

must be constructed, rewritten, assembled into meaningful order by the reader, who has been given a guide to the process in the very magical operations he is reading about.

By placing questions of memory and fate, cause and effect, invention and experience at the level of story, rather than leaving them at the discretion of a narrator as realistic fiction tends to do, fantasy suggests that they are central to the process of storytelling, and not mere stylistic choices. They operate at the level of narrative code, rather than of discourse. A realistic work is merely one that disguises the doubts built into its fictionality. By displaying rather than suppressing the arbitrariness of narrative choices, fantasy can breathe new life into its own conventions.

FIVE

Fantasy and Narrative Conventions: Character

A FICTIONAL CHARACTER is composed of a set of textual fragments scattered through a narrative. The most common of these are passages of description ascribed to a narrator or to other characters, passages summarizing actions, and passages of speech or internal commentary ascribed to the character herself. In the theater, an actor constructs a consistent conception of a character from similar fragments and attempts to embody it, lending the fictional construct the solidity of her physical presence and the continuity of her voice, features, and expressions. Our experience of Hedda Gabler or Blanche DuBois differs from our experience of real acquaintances only in the duration, intensity, and one-directionality of contact.

But with a novel, the reader performs all the characters on the stage of his imagination, using the stage directions provided by the narrator. Evidence of this performative element is the widely varying response of different readers to the same character. Tolkien is a good example: his Gandalf is a figure of power or a colossal bore; Samwise is a cringing servant or a sturdy companion. One senses that readers bringing back such disparate reports have "seen" different "productions" of the novel: in one case as clumsy as a school pageant, in another a rendering by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Curiously enough, it is often unsophisticated readers who mount the most vivid mental productions, while professional critics give half-hearted read-throughs.

This theatrical analogy, like the reference to prestidigitation in the last chapter, is intended to reflect the ~~conventionality~~ of narrative elements, especially the necessity of collusion between writer and reader. But it is dangerous to carry the analogy much further, for characters in narrative fiction are fundamentally different from theatrical characters. This difference is demonstrated most clearly in fantasy. In illustrating the unusual treatment of character by some fantasy writers, however, I hope also to suggest new and productive ways of analyzing the status of fictional characters in general.

To begin with, fantasy characters very rarely resemble the sort of beings found in Ibsen's plays or nineteenth-century social novels. Ursula K. Le Guin borrows Virginia Woolf's name for the latter sort of characters—Mrs. Brown ("Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown," *The Language of the Night* 101-19). Mrs. Brown is any fictional character who not only comes to life for the duration of the fiction but also continues to haunt the reader. She seems larger, if not than life, at least than the text in which she has her existence. She is usually based on close observation of real people—Woolf says she saw her Mrs. Brown for a few moments in a railway carriage. She represents, without generalizing, human nature; that is, we recognize in her (described) appearance, her (recounted) actions, and her (reported) words a being separate from but similar to ourselves. She can trigger a powerful affective response that goes something like, "If I were not myself, I might be this person. I know what it is to be Mrs. Brown." To this extent, Mrs. Brown is equivalent to the psychological concept of the Other, recognition of which is essential to the formation of the Self.

Le Guin's essay primarily concerns the presence or absence of Mrs. Brown in science fiction, but she deals briefly with fantasy as well:

If any field of literature has no, can have no Mrs. Browns in it, it is fantasy—straight fantasy, the modern descendent of folk tale, fairy tale, and myth. These genres deal with archetypes, not with characters. The very essence of Elfland is that Mrs. Brown can't get there—not unless she is changed, changed utterly, into an old mad witch, or a fair young princess, or a loathely Worm. (106-107)

~~Though she later qualifies this statement, Le Guin here identifies fantasy with a completely different conception of character, using the Jungian term archetype. Rather than basing characters primarily on observations of behavior, the writer of fantasy, she says, can "break the complex conscious daylight personality into its archetypal unconscious dreamtime components, Mrs. Brown becoming a princess, a toad, a worm, a witch, a child—so Tolkien in his wisdom broke Frodo into four: Frodo, Sam, Sméagol and Gollum; perhaps five, counting Bilbo" (107). In other~~

words, the characters in a fairy tale or modern fantasy can be viewed as internal phenomena, embodiments of psychological phenomena acting out their struggle toward integration in a projected landscape of the mind. Another fantasy writer, Stephen Donaldson, propounds much the same Jungian conception of character and setting in his essay "Epic Fantasy in the Modern World." Both writers affirm the legitimacy of such a conception of character. It is not inartistic, as E. M. Forster and others have maintained, to have characters whose primary significance is their advancement of the story. Some psychological processes are inaccessible except through the narrative interaction of archetypal characters.

