

☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

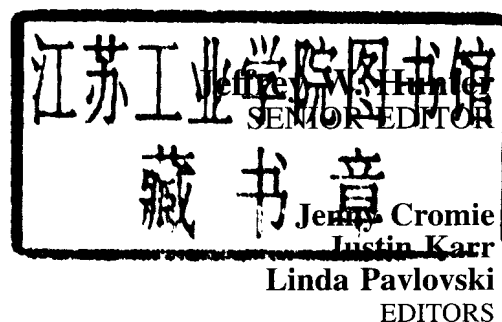
CLC

138

Volume 138

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers



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Preface

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Scope of the Series

CLC provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete biographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

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- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *CLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Yvor Winters, *The Post-Symbolist Methods* (Allen Swallow, 1967), 211-51; excerpted and reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, vol. 85, ed. Christopher Giroux (Detroit: The Gale Group, 1995), 223-26.

Suggestions are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Managing Editor:

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Stephen R. Donaldson

1947-

(Has also written under the pseudonym Reed Stephens)
American novelist and short story writer.

The following entry presents an overview of Donaldson's career through 1998. For further information on his life and works, see *CLC*, Volume 46.

INTRODUCTION

Stephen Donaldson is a bestselling author of fantasy and science fiction. Donaldson's *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant: The Unbeliever* is one of the most popular works of fantasy since J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. The first trilogy in the series, which details the adventures of Thomas Covenant in the magical realm known as "the Land," took Donaldson five years to write. Although it was turned down by almost four dozen publishers, the trilogy was a huge success when it first appeared in 1977. Donaldson has also written several other science fiction and mystery novels.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Donaldson was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on May 13, 1947. He spent twelve years of his childhood in India where his parents, who were medical missionaries, worked with lepers. Donaldson graduated from the College of Wooster in 1968. A conscientious objector during the Vietnam War, he then worked at Akron City Hospital from 1968 to 1970. Donaldson became a teaching fellow at Kent State University in 1971. He then worked as an acquisitions editor and a writing workshop instructor before publishing the three volumes of *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant: The Unbeliever* in 1977. Donaldson won the British Fantasy Award in 1978 and the World Science Fiction Convention awarded him the John W. Campbell Award for best new writer in 1979.

MAJOR WORKS

Many readers and critics compare Donaldson's *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant: The Unbeliever* to classic works of fantasy such as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and the Narnia stories of C. S. Lewis. However, Donaldson's work is acknowledged as being much darker in tone. Thomas Covenant is a bitter, misanthropic leper who is magically transported into the world of "the Land" after being struck by a car. In the Land, Covenant is acclaimed as a long-lost champion in a titanic struggle against the



evil Lord Foul. In *The Second Chronicles of Thomas Covenant: The Unbeliever* (1980–83), Covenant is accompanied by a female companion, Dr. Linden Avery, to the Land. In the second trilogy, several thousand years have passed since Covenant's last appearance. Covenant is forced to return when Lord Foul, once thought vanquished, reappears. Donaldson also wrote a series of three mysteries in the early 1980s, beginning with *The Man Who Killed His Brother* (1980), authored under the pseudonym Reed Stephens. Additionally, Donaldson has published a two-part fantasy, *Mordant's Need* (1986–87). Like *Thomas Covenant: The Unbeliever*, *Mordant's Need* features an unusual protagonist. The heroine, Terisa Morgan, is so psychologically numb that she surrounds herself with mirrors to prove that she exists. A bumbling apprentice from the land of Mordant (where magic is done with mirrors) rescues Terisa from her depressing existence by bringing her with him back to his world. Donaldson's science fiction series, *The Gap Cycle*, began in 1990 with *The Gap into Conflict: The Real Story* (1990). The series concerns the adventures of the beautiful and clever Morn Hyland of

the United Mining Companies Police. Hyland battles space pirates, internal political intrigue, and an ominous race of aliens through the five books of the series.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critics, for the most part, admire the imagination, vivid characterizations, and fast pace of Donaldson's fiction. "Though it's marred by a lot of breast-beating about leprosy and its seemingly unsympathetic hero's lack of humor," writes Sam Frank, "[*The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant: The Unbeliever* work] because of colorful, cinematic imagery, exciting action scenes [and] epic and arcane language." Some critics, including Frank, believe that *The Second Chronicles* was repetitious and that one "feels relieved rather than fulfilled when the whole arduous journey is finally over." Academic criticism has been primarily limited to the comparison and contrast of Donaldson's work with the classics of fantasy and the psychological analysis of his characters. For example, Baird Searles, Beth Meachem, and Michael Franklin describe *Covenant* as "one of the most unusual protagonists in modern fantasy. He is a leper, bitter at the way fate and friends have treated him, and definitely not your typical hero."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

