammond, "'A Continuing and Evolving Creation,'" 19-24.

alchemy, as African wizards have historically been more gifted in that field, but neglects to discuss the implications of wizard colonization on the scramble for Africa: she leaves out the details that would be politically problematic.¹⁵⁷ The decision of what to exclude is her prerogative, but it also suggests the challenge of scope that has been troubling historians since antiquity.

Three: The Prisoner of Subjectivity

“My plan [is] to report a few final things about Augustus, then Tiberius’ principate and the rest, without anger or favour, from whose causes I consider myself distant.”¹⁵⁸

- Tacitus, *Annals*

This quote, from Tacitus’ *Annals*, exemplifies major historiographical tensions and challenges. Tacitus claims that he is far enough removed from the events he is writing about to write “without anger or favour.”¹⁵⁹ Throughout the work, however, Tacitus expresses sadness and anguish over the challenges the senatorial elite, the class of which he was a member, faced by the installment of the principate, and he lambasts the corruption of the emperors and destruction of the republic.¹⁶⁰ He includes much senatorial gossip, sometimes presenting rumors as factual, only to dismiss them later.¹⁶¹ He also gives his personal take on the different groups he discusses, most famously commenting that the Christians executed under Nero “[roused] pity” in spite of their faith, of which he did not think highly.¹⁶² Overall, Tacitus claims objectivity that his work not infrequently transgresses.

¹⁵⁷ Rowling, *Quidditch through the Ages*, 80-81.

¹⁵⁸ Tacitus, *Annals*, trans Cynthia Damon (New York: Penguin Classics, 2012), 3..

¹⁵⁹ Curthoys and Docker, *Is History Fiction?*, 89.

¹⁶⁰ Tacitus, *Annals*.

¹⁶¹ Tacitus, *Annals*.

¹⁶² Tacitus, *Annals*, 325-326.

Questions of subjectivity have been particularly prominent in emergence of history as a “science”. The different ways of achieving “neutrality” and the notion that one can be “sufficiently removed” from a period have been problematized over time, especially as postmodernists began discussing the politicization of history inescapable in the very use of language.¹⁶³ Discussion about whether or not one can be objective, and if this would even be desirable, morally, practically, and otherwise, has played a major role in historical theory.¹⁶⁴ One current understanding is that histories plural triumph over history, that it is best to have multiple accounts of the same event, all grounded in different subjective points of view.¹⁶⁵ This allows the historian to write without claims to objectivity, while still providing a variety of accounts that aim to establish the proverbial “truth” about an era.¹⁶⁶

One of the major ways a narrator shapes their own history is through inclusion and exclusion. One cannot write a completely comprehensive history that stipulates every possible interpretation of an event, so the historian has to decide which details are worth including and which should be excluded.¹⁶⁷ Unsurprisingly, this has caused controversy, as historians typically are influenced to include and exclude information based on the cultures in which they operate.¹⁶⁸ In a famous example, Indigenous perspectives have traditionally been left out of colonial narratives, with Indigenous methods of knowing, such as oral histories, commonly being excluded due to the perception that they “lack historicity.”¹⁶⁹ When evaluating a history, considering scope and the possible problems that could arise from its limits is a good starting

¹⁶³ De Groot, *The Historical Novel*, 111-112.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Poster, *Cultural History and Postmodernity*, 38-71.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Tom Saunders, “Historical Approaches,” Seminar, (Victoria: University of Victoria, 2018).

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

point.¹⁷⁰ This tension is likewise present in fantasies, though usually credited to “authorial voice” as opposed to “subjectivity.”

