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Abstract

Takes exception to the assertions of some critics that Donaldson is derivative of Tolkien. Sets out to show that "Donaldson's chronicles differ from Tolkien's trilogy in their intent, in their use of the shared materials of fantasy, and in their contemporary, American vision."

Additional Keywords

Donaldson, Stephen R. The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings

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John Clute claims that "Donaldson's use of Tolkien's mythopoeic method and plot structures" and his "heavy-handed paraphrases" of Tolkien's names demonstrate Stephen R. Donaldson's excessive dependence on *The Lord of the Rings*; yet he also admits that Donaldson's work is "essentially his own, fundamentally different from Tolkien's in tone, texture, and spirit" (Clute 267). It could reasonably be said that no serious modern fantasy would be possible without Tolkien's accomplishment, so in one sense John Clute is correct. Yet, the dependence of *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant on The Lord of the Rings* that John Clute sees as a "critical truism" does not have the éclat of a proverb that he assigns it. Some early reviews of Donaldson's *Chronicles* do compare the trilogy to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*: Christine Barkley argues that "Donaldson carries on the task Tolkien had begun Thomas Covenant, Donaldson's unusually reluctant hero, is the logical heir to Frodo Baggins as the unlikely common man upon whom the fate of the world rests" (50). Michael Moorcock grumbles that he owes "rather more to Tolkien than I find tolerable" (90).¹ But others reject such connections. Gordon Slethaug says that Donaldson never allows complete escape for anyone and that "It is this refusal to permit escape gives the *Chronicles* of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever its special message, interest, and distinction. It is this quality that separates it from Tolkienesque fantasy" (22). Brian Aldiss places Donaldson among those writers, "who do not think generically; they are not received generically" (277). From another reference comes this: "This is not a Tolkien-like fantasy with a great hero eager to do service for a troubled land" (Tyman 74).

Moreover, Tolkien and Donaldson have attended on the same muse² and use the elves, dwarves, wizards, and so on that belong to the library from which fantasy writers borrow their materials. Both trilogies are works of vast scope rooted in common traditions and inhabitants; corresponding symbolic geographies; circular voyages by unlikely protagonists; animated, vigorous, teeming worlds; rings of doom; and the power of song and tale. The leper Thomas Covenant and the hobbit Frodo Baggins are curious cousins of dissimilar background and temperament but of related quests, shared hardships, and mutual experiences. However, it would be a mistake to see Donaldson's work as merely another of the myriad—and invariably inferior—imitations of *The Lord of the Rings*. Donaldson's *Chronicles* differ from Tolkien's trilogy in their intent, in their use of the shared materials of fantasy, and in their contemporary, American vision as opposed to Tolkien's medieval British ethos.

The Created Worlds: Opposite Visions

In *Epic Fantasy in the Modern World* Donaldson pays tribute to Tolkien, who "restored the epic to English literature." But Donaldson states that in Tolkien's view we can dream epic dreams again "only if we understand clearly that those dreams have no connection to the reality of who we are and what we do." The saga of a past and lost beauty and grandeur, *The Lord of the Rings* has no direct connection to our day to day world, and we can apply Eric Rabkin's assessment of William Morris to Tolkien:

Morris distances history beyond the gulf of a discontented and impassable historical gap, and thus creates a history in a fairy land so that we can escape into a history that is demonstrably not progressive because it is not connected with our own times (93).³

The historical intent of *The Chronicles* is the reverse of *The Lord of the Rings* and underscores the difference between the British and American perspectives. The weight of the history of Middle-earth lies in the past so that any actions which take place in the present of the text are continuations of a plan sprung from previous ages. Conversely, Donaldson uses historical background to establish a story in which all looks to the future, not back to the past. Since Foul is the reigning, immutable demon of the Land, we know that he will return continually. Thus, each battle with Foul exists more as a preparation for the future than as a reflection of the past. The Second *Chronicles* occur forty thousand years later than the First, and their resolution points to the future: Covenant's timeless battle against Foul. Donaldson has said that he has a third series in mind, although he may never write it.⁴

