GOING HOME: AN INTUITIVE INQUIRY INTO THE EXPERIENCE OF
READING FANTASY LITERATURE

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation explored the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state, especially the positive meaningful aspects, such as its ability to heal, transform, or remind one of the meaning of life and one’s values. The hermeneutic research method of intuitive inquiry was used. The researcher began by using self-reflection and a literature review to articulate her preliminary understandings, or, lenses. These lenses were then modified and developed through engagement with detailed written accounts of the experiences of 18 acquired participants (9 women and 9 men, 22 to 64 years of age; 4 from California, 7 from other states, 1 from Poland, 2 from France, 2 from UK, 1 from Italy, and 1 from New Zealand). Findings included lists of positive meaningful experiences of absorbed fantasy reading, in-depth narratives, each describing one positive meaningful experience of absorbed fantasy reading, related creative expression, and 14 final lenses. The final lenses regarding absorbed fantasy reading are: (a) altered state of consciousness that is similar to focused meditation, dreaming sleep, and shamanic journeys; (b) relationship to story; (c) intense emotions; (d) vivid images; (e) distortion of time and perception; (f) ineffable; (g) transformation; (h) healing, consoling and validating; (i) story mirrors life; (j) story is teacher, guide and companion; (k) sense of home; (l) sense of freedom; (m) escape; and (n) creative inspiration. These lenses were integrated with existing literature. The researcher concluded that the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state is essentially a spiritual experience that facilitates transformation, especially at critical junctures.
and times of transition. The results of this study extend the literature on beneficial and therapeutic effects of reading, depth psychology, transpersonal psychology, imaginal psychology, intuitive inquiry, and the use of written narratives in qualitative research. The clinical applications of this study to depth psychotherapy are discussed.
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Participant Characteristics ................................................................................................ 84
Study Statistics .................................................................................................................. 85
  Number of books read by participants ........................................................................ 86
  Book genres. .................................................................................................................. 86
  Most frequently read books ...................................................................................... 88
  Overview of participant reading .............................................................................. 90
Participant Narratives ...................................................................................................... 96
  Dagger Scribe ............................................................................................................ 96
  Mike ......................................................................................................................... 108
  Iranor ......................................................................................................................... 114
  Lynn ......................................................................................................................... 123
  Crowspeaks ............................................................................................................. 126
  Liz .............................................................................................................................. 131
  Andrew .................................................................................................................... 138
  Solaris ....................................................................................................................... 142
  Jane ........................................................................................................................... 152
  Ianárwen ................................................................................................................... 156
  Etruscan King ......................................................................................................... 176
  D. L. S. Foster ........................................................................................................... 182
  Bedap ......................................................................................................................... 186
  Peregrin Took ......................................................................................................... 191
  Sam ........................................................................................................................... 198
  Bella Jean ............................................................................................................... 204
  Branwen ................................................................................................................... 210
  Lucy .......................................................................................................................... 214
List of Creative Expression

1. *Dagger Scribe’s* creative writing inspired by reading Frank Creed’s *Flashpoint* .......... 102
2. *Iranor’s* creative writing inspired by reading J. R. R. Tolkien’s, *The Lord of the Rings* .. 120
4. *Ianárwen’s* images and poetry inspired by J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* ...... 169
List of Tables

1. Book Genres ($N = 18$) .................................................................................................................. 87
2. Most Frequently Read Books ($N = 18$) .................................................................................. 89
3. Overview of Participant Reading ($N = 18$) ............................................................................. 92
4. Cycle 4 Final Lenses .................................................................................................................. 226
5. Cycle 2 Preliminary Lenses ...................................................................................................... 228
6. Books and Genres ($N = 18$) .................................................................................................. 438
Chapter 1: Introduction

The clock in the belfry struck nine. Reluctantly Bastian’s thoughts turned back to reality. He was glad the Neverending Story had nothing to do with that. . . .

Bastian liked books that were exciting or funny, or that made him dream. Books where made-up characters had marvelous adventures, books that made him imagine all sorts of things.

Because one thing he was good at, possibly the only thing, was imagining things so clearly that he almost saw and heard them. When he told himself stories, he sometimes forgot everything around him and awoke—as though from a dream—only when the story was finished. And this book was just like his own stories! In reading it, he had heard not only the creaking of the big trees and the howling of the wind in the treetops, but also the different voices of the four comical messengers. And he almost seemed to catch the smell of moss and forest earth.

—Michael Ende (1979, pp. 21-22)

Who has not had an experience like Bastian’s, in which we become so immersed or absorbed in a story that we forget that any other world exists? This research is an inquiry into such experiences of reading fantasy literature. The focus is on positive meaningful experiences, in which readers perceive that their lives have changed for the better or been transformed. The following definitions are used in this study (the definitions are discussed at greater length in chapter 2).

The phenomenon of reading described above is defined as an altered state of consciousness in which the absorbed reader may participate in the story by identifying or empathizing with the characters (Araoz, 2005; Giovannelli, 2004; Keen, 2006; Nell, 1988; Tart, 1971, 2000; Tellegen & Atkinson, 1974). Reading in general is a creative activity in which readers naturally search for meaning (F. Smith, 1994). Absorbed reading involves all aspects of being, including thoughts, memories of life experiences, emotions, imagination, and the senses (Esrock, 1986; Miall, 2007; Samuels & Eisenberg, 1981; F. Smith, 1994). In addition, absorbed reading of fantasy literature necessitates a relaxation of our worldview or an opening to new ways of seeing (Bruner, 1986; Clute & Grant, 1997; Eliade, 1985; Hartmann, 1991; Tolkien, 2001).
Reading books is one way to become absorbed in and enter a fantasy story. Watching movies and listening to storytellers also provide portals through which one may be transported to the story world (Lampropoulos, Kazantzis, & Deane, 2004; Sharp, Smith, & Cole, 2002; Sussman, 1992). Imagine reading in bed or in a quiet place, sitting in a dark theatre in front of a big screen, or sitting around a campfire, listening to stories read aloud. Each medium appears to engage us in its own way. Readers enter the fantasy story world by actively engaging with the words on the page to create their own internal versions of the story through imagination (Bruner, 1986; Gerrig, 1998). Like actors, absorbed readers create and embody the characters; however, they also create all images, feelings, and senses related to the story (Bruner, 1986; Gerrig, 1998). Movies, which take us on a journey using visual images and sound effects, may allow one to quickly become absorbed in the fantasy world (Lampropoulos, Kazantzis, & Deane, 2004; Sharp, Smith, & Cole, 2002). Storytellers bring fantasy stories to life primarily through the use of their voices, as well as the words on the page, which may help the listener enter the story world (Sussman, 1992). While watching movies and listening to storytellers may facilitate transportation to the world of the fantasy story, these activities seem to be more passive than is absorbed reading (Lampropoulos, Kazantzis, & Deane, 2004; Sharp, Smith, & Cole, 2002; Sussman, 1992). Filmmakers and, to some extent, storytellers may create and portray their own interpretation of the story for the viewer or listener. In other words, it seems that the viewer and listener are not being invited to create their own imaginative internal versions of the story, as much as readers are when they encounter words on a page. For this reason, it would seem that watching movies and listening to storytellers might involve less active creative imagination than absorbed reading. In addition, readers may also return to the fantasy world of the story by rereading the book at any time and in any way they choose (i.e., starting from the beginning or
opening to a specific page), which is not necessarily the case when viewing film or listening to stories.

