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Fantastic Interventions: The Therapeutic Uses of Contemporary Canadian Fantasy for Children

—Karen Coats

Alexis, André. *Ingrid and the Wolf*. Toronto: Tundra, 2005. 159 pp. $12.99 pb. ISBN 0-88776-691-9.

Choyce, Lesley. *Smoke and Mirrors*. Toronto: Dundurn, 2004. 218 pp. $12.99 pb. ISBN 1-55002-534-1.

Melling, O.R. *The Golden Book of Faerie*. Toronto: Penguin, 2004. 946 pp. $26.00 pb. ISBN 0-14-305132-6.

Nugent, Cynthia. *Francesca and the Magic Bike*. Vancouver: Raincoast, 2004. 215 pp. $12.95 pb. ISBN 1-55192-561-3.

Prinz, Yvonne. *Still There, Clare*. Vancouver: Raincoast, 2004. 175 pp. $10.95 pb. ISBN 1-55192-644-X.

Scrimger, Richard. *The Boy from Earth*. Toronto: Tundra, 2004. 161 pp. $9.99 pb. ISBN 0-88776-591-2.

Van Belkom, Edo. *Lone Wolf*. Toronto: Tundra, 2005. 177 pp. $12.99 pb. ISBN 0-88776-741-9.

Literary criticism has undergone multiple paradigm shifts since Plato speculated on the role of the poet in society; emphasis has shuffled from one to another of M.H. Abrams's compass points of world, text, author, and reader as the discipline of literary studies invented and continues to refresh and reinvent itself. Currently, literary critics seem variously invested in literature as one type of semiotic and ideological system among others; as privileged sites of inquiry, textuality has trumped texts, subjectivity has decentred authors and readers, and historicity has complicated straightforward mimetic representation. The field has thus widened to include the serious analytical study of popular and formerly marginalized forms, not as shining exemplars of some Great Tradition of enlightened humanity but as expressions of who we were, who we are, and who we might become, for better or worse.

Without such an expansion of literary studies into the areas of culture and subjectivity, I wouldn't be in this profession. I'm not much interested in Great Traditions and the perfections of literary form; what I *am* interested in is what the stories we tell, especially the stories we can't seem to stop telling, teach us about who we are, both individually and as a culture. And I am very interested in the processes whereby storytelling shapes our realities by providing us with structures that organize random everyday experience. Stories take experiences, emotions, and values and place them within a narrative structure that such experiences don't necessarily have in real life. Instead of life's random or unmotivated sequences of events, narratives impose a plot governed by cause and effect; conflict, complication, and resolution; and a discrete and definable beginning and ending. Accidental assemblages of people thrown together through circumstance become characters who have a function in the progress of the narrative or the development of the protagonist. It is through the narrativizing of experience that events and people in our lives acquire significance, but since that significance is something imposed by a creating and organizing imaginative function, it is at best an enabling fiction, even if it conforms to a pattern that is logically possible in the real world.

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Many such structurings, indeed many of my favourites, do not conform at all to patterns that are logically possible in the real world. These belong to the literary genre of fantasy. Fantasy is as old as storytelling itself, of course, and fantastic stories and myths clearly served the world-ordering and explanatory functions that I outlined above for untold centuries. But we post-Enlightenment types tell other stories about reality now, stories that are based on scientific principles and that clearly delineate what's empirically real and verifiable and what is speculative or simply impossible. So if stories still serve to structure, secure, and manage our current scientific and rationality-based realities, then what use can stories that offer an impossible structuring of reality serve for us other than to foment and multiply our discontent with our limitations? Many of my students resist fantasy on just those grounds—how could something clearly fantastic and not obviously reality-related possibly have any relevance for us? Doesn't fantasy's reliance on impossible interventions and remedies simply sidestep real issues, whether personal or cultural, that we should be dealing with directly? What use could such escapist stories possibly have in making sense of the world? To what impulses do they respond; what needs do they meet?

I suspect that such fantasy figurations don't simply reflect but actively generate the normative structures into which adolescent experience must fit in order for it to be understandable.

