Experiments in Genre: Fantasy and Mimesis in Stephen R. Donaldson

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Fantasy doesn't receive high marks in scholarly circles. Somehow it seems frivolous, connected in our minds with child's play and fairy tales, out of place in the serious adult world of real literature. But post-structural and post-modern criticism has shown us that all fiction--and even history--has an irreducible and essential dimension of fantasy, that literary texts do not reflect reality but construct it. And the old distinction between "novel" and "romance" is really a question of where a text falls on a continuum between the twin impulses of literature to imitate reality and to alter it where both impulses are always mutually implicated.

What would be the consequences to consideration of genre if a writer were to insert novelistic characters into a thoroughly romantic fantasy--and what questions would this raise about the narrative mode of reality and how reality is known and given form by author and character and reader? This interpenetration of worlds is the problematic worked out in Donaldson's fantasy fiction.

In The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever Donaldson creates a novelistic text centered on his focal character, Thomas Covenant, that is superimposed on a romantic text, where all the characters inhabit the same fantastic universe, and the focal character must come to grips with the paradox of the contradictions raised. In The Second Chronicles of Thomas Covenant Donaldson attempts a more unified approach by

creating a classical quest adventure where his focal characters are portrayed both novelistically and romantically. And in Mordant's Need Donaldson creates a fantastic universe completely inhabited by novelistic characters who must find realistic solutions to their problems. That Donaldson is not altogether successful is less important than the value his experiments hold for future explorations of the interplay of fantasy and mimesis.

A QUESTION OF GENRE

Despite Stephen R. Donaldson's popularity among pulp fantasy readers (Meyers 1009), he has received scant notice among critical circles apart from being identified as working within the Tolkien tradition. Criticisms are often aimed at his focal character, Thomas Covenant and at his diction and esoteric vocabulary. At times the Covenant series is handicapped by a writing style that is fine rather than good. Donaldson argues that these faults are a consequence of the epic character of the Covenant stories.

Brian Attebery characterizes Donaldson as a "doubting fantasist" (158) and focuses on Donaldson's "unwilling, unlikable, unbelieving hero," Thomas Covenant. Briefly summarizing The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever, he writes

> Covenant is, in our own world, an author who contracts leprosy and is thereupon rejected by wife, friends, and society. When he is catapulted into the fantasy world, he carries over into it all the bitterness engendered by his disease, even though he is cured of it for the duration of his visit. By the end of the third volume he has rejected the land, betrayed most of his friends there, and pretty much alienated the reader; and then we

> find out that his skepticism is the secret weapon that will destroy the evil Lord Foul and bring happiness to everyone but himself. (Attebery 160)

Attebery concludes that the series "is reduced to a sort of psychotherapy for its hero" and that Donaldson fails to "demonstrate that his world is really a place of wonder and meaning, for that would verify our suspicion that Covenant is an idiot for holding himself aloof" (160).

Donaldson is aware of the difficulties of Covenant's character and argues that he was trying to avoid the "easy answers of a Conan the Barbarian" by introducing a real character who is deeply hurting, who can't overcome his problems by merely waving a magic wand (Personal interview). In "Epic Fantasy in the Modern World", Donaldson argues that The Chronicles is epic literature because it attempts to deal "explicitly with the largest and most important questions of mankind" (13). He explains,

> For that reason, I chose to focus my epic on one "real" human being, Thomas Covenant, a man who personally exemplifies, as dramatically as possible, "The nightmare world, alienation and nausea, the quest for identity, and the (distinctly un-) comic doomsday vision." [Donaldson is quoting James E. Miller in Quests Surd and Absurd.] He is

> an "Unbeliever" precisely because I wanted to bridge the gap between reality and fantasy . . . . Also because I wanted to bring the epic back into contact with the real world, I . . . surrounded him with epic characters . . . which don't in any way pertain to our real experience of life, but which <u>do</u> [emphasis Donaldson's] pertain to the part of us which dreams . . . " (18,19).

It is difficult to accept Donaldson's argument that he is writing epic literature. Much of literature wrestles with the issues of life--often giving literature its enduring value. Donaldson's overriding moral and metaphysical concern that total commitment to any philosophical, moral or religious belief is ultimately disastrous frequently threatens to overwhelm the story. And while his unusual language, marked by obsolete, Latinate, or medical terminology, brings a sense of strangeness (Meyers 1011) to the text, it is not enough to mark his works as epic.

I believe Donaldson's insistence that he has placed a "real" man side by side with "epic" characters is a key to understanding exactly what he has attempted. And his thematic concern for duality thematically parallels what I perceive to be the structural dynamic of the story.

Covenant's unbelief is not to be equated with skepticism, as Attebery appears to assume, but is as dangerous as believing in

the Land. Covenant's dilemma is only worked out when he can stand outside the issues of belief and unbelief, when he can bracket the question of ultimate reality, and act courageously and responsibly from the center of doubt where there are no guarantees, only human choices.

In the same way that the story thematically refuses to commit itself to any truth statement regarding reality, Donaldson has created a text in which genres resist categorization as either novelistic or romantic but remain as both simultaneously. From Covenant's perspective and on a novelistic plane, The Chronicles is psychotherapy. Foul is the manifestation of Covenant's self-despite; the Land is a wish-fulfillment for healing. The paradox of Covenant's position in the Land as savior or destroyer is the working out of Covenant's inner conflicts between his lack of community resulting from his leprosy, his need for companionship and acceptance, and the creative energies of his writing talent. Throughout the story, Covenant insists that the events and characters of his "dream" world are not "real."

But the story is also a romance and operates on the same level of high fantasy as Tolkien's work. For the reader, the Land exists outside Covenant's imagination as a true alternative or secondary world. Mhoram, Elena, Saltheart Foamfollower and the other characters of this world have all the complexity and color of Tolkien's Middle Earth.

The weakness of The Chronicles lies in its inability,

ultimately, to satisfactorily bridge the gap between genres, with the result that the reader never fully accepts Covenant's "realistic" perspective and so rejects Donaldson's protagonist as Attebery and others have done.

A related issue that calls in question the epic character of the Covenant stories is their relationship to Donaldson's most recent work, Mordant's Need. Unlike the Covenant series, Mordant's Need is billed as straight fantasy, but the similarities and parallels between the two suggest a more intimate connection. Viewing his stories, not as epic or fantasy, but as experiments in genre may explain these similarities, for in Mordant's Need, Donaldson successfully melds elements from several genres: novel, romance, science fiction, fairy tale and picaresque, to form a coherent fantasy where his moral and metaphysical concerns develop naturally within the story.

MIMESIS AND FANTASY

Roger Schlobin writes of a colleague who

> expressed great concern that I was wasting my talent and time with such "light fare," [fantasy] as he tactfully put it, and that he had never read a fantasy. I replied, with considerably less tact that I was surprised he had never read Spenser's The Faerie Queene, Dicken's A Christmas Carol, or Shakespeare's The Tempest. To this day, I suspect he's still trying to generate compelling arguments as to why those works are not fantasies, a popular view following such "great traditions" as George Eliot's well-known and negative equation between fantasy and falsehood in Adam Bede (chapter 17, p. 176).(4)

Unfortunately, those who have studied fantasy often have as great a difficulty defining what they mean by fantasy and what works are to be included in its ranks.

Kathryn Hume, in her book Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature, analyzes what she sees as various exclusivist definitions of fantasy. Basing her analysis on her revision of a diagrammatic model of literature offered by M.H. Abrams in The Mirror and the Lamp, she argues that the various

theories regarding the nature of fantasy limit their attention to individual concerns within the totality of literature. Her modification of Abrams' basic schema of the interplay of work, artist, audience and universe centers on the reciprocal relationships of each element of the schema and broadens Abrams' concept of universe into three distinct categories: the world of the author's experience (world-1), the world of the reader's experience (world-2), and the fictive universe and characters of the work itself (9-10). See Figure 1.

With this model, Hume is able to compare implicit and explicit definitions of fantasy, categorizing the concerns of various schools of criticism. For instance, Brian Attebery and Eric Rabkin focus their attention on the fictive world and the creation of a secondary world that overtly violates what is generally accepted as possible (Attebery) where characters must recognize these violations and respond accordingly (Rabkin) (Fantasy and Mimesis 13).

On the other hand, larger definitions like that of J.R.R. Tolkien emphasize not only the creation of a fantasy world, but also the interplay of that world on the conscious perceptions of author and reader alike. For Tolkien, fantasy is a "natural human activity" that engages the author in the act of creating a believable secondary world and rewards the reader through its expressions of recovery (the newness we experience as a result of an altered awareness of the familiar), escape and consolation (16-17). Tolkien's belief in the affirmative powers of fantasy

