J R R Tolkien's lecture "On Fairy -Stories": The qualities of Tolkienian fantasy

Clyde Bryan Northrup
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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J. R. R. TOLKIEN'S LECTURE "ON FAIRY-STORIES":

THE QUALITIES OF TOLKIENIAN FANTASY

by

Clyde Bryan Northrup

Bachelor of Arts, Philosophy
Brigham Young University
1988

Bachelor of Arts, English
University of Idaho
1996

Master of Arts, English
University of Idaho
1998

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
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Doctor of Philosophy in English
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University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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The Dissertation prepared by

Clyde Bryan Northrup

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Dean of the Graduate College

Examination Committee Member

Examination Committee Member

Graduate College Faculty Representative
ABSTRACT

J. R. R. Tolkien’s Lecture “On Fairy-Stories”: The Qualities of Tolkienian Fantasy

by

Clyde Bryan Northrup

Dr. Megan Becker-Leckrone, Examination Committee Chair
Assistant Professor of English
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Critics of fantasy literature, since the publication of Tzvetan Todorov’s work on the fantastic, defining it in relation to reality, have tended toward defining fantasy literature as it violates reality, reader expectations, or the rules of the fictional world created by the narrative. This move on the part of these critics of fantasy has excluded what J. R. R. Tolkien wrote and named, “secondary world fantasy,” which is, fantasy that follows the rules established by the work’s author in creating an independent, “secondary world.” This strain of fantasy, called hereafter “Tolkienian fantasy,” has been ignored, for the most part, by the critics, and no critical framework exists for examining this kind of fantasy literature. Further, Tolkien’s 1939 lecture, “On Fairy-stories,” is viewed by fantasy critics as a statement of Tolkien’s aesthetics, rather than a critical framework for interpreting Tolkienian fantasy. This work will attempt to show that this lecture by Tolkien actually creates a framework for interpretation, the four qualities of Tolkienian fantasy, that will be applied later on to four contemporary fantasies by David Eddings, Roger Zelazny, Stephen R. Donaldson, and J. K. Rowling, along with Tolkien’s The Hobbit and The Lord of the...
Rings.

After surveying fantasy criticism from George MacDonald's late 19th Century essay to the present, we look at Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesy* and his place in fantasy criticism. Following the lead of Italian humanist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Sidney responds to critics of his day, arguing that the poet should not be subject to the restraints of reality, but rather, should be free to go as far as his or her imagination will carry him or her. He also borrows from neo-Platonist ideas as also Aristotle, creating a space for the poet to operate outside of the limits of our world. Joseph Addison's *Spectator* essays on the pleasures of the imagination, expands upon Sidney, noticing the power of words to create images of things not present, requiring a reader of equal imagination. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in his *Biographia Literaria*, posits that this ability to create on the part of the author is a reflection of the creative act of the divine creator who made man. Oscar Wilde's essay, “The Decay of Lying,” defends imaginative literature against the realists of his day, arguing for a return to the “art of lying,” which is the creation, through art, of “beautiful, untrue things.” Tolkien seems to respond to Wilde's challenge, picking of the threads of Sidney and Coleridge to explain his idea of “sub-creation” on the part of the author, who creates through writing secondary worlds that contain fragments of the “truth,” which is, for Tolkien, the truth of his Catholic beliefs in God and his creation of man. If the author does his work well then he creates in the reader “secondary belief” in the secondary world of the narrative, taking up Addison’s ideas and taking exception to Coleridge’s “willing suspension of disbelief.” The reader believes the created world is “real,” in the sense that it exists while the reader is “inside” the narrative world.

These ideas lead Tolkien to give the four qualities of a “fairy-story,” as he names them,
fantasy, recovery, escape, and consolation. As a quality of the fairy-story, fantasy consists of contrasting aspects—enchantment and ordinariness. The ordinariness of the narrative points back to the primary world of our daily existence, laying the foundation for moments of enchantment, the “magical” or “other-worldly” quality of the fairy-story. These contrasting aspects are shown as they operate within Tolkien’s stories as well as the four contemporary mentioned above. Recovery relates to ordinariness—the things taken for granted as we go about our lives—and these simple things recapture their “magic” by our seeing them within the narrative world. Escape allows us to remove ourselves from the miseries of daily life while at the same time freeing us from the limitations of our primary world. Consolation is the “happy ending” the sudden turn at the end that will not happen again, and in the consolation we see the echoes of primary reality, as we show with Tolkien’s stories, and the four contemporary fantasies.
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INTRODUCTION

TODOROVIAN FANTASTIC VERSUS TOLKIENIAN FANTASY:
A SURVEY OF TRENDS IN FANTASY CRITICISM

There is in fantasy criticism what we might call a "great divide"—a recognizable point where the direction of criticism changes. This is not to say that all criticism before or after this point is strictly the same; rather, we would say that at this particular moment in the criticism of fantasy literature, to use an old metaphor, there is a "fork" in the road, and straddling this juncture is the critical work of Tzvetan Todorov. Todorov's structuralist/formalist approach to defining the fantastic ties it directly to the "real," or the expectations of both character in the text and reader outside the text toward what is real and what is fantastic. The fantastic, for Todorov, becomes "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event," or more simply, a character or reader when confronted by something that appears to come from outside of the character's/reader's normal reality. In other words, is that ghost that I think I see an actual supernatural phenomenon—a product of physical laws not yet understood, or is it simply a product of my imagination? While the character/reader

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2Ibid., 25.
remains in this state of confusion, the fantastic operates, and once the character/reader
decides or discovers that the ghost is actually a sheet hanging over a coatrack and stirred
by the night breeze, the fantastic moment ends. The other possibility is that the
character/reader is somehow deranged or perhaps drugged, thinking that the hallucination
he sees is in reality a ghost. Thus, the fantastic is subject to some notion or idea of the
real and any sort of violation of this reality signals a fantastic moment.

This description is perhaps an oversimplification of Todorov’s idea of the fantastic but
will serve for the moment and the supposition about fantasy criticism that I begin with.
Critics of fantasy who follow Todorov, for the most part, use his definition of the fantastic
as either a foundation for their own examination of fantasy, or a touchstone that allows
them to move in their own direction. One example should illustrate this idea. Shortly
after the translation of Todorov’s work into English, fantasy critic Eric Rabkin proposed
that things become fantastic from a particular perspective: “The fantastic does more than
extend experience; the fantastic contradicts perspectives.” The fantastic element occurs
when “the perspective enforced by the ground rules of the narrative [is] diametrically
opposed.” This “perspective enforced by the ground rules” is related to Coleridge’s idea
of the “willing suspension of disbelief” that allows us, for the moment, to accept the
supernatural events presented in a text. Rabkin goes on to call this diametric opposition of

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4Ibid., 8.

5Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, (hereafter cited as *Biographia*)
ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, in *The Collected Works, ed. Kathleen Coburn*

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the ground rules the "dis-expected," and later adds that the "fantastic is a direct reversal of [those] ground rules, and therefore is in part determined by those ground rules." We can thus easily see echoes of the Todorovian fantastic in Rabkin's work on fantastic literature, although the "real" in Rabkin becomes the "real" established by the fantastic narrative.

A second, and more important for my purpose, result of this turning point in fantasy criticism is the exclusion of a whole category of fantasy literature. Because the Todorovian fantastic is subject to the "real," or perhaps a violation of the real, fantasy that creates its own, independent world, has no place within Todorov's framework. This type of fantasy, called by Colin Manlove "secondary world" fantasy, or as I will call it, a Tolkienian fantasy, after the most important fantasy author and critic of the 20th-century, has for its roots the Medieval Romance, which may go far to explain its marginalized position in contemporary criticism. From Samuel Johnson's early comments against romance in The Rambler to Edmund Wilson's infamous review of Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, literary critics continue to dismiss these works as juvenile, not worthy of

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6 Rabkin, 8, 14-15.


8 See Samuel Johnson, The Rambler, No. 4 reprinted in The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends, 2nd ed., Ed. by David H. Richter, (Boston: Bedford Books, 1998.), 220-23. Says Johnson, "These books are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions to life. They are the entertainment of minds unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible to impressions; not fixed by principles, and therefore easily following the current of fancy; not informed by experience, and consequently open to every false suggestion and partial account," 221.

9 Edmund Wilson, "Oo, Those Awful Orcs!" The Nation (April 14, 1956), reprinted in A Reader's Companion to The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings, (New
serious critical attention. Owing to Todorov's definition of the fantastic, fantasy critics, generally, continue to ignore secondary world, or Tolkienian, fantasy, excluding from their critical gazes the 19th-century pioneers of the genre--George MacDonald and William Morris--and 20th-century fantasists, C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and their inheritors/imitators.¹⁰

This shift in critical thinking toward fantasy—the exclusion of Tolkienian, or secondary world fantasy, has left the field open and fertile for critical examination. What these contemporary critics of fantasy fail to recognize are the sources for Tolkienian fantasy—the critical/theoretical works that Tolkien might have used directly or indirectly in working out his own theoretical framework for secondary world fantasy. In these critics' attempts to define fantasy literature with a Todorovian framework, they fail to account for, or even recognize, Tolkien's sources and so ignore the whole tradition of literary critics who lay the foundation for Tolkien's work. Further, they ignore Tolkien's essay, "On Fairy-Stories," that I will later show gives us the necessary framework for critical examination of this strain of fantasy literature. Thus, what I propose is first, to explore the roots of Tolkien's ideas for this strain of fantasy and follow this with a close examination of Tolkien's essay, tying his ideas directly to his critical roots, and establishing the

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York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1995.), 55-63. After asking why this work should elicit reviews that praise, Wilson writes: "The answer is, I believe, that certain people—especially, perhaps, in Britain, have a lifelong appetite for juvenile trash," 62-3.

¹⁰What is most intriguing about this split in fantasy criticism, is that at around the same time, Tolkienian fantasy moves from Britain to America—generally speaking—most of the secondary world fantasy written after Tolkien and Todorov is written in America. With a few notable exceptions, most British and European fantasy, post-Todorov, is subversive and psychological in nature, closely following the ideas of the Todorovian fantastic, again, generally speaking.
framework created for the critical examination of secondary world or Tolkienian fantasy. Therefore, I propose to use the rest of this introduction to survey fantasy criticism, beginning with George MacDonald’s 1893 preface to a collection of his fairy tales, entitled “The Fantastic Imagination,” to the present, reserving Tolkien’s seminal essay on fantasy for later. This survey should set the stage for a tracing of this other strain of fantasy criticism, beginning with what I will argue are its roots in the first English critic, Sir Philip Sidney’s *Defence of Poesy*, and in the aesthetics of Joseph Addison’s *Spectator* essays on the imagination. I will follow these with a chapter on Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*, and a chapter on Oscar Wilde’s essay, “The Decay of Lying,” exploring the place of both Coleridge and Wilde in fantasy theory. Finally, we will follow Wilde with a reading of Tolkien’s essay, “On Fairy-stories,” what I see as the culmination of the threads I have followed, showing how Tolkien used and revised the ideas of this group of critics to create his concepts of “sub-creation”—the imaginative work of the author—and “Secondary Belief”—what is created in the reader. I will then look at Tolkien’s four qualities of a fairy-story—a “Tolkienian fantasy,” as I have named it—beginning in Chapter 6 with the first quality of a fairy-story—“fantasy”—that consists of “hard recognition” and “arresting strangeness,” what we will refer to more simply as “ordinariness” and “enchantment,” respectively, along with examples of the operation of these contrasting aspects of “fantasy” in Tolkien’s creative works, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In Chapter 7, I will apply the contrasting aspects of this quality to four contemporary fantasies—Tolkienian fairy-stories—David Eddings’ *The Belgariad*, Roger Zelazny’s *Chronicles of Amber*, Stephen R. Donaldson’s *Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, Unbeliever*, and J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* Series. Chapter 8 will examine the next
two qualities of a fairy-story, "recovery" and "escape," showing the application of these qualities in Tolkien's works and the contemporary fairy-stories noted above. The final chapter will look at the final quality—"consolation" with its application to the fantasies listed above.

George MacDonald's short essay—"The Fantastic Imagination"—was added by the author to the 1893 publication of his fairy tales as a preface. In dialogue form, a form used by Wilde at about the same time, MacDonald answers a set of questions—probably ones that he had heard from critics for years—in a way that describes his idea of both fairy tales—not just for children, he will point out—and the authors who write them. He begins by noting that he prefers the German word Märchen to the English "fairy tale" as it is commonly translated—the German carries more of the older meaning of "fairy," going back to the sense of the term as used by Spenser in the 16th-century. He refuses to define fairy tale directly, but rather refers us to an 1811 German romance, Undine, by Friedrich Baron de la Morte Fouqué, then adds "that I should as soon think of describing the abstract human face, or stating what must go to constitute a human being. A fairy tale is just a fairy tale as a face is just a face." He further states that many refuse to define a man but have no problem saying what a man "ought to be," and he will not even attempt this action; he refers the reader to his own "poor" examples of fairy tales. He notes that many scholars "would feel sorely hampered if at liberty to use no forms but such as existed in nature, or to invent nothing save in accordance with the laws of the world of the senses;

but it must not therefore be imagined that they desire to escape from the region of law."

He then argues that the laws of the natural world "may suggest laws of other kinds," freeing the writer to "invent a little world of his own, with its own laws; for there is that in him which delights in calling up new forms—which is the nearest, perhaps, he can come to creation." In this declaration we see echoes of Sidney, Addison, and Coleridge who, as we will see later with all three, each argued that the writer through the power of his imagination is free to create a nature better than nature, or imagine worlds that imitate the creative act of the divine creator. MacDonald continues: "When such forms are new embodiments of old truths, we call them products of the Imagination; when they are mere inventions, however lovely, I should call them the work of the Fancy." Once this imaginary world has been invented through the author's creativity and pen, he must follow strictly the laws of that created world. Any deviation from the laws established causes the imagined world to fail: "To be able to live a moment in an imagined world, we must see the laws of its existence obeyed. Those broken, we fall out of it. . . . A man's invention may be stupid or clever, but if he do [sic] not hold by the laws of them, or if he make one law jar with another, he contradicts himself as an inventor, he is no artist." This idea seems to be fundamental to all Tolkienian fantasy, accepted by both writers and readers of these secondary created worlds. Tolkien, it seems, closely read this essay of MacDonald,

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12 Ibid., 5.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 6.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
for his own theory of the fairy-story reflects this same fundamental assumption, as we will see in Chapter 5. MacDonald goes on to argue that truth must be clothed in beauty, and beauty must grow in the soil of law. Imagination becomes the tailor that cuts the fabric to create beauty’s clothes, “and Fancy his journeyman that puts the pieces together. . . . Obeying laws, the maker works like his creator; not obeying laws, he is such a fool as heaps a pile of stones and calls it a church.”

MacDonald next poses a question about the meaning of a fairy tale and argues that it may have “some meaning”: “The beauty may be plainer in it then the truth, but without the truth the beauty could not be, and the fairytale would give us no delight. Everyone, however, who feels the story, will read its meaning after his own nature and development: one man will read one meaning in it, another will read another.” Therefore the question becomes, how will the reader know if she is getting the “right” meaning and not her own? MacDonald replies: “Why should you be so assured? It may be better that you should read your meaning into it. That may be a higher operation of your intellect than the mere reading of mine out of it; your meaning may be superior to mine.”

He goes on to argue that “[a] genuine work of art must mean many things, the truer its art, the more things it will mean. . . . If it does not wake an interest, throw it aside.” He also notes that fairy tales are not exclusively for children but the “childlike, whether five, or fifty, or seventy-

\[17\] Ibid.
\[18\] Ibid., 7.
\[19\] Ibid.
\[20\] Ibid.
Continuing to discuss the meaning of a fairy tale, he states that a fairy tale is not an allegory but could contain allegorical elements. He compares it to a sonata, which arouses common or related feelings in its hearers but not the same thoughts. His imaginary questioner objects to this idea, arguing that words are not like music, that words have definite meanings. In a post-modernist-like move, MacDonald notes that “[i]t is very seldom indeed that they [words] carry the exact meaning of any user of them! And if they can be so used as to convey definite meaning, it does not follow that they ought never to carry anything else. Words are live things that they may be variously employed to various ends.”

After describing the power of music, words, or natural phenomenon to move us, he adds that the “best thing you can do for your fellow, next to rousing his conscience is—not to give him things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him; or say, to make him think things for himself.”

The imaginary detractor then objects that this means a fairy tale can mean anything; MacDonald replies:

Not what he pleases, but what he can. If he be not a true man, he will draw evil out of the best. . . . If he be a true man, he will imagine true things; what matter whether I meant them or not? They are there none the less that I cannot claim putting them there! One difference between God’s work and man’s is, that, while God’s work cannot mean more than he meant, man’s must mean more than he meant. For in everything that God has made, there is layer upon layer of ascending significance; also he expresses the thought in higher and higher kinds of thoughts; it is God’s things, his embodied thoughts, which alone man has to use, modified and adapted to his own purpose, for the expression of his thoughts; therefore he cannot help his words and figures falling into such combinations in the mind of

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21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 8.
23 Ibid., 8-9.
another as he himself had not foreseen, so many are the thoughts allied to every other thought, so many are the relations involved in every figure, so many facts hinted in every symbol. A man may well himself discover truth in what he wrote; for he was dealing all the time with things that came from thoughts beyond his own.  

Even the structures of a fairy tale have a certain “tropic capacity” beyond which a person cannot go in finding its meaning. MacDonald also recognizes, as did Coleridge and as Tolkien will later, that the stories created in some way reflect the thoughts of the maker who created us. He concludes: “If any strain of my ‘broken music’ make a child’s eyes flash, or his mother’s grow for a moment dim, my labor will not have been in vain.”

In a chapter on fantasy from E. M. Forster’s 1927 Aspects of the Novel, Forster argues that “two forces” operate within a novel: the human and the non-human. The novel contains more than the lives and times of people or even the operation of fate. There is something that embraces these ideas, “something that cuts across them like a bar of light, that is intimately connected with them at one place and patiently illumines all their problems, and at another place shoots over or through them as if they did not exist. We shall give that bar of light two names, fantasy and prophecy,” which Forster discusses in separate chapters. Here he argues that fantasy makes a greater demand upon its reader: “[i]t asks us to pay something extra. It compels us to an adjustment that is different to an adjustment required by a work of art, to an additional adjustment. The other novelists say ‘Here is something that might occur in your lives,’ the fantasist says ‘Here’s something

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24Ibid., 9.

25Ibid., 10.

that could not occur. I must ask you first to accept my book as a whole, and, secondly, to accept certain things in my book." 27 This "additional investment," according to Forster, asks the reader to accept, for the duration of the novel, that things impossible will occur. Art operates according to its own laws and those laws do not have to be the laws of everyday life. When faced by an impossible thing in a work of art, the only question the reader should ask is "whether it is suitable to its book? . . . Once in the realm of the fictitious, what difference is there between an apparition and a mortgage?" 28 Forster points out that not all readers are willing to "pay extra," to make an adjustment in their thinking that will allow them to accept impossible things. Fantasy novels will contain gods, mythologies, and fairies—although he does not like the term—they also "have an improvised air, which is the secret of their charm." 29 He names Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* as the greatest fantasy novel, with its god "Muddle." Fantasy may contain the supernatural—another term he does not like—introduce a god, angel, or monster into ordinary life, or an ordinary man into a supernatural realm. Fantasy is not held to a specific time or place and can introduce the devices of parody or adaptation. He also notes that it can use an earlier mythology, then uses this supposition to classify as fantasy Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and Joyce's *Ulysses* for their use of *Pamela* and *The Odyssey* as their respective mythological frames. He also calls (in his introduction) Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* a fantasy for the way the text plays with our notions of time and place, a move

27 Ibid., 159.

28 Ibid., 159-60.

29 Ibid., 163.
which, for me, pushes his framework beyond the breaking point.

Skipping past Tolkien's 1939 essay, we next examine Jean Paul Sartre's 1955 essay on the fantastic, from a collection of Sartre's essays entitled *Literary and Philosophical Essays*. Sartre posits that it is not necessary for the fantastic to contain "extraordinary things." The fantastic, however, cannot be limited in this way. If it is present in a work, we will see, what he calls, "a reverse image of the union of the body and soul," such that the soul takes the body and vice-versa. He continues: "The fantastic thing is nature when she obeys the fairies; it is nature within and outside of man, perceived like a man turned inside out." In art, fantasy transcends the human, referring only to itself. However, in order for fantasy to fit within "the humanism of our time" it must "give up the exploration of transcendental reality and resign itself to transcribing the human condition." In other words, fantasy must give up fairies and the supernatural as "useless and outworn conventions." As he goes on to describe his idea of the fantastic, it comes more and more to look like the subversive younger sister of realism, undercutting all of our notions of consensus reality, destroying any concept of a coherent narrative, and seemingly, leading directly to Todorov's formalist definition of the fantastic.

In a 1972 dissertation focusing on 19th-century fantasists, Rosemary Karmelich

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31Ibid., 58.

32Ibid.

33Ibid., 59.

34Ibid.

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Mundhenk's definition of fantasy follows Tolkien's, depending on German Romantic thinkers like Schlegel for its foundation. She defines fantasy as "that artistic mode which tends to resist representing or referring to observed reality, and instead depicts imaginative images of things not present" producing a "freedom from observed fact." This definition implies that the subject of fantasy is first, "independent of our everyday world"; second, fantasy implies "a suspension of normal laws of causality and of standard conceptions of time and space"; and third, fantasy contains a movement toward "a higher reality of Platonic forms or abstractions within or behind phenomena." She concludes that fantasy thus becomes an alternative to imitative realism. In an essay that pushes Tolkien's definition further, published in 1974, Jane Mobley calls fantasy a "nonrational form which arises from a world view essentially magical in orientation." She argues that realistic fiction depends on "the world the reader knows" and follows "a norm grounded in the details and standards of mundane reality and it derives its validity . . . from its relation to this norm." Fantasy, she claims, is the opposite of realism and does not depend on the everyday. One of the essential parts of fantasy is that it must include magic, "an elemental/creative power capable of actualizing itself in form" and is therefore, "essentially transformational" in nature. Further, "magic is an effective power which can be brought


36Ibid., 9.


38Ibid., 117-18.

39Ibid., 121.
to bear on everything we know, even what is usually considered the realm of ordinary nature.\footnote{Ibid.} She then lists six elements that are necessary to fantasy: 1) poetic quality, 2) creation of secondary, magical worlds, 3) multidimensionality (overlap between created worlds and real world), 4) essential extravagance (the wonderful, exotic, or novel; larger than life characters), 5) spirit of carnival, 6) mythic dimension.\footnote{Ibid., 123-25.}

We have already mentioned briefly Eric Rabkin’s work on the fantastic, noting above that the fantastic is a violation of the ground rules of a text, creating something akin to Tororov’s hesitation. Rabkin names this violation the “dis-expected, those elements which the text has diverted one from thinking about but which, it later turns out, are in perfect keeping with the ground rules of the narrative.”\footnote{Rabkin, 8-9.} Thus, what first appears to contradict the rules of the narrative we later discover to be in perfect harmony with those ground rules. In following Todorov, Rabkin implies that the rules of the narrative are not fully known in the beginning, that it is only after the apparent contradiction of the rules that we discover, or perhaps revise, those narrative rules. However, it is in the violation of those rules that the fantastic occurs, reversing in some way the rules already in place. He thencatalogues three ways or signals of the fantastic: signals of the character, signals of the narrator, and signals of the implied author, and these signals can occur simultaneously within a single text. “However,” Rabkin remarks, “each class of signal can be properly interpreted only by reference to the ground rules that are foisted upon the reader in large
part by his whole life's training in the reading of literature." And thus, the reader's understanding of the ground rules are "shaped by playing on the reader's whole experience." Like Mobley, Rabkin notices that the secondary created world depends on the world familiar to the reader, but as Tolkien will add later, it presents them in new circumstances helping the reader to obtain a clearer view of his or her familiar world.

In his introduction to a 1979 reference work, *The Literature of Fantasy*, Roger Schlobin moves fantasy into the realm of psychology, arguing that fantasy "is an everyday, natural activity that summons and creates images and converts them into external manifestations." Every human accomplishment was first the "fantasy" of a dreamer, who through hard work brought his or her ideas into reality. Also, using this power of our minds to imagine we can vicariously experience situations and events that allow us to examine ourselves and our lives in relation to other lives and people, both past and present, and make sense out of our experiences. He thus argues that fantasy should not be categorized as a literary genre, but rather an effect of our minds—our natural inclination to create new worlds through language. Schlobin notes that what the theorists of fantasy have in common, in defining the literary form of fantasy, is that "the impossible is primary," along with "a rigorous detachment from the ordinary." However, this move away from reality requires that the created world be self-consistent; in other words, the

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43Ibid., 24-25.

44Ibid., 25.


46Ibid., xxvi, xxvii.
rules of the created world must not violate the expectations created within the reader. The reader is then free to make comparisons between his experiences and the fictive experiences represented within the work of fantasy. Quoting C. G. Jung’s *Psychological Types*, Schlobin concludes that fantasy allows us to examine and answer the “unanswerable questions” and resolve the discrepancies between our inner and outer worlds.

In a 1988 dissertation on Wilde’s uses of fantasy, Susan Taylor Jacobs defines fantasy in a way similar to Todorov and the critics of fantasy that follow:

> a fantastic text encodes contradictory ways of seeing and understanding. One code may suddenly replace another either within the text, as when a character discovers magic in a world he had assumed was governed by physical law, or before the story begins, when the reader picks up a fantastic tale knowing that he is about to enter a world run by different rules than those of his common sense world. . . . Fantasy enlightens by breaking the laws that influence how we see our world, control or are controlled by our society, and define ourselves.47

She then notes that “[f]antasy thus addresses the human tendency to mistake for reality our encoded interpretations of it.”48 Using Leo Bersani’s work in *A Future for Astynax*, she believes that fantasy expresses “the fragmentation of identity” and is associated with the “dislocation and disorientation” of the self, “not with order and stability.”49 Fantasy thus becomes “a radical questioning of a self shaped within a limiting and limited culture.”50 Traditional fantasy, as she calls it—Tolkien and his American inheritors fit here-

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48Ibid., 5.

49Ibid., 8, 9.

50Ibid., 9.
-is simply escapist in nature, accepting cultural ideals and is too idealistic. Fantasy should explore the idea of "deconstructed, demolished or divided" selves, always in process, always expressing a multitude of other possible selves and histories. Before introducing how Wilde uses fantasy, she concludes that fantasy of the type she describes is a response to the noninterpretability of our world.

Brian Attebery, in his 1992 *Strategies of Fantasy*, proposes to understand fantasy by looking at it as a mode, genre, and formula of literature. He defines a mode as "a way of doing something, in this case, telling stories." He takes a cue from Northrop Frye who called the mimetic tendency one pole of literature. The other pole Frye does not give a name to, but Attebery calls it, from Frye's description, fantasy. However, he argues that to say these are the two opposite poles of literature is an oversimplification; fantasy and mimesis are not opposite poles but can exist in the same work as "contrasting modes." He continues: "fantasy depends on mimesis for its effectiveness" and "mimesis depends on something akin to fantasy for its ability to organize and interpret sensory data." This move seems to place us back with Coleridge's idea that the power of the secondary imagination is that which "diffuses" so it can reassemble, upon which he seems to base his idea. Speaking on genre he notes that it is useful to group similar things together in order to discuss and "identify the pattern of expectations that allowed them to be written." He

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52 Ibid., 4.

53 Ibid., 11.
envisions genre as “fuzzy sets” that are “defined not by boundaries but a center.”54 In the case of fantasy, Tolkien’s work seems to be the center. He then lists the three fundamental forms of resemblance that are common among fantasies like Tolkien’s: content, structure, reader-response. The fantasy must contain “some violation of what the author clearly believes to be natural law.”55 It also must contain the “eucatastrophe,” the “final turn toward deliverance.”56 Finally, an emotional response in the reader, “joy or consolation” that he calls “a concept of wonder,” a kind of estrangement and/or alienation: “through the formal manipulation of their linguistic representatives we are made to see familiar objects and experiences as strange, distant from ourselves.”57 Fantasy “is a form that makes use of both the fantastic mode, to produce the impossibilities, and the mimetic, to reproduce the familiar.”58

In an attempt to broaden the notion of fantasy, Colin Manlove defines fantasy as “a fiction involving the supernatural or impossible,” and then he defines supernatural as involving “some form of magic or the numinous,” and impossible as “what simply could not be.”59 Next, he divides fantasy into sub-groups: secondary world, metaphysical, emotive, comic, subversive, and children’s. Each of these he defines, noting that there is much overlap between these categories. Secondary world fantasy is an invented world

54Ibid., 12.
55Ibid., 14.
56Ibid., 15.
57Ibid., 16.
58Ibid., 16-17.
59Manlove, Fantasy Literature, 3.
that functions according to its own rules, completely removed from our reality, at the opposite pole from the subversive, and overlapping with the emotive and metaphysical. Metaphysical presents the supernatural as potentially real and can be Christian, mythic, or cosmic in nature. Emotive has at its center an evocation or portrayal of feeling, fantasy of desire and wonder, fear and horror, pastoral and elegiac, and animal. Gothic and horror are the “dark side” of emotive fantasy. Comic includes parody, satire, and nonsense and has the freedom to play—to turn the world upside down and connect opposites. Subversive uses dream and nightmare, and/or a postmodernist notion of dislocation to remove assurances concerning reality, reason, morality, and all fixities: narrative, temporal, sexual, and linguistic. This category includes the Gothic, ghost story, romantic fantasy poetry, Victorian nonsense, and dream. Children’s contains all the above types, with the difference of audience—it is directed at children of all ages.

Manlove’s definition of fantasy seems to be at the opposite end of the spectrum from Todorov’s, but it also includes what Todorov defined as the fantastic. His chapter on the origins of fantasy traces it back to folktales on the one hand, and Old English poetry like Beowulf or “The Dream of the Rood” on the other. His categories seem useful for expanding the idea of fantasy, but he limits his scope to only British writers with some references to American and European fantasy; he notes that European tends to be subversive, while American tends toward secondary world. His conclusion lists what he considers to be the common elements among all British fantasy and argues that fantasy is much larger, including more authors than most would think. His categories can include most literature, and even the most realistic may challenge reality and/or change “reality” for the sake of a narrative.
This summary of critical works is not exhaustive but illustrates the trend toward the Todorovian fantastic or the Tolkienian. Let us briefly summarize some of the other major works of criticism. In an earlier work than that mentioned above, Colin Manlove states that fantasy is "a fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of supernatural or impossible worlds." W. R. Irwin calls fantasy a "story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility"; Kathryn Hume defines it as "any departure from consensus reality." Ann Swinfen, like Mobley above, argues that "the essential ingredient of all fantasy is 'the marvelous,' which will be regarded as anything outside the normal space-time continuum of the everyday world." In each of the fantasy critics summarized above, we can see their leanings toward Todorov or Tolkien, and the "great divide" in fantasy criticism that creates these two trends. Since my interest and purpose is to explore the Tolkienian, what remains to be done is to draw out from these critics those elements pertaining to Tolkienian, or secondary world, fantasy before embarking on my tracing of where these ideas were formed.

We began this summary of criticism with George MacDonald's preface to a collection


of his fairy tales and noticed that, significantly, he refuses to give us a definition of the fairy tale, referring us to an earlier, German romance. This idea expresses one of the problems with fantasy literature and its criticism—its undefinability. Perhaps this explains why the critics cannot agree on what it is. A second element drawn from MacDonald’s essay is the idea that the created, fantasy world must be self-consistent; in other words, once the author has established the “ground rules” of his narrative, he or she must follow them to the letter. This move by MacDonald places him clearly in the Tolkienian strain of fantasy and may be the source for Tolkien’s use of these concepts. We also see in MacDonald a recognition that each reader will bring different backgrounds to his stories, and so the meaning of the story resides as much in the reader as the author. Next, from E. M. Forster’s lectures on the novel, we learn that fantasy requires an “additional investment” on the part of the reader, a willingness to accept, for the duration of the text, those ground rules that were mentioned previously. Thus, magic, gods, monsters, and fairies can have a place in the imagined world, even though they have no place in the worlds of our experiences.

Jean Paul Satre, although writing before Todorov, is Todorovian in stance, giving up supernatural creatures and things in order to define fantasy as a direct violation of the real. Rosemary Mundhenk, on the other hand, follows Tolkien closely, arguing that fantasy frees us from observed facts, acting as an alternative to imitative realism. Jane Mobley notices the importance of magic to fantasy, magic as an elemental or creative power. She also adds the idea that there can be overlap between the created world and our actual world, and we see this principle used by fantasists such as Stephen R. Donaldson—Thomas Covenant, his anti-hero, is a leper from our world—and J. K Rowling—Harry Potter and
the other wizards and witches operate underneath contemporary England. Eric Rabkin follows Todorov, as do Susan Taylor Jacobs, W. R. Irwin, and Kathryn Hume. Roger Schlobin adds that fantasy is a natural activity of each person, allowing us to imagine, not only things that cannot be, but things that could be, the precursor to any new invention.

Brian Attebery adds another new dimension by using “fantasy” as a description of the genre, and “fantastic” as the mode. The fantastic mode contrasts with the mimetic mode, and these two modes can operate simultaneously in the same text. The best fantasy—Tolkienian fantasy—depends on both these contrasting modes for its success. Attebery also blurs the lines of genre, arguing that genres are “fuzzy sets” surrounding a particular text that best expresses a particular genre. At the center of the fantasy genre (he does not use the term “secondary world” but it is clear from his text that this is what he means) is Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, surrounded by other texts that operate in a similar manner. He also notices fantasy’s dependance on language, an idea emphasized by Tolkien. Colin Manlove, in both his texts, tries to broaden the definition of fantasy, but he also gives us the categories of fantasy, which include secondary world (Tolkienian), metaphysical, emotive, comic, subversive, and children’s. He notes that these categories are not exclusive of one another, that there is overlap between and among them.

One thing that we can say about the critics above who are Tolkienian in nature, rather than Todorovian, is that Tolkien’s influence on their ideas is readily apparent, although the reader may not see this influence until much later in this work. Among the Todorovian fantasy critics Tolkien’s ideas are at least dismissed, if not disparaged, and even among those who seem to be Tolkienian in nature, few do more than recognize Tolkien’s
influence, while some dismiss Tolkienian fantasy as simply “escapist” or “juvenile.” None of the fantasy critics I have read look at Tolkien’s lecture “On Fairy-Stories” as a critical framework for interpreting Tolkienian fantasy. At best, most of them recognize that Tolkien’s lecture, as illustrated in the current *Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms,* “has figured significantly in discussions of fantasy’s aesthetic and social value.” As I noted early in this introduction, I intend to show that Tolkien gave us, not only the seminal examples of secondary world fantasy, but also the critical framework to interpret this strain of fantasy. Thus, we will turn now to an examination of some of the critics who influenced Tolkien and led to the creation of his ideas, expressed in “On Fairy-Stories,” as “sub-creation” and “Secondary Belief.” We will begin, therefore, with the critic who is one of the first English critics of fantasy, Sir Philip Sidney.

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CHAPTER 1

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY’S DEFENCE OF POESY: HIS DIVINE ENTHRONEMENT OF POETRY

C. S. Lewis wrote that Sir Philip Sidney’s *Defence of Poesy* was “a defence not of poetry as against prose but of fiction against fact. . . . What is in question is not man’s right to sing but his right to feign, ‘to make things up.’”¹ The power of the imagination to create worlds independent of our earth—to give life to creatures that have never been, to alter facts and tell stories that exceed history, to make Nature better than she appears—has long been under fire from critics both inside and outside literary circles. Even in these days of a post-structuralism that questions the fundamental tenets of the dominant ideology, the watchmen continue the chant, “nothing but the facts: give us only the ‘real.’” Responding to “realists” of his day, Sidney argues:

> And yet I must say that, as I have more just cause to make a pitiful defence of poor poetry, which from almost the highest estimation of learning is fallen to be the laughingstock of children, so have I need to bring some more available proofs, since the former is by no man barred of his deserved credit, the silly latter hath had even the names of philosophers used to the defacing of it. . . .²

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Sidney's *Defence* addresses the enemies of poetry, so “all his efforts are bent to persuade them that there is value in what is not literally true; to do so he must recognize the distinction between two kinds of truth, the truth of fact and the truth of fiction.”\(^3\) Taking this concept one step further, John C. Ulreich, Jr., argues that “Sidney regards fiction not as a shadow of truth, but as an instance of truth.”\(^4\) Åke Bergvall adds: “[t]he poet therefore never truly creates *ex nihilo*, but attempts to re-create what the divine Maker has originally intended.”\(^5\) Michael Raiger notes that “in going beyond nature, [the poet] improves upon nature or the original forms not found in nature. And these forms of invention are products of the mind, though not simply fictions with no relation to reality. Rather, the ‘idea of fore-conceit of the work’ . . . the form according to which the work is made—is tied to nature, as is evidenced by the effect upon the reader in the inculcation of virtue.”\(^6\) The “truth in fiction,” Tolkien argues, reflects fragments of the “truth in fact,” and leads Tolkien to posit “secondary belief” as the end of Fantasy fiction, raising the genre to the “high[est] form of Art.”\(^7\)

Sidney’s Defence elevates poetry to Godlike creation, arguing that the forms of Nature

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\(^3\)Judith Dundas, “‘To Speak Metaphorically’: Sidney in the Subjunctive Mood,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1988): 270. Poststructuralist thought, however, has located this, or any, polar relationship—between fiction and fact—as problematic.


do not bind the poet, but he can “freely rang[e] within the zodiac of his own wit.” He notes that “[t]he Greeks named him ποιητής [poieten]. . . . It cometh of this word ποιεῖν [poiein] which is to make . . . [and] we Englishmen have met with the Greeks in calling him a maker.” For critic S. K. Heninger, Jr., Sidney’s “poet is a maker, a creator of a second nature analogous to God’s creation, a fictioner who produces a golden world of what may be or should be . . . the artful exercise of the imagination in fictive narrative.” I intend, in this chapter, to explore some of the possible sources from which Sidney borrowed the idea to raise poets to the level of makers, somehow equal to God. First, I will look at Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, and Pico’s belief that God gives to man (woman) the freedom to “trace the lineaments” of man’s (woman’s) own destiny. Next, I will show how Sidney takes Pico’s ideas and uses them as he resolves the conflict between humanism and Protestantism. Finally, I will show how Sidney connects Plato to Aristotle, demonstrating their inherence in each other, while answering some of the major objections to Sidney’s *Defence*.

Charles B. Schmitt suggests that “[a]mong the philosophers of the sixteenth century who deserve wider attention than they have hitherto received is Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola.” While Schmitt is referring to the nephew of the more famous member of the Pico family, Gianfrancesco Pico, the assessment applies to both uncle and nephew.

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8 *Defence*, 108.

9 Ibid., 107.


Speaking of Samuel Daniel's *A Defence of Ryme*, critic Martin Dzelzainis emphasizes that "Daniel, in formulating his account, was actually indebted to his humanist predecessors, especially Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, [a fact that] has been largely overlooked."12

Fewer than seventy literary works have addressed Pico della Mirandola’s work over the last three decades; of those, only three mention the work relevant to my current purpose, the *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. Ulreich notices the similarity between Sidney’s belief that God “made man to His own likeness, set[ting] him beyond and over all the works of that second nature”13 and Pico’s comment that

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\text{[t]he nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We [\text{i. e., the Divine Artificer}] have laid down; you [man], by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature . . . in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you prefer.}14
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In commenting on this passage, Jane Melbourne Craig states that “[m]an’s only perfect attribute—that is, his only attribute for which no degree of comparison exists—is the freedom of his will. In this perfection only, man is at one with God. As he creates himself, he is not a mere creature, *but like God, a creator*. He is his own creative substance.”15 I believe, however, that Craig misses something in this passage from Pico that is highly significant: Pico’s “trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature.” In

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post-structuralist thought, a “trace” is an absence that makes present whoever or whatever has passed, like a footprint. When “trace” functions as a verb, as in this passage, it means to follow the traces, or the trail, in order to make what is absent, present. The term comes to us from the Old French tracier, “to make one’s way,” from the Latin verb, trahere, which means “to draw, drag, derive, control, wield, practice, or play the role of.”

According to Pico, God gives to man (woman) the power to make his (her) own way, to trace (draw, drag, derive, control, wield, practice, or play the role of) the “lineaments” of his (her) own nature. The word, “lineaments,” from the Latin lineamentum, means “line, characteristic, feature, or outline,” formed from linea, which is “line, string, thread, outline, boundary line, or limit.” If we think in material terms, when we “trace” something, we lay a thin paper over the original picture and we draw (or drag) an “outline” that duplicates the original, though never exactly: the duplicate will carry some of the “features” of the original, be a “derivative” of the original, even “play the role of” the original, but it can never be the original. This difference between the original and the tracing both allows and precludes originality; the tracing duplicates the original while at the same time, because of differences, creates a new original that reflects the old. Thus for Pico, and as I will later show for Sidney, man’s (woman’s) creations cannot supplant God’s, only duplicate and/or create them (anew). This idea of duplication will be important for Coleridge’s theory of imagination as a “duplication” of God’s, as also for Tolkien’s “splintered fragments” of truth “reflected” in fantasy fiction.

In another part of her essay, Craig argues that “Pico sees man, the last creation, as

16 Definitions for Latin terms are from John C. Traupman, The Bantam New College Latin & English Dictionary, rev. and enl. ed. Definitions for English terms are from The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 3d ed. Definitions hereafter will be cited from one of these dictionaries.

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having been given no fixed attributes. The nature of all other beings is bound by natural law, but God has said to Adam,“17 according to Pico,

In conformity with thy free judgment, into whose hands I have placed thee, thou art confined by no bounds; and thou wilt fix limits of nature for thyself . . . art the molder and maker of thyself, thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer. Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures which are brutes. Thou canst again grow upward from thy soul’s reason into the higher natures which are divine.18

Pico’s declaration resembles Sidney’s argument that “our erected wit maketh us to know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it.”19 Harry Berger, Jr., in an essay on Pico and Neoplatonism, argues that, according to Pico, man “makes himself by his acts of observation, contemplation and interpretation” and, “in the merely metaphoric, the merely imaginative, lies man’s preeminent power of transforming reality.”20 Berger calls this metaphoric transformation “[e]mulation” and “aggressive imitation”21 of the divine:

The Piconian metamorphoses through which “man becomes all things” and so creates his own nature are processes of imagination. They are neither magical nor merely fictional. Not magical, because the word “becomes” really means, for Pico, “plays the roles of.” Not fictional, because the transformational activity of mind which his language mirrors is part of the growth of a real self. . . . 22

God gave us free will and left us to choose for ourselves the “higher” or “lower” path, the

17Craig, 273.

18Ibid. This passage is Craig’s translation of a part of the section of the Oration quoted above in Ulreich.

19Defence, 109.


21Ibid., 43.

22Ibid., 46.
former leading to perfection of wit, the latter to the destruction of wit through our
"infected," brutish will. The poet also may choose to be tied to this world or may choose
divine creation, "disdaining to be tied to any such subjection"\textsuperscript{23} to "the truth of fact," or
"the real." Consequently, the poet transforms the world by the power of his or her
imagination, creating a self while emulating the "divine creator."

S. K. Heninger, Jr., argues that Sidney took the idea for poetry as "divine madness"
from reading John de Serres' preface and translation of Plato's \textit{Ion}. In his preface, de
Serres describes the \textit{Ion} in the following manner:

In this dialogue Plato deals not so much with the art of being a rhapsode—that is,
with the way of actually performing the poets—but rather with the art of poetry in
general, with where poetry stands in the chain of events by which a concept is
expressed. Plato places both the poet and his interpreter in a line that starts from
the power and efficacy of the Muse, and therefore he gives this dialogue a double
title: "On the Poetical Character, or On the Proper Way of Performing Poets."\textsuperscript{24}

De Serres goes on to argue that, according to Plato, the interpretation of poetry comes
from a "divine frenzy" that possesses both poet and listener. The preface continues: "So
for Plato, the entire art of poetry is a certain enthusiasm—literally, \textit{éνθουσιασμός}
[enthousiasmos], or \textit{έν θεός μιμησίς} [en theos mimesis]. And this is why Plato excluded
poetry from the Republic, as pernicious to morals, when he recognized this divine impetus
for what it is."\textsuperscript{25} De Serres then divides poetry into three types: (1) theological, dealing

\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Defence}, 108.

\textsuperscript{24}S. K. Heninger, Jr., "Sidney and Serranus' \textit{Plato}" (hereafter cited as "Serranus"),
opera quae extant omnia. Ex nova Ioannis Serrani interpretatione, perpetuis eiusdem
notis illustrata: quibus & methodus & doctrinae summa breviter & perspicue indicatur.
Eiusdem Annotationes in quosdam suae illius interpretationis locos. Henr. Stephani de
quorundam locorum interpretatione judicium & multitum contextus Graeci emendatio
(Geneva, 1578), trans. by Heninger.

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., 153-54.
with prayers, hymns, and scriptures; (2) philosophical, dealing with nature, morals, and politics; and (3) "various," dealing with epics, lyrics, comedies, tragedies, epigrams, etc. In this division we see Sidney's debt to de Serres, for Sidney divides poetry into the same three categories, calling poets of the third kind the "right poets." Heninger argues that "Sidney rejected the notion of divine inspiration, largely because his puritanical view of man would not allow even a poet to be raised so near the status of God," citing Sidney's declaration that Plato "attributeth unto poesy more than myself do, namely, to be a very inspiring of a divine force, far above man's wit, as in the afore-named dialogue [Ion] is apparent." Heninger's view points to an apparent contradiction in the Defence that many critics invoke to dismiss Sydney's work. Yet, if we read the passage in question carefully, as David Farley-Hills suggests, "it is clear that the phrase 'more then my selfe do' is not the expression of radical disagreement with Plato about the divine inspiration of poetry, but simply an aside suggesting that Plato makes greater claims even than Sidney himself for the divine origin of poetry." Sidney means to distinguish "divine inspiration" for poetry from the loss of self--"far above man's wit"--caused by a "possession," or "divine madness," that leads Plato to banish poets from his Republic. I believe Sidney makes a distinction between divinely inspired Scripture, written down by men but ultimately the work of God, and man as the maker of "right poetry." Sidney's Defence seeks to raise this third type of poetry, the work of "right poets," to that of "making," and justify, as Lewis noted above, the poet's (or prose writer's) "right to feign."

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26 Defence, 111.

27 Heninger, "Serranus," 156; Sidney, Defence, 143.

Referring to Sidney's distinction between the poet as *vates* and *ποιητής* (poieten), Raiger argues that “[t]he former represents God, whereas the latter has perfected nature as the object of representation.” The former kind of poet Raiger associates with Sidney’s first kind of poetry, “with God as its object of representation.” The second kind of poetry—that which is associated with philosophers, scientists, and historians—Raiger states is not poetry at all, “since it is a translation of ideas into verse, not an invention.” He goes on to claim that this second kind of poetry is distinguished from the first, “for its object is not God but the moral principles of human action, and its end . . . the exercise of virtue. . . . The third type of poet goes beyond the human sciences, beyond history, and beyond philosophy, producing pictures of what ought to be done.” Raiger later clarifies what he means here, noting that this third kind of poetry “does not attempt to represent God as He is, but humans as they ought to be.” This move, for Raiger, lays Sidney’s foundation for defending poetry, “by defining it as a mimesis which leads the reader to imitate an imitation . . . that advances Sidney’s conception of poetry as an activity with both an immanent natural function, and a final end which lies outside the scope of mere nature in the realm of the spiritual and moral, wherein human possibility and divine command converge. In this Sidney corrects Plato’s critique of mimesis while maintaining the Platonic dichotomy between the material and spiritual realms. And in this way the

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29 Raiger, 28.
30 Ibid., 29.
31 Ibid., 30.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 34.
‘right poet’ differs dramatically from the *vates*, for divine poetry, which emphasizes the gap between creature and Creator, does not call upon the hearer to imitate that which is inconceivable, beyond imagining, but of recognizing that God is beyond imitation. The ‘right poet’ is permitted to ‘feign’ images, but the object of divine poetry—God—cannot be the subject of such fictions.”34 Taking this position leads Sidney, according to Raiger, to argue that right poetry is characterized by “a purifying of wit,” with its final end “to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of.”35 This position creates, for Raiger, a hierarchy of knowledge, and “the pinnacle lies not in natural knowledge as such, but in self-knowledge,”36 and so is wholly Platonic as Socrates’ most well-known command was the quest for knowledge of self. Thus, the object of poetry becomes a “cognitive object” and its end, virtuous behavior, leading Raiger to conclude that “Sidney’s classification of poetry into types according to their objects and ends establishes a free zone of creativity for the poet, while denying to ‘right’ poetry the divine authority to speak the language of God.”37

Heninger’s remark, that Sidney rejected divine inspiration for his “puritanical views,” begs a discussion of some objections raised against Sydney’s *Defence* that relate to my present purpose. Critics commonly complain that humanism, as envisioned by Pico della Mirandola and others, is incompatible with the Protestantism of Luther and Calvin. This

34Ibid., 31.

35*Defence*, 112.

36Raiger, 31.

37Ibid., 32.
objection lies at the center of Heninger's claim that Sidney rejects divine inspiration. One common view of Sidney, according to Robert Matz, is the belief that Sidney's writing was "a vehicle for which Protestant politics is the real tenor. Sidney is seen as unwillingly diverted into the literary by political failure, by the necessities of indirect communication, or by a need to operate within dominant literary forms." Matz believes that this position "neglects the extent to which Sidney as a courtier locates in diversion--as pleasure--a more valorized content. The Defence does not subordinate courtly pleasures to Protestant politics, but defends the court from Protestant criticisms of its pleasures, including criticisms of poetry. The Defence's humanist emphasis on Horatian 'delightful teaching' . . . would allow Sidney to incorporate the Protestant demand that the aristocrat profitably serve the state while defending the courtly aristocrat's privileged right to pleasure." Protestant values of the time argued that members of the court should engage in profitable service to the state and eschew the pleasures and celebrations of the court. In the move from a warrior to civil elite, the aristocracy, in the eyes of the Protestants, had lost its productive contribution to the state in an orgy of conspicuous consumption. These views of the time are reflected in attacks on both courtly practices and poetry, like Stephen Gosson's The Schoole of Abuse, dedicated to Sidney. Matz notes that Sidney writes the Defence in response to Gosson, and so a concern of Sidney is responding to the charge that poetry has softened the warrior elite with the pleasures of the court. Gosson argues in his Schoole that poetry is an indulgence in pleasure rather than a disciplined service to the state. Matz notes that the commonly held view that Gosson dedicated his work to


39 Ibid.
Sidney out of folly—following a comment by Spenser—and so led to Sidney's hostile response is "wide of its mark," and he rather believes that it drew this response from Sidney for the opposite reason, that "it drew too close to the tensions in Sidney's position as courtier and Protestant activist."\(^{40}\) He agrees with other critics who believe that Sidney used parody in the *Defence* to disguise how closely his views of poetry were to Gosson's. This idea leads Matz to propose that Sidney tries to reconcile Protestant and courtly views by claiming that poetry not only gives pleasure but can also teach virtuous, warrior action in proper service to the state. Matz states that "[b]y making military heroes out of men, poetry becomes a form of patriotic service, rather than imaginative, as well as prestigious, play."\(^{41}\)

In an essay directed at resolving the dispute between humanism and Protestantism in Sidney, Åke Bergvall quotes from Luther's *Disputation Concerning Man*: "And it is certainly true that reason is the most important and the highest rank among all things and, in comparison with other things of this life, the best and *something divine.*"\(^{42}\) Only when faith becomes second to reason does reason, in Luther's words, become "the devil's whore." Calvin echoes Luther: "the wytte of manne, howe muche soeuer yt bee peruerted and fallen from the fyrste integryty, ys yet styll clothed and garnyshed wyth excellente gyftes of God. If wee concyder that the spyryte of God ys the onely fountayne of trueth,

\(^{40}\)Ibid., 62.

