Finding a critical language in which to speak about children's fantasy texts is not as straightforward as might first appear. Children's literature, as a younger and poorer relation of English literature, has inevitably been the recipient of critical and theoretical hand-me-downs, many of which are entirely appropriate to their tasks, but some less so. Among discussions of the genre, the theories of Todorov and, in the Anglo-Saxon world, of Tolkien may be taken to represent characteristic approaches, and neither seems entirely appropriate to the discussion of children's texts.

Todorov's location of fantasy midway between the two literary modes of "the pure uncanny" and "the pure marvellous" enables him to characterize it in terms of the radical uncertainty which opens up at that midpoint. Just what are we to make, for example, of the ghosts—and a good deal more—in Henry James's *Turn of the Screw*? This kind of question however is unproductive and inappropriate for children's fantasy texts. Young readers are hardly ever left long in the disturbing uncertainty which Todorov regards as criterial for the genre; the vast majority of their texts belong to what he designates as "the marvellous."

An essay "On Fairy Tales," by a renowned storyteller, might be expected to offer a more amenable approach. While Tolkien's "three faces" of fantasy—"the Mystical," "the Magical," and "the Mirror of scorn and pity towards Man"—are certainly not antithetical to the character of children's texts, when tested against children's responses their relevance begins to look less unproblematic. Children can and do read texts with a "Mystical" dimension and texts which hold up...
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Kenneth Grahame, The Wind in the Willows

Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels

Charles Kingsley, The Water Babies

"the Mirror of scorn and pity towards Man," but "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn" is just the chapter in The Wind in the Willows which young readers are inclined to skip, and the diminutive size of the Lilliputians, rather than their satiric function, is what interests and delights children who read Gulliver's Travels. The "Magical" face is a different matter but equally problematic, since, while in content it may be said to represent just what interests and delights children, it can hardly be conceived as, for children, "the refreshment and renewal of perception." Upon them "shades of the prison house" have, one hopes, not yet quite closed!

If major discussions like these fail to provide us with a critical language appropriate to children's fantasy texts, perhaps all that can be attempted is a categorization of those texts which, on the basis of some contrast with realism, seem to make up the genre (animal tales, fairy tales, nonsense, "high fantasy," etc.). Categorizing of this kind, however, provides no more than lists of typical ingredients and conventions for each of the subgenres—when, for academic and professional purposes, what we are looking for is a disclosure of fundamental structures in texts and related reading responses.

Further, categorizing of this kind may well involve a covert privileging of what is often, and not insignificantly, referred to as "high fantasy." There are interesting discussions of this subgenre—doubtless came immediately to the reader's mind when, in the first sentences, I talked about the lack of a critical language. High fantasy does not, however, constitute the whole of children's fantasy literature, and the conceptual framework for its discussion cannot comprehend that range and diversity. When Cohen, for example, deploys a "high fantasy" model, he has to concede, "There are some tales which because of the mixture of fantastic elements used are extremely difficult to label. Some Victorian fantasy, such as The Water Babies, falls outside the more usual sub-genres." This is an admission of defeat. Kingsley's text certainly comprehends a rum assortment of materials and varieties of discourse, but this should not obscure its fecund authenticity and centrality as a children's fantasy text. It works not merely on account of its marvelous underwater world, but because it is also a bran tub of jokes, games, stories, and quaint inventions. Any model or conceptualization must be complete and discriminating enough to comprehend texts as diverse as those of, say, Kingsley and Kipling, Masefield, Ted Hughes, and Roald Dahl.

To this end, I propose an anatomy. This is, of course, a naming of parts, but it is more: It aims to describe their functional relationship. Further, in its reference to the body, it is, as I shall suggest, particularly apposite to the human experiences fundamental to children's