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Claire Lucile Schlecht  
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# TOLKIEN AND LEWIS REJUVENATE THE QUEST MOTIF IN FANTASY LITERATURE

Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in the truth that  
is taught by life. --Schiller

## Chapter 1

As Schiller intimates in the epigram above, fairy tales, and other tales of fantasy for that matter, can affect their audiences in a way almost religious. In fact, the *truths* that people have found in fairy tales or other orally handed-down stories are powerful enough that many of the stories have been and still are being retold in new ways. For example, the recent movie *Ever After* is a retelling of the classic oral-tradition fairy tale *Cinderella*, which was first recorded by Charles Perrault in 1697<sup>1</sup>, and C. S. Lewis' 1956 novel *Till We Have Faces* is a retelling of the classic Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche<sup>2</sup>. This sort of retelling occurs in many genres of literature and is so prevalent that it begs explanation. Northrop Frye claims that men create new forms of pre-existing works "in order to rediscover convention on a deeper level" (132). In other words, man may rejuvenate convention and learn more about a truth exposed therein by refracting it away from its original context. In so doing, he may use the parts that impress him most or are most meaningful to him, and, likewise, he may leave out what he wishes. By selectively using the genre, he is, in a sense, recreating the convention.

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<sup>1</sup> The tale was published in the ever popular collection *Contes de ma mère l'oye* (trans. *Tales of Mother Goose*).

<sup>2</sup> Lewis' source for this story is Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, which is dated to the second century A.D. See Works Cited for bibliographic entry.

In borrowing from motifs of the romance genre, twentieth century writers J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis worked to give new life to the romance tradition of the High Middle Ages and Renaissance in the form of fantasy literature. As scholars of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the two authors were familiar with romance motifs and their use in conveying the Christian world-view, especially with regard to the trope of life as a journey. Tolkien actually translated the anonymously-authored Medieval romance poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which he imagined to be “an admirable example” of a fairy-story (“On Fairy...” 39). Lewis specialized in Medieval and Renaissance literature and in 1936 published *The Allegory of Love*, in which Spenser’s early Renaissance quest-romance *The Faerie Queene* figures predominantly. Though their differing preferences in literary study and religious influences are revealed in their writings, Tolkien’s and Lewis’s works of fantasy follow the romance tradition and head the movement to create a new genre, in many ways similar to romance, but with different emphases than those of the tradition. Specifically, these authors employ the quest motif and the trope of life as a journey, with the intention of affecting their readers on a spiritual level and helping to promote the authors’ understandings of Christianity.

## **THE ROMANCE TRADITION AND RELIGION**

Frye asserts that “the essential element of plot in romance is adventure,” which is given literary form in the quest (186). The romance genre enjoyed its height of popularity in the High Middle Ages and it flourished into the Renaissance. The culture of Western Europe in those time periods was decidedly religious and as such, religious ideas shaped its literature. Romance’s quest motif lends itself to Christian ideas and resonates with the medieval and renaissance conception of life as a journey toward God. The hero

of said quest functions simultaneously as 1. Every-Man, who in search of God, comes to a greater spiritual or moral awareness; 2. a Christ figure, who saves mankind by defeating sin (often in the externalized form of some terrible monster) and revealing the path to salvation. Frye posits the following threefold structure to romance: “the stage of the perilous journey and preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero” (187). The hero begins his journey as a fallen man in peril, but he rises closer to God and out of danger—though he may die, he will live eternally. This archetypal plot recalls the Christ story and can be seen in numerous romances, including *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*<sup>3</sup>, and Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (most notably in Book I).

The authors of romance seek to engage readers emotionally, prompting them to a greater spiritual understanding. This is accomplished by providing the readers with emotional verisimilitude to the Christ story<sup>4</sup>. That is, an author creates situations that may evoke emotions similar to those evoked by the Christian journey. It is then possible for the reader to experience vicariously what the main characters experience, thereby coming to a greater understanding of the Christ story itself. For example, in the medieval romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain is tested repeatedly by his hostess, paralleling Christ’s temptation in the desert. In reading of Gawain’s experience, the reader may come to understand more fully the sacrifice made by Jesus in the desert. The reader may, to some extent, experience the emotions of Christ’s experience through Gawain’s experience. Also, in terms of Christian journey, temptation is something that

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<sup>3</sup> This works inclusion in the genre of romance is debatable, but for the purposes of this work, I am including it,

Every-Man experiences and must try to resist. Another example of emotional verisimilitude in romance is Red Cross Knight's triumph in Book I of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*: "Then gan triumphant Trompets sound on hie, / That sent to heaven the echoéd report / Of their new joy, and happie victorie / Gainst him, that had them long opprest" (I.xii.4). The jubilation that the characters experience when the wicked dragon is finally slain resonates with the joyful exultation that Christians feel when Christ is resurrected. Just as in *Sir Gawain*, the reader may experience emotions that correspond to the emotional aspects of the Christ story. In this way, romance can function as an extended metaphor for Christianity.

One may ask if it is appropriate or even effective to use metaphors or extended metaphors such as romance to explicate religion. To answer this question according to an orthodox Christian view, one may look to 1 Corinthians, St. Thomas Aquinas, and John Donne. In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul comments, "At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). In other words, human knowledge is dark, but it becomes clearer through God. This leads the reader to believe that *indistinct* knowledge, or knowledge gleaned through metaphor, *grows to something of greater constancy*<sup>5</sup>. Aquinas tackles this issue head-on in *The Nature and Domain of Sacred Doctrine*, a work in which he sets up theoretical objections in order to explain their refutation. Aquinas presents the objection that "Holy Scripture should not use metaphors [because] by such similitudes truth is obscured" (117). However, Aquinas refutes this objection, asserting that "it is natural for man to be pleased with

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<sup>4</sup> Authors of romance were primarily Christian, so for them, the Christ story is true.

