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THE WORM OUROBOROS AND THE QUEST FOR A LOST FANTASY MANIFESTO[1]

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Abstract: This article aims to specify the key ideas that differentiate what is now understood as Fantasy from the broader category of Non-Mimetic Fiction based on a historical analysis of primary sources. The documents chosen will be limited to those written by the authors most uncontroversially associated with the development of Non-Mimetic Fiction, written as articulations of their own work regarding what these authors perceived to be the main cultural, artistic and political developments of their day. Once selected, these documents will be contrasted to map what ideas overlap. They will also be related chronologically to make any patterns of historical development clearer, and to make more evident which of these documents could have been written from a position of awareness of other documents like it. The utility of such an approach is to provide the contemporary scholar with

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1 Título em língua portuguesa: "A serpente Ouroboros e a busca por um manifesto perdido da fantasia".

a relation of primary sources retroactively organized to explicit what was perceived by these sources as immediately meaningful from their own perspective, which is meant to facilitate more detailed future research, and to provide a historiographical approach that may serve as an alternative to genre-based literary criticism.

Keywords: The Worm Ouroboros. Fantasy. Eric R. Eddison. Manifesto. Non-Mimetic Fiction. History of Literature. Literary Genre. Literary Tradition.

Resumo: Este artigo tem como objetivo especificar as principais ideias que diferenciam o que atualmente é entendido como Fantasia da categoria mais abrangente da Ficção Não-Mimética tendo como base uma análise histórica de fontes primárias. Os documentos escolhidos estarão limitados àqueles escritos pelos autores mais incontroversamente associados ao desenvolvimento da Ficção Não-Mimética, escritos como articulações do seu próprio trabalho relativas ao que estes autores sentiam ser os principais desenvolvimentos culturais, artísticos e políticos da sua época. Uma vez selecionados, estes documentos serão relacionados cronologicamente para tornar mais claros quaisquer padrões de desenvolvimento histórico, e para tornar mais evidente quais destes documentos estavam potencialmente sendo escritos a partir de um contexto de conhecimento prévio uns dos outros. A utilidade de uma abordagem como esta é fornecer ao pesquisador contemporâneo uma relação de fontes primárias retroativamente organizadas de modo a explicitar o que estas fontes acreditavam ser de relevância imediata a partir da perspectiva delas próprias, o que tem o propósito de facilitar pesquisas futuras mais detalhadas, assim como fornecer uma abordagem historiográfica que pode servir como uma alternativa à crítica baseada em gêneros literários.

Palavras-Chave: A Serpente Ouroboros. Fantasia. Eric R. Eddison. Manifesto. Ficção Não-Mimética. História da Literatura. Gênero Literário. Tradição Literária.

INTRODUCTION

Our goal is to find the earliest possible document that can serve as a manifesto within the Tradition of Fantasy: a concise document through which an author makes an open audience aware of a new project. To serve as a manifesto, then, it must be public, aware of itself as a statement, widely known within the circles that identify with the project, and it cannot be so long that it serves more as a treatise than as a declaration.

To achieve this goal, we will first try to specify what "Fantasy" means in a literary context, from there we will be able to better define the terms: "Fantasy Genre" and "Fantasy Tradition". After this, we will go through an overview of an essay written by Tolkien called *On Fairy Stories*. We believe it provides the least controversial basis to start from, Tolkien being the author most associated with "Fantasy" by the public, and by scholars like John Clute, John Grant, and Brian Attebery.

With *On Fairy Stories* summarized and its main ideas mapped, we will try to contextualize those ideas, looking for writers and events that can serve as milestones in the history of their development.

After we have established *On Fairy Stories* as a reference point in history beyond which there is certainly a "Fantasy Tradition", we will be able to survey the period that starts with the French Revolution, searching for authors that seem to converge towards the ideas articulated by Tolkien in his essay.

With enough historical milestones placed, it will be possible to narrow down what publication can serve as the earliest possible manifesto for the cluster of ideas articulated in *On Fairy Stories*.

We believe that *The Worm Ouroboros* is the best candidate, so we will present the novel and detail what has led us to this conclusion and how it fits the criteria we have applied in our historical survey.

Finally, all translations are our own unless the translated source is directly referenced, in all other cases, the texts will be provided in their original languages as notes, as well as with their respective sources.

WHAT IS FANTASY? A BROAD LITERARY CONSENSUS

There are many answers to the question "What is Fantasy?", and from each of them entire histories could be written, new questions formulated, and new answers found. "Fantasy" might be a movement, a genre, or a tradition, and maybe all these things simultaneously, but for our current purposes, we will focus on Fantasy as a tradition after some preliminary considerations about Fantasy as a genre.

It will be important to set boundaries for the times and places we will discuss, and we have chosen to set those boundaries based on the opening statement of *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, it says: "Fantasy is a creation of the Enlightenment, and the recognition that excitement and wonder can be found in imagining impossible things" (EDWARD; MENDLESOHN, 2012). We take from this cue that, for the purposes of this inquiry, the Enlightenment is where our timeline should begin.

WHAT IS A GENRE?

There are complications associated with defining a "Fantasy Genre" because defining "genre" itself is difficult. *The Routledge*

Dictionary of Literary Terms has an entry for "genre" but focuses on the history of the theory of genres rather than on a definition proper, summarizing its usage in the following way:

> There is no agreed equivalent for this word in the vocabulary of English criticism. 'Kind', 'type', 'form' and 'genre' are variously used, and this fact alone indicates some of the confusions that surround the development of the theory of genres. (CHILDS, 2006, p. 97)

Northrop Frye remarks pessimistically:

> The next thing to do is to outline the primary categories of literature, such as drama, epic, prose fiction, and the like. This at any rate is what Aristotle assumed to be the obvious first step in criticism. We discover that the critical theory of genres is stuck precisely where Aristotle left it. The very word 'genre' sticks out in an English sentence as the unpronounceable and alien thing it is. Most critical efforts to handle such generic terms as 'epic' and 'novel' are chiefly interesting as examples of the psychology of rumor. (FRYE, 1971, p. 13)

For the purposes of this article then, rather than chasing an elusive consensus that does not appear to exist, we will use "genre" to mean "the common characteristics, tropes, literary techniques, styles, content and expectations usually associated with a group of texts allowing other texts to be classed as part of that group".

WHAT IS FANTASY AS A GENRE?

There have been attempts to exhaustively define the Fantasy Genre, aiming to produce a comprehensible process of classification, but these approaches have been met with skepticism. Brian

Attebery proposed a definition that has been flexible enough to form a consensus. He claims:

> Tolkien's form of fantasy, for readers in English, is our mental template, and will be until someone else achieves equal recognition with an alternative conception. One way to characterize the genre of fantasy is the set of texts that in some way or other resemble *The Lord of the Rings*. (ATTEBERY, 1992 p. 14)

This seems to have been more successful, if not as a definitive answer, at least as a kind of conceptual anchor. Other reference texts point to it as such, for example, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* remarks:

> The critic Brian Attebery has spoken of fantasy in language which we feel well describes our final sense of the way in which this book has been constructed. Fantasy, he has said, is a "fuzzy set". By this he means a set which cannot be defined by its boundaries but which can be understood through significant examples of what best represents it. The "fuzzy set" model is, therefore, both exploratory and prescriptive. (…) At the center of all the fuzzy sets is a rough definition of what we mean by fantasy: a fantasy text is a self-coherent narrative which, when set in our REALITY, tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it (PERCEPTION); when set in an OTHERWORLD or SECONDARY WORLD, that otherworld will be impossible, but stories set there will be possible in the otherworld's terms. An associated point, hinted at here, is that at the core of fantasy is STORY. Even the most surrealist of fantasies tells a tale. (CLUTE, 1999, p. 7-8)

Since our main concern is mapping a particular milestone in the Fantasy Tradition, we will not be aiming to pinpoint the first

"modern fantasy novel" as perceived from a contemporary genre definition, rather, our goal is to find, if possible, the first text in which there has been a self-conscious articulation of the ideas most associated with that tradition. Following the analogy Brian Attebery proposed with mathematical fuzzy sets, *The Lord of the Rings* is the text the general public recognizes as fantasy the most, which makes Tolkien's views of his own work particularly relevant to ground the beginning of our inquiries, and the text that Tolkien wrote in which he most at length explained and defended his own views of that particular kind of literature he viewed himself as writing was *On Fairy Stories*, an essay based on a lecture he gave in 1939, in between the publication of his two most famous novels, and that has since become a milestone in Non-Mimetic Fiction and Mythmaking.

