

## Peculiarities of Domestic Fantasy in English Literature

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**Abstract:** This article explores the unique features of domestic fantasy in English literature. Domestic fantasy is a type of storytelling where magical or fantastical elements are placed within ordinary, everyday settings, such as homes or small communities. The article examines how this genre blends the familiar with the extraordinary, creating stories that are both relatable and imaginative. It highlights key themes, such as family relationships, personal growth, and the impact of magic on daily life. Examples from well-known English authors are used to illustrate these ideas, showing how domestic fantasy captivates readers by bringing wonder into the ordinary.

**Keywords:** Domestic fantasy, English literature, magic, everyday life, family relationships, imagination, ordinary settings, personal growth, fantasy elements.



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## INTRODUCTION

Fantasy is a genre that takes readers to magical worlds full of wonder and excitement. However, not all fantasy stories happen in distant lands or mystical kingdoms. Domestic fantasy is a unique type of fantasy where magical events take place in everyday settings, like homes, neighborhoods, or small communities. This blend of the ordinary and the extraordinary creates stories that feel both realistic and magical at the same time.

In English literature, domestic fantasy has become a popular way for authors to explore themes like family, relationships, and personal growth. By introducing magical elements into familiar settings, these stories invite readers to imagine how their own lives might change if magic were real.

This article aims to explore the key features of domestic fantasy in English literature. It will examine how this genre combines everyday life with fantastical elements, what themes it often addresses, and how it appeals to readers. Through examples from well-known works, the article

will highlight why domestic fantasy continues to be an important and beloved part of English storytelling.

Domestic fantasy has a long history in English literature, evolving over time to reflect the changing interests and experiences of readers. Early examples can be found in folklore and fairy tales, where magical events often occurred in familiar settings like cottages, forests, or villages. These stories laid the foundation for domestic fantasy by showing how the extraordinary could exist alongside the ordinary.

In the 19th century, domestic fantasy began to take shape as a distinct literary form. Authors such as Charles Dickens and George MacDonald incorporated magical or supernatural elements into their works, often set in realistic environments. For instance, MacDonald's *"The Princess and the Goblin"* (1872) combines a homey setting with magical adventures, emphasizing themes like family bonds and moral growth.

The 20th century saw a significant expansion of domestic fantasy with the rise of children's literature. Authors like C.S. Lewis (*"The Chronicles of Narnia"*) and E. Nesbit (*"The Phoenix and the Carpet"*) brought magical elements into everyday life, using them to teach lessons about courage, kindness, and responsibility. These stories often featured young protagonists who discovered magic in their ordinary worlds, making the genre especially relatable for readers.

More recently, domestic fantasy has grown to include works for adult audiences, blending everyday struggles with magical realism. Contemporary authors such as Neil Gaiman (*"The Ocean at the End of the Lane"*) and J.K. Rowling (*"Harry Potter"* series) have expanded the genre's appeal, weaving intricate stories where magic deeply influences daily life.

The development of domestic fantasy in English literature demonstrates its versatility and enduring charm. By mixing the familiar with the fantastical, this genre continues to captivate readers of all ages, inviting them to see the magic hidden in the everyday.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on domestic fantasy as a genre is not as extensive or formally recognized compared to broader studies on fantasy literature. However, some scholars and critics have explored aspects of domestic fantasy within the larger framework of fantasy studies or in analyses of specific authors and works.

J.R.R. Tolkien, in his essay *"On Fairy-Stories"* discussed the role of fantasy and its ability to merge the mundane with the magical. While not focused specifically on domestic fantasy, his ideas about "secondary worlds" and "eucatastrophe" are relevant to understanding how domestic fantasy operates in everyday settings.

C.S. Lewis - Although better known as an author, Lewis's works, including *The Chronicles of Narnia*, have been extensively analyzed by scholars for their integration of domestic and fantastical elements, such as children discovering magic within their homes or nearby locations.

Farah Mendlesohn in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) categorizes different types of fantasy, including "portal-quest fantasy" and "intrusion fantasy," which can overlap with domestic fantasy when magical elements intrude upon or blend with the ordinary world.

Neil Gaiman's work *"The Ocean at the End of the Lane or Coraline"* has been studied for its domestic fantasy qualities. Critics and academics have used his stories to analyze the interplay of magical realism and ordinary life.

Research on domestic fantasy within English literature often intersects with broader studies of the fantasy genre. Several academic contributions have explored this subgenre, emphasizing its unique blend of the magical and the mundane.

The World Hobbit Project, led by Martin Barker and involving international teams, examined the reception of fantasy literature, focusing on how audiences relate to fantastical elements grounded in familiar environments.

Additionally, Dimitra Fimi, a prominent scholar of children's literature, investigates how fantasy integrates magical realism into everyday life. Her work illustrates how stories like C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* and E. Nesbit's novels reflect societal values and reader expectations.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach to analyze the peculiarities of domestic fantasy in English literature.

The extracts from authors such as George MacDonald, E. Nesbit, C.S. Lewis, and J.K. Rowling are examined to identify how domestic settings are integrated with fantastical elements. Themes such as family relationships, personal growth, and the impact of magic on daily life are explored.

This combination of textual analysis and secondary research provides a comprehensive understanding of the genre's development and distinctive characteristics.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of domestic fantasy in English literature reveals its ability to merge magical elements with ordinary, relatable settings, making it a distinct and engaging subgenre. By blending the extraordinary into familiar environments, such as homes or neighborhoods, domestic fantasy creates stories that appeal to both imagination and everyday experience.