\(^{41}\)Ibid., 69.

Not only does Calvin reiterate Luther, but he also echoes Pico’s declaration that we can “fall” from the “perfection” envisioned for us by God when we choose baser, brutish things. Yet, even in a fallen and perverted state, the “gyfles of God” still form a part of our natures, allowing us to become “makers” of poetry. Calvin’s declaration also supports Tolkien’s position, noted earlier and further explained in Chapter 5, that even in the genre furthest removed from the “real,” Fantasy, “trueth yt selfe . . . shall appeare” as fragments “splintered from” the true light. Augustine declared, “[I]et every good and true Christian understand that wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master [God].”

We can thus argue that man’s (woman’s) reason, when attached to God’s spirit—the desire for a “higher perfection” of will—leads the poet to divine making, as elaborated in Pico’s “tracing the lineaments” of God’s creation. Taking an Augustinian position, Sidney notes that when the poet exceeds both historian and philosopher, “no other human skill can match him . . . for having his scope far beyond any of these as eternity exceedeth a moment.” For Calvin, one can achieve this matchless position by again, marrying reason to God’s spirit:

For the soule enlightened by [the Spirit of God], taketh as it wer a new sharpnes of vnderstanding, wherewith it maye beholde heauenly misteries, with brightnes wherof it was before daseled in it selfe. And so mans vnderstanding receiuing

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44 Tolkien, *OFS*, 144.


46 *Defence*, 115.
brightnesse by the lighte of the holy ghost, doth neuer till then truely beginne to taste of those thinges that belong to the kingdome of God.\(^47\)

Sidney, following his humanist roots, argues that, though the poet in "right poetry" exceeds all other human skills, yet "right poetry," following Calvin, remains a "human skill," capable of God-like creation without aspiring to God's creation. The poet who writes right poetry must therefore strengthen his or her intellect: "This purifying of wit, this enriching of memory, enabling of judgment, and enlarging of conceit, which commonly we call learning, under what name soever it come forth, or to what immediate end soever it be directed, the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clay lodgings, can be capable of."\(^48\) Sidney melds Pico's divine making to Calvin's recognition of the fallen human condition: our reason, the "erected wit," gives us knowledge or a view of perfection—we are capable of Godlike creation—but we reside within a fallen world and our "infected will" keeps us from the perfection we might otherwise attain.

Bergvall stops short of claiming to resolve the conflict between Protestant and humanist thought in Sidney's *Defence*. He creates, at best, an uneasy peace between them, depending entirely upon the poet. If the poet truly couples reason to God's spirit then he or she moves from right poetry to theological poetry, becoming a David and his Psalms or an Isaiah and his visions of the Messiah. If, on the other hand, the poet remains tied to the "real," then he or she moves into philosophical poetry, becoming Empedocles, Pythagoras, or Hesiod writing of nature, mathematics, or morals—all tied to the "truth of fact." The right poet's way is hedged on both sides, either by being too much subjected

\(^{47}\)Calvin, 3.2.34, quoted in Bergvall, 124.

\(^{48}\)*Defence*, 112.
by the real, or by moving too far out of the world and, like Icarus, flying too close to the sun and falling to the earth in a blaze of short-lived glory, for having “no law but wit.”

Martin Raitiere, who tries to resolve the conflict between humanism and neoclassicism, concludes his argument by claiming that Sidney could see these conflicting poles and synthesizes them in right poetry: “what is Sidney’s general argument here but the claim, eventually developed systematically by legions of romantics, that poetry marries the idea and the image, that poetry is the creative, reconciling imagination.” Thus, according to Raitiere, Sidney anticipates Coleridge’s famous melding of idea to image in his *Biographia Literaria*, the subject of Chapter 3.

Another of the criticisms raised against the *Defence* relates to Sidney’s treatment of Aristotle’s three rhetorics. Robert Coogan argues that critics have overlooked Sidney’s overall purpose, “his informing vision, namely, the triumph and coronation of poetry,” which leads them to construe the *Defence* as an apology for poetry rather than a coronation. Aristotle divided rhetoric into three types: “the political or deliberative which argues the expediency of future plans; the forensic or judicial which weights the justice of past deeds; and the epideictic or ceremonial which demonstrates nobility in regard to a current situation.” Coogan claims that the *Defence* is of the third type—epideictic or ceremonial—rather than the forensic or judicial, which critics commonly invoke to show the contradictions within Sidney’s work. The epideictic argument intermittently states

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51 Ibid., 100.
facts in the narratio without raising objections to the position, and Sidney, following epideictic practices, leaves the statement of arguments against poetry until the latter part of the Defence. In the narratio, Sidney argues that poetry was first, citing that Homer came before Plato, and that poetry can be found in all cultures and peoples. Sidney thus “follows the epideictic practice of heightening by making much of time and place, a recommendation of Aristotle,” and since poetry is first it is then noble. Sidney avoids the rhetoric of an apology by using terms of praise and blame—“noblest,” “venerable,” “excellent,” “reverence,” “scorned”—focusing instead on the accomplishments of poetry, the most important of epideictic topics. Sidney further avoids the apology by introducing humorous incidents—Robin Hood, Charon, and “heroical Cupid.” As Coogan remarks, this device “shows that he follows the epideictic practice of avoiding an apologetic tone when a refutatio is admitted into an epideictic speech.” Coogan later notes that “if a single emotion pervades the Defence, it has to be the epideictic one of admiration—enthusiastic admiration for poetry.” In concluding his argument, Coogan notes that, although he invokes Aristotle in the propositio, Sidney means to “describe” rather than “define” poetry, since an Aristotelian definition would contain the four causes while Sidney gives only the final and formal causes. Thus, Coogan’s position keeps the Defence in the more general, epideictic description rather than the formal, forensic definition of

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52 Defence, 103-106.
53 Coogan, 103-104.
54 Defence, 136, 138.
55 Coogan, 105.
56 Ibid., 108.
In an essay that runs parallel to Coogan's, John C. Ulreich, Jr., argues that, although many have tried, Sidney's *Defence* does not fit completely into a single category. Ulreich names three categories as examples: Mannerism, Neoplatonism, and Protestantism. Thus, "the most radical assertion of Sidney's independence from philosophical orthodoxy succeeds in demonstrating his imaginative power only by denying logical coherence." Ulreich wants to show that Sidney's use of both Aristotle and Plato is not contradictory: they are interdependent and interpenetrate one another. In the use of these terms, especially the latter, Ulreich takes a Derridean position, although he never mentions the guru of deconstruction. Yet it is clear, to me at least, that he attempts to demonstrate how the ideas of Aristotle and Plato "inhere" in each other, defusing the polar relationship that has existed between them for millennia.

As an illustration of the polarity between Aristotle and Plato, Ulreich points out that when Aristotle configures poetry as *μιμησία* [mimesis], the "imitation of an action," the focus or fruit of poetry shifts from *γνώσις* [gnosis] to *πρᾶξις* [praxis] and poetry (and the poet) is tied to nature. This view contradicts Sidney's assertion that nature does not bind the poet to "reality," but the poet can freely range wherever his imagination takes him. This "growth into another nature" is Platonic: "the skill of each artificer standeth in the *Idea* or foreconceit of the work, and not in the work itself." If Sidney were

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57 Ulreich, 68.


59 *Defence* 108, my emphasis.
following Aristotle strictly, we should see more of the latter's ideas in the *Defence*. Instead, we see tension between Aristotle’s ideas and Sidney’s: where Aristotle calls plot the soul of poetry, Sidney uses plot as the beginning of invention; where Aristotle’s poet imitates nature, Sidney’s is free from subjection to the “real.” I agree, as Ulreich argues, that we should see the *Defence* as not strictly Aristotelian—that Sidney pulls up short of this position, tugged by Platonic ideals. Sidney’s alternative strategy fuses the two positions into something that partakes of both but does not commit to either. This view lends credence to Coogan’s assertion, noted above, that Sidney does not intend to define poetry in the Aristotelian sense but to make the *Defence* an epideictic encomium for poetry.

To illustrate how Sidney combines Aristotle and Plato, Ulreich begins by examining the notion of *mimesis*. For Aristotle, “imitation gives the essential character, not the surface copy.” Thus, in Aristotle’s view, mimesis looks to the process rather than the product, the activity (*energia*) that forms the product. For Plato, creation is “a moveable image of eternity,” and thus the world we see is an “imitation [*mimesis*] of the divine harmony manifested in mortal motions.” In both cases, art goes beyond mere duplication to look into the heart of the object, and the artist/poet interprets the object according to her vision of the universe. Or, as Plotinus argues, “the arts . . . give no bare reproduction of the thing seen but go back to the Reason-Principles from which nature itself derives, and, furthermore, that much of their work is all their own; they are holders of beauty and

60 Ulreich, 71.
61 Ibid., 72.
add where nature is lacking.®

Mimesis, then, is not an "external copy" but an "internal reproduction of those vital energies which have engendered Nature," so the poet’s "imitation" of nature is a "figuring forth" of her inner workings. This figuring forth is the process of imitation in which the poet exceeds nature, showing openly the divine that is in nature only implied: "poetic fictions make explicit the inherent (but otherwise merely implicit) rationality of the cosmos."® The poet, therefore, imitates God, in whose image He makes the poet, and so poetry becomes the essential activity of God—divine making by the divine Maker: "Thus Sidney implies, what Coleridge was later to state explicitly, that poetic imagination is a ‘repetition in the finite mind [of the maker] of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM’—the ‘heavenly Maker of that maker.’"® In this process of creation, the revelation of nature’s inner workings, the imitation of the divine Maker, Ulreich argues that Sidney synthesizes “Platonic conception and Aristotelian embodiment”: “The mimetic activity of the poet comprehends both conception (invention) and execution (figuring forth), both Platonic Idea and Aristotelian form.”® In distinguishing Sidney’s ideas from Aristotle’s mimesis, Michael Raiger notes that “Sidney’s mimetic theory uses character . . . in order to represent virtue as an ideal, seen through to the end of virtue, which is in desire of the good. As such, Sidney’s poetic representation of the human is iconic in the sense that the human is pictured in an

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®® Ulreich, 73-74.

®® Ibid., 78.

®® Ibid., 79.

®® Ibid., 75.

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idealized, perfected form . . ., allied with the Platonic in presenting an exemplary picture of virtue, rather than with the Aristotelian in the imitation of action. . . . For Sidney, mimesis is not simply an imitation of human action, but a 'speaking picture' (Defence 110), representing the virtuous activity of soul which is to be imitated by the reader. The full scope of what Sidney means by imitation is here disclosed, for his poetic image . . . is finally a poetics of imitation by the reader who is moved to love and then to imitate the example of virtue and carry it forth into action.” Thus, “the poet presents examples of virtue so that the reader is led to imitate them. . . . The task of the ‘right poet’ is to present virtue in its unalloyed luster.”

Critics also argue that the internal conflicts within Sidney's Defence are further widened by other things that Sidney wrote, particularly in his letters. They point to his letter to Edward Denny, dated May 22, 1580, and remark that poetry is nowhere found among Sidney’s list of things he thinks Denny should study. After remarking that Denny wanted his opinion for his studies, Sidney notes that “[w]ell may a man be swallowed in them [studies], and fruitlessly, if he have not the better line to guide him in the labyrinth. The consideration therefore must be particular, and particularly bent to yourself, for one thing is fit to be known by a scholar that will read in the schools, and another by Ned Denny, and even in Ned Denny, one way to have been begun if you were a child, and another of this age you now pass in.” Sidney goes on to tell Denny that the beginning of

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67 Raiger, 36-37.
68 Ibid., 37.
all knowledge is the scriptures, followed by works of moral philosophy by Aristotle, Tully, and Plutarch. Following the study of these works, Sidney also advocates the study of a trade, and in the case of Denny, soldiery. He then tells him to study history, particularly the *Chronicle* of Holinshed. In closing his letter Sidney tells Denny that his ideas are not meant “as a general doctrine, but as I think it best for thee, my own Ned [Denny].”

Remarking on this apparent conflict in his introduction to his edition of Sidney, Peter C. Herman states that the inner conflicts of the *Apology* should also be seen in the context of two letters that Sidney wrote, one to Edward Denny, the other to Sidney’s younger brother, Robert, in which Sidney treats the relative merits of poetry and its place in the reading of young men of action. . . . As Sidney writes in his letter to Denny, he may be constructing a reading program tailored to Denny himself . . . rather than articulating a broad principle. Or the differences among all three may be evidence of Sidney trying out different ideas about literature without necessarily committing himself to one in particular."

Something that may help explain the position taken by Sidney in his letter is a note written to Sidney by his father’s chaplain, David Powel, in Powel’s *Historie of Cambria*. Andrew Breeze notes that “Powel . . . prefaced his edition of Gerald of Wales with a Latin address to Philip Sidney, where he argues that the study of the past, its governments, events, and illustrious men . . . is a fit activity for a man of rank.” We can therefore say at the very least that Sidney’s ideas changed over the course of his life, or, as Herman notes above, that Sidney tailored his list of works for Denny himself and not for a general statement of

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70Ibid., 215.


what all young aristocrats should study.

One issue, relevant to my present purpose, remains. Many critics of Sidney’s *Defence* argue that he sets a standard for poets and shows, through the state of English poetry, the impossibility of ever reaching that standard of “divine making.” They argue that Sidney’s entire project collapses due to Sidney’s methodical undermining of his own position. I believe this accusation falls flat in the face of the arguments noted above, but I also believe that fissures remain in Sidney’s *Defence*: not all poets and their poetry teach virtue, nor does all poetry delight, since much of current poetry deals with issues of rape, incest, abortion, divorce, or the death of an innocent. Yes, Sidney sets a high standard for poetry and at the same time recognizes that few poets will actually attain “divine making,” what Coleridge will later call the “creative power of the imagination,” and what still later Tolkien will call “secondary belief.” Poets and writers of this caliber are rare, but that is not the fault of the art: “If poets have not taught as successfully as philosophers, the fault lies with the poets, not with their art; and, secondly, the poet’s superiority obtains only in the teaching to a popular audience . . . Sidney preferred the images of life to the barren precepts of philosophy.”

Finally, as Sidney asserts, “if the philosophers have more rightly showed themselves philosophers than the poets have attained to the high top of their profession . . . it is, I say again, not the fault of the art, but that by few men [or women] that art can be accomplished.” Recalling Lewis’ words, with which I began, Sidney’s *Defence of Poesy* seeks to defend writers’ and poets’ rights “to feign,” to create worlds and creatures that could never be in our “real” world. If the creation fails, the fault

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73Coogan, 110.

74*Defence*, 117-18.
lies not with the creation—the art—but with the creator, whose “erected wit” has fallen to his or her “infected will.”

To conclude, then, we need to bridge the gap between Sidney’s ideas as examined in this chapter and the Addison chapter that follows, as also tie Sidney’s ideas to the overall purpose, Tolkien’s ideas for fantasy. We will deal with the latter first and follow it with the former. Recalling the articles summarized above on the structure of Sidney’s work by Coogan and Ulreich—Coogan argued that the Defence was epideictic rather than forensic, and Ulreich noted that it defied any single category of rhetoric—critic Tanya Caroline Wood compares Sidney and Tolkien on structural grounds, showing that both critics use the structures of classical rhetoric. Looking back to Aristotle’s Rhetoric and Aphthonius’s Progymnasmata, Wood argues that both writers use the classical structure of the encomium, following Coogan. According to Aphthonius an encomium includes the prooimion (introduction), genos (discussion of the subject’s family), anatrophe (upbringing of the subject), praxeis (praise of the subject’s accomplishments), synkresis (comparison), and Epilogos (conclusion). Wood then goes on to show how both Tolkien in “On Fairy-stories” and Sidney in the Defence use these parts, in differing orders, and include both digressio and refutatio, although Aphthonius does not include them in his encomium, where Aristotle does. Aristotle also adds that an encomium must include and emphasis on the virtues of the subject, something both Sidney, as noted above, and Tolkien include. However, Wood notes that there is no evidence that Tolkien read Sidney’s Defence,75 and she adds in a footnote that she contacted a librarian at Exeter

College to learn what books Tolkien had read as an undergraduate. The librarian, Lorise Topcliffe, informed her by e-mail that he checked out mostly books on grammar, the history of language, and Shakespeare. Another researcher, Wayne Hammond, who has some knowledge of Tolkien's library, told Wood that as far as he knew, Tolkien never read Sidney's *Defence*. Wood concludes that "Sidney's [Defence] adumbrates many of Tolkien's ideas, which indicates that either Tolkien was influenced by Sidney (an argument difficult to prove) or that they have a similar literary heritage. Either way, Tolkien did not write all of 'OFS' himself. Part of Tolkien's legacy is classical rhetoric and Renaissance philosophy. . . . If not of direct lineal descent, Sidney and Tolkien display the kinship of a common ancestry."  Wood's position here illustrates the thrust of my argument—that Tolkien's essay is part of the literary tradition that defines a particular form of literature, what he called the "fairy-story" and what we call fantasy.

To move us into our next chapter, on Joseph Addison's "Pleasures of the Imagination" essays, we will conclude with an article by Judith Dundas. Dundas's article looks at the annotations made by Junius in his copy of Sidney's works in hopes that the ideas and views expressed by Junius about Sidney's ideas might shed more light on Sidney's works, "showing how a humanist of the time might read [Sidney]."  Dundas notices how Junius marked ideas and metaphors in the *Defence* that seemed to appeal to the eye of the painter. This action by Junius points, for Dundas, to his awareness of "the

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Ibid., 107.

interchangeability of eye and ear,″78 relating it to Leonardo da Vinci: “Painting is poetry which is seen and not heard, and poetry is a painting which is heard but not seen. These two arts, you may call them both either poetry or painting, have her interchanged the sense by which they penetrate to the intellect.”79 Dundas goes on to note that “the eye and the ear equally constitute pathways to the imagination.”80 For both Junius and Sidney, “poetry means ‘feigning’ or imagining a similitude,” both see that “the origins of creation lie in the imagination,” and both “view the poetic imagination as working like nature herself.”81 Junius may indeed serve as a bridge between Sidney and Addison, as Junius notes in his The Painting of the Ancients, that “Phantasie doth so represent unto our mind the images of things absent, as if we had them at hand, and saw them before our eyes,”82 an idea explored in the next chapter.

78Ibid., 73.
79Leonardo da Vinci, Paragone, trans. I. A. Richter (Oxford, 1949), 58, qtd. in Dundas, 73. Dundas’s footnote includes the original text: “La pittura è una poesia che si vede non si sente, e la poesia è una pittura, che si sente e non si vede, adonque queste due poesia, o vuoi dire due pitture, hannoscambiati li sensi, per li quali esse dovrebbono penetrare all’ intelletto.”
80Dundas, 73.
81Ibid., 74, 76, 79.
82Qtd. in Dundas, 79.
CHAPTER 2

THE EVOLUTION OF ADDISON’S SECONDARY PLEASURES:
RECAPTURING THE “PLEASURE” OF IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE

During the summer of 1712 Joseph Addison published a series of eleven essays that have since been known as the “Pleasures of Imagination” essays in the *Spectator*, numbers 411-421. Using the associationist ideas of Locke, Addison describes how the mind of both reader and poet take sense impressions and form them into new ideas through the power of imagination, and the greater the imagination, the larger the pleasure derived from the objects, whether natural, artistic, or written. Since their publication nearly 300 years ago, many scholars have come to view Addison as the grandfather of modern aesthetics. Some recent critics have challenged this idea, arguing that Addison simply “performed” for his *Spectator* audience. However, as I will try to show, the revisions Addison made to the essay from its first draft around 1704 as a single essay to its publication in 1712 show that he was indeed thinking about aesthetics in his shift of focus from the primary pleasures—those derived from seeing actual objects—to the secondary pleasures—those derived as we recall and reform objects and ideas within our minds. To examine this issue, I will begin by looking at an earlier essay on Virgil, showing how his thinking changed from Restoration to Empiricist ideals while beginning to toy with the idea of associationism. I will then move into the actual revisions of the essays, focusing on his
shift from primary to secondary pleasure, as well as his shift from author to reader and giving some possible reasons for this shift. This move will lead us to examine how imaginative literature was marginalized and how Addison recaptured the pleasure of fantastic literature. I will follow with a “close-reading” of the relevant parts of his essays, drawing connections to Romantic thought. We will then conclude by looking at some post-structuralist resonances in his series of essays, connecting them to a modern critic and writer, J. R. R. Tolkien, who seems to bring Addison’s secondary pleasures to their fullest use in his theory of the fairy story.

Restoration critics commonly used the terms “precept” and “example” (or image) to speak of poetry’s ability as a teacher of moral values. William Youngren remarks that the terms used in this way disappear from critical terminology early in the eighteenth-century and points to this disappearance as an indication of the changing structure of Addison’s thinking. In Addison’s essay on Virgil’s *Georgics* we see him using precept and example for the last time in their Restoration sense. Youngren notes that “[t]he fact that Addison used the old terminology of precept and example (or image) in the *Georgics* essay and then abandoned it after he came under the influence of Locke reflects a genuine change not only in his thought but also in the aesthetic concerns of the age.”* His essay on the *Georgics* was written in 1697, a few years after the publication of Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Addison’s essay, as Samuel Johnson and others following him have noted, is a conventional piece of work. However, Youngren argues, the essay does contain the seeds of Addison’s later aesthetic ideas.

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One passage from Addison’s essay on the *Georgics* illustrates his early thinking:

Here we see the poet considered all the effects of this union between trees of different kinds and took notice of that effect which had the most surprise and, by consequence, the most delight in it, to express the capacity that was in them of being thus united. This way of writing is everywhere in use among the poets and is particularly practiced by Virgil, who loves to suggest truth indirectly, and without giving us a full and open view of it, to let us see just so much as will naturally lead the imagination into all the parts that lie concealed. This is wonderfully diverting to the understanding, thus to receive a precept that enters, as it were, through a byway and to apprehend an idea that draws a whole train after it. For here the mind, which is always delighted with its own discoveries, only takes the hint from the poet, and seems to work out the rest by the strength of her own faculties.²

Addison here notes that Virgil carefully considered all the effects of placing different kinds of trees together, looking specifically for the combination that would create in the reader “the most surprise.” The notion of this surprise Addison equates with a reader’s delight in the particular combination of different kinds of trees described by Virgil. Implicit within Addison’s statement is the assumption that the reader’s delight is the end the author hopes to achieve. Youngren adds that this delight or surprise of the reader later becomes canonized in Addison’s “pleasures of the imagination” essays as one of the three sources of these pleasures—the idea of “novelty”—along with beauty and greatness.

We also see the “germ of associationism” working throughout the rest of Addison’s statement, best expressed by the “whole train” of ideas drawn by the reader’s mind from the poet’s indirect suggestion of a simple idea. Because of the early date of the *Georgics* essay and the fact that Locke’s chapter (33 of volume 2) on the association of ideas was not added to the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* until 1700 (fourth edition), we must look elsewhere to find Addison’s source. Youngren notices the similarity between

Addison's use of a "train" and a chapter of Hobbes' *Leviathan* entitled "Of the Consequence or Train of Imaginations." By the time Addison wrote the *Spectator* essays on imagination, we can say that his associationist ideas had been crystalized by his reading of Locke. We see, however, from this passage in his early essay on Virgil, that he, like Locke, had begun to consider the way the mind draws associations to other ideas from a simple image. He argues, in the passage cited above, that a great poet like Virgil recognizes this ability in readers and so "indirectly" suggests an idea that will lead the imagination of the reader to the idea intended. We, as readers, "take[] the hint from the poet" and allow our imaginations "to work out the rest."

Addison's first draft of the imagination essays happened sometime after 1704, after his appointment as Commissioner of Appeals, written as one long essay on the right hand pages of his notebook, with many of his later additions added on the left hand pages. Youngren notes that these additions "clearly show Addison laboring to express his deepening sense of the complexity of the mind's action, as it responds through time to the greatness, beauty, and novelty found in the natural world." Youngren, 280.

Albert Furtwangler challenges Youngren's assessment. In examining the manuscript versions of the Imagination essays, Furtwangler describes the original, seven-section draft version as "no more than an essay, a brief, rapid prose composition on a single topic. . . . It also shows that in this form the essay is not a critical treatise," that "the essay views man as a creature of God, and emphasizes imagination as an important means by which God reaches men's

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3Youngren, 280.
souls,” and that “it yields to a conclusion that deals with God, not art.” He then concludes that the essay’s “subject is not literature but psychological philosophy.” After summaries of Addison’s additions to the essay—interpolations, according to Furtwangler—he argues that these interpolations shift the focus away from God of the original to the poet in the published version of the essay:

the comparison of God’s powers over the imagination to those of the poet was a way of returning to the moral implications of art and design. It reinforced the long discussion of section iii, concerning God’s purposes in making objects pleasing to men, and thus concluded the essay by turning away from the art of the poet to consider imagination as a faculty of the soul. But because the interpolations place much greater emphasis on the poet, the ending does not quite read this way in the revised version. The comparison of poetry to God’s powers over the imagination serves to make the poet seem almost godlike, not to make God incomparably greater than any mere poet can be.

I find it highly significant that Furtwangler calls Addison’s revisions “interpolations” rather than “additions.” The term brings with it the negative connotations of an interruption in the flow of the essay, as when someone interrupts a conversation to insert some new thought. He also misses the simple significance of this shift of focus and what it in turn means about Addison’s thinking. Furtwangler goes on to call the interpolations “simple and even repetitious,” arguing that he finds it “hard to believe that they were inserted with the conscious design of shifting its meaning so greatly as to make a new essay on the intellectual and moral powers of the writer.”

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5 Ibid., 9.
6 Ibid., 10.
7 Ibid., 10-11.
sentences about creative powers should be read with extreme caution,” Furtwangler concludes, for “they well may be the inadvertent consequences of cramped revisions in a notebook.” To attribute Addison’s additions expanding the poetic or secondary pleasures of the imagination to the limitations of a “cramped notebook” is to blind oneself to other revisions made by Addison, like the example from Youngren that follows, of Addison’s striking out the very phrase that would support Furtwangler’s reading. He also seems to ignore the many revisions and additions to the essay that he himself summarizes throughout the rest of his article.

In contrast to Furtwangler, Youngren argues that Addison’s thoughts on imagination, particularly the importance of the secondary pleasures, only come to fruition as he revised and expanded his original essay for publication in the Spectator. Interestingly, in the manuscript version of the essay, the secondary pleasures were of no importance to Addison’s early thinking:

Originally, Addison had no interest in the secondary pleasures of the imagination, but as he revised for publication, his thinking had altered and his focus shifted from the primary pleasures, awakened by the observation of natural scenes, to those secondary pleasures, “re-collected” and “re-created” in our minds by associating primary ideas with each other in order to come up with new combinations of ideas that either improve upon natural scenes or create new scenes/things not possible within nature. We notice the affinity here

Ibid., 11.
with Wordsworth’s “emotions recollected in tranquility”9 and Coleridge’s idea of the “secondary imagination” that “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create.”10

This move in Addison’s thinking places the pleasures of the imagination, in *Spectator* no. 411, between the senses and the understanding. Ronald Paulson notes that Addison’s secondary pleasures of the imagination “occupy a middle area between ‘sense’ and ‘understanding,’ serving as a virtuous way to ‘Step out of Business’ without stepping into ‘Vice or Folly.’”11 In this regard Addison follows Aristotle, who also placed fantasy (φαντασία) in the same realm—between the senses and the understanding. This realm of fantasy, or the secondary pleasures of imagination, was moved to an inferior, suspect position, owing mainly to 17th-century scientific rationalism. Donald F. Bond, editor of the standard edition of the *Spectator*, wrote in 1937 that

> [t]he supremacy of Platonic idealism or of Cartesian rationalism would have meant a continuance in England of a dualistic psychology in which imagination would occupy an inferior, distrusted position. It was owing to the rise of the empiricist psychology that the prestige of the imagination was enhanced and that a more intensive, and unbiased [sic], study was made of its operations. Phantasms were no longer evaluated by an ideal truth, but by the truth or falsehood of the sensations which brought them into existence. To the creative writer imagination meant not only the reproducing of images, but the making of comparisons and the combining of materials into new and hitherto undreamed of situations and


characters. Bond argues that what he calls “empiricist psychology” opened a space between sense impressions and our understandings, allowing Addison to “recapture” imaginative writing from its inferior position.

In the first of his essays on the pleasures of the imagination (Spectator 411), Addison argues that our sense of sight is the greatest of our senses, for “this sense . . . furnishes the Imagination with its Ideas.” These ideas supplied by the sight come from objects in our view or from our remembering objects we have seen before. Through the power of imagination, we are capable of “retaining, altering, and compounding those Images, which we have once received, into all the varieties of Picture and Vision that are most agreeable to the Imagination.” Thus, a man in prison could occupy his thoughts with natural scenes remembered or created from the images stored in his mind. Addison notes that his “pleasures of imagination” come from sensations received through the eyes, and he divides them into two kinds: primary pleasures from objects immediately before us, and secondary pleasures from memories of objects before seen, “form’d into agreeable Visions of Things that are either Absent or Fictitious.” As Paulson noted above, the imagination, for Addison, lies between sense and understanding, and the imagination is as capable of


14Ibid., 3:537.

15Ibid.
moving us as the understanding. Addison continues: “A beautiful Prospect delights the Soul, as much as a Demonstration; and a Description in Homer has charmed more Readers than a Chapter in Aristotle.” To receive these pleasures from imagination, Addison argues, we need only open our eyes, becoming passive receivers of the primary pleasures:

A Man of Polite Imagination, is let into a great many Pleasures that the Vulgar are not capable of receiving. He can converse with a Picture, and find an agreeable Companion in a Statue. He meets with a secret Refreshment in a Description, and often feels a greater Satisfaction in the Prospect of Fields and Meadows, than another does in the Possession. It gives him, indeed, a kind of Property in everything he sees, and makes the most rude uncultivated Parts of Nature administer to his Pleasures: So that he looks upon the World, as it were, in another Light, and discovers in it a Multitude of Charms, that concealed themselves from the generality of Mankind.

Addison’s idea of the “Man of Polite Imagination” leads him to qualify what can be pleasures, even though, in theory, anything we think can be a pleasure. He argues that they must be “innocent Pleasures” that would not cause a “wise Man” to blush, or would lead us into vice or folly. What these “unvirtuous pleasures” are, Addison does not define. His assumption, accepted as he believes by his audience, is that anything contrary to Christianity would cause the wise man to blush, and therefore form part of the vulgar imagination rather than the polite imagination. Further, and more to our current intent, this idea is Addison’s direct link to Tolkien, and maybe the source for Tolkien’s ideas of “sub-creation”—the creation through words of imaginary worlds by the author—and “secondary belief”—created in the reader when the author does her job well. Addison here seems to recognize what Tolkien later shows—that for fictional art to work, a reader with

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16Ibid., 3:538.

17Ibid.
an imagination is as vital as the artist's creativity, else the art fails. Tolkien's ideas will be examined more closely beginning in Chapter 5.

We also see in this passage Addison expressing many "pre-romantic" ideas. When he speaks of a man conversing with a picture or statue, we recall Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" as an example of a man with "polite imagination" conversing with a Greek Vase. On Addison's notion of "possessing a view," we recall Wordsworth was not interested in the legal ownership of a "view"; rather, he came to "own" it, in the sense described by Addison—by possessing it through his eyes and its tranquil recollection later on, as Wordsworth "fixes" his feelings and the image in memory of the natural scene. Shelley's poem, "Mont Blanc," operates along similar lines: through the sublime moment created by his view of the mountain, the poet comes to possess the awesome grandeur of the mountain, the same awesome grandeur that at first he is unable to comprehend through sense and understanding. Imagination, for Shelley as for Addison, fills the gap between sense and understanding, enabling the person overcome by seeing Mont Blanc to comprehend what he has seen.

In Addison's second essay on imagination (Spectator 412) he focuses on these pleasures caused by viewing objects, first developing his ideas of the great, uncommon, and beautiful. Addison's notion of the greatness of an object seems to be a precursor to Shelley's idea of the sublime in Mont Blanc. Addison argues that "[o]ur Imagination loves to be filled with an Object, or to grasp [sic] at anything that is too big for its capacity. We are flung into a pleasing Astonishment at such unbounded Views, and feel a delightful

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Stillness and Amazement in the Soul at the Apprehension of them." The overwhelming greatness of an object—like Mont Blanc—causes in us a delightful astonishment, once we understand the object, through our imaginations. Beauty, for Addison, is the pleasurable attraction we feel to our own kind—our own species. Beautiful art reflects that attraction through its symmetry and proportion, but Addison, like many others, seems at a loss to define what those ideal symmetries and proportions might be, beyond an attraction to our own species. The uncommon produces in us "an agreeable Surprise," that "serves us for a kind of Refreshment, and takes off from that Satiety we are apt to complain of in our usual and ordinary Entertainments. It is this that bestows Charms on a Monster, and makes even the Imperfections of Nature please us." Addison's idea that the uncommon—or new, or novel—gives us a "kind of Refreshment," may be a source for J. R. R. Tolkien's idea of "recovery"—that the reading of fantasy literature helps us to regain a clearer view of the world we live in, by placing common ideas and objects into new, fantastic settings. Since this concept is explained in Tolkien's lecture "On Fairy-stories," a defense of fantasy literature, it is hardly surprising that he would turn to Addison's *Spectator* essays that before defended fictitious constructions of the literary imagination. We will examine these connections later on.

The idea of novelty, or the uncommon, bound up in Addison's mind associationism, has some of it roots in the writings of Longinus: "our imaginations often pass beyond the bounds of space, and if we survey our life on every side and see how much more it

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18Ibid., 3:540.

19Ibid., 3:541.
everywhere abounds in what is striking, and great, and beautiful, we shall discern the purpose of our birth.”\textsuperscript{20} We thus see where Addison went for his “great, uncommon, and beautiful.” The translation from Greek of the terms “great” and “beautiful” are straightforward; the “uncommon,” however, is a term used in Greek—\textit{περιττός}—that comes from \textit{περιττός}, “a dialectal variant” of \textit{περισσός} that means “remarkable, unusual, beyond measure.” What is remarkable about Addison’s idea of novelty, appropriated from Longinus, is his focus on the reader’s experience of imagination’s pleasures. This idea never interested Restoration critics, who focused solely on the author. The reader’s will comes into play after he puts down the poem and begins to extrapolate its moral significance. In his work on Addison’s ideas of the great, uncommon, and beautiful, Paulson sheds some more light on what happens, through imagination, in the reader’s mind. He argues that Addison uses the term, “imagination,” “to bridge the gap (unbridgeable to Swift at least) between the curiosity of the Novel and the credulity of the Strange.”\textsuperscript{21} Addison uses the imagination as a mediator between the mind (thought) and the senses (perception). Paulson continues, recognizing Locke as another source for Addison’s idea, “[b]ut, as his acknowledged derivation of [imagination] from Locke’s primary and secondary qualities suggests, Addison’s imagination . . . falls . . . on the side of credulity, the aesthetcian’s substitute for belief.”\textsuperscript{22}


\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 68.
Addison shifts into the reader's mind, to focus on what happens as the poem is read. We see this shift occurring early in Addison's contributions to the Spectator. In an essay (number 44) on the ghost in Hamlet, Addison writes: "The Mind of the Reader is wonderfully prepared for his Reception by the Discourses that precede it: His dumb Behaviour at his first Entrance, strikes the Imagination very strongly; but every Time he enters, he is still more terrifying. Who can read the Speech with which young Hamlet accosts him, without trembling?"  

Addison moves inside the mind of the reader, examining how Shakespeare, through the speeches that precede the ghost's entrance, prepares the mind of the reader to be frightened (as Hamlet) by the ghost. To examine this move to the reader more closely, we will turn from criticism of the text to the text itself, seeing how Addison strengthens and expands the positions of both author and reader through his idea of the secondary pleasures associated with imagination.

Addison, in Spectator 416, moves from the primary pleasures of imagination to the secondary pleasures, which he quickly points out, are secondary only for distinction's sake. We do not need to see all things, he argues, in order for the secondary imagination to operate: "It is sufficient, that we have seen Places, Persons, or Actions, in general, which bear a Resemblance, or at least some remote Analogy with what we find represented. Since it is in the Power of the Imagination, when it is once Stocked with particular Ideas, to enlarge, compound, and vary them at her own Pleasure."  

Our minds act as "comparers" of ideas—when presented with an object the imagination sifts through

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23 Addison, Spectator, 1:186.

24 Ibid., 3:558-59.
the images stored in our minds searching for those images that are most similar to the 
object before our eyes, eventually producing an understanding of what we see. In other 
words, the imagination abstracts an idea of the object before our eyes by enlarging, 
compounding, and varying the ideas and images stored in our memories.

This power of the imagination to abstract leads to the pleasure we feel from art. 
Addison then creates a continuum of representation, running from concrete to abstract 
forms of art. For him, a statue is the most mimetic of all art forms, as a statue has shape 
and dimension that can be apprehended by the sense of touch alone without sight. A 
painting then becomes a secondary form of mimesis, as it can only be understood through 
sight. Moving into a more abstract form of art is the description that depends on our sight 
and our understanding of the letters written—the resemblance to the actual object is 
mediated by language and requires an imaginative leap for our understanding and a 
visualizing of the description. This describes the province of literature. Addison’s final, 
and most abstract, form of art is music, which is even more abstract and symbolic than 
writing. However, Addison points to its universal nature, being capable of crossing 
language boundaries, eliciting similar emotional responses in most of its listeners. Addison 
then limits himself to only those pleasures that derive from writing, later generalizing these 
pleasures to painting and sculpture:

Words, when well chosen, have so great a Force in them, that a Description often 
gives us more lively Ideas than the Sight of the Things themselves. The Reader 
finds a Scene drawn in stronger Colours, and painted more to the Life in his 
Imagination, by the help of Words, than by an actual Survey of the Scene which 
they describe. In this Case the Poet seems to get the better of Nature; he takes, 
indeed, the Landskip after her, but gives it more vigorous Touches, heightens its 
Beauty, and so enlivens the whole Piece, that the Images, which flow from the 
Objects themselves, appear weak and faint, in Comparison of these that come from
Addison believes that the poet is able to get the better of nature through description because our imaginations are limited by the objects before our eyes—their shape, form, size, and color are fixed in our sight. In writing, however, the Poet gives us as free a View of it as he pleases, and discovers to us several Parts, that either we did not attend to, or that lay out of our Sight when we first beheld it. As we look on any Object, our Idea of it is, perhaps, made up of two or three simple Ideas; but when the Poet represents it, he may either give us a more complex Idea of it, or only raise in us such ideas as are most apt to affect the Imagination.

Several ideas seem to operate in Addison’s declaration. Addison’s opening phrase, describing the “Force” or power of words to give the reader “more lively Ideas” than the thing itself, invests language with the ability to create an emotional response in the reader in much the same way as the more abstract music. The poet, as Addison remarked of Virgil, takes the best parts of the object, enhances and adds to them in order to elicit a pleasurable response in the reader. The power of words allows the poet to go far beyond what occurs in nature, limited only by the scope of his own imagination, creating scenes, objects, creatures far beyond what we actually see in the world around us. Implicit in this statement is Addison’s move into the reader. For, if the poet is limited only by his imagination, the reader “of polite imagination” is also limited only by the scope of his own imagination.

\[25\text{Ibid., 3:560-61. Addison’s idea of the power of words sounds remarkably similar to Tolkien’s power of the adjective, discussed in Chapter 5. See Tolkien, } \textit{OFS}, \text{122.}\]

\[26\text{Ibid., 3:561. This move ties Addison directly back to Sidney’s poet who is freed from the constraints of nature, ranging as far as his imagination can carry him. What Addison adds here is a reader of equal imaginative power, also capable of ranging as far as his imagination, added to the author’s imagination, can go. See the discussion of Sidney’s ideas in the previous chapter.}\]
imagination. Poetry (writing) that exceeds what is possible in nature requires a reader whose imagination is as unfettered as the poet’s— if the reader’s imagination is deficient, no added amount of imaginative genius on the part of the poet can overcome the reader’s deficiency, leaving the reader unable to experience Addison’s secondary pleasures.

We also see in this essay an idea of language that seems to anticipate our post-structuralist approach to language. In this essay’s concluding paragraph, Addison examines the different pleasures each different reader experiences after reading the same descriptions. Addison attributes this difference to two possible sources: “either from the Perfection of Imagination in one [reader] more than in another, or from the different Ideas that several Readers affix to the same Words.”27 We noted above the need for an imaginative reader— or a reader who has the “perfection of imagination” necessary to accept imaginative literature. Addison compares the reader of weak imagination to the person with weak sight— neither are capable of enjoying what is before their eyes, whether “written” by nature on the landscape or written by the author upon a page. Of his second reason for difference among readers, Addison writes, “a Man . . . must have well weighed the Force and Energy that lie in the several Words of a Language, so as to be able to distinguish which are most significant and expressive of their proper Ideas, and what additional Strength and Beauty they are capable of receiving from Conjunction with others.”28 In other words, each reader must study and know the meanings of the words

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.

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used by the author and how those words can be used together in stronger and more beautiful ways. Underlying Addison's statement is his assumption that language, if properly studied and understood, is transparent—there is a one-to-one correspondence between any word and its meaning, expressed much later by Ferdinand de Saussure as the relation between signifier (word) and signified (meaning). Therefore, Addison attributes the difference between readers to their superior or inferior imaginations. We can accept that different readers have differing imaginative abilities, but we reject the transparency of language and de Saussure's one-to-one correspondence between signifier and signified. We have learned, rather, that any signifier elicits in us a chain of signifiers from which we choose, according to our individual culture, history, and language, the signifying chain that for us gives meaning to the word in its particular context, which in turn gives meaning to the passage we read. Rather than upsetting Addison's idea of imaginative pleasure in words, I believe signifying chains enhance and increase the imaginative possibilities for both writer and reader. I do not think for a moment that Addison had post-structuralist ideas in mind when he wrote his pleasures; rather, I think that the structure of his secondary pleasures do not come to full fruition until long after Addison. Perhaps a 20th-century example of how Addison's secondary pleasures have been used may help to explain.

If we said that Addison built a home for secondary pleasures, or imaginative literature, we could say that Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in his Biographia Literaria, unlocked the door to this home of imagination by opening a space for what he called "supernatural poetry"—poetry that exceeds what is possible in nature, like his Rime of the Ancient Mariner. We can then say that in the 20th-century, writer and critic J. R. R. Tolkien blew
the door off of its hinges. He also predated post-structuralist thought, yet his ideas on imagination resonate especially for us who have lived through the “French Revolution” of language. In his own “defense” of imaginative literature, a 1939 lecture entitled “On Fairy-stories,” he seems to take up the ideas of Addison toward both author and reader, and apply them to the most imaginative form of literature, the fairy story or fantasy.

(Addison discusses this kind of writing in Spectator 419, using Dryden’s description of it as “the Fairie way of Writing.”) Tolkien argued that if the writer did his work well then he would create in the reader “secondary belief” in the fantastic occurrences related in the story. Fantasy’s success depends, according to Tolkien, on both writer and reader who must both possess Addison’s “Perfection of Imagination.” Tolkien argues that

Literature works from mind to mind and is thus more progenitive. It is at once more universal and more poignantly particular. If it speaks of bread or wine or stone or tree, it appeals to the whole of these things, to their ideas; yet each hearer will give to them a peculiar personal embodiment in his imagination. Should the story say “he ate bread,” the dramatic producer or painter can only show “a piece of bread” according to his taste or fancy, but the hearer of the story will think of bread in general and picture it in some form of his own. If a story says “he climbed a hill and saw a river in the valley below,” the illustrator may catch, or nearly catch, his own vision of a scene; but every hearer of the words will have his own picture, and it will be made out of all the hills and rivers and dales he has ever seen, but especially out of The Hill, The River, The Valley which were for him the first embodiment of the word.

Tolkien’s focus in this passage is on the reader, but his assumption is that the writer takes this ability of his readers into account, and so as Samuel Johnson noted, “does not number the streaks of the tulip.” He writes in terms that allow the reader to imagine for himself

\[29\] Tolkien, OFS, 159.

the bread, hill, river, and valley that are described, according to the reader's conception of what those terms represent. The forests and hills that I imagine from Tolkien's description are the pine and fir forests of the American Northwest and very different from the forests imagined by Tolkien, who lived his entire life in the English midlands. The difference between us enhances the text and allows any of its readers to imagine the forests described (or the creatures), becoming a very personal space for each reader.

This leads us into Addison's discussion of what he called the "Fairie way of Writing," described in No. 419. Contemporary critic David Sandner uses this definition to place Addison as the first critic of the fantastic. Sandner begins his essay with Addison's definition of the "fairy way of writing" and argues that this definition contains a tension: "On the one hand, the fantastic is presented as purely imaginary, as having 'no existence,' thereby framing, and so calling into question, 'existence,' whatever is understood as real and known. On the other hand, the fantastic is associated with a tradition of exploded supernatural beliefs from fairies to demons."[31] The relevant passage in Addison is from No. 419:

There is a kind of Writing, wherein the Poet quite loses sight of Nature, and entertains his Reader's Imagination with the Characters and Actions of such Persons as have many of them no Existence, but what he bestows on them. Such are Fairies, Witches, Magicians, Demons, and departed Spirits. This Mr. Dryden calls the Fairie way of Writing, which is, indeed, more difficult than any other that depends on the Poet's Fancy, because he has no pattern to follow in it, and must work altogether out of his own Invention.[32]

Sandner then asks: "But if fantastic literature presents itself as 'other,' as not only wholly

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imaginary but productive of absolute difference, how can it also be the repository of the all-too familiar elements of superstitious folklore? Upon the idea of this "tension" in Addison's definition, Sandner builds his entire case, and I think he makes an assumption here that is not supported by Addison's "definition" of the "Fairie way of writing." If I'm following his reasoning here, Sandner says that for Addison, the Poet losing sight of Nature, creating characters that have "no existence" in the sensible world around us, means that Addison locates fantastic writing completely outside of the sensible world. But Addison also equates fantastic writing with the elements of superstitious folklore, and since these superstitious elements are part of the sensible world, or at least the world of common experience, then there is a tension between the two sides, as Sandner calls them, of Addison's definition. If we accept Sandner's interpretation, then "tension" is the wrong word, "contradiction" seems better to fit this view, for if the fantastic exists exclusively outside of or beyond the world around us, then nothing that is "in" this world--as are traditions of fairies, witches, and demons--can be part of Addison's fantastic. And yet, according to Sandner, Addison includes them in his definition, and so, logically, the definition collapses for its inherent contradiction. This reductio ad absurdum does not seem to be Addison's purpose, nor is it ultimately Sandner's.

The mistake Sandner makes here is assuming that Addison thinks that when the poet loses sight of nature, he means this absolutely. In other words, that the natural world and the fantastic world are mutually exclusive. Sandner goes on to argue that "Addison elaborates on his definition by claiming that the would-be fantasist should take care lest

33Sandner, 52.
‘his fairies talk like people of his own species’. Though no human (non-fairy?) writer could write, much less think, ‘in a different manner from that of mankind,’ Addison’s definition insists that the appearance of a difference is necessary to the function of the fantastic. There is, it seems to me, nothing in Addison’s text, cited above, that indicates this exclusivity—Addison does not say all of these creations—“the characters and actions”—have no existence, but his word is “many”: “There is a kind of Writing, wherein the Poet quite loses sight of Nature, and entertains his Reader’s Imagination with the Characters and Actions of such Persons as have many of them no Existence, but what he bestows on them.” Many of them,” Addison writes, have “no existence” in the world of our experience. The sentence following this one helps to further debunk the idea of absolute difference: “Such are Fairies, Witches, Magicians, Demons, and departed Spirits.” The key term in this sentence is the word, “such,” which here functions as a pronoun. The referent for this pronoun must be one of the nouns from the previous sentence, which from the context seems not to refer back to “Writing,” “Poet,” or “Reader’s,” but to “such Persons as have many of them no Existence.” The meaning of the word “such,” used as a pronoun in this particular construction can be found in the traces of its etymology: “such” comes from the Old English swylc, which is a compound of the Germanic swā- “so,” and lik “like,” meaning, “of the same kind.” Thus, Addison’s sentence—“Such are Fairies, Witches, Magicians, Demons, and departed Spirits—serves as an example—“of the same

34Ibid.

35Addison, Spectator, 3:570, my emphasis.

36Ibid., my emphasis.
kind"—of persons and creatures who have "no existence" in the world around us—not the exclusive category of fantastic creatures, but an example of creatures and persons that Addison considers as part of the "Fairie way of Writing." For me, then, Sandner's project collapses as the difference that he tries to find in Addison's definition of this kind of writing isn't really there. I think, however, that if we recall the two paths described in my introduction—the two directions of fantasy criticism—it appears to me that Sandner wants to claim Addison as a forefather of the Todorovian fantastic, a move that I think can be made without making Addison an exclusive member of this movement. For, as I hope to show, Tolkien was heavily influenced by Addison's thinking.

Tolkien also argues in his lecture that fantasy is the most difficult to achieve, and he seems to have been reading his Addison. In Spectator 419, as noted above, Addison calls this kind of writing "the Fairie way of Writing" that is "more difficult than any other that depends on the Poet's Fancy, because he has no Pattern to follow in it, and must work altogether out of his own Invention." Writing of this kind, Addison notes, causes the reader great delight through its strangeness and novelty: "how much more must we be delighted and surprised when we are led, as it were, into a new Creation, and see the Persons and Manners of another Species?" Addison argues that "Men of cold Fancies" may object to this kind of writing, but he believes that there is more to nature than what is visible to us. He thinks the problem with literature of this kind is when the reader believes the created world real, rather than an imaginative story—a primary world rather than a

37Ibid.

38Ibid., 3:571.
secondary world created in the mind of the reader. Tolkien followed Addison on this point, maintaining a strict distinction between the world in which we live (primary) and the one created by the story (secondary)—within the confines of the story the created world is real, outside the story the created world is a fiction, existing only in the minds of the readers. Addison is willing to accept this distinction: “we have all heard so many pleasing Relations in favour of them, that we do not care for seeing through the Falsehood, and willingly give ourselves up to so agreeable Imposture.”

Coleridge picks up on this notion of Addison—that we willingly give ourselves to the story—arguing that supernatural poetry requires a “willing suspension of disbelief” on the part of the reader. Addison goes on to argue that the English writer has been the best at writing imaginative works, classifying Shakespeare as the pinnacle of this particular kind of writing. He also includes the allegory with this kind of writing, noting that among the English Spencer and Milton stand out as representatives of this form. As a side note, Tolkien’s fellow Inkling and Oxford professor, C. S. Lewis, used the allegory extensively in his imaginative writing, and his use of allegory was part of the disagreement between Lewis and Tolkien that led to their estrangement in their later lives. Lewis believed that the Christian writer should include elements of his religion in his writings, while Tolkien went to great lengths during the revision process of The Lord of the Rings to remove all traces of his Catholic beliefs.

