

Children's multiple world fantasy fiction
and the *journey Home* structure in the light of the
escapism debate



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Index

Introduction	3
<i>Children's multiple world fantasy fiction: a definition</i>	3
<i>Thesis outline</i>	4
Chapter 1 Home versus Not Home in children's multiple world fantasy fiction	5
1.1 Not Home	5
1.2 Life in the fantasy world	7
1.3 Home at last	8
1.4 A circular journey: when Not Home becomes Home	8
1.5 From circles to spirals	9
1.6 When the fantasy world becomes Home	10
1.7 Early children's multiple world fantasy fiction	11
1.8 Chapter summary	13
Chapter 2 The escapism debate	14
2.1 In defence of children's fantasy fiction	14
2.2 The opposition of children's fantasy fiction	15
2.3 Chapter summary	16
Chapter 3 Children's mult. world fantasy fiction in the light of the escapism debate	17
3.1 Escapism and the plot structure in recent children's multiple world fantasy fiction	17
3.2 Escapism and the plot structure in early children's multiple world fantasy fiction	19
3.3 Genre stereotypes in the escapism debate	20
Conclusion	22
Works cited & consulted	24

Introduction

When discussing *children's fantasy fiction*, the term “escapism¹” usually enters the discussion sooner or later. According to many critics, *fantasy fiction* is by definition escapist and according to many; escapism is bad, especially where *children's* literature is concerned. *Children's fantasy fiction* and *children's realist fiction* are often presented as being opposites. This approach of children's literature leads to genre stereotyping and in my opinion, leads critics away from regarding children's books as valuable works of literature. It feeds the idea that *children's fantasy fiction* is by definition a vessel to escape from the real world, whereas *children's realist fiction* is by definition a vessel to confront children with the (harsh), real world. This genre division leads critics, educators, librarians and parents to the fanning of one genre and the shaming of the other, thereby depriving children of valuable works of literature and the pleasure of reading. As readers will see in [chapter 2](#), *children's realist literature* is often placed above *children's fantasy literature*, because adults argue that it has more educational value.

In this thesis, instead of looking at children's literature through the use of genre stereotypes (escapism versus realism), I will analyze it by looking at a core structure that is present in all works of children's literature: *the journey Home* structure, described by Jon Stott and Christine Francis in their article: “*Home and Not Home in Children's Stories: Getting There - and Being Worth It*” (1993) As this structure demonstrates the complexity of the plot and the development of child characters in children's literature, I think that it is interesting to test it on works within the genre of *children's fantasy fiction*, to see if these works have a complex plot structure and address character development in the same way other genres of children's literature do.

Through this theory, I will also test if the structure in these books is escapist in itself: I will analyse if the child characters in these stories are escaping from a realistic world into (a) fantasy world(s) and if they prefer these fantasy worlds over the realistic world. Because of the size limits on this undergraduate research, I have chosen to focus on a subgenre of *children's fantasy fiction* in which the *journey Home* structure is most visible and has a more complex and interesting appearance: *children's multiple world fantasy fiction*. A short definition of this genre follows at the end of this introduction, followed by a thesis outline.

The research question of this thesis is: In what way does Stott & Francis' *journey Home* structure apply to *children's multiple world fantasy fiction* and how does this relate to the escapism discussion?

Children's multiple world fantasy fiction: a definition

In some books within the genre of *children's fantasy fiction*, child characters are confronted with the existence of other (fantasy) worlds besides their (realistic) *Home* world. Different worlds may be situated on the same planet, in another dimension, or they may be a conceptual world (e.g. an imaginary world come to life). These worlds can be encountered in many

¹ In this thesis, I will stick to the *Oxford Dictionary's* definition of “escapism”:

noun

[mass noun]

- the tendency to seek distraction and relief from unpleasant realities, especially by seeking entertainment or engaging in fantasy

different ways and for many different reasons. Sometimes, the journey to a different world is a one way road, for instance, when the other world is entered through the death of the character(s) (e.g. Astrid Lindgren's *Bröderna Lejonhjärta* (1973) (trans: *The Brothers Lionheart*)). But more often, the child character is able to return to his or her *Home* world. Books in which characters are confronted with multiple worlds are classified as being part of the *fantasy* genre, because the story worlds differs greatly from the real world. To clarify that I am speaking specifically of children's fantasy books in which multiple worlds exist, I dub this specific subgenre *children's multiple world fantasy fiction*.

Thesis outline

In chapter 1 I will analyse Stott & Francis' *journey Home* structure in several books within the subgenre of *children's multiple world fantasy fiction*. Chapter 2 will focus on the escapism debate. I will discuss several critiques on both sides of the debate. In chapter 3, I will bring the structural results of chapter 1 and the critiques of chapter 2 together, and discuss if the critiques are valid. In the conclusion, I will answer my research question.

Note: This research is based on a selection of stories and thus it cannot represent the whole canon of children's multiple world fantasy fiction. I have selected works that are written by several authors, in different periods in time and in different languages. Still, it must be accounted for that when I speak of these works as a whole under the term children's multiple world fantasy fiction, I cannot account for all stories in the subgenre.

Chapter 1 *Home versus Not Home in children's multiple world fantasy fiction*

In their article “*Home and Not Home in Children's Stories: Getting There - and Being Worth It*” (1993), Jon Stott and Christine Francis state that all children's stories can be categorized in terms of the relationship of the main character to two places: *Home* and *Not Home*.

The Home is even more a focal point in the lives of children than in those of adults. It follows, therefore, that children's stories would tend to deal with this theme of hostile and friendly surroundings even more extensively and intensively than adult literature.

In fact, while story settings in children's literature are varied and diverse (cities and countrysides, gardens and forests), they all can be categorized in terms of the relationship of the main character to two places: “Home” and “Not Home.” “Home” to a child is not merely a dwelling place but also an attitude. For a real child or a fictional character, it is a place of comfort, security, and acceptance – a place which meets both physical and emotional needs. Conversely, “Not Home” is a place where needs are not met, for any of several reasons. (Stott & Francis 223)

In the following subchapters, I will test Stott & Francis' *journey Home* theory on several *early* and *recent* (categories are explained below) works of *children's multiple world fantasy fiction* published between 1865 and 2012. I will discuss how *Home* and *Not Home* are defined in these stories, how the journey of the child characters is structured around these two opposites and how this journey affects the child characters' development. The findings of this chapter will be linked to the escapism debate in [chapter 3](#).

In this thesis I have created a division between *early* and *recent children's multiple world fantasy fiction*, for practical reasons. I speak of *children's multiple world fantasy fiction* written before the 1960's as *early*, whereas I speak of fiction written after the 1960's as *recent*. *Early* fiction will be discussed in [chapter 1.7](#). C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, published between 1950 and 1956, forms a bridge between these two categories and has characteristics of both. This will also be discussed in [chapter 1.7](#).