Tolkien aims to include as much contextual information about the world he is creating as possible. If perhaps unintentionally, he embraces the notion of histories over a singular history, with the posthumously published twelve volume *History of Middle-earth* series outlining multiple versions of the same events from different cultural perspectives and with different details.¹⁷¹ The main texts do, likewise, make reference to a variety of traditions and provide narratives and counter-narratives, such as the numerous stories told, across both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, explaining how Bilbo obtained the ring, until settling on the narrative Bilbo reportedly told Gandalf as the “truth.”¹⁷² These narratives and counter-narratives convey the exercise of critical judgement, as if Tolkien, as a narrator, is being objective by including divergent information from a variety of sources.¹⁷³ He is, however, also noted for seeming to take sides when discussing the cultures of Middle-earth, with some scholars even comparing his descriptions of aggressors to Tacitus’ description of the Gallic peoples.¹⁷⁴ Tolkien additionally has been noted for his ethnocentrism. He offers a proto-history of the world, but it is a proto-history filled with pseudo-British characters in patriarchal societies, an intentional choice he made as he desired to write an origin myth for Britain.¹⁷⁵ This demonstrates subjectivity in its limited scope, though it matches the historiographical trends of the day, which were to cling to

¹⁷⁰ Ibid..

¹⁷¹ Hammond, “‘A Continuing and Evolving Creation’,” 19-24.

¹⁷² Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 16-17.

¹⁷³ Paul Thomas, “Some of Tolkien’s Narrators,” *Tolkien’s Legendarium: Essays on The History of Middle-earth*, ed. Verlyn Flieger and Carl Hostetter (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), 176-179.

¹⁷⁴ Sandra Straubhaar, “Myth, Late Roman History, and Multiculturalism in Tolkien’s Middle-earth,” 101-104.

¹⁷⁵ Patrick Curry, *Defending Middle-earth* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1997), 37; Marion Zimmer Bradley, “Men, Halflings, and Hero-Worship,” *Tolkien and the Critics*, ed. Neil Isaac and Rose Zimbardo (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 109-127.

British nationalism, in spite of the imminent decline of the British empire.¹⁷⁶ This grounds his narrator in the era in which he was writing.¹⁷⁷

Rowling, meanwhile, excludes much from her narratives. The prejudice of wizards and the questions of muggle rights are the only stated motivators in terms of wizarding history, explaining how wizard history is apparently unrelated to muggle history.¹⁷⁸ How the wizarding community factored into colonialism, war, and the events of humankind is left unclear.¹⁷⁹ These details are excluded in favour of developing a unique story in the modern day.¹⁸⁰ In-universe discriminatory attitudes against muggles and the muggle-born form the main social commentary, notably through Hermione Granger's activism group Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare (SPEW), with no extended focus on the types of discrimination present in the real world.¹⁸¹ Rowling has, since the publication of the books, tried to claim that wizards do not discriminate based on features other than muggle blood, but that doesn't fit the narrative of the books.¹⁸² For instance, Rowling has also claimed that Dumbledore was a gay man (something not directly stated in the books), but if there was no discrimination in the Harry Potter universe, then one should not need to be closeted about their sexuality.¹⁸³ This flaw, like Tolkien's ethnocentrism, also reflects the era in which she writes, on the eve of progressive movements concerned with representation of marginalized groups in popular literature.¹⁸⁴ It is therefore possible that her

¹⁷⁶ Zimmer Bradley, "Men, Halflings, and Hero-Worship," 109-127; Curry, *Defending Middle-earth*, 37.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid..

¹⁷⁸ Eccleshare, *A Guide to the Harry Potter Novels*, 76-78.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid..

¹⁸⁰ Ibid..

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 82; McEvoy-Levy, *Peace and Resistance in Youth Cultures*, 132-134.

¹⁸² Gavia Baker-Whitelaw, "Is Dumbledore gay? Here's why it matters," *The Daily Dot*, November 18, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2BWUjZM>.

¹⁸³ Ibid.; Hanna Siegal, "Rowling Lets Dumbledore Out of the Closet," *ABC News*, February 12, 2009, <https://abcn.ws/2XuaYRo>.

¹⁸⁴ Baker-Whitelaw, "Is Dumbledore gay? Here's why it matters," <https://bit.ly/2BWUjZM>.

post-publication comments and additions to the Harry Potter lore (such as her much-ridiculed comment about Dumbledore's sex life) reflect a desire to be seen as more forward thinking than her books as originally published suggest.¹⁸⁵ Overall, Rowling bases her narrative in the real world, but still opts to exclude elements that would be politically problematic.

