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A Reading of Tolkien's 'On Fairy Stories'

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J. R. R. トールキンの 'On Fairy Stories' の解釈

ケイト・ボウズ

「フェアリー・テール」(お伽話、妖精物語)という言葉はほとんどの空想上の話に適用され、ヴィクトリア朝以後は、特に子ども用の読み物と思われてきた。これはフェアリー・テール本来の文学形式の評価・鑑賞を制限し、誤解を招くものであった。'On Fairy Stories' はトールキンの最も有名で、かつ重要な評論である。文学形式としてのファンタジー作品を説明し、独創的なマニフェストと評価されているこの評論の解釈を本稿で紹介する。

キーワード：フェアリー、キリスト教、ユーカタストフィー

We talk much of the Imagination . . . It is that which penetrates into the unseen worlds around us . . . It is that which feels and discovers what is, the real which we see not, which exists not for our senses. Those who have learned to walk on the threshold of the unknown worlds . . . may then with the fair white wings of Imagination hope to soar further into the unexplored amidst which we live.

(Ada Lovelace)¹

J.R.R. Tolkien's essay 'On Fairy Stories' was first delivered in condensed form as the Andrew Lang lecture at St. Andrew's University on March 8th, 1939. Later, in 1947, it was expanded and revised and included in a book of essays to celebrate and honor Charles Williams, a member of the esteemed British Christian fantasy writers known collectively as 'The Inklings'. The Inklings were an Oxford group that included, among others, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Owen Barfield, and Charles Williams. The group has long been recognized as one of the most creative literary groups of the mid-twentieth century, one whose fantasy writings in particular have become a major influence on the development of subsequent literature and film. For about a decade prior to the Lang lecture, Tolkien had been thinking and discussing myth (a kind of ur-fantasy²) with his friend and colleague, C.S. Lewis. These discussions led Lewis to take a crucial step on the road to his conversion to Christianity, to accept and give intellectual assent to what

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Tolkien believed about the 'true myth' of the story of Christ.³ 'On Fairy Stories' is an exploration of the roles of language, myth and the imagination in literature. Regarded as Tolkien's most famous and important essay, it is seen as his creative manifesto that explains fantasy as a literary form. My essay will attempt to offer some explanations (with second language speakers and members of another culture in mind) of the main points of the essay with the hopes of making it more accessible.

Most undergraduates have encountered Professor Tolkien's work either in book form or in the cinema. What many may not know is that Tolkien did a long, deep study, gave a milestone lecture and published his essay on fairy-stories just as he was starting to write his sequel to *The Hobbit*, the now famous *Lord of the Rings*. Scholars believe that his work on this essay was very influential in shaping his ideas for the novel. In the essay, 'On Fairy Stories', he asks questions that anyone with an interest in the fantasy genre in general or fairy-stories specifically, ought to consider. For example: What is a fairy story? Must such a story have a fairy character? What does fairy mean? Where do fairies come from? Are fairy-stories only meant for children? What use are fairy-stories?

It is not easy to read J.R.R. Tolkien's essay 'On Fairy Stories'. There are a number of reasons that make it challenging. In addition to it being quite a long piece, it also comes from another time and another world. It is like meeting a time-traveling stranger who doesn't speak your language, someone whose frames of reference and whose knowledge is quite, quite different from yours: a parallel world of difference! In addition, Tolkien's prose lacks the crispness and vivacity that characterises the writing of the earlier fantasist G.K. Chesterton or, indeed, Tolkien's peer, C.S. Lewis.

A few relevant facts about Professor Tolkien might be helpful in preparing a study of his work. He was a philologist--*philo-* meaning 'love of', and *logos* meaning 'words': a lover of words. He studied literature very deeply and was especially interested in it in an historical sense, trying to find out as much as possible about the literary texts' original forms and their meanings. His work was about recovering lost worlds from the fragments of stories he discovered in his research. He was what might now be called an historical or comparative linguist. To know this about Tolkien should make us pay close attention to the many possible layers of meaning that are present in his writings.⁴

