

The Allure of Fantasy, Part Two

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Abstract: this essay continues from “The Allure of Fantasy, Part One,” and is an attempt to explain why three of the best-selling works of fiction of all-time are fantasy novels. I discuss the influence of the Bible on *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and the *Harry Potter* series, examining their treatments of time, war and violence.

Key words: Twentieth Century English Literature; Fantasy Literature; Tolkien, J.R.R.; Lewis, C.S.; Rowling, J.K.; The Bible

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In Part One of this essay, I attempted to answer the seemingly simple question of why certain works of fantasy literature have been the best-selling or most popular works of all-time. I looked at *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1949-1954; hereafter *CN*), *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955; hereafter *LOTR*), and *Harry Potter* (1997-2007; hereafter *HP*). I found that they have in common a number of key themes or motifs. These were 1) the element of sacrifice – one of the main characters commits an act of heroic self-sacrifice, which saves the day. 2) heroes are ordinary characters, children or child-like figures whose strengths lie elsewhere than in physical power. 3) the depiction of Nature as an animate living force, a character, or characters, in its own right. I also note the powerful influence on all three of these fantasy texts of the Bible. Indeed, I conclude that the three modern fantasy works in effect take over where the Bible left off, offering modern readers a hopeful vision of life and appealing modern heroes that serve as guides to living in a world threatened by evil and violence. Though many Western people no longer attend Church or subscribe to Christian beliefs, they continue to believe in some of the most fundamental Christian values, and these values are reaffirmed in fantasy literature. I would like to continue the discussion in Part Two with the same four texts but now looking at two more themes that I believe ‘rule them all and bind them.’ These are time and war.

Fantasy literature plays with our sense of time. At the beginning of *LOTR*, we appear to be in some distant pre-industrial past, which somehow reminds us of the European Middle Ages. There are no guns or machines, but there are swords, bows and arrows.

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horses and farms. We are given to understand that it is long before the 'Age of Men,' and yet evidently there is metal and there is agriculture. (There are even potatoes, coffee, and tobacco, which might give rise to a moment of disbelief in the secondary world, since none of these existed in the European Middle Ages.) Tolkien's world is both prehistoric and pagan, an age of chivalry with its own internal consistency. As a medievalist, "for Tolkien it came naturally, and he must have seen *LOTR* as in some sense a commentary on things medieval," writes Edward James (70). Tolkien goes to great lengths to establish an historical chronology, an authenticity that adds greatly to the sense that we are not in an unreal world of fantasy, but in the real world of *history*. Thus *The Hobbit* is said to begin in the month of April in the year 1341 *Shire-reckoning* (*LOTR* 23; my emphasis). A few pages later Tolkien casually mentions the "Third Age" of Hobbit history, when "many of their members studied its ancient histories and legends" (*LOTR* 26). We are in an ancient mythical world but with continual references to other ages more ancient still. The events of *LOTR* are said to have come from ancient Shire historical documents:

The original Red Book has not been preserved, but many copies were made, especially of the first volume, for the use of the descendants of the children of Master Samwise. The most important copy, however, has a different history. It was kept at Great Smials, but it was written in Gondor, probably at the request of the great-grandson of Peregrin, and completed in S.R. 1592 (F.A. 172). (*LOTR* 26-27)

Tolkien includes these dates as though they were perfectly logical and commonly understood. The reader is liable to forget that he is not beginning a work of history but of pure fantasy, and none of the texts referred to actually exist.

Lending authenticity and structure to the sense of a great and sequential history are the Appendices, which include "Annals of the Kings and Rulers," a full forty-eight pages of Bible-like thin paper in tiny font (1070-1118); "The Tale of Years," a discussion of the Four Ages of Middle-earth (1119-1134); lineages of the principal Hobbits in the tale (1134-1139); and finally, a discussion of the Shire Calendar (1140-1146). That all of this works and fits together logically is evidence of an extraordinarily meticulous creator, but I think only a hardcore Tolkienite could master it. It is incredibly complex, and one wonders at the classification of *LOTR* as 'children's' literature.

Throughout *LOTR*, references to older legends, other times, an ancient history create a sense of the deep importance of the past. While nurturing the mythic quality of the text, these references also lend weight to the sense that the tale is timeless, or that history is recurring. Thus Sauron is once defeated but returns in a new age of Middle-earth in a different form. The blade that Aragorn uses to command the spirits under the White Mountains is known as Andúril, but it has been forged from the handle-shard of Narsil, the same that Aragorn's ancestor Isildur used to cut the One Ring from the hand of Sauron.