Slattery (2008) described the act of reading as follows:

Reading is a mysterious human action. It is embodied, psycho-active, mythic and historical. . . . The act of reading creates an energy field, a dynamic interplay between the work’s own imagination, its own deep intelligence, and mine. A book might be understood to have a multi-faceted imagination that transcends that of the author, even of the words on the page. It possesses its own internal coherence; it snags something beyond its words, its sentences, its paragraphs. The book has the capacity to transport psyche in a unique way through a unique voice of psyche’s motion. At this moment, it can happen that something new is released in a unique energy exchange. Texts are thus transportation vehicles conveying an extensive and elaborate metaphor, even an extended allegory of the self-soul with the self-soul of the text. (p. 1)

Absorbed reading of a fantasy story also seems more intimate than watching a movie or listening to a storyteller. There seems to be something special about sitting in a quiet place, holding the book in your hands as your eyes float across the words on the page. Silence may envelope you as you enter the world of the fantasy, as it does while sitting in a place of worship. In this way, absorbed reading of fantasy literature may seem like meditation and prayer, as well as like exploring the mysteries of the world. According to Slattery (2001), “the line between poetry and prayer is often very thin” (p. 1). The reader’s relationship with the fantasy story is allowed to deepen as the minutes and hours pass by in the first reading and with each rereading. The reader may come to think of the book as a companion or friend and take the memories of it with them throughout the day. It is difficult to imagine having a relationship of this quality with the director’s or storyteller’s version of a fantasy story.

Books appear to have a presence of their own. They seem sacred, mysterious, and inviting. Books seem to hold secrets and knowledge of other worlds as vast and infinite as the cosmos. According to Sabini (1997) the “book of knowledge” (p. 45) is an archetypal symbol, which “seems to be the living source from which shamans and mystics derive their special
wisdom” (p. 45). As an archetypal symbol or image, the book of knowledge is part of the psyche and the individuation process (Jung, 1966/1985; Sabini, 1997). Therefore, it seems possible that while reading fantasy literature we may be predisposed to the influence of this archetype of mystical wisdom, which may enable us to access mystical realms.

Meaningful and/or transformative experiences of reading have been classified as literary experiences. Literary experiences are defined as “having an extremely meaningful and profoundly moving experience while reading a letter, story, novel, or poem” (Palmer, 1999, p. 572). These experiences are a type of exceptional human experience (EHE), which “is an umbrella term for many types of experiences generally considered to be psychic, mystical, or encounter-type experiences … [that] can be life changing” (White, 1993, p. 138).

Fantasy literature is any written story that is either wholly or partly set in an imaginary otherworld or secondary world (i.e., one different from what is commonly perceived to be ordinary reality). This otherworld is believable in the sense that it obeys some or all of the scientific axioms, as well as its own imaginary axioms, provided the author has succeeded in their creation (Clute & Grant, 1997). For example, magic or the supernatural may be an accepted part of reality in the fantasy world, as well as space travel at light speed (Clute & Grant, 1997; Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature, 1995; Tolkien, 2001). Fantasy literature includes ancient literature such as myths, legends, folktales, and fairytales, as well as modern fantasy and science fiction (Clute & Grant, 1997; Mathews, 2002; Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature, 1995).

Spirit is the ineffable Divine source of all creation (Cortwright, 1997). It is a vast, formless, impersonal consciousness, in which everything is one and the same (Cortwright, 1997). Spirit is also our ultimate identity and forms the ground of our own consciousness (Cortwright,
Everything is a manifestation of spirit. The experience of connecting with or touching spirit while reading refers to getting so close to the Divine or pure spirit that one experiences something close to, if not an actual, nondual experience. In essence, this happens when we identify with the aspect of ourselves which is Divine spirit. Such an experience could be in many forms, such as feelings of peace, joy, or truth, or a sense of unity with all beings. In addition, Tolkien (2001) described the “Eucatastrophe . . . as the sudden joyous ‘turn’ . . . [or] sudden and miraculous grace . . . a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief” (pp. 68–69).

Research Questions

This study is based on my personal experiences of reading fantasy literature. Reflecting upon personal healing and transformative life experiences, I realized that many of these experiences seemed to be associated with reading fantasy literature. These healing and transformative experiences of reading fantasy literature involved feelings of psychological support, as well as spiritual unitive experiences. I also observed that it seemed as if these experiences were enhanced while I was absorbed in reading the fantasy story, making it seem as if I was in some way a part of the story. These personal insights led me to ask the following questions in regard to this study: What is the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state? Additionally, what are the positive meaningful aspects of such an experience? Finally, how do such experiences affect us both psychologically and spiritually?

However, emphasizing the positive aspects of the experience does not preclude the existence of negative aspects. Based on my experience, the positive and the negative go hand in hand. For example, feelings of fear, anxiety, and trauma have been part of my experience in reading fantasy literature, just as have those of moral and spiritual support. Encounters with fear,
darkness, and death are crucial to psychic and spiritual transformation processes, such as the “Dark Night of the Soul” (Marion, 2000, p. 117). The emphasis on the positive aspects of reading fantasy literature is an attempt, in part, to understand what healing took place.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state. The experience of absorbed reading involves a complex dance of emotions, thoughts, and senses (Esrock, 1986; Miall, 2007; Samuels & Eisenberg, 1981; F. Smith, 2004). The primary focus of this study is on the positive meaningful aspects of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state, such as its ability to heal, to transform, or to remind one of the meaning of life and one’s values. This could be true of all fiction, especially the classics; however, this study is focused on fantasy literature.

I employ intuitive knowing in this study in order to explore and understand the experience of the absorbed reading of fantasy literature instead of seeking to explain it. I hope that through such knowing, which touches all aspects of one’s being, one may begin to understand the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state on a human rather than an abstract level—one that resonates with the experiences of the participants of this study (Anderson, 2000; Esrock, 1986; Miall, 2007; Samuels & Eisenberg, 1981; F. Smith, 1994).