WHAT IS FANTASY AS A TRADITION?

Now, for "tradition" it might prove even more difficult to find an uncontroversial definition for it than "genre", so, for the present article, we will use it in the sense of a group of writers who are not necessarily contemporaries, but who are collaborating with each other to further develop their work, or to contribute to a common pool of ideas which will later be inherited by a new generation of writers much in the same way they themselves inherited the contributions of their predecessors. The collaboration can be explicit or not. It seems reasonable to say that the members of the Inklings commenting and editing each other's work and overall discussing their ideas was "explicit collaboration", and the same can be said about the members of Lovecraft's Circle contributing

tales to the same Mythos. Brian Attebery points out two tell-tale signs of a tradition "that its authors are aware of one another (...) that by becoming aware of it, one's response to any of its members is enriched" (ATTEBERY, 1980, p. 7). For our purposes, these intuitions and these signs will do.

WHY LOOK FOR A MANIFESTO?

A manifesto is "a public declaration, usually of political, religious, philosophical or literary principles and beliefs" (CUDDON, 2013, p. 418). For the artist, it is a way to promote their views and coordinate with like-minded individuals. For the Historian, it serves as documental proof that certain ideas have reached a boiling point, and that people will start to aggregate around them explicitly, marking a moment from which the exploration of these ideas can be expected to intensify. This is to say, as a historical document, a manifesto serves as a specifiable milestone that helps future generations to navigate the ebbs and flows of the history of ideas and to pinpoint which individuals of interest had contact with those ideas. A manifesto serves, in the end, as a historiographical facilitator.

The practical usefulness of having something like that can be felt when there is need to analyze an author's life in search of explanations about why a certain piece ended up being written the way that it was written, and generating the effects that it did. In *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* an entry was dedicated to "Genre Fantasy", which could be said to be a kind of "Formula Fiction", it starts by saying: "This is an exceptionally difficult term to define, and even more so to define without pejorative implications" (CLUTE, 1999, p. 396). This remark is

not very reassuring. And then it argues that not all "Genre Fantasy" is "imitative dross", which is even less reassuring, and finally concludes:

> The depressing truth, however, is that GF is by and large poor and that a very great deal of it is published – to the detriment of full fantasy, which is often presented in an indistinguishable format. Quite how much commercial damage publishers are doing to the fantasy genre as a whole through this short-termism is hard to establish – and likely will be for some years – but there is considerable anecdotal evidence to suggest the wound is deep. (CLUTE, 1999, p. 396)

As can be seen, the perception is clearly negative.

Where are these perceptions coming from, and how did they become prevalent enough to be included in a specialized encyclopedia? How did we arrive at this state of affairs? This is where historical knowledge about a literary tradition can be useful, as opposed to merely an ahistorical knowledge of the genre as it is then perceived. Taking a final product, say, *The Lord of the Rings*, and trying to imitate it, or borrow aspects, tropes, mannerisms, and so on, produces a very different result from studying an artist, say, Tolkien, and then working within the boundaries of his artistic views.

This may seem paradoxical at first: An artist tries to do a certain thing and an art piece results. Meaning that an artist cannot imitate an art piece that has not been created yet. This being translated to our example means that, by definition, trying to imitate *The Lord of the Rings* is not the same as trying to do what Tolkien was doing, which then resulted in *The Lord of the Rings* as output. Emulating an art piece, the artistic result, can only be

successful when the artist's creative process is understood, and not from a direct imitation of the art piece itself.

In short, understanding an artist's intellectual biography clarifies the creative process, and understanding the creative process clarifies the artistic choices made in a completed artwork.

Having texts that offer a documental trail of the movers and shakers of an artistic trend helps us understand what they believed to be most relevant, communicated in their own words. And every trail needs to start somewhere, needs to have an earliest document. Serving as this earliest document is precisely the role of a manifesto. It organizes our views on the history of an artistic tradition and clarifies how and why those artists did what they did.

WHY BEGIN BY THE END?

Our inquiry will take us backward and forward through time, and if we miss our mark because we moved too far in either direction, the material extracted should itself provide the context and the reasons why, and some indication of how next to proceed, how much to correct in the other direction, and what to look for when going there. So, with every correction, we will be approximating the date that matches what we are looking for.

The ending of our period of interest should be easier to set, anything later than *The Lord of the Rings* is being written within a Fantasy Genre that already has a center, and the latest publication by Tolkien in which he attempted a thorough articulation of his literary views was *On Fairy Stories*. Now we need only to move backward through time in search of a starting date.

We have been able to provide what seem to be a relatively uncontroversial definition of the Fantasy Genre, as broad as it may be, and a sense of what a Literary Tradition is. Since the Fantasy Genre has been defined to be the fuzzy set of texts that more or less resemble *The Lord of the Rings*, insofar as they resemble *The Lord of the Rings*, and our goal is to analyze texts in which authors articulate their own work so that we can form an understanding of the origins of the Fantasy Tradition, it seems like the natural place to start is with a text in which the author of *The Lord of the Rings* is making his views on Literature explicit, so we should proceed to it.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ON FAIRY STORIES

In 1939, J. R. R. Tolkien gave a lecture at the University of St. Andrews after being requested to explore some aspects of Andrew Lang's work, which is closely tied with the popularization of fairy tales in Britain, mostly through the publication of the *Rainbow Fairy Tale Series*. The lecture marks the maturity of his views on the art of storytelling, and it was made in between the publication of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The content of the lecture was enlarged, reworked, and rewritten into the essay: *On Fairy Stories*.

He does not present a system of arguments around a thesis, but rather, an exploration of his opinions on a variety of topics, at the same time denouncing what he saw as common and pernicious misconceptions about supernatural devices in fiction, as well as rebuking points of criticism commonly targeted against works that resembled his first novel.

The essay opens up by defining "fairy story" through differentiation. It is not necessarily a fairy tale like those written by

Perrault, Madame D'Aulnoy or popularized by Lang, though some fairy tales can be fairy stories. It is also not a "beast-fable" like *The Fox and the Grapes* or *The Tortoise and the Hare*, even though fairy stories can contain talking animals. They are also not allegories but can be the basis for various flexible allegorical interpretations, much like history is not allegory, but can be used to write allegories. Finally, they take themselves seriously (TOLKIEN, 2008, p. 31), which means that dismissively presenting the story as "just" a dream disqualifies it from what Tolkien had in mind.

He then argues that fairy stories are an inherent feature and outflow from storytelling itself, finding its distant roots in myths and folklore, but surviving the arrival of post-industrial society, and, according to him (TOLKIEN, 2008, p. 70), maybe will even outlive it. This relationship between them and the stories of old is not one of sources and the passive appropriation of content, but one belonging to the essential dynamics of mythmaking, and so, forever active, and forever present.