representations. But sacred doctrine makes use of metaphors as both necessary and useful...It is befitting Holy Scripture to put forward divine and spiritual truths by means of comparison with material things” (117). This is key. Aquinas says that metaphors are *necessary*. Why *necessary*? Metaphors are necessary because it is often difficult for man to understand truth in its purest form, so it must be explained to him in terms that he can understand. This concept is expounded upon by John Donne in his “Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions”—“My God, my God, Thou art a *direct* God, may I not say a *literall* God, a God that woudest bee understood *literally*, and according to the *plaine sense* of all that thou saiest? But thou art also (Lord I intend it to thy glory, and let no *prophane misinterpreter* abuse it to thy *diminution*) thou art a *figurative*, a *metaphorical* God too” (345). In other words, religious instruction is sometimes communicated by way of metaphor and God’s glory is not diminished in that form. This upholds Aquinas’s notion that metaphors are necessary for some to understand religion and points to the notion that verisimilitude, or likeness to the truth, furthers understanding of truth itself. Similarly, authors working in the romance tradition created extended metaphors to reveal a Christian understanding of life.

There are other critics, however, who do not believe that romance is in any way bound up with religious truth. In his book *The Political Unconscious*, Frederic Jameson argues rather that “romance is precisely that form in which the *worldness* of *world* reveals or manifests itself, in which, in other words, world in the technical sense of the transcendental horizon of our experience becomes visible in an inner-worldly sense” (112). To understand this statement, one must know that Jameson defines “world”

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<sup>5</sup> That’s right, folks—I’ve read my Shakespeare. If you are interested in more information on lunatics, lovers, and poets, please see *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* V.i.26.

phenomenologically, as an object that cannot normally be perceived in its own right because we can know only our own perceptions. For him, romance is a way to get past that limitation and see a world in its entirety. This same idea can be extrapolated to fantasy literature, which follows in the tradition of romance. However, the world to which Jameson refers is the world of man—a world with no higher power or innate truths. He claims that the only *truth* conveyed in these stories is the shifting morality or system of ethics imposed and constrained by social power. It is his opinion that rather than being religious in nature, fantasy stories are politically motivated and, therefore, project political value systems<sup>6</sup>.

Jameson's theory is certainly a valid interpretation of fantasy literature, and indeed, it seems that some authors have intentionally portrayed political agendas in fantasy. For example, the anonymous poet of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* used his romance to express concern for the decline in chivalry. Gawain, as the romantic hero, is the only knight who still holds himself to the ideals of chivalry. In his quest, he falters and subsequently discovers that those ideals are his liberation. Hence, the work is pro-chivalry and encourages its audience to hold themselves to a higher standard than they are wont to do. However, even with the political interpretation intact, there is still room for Christian understanding. The romantic hero, Gawain, embarks upon a journey that teaches him how to be a good Christian and then returns to court to teach his fellow man and, in a way, offer them salvation. Jameson's theory that the figures of fantasy have political significance and Lewis's and Tolkien's belief that one may glean spiritual truth from fantasy are not mutually exclusive. The hero can have political associations as well as religious associations. In fact, it makes sense for political ambition to ally itself with

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<sup>6</sup> Jameson would posit religion itself as only a political system.

religious ideals because in its connection to what the masses perceive as ultimate good, a political entity may be revered as somehow good or correct. And so, romance, even given political relevance, may still function as an extended metaphor for Christian life, especially in its use of the trope of life as a journey.

### THE CONCEPT OF LIFE AS A JOURNEY

Throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the majority of people in Western Europe understood their lives in terms of religion. This understanding translated itself into certain tropes or motifs that the people could apply to themselves to give meaning and direction to their lives. One of the predominant tropes was the view of life as a “journey toward ultimate justice and mercy” (Carithers & Hardy xi). In other words, life was seen as a journey toward God. This understanding of life was reflected in their literature, and some works, such as the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, describe the Christian journey in detail.

In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine recounts his journey toward God and salvation. For him, journey involves three acts of turning, which commentators have labeled *aversio*, *retorqueo*, and *conversio*. *Aversio* is a turning away from God, an inability to see beyond oneself. *Retorqueo* is the moment in which one is finally able to see and turns away from incomprehension. *Conversio* is the point at which one converts to a religious life and chooses God (Hardy 24 Jan 97). This paradigm describes an internal journey, through which one comes to greater spirituality.

The Augustinian structure of journey delineates internal moments that loosely correspond to the external moments of Frye’s archetypal romance plot structure. More specifically, the external moments of Frye’s structure generally function as outward signs



of the inward spiritual progress that is gauged by the Augustinian paradigm. The internal structure posited here is that of a sinful, fallen human working his way toward God. Christ's experience corresponds externally (Frye's structure) but not internally (Augustinian structure), because he was sinless; he cannot at any time turn away from God<sup>7</sup>. By combining these two structures, the external moments experienced by Christ and the internal moments experienced by man, the romantic hero functions simultaneously as Every-Man and Christ figure. For example, in *The Divine Comedy*, Dante experiences the following internal moments: *aversio* in the inferno, *retorqueo* in purgatory, and *conversio* in paradise. He goes through the external moments as well. His preliminary adventure and minor struggles make up his time in the inferno as he struggles to stay on the right path. His crucial struggle takes place in purgatory when he walks through the fire to enter heaven. In heaven, he is exalted and joins in the praise of God. These two structures work in conjunction for Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* as well. Red Cross Knight experiences *aversio* while he is still a knight errant, engaging in such minor adventures as fighting Error and visiting the House of Pride. In the House of Holiness, Red Cross Knight experiences *retorqueo*: he is able to see beyond himself and returns to his mission. As a sign of his inner *conversio*, he chooses to fight the evil dragon: the action itself functions as his crucial struggle. He is exalted after the battle, following in the tradition of other romantic heroes. In his "Letter to Raleigh," Spenser claims that he wrote *The Faerie Queene* to "fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline" (1). Spenser, Dante, and other authors of romance used the motif of journey

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<sup>7</sup> I am aware of Christ's ejaculation "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" However, as that comment's relevance to Christ's sinless nature is not the subject of my argument, I will merely rely on Christian doctrinal assertion that Christ, even as a human in *chronos*, was sinless. (information as per Father Nazareth, private communication)

with the combination of those structures described by Augustine and Frye to spiritually enlighten their readers and set them on the path to salvation.