Having equated the novelistic character with the Other, then, we might put fantastic characters on the side of the Self, the inner, hidden Self that may have little to do with habits, mannerisms, and daily concerns. Yet there is a paradox here. What is the source of these archetypal characters? Do they arise from introspection and self-analysis? Are they intensely private symbolic systems, each encoding a unique psychic balance? Obviously not. Fantasy learned this conception of character from fairy tales and myths, which are by definition public property. Anonymous, traditional, their origins lost in pre-literate prehistory, magical fairy tales would seem to express the identity of the group, not the individual. Until such stories were collected and transcribed, their existence depended on continual re-creation through communal performance. In oral traditional societies, tale-telling is the principal means of inducting the individual into the worldview of the group.

The distinction of Self and Other, then, does not cover the difference between the two conceptions of character represented by fairy tales and novels, between Beauty and Mrs. Brown. Insofar as Beauty reflects a fundamental psychological principle, she relates to interior experience, but she is also a social phenomenon—the product of generations of public performance (adapted, in the form we know her, according to the literary tastes of eighteenth-century France and the artistry of Madame de Beau-mont). Mrs. Brown is portrayed strictly through external details—Virginia Woolf describes her size, age, clothing, expression, actions, and speech—and yet is doubly expressive of inner life, her own and her observer's. In a sense, Beauty has no self, being so entirely at the service of the story that she does not even have a name, only a nickname designating her function. Mrs. Brown is all identity and no story; if Woolf had put her into a novel instead of an essay she would still refuse, as it were, to perform to order.

This last distinction suggests a way to describe the characters of folk narratives without making a priori assumptions about psychological or social function. They may be defined as essential elements of the narrative itself, called "functions" by Propp and the Russian Formalists. A character

in a fairy tale is what he *does*. Beauty is only secondarily the pretty daughter of a merchant; she is primarily the one who redeems the Beast. Characters in other tales are similarly role-bound: hero, helper, giant-killer, adversary. Like novelistic characters, they are verbal constructs, assemblages of textual fragments, but unlike the characters of realistic fiction, they consist primarily of descriptions of movement and transformation. The textual clues that comprise a realistic character, as Seymour Chatman tells us, add up to a set of consistent (or believably inconsistent) traits, by which we could recognize the character even without a proper name to go by (119-25). The textual clues that comprise a fairy tale character add up to an achieved movement, like the testing of the hero or the rescue of a prisoner. Both kinds of character are forms of narrative discourse. Neither is inherently superior. There is no particular virtue in being motivated by envy, melancholy, or some other trait rather than by narrative necessity.

But modern fantasy is not simply a revival of the fairy tale, and its characters can combine the two forms of discourse, just as the genre of fantasy combines the mimetic and fantastic modes. Frodo performs the role of hero, but he fits into that role only approximately; in some ways he barely fills the outline, in others he is too solid to be contained within it. We know too much about Frodo. As Le Guin says, he "really looks very like Mrs. Brown, except that he has furry feet; a short, thin, tired-looking fellow, wearing a gold ring on a chain round his neck, and heading rather disconsolately eastward, on foot" (107). Like no other character in *LOTR*, Frodo establishes himself independently of his role in the story. We know his habits, likes, dislikes, kindness, occasional pettiness, courage, laziness: a whole set of novelistic traits, most of which will need to be pared away by the end of the narrative if he is to become the Hero it requires for resolution, a grander but simpler being than a mere hobbit.

Tolkien underscores Frodo's uncomfortable transformation from realistic character to story-function with a few magical clues. A device that Tolkien uses frequently might be called the "seeming": the brief glimpse (occasionally false) of an underlying reality. An example of a seeming that reveals Frodo's new stature is Sam's vision of him with a temporarily cooperative Gollum:

For a moment it appeared to Sam that his master had grown and Gollum had shrunk: a tall stern shadow, a mighty lord who hid his brightness in a grey cloud, and at his feet a little whining dog. (II, 225)

Tolkien's heroic figures are invariably tall and bright. Critics of his technique mistake these for character traits, whereas they are more properly role-markers.

Sam's seeming shows how Frodo is expanding to fit his destined role, but other glimpses show the cost. His individual character traits give way, marked in magical terms by a gradual fading. Gandalf first notices this change after Frodo is wounded by the Ringwraiths: "But to the wizard's eye there was a faint change, just a hint as it were of transparency, about him, and especially about the left hand that lay outside the coverlet" (I, 235).

Both transformations are essentially complete by the time Frodo reaches the gates of Mordor. As Sam sees him lying in the deathlike trance brought on by Shelob's poison, "Frodo's face was fair of hue again, pale but beautiful with an elvish beauty, as of one who has long passed the shadows" (II, 342). Frodo the hobbit is essentially dead; the elvish beauty and pallor (which are from one perspective the Hero's brightness, and from another the fading of individuality) mark his new identity. It should surprise no one that Frodo fails to fit into the life of the Shire after the return of the Fellowship. His proper milieu is no longer a setting but a story, and his story is over.

