

Magic Words: Illuminating the Role of Language in Lord Dunsany's Fictional Prose

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

The Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Florida Atlantic University

Boca Raton, Florida

August 2011

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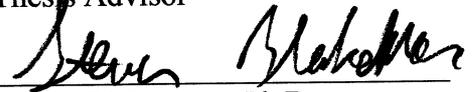
This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Thomas Martin, Department of English, and has been approved by members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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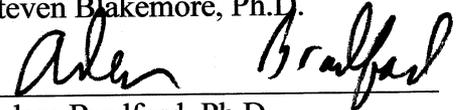


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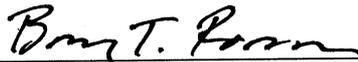
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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family for all of their support throughout the writing of this text. I must also thank Thomas Martin and the members of my committee for their unwavering support and guidance.

## Abstract

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Thesis Advisor: Dr. Thomas Martin  
Degree: Master of Arts  
Year: 2011

It is a great deficit to Fantasy scholarship that Lord Dunsany has remained largely ignored. Despite the lack of critical attention Lord Dunsany's work has received at the hands of critics, his fiction has been immensely important to other Fantasy authors. Dunsany's prose is highly stylized and is an intricate aspect of his world building. While many critics agree that Dunsany's prose style is unique and masterful, no detailed analysis of it exists. This study focuses primarily on Dunsany's prose style in *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, widely agreed to be Dunsany's finest novel, and certainly characteristic of his early fiction writing. I then discuss Dunsany's profound influence on J.R.R. Tolkien's critical and fictional work. Both authors embrace Dryden's "fairy way of writing" within their respective works, embracing the old and romantic, as well as nature's creations, as precious treasures in our realm and in the imaginative realm of Faery.

## Dedication

This work is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my mother, Terry Cervone, to my father, Phil Cervone, for always being there, and to Dan for bringing a little magic into my world.

Magic Words: Illuminating the Role of Language in Lord Dunsany's Fantasy Prose

Chapter One: The Master of Fantasy Prose .....	1
Chapter Two: Dunsany and Tolkien: Two Kindred Spirits .....	25
Conclusion .....	45
Works Cited .....	49

## Chapter One: The Master of Fantasy Prose

It is a great deficit to Fantastic scholarship that Lord Dunsany has remained largely ignored by critics; only a handful of articles have been devoted solely to his work, and only three book length studies. In the introduction to his book, *Lord Dunsany: Master of the Anglo-Irish Imagination*, S.T. Joshi states “Dunsany lives, if at all, as a respected but ill-understood figure in the modern fantasy movement, an acknowledged influence on such later figures as H.P. Lovecraft, J.R.R. Tolkien, Ursula K. LeGuin, and others” (xii). There are a few possible reasons for this; as Joshi notes “it is difficult to write about an author nearly the whole of whose work is out of print” (203), but this is slowly changing as more reprint editions are put on the market. Additionally, Dunsany was on the wrong political side of Irish independence, and was not particularly concerned with writing about Irish culture, making him unattractive to a scholar of Irish literature and a classification of him as an Irish writer problematic. There is, however, another major hurdle when looking at the work of Dunsany, his prose style arguably taxes many modern readers unused to the way his long descriptive passages tend to replace dramatic action. Yet, it is this “naturally musical, rhythmic, and incantatory prose” (Joshi 203) that gives Dunsany’s work much of its charm and makes it nearly impossible to mistake him for any other author. While it has been established that his prose style is unique, and central to his work, no lengthy study of Dunsany’s prose style exists. Joshi devotes a handful of pages in his conclusion to *Lord Dunsany: Master of the Anglo – Irish*

*Imagination* to Dunsany's prose style, as does Darrel Schweitzer in his study, *Pathways to Elfland: The Writings of Lord Dunsany*, and Anderson wrote a brief article on the subject for "Mythlore." A style as unique and masterful as Dunsany's is certainly worthy of more critical attention. As Joshi states, Dunsany's prose is "extraordinarily difficult to analyze" (203), but that does not mean that we, as scholars of the Fantastic, should leave this task to Rhetoricians alone, though I will be using rhetoric as part of my critical analysis. Indeed, we should be especially interested in the prose of Dunsany and its extraordinary effects, which not only create worlds of singular beauty, but also inspired an entire generation of Fantasy authors. I will primarily focus on the study of Dunsany's prose style in *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, widely agreed to be Dunsany's finest novel, and certainly characteristic of his early fiction writing.

This distinction about the prose style of Dunsany's early fiction writing is necessary because in later writing his style has changed considerably; he moved away from long, ornate, Ciceronian sentence structure, and embraced a more clipped prose style. This shift in style is partly due to that fact that Dunsany's fiction writing moved away from Fantasy, and his early prose style was particularly well suited for that genre. It is also important to mention that the prose style of his fiction varies considerably from the prose style of his memoirs, *Patches of Sunlight*. In the opening sentences of the before mentioned work, Dunsany says,

I will not discuss whether my publishers are right in supposing that there can be much interest in the story of my life. It is their affair; and, if they make an

occasional mistake, they can soon get level with their other ventures. (*Patches of Sunlight* 1)

While this is indeed beautiful prose, it stands in stark contrast to Dunsany's fictional prose style of his early work; it is fairly straightforward, and does not make the reader immediately lapse into dreams of distant lands. In short, this sample from *Patches of Sunlight* does not contain the same intoxicating and evocative qualities as does the prose of works like *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. But, there are two decidedly different aims to fictional works and memoir. Dunsany picks a prose style in his fiction that will enhance the beauty and splendor of the magical worlds he depicts; memoir is to explain, not create. At the end of *Patches of Sunlight*, when Dunsany begins to discuss how he has written enough about his life, and wants to return to his fiction work, that is "far hence with fancies" (*Patches of Sunlight* 308), his dreamy prose style does return:

If the things I have seen and done up to the point at which I am about to lay down the pen that has been busy for more than four months, have awakened any interest, as I hope perchance they may have done with a few, those things have been only like flowers or weeds on the way, that delay a traveler bound for a far country. (*Patches of Sunlight* 308)

When discussing instances of his life that have been an inspiration to him, "the weeds on the way," Dunsany avoids sentence structure that invokes a sense of mystery and wonder. It is not until he discusses his fictional work that he returns to the musical prose that is so characteristic of his early fiction. The vocabulary and syntax of a Dunsany story or novel indeed function as a plot device, especially in a novel like *The King of Elfland's*

*Daughter* where little action takes place. His unique use of language is an essential aspect of Dunsany's world building, a point I will return to later.

As Ursula K. LeGuin suggests, language choice is perhaps more important to Fantasy than any other genre, and she discusses this point in *From Elfland to Poughkeepsie*. In Fantasy, the reader's understanding of the world is entirely dependent on the author. If the language of Fantasy is not constructed properly, she correctly insists that "something real has been falsified" (Sandner 146). Authors who fail to produce the correct language of Fantasy do not create a realm of their own. Their stories are too firmly planted in our realm. Style is intricate to Fantasy because in Fantasy "there is nothing but the writer's version of the world. There is no borrowed reality of history" (154). LeGuin sees the act of speech in Fantasy as the act of creation, and only the author can create. Often, the rules of our world cannot be applied to the Fantasy realm, and we cannot depend on our understanding of the world to explain what we encounter in Fantasy. Since the rules of our world cannot be used to understand Fantasy, it is entirely fitting that our language is not adequate for Fantasy, either. Because of his lack of dialogue, this statement is especially true for Dunsany, who LeGuin maintains is the "most imitated, and the most inimitable, writer of fantasy" (Sandner 149). Dunsany's descriptions of landscape, and the words his characters inhabit, make up the majority of his early Fantasy novels, rather than lengthy dialogue. We cannot rely on the characters to explain how the world they live in works, nor can we infer this information through character interaction. We must rely almost entirely on the words Dunsany uses in his descriptions to understand his worlds. Typical sentence structure and vocabulary cannot

give us the sense of wonder Dunsany aims to convey about his worlds, whether they be “typical English woods,” or Elfland. Style for Le Guin is more than strange names, but rather all the ways in which an author’s language helps to create and mold the Fantasy realm. The reader must know she is in a world that only exists on the Fantasy author’s pages, and the deliberate and careful crafting of language is an essential aspect of the process. Dunsany’s language functions in a poetic and musical style, and the repetition of certain phrases helps give his language this effect.