1.1 *Not Home*

According to Stott and Francis, “all [story settings in children's literature] can be categorized in terms of the relationship of the main character to two places: “*Home*” and “*Not Home*.” (224) Many *recent* works of *children's multiple world fantasy fiction* start with the main characters at *Not Home* and they often reside in a non-magical world, or more specifically, in *our* world: the Earth. On page 223-224, Stott and Francis state that there are three possible reasons why a place in the story is defined as *Not Home*:

1. *Sometimes it is just not a suitable place for the child or the character to dwell (the slums of London, for instance).*
2. *One's own attitudes toward his or her dwelling could make it an insecure or unhappy one.*
3. *Possibly it is the attitudes of others, which are threatening in a particular setting.*

When we allow reason no. 1 to encompass not only place, but also situations that are not caused by the behaviour of oneself or others, a book like Mary Hoffman's *Stravaganza: City of Masks* (2002) can be included in this category. In this book, the main character, Lucien MullHolland, is suffering from cancer and is recovering from chemotherapy in the hospital. He accidentally enters a fantasy world called *Stravaganza* through a notebook that he is holding during his sleep. Lucien's reason for being at *Not Home* at the beginning of his story has to do with his illness and his lonely stay in the hospital.

Reason no. 2 seems to be a popular theme in *children's multiple world fantasy fiction*. Stott and Francis illustrate this reason using Paul Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963).

Max of "Where the Wild Things Are" [...] is "Not Home" because of his own attitudes rather than the attitudes of those around him. He is a little boy at odds with the restrictions of his surroundings. [...] Max's wildness results in more confinement, rather than less; he is sent to his room without supper. [...] His physical attempts to escape this uncomfortable setting having been stymied, Max tries another approach: he embarks on a journey of the imagination. The confines of his room expand into a forest, then an ocean which he crosses "through night and day and in and out of weeks and almost over a year to where the wild things are." (Stott & Francis 225)

Reason no. 3 is clearly visible in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997). The main character, 11-year old Harry Potter, lives with his aunt's family, the Dursleys, because his parents have died. Being an orphan does not in itself have to be a reason for being at *Not Home*. Harry could still be *Home*, even though his parents have passed. Stott and Francis define *Home* as "a place of comfort, security, and acceptance – a place which meets both physical and emotional needs." (223) As such, the presence of the character's parents is not necessarily required. But Harry's aunt and uncle do not meet these needs. The Dursleys are narrow minded people who hate their nephew. Harry has to sleep in a cupboard under the stairs and the Dursleys constantly remind him of their dislike for him. Harry is at *Not Home* at the beginning of the story, due to the behaviour of others.

The children in the books mentioned above are at *Not Home* because of one of three reasons stated by Stott and Francis. In most *children's multiple world fantasy* books however, some or all of the above reasons for being at *Not Home* are combined. In Roald Dahl's *The BFG* (1982) for instance, the main character Sophie lives in an orphanage, in stead of in a family situation. This is "not a suitable place for the character to dwell", because in a large orphanage, there cannot be enough love and attention for each individual child. (Reason 1) Moreover, it is suggested that the children are treated badly by the orphanage workers, because they are unjustly punished. (Reason 3) In Michael Ende's *Die Unendliche Geschichte* (1979) (trans: The Neverending Story), Bastian is bullied by his peers and disregarded by his father (Reason 3). But Bastian also has low confidence and does not do anything to change his situation (Reason 2). The children in C.S. Lewis *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) have been sent to the country without their parents, because of the war (Reason 1). They feel lonely and some are unwilling to adapt to their new situation (Reason 2) and they are of no concern to the people with whom they are staying (Reason 3).

Although Stott and Francis' theory applies to many children's books in the *multiple world fantasy fiction* genre, it does not apply to *all* books within this genre. In some books, the starting point of the story is *Home*. This is mostly true for children's books that are written approximately before the 1960's, which I regard in this thesis as *early* books. This issue will

be elaborated upon in [chapter 1.7](#). In the next subchapter, I will discuss what happens after child characters in *recent children's multiple world fantasy fiction* encounter fantasy worlds.

1.2 Life in the fantasy world

Fantasy worlds can be encountered in different ways and for different reasons. Because all fantasy worlds are different, encountering a world does not necessarily mean entering another world. Main characters can discover the existence of another world within their planet, within another dimension or in a conceptual way. Main characters who encounter a new (magical) world usually get to know this world and (some of) its inhabitants. They form relationships and make new friends in this new world. These friends may be other human children or adults, but they can also be magical creatures or animals. Wendy from J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* falls in love with Peter Pan and her brothers adopt the ways of the Lost Boys. Dorothy from L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* befriends the Cowardly Lion, the Tin Man and the Scarecrow and they travel to the Wizard of Oz together. There are many more examples in the canon; the list is endless. All main characters seem to form at least one important relationship in the new (magical) world. This seems inherent to the genre. Even anti-hero Artemis Fowl, from Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* series (2001-2012) eventually forms important friendships with magical beings as the series progresses, although he is an enemy of that magical world at the start of the series.

Many children also fulfil an important role in the fantasy world: they become heroes or kings/queens. Max from Paul Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* is crowned king of the Wild Things. The Pevensie children from C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* defeat the Evil White Witch and become the respected kings and queens of Narnia. They grow into adulthood in the fantasy world. Christopher Chant from Diana Wynne Jones' *The Lives of Christopher Chant* (1988) becomes the new Chrestomanci: ruler of the magical world. J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter turns out to be "The Boy Who Lived": the only person ever to have survived the killing curse of the evil Lord Voldemort. Harry is destined to be the hero who defeats this villain, and at the end of the series he succeeds.

Main characters who were *Not Home* at the start of the story, are encountering several characteristics of *Home* through their contact with the fantasy world: "comfort, security, and acceptance." (Stott & Francis 223) Children that were mistreated or disregarded at the start of the story get to know friendship and sometimes meet characters who fulfil some sort of parental role. They are regarded by others and most are highly esteemed. There is also comfort. Sophie from Roald Dahl's *The BFG* has a lot of fun playing and joking with the Big Friendly Giant. This is truly an escape from the sad and lonely atmosphere at the orphanage.

The security some children may have lacked at the start of the story is supplied by the fantasy world. C.S. Lewis' Pevensie children, who had to leave their *Home* because of the war, are now protected by the noble lion Aslan. J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter, who was mistreated by the Dursleys and bullied by other children, is highly esteemed in the *Wizarding World* because of his status as "The Boy Who Lived". He is protected by friends of his deceased parents and other good wizards and witches, like the powerful Albus Dumbledore. Michael Ende's Bastian Balthasar Bux receives the magical amulet AURYN from the Childlike Empress, which protects him from evil.