Modern fantasy thus draws on two traditions of characterization. To avoid confusion with psychological theories or value judgments, I will not call these character formulations *realistic* or *archetypal*. A. J. Greimas has provided a less loaded terminology: as an element in the construction of a story, a character may be called an *actant*—the French participial ending conveys the sense of *doing* that is essential to such characters. A character who is more interesting for his individual qualities than for his place in a shaped narrative is an *acteur* (Scholes, *Structuralism* 103), or, substituting the English form, an *actor*.

Fantasy, then, makes use of the narrative and semiotic code we call magic to examine the relationship between character as imitated person and character as story function, between actor and actant. One way it does so is by calling into question the continuity of traits by which the reader is accustomed to identify characters. A minor example is Tolkien's changing of Gandalf's identifying color from grey to white. Even so small a change causes confusion, for color was the primary external difference between Gandalf the Grey and Saruman the White. Other characters alter: Merry and Pippin grow taller (for which we are intended to read: more heroic) after drinking Treebeard's draughts. Frodo grows simultaneously grander and more wraithlike. Gollum shifts back and forth between beast and wizened hobbit. But within *LOTR*, for the most part, we are clearly alerted to the moments of change, and so the continuity of traits is at least partially preserved.

In other fantasies, however, characters are fed through the mechanism of magic like grapes through a wine press, emerging with unrecognizable

shapes and flavors. Virtually any character trait can be altered magically: appearance, age, voice, emotional state, memory. In Patricia McKillip's Riddle-Master trilogy (1976-79), for instance, the hero Morgon learns to change his form to that of a tree:

The chill from his motionlessness began to trouble him, then passed as the silence became a tangible thing measuring his breath, his heartbeat, seeping into his thoughts, his bones, until he felt hollowed, a shell of winter stillness. The trees circling him seemed to enclose a warmth like the stone houses at Kyrth, against the winter. Listening, he heard suddenly the hum of their veins, drawing life from deep beneath the snow, beneath the hard earth. He felt himself rooted, locked into the rhythms of the mountain; his own rhythms drained away from him, lost beyond memory in the silence that shaped him. (*The Riddle-Master of Hed* 184)

This tree does not share Morgon's appearance, his humanity, even his perceptions, yet the narrative demands that we accept it as Morgon. When, then, might the character be said to change identity? If the transformation were irreversible? If Morgon remained in tree form long enough to lose his memories of humanity? If we found out that he had originally been a tree, and that his human shape was an illusion? If another character came along claiming to be the real Morgon, with Morgon's memories to prove it? A fantasy can pose any of these questions simply by positing magical operations such as shape shifting, transfer of personalities, or reduplication of characters.

In the case of Morgon, although his identity passes intact through the tree episode, it undergoes more serious alteration as the narrative proceeds. Like Frodo, he is required to be a hero. The hero he must become already has a name: Star-Bearer. The stars are on his face, birthmarks, but they also appear on a harp and a sword made long before his birth: in other words, the identity predates the man. McKillip poses the dilemma in the form of a riddle, and riddles are, in her created world, the foundation of magic.

Other riddles emerge from the story to interact with Morgon's quest for his own identity. McKillip offers a set of names to be sorted out: names from ancient history, from cosmology, and from Morgon's personal experience. The High King, the High King's harpist, the Founder of Lungold, the Wizard Ghistleswchlohm, the Riddle-Master Ohm, the Wizard Yrth (pun undoubtedly intended), the man called Deth (another serious pun), Earth-Master, Shape-Changer: all these identities are combined and recombined—ultimately into only two beings—as Morgon learns more about the past and present. Each reshuffling of the names of these others contributes also to his own self-definition.

McKillip's most unusual variation on the formation of character is to make the mimetic side, the actor, rather simple, and the story-function side, the actant, both complex and variable. Morgon's character is sketched briefly at the beginning, chiefly in terms of his youth, his intelligence, and his ties to his rural homeland. We are given just enough information to establish him as a believable type, not a memorable individual, before the story carries him away to begin his transformations. In the course of three volumes, he is called on to play a great many roles, so that we see him as questor, questioner, answerer, accuser, victim, bystander, lover, pratfaller, rescuer, and mystery. Each role calls on unforeseen abilities, which must then be integrated into the character as we have come to know him.

The entire story hinges on the interaction of power and identity, which are represented as contraries, like movement and structure or sea and land. Morgon ultimately must resolve the paradox, mastering both, becoming a self that is both Morgon and Star-Bearer, both person and story.

McKillip's technique of characterization illustrates fantasy's ability to bring two forms of discourse together in an irreducible and yet inseparable whole. To borrow a term from Mikhail Bakhtin, a fantasy character is essentially a dialogue. Mimesis speaks; story responds; character forms in the tension between the two (Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin* 60-63).

In both Tolkien's and McKillip's formulations of the dialogue, the discourse of the actor is introduced first, but that need not always be the case. Diana Wynne Jones begins *The Time of the Ghost* (1984) with the perceptions of a character who has virtually no realistic character traits, though neither the character nor the reader is at first aware of her undefined state. She is a ghost, of sorts, a disembodied consciousness with a memory of belonging in a particular place but no memory of who she is or was. She is also a plot device, as most fictional ghosts are: a need, to be fulfilled through the action of other characters.