LeGuin has learned from Dunsany’s “intensely mannered, intensely poetic” prose style (Sandner 149). LeGuin notes that in Fantasy “[e]very word spoken is meaningful, though the meaning may be subtle” (Sandner 148). The following quote appears in *The Charwoman’s Shadow*: “And at that he realized that in that dark house more store must be set by immaterial things than by those that men can handle” (86). We see Dunsany expressing multiple important concepts in the novel with these few words. The fact that the magician’s house is dark adds to its mystery, and mystery is closely linked to magic for Dunsany because “[w]ithout a sense of mystery a man may be a scientist, a mathematician or many other things, but he cannot be a poet, for he has had no land to travel in” (*Patches of Sunlight* 5). We see the fact that the magician values immaterial and spiritual things, such as shadows and joy, over material ones. We also see that men cannot fully grasp the importance of the immaterial, and prefer the material, such as gold, a tendency Dunsany clearly considered foolish and misguided. Dunsany’s words are weighted and always of the greatest importance. A single sentence often implies much, a characteristic LeGuin values highly in Fantasy.

LeGuin also praises Dunsany's effortless use of "the archaic manner" which many Fantasy authors use incorrectly and with a laborious effect. Dunsany's archaic language use helps to distance his Fantasy from the ordinary (Sandner 149). Here is an example from a conversation Ramon Alonzo, the hero of *The Charwoman's Shadow*, has with his sister: "'Mirandola,' he said, 'is he not a trifle gross, Senor Gulvarez?'" (117). This is a prime example of Dunsany's effortless use of the archaic manner. It seems perfectly natural within the novel, yet recalls a feeling of a past that we cannot quite place, thus anchoring the reader in the Fantasy realm.

While discussing prose style, Dunsany says that "perhaps prose must not be compared with its elder brother, verse, though the heights to which prose can rise ... show there is no essential reason why it should not be" (*Patches of Sunlight* 132). While Dunsany is discussing *Ecclesiastes* here, this statement is just as true for his own unique prose style, which has a lyric quality akin to verse and song. Indeed, Dunsany writes that from books he learned "the rhythm of prose, for rhythm is a matter of sound, and prose that does not sound well when properly read, and aloud, is not in my opinion good prose" (*Patches of Sunlight* 130). Dunsany was a harsh critique of his own work, and this statement exemplifies what he aimed to achieve.

Repetition of key words and phrases is an important part to the rhythm of music and poetry; hence repetition is an important part of Dunsany's prose, for Dunsany chooses his words the way a poet does, for sound as well as meaning. Repetition in song and poetry helps create rhythms, and typically differentiates these genres from prose. Dunsany uses repetition extensively. These repeated phrases in his fiction help ground

the reader in Dunsany's reality; they anchor the unfamiliar. The phrases "the fields we know," "beyond the fields we know," and "that may only be told of in song" are used so often in the novel that they function as the chorus of a song. We know Dunsany will use these phrases again, but like any good musician, we are not sure when. Repetition serves to preserve the rhythm that Dunsany sees as an intricate part of "good prose."

Since Dunsany's prose style is largely musical, the theme of song is often important in his fiction because the form of the language is echoed in this sense. Song and music are closely linked to what Dunsany considered the limits of human understanding, as well as the idyllic past Dunsany's fiction so often represents. Being related to a pastoral setting and the glamorous world beyond what is common shows a reverence for song and its importance. There is a deep, primal meaning in song, and for Dunsany this is closely associated with longing for some glamour beyond the everyday. Old songs hold a wisdom that is important for man, and man's hopes and dreams. The theme of song is central to *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. The King has a "throne – room of which only song may tell" (40). It is repeated throughout the novel that only song may hint at the glory of Elfland, and only song has the power to discuss the glory that is found within this realm. Non musical words or phrases fall short here. Song holds a wisdom that is beyond human understanding; hence its continuous association with Elfland and its inhabitants, as Dunsany was often critical of man's interactions with one another and nature. Dunsany's personal and aesthetic values were more in tune with the values of Elfland.

It is fitting that Dunsany choose song as a central theme because of how closely his prose style mimics the attributes of song. Part of the lyric quality of his prose is due to Dunsany's continuous use of periodic sentence structure. While simple sentence structure is not absent from *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, it is the exception rather than the norm. The following sentence is a typical example of the type of prose found in the novel:

And little he knew of the things that ink may do, how it can mark a dead man's thoughts for the wonder of later years, and tell of happenings that are gone clean away, and be a voice for us out of the dark of time, and save many a fragile thing from the pounding of heavy ages; or carry to us, over the rolling centuries, even a song from lips long dead on forgotten hills. (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 105)

In this single sentence, spanning seven lines in the original text, there are five coordinating conjunctions that each open up an important aspect of "the wonders of ink." This technique is called polysyndeton. The repetition of "and" pulls the reader along the sentence; the word solidifies the importance of writing by showing the many different purposes writing can serve. The repetition of "and" also serves to invoke a feeling of the King James Bible, adding to the importance and gravity of the written word, as if what Dunsany writes here is somehow sacred. This technique also invokes a feeling of meaningful and important days humanity should attempt not to forget. By stringing these many techniques together in periodic form, Dunsany is able to achieve complex coherence within the sentence. Unlike most authors writing during the Modern period, Dunsany often presents a single thought in a complex sentence, and then moves on to his

next idea. After Dunsany establishes the marvels of the written word in this quoted passage and what is beyond Oth's understanding, in the next sentence he explains what Oth does understand. By keeping the theme to a single sentence, Dunsany highlights how all of these attributes of writing are connected, with an effect that could not be achieved with shorter, simpler prose. The "wonder" of his language serves to exemplify the "wonder" of the written word that Dunsany discusses.

In the above passage there are seven adjectives. The reader is not just told of ages; they are "heavy ages." "Heavy ages" are accompanied by "long dead" lips, and "forgotten hills." Here, Dunsany's choice of adjectives helps to invoke a sense of memory, and a sense of wonder. The effect is much different than if he had simply wrote of everyday ages, lips, or hills. Anyone can write of those things, and alone the words could easily appear in any realistic novel. Even though Dunsany is not writing here of Elfland specifically, there is still a beauty and a mystery to all of the land in his novel. Every reader can imagine ages, lips, and hills, but by combining carefully chosen adjectives to these words they are suddenly a part of a Fantastical world that has a heightened intensity next to our own.

While in many ways this passage is typical of Dunsany's prose style, it is atypical in the abundant use of adjectives in one sentence. As Joshi notes, while Dunsany may make brilliant use of the adjective, he does not need "the assistance of labored adjectives to create his effects" (205). What this passage shows is that each adjective is chosen carefully and carries a meaning that could not be achieved with any other word. Imagine, for example if "forgotten hills" was replaced with "old hills." The indication that humans

have lost something, that Elfland is waning, would be entirely lost, and as noted by both Joshi and Schweitzer, the waning of the magical was an important theme in much of Dunsany's work

Among the multitude of rhetorical techniques that Dunsany uses is parenthesis. While Dunsany's narrative presence is apparent throughout *The King of Elfland's Daughter* because of the lack of dialogue, it is in these moments that his authorial presence is most obvious. Consider this sentence, "And whatever magic there was in the rune of which I cannot tell (and dreadful magic there was), the rune was written with love that was stronger than magic" (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 61). Here Dunsany is using parenthesis to ground his reader in the known world. For the human world, the rune has a dreadful magic because of its power. Dunsany's interruption of the syntax of the rest of the sentence (*Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* 385), is his way of touching the reader to remind him or her that the glories and powers of Elfland are largely beyond human understanding. The only aspect of our world that Dunsany can compare the rune's power to is love, which he ultimately paints as the most powerful magic in *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. While love is indeed familiar to us, it is still an emotion, and often emotions are not concrete or tangible. Indeed, love is an emotion that people often fail to understand, an emotion whose power never fails to evoke a sense of wonder. Through this choice of comparison Dunsany can anchor the power of the rune in our world without removing any of the mystery he aims to surround it with.

While parenthesis is typically considered a technique within a sentence, *The King of Elfland's Daughter* itself has a parenthesis within the novel, the chapter "A Historical Fact." This break in the novel is, I think, entirely forgivable, and even necessary. By using a light humorous tone, saying there are people who do not like stories that are not grounded in fact, and worse "even in history care more for fact than philosophy (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 134), we see Dunsany the man, instead of Dunsany the story teller. We have a hint of Dunsany's values, and an idea of what he aims to achieve in his fiction. This little excursion into Dunsany's mind also adds some humor into what is a rather heartbreaking story. However, the sadness of *The King of Elfland's Daughter* teaches us a lesson, and this break in the narrative shows that this is no accident; indeed nothing in Dunsany's narrative art can be described as accidental.