Kenneth Zahorski and Robert Boyer propose a four-fold classification of high fantasy worlds which spells out the distinction between Tolkien and Donaldson. Middle-earth belongs to the class which is "clearly set in a primary world of the very distant past" and which is mythic and legendary in nature (60). Donaldson's Land falls into those "works set in secondary worlds vaguely defined in terms of their relationship to our world and to our time" (59). To Thomas Covenant, the Land is a dream and its inhabitants attributes of his life in the "real" world; thus, its "relationship to our world and to our time" is specific in terms of the central character in a way that Tolkien's historical tales cannot be. Zahorski and Boyer further assert that fantasists set the secondary world "in some sort of more direct relationship to the primary world enabling them to further define their secondary worlds by comparison with this one" (63), while Gary Wolfe points to the "deeper belief,

which permits certain fantasy works to become analogues of inner experience" ("Encounter" 13). Thus, the quintessential change between Tolkien and Donaldson is that the inhabitants of the Land and the Land itself are closer to us, more reflections of our "real world" than the mythical and folkloric characters of Middle-earth because they grow out of Thomas Covenant, the "one real man," as exponents of his condition as a leper.

Donaldson's aim is, in part, to make us all look at the issues of our present world through the magnifying glass of fantasy. His vision is not limited to simply a spiritual refreshing; it asks us to consider the manifold ills of our world and constitutes an attempt "to bridge the gap between reality and fantasy" (Epic). Thus, *The Chronicles* begin not only in contemporary America but with an appeal to formal realism. At the leprosorium, a doctor impersonally educates Covenant, and concomitantly the reader, about leprosy and its more subtly scourging effects:

the leper has always been despised and feared – outcast even by his most loved ones because of a rare bacillus no one can predict or control. Leprosy is not fatal and the average person can look forward to as much as thirty or fifty years of life as a leper. That fact, combined with the progressive disability which the disease inflicts, makes leprosy patients, of all sick people, the ones most desperately in need of human support. But virtually all societies condemn their lepers to isolation and despair (I, 17).

Our first view of Covenant shows us a woman pulling her child away from Covenant and berating him simply for walking on the public streets while others, "the people who knew him, whose names and houses and handclaps were known to him—he saw that they stepped aside, gave him plenty of room" (I, 1). On one hand, his subsequent translation to the Land amplifies his sense of separation from others, of the unreality of his condition, and of his inability to cope; but on the other the Land presents an alternative to Covenant's world. The Land and the people he meets offer him all the things that he has lost: compassion, sympathy, a place within the community, friendship, a surrogate marriage, and even health through setting. The evil which assails them, and him, arises from the nature of his disease and achieves both numinous and ethereal substance in Lord Foul and his servants, who enact the physical and psychological violence of Hansen's disease; psychic phenomena acquire an outward, understandable form and enact their natures accordingly.

It is important to remember that Covenant rationalizes this experience as a dream (I, 48, 77, 83, 93 etc.). Rosemary Jackson points out that fantasy is essentially a literature in which the unconscious emerges through projection of desire (64), and she affirms it has the end of subverting the governing law of the world in which one lives.⁵ The Land's alternate reality and laws accord with Eric Rabkin's observation that the fantastic is a perspective which contradicts other perspectives (4). The monolithic demands and laser beam focus of leprosy close Covenant off from even typical

daydreaming. This alternate view of reality offered by the Land counterpoints the prescribed perspective of his world, and through his experiences in the Land, Covenant is edged back to his lost humanity. Dream or not, this world provides what he lacks.

The Inhabitants

A comparison of the Lords of the Land and the wizards of Middle-earth illustrates Tolkien's and Donaldson's different uses of a common source: Tolkien's traditional hierarchic and mythic approach as opposed to Donaldson's American democracy and focus on one "real" man. From *The Silmarillion* we discover that the wizards are actually angelic ministers sent to oppose one of their own, Sauron (299-300).⁶ Among them, only Gandalf appears in any depth. Of the original five who sailed to Middle-earth, two have left the knowledge of the others entirely. Gandalf's wanderings, Saruman's isolation in his tower, Radagast's affinity for animals and solitude, and the disappearance of the others underscore their separate natures and distance from even the peoples of Middle-earth. They are archetypes of wisdom and power, mysterious and aloof agents whose role in a greater cosmic scheme is concealed from those they serve.