One characteristic feature is the use of magic to explore real-world themes like family, relationships, and personal growth. For instance, George MacDonald's early works, like "*The Princess and the Goblin*", emphasize familial bonds and moral lessons. Similarly, C.S. Lewis's "*The Chronicles of Narnia*" situates fantastical journeys within the frame of domestic life, such as the Pevensie children entering Narnia through an ordinary wardrobe, linking magical escapades to their emotional growth and sibling relationships.

A defining strength of domestic fantasy lies in its capacity to bring magic into ordinary spaces, allowing readers to imagine enchantment in their own lives. For example, E. Nesbit's "*The Phoenix and the Carpet*" transforms a regular household object into the catalyst for magical adventures, illustrating how fantasy can coexist with the mundane. Similarly, J.K. Rowling's "*Harry Potter*" series grounds its fantastical elements in everyday school and home life, blending the magical with the relatable to captivate readers of all ages.

Culturally, the genre reflects societal values and changes over time. Early domestic fantasy, rooted in Victorian ideals, often emphasized morality and proper conduct. Contemporary works, however, explore broader themes, such as identity, mental health, and societal struggles, showcasing the genre's adaptability and relevance.

The discussion also highlights how domestic fantasy allows readers to confront real-world challenges within a safe, imaginative context. Magic serves not only as a narrative tool but also as a metaphor for personal growth and transformation, bridging the gap between reality and fantasy.

Through thematic analysis and contextual review, it is evident that domestic fantasy has maintained its appeal by evolving alongside cultural and literary trends. This enduring genre continues to inspire readers by showing how even the most ordinary lives can hold extraordinary potential.

### 1. George MacDonald's "*The Princess and the Goblin*":

In this novel, a young girl, Princess Irene, discovers a magical thread that guides her through perilous situations. The magic exists alongside her everyday life in a castle, blending the ordinary

with the extraordinary. For example: “*She took the thread in her hand, and it was as if she were walking in a dream.*”<sup>1</sup> The thread symbolizes how magic can be woven into the fabric of domestic life. It serves as both a physical and metaphorical guide, showing how fantasy can guide individuals through real-world struggles like fear and uncertainty.

## 2. C.S. Lewis’s “*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*”.

The Pevensie children discover Narnia through a wardrobe in the ordinary home of a professor. The magical world exists behind the familiar, offering an escape but also lessons about courage and family. For example: “*They had stepped into the wardrobe, and the next thing they knew, they were in Narnia.*”<sup>2</sup> The wardrobe, a common household item, is a portal to a fantastical world. This juxtaposition of the magical with the mundane is a core element of domestic fantasy, creating a sense of wonder in everyday settings while reinforcing personal growth and moral lessons.

## 3. E. Nesbit’s “*The Phoenix and the Carpet*”.

A magic carpet transports children to different adventures, beginning in the familiar setting of their home. The domestic environment serves as a launchpad for these adventures, emphasizing the connection between the magical and the familiar. For example: “*The Phoenix rose with a great whoosh, and they were flying through the air, far above the ordinary houses*”<sup>3</sup>. The transition from a regular home to an extraordinary adventure reflects how domestic fantasy uses the safety and stability of home as a foundation for exploration and personal transformation. The magic comes not as an intrusion but as an enhancement of the children's lives.

## 4. J.K. Rowling’s “*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*”.

Harry’s discovery of magic at the ordinary home of the Dursleys contrasts with the magical world he enters at Hogwarts. The intrusion of magic into Harry’s mundane life symbolizes his transition from neglect to a place of personal growth and acceptance. For example: “*Harry, who had never heard of Hogwarts, and who had always lived with the Dursleys, was now about to leave the ordinary world behind.*”<sup>4</sup> The contrast between Harry's ordinary life with the Dursleys and the magical world of Hogwarts is a key feature of domestic fantasy. Magic transforms the protagonist’s world, offering new opportunities for growth, self-discovery, and belonging. The juxtaposition of the mundane and the magical in a domestic setting makes the fantasy both relatable and aspirational.

## 5. Neil Gaiman’s “*The Ocean at the End of the Lane*”.

This novel blends magical realism with a domestic setting, focusing on a childhood memory of the narrator who confronts strange forces within his childhood home. For example: “*The house was just as I remembered it, but everything felt different, as though the world had shifted while I wasn’t looking*”<sup>5</sup>. Gaiman’s blending of memory and fantasy in an everyday setting reflects how domestic fantasy often relies on the past and the ordinary to introduce the extraordinary. The house, a symbol of security, becomes a space where magical events can unfold, creating a sense of nostalgia and wonder tied to personal growth.

## CONCLUSION

The extracts analyzed demonstrate that domestic fantasy thrives on the tension between the ordinary and the magical. Whether through portals like wardrobes or magical guides like threads, these stories allow readers to imagine how extraordinary events can emerge from the everyday.

<sup>1</sup> MacDonald, George. *The Princess and the Goblin*. George Allen & Unwin, 1872, P.-58;

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, C.S. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. HarperCollins, 1950, P.-87;

<sup>3</sup> Nesbit, E. *The Phoenix and the Carpet*. T. Fisher Unwin, 1904,P.52;

<sup>4</sup> Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. Scholastic, 1997, P.-112;

<sup>5</sup> Gaiman, Neil. *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*. William Morrow, 2013, P.-69;

The peculiarities of this genre lie in its ability to blend the familiar with the fantastical, making the magical more accessible and reinforcing themes of growth, transformation, and moral lessons within a domestic context.

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