**The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant: The Unbeliever* (novel) 1977

†*The Man Who Killed His Brother* (novel) 1980

‡*The Second Chronicles of Thomas Covenant: The Unbeliever* (novel) 1980-83

Gilden-Fire (novel) 1982

Daughter of Regals and Other Tales (short stories) 1984

†*The Man Who Risked His Partner* (novel) 1984

§*Mordant's Need* (novel) 1986-87

The Gap into Conflict: The Real Story (novel) 1990

†*The Man Who Tried to Get Away* (novel) 1990

The Gap into Vision: Forbidden Knowledge (novel) 1991

The Gap into Power: A Dark and Hungry God Arises (novel) 1992

Strange Dreams: Unforgettable Fantasy Stories [editor] (short stories) 1993

The Gap into Madness: Chaos and Order (novel) 1994

The Gap into Ruin: This Day All Gods Die (novel) 1996

Reave the Just and Other Tales (short stories) 1998

*Published simultaneously; three volumes comprise this work: Volume I: *Lord Foul's Bane*, Volume II: *The Illearth War*, and Volume III: *The Power That Preserves*.

†These works were published under the pseudonym Reed Stephens.

‡This trilogy consists of three volumes; published separately: Volume I: *The Wounded Land* (1980), Volume II: *The One Tree* (1982), and Volume III: *White Gold Welder* (1983).

§Published as two separate volumes: Volume I: *The Mirror of Her Dreams* (1986) and Volume II: *A Man Rides Through* (1987).

CRITICISM

Christine Barkley (essay date Spring 1984)

SOURCE: "Donaldson as Heir to Tolkien," in *Mythlore*, Vol. 10, No. 4, Spring, 1984, pp. 50-7.

[In the following essay, Barkley examines thematic similarities between the fantasy works of Donaldson and J. R. R. Tolkien, focusing on issues such as the thematic importance of community, the need for a changed view of death, and the role of heroes.]

Writing in the tradition and genre of J. R. R. Tolkien, Stephen R. Donaldson is the foremost epic fantasy writer of our time. Both Tolkien and Donaldson share many similar concerns: the importance of community; the necessity for recapturing the wonder of nature, of time, of space, of life itself; the ability to perceive in new ways, through heightened senses; the need for a changed view of death and immortality and of the role of heroes. Most important today, in our world which has lost faith in itself, is the emphasis both Tolkien and Donaldson give to our need for a sense of purpose, our desire to believe in an overarching universe controlled by a Divine Being with a plan not only for the world as a whole but with an individual purpose for every common man. Though the role of the artist and the duties of the hero have changed, the purpose for writing or reading fantasy remains clear: to alleviate our sense of alienation from each other, to restore the wasteland of our private lives and world, and to recapture a sense of wonder and purpose. Donaldson carries on the task Tolkien had begun, to reeducate a world that had lost sight of its past, to provide hope for an eventual catastrophe. Thomas Covenant, Donaldson's usually reluctant hero, is the logical heir to Frodo Baggins as the unlikely common man upon whom the fate of the world rests. There is a logical continuum between Bilbo, Frodo, and Covenant which explains the changes in their personalities as reflections of the changes in the world view of the different time periods of their creation. Following that progression helps to explain why Stephen R. Donaldson should be considered J. R. R. Tolkien's heir apparent.

Bilbo had luck, wit, sharp eyes, and also the moral characteristics of pity, fidelity, and courage. . . . He ran off to encounter his adventures without even a pocket handkerchief. But in his world no forethought was needed. His dangers were physical ones: trolls, goblins, wargs, spiders, unsympathetic elves, a dragon. In the world of *The Hobbit* one could avoid danger, as in the Battle of the Five Armies, by disappearing or just not getting involved. His encounters can all be safely called "adventures" for though he learns by them—for example, he uses on the spiders the disembodied voice trick which Gandalf had used to save them all from the trolls—they are not a necessary part of his psychological growth except to give him confidence. He doesn't have to learn or recognize anything about himself.