There are two further points on language an attentive reader will notice in this essay. One is especially relevant to women readers. Tolkien uses the male pronoun to signify a person or the reader.⁵ This is in keeping with the stylistic conventions of his time, but it is old-fashioned, exclusive and unnecessary (as well as slightly annoying) in modern English. Another point is that there is an inconsistent spelling (and meaning) for the word 'fairy', a word from Middle English, that stems from the Old French word *faerie/faierie* meaning 'enchantment' which, in turn, is rooted in the word *fay/*

fae which may have been developed from the Latin *fata* (plural of *fatum*) meaning 'the Fates'. Verlyn Flieger rightly asks: 'Since Tolkien spoke and wrote of the realm of *Faërie*', one wonders why he didn't call them '*Faërie-stories*'?'⁶ In 'On Fairy Stories', Tolkien reminds the reader that the noun *fairy* is more or less equivalent to *elf*, or as Spenserian tradition has it, *Elfe*.⁷ (7-9)

Keep in mind also that Tolkien's audience at St. Andrew's University was relatively small, probably elite and undoubtedly well-educated. There was a greater general familiarity with the classics and mythology (especially Greek and Roman) than there is today. Everyone would have spoken and understood the language and allusions used by the Professor. At the time of the lecture, Tolkien was known primarily as an expert on *Beowulf*. Thus, when reading the expanded essay that grew out of the lecture, you will find only passing references to stories and poetry that are part of a common global currency in the world today, and these mostly from the coloured fairy tale books collected by Andrew Lang, for whom the St. Andrew's lecture series had been named.⁸ Other tales mentioned include the fourteenth-century ballad 'Thomas the Rhymer,' Shakespeare's *A Midsummer-night's Dream*, Michael Drayton's *Nymphidia*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and Jonathan Swift's *A Voyage to Lilliput*. Tolkien uses these stories as examples to judge how well they fit into his emerging theory of the Fairy Story.

Tolkien was a Roman Catholic and there are strong Christian ideas that run through the essay. He was especially interested in the metaphysics of creation, a Divine act that repeats in human artistry. Central to Tolkien's theology of art is the human expression of creativity that he termed 'sub-creation'. This term has a strong Christian, or metaphysical, nuance. Alison Milbank points out that all fantasy writers have some degree of commitment to metaphysics; something she regards as fundamental to the invention of fictional worlds. 'It is well-nigh impossible to write non-theistic fantasy,' she writes, 'because an intentionality in the act of creation of Being and beings is inherent in the whole enterprise' (18). Milbank goes on to label as radical this key notion of Tolkien's: that fantasy 'can help give us access to the real by freeing the world of objects from our appropriation of them' (19). In other words, fantasy has a way of making the world of objects new, or strange, and Tolkien believed that not only are we able to refresh imaginations that have been dulled by seeing things in relation to ourselves in habitual and familiar ways, but that we are actually given (if only momentarily) access to envision things as they are in Reality: miraculous, spirit-filled gifts.

'On Fairy Stories' is divided into seven sections. It consists of an introduction; instructions on how to look and how *not* to look at a fairy story (in the 'Fairy Story' and 'Origins' sections) and an examination of the questionable assumptions surrounding the relationship between children and fairy stories (in the section entitled 'Children').

Following this there is the section that details the main purposes of fairy stories: Fantasy, Recovery, Escape and Consolation. The essay ends with a short and spirited Epilogue.

From the beginning the reader is made aware of the difficulties in defining what a fairy story is. Tolkien frames what is to come in his investigation as a 'rash adventure' for, he writes, 'Faerie is a perilous land' whose 'richness and strangeness tie the tongue of a traveller who would report them' (3). In spite of the rhetorical devices that signal anticipated danger and suspense, wanting to know more about fairy-stories it is necessary to attempt to answer at least the following questions: 'What are fairy-stories? What is their origin? What is the use of them?' (4).

There is a curious juxtaposition that the author makes in the introduction concerning the concepts 'wonder' and 'information'. Tolkien writes that fairy-stories are 'full of wonder but not of information' (3). This is an interesting combination to look at more closely for two reasons. First, it raises interesting questions relevant to the current (young) generation negotiating lives in this so-called 'Age of Information', heir to so many kinds of (technological) wonder. Second, the statement reveals the facet of Tolkien's personality that raged against the unsettling disenchantments in society that came along with increasing industrialisation: 'mass-production robot factories and the roar of self-obstructive mechanical traffic' (62) that gave rise, in turn, to 'the rawness and ugliness of modern European life' (64). For him, the life of reading and writing and imagination was preferable.

