

# Students spend more knights with elves, fairies

Fairies, hobbits, elves and knights are the magical stuff of children's stories and illustrations. The myth and folklore underlying the tales, however, illicit a deep, sympathetic response from not only children, but adults.

If the brisk sale of fantasy posters, cards and fantasy fiction to college students and adults is any indication, not just children are reading the books and admiring the illustrations.

A trend today reveals a paradox: A growing violence in children's books, and an increase in adult fantasy titles.

### Adults seek escape

While young protagonists struggle to cope with alienation, drugs, premarital sex and suicide, adults seem to seek meaning or, in contrast, thoughtless escape, in by-gone eras or fantasy worlds.

Fantasy is an exploration or manipulation of reality, not escapism, according to English Professor Gene Hardy, who teaches two classes of children's literature.

People seeking answers to existence, Hardy said, find a deeper, original reality in fantasy.

### Personal forces

He added that good and evil are personal, never vague, forces in fantasy. There is a sense that providence and meaning exist.

Alexander partly attributes the growing fascination with fantasy to a "weariness of always being 'cool'". We can "laugh harder, weep longer" he said.

Hardy dates the revival of the fantasy genre to the rediscovery in the 1960s of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Over 100,000 copies a year are still being sold he said.

Adults and children are buying and reading the same books, Hardy said, adding that the division



between adult and children's fantasy literature is arbitrary—all ages share the works together.

Mary Somerville, children's coordinator for the Lincoln Public Libraries, said that adults, including many college students, are becoming less hesitant to seek and read good children's books.

### Mystical fiction

Somerville said that she sees a movement away from dry, realistic fiction, and toward mystical or personal fiction.

Hardy noted that this movement was evident in the enrollments for his English Children's Literature classes. In 1972 thru 73, the class attracted 18 students, he said. Two hundred students enrolled this semester.

Fantasy zealots are not limited to the printed page. Illustrations of turn of the century artists can be found in reissued anthologies, calendars, book

marks and note paper.

Companies, like California's Green Tiger Press, specialize in reprints of the illustrations of Howard Pyle, Arthur Rackham and Beatrix Potter.

Bill Cummins, a buyer for Nebraska Bookstore, said that the lines of fantasy and nostalgia reprint posters are very popular with university students.

### Pleasing art

Besides their appeal as meticulous, pleasing art, Somerville said, many of the illustrations include a tremendous use of color and magical, fantastic scenes.

This colorful imagery, she said, may be connected to the popularity created by the "White Rabbit" imagery and psychedelics of the 1960s' drug scene.

Fantasy is also closely associated with the revival of mysticism and spiritualism, she said.

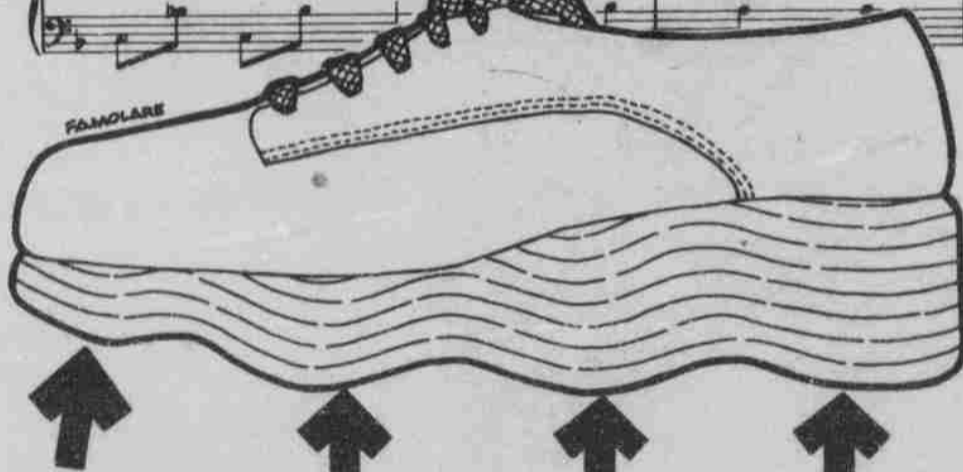
People are turning to visionary art, Somerville said, as well as visionary literature, and away from nihilistic realism.

Hardy said that he thinks there is a difference between the posters, like Maxfield Parrish's, which appeal simply to nostalgia and sentimentalism, and the person seriously reading fantasy.

Paradoxical movements are afoot simultaneously he said. Students are searching for meanings, exploring spiritualism and alternative states of mind at a time of romantic escapism and nostalgia.



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