**Significance of Study**

Today’s world, in 21st-century Western society, is extremely stressful and overwhelming for many people (Newman, 2005). Technology, terrorism, and war have brought about an increase in mental health problems both at home and worldwide (Glendinning, 1994; Macy & Brown, 1998; Schuster et al., 2001). As a nation, our imaginative ability has declined, and we are becoming more illiterate (Hillman, 1989). Romanyszyn (2001) pointed out that “we are expected
to distrust the imaginal . . . to keep it in its proper place. . . . [and yet this] demands too much, for an imaginal understanding of others and ourselves is the texture of human life” (p. 102).

Essential to reading is the “psyche’s capacity to enter imagination” (Hillman, 1989, p. 170).

Imagination is also essential to healing the soul (Moore, 1992). As Eliade (1985) pointed out, we have an existential need to listen to stories and fairy tales. He went on to note that “any creation of the literary imagination reveals a new universe on meanings and values. . . . [and] reveals unknown dimensions . . . of the human condition” (p. 174). Myth, which could be considered the origin of all literature today, has taught us about life through its timeless themes, such as the struggle between good and evil or between love and hatred (Campbell, 2002; Segal, 1998). Myth has served as a guide for both internal and external life concerns (Campbell, 1973; Jung, 1968, 1934-1954/1990).

Modern fantasy follows this tradition by drawing from myths, fairy tales (Burns, 1979; Campbell, 2002; Segal, 1998), romance, and other genres (Nikolajeva, 2000). Tolkien’s (1954/2004) *The Lord of the Rings*, which is considered to be one of the most popular and influential works of modern fantasy literature and which includes the theme of the destructiveness of technology, especially its impact on nature and way of life, is even more relevant today than it was when first written (Curry, 2004; Foden, 1997; Lindrea, 2004). First published in 1954 (and most popular with the counterculture of the 1960s), it is probably the single best-selling work of fiction of the 20th century, having sold about 50 million copies (Curry, 2004). In the past decade, Rowling’s *Harry Potter* books have surpassed Tolkien’s record, selling over 325 million copies worldwide (Jordan, 2007). The success of her series of seven books has been phenomenal, attracting both children and adults. The themes of the hero’s journey and initiation are central to the *Harry Potter* books (De Rosa, 2003; Grimes, 2002;
Nikolajeva, 2003). One reason that readers of all ages are drawn to Rowling’s *Harry Potter* books is because of the parallels in Harry’s development and their own (De Rosa, 2003). “Harry Potter is Everyboy and Everyman, [who] . . . we all know is inside us, whether we are six, sixteen, or sixty . . . who knows he is special, that great things lie in store for him which others do not recognize yet” (Grimes, 2002, p. 122). These are just two examples of the popularity of fantasy literature today.

In addition, recent motion pictures based on these fantasy books, as well as on Lewis’ (2001) *Chronicles of Narnia*, have engaged the imaginations of millions of people globally (Groves, 2002). Technology, which can be so destructive, has in this case been used to help reconnect people with fantasy stories through beautiful and creative screen images and narratives that capture the essence of the original work of art. The movies have, in turn, served to renew the public’s interest in reading fantasy literature. It seems paradoxical that technology has helped us remember and return to a world that was—*once upon a time*.

I believe that the topic of reading fantasy literature is timely, for it addresses today’s stress, alienation and loss of meaning in life by allowing us to use our imaginations to temporarily live in another world that feels more like home. Home is where we may be nurtured and guided by people of wisdom, and may have more freedom to follow our hearts, rather than be forced into an empty conformity. In other words, through fantasy we may find our way back home, back to a place of regeneration and healing, where we may reconnect with spirit, our ultimate identity.

Understanding the experience of people who read fantasy in an absorbed state may also help validate the use of literature in therapy. In addition, the findings of this study may add to the existing body of knowledge by providing a better understanding of the positive meaningful
effects of literature. Most importantly, it may help us to remember who we are and what is most meaningful in life.

**Relevance of Study to Transpersonal Psychology**

Transpersonal psychology focuses on states of being that go beyond the personal and individual in order to connect us with all beings. In other words, the transpersonal involves the realization that all beings and things are connected, all are essentially one, and separateness is an illusion. There are moments in life when we may enter such a state of nondual reality, such as while watching a beautiful sunset. When this happens we temporarily disidentify with our ego and enter the realm of spirit, our identity with the Divine (Cortwright, 1997). In essence, this happens when we identify with the aspect of ourselves that is Divine spirit.

Transpersonal psychology initially studied all aspects of what is thought of as beyond the personal, including mystical experience, altered states of consciousness, various psi phenomena (i.e., ESP, clairvoyance, channeling, telepathy), and shamanic journeying, as well as unitive states (Cortwright, 1997; Hastings, 1979-1980). However, transpersonal psychology also acknowledges the personal self and the unconscious that have been studied in traditional psychology (Cortwright, 1997). According to Cortwright (1997), “transpersonal psychology studies how the spiritual is expressed in and through the personal, as well as the transcendence of the self” (p. 10). In this way, transpersonal psychology includes and exceeds traditional psychology and recasts it into a spiritual framework (Cortwright, 1997). In other words, transpersonal psychology focuses on personal and individual potential to reconnect with the spiritual.

I believe that the experience of absorbed reading in general may trigger transpersonal experiences. It may also guide us on a path of transformation and healing. Absorbed reading of
fantasy literature, which introduces us to worlds very different from our own day-to-day world, may be even more conducive to helping us disidentify with ego than other types of literature. The findings of this study may also add a transpersonal perspective to bibliotherapy and other narrative therapies, as well as further our knowledge of altered states of consciousness and transpersonal ways of knowing.

Overview of Study

The study was conducted using the method of intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2011), a form of hermeneutics, which is meant to systematically incorporate both objective and subjective ways of knowing through a multistage process involving five iterative cycles. This method encourages me to draw from my own experience and to make clear my assumptions, or, lenses. The lenses are used, along with published literature and the detailed accounts of participant experiences, to refine the topic and further inform the researcher. At each step new information was used to help better articulate the essence of the original research question from which I hope to discover the experience of reading fantasy literature.