Arguably, the concepts 'wonder' and 'information' provide a kind of sliding spectrum to use in judging Tolkien's argument in 'On Fairy Stories' because they can be seen to represent different states of mind and different ways of knowing. Perhaps the context in which Tolkien was writing gives a clue to the asymmetry of value he assigns to the notions. When Verlyn Flieger describes Tolkien's time as 'one of the most turbulent in history. Its wars, its use of technology in its most destructive aspects, its material progress and spiritual confusion,' I am reminded, to a degree, of our own times. She notes that Tolkien's generation's 'avowedly 'modern' ethos engendered in him a reaction that was in its own way equally modern: a nostalgic longing for a return to a lost past coupled with the knowledge that this was impossible save in the realm of the imagination' (*A Question of Time*, hereafter QT, 3). With a note of sadness, Tolkien comments: 'It seems to become fashionable soon after the great voyages had begun to make the world seem too narrow to hold both men and elves' (6). This suggests that, once upon a time, our imaginations were wider and more adventurous when we didn't 'know' quite so much, when we were not quite so ever-hungry for, and at the same time, so stuffed with, information.⁹

Is information the opposite of wonder as Tolkien seemed to imply? Surely not. Our age is full of wonders with 'information superhighways'—isn't *this* the way to Faeryland?— and countless feats of technological wizardry, but this is not, it seems,

what Tolkien intends by wonder. He means something more than mere technique or magic. 'Faerie itself,' he writes, 'may perhaps most nearly be translated by Magic--but it is *magic of a peculiar mood and power*, at the furthest pole from the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific, magician' (my emphases, 10). Inventions from the time of the Industrial Revolution had been coming up with methods and machinery that 'perfected' technique and operated as if by 'magic' while simultaneously depriving humans of their need for work and belonging and the nourishment for the imagination that these provided.

If the terms 'wonder' and 'information' point to different ways of knowing, could it be that one grows out of imaginative modes, the other out of the rational? Does one generate the other or are they separate 'non-overlapping magisteria', to use the evolutionary biologist, Stephen Jay Gould's percipient phrase? Jenny Turner's discussion of the Peter Jackson translations of *Lord of the Rings* into film suggests that in our day and age wonder and information are very much mutually generative, overlapping magisteria. She remarks on 'the digitally enhanced hyper-real quality more sumptuous than Technicolor, more magical than cartoons', calling the films, rather cynically, efficient evocations by the entertainment industry of that 'deep, mysterious feeling which yet can be commodified.' Indeed, '[o]f the many strange things there are to observe about Tolkien, the way his ideas about his writing converge with contemporary conceptions of virtual reality is one of the most odd,' Turner concludes. Peter Jackson rationalised his making of the films, translating, as it were, wonder into information, saying: 'The technology has caught up with the incredible imagination that Tolkien injected into that story of his' (n.p).

In Latin, the verb *informare* means 'to give form to; to shape; to mold'. Information, then, is the act of 'infusion with form'. Our modern understanding of the word 'information', however, is more virtual, more fragmented into bits and bytes than 'formal' material. We are said to be living amid a 'flood' of information. One illustration of this serves to prove the point. After the 2010 revision of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, lexicographers updated the definition --which first appeared in Anglo-Saxon in 1386 and meant 'denunciation'-- and now runs the length of a small novella at 9400 words. Once, perhaps in ages more religiously oriented, we were more wonder saturated. Information now defines our world, but it is information in a post-modern sense as defined by the American engineer and father of Information Theory, Claude Shannon. This definition, Gleick argues convincingly, transformed information

into a mathematically defined quality *divorced from any concept of news or meaning* We measure it in bits. We recognize it in words, sounds, images; we store it on the printed page and on polycarbonate discs engraved by lasers and in our genes. We are aware, more or less, that it defines our world. (NYRB, n.p.)

This most recent sense would have been anathema to Tolkien who, despite his loathing of industrialism, recognised the value and fulfilments intrinsic to human making and art

of all kinds. 'Art,' he wrote, 'is the human process that produces . . . Secondary Belief' (53), which is to say, the faith that another, better world is possible. In fact, I find the original Latin sense of information, the infusion with form, to correspond most nearly with Tolkien's notion of sub-creation. And yet, it is fascinating that, despite this flood of information in which we now live and move and have our being, the shine of the fairy story has not grown dull; rather, its light has grown stronger as it finds itself translated into an ever-wider range of media. Why have we not turned our attention away from the wonder of stories and instead given our minds over solely (soul-ly?) to the novelties and wonders of our Information Age?