## **TOLKIEN AND LEWIS REJUVENATE THE TRADITION**

As scholars of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Tolkien and Lewis were intimately familiar with the romance tradition, and they employed its motifs in their fictional works. Romance in its medieval and Renaissance form is no longer being written today, but its tradition is extant still in fantasy literature, especially that of Tolkien and Lewis. Fantasy literature may be defined by the author's role as a sub-creator<sup>8</sup>. That is to say, the author creates a whole new world with its own rules. According to Tolkien, "a successful 'sub-creator'... makes a secondary world which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside" ("On Fairy..." 60). Within the framework of fantasy, authors such as Tolkien and Lewis have rejuvenated the quest motif and the trope of journey to communicate their religious views. Their works, however, are not the same as the Medieval and Renaissance romances; rather, they are extensions of that tradition.

As with any other genre, romance is pliable. It can be characterized only to a certain extent, and within its realm, there is room for free play. Authors of romance consciously worked within a tradition—the essence of which is found in the plot structures and purposes outlined above—molding it to their own purposes and tastes. Tolkien and Lewis worked not within but out of the romance tradition by rejuvenating the quest motif—using it in new ways, with different emphases than the writers of old. Thus,

they created a new romance sub-genre of fantasy literature, a sub-genre with a similar plot structure to the old, but with a new sense of hero. The changes that these two authors made in their uses of the romance tradition are seemingly minor, but they are perceptible enough to make their works of fantasy distinct from the older romance. Specifically, both authors emphasize their heroes' internal movements over their external struggles, which is atypical for traditional romance, and Tolkien focuses on external group efforts over the individual heroism seen in older romance. In this way, they molded the romance form to suit their desires and varying religious sensibilities, adapting the tradition to offer new perspectives on what it means to be a hero.

According to Tolkien, "we make in our measure and our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker" ("On Fairy..." 75). For Tolkien, it is religion itself that drives man to sub-create or devise a secondary world. Similar to Frye's position on what can be gained from such an endeavor, Tolkien held that through sub-creation, man may come to better understand the primary world in which he lives. In writing fantasy, Tolkien believed that he was taking part in one of the consolations of humanity, the ability to "assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation" ("On Fairy..." 89). So, for Tolkien, the act of sub-creation is religiously beneficial.

Tolkien maintained that reading fantasy is intellectually stimulating as well. In his essay "On Fairy Stories," he wrote that in reading fairy stories, one experiences recovery or "regaining of a clear view" (77). That is, removal to fantasy literature's secondary worlds allows one to see more clearly the truths of his own life. For Tolkien,

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<sup>8</sup> In deriving this definition, I was influenced by Tolkien's definition of a fairy story, with which I do not wholly agree. For example, he excludes beast fables, and I do not. See "On Fairy Stories" for his take on

this ability to see clearly is wrapped up in better understanding of God and the Christ story.

Tolkien is not alone in his claim that fantasy literature can expand one's understanding of spiritual truth. In his essay "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said," Lewis addresses the value of fantasy literature. He relates his experience of trying to understand sacred doctrine as a child, saying that he found it difficult to feel about God the way that he knew he ought. Lewis remarks, "an obligation to feel can freeze things" (*Of Other...* 37). In other words, he could not actually enjoy love and awe for God because he did not experience them—he was merely instructed to feel them. As an adult, Lewis discovered that it was possible to encounter those same feelings by reading fairy tales. In that way, fantasy literature can provide emotional verisimilitude to Christian experiences: it can give the reader a taste of love and awe for God in a relaxed, non-threatening format.

Many Christian authors, such as Tolkien and Lewis, have used fantasy to promote their understandings of Christian life. Though both of these authors work within a Christian format, each one emphasizes specific virtues or truths that he feels to be important. For instance, Tolkien's heroes tend to have more agency in their spiritual growth than Lewis's heroes. Also, Lewis's heroes, though they require outside help, are usually involved in a more individualized quest than Tolkien's heroes. Fantasy readily lends itself to specific emphasis because the author can include and exclude what he likes without explanation. Since the stories take place in other worlds, nothing can be taken for granted—everything is unusual and noteworthy. In a recorded conversation with Lewis, Kingsley Amis commented that "in science fiction you can isolate the factors you

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the matter.

want to examine” and “set up worlds...which incorporate the characteristics you need” (*Of Other...* 92). Thus, fantasy provides the perfect backdrop for an author wanting to present his world-view, as in the cases of Tolkien and Lewis, who, adapting the tradition of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, present their understanding of life as a journey.

## Chapter 2

### TOLKIEN

Reared in an orphanage under the guardianship of Roman Catholic monk Father Francis Xavier Morgan after the deaths of both parents, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892-1973) was devotedly Roman Catholic and, not surprisingly, inwardly reflective. A graduate of Oxford's English school, a program that emphasized history and philology, Tolkien came to be quite knowledgeable in the areas of languages, Medieval literature, and Germanic cultures. His fascination with these areas of study is evident in its impact on his fictional writing. Tolkien's academic accomplishments include work on the New English Dictionary (1918-1920), positions as Reader in English Language at Leeds (1920-1925), Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford (1925-1945), and Merton Professor of English Language and Literature at Oxford (1945-1959), and the publication of numerous essays and books. His love of languages and his religion breathed life into his famous fantasy novels *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*<sup>9</sup>, books to which he devoted eighteen years of energy and care (Rosebury 121-151).

