

LITERATURE VERSUS REALITY: FANTASY LITERATURE AS A CULTURAL PRACTICE

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1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

2. The program of advanced study of which this thesis is part has consisted of: Research Methods course during the undergraduate study.

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ABSTRACT

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Fantasy, having the ancient mythology background implies the idea that it explains and satisfies the meaning problem and anxieties originating from ontological insecurity in the modern world. Myths in ancient times were consistent belief systems that would enable humans to understand and explain nature or the unknown. According to Joseph Campbell myths has four basic functions: Metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and pedagogical. Similar to the function of the ancient mythology, fantasy literature becomes a way for the individual to have a “parallel universe” against “reality” in a relatively secure, organized, institutionalized, scientific and civilized world. Initiated by J. J. R. Tolkien, fantasy literature today has several branches in terms of technological developments that are movies, role-playing games, online communities, communities writing the follow-up novels. Therefore fantasy literature, besides being a literary genre it has become a cultural practice of modern individual.

This study, while investigating the role of fantasy literature in modern societies aims to discuss the genre as a component of “modern” culture originated from ontological insecurity and the decline of the program of modernity. While searching the relationship between the formation of modernity and resistance to it, this study intend to describe the intellectual background of the genre. Therefore, fantasy literature will be examined as a leitmotif in the transformation of modern civilization. Finally, one of fantasy products, ‘Avatar:The Last Airbender’, a TV series, will be analyzed as an example of cultural practice and social transformation.

Key words:

Fantasy literature, Ontological insecurity, Romanticism, mythology, Avatar: The Last Airbender.

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KISA ÖZET

GERÇEK KARŞISINDA EDEBİYAT: KÜLTÜREL BİR PRATİK OLARAK

FANTAZİ EDEBİYAT

İsmail AYDIN

Fantazi, antik mitolojik arkaplana sahip olarak, modern dünyada ontolojik güvensizlikten kaynaklanan endişeleri ve anlam sorununu açıkladığı fikrini ihtiva etmektedir. Mitler, eski çağlarda insanların kainatı ve muğlak olanı anlamaya ve açıklamalarını mümkün kılan tutarlı inanç sistemleriydiler. Joseph Campbell'a göre mitlerin dört temel işlevi vardır: Metafizik, kozmolojik, sosyal ve pedagojik. Eski çağlardaki mitlere benzer şekilde fantazi edebiyat bireylerin, göreceli olarak güvenli, düzenlenmiş, kurumsallaşmış bilimsel ve medeni dünyada "gerçek" karşısında "paralel bir evren" tasavvur etmelerini mümkün kılmaktadır. J. J. R. Tolkien tarafından başlatılan fantazi edebiyat bugün teknolojik gelişmelere paralel olarak filmler, Rpg'ler, internet cemaatleri, ve devam romanları yazan topluluklar gibi alanlarda yaygınlaşmıştır. Bu sebeple fantazi edebiyat, edebi bir tür olmasının yanısıra, modern bireyin kültürel bir pratiği olmuştur.

Bu çalışma bir yandan fantasy edebiyatın modern toplumlardaki rolünü araştırırken diğer yandan türü, ontolojik güvensizlikten ve modernite programının çöküşünden ortaya çıkan "modern" kültürün bir unsuru olarak tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır. Modernitenin şekillenmesi ve moderniteye direniş arasındaki ilişkiyi araştırırken bu çalışma türün entellektüel arkaplanını tanımlamayı hedeflemektedir. Bu sebeple fantazi edebiyat modern medeniyetin dönüşümünde ana bir motif olarak incelenecektir. Son olarak, bir fantazi ürünü, 'Avatar: Son Hava Bükücü' adlı bir televizyon çizgidizisi kültürel pratik ve sosyal dönüşüm örneği olarak incelenecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Fantazi edebiyat, ontolojik güvensizlik, Romantiklik, mitoloji, Avatar: Son Hava Bükücü.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to examine the fantasy phenomenon in different forms of cultural practices that displays the transformation of modern society. This transformation is from the rationally established modern lifeworld to a blurry and complicated lifeworld of modern individual. Fantasy literature, reaching its powerful presentations after the second half of the twentieth century, has inhabited the unrest of modern individual. Fantasy literature has been criticized to be non-real, childish, a form of escape from real, or not intellectual and banal. On the other hand, fantasy literature is a reflection of a certain mental state of humankind in a defensive position to protect or give meaning to the world we live in. The themes and plots of the fantasy products are old. The feeling of fantasy is mainly nostalgic; the worlds created in fantasy works are mediaeval. There is a perennial position of fantasy when the modernity and its consequences are considered.

The rise of fantasy literature overlaps with the collapse of grand narration of modernity. Two world wars and the cold war have a great impact on literature and arts. Our planet and daily life have been affected by modern civilization's nuclear weapons, environmental disasters, and the possible conflicts can end the life on the world. The relationships, communities, are dissolved as a result of modern way of life based on rationally designed, value-free, materialistic culture. Today modern blessings provide everything to fulfill our physical needs

but it lacks to give meaning to the world we live in. We are like 'little bubbles of pure reason floating on the stream of time' in a world without transcendental, a life without miracles. This study proposes that fantasy is a breakthrough in the captivity of our modern lifeworld.

The first chapter discusses the main approaches to fantasy literature. The modernist approach asserts that fantasy should be evaluated with its relation to 'reality'. On the other hand, post-modernist approaches try to explain fantasy phenomenon in its social context that the modern individuals are in the need of renovating and rehabilitating life practices. Fantasist or post-modern approaches explain the fantasy as the expression of "things could be different".

The second chapter searches for the intellectual and psychological roots of fantasy phenomenon. It discusses the relationship between the formation of Enlightenment and the Romanticism. Although Enlightenment emerged as a very strong and dominant schema for Western Civilization, Romanticism opposed to it in various ways representing a different worldview. Enlightenment's 'universality, objectivity and rationality' created a significant boost in Western Civilization but Romantics resisted to it for being 'hegemonic, simplistic and mechanistic'. Romanticism today is providing a serious critique of the values of Enlightenment. Ontological insecurity is another root of fantasy phenomenon. The individual is experiencing "a partial loss of relatedness with the other, and in an ultimate form", which means there is a loss of the totality

of human existence. Ontological insecurity is 'a lack of confidence in surrounding reality' and it is the feel of an entrapment in modern lifeworld. Finally, myths constitute an important aspect of fantasy literature. When the functions of myths in primitive societies are considered, it seems that there is a serious mythlessness in modern societies. Mythic or religious explanations of a meaningful world are more comprehensive than the one scientifically explained. Therefore, the mental state of mythic production that never disappeared enables cultures or individuals to produce the fantasy.

The third chapter focuses on fantasy as a cultural practice, looking for another way, protesting and resisting to modern world. Fantasy as a cultural practice proposes a new cultural orientation based on mediaeval values of romance, magic, spell, hierarchy. Fantasy has become a practice through the internet and it is freed from historical burdens, national interests etc. It has created an "enclave" space for millions of people to dwell and participate in the creation of it.

The final chapter analyzes *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, a cartoon series produced for kids. The series was broadcasted between 2005 and 2008. The final episode has been watched by 19 millions of people in 105 countries and it exceeded the kids. It is 'an epic, Asian, martial-arts fantasy/action/adventure/comedy/drama series about the four elements.' It is based on Eastern philosophies of Taoism, Hinduism and Chinese and Japanese

historical and cultural artifacts. These intercivilizational components of the series are constructing an important aspect of the success of the series. The analysis is on the fictional products of *Avatar* as an alternative universe by online writing communities. There are more than twenty-thousand stories based on Avatar in one of the websites, fanfiction.net. Fan groups are actively participating in the development of this parallel universe. Although the series has ended on Nickelodeon, it has another life by creating meaning in thousands of people's lives.

CHAPTER 1

APPROACHES TO FANTASY LITERATURE

Without considering political and social context of the modern world today, any attempts to locate fantasy literature would be in vein. More than fantasy, literature itself is closely connected to political and social developments and is shaped by them. Fantasy literature in this study is going to be regarded as symptom of transformations in modern societies.

Fantasy literature in this study, more than its qualities or characteristics as a genre, is going to be discussed as a cultural practice in the mainstream Western literature. As a cultural practice, fantasy is besides being a popular consumption; it includes a certain value system. This value system is not a separate and totally new set of values but an important vein in the intellectual heritage of modern civilization. Although fantasy as a genre goes back to the first literary productions like mythologies and epics in history, in a modern sense it emerged and was shaped within the enlightenment in the form of romanticism. Since the enlightenment requires "reason" and "ratio", general perception of fantasy tends to be "unreal". Therefore fantasy is fundamentally in conflict with the values of Enlightenment. Moreover, fantasy is going to be considered as a form of expression of modern individual and description of modern psyche both in literary production and in consumption. This situation is

considered to be a crisis and a symptom of transformation in the modern capitalist civilization.

1.1 Modernists vs. Post-modernists

There are basically two important criticisms of fantasy literature, modernist critics; studying fantasy in relation with "the reality", truths or ideologies and postmodernists or fantasists; working on fantasy in the realm of fantasy. Both perspectives put significant contributions to the understanding of the phenomena. These two approaches have roots deep in the formation of modern civilization from Enlightenment to today.

Fantasy literature in terms of its own realm with its all elements seems to be very troubling. For an individual benefiting from the blessings of modern civilization, it is distressing to see some huge books involved with the creation of parallel worlds, peculiar races living there with their histories, cultures and languages. That is the reaction to Tolkien's and other fantasy writers' works. The modernist view of fantasy literature, basically, evaluates it in its relation to reality. The reality, on the other hand, is a significant complication of Enlightenment.

Fantasy in its boundless imaginative realm seems to conflicting 'reality'. A modernist view could be by Colin Manlove:

Two features recur in the children's (and the adult) fantasy of the 1980s: they are more often set within entirely fantastic worlds, and they question reality by depicting it in multiple forms. The theme of the past often disappears, for the past may be co-present in another dimension. World exists in parallel rather than in sequence, and the idea of linear influence is less marked, to the point where plots often involve the discovery of the why things are as they are, rather than development to something entirely new. For our own world is no longer automatically given primary reality, and we may find that it is a fantastic world that is made the objective one, while ours becomes fantastic. In such a context, even such central concerns of our world as moral or social conduct, or even truth to human nature, can sometimes fade away. (Manlove,2003:141)

In fact this process would start before the 1980s when Tolkien is considered. However Colin's description, in terms of a modernist theory, will be understandable when cold war period is taken into account. Fantasy developed in a way that while disturbing a lifeworld standardized through modern project, it deviates to a new understanding of life and world. It is clear that a new epistemological and ontological move is at stake and "the truth to human nature" is no longer a certain basis. While Colin states that fantasy turns reality upside-down, he signs its transformative power.

George Aichele, Jr., in his article, *Literary Fantasy and Postmodern Theology*, states:

An important aspect of the modern search for identity has been the mapping to the limits and structures of human consciousness and experience by the humanities and the sciences. This exploration employs a modernist metaphysics, which posits the fundamental duality of the real and the fantastic. According to this metaphysics, to identify an entity as fantastic—a character in a fictional story, a monster in a nightmare—is to give it a special relationship to reality. For modernism, the fantastic belongs to the realm of the non-real, to which nonbelief is the appropriate response. This exclusion of the fantastic (the dream, the fiction, the lie) from reality makes modernist truth possible. This metaphysics establishes an authority in terms of which proper critical discourse can occur. (Aichele, Jr., 1991)

When the conflict between modernist metaphysics and fantasy is considered, the conflict appears to be an epistemological one about designing the human world. That fantasy is non-real is a priori in modernist metaphysics. While putting forward that, fantasy belongs to nonbelief, modernist view tries to protect a designed identity through a long process. As Jochen Schulte-Sasse clearly identifies, in *Imagination and Modernity: Or the Taming of the Human Mind*, this process is an "anthropological reorganization" of humanity:

It is not only an internal reorganization of human perception; it is linked to a reorganization of human interaction and, thus, to the rationalization of society in modernity. The rationalization of human life means the integration of each and every human habit, pattern of behavior, desire, or way of thinking into human life as a consistent, non-contradictory whole. (Schulte-Sasse, 1986-7)

Schulte-Sasse's argument of 'rationalization of society in modernity' and creating 'non-contradictory whole' matches with Aichele Jr.'s categorization of the 'modernist metaphysics' that tries to keep the human identity in the limits of modern and real world.

