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## Two Views of Faërie in *Smith of Wootton Major*: Nokes and His Cake, Smith and His Star

### **Abstract**

An analysis of *Smith of Wootton Major*, showing how the cake and the star symbolize two diametrically opposed sets of attitudes towards Faërie.

TWO VIEWS OF FAËRIE IN  
*SMITH OF WOOTTON MAJOR*:  
NOKES AND HIS CAKE, SMITH AND HIS STAR

JOSH B. LONG

*SMITH OF WOOTTON MAJOR*, like many of Tolkien's other works, is a fairy tale.<sup>1</sup> It is about both Faërie (the region) and fairies (the fantastical creatures); though in Tolkien's own understanding of the word, the latter is not a qualification of the genre. What is most remarkable about *Smith* is how it reveals Tolkien's comprehension of the world of Faërie; in other words, it tells us how Tolkien specifically wanted his stories to be read and how he wanted generally wanted fairy tales to be written. One might say *Smith* is a handbook on how to write a well-written Tolkienian story. In this respect, it is perhaps best viewed as an epilogue or addendum to "On Fairy-Stories."<sup>2</sup> The richness of the text is due to the fact that the story functions at two levels. At the narrative level, Tolkien is simply presenting a story that embodies the literary aesthetics of what he believes to be necessary for a good fairy tale. However, at a deeper level, he uses the story as a framework to discuss the theory of "On Fairy-Stories." To do so, he positions the characters of Nokes and Smith as antithetical counterparts in order to show the writer and reader alike what Faërie should and shouldn't look like.<sup>3</sup>

One does not have to look far to see that the characters of Nokes and Smith are readily comparable; the thrust of the story largely rests on these two characters's differing attitudes towards Faërie. In order to distinguish between their points of view, Tolkien deliberately employs two variant spellings of the word—Nokes uses the modern spelling *fairy*, while Smith employs the more

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien once wrote, "*The Lord of the Rings* was a deliberate attempt to write a large-scale adult fairy-story" (qtd. in Manlove 158). This quotation is taken from a letter dated 8 February 1967 to C. N. Manlove.

<sup>2</sup> "On Fairy-Stories" was fresh in Tolkien's mind as he began writing *Smith*. Prior to the composition of *Smith*, he had been revising this essay for inclusion in *Tree and Leaf*. Evidence in Hammond and Anderson's bibliography suggests that the bulk of Tolkien's work for *Tree and Leaf* was done between July 1963 and September 1963 (183). *Tree and Leaf* was published on 28 May 1964. Shortly after, Tolkien began work on *Smith* in late 1964 (Scull and Hammond, *The J.R.R. Companion & Guide: Chronology* 625; *Smith* 59).

<sup>3</sup> Verlyn Flieger suggests, "Smith as a character works better in juxtaposition to Nokes than to Tolkien" ("Allegory versus Bounce" 188).

archaic form *Faery*.<sup>4</sup> In an endnote to her edition of *Smith*, Verlyn Flieger observes, "It is worth noticing that the word is consistently spelled 'Fairy' when used by old Nokes, while the preferred spelling, 'Faery', is standard usage for the story's narrator as well as for Smith, the Queen, and Alf" (143).<sup>5</sup> Tolkien did not include different spellings for mere variety; his purpose was to present two contrasting views of the word—the proper historical understanding and the modern mistaken notion.<sup>6</sup>

"Fairy," with its conventional spelling, carries with it the modern misconceptions that fairies are diminutive and only suitable for children. This is plainly how Nokes understands the word. In *Smith*, the narrator explains,

Fairies and sweets were two of the very few notions [Nokes] had about the *tastes of children*. *Fairies he thought one grew out of*; but of sweets he remained very fond. 'Ah! fairylike', he said, 'that gives me an idea'; and so it came into his head that he would stick a *little* doll on a pinnacle in the middle of the Cake, dressed all in white, with a *little* wand in her hand ending in a tinsel star [...]. (11, emphasis added)

From Tolkien's perspective, Nokes's ignorance is twofold—he both misunderstands what Faery is and who it is intended for. In "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien writes, "Among those who still have enough wisdom not to think fairy-stories pernicious, the common opinion seems to be that there is a natural connection between the minds of children and fairy-stories, of the same order as the connection between children's bodies and milk. I think this is an error; at best an error of false sentiment" ("On Fairy-Stories" [OFS] 130). Nokes inevitably maintains this perspective. He makes his cake "fairylike" because he supposes that fairies are synonymous with childhood. But as Tolkien would be quick to point out, "Children as a class [...] neither like fairy-stories more, nor understand them better than adults do; and no more than they like many other things" (130).