Then it proceeds to combat the notion that they are, or should be, targeted at children. The position taken is that anyone can enjoy them within the limits of their experience and intellectual development, and that they are neither pernicious to a cultivation of the self nor to intellectual maturity (TOLKIEN, 2008, p. 64-65).

Then the essay shifts to issues related to the practical artistic side of things, or "how" to write fairy stories. Tolkien presents an approach he calls "fantasy", a higher art form that manipulates words, symbols, representations, attributes, and things, to sub-create, which is to say, create within creation, produce a belief in

the truth of the story within itself: "Secondary Belief"; something similar to how the readers believe things to be true in the non-literary world, the "Primary World" (TOLKIEN, 2008, p. 59-61). The result will be a story told within a world imbued with an inner consistency analogous to the world of mundane life, and this is expected to produce a certain kind of literary experience.

Tolkien was acutely aware that a substantial portion of mainstream literary critics, much like many of his peers, did not consider what was outside the boundaries of Mimetic Fiction[2] and non-fiction as "serious literature" (if literature at all). And so, he anticipated that many would object to this method of "fantasy". With this in mind, he defended his positions in the essay indirectly and against abstracted interlocutors, allowing the audience to infer his beliefs and values from what was being said, beliefs he would continuously defend in writing from time to time.

The following example from the Preface of *The Lord of the Rings* illustrates well this awareness of mainstream criticism, and shows a position of open defiance:

> Some who have read the book, or at any rate have reviewed it, have found it boring, absurd, or contemptible; and I have no cause to complain, since I have similar opinions of their works, or of the kinds of writing that they evidently prefer. (TOLKIEN, 2021, p. 18)

This refusal to approach fantasy apologetically was essential for the development of the Tradition, and it ties in closely with the

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2 That is, fiction that aims to imitate or represent the world as it is, factually. Realism and Naturalism are two Literary Movements closely associated with Mimetic Fiction at its apex. Erich Auerbach offers a comprehensive study of the development of Mimetic Fiction in his book *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*.

latter part of the essay, dedicated to articulating the "why" of the fairy story and its purposes as an art form. It is here that Tolkien rebukes the accusations of escapism, by differentiating the negative "flight of the deserter" from the positive "escape from prison back to home" (TOLKIEN, 2008, p. 69). This positive, therapeutic kind of escapism is presented as the purpose of fairy stories and fantasy.

If we list the main topics of the essay, we have a "what", fairy stories; an approach to creating them, fantasy, a "how"; and a purpose, a meaningful justification, a "why", which is escapism defined as a positive thing. The "what" excludes allegories, fables, and dismissive framing devices. The "how" is taking itself seriously, as true, through the creation of secondary belief in a secondary world by means of manipulating language, which is a "pure art" oriented towards images, therefore "imaginative". And the "why" relates to a certain therapeutical effect that is independent from, and not subservient towards, educational or pedagogical ends, the elucidation of "facts" and the clarification of systems. This closes the loop insofar as it ties in with the exclusion of allegory, fable, and "mere unreality" embodied by the "just a dream" framing device, and it connects with the "how" in that when the fantasy approach is compromised, the effect (the "why"), is lost.

Now we will discuss why there is a pattern of rejection of allegory and fable in the Fantasy Tradition. Then, we will survey history after writers who appeared to reflect the same concerns and sensibilities articulated in the essay.

THE PROBLEM WITH ALLEGORY AND FABLE

The term "allegory" has been differently defined by different authors, but it figures as a main topic of concern for the Inklings

throughout their careers. C. S. Lewis wrote a study on the topic called *Allegory of Love: a Study in Medieval Tradition*. Tolkien notoriously expressed a dislike of it in his letter, the most famous of which might be his letter to Milton Waldman (TOLKIEN, 1981). To avoid going too deeply into semantic disputes, we have chosen to use a definition of allegory that postdates the publications discussed in this article, but encapsulates the meaning that seems to be generating this sense of rejection:

> We have actual allegory when a poet explicitly indicates the relationship of his images to examples and precepts, and so tries to indicate how a commentary on him should proceed. A writer is being allegorical whenever it is clear that he is saying "by this I also (*alios*) mean that". If this seems to be done continuously, we may say, cautiously, that what he is writing "is" an allegory. (FRYE, 1971, p. 89-90)

Defined this way, allegory appears to be incompatible with telling a "story for its own sake", like *On Fairy Stories* suggests is the fantasy approach, or like *The Worm Ouroboros* declares in its Dedication. As a device, it has been historically used for education and commentary, and so, has strong didactic associations with it. As we can see in a very famous allegory from around the time of the Inklings: Animal Farm, it is very straightforward that the effects George Orwell aimed to achieve with his book were very different from the ones Tolkien tried to achieve with *The Hobbit*, or *The Lord of the Rings*. For that reason, if we consider that fantasy aims to generate a therapeutic effect of wonderment, and that allegory means to clarify and teach explicitly, then we are led to conclude that the goals of allegory clash with the goals of fantasy.

A lot of what has been said of allegory applies much the same to fable and for the same reasons: it has strong historical associations with didacticism. Fables are expected to express "a moral of the story", like we can see consolidated in common definitions, such as: "A short narrative in prose or verse which points a moral" (CUDDON, 2013, p. 264). It seems inescapable that fable is inherently pedagogical, from Esopus to La Fontaine.

There was one early proponent of prose poetry in Europe called Heinrich Heine, who was alluded to in the works of some masters of the Fantasy Tradition like Dunsany and Eric R. Eddison. Close to the end of his life, bedridden and sick, he wrote an anthology that was compiled under the title of *Last Poems and Thoughts*[3]. In that book, we find a text under the title of *Addenda to the Travel Pictures.* It describes the narrator's thoughts and feelings relative to a woman he used to know, but passed away. There, we find the character of Mary, the Eternal Return motif common to both *Time and the Gods* and *The Worm Ouroboros*. In this story, we find a very interesting claim that ties in nicely with Eddison's fantasy novels, as well as with the perception that allegory and secondary belief are incompatible:

> The little one laughed and gave me her rose, and this happened on a street of Trento, in front of the Albergo della Grande Europa, under the watch of many thousands of discovered and still undiscovered stars, which all must bear witness that this story did not happen in my room and is no allegory. (HEINE, 1875, p. 216)[4]

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3 Letzte Gedischte und Gedanken.

4 Da lachte die Kleine und gab mir ihre Rose, und Das geschah auf der Straße zu Trient, vor der Bertega, der Albergo della Grande Europa gegenüber, im Angesicht von vielen tausend entdeckten und noch mehreren unentdeckten Sternen, die mir alle bezeugen müssen, daß die Geschichte nicht auf meinem Zimmer passiert und keine Allegorie ist.

Mary's story is true; it is not an allegory...

And with this, we are ready to move from an analysis of literary ideas and devices towards our historical survey, and an overview of the Age of Revolution.

REASON, REVOLUTION, AND THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST

Now it is very difficult to fully appreciate how much the circles of literary criticism rejected Tolkien's work, and with what degree of skepticism they looked down on Non-Mimetic Fiction in general. Let us take a look at one particularly infamous contemporary review of *the Lord of the Rings:*

> One is puzzled to know why the author should have supposed he was writing for adults. (…) the author has indulged himself in developing the fantasy for its own sake (…) How is it, then, that these long-winded volumes of what looks to this reader like balderdash have elicited such tributes as those above? The answer is, I believe, that certain people — especially, perhaps, in Britain — have a lifelong appetite for juvenile trash. (WILSON, 1966, p. 227-234, emphasis added)

That is a pretty harsh statement to put in print, to say the least, and it is particularly interesting that he says "writing fantasy for its own sake" in a context that forces us to assume he believes it to be inherently negative. As for scholars in general, they mostly saw Fantasy Literature with apathy. On the Southern Hemisphere, the gargantuan encyclopedic mind of Otto Maria Carpeaux, when writing his thousands of pages long *História da Literatura Ocidental*, mentions Lovecraft briefly in the context of what was to him "Contemporary Tendencies", and talks a little bit about Magic

Realism and the New Catholic Authors, but makes absolutely no mention of Tolkien or the Inklings.