In both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien rejuvenates the quest-romance convention discussed above, depicting a slightly different understanding of hero than that of traditional romance. The heroes of both his novels work in teams, rather than as individual heroes. The two novels are dissimilar, however, in that the former was meant for children and presents its story in a clear-cut, more easily understandable

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<sup>9</sup> *The Hobbit* was first published in 1937 by George Allen and Unwin. *The Lord of the Rings* was begun in 1937 and first published in three volumes from 1954 to 1955 by the same publisher as above.

fashion<sup>10</sup>. The latter, on the other hand, was intended for adults and is much more complex in its understanding of good and bad. For example, in *The Hobbit*, Gollum is presented as a purely evil character. His background yet is unknown, and there is no sign of anything good about him. According to the narrator, he is “a miserable wicked creature” (74). However, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Gollum is depicted as a more complex character who was actually a hobbit himself before he turned to evil. He keeps his bond with Frodo for a time, which indicates a capacity for good within him. At times, the reader is even encouraged to pity him. Furthermore, Bilbo and Frodo, the heroes of these two works of fantasy, experience journey differently. Bilbo is child-like and selfish at the start of his journey and must learn to see beyond himself. Frodo starts off much more mature than Bilbo and must fight a constant inner battle to stay on the right track, though the path is never clear. The two characters, though to varying degrees of complexity, actively participate in their own growth along their journeys, projecting Tolkien’s Roman Catholic belief that man’s striving for salvation plays a role in achieving it.

### **THE JOURNEY OF BILBO IN *THE HOBBIT***

When Tolkien first published *The Hobbit: or There and Back Again* in 1937, he intended the book for children exclusively and had no idea that it would prove to be so popular with people of all ages. The tale revolves around a hobbit or halfling named Bilbo Baggins, who goes on a great adventure with thirteen dwarves. Though fearful of adventures at the beginning of the book, he finds his courage and fulfills his proscribed

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<sup>10</sup> This was originally narrated for Tolkien’s own children and later written into book form to be more precise.

role in regaining treasure that was stolen by an evil dragon, Smaug. Bilbo's journey is one of personal growth in which he experiences the full range of internal and external moments according to Augustine's and Frye's paradigms. In adapting the trope of journey from the context of Medieval/ Renaissance romance, Tolkien was able to rejuvenate the motifs without actually writing a traditional romance. Bilbo is heroic, but in a different way than a romantic hero of old. He is not a knight fighting his external battles by himself—he works in a team of himself and thirteen dwarves with Gandalf the wizard as a guide. Also, he is exalted for his virtue, not some great physical feat. Furthermore, he is not human; he is a hobbit: a very short, basically good and innocent, individual easily associated with children. He does, however, experience Augustine's inward paradigm of journey and Frye's external threefold structure, which are constructions one expects to find in romance.

At the start of *The Hobbit*, Bilbo experiences *aversio*. He cannot see beyond himself and is concerned with his own comfort exclusively. Bilbo only sets off on the journey through Gandalf's thorough persuasion. In just a few hours, he starts grumbling and thinks, "Bother burgling and everything to do with it! I wish I was at home in my nice hole by the fire, with the kettle just beginning to sing!" (*The Hobbit* 35). Desire for his own comfort inhibits Bilbo's ability to see the importance of his quest. He begrudgingly fumbles along the preliminary stage of his journey that is required by Frye's paradigm, coming through minor adventures such as escaping death by trolls and orcs while still in the *aversio* stage. It is only upon finding Gollum's ring, the great ring, that he experiences *retorqueo*.



That experience of *retorqueo* occurs in the dark hollows beneath the Misty Mountains. Bilbo finds a plain ring of gold: “it was a turning point in his career, but he did not know it” (65). Finding the ring provides Bilbo with a relatively easy method of escape, and in escaping without the aid of others, he gains confidence that enables him to fulfill his role as a hero. It is not the ring but Bilbo’s increase in confidence that prompts him to *retorqueo*, to seeing beyond himself and appreciating the company’s quest. At that point, he stops focusing so much on his own fears and discomfort and actively participates in the adventure. Rather than being the one who needs saving, as in the incident with the trolls, he becomes the one who saves others. For instance, in another of their minor adventures (by Frye’s structure), the party’s encounter with giant spiders in Mirkwood, it is Bilbo who saves them all. This adventure demonstrates his inner development. Though the ring helps him by making him invisible, Bilbo’s worth is not derived from it. In gaining confidence, he learns to use his own natural gifts, such as a quick mind and sharp eyes. After experiencing *retorqueo*, Bilbo continues through several minor adventures before undergoing *conversio* and meeting his crucial struggle.

Like a traditional romantic hero, Bilbo’s moment of *conversio* is almost immediately followed by what Frye would term his crucial struggle, which functions as an outward sign of his inward experience. When Bilbo hears the great dragon Smaug snoring in his den below, he stops in fear. “Going on from there was the bravest thing he ever did” (184). The moment that Bilbo chooses to continue down the passageway and enter the dragon’s lair is his moment of *conversio*. He makes a final turn, completing his internal journey. This mental turn enables him to proceed with his crucial struggle—helping to defeat Smaug, “the Chiefest and Greatest of Calamities” (190). Within the

cave, he matches wits with the wily dragon and successfully discovers the worm's weak spot, a missing patch in his armor. This discovery leads to the dragon's defeat, fulfilling Frye's paradigm, which calls for the death of either the hero or his opponent or both.

Bilbo's verbal battle with Smaug functions as his crucial struggle according to Frye's structure of a romance, but he is most revered by the other characters for his valiant efforts to create peace. He turns over the great Arkenstone of Thrain to Bard, that he might negotiate an appropriate settlement with Thorin and avoid war. It is for this that the hobbit is exalted, not for his crucial struggle, which goes mostly unnoticed. After facing a live dragon, crossing Thorin for the greater good of peace is no struggle for Bilbo. To others his actions seem amazingly brave, but having experienced the internal change of *conversio* and an outward struggle with a dragon, he is primed for the task. The Elvenking and Bard are awed by his courage. When Bard comes into the men's share of the treasure, he says to Bilbo that he "would reward [Bilbo] most richly of all" (246). The Elvenking calls him "Bilbo the Magnificent" (247). Bilbo's triumph, however, is different in emphasis from that of a traditional romance hero, revealing the author's understanding of heroic virtue. The other characters admire his willingness to sacrifice all chances of reward to help others in need. They esteem his Christ-like selflessness, not his brawn. In a typical romance, though the hero's real triumph is internal, he is mostly praised for his physical accomplishment. Bilbo's exaltation is the opposite of this: Tolkien develops his internal struggle to an extent that it outweighs his external struggle.