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<sup>4</sup> As early as 1915, Tolkien used this variant spelling in his poem "The Shores of Faëry" (*The Book of Lost Tales II* 271-2).

<sup>5</sup> This appears to be a slight but important emendation to her original assessment made in *A Question of Time*, where she writes, "In any case, his use of the simpler form [Faery] is consistent throughout the story" (228). Here, she makes no mention of "Fairy." In an earlier version of this chapter, published in *Saga: Best New Writings on Mythology* as an independent article, she points out in a footnote, "The spelling of this important word in Tolkien's lexicon is as elusive as the bounce. It appears in his writing variously as Faery (as above), Fairy (see quote below), Faërie, and Fayery. However changable [sic] the spelling, the meaning remained constant, it was 'the Perilous Realm itself and the air that blows in that country'" (158n1).

<sup>6</sup> For a further discussion of "Faery" and "Fairy," see *The Ring of Words: Tolkien and the Oxford English Dictionary*, pp. 124-127.

Nokes's "little doll" view of fairies is also wrongheaded. In "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien notes, "Of old there were indeed some inhabitants of Faërie that were small (though hardly diminutive), but smallness was not characteristic of that people as a whole" (OFS 110-1). In Tolkien's view, modern writers had undermined Faery by making fairies small and sweet; as it was, Tolkien was determined to redeem the word from the modern world. Flieger writes, "He chose the older spellings to dissociate the word from its modern connotations of prettiness, delicacy, and diminutive stature, and return it to the older, considerably darker meanings it once had had" (*Smith* 143).

Though Tolkien rejected fairy littleness, he allowed Nokes to hold this view in order to show the shortness of his mental and imaginative capacities.<sup>7</sup> According to the *OED*, "nokes" is an obsolete word for "ninny" or "fool."<sup>8</sup> It is not simply that he is ignorant, but that he obstinately, even arrogantly, subscribes to his misbelief. He is guilty of both undervaluing and overlooking Faery. He does not and will not take it seriously. When he first discovers the fay-star, he exclaims, "That's funny!" (*Smith* 12). After Alf corrects him and explains that "It is *fay*"<sup>9</sup> and that "It comes from Faery," Nokes replies, "It means much the same; but call it that if you like. You'll grow up some day. Now you can get on with stoning the raisins. If you notice any funny fairy ones, tell me" (13, emphasis in original). In light of the rest of the story, Nokes's pronouncement, "You'll grow up some day," is absurdly ironic. Alf, who is the King of Faery, is actually older and wiser than Nokes.

Alf again tries to correct him, "But this isn't a trinket, Master, it's a fay-star" (*Smith* 13). To which Nokes replies, "So you've said already. [...] Very well,

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted, however, that in Tolkien's early work he often depicted fairies as small. Scull and Hammond observe, "[S]ome of his earliest writings, such as the poems *Goblin Feet* and *The Princess Ni*, portray similar diminutive beings, and it was his intention in *The Book of Lost Tales* that in the future the Elves would actually fade and diminish and become transparent, and so become the 'fairies' as commonly conceived" (*J.R.R. Tolkien Companion & Guide: Reader's Guide* 280). John D. Rateliff references "*Goblin Feet*," "*The Princess Ni*," and "*Tinfang Warble*" as early examples of poetry in which Tolkien depicts little fairies (120). He writes, "Tolkien later came to disavow the idea of elves as cute little fairies and moved his own elves firmly in the direction of medieval elf-lore" (120).