As these questions indicate, my approach in examining these books of fantasy will be on how they structure certain features of reality, specifically psychic reality, rather than on the literary features of the genre of fantasy per se. Multiple taxonomies exist that attempt to place stories with impossible elements into categories—high fantasy, secondary world fantasy, magic realism, etc.—and to explore and even defend their literary qualities. That kind of work is not my aim here. Rather, I wish to see how far a certain perspective enables us to account for the dynamics at play in this admittedly small sample of contemporary Canadian fantasy literature for children. In discussions with the editor regarding the books chosen for this review essay, I specified that I was interested in a particular type of fantasy; specifically, I wanted fantasies that featured adolescent characters who lived between worlds in some way, that is, who had one foot grounded on Canadian soil while the other could be just about anywhere. I was also interested in shape-shifters, characters whose embodiments were unstable. These liminal,

or threshold, experiences interest me greatly, as they seem to generate specific types of fantasies that, taken together, teach us something about the way culture figures the psychic traumas of adolescence. I suspect that such fantasy figurations don't simply reflect but actively generate the normative structures into which adolescent experience must fit in order for it to be understandable; that readers don't simply respond to or recognize these structures, but unconsciously adopt or conform to them as narratives they can live in and through. Teenagers from the fifties are different from teenagers in the twenty-first century, and I believe that is at least in part because of the stories we tell about what constitutes adolescent experience, what marks the passages from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood, and how each phase of life is valued, both consciously and unconsciously. However, because of the limited nature of my sample, and because of the specificity of my theoretical approach, I make no grand claims of inclusivity or exclusivity for either the literature or the theory; I aim to do simply what literary theory does—offer a possible framework through which we can understand or make more interesting a class of phenomena, using a small sample as evidence and hoping that the theory may be in some way generalizable to other texts by other critics. After all, if I am right about stories generating patterns, then these patterns should be locatable across a spectrum of texts.

My questions regarding the way fantastic stories work to structure psychic realities lead me to work from a psychoanalytic definition of fantasy. I find psychoanalysis and literature mutually informative; as Brian Attebery says, "Some psychological processes are inaccessible except through the narrative interaction of archetypal characters" (71), and I would add that the narrative interaction of some characters is made more interesting and meaningful to me when viewed in light of psychological processes. As I noted above, I asked for fantasies that featured characters in liminal states or whose fantasies turned on shape shifting. These are rather obvious metaphors for adolescent transitions—characters on the cusp of puberty or on the cusp of adulthood occupy threshold spaces in their culture, and adolescence is distinctly marked by a changing body. But I also found that, in each of the books I read, the protagonist experiences some more or less serious experience of loss and grief. Alan Dingwall of *The Boy from Earth* is having a hard time coping with his parents' divorce, especially now that his mother's shrill anger is turned on him in the absence of his father. Simon, in *Smoke and Mirrors*, grieves the loss of his friend, who turns out never to have existed in the first place, after a traumatic brain injury left Simon without the capacity to see the imaginary Ozzie anymore. In *Ingrid and the Wolf*, Ingrid Balazs, though deeply loved by her

parents, is profoundly lonely as she is isolated by her parents' poverty. The title of *Still There, Clare* refers multiply to twelve-year-old Clare's imaginary friend, whom she is in the belated process of outgrowing, her best friend Paul, who is moving away, and her favourite aunt, who is increasingly unavailable to her as she develops a romantic relationship. *The Golden Book of Faerie*, which is a compilation of four books, features multiple losses, including the death of a sister, the disappearance of a cousin and a mother, and the loss of a home. In *Lone Wolf*, the pack of teen werewolves faces the possible loss of their hunting ground to a lumber company, but more profoundly seeks knowledge of their parents, who died when they were born. Frankie, in *Francesca and the Magic Bike*, suffers more profoundly perhaps than any of the protagonists; she has lost her mother to cancer and, being unwanted by her stepfather, must go to live with her dysfunctional alcoholic father, aptly named Ron Rudderless.