By contrast, the Lords of the Covenant novels are a wholly human group who function democratically and whose parents, wives or husbands, children, and homes are known to all. Each has a distinct personality, from the ascetic High Lord Prothall to the comic and cherubic Lord Hyrim, who values food and cheer above all things, to the stark, bitter Lord Verement. All of the lords have human flaws and weaknesses as well as strengths. At Manhome in a conversation with a bitter Covenant, Mhoram responds to the Unbeliever's resignation and cynicism with a laugh, and his "laughter emphasized the kindness of his lips" (I, 384). Tolkien rarely reveals such an intimate side to his wizards, and then only in glimpses of Gandalf's friendships with the hobbits and Aragorn. Gandalf does good because he is innately good. Similarly, no complexity of human personality or motive accounts for Saruman's fall from grace. Hubris, as a deadly sin, tells us all we need to know for Tolkien's purposes and allies Saruman, like the other wizards, to an archetype invested with universal significance.

Mhorham and Gandalf are similar, but Mhorham is the more human, more approachable figure. In their strength, pity for the weak, and appreciation of the quiet things in life, the two are kindred. When situations become bleak and victory seems impossible, all look to these two. But Gandalf, despite his easy laughter and flashing anger, remains a distant figure whose comings and goings are suspect to many and whose nature and purpose are hidden. In contrast, Covenant takes the measure of Mhoram and sees a man with "a crooked, humane mouth, and a fond smile" (I, 223). His love of his fellows and his compassion spell out his generous, sympathetic nature and show to Covenant something that he has lost in his "real" world.

When Covenant informs the Lords that he considers them and their world a dream, Morham, in a display of empathy which Covenant no longer expects, defends him, although they have just met: "Enough, sister Osondrea. He torments himself—sufficiently" (I, 260). Upon the death of his parents, "his eyes bled tears, and his voice wept" (I, 330). Morham is first a man and second a lord. Gandalf is of another order altogether, and his resurrection after his battle with the Balrog in Moria highlights his semi-divine nature. We must note that even Aragorn defers to Gandalf at all times, that he has no equals or peers except in his enemies. In Tolkien's hierarchal, quasi-medieval world, distinctions of rank and kind must be preserved because part of the wonder that infuses his creation arises from the majesty and nobility of the aristocracy, including the wizards. To become too acquainted with Gandalf, too familiar, would be to diminish him and to weaken the image Tolkien intended for him.

Furthermore, we can associate High Lord Elena with the only powerful female figure in *The Lord of the Rings*, Galadriel, greatest of the Eldar remaining in Middle-earth. Elena is a vibrant, young woman, a figure of the lost love and sexuality from which Covenant suffers, while Galadriel has the power and remoteness of a legendary British queen. We know of Elena's childhood, of her passion for the Ranyhyn, of her need for Covenant's love and support. She recalls to him both the lost love of his estranged wife and the lost opportunity to share his son's life. At times she seems a young, coltish girl, not the High Lord trammelled by a burgeoning and desperate conflagration. At Glimmermere, she plays tag with Covenant and ducks his head below the water. "She reappeared almost immediately, laughing almost before she lifted her head above water" (II, 145). Such simple moments sandwiched into the darkling hours of life touch him deeply and sooth his terrible distress. It is difficult to imagine the like from Galadriel, of whose gaze Sam says, "If you want to know, I felt as if I hadn't got nothing on, and I didn't like it" (I, 463); in her rejection of the Ring and of Sauron, "She stood before Frodo seeming now tall beyond measurement, and beautiful beyond enduring, terrible and worshipful" (473). Like Gandalf, Galadriel is of another order, like all the Elves not bound intimately to or ultimately concerned with the fate of others; she is a figure of immense age and the dignity of centuries. Elena is a woman who accedes in critical moments to immense power; Galadriel is an immense power in a woman's form.