A fairy story is an account of a particular 'open-to-wonder,' or, perhaps 'romantic,' way of looking at the world. An authentic fairy story is marked by the creation of a plausible and self-consistent Secondary World, a fantastic world which is governed by its own norms and laws; it is not simply an extension of our Primary World (i.e. Reality). Fairy stories are not, Tolkien explains, usually '*about* fairies or elves, but . . . about . . . *faërie*, the realm or state in which fairies have their being.' *Faërie* contains many things, both fantastic (elves, dwarfs, witches, trolls, dragons and the like) and natural (the seas, the sun, moon and sky; the earth; trees, birds, water and stone, wine, bread and human beings), but each thing is encountered, in the state of *faërie*,—seen or sensed—through the lens of enchantment (9).

How then are we to approach 'Fairyland', this enchanted and enchanting realm of *faërie*? To begin, it is necessary to put aside a few attitudes and methods you may customarily engage in pursuit of your desired goals. To do this, in my view, represents a kind of purification, the kind that precedes initiation and welcome to a new way of inhabiting life. The Secondary World of *Faërie* resembles, after all, as Jane Chance asserts, the Other World of Heaven (75).

First, forget that you might ever have believed fairy-stories to be solely the province of children. In the essay Tolkien asks: 'Is there any *essential* connection between children and fairy-stories?' (33) and answers with a resounding 'no', reminding the reader that his own 'taste for fairy-stories had been 'wakened by philology on the threshold of manhood, and quickened to full life by war' (Fliieger, *Interrupted Music*, hereafter IM, 16). Actually, in the field of children's literature (itself a term that is difficult to define) ways of understanding how a child and childhood is defined is a question that undergoes perpetual revision and change along with culture(s) over time.¹⁰ Put away your 'comfortable Wordsworthian notion of the innocence of the child' urges Verlyn Fliieger, which is 'a naive contradiction of the nineteenth century actualities of sweatshops, child labour, and child prostitution that were the reality of their world' (IM, 20). Fairy-stories, in Tolkien's time, were censored and sanitized so that all the gore and mayhem in them was cut out (to fit with the ideal of the Child rather than the reality of many, perhaps most, children). Tolkien reasoned that if all that editing was necessary,

that fairy-stories in their original states could hardly have been intended for children. In a letter to his publishers Tolkien stated: 'I think the so-called "Fairy Stories" one of the highest forms of literature, and quite erroneously associated with children (as such)' (qtd. in Hart, 1).

Secondly, we are warned that it is inadvisable to approach *faërie* with a rational mindset (seeking 'information', say). There is a strong suggestion embedded in the essay that this attitude may be what makes the realm 'perilous', for in that state, unpredictability holds sway; things do not conform to known models. It is written, for instance, that in *Faërie* 'it is dangerous . . . to ask too many questions, lest the gates should be shut and the keys lost.' (3) The rational belongs not on the side of wonder, but on the side of information and Tolkien rather sourly remarks that the rational has 'transformed the glamour of *Elfland* into mere finesse' (6). The deep allure and promise of *Elfland* is, in other words, stripped away, and in its place instead is a hollow, thinly-imagined, two-dimensional contrivance.

Thus, thirdly, in *Faërie* our meetings are bound to be beyond our imaginations and expectations. In truth, '*Faërie* cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible. It has many ingredients, but analysis will not necessarily discover the secret of the whole' (10). When something is indescribable but still available to perception, this is something one can *recognise* at a deep level of being, but it may be so potent, or fragile, that it cannot be expressed with words. For example, the figure of the elf or the fairy is not anything you can know, in your familiar paths of knowing. Understanding a fairy-story does not depend on an analytical or historical understanding of the figure of the elf or the fairy. Therefore, cute, little Tinkerbell, contrary to popular fashion, or nostalgic sentimentality (or the Japanese preoccupation with *kawaii* phenomena)¹¹, is actually *not* the quintessential fairy figure. Tolkien grumbles that [the Edwardian and Georgian] 'flower-and-butterfly minuteness was . . . a product of "rationalisation"' (6). The smaller were the fairies, the less threatening and easy to manage they appeared for the masters of the 'brave, new world'. But, Tolkien warns that 'the real folk of *faërie* . . . do not always look like what they are' (8).