Fantasy literature is definitely regarded from very different perspectives based on the critical discourses. For modernists, fantasy is not real and is childish since it confronts with the values of modern civilization that are scientifically and carefully established. However, fantasy is valued and viewed as an important component of resistance to modern worldview according to post-modern critics.

1.2. A Social Approach

The rise of fantasy literature fits with the political, social and cultural entrapment of modern society in the cold war period. In other words, fantasy, a revitalization of a great tradition of epic and other pre-modern literary devices, has a great impact on modern individual. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, which was

written after the “Mordor-like” atmosphere of post-World War II, is an attempt to provide the modern readers with new visions of “a lost moral and social hierarchy” covered and forgotten in the rational and mechanic modern life. Rosemary Jackson, in her book, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* states that fantasy is a literature of desire:

A more extensive treatment would relate texts more specifically to the condition of their production, to the particular constraints against which the fantasy protests and from which it is generated, for fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss (Jackson, 1981:3).

The desire for “absent and lost” can be considered as the nostalgia for pre-industrial or pre-modern life world. Jackson suggests the roots of fantasy are to be found in myths and the starting point in industrialization of the western society. Therefore, fantasy becomes a device to provide totality to the modern individual. Totality includes the recalling of the values; norms were purged or lost during Enlightenment. However, this need for totality is named as ‘unreal’.

As a literature of ‘unreality’, fantasy has altered in character over the years in accordance with changing notions of what exactly constitutes ‘reality’. Modern fantasy is rooted in ancient myth, mysticism, folklore, fairy tale and romance. The most obvious starting point for this study was late

eighteen century – the point at which industrialization transformed western society. From about 1800 onwards, those fantasies produced within a capitalist economy express some of the debilitating psychological effects of inhabiting a materialistic culture. They are peculiarly violent and horrific. (Jackson, 1981:4)

According to Jackson, the modern fantasy is the transformation of myths, folklore and fairy tales within the transformation of the western society in the course of industrialization. The significant difference between two forms of fantasy is that; former ones used to be a collective cultural practice and the latter one is the expression of individual's psychology distorted by the materialistic culture. It should be noted that these two forms would reflect two different sets of values and understanding of the world we live in. The pre-modern fantasy would be part of the verbal culture representing common beliefs and values of the society. Jackson focuses on fantasies as the expressions of the 'debilitating psychological effects of inhabiting a materialistic culture'. From this point of view, it would be possible to locate fantasies the product of the industrial age. However, as Jackson emphasizes fantasies are rooted in myths, folklore, fairy tales and this could be identified as the transformation of the tradition. In short, fantasy literature is not only the expression of some fears in industrial capitalist world but also a reshaped,

rehabilitated, form of traditional wisdom or wizardry generating from the imagination of human being.

Jackson identifies the fantasies of last two centuries, "produced within a post-romantic, secularized culture" (Jackson, 1991:4-5). That is, the cultural environment of the fantasies is differentiated from the pre-modern in terms of their basis, post romantic and secular culture.

1.3. Spiritual/Religious Approach

John H. Timmerman, in his article, *Tolkien's Crucible of Faith: The Sub-Creation*, gives a very clear meaning of fantasy:

When I first began reading Tolkien I thought, "Here is a new order of beings, that of the hobbits." Yet, unique species though they be, hobbits are human, and through them Tolkien reminds us of the enduring qualities of the race of man: friendship, fidelity, vision and hope; and of something more: that we are all possessed of wonder, that we have the capacity to dream dreams and envision noble goals, and that in the struggle to realize the vision we may find it true (Timmerman, 1974).

Timmerman's approach to fantasy is one of the basic understandings of the genre that highlights the "qualities of the race of man" that are blurring in modern society. All fantasy literature is dealing with the entrapment of human being, in a strictly organized society reducing life practices to a very limited level

that is isolated from the multiple historical traditions of humanity. From this perspective fantasy is a nostalgia and romantic confrontation to the modern and capitalist lifeworld.

John H. Timmerman in *Fantasy Literature's Evocative Power* observes fantasy literature as a power that could overcome some important problems related to spiritual life:

Fantasy literature as a genre has the capacity to move a reader powerfully. And the motions and emotions involved are not simply visceral as is the case with much modern literature -- but spiritual. It affects one's beliefs, one's way of viewing life, one's hopes and dreams and faith. Since I have had all these -- beliefs, hopes, dreams, faith -- affected by such literature, I feel compelled to ask somewhat uncomfortable questions about the experience. Questions like these: What is the worth of this thing fantasy? What does it do? Why and how does it do what it does? (Timmerman, 1978)

Timmerman's questions are asked to understand through the self experience more than a cold blood criticism based on a certain ideology or theory. Furthermore he puts fantasy a functioning practice:

Here is the invitation fantasy holds out to the reader: to recover a belief beclouded by knowledge, to reaffirm a faith shattered by fact. We know there are no ogres in the next country, yet we may well believe there are.

The lure of this recovery has attracted thousands to Tolkien's writings, has sent readers tumbling through the enchantment of his literary kingdoms, has in fact delivered what it promised: a recovery of being, a refreshment, a keener realization of the importance of our spiritual nature. The surprise is that so many readers are surprised by the experience. The lure of great literature has long been precisely this which fantasy holds forth in a new way: the lure of losing self in order to rediscover or recover one's self in a fresher, revitalizing perspective (Timmerman, 1978).

Timmerman claims that the spiritual nature of human being is beclouded by knowledge, and fantasy plays an important role to rediscover, recover the spiritual potential in a new perspective. What he means by "a belief beclouded by knowledge, a faith shattered by fact" leads us to a very important discussion the clash between enlightenment and tradition. In a later study Timmerman, elucidates the fantasy and spirituality relationship:

Fantasy seeks the undefinable; its subject is nothing less than the human spirit. This, in part, accounts for its powerful impact. Fantasy is never content with objective testimony to pragmatic reality; instead, it explores the world of humankind in its spiritual reality (Timmerman, 1983:4).

1.4. Post-Modernist Approach

A significant approach to fantasy is Patrick Curry's attempt to locate fantasy as a product of the transition from modern to post-modern worldview. Curry in his book *Defending Middle Earth: Tolkien: Myth and Modernity*, focuses on the elements of fantasy literature that signify the dramatic shift from the modern, promising humanity a shiny, perfect world, to its collapse.

Patrick Curry starts with *The Lord of the Rings'* popularity and acceptance by millions of people. Tolkien's work is the most widely read work in the global history of publishing and 100 million of copies are sold (Curry, 1998:11-12). Although this success, Tolkien has been criticized of being "paternalistic, reactionary, anti-intellectual, racist, fascist and, perhaps worst of all in contemporary terms, irrelevant" (Curry, 1998:16)

Tolkien's success is not an exceptional or accidental phenomenon since it overlaps with the transformation of the modern capitalist civilization. As Curry states, '*The Lord of the Rings* has a life of its own to an extent far exceeding what Tolkien himself expected or could have anticipated. That life is integral to understanding its enduring appeal (Curry, 1998:20)'. Therefore, understanding Tolkien is integral with a more extended phenomenon, which is the shift and transformation of modernity to different directions.

When Tolkien's work is considered, his attitude against industrialism or capitalism is clear. Creating the Middle Earth as a parallel or secondary world to

ours and the medieval atmosphere in *The Lord of the Rings*, reveal us that there is something wrong with the modern world and Tolkien himself. Patrick Curry clarifies an important aspect of the perception of Tolkien in the realm of modernity that is in crisis. Curry claims that his approach to Tolkien is influenced by postmodernism. By postmodernism he refers to the exhaustion of modernity. He explains that process in a solid way:

What do I mean by modernity? Basically, a 'world-view' that began in the late seventeenth-century Europe, became self-conscious in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and was exported all over the world, with supreme self-confidence, in the nineteenth. It culminated in the massive attempts at material and social engineering of our own day. Modernity is thus characterized by the combination of the modern science, a global capitalist economy, and the political power of the nation-state. (Curry, 1998:21-22)

And Curry adds:

All of these things are now controversial. They used to be justified by the 'grand narratives' of modernity-secularized versions of divine revelation, which were supposed to supply essentially complete accounts of our progress toward the realization of the truth (as laid down by Marx, or Freud, or Darwin). But no longer command widespread respect or assent. There have been too many broken promises, and too many terrible

'successes': the gulags of universal liberation through class struggle, modern science's showcases at Hiroshima and Chernobyl, and ongoing holocaust of the natural world at the behest of rational economic development. And while I am grateful as anyone for the benefits of modernity, and wish to throw out no babies with the costs have been horrendous, and are, unlike the benefits, increasing (Curry, 1998:22).

The disappointment with modernity has become a significant issue of western civilization. Curry's formulation of the current situation seems to be a core point in attempts to cultural reorientation or rehabilitation. Fantasy both in literary terms and as a human faculty turns out to be one of the ways to cultural rehabilitation. Curry puts it as 'resistance to global modernization':

... [I]n the context of global modernization and the resistance to it, his stories have become an animating and inspiring new myth. It joins up with a growing contemporary sense, represented in postmodernism, of history's sheer contingency: a liberating perception that things might have been different, and therefore *could* be different now. It suggests that just as there was life before modernity, so there can be after it (Curry, 1998:25)

The idea that things *could* be different is a stimulating idea through all levels of dissatisfaction from the day and the world we live in. Discovering the multi-possibilities of human destinies different than modern one seems to be a core point for other fantasists like Ursula Le Guin.

Ursula K. Le Guin, one of the most prominent fantasy writers, in a recent article, defends fantasy in a direct way. She concludes the function of fantasy as exploring a larger reality; regain the knowledge, and offering hope for other alternatives:

In reinventing the world of intense, unreproducible, local knowledge, seemingly by a denial or evasion of current reality, fantasists are perhaps trying to assert and explore a larger reality than we now allow ourselves. They are trying to restore the sense--to regain the knowledge--that there is somewhere else, anywhere else, where other people may live another kind of life. The literature of imagination, even when tragic, is reassuring, not necessarily in the sense of offering nostalgic comfort, but because it offers a world large enough to contain alternatives, and therefore offers hope (Le Guin, 2008).

According to Le Guin, fantasy cannot be considered as a nostalgic approach to the understanding of the world we perceive. It is an attempt to show alternatives beyond the world designed by rational thinking. Le Guin does not defend fantasy in a normative way. Rather she expresses her ideas in a fantasy terminology. In *Language of Night*, she explains that she discovers the places and the characters of her novels. She claims that she does not invent the characters or places. She states that 'The place is there, the person is there. I didn't invent him, I didn't make her up: he or she is there. And my business is

to get there too'(Le Guin, 1992:107) For Le Guin fantasy is a process of finding something that was already there. She comes up with a new epistemological perspective when she asserts that there is a larger reality than we now allow ourselves. The important point for a larger reality is that, it can be perceived by fantasy, imaginative writing. So her attitude against the experts of literature who reduce literature a certain and calculated level of reality, turns against the world that produce these experts:

The mandarins of modernism, and some of the pundits of postmodernism, were shocked to be told that a fantasy trilogy by a professor of philology is the best-loved English novel of the twentieth century. People are supposed to love realism, not fantasy. But why should they? Until the eighteenth century in Europe, imaginative fiction was fiction. Realism in fiction is a recent literary invention, not much older than the steam engine and probably related to it. Whence the improbable claim that it is the only form of fiction deserving the name of "literature"? (Le Guin, 2008).

Le Guin's approach to realism as a new phenomenon like steam engine is an attempt to unite the breakdown of multi basis epistemology after modernity. Her opposition to the only form of literature in the form of realism is an important attempt to gain the wisdom of history as a whole but not a certain

period praised because of definite characteristics. At this point Le Guin describes a picture of our realist world:

The fractal world of endless repetition is appallingly fragile. There is no illusion, even, of safety in it; an entirely human construct, it can be entirely destroyed at any moment by human agency. It is the world of the neutron bomb, the terrorist, and the next plague. It is Man studying Man alone. It is the reality trap. Is it any wonder that people want to look somewhere else? But there is no somewhere else, except in what is not human, and in our imagination (Le Guin, 2008).

Le Guin claims that the world today is a fractal structure following the same depressing process. Nevertheless, at the same time it is in the process of self-destruction by neutron bombs and terrorist acts. Man is an alienated entity, studying Man.

Le Guin, in her famous article *Why are Americans Afraid of Dragons?* excuses adults considering fantasy something to be afraid of or 'escape':

They know that truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phony, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. They are afraid of dragons, because they are afraid of freedom (Le Guin, 1993:40).

