

TO CUIVIÉNEN THERE IS NO RETURN: ENGLISH AND AMERICAN FANTASY
LITERATURE AS A SECOND HAGIOGRAPHY

by

NATHAN E. FLEESON

(Under the Direction of Carolyn M. Jones Medine)

ABSTRACT

In the past twenty-five years, fantasy literature and media have exploded, capturing the imagination and gaining a following. Given fantasy's history with religious writers like J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis and the dedication of fandom communities, scholars have attempted to explain the connections between fantasy and religion. This was an area of exploration for the first generation of Arts, Literature, and Religion scholars. Now, a second generation is addressing these genres to further define "religion" and its limits. I propose to explain fantasy's connection with religion by putting it in conversation with the lives of Christian saints. This approach allows us to speak of fantasy as a serious religious practice, while still different from traditional conceptions of religion. Fantasy literature, thereby, becomes a "second hagiography" that ritually opens a liminal space for individuals to enter to shape and own identity through the religious imagination. My interpretation acknowledges that modern Americans, as the Pew data indicates, have left traditional religious movements, and over a quarter of Americans identify as "spiritual," suggesting increasing disconnections to religious traditions. The devotion to fantasy, individually and in fan groups, however, acknowledges that there is spiritual hunger to engage with the religious imaginary. Young people, particularly, turn to fantasy to enter a religious

frame of mind that mediates relationships with the world around them. Moreover, they claim ownership over these new hagiographic figures because they play a part in shaping the narrative that informs those relationships. This mirrors the ways scholars describe the participatory relationships between the cult of the saints and its devotees. Hagiography proves a fruitful comparison to fantasy due to their literary and functional similarities. In the space both genres create, we can speak about humanity's relationship with God, relationships with other human beings, and a lived morality.

INDEX WORDS: Fantasy literature, Hagiography, Ritual reading, Material culture, Religion and literature, Popular culture—religious aspects, Spirituality in literature

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DEDICATION

For my loving dog, Ozzie. You were with me throughout my college career, from early high school to the dissertation defense, and I couldn't have asked for a better friend. I'll miss you buddy.

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Love is fed by the imagination, by which we become wiser than we know, better than we feel, nobler than we are: by which we can see Life as a whole: by which, and by which alone, we can understand others in their real as in their ideal relations.

– Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*

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Introduction

Religion, Literature, and Pop Culture

Despite Peter Berger's sense that we are entering a more Rationalistic age that will cause a "crisis of credibility" for religion—a phenomenon known as the Secularization Hypothesis—we continue to see people engaging with the religious imagination.¹ Its enduring presence is particularly prevalent in the fandom cultures that have developed around fantasy fiction, like *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, *His Dark Materials*, and other best-selling books and series, along with their adaptations in other media such as film, television, gaming, and adventure parks. The ways these stories engage the religious imagination have often been spoken about as a New Age spirituality, or even as quasi-religious, as Emily McAvan suggests in her book *The Postmodern Sacred*, because they do not hold the same institutional authority as books like the Christian Bible.² Scholars continue to ask questions about the ways these stories engage the religious imagination, and what model best represents their relationship with the more established, so-called "world religions."³ For example, the prevalence of the religious imagination in fantasy raises questions about whether these are only quasi-religious or spiritualist practices, or whether they can carry a greater institutional authority as well. Likewise, we might ask how the religious imagination evoked by

¹ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967).

² Emily McAvan, *The Postmodern Sacred: Popular Culture Spirituality in the Science Fiction, Fantasy and Urban Fantasy Genres* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2012), 5–8.

³ Carole M. Cusack and Venetia Laura Delano Robertson, "Introduction: The Study of Fandom and Religion," in *The Sacred in Fantastic Fandom: Essays on the Intersection of Religion and Pop Culture*, ed. Carole M. Cusack, John W. Morehead, and Venetia Laura Delano Robertson (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2019), 4–6; Laura Feldt, "Contemporary Fantasy Fiction and Representations of Religion: Playing with Reality, Myth and Magic in *His Dark Materials* and *Harry Potter*," *Religion* 46, no. 4 (2016): 570.

these works supplements or replaces more traditional religious systems. Therefore, we are currently parsing how something like fantasy literature intersects with traditional religion in the ways that it engages the religious imagination.

Within this juncture, I argue that fantasy literature becomes a second hagiography by ritually opening a liminal space for people to shape and claim ownership of their collective identity in relationship with the religious imagination.⁴ Such an interpretation acknowledges the ways that we can become cut off from traditional religious traditions and/or hagiography, rooting the disconnect in the ways some people are unable to claim ownership of those institutions for themselves. It, however, acknowledges that there is still a spiritual hunger to engage with the religious imaginary. As a response, people can turn to fantasy to enter a hagiographic frame of mind that mediates relationships with the world around them and an origin to which they cannot return. Moreover, they are allowed ownership over these new hagiographic figures because as a group they play a part in shaping the narrative and community that informs those relationships.

Religion and Literature

While moving through several disciplines, this project is centered in the subfield of Religion and Literature, which emerged from the disenchantment of Modernity, the threat of secularization that Berger points to, and, in particular, the failure of the Great Myth of Progress in the aftermath of events from the first half of the Twentieth Century.⁵ In this moment, the central question became what would happen if organized religion (and most importantly for these scholars, Christianity) were to disappear. In response, scholars such as Paul Tillich began

⁴ Sylvia Wynter briefly makes a similar connection between literary figures as like the Christian saints as she is describing the shifts brought by Humanism and a new post-Humanism where new systems of figuration took the place of the religious schemas. Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," *Boundary 2* 12/13, no. 3/1 (1984): 51.

⁵ Joseph Loconte, *A Hobbit, a Wardrobe, and a Great War: How J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis Rediscovered Faith, Friendship, and Heroism in the Cataclysm of 1914-1918* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2015), 11–15.

to articulate the beginnings of the Religion and Literature subfield, noting the ways that poetry and literature could speak to existential questions of meaning and influencing a number of scholars over the past hundred years to consider how religion and literature intersect with one another.⁶

Paul Tillich, in his theories about the relationship between art, culture, and religion sets the stage for what is to become the subfield of Religion and Literature, and as a result many of the early theorists follow his lead.⁷ Tillich approaches Religion by defining it as “Ultimate Concern; it is the state of being grasped by something unconditional, holy, absolute.”⁸ He clarifies that this is not to say that God is the Ultimate Concern, but that Ultimate Concern is a way of pointing towards God, expressing God in everything that Ultimate Concern touches.⁹ This might be directly, through our more traditional notions of religion, but it also can be indirectly in art and philosophy.¹⁰ In that regard, Tillich argues that everything in culture (including art and philosophy) takes on meaning, depth, and seriousness in the ways that it points us towards Ultimate Reality, and by extension to God.¹¹ The problem for Tillich, however, is that

⁶ David H. Hesla, “Religion and Literature: The Second Stage,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46, no. 2 (1978): 186.

⁷ Before Tillich’s work rose to such prominence and began shaping the subfield, T. S. Eliot also offered a glimpse about what the subfield might hold in a 1935 essay, “Religion and Literature.” While highly significant in posing the two areas of culture in conversation with one another, Eliot did not go far in establishing a whole program around that dialogue in the ways that Tillich and his followers did. Instead, Eliot’s piece seems to be a part of his wider considerations of Christianity and culture. It should be noted, however, that in Eliot’s essay, “Religion and Literature,” he argues for the criticism of literature, not just based on its literary value, but also based on its morality. In this, Eliot takes seriously the sense that literature unconsciously passes along an author’s ethics to readers, and so can have an influence on the morality of readers. In other words, in literature, we have a chance “to learn *something* about life,” but it is up to the critic to help determine if that something is moral or not. Thus, it stands to reason that the job of the literary critic should entail both literary judgment, but also religious or ethical judgement. Hesla, 182. T. S. Eliot, “Religion and Literature,” in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975). For more on Eliot and his work with Christianity and culture, see T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture: The Idea of a Christian Society and Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (San Diego, CA: A Harvest Book, 1976).

⁸ Paul Tillich, “Religion and Secular Culture,” *The Journal of Religion* 26, no. 2 (1946): 82.

⁹ Paul Tillich, “Art and Ultimate Reality,” *CrossCurrents* 10, no. 1 (1960): 2.

¹⁰ Tillich, 2.

¹¹ Tillich, “Religion and Secular Culture,” 82; Tillich, “Art and Ultimate Reality,” 3.

the world (read the West) in the aftermath of World War II has become unmoored from Ultimacy, becoming what Tillich calls an Autonomous culture, in which universal reason is the source and measure of culture and religion. This has led towards secularization now that the world has lost reference to Ultimate Concern and, by extension, any reference of meaning.¹² The question for Tillich then becomes, how do we find our way back to Ultimate Concern.

One option, Tillich argues, is that we can return to a sense of Ultimate Concern indirectly through art and philosophy in the ways that they present transitional Religious Symbols that point to Ultimate Reality, in something like a sacramental theology.¹³ Since Tillich argues that Symbols are embedded in culture, drawing on the finite reality to express a relationship to Ultimate Reality, art and culture have the chance to both empower and empty symbols.¹⁴ In other words, as finite reality changes, so do the Symbols to better express the relationship with the transcendent Ultimate Reality. In the rise of Autonomous societies during the aftermath of the Great Myth of Progress, I see something of how Symbols might be emptied to an extent that the connection to Ultimate Reality is severed. In response, Tillich claims that art and philosophy can re-empower and recreate these Symbols. This has the potential to create a Heteronomous or Theonomous society.¹⁵ The problem for Heteronomous societies, Tillich argues, is that the recreated symbols do not point to Ultimate Reality, but instead become ends in themselves, producing the various “-isms” that help make meaning out of life (such as politics).¹⁶ These, however, remain empty in a Heteronomous culture because they only point to themselves, not to Ultimate Reality.

¹² Tillich, “Religion and Secular Culture,” 80–83.

¹³ Tillich, “Art and Ultimate Reality,” 4; Paul Tillich, “The Religious Symbol,” *Daedalus* 87, no. 3 (1958): 18.

¹⁴ Tillich, “Religion and Secular Culture,” 84; Tillich, “The Religious Symbol,” 3–4.lig

¹⁵ Tillich, “Religion and Secular Culture,” 81.

¹⁶ Tillich, 81; Tillich, “Art and Ultimate Reality,” 4.

At its best what art and literature offer in relationship to Ultimate Reality is not just Symbols by which we might approach Ultimacy. Rather, they articulate the anxieties of death, meaninglessness, and guilt so that we might look into the void, see the emptiness, and accept it as a “sacred void” which might transform our thinking and reaffirm the basis of God as Being.¹⁷ For Tillich, the self-recognition of the sacred void is an acknowledgement of Theonomous roots, which say that there is a superior law at the core of our humanity, and that innermost law is connected with God as Being, and so God as constant.¹⁸ In that recognition, the turn to art and literature do not become ends unto themselves, but bring us back to God as the underlying Ultimate Concern. It is this thread of existential concern that many later theorists of Religion and Literature pick up to ask how Religion and Literature or Culture intersect.

Foremost among these scholars are figures like Amos Niven Wilder and Nathan A. Scott, Jr., who both utilize Tillich’s sense of embracing the void as sacred to ask how we might now respond. Drawing on Tillich’s language, Wilder recognizes around us a Heteronomous society, one in which people are craving the transcendent, longing to fill the void, but they have been starving for so long that they have taken the first food at hand, attaching themselves to various “-isms” through literature and art, sating their hunger for the transcendent for a moment but then fading away.¹⁹ In the end, they “slake a psychic craving but provide no orientation.”²⁰ As such, they move between one “-ism” to the next, in constant search for something to fulfill their spiritual hunger.

¹⁷ Tillich, “Religion and Secular Culture,” 85–86; Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, Third Ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 175.

¹⁸ Tillich, “Religion and Secular Culture,” 80, 85–86.

¹⁹ Amos Niven Wilder, *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Lima, OH: Academic Renewal Press, 2001), 21.

²⁰ Wilder, 21.

The response, for Wilder, is that Christianity (a tradition with enough rootedness to provide orientation) must appeal to where the cultural hunger exists, using the “modes, genres, and styles of contemporary spirituality” offered by the various “-isms” to present itself “in a new contemporary vision.”²¹ Thus, religion utilizes literature to recognize the fractures of Modernity and the void that has remained behind, and responds by articulating itself in a contemporary language, so that it becomes a viable option to meet the present spiritual needs. It turns to literature as a diagnostic for the fractures. In effect, religion for Wilder was too rooted in abstraction and rationalism, so that it lost sight of the need for the elements people found in contemporary spiritualities. On the other hand, contemporary culture only expressed a cult of the imagination, seeking it as an end for itself, without regard for tradition or roots.²² We solve this, he argues by uniting the imagination and tradition/orientation under the umbrella of traditional religion, with literature, art, and poetry as part of that process.

Nathan A. Scott, Jr. follows in a similar vein, arguing that the author looks at and contemplates the world, and through that process offers insight into the human condition.²³ In his “Prolegomenon to a Christian Poetic,” Scott argues that we have entered a time of crisis in which humanity is “peering into those vacuums of tragedy and mystery whose terrors it has traditionally been the office of religion to assist us in confronting.”²⁴ In other words, it is the poet who sees the voids and fractures. The issue for some time, however, has been that Christianity has often looked upon modern writers who explore absence as morbid or immoral, censoring their works due to a Christian moralism.²⁵ This situation has been changing, and Scott argues it is

²¹ Wilder, 35.

²² Wilder, 57.

²³ Nathan A. Scott Jr, “Prolegomenon to a Christian Poetic,” *The Journal of Religion* 35, no. 4 (1955): 195; Nathan A. Scott Jr, “The Relation of Theology to Literary Criticism,” *The Journal of Religion* 33, no. 4 (1953): 270.

²⁴ Scott, “Prolegomenon to a Christian Poetic,” 191.

²⁵ Scott, “The Relation of Theology to Literary Criticism,” 274.

time to come up with a Christian interpretation of these imaginative literatures. Scott finds this interpretation in the way these literatures can return us to a world of interpersonal relations.²⁶ With this interpretation in mind, Scott argues that the purpose of a poet is “to look at and to contemplate the created world...[and] to incarnate his vision in poetic form as to trap the rest of us into a similar act of meditation.”²⁷ When the modern poet contemplates the world they find it an empty vacuum, with human beings having alienated themselves from the living world.²⁸ Scott, like Tillich, argues that this in itself is a discovery of our own finitude.²⁹ In response, he argues that the Christian critic must give us the courage to face our finitude and see it as our yearning for the infinite.³⁰ In this, the recognition of existential finitude becomes a “sacred void,” wherein the disorder of the Twentieth Century attests to the underlying Mystery of Being.³¹ In other words, in the “sense of separation from the Ground of Being there is expressed a profound intuition of its presence.”³² Coming back to the idea of interpersonal relations, in seeing our isolation and emptiness, we become aware of the ways we are intuitively in relationship with something we desire.

After thinkers like Wilder and Scott, there is a shift towards what David Hesla calls a “Second Stage” in the thought of Religion and Literature (although it might be possible to include Scott in this era as well). This includes a more ardent embrace of the term “Religion” (as opposed to “Theology”), and with it a turn to thinkers like Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, Victor Turner and Mary Douglas, or Émile Durkheim and Max Weber, as opposed to the early theories

²⁶ Scott, “Prolegomenon to a Christian Poetic,” 192.

²⁷ Scott, 195.

²⁸ Scott, 198.

²⁹ Scott, 202.

³⁰ Scott, 203.

³¹ Scott, “The Relation of Theology to Literary Criticism,” 276.

³² Scott, “Prolegomenon to a Christian Poetic,” 205.

of Tillich and his influencers, such as Heidegger and Kierkegaard.³³ In other words, the Second Stage embraces the fields of psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Representative of this movement are figures like David L. Miller, Daniel C. Noel, or William G. Doty, who all draw on mythology and psychology to varying degrees to think about the place of literature in articulating religion.

Miller acknowledges the Death of God (drawing on Friedrich Nietzsche and Thomas J. J. Altizer), and turns to myth and the psychology of James Hillman and Carl Jung to ask how a radical poetics might stand in the face of nothingness, or in other words, how humans make signification in the absence of clear ultimate meaning.³⁴ Noel does similar work, also turning to Hillman and Jung, in addition to Mircea Eliade, to ask about a Western neoshamanism that turns to the imagination to find psychological healing for the same fractures that Wilder, Scott, and Miller are addressing.³⁵ Doty also embraced myth to ask how it helps interpret truth and thereby make meaning, especially how contemporary popular culture returns to myth as a means to make sense of the current moment.³⁶ As he says of Joseph Campbell, Doty is asking how we see myth and its articulation of religious significance appearing in non-religious forms through the popular culture and literature of the day.³⁷ All three thinkers not only embrace the turn to psychology or anthropology and their insights on myth to understand Religion and Literature, but they also ask

³³ Hesla, "Religion and Literature: The Second Stage," 189–90.

³⁴ David L. Miller, "Theopoetry or Theopoetics?," *CrossCurrents* 60, no. 1 (2010): 8, 11; David L. Miller, "Polytheism and Archetypal Theology: A Discussion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40, no. 4 (1972): 519; David L. Miller, *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1974).

³⁵ Joel Weishaus and Daniel C. Noel, "The Soul of Shamanism: A Conversation with Daniel C. Noel," *Mythosphere* 2, no. 4 (2000): 397–404.

³⁶ William G. Doty, "Myth, the Archetype of All Other Fable: A Review of Recent Literature," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 74, no. 1–2 (1991): 243–74; William G. Doty, "What's a Myth?: Nomological, Topological, and Taxonomic Explorations," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 86, no. 3–4 (2003): 391–419.

³⁷ William G. Doty, "Dancing to the Music of the Spheres: The Religion in Joseph Campbell's 'Non-Religious' Mythography," in *Paths to the Power of Myth: Joseph Campbell and the Study of Religion*, ed. Daniel C. Noel (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1990), 4.

how the turn to myth in contemporary culture seeks to heal the existential fractures, of which thinkers like Tillich, Wilder, and Scott were so mindful.

Miller, Noel, and Doty's attention to the ways that literature can heal those fractures draws focus to another movement in the Second Stage of Religion and Literature: the ways that literature can play a practical role in shaping the modern religious life. For this, the field owes a great deal to Giles Gunn, who emphasizes the functionalities of religion and literature and their shared basis in the substance of culture to ask how the two relate to one another in the construction of reality.³⁸ When Gunn turns to a definition of religion, his emphasis is on "the function of religion to restore our confidence in the world, in the reality and final worth of our existence, and to help us bear up in the face of life's numerous challenges and obstacles."³⁹ In other words, he asks how religion helps us deal with the fact that we move through the world with consistent attacks on human dignity, which does not accord with our expectations. In turn, religion gives us the strength to face the world by providing an ethical guide and a metaphysical explanation for such a stark reality. These two elements are related so that religion's metaphysical understanding of the world shapes its ethical position. Likewise, if a religion's ethical code helps its followers successfully navigate the world, the religion's metaphysical image receives greater authority.⁴⁰ Literature enters this picture by challenging our metaphysics (and thereby our ethics) by offering new experiences of the world based on daily life.⁴¹ As such, the intersection of religion and literature is rooted around a question of Otherness, where

³⁸ Giles Gunn, *The Interpretation of Otherness: Literature, Religion, and the American Imagination* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), 6.

³⁹ Gunn, 108.

⁴⁰ Gunn, 108.

⁴¹ Gunn, 89–90.

literature practically works to allow us to reexamine our image of the world, the ethical principles we use to navigate it, and the ways we create religious meaning.

Robert Detweiler in *Breaking the Fall*, follows along a similar route as Gunn, asking how the very act of reading not only depicts the world but also transforms the reader's relationship with it. In his work, Detweiler is concerned with *Gelassenheit* and *Geselligkeit*, which he defines respectfully as the sense of "relaxation" and "communality" (and even Turner's *communitas*), and how the religious reading of literature encourages these values.⁴² He argues for the *Gelassenheit* of narrative by exploring the playful nature of reading as humans relax into the text and revel in the seemingly endless interpretations in an attempt to discover its one, true meaning.⁴³ By letting readers participate in the act of narration, reading lets us consciously dwell on the patternlessness of birth, life, and death, using that to play with the ways we narrate our own lives and the multiplicity of our identities.⁴⁴ Yet, for Detweiler, it is not just *Gelassenheit*, but also *Geselligkeit* since religious reading is done in community, pushing against the privatization of texts, and in this community we become open to the infinity of literature's meaning, encouraging the aspect of play.⁴⁵ From this perspective, Detweiler proposes religious reading as the meeting of "a group of persons engaged in gestures of friendship with each other across the erotic space of the text that draws them out of their privacy and its stress on meaning and power."⁴⁶ In this playful relationship around the text, readers reimagine their movement through the world and the shaping of their identity, entering the realm of religion through the encounter with the text.

⁴² Robert Detweiler, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 35.

⁴³ Detweiler, 34.

⁴⁴ Detweiler, 14, 38.

⁴⁵ Detweiler, 39.

⁴⁶ Detweiler, 34–35.

Since Hesla's claim of a Second Stage in 1978, there have been other attempts to think about the historical development of the subfield and its shifts in thought, most notably a special issue of *Religion & Literature* in the summer of 2009 edited by Susannah Monta, which sought to outline the boundaries of the field. From that issue, Darren J. N. Middleton's essay, "Religion and Literature's Unfinished Story," questioned what the future of the subfield might hold based on where it had been since Tillich. He argues that in turning to the future, we might see more work involving "non-Christian faiths and world fictions" and work that explores non-Western Christianity and non-Western literature.⁴⁷ This shift comes to represent something of a Third Stage (if we follow along Hesla's divisions) and has played a major role in shaping Religion and Literature scholarship throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

Carolyn M. Jones Medine characterizes some of this shift, particularly the sense that Religion and Literature (and really Arts, Literature, and Religion at this point) explores the intersections of thought. Thus, she is able to write about Womanist-Buddhist reading communities that explore the making and losing of meaning in conversations, thereby investigating the double readings and double consciousness opened in the past.⁴⁸ Likewise, she can turn to Jan Willis's claim to be a "Baptist-Buddhist," holding together multiple dimensions of identity, embracing a both-and sense of identity that revels in the harmonic and dissonant melodies.⁴⁹ Medine's embrace of these intersections and their impact on Religion and Literature especially comes through in a reflection on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from*

⁴⁷ Darren J. N. Middleton, "Religion and Literature's Unfinished Story," *Religion & Literature* 41, no. 2 (2009): 153–54. Ironically, Hesla made a similar note in 1978, hoping that the turn away from theology and into religion would carry with it a seriousness about non-Western literature, appreciating not only the similarities but also differences and how those might further define the field. Hesla, "Religion and Literature: The Second Stage," 189.

⁴⁸ Carolyn M. Jones Medine, "The Womanist-Buddhist Consultation as a Reading Community," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 32 (2012): 49–50.

⁴⁹ Carolyn M. Jones Medine, "The Practice of Double Belonging and Afro-Buddhist Identity in Jan Willis's Dreaming Me," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 40 (2020): 458–59.

Prison, in which she draws together thinkers and writers as disparate as Bonhoeffer, Toni Morrison, Marilou Awiatka, Gustavo Gutiérrez, W. E. B. Du Bois, John Keats, and Søren Kierkegaard to ask what the work of Arts, Literature, and Religion entails.⁵⁰ Again, she turns to music (this time Jazz) to express the relationship where in art, literature, and religion we begin with a theme, and improvise the work as needed, talking back to the original theme and tradition “with anger and beauty and in the spirit of creation.”⁵¹ This is not just the work of improvising for the sake of improvising, or exploring fragmentation for the sake of fragmentation, but seeking a structure that might contain that improvisation and fragmentation, and using the work of play to further improvise and further fragment in order to transcend fragmentation.⁵² In short, she claims that the work of Arts, Literature, and Religion is about the “and.” It is about using the “and” between expression and meaning as it appears in whatever form to interrogate the nature of humanity and the world around us.⁵³ In light of Medine’s notion of this work as like the dissonance and harmony of music, one wonders how the field could fulfill its purpose without an increased turn to non-Western literature and non-Christian religion, further expressions of the “and” that challenge us to inquire further into the nature of what it means to be human.

Religion and Fantasy Literature and Pop Culture

Emerging from the same milieu of disenchantment in the Twentieth Century but emerging along a slightly different route are questions about the religious nature of fantasy literature as a single genre. While these conversations certainly intersected with those posed by Tillich, Scott, Miller, etc., the lasting influence of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis as religious

⁵⁰ Carolyn M. Jones, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s ‘Letters and Papers from Prison’: Rethinking the Relationship of Theology and Arts, Literature and Religion,” *Literature and Theology* 9, no. 3 (1995): 256.

⁵¹ Jones, 251, 256.

⁵² Jones, 250, 255, 257.

⁵³ Jones, 256.

thinkers in their own right means that fantasy spawned its own questions about religion and literature as well.⁵⁴ Moreover, it is out of this scholarship that there are increased questions today about the religious nature of popular culture and even pop culture as religion, which are often based around pieces of science fiction or fantasy. As such, it is also worth briefly highlighting the scholarship that emerges around fantasy literature and religion, separate from the fuller treatment of fantasy literature as a genre in Chapter Two.

Many of the questions revolving around the religious nature of fantasy emerge from the work of Tolkien, since he lacks the obvious allegorizing that characterizes Lewis's work in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.⁵⁵ While Lewis embraces fantasy and fairy stories for the ways that the genre can sneak past the obligations he felt were associated with religion and thereby present Christianity in its "pure" form, Tolkien thought that the religious element was in the Joy experienced in the realm of Secondary Belief, and which might in-turn come to convey Primary Truth about the world.⁵⁶ In terms of their actual writing, this became apparent in Lewis's retelling of the Gospels through *Narnia* (even as he claims that was not his initial intention), whereas Tolkien provides a world seemingly separated from any obvious Christianity but in which we might experience Joy and become alerted to its truth in our world. The lack of any obvious religion in Tolkien's work (aside from brief mentions at the outset of *The Silmarillion*)

⁵⁴ J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, ed. C. S. Lewis (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 38–89; C. S. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact," in *God in The Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 63–67; C. S. Lewis, "The Grand Miracle," in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 80–88; C. S. Lewis, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To Be Said," in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (Harper One, 1994), 55–60.

⁵⁵ This is not to say that C. S. Lewis's religious allegorization in *Narnia* has not spawned its own religious questions or influences in later fantasy. Indeed, the scholarship of John Granger on the religious nature of *Harry Potter* owes a lot to Lewis's sense of *Narnia*. Rather, it is to acknowledge that Lewis does not shy away from the overtly Christian nature of his texts (in either his fiction or non-fiction) so that it has not engendered the same questions as Tolkien's work. John Granger, *How Harry Cast His Spell: The Meaning Behind the Mania for J. K. Rowling's Bestselling Books* (Carol Stream, IL: Saltriver, 2008).

⁵⁶ Lewis, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To Be Said," 58, 60; Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 82–84.

has left many scholars digging through letters and commentary to understand the specific religious nature of his world (i.e., Is it *more* Pagan or Christian?).⁵⁷

Claudio Testi, in his book *Pagan Saints in Middle-earth*, presents an excellent review of these various positions, ranging from scholars who see a radical Christian vision in Tolkien's works (Joseph Pearce, Stratford Caldecott, Peter Kreeft, John West Jr., Nils Agøy) to those who emphasize the ways that it is Pagan or Polytheistic (Catherine Madsen, Ronald Hutton, Stephen Morillo, Patrick Curry).⁵⁸ Moreover, the debate has continued on even since the publication of Testi's work in 2018, with new perspectives such as Ashna Mary Jacon and Nirmala Menon's investigation of the Godhead of Middle-earth in *The Silmarillion*.⁵⁹ Testi himself follows much of Tolkien's lead in his approach to *Beowulf*, arguing that Middle-earth cannot be said to be

⁵⁷ Through Tolkien, I argue that any questions about the religious nature of fantasy literature are truly questions about the religious nature of *Beowulf*, an epic that inspired Tolkien's work and on which he himself has written about its religious nature. Much like Tolkien's work, the question consistently asked of *Beowulf* is whether it is properly understood as Christian or Pagan. In Tolkien's own take, specifically looking at the monsters of *Beowulf*, the epic represents a transition phase between the Pagan and the Christian. The monsters are referred to using language that recalls the Christian "powers of darkness," such as "inmates of Hell" or "offspring of Cain," yet they have not yet become allegories of evil, they are still monsters that might eat the flesh of humans. In that regard, Tolkien says of the poet that he "is still concerned primarily with *man on earth*, rehandling in a new perspective an ancient theme: that man, each man and all men, and all their works shall die. A theme no Christian need despise. Yet this theme plainly would not be so treated, but for the nearness of a pagan time." I read here the sense that this is an ancient, pagan theme, one represented by the image of Ragnarök, but now within a (at least, more) Christian perspective. J. R. R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 22 (1936): 261, 265. Other scholars have attempted to parse the religious nature of the epic as well, coming to different conclusions at times. This includes F. A. Blackburn's critique that *Beowulf* started as a pagan poem but was later emended to be more Christian. Scholars who emphasize the more Christian elements of the poem include Marie Padgett Hamilton, Margaret E. Goldsmith, Maurice McNamee, and Joseph Marshall. Other scholars follow Tolkien's lead in emphasizing the mixed nature of the religious world of *Beowulf*, such as R. W. Chambers and Mary C. Wilson Tietjen. The various positions of the scholars on this one question plays a role in determining what other interpretations they make about the text, much as we might imagine is the case with Tolkien's own work. F. A. Blackburn, "The Christian Coloring in the *Beowulf*," *PMLA* 12 (1897): 205–25; Marie Padgett Hamilton, "The Religious Principle of *Beowulf*," *PMLA* 61 (1946): 309–31; Margaret E. Goldsmith, "The Christian Perspective in *Beowulf*," *Comparative Literature* 14, no. 1 (1962): 71–90; M. B. McNamee, "Beowulf-An Allegory of Salvation?," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 59 (1960): 190–207; Joseph E. Marshall, "Goldgyfan or Goldwance: A Christian Apology for *Beowulf* and Treasure," *Studies in Philology* 107, no. 1 (2010): 1–24; R. W. Chambers, *Beowulf: An Introduction to the Study of the Poem* (Cambridge, GB: Cambridge University Press, 1963); Mary C. Wilson Tietjen, "God, Fate, and the Hero of *Beowulf*," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 74, no. 2 (1975): 159–71.

⁵⁸ Claudio Testi, *Pagan Saints in Middle-Earth* (Zollikofen, CH: Walking Tree Publishers, 2018), 13, 27.

⁵⁹ Ashna Mary Jacob and Nirmala Menon, "Packaging Polytheism as Monotheism: A Study of the Mythopoeic Deity in Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*," *Religion and the Arts* 24 (2020): 84–109.

either specifically a Pagan or Christian world, but one in which it is both Pagan and Christian, expressing a natural theology that finds harmony through Christian Grace.⁶⁰ Much of this exploration of Tolkien's (and to an extent Lewis's) work and its religiosity has dealt with the intentions of the author and how their own interpretations of Religion and Literature have impacted their writing. There, however, has also been an increased focus on the ways that fans have come to encounter fantasy texts and the religious conversations that emerge in those dialogues.

Over the past thirty years, fantasy stories have been studied for the ways fans have utilized them for religious purposes, with several scholars suggesting how they might relate to organized religion, and in some cases, how it can stand on its own as an independent form of religion.⁶¹ If these thinkers joined conversations with the Religion and Literature scholars that I explored earlier, this element of fantasy becoming its own form of religion might appear as a new Fourth Stage of thought.⁶² While many of these scholars attempt to explain fantasy in

⁶⁰ Testi, *Pagan Saints in Middle-Earth*, 100, 127. In his review of *The Ring and the Cross* and *Light Beyond All Shadow*, Jonathan Evans highlights this element of harmony in relation to the Inklings' exploration of myth to note that truth might appear in any and all mythology, and the Christian vision does not necessitate the rejection of those truths merely because they occur in other traditions. In that light, the natural theology of Middle-earth and the experience of Joy in the realm of the story, one can encounter truth in complete harmony with Christianity. Thus, Evans notes that in Testi's work, he "puts to rest finally and utterly the false dichotomy of pagan/Christian that has divided commentary on Tolkien's work...". Jonathan Evans, "The Ring and the Cross: Christianity and The Lord of the Rings, and: Light Beyond All Shadow: Religious Experience in Tolkien's Work (Review)," *Tolkien Studies* 9 (2012): 97–105; Jonathan Evans, "Pagan Saints in Middle-Earth (2018) by Claudio A. Testi," *Journal of Tolkien Research* 7, no. 1 (2019).

⁶¹ The movement to understand fantasy literature and fandom relationships with these texts as their own form of religion owes a great deal to the work that scholars like Talal Asad and Jonathan Z. Smith have done in destabilizing our sense of what constitutes "Religion" by interrogating the specific cultural moments that have provided our more foundational definitions. In that space, there is the space to expand not only how we understand non-Christian traditions, but traditions that have never been considered in the same vein as religion before, including something like fandom and fantasy. Talal Asad, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category," in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Michael Lambek (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 114–32; Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269–84.

⁶² In some ways, I see one of the goals of my own project as uniting what have been (quite often) two separate threads of thought about the intersections of Religion, Literature, and Popular Culture. My work is a response to the scholars of this period (McAvan, Davidsen, etc.) as I present a different way to relate pop culture religion to organized religion, yet much of my interpretations owe a lot to the Religion and Literature thinkers like Miller,

relation to institutional religions and their sacred texts, fantasy's lack of historical rooting usually creates issues for classification. This means that fantasy gets classified either as something like a pseudo-religion, which does not account for the religious value it provides, or it is placed in the same category as traditions that have survived thousands of years, eclipsing the real differences between the two. Treating fantasy as a second hagiography, as I propose, helps to address both of these issues by attending to the religious work fantasy does, while also associating it more readily with religious literature instead of religion itself.

Emily McAvan offers one interpretation of the intersection of religion with fandom cultures by appealing to New Age Spirituality. From this perspective, we consume fantasy texts in an attempt to experience the sacred in some way and gain access to some form of spiritual instruction.⁶³ This perspective also understands religious fandom as part of the group that identifies as “spiritual, but not religious,” that have been moving away from traditional religions.⁶⁴ She, however, emphasizes that these practices are rooted in “unreal” texts and, as such, are not concerned with either belief or unbelief.⁶⁵ Due to this, she wants to set it apart from other forms of religion and spirituality.⁶⁶ The problem with McAvan's perspective is that it fails to recognize the full presence that exists in those texts, instead treating them as merely fictional. For her, the fictional aspect means that these texts can gain “secondhand experience of transcendence and belief,” but at the end of the day it is not *real* transcendence (it is secondhand).⁶⁷ I understand her as taking a Durkheimian perspective on religion, where fans

Detweiler, Wilder, and Scott. It is in their scholarship that I see the interrogation of why people sought out religion in pop culture itself, and it is in their scholarship that I see a wider perspective on what religion *does* separate from characterizations of belief alone.

⁶³ McAvan, *The Postmodern Sacred: Popular Culture Spirituality in the Science Fiction, Fantasy and Urban Fantasy Genres*, 6.

⁶⁴ McAvan, 7.

⁶⁵ McAvan, 2.

⁶⁶ McAvan, 14–15.

⁶⁷ McAvan, 19.

have constructed a “creative collective effervescence” around a text and its sites, but, in reality, everyone can see the man behind the curtain (including the fans themselves).⁶⁸ In other words, in focusing on the fact that these texts are unreal, and that this form of spirituality is not concerned with belief or unbelief, she treats these spiritualities not just as different, but as lesser, perhaps even imaginary (in its negative sense).

Markus Altena Davidsen proposes another method for understanding the religious value fantasy offers. He argues that we should classify religious systems into “fiction-based religions” and “history-based religions,” considering both of these different from fandom. A fiction-based religion is one based on a text like *Star Wars* (in this case Jediism), which finds religious value and structure from a text that *does not* claim to refer to the primary world. In contrast, a history-based religion (like Christianity) finds religious value and structure based on a text that *does* claim to refer to the primary world. Fandom is then held separately from both of these since it is more rooted in ideas of play than any sort of religious function.⁶⁹ While this perspective can treat something like Jediism as seriously as Christianity, recognizing the religious value that it provides, I find that it cannot adequately account for the number of ways people engage a fantasy text as religion. It finds presence rooted in the institutional structures, rather than the text itself. Yet, not everyone using fantasy as religion is doing so from the perspective of an established fiction-based religion, but instead incorporates small parts of fantasy into their understanding of the world or even into their understanding of more established traditions. This draws on the religious value these texts have to offer, but it is a more individual, non-institutional approach. For Davidsen, this would probably come closer to fandom with its notions of play, whereas I

⁶⁸ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press, 2001), 46, 113–14, 155–56.

⁶⁹ Markus A. Davidsen, “Fiction-Based Religion: Conceptualising a New Category against History-Based Religion and Fandom,” *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 14, no. 4 (2013): 380.

instead find that it points to the presence and religious value inherently found in the texts, separate from any institutional structure that develops around them.

I see another approach in Adam Possamai's term "hyper-real religions," in which he poses the hyper-real religion as "a simulacrum of a religion created out of, or in symbiosis with, commodified popular culture which provides inspiration at a metaphysical level."⁷⁰ Possamai draws this characterization from Jean Baudrillard's claim that society is now structured around so many simulacra that it becomes difficult to distinguish the real from the unreal, creating a hyper-reality.⁷¹ As Possamai describes hyper-real religion, it can embrace the variety of ways that people incorporate popular culture into religious practice, both as a full religious structure (like Jediism) or in bits and pieces, such as drawing inspiration from Lewis's *Narnia* or Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.⁷² I find that this has a similar problem as McAvan in that it treats these religions and religious practices as only simulacra, likenesses of religion, but not the real thing. Possamai updated his definition of hyper-real religions in 2011 to include the ways it may speak to metaphysics in light of similar critiques, but I do not think that the ability to touch on a metaphysics erases the reductive nature of referring to these as "simulacra."⁷³

To some degree, I find the problem in the term "hyper-real" itself since I do not think that we have reached a point in which it is impossible to distinguish the real from the unreal in culture, which seems to describe something more out of *Ready Player One* or the proposed "Meta-verse" than the way we encounter a text in 2023. While I agree that there is a question of the "real" around these texts, it seems that we come closer to the reality of a text like *The Lord of*

⁷⁰ Adam Possamai, "Yoda Goes to Glastonbury: An Introduction to Hyper-Real Religions," in *Handbook of Hyper-Real Religions*, ed. Adam Possamai (Brill, 2012), 20.

⁷¹ Possamai, 1.

⁷² Possamai, 1.

⁷³ Possamai, 19–20.

the Rings by appealing to mythological truth or mythological reality (or, as I will suggest, hagiographic truth) then hyper-reality. These stories do not insist on a breakdown between the real and the unreal as the hyper-real suggests, but rather (to follow Laura Feldt) a sense that our awareness of reality is not the fullness of reality, and that the text can offer us a deeper view into the real.⁷⁴

These approaches (from McAvan, Davidsen, and Possamai) are related to the problems of presence, structure, and belief. Fantasy either becomes pseudo-religion or a simulacrum of reality because it is fictional, which means it cannot provide real presence or refer to a real reality; or it needs to be equated with institutional religion for us to recognize its presence, forgetting the way it differs from those traditions and how it engages play. Scholars like Carole M. Cusack and Laura Feldt approach from a slightly different perspective to ask what religious functions these texts can provide through the practices of play that they embody.⁷⁵ Such an approach lets us acknowledge the serious religious value that fantasy fandom can provide to people, without focusing on institutional structure or claims to reality.⁷⁶ When Cusack explores

⁷⁴ Feldt, "Contemporary Fantasy Fiction and Representations of Religion: Playing with Reality, Myth and Magic in His Dark Materials and Harry Potter," 563.

⁷⁵ Carole M. Cusack, "Fiction into Religion: Imagination, Other Worlds, and Play in the Formation of Community," *Religion* 46, no. 4 (2016): 575–90; Feldt, "Contemporary Fantasy Fiction and Representations of Religion: Playing with Reality, Myth and Magic in His Dark Materials and Harry Potter." It should also be noted that Cusack follows some of the ways that Davidsen and Possamai think about these religions by applying the term "invented religions." In this, she is focusing on the power to construct one's own belief system and how it still fulfills many of the "cognitive science criteria to be regarded as 'religious'." Carole M. Cusack, *Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction, and Faith* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 24. I do not intend to draw upon this aspect of Cusack's thought for similar reasons that I am wary of Davidsen or Possamai's appeal to 'fiction-based religion' or 'hyper-real religion.' What I find valuable about her scholarship, however, is the emphasis on play and how this functions like religion in the ways that people interact with the texts. For me this is based more in what religion does and how people encounter it, while terminology like 'invented religion,' 'fiction-based religion,' or 'hyper-real religion' become too focused on how we justify belief in these texts as sites of religiosity, either by appealing to institutional structure or questions of reality. To follow Robert Orsi, it seems as if belief is the wrong question to ask about these sorts of texts. If we must answer the question of belief, I think we must turn to mythological belief and mythological truth, instead of being bogged down in claims to historical truth. Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 18.

⁷⁶ In some ways, fantasy fandom is about pushing against ideas of structure. When Jenkins describes his notions of participation, it is a moment where the separation between consumer and producer has become blurred, often

play, she argues that the repeated structures of play in the immersive world becomes the basis for a viable community with its own practices. This play is necessarily participating with the text for non-utilitarian purposes, which is generative for living in the space of the imagination.⁷⁷ Feldt reflects this attitude, noting how religion is explored freely, seeking out how it meets pragmatic concerns through playing with the religion itself.⁷⁸ In the space of fantasy like *His Dark Materials* or *Harry Potter*, this imaginative play becomes a site for realizing the hidden magic of the world, realizing that there is more to reality than the eye has first perceived, taking on value in the relationships formed between the text and the community around it.⁷⁹

My approach follows upon Cusack and Feldt's work, noting the functional and pragmatic similarities between hagiography and fantasy. It, however, brings greater clarity to what it means to treat these texts as functionally religious through a comparison to hagiography. In that comparison, I find the language to speak about how people relate to the texts and their figures and why they can fulfill religious functions. Moreover, it helps separate the practices around these texts from more institutional religious structures. In that sense, it creates possibilities to speak about the interaction between something like Christianity and these texts and how the religious value of these texts might stand by itself. Fantasy as a second hagiography, therefore,

because the consumers talk back to the producers. They take control over the text and make it their own, bringing in interpretations that the authority of the producer or author does not want to have there, and sometimes those are the most lasting interpretations. Much of this is rooted in the community around the text, because, as a community, fans often know the text better and use their communal voice to push back against the voice of the author—and even that has an element of play inherent to it. I even understand fandom in relationship to Arjun Appadurai's notion of vertebrae and cellular networks. The institutional authorities, like authors or publishing houses very much move through vertebrae networks—based on a set of premised, regulated norms and signals. Fandom, however, is cellular, moving across nation lines and traditional networks using the internet. Since it moves according to a different system, it can move around the vertebrae networks, and become counter-cultural in nature. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 3. Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 24–26.

⁷⁷ Cusack, "Fiction into Religion: Imagination, Other Worlds, and Play in the Formation of Community," 581, 586.

⁷⁸ Feldt, "Contemporary Fantasy Fiction and Representations of Religion: Playing with Reality, Myth and Magic in *His Dark Materials* and *Harry Potter*," 567.

⁷⁹ Feldt, 566–69.

speaks to the number of ways these texts can serve religious functions and relate to more institutional religious structures, both historical and invented.⁸⁰

Fantasy Literature as a Second Hagiography

The notion of a “second hagiography” is rooted in Paul Ricoeur’s sense that part of the modern condition is a search for a second naïveté. This is a recognition of a loss of our immediate belief in symbols and their power, and the question of how we might replace that loss.⁸¹ Central to Ricoeur’s notion is that we will not make our way back to our first naïveté, back to the immediacy of belief or the connection to our origins that we once had, but going forward we can find a new way to participate with what we lost. Ricoeur argues that this search will lead through criticism, claiming that “it is by interpreting that we can hear again,” following thinkers like Rudolf Bultmann in a work of demythologizing.⁸² Alongside Ricoeur’s search through criticism, I propose fantasy as a second hagiography that approaches the search for a second naïveté through a process of remythologizing. This involves a process of recapturing our

⁸⁰ Something not discussed in this dissertation, but worth an acknowledgement, is the economics of devotion, to both the saints and fantasy characters. Devotion to the saints (whether in taking pilgrimages, buying Books of Hours, making votive offerings, etc.) required money and the same can be said of fantasy devotion in which people purchase books, take trips to fantasy tourist sites, or buy the paraphernalia associated with their desired fandom. In that sense, there can be an exclusionary quality to both where only the wealthiest qualify for this type of devotion. At the same time, within both even the mildest investment allows one to participate in the community and take part in the wider culture. For saints, if you cannot take a pilgrimage, but you make a small donation to someone who does, then you receive a salvatory grace for that act. Likewise in fantasy, a small contribution through fan fiction or borrowing a book from a library is enough to put one in contact with the fandom and see oneself as part of this culture. It is also worth noting that the fact people invest in both of these things (with what little money they have) speaks to how important it is for how they move through the world and the value they derive from it. For more on the economics of devotion, see Adrian R. Bell and Richard S. Dale, “The Medieval Pilgrimage Business,” *Enterprise & Society* 12, no. 3 (2015); Riza Saputra, “Commercial Activity and Beggars as Identity Marker of Community: The Case of Sacred Aura in Pilgrimage Area,” *Al-Banjari* 18, no. 2 (2019); Anna Kérchy, “Transmedia Commodification: Disneyfication, Magical Objects, and Beauty and the Beast,” in *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies*, eds. Gambarato Rampozzo Renira and Matthew Freeman (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 223–33; Elizabeth Teare, “Harry Potter and the Technology of Magic,” in *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*, ed. Lana A. Whited (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 329–42; Jack Zipes, “Why Fantasy Matters Too Much,” *Comparative Literature and Culture* 10, no. 4 (2008); Sarah McFarland Taylor and Mara Einstein, “Introduction to the Special Issue on Religion, Media, and Marketing,” *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 11 (2022).

⁸¹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969), 351.

⁸² Ricoeur, 350–51.

imagination and making it ours in the ways it brings us into a liminal space that remakes the notion of an origin. Remythologizing follows David Miller who argues for a narrative theology that resituates God in our daily lives, and so allows the religious imagination to speak to complex issues of life and death or good and evil.⁸³ Thus, fantasy might engage the religious imagination and do so in a way that brings it into our lived situations, relying on how groups can take ownership of fantasy stories through play.

Central to my approach to fantasy as a second hagiography is the sense that it ritually opens a liminal space, which gives us the possibility to engage the religious imagination, recreate origins, and shape a group identity in relationship with the text. The ritual field around fantasy mirrors that of hagiography, including the ways that reading becomes ritualized and the communal participatory culture around important sites, anniversaries, and material objects. In both instances, Victor Turner and Arnold Van Gennep's three-part framework for a ritual (separation, limen, and reaggregation) guides the movement into liminal spaces and the communal interaction with a religious imaginary in those spaces. While Turner stops short of applying this full framework to the so-called historical traditions like Judaism, Christianity, or Islam (primarily because they are voluntary), he argues that they remain liminoid, sharing characteristics of the ritual structure.⁸⁴ Ronald Grimes follows this distinction as well, speaking about the "ritualization" of "ordinary stuff," as opposed to more formal "rites." While the ritualization around fantasy may not be as formal as we imagine a traditional rite, it shares a ritualizing tendency, which can open liminal spaces.⁸⁵ I use this three-part framework for rituals to organize the dissertation, considering the ways that fantasy and hagiography cause separation,

⁸³ Miller, *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses*, 27–29.

⁸⁴ Victor Turner and Edith L. B. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1978), 35–36.

⁸⁵ Ronald L. Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press, 2014), 192–93.

what happens in their liminality, and how they affect our reaggregation into the world after encountering the text. Such a movement demonstrates the ways fantasy, as a second hagiography, can engage people with the religious imagination and lead to a second naïveté.

Understanding fantasy literature as a second hagiography clearly situates the religious imagination evoked by fantasy in relationship to more traditional conceptions of “religion” through a comparison with other forms of religious literature. In this regard, it pushes against the Secularization Hypothesis’s sense that we are leaving religion behind, while also treating these texts and the culture as religious, going beyond McAvan’s sense that they merely *seem* devotional. It lets us treat the relationships people hold with these texts and their characters as part of a serious religious practice, while also acknowledging differences from more institutional religions. This includes creating the space for someone to engage with the texts religiously as part of a wider spiritual or religious practice, whether that is in what Davidsen calls the fiction-based religions, history-based religions, or as a New Age spirituality as McAvan suggests. In other words, it brings greater clarity to Caroline Cusack and Venetia Robertson’s sense that in modern culture secularization and sacralization are intertwined and symbiotic phenomena.⁸⁶ As such, the hagiographic tradition becomes an important lens through which I can understand the ways people relate to these texts and the religious functions they may play. Hagiography is an especially fruitful comparison due to the number of literary and functional similarities it shares with fantasy.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One (“Who are the Saints?”) examines the notion of sainthood, how saints function in a culture, and the tension between the historical saints and the constructed image of

⁸⁶ Cusack and Robertson, “Introduction: The Study of Fandom and Religion,” 10.

them that devotees most often imagine. The chapter focuses in particular on Peter Brown's idea of participatory culture as a major component of the cult of the saints, how that emerges around the text, and the implications this has for the ways they function.⁸⁷ In the context of participation, the saints become sites of presence, including their own presence and the mediated presence of God, as Brown continues to suggest in his work and as I see show up in Robert Orsi's notion of the saints as a presence-in-relationship with the community around them.⁸⁸ As Orsi suggests, the idea of participation also implies a relationship between the saint and their devotees, and a relationship that is performed through a culture of physical and affective engagement. These responses come to shape a communal identity around the saint, as well as constructing societal norms about virtue or gender. Admitting elements of sainthood that rely on societal constructions reminds us of the tension between the historical saints and how communities have engaged with them. Navigating this tension has increased the comparative study of hagiography across religious traditions to parse out the ways saints become constructed, what they mean for communities, and how I understand their function. Within the context of the larger argument, Chapter One provides a basis for understanding hagiography and the ways the saints influence our understandings of the world. Having this clear outline in place becomes a point of return to compare the ways fantasy operates on a similar level. Moreover, it situates this dissertation as part of the move towards comparative hagiography, with the caveat that this is a comparison across literary genres rather than religious traditions. Specifically, my work offers a comparison across literary traditions (rather than religious traditions) to ask questions about how figures in

⁸⁷ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Enlarged Edition (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2015), xxvii–xxviii.

⁸⁸ Robert A. Orsi, "Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity," in *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World*, ed. Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen, and Catrien Notermans (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 218–21.

different types of writing can share a similar function. In that regard, it follows a track in comparative hagiography that uses comparison to question what constitutes *hagio* and by extension religion.

Much as Chapter One provides the basis for understanding hagiography, Chapter Two (“What is Fantasy?”) builds a similar basis for fantasy literature. Together these chapters set the stage for the comparative work of later chapters as they demonstrate the ways that fantasy functions as a second hagiography, evoking the religious imagination through a hagiographic frame of mind. Since fantasy can be such a wide genre, including works as distant as Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* or Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, I begin Chapter Two by using Brian Attebery’s notion of fantasy as a fuzzy set with multiple centers to frame the rest of the chapter.⁸⁹ Within this framework, Chapter Two then outlines various theories of fantasy and how that theory influences fantasy’s function. This includes engagement with key works like J. R. R. Tolkien’s “On Fairy Stories,” Rosemary Jackson’s *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, Brian Attebery’s *Strategies of Fantasy* and *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*, and Farah Mendlesohn’s *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Ultimately, I lean more heavily into Tolkien’s and Attebery’s definitions since those definitions functionally correlate well with hagiography. This specifically includes how the genre can display our deepest desires and enact a relationship with them and how the genre inspires a sense of wonder in the world. While Tolkien may be especially important here because he thinks of his work as an inherently religious project, an important aspect of Chapter Two is considering how his and Attebery’s theories also apply to authors like Philip Pullman or

⁸⁹ Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 12; Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge, GB: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.

Ursula Le Guin, who understand their work as agnostic or atheistic. Towards the end of Chapter Two, I begin turning to the ways fantasy has become a transmedial experience, occurring in multiple forms of media, and the ways that this has played a role in the recent surge in fandom communities. This helps to define further the set of texts I am interested in for this work, since the fandom aspect of fantasy is central to its role as a second hagiography.

The turn towards fandom communities at the end of Chapter Two and the importance of participation for hagiography in Chapter One reminds us of how these texts are often understood within a communal context. One way to understand these communities and the ways they engage with the text is through the theoretical lens of ritual. This becomes my primary method for comparing hagiography and fantasy, and so arguing that fantasy acts as second hagiography. As the rest of the dissertation shows, the context of ritual plays an important role in not only describing how these communities form, but also the type of work that can occur in ritual space, such as how it recreates an origin for us to engage ideas of presence and participate with these figures, and how they can affect our lived experience of life afterwards. As such, Chapter Three (“Ritual, Reading, and Liturgy”) outlines theories of ritual, including how reading itself is a rite of passage, how texts become incorporated in further ritual activities, and how material culture engages this ritual process in things like relics or pilgrimages. The goal at this point is to outline the ways that a ritual culture develops in conversation with texts, which will allow later chapters to draw on the methodological framework of ritual. To understand reading as a rite of passage, I incorporate the ways the Ronald Grimes writes about ritualization, ways by which we can bring ideas of ritual into everyday activities and how reading might operate as a rite of passage, bringing us into a liminal space.⁹⁰ This also includes an exploration of the ways reading operates

⁹⁰ Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, 192–93.

as a rite of passage through specific reading practices, such as those proposed by Ignatius of Loyola or the use of *lectio divina* in monasteries.

Chapter Four (“Separation: Writing and Performing Texts”) begins the more direct comparison between fantasy and hagiography, considering the ways that the two genres narrate stories that blur the boundaries between text and audience. In the context of ritual, I understand this as Turner’s sense of Separation, a phase often accompanied by multivalent symbols, which cause a pause in our daily, profane rhythms in order to enter sacred space.⁹¹ This is crucial to the success of any fantasy tale, relying on Tolkien’s notion of Secondary Belief, as these porous boundaries allow readers to have an encounter with the fantasy world and so engage the desires towards which fantasy is directed.⁹² To detail the way that fantasy blurs these boundaries on the level of the text, I draw on Brian Attebery’s *Strategies of Fantasy* and Farah Mendlesohn’s *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, both of which detail specific narrative devices that play a role in constructing Secondary Belief. On the side of hagiography, Lucy Grig, Elizabeth Castelli, and Stephanie Cobb all argue about the important ways that hagiographic texts position the saints in relationship with the audience in order to collapse the distances between the two groups, and so allow devotees to participate with the saints. In both fantasy and hagiography, this process, however, does not live solely on the level of the text (although that is an important foundation). In the ways hagiography and fantasy are both transmedial genres, the written text also becomes performed in multiple expressions, such as in retellings and adaptations, clothing and images, or ritual ceremonies inspired by the texts, in each way pushing further into our world. While these other media are a response to the text’s ability to separate us from our world, they become a part

⁹¹ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 1969), 58.

⁹² Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 44, 60–61.

of the process as well, further breaking down the barriers between text and audience in an expanding positive feedback loop.

In the way that fantasy and hagiography ritually break down the barriers between text and audience, they create the possibility for people to participate with the saints and fantasy heroes, and, through them, to have a mediated experience of the Divine. Therefore, Chapter Five (“The Limen: Participating with the Divine”) explores the way the figures of the saints and fantasy characters become a means to participate with the divine. Specifically, it argues that in participating with the saints and fantasy characters, fans and devotees fill them with a presence. This presence allows the interrogation of wonder and desire expressed in these figures and what it says about our humanity. At the same time, they also become articulatory pivots through which fans and devotees are able to name and narrate their own stories as sacred, repeating the first act of creation in how it brings order out of the chaos of life. By recreating the first act of creation in narrating their stories as sacred through the saints and fantasy characters, these devotees and fans, in turn, participate with God as well.

While in their liminality, hagiography and fantasy let us participate with the presence of God, they also open us to reconnect with other living things and persons, notably the community formed around these texts. This function is connected with Turner’s understanding of *communitas* as it is formed in the limen, those moments where we are returned to an understanding of *I-Thou* relationships with each other.⁹³ Chapter Six (“The Limen: Holding Community with Living Things”) focuses on the ways that we form communal identity in tension with personal identity while in the liminal space of fantasy and hagiography, particularly as they are acted out in the material culture of fanzines and Books of Hours. Drawing on

⁹³ Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 126–27.

Turner's notion of *communitas* and the ritual field as a social drama which lets us consistently renegotiate how we define our community, this chapter explores how these texts bring groups together, using the figures of saints or fantasy characters to articulate the communal dynamic. I draw specifically on Robert Detweiler's notion in *Breaking the Fall* that religious reading is based on a group of people joining in "gestures of friendship with each other across the erotic space of the text that draws them out of their privacy and its stress on meaning and power."⁹⁴ In this framework, the religious aspect is the openness that emerges around the text in the context of friendship and community (pushing against the closed forms of interpretation traditionally associated with religious institutions), where the natural desire to create meaning out of a text is subverted by the freedom of friendship. In this play between individual (meaning making) and community (freedom), Detweiler claims we find the hope that the world's chaos is fathomable, even as that chaos must constantly be reinterpreted and reconstructed as a never-ending process.⁹⁵ In other words, in the midst of our personal need to create meaning, the community reminds us that there are endless interpretative possibilities that hint at the divine mystery. In this act of play, new communal networks emerge, held in tension with traditional religious and literary institutions.

As we leave the limen, Turner claims we enter a period of reaggregation. During this time, we bring what we learned in the limen to bear on our everyday lives. Chapter Seven ("Reaggregation: Imitating Saints and Heroes") explores how hagiography and fantasy express the lived morality of the saints and fantasy characters. Reflecting Plato's aesthetic principles, both saints and fantasy heroes represent and embody what it means to be moral in the complexity of life—taking stock of the challenges that a purely logical morality may miss. Along with this,

⁹⁴ Detweiler, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction*, 34–35.

⁹⁵ Detweiler, 43.

they are able to express the changing nature of morality over time as people rethink what it looks like to be a hero and what values we hold as central to our morality. This element is tied up in the experience of the limen, where readers lived alongside these figures and gave them a presence. This brings those figures into the complexity of life and beyond purely rational thought. Moreover, this lived morality becomes expressed in action groups like Fandom Forward (formerly the Harry Potter Alliance), which uses stories and fandom structures to advocate for social issues.

Chapter One

Who Are the Saints?

Beginning my attempt to describe fantasy as a second hagiography asks me to define the genres I am talking about. How can I say that fantasy shares anything in common with hagiography if I am not clear about what either fantasy or hagiography are? This chapter on hagiography and the next on fantasy take on this question, seeking to define my terms. As I set out to ask what hagiography is, however, I am immediately reminded of the limits of my task. Much like “religion,” I find that “hagiography” is a modern term used to organize and understand a diverse group of texts and phenomena that share something in common, namely the saints.¹ This attempt remains problematic since it asks us to group together texts that the original authors may have never considered together. In that regard, I want to ask whether I can even answer the question of what hagiography is, or whether I am left grasping at modern straws.

As scholars have sought to understand the genre, its function, and how we ought to understand saints in general, they have used a vast framework of theoretical methods and asked a diversity of questions. Given the nature of this project, in which I am concerned with whether fantasy can function in a similar way to hagiography in the modern world, I might be able to limit myself to how hagiography and the saints have functioned in culture. This question, however, still leaves me with a number of considerations, beginning with a basic question: is the function of the saints in culture limited to the historical saints or can I extend it to anyone who has been attributed holiness, regardless of their historicity? As such, rather than answering what

¹ Anna Taylor, “Hagiography and Early Medieval History,” *Religion Compass* 7, no. 1 (2013): 2.

hagiography is, it might be better to ask who the saints are. Hagiography then becomes literature that mediates relationships with the saints, drawing on Robert Orsi's definition of religion "as a network of relationships between heaven and earth."²

Ultimately, the goal of this chapter is to understand the place of the saints as a subset of Christians set apart as uniquely holy in culture and what that says about their function. Answering that question, however, begins with one of the earliest debates in modern hagiographic scholarship: the place of legend and history in the lives of the saints. In directing myself towards the function of the saints, I create space to consider any saint and the community formed around their presence, with an ear towards history *and* legend. In some sense, my exploration of hagiography decenters the saints, and instead focuses on the communities around them. This shift lets me consider how devotees have sought to participate with the saints, localize the presence of God through them, and navigate and shape their communal identity in relationship to them.³ As I consider these notions and how I can define the saints, it is also useful

² Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, 2.

³ As I started working through this concept, it struck me how similar the ideas of presence from Orsi and hierophany from Eliade were. In some sense, my description of presence could easily be applied to hierophany (with little adjustment), but I sense there is a difference between the two that needs unpacking, especially when it comes to the saints. For Eliade, a hierophany is when something sacred shows itself to us in some ordinary object. It is the mystery of something from a wholly different order becoming integral with the profane world. In the saint, the sacredness of God is made manifest and localized, even as the saint remains themselves, i.e., remains a material body. In that sense, the saint becomes a living hierophany, becoming the center for the religious community, a being that helps them define themselves and orient how they are going to move through the world. Using Eliade's framework of the Eternal Return, we might also imagine how the saint reproduces the work of Jesus by imitating him, who himself reproduces the act of creation upon the cross by bringing about a new creation. When the saint passes, their material body remains a hierophany. As Cynthia Hahn notes, their material body is a concrete element upon which the religious imagination can structure devotion and create presence. This is where I find the difference between hierophany and presence. The hierophany is the material site where heavenly and earthly meet, and the presence of the saint is the expression of the sacred that inhabits the hierophany. There is a triangulation between sacred presence, profane devotees, and hierophany that merges the two. Important to recognize here is that both the material hierophany and the sacred presence play a role; it cannot reduce be reduced to either occurrence. To ignore the presence behind the hierophany is to ignore what marks the hierophany as sacred. At the same time, to ignore the material hierophany is to miss what grounds the sacred in this world. Drawing on Charles Long, it is not as Paul Tillich would have it where we look at the Cross and see beyond it to the presence of Christ. Instead, we see the divine manifest in the Cross but also see the human suffering of Jesus at the same time. It is easy to imagine how this might apply to the saints as well, especially the martyrs who also suffer, but others as well. In being living hierophanies of God in the world, they become sacred centers, but maintain their profane materiality. Mircea

to look at comparisons across religious traditions. This includes the continued practice within the Catholic Church of honoring the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets as saints.⁴ Not only does this give me a greater appreciation of how holy people have functioned around the world and throughout history, but it also points to the possibility of understanding fantasy characters as holy people within Modernity.

Will the Real Saints Please Stand Up?

If I am going to consider the ways the saints and their stories have functioned in culture, I need to clarify what saints I am considering. Does a saint have to be historical, or even, does every aspect of their story have to be historical, if I am fully going to appreciate their functionality? Or, as a contrast, is it more important to consider the ways devotees have imagined the saints and their stories? The answers I give to these questions have an important impact on the theological foundations through which I understand hagiography. By way of example, if I outline one of the primary functions of the saints as interceding with God in heaven, then it stands to reason that it is important for them to have a level of historicity and a real soul in heaven that can do that work. If I place the emphasis of their function somewhere else, then maybe historicity is not as important as I might imagine.⁵ This question has also been

Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 1987), 11, 21. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 4–5. Cynthia Hahn, *Passion Relics and the Medieval Imagination: Art, Architecture, and Society* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020), 103. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 175; Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York, NY: Perennial Classics, 2001), 47. Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, 1999), 207; Charles Long, “Human Centers: An Essay on Method in the History of Religions,” *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 61, no. 3, Dilemmas of Pluralism: The Case of Religion in Modernity (1978): 412.

⁴ Catholic Church, “The Catechism of the Catholic Church,” Vatican Archive, 2003, para. 61, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

⁵ This question becomes especially important when I consider fantasy literature as a Second Hagiography because fantasy characters rarely have their basis in reality, and certainly not to the same degree as the saints. As such, they would not have a soul in heaven who could intercede with God. If that is the saints’ only or primary function, the case for a Second Hagiography becomes limited.

at the center of hagiographic scholarship since its revival among the Society of Bollandists in the first part of the Nineteenth Century.

The Bollandist Society, often represented by prominent member Hippolyte Delehaye, brought the methods of historical criticism to hagiography. As such, one of their main goals is in some sense to separate the wheat from the chaff in regard to the saints. They ask questions such as which saints actually existed and what parts of their stories are based in history versus legend, hoping to arrive at the “true,” historical figures.⁶ For Delehaye, this type of research into the saints was crucial to treating them with the full admiration they deserved, believing the legendary elements degraded the great tradition of the saints.⁷ This brings us back to concerns about how the saints are going to function, and the implications of their historicity on their functionality. Devotion to the saints is a serious business, and not something that I can take for granted, accepting anyone who has ever had holiness attributed to them. The centrality of the Bollandists, particularly the work of Delehaye, has had the effect of giving more credence to the historical lives, something the Vatican considers in its current process of canonization, even making moves to “de-canonize” those saints who are more legendary in nature (such as St. Christopher).⁸ This was also a concern of Martin Luther in his critique against the saints, challenging how many saints were being canonized and the “excesses” of devotion.⁹

Delehaye’s critique of the legendary characteristics of some saints’ lives is caught up in the historical development of the genre of hagiography, particularly how certain hagiographies related to non-Christian legends. He claims that hagiography is not just the life of the saint, but it

⁶ Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, trans. Donald Attwater (Dublin, IR: Four Courts Press, 1998), x; Lucy Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* (London, GB: Duckworth, 2004), 147.

⁷ Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, ix.

⁸ Lawrence S. Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1980), 39.

⁹ Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn’t, and Why* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 74–75.

is also how the hagiographer has chosen to depict their life, and how the hagiographer is responding to the surrounding community.¹⁰ Because of this, most of the time, we do not just have the historical life of the saint; generally that historical life is also surrounded by an influx of legend which can describe a person different from who we find in history.¹¹ In some ways, Delehaye is describing how the saint becomes an archetype rather than an historical person with historical stories. In other words, they risk becoming universal rather than local. He wants to acquaint us with the historical people and the tiny, significant details of their lives.

Part of this movement relates to literary encroachments which we incorporate into the lives of real people to turn them into legends.¹² For example, an individual saint might become identified with biblical characters, the written lives of other saints, or even non-Christian heroic figures that come from the same geographic location as the saint or who perform similar miracles.¹³ Anywhere there is a similarity in the story, Delehaye argues, there is a chance for these separate lives to be collapsed together into a single, more legendary figure. Therefore, the saint becomes a mosaic of all these characteristics, brought together by the hagiographer who recounts the stories. If the saint's function is rooted in their historicity, this syncretism becomes a barrier to that functionality as they take on more non-historical elements.

He takes this further into the literary aspects of the text, however, pointing to the value historically placed on rhetoric while writing medieval hagiography. It is not just that the stories resemble each other and become merged in peoples' minds, but the way the hagiographer presents the stories also accounts for the legendary aspects. Delehaye claims that rhetoric plays such an important role in these lives because the hagiographer was writing for edification, but

¹⁰ Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, 11.

¹¹ Delehaye, 19.

¹² Delehaye, 43.

¹³ Delehaye, 38,43, 54.

also as entertainment for the Christians who would gather to hear the stories of the saints (perhaps as an alternative to the forms of non-Christian entertainment in the theatre or colosseum).¹⁴ When rhetorical devices (which he seems to suggest are tied to entertainment value) enter the conversation, Delehayé questions whether these stories are really historical (which could be told without embellishment), or if they are merging together a number of stories for theatrical effect, leading some hagiographies to lack a strong historical basis.¹⁵ Due to this, Delehayé proposes a number of categories by which we can separate the different types of hagiography depending on how much they engage with historical truth, and through which we can navigate which stories deserve our greatest degree of attention.

Delehayé's quest for the historical saints is somewhat tied up in what is known as the "two-tier model." This model is primarily asking how the Christian veneration of saints is different from, or perhaps indebted to, the earlier non-Christian ideas of hero worship in Greco-Roman myth. In this model, the original Christian Church was "pure and undefiled, rejecting everything that could obscure the conception of the One True God."¹⁶ Once the general population began accepting Christianity, however, the strict monotheism of the Christian elite had to be sacrificed to keep the attention of the common people considering conversion. As such, a quasi-polytheism worked its way into Christianity in the form of the saints wherein these figures become the new Greek demigods. Delehayé is concerned about the overlap that exists between the Greek heroes and Christian saints recommended by the two-tier hypothesis and how to prove that the saints are different. He seems to acknowledge that there is some overlap between the stories of the saints and the Greek heroes (as the two-tier model suggests), in which

¹⁴ Delehayé, 65–68.

¹⁵ Delehayé, 69.

¹⁶ Delehayé, 160.

the deeds and powers from previous legends are incorporated into the historical lives of the saints.¹⁷ His method of historical criticism, however, is about separating those legendary elements and proving the differences that are present.

In effect, he argues that the similarities between the saints and Greek heroes is a literary similitude, but that theologically they are entirely distinct institutions.¹⁸ If, therefore, we can remove the literary elements, and find the historical saint, we can go back to their proper veneration. In this regard, Delehayé argues that the proper veneration of the saints relies on knowing the historical saint, separate from any literary embellishment, because that is the true saint. If we cannot find the historical person, we are shifting to a different theological foundation. The cult of the saints suddenly becomes about hero-worship, not the veneration afforded to saints and martyrs.¹⁹ This implies a different way for devotees to relate to the saints, and a different way for those saints to function, both in life and upon their death.

Following the work of the Bollandists and Hippolyte Delehayé, Peter Brown becomes one of the most influential scholars of hagiography and suggests a different understanding of the saints and their literary value. Instead of focusing on which saints are historical, Brown focused on the presence of the saints and how people related to that presence in the world.²⁰ He also notes that this function varied, with “different segments of a variegated Christian community project[ing] different expectations of the working of the saints.”²¹ In this regard, it was not so much a single expectation of what the saints would do, but a varied expectation based on the different needs within segments of a community. Brown, therefore, is more focused on how

¹⁷ Delehayé, 187.

¹⁸ Delehayé, 163.

¹⁹ Delehayé, 166.

²⁰ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, xxvi.

²¹ Brown, xxvii.

people were immediately responding to the saints. What remains the same across the variety of saintly functions is that devotees were not focused on the historical person, but on the recorded hagiography and associated liturgical celebrations. Brown's interpretation of the saints will play an important role in my own understanding of hagiography since he shifts the focus towards functionality in connection with the immediately surrounding community and the way the constructed saint interacts with the community.

As an example, Brown might understand the saints through the lens of patronage relationships, a common aspect in Greco-Roman life. In this instance, Brown is considering the social context of the saints and what they mean for a community. For instance, he argues that the cult of the saints "was about people, and about the types of *relationships* that can be established between people [emphasis added]." ²² Brown is relying here on his argument that the saints are related to our desire for an invisible companion and, particularly, an invisible human companion to act as a patron as we move through life. ²³ This is situating the saints in a relationships with communities, looking at how people were responding to the communal remembrances of a saint, not necessarily the historical figures themselves. Thomas Head builds on Brown's argument, claiming that it is not relics themselves (representatives of a historical person) that cause miracles to happen, but rather an interpersonal relationship rooted around the relics that was at the center of any miraculous power. ²⁴ In this sense, hagiography and relics are just aspects of a much broader relationship with the saints. This was a relationship not with an historical person per se, but with the community's imagining of that person. As part of this consideration, Head critiques those like Delehayé who want to separate the historical saints from the ways

²² Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 13.

²³ Brown, 15.

²⁴ Thomas Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints: The Diocese of Orléans, 800-1200* (Cambridge, GB: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 12.

communities have constructed them.²⁵ He even suggests that to focus only on the historical saint does a violence to the ways that believers conceived of those relationships. As an example, he claims that “the only ‘real’ St. Anianus present in the diocese of Orléans during the Carolingian and Capetian periods was the saint ‘constructed’ by the hagiographers.”²⁶

Brown and Head are both working from an awareness that the historicity of the saints was not necessarily the most important aspect of how devotees interacted with them. It does have some importance, since the lived history of a saint has an impact on what they become known for, what communities they enter relationships with, and even what legends become incorporated into their lives. It is not, however, as important to separate the “real” history from all of these other characteristics, as Delehay seems to argue. The whole of these characteristics works together to create our image of the saints and to impact the way we interact with them.

Other scholars have followed Brown and Head’s lead, asking what it means for us to interact with the constructed lives of the saints and what they can tell us about other facets of culture. This includes incorporating practices from Literary Studies to better understand how the saints function in culture, how people have used hagiography to navigate their collective identity, and how they have used hagiography to portray themselves to the world. This includes scholars like Lucy Grig, who looks at the narrative devices hagiographers used to construct not only people as martyrs, but also the power martyrs had in relationship to Rome and in relationship to their community.²⁷ This acknowledges some level of historical fact, but notes the ways that Christians used their stories to help define their identities and how those identities relate to other communities.

²⁵ Head, 119.

²⁶ Head, 119.

²⁷ Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*, 5.

Likewise, Lynda Coon embraces the idea of the saints as archetypal figures, somewhat separated from their historical roots, and uses that as a lens to understand what hagiographers hoped to convey in the saints' lives.²⁸ To answer those questions, Coon finds it valuable to embrace the legendary aspects of their stories and the syncretic meshing of historical saint, biblical figure, and non-Christian legend. Other scholars also take part in this tradition, like Elizabeth Castelli, who wants to ask not "what really happened," but how the memory of this time has been preserved and what that tells us about the way people related to the saints.²⁹ This does not seek to divorce the saints from history completely, since, as Roland Betancourt has noted, these stories still describe a possible past, even if they are not historically true of one specific person.³⁰ For example, just because Mary of Egypt herself may not have experienced everything associated with her hagiography does not mean that a group of women during that time did not experience all the varied elements of her story. Instead, Grig, Coon, and related scholars' focus on the saints as constructions (that still draw on history) allows them to further define how the saints specifically might function within a community. This takes us past metaphysical questions about the saint's role in interceding with God on behalf of the devoted and asks how they and their stories played a role in culture in general, including the ways it reflects on the historical people who saw themselves in the saints' lives.

²⁸ Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 6–10.

²⁹ Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*, Gender, Theory, and Religion (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), 5. See also, John Kitchen, *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender: Male and Female in Merovingian Hagiography* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998); Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2002); L. Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008); L. Stephanie Cobb, *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017).

³⁰ Roland Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender, and Race in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 17.

Is Anyone There?

While contrasting Brown to Delehayé, I said that Delehayé was interested in the historical saint and how people related to them while Brown was more interested in the presence of the saint and the impact that had on the community. This is not to say that Delehayé was not also interested in the presence of the saints, as that is an important part of their function, but that, for him, historicity would imply presence. In fact, the search for the historical saints was about finding those who did have a real presence rooted in their historical person. Brown, however, seems to focus more on the people surrounding the saint and how they constructed the presence of the saint, regardless of historicity. Since many of the saints' functions (for Brown, Coon, Castelli, and others) relate to that sense of presence, there is an important question about whether I can think of social constructions as sites of presence, or if they remain empty signifiers. In other words, can I describe a social construction as "alive?"

Scholar of Twentieth Century Catholicism and hagiography, Robert Orsi, writes a lot about presence and how we can understand that idea in light of Modernity and its terms (like "social construction"). He specifically notes the limits of Modernity's language to speak about religion because the structures of Modernity can only see gods and spirits as social facts, empty of anything "real" and empty of presence. As such, he offers us important language in thinking about the constructed lives of the saints and how I might still think of those as sites of presence.