The last point Tolkien makes about the ideas to let go before we journey to the Secondary World of *Faërie* concerns academic arguments about fairy-stories that were going on around the time of his speech. He advises his audience that there is no likelihood that the origin/s of fairy-stories will ever be figured out. Answering the whats, the wheres and the whys of fairy-stories is no way to gain admission to *Faërie*. We cannot know the answers to these essentially useless questions because 'The history of fairy stories is probably more complex than the physical history of the human race, and as complex as the history of human language,' Tolkien writes (21). Seeking the origins of fairy-stories as an academic exercise irked Tolkien. He took folklorists and anthropologists to task for their attempts at scientific analysis of the tales

and regarded their data-gathering exercises as reductive and frivolous, bringing us no closer to understanding the meanings and purposes of the fairy-stories.¹² He accused them of 'using stories not as they were meant to be used, but as a quarry from which to dig evidence or information' (18). Flieger uses a different metaphor, describing the exercises as a 'Sherlockian search for answers [in which] the close inspection of trees [left researchers] unable to see the forest' (IM,17). A wide view and an openness to surprise are necessary attitudes to bring to the encounter with Faërie. No singular focus will reveal the slightest glimmer or hint of the truth.

Though we cannot know the origins of fairy-stories, Tolkien's interest in philology compelled him to look at the emergence and evolution of patterns that make up the intricate web of fairy-story. He theorised a trio of related terms to explain their existence and distribution: invention, diffusion and inheritance (20-21).¹³ The word 'invention' has a Latin root, *invenire*, that means 'to meet with' or 'to come upon something' and it seems that without this encounter (with Faerie), no true fairy story could credibly be (sub-) created. While sub-creation is not strictly related to the topic of evolution, it could conceivably be tied to recent theorising by literary Darwinists who would certainly take an interest in the notions of diffusion (borrowing in space) and inheritance (borrowing in time) but whose approach may, like the folklorists, anthropologists and other social scientists before them, still fail to understand the true gift of the inventor.¹⁴

Having received advice for the journey to the Secondary World, by way of the things we should not carry with us on our adventure, I will now discuss Tolkien's notions of creativity and the workings, or purposes, of fantasy.

For Tolkien, the Christian, sub-creation was a form of worship, a way for creatures to express the divine image in them by becoming creators.¹⁵ At the base of Tolkien's sub-creation thesis is this: we must give form to what is imagined. The imagination is a gift, to be sure, but without the *act* of sub-creation via the tongue and the tale, without storytelling (in, preferably, literary form), the imagination makes no contact with others and therefore, is essentially meaningless.¹⁶ And fantasy, done properly, is not at all easy. Great effort is needed to build a world that will seem credible and consistent. Where the magician will simply trick you with 'magic [which is] not an art but a technique; its desire is power in this world, domination of things and wills' (53), the fantastist's art does not aspire to 'delusion, bewitchment or domination; it seeks shared enrichment [and] partners in making and delight, not slaves' (54). Fantasy writing is a serious craft; it is active, intentional and difficult to achieve. And yet, it is also 'a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and clearer is the reason, the better fantasy it will make' (55).

Fantasy worlds and plots must be well-designed and controlled. They must

appear seamless. Peter Schakel explains:

If a Secondary World is so well created in its use of detail and inner consistency that it creates a spell of enchantment, readers can enter that world imaginatively and, while they are inside it, believe in its 'truth' or reality the same way that they believe in the truth and reality of the Primary World . . . If the spell is broken, by an inconsistency in the fantasy world or by the intrusion of the Primary World into the Secondary World, readers will find themselves plunged back into the Primary World, no longer able to give unqualified belief to the Secondary World. It is possible to re-enter the Secondary World after the spell has been broken, but not to re-enter the spell. (32)

There is a deep desire in readers to be inspired by, and to believe in, the fictional world and to do this, they must truly be absorbed by it. Such is the essence, purpose and pleasure of faërie. Against those seeking to use Faerie to grow in academic stature Tolkien offered instead what Fliieger calls a 'more imaginative analysis of the true nature and appropriate uses of fantasy' (IM 18). Tolkien's focus of concern was with wholeness, not with the fragments that made the whole. 'A story,' he wrote, 'is a thing told in its entirety.'