Her need is to find out whose ghost she might be and how she got that way, but the question is not a simple one. As she accumulates experiences, she recovers partial memory and identity, but only to the point of being certain that she is one of four sisters, all of whom seem to be carrying on perfectly normal existences apart from herself.

The ghost faces a problem very like that confronted by a reader trying to get to know a character: how to assemble clues of various sorts—bits of conversation, random memories, relationships with other characters—into a coherent personality. Only in this case, her very existence depends on her ability to construct a self from the clues.

She begins by accepting the testimony of others. Though she is invisible, people sense her presence and sometimes speak to her before looking around to see nobody there:

Under the frown, Phyllis said wearily, "Your father's told you, I've told you. How many times have you been told to stay behind the green door, Sally?"

Warmth and comfort and pleasure swelled, as huge and swift as the balloon of panic had swelled earlier. Mother had seen her. Mother knew her. Mother knew who she was. She was Sally. Of course she was Sally. Everything was all right, even though she had gone and done an awful thing and interrupted Father while he was teaching. . . . Sally—yes, she was sure she was Sally—stood guiltily by the green door, wondering how to explain, as Phyllis turned her blue eyes and tired frown towards her. (11)

This, of course, is no solution, and Jones tells us so indirectly. Phyllis does not see her: retreat to Mother is impossible, despite the ghost's adoption of a childlike attitude, represented in the syntax of her thoughts. Nor do the multiple repetitions of the name guarantee its applicability to herself. In order to identify herself, to turn from actant into actor, she needs to do more than be named by a parent.

Her next step is self-justification. Having convinced herself she is Sally, she overhears the other three sisters criticizing her and silently argues with them:

I'm not like that! I'm not hysterical and I don't go on about my career. I'm not like Imogen. They're just seeing their own faults in me! And I don't grumble and criticise. I'm ever so meek and lowly really—sort of gentle and dazed and puzzled about life. (24)

Real progress begins only as she observes the other girls and starts to identify with them each in turn: "Sally found herself saying, *Imogen really is terribly unhappy!* Imogen's face, with its strong angel features, was somehow bloated from behind, with tears she was waiting to cry" (52). Then she comes into contact with the living Sally and is startled to find no identification:

She knew the girl was Sally. There had been no mistake there. Yet she had no sense of identity with her. She had no idea what this Sally thought and felt. She seemed just someone else she was forced to hover and watch, as she had watched Sally's sisters. (87)

The ghost can only hover and watch because the life of Sally and her sisters belongs to a different kind of narrative from her own. Her own story, surprisingly, concerns an old, cruel goddess, roused inadvertently and allayed only through sacrifice. Theirs, on the other hand, is a thoroughly believable story of squabbles and loyalty among four gifted but

neglected sisters and their few allies among the male pupils at their parents' school. Ghost and goddess are pure narrative function; sisters and school are portraiture, with very little narrative movement.

Jones takes these two forms of discourse and forces them to mingle. The appearance of the ghost forces a change in the girls' condition, pushing them into the realm of story, where happier endings are possible. The ghost's observation of herself and her sisters (from a vantage point seven years in the future, it turns out) gives way to interaction with them. She absorbs a measure of their solidity (on a literal as well as figurative level, in a scene in which the girls reenact Odysseus's adventure with the shades), and their help wins her freedom from the goddess.

Kept quietly in the background throughout is a metaphorical level, in which spectral existence represents the character's actual self-effacement. One can see the ghost as a role-bound woman: the unnoticed observer, powerless, able to act only by influencing those around her, condemned always to follow the movements of others. That is, as Jones hints, the life the character has been leading for the seven years between the time of the haunting and the time she discovers is actually her present moment. Thus, her immersion in a story-role represents no great loss of personality; instead, the interplay between the two types of characterization allows her to break free of societal limitations and, for the first time, become a three-dimensional character.

The structure of *Time of the Ghost* can help clarify the puzzling relationship of character to such concepts as Self and Other or individual and group. The ghost character's main claim to selfhood is her ability to report to herself on what she is perceiving and doing. Julian Jaynes, in his problematic but fascinating *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (1976), suggests that such an act of "narrating" constitutes what we call consciousness:

consciousness is an operation rather than a thing, a repository, or a function. It operates by way of analogy, by way of constructing an analog space with an analog "I" that can observe that space, and move metaphorically in it. It operates on any reactivity, excerpts relevant aspects, narrates and conciliates them together in a metaphorical space where such meanings can be manipulated like things in space. (65-66)

The ghost is such an analog "I," and the entire narrative is essentially the story she tells herself. This is represented stylistically by using for the narrative voice what is called indirect free discourse, or quotation of her thoughts grammatically converted into third person, with occasional direct access marked by italics:

She could not even feel anything from the clump of nettles she seemed to be standing in. *Seemed is the right word*, she thought unhappily. *Let's face it. I'm not just invisible. I haven't got a body at all.* (7)