Despite his knowledge of the romantic tradition evinced in his use of its motifs, Tolkien avoids making Bilbo into a typical romance hero. Firstly, Bilbo does not save

the day by himself—he works in conjunction with other heroes. Though a traditional romance hero often has help from others, as Red Cross Knight does from Una and others in *The Faerie Queene*, he accomplishes the actual magnificent deeds alone and the other characters exalt him specifically for his great physical feats (this is a reflection on his spiritual accomplishment, but the physical deeds are emphasized). Bilbo, on the other hand, does not even slay the dragon himself. In *The Hobbit*, no one character functions as *the* hero: there are several heroes. Each character makes use of his own talents and must work with others to accomplish great deeds. Even Gandalf, who at times has resonance with God in his wisdom and guidance, cannot save the day alone. Bilbo uses his sharp eyes and quick wit to find Smaug's weak spot. A swift-flying thrush then conveys that information to Bard, who uses his skill with a bow and arrow to destroy the beast. After the battle there is still work to be done and the wise leaders must work together to rebuild their communities. Tolkien projects an alternate understanding of how to defeat evil than that presented in traditional romance. By making no one man greater than the rest and creating an environment in which all must work together to accomplish good, he stresses the importance of cooperation and comradery: communal values over individual heroism. Thus, in rejuvenating the quest motif, Tolkien changes the presentation of journey inherent to the quest. He reworks the exaltation of the hero by emphasizing his internal movement over the physical adventures, and articulates a group quest over an individual quest.

Tolkien's classic use of the dichotomy between good and evil and his rejuvenation of the quest/journey motif in *The Hobbit* have made it very popular. By selectively borrowing from the romance tradition in this novel, Tolkien has rediscovered

convention on a new level—he has reinvented the romance. This new romance form is most distinct from traditional romance in its heavy emphasis on the hero's internal movement. Similarly, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien rejuvenated the same motif with much of the same innovation seen in *The Hobbit*.

### THE JOURNEY OF FRODO IN *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

A fantasy novel for adults, *The Lord of the Rings* is more emotionally intense and confusing than *The Hobbit*. Whereas good and evil are distinct in the latter novel, in the former, they are blurred and difficult to distinguish. Only a few of the characters can be categorized as wholly good or wholly bad, and none are perfect. For example, Boromir, as a member of the fellowship, is expected to protect Frodo for as long as they travel together, but he succumbs to desire for the ring and tries to take it. Even Frodo must seriously struggle with evil inside himself.

Although the fellowship is involved in many dangerous escapades in accordance with Frye's archetypal plot structure, Frodo's internal struggle seems to be the most difficult battle of all. His experience is far more psychologically complex than that of his predecessor Bilbo. When the tale begins, he is already past *aversio*. He sees the importance of his quest to destroy the ring and willingly accepts that responsibility, though he is grateful for the companionship and help of his friends. His journey begins in a *retorqueo*-like stage, and he struggles with that until the very end. Also, Tolkien places Frodo's *conversio* after his crucial struggle in Mt. Doom. Tolkien chooses to focus on the *retorqueo* stage, and in so doing, he demonstrates the possible difficulty of progressing from that state. By changing the order in which Frodo experiences the moments of his internal journey, Tolkien is adapting the romance tradition to manifest his

own view of Christian journey: a journey that requires a team effort and is contingent upon spiritual maturation.

Traditionally, a romantic hero progresses from *retorqueo* to *conversio* without much regression. Spenser's Red Cross Knight, for instance, takes ten cantos to move from *aversio* to *retorqueo*<sup>11</sup> but in only one canto he makes the change from *retorqueo* to *conversio*. Moreover, Gawain makes that change in mere minutes while talking with Bertilak de Hautdesert (the Green Knight). Conversely, Frodo experiences numerous ups and downs while in the stage of *retorqueo*. He falters and forces himself back onto the right path constantly. Tolkien stresses this constant struggle. For example, when Bilbo asks to look at the ring, "to his distress and amazement [Frodo] found that he was no longer looking at Bilbo; a shadow seemed to have fallen between them, and through it he found himself eyeing a little wrinkled creature with a hungry face and bony gripping hands. He felt a desire to strike him" (*The Fellowship* 244). Throughout his numerous minor adventures, Frodo struggles with temptation imposed by the ring. He endeavors to not lose sight of the greater consequences of his action; to not give in to his own selfish desires for power and slip into *aversio*.

Frodo's minor adventures, the first stage of Frye's structure, are physically and mentally exhausting. He must deal with not only his constant internal struggle, but also physical hardship. He and his companions face a myriad of enemies in battle, including the black riders, who can feel the presence of the ring and are always seeking it, and orcs, working for Sauron the Dark Lord or the traitor Saruman. Frodo nearly dies from a wound inflicted by one of the black riders. Also, he and his friends run short of food

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<sup>11</sup> There are other interpretations of Red Cross Knight's journey. Some would say that his confrontation with Despair is actually part of the healing process and that his *retorqueo* takes place earlier than canto x.

supplies on more than one occasion. Their journey is long and difficult, but they trudge on, that Middle Earth might be saved.

After more than a year of minor adventures, Frodo comes to the second stage of Frye's paradigm, his crucial struggle: he must grapple with himself to overcome the temptation of the ring and destroy it by casting it into the fires of Mt. Doom. Sadly he is unprepared for that moment because he is still in the *retorqueo* stage, and the nearer he goes to Mordor and Mt. Doom, the heavier a burden the ring becomes physically and emotionally. He fails in this battle with himself. At the brink of the fire pit, he proclaims, "I have come, but I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The ring is mine!" (*The Return* 223). Frodo surrenders himself completely to the power of the ring and regresses into *aversio*. He cannot see the evil he is doing. Though the ring is destroyed only a moment later, Frodo does not control the action. Gollum bites both finger and ring from Frodo's hand and falls into the fire, destroying himself along with the ring and ending the Dark Lord's reign.