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The prevalence of grief, loss, and loneliness in these narratives suggests a cultural disposition to view the advent of adolescence as a site of pain. The narratives seem to indicate that childhood isn't something we look forward to leaving, that growing up is an enterprise fraught with loss, even the death of some part of the self. This view is of course not new for children's literature scholars, who have long noted the romanticization of and nostalgia for childhood that marks most children's literature. But the question remains for me: what are we actually losing in the process of growing up, and how do our grief responses shape our character? The death of a parent is a frequent motif in children's literature, and is again one of those obvious metaphors for growing up—our profound dependence on mom or dad must give way to a quest for independence, and the easiest way to initiate that journey in literature is to bump off mom or dad and force the child to deal with the consequences of that loss. For most real children, though, the changes involved in growing up are not registered as losses on a conscious, material level. Instead, they feel as though they are gaining things like more freedom, more responsibility, the ability to make money, drive, choose their own friends and their own clothes; in general, their lives and activities become more self-driven, more governed by their own choices. But according to the grown-ups who write these narratives of adolescence,

these gains come at a stiff price, and psychoanalytic models of development tend to agree. As we shall see, what each protagonist in this set of books loses is the assurance of being unconditionally loved by a steadfast, unchanging other, whether that other be a mother, a twin, an imaginary friend, or a place of safety where they belong.

This originary sense of belonging is the legacy of childhood—it is part of children's egocentric orientation that they do not fully experience themselves as separate entities in the world. It is also often reinforced by a loving family that meets the child's needs, provides him with a comfortable nest, and provides plenty of casual reassurances of love through touch and language. Of course this isn't always the case, and in such instances children either develop compensatory fantasies or, in extreme cases, withdraw from contact altogether. But in the books under discussion here, we see the dynamics of well-loved children, or children who have developed fantasy friends who love them, waking up to the fact that their cocoon of childhood is about to crack open, and things might not be so comfortable on the other side. The response of the characters to this transition is, in some way, to leave the confines of ordinary existence and embark on some fantastic adventure or mission that ultimately empowers them to return to their lives with a newfound acceptance of their changed status.

The magical adventures that each of the protagonists experience, then, are in some way motivated by and resolve or cover over this initial problem of loss, which is more or less the clinical definition of fantasy in Lacanian psychoanalysis. This is fantasy's fetishistic guise—it acts as a stand-in for something that is perceived as missing in our lives or relationships. Whereas Freud first distinguished fantasy from reality as "a purely illusory product of the imagination that stands in the way of a correct perception of reality" (qtd. in Evans 59), the imbrication of fantasy and reality forced him to nuance his definition as a "scene . . . which stages an unconscious desire" (60). On one level, there is nothing particularly unconscious about the desire to recover what has been lost, and most of these stories operate on that level—Clare wants both her imaginary and real friends to stay put; Ingrid wants to assuage her loneliness; Simon wants validation that his friend Ozzie did exist; the werewolves want to preserve both their home and their secret and to recover their parents in some fashion; and Frankie wants someone to love and take care of her. Gwen resolutely enters the land of Faerie to bring back her cousin; Laurel, perhaps more reluctant but no less resolute, goes to battle to free her sister, so that even though she will remain dead on earth she can at least remain alive in Faerie; and Dana accepts even more loss when she enters Faerie to

reclaim her relationship with her immortal mother and ultimately must choose between a fully mortal or a fully fairy existence.

But these obvious fulfillments of desire are not the whole story, for several reasons. First and most importantly, unconscious desire is not the same as seeking and getting what you want. For Lacan, desire is co-extensive with lack—that is, once a subject has recognized that she is separate from the Other, she is immediately confronted with the recognition that she is neither whole nor all. In Lacan's theory of subject formation, the infant exists in a state of undifferentiated oneness with the world around her. As she develops, she goes through a process of alienation from her own experience of her body and learns to differentiate between the me and the not-me. This alienation begins with the mirror stage, where the infant recognizes the image in the mirror as her own body, and is delighted by its coherence and its apparent autonomy of movement (Lacan, *Écrits* 94, 76). But her delight is the result of a misrecognition; she is beginning the process whereby she will replace her actual being in the world with signifiers that secure her in a world of images and symbols. Those signifiers enable her to become a subject—that is, to enter the world of language that will give her status and meaning among the community of other subjects—but they also cut her off forever from the world of undifferentiated plenitude. She moves from being an object of someone else's desire to being a desiring subject. In a move as simple as the mother turning her focus away from the child or as profound as the father intervening, symbolically or actually, in the dual relation between the child and the mother, the child realizes at an unconscious level that her mother has desires other than her, desires that she cannot, or must not, by the terms of the Oedipal prohibition, fill. Up until that moment (which isn't really a precise moment, but rather a growing awareness), mother and infant have been a dyadic couple, each completing the other. But then a third term (alternately figured as the father, the paternal metaphor, the Law, and even the mother's own desire) intervenes, and the child is forced to reckon with a Law that separates her from her desire. In the drama of Lacanian subject formation, this Law institutes a cut, a severing of the dyadic relation between mother and infant that renders them both incomplete, but also sets in motion the chain of signifiers that will turn the infant into a subject. Though it is registered as a profound loss, this cut—or castration in Lacan's terms—is what enables the subject to take up a position with respect to the Symbolic order of language and culture: "Thus it is, rather, the assumption [*assomption*] of castration that creates the lack on the basis of which desire is instituted. Desire is desire for desire, the Other's desire, as I have said, in other words, subjected to