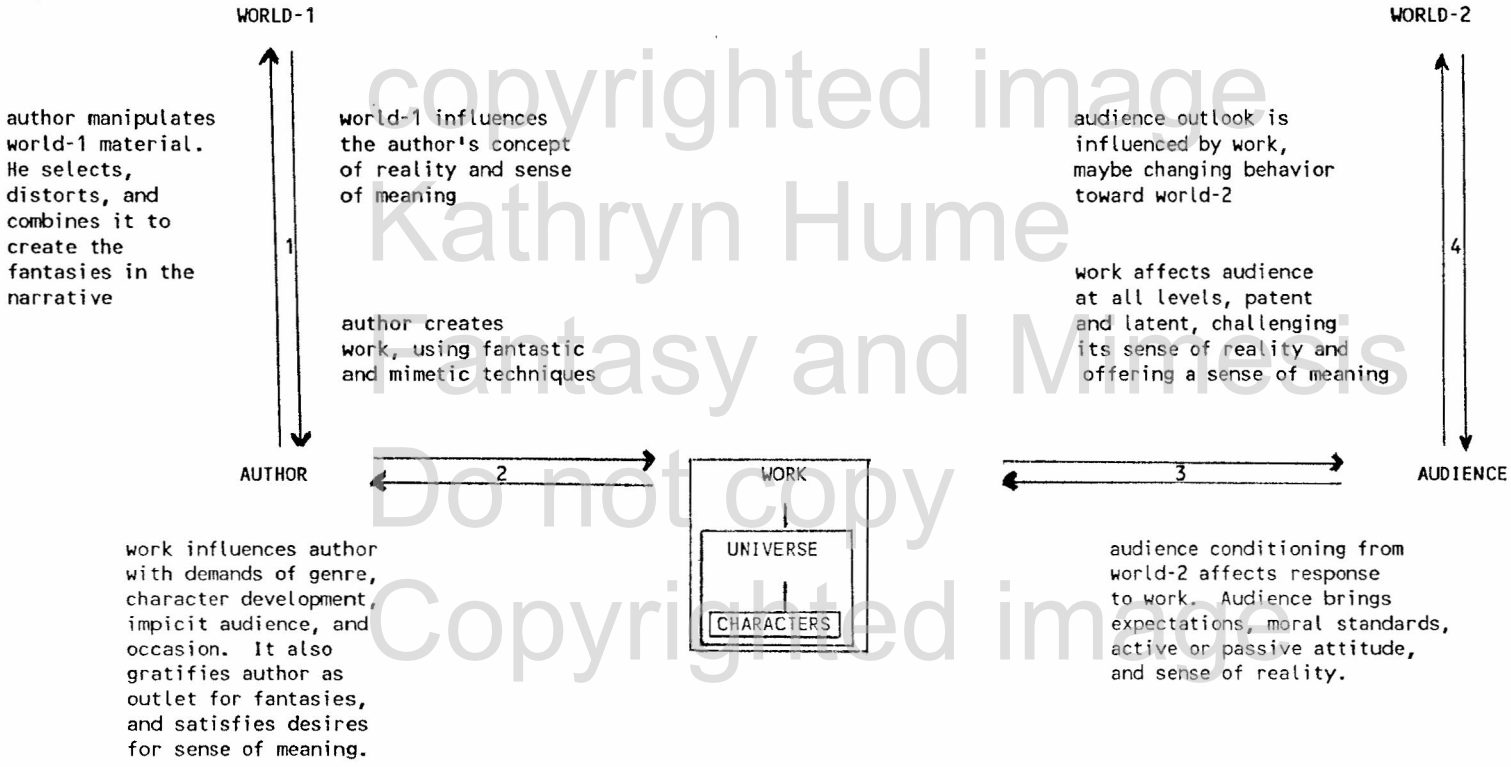

Fig. 1 (Hume, Fantasy and Mimesis 10)

are an influence on Donaldson's thematic concerns and, in consequence, his intermixture of real and fantastic elements.

Despite the broader definitions of Tolkien and others, Hume argues that all exclusive definitions ultimately fail because of their insistence on viewing fantasy as a distinct genre or form (Fantasy and Mimesis 20). Hume maintains that the critical theories of Plato and Aristotle on which western critical theory is based suffer from a bias toward mimesis (Fantasy and Mimesis 5). This classical privileging of mimesis and a modern faith in empiricism has resulted in the arbitrary expulsion of fantasy as a genuine impulse in literary formulation (Schlobin 4).

Most readers not only expect but require texts to refer to the commonalities of life and to possess an "inescapable resemblance to reality" (Fantasy and Mimesis 5). But, as Tolkien argues, fantasy "does not blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. For creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun. . . .If men really could not distinguish between frogs and men, fairy-stories about frog-kings would not have arisen" (Fantasy and Mimesis 16). On the other hand, post-structural theories have exploded the myth that any literature directly portrays reality.

In fact, imaginative departures from consensus reality are an "all-but-universal phenomenon" to be found "in the works of such major authors as Homer and Virgil; Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Pynchon; Cretien de Troyes and Rabelais; Gottfried of Strassburg,

Thomas Mann, and Kafka; Dante and Calvino" (Fantasy and Mimesis 20-21).

It would appear, then, fantasy is not a classification, a pigeon-hole for filing various works of literature. Rather, literature exists along a spectrum whose terminal points are mimesis and fantasy, and fiction arises in the desire to imitate reality and the desire to alter it. No narrative exactly transcribes reality, but, if it is to be recognized as narrative, neither can it abandon it.

While certain genres by nature tend to one or the other end of a broad spectrum, any genre can be invaded by the opposing impulse. But the working out of that impulse will be in line with the strictures inherent to that genre. An analytical reading of Donaldson's stories obliges us to examine carefully the equivocal status of fictive reality and to address those narrative constraints most at issue in contemporary genre criticism.

NOVEL VS. ROMANCE

Richard Chase, in The American Novel and its Tradition, writes

> The imagination that has produced much of the best and most characteristic American fiction has been shaped by the contradictions and not by the unities and harmonies of our culture. . . . (T)here are some literatures which take their form and tone from polarities, opposites, and irreconcilables, but are content to rest in and sustain them, or to resolve them into unities, if at all, only by special and limited means. The American novel tends to rest in contradictions and among extreme ranges of experience (1).

Unlike the English novel, noted for its concern to present life clearly from a strong moral center, the American novel is often characterized by a deep "complexity of feeling" that focuses on the oddities of human nature and its extremes in behavior, thought and feeling. That is, the American novel has often preferred elements of a romantic tradition rather than the mimetic or novelistic tradition of the English (Chase 2).

The following chart summarizes certain distinguishing marks Chase identifies that differentiate the novel from the romance.

	Novel	Romance
View of Reality	close, comprehensive detail	Free, less volume and detail
Character	Complexity of temperament/motive Explicable relations to nature, each other, their social class and the past More important than action or plot Middle class, interest in origins	Two dimensional Ideal relations--abstract and symbolic, deep, narrow, obsessive involvements Prefers action to character Any class, origins mysterious
Plot	Enhance knowledge of character Plausible events	Mythic, allegoric or symbolic forms Symbolic, ideological events

Fig.2 (Chase 12,13)

It is not difficult to see that the novel form lends itself more readily to mimesis or that the romantic form to fantasy. But if Hume is correct in her perception of fantasy as an impulse in fiction, then it should be possible to create fantasies which are novelistic or romantic. The following chart suggests how the impulse to fantasy reveals itself in novelistic and romantic frameworks.

	Novel	Romance
View of Reality	Dreams, Freudian or psychological fantasies	Alternative, secondary world
Character	Realistic, but neurotic or psychotic Explicable relations in terms of psychological	Stock characters, larger than life Ideal relations, archetypal

	processes	
	Story will center on character's state of mind	Story will revolve around character's roles/ actions rather than thoughts or feelings
	Ordinary, everyman	Mythic, symbolic, larger than life
Plot	Psychological fears or wish fulfillment	Functional, mythic/ archetypal patterns
	Possible to explain events in terms of character's state of mind	Magical, suprareal events

Fig.3

Henry James's The Turn of the Screw is a classic example of how fantasy works itself out in the novelistic tradition. The governess is a young woman easily influenced by her emotions as seen in the following conversation between her and Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper, where she looks forward to her first meeting with Miles and reveals her infatuation with his father.

> "You will be carried away by the little gentleman!"
>
> "Well, that, I think, is what I came for--to be carried away. I'm afraid, however," I remember feeling the impulse to add, "I'm rather easily carried away. I was carried away in London!"
>
> I can still see Mrs. Grose's broad face as she took this in. "In Harley Street?"
>
> "In Harley Street."
>
> "Well, miss, you're not the first--and you won't be the last." (James 25)

Later, when she insists that the children are possessed, the reader is unable to decide if her fears are merely the result of an active imagination or a heightened perception of the presence of the evil Quint and Miss Jessel.

For instance, when she describes to Mrs. Grose the figure she has seen looking in the dining room window, Mrs. Grose immediately identifies the intruder as the dead Quint. On the other hand, the governess's non-rational insistence that Quint was looking for Miles could easily be the product of her own intense imagination (James 52-60). Ultimately, the power of this story lies in the ironic tension (Todorov's hesitation between a natural and supernatural explanation) James creates in the slight gap that exists between these two possible realities (Chase 240).

J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings is perhaps the best known work of high fantasy today. Unlike The Turn of the Screw, the story is set outside the real world in a secondary world where goblins, trolls, wizards and magic are ordinary, if not everyday, realities.

In Tolkien, the conflict is sketched in broad strokes between Good and Evil. Faced with the discovery that the hobbit Bilbo's ring is Sauron's great ring of power, the principal characters choose to destroy it believing that its power corrupts. The story follows the larger pattern of a quest full of adventures, dangers and setbacks, and the fulfillment of the quest ends the age, mythically suggesting the end of spring and

the coming of summer. Throughout the story characters seldom change. Strider remains as mysterious and distant when he becomes king as he was when he first joins the Quest. Sam is the faithful follower and homespun companion. Merry and Pippin are the clever young bucks out for adventure, and Frodo is the Ring-bearer, worn out by a responsibility he has carried for too long.

In Donaldson, the realistic cognitive order (a narrative plot governed by human character novelistic in its psychology) and the visionary quest (a fantasy landscape governed by a physics and metaphysics of romance) are overlaid. On the one hand, The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant is a psychological account on the pattern of The Turn of the Screw where fantastic events can be understood as the troubled expressions of Covenant's inner fears and conflicts. But on the other hand, The Chronicles is a transcendental romance set in a "real" alternative world where heroes still live, and magic is possible.

The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever:

Book One: Lord Foul's Bane

The Turn of the Screw is a novelistic fantasy because the interpretation of events is bound up with the governess' perception of reality, between the unresolved possibilities of demonic possession and Freudian fantasy. Donaldson attempts to create a similar psychological dilemma in Lord Foul's Bane.