<sup>8</sup> Jane Chance first noted this in her 1979 book *Tolkien's Art: A Mythology for England* (70); Margaret Sammons identified this in her 1985 article "Tolkien on Fantasy in *Smith of Wootton Major*"; Eric S. Graff again pointed this out in his 1992 article "The Three Faces of Faërie in Tolkien's Shorter Fiction: Niggle, Smith and Giles"; Perry C. Bramlett briefly referenced this in his 2003 book *I Am in Fact a Hobbit: An Introduction to the Life and Work of J.R.R. Tolkien* (44); and most recently, Flieger cited it in her edition of *Smith*. She writes, "While etymologically it does indeed mean 'living by the oak', it is also, as Tolkien knew, a type-name for a fool or ninny, an ignorant person" (144).

<sup>9</sup> "Fay, 'magic, possessing magical powers'" (Flieger, *Smith* 134).

I'll tell the children. *It'll make them laugh*" (14, emphasis added). Alf's admonitions are in vain because Nokes is hubristic; he doesn't even try to understand the true nature of Faery.<sup>10</sup> Flieger points out that, for Nokes, "Faery is at best a mere children's fable and at worst a joke" (*Smith* 60).<sup>11</sup> He does not grasp that "an ever-present peril" exists in it (OFS 109).

If Nokes is indicative of how one should *not* view fairy, Smith is plainly a portrait of how one should. Smith's "Faery" carries with it the wonder, enchantment, and terror of Faery—the place where he journeys, which is home to both the fay-star and the Faery Queen. In truth, Nokes and Smith's approaches to the star reflect two divergent attitudes; while it supplies Nokes with nothing more than a snide snicker, Smith is changed and empowered by it. Here, Tolkien seems to be commenting on the fact that regardless of how compelling Faery might be, it is ultimately up to the individual to accept it or reject it. In other words, Faery fails the moment at which the hearer no longer takes it seriously. The literary belief is lost and the sense of wonder is forsaken.

Though Smith swallows the star at the Twenty-four Feast in the winter, it is not until June that the star reveals its true Faërian wonder. It is interesting to note the effect the fay-star has on Smith (as a child) as opposed to the impression Nokes's cake leaves on the children. At first glance, the children seem to take to the cake; a couple even clap and shout, reiterating Nokes's own words that the cake is "pretty and fairylike" (*Smith* 11, 15). However, it must be remembered that there are twenty-four children at the feast and only two (at the most) are vocally excited about the cake. That is not to say that the cake is necessarily bad; it is simply satisfactory. The narrator observes, "It was a good cake, and no one had any fault to find with it, except that it was no bigger than was needed. When it was all cut up there was a large slice for each of the children, but nothing left over: no coming again" (18). The cake may not be a good depiction of fairy, but it is fair. It is eaten and enjoyed but soon after forgotten. Towards the end of the story, we learn, "[Nokes] just made his century: the only memorable thing he

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<sup>10</sup> The extent of Nokes's vanity is best seen in this narcissistic description: "[H]e used to put on the tall white hat and look at himself in a polished frying pan and say: 'How do you do, Master. That hat suits you properly, might have been made for you. I hope things go well with you'" (*Smith* 10). In addition, at the end of the story, Alf calls Nokes "a vain old fraud" (57). Tolkien is using the word in two senses. Though Nokes is vain in the sense that he is overly conceited, Tolkien would have also been aware of the word's archaic denotation, meaning foolish. Therefore, when Tolkien writes in his "Smith" essay, "Nokes however proved too vain" (97), he is also saying, "The fool however proved too foolish." It at once becomes a philological pun.

<sup>11</sup> The pagination of Flieger's Extended Edition of *Smith* is a bit skewed. The actual story of *Smith* ends on p. 62, while Flieger's "Afterword" begins on p. 59. Therefore, there are two pages numbered 59, two pages numbered 60, and so forth, up to 62.

ever achieved" (59). If making his century was his only noteworthy accomplishment, the assumption is that his cake was not very memorable.<sup>12</sup> Tolkien believed that Faery should both move you and change you; Nokes's cake, for the most part, fails to do either; it remains inadequate because it cannot and does not offer the re-vision of recovery or the overwhelming joy of eucatastrophe.

