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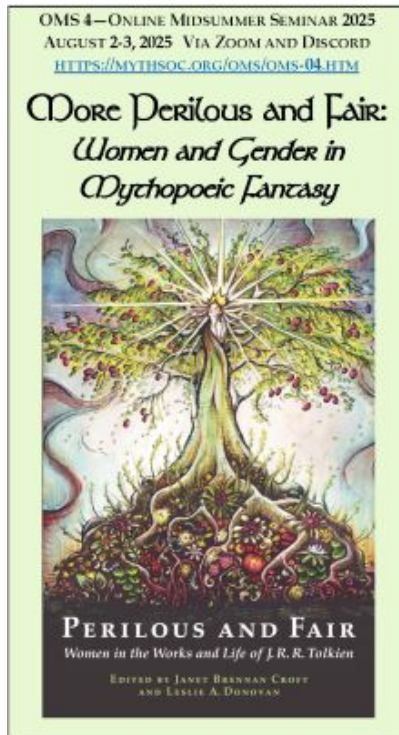
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Abstract

Applying C.S. Lewis' metaphor of authors being cathedral-builders to understand intertextual writing (combining influences with innovation) provides a fascinating lens to understand T.H. White's Arthurian work. Exploring how White's *The Once and Future King* influenced J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (particularly her characters Vernon and Dudley Dursley) provides a particularly interesting example of how fantasy authors use intertextuality to create original works.

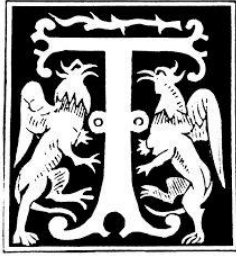
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THE WART, THE WIZARD, AND
THE CATHEDRAL:
APPLYING C.S. LEWIS'S
INTERTEXTUALITY THEORY
TO T.H. WHITE AND J.K. ROWLING

C. CONNOR SALTER

HOW ARE AUTHORS LIKE CATHEDRAL-BUILDERS? C.S. Lewis uses the cathedral metaphor in his posthumously published essay “The Genesis of a Medieval Book” to describe how a medieval text may contain multiple influences, just as a cathedral may contain works from various periods (39). Medieval texts, like cathedrals, may best be understood as the product of multiple people, not a single artist (*ibid.*). Brenton Dickieson argues that Lewis’s cathedral metaphor effectively summarizes the act of intertextuality: “how an author or text uses other authors or texts” (88). One subset of intertextuality is bricolage—making a text from various pieces. Dickieson argues that the cathedral metaphor better summarizes what bricolage does: “an architect/artist/writer uses what is previously there—the oddments left over—to create his or her work of art” (90). Understanding authors as cathedral-builders especially helps in studying medieval texts; as Lewis argues throughout his essay, they feature many layers of contributions by anonymous authors. However, intertextuality can also be understood as what every effective author does: they create something new by combining oddments from classic works with their own ideas.¹

Understanding authors as cathedral-builders proves especially interesting when exploring T.H. White. A contemporary of the Inklings (1906–1964), White is best known for his 1958 Arthurian book *The Once and Future King*. White began his Arthurian writings in 1937, planning a “preface to Malory” (*Letters to a Friend* 93). Five Arthurian novels followed—the first, *The Sword in the Stone*, in 1938. White’s final volume, *The Book of Merlyn*, was posthumously published in 1977; it ends with White calling himself Malory’s “humble disciple,” who continues Malory’s vision (193). Most readers know *The Sword in the Stone* (still in print in its original version) or the four-in-one volume *The Once and Future King* (which collects the first through fourth books in a revised story).

¹ If this seems a broad definition of intertextuality, Dickieson observes that intertextuality has been used to describe many processes; in fact, “it could be that the value of the term is demonstrated in its very elasticity” (88).

Thus, *The Once and Future King* is doubly intertextual: White retells Malory, then retells his story in revised form.

Critics often call White the twentieth century's most important Arthurian writer, which implies innovation, yet he called himself Malory's disciple. Understanding White as an intertextual Arthurian innovator (building on classic works, adding his own perspective) opens the door to discussing another intertextual layer: fantasy authors he influenced. Circumstances provide strong evidence that White's writing informed J.K. Rowling's fantasy fiction. Therefore, considering the resonances between Rowling and White's writings provides a useful lens for exploring fantasy texts' intertextual layers.²

Scholars have explored Rowling's work from many angles, not least comparing her work to J.R.R. Tolkien's.³ However, little research has been done on how White's writing compares to Rowling's work, outside of several short studies comparing White's Merlyn to Rowling's Albus Dumbledore and Arthurian echoes in Harry Potter's adventures.⁴ The absence is particularly interesting as a (discredited) fan debate over whether Rowling plagiarized fantasy author Neil Gaiman accidentally highlighted how much White informs both of their works.

² Rowling has been a controversial author since 2020, when she published an article stating, "When you throw open the doors of bathrooms and changing rooms to any man who believes or feels he's a woman—and, as I've said, gender confirmation certificates may now be granted without any need for surgery or hormones—then you open the door to any and all men who wish to come inside. That is the simple truth" ("J.K. Rowling Writes About Her Reasons" 1). For a recent look at how the controversy affects scholarship on Rowling's work, see Joseph R. Young, "Harry Potter and the Other." For this essay's purposes, I take the view that discussing an author's work does not necessarily indicate condoning the author's views. Further, discussing Rowling as an intertextual author, how her work builds on prior influences, may enrich this very debate. While only time will show Rowling's final legacy, her wide readership means that her work will influence many fantasy authors. Discussing Rowling's influences and innovations gives a fuller picture of what makes her work popular. Hence, discussing White-Rowling influences enriches every aspect of the Rowling debate: helping critics and supporters understand the work better and have more effective dialogue.

³ For a recent example, see *Ethics and Form in Fantasy Literature: Tolkien, Rowling and Meyer* by Lykke Guanio-Uluru.

⁴ Phyllis D. Morris uses White's work to argue that Albus Dumbledore fits a Merlyn role ("Elements of the Arthurian"). Carissa Johnson compares Merlyn and Dumbledore as magical tutors ("First-Rate Eddication"). Alessandra Petrina interprets Harry removing a sword from a hat in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* as alluding to the climactic scene in *The Sword in the Stone* (101).

BOOKS OF MAGIC AND HARRY POTTER

In 1990, DC Comics hired (then mostly unknown writer) Neil Gaiman to create the four-part miniseries *The Books of Magic*. The story involves four men with sorcerous powers giving an 11-year-old British boy, Timothy Hunter, a guided tour of the magic worlds that DC Comics fantasy characters inhabit.⁵ Like Harry Potter (who appeared seven years later), Timothy is an important child: he is “a natural force, for *good* or for *evil*, for *magic* or for *science*, and it is up to *us* to channel *that* force for *good*. And, perhaps, for *magic*” (8, original italics). Artist John Bolton drew the miniseries' first issue, depicting Timothy Hunter as a black-haired adolescent with glasses, wearing t-shirts and jeans (8)—a description surprisingly similar to Harry Potter's. Like Harry, Timothy gains an owl companion—Doctor Occult turns Timothy's yo-yo into an owl (19). Gaiman's four-issue series won several awards and had various spinoffs and continuation series, keeping the work in public consciousness long enough for some early 2000s comic book fans to debate whether Rowling plagiarized *The Books of Magic*. However, the debate never gained much traction: it was limited to several newspapers and a popular comic book culture guide (Cronin 74-75). Today, pop culture articles on famous franchises' predecessors will sometimes discuss the debate (see Berlatsky). However, the situation prompted Gaiman to respond, leading to insights into how White informed his and Rowling's stories.