The novel opens with Covenant on his way to town to pay his telephone bill in person. A successful author, Covenant had contracted leprosy and lost the last two fingers of his right hand. His wife, Joan, has left him taking with her their young son, Roger. Nearly a year has passed since the onset of Covenant's illness, and the town is carefully isolating him at his farm, paying all his bills and dropping off his groceries.

While in town he meets a beggar who sends him a peculiar note about dreams and moral responsibility. Shortly afterward Covenant stumbles and falls in front of an oncoming police car. He regains consciousness in a strange world apparently brought there through the magic of the Staff of Law, a talisman found by an evil cavewight, Drool Rockworm. Covenant is taken from Drool by his master, Lord Foul, who gives him a message of doom for the Lords of the Land. Foul also informs Covenant of his plan to use Covenant in some way to destroy the Land.

Covenant is then found by a young girl named Lena who takes him home where he is hailed as a legendary hero, Berek Halfhand,

and where his white gold wedding band is viewed as a talisman of wild power.

Apparently healed of his leprosy, confused, and unable to believe in the reality of what is happening to him, he is overcome with lust and rapes Lena. Lena's mother, Atiaran, in spite of her hatred for Covenant for what he has done, agrees to lead him to the Lords in their fortress at Revelstone.

Atiaran turns Covenant over to Saltheart Foamfollower, a Giant on his way to Revelstone, and returns home. Covenant delivers his message, and the Lords, fearful of what Drool might do, ride to Mount Thunder, Drool's home, to rescue the Staff of Law. On the way they travel through the Plains of Ra, where the Ranyhyn, great free horses live. The Ranyhyn offer servitude to Covenant, and hoping to escape the demands placed on him, he makes two bargains with them. He demands that they come to him at his call, and guilty for what he has done to Lena, he asks that one Ranyhyn visit her each year.

The Lords retrieve the Staff from Drool with the help of Covenant's ring. Covenant's aid is accidental, and he does not understand how to use the ring. Drool dies, and Covenant fades from the Land to find himself in a hospital back in the real world. He is uninjured, but still a leper. Released from the hospital, uncertain what is real and what is delusion, Covenant returns home.

The tension between ethical responsibility and an ontologically uncertain reality in <u>The Chronicles of Thomas</u>

Covenant the Unbeliever is predicated on the duality of Covenant's role in the Land. His name reflects his role and alludes to both Thomas, the doubting disciple, and the Biblical covenants of God promising redemption. He is a paradox

> everything and nothing,
> hero and fool,
> potent, helpless--
> and with the one word of truth or treachery,
> he will save or damn the Earth
> because he is mad and sane,
> cold and passionate,
> lost and found. (Foul 70)

As Gordon E. Slethaug points out, Covenant is unique in that he is not permitted escape from his primary role as victim in the secondary world, even though his refusal "turns him into victimizer" (Slethaug 22).

But Covenant's refusal to abandon his despair is not a result of self-pity. Covenant's perception of his situation hinges on the fact that he is a leper. In a long intrusive explanation offered as a nightmare memory of actual lectures, certain characteristics of the disease are offered that provide the rationale for Covenant's future behavior.

> Leprosy . . . operates by destroying the
> nerves, . . . produces deformity, largely
> because it negates the body's ability to
> protect itself by feeling and reacting

> against pain, . . . and . . . is irreversible, since the nerves that die cannot be restored. . . . (O)nce you get it you cannot hope for a cure. . . .Most people depend heavily on their sense of touch. . . . They may doubt their eyes and ears, but when they touch something they know it's real. And it is not an accident that we describe the deepest parts of ourselves--our emotions--in terms of the sense of touch. . . . You must fight and change this orientation. (Foul 16-19)

To impress on Covenant the seriousness of his disease, he is shown another victim of leprosy, a West Virginia hermit, who unaware of what was happening to him, allowed the disease to progress unchecked. The description is valuable for its emotional and psychological impact.

> His hands were swollen stumps, fingerless lumps of pink, sick meat marked by cracks and ulcerations from which a yellow exudation oozed through the medication. They hung on thin, hooped arms like awkward sticks. . . . Half of one foot was gone, gnawed away, and in the place of the other was nothing but an unhealable wound.
>
> Then the patient moved his lips to

> speak, and Covenant looked up at his face. His dull, cataractal eyes sat in his face as if they were the center of an eruption. The skin of his cheeks was as white-pink as an albino's; it bulged and poured away from his eyes in waves, runnulets, as if it had been heated to the melting point; and these waves were edged with thick tubercular nodules.
>
> "Kill yourself," he rasped terribly. "Better than this." (Foul 15)

When Covenant finds himself in the Land healed of his leprosy, he can't believe. His life is at stake.

Furthermore, certain aspects of his experience appear to Covenant as evidence that he is dreaming or suffering from a delusion expressed in Freudian imagery. The note given him by the old beggar exactly describes the situation Covenant finds himself in and could have served as the trigger for his fantasy. The two marks of his role as hero are his amputated hand and his white gold wedding band--symbols of his leprosy and his fractured social relationships. The power of his wedding band manifests itself as lightning, a metaphor used of the creative energy of his writing (Foul 5). Covenant views his healing from leprosy as wish-fulfillment, and sees Lord Foul as an expression of his own self-despite.

Covenant's relationships to his wife, Joan, and to Lena are marked by sexual imagery. Joan makes a living by breaking horses

in a way that Covenant describes as "seducing them" (Foul 6). Just before his madness in raping Lena, he tells her that he gave Joan a pair of riding boots for her wedding gift (Foul 90).

Lena is also associated with horses. One of the first things Covenant learns about Lena is her fascination with the Ranyhyn, "wild free horses" who "serve none that they do not themselves choose" (Foul 46-47). Later, when Covenant comes to the Plains of Ra, the Ranyhyn are terrified of him and rather than choosing him, submit themselves to his choice. Driven by his guilt for raping Lena, he demands that one Ranyhyn visit her every year at the last full moon before the middle of spring (Foul 373-374).

Perhaps the most significant detail for Covenant is the circumstances surrounding his entrance into the Land. In each novel he finds himself back in the Land following an injury in the 'real' world. On first entering the Land he is healed, and then in the course of his adventures reduplicates his injuries immediately prior to his return, suggesting to him that his mind was attempting to work out apparent inconsistencies and provide a kind of logic for his dream.

Like Brian Attebery most readers have little trouble accepting the reality of the alternative world Donaldson has created in the Covenant series. The difficulty comes in accepting Covenant's belligerent insistence that the Land does not exist (Personal interview).

That Donaldson was conscious of the need to preserve

Covenant's point of view is evident from comments he made regarding "Gildenfire", a section cut from the original version of The Illearth War for "reasons of narrative logic" (Regals 82). He writes

> It was crucial to the presentation of Covenant's character that he had some good reasons for doubting the substantial "reality" of the Land. But all his reasons were undercut when I employed someone like Korik--a character with no bond, however oblique, to Covenant's world--for a narrative center. . . . In using Korik as I had, I had informed the reader that the people of the Land were in fact, "real": I had unintentionally denied the logic of Covenant's Unbelief. (Regals 82)

However, as Donaldson admits, the issue of the reality of the Land was "already too fragile for its own good (Regals 82).

Unlike The Turn of the Screw which is a first person narrative and therefore limits itself to the governess' perceptions of events, Lord Foul's Bane has an omniscient narrator. While much of the novel might be viewed as a limited third person narration with Covenant as the focus, a shift in focalization occurs in chapter seven with the rape of Lena. Here the alternating use of he and she clearly indicates narrative shifts from Covenant's point of view to Lena's (Foul 90-92). The

text is revealed as the work of a third person omniscient narrator and not the limited third person narration of Covenant.

Todorov points out in The Fantastic that the first person narrator as a character can be deceived regarding the truth of what he is reporting, but "what is given in the author's name . . . escapes the test of truth;" a point of view expressed by a non-represented narrator leaves "no occasion . . . to doubt his words" or the reality of the fantastic event (83). Donaldson apparently chose a third person narrative stance believing that he could shift point of view to characters in Covenant's immediate proximity without damaging either the reader's hesitation in accepting the reality of the Land or Covenant's credibility in disbelieving (Regals 82). But privy to the knowledge that the Land truly exists, the reader fails to develop the necessary sympathy for Covenant's point of view. As a result Covenant's unbelief seems unreasonable or contrived by the author. Instead of a "real" human being struggling to cope with "real" problems, the reader is left with a flawed romance whose hero is "an idiot for holding himself aloof" (Attebery 60).

The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever:

Book Two: The Illearth War

By the time Donaldson had published the first book of The Second Chronicles of Thomas Covenant he had left the issue of narrative stance and its attendant problems of Covenant's credibility open. As he writes concerning his decision to publish "Gildenfire"

> Since it . . . will surely not be read by anyone unfamiliar with The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever . . . the question of whether or not the Land is ultimately "real" (whether or not a character like Korik is sufficiently "actual" to serve as a narrative viewpoint) no longer matters. In reality as in dreams, what matters is the answer we find in our hearts to the test of Despite. (Regals 83)

With The Illearth War Donaldson's use of mimesis begins to shift away from the question of ontological reality and focus on characterization.

The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever are full of Christian and Biblical references, from Old Testament passages on lepers to the dual significance of Covenant's name. However, for Donaldson, religious belief and moral responsibility often find themselves at odds with each other.