We began this chapter by looking at an early essay of Addison’s (1697) on Virgil’s Georgics and noticed how Addison’s thinking had begun to move from Restoration ideas

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39Ibid., 3:571-72.

40Coleridge, Biographia, 2:6.
to his aesthetics based on associationist thought. We also saw in the *Georgics* hints that led us to the conclusion that he was thinking the same thing about our minds as Locke. Locke was for Addison a catalyst who helped to crystalize his thinking on the way our minds associate ideas. We then moved into the actual revisions Addison made to his "Pleasures of the Imagination" essays from its first draft around 1704 to its publication in the *Spectator* during the summer of 1712, focusing explicitly on his changing views of the secondary pleasures. In the time previous to Addison, these secondary pleasures, or imaginative literature, had become "demonized" as the warped delusions of sick minds, owing mostly to rationalist and empiricist thinking. The empiricist depended on sense impressions and anything not based in what we could discern by our senses became suspect. However, the application of empiricist principles enabled the very thing it suspected, by opening a space in the mind for the power of imagination to create new things, creatures, and ideas from the raw materials supplied by the senses. Addison recognized this power and celebrated it as an acceptable use of our minds, within the boundaries set by Christianity. His recapturing of imaginative literature expresses "pre-romantic" thinking on both the imagination—the power to converse with statue or painting—and the sublime—the uncommon found in nature and fantastic literature. His focus on the mind of the reader shifts emphasis from author to reader and the power of words to move the reader emotionally. We see in this shift a hint of post-structuralist thinking and *differance* in language—the idea that words can have different signification for different readers. We concluded by tying the modern critic and fantasy author, J. R. R. Tolkien, to Addison's secondary pleasures, asserting that Tolkien followed and expanded Addison's ideas for the form of literature most difficult to achieve for its distance from
reality, fantasy. Addison and Tolkien are both willing to suspend or even ignore that reality for the sake of a story that is well-written, although grounded only in the superior imaginations of both author and reader.

We have been limited in this chapter by the surprisingly small number of critical articles written that focus on the secondary pleasures of imagination in Addison’s *Spectator* essays. For, if Addison is indeed the grandfather of modern aesthetics, we would think that more criticism would have been written in the nearly 300 years since Addison wrote. Perhaps if we had focused less narrowly, or shifted our focus to romantic thought and the sublime, we would have found more connections between Addison and his 19th-century Romantic counterparts. His connections to Tolkien have been, I have found, largely ignored as has been Tolkien in critical circles. If the revisions in Addison’s essays describe a shift in his thinking to greater emphasis on secondary, more imaginative, pleasures then his ideas did not achieve their full fruition until Tolkien used them to defend fantasy literature, and enthrone it as the “highest form of literature.” I follow Tolkien who follows Addison: I’m willing to suspend reality for the sake of a well-told tale that has little basis in reality—only what I, as reader, bring to it.
CHAPTER 3

IMAGINATION IN COLERIDGE'S BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

In a lecture delivered in June 1795, Samuel Taylor Coleridge argued that we can trace all miseries and vices experienced by men and women back to what he termed "artificial Wants." According to Coleridge, Nature will supply what is necessary while men (women) are left to pursue more important matters:

But we were not made to find Happiness in the complete gratification of our bodily wants--the mind must enlarge the sphere of its activity, and busy itself with the acquisition of intellectual aliment. To develop the powers of the Creator is our proper employment--and to imitate Creativeness by combination our most exalted and self-satisfying Delight.... Our Almighty Parent hath therefore given to us Imagination that stimulates to the attainment of real excellence by the contemplation of splendid Possibilities that still revivifies the dying motive within us, and fixing our eye on the glittering Summits that rise one above the other in Alpine endlessness still urges us up the ascent of Being, amusing the ruggedness of the road with the beauty and grandeur of the everwidening Prospect.

In other words, people are not meant to be mere creatures, but creators: our "proper employment," the work we are meant to do, is to create, "to imitate [the] Creativeness" of our divine parent. Like Italian humanist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Sir Philip


2Ibid., original emphasis.

Sidney, so Coleridge follows in asserting that God has given us an “Imagination that stimulates to the attainment of real excellence,” and, with that power, if we fix “our eye on the glittering Summits that rise one above the other in Alpine endlessness,” we can produce “imaginary” works that elicit in us “our most exalted and self-satisfying Delight.” In a fragment of one of Coleridge’s theological lectures, which runs parallel to the opening of the lecture above, he notes that the “gift of imagination is the power of discerning the Cause in the Effect[,] a power which when employed on the works of the Creator elevates and by the variety of its pleasures almost monopolizes the Soul. We see our God everywhere—the Universe in the most literal sense is his written Language.” Jonathan Wordsworth astutely observes that this power, for Coleridge, is the ability to “perceiv[e] God in His creation.” This observation will become more significant when we discuss its relation to accusations made against the Biographia for its apparent pantheistic tendencies.

Twenty years later, Coleridge wrote his Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions, a work called by some “the greatest book of criticism in English” while others have felt that it was “put together with a pitchfork.” Gyung-Ryul Jang sums up current sentiments toward the Biographia: Coleridge’s text is

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5Coleridge, Lectures, 338-39, original emphasis.


7Coleridge, Biographia, editors’ introduction, l:xli, xliii.
“hopelessly cryptic[,] . . . an academic ‘Aeolian Harp.’”8 Paul Scott Wilson describes current feelings on the problems of the *Biographia*, particularly the definition of imagination in Chapter 13, as related to 1) his personal problems, meaning his addiction and his estrangement from Wordsworth, 2) his several false starts to give a definition of imagination and his failure to do so, leaving Chapter 13 unsupported, 3) his borrowing (plagiarizing, according to most) from so many sources that his thoughts on imagination are confused at best, which leads to 4) his failed attempt to unify such disparate ideas. This problem leads George Whalley to conclude that “[t]he general impression is that the book is incorrigibly diffuse, fragmentary, and obscure.”9 I, like Wilson, J. Wordsworth, and others, believe that there is more unity in the *Biographia* than current critics believe. We can trace much of the current, negative criticism lobbed at Coleridge’s work to comments made by Shawcross in his 1907 Oxford edition of the *Biographia*: “The distinction [between primary and secondary imagination] appears to be this: The primary imagination is the organ of common perception, the faculty by which we have experience of an actual world of phenomena. The secondary imagination is the same power in a heightened degree, which enables its possessor to see the world of our common experience in its real significance.”10 From this declaration, the primary becomes a

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common faculty while the secondary is the “same power in a heightened degree,” standing
the ordinal senses of the terms “primary” and “secondary” on their figurative heads. This
position leads William Crisman to declare, “such readings . . . , in which the secondary
imagination appears a higher force than the primary . . . seem[ ] to violate the various
natural English senses of primary and secondary.”¹¹ I believe that we can see in this
violation of ordinality a desire by critics to maintain poets and poetry as a special case of
activity, outside more mundane matters. These critics, in an effort to fit certain kinds of
poetry and prose into their realistic (and narrow) view of the world as they would like it to
be, ignore their own notions of ordinality to fit Coleridge’s division of imagination into
their world views: poets are supreme though poetic imagination, for Coleridge, is
secondary. Verlyn Flieger, in a study of time in Tolkien’s works, notes that this narrow,
realistic view of poetry and prose led Tolkien and Lewis to “write for themselves the kind
of stories they liked”: this view is “characteristic of an antiromantic reaction, a militant and
narrowly defined modernity that arose after World War I. It reflects the very kind of
nouvelle approach to art that Tolkien and Lewis had reacted against. . .”¹²

This interpretation of the Biographia is, as much of current criticism has shown,
untenable. Modern critics have, in a literal sense, torn the Chapter 13 definitions of
imagination from the text and twisted them, ignoring all that has preceded the definitions.
My purpose, in part, is to “re-place” the definitions within the text and show that the

¹¹William Crisman, “‘Thus Far Had the Work Been Transcribed’: Coleridge’s Use
of Kant’s Pre-Critical Writings and the Rhetoric of ‘On the Imagination,’” MLQ 52, no. 4
(1991): 412n, original emphasis.

¹²Verlyn Flieger, A Question of Time: J. R. R. Tolkien’s Road to Faërie (Kent:
Kent State University Press, 1997), 234-35.

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definition of imagination culminates a long and complex argument that sets a foundation for Coleridge's writing of himself as poet. I will thus begin with the "metaphysical chapters" that precede and prefigure his definition of imagination. I will then attempt to "un-tangle" the "knot" of imagination as defined in Chapter 13. In the larger context, I will illustrate how Coleridge picks up where Addison left off and projects imagination forward in a manner that Tolkien found viable for the creation of secondary worlds as refractions of the "true light."

Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria or Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, was written in 1815, published in 1817, and written as a response to William Wordsworth's poetic ideals. The two titles convey much about the content of the work, and, I would argue, tie his work to both Sidney and Pico della Mirandola. As title, the *Biographia Literaria* is a mixture of Greek and Latin: "Biographia" is a compound of the Greek βίος [bios], meaning "life, mode of life, livelihood, means," and γραφίς [graphis], "writing," γράφω [grapho], "to scratch, engrave, write, draw, paint, register, describe, inscribe." The *Biographia* is thus to write (scratch, engrave, draw, paint, register, describe, inscribe) a life. In the humanist writings of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, God gives to man the right to "trace the lineaments" of his (her) own character, and we note that this action is precisely what Coleridge does in the *Biographia*: he writes (scratches, engraves, draws, paints, registers, describes, inscribes) his life. "Literaria" is a Latin adjective, in the feminine to agree with *Biographia*, meaning "of reading and writing." The adjective thus re-inscribes the act of writing the life of reading and writing in Coleridge's title. The

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"Biographia Literaria" is thus a writing of Coleridge’s life of reading and writing.

The subtitle, *Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, echoes while elaborating the work’s main title. C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon define a “sketch” as

> A brief composition presenting a single scene, character, or incident. It lacks plot and deep characterization. Originally used in the sense of an artist’s *sketch* as preliminary groundwork for developed work, it is now often employed for a finished product of simple proportions, as a character *sketch* or a Vaudeville *sketch*.  

The idea of a “sketch” can perhaps explain the apparent lack of unity within the *Biographia* and that Coleridge was aware of its “preliminary” nature. The term comes from the Latin *schedium*, meaning “an extemporaneous poem.”

We also note the similarity between “sketching” and the “tracing” of a self. When an artist “sketches,” she uses broad, swift strokes to outline a person, place, or thing, to draw a preliminary picture of what she may use later in a final painting. Coleridge, in naming his work, indicates to his readers that it is a “work in progress,” not a final writing of his literary life and opinions, but an “extemporaneous” drafting of his work, his attempt to “write” (scratch, engrave, draw, paint, register, describe, inscribe) his life of reading and writing. Sheila M. Kearns associates this act of writing the self with the “empty sign”: “The self that writes autobiography is always different from the self that is written about, a self that in the act of

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15 Given Coleridge’s knowledge of both Greek and Latin, we can say that he was aware of this sense and so deliberately chose the word. We must also add that most of the text “was dictated to John Morgan, without whose help we might never have had it,” note Engell and Jackson Bate in their introduction to the *Biographia*. They hasten to add that “[t]o remember this will help to explain many characteristics of the book” (*Biographia [CC], 1:xlv*). I would further argue that many critics have taken the “preliminary” nature of the text as a licence to decontextualize the Chapter 13 definitions.
writing is both presented and deferred, or more accurately, is presented as that which is deferred."16 Though Kearns notes that she does not want to call him a "proto-poststructuralist," I think that she points to something in Coleridge's act of writing himself in his literary life that is at least postmodern, that places us in a position to form a kind of unity from the Sketches of [his] Literary Life and Opinions.

Wilson begins his reading of the Biographia by asserting that Coleridge's "'seminal principle' of imagination . . . is both a metaphysical distinction concerning God and a linguistic principle concerning language and metaphor."17 This idea, for Wilson, helps to explain the distinctions in Chapter 13 between primary and secondary imaginations, between Fancy and Imagination. In Chapter 4, Coleridge states his purpose in the Biographia:

But it was Mr. Wordsworth's purpose to consider the influences of fancy and imagination as they are manifested in poetry, and from different effects to conclude their diversity in kind; while it is my object to investigate the seminal principle, and then from the kind to deduce the degree. My friend has drawn a masterly sketch of the branches with their poetic fruitage. I wish to add the trunk, and even the roots as far as they lift themselves above ground, and are visible to the naked eye of our common consciousness.18 The "seminal principle" in the Biographia, for Coleridge, goes deeper than Wordsworth's "masterly sketch of the branches and their poetic fruitage," to find the roots of the imagination. The term "root" comes from the Latin radix, "root, radish, foot (of a hill or


17Wilson, 451.

18Biographia, 1:87-88, original emphasis.
mountain), base, foundation, origin,” and from the Greek ρίζα [rhiza], “root, stem, origin, family.” His purpose is therefore to trace the roots, find the foundation, or locate the origin of the imagination, and this tracing is intimately bound up with the writing of his life of reading and writing.

Kearns points out that many of Coleridge’s texts, like the *Biographia*, *The Statesman’s Manual*, *Aids to Reflection*, and *Logic*, were written to aid others who wanted to train their minds for “philosophical disquisition.” Thus, in the act of writing himself, he hoped to share his experiences with others, giving them key insights into how they could duplicate his growth. Kearns sees this act of “self-writing” as forging a link between the *Biographia* and the *Logic*: “But more than the two works being versions of Coleridge’s account of the growth of his mind, they are linked by the notion that the act of constructing such an account is itself vital to that growth.”*® Kearns posits the link as the notion of the “verb substantive,” the idea that we can trace all language to the verb “to be,” rather than to acts of naming. In the first chapter of the *Logic*, Coleridge sketches the history of logic, and asserts that language begins with the verb that expresses both action and being:

> For all words express either being or action, or the predominance of the one over the other. In philosophical grammar, they are either substantives, or verbs, or as adnouns and adverbs express the modification of the one by the other. But the verb substantive (“am” sum, εἰμί) expresses the identity or coinherence of being and act. It is the act of being. All other words therefore may be considered as tending from this point, or more truly from the mid-point of the line, the *punctum indifferentiae* representing the *punctum identitatis*, even as the whole line

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*Kearns, 7.*
represents the same point as produced or polarised.²⁰

In the verb substantive, Coleridge sees action and being as “co-in-hering”—they “stick with-in” each other. I divide the term, “co-in-herence,” to suggest both its compound nature and its importance to poststructuralist thought. The prefix “co-” is a variation of “com-” from the Latin cum, meaning “with.” The Latin preposition, in, “in, on,” coupled with the “noun-ed” verb haerere—“to cling to, stick to, be attached to”—means “to cling (stick) into” or “be attached into.” Adding the prefix, the word compounded means “to cling (stick) within, be attached within.” However, another sense of the verb, haerere (with both prefixes) means “to come to a standstill within, be at a loss within, be in doubt within,” expresses the kind of “play” recognizable from a poststructuralist perspective, the “slippage” between/among signs. Speaking of this theory, Kearns remarks: “The act of being is to be identical to oneself, to be in-different from oneself. The implication of this theory of the origin of language is that the assertion of existence becomes the founding act of knowledge.”²¹

However, Coleridge recognizes that in naming the ground of being and knowledge, the midpoint between acting and existing, both the “point of identity” and the “point of indifference,” he still needs something to control the slippage between/among signs. He therefore posits self-consciousness as the source of both being and knowing. Coleridge notes,

If the question were: “what is the origin of our knowledge of all truths?”, . . . the


²¹Kearns, 8.
answer must doubtless be self-consciousness, inasmuch as the terms are identical. But we have enquired for something more and higher than this self-consciousness which supposes reflection, and reflection an act antecedent thereto. It were therefore a contradiction in terms to call that a primary truth which is admitted to be secondary or derivative, and we must first secure an absoluteness, an independency, to the position “I am” before we can communicate certainty to other positions on the ground of their being one with it or a part of self-consciousness. But to affirm of any finite being that it is absolute is a contradiction in terms: in order to absoluteness [sic] there must be an “is” (est) which necessarily involves the “I am”, and again an “I am” without which no “is” would be conceivable. This therefore and this alone can be the *principium essendi et sciendi* or the perfect identity of being and knowing and therefore the ground and source of both.\(^{22}\)

In this “re-flection” on the origin of our knowledge of truth, self-consciousness becomes the “principle of being and knowing,” the ground of existence and knowledge, a “tie between signifier and signified . . . what is in effect an autobiographical act of writing, an act of writing the self. For Coleridge, the answer to the problem of the limitation of human knowledge and the source of a language in which human consciousness ‘coinheres’ is self-consciousness.”\(^{23}\) There is another sense in the term *principium* besides “principle”: *principium* also means “beginning, start, origin, beginner, originator, basis, premise.” Self-consciousness thus becomes the beginning (start, origin, beginner, originator, basis, premise) of being and knowing:

In this, and this alone, object and subject, being and knowing, are identical, each involving and supposing the other; it is a subject which becomes a subject in and by the very act of making itself its own object, . . . it is a subject which becomes subject by the act of constructing itself objectively to and for itself, but which never is or can be an object except for itself, and only so far an object as by the very same act and in the same indivisible moment it becomes a subject.\(^{24}\)

\(^{22}\) *Logic*, 81-82.

\(^{23}\) Kearns, 9.

\(^{24}\) *Logic*, 84.

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Kearns argues that we do this act of constructing the self through language—that making the self an object inheres in the autobiographical act of writing the self. In using the term “construct,” built from the Latin *struere*, “to build, erect, deploy (troops), design,” and *cum* (with) means “to build (erect, deploy, design) together,” Coleridge would have recognized its relation to *streuen*, a Greek word that means “to spread or scatter.” Thus, the construction of the self through writing contains the seed of its own “de-construction,” for to build together the self is also to spread or scatter the self through writing. We can therefore say that Coleridge’s use of “construction” shows his “re-cognition” of the slippage between/among signs that propels him forward/upward in his search for a secure grounding of being and knowing.

The passage from the *Logic*, cited above, is a variation of Thesis VI in Chapter 12 of the *Biographia*. Coleridge states, concerning the inherence of subject and object:

> This principle, and so characterised manifests itself in the SUM or I Am; which I shall hereafter indiscriminately express by the words spirit, self, and self-consciousness. In this, and in this alone, object and subject, being and knowing are identical, each involving and supposing the other. . . . It may be described therefore as a perpetual self-duplication of one and the same power into object and subject, which presuppose each other, and can exist only as antithesis.\(^{25}\)

Thus, Coleridge equates “self-consciousness” with “spirit,” “self,” and “SUM or I Am.”

We recall Coleridge’s declaration, cited above, that “[w]e see our God everywhere—the Universe in the most literal sense is *his written Language.*”\(^{26}\) In an earlier lecture, Coleridge states that “[t]he Omnipotent has unfolded to us the Volume of the World, that

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\(^{25}\) *Biographia*, 1:272-3.

\(^{26}\) *Lectures*, 339, my emphasis.
there we may read the Transcript of himself," and in Lecture 3, "to the pious man all
Nature is thus beautiful because its every Feature is the Symbol and all its Parts the written
Language of infinite Goodness and all powerful Intelligence." We see this idea of the
universe as God’s written language expressed in his poetry: “so shalt thou see and hear /
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible / Of that eternal language, which thy God /
Utters.” I believe this idea of God “writing” the universe ties Coleridge’s “self-
consciousness” more closely to Kearns’ idea of autobiography as “writing the self.” The
action of writing the self by the finite “I am” reflects, for Coleridge, the infinite “I Am’s”
act of writing/speaking the Universe into “being.” In speaking of the SUM (“I Am”),
Coleridge notes that in “[t]he verb (verbum), the word is of all possible terms the most
expressive of that which it is meant to express, an act, a going forth, a manifestation, a
something which is distinguishable from the mind which goes forth in the word, yet
inseparable therefrom; for the mind goes forth in it, and without the mind the word would
cease to be a word, it would be a sound, a noise.” The finite “I am,” the “mind which

27Ibid., 94, 158.

See also “Religious Musings,” lines 9-10, “The Destiny of Nations,” lines 17-19, in The
Great Romantics: Selected Poems of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge,

29For a discussion of how writing and speaking inhere in one another, and how
God’s “silence” allows a space for man to write/speak, see Jacques Derrida, “Force and
Signification,” in Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of

30Logic, 82. Also, as my Latin professor, Dr. Louis Perraud, has pointed out, the
Latin verbum means “word,” which I think Coleridge “mis-translates” to draw attention to
his assertion that in the infinite “I Am,” subject and object, being and knowing, name and

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goes forth in the word” (of the infinite “I Am”), is both separate from “yet inseparable from” the “I Am.” Coleridge elaborates this distinction, calling man (woman) “the conditional finite I” and God “the absolute I AM,” noting “the dependence or rather the inherence of the former in the latter: in whom ‘we live, and move, and have our being,’ as St. Paul divinely asserts. . .”31 This notion that “without the mind the word would cease to be a word” and the inherence of the finite “I am” in the infinite “I AM,” yields some conclusions that I have difficulty believing Coleridge could have missed. First, if the finite “I am” inheres in the infinite “I AM,” then the finite “I” must also be infinite, else the relationship devolves into polarities that cannot “inhere” in each other. The reverse is also true: if the infinite “I AM” inheres in the finite “I am,” then the infinite “I” must also be finite, an assertion that would have evoked a “stoning” in Coleridge’s day and at least a charge of “blaspheme” today. Second, if the finite “I” ceases to exist without the infinite “I,” then, equally, the infinite “I” would cease to exist without the finite “I”—the “word,” to have meaning must both be spoken/written and read/heard by self-conscious “I’s,” whether finite or infinite. In order for the relationship of inherence to function, woman (man) must inhere in God as God inhere in man (woman).

In order for Coleridge’s system to avoid the conclusions just noted, he believes that he needs an intermediate faculty: “There are evidently two powers at work, which relatively to each other are active and passive; and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive.” In a parenthetical that follows, he adds, action, coinhere, which lends credence to my assertion that Coleridge is indeed conscious of the slippage between/among signs.

31Biographia, 1:277, Coleridge’s note. See Acts 17:28 for Paul’s declaration.
“In philosophical language, we must denominate this intermediate faculty in all its degrees and determinations, the IMAGINATION. But in common language, and especially on the subject of poetry, we appropriate the name to a superior degree of the faculty, joined to a superior voluntary controul over it.” 32 Thus, the relationship between finite “I am” and infinite “I AM,” “can only exist as antithesis,” mediated by the imagination. This notion of antithesis leads Coleridge into transcendental philosophy and the idea of the transcendental symbol: “An IDEA, in the highest sense of that word, cannot be conveyed but by a symbol; and except in geometry, all symbols of necessity involve an apparent contradiction.” 33 The imagination, “that reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason in Images of the Sense, and organizing (as it were) the flux of the Senses by the permanence and self-circling energies of the Reason, gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the conductors.” 34 The imagination, which is both active and passive, gives birth to the “symbol” that conducts truth derived from the “flux of the Senses” and the “energies of the Reason,” between/among the finite “I’s.” Coleridge argues that the Symbol (ὁ δὲ ταύτην ἄντικα τὸ ζητημένον) [“which is always tautegorical”] is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part

32Biographia, 1:124-5.

33Ibid., 1:156, original emphasis.

Commenting on this passage, Robert J. Barth notes that the "symbol, therefore, expresses not merely the juxtaposition of two realities (as metaphor can do) but articulates, however dimly, the 'interpenetration' of two disparate and often seemingly very distant realities, such as man and God." The term "tautegorical," translated by the editor from Greek and coined by Coleridge, means "expressing the same subject with a difference," and seems related to his ideas of contrariness and inherence. The word "translucence," from the Latin verb, translucere, means "to shine through, to be reflected," which juxtaposes two very different concepts. In the first, the object is to some degree transparent, allowing some light to pass through; the second indicates that the object has some opacity, causing the light to bounce off rather than pass through. Again, we see Coleridge choosing terms that contain contraries, existing simultaneously within the terms. He pairs, in the quotation above, "Special" and "Individual," "General" and "Especial," "Universal" and "General," and "Eternal" with "Temporal"; the first three pairs exist on the same level, while the final pair exists "above all." Each, as symbol, partakes of, shines through, and reflects each other and "the Reality which it renders intelligible." Thus, the symbol (except in Geometry) contains within itself a contradiction.

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37 Sermons, 30, Coleridge's note.

38 I find it curious that he should exclude Geometry from "inherent contradictions," since the symbols of geometry are produced by the same re-duplicated imagination that produces the symbols of language--how could the imagination that "creates" the inherently
These symbols, for Coleridge, form “words which are but the shadows of notions; even as the notional understanding itself is but the shadowy abstraction of living and actual truth.” Wilson argues that the “transcendental philosophers [must] use language to appeal to a source of knowledge ‘far higher’ and more inward than their symbols can convey.” These “transcendental symbols” imply unity, but a unity that is nonexistent, for the symbol remains distinct from the idea, while inhering the idea, which Wilson calls “absolute individuation and infinite opposition.” Speaking of this inhering opposition, Coleridge describes “a nature having two contrary forces, the one of which tends to expand infinitely, while the other strives to apprehend or find itself in this infinity.” These two forces cannot exist alone, requiring a mediating force to avoid simple neutralization:

The counteraction then of the two assumed forces does not depend on their meeting from opposite directions; the power which acts in them is indestructible; it is therefore inexhaustibly re-ebullient; and as something must be the result of these two forces, both alike infinite, and both alike indestructible; and as rest or neutralization cannot be this result; no other conception is possible, but that the product must be a tertium aliquid, or finite generation. Consequently this conception is necessary. Now this tertium aliquid can be no other than an inter-

contradictory symbol, escape contradiction in geometric symbols only? Why would he, like William Wordsworth in The Prelude, posit geometry as above inherent contradiction?

39Biographia, 1:243.

40Wilson, 457.

41Ibid., 458.

42Biographia, 1:297, original emphasis.
penetration of the counteracting powers, partaking of both.\textsuperscript{43}

This act, instead of a thing or substance, reconciles or balances these opposite, ever contending forces in a continual act of balancing, and the "balancing act," performed by the imagination, is his "seminal principle," that lies at "the core of all Coleridge's philosophical thought in \textit{Biographia Literaria}." Wilson continues, "Imagination is an act which at once both reconciles and does not reconcile. It may be said to involve an additional paradox, for it is a finite act with infinite proportions."\textsuperscript{44} Wilson notes that the idea of reconciling opposites is itself paradoxical, for, by definition, opposites are irreconcilable.

We thus come, after a rather circuitous path, to the famous, or infamous, definitions of primary and secondary imaginations:

The \textit{IMAGINATION} then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary \textit{IMAGINATION} I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I \textsc{AM}. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still identical with the primary in the \textit{kind} of its agency, and differing only in \textit{degree}, and in the \textit{mode} of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and unify. It is essentially \textit{vital}, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., 1:300. The term "re-ebullient," divided by Coleridge, raises interesting associations. The prefix "re-" means "again and again"; "ebullient," from the Latin verb \textit{ebulire}, means "to bubble up or boil," but as a transitive verb means "to babble about." The Tower of "Babel," according to Derrida, was a mis-hearing of the name of God, "Bavel," shouted as he encounters the Tower, as the Hebrew word that means "confusion," the way many critics of late have read the \textit{Biographia}. For a full discussion, see Geoffrey Bennington \& Jacques Derrida, in \textit{Jacques Derrida}, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 174-79.

\textsuperscript{44}Wilson, 460.

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Biographia}, 1:304, original emphasis.
Coleridge first divides the imagination into primary and secondary, then divides the primary into “the living Power and prime Agent of all human perception” and “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.” On the primary, Richard Tomlinson notes that the “primary is indeed the highest level of the imaginative power, with a range potentially beyond the artistic.” Wilson calls the primary imagination the “philosophic imagination . . . symbolically expressed in the tertium aliquid, both finite and infinite which keeps separate yet interpenetrates the two forces of infinite opposition, it makes meaning possible.” Coleridge calls the philosophic imagination “the sacred power of self-intuition” and “self-consciousness.” “Self-consciousness,” argues Wilson, “is the first instance, the primary example of reconciliation . . ., and it is this act of self-consciousness that constitutes primary imagination both on the divine and human level.” Gene M. Bernstein asserts that the primary imagination “is responsible for the creation of the psychological and ontological sense of ‘self’; that is, the primary imagination unconsciously generates the birth into self-consciousness.” This action of self-actualization is the “living Power” that creates all human consciousness in its reconciliation of infinite opposites, on both “the divine and human level.” Commenting on the “living Power and prime Agent” of perception, Tomlinson interprets it as “the living


47Wilson, 461.
49Wilson, 462.
power that produces an effect in, and on, the individual perceptive power."\textsuperscript{51} The "birth" into consciousness of a self becomes the "prime Agent" of our perceptions, thus creating the world in which we live, move, and act, a finite repetition of the infinite Creator.

Coleridge also names the primary as "a finite repetition of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM." Wilson argues that "[t]he primary imagination of God duplicates itself in the self-consciousness of the individual."\textsuperscript{52} This process of reduplication in finite form of the infinite "implies an actual participation of the finite mind in the activity of the infinite mind,"\textsuperscript{53} which makes us co-creators with God. Kearns notes that "the primary imagination is the faculty that repeats, in a finite form, the perfect identity of being and knowing that is the ‘I AM,’ the eternal act of creation. The finite form which this repetition takes is the ‘verb substantive,’"\textsuperscript{54} which for Kearns occurs in the act of writing the self. This act of repetition recalls Pico’s tracing: the finite creation of a self in the birth to self-actualization traces (draws, drags, derives, controls, wields, practices, plays the role of) the self-actualization of the infinite “I AM.”

Coleridge’s declaration that the primary imagination duplicates the infinite “I AM,” added to his “coinherence” of the finite “I am” in the infinite, leads many to accuse him of pantheistic tendencies. Tomlinson points out, however, that his position "also embraces the Christian doctrines of immanence and transcendence that can be united in the

\textsuperscript{51}Tomlinson, 57.
\textsuperscript{52}Wilson, 464.
\textsuperscript{53}Barth, 24.
\textsuperscript{54}Kearns, 10.
Barth echoes this position, noting that "it is only imagination that can bring us ... to the full encounter with religious reality, because it is only symbolic language that resists the human drive for clarity and determinateness. The divine, the numinous, the transcendent, can never be encompassed by the clarity of 'consequent reasoning.'" Barth makes reference to a letter written by Coleridge in which he laments a paragraph left out of an essay in The Friend, "it's [sic] object being to preclude all suspicion of any leaning towards Pantheism, in any of it's [sic] forms. I adore the living and personal God, whose Power indeed is the Ground of all Being, even as his Will is the efficient, his Wisdom the instrumental, and his Love the final, Cause of all Existence; but who may not without fearful error be identified with the universe, or the universe be considered as an attribute of his Deity."

The secondary imagination, which Coleridge sometimes calls the "poetic imagination," is an "echo" of the primary, "co-existing with the conscious will, yet still identical with the primary in the kind of its agency." Bernstein notes that "[t]he secondary is identical with the primary in kind of its agency because both are creative, the one in psychological and ontological terms, the other echoing these terms through artistic creation." They are the

55Tomlinson, 55, original emphasis.

56Barth, 30.


58The word "echo" is a mark of its secondarity; for, like the echo that is a "re-flection"—"to bend (curve, turn, wind, twist, double, or sail around) again"—of sound back to the speaker, so the secondary is a "re-flection" of the "sound" back to the "primary," a duplication of the creative act of the infinite "I AM."

59Bernstein, 340, original emphasis.
same in “kind,” a term from the Old English *gecynd*, “nature, race, origin,” from the Latin *gens*, meaning “clan, stock, tribe, race, species.” Thus, they are of the same nature, race, origin, or tribe, which in turn means that the secondary is truly a “re-duplication” of the infinite I AM. Their “agency,” from the Latin verb *agere*, “to do, act, manage, conduct (a war),” meaning they do (act, manage, conduct) the same things, repeating the creative act of the infinite I AM. They differ in *degree* “because the primary is prime—first and most important—and without it there is not yet a ‘self’ to act.”

Coleridge also calls attention to the secondary imagination’s deconstructive mode of operation, for it “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate.” Bernstein adds that “it differs in *mode* of operation because once the primary has created a ‘self,’ the secondary must first willfully ‘dissolve, diffuse, and dissipate’ that creation before it can recreate or redefine the ‘self.’”

Wilson notes that the secondary imagination “brings together apparently discordant elements and fuses them into meaningful thoughts, symbols, metaphors, and images. It lies at the heart of the language process. Like the primary . . . it ‘dissolves’ identity in order to create anew through reconciliation of opposites,” and Kearns calls it “the site of perpetual self-duplication, and . . . the linguistic acts by which consciousness (a subject)

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60 Ibid. The term “degree” means to “de-grade,” from the Latin *de-* “from, away from, out of,” and *gradus, gradi*, “to go, step, walk,” meaning “to go away from, step out of, or walk away from,” indicating both its separate nature and ending any argument that the secondary is above the primary. Since to “de-grade” can also mean “a privation of a grade or level,” showing its lesser nature in relation to the primary.

61 Ibid., 341. “Mode” comes from the Latin *modus*, which can mean “quantity, measured amount, method” but can also mean “bound, limit.”
constructs itself.” The secondary “dissolves”—the prefix “dis-,” “apart, asunder, away” with the Latin solvere, “to loosen, untie, release, break up, detach, disengage”—“diffuses”- -from the Latin diffusus, “extending over a wide area, extensive (writings), expansive (speech)”--and “dissipates”—the Latin dissipare, meaning “to scatter, disperse, demolish, overthrow, squander, drive away”—so that it can “re-create,” or “create again and again,” re-produces itself through “linguistic acts,” and its re-conciliatory power to hold infinite oppositions at bay. In some way, the critics who have tried to elevate the secondary above the primary are right, but for the wrong reasons. The primary imagination only has the power to create, to bring order to the self and the world; the secondary also possesses this ordering power, but only after destroying the order imposed by the primary through the secondary’s deconstructive acts. However, it remains a “lesser” entity, for it is a duplication of a duplication, a secondary secondary instantiation of the infinite “I AM,” an echo of the echo of the creation of the universe in God’s linguistic act of self-actualization. For Wilson, the power of the secondary “belongs to all those who go beyond associational thought. . . . It belongs to all those who employ symbolic language in a manner such that the symbol is not taken for the meaning itself, as some contemporary critics now correctly imply.” The right of man (woman) to “feign” inheres in our very individual creations of self, a reflection of the creative act of the infinite “I AM,” which Tolkien will name our ability as readers or writers to create within ourselves “secondary belief” in “sub-created” secondary worlds that “re-flect” the primary creation of the infinite “I AM.”

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62 Wilson, 463, Kearns, 11.

63 Wilson, 455.
CHAPTER 4

OSCAR WILDE AND THE "DECAY OF LYING": CREATING BEAUTIFUL, UNTRUE THINGS

Critic William E. Buckler believes that Wilde’s “The Decay of Lying” is a turning point in Wilde’s career as also a locus classicus for aesthetics. Buckler notes that Wilde’s earlier essays make “distinctions between art and life and between aesthetic effect and archeological fact.” In the conclusion of his “The Truth of Masks” Wilde states that this essay simply represents an artistic standpoint, and in aesthetic criticism attitude is everything. For in art there is no such thing as universal truth. A Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true. And . . . it is only in art-criticism, and through it, that we can realise Hegel’s system of contraries.

Buckler says of Wilde that “[h]e was deeply sympathetic to thought and relished and respected language as the most joyous creation of humanity, the parent of thought, and the distinguishing characteristic of the human animal. He looked upon the critical imagination as the key to life’s quality for the cultural group as well as the individual.” Buckler later defines what Wilde means by “attitude” in the above quotation: “if in aesthetic criticism

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3Buckler, 312.
‘attitude is everything,’ as Wilde asserts, where one is coming from as a personality is a more vital and provocative consideration than the conclusion one arrives at. An attitude, like a tone of voice, is a way of looking at things and says as much about the seer as the seen." As we hope to show in this chapter, this way of seeing things that will allow the artist to freely range throughout the unlimited vision of his or her imagination, places Wilde’s “Decay of Lying” squarely in the tradition of fantasy criticism. We will attempt to show this by first giving some background to Wilde’s essay and then looking at how the critics have seen it as a critique of realism. We will follow this with Vivian’s four doctrines of his new aesthetics, found in the essay’s conclusion, and use them to help us closely read this text, showing ultimately how “The Decay of Lying” fits into this tracing of fantasy criticism.

According to Buckler, the principle quality or persona of “The Decay of Lying” is “individuality, a strong personality that had developed itself along its own lines, held its own opinions with courage and enviable skill, exuded a joy of language that made conversation a delightful and supremely civilized experience, but kept seriousness from being deadly by maintaining implicitly the attitude that such verbal contests are games of skill from which, as from life itself, one would do well to remain somewhat detached.” In his letters Wilde called “The Decay of Lying” “fantastic,” and “fanciful,” saying that he “was determined to put [his] new views on art, and particularly on the relation of art and

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4Ibid., 313.

5Ibid., 314.
According to Buckler, Wilde did this to prevent the general public, through fantasy, from taking his ideas too literally, while encouraging “qualified readers to play the spirited imagination game along with him.”

Buckler believes that the act of making lying a credible activity shows Wilde’s “skill at playing the idea-game. He wishes to show what distortions result from the introduction of moral considerations into discussions of aesthetics and to illustrate the positive contribution a Platonic-Hegelian dialectic can make to the examination of one’s values or beliefs. What one thinks is, on the whole, less primary than how one thinks.” Buckler notes that “Vivian represents a way of looking at life of which art is the unique symbol. Art is the ultimate expression of the creative development of the individual temperament and hence an ideal for the human race worthy of the best efforts of those who have received its influence.” He also adds that Vivian is “admirably literate without being learned and excitingly conceptual without being theoretical.”

Critic David Walton notices the similarity between Wilde’s ideas and the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, who believed that art as we view it enables us to escape, for a time, from the suffering of life. Walton notes that, for Schopenhauer, “the contemplation of an object of art transports the mind from the actual world of empirical particulars to the ideal

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7Buckler, 314.
8Ibid., 315.
9Ibid., 316.
10Ibid.
realm of the intellect or pure knowledge where . . . suffering ceases." Similarly, Nietzsche sees art as something that protects us from the suffering of life—as a “protection and remedy,” relating this to Wilde’s statement in “The Decay of Lying” that “if something cannot be done to check, or at least modify, our monstrous worship of facts, Art will become sterile and beauty will pass away from the land.” From this Walton concludes that “it is psychologically important that man can, and must, actively participate in the creation of reality: one of the functions of the human mind, for both Wilde and Nietzsche, is to weave a protective veil.” He next argues that Wilde takes these ideas further in “The Critic as Artist,” where he states that for Wilde, “[t]he value of criticism as an art is in its remoteness from reality, and the further it stands from fact (or reality) the more anti-Platonic and, therefore, valuable it becomes.”

One of the moves Wilde makes throughout the “Decay,” according to Patrice Hannon, is one that directly associates usefulness with realism. Art is useful as it empowers the observer to produce meaning by seeing past the surfaces. The meaning is always somewhere else, never on the surface, which means that the meaning is ultimately in the control of the observer.

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14Walton, 25.

15Ibid.
For Wilde, the undesirable distribution of power just described is found most readily in realistic art, where it is manifestly a part of the structure, of the narrative technique. Wilde’s critical prose, by emphasizing surface and process, through its structure resists reducing the meaning of a work of art to useful interpreted “content.”

Thus, for Hannon, the “Decay” becomes a critique of realism comparable to Zola’s ideas in “The Experimental Novel.” Zola establishes a connection between scientist and novelist—as the scientist focuses on nature so the novelist focuses on men and their passions, seeking to learn, according to Hannon, “the laws of human behavior, which are as deterministic as the laws that govern the material world.” This position, Hannon notes, “degrades” the artist to a purveyor of information, a position rejected by Wilde when Vivian says that “Art never expresses anything but itself.” Of this declaration, Hannon writes: “Art does not—should not and cannot—express merely the artist’s message or the age in which it was produced. That is, it cannot be reduced to these things through the critic’s interpretation, in defiance of what it materially is. . . . In literature, the linguistic surface is where the action is— the most important knowledge is invariably superficial.” Hannon then notes that “[Wilde] redefines criticism . . . so that it is no more realistic . . . than the best art.”

Another critic, Declan Kiberd, compares John Millington Synge’s *The Playboy of the

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17Ibid., 188.

18“Decay,” 234.

19Hannon, 189.

20Ibid.
Western World to Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* and notes that “[t]he ruling regime in both plays sets its face against the life of the imagination; religious and educational institutions conspire in the attempt to suppress the young.” In his play, “Wilde thus distinguishes between education, which should cultivate the individual, and schooling, which suppresses the individual in a process of socialisation,” leading Cecily to remark in *The Importance of Being Earnest* that the problem with the education of the day is that no one considers training the female imagination. These flaws in education lead Kiberd to comment:

This was the Age of Realism, of literal-minded fidelity to social surfaces, as novelists like Emile Zola and—to some degree—playwrights like Henrik Ibsen sought to describe the lives of coal-miners or the problems of the urban poor with a photographic exactitude that verged on documentary journalism. Both Synge and Wilde opposed this trend. . . . [Synge] insisted that in a work of art it was not enough to have reality: one must also know joy. In countries where the imagination of the rural people was still vital, he said, a writer could find words both real and beautiful, whereas the joyless literature of towns had lost its beauty, retaining only a bleak realism.

Equally for Wilde, an artist who moves into realistic representation has, like Esau, sold out her art for a “mess of pottage.” Kiberd believes Wilde took up this position “to abandon the attempt at surface realism, since he or she can never hope to compete in that area with the journalist or the photographer. The spread of photography and of electronic recording

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22 Ibid., 282.

23 Ibid., 283.

24 For the story of Jacob and Esau, see Genesis 25: 29-34.
has freed the artist from the dreary obligation of realism, allowing him or her to tell lies and cultivate the distortions which are the basis of art."25

In a book on Wilde’s intentions in his criticism, Lawrence Danson remarks that “[t]he question of realism is not a side issue: it is the contemporary polemical context in which the essay has to be understood. The issue seemed as clear in the art world as it did in the literary world.”26 Danson continues:

What to the scientist or Zolaist is the virtue of accurately observing hard fact is to Wilde the blindness that condemns one to a repetitive imitation of unselfconscious poses. What to the naturalist author is the prestige that comes from membership in a profession is to Wilde the diminution of personality. Realism is a prison, and the bars on its windows are called nature. . . . The liar’s salvific work is to lead us out of nature’s prison, to free us from mere reality.27

Danson then notes that the progressives of Wilde’s day saw realism as “the art of the future. But to Wilde, realism is on the wrong side of a divide that separates imitation from creation, nature from form, life from art, realism from romance, and a supposedly natural sexuality which, like art, disdains any attempts to dictate limits.”28 Summarizing Wilde’s stance toward realism, Danson states that “[r]ealists claim that they refer to a world out there; Wilde claims that the only significant out-there begins in here. The crucial insistence on art’s self-referentiality is intended to create a separate, privileged zone where artists are free from moralizing censorship.”29

25Kiberd, 284.


27Ibid., 54.

28Ibid.

29Ibid., 55.
Another critic, Neil Sammells, looks to the sources for Wilde’s distrust of realism, arguing that “the ‘prison-house’ of realism [was] being undermined before the edifice was built” by earlier writers like Poe and Baudelaire. He cites Baudelaire’s comment on the “new technology”: “Each day art further diminishes its self-respect by bowing down before external reality; each day the painter becomes more and more given to painting not what he dreams but what he sees.” Speaking of one of Wilde’s principle targets in his essay, Sammells writes: “For Zola . . . the literary artist had no real choice but to swim with the scientific current of his time: art should aim at direct observation, exact anatomy, the acceptance and depicting of what is. Wilde rejects this model of art ‘as a window on the real’, yet, while countering it with his claim for the primacy of the imagination over the natural world, he turns paradoxically to Pateresque materialism, making a ‘scientific’ appeal to Aristotle to justify Vivian’s claim that the basis of life is simply the desire for expression.”

David Novitz begins his essay on Wilde’s “Decay” by remarking that the opposition between art and life goes back to Plato, and so many still see art as commenting on reality while separate from reality: “Art, they like to think, is about the real world, refers to it, and so must be different from it.” We never focus on the art itself but the reality about


31Quoted by Sammells, 125.

32Ibid., 126.

33David Novitz, “Art, Life and Reality,” British Journal of Aesthetics 30, no. 4, (1990), 301, original emphasis.
which it comments. According to Plato, Novitz argues, art that draws attention to itself
distorts reality, therefore, "[t]he best art is . . . transparent." Novitz goes on to claim
that impressionism rejects Plato's view of art: "Art ceases to comment on, to refer to, to
imitate and to represent. Instead, it presents us with an imaginatively crafted but entirely
real object which is to be attended to in its own right," and so the work of art creates its
own reality, erasing the distinction between reality and art. According to Novitz, Wilde
takes this further, arguing that "art is thought of not just as a part of reality; it becomes a
touchstone, a measure, of reality while life . . . becomes no more than a pale imitation of
art," and so "art is a formative influence in our lives, that it actually brings things and
states of affairs into being." This is why, for Novitz, "art is inextricably bound up with
everyday life--with real practices, actions, artefacts and institutions. However, there is no
reason to suppose that art is the source of everything." Novitz thinks that Wilde
overshoots his cause by making art first. He takes the definition of art by contemporary
critic Francis Sparshott. According to Novitz, "traditionally an art was conceived of as a
practice consisting of an organized package of more or less integrated skills." He then
names medicine, plumbing, and sheep shearing as "arts," because these "artists" are
interested in increasing their "skills." Thus, "the skills themselves, and not merely the ends

34Ibid., 301.
35Ibid., 302, original emphasis.
36Ibid.
37Ibid., 303.
38Ibid., 304.
39Ibid.
that they serve, become objects of attention” so that “when an art (an organized body of
skills) comes to be treated as an end rather than as a means, that the fine arts begin to
emerge.”40 Life and art cross “within this cluster of skills.”41

It takes more than language skills to be a novelist or playwright, for “the author does
more than merely invent and populate fictional worlds, for a story is usually told in which
the characters are made to act out parts of their lives,” therefore, the skill of the author
“resides both in inventing a world of people and in telling a story about them.”42 This
leads Novitz to posit that the characters represented have certain skills that come from
everyday life, and so art influences life. He also notes that on the other side of this
equation, the artist takes these skills from his observations of daily life. Although he does
not use the term, it seems safe to say that art and life interpenetrate and/or inhere in each
other. Novitz continues:

Whatever the skills and the dialectical interactions from which they derive, the
process of their development is in each use fundamentally similar. It involves
conjuring up and testing possible techniques, rejecting them when they do not
work, and inventing in their stead new techniques. This is the creative, fanciful, or
originative imagination at work; and on my view it is at work in just this way
whenever one attempts to improve and develop not just artistic skills, but any skill
whatsoever.43

Thus we use imagination to fill the gaps of knowledge, to solve problems “we project
ourselves imaginatively into certain problem situations. We imagine how these techniques

40Ibid.
41Ibid.
42Ibid., 305.
43Ibid., 306.
would work, and in this way we develop practical hypotheses which we test on the appropriate occasion. Then these newly developed and tested skills become part of the knowledge of society. This argument, Novitz notes, destabilizes the "rigid distinction we like to draw between art and life." At this point, now that he has blurred the boundary between art and life, he then wants to distinguish between the general "art" according to his definition and "works of art." He argues that if a group of skills represent an art, then the person who possesses those skills represents an "art," thus, a life becomes an art. Novitz states that "not every life is a work of art, but on this view the life well-lived is, and should be praised and judged accordingly." He calls this problematic—with good reason—and then notes that "the thought that every life . . . should be a work of art is plainly counter-intuitive and does much to devalue the currency of art talk." He later argues that the "culture to which we belong and . . . the artistic theories and conventions that characterize the prevailing art world within our culture, determine what will or will not be considered a fine art." Novitz concludes: "There clearly is a sense in which art and life are different and distinct."

There are several problems with Novitz's project that cause it, for me at least, to confirm rather than deny Wilde's argument. As soon as Novitz tries to salvage the idea

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44Ibid.
46Ibid., 305.
47Ibid., 308.
48Ibid., 309.
49Ibid.
that there is a difference between general and fine art, he falls back into the trap that Wilde avoids. If, as he says, life becomes art, then it follows that every life must become art, which destroys the standards that he wishes to uphold. He then turns to culture to argue that the standards of "our culture" will determine what is "good art." To use my father's cliche—does he have a mouse in his pocket? which "we" does he mean? Who decides what the collective culture considers to be "art?" Given his desire to maintain a particular set of standards, I do not think he means society as a whole but particular elements within society. As a real world example, I recently attended a "talent" show at my children's elementary school. Granted that most of the audience recognized "true talent," but the loudest cheers and applause were not for the young girl who performed flawlessly a piano piece with more ink used on the notes than the musical staff, but the pair of girls who performed a "dance" that was at least ten years above their ages and would not be out of place down on the strip. This is, of course, exactly what Novitz fears, causing him to fall back into the argument that culture will decide what is "art."

Returning to Kiberd's article, cited above, Kiberd begins with a discussion of the modern distrust of language, emerging around the time of and shortly after Wilde. He looks particularly at Irish writers, quoting Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Stephen's famous declaration about the English language: "My soul frets in the shadow of his language." He notices how this idea can be related to the problem in Ireland: "In a land where words are the sole weapon of the disarmed, irony, ambiguity and

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deceit flourish as modes of self-protection rather than as graces of literary style.”

The British claimed to rule all of Ireland, and yet the reality was that they did not. Kiberd ties this directly to Wilde and his assertions in the “Decay”: “No wonder that Oscar Wilde could assert that a truth in art is that whose opposite may also be true, for he grew up in a country where things both could and could not be so.”

Shifting his view to Ireland’s past, Kiberd notices that the “poets of ancient Ireland were celebrated for two basic functions: they kept a record of the laws and they told fluent, magnificent lies. The functions of file (poet) and breitheamb (judge) overlapped in a fashion which suggests that Irish cynicism about law has a long and honourable pedigree.”

Quoting the response by the early men of Ulster to their first poet: “What you say is of course incredible—but we believe you because you are a poet. If a poet says something is true, then it is indeed a fact”; Kiberd then comments: “That can be interpreted as meaning that the poets had the power to change reality by their magic words, or that they were simply facile liars.”

There is a continuity then between Wilde’s Irish background and his ideas expressed in “The Decay of Lying,” leading Kiberd to conclude that a “really good tale . . . possesses an inner emotional logic which permits the facts to be forgotten: this is based on a view of art as a matter of internal coherence rather than external correspondence to a knowable, concrete world.”