'The first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship,' writes C.S. Lewis in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, 'is to know *what* it is--what it was intended to do and how it is meant to be used' (1). Can this set of criteria be applied to fairy-story? I believe so. 'The magic of Faërie is not an end in itself,' Tolkien writes, explaining that 'its virtue is in its operations: among these are the satisfaction of certain primordial human desires' (13). That is to say: the intention of Faërie, the place or state in which fairy-stories originate, exists to satisfy human desire. These desires might include the following examples: to go beyond the world of everyday experience, to be able to fly, to explore other dimensions of time and space, to be able to communicate with animals or meet living things not present in our world (66). These desires for a world that is Other, a world richer and more alive than the world of everyday experience, are the kinds of desire fantasy can both stimulate and sate. The way Tolkien describes this state is theologically inflected but not, I think, exclusive. Our 'primordial human desires', after all, are universal and non-denominational. The purposes of fantasy are threefold: 'Recovery, Escape and Consolation' (56).

From what may we need to recover and how can fantasy fiction help? Tolkien writes that recovery concerns a revitalisation of the body and mind, a kind of radical refreshment; but, he writes that recovery is, above all, about the 'regaining of a clear view' (56). Here the teachings of St. Augustine on Tolkien are influential, as this recovery of clear-sightedness is not so much about the physical eyes as it is about the clarity of vision enabled by the 'eye of the heart'. (Remembering the wonder-information spectrum I have mentioned, one might ask: How well does the eye of

the heart work in the busy-ness of the Information Age? How do we see anything clearly when there is so much to see?) St. Augustine taught that clarity of vision was extremely important and in one sermon, he said: 'Our whole business in this life is to restore to health the eye of the heart whereby God may be seen . . .' (38.5). Tolkien does not mention God explicitly, but believes that via fairy-story a moment when 'a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth' (71) may be possible. This intuition of another dimension may stand for what is sometimes called Ultimate Reality, which believers identify with the Divine.

Ordinary perception for the post-modern world-weary may resemble the following depiction by Victor Shklovsky (and serve as example from that which we need to recover):

We are like the violinist who has ceased to feel the bow and the strings, we have ceased to be artists in everyday life, we do not love our houses and clothes, and easily part from a life of which we are not aware. Only the creation of new forms of art can restore . . . [the] sensation of the world, can resurrect things and kill pessimism. (qtd. in Milbank, 31)

Tolkien deftly diagnoses the cause of the malady of losing touch with the liveliness of life:

. . . triteness is really the penalty of 'appropriation': the things that are trite, or (in a bad sense) familiar, are the things that we have appropriated, legally or mentally. We say we know them. They have become like the things which once attracted us by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape, and we laid hands on them, and then locked them in our hoard, acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them. (58)

It is precisely for this condition that the medicine of Faërie is prescribed to aid in the recovery of sight to the eyes of the heart.

Ways of seeing are given a lot of attention in fantasy writing. By definition, this genre is at one remove from ordinary, or realist, fiction and so Tolkien compares two approaches of seeing in 'On Fairy Stories'. One is a technique used by the earlier British writer and sometimes fantasist, G.K. Chesterton. It is called 'Mooreeffoc' and represents a kind of language game that separates the thing from the name in an attempt to reinvigorate one's perception of the thing. '*Mooreeffoc* is a fantastic word . . . It is Coffee-room, viewed from the inside through a glass door . . . and it was used by Chesterton to denote the queerness of things that have become trite, when they are seen suddenly from a new angle' (58). For Tolkien it was fairy-stories that refreshed the connection between words and things. He writes: 'I first divined the potency of the words, and the wonder of the things that populate a life: stone, wood, iron, tree, grass, houses, fire, bread and wine (60).

However, Tolkien finds Chesterton's 'Mooreeffoc' technique limited in its power because 'recovery of freshness of vision is its only virtue' (59). He sees the possibilities

for creative fantasy going further, making something new, where 'gems all turn into flowers or flames, and you will be warned that all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent, not really effectively chained, free and wild; no more yours than they were you.' To be initiated into this faerie realm, you must 'open your hoard and let all the locked things fly away like cage-birds' (59). They must be allowed to escape; you, too, must escape what you thought you knew of reality because 'Faery (*sic*) represents at its weakest a breaking out (at least in mind) from the iron ring of the familiar, still more from the adamantine ring of belief that it is known, possessed, controlled, and so (ultimately) all that is worth being considered--a constant awareness of the world beyond these rings' (Fleiger, QT, 247).