Aragorn's possession of the re-forged blade confirms his identity as heir of Isildur and rightful claimant to the throne of Gondor. The events are new, but history repeats itself. And in a famous scene in the chapter "The Stairs of Cirith Ungol," Sam and Frodo reflect on this pattern of repetition. Referring to the Phial of Galadriel with its star-light, Sam remarks, "We've got – you've got some of the light of it in that star-glass the Lady gave you! Why, to think of it, we're in the same tale still! It's going on. Don't the great tales never end?" To which Frodo replies, "No, they never end as tales," said Frodo. 'But the people in them come, and go when their part's ended. Our part will end later – or sooner'" (*LOTR* 739). Thus Frodo's great task is part of an even greater one, a recurring struggle between good and evil in which the present characters play temporary parts. The past is not past, but is ever now in the present moment.

Time shift is also employed in the *Narnia* series, though in a very different manner. Unlike *LOTR*, which takes us into a "Secondary World" (Tolkien's capitals) with its own coherent space and time, where everything "accords with the laws of that world" (Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories" 36), *Narnia* coexists alongside our own, actual world (the primary world, in Tolkien's scheme). *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950; hereafter, *LWW*) begins in contemporary London, in 1940 during the Blitz. The Pevensie children are sent to stay with Professor Digory Kirke in the countryside to escape the bombing, and there they discover the magical wardrobe, which leads them into the secondary world of Narnia. In Narnia, it is the middle of winter. Time appears to have stopped, for Narnia hasn't experienced spring (or Christmas) in over a hundred years, since the White Witch has used evil magic to make winter permanent. Time has been literally frozen. When Lucy returns through the Wardrobe back into the primary world, she discovers to her amazement that only a few seconds of primary world time have passed, although she had been in Narnia for hours. The effect of such a time shift is to suggest that Narnian time is different, and also to give it a dreamlike quality. Is it real, or is it a dream or hallucination? Only when all four children enter Narnia together does its existence become more convincing.

By the time the adventures of *LWW* are over, the Pevensie children have been crowned kings and queens of Narnia, and they have also grown up. Fifteen years of Narnian time have passed. Then one day while out riding, they discover the wardrobe, which they had all but forgotten. Once again they pass through it and back into the Professor's house, where they are suddenly children again. Thus virtually no time has passed in the primary world, and once again there is a fantasy (in the psychological sense) or dreamlike quality to the experience. They would doubt their own senses, however now they share the memory of the experience together. More importantly, Professor Kirke not only does not doubt them, but even confirms that a place called Narnia exists: "...of course you'll get back to Narnia again someday. Once a King in Narnia, always a King in Narnia. But don't go trying to use the same route twice. Indeed, don't try to get there at all. It'll happen when you're not

looking for it" (LWW 206). Sure enough, in *Prince Caspian*, the children return to Narnia unexpectedly and through a completely different portal.

In the *Harry Potter* series, there are few time dislocations. In fact, J.K. Rowling's contribution to the genre is to suggest that the fantasy or secondary world neither exists in a distant 'medieval' past nor in a parallel world accessible through a magical portal, but is right here right now in the primary world around us. Witches and wizards *exist*, only we 'Muggles' (non-magical folk) are not aware of them. The train to Hogwarts can be caught at King's Cross Station, London, if you can only get to Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. (It might be argued that Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ is a portal, but then characters of the magical world are constantly appearing and intervening in the Muggle World, as when Hagrid rescues Harry from the Dursley's, or when owls are used to deliver messages from Hogwarts to Harry. Passage between worlds is thus fairly fluid for witches and wizards and not restricted to a portal.) But with her invention of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Rowling has perhaps demonstrated some debt to Tolkien, for Hogwarts is given a long and distinguished history extending back to its establishment during the Middle Ages, in the 10th century. Families of witches and wizards are also given lineages as in *LOTR*, and in a society mirroring the social class system of the UK, certain wizard families claim "pure-blood" status and then assume an attitude of superiority over "Mudbloods," or those with mixed lineages of wizards and Muggles.

