

REDEFINING FRIENDS AND ENEMIES IN BRITISH FANTASY: SIDEKICKS AND
ANTI-SIDEKICKS IN *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* AND THE *HARRY POTTER*
SERIES

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a Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of

English

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in English

By

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ABSTRACT

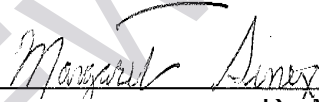
This thesis project examines characters in British fantasy through a sidekick and anti-sidekick lens, specifically focusing on *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* series. Before analyzing events in these texts, I first define the fantasy genre, the traditional hero and the fairy-tale hero, and the sidekick trope. These definitions are important to establish because the characters deemed heroes, Frodo Baggins and Harry Potter, are not traditional heroes; they are fairy-tale heroes who cannot be successful without their sidekicks. In Chapter 1, I analyze Samwise Gamgee, from *The Lord of the Rings*, and Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, from the *Harry Potter* series, as sidekicks—ones who fill the sidekick trope and prove they are necessities to their respective stories. While many readers and fans regard these three characters as merely friends, these characters prove useful to the overall story and provide insight into the British fantasy genre. In Chapter 2, I examine Gollum, from *The Lord of the Rings*, and Draco Malfoy, from the *Harry Potter* series, as anti-sidekicks—ones who do not have their fairy-tale heroes' best interests in mind, but are essential to their heroes and their heroes' missions. Both of these anti-sidekicks are complex; they fulfill characteristics of the sidekick trope, but they are never friendly or care for their respective heroes. After thorough examination, I come to the conclusion that these anti-sidekicks are a clear blueprint of what their fairy-tale heroes could have become. An in-depth analysis of these British fantasy stories through the sidekick and anti-sidekick lens provides an enhanced reading of these texts, coming to a new, insightful conclusion of characters who are often cast aside.

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis by ERICA L. SALMONSON is accepted in its present form by the Department of ENGLISH of Western Illinois University as satisfying the thesis requirements for the degree Master of Arts in English.



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INTRODUCTION

Literature contains a set of characters who take their readers on an adventure from the first page to the last. No matter the genre, readers create a relationship with these characters. Many novels have a set of main characters who influence the story, even if they are supplemental. Most stories only have one protagonist, who holds a certain title or chooses to lead a mission. The hero archetype is a protagonist who saves the day for mankind and restores society to its natural state. Society has deemed these characters heroes because of their strength, bravery, and courage to combat evil.

These heroes complete tasks and defeat evil, but they still have friends by their side who help them. Through research and literary theory, critics have coined these friends sidekicks. The hero/sidekick pair is a common trope in popular culture, whether it's Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Sherlock Holmes and John Watson, or Batman and Robin. Although these heroes surround themselves with their sidekicks, many sidekicks fulfill monotonous duties, which is why heroes are admired, and sidekicks are usually cast aside by audiences.

The term hero is problematic because of how society has constructed the hero. When one thinks of a hero, of course he thinks of someone who saves the day and restores order, specifically a superhero. Superhero stories have provided our culture with an immense amount of characters and narratives to root for. These superheroes are larger than life and society admires them because they contain qualities normal human beings don't have.

These characteristics of the superhero influence how readers view heroes in general. As popular culture has shown us, there are many heroes in literature who have powers the natural person would never be able to acquire. They perform pivotal duties on their own and are so unlike the readers that readers wish to be them; other heroes are not as strong, and, perhaps, need to rely on others to fulfill their duties.

Different heroes reside in different genres of literature. Although superhero comics, mysteries, and detective novels contain the hero figure, society has left the heroes of British fantasy in the dark. Superhero, detective, and mystery genres are immensely popular but so are the fantasy works of J.R.R. Tolkien and J.K. Rowling. The conception of the hero and the hero's friends in British fantasy are important areas of study that many have overlooked.

Both *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* series illustrate rich, dynamic fantasy worlds and include complex characters that make the stories stimulating and worthwhile. Readers cannot help but fight for Harry Potter and his beloved friends, as well as Frodo Baggins and the fellowship against all the evils that exist in these worlds. Although Frodo is the sole owner of the One Ring and Harry is the "boy who lived," these heroes' partners, friends, and, what I prove, sidekicks, are necessities to their journeys.

Samwise Gamgee, Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger are viewed as dear friends to Harry. The bond between friend and hero in these stories is undeniable; however, these friends are more than friends. These characters are sidekicks, who are necessities to Harry and the overall series. Without Sam, Ron, and Hermione, Frodo and Harry would not have been successful on their journeys throughout Middle-earth and the

wizarding world.

Furthermore, Gollum and Draco Malfoy, important characters in both *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* Series, are pivotal to their heroes' missions. Although both Gollum and Draco contain characteristics of the villain archetype, I plan to prove, like Sam, Ron, and Hermione, Gollum and Draco are pivotal to Frodo and Harry's journeys, and thus are coined anti-sidekicks.