Rowling's textbooks largely follow this trend as well, omitting elements that would be awkward for Rowling to address. "Scamander" does, however, acknowledge the politics of exclusion in the opening to his book, noting how creatures such as ghosts have been excluded from the work by their own volition, preferring to be seen as "has-beens" as opposed to "beings," and how centaurs have been included in spite of their human characteristics.¹⁸⁶ More recent editions of the books also add a foreword in which "Scamander" comments that previous editions left out American beasts, mostly based on Indigenous cultures, to dissuade magical tourists from coming to America and negatively impacting the natural ecosystem.¹⁸⁷ These elements suggest historical method within the work, including discourse about exclusion, even when continuing to exclude troubling information. "Wisp" is less clear about his exclusion of information, but he does indicate that he excluded most speculative history in favour of summarizing the events that are directly backed up by sources.¹⁸⁸ Overall, the textbooks are more self-aware, but continue the core pattern of the main books.

Riordan is less consistent with choices of what to exclude. He certainly does not elaborate on the roles Greek gods have taken in mankind's history.¹⁸⁹ Historical figures are

¹⁸⁵ Baker-Whitelaw, "Is Dumbledore gay? Here's why it matters," <https://bit.ly/2BWUiZM>; Lisa France, "JK Rowling is facing a backlash over the Dumbledore/Grindelwald gay relationship reveal," *CNN News*, March 18, 2019, <https://cnn.it/2HH5NI7>.

¹⁸⁶ Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts*, xviii- xxiv.

¹⁸⁷ Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them: Illustrated Edition*, viii-ix.

¹⁸⁸ Rowling, *Quidditch through the Ages*, 9-13.

¹⁸⁹ Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*.

constantly name-dropped, but it is up for the reader to research themselves to figure out their meaning.¹⁹⁰ For instance, Harriet Tubman as a daughter of Hermes is clearly a reference to Hermes' role as the god of both boundary-crossing and language, which were integral to Tubman's role in organizing The Underground Railroad, but this nuance is not explained in the text itself.¹⁹¹ Similarly, Riordan does not elaborate on the role the gods took in World War II at all beyond letting them have influence and be appalled at its outcome.¹⁹² This exclusion leaves the politically problematic elements of the narrative vague, not directly claiming that the narrative of World War II (which would include the systemized execution of millions of Jewish, and other marginalized people, by Nazi Germany) was the fault of gods and not humankind, while still using the real-world event as a backdrop. This is a good decision for Riordan morally, though certainly a more problematic one when evaluating historicity.

“Percy” also censors his stories, made very apparent in his cleaned-up writing style for *Percy Jackson's Greek Gods* and *Percy Jackson's Greek Heroes*, which recount the traditionally-gruesome stories of Greek myth.¹⁹³ While this is certainly good for a young audience, it does make the works more questionable in terms of historicity, given how the actions of Greek Gods are full of adult content. Any attempt to remove them requires major rewrites.

Riordan does, however, include multiple political themes in his work, particularly progressive social politics. The world Riordan depicts has an in-universe-only allegory for real-life prejudice: discrimination against people based on their godly parent.¹⁹⁴ For example, Aphrodite revels in Annabeth and Percy's relationship, as she believes their being children of

¹⁹⁰ Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*.

¹⁹¹ Ibid..

¹⁹² Ibid., 72-76.

¹⁹³ Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson's Greek Gods* (New York: Hyperion, 2014), ix-x.