> (A)n awful lot of religious teaching doesn't spend much time on moral responsibility. . . . One of the reasons that I chose to deal with a character who's a rapist was to confront this whole question of consequences . . . . The problem with believers is that they have no restraint built into their use of power. Even if we could say a principle they believe in contains some strengths, still, ultimately you arrive at the logical position which is anything you do in support of these principles you believe in has got to be okay because the principles are right--they're true, they must be defendable. So now you have inquisitions, now you have jihads, now you have religious wars. You end up behaving exactly the opposite of what you're saying, and yet the logic is impeccable. (Personal interview)

In many respects The Illearth War is much closer to romantic fantasy than Lord Foul's Bane. While Covenant still holds on to the tattered fragments of his unbelief, he begins to come to terms with the Land's demands on him, and "his refusal to let go of what he considers the importance of reality" (Personal interview) appears as strength rather than weakness or mere obstinance. Covenant's position is also brought into sharper

focus as he is contrasted to another man from the "real" world, Hile Troy. Unlike Covenant, Troy accepts the Land and accedes to its demands on him, only to fail.

Donaldson also contrasts two characters from within the fantasy world: Elena, High Lord and Covenant's illegitimate daughter, and Lord Mhoram. Both face their responsibilities but in different ways. Elena is confident in her belief in her own sufficiency to meet the needs demanded of her, while Mhoram realizes he is only human with a human susceptibility for failure.

In The Illearth War Donaldson experiments further with narrative conventions of reality and fantasy. By contrasting typical romantic characters of heroic proportions with novelistic characters beset by self-doubt who must come to grips with the ethical consequences of their behavior, Donaldson attempts to circumvent the criticism often leveled against fantasy's easy optimism regarding human goodness. And by contrapositioning primary and secondary world characters, Donaldson counters the "typically Freudian slur at escapist reality" (Slethaug 22) by providing models of both primary and secondary world characters who cannot escape those ethical demands.

	Novelistic	Romantic
Primary Universe	Covenant	Hile Troy
Secondary Universe	Mhoram	Elena

Fig. 4

Using the power of the Staff of Law, Elena has called Covenant back to the Land. Forty years have passed, and Foul's army is preparing to march on Revelstone. Covenant accidently uses his ring to trigger the power of the krill, a weapon from the Old Lords. This in turn brings a creature made by Kevin before the Ritual of Desecration who holds the secret to Kevin's Seventh Ward of Power. While Troy with Mhoram and the other Lords prepare to lead an army against Foul, Covenant and Elena seek the Seventh Ward, the Blood of the Earth.

The controlling metaphor of The Illearth War is seeing. Hile Troy is an eyeless man from our world brought to the Land by Atiaran, the mother of Lena. As a result of the healing powers of the Land, he acquires exceptional sight during the day, but is still nearly blind at night. In our world Troy was a military strategist, valuable for his ability to "see" the proper defense. He brings this talent to bear on the war with Foul.

As the war progresses, Troy must constantly adjust his plans to meet the unforeseen exigencies of war. In the process more and more lives are lost. Failing to receive the twenty day

warning of Foul's movements he had expected, he is forced to march his army at a killing pace in order to reach Doom's Retreat, a warren of ravines where he hopes to disrupt and overcome Foul's army. Once there, he realizes his plan will fail because he has underestimated the crushing size of Foul's forces.

Overwhelmed by his own need to uphold his guarantees of success, he pressures Mhoram to promise his help, in the belief he can foist his responsibility onto the Lord's shoulders by placing the success of the retreat into Garroting Deep on Mhoram's ability to call Caerroil Wildwood, Forestal of the Deep to their rescue. Mhoram succeeds, and when the Forestal demands a price, Troy rashly promises and is taken by the Forestal to be his apprentice.

The most striking feature of Elena, High Lord and illegitimate daughter of Covenant, is her seeming lack of focus.

> Her eyes invited study. Even while they regarded him, they seemed to look beyond him or through him, as if the space he occupied were shared by something entirely different. He thought fleetingly that perhaps she did not actually, concretely see him at all. (Illearth 116)

As she and Covenant make their way to the seventh ward, Covenant learns that because of the bargain he had made with the Ranyhyn, Elena has shared in the Kelenbrhrabanal, the horserite of the Ranyhyn in which they rage at their betrayal by Foul (Illearth

398). Despite his horror at the savageness he sees in her, he makes a new bargain with himself, aiding Elena in order to gainsay his own responsibility (Illearth 361).

Believing Kevin's Act of Desecration has taught Kevin a great strength, Elena uses the power of the seventh Ward to break the Law of Death and call Kevin back from the grave to do battle with Lord Foul. Frightened of the consequences of his newest bargain, Covenant attempts to prevent her action but is unsuccessful. Overcome by the power of the Illearth stone, Kevin returns to fight Elena, and they destroy each other (Illearth 405+).

Both Covenant and Lord Mhoram stand as contrasts to Troy and Elena. Covenant recognizes that no one is sufficient in himself to fight evil. Although he 'bargains' to foist his responsibility for the Land on Elena's shoulder, Covenant cannot finally accept his duplicity and attempts to dissuade Elena but is prevented by her own sense of self-importance and destiny.

Troy accepts the role of hero demanded of him by the Land. Unable to fulfill his promises, he uses Mhoram to extricate himself from the dilemma of his responsibility. Unlike Elena, Mhoram recognizes his own mortality. He has no internal guarantees of his sufficiency. Despite his self doubt, however, he acts, and without accepting the burden of Troy's responsibility or denying his own, he is able to call the Forestal and save the army.

In contrast to most fantasies, the solutions to the Land's

problems ultimately don't lie in magic rings or arcane powers. The answers to be found are human answers, the results of human choice and action with all the limitations that humans bear. Both Hile and Elena believe themselves sufficient heroes to meet the Land's need and both suffer the consequences of that belief. Mhoram balances belief in himself with self-awareness of his own limitations. And Covenant avoids the danger of accepting a responsibility he cannot meet. Donaldson has confirmed the human element in fantasy, not by creating a masterful epic, but by introducing novelistic characters into a romance setting.

In the final volume of the first trilogy, The Power That Preserves, Mhoram and Covenant each must fully come to terms with their mortality and their responsibility, and in doing so achieve a heroic stature, which if more modest, is also more credible.

The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever: Book Three: The Power That Preserves

In the earlier novels, particularly Lord Foul's Bane, the issue of genre centered on Covenant's perceptions of reality and the credibility of his Unbelief. Donaldson's narrative concerns substantiating that credibility by limiting the narrative to Covenant's immediate sphere have already been noted (see pp. 20-22). However, despite the removal of "Gildenfire" from The Illearth War, Donaldson includes large sections of narrative from Troy's point of view as well as smaller sections from Mhoram's. This trend develops further in The Power That Preserves. Here the narrative is divided into two large sections where the narrative is focalized through Covenant and Mhoram as well as a smaller section focalized through Lena's fiance, Triock.

The multiple focalization serves two purposes. First it emphasizes the parallels drawn between Mhoram and Covenant in The Illearth War. Secondly it is tied to Donaldson's thematic considerations as he works toward a resolution of the tensions between Covenant's grounds for belief and unbelief.

As the novel opens, Covenant, torn by his grief for Elena and unable to find proof of the Land's reality, gives in to madness. He neglects himself, wandering the countryside where he stumbles on a young girl about to be bitten by a snake. Running to meet her, he stumbles, falls, and losing consciousness, is called to the Land by Mhoram from Revelstone.

Covenant refuses the Land's need in order to aid the girl and awakens back in the real world where the girl has been bitten by the rattler. He manages to get her back to her parents, collapses, and wakes to find himself back in the Land, but this time on Kevin's Watch. He has been called there by Saltheart Foamfollower and Triock. Seven years have passed, and the Land is suffering from an unnatural and harsh winter brought on by Lord Foul.

Covenant is taken to Mithil Stonedown where he finds Lena, now a crazed old woman. Overwhelmed by his sense of blame for all that has happened, Covenant decides to destroy Foul in his stronghold, Ridjeck Thome. He, Lena, and Foamfollower set out but are captured by the Ramen. With the Ramen is Bannor, who with the other Bloodguard has forsworn his oath after three of their number were corrupted by the fragment of the Illearth Stone taken from the Raver who destroyed the Giants. The Ramen are betrayed; Covenant and Lena are separated from the others. Lena dies saving Covenant's life.

Wounded, he goes mad, but is healed by an Unfettered One. Triock, who has been possessed by a Raver, captures Covenant and takes him to Elena. She has been recalled from the dead and, using the Staff of Law, holds the Land in winter at Foul's behest. Foamfollower and Bannor are also prisoners. Without quite understanding how, Covenant overcomes her, destroying the Staff. Covenant and Foamfollower travel on to Ridjeck Thome, where with the help of the jherrin, castoff creatures of living

mud, Covenant overcomes Foul and destroys the Illearth Stone.

Meanwhile Mhoram, surrounded by Foul's army, has been struggling with the realization that the power the Lords have been seeking is unrestrained passion, and that their Oath of Peace has actually been the reason they have been unable to master Kevin's Lore. Mhoram fears that the use of this power may lead some one of them to commit another Ritual of Desecration.

Trell, Lena's father, overcome with his own sense of failure, stumbles onto the secret, nearly destroying Revelstone in his despair. In restraining him, Mhoram's great love for Revelstone triggers the power, and he discovers that this strength may be called up by positive as well as negative passions.

As the siege continues, Mhoram realizes desperate action is needed but fears desecration. Caught in his own personal dilemma, he struggles to have faith in the necessity of attacking the Giant Raver leading Foul's army. Mhoram leads his forces against the Raver just as the Waynhim lead their own attack. In the battle, Mhoram is separated from the others, but drawing on his inner strength, and using the power of the krill, defeats the Raver.

The novel closes with the creator of the land returning Covenant to his own world. First, however, he shows him that Mhoram has also triumphed and that the Lords have chosen to search for their own power, one that cannot be turned against the Land. The creator informs Covenant that in his own world

Covenant lies dying in a hospital bed. He offers to cure Covenant of his leprosy, but Covenant is unable to believe this fantasy and refuses. The creator does, however, give him the strength to survive.