While Nokes's cake remains acceptable but forgettable, Smith's first encounter with the star is life-changing and transformational. It is appropriate that on his tenth birthday, Smith is essentially reborn by the star. "A little breeze, cool and fragrant" begins the morning (*Smith* 19). Traditionally, the breeze and wind are associated with inspiration. The breeze "stir[s] the waking trees" and the "dawn-song of the birds" begins (19). Smith is so moved by the music that he begins to sing: "Then he began to sing, high and clear, in strange words that he seemed to know by heart; and in that moment the star fell out of his mouth and he caught it on his open hand" (20).<sup>13</sup> He clapped the star to his head, where "he wore it for many years" (20).

Unlike Nokes's cake, the star significantly affects Smith—he is given new sight, and his voice is awakened.<sup>14</sup> "Some of [the star's] light passed into his eyes" (*Smith* 20). Evidently, his vision has been transformed; Faery has changed how he sees the world at large. Tolkien is, of course, alluding to what he calls "recovery," which he argues is an important function of fairy tales. "Recovery

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<sup>12</sup> Smith does, however, ashamedly remember Nokes's fairy queen when he visits the real Queen. In addition, Alf tells Nokes in their final meeting, "I remember it very well. [...] It was a good cake, and it was enjoyed and praised" (*Smith* 54). These are not inconsistencies. Smith does not remember the cake because it is memorable but because it is regrettable. The fact that Alf remembers the cake does not mean much. As the Faery King, he probably remembers many things "very well." In addition, his kind words towards Nokes do not necessarily reflect the truth but illustrate his generosity. There are many indicators that Alf, in fact, did not think too well of Nokes's cake. For instance, he tells Nokes, "I'll do it [make the Fairy Queen] if you are too busy. But it was your idea and not mine" (14). See also Alf's demeanor at the feast, *Smith* pp. 15-18.

<sup>13</sup> Music and song play a prominent role in Tolkien's fiction. Songs are scattered throughout *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. One of his most successful uses of music can be found in his creation story "Ainulindalë" in *The Silmarillion*. Ilúvatar, with the assistance of the Ainur, sings creation into existence. "Ainulindalë" is arguably Tolkien's greatest and most perfect piece of prose. Robert Murray suggests, "[I]n all literatures since the formation of the sacred books of humankind, surely there is hardly a creation myth to equal, in beauty and imaginative power, the one with which *The Silmarillion* begins" ("Sermon at Thanksgiving Service" 19).

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, the idea that Elvishness affects a mortal's sight and voice was also suggested in *The Lord of the Rings*. Goldberry tells Frodo, "I see you are an elf-friend; the light in your eyes and the ring in your voice tells it" (*LoTR* I.7.122).

(which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining—regaining of a clear view. I do not say ‘seeing things as they are’ and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say ‘seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them’—as things apart from ourselves” (OFS 146).<sup>15</sup>

This is essentially what happens to Smith; the light from the fay-star enters his eyes and gives him a clear view. The fantastic light of Faery brings to life his own world. Tolkien explains it this way, “We should look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red. We should meet the centaur and the dragon, and then perhaps suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep, and dogs, and horses—and wolves. This recovery fairy-stories help us to make” (OFS 146). It is this quality that allows Smith to excel in his own craft and become “the best smith between Far Easton and the Westwood” (*Smith* 21). Though he mostly creates “things of iron” that are “meant for daily needs,” they “had a grace about them” (21). In addition, we are told that when he made things for “delight,” “they were beautiful, for he could work iron into wonderful forms” (21). He has the ability to see the world in a fresh, new way—this is a gift that Faery has given him.

The other immediate transformation that takes place is in Smith’s voice. “[H]is voice, which had begun to grow beautiful as soon as the star came to him, became ever more beautiful as he grew up. People liked to hear him speak, even if it was no more than a ‘good morning’” (*Smith* 20).<sup>16</sup> There is a sense that the more Smith experiences Faery, the lovelier his voice becomes. It is not the words themselves that are remarkable but the tone of his voice. Smith has been changed and the way he speaks and how he sees will never be the same.

Another way that Smith differs strikingly from Nokes is he comes to understand Faery and grows to respect it. The narrator states, “For Smith became acquainted with Faery, and some regions of it he knew as well as any mortal can” (*Smith* 22). The narrator adds, “[F]or he soon became wise and understood that the marvels of Faery cannot be approached without danger” (24). Certainly Tolkien is juxtaposing Smith’s wisdom to Nokes’s foolishness. Nokes does not realize that “Faërie is a perilous land” (OFS 109); he neither comprehends that it is dangerous, nor understands that it is a place.