¹⁹⁴ Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*.

rival gods (Athena and Poseidon having fought on opposite sides in the Trojan War) would lead to a good romantic tragedy.¹⁹⁵ Like Hermione Granger, Percy Jackson also has liberal intentions for reforming the society in which he lives, asking the gods to build additional cabins for the children of non-Olympian deities (such as Hades, Nemesis, and Hypnos) at the end of the first pentalogy.¹⁹⁶ However, unlike Harry Potter, this is not used as a substitute for real-world discrimination, which also appears throughout the books. Ableism is the most omnipresent, as being a demigod manifests in the form of real-world “disabilities” (notably ADHD and dyslexia), which are depicted as being special abilities as opposed to disabilities that result in suffering.¹⁹⁷ However, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia and racism are all tackled as well, with numerous queer characters and characters of colour discussing their lived experiences (including discussing the real-world histories of these types of discrimination).¹⁹⁸ This follows the pattern also present in popular histories, wherein LGBTQ+ characters often reclaim historical narratives, many of which are set in Greco-Roman antiquity, that are ignored by traditionalist or conservative historians.¹⁹⁹ These political elements subjectively ground Riordan while also providing young readers with an understanding about people who may be different from their own lived experience, another byproduct of writing his books in a 2000s-era context.

When considering the question of inclusion and exclusion, the simplest conclusion to come to is that every historian has their own style of writing, as their political viewpoints and

¹⁹⁵ Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Titan’s Curse* (New York: Hyperion, 2007), 185-188.

¹⁹⁶ Riordan, *The Last Olympian*, 352-354; Riordan, *Camp Half-Blood Confidential*, 36-41..

¹⁹⁷ Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*, 88-89.

¹⁹⁸ Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters* (New York: Hyperion, 2006), 48-65; Rick Riordan, *The Lost Hero*, 10-11; Rick Riordan, *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard: The Hammer of Thor* (New York: Hyperion, 2016).

¹⁹⁹ De Groot, *The Historical Novel*, 150-156.

their historical interests shape a historical account that is unique to them.²⁰⁰ However, Hayden White argues that there are modes of emplotment familiar from literature in all historical writing.²⁰¹ This, coincidentally, lines up with Tolkien's perspective on what makes a fantasy (a "fairy-story," as he refers to it), which he defines as "one that touches on, or uses, fairy – whatever its own purpose may be (satire, adventure, morality, fantasy)."²⁰² White's focus is, of course, on history and not on fairy-stories, but the core notion is the same: the historian is "one that touches on, or uses" history for "whatever its own purpose may be."²⁰³ For both White and Tolkien, these purposes are manifest in how the stories are emplotted according to genre, though they have a different selections of genre.²⁰⁴

According to White, the four methods of emplotment are romance, comedy, tragedy, and satire.²⁰⁵ Each of these provides a different way of presenting the past, having their own corresponding mode of exploration of the past and political alignment.²⁰⁶ Romantic histories approach history idiographically, explore the meaning of cultural events and the phenomenon included within them, with an anti-establishment anarchistic edge.²⁰⁷ Comedic histories take an organist approach, situating the history in a larger system of the world and emphasizing this sense of order, and are politically conservative.²⁰⁸ Tragic histories are mechanistic, focusing on the failures of the historical systems and choices, promoting a radical agenda in the process (i.e.,

²⁰⁰ White, "Interpretation in History," 70.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 66-75.

²⁰² Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, <https://bit.ly/1EaGPrd>.

²⁰³ White, "Interpretation in History," 70-75.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid..

²⁰⁶ Ibid..

²⁰⁷ Ibid..

²⁰⁸ Ibid..

providing a solution to the scars of a tragic past through radical ideology).²⁰⁹ Lastly, satiric histories are contextualist, focusing on the wider context and the importance it has for the narrative, corresponding to a liberal perspective.²¹⁰ These modes are not exclusive to any work, White argues. They can be mixed and subverted within a work, but they are the general forms which all histories—factual and otherwise—follow.²¹¹

Tolkien's approach is largely idiographic. Tolkien's real-life politics may be conservative, but as a historian of Middle-earth he is a witness to the end of magic and the anarchistic breakdown of cultural norms.²¹² Tolkien takes great care to shape the reader's understanding of the cultures he depicts, beginning the first volume of *The Lord of the Rings* with an entire chapter "On Hobbits," outlining the cultural practices of the race that the works' protagonists will hail from.²¹³ These cultural cues, perhaps infamously, do not actually relate to the plot of the story directly. One does not need to know the details of Hobbit hash in order to know how the plot of *The Lord of the Rings* unfolds, but they are key to understanding the world in a general sense.²¹⁴ Additionally, Tolkien referred to the written histories of Middle-earth as becoming more of a romance as humans gain prominence in the narrative, i.e., as the story moves away from the epic nature of *The Silmarillion* through *The Hobbit* towards *The Lord of the Rings*.²¹⁵

Rowling's plotment is more complicated. She largely focuses on the idiographic. As Harry Potter was raised by muggles and has to learn about wizarding culture, he is constantly

²⁰⁹ White, "Interpretation in History," 70-75.