While focusing on Sam, Ron, Hermione, Gollum, and Draco, I enter various dialogues of what fantasy really means as a genre, the conception of the hero in British fantasy, the definition of a sidekick in popular culture, and the importance of reading characters of fantasy as sidekicks and anti-sidekicks. We need these characters to tell the entire story of both *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* series. The dialogue between hero and sidekick, as well as hero and anti-sidekick, and the ways in which the sidekick and anti-sidekick influence the hero are important in showing audiences a different aspect of the fantasy world which is rich and complex. The sidekicks and anti-sidekicks not only help readers understand the hero's quest, but also flesh out the fantasy world that is so popular to so many readers.

Exploring the Genre of Fantasy

J.R.R. Tolkien remains one of the most celebrated authors in the world today, as his most famous work, *The Lord of the Rings*, has been translated into most of the world's major languages; J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series set consumer records for the most copies sold in a single day.¹ Fantasy literature permeates the world to such an extent

¹ Mendlesohn, Farah, and Edward James. *A Short History of Fantasy*. Libri Publishing, 2012.

it is hard for one to escape it. Although fantasy literature has grown in popularity (with fan fiction, cinema, theatre, etc.), many scholars disagree on how the fantasy genre should be defined and what texts should be allowed within the fantasy canon.

Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James, two of the most notable scholars of fantasy literature, declare, in their book *A Short History of Fantasy*, the fantasy genre is a genre constructed and founded on the notion that the contents are impossible and cannot be explained. Moreover, these critics point out the common error of fantasy and science fiction being used interchangeably. Science fiction “may deal with the impossible, but [it] regards everything as explicable,” states Mendlesohn and James (3).

After the initial construction and agreement that fantasy deals with the inexplicable and impossible, the definition of fantasy becomes hazy. There are only a handful of theorists interested in fantasy literature, due to many scholars not taking fantasy literature seriously. From seeing fantasy as an escape from the real world, to deciding what is real and unreal, scholars can agree on one proclamation: “they understand fantasy as a conversation that is happening, as we write, between the authors of the texts and the readers” (4-5). J.R.R. Tolkien strongly believed in an author’s ability to create stories. Tolkien states, in his essay “On Fairy Stories,”

The story-maker proves a successful ‘sub-creator.’ He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. (132)

Both Tolkien and Rowling create dynamic worlds comprised of complex characters.

Without the complexity of the sidekick and anti-sidekick, these stories would not meet Tolkien’s requirements, and the art would fail.

Along with Tolkien's proclamations made of the fantasy genre in "On Fairy Stories," Mendlesohn and James' theoretical texts prove useful in defining fantasy. Mendlesohn and James reference John Clute's *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, which constructs and defines fantasy grammatical terms that reveal narrative techniques and tropes. The most informative and important of the grammar sets is the idea of the full fantasy in which the work passes through wrongness, thinning, recognition, and healing. For example, some type of evil emerges (wrongness), the current state, or world, is affected by the wrongness (thinning), the protagonists recognize that the evil needs to be destroyed (recognition), and, finally, the wrongness demands the current state to be restored (healing) (4). Both Tolkien and Rowling's texts use Clute's narrative model to construct their plots.

Along with explaining narrative techniques and tropes, Mendlesohn argues there are four distinct modes of fantasy: portal quest (protagonist enters a new world, which is the fantastic world), the immersive (the protagonist is already a part of the fantastic world), the intrusion (the fantastic world seeps into the primary world), and the liminal (magic may or may not be happening). These modes are defined by the ways in which the fantastic enters the text and the rhetorical choices used to construct these differing worlds.² These modes prove useful in critiquing different fantasy works, rather than looking at fantasy through a realistic lens. Although critics have proved the fantasy genre hard to define, it is important to discuss narrative tropes and common rhetorical devices used in this genre. With the help of Tolkien, Clute, and Mendlesohn, readers can grasp the basics of the fantasy genre, which is found to be rather controversial.

² J.R.R. Tolkien imagined *The Lord of the Rings* as a mythology for the English people. The *Harry Potter* series is a portal quest.

Defining the Hero: Frodo Baggins and Harry Potter as Fairy-Tale Heroes

Using John Clute's grammatical terms that construct a common plot structure in fantasy stories, one can uncover the plot rather easily. The structure in both *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* series follow Clute's wrongness, thinning, recognition, and healing. Since these stories fit the quest trope where evil needs to be defeated, it is important to first define the British fantasy hero, who is combating evil, to understand the importance of his sidekicks and anti-sidekicks. In this trope, Middle-earth and the wizarding world experience an evil uprising, problems begin to arise from this evil immersing, the characters find it necessary to defeat the evil, and, ultimately, the evil is defeated and the world is healed. Defeating evil requires the characters to go on some type of quest. The quest story is immensely popular in fiction and is explained further by Joseph Campbell's structure of the hero's journey.

Although the hero's journey is coined from traditional quest stories and epics, this narrative structure is common in many genres, where evil is lurking around every corner. Because of this evil or danger, the protagonist, from an ordinary world, is called on an adventure, which is first refused but then accepted. Thus, the protagonist ventures on a journey into the unknown with the help of a guide or an aide. The protagonist and his helpers are tested physically, mentally, and spiritually, and then are rewarded by defeating evil and journeying home. Both Frodo and Harry enter worlds that are unknown to them.