In order to explore and understand the experience of absorbed reading of fantasy literature on a human level, 18 participants recorded their remembered experiences in narrative form. This narrative record included details such as (a) the circumstances of the participant’s life at the time the book was read and how each related to the storyline; (b) emotions, sensations, and states of consciousness experienced; and (c) the personal meaning of the experience and its affect on the participant’s life. My belief was that it would also be informative to analyze the narratives as a group in order to understand any major themes that might emerge, such as healing, transformation, or finding meaning.
Conclusion

This chapter introduced the focus, purpose, and significance of the topic in general and in relation to transpersonal psychology, and an overview of the method of this study. The chapters that follow provide more detailed discussions of the study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on fantasy literature, the nature of reality, the psychology of fantasy, the psychology of reading, the psychological effects of absorbed reading, and the therapeutic effects of reading. Chapter 3 covers the research method in detail, including the rationale for the design, a description of the participants, the data collection procedures, and the analysis techniques. Chapter 4 presents the research findings, including the participants’ narratives describing their experiences of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state and related creative expression. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the final set of interpretive lenses, along with a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In a book about Soviet concentration camps in Siberia, Le Septieme Ciel, J. Biemel declares that all internees, almost a hundred in number, living in his dormitory, succeeded in surviving (while in other dormitories ten or twelve died each week) because they listened every night to an old woman telling fairy tales. So greatly did they feel the need for stories that every one of them renounced a part of his daily food ration to allow the old woman not to work during the day, so she could conserve her strength for her inexhaustible story-telling.

—Mircea Eliade (1985, pp. 174-175)

Since ancient times, stories have been used to soothe souls in much the same way as the fairy tales were told to the internees mentioned in the above excerpt from Eliade (1985). Myths, the origins of modern literature, have flourished and inspired throughout history (Campbell, 2002). Their “characteristic efficacy to touch and inspire deep creative centers dwells [even] in the smallest . . . fairy tale” (Campbell, 1973, p. 4). This ability to move people deeply has its origins in the ancient myths that relate “sacred history . . . [which] is equivalent to revealing a mystery” (Eliade, 1987, p. 95).

In order to understand how the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state may move and inspire us, I reviewed literature from multiple overlapping disciplines. This literature included, but was not limited to, disciplines as wide-ranging as comparative religion, history, psychology, neuropsychology, comparative mythology, literary studies, linguistics, philosophy, and aesthetics. Considering the number of disciplines and the fact that there is much overlap between them, it may be more understandable to organize them by focusing on a few areas of study. Hence, for the purposes of this study, the literature is considered to be within, but not limited to, the following four areas of study: story and fantasy, the experience of reading, level of involvement and consciousness, and positive effects of reading.
Fantasy Literature

Fantasy literature (i.e., myths, legends, folktales, and fairytales) was pervasive in ancient cultures from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* in 2000 B.C.E Babylonia until the 1600s, when the Renaissance introduced science and reason as modes of understanding. Around the beginning of the 19th century, modern fantasy literature was born, countering the realism that had become popular during the Renaissance. It became the literature of the fantastic as opposed to the realistic (Clute & Grant, 1997; Mathews, 2002).

Definition of fantasy literature. The consensus among literary critics is that it is very difficult to arrive at a precise definition of fantasy literature (Clute & Grant, 1997; Library of Congress, 2007; Mathews, 2002). This difficulty is due in part to the fact that the distinctions between fantasy and other subgenres of the fantastic are often blurred and artificial (Library of Congress, 2007). In addition, modern fantasy has its roots in the origins of literature, which makes the task of specifying the texts to be included in the genre very complex and somewhat arbitrary (Campbell, 2002; Clute & Grant, 1997; Mathews, 2002).

The definition of fantasy literature used in this study is based on several definitions in order to satisfy the following criteria. It is succinct and consistent with and inclusive of accepted definitions of fantasy. In addition, it encompass the literature that inspired this study. This includes *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by Tolkien (1954/2004), the Irish legend of *Oisin in the Land of Youth* (Heaney, 1995), and the Earthsea series by Le Guin (2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2003, 2004).

The definition is based primarily on Clute and Grant’s (1997) definition of fantasy in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*:

A fantasy text is a self-coherent narrative which, when set in our reality, tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it; when set in an otherworld or
secondary world, that otherworld will be impossible, but stories set there will be possible in the otherworld’s terms. (p. viii)

“Text” in the definition above refers to multiple formats, such as the written word, cinema, comics, music, and art. For the purposes of this study, the written word, or, literature is the main type of text used because it is consistent with the format of the primary text. Other formats may be used as secondary texts.

A self-coherent narrative in written form is by definition a story. Stories tell a sequence of events whose meaning is conveyed partly through the actual telling. Fantasies tell stories about the fantastic (Clute & Grant, 1997). By definition, the fantastic is also related to the anomalous and exceptional (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2005).

Fantasies are stories set in otherworlds or secondary worlds that have different rules from our own reality. For example, otherworlds usually obey rules other than the rules of science (i.e., the basis for reality in our world), which is why they are impossible in comparison to ours. Yet, within this otherworld the story makes sense because its rules are consistent with the otherworld.

Some literary critics pinpoint the birth of fantasy literature as occurring just before the 19th century, claiming the ancient literature of myth, legend, folktale, and fairytale to be important influences but not true fantasy because the authors did not intend for the stories to be counter to reality (Clute & Grant, 1997). However, there are other literary critics who include ancient literature (Mathews, 2002).

Another way of looking at fantasy is as a subgenre of fantastic literature and in relationship to other genres, such as “science fiction, magic realism, fabulation, surrealism” (Clute & Grant, 1997, p. 335). However, working with genres makes it very difficult to accurately include all literature that may fall into a particular category, because there will always be some works of literature that overlap, as is the case with fantasy and science fiction. For
example, the Library of Congress (2007) defined science fiction to be a subgenre of fantasy largely because there is such an overlap within today’s literature. It also included two other subgenres, horror and adaptations of traditional myths, and noted that, in addition to these, much of fantasy literature also falls into the genres of great literature. *Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature* (1995) also claimed that science fiction is a subset or subgenre of fantasy.

Nevertheless, Clute and Grant (1997) made a distinction between fantasy and science fiction, claiming that readers presume the world of science fiction is possible, whereas the otherworld of fantasy is not. Yet, even so, science fiction overlaps with fantasy. Mathews (2002) agreed that the two genres are separate and suggested that there is a spectrum of literature between the two poles (i.e., fantasy and science fiction).

The distinction seems to be one of possibility versus impossibility and science versus nonscience or fantasy. What the critics seem to be saying is that something is possible if it obeys the laws of science and impossible if it does not. They seem to ignore the perspective that something supposedly based on science can be difficult, if not impossible, to believe, especially if it is a story set in the future. Clarke (1980) stated, “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic” (p. 87). In other words, the worlds of the two genres may both be considered impossible.

Therefore, in order to satisfy the second criteria mentioned above, Clute and Grant’s (1997) definition of fantasy literature should be modified to include science fiction; ancient literature such as myths, legends, folktales, and fairytales; and modern fantasy. This categorization includes fantasy literature for both children and adults, for, as Lewis (1994) pointed out, “the same readers will probably read both” (p. 28). The definition of fantasy
literature for this study also excludes all literature that intends to frighten and terrify its readers, such as most works of horror, in keeping with the positive focus of this study and of fantasy literature in general (Clute & Grant, 1997). This refers only to literature that has an intentional focus on horror for horror’s sake and not literature that represents the trials of rites of passage, such as the hero’s journey.