Gaiman supported Rowling when plagiarism accusations appeared. In a 2001 interview with Lindsay Richardson, he argued that Harry's resemblance to Timothy was coincidental—a plagiarist would make sure their hero looked different. Gaiman further suggested the parallels were elements he and Rowling each independently borrowed from White's *The Sword in the Stone* (1). In fact, Rowling has said that the Wart is “Harry's spiritual ancestor” (“JK (Joanne Kathleen) Rowling”). *The Sword in the Stone* also features a child (the 'Wart,' eventually revealed to be Arthur Pendragon) learning about magic through a sorcerous educator (Merlyn). The Wart has an owl friend (Archimedes, Merlyn's pet owl). Gaiman's and Rowling's combined comments provide good evidence that White influenced Rowling's fantasy fiction—an unusual find since scholars cannot always document influences. Therefore, studying White-Rowling resonances provides a unique opportunity to consider Rowling as an intertextual author. It provides scholars a chance to consider what she built on to make her cathedral, with verified evidence that an earlier cathedral-builder influenced her work.

⁵ Dylan Harrocks, who wrote a *Books of Magic* spinoff, has discussed how the magic education concept is a well-used archetype that predates Gaiman and Rowling's stories (Singh 1).

As noted earlier, current White-Rowling scholarship has provided some comparisons between Harry and the Wart. For example, they both have magical mentors (Merlyn and Dumbledore). A key unexplored similarity is how much White and Rowling fit these characters into similar plot scenarios. White and Rowling both present heroes caught between a known (or mundane) world and an exciting (or magic) world where adventures (and a magical mentor to help survive the adventures) await. The Wart initially lives in Sir Ector's castle but meets Merlyn in the magical Forest Sauvage. Harry lives at Privet Drive with the Dursleys but learns about magic at Hogwarts.

In Farah Mendlesohn's terms, both stories are a combination of intrusion fantasy and portal fantasy. In portal fantasy, "the protagonist goes from a mundane life—in which the fantastic, if she is aware of it, is very distant and unknown (or at least unavailable to the protagonist)—into direct contact with the fantastic, through which she transitions, to the point of negotiation with the world via the personal manipulation of the fantastic realm" (*Rhetorics of Fantasy* xix-xx). In intrusion fantasy, the magical element "takes us out of safety without taking us from our place [...] it has as its base the assumption that normality is organized, and that when the fantastic retreats the world, while not necessarily unchanged, returns to predictability—at least until the next element of the fantastic intrudes" (xxii). Mendlesohn has described how Rowling's Harry Potter stories begin as intrusion fantasies (such as the owls intruding on Privet Drive with Harry's Hogwarts acceptance letter), but "very rapidly transmute into almost archetypal portal fantasies, reliant on elaborate description and continual new imaginings" (2). White may also be seen as using intrusion fantasy elements—as shall be discussed later, when Merlyn arrives in the Wart's world, he upsets its hierarchy by humiliating the Wart's guardian, Sir Ector. There is also a case to be made that White and Rowling use an element of wainscot fantasy, where the magical civilization is concealed in mundane surroundings.⁶ Kerrie Anne Le Lievre argues that Rowling's magical world is a "wainscot society" hidden inside the Muggle world (26). White's Forest Sauvage may be seen as a magical realm hidden (or at least ignored) within the mundane nation of England. As will be seen, White's characters in the mundane world sometimes admit the possibility of magic in the forest, but avoid discussing or interacting with its magic.

By combining portal fantasy (the heroes going back and forth between magic and mundanity) with intrusion fantasy (magic feels like an invasive force into the mundane world) and an element of wainscot fantasy (the magical world is hidden but not so far away that there's no hope of seeking it out), White and Rowling create a specific plot dynamic. Their heroes can commute between the

⁶ For a fuller definition of wainscot fantasy, see David Langford ("Wainscot Society").

magical and mundane worlds, but it is always a difficult negotiation because the mundane world sees magic as disturbing. Because both heroes have magic in their backgrounds, and magic is seen as disturbing, both heroes' families (White's Ector and Kay, Rowling's Dursleys) treat them poorly for not fitting the mundane world's standards. As shall be seen, the heroes continue to suffer even after they discover their magic worlds: their mundane families respond in ways that create tension throughout their childhood years.

However, if authors are cathedral-builders, combining old material with new ideas to produce a new story, the question is: how does Rowling use and innovate on White? As shall be seen, she and White both use a problematic foster father and a bullying foster brother to explore this magic vs. mundane world tension. The common elements, in Rowling's innovations, show how she performs an intertextual process.

THE PROBLEMATIC FOSTER FATHER: VERNON DURSLEY AND ECTOR

Rowling and White do not start their stories from the heroes' perspectives. Instead, they start with a detailed scene of the hero's problematic foster father. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* presents most of its first chapter from Vernon Dursley's point of view (1-8). *The Sword in the Stone* opens with Sir Ector discussing with his friend, Sir Grummore, what to do now that his son, Kay, and his foster son, the Wart, have lost a governess (*Sword* 9-12). The mundane authority figure's perspective frames the hero's place in the story.

Arthurian scholars know Ector as the man who adopts the infant Arthur. White imagines Ector as a blustering authoritarian with authority based on wealth or position, not wisdom. When Ector talks with Sir Grummore, the conversation mostly involves Ector declaring that the boys need supervision and offering Sir Grummore more alcohol; finally, Ector decides to make a reminder, to take a quest, to find a tutor (*Sword* 10-12). From the start, Ector appears comically foolish. He is often lovably foolish, but always a fool, a deliberate caricature more than a well-rounded character.

White's many details about Ector's castle (the mundane world) suggest that White finds it an interesting but flawed world. For example, after Ector's conversation with Sir Grummore, Ector tells Kay and the Wart to behave and sends them to help with haymaking. White uses the haymaking scene to give a detailed view of the overall castle community (*Sword* 12-16). Elisabeth Brewer interprets the scene as bucolic—that White presents an idealized medieval world (189). White displays affection for Ector's mundane world, but doesn't describe Ector's mundane world as perfect. He goes from showing the Wart doing a tedious task (haymaking) to entering a magic forest; then the Wart discovers a magician's cottage and has breakfast featuring a magic mustard pot

(*Sword* 35-40). White juxtaposes Ector's and Merlyn's worlds: one is magical and exotic, the other mundane and predictable.

Throughout the book, White shows hypocrisies in Ector's mundane world. It is a world where only the legitimate noble's son can become a knight, despite Kay lacking the necessary maturity. A world where knights like Sir Grummore and Sir Pellinore joust for fun rather than a grievance, pretending to offend each other to follow "the proper formula" (*Sword* 86). A world where Sir Pellinore spends his life hunting the Questing Beast but nurses it to health when he finds it sick (*Sword* 186-188). The mundane world has its good points; like Ector, its inconsistencies can seem lovable. However, White shows it is an inconsistent world needing reform.

Merlyn's entrance into the story hints that reform has arrived. Merlyn's tutoring apparently involves teaching the Wart basic medieval skills, but mostly it involves magical experiences. Merlyn turns the Wart into a series of animals: in the original *The Sword in the Stone*, the Wart becomes a fish (*Sword* 49-58), a merlin hawk (99-109), a snake (151-161), an owl (189-204), and a badger (229-240).⁷ These exceptional experiences matter because Merlyn wants the Wart to be something beyond a typical medieval knight or king. Elisabeth Brewer observes that Merlyn doesn't equip the Wart to be a good knight by medieval English standards: the education gives the Wart "the morality of a nineteenth-thirties pacifist" (180). Merlyn does not explain his education plan's goal at first,⁸ but makes it clear once the Wart has grown to become King Arthur: he wanted the Wart to see the world through animals' eyes because, unlike humans, animals govern themselves without warmongering (*The Once and Future King* 638) (*The Book of Merlyn* 15, 33). Merlyn may not transport the Wart to a semester at his alma mater, the underwater magic school Dom-Daniel,⁹ still, his education

⁷ The revised *Sword in the Stone* in *The Once and Future King* includes two scenes originally in *The Book of Merlyn* manuscript: being turned into an ant (121-130) and a goose (164-177).

⁸ Joseph Torres discusses how Merlyn gives his pupil experiences and refuses to give verbal answers, pushing the Wart to discover the problem and solution for himself ("Time in Teaching,' Part 2"). In this respect, Merlyn's education model resembles Dumbledore's choice to let Harry experience dangerous adventures and learn for himself how to combat evil. After his first adventure, Harry muses that Dumbledore must have known he and his friends would try to stop Voldemort and "instead of stopping us, he just taught us enough to help" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 302).