Dunsany makes extensive use of chiasmus, a technique typically found in verse. As Alveric approaches Elfland he senses an understanding "that reached from men to trees and from trees to men" (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 15). While we have the literal chiasmus with Dunsany's written word, we have the metaphorical chiasmus in the relationship between man and nature as well. Here we see an example of Dunsany's disdain for modern society's increased industrialization and removal from nature. When discussing Alveric and his party's quest Dunsany writes, "[t]here were jests about them and songs. And the songs outlived the jests" (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 120). This chiasmus enhances rhythm, and helps create Fantasy through language. We see the chiasmus combined with the theme of song. The use of the word "jest" instead of "joke" helps evoke a time when song was more important to society; when song preserved

history, an idyllic past that Dunsany tries to evoke throughout the novel, as well as in most of his fiction. Through the songs, that outlive the jests, Alveric and his party reach a kind of textual or musical immortality. Dunsany held this ancient reverence for song, so it is not surprising that this value would be utilized in his fiction. When discussing the devastating destruction he witnessed during World War One, Dunsany says “but it comes to this that though we are all killed there will be songs again” (*The Last Book of Wonder* preface n.pag.). He sees song as a vision of hope and beauty in a world consumed by death and destruction. Songs are immortal and primal. As there was hope for Dunsany that if Europe were destroyed it would have song, there is hope for Alveric because he is remembered more than he is mocked.

Most of the language Dunsany uses has deliberate rhythm and beauty. He often uses alliteration, which is highly appropriate when we consider the importance of repetition to his work. He writes of the “sky, that seemed to shine,” (*The King of Elfland’s Daughter* 32) “the wonder and wildness of Elfland,” (48) Orion’s “bright beauty,” (54) of “stones that shone” (59). He writes of Lirazel that “she knew that he spoke as one that walked safe on shore,” (59) the unicorn has “flecks of foam that shone silvery in the starlight,” (122) the men of Erl show a “lingering love” (136) for magic, and when he meets up with the other trolls Lurulu cannot resist “telling them tales of time” (163). These of course, are only a few meager examples, yet they are typical of the effect alliteration has in *The King of Elfland’s Daughter*. Alliteration is often used when discussing beings or facets of Elfland. By doing so, Dunsany solidifies the association between Elfland and song, for these phrases slip off of the tongue like music.

Dunsany's prose makes use of paronomasia, or the "use of words alike in sound but different in meaning" (*Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* 399). This technique helps to accentuate the rhythm of his prose, producing a musical effect. Some examples include "hinted it to be infinite," (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 85) and "waves of wheat" (140). These phrases help Dunsany invoke the feeling of rhyme, without actually using it. Rhyme does not work as well as paronomasia outside of poetry. By using this technique Dunsany achieves the feeling and sounds of poetry within what is technically prose.

Dunsany's use of inverted word order helps invoke the past that is so central to his land "beyond the fields we know" as well as the human world of Erl. Inverted word order helps Dunsany achieve the archaic manner that is central to his work. As Le Guin notes, "[t]he archaic manner is indeed a perfect distancer, but you have to do it perfectly" (Sander 150). Dunsany uses this style "effortlessly" (149); it seems natural to him and that is exactly why it is such an effective technique to constructing his Fantasy. When discussing the barrier of Elfland, Dunsany tells us that the barrier enchants Orion, "so much more magical was it than any earthly evening" (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 142). Now, if Dunsany had written, "it was so much more magical than any earthly evening," the sentence would lose some of its rhythm; for Dunsany a more Modern prose style would seem forced. The inverted word order brings us to the past, but because it is not entirely archaic, it is a past that only exists in Dunsany, making his world complete.

Dunsany's archaic manner and tone is also achieved through carefully selected words, the use of archaism. His prose is not overwhelmed by these old terms; rather

Dunsany uses them sparingly. Elfland is “lovelier that anything song haith said,” (*The King of Elfland’s Daughter* 143) when Alveric gives up on finding Lirazel he no longer cared what “befell him” (227), and we are told that Zend has stood “upon the edge of Elfland” (229). If Dunsany had replaced “haith” with “had,” “befell” with “happened to,” or “upon” with “on,” more than rhythm would be lost. Like his use of inverted word order, the use of these archaic words, employed judiciously and sparingly, helps Dunsany craft his past. Through his use of archaic words, Dunsany simultaneously evokes a memory of our past, and creates a world all his own. Through his use of language we can sense this past without it having a historical reality in our world.

Dunsany’s use of pleonasm gives his sentences more power and urgency, as well as enhancing their beauty. When the Men of Erl tell Ziroonderel they no longer want magic in their lives, and ask her to banish it for them, she scolds their foolishness:

And you that sought for magic in your youth but desire it not in your age, know that there is a blindness of spirit which comes from age, more black than the blindness of an eye, making a darkness about you across which nothing may be seen, or felt, or known, or in any way apprehended. (*The King of Elfland’s Daughter* 213)

“Blindness” is repeated twice. The second use of the word is not strictly necessary; its use adds emphasis to the sentence. It helps to highlight the foolishness of the men’s desire. Also, the use of the words “seen,” “felt,” “known,” and “in any way apprehended” are not all necessary either because these facets of the men’s shortcomings are implied by the fact that they are spiritually blind to the truth. Yet, these redundant

words serve to emphasize the severity with which Zoonderel speaks. She is scolding the men of Erl, and Dunsany does not have to state this. Rather, we know the men are being treated as fools by the words in Zoonderel's dialogue. This technique is much more effective than if we had been told the witch considered the desire of the men as unnatural and foolhardy.

Anaphora is another technique frequently used by Dunsany. Let us look at a passage describing the magic of the witch Ziroonderel:

For she had a charm for brightening the morning, and a charm for cheering the day, and a charm for calming a cough, and a charm for making the nursery warm and pleasant and eerie. (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 33)

As with his abundant use of coordinating conjunctions, Dunsany's use of anaphora helps to link these ideas together. Anaphora also ties in nicely with Dunsany's theme of repetition, and helps to preserve rhythm. We are pulled along in the sentence until we know all of the charms Ziroonderel has the ability to cast. These sentences have an incantatory feel, almost as if we were listening to the witch cast her spell, rather than reading a written description of her abilities.

In *The King of Elfland's Daughter* Dunsany uses personification as an instrument and outcome of magic. He personifies Elfland. While Elfland is a region, it feels the moods of Lirazel and the King. When the King cries for Lirazel, "all Elfland shivered" (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 38). The King is connected to the land in a way that is only possible in a magical land. Later in the novel when Lirazel sighs, her sigh "lightly troubled Elfland" (168). When the King thinks of a solution to Lirazel's longing for

Earth, he “raised both his arms and his inspiration broke over Elfland in music” (174). Both the personification of Elfland and the personification of the King’s inspiration help Dunsany achieve the magic of the realm as well as the ruler. Here, as opposed to techniques used in realist fiction, the actions and their effects are literal. Elfland is so magical that it has human attributes.

Dunsany makes extensive use of simile, especially when discussing the magic and beauty of Elfland. Simile is especially fitting when discussing magic and Elfland because both the force and the realm are largely beyond human understanding, and the use of simile provides description, yet preserves an element of mystery. While it is difficult for the human mind to completely understand the entirety of Elfland, or the power of magic, certain glories of “the fields we know” can be compared to characteristics of this glorious realm and its overwhelming power. Ziroonderel sings “a melody like a wind in summer blowing from wild wood gardens that no man tended” (*The King of Elfland’s Daughter* 6). With the use of this simile we imagine a sweet, soft, and refreshing song that evokes a sense of wonder and nature; a song closer to nature than the human. When Alveric first comes to Elfland, he sees “[a] line of pine trees up which ivy climbed, as high as their lowering black foliage, stood like sentinels at the edge of the wood” (17). Dunsany defamiliarizes a common image here with a simile, a pine tree. We can likely call to mind the image of a pine tree of our world, but that does not mean we know what the pines of Elfland are like. By equating the pine tress with sentinels, Dunsany also suggests with a single word that Elfland is guarded, that there are hidden dangers, that Alveric cannot interpret everything he sees as he would in “the fields that are mapped and known,” that

nature itself is connected to Elfland. When the first unicorn leaves Elfland it “came across the valley of Erl, like an inspiration, like a new dynasty to a custom-weary land, like news of a happier continent found far-off by suddenly returned seafaring men” (122). Comparing the unicorn to inspiration, Dunsany solidifies the relationship between magic and poetry. The unicorn can bring a glory, a light, to the mundane human world, as does poetry. By comparing the unicorn to a new dynasty, Dunsany shows that the men of Erl will indeed have magic in the lives, and that their lives will be changed drastically by magic’s presence. The bringing of magic over the boarder is no small change, and this is implied although only one magical creature has reached the town. Dunsany achieves these layers of meaning through his word choice and without specifically stating them, building in multiple layers to his sentences, and forcing his reader to unwrap the mystery of his world. By comparing the unicorn to “news of a happier continent,” Dunsany indicates his values. The unicorn, and magic, represent what Dunsany places the highest value on, even if the foolish men of Erl do not. Again, Dunsany reaches out to his reader to make it clear where his preferences lie.