*The hero’s journey.* Much of fantasy literature is related to the archetype of the hero’s journey, in which the protagonists or heroes give themselves over to the call of the journey, face many trials, reevaluate values, learn many lessons along the way, and return transformed (Campbell, 1973, 2002; Clute & Grant, 1997). Melanson (1994) and Tigue (1990) studied fantasy literature with this archetype in mind. Melanson (1994) claimed that the hero’s journey is a metaphor for the quest for identity. Tigue suggested that the reader of fantasy literature undergoes a transformation of consciousness that leads to greater awareness and promotes inner growth. The archetype of the hero’s journey is also the basis for several theories of the development and evolution of consciousness (Henderson & Oakes, 1963; Neumann, 1995; Wilber, 1999). This suggests that reading fantasy literature based on the hero archetype may allow readers to experience a journey similar to that of the protagonist or hero, in which they benefit by being reminded of values, finding more meaning in life, and being psychologically and spiritually transformed (Campbell, 1973, 2002; Eliade, 1985; Grof, 2000; Henderson & Oakes, 1963; Neumann, 1995; White, 1993).

*Shamanic initiation.* The hero’s journey may also be an initiation, similar to that of the primitive shaman (Campbell, 1973, 2002; Eliade, 1985). TePaske (1997) claimed that the shaman is initially a sick person (man or woman), who is extremely introverted and separated from others by inner experiences, such as extraordinary dreams and trance states. The shaman,
who is distinguished as a special person, is tortured and dismembered by demons and spirits and then helped by friendly spirits, who enable him to undergo a regeneration, by which he comes into his own (TePaske, 1997). Ultimately, the shaman becomes a personification of the sacred (TePaske, 1997). Eliade (1963) claimed that the origins of the fairy tale were linked to primitive religious initiation rituals similar to the one just described by TePaske (1997). Eliade (1963) stated,

It is true . . . that the tale always comes to a happy conclusion. But its content proper refers to a terrifyingly serious reality: initiation, that is, passing, by way of a symbolic death and resurrection, from ignorance and immaturity to the spiritual age of the adult. The difficulty is to determine when the tale began its career of pure fairy tale emptied of all initiatory responsibility. . . . We could almost say that the tale repeats, on another plane and by another means, the exemplary initiation scenario. The tale takes up and continues “initiation” on the level of the imaginary. . . . All unwittingly, and indeed believing that he is merely amusing himself or escaping, the man of the modern societies still benefits from the imaginary initiation supplied by tales. (pp. 201-202)

Eliade’s statement further suggests that readers of fantasy literature may undergo an unconscious psychological transformation, for it is the shaman’s confrontation with the darkness of the soul that brings equilibrium, enhanced consciousness, and spiritual power (TePaske, 1997).

*Reality, Soul, and Spirit*

Before going further, I need to define the concepts of reality, soul, and spirit for use in this study. There are as many ways to describe these concepts as there are spiritual traditions, and more. A generic language is needed—one that represents the core areas of agreement among all spiritual traditions. The “perennial philosophy,” first coined by Huxley (1944) and further expounded upon by H. Smith (1992), provides such a language. Cortwright (1997) summarizes H. Smith’s work in a way that makes the concepts easily understood.

According to the perennial philosophy, there are four levels or dimensions of existence or reality: (a) the terrestrial plane, (b) the intermediate plane, (c) the celestial plane, and (d) the infinite plane. There are also four levels or dimensions of identity or selfhood: (a) body, (b)
mind, (c) soul, and (d) spirit (Cortwright, 1997, H. Smith, 1992). The definition of reality used in this study corresponds to the terrestrial plane, the first level of existence. The definitions of soul and spirit used in this study correspond to the third and fourth levels of selfhood, respectively. These two groups of levels are explained in the subsections below.

**Levels of existence.** The terrestrial plane consists of the material world and is defined by our physical senses and mental perceptions (Cortwright, 1997). The terrestrial plane is the definition of reality in this study. In Indo-Tibetan Buddhism the terrestrial plane is known as apparent reality, referring to the illusionary quality of our senses and perceptions of the world, as well as implying the existence of other realities (Karr, 2007).

The intermediate plane can be described as the psychic plane. It is a domain of “subtle energies, refined perception, and subtle physical processes and beings” (Cortwright, 1997, p. 29). It is also the world of shamanism (Eliade, 1974), as well as the realm of Jung’s archetypes (Jung, 1950/1980, 1956/1989).

The celestial plane is the plane of the Personal Divine. It is the domain of the personal relationship with the Divine, which can be a presence with or without form. The Divine can be in the form of an external god or a spark of the Divine within one’s soul. Union with the Divine is the relationship that the soul longs for; the closer one gets to this union, the closer one is to peace, compassion, joy, and truth. This level is also the source of the archetypes (Cortwright, 1997).

The infinite plane is the plane of the Impersonal Divine. It is the domain of pure spirit. There is nothing but the Divine at this level. Everything is one and the same. All are forms of one spirit, which is without form. It is impossible to describe. Each religion has its own language. In Hinduism the Divine is described as Brahman or Being, which is seen as a vast
impersonal consciousness. All of creation is seen to be the movement of this consciousness.

“Brahman or atman is our ultimate identity and forms the ground of our own consciousness” (Cortwright, 1997, pp. 30-31).

H. Smith (1992) pointed out that the higher dimensions seem uncanny because we lack the appropriate senses to connect with them, which makes them mysterious. “Science fiction writers know this. . . . In its preoccupation with a ‘more’ that exceeds man’s ken, science fiction is kin to religion” (p. 22). In this sense the higher domains of existence can be associated with the realms of fantasy. In addition, the otherworlds of fantasy stories often have psychic phenomena and other subtle energies, as well as Divine interventions, seen for instance in Tolkien’s (1954/2004) *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Le Guin’s (2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2003, 2004) *Earthsea* series, Lackey’s (1987a, 1987b, 1988) *The Heralds of Valdemar* trilogy, and De Lint’s (1984) *Moonheart*.

**Levels of selfhood.** The first two dimensions of selfhood—body and mind (including emotions)—are the levels studied by conventional science and psychology (Cortwright, 1997). The third dimension of selfhood is soul. It is our unique spiritual nature, which relates to the Divine and transcends birth and death (and, in Hinduism, reincarnation; Cortwright, 1997). This is the definition of soul used in this study. The fourth dimension of selfhood is spirit, which is the Divine. There is no duality in this dimension. Everything in existence is seen as manifestations of the Divine (Cortwright, 1997). Such a definition of spirit is used in this study.