Once the ring is destroyed, Frodo snaps out of his blinded state. He moves from *aversio* to *conversio*: "and there was Frodo, pale and worn, and yet himself again; and in his eyes there was peace now, neither strain of will, nor madness, nor any fear" (*The Return* 224). His *conversio* comes after the crucial struggle stage of Frye's system, not before, which is unusual in the romance tradition. Though his quest is ended and his goal accomplished, Frodo is not the direct cause of this victory. He is acted upon by Gollum, who ultimately destroys the ring. In spite of this, Frodo is a hero and Gollum is not. Tolkien's unconventional use of the romance paradigms suggests an alternate definition of hero. Despite his attempts to overcome temptation, Frodo fails: the spirit is

willing, but the flesh is weak. He is saved at the last moment by an outside force, presumably an act of God—for, who else could arrange to have Gollum steal the ring and fall into the fire? Frodo is praiseworthy for his willingness to do good works, though he fails in the most consequential act.

In line with the third stage of Frye's external structure, Frodo is exalted, but not alone. His faithful helper is celebrated along with him. He and Sam are literally raised up on eagle's wings. When they are presented to the armies that fought the Dark Lord, the newly crowned King Aragorn cries, "Praise them with great praise!" (*The Return* 232). It is interesting to note that both men are praised. As in *The Hobbit*, there are several heroes: one primary hero, whose story the book follows, and secondary heroes, without whom the quest could not be accomplished. Sam figures as a secondary hero in Frodo's quest. He cannot take on the burden himself or force Frodo to destroy the ring, but he helps him along the journey and is vital to its success.

Tolkien's variations of traditional romance motifs in *The Lord of the Rings* are similar to those in *The Hobbit*, though more extensive. He emphasizes communal values by making several of the characters into heroes. Also, he stresses Frodo's internal struggle far more than his external battles. As with Bilbo, Frodo's labors reflect a Roman Catholic belief that man has some agency in achieving his own salvation. Still, man cannot do it all himself. Frodo fails, but he is rewarded for his effort: an outside force brings his quest to fruition. Though he does not destroy the ring himself, Frodo's role in its destruction is so important and his hardship along the journey so great that the other characters exalt him as their savior. Thus, he functions as a Christ figure as well as Every-Man in quest of salvation. Tolkien's representation of a hero in this novel is keyed

to a Roman Catholic understanding of how to achieve salvation—one may do good works, and God give him grace. The novel also emphasizes comradery and, in keeping with his reinvention of romance as seen in *The Hobbit*, Tolkien gives much greater significance to the hero's internal progression than his external struggles.



### Chapter 3

#### LEWIS

Clive Staples Lewis (1898-1963) devoted his life primarily to the pursuit of knowledge both secular and spiritual. Following tutelage in various primary and secondary institutions, Lewis began a course of study at Oxford in 1916. He completed a program in philosophy and, finding no jobs in that field, went on to study literature in 1922. He held the position of a Fellow of Magdalen College at Oxford from 1925 until 1954, at which point, he became Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge. As he described in his autobiographical book *Surprised by Joy*, throughout his academic career Lewis's spiritual understanding shifted under the guidance of friends and teachers. In his childhood, he was mainly indifferent toward religion and became an atheist in his teens at Chartres preparatory school. During his years at Oxford, with the help of Tolkien and other friends, he converted to theism and later to Christianity. He chose the Anglican Church to foster his growing faith. As a Anglican, he believed that man has less agency in achieving his own salvation than Roman Catholics believe—good works are to no avail, man must rely solely on God's power and mercy in matters of salvation. This view is reflected in his fictional writings.

Like Tolkien, C. S. Lewis borrowed from the motifs of the romance tradition in his works of fantasy. Specifically, he made use of the trope of journey, stressing the importance of divine intervention for the journey's successful completion and thus creating an extended metaphor for the Anglican understanding of life. However, Lewis varied the motif for different intended audiences. His children's books, such as *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, present a primarily external struggle with a black and white

understanding of good and evil. His adult novel *Till We Have Faces*, on the other hand, is not nearly so clear in defining good and evil, which leads to a much more difficult internal struggle for the heroine Orual. In each format, Lewis attaches much greater importance to the hero's spiritual progress than his/her physical accomplishments, and he also necessitates a specifically divine intervention and the presence of a separate Christ figure, which detaches the associations of a Christ figure from the hero. This deviation from the traditional romance format is Lewis's reinvention of the romance: like Tolkien, he stresses internal moments over external moments, but he also splits the hero into separate characters—Every-Man and Christ figure—to demonstrate man's ultimate dependence on God for salvation.

### EDMUND AND ASLAN IN *THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE WARDROBE*

Because he was writing for children in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Lewis created a world in which there was a sharp distinction between good and evil. Though a particular character may be fooled or seduced by evil, the reader is never in any doubt as to who is good and who is bad. For instance, when Edmund first encounters the White Witch, her face is described as beautiful, “but proud and cold and stern,” and the narrator says that Edmund does not like the way that she looks at him (*The Lion*... 27). The reader knows right off to be suspicious of her, though he may understand how Edmund was lured in with the Turkish Delight. Likewise, when the other three children first hear Aslan's name, their hearts surge with joy, and the reader *feels* that Aslan is good. By making it known what is good and bad in Narnia, Lewis is easily able to set up a struggle between the two with a human child in the middle.

Though he borrows the archetypal moments of romance, in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* Lewis splits the romantic hero into two separate characters. Rather than creating one character with dual associations, he sets up Edmund as Every-Man and Aslan as a Christ figure. By following the story of Edmund's journey into the clutches of evil and back out to a place of higher morality than before, Lewis' readers experience emotional verisimilitude to those experienced in the journey of Every-Man seeking salvation. In reading of Aslan's sacrifice in death and his resurrection and compassion, the reader experiences the emotions a Christian feels towards Christ. Lewis emphasizes the internal moments for Edmund and the external moments for Aslan.