the Law" (*Écrits* 852, 723).

This cut, embodied in the separation between mother and baby, moves the child from an undifferentiated sense of oneness with the world into a dynamic relation with the Other. Otherness includes "small o" others, such as other people or things like dolls and animals that children consider people, and "big O" others, like authoritative institutions, language, and culture. According to Lacan, our subjectivities are formed, bound up in, and always a response to the Other. Consider, for instance, what he says about children and stories: "This child, we see that he is prodigiously open to everything concerning the way of the world that the adult brings to him. Doesn't anyone ever reflect on what this prodigious porosity to everything in myth, legend, fairy tales, history, the ease with which he lets himself be invaded by these stories, signifies, as to his sense of the other?" (*Seminar* 49). The stories we tell set the terms for what is desirable because they provide children with the signifiers whereby they can access the Other and the Other's desire. For not only do we desire the Other, we also desire as the Other desires, and we desire to find ourselves as a cause or even object of the Other's desire; as Lacan says, "man's desire finds its meaning in the other's desire, not so much because the other holds the keys to the desired object, as because his first object(ive) is to be recognized by the other" (*Écrits* 268, 222).

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This is what is at stake in these narratives—the desire to be recognized by someone other than that first, stabilizing other. Sure, mom loved me, but what happens when I move beyond that first guise of the other? Is there something in me that secures my desirability to someone other than the (m)other? These characters are at a moment of crisis where they desire a sign of their desirability. In fact, however, because the subject looks to the Other for her completion, it is much more difficult to acknowledge that the Other is also lacking than it is to acknowledge her own need. So the subject stages fantasies that do one of two things (or possibly both)—they imagine within themselves something that is worthy of the Other's love, and they protect themselves against the knowledge of the lack in the Other. Insofar as these stagings represent preferred methods of approaching the problem of lack, these "fundamental fantasies" constitute the subject's clin-

ical structure, her more or less consistent response to the problem of Otherness. In other words, desire defines the subject's relationship with the Other, and she structures a fantasy as a way of inventing herself in response to that desire.

So, for instance, if we examine Clare in more depth, we find that she is on the cusp of puberty. For girls in our contemporary lookist culture, this means that she is about to become the object of an alienating, critical gaze, a gaze that so far has come only from herself in the mirror as she looks for signs of development, but will soon come from boys (probably looking for the same thing) as well as girls caught in a sticky web of competition and envy. Up to this point, she has constructed the objects that stabilize her identity on her own terms—she has an imaginary friend who is stylish, worldly, and sophisticated to her more sporty fashion sense, a geeky best friend who doesn't possess the social skills to branch out, and an aunt who supports her unconditionally. Moreover, she has no rival for her aunt's affection, unlike the (Oedipal) negotiations that she must make with regard to her parents. The story turns on how these objects begin to fail her as stabilizing fantasies. Elsa, the imaginary friend, goes to Paris; at some level, Claire knows that it is past time for her to give up her imaginary friend, but she isn't ready, so she stages the trip to Paris as an impermanent separation. She actively protects the childish part of herself by making the decision Elsa's idea, indicating perhaps that her ego is wiser than her id-based impulses. Elsa's departure causes not only loneliness for Clare but an irrational jealousy as well: think about it—Clare is no longer fascinating to the person she invented explicitly for that purpose; her own creation has gone off to pursue her desire elsewhere. Paul, her best friend, is also moving away, and he is irritated with Clare for making his move all about her: "Clare, why are you acting like this is happening to you? I'm the one that has to leave. Do you have any idea what that's going to be like? I won't know anyone, I won't even know where to go to buy comic books or see a movie!" (Prinz 71). He is directly calling upon her to recognize that she is not all, that he is a subject in his own right and not merely filler for her lack. The final blow comes when her aunt starts seeing her track coach. She is horrified by the double betrayal; as her aunt and as her track coach, they were her objects—extensions of her that she does not consider as having their own distinct subjectivity. What business do they have developing a desire that is both independent of and exclusive of her? In the end, imaginary Elsa pushes Clare into meeting and bonding with a real girl, Allison, and Aunt Rusty gives her a dog, whom she actually names Elsa, so that her fantasy of desirability, of being the adored object of someone's albeit slobbery and inhuman desire, is restored.