But by the time of *LOTR*, [*The Lord of the Rings*] Middle Earth had changed. Between Bilbo's time and Frodo's much had happened to the world. The "small business" Gandalf left the Company of dwarves to accomplish—driving Sauron from his strongholds in Dol Guldur—had become an open declaration of war. Though Bilbo was an admirable character in many ways, he was not the proper hero for the new age. Thus Tolkien created an heir for Bilbo in the person—or rather the hobbit—of Frodo. Frodo's qualifications were his perseverance, endurance, ability to inspire strong friendships—especially in Sam and Gollum, strong will power, a sense of moral obligation to the world—despite his innocence he took responsibility for situations not of his own causing (this was a quality Bilbo also exhibited, but on a smaller scale, as he often had to rescue the dwarves). Frodo was also totally innocent in acquiring the Ring.

Neither hobbit was a great fighter or warrior, yet certainly Bilbo was more accomplished than Frodo in physical combat; poor Frodo hardly ever does more than hack at his enemies' feet. But the dangers in Frodo's world are more than physical, though some physical ones remain: orcs, a cave troll, a Balrog, Gollum, distrustful elves or men, Sauron's armies. However, the most serious dangers are not physical: the Black Riders, the undead in the Barrow Downs or on the Paths of the Dead or in the Dead Marshes, the magic of the Old Willow or the power of the Huorns, Saruman's voice or Sauron's ability to compel responses through the use of the Palantir, and of course the power of the Ring, especially its power to corrupt the Bearer (and even those of the Fellowship) into desiring its power, into desiring the supposed safety of its "gift" of invisibility. From this we might conclude that physical prowess is becoming less important in the world-view of Middle Earth, though it still has a place. Moral or spiritual strength seems to be taking its place.

Bilbo, the food-and-cheer-loving hobbit, was not introspective enough to deal with the seriousness of Tolkien's new world-view for Middle Earth. Frodo, on the other hand, was the perfect hero for *LOTR*: he was aware enough of the outside world to feel concern and pity for the Shire should it lose its innocence; he was innocent of desire himself (even for gold or "adventures"); he was more cautious than Bilbo, procrastinating rather than rushing bravely forward (which may also have saved him some of the temptation Gandalf and Galadriel felt, wishing to use the Ring for good, when it cannot be used so). But Frodo's attributes are important not just because they were the ones needed to accomplish his quest, but because his new characteristics were needed to survive in the new world. His will power saves him at times that Bilbo's bravery would have gotten him in trouble.

And here we come to a fundamental question: why would Tolkien change the world-view of Middle Earth? He was the subcreator; he had control. *The Hobbit* was successful—so why tamper with success? Tolkien, of course, subscribed to the Declining World theory so deterioration

was a necessary element of any change he would incorporate. But why the change from physical to spiritual dangers? I believe Tolkien's subcreation, Middle Earth, also changed in response to his recognition of changes in his real world and his acknowledgment (possibly unconscious) of something I consider axiomatic about great literature: any work of art—film, drama, but especially literature—must not only be universal, and in fantasy this means mythic, echoing age-old conflicts, but must also speak most particularly to its own time-bound audience to be great. It must address the issues, the concerns of its day. It must have something to say to its audience that has not been said before (possibly because it has not been needed), as well as studying in more detail earlier themes, problems our generation has not resolved yet. Each new age has its own fear. Tolkien recognized this in *LOTR* and Donaldson, I think, does this best of any fantasy writer today. This is the main reason that I claim Donaldson is Tolkien's spiritual heir. To show how Donaldson's works are not only universal but also reflective of our age, I would like to suggest the changes in our world-view from the time of Tolkien's creation of *The Hobbit* to *LOTR* and finally to Donaldson's of the Thomas Covenant trilogies. I also would like to suggest how these changes are incorporated into the subcreations.