*Psychology of Fantasy*

**Scientism.** In the 16th century the scientific revolution reduced the domains of existence from several to one, the terrestrial plane of body and mind. Along with it came the “belief that no realities save ones that conform to . . . science . . . exist” (H. Smith, 1992, p. 34). The veneration
of wisdom traditions disappeared and forefathers and foremothers were treated as immature children. Reason and experiment were understood as superior to prayer and devotion in improving life (Leahey, 2004). Religion was either wish-fulfilling or an opiate for the masses (Marx, 1843-44/1970; H. Smith, 1992). Also at this time, modern consciousness and its science, psychology, was born (Leahey, 2004).

Today, much of psychology remains under the influence of the scientific worldview. Connection with reality and a rational mind are still highly valued, and myth, the origin of fantasy literature (Burns, 1979; Campbell, 2002; Segal, 1998), is often equated with falsehood. Fantasy is defined in psychological terms as “any of a range of [either conscious or unconscious] mental experiences and processes marked by vivid imagery, intensity of emotions, and relaxation or absence of logic” (American Psychological Association, 2007, p. 368) and is often viewed as “indicative of pathology, as in delusional thinking or significant disconnection from reality” (American Psychological Association, 2007, p. 368). Someone reading fantasy literature might have such experiences. Perhaps that is why it is often seen as escapism (i.e., pathological behavior). Psychologists are focused on improving the mental health of their clients, which equates to their being mentally functional (i.e., rational and logical) in the world. Granted, delusional thinking or excessive retreating into the otherworlds of fantasy books may prevent one from being a socially adjusted and self-sufficient member of society; in this sense, however, it is a matter of degree that distinguishes an experience as pathological.

Burns (1979) stated that the purpose of fantasy is not escapism into a world separate from human concerns but immersion into a world created by the author that is founded on social, spiritual, and psychological questions of the human condition. In addition, she claimed that this fantasy world has the power to move readers deeply and may be one of the most effective means
for developing a socially integrated people. Keen (2006) also pointed out that empathic reading encourages altruism and good citizenship. Fantasy may also change the way we see ourselves by showing us positive role models (Burns, 1979).

*Alternative viewpoints.* More recently, psychologists have acknowledged that “fantasizing is normal and common and often serves a healthy purpose of releasing tension, giving pleasure and amusement, or stimulating creativity” (American Psychological Association, 2007, p. 368). Von Franz (1996) stated that fantasy comes from the depths and “constellates symbolic situations” (p. 103) that give life a deeper meaning. Various aspects of fantasy have influenced psychological theory and practice. They are related to how we consciously or unconsciously create the stories we live by.

Narrative therapy relates to the stories we tell ourselves and how they do not always serve us. It involves clients partially recreating the stories they live by, which helps them live better lives (White & Epston, 1990). In a sense, we create our own world with our thoughts and beliefs. For example, if we see the world as bleak and our lot in life as hopeless, such a view may come true because our thoughts affect our mood, which in turn creates a downward spiral (Seligman, 1975, 1989).

Hillman (1979) claimed that, together, the analyst and the patient rewrite the case history into a new healing story, a collaborative fiction. Jung (1997) used a technique called active imagination in his practice to encourage patients to actively imagine or give unconscious images a life of their own. In a sense, these images told him a story about their psyches. According to Von Franz (1980), an important part of active imagination involves giving the images some form of expression, such as writing stories.
The above examples illustrate that we live in storied worlds of our creation. They show how important stories are in understanding our identities, our lives, and how we see the world. In addition, these stories can be used to heal us. Most of fantasy literature is positive, in the sense that the stories usually have happy endings (Clute & Grant, 1997). This suggests that reading fantasy literature may enable readers to reframe their worldviews in a positive light (i.e., optimistic, hopeful, healing, spiritual). Similarly, exceptional human experiences (EHEs), including literary experiences, help us to see the world in a life-affirming and self-potentiating way (White, 1998).

*Psychology of Reading*

The psychology of reading has been studied at least since the late 19th century (Fischer, 2004; Rayner & Pollatsek, 1989; Wittrock, 1981). The areas of study have involved the psychology of cognition and perception, as well as linguistics and neuropsychology (Fischer, 2004; Kennedy, 1984). In spite of the amount of research, there seemed to be an incomplete understanding or agreement among researchers in psychology or psycholinguistics on what is involved in reading and how it should be defined. Due to this amount of research and its complexity, studies of the act of reading from these perspectives are not included in this study.

*Definition of reading.* For the purposes of this study, reading is defined as a creative activity in which readers find meaning for the words on the page. Achieving this involves thought, memories of life experiences, emotions, imagination, and the senses (Esrock, 1986; Kennedy, 1984; Miall, 2007; Samuels & Eisenberg, 1981; F. Smith, 1994).

*Experience of reading.* Giorgi (1987) stated that imagination is a form of consciousness that “appears and mingles” (p. 38) with memories, emotions, perceptions, and expectations. Reading is essentially an imaginative activity (Giovannelli, 2004). In other words, imagination
plays a significant role in the reader’s experience of a story, as well as in the reader’s ability to enter a story (Bruner, 1986; Feagin, 1984, 1988, 1996; Giovannelli, 2004; Hillman, 1989; Miall, 2007).

How does the reader enter a story? This question may be partly answered by understanding the psychological processes related to the reader’s life and involvement with the story (Bruner, 1986; Feagin, 1988, 1996; Gerrig, 1998; Giovannelli, 2004). It is also important to understand the reader’s relationship to the characters of the story, either because of identification or empathy with them (Feagin, 1988, 1996; Giovannelli, 2004; Keen, 2006, 2007) or because they represent characters from the reader’s unconscious (Freud, 1925/1950; Bruner, 1986). Another aspect of entering a story is the reader’s relationship to the writer (Kennedy, 1984; F. Smith, 1994, 2004). These aspects of entering a story are expanded upon below.