⁹ White did not originate Dom-Daniel. Ebenezer Cobham Brewer explains that it first appears in the *Continuation of the Arabian Nights* by Jacques Cazotte and Dennis Chavis, published 1788-1793, where it is a "fabled abode of evil spirits, gnomes, and enchanters" located underwater, near Tunis (353). Gaiman references it in *Books of Magic*: one character tells Timothy, "We travel through the fair lands, child. Call them *Avalon*, or *Elvenhome*, or *Dom-Daniel*, or *Faerie*, it matters not. It is the land of summer's twilight" (107, original

gives the Wart a magical worldview: a post-medieval worldview fitting White's pacifist beliefs. Merlyn's education plan is to create a king who overturns convention and reforms Ector's mundane world into something new.

Rowling also starts her protagonist's adventure by describing an authoritarian figure representing the mundane world. The first chapter of *The Sorcerer's Stone* begins with Vernon Dursley going about his day (1-8). While Rowling describes events from Vernon's point of view, the inside view does not humanize him: he seems childish. He overhears conversations about the Potters being in trouble and fears they may visit him, never worrying about their well-being (4-5). Le Lievre believes the Dursleys are the readers' primary view of the Muggle world. She uses this scene to argue that Rowling casts Vernon and other Muggles as "deficient in imagination and sympathy" (27). Like Ector, Vernon is immediately depicted as a childish man, a caricature of how an adult should behave.

Vernon's first scene also establishes that, like Ector, he claims authority through force rather than respect. Readers learn that Vernon's workday highlight is shouting at people and making "important phone calls" (4). Rowling never details why Vernon shouted or what he discussed on the phone: Vernon's forcefulness and pride are more notable than what he said. Like Ector lecturing Kay and the Wart to avoid trouble until a tutor can watch them (*Sword* 12), the scene suggests an authoritarian man using force because he cannot command any other way. Rowling reaffirms in her second book that Vernon must bully or lie to command respect. The first chapter of *The Chamber of Secrets* comically depicts Vernon making his family rehearse hospitable behavior for when a potential client visits for dinner (5-7). Vernon and his family "might be kindly termed dysfunctional" (Arden and Lorenz 64), so he playacts and threatens to maintain his authority. Like Ector, he has nothing if those tactics fail.

The fact that Vernon is a selfish, childish supervisor employed in a technological field—his company makes drills (*Sorcerer's Stone* 1)—gains a larger significance. Petrina highlights how Rowling routinely contrasts technology with magic: "every reference to the Muggle world is punctuated by mentions of modern appliances, generally implying a not too subtle criticism of modern technology" (99). Furthermore, Rowling depicts Harry avoiding modern technology at Hogwarts, underlining what separates him from his Muggle foster family (Petrina 99). Readers first experiencing the Muggle world via Vernon is key to Rowling's magic versus technology dichotomy. Harry eventually meets a wizard, Arthur Weasley, who finds technology fascinating and tinkers with it (*Chamber of Secrets* 39) (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* 46). However, readers

italics). Lewis uses similar imagery to White in *That Hideous Strength*: Merlin has "the last vestiges of Atlantean magic" (198).

get their defining view of Muggles through Vernon—“a narrow-minded, nit-picking, no-nonsense marketing man, who works for the unspeakable industrial conglomerate, Grunnings” (Brown 128). Vernon represents the Muggle world’s flaws—technology as a dispassionate, self-centered enterprise—much as Ector represents medieval feudalism’s flaws.¹⁰ Rowling takes White’s idea of a hypocritical father figure, but uses him for a different critique (against modern technology, not medieval feudalism or war). The cathedral-builder combines old material with new ideas to create new directions.

THE MAGICAL WORLD BREAKS IN: ECTOR AND VERNON RESPOND TO MAGIC

The neglected orphan discovers a magic world after years in the mundane world under the problematic foster father’s rule. Harry gets his Hogwarts letter. The Wart finds Merlyn’s cottage. Both encounters cause the problematic foster father to oppose magic.

When Harry gets his letter, Vernon strives to keep Harry from reading it—including destroying letters and boarding up his mailbox (*Sorcerer’s Stone* 31-46). Ultimately, Vernon moves his family to an island cabin, where Hogwarts groundskeeper Hagrid comes to deliver Harry’s letter personally (*Sorcerer’s Stone* 43-46). Vernon unsuccessfully threatens Hagrid with a rifle and rants about keeping Harry away from Hogwarts (*Sorcerer’s Stone* 43-60). Vernon only stops protesting after Hagrid casts a spell, giving Dudley a pig’s tail (*Sorcerer’s Stone* 59). Vernon the bully is bullied into submission, yet never admits he’s in the wrong.

Ector’s first meeting with Merlyn follows a similar, though less violent, pattern. After the Wart’s magical breakfast, Merlyn announces he will be the Wart’s tutor and they travel to Ector’s castle. Ector meets them at the castle entrance.¹¹ When Merlyn mentions being a magician, Ector asks, “white magic?” (*Sword* 42), suggesting he doesn’t want his charge learning anything unhealthy. Ector does not quite display Vernon’s outright contempt for magic with this comment, but he seems suspicious. Vernon might be seen as this suspicious tendency made more grotesque.

When Merlyn assures Ector that he only uses white magic, it becomes clear that Ector actually doesn’t have much respect even for good magic. He treats Merlyn as a fraud, dismissing various wonders—Merlyn materializing testimonials, making a tree appear, creating a snowstorm—as tricks (*Sword* 42-43). After the snowstorm, Ector gives Merlyn the tutoring job before he does

¹⁰ Similarly, Mendlesohn argues that Dursleys creates a secular technology vs. old England dichotomy, allowing Rowling to protest against secular industrial society (“Crowning the King” 292).

¹¹ Since Merlyn was disguised as a beggar when he left the infant Arthur at Ector’s castle (*Sword* 256), Ector does not recognize Merlyn.

anything else (*Sword* 43). Still, he never admits Merlyn performed genuine magic. The two men do not openly argue like Hagrid and Vernon, but the interaction shows they represent two different viewpoints—one celebrating magic, the other opposing or disregarding magic.

Ector's later interactions suggest that while he accepts Merlyn as tutor, he avoids situations where he might have to backtrack his anti-magic comments. Ector lets Merlyn tutor the boys but never visits the tutoring sessions—avoiding situations where he will see magic happen. The only situation where Ector gets close to admitting he believes in magic is when he worries whether a visiting hunting party will encounter unicorns and dragons in the Forest Sauvage (*Sword* 166-167). However, Ector never meets such animals (again, White never shows castle residents other than Kay or the Wart experiencing the forest's magic). Ector may be repeating rumors to himself as he frets, not admitting he believes in magic animals. As Vernon refuses to mention Hogwarts before dropping off Harry at the train (*Sorcerer's Stone* 88), Ector avoids admitting defeat. The problematic foster father uses silence and space to avoid things that disrupt his mundane worldview.

The fact that Kay and the Wart are the only permanent castle residents who spend much time in the magic world (the Forest Sauvage) suggests that Ector's problem may be the fact he is an adult. Elisabeth Brewer argues that White sharply divides the children's lives and the adults' lives, emulating Kenneth Grahame's books *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* (24). Ector, the adults' leader, rarely experiences magic (and never in the magic Forest Sauvage). Kay, still a child, enters the Forest Sauvage, where he hunts anthropophagi (*Sword* 119-149), gets captured by Madame Mim (*Sword* 61-75), and helps Robin Wood combat Morgan le Fay (*Once and Future* 100-114). Like Vernon, Ector lives a grownup life in the mundane world, separated from the magic world that children (or those with childlike dispositions) can experience.

Ector appears less antagonistic to magic over time, but his changing attitude may not indicate maturity. Near the end of *The Sword in the Stone*, Merlyn announces that his charges have grown up so he will resign as tutor. Ector asks him to stay: "Now, now, don't say that [...] You just stay here and teach me, or be the librarian or something. Don't you leave an old man alone, after the children have flown" (*The Sword in the Stone*, 245). While Ector has warmed to Merlyn, his pleading tone establishes Ector wants Merlyn's company for selfish reasons, not genuine friendship. He is still not interested in Merlyn as a person.