Although time shift is not really a significant element of the *Harry Potter* series, in one of the novels the manipulation of time is critical to the plot. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), Hermione uses a device called a 'Time-Turner,' which allows her to travel back in time and thus to be in two places at once. This is the secret to her being able to attend two classes simultaneously, and it is also how the characters are able to observe themselves in the past. Without the Time-Turner, they would not have been able to save Buckbeak from execution, or to rescue Sirius Black from Azkaban. Interestingly, the Time Turner creates endless possibilities for introducing time shift into *Harry Potter*, but perhaps because of its potential to make nearly *anything* possible, and thus to seriously disrupt the development of the plot, Rowling wisely decided to have the devices destroyed in *Order of the Phoenix* (2003). Time thus continues to hold sway over all life, even magical people.

Interestingly, in spite of the sense of a vast and almost timeless history, John Calabrese has determined that the history of Tolkien's Middle-earth extends over a period of just six thousand years; interesting, perhaps, because the Bible also tells us the age of the earth is six thousand years (32). The Bible has a great deal to say about time, for not only does it determine the moment of creation, a distinct beginning before which time could not exist (there was only God), but it also delineates the end of time in the Apocalypse, according to the Book of Revelation. Time is measured not so much in years but in generations: "This is

the book of the generations of Adam,” and then a catalogue of characters, their relations and offspring and the ages in which they lived (Gn 5: 1 Revised Standard Version). Concepts of time must have been different when these records were written, for some such as Methu'selah are said to have fathered children at the age of a hundred and eighty-seven (Gn 5: 25). Still, so great has been the influence of the Bible on Western perceptions of time that many to this day continue to believe the earth is six thousand years old, and some believe that the end of time is near. The Bible is also our source for the seven days of the week, one each for the days of creation, the seventh, Sunday, a day of rest. Christmas is a festival of winter occurring just after the winter solstice when the light of the sun begins to grow in strength, but it also commemorates the birth of Christ, often called the Light of the world. Easter commemorates Christ's resurrection, and it also celebrates the arrival of spring. Our day-to-day lives are thus regulated by a book some would call the greatest fantasy ever written.¹

It is in the depiction of war that works of fantasy literature perhaps bear the closest resemblance to each other, and to the Bible. All four of the texts under discussion here are, in effect, extended meditations on the nature of evil, attitudes towards meaningless violence, and attempts to find purpose, dignity and meaning in a dangerous and uncertain world in which violence threatens. As Jack Zipes has written, “the Bible and certain fantasy literature are sacred texts: unlike reality, they open the mysteries of life and reveal ways in which we can maintain our integrity. They compensate for the constant violation of the sacred and the everyday violence in our lives that are engendered through spectacle” (ix-x). Non-scholarly fans of Tolkien or Lewis might be surprised to learn that both served in the Great War, and though J.K. Rowling is too young to have had any personal experience of war, I believe *Harry Potter* follows the basic structures and plot devices of classic high fantasy or quest fantasy as they were first laid out by Tolkien and Lewis, structures and devices that were shaped by war experience. Paul Fussell would argue convincingly that “the whole texture of [modern] British daily life could be said to commemorate the war still” (341). Writers are still coming to terms with the horrific violence of two twentieth century world wars.

But surprisingly, Fussell's award-winning study of the literature engendered by the Great War fails to even mention in passing Tolkien or Lewis. It cannot be said that Fussell simply restricts himself to those who wrote directly about their war experiences, for he manages to include in his discussion Norman Mailer and Thomas Pynchon, neither of whom experienced actual combat but who nevertheless became ‘war novelists.’ Samuel Hynes' lengthy historical sweep, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (1990), also omits Tolkien and Lewis. It is as if they had stayed at home, safe, secure and absorbed in their escapist fantasies while all of Europe burned. It has been left to Tolkien and Lewis scholars to remind readers of their significant contributions, as soldiers and as writers. Tom Shippey sees Tolkien as “one of a group of ‘traumatized authors’, all of them