Before World War II (the war to end all wars) completely shattered the illusion that World War I had been the war to make the world safe for democracy, at least one world-view with some prominence was the idealistic view that industrialized countries had a responsibility to spread civilization (some thought this meant Christianity) and commerce (prosperity) to the underdeveloped areas of the world via the Commonwealth (or "foreign aid" as we called it). This view was an outcropping of the idealistic 19th Century view of progress which stated that in some Darwinian manner the world was constantly improving, becoming some ideal state (the Advancing World theory). Tolkien is reacting against this. Though Tolkien was born in a Commonwealth country, South Africa, and was undoubtedly exposed to its tenets, he certainly didn't accept them all. However, just as Bilbo was certainly in favor of spreading the wealth of lonely mountain among the men of Dale, the elves of Mirkwood, and the dwarves, so England said it wanted to bring the standard of living in the third world countries up closer to their own level. And, Tolkien admitted the interdependence of groups upon each other (as seen in the trade barrels which traveled from the elven king's halls to Long Lake). In other words, many of the characteristics of the Commonwealth (simplified, of course, and without the political trappings) existed in *The Hobbit*.

But even before the publication of *The Hobbit*, the ideals of the Commonwealth era were being eroded and this is reflected in *The Hobbit* as well. E. M. Forster and Joseph Conrad were forcing us to acknowledge the ulterior motives which corroded such benevolent enterprises—the abuses possible—and the heart of darkness hidden within even the most idealistic Kurtz among us. Thorin's aware-

ness of having done wrongly softens his death for us (as later Boromir's will as well), but it hasn't the same effect as Frodo's recognition of his own lust for power at the Cracks of Doom. Thorin's obsession for gold and especially for the Arkenstone is an exaggerated vice, but it isn't as fearful as the desire for power to dominate others, to control their will promised to the Wearer of the Ring. A heart of darkness was evident in Thorin, but it was not fully explored by Tolkien at that time nor was it as powerful as the force which threatened Frodo. So even in *The Hobbit* we had the beginning of Tolkien's recognition of the importance of facing the shadow-self. But in *The Hobbit* it was not the point-of-view character who underwent the soul-searching, and Thorin obviously did so off-stage. Frodo wasn't even the point-of-view character while his inner conflict was taking place—Sam was, but we see an outward expression of it filtered through Sam. Covenant, however, is center screen and in close-up when he must not only face the fact of his rape of Lena but must also recognize how similar his own act was to the obvious evil choreographed by Lord Foul (the attack on the wraiths at the Celebration of Spring, for example). So, the concerns of the first world-view incorporated into the Secondary World of that time, Bilbo's Middle Earth, are carried over to Frodo's and later to Covenant's time and are examined more fully each time. Each fantasy builds on the other and introduces new elements: new elements appropriate to its time period.

The time period of the creation of *LOTR*, slightly before and during WWII, found us in the real world concerned with the possibility of being dominated and controlled by a group of people calling themselves the Master Race and claiming superiority over us (and for a while exhibiting superior physical prowess). We weren't as concerned with the hoarding or redistribution of wealth (as in *The Hobbit*) as we were with the possible destruction of groups of people (the Jews) or ways of life (separate countries in Europe). These concerns are echoed in *LOTR* through Boromir's desire for aid for Gondor lest it be conquered by Mordor and the concerns of the hobbits and elves that life in the Shire and Lothlorien will not be as before.

In the Covenant trilogies there are similar concerns, especially in *Illearth War* and *Power That Preserves*, when Foul's armies headed by Giant Ravens attack the people of the Land. The destruction of (most of) the wraiths and hence the abandonment of the Celebration of Spring ritual and the diminution of the Ranyhyn herd seem to carry out the fear of a changed world, dreaded but not realized in *LOTR*. And, of course, the genocide of the Giants at Coerceri fulfills our worst fears about the destruction of a whole people and an important culture. But the Declining World theory (for which the fading of Lothlorien was a poignant but gradual example in *LOTR*) is even more devastatingly exemplified by the changes that take place in the Land between the end of the first Chronicle and the beginning of the second. The fear of new generations losing the wisdom and beauty of the old (like the loss felt by the Fellowship in Hollin, Moria, and at the pil-

lars of the Argonath, and by the ents in Fangorn) is shockingly realized in *The Wounded Land* when Covenant revisits Mithil Stonedown which has lost not only reverence for stonework but reverence for life as well. And, of course, the Clave can be seen to represent a successful domination of the Land by a "Master Race." Once again, some of the concerns of the world when *LOTR* was written are examined within the fantasy world of that time and continue to be explored in fuller detail in the Thomas Covenant trilogies.