This rejection was not new, and the writers who experimented with Non-Mimetic Fiction were aware of it. Instead of arising in the XX century, these controversies found their roots in the Enlightenment itself, and we will attempt to provide a broad chronological overview of them.

With the political turmoil starting in 1789, Europe became a battlefield in all senses, material and ideological. Hardly any intellectual could be said to have no opinions or could be allowed to be neutral. People were forced into sides. Factions arose around all sorts of tensions triggered or aggravated by politics. Some were appalled by the violence of the Revolution, like Tocqueville and Charles Dickens; some denounced the Revolution outright, like Joseph de Maistre; some defended its ideals and sought to justify its violence as extreme but necessary measures, like Michelet. No one was indifferent.

Beethoven is a good example of how emotionally invested artists could be in the political controversies of their day, even when their work was relatively apolitical in nature:

> We know for certain that it was his intention to dedicate the Eroica to Napoleon. The original manuscript of the symphony has disappeared, but early in the spring of 1804 a fair copy had been made to be forwarded to Paris through the French Embassy. At that time Napoleon was still First Consul. Ries says that he saw a copy of the score lying on Beethoven's table with the word "Buonaparte" at the extreme top of the title page. Ries was the first to bring him the intelligence

> that Napoleon had proclaimed himself Emperor. Napoleon's assumption of royalty took place on May 18, 1804, and the solemn proclamation was issued on the twentieth. Therefore, at the latest, the Eroica must have been completed in early May of 1804. (MAREK, 1969, p. 343)

Eric Hobsbawm summarizes the cultural and material changes of the period this way:

> If the economy of the nineteenth century world was formed mainly under the influence of the British Industrial Revolution, its politics and ideology were formed mainly by the French. Britain provided the model for its railways and factories, the economic explosive which cracked open the traditional economic and social structures of the non-European world; but France made its revolutions and gave them their ideas, to the point where a tricolour of some kind became the emblem of virtually every emerging nation, and European (or indeed world) politics between 1789 and 1917 were largely the struggle for and against the principles of 1789, or the even more incendiary ones of 1793. France provided the vocabulary and the issues of liberal and radical-democratic politics for most of the world. France provided the first great example, the concept and the vocabulary of nationalism. France provided the codes of law, the model of scientific and technical organization, the metric system of measurement for most countries. The ideology of the modern world first penetrated the ancient civilizations which had hitherto resisted European ideas through French influence. This was the work of the French Revolution. (HOBSBAWM, 1996, p. 53)

Moving on to literature, we will now focus on the most relevant threads of tension that are nested in Enlightenment thought, are

catalyzed by the Revolution, pass through the Romantics, and, after them, settle within the Fantasy Tradition.

One of these threads of tension, as we saw above, had to do with nationalism and the rise of the nation-state. After the death of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, the Terror and the wars that followed, and the intensification of the nation as an ideal, people drifted away from old perceptions and slowly recontextualized their place in the world. Less and less, they felt like the organic members of a class or a regional polity, or the members of a church or the locals of a village, of a clan, of a family. More and more they felt like individuals in a society. It is not accidental that Sociology was structured as a science in post-revolutionary Europe. This was a massive shift in intuition, and if we look at much of the work of the Romantics, like *The Sufferings of Young Werther*, by Goethe, or *Frankenstein*, which we will later comment in more detail, or the poetry of Novalis, or *Le Rouge et le Noir*, or the prose poetry of Heinrich Heine, they were all, in one way or another, attempts to answer questions like "Who am I? What do I feel? What should I do?" with capital "Is". Romanticism is, among other things, about inventing the individual.

The second thread derives from the implications of the first about the perceived role of the artist in society. Since artists are individuals, to the above question of "what should I do?" is added the question of "to what ends?"

In all prior known history, art, like everything else, was organized in its relation to the divine. The artist, like the warrior, or the farmer, or the philosopher, were to serve God or the Gods with their work, were

to glorify them. That was the ultimate point of reference. After the Enlightenment, the question "What is art for?" no longer seemed to have an obvious uncontroversial answer. Artists felt more and more obliged to find justifications for their practice. Broadly speaking, two opposing sides formed around this controversy, and each had its own nuanced internal factions.

Some believed that the artist had a duty to serve their society with their art by actively promoting better ideals, by studying nature, by fighting for the betterment of institutions, by denouncing oppression, and so on. Which was to say that the purpose of art was to be political, moral, and ideological. In this framework, art is an instrument for higher purposes external to itself. The other side was characterized by a denial of the first, and it strove to prove that art was autonomous. Rather than an instrument of utility, they saw art as the measure of utility. They saw it as what made life worth living, an end in itself. These sides existed in flux, constantly changing, constantly denouncing views. Arguments were thrown in the arena frequently. They were far from organized, and any one writer could defend one position, then the other, then could change their mind again or could try to defend some specific way to harmonize extremes.

Starting with Mary Shelley, because she was chronologically close to the Revolution as well as a kind of holy grail for historians trying to understand XIX-century thought. She was a particularly important personality in the history of literature for her work and her literary connections; she was a living nexus of important writers and events. Author of what was arguably the first Science Fiction novel; wife of the famous radical poet, Percy Shelley; personal

acquaintance of the archetypal Romantic Anti-Hero Lord Byron; of John William Polidori, author of *The Vampyre*; daughter of William Godwin, one of the first Anarchists and Utilitarian Philosophers; and Mary Wollstonecraft, a pioneer of the feminist cause. Mary Shelley could not be more at the center of everything as far as literature and politics were concerned in her time.

Talking about Lord Byron and politically active writers, he did die in Greece, fighting in the Greek War of Independence against the Ottomans, which was a key step in consolidating Greek nationalism. This seems, in retrospect, very harmonious with the spirit of the age.

Frankenstein: or the Modern Prometheus, Mary Shelley's most famous work, was published anonymously in 1818 when she was barely in her twenties, and it was not until the third edition that her authorship was recognized. Of its embodying of the spirits and controversies of the time, Dr. Siv Jansson comments that the book:

> (…) has a significant relationship to revolutionary political ideas of the time, particularly the Revolution in France and subsequent conflict in Britain and Europe. The French Revolution produced considerable anxiety in England about the possibility of parallel uprisings, which translated into a paranoia about the 'masses' that characterised them as fearful and 'monstrous'. However, although Frankenstein engages with a range of radical ideas and philosophies, it has an ambiguous attitude towards the idea of revolution. (SHELLEY, 1999, p. 20)

With this in mind, let us take a look at the Preface for the first edition, very likely written by Percy Shelly:

> The event on which this fiction is founded has been supposed, by Dr. Darwin, and some of the physiological writers of Germany, as not of impossible occurrence. I shall not be supposed as according the remotest degree of serious faith to such an imagination; yet, in assuming it as the basis of a work of fancy, I have not considered myself as merely weaving a series of supernatural terrors. The event on which the interest of the story depends is exempt from the disadvantages of a mere tale of spectres or enchantment. It was recommended by the novelty of the situations which it develops; and, however impossible as a physical fact, affords a point of view to the imagination for the delineating of human passions more comprehensive and commanding than any which the ordinary relations of existing events can yield.
> I have thus endeavoured to preserve the truth of the elementary principles of human nature, while I have not scrupled to innovate upon their combinations. The Iliad, the tragic poetry of Greece-Shakespeare, in the Tempest and Midsummer Night's Dream — and most especially Milton, in Paradise Lost, conform to this rule; and the most humble novelist, who seeks to confer or receive amusement from his labours, may, without presumption, apply to prose fiction a licence, or rather a rule, from the adoption of which so many exquisite combinations of human feeling have resulted in the highest specimens of poetry. (SHELLEY, 1999, p. 10)

From this, we can see that Percy Shelley feels he needs to justify the characteristics of the text. He seems not to take for granted that the "supernatural" in literature can be used for "serious" ends. In fact, it is implied that without a "serious" purpose, the story would be "just a story", "merely a weaving of supernatural terrors", and "a mere tale of

spectres or enchantments". Going a step further, we can map what he considers essential for "respectable" literature. To Shelley, it serves to study human emotions, human nature, the human condition. In short, "respectable" literature here is seen as an exploratory instrument.