extremely influential . . . all of them tending to write fantasy or fable” (29-30). In Shippey’s study, Tolkien, Orwell, Vonnegut, Golding, and C.S Lewis---“combat veterans of one war or another”---were “obsessed with the subject of evil” and tried to “explain something at once deeply felt and rationally inexplicable, something furthermore felt to be entirely novel and not adequately answered by the moralities of earlier ages. . . . this something is connected with the distinctively twentieth-century experience of industrial war and impersonal, industrialized massacre” (119-120). Other scholars have focused their lenses quite sharply on how war shaped the creative lives of Tolkien and Lewis. For instance, Janet Brennan Croft in *War and the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien* (2004) discusses the influence of both wars on Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *LOTR*. Rebekah Long connects Tolkien’s Great War experience with his medievalism in “Fantastic Medievalism and The Great War in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*.” Alan Jacobs suggests that “some of the most powerful writing in the Narnia books” may “owe something to Jack’s experience as a soldier,” even though Lewis appears to have consciously suppressed his “darkest and most grievous memories” (74). However, when *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis* included a chapter “On Violence,” in which Lewis and the war were discussed, it appeared that at last the connection had been made and the contribution acknowledged (see Hauerwas).

Croft in particular does a thorough job surveying previous Tolkien criticism and discussing in detail how aspects of the two wars were treated by him, both in *The Hobbit* and in *The Lord of the Rings*. I will mention two notable themes or settings she discusses that really argue for the inclusion of *LOTR* as one of the great works of war literature. As Fussell had pointed out, a common theme in First War literature was the pastoral, images and recollections of a benign natural world replete with flowers, birds, sheep, sunshine, and rural oases. These are contrasted with the horrors of machine-gun fire, barbed wire, mud, trenches, blood, rats, and everywhere rotting corpses and death (see Fussell 251-292). Mordor is also a war zone. Approaching Mount Doom, Sam looks down upon the plains of Gorgoroth: “what from a distance had seemed wide and featureless flats were in fact all broken and tumbled. Indeed, the whole surface of the plains of Gorgoroth was pocked with great holes, as if, while it was still a waste of soft mud, it had been smitten with a shower of bolts and huge slingstones.” It is then that Sam wishes he could “see Bywater again, and Rosie Cotton and her brothers, and the Gaffer and Marigold and all” (*LOTR* 969). The Shire is of course Sam’s pastoral, “an idyllic rural setting of peace and contentment,” as I mentioned in Part One (de Gruchy 88). Sam is constantly wishing to be back there.

Escape into “moments of pastoral” occurs frequently in *LOTR* (Fussell 251). For instance, having just left the Shire, the hobbits find themselves in the Old Forest, and there they encounter Tom Bombadil, a nature-spirit evocative of the English countryside: “*Hey! Come merry dol!*” rolled out the song to greet them.

Hey! Come derry dol! Hop along, my hearties!

*Hobbits! Ponies all! We are fond of parties.
Now let the fun begin! Let us sing together!*

Then another clear voice, as young and as ancient as Spring, like the song of a glad water flowing down into the night from a bright morning in the hills, came falling like silver to meet them:

*Now let the song begin! Let us sing together
Of sun, stars, moon and mist, rain and cloudy weather,
Light on the budding leaf, dew on the feather,
Wind on the open hill, bells on the heather,
Reeds by the shady pool, lilies on the water:
Old Tom Bombadil and the River-daughter! (LOTR 137)*

This is pure pastoral, and a brilliant contrast to the dark shadows that follow the Hobbits, and the dark lands of Mordor that lie ahead of them. Other pastoral settings are found in the house of Elrond, Rivendell; and in Lothlórien, home of Galadriel, Lady of the Golden Wood. These are both Elven centres of resistance to Sauron and Saruman, but they also represent enclaves of timeless nature akin to Arcadia.

The other setting that shows the strong influence of Tolkien's war experience is The Dead Marshes, in the chapter, "The Passage of the Marshes." Tolkien wrote in a letter of 1960 that this dreadful landscape owed something to "Northern France after the battle of the Somme" (qtd. in Croft 17). Marching through the mud of the marshes, Gollum advises Frodo and Sam not to look down, for there were dead faces in the water: "Who are they? What are they?" asked Sam shuddering, turning to Frodo, who was now behind him." Frodo answers,

'I don't know,' said Frodo in a dreamlike voice. 'But I have seen them too. In the pools when the candles were lit. They lie in all the pools, pale faces, deep deep under the dark water. I saw them: grim faces and evil, and noble faces and sad. Many faces proud and fair, and weeds in their silver hair. But all foul, rotting, all dead. A fell light is in them.'