When reading a story, readers interpret it and create, compose, or construct their own versions of the story (Bruner, 1986; Gerrig, 1998; Giovannelli, 2004). In other words, readers write their own unique versions of the story. Readers also try to reconcile the world of the story with their own remembered experiences (Bruner, 1986; Gerrig, 1998; Giovannelli, 2004). Compelling or absorbing stories are ones in which readers can identify or empathize with the characters, and these stories can be rewritten by the reader with imagination (Bruner, 1986; Gerrig, 1998; Giovannelli, 2004). In other words, compelling stories are ones in which the reader’s creation or own version of the story is highly imaginative. At this level of involvement, the reader may be transported into the world of the story and forget the here and now (Gerrig, 1998; Green, 2004). When this happens, readers may feel that they have entered the story world. In other words, the readers may feel that the story world is real.
**Relationship between reader and writer.** The reader and writer of the story interact in different ways. Kennedy (1984) claimed the relationship between reader and writer is symbiotic, similar to that of speaker and listener, with the goal being meaningful communication. Writers also influence the reader’s ways of writing (F. Smith, 2004), as well as reader’s identities and values (Slattery, 2006). Embodied writers, who seek to reveal the lived experience of the writer’s body, may facilitate the reader’s perceptual and imaginal senses to make the story’s characters “come alive” (Anderson, 2001, p. 83). Anderson (2001) claimed that readers of embodied writing reported experiences that they had never known before. In addition, Giovannelli (2004) claimed that readers who participate with characters through empathy may experience the same emotions and other perceptions as do the characters of the story (as the writer has portrayed them).

Jung (1933) claimed that the human psyche is the “womb” (p. 152) of all arts, including literature. He went on to distinguish between two modes of literature, the psychological, which deals with human consciousness (i.e., lessons of life), and the visionary, which furnishes material for artistic expression (Jung, 1933, 1966/1978). Jung (1933) described visionary experiences as similar to transpersonal ones, in that they “rend the curtain that veils the cosmos [and] transcend the bounds of the humanly possible” (1933, p. 156). Jung (1968) also claimed that mystical experiences were vivid experiences of archetypes. In addition, Grof (2000) claimed that there is a type of transpersonal experience related to myth and fairy tale that is connected to the collective unconscious. These statements suggest that imagination is essentially spiritual or mystical.

If all writing is a product of the human psyche, then the relationship between reading and writing may be intimate (i.e., archetypes are involved with both). Writing may reflect the influence of archetypes in the author’s psyche, and this influence may in turn affect the reader’s
psychic. Assuming these statements are true, it seems reasonable to assume that readers may actually be able to share the spiritual or ineffable, as well as the mundane, experiences of writers.

Reading and dreaming. Reading has been compared to dreaming in various ways. Freud (1925/1950) compared the creations of poets (i.e., creative writers) to daydreams. He suggested that the story characters represent the poet’s unconscious component-egos. Oatley (1999), on the other hand, claimed that dreams and computer simulation are both metaphors for constructive activities involved in reading. In particular, he stated that dreams, like fictional novels, are constructions of the imagination. In addition, he noted that the comparison of dreams to reading is analogous to the reader being transported into the world of the story, forgetting the here and now (Gerrig, 1998). Similarly, Nell (1988) claimed that absorbed reading for pleasure may be similar to dreaming and daydreaming and may be enhanced by vivid imagery. Giovannelli (2004) stated that dreams and iconic imagination are examples of iconic mental states related to reading, because they both act as ways of representing events to ourselves, most commonly by visualizing images.

Psychological Effects of Absorbed Reading

This study is focused on the experience of reading in which one is absorbed in the activity to the extent that only the world of the book is foremost in one’s consciousness. The term absorbed reading is used to describe this state because the American Psychological Association’s APA Dictionary of Psychology (2007) definition for “absorption” (p. 4) has the same general meaning.

Tellegen and Atkinson (1974) created a personality questionnaire to assess hypnotizability. They accomplished this by administering a set of questions related to hypnotizability to 481 female participants. In addition, two subsets of these participants
completed Block’s (1965) ego resiliency and ego control questionnaire scales and measures of hypnotic susceptibility, respectively. Of the two dimensions (i.e., stability and introversion) and one factor (i.e., absorption), absorption was the only one correlated with hypnotizability. It is defined as a personality trait by which one has a disposition to have experiences that fully engage the perceptions, imagination, creation of ideas, and actions.

According to Tellegen and Atkinson (1974), in a state of absorption, the object of attention seems real, even when constructed from memory; distractions seem minimal; and there is an altered sense of reality. Such an experience can result in an altered empathic sense of self and assume mystical overtones. In fact, people with this trait may be likely to have an affinity for mystical experiences (Tellegen & Atkinson, 1974). Tellegen and Atkinson’s research does not directly address the experience of reading in a state of absorption, but it implies that in such an experience readers might have a transformed sense of reality by which the story may seem real. Absorbed readers of fantasy may also develop an empathetic relationship to a character, as well as engage in mystical experiences.

Wild, Kuiken, and Schopflocher (1995) conducted a quantitative study with 68 participants to understand the role of the absorption trait and experiential involvement, which occurs when people disengage from the practical goal-oriented behavior of daily life. They discovered that absorption was positively correlated with the arts, in particular the effect of art on mood and ratings of the importance of art to daily life. Arts as used in that study included painting classes, viewing visual art, attending cultural events, listening to music, and reading literature. It should be noted that reading literature was only one aspect of the arts examined by the researchers with respect to the role of absorption and experiential involvement. However, the size of the study sample, combined with the significance of the results related to reading
literature, suggest that the results may be meaningful. Reading literature correlated positively with absorption with regard to mood and the importance of art to daily life. However, the effect of literature on mood was the most strongly correlated. Wild, Kuiken, and Schopflocher also suggested that a person with a high absorption score might tend to experience profound emotions while reading a novel. Regarding this study, these results indicate that absorbed readers may tend to be more experientially involved with the books they read. They may also feel the emotions of the characters more (i.e., empathize more), as well as find meaning from them that applies to daily life.

Kuiken et al. (2004) studied self-modifying feelings during reading of literary fiction in relation to the personality trait absorption. In order to accomplish this, they asked 58 psychology undergraduates to read a short story, describe their experiences of three striking or evocative passages recorded in writing and on tape, and complete the Reading Experience Questionnaire and the Tellegen Absorption Scale (Tellegen, 1982). A content analysis was done on the written descriptions and transcripts of the tape recordings. Three categories of the participants’ responses (i.e., affective theme variations, metaphors of personal identification, and similes of personal identification) were identified and scored by two judges blind to the results of the questionnaires. Self-modifying feelings occur as a flow of feelings that happen when the world of the story changes a reader’s understanding of his or her world. These feelings are related to blurred boundaries between self and other, which suggest a kind of personal identification with the text. They found that readers scoring high in absorption were more likely to report self-perceptual shifts mediated by the interaction between theme variations and personal identification with story metaphors. In other words, high absorption was correlated with a change in readers’ views of their world when there was a feeling of shared experience with the story or characters.
accompanied by a self-evaluation and comparison of themselves with the characters. In addition, emotionally complicated passages triggered self-perception changes in readers who scored high in absorption. Kuiken et al.’s research method seems to be generally valid. However, the researchers acknowledge that the moderate level of internal consistency in measures of self-perceptual shifts could be improved by employing more precise measures.