The escape Tolkien describes is an escape from 'the essential malady' of time-worn attitudes, 'from our . . . self-made misery' and from the 'vivid sense of separation' we endure, severed from the living wonders in and around ourselves (60). It is an escape from the prison of our minds; a realization of our radical, individual freedom. A crucial point to note, however, is that this is not escape for escape's sake, no more than the archetypal Hero leaves on the quest out of boredom. No, the point is not just to get away; the point is to return. As we return from a Secondary World, we see new things in the Primary World, and we see old things in new ways. Our vision cleansed, Faerie dust from beyond illuminates what has become faded by time and habit. In other words, we return from Faerie transformed by the journey to a world that is itself transformed by what we have experienced outside it.

Escape and Recovery lead to the the ultimate value of all true fairy stories: the Consolation of the happy ending, which is the realisation of love. For this ending, this 'joyous turn', Tolkien coined the word: *Eucatastrophe*. This keyword is rooted in Greek: *Eu*, meaning 'good', and *katastrophē*, meaning a sudden turn with a sense of denouement. It is not so much an ending as a turn that allows us to begin again, keenly and with renewed clarity. Tolkien describes the eucatastrophic turn as 'a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur.' Eucatastrophe 'does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*,¹⁷ of sorrow and failure.' However, to know the equal possibility of the negative occurring is necessary for the special enjoyment that comes with the consolation and relief of the positive 'turn'. Despite 'much evidence' of *dyscatastrophe* in the world, Tolkien finds that the consolation of Faerie 'denies [the eventuality of] universal defeat' because in Faerie our minds are opened to 'a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world . . .' (69). This quality of Joy, Tolkien identifies particularly with the ancient Greek word, *evangelium*, a word meaning 'good news' (and later in Old English was translated to *Gospel*). *Evangelium*, or 'good news' refers to Jesus' vision of the Reign of God, which is, mystically and mysteriously, already here and always coming.

It is most certainly true that Tolkien's epilogue is a fine and moving peroration. It expresses the joy of the fairy-story 'turn.'

The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels—peculiarly artistic, beautiful, and moving: ‘mythical’ in their perfect, self-contained significance; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe. . . . The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of . . . history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. (72)

One can only properly understand this statement if there has been some effort or some inkling of understanding of the concept and context of Faerie. To slip back into the modern, uninformed view of fairy-story or myth is to misread Tolkien’s principle insight. He sees that the Gospels, rather than invalidating fantastic tales and legends, has ‘hallowed’ them, liberating us from death (‘the oldest and deepest desire, the Great Escape’ (68)) and raising in us, the anticipation of the ‘happy ending’. And though, as he points out, the ‘Christian has still to work, with mind as well as body, to suffer, hope, and die’ this can all be done purposefully and hopefully and faithfully. We do not, cannot, know how things will turn out because we know less about Ultimate Reality than we can about the realm of Faerie, but what we intuit about Faerie can help us to imagine and prepare our minds. Both our creations and our selves (which also, to a degree, are our creations) will be recognisable at the end/beginning, but ‘may be as like and as unlike the forms that we give them’ (73).

Tolkien finds in the Christian Gospels justification for the art of fantasy: ‘God is the Lord, of angels, and of [humans] – and of elves’, he writes, and this last word, ‘elves,’ gives me hope that he is not, in the words of a popular idiom, ‘preaching to the choir’. I cannot agree with Jane Chance’s assertion that ‘the Christian alone will believe in Tolkien’s eucatastrophe because such belief is a matter of faith and not of reason’ (83). Making use of the force of the Christian gospels, love, and framing it in a more inclusive manner, Tolkien himself recognised that Faerie

represents love: that is, a love and respect for all things, “Inanimate” and “animate,” an unpossessive love of them as “other.” . . . Things seen in its light will be respected, and they will also appear delightful, beautiful, wonderful even glorious. Faery might be said indeed to represent Imagination (without definition because taking in all definitions of this word): esthetic, exploratory and receptive; and artistic, inventive, dynamic, (sub)creative.