Gollum confirms, "'Yes, yes,' said Gollum. 'All dead, all rotten. Elves and Men and Orcs. The Dead Marshes. There was a great battle long ago, yes, so they told him when Sméagol was young, when I was young before the Precious came. It was a great battle. Tall Men with long swords, and terrible Elves, and Orcses shrieking. They fought on the plain for days and months at the Black Gates" (LOTR 653). Tolkien has replaced tanks and machine guns with swords, and English and German soldiers for men, elves and orcs, but the landscape is Northern France after the battle of the Somme. Great holes in the land suggest massive industrial bombardment, not falling arrows. Edmund Blunden's ironically entitled,

“Preparations for Victory,” inspired by the Battle of the Somme, might have been written by Tolkien and inserted in “The Passage of the Marshes” but for the bombs, coils and cans:

*Days or eternities like swelling waves
Surge on, and still we drudge in this dark maze,
The bombs and coils and cans by strings of slaves
Are borne to serve the coming days of days;
Pale sleep in slimy cellars scarce allays
With its brief blank the burden. Look, we lose;
The sky is gone, the lightless drenching haze
Of rainstorm chills the bone; earth, air are foes,
The black fiend leaps brick-red as life's last picture goes. (qtd. In Webb 62)*

Note the “dark maze,” the “slimy cellars,” “the burden,” the “black fiend”. The memories of Tolkien and Blunden, who both fought at the Somme, are strikingly similar, though they choose different means of expressing the inexpressible horror.

If Tolkien used his memories of war to great effect in *LOTR*, C.S. Lewis was more careful to suppress them. Yet *CN* contain many epic battle scenes, more than one would expect from the typical quest fantasy work.² *LWW* begins in the middle of an actual battle scene, the 1940 bombing of London. The Pevensie children escape to the countryside, and from there they find their way through a portal into Narnia. But the secondary world mirrors the primary, for they find themselves right back in a major war, which bears many similarities to the one from which they have just escaped. Narnia is under the power of Jadis, the White Witch, who controls and intimidates the Narnians through a Secret Police Force headed by Maugrim, Captain of the Police. No reader of the 1950s when the novel was published would have failed to notice the resemblance of Jadis’ Secret Police with the Schutzstaffel, or SS division of the Nazi Party. Even in 2005, reviewing the film version of *LWW*, Phillip French noted that to Lewis, “Narnia must have seemed like Nazi-occupied France. When he finished the book in 1950 it also suggested the Eastern Europe of the Cold War” (n.p).

Violence is considerably subdued in *LWW*, at least in comparison with *LOTR*. Lewis appears to have made an effort to keep the story as accessible to young children as possible. However, the key scene in which Peter slays one of the White Witch’s wolves that is attacking Susan is sufficiently violent and disturbing: “Peter . . . just had time to duck down and plunge his sword, as hard as he could, between the brute’s forelegs into its heart. There came a horrible, confused moment like something in a nightmare. He was tugging and pulling and the Wolf seemed neither alive nor dead, and its bared teeth knocked against his forehead, and everything was blood and heat and hair” (*LWW* 144). The most important point of this scene is not Peter’s victory over the wolf, but his reluctance to fight at all: “Peter

did not feel very brave; indeed, he felt he was going to be sick. But that made no difference to what he had to do.” The task complete, Peter “felt tired all over” (*LWW* 144). The point here is to suggest that violence is nothing we want or look for, and there is no heroism in the killing of an enemy, but sometimes it is an unavoidable action necessary to defend life, and the lives of people we love. This point is also made strongly by Tolkien and Rowling.