1.3 *Home at last*

All child characters become important in this new (magical) world. They are needed by others. They are wanted. Sometimes they receive the attention that they lacked at the start of the story. The fantasy world forms a strong contrast to the *Not Home* most characters come from: the non-magical, *realistic* world. While they are in the fantasy world, their *journey Home* continues. Are the positive experiences in the new (magical) world enough to make it feel like *Home*? Is this other world indeed so satisfying, that the main characters decide to stay there forever? For some children it is. For some it isn't.

It seems to depend on two issues:

- I. Can the place where the main character felt *Not Home* at the starting point of the story be transformed into *Home*? Or is this impossible?
- II. Is the new (magical) world “a place which meets both physical and emotional needs”?

1.4 **A circular journey: when *Not Home* becomes *Home***

A circular journey means that the main characters returns to the place from before the encounter with the new (magical) world. In *recent multiple world children's fantasy fiction*, this *Not Home* has become *Home*, (usually) through a healing process. In *early multiple world children's fantasy fiction*, the journey is always circular. (This is further examined in [chapter 1.7](#)).

If a character's dwelling place begins as a *Not Home* chiefly because of attitudes (either the character's own attitudes or those of others toward the character), then the story may be structured as a circular journey. The environment that the character abandons at the outset is the same one to which she or he returns in the end. The initial focus is on the character's reasons for leaving the original setting, that is, why it was *Not Home*. As the story unfolds, events occur which make the ultimate return possible; the character, grows, develops, is tested, changes. By the time the character returns from his or her journey, he or she has changed: internal and external, physical and emotional changes have transformed the character. Ideally, the setting which at first was *Not Home* now becomes *Home*. (Stott & Francis 224) While the *dwelling place* itself has not changed, the attitude of the character *towards* that dwelling place has.

This circular journey is a common structure in *children's multiple world fantasy fiction*. Max from Paul Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* goes through such a development:

Having had it all his own way, he is still unhappy and dissatisfied; “he was lonely and wanted to be where someone loved him best of all.” Max initiates the return and finishes his circular journey in a relaxed, then joyous state of mind. He appears in the final picture smiling: although he still wears his wolf costume, the hood is pushed back of his head. In contrast to the beginning pictures, the scene here is unrestricted; it fills the whole right-hand pages, without borders. Yet Max's house has not changed – Max has. (Stott & Francis 226)

If it is not the character's own attitude (Reason 2), but the attitude of others (Reason 3) which causes the starting place to be *Not Home*, the encounter with a fantasy world sometimes solves this problem in a direct way. Artemis from Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* series is glad with his new friends in the magical world, but he cannot be truly happy until his mentally

deranged mother is cured with fairy magic and his missing father has been returned to his family with the help of the fairies. Because the fairies eventually return Artemis's parents to him, thereby giving him back his family life, he is finally able to feel *Home* at the end of the series. The comfort, security and acceptance Artemis receives from his encounter with the magical world is thus not only found within the magical world, but is brought upon his life in the non-magical world, by the assistance of the fairies. This is also the case in Michael Ende's *Unendliche Geschichte*. After Bastian returns from *Fantastica*, his father is miraculously cured and is suddenly all concern for his son. It is implied that Bastian, or *Fantastica*, has somehow brought him the curing "water of life". In these examples of circular journeys, the *Not Home* is healed and thus becomes *Home*. This happens either through the healing of the main character, or through the healing of the people that caused the main character grief.

This structure is present in many *recent* works of *children's multiple world fantasy fiction*. The children return to their starting world, because the starting point of the story can be transformed to *Home* (I). They usually begin to long for this place sometime in the middle of the story, because the newfound (magical) world can never be as satisfactory as the place they came from: it does not provide all physical and emotional needs. (II) This usually has to do with family and friends waiting for them in their *Home* world.

1.5 From circles to spirals

Saying that Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* makes a circular journey, is perhaps not entirely correct. The same holds for C.S. Lewis' *Pevensie children* and J.M. Barrie's *Darling children*. These characters do indeed perform a circular journey, but at the end of the circle, they start anew. Spiral journey is probably a better term. This is a common structure for series. In each book, the main character(s) encounter(s) the other (magical) world(s) again, or they encounter new (magical) worlds, that exist next to the worlds they already know of.

In the *Artemis Fowl* series, Artemis comes into contact with the fairy world in each of the books. At the end of each book, the issues which have caused the renewed contact are resolved and Artemis returns to his family. With each of the books, Artemis' house becomes more of a *Home*. After the first book, the fairies return sanity to his mother. At the end of the second book, they return his father to him. In the third book, Artemis starts to bond with his father. At the end of the fifth book, Artemis is surprised to hear that he is now a big brother of twins. His new siblings bring joy to the family and "activate" Artemis's parents even more. At the end of the sixth book, Artemis' mother has come to know of the magical fairy world as well. It is now "their secret". In the eighth and final book, Artemis becomes a true hero, dying to save both the human and fairy worlds. He is later brought back to life and thus reborn as a person without any of his former criminal tendencies. His relationship with the fairies remains strong, but his "need" of the magical world has gone.

The children that visit the magical world of Narnia in C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* also make spiral journeys. The four Pevensie children visit *Narnia* several times, although not all at the same time. Besides them there are other children who also visit multiple times: Eustace Scrubb, Jill Pole, Polly Plummer and Digory Kirke. Digory Kirke is also the professor with whom the four Pevensie children are staying during the first book (he visited *Narnia* forty years before them). Together these children are called the *Eight Friends of Narnia*. In the last book of the series, *The Last Battle*, *Narnia* becomes their final *Home*. The friends (now young adults) are killed in a train crash in the non-magical world and are transported to *Narnia*, to live as children forever. However, there is one amongst them who is not permitted to enter

Narnia. Susan Pevensie stays behind in the non-magical world, losing all of her family. According to Aslan, she is excluded from *Narnia* because she no longer believes in that world.

The Darling children from J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* do not make spiral journeys like Artemis fowl and the Friends of Narnia. They never return to *Neverland*. However, the journey to *Neverland* remains in Wendy's family and the cycle keeps repeating "so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless" (Barrie 178). Wendy's daughter Jane follows Peter Pan to *Neverland*, and so does Jane's daughter Margaret when Jane has grown up. This last example seems to be an ongoing spiral journey, whereas in most books, the spiral journey ends with the end of the book series.

1.6 When the fantasy world becomes *Home*

Although the circular structure is the most common journey structure within *children's multiple world fantasy fiction*, there are some exceptions. For some children, the starting place of the story stays *Not Home*, whereas the newfound fantasy world becomes *Home*.