The implied narrator of all this—a woman lying in a hospital bed seven years hence—is projecting a self, a consciousness, into a fictional space that is, nevertheless, real, thanks to the magic. She is delving into memory to construct a story that will, as Jaynes says only stories can do, conciliate the contradictions of her life, past and present:

If I ask you to think of a mountain meadow and a tower at the same time, you automatically conciliate them by having the tower rising from the meadow. But if I ask you to think of the mountain meadow and an ocean at the same time, conciliation tends not to occur and you are likely to think of one and then the other. You can only bring them together by a narratization. (Jaynes 65)

The only analog the ghost can construct to represent herself is a bodiless, memoryless intelligence—that is one of the conflicts she must narrate into resolution. Her projected self lacks a surface with which to interact with the world: it is an inside with no outside. Yet she does not exist in complete isolation. She is in contact with the common property of humanity: language, the ability to narrate, and archetypal motifs such as *ghost* and *goddess*. She illustrates the paradox discussed earlier: what is most completely representative of the individual psyche is also most traditional.

The other characters, though, including her past self, are most recognizable in their interactions with one another and their environment. They exist at the boundary of the Self and the Other. This is where physical appearance and gestures occur and where they are noted, where language manifests itself as communication or misunderstanding, and where the caress or the slap translates the impulses of the Self into demonstrations of emotion.

Without boundaries, there is no distinction between the Self and primordial Humanity. In Jones's terms, the ghost has no way to hide from her Self, and that circle, that identity, is the product of confrontation with a community of others. It is their boundary as well as hers; like a bubble in a froth, each character is defined by the thin membranes that both join it to and separate it from its fellows. These are the complementary conceptions of character from which Jones has constructed her story. Speaking first separately and then in dialogue, the two modes of discourse come together to create a character linked with both fantasy and mimesis.

Alan Garner's characters also begin as pure actants, but in order to trace their evolution into a more dialogic conception, we must follow Garner's own development as a writer from *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) to *The Owl Service* (1967).

Garner's early novels, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and *The Moon of Gornrath* (1963), both tell of the waking of ancient magic in the contemporary countryside of Cheshire, Garner's home region. In both books, two children named Colin and Susan act as the focus for the magic and the narrative itself. Around them, wizards, dwarfs, and various other figures from English legend struggle and plot for mastery. These supernatural characters are divided into teams—good and evil—but there is little sense of what distinguishes the two sides, for neither plays entirely fair. The wizard Cadellin is no less willing to use the children as pawns than is his evil counterpart (and near twin) Grimnir.

In *The Weirdstone*, which Garner later called "a fairly bad book" ("A Bit More Practice" 197), all the conventional characters are either caricatures or blanks. The country people of Alderly Edge, like farmer Gowther Mossock, speak in thick dialect, they are repositories of ancient stories, and they are sturdy and stolid. That is about the extent of their characterization. The children speak in a colorless standard English, and then only to comment on the action of the story, as if they had no past, no interests, no emotions outside of the action going on around them. There is a vacuum where the discourse of the actor should be.

The magical characters, on the other hand, are drawn in simple, bold strokes. The Morrigan, for instance, a witch and shape shifter, is the first character to warrant a physical description, and Garner's description immediately establishes her as a force in the action:

She looked about forty-five years old, was powerfully built ("fat" was the word Susan used to describe her), and her head rested firmly on her shoulders without appearing to have much of a neck at all. Two deep lines ran from either side of her nose to the corners of her wide, thin-lipped mouth, and her eyes were rather too small for her broad head. Strangely enough her legs were thin and spindly, so that in outline she resembled a well-fed sparrow. . . . (13)

We recognize this character, not so much as a realistic portrait, but as a sort of velocity, like an arrow drawn on a map to show the direction of traffic. The story is going to go in a certain direction, and the Morrigan is going to push it there. Each of the magical beings the children meet is a similar vector marker, and the outcome of the story is their sum.

The most striking characters in the book are those who are most completely at the service of story. Cadellin, whose long conversations with

the children push him toward actor status, is a rather stiff and conventional rendering of the wizard archetype. In contrast, beings whose purely functional nature is represented by their being given titles rather than names—the Morrigan, the Mara—are often vividly original. Likewise, the clumsiness that characterizes Garner's use of actorial discourse disappears when he describes movement and magic, the discourse of the actant.

In *The Moon of Gornrath*, Garner consolidates his strengths, the visualization of fantastic scenes and beings and the economical description of action, while at the same time beginning to amend his weaknesses. In this second book, Susan and Colin are no longer interchangeable, nor do they remain unaffected by the action around them, which is itself more coherently conceived.

In contrast with *The Weirdstone's* plots and counterplots for possession of an amulet in which the audience has very little interest—a Hitchcockian McGuffin—*The Moon of Gornrath* has a single main sequence of action that continually rises in intensity. This means that the actants, as well as the actors, are used more effectively, for their respective directional pushes add up to a shapelier story.