The *HP* series is also riddled with violence and battles, from Voldemort’s first attack on Harry before the series even begins, to the final epic confrontation of *The Deathly Hallows*. Bows and arrows have been replaced with magic wands and spells, but the killing power of the latter is no less effective. As in *LWW*, the influence of the Second World War appears stronger than the First; in particular, images and themes are used that are strongly suggestive of Nazi fascist ideology and the evil of racial purity. As Aida Patient and Kori Street put it, the Nazis “have become the quintessential or archetypal metaphor for evil” in our time, and the evil we see in Voldemort and the Death Eaters – “the drive for world domination, the psychopathic obsession with racial purity, and the systematic social and personal cruelty exhibited by Voldemort and his followers” are all immediately understood and recognized by contemporary readers and audiences because of the widely known horrors perpetrated by Hitler and the Nazis in the Second World War (202). Reader responses studied by Patient and Street indicate that audiences see Hitler in Voldemort, and the campaign against ‘Mudbloods’ in favour of pure-blood wizards is strikingly like the twisted Nazi ideology of a pure Aryan race and the extermination of non-Aryans, especially Jews (see 205-207). Other parallels include the tendency of many characters to deny the threat of Voldemort, or even his existence, just as many European leaders were initially reluctant to recognize the growing danger of Hitler and fascism in the 1930s. Churchill may have been the first to warn of Hitler’s unchecked drive to world domination, just as Dumbledore warns early on of the return of Voldemort, but to a deaf and disbelieving Ministry of Magic. Dolores Umbridge in *The Order of the Phoenix* not only refuses to believe that Voldemort has returned, but begins a campaign of suppression of free speech and student gatherings, abuse of students and other teachers, and a gradual takeover of Hogwarts under her exclusive and oppressive authority, all of which remind us of the oppressive regimes of the 1930s, in Germany, Italy, Spain, or wherever fascism and distorted interpretations of communism prevail(ed). It is left to Harry to organize the students in a campaign of resistance, which they call Dumbledore’s Army, and to teach proper and effective skills of defense against violent threats. Thus World War Two inspires the entire story of *Harry Potter*, from plot and theme to characterization.

War and violence are also central themes in the Bible, so much so that Christians have had to try and explain how the violent war-mongering God of the Old Testament could be the same God of love and peace in the New. In Numbers, for instance, we read that the Jews

warred against Mid'ian, as the Lord commanded Moses, and slew every male. They slew the kings of Mid'ian with the rest of their slain, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Mid'ian; and they also slew Balaam the son of Be'or with the sword. And the people of Israel took captive the women of Mid'ian and their little ones: and they took as booty all their cattle, their flocks, and all their goods.

The soldiers bring the prisoners to Moses, who is enraged, and for a moment, the hopeful and idealistic reader might expect that Moses would be angry at their unnecessary cruelty and violence. But Moses said to them, "'Have you let all the women live? . . . Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man by lying with him. But all the young girls who have not known man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves" (Num. 31: 7-18 Revised Standard Version). This is rape and genocide in the name of God, and it is only one of many examples. One website records over a thousand instances of violence in the Old Testament alone.³ Christian apologists have pointed out that the New Testament contains numerous examples of Christian pacifism, the most famous of which might be Matthew 39: "But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Still, there are also hundreds of examples in the New Testament in which war and violence are condoned.

Interpreting the meaning of all this Biblical war and violence is well beyond the scope of this essay, particularly as centuries of scholars and specialists have not found a way to reconcile the apparent contradictions. People will believe what they want to believe, and find in the Bible any line or passage to support their ideology. Pacifist movements often claim Christ as the origin of their thinking, while others maintain that sometimes, war and violence are justified and God is behind them. From the point of view of fantasy literature, perhaps we might say that at least the Bible teaches us that war and violence have always existed in the world, and there will always be forms of evil to face. Fantasy literature shows us various ways of dealing with them. 'Turn the other cheek' doesn't always work, even though forgiveness is what Frodo offers to Gollum. *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and *Harry Potter* all provide other, similar answers: friendship and cooperation over individual heroism; love and laughter over hate and despair; faith and courage in the face of evil and death. 'Gandalf' probably says it best, but not in *LOTR*. In the film version of *The Hobbit, An Unexpected Journey*, he attempts to explain to Galadriel why the small and relatively weak Bilbo Baggins has been chosen to accompany the dwarves on their adventure. "Saruman believes," Gandalf explains, "[that] it is only great power that can hold evil in check, but that is not what I have found. I found it is the small everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay. Small acts of kindness and love."⁴ These words seem to get at the heart of *The Hobbit* and *LOTR*, but they also might have been said by Aslan to Lucy Pevensie, or by Dumbledore to Harry: kindness and love keep the darkness at bay.

Notes

- 1 For example, see <http://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/1238735-is-this-the-best-fantasy-fiction-book-ever>. Accessed 18 August 2014.
- 2 For a good summary of the structure of the quest fantasy genre, see Senior, p. 190.
- 3 See <http://skepticsannotatedbible.com/cruelty/long.html>. Accessed 20 August 2014.
- 4 See <http://www.fromthefrontrow.net/2012/12/why-bilbo-baggins.html>. Accessed 18 September 2014.

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