Next, Donaldson's Giants, with their deep sadness, long lives, welling humor, and love of stories are prefigured by Tolkien's Ents: huge, powerful creatures who are slow to become roused, as Treebeard puts it, they are lethal if threatened. But in each, a gentle nature contradicts an imposing appearance. When Covenant meets Foamfollower, he observes a muscular being twelve feet high with "small, deepset, and enthusiastic eyes" which communicate "an incongruous geniality, of immense good humor" (I, 175). Treebeard studies Merry and Pippin

with a similar "half-knowing, half-humorous look" in his small, well-like green eyes (II, 85). Long names in deep, sonorous languages tell their histories and character, and the dearth of children spells tragedy and doom to both. Again, though, their ultimate natures are incongruent. Treebeard is a tree on whom human attributes have been grafted, an Ent to whom the world is a distant and passing tale. Even within Middle-earth, the Ents are the stuff of legend and fairy tale. Legolas tells the others that "even among us [the Elves] they are only a memory" (131). In fact, like those very Elves, the Ents are primeval expressions of a natural good. In them reside no moral doubts, no quandries of ethical decision, such is the legacy of their ancient memory and being.

Saltheart Foamfollower and the Giants have legendary strength and tell legendary tales which reach far back into time, but they contribute regularly to the warp and woof of life in the Land. Their source is more the tall tales of the American west, and they recall the likes of Paul Bunyon and other pioneering giants in the earth. Donaldson clearly features them as large, powerful people with recognizable human traits, chiefly booming humor. The Giants have greater size and thus more capacity to laugh or to suffer and endure the headache and the thousand natural shocks that others, including Covenant, are heir to. Foamfollowers' understanding of Covenant, his pity for the child Pietten, his charity to the dying caveknight at the battle of Soaring Woodhaven, and his despair at his own capacity for hate and violence all bring him closer to us. Covenant finds himself awed by Foamfollower's sensitivity and charity; the Giant's "capacity for gentleness surpassed him" (I, 387). Giants offer the bereft Covenant and the people of the Land a sturdy and unquestioning alliance. Where Treebeard and the Ents battle Saruman for their own purposes and retreat to Fanghorn Forest, the Giants have actively opposed Lord Foul and aided the Lords and people of the Land for ages.

In Donaldson's Gravelingas Tolkien's frequently stiff-necked and grasping Dwarves find a more pleasant countenance, but only the love of fine craftsmanship, stone, and mountain truly links the two. Gimli's confidence and comfort in the fortress of Helm's Deep is reflected in the Gravelingas' surety of the guttock of Revelstone even under siege. But here resemblances, including the physical, end. The Gravelingas are not Dwarves, although they take a page from the same book. The Dwarves of Middle-earth belong to their own race and, like the Ents although to a lesser degree, live isolated in their own mountain abodes; few are evident in *The Lord of the Rings*, and Gimli, as their representative, demonstrates the characteristics we are meant to associate with Dwarves: immense strength and endurance, obdurate loyalty and prejudice, and hidden depths of emotion. Gimli's close friendship with Legolas, an Elf of tree and green, is an anomaly, and his reaction to the caves at Helm's Deep reinforces the typical Dwarf's essence in his love of stone and mountain.

A Gravelingas, like a lord, is not a member of a separate people or race; he is a master of stone-lore who can work with rock through a communion with it. The Gravelingas are integral members of their communities and stand high in the regard of their fellows. Covenant's first meeting with Trell shows him a "bluff, hale man" whose "presence felt imperturbable and earthy, like an assertion of common sense" (I, 64). His paternal solicitude for his daughter combined with his initial hospitality and acceptance of Covenant fashion another touch of humanity that has been missing in his life. Tohrm, the Hirebrand of Lord's Keep, has a "clean and merry face" and a "voice that seemed to bubble with good humor" (II, 72), a portrait of contrast to the restrained, grave Trell. He even moves Covenant out of his dour self-absorption to "say a word to good Boril-lar," who does cherish it. Thus does his light illuminate the heart and warm the spirit. To the end he remains both cheerful and optimistic, implicitly believing that the Unbeliever will save them.