There are many archetypes found within the hero's Journey. For example, there are the heroes, shadows (villains), mentors, tricksters, and allies. Many of these characters are prevalent in stories, and this formula undermines their influence on

narrative movement and character development. If readers find a story to fit the formula, why would they delve deeper into each of the character's uniqueness? I believe this thought process is perhaps why many audiences don't value the efforts of the sidekicks and anti-sidekicks; they see the story in its entirety as a formula.

As I delve deeper into the characteristics of the quest, I will turn to W. H. Auden, who defines the quest hero in his article "The Quest Hero." He claims there are two types of quest heroes. The first type is the hero of the epic: "His superior *arête* is manifest to all" (37). *Arête* means excellence or goodness in Greek. One prime example of the hero of the epic would be Aragorn in *The Lord of the Rings*. Aragorn is strong, smart, loyal, brave, and courageous, which is why every character, besides Boromir, trusts him. The characters yield to his leadership because he is the classic hero. Marion Zimmer Bradley, in her article "Men, Halflings, and Hero Worship," gives good insight into the character of Aragorn, "he is the *born hero*—son of a long line of kings, born to achieve great deeds in his time" (83). Characters follow him because he contains positive, supreme qualities that they themselves do not contain.

Auden claims that the second type of quest hero, who resides in fairy-tales, is the hero "whose *arête* is concealed. The youngest son, the weakest, the least clever, the one whom everybody would judge as least likely to succeed, turns out to be the hero when his manifest betters have failed" (37). Frodo's *arête* is not obvious, since he is a hobbit; although, Gandalf has faith in Frodo because he has seen his uncle, Bilbo, do great things. Harry's *arête* is known by everyone in the wizarding world because he is the "boy who lived"; however, Harry doesn't know this and, since he is young, survives through the help of his sidekicks and anti-sidekicks. The fairy-tale heroes' betters would be

Gandalf, Aragorn, or Dumbledore. Respectively, these characters either know they would succumb to the power of the One Ring or understand that they do not have the power to defeat the presented evil. Katherine Grimes also gives good insight into the fairy-tale hero, in her article “Harry Potter: Fairy Tale Prince, Real Boy, and Archetypal Hero.” She states, “Our fairy and folk tale heroes suffer, struggle, and triumph...Rowling’s books show young Harry at least temporarily triumphs over those who would destroy him and those he loves, although he cannot always save the people around him” (98). Both Frodo and Harry struggle throughout their missions, which is why Sam, Ron, Hermione, Gollum, and Draco’s presence are so important. These heroes are not perfect, not larger than life, and they need sidekicks and anti-sidekicks to help them.

Although Frodo and Harry are not weak, they are young at the beginning of the stories. It is important to note that both characters accept roles they do not fully understand when they are young. Christopher Wrigley, in his book *Return of the Hero*, states, “These epic tales begin with childhood, but they do not stay there...” (3). Harry is young at the beginning of the series and ages throughout the series; Frodo’s growth cycle is different because he is a hobbit. Hobbit stature is viewed as weak because they are so short; they mimic young boys because of their height, although, when Frodo accepts the One Ring from Gandalf, he is still “in his *tweens*, as the hobbits called the irresponsible twenties between childhood and coming of age at thirty-three” (Book 1 21). Both characters have attributes that work against them. Frodo is a hobbit and Harry remains a teenager throughout the series. With these qualities, readers may view these heroes as weak; however, instead of viewing them as weak, readers must view them as who they are, not as a middle-aged, insanely strong Batman, but as heroes in their own ways. These

fairy-tale heroes owe their successes to the people who are determined and want to help them. They can accept their help because they are humble enough to do so, since they are not larger than life like their superhero counterparts.

A very popular opinion is to look at Harry and Frodo as heroes, because they are main characters who ultimately defeat evil; however, this assignation becomes problematic when we define Harry and Frodo compared to Batman or Sherlock Holmes. The hero cannot be an umbrella term. If audiences read these protagonists as the typical hero, they read the supplemental characters as stereotypes, instead of who they truly are and their importance to the story as a whole. The friends, enemies, professors, etc. fit a stereotypical mold in these novels containing a hero; however, Frodo and Harry are not superheroes. They are fairy-tale heroes. This definition changes the way audiences read the novel, the main characters, and the supplemental characters. Because Frodo and Harry are not larger than life, they need characters to help them out. It is undeniable that Sam, Hermione, and Ron are friends of Frodo and Harry, and Gollum and Draco are enemies, respectively. They fit those molds, but those are superficial readings. A closer read shows how these characters are a necessity to their stories and their heroes, for their heroes to complete their missions.

From *Don Quixote* to *Nancy Drew*: Defining the Sidekick in Popular Culture

When readers think of cartoons, comics, superheroes, or mysteries, they think of Batman and Sherlock Holmes. These characters are the first to come to mind and for good reason. These stories are extremely popular among a variety of audiences. Batman and Holmes represent the strong, intelligent, unique character that readers would like to become but never can; however, the audience can relate to their sidekicks because they