Our central concern today is no longer that we recognize within ourselves a secret desire for domination over others, over our environment, over death itself, in essence over God—and that we fear in others the capability for control over us. Not that these concerns no longer exist; they do. Experience is cumulative. We cannot go back to a previously possessed innocence. So any literature which helps us deal (subconsciously, allegorically, symbolically) with our fears (of a secret self, of being dominated) will be universal from now on. For example, today we fear a Mideast oil embargo or Soviet missiles too close to our mainland or some bloodthirsty group in possession of nuclear weapons or nerve gas: those fears still are very real. So one nation, one tyrant could threaten us as Hitler did England or Sauron did the Free Peoples or the Na-Mhoram did the people of the Wounded Land. We must continue to learn to deal with this kind of threat. And that is why today's fantasies must continue to examine yesterday's problems as well as our own. Now, in the time of the creation of the Thomas Covenant trilogies, as our global interdependence increases—our economic, political, and environmental interdependence—the possibilities of coercive control (like that exerted magically by the One Ring) increases geometrically. Today in order to destroy each country's possible level of control over us, we'd need dozens of Frodos to make several trips each to the Cracks of Doom. Therefore, the fantasies which will touch this generation most forcefully, which will not seem more naive or innocent than we are, will need a new hero, one who can operate in a world in which the dangers cannot be destroyed or unmade, no matter how brave he is, no matter how he perseveres, no matter how strong his personal willpower is.

Now, the concept of unmaking the bomb, like dropping the Ring into the Cracks of Doom as a solution to all our problems, thus destroying not only the object of the threat but the knowledge to recreate it, is a simplistic solution to the problem and would have been recognized as such by Tolkien. But in fairy tales we find ways to accomplish the goals our hearts desire most, and we suspend our disbelief if the result is at least somewhat credible within its own context (following the laws of the Secondary World). So the spokesman for our age will not have to come with a foolproof plan for alleviating our fears, destroying those things which threaten us, solving the world's problems, but must only help us to feel hope again that this too shall pass away—we will survive this era. In other words, he doesn't have to show in scientific (or magical) detail just

how the wasteland will be cured, but only give us the assurance that it is.

So what are the fears which plague us today (besides those already mentioned connected with military power and aggression)? Among our central concerns are the possible irreversible pollution of our ecology, the depletion of our energy sources, the possible extinction of endangered species and the way that might affect the rest of the animal and plant kingdom, and military aggression gone haywire, or in other words, total annihilation. We cannot fight these dangers—pollution, extinction, a wasteland created by atomic war—using physical means, or even spiritual control over our own wills (though that might help stop the deterioration). And ideological controls—talking, arguing, even ad campaigns—are not working so well either. One major dilemma is that today's problems are not centralized. These problems would seem undefeatable (but then WWII's problems seemed so at the time). We need a hero who can defeat the undefeatable, preferably not through conventional means (or we should have tried it already). A nice epic hero would do, someone with control over the environment. But, unfortunately, though we cheer such a hero on, our "realistic" world-view is too experienced: we like superheroes but we can't identify with them so we cannot believe theirs is a legitimate solution to our problems. Besides, that is just one other excuse for not acting ourselves, waiting for someone else to solve our problems for us. We must find a way that the common man, the hobbits of the world, the readers of the fantasy, even the lepers can hope to cope themselves. Covenant, believe it or not, is the perfect hero for our age.

Covenant brings with him to the fantasy world all our knowledge, the painful experience we've acquired in learning to face our own capabilities, our loss of innocence. He also embodies our sense of alienation, our disillusionment with the view of a future utopia, our feelings of impotence in the face of the world's problems. Actually, he was undoubtedly created as a leper precisely to be able to exaggerate these characteristics. As a leper he has "lost touch"—he has lost a way to connect himself to his world, and, second only to sight for us, we rely more on touch than on any other sense to validate the world. And, in fact, in the second trilogy, Covenant loses his land-born sight and does not regain his sense of touch (still has his leprosy) so he is doubly bereft. (Luckily for us, through Linden and also through the Giants teaching us to value more highly another sense—sound, especially via stories—we the readers learn new ways to compensate for this loss.)