The chapter “Lurulu Watches the Restlessness of Earth” is a beautiful example of how Dunsany contrasts the world we know with Elfland. Lurulu is a troll visiting Erl, a land as unfamiliar and magical to him as Elfland is to us. Through Lurulu’s perspective we see how different the two worlds are, and how there are wonders in our world that we normally take for granted because we find them so common. As Demetrius tells us “anything usual is trivial and so fails to impress” (389). He is discussing style here as

well as subject matter. Through Dunsany's use of Lurulu's perspective, and his use of style, the usual becomes unusual, and thus impressive.

Dunsany achieves much of this contrast through antithesis. When discussing antithesis, Demetrius tell us that "[t]he antithesis may lie in content ... or it may be twofold, in content and language" (363). The pigeon loft Lurulu sits in is contrasted with "the deep natural calm" of Elfland (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 153). When the idea is first introduced Dunsany sets up antithesis with this "deep natural calm" and the word "flood." The troll is lonely in Erl, and it is his desire to overcome this loneliness that initially attracts him to the pigeon-loft:

The door of the pigeon-loft was open some ten feet from the door of the hayloft, and some six feet higher. A ladder led to the *hayloft*, clamped to the wall with *iron*; but nothing at all communicated with the pigeon-loft lest cats should go that way. From it came the murmur of *abundant life*, which attracted the *lonely* troll. (153, emphasis mine)

Here the troll's feelings are antithetical to the pigeons who live in a flock. This antithesis is continued by the fact that the troll is magical and the pigeons are from our world. Here we see the contrast through content, and with the words "abundant life" and "lonely" through language, providing Demetrius' twofold antithesis. Lurulu's feeling of loneliness in Erl is antithetical to his life in Elfland where he and the other trolls "are no lonelier than the rabbits are" (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 153). The pigeon-loft is part of a hayloft which has a ladder that is "clamped to the wall with iron" (153). Here

we see the antithetical pairing of “hay” and “iron,” of a plant based material with a metal material, of the natural with the manmade.

While *The King of Elfland's Daughter* shows some of the greatest heights to which Dunsany's fictional prose style can achieve, the prose of some of his other work is worthy of attention as well. Many of his short stories show the beginnings of characteristics and techniques that he will later perfect in *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. This is partly due to the fact that many of his Fantastic short stories were written prior to *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, but also because the scope of a short story is of course quite different than that of a novel. In a short story the author does not have the luxury of taking his time to create his world. In Dunsany's short story “The Highwayman” (1908) we see Dunsany using some of the techniques that he will later use in *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. This short story is considered important for several reasons. This is Dunsany's first story “that is entirely about human characters,” and “it is the first tale set concretely in the real world” (Joshi 41). Joshi considers “The Highwayman” one of Dunsany's first horror stories because it is set in the real world with an “intrusion of the unreal” (41). Like *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, “The Highwayman” also uses repetition of a key phrase, although the effect is much different in the short story than in the novel. The sentence “[a]nd the wind blew and blew” (Carter 159) is repeated eight times, and the story is only a little over five pages long. Here we see Dunsany's prose acting as a plot device. The phrase is eerie and ominous within the story, and as Joshi notes this “incantatory repetition” helps to evoke the story's “atmosphere of horror” (41). While we are not in a magical realm here, Dunsany still achieves an otherworldly effect

through his use of this repetition, rather than setting. Like the phrases “that may only be told of in song,” and “beyond the fields we know,” “[a]nd the wind blew and blew” is similar to the chorus of a song, albeit it a more ominous kind of song, entirely fitting for this short story.

“The Highwayman” also has a deliberate beauty and rhythm through alliteration. Dunsany’s use of this technique is much more noticeable and pronounced here than it is in *The King of Elfland’s Daughter*. Part of the reason for this might be in the story’s length. When working with a short story the language must be compact, and the author has much less room to produce desired effects. Yet, alliteration is a central technique to the story, and it serves as a plot device. In the first paragraph Dunsany writes “all the sounds were silence in his ears; only his soul struggled to slip from the iron chains and to pass southwards into Paradise” (Carter 159). Unlike in *The King of Elfland’s Daughter*, alliteration is not being used here to describe Elfland. Yet, alliteration is still being used to describe the longing of Tom’s soul to leave the human realm, and move on to Paradise. Like Elfland, Paradise is not a place humans know or understand; Paradise is not part of the fields “that are mapped and known,” here called “remembered fields” (Carter 161).

When discussing the passing of souls to Paradise Dunsany also uses rhyme, as well as alliteration. He writes that “the souls of the sepulchred” fly on the wind “past the Gallows Tree and past the soul of Tom, that might not go free” (Carter 160). Again we see here poetical effects being used in conjunction with events that are beyond human knowledge, and otherworldly. Dunsany writes that “the seeds of Tom’s own soul that he had sown all this life had grown into a Gallows Tree” (Carter 162). The rhyming of

“sown” and “grown” gives the impression of song and poetry, as well as the further repetition of the “s” sound.

“The Highwayman” also makes use of personification. Tom’s three friends remove the Archbishop from his grave so that Tom may be buried in holy ground, and they dig a new grave for the Archbishop. While digging the grave “one watched in the wind and rain. And the worms that crept up in the unhallowed ground wondered and waited” (Carter 161). Here we see alliteration combined with personification.

Personification helps solidify the otherworldly atmosphere of “The Highwayman,” as well as the aspects of horror. The grotesque imagery of worms waiting to feed is enhanced by the fact that they are wondering when they will get their meal.

At the end of “The Highwayman” Dunsany connects song with joy. After Tom is buried in the sacred ground, his soul begins its trip to Paradise. His soul flies in the wind, and passes the “old haunts of his childhood” (Carter 163).

There, there met with it all the kindly thoughts that the soul of Tom had ever had, and they flew and sang beside it all way southwards, until at last, with singing all about it, it came to Paradise. (Carter 163)

Here we see the reverence for song that is present in *The King of Elfland’s Daughter*.

Song is not introduced into the story until Tom’s soul ascends, implying an association with Paradise and the otherworldly. By associating song with Paradise, Dunsany shows it belongs with a realm greater than the human world. We again see the use of personification; his kindly thoughts can sing. Personification is again used in connection

with the otherworldly, and with an act that is largely beyond human understanding, the journey of a soul out of the known world.

In Dunsany's short story "The Field" (1910) Dunsany also makes use of themes that will appear in *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. Dunsany equates the field with the realm of Faerie, and the past, both of which he highly values. The field is personified to highlight its uniqueness.

The call is from afar both in leagues and years, for the hills that call one are the hills that were, and their voices are the voices of long ago, when the elfin Kings still had horns. (Carter 148)

The hills call to the unnamed narrator, and the narrator can hear the call all the way from London. By having the hills call, Dunsany presents a living land. The field possesses an intrinsic value removed from the value humans would place on it, because the field has a life of its own. By giving the hills a voice, Dunsany implies that there is a knowledge that can be gained from listening to these hills, wisdom that humans would benefit from learning. Through his use of the word "afar" Dunsany helps to evoke the past that is central to his work, and the past represented by the Elfin Kings. Through repetition of "call," "hills," and "voices" Dunsany achieves a rhythm within the sentence, like the rhythm of poetry and song, and he ties this effect with the natural world.

The next lines of "The Field" continue with the hills' personification, their connection to the realm of Faery, and the invocation of the past.

I see them now, those hills of my infancy (for it is they that call), with their faces upturned to the purple twilight, and the faint diaphanous figures of the fairies peering out from under the bracken to see if evening has come. (Carter 148)

Dunsany's personification of the land continues throughout "The Field." As the narrator leaves London and enters the country, "the errors of civilization stand bare to the scorn of the fields" (Carter 149). The fields are not just alive; they possess the ability to pass judgment on humanity, and humanity's creations. "The Field" presents the "country/city juxtaposition prevalent in *The King of Elfland's Daughter*" (Pashka 20) through the use of personification.