One example of this is J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Harry Potter completely blends in with the *Wizarding World*, because he is, after all, a wizard himself. He feels at *Home* with other Wizards and at Hogwarts, school of witchcraft and wizardry. He does have to go back to the Dursleys during holidays and truly resents having to stay with them. In the non-magical world, Harry is still mistreated and disregarded by his aunt's family. The house of the Dursley's is still Harry's *Not Home*, but through his encounter with the magical world, he has received a *Home*. After Harry finishes school at the end of the series, he truly becomes part of the *Wizarding World*. He marries a witch and becomes a father to three magical children, leaving the non-magical world behind for good. Harry strongly feels that the magical world is his true *Home*, and the non-magical world always remains *Not Home* to him. This is because the Dursleys are unable to change their behaviour towards Harry (I) and because he does not have any relationships in the non-magical world. (II)

Lucien from Mary Hoffman's *Stravaganza, City of Masks* is able to travel between his modern day starting world and the world of *Stravaganza*. When he is in *Stravaganza*, he appears to be asleep in his starting world. He returns to his starting world each morning, in order to be with his parents. However, at a certain point in the story, Lucien is held captive and thus is unable to return to his starting world. His parents, at his bedside in the modern starting world, perceive him to be in a comatose state and after a few days, agree with the doctors that they should pull out the plug. Lucien thus dies in his starting world and becomes anchored to *Stravaganza*. Although Lucien is healthy and cured of his cancer in *Stravaganza*, he misses his parents enormously. He eventually adapts to life in *Stravaganza*, marries a Stravagantian girl and starts to fulfil an important role in that world. *Stravaganza* thus becomes *Home* to Lucien by force. The loss of his parents leaves a deep wound that only time can heal. Lucien stays in *Stravaganza* because his starting world cannot be transformed into his *Home*, because he is not able to enter it anymore (I). However, *Stravaganza* does not supply all his physical and emotional needs because of the loss of his parents. (II) Lucien will truly have to make an effort to reach *Home*. His journey is not yet finished.

1.7 *Early children's multiple world fantasy fiction*

In this thesis I speak of *children's multiple world fantasy fiction* written before the 1960's as *early*, whereas I speak of *children's multiple world fantasy fiction* written after the 1960's as *recent*. In a 2012 interview Kathleen Horning states that Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) was a turning point for children's literature when it comes to realism.

For the first time, authors and illustrators began to show young children the world as it really is, rather than how some adults in charge thought it ought to be. [...] Many works with a much more realistic depiction of the childhood experience followed, such as John Steptoe's 1969 "Stevie," featuring a young boy's experience as his family takes in an older foster child. In an earlier era, a book like this would probably have focused on the joys of having an older brother, rather than exploring the more difficult psychological issues relating to feeling displaced by a newcomer as the book did."

It seems that the depiction of children in children's literature became more realistic around the 1960's. The term "realistic" meaning that the child character's thoughts and emotions became more like those of real children. These transitions had to do with new, revolutionary thought on the development and upbringing of children in the Western world. Children's emotional needs were better recognized and understood. The focus in the upbringing of children shifted from obedience to individuality. For children's literature, this meant that child characters could suddenly be described as being disobedient. They could criticize adult characters, and could overall be more eccentric. Before the transition to realism, some elements in children's books seemed idealised. The world and the family were "as it should be". Children were very polite and always listened to their parents. Parents did not divorce and did not have personal issues. In stead, they were hardworking fathers and nurturing mothers.

In *early* works, the fantasy world is governed by (a) higher power(s), or people who throughout the story, remain stronger than the child characters themselves. The Wizard of Oz reigns over the land of *Oz*. Peter Pan and Captain Hook remain the important powers in *Neverland*, not once do Wendy and her brothers surpass them in power. *Wonderland* has several kings and queens. Alice becomes a queen herself in *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) but she is the youngest queen amongst two other queens and two kings (red and white). When she begins a fight with the Red Queen, she is abruptly brought back to the real world, thus losing her royal status. The world of *Narnia* has a supreme ruler: the lion Aslan. Though the Pevensie children do become royalty in *Narnia*, they still have to abide Aslan's will. They also need Aslan in order to fight the evil forces that threaten that world. Without him, they cannot win. In *early* works, child characters cannot become the most powerful entity in the fantasy world. This is probably the result of stronger religious influences on literature in the period before the 1960's. In *recent* works, there can also be higher powers or powerful characters in the fantasy world(s) (e.g. the Childlike Empress in Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story*), but these powers usually *need* the help of the child characters in some way. The most powerful in *early* works do not necessarily *need* the children to assist them, though in some ways, an exception should be made for C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, in which Aslan needs the children's faith.

Early works of *children's multiple world fantasy fiction* were also heavily influenced by colonialist ideology. The starting world of the stories, the Western world, was presented as a perfect, civilized world, in which everything was in order. It could not possibly be criticized in a children's book. These *early* stories do not introduce readers to fantasy worlds that are more "civilised" or more "interesting" than our own world. Instead, fantasy worlds are

represented as being non-sensible and often chaotic. A good example of this is the following quote from L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*:

The Witch of the North seemed to think for a time, with her head bowed and her eyes upon the ground. Then she looked up and said, "I do not know where Kansas is, for I have never heard that country mentioned before. But tell me, is it a civilized country?" "Oh, yes," replied Dorothy. "Then that accounts for it. In the civilized countries I believe there are no witches left, nor wizards, nor sorceresses, nor magicians. But, you see, the Land of Oz has never been civilized, for we are cut off from all the rest of the world. Therefore we still have witches and wizards amongst us." (Baum 9)

In most of these *early* stories, there never seems to be a possibility that the characters want to stay in the fantasy world. Why would someone willingly stay in a strange, uncivilised world? Most characters start at *Home*, travel to *Not Home* and then return *Home* again. They are glad to be back in the "normal" world at the end of the story. This type of story does not allow for any change in the family situation of the children. Their family does not need to be transformed, because it is already *as it should be* (it may not be perfect, but the characters *accept their fate* nevertheless). Other major examples of *early* multiple world fantasy fiction are Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*.