From the Enlightenment then, we see a tension manifesting through pairs of opposition: old against new, reason against nature, science against art, objective against subjective, and individual against collective. These tensions are then inherited by late XIX century and early XX century intellectuals.

Early iterations of these tensions in the world of practical affairs were the Reign of Terror and the Jacobin attempt to organize a new institutionalized rationalistic religion around the worship of the Supreme Being. This is the sort of background from which intellectuals like Goethe were writing things such as:

> Thus, the scholars sing the honors in every hall, in every place. Though they are incapable of weaving a simple line or a simple lace. To study and measure a thing alive. They strive to purge what they cannot revive. Only fragments are left as pieces in their hands. And then the whole is broken, and no link still stands. "We mastered nature" the Chemists cry. They make fools of themselves and know not why[5]. (GOETHE, 1990, p. 198)

As a late spokes person of the position that there could be art for art's sake, we have Oscar Wilde, who summarized his views in the Preface of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, of which we singled out the most relevant passages:

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5 Das preisen die Schüler aller Orten, Sind aber keine Weber geworden. Wer will was lebendig's erkennen und beschreiben, Sucht erst den Geist heraus zu treiben, Dann hat er die Theile in seiner Hand, Fehlt leider! nur das geistige Band. Encheiresin naturae nennt's die Chimie, Spottet ihrer selbst und weiß nicht wie (GOETHE, 1990, p. 198).

> The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim. (…) They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only Beauty. There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all. (…) No artist desires to prove anything. Even things that are true can be proved. No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style. (…) We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely. All art is quite useless. (WILDE, 2006, p. 3-4, emphasis added)

And now, let us compare it with a passage by Émile Zola, a herald for the most extreme trends of Mimetic Fiction:

> In my literary studies, I have often spoken of the experimental method applied to drama. The return to nature, the naturalistic evolution that the centuries bring, they pressure all the manifestations of human intelligence onto the same scientific path. Yet, the idea of a literature determined by science may have been surprising, for lack of being clear and precise. It therefore seems to me useful to state cleanly that which is necessary to understand, according to me, by the experimental romance. (...) Most frequently, it will be enough for me to replace the word "physician" with the word "writer" to make my thoughts clear and lend them the rigor of a scientific truth[6]. (ZOLA, 2006, p. 47-48)

6 Dans mes études littéraires, j'ai souvent parlé de la méthode expérimentale! appliquée au roman et au drame. Le retour à la nature, l'évolution naturaliste qui emporte le siècle, pousse peu à peu toutes les manifestations de l'intelligence humaine dans une même voie scientifique. Seulement, l'idée d'une littérature déterminée par la science, a pu surprendre, faute d'être précisée et comprise. Il me paraît donc utile de dire nettement ce qu'il faut entendre, selon moi, par le roman expérimental. (...) Le plus souvent, il me suffira de remplacer le mot «médecin» par le mot «romancier», pour rendre ma pensée claire et lui apporter la rigueur d'une vérité scientifique (ZOLA, 2006, p. 47-48).

The clash between the artistic ideals espoused by these two authors is immediately evident. And they define themselves from dialectical opposition. The identification with Medicine is very telling, it colors well the way Zola saw his work: Medicine strives towards knowledge through the highest degrees of observational rigor, and this knowledge is goal-oriented, Medicine is not only a science, but a holy practice meant to restore and improve health and the human condition. Nothing could be more useful, or more distant from Oscar Wilde's views.

THE GREAT PRECURSORS

We started this with our timeline set to end with *On Fairy Stories*. By its publication, it seems uncontroversial that there was a collection of ideas and techniques already unified under a single self-conscious purpose that we could call "Fantasy". If not as a genre, at least as a tradition. But when were those ideas first self-consciously articulated and applied? When one starts to make sense of the quantity of authors working on new ways to write Non-Mimetic Fiction, that were reading each other's work and were actively corresponding, it seems more probable that there was a historical development moving towards *On Fairy Stories*, rather than starting with it. So let us rewind time to see if a starting date can be found. There are two authors with styles, texts, and sensibilities who frequently associated with the Fantasy Genre as "Precursors".

William Morris was born in England, in 1834 and died in 1896. Throughout his very prolific career, he wrote extensively on art and aesthetics and the politics of his day. He was a close

associate of the Pre-Raphaelite Society, and is considered one of the founders of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Politically, he was an early Socialist, and his texts tackled issues like oppression, the expropriation of work, the role of labor in healthy societies, and what "health" meant in a more holistic sense. He believed in the curative properties of beauty and strove to beautify everything he could: history, nature, architecture, furniture, and storytelling. The texts he is most known for are his translations of the Sagas, and fiction pieces like *The Well at World's End* and *The House of the Wolfings*.

George MacDonald was born in Scotland, in 1824 and died in 1905. He was very well-connected and served as a mentor for younger writers like Lewis Carroll. By profession, he was a minister for the Congregational Church. He wrote extensively, thousands of pages of poetry, essays, sermons, Theology, social commentary, and novels. The three novels that are usually considered the most relevant for the Fantasy Tradition are *Phantastes*, *Lilith*, and *The Princess and the Goblin*.

WHY NOT WILLIAM MORRIS?

We can see the thread that pulls from the Revolution towards our first candidate for a Fantasy Manifesto articulated by one of the most famous political and social critics of the period, Karl Marx, who tells Engels in one of their letters:

> The first reaction against the French Revolution, and the period of Enlightenment bound up with it, was, of course, to regard everything medieval as romantic, and even people like Grimm are not free from this. The second reaction and this corresponds

to the socialist tendency, even though those learned men have no idea that the two are connected — Is to look beyond the Middle Ages into the prehistoric period of each nation. (MARX, 1979)

He sees a pattern connecting all of this: 1789, the Revolution in abstract, the proliferation of the Nation-State, Socialism, the attempts to create "national identities", folklore, and a fascination with the distant past.

In the sensibilities this pattern represents, one can clearly see the profile of William Morris, and of his novels, translations, art, work, Socialist inclinations, and aesthetics. A web of interrelations is more and more evidently a development that transcends this or that writer, and more and more seems useful as a historiographical framing angle to connect several literary traditions, Fantasy included.

Morris was a man of many talents, and, when writing non-fiction, he focused his writing prowess on art, but art in general, pictorial art, ornamental art, arts and crafts. So, we find in William Morris moods and sensibilities that would later be echoed by Eddison and much later by Tolkien: art as valuable in itself, fundamental for the materialization of beauty and of the happiness of man, as well as a rejection of the barren world of machines and the societies it was engendering. This is why it is very hard to find, among his essays and letters, something that could be seen as a manifesto for Fantasy, though there are things that resemble manifestoes in other topics. But what about his Fantasy proper, where does it deviate from the views presented in *On Fairy Stories*? Well, the divergence is in how much politics is overt and central in

Morris' views of his own work. This is not to say Fantasy may not include politics or embody political themes, but writing from pre-existing political aims takes the writer and reader outside of the work itself, and risks placing it as an instrument of primary beliefs, or as something subsidiary to the primary world. This change in approach implies a change of procedure and effect. The "why" is different, and it has implications for the "how".