The field is also shows connection thematically with song and poetry. "Before one are the fields like an old, old song" (Carter 149). The stream in the field is "singing a happy song" (Carter 150). The stream is alive as well as the fields, and both are connected to music. When the narrator cannot figure out why the field makes him feel uneasy, he asks a historian for facts concerning the history of the field. The historian informs him that "nothing of interest had ever occurred there, nothing at all" (Cater 150). Next, the narrator turns to a poet for wisdom, assuming that his feeling must arise from some future event. After looking at the field the poet knows that "[i]t is a battlefield" (Carter 151). The narrator can gain no knowledge from facts, but instead must turn to poetry for knowledge and wisdom. Dunsany notes it is "a battlefield, not of the past but of the future" (*Patches of Sunlight* 108). Here we see a clear example of Dunsany's increasing anxiety over the future.

Whether looking at his memoir or fiction it is clear that Dunsany writes beautiful prose worthy of critical attention. Yet, it is in his fiction that his heart lies, and this fact is inescapable when comparing the two. Dunsany saw his work as the work of his dreams.

In his Preface to *The Last Book of Wonder* he says

my dreams are here before you amongst the following pages; and writing in a day when life is cheap, dreams seem to me all the dearer, the only things that survive.

(Dunsany n.pag.)

Those dreams he captures for his readers and preserves them in a luminous prose as bright and durable as a crystal vial. While *The King of Elfland's Daughter* was written almost twenty years later, his likening his reader to one who is “bound for a far off country” (*Patches of Sunlight* 308) indicates how important he viewed his fiction writing and how important it was for him to pass those dreams on to others. It is when Dunsany is describing what is most important to him to that his language is at its best. In no way do I offer this work as a complete analysis of what Dunsany achieves with the written word, but it is a start. My aim is to help foster an appreciation for a literary master who has been wrongfully forgotten.

## Chapter Two: Dunsany and Tolkien: Two Kindred Spirits

Despite the lack of critical attention Lord Dunsany's work has received at the hands of critics, his fiction has been immensely important to the work of other Fantasy authors. While we have seen the impressive stylistic effects of Dunsany's prose and its profound effect on subsequent Fantasy authors, I will now turn my attention to Dunsany's influence on a single author, J.R.R. Tolkien, whose influence is likely more obvious to the casual reader of Fantasy literature. This section will carefully trace the influence of Lord Dunsany on Tolkien's fictional and critical work.

Using a phrase first employed by John Dryden, Joseph Addison defines what is required to achieve "the faery way of writing." Both Dunsany and Tolkien masterfully achieve this mode in their works. Addison argues this form of writing is "more difficult than any other that depends on the poet's fancy, because he has no pattern to follow in it, and must work altogether out of his own invention" (419). The writer who embraces this tradition must rely primarily on his own imagination and cannot find a direct correspondence between our world and his created world. The writer must have a strong sense of fancy, a concept Dunsany himself considered paramount. The writer also should "be very well versed in legends and fables, antiquated romances, and the traditions of nurses and old women" (419). Addison argues that if the writer is not able to work within these areas, he is doomed to produce the false fantastic, with fairies barely distinguishable from humans.

Addison places such importance on tradition and old tales because “[o]ur forefathers looked upon nature with more reverence and horror, before the world was enlightened by learning and philosophy, and loved to astonish themselves with the apprehensions of witchcraft, prodigies, charms, and enchantments” (419). Natural forces and places were tinged with wonder because they could not be fully explained by science. For Addison, “the faery way of writing” embraces both tradition and the natural. As previously discussed, traditions, and the wonder of the natural world, are central to Dunsany’s work. The old and romantic, as well as nature’s creations, are precious treasures for him. Tolkien, too, grounds his work in tradition, legends, and romance to achieve his own unique fantastic works. Nature, as well, is central to the works of Tolkien. Both men brilliantly achieve their own “faery way of writing” that fully embraces Addison’s tradition and creates realms of terror and beauty unlike any other.

Dunsany and Tolkien were troubled by man’s increasing removal from nature, as well as valued man’s return to nature, and their fictional writings contain dire warnings of the desolate world humans will find themselves in if the natural world is destroyed humans. These themes were of a paramount importance to the work of both authors. Lord Dunsany’s depiction of the realm of Faery was metaphorically important to Tolkien’s understanding of that “Perilous Realm” (“On Fairy-Stories” 38).

As Tolkien states, “[m]ost good ‘fairy stories’ are about the *adventures* of men in the Perilous Realm or upon its shadowy marches” (“On Fairy-Stories” 38), rather than the fairies or elves themselves. It is not the fairies or elves that make the story interesting, but the effect this “Perilous Realm” has on the humans that come in contact with it. As

previously stated, in *The King of Elfland's Daughter* the men of Erl wish to be ruled by “a magic lord” (1). So the King of Erl sends his son, Alveric, on a journey to Elfland so he can “wed the King of Elfland’s daughter” (2). Even though he is only in Elfland for a day, ten to twelve years pass in the human realm during the time it takes Alveric to bring Lirazel back to his kingdom. Naturally, since Alveric first set out on his journey much has changed in the land of Erl. On his return, Alveric discovers that his father has died long ago, and yet this news does not elicit any response from the young man. He spends no time discussing his father’s death, asking questions, or grieving. Any one, or all, of these responses are normal steps in the grieving process. Yet, Alveric appears entirely unmoved and unconcerned by what should be one of the most devastating experiences in his life, illustrating his mental disconnection with the human world. Even though he has physically returned from Elfland, Alveric has left something significant behind.

Immediately following his arrival in Erl, Alveric brings Lirazel to the Freer so that he can marry the Elfin princess. This strange reaction is not an act of denial aimed at lessening Alveric’s grief; rather it is an emotionless reaction that is a direct result of Alveric just returning from Elfland. The realm of Faery possesses the ability to toy with the hearts and desires of mortal beings. As LeGuin notes, “[a] fantasy is a journey. It is a journey into the subconscious mind, just like psychoanalysis is. Like psychoanalysis, it can be dangerous; and *it will change you*” (Sandner 153). The hold Elfland has on Alveric changes him profoundly, and after the town of Erl is touched by magic, it too is never the same. Alveric has little care for what has happened in his absence. His heart is entirely consumed by Lirazel, and his desire to possess her as his wife. He cannot pause or react

to any event that is not connected to Elfland. The events of human life pale in comparison to the hold the realm of Feary has on humans. Alveric is a man possessed with longing for Elfland and its Princess, and is unable to grieve for the father who he so aimed to please by finding Lirazel in the first place.

The effects of Elfland on Alveric do not end with his cold and emotionless response to his father's death. Looking through Lirazel's eyes Alveric is able to see the land of Erl in a new light. He is able to fully appreciate its own unique beauty in a way that was no possible for him before:

So glad was she, so gay, with her cries of surprise and her laughter, that there seemed thenceforth to Alveric a beauty that he had never dreamed of in buttercups, and a humor in carts that he had never thought of before. (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 27)

For Lirazel the land of Erl is a novel place, and this is a source of much joy for her, and Alveric also receives this joy. The effects of Elfland change how Alveric views his world. Alveric reacts as if he has felt the ten to twelve years pass, even though he is not conscious of this passage. The land of Erl is no longer familiar to him. His heart and mind are touched by Elfland; thus his home is slightly foreign to Alveric as it is foreign to Lirazel. It is only through this new way of seeing that Alveric is able to view the everyday objects around him with a tinge of wonder.

Alveric is so changed by his visit to Elfland that he is not troubled when he requests a Christian wedding and the Freer tells him and Lirazel that "all in that land [Elfland] dwelt beyond salvation" (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 28). All Alveric can

understand at the time is his dire need to wed the Elfin princess, so he is initially unconcerned about the Freer's religious warning. The concept of salvation is entirely of the human world; those that live in Elfland know nothing about the laws of Christianity, so Lirazel is equally undisturbed by this news, and responds with laughter. Erl is a Christian land, but Alveric is completely disinterested in his heritage and Lirazel's salvation while the memory and hold of Elfland are fresh and all he can remember. It is not until a few years pass, and the effects of Elfland drift away, that Alveric begins to feel concern because Lirazel would never "grow familiar with earthly things, never understand the folk that dwelt in the valley, never read wise books without laughter, never care for earthly ways" (36) and, most importantly, never practice Christianity. After a few years of attempting to be understanding, Alveric becomes angry at Lirazel's innate nature, and fights with his wife, although she has previously been the only object of his longing, a being of the Realm of Feary. After now possessing his object of longing for a number of years, the effects of Elfland have had time to wane, and he begins to wish Lirazel were more like a mortal wife.