The sequel, *The Queen of Air and Darkness*, shows Ector slightly warmer to Merlyn but perhaps distant. Ector appears at a council where King Arthur discusses using Merlyn's ideas to create a new government (*Once and Future* 246-248). Ector shows no antagonism to Arthur's talking about Merlyn and magic,

but shows no support either. He says nothing. White keeps it ambiguous whether the problematic foster father has grown to accept magic. Ector may not perpetually talk about how much he hates magic as Vernon does, but neither progresses past their first meeting with the magician. The magic educator and the problematic foster father come from different worlds with different worldviews. The key difference is that Rowling makes the problematic foster father's attitude to magic more verbal, more aggressive. Her cathedral uses a similar structure to White's but adds a grotesque element.

Exploring whether Ector has Vernon's abusive behavior further shows he is Vernon's less grotesque spiritual ancestor. Unlike Vernon, Ector does not physically abuse his charge. In fact, Ector can be affectionate—when the Wart returns with Merlyn, Ector scolds him for being out all night, but the narrator observes that Ector likes the boy's bravery (*Sword* 42). When the Wart feels lonely as Kay's knighthood ceremony nears, Ector comforts the Wart and recommends he visit Merlyn (*Sword* 227). Ector cares for the Wart, and the Wart cares for him: when Ector kneels to his new king, the Wart cries, "Oh, father, don't kneel down there like that, because it breaks my heart" (*Sword* 254). Though the Wart values Ector as a father figure, Ector does not live up to his fathering role. He does nothing to stop Kay from bullying Wart. He gives the Wart a dwelling, but Merlyn gives the Wart a worldview. Ector lacks Vernon's abusive edge; sometimes, his foolishness is humorous, making him a sympathetic fool.

Vernon is abusive, very foolish, but never sympathetic. Still, the difference lies more in degree than type.¹² Ector and Vernon both oppose the hero's learning about the magic world and they both represent a mundane world's flaws Vernon is Ector's negative traits enlarged, the good moments stripped away. Rowling also seems to have borrowed from Roald Dahl, another acknowledged influence—she included *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* on a list of ten recommended books for children (Higgins 1). As Mendlesohn observes, Vernon and the other Dursleys are grotesque abusive guardians comparable to the aunts in Roald Dahl's story *James and the Giant Peach* ("Crowning the Prince" 288-289). As the series goes on, Rowling innovates on Dahl by making one of

¹² Gaiman provides a similar father absence in *Books of Magic*, via a distant father. Timothy's father only appears in two scenes. Early in his adventures, Timothy calls his father and realizes an enchantment means his father believes Timothy is visiting family in Brighton (*Books of Magic* 90). After his adventures, Timothy returns home; his father never looks up from the TV as he enters the house (*Books of Magic* 197). Thanks to the aforementioned enchantment, he assumes Timothy is joking when Timothy asks if he's been gone several days (*ibid*). Timothy's father is not abusive, but emotionally absent; like Vernon or Ector, he creates a father-shaped gap in the hero's life.

these abusive guardians, Petunia, more complex,¹³ but Vernon remains the same. So, Rowling redevelops White's model by taking an element from Dahl, and possibly an element from White's parental guardians in *Mistress Masham's Repose*,¹⁴ to make the father figure more grotesque. In doing so, she increases the magic-mundane world contrast: one world is loving, the other hostile.

BULLYING FOSTER BROTHERS: KAY AND DUDLEY

White and Rowling's problematic foster fathers lay the foundation for readers to understand these two stories as tales about tension: the mundane world needs help, the magic world provides tools to create a savior, but the hero struggles against the foster father to become a savior. Once White and Rowling have laid that foundation, they use another character, the bullying foster brother, to increase the mundane-magic tension. Once again, Rowling takes White's cathedral and adds some grotesque touches: Dudley is like Kay, but darker. As shall be seen, the darker depiction raises crucial questions about how White and Rowling depict their heroes' suffering.

White does not depict Sir Kay as a kind foster brother. He frequently verbally abuses the Wart, calling him stupid (*Sword* 95) and taunting him for not having parents (*Sword* 14, 223). When Kay first meets Merlyn, the magician warns Kay: "Thou wast ever a proud and ill-tongued speaker, and a misfortunate one. Thy sorrow will come from thine own mouth" (43). The warning intimidates Kay (*ibid*), but he does not change his attitude.

White also establishes that Kay is spoiled. In combat training, the Wart gets spanked with a sword for making mistakes, but Kay never gets spanked despite frequently making mistakes (*Sword* 9). Kay uses his privilege in childish ways—he takes an unprepared falcon out for falconry, then calls it "a rotten, stupid hawk" when it fails to deliver (*Sword* 18). Kay then leaves the Wart alone in the woods to retrieve the falcon (*ibid*). Like Dudley with his electronics, Kay handles possessions in an entitled manner, never accepting responsibility for damaging them. Since Kay uses his position (being Ector's legitimate son, not an

¹³ Petunia shows unexpected nobility when she refuses to throw Harry out after a dementor attack (*Order of the Phoenix* 40-41), and Dumbledore later tells Harry that while Petunia may not love him, her choice to take him in as a baby ensured his safety (836). It becomes clear in *The Deathly Hallows* that Petunia desired magic as a child and her jealousy grew into hate (663-670). So, while Dahl keeps the abusive aunts grotesque and eventually kills them, Rowling lets the grotesque aunt become three-dimensional.

¹⁴ As of this writing, I have not located any source in which Rowling has mentioned reading *Mistress Masham's Repose*, though it is a strong possibility. The scene in the novel where the parental guardians, Miss Cook and vicar Mr. Hater, lock Maria in a dungeon and her Lilliputian friends rescue her is not dissimilar from Harry's friends rescuing him after Vernon locks him in his room in *The Chamber of Secrets*.

orphan like the Wart) to get what he wants, his behavior suggests a tension between being part of an adult's world and a child's world. As noted earlier, Brewer observes that Kay apparently accesses magic because he is a child. However, Kay makes it clear that he sees the Wart as beneath him: Kay puts himself on the same level as the adults (the proper castle residents). Kay strives to be seen as an adult, part of the mundane world, even as he experiences the child's world where magic is available.

Time shows that Kay relates to magic differently than the Wart. His attitude demonstrates what separates the magic world from the mundane world. Kay sometimes sees Merlyn do magic: he witnesses Ector meeting Merlyn and has adventures with Wart. However, Kay never experiences the most radical magic: Merlyn cannot turn Kay into animals (*Sword* 114, 117). Kay deduces that the Wart is getting some magic training and resents it. After a fight when the Wart won't admit he had an adventure, Kay sobs and says, "Merlyn does everything for you, but he never does anything for me" (*Sword* 111). The Wart later tells Merlyn that Kay is jealous and wishes Kay could experience the more radical magic too (*Sword* 113). Kay's jealousy of magic distinguishes him from his father's animosity toward magic. However, Kay's jealousy stems from discovering someone has something he cannot have, not a genuine desire for Merlyn's magical education to transform his life. In this respect, he is not dissimilar from Aunt Petunia, whose jealousy of her sister's magical powers ultimately leads her to hate her sister and her sister's son. Fortunately for Kay and the Wart, the jealousy does not lead to such contempt: they reconcile after their fight (*Sword* 118), but it demonstrates a rift: a magical worldview molds one boy, a mundane world molds the other.

As Kay ages, the rift increases. After several scenes of Merlyn tutoring Kay, all the tutoring scenes show the Wart alone with Merlyn. Even Kay's tutoring scenes often juxtapose his behavior against Merlyn's values. For example, Merlyn and the Wart discuss birds' beauty and Kay walks in, announcing he's late because he was practicing his crossbow and killed a thrush (*Sword* 195). Elisabeth Brewer argues this scene contrasts Kay's "predatory attitude" and the Wart's "understanding of and sympathy with" animals (177). The rift has become clear by Kay's knighthood ceremony; the Wart feels saddened that he cannot join Kay as an equal, only as a squire (*Sword* 224). Merlyn explains the knighthood ceremony to the Wart, dismissing it as "just a lot of fuss" (*Sword* 225). Merlyn, not the knights, telling the Wart about the ceremony demonstrates how the boys have changed: one molded by Merlyn's standards, the other by Ector's.