Fantasy literature is generally considered as "escape literature". Opposing this understanding of fantasy has been one of the main debate issues by the defenders of fantasy. However, fantasy literature is an escape as many critics claim. When literary critics assert that fantasy is an escape, naturally they base their premise on certain propositions. These propositions are certainly related to "reality" of humanity that was designed in pain: "Modern civilization is the ultimate stage of progress that you can live here in security. Technology and modern life organization are the means of a standard and guaranteed life. Then escape is illogical, and we do not understand why you want to escape."

Tolkien himself claims that escape is one of the main functions of fantasy:

Why should a man be scorned if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he can not do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it (Tolkien, 1965:60).

According to Tolkien, the modern world is a prison and he cannot be scorned if he tells stories about other topics, namely fantastic. And Tolkien is not the only person did so. Beginning from Enlightenment many "prisoners" have been talking to the "guardians" and telling about monsters, wizards, ordinariness of outer world-'s extraordinary according to guards. Then fantasy literature has deep roots in the formation of modern civilization that can be identified as the opposition between romanticism and modernity.

Tolkien's analogy of prisoner needs to be scrutinized in terms of modern culture and opposition to it in different forms of fantasy production and consumption. A distinctive theoretical study was done by Kim Liv Selling. According to Selling fantasy, being a part of Romantic Movement and "its ability to express Romantic ideologies critical of western cultural modernity in an entertaining narrative form" (Selling, 2005: Intro).

Selling 'examines how the modern genre has been perceived and constructed by critical theory' referring to Jonathan Culler's concept of literary theory that "is not a disembodied set of ideas but a force in institutions" (Selling, 2005:5). Selling does not only focus on the fantasy's acceptance in the field of literary theory but also analyzes 'its relevance to contemporary Western audiences and society as a whole' (Selling, 2005:7). Since fantasy literature is profoundly related to an epistemological breakdown from modern to post-modern, as Patrick Curry emphasized, fantasy has to be analyzed in the framework of transformation from worldviews.

Foundations of the modern capitalist civilization were established on the values of the Enlightenment. Therefore, romanticism while it was a set of resistance and opposition to Enlightenment need to be accepted as a base for understanding the modern and postmodern epistemology/worldview.

1.5. Conclusion

Although there are different approaches to fantasy literature, there are certain common points about its origins and functioning in the capitalist modern civilization. One of the important similarities between these approaches is that, fantasy literature is based on a different understanding of the world. In other words, fantasy originated from the unrest created by the modern culture, and it offers the readers an alternative outlook about the meaning of life. Secondly, it corresponds with the psychological effects of materialistic culture. It can be asserted that fantasy shows a distorted psyche-according to modernists- or it provides a rehabilitative refreshment for the modern individual. Thirdly, it is an upside-down of the fundamental concepts of Enlightenment/modernity on real/unreal. However this upside-down is natural when the literary history of Europe is considered. Realism and realist literature is an invention of modernists according to Le Guin. Finally, fantasy literature is one of the ways that is suggested against global modernization. Although modernity enforces humanity one way of developing, existing, and lifestyle, things could be different. Therefore, while fantasy literature inherits the pre-industrial and traditional values of medieval ages, it enlightens modern man in the way to multi-possibilities.

In conclusion, fantasy literature is a form of imaginative production that strongly shows that the modern individuals are not happy with the world they

live in. Fantasy literature is both a production of the modern psyche affected and distorted by modern capitalist civilization and rehabilitation in the form of entertainment that criticizes today's world stemmed from pre-modern times' literary forms. Since fantasy literature is at the core of transformation of modern capitalist civilization, the intellectual and psychological background of this literature needs to be analyzed.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND OF FANTASY LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction

Criticisms of fantasy literature largely concentrate on the conflicting relationship between modernity and oppositional movement Romanticism. Fantasy literature stands on certain values that conflict with modern worldview. Those values are mainly pre-modern and they are in the course of disappearing. Friendship, sacrifice, heroic actions, magic, spirituality, faith are those kinds of values that are getting vanished in the global, modern capitalist culture. Although Enlightenment emerged as a very strong model/explanation to understand the world, there was a strong resistance to the overall project of Enlightenment. In other words, a very influential vein in the development of modernity, starting from the very beginning of Enlightenment, is the Romantic resistance.

Isiah Berlin in his influential work, *The Roots of Romanticism*, proposes that, 'The history not only of thought, but of consciousness, opinion, action too, of morals, politics, aesthetics, is to a large degree a history of dominant models. (Berlin,1999:2)' Moreover he claims that every civilization has its dominant models represented by, and all the cultural products are dominated by, that model. However, according to Berlin 'in order to identify a civilization, in order

to explain what kind of civilization it is, in order to understand the world in which men of this sort thought and felt and acted, it is important to try, so far as possible, to isolate the dominant pattern which that culture obeys (Berlin, 1999:2)'. For the global capitalist civilization the dominant model is the Enlightenment that proposes "universality, objectivity and rationality". Berlin suggests that to understand a civilization we should try to isolate the dominant pattern because the patterns may turn out to be despotic mechanisms that the civilization itself suffers:

These models invariably begin by liberating people from error, from confusion, from some kind of unintelligible world which they seek to explain to themselves by means of a model; but they almost invariably end by enslaving those very same people, by failing to explain the whole of experience. They begin as liberators and end in some sort of despotism (Berlin, 1999:3).

While Berlin criticizes Enlightenment as a dominant pattern trying to explain the world based on certain principles like universality, objectivity and rationality, he tries to assert unexpected consequences of this pattern. Moreover he offers a perspective to understand modern civilization by examining the relationship between Enlightenment and Romanticism. He considers romanticism to be the set of view that was overlooked in attempts to understand modern civilization.

Modern civilization is in a crisis and Berlin's approach is important to understand this crisis as well. Fantasy literature is conflicting with the 'universal' arguments of Enlightenment and suggesting pre-modern values for modern individual. It is clear that these values reveal a new worldview and epistemology. A more concise approach to Romanticism is asserted by Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, in *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity*.

2.2. Romanticism vs. Enlightenment

Optimistic perception of modern civilization and the belief in progress, future and the "spell" of modernity was criticized by romantics harshly but not in a unified form. Romanticism has many faces of representation by different intellectuals. In this study Romanticism is going to be accepted as a worldview as defined by Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre. Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre in their inspiring study, *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity*, locate romanticism as 'a reaction against the way of life in capitalist societies' that is a worldview coextensive with capitalism: 'Romanticism represents a critique of modernity, that is, of modern capitalist civilization, in the name of values and ideals drawn from past (the precapitalist, premodern past) (Löwy and Sayre, 2001:17)'.

Löwy and Sayre put Romanticism as a worldview that is a "collective mental structure", functioning in a broad sense that should not be reduced to only literature but encompass philosophy and theology, political, economic and legal

thought; sociology and history (Löwy and Sayre, 2001:14) Although they borrow the term "worldview" from Lucien Goldmann, their formulation of Romanticism emerges from the analysis of György Lucacs who defined Romanticism as an opposition to capitalism (Löwy and Sayre, 2001:15). Romantic opposition is basically against certain components of Enlightenment that are; disenchantment, quantification, and mechanization of the world, rationalist abstraction, the dissolution of the social bonds (Löwy and Sayre, 2001:29-43). These main components of criticism of modernity summarize a total worldview. However, this worldview is not a 'pattern' pretenses a certain understanding of the world. Although Romanticism has not been a unified movement, it has a definite stance to Enlightenment or modernity:

Trying to describe the spiritual essence common to such diverse manifestations, most of these authors define the Romantic view of the world by its opposition to the Aufklärung, that is, by its rejecting of the abstract rationalism of Enlightenment philosophy. Thus in a brilliant essay the intellectual historian Isaiah Berlin presents Romanticism as a manifestation of counter-Enlightenment: rejecting the central principles of Enlightenment's philosophy (universality, objectivity, rationality), Johann Georg Hamann, Johann Gottfried Herder, and their Romantic disciples from Burke to Henri Bergson proclaimed their faith in the intuitive spiritual faculties and in the organic forms of life (Löwy and Sayre, 2001:8).

Rejecting the central principles of Enlightenment reveals Romanticism as a worldview without any grand projects. It is an intellectual awareness developed in its own historical circumstances. In other words Romanticism coexists with Modernity and it represents a unity of sets of attitudes developed in the formation of Modernity.

The most complete and coherent expressions of the Romantic vision also perceive modernity as a whole whose multiple aspects are interrelated and interlocking: an all-encompassing civilization, a world in which everything holds together. ... (Löwy and Sayre, 2001:20)

However, it is clear that the critic of modernity is part of modernity itself:

We must also not that, whether we like or not, Romanticism is a modern critic of modernity. This means that, even as the Romantics rebel against modernity, they cannot fail to be profoundly shaped by their time. Thus by reacting emotionally, by reflecting, by writing against modernity, they are reacting, reflecting, and writing in modern times. Far from conveying an outsiders' view, far from being a critique rooted in some elsewhere, the Romantic view constitutes modernity's self-criticism. (Löwy and Sayre, 2001:21)

This situation makes romanticism a component of critical stances to modernity. Romanticism cannot be regarded an ideology based formula but a

strong attitude and awareness of modernity and its consequences. Moreover Romanticism initiates a basis for the criticism of the modern civilization.

Löwy and Sayre's attempt to formulate Romanticism against modernity is not unique. Max Weber as he analyses modernity, he proposes that " the principal characteristics of modernity – the calculating spirit (*Rechnenhaftigkeit*), the disenchantment of the world (*Entzauberung der Welt*), instrumental rationality (*Zweckrationalität*), and bureaucratic domination- are inseparable from advent of the "spirit of capitalism" (Löwy and Sayre, 2001:18).

The broad use of romanticism by Löwy and Sayre enables us to accept fantasy literature as a component of resistance against modern capitalist civilization. Furthermore, literature is an important component of this resistance and historical period that this oppositional literature emerged is important. It seems that the collapse of the belief in dominant pattern of Enlightenment occurred in the first half of the 20th century.

The World War I was the end of the classical empires like Austrian-Hungary, Russian and Ottoman. The collapse of the colonial empires after the World War II and Cold War were the ultimate handicaps of the political formation of modern age. It is not surprising that the most important literary movements of the 20th century were established just within and after these destructive periods. The security problem started to be a significant motive in existentialism, surrealism, and fantasy. Thus, labeling these literatures as

“escape literature” does not seem a coincidence. A typical example is given by James Miller in *Quests Surd and Absurd*. He identifies that the World War II was the turning point in American literature:

... that for the first time in our literature, after World War II, the world that dominated our fiction was sick, hostile, or treacherous, and that the recurring stance of the modern fictional hero reflected some mixture of horror, bewilderment, and sardonic humor - or, to use the popular term, alienation. The common pattern of action which recurred was the pattern of the quest, the quest absurd in a world gone insane or turned opaque and inexplicable, or become meaningless. . . . The nightmare world, alienation and nausea, the quest for identity, and the comic doomsday vision - these are the four elements that characterize recent American fiction. (From Donaldson,1986)

This literary change was not only in American literature but definitely in all Western literatures. Furthermore it was not a literature of accidental sickness but a clear symptom of an important intellectual errand. Second World War started intellectual questioning of modernity in a wide range of discussions. Frankfurt School is one of the important intellectual movements that initiated this questioning. Adorno and Horkheimer, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ask an important question: ‘why mankind, instead of entering a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997, xi).’

This question is important as it provoked intellectual awareness against a "self-destructive" process. They put the primary investigation as the "self-destruction of the Enlightenment" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997, xiii) in the introduction of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Enlightenment becomes a central term to be criticized in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. According to George Friedman, Frankfurt School was after an important quest that had been neglected by Enlightenment:

Whether or not a new transcendental philosophy was possible, a retroactive act was possible: the realm of the transcendental could be resurrected.(Friedman, 1988:19-20)

The quest for a possibility of transcendental philosophy is a profound attempt after questioning all the blessings of modern civilization including mass destruction weapons. It seemed to Frankfurt school that the rationalization of the being in the world ended with 'a new kind of barbarism'. When the self-destructive process of Enlightenment was revealed and discussed there have been new attempts to understand modern capitalist civilization. And as Isiah Berlin suggests, the focus turn to the minor, neglected intellectual movements and philosophical approaches that portrays a different picture of civilization.