WHY NOT GEORGE MACDONALD?

With the second Precursor in our list, there were also characteristics that would later be echoed, but not yet a sense of full identity. He diverges from *On Fairy Stories* in a different way when compared to Morris. He was a preacher and a leader of a spiritual community. These were first and foremost in his mind. This led one of his two main works directed at adults, which was *Lilith*, to be seen as allegorical in design, not just pliable to allegorical interpretation, and the other one, *Phantastes*, as too dreamlike if not a "just a dream" story. In other words, *Phantastes* was not perceived as convinced of its own reality enough to go beyond Coleridge's "suspension of disbelief", and into the territory of "secondary belief". Both are brilliant works of literature, but not quite exactly what *On Fairy Stories* had in mind.

We interpret this slight mismatch as a sign we have gone too far back into the past, too far away from *On Fairy Stories* to find its earliest counterpart. We will adjust by proceeding to authors later than these two.

WHY NOT LOVECRAFT?

Howard Phillips Lovecraft was born in 1890 and died in 1937, living most of his life in the city of Providence, Rhode Island. His life was riddled with contradictions: he was severely agoraphobic, but cultivated a huge circle of friends; he was very passionate about science, but leaned towards Aestheticism philosophically; he was intransigent with making artistic compromises for the venues he wrote for, seemingly not very worried about commercial success, but co-authored and edited a couple of stories with amateur writers he was mentoring in the craft, and credited them and vouched for them even when the result deviated from what he would have done himself.

The Master of Providence wrote a great volume of letters, his large circle of correspondents included other writers like Ashton Clark Smith, Robert E. Howard, Robert Bloch, and August Derleth. He also wrote an extensive essay called *Supernatural Horror in Literature* in 1927, showing deliberation and erudition within the boundaries of his literary project and his topics of interest.

On the opening page, he says:

> The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown. These facts few psychologists will dispute, and their admitted truth must establish for all time the genuineness and dignity of the weirdly horrible tale as a literary form. Against it are discharged all the shafts of a materialistic sophistication which clings to frequently felt emotions and external events, and of a naively insipid idealism which deprecates the aesthetic motive and calls for a didactic literature

to uplift the reader toward a suitable degree of smirking optimism. (LOVECRAFT, 2011, p. 1041)

There is a lot of what we are looking for here: the awareness of hostile positions against the kind of literature he wanted to write, a rejection of those positions, as well as an awareness of what motivated those hostile positions. Relative to William Morris and George MacDonald, it is clear that the confidence in rejecting the Mimetic Paradigm is incrementally growing. He sees with increased irreverence devices like allegory, social commentary, character studies, satire, fables, and the role of the artist as a social educator.

He praises the aesthetic motive and rejects didacticism. In fact, he mentions it a couple of times, always negatively. One reason we cannot take this as an early Fantasy document is one of focus. A lot of the structure is already built, as well as the sensibilities required, but Lovecraft is more interested in pushing those towards effects more in line with "the Fantastic" than with Fantasy. He could have gone either way, and a portion of his work, especially the Dream Cycle and tales like *The Quest of Iranon,* can be argued to align perfectly with Fantasy, up to the very Eucatastrophe motif. But he, as an author and thinker of literature, was simply more invested in the horrible aspect of wonder. Rather than a founding document of Fantasy, it appears that the essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature* is better seen as an accomplishing document for the Weird Tale, or for the Fantastic, much in the same way *On Fairy Stories* fills that role for Fantasy proper. We seem to have advanced too much from George MacDonald and William Morris, and it would seem we should go back a little bit.

WHY NOT DUNSANY?

Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, known as Lord Dunsany for his peerage, was the archetypal polymath. He wrote chess puzzles for fun, won Irish pistol and chess championships, and was militarily active. People shot at him, not always on duty, and sometimes managed to land a hit. He hunted, played cricket, allegedly wrote manuscripts that he did not edit, and wrote novels, short stories, poems, and plays. In short, larger than life and a figure of legend.

Dunsany raised a huge written corpus, and that may be part of why he was undoubtedly one of the great, maybe even the greatest of the Predecessors. The breadth of his occupations and talents made any single one of his many pieces a poor candidate for a clear autonomous milestone, though.

In a way, there are many similarities between him, the person, and Lessingham, the narrator of Eddison's collection. So, more than an author of a Fantasy Manifesto, he is more like a Fantasy Hero. No doubt a Theory of Fantasy could be extracted from his autobiographies (he wrote more than one), but not a manifesto, we believe, because one of the characteristics of a manifesto is the succinctness of a public statement.

And, from what we could extract from documental evidence, he was less of a nexus on the social side of things than the other candidates. We were unable to find any direct evidence of him corresponding directly with Eddison or any of the Inklings, or with the Lovecraftian Circle across the Atlantic, even though Lovecraft's Circle did read him avidly. His works most associated with the Fantasy Tradition, like *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, or the collection that

includes *The Sword of Welleran*, or *Time and the Gods*, or *The Book of Wonder*, had prefaces that were very short and abstract remarks, like "Come with me, ladies and gentlemen who are in any wise weary of London: come with me: and those that tire at all of the world we know: for we have new worlds here" (DUNSANY, 1912) or "These tales are of the things that befell gods and men in Yarnith, Averon, and Zarkandhu, and in the other countries of my dreams" (DUNSANY, 1906).

These certainly set the mood, but they are not specific enough to serve as the concrete paradigms of a new literary project. They are compasses pointing north, rather than proof ships were built and sailed with set destinations. But the most relevant factor that moves his work away from serving as the milestone of a self-conscious fully consolidated Fantasy Tradition as envisioned by *On Fairy Stories* is that, occasionally, Dunsany feels the need to be apologetic about writing "just fantasy stories", as can be verified in the Preface of *The King of Elfland's Daughter*:

> I hope that no suggestion of any strange land that may be conveyed by the title will scare readers away from this book; for, though some chapters do indeed tell of Elfland, in the greater part of them 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, a good twenty or twenty-five miles from the border of Elfland. (DUNSANY, 1924)

FINDING A MANIFESTO

Eric R. Eddison was born in Leeds, England, in 1882, and died in 1945. For most of his adult life, he was a civil servant working in

the Board of Trade of the British Empire. He wrote relatively fast, but his writing was focused on a few large projects. He published a poetry collection, *Poems, Letters and Memories of Philip Sidney Nairn*, after which he published his first novel, *The Worm Ouroboros*, then authored his own saga, *Styrbiorn the Strong*. He translated *The Saga of Egil*, returned to his fantasy world by publishing *Mistress of Mistresses*, then *A Fish Dinner in Memison,* and unfortunately, he died without being able to finish *The Mezentian Gate,* the last novel in his planned tetralogy.

He was the author of the earliest document we were able to find matching the criteria chosen, which is the novel *The Worm Ouroboros* in its entirety, for reasons we will detail below. He was very familiar with William Morris' work, as can be seen by his essay about translating the Sagas into English, and was personally acquainted with the Inklings, being avidly read by both Tolkien and Lewis (TOLKIEN, 1981, p. 258). Eddison's first novel was highly praised by Lovecraft, who recommended it to at least one of his friends, saying: "*The Worm Ouroboros* is assuredly a phantastical classick of the first order, and I know not where else in current letters you can find an equal exaltation of the heroik spirit" (LOVECRAFT, 1968, p. 174). Based on this, it is reasonable to assume that Lovecraft's circle of correspondents was made aware of him through Lovecraft himself. With a viable candidate found, let us start our direct analysis of the document.