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51 Kiberd, 278.
52 Ibid., 279.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
With these ideas about the conflict between realism and fantasy, along with the probable contribution of Wilde’s Irish background, we turn from the critics of Wilde’s essay to the text itself, in order to further establish his essay within the tradition of fantasy criticism. We will adopt Vivian’s four doctrines, summarized at the essay’s conclusion, as a framework to guide our close reading of the text. I think it is significant that Cyril calls these “the doctrines of the new aesthetics,” when asking for a summary of what Vivian has just read to him, and Vivian does not disagree, but goes on to describe them. First, “Art never expresses anything but itself”; second, “All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them to ideals”; third, “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life”; and fourth, “Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art.” What is most interesting about this summary is that it contradicts the actual structure of the essay. More than the first half of the essay is dedicated to proving the second doctrine—that bad art emanates from a return to life and art. Using the major part of his essay on this doctrine may go far to explain why most of the criticism on this essay focuses on Vivian’s critique of realism. This second proposition sets the stage to prove the third doctrine—life imitating art—which in turn leads to the first—art expressing only itself. The fourth—lying as the aim of art—seems to act as a frame to the other three, as it appears at the beginning and the end. Logically, this structure makes the most sense, for, as I have noted, each doctrine follows from what went before, culminating in lying as the

56“Decay,” 238.

57Ibid.

58Ibid., 239.
end of art. However, the logic of his summary is also sound: "Art never expresses anything but itself," and so, it is a mistake to return art to nature and life, since art is not about nature or life. Therefore, life imitates art more than art imitates life. Thus, since art is not about life or nature, lying, in the sense of beautiful untrue (not imitative of life or nature) things is the end of art. This changing of the structure may serve, for Wilde, to emphasize his overall project—it is not about a critique of realism, although most of the text does exactly that, rather, the critique of realism, from both structures, leads to his most important point, that the proper aim of art is lying—the telling of beautiful untrue things.

In this essay, Wilde, again using a dialogue between two gentlemen—Cyril and Vivian—elaborates on his aesthetic theory by having Vivian argue that what is missing from art in his day is the art of lying: "the modern novelist presents us with dull facts under the guise of fiction," instead of exaggerating what he sees to create something "great and wonderful." A slavish attitude toward facts, Vivian says, would be "fatal to the imagination of anybody." When the imagination dies, each person "develops a morbid and unhealthy faculty of truth-telling, begins to verify all statements made in his presence, and often ends by writing novels which are so like life that no one can possibly believe in their probability." Vivian calls this a "monstrous worship of facts" that will destroy

59 Ibid., 217.
60 Ibid., 218.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
beauty and sterilize art. This describes Vivian's second doctrine, that "All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals." Buckler comments that "[t]he two key terms are 'returning' and 'ideals,' each of which embodies a principle basic to the Romantic outlook." He goes on to note that for Vivian, "it is not the truth or the facts or the accuracy he objects to but the false and fatal assumption that to copy life is to create art." Buckler later states that "[t]he danger emerges when life, having been admitted as part of art's 'rough material,' tries to get the upper hand and substitute itself for the imagination. . . . It is that danger which makes realism such a pernicious aesthetic doctrine." Buckler then argues that "[a]s soon as one begins to impose on art external considerations—a doctrine of imitation, a method of realism, modernity of form, modernity of subject matter, contemporary relevance, even spiritual elation or moral exemplariness—one goes beyond art's proper sphere and introduces into aesthetic discussion irrelevant or ambiguous or deleterious considerations."

After examining many of the novelists of his day, Vivian finally compares Zola to Balzac and argues that the difference between them is the "unimaginative realism" of Zola and the "imaginative reality" of Balzac, preferring the latter. For Vivian, "[l]ife . . . is the solvent that breaks up Art, the enemy that lays waste to her house," and so must be

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63 Buckler, 317.
64 Ibid., 317-18.
65 Ibid., 318.
66 Ibid., 319.
67 "Decay," 222.
68 Ibid., 223.
avoided by any artist who wishes to create "true" art. The things that must be avoided are listed earlier: "As long as a thing is useful or necessary to us, or affects us in any way, either for pain or pleasure, or appeals strongly to our sympathies, or is a vital part of the environment in which we live, it is outside the proper sphere of art." He goes on to critique Wordsworth's return to nature, saying that "Wordsworth went to the lakes, but he was never a lake poet. He found in stones the sermons he had already hidden there." This leads him to argue that there are three stages to art; the first, reflecting what we might call the purely fantastic, is "purely imaginative and pleasurable work dealing with what is unreal and nonexistent." The second is a mixture of the first and third: "art takes life as part of her rough material, recreates it, and refashions it in fresh forms, is absolutely indifferent to fact, invents, imagines, dreams and keeps between himself and reality the impenetrable barrier of beautiful style, of decorative or ideal treatment." The third stage we could call the purely mimetic, where "Life . . . drives Art out into the wilderness." The spirit of true art is exaggeration, "nothing more than an intensified mode of overemphasis," and then uses this to critique the drama of Shakespeare: "He is too fond of going directly to life. . . . He forgets that when Art surrenders her imaginative medium

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69Ibid., 222.
70Ibid., 223.
71Ibid., 224.
72Ibid.
73Ibid.
74Ibid.
she surrenders everything.” Vivian goes on to call realism a complete failure, advocating a return to the lost art of lying, that we can again enjoy the fruits of the Fancy, since “the aim of the liar is simply to charm, to delight, to give pleasure.” Art must break out of the “prison-house of realism” and return to the “liar” to create new marvels. Thus he dismisses realism, having clearly established that the return of art to life and nature is a mistake—his second doctrine.

The transition from second to third doctrine occurs as he tosses aside the metaphor of art as a mirror to nature, replacing this metaphor with the idea of art as a veil, as also giving us a glimpse of the first doctrine:

Art finds her own perfection within, and not outside of, herself. She is not to be judged by any external standard of resemblance. She is a veil, rather than a mirror. She has flowers that no forests know of, birds that no woodland possesses. She makes and unmakes many worlds, and can draw the moon from heaven with a scarlet thread. Hers are the “forms more real than living man,” and hers the great archetypes of which things that have existence are but unfinished copies... She can work miracles at her will, and when she calls monsters from the deep they come. She can bid the almond tree blossom in winter..., and the winged lions creep out from the hollows of the Lydian hills. The dryads peer from the thicket as she passes by, and the brown fauns smile strangely at her when she comes near them. She has hawk-faced gods that worship her, and the centaurs gallop at her side.

What I find most intriguing about this passage is how much it resembles what the poet/critics we have thus far examined—Sidney, Addison, and Coleridge—have already said

75 Ibid., 225.
76 Ibid., 227.
77 A footnote to the text references Shelley’s Prometheus Unbound, 1:748, as Wilde’s source for this phrase.
78 “Decay,” 228.

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on the art of poetry or writing—we could easily slip it into any one of their texts and it would not be out of place. It is reminiscent of Sidney's poet who ranges freely, unbound by the limits of nature, or Addison's power of words, or Coleridge's power of the imagination. As we will discover in the next chapter, Wilde's passage would as easily fit into Tolkien's essay, which I believe strengthens the possibility that Tolkien was familiar with Wilde's essay. Here, Vivian frees art to surpass the "real"—leaving the artist, whatever her medium, open to create persons, places, and things that have no connection to the world around us, again, limited only by the scope of her imagination.

This leads Vivian to posit his third doctrine—"Life imitates art far more than Art imitates life" and deeper into a discussion of the imagination, that is "essentially creative and always seek[ing] for new form." Vivian next argues that it is life that holds up a mirror to art, "and either reproduces some strange type imagined by painter or sculptor, or realizes in fact what has been dreamed in fiction... Life seizes on [the forms of art] and uses them, even if they be to her own hurt." Literature molds life and nature to its own purpose; nature brings our imaginations to life:

Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and then only, does it come into existence.

Art thus affects how we understand the things that we see and how we interpret the signs

79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 229.
81 Ibid., 232.
82 Ibid., 232-33.
that are placed before us. A principle of Vivian’s new aesthetics—the first doctrine—is that
“Art never expresses anything but itself,” a declaration that Tolkien echoes in the preface
to the authorized, Ballantine editions of The Lord of the Rings in its American publication—
that a story is first simply about itself. In remarking on this first principle, Buckler notes:
“What the first principle signifies in the narrowest sense—what it means—presents little
difficulty: art is a thing-in-itself, autonomous, self-evolving, self-instructive, self-
delighting. Art is not ‘true’ by any external standard, but . . . art as quintessential beauty
is humanity’s most accessible metaphor of truth under its ideal aspect,” and later, “the
principle that art expresses only itself places it at the apex of humanity’s visionary
possibilities and makes self-containment both a necessity and a strength. Art is the closest
thing mankind has to the perfect expression through beauty of the ultimate truth.”

In a dig against Arnold, Vivian goes on to declare that “[n]o great artist ever sees
things as they really are. If he did, he would cease to be an artist.” Art is the lens
through which we view the past; art has never told us the truth. In beginning the
transition to his fourth doctrine, Vivian notes that the Church serves a function for art as it
provides us with “a body of men whose duty it is to believe in the supernatural, to perform
daily miracles, and to keep alive that mythopoeic faculty which is essential for the
imagination.” When common sense enters religion then the mythopoeic faculty is

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83 Ibid., 234.
84 Buckler, 320.
86 Ibid., 236.
replaced by what he calls “a low form of realism.”87 He then argues that the “only form of Lying that is absolutely beyond reproach is Lying for its own sake, and the highest development of this is . . . Lying in Art.”88 In a passage that sounds like Coleridge, MacDonald, and Tolkien, Vivian states: “The solid stolid British intellect lies in the desert sands like the Sphinx in Flaubert’s marvellous tale, and fantasy, La Chimère, dances round it, and calls to it with her false, flute-toned voice. It may not hear her now, but surely some day, when we are all bored to death with the commonplace character of modern fiction, it will hearken to her and try to borrow her wings.”89 This boredom with modern realism will signal the return of romance; he continues:

Dragons will wander about the waste places, and the phoenix will soar from her nest of fire into the air. We shall lay our hands upon the basilisk, and see the jewel in the toad’s head. Champing his guilded oats, the Hippogriﬀ will stand in our stalls, and over our heads will float the Bluebird singing of beautiful and impossible things, of things that are lovely and that never happen, of things that are not and that should not be. But before this comes to pass we must cultivate the lost art of Lying.90

One could argue that Wilde, through the voice of Vivian, saw into the late 20th-century when the romance, now named fantasy, would have its day. Also, this further reinforces the idea that Tolkien might have read this essay by Wilde, as it seems, like the other passage, to anticipate some of the ideas that he wrote of in his essay on the fairy-story. Again, we could slide this passage, as we will see in the next chapter, into Tolkien’s essay,

87Ibid., 237.
88Ibid., 238.
89Ibid.
90Ibid.
as also the critics we have already examined. The art of lying—the writing of beautiful but untrue things—is Wilde’s response to the realism of his day, as also the “proper aim of art.” Without it, literature in any of its many forms is trapped in the prison-house of realism, limited by a slavish adherence to the facts. But Wilde in this essay seemed to anticipate this turn, and so he advocated a new aesthetic—one not tied to the world around us, one limited only by the size and scope of the imagination, setting the stage for Tolkien’s essay, and the rise to prominence in the next century of the romance, renamed because of Tolkien’s essay, fantasy.
CHAPTER 5

TOLKIEN'S IMAGINATION: THE ART OF SUB-CREATION

Shortly after the publication of the first volume of Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* in 1954, C. S. Lewis wrote that the volume was “like lightning from a clear sky; as sharply different, as unpredictable in our age as *Songs of Innocence* were in theirs. To say that in it heroic romance, gorgeous, eloquent, and unashamed, has suddenly returned at a period almost pathological in its anti-romanticism, is inadequate.”\(^1\) Another of Tolkien’s admirers, W. H. Auden, writes of *The Lord of the Rings* that “however superficially unlike the world we live in its characters and events may be, it nevertheless holds up the mirror to the only nature we know, our own; in this, too, Mr. Tolkien has succeeded superbly, and what has happened in the year of the Shire 1418 in the Third Age of Middle-earth is not only fascinating in A. D. 1954 but also a warning and an inspiration. No fiction I have read in the last five years has given me so much joy. . . .”\(^2\) The reviews were not always this positive; in fact, most members of the academy felt that *The Lord of the Rings*, in the words of critic Edmund Wilson, was simply “balderdash”:  


Now, how is it that these long-winded volumes of what looks to this reviewer like balderdash have elicited such tributes as those above? The answer is, I believe, that certain people—especially, perhaps, in Britain, have a lifelong appetite for juvenile trash. They would not accept adult trash, but, confronted with the pre-teen-age article, they revert to the mental phase which delighted in *Elsie Dinsmore* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and which seems to have made of Billy Bunter, in England, almost a national hero. You can see it in the tone they fall into when they talk about Tolkien in print: they bubble, they squeal, they coo; they go on about Malory and Spenser—both of whom have a charm and a distinction that Tolkien has never touched.¹

In responding to this critique, R. J. Reilly believes that *The Lord of the Rings* is for critics “a mirror, not to life but to critical attitudes, and in it each critic ha[s] seen himself.”² I believe Reilly correctly argues that the critical reaction to *The Lord of the Rings* re-flects³ the critic’s attitudes toward certain preferred genres, like realism and naturalism, as opposed to the marginalized form of *The Lord of the Rings*, what Coleridge called “supernatural poetry” and what Tolkien called the “fairy-story.” In the quote above, from Wilson, he re-flects, according to both Reilly and Auden, his bias toward realistic fiction, a

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³I divide the term to “reflect” its compounded meaning from the Latin reflectere—the prefix “re-,” “again” and “flectere,” meaning “to bend, curve, turn, wind, twist, double, or sail around”; so to reflect is to bend (curve, turn, wind, twist, double, or sail around) again, as a mirror bends again, or gives back all light that strikes its surface; or perhaps we should say that the mirror “doubles again” or “re-doubles” the light. When we each “face” the mirror, we see that which we ourselves can never see; for the image that for others is redoubled is for us single. We can never reach out and touch the image re-flected; we always touch the redoubled image of the fingers and hand reaching for the mirror’s surface. Others, however, can touch both the image in the mirror and we of whom the image is for them a redoubling. For us to touch the reflection, we must touch the image we can never behold; thus, for us, to reflect we must turn inward and touch the image we can never behold, the primary image to others that for us is always secondary.
bias that still haunts literary criticism today. He also, as Lewis noted, echoes an "anti-romanticism" that still leads literary critics to marginalize certain genres of literature, genres that do not "wallow" in the "real" miseries of our fallen world. These same critics will twist any piece of prose or poetry from the list of canonical writers to fit their conception of "realism." For example, Fielding's *Tom Jones* is called the first "realistic" novel in English literature. Yet, anyone who reads the novel will recognize that Tom's adventures are hardly realistic and that the plot surrounds the fairy tale-like romance between Tom and Sophie. Nor could Wilson call the works of Malory or Spencer "realistic," since the former writes of the mythic Arthur of Camelot while the latter creates an allegory representing England that, for me, lies closer to Middle-earth than naturalism.

Wilson, on the other hand, perhaps correctly stereotypes those who respond positively to fantasies like Tolkien's, for most of literary criticism of Tolkien's works either "bubbles" about how great his works are, or dismisses them without a second thought for not being "real." Thus, I will begin my discussion, in this first chapter on Tolkien's essay on imagination, "On Fairy-Stories," by looking at some aspects of the ongoing debate between realism and romance, in which realism becomes the preferred genre while romance is marginalized. In this discussion, I plan focus on Tolkien's ideas of imagination as expressed in his notion of "sub-creation." I will follow this discussion by showing that Tolkien did more than simply take exception to Coleridge's phrase, "willing suspension of disbelief." Rather, Tolkien extends Coleridge's theory of imagination to its logical next step.

The debate over genres, particularly concerning the preferred form of the novel--realistic or romantic--has raged for several centuries. Deirdre Greene contends that
"[a]lthough the evolution of what would become realism and naturalism ran concurrently with the romantic movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the twentieth century (during the lifetimes of T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis) literary taste turned against romanticism in its various forms in favour of empirical literature." Henry B. Parks pushes this argument back further, by recalling that the debate over the "epistemological status of imaginative literature" has raged since the eighteenth century, turning "on the question of which of the two genres [the novel or the romance] represents reality more truthfully . . . , it was that genre which could be most readily defended as according with the imposed notions of reality, truth, and hence value." Parks continues: "If the opposition is correct in maintaining that the novel owns a kind of privileged access to reality, they are apparently left alone with the need to defend the purely imaginative—or, in other words, to perform the traditional task of speaking for the fictional task of fiction." He later calls this idea "novel-centered criticism" that leads many would-be supporters of imaginative fiction to begin on the defensive, compromising secondary belief even as they attempt to defend it. Karen Michalson adds that "as readers of a literature that has long been belittled, or worse, ignored, by the majority of academic literary critics, we do ourselves no service by defining it as 'different' from and 'oppositional to' those works that have achieved 'legitimate' status. Such a stand only tends to perpetuate the ghettoization of . . . .


8Ibid., 134.
fantasy and to confine it to a specialized realm of study outside of ‘legitimate’
scholarship.”

Parks claims that only by renouncing these hierarchical arrangements of genres can we
escape useless arguments over which type of story is more valuable, since all stories are
stories. He points to Tolkien’s essay on Beowulf: “Tolkien realized that as long as
criticism insisted on superimposing the ‘epic’ upon Beowulf, its impression of that work
would be distorted. Matters that are central would seem peripheral; matters that are
peripheral would seem central. Likewise, he saw that devaluations of fairy stories and
romances as a whole were the result of an a priori conviction that narrative should be, like
novels, ‘realistic’—a bias Northrop Frye calls ‘the representational fallacy.’” Tolkien thus
confronts “not a kind of fiction but a kind of criticism, one that would describe and judge
all stories in relation to a single type, a ‘novel-centered’ criticism as Frye calls it.” A
story, after all, is a story, regardless of the genre classification we would impose upon it.
For, according to Parks, “Tolkien insists that each story be considered according to the
conventions of its own kind” and he “would have us realize that, as Frye says, ‘no set of
critical standards derived from only one mode can ever assimilate the whole truth about
poetry,’ or, specifically, that the genres must be understood in their relation to story

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11Parks, 136.
convention.” Rose A. Zimbardo supports this notion, arguing that Tolkien’s conception is quite different from most post-eighteenth-century conceptions of artistic imitation, which, by attempting to shape art to the dimensions of what can be empirically known, diminish the function of art, narrow the conception of the ‘nature’ that art imitates to the confines of human experience, and confuse ‘realism’ with reality. For Tolkien’s conception of artistic imitation we must go back to the Renaissance commonplaces that associate the creative artist with the Creator, that make his arena ‘the Globe,’ and that consider a work of art a design that, as Sidney says in An Apologie for Poesie, ‘shewes such formes as nature, often erring, would shew’ if she could.

Thus, on one level, we can see the debate between realism and romance occurring even as Sidney defends the poet’s “right to feign,” as Addison creates his reader of “polite imagination,” as Coleridge tries to define imagination, as Wilde defends “lying” as an art, and as Tolkien defends fantasy. “What seems to be at stake,” Chris Seemans argues, “is the truth value of art in its various forms, particularly those forms which do not merely seek to ‘reproduce’ or ‘imitate’ empirical reality. This concern, in turn, addresses the question of the value and validity of art, which for Romantic thought comes to be signified by the image of the artistic process as analogous to God’s creative activity.”

In this image that compares artistic creativity to God’s creative act, many critics have noticed a congruence between Tolkien and Coleridge. Jeanie Watson notices “the similarity between Coleridge’s theory of the creative imagination and Tolkien’s theory of

12Ibid., 136-37.


the sub-creation of secondary worlds.”

Reilly sees in Tolkien’s theory of imagination “the romantic doctrine of the creative imagination. Faerie is a product of the ‘esemplastic’ imagination, a product of Coleridge’s Secondary Imagination, which is an echo of the Primary Imagination that creates and perceives the world of reality.”

Peter Russel and Raimund Kern have also noticed this connection: “since the time of Coleridge (and Schelling) the word *Imagination* (or *Einbildungskraft*) has been used exclusively for the much broader concept of what Tolkien called *sub-creation*, that is the building up of a large canvas in which all the individual images articulating dynamically with one another produce a total symbolic impact which reflects a very broad unified vision of many facets of life and death, the cosmos and the spirit, if not the Godhead itself.”

Michael Havens also comments on their similarity: “Works of imagination, Coleridge feels, echo the original act of imagination, God’s creation of the world. Tolkien agrees, centering his theory on fairy stories. In creating imaginary worlds, Tolkien feels, the artist imitates some of the original creation’s essence, for ‘we make still by the law in which we’re made.’” In the final phrase, Havens quotes a line from Tolkien’s poem, included in “On Fairy-Stories” and written for C. S. Lewis, that expresses Tolkien’s idea of artistic creation:


16 Reilly, 100.


“Dear Sir,” I said—“Although now long estranged, Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed. Dis-graced he may be, yet is not de-throned, and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned: Man, Sub-creator, the refracted Light through whom is splintered from a single White to many hues, and endlessly combined in living shapes that move from mind to mind. Though all the crannies of the world we filled with Elves and Goblins, though we dared to build Gods and their houses out of dark and light, and sowed the seed of dragons—‘twas our right (used or misused). That right has not decayed: we make still by the law which we’re made.”

Shortly after citing this poem, Tolkien notes that “we make in our measure and our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker.” We might call this declaration a clarification of the poem that for me echoes Coleridge’s theory that the Secondary, or creative, Imagination reflects the Primary Imagination, which also is a reflection of the infinite I AM. Randel Helms adds that “Tolkien’s poem echoes Shelley’s Adonais and reveals his constitutional romanticism, his conviction that our creative imagination is our God-like part, never lost, and that myth-making is a sacred act of creation.” I believe Helms ties Tolkien closer to his romantic roots, arguing that “[b]oth the English Romantic thinker who mattered most to the nineteenth century, Coleridge, and the one who has mattered most to the twentieth, William Blake, firmly identified themselves as Christians and went to the Bible as a prime

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19Tolkien, OFS, 144.

20Ibid., 145, my emphasis.

source of critical authority for their notion that human creativity, which is real and to be religiously cultivated, is, more than just an imitation of divine creativity, to some greater or lesser extent, equivalent to it. In relating this position to Coleridge’s definition of the Primary Imagination, Helms states that “[i]t is not that human products of imagination are imitations of God’s works, but that the human creative power itself is a repetition of, a small example of, the divine power.” An earlier critic, Clyde S. Kilby, contends that “Tolkien described the myth-writer as a sub-creator imitating the real Creator and making worlds no less complex yet no less proportioned and heirarchical than His. And such a world appears necessary to our best inner health.” J. S. Ryan adds that “[t]he conclusion to be drawn is that Tolkien has advanced Coleridge’s claim for the true value of the imagination. . . . The fairy story, the making of a Secondary World, is a construct of the Imagination for Tolkien, just as the world is the creation of God the Creator.”

Critic David Sandner also relates Tolkien to Romanticism, looking at how Tolkien’s ideas in OFS are related to the sublime in Romanticism. Commenting on Tolkien’s metaphor on the nature of faerie as “the air that blows in that country,” Sandner notices how this is a romantic image for the feelings that flow from the world of spirit: “Fantasy

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22Ibid., 40, original emphasis.

23Ibid., 41.


itself cannot reveal this other world; it can only bring the reader to the moment of perception before apprehension of it, that is, to the moment of the expression of its quality of being "indescribable, though not imperceptible." Fantasy can bring the reader right to the edge of the primeval forest that is so often the border of fairyland in fairy tales."

This movement in the reader Sandner claims is a movement toward transcendence, and he uses Thomas Weiskel's three phases of the sublime to show how fantasy also puts the reader, as in some romantic poetry, through these sublime phases. The mind of the reader moves from a determinate state in contemplation of the object, in this case, the story, to the breakdown phase, in which, through powerful feelings, the relation of reader to story becomes indeterminate, usually through surprise or astonishment. In the third or reactive phase, the sublime moment occurs and "the mind recovers the balance of outer and inner by constituting a fresh relation between itself and the object such that the very indeterminancy which erupted in phase two is taken as symbolizing the mind's relation to the transcendent order."

These sublime moments occur in romantic poetry as Wordsworth's "spots of time" or as illustrated in Shelley's "Mont Blanc." Taking a cue from Northrop Frye, Sandner argues that "[f]antasy can occasion an intense, frightening breakdown of identity, a breakdown that leads to another world, the world of dreams and imagination, and of spirit. This breakdown is characteristic of the second phase of the sublime moment." Relating this to Tolkien's ideas, this second phase is where Tolkien's

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27 Ibid., 5.

28 Ibid.
recovery, escape, and consolation occur. "Recovery," says Sandner, "is the tearing of the veil between worlds, and apprehension of the otherness of things, the movement into the second phase," while escape "loosens the constraints of the world" and consolation "is the release and transcendence of fairy stories, which in one of its aspects, the happy ending," which is "the fantastic sublime, drawn from the Romantic tradition of the natural sublime, both extending and revising it."²⁹

Verlyn Flieger sees the section with Tolkien’s poem to Lewis as "[t]he critical hub of the essay . . . discussing the writing of fantasy as sub-creation—the making of a Secondary World," in which "man imitates God. . . . His tools are words (suggesting the logos of John), which are then not merely for describing and recording, but for actual making, for bringing an imaginary world into being."³⁰ Flieger follows this declaration with Tolkien’s poem, quoted above, arguing that Tolkien “is building on the etymological link between phenomena and fantasy, and suggesting strongly that both have a direct relationship to words and to light.”³¹ Although the connection to light is significant, especially in view of Tolkien’s “splintered light,” my current interest is with the etymological connection she claims Tolkien builds between phenomena and fantasy. Flieger goes on to note that “phenomena” comes from the Greek phainesthai “to be brought to light,” and “fantasy” from the Greek phantazein “to make visible.” Both Greek words are derived from phainein, “to bring to light, cause to appear, show,” from proto-Indo-European root bha,

²⁹Ibid., 6.


³¹Ibid., 52, original emphasis.

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"to shine." This connection leads Flieger to posit a time when the phenomena of the primary world were not distinguished from the fantasy, created by imagination, of a secondary world. Flieger notices that "[t]he parallel to [Owen] Barfield's theory of the splintering of meaning from a whole concept into separate words is clear. Man, splintering light to 'many hues' using words imaginatively to make a secondary world, is particularizing and expressing some fragment of divine truth through fantasy." 

James Engell believes these terms are also significant for Coleridge:

> Coming from the Greek, *phantasia* carried with it the suggestion of creativity and play of mind, with the possible implication of license and illusion as a by-product of that freedom. The Latin *imaginatio*, on the contrary, had a block-like Roman solidity derived from the primary word 'image,' which referred to a mental concept as much as a visual 'image.' It was akin to the word 'imitation' and carried with it a sense of fidelity and accuracy. But precisely because *phantasia* suggested a greater freedom of mind, whether for creative insight, for perception, or for illusion, the word 'fancy' began to bear the brunt of suspicion or distrust thrown by seventeenth century rationalism, and, above all, by the fashionable colloquial speech that echoed it.

Seeman, commenting on Engell's statement and relating it to Tolkien, notes that "[w]hat Tolkien has done, then, is to return imagination from its enlarged meaning and to recover its literal sense." 

"In the new hierarchy of terms," Jan Wojcik adds, "Imagination would

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35 Seeman, 75.
occupy its previous position in the Thomistic system which describes it as the image making function, and a new word, Fantasy (a word that Thomas held to be synonymous with imagination) would be the term which described [what Coleridge called] the ‘secondary’ or ‘intellectualized’ imagination." These connections between Tolkien and Coleridge lead Reilly to conclude that “Tolkien’s view of the fairy story has made explicit Coleridge’s claim for the worth of the creative imagination. The Secondary Imagination, which created literature, was for Coleridge an ‘echo’ of the Primary Imagination, which is ‘the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and ... a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.’”

Flieger also argues that Tolkien’s theory of imagination has sources in Owen Barfield’s Poetic Diction, first published in 1929. C. S. Lewis reported to Barfield, shortly after the book’s publication, that “when Tolkien dined with me the other night he said, à propos of something quite different that your conception of the ancient semantic unity had modified his whole outlook and that he was always just going to say something in a lecture when your conception stopped him in time. ‘It is one of those things,’ he said, ‘that when you’ve once seen it there are all sorts of things you can never say again.’” According to Flieger, “Barfield suggests that myth, language, and man’s perception of his world are inseparable.” In the beginning, language “made no distinction between literal

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37Reilly, 105.
and metaphoric meaning... All diction was literal, directly expressing man's perception of phenomena and his mythic participation in them... Primitive man had a vision of the cosmos as whole, and of himself as part of it, a vision which is lost to us." Flieger uses, as an example, the Latin *spiritus*, or the Greek *pneuma*, which conveys notions of "wind," "breath," and "spirit" as the same phenomena: "To translate such a word, as we are forced to do today, by selecting out any one of these meanings, is to separate arbitrarily the word from that cluster of concepts which it was meant to express." Iwan Morus echoes Flieger's summation of Barfield, noting that "[f]or Barfield, poetic and apparently metaphorical meanings were in fact latent in language from the very beginning." Morus believes that Tolkien, taking Barfield's position, argues that these original metaphoric meanings have been lost. Morus continues, "[i]n modern languages... a tree is simply a vegetable organism, but when these words were first invented by men their meanings were completely different. For the speakers of early language the world was alive with mythological beings: the stars were living silver, bursting into flame in answer to the eternal music; the sky was a jewelled tent and the earth the womb which all living things were born."

40 Ibid., 49.
42 Ibid., 8.
activity following inevitably from Man’s existence as a thinking, speaking being. . . . Men as social beings subcreate because that is an inherent part of having a language, but at the same time each man as an individual is a subcreator because he is made in God’s image, and God is above all a Creator.” He quotes from OFS, as cited above, “we make in our measure and in our operative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker,” concluding that “just as we are like the Creator, our creations are like his creations.” Morus finally notes that “[t]he Chaucer essay can be regarded as an allegory about how to be a good subcreator: in order to use language as a tool of subcreation the author must be able to understand and appreciate the essential feature of his language. He must understand where it came from and how it works in a particular time and place.”

Other critics have noticed that, for Tolkien, language is at the heart of all the sub-creator does. Mary Schmiel argues that

> [a]s beings made in ‘the image and likeness’ of God, we are endowed by our Creator with absolute freedom of will and imagination. . . . We have at our command one of the most powerful tools of Enchantment conceivable: language. The moment the mind frees itself from preformed notions and fits words together in a new way, whole worlds open up. Tolkien reminds us of the origin and literal meaning of the word ‘image-ination’—the creation of images in our minds and the projection of them onto the world around us on our own internal world.

Wojcik notes that “[t]he creation of a secondary world like that of the poem Ancient

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43Ibid.

44Ibid.


Mariner or that of The Lord of the Rings that must be consistent only within itself, and not in relation to the primary world of experience is one of the possibilities of symbol when it is used deliberately this way."* Calling the language used by the creative artist "symbol," as he does above, directly references Coleridge's discussion of symbol in the Lay Sermons. Symbols (language), as noted in Chapter 3, for Coleridge, are created by the imagination, the power which brings harmony to sense images, as the Reason brings order to the world. These symbols, when combined, form ideas that each person uses to describe the world of the senses. In Tolkien's theory, language (symbol) becomes the tool of sub-creation:

The human mind, endowed with the powers of generalization and abstraction, sees not only green-grass, discriminating it from other things . . ., but sees that it is green as well as being grass. But how powerful, how stimulating to the very faculty that produced it, was the invention of the adjective . . . The mind that thought of light, heavy, grey, yellow, still, swift, also conceived of magic that would make heavy things light and able to fly, turn grey lead into gold, and the still rock into swift water. If it could do the one, it could do the other; it inevitably did both. When we can take green from grass, blue from heaven, and red from blood, we have already an enchanter's power—upon one plane; and the desire to wield that power in the world external to our minds awakes. It does not follow that we shall use that power well upon any plane. We may put a deadly green upon a man's face and produce a horror; we may make the rare and terrible blue moon to shine; or we may cause woods to spring with silver leaves and rams to wear fleeces of gold, and put hot fire into the belly of the cold worm. But in such "fantasy," as it is called, new form is made; Faërie begins; Man becomes a sub-creator.**

In this passage, argues Dwayne Thorpe, Tolkien "explained fantasy as a product of the same process which produces the adjective: the mind's ability to abstract. A mind which can remove green from grass, treating it as a separate quality, can also place it, at will, on a face, or a ceiling, or the sun. The mind has an innate ability to split wholes and abstract

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*Wojcik, 137.

**OFS, 122, original emphasis.
parts. The adjective, that common, unregarded aspect of language, is the key to the power of fantasy, which combines imagination (simple image-making) with art to achieve 'the inner consistency of reality.' The power of language, for Tolkien, is in our ability to use it to describe things that do not normally exist in the primary world. This act of creation through fantasy allows the artist to become what Tolkien calls a "sub-creator."

Returning to Tolkien's poem, quoted above, he uses several words, including sub-creator, that for me invite a closer examination. In much the same manner as Coleridge, Tolkien divides words like "dis-graced," "de-throned," "sub-creator," and in the clarification following the poem, "we make in our measure and in our derivative mode."

The term "dis-graced" is compounded from the Latin preposition dis, meaning "apart, asunder, separation, dispersion, not," and gratus, "pleasing, beloved, agreeable, thankful, favorable." Gratus comes from the Indo-European g*e-re- that means "grace, grateful, gratitude." This Indo-European root is also used to form "bard," meaning "he who praises," much like the action of Tolkien's sub-creator. Thus, Tolkien divides the term, "dis-graced," first to draw attention to its compound nature and to remind us, from its etymology, which Tolkien as philologist knew very well, of his Christian perspective—that we live in a fallen world, "separated" (apart, asunder) from "grace" (favor, pleasing, thanks, beloved), or, we might say, fallen from the favor of our maker, although, as the poem notes, "not wholly lost nor wholly changed." We are "dis-graced" but not "de-throned." The prefix "de-" derives also from the Latin dis and "throne" from the Latin thronus and the Greek ἠθρόνος [thronos], meaning "seat, chair, throne, elevated seat."

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The term comes from the Indo-European root *dher-, “to hold firmly, support,” and *dhr-ono yields the Greek thronos. Thus, throne, the firmly supported, elevated seat becomes the symbol of power and authority that in the poem we have not yet lost. For the Christian, Catholic Tolkien, “de-throned” signifies the dominion given to all over nature and the world, the materials we are given for making, for creating secondary worlds.

Yet, since our world is fallen, our mode is derivative, “because we are made . . . in the image and likeness of a Maker.” The terms, “measure” and “mode,” used in his clarification, have the same Latin root modus, meaning “measure, mode, boundary, limit, manner, kind.” Therefore, “we make in our measure (boundary, limit, manner, kind) and in our derivative mode (boundary, limit, manner, kind).” The word “derivative” generates out of the Middle English deriven, “to be derived from,” and comes from the Latin derivare, meaning “to derive, draw off.” We can divide the word into de- (dis, as above) and rivus, “stream,” from the Indo-European rei, “to flow, run,” to assert that “derive” means “to flow apart, to be drawn off from the main stream and to run separately, dispersed from the source,” which in Tolkien is the Maker. Coleridge would agree with Tolkien, since Coleridge’s secondary imagination is an echo, a reflection, even a derivative of the primary imagination, which is itself an echo—derivative, reflection—of the infinite I AM, the Maker of the universe.

Tolkien further reinforces his position by coining the term “sub-creator,” again divided to draw attention to its compound nature. The prefix “sub-,” “below, under, beneath,” comes from the Latin preposition sub, meaning “under, beneath, underneath,” from the Greek ὑπό [hypo], “under, from under, by, through, by reason of, in consequence of, with.” The Indo-European upo, “under, up from under,” yields *upo-st-o, or “vassal,”
“one who stands under.” “Creator” comes from the Latin creator, “creator, procreator, father, founder, one who appoints,” from the verb creare, “to bring forth, create, produce, to elect or appoint.” Its Indo-European root, ker-, “to grow,” yields kre-ya, “to cause to grow” or create. As “sub-creators,” we are under (beneath, underneath, by, through, with) the creator (father, founder, procreator, one who appoints); in other words, we are vassals, those “who stand under” the divine maker, or, as Coleridge puts it, we echo the infinite I AM.

In commenting on Tolkien’s notion of sub-creation, Greene argues that

Tolkien’s ontological and literary theory of sub-creation articulates most completely Tolkien’s belief that man’s creative impulse derives from his having been made in the image and likeness of the Creator. Further, he stated that true sub-creation, as opposed to realistic representation, involves the making of things that do not occur in God’s creation. . . . Clearly Tolkien held his fiction to be of a higher kind than the realistic fiction that dominated his generation; to some degree he was rebuking writers for their obsession with realism. He felt that he was contributing to the efflorescence of Creation by making things that were possible to God but not actually made by him. By logical association, if inclination and ability to create are given by an omniscient and omnipotent God, then whatever proceeds from that faculty proceeds from God.50

Gordon Slethaug notes that the “artist cannot create nature—that has already been done; but he can use her, the tools of existence, in order to create and people a world of his own.”51 Slethaug also recognizes the similarity to Coleridge’s ideas: since nature already exists, “man can not be a primary creator . . . but he can be sub-creator, using previously existing objects in order to form his own secondary world, his sub-creation.”52 On this

50Greene, 48-49.


52Ibid., 343-44.
desire for making and its connection to the divine maker, Tolkien writes,

Probably every writer making a secondary world, a fantasy, every sub-creator, wishes in some measure to be a real maker, or hopes that he is drawing on reality: hopes that the peculiar quality of this secondary world (if not all the details) are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it. If he indeed achieves a quality that can fairly be described by the dictionary definition: “inner consistency of reality,” it is difficult to conceive how this can be, if the work does not in some way partake of reality. The peculiar quality of the “joy” in successful Fantasy can thus be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth. It is not only a “consolation” for the sorrow of this world, but a satisfaction, and an answer to that question, “Is it true?” . . . “If you have built your little world well, yes: it is true in that world.” That is enough for the artist (or the artist part of the artist). But in the “eucatastrophe” we see in a brief vision that the answer may be greater— it may be a far-off gleam or echo of evangelium in the real world.

Tolkien clarifies this position in a letter to Milton Waldman: “Myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary world.” Tolkien here takes exception to the Fantasy writing of C. S. Lewis, whose works contained explicit references to Christianity, which seemed to Tolkien, “fatal.” Commenting on this letter, Sarah Beach notes that “[f]or Tolkien, then it was very important that a sub-creation, a Secondary creation, be—to the receiver, be it the author or the reader—separate from ‘reality,’ the Primary creation. He was fully conscious of the dangers of giving Primary

\[53\] Tolkien’s note: “For all details may not be ‘true’: it is seldom that the ‘inspiration’ is so strong and lasting that it leavens all the lump, and does not leave much that is mere uninspired ‘invention,’” OFS, 155n.

\[54\] OFS, 155.


\[56\] Ibid.
belief to a Secondary creation; for such an action would be truly cultic (in the religious sense) reaction to a fiction— which is a work of art only partially composed of Truth."

Another possible source for Tolkien's theory of sub-creation, according to Nils Agøy, was Danish theologian, poet, and philologist N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783-1872). According to Agøy, Grundtvig thought of mythology as a result of Man’s poetic ability, which itself was the Image of God in Man. Man the creator was both creation and image of God the Creator. . . . The function of the poetic ability is not to invent, but to uncover. . . . When correctly used, the poetic will of its nature express truth, whether the user intends it or not. And the ability should be used. Only by ‘imitating [God’s] Creation’ (efterligne Skabelsen, a possible translation might be ‘sub-creating’) can Man realize the Image of God that he carries within him and become aware of his own true nature.

Agøy argues that according to Grundtvig, “[t]he medium of the poetic ability, and the symbol of Man’s lordship over the rest of creation, is language. Man’s word echoes God’s word in that it re-creates in images the things which God’s word has made reality. Man is created; therefore his word, his ‘image-language,’ contains an image of God’s Word of Creation.” Of the connection between Tolkien and Grundtvig, Agøy writes:

Both men believed that Man, made in the image and likeness of a Maker, fulfilled that Maker’s will by creating with words, thereby helping him to gain a better understanding of his existence and uncovering underlying truth. Both men referred to Man’s gift of Fantasy as his symbol of kingship over the rest of creation. Both agreed that the gift was used most effectively when describing those things that could not be directly observed in the primary world. Both believed that language and myth were inextricably entwined. And both men, finally, hoped that the fruits

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58Nils Ivar Agøy, "Quid Hinieldus cum Christo?—New Perspectives on Tolkien’s Theological Dilemma and his Sub-Creation Theory," Mythlore 21 (Winter 1996): 34, original emphasis.

59Ibid.
of Man’s creativity would be redeemed in God’s new creation.\textsuperscript{60}

Agøy goes on to argue that Tolkien and Grundtvig were professionally related, “because Grundtvig was one of the pioneers in Tolkien’s professional field: Anglo-Saxon studies.”\textsuperscript{61}

Further, “Grundtvig was himself the first to translate the poem into a modern language, and was also ‘the first to understand the story of Beowulf,’ according to one authority.

The discovery that king Hygelac in the poem was actually identical with a historical person mentioned by Martin of Tours—to Tolkien one of the ‘most important fact[s] . . . that research has discovered’—was Grundtvig’s. . . . Professionally, Tolkien probably knew Grundtvig best as a critic and editor of Beowulf.\textsuperscript{62}

We thus may legitimately ask, given Tolkien’s position on fantasy, what has Tolkien done with Coleridge’s theory? Reilly argues that instead of updating Coleridge’s theory, Tolkien “has done just the reverse, has instead taken it backwards and given it specifically Christian implications which it has hardly had since Sidney’s Defense.”\textsuperscript{63} While I do not agree with the negative sense of Reilly’s declaration, I would say that Tolkien has tied

\textsuperscript{60}Ibid. In a footnote that echoes Coleridge’s “supernatural” preface attached to The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, translated by Agøy from Grundtvig, Grundtvig notes: “it is not by far so, that our word is strongest when it mentions and describes what a man may see with his eyes and touch with his hands; it is precisely when it gives expression to the invisible and unfathomable that it gains its full power, [the things] that live in us, or hover above us, and creates in this fashion a whole invisible world, which we humans have to ourselves [as opposed to animals] and of which we can only see shadows and images in the visible world,” 34n. This declaration, for me, establishes stronger connections between not only Tolkien and Grundtvig, but also between Tolkien and Coleridge, with a possible, although unexplored, connection between Grundtvig and Coleridge.

\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., 35.

\textsuperscript{62}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{63}Reilly, 90.
Coleridge closer to Sidney, and done for fantasy what Sidney did for poetry: made it a legitimate form for the creative artist. According to Robley Evans, "Tolkien tells us [in OFS] that the vital creative act is that of the imagination which perceives ultimate truth. Its vehicle is Secondary Creation, the fantastic breaking through the limitations of preconceived response, and revealing an essentially sacred reality. The fantasist has the aim of helping human beings achieve 'freedom from observed fact' through 'the making or glimpsing of Other-worlds.' Such an aim is moral as well as perceptual, a Romantic vision thematically and structurally, with its existence upon an ideal reality against which the actuality of time and space is to be judged."^64 Anita Gorman adds that "[t]he primary world, the world created by the Creator God, is mirrored in the secondary world, the universe created by the human artist. The reader enters that secondary world via a process more powerful than Coleridge's theory of the willing suspension of disbelief. Art leads not to a rather tepid mere suspension of disbelief, but, in Tolkien's view, to the more positive secondary belief, not a belief that is second-rate, but a credo which parallels that secondary world created by humanity."^65

Why write stories that exceed the limits of the "real?" Critic Daniel P. Woolsey claims that, for Tolkien, "fairy stories represent a willful attempt on the part of the writer to transcend the petty problems and mundane concerns of the modern world. Like other kinds of literature, but perhaps to a greater degree, fairy stories provide a place of refuge,


a solace in a world filled with 'hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death.'  

Gunnar Urang adds that “Tolkien insists, fantasy of this sort contributes to the satisfaction of certain primordial human desires; and to be successful it need not convince the reader of the possibility, but only of the desirability, of the Secondary World.”  

Seeman believes that for Tolkien, “purely fantastic creations (like the Pegasus) do constitute an aesthetic unity because the human desire from which they arise is natural rather than contrived. Their truth value rests not in their fidelity to the primary world but in their capacity to signify desire.”

Tolkien’s answer to the question—why write fantasy— is given in the preface to the second edition of The Lord of the Rings: “The prime motive was the desire of a tale-teller to try his hand at a really long story that would hold the attention of readers, amuse them, delight them, and at times maybe excite them or deeply move them . . . . As for any inner meaning or ‘message,’ it has in the intention of the Author none.”  

Parks adds that “[w]hatever reality [a] story may legitimately be construed to be about, it is first of all ‘not about anything but itself.’ And whatever original ‘matter’ a storyteller deals with, once a story begins, the ‘actual’ disappears. In itself, this disappearance says nothing about a

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68Seeman, 78.

story’s significant relation to ‘reality,’ empirical or existential; and though it is well to
remember Dante’s discovery that ‘reality’ actually stands on its head.”

He concludes his essay by noting that “there are as many ‘effective ways of telling a story’ as there are
storytellers who can make with words that ‘Sub-Creation’ which induces Secondary
Belief. . . . It is this principle, operating in story by way of its teller, that assures the
difference of each story and hence the possibility of significant difference, that is, of the
individuality constituting the virtuality of life that marks a story.”

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70Parks, 135.

71Ibid., 143.
CHAPTER 6

THE QUALITIES OF TOLKIENIAN FANTASY I:
“ARRESTING STRANGENESS” AND “HARD RECOGNITION”

Having traced the critical tradition from which Tolkien draws many of his ideas, and having closely examined how Tolkien used and revised Coleridge’s ideas of the imagination to create the notion of sub-creation, we turn now to discover the specific qualities of Tolkien’s “fairy-story,” what I have named “Tolkienian fantasy,” as delineated in his lecture “On Fairy-stories.” To this end, it seems to me beneficial to first briefly summarize how he begins his lecture, the set-up for examining the qualities of the fairy-story. We will follow this summary by looking at the qualities of “enchantment” and direct references to the primary world. We will then illustrate these two qualities as they operate within Tolkien’s first fairy-story, The Hobbit.

Tolkien begins his lecture by stating that his purpose is to answer the questions, “What are fairy-stories? What is their origin? What is the use of them?”¹ He turns, as any philologist would, to the OED and discovers that the combination “fairy-story” is not found but “fairy-tale” is. This second combination appears for the first time in English in 1750, and is described as a tale about fairies or a fairy legend. It is an unreal or incredible story that is also false. “Fairies” are “supernatural beings of diminutive size, in popular

¹Tolkien, OFS, 109.
belief supposed to possess magical powers and to have great influence for good or evil over the affairs of men,"\(^2\) according to Tolkien. He believes, however, that the word "supernatural" is a bad descriptor for fairies, as they are more natural than man. To Tolkien man seems more super-natural—"super" in the sense of "beyond" and "above" nature. He also discredits the notion of fairies as diminutive, which notion he calls a "product of the literary fancy."\(^3\) This idea goes back to Shakespeare's *Midsummer's Night Dream* and Drayton's *Nymphidia*, noting that Andrew Lang also disliked this idea. He calls Drayton's fairy-tale "the worst," not a fairy-tale at all and cites the example of stories about King Arthur's court as his idea of a fairy-story.

The noun, "fairy," is the modern equivalent of "elf," and cites Gower's "as he were faierie" as the first use of the term. He remarks that Gower was here "describing a young gallant who seeks to bewitch the hearts of the maidens in church."\(^4\) The folk of fairy put on the human guise, as we see in Thomas the Rhymer and more particularly in Spencer. The *OED* definition of "fairy-tale" as "stories about fairies" is too narrow for Tolkien's purpose, "even if we reject the diminutive size, for fairy-stories are not in normal English usage stories about fairies or elves, but stories about Fairy, that is *Faërie*, the realm or state in which fairies have their being."\(^5\) He adds that there is more to this realm—*Faërie*—than the so-called "magical" creatures, we also find there the earth and sky, sea and land,

\(^2\)Ibid., 110.
\(^3\)Ibid.
\(^4\)Ibid., 112.
\(^5\)Ibid., 113, original emphasis.
animals and men, "when we are enchanted." Thus, for Tolkien, fairy-stories tell stories of men who enter the "Perilous Realm," as he names it. Even though these stories are creations wholly, they still reflect truth, according to the story’s author.

Tolkien argues that the definition of the fairy-story does not depend upon a history of fairy or elf, "but upon the nature of Faërie, the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in that country. I will not attempt to define that, nor to describe it directly... Faërie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible." Here Tolkien sets himself apart from his critical inheritors, for as we have shown in the introduction, they try to define precisely what it is—we might say, set its boundaries. Tolkien, however, avoids that trap by stating in the beginning that the place where fairy-stories exist cannot be described; its limits, if it has any, are the limits of the imagination of its creator and its reader. Thus, it can be altered to fit the circumstances of any maker or reader; it can evolve to fit any time period. C. S. Lewis, Tolkien’s fellow Inkling, described these stories as magical birds that slip the net even as we think we have caught them. We see here in both these writers of fantasy an affinity for the ideas of Sidney, as described in the first chapter, and Addison in the second. For Sidney, the poet is limited only by his own imagination, "freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit." On the other side, Addison argued for the "reader of polite imagination" who could be moved by well-chosen words. We again note that Tolkien is here speaking of the place, or space, where these stories exist, a space delimited by not trying to define it

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6Ibid.
7Ibid., 114.
directly. As we will see later, Tolkien describes the qualities of this realm that appear in fairy-stories.

He next translates *Faërie* as magic of a particular kind, although he will discard and replace this term later in the lecture. He notes that this kind of “magic” is “at the furthest pole from the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific magician.” The fairy-story uses *Faërie* and its purposes can be satire, adventure, morality, and fantasy. He does add one proviso to satire: if satire is present, then it cannot make fun of the magic itself. He cites *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as an example of its proper function. Next, he excludes literary types that he feels do not qualify as fairy-stories. The first of these he calls the travel narrative, like Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* and H. G. Wells *First Men in the Moon* and *The Time Machine*. This, for Tolkien, reinforces his idea above, that the borders of the fairy-story are dubious at best. The operation of magic within the fairy-story satisfies what he calls “primordial desires.” The first is the desire “to survey the depths of space and time,” and the second is “to hold communion with other living things.” He goes on to say that a “story may thus deal with the satisfaction of these desires, with or without the operation of either machine or magic, and in proportion as it succeeds it will approach the quality and have the flavour of fairy-story.” He also excludes stories using “the machinery of Dream” to explain the marvelous events of the story, for this action cheats “the primal desire at the heart of Faërie: the realisation, independent of the conceiving

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8Ibid.

9Ibid., 116.

10Ibid.
mind, of imagined wonder." In order for the story to fit into Tolkien’s conception, it
must be presented as “true,” excluding any kind of illusory or dream frame, such as used
by Lewis Carroll. He excludes the beast fable, noting that talking beasts do qualify as the
primal desire to speak with others, but a “magical understanding by men of the proper
languages of birds and beasts and trees” is “much nearer to the true purposes of Faërie.”
Finally, he excludes the tales of Beatrix Potter, although he admits that they are very near
to Faërie.