To define presence, Orsi looks at the difference between Protestant and Catholic beliefs about the Eucharist.³¹ Painting in broad strokes, Orsi says that the stereotypical view of the

³¹ Orsi is making this distinction between Protestant and Catholic based on the story of President Bill Clinton (a Baptist) and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton (a Methodist) receiving Eucharist at a Catholic Church, and the following backlash. In that sense, he is responding to the ways that institutions (and particularly the Catholic Church) have interpreted the difference between Protestants and Catholics. In reality, he is clear that presence is not something restricted to Catholics and not something restricted to pre-Modern times, but rather the search for presence is something that is the norm for human existence. This just happens to be an example where we can highlight how we might define presence. Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press

Eucharist for Protestants is that it is a symbol for Jesus, which is meant to remind believers of the Cross. Meanwhile, for Catholics, the “real presence” of Jesus enters the Eucharist as his body and blood, soul and divinity, enacting a new relationship between spirit and matter, past and present, representation and reality.³² In another example about presence, Orsi quotes literary critic Roberto Calasso, that “[T]here was a time when the gods were not just a literary cliché, but an event, a sudden apparition.”³³ In both examples, Orsi can define presence by pointing to what it is not. Presence exists when the saints, gods, or God appear, not as literary representations or symbols, but as something “really real,” something existing and making itself known in the world. I turn to Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s explanation of presence as the moment something within literature itself becomes tangible to us, reaching out.³⁴ In effect, it is recognizing a “there-ness” or an aliveness to something that we expect would be empty or merely a signifier for something else.

This concept becomes difficult to understand approached from the perspective of Modern Rationalism. Drawing on Max Weber, Orsi says that Modernity is full of disenchantment, where we no longer see the world as a sacrament revealing God in everything we see.³⁵ Due to that, we often lack the language to speak about presence, referring to the social construction of religion but losing sight of the abundance that emerges from those constructions, an abundance that refuses to be empty. To explain presence then, Orsi believes we need a new, richer vocabulary that can describe notions of presence, even in the space of a social constructivist approach to religion.

of Harvard University Press, 2016), 6. For a more nuanced presentation of views of the Eucharist within Protestantism, see Jack F. White, *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith* (Abingdon Press, 1999).

³² Orsi, 2–3.

³³ Orsi, “Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity,” 218–19.

³⁴ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford University Press, 2012), 4, 6–7.

³⁵ Orsi, “Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity,” 218.

Considering the need for new language, Orsi proposes that we describe moments of presence as Abundant Events. If I take as an example the Marian apparition at Lourdes, Orsi claims that in this moment “what is really real...is the presence of the supernatural *in relationship* with humans and the power of the needs, fears, desires, and imaginings, conscious and unconscious, that this exchange unlocks [emphasis added].”³⁶ The point of emphasis in this theory is on the relationship that devotees have with their saints or gods. This is important because Modern language can affirm that there is a relationship without turning to theological ideas of belief in supernatural powers. In other words, whether I (as a researcher) believe Mary really appeared at Lourdes is irrelevant because her devotees do believe it and I can see that relationship acted out in the practices, things, and rituals there. This follows what I see in a social construction approach to religion, thinking about how the community’s performance of their relationship around a site like Lourdes constructs Mary as a totem for that community. The language of “Abundant Events” goes a step further to think of these constructions not as proof of Mary’s emptiness at Lourdes, but as contributing to her presence.

Around the shrine at Lourdes, Orsi claims that Mary “comes alive” both being enlivened by her devotees, but also remaining as Other to them as she is connected to their imagining of her.³⁷ By this “coming alive,” Orsi means that around the image of Mary at Lourdes (and around any religious site), “place and time become fluid” so that one moves according to a different rhythm than everyday life, representations and souvenirs of Mary bear a greater immediacy, and our ordinary gauge for experience is renegotiated.³⁸ Borrowing from psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas, he says our experiences around religious sites take on an “unusual intensity.”³⁹ All of this

³⁶ Orsi, “Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity,” 222.

³⁷ Orsi, 222.

³⁸ Orsi, 222.

³⁹ Orsi, 222.

is possible because of how Mary's devotees are responding to her at Lourdes, and the effervescence that anyone (believer or not) can experience there is a product of the social construction. What Orsi wants to emphasize about this is that our description of this site is not characteristic of emptiness, as Modernity might have us imagine, but rather presence. In the excess and abundance that devotees bring to these sites and that no one can fail to notice, I see something that is alive. I see a presence. Through this process, Mary takes on a tangibility that reaches out of the text itself, touching her followers as much as they touch her shrine.

The distinction that Orsi is making here is, in his own words "subtle, but significant."⁴⁰ In thinking of these sites, not as places of absence, despite their socially constructed nature, there is the possibility of relationship (something central to Brown and Head's accounts of the cult of the saints). Relationships are not possible with empty signifiers, but they are central to ideas of presence, and particularly a presence-in-relationship. The value Orsi places on relationships as sites of presence even leads him to claim that whether even devotees believe in a saint is probably the wrong question. Instead of belief, he claims that the saints "are real in experience and practice, in relationships between heaven and earth, in the circumstances of people's lives and histories, and in the stories people tell about them."⁴¹ All of these elements contribute to the excess of the saints, highlighting their abundance, and the presence that is easily recognized. Not a presence based on ontological belief, but on the materiality of their impact. The significance of this shift, for Orsi, is that it directs us away from what we can know (the social, linguistic, and historical realities) and points towards what is possible. As Orsi says, "it introduces creativity and unpredictability into what would otherwise be determined."⁴²

⁴⁰ Orsi, *History and Presence*, 7.

⁴¹ Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, 18.

⁴² Orsi, *History and Presence*, 7.

What Do Saints Even Do?

The presence of the saints at their tombs, in their relics, and around their stories has an impact on the ways that devotees are able to respond to them. In the preface to the 2014 edition of Peter Brown's *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Brown notes that central to the debate of the presence of the saints was the ways that different segments of the Christian community brought different expectations of functionality to the saints.⁴³ For the bishops, they often spoke about imitating the virtue of the saints, but for most, he writes, "they had not come to imitate. They had come to participate."⁴⁴ For those who sought to participate with the saint, that model came to define the active power of the saints and the ways that the community responded to their presence. Before going further into what participation entails, it is worth noting that the notions of presence and participation are inherently interconnected. Participation helps construct the presence of the saints at certain sites, and their presence there demands an interaction beyond imitation. The two come to reinforce and support one another.⁴⁵

When Brown describes the idea of participating with the saints, he is heavily focused on the material ways that devotees interacted with these figures and the types of relationships that developed between the two. Returning to the preface, he writes:

They did not only come to bow, to pray, and to be prayed for. They came to touch—to rub themselves against the tombs, to take away their dust and their candle wax, and to

⁴³ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, xxvi.

⁴⁴ Brown, xxvii.

⁴⁵ It can be noted here that Robert Orsi also speaks of the saints as a form of participatory culture and does so using a different theoretical basis than Brown. Orsi draws on Stanley Tambiah and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl who describes participation "as occurring when persons, groups, animals, places, and natural phenomena are in a relation of contiguity, and translate that relation into one of existential immediacy and contact and shared affinities." Orsi uses Tambiah's notion of participation to speak about presence and Abundant Events as tending towards wholeness and unity. Brown, Orsi, and Stanley Tambiah are working separately from Henry Jenkins who outlines a theory of participatory cultures in relation to media studies, which we will explore in more depth in the next chapter. Orsi, "Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity," 224.

drink the oil of their lamps. What they wanted was a participatory, one might almost say, “symbiotic,” relationship with the other world... Their image of the saints hinted at more intimate bonds, such as those which had once linked the souls of pagans, Jews, and Christians, in a shimmering continuum, to the guardian angels and *daimons* who had always been thought of as filling the huge gap between earth and a God enthroned far above the stars. Intercession alone... was never enough to close that vast notional chasm.⁴⁶

I argue this notion of participation is inherently connected with notions of presence. The desire to touch a tomb or take away the dust upon it makes little sense if the saint is not present in that space or if the object does not connect in some way to the presence of the saint. Moreover, that desire to touch the tomb and take the dust reinforces the notion that there is a presence there, and that taking the dust somehow puts us into a deeper relationship with that presence. If I go back to some of Orsi’s terminology, the saints that devotees want to touch are not just literary clichés. I am also reminded at this point that Brown understands the saints through the lens of Greco-Roman patronage relationships. The desire to participate with the saints was part of performing those relationships in real time and space, creating, and demonstrating the connections that existed between saint and individual.

An important instance of the notions of participation and presence that Brown explores is the veneration of relics. The cult of the saints, Brown argues, “gloried in particularity” and was directed towards “localizing the holy”; relics were at the center of this function.⁴⁷ It was the play of relics as both localizing the holy and existing in a potentially distant location that ensured the

⁴⁶ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, xxvii–xxviii.

⁴⁷ Brown, 86.

presence of the saints.⁴⁸ It was this presence (Brown uses the Latin, *praesentia*) that drove relationships with the saints and impacted the way that they functioned in society. If the saint is truly present in their relic, then relics become signs of the saints' favor passed between cities, cementing relationships in the ancient world.⁴⁹ To have a relic in your city meant that the saint truly wanted to be there (maintaining saintly agency), and was there to bless your city on behalf of God.⁵⁰ The agency of the saints, rooted in the way the cult acted similar to patronage relationships, prompts participation from devotees in attempts to schmooze the saint to remain in your city. In a sense, just imitating the examples of the saints was not enough to ensure their continued presence, and the continued blessing of God.

The attempt to keep the favor and power of the saints brings with it great fanfare and many of the activities that I generally associate with devotion to the cult. Much like the *adventus* of an emperor to a city, the arrival of a relic was an important occasion, bringing the community together and honoring the presence of the saint.⁵¹ As Thomas Head notes, the procession of a new relic was about demonstrating the saint's desire to be in that city, and ensuring the saints good will for the inhabitants.⁵² Since it was a relationship, and not "sympathetic magic"

⁴⁸ Brown, 88; Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints: The Diocese of Orléans, 800-1200*, 118. Brown almost speaks about the presence of the saints here in like Walter Benjamin speaks about "aura" in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." To keep a sense of the presence of the saints around their relics, there needed to be some degree of distance from us, otherwise the presence disappears. Likewise, Benjamin notes that art has an aura about it because of the distance it maintains from our life. Once we enter an age of mechanical reproduction, anyone has access to the art and the distance disappears, along with the aura. Orsi disagrees about this to some degree, since even in mass produced images of the Virgin Mary in the Twentieth Century, he argues that there is still a sense of presence around them. What matters, for him, is not necessarily the distance, but the relationship and values that a person or community associates with the saint, and the impact that has on the relic or object. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, ed. Douglas M. Kellner and Meenakshi Gigi Durham (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 20–23. Robert A. Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 59.

⁴⁹ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, 89–90; Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*, 91.

⁵⁰ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, 91–92; Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints: The Diocese of Orléans, 800-1200*, 155.

⁵¹ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, 98.

⁵² Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints: The Diocese of Orléans, 800-1200*, 143.

according to Head, we should expect these types of interactions.⁵³ In this instance, it is putting on the procession and the associated activities (like a feast) where we see devotees not only imitating what the saint did in life, but participating with their presence, hoping to gain their favor out of respect for what they have done in the past.

June Mechem points to other forms of participating with the saints, namely through creating and interacting with religious art. In one notable example, a stained glass window at Kloster Wienhausen depicts the entombment of Jesus, but replaces the Virgin Mary with a figure in a Cistercian habit.⁵⁴ In this instance, a nun praying before this window could elide herself with the Virgin, participating *with* and *as* Mary at the entombment of Christ.⁵⁵ In another example from Mechem, women (those inside and outside religious orders) would create or donate jewelry and clothing to the statues of saints, acting as kinswomen and servants to them.⁵⁶ This became a tangible way to participate with and care for the saints as a sign of the relationship that existed between them and the community.⁵⁷ It is also a sign of the participatory culture that existed around the saints, going beyond imitating their virtue, but seeking to create connections and relationships with their presences.

In response to this ministering, the saints were expected to take part in the relationship as well, returning gifts and favors. Brown notes that it was the *praesentia* of the saints that turned

⁵³ Head, 200.

⁵⁴ June L. Mechem, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions: Gender, Material Culture, and Monasticism in Late Medieval Germany*, ed. Allison I. Beach, Constance H. Berman, and Lisa M. Bitel (Turnhout, BE: Brepols, 2014), 40–41.

⁵⁵ This example works really well with Jenkins's definition of participation that will be more central in the next chapter. For Jenkins, participation is about the blurring of boundaries between consumers and producers. In this instance, the production is the story of Jesus' entombment with the Virgin Mary as expressed in illustrations. This particular window, most likely made by or in connection with a Cistercian nun, blurs that boundary by placing the consumer (the nuns of the cloister) into the production. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 3.

⁵⁶ Mechem, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions: Gender, Material Culture, and Monasticism in Late Medieval Germany*, 78–83.

⁵⁷ Mechem, 85.

their shrines into places of *potentia*, expressed through acts of healing and exorcism.⁵⁸ Moreover, much as presence and participation support one another, the exercising of *potentia* became a sign of the presence of the saints, encouraging greater participation.⁵⁹ This power was explicitly connected with the ways that devotees engaged with the saints. For Head, these relationships could even take on the social framework of a contract, noting the way that miracle accounts drew on the language of contracts.⁶⁰ A negligent saint who refused to respond to the attention of the community was seen as “sleeping on the job,” and ultimately berated by their petitioners.⁶¹ The saint’s response was a necessary part of the social contract and patronage relationship that the saints have created with their devotees. To go back to Brown’s words at the beginning of this section, it was part of the symbiotic relationships that brought petitioners to their tombs, seeking to know the presence of the saints and the God they localized.

Yet, many of these functions are what I would expect from the saint if I accepted Delehayé’s proposal that the historical saints are the most important because they are the ones with a soul in heaven and who can respond to petitions. Participation is certainly an important part of that functionality, since it is in the context of participatory relationships that a saint is likely to offer healing, as I see with the examples from Brown and Head. It is, however, worth remembering that the saint that is responding in those moments is also constructed to a degree, since they reflect everything that the community believes about that saint, and not just the historical lives. These less metaphysical functionalities are just as important for our understanding of the saints and just as reliant on presence, especially in the ways they constructed meaning for their devotees.

⁵⁸ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, 105.

⁵⁹ Brown, 106.

⁶⁰ Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints: The Diocese of Orléans, 800-1200*, 189.

⁶¹ Head, 190.

Elizabeth Castelli offers us an important example of the meaning making potential of hagiography that emerges from saintly presence while exploring how early Christians used the stories to make meaning out of suffering. Castelli is paying attention to how the saints articulated a collective memory of martyrdom that later generations can use to shape their identities and to find meaning in the experience of suffering.⁶² In this way, she views the saints as part of constructing a framework around Christian identity, in contrast to an opposing Roman-ness.⁶³ In this framework, the saints become public embodiments of a Christian identity. The degree to which later Christians could place themselves into the narrative identity that the saints voiced became a pathway towards meaning and a rooting within salvation history. As such, we see people retelling/reinterpreting the stories of the saints throughout history to construct their struggles in connection with the saints, deriving both personal meaning and power from the story.⁶⁴ This extends beyond the realm of martyrdom as well, and lets Christian communities use the saints to construct many facets of Christian identity. For instance, Kathleen Coyne Kelly argues how a similar process functions around ideas of virginity and how that constructs Christian identity.⁶⁵ In this instance, the Church can picture itself as the menaced virgin, just as it is able to picture itself as the victorious martyr.⁶⁶ In both instances, the saints embody an identity around which Christian communities can live and construct their identities. Religious art and literature, like hagiography, come alongside this process to produce the presence of the saints, granting greater authority to the claims about identity.⁶⁷ As the saints come to define that identity, they become a measure for the community and a way of expressing that specific identity

⁶² Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 32.

⁶³ Castelli, 35.

⁶⁴ Brigitte Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 31; Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*, 145.

⁶⁵ Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*, 41.

⁶⁶ Kelly, 44.

⁶⁷ Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*, 92–94.

to the rest of the world. To use Lucy Grig's assessment, the fictional, constructed memory of the saints are joined with the real experience of the world so that the fictional world can give meaning to our experiences.⁶⁸

This process demands and further constructs the presence of the saint, just as much as Brown's examples of *potentia* around their relics. Robert Orsi has focused on the ways that saints become meaning making figures, as well as wounding figures, when it comes to identity construction. Taking the example of his uncle Sal, a disabled man who found a connection with the (then Blessed) St. Margaret of Castello, Orsi argues that she offered Sal an "articulatory pivot" for him to express his identity and to find that identity reflected in heaven.⁶⁹ In this process, he notes that Margaret is both a figure of meaning making and wounding for Sal. St. Margaret was disabled—she was born blind and experienced dwarfism because of the curvature of her spine—and was abandoned by her parents. As such, she provided the terms to express his experience of the world and offered a comfort in that process, but also emphasized the ways Catholic theology pictures the redemptive power of suffering.⁷⁰ The reason that Margaret of Castello can play this role for Sal, or the reason that any saint can offer the language to articulate one's life and find meaning (and wounding) in that process, is because that process is constructed through the lens of relationship. Sal treats Margaret as real and as having an influence on his life, and he participates with her, creating the pathway for meaning. In this, he is drawing on a presence that her hagiography suggests she embodies, that of the Suffering Christ (much as Brown has described), but his devotions to her adds to this presence as well. I would even say

⁶⁸ Grig, 5.

⁶⁹ Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, 45.

⁷⁰ Orsi, 44–45, 145.

that he articulates Margaret's presence in a new way through his own life, since he becomes another expression of what she values in the world, sharing her with others around him.

From the perspective of saintly presence, I can articulate much of the functionality that I associate with saints. This includes more traditional understandings of the saints, in which they perform miracles and act as the patrons of a community, but also the ways they function to articulate Christian and personal identities, both for the community themselves and to the world around them. These functions are part of a positive feedback loop between participation and presence, wherein all three reinforce the others. As we accept the presence of the saints, we desire to participate in their power, allowing them to respond, and reinforce that notion of presence.

Who are All of These Other People?

Underlying these discussions of the functionality of saints is a tension between personal and communal devotion. At times these functions appear highly personal, such as the touching of a shrine, but they are often carried out within a communal space (such as at the saint's festival). This tension becomes essential for understanding the ways that presence is constructed, the ways that people can participate with the saints, and the ways that the saints respond. Ultimately, it speaks to a complexity in answering who the saints are and what we expect from them. June Meham and Kathleen Coyne Kelly help illuminate that complexity in the ways they think about gender and virginity in relation to the saints.

In thinking about devotion to the saints in late Medieval German monasteries, Meham describes the complex ways that personal and communal devotions mixed with one another. She takes the example of constructing and manipulating the materiality of a communal altar to Saint Anne as a part of one monastery. In this example, the altar is shared by the community and is a

place for the community to celebrate together their connection to Saint Anne. At the same time, however, it is individual women showing their piety and personal devotion to Anne when they play a role in deciding the material culture of that monastery.⁷¹ For instance, returning to the example of donating clothing to statues of the saints, each woman may donate a personal piece of clothing that she has made or that she owned to place on a statue of Jesus or Anne, making their mark on the communal realm through their personal devotion. The act of providing clothing was something that a kinswomen or servant might do, indicating the closeness of their relationship with the saint depicted by the statue.⁷² At the same time, since the statue was in the communal space, they were performing their spirituality in conjunction with a community. This speaks to the ways that private and public relationships with the saints were often fluid, each having an impact on the other.⁷³

Kelly makes a similar argument about the ways that literature around the saints has an impact on notions of virginity in the Middle Ages. In thinking about virginity, Kelly notes that, for the Patristic Fathers, virginity was not rooted in a medical or magical test about what might be considered the “biological facts” of the body. Rather, virginity was displayed by the body in operations like prayer, dress, and ritual.⁷⁴ In that sense, there is a social performance of virginity, just as Judith Butler thinks about gender as a performance.⁷⁵ What Kelly asks us to note about this phenomenon is that virginity is no longer rooted in the personal body, but instead is in social space and impacted by cultural ideas around sanctity, femininity, and virginity.⁷⁶ In other words, the community decides what chastity and holy feminine behavior look like, and a woman is

⁷¹ Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions: Gender, Material Culture, and Monasticism in Late Medieval Germany*, 138.

⁷² Mecham, 83.

⁷³ Mecham, 138.

⁷⁴ Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*, 35.

⁷⁵ Kelly, 16.

⁷⁶ Kelly, 41.

proven to be a virgin, not in biological fact but in the ways she fits those communal expectations. Saints, especially virgin saints, are an important part of this process because they provide that model of holy feminine behavior that becomes the test of virginity. This is a powerful expression of the communal and personal understanding of devotion to the saints, reminding us how it becomes a complex interaction between the two. Even as the body remains a personal feature, its physicality spills beyond the material boundaries of personal experience and becomes part of the communal conversation. In a similar way, the body of the saint is both personal to them and can be caught up in a personal relationship with another. At the same time, the saint's body and any personal relationships they may have immediately mediates community relationships and plays a role in the communal perception of the saint's presence.

Mecham and Kelly's characterizations of the saints and their bodies as spilling beyond the realms of personal experience and into communal spaces has an impact on how I understand the function of the saints, specifically ideas like presence and participation, to which I keep returning. L. Stephanie Cobb leans into the more communal nature of hagiography, by considering how early Christians would have encountered these texts. Specifically, she argues that early Christians would have been familiar with hagiography as it was read aloud to a group of listeners.⁷⁷ This has an impact on how the text is received, as the narratives can then further evoke an affective response in listeners.⁷⁸ An important part of this is that the narrative normally would be received in a collective, public space. At least in the earliest years, this would not be the open cathedrals we associate with churches today. Drawing on Ramsay MacMullen, Cobb notes that the early Christians were likely packed together in a small gathering space (maybe even a house church) where they would have been heavily influenced by the movements and

⁷⁷ Cobb, *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, 3.

⁷⁸ Cobb, 4.

responses of each other.⁷⁹ People would have been standing in these spaces, looking at each other's faces and their immediate physical reactions, which each hearer would likely mirror. In this way, Cobb argues, the experience of reading hagiography would resemble Durkheim's "collective effervescence" with each person electrifying the responses of the others. This is tied back to her earlier point about the emotional responses that hagiography would likely elicit in a liturgical setting, but more important than that is the way that reading hagiography physically takes part in the construction of a community in their shared response, each person moving as part of a collective body.

I would like to take the interpretation of these moments as examples of "collective effervescence" one step further and instead tie them to a notion of presence, drawing on Orsi's distinctions between the two. In that sense, the communal nature of reading hagiography plays an important role in constructing the presence of the saint in such a way that the saint is able to respond in tangible ways to believers. This still exists as a complex relationship between communal and personal devotion. While the community plays an important role in developing that sense of presence, it still touches each person in an individual way, impacting their own identity. Taking the example of virginity from Kelly once more, the saints exist and are constructed by the social sphere, but they still have a bearing on the ways that individuals interact with them just as virginity is constructed in the social sphere and has an impact on the performance of an individual body and identity.

Cynthia Hahn offers another perspective on how this dynamic plays out to construct the presence of the saints using the example of Passion relics. I have already explained the roles that relics have played in evoking the presence of the saints as localized persons and how they

⁷⁹ Cobb, 6.

become sites whereby the power of the saints becomes exercised in the world. Yet, they also play a role in constructing this complex relationship between personal and communal devotion. As Hahn notes, while relics are material, their purpose is to evoke an absent person, place, or event, especially the Passion relics.⁸⁰ Part of making this possible is how the relics are presented to a community, which often involved a reliquary that was highly decorated and therefore added to the authority of what was a simple object.⁸¹ The context of authority and the associated aura around the reliquary plays into the communal nature of these relics. Hahn even notes an example of Charles IV using reliquaries to establish his own authority and to unite an empire around himself.⁸² In that sense, they are central to the ways that the saints bring communities together and how the saints can become a means of defining the communal identity. At the same time, personal devotions spring up around the saints, using the relics as a material basis upon which the imagination can construct forms of devotion.⁸³ The creation of the reliquaries itself was likely an act of personal devotion from a wealthy donor. As such, the ways that the saints exist at a complex intersection between both communal and personal piety even in the ways that people have drawn on their relics. Moreover, the ways that the relics become material centers, around which we can imagine something that is absent, recalls saintly presence and the participatory lens through which devotees approach these items.

The tensions between personal and communal devotion returns me to the multi-functionality of the saints. They are called on to fill a number of roles, which can change from generation to generation as new needs arise. In these instances, it becomes necessary to re-story the saints to meet the needs of a new cultural moment or environment, letting the saint meet new

⁸⁰ Hahn, *Passion Relics and the Medieval Imagination: Art, Architecture, and Society*, 3.

⁸¹ Hahn, 64.

⁸² Hahn, 91–92.

⁸³ Hahn, 103.

communities and new people. This immediately takes me back to the constructed nature of the saints since each generation creates a new variation on past constructions to meet their needs. It is the malleability of these constructions that lets them meet the demands of Christians across time and space. It, however, also becomes difficult to establish one simple definition for hagiography since the literature dedicated to the saints has taken almost every form imaginable. This has led some scholars, like Elizabeth Castelli, to even question if there is a genre of “hagiography” and what really defines it.⁸⁴ This stretches into today as people continue to encounter the saints and ask what function they will play in the Twenty-First Century.

Well, If It’s Not Hagiography, What Is It?

Following Orsi and others, hagiographic scholarship is turning towards what the saints might mean for us today, not just looking at their function in their original context. Since the genre has become unstable, scholars have asked how we might understand the saints today, and who even qualifies as a saint. This can emerge in any number of directions and creates the space to consider what ways fantasy figures also intersect with our ideas of a saint. For example, a collection of essays edited by Françoise Meltzer and Jas Elsner explores the excesses of the saints and how, through that excess, they are able to enter into conversations around Modernity and Postmodernity.⁸⁵ More specifically, Meltzer and Elsner’s collection asks how the saints are able to hold contradictions within themselves, both expressing their excess while being domesticated by cultural institutions.⁸⁶ In one essay, Aviad Kleinberg notes that saints offer a hope of systemic change, standing in their excess, while also being symbolic figures that the elite can use to push aside real change. Moreover, they represent both our own failures to become

⁸⁴ Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 70.

⁸⁵ Françoise Meltzer and Jas Elsner, eds., *Saints: Faith without Borders* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), x.

⁸⁶ Meltzer and Elsner, xii.

saints and the difficulty in defining what that looks like in our own lives.⁸⁷ The scholars in Meltzer and Elsner's collection are asking these questions not only of saints today, but also in relation to how they have historically functioned—working upon the understanding that saints are a constructed category which allows them to function as excessive difference when chosen by the people, while also operating as tools of domination under institutional authority.⁸⁸ In other words, it leans into their fluidity to better understand their functionality.

The constructed nature of the saints and challenges to hagiography as its own genre have also presented a pathway for current scholarship to engage in comparative practices across religious traditions.⁸⁹ This has included a series of panels in recent years at the American Academy of Religion, the professional organization for religion scholars. These panels have posed questions about how various traditions determine who becomes a saint and how that impacts universal understandings of “sanctity.”⁹⁰ There may even be a suggestion that comparative studies is the best route to understand better how we engage with holy people and the literature around them.⁹¹ Monge, San Chirico, and Smith edited a collection that explores this notion, *Hagiography and Religious Truth: Case Studies in the Abrahamic and Dharmic Traditions*. The essays in this work draw on Orsi along with other theorists of religion to ask how hagiography in both Abrahamic and Dharmic traditions express ideas of religious truth, even for

⁸⁷ Aviad Kleinberg, “Apophthegmata,” in *Saints: Faith without Borders*, ed. François Meltzer and Jaś Elsner (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 396.

⁸⁸ I see here Dorothy Day's assertion never to be called a saint and be so easily dismissed. No matter what she may mean for the people around her, entering that category of sainthood displaces that power.

⁸⁹ Massimo A. Rondolino, “Some Foundational Considerations on Taxonomy: A Case for Hagiography,” *Religions* 10, no. 10 (2019): 538.

⁹⁰ Massimo A. Rondolino, “Introduction: Comparative Hagiology, Issues in Theory and Method,” *Religions* 11, no. 4 (2020): 158.

⁹¹ Alexandre Coello de la Rosa and Linda G. Jones, “Introduction,” in *Saints and Sanctity in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Striving for Remembrance* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2020), 2–3.

those saints who may not be historically real, in opposition to Delehayé's historical criticism.⁹² They are using Ricoeur's idea of religious truth here to understand hagiography as something that expresses the truth of what could be, how we could live our lives as opposed to our current experiences, going beyond an idea of historical truth.⁹³ While building off the notion of saints as constructed and even off the historical research on how people have engaged with the saints, these scholars are asking what comparisons we can make across the traditions to better understand that history and the functions we might imagine for the saints. The goal is not to deny the importance of each historical moment, but rather to acknowledge that "hagiography" provides a useful starting point for comparison, even as it leads us to greater complexity.⁹⁴

The turn to comparison in hagiographic scholarship is a good place to conclude because it is also where my work enters the picture. While I am doing a comparison across literary traditions, more so than religious traditions, the questions that I ask are about how figures in different types of writing can share a similar function. To follow Don Keune, I approach the study of comparative hagiography/hagiology seeking to use comparison to question what constitutes *hagio* and by extension religion.⁹⁵ This draws on the work of earlier people like Peter Brown to understand the function of the saints within their social context in order to ask what functions we might look for in other traditions as well. It also points to the importance of people like Grig, Head, Coon, and others who facilitated the turn towards saints as literary constructions, which emphasizes the ways we relate to these figures more so than the historical criticism of Delehayé. Like some of these later studies, I define hagiography broadly, looking at

⁹² Rico G. Monge, Kerry P. C. San Chirico, and Rachel J. Smith, eds., *Hagiography and Religious Truth: Case Studies in the Abrahamic and Dharmic Traditions* (London, GB: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 12.

⁹³ Monge, San Chirico, and Smith, 21.

⁹⁴ James T. Palmer, *Early Medieval Hagiography* (Leeds, GB: Arc Humanities Press, 2018), 10.

⁹⁵ Jon Keune, "Comparative vs. Hagiology: Two Variant Approaches to the Field," *Religions* 10, no. 20 (2019): 575.

any literature or other medium that mediates relationships between people and the saints. While the subgenres of that literature certainly play a role in how the saints are imagined in relationship with devotees, what is most important for me is the fact that those relationships exist at all and that there are a number of ways they can be imagined and enacted.

Chapter Two

What is Fantasy?

Attempting to define fantasy literature seems to be one of the rites of passage for fantasy writers and scholars, and invariably it always begins with the humble prologue I would expect of any hagiographic account. Even the greatest fantasists, like J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and Ursula K. Le Guin, always express some trepidation about defining the genre. At the beginning of his famous attempt to define fairy stories, Tolkien wrote that the attempt left him feeling “like a conjuror who finds himself, by some mistake, called upon to give a display of magic before the court of an elf-king.”¹ Other fantasists, like J. K. Rowling, reject the notion that they even write fantasy, raising further questions about what the genre actually entails.² Yet, if I am going to make a comparison between hagiography and fantasy, defining fantasy is a necessary first step to know where I am going.

As I begin the work of defining fantasy, however, I am immediately met with a challenge of what criteria I am to use. Should I define fantasy based on the contents of its story, so that anything that contains a hint of the supernatural might be considered fantasy? Or should I be more focused on the way that fairy worlds are built in relation to our own, so that a true fantasy world takes us into another realm (no matter how supernatural)? While these questions certainly play an important role in the definitions put forward by great theorists, I find them lacking for the work of comparing fantasy to hagiography. Most hagiography will contain something supernatural and will restrain itself to our realm, leaving little more for us to consider. Instead,

¹ Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 38.

² Lev Grossman, “J. K. Rowling Hogwarts and All,” *Time*, July 25, 2005.

partly influenced by what I have already considered for hagiography, I would like to attempt a definition of fantasy based on its function. What does fantasy do to us as its readers?³ Even with an approach decided, however, I am still left looking out on a plethora of scholarly input on the proper way to understand fantasy's function within a society. The goal of this chapter is to explore a few of the more accepted proposals with attention to their strengths and weaknesses for our purposes. Many of these proposals are primarily considering fantasy as it appears as a written text, which is not always the first medium (nor the most popular) in which people encounter fantasy. As such, towards the end of this chapter, I will also consider how the more recent turn in fantasy (since the early 2000s) towards transmedia storytelling impacts its function. This is an important consideration given the ways hagiography is also understood as transmedial, and how that has impacted its function as well.

Brian Attebery and the “Fuzzy Set”

Given the depth of the fantasy genre and the number of definitions put forward, scholars have come to the recognition that no *one* definition of fantasy will ever suffice. It is more accurate to say that we find working definitions that fit our purposes. Each of these working definitions carries its own baggage (both good and bad) and has a history that may work for what we need or may not. That one definition does not fit this project does not necessarily mean it is an inherently bad definition, but that it has the wrong baggage for the trip I am taking. The same might be said for the texts that I will be using. Fantasy texts range from obscure texts that only die-hard fantasy fans are aware of to those that have had an incalculable cultural impact. Other texts, such as *Star Wars*, might belong to the fantasy genre based on some definitions, but to

³ While I am primarily focused on the way fantasy functions as part of its definition, it should be noted that function cannot be fully separated from fantasy's content or structure. The three interact with one another in order to produce fantasy's effect on its readers, as the definitions explored in this chapter hopefully demonstrate.

science fiction based on others. The question comes back to what my purpose is for using or not using a text, and whether it is described as fantasy according to that purpose. At the same time, I need to balance this tendency with the fact that not every text can be described as fantasy, no matter how much I may desire.

Fantasy scholars have come to understand this balancing act of definitions using Brian Attebery's notion of fantasy as a "fuzzy set." To treat fantasy as a fuzzy set, according to Attebery, means we understand it as a genre that shares some common tropes, including its content, rhetorical structure, and its function.⁴ Specifically, he claims that fantasy texts touch on the impossible (content), have a problem and resolution (structure), and evoke wonder (function).⁵ These three characteristics become a center around which the fantasy genre is built. Those texts that easily share these three tropes we know without a doubt are fantasy. Texts that only share some of these characteristics become harder to classify. They move further away from the center towards the periphery where a text may belong to fantasy or not based on one's own interests.⁶ This model then becomes a way for us to hold a tension between allowing for the depth of fantasy, while not necessarily finding it in every text. To some degree, fantasy texts should line up with the criteria we have put forward as the center of the fuzzy set. Within the course of this project, I am primarily interested in the function of fantasy (although content and structure will certainly play a role as well), placing function at the center of the fuzzy set.

Attebery's claim of fantasy as a fuzzy set is definitive enough that it frames the entries for *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, edited by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn.⁷ In fact, elsewhere Mendlesohn claims that due to the framework of the fuzzy set,

⁴ Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 14.

⁵ Attebery, 14–16.

⁶ Attebery, 12.

⁷ James and Mendlesohn, "Introduction."

fantasy scholarship has gone beyond the need to define fantasy further, and future scholars may just pick and choose from the previous “definers” who have done the work for us.⁸ In that sense, this chapter is about exploring those previous definers and finding those that are most appropriate for our comparison. Among those definers, I am going to look at J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Tzvetan Todorov, Rosemary Jackson, Brian Attebery, and Farah Mendlesohn.

J. R. R. Tolkien: Fantasy Awakens Desire

Of the definitions I will be considering here, Tolkien’s is the fullest, and likely the most influential. Much of his definition comes in his now famous essay, “Sometimes Fairy Stories,” in which he outlines a brief history of the fairy story genre (which feeds into modern fantasy), along with its functions. In total, Tolkien finds four primary functions of the fairy genre: that it produces Fantasy, takes part in a Recovery, provides an Escape, and is a Consolation.⁹ In a moment, I will go into more depth for all these functions, with particular attention to Consolation. Beforehand, however, it is important to note that Tolkien believes these four functions are rooted in the fact that fairy stories are not primarily concerned with (im)possibility, but with desire. He writes that “if they [fairy stories] awakened *desire*, satisfying it while often whetting it unbearably, they succeeded.”¹⁰ This is an important distinction to keep in mind for later when theorists like Todorov or Mendlesohn will focus on the (im)possibility of the fantasy genre. It will also have an impact when I consider fantasy in connection with hagiography since many people do believe the events of hagiographic tales. In effect, Tolkien is arguing that fantasy is not about displaying the supernatural merely for the sake of displaying the supernatural.¹¹ Rather, fantasy includes the supernatural as part of its content, but it does so as

⁸ Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Westport, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), xiii.

⁹ Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 66.

¹⁰ Tolkien, 62.

¹¹ Tolkien, 44.

part of its function to express and awaken the desires of humanity. To truly understand this distinction, it is worth exploring how Tolkien understands our relationship to the supernatural content of fairy stories and the level of belief we are expected to bring to our reading. This will better prepare us to explore his argument that the function of fairy stories is to awaken desire by producing Fantasy, taking part in a Recovery, providing an Escape, and acting as a Consolation.

As mentioned, Tolkien does not believe that fantasy is about provoking belief in what he calls the more “ordinary sense,” the sense of believing that the things depicted in a fantasy story are possible in this world.¹² He even seems to suggest that posing fantasy as possible for our world robs it of its Faërie quality, turning it into something that distance alone has hidden from us.¹³ Instead, Tolkien is interested in what he calls literary belief, or Secondary Belief. Secondary Belief exists with enchantment, when our minds can enter the Secondary World and believe it, while we are inside it.¹⁴ This is not a mere suspension of disbelief, which accepts the idea as possible for a short period of time and which he considers lower. It is to be enchanted by the story, and to be held by desire.¹⁵

We might understand this better looking at Tolkien’s essay on *Beowulf* and its monsters where he argues that “a dragon is no idle fancy. Whatever may be his origins, in fact or invention, the dragon in legend is a potent creation of men’s imagination.”¹⁶ A suspension of disbelief treats a dragon as an idle fancy, something we agree to allow as possible for a moment

¹² Tolkien, 60.

¹³ Tolkien, 44.

¹⁴ Tolkien, 60–61.

¹⁵ Matthew Dickerson and David O’Hara turn to the Old English *spell* meaning “story” to help explain this notion of literary belief and enchantment. They explain how stories become like magic spells that create characters and worlds so real that we come to care about them and have an emotional investment in them. When this happens, we have Secondary Belief. If, as a reader, we sit on the outside of the story looking in, with no emotional engagement, it ceases to be a Story (a *spell*). Secondary Belief means that we have dwelt in the story, and that the story also dwells in us. Matthew Dickerson and David O’Hara, *From Homer to Harry Potter: A Handbook on Myth and Fantasy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 55.

¹⁶ Tolkien, “Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics,” 257–58.

or treat it as a metaphor for something else, which we need to interpret. Secondary Belief, however, demands that we pay attention to dragons, to ask about the pull they have on our imaginations as dragons. They are no idle metaphor that we can set aside because the dragon itself is important in its dragonality.¹⁷ In some respects, if we set aside what makes a dragon a dragon (to interpret it merely as sin or something else), we really do not understand the desire to be in contact with them and the hold they have upon us. Returning to “On Fairy-Stories,” Tolkien continues to think about dragons, arguing that it is not that he had ever pictured dragons as being of the same order as a horse (within the realm of history), but that they expressed a desire that he saw within himself which demanded his attention.¹⁸ As such, when Tolkien is centering desire as one of the defining factors of fantasy, he is pointing to the way that fantasy texts awaken desire by creating worlds in which we can be in relationship with beings that exercise a pull on our imagination, like dragons. We do not have to believe them possible in those moments, but the desire to be in contact with such beings in itself says something about us as humans and what we desire. This construct of Secondary Belief thus brings me back to desire, and the question of what it means that fairy stories awaken desire in us, if that is to be their function. This takes me back to Tolkien’s claim that, in the awakening of desire, fairy stories produce Fantasy, take part in a Recovery, provide an Escape, and act as a Consolation.

¹⁷ Science fiction and fantasy writer, Ursula K. Le Guin makes a similar argument using the language of “symbols.” For her, literary criticism today often comes up short, playing a game of finding symbols in the text and telling readers what they are supposed to mean. Yet, she claims that with a true symbol, a critic could not tell us what it means. Rather it is expressing something that can only be expressed in the language of symbols. There is something about it that stands on itself and that we lose the moment we try translating it into other terms. Much like the dragon, if we start treating it like something else and willfully suspending our disbelief for a few minutes, we have lost an important part of what makes it a dragon. We turn to the language of dragons in all of their dragonality because without them we could not properly speak about this desire we have as humans. Likewise, I would like to speak of these symbols as sites of Infinity, to use Emmanuel Levinas’s terminology. They introduce us to new significations, and thereby new ways that we move through the world. Any attempt to fit them into our Totality through allegory of suspension of disbelief loses track of what they are in-and-of-themselves. Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*, ed. Susan Wood (New York, NY: Berkley Books, 1982), 66.

Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, trans. Nidra Poller (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 30.
¹⁸ Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 63.

In speaking of Fantasy as one of the functions of the fairy story, Tolkien may cause us some confusion today since we have taken to calling the whole genre that owes its history to fairy stories “fantasy.” He, however, uses the word to speak primarily of the inner consistency to the content of any fairy realm, thereby producing Secondary Belief.¹⁹ Tolkien here is making a distinction between the Imagination on one level and Fantasy on another.²⁰ Our Imagination is the capacity to form mental images in our mind of things that are not actually present.²¹ In other words, the Imagination lets us imagine the supernatural, even if it is not real. Fantasy, on the other hand, is the combination of Imagination with the Artistic mode to create an entirely different realm, in an act of what Tolkien calls “Sub-creation.”²² So while the Imagination creates an image for us of a green sun, Fantasy creates a world where a green sun is believable.²³ It creates a world in which we might have Secondary Belief, creating that emotional investment. In effect, this is about how fairy stories are crafted and the content they may hold, but it goes back to their key function of awakening desire. It is the fact that these stories create coherent other worlds where dragons might roam that allows us to explore our desire to know dragons. In that sense, while I am focusing primarily on the function of fantasy, I cannot divorce that function from the content and structure of these stories.

¹⁹ Tolkien, 67.

²⁰ Tolkien is drawing on Samuel Coleridge’s definition of the Imagination as something that “struggles to idealize and to unify,” (Secondary Imagination) and also acknowledging the way that the Imagination is connected with our desire to repeat the eternal act of creation by becoming sub-creators ourselves as we merge ideas together to create a green sun (Primary Imagination). Going back to his description of a dragon as “not a mere fancy” I can also note that he appreciates the power of the Imagination over fancy (that which can only associate two materials) much like Coleridge. He, however, appears to be going a step further in proposing Fantasy. While Coleridge recognizes that the Imagination can combine and create new objects, Tolkien asks what happens if we can create a whole world in that manner. In that regard, he is drawing more on another noted fantasist, George MacDonald, who presents on the idea of Sub-Creation in his essay, “The Fantastic Imagination.” Samuel T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Adam Roberts (Edinburgh, GB: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 205–6. George MacDonald, “The Fantastic Imagination,” in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Sandner (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 65–66.

²¹ Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 66.

²² Tolkien, 67.

²³ Tolkien, 68.

For Tolkien, part of the function of fairy stories as they awaken desire in us is that they take part in a Recovery of something we have lost. This is based on a recognition that as humans we have a need for renewal and a return, going back to an age that allowed dragons or centaurs so that we might better appreciate horses and sheep. Tolkien argues that fairy stories allow for this Recovery because they let us “see things as we are (or were) meant to see them—as things apart from ourselves.”²⁴ In this mindset, Tolkien understands humanity as moving through the world as if we own it, asking how it can work for us, and, therefore, it becomes so familiar to us that we are unable to see the wonder and enchantment that already exists. Fantasy disrupts this way of seeing the world by presenting to us an image of the world that is alien from our own, that is made up of strange combinations.²⁵ For instance, we are offered the notion of a centaur, the combination of a horse and a human. In this alienation, we can again appreciate horses, seeing them not as familiar beings, but as we are meant to see them: as other from ourselves. This whole enterprise is built on the way that fairy stories are a Fantasy, a world unto itself within which we are free to dwell. Once there, we come back to the object of our desires. In the instance of the centaur and the horse, the desire to hold communion with other living things is reawakened, something we lost track of when we attempted to take ownership of living things. While we inhabit the story, we get a brief taste of what it might be like to fulfill fully our desire to be with other beings before we must return to our own world with its notions of possession.

²⁴ Tolkien, 74.

²⁵ I might return to Coleridge again here and his description of the work he and William Wordsworth were attempting in their poetic works. Coleridge claimed that he was going to write poems (like *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*) that focused on supernatural beings in a way that produces “poetic faith” (Secondary Belief). Wordsworth, however, was going to use poetry to give a novelty to everyday items, making them feel as if they were supernatural by drawing our attention to the lethargy custom produces. Tolkien seems to be combining the two notions in discussing fairy stories, attending to the supernatural to produce Secondary Belief or poetic faith, while also paying attention to the ways that alerts us to our possessiveness or the “lethargy of custom,” as Coleridge calls it. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 208.

Tolkien finally turns to the way fairy stories awaken desire in how they provide an Escape and act as a Consolation, two points he considers closely related. I have already mentioned how Recovery can appeal to the desire to commune with other living beings, but fairy stories as an Escape also appeal to our deepest desire: the escape from Death.²⁶ More specifically, he writes that we are offered an escape from Death in fantasy by seeing the burden of immortality that the fairies and elves experience. If I turn to Tolkien's own writing, Death is pictured as the "gift" of the "Race of Men," that they may pass away while the Elves live on as their "years lengthen ever more sorrowful."²⁷ Thus, fantasy offers us the space to escape into a world marked by deathlessness, and so come to see the gift that Death is for us.²⁸ All of these desires are awakened when we enter the fairy story, when we have Secondary Belief in that world, and, thereby, are given the space to explore our relationship with those desires and what they might demand of us.

Closely connected with Escape is that of Consolation, and specifically what Tolkien calls the "Consolation of the Happy Ending."²⁹ This element is so important to the fairy story for Tolkien that it appears to be the only element related to awakening desire that he believes must be present if a tale is going to engage the Faërie, otherwise they fall into the realm of Drama or

²⁶ Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 80–81.

²⁷ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, Second Ed. (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2001), 36.

²⁸ Tolkien is not the only fantasy author to explore this theme of deathlessness and what that might mean for humanity. He is most inspired by George MacDonald, who includes Death as a central theme for his fairy stories, most notably *Lilith*. J. K. Rowling also explores the idea through Voldemort's attempt to escape Death using Horcruxes and Dumbledore's attempt to escape death using the Deathly Hallows. In both instances, the lesson becomes the dangers of seeking this type of power. In fact, the wisest Peverell Brother in the story of the Deathly Hallows is the one who embraces Death as an old friend. Even more recently, Cassandra Clare used Magnus Bane and Alec Lightwood in *The Mortal Instruments* to ask what it means for an immortal to be in relationship with a human and how love survives such a burden, mirroring some of the questions of Tolkien's Arwen and Aragorn. George MacDonald, *Lilith: A Romance* (Salt Lake City, UT: Stonewall Press, 2013). J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (New York, NY: Scholastic Inc., 2007), 409; 713. Cassandra Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Lost Souls* (New York, NY: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2012), 76.

²⁹ Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 81.

Tragedy. To explain the Consolation of the Happy Ending, Tolkien introduces his notions of *dyscatastrophe* and *eucatastrophe*. Within this framework, *dyscatastrophe* comes in those moments of a fairy tale when sorrow and failure reign supreme and there appears no way out of the situation. In those moments, there is the possibility of a *eucatastrophe* or a “sudden joyous ‘turn’ ... a sudden miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur.”³⁰ In that sudden turn, not only does the character of the story find a sudden grace, but, to the person who hears it, there can be a “catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears.” In other words, we experience that Joy alongside the character, a glimpse at our own heart’s desire. For *eucatastrophe* that is likely the desire to escape Death, but what Tolkien is centering here is not the desire itself, but our response to its fulfillment in the Secondary World.

Tolkien, however, pushes us beyond appreciating that experience of Joy just in the Secondary World. In the way that we are enchanted by a fantasy text, the way that it takes us into the story through the construction of Secondary Belief, we ourselves experience that Joy, and it points us to an underlying truth of our own world.³¹ Tolkien argues that the Joy we would experience in finding a fairy story to be “primarily” true is the same Joy we experience when we have that sudden turn in fantasy: the experience of Joy is a taste of “Primary” Truth or Primary Belief.³² Going even further, this Joy, for Tolkien, points to the truth of the birth and resurrection of Jesus, merging together the power of Legend and History.³³ Thus, the Consolation of a Happy

³⁰ Tolkien, 81.

³¹ Tolkien, 82–83.

³² Tolkien, 84.

³³ Tolkien, 83–84. Dickerson and O’Hara point out that Tolkien even describes the Gospels as “entering into our ‘History and the primary world’.” In that sense, the truth of the Gospels was timeless and independent of historical truths, and thus mythic or legendary. The historical incarnations of the Gospels in a specific time and place is the moment that mythic truth merged with history to take on a new reality. This is the distinction that plays a role in C. S. Lewis’s return to Christianity when Tolkien convinces him that the Gospels have both mythic and historical truth. Dickerson and O’Hara, *From Homer to Harry Potter: A Handbook on Myth and Fantasy*, 35. Lewis, “Myth Became Fact,” 66–67.

Ending can awaken our desire for *eucatastrophe*, and even whet it in the ways that we can experience Joy while reading, but leave us wanting more as we remember that we were caught in an enchantment.

C. S. Lewis: Fantasy Reveals the World's Real Potency

C. S. Lewis, another noted fantasist and a close friend of Tolkien, offers me another definition of fantasy that focuses on its mythic qualities. For him, the function of fantasy is to open us to the real potency of the world, particularly as that potency is expressed in the figures of Greek, Norse, and Christian mythology.

Lewis outlines many of his thoughts on the fairy genre in his short essay, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To Be Said," whose title gives a hint at his argument. What is unique about the genre for Lewis is its form. He notes that it has the power "to generalise while remaining concrete, to present in palpable form not concepts or even experiences but whole classes of experience, and to throw off irrelevancies...it can give us experiences we have never had and thus, instead of 'commenting on life', can add to it."³⁴ In short, what is unique about the fairy story is that it has the power to speak in both the abstract and the concrete, and so perhaps speaks more immediately to how we live our lives. In the realm of religion and myth, however, this takes on greater significance. Lewis believes that the imaginary worlds of fairy stories let him speak about things like Christianity apart from the "stained-glass associations" we already have.³⁵ In presenting the stories in a new light, their true potency is revealed and we can become re-enchanted with what has become familiar through lessons in abstract theology and

³⁴ Lewis, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To Be Said," 60.

³⁵ Lewis, 58.

dogma.³⁶ This does not mean that these stories do not teach the same lessons that doctrine or theology might, but that they approach the questions in a different manner.

In some ways, this model resembles what I pointed to in relation to Tolkien when he argued that fairy stories provide a Recovery of something we have lost by presenting that world without the lens of possessiveness. Lewis, however, seems to put a greater emphasis on fantasy's power to show the world in its true potency, perhaps in connection with the role fantasy played in his own return to Christianity and his evangelizing tendencies. Throughout the autobiography of his early life, Lewis points to the ways that literature evoked in himself what he called Joy ("an unsatisfied desire which is more desirable than any other satisfaction").³⁷ His experience of Joy was especially potent when he read MacDonald's *Phantastes, a Faerie Romance* in which he found Joy inseparable from the story itself.³⁸ In such a pure expression of Joy, Lewis claimed he saw a "bright shadow coming out of the book into the real world and resting there, transforming all common things and yet itself unchanged."³⁹ In other words, the experience of Joy had revealed the world to him in its true potency, so much so that he felt he had a baptism of the imagination, taking his first step back to Christianity. In that sense, Lewis has a personal

³⁶ I see here the Romanticism that influences Lewis (and, as we have seen, Tolkien as well) in this sense that dogma is not in-itself the only way to know the world or God, and perhaps may not be the best means either. I connect his critique of "stained-glass and Sunday school associations" with Romantic thinkers like Rudolf Otto or Friedrich Schleiermacher who argued we cannot know God through reason alone since God is beyond reason. Instead, they turn to ideas of the *Numinous* or a feeling of absolute dependence on something outside ourselves to explain our relationship with God. Lewis pushes against reason as a means of knowing God as well (since it is reason that had "paralysed" his own religion in childhood) but finds stories a suitable way to catch reason momentarily off-guard. In that sense, he brings me back to Coleridge who uses the imagination to probe the truths of the world, leading him to also reject Doctrine as petrifying to scripture. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (London, GB: Oxford University Press, 1923), 3–7. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (London, GB: T & T Clark, 2004), 16–17. Lewis, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To Be Said," 58. Samuel T. Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988), 35–36.

³⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 2012), 17–18.

³⁸ Lewis, 179–80.

³⁹ Lewis, 181.

experience with the ways that fantasy reveals the world in its real potency, influencing what he emphasizes as fantasy's function.

Another way I understand Lewis's definition of fantasy as showing the world in its real potency is by turning to his understanding of medieval cosmology, outlined in *The Discarded Image*. He describes a universe that is thick with meaning, both "unimaginably large," and "unambiguously finite" that today we can only get a glimpse of looking out on a starry night, far from the city lights.⁴⁰ On that starry night, one would be able to see the planetary bodies moving through the heavens, pushed on by the *Primum Mobile*, and imagine how they would have caught the attention of humanity throughout history, imagine them in their power. In looking upon the planets in that way, we might come close to the truth that "the planetary characters need to be seized in an intuition rather than built up out of concepts.; we need to know *them*, not to know *about* them [emphasis added]."⁴¹ In other words, that we might have an experience of them as beings or bodies of presence, not physical objects to build knowledge or reason about. For Lewis, it would be the difference of knowing the moon as "the moon" or as "Luna." We might recapture that sense of knowing the planets through the experience of looking at the night sky as I mentioned, through an intuition of the planetary influences (astrology), or through the mythology of the figures the planets embodied.⁴² In the interaction of these three, we get a sense of the true potency of the universe, a knowledge of what it might really contain and the inherent beauty in that knowledge.

We, however, seem to have lost that knowledge or at least the beauty of the knowledge in the distance created by Modernity. We are now cut off from the night sky due to the rise in light

⁴⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge, GB: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 98–99.

⁴¹ Lewis, 109.

⁴² Lewis, 105.

pollution and the focus on astronomy as a rational science. Moreover, astrology and myth are abandoned as excesses of the past, no longer fit for Modern culture. Lewis's fantasy, by revealing the world's true potency, sought to re-enchant those same notions and so reveal the world in its potency.⁴³ To this end, much of his fantasy (including *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Space Trilogy*) makes imaginative attempts to communicate who the planets are as beings of presence, living inside what he considered their Influences as we read his tales.⁴⁴ As such, Lewis's own fantasy writing became a way to evoke in others the same experience of Joy and re-enchantment he experienced himself while reading *Phantastes*, coming back to what he might consider a fuller knowledge of the world.

Tzvetan Todorov: Fantasy Produces a Hesitation

Unlike Tolkien or Lewis, who take for granted the type of literary belief involved in fantasy, Tzvetan Todorov identifies the Fantastic (or rather the *fantastique* since his work was originally written in French) as a hesitation in belief.⁴⁵ I should note, however, that he is considering belief in a different manner than Tolkien. When Tolkien was considering Secondary Belief, he was picturing Secondary Faërie worlds that the literature creates and enchants us as readers into believing we might occupy. When Todorov writes about belief he argues that the Fantastic is the moment we experience something in a piece of literature and hesitate about how we are to explain its presence (or if we are to believe it is present at all).⁴⁶ In that sense, Todorov

⁴³ Maria Sachiko Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise of Children's Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 65.

⁴⁴ Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (London, GB: Oxford University Press, 2008), 229.

⁴⁵ I note that Todorov focuses on the *Fantastique* rather than the Fantastic because some theorists (including Brian Attebery) argue that he is discussing a wholly different genre of literature than what most English speakers mean when they speak of fantasy and the fantastic. The fact that he is even considered in conversations about the Tolkienian brand of fantasy seems largely due to a choice of translation. Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 20.

⁴⁶ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 25.

is more concerned with literature that takes place in the Primary World we inhabit, while Tolkien is more concerned with literature that creates Secondary Worlds we might visit.⁴⁷

I gain a clearer picture of Todorov's notion of the Fantastic when I compare it to what he considers to be its neighboring genres: the Uncanny and the Marvelous. The Uncanny is that genre in which we see something that appears to be supernatural, but, in reality, it is an illusion that has fooled our senses, even as the laws of the universe remain the same. In contrast, the Marvelous is a genre in which a supernatural event has indeed taken place, challenging the known laws of the universe.⁴⁸ The Fantastic then is a genre of hesitation, where we are unsure whether to believe that what we have witnessed is an example of the unknown laws of the universe (the Marvelous) or to dismiss it as an illusion (the Uncanny). As such, he defines the Fantastic as a liminal genre, always threatening to slip into the Marvelous or the Uncanny as soon as something in the novel indicates it is real or an illusion.⁴⁹ In fact, Todorov seems to indicate that the true Fantastic tale is rare as most novels provide some form of explanation at the end, thereby resolving the hesitation in both the minds of the character and of the reader.⁵⁰ It is the hesitation of belief that Todorov believes unsettles us, and captures our attention about the true Fantastic, pushing us to challenge the bases of reality.⁵¹

It is easy to see how Todorov's theory of fantasy is distinct from those of Tolkien and Lewis, who probably do not desire to leave their readers unsettled. In fact, using his

⁴⁷ More recent fantasy literature has attempted to straddle the gap and create Secondary Fantasy worlds within our own, a feat that requires the use of special literary devices to pull off. Brian Attebery gives great attention to some of these works (although since the publishing of his *Strategies of Fantasy* we might include popular fantasy works like *Harry Potter*, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, or *The Shadowhunter Chronicles* among those fantasy novels to straddle the worlds). I will return to those narrative devices later since hagiographic writing in some ways also attempts to merge Primary and Secondary worlds. Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 126–29.

⁴⁸ Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, 25.

⁴⁹ Todorov, 42.

⁵⁰ Todorov, 43.

⁵¹ Todorov, 162.

classification system, it would be more accurate to include Tolkien and Lewis's writings among the Marvelous since their supernatural elements are clearly meant to be real in their own worlds and not illusions of the mind.⁵² Following David Sandner's assessment of fantasy as both a literature of transcendence and a literature of fragmentation, Todorov's definition leans towards the Fantastic in fragmentation, while Lewis and Tolkien emphasize the transcendent.⁵³ Yet, Todorov is not the only theorist of fantasy that takes this route and he influences many other scholars, most notably Rosemary Jackson.

Rosemary Jackson: Fantasy Subverts Culture

Jackson draws on Todorov's sense that fantasy is a hesitation to argue that fantasy is the literature of subversion. Like Todorov, she is considering texts rooted in our world, not the Secondary Worlds that Tolkien might suggest. In these texts, rather than producing fantasy by creating a whole new world, the fantasy comes from combining things in our own world in strange and unfamiliar ways.⁵⁴ In this sense, I am going back to Todorov's Fantastic hesitation, asserting that the Fantastic arises when we encounter a phenomenon that we can neither explain through the natural laws of the universe nor treat as supernatural. This is immediately rooted in our experience and belief of this world, not a Secondary World we have created with its own type of belief. In response to that hesitation, Jackson argues we enter into existential anxiety and

⁵² Despite the differences between Tolkien and Todorov's ideas about belief in fantasy, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas finds an overlap. She argues that at the core of fantasy is the phrase "I nearly reached the point of believing." Todorov might argue that the true Fantastic lives in that moment of hesitation, and we become unsettled when we do not know what to do. Tolkien, however, would hope that we believed while reading, and find beauty in the fact that we want to keep believing as the story ends, even as we acknowledge it is not so (that is has whet our desire with its possibility, while leaving us wanting more when we realize it was not real). For both, that moment takes us to a place outside of spacetime, separate from our primary world and the world of the story, and in that moment fantasy is both real and unreal. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2019), 18; 72.

⁵³ David Sandner, "Introduction," in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 1.

⁵⁴ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London, GB: Methuen, 1981), 8.

unease, the same anxiety Todorov claims fantasy produces.⁵⁵ In the Fantastic, we lose track of what truth is and enter into fragmentation, unsure if we are seeing the Marvelous (a supernatural event) or are caught up in the Uncanny (an illusion of our mind).⁵⁶ In effect, the Fantastic leaves us questioning what is “real,” creating symbols without names and names with meanings.⁵⁷ In another comparison to Tolkien’s Marvelous Secondary World and what Jackson and Todorov term the Fantastic, she claims that a Secondary World constructs an alternative reality, whereas the Fantastic finds reality to be empty.⁵⁸

Using these structural notions from Todorov, Jackson takes a psychological turn, drawing on Freud to argue how the literary hesitation of belief impacts us psychologically. Just as the Fantastic produces a hesitation of belief, pushing us to question what is real, Freud’s notion of the Uncanny also challenges realness.⁵⁹ According to Jackson, Freud’s notion of the Uncanny involves people projecting their unconscious desires and hidden anxieties onto an environment or person around them.⁶⁰ When this happens, the hidden parts of our unconscious reveal themselves, turning what is familiar (a person) into the unfamiliar (a ghost), taking what appears full and finding it empty. As such, the psychological Uncanny again forces us to question what is real, creating symbols without names and names without meanings. In this sense, both the psychological Uncanny and the literary Fantastic create a space of absence and non-signification.⁶¹ Since they both produce the same effect, the Fantastic becomes a way for us to

⁵⁵ Jackson, 26.

⁵⁶ Jackson, 29–31.

⁵⁷ Jackson, 40–41.

⁵⁸ Jackson, 45.

⁵⁹ It is important to note that when referring to Freud’s notion of the Uncanny, Jackson is discussing something different from the Uncanny literary genre that Todorov believes bookends the Fantastic. In fact, in Jackson’s theory, the psychological Uncanny is more in line with the literary Fantastic than it is with the literary Uncanny. This difference can become a point of confusion. As such, I emphasize whether it is the psychological or literary Uncanny, unless it is clear from the context.

⁶⁰ Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 64–65.

⁶¹ Jackson, 69.

probe the psychological Uncanny, expressing the forbidden and taboo desires that we have repressed over time, and letting us expel them.⁶² In expressing and expelling those notions, fantasy intersects with our cultural presuppositions and becomes subversive.

As fantasy finds absences in the world, not only does it create anxiety about those absences, but it has the effect of destabilizing the whole signifying practice of a culture. Thus, it subverts the very meanings we use to construct our world.⁶³ Instead, it replaces our cultural significations with all the things that we have repressed for the sake of harmony. In the case of *Dracula*, Jackson claims the tale is a classic Oedipal myth, returning us to a time before religious sensibilities. Underlying the tale is the sexual desire and taboos of the time, while it is directed towards the killing of Dracula, an ancient being related to the father.⁶⁴ In that sense, Dracula evades categorizations of both Good and Evil because he exists before such cultural norms came to be.⁶⁵ Instead, he exists independently, destabilizing our own sense of Good and Evil. In reading the story, we allow ourselves to exist outside those categories as well (and, as Jackson claims, as we desire to do), but in doing so, we fulfill and thereby expel those desires.⁶⁶ Thus, even as culture is subverted in the Fantastic, it brings us back to a stasis as we leave the text.

⁶² Jackson, 4, 70. While Jackson's definition of fantasy is not as overtly religious as Tolkien and Lewis's (and in fact she is against religious interpretations of fantasy, finding that they reinforce culture rather than subverting it), several scholars of Religion and Literature interpret literature similar to the works she is discussing and use them for religious purposes. Nathan A. Scott, Jr. is perhaps the most notable of these scholars, who questions absence in modern literature, a space that religion has traditionally helped us confront. Scott argues that in finding a vacuum of significance, modern literature reveals our finitude. From a Christian perspective, Scott argues that this realization points to our yearning for the infinite. In other words, by realizing how empty we have become, we ought to realize that we are meant for relationship, and for a relationship with the infinite. Scott, "Prolegomenon to a Christian Poetic," 191–205.

⁶³ Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 69.

⁶⁴ Jackson, 120.

⁶⁵ Jackson, 119.

⁶⁶ Jackson, 70.

Brian Attebery: Fantasy Evokes Wonder

I have already mentioned Brian Attebery briefly and his notion of fantasy as a fuzzy set, allowing for multiple definitions revolving around a (perhaps wobbling) center. Based on this notion, Attebery proposes his own definition for fantasy based around three centers: its content is the impossible, its structure is comic, and its function is to evoke wonder.⁶⁷ As already mentioned, I am focusing on the function of fantasy in order to define it. This is a more valuable point of comparison to hagiography since I am concerned about the ways in which fantasy can resemble the work of hagiography for people who feel a disconnect to the traditional saints. In many ways, Attebery's definition of fantasy as evoking wonder heavily draws on Tolkien's own definitions, leaving little I can add to what has already been said. Attebery, however, does pay special attention to the ways in which the content and structure play into the ways that fantasy evokes wonder, which also lets him consider fantasy set in our Primary World. As such, he is worth reviewing for how those traits come to impact ideas of wonder.

When Attebery considers wonder, he is specifically pointing back to Tolkien's argument about Recovery and its connection to the Consolation of the Happy Ending. In considering Recovery, Attebery turns to C. N. Manlove, who "connects wonder with the 'contemplation of...strangeness.'"⁶⁸ In focusing on estrangement, I turn to the ways that fantasy draws us away from how we think we live in the world to reconnect us with their original life. What is important about Attebery's contribution to this notion, however, is that he applies it to a group of fantasy books that he terms "Indigenous Fantasy," or fantasy that takes place in the Primary World.⁶⁹ This is in sharp contrast to Tolkien's own ideas of fantasy, since Tolkien argued that a true

⁶⁷ Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 14–16.

⁶⁸ Attebery, 16.

⁶⁹ Attebery, 127–28.

Faërie story needed to enter into the realm of the Faërie, taking place in a Secondary World.⁷⁰

Attebery recognizes this viewpoint of Tolkien, but wants to explore fantasy traditions that I see today, which are increasingly picturing the fantastic as part of our own world.⁷¹ Creating wonder or alienation set within our Primary World is more difficult as it attempts to attach the wonder-generating mechanisms of fantasy with the realistic settings of a world with which we are intimately familiar.⁷² This might hint more at the type of fantasy Jackson is interested in, because it explores the ways that fantasy might challenge our notions of Primary Belief, or even create a hesitation of belief. Despite that, Attebery still thinks the end product of this estrangement is one of wonder, not anxiety.

To make this case, Attebery has to argue that while we may encounter the Primary World as ordinary, there is a magic behind it that all of our sensory evidence seems to contradict.⁷³ In this sense, it may come closer to what Todorov referred to as the Marvelous, where these magical occurrences are a part of our reality, even if they appeal to laws with which we are unaware.⁷⁴ This argument takes me back to how Tolkien and MacDonald conceived of the internal consistency of fantasy tales, that they must produce within us Secondary Belief. This becomes difficult for fantasy set within our own world because it already presupposes an internal inconsistency: that our world has magic.⁷⁵ This goes against much of the first-hand evidence each of us has of our world and, therefore, can become a barrier to belief. As such, Attebery is

⁷⁰ Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 44, 69.

⁷¹ Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 47.

⁷² Attebery, 128.

⁷³ Attebery, 129.

⁷⁴ Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, 25.

⁷⁵ In reference to Attebery's three "centers" for fantasy (its content as the impossible, its structure as comic, and its function as evoking wonder), this issue relates to the ways that the content intersects with function. If we cannot have Secondary Belief in what is happening because the content seems too extreme or does not fit the world in which it is constructed, then we will immediately dismiss it as unimportant, not as something wonderful. In this case, if we cannot believe there is magic in our world (a much more difficult case to make than allowing magic in a Secondary World), then the tale cannot evoke wonder.

interested in strategies (or narrative devices) that these types of fantasists might use to enable Secondary Belief and overcome that hurdle.⁷⁶ One way he navigates that tension is an appeal to a gap between history and story, the two ways he claims we organize time and our place in it.⁷⁷ For Attebery, history is merely reporting different events, whereas story is the construction of those events in such a way that gives them meaning.⁷⁸ For him, Indigenous Fantasy brings the meaning-making quality of story into the Primary World, which we normally understand only through the lens of history.⁷⁹ When this is successful, Attebery claims that the fantasy author can break past modern distinctions between history and story, and so “recapture the modern world for the imagination” in an act of mythopoesis.⁸⁰ This certainly does not discredit those fantasies that do a similar type of work within completely Secondary Worlds, but Attebery seems to suggest that in an indigenous fantasy, we are able to associate that wonder with our own world in a more immediate way.

Farah Mendlesohn: Fantasy Constructs Belief in the Impossible

The last major definition of fantasy I will consider is that proposed by Farah Mendlesohn in her book, *The Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Mendlesohn begins her text trying to leave definitions of fantasy behind, clearly stating in the first sentence that “this book is not about defining fantasy.”⁸¹ Instead, she takes as a given that the fantasy genre includes texts that engage the fantastic in some way, texts that construct the impossible.⁸² What most concerns her about the

⁷⁶ Here I want to acknowledge how the structure of the story intersects with the content and the function. To make up for the fact that the content becomes unbelievable when set in our Primary World, thus limiting the function, the author must use literary strategies and consider the ways the tale is structured. As Attebery theorizes, the three become intimately interconnected.

⁷⁷ Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 129.

⁷⁸ Attebery, 130.

⁷⁹ Attebery, 133.

⁸⁰ Attebery, 141.

⁸¹ Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, xiii.

⁸² James and Mendlesohn, “Introduction,” 1.

genre is how the reader is framed in relationship to the fantastic.⁸³ In this sense, she is following the work of Brian Attebery to ask how the structure of the text impacts our Secondary Belief. Based on those questions, Mendlesohn defines four subtypes of fantasy, distinguished from one another based on the ways the fantastic enters the text. Just as Attebery helps us connect function with structure and content, Mendlesohn provides a similar frame on a more nuanced level and thus deserves our attention. As I noted in comparing Tolkien and Todorov, the ways that belief in the impossible is constructed has an impact on any other function I associate with the genre. I would even say that Mendlesohn takes me closer to the core of fantasy, asking how we imagine the fantastic and what that means for its function.

Each of the four subtypes Mendlesohn proposes situates the fantastic in relation to the text in different ways, which she claims has an impact on how the author will guide readers to Secondary Belief. The first subtype is the Portal-Quest Fantasy, in which we arrive at the fantastic through a portal that does not allow the fantastic back into our world.⁸⁴ This subtype includes writers like Lewis, where Secondary Belief becomes possible because the fantastic exists in a world that operates according to different laws than our own, and the goal of the story is to help us learn those laws. The second subtype is Immersive Fantasy where the fantastic elements are assumed to be a natural part of the world, and therefore do not require comment.⁸⁵ Instead, those elements take on a feeling of realism in-and-of-themselves. Like the Portal-Quest Fantasy, Secondary Belief becomes dependent on a world where we can take the fantastic for granted. In fact, the fantastic becomes so commonplace that it does not even inspire wonder in the characters. Mendlesohn's third subtype is the Intrusion Fantasy, in which the fantastic

⁸³ Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, xviii.

⁸⁴ Mendlesohn, ix.

⁸⁵ Mendlesohn, xxi.

threatens to break into our world and bring chaos along with it.⁸⁶ In this system, the world is seen as organized, and the arrival of the fantastic causes everything to fall to pieces.⁸⁷ As readers we gain Secondary Belief seeing an ordered world that is easy to believe in, and anything to the contrary (any fantastic element) does not belong, which is why it becomes a harbinger of chaos. Lastly, Mendlesohn describes the subtype of the Liminal Fantasy. This is a mixture of some of the other types, creating the opportunity to go through a portal, before the protagonist refuses and causes the fantastic to leak back into the world.⁸⁸ This subtype produces Secondary Belief by drawing on notions of the portal as the source of the fantastic (like Portal-Quest Fantasy), the fact that the portal is an accepted part of the world (like Immersive Fantasy), and that the leakage causes chaos (like Intrusion Fantasy). Even in this brief outline, Mendlesohn's subtypes help me consider the ways authors might approach the fantastic so that it becomes believable. While generating this belief does not necessarily become the primary function of fantasy, it is a necessary precursor if the genre is to succeed. As such, any definition of fantasy must take it into account, as it seeks to understand the genre.

My Definition: Fantasy Enacts Relationship with Wonder and Desire

These definitions all become "centers" around which I understand the fantasy genre, and, as Attebery notes, depending on which centers I use, different texts may shift in or out of the genre. A challenge for my purposes is finding centers that create space to consider fantasy and hagiography alongside one another, while still acknowledging important differences. To that end, I intend to define fantasy as a genre that enacts humanity's relationship with wonder and desire. This definition draws on those I have already seen, and focuses on what fantasy does, while

⁸⁶ Mendlesohn, xxi.

⁸⁷ Mendlesohn, xxii.

⁸⁸ Mendlesohn, xxiii.

keeping in mind its central content and structure. Moreover, it accounts for disenchanted and non-religious interpretations of fantasy, including Ursula K. Le Guin, Philip Pullman, and Lev Grossman. These texts still deal with wonder and desire, even as they use different terms and take different conclusions than the more Christian approaches of writers such as Tolkien, Lewis, and Rowling.

Defining fantasy as enacting relationship with wonder and desire starts at the level of being in relationship with the fantastic. This aspect recognizes the importance of thinkers like Brian Attebery and Farah Mendlesohn who argued for the ways that the genre's structure enables belief in the supernatural/fantastic content of the genre. As I noted, if we cannot have a Secondary Belief in the tale, then any further function of fantasy will fall short, which means coming into a relationship with the content is paramount. Moreover, the language of relationship should recall the ways that Peter Brown and Robert Orsi spoke about the saints, and so becomes a pathway to explore those connections. At their base, both fantasy and hagiography are literatures that put us into relationship with something, which accounts for their larger functions. When I turn to fantasy as a transmedial genre in a moment, I will also emphasize the importance of relationship in the ways Media Theory has spoken about fandom communities.

As the other theorists remind me, however, fantasy is not just about being in relationship with the fantastic. Tolkien argued that fantasy does not display the supernatural for the sake of displaying the supernatural, but it is supposed to take us further.⁸⁹ I would say that the relationship ought to influence who we are, and what we understand fantasy to be. This influence becomes apparent when I turn to the desire and wonder that fantasy evokes or awakens within us. As I have briefly noted, I could take this interpretation in multiple directions. On the one

⁸⁹ Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 44.

hand, there is Tolkien, Lewis, and Attebery who see the wonder and desire of fantasy as rediscovering the world as it ought to be, namely full of transcendent meaning. On the other hand, there are theorists like Todorov and Jackson who see the fractures of fantasy, and how the desire and wonder of the genre shows the world as ultimately empty. While I am inclined to interpret fantasy along the lines of Tolkien and Lewis, it is also easy to see how these theorists represent two sides of the same coin. In the transcendent wonder and desire of Tolkien and Lewis, Jackson argues that we have found the world as empty and so attempt to create something else.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, in the absences that Jackson sees in fantasy, theorists like Nathan Scott Jr. see the early recognition that we are designed for transcendence.⁹¹ Both, however, recognize that fantasy is taking us into a space where we can interrogate the desire and wonder we have in the world and ask what they might mean for us as humans. As such, my definition leaves room for those differing interpretations of desire and wonder by emphasizing the way that fantasy creates the space to explore those relationships.

In this regard, my definition also creates space for more recent fantasy works that seem to exist at the intersection of these two interpretations. For example, I look at Philip Pullman who emphatically argues that *His Dark Materials* is anti-Lewisian. Pullman is important to consider in this regard because, often, when Lewis and Tolkien speak about fantasy as awakening desire or showing the world in its real power, they mean that it points us back to Christianity.⁹² Pullman, however, has been critical of such easy interpretations, arguing against the blasé supernaturalism and pushing for (what he regards as) a more thoughtful approach to religion and

⁹⁰ Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 150.

⁹¹ Scott, "Prolegomenon to a Christian Poetic," 205.

⁹² Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 181; Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 83–84.

belief.⁹³ That said, Pullman still uses his work to explore our relationship with desire and wonder. As Laura Feldt points out, the mystical Dust of his novels is a way to become connected with sentient beings, and somehow appease sorrow and longings.⁹⁴ In that regard, Pullman offers an engagement with supernatural images (such as his Dust) to parse out our relationship to desire and wonder, hoping that such engagement allows his readers to examine critically their own spiritual lives outside institutional religions and how the supernatural is utilized in culture.