It is interesting to note that in *recent* film adaptations of these *early* works, the starting point of the story is often rewritten by turning the *Home* into a *Not Home*. In these adaptations, the child characters encounter a problem in the starting world (which wasn't present in the original work), and by travelling to the fantasy world, they are able to solve this problem when they return to the real world. Their journey stays circular, but the typical *Home-Not Home-Home* structure of *early* works is rewritten into a more *recent Not Home-fantasy world-Home* structure. It seems that the directors of these adaptations felt the need to connect a learning experience with the journey to the fantasy world. The post-colonialist idea that one can actually learn from other societies, in stead of just marvelling at their strangeness and attempting to *civilize* them, is transforming these *early* stories into more *recent* versions. Probably, this transformation is also influenced by the modern idea that children can learn from experience, in stead of only learning through tutoring and discipline. A good example of such an adaptation is the 1999 BBC adaptation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*:

[The 1999 adaptation] changes the opening real world scene from Alice and her sister sitting at a riverbank to Alice in her bedroom, reluctantly practicing the song "Cherry Ripe", which she is expected to perform at a garden party. [...] Thanks to stage fright, and constant nagging from her confident music teacher, Alice runs out of the house and hides herself in the woods nearby until the party has ended. [...] [In Wonderland, Alice meets] the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle. The two sing with Alice, teaching her the Lobster Quadrille and encouraging her. Alice then wanders into a darker area of Wonderland, meeting a White Knight who encourages her to be brave and also shows her his newest invention. [...] Awakening back Home, Alice courageously sings in front of her parents and their guests, but instead of singing Cherry Ripe, she sings the Lobster Quadrille which she finds much more interesting. The audience enjoy her performance and applaud. ("Alice in Wonderland (1999 Film))"

1.8 Chapter summary

In this chapter the several outcomes of the journey “*Home*” have been discussed. The main characters in *children’s multiple world fantasy fiction*:

Circular journey

- Return to their starting world. This world has transformed from *Not Home* to *Home*. (*Recent*)
- Return to their starting world. Nothing has changed. (*Early*)

One way journey

- Choose to stay in the new (magical) world. This world becomes *Home*.
- Are forced to stay in the new (magical) world. They have to transform this into *Home*.

Chapter 2 The escapism debate

In this chapter, some major examples of critique on *children's fantasy fiction* (especially on *children's multiple world fantasy fiction*) will be discussed. According to many sources, a debate about the quality of *children's fantasy fiction* versus *children's realist fiction* began around the time J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series rose to popularity. It is however, hard to localise the exact sources of people taking a stance in this debate, because the people concerned are often educators, parents, librarians and children and the debates are carried out in *Home* or school situations. Arguments often go unrecorded or revolve around certain stereotypes of genres, instead of the actual books. Karolin Koecher states in the *Deutsche Presse-Agentur* of October 22, 2009:

A debate has broken out in the arts sections of newspapers and on the internet over "escapism" in literature. Some describe it as a flight from reality. [...] Those on the anti side argue that cross-over literature, especially when it comes to fantasy novels, leads to a flight into a world where good always conquers evil. It encourages escapism instead of debate and it often deals in stereotypes and simple formulas. Fantasy novels are encouraging the infantilisation of literature and their readers.

Fantasy fiction is often set apart from *realist fiction*. Many critics define *fantasy fiction* as being escapist in itself. They assume that escapism is a characteristic of *fantasy* without ever questioning this connection. In the subchapters, some critiques of *children's fantasy fiction* will be discussed.

2.1 In defence of *children's fantasy fiction*

Many authors of *fantasy fiction* state that their work is escapist or "the opposite of realism". However, they think that escapism is a good thing. Traci Harding, Australian author of sixteen adult fantasy novels including *The Alchemist's Key* (1999) and *Book of Dreams* (2003) states:

I don't enjoy reading reality much at all. I can have reality every day and so many kids get far more reality than they really want or can deal with. Fantasy gives them heroes and morals, and they can often see themselves here too. [...] You can thrust too much reality at kids, especially when they're going through tough times themselves.
(Williams)

The idea that *children's fantasy fiction* helps children to escape from reality, whereas *realist fiction* confronts them with reality is clearly represented in this quote. It is also interesting to note that the "heroes and morals" that Harding describes as being specific *fantasy* genre characteristics are in fact also present in *realist* fiction. One has only to look at major literary works like Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838), Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) or Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* (1932) to find that these elements can be present in *realist fiction* as well.

Some critics defend *children's fantasy fiction* by attacking the *realist* genre. They accuse *realist fiction* of presenting a harsh, mature reality to children too *early* in life. Christopher Bantick states in the *Courier Mail* of January 2, 2006:

Some librarians and booksellers, can do more harm than good by suggesting children read beyond their years and experience for the sake of a "good" book. Some children

who are thrust books about dysfunctional families, abusive parents, incest, same-sex relationships, drug addiction or adoption can be confused and emotionally destabilised.

Another argument often made by advocates of *children's fantasy fiction* is that *fantasy fiction* inspires more children to read: "Harry Potter books have encouraged many children and adults to read when they have never been keen on reading before." (Andrus)

2.2 The opposition of children's fantasy fiction

Many critics of *children's fantasy fiction* think that fantasy worlds are unrealistic, safe harbours, where child characters and the young readers that read these stories can flee from reality. To these critics, fantasy worlds are comfortable places that do not resemble the real world. Anthony Holden, judge of the prestigious *Whitbread* book prize in 2000, said that "it would have been a national humiliation if Potter had won" ("Embarrassment Averted") and criticized J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series as follows:

For all the long shadows of its various villains, the world of Harry Potter is essentially a familiar and thus safe one for young readers to roam in. Their thrill at the smell of danger is carefully controlled by the certainty that virtue will prevail - no Roald Dahl-type risks for Rowling - and their minds unstretched by any reflective pauses in the breathless narrative, any encouragement to assess the rights and wrongs of what is going on. Not that Potter's world offers much scope to moral philosophers. Harry's dead parents were uncomplicatedly good. His wicked uncle and aunt are unequivocally bad, like the super-villain Lord Voldemort. Given their unadorned prose style, these books wind up reading themselves. They are not teaching children the joys of literature any more than they are challenging them to question the supposed certainties of their daily lives. Children's literature is what it is: the invention of a captivating alternative world in which, at its best, Home truths about adult behaviour are glimpsed through the eyes of innocence. Harry Potter offers no such transcendent adventure. He is a children's hero for our culturally impoverished times, rating escapism above enlightenment. (Holden)

The escapist view of *fantasy fiction* has led many critics to believe that *children's fantasy fiction* can be harmful to young readers. Critics argue that instead of helping children to face their problems in the real world, *fantasy fiction* would lead them away from their responsibilities and supply them with illusions. In the eyes of these critics, *realist fiction*, which according to them addresses real life problems, is more effective in showing children how to deal with life than *fantasy fiction* is. One of these critics is realist writer Phillip Gwynne, the award-winning author of *Deadly Unna?* (1999):

I think [fantasy fiction] is pretty infantile stuff, generally, and I think most kids'll grow out of it. [...] Even the good [fantasy], when I read it, seems bad. And the bad stuff sounds like pages and pages of vomit. My main problem with it is that it exists in a social vacuum. We live in a world that's rapidly going down the shithole and my duty as a writer is to make sense of that world. But with the fantasy writers, every story is a battle between good and evil, with no specifics at all. [...] I'm always glad to see kids reading and I desperately want them to read, especially boys, but I think they'd be far more socially engaged if they spent their time watching South Park and The Simpsons. (Williams)