Covenant begins as an anti-hero reluctant to act at all, for whenever he involves himself in the Land's fights either he causes pain (to Lena or to Elena or to the Unfettered One and the small animals or to countless others who have to save him—the Ranyhyn, for example) or he does evil himself (the killing at Soaring Woodhelven). Even when he finally understands the nature of the power he possesses through the white gold, like Mhoram with his knowledge of the power to cause desecration, he is still

reluctant, restraining his power like a Superpower in our world sitting tightly on the lid of its arsenal capable of destroying the world ten times over. If Bilbo's world valued bravery and cunning, and Frodo's moral fortitude and dedication, Covenant's advocates restraint and acceptance.

Covenant, as a descendant of Tolkien's fantasy tradition, also possesses many characteristics Frodo needed to cope with the spiritual or ideological dangers of his world: endurance, strong will power, sense of moral obligation and rightness, and in addition, he has already recognized his own heart of darkness (so we won't have to worry about that test coming at the end where failure might occur with no Gollum around to save the quest). The rape of Lena occurs early in the story and, therefore, throughout his entire sojourn in the Land he must be wary of the destruction he knows he is capable of or what his failure to perform might cost others (not that he's always willing to admit responsibility, but there's always that nagging thought that if this is his dream, then he—or his subconscious—is in control and is therefore responsible). So in a sense, Covenant begins at a point Frodo doesn't reach until the end. He loses his innocence and must learn to function without it, with no Grey Havens to sail from or time to heal the wound of its loss. But Covenant eventually goes beyond the recognition state—he learns to integrate both sides of himself (innocence and knowledge, impotence and power, anger as power and compassion as wisdom, venom and wild magic, dependence on others and independence, disbelief and commitment, life and death).

Donaldson's insistence on the total acceptance and integration of opposites sets him apart—in a major way from Tolkien. As Tolkien's dialectical world of pure good and evil in conflict with each other was Medieval in nature, Donaldson's world of unified oppositions, of juxtaposed contraries is Renaissance. Throughout most of *LOTR*, even when good and evil exist within the same character, Gollum for instance, they are battling for dominance. The juxtaposition of opposites in Tolkien is more external—it has more of an oxymoronic quality—a vision of the fiery darkness of the Balrog or the union of youth and age in the countenance of Arwen or Elrond. Both qualities exist but they are not fused; they are separate opposites. Finally, in Tolkien towards the end, the binary oppositions become more internalized and are seen as emotional qualities and hence much of the joy of the final sections is bittersweet; Frodo is both hero and failure within himself; though Middle Earth is saved, it is also lessened by the passing of the elves. The very last line of the book, Sam's "Well, I'm home," has always seemed both joyful and sad at the same time to me. In Donaldson the juxtapositions are emphatically internal, not just outward shows of superimposed opposite images but fused together as deliberately as the venom and wild magic were by the Banefire. The Giant's two symbols, Stone and Sea, permanence at rest and permanence in motion, are another good example of this.

And this, in essence, is what is also exemplified by Covenant's differing role in the two trilogies, necessitated by the different views of the Land. Donaldson is saying that opposites are needed to balance each other. In the first trilogy Covenant is the ironic anti-hero in a Romantic/heroic world. In the second, because the world is now ironic, he tries to be a Romantic hero—and might have the power, the ability to control his environment, if it weren't for the venom and that he is hampered by the ironic world that even his new power cannot cure. But obviously both awarenesses are necessary at the same time. This may also explain the original need for the frame tale literary device. And the need for the heroic vision as well as ironic awareness is what both Tolkien and Donaldson are trying to convince our world of.