Reformulation of romanticism as a worldview against the way of life in capitalist society, illuminates some important obstacles of modern world while it creates opportunities to establish alternative life worlds. Disenchantment of the

world and instrumental rationality becomes key concepts to approach fantasy literature. Through instrumental rationality that ignores the meaning of actions; capitalist society has been created under the pretext of functionality and progress. Instrumental rationalism is related to the "how" of actions but not "why". The modern civilization knows how to invent and shape the world we live in but it does not explain why we should live in a world like this. The most significant characteristic of contemporary civilization is that, there are nice cars that we use for our daily life and there is need of wars for oil, we have big cities functioning as a big machine but there is pollution of any kind and the world is melting as a result of the progressed society. Disenchantment of the world is the result of our understanding of things only in the functional way. Instruments that we have are making our lives easier but not meaningful. All the secrets of the world are exposed by science. Technical obstacles are solved by technology. There are psychiatrists and psychologists digging our souls but they have not declared yet that they found any buttons to refresh and reset us. Vaclav Havel in a conference in 1995 clearly portrays our world's complicated condition:

We enjoy all the achievements of modern civilization that have made our physical existence on this earth easier in so many important ways. Yet we do not know exactly what to do with ourselves, where to turn. The world of our experiences seems chaotic, disconnected, confusing. There appear to be no integrating forces, no unified meaning, no true inner

understanding of phenomena in our experience of the world. Experts can explain anything in the objective world to us, yet we understand our own lives less and less. In short, we live in the post-modern world, where everything is possible and almost nothing is certain (Havel, 1995).

At the point where modern civilization can not explain "why" for the blessings of the rational world, fantasy literature opens new visions for modern individual. Fantasy, aiming to restore "friendship, fidelity, vision and hope" and underlying premodern values and forgotten folk traditions in harsh capitalist societies has a great influence on individual's identity formation since modern civilization suggests only an artificial and consumption-based life world. More than its influence, fantasy literature seems to be a source of a rehabilitation in the pre-modern sense of explanation of the world.

Romanticism as defined by Löwy and Sayre is fundamentally focusing on the nostalgia and reconstructing medieval world. An important aspect of Fantasy is the acceptance of modernity in the secular form although it subverts it. Fantasy is far beyond presenting a new worldview but it is a new condition in the secular world. It has the tradition of medieval ages, it constructs an understanding of the world akin to romantic age but it does not carry the burdens, historical constraints of the age. It is a pure stratum released from ideologies, and grand narrations. It is a new historical period of introvert condition of human being under the threat of self-destructive modernity.

Fantasy asserts a worldview but not in terms of institutional practices of modern era. It seeks a psychic equilibrium that emerges from the deep anxiety of maintenance of the species left alone in the big machine of modern capitalist civilization. This is not a constructed, conscious but intuitive subconscious process. Fantasy literature originates from an important component of the psychological condition of modern individual which can be called psycho-ontological insecurity.

2.3. Portrait of Enlightenment as a Despot: Ontological Insecurity

The beginning of modern society that prophesized a legendary future to humanity collapsed during its formation of a political system starting in the beginning of the 20th century. Although the period after industrial age created a very broad secure environment for Western world it limited other secure and stabled worlds or civilizations. With World Wars the security within civilization started to threaten the residents of modern capitalist civilization. The idea of security is not only material but also a spiritual one that is inherent in different forms of cultural products. Since there are thousands of literary works and movies and computer games that are creating a culture that is not connected to the reality of the day, there must be an explanation. For some it is escape and it is an abnormality. However there must be an explanation for millions of "abnormal" individual in modern capitalist civilization. Ontological insecurity is

also a result of the dominant model of Enlightenment as a despotic pattern on the individuals' psyche.

Sigmund Freud, in *Civilization and Its Discontents* discusses the freedom and its price in the modern world:

If civilization imposes such great sacrifices not only on man's sexuality, but also on his aggressivity, we are in a better position to understand why it is so hard for him to feel happy in it. Primitive man was actually better off, because his drives were not restricted. Yet this was counterbalanced by the fact that he had little certainty of enjoying this good fortune for long. Civilized man has traded in a portion of his chances of happiness for a certain measure of security. But let us not forget that in the primeval family only its head could give full rein to his drives; its other members lived in slavish suppression (Freud, 1961)

The sacrifices made for the security were not for a temporary stabilization for modern society when the publication of Freud's book is considered. Since *Civilization and Its Discontents* was published in 1930, the future of modern civilization which would include a second world war was out of sight for Freud. The trade of civilized man of security instead of happiness was the legitimization of power on the destiny of humanity. The consequence of the trade for security gave the power to the states to trade the humans for more power which vanished the temporary security of individual. Then, the whole system turned

out to the situation of the "primeval family" which can be identified as the "institution" in charge of the "full rein of the drives".

Ontological insecurity, in psychology refers to 'man, as a person, encounters non-being, in a preliminary form, as partial loss of the synthetic unity of self, concurrently with partial loss of relatedness with the other, and in an ultimate form, in the hypothetical end-state of chaotic nonentity, total loss of relatedness with self and other' (Laing, 1999, 36). 'To live in a state of ontological insecurity, or to have a low threshold of security, means to experience perpetual threat. This threat comes either from other persons, or from the external world as a whole. A person who is ontologically insecure may avoid all contact with others for fear of being engulfed by them (Kotowicz, 1997 p17).' On the other hand ontologically secure person 'will encounter all the hazards of life, social, ethical, spiritual, biological, from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people's reality and identity (cited by Hershkowitz, 1998, 170).'

Ontological insecurity was formulation of schizophrenia by R. D. Laing. As Laing was an important figure of anti-psychiatry movement, he evaluates schizophrenia or madness different from the modern implication what madness is. In his article *Transcendental Experience in Relation to Religion and Psychosis*, he claims that madness 'need not be all breakdown. It is also breakthrough. It is potentially liberation and renewal, as well as enslavement and existential death (Laing, 1964).' Laing claims that 'the ground is shifting and the foundations are

shaking' in the secular world we live in. 'In these circumstances, we have all reason to be insecure. When the ultimate basis of our world is in question, we run to different holes in the ground; we scurry into roles, statuses, identities, interpersonal relations (Laing, 1964).'

Having lost our experience of the Spirit, we are expected to have faith. But this faith comes to be a belief in a reality which is not evident. There is a prophecy in Amos that there will be a time when there will be a famine in the land, "not a famine for bread, nor a thirst for water, but of *hearing* the words of the Lord." That time has now come to pass. It is the present age.

Our time has been distinguished, more than by anything else, by a mastery, a control, of the external world, and by an almost total forgetfulness of the internal world. If one estimates human evolution from the point of view of knowledge of the external world, then we are in many respects progressing. (Laing, 1964)

Laing is deeply concerned about the inner world of human and he accepts the great achievements about the external world as the collapse of inner world. The control over external world is in a certain level of mastery and there is no doubt that it can be called a profound triumph. However, while the external is expanding, the internal is shrinking and creating unique but "abnormal" experiences. According Laing, internal world as it is ignored but still a place of transcendental experiences can not be identified abnormal. These experiences

create madness but madness is not an illness (Laing, 1964). Being mad is a breakthrough of modern man by transcendental experiences.

What regions of experience does this lead to? It entails a loss of the usual foundations of the 'sense' of the world that we share with one another. Old purposes no longer seem viable. Old meanings are senseless: the distinctions between imagination, dream, external perceptions often seem no longer to apply in the old way. External events may seem magically conjured up. Dreams may seem direct communications from others: imagination may seem to be objective reality (Laing, 1964).

Laing proposes that we are living in an age of darkness since the outer is freed from the illumination from inner. The knowledge on external world is magnificent but the inner world of man is suppressed. Meaning in life is no more at the core of lives. But the reflections of the inner world like dreams and product of imagination are showing the insecurity of our existence. The man of science meaning 'the secular psychotherapist is often in the role of the blind leading the half-blind' and transcendental experiences are equivocal between sanity and insanity.

Ontological insecurity as a characteristic of our age also refers to social security. Martin Albrow asserts that ontological insecurity is 'a lack of confidence in surrounding reality, which is a more fundamental insecurity than that produced by lack of employment or health which are often seen as the narrow

area of 'social security' (Albrow, 1999).' It is clear that Albrow indicates an overall existential state under threat:

There are many who would argue that ontological insecurity has increased in contemporary society for many reasons, including the impact of mass media, migration and global markets. This is the background to the persistent call for a return to community where people know where they stand, which is expected to be much more than simply a welfare provider but rather a frame for social relations (Albrow, 1999).

Globalization being the contemporary historical case has a great impact on the alienation of individual. Social relations are becoming less than pre-modern periods. So the idea of community is seen as a central form to establish social relations again.

The idea of security is changing in global politics as well. An interesting approach in *Contemporary Security Analysis and Copenhagen Peace Research*, by Morten Kelstrup is proposed related to Antony Giddens' definition of ontological insecurity based on the change of institutions, traditions, lifestyles and identities:

The general picture is that the different forms of globalisation create a move from a world in which military concerns dominate questions of security to a world in which societal insecurity plays a much greater role, not in the sense that military means are unimportant, but rather in the

sense that new complexities of societal insecurity become the primary security concern (Kelstrup, 2004).

Anthony Giddens identifies ontological insecurity based on the change emerged from modernity. He focuses on the engulfment of individual and the emergence of fantasies as a form of ontological insecurity:

... an individual feels overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness in the major domains of his phenomenal world, we may speak of a process of *engulfment*. The individual feels dominated by encroaching forces from the outside, which he is unable to resist or transcend. He feels either haunted by implacable forces robbing him of all autonomy of action, or caught up in a maelstrom of events in which he swirls around in a helpless fashion. At the other pole of the powerlessness/ appropriation divide is *omnipotence*. Like all personality pathologies, it is a fantasy state. The individual's sense of ontological security is achieved through a fantasy of dominance: the phenomenal world feels as if it is orchestrated by that person as a puppeteer. Since omnipotence is a defense it is brittle, and often links psychologically to the other pole of the powerlessness/ appropriation composition: in other words, under pressure it can dissolve into its contrary, engulfment (Giddens, 1991).

Giddens proposes a very clear state of modern man that is trapped in a life that disables him to resist or transcend. Considering the promises of modernity,

we can conclude that a subsequent way for individual to equilibrium is fantasy. Fantasy enables the individual to perform a total role in a secondary world created in psyche through a schizophrenic process. Since fantasy activity is reachable in multiple forms there are many holes for the modern individual to be a puppeteer or experience secondary worlds. The power of fantasy can be found in the possibilities it created for individual for an ontologically secure perception and understanding of the factual world.

Lastly, ontological security/insecurity is going to be mentioned as legitimacy of civilizations. The legitimacy of modern capitalist civilization is being questioned both by the "West" and "rest". Ahmet Davutoğlu in his article, *Western Civilization and Christianity: from Crisis to Transformation*, focuses on a fundamental aspect of the civilizational experience:

Throughout the history the basic aim of human has been the maximum ontological security and freedom. Institutionalization of political and economic systems has gained social legitimacy when they were the means of this aim. Revivals and parades of civilizations occur at the crossroads of the unity between this basic aim and the institutionalization of social systems. On the other hand civilizational crisis deepens when the social mechanisms are threatening the hope for ontological security (Davutoğlu, 2000).

While Davutoglu focuses on the legitimacy of a civilization, he considers harmony between ontological security and political and economic systems. Davutoğlu, states that the modern transformation of Western civilization is an intellectual transformation rather than an institutional one since it produced a new framework of cosmological, ontological and epistemological development. That is while Euro-centric ontological security and freedom space was widening, it was narrowing the other society's spaces in the beginning of the modernity. Discovery of the new lands and colonization of them boosted economy and political systems. However the two world wars, Great Depression, and economic system started to threaten the ontological security of humanity and the residents of modern capitalist civilization as well (Davutoğlu, 2000).

Ontological security seems to be an important component of modern civilization in terms of the formation of the modernity and the lifeworld it has created. Individual experiencing 'total loss of relatedness with self and other' is a standard case of today's society. However, ontological insecurity is not experienced only by few sensitive irrelevant members of modern society but it is an overall condition of humanity not to feel secure in the world we live in. It became a collective feeling of a 'lack of confidence in surrounding reality' and it is more serious than narrow social securities like unemployment and health. The surrounding reality is limiting the 'autonomy of action' and this is created through the formation of the modern civilization.