Like the vague association which links Dwarf to Gravelingas, the bond between Tolkien's Elves and the Woodhelvinnin is a very tenuous connection attributable to their distant but common stock. The Woodhelvinnin share with Tolkien's Elves woodcraft, keen eyes, and mastery of the bow and marksmanship, as well as a passion for tree and leaf, deep wood and starlight, albeit less brilliantly or loftily. Tolkien's Elves are more elemental, sprung from a deep past with its own ancient rhythms, while Donaldson's Woodhelvinnin recall people in a mid-western community. Covenant spends one night in Soaring Woodhelven where he is tested by frightened and worried guardians as children frolic among the branches of trees, playing tag and chasing one another. People come and go, performing their daily tasks and going about their usual routines. Covenant stays in the modest home of the tree's Hirebrand and eats an equally modest meal of cheese, bread, grapes, and springwine. Here is the world he has been deprived of, the activity and sense of place rent from him by leprosy. The Woodhelvinnin have no supernatural powers or weapons, no exotic foods or airs to brush away the rigors of his journey; he and Atiaran receive no seemingly magical gifts, as Aragorn and the company do, to aid them upon parting. Perhaps most tellingly, the aura of sadness and antiquity that permeates Lothlórien and removes it even from the "real" world of Middle-earth does not exist here, and nothing compares to the house of Elrond and the massive power and dignity invested there. Soaring Woodhelven is identifiable as a country town, populated as any small, rural town is, and does not compare to the regal majesty of Caras Galadon in Lórien, sharing the common foundation of a tree only. But it does offer Donaldson another bridge between reality and fantasy through its quotidian inhabitants and its fantastic construction. In his world and his own small rural town, Covenant fails all tests and is outcast; in Soaring Woodhelven he finds acceptance through the Hirebrand's testing, even though he does not entirely merit—or desire—it.

We in the "real" world do not expect to meet Elves or Dwarves. Elves themselves recall a time gone by and a world which is no longer ours. Yet we, like Covenant, wish to live in and share the simple and healthy lives of the Woodhelvinnin and Gravelingasses. Their communities, their sense of rightness or justice, their unity are what is denied to Covenant in his "real" world. The reaction of those in the Land stands in stark contrast to his alienation by his own fellows in his world. He is not shunned, because no one can see his illness; even the concept confuses them. He craves the acceptance and purpose or place that everyman searches for in life, but as a leper he needs it even more. The wanton, Foul-like cruelty of his neighbors—the persecution by the sheriff, the razor blade inserted in his food, the arson of his stable—has so jaunted him that he cannot trust the Land. Gradually, his treatment by those in the Land and the position they accord him erodes his mechanical defensiveness and aloofness and will eventually propel him toward a transformed, reinvigorated perspective in his own world.

While they have certain similarities, Lord Foul and Sauron are radically different expressions of evil. The salient features of each, we note, emanate from their sleepless, unblinking eyes: the yellow greed and venom in Foul's (II, 451) balance the piercing, red malevolence of Sauron's (III, 270). Both have many slaves and servants and hide themselves in deep, remote fortresses; both wish to crush all opposition and reduce the world to a desert of nightmare. Yet Sauron, as a force, is removed physically and psychologically from us; we never see him. He represents a generic evil compounded of mindless hate and enmity. His goal is to cover all in shadow, "to bring them all and in the darkness bind them," and to obliterate the light of goodness. An analogue of Satan, Sauron is symbolic not literal, universal as opposed to particular.⁷ He is the composite, traditional figure drawn from western Christian demonology and meant as the animation of the powers of hell.

Where Sauron is primarily metaphorical, Foul is basically synecdochic and operates as the active expression of a specific type of corruption. Foul does not wish to bind all in darkness; he wishes to twist and deprave, to hold something up to what it should be as opposed to what it has made itself through his machinations. Foamfollower comes to despise himself because he sees that in fighting Foul, he comes to resemble Foul. The Giants lie down and die at their own hands, in a sense, because they perceive in themselves the capacity for evil that Foul incarnates, the heart of darkness in all men. It is no accident that one of their own slays them one by one and meets no resistance, because they are actually fighting a deeply repressed part of their own being. Foamfollower adumbrates their demise in Treacher's Gorge: "It may be that hope misleads. But hate—hate corrupts. I have been too quick to hate. I become like what I abhor" (I, 408). During his temptations before Foul, Covenant comes to understand his demon's nature: "Lord Foul was only an externalized part of him-

self" (III, 462); he is the ills of leprosy given life and force, a disease that works unseen and unfelt until it is too late. Foul's immanence, his proximity to humanity, makes him defeatable, and Covenant's command to the Lords to heal themselves and thus purge themselves of Foul unlocks the secret of despise and overcomes it. As their laughter mounts, Foul regresses from adult to squalling infant to absence. His ending underscores his difference from Sauron: Sauron is destroyed; Foul is merely rendered impotent for a while and will return.