THE WORM OUROBOROS

This is a novel that is very hard to pin down. The style is a poetic prose that rivals anything written by Heinrich Heine or Baudelaire,

both authors he cared enough about to reference in his novels. The style takes itself very seriously and never breaks character. Ursula Le Guin comments on Eddison's poetic in the following way:

> The archaic manner is indeed a perfect distancer, but you have to do it perfectly. It's a high wire: one slip spoils all. The man who did it perfectly was, of course, Eddison. He really did write Elizabethan prose in the nineteen-thirties. His style is totally artificial, but it is never faked. If you love language for its own sake, he is irresistible. (LE GUIN, 1993, p. 85-86)

One very peculiar trait of its poetics is that everything is described as experienced by an observer, all surfaces and appearances. Characters either do or say things, and the reader is meant to take it as an aesthetic experience, as if the reader, like Lessingham, the poet, is being blessed with the boon of witnessing the greatest of adventures. Readers are never told by the narrator how to feel about anything, and this completely crushes any attempt to extract a didactic intention, a "moral of the story". Using Oscar Wilde's vocabulary from the Preface of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: "The artist has no ethical sympathies". It is all about action and beauty.

The novel is structured in thirty-three chapters plus the Induction, which starts and frames the tale. The story begins at Juss' birthday party, and it ends when he is commemorating his birthday again, thirty-three years old, exactly four years later.

The story itself starts *in medias res*, the nations of the world are enjoying the beginning of a new era of peace after just having been saved in a brutal war against the Ghouls. The Lords

of Demonland, who performed the greatest acts of heroism of the war and were abandoned by the Witches to face the Ghouls alone in the last battle, are celebrating, when suddenly they are interrupted by an ambassador sent by King Gorice XI of Witchland, who comes with a clear message: submit or perish. This, in turn, starts a new cycle of wars, treachery, sorcery, adventures, and impossible feats of heroism.

Each chapter has a small summary of the dramatic events narrated within them, and there is a timeline of the events relevant in the history of Mercury, this secondary world, and a list of real-world texts quoted, which range from Sappho to William Dunbar. Quoting primary world writers might seem like secondary belief is being abandoned for something "whimsical" or "fanciful", but it is actually well nested, since as, we have seen, a man from Earth is heavily implied to be the narrator.

The novel starts with the Induction, a landscape in Northern England is then described, containing a house in which a couple lives with their daughter. The husband and wife are Lessingham and Mary, the daughter is not named. They are portrayed as people with a deep knowledge of higher realities and the supernatural, and they see signs of something portentous about to happen. He chooses to experience whatever it is that is to follow, which he intuits will be a visit to another world, something implied that they have done many times before. Mary prefers to stay home and rest after having a passing intimation of their mortality. Before long, a martlet, a sacred legendary bird, comes and tells Lessingham to accompany her. They board a chariot pulled by a hippogryph and fly away to Mercury.

One important note here is that this is not Mercury the planet, but the luminary like the Ancients understood it, a different sphere, a different and higher reality altogether. When they arrive, Lessingham notices that he is insubstantial, only there to bear witness to events about to happen, and the text subverts the "just a dream" framing device by saying that, in the narrator's voice, "as in a dream, he followed her." (EDDISON, 2006, p. 14), and then later through the martlet: "For thou and I walk here impalpable and invisible, as it were two dreams walking" (EDDISON, 2006, p. 1). It is clear earthly things are the dream here, and Mercury the "real" world.

Considering the sophistication of the style, the quotation of real-world writers of the highest renown, the graphical brutality of some scenes like the first battle of Carcë or the fight against the mantichore, and the sporadic reminder that sex does exist, all of these made *The Worm Ouroboros* impossible to classify as a "story for children", most of all in the 1920s.

As we can see, *The Worm Ouroboros* challenged many things taken for granted in its date of publication about Non-Mimetic Fiction and turned them upside down in very deliberate ways. This is further pushed and made obvious by the Dedication, which says: "It is neither allegory nor fable but a Story to be read for its own sake" (EDDISON, 1922, p. 9). "Story" here capitalized is a subtle clue. In all his fantasy works, Eddison capitalizes those terms that are true in essence. For example, he differentiated gods from Gods, and kings from the King. This "Story" is true in the sense that the Forms or Mathematical truths are true, transcendentally true, universally true, true beyond any particular.

Combining the ostensive characteristics of the text and what is said in the Dedication, the reader is disoriented and can only proceed by taking at face value what is given. *The Worm Ouroboros* was simply what it was, Eddison knew what it was, and offered it to the public with pure honesty: take it or leave it.

It is truly a milestone, nothing can be found prior to *The Worm Ouroboros* that is quite doing what it is doing, though many later books would align with its literary values. In retrospect, this was noticed by literary historians, and their impressions seem to have been accurate:

> For the next quarter-century, *The Worm Ouroboros* remained the private enthusiasm of a small circle of connoisseurs, including James Branch Cabell. When I was a fledgling writer, Fletcher Pratt introduced me to The Worm. This extraordinary novel failed, on first publication, to make a bigger impression because it belonged to a genre that never became popular until the 1960s, when Tolkien and Howard became best-sellers in paperback. The first printing of The Worm was forty-odd years ahead of its time. (SPRAGUE, 1976, l. 2137-2151)

Even accessories seemed to become a kind of template. The paratext of *The Worm Ouroboros* serves as first example of things that *The Lord of the Rings* would also do decades later, with a kind of "Appendices" that here are called by Eddison a "List of Arguments with Dates", showing a timeline with relevant events and worldbuilding information using a calendar internal to the story; in this case, all dates are relative to "The Founding of Carcë". Most of this information extrapolates the plot itself, starting centuries before the events of the novel, helping to generate that

"illusion of historicity of a secondary world" that would become so characteristic of the Fantasy Genre.

In how the writers within the Fantasy Tradition use framing devices to justify the characteristics of their stories, Eddison's work is also seminal. There are exceptions, of course, but whereas Science Fiction and Supernatural Horror tend to prefer diegetic approaches like first-person narration through reports, letters, or journals, Fantasy tends to gravitate towards the *pseudobiblia* approach. *The Worm Ouroboros* subtly presents itself as a prose poem written by the narrator, a character that exists within the story being told. Maybe the most famous example of this approach in Western Literature is *Don Quixote*, which introduces itself as the translation of a manuscript detailing the adventures of someone who supposedly existed. Eddison, then, did not invent this framing device, but integrated it into this specific kind of Non-Mimetic Fiction well enough for it to be associated with the Fantasy Tradition. To see how typically this approach crystallized as a trope, *The Lord of the Rings* presents itself in the exact same way, as a long-lost manuscript eventually translated into the vernacular.

As we can see, *The Worm Ouroboros* is autonomous and requires nothing from the primary world to be fully understood, however, the artistic decisions involved in its composition cannot be understood except as some kind of statement.

They seem extremely out of place if that is not considered, and commentators were hard-pressed trying to find explanations for them. Usually, the puzzlement appears around two topics: the choice of names, and where does the Induction fits.

We believe that the purpose of the Induction as a framing device is already sufficiently clear, so we will focus on the choice of names. The nations and tribes of Mercury have names like "Demonland", "Witchland", "Goblinland" and "Pixieland", but their inhabitants exhibit none of the traits usually associated with Demons, Witches, Goblins, and Pixies. This seems like a way to enforce the perception that this is the pure output of the author's imagination, a cry for literary freedom. Since stories are about characters and characters need to do things somewhere, no place offers a wider horizon for the imagination than Nowhereland or Fantasyland.