In that story, actor and actant begin to work together in dialogue fashion, for Susan and, to a lesser extent, Colin find themselves altered this time around, as they were not in their previous contact with magic. The action begins by picking up a loose thread from the prior story: Susan has had to give up her heirloom bracelet, and in exchange the Lady of the Lake has given her a silver band with unreadable markings—the Mark of Fohla. It is, not surprisingly, a thing of power, and Susan is asked to lend it. Wearing it has marked her, however, and its loss makes her vulnerable to attack, which comes in the form of a legendary beast, the Brollachan. In horse form, this creature tempts Susan to ride and carries her off into the depths of a lake. She returns with wet and weedy hair and a hand that feels like a hoof: she is possessed.

The pattern is repeated: the solution to one problem leads to a new danger, each time plunging the children deeper into the world of magic. The return of the bracelet to Susan's wrist casts out the Brollachan, but sends her spirit to the realm of the Daughters of the Moon, who wear bracelets like hers and who greet her as a sister. Her body, meanwhile, lies in a coma. Colin brings her back by gathering a magic flower by moonlight, but in doing so wakes the Wild Hunt. None of this makes Cadellin happy, for the powers that are being roused are Old Magic, indivisible into good and evil, rather than his own intellectual High Magic. He describes what has happened to Susan since she put on the bracelet:

"She was saved, and is protected, only by the Mark of Fohla—her blessing and her curse. For it guards her against the evil that would crush her, and it leads her ever further from the ways of human life." (56)

Susan does not share his apprehensions: she is eager to learn the powers that come with her bracelet. In the end, she rides with the Wild Hunt and the Daughters of the Moon to put the Brollachan to flight, and would be happy to ride off into legend with them. Her time, though, has not yet come:

But as they crossed the valley, one of the riders dropped behind, and Colin saw that it was Susan. She lost ground, though her speed was no less, and the light that formed her died, and in its place was a smaller, solid figure that halted, forlorn, in the white wake of the riding. (138-39)

With this curious sour note in an otherwise happy ending, Garner found a theme that he developed further in *Elidor* (1965) and *The Owl Service*. In the former, four children pass from a derelict church in a Manchester slum into an enchanted land where they are hailed as prophesied saviors. A successful quest seems to validate the prophecy, but its accomplishment only takes a quarter of the book. The remaining and more interesting portion concerns their return home, and the strains of incorporating the memory of glory into their mundane suburban lives and of being heroes in an unheroic age. The dialogue between actor and actant grows more poignant when the character is aware of his dialogic nature, and that is one key to the success of *Elidor* and the greater success of Garner's next story.

Made up largely of conversation, tightly restricted in setting, and compressed in time, *The Owl Service* resembles a play. By the time he wrote this novel, Garner had mastered the art of making characters reveal themselves through speech, gesture, and the other elements of the discourse of the actor. He credits his new facility to a stint of interviewing for radio and television:

This often meant having to condense what somebody spent an hour saying into three minutes—without cheating!—preserving the root of what they were trying to say. The pressure of this programming meant having to listen very very carefully to what was being said. (Wintle and Fisher 230)

Garner throws his interviewing skills into generating believable, sharply individuated, and highly compressed dialogue for his three chief characters: Gwyn, Alison, and Roger. Less fully explored but equally vivid are Gwyn's mother Nancy, Roger's father Clive, and even Alison's

mother Margaret, who is never on stage but who dominates the lives of the others. Unlike Garner's earlier heroes, who seemed to have no ties outside of the story, Gwyn and the others represent the intersection of a large number of conflicting loyalties. Gwyn is bright, ambitious, poor, illegitimate, and Welsh. Roger's mother abandoned him and his nouveau riche, ex-Army father. His father has married Alison's mother, so they are step-siblings trying not to dislike one another. Alison represents old money and is, like Roger, English. These factors throw up barriers to the communication all three desperately need to establish, especially after they find themselves caught up as actants in an ancient story.

Whereas Garner's earlier story lines were cobbled together from multiple sources—local legend, Scandinavian myth, fairy tale—*The Owl Ser-vice* draws on a single source which is explicitly acknowledged in the text. It is the tale of Llew Llaw Gyffes, from the *Mabinogion*. Llew, whose mother has cursed him so that he can marry neither mortal woman nor goddess, is given a bride made of flowers by the wizard Gwydion. The beautiful Blodeuwedd, though, betrays her husband with a neighbor, Gronw Pebyr, and with him she plots Llew's death. Rescued by Gwydion, Llew kills Gronw, and Blodeuwedd is transformed into an owl. Their story of love, betrayal, murder, and metamorphosis impinges on the present-day narrative when Alison finds a set of plates, the owl service of the title, with a floral design that can be rearranged to form owl faces.