Foul's most powerful servants, the quasi-vampiric Ravens, lack any being of their own, much like Sauron's Nazgûl, and both share a resultant loathing for life and a lust for blood. Before the gates of Minas Tirith, Gandalf faces the Nazgûl chief, who flings back his hood to expose a crown: "and yet upon no head visible was it set. The red fires shone between it and the mantled shoulders vast and dark" (III, 125). In essence, they are extensions of the malice of Sauron and possess no individual traits or nature, not even varied aspects of evil. Although they once were men, in an age long past, they retain no scintilla of human quality and become amorphous, tenbral horrors of Sauron's nightmare reign.

By contrast, the Ravens are three brothers with identifying names, who must seize and possess human form in order to give vent to their destructive detestation of life. Like Foul, they pervert from within, using the weaknesses of those they exploit and violating them. Thus, they impinge upon our consciousness as the id gone wild. When the Raven takes Triock, he/they do to Covenant all the things Triock has dreamed of doing; the Raven uses the Stonedowner's deep-seated abhorrence and resentment of Covenant to his own purposes. Even after the Raven has left him, Triock seems possessed: "In the place of such distortions was an extravagant bitterness, a rage not controlled by any of his old restraints. He was himself and not himself" (III, 361). Hate has conquered and corrupted him, the same hate which Foamfollower is so appalled to discover within himself. Seen in this light, the possession of the Giant triplets by Ravens becomes a logical extension of this execration, a hallmark of leprosy, the natural tendency of all to understand it as a condign punishment for some moral blemish. "In the absence of any natural, provable explanation of the illness, people account for it in other way, all bad—as proof of crime or filth or perversion, evidence of God's judgement, as the horrible sign of some psychological or spiritual or moral corruption or guilt" (I, 18).

In the perversion wreaked by Foul and the Ravens is the image of the American national psyche after the Vietnam War. Its symptoms are a loss of innocence, the loss of faith in a previously assumed manifest cultural goodness, the recognition of what power can make one become, and the fear that the truths of the past were nothing but illusions, the self-serving records of the victors who write their own history. Slethaug makes a case for The Chronicles as typically American "in the manner of Haw-

thorne, Melville, Ellison and Barth where innocence cripples, leading to despair over the knowledge of pain, suffering, and evil" (22).

Christine Barkley distinguishes between the nature of evil in *The Lord of the Rings* and Donaldson's *Chronicles* with a historical argument (51-3). World War II threatened the free peoples of the world with domination by a Master Race, the major fear of the period. Unmaking the Ring led at one stroke to solving the problem of Sauron, just as dropping the bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki did the same. On the other hand, the ills of Covenant's post-Vietnam world are multiple: pollution, terrorism, the proliferation of weapons in all countries, loss of ideals, and so on. No single action can solve such decentralized threats, and Lord Foul becomes the appropriate villain and Covenant the appropriate hero for such a world. Foul returns in another guise, and Covenant represents the average person's sense of frustration, alienation, and impotence before this protean menace.

The nature of the armies of evil signals anew the difference between Tolkien's world and Donaldson's. Orcs, trolls, Shelob the great spider, Wargs, the carrion-bred steeds of the Nazgûl—all have bestial connotations and belong to the realm of the goblins, wicked wolves, and flying monsters of folklore and myth. They are not allegorical or symbolic except in that they represent the hostile powers of a minatory and mysterious world in which man must be alert at all times. They are creatures sprung from nightmare, from the recesses of the reptilian core of the brain where the dark is impenetrable, half-seen, half-imagined monsters, Grendels lurking on the fringe of sanity and society and contemplating mindless, incomprehensible chaos. In contrast, many of Foul's sickening creatures are human in form, the product of horrible mutations. Many recall the effects of leprosy or of deformity due to other diseases, birth defects, or the radiation exposure of (generally bad) science fiction:

Most of them were vaguely human in outline. But their features were tormented, grotesquely arranged, as if some potent fist has clenched them at birth, twisting them beyond all recognition. Eyes were out of place, malformed; noses and mouths bulged in skin that was contorted like clay which had been squeezed between two strong fingers. (III, 119)

These beings are so monstrous and hideous precisely because they are, broadly speaking, human, and as lepers are perceived, sinners in the hands of an angry god. The outer vestiges of humanity remain in them, but all qualities and traits we associate with being human have been denied them as a result of the moral depravation, the parody of extreme leprosy, they have been submitted to, one which finds countenance in their forms.