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<sup>15</sup> It is apparent that the star provides its wearer with recovery because immediately after Smith gives it up, he explains, “I cannot see clearly” (*Smith* 47). In addition, after the star is passed on to Tim, the narrator notes that “a light began to shine in his eyes” (61).

<sup>16</sup> It is noteworthy that Tolkien’s own idiolect was known to be muddled or difficult to comprehend. If one were to apply a psychoanalytical reading to this text, one might suggest that Tolkien desired this same clarity in his own speech. Did most of Tolkien’s students and colleagues “like to hear him speak”? To hear some audio clips of Tolkien, see *J.R.R. Tolkien: An Audio Portrait or A Film Portrait of J.R.R. Tolkien*. It is also interesting how clear his speech was when he was reading rather than conversing.



While Nokes does not grasp the severity of Faery, Smith “had seen things of both beauty and terror that he could not clearly remember nor report to his friends” (*Smith* 26). Here, Tolkien is alluding to a passage from “On Fairy-Stories”:

The realm of fairy-story is wide and deep and high and filled with many things: all manner of beasts and birds are found there; shoreless seas and stars uncounted; *beauty* that is an enchantment, and an ever-present *peril*; *both joy and sorrow* as sharp as swords. In that realm a man may, perhaps, count himself fortunate to have wandered, but its very richness and strangeness tie the tongue of a traveller who would *report* them. (109, emphasis added)

The two passages are related semantically as well as syntactically. In both passages, Tolkien emphasizes that Faery contains both light and dark—“beauty and terror” he writes in *Smith*, and “beauty” and “peril” and “joy and sorrow” he points out in his essay. In addition, each passage identifies that the wanderer is unable to “report” the wonders he has seen. Syntactically, “both beauty and terror” is similar to “both joy and sorrow.”

This notion, that Faery is dichotomous, was an important one for Tolkien, and Smith’s four Faery visions best exemplify this. The first vision of the elven mariners exhibits terror. “His heart was shaken with fear” (*Smith* 26). The next one of the King’s Tree displays beauty. “[I]ts light was like the sun at noon; and it bore at once leaves and flowers and fruits uncounted” (28). The third vision of the birch tree elicits sorrow. “His heart was saddened as he went on his long road” (30). The following vision when he dances with the elven maiden produces joy. “He knew what it was to have [...] the joy to accompany her” (33). These scenes are not meant to be allegorized but to be experienced by Smith and the reader alike. The same strangeness that astounds Smith should fill the reader with the same awe and perplexity. As we read, we journey with Smith as visitors and wanderers in that enchanted realm. Perhaps one of the reasons Tolkien left these visions of Faery so enigmatically strange was so the reader might simply enjoy them without trying to discover some underlying meaning.

Smith’s final venture into Faery, however, definitely “means” something. That is not to say that it is allegorical, but it is rich with applicability. This scene, when Smith comes to meet the Faery Queen, is interesting for two reasons—for the Faery Queen’s contrast to Nokes’s fairy queen and for what she says. Perhaps the only commonality the Queen shares with Nokes’s queen is they are both queens; there the similarities end. The narrator provides this apt description of her:

She wore no crown and had no throne. She stood there in her majesty and her glory, and all about her was a great host shimmering and glittering like the stars above; but she was taller than the points of their great spears, and upon her head there burned a white flame. (*Smith* 36-7)

Unlike Nokes's queen, she is someone to be reckoned with. The same terrible beauty that Galadriel exemplifies in *The Lord of the Rings* resurfaces here in the Queen. Tolkien recognized that ugliness and evil had become so inextricably tied together that it was difficult for the modern mind to perceive of something that was both beautiful and terrifying. He writes in "On Fairy-Stories," "The fear of the beautiful fay that ran through the elder ages almost eludes our grasp" (151). He was bent on restoring the origins of not only the word Faery but also the world of Faery; he was trying to recreate the greatness of a past that had been forgotten and lost.<sup>17</sup>