John Marsden, also an author of children's realist fiction, thinks that reality writing plays an increasingly important role in the life of children:

It gives children an understanding of their own lives or other people's lives and can support their own situation. It follows that if you read realistic novels, you're likely to have a much better understanding of how life works. [...] Reality fiction gives you much more of a chance to get close to something that's honest and real. (Williams)

Scott Monk writes tough realist books like *Boyz 'R' Us*, *Raw* and *Crush*, that address violence, drug abuse and street life. He finds *fantasy fiction* a “rip-off”:

Good always triumphs, the endings are invariably happy and the stories all feel a bit formulaic. [...] "Fantasy is what I sometimes call 'cheeseburger lit'. Stories about wizards and zombie bums from Uranus are great escapism, but after a while young people look for something that's not sugary or mass-produced or all tastes the same. That's where realistic fiction fills the gap. It's challenging, there's no easy answers, it doesn't pretend life is all rosy and cheerful ... and, in most cases, it empowers young people. (Williams)

2.3 Chapter summary

On both sides of the debate, critics attribute specific characteristics to the *fantasy* and *realist* genres, thereby creating stereotypes of these genres. Those in favour of *realist fiction* say that *fantasy fiction* is “escapist”, “stereotypical” fiction that has a “simple formula” in which “good always concurs evil”. Those in favour of *fantasy fiction* often attribute some of the same characteristics to fantasy fiction, but argue that these characteristics are a good thing for children. They state that the real world is “harsh” and think that escape is necessary. They accuse *realist fiction* of confronting children too much with the “harsh” real world.

Chapter 3 *Children's multiple world fantasy fiction in the light of the escapism debate*

It is interesting to link *children's multiple world fantasy fiction* to the escapism debate, because the *fantasy* versus *realism* issue is literally depicted in this kind of fiction, through the contrast between the real world and the fantasy world(s). Child characters literally travel between reality and fantasy. Therefore, with this subgenre, the issue of escapism can be addressed in two different ways: the first is the way the stories deal with this issue plotwise, and the second is the way in which the *realism* versus *fantasy* debate is constructed.

In *early* and *recent children's multiple world fantasy fiction*, child characters travel to fantasy worlds which, when only *décor* is concerned, usually differ greatly from the real world. These worlds can have very different natural laws. For instance: they may be inhabited by magical creatures. To some critics, the mere fact that the *décor* of these worlds is different from the real world makes them escapist. However, I feel that examining the underlying plot structure of these works is more important than the fact that their *décor* may be unrealistic. The *décor* of stories can be very variable, even within one genre, there are endless possibilities. The *décor* of a historical novel set in the renaissance for instance, will probably be very different from the *décor* of a novel set in the 21st century, though both novels could be categorised as belonging to the *realist* genre. In my opinion, stating that all works of *children's fantasy fiction* are escapist for reasons of unrealistic *décor*, is ignoring the (complex) plot structure within these books. Though the *décor* of these stories could be called escapist, the underlying structure can in fact be realistic. In the following subchapters, I will examine these structures and link them to the escapism debate.

3.1 **Escapism and the plot structure in *recent children's multiple world fantasy fiction***

According to Stott and Francis, *Home* is “a place which meets both physical and emotional needs”. As shown in [chapter 1](#), in many books, this place turns out to be the starting place of the story. Thus, in *children's multiple world fantasy fiction*, *Home* is usually found in the real world. In *recent* works, the child characters learn certain values in the fantasy world, that help them understand and deal with the real world better. The fantasy world provides them with learning experiences that they would not encounter in that form in the real world. There is a strong parallel between this plot structure and the arguments of the pro-fantasy side in the escapism debate, who argue that children actually need fantasy worlds in order to make sense of the real world. In a fantasy world, everything is possible and usually more intense, and therefore morality and heroism become more visible. This could actually be what Traci Harding meant when she said that “fantasy gives [child readers] heroes and morals”. (Williams) It is not that *realist fiction* does not present these as well, but because the role of the child characters and the intensity of the events are so much greater in *children's fantasy fiction* than in most *children's realist fiction*, they become more visible. According to child psychologist Dianna Kenny, associate professor of psychology at the University of Sydney, children's *fantasy fiction* “can provide a useful route through complex moral issues”:

Fairytales were originally used as metaphors for political ideas or philosophies dangerous in the social environment of the time. If powerful impulses can be encapsulated in make-believe characters and stories that enable adults and children to

explore their dark side in a way that's not scary or confrontational, that can be very useful. If reality is too confrontational, people defend themselves against it. (Williams)

In *children's fantasy fiction*, the main characters often become very powerful. For instance, they become kings and queens and have to make decisions that affect their kingdoms and all people that live there. The fact that Michael Ende's Bastian Balthasar Bux (*The Neverending Story*) is responsible for the fate of all of *Fantastica* and all its inhabitants makes his decisions much more heroic or horrendous than the decisions he had to make in the real world. If Bastian does not open his eyes for the troubles of his father in the real world, only he and his father suffer the consequences. If he closes his eyes to the disasters in *Fantastica*, the whole kingdom suffers and the world will eventually come to an end. By enlarging the issues through a *fantasy décor*, *children's fantasy fiction* is able to make them more visible and perhaps more understandable for child readers. The fact that Bastian actually learns from his experiences in the fantasy world and uses his experience to address his problems in the real world, makes the accusation of escapism partly unjust. The character is indeed fleeing into the fantasy world at first, but in the end, this escape into fantasy is what causes him to develop his connection with the real world.

In many *recent* works of *children's multiple world fantasy fiction*, the plot suggests that things learned in the fantasy world apply to the real world as well. Fantasy is not in any way presented as a (definite) escape from reality, but as a different medium to make reality more understandable. Through this argumentation, it could be said that most *recent* works of *children's multiple world fantasy fiction* are not escapist plotwise and even seem to be in themselves a statement that engaging in fantasy can help child readers to understand the real world better. According to an article in *The Times* of August 30, 1995, Michael Ende's message in *The Neverending Story* was that "fantasy can rejuvenate the world". ("Michael Ende")

Then there are the *recent* works of *children's multiple world fantasy fiction* in which the child characters decide to stay in the fantasy world. Could it be poisonous to young minds that Harry Potter, a character with whom they identify, decides to stay in an unrealistic, magical world? Will child readers not come to hate their own uninteresting, non-magical world and spend their whole lives dreaming of the *Wizarding World*? I am not a student in the field of educational theory or practise, but as a student of literature, I think that making this statement is simply overlooking the main theme of the books. If critics and educators are afraid that young readers will identify with Harry, it is important to note what Harry's reasons are for wanting to stay in the magical *Wizarding World*. This is something that is often overlooked in the escapism discussion. Harry Potter does not prefer the magical world over our world, because it is magical. By the end of the series, Harry has experienced many devastating aspects of magic. He has had to fight dark wizards and in this struggle, he has lost many friends to magic. His own parents were murdered by magic, and Harry carries a magical scar on his forehead to forever remind him of this painful event. The magical world in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is not a utopian place, and the main character is not completely free of worries. Next to none of the (magical) secondary worlds in *children's multiple world fantasy fiction* are carefree, utopian places. Not in *early* works, not in *recent* works.