The characters live in the same Welsh valley where Blodeuwedd was created and punished. The forces that came together to produce tragic legend still exist within this small community, in the flowers from which Blodeuwedd was formed—oak, broom, and meadowsweet—and the passions that undid her. Dammed up like a mountain stream, these forces periodically seek outlet. In every generation, three victims take on the roles of husband, wife, and lover. A generation ago, the actants were Huw, the half-mad gardener and hereditary lord of the valley; Gwyn's mother Nancy; and Bertram, the cousin from whom Alison's father inherited the estate. Now the roles have shifted, with Huw standing as Gwydion to Gwyn's Llew and Nancy as Llew's vengeful mother, who in the original legend denies him name, armor, and a bride until tricked by Gwydion.

So we have three unremarkable teenagers reenacting a love story of heroic proportions, like that of Tristan and Isolde or Arthur and Guinevere. The distance between actor and actant is enormous, seemingly unbridgeable, and yet Garner convinces us that such an overlay is a valid formulation of character. Huw, Alison, and Roger are capable of enacting the narrative functions known as Llew, Blodeuwedd, and Gronw: furthermore, they know they are doing so, know the tragic outcome implied, and

are seeking, with all the resources available to them as actors, to prevent the cycle from taking its accustomed course.

They do not have all this knowledge at the beginning, of course. All they are aware of is that something strange is happening. The magic seems at first to be external to themselves: scrabbling noises in the attic that lead them to the flowered plates, Alison's tracings of the owl pattern that keep disappearing, a plaster wall that crumbles away spontaneously to reveal a portrait. The twin motifs of owls and flowers recur in every case: the woman in the portrait stands against a background of clover; the clover heads are made of claws.

Beauty and half-understood sexual desire alternate with violence, as when Roger is bathing in the stream where Llew's spear struck Gronw. The scene is almost sybaritic at first:

Roger splashed through the shallows to the bank. A slab of rock stood out of the ground close by him, and he sprawled backwards into the foam of meadowsweet that grew thickly round its base. He gathered the stems in his arms and pulled the milky heads down over his face to shield him from the sun. (13)

But Roger's dalliance turns surreal when the spear thrown by Llew centuries before again pierces the stone behind which Gronw once hid:

Something flew by him, a blink of dark on the leaves. It was heavy, and fast, and struck hard. He felt the vibration through the rock, and he heard a scream.

Roger was on his feet, crouching, hands wide, but the meadow was empty, and the scream was gone: he caught its echo in the farmer's distant voice and a curlew away on the mountain. There was no one in sight; his heart raced, and he was cold in the heat of the sun. He looked at his hands. The meadowsweet had cut him, lining his palm with red beads. The flowers stank of goat. (13-14)

Such incidents supply pieces to the puzzle while helping to convince the protagonists that the puzzle is no mere intellectual game. Other clues come from Huw, whose madness makes more and more sense—whose Welsh-influenced verb forms, even, help convey the sense of the past impinging on the present:

"There is a man being killed at that place," said Huw: "old time."
"Was there now!"

"Yes," said Huw. "He has been taking the other man's wife." (33-34)

To Huw and the other local residents, there is no question that myth is a matter of here and now. The outsiders Alison and Roger, though, and even Gwyn, cut off from local culture by his schooling, have a hard time believing that their lives are being warped into a pattern they think of as a quaint piece of local color. Though they find the text of the legend in a book borrowed from Gwyn's English teacher, it is not until each of them experiences firsthand the emotions that led to the original tragedy that they begin to have any real understanding of its significance. They learn to think of it, as Huw does, in the present tense.

The supernatural events that occur in the course of the book are dramatic but inconclusive. There are no sudden transformations, no glowing jewels, no monsters. Alison's paper owls disappear and are found surrounding a stuffed owl in the shed. Her anger shreds a book and sends its fragments swarming through the air at Gwyn. Gwyn is led through the woods by a will-o'-the-wisp and sees a figure that is not Alison: "The figure was still there at the end of the causeway, waiting, under the tree, head and shoulders, and arms and the slim body, and then he saw, no less clearly, leaves, and branches, thicket and moonlight, and no one waiting" (67). Roger takes a photograph through the hole in the stone of Gronw and it shows, blurrily, a horseman raising a spear. These events are markers of interior changes in the three main characters, glimpses of a kind of experience that cannot be told through the discourse of the actor, though the outward signs can be shown.

Garner takes the dialogic nature of character about as far as it can be taken; the book's every scene advances both conceptions at once. It takes at least two readings to sort them out, particularly in the early scenes before all the clues are given. Oftentimes the same descriptive phrase or line of speech will function on both levels. The setting itself reflects the double nature of the characters. The house is a society in miniature, while the valley provides the raw materials for myth: water and weather, flowers and feathers, mating and dying. Human beings live in both worlds, though some are blind to the latter or excluded from the former.