He turns now to the origins of the fairy-story, and argues that the origin of story is the
same as the origin of language, then refines his question to the origin of the fairy element.
He moves immediately away from folklore and anthropology, noting that they use stories
as mines for evidence rather than as stories. Tolkien believes that while important,
showing that the similarities among stories argue that they are the same story ignores the
fact that they are first, stories. He quotes from Dasent’s introduction to Popular Tales
from the Norse: “We must be satisfied with the soup that is set before us, and not desire to
see the bones of the ox out of which it has been boiled.” “By ‘the soup,’” Tolkien notes,
“I mean the story as it is served up by its author or teller, and by ‘the bones’ its sources or
material— even when . . . those can be with certainty discovered.” Fairy-stories are
ancient and found wherever there is language. He notices that the problem of the origin of

\[11\] Ibid.
\[12\] Ibid., 117.
\[13\] Ibid., 120.
\[14\] Ibid.
the fairy-story is the same as the problem of origin for both philologists and archeologists, which is the debate between independent evolution, or invention, inheritance from a common ancestry, or borrowing in time, and diffusion, or borrowing in space. He overturns Max Müller's belief that mythology is a "disease of language" and says instead that language is a disease of mythology. The power of the mind and language is the ability to create new ideas and things; the adjective thus becomes the most powerful "spell" of Faërie. Fantasy is here equated with this power of language to create what is not, or what cannot be: "But in such 'fantasy,' as it is called, new form is made; Faërie begins; man becomes a sub-creator."\(^{15}\) Thus, he goes on, an "essential power of Faërie is . . . the power of making immediately effective by the will the visions of 'fantasy.'"\(^{16}\) He notes that the power of sub-creation is one aspect of mythology, the aspect that is seldom considered. The other aspects are representation and symbolic interpretation, referencing all three back to natural phenomena. In the orthodox view, myth began as personifications of nature; these become epics, heroic legends, and sagas about ancestral heroes who are greater than men; and these become, in time, folk tales, fairy-stories, and nursery tales. Tolkien disagrees with this view, arguing that the characters of these gods and heroes cannot come from the natural phenomena they represent but from the men who abstracted them from nature. As an example, he points to the Norse god Thórr--there is nothing in his character that indicates thunder or lightning. Some of the details can be related to nature, but Tolkien does not think these details actually reflect nature, rather that they

\(^{15}\)Ibid., 122.

\(^{16}\)Ibid.
reflect the farmers who most revered him. Ultimately, Tolkien does not believe that either view, by itself, is right, as he thinks that mythology and religion have become “inextricably entangled.”

Fairy-stories, he goes on, have three faces: the “Mystical towards the Supernatural,” the “Magical towards Nature,” and the “Mirror of scorn and pity towards man.”

Essential to Faërie is the second, but the others may appear, according to the designs of the author. He cites George MacDonald’s *The Golden Key* as successful in this way, while his *Lilith* Tolkien calls a partial failure. He returns to the “soup” mentioned previously to use as a metaphor to describe the history of fairy-stories as a “Pot of Soup” or a “Cauldron of Story.” All that happens throughout history is added to this pot, like the historical Arthur. These pieces of history and myth are mixed together, boil together, until a sub-creator comes along, like Malory, and ladles out a bowl of this soup and creates the legendary king Arthur and his round table. Thus history and myth, fact and fiction, have been mixed together to create the legend. To illustrate this point he uses examples of the fairy-tale, *The Goosegirl* being associated with Bertha Broadfoot, the mother of Charlemagne; the story of the disastrous love between Ingeld, son of Froda, and Freawaru, daughter of Hrothgar, the fathers sworn enemies, a story that reflects the legend of their god, Frey who fell in love with the daughter of a giant. Tolkien argues that the historical story in these pairs does not become mythical or less historical for being associated with legend or fairy-tale. He believes that the attraction to these stories is their

17Ibid., 124.

18Ibid., 125.
distance from us, from our own present: "they open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself."  

At this point, he turns to children and his third and "most important of the three questions: what, if any are the values and functions of fairy-stories now?" He does not agree that the enjoyment of fairy-stories should be limited to children. He asks if there is any natural connection between children and fairy-stories, any reason why adults cannot read them as stories rather than studying them as a curiosity? He believes that to connect fairy-stories exclusively to children is an error, that such a position relegates them to the nursery, like a collection of old, disused furniture. Fairy-stories "banished in this way, cut off from full adult art, would in the end be ruined; indeed in so far as they have been so banished, they have been ruined." Thus, he concludes that the value of the fairy-story cannot be found in children. He points to the collections of Andrew Lang examples of how this has happened, and then examines a comment made by Lang in the introduction to one of these collections. Children asked Lang if the tales are true, and Lang comments that children have an "unblunted edge of belief, a fresh appetite for marvels." Tolkien wonders what Lang meant by "belief" and "appetite for marvels." Tolkien thinks that Lang must have meant belief in an ordinary sense, "that a thing exists or can happen in the real (primary) world." If this is the case, he continues, then the story-teller plays on their

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19 Ibid., 129.
20 Ibid., original emphasis.
21 Ibid., 131.
22 Ibid., qtd. by Tolkien.
23 Ibid., 132.
credulity, "on the lack of experience which makes it less easy for children to distinguish fact from fiction in particular cases." At this point he introduces his concept of literary belief, distinguishing it from Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief," that he thinks does not adequately describe what happens:

What really happens is that 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. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. If you are obliged, by kindness or circumstance, to stay, then disbelief must be suspended (or stifled), otherwise listening and looking would become intolerable. But this suspension of disbelief is a substitute for the genuine thing, a subterfuge we use when condescending to games or make-believe, or when trying (more or less willingly) to find what virtue we can in the work of an art that has for us failed.

Literary belief is thus actual belief in a "Secondary World" created by the author, here called a "sub-creator," a term explored in the previous chapter, that we "enter" while we read the story, and believe it to be true within the confines of the story, or the covers of the book. We again see here Coleridge's influence on Tolkien, where Tolkien here redefines Coleridge's notion of "poetic faith"—the suspension of disbelief—as actual belief in a created, Secondary World. The moment we "dis-believe" the story, the "spell" of the narrative is broken, and we can no longer have literary belief. Tolkien goes on to support this by noting that when we like something for itself—like an enthusiast for cricket—we do not need to suspend our disbelief. He adds that he is not fan of cricket, so to watch a match he must suspend his disbelief, or support his belief with another motive. This is the

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24Ibid.

25Ibid.
state, he argues, of most adults when they approach a fairy-story—the recalled sentiments of a child’s view of these tales allows them to suspend disbelief. However, Tolkien adds, if they liked it, “really liked it, for itself, they would not have to suspend disbelief: they would believe—in this sense.” There are some who argue that secondary belief is easy to produce in children; Tolkien does not think so. He posits that it is “an adult illusion produced by children’s humility, their lack of critical experience and vocabulary, and their voracity.”

Children tend to be less discriminate, because of a lack of experience, and they generally do not express their dislikes. Andrew Lang argued that children’s great question of a fairy-story was, “Is it true?” Tolkien admits that they might ask this question, but attributes it to a desire to know what kind of literature the fairy-story is, not evidence of “unblunted belief.” Tolkien adds that he was one of the children Lang wrote for, and that his experiences as a child and of other children contradict Lang’s assertion. As a child his “enjoyment of a story” did not depend “on belief that such things could happen, or had happened in ‘real life.’” Fairy-stories were plainly not primarily concerned with possibility, but with desirability. He did not want adventure in wonderland or pirate’s treasure, but he liked Native American stories, better liked Arthur and Merlin, and best liked Norse sagas, especially if they included dragons; for dragons have “the trademark Of Faërie written plain upon [them].”

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26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 133.
28 Ibid., 134.
29 Ibid., 135.
At this point, he calls fantasy “the making or glimpsing of Other worlds” and “the heart of the desire of Faërie.” A child’s fear of dragons leads him to ask Lang’s question—“Is it true?”—meaning, do they exist today? Or, as Tolkien notes in a footnote, “Am I safe in my bed?” Learning to read was the act that increased his personal desire for the fairy-story, the “real taste,” as he names it, “wakened by philology on the threshold of manhood, and quickened to full life by war.” Thus, he concludes that fairy-stories should not be the exclusive province of childhood; the desire of fairy-stories is “a natural human taste,” although not universal. He agrees with Lang’s declaration that the “heart of a child” is necessary for entering Faërie, but this does “not necessarily imply an uncritical wonder, nor indeed an uncritical tenderness,” something that many of the critics of Tolkien’s fairy-stories are guilty of.

A further problem that he sees with Lang’s ideas is that Tolkien sees Lang confusing justice and mercy. As an example, Lang thinks that it is more just for a dwarf to die in a fair fight than for the execution of “wicked kings and evil stepmothers”; Lang “sends criminals (as he boasts) to retirement on ample pensions. That is mercy untempered by justice.” Tolkien argues that this is “a small sample of the falsification of values that

30Ibid.
31Ibid., note 2.
32Ibid.
33Ibid., 136.
34Ibid.
35Ibid., 137.
results” from Lang’s move. For Tolkien, fairy-stories give youth lessons from “peril, sorrow, and the shadows of death” that “bestow dignity, and even sometimes wisdom.”

He next notes that “[i]f fairy-story as a kind is worth reading at all it is worthy to be written for and read by adults.” As children’s books, the fairy-story should encourage growth by being “beyond their measure rather than short of it. Their books like their clothes should allow for growth and their books at any rate should encourage it.” A contemporary example of this can be found in the reaction of many parents to the fourth Harry Potter book, and the death of Cedric, witnessed by Harry. These parents felt that this was too much for their children—the book’s intended audience. Yet Rowling seems to follow Tolkien here, recognizing the need to be slightly beyond the audience, helping them to grow, painfully for most, along with Harry. Tolkien again asks his question about the value of the fairy-story as “a natural branch of literature,” and calls this the “last and most important question”: “If written with art, the prime value of fairy-stories will simply be that value which, as literature, they share with other literary forms.” He adds that the fairy-story also offers beyond this value, “Fantasy, Escape, Recovery, Consolation, all things of which children have, as a rule, less need than older people. Most of them are

36Ibid.
37Ibid.
38Ibid.
39Ibid., 138.
nowadays very commonly considered to be bad for anybody.”  

This brings us to the heart of Tolkien’s lecture, the actual qualities of the fairy-story, the first of which he names “fantasy.” We should note, at this point, that Tolkien thinks of “fantasy” in a different way than it has come to denote. In contemporary circles, the term has come to signify the genre of fantasy, a type of novel possessing fantastic or fanciful qualities. Here Tolkien uses the term to describe one of the qualities of the fairy-story, and the “fairy-story” is for Tolkien the “genre” of this kind of literature, a genre which is described as possessing the quality of fantasy. Tolkien begins this section of his lecture by noting that our minds able to recreate images of things not immediately before us, reflecting the “pleasures of the imagination” as described by Addison and discussed in Chapter 2. This is the power of the imagination, and Tolkien again takes exception with Coleridge, for his attempt to distinguish “imagination” from the “fancy.” He then argues that Coleridge’s distinction has led others to “restrict” and “misapply” imagination to “the power of giving to ideal creations the inner consistency of reality.”

Tolkien believes that this “verbal distinction philologically inappropriate,” and he adds, “[t]he mental power of image-making is one thing, or aspect; and it should appropriately be called Imagination. The perception of the image, the grasp of its implications, and the control, which are necessary to a successful expression, may vary in vividness and strength: but this is a

\[OFS, 138.\]


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difference of degree in imagination, not a difference in kind." We notice that one familiar with Coleridge would immediately recognize the echo of the Romantic theorist in this statement by Tolkien. He next defines “fantasy” as “a quality of strangeness and wonder in the Expression, derived from the Image: a quality essential to fairy-story.” This move, Tolkien argues, ties “fantasy” to “its older and higher use as an equivalent of Imagination the derived notions of ‘unreality’ (that is, of unlikeness to the Primary World), of freedom from the domination of observed ‘fact,’ in short of the fantastic. I am thus not only aware but glad of the etymological and semantic connections of fantasy with fantastic.” Here, he also uses “Art” to describe this action, “the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation.” He then notes that “fantasy,” the quality of a fairy-story, is “not a lower but a higher form or Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieve) the most potent.”

Since Tolkien says he is both “aware” and “glad” of the etymological and semantic connections between fantasy and fancy, it seems to me appropriate to establish what they are. Given that semantics is the study of relationships between signifiers and etymology studies their history, we will see, as Tolkien knew, the close connection between these words. Also, since Tolkien wants to collapse the distinction between “fancy” and “imagination,” it seems useful to look also at these words. “Imagination” comes to us

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40 OFS, 138-39.
41 Ibid., 139.
42 Ibid., original emphasis.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.

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through Old French—*imaginer*—from that Latin *imaginari* and *imago*, meaning “image.”

“Fancy,” the *OED Online* tells us, is a contraction of “fantasy,” collapsing the distinction between them. “Fantastic” comes to us through Old French—*fantastique*—from the late Latin *phantasticus* and the Greek *φανταστικός* (phantastikos), from *φαντάζειν* (phantázien), “to make visible” and *φαντάζεσθαι* (phantazethai), “to imagine, have visions.” “Fantasy,” sometimes spelled “phantasy” by contemporary critics in an attempt to recapture its earlier meaning, comes through Old French—*fantasie*—from the Latin *phantasia*, and the Greek *φαντασία* (phantasia), literally “a making visible,” from *φαντάζειν* (phantazein, as above), “to make visible,” and *φαίνειν* (phainein), “to show.”

The *American Heritage Dictionary* notes further that the three terms—imagination, fancy, and fantasy—are synonymous, referring to “the power of the mind to form images, especially of what is not present to the senses.” Thus, Tolkien saw past the technical distinctions between these terms, recognizing that they come from the same Greek root, words which mean “to make visible” and “to show.”

“Fantasy,” as an effect or quality of the fairy-story, is the result of the “sub-creative art” of the author that creates the secondary world, and the “secondary belief” created in the reader of the fairy-story, concepts of the fairy-story discussed previously. Tolkien notes that “fantasy” includes “a quality of strangeness” and “wonder of expression,” the “desired notion of unreality,” or unlikeness to the primary world, and a “freedom from the domination of observed fact.” These phrases of Tolkien describe an aspect of fantasy, what he later calls and I will use to describe this aspect, “arresting strangeness,” the sense

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*OED Online*, “fantasy.”

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of wonder and freedom from fact that is an essential quality of the fairy-story. Arresting strangeness, however, is at once an advantage and debility of the fairy-story, for people generally do not like “meddling with the Primary World,” Tolkien remarks, and so some associate fantasy with “artless” dreaming or with mental disorders. It is also a drawback—the more removed from the Primary World, the more difficult to achieve. Too often the fantasy is “undeveloped; it is and has been used frivolously, or only half-seriously, or merely for decoration: it remains ‘fanciful.’” Tolkien continues:

To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft. Few attempt such difficult tasks. But when they are attempted and in any degree accomplished then we have a rare achievement of Art: indeed narrative art, story-making in its primary and most potent mode.

The ability to create this story of a Secondary World that, as Tolkien says, “commands Secondary Belief” requires an “elvish” skill, ties the notion of “arresting strangeness” directly to both sub-creation and secondary belief, discussed previously. Later, Tolkien gives this aspect—“arresting strangeness”—the name of “Enchantment,” and he distinguishes this term from “Magic”:

Enchantment produces a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside; but in its purity it is artistic in desire and purpose. Magic produces, or pretends to produce, an alteration in the Primary World. It does not matter by whom it is said to be practiced, fay or mortal, it remains distinct from the other two; it is not art but a

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49OFs, 139.

50Ibid., 140.

51Ibid.
technique; its desire is power in this world, domination of things and wills. This kind of magic is exemplified in Tolkien’s sub-creation, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, in the characters of Saruman and Sauron, and the ultimate representation of evil from the earliest history of Middle-earth, Melkor, renamed by the elves of the First Age, Morgoth, of whom Sauron was only a lieutenant. There is, however, another side of “Enchantment,” or “arresting strangeness,” that is the second aspect of fantasy, what Tolkien calls the “hard recognition of fact.” This “hard recognition of fact” ties any fairy-story directly to the Primary World and seems, at first glance, to contradict the idea of “arresting strangeness.” They are opposed to each other, in constant tension one with the other, the literal balancing act that any sub-creator must perform in order to create a secondary world that commands secondary belief. They are, as I hope to show, but two sides of the same coin, both necessary for the fairy-story, what I call Tolkeinian fantasy.

In a recent article, Tolkien scholar Verlyn Flieger discusses this very idea. Flieger takes as her starting point a passage from Tolkien’s essay: “For creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it. So, upon logic was founded the nonsense that displays itself in the tales and rhymes of Lewis Carroll.” What Tolkien noticed about Carroll was the latter’s dependance on logic for his puns and play with language that would not work without an understanding of the language system he

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52 Ibid., 143, original emphasis.
53 Ibid., 144.
54 Ibid.
mocks. Flieger goes on to notice Tolkien’s emphasis in the passage quoted on the word “recognition,” “the key to the whole idea, for it places the emphasis where it belongs: on the beholder rather than on something called ‘reality,’ about which there could be and often is disagreement. Recognition brings the idea home to the reader,” and “fantasy, to be successful, must be recognizable by the perceiving human consciousness.”55 She then remarks that she will not attempt to define fantasy, taking her cue from Tolkien, and noting that many critics have tried to define it, as we have seen in the introduction, “yet they are no nearer a definition that does more than define their own theories. Tolkien, wiser than most, did not try to define it, but he did in the fairy-story essay lay out the principles of his fantasy,”56 what we have named Tolkienian fantasy. Tolkien tells us that every writer making a secondary world, a fantasy, every sub-creator wishes in some way to be a real maker, or hopes that he is drawing on reality: hopes that the peculiar quality of this secondary world (if not all the details) are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it. If he indeed achieves a quality that can fairly be described by the dictionary definition: “inner consistency of reality,” it is difficult to conceive how this can be, if the work does not in some way partake of reality. The peculiar quality of the “joy” in successful Fantasy can thus be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth.57

For Flieger, she sees here the “recognition” of the previous quotation that “things are so in the world.” There is, however, “a reality or truth that underlies that fact. And if the writer, the sub-creator, is an honest craftsman, and Tolkien certainly was, it will sometimes be ‘hard’ recognition, for there are some underlying realities or truths that do


56Ibid.

57OFS, 155.
not always bring joy.”

For fantasy to succeed it must be formed out of the primary world and refer the reader back to the primary world. Flieger comments: “[t]he particular skill of the writer of fantasy, especially in devising a sub-created Secondary World, lies in effecting the escape and still keeping the recognition; the craft resides in achieving and maintaining that delicate balance between fantasy and reality that will lead us to the underlying truth.” And at this, she notes, Tolkien was the master, for the difficulty lies in not losing sight of the primary world while at the same time, at least partially, escaping from it. For, “[n]ot only must one be able to recognize reality before one can depart from it into fantasy, one must also have a pretty good sense of how far one can go before recognition disappears and there is no point of reference.” This position on Tolkien’s ideas leads Flieger to argue that in actuality, Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings “if examined closely, one finds that for a major fantasy it has surprisingly few actual fantastic elements,” especially when compared to many of the fantasies that have followed, and so “Tolkien’s ‘fantasy’ is both attractive and powerful not because of its fantasy but because of its reality, because his world shows us that things are ‘so’ in our own world.” Flieger goes on to examine the elements of Tolkien’s tale that might be considered fantastic—the elves, hobbits, orcs, and finally, the ring itself--and shows how each one reflects reality—the humanity of both elves

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59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., 7.

62 Ibid.

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and hobbits, as also the orcs who behave like soldiers in every culture. The ring is the best example of an element in the story that might be fantastic, and the ring is the central element of the story. But in *The Lord of the Rings* we never see the power of the ring itself, we only see how it affects others, most particularly, its terrible effect on Frodo. Yet in all of these effects, the ring, for Flieger, is the least fantastic and most realistic of all:

> So how fantastic is the Ring? Hardly at all; it is the very embodiment of reality as reality acts on people all the time—as they are effected by power, by greed, by envy, by violence, by shock, by serious injury to mind or body. It is Tolkien forcing us into “the hard recognition that things are so in the world.” The Ring, then, is not so much a fantastic artifact of Tolkien’s Secondary World as it is a direct reference to the Primary World, a sign pointing to and standing for an inescapable, underlying reality or truth, a hard recognition of the human condition. . . . As the Ring is to humanity, so Tolkien’s fantasy world is to our Primary one—founded on it, grounded in it, and standing for it. 63

Thus, we see this “hard recognition of fact” operating within Tolkien’s masterwork, while at the same time showing us how this aspect of fantasy works. We reiterate that this “hard recognition,” or direct tie to the Primary World, is one aspect of fantasy that must work in tandem with the other aspects, even that “arresting strangeness” that it seems to oppose. The best fairy-story will have both, so it seems to me useful at this point, before turning, in the next chapter, to examples of these aspects operating within the fairy-stories of Tolkien’s American imitators, to show these opposing aspects as they work within Tolkien’s earlier fairy-story, *The Hobbit*.

The largest difference between Tolkien’s *Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* is one of audience: the former was directed at children, more particularly, Tolkien’s own children, while the latter was directed at adults. *The Hobbit* had been in publication for two years

63Ibid., 12.
when Tolkien delivered his lecture, “On Fairy-stories,” and the drafting of *The Lord of the Rings* had begun. Although unfinished at the time of this lecture (and it would not be completed for another ten years), it seems to me apparent that both works inform his ideas and thus help to form them. *The Hobbit* concerns the adventures of Bilbo Baggins, a hobbit of the Shire, a pastoral land in the northwest part of Middle-earth, employed by a group of dwarves, at the insistence of the wizard, Gandalf, as a professional burglar, to help the dwarves regain their kingdom under the Lonely Mountain, far to the east, taken from them by the dragon, Smaug. Hobbits live in an agrarian society, where peace, quiet, and frequent meals are the rule. There is little about them that makes them different from humans, only their size—they seldom grow taller than three feet—and the thick hair that grows on the tops of their feet and backs of their hands. They are as social as humans, liking to have company, and it is this quality that gets our protagonist into “trouble.”

Bilbo invites the wizard to come to tea the following day, and the wizard arrives following 13 dwarves. Dwarves are slightly taller than hobbits, stouter and stronger, and all bearded. They are miners and smiths by profession, living in underground caverns where they do most of their work. In both cases—hobbit and dwarf—there is little about them that distinguishes them from humans, little that might qualify as the “arresting strangeness” described above. If we can accept their size differences and their racial quirks, they are quite “ordinary” in their desires and behaviors, and maybe “ordinary” is the word we can use for the “hard recognition” described above. In the evening they spend in Bilbo’s home, they eat, clean-up, and discuss the plans for their adventure, which, except for the dragon, seems quite “ordinary.”

The first moment of “arresting strangeness,” or “enchantment,” comes after they have
traveled for a time. Gandalf leaves them to scout out the road ahead, and they cross a river on a gray, rainy, windy evening. They camp in a clump of trees in an effort to get out of the wind and rain, fail to start a fire to warm themselves, and one of the baggage ponies bolts and is lost in the flood swollen river before they could catch him. This particular pony was carrying most of their food. The dwarves and hobbit mope for a while, hungry and cold, when one of the lookouts sees a fire flickering in the distance. Since they were in lands wild and unsettled, they decide to send the “burglar” to investigate. Bilbo sneaks up to the fire and sees:

Three very large persons sitting around a very large fire of beech-logs. They were toasting mutton on long spits of wood, and licking the gravy off their fingers. There was a fine toothsome smell. Also there was a barrel of good drink at hand, and they were drinking out of jugs. But they were trolls. Obviously trolls. Even Bilbo, in spite of his sheltered life, could see that: from the great heavy faces of them, and their size, and the shape of their legs, not to mention their language, which was not drawing-room fashion at all, at all.64

As the narrative proceeds from the perspective of our hobbit, Bilbo, we, as audience, come to identify with Bilbo, and so, we, with Bilbo, are confronted by “three very large persons” who have “great heavy faces” that, in spite of our “sheltered lives,” we recognize for trolls. This is the moment that Bilbo recognizes that he is not in “the Shire” anymore; in this same moment, we also recognize that we are “not in Kansas anymore,” confronted by what is our first moment of “arresting strangeness.” Although it is true that neither hobbits nor dwarves inhabit the Primary World of our experience, they have been painted in such a way that they appear “ordinary” to us as their behaviors are human-like, even if quirky, and we have been with them long enough in the narrative to recognize their

character types as similar to persons we already know. The trolls, on the other hand, from our hobbit viewpoint, live solely in our minds—nightmares, likely—and step into the forest of Middle-earth and into the waking world of Bilbo Baggins—and of course, us as audience—forcing both character and audience to stop and adjust our conceptions of the narrative world. This is our first brush with the power of faërie, causing us to be “enchanted,” although it is a dark and frightening enchantment. The hobbit and dwarves are quickly captured, and the trolls begin to argue over how they should cook thirteen dwarves and a hobbit. Gandalf returns in the middle of this argument, and interestingly enough, uses no “magic” to rescue the company. Gandalf uses his knowledge of the trolls to trick them by feigning their voices, and he manages to keep them arguing over how to cook their captives until the sun rises and turns the trolls to stone. The narrator reminds us what we “already know,” that “trolls . . . must be underground before dawn, or they go back to the stuff of the mountains they are made of, and never move again.”

Tolkien recognizes that the touch of faërie can be overpowering, so once we have been “brushed” by its power, we are quickly returned to the “ordinary,” thus the wizard uses his superior intellect to out-wit the trolls, causing them to forget, through their constant arguing, their need to be underground before dawn—a thoroughly mundane and ordinary solution to the problem.

A second example of a moment of “arresting strangeness” in Tolkien’s *Hobbit*, what is arguably the most powerful brush with faërie, comes the moment Bilbo—the audience’s viewpoint—first confronts the dragon, Smaug. After many adventures the company

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65Ibid., 51.

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arrives, without the wizard, who had business to attend to in the south, at the mountain and discovers the secret entrance that we learned of long before. The dwarves "delegate" to Bilbo the job for which he was included in their company—to sneak down the passage and confront the dragon. By this time in the narrative, Bilbo has proven again and again that he is the most valuable member of the company, for his luck and his magic ring, which has the power to make him invisible. Bilbo creeps carefully down the passage, with his ring on. As he approaches the bottom, he notices a red glow growing brighter as he descends. The air grows warmer, and he sees wisps of smoke in the tunnel. He begins to hear a sound, "a sort of bubbling like the noise of a large pot galloping on the fire, mixed with a rumble as of a gigantic tom-cat purring." Bilbo stops then, recognizing the sounds as of a giant animal snoring. The narrator tells us that stepping out of the tunnel and into the hall where the dragon lay sleeping on his bed of gold and jewels, "was the bravest thing he ever did." Bilbo enters the lowest hall of the old dwarven stronghold and sees the source of the glow and the sound:

There he lay, a vast red-golden dragon, fast asleep; a thrumming came from his jaws and nostrils, and wisps of smoke, but his fires were low in slumber. Beneath him, under all his limbs and his huge coiled tail, and about him on all sides stretching away across the unseen floor, lay countless piles of precious things, gold wrought and unwrought, gems and jewels, and silver red-stained in the ruddy light.

Smaug lay, with wings folded like an immeasurable bat, turned partly on one side, so that the hobbit could see his underparts and his long pale belly crusted with gems and fragments of gold from his long lying on his costly bed. Behind him where the walls were nearest could dimly be seen coats of mail, helms and axes, swords and spears hanging; and there in rows stood great jars and vessels filled with a wealth that could not be guessed.

To say that Bilbo's breath was taken away is no description at all. There are

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66Ibid., 226.
67Ibid., 227.
no words left to express his staggerment, since Men changed the language that they learned of elves in the days when all the world was wonderful. Bilbo had heard tell and sing of dragon-hoards before, but the splendour, the lust, the glory of such treasure had never yet come home to him. His heart was filled and pierced with enchantment and with the desire of the dwarves; and he gazed motionless, almost forgetting the frightful guardian, at the gold beyond price and count. 

What is most interesting about this passage is the way Tolkien juxtaposes “arresting strangeness” with “hard recognition,” recognizing how powerful is the intrusion of faërie in the form of the dragon and so offsets it with the description of the hoard. Each paragraph does both, beginning with the dragon and concluding with the hoard. In the first, the dragon is described broadly, giving us his size and color, the sound and smoke, his fire and slumber. The narrator turns our gaze from the “enchantment” of the dragon to his vast “couch,” which consists of gold and silver objects, precious gems and jewels, all of which are “red-stained in the ruddy light” of the dragon, reminding us of the intrusion of faërie. The second paragraph turns our gaze back to the dragon, describing his wings and gem-crusted underbelly as he lies sleeping on his side. Our gaze is then draw to the nearby walls, dimly lit by the dragon’s glow, where we see armor and weapons, jars and vessels “filled with a wealth that could not be guessed.” Then in the third paragraph, because we have been given a structure that first draws our gaze to the dragon, we automatically associate Bilbo’s breath being taken away and the lack of words to describe how he feels, with the dragon, even though the next sentence, where we would expect our gaze to be draw from dragon to the hoard, tells us that the lack of words and the loss of breath refer to the dragon’s hoard rather than the dragon. But the structure remains—sight of the dragon takes Bilbo’s breath from him, which is “no description” of how he truly

68Ibid., 227-28.
feels. The narrator recognizes that if he does not distract our gaze from contemplating the
dragon, the “potion” or “spell” of enchantment will become “too strong,” crushing our
fragile secondary belief in this secondary world. “Wealth unimaginable” fills our
protagonist, and us as audience, with the “desire of dwarves” for the riches filling our
gaze, and we almost forget the treasure’s guardian, “enchanted” by “the gold beyond price
and count.” The stroke is masterly; the dragon is by far the most strange and wondrous
creature we have encountered, making the trolls pale into the ordinary by comparison, a
primary example of both “arresting strangeness” and “hard recognition,” as we see them
operating within the fairy-story in tandem.

Having clearly established these two aspects of fantasy, one of the qualities of the
fairy-story, we will move, in the following chapter, to examine instances of these aspects
in contemporary fairy-stories, what I have called, after Tolkien, Tolkienian Fantasy, or
Secondary World Fantasy. We recall, at this point, that “arresting strangeness” refers to
the “enchantment” we feel when confronted by persons, places, or things that are unlike
anything familiar to us in the Primary World, freed from the domination of observed fact.
However, these instances of “arresting strangeness” must be counter-balanced by the
“hard recognition” that things are so in the Primary World, what we called the “ordinary,”
direct reference to our Primary World. Thus, we will examine these two aspects of
fantasy as they express themselves in four contemporary fairy-stories, three of them
American and one British: David Eddings’ *The Belgariad*, Roger Zelazny’s *Chronicles of
Amber*, Stephen R. Donaldson’s *Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, Unbeliever*, and J. K.
Rowling’s *Harry Potter*. 

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CHAPTER 7

"ARRESTING STRANGENESS" AND "HARD RECOGNITION"
APPLIED TO CONTEMPORARY FAIRY-STORIES

We begin by reminding ourselves that the first quality of a Tolkienian fairy-story is what Tolkien called "fantasy," and fantasy consists of two aspects. These two aspects of the quality of fantasy, which will be applied to contemporary fairy-stories in this chapter, are "arresting strangeness" that Tolkien later named "enchantment" and "hard recognition" that we called "ordinariness." "Arresting strangeness," we noted, Tolkien called the "wonder of expression" that enters the fairy-story when we meet persons, things, places, and/or situations that are unlike persons, things, places, and/or situations in our Primary World, or the world of our daily existence. These moments of enchantment must be balanced, in Tolkien's view, by a "hard recognition that things are so in the world," and later, "a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it."1 We showed how this "hard recognition" in the fairy-story points back to the Primary World, and we called it the "ordinary," those elements in the fairy-story that directly reference the Primary World. These two aspects both complement and contrast each other, the "ordinariness" laying the foundation for "enchantment." Our purpose in this chapter is to show these aspects of fantasy operating in contemporary fairy-stories--three American and one British--The

1OFs, 144.

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Belgariad, by David Eddings; The Chronicles of Amber, by Roger Zelazny; The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, Unbeliever, by Stephen R. Donaldson; and the Harry Potter series, by J. K. Rowling. The order is not chronological but moves from the farthest removed from the Primary World—Eddings, set in a wholly Secondary World—to the closest to our world—Rowling, set in contemporary London and England.

As we saw in Tolkien’s Hobbit, “ordinariness” lays the foundation for “enchantment.” In other words, moments of enchantment come after the ordinariness of both scene and characters has been firmly established, enchantment depending on ordinariness for its operation. David Eddings uses this idea of the ordinary almost as an archetype in his Belgariad. Eddings creates a Secondary World entirely independent from our Primary World, but absolutely ordinary in all of its aspects. If we removed the names of the places described within this contemporary fairy-story and replaced them with the names of places from Medieval Europe or early America, or any other place, for that matter, prior to the Industrial Revolution, the characters would not seem out of place. The Belgariad traces the history of Belgarion, who becomes by the end of the tale a sorcerer, Overlord of the West, guardian and wielder of the west’s most powerful artifact, the Orb of Aldur, and finally the Godslayer, who faces the maimed and corrupted god Torak and kills him in single combat. These are stupendous accomplishments for the boy who we have followed since his birth as an orphan.

The boy, introduced as Garion, begins his life and tale in the kitchen of a farmstead, run by a freeholder named Faldor, in a rural part of central Sendaria:

The first thing the boy Garion remembered was the kitchen at Faldor’s farm. For all the rest of his life he had a special warm feeling for kitchens and those peculiar sounds and smells that seemed somehow to combine into a bustling seriousness
that had to do with love and food and comfort and security and, above all, home. No matter how high Garion rose in life, he never forgot that all his memories began in that kitchen.²

One of the more ordinary and domestic places, also highly important, in any farmstead is the kitchen—that place where food is prepared, that place of warmth and comfort. The narrator tells us that, "no matter how high Garion rose in life," he always remembered that his life’s journey—his hero’s tale—began in a kitchen. The narrator goes on to describe this particular kitchen, how the boy learned to stay out of the way, and how he dozed by the fire in the afternoons. The center of this kitchen was a woman Garion, and everyone else, called “Aunt Pol,” who “seemed to be able to be everywhere at once,” whose touch went to and finished everything: "Though there were several others who worked in the kitchen, no loaf, stew, soup, roast, or vegetable ever went out of it that had not been touched at least once by Aunt Pol. She knew by smell taste, or some higher instinct what each dish required."³ The narrator then tells us, in our first hint of enchantment, that Aunt Pol’s skill in the kitchen appeared “as if there was a kind of magic about her, a knowledge and power beyond ordinary people.”⁴ The boy Garion believed that his Aunt Pol was quite the most important and beautiful woman in the world. For one thing, she was taller than the other women on Faldor’s farm—very nearly as tall as a man—and her face was always serious—even stern—except with him, of course. Her hair was long and very dark—almost black—all but one lock just above her left brow which was white as new snow.⁵


³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 1:12.

⁵Ibid.
All about our introduction to the boy and the farm on which he lives seems perfectly ordinary, only in his Aunt Pol do we see a hint of enchantment—her way in the kitchen, her height, and the lock of white hair above her left brow. This lock will play an important role later in what is our first brush in the text with enchantment.

A second pillar of Garion's boyhood on Faldor's farm is the smith, Dumik. When the boy was older, though still young, he was allowed to visit Dumik in his smithy, watching the goodman as he worked. In the story, Dumik comes to represent all that is Sendaria, a stereotype for the down-to-earth, common-sensical, ordinary person, who inculcates in the boy those values—the practicality that Sendaria represents. His description illustrates this idea:

Dumik was an ordinary-looking man with plain brown hair and a plain face, ruddy from the heat of his forge. He was neither tall nor short, nor was he thin or stout. He was sober and quiet, and like most men who follow his trade, he was enormously strong. He wore a rough leather jerkin and an apron of the same material. Both were spotted with burns from the sparks which flew from his forge. He also wore tight-fitting hose and soft leather boots as was the custom in that part of Sendaria.6

The smith, in some ways, seems to act as a contrast to Aunt Pol, the one practical in every way and the other magical. Dumik's description is absolutely common and ordinary, while Aunt Pol's seems, on the surface at least, ordinary, with the hint, in Garion's eyes, of something magical.

The third pillar of Garion's boyhood is the storyteller, as he is first called, who frequently visited the farm and earned his stay by the stories that he told, much like the traveling minstrels of Medieval Europe. He is described as a vagabond with mismatched

6Ibid., 1:13.
boots, a rope for a belt, and tunic and hose that are worn and patched. But like Aunt Pol there is something magical about him. The narrator tells us that he "could imitate the voices of a dozen men," and "when he imitated the howl of a wolf, the sound could raise the hair on the backs of his listeners' necks and strike a chill into their hearts like the depths of a Drasnian winter." Further, "[h]is stories were filled with sounds that made them come alive, and through the sounds and the words with which he wove his tales, sight and smell and the very feel of strange times and places seemed also to come to life for his spellbound listeners." To illustrate this ability, we hear him tell a story of the seven gods who made the world, the divisions of the people into races with their respective god, the making of the orb by the god, Aldur, how his brother-god, Torak, stole the orb and used it to crack the world. The orb struck back at Torak for his action, maiming him. The story continues with the tale of how Belgarath the sorcerer, with Cherek and his three sons, steals the orb back from Torak, how the son named Riva was the only one who could touch the orb and became its guardian and keeper. Riva established a fortress to the west on an island, where he forged a sword upon whose pommel the orb was placed. Belgarath sent one of his daughters to be Riva's wife, while his other daughter, Polgara, became a sorceress. His listeners are impressed, and Faldor remarks that he has told them "a kingly story." The storyteller, who Garion calls Mister Wolf, replies that he has not been around any kings lately, and kings "seem too busy to listen to the old tales, and a story must be told from time to time if it is not to be lost--

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7Ibid., 1:23.

8Ibid., original emphasis.
besides, who knows these days where a king might be hiding."® Later, as the boy Garion leads Mister Wolf to his sleeping quarters, Garion asks:

"Why is the story unfinished?" Garion asked, bursting with curiosity. "Why did you stop before we found out what happened when Torak met the Rivan King?"

"That's another story," the old man explained.

"Will you tell it to me sometime?" Garion pressed.

The old man laughed. "Torak and the Rivan King have not as yet met," he said, "so I can't very well tell it, can I?—at least not until after their meeting."

"It's only a story," Garion objected. "Isn't it?"

"Is it?" The old man removed a flagon of wine from under his tunic and took a long drink. "Who is to say what is only a story and what is truth disguised as a story?"

"It's only a story," Garion said stubbornly, suddenly feeling hardheaded and practical like any good Sendar. "It can't really be true. Why Belgarath the Sorcerer would be—would be I don't know how old—and people don't live that long."

"Seven thousand years," the old man said.

"What?"

"Belgarath the Sorcerer is seven thousand years old—perhaps a bit older."

"That's impossible," Garion said.

"Is it? How old are you?"

"Nine—next Erastide."

"And in nine years you've learned everything that's both possible and impossible? You're a remarkable boy, Garion."®

After a moment, Garion asks the inevitable question, marking him as any ordinary boy, "How old are you?"; to which the old man, also inevitably replies, "Old enough." Garion still thinks that what he has heard is only a story, and the old man replies, marking the boundary between what Dumik represents and what he and Aunt Pol seem to represent:

"Many good and solid men would say so," the old man told him, looking up at the stars, "good men who will live out their lives believing in only what they can see and touch. But there's a world beyond what we can see and touch, and that world lives by its own laws. What may be impossible in this very ordinary world is

® Ibid., 1:27.

® Ibid., 1:27-28, original emphasis.
very possible there, and sometimes the boundaries between the two worlds disappear, and then who can say what is possible and impossible.”

“I think I’d rather live in the ordinary world,” Garion said. “The other one sounds too complicated.”

“We don’t always have that choice, Garion,” the storyteller told him. “Don’t be too surprised if that other world someday chooses you to do something that must be done—some great and noble thing.”

“Me?” Garion said incredulously.

“Stranger things have happened . . .”

As we saw in Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, these first brushes with enchantment are light and hardly noticeable. Eddings thus follows the pattern established for the fairy-story by Tolkien by clearly showing us how “ordinary” the Secondary World is in both people and places, inserting early only light touches and hints of enchantment.

As Garion grows older and begins to feel the first pulls of manhood, his playmates notice a strange, white mark, perfectly round, in the palm of Garion’s right hand. They decide it must be some kind of birthmark, and later in the evening, as they are going to bed, Garion asks his Aunt Pol what it is; he learns from her that his father had the same mark on his right hand and that it has been in his family for a long time. The narrator tells us:

A sudden strange thought occurred to Garion. Without knowing why, he reached out with the hand and touched the white lock at his Aunt’s brow. “Is it like that white place in your hair?” he asked.

He felt a sudden tingle in his hand, and it seemed somehow that a window opened in his mind. At first there was only the sense of uncountable years moving like a vast sea of ponderously rolling clouds, and then, sharper than any knife, a feeling of endlessly repeated loss, of sorrow. Then, more recent, there was his own face, and behind it more faces, old, young, regal or quite ordinary, and behind them all, no longer foolish as it sometimes seemed, the face of Mister Wolf. But more than anything there was a knowledge of an unearthly, inhuman power, the certainty of an unconquerable will.

Aunt Pol moved her head away almost absently. “Don’t do that, Garion,” she

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11Ibid., 1:28.
said, and the window in his mind shut.

"What was it?" he asked, burning with curiosity and wanting to open the window again.

"A simple trick," she said.

"Show me how."

"Not yet, my Garion," she said, taking his face between her hands. "Not yet. You're not ready yet. Now go back to bed."12

Again, we see the light brush of enchantment, although it is getting stronger, and the window that opens in Garion's mind seems to be a window into that other world, described by Mister Wolf, where what seems impossible in the ordinary world of Sendaria may indeed be possible. It is a window filled with loss and sorrow, faces that include Garion's and Mister Wolf's, but it also gives Garion a glimpse of "inhuman power" and "an unconquerable will." We recognize, with Garion, that there is more to his Aunt than there appears to be, that our first assessment of her as "magical" may in some fashion be correct.

The ordinariness of the text continues as we follow the story of Garion's early life. Not long after the moment described above, Aunt Pol catches Garion in the barn kissing a farm girl named Zubrette, and so puts him to work in the kitchen, keeping him too busy and too tired to pursue her. Shortly after that, Mister Wolf returns and Garion overhears a conversation between the storyteller and his Aunt about something that has been stolen that he needs Aunt Pol's help to find. They leave with Garion and Durnik and begin to travel in search of this stolen object that remains unknown to Garion. Others join them, and they travel by wagon or horse, assuming the guise of merchants or noblemen, as the occasion demands. They sleep in the woods or roadside inns, carry turnips or hams to

12Ibid., 1:42-43.
market, and again, if this were not a fictional, Secondary World, we could accept that we were moving through a story told of Medieval Europe. During the course of the first book, Garion learns and slowly accepts the fact that Mister Wolf is actually Belgarath the Sorcerer, and that his Aunt Pol is Belgarath’s daughter, Polgara the Sorceress. He also learns that he is related to both—Polgara is his “ultimate” aunt as Belgarath is his “ultimate” grandfather. But these brushes with enchantment continue to be light, and Eddings like Tolkien, establishes them by laying a groundwork of the ordinary.

Although there are many other examples in this fairy-story of Eddings following Tolkien’s lead, one more should suffice to establish the contrasting relationship in the text between enchantment and ordinariness, the moment when Garion discovers his power as a sorcerer. Throughout the text up to this point, we have learned the reason that Polgara raised Garion, as Garion’s parents were murdered when he was an infant. We learned that Belgarath arrived too late, finding the house of Garion’s parents—a stone house—engulfed in flame and a Murgo Grolim—a minor sorcerer among their enemies—holding a blanket wrapped infant—Garion. This Grolim recognized Belgarath, and threw the baby at the old sorcerer in order to allow him to escape. Garion learns this from Belgarath, whom he calls his grandfather, and vows that he will avenge his parents. Belgarath warns him of the price of revenge, but agrees that he will tell Garion who the murderer was—in time. We also get glimpses that Garion might have the power of sorcery, but these moments are always explained away. We have also seen a sometimes shadowy figure, a Grolim by the name of Asharak, who seems to be following them, trying to get Garion away from them. It is in the final meeting with this Murgo that Garion’s power is revealed.

They have traveled far south, passing out of Sendaria, through the kingdom of
Arendia, and nearly through the kingdom of Tolnedra. Various other people have joined them on the way, and they are still following the trail of the missing object, that turns out to be the Orb of Aldur, stolen from the Hall of the Rivan King. The line of the Rivan king was believed to have died out a millennia before, and astute readers have by now realized that Garion is of this supposedly dead line, although Garion has not realized it. As they are about to follow the trail of the Orb from Tolnedra into the kingdom of Nyissa, they stop in the Wood of the Dryads at Tolnedra’s southern border, and Belgarath with another member of the party, leaves to scout ahead. A group of Tolnedran Legionnaires, hunting for the missing royal princess, who has joined the party, led by the Murgo Asharak, capture them before they have left the wood. After we learn from Polgara that Asharak’s name is really Chamdar, and Chamdar claims to have watched Garion’s growth as carefully as Polgara, and they exchange threats for a time, Chamdar says that he has his hand around Garion’s heart, preventing Polgara from using her power. The dry voice in Garion’s mind, which has always been there and we learn, much later, is the voice of one of two competing destinies, tells Garion, as the boy draws his dagger to strike Chamdar, not to try and kill him that way but the “other” way, since Chamdar will simply hold him in place, preventing Garion from striking. Garion asks how he can do this, and the voice replies:

"Remember what Belgarath said—the Will and the Word."
"I don't know how. I can't do it."
"You are who you are. I'll show you. Look!" Unbidden and so clearly that it was almost as if he were watching it happen, the image of the God Torak writhing in the fire of Aldur’s Orb rose before his eyes. He saw Torak’s face melting and his fingers aflame. Then the face shifted and altered until it was the face of the dark watcher whose mind had been linked with his for as long as he could remember. He felt a terrible force building in him as the image of Chamdar wrapped in seething flame stood before him.

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“Now!” the voice commanded him. “Do it!”

It required a blow. His rage would be satisfied with nothing less. He leaped at the smirking Grolim so quickly that none of the legionnaires could stop him. He swung his right arm, and at the instant his palm struck Chamdar’s scarred cheek, he felt all the force that had built in him surge out from the silvery mark on his palm. “Burn!” he commanded, willing it to happen.\(^{13}\)

Chamdar begins to burn from within, surprised by Garion’s action, then Aunt Pol’s voice comes into Garion’s mind, telling him to stand still and not weaken. Chamdar, in agony, reaches up to Garion, calls him “master” and asks him to have mercy. Garion, horrified by what he has done, begins to relax his will and think how he could heal Chamdar. Aunt Pol’s voice comes into his mind again:

“No!” Aunt Pol’s stern voice commanded. “He’ll kill you if you release him!”
“I can’t do it,” Garion said. “I’m going to stop it. . . .”
“Garion!” Aunt Pol’s voice rang. “It was Chamdar who killed your parents!”

The thought forming in his mind froze.
“Chamdar killed Geran and Ildera. He burned them alive—just as he’s burning now. Avenge them, Garion! Keep the fire on him!”

All the rage and fury he had carried with him since Wolf [Belgarath] had told him of the deaths of his parents flamed in his brain. The fire, which a moment before he had almost extinguished, was suddenly not enough. The hand he had begun to reach out in compassion stiffened. In terrible anger he raised it, palm out. A strange sensation tingled in that palm, and then his own hand burst into flames. There was no pain, not even a feeling of heat, as a bright blue fire burst from the mark on his hand and wreathed up through his fingers. The blue fire became brighter—so bright that he could not even look at it.\(^{14}\)

Chamdar, in the blaze of Garion’s anger coupled with his sorcerous will, quickly perishes in the flames, and Aunt Pol’s voice speaks again in his mind, noting that his parents have been avenged, and she calls him “Belgarion,” a name that marks him as a sorcerer. But the potion here is too strong, as Eddings knows, and so the narrative backs away from this

\(^{13}\)Ibid., 1:438.

\(^{14}\)Ibid., 1:439.
display of "arresting strangeness" very quickly. The Tolnedran Legionnaires break and run, overwhelmed by the sorcery displayed. Durnik—practical repository of Sendarian common-sense—cannot believe his eyes, and so says to Garion, "[w]ho are you, Garion, and how did you do this?" Aunt Pol tells the smith that he was mistaken, that she really did it, working through Garion, and her voice speaks in Garion's mind again, telling him to keep quiet. Garion is confused by what has happened, and accuses the dry voice in his mind of doing it. But the voice tells him that it was all him.

At this point, it seems to me appropriate to recall the earlier conversation between the boy and the storyteller about the two worlds that exist—the ordinary and the enchanted, mirroring Tolkien's contrasting aspects of fantasy—and these two worlds seem to be represented in the text by Durnik and Polgara. The majority of the narrative exists in the ordinary world, a world so common that only the strange names of places and people mark it as different from our Primary World of an earlier time. The second world, the world of enchantment, hovers at the edge of our awareness, and when it intrudes into the ordinary world, we, like Durnik, are left with a sense of wonder, hardly believing that we have seen what we have—we say to the text, "I thought I knew you but am now unsure of who you are." Then, to reinforce the ordinary world, enchantment moves out of reach, telling us that we must have been mistaken, as Polgara explains to the startled smith. Thus, we see Eddings establishing the groundwork for enchantment by clearly defining his secondary world as ordinary—so like our Primary World, from the past, that we believe we are in a familiar place. Moments of enchantment are infrequent, and when they do come

15 Ibid., 1:441.
they are seen as intrusions from that other world beyond our senses, quickly over and as quickly explained, preventing us from being overcome by the power of its “arresting strangeness.”

Roger Zelazny’s approach is different in the creation of his secondary world of Amber, positing that Amber and its royal family are the center of the universe, and that all other places that exist are simply “shadows” of the center place. A prince or princess of the royal blood, once initiated, can move through these shadows of Amber by the strength of his or her will, adding and subtracting aspects from his/her surroundings as he/she moves through shadow until finding the “place” which he/she seeks. Our Primary World is thus a “shadow” of Amber, although one favored by many of the Amberites, and is the beginning point for the narrative. This idea of center-place and shadows is, however, complicated as we move through the story—we learn that Amber—the city and its inhabitants, are actually the first shadow of the “primal” place, and this primal Amber is only one pole of two power centers. The primal Amber represents order and is opposed to the “Courts of Chaos,” with which there is an ongoing battle for control of the shadows that lie between. This polar relationship is further complicated as we learn that the Amberites originally came from the Courts of Chaos—that they rebelled against Chaos, and the first king—father of all the princes and princesses we meet—drew the original, primal pattern of Amber as an expression of order, bringing into existence the possibility of all the shadows that lie in between. As if this is not complex enough, at a later point in the narrative, the main character, Corwin, one of the princes of Amber, believes his father has failed in his attempt to repair damage to the primal pattern. So to stave off what he believes is the impending return of all shadows to chaos, he inscribes his own primal pattern, creating a third pole.
and complicating the balance even more. This cosmology, however, we learn very slowly as we follow the course of the tale and Corwin, Prince of Amber.