At the point that the modern civilization does not fulfill to envision the individual with a total meaningful understanding of the existence and the surrounding, we come up with the lack of the 'social legitimacy' of the civilization, failing to provide security and freedom. Although this is a civilizational crisis according to Davutoglu, fantasy becomes one of the ways that people try to gain their security. Although Giden approaches this condition as a 'personality pathology', as discussed before, fantasy has its roots in Romanticism and goes back to the primitive ages and it can not be just a pathology. Today fantasy is a multi-faced cultural practice and it is not limited to exceptional cases. Furthermore it is a collective fantasy state of society that aims to reach equilibrium.

It is clear that ontological insecurity is not a special case for modern society. It must have been experienced and recorded throughout the history. The relationship between ontological insecurity and the rise of fantasy or imaginal realms is a basic human faculty that created mythologies. Ursula Le Guin identifies science fiction and fantasy fiction as the products of 'the mythmaking faculty on new material' (Le Guin, 1993:70) Mythologies and their representation of the totality of the worldviews of societies is closely connected with the fantasy phenomenon.

2.4. From Myths to Fantasy

Myths constitute one of the main components of fantasy literature and activity. There is a significant aspect of myths in the formation of the fantasy that is the mental state of mythic production that enables cultures or individuals to produce the fantasy. This mental state is the ontological insecurity that creates the space of seeking equilibrium of being in the world.

Myths have been considered to be collection of stories about the past societies' social life, belief systems and values. However, myths are not only antique "irrational" stories of primitive human, but they are production of a certain mental state related to the perceiving the meaning of life or understanding the world throughout the centuries. Ursula Le Guin opposes the idea of the only rational explanation of myths. According to her we are not 'little bubbles of pure reason floating on the stream of time but we are also sensual, emotional, appetitive, ethical beings, driven by needs and reaching out for satisfactions which the intellect cannot provide' (Le Guin, 1993:69). Therefore myths are considered to be living mental structures within the human understanding the world and quest for meaning.

According to Maureen B. Roberts, 'Myth is both a response to the emerging needs of a culture and an impetus for its change. As a redeeming quest for meaning, myth is a mirror held up to the collective mind (Roberts, 1994)'. Indeed myths are powerful components of cultures. Their formations and

perceptions by the society sign the significant directions of the culture and systematization of values and also the transformation of the society. Although myths are accepted as the reflections of past cultures, some critics tend to defend that myths are not just stories emerged from the fears of societies but also they are common through all ages and are reproduced in different forms. Although Francis Fukuyama asserts that liberal capitalism is the last developmental stage of humanity, it is clear that the quest for “meaning, truth” has never ended. Therefore ‘needs of a culture and the impetus for change’ are at the heart of social flux.

Joseph Campbell asserts that myths were functional devices that held societies together. According to Campbell, myths have several functions that are crucial to the very existing of an organized and meaningfully designed society that has inner consistency:

The first is what I have called the mystical function: to waken and maintain in the individual a sense of awe and gratitude in relation to the mystery dimension of the universe, not so that he lives in fear of it, but so that he recognizes that he participates in it, since the mystery of being is the mystery of his own deep being as well.

The second function of a living mythology is to offer an image of the universe that will be in accord with the knowledge of the time, the sciences and the fields of action of the folk to whom the mythology is addressed.

The third function of a living mythology is to validate, support, and imprint the norms of given, specific moral order, that, namely, of the society in which the individual is to live.

And the fourth is to guide him, stage by stage, in health, strength, and harmony of spirit, through the whole foreseeable course of a useful life. (Campbell, 1972:214-215)

Campbell in his deep analysis identifies the social systems by their basic needs and emphasizes that they have been requirements for all societies. These metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and pedagogical functions are vital for the establishment of a society.

Campbell scrutinizes societies and identifies what happens when societies experience the loss of the myths or religious formations. He claims that when the myths or religious claims are not taken into consideration there is a big danger:

With the loss of them there follows uncertainty, disequilibrium, since life, as both Nietzsche and Ibsen knew, requires life-supporting illusions; and where these have been dispelled, there is nothing secure to hold on to, no moral law, nothing firm. We have seen what happened, for example, to primitive communities unsettled by the white man's civilization. With their old taboos discredited, they immediately go to pieces, disintegrate, and become resorts of vice and disease. (Campbell, 1972, 10)

Actually today's world does not provide a space for myths. The modern society has been established on opposite bases to the classical societies. Ontological insecurity is the result of the collapse of the belief system that was established upon centuries-long material and spiritual experiences of these disintegrated societies. History of colonization provides many examples of these unsettled communities that 'disintegrated' after the failure of their "life-supporting illusions". Campbell puts forward a significant claim that questions "white man's" role not only for colonized but also for the colonizer. He identifies that the loss of myths and religion is also a problem of Western civilization:

Today the same thing is happening to us. With our old mythologically founded taboos unsettled by our own modern sciences, there is everywhere in the civilized world a rapidly rising incidence of vice and crime, mental disorders, suicide and dope addictions, shattered homes, impudent children, violence, murder, and despair. ... Is there not some point of wisdom beyond the conflicts or illusion and truth by which lives can be put back together again? (Campbell, 1972:11)

Since the civilized world is suffering from the loss of life-supporting illusions there must have been a mistake in the formation of the civilization-the modern one-. According to Samuel Fleischacker, Enlightenment is a turning point that created a process that affected all of the social structures:

... the philosophers and writers of the Enlightenment presented a radical challenge to traditional Christian values, and the real clash, which we still face today, is a 200-year-old clash within civilizations, between Enlightenment ways of life and traditional ones. If we are to find common moral ground among human beings across the world, we will need to deal with this deeper clash (Fleischacker, 2007).

Modern sciences and the value system originated from capitalist application of sciences to society caused a 'clash within civilizations'. This clash spread all over the world and the traditional way of life was dissolved. Unquestionably, the harmony and meaningful explanatory devices of traditional communities were devalued. As a result, things have fallen apart and there is the unrest of "civilized" and "uncivilized" world. Today the modern and modernized worlds are experiencing a psychic disequilibrium. As Campbell summarizes "vice and crime, mental disorders, suicide and dope addictions, shattered homes, impudent children, violence, murder, and despair" are common characteristics of the modern societies. Modernized traditional societies are displaced and they are the outcasts of global village. Another result is that, populations of those societies are migrating to western countries and mainly they are representing the "loser" type of human. Indeed they are losers, both spiritually and materially. The difference between Western and non-western societies is that,

western societies have the material and they are living in better economical conditions while the rest lacks both.

However modern western societies are lacking that same important element that enables them to have a meaning, fear, joy etc. in the world. Fantasy is emerging to respond this need of meaning in the realm of non-rational. Contemporary world is not different from the pre-historic world of human in the sense of understanding world. This can be identified with the primitive ages of humanity in the sense of defense mechanisms, both material and spiritual. Spiritually, individual is living in a system that is similar to the external world of primitive man of prehistory. In the far past humans were living in a wild life or mystic, incomprehensible strange world and the myths were their needs to understand their world. Today there is a clear and scientifically explained and analyzed outer world but we are not sure about the inner world. We may have millions of undeniably beneficial technological gadgets but they are not providing our emotional needs. Psychologists are working hard to find 'something' that would make humans happy or solve their psychological problems but what they are providing today is to convince us to live in the existing world.

Joseph Campbell is concerned about the mythlessness of post-enlightenment world. He believes that the loss of the myths is a critical problem for human societies since myths are the source of moral codes and possible answers to the

innate why/how to live questions. Besides he worries about the studies of myths scientifically and devaluing them by comparing with scientific tradition:

It is my considered belief that the best answer to this critical problem will come from the findings of psychology, and specifically those findings having to do with the source and nature of myth. For since it has always been on myths that the moral orders of societies have been founded, the myths canonized as religion, and since the impact of science on myths results-apparently inevitably- in moral disequilibrium, we must now ask whether it is not possible to arrive *scientifically* at such an understanding of the life-supporting nature of myths that, in criticizing their archaic features, we do not misrepresent and disqualify their necessity- throwing out, so to say, the baby (whole generations of babies) with the bath (Campbell, 1972:11-12).

Campbell's approach to the need of societies based on myths seems to be a remaining situation. However his belief that psychological findings will contribute to the solution of the problem do not seem to work. Psychic and moral disequilibrium of the individual has started to create its own mythic world. The parallel worlds of fantasies are becoming 'life-supporting' components of modern individual who has never lost its collective mental state that is inherent within existence.

The collective mental structure of society that created the myths has never disappeared when the romantic opposition to modern capitalist civilization is

considered. There always have been attempts of cultural productions for a better world. Fantasy literature represents a fresh statement of “the mythmaking faculty” of human being. Akin to the functions of myths, fantasy has similar metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and pedagogical functions. It proposes a new cultural orientation based on pre-modern values like friendship, fidelity, hierarchy, romance.

CHAPTER 3

FANTASY: A CULTURAL PRACTICE

Fantasy literature is an important element of new protest movements within modern civilization. Eisenstadt, analyzing the structural changes in the contemporary era, states that 'movements and symbols of protest' can be seen in the far-reaching transformation of the cultural discourse (Eisenstadt, 2007). Moreover, he clarifies that this process of the great change is inherent in modernity:

These transformations were heralded above all by the new movements and ideologies of protest which have developed first in the West and then throughout the world from the sixties on and which have indeed been often seen as the harbingers of far-reaching transformations to the contemporary cultural and institutional scene, possibly also of the exhaustion of the entire program of modernity (Eisenstadt, 2007).

Cultural discourse of modernity claiming to be liberating human race from the restraints of traditional structures and homogenizing societies was the outcome of the 'hegemony of Western "Enlightenment" modernity' (Eisenstadt, 2007). Enlightenment proposed a new vision for humanity claiming to free humans from the burdens of all traditional forms of medieval lifeworld. Edward Wilson reviews the role of Enlightenment in a precise way:

The Enlightenment, defiantly secular in orientation while indebted and attentive to theology, had brought the Western mind to the threshold of a new freedom. It waved aside everything, every form of religious and civil authority, every imaginable fear, to give precedence to the ethic of free inquiry. It pictured a universe in which humanity plays the role of the perpetual adventurer. . . .(Wilson, 1998)

Enlightenment, the producer of 'the perpetual adventurer' had also caused some reactions. It is important to point out that some of these reactions are secular in its nature akin to Enlightenment. The reactionary or protest movements are not just traditional or religious to establish or search for the old lifeworld. In fact these protest movements are not in the pursuit of the pre-modern life but a perception of life in a certain way. That is multi-dimensional perception of life consisting of not only 'ratio' but also magic, spell, hierarchy, romance etc.

Protest, as it originated from Romanticism and in the 1960s, seems to be expression of the unrest from the program of modernity. Eisenstadt, identifies those protest groups as 'the various "post-modern," "post-materialist", such as the women's, ecological ones, anti-globalization ones, as well as many movements promoting local, regional and ethnic autonomy; and, on the other hand, various religious-fundamentalist and religious-communal movements--all of them often entailed some combination of single-issue movements with the

promulgation of politics of identity' (Eisenstadt, 2007). In addition, romanticism is a significant artifact of this protest culture. Romanticism against capitalist civilization shapes the nature of the culture of protest that is basically stemmed from the 'disenchantment, quantification, and mechanization of the world, rationalist abstraction, the dissolution of the social bonds (Lowy and Sayre, 29-43)'.

Fantasy literature is a significant protest movement that opens spaces and cultural scenes in the post-modern era. Against the modern besiege of the individual, this new culture aims to reconstruct a culture of medieval values which is nostalgic in nature but genuine when the needs of the individual are considered. In other words, new culture proposes an authentic communal reorientation that originates from the alternative universes created in fantasy literature and with the effect of globalization different civilizational practices that are akin to medieval or pre-modern. Thus ontological insecurity and its consequences require a rehabilitative form of culture for the individual to restore the balance and provide a psychic equilibrium.

The collapse of grand narratives and the endless quest for the meaning in modernity triggered a huge transformation. This transformation has created many whirlpools and currents. Eisenstadt recognizes these new movements as 'enclaves':

One of the most important institutional changes has been the development of various structural, semi-liminal enclaves within which new cultural orientations, --often couched in transcendental terms--tend to be developed and upheld, partially as counter-cultures, partially as components of new culture. These enclaves, in which some people may participate fully, but most in a more transitory fashion, may serve in some situations as reservoirs of radical activities, and on the whole they tend to serve as loci or starting points of far-reaching changes in roles and cultural orientations (Eisenstadt, 2007).