In *Fantastica*, from Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story*, the Nothing creeps over the world, vanishing everything it touches. The fantasy world is about to be destroyed. Evil characters, like the sorceress Xaïde, try to manipulate Bastian. Bastian is almost lost in *Fantastica*, doomed to stray there forever. In C.S. Lewis *Chronicles of Narnia*, the magical

world of *Narnia* is always in danger. Evil forces try to overrule Aslan. The children who enter *Narnia* must fight to save this world and are in mortal danger many times. The *Giantworld* from Roald Dahl's *The BFG* is filled with evil giants, who murder children in the real world while they are sleeping. The Big Friendly Giant is afraid of these giants, and often hides from them in his cave. These worlds may be unrealistic, but they are not utopian. They may harbour all sorts of creatures, elves, centaurs, wizards, talking animals. People may have magical powers. But they are not without trouble. Main characters who enter a fantasy world are not necessarily "safe" in that world. Moreover, they are sometimes met by dangers that they would have never encountered in their starting world. In short, the magical properties of newly discovered worlds are usually not enough to make them appealing to the main characters.

So, why *does* Harry want to stay in the magical world? What makes the Wizarding World so appealing? It is, again, the "physical and emotional needs". The only difference between books like the Harry Potter series and other works of *children's multiple world fantasy fiction*, is that Harry has absolutely no one to return to in the non-magical world. No one in the non-magical world knows about his true identity as a wizard. No one knows of his struggles. Because Harry cannot relate to non-magical humans anymore, there is no possibility for Harry to ever return to the non-magical world. If one looks at Harry's choice for the magical world in this way, it becomes clear that he does not really have a choice to make. Harry's fate is not very different from Lucien MullHolland's fate in Mary Hoffman's *Stravaganza: City of Masks*, or from the brothers Lionheart's fate in Astrid Lindgren's *The Brothers Lionheart*. It is because of Harry's specific, individual situation that he chooses the magical world over the non-magical world. Harry chooses to be with his friends and newfound family. He chooses to stay in a place where his emotional needs are met. That the world he chooses is magical, is just a *decorative* aspect.

Whatever the *décor* of the story may be, child readers can theoretically still learn the same lessons from the issues that the main character has to face. More so, by enlarging these issues, *recent fantasy fiction* could actually be addressing these issues more visibly than most *realist fiction* does. *Realist fiction* however, has the possibility to address some issues more exact or detailed. For instance, *fantasy fiction* could address the issue of racism by presenting a situation in which one race is *clearly* mistreated by the other, without softening the tone in order to be accessible to all readers. An example of this is the harassment of the House elves by wizards, in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. *Realist fiction* however, could address more realistic cases of racism, e.g. a historical novel about the Apartheid regime, or the Holocaust. In such a story, racism can also be presented in a haunting, unacceptable way. However, I suspect that there would be more limitations to such a story when child readers are concerned. Partly because, as child psychologist Dianna Kenny puts it: "If reality is too confrontational, people defend themselves against it." (Williams) A *fantasy décor* allows for more ways to address an issue, because the rules of a *fantasy* story world are flexible, whereas a *realist décor* could be more exact on real world issues.

3.2 Escapism and the plot structure in *early children's multiple world fantasy fiction*

The learning experiences and character development that go alongside an encounter with (a) fantasy world(s) in *recent* works of *children's multiple world fantasy fiction* seem to be absent in the *early* works. Child characters travel to a nonsensical world, that doesn't seem to provide them with means to help them understand the real world better or help them solve any real world issues. They solve problems with the *civilised* knowledge they already had in the

starting world. Also, because the world is ultimately governed for them, they never truly seem to achieve more strength or independence. They do not go very far beyond their humble position in the real world. Therefore, the time the child characters spend in the fantasy world seems to have no ties to the real world at all, rather, it seems to be a dreamlike escape from that world. Phillip Gwynne's argument that "[fantasy fiction] exists in a social vacuum" (Williams) does indeed apply to the *early* category of *children's multiple world fantasy fiction*. Thus, when considering both *décor* and plot structure, the works within the *early* category can indeed be called escapist.

3.3 Genre stereotypes in the escapism debate

Because the escapism debate discussed in chapter 2 is *recent* and still ongoing, it affects modern day ideas about the *fantasy* and *realist* genres. Usually, when discussing these genres, critics speak about *recent* children's books. *Early fantasy* works such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* may be affected by the debate as well, but because these works have already achieved the status of literary classics, their position seems less vulnerable than the position of *recent children's fantasy fiction*. While the escapism statements critics make about the *fantasy* genre may be true for the *early* category of *children's multiple world fantasy fiction*, much has changed since the 1960's. *Recent* works of *children's fantasy fiction* are far closer to realism than their predecessors. Therefore, when discussing escapism in children's literature, it is wrong to talk about the genre of *children's fantasy fiction* as a whole. To do so is ignoring the development the genre has experienced in the 20th century.

A lot of arguments in the escapism debate seem to be based on genre prejudice, and on the assumption that all forms of *fantasy fiction* and *realist fiction* are opposites. In some cases, the discussion seems to have become so heated, that some critics lose sight of the books they are discussing and resolve to blindly shaming a specific genre instead. In short, these are some genre stereotypes about *fantasy fiction* and *realist fiction* that are often used in the escapism debate, but would probably not stand ground in a logical discussion:

* The assumption that all *realist fiction* (by definition) addresses important or difficult issues, while all *fantasy fiction* (by definition) avoids important or difficult issues:

You can thrust too much reality at kids, especially when they're going through tough times themselves. (Harding qtd. in Williams)

My main problem with [fantasy fiction] is that it exists in a social vacuum. We live in a world that's rapidly going down the shithole and my duty as a writer is to make sense of that world. (Gwynne qtd. in Williams)

Stories about wizards and zombie bums from Uranus are great escapism, but after a while young people look for something that's not sugary [...] [Realist fiction] is challenging, there's no easy answers, it doesn't pretend life is all rosy and cheerful. (Monk qtd. in Williams)