I find in Tolkien’s essay ‘On Fairy Stories’ a great guide in the matter of cultivating true wisdom via wonder in the age of information. It highlights, too, why great storytellers matter a great deal: we need help to make sense of our increasingly complex world. To Tolkien it mattered that we did not become mired in the material world and forget the parts of ourselves capable of experiencing mystery and self-transcendence, and of imagining and acting ourselves into new spaces of well-being and

promise. A Tolkeinesque theology of art reveals, as Alison Milbank has pointed out, 'the createdness of the world, and the creative vocation of the artist in remaking it.' Art is 'mediatory: a theological tool for opening human eyes to see the reality of God and the reality, albeit contingent, of the world beyond the self' (xiv). Indeed, as Tolkien himself claimed: 'Fantasy [is] a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker' (56).

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Endnotes

¹ Qtd. in Gleick, *The Information*, 112-3. Lovelace, Ada. *Untitled Essay, 5 Jan. 1841* note 112, 441].

² The prefix ur- means primitive, original, or earliest. It denotes someone or something regarded as embodying the basic or intrinsic qualities of a particular class or type.

³ Humphrey Carpenter writes in his biography of Tolkien that it is '... only by myth-making, only by becoming a 'sub-creator' and inventing stories, can Man ascribe to the state of perfection that he knew before the Fall. Our myths may be misguided but they steer however shakily towards the true harbour' (147-8).

⁴ Reading Tolkien with the benefit of a good dictionary supplemented by an etymological dictionary is highly recommended. Much that is hidden to our conventional expectations could be revealed with careful close reading.

⁵ By the time Tolkien gave his lecture in Scotland, it had not yet been 20 years since women at Oxford, his university, were allowed to matriculate with equal qualifications to men.

⁶ See Verlyn Flieger's note on Tolkien's "idiosyncratic" uses of "Fairy>Faëry>Fayery>Faery," in J. R. R. Tolkien, *Smith of Wooton Major*. See also, Tolkien, footnote [1] ("On Fairy Stories", 6)

⁷ Edmund Spenser wrote (but did not complete) a long, allegorical poem called *The Faerie Queene* in the late 16th century.

⁸ Andrew Lang (1844-1912), the pioneering collector of twelve volumes of the "colour" fairy tale books between 1889 and 1910.

⁹ It is a common misunderstanding nowadays that access to information produces increased knowledge. If anything, the opposite is true as Maria Popova observes in a recent blog post: 'more and more information without proper context and interpretation only muddles our understanding of the world rather than enriching it.'

¹⁰ Cf. Fiona MacCulloch, *Children's Literature in Context*, (2011); Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (1982); Colin Heyward, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times* (2001).

¹¹ Cf. Arguably, most Japanese youth have a limited knowledge of what fairy-stories are because their impressions have been colonised by Disney. For a critical description of the phenomenon, see Donald Richie's chapter "Kawaii-Kingdom of the Cute" in *The Image Factory: Fads and Fashions in Japan* (London: Reaktion, 2003).

¹² Tolkien's arguments with Andrew Lang, George Dasent and Max Müller are neatly summarised in Fleiger's *Interrupted Music*, in the last two sections of Chapter One.

¹³ The irony of Tolkien's own 'scientific' take on fairy tales seems to have escaped him. An instance, of shadow-boxing, perhaps?

¹⁴ On Literary Darwinism, see Denis Dutton's review "The Pleasures of Fiction" in *Philosophy and Literature* 28 (2004) 453-66 (also available on www.denisdutton.com);

D.T.Max in *The New York Times*, "The Literary Darwinists" on 6 Nov. 2005. [accessed Sept. 5, 2014]. For a recent, full and interesting introduction see M.M.Owen "On the Origin of Novels: Encountering Literary Darwinism" Feb. 6th, 2014 at www.themillions.com.

¹⁵ Jews, Christians and certain Islamic sects believe in the Doctrine of the Image of God, that human beings are created in God's image and therefore have inherent value independent of their utility or function.

¹⁶ Jane Chance summarises Tolkien's argument comparing the literary with the dramatic. Literature is characterised by eucatastrophe, the happy turn, with the triumph of the mortal over death and the escape into the other world, whereas Drama mirrors the primary world which is tragic and dyscatastrophic. (82)

¹⁷ *dys-* means hard, difficult or bad. It is the opposite of the prefix *eu-*.