The worldview difference climaxes when the Wart pulls the sword from the stone. Advice from Merlyn's lessons helps him remove the sword (*Sword* 250-252). Kay tries to take credit for pulling the sword from the stone,

only admitting the truth when his father presses him (*Sword* 252). Despite his few experiences with magic and Merlyn's warnings, Kay remains a blowhard and bully—which is to say, a ruder version of his father. The problematic foster brother is a more nuanced variation of the problematic foster father, but still the father's son.

Dudley follows a similar but darker role as Harry's bullying foster brother. While biologically Harry's cousin, growing up in the same house means they can be seen as foster brothers. Like Kay, Dudley is spoiled—his parents indulge his tantrums, even fake ones over wanting more birthday gifts (*Sorcerer's Stone* 21-22). Even when Dudley's parents enact limits, like a diet, they cannot discipline him effectively: Vernon grumbles about the diet rather than enduring it to give Dudley a good example (*Goblet of Fire* 26-28). Like Kay, Dudley's "proper son" status leads to his being spoiled.

Dudley also fits the Kay profile in the way he follows the problematic foster father's values. As mentioned earlier, Rowling uses Vernon to present a dichotomy between magic and (at least poorly used) technology. George M. O'Har observes the parallel between Vernon and Dudley: the father makes technological tools for a living, and Dudley's life is filled with technological toys (863). Dudley also mimics his parents' attitudes—hating magic and treating Harry as worthless. Even when Dudley's diet creates a rift with his parents, he reconnects with his father's values. He becomes athletic, and Vernon praises him for doing well in boxing, "the noble sport" (*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* 11). Dudley is devoted to his father's mundane world and his father's mundane values. Rowling presents a bullying foster brother who has the same fundamental flaws as Kay, although explored in more detail—his childhood is covered in seven books instead of one. There is a cathedral (White's material), and then there are the innovations (more details about the childhood, rare moments of rebellion to avoid going on a diet) which show Rowling innovating on past material.

OTHER CHILDREN'S RIDICULE: HARRY AND THE WART AS ISOLATED ORPHANS

As Vernon is Ector's worst traits increased to create an abusive figure, Dudley is Kay's bullying traits increased to violent proportions. He bullies Harry from the start: he pokes and pinches Harry during his first weeks at Privet Drive (*Sorcerer's Stone* 17). Harry continues for years to be Dudley's "favorite punching bag" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 20) and target for his gang (31). Sometimes Dudley uses verbal abuse, such as mocking Harry for being apparently friendless (*Chamber of Secrets* 9) and jeering at Harry's nightmare screams (*Order of the Phoenix* 15). Unlike Kay, Dudley never appears jealous of magic. Like his parents, Dudley views Harry's magic as unnatural and Harry as worthless. Rowling makes Dudley darker than Kay, much as she makes Vernon darker than Ector.

White and Rowling's bullying foster brothers create an unusual melancholy—an area where they innovate on a classic fantasy trope. Being orphans puts Harry and the Wart into a classic fairy tale tradition. As Lynn Whitaker observes, “isolation from parents or of exclusion from the family unit or home [...] is almost a prerequisite for a successful child protagonist in both children's and non-children's media” (26). The problematic guardian who belittles the hero's desire for adventure (Ector and Vernon) is also a common genre trope.

However, fantasy orphan protagonists usually have siblings or confidants who share their values and adventures. Frodo is an only child but has Bilbo and his friends (Merry, Pippin, and Samwise). The Pevensie children have each other and Professor Kirke. In *Mistress Masham's Repose*, the orphan Maria has a retired professor¹⁵ who helps her escape her abusive guardians. The Wart and Harry have no siblings or easily accessible confidants to ease their pain.¹⁶ The Wart only has Merlyn. Harry has a “variety of surrogate family situations” (Arden and Lorenz 64)—Hermione, Ron, and Ron's family. However, Harry always returns to Privet Drive for the summer. Harry and Wart know they are lonely, and the primary children they grow up with from infancy to adulthood affirm what the mundane world tells them: they are worthless. Their pain resembles what would happen if Lucy Pevensie visited Narnia alone multiple times and her siblings always treated her as foolish or insane. Or, given what Gaiman dubbed “the problem of Susan,” the pain that would come if Lucy's siblings had Narnian adventures but all three pretended Narnia didn't exist. White and Rowling take a common cathedral element (the misunderstood orphan) and innovate (a deeper sense of isolation and melancholy) to enter darker territory. As shall be seen, the darker territory adds a surprise to their heroes' savior motivations.

However, White and Rowling's innovation on the common trope creates a dilemma. Their heroes are isolated until they have little reason to trust other people. Their heroes must become saviors, which includes helping those who harmed them. Neither White nor Rowling fully resolve this dilemma: both heroes find their savior journeys do not lead to everyone thanking them, which means they can both be seen as suffering servant saviors.¹⁷ However, White and

¹⁵ Given that the character used to be a professor, this may be another element where White influenced Rowling, providing inspiration for Dumbledore. It's also possible that Kirke provided some inspiration, as Rowling has cited Lewis's influence on her writing (Renton 1)

¹⁶ For comparison, Gaiman gives Timothy Hunter no siblings in *The Books of Magic*, but Timothy's general rudeness to authority figures may indicate bravado masking loneliness.

¹⁷ There may be a Tolkien parallel here. Robert Steed notes many scholars see Frodo as “a type for Christ-as-priest or for Christ-as-suffering-servant” (7). However, the Shire thanks

Rowling both add unexpected nuance to the bullying foster brother, which leads to their heroes showing unexpected affection.

THE FOSTER BROTHERS AGE: KAY AND DUDLEY'S HINTS OF REDEMPTION

While White and Rowling use the bullying foster brother to torment the protagonist, neither keeps the character purely malicious. Ector and Vernon may stay caricatures, but Kay and Dudley change with age, despite never making full redemptive arcs.

As mentioned earlier, White saw his Arthurian epic as building on Malory. Therefore, to understand his deception of Kay, it's important to understand that White saw Malory's Kay as "a decent chap with an inferiority complex" (*Letters to a Friend* 93). Consequently, White creates empathy for Kay even when Kay behaves poorly. He describes Kay's behavior (bullying, spoiled behavior, and selfishness) as stemming from insecurity. Kay's jealous fight with the Wart over magic lessons underlines his insecurity: he feels inadequate and craves what others have. After their fight, the Wart talks to Merlyn and makes this telling comment: "I like Kay, you know, and I think people don't understand him. He has to be proud because he is frightened" (*Sword* 114). Kay's victim sees hidden depths in him.

White's second book again shows Kay as a complex, though perhaps smarter, antagonist. *The Queen of Air and Darkness* shows Kay and Arthur as adults, with Merlyn advising Arthur about a reform plan: Arthur must convince English nobles to stop treating war like a lark (*Once and Future* 225). Kay participates in Arthur's extended conversations with Merlyn about war theory. Kay opposes Merlyn and argues that war is justified. Kay loses most, but not all, of the debates. He wins one debate where Merlyn argues that a leader should not start a war to impose a better way of life. Kay responds that Arthur is about to do just that—defeat King Lot so Lot will follow Arthur's new laws (*Once and Future* 267). Ultimately, the mundane world that Kay wanted to fit into ends with Arthur's new plans. Arthur announces he will create the Round Table and a new chivalric tradition (*Once and Future* 248). In other words, White's second book shows Kay as having wise moments (he wins one argument with Merlyn) but still unreformed. His father's mundane worldview still controls him.