After living in the land of men, the effects of Elfland have lessened, and Alveric is so accustomed to living with magic, he no longer appreciates this magnificent force, or recognizes its value. He no longer sees Lirazel as a being of Elfland; rather she simply is his wife, and he begins to feel the loss of magic, even though magic is literally right beside him. Alveric attempts to control a natural, wild, and untamable force, clearly commentary on man's attempted dominion over the natural world. When he had first met her, Alveric had been enraptured with all that is innate to Lirazel, and her ability to

change him. After living in Erl again for a number of years, he remembers what it is to be human, and wishes to tame her natural spirit. Angry for the loss he feels of Elfland, Alveric is fundamentally conflicted in his loss, a conflict that almost drives him to insanity. Confused and hurt after their argument, Lirazel leaves her husband to return to Elfland and her father.

Alveric becomes so upset that he decides these differences do not matter to him. He spends years of his life attempting to reach Elfland, which “is both a place and a state of existence” (Schweitzer 79), a state of existence Alveric no longer can have because he no longer lives with his Elfin princess. Alveric’s change of heart must be partly due to the fact that with the object of his longing removed, with his piece of Elfland entirely removed, he remembers his state of being close to Elfland and part of him longs to regain the magic constantly receding from him. While he does love Lirazel, the fact that she represents Elfland, and the ability of Elfland to toy with the hearts and desires of mortals, cannot be overlooked. Lirazel’s father is able to move Elfland at his whim and he spends many Earthly years preventing Alveric from reaching his goal. Schweitzer notes this is “a literalized, multiplex metaphor for the imagination, for the lost innocence of childhood, for everything which lies beyond our grasp” (79). The loss of childhood also ushers a loss of childhood follies, and Alveric realizes he cannot tame or change his Elfin princess. He literally must admit she is a being of the natural world.

In “On Fairy-Stories,” Tolkien contests that the realm of Faery is not primarily concerned with humans, and that humans are not concerned with those that live in Faery, until their paths cross. The King of Elfland is not concerned with men at all until his

Lirazel marries a mortal. At that point the King only becomes concerned with “the fields that are mapped and known” (*The King of Elfland’s Daughter* 21) because he wants his daughter to return to home. Towards the end of the novel his interest in our realm continues only long enough to ensure the happiness of his daughter because of her love for Alveric. Both of these examples show that the King’s only interest in the world of humans is a direct result of their paths crossing; if it were not for his daughter the King never would have concerned himself with the world outside of Elfland. Similarly, Alveric is entirely unconcerned with Elfland until he visits there.

In “On Fairy-Stories,” Tolkien states of fairies and elves (for Tolkien these terms are largely interchangeable) that “at least part of the magic that they wield for the good or evil of man is power to play on desires of his body and heart” ( 37). This premise is clear in many instances, but especially so when Alveric is consumed by his desire to bring Lirazel back to the human world. His relentless hunt for her consumes and almost ruins his life, and he shows “that heavy burden of years, and all the sorrow of wandering” (*The King of Elfland’s Daughter* 238). Their son, Orion, grows up without a father, a fact Alveric never comments on or seems to regret. The responsibilities of a father never concern him. After he leaves on his hopeless quest, Alveric’s kingdom is without its ruler for years. Like Alveric’s complete disregard for the death of his father, these instances illustrate how Elfland’s pull can entirely consume the human mind. The duties that are important aspects of Alveric’s life, the role of son, father, and king pale in comparison to the lure of Lirazel and Elfland. Forsaking his responsibilities and health,

Alveric continues his relentless quest to find Elfland. His desire knows no reason or responsibility; he is solely concerned with the object of his longing.

Elfland's "power to play on desires" of man's "body and heart" ("On Fairy-Stories" 37) are illustrated not only by Alveric, but also by the men of Erl who ask "to be ruled by a magic lord." The old King of Erl knows his people "have chosen foolishly ... and only the Dark Ones that show not their faces know all that this will bring" (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 3). The men of Erl do not know or understand magic, yet they are still subject to the mystical and irresistible lure of Elfland. When magic enters the Kingdom of Erl, the men grow unhappy and want to return to their old ways of life. They go to the witch Ziroonderel and request that she give them "a goodly spell which shall be a charm against magic, so that there will be no more of it in the valley, for overmuch has come" (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 211). The foolish men have exactly what they had asked their old ruler for, yet they are weary of the magic in their lives because they cannot control it, and so they fear it. Again we see Dunsany alluding to the human desire to control and exert dominion over magic and so by extension, the natural world.

Zoonderel responds with scorn and denies their request. She states:

I would sooner give you a spell against comfort and clothing, food, shelter, and warmth, aye and will do it, sooner than tear from these poor fields of Earth the magic that is to them an ample cloak against the chill of Space, and a gay raiment against the sneers of nothingness. (212)

Magic is linked to the land, and so the men are depicted as foolish for wishing to rid themselves of it and gain control over it. Dunsany seems to be suggesting here that the

Earth would not miss a town of healthy and happy humans, but that a loss of the magic that has reached it would make the Earth itself sad and diminished.

At the end of the novel magic indeed becomes the end of the old ways of Erl, and they are never able to tame and control the wild and natural force that they invite into their world. The men's kingdom is never the same again as it becomes entwined with Elfland. That was certainly never the result the men of Erl would have wanted, but the ability of Elfland to manipulate their desires impedes their ability to think about any possible ramifications of their rash request. As Neil Gaiman states in his introduction to the novel, it is a story "about the perils of inviting magic into your life" (xii). Dunsany suggests humans cannot appreciate magic (or nature), and will favor trying to control it, rather than value the mystery it brings into their lives. This sentiment at work in his fiction can be viewed as a comment on Fantasy in general, which is often not appreciated for what it is. Dunsany was certainly disheartened about the critical reception of his Fantasy work.

In his commentary in *Tales Before Tolkien*, Douglas Anderson mentions Tolkien's high regard for Dunsany's *The Book of Wonder*, and the story of "Chu-bu and Sheemish" specifically. In response to a quote about inventing language that appeared in 1967, Tolkien wrote:

if I attributed meaning to *boo-hoo* I should not in this case be influenced by the words containing *bu* in many other European languages, but by a story by Lord Dunsany... about two idols enshrined in the same temple: Chu-Bu and Sheemish. (qtd. in *Tales Before Tolkien* 293)

The story had a profound effect on Tolkien's imagination. Dunsany's unique use of language gripped Tolkien's imagination, who mentions the story again in a letter in 1972.

He was discussing:

that being a cult figure in one's own lifetime was not at all pleasant, but he felt that 'even the nose of a very modest idol (younger than Chu-bu and not much older than Sheemish) cannot remain entirely untickled by the sweet smell of incense. (*Tales Before Tolkien* 294)

Tolkien's use of the word "idol" is worth discussing. Both Chu-bu and Sheemish are literally idols, but would Tolkien himself, even begrudgingly, consider himself an idol? He uses the term in a religious sense, yet the man's Christian beliefs would certainly problematize that statement. Or was his imagination simply sparked by Dunsany's story and it stuck with him? It is interesting to note here that Chu-bu and Sheemish are not originally worshiped because of any specific deeds on their part. At the end of the story the power of the gods together initiates an earthquake, which in turn destroys them both. Yet, their followers "never guessed the truth that the thing was done in rivalry" (297). As a devout Christian, Tolkien might have liked the end result of two pagan gods destroying each other. Certainly Tolkien would have appreciated Dunsany's use of invented language to enhance the reality of his idols.

In the essay "Lord Dunsany: The Potency of Words and the Wonder of Things," Angelee Anderson states:

Fairy-stories enable us to grasp anew the goodness of the 'natural,' by placing it in another context in which the pall of familiarity falls from it

and its inherent beauty and wonder shine forth. Tolkien called this ability of fairy-stories ‘Recovery.’ (10)

As Angelee Anderson notes, Dunsany’s fantasy “succeeds highly, first because of his gifted use of universalities” (10). Dunsany introduces the familiar, and then reinvents it in his fiction. He also shows us the splendor and beauty in the human realm. In his preface Lord Dunsany assures us that in the majority of *The King of Elfland’s Daughter* there is no more to be shown than the face of the fields we know, and ordinary English woods and a common village and valley.” Yet within his tale we are transported “beyond the fields we know.” In his introduction Peter Beagle notes that *The Charwoman’s Shadow* is set in “a Spain that never existed; but it is a real Spain within these [the novel’s] pages” (x). Dunsany takes the Europe that would be familiar to his readers and creates the unfamiliar within his fantasy. Tolkien clearly admired the ability of Fantasy authors to achieve this defamiliarizing effect.