Alan Dingwall gains the equivalent of an ima-

ginary friend when Norbert, a boy from Jupiter, takes up residence in his nose. *The Boy from Earth* is the sequel to Scrimger's earlier *The Nose from Jupiter*, which tells the story of Norbert's arrival and the way his snappy, snarky responses from inside Alan's nose get Alan through the pangs of entering junior high, dispensing with a bully, and catching the attention of a girl, all of which the polite, demure, and slightly geeky Alan could not have done on his own. In *The Boy from Earth*, the tables are turned, and it is Alan's turn to help Norbert by fulfilling a prophecy that would set him against the Black Dey, a villain who is enslaving the people of Jupiter. In this self-consciously goofy Freudian fantasy, "Jupiter" is an analogue for Alan's own brain; he traverses the Amyg Dale (the amygdala), the Hippo Campgrounds (the hippocampus), the Optic Chasm (the optic chiasm), and the Parietal River (the parietal lobe—don't worry, there's a glossary) to reach the Black Dey of Ich (Ich being the German for Freud's id), who turns out to look like a tattooed, bad-ass version of Alan himself. After Alan bests the Black Dey on the field of battle, he is struck by lightning and awakens from his dream of Jupiter in the back seat of the minivan where he fell asleep and found himself in a space-craft at the beginning of the story. He swears at his mother, who has greeted him by yelling at him, smokes a cigarette, and looks into the mirror to find that he has become the Black Dey of his fantasy. *"Identity is tricky"* (155), Norbert has warned him, and he finds it doubly so when he awakens again, this time back on Jupiter and in his more respectable nice-guy guise, to finish his quest and free Norbert and his girlfriend from the evil Dey. Hence he, like Clare, returns to a fantasized place where he is desirable to the Other—if his mother doesn't want him, then Norbert and the good citizens of Jupiter clearly do.

In *Smoke and Mirrors*, Simon also develops an imaginary friend as a stabilizing object. As Clare and Norbert do, he creates Ozzie as an alter ego, a person much edgier than he is willing to be, so that he can act out in wild ways and put the blame on Ozzie. After his brain injury prevents him from seeing Ozzie anymore, his parents perpetuate his fantasy by telling him that Ozzie moved away. But Ozzie isn't Simon's only loss; he says, "Despite the fact we all live in the same house, I think I've grieved over the loss of my parents for six or seven years now" (Choyce 10), referring to fact that his parents are busy executives who have always ignored him, but are also "continually disappointed that they couldn't buy their way back to having a normal son" (33). When Simon begins to see Angela, a girl no one else can see, he doesn't make the connection to Ozzie, but instead thinks that she is there to help him in some way. He slowly realizes that it is she who needs his help; Angela is the wandering spirit of a girl who is in a coma following an attempted suicide. She forms a

psychic bond with Simon and he is able to convince her to choose to live, but he loses her in the process. When he attempts to make contact with her as a flesh-and-blood girl rather than a spirit, she doesn't remember him, and is freaked out by how much he knows about her. He grieves the sense of importance and purpose she gave him:

> Despite what I had been through, or maybe because of it, I had triggered an inner realization that what had happened probably would never happen again. I felt like I was changed somehow. I was older, more reasonable even. Maybe I was becoming normal. It was a kind of death. The death of possibility. (211)

Even the silliest, most banal fantasy narratives seek to perpetuate the fantasized supports of the royalist unconscious, which believes itself the rightful, if temporarily displaced, monarch and hero of its own story.