Throughout the novels, Covenant has been overwhelmed by the Land's demands on him against his incessant need to deny its reality. In The Power That Preserves Covenant learns that

> (o)nly by affirming them both [the Land and his Unbelief], accepting both poles of the contradiction, keeping them both whole, balanced, only by steering himself not between them but with them, could he preserve them both, preserve both the Land and himself, find the place where the parallel lines of his impossible dilemma met. The eye of the paradox. (Power 363)

In this last book of the trilogy Covenant has to learn to accept both sides of the dilemma regardless of the fact that they are mutually exclusive.

While willingness to accept a paradoxical reality may appear a contorted exercise in mental gymnastics, in actuality, it differs little from the position of nuclear physicists today who argue that light is both a wave and a particle or that matter is both mass and energy. In effect, Covenant refuses to accept the limitations imposed by "either/or" and chooses instead "both/and."

As a result his defeat of Foul is not permanent. Although he strips Foul of power, Covenant refuses to destroy him, believing that such an act will only change Covenant from victim to victimizer, only become a new act of self-despite. Instead he begs Foamfollower to laugh, reminding him that "joy is in the ears that hear." Foul fades away, and Covenant embraces the Illearth Stone, "hugged it to his breast like a chosen fate" (Power That Preserves 372-374).

Donaldson's solution involves resisting final answers. Unable to escape the demands of the primary universe (i.e. the reality of his leprosy), Covenant, nevertheless, cannot refuse the Land's need. Covenant finds the equilibrium between the opposing forces of hope and despair, denying neither, accepting both.

Donaldson suggests that the human equation is always an open one, where choices have unexpected consequences. His heroes learn to accept their limitations and, more important, accept themselves, with all their weaknesses and their strengths, to do the best they are capable of, and if that is insufficient, to accept that as well.

The Second Chronicles of Thomas Covenant

Book One: The Wounded Land

Book Two: The One Tree

Book Three: White Gold Wielder

Throughout The First Chronicles Donaldson has set up a series of contrasts which I have argued are symptomatic of two genres at work. Although all have not been dealt with, the following chart lists several of the antitheses apparent throughout the series.

Novel	Romance
Reality, Unbelief	The Land, Belief
Dream fantasy	Myth fantasy
Leprosy Self Savagery Rape	Health Society Community Relationship
Head	Heart

Fig. 5

In the last book of the first trilogy, Donaldson attempts to resolve these antitheses as he answers the thematic dilemma posited in the opening chapters of the first novel: Is Covenant responsible for his behavior if he is, as he believes, merely dreaming?

The solution Covenant achieves in The First Chronicles

involves duality, accepting both the reality and unreality of the Land. Covenant's name, with its Biblical allusions, reflected this duality: Thomas, recalling the disciple who refused to believe without physical proof, and Covenant, suggesting obligation and duty. However, the name Linden Avery (whom Covenant titles the Chosen) suggests only affirmation. The linden tree has heart-shaped blossoms (recalling the beggar's words to Linden "There is also love in the world" Wounded Land 15), and her last name has as its root, *aver*, to affirm with confidence. In The Second Chronicles Covenant attempts a more definitive answer to the dilemmas he has posited in the earlier novels.

In consequence, The Second Chronicles lacks the obvious demarcation of genres apparent in The First Chronicles. Linden and Covenant appear as romantic characters, their pasts shrouded in mystery and legend. While the reader is familiar with the facts of Covenant's past, Avery's is only hinted at--a mother who died of cancer, a father who committed suicide, murder, and guilt for her parents' deaths. In addition, Avery's inability to accept the reality of a life of deliberate evil, insisting that it is only sickness, suggests that a relativistic view of the world is inadequate, that moral categories of black and white do exist. A further fact that lessens the novelistic impact of The Second Chronicles is that, unlike The First Chronicles, once Covenant and Linden arrive in the Land they remain to the end of the series. As a result, the alternative universe receives a

narrative reification. Finally, in The Second Chronicles the issues at stake are internal and not external, moral rather than epistemological.

In fact, the three novels of The Second Chronicles follow the classic romance form of the successful quest described by Frye in Anatomy of Criticism. Each book corresponds to the three main stages: **agon** or conflict, often involving a perilous journey and preliminary adventures (The Wounded Land); **pathos** or death-struggle (The One Tree); and **anagnorisis** or discovery (White Gold Wielder) (Frye 187).

AGON--The Wounded Land

The Wounded Land is comprised of four sections. The prologue, set in the real world, introduces Linden Avery and provides the motivation for Covenant's return to the Land. Part I (Need) establishes the Land's agony under the Sunbane, Avery's distress in seeing the Land's need, and the beginning of Covenant's loss of control over his power. It ends when the members of the quest reach Andelain. Part II (Vision) marks Covenant's growing awareness of the answer to the Sunbane which culminates in a soothtell in the Clave. Part III (Purpose) marks the beginning of the actual quest to reach the One Tree and ends when the Quest leaves the Land with the Giants. The Wounded Land fits Frye's definition nicely, the prologue serving as preliminary adventure, Parts I and II as perilous journey, and

Part III, as the inception of the quest for the One Tree.

The book also establishes the principal lines of conflict: Foul and Covenant, Foul and Avery, Covenant and Avery, and the Clave (controlled by Foul) and the Quest. It introduces several mysterious figures: Linden Avery, whose troubled and unexplained relationship with her parents fits her as a chosen vehicle for both the creator and Foul; Vain, created by the ur-viles, enemies of the Land, but given to Covenant by Foamfollower, whom he has every reason to trust; and Cable Seadreamer, whose Earth-Sight and vision of the consequences of the Sunbane have robbed him of speech and led the Giants from their ancient home to the Land.

Linden Avery is a doctor who has recently taken residency at the county hospital. The chief of staff, Dr. Berenford, with an air of mystery, persuades her to visit Covenant. On the way she sees a beggar in an ocher robe who collapses from a heart attack. She performs CPR until she is exhausted but saves his life. The beggar tells her she will not fail, however Foul may assail her, that there is also love in the world, and to be true (Wounded Land 15).

At Covenant's she discovers Joan, Covenant's ex-wife, who is possessed by Foul. More than ten years have passed since Joan left Covenant. As time passed, Joan, unable to assuage the guilt she felt for abandoning Covenant, became prey to Foul. Avery cannot accept the possibility that Joan is possessed. She insists that Joan suffers from madness.

Some time later, she returns to Covenant's to see Joan about

to be offered in sacrifice by a cult controlled by Foul. Covenant rescues Joan by offering himself in trade. As Avery rushes to Covenant, she is overcome by a figure of evil in the sacrificial fire. Covenant is struck a death blow, and Avery receives a glancing blow to the head. They awake on Kevin's Watch.

Covenant's belief that the Land is a dream is offered to Linden as an escape from insanity more than as a viable alternative, even though there are suggestions that the interpretation is accurate (cf. Avery's dream, The One Tree, 20-22). Avery accepts his explanation, unwilling to believe in the Land because she refuses to believe in Foul or in the existence of total and deliberate evil.

Having arrived in the Land, Covenant discovers that 3,500 years have passed and much has changed. The Stonedowners and Woodhelven have forgotten their lore. The Land is afflicted by the Sunbane, a corruption of the Law of Nature which forces the Land to endure three day cycles of fertility, drought, pestilence and rain in a random and disorderly succession. Led by the Clave, which has replaced the Council of Lords, the people of the Land practice blood sacrifice in an attempt to control the Sunbane.

Foul secretly controls the Clave through a Raver. The Clave has warned everyone to watch for Covenant and to deliver him to the Clave to be put to death. Covenant manages to convince Sunder, the leader of Mithil Stonedown, to release him, and

together with Linden, they travel to Revelstone where Covenant hopes to find the answers he needs to defeat the Sunbane.

Linden Avery is tortured by the Sunbane. While all the inhabitants of the Land have lost their health sense, and Covenant, because of his leprosy or his sacrifice at Foul's hand, has not recovered his, she sees the corruption behind the Sunbane. Even the sun of fertility is a writhing agony to her health sense.

On their journey, Covenant is repeatedly attacked by Ravers who infect him with a venom that will eventually drive him insane and cause his wild magic to run rampant.

Near Andelain, the quest rescues from the Clave a woman of Crystal Stonedown named Hollian who can foresee the Sunbane. Covenant enters Andelain alone and meets Hile Troy and his Dead--Mhoram, Elena, Bannor, and Foamfollower. He is given riddles and half-knowledge and a creature of the ur-viles named Vain.

While Covenant is in Andelain, the rest of the quest is captured by the Clave led by Gibbon-Raver. With Vain, Covenant travels to the Clave, helped on his way by the Waynhim, who have kept alive flora and fauna from the Land before the Sunbane in underground caverns. While at Revelstone, Vain finds the heels of the Staff of Law and takes them to wear on one wrist and ankle. Covenant submits to a soothtell and learns that Gibbon is a Raver and that the Sunbane exists as a result of the loss of the Staff of Law. Freeing his companions from the cells where they have been imprisoned and joined by Haruchai, who were also

prisoners of the Clave (and kin to the Bloodguard), Covenant leads them to the ocean where he meets Giants who have received a vision of the Sunbane and have come to destroy it. Covenant takes the Giants to Coercri and tells the tale of the destruction of the Unhomed (The Illearth War). Covenant convinces the Giants to aid him in his search for the One Tree so that he may make a new Staff of Law. Sunder and Hollian return to the Land to muster resistance to the Clave.

PATHOS--The One Tree

The One Tree narrates the adventures of the quest from leaving the Land to the resolution of the Quest at the Isle of the One Tree. The first leg of the journey involves a trip to Elemesnedene home of the Elohim, who are Earthpower incarnate. On the way Linden discovers a Raver on board who attacks Covenant through a pack of rats. Avery reluctantly attempts twice to enter Covenant in order to induce him to accept medication and is successful on the second attempt.