Edmund's journey is primarily internal. He follows the Augustinian moments, starting as a fallen man and hitting rock bottom before he can begin his return journey back up. He does partake in external moments as well, but he cannot defeat the witch himself, which prevents him from fulfilling the role of a romantic hero.

The novel begins with Edmund experiencing *aversio*. He is in general contrary and specifically cruel to his younger sister Lucy. Rather than admit that he was wrong, he denies the existence of Narnia even after seeing it for himself. He is only concerned with himself; he cannot see beyond his own selfish interest. For example, when all of the children enter Narnia and find that Mr. Tumnus the faun has been arrested, Edmund tries to dissuade them from going to his rescue. Furthermore, his overwhelming desire to be king and wield power over his siblings prompts him to betray them to the White Witch. Lewis focuses on Edmund's mental and emotional experience throughout the novel. When Edmund chooses to go to the witch, he knows deep down that she is "bad and cruel" (86). He is miserable and lonely on his journey to the White Witch, but he refuses

to acknowledge what evil he is doing. Rather, he blames Peter for his own transgressions. While experiencing *aversio*, Edmund is consumed with satisfying his own desires and thinks that turning to the White Witch will bring about the fulfillment of his wishes, though he is shortly proven wrong.

Upon delivering himself to the White Witch, Edmund is greatly disappointed. He can no longer lie to himself about the so-called queen of Narnia. At first, he pities himself. But then he sees her cruelty to the innocent family of squirrels. Though the witch hits him for questioning her judgement, it is precisely at this point that “Edmund for the first time in this story felt sorry for someone besides himself” (113). That moment marks Edmund’s *retorqueo*. He is able to see beyond himself and his own comfort, and understand what it means that the witch is evil.

Having experienced *retorqueo*, Edmund’s feelings are far different than before. He no longer wants to be allied with the witch, and he takes pleasure in the coming of spring. After rescuing Edmund, Aslan has a private conversation with Edmund (the conversation is not narrated), which seems to move him in a positive way. As a sign of his inward *conversio*, Edmund apologizes to each of his siblings and later fights alongside Aslan and the other children against the witch and her army of terrible creatures. Edmund destroys the witch’s magic wand, though Aslan kills her. It is necessary that Aslan, who functions as a Christ figure, kills the witch. As a mere human, Edmund is not equal to the task and he requires divine aid.

Whereas Edmund’s journey is primarily internal, Aslan’s journey is primarily external. He is involved in physical struggles and experiences pain, but his spiritual understanding is static. In this way, Aslan has resonance with Christ, who is sinless and

never experiences *aversio*, even though he must suffer. By sacrificing himself for Edmund, Aslan is the real hero of this tale. However, he is only half of a romantic hero because he does not experience an internal journey. That is, he does not better himself as a romantic hero does (perfection cannot be improved), though he follows in the traditional external paradigm posited by Frye.

Aslan's minor adventures, the first stage of Frye's archetypal plot structure, are fairly insignificant because they do not reflect an inward progression. He does a few good deeds to introduce him to the reader. For example, he teaches Peter to be responsible with his sword and deliberates with the White Witch. At that time, he agrees to give his life in place of Edmund's life, which is forfeit.

Aslan's composure and refusal to defend himself against the witch and her minions mark his crucial struggle of Frye's system. Though his enemies ridicule him and shave his great mane, he remains calm. The witch claims that she will take Narnia for her own, taunting Aslan, "In that knowledge, despair and die," yet Aslan does not retaliate (152). He willingly gives his life to redeem one person. Both in his selfless death for Edmund and in his resurrection, Aslan is exalted.

Lewis's presentation of journey here is different from that of a typical romance. He divides the role of romantic hero into two characters to demonstrate man's dependence on God. In creating a separate Christ figure, he is able to develop a more perfect and generous representation of divinity. Also, the Every-Man part of the hero (Edmund) is made all the more human by this act. Edmund cannot save himself—he needs divine assistance. This depiction of salvation is in keeping with Lewis's Anglican belief system. By giving Aslan the job of saving the day, Lewis keys the focus on

Edmund to stress his internal progress more so than is typical with traditional romance. In splitting the romantic hero into two characters, Lewis emphasized what he felt to be each one's important characteristics. By making such changes, he extended the tradition, and along with Tolkien, worked to recreate romance. Though Lewis's version of the new romance separates the hero into his two parts, which assigns Every-Man less agency in his journey, the Lewis joins Tolkien in making the internal struggle primary in importance.

### **JOURNEY FOR ORUAL IN *TILL WE HAVE FACES***

C. S. Lewis's 1956 fantasy novel *Till We Have Faces* is a retelling of the Greco-Roman myth of Cupid and Psyche. He preserves the story from the perspective of Psyche's eldest sister Orual, who is jealous both of Psyche and of the gods for having Psyche's love. Orual is not a heroine in the sense of saving someone else's life or ridding the world of a monster—in fact, she herself must be saved by the gods—but she does follow the patterns of a romantic hero. As she experiences the paradigmatic internal journey described by Augustine, she goes through the corresponding external moments outlined by Frye.

As is usual for a romantic hero, Orual starts her journey in the stage of *aversio*. She cannot see beyond herself, and she acts selfishly. Her blindness is represented in her refusal to see Psyche's palace: she is given a glimpse of it at one point but affects that she has never seen it. Though her beloved sister Psyche tells her that a palace is there, she refuses to listen, yelling, "Stop it, stop it, I tell you! There's no such thing. You're pretending. You're trying to make yourself believe it" (*Till We*... 118). Everything that Psyche says to Orual about the gods is foreign to her, and she fights understanding every

step of the way. When Psyche says that the god will make Orual see, Orual cries out, “I don’t want it. I hate it. Hate it, hate it, hate it” (124). Thus, Lewis depicts a fallen human at her spiritual lowest: everything that Orual thought to be true falls apart and when truth is offered her, she flees from it.