The choice of character names is more difficult to explain, especially without biographical information that only became available to the critic decades after the novel's publication. In general, there is consistency within character groups: Demons mostly have short names with strong consonantal sounds such as Vizz, Zigg, Volle; Witches have Latin-sounding names like Corinius, Gallandus, Laxus, and Corsus; Goblins have names like Gro, Gaslark, and Teshmar, which is remarkably similar to how Tolkien would later name his own Goblins and Orcs (for example, Gorbag and Grishnak); Pixies are named with strong voiced Z sounds, like La Fireez and Prezmyra. So far so good, but some names defy any form of classification, like Mevrian, Brandoch Daha, Juss, Goldry Bluszco, and Gorice. After some pondering, however, one notices that the names that do not appear to follow any phonetic grouping pattern are all main characters.

One of Eddison's childhood friends, Arthur Ransome (1976, p. 38), mentions that he clearly remembers those names as the

names of childhood characters they had made up together, that they were part of their stories. All this information weighs against just waving away the nomenclature of *The Worm Ouroboros* as "inept" or lacking technique, most of all, after seeing how technically accomplished the structure and poetics of the novel are. Choices are being made here, and choices consciously taken in art are meaningful, but what do these choices communicate?

The key to this puzzle is to be found in the French Realist Movement. Long story short, after the Napoleonic Wars were over, the XIX century was for France a booming period of economic prosperity and literary experimentation. Literacy grew at rates never seen before, the general population followed literary disputes fought by intellectuals with avid interest, like a new kind of national sport. Many literary trends appeared: the Realists, the Naturalists, the Aestheticists, and the Symbolists. Sometimes they overlapped, sometimes they did not.

But for all these groups and movements, there was an intensification of focus on style. The more constrained artists became by political circumstances and acceptable object matters, the more writers differentiated themselves from each other in how they tackled these topics. Style was paramount, and it was in style that the public measured the craftsmanship, depth, and sophistication of the writer. The more trivial the subject matter, the more sophisticated the techniques became.

Gustave Flaubert, author of *Madame Bovary*, is taken by many to have been the very apex of the Realist Movement and French literary excellence. A man known to brood about every

detail of his work, always obsessed with the perfect arrangement and the perfect choice of words. After a very productive career, knowledgeable of the artistic comings and goings of his tradition and his generation of writers, and in full possession of a life worth of practice and consideration, he made the following remark:

> What seems to me beautiful, that which I would like to do, is to write a book about nothing, a book without any connection external to it, that will hold itself together by the internal force of its style, like the earth holds itself in the air without being held, a book that would hardly have a subject or that would have a subject almost invisible, if that were possible. The most beautiful works are those where there is the least amount of subject matter; the more the expression approaches thought, the more the word adheres to it and disappears, the more that is beautiful. I believe the future of art is along this path, I see it, as it grows, making it as ethereal as possible, from the Egyptian pylons to the Gothic lancets, and from the twenty thousand verse poems of the Hindus to the bursts of Byron. The form in becoming more skillful, attenuates itself, abandons all liturgy, all rules, all measure; it abandons the epic for the novel, verses for prose; it no longer recognizes any orthodoxy and becomes as free as each will that produces it. This liberation from materiality finds itself everywhere and the governments have followed it, from Oriental Despotism up until future Socialisms. It is because of this that there are no good or villainous subjects and that one can almost establish as an axiom, by proposing to themselves the point of view of pure Art, that there is not any other, the style standing in front of him all alone as an absolute way of seeing all things[7]. (FLAUBERT, 2017)

7 Ce qui me semble beau, ce que je voudrais faire, c'est un livre sur rien, un livre sans attache extérieure, qui se tiendrait de lui-même par la force interne de son style, comme

Placing this side by side with the Preface written by Oscar Wilde would suggest these are authors whose projects profoundly synergize, instead of authors that are usually taken to belong to opposing movements, and so the idea that Fantasy is a child of the Enlightenment is corroborated: there are technical discussions and developments within Mimetic Fiction that outflow naturally into Non-Mimetic experiments and explorations.

So, what is the rationale that made the names of the characters from the novel mirror those of Eddison's childhood imaginary heroes? Well, in more ways than one, *The Worm Ouroboros* can be seen as Realism radicalized enough to go beyond itself. What can be more personal and devoid of subject matter than the adventures of made-up people in made-up worlds? And what novel can be said to be held together more exclusively by the forces of its style alone than *The Worm Ouroboros*?

CONCLUSION

For these reasons, *The Worm Ouroboros* itself may be regarded as a self-conscious manifesto of a new literary project, self-articulated through the succinct series of direct statements

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la terre sans être soutenue se tient en l'air, un livre qui n'aurait presque pas de sujet ou du moins où le sujet serait presque invisible, si cela se peut. Les oeuvres les plus belles sont celles où il y a le moins de matière; plus l'expression se rapproche de la pensée, plus le mot colle dessus et disparaît, plus c'est beau. Je crois que l'avenir de l'Art est dans ces voies. Je le vois, à mesure qu'il grandit, s'éthérisant tant qu'il peut, depuis les pylônes égyptiens jusqu'aux lancettes gothiques, et depuis les poèmes de vingt mille vers des indiens jusqu'aux jets de Byron. La forme, en devenant habile, s'atténue; elle quitte toute liturgie, toute règle, toute mesure; elle abandonne l'épique pour le roman, le vers pour la prose; elle ne se connaît plus d'orthodoxie et est libre comme chaque volonté qui la produit. Cet affranchissement de la matérialité se retrouve en tout et les gouvernements l'ont suivi, depuis les despotismes orientaux jusqu'aux socialismes futurs. C'est pour cela qu'il n'y a ni beaux ni vilains sujets et qu'on pourrait presque établir comme axiome, en se posant au point de vue de l'Art pur, qu'il n'y en a aucun, le style étant à lui tout seul une manière absolue de voir les choses (FLAUBERT, 1852).

found in the Dedication. A comprehensive and international understanding of the textual tradition associated with Fantasy is difficult without this as a milestone. All defining traits taken as essential by Tolkien and for what Tolkien was doing are first found in Eddison's novel, a text published fifteen years before *The Hobbit* and about twenty before *The Lord of the Rings.* We propose that the date in which the Fantasy Tradition became aware of itself as a distinct kind of literature is marked by the publication of *The Worm Ouroboros* in 1922.

The novel taken as a whole is akin to a manifesto in function, which is to offer principles and guidelines for a literary project, and the Dedication is what would be expected of a manifesto proper in terms of form, it is declarative in essence. Historically, *The Worm Ouroboros* embodied all the combined elements that were later to characterize the Fantasy Tradition as such.

Many of the historiographical difficulties associated with clearly delineating what Fantasy is may well be the consequences of taking *The Lord of the Rings* as foundational rather than perfective. Rather than inaugurating something new, Tolkien's work seems to be more adequately contextualized as the completion or consolidation of a tradition, the gathering of a cycle.

As we see it, *The Worm Ouroboros* is the beginning and *The Lord of the Rings* the accomplishment. *On Fairy Stories* is the detailed articulation of those principles the Dedication of *The Worm Ouroboros* stated with an unassailable, unapologetically self-consciousness that hammered with stern words three iron nails, three declarations that did not invite dispute or controversy.

It fits all the criteria. It rejects allegory and didacticism. It embraces Aestheticism and art as its own end. It aims at secondary belief in a secondary world, and not just at suspension of disbelief. It was designed for an adult sophisticated public, and it is, in its own way, continuing the work of the masters of the Western Tradition, like Flaubert, fully participating in the literary controversies of its day. With roots in the Enlightenment, the conceptual tools to define and represent reality developed slowly, and from the literary concerns surrounding Mimetic Fiction there flourished a deliberate and self-aware kind of Non-Mimetic Fiction. *The Worm Ouroboros* goes full circle and bites its tail.

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