As the two forms of existence—actors and actants—draw together, the natural world imposes its presence more strongly. In the final scene, the house fills with feathers:

They circled and clung: circled and clung: the owl dance he had found in the dust. They were moving on the ceiling and the walls, and he began to see the patterns that had followed Huw in the rain: eyes and wings and sharpness: winged eyes, yellow, and blackness curved: all in the rafters and the wall and the feathers everywhere. (154)

At the same time, the social reality feeds the magic, because it is keyed to the three protagonists who have been chosen to reenact the story: "She is coming, and will use what she finds, and you have only hate in you," said Huw. 'Always and always and always' (155). "She" is Blodeuwedd, not just a woman in a story, but a goddess of beauty and cruelty, embodied in the natural objects of the valley and in the passions of humans. The beauty comes from nature; the cruelty from the admixture of humanity.

As Garner uses the two forms of characterization, each expands upon the other. The realistic characters of Gwyn, Alison, and Roger make the reenactment of the legend possible; the legend gives them grandeur. The legend says that Gwyn is not merely a bright, shy, unhappy teenager, but also the wronged lord of his Welsh kingdom. It says that Blodeuwedd is invoked whenever a young girl blooms into womanhood and that she turns dangerous when locked up against her will in someone else's life. Huw, who has already lived through his own cycle, has gained an understanding of the Blodeuwedd within his Nancy:

She was made for her lord. Nobody is asking her if she wants him. It is bitter twisting to be shut up with a person you are not liking very much. I think she is often longing for the time when she was flowers on the mountain, and it is making her cruel, as the rose is growing thorns. (55)

The structure of Garner's book suggests that no character is complete until she has encountered her own mythic narrative: the discourse of Mrs. Brown, by which we usually identify ourselves as well as those we meet, lacks depth and direction without the discourse of Beauty or Blodeuwedd. Yet the latter discourse is dangerous, leading to death or madness as easily as to a happy ending. Of the three primary characters in *The Owl Service*, Alison is too unformed and Gwyn too deeply wounded to work their way through the myth to a resolution. Roger, the least sympathetic through most of the action, proves to be the one able to learn from his role and thus to divert the story from its apparently inevitable end. Something in his ordinary past experience enables him to take hold of the power of the myth, and, as Huw says, "leash it, yet set it free . . . so that no one else may suffer" (135).

The Owl Service suggests that the number of ways the discourse of actants can interact with that of actors is limitless, that each combination will result in a different formulation. When Huw becomes Llew Llaw Gyffes, the result is not the same as when he later plays the part of Gwydion. Gwyn's version of Llew is something else again. Yet in each case, the pattern that emerges from the dialogue illuminates both elements. The archetypal role may end up effacing the actor or disappearing

under the weight of the actor's traits, or the two may strike a balance, as Patricia McKillip's Star-Bearer does. No matter what the result, an important component has been restored to the concept of character.

In the stories that combine literary greatness with popular appeal, from the *Odyssey* to *Great Expectations*, characters are both determiners of and subservient to the action. The pleasure is in seeing believable analogs of humanity acting out the patterns of fairy tale or myth. The more realistic the discourse of the actor, the more strongly we identify with his shock or pleasure at finding himself transformed into actant. Fiction that arbitrarily foregoes the possibility of such transformation—fiction with no heroes, helpers, or villains—gains verisimilitude at the expense of psychological and philosophical range.

These fantasies echo the old and recently rediscovered truth that only through such narrative structures can we define ourselves and our relationships with others. From our first "memories," which are not infrequently constructed from anecdotes told to us by family members (Baldwin), to the narrative constructions through which the psychoanalytic subject presents himself to the analyst or the testifying churchgoer to God, we examine our experiences and our characters by dropping them into the stream of a story and seeing where they wash ashore. Writers of fantasy reflect this process when they set up the dialogue of actor and actant. Its mixed parentage—fairy tale on the mother's side, realistic fiction on the father's—gives fantasy a unique ability to investigate the twofold process of constructing a self.

SIX

Women's Coming of Age in Fantasy

A STRENGTH AND A WEAKNESS of fantasy is its reliance on traditional storytelling forms and motifs. By making its conventional basis explicit and primary, rather than submerging traditional tale types or character functions beneath a surface of apparent reported reality, fantasy is empowered to reimagine both character and story, as we have seen. But a willingness to return to the narrative structures of the past can entail as well an unquestioning acceptance of its social structures.

This danger is particularly evident when the inherited story focuses on the process of coming of age, the transition from immature individual to mature member of society. In the societies from which we derive our legacy of myths and fairy tales, coming of age was a process of accommodating oneself to a strictly defined social role: hunter, chieftain, farmer, king. The passage from childhood to adult status was generally marked by the enactment of rituals which not only marked the individual's transition but also at the same time reaffirmed the hierarchical order in which the newly adult member was to find a place. Sometimes accompanying the rituals and sometimes serving in their place were spoken narratives. These told of a young hero's displacement, transformation, and return—the fundamental pattern of both the hero monomyth, as described by Joseph Campbell, and of the fairy tale, as analyzed by Vladimir Propp.

We see this pattern reproduced in some form in virtually every modern