I can also turn to *The Magicians* series by Lev Grossman, which draws on the tropes of Tolkienian and Lewisian fantasy to explore the danger of the desire for fantasy worlds. In this series, the main protagonist, Quentin, suddenly gains access to a school of magic, fulfilling his dreams of discovering another world through the magic portal. Over time, however, he finds this school to be empty.⁹⁵ His friend tells him that of all the students, he is “the only one who still believes in magic,” even though they are at a school *for* magic.⁹⁶ His belief in magic is tied to the sense that there has to be something more out there, beyond the emptiness of the world. This ultimately leads him to a Narnia-esque world called Fillory, which he believes is that “something more,” until it also starts to leave him empty.⁹⁷ The trilogy becomes a reflection on the disenchantment of readers of the fantasy genre who never found the magic world in the wardrobe and have come away dissatisfied. In that sense, this fantasy world, while taking on the quality of a Tolkienian realm and even ultimately ending in a Consolation, still explores the emptiness of

⁹³ Philip Pullman, “Portrait - The Dark Side of Narnia,” *The Guardian*, October 1, 1998; “Profile: The Devil in Philip Pullman,” *The Telegraph*, November 30, 2007.

⁹⁴ Feldt, “Contemporary Fantasy Fiction and Representations of Religion: Playing with Reality, Myth and Magic in His Dark Materials and Harry Potter,” 561.

⁹⁵ Lev Grossman, *The Magicians: A Novel* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2009), 40.

⁹⁶ Grossman, 179.

⁹⁷ Lev Grossman, *The Magician King: A Novel* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2011), 29.

the world.⁹⁸ To use Tolkien's terms, it explores what happens when fantasy has what our desire so much that nothing lives up to the expectations, a characteristic Tolkien never seems to consider.⁹⁹ These stories, however, still speak to our relationship with wonder and desire, creating the space to see the positive and negative aspects of relationship. As Robert Orsi argued in his definition of religion as rooted in relationships, relationship is neither wholly good nor bad, but involves both meaning making and wounding.¹⁰⁰

Fantasy as Transmedia Storytelling

So far, I have been considering traditional definitions of fantasy, focused largely on their literary form, and from these I have proposed my own definition focused on fantasy as enacting relationship with wonder and desire. Before moving on from my definitions, however, it is important to consider an aspect of fantasy that has surged since the early 2000s: fantasy as a transmedial experience. The early 2000s offered a renaissance moment for fantasy with the

⁹⁸ For more on Grossman's *The Magicians* in relation to Lewis and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, see Kelly Kramer, "A Common Language of Desire: *The Magicians*, *Narnia*, and Contemporary Fantasy," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature* 35, no. 2 (2017): Article 10.

⁹⁹ This has also become a question of recent scholarship in fantasy, particularly as it relates to who is allowed to enjoy fantasy worlds. Scholars Ebony Elizabeth Thomas and Maria Sachiko Cecire have both explored the racial dimensions of fantasy and how they grew up loving fantasy books, but realized that, as women of color, the stories were never written about them. In this sense, fantasy was the realm through which W. E. B. Du Bois's veil of double consciousness was revealed to them. Lev Grossman even incorporates some sense of double consciousness into *The Magicians*. In the second book, there is a threat that magic will be removed from the world forever. Quentin describes the moment he realizes this saying that "He wouldn't be a magician anymore, nobody would be. All of their double lives would become single ones again." Here, however, it is the white male who has double consciousness, seeing himself through the lens of magic and the lens of the "real" world, and what would happen if that disappeared. This mirrors some of how George MacDonald also speaks about Enchantment. In *Phantastes*, the main character, Anodos, recounts the experience of reading a story (much as the reader is reading his), and claims that "while I read it, I was Cosmo, and his history was mine. Yet, all the time, I seemed to have a kind of double consciousness, and the story a double meaning. Sometimes it seemed only to represent a simple story of ordinary life, perhaps almost a universal life; wherein two souls, loving each other and longing to come nearer, do, after all, but behold each other as in a glass darkly." Each instance explores the fractures around fantasy and what it means to not have access to the fantastic. We are reminded in some sense of Tolkien's claim that "fantasy remains a human right." Thomas, *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*, 19, 23–25. Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise of Children's Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century*, vii. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Dover Thrift Editions (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994), 2. Grossman, *The Magician King: A Novel*, 301. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 72. George MacDonald, *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance* (Salt Lake City, UT: Stonewall Press, 2013), 91–92.

¹⁰⁰ Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, 5–6, 144–45.

advent of major fantasy film franchises, such as *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and the first *Harry Potter* movies, both of which sparked huge cultural movements, bringing the influence of the texts further than before. Nor has this trend slowed in the past twenty years, with the development of movies and television shows for *The Shadowhunter Chronicles*, *His Dark Materials*, *The Magicians*, *The Hobbit* trilogy, multiple iterations of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Game of Thrones*, and most recently, *Percy Jackson* and *The Rings of Power*. This media has brought fandom communities into the forefront of mainstream popular culture, despite existing in more private circles long beforehand. As such, a definition of fantasy today must take into account the ways that fantasy has involved transmedia storytelling and the increasingly larger fandom communities in association with those experiences. For the remainder of the chapter, I will explore how my proposed definition of fantasy intersects with fantasy as transmedia storytelling, how it helps me understand them better, and how it can better define the texts of greatest interest to me.

Henry Jenkins, a scholar of Media Studies, proposed the notion of transmedia storytelling in 2006 as part of an investigation into the ways that media culture was evolving with the rise of new technologies in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Jenkins claims that:

Transmedia storytelling refers to a new aesthetic that has emerged in response to media convergence—one that places new demands on consumers and depends on the active participation of knowledge communities. Transmedia storytelling is the art of world making. To fully experience any fictional world, consumers must assume the role of hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels, comparing notes with each other via online discussion groups, and collaborating to ensure that

everyone who invests time and effort will come away with a richer entertainment experience.¹⁰¹

In other words, transmedia storytelling involves the telling of stories across multiple media, including film, television, print, and online discussion groups. To gain the greatest entertainment and experience out of a story, it requires the investment to engage with it (and add to it) across these media forms. In the case of *Harry Potter*, this might include not only reading the books, but watching the movies (especially the extended cut versions), visiting the theme parks, attending the Broadway musical, interacting with fans using online games and sites like The Wizarding World (formerly known as Pottermore), reading fanfiction, and any number of other interventions into the story. The failure to engage in one of these forms might mean missing an important part of the story and its richness. This holds a particular interest for me in relation to fantasy because of Jenkins's claim that "transmedia storytelling is the art of world making." As I have briefly explored, the art of world making (particularly in relation to Secondary Belief) has an impact on fantasy's ability to fulfill its various functions.

When Jenkins points me towards transmedia storytelling, he is also outlining the ways that fantasy and fandom are caught up in what he terms "participatory culture" (also recalling Brown and Orsi's treatment of the saints). This is where the lines between producers and consumers of media have blurred, allowing for consumers to participate more fully in the ways their favorite stories are told.¹⁰² Fans demonstrate this type of participation in the fandom cultures around texts, where they may disagree with the producer's choices for the story and then get together to rewrite the story to better fit the fandom community's expectations.¹⁰³ In this

¹⁰¹ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 20–21.

¹⁰² Jenkins, 3.

¹⁰³ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, 20th Anniversary Ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 52.

model, the text takes on a greater meaning in the social interactions which recreate it in a different way. Fans draw texts closer to them, making them more personal, and bringing them to bare on their everyday lives. Another model of participation Jenkins points me to is re-reading or re-watching a text. By re-watching a text, fans are no longer interested in consuming it, but with playing around with it.¹⁰⁴ They have the chance to let it speak to them in a new way, the meeting of a person and a text that are both the same and different.¹⁰⁵ It is this participation that guides the interchange between fans and text, bringing the two inexplicably close. Fans thus make the figures of the text “real” even as they remain constructed.¹⁰⁶ I associate this with Tolkien’s notion of Secondary Belief, where the fantasy world becomes much bigger and more real because of the many ways people are able to participate with the text. In a sense, fans expand the world and its presence with their own engagement, making it more than it once was, allowing for greater interaction in the future and more expansions.

Through participation, fans have the opportunity to make the texts and their figures real, bringing them into greater interaction with their lives. These sorts of connections have come to be called “parasocial relationships,” which are described as when a viewer interacts with a fictional character or celebrity as if they were the same as regular social relationships.¹⁰⁷ Research into this form of relationship is usually directed towards the role that they play in forming identity, since people pick up personality traits from their parasocial relationships, or

¹⁰⁴ Jenkins, 67.

¹⁰⁵ Jenkins, 67–69. In some ways, this describes Gadamer’s Hermeneutic Circle, wherein we assume that our understanding of a text is complete until we come upon it again and find that the text is unintelligible to who we are now. Thus, we must alter our interpretations, letting the text change with us as we do. In this, the text remains both familiar and strange. Familiar because we have encountered it before and may know the story, but strange in that we are encountering it in a new time, seeking to complete our circle of understanding. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London, GB: Continuum Publishing Company, 2004), 294–95.

¹⁰⁶ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, 66.

¹⁰⁷ D Horton and RR Wohl, “Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction,” *Psychiatry* 19, no. 3 (1956): 215–29.

around how these relationships mirror more typical social relationships in the way that they develop.¹⁰⁸ The concept of a parasocial relationship, especially as it relates to participating with fantasy characters, is an important part of my evolving definition of fantasy. It shows the number of ways that transmedia storytelling has expanded the world-creating possibilities of fantasy and the ways it can function.

In relationship to the definition that I have proposed for fantasy (fantasy enacts relationships with wonder and desire), transmedia storytelling and parasocial relationships add another layer to that definition. The notion of a parasocial relationship feeds into fantasy as enacting relationships and directs us to understanding desire and wonder connected with fantasy characters and the worlds they open to our imagination. Transmedia storytelling demands a greater response from readers and fans of fantasy to connect with their world, but it also plays into the awakening of desire, which Tolkien discussed, whetting it to a degree that we have drawn the world closer to our lives and take part in the act of storytelling.

Having examined major theoretical attempts to define hagiography and fantasy, the ways their functions may overlap and how I might imagine fantasy as a second hagiography becomes clearer. Perhaps most importantly, it helps me acknowledge the way these stories are told and shaped within communities that form around the texts. That, however, leaves me to ask how communities interact with these texts. Chapter Three turns towards these questions, posing ritual as a lens through which I understand the interaction with these stories. It also explores the place of reading in relation to ritual to establish a foundation to explore both the reading practices of

¹⁰⁸ Jonathan Cohen, "Parasocial Breakups: Measuring Individual Differences in Responses to the Dissolution of Parasocial Relationships," *Mass Communication & Society* 6, no. 2 (2003): 192; David C. Giles, "Parasocial Interaction: A Review of the Literature and a Model for Future Research," *Media Psychology* 4, no. 3 (2002): 289–90.

Christians gathering to read a saint's life and the means through which fantasy fandoms encounter their texts together.

Chapter Three

Ritual, Reading, and Liturgy

In thinking about the ways that the functionality of hagiography and fantasy literature mirror one another, and specifically as I look towards describing fantasy as a second hagiography, I find the theoretical framework of ritual to be a useful tool to unpack their functionalities. It is evident that ritual plays a role in the way devotees have historically and continue to encounter the saints through practices like the liturgy or pilgrimages, but it also goes a long way in explaining the reasons why saints can function to build communal identity and connect people with God. Moreover, if I am to take Paul Ricoeur's notion of a second naïveté as the inspiration for understanding fantasy as a second hagiography, then ritual becomes an integral corollary to that process as well. As explored in the Introduction, for Ricoeur the search for a second naïveté is about finding a way to hear again now that we have lost the immediacy of belief through symbols.¹ As such, Ricoeur is seeking to reestablish origins (with all that entails), even if he approaches that movement using demythologization and textual criticism. While I am arguing for a remythologization by using fantasy as a second hagiography, and so take a different approach than Ricoeur suggests in *The Symbolism of Evil*, we are both thinking about how humanity relates to their symbols, the place of myth and storytelling in that process, and the recreation of a new origin, acknowledging that we cannot go back the way we came. Ritual becomes a valuable means for addressing these concerns, and especially the idea of a remythologization, as it also asks about how we recreate origins and the social drama that

¹ Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 351.

emerges from that site. In this regard, ritual is a reasonable lens by which to understand both hagiography (through its historical connection to ritual) and fantasy (as it attempts to recreate an origin), and especially how fantasy literature becomes a second hagiography.

As such, this chapter seeks to set out a theoretical framework for ritual to help structure the remaining chapters of the dissertation. Specifically, I intend to outline Victor Turner's three-part structure for a rite of passage, paying attention to how each part moves the initiates through sacred and profane time. This section will set up the ways that I intend to explore the functionality of hagiography and fantasy, particularly how both separate initiates from the world and bring them into a new, sacred rhythm, how ritual reconnects people with a divine origin and with the community around them, and how it establishes a new mode for moving through the world as they reaggregate to the profane rhythm of the world. Since we primarily experience fantasy literature today through the lens of leisurely reading, I then want to turn to the historical ways that ritual and reading have been connected with one another. This will start with examining where reading was incorporated as an aspect of the liturgy around devotion to the saints before moving towards how reading comes to stand on its own as a ritual-esque activity. This later turn will draw on Turner's work on liminoid (rather than liminal) spaces and Ronald Grimes's sense that there is a "ritualization" of "ordinary stuff" that contrasts with the more formal "rites" (Grimes's terms) so that reading can still function in ways that Turner has primarily associated with more established rites of passage.

In this chapter, I am primarily concerned with establishing the connection between ritual and reading, particularly as liturgical practices around the saints help to make those connections possible. As such, I am not going to engage much with actual fantasy or hagiographic texts at this point or the ways that fans encounter fantasy outside the practice of reading. I will instead

save those more in-depth looks for the subsequent chapters when I argue for how hagiography and fantasy are moving through the three-part structure of ritual in similar ways, creating these mirrored functionalities, and demonstrating fantasy literature as a second hagiography. At the moment, it will be enough to state that reading can engage in these ritualizing tendencies so I might begin imagining the many possibilities that can emerge.

Victor Turner and Rites of Passages

Victor Turner borrows his tripart ritual structure (separation, limen, reaggregation) from Arnold van Gennep (Figure 3.1), but took it a step further to give it a functionalist-structuralist purpose in defining social dramas.² Before exploring this tripart structure in more depth and what it might mean for my own arguments about a second hagiography, drawing on Catherine Bell, I want to situate van Gennep and Turner in relationship to other scholars like Mircea Eliade and Émile Durkheim to better conceptualize how their ideas of ritual structure are useful for the task of remythologizing.

Van Gennep is focused primarily on rites of passage, rituals occurring during major life events, meant primarily to change and reconstitute groups as a social structure.³ While Turner agrees with much of this, he understands ritual as dynamic so that they do not only reaffirm social structure, but also recreate it, constantly refiguring the social equilibrium as a social drama.⁴ For Turner, the social drama was a movement between different arenas in which symbols and metaphors are created and used with reference to political powers.⁵ In other words,

² Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1960); Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 14; Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 13; Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press, 1997), 39.

³ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 35–37.

⁴ Bell, 39; Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 121.

⁵ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 17.

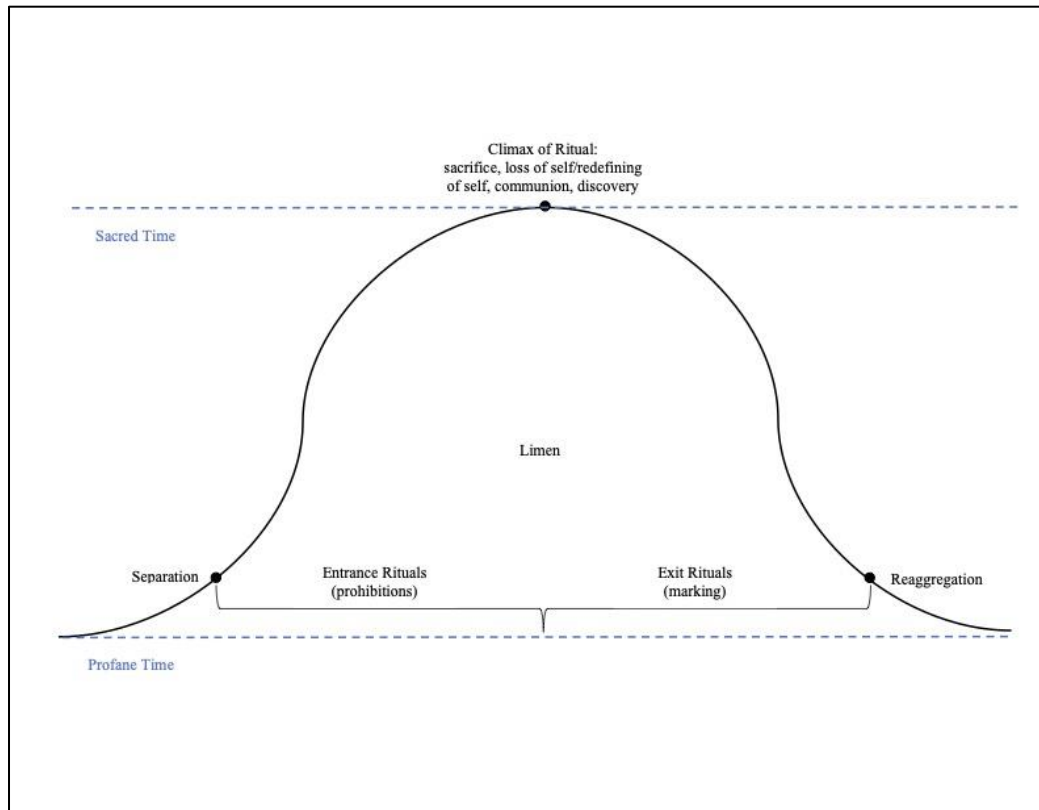


Figure 3.1: A map of Victor Turner's tripart ritual structure showing the movement from separation, into the limen, and then reaggregation in relationship to sacred and profane space and time.⁶

ritual moved cultures through moments of social stress and tension by returning to symbols and re-creating the symbolic meanings to reconstitute humanity's connections with itself and its social structures. This is well beyond van Gennep's initial formulations about how ritual moves people through social strata since it asks not only where each individual exists in the social sphere, but also how we continue to (re)construct the social sphere. Moreover, for Turner, this

⁶ Adapted from Carolyn M. Jones Medine, "Rite of Passage/Pilgrimage Handout," Fall 2019, AFAM 4250, University of Georgia.

extends beyond the major life events that van Gennep examined and touches every aspect of our social life, even emerging in the space of theatre and literature.⁷

What both van Gennep and Turner affirm, however, is the central, universal structure of ritual. For Catherine Bell, it is this element of van Gennep and Turner's thought that connects them to the myth-and-ritual school and the phenomenologists, including thinkers like Mircea Eliade and Jonathan Z. Smith.⁸ Van Gennep shared the most in common with these schools, arguing that ritual had an ahistorical and symbolic dimension, mirroring how the phenomenologists discussed myth and its association with ritual.⁹ It is through these connections that he is able to argue for the role of ritual in defining what is sacred, rather than repeating a sacred past, as suggested by Eliade.¹⁰ Turner picks up these ideas of the sacred, noticing how ritual can play a role in distinguishing Eliade's cosmos and chaos or act as a theophany.¹¹ While, according to Bell, Turner did not take this universal structure to be tied with a primordial, ahistorical event, as Eliade and van Gennep seem to suggest, he does argue for a universal structure that helps to illuminate an underlying ethos of sacrality in each situation.¹² In some sense, he may owe more to Durkheim, with ritual as a universal system to structure communal relationships.¹³ Yet, in his own comparison to Durkheim, Turner claims that the social influence of ritual does not exist within a specific group, but instead extends to humanity as a whole.¹⁴ More specifically, while Durkheim found the origin of symbols in social behavior, Turner found

⁷ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 13–14; Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York, NY: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982).

⁸ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 55.

⁹ Bell, 37, 10.

¹⁰ Bell, 37.

¹¹ Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 38–39; Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 189.

¹² Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 55, 40.

¹³ Bell, 55, 24.

¹⁴ Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 132.

their origin in the universal human body so that the sensory inspires the abstract, and thus something shared by all humanity.¹⁵ In other words, while Turner does lean towards the construction of symbols and ritual, they are constructed on the human body and are, therefore, universal to all humans. This becomes a means of uniting both the social (constructed symbols) with embodied individual experiences through the movement of ritual. This would likely imply for Turner an earlier, more primordial bond that ritual evokes, touching closer to Eliade's notion of a primordial sacred than Durkheim's socially constructed sacred.¹⁶ These connections will be important for how I conceive of the type of work ritual displays, specifically considering how it creates and touches sacred space and time.

Separation

For Turner (and van Gennep), any ritual or rite of passage begins with a movement of separation. More specifically, he notes that rituals begin in a place of high social structure where our relations with one another are guided by many structural ties that link us together.¹⁷ I relate this to profane space and time, drawing on Eliade and Durkheim's binary distinction.¹⁸ In the terms of a social drama, Turner notes that this movement of separation comes when there is a breach in the social structure, causing a disturbance and moving the culture further away from structure and into what he terms anti-structure.¹⁹ In both instances, the purpose of the separation is that an individual or group becomes detached from the fixity of structure and their place within

¹⁵ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 41; Caroline Walker Bynum, "Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality," in *Anthropology and the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert L. Moore and Frank E. Reynolds (Chicago, IL: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1984), 115.

¹⁶ In other words, for Turner, the ritual structure develops in time, as Durkheim argues, placing it somewhere within human evolution. The sacred space that ritual creates, however, connects to all of humanity, coming closer to Eliade's sense of the sacred. This might be because the structure developed earlier in the human experience for Turner than for Durkheim, but that remains unclear. What is certain is that even if the structure and bonds are not primordial, it still points to a moment that connects all humanity together.

¹⁷ Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 96.

¹⁸ Turner, 38.

¹⁹ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 38.

it so that they might step away from the structural bonds for a period of time.²⁰ For Turner, it is in this liminal space, cut off from our traditional structures, where ritual is able to effect certain transformations, which I will soon explore. In other words, the movement of separation is to initiate a new rhythm by which someone moves through the world leaving behind profane structure and entering into sacred anti-structure, where we are bound by different ties. Before examining what happens in the limen, however, it is important to recognize how rituals evoke this movement of separation, keeping in mind that hagiography and fantasy literature must also evoke separation in a similar manner, if they are to be understood through the lens of the tripart ritual structure.

In describing the rites of the Ndembu (and particularly the rite of *Isoma*), Turner notes that the movement towards separation in the ritual structure is initiated by a physical separation of the initiate from their usual place in the social structure.²¹ This might be removing them to a different part of the village, or more likely to the outskirts of the village, where social structure no longer operates. Since, for Turner, the abstract, symbolic meaning is mirrored and initiated by physical movements (movements rooted in the human body), such a physical separation is a logical place to begin any symbolic or spiritual separation as well, preparing the initiate to enter into this new rhythm of anti-structure. The other major element of any separation for Turner is the use of symbols, which become the building blocks of the ritual space.²² I see this especially in the preparation of the site of the ritual, where “rites of separation” appeal to symbols to create a place of sacred order in the midst of the profane chaos that exists once the initiate leaves the structured village.²³ These symbols are multivocal, representing more than one thing, and not all

²⁰ Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 94.

²¹ Turner, 14; Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 196.

²² Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 14.

²³ Turner, 21–23.

of the same logical order.²⁴ In fact, Turner notes that a single symbol will have social, physical, ethical, and even psychological meanings, meant to channel certain emotions.²⁵ In bringing together all of these meanings into a single symbol, the organic, social, and religious become one, making normative topics and questions that are traditionally marginalized.²⁶ In this manner, the symbols shift our perspective away from the old structure and bring us into anti-structure where objects suddenly have new meanings and, in many ways, establish a new reality. As he says elsewhere, this is a separation from the habitual and familiar so that “generic rather than particularistic relationships are stressed” changing the way we think about the world and those around us.²⁷ It is thinking about the world through the lens of humanity, rather than the social structures we usually use.

These same principles apply for Turner when he leaves behind the Ndembu and turns towards Christian pilgrimage and other rites, which come a bit closer to my own concerns around the saints and fantasy literature. In the example of a pilgrimage, Turner notes that as the pilgrim begins their journey, they enter the movement of separation (physically leaving behind their profane structure of life) and encounter a series of symbolic structures that prepare the pilgrim to enter sacred space and time.²⁸ The encounter with these symbols, and particularly their reiteration on the often long pilgrimage route, further separates the pilgrim from their profane way of life and enables them to enter imaginatively into relationship with the events depicted (such as standing before the crucifixion).²⁹ It is these encounters that effect a change in the pilgrim’s state of grace, as they come alongside Jesus.³⁰ As such, I see that once again, symbols,

²⁴ Turner, 58, 52.

²⁵ Turner, 52, 42–43.

²⁶ Turner, 52–53.

²⁷ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 196.

²⁸ Turner, 197.

²⁹ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*, 10–11.

³⁰ Turner and Turner, 11; Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 197.

and specifically the repetitive encounter with multivocal symbols, allows the pilgrim or initiate to imaginatively and physically enter a space that is separate from social structures and that moves according to a sacred rhythm. A new reality is created where standard and habitual objects take on new meanings. It is making the familiar unfamiliar and living in that space, if only for a moment, that opens up a space for the limen.

As I ask how reading might share in this tripart structure, it is important to note that Turner does not understand this example of a pilgrimage as a rite of passage since pilgrimages are often one-time events and voluntary.³¹ Reading is very similar. While I might read a book more than once, it is still voluntary and often considered separate from the space of spiritual work, and instead a matter of play. While I will explore this distinction in more depth later, it is worth noting now that despite these differences, both reading and ritual use names and meanings to make the familiar unfamiliar and create new spaces to inhabit for short periods of time. It is this same element of making the familiar unfamiliar that Giles Gunn turns to in order to argue for the interconnection between religion and literature.³² With that in mind, I want to turn to the limen itself and the type of work that Turner argues happens in that space.

The Limen

Turner gives the majority of his attention to describing the limen and the type of the work that happens there as the central element of the ritual structure. Specifically, he focuses on the limen as a sacred space where we return to what he calls *communitas*, the general communal bond between all humans that existed before devolving into the many social structural ties that orient our interactions with one another.³³ This notion implies two types of work that occur in the

³¹ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*, 31–35.

³² Gunn, *The Interpretation of Otherness: Literature, Religion, and the American Imagination*, 85–91.

³³ Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 96.

limen that I want to focus on as relative to fantasy and hagiography: the recreation of an origin and the (re)formation of community. In evoking a sense of sacred time, rituals recreate a sacred origin and sacred center, which takes us back to the bonds of *communitas*. Yet, besides noting that the space of the limen is a place of undifferentiated *communitas*, Turner does not spend much time on the notion of a sacred origin, instead choosing to explain the dynamics of *communitas*.³⁴ I draw from Arnold van Gennep, however, the sense that there is a pivoting sacred, where something is held to be sacred in relation to other profane spaces and ritual helps to establish those relationships.³⁵ With this in mind, I want to turn to Mircea Eliade's own sense of the sacred and profane and how it might work in tandem with Turner and van Gennep to discuss the way ritual recreates sacred centers. This prepares me to appreciate more fully how Turner uses that framework to argue about the functionality of *communitas* in rituals.

For Eliade, the world is split into both sacred and profane spaces, which I break into the further dualities of cosmos and chaos, center and periphery, or order and disorder.³⁶ Moreover, this break in sacred and profane goes back to the moment of creation in which cosmos broke into chaos, separating the two from each other.³⁷ Thus, for Eliade, it must be noted now that this is a primordial and transcendent distinction, which differs slightly from Turner who is more interested in how rituals create sacred, liminal spaces without appealing to a primordial moment. For Eliade, it is the movement between profane and sacred, particularly as it is represented in an hierophany (sites where the sacred breaks into the profane) that gives humanity orientation in the world.³⁸ The hierophany becomes a sacred center in the middle of profane chaos by which we

³⁴ Turner, 96, 104.

³⁵ van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 13.

³⁶ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 20.

³⁷ Eliade, 21.

³⁸ Eliade, 21–22.

know our place in space and time. The question then becomes how humanity makes the movement between profane and sacred space and time (in imitation of that first primordial break) and, thereby, how humanity finds and/or establishes hierophanies in the world.

To help elaborate this distinction, Eliade takes the example of inhabited territory and the surrounding area. The area around a society is uninhabited and chaotic, lacking any sort of sacred center by which to orient living in those areas. To make a space inhabitable, it must first be consecrated and made into a sacred center.³⁹ To move into chaotic space, Eliade claims it must first be consecrated by a ritual repetition of the cosmogony, symbolically repeating Creation and repeating the initial split between sacred and profane.⁴⁰ Thus, ritual helps to give space form and order, in contrast to the chaos it once held.⁴¹ In this way, ritual is used to create sacred spaces and recreate human origins, much as Turner or van Gennep argue that ritual effects the movement from profane into sacred space and out again. The primary difference is that while Eliade (and to a degree van Gennep) appeal to a primordial center, to which all rituals return us, Turner argues that ritual is creating its own sacred center independent from any primordial value. To put it another way, for Eliade rituals are not just the creation of a sacred center, but a moment in which we collapse time and return to the mythical moment of creation, participating with the gods themselves in the ways we re-enact creation.⁴² In repeating the act of creation, the ritual gives order and purpose to the new center by harmonizing with those mythic moments. In other words, there is order because there is an established way forward, unlike the unknowable chaos of history. By way of contrast, for Turner, ritual still lets us collapse the barriers of time,

³⁹ Eliade, 29–30.

⁴⁰ Eliade, 31–33; Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, 10.

⁴¹ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, 11.

⁴² Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 68, 96; Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, 24.

returning to generic human bonds and participating with figures throughout history, but the return is not primordial. Instead, ritual remains rooted in culture and the people who first initiated the ritual.⁴³ What both theorists argue, however, is that there is the creation of a sacred center and, in particular, that the undifferentiation of the sacred center is the space in which we return to the core of human being and generic human bonds.⁴⁴

What Eliade offers me in this instance is a better understanding of what the movement into sacred time offers, specifically the way that it collapses time and allows initiates to participate with those who came before—whether that is in mythic time as Eliade implies or in historical time as in Turner’s thought.⁴⁵ Specifically, in the examples of how Eliade and Turner interpret pilgrimages and the way Christian rituals connect with Jesus, I begin to see the value his more developed definition of the sacred offers. When Eliade turns to the example of Christian rituals, he claims that they do not return to a primordial beginning, but to Jesus on the Cross at

⁴³ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 28, 172; Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 106.

⁴⁴ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 130; Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 96, 104–5.

⁴⁵ I find value in understanding Eliade’s notion of a return through the lens of Stuart Hall and his ideas of roots and routes. Hall is writing about the African diaspora and how it relates to ‘Africa’ again, and in his writing, he emphasizes that it is impossible to return home. Much like Paul Ricoeur and his notion of the first naïveté, home has been lost to the African diaspora because they have lost that immediacy of belief or because they have experienced life and dwelt in other homes since the time that they were taken from Africa. In the same way, we cannot fully return to sacred origins because there is so much distance there, and we will never be able to reconcile the sum total of our experiences since leaving those origins. Through ritual, however, we can recreate an origin that shares enough of that first home that we can participate with its meaning making potential, while also recognizing where we are now. For Hall, this is an awareness, not of our roots, but of our routes. This takes into consideration the past and its traditions (and that original origin), since that is where the route began, but it also shows that we have moved forward and are continuing to move forward. Thus, we can keep an element of those roots in what we seek to build, still participating with them, even as we express them in different ways. Returning to Eliade, we can recreate the sacred mountain using ritual and recreate a sacred center, but we have still left the sacred mountain behind. As Hall says, we can make meaning out of these new centers, “not primarily because we are connected to our African past and heritage by an unbreakable chain across which some singular African culture has flowed unchanged down the generations, but because of how we have gone about producing ‘Africa’ again, within the Caribbean narrative.” In the same way, when ritual (and as I will argue, fantasy and hagiography) recreate sacred origins in a way that helps give meaning to identity and constructs a relationship with the divine, it is not because they are continuing a singular tradition with implicit ties to the original sacred origin (with its mythic overtones), but because they are producing ‘Eden’ again in the Egyptian desert (*Life of Antony*) or in Middle-earth (*The Lord of the Rings*). Stuart Hall, “Thinking the Diaspora: Home-Thoughts from Abroad,” *Small Axe* 6 (1999): 1–18.

Golgotha, and thus ritual and sacred space are initiated in historical time.⁴⁶ In this moment, Christians return to this moment and participate with Jesus at the Crucifixion. Since Eliade treats Jesus as a unique example where mythical and historical time meet, this comes closer to Turner's own notions of ritual which are initiated in a historical moment, rather than primordial time. When turning to pilgrimage rites, Turner even notes that initiates remove themselves from their own time and come to the time of the saint, "kinetically reenact[ing] the temporal sequences made sacred and permanent by the succession of events in the lives of incarnate gods, saints, gurus, prophets, and martyrs."⁴⁷ In this sense, he himself comes close to Eliade in noting how ritual collapses the barriers of time in the space of the sacred, allowing the pilgrims to participate with those saints and, thereby, returning them to a generic human connection.

The fact that this sacred space opens us to new connections recalls the way that Turner sees ritual as enacting *communitas* and the central role that plays in his understanding of ritual. For Turner, if we move according to structure during profane time, then *communitas* is associated with anti-structure, returning us to bonds that exist outside and before the ways societal ties connect us together.⁴⁸ This generic bond is something rooted in the core of our humanity (perhaps even in the human body itself), making us aware of the humankindness of everyone we encounter or to use to the language of Martin Buber, to be aware that there is an *I* looking back at us.⁴⁹ It is the role of ritual to recreate this generic bond for us so that we might model structural ties upon it, reminding ourselves of shared humankindness even when we leave

⁴⁶ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, 14; Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 111. He also acknowledges at this point that even Jesus' life is a repetition of Adam and mythical time, but because Christians are primarily rooted around Jesus, they are more rooted in a historical origin, even as it returns to a mythical.

⁴⁷ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 207.

⁴⁸ Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 96.

⁴⁹ Turner, 137.

sacred space behind.⁵⁰ In other words, the goal of moving through the ritual structure is that we might participate in a social drama to gauge whether *communitas* values exist in our social structures and recreate them if they do not. I should note here that Turner does not elevate structure or anti-structure above the other, but rather sees both as part of a complex interaction in which structure feeds anti-structure and anti-structure feeds structure in a balanced society.⁵¹ This is part of the dynamism of ritual, that it adapts over time based on the structure it responds to, in each instance instilling *communitas* values back into culture either by affirming where it already exists or transforming culture to better display those values.⁵²

In this turn to *communitas* in the space of ritual, ritual plays a role in building communities, and specifically communities built around *communitas* values. Moreover, since *communitas* is such a basic and generic bond, it is often equated with religious values of loving God and loving others.⁵³ In this sense, ritual helps build community around important religious values. As if to emphasize this notion, Turner notes that it is the marginalized who often stand for humanity in the space of *communitas*, restoring the generic human bond with everyone.⁵⁴ In the space of the limen, as all the structural ties breakdown, each person becomes a blank slate apart from notions of class or gender to appreciate better the ways that we are connected outside of those bonds by the mere fact of our humanity.⁵⁵ Thus, the marginalized is recognized as human again, creating the space to reaffirm those ties. I see this in Turner's affirmation that *communitas* does not deny multiplicity but denies its divisiveness so that we recognize

⁵⁰ Turner, 96; Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 48.

⁵¹ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 52.

⁵² Turner, 42; Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 177.

⁵³ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 266.

⁵⁴ Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 111.

⁵⁵ Turner, 103–5.

heterogeneous unity.⁵⁶ It is the return to this common human bond that lets the initiates do the work of reaggregation.

I return to pilgrimages as a precursor to my conversation about reading and the way it mirrors this tripartite structure to ask how they create a sacred center to orient pilgrims' movement through the world and invite them into a state of *communitas*. Turner recognizes how the mere act of pilgrimage brings together large numbers, united by a common aim, creating the opportunity for more sacred communion and fellowship than anything else the pilgrim has ever known, as expressed in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, forming these bonds after leaving behind the tight kinship and local structures with which they are most familiar.⁵⁷ Moreover, the pilgrimage is often both physical and spiritual, undertaken to effect the state of grace of the pilgrim and those who support them.⁵⁸ It takes on this quality in the way that it mirrors and participates with the lives of religious figures, such as Jesus or the saints, and so allows the pilgrim to return to a sacred time, imaginatively re-creating the holy past and thereby impacting their own spiritual lives.⁵⁹ As I will explore shortly, reading plays an important part in this process and comes to operate in a similar way, directing groups towards a common aim and imaginatively opening sacred spaces for readers. Before turning to the place of reading in this dynamic, however, the final stage in Turner's tripart structure asks what happens as initiates begin to leave the limen behind.

⁵⁶ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 203, 208. Galatians 3:28

⁵⁷ Turner, 171, 182–83, 217; Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*, 13.

⁵⁸ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*, 16–17, 33–34.

⁵⁹ Turner and Turner, 33–34.

Reaggregation

At the stage of reaggregation, initiates are moving out of the limen and back into profane time and space where they need to apply the *communitas* values to the ways they structure society.⁶⁰ Reaggregation is the purpose of the rituals to the degree that by temporarily setting aside societal structures, it has purified them in the return to a generic human bond, letting us build back a foundation more aware of common humankindness.⁶¹ Turner's explanation of reaggregation comes through clearest when he turns to social drama. Just as a break in regular social relations causes a moment of separation for a disturbed social group and an opening of liminal space, the redressive action that seeks to solve the breach demonstrates the ways that society takes stock of its structures in the middle of a social drama and either reaffirms them (leading to social schism) or adapts to integrate more fully those from the disturbed social group.⁶² In either case (schism or adaptation) the forward direction of society is determined by the experience of *communitas* and a (perhaps unconscious) decision about how best to integrate the antistructure *communitas* values into structure. Important to recognize at this point is how Turner leaves open-ended the effect that ritual and the experience of *communitas* has on the community. It can either reaffirm societal structures or create the chance for change, and this process repeats, always open for either reaffirmation or change. Leaving open the opportunity for both reaffirmation and change, Turner advances the theory of ritual, departing from his mentors Alfred Radcliffe-Brown and Max Gluckman who emphasized how ritual works out social tensions and he is also departing from earlier theorists like Durkheim and van Gennep who emphasized how ritual reinforced social structures.⁶³

⁶⁰ Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 94–95.

⁶¹ Turner, 177–81.

⁶² Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 38–42.

⁶³ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 39.

As I look forward to reading as ritual, it is worth emphasizing at this point that, for Turner, the experience of *communitas* and a sacred center while in the limen reorients us to *communitas* values and reaffirms universal humankindness, which Turner explains using Martin Buber's notion of *I* and *Thou*. This in turn ought to have an impact on social structure, which I reduce on a more individual level to moral behavior. I also pay attention to the dynamism that Turner suggests about ritual so that we might repeat the same ritual but return with a different sense of *communitas* values, which in-turn impacts later iterations of that ritual. This implies that if I am going to understand reading as ritual, it is going to require a level of repetitive reading to make room for that dynamism, and the opening of new possibilities in those repetitions. This recalls Henry Jenkins' notions about the ways fans encounter media at the end of Chapter Two and Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic circle, an element I see reaffirmed in the historical development of reading in relation to the ritual of the liturgy.⁶⁴

The Critics

Victor Turner's emphasis on a *universal* tripart structure is at the heart of many of the critiques leveled against him, which I should be aware of if I am to rely on his structure. An especially important critique for my purposes is that from Caroline Walker Bynum, who argues that Turner's structure has some validity, but it is not universal.⁶⁵ Bynum is specifically critical of how Turner's tripart structure could be applied to the rituals of medieval women. According to Bynum, since Turner's theory is rooted in an idea of social drama, it requires transformation (something affirmed by Ronald Grimes in his own treatment of Turner).⁶⁶ Women's rituals,

⁶⁴ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, 67–69; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 294–95.

⁶⁵ Bynum, "Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality," 105–6.

⁶⁶ Bynum, 108; Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage*, 121.

however, are about continuity, not sharing in the role reversal inherent in Turner's structure.⁶⁷

Catherine Bell summarizes the distinction Bynum is making well, noting that "Turner's theory may be truer for those who occupy a certain place in the structure, namely, elites, those who in effect *are* the structure."⁶⁸ Bynum is characteristic of the critiques against Turner, questioning our ability to find a universal structure of ritual (or religion in general) and instead encouraging an examination of distinct rituals at a radically local level.⁶⁹ Part of this is a turn towards the constructed nature of religion and ritual, as opposed to something primordial and universal to all humankind. In some sense, I have shown how Turner navigates more of a middle ground between these positions, affirming something that is constructed but also universal.

While I want to be mindful of Bynum's critique, I still find value in Turner's structural approach as a starting point for comparing hagiography and fantasy literature and the activities that emerge around them. Ronald Grimes, a former student of Turner, perhaps gives me the language and structure to think about Turner's work and his critics. Grimes affirms using Turner's typology (or any other typology, including a radically local approach as Bynum suggests) as a starting point for any investigation into rituals and their use in culture.⁷⁰ In fact, he even suggests that for comparative work (such as I am doing), such taxonomies are incredibly useful, if we are mindful of the ways that they both enhance and obstruct our view of the rituals we are studying.⁷¹ In the instance of Bynum's critique, Turner's framework might be a useful starting point for comparison, even as she is right to alert us to the many ways it falls short. One way we might remain aware of these obstructions, for Grimes, is to invoke not only ritual

⁶⁷ Bynum, "Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality," 108.

⁶⁸ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 56.

⁶⁹ Bell, 58.

⁷⁰ Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, 201–2.

⁷¹ Grimes, 207.

typologies, but also ritual modes. Grimes suggests ritual modes, not as a way of classifying a ritual, but as a way to mine them and explore their depth. In that sense, he treats them as layers that come together in unique ways to help describe the rituals we are encountering. For instance, he suggests the modes of ritualization, ceremony, magic, and liturgy, which all describe different movements within rituals and taken together might help describe a ritual better than a single typology.⁷² In this instance, thinking ahead to the comparison between reading and liturgy that I want to make, reading implies a different mode than liturgy (even as it might include a liturgical layer), so we should think about the meanings that exist behind them differently, something I intend to explore in the remainder of this chapter.

Combining Grimes's notion of modes with the more traditional religious typologies, I want to utilize Turner and his notion of the tripart ritual structure to help illuminate the ways that ritual, reading, and liturgy are related to one another and might offer similar functionalities. At the same time, using Grimes's modes (such as liturgy and ritualization) reminds me that ritual typologies (like Turner's tripart structure) often obstruct important details. As such, even while I use Turner's structure to think about the similarities between reading and liturgy, returning to Grimes's modes keeps me mindful of differences between the two. With Turner's structure in mind then, in the remainder of this chapter I want to explore the historical connections between reading and liturgy, how that creates a mirrored ritual structure that I can utilize, and how they have emerged as different ritual modes that occasionally layer together.

Monastic Reading Practices as Ritual

Reading has long been part of ritual celebrations, especially the Christian liturgy and monastic practices, but today we often consider reading a more private and leisurely activity.

⁷² Grimes, 203–5.

Turning to an abridged history of reading, I mark out that transition and how elements of ritual and Turner's tripart ritual structure continue to hang around reading, even as it looks different than we have historically imagined. First, it is important to note that when Turner himself studied some of these same traditions, he did not believe they produced liminal spaces as I just explored. Instead, since they were voluntary, he classified them as liminoid, sharing an aspect of the liminal but to a different degree.⁷³ Over time, as some of these interventions, such as pilgrimages, became more central to Christianity, they took on a more liminal quality because they started playing a central role in penitential theology.⁷⁴ In this sense, I already see how these might be operating according to a different mode, as Grimes suggests, even as they share Turner's tripart ritual structure.

We might begin this history of reading and ritual with monastic orders and liturgical celebrations where the text was read aloud, moving the minds and feelings of listeners to meditate on the text. The very act of reading aloud in this instance committed the words to muscle memory so that they could be recalled and used consistently for the purpose of meditation.⁷⁵ While in some instances there was space for private, silent reading, the Rule of St. Benedict placed a heavy emphasis on reading during mealtimes, often in a rhythmic chant to commit scripture further to memory among the monks and to make meditation on the life of Jesus a persistent element of the monastic life.⁷⁶ This practice found its way into many of the monastic rules that followed due to the influence of St. Benedict of Nursia on the monastic

⁷³ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*, 231.

⁷⁴ Turner and Turner, 232–33.

⁷⁵ M. B. Parkes, "Reading, Copying, and Interpreting a Text in the Early Middle Ages," in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 92; Jacqueline Hamesse, "The Scholastic Model of Reading," in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 104.

⁷⁶ Steven Roger Fischer, *A History of Reading* (London, GB: Reaktion Books, 2003), 92–94.

orders of Western Europe. This liturgical reading practice follows Turner's structure and a liturgical mode, but the place of reading in the Rule takes on a greater weight when I look at how it shaped the lives of the monks and their meditations.

While looking at monastic rules (and especially the Rule of St. Francis), Giorgio Agamben argues that the rule is a liturgical structure for the common life of the monks so that the rule (including ritual reading) and life come together to make a form-of-life.⁷⁷ Following on this, the rule and all it involves come to shape and be shaped by the common life of the monks to the point where there is a threshold of indistinction between the rule and the monks' actual practice.⁷⁸ In other words, I can say that the common elements of daily life took on ritual and liturgical meanings, entering the space of the limen. This applies not only to the rule, but to the reading invoked by the rule as well, so that the lives of the saints that make up part of the liturgical reading at meals start to become embodied and shaped in the lives of the monks.⁷⁹ To continue with Agamben, this leads to "a total liturgicization of life and a vivification of liturgy" so that the two become one-and-the-same, making possible the total reflection on Christ in every aspect of life.⁸⁰ In a sense, liturgy and life become inseparable from one another, bringing the monk into a liminal space of contemplation, in part, through the act of reading.

⁷⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), xi–xiii.

⁷⁸ Agamben, 60.

⁷⁹ Ingrid Nelson and Shannon Gayk, "Introduction: Genre as Form-of-Life," *Exemplaria* 27, no. 1–2 (2015): 4–5; William Sherman, "A Saint Dismembered," in *Hagiology Seminar: Constructing (and Deconstructing) the Holy* (San Antonio, TX, 2021). Keeping in mind the monks at Lindisfarne who spent some of their meals reflecting on the Norse hero Ingeld, we can also see how it was not just the saints influencing this form-of-life (and perhaps understand more of Alcuin's frustration that the abbot at Lindisfarne was being so loose with the reading). Thomas Shippey, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 180–81. J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary*, Reprint Ed. (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 2015), 328–29.

⁸⁰ Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, 82.

Turner speaks about monastic rules as an attempt to institutionalize the liminal state, separating a group from traditional structure to form a *communitas* value-oriented community.⁸¹ If I take the case of the Franciscans, they put on poverty to separate themselves from societal structures and enter the ambiguous space of the limen, and so return to *communitas* with one another.⁸² While Turner sees a limit to the Rule of St. Francis in maintaining a permanent *communitas*, especially after it is institutionalized by the Catholic Church and takes on a form of legalism (turning anti-structure into structure), I see how the notion of a Rule governing monastic orders fits into Turner's notions of a rite of passage without the moment of reaggregation.⁸³ Agamben's argument that the Rule is more a form-of-life than any legalistic principle, being formed and forming monks through the shared common life also makes the case that there is a stronger continuing liminality to these movements than Turner initially appreciated.⁸⁴ Throughout this process, reading plays an important role in separating the monks from societal structure and establishing the form-of-life in which they might encounter *communitas* as the reading practices create a separation so that the monks enter a threshold of indistinction between rule and life, text and reality.

Returning to how I spoke of separation earlier, it is enacted through the invocation of multisensory symbols that give new meanings to how we encounter the world, which reading also offers us, particularly in the ways the monks used it to construct and live out a form-of-life, as Agamben argues. It is no longer just the monk in the space of reality but involves the monk entering into conversation with a form and the ambiguous space of the limen. This space is a sacred center, returning the monks to the founder of the order who initiated the Rule and

⁸¹ Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 107.

⁸² Turner, 144.

⁸³ Turner, 146–47.

⁸⁴ Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, 45.

returning them to Jesus in the monks' meditation on his life through the readings. Moreover, the rule brings form-of-life to a whole order, in which monks recreate a *communitas* value community, guided by the Rule to remember the generic bond of humankindness.⁸⁵ While this does take on a degree of structure, as Turner suggests, it is consistently re-enacted, creating space for a dynamic transition in how the rule and form are encountered in conversation with texts.

Ritual Reading Practices Outside the Monastery

These same notions do not stay isolated in the monastery, and, with the increase in literacy in the late Middle Ages, reading comes to play an increasingly important role in the spiritual lives of the laity, often drawing on the practices of the monks themselves. In this movement, as with the monastic rule, I see a continued blurring of the bonds between ritual and reading, liturgical mode and ritualization, where one influences the other to create Agamben's threshold of indistinction. As reading became more common, it increasingly became a silent and private activity, with silent reading being emphasized as a valuable spiritual exercise by noted theologians like Hugh of St. Victor in his *Didascalicon*.⁸⁶ The increase in silent and private reading brought several developments in the ways people read, including the rise of Scholasticism and the university where reading was directed towards exploring the nuance of a text in preparation for lectures.⁸⁷ More pertinent to my purposes, however, is how this turn also promoted silent and private reading as a path to divine knowledge and moral fortitude, allowing

⁸⁵ To think about the generic bond of humankindness in monastic communities, compare St. Benedict's directions to abbots with the previous description of *communitas*: "Let him make no distinction of persons in the monastery. Let no one be loved more than another, unless he be found to excel in good works or in obedience. Let no one of noble birth be raised above him who was formerly a slave, unless some other reasonable cause intervenes." *The Rule of St. Benedict*, quoted in Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 108.

⁸⁶ Hamesse, "The Scholastic Model of Reading," 104; Paul Saenger, "Reading in the Later Middle Ages," in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 121–22; Fischer, *A History of Reading*, 162; Hugh of St. Victor, *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1991), 127–28.

⁸⁷ Hamesse, "The Scholastic Model of Reading," 122–24; Saenger, "Reading in the Later Middle Ages," 133.

the laity to pursue an individual and immediate relationship with God.⁸⁸ This draws on the earlier monastic model, which saw reading and specifically group reading as a pathway towards contemplating God and meditating on Jesus' life as a lived form, but it was becoming more accessible to a wider audience.⁸⁹

The debt that reading among the laity owes to monastic practices comes through clearly in the various ritual reading practices (such as *lectio divina* or the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises) that the laity adopted in their own meditations.⁹⁰ In *lectio divina*, one would slowly read the text aloud, meditating on the text and committing it to memory, praying for better understanding, and finally contemplation, in which the mind is lifted up to God.⁹¹ Throughout the practice, the body is heavily involved in a multisensory appreciation of the text so that the reading itself becomes embodied, furthering the memorization and prayerful practice.⁹² In this process, there is an "incorporation of the text into one's self" leading to moral growth.⁹³ In a similar manner, the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises guided devotees in an imaginative reflection on the life of Jesus, bringing the five senses to picture the events of the Gospels before the mind's eye, to stir up deeper affection and, thereby, to contemplate God.⁹⁴ This practice mirrors some of Ignatius' own

⁸⁸ Fischer, *A History of Reading*, 173; Saenger, "Reading in the Later Middle Ages," 137, 147.

⁸⁹ Saenger, "Reading in the Later Middle Ages," 125.

⁹⁰ The institution of *lectio divina* is often traced back to chapter 48 of the Rule of St. Benedict, in which it is noted that throughout the day there is a certain time for the brothers to be in manual labor, and other times to be in sacred reading (*otiositas inimical est animae, et ideo certis temporibus occupari debent fratres in labore manuum, certis iterum horis in lectione divina*.) The Ignatian Spiritual Exercises are a group of exercises devised by Ignatius of Loyola as he recovered from a war injury. He later guided his followers and companions in the practice. St. Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of St. Benedict: The Abingdon Copy*, ed. John Chamberlin (Toronto, CN: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1982), 54; Ignatius of Loyola, *Personal Writings: Reminiscences, Spiritual Diary, Select Letters Including the Text of the Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2004), 281–83.

⁹¹ Laura Sterponi, "Reading and Meditation in the Middle Ages: Lectio Divina and Books of Hours," *Text & Talk* 28, no. 5 (2008): 672–73; Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 408–9.

⁹² Sterponi, "Reading and Meditation in the Middle Ages: Lectio Divina and Books of Hours," 673.

⁹³ Sterponi, 669.

⁹⁴ Ignatius of Loyola, *Personal Writings: Reminiscences, Spiritual Diary, Select Letters Including the Text of the Spiritual Exercises*, 303–8.

conversion, in which he was imaginatively caught up in the lives of St. Francis and St. Dominic, using their lives to propose his own way of living.⁹⁵ Both practices drew readers inward and embodied the text so that the reader might, as Mark Amsler argues, inhabit “a liminal position between the inner and outer words...perceive[ing] the page of a devotional text and then creat[ing] and participat[ing] in an interior experience of pious contemplation.”⁹⁶ This language mirrors how Agamben discussed form-of-life among monks, in which reading offered a pathway to a liminal threshold of indistinction between the text and the life of the reader, allowing the reader to inhabit a space of interiorized reflection, or an Interior Castle, to borrow St. Teresa of Avila’s terminology.⁹⁷ From this emerges moral behavior and a sacred center to contemplate and participate with the divine. Moreover, this continues to follow Turner’s language of a tripart rite of passage, whereby there exists a separation in the way the text removes the reader from our world by creating an Interior Castle between the real world and the world of the text that has a transformative power. As such, I see how the practices of ritual and reading become increasingly blurred so that reading takes on part of Turner’s tripart ritual structure.

The materiality of the text was an important part of this process, opening the reader towards the Interior Castle of Contemplation not only through specific spiritual exercises but also in the mere physicality of the text. It has been often noted that images played an important

⁹⁵ Ignatius of Loyola, 14–15.

⁹⁶ Mark Amsler, “Affective Literacy: Gestures of Reading in the Later Middle Ages,” *Essays in Medieval Studies* 18 (2001): 89.

⁹⁷ I borrow the term “Interior Castle” from St. Teresa of Avila to note the sense that through the practice of reading, someone can draw into themselves and so draw nearer to God. This gives us a better sense of the movement that Turner and van Gennep both imagine as important for a rite of passage, even as it is acknowledged as an inner movement. There is likely some difference in how St. Teresa and I utilize the term since I imagine the castle as existing between the world of the text and the real world, which we perceive internally, whereas she seems more intent on a truly internal turn, exploring the nature of the interior senses in solitude to thereby commune with God through intellectual visions. Benedict Zimmerman, “Introduction,” in *The Interior Castle or The Mansions by Saint Teresa of Jesus*, 2nd Ed. (New York, NY: Benziger Brothers, 1912), xxiii; St. Teresa of Avila, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1976), 355.

role in the reading of the late Middle Ages.⁹⁸ This is especially true turning to the standard religious meditative text of the laity: the Book of Hours. These texts, sometimes the only book a family owned, allowed the laity to participate in the daily round of prayer that the monks exemplified by offering the hours of the monastic Divine Office alongside astounding illustrations related to that specific hour.⁹⁹ This was not just mere decoration, however, but further encouraged the meditative and embodied reading of a text, turning reading into a ritual, devotional practice.¹⁰⁰ The illustrations further commented on the meaning of the text, offering expansive moments of meditation, and prompting a connection between the text and the interior life of the reader.¹⁰¹ For Mark Amsler, it is these illustrations that further dissolve the borders between the text and the reader, and thus further dissolve the barrier between the event and the reader, collapsing time as Eliade suggests of sacred centers.¹⁰² Isidro Rivera notes that the images provide the meaningful “switch points between the physical and spiritual worlds,” or as we might say, the gateways into the Interior Castle.¹⁰³ In one example, Amsler notes that we see evidence of readers having touched the illustrated wounds of Jesus on the page based on its wear and tear, turning the Book of Hours into a sacred object through which they become the disciple Thomas reaching out to touch Jesus’ wound.¹⁰⁴ In other words, through the act of reading and the materiality of the text, the reader can return to the moment of the Resurrection as a sacred center, mediated by the book itself (much like a ritual). As Eliade and Turner argued, the reader collapses the barriers of time to kinetically return to a sacred moment. These moments rely on

⁹⁸ Fischer, *A History of Reading*, 148.

⁹⁹ Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 208–12.

¹⁰⁰ Sterponi, “Reading and Meditation in the Middle Ages: Lectio Divina and Books of Hours,” 674.

¹⁰¹ Sterponi, 682.

¹⁰² Amsler, “Affective Literacy: Gestures of Reading in the Later Middle Ages,” 94.

¹⁰³ Isidro J. Rivera, “Devotional Reading and the Visual Dynamics of La Passion Del Eterno Principe (Burgos, 1493?),” *Hispanic Review* 88, no. 4 (2020): 475.

¹⁰⁴ Amsler, “Affective Literacy: Gestures of Reading in the Later Middle Ages,” 98.

both the materiality of the text and the reading practices suggested in *lectio divina* and the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises that encourage meditation on these moments, and the incorporation of those moments into the life of the reader. Taken together, reading comes to act like an experience similar to the liturgy, a more obviously ritual moment, but on a private and interior level.¹⁰⁵

The examples explored so far show a clear connection between reading and aspects of Turner's tripart ritual structure. This includes the way that reading leads a separation from the real world to open an Interior Castle, in which one can return to and participate in the sacred events described in the text as a contemplation on God, further shaping one's future moral life. Much of this relies on the ritualized reading practices inherited from the monastic orders and the materiality of the text that helps to open a space for imaginative contemplation. I, however, still see the general blurring of reading and ritual so that when I turn to the more leisurely reading that we are familiar with today, I can imagine how it mirrors Turner's structure.

That said, a notable absence in this exploration of reading so far is the place of *communitas*, which appears as a barrier since much of my description of reading has focused on how it turns ritual into a privatized and interior practice—not something immediately carried out within a community. This matches Brian Stock's sense of how literacy and orality interacted in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries as reading became more popular, displacing the role of ritual. Looking at Bernard of Clairvaux, Stock argues that it was the *internalized* text, brought about through the ritual meditation I have been describing, that allows one to truly experience a text and the events depicted, collapsing the barriers of time (and entering a limen), and so apply

¹⁰⁵ Rivera, "Devotional Reading and the Visual Dynamics of La Passion Del Eterno Principe (Burgos, 1493?)," 476.

the text to one's life (reaggregation).¹⁰⁶ Thus, the experience of a text itself becomes a ritual of sorts involving the interpreter and the text itself.¹⁰⁷ Stock, however, also takes me a step further to position reading at this time in the space of textual communities, creating the space to consider *communitas*.

As Stock theorizes the shift from orality to literacy, he claims that literacy does not come to stand by itself but rather interacts with a continuing orality.¹⁰⁸ This is why we continue to see an element of formal ritual remaining in reading, because the reading practices are rooted in an orality that continues to shape the ways we encounter texts. This continuing orality also shapes Stock's notions of textual communities. Stock claims that a textual community is a group based around a literate inner group who interprets a text and gives common meaning to it for a group of less literate followers.¹⁰⁹ The text then comes to define the movements of the group, shaping them into a whole as the text is internalized and transformed into something akin to Agamben's form-of-life.¹¹⁰ In this sense, a community is formed by its interaction around a text, and that community goes on to shape personal and communal thought and behavior.¹¹¹ While I might question the degree to which this becomes a form of *communitas* by appealing to a generic human bond, it is useful to remember that Turner saw a degree of *communitas* in the common aim of those on a pilgrimage journey, mirroring the ways that Stock speaks about textual communities. In any sense, it is the affirmation of a community based on the encounter with a

¹⁰⁶ Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 452.

¹⁰⁷ Stock, 416.

¹⁰⁸ Stock, 3.

¹⁰⁹ Stock, 238.

¹¹⁰ Stock, 91.

¹¹¹ Margriet Hoogvliet, "'Pour Faire Laies Personnes Entendre Les Hystoires Des Escriptures Anciennes': Theoretical Approaches to a Social History of Religious Reading in the French Vernaculars during the Late Middle Ages," in *Cultures of Religious Reading in the Late Middle Ages: Instructing the Soul, Feeding the Spirit, and Awakening the Passion*, ed. Sabrina Corbellini (Brepols, 2013), 264–65, 267.

text that opens a liminal space in which readers can encounter a sacred center and so contemplate God. Moreover, this community forms outside the bonds of typical societal structure since, as Benedict Anderson suggests of the nation-state, many members of the community may never meet and are only held together by their imagined relationship through the text.¹¹² As such, in its initial stages, the textual community forms along pathways of anti-structure until it becomes established or institutionalized.

The materiality of the text also plays a role in the formation of these textual communities, just as it created space for the construction of an Interior Castle. As I already noted, many of these private and internal reading practices were carried out in solitude, with some theologians even stressing the importance of separation during reading to place one's eyes fully before Jesus.¹¹³ Yet, the material text served as a reminder that this work was still carried out in the space of community. Jessica Brantley offers a powerful example looking at the Carthusian Order, a group of monks that lived in solitary communities by spending most of their time in their own cells but coming together on rare occasions in a chapter house for a communal liturgical celebration.¹¹⁴ In a Fifteenth Century Carthusian manuscript that Brantley examines, it merges private reading practices with public liturgical performances by including illustrations of the communal liturgical celebration in the private text. Brantley argues that "devotional readers brought the idea of public recitals into the surprising private space of vernacular manuscripts, not as an atavistic remnant, but as a vibrant means of making spiritual meaning."¹¹⁵ This relied on a mixing of pictorial and textual media, such as appeals to images of Jesus, monks moving through

¹¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised (London, GB: Verso, 2016), 6.

¹¹³ Saenger, "Reading in the Later Middle Ages," 148.

¹¹⁴ Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2007), 12; Kevin Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 152–54.

¹¹⁵ Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England*, 2.

spiritual practices, and pieces of liturgy alongside a private devotional text, all of which brought the performative aspect of the spoken liturgy into the private reading space.¹¹⁶ The materiality of the text, thereby, brought the communal aspect of the Carthusian textual community into the monks' private reading practices. In this context, Brantley argues that books provided a "lived textual community" where even in solitary reading, the books were associated with liturgical practices.¹¹⁷

Leisure Reading as Ritual

Up to this point, I have been primarily focusing on intentional reading practices that have drawn on monastic reading rituals, and so clearly align with some aspect of Turner's tripart ritual framework. Reading today, however, is much more leisurely and does not always rely on such intentional practices (although it can).¹¹⁸ As such, I want to ask how reading can move from the intentional use of something like a Book of Hours with clear ritual undertones to a form of leisurely reading while still moving readers through Turner's structure. Establishing such a lineage then becomes valuable for making a comparison between how readers have encountered the saints (which might draw on more intentional practices) and how readers have encountered fantasy figures (both in intentional practices and as leisure reading). In this space, I can then imagine the functionality of fantasy as a second hagiography.

¹¹⁶ Brantley, 6.

¹¹⁷ Brantley, 12.

¹¹⁸ This section focuses primarily on how leisure reading incorporates elements of Turner's tripart framework by the mere fact of being reading. At the same time, it is worth noting that there are groups applying the same spiritual practices I just explored (*lectio divina*, the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, and others) to books that are more associated with leisure. Perhaps the most notable is the podcast group *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text*, that seeks to use these ritual reading practices to treat the *Harry Potter* series as sacred and find spiritual value in the text. Ritual is at the core of their practice, and so it is easy to see how it continues to draw on aspects of Turner's framework, even though *Harry Potter* is different from the Books of Hours we would more immediately associate with these practices. Vanessa Zoltan and Casper ter Kuile, "Commitment: The Boy Who Lived (Book 1, Chapter 1)," *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text*, accessed July 9, 2021, <https://www.harrypottersacredtext.com/series-1-sorcerers-stone>; Casper ter Kuile, *The Power of Ritual: Turning Everyday Activities into Soulful Practices* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2020), 40, 45, 52, 59; Cara Curtis and Vanessa Zoltan, "Practicing Re-Imagination: An Interview with Vanessa Zoltan of Harry Potter and the Sacred Text," *Practical Matters Journal*, no. 12 (2019): 114, 118.

A useful starting point is to recall Ronald Grimes's sense that there exist different ritual modes, even if they follow a similar typology. So far, the reading practices I have examined maintained a strong liturgical mode about them, even the lay reading of the Book of Hours.¹¹⁹ Moving into the space of leisure reading, however, I am clearly shifting ritual modes to something no longer defined by the formal liturgy. Instead, it is more accurate to say that leisure reading comes closer to what Grimes calls the ritual mode of ritualization, characterized by bodily and internal reflection as we embody habits and ordinary activities.¹²⁰ Ritualization, then, is much less formal than our more traditional and established "rites" (using Grimes terms as a distinction), but it does take on a ritual aspect, incorporating elements of Turner's structural typology.¹²¹ In fact, for Grimes, the way we ritualize ordinary activities becomes a useful ground upon which to build more formal rites.¹²² In this instance, I suggest that the reverse is true as well so that activities that were once formal rites and highly ritualized can take on a more ordinary, leisurely nature while still retaining an element of the ritual typology.

While he does not use terms of "ritual mode" or "ritualization," Turner does affirm space for applying his typology to less formal structures when he appeals to the idea of the liminoid (rather than liminal).¹²³ This language suggests something similar to Grimes's own statements, that I can affirm the tripart typology to an activity that is not a firmly established ritual, still finding room for recreating sacred centers and realizing *communitas*. Moreover, Turner applies this theory to the realm of play and leisure when he explores theatre in relation to his earlier theories of social drama. For Turner, the distinction between the liminal and the liminoid is the

¹¹⁹ Grimes defines the liturgical mode as having religious layers and motivated by a reverent attitude, which fits many of these ritual reading practices. Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, 204.

¹²⁰ Grimes, 204.

¹²¹ Grimes, 193; Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage*, 28.

¹²² Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage*, 28.

¹²³ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, 32.

degree to which it contains both play and earnest behavior or work. In pre-modern cultures, work and play are hard to distinguish from one another, and so liminal spaces are characterized by both elements of play and earnest action.¹²⁴ The liminoid, by way of comparison, is rooted solely in ideas of play (albeit serious play) and leisure, or rather, the spaces in which we find a freedom in modern society from the obligation and societal structures of work.¹²⁵ In the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, as Max Weber's Protestant Ethic takes over, work and play become isolated from one another.¹²⁶ In this framework, following the moral life and exploring salvation becomes the work of existence, with play and leisure the enemy of that all-important task.¹²⁷ Due to this shift, the place of play and leisure takes on a characteristic of anti-structure in which we have the freedom to encounter identity and form a sense of *communitas* that is now missing in other spheres of life.¹²⁸ Following Turner, then, leisurely reading becomes a prime space to experience the movement of a ritual process and return to some of the same elements that he saw in pilgrimages.

It should be noted that Turner argues that these liminoid structures are more individual in nature, and so perhaps *communitas* is not the best model to understand the confrontation with identity and sacred centers that occurs in the space of leisure, instead turning to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's notions of Flow.¹²⁹ At the same time, I have already explored the ways that leisurely reading can remain rooted in community (and so produce *communitas*) through textual communities and even in the materiality of the text (something I will explore in more depth for

¹²⁴ Turner, 34–35.

¹²⁵ Turner, 37.

¹²⁶ Turner, 38.

¹²⁷ Turner, 38–39.

¹²⁸ Turner, 46.

¹²⁹ Turner, 52, 58.

fantasy and hagiography in Chapter Six).¹³⁰ Moreover, I would like to suggest that Turner has reduced the liminal to pre-Industrial cultures and the liminoid to Industrial and post-Industrial cultures.¹³¹ Much as we have complicated “progressive narratives” in other fields (such as complicating the orality to literate to print progression or the religion to secularization model) by recognizing the ways culture moves in many directions, there is a greater deal of what Turner terms “pre-Industrial” and “pre-Modern” prevalent in the so-call post-Modern West today, as will become evident in my exploration of fantasy as a second hagiography.¹³²

Turning to the way leisure books are written and organized, I see some of the ways that the act of reading and the text inherently begin a movement of separation and take us into a liminoid space, as I have already explored in other forms of reading. Heather Blatt uses the framework of participation (which Chapter Two presented in relation to Henry Jenkins) to explore how books in late Medieval England began incorporating elements that separated readers from the known world and into the space of the text, regardless of any ritual reading practices.¹³³ In the framework of participation, Blatt shows how authors use devices to guide reader choices in the manuscript itself, allowing the readers to make meaning out of the work.¹³⁴ While some of these practices, such as inviting reader emendation, explicitly brought readers into the realm of the text, others, over time, became an inherent part of the textual technology.¹³⁵ In the example

¹³⁰ Religion and Literature scholar Robert Detweiler thought about the question of leisurely reading and play and the intersection of the private and communal life. I will return more to his thoughts about this process in Chapter Six to think about how it influences our understanding of fantasy literature as a second hagiography. Detweiler, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction*.

¹³¹ Throughout the remainder of the dissertation, I use “limen” for its ease of use, but in its use I want to imply a spectrum of liminality (both liminal, liminoid, and anything between) to say that the liminal is not reserved for the pre-Modern or the liminoid for the Modern. Instead, I imagine that anywhere at any time, there can be expressions of liminality across the spectrum, independent of time or place.

¹³² Robert Fraser, *Book History through Postcolonial Eyes: Rewriting the Script* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 12.

¹³³ Heather Blatt, *Participatory Reading in Late-Medieval England* (Manchester, GB: Manchester University Press, 2018), 1–3.

¹³⁴ Blatt, 3, 10.

¹³⁵ Blatt, 12.

of reader emendation, the author invites the reader to make corrections in the marginalia, thereby building a dynamic space for moral exploration between author, text, and reader.¹³⁶ This is true not only of sacred texts, but vernacular texts such as *The Canterbury Tales*.¹³⁷ This action not only separates the readers from their own world, asking them to become more involved in the space of the text, but also continues to put them in a textual community that edits the text together, and, through the process, arrives at an increased moral fortitude.¹³⁸ As such, I continue to see how leisurely reading of vernacular, non-sacred texts still maintains elements of Turner's tripart ritual typology, even if it lacks the formalization of the liturgy and moves closer to Grimes's ritual mode of ritualization. This is also true of practices like non-linear reading and repetitive reading, which were central to the use of the Book of Hours but also part of how Lydgate presented the connection between *The Siege of Thebes* and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*.¹³⁹ It is in this non-linear and repetitive mode that readers take control of the experience of reading, further participating with the text, and making connections to their own life. These are explicit moments when the author has invited the reader to control their experience of the text and, therefore, deepening their path into the Interior Castle of Contemplation.

Beyond these explicit practices, however, Blatt also notes there are implicit elements in the text that call for participation. The movement of time in the text is one example of this implicit aspect of participation. Using chapter headings, and even elements like prophecy, the author manipulates the passage of time in the book in comparison to time in our own world.¹⁴⁰ In working out these "temporal puzzles," readers become contextualized by the passage of literary

¹³⁶ Blatt, 32–34.

¹³⁷ Blatt, 37.

¹³⁸ Blatt, 40–42.

¹³⁹ Blatt, 64, 70–71, 80–81.

¹⁴⁰ Blatt, 170, 182–83, 185.

time and enter the space of the book.¹⁴¹ Furthering the connections to ritual and especially ritual separation, Blatt notes that through the mode of participatory reading, the practice of leisurely reading becomes an embodied experience, demanding the body move through the text and move through the Interior Castle of Contemplation, harkening back to Turner's sense that the movement of separation is a physical movement.¹⁴² In this instance, the physical movement happens to be internalized, but it still involves a pull on the body and the sense that we are moving through physical spaces within our consciousness. Given this emphasis on materiality and embodied experience, even the act of holding a book begins a movement of separation in which we come closer to the Interior Castle of Contemplation.¹⁴³

For Eliade, leisure stories also have a role in creating sacred centers for Modernity. He notes that it is through reading that modern humanity can "escape from time" and enter into new rhythms, much as myth lets people "emerge from time" and return to origins.¹⁴⁴ Elsewhere, Eliade notes that every literary piece is the creation of its own universe, much as mythology repeats the creation of our own universe, returning us to sacred centers.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, just as mythology reveals the nature of primordial creation, so literature can reveal long forgotten

¹⁴¹ Blatt, 177.

¹⁴² Blatt, 110, 142.

¹⁴³ One might imagine that holding a book does not have the same power to separate us from the world today as these scholars argue for Books of Hours, yet there is a degree of repetition and intentionality behind the way we continue to hold books today. One way to illuminate this point is to pay attention to the moments where we are suddenly made aware of the materiality of texts today. One such moment comes at the end of Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, in which the book directs the reader to "Look where your hands are. Now." making us aware of the act of holding the book and the way the medium has impacted our encounter with the novel. The invocation to look where your hands are emphasizes that in the act of reading, even today, there is a moment of situating the text before your eyes to encounter this other world. I even recall St. Augustine's account in which he heard a boy chanting *tolle lege*, reminding him of St. Antony's early conversion and shaping his own. Even in this iconic moment, the act of reading begins with lifting a text before one's eyes and being aware of where your hands are. Toni Morrison, *Jazz: A Novel* (New York, NY: Vintage International, 2004), 229; Carolyn M. Jones Medine, "Jazz: The Narrator" (University of Georgia, Fall 2019); St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, trans. E. B. Pusey (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1951), VIII.8[19].

¹⁴⁴ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, 205.

¹⁴⁵ Mircea Eliade, "Literary Imagination and Religious Structure," in *Waiting For The Dawn: Mircea Eliade in Perspective*, ed. David Carrasco and Jane Marie Law (Avalon Publishing, 1985), 22.

meanings in creation—the central aspects of who we are as human—and so present universal human values (we might even say *communitas* values) to the sophisticated reader.¹⁴⁶ The distinction of *escape* from time and *emerge* from time between modern literature and ancient myth that Eliade makes seems to follow some of Turner’s distinctions between the liminal and the liminoid or Grimes’s distinctions between rite and ritualization. Since reading for modern humanity is not as intentionally religious and ritualistic, all three want to avoid pushing it into the same category as myth and ritual, while still acknowledging that they function in a similar way. This follows some of my own thinking about fantasy literature as a second hagiography. It recognizes that in fantasy we are not repeating hagiography and producing the same literary genre but that the two can function in a similar manner and so, while not recreating our first naïveté, might lead us forward from where we are now.

Moreover, this happens in the space of the literary text itself, separate from any specific ritual practice as I argued with monastic reading practices and lay Books of Hours. For instance, if I take the example of plot in a novel, it helps make sense of our actions by offering a conclusion to narrative, dispelling the meaninglessness felt by living in the “middest” of time.¹⁴⁷ This follows Eliade’s argument that returning to sacred centers provides an orientation by placing life into cyclic time and offering meaning in participating with the gods and heroes of old.¹⁴⁸ As Mark Ledbetter notes, “plot is ritual and repetitive and allows for a moment of return to a time that is stable and meaningful and that sets one free from the chaos and the meaninglessness of the present.”¹⁴⁹ This becomes especially true of narratives in series, where

¹⁴⁶ Eliade, 23.

¹⁴⁷ Mark Ledbetter, *Virtuous Intentions: The Religious Dimension of Narrative* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 7.

¹⁴⁸ Wesley Kort, *Narrative Elements and Religious Meaning* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975), 65; Ledbetter, *Virtuous Intentions: The Religious Dimension of Narrative*, 14.

¹⁴⁹ Ledbetter, *Virtuous Intentions: The Religious Dimension of Narrative*, 14.

the plot further places us into cyclic time by letting readers repeat a school year or reencounter the hero journey with the same figures. Likewise, returning to Heather Blatt and ritual reading practices, the rereading of a text also plays a role in the repetitive nature of plot and how it mirrors Turner's tripart ritual typology. As such, something as basic to narrative as the notion of plot begins to guide our experience of a sacred center in which we might orient life and return to a sense of *communitas* in the textual community.

Turner sees leisure as the place in which modern humanity finds the liminoid to return to a place of *communitas*. Moreover, turning to Eliade or Ledbetter on literature and eternal time or Blatt on text technologies, literature and reading increasingly become a prime example of leisure as taking part in the liminoid. The act of reading opens up an Interior Castle, in which readers may separate themselves from their own worlds and move through the interior spaces of contemplation. Not only is this a fundamental part of the meditative practices of monastic orders and the laity to experience God and build moral fortitude, but I find the same aspects inherently rooted in the act of reading. While we may not picture reading as occurring in public communities today, often being cordoned off to private studies and rooms, I still see the influence of textual communities that come together through similar interpretations of a text to further shape their moral life, in a move that at its core returns the community to the generic human bond and *communitas* values. This is not to say that reading and the formal rites of the liturgy are the same thing or have the same force to shape our lives, but they do move according to a similar typology with similar functions.