On reaching Elemesnedene, the Elohim proclaim Linden the Sun-sage, implying that the fate of the quest is hers. They denigrate Covenant, only recognizing him to grant his request to release the knowledge of the way to the One Tree given him by Hile Troy in Andelain. In doing so, they impose a type of catatonia on Covenant that leaves him conscious of events around him but incapable of either action or interest in his

surroundings. They also attempt to imprison Vain.

Leaving Elemesnedene, the quest is joined by one of the Elohim, Findail the Appointed. Findail has been chosen by the Elohim to meet the Land's need but refuses to reveal his role or aid the quest. The ship is once again attacked by a Raver during a terrific storm in which the ship is severely damaged although Covenant is protected from further injections of venom. The decision is made to enter the harbor of Bhrathairealm for repairs.

Bhrathairealm sits on the edge of the Great Desert and for years was overrun by Sandgorgons, powerful desert creatures singlehandedly capable of destroying an entire city. The Sandgorgons had been imprisoned by a magician, Kasreyn of the Gyre, who now rules the city and attempts to possess Covenant and take his ring. In defending Covenant, Hergrom, one of the Haruchai, kills a servant and is condemned to risk his life against a Sandgorgon, who is released when Hergrom calls the Sandgorgon's name, Nom. Hergrom is killed in the fight, and Ceer, another of the Haruchai, is wounded. Kasreyn forces Linden to possess Covenant's mind so that he can obtain the ring.

Linden seems to obey only to take Covenant's catatonia on herself while implanting the suggestion that he call Nom. Covenant does, Kasreyn flees to escape being killed by the Sandgorgon, and Covenant overpowers the creature, then releases it on condition it not kill him. Kasreyn is killed, and the quest resumes.

On reaching the Isle of the One Tree, Brinn, the leader of the Haruchai overpowers the Guardian of the Isle and takes his place. He leads the quest to the tree but refuses further assistance.

Covenant attempts to remove a branch from the tree to fashion into a new Staff of Law but is prevented by Cable Seadreamer, who sacrifices himself to reveal that the quest has been manipulated by Foul all along. The One Tree is protected by the Worm of the World's End. Any attempt on the tree will rouse the Worm and destroy the world.

Seeing the danger, Avery is able to restrain Covenant, who filled with venom is capable of destroying the Arch of Time and ending the world himself. Diverting his power, Covenant attempts to send Avery back to the real world, but she resists him, knowing that she can't save his life there unless he returns with her.

At the center of The One Tree is the myth of the Worm of the World's End. The story, with variations, is twice repeated in the narrative (by Pitchwife, a deformed Giant and husband to the First of the Search, 53-55; by Daphin of the Elohim, 124-125). According to the legend, the Worm had awakened to devour the bright beings of the Universe. Once sated, the Worm grew dormant. From within, the power of the stars created a rough skin of Earth which encase the worm until it rouses.

Pitchwife, speaking of the Worm, says, "Every creation contains destruction, as life contains death " (The One Tree 54).

Kasreyn repeats this idea of imperfection in perfection, explaining to Covenant

> You have seen . . . that I possess an ocular of gold. Purest gold--a rare and puissant metal in such hands as mine. With such aids, my arts work great wonders. . . . But my arts are also pure . . . and in a flawed world purity cannot endure. . . . But you possess white gold. . . . an imperfect metal--an unnatural alliance of metals--and in all the Earth it exists nowhere but in the ring you bear. . . . Its imperfection is the very paradox of which the Earth is made, and with it a master may form perfect works and fear nothing. (The One Tree 271-272)

In Elemesnedene, Pitchwife and his wife, the leader of the Giants, are shown a vision of Pitchwife "as I might be in dreams. . . . of untainted birth and perfect growth . . . straight and tall, . . . in all ways immaculately made, and beautiful with the beauty of Giants" (The One Tree 176). But each rejects the vision because "it was not I who stood there" (176) "For all his cunning, that Elohim could not equal the joy that enlightens Pitchwife" (181).

It is the acceptance and affirmation of personal imperfection that lies at the heart of the death-struggle both Avery and Covenant must face. Covenant fears that in sacrificing

himself for Joan, he has become the Despiser's tool and lost his freedom of choice (The One Tree 395+). He is trapped between isolation and destruction, between his inability to totally control his venom-enhanced power and his fear that he must surrender his ring and thereby deny his self-purpose and identity.

Like Covenant, Linden Avery is also caught between her inadequacies and her need to act. Two events from her past are revealed which have controlled the tenor of her life and complicate her ability to accept herself and her possible role in meeting the Land's need.

When she was eight years old, her father committed suicide. Linden discovered him in the attic. He had cut his wrists and was bleeding to death. Before she realized what was happening, he had locked her in with him. She screamed and cried, but her mother was at church, and no one heard. Her crying made her father angry, and he beat her, covering her with his blood, blaming her for his failures. Finally, he fell back, eyes glazing, and in a last attempt to reach him, she told him that if he died, she wouldn't love him anymore. His last words were "You never loved me anyway." A long time later, he finally dies, laughing at her (The One Tree 81-84).

Following her father's suicide, Linden's mother was forced to sell their belongings, and trapped in her own self-pity and bitterness began blaming Linden for her husband's death. When Linden was fifteen, her mother contracted an incurable cancer.

By the time the doctor realized she was actually sick and not just bidding for attention, there was nothing left to do but hospitalize her until she died.

Out of school for the summer, Linden sat with her mother each day, listening while she begged to die and blamed Linden for her troubles. Her mother refused to look at Linden or acknowledge her presence, and the doctors and nurses, unable to bear the woman's complaints, left Linden alone with her, only entering the room when necessary. Linden was given boxes of tissues to wipe away the sweat and the mucus that dribbled from her mother's mouth. One day, after about a month of facing her mother's suffering and recriminations, Linden stuffed tissues into her mother's mouth until she suffocated, and then told the nurses her mother had stopped breathing (The One Tree 386-390).

Avery's life has been one of denial, denying her love for her parents, her guilt for her mother's death--even her life as a doctor has been one of denying death rather than affirming life (The One Tree 15). Her greatest fear is that the only answer to evil is amputation, and if the infection has gone too far, death (The One Tree 38-39). Burdened by the growing evidence that she may be the Land's succor and not Covenant, she is torn between possessing Covenant and wresting the ring from him or paralyzed inaction. Torn between the opposing forces of her nature--her paralysis and her need to be a healer, between her hunger for power and her sense that possession is evil, a violation of personal freedom and choice--she chooses a middle path of pain,

where, like Covenant, she takes doom on herself (c.f. the events surrounding her taking Covenant's catatonia on herself--305ff).

In the realization of their love for each other, Linden and Covenant begin the path that will lead them to healing and self-discovery.

ANAGNORISIS--<u>White Gold Wielder</u>

After his failure at the Isle of the One Tree, Covenant comes face to face with the doubt which has haunted him from the moment he entered the Land. He reveals to Linden the truth he has kept hidden from her

> Nothing here interrupts the physical continuity of the world we came from. What happens here is self-contained. . . . I go into the Land hurt--possibly dying. A leper. And I'm healed. . . . But before I left the Land, something always happened to duplicate the shape I was in earlier. . . . What happens here doesn't change what's going on there. All it does is change the way we feel about it. . . . I didn't want you to know. I didn't think I had the right to ask you to love a dead man. (<u>White Gold Wielder</u> 21)

Linden refuses to allow Covenant to give up, to blame himself for failure as if all that Foul has done is Covenant's

fault, and Covenant realizes that she needs an answer to her grief, that there is still something he can do.

> Leprosy itself was defeat, complete and incurable. Yet even lepers had reasons to go on living. Atiaran had told him that it was the task of the living to give meaning to the sacrifices of the dead; but now he saw that the truth went further: to give meaning to his own death. And to the prices the people he loved had already paid. (White Gold Wielder 23)

The quest turns back to the Land but is caught in a storm, and the ship is trapped in an ice floe. Covenant and Linden with a small party leave the ship and travel across the ice to Revelstone. On the way they are attacked by creatures of ice and are rescued by the Waynhim. The Waynhim have been reduced to a handful by the ur-viles who believed the Waynhim had revealed Vain's purpose to Covenant.

Later Covenant and his party are met by Sunder and Hollian. They have had little success in mustering resistance. The Clave has increased its demand for sacrifice, taking the youngest and strongest from each village. Sunder is additionally troubled at the failure of the quest by his fears for Hollian who is pregnant with his child.

Reaching Revelstone, Covenant is attacked by Gibbon and struggles to contain his wild magic which is now completely black

with venom. Unable to trust himself to win entry to Revelstone without destroying the Arch of Time, he calls Nom. Nom breaches the gate, and Covenant and Linden pursue Gibbon. Covenant attacks Gibbon, but is unable to beat him without losing all restraint. Gibbon, wanting to further torture Covenant, attempts to possess Honnescrave, Master of the Giantship and Seadreamer's brother. Honnescrave resists, holding Gibbon captive in his body, and Nom destroys them both.

Torn by power and his need for release, Covenant enters the Banefire which the Clave used to support the Sunbane. Somehow he is not destroyed. Wild magic, venom, flesh and blood are fused in him. As a result, Covenant can no longer use his power without corrupting the Arch, but he believes Foul can no longer use him either.

Leaving the Haruchai to restore and protect Revelstone, Covenant and Linden, the First and Pitchwife, Vain and Findail, and Sunder and Hollian set out to best Foul in his stronghold, Kiril Threndor in Mount Thunder. On the way they are attacked by Sunbane corrupted ur-viles who attempt to destroy Vain. Hollian is killed defending him, but Sunder refuses to accept her death. Arriving at Andelain he meets Hollian's spirit and is provoked by Hile Troy into killing Hile. As a result the Law of Life is broken, and Hollian is restored. But neither she nor Sunder can leave Andelain because their lives are now "sustained, and in some manner defined, by the sovereign Earthpower of the Andelainian Hills" (White Gold Wielder 352-353).