One other way to show the progression from Bilbo to Frodo to Covenant is to examine each hero as he would be defined by Northrup Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, since integral to his theory is the concept of change or progression from one level to the next in a specific order. (Please see the summary of Frye's argument at the end.) The epic hero is superior to man in kind (he is a god, for example) and also has control of his environment (stories from the *Valaquenta* of the Valar would fit this category.) The Romantic hero is superior by degree and also possesses the virtue of some method of controlling the environment—a magic sword, a shield of invulnerability, knowledge of Earthpower (Beren and Kevin are obvious examples). Bilbo would fit into Frye's High Mimetic mode; he is superior by degree, but only to the dwarves for he is the one who must rescue them. The Ring gives a kind of superiority over his environment but it is limited since he can still be found, bumped into, or starved through lack of food in his invisible state. Nor does it protect him from a common cold or a bump on the head. Frodo belongs on the Low Mimetic level. He is clearly the common man hero, chosen as protagonist over more likely (more powerful, more Romantic) heroes. His heroic characteristics are not those learned in battle or even in the great council seats but strengths possibly found in even the humblest of hearts. He is mostly equal to his environment, though in Mordor the wasteland of Gorgoroth threatens to overpower him and he almost slips into the ironic mode. Covenant clearly begins in the ironic mode. Even within his "real" world, as a leper he is relegated to a position subservient or at least socially inferior to others. Though in the Land he is acclaimed a Romantic hero with a potential power over the environment greater than that of the Lords, and though he even somehow inexplicably uses the power occasionally, his lack of knowledge about the wild magic and his lack of conscious control of the white gold relegate him to the ironic mode still. Even at the beginning of the second trilogy, when the wasteland he traverses and cannot cure is so evident and he is hampered by the venom just as he may be about to learn control of his power (Donaldson's Catch 22), Covenant is still the ironic hero unable to break into the epic of romantic modes, even though now he yearns to. However, as the story progresses, Covenant grows in stature.

Frye suggests a progression from Epic to Romantic to High Mimetic to Low Mimetic to Ironic and then back to Epic. He claims literature has existed in the ironic mode since about 1920 with publications by James Joyce and T. S. Eliot. Within the ironic age most writers (mainstream and fantasy writers also) deal with certain modern themes: the effects of alienation, the devastation of the wasteland, and especially the loss of purpose. Tolkien strove for a vision of Cosmic Harmony; Donaldson's "unified sensibilities" attempt the same sort of recapturing of that sense of purpose. In mainstream literature, the ironic age seems to spark two dominant views about the seemingly inevitable futility of this age. In both cases we see that in the past, meaning existed but that it has been lost and we either 1) bewail the depth of our fall, say "woe is me" and question or satirize 20th century values. James Joyce's *Ulysses* is the epitome of this view where nothing is heroic, and the modern world is tawdry in comparison with the past but there is nothing to be done. Covenant seems to embrace this philosophy when he first arrives in the Land—in reaction to Lena's report of Atiaran and Trell's marriage or in describing the poverty and crime of his "real" world to Mhoram, the "real" world always suffers in comparison and seems unredeemable. Or 2), the other major approach to the loss of meaning in our ironic world is found in works like D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*. There some harmony or pattern or meaning or purpose for living still exists but we have to find it within our own experiences. Here we must try to create a free and useful life despite the industrial, dehumanizing atmosphere. Usually meaning is best found by getting back to nature. Obviously Tolkien subscribes to this view. His pastoral ideal, the myth of the carefree country life, sustains not only Frodo and Sam as they eat rabbit stew on the border of Mordor, but also Theoden when Merry wishes to share the pleasures of pipe weed with him, or Aragorn when he rejoices at the discovery of the white tree. Tolkien's obvious symbol or standard of the Pastoral ideal is Lothlorien, just as Andelain is for Donaldson. For Covenant is "rescued" from his early despair based on his depth-of-our-fall view and given a more optimistic belief that perhaps redemption, rediscovery of meaning is yet possible through the beauty of the Land. And when he accepts this he changes from an ironic anti-hero to a romantic hero. It is the memory of the unspoiled Land which motivates him when he must cope with Lord Foul at the end of both *The Power that Preserves* and *White Gold Wielder*. Thus Donaldson acknowledges both dominant views of our ironic age but chooses the one, also advocated by Tolkien, which provides the most hope. In fact, both authors are saying that the purpose of fantasy is to help us in the ironic world recapture or recover meaning through a view of the Golden Age (necessarily in the past or separated by space or available only in our imaginations). Imagination provides the link from realistic beauty (still found if sparsely in the ironic world) to Idealized Beauty—in the Renaissance sense of that word.

However, if we are in an ironic age now and if Frye's progression continues to hold, then the next step is to return to the epic mode. Frye says,

irony descends from the low mimetic; it begins in realism and dispassionate observation. But as it does so, it moves steadily toward myth, and the dim outlines of sacrificial rituals and dying gods begin to reappear in it.