²¹⁰ Ibid..

²¹¹ Ibid..

²¹² Kocher, "Middle-earth: An Imaginary World?," 125.

²¹³ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of The Ring*, 1-18.

²¹⁴ Kind, "Inside The Hobbit," 169-172.

²¹⁵ Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 142-162.

having phenomena explained to him as they occur.²¹⁶ However, mechanistic approaches are used when outlining the history of the villains, callously discussing the events as they unfold as if Rowling herself is adapting the historical approach to match their radicalism.²¹⁷ The work moves between modes of emplotment freely, using whatever best suits the situation, an approach that perhaps reflects the work's mixed political messages. However, as White has observed, this tension can be helpful when historical works aim to mix events, ideologies, and methodologies that do not necessarily fit together perfectly.²¹⁸ It serves a clear purpose within Rowling's work by allowing her to make the different sections of the book feel different in form and in content.²¹⁹

Rowling's textbooks, meanwhile, are significantly more consistent, taking an idiographic approach, like Tolkien, that explores how the cultural phenomena of Quidditch and Magizoology came into practice.²²⁰ The evolution of these practices is discussed in terms of British wizarding culture and their spread across the world, with a focus on the processes instead of the influences on the events.²²¹ For example, "Scamander" discusses the various meetings called to define what a "beast" should be and the large bureaucracy involved, focusing on the cultural reasons for refining and redefining "beast" over the contextual reasons for the meetings occurring and recurring.²²² The books provide a cultural history to help engage and immerse readers in the fictitious culture that the book claims to have originated from.

²¹⁶ Eccleshare, *A Guide to the Harry Potter Novels*, 76-78.

²¹⁷ Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.

²¹⁸ White, "Interpretation in History," 70.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*.

²²⁰ Rowling, *Quidditch through the Ages*, 75-88; Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts*, xxxiii-xxxv.

²²¹ Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts*, xviii-xxiv.

²²² *Ibid.*.

Riordan, lastly, perfectly exemplifies a liberal contextualist satire. Throughout his work is focused on parodying Greco-Roman mythology in a humorous vein, often highlighting the absurdity of the original stories by inserting them into modern-day contexts.²²³ He depicts the narrative as dependent on its wider context. For example, Percy Jackson's birth is only important due to the context of the truce between the Gods in which he was discovered.²²⁴ Additionally, Jackson's actions are all shown in parallel to earlier heroes, with his feats often being made more impressive when compared to his predecessors.²²⁵ Riordan uses these comedic elements directly to advance liberal politics in his works. All of this follows White's understanding of liberal satirical emplotment.

In conclusion, all of the works exhibit elements familiar from postmodern assessments of historical writing. They display calculation in scope, omitting what the author judges is not worth exploring, usually providing both narratives and counter-narratives for the reader to compare, and offering emplotments that indicate political choices. Their subjective scope and emplotments are inherently historical.

Four: The Scholarship of the Ring

Historical theorists have debated whether or not the postmodernist challenge undercuts the truth claims of historical writing. If a singular history is only one aspect, subjectively-grounded in a larger set of histories, then can a singular history be considered "true"?²²⁶ Can a

²²³ Morey and Nelson, "'A God Buys Us Cheeseburgers,'" 235-245.

²²⁴ Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*, 126-127.

²²⁵ Ibid..