The rest of *The Once and Future King* balances empathy for Kay with honesty about his fallibility. Kay is described as "keen-eyed and sarcastic" (*Once*

Frodo when he returns and removes Saruman, and he lives there happily before leaving for the Undying Lands. White ends his story with Arthur dead, though rumored to return (*Book of Merlyn* 192). Rowling ends her story with the Muggle world never aware Harry saved it (and he chooses to live in the magic world, not quietly among Muggles). Harry and the Wart save their mundane worlds, but those mundane worlds never appreciate their sacrifice or express gratitude.

and *Future* 456). People dislike him for not controlling his tongue (362). He bullies a young kitchen worker named Gareth, dubbing the boy “Pretty Hands” (589). However, not everyone hates Kay. Lancelot stands up to Kay’s bullying Gareth (554) but protects Kay from attackers (362). Lancelot finds Kay’s foolishness amusing: catching up with another knight, Lancelot asks, “Has Kay been making a fool of himself lately?” (416). When Kay believes Lancelot has died, Kay weeps and admits to being a “mean blackguard” (457). While White never shows Kay making a clean redemption arc, these empathetic scenes suggest Kay can be decent. His inferiority complex keeps him from fully changing, but he has good moments.

Rowling achieves a similar effect with Dudley. *The Order of the Phoenix* opens with a surprising scene: Harry saving Dudley from dementors (15-19). Dudley has given Harry no reason to value his life, and Harry has shown no affection for Dudley. Often, Harry has enjoyed retribution for Dudley’s abuse, like threatening to use magic around Dudley (*Chamber of Secrets* 8-9) or goading Dudley about his mother’s nickname for him (*Order of the Phoenix* 13). The altruistic rescue institutes a redemptive shift. Dudley and Harry do not become friends, as Kay and the Wart do after their fight. However, no new bullying follows. Dudley becomes less abusive—and, like Kay, he eventually admits his unwanted foster brother has value. Dudley eventually thanks Harry for saving his life (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* 40-43). The scene—Dudley saying, “I don’t think you’re a waste of space” (40), which Harry observes is like Dudley saying “I love you” (41)—is filled with tension between Dudley growing, yet never admitting his flaws. Like Kay, Dudley remains his father’s son too much to behave like a mature adult.

As with Kay and the Wart, the reconciliation proves partial. *The Deathly Hallows* ends with a detailed portrait of a middle-aged Harry. He is married with children (*Deathly Hallows* 753) who do not yet know his fame (757). He stays in contact with his godson, who may soon marry into Harry’s family (*Deathly Hallows* 756-757). His friends Ron and Hermione have married each other and had children (*Deathly Hallows* 755). Rowling even establishes that Harry’s old nemesis, Draco Malfoy, has become a married father (*Deathly Hallows* 755-756). Given the detailed picture of Harry’s life, it’s telling that Rowling never mentions Dudley. No Dudley coming along for the ride to Platform Nine-and-Three-Quarters. No Harry telling his wife that Dudley wants to meet at a pub and catch up. No Dudley arriving at the Hogwarts train with a son or daughter who he was surprised to find have magic powers. Like White, Rowling avoids having this problematic foster brother completely change. However, in both cases, the hint of redemption makes the character more than just a caricature. The partial redemption also allows for scenes showing the hero cares more for the bullying foster brother than readers would assume.

SURVIVAL OR ALTRUISM: THE FOSTER BROTHER INFORMS THE SAVIOR JOURNEY

As mentioned in the Ector-Vernon section, the Wart's savior journey becomes about reforming flaws that he first sees in Ector. The Wart becomes a king who reforms Kay and Ector's hypocritical medieval society. Harry has a similar journey: he experiences magic vs. Muggle bigotry through the Dursleys, then grows up to defeat Voldemort. Voldemort's anti-Muggle campaign displays the same bigotry but from a different angle. If the Wart and Harry are redeeming what they experienced in their foster families, what leads them to do so? Why do they save mundane worlds that have brought them so much pain?

White gives the Wart heroic motivation by making him a forgiving and trusting character. The Wart is a "born follower" and "hero-worshipper" (*Sword* 15) who loves Kay despite his flaws. As noted earlier, he sees Kay's insecurities and empathizes with him. He also regards Ector as his father despite Ector's buffoonery. Readers are unsurprised that such a trusting character would see good in the mundane world.

Rowling provides more complex motivations for Harry. Initially, Harry has no affection for Dudley. He would likely reject fighting Voldemort if his primary motivation was making sure Muggles like Dudley were safe. Instead, chapter one of *The Sorcerer's Stone* provides survival motives: Lord Voldemort killed his parents and wants Harry dead. Near the book's final act, when Harry realizes that Voldemort is returning, he tells Ron and Hermione that he must fight to avoid being killed and to preserve the wizarding world (*Sorcerer's Stone* 270). Harry frames his mission as survival and preserving the magic world—not the mundane world. Rowling builds her cathedral—taking an older work and adding new touches—by making her hero initially more interested in his survival.

By the series' final book, the book in which Harry achieves some form of reconciliation with the family whose abuse he struggled to survive,¹⁸ Harry's mission has evolved beyond vengeance and self-preservation. He knows that Voldemort's agenda involves subjugating Muggles. He is disgusted by a sculpture depicting enslaved Muggles (*Deathly Hallows* 242). By now, Harry has taken the same journey as the Wart: his mundane family showed him the mundane world's flaws, so he recognizes his trauma and strives to produce a better world.

Harry's evolving savior motivations (from self-preservation to altruism) may seem less noble than the Wart's consistent savior motivations.

¹⁸ Not only is this the book where he has the semi-reconciliation with Dudley, it's the one where Petunia seems reluctant to leave Harry without saying anything (*Deathly Hallows* 42) and Harry learns about Petunia's secret childhood jealousy of magic. Harry develops a more mature view of his family as he develops more mature views about what he must stand for.

However, Rowling's story requires a different journey. She begins with the same model White uses (a mundane-magic world tension, a problematic foster father, a bullying foster brother, isolation, and an unexpected journey to become a savior). However, she innovates on the past work not only by adding a female guardian who eventually proves to be complex (Aunt Petunia) but also by adding grotesque elements from another influence (Dahl). The result is that Dudley and Vernon are more verbally and physically abusive than Kay and Ector, which means that her hero starts in a darker place before he matures (discovering Petunia's complexity and experiencing Dudley's unexpected gratefulness). It's not surprising that Harry is more interested in self-preservation than nobility at his journey's beginning. Rowling does provide hints that Harry has some exceptional altruism: Dumbledore observes that Harry's ability to love, "given everything that has happened to you, is a great and remarkable thing" and differentiates him from Voldemort (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* 509). Still, Harry's savior journey would be implausible if he began as a pure altruist. If writing a story is like building a cathedral, taking the past work and adding new, gothic touches, Rowling adds some surprising touches along the way. However, these surprises fit the new, darker fantasy story she aims to tell.

THE FRODO DISCUSSION: COMPARING ROWLING AND WHITE TO TOLKIEN

Fantasy scholars may wonder at this point if these parallels between Harry and the Wart are unique enough to argue that Rowling builds on White's ideas. After all, orphan heroes are common in fantasy literature.¹⁹ Some Tolkien readers may note that Frodo is an orphan, adopted by Bilbo after his parents' drowning (*The Lord of the Rings [LotR]* I.1.23). Given that more scholars have explored Tolkien-Rowling connections than White-Rowling connections, one might ask: does Harry resemble Frodo more than the Wart?

Certainly, all three are orphans preordained to become saviors. Gandalf tells Frodo that "something else at work" beyond Sauron's plans determined that Frodo should receive the Ring via Bilbo (*LotR* I.2.54-55). A prophecy before Harry's birth states that he will destroy Lord Voldemort (*Order of the Phoenix* 834-844). Time travel knowledge shows Merlyn that the Wart is destined to become Arthur Pendragon.²⁰

¹⁹ For an in-depth exploration of orphanhood in Lewis and other classic twentieth-century children's fiction, see Mackenzie Sophia Balken's thesis "'Everything's a story.'"

²⁰ If preordained means a past figure predicted current events, the Wart may not strictly be preordained (Merlyn time travels from the future). However, the timeline need not be crucial, if the key point is preordination's source. Prophecy is traditionally understood to come from a divine source, and theologians like Augustine and Boethius argued that God dwells in eternity, outside conventional time.