It is not surprising that as an author who valued the defamiliarizing effects of Fantasy, Tolkien was deeply dissatisfied with the mechanization of the modern world, and the ugliness it produces. He discusses his disdain for the destruction of the natural world, and the growing abundance of technology and machines. He mentions his dislike of “the proximity of mass- production robot factories, and the roar of self-obtrusive mechanical traffic” (“On Fairy-Stories” 80). For Tolkien these intrusions are indicative of humans’ “increasing in barbarity” (81). Dunsany believed “the evils of civilization—bred by our increasing distance from Nature—will emerge and eventually overrun us” (Joshi 174). Tolkien continues to say that “we are acutely conscious both of the ugliness

of our works, and of their evil” (“On Fairy-Stories” 81). He distrusted and disliked man’s removal from nature and wished to see man’s return to nature. He regarded man made things as primarily ugly, especially in modern times. When referring to buildings, he states that it would be impossible to find a man made structure that wasn’t ugly “unless it was built before our time” ( 83). Tolkien illustrates this beautifully in one of the concluding chapters of *The Lord of the Rings* when the Shire is desecrated and rebuilt in a desolate and modern way. While I will not be so bold as to suggest Tolkien gets his love of nature and distrust of modern machinery from Dunsany, he found a voice that echoed this important outlook. Indeed, Dunsany was also highly concerned with the ugliness of technology as opposed to the grandeur of the natural world. With regards to technology Dunsany held the “belief that our civilization has somehow gone astray” (Joshi 127). In an essay written in 1911 entitled “Romance and the Modern Stage” Dunsany states, “I know of the boons that machinery has conferred on man, all tyrants have boons to confer...” (qtd. in Joshi 127). Machines were tyrants that would lead eventually to the downfall of man. The two men shared the same pessimistic view of the destructive and mechanical tendencies they saw in their respective societies.

Tolkien was able to look at the world around him and imagine ways in which it could be improved. He was able to envision a world at peace with nature, with beings that appreciated natural wonders, and did not seek to dominate and destroy them. The Shire shows Tolkien’s ideal society. Nature is valued and nurtured by the Hobbits, and for the most part they treat each other kindly. Their homes are in the ground, as close to nature as physically possible. The chapter “The Scouring of The Sire” paints a vivid

portrait of Tolkien's worst fears about the ravages of technology, and the consequences of pollution, as well as what he saw as the inevitable destruction of the natural world. Tolkien's descriptions portray the worst of what man kind can inflict on nature. The Hobbits see "rows of new mean houses" (993) and "the new mill in all its frowning and dirty ugliness: a great brick building straddling the stream, which it fouled with a steaming and stinking outflow" (993). These new structures provide a sharp contrast to the beautiful Hobbit holes that once existed in the Shire. Not only have they taken the place of trees and plants, but by building above ground homes the Hobbits have physically removed themselves from nature. These new structures portray a startling example of what Tolkien was referring to in "On Fairy Stories." In addition, with this removal of the Hobbits from nature comes a decline in their values. When Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin first arrive they receive a chilly welcome and are denied large amounts of food, comfortable beds, clean accommodations, and beer. These unHobbit-like characteristics are a direct result of the Shire being forced to embrace technology and remove itself from the natural world.

This vision of the destruction of the Shire echoes a passage in one of Dunsany's novels. Joshi's study carefully traces Dunsany's negative depiction of technology. He begins with Dunsany's condemnation of machines and their effects in *The Chronicles of Rodriguez*, a novel written in 1921, a few years after Dunsany returned from fighting in World War I. Dunsany's experience with war, like Tolkien's, only deepened his innate dissatisfaction with man's removal from nature. Both men saw destruction that frightened them, and that they never thought possible. They were both painfully aware

that this horror could only be a result of the human world. Joshi quotes a passage from *The Chronicles of Rodriguez* where Rodriguez sees the future horrors of technology and war in a magic window:

beautiful blue Rodriguez saw Man make a new ally, an ally who was only cruel and strong and had no purpose but killing, who had no pretences or prose, no mask and no manner, but was only the slave of Death and had no care but for his business. He saw it grow bigger and stronger. Heart it had none, but he saw its cold steel core scheming methodical plans and dreaming always destruction. (91)

Human's alliance with the machine is akin to an allegiance with death. The machine kills and possesses no mystery, nature, or beauty. This scene in *The Chronicles of Rodriguez* seems a precursor to another scene from *The Lord of the Rings*. When Sam peers into the Mirror of Galadriel, which is strongly reminiscent of Dunsany's magic window, he sees a dismal hint of the future of the Shire. Sam sees technology, pollution, and the death of nature in his vision, as well as the building of ugly, modern buildings. Both Sam and Rodriguez have visions of the future that include the death of nature and the destruction of what their respective authors value.

The "killing machine" Rodriguez sees is likely modeled after some of the horrors Dunsany experienced during World War I. Yet, it also epitomizes some of his worst fears about the destruction of the natural world and the uniquely human propensity for war, as shown in Dunsany's short story "The Field." Joshi notes that "the effect on Rodriguez is traumatic" (91). Dunsany's main characters, like Tolkien's, value nature's beauty and

the profound role nature plays in their happiness. Rodriguez's feelings are comparable to the Hobbits' feelings and reactions when they return to the Shire and see the destruction Saruman has wrought there. When Frodo, Merry, Pippin, and Sam approach Bag End and see the ravages of technology first hand, "it was one of the saddest hours of their lives" (*The Lord of the Rings* 993). Considering the trials the Hobbits endured during the preceding pages of the trilogy, it is of huge importance for the site of the desecrated Shire to be one of their "saddest hours." "Even Sam's vision in the Mirror [of Galadriel] had not prepared him for what they saw" (993). After seeing the dead Party Tree, "Sam burst into tears" (993). Sam's reaction can be compared to Rodriguez's reaction when "he turned from the window and wept" (Joshi 91). Their love of nature and mental anguish at nature's wanton destruction are integral, and in many ways define Tolkien's main heroes, as well as Dunsany's. The effect on Tolkien's Hobbits is nothing short of "traumatic," just like Dunsany's Rodriguez.

*The Charwoman's Shadow* continues with the themes of Dunsany's scorn for man's removal from nature, and his strong desire that man would return to nature. Joshi states "that there is a suggestion that that shadow is a metaphor for man's closeness to Nature" (93). While this is a brief theme in Joshi's study, and only slightly explored, it still an important illustration of Dunsany's values at work. More importantly, however, is the fact that other people find Ramon Alonzo so repulsive because the shadow the magician gave him is so unnatural. The unnatural shadow frightens the village girls and any of the other rustic folk Ramon Alonzo encounters.

Ramon Alonzo gives up his true shadow as a result of youthful impulse and pride, “[f]or youth argues rapidly, and—in a way—clearly, from whatever premises it has, not often trying to enquire if more premises be needed” (Dunsany 100). The charwoman warns Ramon Alonzo of the magician’s fees for teaching magic. She pleads with him, “[g]ive him nothing, whatever he ask! His prices are too high, young master, too high too high” (23). Ramon Alonzo believes that the charwoman is speaking of money, and she needs to explain to him that she means things that are much more valuable than money, which he cannot understand at this point in his young life. He questions what she means by her statement if she does not mean money, and she shows him that she has no shadow. The charwoman fully understands that she has paid a terrible price, and she tries her best to convince Ramon Alonzo who “had never before considered the value of shadows” (28) of this fact. Ramon Alonzo does pay some attention to the charwoman’s words and

[h]e saw now that to loose his shadow and to come to yearn for it when it were lost, and to loose the little greetings that one daily had from one’s kind, and to hear no more tattle about trivial things; to see smiles no more, nor hear one’s name called friendly; but to have the companionship of only shadowless things. (28).

Not to have a shadow is to be exiled from the natural world as well as the human realm, and Ramon Alonzo does not want this to happen; yet he also foolishly believes this is the only price, and that a shadow is a silly thing to believe important. With the shadow as a symbol for man’s closeness to nature as Joshi notes, we see the townspeople shun Ramon

Alonzo because of his removal from nature. This attitude of the townspeople represents an important ideal for Dunsany. Even though he is clearly warned otherwise, Ramon Alonzo impulsively believes the charwoman only misses being able to have the company of others, that she is being dramatic about the magician's prices and the importance of shadows, and that he pays no real price by giving away his shadow. He thinks he knows better than she does, even though she is older, wiser, more familiar with the nature of magic, and has known the magician much longer than he. Ramon Alonzo does not trust in the wisdom of the elder who is trying to teach him, and pays the terrible price of having to live an unnatural life. This is one of the worst fates for a Dunsany character. The young human who is willing to live a life removed from nature is the fool, and Dunsany makes Ramon Alonzo's foolishness clear.