²²⁶ Keith Jenkins, "Historiography and postmodernism," *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. Keith Jenkins (London and New York: Routledge Publishing, 1997), 1-35; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Literary Criticism and the politics of the New Historicism," 84-88.

subjective history be true in of itself, in spite of its subjectivity or perhaps because of it?²²⁷

Hayden White addresses some of these concerns in his article “What (if Anything) Can Properly Be Said about the Holocaust?”²²⁸ There he argues that a subjective history can contain “truth” about an event while not even containing factual information about it.²²⁹ He argues this using the example of poetry written by holocaust survivors, which communicate the true feelings and therefore represent the experience of the event, without having to rely on traditional notions of “factual information.”²³⁰ Less directly he also addresses the notion of fact-checking in fiction and histories in his article “The Fictions of Factual Representation.”²³¹ When comparing the two methods of literary and historical writing, he posits that logical consistency is important in both, with a logically consistent history being expected to match the representations of events contained in the sources and a logically consistent fiction being expected to follow the standards of writing at the time and thus not have “plot-holes.”²³² Both of these draw on broader postmodernist theory, acknowledging the literary nature of historical accounts without dismissing notions of reality entirely.

In these arguments, inquiry becomes a route to a “truth.” Questioning the nature of truth becomes its own form of fact-checking. Recognizing the forms that histories take and how those forms can be political, tropical, and even “fictional” allows for more self-aware historical scholarship and more people being able to access more representations.²³³ These forms and the

²²⁷ Ibid..

²²⁸ Hayden White, “What (if Anything) Can Properly Be Said about the Holocaust?” *The Holocaust and Historical Methodology*, ed. Dan Stone (Brooklyn: Berghahn Books, 2012), 190-202.

²²⁹ Ibid..

²³⁰ Ibid..

²³¹ White, “The Fictions of Factual Representation,” 130-135.

²³² Ibid..

²³³ Frank Ankersmit, “In Praise of Subjectivity,” *Historical Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 95-103.

embracing of histories over a singular history allow for a variety of narratives and a more extensive historical record, including a variety of genres and works, all of which represent the past that they do not directly contain.²³⁴ This focus on multiplicity of the narratives and logical consistency within and between said narratives functions to aid the reader to acquire a more complete representation of the time period under examination.

Fictional works function similarly. In Tolkien, the logic of Middle-earth is internally strong, with revisions being made to the different works to ensure this strength over time.²³⁵ This has not, however, prevented dedicated fans and critics alike from criticizing it for historical inaccuracy.²³⁶ One of the most famous internet “fan theories” is about *The Lord of the Rings* and the thought process of Gandalf, arguing that his exclamation of “Fly you fools” made while falling to his death actually was suggesting the fellowship should travel by flight on the backs of the Great Eagles to Mount Doom, an obviously simpler and quicker route.²³⁷ This is a clear example of a historically revisionist idea taking an established fact (Gandalf saying “Fly you fools” prior to his first death) and then re-contextualizing it to fit with a new idea (Gandalf’s true plan being to fly on the Great Eagles, not walk to Mount Doom). Tolkien’s extended works do, however, come prepared for this sort of argument. The Great Eagles are not just giant Eagles, but are the Eagles of Manwë. This means that they are: (i) sacred and non-interventionist and (ii) too powerful for it to be safe to have them interact with the ring of power for a long period of time.²³⁸ This sort of discourse is, in fan culture, generally seen as pedantic. However, it parallels

²³⁴ Ankersmit, “In Praise of Subjectivity,” 95-103.

²³⁵ Hammond, “‘A Continuing and Evolving Creation,’” 19-24.

²³⁶ Matthew Patrick, “Film Theory: Why You SHOULDN'T FLY to Mordor! (The Lord of the Rings),” YouTube video, 12:07, November 26, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2GaMV4J>.

²³⁷ Ibid..

²³⁸ Patrick, “Why You SHOULDN'T FLY to Mordor! (The Lord of the Rings),” <https://bit.ly/2GaMV4J>; Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 332-333.

the discourse of academe. Against the narrative, someone suggests a counter-narrative citing elements from the original. This counter-narrative is scrutinized, and a standing “truth” is achieved, with the process susceptible to repetition indefinitely. In this regard, everyone can play the historian, using the historical method to argue over the accuracy of even a fantastic historical claim.