All three protagonists have complex savior journeys. Harry learns Dumbledore raised him not to be a victor, but "like a pig for slaughter" for Voldemort to kill (*Deathly Hallows* 687). The Wart fails to create a new England, but Merlyn tells him Camelot will become a long-remembered standard (*Book of Merlyn* 4-6). Frodo fails his task, but his pity for Gollum makes it possible for Gollum to destroy the Ring.

All three heroes feel caught between a mundane world and a magic world. Frodo starts in the mundane world of the Shire before he travels to the outer, adventurous regions of Middle-earth. Rowling depicts the mundane and magic worlds interacting with each other a little differently than Tolkien and White. In Tolkien and White's stories, the magic and mundane worlds exist on the same geographic map. Rowling's magic world hides within the mundane world, through enchantments and Muggles being physically unable to see some magic creatures, such as dementors.²¹ Regardless, all three stories feature a conflict between the magic and mundane worlds (between leaders, between worldviews) that the hero must resolve.

All three authors use Arthurian forest imagery in their magic worlds. Petrina notes how Hogwarts castle, with its mysterious lake and forbidden forest, evokes Arthurian motifs (102). She particularly highlights the forest: in Arthurian stories, characters routinely experience magic in a mysterious, forbidden forest (105-106). Corinne Zemmour discusses how Tolkien uses Arthurian imagery as Frodo and his companions travel into the Old Forest outside the Shire ("Tolkien in the Land of Arthur"). White has the Wart discover magic by going into the Forest Sauvage, where he meets Merlyn (*Sword* 30).

All three authors also establish that the mundane world opposes magic. Frodo doesn't experience quite as much scorn from his family for being interested in magic as Harry and the Wart do, but he does know the Shire's other hobbits frown on adventure.

While all these elements make Harry and the Wart resemble Frodo, Tolkien presents some key differences. These differences show that while Rowling certainly builds on Tolkien's ideas, the Wart, not Frodo, is Harry's spiritual ancestor.

FRODO VERSUS THE WART AND HARRY

While these three heroes have similarities, Tolkien's hero has some critical differences. Harry and the Wart are their stories' primary saviors; Frodo carries

²¹ Gaiman uses the same approach in *The Books of Magic*. John Constantine tells Timothy he will never notice magic if he rejects it, but embracing magic will change his everyday experiences: "it's like stepping off the sidewalk into the street. The world still looks the same, on the surface, but you can be hit by a truck at any second" (86).

half the savior responsibilities alongside Aragorn. Frodo is noticeably older—Whitaker sees Frodo’s journey as a child losing innocence (26-27), but Frodo begins his journey as an adult, so his story is not a *Bildungsroman* narrative.²²

More crucially, Frodo experiences magic as something negative: his savior journey revolves around destroying a magical object that he is cautioned never to use. The Wart and Harry experience magic as something positive that enables them to become saviors. Harry must train to wield magic so he can control his inherent powers and eventually defeat Lord Voldemort. The Wart must undergo Merlyn’s guided magical experiences to learn exceptional things preparing him to be an exceptional king.

The fact that Rowling and White’s heroes are children living in mundane worlds, yet on *Bildungsroman* journeys where they must embrace magic, signals the most crucial difference between their stories and Tolkien’s story. Frodo, an adult who can leave the mundane world without supervision, only takes two trips outside the mundane world—to destroy the Ring, and to sail to the Undying Lands. The Wart and Harry both live for many years in their mundane worlds, so their narratives involve constant commuting between the mundane and magic worlds. The Wart’s adventures happen either in Sir Ector’s castle and the surrounding Forest Sauvage. White provides hints of a larger magic world when Merlyn refers to learning magic at Dom-Daniel (*Sword* 72). However, he never takes the Wart to his alma mater: the Wart’s magical education primarily involves lessons occurring outside the castle, in the magic forest. As the Wart alternates between the mundane world (Ector’s castle) and the magic world (the Forest Sauvage), Harry alternates between living in his mundane world (Privet Drive) and a magic world (Hogwarts). In Mendlesohn’s terms, Frodo negotiates how to transition from the mundane world to a fantastic new place, but only does so rarely. Harry and the Wart spend years making routine transition journeys.

The constant mundane-to-magic-world commuting becomes key to White and Rowling’s stories; it generates tension between those two worlds. Tolkien dabbles in this tension: Frodo must decide between the wonder his loving foster parent instilled in him for adventure and the small-minded attitudes his neighbors have toward the outside world. While some Shire hobbits (the Sackville-Bagginses) irritate Frodo, they create minimal pain. His community worries about him but tolerates him as the eccentric local gentry. At worst, they treat him as the Shire’s Mr. Toad of Toad Hall. Further, Frodo only

²² Johnson describes Harry and the Wart as having *Bildungsroman* narratives—narratives about the child-to-adult journey (4). Frodo has reached the hobbit age of responsibility, thirty-three, when he inherits the Ring (*LotR* I.1.22) and is fifty when he leaves the Shire (I.3.68).

faces the Shire's disapproval once (when he leaves with only his friends knowing his true mission). As Mendlesohn might say, all three heroes negotiate a mundane-to-magic world journey, but Tolkien never makes that negotiation a recurring plot point. For White and Rowling, that negotiation is continual and crucial to the plot.

Harry and the Wart also find the negotiation brings routine pain. Unlike Frodo, they do not have a loving foster father (Bilbo) who inspires and equips them to leave the mundane world. They find this figure (Merlyn, Dumbledore) in the magic world. Their mundane families never support their interests in the magic world. The Dursleys lock Harry into his closet every time he accidentally does something magical (*Sorcerer's Stone* 24-25), never telling him that he has magic powers. Kay mistreats the Wart for being presumably illegitimate (*Sword* 14, 223), an outsider grafted into the castle community. If Frodo is Mr. Toad, Harry and the Wart are *Oliver Twist*. Or, to refer back to Mendlesohn's example, they are James in *James and the Giant Peach*—heroes suffering under abusive guardians, invited into a magic world that allows them to escape their abusive situations. While Harry and the Wart have much in common with Frodo (and for that matter, the larger tradition of orphan heroes in fantasy literature), these critical differences underscore Rowling's point: White provided a particular model she used for Harry. Her cathedral shows distinct signs she built on White's material.

THE VALUE TO STUDYING WHITE'S INFLUENCE ON FANTASY

Scholars may grant at this point that the White-Rowling resonances show Rowling was correct: the Wart is Harry's spiritual ancestor. They may also grant the White-Rowling resonance provokes further discussion about intertextual works, but wonder why to take the next step. What does scholarship gain by considering White as an intertextual author?

In fact, considering White as an intertextual author who influenced later authors like Rowling and Gaiman is crucial to explain why his writings warrant further study. His writing has been acclaimed for decades—early critic Lin Carter even ranked *The Sword in the Stone* above *The Lord of the Rings* (125). While most modern critics rank Tolkien above White, it is fair to say that White and *Gormenghast* author Mervyn Peake are the two Inklings contemporaries who could best compete with the Inklings' legacy.²³ Peake has generated more scholarship than White (the journal *Peake Studies* was published from 1988 to 2015) but had limited influence. Michael Moorcock observed that Peake's writing was so particular that "he can't be imitated" and "has influenced very few generic fantasts" (Winter 1). In contrast, White has influenced not just

²³ David Bratman notes that Lewis corresponded with White and Peake (32-34).

Rowling and Gaiman but also acclaimed fantasists like Lev Grossman (“Interview with Lev Grossman”) and Gregory Maguire (Nolan 1).²⁴ White not only took his influences (Malory) to create a new fantasy story; later fantasy authors continue the intertextual process by using his influences to create new stories. Considering White’s influence on later writers demonstrates what makes him a great writer.