Julius Zanger and Robert Wolf contend that modern fantasy has undergone a shift from an earlier, predominantly British view of magic to a primarily American perspective. In the traditional schema, the hero

is everyman and the battle primarily a moral one against an evil whose magical abilities are far superior to those of the good; magic, in this view, is primarily immoral and threatening. In the emerging American outlook, magic is an amoral, neutral force, and the struggle between good and evil hinges on a hero who must master "the technology of magic" and use it better than his foe (31-3). Magic, then, is a natural resource available to anyone with the power and will to use it.

At the center of each trilogy is a ring of power whose apparent simplicity denies its hidden potency but whose natures are wholly different. Sauron's One Ring is the extension, like the Nazgûl, of his power and malice. As Roger Sale points out, "With power enough to bind everything, Sauron's world can only be destroyed with a bang" (282). Gandalf explains to Frodo, "he let a great part of his former power pass into it, so that he could rule all the others" (I, 82). The ancient verses from Elven lore spell out its particular purpose:

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.
(*The Fellowship of the Ring*, vii)

Beyond abstract hatred and supernatural puissance, the Ring embodies the desire to possess, to entrap. The one year that Frodo carried it so works upon him that once it is destroyed he must seek another type of healing and so he leaves Middle-earth.

Covenant's ring is a neutral source of power, not a moral agent bent on evil. He keeps his ring because his wife gave it to him; it is the last lifeline to his old, innocent life and inspires the memory of all that a wedding ring should: "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 his vestigial humanity" (I, 27). He repeatedly tells himself that he should have thrown it away but can't, for that action would indicate that he has capitulated and sees himself as damned irrevocably from his fellow beings. Mhoram whispers to Covenant, "You are the white gold" (III, 59). He cannot understand the white gold and its power because he does not comprehend himself, and he cannot control it because he cannot control himself. The ring and its wild magic incarnate all the possibility denied him as a leper, all the life and force that he craves but cannot find a way to grasp. His plight is an analogue of the post Vietnam American distrust of power in the face of amorphous and ever changing evils. Before the direct and comprehensible evil of Sauron, a reflection of World War II's Nazi threat, Frodo has no qualms about forsaking the use of power and seeking to destroy it.

Between Frodo Baggins and Thomas Covenant lies a universe of differences. Frodo belongs to a bucolic and

mythic world in which the past is alive; Covenant lives in the twentieth century where even the recent past is quickly forgotten. Frodo is cheerful, friendly, happy, and respected; Covenant is bitter, violently angry, and abhorred. If Frodo exemplifies the standard development of the protagonist moving from virtuous obscurity through tests of character to heroic achievement, Covenant provides an inverse dynamic: Frodo begins as normal and moves toward abnormality (Sauron) whereas Covenant moves from abnormality back toward normality. Frodo has plumbed his own depths and seen Sauron peering up out of the darkness of his soul; he has discovered the potentiality of evil within himself and cannot reintegrate himself into the innocent life of the Shire. He realizes the temptations of power and evil, the effect of the Ring, which Gandalf and Galadriel shunned. Hobbits are, of course, basically human in all the ways that are important, like telling tales while sitting around a fire eating and drinking. But Frodo and Bilbo travel routes of initiation, of maturity because hobbits mark a special stage of ethical development. They begin as children and grow up to self-sufficiency. Covenant begins as pariah, as unclean, as fallen adult in the "real" world. Frodo must learn that he has an inner darkness, but Covenant's is transmogrified to outer negatives in the form of leprosy, hate, rage, bitterness, and self-disgust. His progression is in a sense a healthy regression as he slogs back to normality. His rejection of hate, of Foul himself, when he tells the Lords and Foamfollower to heal themselves and to laugh Foul into insufficiency, undertakes a proportionate healing, both physically and spiritually, within himself. His recovery creates the recovery of the Land and looks to the future; Frodo's destruction of the Ring ends an era of the past.