Orual is miserable and alone. In proper romantic hero fashion, as defined by Frye, she participates in several minor adventures that serve to gauge her progression through the stage of *aversio* and into *retorqueo*. Her visits to Psyche on the mountain attest to a troubled mind and an unwillingness to see or believe, even though she is given a momentary glimpse of the palace. When she attempts to drown herself in the river and hears the god’s voice, she obeys. This marks a change in her—she is no longer fighting the gods.

Orual’s gradual movement into *retorqueo* takes place over several years, through the acts of writing and reading. Little by little, she is given spiritual knowledge through a series of visions leading up to the final one, in which she learns to see. She finds herself in the underworld and is taken before a judge and all the host of the dead to make her complaint against the gods. After reading her complaint aloud, the judge asks her if she is answered, and she responds in the affirmative. In her journal, Orual writes, “The complaint was the answer. To have heard myself making it was to be answered” (294). Orual finds that her complaint is different in reading it aloud than it was written. The complaint that she reads to the court tells the truth of the matter: how she was jealous of Psyche and how she was jealous of the gods for having Psyche’s love. That moment in which she finally sees the truth marks her *retorqueo*. Though it comes late in her life, this is the major turning point of Orual’s spiritual journey.

*Conversio* follows quickly on the heels of *retorqueo* for Orual. In fact, they both occur in the same vision. Her old teacher the Fox, like Virgil instructing Dante, shows her a vision of Psyche's journey and reveals that Orual herself has borne "nearly all the anguish" of the dreadful labors (300). Even though Psyche performs the tasks, she does not suffer because she is sure in the knowledge of her god. Once she understands, Orual gives herself completely over to a spiritual life. As a sign of her inward *conversio*, she falls to the ground in praise of Psyche, saying, "Oh Psyche, oh goddess, never again will I call you mine; but all there is of me shall be yours" (305). As she is drawing her last breaths, she completes her spiritual journey and is utterly changed.

Orual's *conversio* strengthens her for her crucial struggle of Frye's paradigm, the god's judgement of her. She bravely stands for the judgement. True to Frye's paradigm, which states that the hero, the foe, or both must die, Orual is "unmade" (307). The struggle is not painful, but rather "overpowering sweetness" (307). Her external struggle throughout most of the book is with the god, her enemy, but he is actually, in conjunction with Psyche, her savior. At the end of her struggles, Orual is exalted. She gazes down into a pool of water and sees herself, ugly all her life, now beautiful. The god of the mountain pronounces, "you also are Psyche" (308). Her journey is ended and she finally understands and can come face to face with the gods

Though Orual's journey admits both internal and external moments, the internal moments are the most important. Like Edmund, her agency in her salvation is minimal—only by the god's direct intervention, can she see and be saved. Lewis stresses the importance of writing for Orual's growth. Her writing and then rewriting operate as a means of reflection that helps her to see her own actions and motivations more clearly.



Later in her journey, Orual comments that she sees why the gods do not speak to humans openly, asking, “how can they meet us face to face till we have faces?” (294). In other words, the gods cannot interact with humans until they are at an appropriate level of understanding. Orual does not achieve that level until just before her death. Though the process takes a lifetime, with the aid of the god of the mountain, Orual completes her spiritual journey.

Though in a more complex format than *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, *Till We Have Faces* offers the same view of salvation, an Anglican view, in which one must rely heavily on God. In this novel, as in the other, the romance hero is split into two characters. Orual is Every-Man, and Psyche functions as a Christ figure, at once both human and deity, who sacrifices herself for Orual. In her dream visions, Orual carries Psyche’s burden sacrificially, retaining a rather minor Christ figure association. By adapting the tradition in this way and focusing on the hero’s internal progress to the exclusion of any real emphasis on her external struggles, Lewis has recreated romance. He has rejuvenated the quest motif but with heavier emphasis on the hero’s dependence on God and his/her inward progression. The adventure is not near so important as increasing spiritual awareness in this new sub-genre.

## Chapter 4

### CONCLUSION

The romance form describes an inward journey, using external struggles to gauge its progress. Very often the hero's external enemies are psychomachic projections of his own inward fallings. Likewise, his helpers may be projections of himself as well. For example, when Spenser's Red Cross Knight fights Sans Foy (Faithless), he is actually fighting his own propensity to faithlessness. This tendency to allegorize romance is more obvious in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, but traces of the tradition are still found in modern fantasy. For instance, Gollum, a former hobbit, may at some points be perceived as a projection of Frodo's propensity for evil. Accordingly, Gollum's death puts an end to Frodo's *retorqueo* and allows him to move fully into *conversio*.

In the new romance genre created by Tolkien and Lewis, the authors are not so dependent on the hero's external movement to describe his inward progress as their predecessors. Rather, these authors focus more openly on the internal struggles and increasing spiritual awareness of their heroes. In fact, the very essence of the hero changes, and the term *hero* must be redefined. Whereas in older romance, a hero accomplished great physical feats (with spiritual significance), the new romance heroes are not required to kill a monster. Orual, for example, never fights a monster—she merely struggles with herself. The heroes of this new romance form are openly exalted for their spiritual accomplishment, rather than subtly through praise of their bravery in battle.

Aside from their focus on the heroes' internal movements, Tolkien and Lewis made other changes as well. Most notably, each author adjusted the social dynamics

within their stories to suit their understandings of Christian journey. For instance, Tolkien implemented group quests but gave his heroes more personal agency in their spiritual growth. Whereas Red Cross Knight needs the guidance of Una and other benevolent characters, Bilbo improves himself with very little encouragement. Lewis, on the other hand, maintained the individual journey, but he required that the hero have undiluted divine intervention. Una and the ladies at the House of Holiness (representatives of divinity but not divinity itself) work for Red Cross Knight, but Orual needs the help of the god himself and Edmund cannot undergo *conversio* until Aslan speaks to him. Thus, the two authors rejuvenated the quest motif, changing it to suit their needs. In so doing, they recreated romance itself, making it more accessible and more amenable to twentieth-century sensibilities.

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