In each of these fantasies, the protagonists have created fantasized objects that guarantee their status as desirable to the Other. Lacan explains this way of conceiving one's desirability in his 1960–61 seminar on *Le transfert*, using a concept he borrowed from the ancient Greeks—the *agalma*. Traditionally, the *agalma* is a gift that one would offer to the gods to curry favour. The psychoanalytic rendering of the term offered by Slavoj Žižek is "the secret treasure that guarantees the minimum of fantasmatic consistency of the subject's being . . . that 'something in me more than myself' on account of which I perceive myself as 'worthy of the Other's desire'" (194). That is, the imaginary friends whom these characters create are manifest representations of that "something in me more than myself" (Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 268); they stage the unconscious desire that there is a secret or enigma at the core of my being that is worth seeking and that makes me worth the care and attention of the Other. The common, plaintive fantasy that most of us cherish of being misunderstood, underestimated, and not getting the respect we deserve rests on this support. But Lacan says that we must recognize that it is, in fact, a fantasmatic, capricious support at best. Rather than cover over the lack in ourselves through substitutions, as in Clare's case, or perpetuation of the fantasy, as in Alan's case, we need, like Simon, to cultivate "an acceptance of the fact that *there is no secret treasure in me* at all" (Choyce 196), grieve its loss, and move on as ordinary, flawed people in an ordinary, flawed world.

This insight is precisely what most fantasy narratives, especially for children, are designed to postpone. Even the silliest, most banal fantasy narratives seek to perpetuate the fantasized supports of the royalist unconscious, which believes itself the rightful, if temporarily displaced, monarch and hero of its own story. For instance, Alan's presence on Jupiter is in response to the need for a champion from Earth. In *Francesca and the Magic Bike*, the elderly Augusta needs Frankie, who is strong enough to ride her magic bike, can swim well enough to recover her lost ring, and is resourceful enough to escape from bad guys, to restore both Augusta's and Frankie's family legacies. Only a true Balazs could pass the tests and free Gabor the wolf from his eternal existence in the dark labyrinth of *Ingrid and the Wolf*; only a human can restore the passages between Faerie and the human world in Melling's series; and only a werewolf can foil the plans of those who would seek to spoil the woods in *Lone Wolf*. In other words, these fantasies revolve around the specialness of their protagonists, and thus support, rather than dismantle, the notion of an *agalma* as the core of our desirability.

Such a view of fantasy—that it needs to be confronted and dismantled as an illusionary support for subjectivity—is anathema to fantasists of a Tolkienian disposition. As Attebery points out, "Tolkien, a Catholic, also saw the necessity of penetrating illusion. However, for him, such illusion . . . was produced by boredom, habit, false sophistication, and loss of faith. The illusion is that the world has become trite or stale" (16). Thus Tolkien locates the problem of illusion in precisely opposite terms from Lacan—rather than seeing through the *agalma* as a fantasmatic guarantee of our specialness, he encourages the reclaiming of wonder, the rediscovery of the secret treasure, not only within us, but within the Other as well. For Tolkien, the possibility of a desiring, mutually fulfilling relationship with the Other, specifically understood for him as God, was a live issue, a goal to be pursued rather than a fantasy to be abandoned as illusory or impossible. Whereas for Lacan the use of narrative to structure reality covers over a fundamental lack or irreconcilable antagonism that is more ethically left exposed, for Tolkien it introduces "an awareness of and a pattern for meaningfulness" (Attebery 17) that may in fact point the way to personal development and social change. Interestingly, the two thinkers would probably agree on the central problem—an insurmountable alienation from the Real—while disagreeing violently as to its remedy. Tolkien comes down squarely in favour of heroes, supported by the myths and narratives of their culture.

In the narratives described above, the emphasis was on the protagonist confronting his or her own lack and seeking to cover it over with the fantasy

of some secret treasure within. Often, though, that treasure is needed to rescue a world in crisis—that is, the lack that is revealed through the child's sense of separation is less the lack in the self and more the lack in the Other. This is more frightening, because the Other is what secures the subject's status in the world to begin with; in other words, it is often easier to acknowledge that one desires something that is out there but inaccessible than it is to admit that it just isn't out there to begin with. If fantasy narratives function to cover over an awareness of lack in the self, does it stand to reason that they also do so for the more anxiety-producing lack in the Other?