As I seek to argue that fantasy literature functions as a second hagiography in the spaces it opens for readers to experience God, form communities, and shape our moral lives, this similar functionality becomes a firm theoretical foundation to expand those connections. Moreover, the

language of a second hagiography suggests that reading should not be the same as the formal liturgy because we are not attempting a return to a first hagiography or a first naïveté, but instead to form a second hagiography that can meet the specific demands of a different world. With those connections in mind, the remaining chapters will focus on the three parts of Turner's framework to better understand not only how reading mirrors these ritual functions, but also how fantasy literature and hagiography specifically intersect with reading and ritual.

Chapter Four

Separation: Writing and Performing Texts

As noted in Chapter Three, Victor Turner's ritual structure begins with a movement towards separation, wherein the initiates experience a variety of multivocal symbols that signal that they are entering into sacred space and time and that they ought to be aware of the larger truths being revealed in these moments. Going back to the question of functionality, I argue that the movement of separation is what allows rituals to have any function because it prepares the initiates to pay attention to what happens around them while they are in sacred space and time. Borrowing from Catherine Bell's description of performance theories of ritual, the movement of separation acts as a frame by which initiates understand the coming events to refer to a different reality with reference to "larger truths under the guise of make-believe situations."¹

Being what I could call literatures of the impossible—in that they depict events that by the standards of the Primary World should not happen or should not exist—fantasy literature and hagiography must both make a similar movement of separation. In this instance, the text alerts readers that they are about to occupy a space that moves according to a different rhythm than the Primary World—as Turner said about the space ritual opens for us—and allows readers to move according to that different rhythm, at least while they are in the realm of the text.² In other

¹ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 160.

² I imagine the connection between sacred time and different rhythms by turning to how both C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien narrate the creation accounts of their worlds. For both, Creation begins in song and movement. Thus, Narnia begins with Aslan in song that brings to life the stars, who join their voices in the creation of this world. Likewise, Middle-earth begins when Ilúvatar invites the Ainur to adorn a theme he has presented with their voices. This Music then becomes World forming in the Void, and every element the Ainur added to the theme becomes a movement in the history of Middle-earth, with Melkor often signaling the change of an age in the dissonance he presents. In that sense, not only does Creation begin in song, but the history of the world itself is song, waiting for its inhabitants to recognize it. C. S. Lewis emphasizes this aspect in *Perelandra*, in which the history of the universe

words, the text must make specific moves to make readers aware that there is a different rhythm available through these figures (saint and fantasy character) and help us to believe it is “true” in order to separate us from our world. In accepting that we are entering that different, sacred rhythm for a short period of time, readers gain access to the functions of fantasy and hagiography, going back to what Bell referred to as larger truths. It is important to recognize here that although we are working towards the functionality of these texts in paying attention to the movement of separation, I am reminded that we cannot separate that function from their form or content.

By speaking of the ways that the ritual movement of separation allows readers to move according to the different rhythm of the text, I come back to Tolkien’s sense of Secondary Belief, which was first introduced in Chapter Two. At the point, I defined Secondary Belief as the moments where readers enter into the space of the Secondary World of the story and believe it, while they exist in that space. This was predicated on a sense of enchantment and desire, in which the movement of the story and the Secondary World captures readers in its completeness and inherent consistency so that they feel as if they are actually there. If I draw on the language presented in Chapter Three about reading as ritual, the feeling of Secondary Belief is what draws readers into an Interior Castle of Contemplation, letting them occupy a liminal space between the real world and the world of the text. It was the movement into an Interior Castle that let readers come to a place of contemplation, exploring the functionality of ritual. Likewise, it is being caught in Secondary Belief that allows fantasy literature to enact a relationship with wonder and desire or that allows hagiography to enact a relationship with saintly presence. As I will explore

is presented as a Great Dance, moving according to the will of Maleldil. C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Magician’s Nephew* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1983), 115–20; Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 3–6; C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2003), 185–88.

in later chapters, it is from this space of relationship in both instances that readers recreate sacred centers to shape personal and communal identity, just as Turner presented as the work of the limen. Before exploring that greater functionality, however, it is worth asking how fantasy literature and hagiography approach the movement of ritual separation as they both face the challenge of mediating the impossible.

It is important to highlight at this moment that there is a clear distinction in how readers approach hagiography and how they approach fantasy literature, which has an impact on how I understand the movement towards separation. When readers approach something like fantasy literature, there is an expectation that what they are about to read is not historical.³ As I noted earlier, Tolkien himself never admitted dragons to be of the same order as a horse (i. e. existing in this Primary World) and it might be properly argued that getting people to believe that dragons are *historically* real is not the purpose of fantasy.⁴ For Tolkien, fantasy does not display the supernatural for the sake of showing us the supernatural, but to probe questions about desire and wonder and their implications for our humanity. The question of a dragon's historicity pays too much attention to the question of belief, not desire. On the other hand, when one sets out to read hagiography, there is a greater expectation that the events recounted refer to historical moments in our Primary World, and that the fact of their historicity presents the active movement of God

³ I am using the term "historical" here to differentiate the expectations of fantasy and hagiography as opposed to a term like "real" because I believe it captures better what sets the two apart in the mind of readers and writers. For Tolkien, Middle-earth and dragons are real in the ways that they have the power to move us and in the ways that they touch on something at the deepest part of us—namely desire and wonder. In the same way, hagiography and the saints appeal to what is real for their readers, making present religious truths and persons. The difference is that while hagiography appeals to the history of our Primary World, most fantasy does not (and even those fantasy stories that do appeal to the Primary World, often do not imagine readers accepting it as historical). Moreover, the distinction of "history" seems to fit how C. S. Lewis distinguishes his work and other mythologies from the Gospels in his essay "Myth Became Fact," even as he is affirming the real qualities of myth and his fantasy. Because of this, in the terms of at least one fantasy scholar, this notion of history probably comes close to capturing the divide between fantasy and hagiography. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact," 66–67.

⁴ Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 63.

in human affairs. In that sense, the believed historicity of hagiography, even among the “constructed” saints, is an important part of how readers encounter those stories in ways that differ from how readers encounter fantasy literature. With that said, both fantasy literature and hagiography are encouraging readers to recognize and engage with a different rhythm for the world, touching on the *real*, if not the *historical*. For fantasy, it is that readers can believe in the Secondary World of the text while they are in it so that they might perceive a greater truth about the Primary World. For hagiography, it is that readers will recognize that, in the saint, the interplay between heaven and earth is possible, and that the reader might have access to it.⁵ In that sense, what both genres allow is an encounter with a different, sacred rhythm for the world, despite how we believe the world to naturally exist. To do this, the movement of separation must make the familiar unfamiliar, so that we might recognize that there is a sacred rhythm underlying the things we might normally take for granted.

I think about the way that hagiography and fantasy literature enact this movement of separation from two directions. First, I approach the movement of separation from the lens of the text itself, exploring what narrative devices the hagiographer and author use to introduce saints and fantasy heroes and the worlds they inhabit. In this instance, the text invites the reader into its space and into its rhythm so that we might recognize the reality behind it. From a second direction, however, I also see the ways in which readers pull the world of the text further into their own spaces by performing aspects of the text in unique celebrations, further blurring the line between text and reality. In both, I am interested in how the readers’ encounter with the text

⁵ Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), xiii. In this point of “accessibility,” we see the importance of the historicity of the saint since it is the fact that the saint exists in our time that makes them so important.

makes them aware of and accept a different rhythm in the world, thereby, entering the liminal space of the Interior Castle in which the various functions of hagiography and fantasy begin.

Writing Texts Using Narrative Devices⁶

I find there to be two methods for thinking about the ways that authors write a text and how they use different narrative devices in order to make us aware of the different sacred rhythm either the saint or the fantasy hero represents. On the one hand, authors need to destabilize our sense of the Primary World, alerting us to the fact that there is a deeper reality of which we might not always be aware. To do this, an author might utilize narrative devices such as multivocal symbols (as Turner suggests of ritual separation), character clairvoyance, and a turn to literary time. On the other hand, however, once the author has destabilized the Primary World, they need to restabilize a reader's sense that the new reality they are presenting (the Secondary World) has its own inner consistency so that it might enchant the reader and pull them into the Interior Castle. This often draws on narrative devices such as thick description, traditionalisms

⁶ While writing this section, I appeal to hagiography from across time periods (although mostly pre-1000 CE), geographical region (with some emphasis on Italy, Britain, France, and North Africa), and utilizing both prose and poetry in order to point to "universal tropes" about how hagiography is written in order to make a comparison with how fantasy literature is written. In some regards, this is an unconventional approach to hagiography scholarship, which has traditionally emphasized regional and chronological differences and stressed the importance of understanding the lives of the saints in specific local historical and geographic contexts. For those studies, which tend to be historical and philological, these differences are indeed important. As I am more interested in how people have generally encountered the saints, I believe there is value in focusing on what elements remain universal and shifting between regions and across time to notice specific literary tropes that remain consistent for hagiography. Indeed, such a universal approach benefits from moving between time and region. (For another example of this type of scholarship, see Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 9–14.) To that end, I have chosen the examples for this text either because they come from a preeminent piece of hagiography that has influenced many others (such as Athanasius' *Life of St. Antony* or Prudentius' *Peristephanon Liber*) or because they are an excellent example of the specific trope that I want to emphasize (such as when I draw upon Bede's *Life of St. Cuthbert*), regardless of chronological and regional jumps. I still want to acknowledge the importance of contextual information, and so include details in the footnotes, but it is not the center of my argument. Likewise, I offer a few brief examples of each trope, acknowledging that I must show the ways in which it appears in both hagiography and fantasy literature. As such, the footnotes also mark other places where the trope might appear. This list is not exhaustive but rather serves to further illuminate the ways these tropes can be universal. Since all my fantasy examples come from the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries, in either America or Great Britain, making such broad and universal statements is less problematic.

and intertextuality, and direct audience address. This section aims to provide several examples of these various narrative devices, arguing for how they affect this movement of separation by destabilizing our sense of the world and its profane rhythms while also empowering a new vision of the world that moves according to a sacred rhythm.

Destabilizing the Primary World

In the outline of Victor Turner's notion of ritual separation, I noted that separation is affected by multivocal symbols. In his case, symbols would start representing multiple things, often from different logical orders, but remain present in the same ritual field.⁷ In this manner, the symbols start to destabilize our sense of profane reality since they make us aware of the fact that there can be different meanings of the world around us, meanings connected to a sacred rhythm. Hagiography and fantasy employ this same effect within the space of the story to present figures and objects in a new light so that they might indicate the sacred rhythm the text is opening for its readers.

One such multivocal symbol within patristic Christianity, which became a common referent for the martyrs of the first few centuries CE and the later saints and the clergy, is the phrase "Soldiers of Christ" or "Soldier of God" (Latin: *milita*, Greek: *στρατιώτης*). Drawn from 2 Timothy 2:3–4, the phrase became a means of representing the new type of soldier that Christianity was to represent.⁸ I see a striking example of this type of language and its utility as a

⁷ Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 52, 42–43.

⁸ I. S. Robinson, "Gregory VII and the Soldiers OF Christ," *History* 58, no. 193 (1973): 177; Roland Potter, "St. Ignatius Loyola, Soldier of Christ," *Life of the Spirit (1946-1964)* 12, no. 136 (1957): 174. See also, Huw Grange, "Preacher, Dragon-Slayer, Soldier, Elephant: George the Miles Christi in Two Late Medieval French Versions of the George and the Dragon Story," *Reading Medieval Studies* 37 (2011): 15–25; Joyce Hill, "The Soldier of Christ in Old English Prose and Poetry," *Leeds Studies in English* 12 (1981): 57–80; Brian Brennan, "The Revival of the Cult of Martin of Tours in the Third Republic," *Church History* 66, no. 3 (1997): 489–501, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3169453>.

multivocal symbol in Sulpicius Severus' *The Life of St. Martin*.⁹ I read in Severus' account that Martin's early life is characterized by (reluctant) military service to the Roman emperor, an institution with which many readers of Severus' life would have been familiar in experience or in legend. Once Emperor Julian calls Martin up for military service in Gaul, however, Martin declines further service, including the associated bonus in pay, stating that: "Thus far, I have fought [*militavi*] for you. Now, allow me to be a soldier for God [*militem deo*] ... I am a soldier of Christ: it is not permitted to me to fight [*pugnare*]." ¹⁰ In this statement from St. Martin, I see a clear contrast between what it means to be a Soldier of Christ and what it means to be a Soldier of the Emperor or a Soldier of Rome. There is such a breakdown in the symbology behind the word *milita* here that it is not even permitted for a Soldier of Christ to fight—the main activity with which one would likely associate a soldier. The utilization of the phrase "Soldier of Christ" then becomes a multivocal symbol that begins to destabilize the sense of the profane world around us as we begin to read *The Life of St. Martin*. This is especially true in this context where there is a clear contrast between the two types of soldiers (profane and sacred) and where military service is held in certain esteem and even presented as required for St. Martin. As readers, we get the sense that there could be a different, sacred rhythm underlying the way that Martin is understanding what it means to be *milita* and how that is going to be represented in his

⁹ Sulpicius Severus' *Life of St. Martin* was written in 396 CE, in response to letters shared with Paulinus of Nola, and went on to become a major influence and model for later hagiographic writings. In addition to this work, Severus wrote a *Chronicle* summarizing the Hebrew Bible and early Christian history along with his *Dialogues* (c. 405 CE), also about St. Martin. He founded a monastery in Gaul after his wife passed and his turn to asceticism. F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd Edition Revised (Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1567. For more on Sulpicius Severus and his hagiography of St. Martin, see Clare Stancliffe, *St. Martin and His Hagiographer: History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus*, Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford, GB: Clarendon Press, 1983).

¹⁰ Sulpicius Severus, *Life of St. Martin* IV. 2–3. My translation. Latin: "*hactenus, inquit ad Caesarem, militavi tibi: patere ut nunc militem deo...Christi ego miles sum: pugnare mihi not licet.*" Sulpicius Severus, *Sulpicius Severus' Vita Martini*, ed. Philip Burton (Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press, 2017).

life.¹¹ It suggests that there is an incomplete picture to how we have perceived reality, which St. Martin is able to fill.

I see a similar dynamic around the language of “athlete” as it is applied to the early Christian martyrs, reflecting the influence of another letter connected to Paul in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 9:24–27). In the context of the arena, where many martyrdom accounts are set, the language of “athlete” enters into the space of the multivocal symbol where it means not only the one who competes for entertainment in the Roman, profane mindset but also how Christians take on that name and imagine it in a way that defies expectations, turning the power of the spectacle towards God and their virtuous courage, particularly in their willingness to die.¹² I see one example of this multivocality in Eusebius of Caesarea’s description of the martyrdom of Blandina, amongst a group of other martyrs during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, in Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*.¹³ In this context, Eusebius writes of Blandina that during her martyrdom “she looked to be hanging in the shape of a cross and was creating great eagerness in the

¹¹ For more examples of “Soldier of Christ” being used as a multivocal symbol, see Jerome’s *Life of Hilarion* 3, Prudentius’ *Peristephanon Liber I*. 31–39, Adomnán’s *Life of St. Columba* Second Preface, Luis Gonçalves da Câmara’s *Reminiscences of St. Ignatius of Loyola* I. 1, or “St. George” in Jacobus de Voragine’s *The Golden Legend*. St. Jerome, *Jérôme: Trois Vies de Moines (Paul, Malchus, Hilarion)*, ed. Edgardo M. Morales, trans. Pierre Leclerc, Sources Chrétiennes 508 (Paris, FR: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2007); Adomnán, *Adomnán’s Life of Columba*, ed. Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson (Oxford, GB: Clarendon Press, 1991); Ignatius of Loyola, *Personal Writings: Reminiscences, Spiritual Diary, Select Letters Including the Text of the Spiritual Exercises*; Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1969).

¹² Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 120–22; Cobb, *Dying to Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, 57. For more on this, see the remainder of Castelli’s chapter, “Martyrdom and the Spectacle of Suffering,” Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 104–33. Also see, Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*, 34–53; Cobb, *Dying to Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, 33–59.

¹³ Eusebius of Caesarea wrote his *Ecclesiastical History* in the early Fourth Century, recounting the events of the Early Church in a series of ten books, including a period of martyrdom. This text went on to define the genre of “Church History,” inspiring works such as Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. His work emerged in the scholarly tradition of Origen and Pamphilus of Alexandria and includes other forms of hagiography and historicizing, including a hagiographic *Life of Constantine* at the request of the emperor. While sometimes criticized for the ways that his work interprets events, it does provide rich historical detail. Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 577–78. For more on Eusebius and his *EH*, see Robert M. Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian* (Oxford, GB: Clarendon Press, 1980); Anthony Grafton and Megan Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book: Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

contenders [ἀγωνιζόμενοι] watching on the contest [ἀγῶνι] through her mighty prayers.”¹⁴

While this example does not specifically utilize the Latin *athleta* or its Greek equivalent *ἀθλητής*, it continues to draw on gaming and athletic language (like *ἀγωνιζόμενος*) to make a comparison between what Blandina is doing in the arena (sacred rhythm) and what gladiators and others do in the arena (profane rhythm). The multivocality of the moment comes through in the ways that Blandina subverts the expectations of her suffering, not scaring her fellow *ἀγωνιζόμενος* into repenting, but offering them further encouragement and increasing virtuous courage by taking on the image of Christ.¹⁵ In this light, the image of “athlete” in the profane perception becomes unstable, along with the world around it, so that we might imagine a different level of reality behind it.

I continue to see this same type of multivocality around a number of different symbols, both in terms of roles that the saints play (such as soldier or athlete) and more elemental symbols that the saints encounter (such as water¹⁶, death¹⁷, and blood¹⁸). For my purposes, it is worth

¹⁴ Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Ecclesiastical History* V. 1. 41. My translation. Greek: “ἡ καὶ διὰ τοῦ βλέπεσθαι σταυροῦ σχήματι κρεμαμένη διὰ τῆς εὐτόνου προσευχῆς πολλὴν προθυμίαν τοῖς ἀγωνιζομένοις ἐνεποίει, βλέπόντων αὐτῶν ἐν τῷ ἀγῶνι καὶ τοῖς ἔξωθεν ὀφθαλμοῖς διὰ τῆς ἀδελφῆς τὸν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἐσταυρωμένον...” Eusebius of Caesarea, *Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Kirsopp Lake, vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957).

¹⁵ For more examples of the language of athlete or runner, see Bede’s *Life of St. Cuthbert* 8, Henry of Avranches’s *Life of St. Thomas Beckett* lines 202–203, or Gerontius’ *Life of St. Melania the Younger* 26. Bertram Colgrave, ed., *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede’s Prose Life* (Cambridge, GB: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Henry of Avranches, *Saints’ Lives of Henry of Avranches*, ed. David Townsend, vol. 2, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* 31 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Gerontius, *Gérontius: La Vie Latine de Sainte Mélanie*, ed. Patrick Laurence, *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* 41 (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2002).

¹⁶ See *The Voyage of St. Brendan* chs. 1, 28 or Prudentius’ *Peristephanon Liber X*. 726–730. Carl Selmer, ed., *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis: From Early Latin Manuscripts* (Dublin, IR: Four Courts Press, 1989); Prudentius, *Prudentius*, ed. H. J. Thomson, vol. 2, Loeb Classical Library 398 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953).

¹⁷ See *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* 20, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* 25, or Prudentius’ *Peristephanon Liber I*. 24–27. Herbert Musurillo, ed., *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford, GB: Clarendon Press, 1972); Maximilian Bonnet and Richard Adelbert Lipsius, eds., “De Actis Pauli et Theclae,” in *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Leipzig, DE: H. Mendelssohn, 1891), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/005783603>; Prudentius, *Prudentius*.

¹⁸ See *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* 18 or Prudentius’ *Peristephanon Liber V*. 117–132, X. 556–570. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*; Prudentius, *Prudentius*.

illuminating another example around the language of “fire,” another common symbol that takes on multivocal meanings around the saints. One such example comes from the early martyrdom account, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*.¹⁹ In this account, the proconsul overseeing Polycarp’s trial threatens him with fire if he does not repent of Christianity and swear by the Fortune of Caesar, but in response Polycarp plays on the multivocal nature of fire within Christianity to destabilize the reader’s sense of the profane world. He states that “you threaten with fire that burns for an hour and goes out after a little bit; for you do not know about the fire of the future judgement and perpetual retribution that is preserved for the ungodly.”²⁰ His statement emphasizes the double nature of fire (and by extension the world), arguing that he has nothing to fear from this profane fire in comparison to the more spiritual, sacred fire of Godly judgment that the proconsul presumably faces. Turning to the Greek, the multivocal quality of fire in this scene becomes more obvious since Polycarp’s sentence both begins and ends with *πῦρ*, the Greek for “fire.” As such, the statement and the poetic structure of the Greek itself attest to the quality that there is a hidden depth to the world, an underlying rhythm that not everyone perceives, but of which Polycarp becomes an expression.²¹ Polycarp’s use of the word in this moment raises questions in the minds of his listeners (especially those on the outside looking in) about the nature of these

¹⁹ *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* is an early text dictated by Marcion to the scribe Evaristus, written from Smyrna in response to a request from the Church at Philomelium that recounts Polycarp’s trial and martyrdom after returning to the city during a pagan festival. The text, likely written in the late Second Century following Polycarp’s death in c. 155–180 CE, becomes an early and influential example of the *passion* genre. Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1314–15. For more on *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, see Paul Hartog, ed., *Polycarp’s Epistle to the Philippians and the Martyrdom of Polycarp: Introduction, Text, and Commentary*, Oxford Apostolic Fathers (Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press, 2013); Sara Parvis, “The Martyrdom of Polycarp,” *The Expository Times* 118, no. 3 (December 1, 2006): 105–12, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524606072683>.

²⁰ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 11. My translation. Greek: “πῦρ ἀπειλεῖς τὸ πρὸς ὥραν καίόμενον καὶ μετ’ ὀλίγον σβεννύμενον, ἀγνοεῖς γὰρ τὸ τῆς μελλούσης κρίσεως καὶ αἰώνιου κολάσεως τοῖς ἀσεβέσι τηρούμενον πῦρ.” Bart D. Ehrman, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library 24 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

²¹ For another example of multivocal fires, see Bede’s *Life of St. Cuthbert* 14, in which we see another sense of fire’s multivocal nature since fire can also stand for the “fires of the flesh” which the saint must control to avoid the fires of the wicked one. Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede’s Prose Life*.

different fires, destabilizing the sense of how the world operates and encouraging us to see our perception as incomplete.

I see a similar phenomenon in the fantasy tradition, especially those fantasy stories that are set, at least in part, in the Primary World around us. I find that some of the best examples of this element in fantasy are the moments when authors bridge the worlds of the profane and the fantastic, often using the most mundane and most familiar objects or locations as portals into the fantastic. In those ways, the familiar object or location (like school in *Harry Potter*, *The Magicians*, and *The Earthsea Cycle* or summer camp in *Percy Jackson*, etc.) carries with it all of our profane associations. When it, however, becomes a site of the fantastic, that familiarity becomes alienated, further displacing our sense of the world around us. As such, those sites become greater breaks, causing a separation from the Primary (profane) World. Two powerful examples of this motif are the wardrobe C. S. Lewis utilizes in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and J. K. Rowling's use of King's Cross Station in *Harry Potter*.²²

When Lewis first describes Lucy's entrance into Narnia, he begins with the Pevensie children looking around the spare rooms of a country manor at which they are staying, and the one room that contains nothing "except for one big wardrobe; the sort that has a looking-glass in the door."²³ The wardrobe is presented as if it has been forgotten, and when Lucy opens the door, two moth-balls drop out—the epitome of the mundane. In fact, it is so mundane and familiar that during the children's adventures exploring the house, only Lucy lingers to look inside. Yet, it

²² Marius Conkan talks about the portals (like the wardrobe or King's Cross Station) of what Farah Mendlesohn calls "Portal-Quest Fantasies" in a similar way, noting that they are the site whereby the fantastic becomes possible and consistent with the regular world, making the familiar unfamiliar and the unfamiliar familiar in the ways they juxtapose multiple meanings. Marius Conkan, "On the Nature of Portals in Fantasy Literature," *Caietele Echinox* 26 (June 2014): 105–13; Marius Conkan, "Betraying Reality: Defamiliarization's Effect on Fantasy Worlds," *Caietele Echinox* 31 (December 2016): 1–8.

²³ C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1978), 4–5.

begins to take on sacred meanings as Lucy works her way through the forgotten fur coats and emerges into the world of Narnia with snow beneath her feet. In the magic of this moment, the familiar wardrobe suddenly takes on a multivocal meaning and becomes unfamiliar. Like the fire that both burns for an hour and for eternity, the wardrobe both holds clothes and becomes a gateway into another world. The question becomes what else might open a door into Narnia so that the perception of the profane world becomes incomplete without acknowledging the possibility of such doors. This symbol becomes so potent that the wardrobe becomes equated with Narnia itself.²⁴ For instance, the wardrobe is one of the first images in the trailer for the 2005 Disney movie adaptation of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, standing at the gateway of entering the magical world through film.²⁵ At the same time, the wardrobe remains multivocal: both a doorway into Narnia and a wardrobe. It is easy to miss in this moment, but the wardrobe is still being used to hold coats. Moreover, when the other children go to check the wardrobe (Peter even rapping the back with his knuckles to ensure its solidity) it fails to reveal its secrets.²⁶ In this alienation around something like a wardrobe, as readers, our sense of the world becomes destabilized and there is a possibility that there exists a deeper reality than the one with which we are familiar, perhaps waiting behind the next door we open.

J. K. Rowling follows a similar pattern in *The Sorcerer's Stone*, in which she utilizes the common image of King's Cross Station and the familiar task of a train trip to bring Harry into the Wizarding World. Rowling emphasizes the mundane nature of the train (particularly in England) when the Dursleys express their shock that Harry is traveling to a wizarding school on

²⁴ There was once a drawer in the Religion Graduate Student offices at the University of Georgia that would not open, and someone had taped on the side a sign stating "Narnia not inside" giving the hint that there is an allure of the locked door or the locked drawer that behind it might lie wonderful worlds unexplored.

²⁵ *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe Trailer*, Trailer (Walt Disney Pictures), accessed February 6, 2022, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0363771/?ref_=vp_back.

²⁶ Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 22–23.

something as familiar as a train. Yet, this moment is immediately followed with a shift towards the unfamiliar when Harry tells them that his train leaves from Platform Nine and Three-Quarters, which the Dursleys immediately insist does not exist.²⁷ The profane nature of the train station continues to push itself to the foreground when Harry actually arrives at King's Cross. In that moment, he is almost overwhelmed by how natural it is, fearing that he might miss his train. He is offered a way out of the familiar in the course of the single word "Muggle" that Mrs. Weasley mentions to her children as she passes Harry.²⁸ In the strangeness of that word the fantastic opens up in the middle of the familiar train station. The ultimate moment of destabilization, however, comes as one by one, the Weasleys and Harry rush through the barrier that opens out onto Platform Nine and Three-Quarters, something Harry must take at a run in order to overwhelm his body's familiarity with the mundane rules of physics.²⁹ In bursting through the barrier and onto the platform, something as stable as a wall has become destabilized and the portal to a new world, inviting the reader to ask what deeper realities lie behind something as natural as a train station. In other words, we are challenged to ask what sacred rhythms might exist beyond our sight in a world that is suddenly much larger.

As if to emphasize that the most mundane and familiar objects can become pathways into these Secondary Worlds, and perhaps more importantly into a sacred rhythm, both Lewis and Rowling return to the imagery of the wardrobe door and King's Cross in their depictions of the afterlife. When Narnia is coming to an end in *The Last Battle*, it is through a stable door (not unlike a wardrobe) that the beings of Narnia emerge into "the real Narnia."³⁰ Likewise, after Harry's (temporary) death in *The Deathly Hallows*, he awakes in an area that, to him, resembles

²⁷ J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (New York, NY: Scholastic Inc., 1998), 89.

²⁸ Rowling, 90–91.

²⁹ Rowling, 92–94.

³⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Last Battle* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1984), 159–60, 170, 195.

King's Cross Station, the same site where he first caught *The Hogwarts Express* as an eleven-year-old.³¹ Dumbledore even plays on the characteristic of the train station to note how Harry might proceed, if he would return to life or take a train onward, just like his train to Hogwarts.³² In both examples, the familiar is not only a passageway into the magical worlds of Narnia and Hogwarts, but it is also the symbol of sacred space and time into an afterlife. Thus, I read Lucy's first encounter with the wardrobe or Harry's first trip to King's Cross as not just entering the magical world, but as encountering the truly sacred on earth. Just as the saints make the image of the soldier or the athlete into sacred symbols, fantasy turns the train or the wardrobe into sites of the sacred. Moreover, as readers we come to experience that element as well, finding the sacred in the familiar, and destabilizing our sense of what is and what can be sacred.

This is the same movement expressed in the hagiographic language of a "Soldier of Christ," "athlete," or "fire" where each represents the power of heaven on earth, moving according to a different order and rhythm, but to which we still have access. As such, they play a role in enacting the separation from the regular world by alerting us to these different rhythms—rhythms that recognize the different meanings of "soldier" or "fire" and that find the fantastic and the sacred in the ordinary wardrobe or train station.

Just as there exist multivocal symbols, the characters of fantasy or the saints possess a unique clairvoyance to see through those symbols and into the sacred rhythms of the world that are hidden from the rest of us. In other words, they are the ritual guides who can see through to the multivocal nature of the world, much as when Polycarp recognizes the different types of fire or when Harry eventually passes through the wall in King's Cross. I see that in both hagiography and fantasy these people are usually those who live in a liminal relationship to society, having

³¹ Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 712.

³² Rowling, 722.

been marginalized in some way so that they can see the aspect of the world that the majority of people miss.³³ In other words, it is the liminal person who recognizes the sacred rhythms of the world and whose perspective can destabilize the profane rhythms. The fact that only some people possess this unique clairvoyance further destabilizes our sense of the world around us, opening a hesitation in belief (to follow Todorov's definition of the *fantastique*) because they raise a question about what else exists in the world that we miss. It is a question of the *real* and where we can encounter it so that we are prepared to accept the saints as a site of the real or the completeness of the Secondary World in which we encounter the real.

In hagiography, the saints' ability to see through to the other world, both to converse with the angels or to stump the tricks of the devil, plays a common theme to set up the saint as someone who sees the sacred rhythms. For instance, in Adomnán's account of the *Life of Columba*, I see a few instances in which the saint has a conversation with an angel or the Holy

³³ In hagiographic scholarship, Peter Brown notes that the arrival of a saint relic must be attested to if it is to be accepted by the community, proving that it is indeed a relic of a saint and carries that power. Specifically, he says that it is the possessed that provide this drama, wherein the liminal figure of the demoniac can recognize the liminal figure of the saint, thereby also shifting the social ties that construct the community. Brian Attebery makes a similar note about what he calls "Indigenous Fantasy," those fantasy stories that are set in our Primary World like *Percy Jackson*, *Harry Potter*, or, to a degree, *His Dark Materials*. According to Attebery, to make this otherwise unimaginable reality imaginable—to break the stability of our world and form a gap where a new world might form—it requires a marginal figure. This is someone who comes close enough to the shared reality of the world, while also existing on the outside of community and, therefore, open to the impossible and the miraculous. Tolkien offers perhaps one explanation for this in his essay, "On Fairy-Stories," when he argues that one of the tasks of fantasy is to break the world of its feeling of triteness by reminding us that we do not own it. Since the majority of people can move through the world in that relationship of "what does this world offer to me," we become entrapped in that triteness of possessiveness. Marginalized and liminal perspectives, however, do not always exist in that same relationship with the world. Instead, there are often barriers to their full participation where they need to find new ways to move through what, to someone else, is a natural space. As such, they are open to a new perspective on the world. Sylvia Wynter (drawing on Asmarom Legesse) raises a similar notion in relation to how she thinks of Black Studies and the university, noting that for the most part we get trapped in our categories and episteme, but it is the liminal groups that break those categories from the outside, having experienced the inherent ways the system does not work for them. In other words, the liminal categories of being in the world experience a reality that is outside normative categories, and their very presence calls into question any frame of reference. A gap, thereby, opens in the world in which we might imagine something new. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, 237–39; Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 137; Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 74; Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," 38–39.

Spirit while hidden away in a monastery or upon a cliff.³⁴ Along with this trope, however, is the monk who accidentally spies upon the saint, and inadvertently endangers his life because he risks seeing through to a heavenly reality that he is not prepared to witness. In one such instance, Columba even remarks to the monk, Virgno, that “you were pleasing in the sight of God this last night, by pressing your eyes down to the earth, fearing greatly his brightness with dread. For if you had not done so, your eyes would have been blinded by seeing that inestimable light.”³⁵ Columba, however, appears unaffected by having witnessed the light, as a testament to his ability to move between the worlds. Such an ability destabilizes our sense of profane reality by giving credence to this other rhythm and value system, and the saint as the bridge between the two.³⁶ It suggests that there is more out there. This clairvoyance not only impacts a saint’s ability to speak with the angels, but it increases their authority in other areas of morality and ethics as well,

³⁴ Adomnán was a Irish monk of Iona, an island monastery he pushed to accept the Roman dating of Easter after 688 CE. He wrote the *Life of Columba* c. 688–700 CE, which offers much information about Columba and the Irish monastic life. Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 19. See also Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (New York, NY: Clarendon Press, 1988); D. A. Bullough, “Columba, Adomnan and the Achievement of Iona: Part I,” *The Scottish Historical Review* 43, no. 136 (October 1, 1964): 111–30; D. A. Bullough, “Columba, Adomnan and the Achievement of Iona: Part II,” *The Scottish Historical Review* 44, no. 137 (April 1, 1965): 17–33; J. M. Picard, “The Purpose of Adomnán’s *Vita Columbae*,” *Peritia* 1 (1982): 160–77.

³⁵ Adomnán, *Life of St. Columba* III. 19. My translation. Latin: “*hac praeterita nocte in conspectu dei placuisti, oculos ad terram depremendo claritatis timore perterritus eius. Nam si non ita fecisses, illa inestimabili obcaecarentur tui luce visa oculi.*” Adomnán, *Adomnán’s Life of Columba*.

³⁶ For other examples where the saint sees through to converse with God and the angels or other spiritual truths, see *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 22; Athanasius’ *Life of St. Antony* 1, 60; Gregory the Great’s *Life of St. Benedict* I. 6, XVI. 3–7, XXXIV. 1, XXXV. 3–5; Adomnán’s *Life of Columba* I. 1, I. 8, I. 44, III. 2, III.6–7, III. 16, III. 20–21, III. 23; Bede’s *Life of Cuthbert* 1, 4, 6, 7, 10, 34; Rhigyfarch’s *Life of St. David* 14, 59; Sulpicius Severus’ *Life of St. Martin* II. 2, VII. 1, VII. 7, IX. 4, XIV. 7; Prudentius’ *Peristephanon Liber* II. 385–92, VI. 127–29; *Martyrdom of Polycarp* II. 3. Bonnet and Lipsius, “De Actis Pauli et Theclae”; P. H. E. Bertrand and Lois Gandt, eds., *Vitae Antonii Versiones Latinae: Vita Beati Antonii Abbatii Evagrii Interprete*, Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina 152 (Turnhout, BE: Brepols Publishers, 2018); St. Gregory the Great, *Grégoire Le Grand: Dialogues*, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, trans. Paul Antin, vol. 2, Sources Chrétiennes 260 (Paris, FR: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1979); Adomnán, *Adomnán’s Life of Columba*; Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede’s Prose Life*; Rhigyfarch, *Rhigyfarch’s Life of St. David: The Basic Mid Twelfth-Century Latin Text with Introduction, Critical Apparatus and Translation*, ed. J. W. James (Cardiff, GB: University of Wales Press, 1967); Sulpicius Severus, *Sulpicius Severus’ Vita Martini*; Prudentius, *Prudentius*; Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*.

positioning the saint as a figure of great wisdom and understanding, a mentality that goes on to shape various aspects of the Christian world.³⁷

By way of contrast, the saint also sees through the tricks of the devil, and therefore, affirms the presence of a secondary rhythm underlying our reality, to which they open a door. Gregory the Great offers one example of this type of clairvoyance when he describes St. Benedict's ability to see and dispel phantom flames that threatened to burn down a monastery's kitchen.³⁸ In this account, Gregory tells us that St. Benedict arrives at a monastery to find the monks rushing around to put out a fire, but reflects that "the fire was in the eyes of his brothers, but truly not in his own" and in response "bent his head immediately in prayer, and...recalled the brothers to their eyes so that they might also discern the cooking building standing sound, and so that they were not seeing the flames, which the ancient enemy had contrived."³⁹ Gregory uses a scene like this one to show that Benedict has a unique ability to see through the deceptions of

³⁷ Patricia Cox (Miller) notes some of this in describing the character of holy figures in Greek biography. Kathleen Coyne Kelly, however, alerts me to the wider implications of this characterization of wisdom when she addresses notions of virginity and testing chastity. In her writing, Kelly argues that we ought to understand virginity in the Middle Ages, not as a biological fact, but as something that is constructed in community, evident not through any type of physical inspection, but through a measure of spiritual character. In this dynamic, the community comes to shape the image of spiritual character that comes to stand for virginity, and this is often produced in the images of the saints themselves. As such, the saints become those who see through and can estimate spiritual character and highlight these underlying sacred values that speak to a different rhythm in the world. In other words, the community can test the virginity of any woman in relation to where she stands in relation to the saints and their spiritual character. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man*, 21–23; Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*, 35, 41, 62, 72–75.

³⁸ Gregory the Great lived and wrote between c. 540 and 604 CE and serves as one of the more monastic-leaning popes. He wrote his *Dialogues* c. 593, which include the lives of many Italian saints, but perhaps most notably *The Life of St. Benedict*. His goal was to provide religious exemplars from amongst the recent history and from Italy itself to provide an example for his time. Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 710–11. See also Carole Ellen Straw, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988); R. A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (Cambridge, GB: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Paul Meyvaert, *Benedict, Gregory, Bede and Others* (Variorum reprints, 1977); Joan M. Petersen, *The Dialogues of Gregory the Great in Their Late Antique Cultural Background* (Toronto, CN: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984); Francis Clark, "Saint Benedict's Biography and the Turning Tide of Controversy," *The American Benedictine Review* 53, no. 3 (2002): 305–25.

³⁹ Gregory the Great, *Life of St. Benedict* X. 2. My translation. Latin: "qui eundem ignem in oculis fratrum esse, in suis vero non esse considerans, caput protinus in orationem flexit, et...revocavit fratres ad oculos suos, ut et sanum illud coquina aedificium adsistere cernerent, et flammam, quas antiquus hostis finxerat, non viderent." St. Gregory the Great, *Grégoire Le Grand: Dialogues*.

demons (implying his ability to see the underlying rhythms of the world that many people miss). Moreover, he is also able to share that with others through the power of prayer. In the reaction of the monks, we can see how this is a destabilizing moment—we see them throwing water on a phantom fire to no avail—but the author guides us to interpret Benedict as the cure to this instability. Since Benedict mediates the vision of the sacred world, he encourages a movement of separation when he appears in the narrative.⁴⁰

Fantasy must evoke a similar sense in its readers, especially when the fantasy tale is set in the Primary World, because if it is to provide an “inner consistency of reality” and so elicit Secondary Belief, it needs to account for the fact that most of us have not experienced the fantastic in our world. In other words, it needs to help us imagine that there is more than what we have encountered, just as Columba sees into the spiritual realm of the angels. As such, the fantasy author must offer some explanation for why Harry finds his way to Hogwarts, why Percy can be a demigod, or how a whole country exists for the Shadowhunters of *The Shadowhunter Chronicles* that none of us have ever heard about before. At stake here is the way that the narrative opens a gap between our experience of the world and the narrative, and so destabilizes our conception of the profane world so that the sacred rhythm might be considered as even possible.

Percy Jackson author, Rick Riordan opens this gap using a narrative effect he terms “The Mist,” which can obscure the vision of mortals so that they see the world differently than the

⁴⁰ For other examples of the saints seeing through the tricks of demons or the devil, see Athanasius’ *Life of Antony* 6, 25, 35; Gregory the Great’s *Life of St. Benedict* I. 8, IV. 2, VIII. 12, XXV. 2; Adomnán’s *Life of St. Columba* I. 17; Bede’s *Life of St. Cuthbert* 13; Jerome’s *Life of St. Hilarion* 28, 42; Sulpicius Severus’ *Life of St. Martin* VI. 1–2, XXI. 1, XXII. 1, XXIII. 2–11. Bertrand and Gandt, *Vitae Antonii Versiones Latinae: Vita Beati Antonii Abbatis Evagrio Interprete*; St. Gregory the Great, *Grégoire Le Grand: Dialogues*; Adomnán, *Adomnán’s Life of Columba*; Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede’s Prose Life*; St. Jerome, *Jérôme: Trois Vies de Moines (Paul, Malchus, Hilarion)*; Sulpicius Severus, *Sulpicius Severus’ Vita Martini*.

demigods do.⁴¹ In one instance, Percy is on a bus that is attacked by a group of monsters, whom he fights off using his sword, before the bus is destroyed by one of Zeus' lightning bolts.⁴² The events sound uncertain and unlike something we would expect in our world. To account for this instability, Percy's mentor, Chiron, explains that mortals (meaning us as readers) interpret the events differently, noting that it is "remarkable, really, the lengths to which humans will go to fit things into their version of reality."⁴³ In the example of the attack on the bus, the mortal news reported the event as Percy wielding a blurry metal object, like a baseball bat, and causing the bus to explode.⁴⁴ The Mist explains our inability to see the fantastic. In response, we begin to question where we may have overlooked the fantastic in our own lives in an effort to preserve our version of reality. In effect, the Mist as a narrative device becomes further destabilizing, hinting at the possibility of a deeper, more sacred world if we could set aside our need to preserve reality.

Percy also becomes the one who can move between the worlds and open this sacred rhythm for us as readers, especially as the narrator. His characterization as a "troubled kid" fits Brian Attebery and others' notion that it is often the marginalized protagonists that play a role in destabilizing our sense of the world and opening gaps in our perception of reality. In Percy's case, we even get the explanation that his dyslexia and ADHD are the Primary World's attempt to explain the fact that he is meant for a sacred world of Greek-language and battle-reflexes.⁴⁵ This further contributes to the sense that perhaps the majority of us are just not perceiving the world in the correct way, creating enough of a hesitation in belief that the fantastic becomes

⁴¹ Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (Los Angeles, CA: Disney Hyperion, 2005), 155.

⁴² Riordan, 166–67.

⁴³ Riordan, 155.

⁴⁴ Riordan, 197.

⁴⁵ Riordan, 88.

possible.⁴⁶ As such, Percy becomes like St. Benedict, with the ability to see through and recognize the true nature of the phantom flames, and act accordingly. As the narrator of his tale, he even takes this a step further in mirroring St. Benedict because his recounting of the tale helps dispel the Mist from our own eyes—at least while we are in the realm of the text.⁴⁷

Another common means of depicting the unique clairvoyance of fantasy characters is the use of memory charms/items/runes. These items both hide the magical world from mortals and let the fantastic figure see into that realm. In Cassandra Clare's *The Shadowhunter Chronicles*, she uses such a device to set the Shadow World (including Shadowhunters, vampires, werewolves, faeries, etc.) apart from the mortal world, even though they are moving through the same spaces. In one interaction between the main characters Jace and Clary, Jace (a young, but seasoned Shadowhunter) reveals to Clary, who has grown up mortal, that all Shadowhunters

⁴⁶ Dust in *His Dark Materials* works in a similar manner to the Mist, except rather than hiding the true reality from the vision of mortals, the Dust is the true reality that is only perceived by certain devices and is most often associated with children. It is Dust, in connection with the Alethiometer or Dr. Malone's Cave, that gives Lyra clairvoyant vision about the world. See also the *eldila* of C. S. Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet* who only appear to those they chose. One character, Hyoi, even claims that one could mistake them for a beam of sunlight moving through the leaves, perhaps suggesting that our mind attempts to make sense of them and fit them into our non-fantastic understandings of the world, much as with the Mist. Philip Pullman, *The Golden Compass* (New York, NY: Yearling Books, 2005), 20–23; Philip Pullman, *The Subtle Knife* (New York, NY: Yearling Books, 2005), 90–95; C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2003), 77.

⁴⁷ Fantasy scholar, Farah Mendlesohn, talks about the power of the narrator in fantasy to open us, as readers, to another layer of reality. Specifically, she argues that in fantasy stories that use the club narrative model (portal-quest and intrusion fantasy), the narrative focus is on what the protagonist can *see* with the narrator providing the interpretation and analysis to shut down any sense that the reader can offer their own interpretation. In this example, Percy is both protagonist and narrator, so we encounter what he sees and how he interprets them quickly, before we are presented with an outside perspective (i. e. the news) that Percy must discredit in some sense to show this break in the world. To quote from Mendlesohn about intrusion fantasy, “what one can see and observe, rather than what one actually knows of the world, seems to me to be fundamental to the construction of faith in the fantastic...” Thus, Percy's perception of reality is given more credibility in this instance than what we (as readers) know of the world, as reported by the news, and so the fantastic becomes possible. In this, there is a movement between the perception of the protagonist and how they are presenting their understanding of the world through the text itself to make this fantastic world possible for the reader. For example, Percy is reflecting on what he sees in the attack on the bus, but it is not just his perception, but also how he conveys that to the reader that creates this gap in the space of the world. Elizabeth Castelli makes a similar argument about the self-narrative writing of early martyr stories, like the letters of St. Ignatius or the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*. In her account, it is the private-self making an account of their lives but done so in a way that is aware of audience, thereby creating a public-self that can be a collective site to encounter the divine. Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 5–7, 118; Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 78. See also, Cobb, *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, 40–44.

have a “Voyance rune” on their dominant hand that helps them see through to the magical world that is often hidden by a Glamour.⁴⁸ Since Clary was raised as mortal, she lacks this rune—even as she possesses some natural ability of Sight because she has Shadowhunter parents. In another instance, when a new Shadowhunter, Kit, received the Voyance rune, he was immediately able to see and converse with a ghost that was hidden from the other people in the room.⁴⁹ The rhetorical prospect of a Voyance rune and Glammers that intentionally hide other worlds from the perspective of mortals encourages us to question the true nature of the world.⁵⁰ Moreover, it does so in a way that positions the other (sacred) world as potentially dangerous to mortals, similar to the danger to Virgilio should he have seen the light of the divine with whom St. Columba converses. In that regard, the nature of sight and who possesses full sight can be shifted in such a way as to destabilize our sense of reality and introduce the possibility of a deeper reality in our imagination, even as we remain separated from it. Since it is the saints and the fantasy figures that make us aware of this new reality, they become the mediators between the profane and sacred world, to whom we turn in our texts and celebrations to encounter the divine.

A final destabilizing element that raises the possibility of a deeper, sacred rhythm to the world is the introduction of literary time. Literary time conveys, perhaps in the most literal sense, that profane time is not the only type of time. As Heather Blatt notes, the manipulation of time in texts is one of the most participatory elements of narrative because we all experience the different times of the (profane) world and the (sacred) text. As such, reading is almost always an

⁴⁸ Cassandra Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones* (New York, NY: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2007), 42.

⁴⁹ Cassandra Clare, *The Dark Artifices: Lord of Shadows* (New York, NY: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2017), 326–27.

⁵⁰ For other examples of memory charms/clairvoyance objects, see Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, 68, 93; J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (New York, NY: Scholastic Inc., 2000), 77–78, 166; Grossman, *The Magicians: A Novel*, 39; Lev Grossman, *The Magician’s Land: A Novel* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2014), 215–16.

embodied practice (i.e., it makes us aware of our rootedness in the material body) because there is a separation between how the text proceeds in time and how we move through regular time.⁵¹ This, however, is not only participatory, but also destabilizing because just as we start experiencing the time of the story (entering into the Secondary World), our experience of time in the Primary World becomes alienated. While we could note several ways in which the author and printer manipulates literary time through the text (including, according to Blatt, chapter headings and the act of rereading), it is worth highlighting that both hagiography and fantasy literature use episodic narrative styles mediated by vague chronological transitions.⁵² As a whole, they enact a new form of time that readers occupy in the space of the book and that we can imagine as playing a significant role in bringing readers into a new conception of the world.⁵³

I see an excessive example of this shift into literary time in *The Voyage of St. Brendan*, which is entirely oriented by the liturgical calendar.⁵⁴ In that narrative, Brendan and a host of

⁵¹ Blatt, *Participatory Reading in Late-Medieval England*, 176–77.

⁵² Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man*, 55–56; Patricia Cox Miller, “Strategies of Representation in Collective Biography: Constructing the Subject as Holy,” in *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. Tomas Hägg and Philip Rousseau (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 232–33. See also Claudia Rapp, “Storytelling as Spiritual Communication in Early Greek Hagiography: The Use of Diegesis,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6, no. 3 (1998): 431–48.

⁵³ Benedict Anderson lists the perception of time (and the perception of a shared time) conveyed through newspapers or other books as one of the fundamental building blocks of the imagined community of the nation. In that interpretation, we might think about how different nations (and different imagined communities) have different perceptions of time, which is why England can imagine itself as a different community than America. If readers are caught up into literary time, then it stands to reason that they are also experiencing a different perception of time, and potentially even conflicting perceptions of time, which destabilizes how they imagine their place in the world around them, further opening that gap to imagine a new world with a new time and a new community. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 22–36.

⁵⁴ *The Voyage of St. Brendan* provides an account of St. Brendan’s (484–557/583 CE) supposed voyage through the mythical lands of the Celtic seas. It is an “anonymous Hiberno-Latin work” that might date from the Eighth Century, although there is debate on its dating. It gained popularity in the Tenth Century and was translated into a number of vernacular languages. Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 236. See also Denis O’Donoghue, *Brendaniana: St. Brendan the Voyager in Story and Legend* (Dublin, IR: Browne & Nolan, 1893); George A. Little, *Brendan the Navigator: An Interpretation* (Dublin, IR: M. H. Gill and Son, 1945); Brendan Lehane, *Early Celtic Christianity* (London, GB: Continuum Publishing Company, 2005); Barbara Hillers, “Voyages between Heaven and Hell: Navigating the Early Irish Immram Tales,” *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 13 (1993): 66–81; David Dumville, “Echtrae and Immram: Some Problems of Definition,” *Ériu* 27 (1976): 73–94.

other monks are making an *immram* voyage through the Celtic seas where they encounter a series of islands, including one that houses Judas Iscariot and another that resembles a tower of crystal (most likely an iceberg). A year into this voyage, a talking bird reveals to Brendan and his monks that they will spend the next seven years upon the sea, but they have special spots set aside for the various liturgical holidays (Maundy Thursday with a steward, the Easter vigil on the back of a sea monster, Easter until Pentecost on the island of talking birds, and the Nativity with the monks of St. Ailbe).⁵⁵ The reader experiences the emphasis of liturgical time to an intense degree so that they also join in the time of the tale, gaining a heightened sense of (sacred) literary time.

Other examples from hagiography use short phrases to denote shifts in time within the narrative that shock the reader out of their profane sense of time. For instance, Jerome's *Life of St. Hilarion* uses several phrases such as "from the sixteenth until his twentieth year of his life" or "from the twenty-first year until the twenty-seventh."⁵⁶ Likewise, in Athanasius' *Life of St. Antony*, he notes that "he was passing twenty years alone and being separated from the sight of people."⁵⁷ Often these brief chronological transitions in the narrative are accompanied by very

⁵⁵ *Voyage of St. Brendan* 9, 11, 15. Selmer, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis: From Early Latin Manuscripts*.

⁵⁶ Jerome, *Life of St. Hilarion* 4.1 and 5.1. My translation. Latin: "*a sextodecimo usque ad vicesimum aetatis suae annum*" and "*A vicesimo primo anno usque ad vicesimum sextum*." St. Jerome, *Jérôme: Trois Vies de Moines (Paul, Malchus, Hilarion)*. Jerome lived in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries, spending much of his time in Rome where he served as the secretary to Pope Damasus. He is marked as a major scholar of the early Church, including his contributions to the Latin Vulgate Bible, edits to Eusebius' work, and hagiography. It is likely that Jerome received much of his information about Hilarion through Epiphanius. Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 773, 872. See also E. Coleiro, "St. Jerome's Lives of the Hermits," *Vigiliae Christianae* 11, no. 3 (1957): 161–78, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1582215>; J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1975); Irina Kuzidova-Karadzhinova, "St Jerome's Lives and the Formation of the Hagiographic Canon," *Scripta & E-Scripta*, no. 12 (2013): 201–10.

⁵⁷ Athanasius, *Life of St. Antony* 14. My translation. Latin: "*annis viginti solitarie transactis atque ab hominum segregatus aspectibus*." Bertrand and Gandt, *Vitae Antonii Versiones Latinae: Vita Beati Antonii Abbatis Evagrio Interprete*. Athanasius' *Life of St. Antony* plays a major role in introducing Egyptian monasticism to the Western world and became a defining work in the development of the hagiographic genre. Some debate Athanasius (c. 296–373 CE) authorship of Antony's life (251–356 CE), instead attributing it to his school. Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 81, 121. See also Tim Vivian, Rowan A. Greer, and Rowan Williams, eds., *The Life of Antony* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2003); David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father* (Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press, 2012).

little information, instead focusing the reader's attention on the narrative episodes where the virtue of the saint is on full display. Even the brief information provided in these transitions serves the purpose of highlighting the saint's virtue, such as in the passage following one of the transitions in the *Life of St. Hilarion* above. In that passage, Jerome notes that "for three years, he consumed half a pint of lentils having been moistened with cold water, and the other three years, dry bread with salt and water."⁵⁸ As such, the literary time of the saint's life is unstable, putting the period of several years in a single sentence, which breaks our traditional sense of narrative progression and how we ourselves experience time.⁵⁹

Fantasy repeats this episodic narrative chronology. It might be said that if a fantasy tale mentions an event or episode, it is going to play a major role later in the narrative.⁶⁰ In that regard, the episodic nature of the tale focuses our attention on narrative fragments that coalesce into greater meaning, something we cannot immediately say about the narrative fragments of our own lives. One can think about *The Sorcerer's Stone*, in which even the early classes that Harry takes—such as his charms class on levitating objects—begins to play a role in the narrative itself.⁶¹ To make this possible, it also relies on the vague chronological transitions that I saw in *The Life of St. Hilarion* or *The Life of St. Antony*. For instance, towards the end of Ursula K. Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*, the main hero Ged and his friend Vetch spend a long stretch of time upon the sea, chasing after Ged's shadow. They are said to travel to the very edges of the

⁵⁸ Jerome, *Life of St. Hilarion* 5.1. My translation. Latin: "tribus annis, dimidium lentis sextarium madefactum aqua frigida comedit, et aliis tribus panem aridum cum sale et aqua." St. Jerome, *Jérôme: Trois Vies de Moines* (Paul, Malchus, Hilarion).

⁵⁹ For more examples of these brief chronological transitions, see Athanasius' *Life of St. Antony* 10; Sulpicius Severus' *Life of St. Martin* III. 1, V. 1 V. 3; *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* 4, 6, 7. Bertrand and Gandt, *Vitae Antonii Versiones Latinae: Vita Beati Antonii Abbatis Evagrii Interprete*; Sulpicius Severus, *Sulpicius Severus' Vita Martini*; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*.

⁶⁰ Mendlesohn makes a similar point about the landscape in fantasy, where to mention an object or location in the description means that it is going to play some role in how the story progresses. Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 28, 34.

⁶¹ Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, 171–79.

world, past where anyone else had dared travel before. To give a sense of this, Le Guin must offer a series of these vague chronological transitions to emphasize the distance and time they have spent reaching the furthest stretches of the world when the true narrative episode picks up.⁶² This section is interspersed with dialogue, but the primary element is the sense that Ged and Vetch are traveling a great distance. The vagueness of the chronological information (“in these days and nights of sailing...”), but also the repetition aids the sense that this is a long journey, so long that it cannot be contained in just one transition.⁶³ That repetition further emphasizes the reader’s movement into literary time, destabilizing their sense of the world because up until this moment one chronological transition would suffice to narrate that we are moving to a new episode.⁶⁴

We find a similar episodic approach to the narrative and chronology in Lev Grossman’s *The Magicians*. This series begins with the main character, Quentin, spending five years at a school of magic called Brakebills, before he and his friends graduate and discover a Narnia-esque land, known as Fillory. The first five years of the narrative (when Quentin is at Brakebills), however, occur within the first half of the first book in the trilogy, relying on vague chronological transitions to pass the time and focus on certain episodes. For instance, at the start of one chapter, the narrative notes that “the rest of Quentin’s Third Year at Brakebills went by beneath a gray watercolor wash of quasi-military vigilance,” yet two pages later, suddenly it is

⁶² Ursula K. Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1975), 166–79.

⁶³ Le Guin, 170.

⁶⁴ For more examples of these type of travel sequences, see Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, 196–98, 266–69; Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 390–92; J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 50th Anniversary Edition (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004), 197–215. We might also note that time moves differently in Narnia, so that the passage of many years in Narnia amounts to less than a second in the English manor. Here, the distinction between literary time (the time of Narnia) and the time of the Primary World (in the English manor) is on full display, and the first encounters with that difference in time has a destabilizing effect on Peter and Susan. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 49–50, 196–97.

August, and everyone is returning to the school.⁶⁵ At the time Grossman published *The Magicians*, series like *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* were still very popular following a trope that each book equaled a single year of school. As such, this becomes a moment where Grossman can draw on the accepted forms of the genre to enact a further destabilization of literary time—not only from the time of the Primary World but also the time of the traditional fantasy novel. Each book in his series is not a single year of school, but instead, five years of schooling occur in the space of half a book. Such a turn further disturbs the reader’s sense of the profane world around them and opens the possibility for a new chronology and sacred time to guide our experience of the text.⁶⁶

The narrative devices explored so far (multivocal symbols, character clairvoyance, and literary time) work to make the familiar world of the reader unfamiliar again. They create a pause in how we approach the world around us so that we can begin asking whether these fantasy texts and their Secondary Worlds or the saints and their miracles might indeed be possible against all expectations. It creates a pause to ask if our conception of the world is

⁶⁵ Grossman, *The Magicians: A Novel*, 117, 119. For other such transitions, see Grossman, 76, 90, 134, 151, 194, 213, 221.

⁶⁶ We can see a special awareness of literary time and how it intersects with real time in *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* and *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. In one scene from *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the scribe notes that “these things happened with a great swiftness, swifter than it was described” (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* XIII. 1. My translation.). In this description, we have a clear sense that there is a break between literary time and regular time, and a break that is so significant that the scribe is not even able to write out the events fast enough. When Dumbledore is killed in *Half-Blood Prince*, we get a similar disjuncture between describing the events in the narrative and their actual happening. In that scene, we read “Snape raised his wand and pointed it directly at Dumbledore. ‘Avada Kedavra!’ A jet of green light shot from the end of Snape’s wand and hit Dumbledore squarely in the chest. Harry’s scream of horror never left him; silent and unmoving, he was forced to watch as Dumbledore was blasted into the air. For a split second, he seemed to hang suspended beneath the shining skull, and then he fell slowly backward, like a great rag doll, over the battlements and out of sight.” This description not only tells us what Harry is feeling in this moment but evokes the same experience in ourselves. For Harry, Dumbledore seems to hang in the air for a moment before falling, while he watches motionless. In the same way, the reader takes several seconds to read this passage, so Dumbledore also momentarily hangs in our consciousness, before he falls away, leaving us in motionless shock. In that sense, we join with Harry in his movement of time, and experience it as one that is both in-line and different from our own. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*; J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (New York, NY: Scholastic Inc., 2005), 595–96. For more on time as a narrative device in fantasy literature, see Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 55–59, 64–65.

complete, or if there is a deeper, sacred reality. That momentary pause of questioning, what Todorov called a hesitation, begins the movement of separation so that we might leave behind the world of familiarity and enter this interstitial space of the Interior Castle where we might contemplate God and our own identities. Moreover, it posits the saint or the fantasy figure/narrator as the mediatory power between those worlds. In other words, it claims that the saint or fantasy figure makes the sacred attainable for the rest of us. They are the ones who are able to see and interpret the different rhythms of life and make us—as readers and followers—aware of those as well.

Stabilizing the Secondary World

At this point, I have focused on narrative devices that destabilize the profane world, without gaining a new sense of the sacred world that we are entering and how it might stand upon its own. To truly establish the Secondary World of fantasy or to make the sacred rhythm of the saint believable, it needs to have an inner consistency of reality and a sense of depth in-and-of-itself so that it might enchant us and present truth. In effect, this is the moment when the bounds of the world of the text and the world of the reader begin to blur, and the Interior Castle opens before us. This involves narrative effects such as thick description, traditionalisms and intertextuality, and direct audience address.

The device of thick description relies on a choice on the part of the author or hagiographer about when to give extensive detail and when to obscure information. Both fantasy and hagiography approach these questions in similar ways, offering deep descriptors of the most realistic elements in the world while obscuring elements of the fantastic and the miraculous so that we might fill those spaces with our own imagination.

A common way to discuss the element of thick description in hagiographic scholarship is by turning to the language of *ekphrasis*. This denotes the idea—especially common in martyr scenes—wherein the hagiographer provides a word-image (perhaps even based on a physical image) that evokes such a thick description of the events that readers or hearers come to experience what is described as it comes vividly before the eyes.⁶⁷ The emphasis, however, is not just on a thick description that makes the event imaginable, but a description that begins to blur the boundaries of text and reader so that it is as if the reader is physically seeing the image described or the events depicted in the image, evoking an emotional and affective response.⁶⁸ In the emphasis on readers experiencing the image so that it begins to blur the bounds of the text, the world of the text becomes stabilized in the ways it begins to connect with the Primary World. Going back to the image of the Interior Castle, the blurring of boundaries is what begins to move readers into that interstitial, liminal space.

Lucy Grig and Stephanie Cobb both turn to Prudentius' *Peristephanon Liber* as an example of *ekphrasis*, particularly chapters IX and XI, since both include images that prompt associated descriptions.⁶⁹ Chapter IX of *Peristephanon Liber*, begins with Prudentius attending the tomb of St. Cassian where, while he is praying, he looks up to heaven and sees an image of Cassian [*imago martyris*] during his martyrdom. When he asks about the image, he hears a description of Cassian's martyrdom at the hands of his former students, including this excerpt:

⁶⁷ Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 129–30; Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*, 111–13.

⁶⁸ Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 129–30; Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*, 111–17; Cobb, *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, 8–11; Patricia Cox Miller, "Visceral Seeing: The Holy Body in Late Ancient Christianity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12, no. 4 (2004): 395–98.

⁶⁹ Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*, 113–17; Cobb, *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, 149–51. Prudentius (348–c. 410) was a Latin poet and hymn-writer born in Spain who went on to write several poetic works about Christ, against heresies, and the *Peristephanon Liber* in honor of a variety of Spanish and Italian saints. Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1350–51. See also Anne-Marie Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs* (New York, NY: Clarendon Press, 1989); Michael Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs: The Liber Peristephanon of Prudentius* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

Some throw their fragile tablets in anger and / they shatter, the broken wood fragments
 having struck his face / the wax-covered box-wood breaks, having struck his bloody
 cheeks / and the mutilated and wet page becomes red from the strikes. / The others
 brandish sharp, iron pricks / the end with which they write in the wax by plowing ruts /
 and the end with which the letters are obliterated and the roughness of the surface / is
 returned again as open and shining. / The confessor of Christ is stabbed with the first and
 cut with the other / one part enters the soft organ, the other part divides the skin. / Two
 hundred hands come together to pierce all his limbs / and just as many wounds drip blood
 at the same time.⁷⁰

In this section, there is in-depth detail about the breaking of both the instruments of torture and the body of the saint as he takes on the many wounds that Prudentius first describes in the image of him. As such, the torture takes on a visceral element, with the shock and vividness it entails, so that we might form a literal picture in our mind. As we come to see this moment, the world around Cassian also becomes clearer, taking on a depth as it shares the inner consistency of Cassian's tortured flesh. In other words, it is not just the image that becomes more real in the description, but the world in which the saint moves and enacts their story.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber IX*. 47–58. My translation. Latin: “coniciunt alii fragiles inque ora tabellas / frangunt, relisa fronte lignum dissilit, / buxa crepant cerata genis inpacta cruentis / rubetque ab ictu curta et umens pagina. / inde alii stimulos et acumina ferrea vibrant, / qua parte aratis cera sulcis scribitur, / et qua secti apices abolentur et aequoris hirti / rursus nitescens innovatur area. / hinc foditur Christi confessor et inde secatur; / pars viscus intrat molle, pars scindit cutem. / omnia membra manus pariter fixere ducentae, / totidemque guttae vulnorum stillant simul.” Prudentius, *Prudentius*.

⁷¹ I am noting other examples of thick description in hagiography here, with the caveat that many of these other examples do not include the sense that the hagiographer is describing an image/scene they have witnessed as is the case in the examples of *ekphrasis* that Cobb, Grig, Miller, or Castelli point to. While I do not think that element is necessarily important to recognize how the level of description plays a role in world building, it is important for the specific context of the hagiography itself. Since I am more interested in world building as a form of separation, I think we can speak about this and the imaginative work of description independent of references to images that have been presented as real. For other examples of thick description, see Athanasius' *Life of Antony* 5, 8, 9; *The Voyage of St. Brendan* 22; Adomnán's *Life of St. Columba* II. 27; Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* V. 1; Prudentius' *Peristephanon Liber X*, XI; Evagrius' *Life of Polycarp* II. 2, XV. 1–2. Bertrand and Gandt, *Vitae Antonii Versiones Latinae: Vita Beati Antonii Abbatis Evagrio Interprete*; Selmer, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis: From Early*

Fantasy mirrors this level of thick description, with Farah Mendlesohn noting that the accumulation of detail about the landscape around the hero (even to the degree of what she and Michael Rifaterre call “*diegetic overkill*”) makes the new fantastic world comfortable enough that when we encounter the truly fantastic, we can incorporate it into our sense of the world around us.⁷² In essence, it is in the thickness of the description around the mundane in both hagiography and fantasy that allows the reader to feel as if they are on firm footing when they begin to encounter the more unbelievable elements. In that movement, the world takes on a realness and stability in its own right, in relation to how the description has begun to blur the bounds between text and world.

C. S. Lewis offers an example of this level of description that mirrors the sense of *ekphrasis* in the opening scenes of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. In that scene, Lucy, Edmund, and Eustace arrive in Narnia through a painting of a ship on the sea. Lewis’s description asserts that “the things in the picture were moving. It didn’t look at all like a cinema either; the colors were too real and clean and out-of-doors for that...[and] the wind was blowing out of the picture toward them. And suddenly with the wind came the noises...but it was the smell, the wild, briny smell, which really convinced Lucy that she was not dreaming.”⁷³ Immediately following this moment, the three of them seem to fall into the painting, where they encounter the ship itself.⁷⁴ Lewis’s description embodies the notion of *ekphrasis*, but takes a fantasy spin on it so that not only does the image and its description start to blur the bounds of the worlds, but it actually brings the three children into another world. In this moment, the world

Latin Manuscripts; Adomnán, *Adomnán’s Life of Columba*; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History*; Prudentius, *Prudentius*; Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*.

⁷² Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 7–9.

⁷³ C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1980), 9.

⁷⁴ Lewis, 10–11.

of Narnia does become real for the children, and the readers who follow them through their journey, with thick description mediating that movement.⁷⁵

Yet, in contrast to these sections of thick description, both hagiography and fantasy also obscure certain elements, leaving the reader to fill in the details with their imagination. This movement gives the world a depth in tandem with the thick description, since the mere mention of other information leads us as readers to assume that it has the same thick detail and realness as everything else that we have encountered so far. In the gaps, therefore, we can imagine not only what does exist, but also expand the world ourselves by asking what else lies beyond those descriptions. In some ways, these gaps feed into what Henry Jenkins refers to as an encyclopedic impulse in readers and writers to master a world that always threatens to expand beyond our grasp.⁷⁶ The effect of this imagining is that, with little effort from the hagiographer or author, the lives of the saints and the Secondary Worlds of fantasy take on the fullness and complexity of life (its inner consistency) as we imagine it through our own experiences.

In fantasy literature, I see this tendency to leave gaps that readers can fill when maps are used at the opening of a text. While thinking about *The Lord of the Rings*, Thomas Shippey notes that there is an importance to the names in the story because any name implies that there is an associated physical location that must exist, even if the reader never encounters it.⁷⁷ The map offers a collection of all of these names in one space, including places where the heroes never

⁷⁵ See also, Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 110–13. Likewise, Mark Wolf talks about the descriptions of Treebeard and Sauron's eyes in *The Lord of the Rings* in a similar way, noting that what the description emphasizes is not only the imagery itself but also what emotions it evokes in the other characters (and by extension the reader), sharing in the *ekphrasis* sense that it is a level of description that causes the ideas described in the reader themselves. Mark J. P. Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 250–51.

⁷⁶ Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling 101," Henry Jenkins, March 21, 2007, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html.

⁷⁷ Thomas Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth: How J. R. R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), 101, 74–76, 102–14; J. R. R. Tolkien and Christopher Tolkien, *The Book of Lost Tales: Part One* (London, GB: Harper Collins Publishers, 2015), 2–3.

travel, but their presence on the map and their mention in passing in the narrative gives a solidity and extent to the world of Middle-earth that readers can imagine around the narrative.⁷⁸ The parallel of this effect in hagiography are the short apologies that often occur in the prologue wherein the hagiographer notes (like John 21:25) that they could not contain all the wealth of information about the life of the saint because it was so full. For example, Gerontius introduces the *Life of Melania the Younger* by stating that “Truly, if I wanted to report the whole way of life of this saint, O Venerable One, time would leave me without sufficiency, still narrating.”⁷⁹ This is a narrative gap around the details of Melania’s life that allows the reader to imagine what other miraculous and moral activities she completed over the course of her life based on what Gerontius has chosen to recount. As such, the narrative and the world of the text around Melania start to expand off into eternity, further affirming Melania’s standing as a site into the realm of the sacred, much like the maps of *The Lord of the Rings*.⁸⁰ By mentioning these short details, even as the narrative obscures their depth, the reader can imagine a fuller, more consistent world, and therefore one that is real. Its reality enchants readers and moves us towards the Interior Castle to take part in the religious functionality of the limen.

⁷⁸ Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth: How J. R. R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology*, 103. For more on maps, see also Stefan Ekman, “Entering a Fantasy World through Its Map,” *Extrapolation* 59, no. 1 (2018): 71-87, 122; Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation*, 156–64.

⁷⁹ Gerontius, *Life of Melania the Younger* Prologue. 12–13. My translation. Latin: “Si enim vovero omnem conversationem huius sanctae referre, o venerabilis, deficiet me tempus enarrantem.” Gerontius, *Gérontius: La Vie Latine de Sainte Mélanie*. Gerontius was a monastic companion of Melania the Younger (c. 383–438/9 CE), although there remain questions about his full identity and his connection with Melania. It is suggested that perhaps he wrote her life after the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE. Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1073; Elizabeth A. Clark and Gerontius, *Melania the Younger : From Rome to Jerusalem* (Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press, 2021), 6–7. For more on Melania the Younger and Gerontius, see Gerontius, *Gérontius: La Vie Latine de Sainte Mélanie*; Clark and Gerontius, *Melania the Younger : From Rome to Jerusalem*.

⁸⁰ See also, Adomnán’s *Life of St. Columba* First Preface, I. 17, II. 4; Rhigyfarch’s *Life of St. David* 66; Severus Sulpicius’ *Life of St. Martin* XI. 4; Henry of Avranches’s *Life of St. Thomas Beckett* lines 100–105. Adomnán, *Adomnán’s Life of Columba*; Rhigyfarch, *Rhigyfarch’s Life of St. David: The Basic Mid Twelfth-Century Latin Text with Introduction, Critical Apparatus and Translation*; Sulpicius Severus, *Sulpicius Severus’ Vita Martini*; Henry of Avranches, *Saints’ Lives of Henry of Avranches*.

If thick description and the obscuring of certain elements help to make the fantasy world seem wider or the life of the saint seem more complete, the use of traditionalisms and intertextuality make the fantasy world seem older and the life of the saint part of a broader tradition. In both instances, the narrative gains a greater degree of authority to emphasize that there is a realness to these encounters. In other words, it affirms that there is a realness to the sacred rhythm underlying the world that has something to offer us. Traditionalisms in this context involve the appeal to older, traditional sources of knowledge as a way of historicizing an aspect of the story.⁸¹ In the case of hagiography, this might be an appeal to the ancient tradition of the saints or historical hearsay. For fantasy, it can include the appeal to ancient sources within the world or forms of remediation to historicize elements of the narrative.⁸² By way of contrast, intertextuality involves linking the current narrative with older, more authoritative narratives as a way of utilizing the credibility in those stories to add to the credibility of the current source. Both help to create the slippage between past and present, Secondary World and Primary World, so that readers begin to accept the saints and fantasy figures as sites in which to encounter a new sacred rhythm, thus entering the Interior Castle.

As an example of traditionalism in fantasy literature, I turn to the use of languages and “documentary evidence” in stories like *The Lord of the Rings* or *His Dark Materials*. For instance, in *The Lord of the Rings*, when we first encounter the One Ring, Gandalf places it in Frodo’s fire and the script of Mordor begins to appear on the side. In the book itself, readers can

⁸¹ Catherine Bell talks about ritual’s use of traditionalisms in a similar way, acknowledging how their use can lend an air of legitimacy about a ritual, especially in the use of ancient costume, older social customs, or archaic linguistic forms. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 145.

⁸² For how the use of medievalisms create a slippage between past and present, see Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise of Children’s Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century*, 1–3, 22–24.

see that script on the page, disrupting the more traditional typeface of the story itself.⁸³ This functions as a form of remediation (where one medium is represented in another, with the new medium acknowledging the older one) so that the reader encounters these special scripts in their “original” form, giving the illusion that they come from a real, distant past.⁸⁴ As such, the text takes on a greater authority, letting the reader imagine the depth of the world of Middle-earth as it places these scripts before us.⁸⁵ *His Dark Materials* makes a similar move of remediation in the appendix to *The Golden Compass*, where it presents what it claims are papers from the Library of Jordan College, marked with the Jordan stamp, and preserving the appearance of written script.⁸⁶ The effect lends a similar air of authority to Lord Asriel’s research into Dust in that series, and therefore his ability to find the City in the Sky and open a portal into another world.

Associated with this is the use of older, wiser figures or texts that provide knowledge of the fantasy world to help the protagonist succeed.⁸⁷ The illusion of an older, wiser figure that knows the world well helps to give the reader a sense that the world has existed long enough for such a figure to come about or for texts like those from Asriel to be written. I see something like this in the use of Gandalf and Elrond in *The Lord of the Rings* or in Ged’s research into the Language of the Making (a term that evokes the sense of Creation and Eden) in *A Wizard of Earthsea*.⁸⁸ These little moments imply that there is an ancient history behind the fantasy world and begin to create the illusion of historical depth so that it has an inner consistency of reality.

⁸³ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 50. I see something similar in Appendix E where Tolkien gives us a sense of how the various scripts of Middle-earth work or where we are given an image of the door to Moria and the text on Balin’s tomb. Tolkien, 1117–26, 305, 319.

⁸⁴ Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 45–47.

⁸⁵ See also Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth: How J. R. R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology*, 114–27.

⁸⁶ Pullman, *The Golden Compass*, 401–15.

⁸⁷ Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 13.

⁸⁸ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 89–91; Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, 89–91.

The same techniques are used to put the saints in a long tradition of which they are present-day representatives, highlighting the ways that they provide access to a sacred rhythm.