Eisenstadt focuses on these enclaves as counter-cultures functioning to serve people to create meaningful lifeworlds. They seem to be isolated from the modern but they have a consistent structure. As this condition is a result of ontological insecurity it is also an explanation for the disbelief in the promises of modernity:

Cognitive rationality--especially as epitomized in the extreme forms of scientism--has become dethroned from its relatively hegemonic position, as has been the idea of the "conquest" or mastery of the environment, whether of society or of nature. The validity of the presumed predominance of the scientific world view, as well as of any future common to the whole of humanity, of the idea of progress, of any common criteria--especially those of liberty, freedom, or progress--according to which

different societies can be compared or evaluated, were questioned or denied (Eisenstadt -2007).

The deposition of the hegemony of scientism in modern culture created a huge space in cultural orientation. As explained above ontological insecurity is an important result of this situation. Since the traditional belief system was dethroned by Enlightenment, the new era of post-modern have complicated and uncertain cultural atmosphere. In these circumstances, fantasy; overlapping with the structural transformations of the modern civilization creates a new cultural practice based on mythmaking human faculty and schizophrenic reaction to the existing lifeworld emerging from ontological insecurity.

Eisenstadt's approach to new cultures as "enclaves" is a comprehensive starting point to locate the cultural practice of fantasy. Enclaves are independent territories within greater unities. However enclaves are developed within the greater unities and they certainly have a close relation to the greater ones. Fantasy as an enclave has attracted the attention of many critics and created debates over the central themes of fantasy.

The acceptance of fantasy literature by critics has the similar reaction to the perception of fantasy as a form of cultural phenomenon. Kim Liv Selling's 'weed theory' is a good explanation of the criticisms of fantasy literature. This approach clarifies the acceptance and the location of fantasy literature in modern criticism. 'According to the Weed Theory of Fantasy, genre fantasy is

fiction that critics do not want in the garden of literature' (Selling, 2005:93).

Selling notes that fantasy was defined by exclusion, as the 'Other to Literature':

Therefore, the question to ask about fantasy is not what it is, but what makes us treat fantasy as not-literature? What is involved in treating/categorizing something as genre fantasy in our culture? The Weed Theory of Fantasy highlights the fundamental thrust of my approach: to openly recognize the structures of domination and "othering" at work within the field of literature, and to assert to possibility of finding alternative ways of conceptualizing genre fantasy that are less evaluative and hierarchical, enabling the construction of difference that is neither devalued nor excluded from the continuum of literary art (Selling, 2005:93).

The perception of fantasy literature is also related to the evaluation of the fantasy practice in the form of an enclave. While modern civilization has a highly sophisticated and well-defined strong self perception, it has an exclusive structure. However, the excluding aspect of modern civilization is in a transformation through enclaves. These enclaves are formed within the modern but they are proposing a new lifeworld and cultural orientation. This new phenomenon has been developed as a result of the collapse of modern project. Yet there is an interesting similarity between the emergence of these enclaves

and the emergence of modern civilization. That is refusing to rely on the episteme of the previous one.

Fantasy is a brand new phenomenon that is freed from all burdens created during modern centuries. It aims the inward discovery of the imagination opposed to the modern purpose to discover the outward, the material reality. Moreover it provides the individual a multi-dimensional worldview of faith, transcendental experience, magic, spell, hierarchy, and romance to restore 'friendship, fidelity, vision and hope'.

Fantasy as an enclave is proclaiming a set of values and it fulfills to provide a meaningful worldview to its practitioners. As in myths, fantasy products create and design a world to be sophisticated enough for individuals to recover from the "loss of relatedness" from the world of reality. In other words, fantasy provides the reader or player an ontologically secure enclave to reside in. Moreover fantasy literature is a complex cultural practice since it inspires generations to go further in their experience of transcendental beyond the possibilities of modern. The impact of fantasy literature can be seen in new cultural products like movies, TV shows, computer games. Furthermore internet is a fertile ground for this dynamic practice.

There are significant aspects of fantasy that make it a very influential cultural practice reflecting the change in modernity. Fantasy is not only in the form of literature but it is living through movies, RPGs(Pole Playing Games), forums, TV

shows and writing communities. However, one important component of fantasy practice is that, fantasy is widely shared and developed through online writing communities.

Fantasy is not only consisted of written literature, and all the other forms of fantasy and their acceptance by large number of people makes it a cultural practice. Regardless of its form, everything related to fantasy is closely connected with internet today. Therefore, internet becomes a very influential cultural territory.

Interactive nature of internet creates limitless opportunities for fantasy practitioners. Discussion forums enable them to share ideas about the fantasy products. The widespread popularity of certain products becomes possible by sharing ideas. Internet is the territory of fantasy activity when the product of any kind is introduced to public. These activities can be classified into several groups.

First, there are individual sites that publish original fantasy products like, short stories, comics and essays about fantasy. This group is consisted of dedicated people who produce fantasy work without any expectancy. There are fantasy writers defending fantasy literature in the realm of fantasy. Second group internet sites are mainly commercial and they provide quality and sophisticated games. RPG sites that millions of people participate are in this group.

Second, there are many different kinds of websites that are based on some fantasy works. This websites constitutes the majority, apparently. Individual blogs are the first group that aims to post individual comments and news about one or several fantasy novels, movies or games. Forums are territories for thousands of readers or viewers to discuss the writer, the character and the developments about the fantasy products.

The last type of website is a territory that provides individuals endless production possibilities of fantasy. Some fan sites, Wikia pages and fan fiction websites are in this category. This websites are places to participate the process of creating fantasy.

CHAPTER 4

AN ANALYSIS: AVATAR: THE LAST AIRBENDER

4.1. Introduction

Avatar: The Last Airbender is one of the recent and very effective examples of the fantasy products in the course of cultural activity. *Avatar* is a cartoon TV series that reflects the components of fantasy genre in cartoon form. It was broadcasted on Nickelodeon between 2005 and 2008. This cartoon series is preferred as an example of cultural practice for several reasons.

First, it is produced for children as fantasy generally is considered to be limited, but it exceeded the children as it always happened. The series was created for Nickelodeon and Nicktoons Network. This TV network aims to produce shows for children. The series attracted the attention of children and it became a success in its first season. The producers Brian Konietzko and Mike DiMartino stated that they started with the idea of the 'inner kid' at the beginning (Clark, 2007). They claim that they tried to think what they liked when they were kids. As a result they stated that 'We're lucky that kids and 'inner kids' have really connected with the show.' This children series after the second season became a phenomenon. The second season episodes started to be watched by more than 1 million viewers (Bynum, 2006). This is a common phenomenon when fantasy products are considered. *Lord of the Rings, Harry*

Potter and fantasy online games have been in the same situations. It is a sign of the mentioned cultural reorientation. Since children literature ventures in the realm of non-real, it is adjusted to the needs of matures quickly.

Second, this series has created its written form after the series were broadcasted. In other words, many people started to complete the parallel universe created in *Avatar*, independent from the show. The background of the story, some minor characters in the series are taken and developed in this literature. This form of literature is on fanfiction websites or forum and independent websites and it is open to anyone. This phenomenon clearly shows that fantasy products are becoming living cultural structures and they are fulfilling the modern individual in various ways. A significant aspect of this process is the role of individual as a creator and participant in fantasy worlds. Another aspect is the cultural interaction between the members of these groups. Finally this practice enables a new cultural incident that is the development of certain values and identity. Literary production based on this cartoon series shows the interrelational nature of fantasy practice. These writing groups, developing a parallel universe in a cartoon series independently are at the core of fantasy practice.

Thirdly, this series is about saving the world. It follows typical epic plots. Avatar Aang is the one who can maintain balance between the four nations that

is broken by the Fire Nation. The beginning of the each episode starts with one of the main characters', Katara, words as follows:

Long ago the four nations lived together in harmony. Then, everything changed when the fire nation attacked. Only the avatar, master of all four elements, could stop them. But when the world needed him most, he vanished. 100 years passed, and my brother and I discovered the new avatar, an airbender named Aang. And although his airbending skills are great, he has a lot to learn before he's ready to save anyone. But I believe Aang can save the world (Avatar: The Last Airbender, 2005).

A children cartoon series starting with these words does not look like just for children. Saving the world is an inherent matter for the 'inner child'. And the world to be saved resembles to ours. It is almost the same world having the same historical process but saved in a fantasy world and the balance restored. Therefore this series is a strong story reminding us that things could be different.

4.2. The Story

The story is set in a lost age (Avatarspiritmedia.net, 2009). The world is inhabited by four great societies: Air Nomads, Water Tribes, Earth Kingdom, and Fire Nation. These four groups are named after the element they bend and manipulate; Airbenders, Waterbenders, Earthbenders, and Firebenders. Each society can use their elements as a weapon but not all the members have the

same ability. Besides humans, there are spirits and fantastic animals. The master of all elements is the Avatar. Avatar is the incarnation of the Spirit of the Planet in human form. (Avatarspiritmedia.net, 2009). When the former avatar Roku dies the Firelord Sozin starts a global war over other nations. His aim is to eliminate the other societies and become the ruler of the world. One hundred years before the series starts, Avatar Aang from the air nomads, is told that he is the next avatar, when he was twelve years old. He panics and runs away from the temple with his flying bison Appa. In a storm he falls into the sea and his avatar powers keep him in the iceberg in a deep sleep for one hundred years.

4.2.1. Book One: Water

The series starts with the awaking of Aang by Katara and Sokka two siblings from the Southern Water Tribe. Katara is the only waterbender in her tribe and the men of the tribe left for fighting against the Fire Nation. She knows little about waterbending and she needs a master. Aang as he needs to master the four elements from other societies, needs a waterbender master. Therefore they decided to go to the Northern Water Tribe to find a master for both. Prince Zuko, the son of the Firelord Ozai, is after the Avatar to kill him and to destroy the only obstacle for the domination of the Fire Nation. He is banished from Fire Nation by his father and his only aim is to find the Avatar and restore his honor. His uncle Iroh, seems to be a relaxed man, drinking jasmine tea and playing pie sho, is his mentor.

4.2.2 Book Two: Earth

Avatar Aang, after mastering the waterbending in the Northern Water Tribe, travels to the Earth Kingdom to master earthbending. There they meet Toph, a blind earthbender with extraordinary talent. She becomes Aang's earthbender master. Meanwhile Aang and his friends discover that the coming solar eclipse is a vulnerability for Fire Nation. In other words firebenders will not be able to firebend on the solar eclipse. They try to give this information to the Earth king in Ba Sing Se but Firelord's daughter Azula and prince Zuko organize a takeover in the Earth Kingdom.

4.2.3. Book Three: Fire

Aang and his friends decide to invade Fire Nation on the solar eclipse. The plan fails but Prince Zuko who have been discovering himself rebels his father and joins the Avatar. And Zuko becomes Avatar's firebending master. The time of the Sozin' Comet, the most powerful time of Fire Nation, Aang faces the Fire Lord Ozai. Aang defeats him in a new way. Aang takes the Fire Lord's firebending power. Fire Nation's fleet and army are stopped. Prince Zuko defeats his sister Azula and he becomes the new Fire Lord. Fire Lord Zuko and Avatar Aang declare that they will restore the damages done to the earth and start an era of love and peace between four nations.

4.3. Cultural Background

Cultural background of Avatar is constituted both from Eastern and Western cultural, religious motives but eastern motives are dominant than Western (DiMartino and Konietzko, 2005). Epic tradition, myths are the basis of this series. Eastern impact is clear in the show. Chinese calligraphy, myths, legends and philosophy are main components of the show. The producers DiMartino and Konietzko in an interview emphasizes that they benefited from many cultural components of Eastern philosophy:

Although "Avatar" isn't based on a specific Asian myth, we were inspired by Asian mythology, as well as Kung Fu, Yoga, and Eastern Philosophy. We were also inspired by Anime in general. We wanted to create a story that inspired people's imaginations and that had elements of comedy, drama, and action (DiMartino and Konietzko, 2005).

This cultural background is blended with the dialogs of characters as members of western culture. The child characters' dialogs to gender related criticisms and their approaches to the problems make them part of living culture of any Western society. This is one of the strong aspects of the series. More than being a strong component of the show it signs a powerful intercivilizational cultural product. Producers state that they have read a lot about Buddhism, Taoism and Chinese history (DiMartino and Konietzko, 2005). Moreover they

said that they had several cultural consultants both for philosophical references and the use of calligraphy and martial arts.