The endings of the works raise one last difficult and abstract issue: that of atmosphere or what John Clute refers to as the spirit of each work. For the denouement of each summarizes the gap between them. Samwise returns home to a wife and rapidly growing family, accepts his child on his lap, and quietly announces in front of the fire, "Well, I'm back" (III, 385). Domestic tranquility, order, and happiness reflect the condition of the world at large. Tolkien's story has the prescribed happy ending tintured with the sadness and sense of loss that high fantasy so often invokes, but order has been restored, the world renewed, and good rewarded. The macrocosmic scales of justice have weighted and balanced themselves, and all's right in Heaven and on Earth.

Covenant, by contrast, wakes up alone in a hospital bed and after a brief discourse with a doctor remains alone. He has caused or been implicated in so many deaths—Lena's, Atiara's, Triock's, Elena's, Foamfollower's—that sentimentalism would invalidate his entire experience. Donaldson does not try to make the reader feel good, does not assert the universal joy that Tolkien ascribes to the consolation of fantasy ("On Fairy-Stories" 85-6). To gloss over his crimes, to deny the utter evil perpetrated by so many, to place a moral bandage on spiritual wounds—

any shirking from the grim vision of the trilogy violates its intent and admits that despite appearances, things were never all that bad. But they were, and in our world they still are. Frodo lives, but Covenant survives. And that is how their creators would have them be.

Notes

1. Moorcock complains that "not enough modern practitioners [of fantasy] pay sufficient attention to the invention of their own specific landscapes" (70), and he cites Donaldson as a follower of Tolkien who does nothing new (66).
2. Humphrey Carpenter quotes a letter written to Tolkien by C.S. Lewis in 1949 about his first reading of *The Lord of the Rings*, the praise and judgement of which could fairly be applied to Donaldson's "Chronicles" and to Covenant's dark quest: "In two virtues I think it excels: sheer sub-creation — Bombadil, Barrow Wights, Elves, Ents — as if from inexhaustible resources, and construction. Also in gravitas" (204).
3. Donaldson disavows any intention of emulating Tolkien or *The Lord of the Rings*. He attributes his vision to the whole process of literature and says that Tolkien is an important part of that process: "Tolkien influenced me powerfully by inspiring in me a desire to write fantasy. But when I actually began writing the Covenant books, I stayed as far away from Tolkien's example as the exigencies of my own story allowed" (153).
4. Donaldson says, "In the First Chronicles . . . Thomas Covenant faces Lord Foul and defeats him. In the Second . . . Thomas Covenant surrenders to Lord Foul and accepts him. In the last Chronicles . . . Thomas Covenant becomes Lord Foul. Following the psychological paradigm through, what happens at the point that you become your own other self is that you become whole, and the universe is made new" (Personal Interview).
5. Jackson takes as her starting point Todorov's system of the uncanny as opposed to the marvellous. When a person experiencing the fantastic hesitates, the famous moment of Todorovian hesitation, there are two possible explanations: the uncanny, which can be understood by natural causes; and the marvellous, which has supernatural causes (25-6). Donaldson's work causes a hesitation in both us and Covenant because we don't know if this is uncanny (dream), or marvellous (a supernatural translation to another world).
6. In *Unfinished Tales* Tolkien sketches the history of the arrival of the Istari, or wizards, in the north of Middle-earth; "We must assume that they [the Istari] were all Maiar, that is persons of the 'angelic' order, though not necessarily of the same rank" (394); thus, Gandalf has no counterpart in the Land.
7. Colin Manlove complains that there is no balance to Sauron, that he is too powerful a force (*Modern Fantasy* 190-93). Sauron is *The Lord of the Rings*'s title character, but there is no opposition in Middle-earth that can stand against him. Manlove says "Tolkien has done what Milton is sometimes accused of having done: he has unconsciously let the weight of his imagination fall on the wrong side" (192). This is the point that Covenant works backwards from toward a recognition that good is more real and evil more ephemeral. Foul's layers melt away as the Lords laugh him into a non-entity. There is no mystery here, simply the refutation and defeat of despite itself. Where Sauron surpasses human nature and understanding, Foul is overcome by both because he is contained by both.

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