We also see this ideal of being in tune with nature in the work of Tolkien. While Tolkien's heroes value nature, his villains abhor and destroy nature. In *War and the Works of J. R. R. Tolkien*, Janet Croft points out that "Saruman 'has a mind of metal and wheels' and a special enmity for trees" (35). Whenever Saruman can he destroys the trees that are unfortunate enough to cross his path. It is important to note that he does not just kill them. By having Saruman cut them down, instead of killing them magically, Tolkien comments on the dominion of man over nature. Even though he has magical abilities, Tolkien chooses for Saruman to employ a human method of destruction. Saruman cuts down the trees because he is so entwined with technology, and in the world of this author technology and nature cannot together; technology is always the driving force behind nature's destruction. In contrast to Saruman and his humanistic methods of

killing and domination, the magic of the Elves is primarily natural magic, and they value and world and beings around them.

In the essay “Possible Echoes of Blackwood and Dunsany in Tolkien’s Fantasy” by Dale J. Nelson, the author draws parallels between Dunsany’s “The Hoard of the Gibbelins” and Tolkien’s “The Mewlips.” As Nelson notes the Gibbelins and the Mewlips are very similar creatures. “The Gibbelins eat, as it is well known, nothing less good than man (*Gods, Men, and Ghosts* 63). The Mewlips will “in a sack/ Your bones they take to keep” (233). Both creatures have rather terrifying eating habits. Nelson also points out some other similarities between the two sets of creatures and the two stories. Both sets of intimidating creatures are excessively greedy; the Gibbelins collect gold, emeralds, rubies, sapphires and the Mewlips sit and “count their gold” (232). Nelson illustrates that the Gibbelins and Mewlips both sit in the dark counting their riches, and wait for would- be robbers to arrive so they can be eaten. Nelson also mentions that the Gibbelins and Mewlips both live outside of “Terra Cognita” and that both tales end on a cautionary note, warning readers not to venture too far away.

Nelson seems to overlook that both stories point out what Dunsany and Tolkien considered to be one of the worst aspects of humanity through the actions of these creatures. The Gibbelins and the Mewlips possess the human capacity for killing that both men loathed and warned against. There are also clear similarities between this Dunsany tale and *The Hobbit*. The Gibbelins “hoard is beyond reason; avarice has no use for it” (63) and they possess “ridiculous wealth” (63). Through his use of language, Dunsany places a clear value judgment on the Gibbelins’ love of money. They are

greedy, and such a value system will receive no praise from Dunsany. The riches of the Gibbelins can easily be compared to the riches of Smaug, neither being the original owner of their respective treasures. The Gibbelins live in a tower and Smaug lives in a mountain, a natural structure that serves him as a tower. The Gibbelins can not use their treasure and simply keep it out of greed, as does Smaug. Both the Gibbelins and Smaug sit and wait for thieves so they may consume them. Both *The Hobbit* and “The Hoard of the Gibbelins” can be seen as tales that warn against greed. The Gibbelins are chided by Dunsany for their greed, and so are the foolish men who try to take their treasure.

Alderic, Knight of ... a man not unremembered among the makers of myth, pondered so long upon the Gibbelins' hoard that by now he deemed of night by a valorous man, that its motive was sheer avarice!” (*Gods, Men, and Ghosts* 63)

Alderic pays for his “avarice” with his life. Similarly, Thorin becomes obsessed with the Arkenstone and the treasure as a whole, and dies because he refuses to share it with anyone. In addition, the Dwarves obsess over the treasure and decide it is theirs before they ever send Bilbo into Smaug’s lair, just as Alderic decided the Gibbelins’ treasure rightfully belonged to him. For both authors, greed is depicted as an obsession that ruins the characters that are consumed by it. Both suggest there are far more important parts of life than money.

The similarities between the Lord Dunsany and J.R.R. Tolkien are of too great an importance to be ignored. Dunsany’s fantasy work has influenced many other authors within the genre, and Tolkien was familiar with his work. The men shared a strong love

of nature. Tolkien's understanding of the realm of faery must have been influenced, in part, by Dunsany's depiction of that realm.

## Conclusion

After carefully analyzing Dunsany's prose style, it is important to draw conclusions about its significance. Yes, Dunsany clearly enjoyed writing the way he did. He held a profound value on beauty, and his prose is nothing if not beautiful. Yet, to limit the rationale of his unique style to simply aesthetic effects would be misguided. Dunsany influenced a generation of Fantasy authors, most notably perhaps is Tolkien himself, and this was mostly through his unique use of language. Dunsany used his unique prose style for a task that is of the utmost importance in Fantasy, world building.

Before Alveric begins his quest for the King of Elfland's daughter, he visits the witch Ziroonderel to procure a magic sword, knowing his earthly sword will not help him in Elfland. Ziroonderel begins to make the sword magical from fire, but she cannot use an earthly fire. She must add magic to the earthly fire, and she does so with the help of a rune. "And what had been but a lonely fire in the night, with no more mystery than pertains to all such fires, flared suddenly into a thing that wanderers feared" (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 5). With the addition of the correct letter, a typical fire is transformed into a magical fire, as the correct word transports a reader to a land she cannot know outside the confines of Fantastic fiction. Ziroonderel continues to utter runes at the fire and through the combination of the two the witch creates Alveric's magical sword. She removes the sword from the fire and sings to the sword to complete the task. Ziroonderel's song contains magic.

[S]he sang on that high dark hearth a song that seemed so full of mornings and evenings preserved with all their dews by her magical craft from the days that had else been lost. (6)

As Ziroonderel sings the sword grows harder. It is through the magic of words that Ziroonderel is able to create the sword that will accompany Alveric through his dangerous journey to Elfland.

The witch's creation of the sword mimics how Dunsany creates his Fantasy. It is through his deliberately artful use of the perfect word that he is able to transport his readers into the Fantasy realm. The majority of *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, as with most of Dunsany's Fantastic fiction, takes place within the world we know. Yet, every aspect of this fiction is touched by the Fantasy realm. The kingdom of Erl is in the human world, and yet it is touched by Fantasy even before too much magic arrives there. This seemingly contradictory dual state of being is possible only through Dunsany's language. As Ziroonderel creates magic, and enables Alveric to experience his fantasy, through the use of words and song, Dunsany transports his readers through the same means. When we read Dunsany we are not in a Fantasy because we encounter an Elfin princess, briefly visit the Realm of Feary, join Orion on a unicorn hunt, or become perturbed because a field is the sight of a future battle. We encounter and are firmly planted in the Fantasy realm because buttercups are more beautiful, carts are suddenly humorous, the simple sound of pigeon wings is a roar, and a pigeon loft is a "vortex of restlessness" (*The King of Elfland's Daughter* 160). We view what we know to be common everyday things differently in Dunsany's Fantasy fiction because through his

use of language Dunsany allows us to view our world through his eyes, as Alveric views Erl through Lirazel's.

Both Dunsany and Tolkien held alarming views of where they saw humanity heading. The men used their fiction, in part, to illustrate to their readers that perhaps society's priorities were not correct. Both authors suggest that humans should not seek to dominate or control the natural world, that nature is powerful and beautiful it should be appreciated and left unhindered by human influence. Both authors suggest that technology fueled war was terrifying, and would end in disaster for both the human world and the natural world. An author feeling dissatisfaction with his or her time is not uncommon. However, Tolkien must have found it refreshing to find his fears and sentiments echoed in the work of a man whom he regarded so highly.

Yet, it is perhaps Dunsany's brilliant ability to achieve "Recovery" through masterful use of language that we can best see his profound effect on Tolkien's fictional and critical world view. As Tolkien states, "[r]ecovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining—regaining of a clear view" (77). In the case of Alveric, and in the case of Dunsany's readers, this clear view is similar to how a child views the world. Children marvel at what adults find normal and mundane. Children can find value, beauty, and mystery in what adults often ignore. Tolkien insists we need to clear our view "so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity—from *possessiveness*" (77). This tendency to feel possessive over, and take for granted what is always beside us is the very same impulse that almost ruins Alveric's marriage to Lirazel. Like Tolkien insists we do with our world, Alveric "acquires" Lirazel, and in acquiring

her, ceases to look at her for what she is: natural, wild, and magical, decidedly not human. One of the lessons we must conclude from the *King of Elfland's Daughter* is the very same lesson Tolkien insists is critical to Fantasy in general. There is a profound and valuable magic in the every day, whether the every day is originally from our realm and we no longer see its beauty, or whether it is magical in origin and eventually taken for granted because it has become all too "familiar." Such cases, Dunsany and Tolkien remind us, must be redirected back to the land of Faery so we can glimpse anew what we know all too well.

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