(*Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 42)

This is the direction Donaldson seems to be heading. Covenant's self-sacrifice for Joan's sake and eventually his martyrdom when he had become larger than life and so powerful that with little effort he could have destroyed the Arch of Time fit better into the mode of epic tragedy than ironic. Clearly he is no longer the hero completely dominated by his inferiority to other men or to his environment. But he has also learned not to try to dominate.

And at last we come to another major function of the artist to both Tolkien and Donaldson, that of mythmaker, epic writer. We need a mythmaker to lead us out of our ironic age and to reestablish that sense of purpose we are lacking.

And the other progression we would like to make is from tragedy back to comedy, thus alleviating another we of our modern world: our sense of alienation. Using Frye's definition of comedy as the integration of the hero back into his community or society at the end of the tale and tragedy as his alienation from his community, we can see that Bilbo's story is clearly a comedy throughout. In fact, though he leaves the Shire physically, he is never alienated from any society the way Rosalind is banished from the Court in *As You Like It*, for example. Even on his journey he is with the Company except when he is with Gollum, and even then he was not deliberately abandoned. Bilbo doesn't feel any alienation. Frodo doesn't at first and has companions for most of his journey (though their number dwindles), but despite the happy ending to the quest, there is no fairy tale "and he lived happily ever after" for Frodo. His tale ends in tragedy with a self-imposed sense of alienation. Covenant begins alienated from those in his own world (though it was not always the case) and he also feels set apart from the inhabitants of the Land. But by the end of the first trilogy he has been accepted into a community within the Land and also won a place in his own "real" society through his rescue of the little girl, though he still chooses to remain outside of it. When he chooses to go back to the Land at the beginning of the second trilogy he actively seeks a community which includes Sunder, Hollian, the Haruchai, and eventually the Search. He earns an important place in the society of the Land, as does Linden when she heals the Sunbane. Linden also has learned that there is love in the world and would be more ready to fit into her "real" world as well. So the pendulum has begun to swing back from tragedy to comedy.

It seems clear that one reason fantasy (especially epic fantasy) is so important today is that we desperately need

to escape from our ironic view of the world and its depressing side-effects: a sense of alienation, the sterility of the wasteland, and the loss of meaning in our modern world. Only imagination seems to be able to provide the necessary vision, usually arising from a sense of the importance of the past and of the idealistic beauty of nature. Seen as a continuum, Tolkien's and Donaldson's works trace a history of the modern ironic age. Actually the progression is not quite complete, though it is clear that it is heading in the direction of epic or romantic comedy with a reemergence of the sense of the importance of the community or unity, a recovery of wonder, and the rediscovery of purpose through service to something worthwhile. Both Tolkien and Donaldson leave us with the feeling that this is not only achievable but inevitable.

Gordon E. Slethaug (essay date Autumn 1984)

SOURCE: "No Exit: The Hero as Victim in Donaldson," in *Mythlore*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Autumn, 1984, pp. 22-27.

[In the following essay, Slethaug argues that the Covenant novels defy the traditional modes of "escapism" related with fantasy, as his protagonist is never truly allowed to "escape."]

And he who wields white wild magic gold
is a paradox—
for he is everything and nothing,
hero and fool,
potent, helpless—
and with the one word of truth or
treachery
he will save or damn the Earth
because he is mad and sane,
cold and passionate,
lost and found.¹

In his essay "On Fairy-Stories" J. R. R. Tolkien counters the typically Freudian slur at escapist fantasy by distinguishing between the "Flight of the Deserter" and the "Escape of the Prisoner."² The Deserter is one who cannot cope with the world and so wants to escape, but the prisoner is he who needs a reprieve from diseased vision, the charnel house of life, long enough to recover a fresh, untainted, prelapsarian view. Tolkien, of course, implies that he himself, his fantasy heroes, and his readers are among the escaped prisoners, fleeing from the primary to the secondary worlds for that fresh vision.

It is for this reason of escape—momentarily abandoning the decayed world and recovering fresh vision—that Tolkien's heroes so clearly follow the pattern of the hero as described, for instance, by Lord Raglan in *The Hero*.³ According to this view, the hero comes of honorable and royal lineage, but he must escape from his home and go to a foreign location where he gains his education and maturity among strangers. Within this formulation, the innocent, noble origins of the hero are essential mainly to