Nokes's queen pales in comparison to the real one, and Smith comes to realize this: "[S]uddenly he saw again the little dancing figure with its wand, and in shame he lowered his eyes from the Queen's beauty" (*Smith* 37). The Queen is regal yet she responds graciously to Smith, "Do not be grieved for me, Starbrow. [...] Nor too much ashamed of your own folk. Better a little doll, maybe, than no memory of Faery at all. For some the only glimpse. For some the awaking" (37-8). Her words are telling; they are, to some extent, Tolkien's own. Speaking of the "bad author" in his abandoned introduction to *The Golden Key*, Tolkien writes, "Someone may meet them [marvels of Fairy] for the first time in his silly tale, and catch a glimpse of Fairy, and go on to better things" (61). It seems quite evident that although Tolkien is referring to the bad writer in general, he definitely has George MacDonald at the back of his mind, when he wrote both of these passages. He is essentially saying (through the Queen) that although some may not possess, in his view, a proper understanding of Faery, their mistaken notions and flawed depictions are *perhaps* better than no Faery at all.<sup>18</sup>

If Nokes's fairy was so unsuccessful with the children and he is depicted as misguided throughout the story, why all of a sudden is this concession made? Tolkien is not negating his criticism of Nokes but is simply recognizing the fact that for many the only glimpse of fairy they will ever encounter is this one. Clearly, Nokes's fairy had, for the most part, failed, but there were a couple of

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<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note that Nokes's response to Alf when he reveals himself as the King of Faery is also trembling. If there is one point that Tolkien is trying to make, it is that fairies or elves are not cute but awe-inspiring and terrifying.

<sup>18</sup> Kilby was the first to identify this connection. He rhetorically asks, "Does Tolkien mean that though MacDonald knows nothing about the real inside of a cake, nevertheless he may accomplish something by the saccharine figures he presents?" (*Tolkien and The Silmarillion* 39).

children that had been excited by his cake. It is Tolkien's hope that those children discover Faery through Nokes's *faery*; that they "go on to better things." It is as if Tolkien is reluctantly willing to accept something he reviles in order to ensure that the world of Faery is not lost. Even so, the Queen specifically says, "Better a little doll, *maybe*" (emphasis added), as if the Queen and Tolkien are in agreement that they are not quite sure that Nokes's view is in fact better than no Faery at all.

Though we are introduced to Nokes at the beginning of the story, he does not reappear until the end. What is most interesting about him is how much he has *not* changed. He is now approaching ninety, yet he remains largely the same—certainly he is no wiser than he was before. He still erroneously calls the star a "trinket" (*Smith* 54). If he has changed at all, he has simply become more stubborn, more set in his ways. After Alf comes to visit him, Nokes inquires about who swallowed the star. However, before Alf has a chance to tell him, Nokes starts guessing names. To no avail, he finally exclaims, "Then I give up. Who was it?" Alf tells him Smith, to which Nokes characteristically laughs (55). Just as he ignorantly laughs at the fay-star, he does the same thing to the King of Faery.

After Nokes accuses him of stealing the star out of the cake, Alf loses his patience and rebukes him,

[Y]our knowledge is so great that I have only twice ventured to tell you anything. I told you that the star came from Faery; and I have told you that it went to the smith. You laughed at me. Now at parting I will tell you one thing more. Don't laugh again! You are a vain old fraud, fat, idle and sly. I did most of your work. Without thanks you learned all that you could from me—except respect for Faery, and a little courtesy. (*Smith* 57)

Tolkien reminds us, "[Alf's] last conversation with Nokes as a very old man must not be taken as baiting or gloating over a stupid and defeated opponent" (*Smith* 98). It is perhaps best to understand Alf's words as a final caveat. He is correcting someone that is in desperate need of it. Rather than accept Alf's harsh reproof, Nokes resorts to insulting him in return. He knows precisely where Alf is most vulnerable. He once again laughs, "If you've got one of your fairy friends hidden in the Kitchen, send him to me and I'll have a look at him. If he waves his little wand and makes me thin again, I'll think better of him" (*Smith* 57-8). Ironically, he is granted his wish. For all his vanity and lack of generosity, he is paid back accordingly.