Hagiography shares the need for traditionalisms, not only to present the text as part of a longer tradition, but also to establish it in a specific spot in historical time. It is this historicizing and traditionalism that marks a continuity between the past and the present Church, further collapsing the distance of time and space between reader and text, bringing the reader into a liminal space for contemplation.⁸⁹ A common way of bringing about this traditionalism or historicizing effect is to mention the names of the emperors or other figures to provide historical context. This method utilizes their names to present the information as something from a storied past that helps to place the reader in the time of the narrative.⁹⁰ An especially good example of this name-dropping comes in Prudentius' *Peristephanon Liber* chapter X where a Roman official is named as Galerius, who "as antiquity reports [*ut refert antiquitas*], / was cruel, savage, harsh, and relentless."⁹¹ In this instance, the reader can both place themselves in a specific time in history (a point under the leadership of Galerius), but in the appeal to "antiquity", it also establishes this story as something more firmly set within the ancient past with associated claims to truth and authority. Likewise, I look at the way that the *Voyage of St. Brendan* introduces the famous monk, claiming that he was the "son of Findlug, grandson of Atla, from the line of Eogenus, descended from the watery region of Munster."⁹² The implication of a "line" from

⁸⁹ Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*, 5.

⁹⁰ Cobb, *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, 36.

⁹¹ Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber* X. 32–33. My translation. Latin: "*Galerius orbis forte Romanae statum / ductor regebat, ut refert antiquitas, / inimitis, atrox, asper, inplacabilis.*" Prudentius, *Prudentius*.

⁹² *Voyage of St. Brendan* 1. My translation. Latin: "*Sanctus Brendanus, filius Finlocha, repotis Althi de genere Eogeni, stagnili regione Mumenensium ortus fuit.*" Selmer, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis: From Early Latin Manuscripts*.

which Brendan is descended also places him within a specific historical moment, with the evidence to back up the claims that the hagiographer is making about his coming voyage.⁹³

In both hagiography and fantasy, the turn to traditionalisms and historicizing becomes a point for the author or hagiographer to claim greater authority over the narrative, increasing the level of belief in the following tale. Since these devices position the story in a historical moment, that history implies an inner consistency and depth to the world, and by extension a reality. In response, the reader becomes enchanted, trusting the saint or the fantasy world to be a site to encounter a sacred rhythm. In that enchantment, the reader is further separated from the profane Primary World and enters the Interior Castle of Contemplation.

Intertextuality follows a similar movement and also works to add a historical realism and fullness behind both the lives of the saints and the fantasy tale, but it does so by linking the current narrative with an older and more authoritative text. Heather Blatt approaches Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* in relation to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* through this perspective, arguing that Lydgate is able to establish himself as Chaucer's heir apparent in the ways that his writing borrows on Chaucer's authority to become established.⁹⁴ Not only does this add to the authority

⁹³ See also Athanasius' *Life of St. Antony* 46, 81; Adomnán's *Life of St. Columba* I. 1, II. 33; Bede's *Life of St. Cuthbert* 27; Rhigyfarch's *Life of St. David* 55; Jerome's *Life of St. Hilarion* 33; Jerome's *Life of St. Marcella* 2, 5, 8, 12; Sulpicius Severus' *Life of St. Martin* II. 7, XX. 2–3; Gerontius' *Life of St. Melania the Younger* 2, 10, 11, 37; Jerome's *Life of Paul of Thebes* 2; *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* 6; Evaristus' *Martyrdom of Polycarp* XXI. 1. Bertrand and Gandt, *Vitae Antonii Versiones Latinae: Vita Beati Antonii Abbatis Evagrii Interprete*; Adomnán, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*; Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life*; Rhigyfarch, *Rhigyfarch's Life of St. David: The Basic Mid Twelfth-Century Latin Text with Introduction, Critical Apparatus and Translation*; St. Jerome, *Jérôme: Trois Vies de Moines (Paul, Malchus, Hilarion)*; Caroline White, ed., *Lives of Early Christian Women* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2010); Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*; Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*.

⁹⁴ Blatt, *Participatory Reading in Late-Medieval England*, 80–81. I see an example of this more explicit intertextuality in the hagiographic tradition of Jerome. When Jerome writes his first hagiographic tales about Paul of Thebes, he makes clear efforts to put it in connection with Athanasius' *Life of St. Antony* to add legitimacy to his story and to posit Paul of Thebes as the original Desert hermit before Antony. I see this perhaps most clearly in the reference to the "cloak" which Athanasius gave to Antony, and which Paul of Thebes requests Antony retrieve in order to bury him in (Jerome, *Paul of Thebes* 12. 2). This allows Jerome to borrow on Athanasius' authority to begin his first work of hagiography, and it is something he repeats with his *Life of St. Hilarion*, although with a bit more tact. St. Jerome, *Jérôme: Trois Vies de Moines (Paul, Malchus, Hilarion)*; Caroline White, ed., *Early Christian Lives* (London, GB: Penguin Books, 1998), 74.

of the new text because it can become part of the same world as the previous text (i. e. *Siege of Thebes* exists in the same timeline as *Canterbury Tales*), but the combination of multiple tales together adds to the historical realness and fullness of the world. It is no longer just a single narrative in the world, but a series of connected narratives. In terms of separation and sacred time, this comes to attest to the continuing presence of the sacred rhythm that people have encountered throughout history.

Among the lives of the saints, the most common form of intertextuality is utilizing the images of the prophets, disciples, or previous saints and their miracles to show the working of the same spirit in a new age. Throughout this, the message becomes that each saint is a representation of the same sacred rhythm which they mediate for the reader.⁹⁵ For instance, in Gregory's *Life of St. Benedict*, there is an explicit moment in which Peter (the disciple with whom Gregory is in dialogue) notes that "in the water being brought out of the rock, I see Moses, in the iron which returned from the depths of the water, truly I see Elisha, with the journey on the water, I see Peter...As I weigh it, this man [Benedict] was filled with the spirit of all just men."⁹⁶ In this regard, we have the clear acknowledgement that there is an intertextuality across Gregory's work with pieces of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. In sharing in those moments, Benedict takes on a greater authority as a representative of the sacred rhythm by historicizing himself in connection with these other great figures.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity*, xvi–xviii.

⁹⁶ Gregory the Great, *Life of St. Benedict* XIII. 8. My translation. Latin: "Petrus. Mira sunt et multum stupenda quae dicis. Nam in aqua ex petra producta Moysen, in ferro vero quod ex profundo aquae rediit Heliseum, in aquae itinere Petrum, in corui oboedientia Heliam, in luctu autem mortis inimici David video. Ut perpendo, vir iste spiritu iustorum omnium plenus fuit." St. Gregory the Great, *Grégoire Le Grand: Dialogues*.

⁹⁷ For similar examples, see *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* 5–6; Athanasius' *Life of St. Antony* 2, 3, 35, 54; *Voyage of St. Brendan* 12; Adomnán's *Life of St. Columba* I. 43, II. 1, II. 10, II. 32; Bede's *Life of St. Cuthbert* 14, 19; Rhigyfarch's *Life of St. David* 33; Jerome's *Life of St. Hilarion* 15; Jerome's *Life of St. Marcella* 2, 5; Severus Sulpicius' *Life of St. Martin* III. 3–4, IX. 5–7, X. 4, XXV. 3; Gerontius' *Life of Melania the Younger* 9; *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* 21; Evaristus' *Martyrdom of Polycarp* VI. 2, VIII. 12, XIX. 1. Bonnet and Lipsius, "De Actis Pauli et Theclae"; Bertrand and Gandt, *Vitae Antonii Versiones Latinae: Vita Beati Antonii Abbatis Evagri*

Fantasy literature makes use of a wide array of intertextuality as well, but perhaps few more so than Cassandra Clare's *The Shadowhunter Chronicles*, which often draw on references to the Hebrew Bible, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, or Poe to fill out the faerie and spiritual world of the Shadowhunters.⁹⁸ In her series, Clare follows the notion that "all the stories are true," so everything that Milton or Dante wrote has some insight into the world that her characters now inhabit.⁹⁹ Thus, the Shadowhunters themselves are the inheritors of the Biblical Nephilim, formed from the blood of angels and humans, much like the Nephilim of Genesis.¹⁰⁰ Presented in that light, the entire world of *The Shadowhunter Chronicles* can insert itself into the same authoritative tradition as the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, the turn to these former stories provides a backdrop to understand the narrative. For instance, Valentine Morgenstern, one of the main villains, imagines himself as Milton's Satan, refusing to serve the governing structure of the Shadowhunters and adopting the slogan "*Non serviam*."¹⁰¹ Placing Valentine in a parallel narrative with Satan adds a complexity to the narrative since Clare is able to draw on centuries of scholarship and thought about Milton's Satan to present Valentine as a potentially tragic character. Even as his character does not develop in the same direction, remaining unpitiable, the parallel in his first introductions does a tremendous work of character development with a single

Interprete; Selmer, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis: From Early Latin Manuscripts*; Adomnán, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*; Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life*; Rhigyfarch, *Rhigyfarch's Life of St. David: The Basic Mid Twelfth-Century Latin Text with Introduction, Critical Apparatus and Translation*; St. Jerome, *Jérôme: Trois Vies de Moines (Paul, Malchus, Hilarion)*; White, *Lives of Early Christian Women*; Sulpicius Severus, *Sulpicius Severus' Vita Martini*; Gerontius, *Gérontius: La Vie Latine de Sainte Mélanie*; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*; Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*.

⁹⁸ For other examples of intertextuality in fantasy, see Percy Jackson's use of Greek Myth, *The Chronicles of Narnia's* use of Jesus, or *His Dark Materials* use of Eve in Genesis. Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, 67–73, 346, 351; Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Titan's Curse* (Los Angeles, CA: Disney Hyperion, 2007), 140–47, 243; Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 161, 168–70; Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 247; Pullman, *The Golden Compass*, 370–73; Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass* (New York, NY: Yearling Books, 2005), 205.

⁹⁹ Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones*, 485.

¹⁰⁰ Clare, 78; Genesis 6:1–4.

¹⁰¹ Cassandra Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Ashes* (New York, NY: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2008), 258; Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones*, 438.

quote.¹⁰² In this way, Valentine takes on a greater realness, along with the world around him by drawing on the narratives and authority with which we are already familiar, just as St. Benedict's character and power become more real in the comparison to figures like Moses or Peter.

Behind the efforts to destabilize our experience of the world—which opens gaps to imagine the sacred rhythms of the limen—and attempts to stabilize the new world and rhythm presented in hagiography and fantasy, stands the narrator or hagiographer. Much of the time, these figures remain invisible to the reader, yet they will occasionally insert their own voices in an attempt to shore up their authority, present information about their sources, and further stabilize the sacred narrative. The presentation of the narrator's voice gives readers a glimpse behind the curtain to encounter someone (theoretically from the profane world) who has insider knowledge about the events they are recounting. As such, it plays a role in blurring the bounds of the two worlds as the narrator in the profane world comes to attest to the presence of the sacred world of the narrative as someone who has occupied both spaces. In effect, the presence of the narrator's voice invites the reader to take part in the text further, in some cases even to challenge the text, blurring the boundaries between writer, reader, and text.¹⁰³

In hagiography, the most common acknowledgement of the hagiographer comes in the preface to a hagiographic text, which often emphasizes the humility of the narrator and sources on the historicity of the saint.¹⁰⁴ Bede is very clear about how he goes about researching the *Life of St. Cuthbert*, noting that before writing anything he had researched everything with great

¹⁰² Clare does something similar to make sense of the love story between two of the main character, Jace Herondale and Clary Morgenstern, by appealing to Dante on love: "My will and my desire were turned by love, the love that moves the sun and the other stars." Cassandra Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Fallen Angels* (New York, NY: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2011), 407–8.

¹⁰³ See Heather Blatt on emendation invitations, Blatt, *Participatory Reading in Late-Medieval England*, 27–34.

¹⁰⁴ Palmer, *Early Medieval Hagiography*, 33; Rapp, "Storytelling as Spiritual Communication in Early Greek Hagiography: The Use of Diegesis," 432; Phillis R. Brown, "Hrotsvit's Apostolic Mission: Prefaces, Dedications, and Other Addresses to Readers," in *A Companion to Hrotsvit of Gandersheim (Fl. 960): Contextual and Interpretive Approaches*, ed. Phillis R. Brown and Stephen L. Wailes (Boston, MA: Brill, 2013), 240–43.

thoroughness, and has even “judged to place their names [his sources] in this book several times for the sake of the fixity of my knowledge of the rich truth.”¹⁰⁵ In this affirmation, the reader is introduced to Bede as the narrator (someone to whom they can affirm an identity), and they gain more knowledge about the sources of this knowledge, further affirming Cuthbert’s historicity and his work in their world.¹⁰⁶

Similar to the preface are moments throughout the narrative in which the narrator or editor insert their voice to affirm what has been recounted or add further information. For instance, we see the editor of *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* breaking in every so often to guide the reader in their understanding of the text, such as when they note that what they just recounted were the first-hand recorded visions of Perpetua and Saturus.¹⁰⁷ In making such an

¹⁰⁵ Bede, *Life of St. Cuthbert* Prologue. My translation. Latin: “quia nec sine certissima exquisitio rerum gestarum aliquid de tanto viro scribere, nec tandem ea quae scripseram sine subtili examinatione testium indubiorum passim transcribenda quibusdam dare praesumpsi, quin potius primo diligenter exordium, progressum, et terminum gloriosissimae conversationis ac vitae illius ab his qui noverant investigans. Quorum etiam nomina in ipso libro aliquotiens ob certum cognitae veritatis inditium apponenda iudicavi, et sic demum ad scedulas manum mittere incipio.” Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede’s Prose Life*. The Venerable Bede (c. 673–735) was one of the most prolific scholars in Medieval England, contributing works on the Bible, on the measuring of time in relation to Easter, hagiography, and, perhaps most famously his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Bede wrote a verse and prose life of Cuthbert, completing the prose life c. 721, which established him as a hagiographer and played a large role in the establishment of Cuthbert’s cult in Europe. Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 178–79, 443–44. For more on Bede’s *Life of St. Cuthbert* and Cuthbert’s cult, see Gerald Bonner, D. W. Rollason, and Clare Stancliffe, eds., *St. Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to AD 1200* (Suffolk, GB: Boydell Press, 1989); D. P. Kirby, “The Genesis of a Cult: Cuthbert of Farne and Ecclesiastical Politics in Northumbria in the Late Seventh and Early Eighth Centuries,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46, no. 3 (1995): 383–97.

¹⁰⁶ For similar affirmations, see Athanasius’ *Life of St. Antony* Preface, 71; Gregory the Great’s *Life of St. Benedict* Prologue, 2, XV. 4, XVII. 2; Adomnán’s *Life of St. Columba* Second Preface, I. 1; Bede’s *Life of St. Cuthbert* 1, 37; Jerome’s *Life of St. Malchus* 2, 3; Jerome’s *Life of St. Marcella* 1, 7; Severus Sulpicius’ *Life of St. Martin* I. 9, V. 6, VII. 5, XIX. 5, XXXIV. 6, XXV. 1; Gerontius’ *Life of St. Melania the Younger* Prologue, 12; Jerome’s *Paul of Thebes* 6, 8; *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* 2; Evaristus’ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* XXII. 2–3. Bertrand and Gandt, *Vitae Antonii Versiones Latinae: Vita Beati Antonii Abbatis Evagrii Interprete*; St. Gregory the Great, *Grégoire Le Grand: Dialogues*; Adomnán, *Adomnán’s Life of Columba*; Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede’s Prose Life*; St. Jerome, *Jérôme: Trois Vies de Moines (Paul, Malchus, Hilarion)*; White, *Lives of Early Christian Women*; Sulpicius Severus, *Sulpicius Severus’ Vita Martini*; Gerontius, *Gérontius: La Vie Latine de Sainte Mélanie*; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*; Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*.

¹⁰⁷ *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* 14. 1. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*. The *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (or *Felicity*) documents the martyrdom of several African catechumens in Carthage during 203 CE. The passion is a rough contemporary of the event, with Perpetua’s and Saturus’ reflections part of the account, which some scholars believe to be edited by Tertullian. Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1265. For more, see Barbara K. Gold, *Perpetua: Athlete of God* (Oxford, GB: Oxford University

affirmation, the reader imagines a connection between the editor and Perpetua and Saturus so that the voice of the narrator/editor becomes a connection between the reader and Perpetua and Saturus. In effect, the narrator, subject, and reader enter into the same world and the same rhythm in these short narrative guides. Likewise, in the *Life of St. Benedict*, Gregory and Peter's dialogue allows Peter to raise questions about the history Gregory presents and for Gregory to respond with a pithy "It is proven, Peter."¹⁰⁸ These moments assure the reader that the narrator has all of the necessary information and that there is a depth and veracity to the account. In turn, the reader can share in the veracity of the narrator about the life of the saint, imagining them as a mediator to the sacred rhythm the saint's life represents.

Fantasy also relies on frame narratives and audience address to collapse the worlds of the reader and the text, further opening the Interior Castle of Contemplation as the reader becomes separated from their understanding of the world.¹⁰⁹ Rick Riordan's opening to *The Lightning Thief* offers a prime example of this type of frame narrative.¹¹⁰ The first sentence we have in *The Lightning Thief* is Percy telling the readers that "I didn't want to be a half-blood" before offering advice for any readers who believe that they see themselves reflected in the tale.¹¹¹ While this is an interesting example in which our narrator is our protagonist, the opening direct address between the narrator and the reader immediately begins to break down the walls between the Primary World and the Secondary World of the text. If hagiographers can claim a special

Press, 2018); L. Stephanie Cobb, "Suicide by Gladiator?: The Acts of Perpetua and Felicitas in Its North African Context," *Church History* 88, no. 3 (2019): 597–628.

¹⁰⁸ Gregory the Great, *Life of St. Benedict* II. 4. My translation. Latin: "*Liquet, Petre.*" St. Gregory the Great, *Grégoire Le Grand: Dialogues*.

¹⁰⁹ Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 5–8.

¹¹⁰ Also see the "Postscript" in C. S. Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet*. In that example, Ransom writes back to Lewis with suggested corrections to the manuscript of his time on Malacandra, noting that the manuscript will be a disappointment for himself since he had actually experienced the events. In that regard, Lewis elides the distance between the world of *Out of the Silent Planet* and our own by allowing the narrator a voice in which he acknowledges himself as narrator. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 153–58.

¹¹¹ Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, 1.

knowledge about the lives of the saints through sources and their own experiences with the saints, Percy Jackson is in the position of the saint himself telling his own story, creating a great deal of trust in his account. In a sense, the reader is becoming a confidant of Percy with the trust and veracity that entails. Percy goes on to acknowledge that some readers might approach this tale as fiction, a position he envies given the danger that he experienced firsthand.¹¹² In stating the obvious—that this is a fictional tale—Riordan actually creates further doubt about its fictionality, undermining his own statements and producing the moment of hesitation about what to believe, a moment of hesitation in which Percy’s direct statement pushes us to trust his voice.

Fantasy also relies on the narrator—or a figure of authority—to provide statements of affirmation in the face of the supernatural to dissuade any questions that might arise in the protagonist’s and readers’ minds. Farah Mendlesohn notes that the protagonist in Portal-Quest and Intrusion Fantasy stories often approach the fantastic out of ignorance, and it is their role to learn how the fantastic operates and guide the ignorant reader in that movement as well.¹¹³ This immediately creates a co-identity between the reader and the protagonist to collapse the bounds of the worlds. Tom Shippey takes this a step further, arguing that within *The Hobbit* the narrator often presents information with an affirmative “of course” to information that is not obvious in any way. For instance, Tolkien’s narrator notes at one point that “This of course is the way to talk to dragons” (as if we all ought to know the proper way to talk to a dragon).¹¹⁴ As Shippey notes, these phrases give the sense that more information exists behind the statement, a knowledge of the general world that the reader must trust the narrator to provide—much like

¹¹² Riordan, 1.

¹¹³ Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 13.

¹¹⁴ See J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit or There and Back Again*, Revised Ed. (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1982), 223.

statements from Gregory to Peter about the proven knowledge about St. Benedict.¹¹⁵ Moreover, through the sense that there is more information, these statements add a degree of veracity about the events that are most in doubt (such as the existence of dragons), built into the narrator's voice.

All these narrative devices—both those that destabilize the sense of the profane world and affirm the presence of the sacred world—work to build in the reader Secondary Belief by showing a complete world around the saint or fantasy figure. In that world's completeness is the power to enchant and, thereby, draw the reader into the Interior Castle of Contemplation. In effect, these devices push the reader to trust that there is a reality (even if not a historicity) behind what the hagiographer and the fantasy author recount, more specifically, the reality of the sacred rhythm. As such, this becomes an important movement to separate the reader from the profane world and bring them into a liminal space where the saint or the fantasy figure might provide an encounter with the divine, an affirmation of identity, or insight into *communitas*. Much as these devices work to separate the reader from their world and take them into the text, however, readers also play a role in performing the text, thereby drawing the reality of the sacred rhythm into their own lives. While I could say much about this in relation to the functionality of hagiography and fantasy (to which I will turn in the following chapters), I also want to argue that it plays a role in separating the reader from their experience of profane reality.

Performing Texts in Everyday Life

Relationships with the saints or with fantasy characters rarely stay on the level of the established hagiography or the established narrative of the fantasy text. Instead, those relationships spill out from the pages when readers begin performing aspects of the text or the

¹¹⁵ Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth: How J. R. R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology*, 74.

relationship as a means of participating further with these figures. In the language around participation, I return to the way that Peter Brown spoke about relationships with the saints as participatory, as people sought to touch the saint's tomb, but I also return to Henry Jenkins and his notions of participation in Media Studies, which he connects with activities that blur the boundaries between producer and consumer—between saint/fantasy character, text, and devotee.¹¹⁶ While both Brown and Jenkins talk about how these participatory activities work to shape the reader's identity (which I will explore in Chapter Five), I also want to note how these activities work as a form of separation by making the world of the text more real. In particular, I want to pay attention to how these participatory activities are also performative, and, therefore—to draw on Judith Butler's sense of performance—function to create these literary worlds.

When Butler describes the performative nature of gender in *Gender Trouble*, she emphasizes that gender is an act of doing, an identity that is constituted and constructed in the very expressions that perform it. In this sense, to express masculinity or femininity is to create the identities of male or female in the expression of the notion.¹¹⁷ In this, gender takes on a high degree of reality in the ways that it is enacted and performed, even as it cannot be raised to the level of *the* real or *the* authentic (i.e., to put gender into essentialist terms).¹¹⁸ Scholar of Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion, Melissa Wilcox, drawing on J. L. Austin, associates Butler's notion with ritual itself, where the language is performative not only to say something, but also to enact something.¹¹⁹ She goes on to note how much Queer Studies and Religion have to offer each other in how they both deal with phenomena that are constructed, but which have a

¹¹⁶ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, xxvii; Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 3.

¹¹⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 34.

¹¹⁸ Butler, 45.

¹¹⁹ Melissa M. Wilcox, *Queer Religiosities: An Introduction to Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 20.

major influence on human experience.¹²⁰ I am arguing along a similar vein to say that in these participatory activities, elements of the text (both hagiography and fantasy) are performed in the world and, through that process, take on a high degree of reality. In their realness, they then open up the liminal space of the Interior Castle for the functions of contemplation, identity formation, and communal connection.¹²¹ I see this performative nature in activities like transmedial and transauthorial retellings and adaptations, the use of clothing and images, and ritual ceremonies inspired by the text itself.¹²²

In transmedial (expanding the world across new media) and transauthorial (inviting new authors to build the world) retellings and adaptations, devotees and fans have the opportunity to use the figure of the saint or the fantasy character to make them more relevant for their own situations. In other words, they bring the figure into a new context and ask new questions about what they can mean and do, specifically meeting the needs of a new audience or new author.¹²³

¹²⁰ Wilcox, 30.

¹²¹ Sylvia Wynter says something similar about the extent to which we can apply Butler's theories of performative constructions in her essay "The Ceremony Found." In this essay, she argues that the epistemes that guide our movement through the world and all of the genre-specific roles associated with those epistemes are also performed. In that sense, even what it means to be human becomes performative as we enact that identity in our very expressions of humanity. This becomes a corollary for me to show how something as large as a world or a world-view (an episteme) can be performed and thereby productive of being. In my case, that episteme is of the sacred rhythms revealed in the saint or in fantasy literature. Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoietic Turn/Overtake, Its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self-)Cognition," in *Black Knowledges/Black Struggles: Essays in Critical Epistemology*, ed. Jason R. Ambrose and Sabine Broeck (Liverpool, GB: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 195–96.

¹²² It is worth noting that in the performance of the text through retellings, art and cosplay, or rituals like taking a patron saint/belonging to a *Harry Potter* house, the text takes on a greater emotional investment, which Romantic thinkers like Tolkien would associate with Secondary Belief or Rudolf Otto would associate with religion. A major element of Tolkien's consideration of fantasy is the movement from *Dyscatastrophe* to *Eucatastrophe*, of which he claims that "it can give a child or man that hears it, when the 'turn' comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, *near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears*, as keen as that given by any form of literary art, and having a peculiar quality [emphasis added]." This turn is central to the fantasy genre for Tolkien, and it is entirely predicated on the feeling of the turn. As such, it is hard to underestimate the importance of an emotional investment in the story and in the world if it is to take on the 'inner consistency of reality' that I associate with Secondary Belief. The degree to which performing a text aids in this process, thereby, plays a large part in both the production of Secondary Belief, but by extension the separation of the reader from the Primary World. That element of emotion is also an element that Patricia Cox Miller turns to in discussing how a hagiographer fosters a connection between a saint and future readers. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 81; Miller, "Strategies of Representation in Collective Biography: Constructing the Subject as Holy," 213.

¹²³ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, 62.

In this process, Jenkins argues that we make the other world “real” for us because it can now meet these new situations in the ways that it blurs the bounds of producer and consumer, and text and reality.¹²⁴ This might be because the text now begins to resemble the world of the reader more or because the reader starts to imbue part of themselves in the text itself. Either way, the effect is that in participating with the text, we begin to give it a degree of realness and presence (looking forward to Chapter Five). I see this happening in retellings of different hagiographies, such as Gregory’s of Tours retelling/updating of the *Life of St. Martin* from Sulpicius Severus’ edition or in Hrotsvit’s retelling of St. Agnes’ martyrdom, drawing on Prudentius’ *Peristephanon Liber*. This is mirrored in fantasy’s use of classical and medieval sources and, more explicitly, in fantasy fan fiction.

For the saints, retelling their stories in different narratives or forms and by different authors is a staple of the genre.¹²⁵ The liturgical celebration of the saints invites consistent new retellings of their lives—separate from an official hagiography—such as when Augustine of Hippo preaches a series of sermons of Ss. Perpetua and Felicitas that exists independent of the Second Century account from Perpetua herself.¹²⁶ Moreover, since different saints become popular across different periods of time, their stories are often retold within new communities. As Brigitte Cazelles notes, this element of retelling a story and giving it new significance for a new audience is an essential element of literary composition in the late Middle Ages.¹²⁷ As such, if we look at the hagiographic story of St. Agnes as it appears in Prudentius and the version

¹²⁴ Jenkins, 63–67.

¹²⁵ For more on transmedia storytelling in hagiography, see Monika Amsler, “Martyrs, Athletes, and Transmedia Storytelling in Late Antiquity,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 31 (2019).

¹²⁶ See sermons 280–283. St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons: On the Saints*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. Volume 8: Sermons 273–305A, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, Part III–Sermons (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1994).

¹²⁷ Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century*, 31.

Hrotsvit writes in Tenth Century Ottonian Germany, there are clear distinctions based on the perceived audience that helps to make Agnes more real for those groups of people.

Prudentius' Agnes is first and foremost an example of faith, persevering in her martyrdom despite the obstacles placed before her, leading him to give her a double crown of martyrdom—that of faith and virginity. By way of contrast, Agnes in Hrotsvit's account shares the double characteristics of faith and virginity, but her virginity is emphasized as its own unique virtue, independent of faith in some instances. As such, Agnes receives a crown for her martyrdom, but a palm branch for her virginity, offering a clear break from the tradition of Prudentius.¹²⁸ Prudentius' focus is on writing hymns of the martyrs, something he continues in his treatment of Agnes, turning her hymn of martyrdom into a wedding march, emphasizing that her virginity is done in faith to Christ.¹²⁹ Hrotsvit, however, is writing among a group of nuns, who likely would have expected something of a focus on virginity in the poem about a saint like Agnes—even as Hrotsvit often puts her own unique “spin” on virginity.¹³⁰ This move retains many of the same elements of the story of St. Agnes, but in the shift towards virginity as a virtue in-and-of-itself and of great importance separate from the faith of martyrdom, Agnes becomes more pertinent and, therefore, more real to the nuns at Gandersheim. The retelling provides a different resonance to meet this new group and blurs the line between consumer and producer so that the nuns have a more immediate encounter with Agnes, participating with her body in the retelling of her life and martyrdom.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Stephen L. Wailes, *Spirituality and Politics in the Works of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), 118–19.

¹²⁹ Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 203.

¹³⁰ Wailes, *Spirituality and Politics in the Works of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim*, 33, 40, 52, 73.

¹³¹ I could also look at the example of St. Martin of Tours, whose life is written down early on by Sulpicius Severus and in which he is depicted as a staunch ascetic. Later, Gregory of Tours retells Severus' hagiography, picturing Martin as a powerful bishop and adding to the list of miracles conducted around his tomb. In Gregory's retelling, he brings the patronage of St. Martin into another age, making him more real for Gregory since he shows how Martin's power is still working in the area around Tours, but also shaping his legacy as a powerful bishop (and thereby

Just as Cazalles notes that medieval hagiographic and secular literature was based on retelling stories, fantasy also draws on a culture of retelling, often in a way that elides the differences between the world of the story and the world of the reader. While this is a common theme in general for fantasy, with many fantasy writers like Lewis and Tolkien drawing on medieval texts to construct their worlds, I want to use the framework of fan fiction to highlight how these retellings elide differences.¹³² When Jenkins writes about fan fiction, he notes that it happens when fans have encountered a world so often that it begins to lose its aura and, in order to return a sense of power to it, they must retell the story in a way that is meaningful to their own contexts, giving the story/world aura by putting aspects of their own lives into the narrative.¹³³ From that theoretical framework, we can look at Rick Riordan's use of Greek mythology not only as borrowing from ancient sources, but as a form of fan fiction in which he retells the stories of the ancient Greek heroes in a way that finds a new resonance and realness in that narrative. Riordan started telling the *Percy Jackson* tales as a bedtime story for his son, Haley, where he wanted to embody the Greek heroes as having ADHD and dyslexia to make it empowering for his son to see the world differently.¹³⁴ In terms of fan fiction, I argue that Riordan's series is in some ways a fan fiction of Greek myth that takes the voices of the Greek

strengthening Gregory's own position) rather than as an ascetic (which better met the needs of Sulpicius Severus). Indeed, Gregory's own writing of Martin's miracles is a way of honoring the patronage that Martin had provided to Tours, acting out their relationship in the current age through the act of retelling his life and miracles. In essence, Gregory's hagiography of St. Martin is a performance of the relationship that exists between them, giving Martin a greater presence and separating Gregory from his experience of the mundane world. Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head, "Introduction," in *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), xxvii–xxviii; Gregory of Tours, *Lives and Miracles*, ed. Giselle de Nie, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* 39 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), xx–xxi. See also Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Raymond Van Dam, "Images of Saint Martin in Late Roman and Early Merovingian Gaul," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 19 (1998): 1–27.

¹³² Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise of Children's Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century*, 134.

¹³³ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, 69.

¹³⁴ Michael M. Jones and Rick Riordan, "Rick Riordan on Wrapping Up His Trials of Apollo Series," *Publishers Weekly*, October 1, 2020, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-authors/article/84508-rick-riordan-on-wrapping-up-the-trials-of-apollo-series.html>.

heroes and grants them an aura based on how those heroes can share and empower the life of his son. Through that specific retelling, the bounds between Greek myth and Haley's life begin to collapse and Haley and other readers are able to separate further from the Primary World because they find other characters that resemble their own experience. This is another form of narrative retelling as performance that allows the Greek heroes to exist in the world in a new way and in greater relationship with our time, much like Hrotsvit's retelling of St. Agnes' martyrdom. While Riordan's storytelling has become published, fans do the same type of work in their own fan fictions, often as part of a (smaller) community.



Figure 4.1: This icon depicts Mary, the Mother of God, holding a baby Jesus with six saints surrounding her (Lower tier, from Left to Right: St. George, St. Demetrius of Thessalonica; Upper tier, from Left to Right: St. Alexander Nevsky, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Xenia, St. Nicholas). Unidentified artist, Russian. 1875. *Icon of the Mother of God of the Sign with the Saints*. Tempera on wooden panel, 12 1/4 x 9 5/16 x 1 inches. Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia; Promised Gift, The Parker Collection. GMOA E.2015.1525. Courtesy of the Georgia Museum of Art.

I see something similar in the use of images in icons and stained glass and the production of fan art and cosplay. Both instances allow fans or devotees to imagine themselves within the terms of the text, collapsing the barriers of reality and performing the text in the Primary World. I take, for example, the *Icon of the Mother of God of the Sign with the Saints* (Figure 4.1), which depicts Mary with Jesus and a host of six saints.¹³⁵ This icon was a gift to Grand Duchess Maria Feodorovna, the wife of Russian Emperor Alexander III, and five of the six saints selected have great significance as the patron saints of the grand duchess, her husband, and their four children born prior to 1875.¹³⁶ Placing all of these saints together and around the double-headed eagle (a symbol of the Russian Imperial Court) removes them from their original context and recontextualizes them in light of the experience of Maria Feodorovna. In this movement, they take on a new life and become more real for Feodorovna as the patron saints of her family. The presence of the icon, and the ways that Feodorovna likely interacted with it, becomes a performance that puts her family within the framework of these specific saints and their divine patronage, collapsing the boundaries between her family members and the saints themselves. In effect, the question becomes where the influence of the saints ends and the power of her family begins as they figure in the same plane. This interpretation is highlighted by the ways that the gold-leaf of the icon begins to blur the lines between the heavenly realm and the city in the background, emphasizing how the icon (and the saints themselves) create opportunities for participation between heaven and earth.¹³⁷ I even imagine how this icon depicts the moment of separation and entrance into the limen itself as it shows the breakdown between

¹³⁵ Unidentified artist, Russian, *Icon of the Mother of God of the Sign with Saints*, 1875, Tempera on a wood panel, 12 1/4 x 9 5/16 x 1 inches, 1875, Promised Gift, The Parker Collection. GMOA E.2015.1525, Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia.

¹³⁶ Asen Kirin, *Gifts and Prayers: The Romanovs and Their Subjects* (Athens, GA: Georgia Museum of Art, 2016), 84.

¹³⁷ Kirin, 82.

the borders of the divine and earthly realms in the figures of the saints, letting Maria Feodorovna and her children put on the guise of the saint, if temporarily.¹³⁸

Scholars of cosplay and fan practices argue that the act of cosplaying enacts a similar form of identity expression that finds resonances with characters and works to blur the bounds of the Secondary and Primary World. Nicolle Lamerichs, for instance, notes that the act of cosplay is a way to transform elements of a story, performing it and actualizing it in the Primary World through the body and identity of the fan.¹³⁹ In other words, the fantasy realm becomes real in the embodied presentation of these fans, drawing on the use of the fans' own identity (their own space in the Primary World) to enter into the Primary World themselves. Going back to Butler's notion of performance, by becoming the character (even for a few hours) that character starts to exist in new contexts and new forms, taking on a realness beyond just the text, and specifically in connection with these fans and what they need the character to do for them. John W. Morehead takes the performative quality of cosplay a step further using the terms of ritual to argue that in taking on the costume, fans re-enact the sacred myths of fantasy for a weekend, much as Turner describes the experience of a pilgrim traveling to a sacred center.¹⁴⁰ This is especially true when I think about special sites (like the Wizarding World of Harry Potter) as a space for cosplay, which adds another aspect of performance to cosplay to make the text real in the world around

¹³⁸ Natasha Trethewey also talks about a portrait of St. Gertrude helps her to think through the portrait of her mother, finding the resonances between the two and how that leads her into this liminal space where it is hard to distinguish the one from the other. Natasha Trethewey, *Monument: Poems, New and Selected* (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 2018), 182–83. See also Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions: Gender, Material Culture, and Monasticism in Late Medieval Germany*, 40–42; Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 171; Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*, 118.

¹³⁹ Nicolle Lamerichs, "Stranger than Fiction: Fan Identity in Cosplay," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 7 (2011).

¹⁴⁰ John W. Morehead, "Afterword: Fantastic Fan Conventions and Transformational Festivals," in *The Sacred in Fantastic Fandom: Essays on the Intersection of Religion and Pop Culture*, ed. Carole M. Cusack, John W. Morehead, and Venetia Laura Delano Robertson (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2019), 189, 192–93.

fans.¹⁴¹ Fans might also use their various cosplays to expand the world around them (such as a couple who makes matching costumes), or make new conversations (such as uniting DC's Batman and Marvel's Captain America in the same space). These new connections further bring the characters out of the screen and into material reality, giving the characters a realness of their own.¹⁴² Like the images of the saints found in icons and other spaces, the act of cosplay allows fans to imagine themselves in the place of the figure, participating with them in their movement through the world. In turn, the character or saint draws on the body and identity of the fan or devotee to become part of the Primary World. This creates a play of identity and reality as the fan or devotee comes to shape their identity in relationship to the saint or fantasy character, but also as the saint or fantasy character takes on a higher degree of reality in the ways their existence is performed by the fan or devotee. In effect, images and cosplay serve to bring fans and devotees further into a realm of contemplation by setting an element of their life as separate when they put on a new image and identity. While this is often conducted on the level of play itself, using art and images, fantasy and hagiography also inspire their own forms of rituals that put that play into more overtly religious language.

A major ritual involving the saints is their role in the process of Confirmation within the Roman Catholic tradition as new initiates take the name of their patron saint. Elizabeth Castelli describes this process in the introduction to *Martyrdom and Memory* as a way to introduce how the saints have been used in the process of culture making among Christians. In this section, she notes that in taking on a name, not only are the catechumens entering a saintly tradition with

¹⁴¹ Dennis J. Siler, "Wizarding World Tourism: Numinous Experiences of the Harry Potter Generation," in *The Harry Potter Generation: Essays on Growing Up with the Series*, ed. Emily Lauer and Balaka Basu (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2019), 110–13.

¹⁴² Matthew Hale, "Cosplay: Intertextuality, Public Texts, and the Body Fantastic," *Western Folklore* 73, no. 1 (2014): 12.

connections to a long communal history, but also, that in taking the name of the saint and entering that tradition, they were joining “a realm that struck many of us as tantalizingly mysterious.”¹⁴³ In other words, just as the act of taking a saint’s name is a way to narrate a part of one’s life (even a hidden part of their life), it is also a way in which one makes the heavenly realm present in the world through their being. It is an attempt to bridge the gap between the past and now through the act of self-naming. This involves an aspect of retelling narratives as I mentioned earlier, with the associated notion that, in the retelling, the saint can better meet one’s own cultural moment. It, however, goes further since the story is not just being told, but also being told through the catechumen’s own life and story, sharing the realness of their being. Moreover, since this act of self-naming is worked out in the liturgical, ritual space of Confirmation, it takes on a great deal of authority that might be missing from other forms of retelling. If for Judith Butler, gender is something that is created in the acting out of its expressions, then this is a major moment of acting out the lives of the saints through the bodies of devotees, creating their presence as well and bringing devotees into a separate space of contemplation.

I see similar language used around fandom quizzes based on fantasy tales, which (while not as formal or liturgical as the rite of Confirmation) play a major role in constructing fan identity in relation to a text. There are many such quizzes, such as the *Percy Jackson* “What god are you descended from?” quiz on Rick Riordan’s website, but perhaps the most famous is the *Harry Potter* house sorting quiz on J. K. Rowling’s WIZARDING World (formerly known as Pottermore).¹⁴⁴ Often fans take these quizzes as a way of shaping an aspect of their identity or for

¹⁴³ Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 2.

¹⁴⁴ Read Riordan Staff, “Quiz: What God Are You Descended From?,” Read Riordan, n.d., <https://www.readriordan.com/2017/10/12/what-god-are-you-descended-from/>; J. K. Rowling, “Hogwarts Sorting Experience,” WIZARDING World, n.d., <https://my.wizardingworld.com/sorting-hat>.

immersion in the fantasy world.¹⁴⁵ Taking the *Harry Potter* sorting quiz, a fan is placed in one of the four Hogwarts Houses with their associated personality traits that becomes a basis for exploring identity amongst fans. In fact, transgender activist, Jackson Bird, has even used the language of sorting to describe the act of thinking about gender and its labels based on his experience in the *Harry Potter* fandom, and specifically as part of the Harry Potter Alliance (now called Fandom Forward).¹⁴⁶ This serves as a testament to how powerful the language of sorting has become in thinking about identity and identity construction. Moreover, Victoria Godwin argues the merchandise associated with sorting in the *Harry Potter* fandom plays a major role in blurring the bounds of the Secondary World of the text and the Primary World. The uses of house-claiming ceremonies and the associated merchandise play such a role in the movement towards separation because they take elements from the story world (like a Slytherin scarf) and bring it into everyday life.¹⁴⁷ In effect, these practices invest real places and objects with elements of mythology and fantasy, inspired by these sorting quizzes, so that the rooms around us become liminal in-and-of-themselves, reflecting both the story and the real world. As various items (based on the results of the sorting) enter into our spaces, they are increasingly performed and take on greater importance in their connection to identity construction, thus becoming a part of the world around us.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Steven T. Proudfoot, Courtney N. Plante, and Stephen Reysen, "Why We Put on the Sorting Hat: Motivations to Take Fan Personality Tests," *Current Issues in Personality Psychology* 7, no. 4 (2019): 267.

¹⁴⁶ Jackson Bird, *Sorted: Growing Up, Coming Out, and Finding My Place: A Transgender Memoir* (New York, NY: Tiller Press, 2019), 148–50.

¹⁴⁷ Victoria L. Godwin, "Hogwarts House Merchandise, Liminal Play, and Fan Identities," *Film Criticism* 42, no. 2 (2018).

¹⁴⁸ There can be some question of whether a sorting ceremony using the online quiz comes to the same importance as something like choosing a patron saint during Confirmation in the Roman Catholic tradition. Confirmation is certainly more associated with what Grimes called a rite, while an online quiz might be considered something else, maybe more akin to a ceremony. That said, one's house loyalty (for those who want to invest it with such influence) does play a large role in how fans connect at fan conferences, how they present themselves to the world, and how they make meaning out of their life stories. As such, it is hard to dismiss it as unimportant. By way of example, my sister has recently started planning my nephew's eleventh birthday party, which is to be themed around *Harry Potter*. She has chosen his eleventh birthday because in the books that is when a student usually receives their

This section has been interested in the ways that fans and devotees participate with fantasy characters and saints as a form of separation so that they might move into a liminal space between the Primary and Secondary World. This follows my exploration of narrative devices the story uses to destabilize our sense of the Primary World and restabilize the Secondary World, imagining that there is a physical space we might move through as we enter into the Interior Castle of Contemplation. Just as participation can play a role in separation, however, it also moves towards the creation of presence around the saints and fantasy characters (as mentioned in Chapter One and Two). This movement towards presence is a key element of the liminal space of ritual and story since it is in connection with the presence of the saints and fantasy characters that devotees and fans begin to recreate a connection with God and primordial elements of what it means to be human, reconstructing identity in those spaces.

Hogwarts letter and begins the journey into the Wizarding World. A major part of this party is that my nephew is going to take the sorting quiz through the Wizarding World website for the first time and find out his “official” house, which is going to shape the theme of the party itself. He already has thoughts about what house he wants to belong to, based on the ways that my sister, her friends, and I have spoken about our own house loyalties. As such, it is slowly becoming an exciting moment for him. What is strange, however, is that separate from this party, my nephew is not a huge *Harry Potter* fan. The selection of his house has just taken on meaning in the context of our family and the fact that he has been forced to wait until he turns eleven to actually find out his house. In that sense, there is an element of importance or aura around this occasion, perhaps similar to what we might imagine for someone going through a religious rite of passage into puberty. In fact, I think it is somewhat significant that this is happening around his eleventh birthday, right on the cusp of many religious rites of passage.

Chapter Five

The Limen: Participating with the Divine

Part of the work that emerges in the space of the limen is a return or a recreation of sacred centers in which we are able to participate and experience the divine (or some level of vertical reality and orientation).¹ In Chapter Three, I discussed how this goes back to the ideas of Mircea Eliade and the *Myth of the Eternal Return*, whereby mythology and ritual collapse time through hierophanies so that initiates return to the first moments of creation, and thereby return to sacred order. Moreover, in the eternal return, the initiates meet all the initiates that came before them in sacred space, participating with their stories and with the divine story in that movement. To follow Charles Long's interpretation of Eliade, by returning to the sacred center, humanity is able to reorient itself in the world and participate in reality by moving through a space in which the human, natural, and supernatural converge.² In this space, life takes on meaning and purpose by sharing in and participating with the meaning and purpose of the divine.³ As such, this chapter seeks to demonstrate how the figures of the saints or fantasy characters allow devotees and fans to align themselves with a sacred center, and thereby

¹ An early draft of this chapter was shared at the 2021 conference for the American Academy of Religion in San Antonio, TX as part of the Hagiology Seminar, "Constructing (and Deconstructing) the Holy." I am thankful to my fellow panelists and others who attended for the feedback they shared in thinking about the presence of saints and fantasy characters and how that might impact the ways we think about fantasy literature as a second hagiography.

² Long, "Human Centers: An Essay on Method in the History of Religions," 404.

³ To understand how this offers purpose and meaning, it is useful to imagine the first moments of creation. For Eliade, prior to creation, everything exists in chaos, moving in random directions without any intentionality. The moment creation begins, suddenly there is a defined directionality and intention in the world. In other words, there is a purpose behind the movement. In the sacred center, humanity is able to align itself and participate with that intentionality, allowing it to share in this higher purpose.

participate with the intentionality and purpose of the divine to find meaning in the resonances between the stories of heaven and earth.⁴

At the same time, however, I want to complicate the notion of the eternal *return*, since as the dissertation title (“To Cuiviéne There is No Return”) implies, I neither think that *return* is actually possible nor do I think it offers the best interpretative framework by which to understand the saints or fantasy characters in relation to sacred centers. Instead, drawing in-part from theories of African American and Diasporic Studies, I want to argue that what saints and fantasy characters offer is a chance to *recreate* a sacred center within ourselves, recognizing that wherever one stands becomes a center for participating with the divine. The notion of a *return* carries with it the sense that there is an established time or location (such as Eden) to which we are attempting to re-enter. The issue, however, is that the places to which we wish to return exist only as memories, constantly changing even in our absence. By contrast, in asking how we *recreate* centers through these stories, I want to turn to the power of the imagination and the interactions between readers, texts, and authors to create a new space through which we can affirm something about our identity. This focus on recreating centers follows the language that Robert Orsi uses in speaking about how devotees create a sense of presence around the saints through participation. It asks how we find the sacred not as an essential thing that exists independently in the world, but rather how the sacred emerges in the acts of participation between text and community, just as presence emerges.

⁴ With Robert Orsi, I also want to acknowledge how this is never solely an act of meaning making. Or rather, I want to acknowledge with Orsi that meaning making is not an entirely positive movement, but that it also involves wounding along the way. As Orsi writes, “Meaning making begins in wounding, and the process of meaning making is wounding.” In truth, I am more interested in what Orsi called “the dreadful resonance between heaven and earth” and how we find those resonances in our lives (with both the positive and negative aspects that entails). That said, “meaning making” is a more wieldable term and one I will use often alongside “resonances.”

Such an interpretation relies on our location in the limen, separated from our typical construction of the world, because it is in the space of the limen that the walls of our identity and the identities of the saints or fantasy characters begin to break down and mesh together. In other words, in the space of the limen, we become more open to the fluidity of our identity so that we might become aware of those resonances, giving the saints or fantasy characters a greater presence in the world and naming the divine within ourselves. This necessarily implies a plurality of centers, allowing anyone to exist as a site of the divine or as an origin, which, to follow David Miller, also works to open us to a narrative theology and a remythologized view of the world and God.

Throughout this chapter, I speak of recreating centers within ourselves or naming the divine within ourselves, situating our stories and our physicality as an essential aspect of the narrative. My inspiration for centering us in this approach comes both as an inherent element of the theories of African American Studies I am about to recount (Stuart Hall and Sylvia Wynter) but also from Queer Theology and its emphasis on the body as a site of narration. For both Hall and Wynter, centers are related to the narratives we tell about where we come from and how we are journeying. Inherent in this notion is that centers are caught up in who we are. Even for those (like Tolkien or Lewis) who speak about stories or images coming from beyond themselves, those narratives are recounted through their experiences and expressed in their lives and bodies. Turning to Queer Theology I reaffirm the sacredness of this act and the sacredness of the body as a site of story. Marcella Althaus-Reid offers a potent example of Queer Theology, arguing that matters of the spirit (matters of things “beyond”) are not diametrically opposed to the lived experiences of the body as a concrete site of the divine. Much as David Miller argues about the Death of God and the value of story, Althaus-Reid contends that our terms like “poverty” often

become abstracted into nothingness, and it is the physical body (often in its indecency and precarity) as a site of story that resists such abstraction.⁵ As such, it is within ourselves and in our lives that we might imagine terms like “poverty” and “sacred” for their realities in our lives.

I turn to African American Studies and Queer Theology here because I find in both immense value for addressing what it means to be separated from origins and sacred centers and still finding ways to affirm oneself as holy. Both answer that separation by claiming that the sacred is in every story and in every body, and it is our responsibility to recognize and to claim it for ourselves. To follow Baby Suggs in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, “Here in this place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard.”⁶

There is No Return, Only Recreation

Scholars of diaspora have often thought about the inability to return to a point of origin. As such, they bring great insight into what it means to participate with and to shape an identity in relationship with an origin to which one cannot return. Especially useful for me is Stuart Hall’s notion of a route as a space for production and Sylvia Wynter’s emphasis on recognizing something in yourself as an origin.

When Stuart Hall writes about the Black Diaspora, he wants to push against a more traditional understanding of identity that says that our cultural sense of self is shaped primarily by our place of birth and kinship groups, often outlined in foundation myths.⁷ Instead, he emphasizes (like myself) that there is no returning to the places represented in foundation myths, and we will always be defined, in part, by a sense of dislocation—something that is true of

⁵ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London, GB: Routledge, 2001), 4.

⁶ Toni Morrison, *Beloved: A Novel* (New York, NY: Vintage International, 2004), 103.

⁷ Hall, “Thinking the Diaspora: Home-Thoughts from Abroad,” 3–4.

people in the African Diaspora but (drawing on Heidegger) also as a condition of Modernity.⁸ One of Hall's key explanations for why a return is not possible is to question what we are truly returning to, what is now "home." Since the Black Diaspora inevitably involves a degree of syncretized and hybrid identities, there are always stops on the road to diaspora that also become "home" (if only temporarily) and they come to define identity in the same ways that any origin defines identity.⁹ The same might be said of sacred origins, since (from a Jewish or Christian perspective) we may have begun in Eden and may be working towards a New Heaven and Earth, but humanity has changed since that moment and will continue to change on the way forward. We have created new homes along our journeys, finding meaning and connection with God in different ways and in response to different challenges. Is it truly possible to return to Eden at this point without fundamentally losing a part of who we now are, without losing sight of the rupture created by the Fall? Likewise, is it possible to imagine a New Heaven and Earth completely alienated from our experiences in this world?

The solution that Hall offers to this challenge is that instead of returning to a foundational origin, we complete an act of production to recreate the origin wherever we are and wherever we are going (along our routes) through a form of remythologizing. Such an act of production keeps an eye upon origins, since that is where our routes begin, but it also asks where we are going and how we can create that origin along the way. This is necessarily centered within ourselves because it is our routes that provide the source for remythologizing. He notes that when this happens, it is not because we are connected to our past to such a degree that our origins flow "unchanged down the generations" but rather because we have worked to produce those origins over and over again, rethinking what they mean in a new cultural context, and really what they

⁸ Hall, 3.

⁹ Hall, 7–9.

mean within our own lives.¹⁰ While this might be imagined as a return of sorts, since we are reconnected to our mythic foundations, Hall wants to emphasize this is only a return to ourselves, not a return to the origin itself. The difference is the point of emphasis: the return to origins asks how traditions make meaning for us, whereas a return to ourselves asks what we make meaningful of our traditions.¹¹ To ask this question of the saints or fantasy characters and sacred origins is to ask not how we can find meaning by using these figures to make a return, but rather to ask how we can use these figures to find and to name a resonance in ourselves with the divine, how we can use these figures to make the divine meaningful for us in our current situation. It is this process that produces the presence mentioned in Chapter One and that reflects fantasy's interrogation of desire and wonder evoked by an origin in Chapter Two. Such a question turns my attention to a thinker like Sylvia Wynter, who argues about the importance of recognizing something of the origin within ourselves and our stories. Like Hall, this continues to think about origins and sacred centers as something we create in ourselves and in our particular situations rather than forcing ourselves to fit into a ready-made center.

Sylvia Wynter does a Foucauldian analysis of the changing topoi by which humanity institutes social orders to respond to the entropic nature of life and death.¹² For instance, in the Christian Medieval world, life and death were divinely caused and ordered, which offered a system against entropic decay.¹³ As part of the humanistic turn, divine ordering is replaced with human reason expressed in the natural sciences and literature.¹⁴ In this shift, the Divine Other was no longer seen as the referent for determining humanity, but rather a Social Other took its

¹⁰ Hall, 13.

¹¹ Hall, 15–16.

¹² Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," 26–27.

¹³ Wynter, 28.

¹⁴ Wynter, 33.

place, positing the “Negro” or the “Semite” as the images of Chaos and the Indo-European as “Humanity” (what Wynter calls Man(2)).¹⁵ The new episteme of natural reason is held in place by the literature and cosmogonical narratives performed and told about it to situate it as a universal ordering structure.¹⁶ In outlining this history, Wynter makes visible the epistemological categorical systems by which life is ordered, but she also wants to ask how we might find freedom from those systems.¹⁷ In other words, how do we undo the narratives (including foundational narratives of origins) around these various epistemes? By asking this question, Wynter acknowledges the ways that we cannot return to the mythological origins, in this instance because many of us cannot measure ourselves as human according to the definition of Man(2) (read straight, white, upper-middle class, cisgender, Christian male).¹⁸ As such, she argues that we need to find a new way of signifying ourselves in the world as ecumenically-Human, a way of holding entropic decay at bay, specifically a way that acknowledges our distinct location in the world, both where we have come from and where we are going (i.e., Stuart Hall’s routes).¹⁹ To go back to the terminology I have been using, she argues that we need to recreate our own centers to meet our specific situations. This must be a center within us because only such a center is representative of our placement in the world.

In turning to the notion of recreating centers, Wynter is pushing against cosmogonical narratives because a return to a pre-existing origin can never lead to our co-identification as

¹⁵ Wynter, 36; Wynter, “The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoietic Turn/Overtake, Its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self-)Cognition,” 187.

¹⁶ Wynter, “The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism,” 46–48; Wynter, “The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoietic Turn/Overtake, Its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self-)Cognition,” 198.

¹⁷ Wynter, “The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism,” 38.

¹⁸ Wynter, “The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoietic Turn/Overtake, Its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self-)Cognition,” 199.

¹⁹ Wynter, 191–94.

humans.²⁰ Instead, she argues that we must craft our understanding of the human separate from any cosmogony, or, in other words, separate from any origin to which we might return because it will always fall back into the patterns of signifying that have characterized the human quest to keep entropy at bay and that created the category of the Other.²¹ The problem, however, is that humans are unable to pre-exist our cosmogonies and, therefore, unable to fully escape them. Instead, for Wynter, we must embrace a hybridity and a unique mode of narrating ourselves as human.²² Specifically, Wynter pushes for an awareness of the human as *Homo Narrans*, the being who narrates their origin and navigates how others narrate their origin.²³ In this, we have the chance to recognize “the magma of all ‘local’ origin stories/accounts and their...*member-class* representations of origin...revealing it [the Man(2) cosmogony] to be but *one*, even if the first purely secular, *member-class* of the Ceremony Found’s own ecumenically human *classes of classes*.”²⁴ In other words, we can recognize that each narration (including that of Man(2)) is just one of many different origin stories, but what truly makes us human (what lets us find meaning) is that we all narrate our specific and local origins. As such, we can answer the inability to return to origins and the inability to define ourselves according to the Western origin story (and thereby find meaning according to the Western origin myth) by arguing that there is not one origin, but a plurality of origins.²⁵ Moreover, it is to say that origins do not exist as pre-defined stories, but

²⁰ Wynter, 201. Note the difference from Victor Turner’s notion that a return to our origins in the space of the limen would make us aware of our co-humanity and evokes a sense of *communitas*, since it is at the origin that we are the most undifferentiated. Wynter’s focus on the performed nature of origins may play a role in this since she can challenge what mythological origins we are allowed to imagine, and who those first people look like. Looking to Western European art that depicts Adam and Eve in Eden, where they are often shown as white, I become more aware of Wynter’s critique of whether origins can emphasize our co-humanity because the way that story is narrated inherently becomes exclusionary.

²¹ Wynter, 202–4.

²² Wynter, 213.

²³ Wynter, 216, 222–23.

²⁴ Wynter, 241.

²⁵ I will return to Wynter’s sense of a plurality of origins in a later section (“The Sacred Recreated”) when I use David Miller’s similar notion of plurality to discuss the remythologizing of the divine in the modern world through the lens of story. It is worth noting this here because the connection helps to establish how we are not just discussing

stories that we create in our narration of them. As such, origins are not something that one returns to, but something that one recreates in and through their own experiences. Such an argument follows Stuart Hall's lead in recognizing the need for producing our relationship with our origins, not just in where we have come from, but also where we are going. Likewise, it acknowledges the focus we put on communities for the notion of presence, rather than just centering the story itself. In that shift in thought, the search for origins becomes a search to recreate origins in our own specific situation, finding and making the origin in the act of narration itself.

In my own interpretation, the figures of the saints and fantasy characters are essential in facilitating the narration of an origin, and thereby play a fundamental role in allowing humanity to participate with the divine and craft religious meaning. Specifically, the saints and fantasy characters are valuable to this process because of their repetitive nature, allowing devotees and fans to create presence with the figure through the enactment of a relationship. In other words, the saint or fantasy character takes on presence and connection with divinity in the ways that devotees and fans find themselves reflected in the lives of the saints and fantasy characters, filling in their narrative arcs with their own being in acts of participation, and thereby reforming connections with the divine, which say something about our own being as human.

cultural or national origins (as one might be tempted to think of Wynter's work), but that through the work of Miller, it might also be applied to sacred origins and the ways we narrate our connection with the divine.

Dark Matters and Entropy²⁶

Scholars of both fantasy literature and hagiography have noted that the principal characters in these genres often lack in-depth physical characteristics, play large archetypal roles, and repeat the actions of former heroes and saints. This movement works to both empty the saint or fantasy character of their individuality and aura, but also to turn them into an “everyman” figure with which anyone can imagine themselves in association. In this tension between the emptiness of the holy figure and the resonances that might form with anyone, devotees and fans have a chance to restore (and restory) the presence of those figures using their own lives and stories through various means of participation. In this section, I focus on the emptiness of saints and fantasy characters and how that presence is restored through participatory relationships. This sets the stage to consider how devotees and fans narrate an origin and affirm identity for themselves in the following section.

L. Stephanie Cobb offers one insight into the repetitive characteristics of the saints arguing that what helps to make the saints so effective for the moral imagination is that they lack

²⁶ The title for this section is inspired by the artist Jack H. White’s series *Dark Matters and Entropy* and specifically, *Dark Matters and Entropy #52*, in the collection of the Georgia Museum of Art. White talks about how the series comes out of an interest in cosmology and physics in which he is thinking about the origins of the universe. He notes how Entropy represents the universe’s movement towards chaos over time (what Eliade might call the profane), whereas Dark Matter is an invisible force that helps to hold the universe together and create order (Eliade’s sacred). Since it plays such an important role in ordering the universe, White parodies the name to say that “Dark Matter” matters. The two notions together are interesting to him as “the dualities which most often engender creation.” In this instance, Dark Matter and Entropy fascinate me as the same dualities of order and disorder that Eliade uses to describe the origins of the universe. What is especially unique, however, is that Dark Matter remains invisible (neither emitting nor absorbing light) and the only reason we can recognize it is due to the gravitational pull it exercises on the objects around it. Because of its connections to origins, sacred order, and the fact that we can only detect it due to the effect it has on other bodies, I think it is a powerful metaphor for the presence of the saints or fantasy characters—figures that remain invisible but whom we can recognize in the ways they impact our movement through the world. Both represent ideas or particles that at first sight are empty or non-existent, but when we turn to their influences, they become essential to our conception of the world. “Renaissance Fine Art Opens in Harlem,” *Pendulum: Oscillating Inspirations* (blog), October 19, 2009, <https://pendulumswing.wordpress.com/2009/10/19/renaissance-fine-art-opens-in-harlem/>; Jack H. White, *Dark Matters and Entropy #52*, 2006, Dry pigment, oxidized iron and copper-bronze plaster on Masonite, 18 × 24 inches, 2006, GMOA 2011.607, Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia; The Larry D. and Brenda A. Thompson Collection of African American Art.

thick description in their physical characteristics, so devotees can use their imagination to fill the saints with a part of themselves.²⁷ Patricia Cox Miller makes a similar argument, noting that the saints lack major physical characteristics because they are said to share one spirit, and the absence of those characteristics allows for the easy elision of one character into another.²⁸ In this instance, I recall the example of St. Benedict from Chapter Four, whom Peter (the disciple of Gregory the Great) notes carries the same spirit as Moses, Elisha, Peter, and a host of others, recognizable in the fact that he completed the same miracles.²⁹ In turning to the Sufi mystic, Bayazid Ansari, William Sherman notes that these patterns of repetition around the saints work to empty them of their presences, specifically so that Bayazid's followers can place themselves in the skin of the saint and participate in his holiness.³⁰

I turn to these notions of repetition to describe the emptiness of the saints because it takes me away from questions of historicity, which complicate the question of presence, especially as I prepare to turn to fantasy characters. Since many saints are historical (or at least understood as historical) it might be easier to imagine them as having a real presence in the world, tied to their human spirit, than it is to imagine the presence of fantasy characters that lack such a distinction. By noting how emptiness can be established in the narrative itself, beyond what we might know about the historicity of the saint, I can understand them through the same theoretical framework, defining their presence on a literary level as I can with fantasy characters, who, as I will argue, also share in patterns of repetition. This takes me back to a distinction I made earlier where I want to look at the *realness* of these figures, not the *historicity*, which I do not consider to be exclusionary terms. While the historicity of the saints is certainly important to how we think

²⁷ Cobb, *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, 37.

²⁸ Miller, "Strategies of Representation in Collective Biography: Constructing the Subject as Holy," 232.

²⁹ Gregory the Great, *Life of St. Benedict* XIII. 8. St. Gregory the Great, *Grégoire Le Grand: Dialogues*.

³⁰ Sherman, "A Saint Dismembered."

about them, I want to pay attention to how I can think about their emptiness, presence, and reality separate from that category. On some level, it is easy to recognize the emptiness of fantasy characters because they do not refer to historical people and so, in essence, their names are empty signifiers. This, however, just raises more questions when I begin to think about the moments in which they take on presence (such as when someone mourns the death of a fantasy character), so it is worth asking how they are represented as empty through the literature itself before turning to the ways fans grant them presence through participation.

Drawing on A. J. Greimas's distinction between *actant* and *acteur*, Brian Attebery makes a similar argument about repetitive forms in reference to the construction of fantasy characters.³¹ In this breakdown, an *actant* is the archetypal level of the character, defined by the function they play in the story, whereas the *acteur* is the individual qualities the character holds. The way fantasy imagines its characters, for Attebery, is a dialogue between *actant* and *acteur*, so that while there may be some physical characteristics (which play an important role) there is still an empty space created by the *actant*.³² As readers, we join this dialogue as well and can project our own qualities onto an *actant*, shaping the character to look and act like ourselves.³³ This begins to resemble the ways that Cobb understands the development of saints where both leave room for the devotee or reader to imagine how their sense of Self overlaps with the character, and so how they can be an imaginative tool to shape identity.

I see examples of this in characters like Lewis's Ransom or Tolkien's Bilbo, who as pilgrims and wanderers, emerge as figures of the "everyman."³⁴ For instance, on the first page of

³¹ Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 73.

³² Attebery, 75.

³³ Brian Attebery, "Structuralism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge, GB: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 83.

³⁴ It is worth challenging this characterization on some level to ask who is really allowed to imagine themselves in the place of the so-called "everyman." Even its name implies a masculine presentation, which is not true to the general demographics of the fantasy fandom. I could further emphasize this break when the "everyman" figure for

Out of the Silent Planet, Ransom is solely named as “The Pedestrian,” leaving us with a truly empty signifier and offering an invitation for anyone to place themselves in his shoes as he begins this journey.³⁵ Bilbo first enters the pages of *The Hobbit* in the now famous line: “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.”³⁶ Moreover, Bilbo is continually referred to as “this hobbit” or “our particular hobbit” for a few pages before Tolkien gets into Bilbo’s genealogy. Therefore, like “The Pedestrian” there is a gap where an empty signifier takes on the principal role as the story begins to unfold. Since “hobbits” were a wholly new invention, coming to Tolkien as inspiration during the tedious task of grading student papers, the name serves as a doubly empty signifier as readers attempt to name this particular hobbit and what even *is* a hobbit in general.³⁷ In this emptiness, the imagination takes hold and we can begin to fill hobbits and saints with our own selves, granting them a presence through the act of participation in relationship.

Earlier, I described briefly how hagiography (Chapter One) and fantasy literature (Chapter Two) draw on participation, where in both instances, it described the ways devotees or fans bring narratives and figures closer to their own lives by touching the shrines of the saint or taking pilgrimages to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Key to this notion of participation

most fantasy texts begins to look remarkably alike (Frodo, Harry Potter, Percy Jackson, Jon Snow, and Edmund Pevenise might all be described as young, cisgender, white boys with unruly black hair). Fantasy scholars Ebony Elizabeth Thomas and Maria Sachiko Cecire, among others, have increasingly challenged the typical image of the fantasy figure and who is allowed to imagine themselves in the space of these stories. As Cecire writes, “I was looking into the downstairs bathroom mirror when I suddenly realized that I would never grow up to be a blonde-haired, blue-eyed fairy-tale princess. Seeing as I’m American and of Japanese-Italian descent, this seems obvious now...but in that moment, as I stood on the bathroom step stool scrutinizing my Asiatic features and sun-browned skin as if for the first time, I was crushed.” Cecire’s personal account stands as a clear critique of the “everyman” notion, and one that presents challenges to the construction of identity using the genre, even as we will explore forms of restorying that work around the limits of the genre. Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise of Children’s Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century*, vii; Thomas, *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*.

³⁵ Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 9.

³⁶ Tolkien, *The Hobbit or There and Back Again*, 1.

³⁷ Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth: How J. R. R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology*, 65–66.

was how it produces what Robert Orsi termed “presence-in-relationship,” namely presence constructed through the relationships we have with the saints or fantasy characters. Having noted the importance of participation for both literary cultures, I need to explain how people placing themselves into the narrative can give it greater power, aura, and presence through the connection with the lived experiences of devotees and fans.

Describing women’s devotions to St. Jude in Twentieth Century American Catholicism, Orsi gives us an example of how hagiographic texts mediate a presence-in-relationship. He is interested in the letters women would write to St. Jude including their prayer requests, thanks for the ways he responded, and encouragement to one another.³⁸ While this might move outside what we typically consider hagiography, since it is not describing the life of St. Jude, they become testaments to Jude’s continued activity in the world.³⁹ Each letter was a sign that Jude could and would respond to those prayer requests. As such, they are a sign of the presence that Jude had, an expectation that he was real and could act, even as we would not expect him to. Those letters were also published in a newsletter called *The Voice of St. Jude*, which allowed others to imagine the presence of Jude as well. In that sense, the devotees literally came to make up his voice in their participation, filling the publication with their words. The published letters were an account of prayers petitioned and prayers answered, becoming a living testament to how Jude moved in the world, and a voice comforting the devoted.⁴⁰ Therefore, their devotions, acted out in a relationship of letter writing, gave Jude a presence in the world. He was not just a figurine on an altar, but a voice that responded to their calls. In this instance, I can affirm presence in St. Jude, not because I know the historical person or see an apparition of him, but

³⁸ Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude: Women’s Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes*, 121.

³⁹ It is perhaps better to relate these letters to those segments in official hagiographic accounts with the list of post-mortem miracles often ascribed to the saint.

⁴⁰ Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude: Women’s Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes*, 125.

because I can see the impact that he has on his devotees, exercising something of a gravitational pull on their movements through the world, bringing order to the chaos of life.⁴¹

Prudentius, in his *Peristephanon Liber*, talks about the presence of the saints in a similar manner and how the participatory interactions between devotee and saint work to gift the saint a presence in the world. In speaking of devotion to St. Lawrence, whose body lies in Rome, Prudentius (writing in modern-day Spain) notes that he and his fellow devotees are separated from his body by the Ebro River and cannot attend to it—the site we might typically associate with the presence of the saint. Prudentius challenges this idea, however, claiming that given to Lawrence “is a double court / that of his body, [and] that of his soul in heaven.”⁴² Since he has a presence in heaven, devotees like Prudentius can honor him in Spain, praying and offering devotion to him, and, in turn, rooting his presence in Spain as well. Prudentius’ act of writing a hymn in honor of St. Lawrence even serves as an example of a participatory activity, as he prays that Lawrence will hear his prayer in light of the hymn that he has offered to him.⁴³

A similar notion is evoked later in the *Peristephanon Liber*, when Prudentius discusses the presence of St. Cyprian through his writings. After discussing Cyprian’s martyrdom and the consecration of his tomb, Prudentius comforts his readers, telling them to “stop crying for so good a man, he holds the reign of heaven, / neither does he move little over the earth nor has he withdrawn from the world: / he still discourses, speaks out, discusses, teaches, instructs, and prophesizes” and that this influence has now spread beyond the borders of Libya into Italy, Spain, and even among the Britons.⁴⁴ Prudentius imagines the presence of Cyprian still active in

⁴¹ See also Nancy E. Van Deusen, *Embodying the Sacred: Women Mystics in Seventeenth-Century Lima* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 16, 37–41.

⁴² Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber* II. 551–52. My translation. Latin: “*est aula nam duplex tibi, / hic corporis, mentis polo.*” Prudentius, *Prudentius*.

⁴³ See Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber* II. 577–84.

⁴⁴ Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber* XIII. 99–106. My translation of XIII. 99–101 quoted. Latin: “*desine flere bonum tantum, tenet ille regna caeli, / nec minus involitat terries nec ab hoc recedit orbe: / disserit, eloquitur, tracet, docet,*

the world and spreading beyond his original influence as a teacher in Libya. Moreover, given Cyprian's reputation as a bishop and a scholar, I can imagine how that influence and presence might spread throughout these regions in his writings themselves. In a sense, any time a devotee picks up the words of Cyprian, his presence is evoked and made real in the participatory action of reading. I would even say that Cyprian's writings become their own type of relic that can embody the presence of the saint, much like a piece of their body or clothing. In this dynamic, the participation of the devotees grants Cyprian his place within the cult of the saints and shapes how he might respond, even as he maintains a will of his own.⁴⁵

When I turn to fantasy, I see the same framework of participation and presence around the landscape authors develop, how fans imagine themselves in those landscapes, and the subsequent impact that has on the presence of fantasy characters. As an author, Tolkien is specifically constructing a world that readers can experience as real, even when we do not expect it to be, in order to produce Secondary Belief. This mirrors how hagiographers recount stories of the saints and their miracles, allowing devotees to imagine a power there that we would not expect. It is the story itself that helps to foster that relationship, and, therefore, construct the presence of these figures.⁴⁶

instruit, prophetat. / nec Libyae populos tantum regit; exit usque in ortum / solis et usque obitum, Gallos fovet, inquit Britannos, / praesidet Hesperiae, Christum serit ultimis Hiberis, / Denique doctor humi est, idem quoque martyr in supernis, / instruit hic homines, illinc pia dona dat patronus. Prudentius, Prudentius.

⁴⁵ I might make a comparison to Foucault's notion of the Author Function, in which the "Author" comes to embody how we think about the writer of a text, holding together as an idea everything we relate to that Author (their life, their writings, their cultural impact, etc.) In a sense, the Author takes on a life of its own, separated from the author themselves, and comes to stand as a presence because of the influence they can exercise in the world. The figure of the Saint takes on a similar function, gaining a presence and authority not based solely on their historical lives, but also in the ways that people have imagined them and participated with their relics and writings. In a sense, the Saint becomes more than the historical saint ever was. Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Select Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977).

⁴⁶ Hahn, *Passion Relics and the Medieval Imagination: Art, Architecture, and Society*, 102–3.

I see this especially well in how fans have responded to the landscape of Middle-earth, such as I see in an example of Hobbiton and the surrounding forests.⁴⁷ Fans have a relationship with these texts that give the land a presence, not only in Middle-earth, but in our world as well, like Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle mirrors an actual castle structure. They become real places we can immerse ourselves within. For instance, a look at the film locations for Hobbiton in New Zealand reveals that fans have a greater relationship with the world of Middle-earth than simply picturing it as a fantasy world.

On the North Island of New Zealand, an outdoor film set from the initial *The Lord of the Rings* movies and the later *The Hobbit* movies remains intact, recreating an immersive version of J. R. R. Tolkien's Hobbiton. This has become a popular tourist destination, especially among fans of Tolkien's work. It also provides us with an example of how fans have come to engage with fantasy texts. It should be noted that film tourism like this is extremely common now, and by itself, does not say anything unique about how fans relate to the fantasy genre. One difference, however, is how fantasy fans might approach these types of tourism opportunities. In a study of tourism to Hobbiton, Gary Best and Kamaljeet Singh break down the categories of visitors to this site and what they hope to achieve from the experience. Many of those surveyed note that they primarily visited because of the location, and a desire to gain a the behind-the-

⁴⁷ Farah Mendlesohn once noted that the landscape or world of the fantasy realm (especially the portal quest fantasy) is perhaps the most important character, which makes sense when I think about how fantasy and science fiction stories allow space for new writers to occupy the same world and produce the same effect amongst fans. It is the world that unites the stories together. This plays into Tolkien's notion of Secondary Belief, which I align with the notion of presence-in-relationship. Tolkien draws our attention to Fantasy, which not only creates a green sun, but also a world in which we might believe a green sun to be possible. Fantasy creates a world in which talking trees are possible and draw our attention. Fantasy creates worlds in which we might have Secondary Belief. By creating this realm in which we can believe a green sun or talking tree to be real, the writer has to bring the reader into relationship with that realm. It requires an emotional investment that demands the reader immerse themselves in the story, treating it as real, even as it is fiction. It is that immersion and relationship that is essential to creating a presence around these tales because it is what allows us to treat them as real, even when we do not expect them to be. As such a profound voice in fantasy scholarship, Tolkien's framework adds credence to my argument that fantasy can be a form of hagiography because it produces presence. Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 28.

scenes look at the set. This fits what I would expect from someone who visits a Hollywood set of their favorite show, hoping to see some of the set secrets. Other visitors to Hobbiton, however, specifically desired an immersive experience of it, inspired by their reading of *The Lord of the Rings*.⁴⁸ While the first group speaks to general practices of film tourism, the desire to immerse oneself in another world is a unique quality of the fantasy genre that is worth examining for what it says about ideas of presence.⁴⁹

It is also worth noting that this is not unique to *The Lord of the Rings* series, but Dennis Siler has noted a similar phenomenon around The Wizarding World of Harry Potter in Orlando, Florida, in which people visit the site with the intention of having an immersive, “numinous,” experience of the world of *Harry Potter*.⁵⁰ This example especially alerts me to the difference between regular film tourism and those seeking an immersive experience because there are few behind-the-scenes elements to The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, mainly consisting of costumes and props from the set. Instead, it is almost solely built as an immersive environment in which fans can wave wands that utilize technology to impact the environment around them, drink butterbeer, dress in Hogwarts robes, and go on rides that simulate some of Harry’s experiences (like a ride on *The Hogwarts Express*).