THE GAP IN WHITE SCHOLARSHIP

Despite White’s influence on multiple acclaimed fantasy writers, White scholarship is scattershot. Two books have been published about his life: Sylvia Townsend-Warner’s 1967 biography and John K. Crane’s 1974 book discussing White’s life alongside his books’ themes. François Gallix provided a list of White scholarship in his 1986 White bibliography: eight books and fifty-nine articles devoted to White, twenty-four books discussing him alongside other writers, and twenty-nine books briefly referencing White (105-130). Since that time, various undergraduate essays, master’s or doctoral theses, blog posts, and glossaries²⁵ on White’s writing have been released. However, most peer-reviewed studies on White appear in the quarterly journal *Arthuriana*, which has published fewer than ten essays focusing on White since 2000. During the same period, fewer than ten book-length studies of White have appeared. The most notable post-2000 book has been *T.H. White’s Troubled Heart* by Kurth Sprague, released in 2007 but written in 1978.

All told, plenty has been written about White, but precious little peer-reviewed current research. Gallix’s 1986 list of White scholarship would require little expansion today. In contrast, Dickieson cites at least five open access or easily accessible academic journals specializing in the Inklings (*Mythlore*, *Mallorn*, *Inklings Forever*, *VII*, *Journal of Inklings Studies*), as well as limited-access journals like *Sehnsucht* and Inklings-related journals like *North Wind* (“5 Ways”). Even if readers remove *Inklings Forever* from the discussion (it was discontinued in 2016), every quarter sees these combined academic journals release dozens of articles on Lewis alone. Compared to the Inklings, the lack of current White research stands in stark contrast.

²⁴ Lev Grossman published his first fantasy novel, *The Magicians*, in 2009. Maguire published his first fantasy novel, *The Lightning Time*, in 1978, but is best-known for his 1995 novel *Wicked*.

²⁵ See the Camelot Project’s glossary for White’s Arthurian work, released in 2003. As I’ve mentioned in “The Once and Forgotten T.H. White,” I performed a preliminary search (*Mythlore*, *Mallorn*, *Open MUSE*, and *Inklings Forever*) in August 2021 to find current White research. I found under 30 peer-reviewed essays available, along with perhaps a dozen undergraduate essays, master’s theses, or doctoral theses available through various universities.

Various reasons have been put forward for why White scholarship has stagnated. I have recently discussed some obstacles, including the fact White lacked a designated heir, a Christopher Tolkien or Douglas Gresham figure, to promote further research into his work ("The Once and Forgotten T.H. White" 1). Gallix highlights a key dilemma: White "never fitted any of the literary classifications in which scholars and reviewers so safely and conveniently pigeon hole many authors" (xix). Outside his Arthurian novels, White's oeuvre includes children's books, detective novels, a translation of a medieval bestiary, two studies of eighteenth-century European history, a science fiction novel, and a memoir about falconry. These obstacles' overall effect is White's Arthurian books attract numerous readers each year and have influenced many renowned fantasy authors, yet the last thirty years of White scholarship might not fill a bookshelf.²⁶ White's varied corpus makes him difficult to study.

However, this discussion about how White influenced later authors, from Rowling to Gaiman and beyond, provides an accessible way to correct this scholarship gap. As noted in an earlier footnote, it also presents an important opportunity for anyone (critics or supporters) seeking to understand Rowling's influences.

Furthermore, the present is an ideal time to expand on White scholarship. Townsend-Warner's biography was re-released in 2023 and the Walt Disney Company reported planned for a live-action remake of its 1963 film *The Sword in the Stone* in 2018 (Kit 1). White fandom and scholarship may be in for a renaissance.

POTENTIAL FUTURE WHITE-ROWLING SCHOLARSHIP

For brevity's sake, this discussion has only explored parallels between White and Rowling's characters. The parallels have shown how Rowling and White explore similar ideas, and how Rowling creates a new story by combining White's influences and others with her own innovations.

There are other White-Rowling connections worth exploring. As noted earlier, some work has been done comparing Dumbledore to Merlyn—a subject that could certainly be expanded upon, given Merlyn's key role in Arthuriana. A few notes have been made here about how Rowling uses Petunia, the foster mother who proves more complex than she seems, to nuance the Dursleys. Given how important female authority characters (particularly mothers) prove

²⁶ Granted, this could be said of almost any Inklings outside Tolkien and Lewis. In 2022, Barfield's grandson and literary executor, Owen A. Barfield, pointed out there were an estimated 10,000 or more books available on Lewis; he estimated only 12 books were then available on his grandfather ("Charles Williams").

to be in White and Rowling's fiction, more could easily be done comparing Rowling's Petunia Dursley or Lily Potter to White's Morgause or Guenevere.²⁷

One could argue also that Rowling's writing often resembles White's more than Tolkien's. Amy Sturgis observes that Rowling follows Tolkien's theories on fairy stories in how she "takes the magic of Hogwarts and its environment seriously," ensuring magic always has serious consequences (5). While Rowling takes the magic seriously, she freely includes absurd elements in her worldbuilding which are far closer to White's sense of humor than Tolkien's. For example, Rowling and Tolkien both use puns in their location or character names, but in different ways. Rowling builds puns based on modern English homonyms—like naming a dark street Knockturn Alley. Tolkien has puns based on double meanings in other languages. Pierre H. Berube cites several Elvish names with double meanings in other languages: *Orthanc* is Sindarin for 'Mount Fang' and also Old English for 'cunning mind' (214). These puns—what Jared Lobdell called the "Tolkienian pun," where a word's older meaning creates the joke (219)—employ careful etymology and meticulous worldbuilding. Tolkien would likely find a dark street being named Knockturn Alley too simple. Hence, Rowling's sense of humor—playfully defying worldbuilding plausibility with absurd touches—resembles White more than Tolkien. Since a playful sense of humor appears in many British fantasy authors' works,²⁸ exploring whether White influenced Rowling's writing style may require a close reading. Still, it presents intriguing possibilities for scholars seeking to understand White's influence on later writer's fantasy styles. The study may also lead to new insights into how White's writing style compares to Tolkien's work (including works like *The Hobbit*, where Tolkien's writing style most resembles White's).

CONCLUDING APPLICATIONS

Lewis's idea that medieval authors were like cathedral-builders is, as Dickieson has shown, useful to understanding intertextual writing. It can apply not just to expanding on a classic document's narrative but to the broader process of creating a new work that draws on past ideas.

This discussion has shown that Rowling is an intertextual author who built on White's influences, yet innovated on his work by adding grotesque elements. This insight raises some compelling questions about Rowling's

²⁷ Scholars looking into this topic can consult Sprague's book *T.H. White's Troubled Heart*, Amanda Serrano's essay "T.H. White's Defence of Guenever," and Margaret S. Mauk's essay "'Your Mother Died to Save You.'"

²⁸ British children's fantasy authors who use absurd humor (sometimes wordplay, but always a general sense of absurdity) could include Dahl, Diana Wynne Jones, and Terry Pratchett. Rowling has cited her admiration for Dahl, and both Jones and Pratchett have been quoted various times discussing parallels between their works and Rowling's.

appeal. If Vernon and Dudley are Ector and Kay minus nuance, does this mean contemporary readers have become less patient with nuance? Does Vernon and Dudley's grotesque behavior demonstrate that black-and-white villains are preferable today? Rowling's grotesque touches also affect her story's pacing. Keeping the Dursleys grotesque means she can quickly define them as villains, have readers immediately sympathize with Harry, then focus on how Harry finds a way to escape their world. White's nuanced depiction (Kay sometimes being jealous, sometimes a bully, something friendly) requires more time to understand his characters.

As alluded to earlier, this discussion also prompts questions about how Rowling depicts childhood suffering. Her grotesque touches mean that her hero experiences more extreme childhood trauma than White's hero. Despite the fact Harry experiences far more violent abuse than the Wart, they reach a similar place: they become well-adjusted, forgiving adults. Rowling addresses the potential plot holes this situation creates, adding references throughout the books to Harry's exceptional capacity to love people and to survive extreme circumstances. Still, her depiction of childhood trauma goes darker than White's depiction, raising questions about her vision of childhood abuse and endurance. Discussions about her work—both defenses and critiques—will find this angle useful, as it shows how her depiction of childhood trauma starts with White's model before she innovates. Understanding authors as cathedral-builders, adding and innovating on what came before, promotes better conversations about what makes a fantasy work distinct.

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