The following night in Andelain, Linden meets the spirit of High Lord Kevin, who first invoked the Ritual of Desecration and destroyed the Land in his attempt to beat Foul. He warns her that Covenant has decided to surrender his ring to Foul and tries to convince her Covenant is now totally corrupt.

Linden confronts Covenant and the spirits of his dead friends, Bannor, Elena, Foamfollower and Mhoram. Covenant admits to intending to give Foul the ring, asking Linden to trust him, but she is unable to.

The quest leaves Andelain and enters Mount Thunder where they are betrayed by Findail. Vain and Findail fall into a magma pit and are believed lost. Pitchwife and the First are trapped by Cavewights, and Covenant and Linden are captured by the remaining two Ravers who deliver them to Foul after one of them possesses Linden.

Linden resists the Raver and defeats him just as Covenant is surrendering his ring to Foul. Possessing Covenant, she is ready to fight Foul but

> Covenant's gaze held her. . . . How could he speak, do anything other than repudiate her? She had taken his will from him--had dehumanized him as thoroughly as if she were a Raver. . . . She had known all along that possession in every guise was evil; but she had tried to believe otherwise, both because she wanted power and because she wanted to

> save the Land. . . . She could have argued that even evil was justified. . . . Deliberately, she let him go. (White Gold Wielder 445)

Covenant surrenders the ring and Foul kills him, but when Foul attempts to break the Arch, the blast of white gold fire strikes Covenant's spirit, each blast making Covenant stronger and Foul weaker until Foul fades away.

Covenant begs Linden to take his ring and heal the Land before she returns to the real world. Findail enters, who, unable to break away from Vain, has preserved them both, and tries to take the ring for himself. Vain stops him and reveals his purpose to Linden.

Using the power of the ring, she transforms Vain and Findail into a new Staff of Law giving it "her passion for health and healing, her Land-born percipience, the love she had learned for Andelain and Earthpower" White Gold Wielder 460). With the Staff and the ring, she takes the blight of the Sunbane on herself, accepting the pain, and "restored it to wholeness, then sent it back like silent rain" (White Gold Wielder 464). Before fading completely from the Land, she gives the Staff in trust to Pitchwife and the First who had escaped the Cavewights.

Between worlds Linden sees Covenant for the last time, and he explains how he was able to defeat Foul. By breaking the Law of Life, Hile Troy had made it possible for Covenant to act. And Foul had forgotten that killing Covenant didn't change the fact

that Covenant was the white gold

> We aren't enemies, no matter what he says. He and I are one. But he doesn't seem to know that. Or maybe he hates it too much to admit it. Evil can't exist unless the capacity to stand against it also exists. And you and I are the Land. . . .(and)(h)e's just one side of us. . . .We're one side of him. . . . As long as I accepted him . . . he couldn't get past me. (White Gold Wielder 471)

Restored to the real world, Linden awakes beside Covenant's body and is found by Dr. Berenford. And Linden realizes "(i)n this world also there was health to be served, hurts to be healed (White Gold Wielder 475). Together they return to town.

While the structure of The Second Chronicles is primarily romance, it still exhibits an element of realism in its portrayal of its principal characters, Linden Avery and Thomas Covenant. This is manifested in the story's approach to morality and in the characters' perception of the secondary world.

While the metaphor of redemption in The First Chronicles was balance, the metaphor of redemption in The Second Chronicles is the imperfection of white gold. Unlike most transcendental narratives where the wicked witch, evil stepmother, ogre, or black wizard are killed and everyone lives happily ever after, Donaldson creates narratives where "(y)ou can't kill Despite" (White Gold Wielder 453), where Good and Evil are a matter of choice, and the only difference between a good man and a bad are the roads he takes. The paradox in resolving imperfection lies in accepting our inner capacity for evil, accepting our mistakes, accepting those moments of weakness when we have deliberately chosen the wrong, and choosing the right. For Donaldson, choosing the right is a middle way between power and passivity, seldom free of pain.

The emphasis in The Second Chronicles is consistently on the moral choices of Avery and Covenant and the moral and psychological consequences of those choices. While the situation of their choices may exist in a transcendental realm, the ethos of those choices, if affirmative, is naturalistic.

Whether following Jungian models or a mythology unique to

the text, the moral and psychological conflict of transcendental texts is implicit to the symbolic structure of the work. What distinguishes The Second Chronicles from similiar works is that here the symbols are not merely implicit but explicit within the text; both Covenant and Linden are aware of the moral and psychological significance of the events surrounding them, that is, *the principal characters are consciously aware of the metaphorical relationship of the fantastic world with the real world* (Wounded Land 61).

This self-awareness is eventually the key to their salvation. Covenant and Avery learn to accept "the victimization at the heart of the human condition" (Slethaug 27), that mortality implies the presence of good and evil, venom and power, the capacity for growth and destruction, for "nature" and "dream." Covenant and Linden are both Lord Foul and the creator, and the internalization of that duality provides the freedom to act.

Mordant's Need

Book One: The Mirror of Her Dreams

Book Two: A Man Rides Through

The reader familiar with Donaldson is immediately struck by the difference between The Mirror of Her Dreams and Lord Foul's Bane. Much of the awkward didactic and inflated language has disappeared. The writing is both smoother and simpler. Story and ethic are fused as integral parts of one another.

Alexei Kondratiev, in a review for Mythlore, refers to Mordant's Need as "a novel, a story of the growth and interaction of very recognizable human personalities" (Kondratiev 43). Mordant's Need achieves part of its effect by asking the reader to interpret the real world in terms of enchantment and the fantasy world in terms of normal human behavior. In the prologue to The Mirror of Her Dreams, Donaldson writes that the story of his two central characters "began very much like a fable." Terisa Morgan is "a princess in a high tower" "held prisoner by enchantment." Geraden is "a hero come to rescue her" and "a fearless breaker of enchantments" (Mirrors 1).

But then we are told "their lives weren't that simple," that Terisa's "high tower was a luxury condominium building over on Madison" (Mirrors 1) and that her enchantment was "nothing more than a habit of mind" (Mirrors 2), an inability to escape her father's domination or believe in her own reality. "Nothing around her, or in her, reflected her back to herself" (Mirrors

2), so she surrounds herself with mirrors to prove to herself that she exists.

While Geraden lives in a world where mirrors are magic, his difficulties lie in his unique "capacity for disaster" (Mirrors 3). Apprenticed to the Congery of Imagers,

> he wasn't just the oldest Apt currently serving the Congery: he was the oldest person ever to keep on serving the Congery without becoming skillful enough to be a Master. . . .
>
> He was so hamhanded that he couldn't be trusted to mix sand and tinct without spilling some and destroying the proportions; so fumble-footed that he couldn't walk through the great laborium which had been made out of the converted dungeons of Orison without tripping over the carefully arranged rods, rollers, and apparatus of the Masters. Even rabbity Master Quillon . . . was heard to mutter that if Geraden made the attempt [to translate the champion] and failed, the Congery would at least gain the advantage of being rid of him. (Mirrors 3)

In Mordant's Need Donaldson creates a secondary romantic world completely inhabited by novelistic characters, collapsing the distinctions between enchantment and a reality that is psychologically disordered. The distinction between fantasy and mimesis becomes a matter of perspective, interpretation. If The

Chronicles revealed how a romantic fantasy is affected by the introduction of novelistic characters, Mordant's Need offers the possibility that the reverse is also true, that the real world is open to a romantic interpretation.

The hero that Geraden is supposed to translate through his mirror comes straight from the pulp fiction of the 1950s complete with spacesuit and ray gun. King Joyse, ruler of Mordant, formed the Congery to determine if the images translated by the Masters had an independent reality, and insisted that any champion sought by the Congery must not be coerced but brought of his own free will.

But when Geraden enters his mirror, he ends up in Terisa's living room. Convinced that she is a master of mirrors and that he has not merely blundered again, Geraden convinces Terisa to return with him to Mordant.

Once there Terisa finds herself at the center of court intrigue. She is openly denied any precise knowledge of Mordant's history by the Congery who fear she may be dangerous. Terisa is forced to choose sides as events develop around her.

Mordant consists of small family-ruled Cares that serve as a buffer state between the two countries Cadwal and Alend, and most of its history has been one of subjugation under first one and then the other of these two powers. Some years before Joyse had united the small Cares of Mordant into a single unit and had brought all the Imagers together under Mordant's control with the help of Havelock, adept and Joyse's advisor.

But in recent years a small renegade group of Imagers led by the Arch Imager Vagel has begun loosing atrocities against the land. King Joyse appears to have abandoned his throne to play hop-board (a game like checkers) with Havelock, who has gone mad after translating himself through a flat mirror in an attempt to take Vagel (Flat mirrors reflect scenes within Mordant. Curved mirrors reflect scenes alien to Mordant.) In consequence, Alend and Cadwal have mustered their forces to take advantage of Mordant's weakness and wrest the Congery away from Joyse.

The Congery is divided into factions. Some accept King Joyse's belief that the images in their curved mirrors reflect real places. Others believe the Master creates the image when he creates his mirror. The latter deny Terisa her humanity and see her as a tool to bend to their desires.

Master Quillon is in league with the King and Havelock. He secretly informs Terisa of Mordant's history and works the King's will within the Congery.

Master Eremis and Master Gilbur secretly work for Vagel and try to prevent both Terisa and Geraden from realizing their true talents. Eremis cleverly arranges a meeting between the Lords of the Cares, the Congery and Prince Kragen of Alend in order to force the Congery to translate the spacesuited figure in Master Gilbur's mirror. Darsint, the champion, wrested against his will from his own time and place, assumes he is under attack, turns his weapon on the castle and escapes.