Another important element of show is the idea of Avatar. Avatar is a well-known figure of Hinduism. According to Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism Avatar is the god in human form to keep the balance on earth. When one Avatar dies it is believed that his spirit transform to a newborn baby in the same days. The monks search for that baby and find him. The new Avatar is educated to be the authority in Hinduism. The same process takes place in *Avatar*, the series. In the series there is a circle and each Avatar is born in different nations and they master all elements by traveling to each nation. Producers state, 'We chose the word "Avatar" because it is an ancient Hindu word meaning "a temporary manifestation of a continuing entity." In our world, Aang is the current incarnation of this very powerful being: the one person who can control all four elements and keep balance in the world. (DiMartino and Konietzko, 2005)'

Four elements are mentioned almost in all myths and classical philosophical traditions. They are accepted as the four basic elements of life on the world. The series producers structure the four elements and their manipulation with different nations. It is not magic but an innate ability. It is the way it is. Therefore manipulation of the elements became the focus of the show and most attractive element. The producers state that the show is "an epic, Asian,

martial-arts fantasy/action/adventure/comedy/drama series about the four elements. It isn't easy to fit it all into one sentence!" (Clark, 2007)

Martial arts are composing another detailed cultural phenomenon in the series. Airbending is based on Chinese martial art Bagua style of Kung Fu. The idea in Airbending is 'fighting without fighting'. Bagua uses soft flowing movements yet it tends to be more dynamic and spontaneous. Airbenders use their opponents' energy to overcome them (Nick.com, 2009).

Waterbending is developed from the relationship between moon and water. Waterbenders imitated the moon. The idea for waterbending is based on 'Tai Chi style of Kung Fu, 'Chi- the circulating of life energy that in Chinese philosophy is thought to be inherent in all things. In traditional Chinese medicine the balance of negative and positive forms in the body is believed to be essential for good health (Nick.com, 2009)'.

Earthbending is based on Hungar style of Kung Fu. In the show badgermoles are the first earthbenders. They are blind but they feel the ground. Earthbenders move the earth by connecting to the ground, firmly settling, rooting.

Firebending is based on Northern Shaolin style of Kung Fu. It 'comes from the realm of energy and inner power.' It is related to controlling breathing. It is an aggressive bending style but it must be done by 'inner calm, discipline, and emotional stability. (Nick.com, 2009)'

Calligraphy in *Avatar* is classical Chinese.

The characters are Chinese used in the Classical Chinese format. The Chinese language format evolved and changed over a long period of time, and Classical Chinese format is very different from contemporary and spoken format. Nowadays Classical Chinese is rarely used (and only in literature) and considered as a proper form to Chinese, just as the Latin or Shakespearean language is to the West (Distant Horizon, 2009).

All of the scripts in the show are in Chinese. The producers' insistence on using classical Chinese calligraphy creates an authentic atmosphere within the series. A Chinese calligrapher Siu-Leung Lee worked for the show (Lasswell, 2005).

Finally the western literary and cultural components can be mentioned. The story is a typical epic story. The hero Avatar Aang's quest is to restore the balance on the earth and save it from the imperial acts of the Fire Nation. The hero being a child created a similar impact to *Harry Potter*. *Lord of the Rings* is heavily felt through the story. Different races, spiritual references and different creatures in the Avatar world show the impact of *Lord of the Rings* on the show. Moreover the producers in an interview state this natural link between Avatar and other fantasy literature. Konietzko states:

Mike and I were really interested in other epic "Legends & Lore" properties, like *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings*, but we knew that we

wanted to take a different approach to that type of genre (Vasconcellos, 2007).

4.4. Reaction to *Avatar*

Avatar was nominated for fifteen prestigious awards, and it won ten. It has been watched by millions of people in more than one hundred countries. The series final gathered 19 million viewers (NewsBlaze, 2008). According to Viacom 'Avatar is currently syndicated to more than 105 countries around the world and is one of Nickelodeon's top rated programs across broadcast and cable in multiple markets. The series is currently ranked No. 1 on Nick in Germany, Indonesia, Belgium and Colombia(viacom.com, 2007).'

4.5. Beyond the Series

The show has four video games, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, the video game, was released in 2006, *Avatar: The Last Airbender - The Burning Earth* was released in, 2007. *Avatar: The Last Airbender – Into the Inferno* was released in 2008. *Avatar: Legends of the Arena*, a video game for Microsoft Windows launched in 2008 by Nickelodeon. It is an online game and players have choices to select their nation, create their own characters. Besides, nick.com have games for kids.

According to USA Today *Avatar* has been a great success:

Meanwhile, lots of fans snap up merchandise, including video games, trading cards, toys and DVDs. Nickelodeon expects consumers to spend about \$121 million this year on the franchise, rising to \$254 million in 2009.

Video game maker THQ (THQI) sold more than a million copies last year of its first release, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. That made it the year's fifth-best-selling kids game licensed from entertainment properties. THQ plans to boost by 25% its ad budget for the second release, *Avatar: The Last Airbender — The Burning Earth*, due Oct. 16. (Lieberman, 2007)

There is an upcoming live action movie of Avatar that is directed by M. Night Shyamalan. It is planned to be released in 2010. The film is going to be the first film of the trilogy.

4.6. What *Avatar* is Really About: Social Criticism of the Consequences of Modern or An Innocent Series for Kids?

Without any doubt *Avatar* has a back story of the consequences of capitalist modern civilization. Avatar as a parallel universe is a clear perspective of the idea that things could be different. The series setting is a time that a specific society, Fire Nation, is in the course of industrial revolution, colonialism and imperialism that corresponds with the beginning of our modern civilization. However in the show this process is stopped by the Avatar and the balance of the world is restored.

4.6.1 Societies

In Avatar world each society is representing a lifestyle and social structure related to their elements. Air Nomads had the characteristics of air. They had Airtemples on top of the mountains. They were vegetarians and traveled the world on their flying bison. They did not have a government and they were peaceful.

When the series starts Air Nomads are vanished except Aang, the Avatar. They were the first society destroyed because of their lifestyle that was based upon passivism. The 'genocide' of Air Nomads becomes a significant incident showing the intentions of Fire Nation. Air Nomads represent the extinct civilizations like Maya, Aztec in our modern world.

Water Tribes mainly live on the poles of the Avatar world. There are Northern Southern and Foggy Swamp Water Tribes. They have a hierarchical social structure. Northern Water tribe is a more structured society and it does not let women bend water but instead educate them as healers (Volpe, 2005). All the members of the Water Tribe are not benders, there is a limited number of waterbenders in each generation and the Waterbenders of the Southern Tribe are killed or captured by the Fire Nation during one-hundred years of war. There are just women and children left in the tribe. The men of the tribe are helping the Earth Kingdom against Fire Nation.

Earth Kingdom is a sophisticated society. Earth benders are the most crowded society on the Avatar world. There are two main cities of Earth Kingdom, Omashu and Ba Sing Se, governed by two different kings, and the government is a monarchy supported with councils.

Fire Nation is organized in the form of absolute monarchy and it is a highly sophisticated society. It has formal school system for indoctrination of the young generation. It is aimed to educate loyal youth to Fire Lord. The subjects include official history, music, and warfare. Dancing is forbidden as a form of self expression (Santos, 2007). It has a well-developed army.

All four societies are similar to medieval classical societies of our world. However, Fire Nation with the attempt to overrule the world has changed and it has distinctive characters. First, The Fire nation used to be ruled by Fire Sages and the Fire Lord. The sages used to be loyal to only Avatar (Volpe, 2005). Second, Fire Nation has the strongest military forces including navy and air forces. Only the Fire nation has mechanized forces. Contrary to other nations, Fire Nation aims to dominate the land and people on the world. And they came close to their objective by colonizing or destroying the other nations. Another aspect is that they use the technology and industry to develop new weapons. Furthermore they built high-security prisons for prisoners from other nations. As a result, Fire Nation broke the balance and harmony between the nations and human-nature.

4.6.2. Industrialism

Industrialism is another aspect of the *Avatar* that is criticized. Fire Nation is in the course of an industrial revolution. There are factories, technological improvements all over their lands and on the colonies. Environmental pollution is a clear consequence of industrial development. In one of the Fire Nation colonies in the Earth Kingdom, a factory is moved there and it makes the army metals there. The factory's wastes kill the life in the river and the town nearby. When Avatar Aang and his friends come to the town, they destroy the factory and help people to clean the river (Spaulding, 2007). This anti-industrial attitude is dominant in the series.

4.6.3. Imperialism

In *Avatar* the most important phenomenon emphasized is the balance and the harmony of the nations and world. On the other hand, Fire Nation is after ruling the world for their benefits. In the *Avatar* the balance is the core issue for all inhabitants of the world. The first episode starts with emphasizing balance by Katara's voice:

My grandmother used to tell me stories about the old days, a time of peace when the Avatar kept balance between the Water Tribes, Earth Kingdom, Fire Nation, and Air Nomads. But that all changed when the Fire Nation attacked. Only the Avatar mastered all four elements. Only he could stop the ruthless firebenders. But when the world needed him most, he

vanished. A hundred years have passed and the Fire Nation is nearing victory in the war. Two years ago, my father and the men of my tribe journeyed to the Earth Kingdom to help fight against the Fire Nation, leaving me and my brother to look after our tribe. Some people believe that the Avatar was never reborn into the Air Nomads and that the cycle is broken, but I haven't lost hope. I still believe that somehow the Avatar will return to save the world (Filoni, 2005).

Imperialism or ruling over other nations is not a new phenomenon in the world of Avatar. There had been attempt before but all of them were stopped by avatars. When Avatar Aang is reluctant about killing the Fire Lord Ozai, he communicates with his past lives and asks for advices from them. Past avatars, Roku, Kyoshi, Kuruk and Yangchen tell him that the only way to restore the balance to the world, there must be sacrifices (Ehasz, 2008). Except Fire Nation, all the people and the spirits of the world agree that the balance is a requirement for the life on the world.

The expansion of the Fire Nation is not only aimed to the other nations on the world but it is against nature. They do not respect the nature and the spirits and the tradition as well. An interesting detail about the Fire Nation is about the original firebenders. According to the legend the original firebenders were dragons. And it is believed that they are extinct. The Fire Lord Sozin, who started the war on other nations, started a tradition of hunting dragons. He

claimed that the one who hunts a dragon will have legendary powers (Volpe, 2008). So the Fire Nation besides destroying the balance on earth they betrayed their origins, traditions and sacred symbols for more power. The lust for power and domination on the world threatens not only the world but also the Fire Nation.

Imperialism in this alternative universe is so similar to ours. However in the Avatar world everyone, even the some members of Fire Nation who know and respect the lore except that the world could survive only if it's balanced. Fire Lord's brother Iroh, the crown prince Zuko and some generals and sages help the Avatar Aang to stop the domination of their nation.

As a result imperialism in the Avatar world is stopped by the Avatar and wise people like in other epic fantasies. *Avatar* is a story about our world proposes that things could be different. The imagination is reflecting the dangers of our existing world in the form of a cartoon for kids.

4.7. Developing the Avatar Universe: Writing Communities

Avatar: The Last Airbender has created a similar impact on modern audience like other fantasy products *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*. Internet is providing a huge cultural territory for the fans and dedicated fantasy readers or audiences. Many 'Avatar fans have built their own unique fan sites full of original fiction, storyline proposals, artwork, comics, message boards, blogs and more, all based on the property.(Viacom.com, 2007)' Among these websites fan

fiction phenomenon based on the show is going to be analyzed. Fan Fiction is a growing trend on internet nowadays. According to Bill Tancer from *Times*:

Today fan fiction (or fanfic if you're in the know) is an Internet phenomenon where anybody with a computer and a connection creates and posts stories using existing fiction, television sitcoms, movies and their characters as the basis for their creations — much in the way that Lydgate continued the *Canterbury Tales*. True to the participatory web, many fan fiction sites provide visitors with popularity rankings and the ability to review fan fiction entries and sort based on those reviews.

The combination of content-hungry fans, amateur writers with arguably too much time on their hands, and the Internet as the perfect distribution medium has led to this new Internet phenomenon. (Tancer, 2007)

Fan fiction is a transformative phenomenon in literature and it has some unique characters:

Amateur writing flourishes in fan communities, where writers create work that is, by definition and by convention, noncommercial—that is, unpublishable for money. When such writers communicate online with their readers, there are fewer of the status concerns mentioned above. These fanfic writers are also usually fanfic readers, and because there is no economic transaction involved, the relationship between writer and reader is more egalitarian than the relationship between a pro writer and his or

her buying audience. Fanfic writers are writing to, and for, an amateur community to which they belong (Bode, 2008).