The ordinariness of his secondary world, Zelazny establishes immediately in the first book of The Chronicles of Amber, by beginning his fairy-story in the Primary World, in a hospital bed with a character who does not remember who he is or why he has been heavily sedated:

> It was starting to end, after what seemed most of eternity to me.
> I attempted to wriggle my toes, succeeded. I was sprawled there in a hospital bed and my legs were done up in plaster casts, but they were still mine
> I squeezed my eyes shut, and opened them, three times.
> The room grew steady.
> Where the hell was I?
> The fogs were slowly broken, and some of that which is called memory returned to me. I recalled nights and nurses and needles. Every time things would begin to clear a bit, someone would come in and jab me with something. That’s how it had been. Yes. Now, though, I was feeling halfway decent. They’d have to stop.
> Wouldn’t they?
> The thought came to assail me: *Maybe not.*
> Some natural skepticism as to the purity of all human motives came and sat upon my chest. I’d been over-narcotized, I suddenly knew. No real reason for it, from the way I felt, and no reason for them to stop now, if they’d been paid to keep it up. So play it cool and stay doopey, said a voice which was my worst, if wiser, self.16

At this point, if we had been given this novel without its fantastic cover art, we could easily believe that we have picked up some kind of detective novel, or a psychological thriller that is currently on the best-seller list. The story so far seems absolutely ordinary—the story of someone who has lost his memory with the hint of something sinister in the way he has been “over-narcotized,” as he tells us. He realizes, vaguely, that he was in

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some kind of accident, taken first to a regular hospital for treatment, then moved to the place where he finds himself. He cannot recall how much time has passed since the accident, but he knows his legs were broken. He manages to sit up, stand and test his legs, and discovers that they held him. He believes he has healed enough to leave, although still weak. The nurse enters while he feigns sleep, ready to give him another injection, but he “bullies” her into not giving him another shot without first speaking to the doctor. While she is away, he continues to think about his current state:

So I lay there and mulled. It seemed I was in some sort of private place—so somebody was footing the bill. Whom did I know? No visions of relatives appeared behind my eyes. Friends either. What did that leave? Enemies?

I thought a while.

Nothing.

Nobody to benefact me thus.

I’d gone over a cliff in my car, and into a lake, I suddenly remembered. And that was all I remembered.

I was...

I strained and began to sweat again.

I didn’t know who I was.

But to occupy myself, I sat up and stripped away all my bandages. I seemed all right underneath them, and it seemed the right thing to do. I broke the cast on my right leg, using the metal strut I’d removed from the head of the bead. I had a sudden feeling that I had to get out in a hurry, that there was something I had to do.

I tested my right leg. It was okay.

I shattered the cast on my left leg, got up, and went to the closet.

No clothes there.

Then I heard footsteps. I returned to my bed and covered over the broken casts and the discarded bandages.17

A burly guy enters and tries to give him a shot. After a short scuffle, our character leaves the room dressed in the nurse’s clothes. He finds the director up early in his office and bullies the director into telling him who put him here and who is paying the bill. He learns

17Ibid., 1:5, original emphasis.
that his name is Carl Corey and that his sister, Evelyn Flaumel, with a New York City address, had him placed in this institution. He extorts some money from the director and leaves to go visit his sister.

The ordinariness of the story continues as the character goes to his sister’s home and bluffs his way through a long conversation. He learns that his name is actually Corwin, and learns the names of some of his brothers, along with dim recollections of how he liked or disliked each one. The conversation revolves around vague hints of “trying for something,” some competition between him and his brothers, which she accuses him of “trying for.” He denies it at first, “[b]ut as she said it, I knew she’d struck some chord, some deep-buried thing which replied with a powerful ‘Why not?’”18 The conversation continues, giving us our first hint of something beyond the ordinary:

“You know,” I said after I’d reseated myself, “it’s pleasant to be together with you this way, even if only for a short time. It brings back memories.”

And she smiled and was lovely.

“You’re right,” she said, sipping her drink. “I almost feel in Amber with you around,” and I almost dropped my drink.

Amber! The word had sent a bolt of lightning down my spine!

Then she began to cry, and I rose and put my arm around her shoulders to comfort her.

“Don’t cry, little girl. Please don’t. It makes me unhappy, too.” Amber! There was something there, something electrical and potent! “There will be good days once again,” I said, softly. . . .

“Corwin,” she said, “if you do make it—if by some wild and freakish chance out of Shadow you should make it—will you remember your little sister Florimel?”

“Yes,” I said, knowing it to be her name. “Yes, I will remember you.”19

Our hint here of enchantment is light, only a single word—“Amber”—that causes Corwin nearly to drop his drink and sends “a bolt of lightning” surging down his spine. He next

18Ibid., 1:19.

19Ibid., original emphasis.
tells us that there is “something electrical and potent” about the name. Here, it seems as if Zelazny is letting us carefully “test the waters” of enchantment, and we find their touch shockingly cold. This light testing continues on the next day in narrative time, after Corwin takes a call for his sister, who is out, a call from one of his brothers, Random, after he has found Flora’s (Florimel) secret deck of tarot cards, which includes a set of greater trumps that are pictures of all his brothers and sisters, including one of himself. He bluffs his way through the conversation, finds out Random is in trouble and pursued, and agrees to give him protection. Random arrives in the evening, pursued by six thugs, and a fight follows. They manage to kill all six, and when they begin to examine Random’s pursuers, we are brushed by “arresting strangeness”:

There was something unusual about their appearance.
Flora entered and helped us decide what.
For one thing, all six had uniformly bloodshot eyes. Very, very bloodshot eyes. With them though, the condition seemed normal.
For another, all had an extra joint to each finger and thumb, and sharp, forward-curving spurs on the backs of their hands.
All of them had prominent jaws, and when I forced one open, I counted forty-five teeth, most of them longer than human teeth, and several looking to be much sharper. Their flesh was grayish and hard and shiny.
There were undoubtedly other differences also, but those were sufficient to prove a point of some sort.
We took their weapons, and I hung onto three small, flat pistols.
“They crawled out of the Shadows, all right,” said Random, and I nodded. “And I was lucky, too. It doesn’t seem they suspected I’d turn up with the reinforcements I did--a militant brother and around half a ton of dogs.” He went and peered out of the broken window, and I decided to let him do it himself.
“Nothing,” he said, after a time. “I’m sure we got them all,” and he drew the heavy orange drapes closed and pushed a lot of high-backed furniture in front of them. While he was doing that, I went through all their pockets.
I wasn’t really surprised that I turned up nothing in the way of identification.20

Again, we see the touch here is light—only small hints—and the metaphor of a swimmer

20Ibid., 1:35-36.
testing the waters seems appropriate. Our place, as the place of the characters, is firmly fixed within the Primary World, and only hints found in strange names, references to “Amber” and “Shadows,” capitalized as if they were the names of particular places, and now figures who pursue and attack them, having attributes that mark them as non-human, although human-like. And we, like Corwin, are left wondering what is really going on, or like Garion in Eddings’ fairy-story, have been given a glimpse of the world beyond the ordinary. The swimmer testing the water is an apt metaphor for Zelazny’s approach to and use of enchantment; for, as we know, the best way to get used to very cold water is to simply plunge in, hoping the shock of cold does not stop one’s heart. Zelazny recognizes this idea, and so “plunges” us directly into the shocking cold, or arresting strangeness, of enchantment.

On the next day in the narrative, Random and Corwin borrow Flora’s Mercedes to go for a ride and talk. Again, Corwin bluffs his way through the conversation, not really knowing what it is that Random believes he will “try for.” Corwin assures him he will try, Random asks when, and Corwin replies, “[w]hat about now?” Random is silent for a time, then replies:

“Okay,” he finally said. “When’s the last time you’ve been back?”
“It’s been so damn long,” I told him, “that I’m not sure I even remember the way.”
“All right,” he said, “then we’re going to have to go away before we can come back. How much gas have you got?”
“Three-quarters of a tank.”
“Then turn left at the next corner, and we’ll see what happens.”
I did this thing, and as we drove along all the sidewalks began to sparkle.
“Damn!” he said. “It’s been around twenty years since I’ve taken the walk.

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21Ibid., 1:38.
I’m remembering the right things too soon.”22

As they continue driving, the sky changing from green to pink, we, like Corwin, wonder what we have slipped into, and Corwin, like the reader, remains silent, not wanting to give away his ignorance. He continues:

We passed beneath a bridge and when we emerged on the other side the sky was a normal color again, but there were windmills all over the place, big yellow ones.

“Don’t worry,” he said quickly, “it could be worse.”

I noticed the people we passed were dressed rather strangely, and the roadway was of brick.

“Turn right.”

I did.

Purple clouds covered over the sun, and it began to rain. Lightning stalked the heavens and the skies grumbled above us. I had the windshield wipers going full speed, but they weren’t doing a whole big lot of good. I turned on the headlights and slowed even more.

I would have sworn I’d passed a horseman, racing in the other direction, dressed all in gray, collar turned high and head lowered against the rain. . . .

Random just kept smoking and staring out of the window as our road turned away from the shore and curved around a hill. A grassy treeless plain swept away to our right and a row of hills climbed higher on our left. The sky by now was a dark but brilliant blue, like a deep, clear pool, sheltered and shaded. I did not recall having ever seen a sky like that before. . . .

“All roads lead to Amber,” he said, as though it were an axiom.23

The shock of this plunge into enchantment is cold, and like Corwin, we are both surprised and confused by how the world around us changes in very strange ways, as we turn corners and pass under bridges, appearing to have moved to a completely different and new place. After a discussion about Flora, who Corwin suspects had tried to make this “walk” on the previous day and failed, and Random’s remarking that the way would be blocked at this time, Corwin tells us:

22Ibid.

23Ibid., 1:38-39.
What was happening? I knew that he was in some way responsible for the exotic changes going on about us, but I couldn't determine how he was doing it, where he was getting us to. I knew I had to learn his secret, but I couldn't just ask him or he'd know I didn't know. Then I'd be at his mercy. He seemed to do nothing but smoke and stare, but coming up out of a dip in the road we entered a blue desert and the sun was now pink above our heads within the shimmering sky. In the rear-view mirror, miles and miles of desert stretched out behind us, far as I could see. Neat trick, that.

Then the engine coughed, sputtered, steadied itself, repeated the performance. The steering wheel changed shape beneath my hands. It became a crescent; and the seat seemed further back, the car seemed closer to the road, and the windshield had more of a slant to it.
I said nothing, though, not even when the lavender sandstorm struck us. But when it cleared away, I gasped.
There was a godawful line of cars all jammed up, about half a mile before us. They were all standing still and I could hear their horns.
"Slow down," he said. "It's the first obstacle."
I did, and another gust of sand swept over us.
Before I could switch on the lights, it was gone, and I blinked my eyes several times.
All the cars were gone and silent their horns. But the roadway sparkled now as the sidewalks had for a time, and I heard Random damning someone or something under his breath.24

By using several narrative devices here, Zelazny "warms" that water that we have been plunged into. Beginning the story, as he does, in a hospital bed with a character who has amnesia, and using first person point of view places the reader firmly with Corwin and we respond with Corwin as each successive wave of enchantment crashes over us. Instead of immediately rejecting the tale as too "arresting," we react, out of our empathy for the main character as he does--a kind of surprise that is heavy with curiosity. We know that Random is somehow altering the landscape around us--which surprises us--but we want to know how he does. This action, we learn later, is called "shadow walking," which allows the prince of princess to move through "Shadows" by adding and subtracting, through his

24Ibid., 1:40.
or her individual power of mind, features from his or her surroundings, until he or she comes to the place she or he desires. These narrative movements through shadow space are the most "arrestingly strange" parts of the fairy-story, moments when we are plunged for long periods of time into the icy cold waters of enchantment. For the other parts of the narrative, we are in a world much like Eddings'--a world that resembles that of Medieval Europe. In Zelazny's fairy-story, we still see Tolkien's ideas of ordinariness that lays the foundation for enchantment, although the movement from ordinary to enchanted is less smooth, more abrupt, and the boundary between the Primary and Secondary Worlds is blurred.

Stephen R. Donaldson's approach in his *Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, Unbeliever* is similar to Zelazny's, as he begins his fairy-story in our Primary World. The main character, Thomas Covenant, is a writer afflicted with a primary case of Hansen's Disease, more commonly known as leprosy. We are first introduced to our "hero" as he walks the two miles from his home into town to pay his telephone bill; we immediately see how he has been ostracized, a leper in the modern world:

She came out of the store just in time to see her young son playing on the sidewalk directly in the path of the gray, gaunt man who strode down the center of the walk like a mechanical derelict. For an instant, her heart quailed. Then she jumped forward, gripped her son by the arm, snatched him out of harm's way. The man went by without turning his head. As his back moved away from her, she hissed at it, "Go away! Get out of here! You ought to be ashamed!"

Thomas Covenant's stride went on, as unfaltering as clockwork that had been wound to the hilt for just this purpose. But to himself he responded, *Ashamed? Ashamed?* His face contorted in a wild grimace. *Beware! Outcast unclean!*25

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In some ways, Thomas Covenant is a character exactly opposite of Zelazny's Prince Corwin. Although both tales begin within the Primary World, the heroes have little else in common. Where Corwin is strong, sharp, highly intelligent, capable of bluffing his way forward despite his amnesia, in short, an extremely powerful character, Covenant the leper is powerless, impotent, a "social leper" because of his disease. He is also angry and bitter over what has happened to him. The narrator continues:

But he saw the people he passed, the people who knew him, whose names and houses and handclasps were known to him—he saw that they stepped aside, gave him plenty of room. Some of them looked as if they were holding their breath. His inner shouting collapsed. These people did not need the ancient ritual of warning. He concentrated on restraining the spasmodic snarl which lurched across his face, and let the tight machinery of his will carry him forward step by step.  

We get the sense here that before he came down with his disease that he was well-known and well-liked by the townsfolk, as would be the case for a best-selling author—he would have been a celebrity. Now, however, their fear of his disease, of its crippling and disfiguring effect, has erased his former relationships with anyone here. We soon learn that his trip into town to pay his phone bill is the act of a desperate man, one who seeks to assert his humanity, and the narrator tells us that his electric bill has been paid by someone unknown, in advance, that the local grocery store delivers food to his door, whether he pays for it or not, and all these actions are an attempt to isolate our hero from his neighbors. We learn that Covenant had been married and had a son, but that his wife, on learning of his disease, had left with their son and divorced—for the good of the child, since leprosy is contracted by coming in contact with a leper as a child. And Covenant chews on this fact constantly, angry and bitter, and unwilling to let go. We are immersed,

26Ibid.
as he walks, in the world of the leper, his repeated “VSE”—“Visual Surveillance of Extremities”—an action made necessary because the leper can no longer feel the pain of an injury, and an injury, if left untreated, quickly becomes infected, leading to gangrene, amputation, and death. Covenant has lost two fingers on his right hand to infection and neglect, before he realized what he had. In the second chapter, as he continues on his way to the phone company, our immersion continues as he recalls his survival training in the leprosarium. The scene is ordinary and commonplace, except for the anger and bitterness that swirls around our hero, firmly established in the Primary World of our daily existence. The only hint of enchantment—hardly noticed—is as he bumps into a strangely garbed old man: “the person he had bumped seemed to be wearing a dirty, reddish-brown robe,”

attire out of place in the modern world. He continues on his way without a second glance, but is later interrupted by a boy who hands him a note from the strange figure, then points him out to Covenant:

Covenant looked and saw an old man in a dirty ocher robe standing half a block away. He was mumbling, almost singing a dim nonsense tune; and his mouth hung open, though his lips and jaw did not move to shape his mutterings. His long, tattered hair and beard fluttered around his head in the light breeze. His face was lifted to the sky; he seemed to be staring directly at the sun. In his left hand he held a wooden beggar-bowl. His right hand clutched a long wooden staff, to the top of which was affixed a sign bearing one word:

Beware.

Beware?

For an odd moment, the sign itself seemed to exert a peril over Covenant. Dangers crowded through it to get at him, terrible dangers swam in the air toward him, screaming like vultures. And among them, looking toward him through the screams, there were eyes—two eyes like fangs, carious and deadly. They regarded him with a fixed, cold and hungry malice, focused on him as if he and he alone were the carrion they craved. Malevolence dripped from them like venom. For that moment, he quavered in the grasp of inexplicable fear.

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27Ibid., 3.
Beware!
But it was only a sign, only a blind placard attached to a wooden staff.
Covenant shuddered, and the air in front of him cleared.  

The first touch of enchantment here, as we have seen previously, is light, a soft brush, quickly withdrawn but dripping with malevolence and fear. The boy tells him he is supposed to read the note, although he does not read it until after he has entered the phone company and the receptionist—in the days before computers—goes off to check his file. The note posits a situation and then asks an ethical question, but the situation posed foreshadows what is about to happen to Covenant:

A real man—real in all the ways that we recognize as real—finds himself suddenly abstracted from the world and deposited in a physical situation which could not possibly exist: sounds have aroma, smells have color and depth, sights have texture, touches have pitch and timbre. There he is informed by a disembodied voice that he has been brought to that place as a champion for his world. He must fight to the death in single combat against a champion from another world. If he is defeated, he will die, and his world—the real world—will be destroyed because it lacks the inner strength to survive.

The man refuses to believe that what he is told is true. He asserts that he is either dreaming or hallucinating, and declines to be put in the false position of fighting to the death where no “real” danger exists. He is implacable in his determination to disbelieve his apparent situation, and does not defend himself when he is attacked by the champion of the other world.

Question: is the man’s behavior courageous or cowardly? This is the fundamental question of ethics.

After reading this note given to him by the strange old man, the receptionist returns and tells him his bill have been paid in advance. Covenant strangles his fury and leaves, turning to walk the two miles back to his home. The old man is still standing in front of the courthouse, staring up at the sun. Covenant notices how out of place he seems,

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28Ibid., 6-7.

29Ibid., 21.
notices that he has not collected enough coins for even a single meal, and suddenly feels compassion for the odd-looking old man. The beggar asks for a donation and then tells Covenant, “I have warned you.” This statement strikes Covenant powerfully:

Unexpectedly, the statement struck Covenant like an insight, an intuitive summary of all his experiences in the past year. Through his anger, his decision came immediately. With a twisted expression on his face, he fumbled for his wedding ring.

He had never before removed his white gold wedding band; despite his divorce, and Joan’s unanswering silence, he had kept the ring on his finger. It was an icon of himself. It reminded him of where he had been and where he was—of promises made and broken, companionship lost, helplessness—and of vestigial humanity. Now he tore it off his left hand and dropped it in the bowl. “That’s worth more than a few coins,” he said and stamped away.

“Wait.”

The word carried such authority that Covenant stopped again. He stood still, husbanding his rage, until he felt the man’s hand on his arm. Then he turned and looked into pale blue eyes as blank as if they were still studying the secret fire of the sun. The old man was tall with power.

A sudden insecurity, a sense of proximity to matters he did not understand, disturbed Covenant. But he pushed it away. “Don’t touch me. I’m a leper.”

The vacant stare seemed to miss him completely, as if he did not exist or the eyes were blind; but the old man’s voice was clear and sure.

“You are in perdition, my son.”

Again, we see the brush here is light, only a hint that the old man may be more than he appears to be. Covenant feels this hidden power, which makes him feel insecure, but he pushes the feeling down, hiding behind his disease.

The old man remarks on Covenant’s bitterness, then asks why he does not kill himself. This strikes Covenant like a blow and echoes the advice given him by a leper in the leprosarium, and this advice from the leper convinces him to struggle to survive. The old

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30 Ibid., 23.

31 Ibid.

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man returns the ring with the words, "[b]e true. You need not fail." Covenant walks away, stunned by his encounter with this old man, who seems to represent the possibility of enchantment, almost like the cloud Covenant saw when looking at the sign, hovering on the horizon. Here, however, the enchantment has an edge to it, the underlying possibility for violence, and unlike Corwin in Zelazny's tale, Covenant seems totally incapable of fighting against the threat. He comes to a street, waits for the traffic light to change, and moves to cross the street. Three steps forward and he is frozen in place by the siren of a police car that shoots from a nearby alley and flies straight at him. The narrator tells us that Covenant felt himself falling, but too soon, implying that the police car has not hit him, and we soon learn that he has been dragged from his Primary World into an enchanted world by a cavewight who calls himself "Lord Drool." Before Covenant can comprehend what has happened to him, another voice intervenes, coalesces into a figure, and takes him away from this Lord Drool. This new figure tells Covenant that he should pray to him, then gives a short historical background that, without a context, has little meaning for Covenant. He eventually offers Covenant health, if he will worship this new figure. The contempt in this figure's voice moves Covenant to resist, and the figure reveals his names, including "Lord Foul the Despiser." Covenant rejects his offer and Lord Foul gives him a message to take to the Council at Revelstone, then leaves Covenant at the top of a place named "Kevin's Watch." The narrator tells us:

He stretched himself flat and lay still for a long time, welcoming the sun's warmth into his fog-chilled bones. The wind whistled a quiet monody around him, but did not touch him; and soon after the trouble of Foul's passing had ended, he heard the call of faraway birds. He lay still and breathed deeply, drawing new

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\(^{32}\)Ibid., 24.
strength into his limbs—grateful for sunshine and the end of nightmare.

Eventually, however, he remembered that there had been several people nearby during the accident in the street. They were strangely silent; the town itself seemed hushed. The police car must have injured him worse than he realized. Leper’s anxiety jerked him up onto his hands and knees.

He found himself on a smooth stone slab. It was roughly circular, ten feet broad, and surrounded by a wall three feet high. Above him arched an unbroken expanse of blue sky; it domed him from rim to rim of the wall as if the slab were somehow impossibly afloat in the heavens.

No. His breath turned to sand in his throat. Where—?

Then a panting voice called, “Hail!” He could not locate it; it sounded vague with distance, like a hallucination. “Hail!”

His heart began to tremble. What is this?

“Kevin’s Watch! Are you in need?”

What the hell is this?³³

Thinking that his encounter with Drool and Foul was simply a nightmare, Covenant “wakes up,” expecting to find himself still in the street knocked down by the police car, but he finds himself somewhere else—on the pinnacle of a rock, high in the air, in a place that we learn later is simply called “The Land.” A local teenage girl appears from below, and hails him as a legendary figure reborn. As he looks out from the watch, he sees a huge vista of plain and mountain, beautiful beyond imagining, and he is gripped by vertigo and anxiety:

The giddy height staggered him. Vulture wings of darkness beat at his head. Vertigo whirled up at him, made the earth veer.

He did not know where he was. He had never seen this before. How had he come here? He had been hit by a police car, and Foul had brought him here. Foul had brought him here?
Brought me here?
Uninjured?

He reeled in terror toward the girl and the mountain. Three dizzy steps took him to the gap in the parapet. There he saw that he was on the tip of a slim splinter of stone—at least five hundred feet long—that pointed obliquely up from the base of the cliff.

For one spinning instant, he thought dumbly, I’ve got to get our of here. None

³³Ibid., 33.
of this is happening to me.

Then the whole insanity of the situation recoiled on him, struck at him out of the vertiginous air like the claws of a condor. He stumbled; the maw of the fall gaping below him. He started to scream silently:

No!**

The girl catches his arm and keeps him from stumbling over the edge. For a time, he sits with his back against the parapet, knees drawn up, thinking that he has gone crazy. Then he thinks,

Nightmare. None of this is happening, is happening, is happening.

Through the wild whirl of his misery, another hand suddenly clasped his. The grip hard, urgent; it caught him like an anchor.

Nightmare! I’m dreaming. Dreaming!

The thought flared through his panic like a revelation. Dreaming! Of course he was dreaming. Juggling furiously, he put the pieces together. He had been hit by a police car—knocked unconscious. Concussion. He might be out for hours—days. And while he was out, he was having this dream.

That was the answer. He clutched it as if it were the girl’s grip on his straining hand. It steadied him against his vertigo, simplified his fear. But it was not enough. The darkness still swarmed at him as if he were carrion Foul had left behind.

How?

Where do you get dreams like this?

He could not bear to think about it; he would go mad. He fled from it as if it had already started to gnaw on his bones.

Don’t think about it. Don’t try to understand. Madness—madness is the only danger. Survive! Get going. Do something. Don’t look back.35

There are several things going on here, the first of which is that this is Tolkien’s “hard recognition”—if a man from the Primary World were somehow thrust into a Secondary World—and Tolkien tells us in his lecture that the “potion” would be too strong and overwhelm the mind of the person, quite possibly producing madness—he or she would react in the way that Covenant does, suspecting that he has gone mad. What we see are

34Ibid., 35-36.

35Ibid., 36-37.
the reactions of a "real" man confronted by an enchanted world—a world that for him is an impossibility. Few people would be capable of surviving such an ordeal, and a modern leper is likely one of the few who could cope, because of the ingrained need to survive. This also marks a large difference between Covenant and Zelazny’s Prince Corwin, who takes his movement, although gradual, into enchantment without responding in a way that would show his ordinariness, leading us to conclude that Corwin is, from the beginning, far from ordinary. His amnesia could play a role in preventing madness, as also the gradual way he is lead into the enchanted secondary world from what is recognizably our Primary World. Covenant is not given that leisure—one moment he sees himself about to be run over by a police car and in the next, he is at the top of “Kevin’s Watch” in a completely different world. Is it any wonder then, that he hovers on the edge of madness throughout the course of the fairy-story?

A second feature found here lies in Covenant’s choice to view his presence in a Secondary World as a “dream.” What he is seeing, what will follow, are the kinds of things that happen to us when we dream, the sometimes lurid or sordid images produced by the subconscious while we sleep. And yet, the narrator tells us, his decision that he was in a dream “was not enough,” introducing the seeds of doubt in both character and us as readers. Tolkien eschewed this kind of device—the “machinery of dream,” he calls it—arguing that it is a substitute for real enchantment. Donaldson here seems to walk a fine line, as the issue of whether or not Covenant is in a dream remains unresolved. When Covenant finally returns to the Primary World, he “wakes up” in a hospital bed a few hours later with only a few scratches to show he has been in a minor accident—from falling down as the police car did not hit him. As we have seen previously, what usually happens
after enchantment enters the story is its quick withdrawal, lest we be overwhelmed by its power. Donaldson here gambles, for we will spend almost the rest of the narrative within his created world, and it is likely that some readers will find the "potion too strong" and lay the book aside without finishing it. If we continue to read, we must choose whether we accept that Covenant is dreaming, or he has actually entered a different world. I suspect that few readers would accept that it is simply a dream--the latter choice seems more likely--and the device used by Donaldson to keep us "believing" in his secondary world is Covenant's ambiguous relationship to it. His rejection of its reality becomes a kind of religion, or a belief system, that for Covenant keeps the madness in check. As readers, his recurring affirmation that he does not believe, his unwillingness to help or participate in the life, with its concerns and problems, going on around him, becomes an irritation to us and subtly moves us to side with the people of his created world. Much of the time the reader finds himself wishing he could shake Covenant and knock some sense into him. And this movement away from the disbelieving main character allows us to accept the continued presence of enchantment, much different from Tolkien's and Eddings' constant retreat of enchantment.

J. K. Rowling also uses Tolkien's ideas in her recent and highly popular *Harry Potter* series, although like Zelazny and Donaldson, bases her fairy-story squarely in our contemporary world, but instead of keeping her worlds separate and distinct, the world of the ordinary and the world of enchantment exist at once in the same space. However, as Tolkien argued and we have shown, Rowling uses the Primary World to establish her enchanted world. The narrative begins in a suburb of London:

Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that
they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you’d expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn’t hold with such nonsense.

Mr. Dursley was the director of a firm called Grunnings, which made drills. He was a big, beefy man with hardly any neck, although he did have a very large mustache. Mrs. Dursley was thin and blonde and had nearly twice the amount of neck, which came in very useful as she spent so much of her time craning over garden fences, spying on the neighbors. The Dursleys had a small son called Dudley and in their opinion there was no finer boy anywhere.

The Dursleys had everything they wanted, but they also had a secret, and their greatest fear was that somebody would discover it. . . . 36

The Dursleys seem absolutely ordinary—the kind of people one might have as his or her neighbors, anywhere in the world. They don’t “hold with such nonsense” as things strange or mysterious and they become, in the narrative, representatives of all that is ordinary—people as they exist in the Primary World. Yet, the narrator tells us, they have a “secret” that causes them to live in fear that someone, especially among their neighbors, will discover that Mrs. Dursley has a sister that pretends not to know, and her sister and husband—the Potters—are “as unDursleyish as it [is] possible to be.”37 Since we have already been told that the Dursleys are absolutely ordinary, we know that the Potters must be the opposite—as enchanted as the Dursleys are ordinary. Rowling, however, goes on to firmly establish the Dursleys as ordinary, while at the same time giving us hints of enchantment. As Mr. Dursley leaves for work at “half past eight,” no one notices the “large, tawny owl flutter past,” but he soon thinks that he sees “a cat reading a map,”38 but of course, when he looks again, he sees only the cat. As he drives to work, he notices “a


37Ibid., 2.

38Ibid.
lot of strangely dressed people about. People in cloaks,” and he assumes it must be “some stupid new fashion,” but then notices that many of these strangely dressed people “weren’t young at all; why, that man had to be older than he was, and wearing an emerald-green cloak! The nerve of him! But then it struck Mr. Dursley that this was probably some silly stunt--these people were obviously collecting for something . . . yes, that would be it.”

After arriving at work, the narrator tells us that he sat with his back to the window on the ninth floor and so missed the large number of owls flying past. At lunchtime, oblivious to the strange things happening outside, he decides to walk across to a bakery:

He’d forgotten all about the people in cloaks until he passed a group of them next to the baker’s. He eyed them angrily as he passed. He didn’t know why, but they made him uneasy. This bunch were whispering excitedly, too, and he couldn’t see a single collecting tin. It was on his way back past them, clutching a large doughnut in a bag, that he caught a few words of what they were saying.

“The Potters, that’s right, that’s what I heard—”

“--yes, their son, Harry—”

Mr. Dursley stopped dead. Fear flooded him. He looked back at the whisperers as if he wanted to say something to them, but though better of it.

Dursley goes on to convince himself that he hadn’t heard the name “Harry,” that it could have been “Harvey,” or “Harold,” and he’d never seen his nephew, so he did not know his name was “Harry.” On his way out of the building, because of his worry, he bumps into one of these strange figures, in “a violet cloak,” who smiles and tells Dursley, “[d]on’t be sorry, my dear sir, for nothing could upset me today! Rejoice, for You-Know-Who has gone at last! Even muggles like yourself should be celebrating, this happy, happy day!”

39Ibid., 3.
40Ibid., 4.
41Ibid., 5.
The strange, old man give Dursley a hug and walks away. The narrator tells us:

Mr. Dursley stood rooted to the spot. He had been hugged by a complete stranger. He also thought he had been called a Muggle, whatever that was. He was rattled. He hurried to his car and set off for home, hoping he was imagining things, which he had never hoped before, because he didn’t approve of imagination.42

As we have seen in the three previous examples, and as we have shown with Tolkien, the ordinary is here used to establish the groundwork for the appearance of enchantment, and like the others we have examined, these first brushes are light, only hinting that all is not as “ordinary” as we, or Dursley, might think. Dursley here is similar to Donaldson’s Covenant, as these first brushes “root” him to the spot, and “rattle” him. It seems to me that Dursley, like Covenant, or even like Eddings’ Durnik, is not equipped to deal with things enchanted, as “he didn’t approve of imagination.” The Dursley’s of the world find the fairy-story to be “juvenile trash,” and Tolkien might add that they are welcome to the realistic stories that they thrive on and value above all other literature. They are “rooted to the spot” and “rattled” when confronted with a fairy-story, lacking the imagination necessary to enjoy a well-written fairy-story, “because [they] don’t approve of imagination.”

The brushes with enchantment continue, the same cat is still hanging around number four Privet Drive, the TV weatherman notices the strange behavior of owls and the sky filled with shooting stars. Mr. Dursley asks what his wife’s sister named her son, and Mrs. Dursley tells him “Harry. A Nasty, common name,” she tells him, and he agrees, but “his

42Ibid.
As they prepare for bed, he sees that the same cat is still sitting outside, watching his house, and they go to bed. The narrator tells us:

Mrs. Dursley fell asleep quickly but Mr. Dursley lay awake, turning it all over in his mind. His last, comforting thought before he fell asleep was that even if the Potters were involved, there was no reason for them to come near him and Mrs. Dursley. The Potters knew very well what he and Petunia thought about them and their kind. He couldn’t see how he and Petunia could get mixed up in anything that might be going on—he yawned and turned over—it couldn’t affect them.

How very wrong he was.

While they are sleeping, which seems to be a metaphor for the state of the Dursleys’ imaginations—asleep—enchanted things are moving outside. The cat watches without moving until midnight, when “[a] man appeared on the corner the cat had been watching, appeared so suddenly and silently you’d have thought he’d just popped out of the ground.” After telling us that no one like this man “had ever been seen on Privet Drive,” the narrator describes him as

tall, thin, and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt. He was wearing long robes, a purple cloak that swept the ground, and high-heeled, buckled boots. His blue eyes were light, bright, and sparkling behind half-moon spectacles and his nose was very long and crooked, as though it had been broken at least twice. This man’s name was Albus Dumbledore.

Albus Dumbledore didn’t seem to realize that he had just arrived in a street where everything from his name to his boots was unwelcome.

In the world of the Dursleys and of Privet Drive, everything about this new character is “arrestingly strange”—far beyond the ordinary. To reinforce the point, the narrator tells us

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43Ibid., 7.

44Ibid., 8, original emphasis.

45Ibid.

46Ibid., 8-9.
that the figure is unaware that his presence on this street offends everything that the people here represent—the unimaginative ordinary. To heighten his arresting strangeness, the narrator then tells us that this strange figure withdrew from a pocket what looked like an ordinary lighter, opens it and holds it up, clicks it, and with each click, one of the streetlights goes out. He moves toward number four, sits on the wall next to the cat, and says, "[f]ancy seeing you here, Professor McGonagall." His greeting to the cat is not enough strangeness—the cat disappears and is replaced, almost instantly, by "a rather severe-looking woman who was wearing square glasses exactly the shape of the markings the cat had around its eyes," and she also is "wearing a cloak, an emerald one," with "black hair . . . drawn into a tight bun. She looked distinctly ruffled." In the conversation that follows, we learn that the "You-Know-Who" mentioned in an earlier conversation is named Voldemort, and Dumbledore seems to be the only one who will speak his name. We also learn that the Potters are dead, killed by Voldemort, but that Voldemort tried to kill the Potters' son, Harry. However, for some reason unknown to any of these strange people, the infant child survives and Voldemort is destroyed. We further learn that they are waiting for someone to arrive with the infant, Harry, and they intend to leave him with his only surviving family, the Dursleys. The fact that Dumbledore intends to leave Harry here upsets McGonagall, as she has been watching them all day and describes them in much the same way that the Dursleys described the Potters: "You


48Ibid.
couldn’t find two people who are less like us,” and if the Dursleys are absolutely ordinary, then these strange figures—arrestingly strange—must be absolutely enchanted. McGonagall also adds that Harry will be famous, “every child in our world will know his name.” Dumbledore replies:

“Exactly,” said Dumbledore, looking very seriously over the top of his half-moon glasses. “It would be enough to turn any boy’s head. Famous before he can walk and talk! Famous for something he won’t even remember! Can’t you see how much better off he’ll be, growing up away from all that until he’s ready to take it?”

And, we might add, growing up with the Dursleys will make Harry absolutely ordinary and make him fully a part of the ordinary world before he makes his entrance into the enchanted world of his parents. Further, this approach juxtaposes the ordinary and enchanted, the two worlds operating within the same space, and Harry will come to exist in both.

Rowling continues to increase the strangeness of this scene—almost an invasion of the ordinary world by the enchanted one—in the manner of arrival and the person who brings the infant, Harry:

A low rumbling sound had broken the silence around them. It grew steadily louder as they looked up and down the street for some sign of a headlight; it swelled to a roar as they both looked up at the sky—and a huge motorcycle fell out of the air and landed on the road in front of them.

If the motorcycle was huge, it was nothing to the man sitting astride it. He looked simply too big to be allowed, and so wild—long tangles of bushy black hair and beard hid most of his face, he had hands the size of trash can lids, and his feet in their leather boots were like baby dolphins. In his vast, muscular arms he was

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49Ibid., 13.
50Ibid., my emphasis.
51Ibid.
holding a bundle of blankets.\textsuperscript{52} If the first two figures—Dumbledore and McGonagall—were strange, then this one is stranger, arriving on a flying motorcycle, huge hands and feet, and to remind us of where we are, the system of values operating, he is “too big to be allowed.” We learn that his name is Hagrid, the bundle is Harry, and we see the scar he will always have from his encounter with Voldemort, lighting shaped on his forehead. These strange figures leave Harry on the Dursley’s doorstep and leave, and as they leave so the enchanted world leaves, making a hasty retreat after a large dose of arresting strangeness, following Tolkien’s pattern.

For ten years, in narrative time, Harry lives with the Dursleys, and we see how horribly they have treated him, forcing him to sleep in a cupboard under the stairs, to wear his cousin’s cast-off clothing, and acting in front of others as if Harry does not exist. We see hints in Harry of his “enchanted” nature—the way his hair, no matter how short it is cut, seems to grow back overnight. We also see an incident at the zoo, where Harry understands the speech of a python, and when his cousin shoves him out of the way to see the snake, Harry causes the glass front of the cage to vanish, allowing the snake to escape. However, aside from these hints, the enchanted world does not intrude upon the Dursley’s ordinary world until letters for Harry begin to arrive, burned by his Uncle before Harry can read them, first one, then two, then four, and they continue to multiply until Uncle Vernon decides to leave town to hide from the sender of all these letters. They end up in a fishing shack on an island rock just off the coast, before the enchanted world catches up to them.

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., 14.
A booming knock on the door is followed by the door crashing in and the appearance of Hagrid with a letter for Harry from Hogwarts’s School of Witchcraft and Wizardry—the very letter and world the Dursleys have been struggling desperately to avoid. The letter tells Harry that he has been accepted to study at Hogwarts, gives him a list of items to purchase, and tells him the term will begin on September 1. Uncle Vernon says Harry will not be going, and Hagrid replies that he’d like to see a “Muggle” stop him. Harry asks what a “Muggle” is, and in the conversation that follows, we learn just how “ordinary” the Dursleys are:

“A Muggle,” said Hagrid, “it’s what we call nonmagic folk like them. An’ it’s your bad luck you grew up in a family o’ the biggest Muggles I ever laid eyes on.”

“We swore when we took him in we’d put a stop to that rubbish,” said Uncle Vernon, “swore we’d stamp it out of him! Wizard indeed!”

“You knew?” said Harry. “You knew I’m a— a wizard?”

“You knew?” shrieked Aunt Petunia suddenly. “Knew! Of course we knew! How could you not be, my dratted sister being what she was? Oh, she got a letter just like that and disappeared off to that— that school—and came home every vacation with her pockets full of frog spawn, turning tea cups into rats. I was the only one who saw her for what she was-- a freak! But for my mother and father, oh no, it was Lily this and Lily that, they were proud of having a witch in the family!”

She stopped to draw a deep breath and then went ranting on. It seemed she had been wanting to say all this for years.

“Then she met that Potter at school and they left and got married and had you, and of course I knew you’d be just the same, just as strange, just as— as— abnormal—and then, if you please, she went and got herself blown up and we got landed with you!”

The Dursleys, according to Hagrid, are “the biggest Muggles” that Hagrid has ever known. “Muggle,” or people without magic, describes what the Dursleys represent—the ordinariness of the Primary World. Structurally, Rowling’s fairy-story emulates most closely Donaldson’s, with a difference. Both stories take characters from the Primary

53Ibid., 53, original emphasis.
World, after establishing their, in both cases, impotent ordinariness and move them into
the enchanted world, which in Donaldson is independent from the Primary World, while
Rowling’s is juxtaposed upon the world of the ordinary. When Harry finally leaves for
school, he goes to London to take a train, and until the point where he enters the
enchanted platform between the ordinary platforms nine and ten, seems absolutely
ordinary. The train—an old style steam locomotive, takes him north from London and
travels all day before reaching Hogwart’s. Until the term ends in June, we (and Harry)
remain in the enchanted world of Hogwart’s. However, Harry is more like Zelazny’s
Corwin than Donaldson’s Covenant, who continues to be powerless in his enchanted
world. Harry, although not the best student, learns his wizardry quickly.

Rowling, being the most recent of our four contemporary fairy-stories, draws on the
other, melding them together in new and interesting ways. We still can see, however, the
ideas of Tolkien operating here, the aspects of “arresting strangeness” and “hard
recognition,” or enchantment and ordinariness, the ordinary of the Primary World is used
to lay the groundwork for enchantment, and Rowling’s innovation is to place the ordinary
world in the same space as the enchanted world, and our boy hero, Harry, operates in
both. We have shown how each of these contemporary fairy-stories, by Eddings, Zelazny,
Donaldson, and Rowling, both use and modify the ideas of Tolkien. We have seen them
use the ordinariness of the world of our daily existence to set the stage for enchantment,
and some, like Tolkien, retreat from enchantment to prevent it from overwhelming the
reader. Others have begun in our world and then moved us into the enchanted world,
using that foundation to then immerse the reader in the enchanted world. Finally, Rowling
juxtaposes the enchanted world onto the ordinary world, having them both occupy the
same space. We now turn back to Tolkien's lecture, to examine the next two qualities of
the fairy-story in the next chapter—recovery and escape—which we will apply these to the
four contemporary fairy-stories examined in this chapter.
CHAPTER 8

THE QUALITIES OF TOLKIENIAN FANTASY II:

RECOVERY AND ESCAPE

We return now to Tolkien's lecture, "On Fairy-Stories," to examine two of the final three qualities of a fairy-story: recovery and escape. As we have seen with the aspects of the quality of fantasy, these qualities seem to me to be interrelated. Both recovery and escape are natural effects of any fairy-story: the fact that a sub-creator makes a Secondary World that can be entered by the reader, and the fact that the sub-creator uses the ordinary to establish the groundwork for enchantment, both result in an escape from the everyday monotony of living, along with a clearer view recovered of ordinary things placed in an enchanted light. The recovery and escape offered by the fairy-story then ends with the final quality, covered in the next chapter, the consolation of the "happy ending" that forms a necessary part of every Tolkienian fantasy, and the reader, if he or she chooses to follow the story to its conclusion, becomes like the wedding guest, who, in Coleridge's supernatural tale, has just heard the Ancient Mariner's tale and walks away, "[a] sadder and a wiser man."¹

Tolkien begins his explanation of recovery by telling us that this quality of the fairy-

story is what allows us to stay "childish," in the sense of viewing the world in the same way that a child does—as if everything is brand new. He then states that recovery is simply a "regaining of a clear view," and distinguishes himself from Matthew Arnold's ideas by remarking that he does not mean "seeing things as they are," but "seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them," which he then clarifies "as things apart from ourselves . . . so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity—from possessiveness." He argues that "triteness is really the penalty of 'appropriation,'" and goes on to add that

the things that are trite, or (in a bad sense) familiar, are the things that we have appropriated, legally or mentally. We say we know them. They have become like the things which once attracted us by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape, and we laid hands on them, and locked them in our hoard, acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them.

The things in the world around us, things that as a child were new and filled with wonder, have become so familiar to us—so common—that they have lost their "sense of wonder." The recovery offered by the fairy-story removes this veil of familiarity by taking these ordinary things from our "locked hoard" and placing them in an unfamiliar Secondary World, causing us to re-view them, recovering for us that child-like sense of wonder that things used to have. It is not that the things have changed but that the fairy-story "re-appropriates" them from our possession, wiping away their familiarity. On the surface, it seems that Tolkien "borrows" this idea from the Russian formalists, who called this

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2OFS, 146.

3Ibid.

4Ibid.

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"defamiliarization." However, I think that Tolkien's recovery is different from the formalist idea, and it seems to me appropriate to review the formalist concept of defamiliarization in order to show recovery as fundamentally distinct.

The Russian Formalists noted that great art, which included literature, instead of representing an outside reality by transparent means, is directed at the human means of perceiving and communicating information. Because our senses are forever falling into rigid habits and empty routines, we need art periodically to wake us up by making the familiar suddenly seem strange—and the process of estrangement is defamiliarization... by which literature can make us realize that we speak a language with physical features that we can question and enjoy. Art does not strive in the least for verisimilitude but keeps baring the device to remind us that it is art... This formalist idea of defamiliarization uses the technique of "baring the device" rather than "verisimilitude" to make the familiar seem strange. Holman and Harmon note that they are opposites, and that "baring the device," "instead of making beholders forget or ignore the fact that they are encountering an artifact, much art bares its devices and admits that it is not transparent but opaque, not life or even like life but a willed simulacrum never able to achieve commensurateness with life itself." Verisimilitude, on the other hand, strives for a "semblance of truth," echoing the words of Coleridge in the Biographia as he described what he meant by supernatural poetry that requires "a willing suspension of disbelief." The seminal example of a work of literature that uses this technique of baring the device is Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy. A more familiar—and simpler—example

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5Holman and Harmon, Handbook, 130, original emphasis.
6Ibid., 46, original emphasis.
7Ibid., 494.
8Biographia, 2:6.
of this technique in operation can be found in popular media, in cartoons where the carrot-
chewing rabbit turns to the audience and comments on the action, reminding us that we
have not slipped into a world where animals speak, but we are still firmly in the Primary
World viewing pictures as they move across a small screen. This is what distinguishes
Tolkien’s recovery from the formalist defamiliarization: the fairy-story strives for
verisimilitude, and, as we noted in Chapter 5, Tolkien told us that if the sub-creator does
her or his job well, then she or he creates in the reader Secondary Belief—the revision of
Coleridge’s idea, noted above and explained in Chapter 6. Further, we showed in Chapter
6 that the fairy-story depends on the “ordinary” to establish “enchantment,” and these
aspects of the quality of fantasy are exactly what defamiliarization does not do—it does not
strive for verisimilitude. Thus, Tolkien’s quality of recovery is different from the formalist
notion of defamiliarization.

Recognizing that Tolkien was a linguist, and that his first interest was with language,
we should examine more closely the word that he uses to describe this quality of the fairy-
story. “Recovery” is the noun form of the verb “recover,” a compound word made from
the prefix, “re-,” meaning “again,” and “cover.” “Cover” comes to us from the Old
French cognate cower and couver, meaning “to get, acquire.” When we add the prefix,
we get the Old French re-couvrer, from the Latin recuperare, “to regain, recover.”9 We
can thus say that the word means “to get again, acquire again,” which is precisely what
this quality of the fairy-story is supposed to do. Still using the notion of “things locked in
our hoards,” Tolkien goes on to say that “[c]reative fantasy, because it is mainly trying to

9OED Online, “recover,” “cover.”
do something else (make something new), may open your hoard and let all the locked
gems all turn into flowers or flames, and you will be
warned that all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent, not really effectively
chained, free and wild; no more yours than they were you."

These things that seem so familiar, the ordinary, everyday things, things that we have appropriated to ourselves and
so have come to possess them in such a way that they become trite and familiar, are
released from their triteness through the medium of the fairy-story. They have not
changed their forms, but we “acquire again” their potency. This happens, Tolkien says,
because “fairy-stories deal largely, or (the better ones) mainly, with simple or fundamental
things, untouched by Fantasy, but these simplicities are made all the more luminous by
their setting.” Tolkien adds that through fairy-stories he “first divined the potency of the
words, and the wonder of things, such as stone, and wood, and iron; tree and grass; house
and fire; bread and wine.”

The fairy-story takes these “simple or fundamental things,
untouched by Fantasy,” or we might say untouched by enchantment, and so “ordinary,” in
the sense that we have described, and “recovers” their potency by the “luminous setting”
in the Secondary World. What are these “simple or fundamental things?” I think the
easiest way to understand what he means by “simple or fundamental things” is by example
from Tolkien’s fairy-stories, particularly The Hobbit.

As we remarked in Chapter 6, Bilbo Baggins represents the ordinary—a kind of

\[10\] OFS, 147.

\[11\] Ibid.

\[12\] Ibid.

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“everyman”—and most of the story is told from his perspective, it seems to me that we should look to him to find the “simple or fundamental things” that this fairy-story of Tolkien’s helps us to recover. Also, since the story as a whole helps us to recovery, it seems logical that these simple or fundamental things would be repeated throughout the text. The one idea repeated throughout the text by our hobbit is his desire for home and hearth, a desire expressed on 17 different occasions throughout the text: “’Bother burgling and everything to do with it! I wish I was at home in my nice hole by the fire, with the kettle just beginning to sing!’ It was not the last time that he wished that!” This is the first time Bilbo tells us his desire—for his home, fire, and kettle—to which the narrator sagely adds that this will not be the last time Bilbo has such thoughts. The narrative context for this first declaration of his desire for simple things is just before he meets the trolls, an incident described in Chapter 6 as related to ordinariness and enchantment.

Another example of this desire of Bilbo comes as the party escapes from the goblins and Bilbo tumbles into a dark hole and is knocked unconscious. When he awakes later on, he crawls along the dark passageway, and his groping hand finds the ring that will prove to be significant in the later tale. After placing the ring in his pocket, the narrator tells us: “He did not go much further, but sat down on the cold floor and gave himself up to complete miserableness, for a long while. He thought of himself frying bacon and eggs in his own kitchen at home—for he could feel inside that it was high time for some meal or other; but that only made him miserabler.”14 In a later “miserabler” moment, after the


14 Ibid., 79.
party has left the path deep in the forest of Mirkwood, chasing after the elves and their nighttime feasting in the forest, after they have become lost in the darkness and the cries for help have faded into silence, then the narrator tells us:

That was one of his most miserable moments. But he soon made up his mind that it was no good trying to do anything till day came with some little light, and quite useless to go blundering about tiring himself out with no hope of any breakfast to revive him. So he sat himself down with his back to a tree, and not for the last time fell to thinking of his far-distant hobbit-hole with its beautiful pantries. He was deep in thoughts of bacon and eggs and toast and butter when he felt something touch him. . . .

We can further argue that these simple or fundamental things express themselves in moments of trial or duress. The party here has used up all its supply of food and water, and the draw of the elven celebrations in the forest because of the party's hunger, overcomes the advice that the party has been given not to stray from the forest path, at peril of losing their way and their lives. We learn later that the dwarves have been captured by giant spiders, and the "touch" that Bilbo feels here is the touch of the clinging strands of web, which the spider who has found him uses in an attempt to capture Bilbo also, but Bilbo awakens and manages to escape. It is at this point in the narrative where he shows his courage and resourcefulness, as he manages against great odds to rescue the dwarves from the spiders.

One other incident at an equally difficult moment in the story comes just before Bilbo sees the dragon for the first time, and his "foolishness," as he calls it, in having accepted the dwarves' (and Gandalf's) proposal to join their quest. He tells us: "I have absolutely no use for dragon-guarded treasures, and the whole lot could stay here for ever, if only I

\[15\text{Ibid., 166.}\]
could wake up and find this beastly tunnel was my own front-hall at home!" He does not
"wake up," as the narrator reminds us, but continues on down the passageway toward his
first sight of the dragon. The leader of the dwarves, Thorin, best sums up Bilbo's desire
on Thorin's deathbed and reconciliation with Bilbo:

There is more in you of good than you know, child of the kindly West. Some
courage and some wisdom, blended in measure. If more of us valued food and
cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world. . . .