Harry Potter and Percy Jackson are built from the real world and have more questionable content. Some fans, perhaps over-zealously, have observed plot-holes in the minutiae of the books. For instance, the wizards of Harry Potter use the same date-time system as used by us, so one can fact-check their date system in comparison to our calendar, meaning that *Quidditch through the Ages* makes contradictory claims about how often the Quidditch World Cup has occurred, the particulars of which don’t bear repeating.²³⁹ The stories within Potter and Jackson, in spite of their lack of consistent historicity when compared to Tolkien, provide an opportunity for readers to practice and hone their skills for historical inquiry, noticing minor plot holes and speculating about the vague background information (for example, the lack of details surrounding the lives of the historical Greco-Roman demigods).

Overall, the fictional works are able to engage in processes that parallel historical inquiry beat-for-beat. Readers are able to observe, speculate, and then debate over the authenticity of their speculations from a variety of perspectives.²⁴⁰ Everyone can participate, acting as a historicist for the fictional world, opening up the possibility of a variety of histories represented by diverging fan-theories. All of these discourses encourage historical thinking amongst their fandoms, bringing historiographical and historical methods to massive audiences.²⁴¹

²³⁹ “Quidditch World Cup,” Harry Potter Wiki, accessed February 21st, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2VmElh4>.

²⁴⁰ De Groot, *Remaking History*, 89-91.

²⁴¹ De Groot, *Remaking History*, 89-91.

Conclusion: Historicism and Fiction

Mark Poster, in his 1997 book *Cultural History and Postmodernity*, discusses the difficulty of writing a conclusion to a book about postmodernist history.²⁴² His final chapter, labelled “In Place of a Conclusion: History as Knowledge,” elaborates how a conclusion cannot really be reached, as the debates about the nature of history have been joined for as long as history has existed.²⁴³ This paper still has a conclusion: the three fantasy series of *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and *Percy Jackson* are in intense dialogue with history and with much of the apparatus of the historical method. The works use sources to back up their historical claims, scrutinizing and analyzing the sources for more information, while also pointing the reader towards them for additional context, even if the sources do not exist in our world. They rely on real-world institutions, ideas, and places to form their narrative, thus lending them historical authenticity. They ground themselves subjectively, leaving out problematic details that would interrupt their narrative tonally, and choose emplotments with specific political implications. They can be scrutinized for their logical consistency while at the same time providing multiple perspectives on the same narratives through fan criticism. All of these demonstrate the ways these texts, containing invented narratives, engage with the notions of and evaluate themselves as history.

It is not clear whether Hayden White thought of the relationship between fictional histories and their academic counterparts as mutually constitutive or mutually beneficial.²⁴⁴ It is clear, however, that they have developed a mutually constitutive dynamic wherein the two operate in parallel, even if they are not treated as such. For the future, it would be interesting for

²⁴² Poster, *Cultural History and Postmodernity*, 154.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 153-158.

²⁴⁴ White, “The Fictions of Factual Representation,” 121-135.

historians to continue exploring this reciprocity. As Poster observed, most historians do not need to consider historical theory in order to write their histories.²⁴⁵ In fact, the discipline is largely self-affirming, avoiding engagement with these questions.²⁴⁶ It would be interesting to see more fictional works analyzed for their historical merit, as has occurred in this paper and in works such as De Groot's book *Remaking History* (which analyzes the modes of knowledge employed in a variety of historical fictions, including some that may not typically be viewed as historical, such as *The Walking Dead*).²⁴⁷ Discussion of histories of the future, as present in worlds such as *Star Trek* or the fictitious histories of cultures not grounded in Herodotus-inspired historical traditions, such as the Japanese light novel series *Sword Art Online*, whose movie adaptation directly discusses the perils of big-figure history, would be especially interesting to explore.

Word Count: 10597 Words

²⁴⁵ Poster, *Cultural History and Postmodernity*, 47-58.

²⁴⁶ Ibid..

²⁴⁷ De Groot, *Remaking History*, 3-9.

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