These characteristics of fan fiction creates thousands of fans to enjoy writing and creating alternative universes and develop the ones already exist in different forms.

4.7.1. Fun Culture

Henry Jenkins, in his distinctive study, *Textual Poachers*, identifies five basic dimensions of fan culture: 'its relationship to a particular mode of reception; its role in encouraging viewer activism; its function as an interpretive community; its particular traditions of cultural production; its status as an alternative social community (Jenkins, 1992:1-2).'

Fun culture today is a growing trend in the social interaction on internet. It seems that the nature of communication and the relationship is in the course of a change. Specifically, the fan culture of fantasy products is the most effective one.

However, the idea of fan (comes from fanaticus) has always been problematic in mass culture. Henry Jenkins states:

Whether viewed as a religious fanatic, a psychopathic killer, a neurotic fantasist, or a lust-crazed groupie, the fan remains a "fanatic" or false worshiper, whose interests are fundamentally alien to the realm of

"normal" cultural experience and whose mentality is dangerously out of touch with reality (Jenkins, 1992:15).

This is a common stereotyping about fans and Jenkins emphasizes that fans generally 'are seen as intellectually debased, psychologically suspect, or emotionally immature (Jenkins, 1992:17).' Jenkins clarifies the reasons behind this phenomenon:

The stereotypical conception of the fan, while not without a limited factual basis, amounts to a projection of anxieties about the violation of dominant cultural hierarchies. ... Fan culture muddies those boundaries, treating popular texts as if they merited the same degree of attention and appreciation as canonical texts. Reading practices (close scrutiny, elaborate exegesis, repeated and prolonged rereading, etc.) acceptable in confronting a work of "serious merit" seem perversely misapplied to the more "disposable" texts of mass culture. Fans speak of "artists" where others can see only commercial hacks, of transcendent meanings where others find only banalities, of "quality and innovation" where others see only formula and convention (Jenkins, 1992:17).

This approach is akin to Kim Liv Selling's 'weed theory' of fantasy literature. Excluding a form of literature for not being 'suitable' for the mainstream literary tradition results with the dominant cultural hierarchies to label it immature, banal or non-real. On the other hand fantasy literature is developing a certain

attitude to the modern literature and values. Moreover it is representing a resisting form of culture against the modern capitalism. In the same way fan culture is creating its own community based on activism, interpretation, cultural production and alternative social community, and it is different from the practices of mainstream culture. Jenkins goes further in his criticisms and discusses the new cultural orientation in modern civilization. He claims that fan culture is a reaction to social changes within the culture and it is in a constant flux:

There is nothing timeless and unchanging about this culture; fandom originates in response to specific historical conditions (not only specific configurations of television programming, but also the development of feminism, the development of new technologies, the atomization and alienation of contemporary American culture, etc.) and remains constantly in flux. Such a culture also defies attempts to quantify it, because of its fluid boundaries, its geographic dispersement, and its underground status (Jenkins, 1992:3)

Therefore, Jenkins while trying to have a look on fan groups from an inclusive perspective; he deepens his observations as a participant of fan culture. He states the objective of his study as to 'describe a social group struggling to define its own culture and to construct its own community within the context of what many observers have described as a postmodern era; it

documents a group insistent on making meaning from materials others have characterized as trivial and worthless.'

Postmodern era is a key concept to understand the phenomenon. Fan culture is an enclave in the mass culture. It overlaps with the collapse of the modern project. What makes fan culture transformative is that; the level and the quality of the interaction fans share through internet is not available in their environment.

Online writing communities are formed by fan groups. The interpretation and the reception of fantasy is practiced by these online communities that have created new alternative social communities. People in these groups write stories, poems on an existing work. The members of the communities read each others stories, write reviews, send messages and have a strong communication. With the broad and popular use of internet these communities are developing and changing.

4.7.2. *Avatar* Fans and the Fan Fiction Examples

Avatar: The Last Airbender series is one of the favorite universes that fan fiction writers are participating. Fanfiction.net is the leading website of fun fiction. There are nine categories, anime, books, cartoons, comics, games, misc, movies, plays, and TV. It is not a surprise to see the fantasy products on the top of the lists. For example there are more than 400000(four-hundred-thousand) stories on *Harry Potter* and it is at the top of the list.

In cartoon category *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is in the second place with total products of 20154. There are 17888 stories, 143 crossover stories (stories that combine different products, like reading Avatar as a character in *Stargate* or in *Harry Potter.*), 283 communities, 333 discussion forums. 93 of the stories exceed 100.000 words and they are novel size products.

The stories can be categorized into several groups. Follow-up and character development, (major, minor and non-existing) stories are popular types. Developing the stories about the past of the parallel universe is another one. Crossovers that combine *Avatar* with other cultural products are constituting another type of stories written by fan communities.

The most typical stories are follow-up stories. Follow-up stories are about the life after the series. The active audience is not satisfied with the end or the finale of the show. As a result they produce alternative endings or stories about the future of the characters. *Avatar* is broadcasted in three seasons and each season is named as a 'book'. First book is water, second is earth, and third is fire. Typical stories of follow-up are titled as 'book four'.

On fanfiction.net there are thousands of follow-up stories and some of them are novel size. One of these stories is 'Book Four: Future' written by Zoe Valentine. The story is written from first person view and the hero is Princess Yui, Fire Lord Zuko's sister. It is about two decades after the defeat of Lord Ozai. Zuko and Mai married and they have a daughter. Avatar Aang and Katara

married and they have a daughter too. It is Avatar Aang's visit day to Zuko and some rebels attack the palace to capture the kids. It is the first chapter of this story and the writer probably is going to write many more chapters (Zoe Valentine, 2009). During this process other writers and readers write reviews on the story and their comments are going to help the writer to continue. This story is published on June 29, 2009 and it has a long way to go.

Another type is stories about the characters' inner world. There are really good examples of this kind. It is clear that the audiences has involved with the story and feel the characters. *Madness Most Discreet* by Wolfish Inclinations is a story about Prince Zuko's inner conflicts on love (Wolfish Inclinations, 2005). Prince Zuko who is after his quest of hunting the Avatar to restore his honor is thinking about Katara, who is always beside Avatar and helps him and loves him apparently. While Zuko looking at the girl he thinks that 'she was everything he had ever wanted (Wolfish Inclinations, 2005).' He is convinced that she is the one he would always love:

But the newly created lover in his veins screamed for her, begged for her touch, and affection. He silenced them both, as best as humanly possible. After all, such things were matters for weaker mortals, he had better things to achieve than the ownership of some woman (Wolfish Inclinations, 2005)

This story is written in 2008 and gathered 44 reviews by other writers. The commentators help the writer to develop the story or they show how much they liked the story. For example one of the readers comments on Zuko:

have you no faith in the dear prince? He dedicates himself single-mindedly to everything; how could he do less for the woman he loves? Or was that your point? -loses train of thought. runs after it, shouting and waving arms- idk. But I have faith in his redemption, and I think he will truly love her someday. But good fic, regardless of ships (spelling kept)(pringle.sam, 2007)

Many more reviews are done in a constructive way. This is the way of creating an alternative community based on moral values they discuss, psychological treats, attitudes and behaviors they approve or not. This type of close relationship is a significant way for the members of this community to form their identities.

Another story is *What I can't See behind my Blind Eyes* by YuukixZero16-in-yellow. It is about Toph, one of the main characters, twelve years old, an earthbender and Avatar Aang's earthbending teacher. She is blind, stubborn and she does not show her feelings. She is sarcastic and in many conditions it feels that she has a lot to say but she silences her feelings. This story is about Toph's feelings for Zuko after he stopped to chase them and joined them. She is in love with Zuko. We read Toph's inner speech as the beginning of the story:

And I can really say is I love you.

So why, so why can't I say it out loud?

Or can I not speak either?

You used to chase us....now you travel with us.

You use fire, while I use earth.

You are scared, while I am blind.

So are we the same?

Abused.

Hated.

Wanted.

Rich (YuukixZero16-in-yellow, 2009).

These lines brilliantly link the relationship between aspects of the series and refer to the psychology of the characters. Moreover they show how 'obsessively' the writer is involved with the characters. First of all both have problems with their families. Prince Zuko was forced to fight his father and his father made a scar on his face and banished him from the palace. Toph is from a noble family of Earth Kingdom and she left her family. Her family did not know her abilities and they were always protective and behaving her as if not being capable of living alone. When she reveals her earthbending abilities her family is shocked and they force her to live a prison life. However she runs away with Avatar and

her parents hire some criminals to find and bring her home. Toph in the poem is stating the similarities more than differences like being from different nations, to justify her love to Zuko. They are both rich, abused and wanted. They have some physical defects like being blind and having a scar on the face. At the end of the story they become lovers.

4.8. Conclusion

Avatar: The Last Airbender, is reflecting multi-layered fantasy practice in different ways. The story is a well-structured alternative universe. It has an inner consistency that has a great impact on the audiences. The inner consistency of the *Avatar* series provokes the audiences to participate this fantasy world. The story has multitude aspects like manipulation of the four elements, the idea of Avatar and the age of main characters being around twelve and sixteen. Manipulation of elements, earth, water, air and fire is an exciting idea that would attract the attention of 'inner child'. Although the series is produced for kids it has exceeded them and millions of adults or young audiences are involved within the series practices.

Although *Avatar* is ended in 2008 there is another life of it. Fan groups have created websites forums and they are writing fiction based on *Avatar*. This phenomenon is common about science fiction and fantasy products. Online communities, as part of fan culture are producing stories, poems and theories about the Avatar world. While creating stories and other cultural products these

fan groups are in a certain activism, interpretation of an existing work in endless possibilities and forming an alternative social community different than modern society.

On the other hand, the content of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, is reflecting our real world. The Avatar world is similar to ours, until the modern ages. It is medieval but the story is based on how things became different than ours. It is a parallel universe that there is a great war by the Fire Nation over the rest of the people. There is colonialism and imperialism. There is the beginning of industrial age and there is environmental pollution. The series does not show all these aspects to criticize our modern world as a primary objective. It is the way it is. It is the Avatar World and things happen in that way. The things in the Avatar World happened in a way that imperialism, colonialism was stopped and the balance and harmony of the world restored by the Avatar Aang. As a result the world is saved.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion fantasy is a phenomenon of the transformation of the modern society by constructing alternative communities based on alternative universes. While doing that, fantasy is closely connected with the real world. In its realm, fantasy is suggesting a constructive perspective for the existing self-destructive process on the world. By expressing the complicated historical processes of the real world like colonialism, imperialism and environmental disasters, fantasy practice is providing a more humane understanding of the world. Fantasy products are based upon mythic archetypes and they have a restorative impact on the restless psychological conditions of modern individual.

Fantasy phenomenon is one of the most significant developing and expanding enclaves or "up-cultures" of contemporary era. It is reconstructing the collapsed pre-modern values through a perennial mental state in a new environment. Fantasy has a rehabilitative function in the rational entrapment of individual. It proposes that as things are different there, things could be different here. Since it is not isolated from the modern life, it creates the opportunity to evaluate modernity in a new and more comprehensible way. Fantasy is providing 'life-supporting illusions' for individual. It generates an ontologically secure lifeworld offering a total meaning in life through values of friendship, fidelity, romance.

Fantasy, being part of Romanticism, is serving to the establishment of a creative vision for psychic equilibration and social interaction. The intellectual background of fantasy clearly shows that Enlightenment is the dominant model of interpretation of the world, and fantasy as evaluated non-real or childish is expanding a new interpretation of world different than the hegemony of Enlightenment.

Fantasy reader or audience is constructing communities without questioning the reality of alternative universes. The distorted modern individual is establishing relationship through mediaeval stories of friendship, fidelity, romance, magic and transcendental experiences in online communities. These online communities are providing individual activism, interpreting, producing culture and establishing alternative communities.

Fantasy practice based on Avatar is an example of intercivilizational relations. Contrary to orientalist approach, in Avatar, Eastern components are innate nature of the universe. Although Western speech and cultural references are dominant, Eastern philosophies are blended as inherent aspects, not exotic. Therefore Avatar sets a significant example of the nonhierarchical relationship between East and West. Moreover, through the restoration of the balance to world, series promotes the traditional worldviews that are respectful to nature, world and humans.

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Figure 1: Map of the Avatar Universe