Thus, Bilbo's desire for home and hearth become one of the story's themes, and we, as
audience, come to recognize these things as important: home and hearth have been taken
from our "locked hoard" where they have become so commonplace that we take them for
granted, and placed into the Secondary World of Bilbo Baggins where they become one of
his most fundamental and motivating desires—his reason to keep moving forward in the
face of great resistance. The "film of familiarity" has been removed from our eyes, and we
come to appreciate, with Bilbo, the value of home and hearth. Thorin's words thus serve
as a kind of moral, and we return to the Primary World nodding in agreement, recognizing
that if more people did value food, cheer, and song over "hoarded gold"—the acquisition
of wealth—the world would indeed be a happier place.

In Tolkien's seminal example of a fairy-story, The Lord of the Rings, one of the
"simple fundamental things" recovered is the value of freedom—the right to live free from
domination, whether one is a hobbit, or a man, or an elf, or dwarf, or ent, or even an orc,
one has a right to live free from the interference of others, and this right is fundamental to

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16Ibid., 226.
17Ibid., 301.
the conflict that drives the story’s plot. The quest to destroy the One Ring—Sauron’s ruling ring—is a quest to free the peoples of Middle-earth from the threatened domination of Sauron, or Saruman, or that of the Ring itself. It seems appropriate, at this point, to cite the short verse that goes with the “rings of power,” and should aid us in understanding how the destruction of the ring helps us to recover the value of freedom:

Three Rings for the Elven-kings under the sky,
Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone,
Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,
One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.
One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.18

In these short lines, lines that we could call a kind of incantation of power, binding these rings of power together, we see the Dark Lord’s purpose in creating the “One Ring,” which is “to rule them all” and bind them to him. The pair of lines that describe this purpose are the very lines inscribed on Frodo’s ring, and the final proof for Gandalf that the halfling’s ring is indeed the one ring lost by Sauron. Early in the wizard’s explanation to Frodo of the ring, Gandalf tells Frodo that the ring is “so powerful that in the end it would utterly overcome anyone of mortal race who possessed it. It would possess him”; he then tells Frodo that “sooner or later the dark power will devour him.”19 Later in this conversation, Gandalf tells us that the ring is the one thing Sauron lacks “to give him strength and knowledge to beat down all resistance, break the last defences, and cover the

18LOTR, 1:59-60.

19Ibid., 1:56.
lands in a second darkness."\(^{20}\) The ring was created by Sauron, "and he let a great part of his own former power pass into it, so that he could rule all the others. If he recovers it, then he will command them all again, wherever they be, even the Three, and all that has been wrought with them will be laid bare."\(^{21}\) This fear of the domination of Sauron of the Three Elven Rings, Elrond elaborates further as he explains that the purpose of the Three was not "strength or domination . . . but understanding, making, and healing, to preserve all things unstained"; he goes on to tell us that "all that has been wrought by those who wield the Three will turn to their undoing, and their minds and hearts will become revealed to Sauron, if he regains the One."\(^{22}\) One of the other elves at this council on the ring held in Rivendell, after the hobbits arrive, tells us that this fear of domination will end if the ring is destroyed.

Returning to Gandalf's earlier conversation with Frodo, we learn more about the power of the ring to dominate when Frodo offers to give the ring to the wizard:

"No!" cried Gandalf springing to his feet. "With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly." . . . "Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is pity, pity for weakness and the desire to do good. . . . I dare not take it, not even to keep it safe, unused. The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength. . . ."\(^{23}\)

The wizard recognizes the power of the ring to corrupt and dominate, and he fears to take the ring even to keep it safe. These ideas of the ring’s power to dominate are echoed by

\(^{20}\)Ibid., 1:61.

\(^{21}\)Ibid.

\(^{22}\)Ibid., 1:282.

\(^{23}\)Ibid., 1:70-71.
Elrond in the council mentioned above, when Boromir suggests they use the ring as a weapon against Sauron:

We cannot use the Ruling Ring... It belongs to Sauron and was made by him alone, and is altogether evil. Its strength, Boromir, is too great for anyone to wield at will, save only those who have already a great power of their own. But for them it holds an even deadlier peril. The very desire of it corrupts the heart... If any of the Wise should with this Ring overthrow the Lord of Mordor, using his own arts, he would then set himself on Sauron's throne, and yet another Dark Lord would appear. And that is another reason why the ring should be destroyed: as long as it is in the world it will be a danger even to the Wise. For nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so. I fear to take the Ring to hide it. I will not take the Ring to wield it.24

Elrond reinforces what Gandalf told us earlier—that the power of the ring will corrupt and dominate even the wise. To use it as a weapon against Sauron is to become Sauron, for the ring is totally evil, and its purpose is to dominate and rule over all others. Even the simple knowledge that the One Ring exists is a temptation that could corrupt even the very wise.

A third example of the ring's power to corrupt and dominate comes later in the same volume, when the company passes through the elvish kingdom of Lothlórien. Galadriel, queen of this land, reveals to Frodo that she bears one of the three elvish rings. She tells Frodo:

Do you not see now wherefore your coming is to us as the footstep of Doom? For if you fail [to destroy the ring], then we are laid bare to the Enemy. Yet if you succeed, then our power is diminished, and Lothlórien will fade, and the tides of Time will sweep it away. We must depart into the West, or dwindle to a rustic folk of dell and cave, slowly to forget and to be forgotten.25

Galadriel here shows us that should Sauron regain the ring, then she will be open to him,

24Ibid., 1:281.

25Ibid., 1:380.
subject to his domination. Frodo then, as he had done previously with Gandalf and Elrond, offers to give the ring to Galadriel, and her response again shows us the power of the ring to corrupt and dominate:

And now at last it comes. You will give me the Ring freely! In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!\(^{26}\)

To Frodo, she appears to grow larger with her ring-hand raised, illuminated by a pillar of light, but her hand falls, she shrinks, and the light fades. She then tells us: “I pass the test. . . . I will diminish and go into the West, and remain Galadriel.”\(^{27}\) Like Gandalf and Elrond, Galadriel rejects the offer, although she gives us a glimpse of what could happen should one of the wise take the ring, and so shows us its power to corrupt and dominate.

This trio of examples shows the temptation of the ring and hints at its power to corrupt and dominate. Tolkien’s fairy-story gives us other examples of characters actually corrupted, to a lesser or a greater degree, by either possession of the ring or desire to possess the ring. We see the actual effects first in Bilbo, who tells Gandalf that possession of the ring has made him feel “thin, sort of stretched,”\(^{28}\) how it has strained to the breaking point his friendship with Gandalf,\(^{29}\) and how he feels that the ring “has been growing on [his] mind” and is “like an eye looking at [him],” and that he often has to check to see if he

\(^{26}\)Ibid., 1:381.

\(^{27}\)Ibid.

\(^{28}\)Ibid., 1:41.

\(^{29}\)Ibid., 1:42.
still has it, that he "couldn't rest without it in [his] pocket."\textsuperscript{30} Gandalf later tells Frodo that these signs showed him that "the ring was getting control"\textsuperscript{31} of Bilbo. These actions by Bilbo, as he tries, and, with the help of Gandalf, succeeds in passing the ring on to Frodo, are the impetus that sends the wizard searching for answers about the ring.

We find a second example of the ring's power to corrupt and dominate in Gollum, a hobbit totally corrupted by possessing the ring, and with Gollum, that corruptive and dominating influence affects him before his hand ever touches the ring. Gandalf relates to Frodo how Gollum came by the ring, how Gollum murdered his friend Déagol, who found the ring in the River Anduin while the pair were fishing, "because the gold looked so bright and beautiful."\textsuperscript{32} Gollum then concealed the murder of his friend, his discovery of the ring and its power to make one invisible, and used the ring "to find out secrets, and he put his knowledge to crooked and malicious uses. He became sharp-eyed and keen-eared for all that was hurtful"; Gandalf adds that the "ring had given him power according to his stature."\textsuperscript{33} He was driven out by his people and soon hid in the cave where Bilbo met him (and found the ring) almost 500 years later. The wizard goes on to tell Frodo that, remarkably, "Gollum was not wholly ruined [by the ring]. He had proved tougher than even one of the Wise would have guessed--as a hobbit might. There was a little corner of his mind that was still his own. . . ."\textsuperscript{34} Eventually, the desire for the ring caused him to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{30}Ibid., 1:43.
  \item \textsuperscript{31}Ibid., 1:56.
  \item \textsuperscript{32}Ibid., 1:62.
  \item \textsuperscript{33}Ibid., 1:63.
  \item \textsuperscript{34}Ibid., 1:64.
\end{itemize}
leave his cave, and Gandalf notes that, "though still bound by the desire of [the ring], the Ring was no longer devouring him; he began to revive a little. He felt old, terribly old, yet less timid, and he was mortally hungry."35

We see the power the ring has over Gollum when he finally catches up to Frodo in the Emyn Muil after the breaking of the fellowship. Frodo and Sam overhear Gollum speaking to himself as he climbs down a cliff:

Where iss it, where iss it: my precious, my precious? It’s ours, it is, and we wants it. The thieves, the thieves, the filthy little thieves. Where are they with my precious? Curse them! We hates them.36

One of the things that tipped Gandalf off with Bilbo’s behavior was the latter calling the ring his “precious” in precisely the same way as Gollum does in the above quotation, in the same way he did when Bilbo met him under the mountain. It is both the ring that draws him to follow Frodo, and the compulsion set on him by the Dark Lord to find the ring, and we see how strong both of these are after Frodo and Sam capture him. Frodo asks him if he has been to Mordor, and if he is being drawn back:

"Yess. Yess. No!" shrieked Gollum. “Once, by accident it was, wasn’t it, precious? Yes, by accident. But we won’t go back, no, no!” Then suddenly his voice and language changed, and he sobbed in his throat, and spoke but not to them. “Leave me alone, gollum! You hurt me. O my poor hands, gollum! I, we, I don’t want to come back. I can’t find it. I am tired. I, we can’t find it, gollum, gollum, no, nowhere. They’re always awake. Dwarves, Men, and Elves, terrible Elves with bright eyes. I can’t find it. Ach!” He got up and clenched his long hand into a bony fleshless knot, shaking it towards the East. “We won’t!” he cried. "Not for you.” Then he collapsed again. “Gollum, gollum,” he whimpered with his face to the ground. "Don’t look at us! Go away! Go to sleep!”37


36Ibid., 2:220.

37Ibid., 2:222-23.
Key to understanding Gollum’s speech here comes when the narrator tells us that Gollum’s “voice and language changed” and that he continued to speak “but not to them” —the hobbits. Who is it, then, that he speaks to? We are given a hint later in this speech, when Gollum shakes his fist “towards the East.” The capitalized “East” has come to represent in the text Mordor and Sauron, so when Gollum ceases to speak to the hobbits, looking to the “East,” he is speaking to the Dark Lord and here rejects Sauron and the compulsion placed upon him to find the ring and return it to Mordor. This rejection of Mordor holds throughout the rest of the story, although Gollum’s loyalty to Frodo wanes. What Frodo sees groveling in front of him is what could happen, and maybe is happening, to Frodo himself, because of his possession of the ring—he could end up like Gollum, completely overcome by the ring’s power, motivated solely by his desire for it, and what makes him loyal, for a time, to Frodo, is Gollum’s overriding desire to prevent Sauron from getting it. But it also gives Frodo—and us—a glimpse of hope, and a hint that it might be possible to recover freedom, in spite of the ring’s overwhelming power. If Gollum, who is totally corrupted by the ring and fully in its power, can reject the compulsion of Sauron to find and return the ring to Mordor, then Frodo, who accepted the burden of the ring fully aware of its power to corrupt, must have a greater chance of resisting both the ring and the Dark Lord. However, as we will show in the next chapter, Frodo succumbs to the temptation of the ring, but as we will see, the hope he has here for Gollum’s healing—the possibility that the wholly corrupted creature might be cured—leads Frodo to trust and protect Gollum. Frodo’s hope and trust prevents himself, and others like Sam and Faramir, from simply punishing Gollum by putting him to death for the many murders he has committed, and it enables the destruction of the ring, which frees Middle-
earth from both the domination of Sauron and the corrupting influence of the ring. And according to Tolkien’s schema, we “re-learn” and “recover” the value of freedom, the right that we each have to live our lives free from the domination of anyone, or the corrupting influence of any “thing” that might take that freedom away should we be tempted by its “power.”

Space prevents us from examining each of our chosen contemporary fairy-stories for the way they help us to recover “simple fundamental things,” but we can at least mention some things that they help us recover. Eddings’ *Belgariad* similarly helps us to recover the value of freedom, in this case freedom from the domination of the maimed and insane god, Torak, most simply expressed in Polgara. One of the prophecies of what will happen when Torak meets Belgarion is that if Torak wins, then Polgara will marry Torak, whether she wants to or not. As we will show in the next chapter, the key to Belgarion’s victory over Torak is in Polgara’s rejection of the maimed god, a thing she cannot do alone, once the god turns the force of his mind on her. Only her love for Goodman Durnik, and his death at a certain point in this final battle, gives her enough strength to reject Torak’s compulsion. Stereotypically, most fairy-stories recover the value of freedom, as most include a force, dark lord, evil god, or corrupt brother or sister, who desires to inflict his or her will on all others. We can see this operating in Zelazny’s *Amber* series, since Corwin’s desire is to revenge the wrong that he suffered at the hand of his brother Eric, who usurped the throne of Amber, and then the forces of chaos that want to remove all order from the universe. However, we also see another stereotypical recovery of individual identity, in Corwin’s case, first, who he is and second, where does he fit in his society, questions that still plague us today. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* also helps us to
recover identity, since Harry begins without knowledge of who he is, the world he comes from, and where he fits in that world. Another simple thing recovered in many fairy-stories is an appreciation for the natural world around us—this is true of Tolkien’s stories and exemplified in Donaldson’s Thomas Covenant series, as the beauty and living nature of “The Land,” as it is called throughout the text, is so great, that it causes Covenant to feel pain. It is only when the Land becomes corrupted, its beauty marred, that our anti-hero finds the impetus to face and defeat Lord Foul, to “recover” the beauty of the Land, which recovers for us the beauty of the natural world in which we live.

To make the transition from the quality of “recovery” to the third quality of the fairy-story, “escape,” an article that echoes and parallels Tolkien’s lecture, seems appropriate at this point. In the article, Albert J. Raboteau uses the term “re-enchantment” to discuss the relationship between education, wisdom, and imagination, and his idea of “re-enchantment” appears, at the very least, similar to the idea of “recovery.” He argues that we live in two worlds: the ordinary, mundane world of everyday life, and the world of fantasy, mystery, and spirit. These are sometimes called the “inner” and “outer” worlds, but his argument is that these two worlds interpenetrate and that this coinherence is the source of all enchantment. A result of the modern industrial world in which we live is a “disenchantment” from the world of fantasy, mystery, and spirit. We replace this missing world with what he calls a “pseudo-enchantment of addiction to entertainment, to food, to alcohol, to sex, to possessions—out of our deep innate hunger for mystery, for spirit, for glory.”

the problem and a source of the solution” to disenchant us. He next says that

[1]he sheer routinization of schooling seems overwhelming. Learning requires of us separation, observation, abstraction, objectification, convention. We learn to match the particularity of our unique selves to patterns of expectation and obligation, dividing up the wholeness of experience into blocks of material to be mastered or completed. The harnessing of imagination and restriction of the free play of curiosity into performance-oriented tasks begins to happen early in the primary grades and intensifies in high school and college.

In our educations, he argues, there are moments when we learn the wisdom received from those who have gone before, but most of these are lost in the rigors of a disciplined search for “knowledge.”

He believes that “the path to re-enchantment lies in recovering wisdom, wisdom made most readily accessible to us in story. Stories, particularly in the form of folktales, myths, and legends, convey to us the collected wisdom of the human race.” He continues:

Stories develop (or repair) our capacity for wonder, our ability to make believe and make belief. It is no accident that fantasy literature of all sorts has such a wide audience today. The realm of fantasy or faerie, inhabited by dragons, elves, magic, hero quests, transmits to us adults the make-believe world of children’s stories and the “once upon a time” quality of old folktales... In this realm things are more than they seem. Events don’t happen by chance; the are meant... It is a world of antinomies, light and dark, good and evil, power and weakness, love and hate—a world of high drama in which life and death, catastrophe and triumph, contest one another in the lives of ordinary creatures, children, hobbits, plain men and women, suddenly raised by exceptional challenges to deeds of heroism. Why does the literature of fantasy appeal to us so deeply? Because it echoes within us lessons that we lose at peril of losing essential qualities of our humanity—amazement, wonder, and mystery.

Ibid., 394.

Ibid., 395.

Ibid. 396.

Ibid., 396-97.
He argues that it is wrong to categorize fantasy as simply escapism but also recognizes "that the desire for enchantment may degenerate into reverie, nostalgia, or sentimentality. Escapism results from losing sight of the interconnectedness of both worlds—the ordinary and the wondrous. The escapist has yielded to the power of one world and become absorbed by it." This idea recalls Tolkien's strict separation of the secondary world from the primary, as if Tolkien recognized the danger that Raboteau here articulates.

He goes on to claim that the disciplined part of our education is what keeps enchantment from becoming escapism or sentimentality. "The key," he claims, "is to keep hold of both worlds, the world of the ordinary and the world of mystery, sacrificing neither for the other." How do we overcome this? A return to story, Raboteau replies: "Re-enchantment is a consciousness that develops in a person who has first had the world disenchanted but then returns to the world fully conscious of the previous stages of experience. This third stage of mature consciousness is the beginning of true wisdom. . . To do so we have to understand education as personal transformation and not just as exchange of information." Knowledge must be transferred "while simultaneously attending to the values and feelings that are part of the act of apprehension we call knowing. Move the mind into the heart. Mind begins in heart." If knowledge and feeling remain separated, "we distort learning and blind ourselves to its full human

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43Ibid., 397.
44Ibid.
46Ibid., 399.
meaning. And in so doing we abrogate our promise that knowledge leads to wisdom. For to achieve wisdom, as the elders of every continent tell us, requires transformation of the whole person.47

Raboteau’s “re-enchantment” seems to reflect Tolkien’s idea of recovery, particularly that this re-enchantment brings back the sense of wonder that leads us into stories, and he uses the term “fantasy” here in the same way that Tolkien uses “fairy-story.” It also seems to me significant that Raboteau argues that the wisdom of humanity resides and is perpetuated in these stories, and that if we do not “recover” our desire for them that we will lose the collective wisdom of our ancestors passed down through the medium of “fantasy” and folktale. They way he describes “escapism” as losing sight of the interconnectedness of the ordinary and wondrous worlds, and the “escapist” as one who “has yielded to the power of one world and become absorbed by it” is true of the person who lives wholly in either world—the ordinary or the wondrous, shows at least his affinity for Tolkien’s idea of escape. Tolkien compares the prisoner of war to the deserter, and argues that the kind of escape he refers to is that of the prisoner:

Why should a man be scorned, if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it. In using Escape in this way the critics have chosen the wrong word, and, what is more, they are confusing, not always by sincere error, the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter.48

The difference here between the negative quality of “escapism” and the positive quality of the fairy-story, “escape” seems to be what Raboteau has in mind when he calls the escapist

47Ibid.

48OFI, 148.
one who lives wholly in one world or the other, to the exclusion of the world he does not
inhabit. Tolkien's use of prisoner and deserter seems apt for understanding this idea.
Perhaps the question to ask, in order to more fully understand this distinction, is what is it
that the deserter and the prisoner are trying to escape from? “Deserter” is a term we use
to refer to the soldier who breaks ranks and leaves the battlefield, usually for fear of death,
and this fear so consumes and overcomes him that he forgets his responsibility to his
fellows and his country, fleeing from his fears, his friends, and the enemy he has come to
fight. Deserting may cause the death of his friends and the victory of the enemy, and
Tolkien thinks, in the dark days of the Second World War, a loss of freedom. The
prisoner, on the other hand, desires to escape from the enemy, who has him confined, to
go home and fight again on another day. If he cannot escape, then he does not allow the
misery of his situation to overcome him and lead him to despair, maybe revealing in his
despair vital information that will help the enemy. In following this idea, we can see that
the distinction here is very subtle, and we see how easy it would be to argue that there is
no real difference between them. I think, however, that what Tolkien means here is that
one—the deserter—flees from his obligations out of fear while the other—the prisoner—
escapes from the misery of his situation by thinking of something besides his oppressive
circumstances.

Tolkien does not stop here but goes on to further define what he means by escape. He
mentions overhearing someone claiming to be glad that factories and motor vehicles have
come to Oxford, because it brings the people of Oxford into contact with “real life.”
Tolkien goes on to scoff at the idea that factories and motor-cars are expressions of “real
life”: “The notion that motor-cars are more ‘alive’ than, say, centaurs or dragons is
curious; that they are more ‘real’ than, say, horses is pathetically absurd. How real, how startlingly alive is a factory chimney compared with an elm tree; poor obsolete thing, insubstantial dream of an escapist! After discussing this idea for a time, he remarks that the fairy-story appeals to our desire to escape from the disgust we sometimes feel for manmade things to “a time when men were as a rule delighted with the work of their hands.” Again we see that he is in danger of sliding into the negative sense of the word--escapist--here with a sense of nostalgia for things lost and past, another form of escapism that is more commonly associated with the “deserter” rather than the “prisoner,” as we have defined them.

Tolkien does go further than this, and it seems relevant at this point to mention the etymology of the verb, “escape,” to help us capture the positive sense of the word that Tolkien uses as a quality of the fairy-story. “Escape” has had numerous forms, coming to English through Old French from the Late Latin *excappare*, meaning “to get out of one’s cape, get away,” compounded from *ex*, “out” and *cappa*, “cloak.” We can compare it to the Greek *éκβοεσθαι*, “to put off one’s clothes, to escape.” The idea of removing one’s cape or clothes is interesting and seems to relate escape back to recovery. The cape or cloak is worn outside to protect us from the cold, wind, rain, or snow, and the cloak is removed once we have entered a building and are, as it were, inside. The cape or cloak can also be used to conceal one’s identity, to hide from unfriendly eyes, and so escape

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49 Ibid., 149.

50 Ibid., 151.

51 *OED Online*, “escape.”
detection. We also sometimes say that "the clothes make the man," meaning that we can
tell much about a person from the clothes that he, or she, wears; we can tell the social
station, the profession, and even the wealth possessed by the individual. We dress
according to the demands of the social situation, and in some circles, people argue that the
clothes we wear have an effect upon our behavior, formal and informal clothing for formal
and informal occasions. Some go so far as to radically alter their individual characters,
according to the clothes they wear. In the Christian view, Adam and Eve were given
clothes after they had partaken of the forbidden fruit to "cover their nakedness." To
remove one's clothes in the presence of another is, both literally and metaphorically, to
allow the other person into one's most intimate and secret places. Raboteau's distinction
between inner and outer worlds seems particularly appropriate in view of all these senses
of "escape" as getting out of one's cape or putting off one's clothes. Symbolically
speaking, then, we could say that the "escape" of the fairy-story is a simple movement
from outer to inner, from the ordinary world into the wondrous or enchanted world. We
can add further that to escape in these senses is directly related to the idea of recovery as a
removing of the veil of familiarity that Tolkien describes.

However, as we noted above, Tolkien does not stop here, but he goes on to describe
further what he means by escape:

There are other things more grim and terrible to fly from than the noise, stench,
ruthlessness, and extravagance of the internal-combustion engine. There are
hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death. And even when men are not
facing hard things such as these, there are ancient limitations from which fairy-
stories offer a sort of escape, and old ambitions and desires (touching the very
roots of fantasy) to which they offer a kind of satisfaction and consolation. Some
are pardonable weaknesses or curiosities: such as the desire to visit, free as a fish,
the deep sea; or the longing for the noiseless, gracious, economical flight of a bird,
that longing which the aeroplane cheats, except in rare moments, seen high and by
wind and distance noiseless, turning in the sun: that is, precisely when imagined and not used. There are other profounder wishes: such as the desire to converse with other living things.  

Escape, here, offers us two categories of things: the first, we can remove ourselves from the pain, suffering, sorrow, and injustice of the ordinary or Primary World. We need this kind of escape in order that we can re-group, so to speak, and again face the miseries and pains of our ordinary lives. A simple example of this kind of escape might be found in contemporary cinema—the hero who manages to apply justice in spite of everything, including the justice system itself. From my generation this kind of hero would be Clint Eastwood’s character, Dirty Harry—no matter how clever or wealthy the criminal, Harry manages to bring him, or her, to justice, usually out of the barrel of his 44 magnum, and we cheer every time these criminals “get what they deserve,” and Harry gets rewarded, usually by “getting the girl.” Thus, this aspect of the quality of escape allows us to “put off,” in the sense of clothing described above, the cares and concerns of the Primary World to enter a Secondary World in a fairy-story where truth, justice, and similar ideas, actually work. Second, this kind of escape allows us to momentarily remove the limitations of reality, by flying with the birds or speaking with animals and trees, or by experiencing immortality and, for a moment, escaping death. We see examples of these escapes in Tolkien’s fairy-stories, from Bilbo’s flying with the eagles, to the dwarves learning that Smaug is dead from the ravens, or Bard hearing from the thrush of the dragon’s weak spot. In The Lord of the Rings we see the ultimate expression of this principle in the character of Treebeard and the other ents, who are walking, talking,

\[^{52}OFS, 151-52.\]

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thinking, and feeling trees, guardians of the forest. We also associate, in both of Tolkien’s stories, with elves who possess immortality, the “oldest and deepest desire,” Tolkien tells us, the escape from death. Although Tolkien does not here mention it, one of the greatest limitations that the fairy-story allows us to escape from are the physical, natural laws that prevent magic from working, and I think that the reason he does not mention it, and the reason there is actually very little magic in his stories, is because of the danger of going too far, so that we lose sight of the “ordinary.” In other words, we lose that “hard recognition” that things are so in the Primary World, then our Secondary Belief fails along with the art. Returning to Raboteau’s ideas, too much magic causes us to lose sight of the interconnectedness of ordinary and wondrous worlds.

The first aspect of escape—the laying aside of the burdens and cares of the Primary World—happens each time someone picks up and reads a fairy-story, so no further comment seems required. Each of the contemporary fairy-stories that we have chosen produces this first aspect whenever it is read, and also shows numerous examples of the second aspect of escape—removing the limitations of the Primary World. In David Eddings’s fairy-stories, we see many examples of the removal of these limitations, particularly in the system of magic practiced by the main characters, although he calls it “sorcery” rather than magic. Sorcery in this Secondary World is accomplished through what they call “the will and the word”: the sorcerer gathers his will, forms an image in his mind of what he wants to do, then releases his will by speaking a word of command, as we showed in the previous chapter, when Garion commanded the murderer of his parents to

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53 Ibid., 153.
“burn.” Mister Wolf explains the concept of the will and the word to Garion shortly after witnessing Aunt Pol cure an old woman of her blindness:

... “How did Aunt Pol do that to old Martje’s eyes?”
“The Will and the Word,” Wolf said, his long cloak whipping about him in the stiff breeze. “It isn’t difficult.”
“I don’t understand,” Garion said.
“You simply will something to happen,” the old man said, “and then speak the word. If your will’s strong enough, it happens.”
“That’s all there it to it?” Garion asked, a little disappointed.
“That’s all,” Wolf said.
“Is the word a magic word?”
Wolf laughed. ... “No,” he said. “There aren’t any magic words. Some people think so, but they’re wrong. Grolims use strange words, but that’s not really necessary. Any word will do the job. It’s the Will that’s important, not the Word. The Word’s just a channel for the Will.”

Wolf goes on to tell Garion about the first time he used the will and the word. His master, the god Aldur, wanted him to move a large rock. Wolf attempted to move it, but it was too heavy and large. He finally got angry with the task and simply told the rock to move, and it did. Wolf tells Garion that he was quite surprised by what happened, but Aldur was not, as we learn later on, as this was the moment Aldur had waited for. Later in the story, the party is in Aldur’s Vale, home of Wolf and Aunt Pol, when Garion decides to use sorcery, in his first conscious attempt with the will and the word, to move the same rock that Wolf had. Garion manages to move the rock, but in the act he also buries himself up to his neck in the ground, ignorant of the action/reaction principle of Newtonian physics.

54Eddings, Belgariad, 1:219-20.

55For a full account, see David and Leigh Eddings, Belgarath the Sorcerer (New York: Del Rey, 1995), 29-30.

56See Belgariad, 1:610-14.
Another example of the way Eddings’ fairy-story removes the limitations of the Primary World relates directly back to Tolkien’s comment that one of the desires we have is to converse with other living things. Eddings brings this about in one of the more interesting ways I have seen. Sorcerers have the ability to change their forms and assume the form of another creature. This ability was discovered by Wolf’s brother sorcerer, the deformed hunchback, Beldin. We have seen this ability in the principle fairy-stories that focus almost entirely on Garion, *The Belgariad* and *The Mallorean*, and we learn of its discovery in *Belgarath the Sorcerer*, Wolf’s life story. Wolf recalls sitting in his tower one day when a blue-banded hawk flew to his window and landed on the sill, blurring and changing into Beldin. Wolf nearly chokes to death on the ale he was drinking, and Beldin tells him that he had been studying birds and “thought it might be useful to look at the world from their perspective for a while.”^57 Belgarath (Wolf) then asks Beldin what flying is like, and Beldin responds: “‘I couldn’t even begin to describe it, Belgarath,’ he replied with a look of wonder on his ugly face. ‘You should try it’” (52). Beldin then teaches his brother sorcerers how to do it, and they all begin to travel on errands for their master in these alternative forms. Wolf/Belgarath goes on to inform us that he wasn’t very good at flying and so decided on a different form and chose the form of a wolf. In this form, he discovers that they are able to communicate with other creatures of the same kind. As he travels north on an errand for Aldur, he crosses the path of another wolf:

> I ran north for a week or so... Then on one golden afternoon in late summer I encountered a young she-wolf who was feeling frolicsome. She had, as I recall, fine haunches and a comely muzzle.

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"Why so great a hurry, friend?" she said to me coyly in the way of wolves. Even in my haste, I was startled to find that I could understand her quite clearly. I slowed, and then I stopped.

"What a splendid tail you have," she complimented me, quickly following up on her advantage, "and what excellent teeth."58

The conversation continues, with Belgarath trying to explain to the she-wolf that he is not really a wolf. What is important for our present purpose is that it illustrates the removal of limitations that Tolkien argues is a part of the quality of escape—the ability to communicate with other living things. In Garion’s story, he, too, chooses the form of the wolf as his alternate form, and so he gains the ability to communicate with wolves, and what is most interesting about this is that when they cross the paths of wolves, the wolves recognize him as a wolf, although he is in the form of a man, and he is able to communicate with them although not in their form.59

The other fairy-stories that we have selected as examples of a Tolkienian fairy-story remove the limitations of the Primary World in similar ways. Each has a system of magic, and the system most similar to Eddings’ is Zelazny’s. As we noted in the previous chapter, the prince, or princess, of Amber has the power to move through shadows from the pattern of Amber and being initiated into the pattern by walking it. In this process of walking it, the pattern, a symbol of order and power, becomes inscribed on the prince’s or princess’s very being, giving him or her the ability to draw on its power and move through shadow, by adding and subtracting to the features of his/her surroundings through an act of will. We gave an example of this in the previous chapter. The fairy-stories of

58Ibid., 63.

59See Belgariad, 2:349-50.
Donaldson and Rowling use magic in ways that are more conventional, we might say, drawing on the examples of the medieval alchemists, using symbols, motions, incantations, and substances to work the magic. One of the first examples we see in Donaldson's fairy-story comes after the girl, Lena, who finds the anti-hero, Covenant, shortly after he has been summoned to the land and been given a message by Lord Foul. Covenant tries to explain to Lena his leprosy—the numbness in his hands and feet and his need to wash the scratches on his hands to prevent infection—but she only understands his need for healing and offers him what she calls “hurtloam,” or “healing earth.” She explains:

... This is hurtloam. Listen. My father is Trell, Gravlingas of the rhadhamaerl. His work is with fire-stones, and he leaves healing to the Healers. But he is rhadhamaerl. He comprehends the rocks and soils. And he taught me to care for myself when there is need. He taught me the signs and places of hurtloam. This is healing earth. You must use it.  

The leper can only see mud—a source of infection—but Lena simply smears the mud over the bruises on his knees and shins. The narrator tells us that to Covenant, the hurtloam “seemed to stroke his legs tenderly, absorbing the pain from his bruises. . . . The relief that it sent flowing through his bones gave him a pleasure he had never felt before.”

Surprised by this, he allows her to rub the remaining hurtloam onto the cuts on his hands: At once, the relief began to run up into him through his elbows and wrists. And an odd tingling started in his palms, as if the hurtloam were venturing past his cuts into his nerves, trying to reawaken them. A similar tingling danced across the arches of his feet.

The “mud” dries quickly, and Lena rubs it off of his legs, and Covenant is surprised to see

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60 Donaldson, Foul, 47.

61 Ibid., 47-48.

62 Ibid., 48.
that his bruises have nearly faded. On his hands, the cuts and scrapes have completely healed without scarring. Lena explains that there is power in things—like the earth—that can aid those who know where to find it or how to awaken it.

We learn more of the power in things when they enter Lena’s home and we see, with Covenant, Lena’s father Trell for the first time. Covenant notices that the inside of the house is lit by stone pots glowing in the four corners of the room. He sees Trell leaning over a pot that is half his size. The narrator tells us the this large glowing pot has a shadow in it,

which the brightness of the room did not penetrate, and for some time the man stared into the darkness, studying it while he rotated the pot. Then he began to sing. His voice was too low for Covenant to make out the words, but as he listened he felt a kind of invocation in the sound, as if the contents of the pot were powerful. For a moment nothing happened. Then the shadow began to pale. At first, Covenant thought that the light in the room had changed, but soon he saw a new illumination starting from the pot. The glow swelled and deepened, and at last shone out strongly, making the other lights seem dim.63

This, we later learn, is an example of the power of the rhadhamaerl, the workers in stone and earth, who use the power of stone for heat, light, and healing. A similar power is found in growing things—trees and wood—and workers of power in wood are called lillianrill.

A different example from Donaldson’s fairy-story of escape we see when Covenant reaches the home of the ruling council, Revelstone, to deliver the message given to him by Lord Foul. The Lords and the Keep of Revelstone are protected by the “Bloodguard,” and each Lord has one of the Bloodguard assigned to him or her as a guardian. Covenant is also given a Bloodguard to protect him—Bannor, he is named. Covenant asks Bannor

63Ibid., 56.
about the Bloodguard, learning that Bannor’s people are called the Haruchai, and they live in the western mountains. They came into the land over two thousand years before, intending to conquer the land, but were awestruck by the Lords and the land and instead swore their “Vow” to protect the Lords. We learn that the Bloodguard has always numbered 500, and that when one is slain in battle, his body is sent back into the mountains and a replacement sent. Covenant asks Bannor if he has a wife, and Bannor responds, “[a]t one time.” Bannor tells Covenant that she died two thousand years before, and we, with Covenant, are shocked to learn that the Bloodguard do not die unless killed in battle, that Bannor himself came with the original group. Covenant voices our question, “why?” and Bannor responds:

“When we came to the Land, we saw wonders—Giants, Ranyhyn, Revelstone—Lords of such power that they declined to wage war with us lest we be destroyed. In answer to our challenge, they gave to the Haruchai gifts so precious—” He paused, appeared to muse for a moment over private memories. “Therefore we swore the Vow. We could not equal their generosity in any other way.”

We later learn that their “Vow”—always capitalized—not only has made them immortal, but also taken away their need for sleep. The sleepless and deathless nature of the Bloodguard and the power of stone and wood, among other things, illustrate the ways in which Dondaldson’s fairy-story escapes the limitations of the Primary World.

In Rowling’s tales of Harry Potter, we see these limitations escaped through a system of magic related to ancient alchemy. After Harry finally arrives at his school, Hogwarts,

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64 Ibid., 209.
65 Ibid., 210.
66 Ibid., 228.
we see our first example of magic in transfiguration class, as Professor McGonagall changes her desk into a pig, then back into a desk.67 We see Harry and the other first year students making a cure for boils in their first potion class, brewing it from “dried nettles,” “snake fangs,” “horned slugs,” and “porcupine quills.” Probably the best example of escape comes in Harry’s first flying lesson, and we see his aptitude for flying, as his “broom jumped into his hand at once,”68 and few other students accomplish it on their first try. As they all lift off the ground for the first time, the hapless Neville manages to crash and break his arm. While the teacher is away with Neville, Harry’s antagonist, Draco Malfoy, takes Neville’s dropped “Rememberall” and flies off with it, daring Harry to follow. Draco—like all students from wizarding families—has flown on a broom before, while Harry, raised by his non-magical Aunt and Uncle, never has. Ignoring the advice of the other students, Harry takes off and follows Draco, threatening to knock him off his broom if he does not return Neville’s trinket. Draco hurls the Rememberall away, daring Harry to catch it if he can:

Harry saw . . . the ball rise up in the air and then start to fall. He leaned forward and . . . [the] next second he was gathering speed in a steep dive, racing the ball . . . he stretched out his hand—a foot from the ground he caught it . . . and he toppled gently onto the grass with the Rememberall clutched safely in his fist.69

In the context of the tale this first, spectacular broom flight by Harry wins him a place on his house Quidditch team, the youngest player in a very long time. For our purpose, we see Rowling using the Tolkienian quality of escape, removing the limits of gravity.

67Rowling, Sorcerer, 134.
68Ibid., 146.
69Ibid., 149.
CHAPTER 9

THE QUALITIES OF TOLKIENIAN FANTASY III: CONSOLATION

At the beginning of the previous chapter, we noted that the qualities of fantasy as described by Tolkien are interrelated, and that these final three qualities—recovery, escape, and consolation—are effects produced in the reader, when the author's sub-creative activity, by establishing enchantment through ordinariness, produces actual Secondary Belief in the reader. Recovery, escape, and consolation are the effects produced by the reader's Secondary Belief in the author's sub-created Secondary World. For the fairy-story to "work," all of these qualities must work, and work together, to produce, in Tolkien's view, a successful fairy-story. The author's sub-creative work, brought about through his or her use of ordinariness to lay the foundation for enchantment, the inclusion of simple or fundamental things, and his or her satisfying the reader's desire to escape the limitations of the Primary World, produce in the reader Secondary Belief, so that the reader accepts, for the duration of the narrative at least, that the story is "true," while the reader remains within the narrative space sub-created by the author. All these qualities working together lead to the consolation of the fairy-story, what Tolkien names more precisely, "the Consolation of the Happy Ending," and the subject of our final chapter.

The "consolation of the happy ending," is a quality, Tolkien says, that must be found

\[1\] OFS, 153.

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in a fairy-story for it to be complete. He then sets up an analogy to drama: "Tragedy is
the true form of drama, its highest function, but the opposite is true of Fairy-story. Since
we do not appear to possess a word that expresses this opposite--I will call it

Eucatastrophe. The eucatastrophic tale is the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest
function." Tolkien here refers to the "catastrophe" that was the term used to describe the
fifth part of a tragic drama, more commonly called the dénouement. Holman and Harmon
describe "catastrophe" in this way:

The conclusion of a play, particularly of a tragedy; the last of the four parts into
which the ancients divided a play. It is the final stage in the falling action, ending
the dramatic conflict and consisting of the actions that result from the climax.
Because it is used mostly in connection with a tragedy and involves the death of
the hero, it is sometimes used by extension to designate an unhappy ending (or
event) in nondramatic fiction and in life as well. In the strict sense, every drama
has a catastrophe.

This dramatic structure is more commonly known as Freytag's pyramid, that describes the
five-act tragedy, like Hamlet, of which the "catastrophe" is the final part. The best known
example in drama of the catastrophe is in Shakespeare's Hamlet, when young Fortinbras
comes onto a stage littered with dead bodies; as audience we have witnessed the death of
nearly all the main characters, with the exception of Ophelia, whose death and burial come
at the end of Act 4 and beginning of Act 5. Fortinbras sees King Claudius, Queen
Gertrude, Laertes, and Hamlet dead upon the stage, and only Horatio, and us as audience,
knows the "full" tale. Holman and Harmon tell us in the above quotation, that the
catastrophe is the "unhappy ending," the death of the hero, and all those close to him in

\[\text{\cite{Ibid., original emphasis.}}\]
\[\text{\cite{Holman and Harmon, Handbook, 73.}}\]
Hamlet. Thus, Tolkien reasons, if the “unhappy ending” is the “true form of Drama,” then, since he has established the fairy-story at the opposite end of the literary scale, its true form must be the happy ending, described by the term Tolkien coins, the “eucatastrophe.”

Again, as we have noted previously, given Tolkien’s specialty and his sensitivity to language, it is worth our time to stop and examine both these terms—“catastrophe” and “eucatastrophe”—that for Tolkien express the idea of the unhappy and happy endings of tragedy and the fairy-story. “Catastrophe” comes to us from the Greek, kata-, meaning “down” or “downward,” and strephein, meaning “to turn.” So that the “catastrophe” is in tragedy “to turn down” or “the downward turning” that describes the end of the hero. To make his coined term, “eucatastrophe,” Tolkien affixes the prefix, “eu-,” which, and no surprises here, means “good, well, true,” giving his coined term the meaning, “the good down turning” or “the true down turning.” What is the most interesting, and I think helps us to understand what he means here and why he chooses these terms, is the fact that he does not call the “unhappy ending” of tragedy the “catastrophe,” but rather he uses the term—another coined term—“dyscatastrophe.” The prefix, “dys-,” means simply “bad” or “evil,” and so, “the bad down turning” or “the evil down turn.” At the core then of both the happy and unhappy ending, is “the down turning,” implying that even the happy ending, the “good catastrophe,” has an edge to it. We should also pause to look at the term, “consolation,” again recognizing Tolkien’s sensitivity to the sources of the words. “Consolation” is the noun form of the verb, “console,” coming from the Latin consolare,

4OED Online, “catastrophe.”

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compound of the intensive prefix _con-, and _solarí_, “to solace, soothe.”

The happy ending then “soothes” us and gives us “solace,” reinforcing the notion that even the good catastrophe comes with a grief or sadness that must be “soothed,” as we will show hereafter.

Tolkien goes on to define what he means by the “eucatastrophe” of the fairy-story by both description and contrast:

The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending: or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous ‘turn’ (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale).\(^5\) this joy, which is one of the things which fairy-stories can produce

\(^5\)Ibid. “consolation,” “console.”

\(^6\)Tolkien’s note, in part: “The verbal ending—usually held to be as typical of the end of fairy-stories as ‘once upon a time’ is the beginning—‘and they lived happily ever after’ is an artificial device. It does not deceive anybody. End-phrases of this kind are to be compared to the margins and frames of pictures, and are no more to be thought of as the real end of any particular fragment of the seamless Web of Story than the frame is of the visionary scene, or the casement of the Outer World. These phrases may be plain or elaborate, simple or extravagant, as artificial and as necessary as frames plain, or carved, or gilded. ‘And if they have not gone away they are there still.’ [He gives several more examples of fairy-tale endings]. . . .

Endings of this sort suit fairy-stories, because such tales have a greater sense and grasp of the endlessness of the World of Story than most modern ‘realistic’ stories, already hemmed within the narrow confines of their own small time. A sharp cut in the endless tapestry is not unfittingly marked by a formula, even a grotesque or comic one. It was an irresistible development of modern illustration (so largely photographic) that borders should be abandoned and the ‘picture’ end only with the paper. This method may be suitable for photographs; but it is altogether inappropriate for the pictures that illustrate or are inspired by fairy-stories. An enchanted forest requires a margin, even an elaborate border. To print it conterminous with the page, like a ‘shot’ of the Rockies in _Picture Post_, as if it were indeed a ‘snap’ of fairyland or a ‘sketch by our artist on the spot,’ is a folly and an abuse.

As for the beginnings of fairy-stories: one can scarcely improve on the formula _Once upon a time_. It has an immediate effect. This effect can be appreciated by reading, for instance, the fairy-story _The Terrible Head_ in the _Blue Fairy Book_. It is Andrew Lang’s own adaptation of the story of Perseus and the Gorgon. It begins ‘once upon a time,’ and it does not name any year or land or person. Now this treatment does something which could be called ‘turning mythology into fairy-story.’ I should prefer to
supremely well, is not essentially "escapist," or "fugitive." In its fairy-tale—or otherworld—setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies . . . universal final defeat . . . giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.°

Here, Tolkien describes the "eucatastrophe" as "the sudden joyous turn," and "a sudden miraculous grace" that is "never to be counted on to recur." He then contrasts it with tragedy’s "unhappy ending," stating that the happy ending does not deny the existence or possibility "of sorrow and failure," which are necessary to throw the "joy of deliverance" into stark relief; the eucatastrophe "denies . . . universal final defeat" and gives the reader a "fleeting glimpse of Joy . . . poignant as grief." Tolkien goes on to tell us that the best and most complete fairy-story is the one that produces this "sudden joyous turn," that no matter how far the enchantment takes us during the course of the narrative away from the ordinariness of the Primary World, "it can give to child or man that hears it, when the 'turn' comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art."°° We recall that we noted above that the core of both the happy and unhappy endings is the "down turn," and we remarked that even the happy ending has an edge to it, that great sorrow and

say that it turns high fairy-story (for such is the Greek tale) into a particular form that is at present familiar in our land: a nursery or 'old wives' form. Namelessness is not a virtue but an accident, and should not have been imitated; for vagueness in this regard is a debasement, a corruption due to forgetfulness and lack of skill. But not so, I think, the timelessness. The beginning is not poverty-stricken but significant. It produces at a stroke the sense of a great uncharted world of time," OFS 160-61.

°OFS, 153.

°°Ibid., 154.
suffering always seem to accompany the sudden joyous turn of the fairy-story. The difference between joy and grief is so slight that most would find them difficult if not impossible to distinguish. In both emotions we shed tears—"tears of joy" or "tears of sorrow"—and like Tolkien’s choice of words to describe both endings, at the center of both are tears. He then tells us that in the serious fairy-story, the effect of the happy ending is "powerful and poignant": "In such stories when the sudden ‘turn’ comes we get a piercing glimpse of joy, and heart’s desire, that for a moment passes outside the frame, rends indeed the very web of story, and lets a gleam come through."\(^9\) In his epilogue that immediately follows, he explains what this "gleam" is that shines through: "a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth,"\(^10\) tying the consolation directly back to the "hard recognition that things are so in the world," the aspect of fantasy that we showed previously lays the foundation for enchantment. Through the eucatastrophe that is the consolation of the happy ending of every good fairy-story, "we see in a brief vision that the answer may be greater—it may be a far-off gleam or echo of \textit{evangelium} in the real world."\(^11\) Tolkien here refers the eucatastrophe to what he calls the greatest eucatastrophe in any fairy-story, the Christian gospel, with its never to recur, in Tolkien’s Catholic terminology, Incarnation of Christ. Remembering that a good sub-creator echoes or imitates the ultimate creation of God, all happy endings of good fairy-stories should thus echo, or give us an underlying glimpse of, the ultimate Creator’s one fairy-story that

\(^9\)Ibid.

\(^10\)Ibid., 155.

\(^11\)Ibid.
culminates, in Tolkien's Christian, Catholic view, with the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ.

As in previous chapters with the other qualities of the fairy-story, the best way to illustrate the consolation of the happy ending is by example from Tolkienian fairy-stories, beginning, of course, with Tolkien's own tales. The eucatastrophe of Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, the sudden joyous turn, happens at the end of the battle of five armies, when the eagles arrive. The arrival of the eagles tips the balance of the battle from the goblins to the elves, dwarves, and men, but the setup for this ending really begins with the story, in the dwarves’ lack of a plan or method for dealing with the dragon. The dwarves come to depend heavily on Bilbo, but as he reminds us and the dwarves, he is only one, small hobbit. Bilbo’s theft of the cup from the dragon’s hoard—an echo and likely homage to *Beowulf*—is the single event that sets off a chain reaction leading to the happy ending. Bilbo’s theft causes the dragon to leave his lair and search the mountain for the thief. In this search the dragon discovers the ponies the dwarves have ridden to the mountain from Laketown, reasons that the thief must have come from Laketown, or at least had their help. The dragon decides to make a visit to Laketown on the next night, destroys half the town, but he is killed by Bard in the battle. The men of Laketown send for the help of the elves, sharing the news that the dragon is dead. The elves and men remember the dragon’s hoard, believe the dwarves and Bilbo must have been killed by the dragon, and so leave to collect the hoard. In the meantime the dwarves learn of the dragon’s demise and that the elves and men are coming with a large host, so they send word to Thorin’s cousin Dain, appraising him of the situation and asking for help to protect the hoard. The dwarves then barricade themselves in the mountain. The hosts of elves and men are
surprised to find the dwarves alive, and ask for part of the hoard as reparation for the
damage the dragon caused to Laketown. They also remind the dwarves that part of the
dragon’s hoard belonged to the men of Dale, also destroyed and their town ransacked
when the dragon first came to the mountain. The dwarves refuse to give up anything until
the armies before their gate disperse, hoping to delay them until Dain’s army can arrive.
Thus the conditions for a battle have been established.

Bilbo is caught in the middle of this approaching battle and resolves to stop this
tragedy before it gets started. When the dwarves and Bilbo first examined the hoard,
Bilbo found the Arkenstone of Thrain, the heart of the mountain and the center of
Thorin’s desire. We learned earlier from the dwarves that this stone was the most
valuable artifact of the hoard, and Bilbo, on finding the Arkenstone, desires it, and so
keeps his discovery from the dwarves:

... The great jewel shone before his feet of its own inner light, and yet, cut and
fashioned by the dwarves, who had dug it from the heart of the mountain long ago,
it took all light that fell upon it and changed it into ten thousand sparks of white
radiance shot with glints of the rainbow.

Suddenly Bilbo’s arm went towards it drawn by its enchantment. His small
hand would not close about it, for it was a large and heavy gem; but he lifted it, shut
his eyes, and put it in his deepest pocket.

“Now I am a burglar indeed!” thought he. “But I suppose I must tell the
dwarves about it—some time. They did say I could pick and choose my own share;
and I think I would choose this, if they took all the rest!” All the same he had an
uncomfortable feeling that the picking and choosing had not really been meant to
include this marvelous gem, and that trouble would yet come of it.\footnote{\textit{Hobbit}, 249.}

Bilbo uses the Arkenstone to try and purchase peace from the elves and men. He sneaks
out of the mountain and to the camp of the elves and men one night, and he offers the
Arkenstone to Bard, to trade with the dwarves for a portion of the treasure. Thorin is not
pleased by this turn of events, threatens Bilbo's life, is stopped by the sudden reappearance of Gandalf, and allows Bilbo to leave, with the parting shot of "may we never meet again!" He then tells the delegation from the hosts before his gate:

It was rightly guessed that I could not forbear to redeem the Arkenstone, the treasure of my house. For it I will give one fourteenth share of the hoard in silver and gold, setting aside the gems; but that will be accounted the promised share of this traitor, and with that reward he shall depart, and you can divide it as you will. He will get little enough, I doubt not. Take him, if you wish him to live; and no friendship of mine goes with him.  