In the books under study, this lacking Other is conceived as an alien being or an alien world, a spirit, a fairy, an animal partner, an inverted version of the self, the environment, or even Canada itself. Indeed, Melling's work is most interesting under this analysis in its attempt to transform Canada from an alienating, disenchanted space to a re-enchanted homeland for the final protagonist, Dana.

Melling sets up her epic cycle by introducing two cousins, on the brink of putting away childish things for good, who nevertheless take one final trip to look for the door to Faerie. Though their names are both derivatives of Guenevere, Gwen and Findabhair are physical and psychic antitheses. Gwen is a sturdy, practical minded Canadian, while Findabhair is a wispy, free-spirited Irish girl; so when the fairies call the girls as they recklessly sleep in an ancient burial mound, Gwen resists as Findabhair disappears. This binary characterization persists throughout the books; Canadians are creatures of earth, whereas the Irish are at home in the airy lands of the fey folk. In the second book, twins Laurel and Honor form the pair that moves between Faerie and Ireland. Honor has been killed in a hang-gliding accident, which Laurel learns was orchestrated by the Summer King, with whose human aspect she has unwittingly fallen in love. Though she reconciles herself to her sister's new existence as the queen of Faerie and even helps restore the amoral and largely unrepentant Summer King to power, she cannot forgive the human Ian and returns to Canada with a bad taste in her mouth where Faerie is concerned. She is much happier to be in Canada where the boundaries between worlds appear fixed.

The last two books in the chronicles centre on Dana. Like the protagonists of the books I discussed earlier, Dana has suffered a significant loss that acts as an unconscious catalyst that propels her into magic. Dana has never given up hope that her mother, who disappeared when Dana was three, will return to her. When her father tells her that they are moving from Ireland to Canada, she is devastated, fearing that her mother will not be able to find them should she come back. She sees her father's decision as a betrayal of her fantasy of a complete family.

Also like earlier protagonists, Dana is possessed of an *agalma*—she is the light-bearer's daughter, which means that, among other powers, she can produce light from her fingertips. This special gift, however, is what awakens her mother from the love-enchantment that has fallen over her and causes her to flee her daughter and husband. So the thing that was supposed to make Dana desirable to the Other has in fact alienated her from the (m)other whose love she most earnestly desires and, as a result, becomes the traumatic but repressed memory that hinders her ability to make new connections. Before she leaves for Canada, an environmental crisis precipitates her first flight into the realm of Faerie; she meets Honor, who promises her heart's desire if she will help prevent the destruction of the woods. Her journey through Faerie proves therapeutic in the extreme, as she gains a new aspect of her identity through identifying with a wolf; learns through the wolf's death to grieve properly rather than melancholically, as she has grieved for her mother; and squarely faces the repressed memory of her role in her mother's disappearance. The therapeutic importance of this last move is heavy-handedly underscored with almost theological resonance: *"If you make peace with your monster, the shadow cannot touch you. And the Enemy's power will lessen in the world"* (460). By forgiving herself, she is able to unleash her *agalma*, shedding the literal light of day on the bulldozers taking out the ancient trees, and revealing her specialness. Her reward is, predictably, reconciliation with her mother.

In the second book, when she, her father, and Aradhana move to Canada, Dana plunges into a sullen teenage depression, broken only by her frequent journeys to visit her mother in Faerie through dreams. She thinks that there are no spirits in Canada, and thus this is not a land for her. Melling's project, then, turns to fleshing out the Native myths of Canada and conjoining them with the Irish and Scottish fey folk who emigrated with their humans. An enemy of Faerie, Grimstone, has been able to close all of the portals between worlds except one, which had been sealed by Dana's own ancestor, and could be opened, of course, only by her. Before she can accomplish her task, however, she must learn to love and respect the environs of Canada by feeling the land and coming to know the Ancient Ones—the elemental indigenous spirits that walk the wilds of Canada. Along the way, she meets a cute boy of French ancestry, who turns out to be a *loup-garou*.