[Those on the anti-fantasy side argue that fantasy fiction] encourages escapism instead of debate (Koecher)

* The assumption that (all) *fantasy fiction* presents an unrealistic black-white view of the world:

[Scott Monk] finds fantasy writing a rip-off: good always triumphs, the endings are invariably happy... (Williams)

With the fantasy writers, every story is a battle between good and evil, with no specifics at all. (Gwynne qtd. in Williams)

Many fans [of fantasy fiction] find it absurd that the books have been criticised as being black and white in their presentations by what they say is a one-sided style of reporting by the world's media. (Koecher)

* The assumption that (all) fantasy fiction has a simple plot structure, or is unoriginal:

[Those on the anti-fantasy side argue that fantasy fiction] often deals in stereotypes and simple formulas. (Koecher)

[Fantasy fiction is] mass-produced or all tastes the same. (Monk qtd. in Williams)

Conclusion

The research question of this thesis was: In what way does Stott & Francis' theory of *Home* versus *Not Home* apply to *children's multiple world fantasy fiction* and how does this relate to the escapism discussion?

In what way does Stott & Francis' theory of *Home* versus *Not Home* apply to *children's multiple world fantasy fiction*?

While working on this thesis, I discovered many differences between *children's multiple world fantasy fiction* written before c.a. the 1960's and works within this genre written after c.a. the 1960's. Therefore, I separated the books into two categories: *early* and *recent*.

In *recent* works (written after the 1960's) children are usually at *Not Home* at the beginning of the story. When they encounter new worlds, they go on a variety of adventures and meet a variety of people. The experience they get from these adventures helps the characters to develop and to finally fulfil their journey *Home*. While it is true that these unrealistic worlds have many likable aspects, they are not utopian. The wonderful aspects of magic, for instance, are usually countered by evil characters who misuse this magic. Main characters usually enjoy being in the new (magical) world because some of their emotional and physical needs are met, but most eventually want to return to their starting world. In many stories, a stay in the fantasy world gives the main character insights about their starting world, and about their reasons for feeling *Not Home* there. Through these new insights, they are empowered. They either come to accept the problems in their starting world and learn to appreciate their starting world more, or they become able to resolve these problems. It is important to note that the positive effects of encountering a fantasy world are not related to that world being unrealistic. The core of these children's books is the (spiritual) development of the main characters. The books are about friendship, love and growing up. The fact that the stories (partly) take place in fantasy worlds is, when narrowed down to the core structure of the story, just a *décor*.

In *early* works (written before the 1960's), children are usually at *Home* at the beginning of the story. They encounter an estranging fantasy world that is *Not Home*. They long to return to the starting world and at the end of the story, they finally do. This starting world does not undergo any changes, it stays exactly the same and it is still *Home*. Thus, Stott & Francis' *journey home* theory seems to work in a different way for *early children's multiple world fantasy fiction* than it does in for *recent* works. These stories do indeed have a *journey home* structure, but the starting point of the story does not need to be transformed. In stead, the child characters lose their *Home* at the start of the story by travelling to a fantasy world that is *Not Home*. They then go on a journey to regain this *Home*. Interestingly, many *recent* adaptations of these *early* works change this *early* Home-Not Home-Home structure into a *recent* Not Home-fantasy world-Home structure.

How does this relate to the escapism discussion?

When analysing *recent children's multiple world fantasy fiction* through Stott and Francis' *journey Home* theory, it becomes clear that the structure of these books is in fact not different from *children's realist fiction*. *Home* is defined by strong relationships, comfort, acceptance and appreciation. *Home* is not found through escape, it is found by making friends and meeting one's emotional needs. The fantastic aspects of *recent fantasy literature* are in fact just a *décor*. The plot in all *children's literature* revolves around the development of the main

character and his or her *journey Home*. If this happens through encountering a fantasy world in *recent multiple world fantasy fiction*, or through, for instance, confronting an abusive stepfather in *realist fiction*, doesn't really influence the structure of the journey. Moreover, some critics on the pro-*fantasy* side argue that realistic issues can be better addressed in *fantasy fiction* than they can be in *realist fiction*.

Early children's multiple world fantasy fiction does however, seem to exist inside a social vacuum. This is not only because the *décor* of the fantasy worlds depicted in these stories is very different from the real world (some *early* *décors* are far more nonsensical than recent *décors* are), but especially so because the child characters do not encounter any learning experiences or go through any development in these fantasy worlds. Works within the *early* category of *children's multiple world fantasy fiction* can indeed be defined as being escapist.

Many critics treat the genre of *children's fantasy fiction* as a whole. They accuse the whole genre of being escapist and of being harmful to young readers. In this thesis, I have proven that the main characters in *recent children's multiple world fantasy fiction* do not escape realistic issues through the encounter with a fantasy world. The new worlds they encounter are just as real as the real world. The same core values apply. In this thesis, I have narrowed my research down to a subgenre of *children's fantasy fiction*. However, I do think that it is safe to presume that the process of plot structures becoming less escapist and more realistic applies to the broader genre of *children's fantasy fiction* as well, though further research on the matter would be required.

In my opinion, when discussing the issue of escapism in children's literature, it would be more accurate not to treat this issue as a characteristic of the *fantasy* genre. I think that escapism in literature is a characteristic that could apply to books within many different genres. In this thesis, I have not addressed the issue of the educational quality of escapist versus non-escapist literature. I personally think that it is important that children have access to a wide variety of books, within a wide variety of genres. I do not believe in the fanning or shaming of a specific genre of children's fiction. In my opinion, depriving children of a certain genre of books is not good for their literary education, and neither is smothering them with only one genre, be it *fantastic*, *realistic*, or any other. I disagree with the idea that reading *fantasy fiction* is harmful for child readers. Not all *fantasy fiction* does by definition avoid realistic issues, or provide child readers with a way to "find relief from unpleasant realities". I also disagree with the idea that *realist fiction* should always confront difficult social issues. Both genres may address realistic issues in different ways, but I do not think that they *should* address these issues, in order to be of educational value to children. I think that the experience of reading an enjoyable book has much (educational) value in itself.

As shown in chapters 2 and 3.3, many critiques about *children's realist* and *fantasy fiction* are based on genre stereotypes, in stead of actual children's books. However, these stereotypes are widespread and even though there is a lack of argumentation in this kind of debate, it does often influence educators, schools and librarians in designing their curriculum. We must not forget that adults mostly decide what children will read. If certain books are not present in (school) libraries, or are not chosen as birthday or Christmas gifts, children will never be able to enjoy them. Therefore, I would like to suggest to critics, educators, librarians, parents and other adults concerned with the literary education of children to judge children's books on their individual quality, in stead of praising or shaming complete genres and thereby depriving children of a valuable reading experience.

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