Prevented from seeing herself in a mirror by Mordant's

paranoia of accidental translation into madness, Terisa is drawn by the reflection of herself in Eremis' sensuality despite his declared disbelief in her reality. His nearness to her and his lust hint at self-realization. She gradually becomes aware that Eremis is toying with her in the same way he plays at intrigue and that she loves Geraden.

Eventually the lines are drawn and each of the principal players in Mordant's drama chooses sides. King Joyse's indifference is revealed as a clever plot to draw out his enemies. Eremis' treachery is revealed, and he is destroyed by his own vanity. The king's daughters, each acting independently according to their abilities and beliefs choose courses of action that aid in ending the war, although each fears she acts contrary to her father's wishes. Terisa learns to believe in herself. Geraden discovers his own abilities and outgrows his youthful clumsiness. Vagel and his forces are overcome, and Mordant reaches new heights of prosperity.

The primary difficulty of the Covenant novels was Donaldson's use of a novelistic character in conjunction with romantic characters. In Mordant's Need Donaldson escapes this problem by creating an alternate universe peopled by novelistic characters.

Figure 6 compares Mordant's Need to novelistic and romantic approaches to fantasy as previously outlined in Figure 3 (pp. 14-15). The chart reveals that Mordant's Need shares more in common with novelistic fantasy than with romantic. In fact, Figure 7,

	Novel	Romance	Mordant's Need
View of Reality	Dreams, Freudian or psychological fantasies	Alternative, secondary world	Alternative, secondary world
Character	Realistic, but neurotic or psychotic	Stock characters, larger than life	Realistic or realistic expressions of stock characters
	Explicable relations in terms of psychological processes	Ideal relations, archetypal	Explicable relations, although expressed in terms of an alien culture
	Story will center on character's state of mind	Story will revolve around character's roles/ actions rather than thoughts or feelings	Story centers on character's thoughts and feelings
	Ordinary, everyman than life	Mythic, symbolic, larger	Mixed levels of society
Plot	Psychological fears or wish fulfillment	Functional, mythic/ archetypal patterns	Enhances knowedge of characters
	Possible to explain events in terms of character's state of mind	Magical, suprareal events	Plausible events if accept pseudoscientific nature of mirrors

Fig.6

	Novel	Romance	Mordant's Need
View of Reality	close, comprehensive detail	Free, less volume and detail	Limited, but detailed,
otherworld			
Character	Complexity of temperament/motive	Two dimensional	Complexity of temperament/ motive
	Explicable relations to nature, each other, their social class and the past	Ideal relations--abstract and symbolic, deep, narrow, obsessive involvements	Mixed--explicable human relations Pseudoscientific relation to
	nature		
	More important than action or plot	Prefers action to character	More important than action or plot
	Middle class, interest in origins	Any class, origins mysterious	Mixed
Plot	Enhance knowledge of character	Mythic, allegoric or symbolic forms	Dependant on and determined by character
	Plausible events	Symbolic, ideological events	Plausible if accept alternate worlds, pseudoscientific use of mirrors

Fig. 7

which compares Mordant's Need to the novel and romance as outlined in Figure 2 (p. 14), indicates that, apart from its setting in an alternative world and its pseudoscientific use of mirrors, Mordant's Need could be a mimetic novel.

Darko Suvin defines science fiction as "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device" (Suvin 7-8) is a fictional "novum . . . a totalizing phenomenon or relationship" (Suvin 64) "locus and/or dramatis personae . . . radically or at least significantly" alternative to the author's empirical environment "simultaneously perceived as not impossible within the cognitive (cosmological and anthropological) norms of the author's epoch" (Suvin viii). Suvin argues that the distinction between science fiction and other estranged genres is the interrelationship of the hero, the fictional world and ethics. In science fiction, there are no guarantees that the hero will win, no correlation between nature and morality. The universe is amoral and objective.

It would be tempting to identify Mordant's Need as science fiction, applying Darko Suvin's definition of the scientific *novum* to Donaldson's use of mirrors. Mordant's Need, however, fails to meet the stringencies of this definition.

First of all, Donaldson's mirrors cannot serve as a scientific novum because no rational explanation for their power is offered. The making of mirrors is a craft that involves applying the right procedures, the correct mixture of tinct and

sand, but it also involves a relationship between mirror and user that dissolves the borders of self and non-self and implies a mystical connection of human spirit and external reality (A Man Rides 381+).

The second crucial issue revolves around the nature of reality. While most of the resolution of conflict in Mordant's Need hinges on human choices, two elements of the plot suggest a mystical relationship between moral choice and the natural world.

The first is Terisa's own role in the fate of Mordant. Neither the King (A Man Rides 418+) nor Geraden (Mirrors 51) can accept her coming as accident. Some purpose had to be at work. Her appearance is part of the King's destiny. While Terisa had freedom of choice regarding the direction her role in Mordant's need should take, there is never any doubt that she has a necessary role to play.

Finally, throughout the story, Geraden relies on a series of hunches (cf. Mirrors 22; A Man Rides 460; A Man Rides 554; etc.) that border on prescience. No rational explanation is given for the source of these hunches, but each foreshadows the plot.

Mordant's Need is fantasy, but a familiarly human fantasy. As the king's youngest daughter, Myste, tells Terisa, "problems should be solved by those who see them" (Mirror 344). Good and evil are cast in familiar human terms, and their resolution, if expressed in the fairy tale terminology of "happily ever after," depends on human choices, human conduct.

* * *

The distaste for genre fiction in academic literary circles is more than just traditionalism or elitism as many post-structural critics would like to suggest. Far too often, these writings <u>are</u> inferior--inferior in workmanship and craft, inferior in depth of feeling and insight. They are "escapist" literature--their value lies in allowing the reader to escape the responsibilities of empirical reality. Stephen R. Donaldson is not exempt from this kind of criticism. Alexei Kondratiev writes, "Few modern fantasists can boast of having been, at one and the same time, so highly praised and so thoroughly reviled as Stephen R. Donaldson" (43).

But Donaldson, despite his weaknesses of style, is no "derivative hack" (Kondratiev 43). Admitting his indebtedness to Tolkien, Donaldson attempts to move beyond Tolkien, to, in his own words, "pull the themes and questions of fantasy back into the real world" (Rich 26), to avoid escapism or easy answers and deal with the "largest and most important questions of humankind" ("Epic Fantasy" 13).

Donaldson hoped to do this by bringing "the epic back into contact with the real world" ("Epic Fantasy" 18). In effect, he hoped to do the reverse of what he saw Tennyson accomplishing in <u>Idylls of the King</u>. Where Tennyson surrounded an epic character (Arthur) with "normal, believable, real human beings who lie and cheat and love and hate" ("Epic Fantasy" 16), Donaldson attempted in <u>The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever</u> to surround a

real human being (Covenant) with epic characters.

But the average reader rejects Covenant and fails to understand his refusal to believe in the Land or accept responsibility as its hero. Instead of viewing The Chronicles as a failed epic, I believe the answer to this reader reaction lies in a reevaluation of Donaldson's genre. In attempting to introduce a mimetic character into a romance fantasy, Donaldson does not create an epic but mixes novelistic and romantic fantasies. Donaldson superimposes a novelistic fantasy onto a romance fantasy and then, by his choice of point-of-view, undercut the novelistic fantasy and privileged the romantic. That he was not entirely aware of the process has much to do with his fascination and admiration for Tolkien, Tennyson and epic literature.

Donaldson's works call in question our distinctions between novel and romance, fantasy and reality by his experiments with genre. In The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever Donaldson attempts to overthrow the argument that fantasy literature can only be a literature of escape from the axiological and ontological problems of the real world by introducing a character who cannot escape. The physical, social, emotional, and psychological dimensions of Covenant's leprosy provide the environment for his perceptions of himself and the secondary universe in which he finds himself. Donaldson's failure in superimposing a novelistic fantasy onto a romantic fantasy does not invalidate the attempt.

In The Second Chronicles of Thomas Covenant Donaldson subverts the classic fantasy romance quest by dissolving the metaphorical distance between the primary and secondary universes. Covenant and Avery resist the larger-than-life heroic role forced on them by the secondary universe because of their awareness of the symbolic nature of their actions and by their insistence on realistic solutions to their dilemma. They (and the reader) are constantly reminded that their actions in the Land are directly related to their lives in the empirically real world, that what happens to them in the fantasy world makes a difference, that ethics transcends reality. By refusing final answers, by recognizing that evil is an inseparable part of the human condition, and accepting it, they achieve a measure of heroic stature while retaining their humanity.

Mordant's Need is Donaldson's most successful work. By filling his fantasy world with novelistic characters, he avoids the difficulties of credibility that he faced in The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever. The forces of evil in Mordant's Need are the same forces that trouble the real world--greed, ambition, ignorance, treachery. The heroes are ordinary people whose only claim to heroic stature is their awareness that a problem exists and their willingness to respond as best they are able.

Literature not only mimics the patterns of our everyday life but also its complexity, its tendency to escape categorization. The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant and Mordant's Need are the

struggles of a new author, and like the early efforts of any new writer often reveal the author's lack of experience. But Donaldson's primary concern for his writing is that it not be easy. His writing struggles with serious ethical questions and attempts to answer them realistically. If a person is dreaming, is he still responsible for his behavior (Foul 25)? Does the means to an end always color the end achieved (White Gold 445)? Does the awareness of a problem entail the responsibility to act (Mirror 344)?

For Donaldson, the answer to these questions is always yes. His writing is endued not only by the need to affirm the human spirit, but also by the need to make that affirmation humanly possible. Donaldson reminds us that the tendencies of literature to alter reality are not picayune but an attempt to discover meaning and purpose.

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