I explain the difference between the two types of film/literary tourism through an appeal to the notions of participation and presence. Treating this type of tourism as a form of participation, such tourism reinforces a presence around Hobbiton or Hogwarts where devotee

⁴⁸ Gary Best and Kamaljeet Singh, “Film-Induced Tourism- Motivations of Visitors to the Hobbiton Movie Set as Featured in The Lord of the Rings,” in *International Tourism and Media Conference Proceedings* (Melbourne: Monash University, 2004), 106.

⁴⁹ Cf. Elijah Wood (the actor who played Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* films) gave an interview on *The Graham Norton Show* discussing his final days on the Hobbiton set. In that interview, one can hear the contrasts between how Graham Norton discusses Hobbiton as a set and Wood’s sense that it is a real place. “Series 10, Episode 5,” *The Graham Norton Show* (BBC One, November 29, 2011), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xf1nYEOYx-U>.

⁵⁰ Siler, “Wizarding World Tourism: Numinous Experiences of the Harry Potter Generation,” 99–100.

and fan responses to these texts treat them as real, as exercising an impact on the fan. They, thereby, take on a level of reality, even as we do not expect it. In short, these places have presence. In the example of Hobbiton, a regular film tourist wants to see how the film is made. They want the mask drawn back, emphasizing the fictionality of it all. For someone seeking an immersive experience, however, they want to enter into the world of *The Lord of the Rings*, even if just for a moment, because the world is real for them and by placing their being in that space, Hobbiton takes on a greater level of reality, sharing in the presence of the fans.⁵¹ Likewise, when one enters the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, especially on a busy day, it appears (if for a second) as it did when Harry first arrived at Diagon Alley in *The Sorcerer's Stone*. In that regard, all the people in that space contribute to its realness, increasing its presence as more fans enter the space. I would even say it is a difference of hypermediacy and immediacy, where the film tourist wants to know more about the medium and the fantasy tourist hopes to make the medium disappear entirely.⁵² The impact of the land plays an important role, not only in making the world imaginable to the reader, but also making it into a world the readers can imagine themselves within, further granting it and its characters presence.

The vast scholarship from fans of *Harry Potter* shows how these complex notions come together to have an impact on the presence of characters. Dion McLeod and Elise Payne note that the continued work on *Harry Potter* has blurred the lines between the world of the text and the world of reality (as discussed in Chapter Four), to the point that fans can almost imagine themselves as part of that world, especially through sites like The Wizarding World of Harry

⁵¹ See Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, 52.

⁵² Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 24, 34.

Potter or Hobbiton and roleplaying video games.⁵³ A related movement, however, is that not only does the land take on a presence, but fans almost come to picture themselves as pseudo-supporting characters, moving around in the background as all of the events of the story unfold. They may even identify themselves strongly with the tertiary characters we see in the text, like Neville Longbottom or Luna Lovegood.⁵⁴ Fans have this possibility before them because these tertiary characters are more *actant* than *acteur* and so are open to filling in the details of our own lives to a degree the primary characters lack. In this act, fans form their own interpretations of the world, giving the characters presence in relation to their own lived experiences in the world. Heather Urbanski notes how this is something that really picked up with the *Harry Potter* fandom, as the new media of the Twenty-First Century allowed the blurring of lines not only between the world of the text and the world of reality, but also to blur the line of producer/author and receiver/reader, allowing fans to fill in the gaps left in the narrative.⁵⁵ In that sense, fans are allowed to construct the voices of different *Harry Potter* characters based on their interpretations of their lives and how they see their character arc developing, in turn empowering those characters with a presence of their own. This is the same process Orsi describes happening among women who write in letters to St. Jude.⁵⁶ In both, I see how fan and devotee participation with fantasy worlds, characters, and saints plays a major role in constructing their presence, even as they might appear to be empty, repetitive, or archetypal forms.⁵⁷

⁵³ Dion McLeod and Elise Payne, “Loony Lovegood and the Almost Chosen One: Harry Potter, Supporting Characters and Fan Reception,” in *The Harry Potter Generation: Essays on Growing Up with the Series*, ed. Emily Lauer and Balaka Basu (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2019), 37.

⁵⁴ McLeod and Payne, 38.

⁵⁵ Heather Urbanski, “Filling in Memory Gaps with Love: Harry Potter on Tumblr,” in *The Harry Potter Generation: Essays on Growing Up with the Series*, ed. Emily Lauer and Balaka Basu (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2019), 114–15.

⁵⁶ Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude: Women’s Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes*, 125–26.

⁵⁷ If there is any doubt about the presence that these characters take on in relation to fans, one need only consider the impact a character death has on fan communities. In those moments, these fans experience real grief over these lost characters. In a sense, I recall Judith Butler’s claim that “if a life is not grievable, it is not quite a life...” even as I

Presence-in-relationship becomes such a central aspect of understanding the saints and understanding the ways fans relate to fantasy characters, that hagiographers and authors include explanations and signs of this presence in the stories themselves. In the lives of the saints, this is often expressed when the cult of the martyrs refuses to heal someone at their altar, as a sign of their continued presence and activity in the world, specifically in the ways they maintain the authority to refuse healing. I see one such example in Bede's *Life of St. Cuthbert* where a group of martyrs refuses to grant a cure in order to show Cuthbert's power and influence amongst them.⁵⁸ Likewise, in Prudentius' *Peristephanon Liber*, he notes the martyrs' ability to hear prayers and fulfill any they deem acceptable.⁵⁹ Near the end of Gregory the Great's *Life of St. Benedict*, Gregory offers an explanation for the ability to grant or refuse prayers by evoking the notion of presence (*praesentia*). In that section, Gregory notes that there is no doubt the martyrs are able to reveal themselves through powerful signs where they are buried, but he emphasizes that "because it is possible for weak minds to doubt whether they are present (*praesentes sint*) and able to listen there, where they are obviously not in their bodies [i.e., where their soul no

put her claim in reverse. If a fantasy death is grievable, then surely that character had life and reality to some degree. Even if we cannot really see the character and their corporeality, we know that they are there based on the gravitational pull they have on us in their death. We see the impact in how they can undo us since, in the context of relationship, they have become part of our identity and therefore real by participation with us. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London, GB: Verso, 2004), 34. For more on fantasy death, presence, and religion, see my forthcoming chapter: Nathan E. Fleeson, "'Remember What It's Like to Be Human': Finding Humanity in Fantasy Grief," in *Theology and the Riordanverse*, ed. Nathan E. Fleeson and Carolyn M. Jones Medine, Theology and Pop Culture (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books and Fortress Academic, Forthcoming). For further examples of this type of fan participation and presence, see Amelia Wynne, "Hundreds of Harry Potter Fans Dressed in Their Magical Best Descend on London's King's Cross Station to Mark What Would Be the Boy Wizard's First Day Back at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry," *Daily Mail*, September 1, 2019, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7416515/Harry-Potter-fans-descend-Londons-Kings-Cross-station-mark-day-Hogwarts.html?ito=social-facebook&fbclid=IwAR208TBXm7OA7tIm9JC2KO6I9B0AFIBepsLcgdumUYz7sMeDCeDjqlRMsvU>; "Harry Potter: Could Dobby's Grave Be Moved from Freshwater West?," *BBC News*, May 4, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-61317891>.

⁵⁸ Bede, *Life of St. Cuthbert* 41. Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life*. Also see Gregory the Great's *Life of St. Benedict* XVI.1. St. Gregory the Great, *Grégoire Le Grand: Dialogues*.

⁵⁹ Prudentius, *Peristephanon Liber* X. 97–98. Prudentius, *Prudentius*.

longer resides because the body is dead], it is necessary that they reveal greater signs there, where it is possible for a weak mind to doubt their presence (*praesentia*).”⁶⁰ In this passage, Gregory points to the importance of the presence of the martyrs as that which allows them to perform signs and grant miracles. This presence, however, is established in relationship, whereby it becomes more real and powerful for people in the signs performed and in the devotions wrought at the tomb of the saint. I see the tension here between presence and participation in which signs of presence encourage participation and participation affirms the presence of the saint.

Fantasy authors also insert their voice into the text to affirm the presence of their characters, even as they exist in the field of fiction. For example, in *The Deathly Hallows*, after a conversation with Dumbledore in a vision, Harry asks him if the conversation has been real or if it has just been happening inside his head. Dumbledore responds that “Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?”⁶¹ Dumbledore’s characteristic response offers an answer not only for Harry’s visionary encounter with him, but also the question of readers about whether the story of *Harry Potter* has been real or if it has just been taking place as a plot in their head. While it may be something that readers have been imagining, Dumbledore challenges that it is still real and that it still has presence because of the impact the story has had upon readers and the ways they have affirmed its importance in their lives.

⁶⁰ Gregory the Great, *Life of St. Benedict* XXXVIII.3. My translation. Latin: “*Ubi in suis corporibus sancti martyres iacent, dubium, Petre, non est quod multa valeant signa monstrare, sicut et faciunt, et pura mente quaerentibus innumera miracula ostendunt. Sed quia ab infirmis potest mentibus dubitari, utrumne ad exaudiendum ibi praesentes sint, ubi constat quia in suis corporibus non sint, ibi eos necesse est maiora signa ostendere, ubi de eorum praesentia potest mens infirma dubitare.*” St. Gregory the Great, *Grégoire Le Grand: Dialogues*.

⁶¹ Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 723.

Rick Riordan plays with the same idea in his description of the Olympians in *Percy Jackson* as he attempts to explain their ontological status to Percy and the reader. When the Olympians are first introduced in *Percy Jackson*, Riordan emphasizes that they are neither the metaphysical God we normally imagine when thinking about deities (especially from a monotheistic perspective), but neither are they just stories to explain lightning or the seasons.⁶² Rather, they are something in between, in which they do not exist on a metaphysical level, but they have too great an influence on us and our world to be *just* stories or *just* myth. As Chiron tells Percy,

The gods are part of it [the West]. You might even say they are the source of it, or at least, they are tied so tightly to it that they couldn't possibly fade, not unless all of Western civilization were obliterated...I defy you to find any American city where the Olympians are not prominently displayed in multiple places...America is now the heart of the flame. It is the great power of the West. And so Olympus is here.⁶³

Riordan uses this passage to claim that the Olympians have a continued presence in the world and still tell us something about our experience as humans (at least in the West)⁶⁴ because we continue to evoke their names to construct our identities.⁶⁵ In turn, we stay in relationship with them, granting them a continued presence in the world. Returning to our definition of fantasy in Chapter Two, it is in the presence that these figures reveal something to us about our humanity in the ways they produce desire and wonder.

⁶² Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, 67–68.

⁶³ Riordan, 72–73.

⁶⁴ Compare to how C. S. Lewis speaks about fairy stories at the end of his essay, “Sometimes Fairy Stories” in which he says these stories have the power to “give us experiences we have never had and thus, instead of ‘commenting on life,’ can add to it.” Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s To Be Said,” 60.

⁶⁵ This concept rings especially true working at a university in Athens, GA, that borrows extensively on its Grecian namesake to define itself, whether in buildings like “The Classic Center” or the architecture.

Later, in *The Battle of the Labyrinth* and *The Last Olympian*, Riordan elaborates on this relationship, rooting the presence of the Olympians in their relationship with humanity and the demigods. A side-plot in the *Percy Jackson* series is the character Grover's quest for the god Pan, who will hopefully restore the environment to its former glory. When the heroes find Pan, however, they discover that he has begun to fade and will not last much longer. In that moment, Pan explains that the gods begin to fade "when they cease to have power, and their sacred places disappear."⁶⁶ In other words, they fade when they no longer create desire and wonder within humanity and offer us new experiences to understand ourselves further. Dionysius later explains to Percy that the Olympians need the mortals to save Olympus because it serves as a reminder that the Olympians still stand as a site of enchantment for mortals.⁶⁷

I see in this dynamic how presence becomes mediated by fan participation. It is the mortals caring about the Olympians and their sites that help create a sense of enchantment about them and offer them a presence in the world. Otherwise, they would simply fade out of time and memory. As readers encounter Percy Jackson on the level of story, I would say something very similar about him and his presence. Just as the Olympians rely on the demigods to maintain a level of reality in the world, so Percy Jackson takes on meaning in relationship with his readers and relies on us and the ways we participate with his story to maintain his own sense of presence in the world. As such, both fantasy characters and the saints operate in this space of presence and participation in which they derive their being and reality in the ways fans and devotees honor them.

⁶⁶ Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Battle of the Labyrinth* (Los Angeles, CA: Disney Hyperion, 2008), 314.

⁶⁷ Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Last Olympian* (Los Angeles, CA: Disney Hyperion, 2009), 268–69.

The play between empty fantasy characters and saints and the construction of presence through participation with fans and devotees requires movement through a liminal space. It is in that space where the fan or devotee can occupy the name or world of a fantasy character or saint, and thereby gift them presence through their own place in the sacred rhythm of the world. So far, however, I have primarily been exploring how fans and devotees contribute to this presence with their own being, which will be important later when we consider whether these presences connect fans and devotees with the divine. There is another side of this tension, however, namely the ways that fans and devotees find resonances with the stories of fantasy characters and saints, and thereby make the divine meaningful within their current situation. The ability to find those resonances returns us to Sylvia Wynter and Stuart Hall and their notions of recreating origins within ourselves by recognizing the divine in the stories of our identity. As such, I must next explore the ways that the presences of the saints or fantasy characters come into the space of the Self to construct identity and to find resonances. With this established, the last section can affirm the sacredness of those presences, and, thereby, how fans have made the sacred meaningful for their particular lives.

“The Dreadful Resonance Between Heaven and Earth”

As I explored, the liminal space of story allows devotees and fans to fill the stories of the saints and fantasy characters with a presence in acts of participation, making the figures real for the lives of the fan or devotee. That liminal space, however, also lets fans and devotees merge their stories with the lives of the saints or the legends of fantasy characters to recreate a sacred origin in themselves. Hagiography scholar, Robert Orsi, refers to this as the moments we find a “dreadful resonance between heaven and earth” recognizing how the stories of the saints (or fantasy characters for my argument) let us articulate aspects of our identity, and find meaning in

their relationship to heavenly figures.⁶⁸ This happens as the figure of the saint or fantasy character gives devotees and fans the words to name and discover aspects of their identity they previously lacked and as the devotee and fan uses the saint or fantasy character to recognize those elements as reflections of divinity. It happens in moments while reading a story when a character says or does something that touches the core of one's being, even if we never had the words to name it before. As emphasized earlier, the language of resonance here does not promote the notion of a "return" to sacred origins, but rather a recognition of how we ourselves already hold the sacred within us and how saints or fantasy characters let us name and narrate that value in an act of identity construction. Paul Ricoeur's notion of emplotment offers me a useful theoretical framework to understand what this act of narration might entail.

I find Ricoeur valuable here because of his emphasis on narration as part of identity construction, which mirrors how I opened this chapter with Stuart Hall and Sylvia Wynter who emphasize the importance of narrative for recreating an origin within ourselves. Moreover, Ricoeur's theory of emplotment relies on bringing together the narrative threads of our lives and the stories we read, which resembles Orsi's language of "resonances," offering another connection to bring my theoretical framework full circle. In short, Hall and Wynter offer a framework in which narration recreates origins, while Orsi argues that narrative resonances are an important part of identity construction. As such, Ricoeur helps unite the three by pointing to how emplotment as narration plays a role in identity construction, an action that can recreate the sacred within us when we utilize the resonances that exist between heaven and earth.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, 144–45.

⁶⁹ Rico G. Monge offers a similar assessment of how Paul Ricoeur comes together with Orsi along with other theorists to help understand the impact of hagiography on devotees, although using a slightly different framework than what I am offering here. See Rico G. Monge, "Saints, Truth, and the 'Use and Abuse' of Hagiography," in *Hagiography and Religious Truth: Case Studies in the Abrahamic and Dharmic Traditions*, ed. Rico G. Monge, Kerry P. C. San Chirico, and Rachel J. Smith (London, GB: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 7–22.

When Ricoeur thinks about identity, he positions it in relation to narrative using the term “emplotment,” to note how humans use narrative to create meaning out of the stories of their life.⁷⁰ This process, for Ricoeur, is a merging of the world of the text and the world of the reader, much as I have described above in the creation of presence. Ricoeur takes this in the direction of identity, however, and claims that when we narrate ourselves (emplot our lives) to create a Self, we are drawing on the givens of our historical existence (those stories that we have experienced) along with the possibilities offered by the freedom of the imagination.⁷¹ As such, I would say that we construct the Self by cobbling together bits and pieces of our experience of the world and the possibilities that literature offers to us, using the pieces of literature to give meaning to the historical experiences. This relies on the narration of the text in ways I have already explored, but the true potential lies in what readers do with that once they encounter it. In Orsi’s terms, it allows the saints or fantasy characters to function as articulatory pivots by which we make sense of our stories in the act of narration, but also see them validated in the resonances that form with the eternal stories of heaven, with the divine presences of these figures. The important ways that fantasy and hagiography can play this role is probably best expressed in the moments where they fall short of that idea or where fans and devotees utilize a religious imagination to encounter these figures in new ways.⁷²

Working out of the fantasy tradition, Ebony Thomas describes the ways that it takes part in myth-making and meaning-making, which I have been discussing, but is more interested in

⁷⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 11; Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 155–62.

⁷¹ Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, 12.

⁷² Ricoeur seems to encourage such imaginative works in the act of emplotment, noting that what lets literary fiction serve such an important role in shaping identity is how it can be an “immense laboratory for thought experiments in which this connection is submitted to an endless number of imaginative variations.” Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 159.

“what happens when neither characters nor narrators in the fantastic seem to image *you* as a possible interlocutor.”⁷³ In other words, what happens for those who read fantasy, but who do not have the heroic resonance between the story and their lives, and, through that, the resonance between heaven and earth. Specifically, Thomas is asking about when “young readers of color realize that the characters I am rooting for are not positioned like me in the real world, and the characters that are positioned like me are not the team to root for.”⁷⁴ She notes that usually in fantasy, the purpose of darkness is to unsettle and act as the foil by which we understand goodness, a trait that Maria Sachiko Cecire also notes in her recent work.⁷⁵ As such, not everyone is allowed to see themselves as the heroic figure of fantasy, due to the ways that race and a colonial imagination has affected it.⁷⁶ For my purposes, what this demonstrates is how certain groups may be cut off from the imaginative spaces of fantasy, and so cut off from the religious imagination that fantasy can offer. Ultimately, this impacts the ways people can understand themselves and the world around them, confining them to single stories.⁷⁷ In light of Ricoeur’s sense that the freedom of the imagination is a crucial aspect of how we construct a Self, and find meaning in that construction, this is a major failure on the part of fantasy if it cannot foster a religious imagination and create those resonances.

Thomas, however, also explores the ways that fans have reacted to this characteristic of fantasy, with Hermione from *Harry Potter* as a key example in that framework. Like other scholars of fandom, Thomas notes the ways that there is a blurred boundary between reader, author, and text made possible through powerful, new media networks that let fans reimagine the

⁷³ Thomas, *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*, 19.

⁷⁴ Thomas, 19.

⁷⁵ Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise of Children’s Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century*, 173.

⁷⁶ Thomas, *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*, 30–32.

⁷⁷ Thomas, 6.

stories for themselves and find themselves in those stories.⁷⁸ This has expressed itself in the ways that fans read Hermione Granger as Black, claiming her for themselves.⁷⁹ The books do little to dispel this reading since the first time we encounter Hermione, she is described as having “a bossy sort of voice, lot of bushy brown hair, and rather large front teeth.”⁸⁰ In these descriptions, race never really enters the picture, and so, many Black girls have described their experience as reading Hermione as Black from the first time they picked up the books.⁸¹ In this, Thomas sees a liberation of the imagination, opening an infinite number of story worlds where fans can reconstruct the narrative in ways that are meaningful for them.⁸² This is a characteristic of restorying narratives to make room and further inscribe themselves into the stories that are told.⁸³ This itself becomes a powerful mode of participation with the figures of the story as one begins to fashion their lives around one’s own identity, rethinking these figures in art and fan fiction.

Turning to examples of how LGBTQ people have encountered both the saints and fantasy characters offers another example of this restorying potential and how both types of figures can become powerful articulatory pivots to recognize and name the holy within fans and devotees. Often this work occurs in fanzines or fan fiction, which allow fans to analyze the text and its visual elements in relation to the fan themselves, so that the fan can re-articulate and complicate ideas of their identity through the material form of the zine or fiction.⁸⁴ Moreover, the “in-progress” nature of fanzines and fan fiction allows for fans to bring together multiple aspects of

⁷⁸ Thomas, 154.

⁷⁹ Thomas, 153.

⁸⁰ Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, 105.

⁸¹ Thomas, *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*, 153.

⁸² Thomas, 155–56.

⁸³ Ebony Elizabeth Thomas and Amy Stornaiuolo, “Restorying the Self: Bending Toward Textual Justice,” *Harvard Educational Review* 86, no. 3 (2016): 314.

⁸⁴ Anne Hays, “Reading the Margins: Embedded Narratives in Feminist Personal Zines,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 50, no. 1 (2017): 91–92; Sanna Lehtonen, “Writing Oneself into Someone Else’s Story-Experiments with Identity and Speculative Life Writing in Twilight Fan Fiction,” *Fafnir: Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research* 2, no. 2 (2015): 8.

their identity, considering them in the process of writing these narratives, even crossing out previous thoughts, feeding Ricoeur and Jenkin's sense that the infinite possibilities of fiction play into the ways we narrate our identity, or Wynter's sense that we recognize the origin as a plurality.⁸⁵ In this effort to cut and paste aspects of the story and aspects of one's life together in the creation of a fanzine or fan fiction, one takes part in a material act of emplotment, not only recognizing the resonances between heaven and earth, but also voicing them in an act of subcreation. While there may be a question about whether such an act really forms resonances between heaven and earth, especially in relation to fantasy literature (which I will explore in the next section), what it does offer is a sense that you are making yourself part of something bigger by bringing yourself into the space of the text.⁸⁶ In other words, this is still an important and identity-empowering resonance that plays a role in how we move through the world.⁸⁷

With this framework in mind, I want to consider the popularity of slash fiction within fandom communities as a way to create space and narrate queer identity. Slash fiction refers to fan writing in which typically straight characters are reimagined in queer romances, drawing on subtext that fans claim exists in the canon.⁸⁸ In these re-imaginings, scholars argue that queer audiences read media texts "as if" to challenge the fixed nature of a text and question what it

⁸⁵ Hays, "Reading the Margins: Embedded Narratives in Feminist Personal Zines," 101.

⁸⁶ Elizabeth O'Brien, "Zines: A Personal History," *New England Review* 33, no. 2 (2012): 93.

⁸⁷ I could say something similar about cosplay or any number of other fan interventions in which fans "put on" a character for a period of time, using that character as a way to articulate and voice a part of their identity. In a sense, this performance helps to make that aspect of their identity real for the fan. See Hale, "Cosplay: Intertextuality, Public Texts, and the Body Fantastic"; Joel Gn, "Queer Simulation: The Practice, Performance, and Pleasure of Cosplay," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 25, no. 4 (2011): 583–93; Elizabeth Gackstetter Nichols, "Playing with Identity: Gender, Performance, and Feminine Agency in Cosplay," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 33, no. 2 (2019): 270–82; Lamerichs, "Stranger than Fiction: Fan Identity in Cosplay."; Taylor Driggers, *Queering Faith in Fantasy Literature: Fantastic Incarnations and the Deconstruction of Theology* (London, GB: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 162–164.

⁸⁸ Frederik Dhaenens, Sofie Van Bauwel, and Daniel Biltereyst, "Slashing the Fiction of Queer Theory: Slash Fiction, Queer Reading, and Transgressing the Boundaries of Screen Studies, Representations, and Audiences," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 32, no. 4 (2008): 335; Catherine Tosenberger, "Homosexuality at the Online Hogwarts: Harry Potter Slash Fanfiction," *Children's Literature* 38 (2008): 187.

might mean to imagine queer characters through the lens of the reader.⁸⁹ In other words, what it might mean for LGBTQ readers to narrate themselves in the story, thereby crafting a resonance and sacred origin or to follow Wynter, what it might mean to narrate an origin for ourselves using this literature.⁹⁰ For instance, I take the common example of Draco/Harry slash fiction from the *Harry Potter* fan community. Catherine Tosenberger, in a study of Draco/Harry slash fiction, notes that fan fiction offers a space for young fans “to explore discourse of sexuality, especially queerness, outside the various culturally official stances marketed to them.”⁹¹ This play with identity, through characters like Harry and Draco, displays the ways these characters allow fans to voice ideas around queerness and ask what it means for them, taking advantage of the infinite possibilities these characters offer for that type of play.

⁸⁹ Dhaenens, Van Bauwel, and Biltereyst, “Slashing the Fiction of Queer Theory: Slash Fiction, Queer Reading, and Transgressing the Boundaries of Screen Studies, Representations, and Audiences,” 338, 341, 343.

⁹⁰ Throughout this section, I am interested in the ways that LGBTQ people in general might use fantasy slash fiction to help narrate an identity for themselves, particularly in a series like *Harry Potter* that lacks any canonical queer characters but carries a strong queer subtext. As part of this, it is necessary to acknowledge that a number of studies have emphasized the common base for writing and reading slash fiction is young, heterosexual, females and not necessarily the queer people that I am arguing might use slash fiction to narrate an aspect of their identity. For instance, in the case of Draco/Harry slash fiction I am about to explore, one might expect that gay men would find this pairing the most meaningful for narrating identity, contrary to the fact that it is straight women writing the stories. That said, there has recently been more scholarship acknowledging the complexity of the fan communities, where while the vast majority of fan fiction writers/readers may be women, many identify as queer, and there is a decent number of queer men involved in these communities as well. In fact, Draco/Harry slash fiction is used as a foil to establish queer identity in the popular coming-out story, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (See Becky Albertalli, *Simon vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda* (Balzer + Bray, 2015), 21.). This has raised some questions about both the ethics of writing slash fan fiction (does it constitute a queer minstrel show?) and how to navigate the various voices of the community. With this in mind, I intend to bring the example of Draco/Harry slash fiction, with the knowledge of its limitations, but also following the example of Lucy Neville and James Joshua Coleman who argue for how slash fiction can play a role in navigating identity for the various voices of the fan fiction community, meeting different demands as we lean into the infinite potentials that fan fiction offers. Joseph Brennan, “‘Fandom Is Full of Pearl Clutching Old Ladies’: Nonnies in the Online Slash Closet,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 17, no. 4 (2014): 363–80; Lucy Neville, “‘The Tent’s Big Enough for Everyone’: Online Slash Fiction as a Site for Activism and Change,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 25, no. 3 (2018): 384–98; James Joshua Coleman, “Writing with Impunity in a Space of Their Own: On Cultural Appropriation, Imaginative Play, and a New Ethics of Slash in Harry Potter Fan Fiction,” *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 11, no. 1 (2019): 84–111; Marianne MacDonald, “Harry Potter and the Fan Fiction Phenom,” *The Gay and Lesbian Review* 13, no. 1 (2006): 28–31; Sharon Hayes and Matthew Ball, “Queering Cyberspace: Fan Fiction Communities as Spaces for Expressing and Exploring Sexuality,” in *Queering Paradigms*, ed. Burkhard Scherer (Oxford, GB: Peter Lang, 2009), 219–39.

⁹¹ Tosenberger, “Homosexuality at the Online Hogwarts: Harry Potter Slash Fanfiction,” 202.

One common example of this type of play around Draco/Harry slash are the ways the characters allow fans to think about how masculinity might be expressed, pushing against traditional expectations.⁹² In the example, “Checkmate” by a fan with the handle Sweetdeniall, Harry and Draco maintain their hyper-masculine image as sport-stars from the books (even taking flying-related dates together), while also renegotiating their toxic aggressiveness that fan fiction writers often depict as preventing their early friendship and exploring what traditionally may be considered feminine interests, such as Draco’s love of fine clothing.⁹³ In this case, fan fiction gives Draco and Harry (and by extension fans) the space to mix characteristics across the gender spectrum while engaging in romantic relationships, so that the characters offer new expressions of gender and sexuality for fans to integrate into their own identity.⁹⁴ What is especially interesting about this movement is that these fans have the ability to think through and voice these new gender identities in any number of ways, but they choose characters like Harry and Draco for this type of play, borrowing on a powerful narrative to help narrate an identity for themselves. In this dynamic, Harry and Draco act as the articulatory pivots for shaping identity, as fans embody part of themselves into these figures to give that part of themselves a voice. Moreover, in voicing their queerness through a fantasy world, they are able to participate with a divine presence and claim queerness as a sacred center through which they find a resonance with something beyond themselves.

I see a similar dynamic in the ways that LGBTQ Christians have crafted relationships around the saints to recognize and name the sacred within themselves and within their queerness.

⁹² Tosenberger, 192–93.

⁹³ Sweetdeniall, “Checkmate,” Wattpad, July 5, 2015, <https://www.wattpad.com/story/43922058-checkmate>.

⁹⁴ Hayes and Ball, “Queering Cyberspace: Fan Fiction Communities as Spaces for Expressing and Exploring Sexuality.” Since fan fiction creates the space for anyone to add their own narrative, to a certain degree it resists the possibility of a single normative identity, allowing for the rich possibility of self-constructing among fans. Jennifer Duggan, “Transformative Readings: Harry Potter Fan Fiction, Trans/Queer Reader Response, and J. K. Rowling,” *Children’s Literature in Education*, 2021.

Often this involves the same type of imaginative work, but again demonstrates the ways that the figures of the saints offer a powerful way to narrate that identity within ourselves. Donald Boisvert has written several reflections on his own experience in queering the lives of the saints as a way to positively affirm his identity as a gay Catholic.⁹⁵ In his own words, Boisvert argues that “in enfolding my life with their lives, I became more and more myself. In looking to their lives as models and inspirations, my own life, as a believer and a gay man, was enriched and made holy.”⁹⁶ This follows the same type of language that Jenkins and Hays use to describe the work of fan fiction, in which fans enfold parts of their lives with the lives of fantasy characters to narrate a personal identity, or how Ricoeur speaks of the act of emplotment. Boisvert takes it a step further though to emphasize the ways that the resonances that form there signal the holiness within himself and his queerness because the saints let him narrate their holiness into himself and his queerness in an act of religious play.⁹⁷ Returning to Stuart Hall, Boisvert is able to recognize how the sacred origins of the saints can become meaningful in a new context as the figures travel new routes and encounter new communities.

As one example of this imaginative narration, Boisvert points us to the figure of St. Sebastian, in whose story we see the ideological battle between Christianity and Roman religion after he begins converting members of the Roman army to Christianity under Diocletian.⁹⁸ In his reimagining, however, Boisvert emphasizes the closeness of Sebastian to Diocletian prior to his martyrdom, questioning whether their relationship had a sexual undertone and whether a

⁹⁵ Donald L. Boisvert, *Sanctity and Male Desire: A Gay Reading of Saints* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), 9; Donald L. Boisvert, “The Queerness of Saints: Inflecting Devotion and Same-Sex Desire,” in *New Approaches in History and Theology to Same-Sex Love and Desire*, ed. Mark D. Chapman and Dominic Janes (Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 250.

⁹⁶ Boisvert, “The Queerness of Saints: Inflecting Devotion and Same-Sex Desire,” 262.

⁹⁷ Boisvert, 253, 255, 261.

⁹⁸ Boisvert, *Sanctity and Male Desire: A Gay Reading of Saints*, 44.

secondary reason for his martyrdom was Sebastian's refusal to continue that relationship.⁹⁹ Boisvert goes on to argue that in such an interpretation, St. Sebastian's martyrdom is no longer just one of Christianity confronting Roman religion, but also "a struggle between two men desiring and possessing each other, to the ultimate destruction of one of them."¹⁰⁰ While there is certainly reason to question the historicity of Boisvert's reinterpretation of St. Sebastian, Boisvert also wants to emphasize that the history is not necessarily the most important aspect of Sebastian's story. Rather, Sebastian is able to speak across the limits of time to create a resonance of meaning for Boisvert and other LGBTQ Christians through an act of participatory imagination.¹⁰¹

I also want to look at the popular example of Saints Sergius and Bacchus and the ways LGBTQ Christians have reimagined their stories in an act of creative identity formation. Popularized in John Boswell's 1994 book, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*, Ss. Sergius and Bacchus have become beloved figures for present-day LGBTQ Christians. Their story, as recounted by Boswell, resembles St. Sebastian's, in which they were high-ranking members of the Roman army joined in a bond of "blood brotherhood" (ἀδελφοποίησις) with unclear connotations (though Boswell would like to suggest something romantic).¹⁰² Having converted to Christianity, they drew the anger of the Roman emperor and were sentenced to death. Bacchus was martyred first, flogged to death, while Sergius remained in jail due to his favor with a high ranking official. As Sergius bemoans the death of Bacchus, he appears in a vision to Sergius to

⁹⁹ Boisvert, 46.

¹⁰⁰ Boisvert, 47.

¹⁰¹ Boisvert, 184. I also pay attention to the argument of someone like Roland Betancourt, who notes that even if St. Sebastian did not historically have a sexual relationship with Diocletian, the fact of the matter is that there were likely other Christians at the time who did participate in same-sex relationships. What St. Sebastian offers is a way to make those ancient Christians real and meaningful for people today. Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender, and Race in the Middle Ages*, 17.

¹⁰² John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), 146–48, 193–96, 218–19.

strengthen him before his own martyrdom, telling Sergius to “hurry then, yourself, brother, through beautiful and perfect confession to pursue and obtain me, when you have finished the course.”¹⁰³

It should be noted that there has been much scholarly work critiquing Boswell’s interpretation of history.¹⁰⁴ The question I want to bring, however, is how much the history is important (mirroring the question brought by Donald Boisvert) if I am thinking about the ways that saints like Sergius and Bacchus can become figures through whom people are able to narrate identity and narrate a sacred origin in themselves in order to participate with the divine.¹⁰⁵ I see a meaningful example of this imaginative potential and what it might mean in Franciscan Br. Robert Lentz’s creation of an icon of Ss. Sergius and Bacchus (Figure 5.1) which incorporates elements of Boswell’s queer interpretation of their story.¹⁰⁶ Frantz created this icon on commission from a group called The Living Circle, a collective of LGBTQ Christians in Chicago, with the original icon carried as part of the 1994 Chicago Gay Pride Parade.¹⁰⁷ I interpret the commission of this icon and its appearance in a Pride parade as acts of participation with Ss. Sergius and Bacchus, embodying them with a presence in the world, and allowing them

¹⁰³ Boswell, 148–51. I use Boswell’s translation here to help emphasize the imaginative work around these figures, while acknowledging how various scholars have disputed Boswell’s work.

¹⁰⁴ For discussions of Boswell’s historicity and its interpretation, see Claudia Rapp, *Brother-Making in Late-Antiquity and Byzantium: Monks, Laymen, and Christian Ritual* (Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press, 2016); Derek Krueger, “Between Monks: Tales of Monastic Companionship in Early Byzantium,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 1 (2011): 28–61; Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender, and Race in the Middle Ages*; Mark Masterson, *Between Byzantine Men: Desire, Homosociality, and Brotherhood in the Medieval Empire* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2022).

¹⁰⁵ Craig E. Stephenson makes a similar argument from a Jungian perspective: Craig E. Stephenson, “On Rereading John Boswell’s Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe,” *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche* 4, no. 3 (2010): 8–15.

¹⁰⁶ Br. Robert Lentz OFM, *Sts. Sergius and Bacchus*, 1994, 1994, Trinity Stores, www.trinitystores.com, 800.699.4482. We can also see the impact turning to books or websites that evoke the names of Sergius and Bacchus for a queer spirituality. See for instance Daniel C. Maguire, *Whose Church? A Concise Guide to Progressive Catholicism* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2008), 47; Kittredge Cherry, “Sergius and Bacchus: Paired Male Saints Loved Each Other in Ancient Roman Army,” *Q Spirit* (blog), April 7, 2022, <https://qspirit.net/sergius-bacchus-paired-male-saints/>.

¹⁰⁷ Dennis O’Neill, *Passionate Holiness: Marginalized Christian Devotions for Distinctive Peoples* (Trafford Publishing, 2010), 82–83.

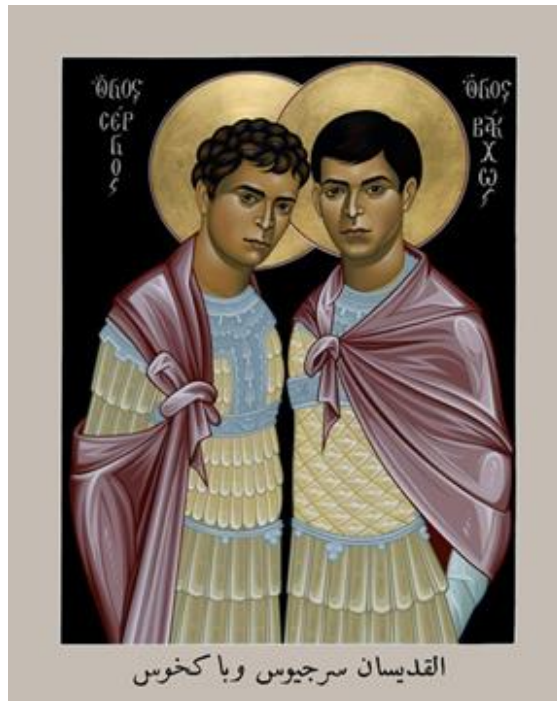


Figure 5.1: © *Sts. Sergius and Bacchus* by Br. Robert Lentz, OFM, Courtesy of Trinity Stores, www.trinitystores.com, 800.699.4482.

to act as articulatory pivots through whom people are able to name and narrate their identities as holy.¹⁰⁸ The presence of the icon itself takes on special importance in the act of identity-creation when I consider how icons facilitate meaningful interactions with the saints since it becomes a tangible site of presence, blurring the line between devotee and saint so that these acts of identity narration become possible.¹⁰⁹

In essence, the relationship with Ss. Sergius and Bacchus or with St. Sebastian stands as the most essential element for understanding the ways people construct identity, since it is in that relationship that people are able to find what Orsi calls the “dreadful resonance between heaven and earth” and so participate with the divine. Moreover, when I think about the act of narrating a

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, 42.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel Winchester, “Windows into Heaven, Mirrors for the Soul: How Icons Shape Identities among the Eastern Orthodox,” *Liturgy* 35, no. 2 (2020): 48–50.

sacred origin within ourselves, this imaginative recreation becomes a further act of narration to find the sacred in someone's present situation, as opposed to seeing the divine as a pre-established ideal to which one must mold themselves. In other words, it is recreating the origin in a way that is meaningful for us through these figures, rather than finding meaning in these figures by returning to their origins, as Hall and Wynter suggest we must do.

Throughout the past two sections, I have focused on the way that fan and devotee encounters with fantasy characters and saints within the space of the limen allows for relationships to develop in that space. These relationships create a presence for the saints and fantasy characters, as devotees and fans participate with them through acts of devotion, thus embodying them through a piece of the Primary World. At the same time, fans and devotees utilize the figures of fantasy characters and saints to narrate aspects of their identity in acts of emplotment, drawing on the presence of these figures to claim their personal identities as sacred. The limen is essential to this type of work because in that space one's identity becomes more fluid in its interactions with the saints or characters.¹¹⁰ I have spoken about this movement both using Orsi's phrase "the dreadful resonance between heaven and earth" but also as fans narrating themselves by participation in something bigger than themselves (i.e., the story). The question this poses, if I am going to speak of the sacred recreated within each of us through acts of narration, is whether the stories that fans and devotees use can truly be treated as sacred or if they remain *just* stories. While this question might be easy to answer of hagiography, which carries with it notions of the sacred (its root coming from the Greek *ἅγιος* for sacred or holy)

¹¹⁰ Many fantasy writers are wary of what it means to enter the fantasy realm, believing that it is a place of danger because you are confronted with your identity and risk losing yourself along the way. I see this in Dumbledore's warning to Harry that "it does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live" or in Bilbo's description of the Long Road, that "you step into the Road, and if you don't keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to." Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, 214; Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 74.

there remains a question about fantasy literature. Can I say that fantasy allows us to participate with the sacred in the same ways that hagiography does by intersecting with the ideas of presence and emplotment presented in the previous sections?

The Sacred Recreated

As I ask how these stories recreate the sacred, it is useful to return to Mircea Eliade and his ideas of the sacred as opposed to the profane to set out what it means to call stories sacred and to say they allow people to participate with the divine. In Eliade's framework, the sacred is the space of order, and cosmos, as opposed to the chaos that exists prior to creation.¹¹¹ In performing rituals of consecration, humanity can repeat the act of creation, recreating sacred origins and order in the world.¹¹² Within this framework then, we recreate sacred centers and participate with the divine when we can find resonances with those first moments of creation through acts of consecration. Cosmos is revealed in hierophanies in which we recognize a sacred order that is beyond us within an element of our world, either in a place or (as I have been arguing) within ourselves. Thus, Eliade claims that for "primitive and archaic societies...the eternal recovery of the same mythical time of origin...by virtue of this eternal return to the sources of the sacred and the real that human existence appears to be saved from nothingness and death."¹¹³ In the shift to Christianity and historical time, God stands in history through the person of Jesus, allowing Christians to recreate the *illud tempus* when moving through liturgical time.¹¹⁴ Either way, Eliade affirms the importance of finding resonances with the mythological or historical narratives that connect us to our sacred beginnings. By recognizing those resonances, humanity can affirm that its actions and identities have meaning because they repeat the acts of

¹¹¹ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 29.

¹¹² Eliade, 28–31, 79–81.

¹¹³ Eliade, 106–7.

¹¹⁴ Eliade, 111.

creation, whereby sacred order burst forth in the middle of profane chaos and recreates order. In other words, in finding resonances with these figures and the moments of creation, we participate with divinity. I have already focused on how hagiography and fantasy literature allow devotees and fans to find resonances with these narratives (to the degree that it gifts these figures a presence in the world and offers meaning-making potential for the fans and devotees). What remains is to show whether those resonances repeat creation in their meaning making potential.

On some level, it is easy to see how the saints participate in the form of creative repetition that Eliade argues as the central aspect of cyclic time and how they might offer a chance to participate with the divine. They are all imitations of Jesus, offering a chance for devotees to participate with God and Jesus through their actions in a specific place and time.¹¹⁵ With that in mind, I want to focus most of my argument here on how fantasy literature might share in this idea as well, with the sense that a similar argument would hold true for hagiography. The overall argument of this dissertation is that fantasy literature might play the same role today that hagiography has played and continues to play for some people, which I have been attempting to demonstrate through their functionality and in how they both follow a ritual pattern to open a liminal space. As such, answering whether fantasy might be understood as sacred, just like hagiography, possibly poses the greatest challenge to that thesis. At the end of the chapter, I will return to fantasy literature's relationship with hagiography in relation to this question, using Robert Orsi once again, but for the moment I would like to set that aside.

Many fantasy scholars and theorists of religion, including Ursula K. Le Guin, Brian Attebery, and David Miller, have increasingly turned to a Jungian interpretation of literature and

¹¹⁵ See Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity*, 10; Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 54, 84; Cobb, *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, 29; Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*, 39, 144; Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints: The Diocese of Orléans, 800-1200*, 113.

its archetypes to emphasize its creative power in connection to the religious imagination. For instance, we can note Jane Yolen's quote about the function of fantasy for adults and why it deserves our attention as readers:

For adults, the world of fantasy books returns to us the great words of power which, in order to be tamed, have been excised from our adult vocabularies...these are the words that were forged in the earth, air, fire, and water of human existence. And the words are: Good. Evil. Courage. Honor. Truth. Hate. Love.

They are a litany, a charm so filled with power we hardly dare say them.¹¹⁶

Yolen's emphasis here is that fantasy can recreate primordial elements of what it means to be human in the ways that it connects us to archetypal ideas of Good or Evil, Hate or Love, and makes us aware of what those mean in a narrative form.¹¹⁷ A look at Ursula Le Guin's writing process reveals why fantasy might function this way. When Le Guin writes about how she came upon her worlds, and especially the names of her worlds (claiming naming as the essence of magic), she notes that she did not make character profiles or outline all the details of her world, but rather that the writing required her to wait and listen for the characters to reveal themselves to her through a process of discovery.¹¹⁸ For Le Guin, this is a very Taoist practice, albeit described in Jungian terms, whereby one chases the Shadow to explore the intersections of our conscious and unconscious mind.¹¹⁹ In that act, we find the transcendent Self, emerging from the collective unconscious and tied with the archetypes.¹²⁰ Thus, what Le Guin hopes fantasy offers

¹¹⁶ Jane Yolen, *Touch Magic: Fantasy, Faerie and Folklore in the Literature of Childhood* (New York, NY: Philomel Books, 1981), 62.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Miller, *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses*, 29.

¹¹⁸ Le Guin, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*, 39–42.

¹¹⁹ Le Guin, 53–54. Cf. C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 20–21.

¹²⁰ Le Guin, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*, 53. Cf. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 21–22.

is a tale of the journey into the collective unconscious using the terms of the unconscious and arriving at a fundamental part of who we are as human and who we are in relation to one another.¹²¹ As such, in her own way, Le Guin finds an element of what Eliade might call the sacred (something tied with who we are at the core of our being) in the ways that fantasy recreates the archetypes in our stories so that we might encounter them anew, realizing how we are tied together as human through these stories and their figures.¹²² This is a process, which for Jung, is heavily tied with the first moments of creation and defining how we make purpose and meaning in the world, again connected with Eliade's notion of the sacred.¹²³

Tolkien and Lewis have offered similar (albeit more Christian) reflections about their own writing processes, noting that their stories began as languages or images that as Tolkien said “arose in my mind as given things,” perhaps pointing to something of a divine inspiration.¹²⁴ For both Tolkien and Lewis, this might point to their sense of the religious imagination, influenced as it is by sacramental theology and the Catholic imagination, which sees the presence of God in nature and the mythology of the world, and so also possible in their own writings.¹²⁵ While using different terms than Le Guin, Tolkien and Lewis both speak of parts of their worlds coming from beyond themselves, appearing in images or as “given things” that help act out questions of who we are at the core of our being.¹²⁶ There is a tension in this language of something coming from

¹²¹ Le Guin, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*, 52, 55.

¹²² Le Guin, 69–70.

¹²³ Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 5, 13–15.

¹²⁴ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London, GB: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 130; Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s To Be Said,” 57; Markus A. Davidsen, “The Spiritual Milieu Based on J. R. R. Tolkien’s Literary Mythology,” in *Handbook of Hyper-Real Religions*, ed. Adam Possamai (Brill, 2012), 190.

¹²⁵ Thomas W. Smith, “Tolkien’s Catholic Imagination: Mediation and Tradition,” *Religion & Literature* 38, no. 2 (2006): 73–100; C. S. Lewis, “Mere Christianity,” in *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2002), 153.

¹²⁶ Fantasy scholar, Brian Attebery, has tied together similar thoughts from Lewis, Tolkien, and Le Guin that I have mentioned here under a Jungian interpretation to pose questions about how we might interpret fantasy and its place in the world, as opposed to a (previously) more common Freudian interpretation. See Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 8, 30–31, 70–71.

“beyond” Lewis or Tolkien even as it touches on the core of their being, “within” them, that shares in Jungian descriptions of the collective unconscious. In that regard, it speaks of images and stories that are so fundamental to our nature that they express something that transcends it. The expression of those stories inherently become embodied in Lewis and Tolkien’s lives, and the lives of their readers, through acts of participation. This includes the moments when Lewis and Tolkien first wrote down those stories as a first moment of participation.

Following this line of Jungian interpretations, I turn to a theorist of religion like David Miller to further emphasize the importance of narrative in recreating sacred origins within ourselves. For Miller, the Death of God is the result of Rationalism’s attempt to give logical explanations of God, turning God into an abstract concept removed from our experience.¹²⁷ Miller, in turn, proposes a narrative theology, in which we may “revivify an irrelevant doctrinal theology which has abstracted itself out of life by managing to kill God.”¹²⁸ In other words, the reason people feel alienated from God and the religious imagination is because our abstractions of God have removed the notion of God from our lived experience. A narrative theology of story can resituate God in our lives, bringing God into temporality and so allowing religion to speak to the complicated mixtures of Life and Death, Truth and Falsehood, or Good and Evil. In this, I hear echoes of Jane Yolen’s own description of fantasy and the archetypes to which it returns us, recognizing these ideas as divine and sacred in their own right.

Fantasy and hagiography, then, may offer a revivification of the religious imaginary from which we have cut ourselves off in our logical abstractions about God. In this instance, it is the ability to narrate the saints and fantasy characters and the ability to use them to name the elements of our lives as sacred that allows them to connect us to the divine, following my use of

¹²⁷ Miller, *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses*, 26–27.

¹²⁸ Miller, 29. Cf. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 8.

Stuart Hall and Sylvia Wynter. To go a step further, Miller emphasizes a polytheistic interpretation of narrative theology in which there is not a single center, so that, like Wynter, anywhere one stands can be a sacred center when we become aware of the resonances we have with the various figures of myth and story, and therefore the resonances we have with the archetypes of Humanity.¹²⁹ In fact, for Miller, awareness of the plurality of our centers becomes the pathway towards wholeness because it becomes a recognition of the plurality of our being in the world where multiple stories offer resonances for our identity.¹³⁰ It is in embodying the stories of mythical (and, for me, hagiographical and fantastic) figures that we might use them to find meaning in our lives, living out of their presences in our everyday lives.¹³¹ In this, we make not a return but a “re-turn” embodying the same cycle of myth in a new time and place, moving as a spiral that does not return to our origins, but marks those origins as we move off into infinity, remaking the sacred and divine in new contexts through the act of narration.¹³²

Beyond the ways that fantasy literature evokes the collective unconscious or the ways that hagiography and fantasy offer a way to narrate God into the world and into our lives, I also want to emphasize that there is a sacredness in how people find meaning-making potential in these stories. In other words, the ability to make a story meaningful in one’s life is sacred in-and-of-itself. As I mentioned in Chapter One, when Robert Orsi offers his definition of religion as relationship, part of his argument is that perhaps belief is the wrong question to ask when determining realness in religion, and by extension (for me) for determining sacredness in religion, even as it looms large in our conversations (likely due to the influence of Protestantism

¹²⁹ Miller, *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses*, 11, 23–24, 54, 56–57.

¹³⁰ Miller, 5, 18, 20–21, 34, 35.

¹³¹ Miller, 55, 59, 63, 65.

¹³² Miller, 77.

in America).¹³³ Instead, for Orsi, religion occurs in the “things, practices, or presences” where saints (and perhaps fantasy characters) become “real in experience and practice, in relationships between heaven and earth, in the circumstances of people’s lives and histories, and in the stories people tell about them.”¹³⁴ In this framework, what gives value and meaning to religious figures is the way that they give devotees the chance to name and narrate value and meaning in their own lives. In that act of meaning making, devotees and fans find the language to make order and purpose out of the chaos of life. In other words, they bring order to the chaotic and disparate events of their lives, and thereby themselves take part in an act of creation, as charged with meaning as the first moments of creation Eliade recalls in his theories of cyclic time. Therefore, emplotment itself becomes a repetition of the creative act, allowing fans and devotees the language to name the circumstances of their lives as purposeful and, therefore, sacred.¹³⁵ Central to this dynamic, however, is that the act of emplotment and many of the modes of participation presented in the chapter are rarely carried out alone, but are instead enacted in the context of community, which adds additional components to how we interpret the meaning-making potential of fantasy characters or saints.

¹³³ Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, 18. Cf. Jung on the way we have “stiffened [the Virgin Birth, the Trinity, etc.] into mere objects of belief” or Miller on the death of God due to our rationalizing of God. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 8; Miller, *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses*, 26–27.

¹³⁴ Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, 18.

¹³⁵ The repetition of the creative act when fans and devotees use a story to make meaning in their life, making order out of the chaos, recalls Tolkien’s description of fantasy as sub-creation. Much like the fantasy writer builds a new world by piecing together elements of the Primary World into a new form, the narration of identity pieces together stories into a new, meaningful form. I repeat with Tolkien that “we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker.” In other words, the reason we tell these stories to make order out of chaos is because we are fashioned after a Being who made order out of chaos. Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 72.

Chapter Six

The Limen: Holding Community with Living Things

Chapter Five explored how in the space of the limen, fantasy literature and hagiography create room for fans and devotees to participate with the divine by using the stories of saints and fantasy characters to narrate and name their own lives as sacred. In addition to this personal focus, however, the limen also creates space for people to reconnect with other living things, notably the community that forms around these texts and the figures at their core. This function is connected with Turner's understanding of *communitas* as it is formed in the limen, the moments where the social structures of the world break down and we might encounter each other for who we are, as an *I* and *Thou*. This notion comes into tension with the more personal and individual project of meaning-making that I have just been exploring in Chapter Five but plays an important role in how I imagine the saints and the meaning making project.

As such, this chapter explores the role of the community that forms around saints and fantasy characters, how it interacts with meaning making and how these figures allow communities to articulate and sustain their own identity. As part of this, I draw on Robert Detweiler and his ideas around religious reading communities as an act of play to connect with Victor Turner's own ideas about play in the context of the liminoid and *communitas* (as mentioned in Chapter Three). This helps to set up an exploration of the unique nature of these communities, which often form along routes different from traditional, institutional religious and literary structures. As such, it offers insight into how I understand fandom as a second hagiography in relation to scholarly attempts to define the religious nature of fandom

communities. In my argument, fandom does not exist as a distinct religious institution, but rather interacts with these broader structures utilizing different networks and rooted in ideas of play to distinguish itself, much like the play around the cult of the saints.

A large part of this chapter follows a material turn to look at Books of Hours and fantasy fanzines/filk songbooks (especially Tolkien fanzines) as a way to highlight the interaction between the personal and the communal, the fandom community and the institutional community. As such, it is worth offering a brief description of Books of Hours and fanzines before a much fuller exploration later in the chapter. The Book of Hours was one of the most popular books sold from the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Centuries in Europe. It was primarily dedicated to the Virgin Mary, containing the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a sequence of prayers to be recited throughout the day, originating in the monastic movement of the Ninth Century, but becoming popular among the laity.¹ Over time, however, the Book of Hours also came to include other offices and prayers, regularly including a calendar, the Hours of the Holy Spirit, the Hours of the Cross, additional prayers to the Virgin, the seven Penitential Psalms, suffrages (additional prayers to various saints separate from a litany), and the Office of the Dead.² Within this mix, however, there was much room for personal variation, both in the selection of saints included in the calendar or among the suffrages, and in any auxiliary texts that someone might choose to have included in their Book of Hours (such as the seven prayers of St. Gregory or the “Salve sancta facies”—a prayer to the face of Christ, often presented alongside an illumination of the Veronica).³ Additionally, after 1390, there were usually many blank pages in a Book of Hours by nature of its production, which allowed families to write in their own prayers

¹ Roger S. Wieck, *Painted Prayers: The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (New York, NY: George Braziller, Inc. in association with The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1997), 9.

² Wieck, 10.

³ Wieck, 10–13.

that they received from friends or sew in pilgrim badges they received on pilgrimages.⁴ As such, we see the semi-established form of the Book of Hours (containing the Hours of the Virgin and other common texts) become a space for personal interpretation and meaning making through adaptation to meet the specific desires of the individual. These adaptations, however, rarely stay on the personal level, but instead become shared with others, allowing the Book of Hours to articulate a new community around saints (such as Richard Scrope) based on the suffrages included in the Book of Hours or the saints who appear in the calendar. In fact, the calendar and suffrages to saints within a Book of Hours are often used today to place the text geographically because they are such strong indicators of the community that these texts help articulate.

Fantasy fanzines and filk songbooks follow a similar pattern of play, in which fans take established texts and place their own interpretations alongside canonical images or passages to transform the text into something for personal meaning making and communal development.⁵ This often involves a literal “cut and paste” method, with a mixture of typewritten and handwritten text and art.⁶ This form of production has been called a “work-in-progress” model, which allows fans to reflect on their thoughts in relation to the text even in the act of production, sometimes going back to strikeout some of their thoughts or add further notes.⁷ As Anne Hays also notes, these fanzines were often shared broadly amongst the fan community to “express the collective spirit of a community that emphasizes continued conversations and discussion over finality” and thereby embodying an ethic of play.⁸ Moreover, in its blatant pilfering of published

⁴ Kathryn M. Rudy, *Piety in Pieces: How Medieval Readers Customized Their Manuscripts* (OpenBook Publishers, 2016), 2–5.

⁵ Dot Porter has made a similar connection between Books of Hours and fan productions, using the terms of “transformative works” which comes from fandom studies. Dot Porter, “Books of Hours as Transformative Works” (Madison, WI, 2021), <http://www.dotporterdigital.org/more-books-of-hours-as-transformative-works/>.

⁶ Teal Triggs, “Scissors and Glue: Punk Fanzines and the Creation of a DIY Aesthetic,” *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1 (2006): 70–73.

⁷ Hays, “Reading the Margins: Embedded Narratives in Feminist Personal Zines,” 101–3.

⁸ Hays, 106.

texts (with little regard for copyright laws) and the mixture of one's own thoughts, the form of the fanzine easily lent itself to counter-cultural movements, forming new networks around a text beyond what publishing companies or authors sanctioned.⁹ In both the Books of Hours and fantasy fanzines I see these notions of playing within the space of community around a text and its figures (saint or fantasy character) to sustain the community dynamic, and perhaps leading on to a community characterized by *communitas* through the ethic of play.

Communitas and Play

Chapter Five focused primarily on the ways that fans and devotees participate with fantasy characters and saints as a way of narrating meaning out of their experiences and naming them as sacred. As such, it primarily focused on a more individual approach to the saints and fantasy characters and the search for purpose in those stories. However, neither devotion to the cult of the saints nor fandom communities exists primarily in an individual context, but instead connects people together, utilizing the figure of the saint or the fantasy character to articulate a group dynamic and identity. Religion and Literature scholar, Robert Detweiler (drawing in part on Victor Turner and Kenneth Burke) provides a useful framework to understand this tension around literature (including fantasy and hagiography), particularly in the context of play as religions reading.

In *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction*, Detweiler argues that what defines “religious reading” is a group of people joining together in “gestures of friendship with each other across the erotic space of the text that draws them out of their privacy and its stress on meaning and power.”¹⁰ To explain this he notes a tension between our natural human desire to narrate and give meaning to stories (as *Homo interpretans*) and what happens to that

⁹ Triggs, “Scissors and Glue: Punk Fanzines and the Creation of a DIY Aesthetic,” 73.

¹⁰ Detweiler, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction*, 34–35.

desire in the context of community, which he characterizes with the terms *Gelassenheit* (abandonment or relaxation) and *Geselligkeit* (togetherness, communality, or maybe Turner's *communitas*).¹¹ In this framework, the religious aspect is the openness that emerges around the text in the context of friendship and community (pushing against the closed forms of interpretation traditionally associated with religious institutions), where the natural desire to create meaning out of a text (as explored in Chapter Five) is subverted by the freedom of friendship.

In the space of community, the possible meanings of a text multiply as each person must entertain the possibility of new interpretations. In other words, all literature contains within it a surplus of meaning (an endless number of interpretations) that it attempts to control through metaphoric language, much like rituals or religious festivals.¹² At the same time, to be part of a reading community requires the possibility of shared belief—the possibility of a single interpretation arrived upon together.¹³ This, however, leads to an impasse wherein we face both the possibility for endless interpretations (chaos) and the need for a single shared belief that roots the community. One option to resolve this dilemma, Detweiler acknowledges, is that we realize there is no single interpretation and chaos reigns supreme, and the community becomes rooted by nihilism. Detweiler, however, suggests that we instead accept the impossibility of a single interpretation and understand this as an “irreducibility of form” (following Kenneth Burke’s “intensity of form”) so that the community revels and finds pleasure in the infinite possibility of interpretation. In this instance, the shared belief of the community is that the text opens us to infinity, rather than narrows down to nothingness.¹⁴ The way we manage this dichotomy is

¹¹ Detweiler, 34–35.

¹² Detweiler, 40–41.

¹³ Detweiler, 41–42.

¹⁴ Detweiler, 42–45.

through serious play. Detweiler claims that in play we both allow ourselves to explore the infinite possibility of meaning while also finding pleasure and enjoyment in the search. Similar to arguments about fandom and religion, he sees this type of religious reading as engaging in both entertainment (play) and seriousness. What sets this play apart as both serious and religious is that it is always on the verge of giving into nihilism and accepting the lack of meaning but turns to the pleasure of the irreducible form to embrace the infinite, as something akin to a divine mystery.¹⁵ Religious reading for Detweiler is a practice in which we use a text to play with the endless possibilities, allowing it, as Paul Ricoeur says of religious texts, to reveal in everyday life “the reality of the *possible*” and so “open up a horizon that escapes from the closure of discourse.”¹⁶ It is the practice and experience of play in texts like Books of Hours or fanzines that create the possibility to glimpse the *possible*.

Detweiler’s theory about how the individual and community interact across the space of the text encourages thinking about interpretation as an act of play, even characterizing the act of play as religious in-and-of-itself. As he notes, what makes this type of reading religious is “its very openness to others; its willingness to accommodate and adapt; its readiness to entertain the new...its celebration of the text’s possibilities rather than a delimiting of them.”¹⁷ In other words, religion happens in the act of play in communion with others because it is in that space that one might relax into a text and enjoy it for its possibilities, rather than interpret it for its meanings, and so come upon the *possible*.¹⁸ It is in the space of community that interpretation becomes festive and carnivalesque, reveling in mystery. This returns me to Victor Turner who, as noted in

¹⁵ Detweiler, 45.

¹⁶ Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, 12. Cf. Monge, “Saints, Truth, and the ‘Use and Abuse’ of Hagiography,” 19–22.

¹⁷ Detweiler, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction*, 35.

¹⁸ Detweiler uses this to distinguish from reading “geared to ultimate concern,” evoking the language of Paul Tillich to help distinguish his theory of religious reading. Detweiler, 38.

Chapter Three, also emphasizes the religious value in play, which he claims as the sphere of liminoid antistructure in the modern world, and thus a place wherein *communitas* might develop.¹⁹ In the space of play, texts and personal identity resist complete interpretation, and so it becomes a place to explore what texts and identity might mean, encouraged by the community that develops around them. Later, Detweiler draws on Turner's notion of play and *communitas* to further emphasize his ideas that the ludic recombinations of play form new communal networks that push against established and authenticated institutions that place limits on texts.²⁰ In this, Detweiler sees the same type of fellowship that Victor and Edith Turner find among ritual initiates, entering into a space undefined by social differentiation and thus resembling the *communitas*-value of the *I-Thou*. The materiality of texts like fanzines or Books of Hours come to represent this type of play and the forms of *communitas* it might foster.

New Communal Networks

A key aspect of the *communitas* relationships that develop in the act of play around fantasy characters and the saints is how those relationships form across new pathways, pushing against established institutions and creating the space for new interpretations. This is something Detweiler pays close attention to in his own treatment of Turner and religious reading, highlighting how these religious reading groups move against the grain of publishing houses and even religious institutions.²¹ I explain this dynamic using Arjun Appadurai's notion of vertebrae and cellular networks. The institutional authorities, like authors, publishing houses, and established religions move through vertebrae networks—based on a set of premised, regulated norms and signals. These new communities, however, are cellular, moving across nation lines

¹⁹ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, 37.

²⁰ Detweiler, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction*, 58–61.

²¹ Detweiler, 60–61.

and traditional networks using the figures of the saints or fantasy characters to articulate a new dynamic. Since it moves according to a different system, it can move around the vertebrae networks, and become counter-cultural in nature.²²

I also understand this dynamic in the framework of “fanon” and “canon.” These terms come from fandom and Media Studies but can be useful in understanding the saints as they are represented in Books of Hours as well. Within Media Studies, canon refers to the source material, and generally carries the authority of the author and the legal backing of publishing companies. This would correlate with Appadurai’s vertebrae networks and could also describe the role of established religious structures in controlling the cult of the saints, an easy connection since Media Studies pulls the term “canon” from a religious framework. Fanon, on the other hand, refers to particular details or characteristics of a fantasy character, world, or story that emerge in the readings of individuals and groups of fans, which can exist either in agreement or in tension with the formal canon.²³ Since the interpretive possibilities of a text is endless (a key aspect to Detweiler’s theory of religious reading), fans (and I am going to argue devotees to the saints) often play with the stories and produce many fanons, individual subgroups within the larger fandom that often exist in tension with one another. As such, fandom practices engage with Detweiler’s notion of serious play, reveling in the endless possibilities of interpretation. These fanon groups form along Appadurai’s cellular networks, articulated in the figure of the fantasy character or saint, and mediated through non-traditional mediums, such as fanzines, internet chats, social media sites (like Archive of One’s Own or Tumblr), and potentially (as I will argue) Books of Hours. Moreover, these fanons are never set, but are constantly

²² Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*, 24–26.

²³ Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson, “Introduction: Work in Progress,” in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, ed. Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2006), 5–7.

reinterpreted in the space of serious play, allowing for the constant redefining of the fandom community and the text itself.²⁴ In many ways, the development of a fanon is predicated on the ability to take ownership of a character or saint, rooted in the relationship that develops between fan/devotee and the main figure, as fanon itself is an act of participation with that figure. This evokes many of the ideas mentioned in Chapter Five, particularly around the figure's ability to allow fans/devotees to narrate an identity for themselves.

Essential to note about both Appadurai's notion of the cellular network and the notion of fanon is that in both examples it is play acted out in community that allows these new networks to form, standing in tension with the more established canon and vertebrae networks. Without the aspect of community, there is not the freedom for endless interpretation, and without the figure of the saint or the fantasy character to help articulate that network, the community does not stand. Rather, it is the saint or fantasy figure becoming the object of play that brings the community together around the text (as I mentioned in relation to Benedict Anderson's imagined communities in Chapter Three), even as that figure and text remain unstable and in a constant state of reinterpretation.²⁵ As such, the figure of the fantasy character or saint helps to unite the community together, further articulating their identity and sustaining the community itself as it affirms and challenges our personal interpretations.²⁶ Going back to the frame of ritual, I emphasize Ronald Grimes's critique that many of the new age rites of passage created in the past few years often lack a lasting power because they are unable to sustain a successful group

²⁴ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, 257; Rachel Barenblat, "Fan Fiction and Midrash: Making Meaning," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 17 (2014).

²⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 6. In some sense, it is the fact that the figure and text remain unstable that allows them to fit this role as an object of play and communal connection.

²⁶ Cf. to Turner on Social Drama, Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 38–42.

dynamic.²⁷ Those that have been successful, however, are rites already situated in a “real” community, rather than a rite trying to create a community, *ex nihilo*. In this instance, what allows the community to last and the rite of reading to remain powerful is the constant movement of play within the communal space, which allows for the rearticulation and dynamism of the community and the text.

With this theoretical footing in mind, I want to turn now to the representations of fantasy characters/worlds in fantasy fanzines and saints in Books of Hours to demonstrate how both types of figures exist in relationships of play as articulated by thinkers like Detweiler and Turner. From this, I further consider fantasy literature as a second hagiography in the types of communities it forms, and its relationship to established religious structures. As noted, both Books of Hours and fanzines are media in which devotees and fans may take an established (semi-canonical or canonical) text and add some of their own personal interpretations. These then get shared either as gifts or through trading, pushing minute personal interpretations further into the space of the communal, so that these individual interpretations might gain further popularity and stake in the world. As such, throughout the following sections, I focus on moments where the personal (fanon) is placed alongside more canonical elements, with the understanding that those personal interventions rarely stayed at the personal level and rarely start on the personal level, but that they are signs of communal interaction and reinterprative play across the space of the text, expressed in fanzines or Books of Hours.

Fanzines and Fantasy Worlds

Fantasy fanzines and filk songbooks embody this notion of play that can become the basis of new communal networks. As noted earlier, fanzines are amateur fan productions in

²⁷ Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage*, 146.

which fans take canonical parts of a text (including quotes or images) and often literally “cut and paste” those words and images alongside their own commentary. Due to this, they are able to move against traditional publication standards and offer what Teal Triggs calls “a free space for developing ideas and practices and a visual space unencumbered by formal design rules and visual expectations.”²⁸ This might include putting handwritten notes alongside typewritten passages or little awareness of space between images and text. Being such amateur productions, the process of putting together a zine is highly transparent (what Bolter and Grusin would call immediate) and adds to the Do-It-Yourself culture of fandom communities.²⁹ In that sense, they come to embody materially Henry Jenkins’s notion of “textual poaching” (drawing on Michel de Certeau).³⁰ In this freedom to bring together text and personal interpretation, fans play across the space of the fantasy world, using it to articulate who they are, but also a growing community around the text.

One common way fans play with the canonical text is to notice gaps in the narrative and to fill in those spaces. One instance of this type of play is the short story, “The Parting of Arwen” by Elfrida Rivers in a copy of the fanzine *I Palantir*.³¹ Rivers begins this story with a long quotation from *The Return of the King*, including the following passage:

²⁸ Triggs, “Scissors and Glue: Punk Fanzines and the Creation of a DIY Aesthetic,” 70; Hays, “Reading the Margins: Embedded Narratives in Feminist Personal Zines,” 91.

²⁹ Triggs, “Scissors and Glue: Punk Fanzines and the Creation of a DIY Aesthetic,” 72. In some ways, this is allowing a revival of zines as opposed to online blogs which lack the same immediacy in production. See Miloš Hroch, “Not Out of Date, but Out of Time: The Materiality of Zines and Post-Digital Memory,” *Forum Historiae* 14, no. 1 (2020): 17–27; Hays, “Reading the Margins: Embedded Narratives in Feminist Personal Zines.”

³⁰ Cf. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, 24–27.

³¹ Bruce Pelz, “I Palantir, Is. 3” (Zine, Los Angeles, CA, April 1964), MS 3951, Box 17, Folder 3, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries.

And Arwen Evenstar remained also, and she said farewell to her brethren. None saw her last meeting with Elrond her father, for they went up into the hills and there spoke long together, and bitter was their parting that would endure beyond the ends of the world...³²

Rivers uses this gap in the narrative to imagine what words might have been spoken in that meeting between Elrond and Arwen, bringing in the lore of Middle-earth (such as the stories of Beren and Lúthien and the passing of Arwen's mother, Celebrían, from the Grey Havens into the Blessed Realm) to add weight to the encounter and to help readers accept the story as among the legends of Middle-earth.³³ This type of play demonstrates the mixture of canon and fanon as Rivers draws on established parts of Tolkien's narrative, but also starts to mix in her own ideas about how the story unfolded to create a narrative that is meaningful for her.

In another fanzine, *Mazar Balinū*, Bob McCrea writes a similar style story entitled "The Legend of *Glamdring*."³⁴ *Glamdring* and its partner sword, *Orcrist*, are legendary blades in the history of Middle-earth. They are first mentioned by Elrond in *The Hobbit* as being made in Gondolin for the Goblin-wars many thousands of years before the War of the Ring and even belonging to the king of Gondolin, Turgon. The history of the blades and how they ended up in a troll cave for Gandalf, Bilbo, and Thorin to find remains a mystery that not even Elrond is able to answer.³⁵ Tolkien's other writings offer little clarification since neither *Glamdring* nor *Orcrist* are mentioned in the short story, "The Fall of Gondolin," where we might expect them to appear since they had once belonged to such high-ranking officials. As such, readers have questioned how these legendary blades passed out of memory and traveled so far from Gondolin. In this gap,

³² Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 978.

³³ Pelz, "I Palantir, Is. 3."

³⁴ David Liscomb, "Mazar Balinū, Is. 1" (Zine, Augusta, Maine, 1980), MS 3951, Box 17, Folder 6, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries.

³⁵ Tolkien, *The Hobbit or There and Back Again*, 52.

McCrea offers a new narrative of Gondolin's fall, with special attention to *Glamdring* and *Orcrist*. As part of this, he draws on canonical characters, such as Turgon and his daughter Idril to help set the scene, but then shifts our attention to his own character, Erelin (or Erelen), the king's squire and so a character we would imagine having a close relationship with the king. Throughout the tale, McCrea recounts the fall of Gondolin through Erelin's perspective as he fights many goblins using *Orcrist* (earning it a reputation as the Goblin-Cleaver) and as he finds King Turgon dying at the hands of a dragon, entrusting Erelin to bring *Glamdring* to Turgon's heir (Eärendil). After a long escape into the forests on the northern side of the mountains, Erelin dies of exhaustion, leaving *Orcrist* and *Glamdring* in a mountain pass far from Gondolin, perhaps setting the stage for trolls and then Thorin, Bilbo, and Gandalf to find them much later.³⁶ This again offers an example of the type of play that emerges around the canonical texts, allowing fans to add their own twist in the gaps of the stories and creating the space for fan conversations and the possibility of a fan community.³⁷

Another common act of play among fans appears in moments when they disagree with the interpretations of either other fans or even the author/publisher themselves about an aspect of the world expressed in canonical works. In the zine, *Mazarbul*, the creator Stanley Hoffman voices some objections to the book *The Road Goes Ever On*, in which J. R. R. Tolkien collaborated with Donald Swann to produce sheet music for a number of songs that appeared in *The Lord of the Rings* book.³⁸ Hoffman notes in his zine that some of the music works, but he

³⁶ Liscomb, "Mazar Balinū, Is. 1."

³⁷ In another example, Sharon Towle has passed on a poem, "A Hobbit-Song, for Ents" to Cuyler "Ned" Brooks to possibly be shared in *I Palantir* or the *Tolkien Society Annual Journal*. She is likely responding to a portion of *The Two Towers* in which Treebeard notes that the ents have no song for hobbits, like they do for the other major races of Middle-earth. Sharon Towle to Cuyler "Ned" Brooks, "A Hobbit-Song, For Ents," Correspondence, n.d., MS 3951, Box 20, Folder 20, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries; Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 464–65.

³⁸ See J. R. R. Tolkien and Donald Swann, *The Road Goes Ever On* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967).

has a special issue with the sheet music for “A Elbereth Githoniel,” arguing that the composer has made the music “a bright cheerful marching tune” when he has imagined it as a mournful and solemn work after the style of the elves. As such, Hoffman has taken it upon himself to compose new sheet music for “A Elbereth Githoniel” which he shares in his zine, to match the more solemn mood that he would expect.³⁹ In this instance, there is a clear moment of tension between the more canonical interpretation (since Tolkien’s voice adds authority to Swann’s original composition) and the more fanonical interpretation offered by Hoffman. This tension, even more so than previous examples, demonstrates the aspect of play that emerges in the space of the text. In these disagreements, new interpretations are offered and made possible by the form of the fanzine. This embodies Detweiler’s earlier arguments about the role of a community in breaking past the natural desire to interpret the text by presenting even more interpretations that we might entertain through the bonds of friendship the text creates. Moreover, it is an example in which I see those communities forming across a new network since Hoffman has chosen to offer his playful interpretation in the space of a fanzine, rather than attempting to work with Tolkien to offer a new “official” songbook that includes his version of “A Elbereth Githoniel.”⁴⁰

Differences in interpretation are a reminder that a key aspect of zines or filk songs are the ways that they are shared and emerge within a communal context. Zines were often shared through the mail, traded at zine fairs, or even used as currency to purchase a cigarette or alcohol at conventions. In that sense, they embodied a social currency, where people would take your thoughts seriously, if you were moving through the right community.⁴¹ This was especially

³⁹ Stanley Hoffman, “Mazarbul, Is. 1” (Zine, Van Nuys, CA, December 1968), MS 3951, Box 17, Folder 6, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries.

⁴⁰ For the text of “A Elbereth Githoniel” (albeit in Sindarin), see Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 238.

⁴¹ O’Brien, “Zines: A Personal History,” 93–94.

valuable for fan voices (often women and queer people) when mainstream media and production companies would not take their thoughts seriously.⁴² For these communities, the do-it-yourself and in-progress nature of zines allows room to explore the complexity of their individual and communal identities that are often simplified through publication standards of a single linear text.⁴³ Returning to Tolkien zines, I see some aspect of this communal expression around the phrase “Frodo Lives!” which gained popularity in the 1960s and early 1970s to express anti-war sentiments.⁴⁴

While it is unclear where the phrase “Frodo Lives” originated, the Tolkien fandom quickly embraced it and it makes many appearances in their zines and other bits of fan culture, especially those from the late 1960s. Sometimes this was a brief stamp or hand-written note that repeated the phrase;⁴⁵ other times, it might be an advertisement for buttons or bumper stickers related to the phrase⁴⁶ or a reflection on the time it was scrawled in the New York City subway.⁴⁷ The University of Georgia’s Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library has examples of these buttons as well as designs for others from Cuyler “Ned” Brooks, a major fandom figure.⁴⁸ On

⁴² Hays, “Reading the Margins: Embedded Narratives in Feminist Personal Zines,” 89.