Shortly after this, Thorin shouts at Bilbo: "You have mail upon you, which was made by my folk, and is too good for you. It cannot be pierced by arrows; but if you do not hasten, I will sting your miserable feet." The battle soon follows, although it does not proceed as both sides had anticipated. As the dwarves with their cousins face the host of men and elves, two more armies appear--the goblins and the wargs (wolves)--enemies of all. The dwarves, men, and elves lay aside their differences to face this new threat, and the battle goes ill for them, outnumbered by the goblins and wargs. Bilbo stays among the army of the elves with Gandalf, and they soon realize that their end is not far distant, and the narrator tells us that "Gandalf, too, I may say, was there, sitting on the ground as if in deep thought, preparing, I suppose, some last blast of magic before the end." The clouds then break, and Bilbo sees far off the coming of the eagles. He shouts out what he sees, but is then struck on the helm by a rock and knocked unconscious. We awake with

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13Ibid., 288.
14Ibid.
15Ibid., 289.
16Ibid., 297.
Bilbo later, who sees that the battle is over without knowing the outcome. A man comes
looking for him, and Bilbo realizes he might have been found earlier had he not been
wearing his invisibility ring. He is taken immediately to the camp and is led to a tent
where Thorin waited, wounded and about to die. Thorin tells him he is sorry for what he
said: “I wish to part in friendship from you, and I would take back my words and deeds at
the gate,”¹⁷ and then Thorin dies. The narrator tells us that “Bilbo turned away, and he
went by himself, and sat alone wrapped in a blanket, and, whether you believe it or not, he
wept until his eyes were red and his voice was hoarse. He was a kindly little soul,”¹⁸ and
we, having followed the narrative almost entirely from Bilbo’s perspective, weep with him.

We learn shortly after this, that even the arrival of the eagles is not enough to turn the
battle, that the shape-changer Beorn arrives after the eagles and helps the combined armies
defeat the goblins and wargs. But this sudden joyous turn does not come without loss—
Thorin, along with two others of Bilbo’s dwarven companions, Fili and Kili, die, the elf-
host returns home “sadly lessened,”¹⁹ and the men and dwarves endured a lean winter,
many dying of hunger and disease, due to the destruction caused by the dragon. The
consolation of the happy ending is bittersweet; the victory against the dragon and the
goblins does not happen without suffering and great loss; the eucatastrophe has at its heart
the “down turning.”

The eucatastrophe of The Lord of the Rings comes the moment the ring finally goes

¹⁷Ibid., 301.
¹⁸Ibid.
¹⁹Ibid., 305.
into the fire, but like *The Hobbit*, it begins to build with the beginning of the story and the power for evil of the ring, and the tension created by trying to keep it from the enemy, who has agents hiding behind every tree and hedge, from the heart of the Shire all the way to Mount Doom. However, considering what happens just before the ring goes into the fire—Frodo finally overcome by the ring, claims it for his own and Gollum, biting off finger and ring, finally regains his “precious,” but in his moment of triumph and celebration, he steps off the edge and plunges into the fire still holding the ring—we have to go back to *The Hobbit* and a chapter that was rewritten by Tolkien after the *LOR* was completed, “Riddles in the Dark.” In this chapter, Bilbo, separated from Gandalf and the dwarves, meets the creature, Gollum. In the original version, the two play the riddle game, Bilbo wins, and Gollum leads Bilbo to the way out—the ring had little or no significance. Since Tolkien’s conception of the ring had changed, from simply a magic ring to Sauron’s ruling ring of power—the culmination of the ring-making of the Second Age and altogether evil—the chapter on its finding had to be altered. In the revised version when Gollum discovers his “precious” is missing, he immediately realizes what Bilbo has in his pocket—the missing ring—and returns to the shore of his underground lake intending to kill Bilbo. Bilbo sees murder in Gollum’s eyes as he returns and flees up the passage in the dark. Having heard Gollum’s debate about his lost precious, Bilbo’s hand goes into his pocket to touch the ring, and the narrator tells us that it “felt very cold as it quietly slipped on to his groping forefinger,”20 but as he runs he notices that Gollum is catching up to him:

The hiss was close behind him. He turned now and saw Gollum’s eyes like small green lamps coming up the slope. Terrified he tried to run faster, but suddenly he

20Ibid., 94.
struck his toes on a snag in the floor, and fell flat with his little sword under him.

In a moment Gollum was on him. But before Bilbo could do anything, recover
his breath, pick himself up, or wave his sword, Gollum passed by, taking no notice
of him, cursing and whispering as he ran.\textsuperscript{21}

Bilbo is as surprised as we are, but keeps his wits, recognizing that Gollum may still lead
him to the way out, so the hobbit follows him. He learns from Gollum, as the creature
constantly talks to himself, that he had been this way earlier and calls the ring “his birthday
present,” then tells us that “[i]t [the ring] slipped from [him], after all these ages and ages!
It’s gone, gollum.”\textsuperscript{22} Gollum continues to talk and lament his loss, and Bilbo learns that
the ring has the power of invisibility. Gollum continues up the passageway, counting the
side passages, until he reaches the way out. The creature sits in the threshold of the
passage out and weeps for his loss. Bilbo thinks he can sneak past Gollum, but the
creature hears him move, goes silent, and tenses to spring. The narrator then tells us:

Bilbo almost stopped breathing, and went stiff himself. He was desperate. He
must get away, out of this horrible darkness, while he had any strength left. He
must fight. He must stab the foul thing, put its eyes out, kill it. It meant to kill
him. No, not a fair fight. He was invisible now. Gollum had no sword. Gollum
had not actually threatened to kill him, or tried to yet. And he was miserable,
alone, lost. A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in
Bilbo’s heart: a glimpse of endless unmarked days without light or hope of
betterment, hard stone, cold fish, sneaking and whispering. All these thoughts
flashed passed in a flash of a second. He trembled. And then quite suddenly in
another flash, as if lifted by a new strength and resolve, he leaped.\textsuperscript{23}

The choice that Bilbo makes at this point—not to kill Gollum—has a profound impact on
the \textit{LOR} and sets up the consolation. We also learn later in \textit{LOR}, when we learn the

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 95.

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., 97.

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history of the creature Gollum, that this choice is why the wholly evil ring does so little
damage to Bilbo, why he is able to give it up, although with great difficulty, and of course,
makes possible the destruction of the ring. We also learn that Bilbo, while possessing the
ring, does not understand what it actually is, and so through both pity and ignorance, the
ring does not do any lasting damage to him. But since the ring is an artifact of evil, we
have to have a hint in The Hobbit that it does have some negative effect on Bilbo, and so
we get Bilbo’s fabricated story, told to the dwarves and Gandalf, that he won the ring
from Gollum—a hint that the ring may be more than a simple toy that makes its wearer
invisible. The evil of the ring is further strengthened at the beginning of the LOR.

After Bilbo has vanished from his birthday party, and sneaks back into his home, he
tells Gandalf that he feels old, even if he doesn’t look old: “Why, I feel all thin, sort of
stretched, if you know what I mean: like butter that has been scraped over too much
bread. That can’t be right.” The wizard agrees with him, and asks if he intends to go
through with his plan, including giving the ring to Frodo. Bilbo says yes, but then is
surprised to find the ring in his pocket rather than on the mantelpiece, where he tells
Gandalf that he has placed it. The wizard counsels him to leave the ring behind, then asks,
“[d]on’t you want to?” Bilbo replies:

“Well yes—and no. Now it comes to it, I don’t like parting with it at all, I may say.
And I don’t really see why I should. Why do you want me to?” he asked, and a
curious change came over his voice. It was sharp with suspicion and annoyance.
“You are always badgering me about my ring; but you have never bothered me
about the other things that I got on my journey.”

“No, but I had to badger you,” said Gandalf. “I wanted the truth. It was
important. Magic rings are—well, magical; and they are rare and curious. . . . Also
I think you have had it quite long enough. You won’t need it anymore. . . .”

^LOR, 1:41, original emphasis.

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Bilbo flushed, and there was an angry light in his eyes. His kindly face grew hard. “Why not?” he cried. “And what business is it of yours, anyway, to know what I do with my own things? It is my own. I found it. It came to me.”

“Yes, yes,” said Gandalf. “But there is no need to get angry.”

“If I am it is your fault,” said Bilbo. “It is mine, I tell you. My own. My precious. Yes, my precious.”

Bilbo’s words and anger here echo Gollum’s, and he immediately recognizes them as Gollum’s words, with the prodding of the wizard. Gandalf finally gets angry with Bilbo, an action that surprises us as much as Bilbo’s words and anger surprise the wizard, causing Bilbo to apologize. Then he tells Gandalf:

But I felt so queer. And yet it would be a relief in a way not to be bothered with it anymore. It has been so growing on my mind lately. Sometimes I have felt it was an eye looking at me. And I am always wanting to put it on and disappear, don’t you know; or wondering if it is safe, and pulling it out to make sure. I tried locking it up, but I found I couldn’t rest without it in my pocket. . . .

Bilbo’s behavior here so startles the wizard that he leaves the Shire on Bilbo’s heels, trying to learn more about the ring. He warns Frodo before he leaves to keep the ring secret and not to use it. For fourteen years Gandalf searches for information about the ring, ultimately capturing Gollum and learning the whole story. After telling Frodo that Sauron has returned, that he has captured and interrogated Gollum before releasing him, and that he—the dark lord—knows about hobbits, The Shire, and the name, Baggins, Frodo exclaims, “[w]hat a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature, when he had the chance!” Gandalf replies that “[i]t was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to

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25Ibid., 1:41-42.

26Ibid., 1:43.

27Ibid., 1:68.
strike without need,”\textsuperscript{28} and because of his pity for Gollum, Bilbo “took so little hurt from
the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so.”\textsuperscript{29} Frodo
confesses that he feels no pity for Gollum, and that Gollum deserves to die. Gandalf then
tells him:

\begin{quote}
Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die
deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death
in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope
that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it. And he is
bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to
play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo
may rule the fate of many—yours not least. . . \textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

We see, when Frodo and Sam finally make it to Mount Doom, that Gandalf’s feeling was
right—without Bilbo’s pity—and Frodo’s, as we will next show—the quest to destroy the
ring would have been in vain; Middle-earth and all its inhabitants would have fallen under
the shadow and control of the dark lord Sauron.

Frodo, also, comes to pity Gollum, when the two finally meet as Frodo and Sam
struggle to escape the mountains east of the great river—Anduin—following the breaking
of the fellowship. Gollum catches the two hobbits—apparently napping—but they turn the
tables on Gollum and capture him. As they ponder what to do with him, Frodo recalls his
conversation with Gandalf, cited above, and he tells us, “now that I see him, I do pity
him.”\textsuperscript{31} They decide to take Gollum as their guide to Mordor, and he immediately leads

\textsuperscript{28}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid.}, 1:69.

\textsuperscript{30}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ibid.}, 2:222.

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them out of the mountains and into the Dead Marshes. He leads Frodo and Sam faithfully until they enter the pass of Cirith Ungol, where Gollum betrays them to the spider, Shelob, hoping that when she is through with them (e.g., finishes eating them), he can go through their things and reclaim his “precious.” The hobbits manage to escape both Gollum and the spider, and Gollum does not reappear until after they climb Mount Doom, realizing that Frodo means to destroy the ring. Gollum attacks them, but they manage to stop him again, and Sam is left to deal with Gollum while Frodo enters the Cracks of Doom. Sam has had a turn at carrying the ring, taking it from Frodo after Frodo was poisoned by the spider and apparently dead. When Sam now has the opportunity to kill Gollum, as the creature grovels before him, the narrator tells us that

Sam’s hand wavered. His mind was hot with wrath and the memory of evil. It would be just to slay this treacherous, murderous creature, just and many times deserved; and also it seemed the only safe thing to do. But deep in his heart there was something that restrained him: he could not strike this thing lying in the dust, forlorn, ruinous, utterly wretched. He himself, though only for a little while, had borne the Ring, and now dimly he guessed the agony of Gollum’s shriveled mind and body, enslaved to that Ring, unable to find peace or relief ever in life again. But Sam had no words to express what he felt.32

We now have three cases of pity—Bilbo’s, Frodo’s, and Sam’s—that enable the completion of the quest, for when Sam leaves Gollum and enters the chamber called the Cracks of Doom, he sees Frodo, with the light of Galadriel, standing at the brink of the chasm. He calls out to his master, seeing him standing at the edge of the abyss as still as a stone, then the narrator tells us:

Then Frodo stirred and spoke with a clear voice, indeed with a voice clearer and more powerful than Sam had ever heard him use, and it rose above the throb and turmoil of Mount Doom, ringing in the roof and walls.

32Tbid., 3:221-22.
“I have come,” he said. But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!” And suddenly, as he set it on his finger, he vanished from Sam’s sight. Sam gasped, but he had no chance to cry out...

Sam is knocked down at this moment, and he sees a dark shape pass over him. We learn that in the moment that Frodo claimed the Ring, Sauron becomes aware of him, and the dark lord finally realizes his enemies’ purpose. At this moment, Gandalf and Aragorn, lead the men of Gondor and Rohan in an attack against the Gate of Mordor, an attack whose only purpose is to distract Sauron from searching for the Ring. The dark lord calls back his winged Nazgul—the black riders mounted on beasts that fly—to enter the Cracks of Doom and capture Frodo. In the few minutes that Frodo has before they could arrive, he could not master the power of the Ring sufficiently to control, let alone, ward off these servants of Sauron, and so the outcome is inevitable—he will be captured, taken to Sauron, and the dark lord will again possess the ruling ring, except for the pity of Bilbo, Frodo, and finally Sam. The dark shape that leaps over Sam is Gollum, who is somehow able to see Frodo, and the two begin wrestling for the Ring at the brink. Sam sees Gollum fighting with empty air and sees Gollum draw his hands to his mouth:

. . . his white fangs gleamed, and then snapped as they bit. Frodo gave a cry, and there he was, fallen upon his knees at the chasm’s edge. But Gollum, dancing like a mad thing, held aloft the ring, a finger still thrust within its circle. It shone as if verily it was wrought of living fire.

“Precious, precious, precious!” Gollum cried. “My precious! O my Precious!” And with that, even as his eyes were lifted up to gloat on his prize, he stepped too far, toppled, wavered for a moment on the brink, and then with a shriek he fell. Out of the depths came his last wail precious, and he was gone.

The mountain shakes at the destruction of the ring, Sauron and his fortress fall, and the

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33Ibid., 3:223.

34Ibid., 3:224.
Ringwraiths perish. The hobbits struggle out of the chamber, and Sam hears the normal voice of his master at his side. The narrator tells us that Sam, "[i]n all that ruin of the world for the moment he felt only joy, great joy. The burden was gone. His master had been saved; he was himself again, he was free." It is Frodo who reminds Sam, and us, that it would not have happened had it not been for Gollum: "But for him, Sam, I could not have destroyed the Ring. The Quest would have been in vain, even at the bitter end. So let us forgive him! For the Quest is achieved, and now all is over." We see that Tolkien not only gave us the structure of the happy ending, but he also gives us a fairy-story that includes this kind of happy ending—a “sudden joyous turn not likely to recur.”

The pity, in *LOR*, of first Bilbo, then Frodo, and later Sam, allowed the quest to destroy the ring to succeed. I believe that it is Galadriel who tells Frodo that the quest hangs by a thread, and we recognize throughout the course of the narrative that the possibility of failure is always there—they could be captured, betrayed to the orcs, or discovered by the ringwraiths. All recognize that the quest is a “fool’s hope,” as Gandalf tells Pippin, and the belief by Denethor, Steward of Gondor, that Sauron has captured the Ringbearer leads him to despair and burn himself to death on a pyre. We see that the “pity of Bilbo,” and others, as Gandalf told us, did indeed “rule the fate of many,” including the fate of Frodo himself, at the bitter end. The “edge” or “downturn” of the eucatastrophe necessarily follows, for even though they have saved Middle-Earth from a second darkness, Gondor and Rohan lose their leaders—Denethor and Theoden—in the same day; the elves and

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36Ibid.
Gandalf must leave Middle-Earth; the Shire is saved but not for Frodo, wounded by the Ringwraith's knife, the poison of Shelob, and the bite of Gollum, who finds no peace in the Shire, so he leaves with Gandalf and the elves. Thus, Tolkien's good "catastrophe" has its "sudden joyous turn, not likely to recur," the world is saved but not for the heroes who save it—it is a "happy ending" with a bitter edge.

We turn now to examine the consolation of the first of our contemporary fantasies, David Eddings’ *Belgariad*. As we noted in the previous chapter, the key to the consolation of Eddings’ tale is in the death of Goodman Dumik, whose death gives Polgara the strength of will to reject Torak, opening the way for his death at the hands of Belgarion. However, we should begin with some preliminary words regarding the cosmology of this created, Secondary World. At the beginning of time in Eddings’ fantasy world, the universe came into existence with a purpose, or a specific destiny. That purpose moved forward to its fulfillment until an accident occurred that divided the purpose into two competing destinies or possibilities—a star exploded in a place where it should not have happened. We learn much later in the story that the cosmic accident resulted in the creation of Torak, who should not have been. These two destinies are in constant battle with each other, although to the characters in the story, their battle seems more like a game, for it has to proceed according to specific rules agreed upon by the two destinies. One of the rules is that their periodic meetings must take place through people who live in this world, living agents who are called the “child of light” and the “child of dark.” The meeting between Belgarion and Torak—child of light and dark, respectively—is one of the two most important of these meetings, that will lead to the healing of the divided purpose of the universe. *The Belgariad* tells the story of this meeting between
Torak and Belgarion; Eddings’ *Mallorean* tells the story of the final meeting in which the purpose is fully healed. The two destinies speak sometimes through their agents directly, and other times through prophets. These prophecies set forth the conditions for these meetings—who must be there and what conditions must be satisfied—but they are written in a kind of code, sometimes obvious, sometimes obscure. The birth of Belgarion, simply Garion at the time, signals the time of these two final and decisive meetings. To illustrate how this operates, and ultimately leads to the consolation, we will examine the moment in the text where one of the destinies reveals to Garion that he and Torak are destined to meet.

In the context of the story, Garion has just been shown to be “Belgarion,” lost heir to the throne of Riva, Overlord of the West, and Keeper of the Orb. Because of Garion’s return from obscurity, the council of kings discusses the need to prepare for a war with the Angaraks—Torak’s people—a war that seems to Garion to be hopeless. After many nightmares about this hopeless war, the voice of destiny tells Garion that there is an alternative, and leads him to read the relevant passage from one of the prophecies, the “Mrin Codex.” This prophecy states: “Behold, it shall come to pass that in a certain moment, that which must be and that which must not be shall meet, and in that meeting shall be decided all that has gone before and all that will come after. Then will the Child of Light and the Child of Dark face each other in the broken tomb, and the stars will shudder and grow dim.”  

Garion complains—of course—that it doesn’t make any sense, the voice replies that “the man who wrote it was insane. I put the ideas there, but he used

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his own words to express them."\(^{38}\) The voice then indicates that Garion is the current
"Child of Light," while Torak, the maimed god, is the "Child of Dark," and that the two of
them will meet alone, no matter how many armies each might bring to the meeting. After
balking at this idea for a time, Garion finally decides that the best course of action is for
him to slip out of Riva with his sword (the orb attached), Belgarath, and Silk, and go to
Cthol Mishrak, where Torak's body lies in restless slumber.

As they travel to this meeting, we learn that Ce'nedra, Garion's bride-to-be, has raised
an army, with the help of the Alorn kings, as a diversionary attack on the Angarak
kingdoms. In the course of this battle, she, Durnik, Polgara, and the boy, Errand, are
captured and taken to Cthol Mishrak. When Durnik questions Polgara about why they are
going to Cthol Mishrak, we learn that the four of them are destined to be there, and also,
we get our first hint of Durnik's pivotal importance, Polgara replies:

"... All I know is that the four of us are supposed to go to Cthol Mishrak.
What's going to happen there needs us in order for it to be complete. Each of us
have something to do there."
"Even me?"
"Especially you, Durnik. At first I didn't understand who you really are.
That's why I tried to keep you from coming along. But now I do understand.
You have to be there because you're going to do the one thing that's going to turn
the entire outcome one way or the other."\(^{39}\)

Durnik then expresses his worry that he is afraid he will, not knowing precisely what he is
supposed to do, do it wrong. Polgara assures him that what he has to do will flow
naturally out of who he is, and as we will see shortly, his desire to protect Polgara leads
him to attack Zedar, disciple of Torak, who, in the scuffle, kills Durnik. Previous to the

\(^{38}\)Ibid., 2:197.

\(^{39}\)Ibid., 2:552, original emphasis.

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above conversation, one of the Grolims--a member of Torak’s priesthood--sent to convey
Polgara and the others to Torak’s city, calls Polgara the “Queen of Angarak,” to which
Polgara responds by reminding him that there are two possible outcomes of the coming
confrontation, and which will win has not been decided. This reference to Polgara as
Torak’s bride comes from the second destiny, who, like the first who speaks to Garion,
has its own set of prophecies that govern the actions of Torak, his disciples, and his
priesthood.

When Garion and his companions finally arrive at the appointed place in Torak’s city,
the ruins of his tower, they find that Polgara and the others are already there in the
company of Torak’s disciple, Zedar, sometimes called the “Apostate.” Zedar used to be
“Belzedar,” a follower of Aldur and one of Belgarath’s brother sorcerers, and in his pride,
he believed he could get Aldur’s orb back from Torak by subterfuge--by pretending to be
Torak’s disciple. The conversation between Zedar and Polgara as Garion arrives--and
overhears--revolves around Polgara questioning Zedar on why he turned against Aldur,
and gives us insight into just how powerful Torak’s mind is, and how persuasive--maybe
“dominating” is a better word--when he turns it upon the mind of a person, like Zedar and
Polgara, and the danger Polgara will be in when Torak wakes. Zedar tells Polgara:

You cannot know! I was so sure of myself--so certain I could keep a part of my
mind free from Torak’s domination--but I was wrong--wrong! His mind and will
overwhelm me. He took me in his hand and he crushed out all of my resistance.
The touch of his hand, Polgara! . . . It reaches down into the very depths of your
soul. I know Torak for what he is--loathsome, twisted, evil beyond your
understanding of the word--but when he calls me, I must go; and what he bids me
to do, I must do--even though my soul shrieks within me against it. Even now, as
he sleeps, his fist is around my heart.40

40Ibid., 2:575.

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As Zedar tells us that he was unable to resist Torak, so we know that when the evil god awakes and turns his will upon Polgara, she will not be able to resist. Belgarath tells Garion, after the encounter is over that this was the one flaw, “the possibility that Polgara might yield. All Torak needed was one person to love him. It would have made him invincible,” and Garion would have lost his battle with Torak.

After admitting how powerful Torak’s mind is, he tells Polgara that it is useless to resist--that she should submit freely, and it is this comment by Zedar that causes Dumik to attack him. Zedar kills him and then asks Dumik’s dead body, “Why did you make me kill you? That’s the one thing above all others I didn’t want to do,” admitting that he knew that Dumik’s role was pivotal in this meeting and recognized that his victory—Torak’s--could only be achieved if Dumik did not die at his hands. Polgara is stricken at this point by grief, and she weeps as she holds Dumik’s lifeless body in her arms. This is the moment that Torak awakes and rises to face Garion. Polgara interposes herself between Torak and Garion, and Torak notices her, calls her his bride, tells her to come to him. She rejects him and then he turns his mind upon her:

So overwhelming was the force of his mind that she swayed almost as a tree sways in the grip of a great wind. “No,” she gasped, closing her eyes and turning her face sharply away.

“Look at me, Polgara,” he commanded, his voice almost purring. “I am thy fate. All that thou didst think to love before me shall fall away, and thou shalt love only me. Look at me.”

Against her will, the force of Torak’s mind and will compels her to look, and her defiance

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41Ibid., 2:590.

42Ibid., 2:577.

43Ibid., 2:583.

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and hatred for him are overwhelmed. Torak continues:

"Thy will crumbles, my beloved," he told her. "Now come to me."

She must resist! All the confusion was gone now, and Garion understood at last. This was the real battle. If Aunt Pol succumbed, they were lost. It had been for this.

"Help her," the voice within him said.

"Aunt Pol!" Garion threw the thought at her, "Remember Dumik!" He knew without knowing how he knew that this was the one thing that could sustain her in her deadly struggle. He ranged through his memory, throwing images of Dumik at her—of the smith's strong hands at work at his forge—of his serious eyes—of the quiet sound of his voice—and most of all the good man's unspoken love for her, the love that had been the center of Dumik's entire life.

She had begun to involuntarily move, no more than a slight shifting of her weight in preparation for that first fatal step in response to Torak's overpowering command. Once she had made that step, she would be lost. But Garion's memories of Dumik struck her like a blow. Her shoulders, which had already begun to droop in defeat, suddenly straightened, and her eyes flashed with renewed defiance. "Never!" she told the expectantly waiting God. "I will not!"

As we saw with Tolkien's fairy-stories, so we see here that the consolation begins with the story, in this case, that Garion was raised on Faldor's Farm, where Dumik was the smith, makes him uniquely capable of supporting Polgara in this crucial narrative moment. At the beginning of the text, as we showed in Chapter 7, Garion's earliest memories of his childhood were first, of Polgara's kitchen, and second, of Dumik's smithy, so that the images Garion projects to Polgara are precisely those images that will touch her most deeply, giving her the courage and will to resist Torak's domination and reject him, leaving him alone to face Belgarion wielding Aldur's orb, the object that maimed him and drove him insane. In the duel that follows—the moment of the consolation—what Garion has done to help Polgara resist leads him to recognize what will help him win the fight, that he too, must reject Torak, and so Garion taunts Torak:

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*Ibid.*, 2:583-84, original emphasis.
You are nothing. Your people fear you, but they do not love you. You tried to deceive me into loving you; you tried to force Aunt Pol to love you; but I refuse you even as she did. You’re a God, but you are nothing. In all the universe there is not one person—not one thing—that loves you. You are alone and empty, and even if you kill me, I will still win. Unloved and despised, you will howl out your miserable life to the end of days.45

The narrator tells us that the “words struck the maimed God like blows,” and that in this moment, Garion realizes that the purpose of this meeting between Child of Light and Child of Dark—between Belgarion and Torak—was “not to fight Torak, but to reject him.”46

What follows Garion’s rejection is simple and predictable: Torak lets animal rage overcome his reason, and he charges at Garion with his sword raised, intending not just to kill but to hack his foe to pieces. Garion holds his sword before him, point aimed at Torak’s chest, and waits for Torak to impale himself upon Garion’s sword. In this moment, Garion defeats his enemy, but it is a victory that to Garion tastes bitter: “It was over, but there was a bitterness in the taste of Garion’s victory. A man did not lightly kill a God, no matter how twisted or evil the God might be.”47 Belgarath comes first out of the ruins of Torak’s tower, and seeing Garion standing over Torak’s body, asks if he has any regrets:

Garion sighed. “No, Grandfather,” he said. “I suppose not—not really. It had to be done, didn’t it?”

Belgarath nodded gravely.

“It’s just that he was so alone at the end. I took everything away from him before I killed him. I’m not very proud of that.”

“As you say, it had to be done. It was the only way you could beat him.


46Ibid.

47Ibid., 2:589.
"I just wish I could have left him something, that’s all."

Garion here recognizes that, although what he did had to be done, it is a terrible thing to kill a god, even if that god is totally evil and insane, and has no redeeming qualities. Eddings gives us the “eucatastrophe”—the “good down turning”—the bitter taste of Garion’s victory.

Eddings, however, does not leave it here, but pushes his consolation further, almost as if he recognizes Tolkien’s requirements for the happy-ending—the need for the miraculous event, never likely to recur. Garion’s victory certainly qualifies as an event not likely to recur, but a greater miracle will follow, in which, we might argue, we see evidence that a fairy-story’s consolation reflects and echoes, what for Tolkien is the greatest fairy-story of all, the story of Christ. Following Torak’s death and Garion’s reflection of the bitterness he feels, the gods—brothers and father to Torak—come to mourn the loss of their brother, we learn that they still loved him, even though he had become twisted and evil—probably the reason why he did not recognize that they still cared for him. As they mourn, the boy, Errand, unabashedly approaches UL, the father of the gods, twice calls him “Father” and twice points to Dumik’s dead body. Errand’s request, without words, is plain, and UL notes that what he asks “crosses the uncrossable boundary.”49 The voice of destiny, speaking through Garion, notes that the gods cannot do this, for once any of them has broken this boundary, he, and the others, will be tempted to do so again, an action that could divide destiny further; however, it could be done through Garion, keeping the

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48Ibid.

49Ibid., 2:591.
boundary intact, if the gods are willing to lend power to Garion. After some discussion, in which Polgara admits that she loves Durnik and is willing to give up her powers of sorcery to have him back, the dry voice of destiny tells Garion that the “restoration” of Durnik is in Garion’s hands. Garion balks at this, saying that he has no idea how to proceed, and the voice tells him, “[y]ou did it before. Remember the colt in the cave of the Gods?”

The incident mentioned happened much earlier in the story, as the large company followed the trail of the stolen orb. At a certain point, they were traveling to the Vale of Aldur, when crossing the mountains, they were caught in a blizzard and took refuge from the storm in the cave where the gods met as they created the world and its inhabitants. One of the horses foals in the cave, but the stress of traveling causes the foal to die. Garion, only recently learning of his powers of sorcery, and so ignorant of the possible consequences of his actions, manages through sorcery to bring the colt back to life (1:584-86), an action, which we see at the end, that prepares him to bring Durnik back to life. Garion takes the orb and places it on Durnik’s chest; the gods form a circle around him, and Errand joins him, kneeling across from Garion. Garion describes the “blank wall” that represents the boundary between life and death:

The blank wall he had seen once before was there again, still black, impenetrable, and silent. As he had before in the cave of the Gods, Garion pushed tenatively against the substance of death itself, striving to reach through and pull his friend back to the world of the living.

It was different this time. The colt he had brought to life in the cave had never lived except within its mother’s body, and it lay but a short distance beyond the barrier. Durnik, however, had been a man full grown, and his death, like his life, was far more profound. With all his strength, Garion pushed. He could feel the enormous force of the combined wills of the Gods joining with his in the silent

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Ibid., 2:595.
struggle, but the barrier would not yield. With the added help of the orb and the boy, Errand, who turns out to be the god who was meant to be when the destiny was divided, as we later learn in Eddings’ *Mallorean*, the story that follows in which divided destiny is healed, the barrier opens and Dumik lives again. We cannot help but notice that Dumik’s miraculous restoration, forming an integral part of this fairy-story’s consolation, echoes, as Tolkien tells us it should, the Christian resurrection of Christ, and creating in the story the “sudden joyous turn, never likely to recur.”

The consolation of Roger Zelazny’s Amber series revolves around the princes’ squabbling, maneuvering, and fighting for the throne of Amber, vacant as their father and king, Oberon, has been missing for many years. As we noted in Chapter 7, Corwin, the prince from whose perspective the story is told, is motivated by his desire for revenge on his brother Eric, who seizes the throne and who Corwin feels is responsible—at the beginning, at least—for his loss of memory. Further, as we have seen previously, the consolation of this fairy-story builds throughout the text. Once Corwin manages to re-walk the pattern of Amber, restoring most of his memories, he falls in with another brother, Bleys, who is raising an army to fight against Eric and seize the throne. They eventually reach Amber with some of their armies, fight a losing battle, until Bleys manages to escape while Corwin is captured by Eric. After being forced to witness Eric’s coronation as king, Corwin’s eyes are burned out and he is left to rot in the dungeon. In his pain and anger at what has been done to him, Corwin uses his prince’s curse—a

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powerful spell—on Eric and opens the way for the forces of chaos to touch Amber. After several years in this state and because of the supernatural healing power of the children of Amber, his eyes re-grow and he manages to escape from the dungeon with the help of mad Dworkin, the maker of the trumps of Amber, also confined to the dungeons. He soon discovers a “black road” that travels across all shadows to Amber from Chaos, one of the results of his curse. We later learn that another prince and brother—Brand—has made an alliance with Chaos, and furthered Corwin’s curse by damaging the pattern of Amber by spilling the blood of a prince—Random’s son, Martin—erasing a section of the primal pattern and opening the way further for the forces of chaos.

Corwin’s first travels after escaping from Amber’s dungeon, lead him to a place where the black road is a black circle, and he joins the local’s fight against this circle and its denizens, feeling partial responsibility for its presence. He picks up an old acquaintance, Ganelon, who goes with him when he leaves this place as Corwin travels to a shadow of his Avalon, a shadow where he ruled many years before. The jewelers of his Avalon used a polishing compound that Corwin discovers—accidently—burns like gunpowder in Amber. His visit to this shadow of Avalon is to collect enough of this compound for making bullets and guns that he can use to take Amber from Eric. When Corwin returns to Amber with his guns and an elite force, Amber is under attack by the forces of chaos, which Corwin easily defeats. In the battle, Eric dies, and so Corwin, owing to his guns, which no other person of Amber has been able to create, becomes the de facto head of Amber, although he does not take the throne at this time. They discover Brand’s treachery and the damage to the primal pattern, and in the process, Corwin’s companion, Ganelon, turns out to be the old king, Oberon, in disguise. Oberon lays his plans and will attempt to
repair the primal pattern. As he prepares, he tells his son, Corwin, that when he escaped from the dungeon, all roads would lead him to the place of the black circle so that Oberon could test and travel with Corwin. Corwin asks why, and Oberon replies,

Can you not guess? I have watched all of you over the years. I never named a successor. I purposely left the matter muddled. You are all enough like me for me to know that the moment I declared for one of you I would be signing his or her death warrant. No. I intentionally left things as they were until the very end. Now, though, I have decided. It is to be you.\(^{52}\)

The moment of Corwin’s desire, his motivation for action throughout the course of the story has come—his father and king has named him successor to the throne. But Corwin’s experiences have changed him, and Corwin is surprised here by his father’s willingness, not only to give him the throne, but his willingness to sacrifice his life for the kingdom, as he tells Corwin that repairing the pattern will kill him. Corwin replies:

My own hands are not clean . . . and I certainly do not presume to judge you. A while back, though, when I made ready to try the Pattern, I thought how my feelings had changed—toward Eric, toward the throne. You do what you do, I believe, as a duty. I, too, feel a duty now, toward Amber, toward the throne. More than that, actually. Much more, I realized, just then. But I realized something else, also, something that duty does not require of me. I do not know when or how it stopped and I changed, but I do not want the throne, Dad. I am sorry it messes up your plans, but I do not want to be king of Amber. I am sorry.\(^{53}\)

Oberon revises his plans and sends Corwin riding toward the Courts of Chaos. On the way, Corwin receives from his father the Jewel of Judgement, a powerful talisman that is used by the king to try and repair the pattern. Corwin is attuned to the jewel and Oberon sends it to him, so that Corwin can protect the rest of his family from the wave of chaos that will sweep over shadow as a result of Oberon’s attempt to repair the pattern. Along


\(^{53}\)Ibid., 2:328.
the way, Corwin is attacked and taunted by Brand, who is trying to get the jewel from Corwin. From their conversations, Corwin concludes, wrongly, that his father failed to repair the pattern and that the wave of chaos will destroy all. He then inscribes, with the jewel, a new pattern. This action completely exhausts him, and Brand shows up and easily takes the jewel from him.

The action shifts to the battle before the Courts of Chaos—a diversionary action to occupy the Chaosites while Oberon attempts to repair the pattern. The consolation comes when Brand shows up with the jewel, demanding his brothers and sisters surrender to him, for which he will protect them from the approaching wave of chaos. Brand holds one of his sister’s at knife point—Deirdre—and Corwin moves close enough to him that he can control the jewel; he uses its power to heat and burn Brand. This action allows Deirdre a moment to try to escape, and one of the brother shoots Brand with an arrow that takes him in the throat, and a second follows striking him in the chest:

He stepped backward and made a gurgling noise. Only there was no place to which he might step, from the edge of the abyss.
His eye went wide as he began to topple. Then his right hand shot forward and caught hold of Deirdre’s hair. I was running by then, shouting, but I knew that I could not reach them in time.
Deirdre howled, a look of terror on her bloodstreaked face, and she reached out to me. . . .
Then Brand, Deirdre and the Jewel were over the edge and falling, vanished from sight, gone. . . .
I believe I tried to throw myself after them, but Random caught hold of me. Finally, he had to hit me, and it all went away. 54

We learned, early in the narrative, that Deidre was Corwin’s favorite sister, the one he was closest to, and the one he loved the most, and so we have the loss, or bitter edge, to the

54Ibid., 2:407.
"good down turning": Brand, the traitor, is defeated and destroyed, but in the process, Deirdre is lost. The jewel, however, returns from the abyss on the horn of the unicorn, which Oberon told us earlier, would decide who the next king should be, and to the surprise of everyone, the unicorn touches her horn to Random. In a conversation with Corwin after taking the jewel from the unicorn and accepting the fealty of his brothers and sisters still living, Random asks Corwin about his reasons for wanting the throne and ultimately rejecting it. Corwin tells him,

I wanted it only because Eric did. I did not realize it at the time, but it is true. It was the winning counter in a game we had been playing across the years. And I would have killed him for it. I am glad now that he found another way to die. We were more alike than we were different, he and I. I did not realize that until much later either. But after his death, I kept finding reasons for not taking the throne. Finally, it dawned on me that it was not really what I wanted. No. You are welcome to it. Rule well, brother. I am sure that you will.55

The consolation of Zelazny's *Amber* includes both the bitter edge that we have seen is a part of the “happy ending”—here with the death of Corwin’s beloved sister, the loss of the “girl,” Dara, who Oberon meant to be Corwin’s queen, and Corwin’s recognition that he, after all we have seen, does not want the throne. The “sudden joyous turn” comes when the unicorn returns the Jewel of Judgment and selects Random as the next king, a happy surprise to both the characters in the story and us, as readers of the story, satisfying Tolkien’s requirements for the happy ending.

One of the effects of modern publishing practices on fantasy literature has to do with the length of the stories told: in Tolkien’s masterwork as also the four contemporary fantasies, the stories are long and complex, in the case of Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*

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55Ibid., 2:425.
is over 1000 pages in print; *The Belgariad* and *The Chronicles of Amber* were both published in five books; Donaldson’s *Thomas Covenant*, three books; and Rowling’s *Harry Potter* has a planned seven books, five of them published so far. In Tolkien’s conception, his work was meant to be published in its entirety, but the publisher balked at such a large volume, and so published it in three volumes, hoping to minimize their losses. This approach has led fantasy authors to write their stories episodically, that is, they conceive of the story as a discrete number of publishable parts, so that the story is told over the publication of separate books. In the cases of the two we have thus far covered in this chapter, although conceived of as individual books, the parts all point toward a single, final consolation that comes in the final book. Each earlier book tends to end in a “cliffhanger”–the characters are left in what is usually a difficult situation that remains unresolved until the next book is published, to keep the audience reading. In the cases of our last two fairy-stories—Donaldson’s and Rowling’s—each book has its own eucatastrophe, and each eucatastrophe contributes to the final eucatastrophe that comes with the final book of each series.

We might call these, following Tolkien’s lead, “sub-consolations” that lead to the final or overall consolation of the fairy-story when taken as a whole. In the case of Donaldson’s first *Thomas Covenant*, the sub-consolation of the first two books—each a eucatastrophe in its own right—points directly to and brings about the final consolation of the story as a whole. The consolation of the first book, *Lord Foul’s Bane*, fulfills one part of the prophecy that Covenant delivers to the Lords of Revelstone and was given to him by Foul when first brought to the land. The Lords go to Mount Thunder to recover the Staff of Law—the most important tool of power of the lore the Lords follow—from the
cavewight, Drool. Drool used the staff’s power to call Covenant to the land, and the lords enter his stronghold and take the staff from him. The sub-consolation comes as the party escapes from Mount Thunder with the staff and Covenant, not knowing how he does it, uses the power of his white gold wild magic to call the fire lions of Mount Thunder to enable the party to escape. Drool is killed at this point, and so Covenant returns to his “real” world.

When he is summoned back to the land the second time, in the book titled *The Illearth War,* by the High Lord, Elena, who we learn is Covenant’s daughter by his rape of Lena in the first book, the High Lord gives him a gift that she hopes will help him to use his wild magic that destroys law. This dagger of power, called the krill of Loric, offends the Unbeliever, Covenant, and in a rage he drives it deep into a stone table. This action accidently awakens the dagger’s power, which awakening is a signal to an ancient messenger, who holds the final power of the lore the lords follow. Elena takes Covenant to find this final power while the other lords take their armies to fight Lord Foul’s. The armies meet Foul’s and are routed and eventually driven back into a forest called Garroting Deep, where the leader of the army, Hile Troy—another person summoned from the “real” world—makes a bargain with the guardian of the forest to save his army and destroy Foul’s. Meanwhile, Elena and Covenant are led by the messenger to the final power—the power of command—and Elena uses this power to call back from the dead a former high lord, Kevin, and the author of the lore, to fight Foul. This action breaks the law of death and Foul easily masters Kevin and sends him back to fight Elena and take the Staff of Law. Covenant manages to escape, but Elena dies in the battle with dead Kevin, and the Staff of Law, still held by dead Elena, falls into Foul’s hands. In this book’s
consolation, the loss of Elena, who Covenant has fallen in love with, gives us the bitterness that is part of a Tolkienian consolation.

In the third and final volume, *The Power That Preserves*, Covenant is returned to a land that is held in the grip of an unnatural winter, and spring should have come three months previously, in the time of the land. The land no longer has the power to heal Covenant, who is so appalled by what has happened that he decides to go to Foul’s fortress and destroy him with his wild magic. He is captured on the way, and in his capture we learn how winter still holds its grip on the land. The servants of Foul take him to the “Colossus,” where we see, with Covenant, dead Elena wielding the Staff of Law on Foul’s behalf, holding the weather in winter. The power of the Colossus, a powerful artifact of nature, is awakened by the presence of two of Foul’s most loyal servants, called “ravers”–spirits who forcefully possess the bodies of others. The ravers are destroyed and in the scuffle that follows, Covenant tries to take the staff from Elena, but the staff triggers the wild magic of Covenant’s white gold ring. The Staff of Law is destroyed, releasing Elena from the spell that holds her as also the land from Foul’s unnatural winter. With only the giant, Covenant’s friend, Foamfollower, Covenant goes to Foul’s fortress and defeats him, freeing the land from Foul’s power and influence, but at the cost of many lives, including his daughter Elena and his friend, Foamfollower.

In similar fashion, Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, although not yet complete, gives us a sub-consolation in each book that points to the final consolation, that we are led to believe will be the final confrontation between Harry and Voldemort, in which one of them will be defeated and destroyed—we assume Voldemort—which will free the wizarding world from the evil power of Lord Voldemort. Each of these sub-consolations involve in
some way Voldemort, or his servant: 1) the surviving essence of Voldemort, who shares the body of Quirrel; 2) the memory of Voldemort preserved in a diary and given flesh by the writings of Ginny Weasley; 3) Voldemort’s servant, Wormtail, hidden for thirteen years as Ron’s rat, Scabbers; 4) Voldemort reincarnated using Harry’s blood; and 5) Voldemort. What is interesting is that as Voldemort increases from essence to actual flesh with each encounter, the cost of each encounter, or the bitter edge to each encounter, gets closer and closer to Harry: 1) the corruption and death of Professor Quirrel; 2) Ginny, Ron’s younger sister, controlled by Voldemort and almost lost; 3) Harry discovers but is separated from his godfather, Sirius; 4) death of fellow student, Cedric Diggory; 5) death of Sirius. Since the series is yet to be completed, we cannot say if this pattern will continue, or even if there is a pattern. We can say, at least, that these sub-consolations contain the eucatastrophes that Tolkien argues form a part of every good fairy-story. The “good down turning,” as Tolkien defines it, contains both the triumph of the happy ending, the sudden joyous turn, and the bitterness of some loss, the cost of the triumph, that causes us to cheer for the victory and mourn the cost, and impels us, if we are secondary believers in the author’s created world, to read, and re-read good fairy-stories for the joy of consolation that forms a part of fantasy literature.

We began this study by showing the tendency of contemporary critics of fantasy to follow Todorov’s lead in defining the literature of fantasy in relation to the world of everyday, or the established world of the fairy-story, so that the fantastic becomes a violation of our primary world or the ground rules of the secondary world established by the narrative. We noticed that, for the most part, critics of fantasy have ignored Tolkien’s
contribution to the study of fantasy, as also Tolkienian fairy-stories. We established this idea through a survey of fantasy criticism, beginning with George MacDonald through the present day. We then argued that the framework for interpreting Tolkienian fantasy was described in Tolkien’s lecture “On Fairy-Stories,” also stating that Tolkien’s ideas of “subcreation” and “secondary belief,” were the culmination of critical ideas that began with the first English critic, Sir Philip Sidney. Sidney’s *Defence of Poesy* was his response to critics of the English Renaissance who argued that poetry and poets were tied directly to reality, that Sidney defended the poet’s right to make things up—to exceed the limits of objective reality. Poetry is raised by Sidney to Godlike creation, and we showed that he may have borrowed this idea from an early Italian humanist, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who argued that men and women could create for themselves their own destinies. We further noted that Sidney’s use of these ideas help him to resolve the conflict between his humanism and Protestantism, as also the conflict between Plato and Aristotle, demonstrating their inherence in each other. We noticed the structural similarities between Sidney’s *Defence* and Tolkien’s lecture, and Sidney’s Godlike creation seems to be an early form of Tolkien’s sub-creation.

We followed with Joseph Addison’s *Spectator* essays, answering recent criticisms against Addison’s aesthetic, showing through Addison’s revisions of his essays that he increased the importance of the secondary pleasures of the imagination—pleasures that only exist through well-written literature. Addison’s ideas set the stage for Romantic thought, preparing the way for Coleridge’s assertions in his *Biographia Literaria*. We noticed that Addison’s reader was capable of imagining what the writer created through words, which becomes the pre-cursor for Tolkien’s idea of “secondary belief” created in
the reader when the sub-creator does his or her job well. When we turn to Coleridge in the third chapter, we first established the context for his definitions of primary and secondary imagination, showing that the *Biographia* has a coherence that most critics fail to recognize. We then examined Coleridge’s definition of imagination and how the secondary imagination reflects the imagination of the “I AM,” and creative acts of the poet or artist reflect the creative act of the divine maker, bringing the world and man into existence. These ideas of Coleridge lay the foundation for Tolkien to argue that all imaginary creations contain “splintered fragments” of primary truth, as also imitating the creative act of the divine maker. Oscar Wilde, like Sidney, again defends the right of the artist to “lie,” to create beautiful, but untrue things. We showed in Chapter 4 that Wilde, in his “Decay of Lying,” responded to the realists of his day, arguing against realism in favor of writing that created beautiful but untrue things. We followed with a discussion of the four doctrines of the new aesthetics, described in Wilde’s essay, which establish a space for fantasy literature.

At this point, we turned to Tolkien’s lecture, showing that Tolkien also defended fantasy against realism. His idea of sub-creation. We went on to examine how Tolkien extended the ideas of Coleridge, picking up the threads of these previous critics and laying the foundation for what he calls the “fairy-story.” We then looked at how he took exception to Coleridge’s “willing suspension of disbelief,” replacing it with his notion of actual secondary belief, created in the reader through the authors sub-creation of a secondary world. After showing him tracing the history of the fairy tale in the early part of his lecture, we examined the first of the four qualities of the fairy-story, what he names fantasy. This quality contains the contrasting aspects of “arresting strangeness,” or
“enchantment,” and “hard recognition,” or the “ordinary.” Enchantment is the magical quality of the fairy-story, in other words, those elements that exceed the limits of our everyday world. The ordinary, on the other hand, is the direct referencing of the primary world of our daily existence, those elements that we recognize from the primary world. We showed that the ordinary in a fairy-story laid the groundwork for moments of enchantment, so that, in our example from Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins becomes an ordinary person—the kind that we could meet and be friendly with—whose ordinary life is disrupted by thirteen dwarves and a wizard, who convince him to go on a quest to destroy a dragon. We also showed that for Tolkien, these moments of enchantment—like the trolls or the dragon—had to be fleeting, passing quickly lest the reader’s secondary belief be overwhelmed. In the seventh chapter, we showed these contrasting aspects of fantasy as the operate in four contemporary fairy-stories: David Eddings’ *Belgariad*, Roger Zelazny’s *Amber*, Stephen R. Donaldson’s *Thomas Covenant*, and J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter*.

The second quality of the fairy-story, recovery, follows from the author’s sub-creation and the reader’s secondary belief, established at the author weaves moments of enchantment into the ordinary of the fairy-story. Recovery is the taking of ordinary things and placing them into the secondary world—like Bilbo’s repeated desire for hearth and home—where we re-appropriate them, or see them in a new light, the way a child sees the world. We showed that this idea is different from the formalist idea of defamiliarization, as the fairy-story strives for verisimilitude, rather than trying to call attention to itself. The third quality is escape, that we showed as escaping the monotony of our daily lives as also the limitations of our primary world. The final quality is consolation, the happy-ending
that contains a downturning, where happiness becomes as poignant as grief. With each of
these final three qualities, we showed them operating within both Tolkien's fairy-stories
and the contemporary fairy-stories named above.

This framework established by Tolkien in his lecture “On Fairy-Stories,” the qualities
of a Tolkienian fairy-story, as we have named them, allows us to turn our critical attention
to other fantasies like Tolkien's, many of them written in the past four decades, opening
the door for close examination of this strain of fantasy literature. We also avoid the trap
of trying to define precisely what fantasy is—the trap many of the critics have fallen into. I
believe, however, that these qualities have wider application than just simply the
Tolkienian fantasy. Since very little criticism has focused on this strain of fantasy
literature, we can see a need to apply it to this strain, but I think its application can and
should be wider than just secondary world fantasy. If we accept the proposition that all
writing is fiction, than we could argue that all writing creates a secondary world that we as
readers can enter, believing for the duration of the narrative that what we are reading is
true—it follows the rules of its “created world.” If such is the case, then it follows that all
writing is in this sense, is a fairy-story, so that the framework established by Tolkien, his
four qualities of fantasy, is applicable to all fiction. The qualities of fantasy thus become
the qualities of fiction generally, meaning that we should be able to see these four qualities
operating in any work of fiction—in any writing. We can say, at the very least, that
Tolkien's framework deserves more attention and its application to a wider sample of
fantasy literature.
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VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Clyde B. Northrup

Home Address:
4673 Swaying Ferns Dr
Las Vegas, Nevada 89147

Degrees:
Bachelor of Arts, 1988, Philosophy, with emphasis in Political Science
Brigham Young University

Bachelor of Arts, cum laude, 1996, English
University of Idaho

Master of Arts, English, 1998
University of Idaho

Publications:
“The Qualities of a Tolkienian Fairy-Story,” Modern Fiction Studies 50.4
(forthcoming, 2004)

“The Evolution of Addison’s Secondary Pleasures: Recapturing the Pleasure of
Imaginative Literature,” Deep Thoughts: Proceedings of Life, the Universe, &
Everything, XIX, An Annual Symposium on Science Fiction & Fantasy (forthcoming, 2001)

“Tolkien’s Revision of Coleridge,” Deep Thoughts: Proceedings of Life, the Universe,
& Everything, XVIII, An Annual Symposium on Science Fiction & Fantasy
(forthcoming, 2000)

Dissertation Title: “J. R. R. Tolkien’s Lecture ‘On Fairy-Stories’: The Qualities of
Tolkienian Fantasy”

Dissertation Examination Committee:
Committee Chair: Dr. Megan Becker-Lekrone, Ph. D.
Committee Member: Dr. J. Michael Stitt, Ph. D.
Committee Member: Dr. D. Timothy Erwin, Ph. D.
Graduate Faculty Representative: Dr. Paul Schollmeier, Ph. D.