

On Divergence in Fantasy

(dissertation)

Stranger, I

(a novel)

Thesis for Master of Arts (Honours) in English Literature

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May 2006

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Acknowledgments

Thank you to Professor Tony Cousins for unfailing encouragement and support, for always having time, and for your erudite and wise advice.

And thank you to those inspired and inspiring writers Jeni Mawter, Alan Mills, Sue Murray and Pauline O'Carolan, whose support has been bedrock.

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Abstract

This thesis is in two parts, a paper *On Divergence in Fantasy* (dissertation component) and a novel *Stranger, I* (creative component).

On Divergence in Fantasy explores the ways in which fantasy criticism continually redefines its boundaries, without arriving at agreement. The paper draws on Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* to suggest that these disputes and dispersions are not so much a *problem* of fantasy criticism as they are *characteristic* of its operation as a discursive formation.

Stranger, I is young adult fantasy novel which explores the themes of identity, difference and relationship to the natural world. The youthful hero Avi must leave a version of a classic fantasy world: a medievalist society with rigid divisions based on family and guild allegiances. Avi's quest is to smuggle vital knowledge beyond the control of the oppressive Alliance of Kai. His journey takes him deep into the unknown landscape of the planet Kai, where he discovers the hidden lives of the Strangers and the secrets of his own past.

Statement

This thesis comprises a dissertation and a novel (creative component).

The dissertation comprises approximately 30% of the submission.

The thesis is my own original work and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Word count:

Dissertation: 27,000 words approximately (without quotes or references)

Novel: 80,000 words approximately.

Preface

Stranger, I is young adult fantasy novel which has been written with publication as its goal. To a degree, it therefore works within the conventions of the genre and perceived expectations of the marketplace. However it also breaks with convention in some important respects (which will be apparent on reading). Without “giving away” the story, it can be mentioned that the boundary between fantasy and science fiction has not been observed. Such a boundary has not been fixed in the history of either genre where such cross-overs have been common, but by (a) critical insistence on exclusive definitions and (b) a commercially stronger market for young adult fantasy than science fiction.

During the early stages of writing *Stranger, I*, several people advised that a work which appeared to be science fiction would be unpublishable in the current climate where fantasy predominates. In these discussions, many differences emerged between the author’s perception of fantasy (for example, that it could take place within a technological or futuristic society and not merely in a pre-industrial one) and those of others either writing or reading within the science fiction or fantasy areas. The vehement insistence in various conversations that fantasy is or is not this or that other thing prompted reflection on the nature of fantasy and the research leading to *On Divergence in Fantasy*.

It is also worth noting that in accordance with the realities of commercial publishing (stand-alone fantasy works are rarely published), *Stranger, I* is established as the first book of a trilogy. Some narrative elements are therefore present to establish later books, and are deliberately undeveloped in this initial work.