⁴³ Hays, 101.

⁴⁴ Jane Ciabattari, “Hobbits and Hippies: Tolkien and the Counterculture,” *BBC News*, November 19, 2014; Martin Barker, “On Being a 1960s Tolkien Reader,” in *From Hobbits to Hollywood: Essays on Peter Jackson’s Lord of the Rings*, ed. Ernest Mathijs and Murray Pomerance (Amsterdam, NL: Rodopi, 2006), 94; William L. Taylor, “Frodo Lives,” *The English Journal* 56, no. 6 (1967): 821.

⁴⁵ Dale Barich and Lawrence Bryk, “Mathom Sun, Vol. 1, Is. 1” (Zine, May 1967), S. Gary Hunnewell Collection, Raynor Memorial Library, Marquette University, <https://cdm16280.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16280coll10/id/1028/rec/7>; Hoffman, “Mazarbul, Is. 1”; Scott S. Smith, “Ilmarin” (Zine, October 1967), S. Gary Hunnewell Collection, Raynor Memorial Library, Marquette University, <https://cdm16280.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16280coll10/id/511/rec/6>.

⁴⁶ Greg Shaw, “Entmoot, Is. 4” (Zine, August 1966), S. Gary Hunnewell Collection, Raynor Memorial Library, Marquette University, <https://cdm16280.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16280coll10/id/120/rec/1>; Scott S. Smith, “Nazg” (Zine, June 1967), S. Gary Hunnewell Collection, Raynor Memorial Library, Marquette University, <https://cdm16280.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16280coll10/id/445/rec/3>.

⁴⁷ Bruce Pelz, “I Palantir, Is. 4” (Zine, August 1966), S. Gary Hunnewell Collection, Raynor Memorial Library, Marquette University, <https://cdm16280.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16280coll10/id/467/rec/5>.

⁴⁸ Cuyler “Ned” Brooks, Nancy Lebovitz, and John Clossen, “Frodo Lives! Tengwar Button Designs,” Correspondence, 1977, MS 3951, Box 21, Folder 15, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries.

one such button the phrase “Frodo Lives” is written in golden yellow on a light green field, using Tolkien’s Tengwar (elvish) script (Figure 6.1).⁴⁹ The creative move to make the button itself becomes an act of play around the character of Frodo, imagining new ways of expressing a connection with him that encourage further acts of play and the proliferation of *communitas*. Other zines go in more depth, such as when one fan (BB, perhaps Bee Bowman) recounts an experience while leaving a teaching conference when he noticed that someone had left a piece of paper under his wiper blade that said “Hail, Elf Friend,” likely in response to the “Frodo Lives” bumper sticker on his car. The zine writer notes that while he was not sure who the other fan was, he would “remember him. For I found a friend where least I expected to find one, and ‘may



Figure 6.2: “Frodo Lives” button created by Cuyler “Ned” Brooks (drawn by Nancy Lebovitz), based on an earlier design by John Closson. The gold script reads “Frodo Lives” in Tengwar script on a green field. Cuyler “Ned” Brooks and Nancy Lebovitz, “Frodo Lives! Tengwar Button” (Button, 1977), MS 3951, Box 21, Folder 15, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries. Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries.

⁴⁹ Cuyler “Ned” Brooks and Nancy Lebovitz, “Frodo Lives! Tengwar Button” (Button, 1977), MS 3951, Box 21, Folder 15, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries.

the stars shine on the end of his road!’”⁵⁰ Such a statement is a powerful testament to the *communitas*-level relationships that form around these fantasy texts, and how they might be embodied in simple phrases like “Frodo Lives” or “Hail, Elf Friend.”

Moreover, “Frodo Lives” became such a strong indicator of the Tolkien fandom and the special network of connections that formed along these non-traditional paths of fanzines and fandom conventions that traditional publications also started to refer to the phrase as a way of challenging those connections. In the cover article for *Esquire* in September 1967, entitled “An Open Letter to Flunk-Outs & Patriots,” the anonymous writer reflects on the changing nature of American college campuses, such as the end of the Civil Rights movement and the start of the “Student Rights hassle” or ideas of “Equality for all” which the writer claims are fronts for draft-dodging. In the midst of a long list of changes, the writer claims “Forget J. R. R. Tolkien; Frodo’s dead. *Stranger in a Strange Land* is grokking it to the top of the campus best-seller list...”⁵¹ The article raised questions in several Tolkien fanzines about the state of Tolkien fandom, perhaps highlighted by the *Esquire* article’s flip of the beloved phrase “Frodo Lives” to “Frodo’s dead.” In *Mumak*, the fanzine of the Tolkien Society of St. Louis, Bob Leibert echoes the *Esquire* article to ask, “Is Frodo dead?” with similar comments about the state of the fandom.⁵² The writers at another zine, *Ilmarin*, are much more hopeful, encouraging their readers to write to *Esquire* in response to the article, mentioning several moments in which Tolkien’s influence can continue to be felt in culture. Perhaps most notably, the zine writers highlight William Shatner’s comment at a recent fan convention that “First of all I’d like to say Frodo does

⁵⁰ Bee Bowman and Frank Denton, “Hoom, Is. 1” (Zine, June 1968), S. Gary Hunnewell Collection, Raynor Memorial Library, Marquette University, <https://cdm16280.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16280coll10/id/176/rec/2>.

⁵¹ “An Open Letter to Flunk-Outs & Patriots,” *Esquire: The Magazine for Men*, September 1967.

⁵² Bob Liebert, “Mumak, Is. 1” (Zine, St. Louis, MO, February 1968), MS 3951, Box 17, Folder 7, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries.

live....”⁵³ This becomes another moment I see the meeting of cellular and vertebrae networks in tension, and thus an example of the power of the cellular network of fandom and the *communitas* value it can express.

Filk songs (folk-style songs written by fans about fictional worlds and commonly shared through zines) also express this communal quality especially well. When Henry Jenkins discusses the filk culture of fandom, he emphasizes its importance for expressing the alternative social community of fandom, especially amongst those fans who travel to a string of conferences and continuously encounter the same people.⁵⁴ Moreover, filk is a space for constant play since it becomes an on-going process wherein any individual can build upon a long communal tradition.⁵⁵ In that sense, it is a good expression of Detweiler’s notion of play in the communal space of friendship and an embodiment of *communitas* in which anyone (no matter how new to the fandom) can attempt to contribute a verse, reinterpreting the community’s relationship to the text, because they join together in the context of friendship made possible by the fantasy world.

A look at zines containing Tolkien filk songs demonstrates this constant quality of play, as different versions of the same songs emerge in different publications, either by rearranging or contributing new verses. While there are a number of filk songs related to Tolkien’s works, such as “High Fly the Nazgul” by Ted Johnstone⁵⁶ or “The Witch King of Angmar” by Alexis A. Gilliland,⁵⁷ I am going to focus on “The Orc’s Marching Song” (also known by other titles) because of the number of variations that appear in different zines. The number and order of

⁵³ Smith, “Ilmarin.”

⁵⁴ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, 253–54.

⁵⁵ Jenkins, 257.

⁵⁶ “Songbuch Der Filken” (Zine, n.d.), MS 3951, Box 15, Folder 6, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries; Richard H. Eney, “Ring Cycle” (Zine, September 1967), S. Gary Hunnewell Collection, Raynor Memorial Library, Marquette University, <https://cdm16280.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16280coll10/id/694/rec/8>.

⁵⁷ Jim Landau, “Filk Song Book DISCLAVE ’74” (Zine, 1974), MS 3951, Box 15, Folder 6, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries.

verses varies between five versions available through the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Georgia and the Raynor Memorial Library at Marquette University, but generally share the same two choruses. Figure 6.2 presents these versions to note variations in verse inclusion and order. Version 1 is a loose-leaf piece of paper from the Hargrett collection,⁵⁸ Version 2 includes five pages stapled together that was sent to Ned Brooks and others and is now part of the Hargrett collection,⁵⁹ Version 3 comes from a zine called the *Songbuch der Filken* from the Hargrett collection,⁶⁰ Version 4 comes from a zine called the *Trufannish Song Sheet* from the Hargrett collection,⁶¹ and Version 5 comes from a zine called *Ring Cycle* from the Raynor Memorial Library.⁶² From these five versions, only Version 1 and Version 3 match completely, though Version 4 contains most of the same verses and is close to the same order (save for verses 7 and 18, which are reversed). Version 2 is the fullest of all of the versions, containing thirty verses. Moreover, it appears as part of a letter in which there is encouragement for others to add even more verses, noting that “a good ballad has at least 100 verses.”⁶³ Version 5 is one of the shortest versions but also the most complex mixture, with half of its verses (verses 2, 4, 18, 19, and 23) appearing in the four other versions, while all but one of the remaining verses only appear in Version 2. Verse 31 only appears in Version 5.

It is difficult to parse the development of this filk song since many of the zines and song sheets that contain these five versions are undated. I guess, however, that verses 2, 4, 18, 19, and 23 along with the choruses are at the core of the song structure since they appear in every

⁵⁸ “The Official Song of the League of the Friends of Sauron” (n.d.), MS 3951, Box 15, Folder 6, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries.

⁵⁹ “The Orcs’ Marching Song” (n.d.), MS 3951, Box 15, Folder 6, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries.

⁶⁰ “Songbuch Der Filken.”

⁶¹ “The Trufannish Song Sheet” (Zine, n.d.), MS 3951, Box 15, Folder 6, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries.

⁶² Eney, “Ring Cycle.”

⁶³ “The Orcs’ Marching Song.”

Chorus/Verse	First Words	Version 1	Version 2	Version 3	Version 4	Version 5
Chorus 1	Now Sauron had no friend...	Verse 2	Verse 1	Verse 2	Verse 2	Verse 2
Chorus 2	Now Sauron had no friends...	Chorus 1	Chorus 1	Chorus 1	Chorus 1	Chorus 1
Verse 1	Oh, Sauron was quite loth...	Verse 3	Verse 2	Verse 3	Verse 3	Verse 8
Verse 2	Now, Sauron made some rings...	Chorus 2	Chorus 2	Chorus 2	Chorus 2	Chorus 2
Verse 3	Oh, Isildur started forth...	Verse 8	Verse 3	Verse 8	Verse 4	Verse 4
Verse 4	Then Gollum met his ruin...	Verse 4	Verse 4	Verse 4	Verse 18	Verse 18
Verse 5	Well, Bilbo was the one...	Verse 7	Verse 5	Verse 7	Verse 7	Verse 13
Verse 6	But he found the Shire a bore...	Verse 18	Verse 6	Verse 18	Verse 22	Verse 19
Verse 7	Well, Gandalf found the gate...	Verse 14	Verse 7	Verse 14	Verse 24	Verse 31
Verse 8	Then Sauron went to war...	Verse 13	Verse 8	Verse 13	Verse 23	Verse 27
Verse 9	Now, Boromir was tempted...	Verse 22	Verse 9	Verse 22	Verse 19	Verse 25
Verse 10	That Merry and that Pippen...	Verse 24	Verse 10	Verse 24	Verse 25	Verse 23
Verse 11	Later Frodo and Sam...	Verse 23	Verse 11	Verse 23		
Verse 12	The wizard Saruman...	Verse 19	Verse 12	Verse 19		
Verse 13	Yes, the wizard Saruman heard...	Verse 25	Verse 13	Verse 25		
Verse 14	Well, Treebeard and his pals...		Verse 14			
Verse 15	Yes, the axes of us Orcs...		Verse 15			
Verse 16	Now, Denethor did say...		Verse 16			
Verse 17	Yes, Denethor did say...		Verse 17			
Verse 18	When Frodo saw that golden ring...		Verse 18			
Verse 19	Oh, Sauron felt quite poor...		Verse 19			
Verse 20	If you doubt there are orcs left...		Verse 20			
Verse 21	And if you cry "That's bad" ...		Verse 21			
Verse 22	Tho Sauron is no more...		Verse 22			
Verse 23	After Barad-dur's collapse...		Verse 23			
Verse 24	You'd think Sauron would be done...		Verse 24			
Verse 25	Shagrat's job went down the drain...		Verse 25			
Verse 26	In the wake of his defeat...		Verse 26			
Verse 27	Sharkey's last desire...		Verse 27			
Verse 28	Oh, other's aren't in pain...		Verse 28			
Verse 29	So when Westrons...		Verse 29			
Verse 30	Yes, when Westrons...		Verse 30			
Verse 31	Sauron fell with Mordor...					

Figure 6.3: Verse order for five versions of the Tolkien filk song “The Orcs’ Marching Song” (also known as “The Official Song of the League of the Friends of Sauron” or “An Epical History of the War of the Ring”).

version. Many of the other verses can then be said to embody the notion of play as different zine writers have attempted to incorporate new verses to varying degrees of success. For example, Version 5 shows ways that fans have picked and chosen various verses that perhaps were more liked by the specific community with whom they shared their zine, so the editor chose to emphasize those verses. Likewise, the encouragement to add *at least* one hundred verses in order to make this a great ballad in Version 2 reminds me of Jenkins’s claim that filk songs (and the interpretation of fan communities in general) represents a never-ending process, and, thereby, a

process by which the community can consistently define and redefine itself through the process of play across the space of the text. In other words, to draw on Detweiler, it represents the ways that the community can continue to complete a religious reading of the text and return to a sense of *communitas* values at the core of their community.

Variations in different filk songs can come to express tensions both between the fans and the traditional structures of publication (demonstrating the new communal networks that are developing), but also between different segments of the fandom. On a loose-leaf page in the Hargrett Collection, entitled “Study Song Sheet #4 (April 1968)” a fan has noted the variations between songs that emerge within various subgroups of the fandom. Specifically looking at the song “Western Lands” from *The Lord of the Rings*, one fan notes that Houghton Mifflin has published a version, but it is considered by many fans to be “too baroque and artificial.” Instead, one fan (Karen Anderson) has adapted her own tune based on a Danish folk-tune that has become popular on the West Coast, while another fan (Chuck Rein) further adapted Anderson’s version, which has become popular on the East Coast.⁶⁴ This note recalls the earlier critique of Stanley Hoffman and his attempt to create a new tune for “A Elbereth Githoniel,” but imagines the impact on the communal level where new tunes have emerged within the fanon in stark contrast to one officially part of the canon. Moreover, even the fanon version is not set in stone, but continues to be a source of play within the fandom community so that different versions have become popular in different parts of the country, defining various communities across the space of the text.

These zines clearly show the development of community across new network pathways and often in tension with traditional institutional structures, and therefore reminiscent of Turner’s

⁶⁴ FGRP Filksong Press, East Ringwraith, “Study Song Sheet #4” (Correspondence, April 1968, n.d.), MS 3951, Box 15, Folder 6, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries.

notion of *communitas* as it develops among new initiates or in the act of play. There, however, might be some question about whether this act of play should be understood as religious or merely as communal. This critique could come from a sense that the examples explored so far do not necessarily resemble a traditional religious devotion nor do they resemble the suffrages to the saints we are about to explore in Books of Hours. While I intend to return to this question towards the end of this chapter, after considering Books of Hours and how they also resemble play, it is worth bringing in one more example of play in fan communities that might resemble a more traditional religious practice. I offer this not to say that the other examples of play explored already did not have a religious quality (as I hope to explain later in this chapter), but to emphasize the many possibilities that emerge in the context of play and how the *communitas* of that movement can take many forms, both different from and similar to a traditional religious practice.

In April and May 2020, as the world was first adjusting to the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, a reading group in Edinburgh, Scotland known as The EdinBurrow initiated a practice that they called “The Stations of the Horcruxes” (created by member Jowita A. Thor), which they shared using their Twitter account, @EdinBurrow. The idea behind the practice was to create something similar to the more traditional Stations of the Cross that Christians might pray during Holy Week, but instead connected with the events leading up to the Battle of Hogwarts (May 2, 1998) in *Harry Potter*.⁶⁵ For each station, they would offer a brief reflection on a theme (such as Death, Love, or the death of children) that connected the idea to the real world, passages

⁶⁵ The EdinBurrow (@EdinBurrow) and Jowita A. Thor (@JowitaAThor), “With the Battle of Hogwarts Fast Approaching Our Member @JowitaAThor Prepared a Special Spiritual Practice to Celebrate It Together - Stations of the Horcruxes. Here’s Just a Teaser - the Introduction into the Practice. We’ll Post the Stations Nearer the Time! @hpsacredtext,” Twitter, April 22, 2020, https://twitter.com/EdinBurrow/status/1252895716755877888?s=20&t=0loNgw28Hm_COfl-VvMzdQ.

from the *Harry Potter* books, and a poem or traditional religious prayer to help bring the reflection to a close.⁶⁶ For instance, in the Eighth Station, fans are encouraged to reflect on Death in the series, especially events around the Battle of Hogwarts, such as Colin Creevey's death or Harry walking to the woods to sacrifice himself, before closing with a prayer from the *Siddur Lev Chadash: The Liberal Jewish Prayer Book*.⁶⁷ For those in Edinburgh, there were also suggested places to "pray" the stations, such as Edinburgh Castle (to represent Hogwarts) or Victoria Terrace (which supposedly inspired Diagon Alley).⁶⁸ The whole practice was then to close with a special vigil the night before the Battle of Hogwarts, which was supposed to bring fans together in a meaningful space to reflect on all of the stations and the fans' connections to one another across the space of the text.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ The EdinBurrow (@EdinBurrow) and Jowita A. Thor (@JowitaAThor), "Station VIII Death This Might Be the Most Private and Personal of All the Stations Where Words Fail Us and It Is Difficult to Connect with Others. No One Can Accompany Us in This Journey. (by @JowitaAThor) @hpsacredtext With a Quote from @LiberalJudaism's Prayer Book.," Twitter, April 30, 2020, <https://twitter.com/EdinBurrow/status/1255806714114461696>; The EdinBurrow (@EdinBurrow) and Jowita A. Thor (@JowitaAThor), "Station VII: Love Love Ultimately Saved Snape from Being a Hardened Death Eater. His Love for Lily Evans Is More than Just a Love Story. It Is, in Its Endurance and Magnitude, an Unattainable Ideal. (by @JowitaAThor) Including @JackieKayPoet's Beautiful Poem @hpsacredtext," Twitter, April 29, 2020, https://twitter.com/EdinBurrow/status/1255432566666076161?s=20&t=0loNgw28Hm_COfl-VvMzdQ; The EdinBurrow (@EdinBurrow) and Jowita A. Thor (@JowitaAThor), "Station V. Death of Sons. A Couple of Weeks Ago Ismail Mohamed Abdulwahab, a 13yr-Old Boy from London, Died after Being Tested Positive for Coronavirus. Since Then Many Other Children, so Unexpectedly and Prematurely, in the Pandemic. by @JowitaAThor @hpsacredtext," Twitter, April 27, 2020, <https://twitter.com/EdinBurrow/status/1254704338909442049>.

⁶⁷ The EdinBurrow (@EdinBurrow) and Jowita A. Thor (@JowitaAThor), "Station VIII Death This Might Be the Most Private and Personal of All the Stations Where Words Fail Us and It Is Difficult to Connect with Others. No One Can Accompany Us in This Journey. (by @JowitaAThor) @hpsacredtext With a Quote from @LiberalJudaism's Prayer Book."

⁶⁸ The EdinBurrow (@EdinBurrow) and Jowita A. Thor (@JowitaAThor), "10 Days Left until the #BattleOfHogwarts. This Is When We Start Sharing with You the Stations of Horcruxes Prepared by @JowitaAThor This Is Station I - Harry's Final Decision. Ariana, and Aberforth's Advice. @hpsacredtext," Twitter, April 23, 2020, https://twitter.com/EdinBurrow/status/1253248330932592641?s=20&t=0loNgw28Hm_COfl-VvMzdQ; The EdinBurrow (@EdinBurrow) and Jowita A. Thor (@JowitaAThor), "Stations of the Horcruxes. Station II: At This Station Let Us Absorb Niemöller's Message (and McGonagall's Message to Slughorn, Hagrid's Message to Centaurs): Whatever Decision You Make It Will Not Be Morally Neutral. by @JowitaAThor | #BattleOfHogwarts @hpsacredtext," Twitter, April 24, 2020, https://twitter.com/EdinBurrow/status/1253617176134791168?s=20&t=0loNgw28Hm_COfl-VvMzdQ.

⁶⁹ The EdinBurrow (@EdinBurrow), "The Battle of Hogwarts Start in Just a Couple of Hours (UK). Just like in 1998, This Year It Falls on Saturday. Some of Us Are Doing a Night Vigil, Others Will Celebrate Tomorrow. May It Be a Thoughtful and Meaningful Time for All of Us! #battleofhogwarts #stationsofthehorcruxes," Twitter, May 1, 2020, <https://twitter.com/EdinBurrow/status/1256304193335439360>.

This inventive spiritual practice embodies the same quality of play that show up in the Tolkien filk songs or fanzines (albeit in a slightly more serious direction), and which fantasy texts and fandoms encourage. These creative recombinations develop and sustain communities across the space of the text as it gathers the fans together for the final vigil. Moreover, “The Stations of the Horcruxes” is also a text that mirrors what one might find in a Book of Hours as part of a religious practice that emerges and is shared in communities.

Books of Hours and the Saints

Books of Hours encourage the same aspect of play through the figures of the saints to build and sustain communities through the ways they combine well-established (though not regulated) prayers and liturgical forms with private devotional objects, family histories, and prayers dedicated to personal saints which can develop into new communal networks.

The standard make-up of a Book of Hours includes a calendar, selections from the four gospels (usually related to Christmas, Epiphany, the Annunciation, and the Ascension), the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, special prayers to the Virgin (notably “Obsecro Te” and “O Intemerata”), various accessory texts (most often including the Office of the Cross and the Office of the Holy Spirit), suffrages to various saints, and the Office of the Dead, all used to guide prayer for medieval devotees.⁷⁰ Many of these principal contents emerged out of private devotions before becoming common among various monastic movements.⁷¹ With the expansion of lay devotion in the Thirteenth Century, however, these devotions become more common

⁷⁰ Roger S. Wieck et al., *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (New York, NY: George Braziller, Inc. in association with The Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, 1988), 27–28; Wieck, *Painted Prayers: The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art*, 9, 39; Clemens and Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies*, 208–21; Virginia Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, c. 1400-1600* (Cambridge, GB: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 17.

⁷¹ Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers 1240-1570* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 5.

among lay people (especially wealthy women), and the Book of Hours became a key devotional manual that further involved the laity in a network of spiritual patronage and prayer.⁷²

During the medieval period, the various offices found in a Book of Hours were not well-regulated by the Church hierarchy (which would not occur until after the Council of Trent and the advent of printing), so they probably would not be considered “canonical” by the strictest definition of the term.⁷³ That said, there is a great deal of standardization in the principal texts (such as the Office of the Virgin or the Office of the Dead) with only minor variations between regions so that it is noticeable if there is a major adjustment to the text for personal preference. Moreover, since these texts were inherited from liturgical forms found in the Church, the Book of Hours is often seen as a link between the formal liturgy and home life.⁷⁴ In that sense, for my purposes, the principal texts approach the level of canonicity and demonstrate how the Book of Hours became a common form for medieval Christians, but which also became a site of play.

Within this standardized framework, there was much room for personalization from the owner (as well as the publisher and artisans), often seen in the calendar, accessory texts, suffrages to the saints, and the various illuminations included.⁷⁵ These pieces of personalization begin the process of play around the common form of the Book of Hours, adapting the form for the personal piety of each user or community. Sometimes, these personalizations even become the basis for a new communal network as others join in the act of play. Personalization usually occurred in the individual notes that owners added, especially family histories that could be

⁷² Duffy, 6; Wieck, *Painted Prayers: The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art*, 14; Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, c. 1400-1600*, 4.

⁷³ Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, c. 1400-1600*, 2, 19.

⁷⁴ Reinburg, 6.

⁷⁵ Reinburg, 2, 13; Cynthia Turner Camp, “Praying to Northern Saints in English Books of Hours,” in *Late Medieval Devotion to Saints from the North of England: New Directions*, ed. Christiania Whitehead, Hazel J. Hunter Blair, and Denis Renevey (Turnhout, BE: Brepols, 2022), 101.

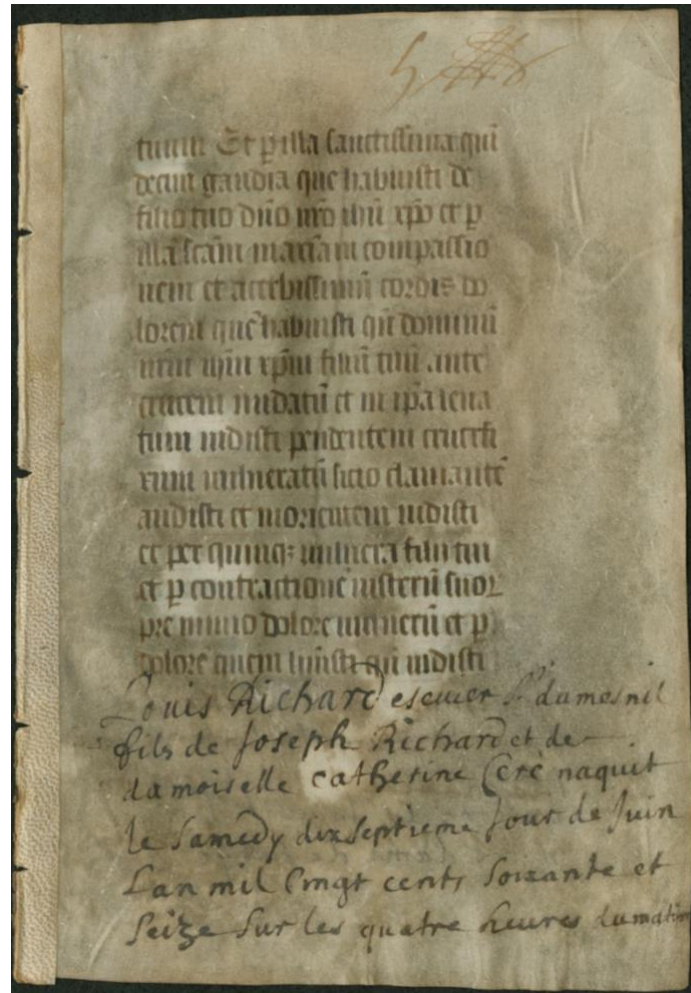


Figure 6.4: An example of family history written into a Book of Hours. This is an instance of what is known as a “Livre de Raison,” recording the family history of the Dumesnil family on the same folio as part of the text for “Obsecro Te,” a common prayer to the Virgin. The note at the bottom of the page records the name of Lord Louis Richard Dumesnil, born of Joseph Richard and his wife Catherine on June 17, along with additional family information. “Book of Hours (‘Livre de Raison’)” (France, ca 1450), Early MS 132r, Early Manuscript Collection, Irvin Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries, Columbia, S.C. Image courtesy of Irvin Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries.

passed down through the Book of Hours (Figure 6.3).⁷⁶ For instance, some owners would include their own name in the prayers to the Virgin or include a portrait of oneself (perhaps in a common

⁷⁶ Wieck et al., *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life*, 40; Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer*, c. 1400-1600, 63-75; “Book of Hours (‘Livre de Raison’)” (France, ca 1450), Early

scene such as the Annunciation that usually opens the Hours of the Virgin) as a means of making the text their own.⁷⁷ On a more expansive level, owners (especially non-original owners) would add pilgrim badges or whole new prayers to keep the text “up-to-date” with the latest indulgences, further altering the meaning of the standardized text as it is held in tension with various levels of personalization.⁷⁸ Every aspect of personalization was a means of utilizing the Book of Hours and the saints it includes as an interactive object in-progress to express identity.⁷⁹

Kathryn Rudy offers great insight into how the materiality of the Book of Hours encouraged these elements of personalization, especially as they shifted from bespoke manuscripts to semi-mass produced (or what she calls “modular”) texts. Rudy argues that as Books of Hours became more popular in the late 1300s, it was easy to know what texts people would routinely need (such as the Office of the Virgin), so a scribe would be able to make many copies of these “modules” that could then be sold separately, rather than producing a whole book.⁸⁰ The same process could be applied to the illuminations in a text, such that full-page illuminations would be produced and then sold separate from the rest of the book.⁸¹ Even for the saints’ suffrages, scribes could produce full-page illuminations of a saint and full-page suffrages that anyone might buy piecemeal to include in their Book of Hours based on their budget.⁸² The effect of the modular method is both a further standardization of the elements of a Book of Hours, but also the increased opportunity for personalization since even after the initial production, one could easily add another suffrage or auxiliary text to match the changing nature

MS 132, Early Medieval Manuscript Collection, Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries, Columbia, S.C.

⁷⁷ Wieck, *Painted Prayers: The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art*, 22, 86–88.

⁷⁸ Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, c. 1400-1600*, 53; Rudy, *Piety in Pieces: How Medieval Readers Customized Their Manuscripts*, 2.

⁷⁹ Rudy, *Piety in Pieces: How Medieval Readers Customized Their Manuscripts*, 9–10.

⁸⁰ Rudy, 17.

⁸¹ Rudy, 20–22.

⁸² Rudy, 24.

of one's devotion.⁸³ Another effect, however, was an increase in empty space as single-leaf illuminations and suffrages would only have text on one side.⁸⁴ While this might worry scribes operating according to the Medieval principle of *horror vacui* (the fear of empty space), owners utilized the blank side of these pages to further personalize their Books of Hours, drawing on those gaps to include pilgrims' badges, write in family history, or add additional prayers themselves.⁸⁵ The modular method, thereby, set the foundation for even greater personalization in the Books of Hours that I am about to explore and emphasizes the nature of a Book of Hours as a site to express personalization, as a text-in-progress, and as a means of articulating communal identity, much as I saw with fanzines and filk songs.

In Books of Hours, the calendar primarily served to inform users about which saint(s) or feasts are commemorated on the days of the year, often utilizing different colors (red or blue) to highlight the most important feasts.⁸⁶ This is a prime site for personalization since different regions, communities, and individuals might include and emphasize different saints in their calendar to reflect their regional or personal devotion (some of which might be added at a later date to reflect the passing of Books of Hours between generations).⁸⁷ For instance, on the September calendar in Pitts MSS 161 (Figure 6.4), saints are listed in alternating red and black ink with important feast days written in blue.⁸⁸ The emphasized days on this leaf include two commonly emphasized feasts, the Nativity of the Virgin (September 8) and the Exaltation of the

⁸³ Rudy, 25.

⁸⁴ Rudy, 33.

⁸⁵ Rudy, 49; Nicholas Rogers, "Patrons and Purchasers: Evidence for the Original Owners of Books of Hours Produced in the Low Countries for the English Market," in *Als Ich Can*, ed. Bert Cardon, Jan Van der Stock, and Dominique Vanwijnsberghe (Paris, FR: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2002), 1169. Rudy offers several examples on pp. 51–55.

⁸⁶ Clemens and Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies*, 209.

⁸⁷ Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, c. 1400-1600*, 174–75; Rudy, *Piety in Pieces: How Medieval Readers Customized Their Manuscripts*, 77–81.

⁸⁸ "Les Heures de Nostre Dame" (ca 1420), fol. 9r, MSS 161, Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

Cross (September 14). Curiously, however, also emphasized is the feast to the Saints Leu (sometimes Lupus) and Gilles (September 1). Comparing this manuscript to others using resources such as the Hypertext Book of Hours, the feasts to Leu and Gilles are rarely emphasized in calendars, except in Paris, and rarely appear together.⁸⁹ This then becomes an act of personalization and an act of play by the person who requested this Book of Hours to be made based on their personal devotional interests, ones which find a value in devotion to Ss. Leu and Gilles together. Such devotion is primarily found in Paris and the surrounding Île-de-France region, emphasized by the presence of the Thirteenth Century Église Saint-Leu-Saint-Gilles in central Paris (originally just dedicated to St. Gilles but expanded in the Fourteenth Century to include St. Leu).⁹⁰ Placing Ss. Leu and Gilles together alongside such notable (and canonical) feasts as the Nativity of the Virgin and the Exaltation of the Cross appeals to the importance these saints have for the owner of the Book of Hours and allows them to place the saints in an exalted position through a material act of play on the calendar page. Moreover, it speaks to the value of these saints for the owner of this Book of Hours that they are the ones included and written in blue ink as opposed to any number of other saints with a September 1 feast day, who might be emphasized in another community.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Glenn Gunhouse, "A Hypertext Book of Hours," accessed June 3, 2022, <http://medievalist.net/hourstxt/home.htm>.

⁹⁰ Marcia Kupfer, "Symbolic Cartography in a Medieval Parish: From Spatialized Body to Painted Church at Saint-Aignan-Sur-Cher," *Speculum* 75, no. 3 (2000): 629; Christine Garcette, "Histoire de l'église Saint-Leu-Saint-Gilles à Paris," *Saint-Leu-Saint-Gilles: Paroisse Catholique à Paris* (blog), January 30, 2013, <https://www.saintleuparis.catholique.fr/2013/01/30/histoire-de-leglise-saint-leu-saint-gilles-a-paris/>.

⁹¹ By way of comparison, Irvin Early MS 62 is a Use of Sarum (Salisbury) and, therefore, includes many English saints instead of those related to Paris, like Leu and Gilles. For instance, its calendar contains rubricated dates in honor of Thomas Becket (July 7 and December 29), Hugh of Lincoln (October 6 and November 17), and King Edmund the Martyr (November 20). An owner has also added in more English saints to further emphasize its connection with the Use of Sarum, such as Edward the Confessor (October 13) and Richard, bishop of Chichester (April 3). "Book of Hours (Use of Sarum)" (Bruges, ca 1430), Early MS 62, Early Medieval Manuscript Collection, Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries, Columbia, S.C.

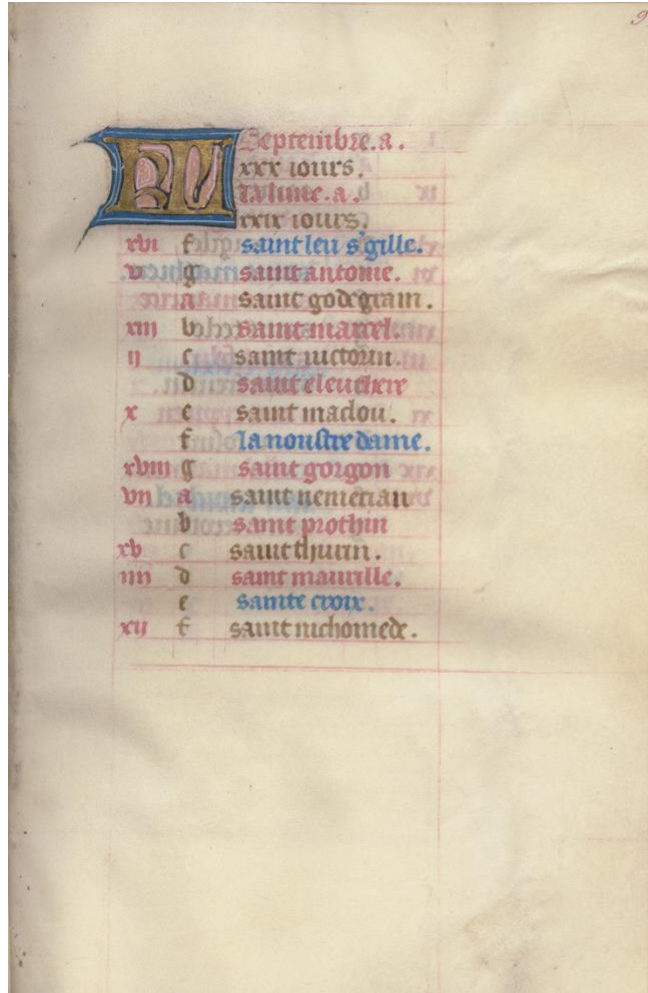


Figure 6.5: September calendar entry showing the feasts of Ss. Leu and Giles (line 5), the Nativity of the Virgin (line 12), and the Exaltation of the Cross (line 18) in blue ink. “Les Heures de Nostre Dame” (ca 1420), fol. 9r, MSS 161, Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University. Image provided courtesy of Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

Suffrages were another common site of personalization in the Book of Hours since owners would often choose what saints they included suffrages for or whether they included an illumination along with the suffrage.⁹² While there are some popular saints that appear in most Books of Hours (like Michael the Archangel, Nicholas, Anthony, Mary Magdalene, Catherine,

⁹² Wieck et al., *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life*, 111.



Figure 6.6: An illumination of the prophet Daniel in the lion's den with Daniel Rym praying to him on the outer frame. Master of Guillebert de Mets, "Book of Hours of Daniel Rym" (Flanders, ca 1420), fol. 168v, Ms. W. 166, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Image courtesy of The Walters Art Museum.

Margaret, Barbara, and Sebastian), others (like the suffrage to Peace in Irvin MS 62) are included for their personal importance to the owner, with the assumption that owners would include prayers to their favorite saints.⁹³ Roger Wieck points us to one notable suffrage in terms of

⁹³ Camp, "Praying to Northern Saints in English Books of Hours," 99; Rogers, "Patrons and Purchasers: Evidence for the Original Owners of Books of Hours Produced in the Low Countries for the English Market," 1167; Sarah Rees Jones and Felicity Riddy, "The Bolton Hours of York: Female Domestic Piety and the Public Sphere," in *Household, Women, and Christianities in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Brepols, 2005), 219; "Book of Hours (Use of Sarum)," fol. 48rv.

personalization in the Book of Hours of Daniel Rym (Walters Ms. W. 166), in which there is a suffrage to the Hebrew Bible prophet, Daniel, honoring him as the patron saint of Daniel Rym himself (Figure 6.5). The illumination for Daniel shows the prophet in the lion's den, but as Wieck notes, the lions appear more like golden sheep. While a suffrage to Daniel itself is rare, Rym has had this image further personalized to show himself kneeling at the border of the image with a scroll in his hands that reads "Sancte Daniel: Ora pro nobis."⁹⁴ By including such an unconventional suffrage and placing himself in the illumination, Rym makes the form of the Book of Hours more meaningful for himself and his personal devotion, helping to collapse the distinctions between the liturgy, the prophet, and his life.

For perhaps a less overt, but still important, form of personalization I could return to Pitts MSS 161, which includes a long list of suffrages, many to popular medieval saints. These include the Trinity, Michael the Archangel, John the Baptist, Nicholas, Sebastian, Anthony, Catherine, Barbara, and Margaret.⁹⁵ Also included, however, is (the still popular) Saint Genevieve, one of the patron saints of Paris, along with an illumination (Figure 6.6).⁹⁶ Based on the presence of the suffrage to Genevieve, taken along with information from the calendar (such as the presence of Ss. Leu and Gilles noted earlier, along with the presence of St. Denis and Marcel of Paris) and the Use of Paris for the Hours of the Virgin, it is possible to imagine a strong Parisian connection for Pitts MSS 161.⁹⁷ While Genevieve is a popular saint found among

⁹⁴ Wieck et al., *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life*, 119; Master of Guillebert de Mets, "Book of Hours of Daniel Rym" (Flanders, ca 1420), fol. 168v, Ms. W. 166, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Such owner portraits are another common means of adding personalization to the book of hours, and often put the owner in conversation with the Virgin or a patron saint. See Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, c. 1400-1600*, 116–25, 175–76.

⁹⁵ "Les Heures de Nostre Dame."

⁹⁶ "Les Heures de Nostre Dame," fol. 136v; Wieck et al., *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life*, 122.

⁹⁷ The Use of Paris for Pitts MSS 161 was determined by comparing the Chapter text from the hours of Prime and None with other Books of Hours using CHD tests. The Pitts MSS 161 Prime chapter begins "Felix namque es" and the None chapter begins "Per te dei genitrix," a combination primarily found among the Use of Paris. While this test



Figure 6.7: A suffrage to St. Genevieve, along with an illumination in which she holds her attribute, a candle being extinguished by a small devil and an angel who immediately relights it. “Les Heures de Notre Dame” (ca 1420), fol. 136v, MSS 161, Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University. Image provided courtesy of Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

many Books of Hours with a Parisian connection, it is important to note how her presence in this Book of Hours begins to point us towards the new communal networks that develop around the figures of the saints, communities that can be articulated using these suffrages. The incentive for

is not always enough to fully identify a Use, taken with other evidence of a Parisian connection, there is a good case for the Use of Paris. Erik Drigsdahl, “CHD Test for HV-Uses,” The Hours of the Virgin: New Tests for Localization of the Hore Beate Marie Virginis, accessed June 3, 2022, http://manuscripts.org.uk/chd.dk/use/hv_chdtest.html.

anyone to include an illumination like that found in Pitts MSS 161 is to play with the figure of St. Genevieve as a means by which to articulate an aspect of their personal identity, but also that identity as part of the devotional community of Paris. While this example emphasizes the geographical communities that might be articulated by saints in a Book of Hours, I see the same principles apply to other forms of religious communities as well.

Another common suffrage, especially in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, that shows the personalization involved in Books of Hours is the inclusion of prayers to personal guardian angels, sometimes replacing patron saints.⁹⁸ There are a number of prayers dedicated to guardian angels, but one popular one—seen in Irvin Early MS 47v (Figure 6.7)—comes from Reginald of Canterbury's verse *Life of Malchus*, ca. 1100 CE.⁹⁹ As Monika Otter argues, Reginald's *Life of Malchus* is itself an act of play on Jerome's more well-known prose *Vita of Malchus*, using the established narrative but adding further description and other interludes.¹⁰⁰ The prayer that appears in Irvin Early MS 47v (*angel qui meus es custos pietate superna*) comes from the sixth chapter of Reginald's *Life of Malchus*, where a number of prayers appear that Killings claims follow the Carolingian tradition of devotional prayers.¹⁰¹ In time, it was adapted into a sequence that could be included either as a prayer itself or as an antiphon to a series of other prayers or the Hours of the Guardian Angel.¹⁰² In these series of adaptations, both moving from Jerome's *Vita of*

⁹⁸ Wieck, *Painted Prayers: The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art*, 107; Dagmar Eichberger, "Oratio Ad Proprium Angelum: The Guardian Angel in the Rothschild Hours," in *The Primacy of the Image in Northern European Art, 1400–1700: Essays in Honor of Larry Silver*, ed. Debra Cashion, Henry Luttikhuisen, and Ashley West (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2017), 151.

⁹⁹ "Book of Hours (Edge 47)" (Flanders, ca 1450), Early MS 47, Early Medieval Manuscript Collection, Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries, Columbia, S.C. For more on Reginald of Canterbury and his writings, Steven Killings has been writing a biography, of which the Introduction is available online: Steven Killings, "Introduction," in *The Life and Writings of Reginald of St. Augustine's Canterbury* (SSRN, 2014), <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2447271>.

¹⁰⁰ Monika Otter, "Magnum Iocum Dare: Literature as Play in the Eleventh Century," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 27, no. 1 (2017): 329. See pp. 334–38 for the various types of play that Reginald includes in his *Life of Malchus*.

¹⁰¹ Killings, "Introduction."

¹⁰² Killings; Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, "The Cult of Angels in Late Fifteenth-Century England: An Hours of the Guardian Angel Presented to Queen Elizabeth Woodville," in *Women and the Book: Assessing the*

Malchus to Reginald's *Life* and the further adaptation of his verse into a prayer sequence, I see a quality of play around these texts to adapt the lives of the saints to the particular needs of individuals. Moreover, the Book of Hours is a central part of this process. As Anne Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs note, the cult of the guardian angel stayed an unofficial devotion, primarily

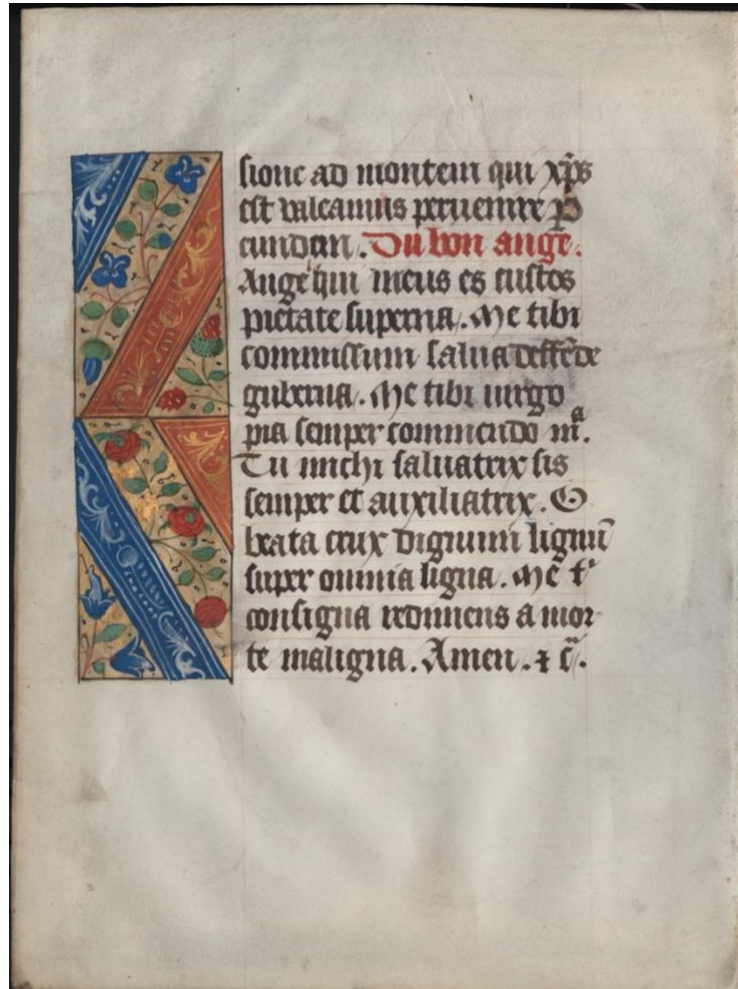


Figure 6.8: A suffrage to a guardian angel based on a prayer from Reginald of Canterbury's *Life of Malchus*. "Book of Hours (Edge 47)" (Flanders, ca 1450), Early MS 47v, Early Manuscript Collection, Irvin Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries, Columbia, S.C. Image courtesy of Irvin Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraires.

found in Books of Hours rather than the official liturgy.¹⁰³ As such, it is the Book of Hours that makes room for this aspect of play and preserves this act of devotion as part of a new communal network, resembling fanon more than the canonical hours.

The accessory texts of the Book of Hours are another common site of personalization. This is a section in which owners might include ancillary prayers depending on the personal nature of their devotion. While there are any number of prayers possible, different devotions became popular in different regions or among devotional communities, emphasizing how this section may be adapted based on the needs of the owner.¹⁰⁴ For instance, I might look at a loose-leaf vellum page from Pitts RG 020-2, which depicts in the margin an angel holding a shield containing the Five Wounds of Christ (Figure 6.8).¹⁰⁵ In Kathryn Rudy's research on this leaf and its parent manuscript, she argues for a connection with the Franciscan convent of St. Ursula in Delft, noting that the devotion to the Five Wounds was especially common among Franciscans because St. Francis himself had received the stigmata.¹⁰⁶ As part of this Franciscan devotion, the wounds were considered to offer protection to their devotees, with the rubric of this prayer even noting that reading the prayer daily would protect them from sudden death and offer an

¹⁰³ Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "The Cult of Angels in Late Fifteenth-Century England: An Hours of the Guardian Angel Presented to Queen Elizabeth Woodville," 233.

¹⁰⁴ Wieck, *Painted Prayers: The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art*, 99–100; Wieck et al., *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life*, 103.

¹⁰⁵ "Book of Hours, Dutch (Delft). 'Wounds of Christ'" (Vellum leaf, ca 1475), Record Group No. 020-2, Box 1, Folder 3, Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

¹⁰⁶ Kathryn M. Rudy, "Images, Rubrics and Indulgences on the Eve of the Reformation," in *Authority of the Word: Reflecting on Image and Text in Northern Europe, 1400-1700*, ed. Celeste Brusati, Karl A. E. Enenkel, and Walter Melion (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2012), 463–64; David H. Williams, *The Five Wounds of Christ* (Leominster, GB: Gracewing, 2004), 19; Amy Neff, "'Palma Dabit Palmam': Franciscan Themes in a Devotional Manuscript," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 65 (2002): 53.



Figure 6.9: The recto side of a vellum leaf from a Dutch Book of Hours that includes a prayer to the Five Wounds of Christ (in Dutch) with an accompanying illumination of an angel holding a shield containing the five wounds. “Book of Hours, Dutch (Delft). ‘Wounds of Christ’” (Vellum leaf, ca 1475), Record Group No. 020-2, Box 1, Folder 3, Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University. Image provided courtesy of Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

indulgence of five hundred years.¹⁰⁷ This becomes represented by the wounds on a shield,

emphasizing their role in protecting the devotee.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Rudy, “Images, Rubrics and Indulgences on the Eve of the Reformation,” 464; Petra Kayser, “Wounds on Paper: Early German Woodcuts in the British Museum,” in *Horizon Lines: Marking 50 Years of Print Scholarship*, ed. Kerrianne Stone (Melbourne, AU: University of Melbourne Library, 2019), 52–53.

¹⁰⁸ Rudy, “Images, Rubrics and Indulgences on the Eve of the Reformation,” 464. Christopher Woodforde also argues that the Five Wounds of Christ appearing on a shield in this manner was considered an escutcheon (a coat of arms) for the Franciscans. Christopher Woodforde, “Franciscan Saints in English Medieval Glass and Embroidery,”

I think about this illumination as a double act of play that the form of the Book of Hours helps make possible. On the one hand, the Franciscan nuns who included this particular illumination are playing with the image of the Five Wounds of Christ and its connection with St. Francis to demonstrate their connection both to their patron saint and to Christ himself. This aspect of play goes so far as to turn the wounds of Christ into something like a coat of arms for the Franciscan community. The Book of Hours becomes an exemplary medium to express this imagery because the collection of various prayers and images together encourages playful connections, such as Francis' special relationship with the Five Wounds. On the other hand, the owners of this Book of Hours' decision to include the prayer to the Five Wounds and the illumination becomes another act of play in which they are able to express an aspect of their devotion, emphasizing the salvation power they see possible in the Five Wounds.¹⁰⁹

There is a similar embodiment of play in accessory texts that reflect different geographical regions, such as prayers like the *Fifteen Oes of St. Bridget*. The *Fifteen Oes* is a group of fifteen prayers (so named because they all begin with the phrase "O Iesu") that are structured around the Seven Last Words of Our Lord.¹¹⁰ The Seven Last Words (really the seven last phrases) come from the biblical accounts of the Passion, drawing on the various recorded last words of Jesus, such as "I thirst" (John 19:28), "It is finished" (John 19:30), or "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). The Last Words popularly appear in Books of Hours

in *Franciscan History and Legend in English Medieval Art*, ed. A. G. Little (Manchester, GB: Manchester University Press, 1937), 29.

¹⁰⁹ The Five Wounds of Christ are also popular in English Books of Hours, perhaps because of the legend that Thomas Becket also received five wounds during his martyrdom. This includes prayers related to the Five Wounds in Irvin Early MS 62, which has a strong emphasis on Becket, and in the Bolton Hours, which pictures Richard Scrope as following in the tradition of Thomas Becket. Such a connection would be another act of play, much like associating the Five Wounds with the Franciscans.

¹¹⁰ Rebecca Krug, "Jesus' Voice: Dialogue and Late-Medieval Readers," in *Form and Reform: Reading Across the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Shannon Gayk and Kathleen Tonry (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2011), 115; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-c. 1580*, Second (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 249.

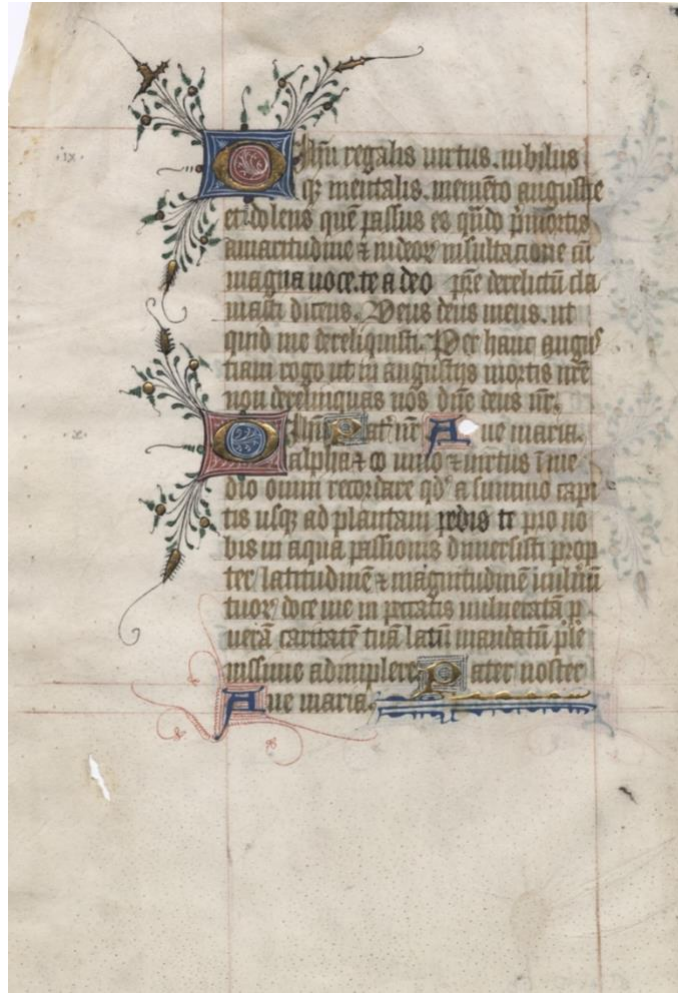


Figure 6.10: The verso of a vellum leaf containing Prayers Nine and Ten of the *Fifteen Oes*. Prayer Nine focuses on the sorrow of Jesus on the Cross, citing the final words, “My God, My God why have you forsaken me” (lines 6–7: *Deus, deus meus. ut | quid me dereliquisti.*). “Illuminated Manuscript Leaf (#ST12640-58)” (ca. 1425), fol. 58v, MS 3961, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries. Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries.

in their own right, especially on the continent, but in the *Fifteen Oes* they take on an additional layer of play.¹¹¹ In a loose-leaf sheet of vellum, formerly from the Cotterell-Throckmorton Book of Hours and now part of Hargrett MS 3951, we can see the Ninth Prayer of the *Fifteen Oes* with

¹¹¹ Wieck, *Painted Prayers: The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art*, 99.

its focus on the sorrow Jesus feels on the Cross (Figure 6.9).¹¹² In this prayer, the writer pulls from the Last Words, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me” (Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:34) and uses it to emphasize the sorrow of Jesus on the Cross but also as a prayer that we would not be forsaken in the same manner. As Rebecca Krug notes, by drawing on the Last Words of Jesus, the prayers let the devotee appropriate the voice of Jesus and establish a connection between his condition and their own, in this instance Jesus’ and the supplicant’s relationship to God.¹¹³ In an awareness of Jesus’ humanity and, therefore, someone who understands the human condition, these prayers reflect an aspect of play around Jesus’ words and his Christological nature into a prayerful devotion.¹¹⁴

In their debt to the tradition of the Seven Last Words, the composer of the *Fifteen Oes* reconceptualizes what those words might mean in the context of the new Bridgettine devotion of Medieval England. While traditionally attributed to St. Bridget of Sweden, scholars today claim an English origin for the *Fifteen Oes*, perhaps among the Bridgettine community or the disciples of Richard Rolle.¹¹⁵ While scholars today discredit the attribution to St. Bridget because of their theological sophistication, differing from the more personal style of Bridget’s *Revelations*, much of their popularity in medieval England was because of their association with her.¹¹⁶

St. Bridget started receiving her visions as a child and they increased when she became a widow, eventually receiving one in which she was instructed to establish a new monastic order for women dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the Order of the Most Holy Savior. As an aristocratic

¹¹² “Illuminated Manuscript Leaf (#ST12640-58)” (ca 1425), fol. 58v, MS 3961, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries.

¹¹³ Krug, “Jesus’ Voice: Dialogue and Late-Medieval Readers,” 113–15.

¹¹⁴ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-c. 1580*, 250.

¹¹⁵ Duffy, 249; Charity Meier-Ewert, “A Middle English Version of the ‘Fifteen Oes,’” *Modern Philology* 68, no. 4 (1971): 355–56; Krug, “Jesus’ Voice: Dialogue and Late-Medieval Readers,” 112.

¹¹⁶ Seth Lerer, “Literary Prayer and Personal Possession in a Newly Discovered Tudor Book of Hours,” *Studies in Philology* 109, no. 4 (2012): 414.

woman of Sweden, she received the backing of the Swedish Royals to establish a monastery in 1346. In time, this order arrived in England and quickly gained popularity, perhaps due to the efforts of Henry Fitzhugh to establish a Bridgettine monastery near Cambridge and the marriage of Philippa (daughter of Henry IV) to Eric XIII of Sweden in 1406 or because of St. Bridget's support of the English to the French throne during the Hundred Years' War.¹¹⁷ Either way, St. Bridget quickly gained popularity in Medieval England, seen in the spread of her *Revelations*. The early attribution of the *Fifteen Oes* to St. Bridget becomes part of her growing popularity as the writer combines the traditional Seven Last Words with a contemplative devotion mirroring Bridget's *Revelations*, even if they are more theologically oriented.¹¹⁸ In essence, the prayers become a means of merging the devotion to St. Bridget (fanon) and the Passion of Jesus (canon), with its associated salvatory power, much like the devotion to the Five Wounds becomes a shared veneration of St. Francis and Jesus united by an act of play. I further interpret this as a moment in which different devotional groups develop independent fanons based on their own devotional interests (in this case devotion to the Seven Last Words as one group and its varied expression alongside St. Bridget as another group), much like I saw different fanon groups develop around separate versions of Tolkien filk songs. In both instances, it is the Book of Hours or the fanzine as works-in-progress and sites of play (made possible through their "cut and paste" mentality) that encourages this kind of recombination in order to develop new devotional practices which might become the basis of new devotional communities.

These individual adaptations rarely stayed at the individual level, but rather would commonly lay a foundation for the development of new communal networks (even as they also

¹¹⁷ Carol F. Heffernan, "The Revelations of St. Bridget of Sweden in Fifteenth-Century England," *Neophilologus* 101 (2017): 338, 341.

¹¹⁸ For more on the impact of the *Fifteen Oes* and Bridgettine devotion in Medieval England, especially with Margery Kempe, see Heffernan, 344–46.

emerged from communal networks). As Eamon Duffy notes, the personal prayers included in a Book of Hours were drawn from a common pool of similar devotions that circled amongst lay people.¹¹⁹ In other words, these prayers were very rarely written by the person who added them to their Book of Hours, but rather they are borrowed from others so that the Book of Hours becomes a collection of words borrowed from others that become personal in the act of recitation (in the act of play).¹²⁰ Sometimes these prayers would literally be cut from a spare piece of parchment or gifted as single pieces of parchment and either pasted or sewn into the Book of Hours itself, recalling the “cut and paste” attitude of fanzines.¹²¹ In the act of sharing these prayers, passing them from book to book, they took on new meanings for each devotee who incorporated them into the larger structure of their personal Book of Hours.¹²² Rudy even notes that in this process, owners took part in the act of production, not just consumption, the same terms we saw Jenkins utilize to describe fan participatory culture.¹²³ In the willingness to incorporate new elements, I see an element of play around what the saints might mean in different contexts and how sharing prayers can come to define and reshape a community. Additionally, whole Books of Hours may be given as gifts (especially at a wedding) in which the gift-giver bequests a Book of Hours with personal meaning to share with the new generation a familial legacy or attachment to a particular saint.¹²⁴ As such, Duffy interprets the use of the Book of Hours not as a rise in individualistic devotion (as some have argued), but rather an “individual participation in a varied but coherent public religious culture.”¹²⁵ Likewise, Virginia

¹¹⁹ Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers 1240-1570*, 80.

¹²⁰ Duffy, 104; Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, c. 1400-1600*, 89.

¹²¹ Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, c. 1400-1600*, 235; Rudy, *Piety in Pieces: How Medieval Readers Customized Their Manuscripts*, 109–10.

¹²² Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, c. 1400-1600*, 18.

¹²³ Rudy, *Piety in Pieces: How Medieval Readers Customized Their Manuscripts*, 4–5.

¹²⁴ Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, c. 1400-1600*, 75–76.

¹²⁵ Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers 1240-1570*, 118.

Reinburg argues for interpreting the prayers in a Book of Hours as personal devotions that gain meaning in collaboration with family, community, church, and established customs.¹²⁶

One common reason that prayers might be added to a Book of Hours is the rise of a new cult or the creation of a new prayer that carries the weight of an indulgence.¹²⁷ Paying attention to these new cults and how they are reflected in Books of Hours can mark how people were developing new communities, even as they may be in tension with other communal commitments (local, regional, or national).¹²⁸ As Cynthia Turner Camp has shown, among northern saints of England, the varied textual combinations of saint suffrages can demonstrate how owners might express a northern sanctity through the use of saints, even as there are different nuances in what that sanctity might look like for each individual.¹²⁹

I take the rise of the cult of Richard Scrope as one example of how Books of Hours can express a new communal network, one focused in the Micklegate neighborhood of York. Richard Scrope was an archbishop of York who took part in the rebellion of 1405 against King Henry IV and was subsequently executed for his involvement. After his execution, the archbishop was buried in York Minister and his body became a site for pilgrimages and offerings.¹³⁰ In the aftermath, a popular cult emerged around Scrope, potentially as an image of anti-Lancastrian sentiment, although he was later utilized by Henry V as a means of maintaining political power.¹³¹ Indeed, with the rise of Henry V and later Edward IV, Scrope became

¹²⁶ Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, c. 1400-1600*, 140.

¹²⁷ Rudy, *Piety in Pieces: How Medieval Readers Customized Their Manuscripts*, 88.

¹²⁸ Catherine Sanok, *New Legends of England: Forms of Community in Late Medieval Saints' Lives* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 9; Camp, "Praying to Northern Saints in English Books of Hours," 101; Rees Jones and Riddy, "The Bolton Hours of York: Female Domestic Piety and the Public Sphere," 220.

¹²⁹ Camp, "Praying to Northern Saints in English Books of Hours," 114–16.

¹³⁰ J. W. McKenna, "Popular Canonization as Political Propaganda: The Cult of Archbishop Scrope," *Speculum* 45, no. 4 (1970): 611.

¹³¹ McKenna, 608, 616–17.

remembered more as a patron of the city of York than anything else.¹³² This devotion to Scrope as a saint continued among the people of York for an extended period of time and in 1462 there was even a question of the possible canonization of Scrope. There, however, was little support among the ruling hierarchy to invest the necessary funds and political capital, despite his continued popularity.¹³³

The devotion to Richard Scrope as a saint is reflected in various depictions and *memoriae* in psalters and Books of Hours, also being entered as part of English liturgical calendars.¹³⁴ One of Scrope's nephews, Stephen le Scrope (archdeacon of Richmond) even makes an invocation that appeals to Scrope as a saint, despite not yet being canonized.¹³⁵ Most notable, for my purposes among these various depictions are two Books of Hours that contain illuminations and suffrages dedicated to Scrope: the so-called Bolton Hours (York Minister Library, MS Add. 2) and Bodleian Library, MS Lat. Liturg. f. 2.¹³⁶ Bodleian Library, MS Lat. Liturg. f. 2 (ca. 1410) includes an image of the execution of Richard Scrope and suffrages addressing him as a saint. Christopher Norton suggests this book may have belonged to the Scrope family of Masham, the immediate relatives of the archbishop, and most likely Henry, the Third Lord of Masham and

¹³² Danna Pirovansky, *Martyrs in the Making: Political Martyrdom in Late Medieval England* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 55–56, 70–71; Camp, “Praying to Northern Saints in English Books of Hours,” 105; Simon Walker, “Political Saints in Later Medieval England,” in *The McFarlane Legacy: Studies in Late Medieval Politics and Society*, ed. R. H. Britnell and A. J. Pollard (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 94.

¹³³ McKenna, “Popular Canonization as Political Propaganda: The Cult of Archbishop Scrope,” 622.

¹³⁴ Walker, “Political Saints in Later Medieval England,” 83. For more on the early development of Scrope's cult, see Christopher Norton, “Richard Scrope and York Minster,” in *Richard Scrope: Archbishop, Rebel, Martyr*, ed. P. J. P. Goldberg (Donington, GB: Shaun Tyas, 2007), 171–91.

¹³⁵ T. W. French, “The Tomb of Archbishop Scrope in York Minster,” *The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 61 (1989): 97.

¹³⁶ “The Bolton Hours” (ca 1420), MS Add. 2, York Minister Library; “MS Lat. Liturg. f. 2” (France/Flanders with additions in England, 14th century, late-15th century, early), MS Lat. Liturg. f. 2, Bodleian Library, Oxford University; Norton, “Richard Scrope and York Minster,” 177; French, “The Tomb of Archbishop Scrope in York Minster,” 97; Pirovansky, *Martyrs in the Making: Political Martyrdom in Late Medieval England*, 62, 65–66; Camp, “Praying to Northern Saints in English Books of Hours,” 105. Camp also highlights four other books of hours that contain suffrages to Richard Scrope, three of which are currently housed at York Minister Library and the fourth at St. John's College, Cambridge. Camp, 102–3. Also see, Pirovansky, *Martyrs in the Making: Political Martyrdom in Late Medieval England*, 50–51.

nephew of the archbishop.¹³⁷ While the association of Bodleian Library, MS Lat. Liturg. f. 2 with Archbishop Scrope's immediate family (many of whom are buried near him in York Minster) might suggest a familial devotion to Scrope rather than the emergence of a new communal network articulated through Scrope as a saint, Norton has argued against this interpretation by noting the number of pilgrims attending to Scrope's tomb who would not have the "theological sophistication to distinguish between a mass for the soul of a deceased archbishop and a mass in honour of a saint."¹³⁸ In other words, taken in light of the intense devotion to Scrope outside the family, it is proper to interpret his suffrages in this Book of Hours as a sign of the emerging cult to Scrope and the community it entails.¹³⁹ Given the family's involvement in pushing for devotion to Scrope as a saint, this Book of Hours could even be considered one of the earliest acts of play to think of Scrope as a saint and to include him as part of a larger liturgical network.

Turning to the example of the Bolton Hours, there is further evidence for this new devotional community emerging around Scrope and their particular interest in the would-be saint. Some have suggested that the Bolton Hours was commissioned by Margaret Blackburn (wife of York mayor, Nicholas Blackburn) in order to teach her children (including Alice Bolton who lends her name to the text) how to read.¹⁴⁰ Whether this argument is correct or not is difficult to confirm, but Sarah Rees Jones and Felicity Riddy have made a strong case for placing the Bolton Hours in the Micklegate neighborhood of York based on the established fraternities

¹³⁷ Norton, "Richard Scrope and York Minster," 177, 188–89; Pirovansky, *Martyrs in the Making: Political Martyrdom in Late Medieval England*, 65–66.

¹³⁸ Norton, "Richard Scrope and York Minster," 184.

¹³⁹ Norton, 190.

¹⁴⁰ P. H. Cullum and P. J. P. Goldberg, "How Margaret Blackburn Taught Her Daughters: Reading Devotional Instruction in a Book of Hours," in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Belgium: Turnhout, 2000), 217–36; Pirovansky, *Martyrs in the Making: Political Martyrdom in Late Medieval England*, 62.

and churches in the area at the time that are reflected in the Bolton Hours.¹⁴¹ As Rees Jones notes, a look through the suffrages of the Bolton Hours would offer a “virtual tour of the devotional sites of the early Fifteenth Century city.”¹⁴² This includes a particularly strong connection to Micklegate, which was the home of the Scropes of Masham and adjacent to the site of Richard Scrope’s execution.¹⁴³ Such an interpretation helps to account for many of the unusual saints found in the Bolton Hours (such as St. Zita and St. William with Mary) who have churches or hospitals dedicated to them in the Micklegate neighborhood.¹⁴⁴ Rees Jones goes on to note that many of the families living in the Micklegate area were survivors of or had a connection to the 1405 rebellion and, therefore, a connection with Richard Scrope.¹⁴⁵ As such, Rees Jones suggests that the Bolton Hours may have belonged to any number of those families and that the devotion to Scrope found in the Bolton Hours was a means to heal the divisions rising in the city that led to the rebellion, uniting York as a textual community under the patronage of shared saints like Richard Scrope.¹⁴⁶ In other words, devotion to Scrope as a saint becomes a means of uniting the city of York and its various institutions, utilizing the new network of communal ties that Scrope represents. The Bolton Hours, much like Bodleian Library, MS Lat. Liturg. f. 2 becomes part of that process in the ways that it offers a site of play to incorporate a figure like Richard Scrope into the sacred history of York, England, and

¹⁴¹ Sarah Rees Jones, “Richard Scrope, the Bolton Hours and the Church of St Martin in Mickle-Gate: Reconstructing a Holy Neighbourhood in Later Medieval York,” in *Richard Scrope: Archbishop, Rebel, Martyr*, ed. P. J. P. Goldberg (Donington, GB: Shaun Tyas, 2007), 218.

¹⁴² Rees Jones, 223; Rees Jones and Riddy, “The Bolton Hours of York: Female Domestic Piety and the Public Sphere,” 240.

¹⁴³ Rees Jones, “Richard Scrope, the Bolton Hours and the Church of St Martin in Mickle-Gate: Reconstructing a Holy Neighbourhood in Later Medieval York,” 225–26.

¹⁴⁴ Rees Jones, 227.

¹⁴⁵ Rees Jones, 232; Rees Jones and Riddy, “The Bolton Hours of York: Female Domestic Piety and the Public Sphere,” 249.

¹⁴⁶ Rees Jones, “Richard Scrope, the Bolton Hours and the Church of St Martin in Mickle-Gate: Reconstructing a Holy Neighbourhood in Later Medieval York,” 232–33, 235; Rees Jones and Riddy, “The Bolton Hours of York: Female Domestic Piety and the Public Sphere,” 239, 250–51.

Christianity in general because of the ways that Books of Hours operate at the intersection of canon and fanon.

As Danna Piroyanksy notes, “in the immediate aftermath of Scrope’s execution, a *communitas* (in the sense Victor Turner used) evolved through a spontaneous socializing process which created—temporarily—an unstructured, ‘open’ society.”¹⁴⁷ The inclusion of Scrope among Books of Hours, such as the Bolton Hours, is evidence of how these books allowed a place for play to include Scrope in the larger liturgical system, even as he represented a *communitas* that was held in tension with that liturgical network. Moreover, since Richard Scrope was never canonized, he becomes an interesting example of the tension between fanon and canon and the importance of Books of Hours as a site of play to think about the canonical status of saints (and would-be saints) within a community. Christopher Norton notes that the process of canonization was often long and expensive and potentially a political statement.¹⁴⁸ Yet, Scrope was already appearing on liturgical calendars and in Books of Hours, so there is a clear devotion to him as a saint where we might even speak of him as an object of “popular canonization” (what I would call fanonization) rather than official canonization by papal decree. Rather than seek canonization, the leaders at York Minister may have opted for translation instead (moving Scrope’s head from where it was held following his execution to York Minister itself), acknowledging his importance to the community while also avoiding the hassle of official canonization since even unofficial saints’ relics could be transferred.¹⁴⁹ Such a move fits the tension between canon and fanon, in which the unofficial devotion to Scrope is encouraged to continue and even fostered in the act of translation. This move promotes the new communal

¹⁴⁷ Piroyansky, *Martyrs in the Making: Political Martyrdom in Late Medieval England*, 69.

¹⁴⁸ Norton, “Richard Scrope and York Minster,” 201.

¹⁴⁹ Norton, 202.

network that has emerged around him, even as he remains separated from the official networks of canonization.

Hargrett MS 836 offers an even more overt example of how a Book of Hours can mediate a communal relationship through play since it has been radically altered from the common form of the Book of Hours to focus on devotion to the Sainte-Chapelle de Paris.¹⁵⁰ Hargrett MS 836 is interesting in that it no longer contains many texts related to Marian devotion, including the Hours of the Virgin, the office typically central to any Book of Hours.¹⁵¹ Likewise, it does not contain passages from the Gospels (other than John) or any of the common prayers dedicated to the Virgin. Instead, it contains a calendar (like normal), the Long Office of the Passion (different from the Short Office of the Cross occasionally found in a Book of Hours), a long segment of the Passion account from John's Gospel, seven prayers dedicated to the Passion, and suffrages to the saints. This departure from the typical structure of a Book of Hours points to the way that it is emerging within a specific textual community and how this is an example of play around the standard form of a Book of Hours. The specific ways that the owners of this book play with the form of the Book of Hours points to a special dedication to the Passion and the Cross that can be situated in relationship to the community of the Sainte-Chapelle de Paris.

The Sainte-Chapelle was built alongside Notre Dame on the Ile-de-la-Cité between 1239 and 1248 by King Louis IX (r. 1226–70) of France as a massive reliquary in which to store his

¹⁵⁰ "Book of Hours, Catholic Church, Liturgy and Ritual" (15th Century), MS 836, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries; Cynthia Turner Camp et al., "The Hargrett Hours Edition," The Hargrett Hours Edition, DigiLab, University of Georgia, 2018, <https://hargrethoursproject.digilabuga.org/>.

¹⁵¹ There has been a lot of work conducted by courses at the University of Georgia about the lack of Marian devotion in Hargrett MS 836 and its focus on the Passion in relation to other Books of Hours. See Cynthia Turner Camp et al., "Passion Devotion in Books of Hours," The Hargrett Hours Edition, DigiLab, University of Georgia, 2018, <https://hargrethoursproject.digilabuga.org/commentary/passion-devotion/>.

newly acquired Passion relics.¹⁵² This included the Crown of Thorns, translated from Venice in August 1239, a splinter of the True Cross, and the Holy Lance.¹⁵³ Over time, it came to hold other important relics as well, many related to Christ and Mary, including Jesus' swaddling clothes and drops of Mary's breastmilk.¹⁵⁴ In time, it would even hold the head of Louis IX (canonized as St. Louis in 1297 by Pope Boniface VIII), after it was translated from the Cathedral of St. Denis in 1307.¹⁵⁵ The moments of play that separate Hargrett MS 836 from a traditional Book of Hours mirror this devotion to the Passion, the Cross, St. Louis, and the Sainte-Chapelle itself, emphasizing its connection to a specific communal network held in tension with the Marian devotion commonly found among Books of Hours.¹⁵⁶

Saints and feasts included in the calendar of Hargrett MS 836 emphasize saints and relics attached to the Sainte-Chapelle. For instance, the calendar includes important dates like the Dedication of the Sainte-Chapelle (April 26) (fol. 4v)—a day which Pope Innocent IV granted an indulgence of 465 days for anyone visiting the Chapelle—or the arrival of the Crown of Thorns at the Sainte-Chapelle (August 11) (fol. 8r), and feasts related to the Cross such as the Invention (May 3) (fol. 5r) and the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14) (fol. 9r).¹⁵⁷ Other dates on the

¹⁵² Charles Freeman, "Louis IX and the Sainte-Chapelle," in *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 134, 136; Christopher Olaf Blum, "Art and Politics in the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 4, no. 2 (2001): 14, 17–18; Meredith Cohen, "An Indulgence for the Visitor: The Public at the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris," *Speculum* 83, no. 4 (2008): 840. For an extensive history of the Sainte-Chapelle, see Yves Bottineau, *Notre-Dame de Paris and the Sainte-Chapelle*, trans. Lovett F. Edwards (Rand McNally & Company, 1967), 67–75.

¹⁵³ Freeman, "Louis IX and the Sainte-Chapelle," 132–33, 135; Blum, "Art and Politics in the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris," 17; Cohen, "An Indulgence for the Visitor: The Public at the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris," 845–46, 865; Jean-Michel Leniaud and Françoise Perrot, *The Sainte-Chapelle* (Paris, FR: Éditions du Patrimoine, 2007), 51.

¹⁵⁴ Freeman, "Louis IX and the Sainte-Chapelle," 135–36. For more on the extensive collection of relics at the Sainte-Chapelle, see Karen Gould, "The Sequences De Sanctis Reliquiis as Sainte-Chapelle Inventories," *Journal of Medieval Studies* 43 (1981): 315–35.