Alf, who has been "hidden in the Kitchen" for years, reveals himself as the King of Faery. "To Nokes' dismay [Alf] grew taller as he spoke. He threw back his cloak. He was dressed like a Master Cook at a Feast, but his white garments shimmered and glinted, and on his forehead was a great jewel like a radiant star. His face was young but stern" (*Smith* 58). Alf's advance towards

Nokes is evocative of Gandalf when he insists that Bilbo give up his ring in *The Lord of the Rings*.<sup>19</sup> “[Gandalf] took a step towards the hobbit, and he seemed to grow tall and menacing; his shadow filled the little room” (*LotR* I.1.33, emphasis added). In both instances, the wiser, more powerful individual is forced to demonstrate his authority to an unrelenting, stubborn subordinate. The responses by Bilbo and Nokes are equally analogous. “[Alf] stepped forward, and Nokes shrank from him, trembling” (*Smith* 58, emphasis added). “Gandalf’s eyes remained bent on the hobbit. Slowly his hands relaxed, and he began to tremble” (*LotR* I.1.33, emphasis added). Though Nokes receives what he wants (to be thin), Bilbo surrenders what he desires (the ring). The former, however, faces the harsher end. Nokes becomes so thinly decrepit that the children christen him “old Rag-and-Bones” (*Smith* 59).

Just as Nokes’s physical appearance becomes feeble, his understanding of Faery takes on a similar form. In addition to all his misconceptions and stereotypes, he now foolishly associates Faery with dreaming. “Ugh! What a dream!” he says about his encounter with the Faery King. He later adds, “Alarming, you might call it; but a silly dream, when you come to think of it” (*Smith* 59). Evidently, Nokes is one of those people that Tolkien speaks of in “On Fairy-Stories” who “stupidly and even maliciously confound Fantasy with Dreaming” (139).<sup>20</sup>

Arriving at the conclusion of *Smith*, it seems strange that Tolkien’s fairy story should end on such a melancholic note—Smith is left bereaved, and Nokes remains oblivious. Where is the eucatastrophe—the happy ending, the good turning that Tolkien calls the “highest function” of a fairy tale? (OFS 153). I believe it comes in one of the final scenes when the star is passed on. It is important and appropriate which child is chosen to receive it—Tim, Nokes’s great-grandson. The turn occurs in two ways. Though Smith is saddened by his own loss, he finds contentment in the fact that the star will be put to good use.

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<sup>19</sup> There are other notable parallels between *Smith* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Flieger observes, “In three years [Rider] disappears again, saying farewell only to his Apprentice in a speech that strikingly recalls Bilbo’s farewell to Gandalf at the end of the first chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*” (“The Footsteps of Ælfwine” 195). I would add that the scene when Alf urges Smith to surrender his star is analogous to the one when Gandalf advises Bilbo to give up his ring. Smith asks, “Isn’t it mine?” just as Bilbo asserts, “It is mine” (*Smith* 41; *LotR* I.1.33). David Bratman also pointed out to me in personal correspondence that “greed and the possession of jewels is a constant theme in Tolkien, everywhere from the Silmarils to the dwarves’ gold-lust in *The Hobbit*.” Evidently, Tolkien chose to return to this theme in *Smith*.

<sup>20</sup> Lest we think too badly of Nokes, Tolkien reminds us, “Nokes had however a virtue, or the remains of one. He seems to have been generally fond of children, in his way” (*Smith* 97). As Tolkien’s children and grandchildren can attest, this was certainly true of Tolkien as well. See for instance *The Tolkien Family Album*.

"All is *well* then [...]. So you are my heir. I wonder what strange places the star will lead you to?" he thinks (*Smith* 61, emphasis added). The second and perhaps more powerful effect of the eucatastrophe is the fact that although Nokes never comes to understand the true nature of Faery, his great-grandson will come to value and appreciate it. As Smith notes, "Poor old Nokes. Still I suppose he will never know what a shocking thing has happened in his family" (*Smith* 61). Hope is found in neither Smith nor Nokes but in Tim; it is the next generation that holds the key to Faery. Tolkien notes that the story "includes sacrifice, and the handing on, with trust and without keeping a hand on things, of power and vision to the next generation" (81).

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