Though archetypal figures crowd these incredibly involved narratives, and Dana very nearly passes from character to hero archetype in the end, there is a clear sense of the notion that the personal identity of characters must be worked out with respect to a national Other, foregrounded by a tension between

the desires of and for what have been called, erroneously, the New and Old Worlds. A similar fantasy plays out in *Ingrid and the Wolf*, where a girl, though born in Canada, nevertheless feels alienated from her fellow schoolmates and unsettled in her identity until she receives a summons to visit her grandmother in Hungary. Similar themes and motifs emerge: the girl's mystical connection with the wolf, the enchanted Old World of lineage beyond time in tension with a mundane and ordinary Canada, the realization that magic traverses national boundaries. Both girls come to prefer Canada, not only to the Old World, but to other, more properly magical worlds as well. But while Ingrid recognizes that her life could be a fairy tale of wealth and prestige in her grandmother's home in Hungary, she chooses to bring the wolf Gabor with her to Toronto instead, to live as a seemingly ordinary girl with a dog rather than as a duchess with a talking wolf. Thus she retains her *agalma*, her secret treasure, which is reinforced by the adoring and utterly loyal figure of her wolf companion. By leaving Hungary, she can preserve it in memory as a perfect world of romance, magic, and dreams, in opposition to Toronto, where she will face the ordinary pangs and joys of growing up. Dana, on the other hand, seems to work a synthesis between Tolkienian and Lacanian theories of fantasy. In the end, she dies rescuing Faerie, and her boyfriend, having transformed during daylight, is destined to remain a wolf like his grandfather before him, who made a similar sacrifice by transforming in daylight in order to save his grandson's life. She requests a boon of Faerie in return for her service: she wants to be alive again in the human world, and she would like for her boyfriend and his grandfather to be able to recover their ability to shape-shift. The King of Faerie considers, but forces them each to choose: they may opt for an ordinary human life, or they may remain as they are. That is, in order to live, they must give up their *agalma*, that which makes them special, grounds their identity and desirability in the Other, and affords them a measure of *jouissance* that will be unavailable to them without it. Ultimately, they each choose the life without guarantees, satisfying Lacan's call to give up their fantasmatic supports and Tolkien's call to reinvest the real world with the wonder of a meaningful life.

Once the magical world has finally been rescued, the hero is usually banned from walking between worlds, and it is in this way that the lack in the Other is ultimately covered over. Just as the fantasy narrative preserves the notion of the *agalma* that ensures our desirability for the Other, it also preserves the desirability of the Other in its romantic wholeness by consigning it to the haze of memory or barring our way of return. Whether such fantastic resolution be a light or a trap, a Tolkienian possibility or a Lacanian illusion, I will leave to individual

dispositions.

It does seem clear, however, that this motif of the special child rescuing the world is experiencing a resurgence of sorts in these early years of the twenty-first century. While heroes and heroines of the early part of the twentieth century were busy saving their elders or their communities (I'm thinking here of Anne Shirley, Pollyanna, Heidi, Mary Lennox, etc.), today's heroes have bigger responsibilities. jan jagodzinski (he prefers a lower-case spelling of his name) refers to William Strauss and Neil Howe's thesis of generational crisis and heroic emergence when he points out that:

> Although the tragic event of 9/11 didn't quite live up to the parameters as to when the next crisis was expected to occur (ca. 2050) as developed in their last book, *Millennials Rising*, it was seized as the ordained event to present the necessary challenge for the newest generation to prove itself "heroic," like the GI generation did 75 years ago. (18)

Strauss and Howe suggest that the cycle of heroism repeats itself every three generations; hence the need for a crisis and its correspondent messianic response, which inevitably falls to youth. There is perhaps no better support for the development of a heroic consciousness than literary narratives such as the ones under study here, which perpetuate the idea that there is a crisis afoot and that only a child with something special within him or her can succeed in accomplishing the task of rescuing the world, an accomplishment which will earn that child the undying admiration and love of the Other. In that sense, the fantasies that I have looked at here seem to partake in a large cultural cycle that requires the continual refreshment of the myth of the child messiah—a myth that, from Buddha to Jesus to Kirikou to Harry Potter and beyond, is as cross-cultural as it is timeless. On the other hand, there is something distinctly Canadian in the stories of Melling, Van Belkom, and Alexis, a deliberate attempt to rediscover the magic and enchantment of indigenous tradition that threatens to be eclipsed by increasing trends toward urbanization and globalization. The children and young adults are important in these stories, but preserving and reinvigorating the myth of Canada as a wild, untouched, spirit-inhabited plenitude is at the heart of these fantasies.

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