¹⁵⁵ Freeman, "Louis IX and the Sainte-Chapelle," 138; Cohen, "An Indulgence for the Visitor: The Public at the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris," 867; Leniaud and Perrot, *The Sainte-Chapelle*, 52–53.

¹⁵⁶ Cynthia Turner Camp et al., "Sainte-Chapelle," The Hargrett Hours Edition, DigiLab, University of Georgia, 2018, <https://hargrethoursproject.digilabuga.org/commentary/sainte-chapelle/>. For more on devotion to the Passion relics and to St. Louis at the Sainte-Chapelle, see Leniaud and Perrot, *The Sainte-Chapelle*, 69–75.

¹⁵⁷ Cohen, "An Indulgence for the Visitor: The Public at the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris," 866–67.

calendar specifically honor Louis IX as a saint, such as an extended note about the translation of his head in mid-May (fol. 5v) and the Feast of Louis IX, King of France, on August 25 (fol. 8v).¹⁵⁸ The emphasis on St. Louis is special, especially the extended note marking the translation of his head, which is usually only indicated like a regular feast day on May 8. Likewise, the celebration of Louis' feast in August is rubricated (placed in red ink) to mark it as an important day for the owner of this calendar, while other feasts around the same time are recorded in a more traditional black ink (Figure 6.10). This includes the Feast to St. Augustine of Hippo (August 28), an arguably more important feast for the Church-at-large and one that we find rubricated in other Books of Hours (like Vat. lat. 6082).¹⁵⁹ Augustine's feast in black ink is especially strange given the fact that Hargrett 836 includes a suffrage to St. Augustine, but not to St. Louis. Such a tension again points to the practice of play within a Book of Hours so that a figure like St. Louis can be accorded such an honor, indicating a devotional (and perhaps communal) commitment on the part of the owner to Louis and his legacy.

There is a similar connection to the Sainte-Chapelle in the devotion to the Cross and the Crown of Thorns in the seven auxiliary prayers of Hargrett MS 836 (fol. 51v–56v). While auxiliary prayers and texts typically involve devotion to Mary (such as in “Obsecro Te” or “O Intemerata”) or elements of the Passion (such as the “Salve sancta facies” or the “Seven Last Words of Our Lord”), Hargrett MS 836 is special for its sole focus on the Passion of Christ and its various elements.¹⁶⁰ As Camp et al. note in their work on Hargrett MS 836, the first three auxiliary prayers, beyond just maintaining a focus on the Passion, specifically highlight the place

¹⁵⁸ Camp et al., “Sainte-Chapelle.”

¹⁵⁹ “Vat. Lat. 6082” (Italy, 12th Century), fol. 4v, Vat. lat. 6082, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

¹⁶⁰ Cynthia Turner Camp et al., “Livin’ on a (Passion) Prayer: The Hargrett Hours Passion Prayers,” *The Hargrett Hours Edition*, DigiLab, University of Georgia, 2018, <https://hargrethhoursproject.digilabuga.org/commentary/passion-devotion/passion-prayers/>.

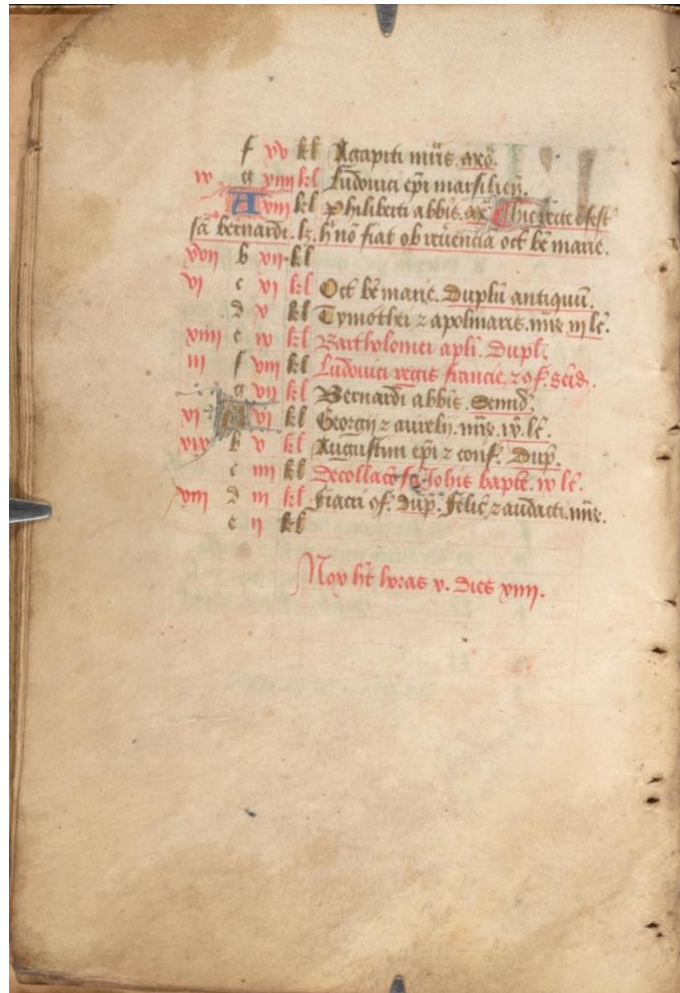


Figure 6.11: August calendar page including the rubricated Feast of St. Louis, King of France, on August 25 (line 9). Also included is the Feast of St. Augustine on August 28 (line 13) in regular black ink. “Book of Hours, Catholic Church, Liturgy and Ritual” (15th Century), fol. 8v, MS 836, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries. Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries.

of the Crown of Thorns at the Passion, and as part of a unique grouping not found in 217 other manuscripts surveyed.¹⁶¹ The last three auxiliary prayers (a more standard grouping) focus specifically on the Eucharist and a Marian lamentation on Christ’s sufferings, which mirrors Louis’ own piety towards the Passion relics as an extension of his piety towards the Eucharist.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Camp et al.

¹⁶² Camp et al.; Blum, “Art and Politics in the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris,” 18.

Together these two grouping emphasize elements of the Passion that would have held a specific interest for St. Louis and the Sainte-Chapelle. Prayer Four (Figure 6.11) shows a further devotion to the Passion, but appears in Middle French (as opposed to the more common liturgical Latin of the time for auxiliary prayers), which might be interpreted as an even greater personalization in order to bring the Book of Hours into the devotional community of the Sainte-Chapelle.¹⁶³ The opening rubric of Prayer Four instructs the user that the prayer is to be said during the mass between the *Pater Noster* and the *Agnus Dei*, a moment often associated with the elevation of the Host, which marks this as another prayer associated with the Eucharist. The prayer goes on to describe in great detail the various wounds of Christ on the Cross, such as the bitter taste of gall in his mouth (*ton goust amer de fiel*) or his outstretched hands (*tes mains expandues*), leading up to a description of the living fountain flowing from his side (*vive Fontaine courant de ton coste*).¹⁶⁴ This becomes a turning point in the prayer, in which the petitioner (having directed Christ to the many points of his suffering) notes the power of that suffering for the forgiveness of sins (*tu me suie piteables en mor predonnat la tres grant multitude de tous mes pechier*).¹⁶⁵ Together, the rubric, the thick description of Christ's sufferings on the Cross, and the appeal for the forgiveness of sins emphasizes the importance of the Passion and the Eucharist as sites of the body of Christ and the forgiveness of sins, and, by extension, the Passion and Eucharistic devotion embodied in Hargrett MS 836.

Such a devotional emphasis in a Book of Hours emerges out of a practice of play around the events of the Passion and the devotion of St. Louis to its relics to shift the emphasis away from a more standard Marian devotion. In Prayer Four, moreover, this attitude of play has

¹⁶³ Camp et al., "Livin' on a (Passion) Prayer: The Hargrett Hours Passion Prayers"; Reinburg, *French Books of Hours: Making an Archive of Prayer, c. 1400-1600*, 89–96.

¹⁶⁴ "Book of Hours, Catholic Church, Liturgy and Ritual," fol. 54r-v.

¹⁶⁵ "Book of Hours, Catholic Church, Liturgy and Ritual," fols. 54v–55r.

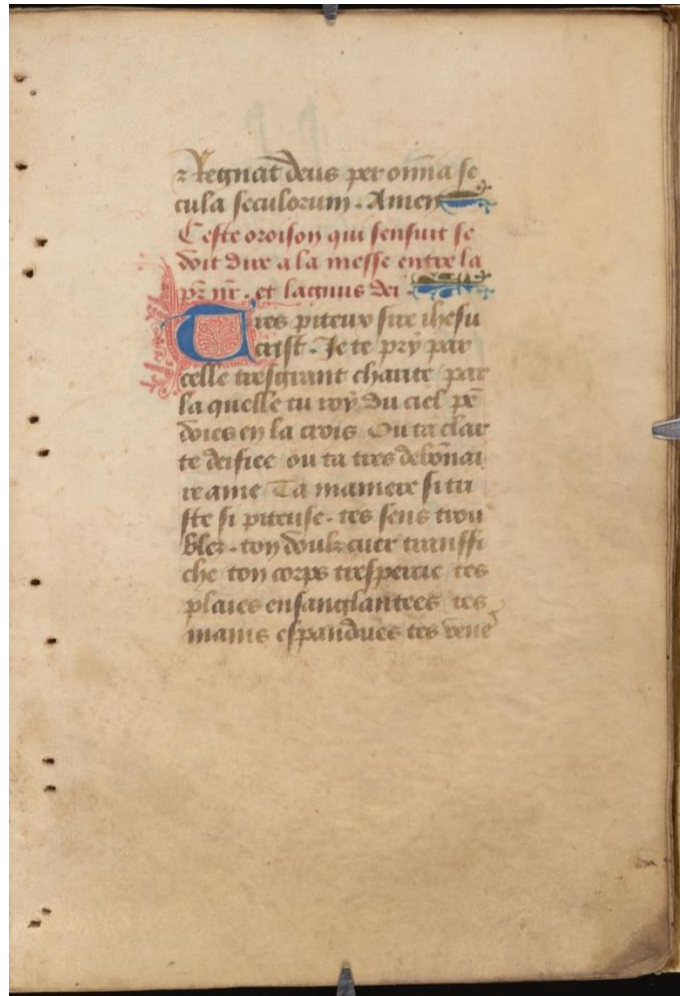


Figure 6.12: The rubric and opening sequence of the fourth auxiliary prayer in Hargrett MS 836. The rubric in French reads “*Ceste oroison qui s[']ensuit se doit dixe a la messe entre la p[ate]r n[oste]r et l[']agnus dei,*” which offers instructions on when the prayer ought to be read during the mass (between the *Pater Noster* and the *Agnus Dei*, which is associated with the elevation of the Host). “Book of Hours, Catholic Church, Liturgy and Ritual” (15th Century), fol. 54r, MS 836, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries. Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries.

encouraged the inclusion of a vernacular prayer, one that likely had an intensely personal value for the owner for it to be included amongst the other auxiliary prayers and liturgical offices that are entirely in Latin. Much like the devotion to Richard Scrope found in the Bolton Hours and other Books of Hours, this aspect of play has emerged within and has further encouraged a new

communal network around the Sainte-Chapelle and Louis himself that I imagine as distinct from but in conversation with the general liturgical practice of the Church.¹⁶⁶

Saint and Fantasy Devotion and the “World Religions”

What both Books of Hours and fanzines present to me is a material example of play around texts like hagiography and fantasy literature that encourages the creation and constant redefinition of new communal networks. These networks can be understood as expressions of Appadurai’s notion of the cellular or Media Studies’ idea of fanon, and, therefore, in tension with vertebrae systems and more canonical structures. It is the materiality of fanzines and Books of Hours (two media inherently tied with fantasy fandom and the cult of the saints, respectfully) that sets the foundation for this ethic of play in the ways they are established as works-in-progress and, therefore, resist becoming fully established in canonical form.¹⁶⁷ In turning to the ethic of play and its connection with cellular networks, I return to a central aspect of my thesis of fantasy as a second hagiography to emphasize the ways that the religious nature of fantasy fandom can often be understood in conversation with traditional religious structures/practices (even religious structures such as Atheism and Agnosticism) rather than being understood as its own distinct religious institution. In other words, the types of communities that I see form around fantasy characters (seen in fanzines) better resemble the communities that form around, initially, individual and communal devotion to particular saints (as reflected in Books of Hours) than they do Christianity and the Church as a vertebrate institution. This does not deny the religious nature of these communities, given the ways in which people use the saints to construct personal

¹⁶⁶ Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers 1240-1570*, 59.

¹⁶⁷ For instance, I could compare the ways a Book of Hours treats sections of the gospels (pulling various pieces together and imagining them in new contexts) in comparison to a biblical commentary (a text that will keep the biblical passages central to the page, with the commentary set off in the strictly defined areas around the biblical text). Commentaries then preserve and even enhance the canonicity of the biblical text while Books of Hours have more room to play with how we might think about the text, even as it maintains its status as canon.

meaning for themselves (explored in Chapter Five) and the ideas of *communitas* I find in Victor Turner and Robert Detweiler to describe how play puts us in a state of anti-structure resembling the new communities of ritual initiates. Rather, it affirms a different type of community, one that interacts with but does not necessarily determine broader—institutionalized—spiritual beliefs and practices. In other words, fantasy characters (like saints) become malleable presences that unite communities in their religious practice where and when they need the character and independent of vertebrate systems.

In the review of scholarship on fandom and religion I discuss in my “Introduction,” I mentioned that much of the scholarship (from scholars like Emily McAvan, Markus Altena Davidsen, and Adam Possamai) struggles to place the religious attitude of fans because it becomes focused on ideas of presence, structure, or belief. For McAvan, fantasy fandom becomes a pseudo-religion because it is rooted in “unreal” texts and so should be set off from other forms of spirituality.¹⁶⁸ Davidsen focuses on comparing fantasy fandom to the traditional “world religions” and their institutional structure and makes a distinction between “history-based religions” and “fiction-based religions,” neither of which is embodied in notions of play but instead finds a presence (and value) in the institutional structures of religion that lend an authority of presence.¹⁶⁹ Lastly, Possamai presents ideas of the “hyper-real” religion in which the world contains so many simulacra that it becomes difficult to tell reality from non-reality.¹⁷⁰ Many of these approaches raise the question of fandom and religion by exploring fandom in comparison to the “world religions.”

¹⁶⁸ McAvan, *The Postmodern Sacred: Popular Culture Spirituality in the Science Fiction, Fantasy and Urban Fantasy Genres*, 2, 14–15.

¹⁶⁹ Davidsen, “Fiction-Based Religion: Conceptualising a New Category against History-Based Religion and Fandom,” 380.

¹⁷⁰ Possamai, “Yoda Goes to Glastonbury: An Introduction to Hyper-Real Religions,” 1.

By focusing on the liminal qualities in religious literature, like those I find in hagiography, and the ways that fans can relate to the texts and each other in the spaces the text creates, I am able to avoid the shortcomings I find in McAvan, Davidsen, and Possamai. For instance, in Chapter Five, attention to the liminal nature of literature allowed us to consider how fans create a presence for the saints and fantasy characters by utilizing these figures to narrate and name aspects of themselves as sacred. In a sense, the figures come to share in the reality of the fan or devotee and take on meaning for how fans understand their lives, meaning that does not depend on the level of reality found in a text, the main concerns of McAvan and Possamai. In this chapter, the liminal offered a space of play around figures like the saints and fantasy characters to form communities that are distinct from (and occasionally in tension with) the organized institutions that Davidsen values in determining religiosity. This does not mean that fandom must be totally separate from institutional practices or that it entails whole-hearted belief in Frodo or Ged as real people. Instead, it acknowledges a different type of belief (one based on myth and Tolkien's Secondary Belief) and that might operate as an aspect of the spiritual or religious life without being conflated with something like Christianity. Rather, in the comparison to the cult of the saints, I find the language to speak about fantasy fandom and its religious qualities that takes stock of both of these challenges and the ways that they are tied together.

Chapter Seven

Reaggregation: Imitating Saints and Heroes

Having explored the role of the limen in Chapters Five and Six to allow fans and devotees of fantasy literature and hagiography to shape their identities and find community with others, we come to the final stage of Victor Turner's three-part ritual structure, reaggregation. As Turner notes, the limen cannot last forever, even as he hopes the *communitas* and anti-structure values come to influence life in profane time.¹ Likewise, we eventually finish reading the fantasy story or the saint's life and emerge back into the Primary World and must find a way to incorporate what we have experienced from the limen into our everyday experience of the world. This raises a challenge for any writer or reader of fantasy and hagiography since, in this movement, I am reminded that these stories move beyond a reason and logic that can easily be expressed in our everyday lives. As he brings his Faerie Romance, *Phantastes*, to a close George MacDonald offers a reflection on this challenge:

Could I translate the experience of my travels there [in Fairy Land], into common life?

This was the question. Or must I live it all over again, and learn it all over again, in the other forms that belong to the world of men, whose experience yet runs parallel to that of Fairy Land? These questions I cannot answer yet. But I fear.²

MacDonald here brings us back to Tolkien's characterization of Secondary Belief and the admittance that much of the power of fantasy to transform us and our lives comes when we are

¹ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 56; Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 94–95.

² MacDonald, *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance*, 204.

caught up in the space of the text, when we experience the fantasy world and its lessons as if we were a part of it. In that reflection, the question remains what can we truly bring from the world of the limen into our everyday lives, even as we will likely need to experience the story and its lessons once again, much like rituals that are consistently repeated.

While we might struggle to carry with us the experience of the saints or the fantasy characters, I can emphasize the ways that these figures and our experiences with them can shape our morality and our actions in the world. Moreover, they help make me aware of an ethics that is rooted in the lived experiences of the world and the complexity of life to meet the changing nature of morality across time and space. On some level, this recalls the writings of Plato and his thoughts on the role of poetry in shaping virtue as well as the ways his thoughts are evoked in thinkers like T. S. Eliot when considering the intersection of Religion and Literature. A key aspect of this lived morality is the ways in which it adapts and changes over time to fit the needs of a certain age, allowing morality to develop in time rather than standing as what Edith Wyschogrod thinks of as the still morality of fable.³ I find this in the heroic virtue of the saints, a key element in the process of canonization, and in the ways that fantasy heroes provide a reflection on what it means to be a hero in the Twenty-First Century in comparison to the heroes of old. Moreover, the morality of hagiography and fantasy rarely stay on the level of the story but become part of the lived practice of devotees and fans, reflected in projects of fan activism.

Aesthetics

Scholarship on fantasy literature and hagiography generally carries a basic assumption that the imitation of virtue is one of the primary means by which we relate to these figures. For instance, Peter Brown notes early in *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin*

³ Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 8.

Christianity, that many worshippers gathered around the saints not to imitate them, but to participate with them.⁴ In Brown's acknowledgement of this difference, he points out that imitation is a generally accepted means of encountering the saints, even as he is challenging its primacy. Lucy Grig also talks about the importance of imitating the saints, much as they imitate Christ, as a means of moral and ethical instruction.⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, one of the documents released from the Second Vatican Council, even claims that one of the three central ways the faithful relate to the saints is as an "example in their way of life" (alongside "fellowship in their communion and aid by their intercession").⁶

In fantasy, I see this assumption reflected in the debates about what specific ethic emerges in different fantasy tales, operating from an assumption that some virtue system must be embedded in the narrative. Farah Mendlesohn argues that "fantasy, unlike science fiction, relies on a moral universe...a sermon on the way things should be, a belief that the universe should yield to moral precepts."⁷ In making this assertion, Mendlesohn centers the value of morality for how people experience the fantasy tale so that the two cannot be separated. Likewise, I could return to the George MacDonald quote with which I began, in which the narrator reflects on whether he could translate his experiences of the text into his actual life, bringing everything that he learned, implying that a new ethic emerged for him while in Fairy Land. Andrew Flescher also speaks about the virtuous image that saints and heroes offer in general, specifically arguing

⁴ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, xxvii.

⁵ Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*, 4, 46, 50. See also, Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints: The Diocese of Orléans, 800-1200*, 118-19; Katja Ritari, *Saints and Sinners in Early Christian Ireland: Moral Theology in the Lives of Saints Brigit and Columba*, *Studia Traditionis Theologiae* 3 (Turnhout, BE: Brepols Publishers, 2009), 7-9, 173.

⁶ Austin Flannery, ed., "Lumen Gentium," in *Vatican II: The Basic Sixteen Documents: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations* (Northpoint, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), para. 51.

⁷ Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 5.

that they show an image of the proactive nature of morality for us to emulate, regarding virtue not as avoiding wrong but asking what good we can do for others.⁸

I attribute this emphasis on virtue in the lives of the saints and fantasy literature to a centrality of Platonic aesthetics in understanding the relationship between narrative and ethics. In Book III of the *Republic*, Plato offers an overview of the impact narrative and fable have on morality, acknowledging the role of both the content and the form of recitation.⁹ In the *Republic*, a group of philosophers propose a number of cities in the pursuit of the “just” society. A central aspect of Plato’s argument is that the people of the just city they are designing should not be persuaded that the gods and heroes of the *Iliad* had done many of the evil deeds we find in the epic poem because it would give permission for anyone to do the same evil deeds.¹⁰ In effect, any act of the heroes gains a positive moral value that will have an influence on the just men of the city, implying that there is an inherent bent in humanity to imitate its heroes. As such, the poets should be compelled to offer for the just men good and pious examples of morality as exemplars for a just life.¹¹ Moreover, the implications of the arts for morality does not just extend to the content of the poetry, since Plato admits the need for the just man to learn about bad people and evil deeds and, therefore, they must hear something of evil in narrative.¹² Plato, however, wants to imagine a divide between poetry that is told in narrative and poetry that is told in imitation (most commonly seen in the drama of tragedy or comedy). He works from the idea that when people imitate an action or a person for a long enough time by acting out certain

⁸ Andrew Michael Flescher, *Heroes, Saints, and Ordinary Morality* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 7–9.

⁹ For an in-depth explanation of Plato on morality and the arts, see Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1975), 46–51.

¹⁰ Plato, “Republic,” in *The Great Dialogues of Plato*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse (Signet Classics, 2008), 3.391bcde.

¹¹ Plato, 3.401b.

¹² Plato, 3.396a.

characters, those imitations become habits and then part of one's nature.¹³ As such, it is dangerous for the just man to act as the bad people of the stories (along with animals, women, drunks, and other groups of people) because those imitations might become part of their nature at some point, even as there might be a benefit to playing the role of the hero in a play for the same reasons.¹⁴

Plato then places a strong emphasis on the morality we find in our stories and especially the stories of heroes (which we might associate with hagiography and fantasy) and their impact on the morality of the reader. In his appeal to a difference between narration and imitation, I would even go a step further to associate imitation with the ideas of participation that I have been discussing the past couple of chapters. In those acts of participation, one often places oneself in the place of the hero to form a greater resonance with them, much like one would do in Greek drama (or the saint plays of medieval devotion and the cosplay of fantasy fandom). In this context and given the importance of Plato for Western philosophy and ethics, the assumption about the role of fantasy and hagiography in shaping the ethics of its readers becomes clearer. Indeed, T. S. Eliot's early essay, "Religion and Literature," held as a central theme that good literary criticism will look for not just literary value but also the moral value of a work because fiction has the ability to shape our ethics.¹⁵ Narrative can play an especially powerful role in shaping morality because it reflects ethical commitments as they play out in real-world situations and, therefore, how morality and ethics adapt over time to meet the changing demands of new generations. An attention to the assumed connection between morality and narrative helps to

¹³ Plato, 3.395cd.

¹⁴ Plato, 3.395de-396acbd.

¹⁵ Eliot, "Religion and Literature," 100–101.

emphasize the ways that hagiography and fantasy literature reflect on the changing nature of virtue in their specific age in order to adapt to the needs of fans and devotees.

The Heroic Virtue of Saints

Today, an important early step in the process of canonization for sainthood is the proof of “heroic virtue,” after which a potential saint is granted the title “Venerable,” only needing two posthumous miracles to be fully canonized. In Kenneth Woodward’s account of the modern process of canonization, he notes that heroic virtue is determined based on whether a candidate performs the three theological (Faith, Hope, and Charity) and four cardinal virtues (Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance) to an exceptional degree, as determined by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.¹⁶ These are the same virtues expected of any Christian, and the requirement that a potential saint display these virtues early in the canonization process speaks to the importance of virtue in how we perceive the role of the saints. In fact, some theologians/scholars (like Lawrence Cunningham) are critical of how much emphasis has been placed on miracles in the modern canonization process, noting that saints are more than just conduits of divine grace and favors, that their heroic virtue is an important aspect of their humanity and as models for the virtuous life.¹⁷ Being such a central aspect of a saint’s character, there is a degree to which people would be expected to admire and imitate their virtue (even when it seems unattainable), especially if we interpret hagiography through a Platonic aesthetic in which the virtues that heroes and saints display are an important element in the instruction and development of the moral life.

¹⁶ Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn’t, and Why*, 223.

¹⁷ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 23–27.

The saints play an important role in thinking about virtue because they offer a lived expression of core Christian values, helping devotees to picture what something like Charity or Justice looks like beyond a theological-doctrinal statement. For example, in her scholarship on the two lives of St. Margaret of Antioch and how they emphasize different virtues, Laurie Postlewait argues that what makes the saints such powerful shapers of the religious conscious is that they show piety in real and imitable ways that eluded theological abstraction.¹⁸ I make a comparison here to how David Miller thinks about the Olympians and the Death of God for the Twentieth Century in which the challenge of theology is that it cannot meet the demands of life in its abstraction.¹⁹ While Miller is speaking about the presence of God, Postlewait points to a similar issue in thinking about abstractions of virtue. This also becomes a major part of Edith Wyschogrod's argument about why saints work well for a postmodern ethic, specifically pointing to how the lives of the saints allow for multiple voices, and, therefore, multiple perspectives, because of the narrative frameworks in which we encounter their lives.²⁰ She too follows the notion that theories of virtue become too abstract and that, instead, we need the flesh and blood example of what virtue means.²¹ A key element of this process is how the saint acts as an "imperative force" that draws readers in to "extend and elaborate" the self.²² In this idea of being "swept up" and drawn in, I recall Tolkien's idea of Secondary Belief, but also how the affective connection between saints and their devotees becomes a way to narrate and name one's story as sacred (Chapter Five). In that sense, I understand the saints as being models of virtue,

¹⁸ Laurie Postlewait, "Vernacular Hagiography and Lay Piety: Two Old French Adaptations of the Life of Saint Margaret of Antioch," in *Saints: Studies in Hagiography*, ed. Sandro Sticca, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies 141 (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1996), 130.

¹⁹ Miller, *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses*, 29.

²⁰ Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy*, xvi–xvii.

²¹ Wyschogrod, 3–4.

²² Wyschogrod, xxiii.

extending from our liminal encounters with their presences in our religious practices but also impacting our movement through everyday life.

One of the benefits of such a lived virtue is hagiography's direct response to the surrounding culture, depicting the social and religious values of that society and how it encounters other value systems.²³ For instance, Elizabeth Castelli argues that part of what martyr stories demonstrated in early Christianity was the reinterpretation of virtue into a Christian context. In one example, she points to Pionius, who during a trial calls upon great virtues like Piety, Justice, and Obedience and invokes the names of famous figures like Socrates, Aristides, and Anaxarchos in order to associate himself and Christianity with the proper imitation of those virtues and those figures.²⁴ In this shift, the image of the saint becomes an indication of the changing image of virtue and who can claim virtue in real life, as Pionius offers a new expression of what Justice and Piety might mean, specifically through a Christian lens.²⁵ Stephanie Cobb offers another example when thinking about what masculine courage looked like in Greco-Roman culture and how the stories of martyrs drew on these values in order to reinscribe them onto Christian saints.²⁶ This was most clearly acted out in the arena during martyrdom, in which martyrs become identified with the Roman gladiators often used to kill them. Since martyrs often showed restraint and control in the arena (even showing control in the way they accepted death when it came), virtues extolled by philosophers, they were able to express their Courage beyond that of the gladiators who were controlled by their passions.²⁷ This is especially apparent in a figure like Perpetua, who not only accepts her martyrdom (rather than

²³ Marie Anne Mayeski, "New Voices in the Tradition: Medieval Hagiography Revisited," *Theological Studies* 63, no. 4 (2002): 692.

²⁴ Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 101–2.

²⁵ See also Stephanie Cobb for a similar argument in relation to Stoicism: Cobb, *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, 136–47.

²⁶ Cobb, *Dying to Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, 5–13.

²⁷ Cobb, 51–62.

giving into the will of others, like her emotional father), but guides the sword of the gladiator, who was too weak to kill her himself.²⁸ In both instances, the saints come to represent what it means to express abstract virtues like Prudence and Faith in the complexity of life that continually presents us with new situations and an ever-shifting cultural milieu.

The saints' ability to stand as a model for imitation is contingent upon what devotees have already encountered in the limen, reflecting the affective connection that exists between the saint and their devotees and the religious community that has emerged around them. For instance, Stephanie Cobb interprets the virtues embodied in the lives of the saints as not representing the virtue of a single individual, but rather the values of the whole community that emerges around them.²⁹ In this regard, the value of the saint's virtue and the ways that devotees might directly imitate them in their daily lives is a product of the *communitas* that has emerged in the space of the limen. This further emphasizes how the virtue of the saints can represent the shifting values between different communities and, as I saw in Hall and Wynter's work, how communities are in contact zones with other groups and discover new meanings in their myths, because they are embedded in a novel encounter and expression of communal networks.

Heroes for the Twenty-First Century

Many scholars have recognized the role literature has played in eclipsing the saints and other heroes for moral instruction during the rise of Modernity. Theorist of African American Studies, Sylvia Wynter, notes in her account of the changing nature of Western epistemes that literature replaces the Christian saints as "rhetorically powerful hero-figures" when the episteme shifted from a Medieval to a Modern society.³⁰ Likewise, Arjun Appadurai argued that fiction

²⁸ *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* 5–6, 21. White, *Lives of Early Christian Women*.

²⁹ Cobb, *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, 37–38.

³⁰ Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," 50–51.

and novels move readers to “intense action,” just like myth once did for readers, and “authors often contribute to the construction of social and moral maps for their readers.”³¹ Catholic scholar, Lawrence Cunningham, makes a similar argument in his book *The Meaning of Saints*, noting that literature might offer a new hagiography.³² C. S. Lewis himself claims in his essay, “On Three Ways of Writing for Children,” that real-world threats (similar to giants and dragons) exist and that, in their face, St. George offers a greater comfort than the police.³³ By arguing for the value of figures like St. George in his advice on writing fairy stories for children, Lewis makes an inherent connection between George and a character like Peter Pevensie from *The Chronicles of Narnia*, positioning Peter as a new St. George of sorts to inspire the imagination of children. In that sense, there is a clear reflection on how literature (and even fantasy literature in particular) might play a role in reflecting the changing ethics of a society as new figures meet the needs of a new generation or age. Moreover, it highlights Platonic notions that literature plays an important role in shaping the moral lives of its readers. In this section, I want to focus on moments where two authors (Cassandra Clare and Rick Riordan) acknowledge the changing nature of heroes in order to embody an ethic of relatedness for the Twenty-First Century, an ethic that becomes reflected in fan activism.

I draw the ethic of relatedness from Mark Ledbetter’s *Virtuous Intentions*, a book which reflects on the role literature plays in offering a theological-ethic that can face the existential crises of humanity. While discussing the ways that narrative can offer a solution to the existential crisis of meaninglessness, Ledbetter offers three “religious world-views” that might function as

³¹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 58.

³² Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 4, 92–93.

³³ C. S. Lewis, “On Three Ways of Writing for Children,” in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (HarperOne, 1994), 49.

solutions within narrative. He acknowledges that this is neither an exhaustive nor exclusive list, but focuses on a theology of relatedness, a transcendent theology, and a tragic theology.³⁴ For Ledbetter, a theology of relatedness answers the existential crisis of meaning by turning to the “fellowship of humanity,” noting that we find meaning by living together in harmony with others to face the problems of the world. This is expressed most poignantly for him in the social gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch or the psychology of William James, but I might add Victor Turner’s notion of *communitas* as well.³⁵

A transcendent theology claims that the solution to existential crisis cannot be found in the world or each other, but, instead, we must turn towards a transcendent being to bring meaning to the problems of the world. The transcendent theology, for Ledbetter, appears in classic Christian theologians, such as St. Augustine’s *City of God* and perhaps the lives of the saints as well.³⁶ Finally, a tragic theology accepts the existential crisis and claims that the only way to find meaning is to have the virtuous courage to make meaning for oneself in the face of such precariousness. Ledbetter finds this theology in Paul Tillich, notably *The Courage to Be*.³⁷

I see the ethic of relatedness in how Cassandra Clare finds a resolution to the major threats in *The Shadowhunter Chronicles*. This series follows a group of part-human, part-angelic warriors (recalling the biblical Nephilim), created by the angel, Raziel, to fight the demonic forces from another dimension that threaten to take over the world. To help them in this task, Raziel gives his Shadowhunters special runes/Marks (similar in appearance to tattoos) that, when drawn on their skin, gift them with super-human abilities like agility, clear-sight, and even a Mark to link two Shadowhunters in brotherhood. While these powers were initially offered so

³⁴ Ledbetter, *Virtuous Intentions: The Religious Dimension of Narrative*, 16.

³⁵ Ledbetter, 17.

³⁶ Ledbetter, 17–18.

³⁷ Ledbetter, *Virtuous Intentions: The Religious Dimension of Narrative*, 18.

that the Shadowhunters might protect the world, they have also become a source of pride and separation for the Shadowhunters from regular humans. As such, the Shadowhunters have established their own aristocratic class, even developing their own government known as the Clave. Beyond the Shadowhunters, demons, and regular mortals of *The Shadowhunter Chronicles*, there is also a group known as Downworlders, which includes vampires, werewolves, warlocks, and faeries. These beings all contain some demonic energy, which leads to tension with the Shadowhunters, who often debate whether their commission from Raziel includes fighting the Downworlders or only pure demonic forces. As a means of compromise within their ranks, the Shadowhunters have developed a series of laws to govern what Downworlders are allowed to do and to prevent them from engaging in demonic activity.

Through the Shadowhunters, Clare presents two images of “the hero” that compete over how to interpret their mission. One image, represented by the character Valentine and his followers, known as the Circle, see Shadowhunters as above everyone else in the world, commissioned with a special mission to rid the world of demons.³⁸ To demonstrate their special position in the world, Valentine even refers to Shadowhunters as “the closest thing that exists in this world to gods,” recalling the heroes of Greek myth.³⁹ In turn, they root their heroism in the great deeds they perform and that set them apart from others. Maintaining that separation is key to preserving their image as heroes. As such, this group often refers to regular humans as “mundies” or “mundanes,” disparaging their “lower” place in the world and believing that the

³⁸ Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Ashes*, 67; Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones*, 11.

³⁹ Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Ashes*, 262–63.

Shadowhunters do not need the help of anyone else in their fight against the demons.⁴⁰ To others, especially the Downworlders, the Circle is “haughty, proud, and cruel.”⁴¹

Much of the Downworlders’ distrust of Shadowhunters emerges because Shadowhunters in the first group view the Downworlders as little better than demons and even as a source of wealth. There is a tradition among the Clave of taking “spoils” from Downworlders they kill, in which their property becomes that of the Shadowhunter.⁴² As such, killing Downworlders who break Shadowhunter laws offers a means of setting Shadowhunters apart from humans and other Downworlders and established them as having a unique place in the world. We might connect this interpretation to Max Weber’s notion of the Protestant Ethic, in which wealth is a sign of God’s favor and one’s own virtue and special state of grace in the world.⁴³ In the past, these spoils might even extend to taking body parts and possessions of Downworlders and displaying them like a cabinet of curiosity or hunting trophy, a tradition some Shadowhunters remember fondly.⁴⁴ This attention to killing Downworlders for wealth also places an emphasis on the “great” Shadowhunter dynasties, further emphasizing their separation from humans as a source of their heroics.⁴⁵ This history ultimately leads to The Uprising, in which Valentine leads the Circle in an attack on Downworlders and members of the Clave who disagree with him.⁴⁶

The other image of “the hero,” seen among the main characters Jace Herondale, Clary Fairchild, and Alec and Isabelle Lightwood, emphasizes the importance of Downworlders in the

⁴⁰ Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones*, 64, 139–40, 299; Cassandra Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Glass* (New York, NY: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2009), 229.

⁴¹ Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Ashes*, 31.

⁴² Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Glass*, 127; Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones*, 201–2.

⁴³ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London, GB: Routledge, 2001), 114–20.

⁴⁴ Cassandra Clare, *The Infernal Devices: Clockwork Prince* (New York, NY: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2011), 108–12.

⁴⁵ Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones*, 68.

⁴⁶ Clare, 145–46.

fight against demons, the ultimate goal and commission of the Shadowhunters.⁴⁷ While these characters start the series holding many of the prejudices that characterize Valentine's image of the ideal Shadowhunter, as they interact with more Downworlders, they begin to reimagine the world in which they have grown up.⁴⁸ They are also a group that I would characterize by the theology of relatedness because of the emphasis they place on connections with others. For example, when offered a chance, Jace reflects on his inability to kill Valentine, who helped rear him and who played an important role in his early life. Clary responds that the inability to do so is part of what makes him virtuous because he honors the ways that he is connected to others. If he could throw away that connection so easily, it would make him no different than Valentine, a fear at the core of Jace's identity.⁴⁹ While some might see killing Valentine as virtuous in itself because of the threat he poses to the world, Clary, here, emphasizes the importance of relatedness in structuring how we move through the world.

In a later subseries, one character, Tessa Gray, reflects on the tensions between these two images of the hero and its connection to relatedness. She describes the Clave and its traditions (most readily associated with Valentine and his quest for separation) as "like the heroes of ancient times, like Achilles and Jason." Her friend, Will Herondale, counters that "'Achilles was murdered with a poisoned arrow, and Jason died alone, killed by his own rotting ship. Such is the fate of heroes; the Angel knows why anyone would want to be one.'" ⁵⁰ Will's response exemplifies the changing nature of what it means to be a hero amongst the new faction of Shadowhunters and along with it the changing nature of virtue for the Twenty-First Century. His

⁴⁷ Clare, 79.

⁴⁸ Clare, 196, 385.

⁴⁹ Clare, 466; Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Glass*, 90, 186.

⁵⁰ Cassandra Clare, *The Infernal Devices: Clockwork Princess* (New York, NY: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2013), 66.

attitude reflects a disillusionment in gaining so much power and in separation from others because of the very fact that one is, then, alone in the world. Based on Platonic notions of literature's influence on readers, I would also imagine the impact on readers encountering this ethic changing their own notions of virtue and what makes a hero.

The treatment of Downworlders in the Shadowhunters' war against demons becomes a central debate between the two groups and what it means to be a Shadowhunter, and, by extension, the image of virtue that these stories present. In one instance, Jace saves a vampire that Valentine has drained of blood by allowing him to drink his own blood. As a Shadowhunter, this is not a light decision and is one that could be seen as an act of defilement by other Shadowhunters, especially those who empathize the importance of separation from Downworlders as the core of their heroism. When Valentine finds out, he even questions Jace saying, ““You *willingly* let a vampire drink your blood? [...] You resurrected a monster that will only kill to feed again.””⁵¹ In his short response, Valentine's disgust with Jace and his decisions are palpable, emphasizing the moral code he perceives Jace to be breaking. Yet, Jace's primary response is that, in actuality, what he had done was save a life, just as Shadowhunters ought to do. In the contrast between these two groups, we see the shifting ethic about what virtues characterize a hero: the ability to kill a vampire or the ability to save a life. I interpret this question through the lens of the ethic of relatedness, in which it is one's connections with others that sets one apart as a hero and gives one the ability to overcome existential crises. This same contrast and the shift in ethics continues in the third book of the series, in which Valentine threatens the destruction of the Clave and all Shadowhunters who disagree with him.

⁵¹ Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Ashes*, 418–19.

In a last attempt to destroy Downworlders and what he views as the corruption of the Clave, Valentine makes a plan to summon the angel Raziel, who originally made the Shadowhunters. Leading up to this moment, Valentine offers an ultimatum to the Shadowhunters: either join him or be destroyed. Rather than joining Valentine, however, the Shadowhunters, led by Clary, form a new alliance with the Downworlders, embodied in a special Mark, similar to those originally gifted to Shadowhunters by Raziel. This Mark binds the Shadowhunters and Downworlders together, allowing them to share their abilities with one another. What makes this moment special is that the Mark Clary creates in this moment is not one of those given to Shadowhunters by Raziel, leading some characters to suggest that it must be older than the Shadowhunters themselves and maybe something from the first foundations of the world.⁵² In recreating such a primordial Mark that unites the Shadowhunters and Downworlders, Clary recreates the notion of *communitas* that Turner associates with ritual reaggregation because she is recalling an inherent bond between these two groups of beings. By accepting the Mark, the Shadowhunters restructure their society according to a *communitas* ethic, and an ethic that readers also encounter and might adopt, per Plato's interpretation of literature and ethics.

Moreover, Clary's plan to align Shadowhunters and Downworlders using a Mark cuts at the core of Valentine and his fears about the uniqueness of Shadowhunters. In *City of Glass*, Valentine reveals that his anger with the Downworlders is that they have abilities (like speed and immortality) that the Shadowhunters lack, which challenges his idea that the Shadowhunter's separation is what makes them heroes.⁵³ By binding Shadowhunters and Downworlders together and allowing them to share their abilities, Clary demonstrates that the Shadowhunters' survival

⁵² Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Glass*, 368, 373, 415.

⁵³ Clare, 202–3, 380.

and heroics will not be rooted in remaining separate from the world but in uniting with the Downworlders to become stronger together.⁵⁴ By following Clary, the Clave sets itself on a new path, governed by a new ethic, in which it cannot exist independently in the world and see itself as above others because of its commission, but rather must lean into the relatedness of Downworlders and Shadowhunters in order to survive.⁵⁵ The tension in making this decision is, therefore, one about what it means to be a Shadowhunter and what it means to be a hero in the Twenty-First century. For readers, this reinforces the theological ethic of relatedness as the true core of what it means to be a hero, rather than the ability to destroy monsters and the associated pride that one was gifted with that ability and has a special commission.⁵⁶

I see a similar theological-ethic of relatedness in Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* books, in which he makes clear contrasts between the type of Greek hero that Percy is becoming and depictions of the Greek heroes of old.⁵⁷ Whenever Percy is faced with a difficult choice about what it means to be a hero in *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, Riordan offers a view into Percy's mental process and the reasoning behind many of his decisions. Throughout this process, I see a consistent reflection on the choices of the original Greek heroes and their willingness to sacrifice others in their pursuit of glory. Instead, Percy prioritizes his relationships with the characters around him.

Percy's first reflections on the type of hero he will become begin at the end of *The Lightning Thief*, the first book in the series, after completing his first quest. Having met his father, Poseidon, for the first time, he tells Percy that he must soon make a mysterious choice

⁵⁴ Clare, 255–56, 308, 372–73.

⁵⁵ Clare, 321.

⁵⁶ Clare, 493–94.

⁵⁷ Joanna Paul, "The Half-Blood Hero: Percy Jackson and Mythmaking in the Twenty-First Century," in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, ed. Vanda Zajko and Helena Hoyle (John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 231–42; Alexander Leighton, "Re-Discovering Mythology: Adaptation and Appropriation in the Percy Jackson and the Olympians Saga," *Mousaion* 32, no. 2 (2014): 63.

before going into a reflection about the fate of Greek heroes. Poseidon notes ““I am sorry you were born, child. I have brought you a hero’s fate, and a hero’s fate is never happy. It is never anything but tragic.””⁵⁸

I read in Poseidon’s comments the rich tradition of Greek tragedy, embodied in the poets: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. In this instance in particular, Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* stands out for its reflection on what it takes to become a great hero and the consequences of those deeds. The *Agamemnon* begins with the Chorus recounting how the Greek fleet became stuck in Aulis on its way to Troy and the charge laid upon Agamemnon to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, if he is to appease Artemis and turn the course of the winds so that he might lead the fleet on to Troy. As part of this Chorus, Aeschylus offers Agamemnon’s own words in considering this choice, in which he reflects

My fate is angry if I disobey these,
but angry if I slaughter
this child, the beauty of my house,
with maiden bloodshed staining
these father’s hands beside the alter.
What of these things goes now without disaster?
How shall I fail my ships
and lose my faith of battle?⁵⁹

In this moment, Agamemnon faces the choice of either killing his daughter so that he might go on to Troy and be a hero or abandoning his fleet and his honor in order to save the life of his

⁵⁸ Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, 346.

⁵⁹ Aeschylus, “Agamemnon,” in *Greek Tragedies*, ed. David Grene et al., trans. Richmond Lattimore, Third, vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), ll. 206–216.

daughter. As Mark Edwards argues, his decision to sacrifice his daughter is a moment in which he gives in to Atê, the Greek goddess of blind folly, out of his *hubris* (his desire for glory) despite knowing it is wrong to sacrifice her.⁶⁰ It is this decision to sacrifice Iphigenia that stokes the anger of Clytemnestra and causes her to murder Agamemnon, sealing his tragic fate, which Percy hopes to avoid.⁶¹ Indeed, James Helm pays special attention to the opening of the Chorus as it recalls the adage that greatness begets misery before amending it to emphasize that impiety begets misery.⁶² I apply both to Agamemnon to assert that it is his impious act of killing Iphigenia that led to his greatness at Troy and therefore his downfall. In other words, it is his willingness to do anything to become a great hero (which he achieves) that leads to his tragic fate.

The tragedy of *Agamemnon* takes on great importance in interpreting Percy and the type of hero he hopes to become when he must face the mysterious choice Poseidon warns him about. After leaving Poseidon, Percy discovers that the Olympians have sent him a package containing the head of Medusa, and he realizes that he might use Medusa's head and its powers to get rid of his abusive stepfather, Gabe. Upon this realization, he reflects that killing Gabe is "what a Greek hero would do in the stories...but a hero's story always ended in tragedy. Poseidon had told me that."⁶³ He then goes on to think about his experiences in the Underworld earlier in the book and whether *he* had the moral authority to send someone there, whether it was his role. As such, this first reflection on what it means to be a hero becomes one characterized by the fact that a hero's fate is always tragic and how to break that tragic cycle. By killing Gabe, Percy might be

⁶⁰ Mark W. Edwards, "Agamemnon's Decision: Freedom and Folly in Aeschylus," *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 10 (1977): 23–28.

⁶¹ Aeschylus, "Agamemnon," ll. 1214–1241. See also Paul Roth, "The Theme of Corrupted Xenia in Aeschylus' Oresteia," *Mnemosyne* 47, no. 1 (1993): 2–8.

⁶² James T. Helm, "Aeschylus' Genealogy of Morals," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 134, no. 1 (2004): 25–28.

⁶³ Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, 351.

repeating the stories of the Greek heroes and living into that legacy, but it would be the legacy of Agamemnon, punished for killing a relative and doomed to a tragic end. While Gabe is only Percy's stepfather, not a blood-relative as in the case of Agamemnon and Iphigenia, one could imagine the same moral argument against his actions. In that light, the decision Percy makes in this moment will come to define what type of hero he chooses to become and, by extension, what ethic of heroism Riordan imagines for the Twenty-First Century and the modes of virtue that readers are encountering.

As Percy plays out this choice, he turns to his mother, Sally, and claims that *he* could solve her problem and get rid of Gabe, perhaps reflecting a willingness on his part to take on the tragic fate of Greek heroes. She, however, stops him noting that "...if my life is going to mean anything, I have to live it myself. I can't let a god take care of me...or my son. I have to...find the courage on my own."⁶⁴ Percy then leaves Medusa's head with his mother, allowing her to make the decision for herself about how to respond to Gabe. It is possible to imagine this moment as one where Ledbetter's tragic theological-ethic emerges, especially for Sally who invokes the need for "courage" if she is going to find meaning in life, rather than relying on the gods (a transcendent theological-ethic) or her son (a theological-ethic of relatedness).

From Percy's perspective, however (a perspective that I am interested in as the "central" hero of the series), this is a marked difference from the choices of Agamemnon and one that is characterized by relatedness. Percy here does not put first his quest to become a hero, a quest for divinity, like Agamemnon on the way to Troy. Rather, he yields control to his mother and fades into the background, becoming heroic in the ways that he lets her control her own destiny. This is an embodiment of the value of relatedness, and it is the quality of yielding to others that comes

⁶⁴ Riordan, 352.

to characterize Percy's heroics. In that sense, it becomes a central aspect of how Riordan pictures the changing nature of ethics for the Twenty-First Century. Moreover, I continue to see Percy return to this ethic when he encounters other moments in which he might become more like the Greek heroes of old, and, in particular, his favorite hero, Hercules.

In the second book of the series, *The Sea of Monsters*, we get insight into Percy's favorite Greek hero, Hercules, and why he admires him so much. While talking to Hermes before a quest, Percy notes that he admires Hercules because he had rotten luck, even worse than Percy's own, not because he was strong or famous, as Hermes expects.⁶⁵ This is in contrast to his namesake, Perseus, whom Percy notes is unique among the Greek heroes for having a happy ending, unlike the tragic end of Agamemnon.⁶⁶ Percy's admiration of Hercules becomes an important detail because throughout the five books, he completes many of the Twelve Labors of Hercules (such as fighting the Nemean Lion, cleaning the Augean stables, or holding the curse of Atlas) and seems on track to become a modern Hercules himself, gaining immortality for his great deeds. During his adventures, however, Percy becomes disillusioned with the image of Hercules and makes intentional choices to defy his model in favor of a theological-ethic of relatedness. This reflects Riordan's concern with what the image of a hero will become for the Twenty-First Century, an image which Hercules (even a reimagined Hercules) perhaps no longer fits.

The tension between Percy and Hercules is perhaps its greatest in book three of the series, *The Titan's Curse*, in which Percy encounters a Hunter of Artemis named Zoë Nightshade, formerly one of the Hesperides who has a history with Hercules. In Riordan's account, Zoë helped Hercules to steal three apples from the Garden of the Hesperides and gifts to him the

⁶⁵ Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Sea of Monsters* (Los Angeles, CA: Disney Hyperion, 2006), 100.

⁶⁶ Riordan, 112.

sword *Anaklusmos*, for which she is banished from the Hesperides before joining Artemis as a Hunter.⁶⁷ After she is banished, however, Hercules does nothing to help her and fails even to mention the role she played in helping him complete his quest (perhaps explaining why her name never appears in traditional Greek myth).⁶⁸ During his quest with Zoë, she makes many comparisons between Percy and Hercules, representing her fierce hatred for Percy and all male heroes. The connection between Percy and Hercules is strengthened when Percy has several dream-visions in which he plays the part of Hercules and in which we learn that he now carries the sword that Zoë gifted Hercules long ago.⁶⁹ As Percy comes to learn this new perspective on Hercules' legacy, one in which he abandoned Zoë (abandoned a theology of relatedness) on the pathway to herohood and his own divinity, Percy begins to resent the semblances that exist between him and his former hero.

This tension comes to a head towards the end of their quest when they must make an appeal to Poseidon for divine aid, which Percy's friends caution will require a big sacrifice. In response, Percy removes the Nemean lion-skin he had won earlier in the book and prepares to offer it to the sea. Before he has a chance, however, his friend Grover questions his choice, emphasizing the importance of the skin by noting that Hercules had used it. In response, Percy looks at Zoë and remembers the past she has had with Hercules and the ways that he put his own quest to be a hero over his connections with others. Percy then boldly claims, "If I'm going to survive, it won't be because I've got a lion-skin cloak. I'm not Hercules."⁷⁰ In this moment, Percy draws on his connection with Zoë and the importance of their quest as a whole and what it means for the sake of the world and yields his own status and connection with Hercules for the

⁶⁷ Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Titan's Curse*, 157–60.

⁶⁸ Riordan, 243.

⁶⁹ Riordan, 157, 159–60.

⁷⁰ Riordan, 243.

good of everyone else. He drives this point home noting that his survival (his ability to avoid existential crisis) is not going to be because he is a great hero like Hercules. Instead, his survival is rooted in his connections with his friends and those around him. When she is about to die after being injured in battle, Zoë reflects on this moment and her whole quest with Percy to affirm that he indeed is nothing like Hercules and that he is changing the legacy of *Anaklusmos* in his actions.⁷¹ The shift from Hercules to Percy's depiction of heroism becomes a new image of virtue for readers that they might make part of their own image of morality.

Later, in book four, *The Battle of the Labyrinth*, I find another moment in which Percy's actions are compared to those of Hercules as he must complete another of Hercules' Labors by cleaning the Augean stables to save his friends. Within the Greek myth, recounted by Apollodorus, Hercules cleaned these stables as his fifth labor by redirecting the Alpheus and Peneus rivers to flow through the stable yard and, thereby, clearing the dung.⁷² Percy, being a son of Poseidon, prepares to follow Hercules' example by redirecting a nearby river to clean the stables when he is interrupted by a naiad (the spirit of the river) who refuses to let him pollute her river as Hercules had done a few thousand years before.⁷³ In his insistence on his need to clean the stables, the naiad becomes scared that Percy will fight her for control of her river, a fight she would likely lose—and another example of heroes steamrolling over the needs of others on the road to herohood. As Percy notes, he “felt like a bully, a son of Poseidon throwing his weight around” much like Hercules or any other classical Greek hero might do.⁷⁴ Instead, Percy once again yields and refuses the pathway of Hercules, specifically because such a path would harm those around him. In gratitude, the naiad reveals another means through which Percy might

⁷¹ Riordan, 278.

⁷² Apollodorus, *The Library*, trans. James Frazer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 2.5.5.

⁷³ Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Battle of the Labyrinth*, 150–51.

⁷⁴ Riordan, 151.

clean the stables that would not be harmful for her or her river.⁷⁵ This is a moment at which Percy places his connections with those around him, in this case the naiad, ahead of his own divine powers to redirect rivers in order to complete a quest, and in that relatedness, he finds another way to hold the existential crisis at bay. In other words, his heroism is rooted in how he places an emphasis on relatedness, not on the ways he is growing into a divinity of his own through his supernatural deeds.

In these examples, I see the ways that authors picture the shifting images of morality, often emphasizing a theological-ethic of relatedness in which prioritizing our connections to one another in order to overcome the challenges of the world is seen as a sign of virtue. Keeping in mind Plato's own insistence that literature and the arts have an impact on readers morality, I can imagine how these stories impact the moral lives of readers as they leave the text of the story and begin to ask what it might mean for how they are going to live in the world. I see a similar role in hagiography in which these saints may influence on the ways that we live our everyday lives.

I turn now to how these stories may have an impact on readers' conceptions of virtue in a practical way by looking at examples of fan activism, especially among groups like Fandom Forward.⁷⁶

Virtue in Action

Fan activism has increasingly become an area of scholarly interest since the early 2000s and the rise of Fandom Forward (due to its association with the *Harry Potter* series). Fan activism, historically, has been connected primarily with fan efforts to prevent a show from

⁷⁵ Riordan, 152.

⁷⁶ Fandom Forward was formally known as The Harry Potter Alliance but rebranded in 2021 in response to J. K. Rowling's increasingly vocal anti-transgender views, which leaders of Fandom Forward considered antithetical to the expressed goals of the organization. "Weren't You The HPA?," Fandom Forward >, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://fandomforward.org/hpa>.

being cancelled or to calls for greater racial and gender inclusion in series such as *Star Trek*.⁷⁷ With the rise of Fandom Forward, however, these efforts expanded into the broader social-political realm, with the organization making efforts to combat food insecurity, gender inequality, marriage equality, and suicide prevention.⁷⁸ While politics is not the only area in which I could imagine fans imitating the virtue of fantasy characters (for instance, the podcast, *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text* reflects on a theme/virtue in every episode as they read through the text, not always associated with politics),⁷⁹ I want to pay attention to political action as a physically tangible expression of imitating virtue in direct conversation with fantasy texts.

Henry Jenkins, Melissa Brough, and Sangita Shresthova have offered the most accepted definitions of fan activism, arguing that it involves “fan-driven efforts to address civic or political issues through engagement with and strategic deployment of popular culture content” often drawing on the existing framework of fandom to conduct their activism.⁸⁰ Based on this definition of fan activism, they point out how groups like Fandom Forward map the images and symbols of fantasy texts onto the real world in order to explain complex social issues and to channel the emotional investments of fandom into political action.⁸¹ Often, this has the effect of

⁷⁷ Henry Jenkins, “‘Cultural Acupuncture’: Fan Activism and the Harry Potter Alliance,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 10 (2012).

⁷⁸ Jenkins; Henry Jenkins, “Fan Activism as Participatory Politics: The Case of the Harry Potter Alliance,” in *DIY Citizenship: Critical Making and Social Media*, ed. Matt Ratto and Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 67; Melissa M. Brough and Sangita Shresthova, “Fandom Meets Activism: Rethinking Civic and Political Participation,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 10 (2012); Kevin R. Carriere, “‘We Are Book Eight’: Dialoging the Collective Imagination through Literary Fan Activism,” *Culture and Psychology* 24, no. 4 (2018): 534. To see more about Fandom Forward’s various campaigns, one can look at their website for brief descriptions of past campaigns and toolkits. “Our Impact,” Fandom Forward >, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://fandomforward.org/impact>.

⁷⁹ Zoltan and ter Kuile, “Commitment: The Boy Who Lived (Book 1, Chapter 1).”

⁸⁰ Jenkins, “‘Cultural Acupuncture’: Fan Activism and the Harry Potter Alliance”; Brough and Shresthova, “Fandom Meets Activism: Rethinking Civic and Political Participation.”

⁸¹ Jenkins, “‘Cultural Acupuncture’: Fan Activism and the Harry Potter Alliance”; Kevin R. Carriere, “Framing the Issue: Literature, Collective Imagination, and Fan Activism,” in *Imagining Collective Futures: Perspectives from Social, Cultural and Political Psychology*, ed. Constance de Saint-Laurent, Sandra Obradović, and Kevin R. Carriere (London, GB: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 49; Carriere, “‘We Are Book Eight’: Dialoging the Collective Imagination through Literary Fan Activism,” 531.

encouraging fan participation in these causes as they become personally meaningful, but also capitalizing on the media attention and cultural currency that the release of a new *Harry Potter* movie brings to highlight issues that otherwise might not be covered in the media.⁸² In this framework, the low barriers of fandom make it easier for people to get involved in activism and cultivate skills that are difficult to obtain in traditional forms of activism, which often boxes out younger voices and requires an in-depth familiarity with debates and politics.⁸³

Fan activism interests me when thinking about imitating fantasy characters and adapting their virtues to our own lives (including a theological-ethic of relatedness) because of the role the imagination plays in the inherent moralism of activism. Very often, people think of activism as a very logic-oriented activity, separate from ideas of play and the imagination. As a result, there is often criticism for fan activism, such as critiques of women dressed in cosplay from *The Handmaid's Tale* as a form of protest to anti-abortion laws. The imagination, however, plays a major role in how we consider the goals of activism, and literature can be an important means of mediating the imagination for the purposes of activism. As Hawlina, Pedersen, and Zittoun argue, within social movements, the imagination plays a role in allowing participants to sustain a group collective and to escape from the bounds of time and its uncertainty in order to consider what is possible.⁸⁴

The imagination also extends beyond imagining what is possible in order to imagine the world as it ought-to-be, implying that fantasy literature can offer an image of a more moral

⁸² Jenkins, "'Cultural Acupuncture': Fan Activism and the Harry Potter Alliance"; Jenkins, "Fan Activism as Participatory Politics: The Case of the Harry Potter Alliance," 68; Brough and Shresthova, "Fandom Meets Activism: Rethinking Civic and Political Participation."

⁸³ Jenkins, "'Cultural Acupuncture': Fan Activism and the Harry Potter Alliance"; Brough and Shresthova, "Fandom Meets Activism: Rethinking Civic and Political Participation."

⁸⁴ Hana Hawlina, Oliver Clifford Pedersen, and Tania Zittoun, "Imagination and Social Movements," *Current Opinion in Psychology* 35 (2020): 31–32; Carriere, "Framing the Issue: Literature, Collective Imagination, and Fan Activism," 45; Carriere, "'We Are Book Eight': Dialoging the Collective Imagination through Literary Fan Activism," 532.

universe.⁸⁵ For instance, Henry Jenkins offers an example of Barbara Adams, an alternate juror in the 1996 Whitewater trial who wore a Star Fleet uniform in the courtroom to carry the idealism of *Star Trek*'s virtue system into real world politics.⁸⁶ In this instance, *Star Trek* exists as a "more moral" universe to which we might aspire, mediating an image of the world as it ought-to-be to bring fans together for social action. Likewise, I look towards Fandom Forward's *Protego Toolkit*, which utilizes the image of the *Harry Potter* defensive spell, *Protego*, as a rallying point for fans to protect the trans community.⁸⁷ By connecting activism in support of the trans community with a spell that was primarily used by the heroes of *Harry Potter*, this action takes on an inherently positive moral value in our world by sharing in the connections with figures like Harry and Hermione. This toolkit encourages fans to imagine their activism of protecting the trans community as imitating the actions of morality of the *Harry Potter* world and bringing about an image of the world as it ought-to-be. Since *Harry Potter* also represents the ethic of relatedness (placing friendship and love at the center of what it means to be a hero),⁸⁸ that virtue system and notion of heroics becomes not just part of the text fans are reading, but what they act out when they use the *Protego Toolkit*.

Beyond speaking to specific issues based on the virtues espoused by fantasy books, fan activists also tie their actions to specific characters, often resembling something from the cult of the saints. For instance, one activist mentions that her actions are based on Hermione and the Patel twins in *Harry Potter* as role models for what happens when girls have access to

⁸⁵ Carriere, "'We Are Book Eight': Dialoging the Collective Imagination through Literary Fan Activism," 530–32.

⁸⁶ Jenkins, "'Cultural Acupuncture': Fan Activism and the Harry Potter Alliance."

⁸⁷ Jackson Bird, "Protego: Spells and Actions to Make the World Better for the Trans Community" (Fandom Forward >), accessed June 28, 2022, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzUCAywi1eQDUDDB5WEkzeVpCSUk/view?resourcekey=0-kA9fwW603fmr1qYp31dglQ>.

⁸⁸ Anne Ganzert, "Dumbledore's Army, Still Recruiting: Fan & Media Activism as Practice," in *Taking Sides: Theories, Practices, and Cultures of Participation in Dissent*, ed. Elke Bippus, Anne Ganzert, and Isabell Otto (Transcript: Culture and Theory, 2021), 113.

education.⁸⁹ There is an added connection because fan activism usually appeals to younger people who are able to find connections with the young characters in Young Adult and Middle Grade fiction, like Percy Jackson, Clary Fairchild, or Hermione Granger, that are able to change the world while they are still teenagers. Likewise, in their *Star Wars Toolkit*, Fandom Forward makes connections between the actions of characters like Rose Tico or Leia Organa (both women involved in resistance movements) to the female leaders of modern resistance organizations like Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi with Black Lives Matter or Emma González with March for Our Lives.⁹⁰ By making such direct connections between pop culture and the real world, fans can use the qualities they admire about Leia or Rose to become active in larger movements in our own world. In another instance, Jenkins highlights a campaign inspired by the phrase “What would Dumbledore do?” (playing on the evangelical Christian motto, “What would Jesus do?”) to guide one’s morals in fighting racism or homophobia.⁹¹ Such a direct connection with religious imagery (even though Jenkins is highly resistant to interpretations of fandom as religion) emphasizes how fans are imitating these fantasy characters much like people can imitate the saints.

It should be noted that there are limits to the imagination and what it can offer in the way of morality in the real world, especially when applied to complex social issues. Kevin Carriere specifically notes that while the imagination can act as a motivator, it often faces structural challenges in rigid political systems and the ways it itself participates in upholding structures like Capitalism.⁹² Moreover, while one benefit of this method is that it inspires people to get involved

⁸⁹ Carriere, “‘We Are Book Eight’: Dialoging the Collective Imagination through Literary Fan Activism,” 537.

⁹⁰ “The Star Wars Toolkit: Women in Politics and Resistance Movements” (Fandom Forward >), accessed June 28, 2022, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bb7c102aadd3458f7d0aca2/t/61009626f4d09d4ead0fa3c4/1627428393917/fandomforward-starwarstoolkit-jul21.pdf>.

⁹¹ Jenkins, “‘Cultural Acupuncture’: Fan Activism and the Harry Potter Alliance.”

⁹² Carriere, “Framing the Issue: Literature, Collective Imagination, and Fan Activism,” 47.

using the affective imagery of fantasy stories, it often simplifies the important complexities of many issues.⁹³ In that sense, there is a question of how long such movements can last and how effective they truly are if people do not become further engaged in social activism beyond what fan activism can offer.⁹⁴ Fandom Forward has attempted to address this by forming partnerships and coalitions with more traditional NGOs, charities, and political organizations, including sponsoring an event on the Sudanese genocide that put experts (such as a former U. S. ambassador to Gabon and senior advisor to the International Crisis Group) alongside Wizard Rock groups.⁹⁵

This type of fan activism becomes a moment of reaggregation in which fans attempt to reshape the world around them to look more like the fantasy world that they encountered in the limen. In that sense, it follows Victor Turner's notion of a social drama in which people use liminal values as a guide for redressive action in profane time.⁹⁶ Such action mirrors how people encounter the saints in hagiography and the ways in which they utilize the image of the saints to guide their movement in profane time in an act of imitation. It is important to recognize how this type of action does not just occur by itself but is constituted by fans and devotees' time in the limen.

I traced, in my argument, how a reading community as a limen that invites one into identification with a character, much in the way that one might identify with a saint, can move one into relationship and, through relationship, into social action that signals the exit from a ritual and back into community. In Chapter Five, I explored how the limen becomes a place in which fans and devotees can use the figure of the fantasy character or saint to name themselves

⁹³ Ganzert, "Dumbledore's Army, Still Recruiting: Fan & Media Activism as Practice," 110.

⁹⁴ Jenkins, "Fan Activism as Participatory Politics: The Case of the Harry Potter Alliance," 69–70.

⁹⁵ Jenkins, 71.

⁹⁶ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, 38–42.

as holy by drawing on the resonances that exist in their stories. This fosters the connections between devotees and fans and their respective devotional figure so that they can utilize that figure as a model of virtue, already seeing themselves as sharing in the story of the saint or fantasy character. Likewise, in Chapter Six, I discussed how new communal networks form in the space of the limen, social networks built on the idea of *communitas*. Fan activists generally use the framework of fandom already in place (a framework of *communitas* and play) in order to advocate for social action, demonstrating how that activism emerges from the liminal community. The communities of play and the creative imagination that emerge around saints, which I explored in our examination of Books of Hours and how they become individualized by persons and communities, also become sites to explore morality and social action, such as how imagery of the Five Wounds around St. Francis helps a devotee to understand and to emulate Francis' life of poverty and care within the Franciscan Order or how Richard Scrope helped to connect communities together to advocate for the pastoral care of York. This ritual movement of reading, done in relation to both hagiography and fantasy literature, suggests that they share modalities of virtue building, modes that the authors creating Secondary Worlds, to use Tolkien's idea, intend. As such, it further encourages an interpretation of fantasy literature, not through the lens of organized religious structures, but as a second hagiography.

Conclusion

To Cuiviénen There Is No Return

Within the Tolkienian lore of Middle-earth, Cuiviénen is the site where the elves first awoke and so where the first Children of Ilúvatar entered the world, mirroring the creation of humanity in Genesis. It is in Cuiviénen that the elves first beheld starlight as Middle-earth was still in darkness (the only source of light being the Trees of Valinor, the home of the semi-divine Valar) and where they first heard the flow of water over stone.¹ Yet, many of the elves did not remain in Cuiviénen. When the Valar found them, they invited the elves to Valinor out of love for their creation and to protect them from the shadows of Melkor.² While the elves found happiness in Valinor for a long time, some (influenced by the power of Melkor) grew wary of the Valar and longed for the freedom of Middle-earth and their ancestral home, Cuiviénen. In an impassioned speech, the elf, Fëanor, expressed this sentiment, pointing out that in Valinor the elves are restricted to a tiny strip of land and reminding his people that “in Cuiviénen sweet ran the waters under unclouded stars, and wide lands lay about, where a free people might walk. There they lie still and await us who in our folly forsook them.”³ It was not to be, however, for with the passing of the ages, the lands and seas had shifted, and now “to Cuiviénen there is no returning.”⁴ Instead, it became a symbol of the elves’ eternal longing, a mark of the changing world as they remain the same during the passing years.

¹ Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 45.

² Tolkien, 49–51.

³ Tolkien, 89.

⁴ Tolkien, 45.

While there is no returning to Cuiviénen, it does not prevent the elves from creating new homes in which they might preserve the world. For instance, we see Elrond and Galadriel use the Rings of Power to create spaces like Rivendell or Lothlórien.⁵ In each home I see the mark of Cuiviénen and the other homes of the elves from the centuries past (like Valinor), as the elves attempt to recreate their ancestral home and freeze time around them. Rivendell is described as a house upon which “the stars of heaven most brightly shone” and when Bilbo first approaches the valley in *The Hobbit*, one of his first descriptions is the sound of “hurrying water in a rocky bed at the bottom.”⁶ The appeal to starlight and running water to describe Rivendell recall the memory of Cuiviénen as the first home of the elves, recreated and sustained by the influence of Elrond. Likewise, Lothlórien is most strongly characterized by its trees, those with “bark of snowy white” and the mallorn trees “arrayed in pale gold.”⁷ The mallorn trees themselves were transferred as nuts from Valinor and, in the description of the trees as white and gold, they recall the silver and gold Trees, Telperion and Laurelin, that grew in Valinor and once gave light to Valinor.⁸ In the degree to which the trees of Lothlórien descend from that line and recreate the symbology of Valinor, Galadriel creates a new home for the elves and re-empowers these symbols. In doing so, she marks not only their first awakening but also other sites that have served as the foundation of their being. In both Rivendell and Lothlórien, I see the creative spirit of the elves to recreate their previous homes and their desire to stall the passing of time that leaves no mark upon them.

Posing fantasy literature as a second hagiography follows the imagery of Cuiviénen, Rivendell, and Lothlórien, much like Ricoeur’s language of a second naïveté. In both instances,

⁵ Tolkien, 358.

⁶ Tolkien, 358; Tolkien, *The Hobbit or There and Back Again*, 47.

⁷ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 350.

⁸ Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 31–32.

there is an acknowledgement that something from our origins has been irretrievably lost but can be recreated and re-narrated in a way that both acknowledges that loss and finds a pathway forward. Just as the elves cannot return to Cuiviénen and must therefore create Gondolin, Rivendell, or Lothlórien, not everyone finds they are able to return to the power of hagiography and the Christian saints. In doing so, they can become cut off from what the saints offer to the imagination as a form of religious practice (whether that comes in the ways that hagiography was able to open a liminal space for us, offer a means to narrate and name identities as holy, become the foundation for new communal networks, or serve as an ethical exemplar for a lived morality). Thinking of fantasy as a second hagiography, however, alerts me to the imaginative framework fantasy offers and how it mirrors many of the functions of hagiography. In that sense, even if Cuiviénen and the saints have been lost for some, the imaginative potential of fantasy in Rivendell and Lothlórien remain open as a hagiographic frame of mind for me to rethink what religiosity or spirituality might look like for the present—usually designated post-secular—age. This is an age, in which traditional religious affiliation continues, according to some, to decline⁹ and, to others, to be in shift,¹⁰ and in which symbol and myth shape the imagination in new ways and in new areas of life.

It is also worth emphasizing at this point that in figuring fantasy as a second hagiography, I do not claim it solely as a new “secular religion” (even if some fans affirm it as their full religious framework). To do so seems to imply that “religion” (with the many associations we bring to the term in relation to the “world religions”) is the only means of expressing religious or

⁹ Gregory A. Smith, et al. “In U. S., Decline in Christianity Continues at a Rapid Pace: An Update on America’s Changing Religious Landscape” (Pew Research Center, October 17, 2019), <https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2019/10/Trends-in-Religious-Identity-and-Attendance-FOR-WEB.pdf>.

¹⁰ Stephanie Kramer, Conrad Hackett, and Marcin Stonawski, “Modeling the Future of Religion in America: If Recent Trends in Religious Switching Continue, Christians Could Make Up Less than Half of the U. S. Population within a Few Decades,” (Pew Research Center, September 13, 2022), <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/09/13/modeling-the-future-of-religion-in-america/>.

spiritual commitments. Part of my aim in exploring the religious dimensions of fantasy literature has been to create space for exploring the breadth of where religious value might exist apart from traditional conceptions of religion. My comparison between fantasy literature and hagiography specifically points to the possibilities in fantasy for a range of religious and spiritual purposes because of the malleability of both the saints and fantasy characters.

While the Christian saints are firmly rooted in the Catholic and other Christian traditions, each individual believer incorporates devotion to the saints based on their own needs and purposes. In other words, devotees bring their own various levels of commitments to different saints or the cult in general and think of those as an expression of their larger Christian practice to meet different needs. At the same time, because the saints are such malleable figures, they are also incorporated into other religious traditions as hybrids between Christianity and local religions, such as Orishas in some African Traditional Religions¹¹ or Celtic images of St. Brigid of Kildare.¹² In essence, the full relationship between hagiography and institutional religious systems varies between each devotee so that each person constructs a web of religious meaning making, adopting the saints where and when one wants to include them as part of their religious practice. In this movement, there is a freedom and complexity of religious expression that I want to bring into my understanding of the religious nature of fantasy literature and its fandom, in which each person adapts fantasy characters into differing religious practices based on their individual needs.

In that light, the ways in which fantasy literature and fandom can take on religious meanings can only be understood as only one thread in a broader framework of what religion

¹¹ Emem Michael Udo, "The Vitality of Yoruba Culture in the Americas," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 42, no. 2 (2020): 31–32.

¹² Donál Ó Cathasaigh. "The Cult of Brigid: A Study of Pagan-Christian Syncretism in Ireland," in *Mother Worship: Theme and Variations*, ed. James J. Preston (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

might entail for any given person. A religious expression of fantasy literature will look differently for someone who uses it in connection with Christianity (as Lewis or Tolkien) than someone who is thinking about it in a framework of Agnosticism or Atheism (as with Pullman or Le Guin). In either instance, those further connections do not deny or change that fantasy can offer something of religious or spiritual meaning for those who invest it with that power, no matter the framework within which they situate it. Central to my argument is that fantasy characters do not have *one* immediate means by which they have to become part of someone's religious practice, but that, like the saints, there is a freedom and malleability to their presence that fans can utilize in a way that works for them, even if the fans are constructing the framework for all the aspects of their religious practice from scratch. What I find valuable about hagiography in this comparison is that it makes us aware of this malleability and the broader web of meaning that can emerge around religious literature. The web of meaning implies that I cannot just pay attention to the practices that emerge around the saints or fantasy literature as a sole expression of someone's religious commitment, but that I must also be mindful of where that fits within the broader web. For many Catholics, that web is mediated by the Catholic Church Magisterium and its vetting of the saints, but it can take on a variety of expressions even within that framework. In the comparison between hagiography and fantasy literature, I am also reminded of how other patterns of meaning making emerge around fantasy literature as a spiritual practice and how at some point fantasy itself may be displaced.

With time, Rivendell and Lothlórien fade during the passing of the Third Age of Middle-earth as Elrond and Galadriel depart from the Grey Havens into the Blessed Realm.¹³ In the same way, fantasy literature may also fade as a means to explore the religious imagination at some

¹³ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 985.

point, as new needs emerge or different symbols capture the imagination of humanity. It is the same as the passing of the elves into the West and the rise of Gondor during the Fourth Age of Middle-earth. In that passing, Gondor was still marked by the White Tree, a recollection of Telperion in Valinor, just as a golden mallorn tree now grows in the Shire in memory of Laurelin and Lothlórien. The presence of these trees are moments when Cuiviénen, Valinor, Rivendell, and all the other homes of Elves and Men become recreated for a new people, both marking the loss that has occurred and charting a new route forward.¹⁴ The trees of Middle-earth and the literary expressions of hagiography and fantasy both attest to the imaginative play of people to craft and see religiosity in the world around them, returning to its ability to speak to our quest for meaning, our relationships with others, and a lived morality that reflects the complexity of life.

¹⁴ Tolkien, 971–72, 1023.

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