The fact that the research was done in an artificial laboratory setting, which might have made it more difficult for the participants to become absorbed in the assigned literary reading, also seems to weaken the researchers’ conclusions. However, in spite of these limitations and the fact that this study focused on literary fiction rather than fantasy literature, it has implications for absorbed fantasy reading. It suggests that fantasy reading may bring about changes in the worldview of its readers as they read emotionally complicated passages and evaluated themselves relative to a character in the story.

Roche and McConkey (1990) conducted an extensive literature review on absorption and defined it as openness to emotional and cognitive experiences in a variety of situations. Most of the studies used the Tellegen Absorption Scale (Tellegen, 1982). According to the authors, it is the most widely used measure of the absorption trait and is seen to be consistent in finding personality correlates of hypnotizability. They looked at absorption in relationship to a variety of processes and concluded it to be the key to understanding subjective experience, as well as cognition and behavior. More specifically, they reported that studies on self-reported absorption in reading showed a relationship to hypnotizability and a trance state similar to hypnosis. However, they pointed out that interest in reading material might affect absorption studies. In other words, some participants might only become absorbed in reading material they chose for themselves. Roche and McConkey’s review of absorption, reading, and hypnosis literature
suggests that absorbed reading of fantasy may be related to a hypnotic state. In addition, the
literature supports the participant’s selection of reading material. Roche and McConkey also
noted that daydreaming studies indicate that emotion plays a role in the experience of absorption.
This suggests that there may also be an emotional aspect to absorbed reading. They also pointed
out the lack of differentiation between the absorption trait and the absorption state and the need
for more studies related to the state. This study and the studies above imply that there may be a
link between absorbed reading and hypnosis.

*Hypnosis.* Tellegen and Atkinson’s (1974) work showed that those who have a high
absorption trait score have a high susceptibility to become absorbed or to be hypnotized. This
relationship between absorption and hypnosis is distinct from the relationship between the
experiences of being in a state of absorption or hypnosis. What then is this relationship? More
specifically, is absorbed reading similar to hypnosis? A major roadblock to answering these
questions is the fact that there is no one definition of the experience of hypnosis, let alone of
hypnosis in general (Baruss, 2003; Heap, 2005; Hilgard, 1965; Pekala & Cardena, 2000; Tart,
1972, 2000; Winsor, 1993). However, Tart (1971, 2000) claimed that, in spite of the many ways
of inducing hypnosis, there are some common steps to most of these ways. The goal of the
induction is to withdraw the participant’s attention and awareness from the external environment
onto the hypnotist to the point that the individual’s sense of identity is affected such that his or
her internal voice is replaced by the hypnotist’s (Tart, 1971, 2000). Absorption seems to be one
of the key aspects of the hypnotic state in that the external environment and usual thought
processes are placed in the background to destabilize the ordinary state of consciousness (i.e.,
ordinary overall pattern of psychological functioning) and stabilize a different psychological
state, in this case, the hypnotic state.
However, it appears that absorption is necessary but not sufficient for a successful induction. Tart (2000) referred to the hypnotic state as an altered state of consciousness (i.e., a qualitative change in the overall pattern of mental functioning by which the experiencer feels his or her consciousness to be radically different from the ordinary). He characterized the state of deep hypnosis as one in which the individual is not aware of thinking or experiencing, yet is more open to suggestion, so that when an experience is suggested, the individual will likely experience it far more vividly, to the point of experiential reality, than in his or her ordinary state.

Based on Tart’s (1971, 2000) research, it seems that absorbed reading may be similar to hypnosis. For example, the induction of absorbed reading might be similar to the hypnotic induction in that the reader focuses on the book just as he or she might focus on the hypnotist, eventually completely leaving behind the ordinary state of consciousness and entering the story world. The characters might then become the reader’s internal voice and allow him or her to empathize, or walk in the character’s shoes, creating a vivid experience in the world of fantasy that seems virtually like reality. Based on Tart’s (2000) work, the story would need to compel the reader to enter its world or altered state of consciousness, which requires a new psychological state to be formed and remain stable.

The literature on hypnosis and altered states is controversial (see, for example, Baruss, 2003; Cardena, Lynn, & Krippner, 2000; Tart, 1972). Some literature supports the hypothesis that absorbed reading is similar to hypnosis, and some literature does not. For example, Kihlstrom (2007) reported that the state of absorption is distinct from hypnosis but that it is an altered state. It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss these topics in depth; however, one of the primary qualities of this state seems to be the intensity or level of absorption or altered state.
On the one hand, Hilgard’s (1965) studies of hypnotic susceptibility used reading because it modeled hypnosis (i.e., reading is a hypnotic-like experience). In addition, his participants were chosen based on the types of books they became involved with: novels, adventure stories, mysteries, science fiction, and related books likely to stir the imagination and arouse the emotions, rather than factual, analytic, or scientific books.

Araoz (2005) defined all hypnosis as self-hypnosis. He also placed no emphasis on depth of trance or being under hypnosis but rather on the quality of experiential thinking (i.e., less rational) as opposed to ordinary rational, outer-directed thinking. Daydreams, intense absorption in a book, a lecture, a movie, or a religious service are all examples of hypnosis (Araoz, 2005).

On the other hand, Shor (1972) called absorption nonfunctional awareness or trance and gave an example of how to achieve this state by becoming absorbed or lost in reading a technical book. He differentiated absorption from the state of hypnosis claiming that hypnosis is an alteration of the ordinary state of consciousness. Pekala, Wenger, and Levine (1985) conducted a study with 304 participants to understand individual differences in states of consciousness as a function of absorption. The participants completed the Tellegen Absorption Scale (Tellegen, 1982) and retrospective self-report questionnaires on their experiences of hypnosis. They discovered that only high-scoring absorption individuals were able to enter an altered state in deep hypnosis with eyes closed, which suggests that an absorbed reader may not be able to attain such a state.

Nevertheless, James (2004) gave an example of a mystical experience of John Addington Symonds, who described a recurring trancelike mood (i.e., a state of profound absorption) that occurred “suddenly at church, or in company, or when I was reading” (p. 285). Mr. Symonds’ experience lead to an ecstatic state in which he felt “the sense of an underlying or essential consciousness acquired intensity. At last nothing remained but a pure, absolute, abstract self. The
universe became without form and void of content” (James, 2004, pp. 285-286). This sample from the body of absorption, hypnosis, and altered state literature illustrates the difficulty in determining the nature of the state of absorbed reading as it relates to hypnosis and altered states of consciousness. It may be an altered state of consciousness under certain circumstances, just like hypnosis, or it may be similar to another altered state, such as sleeping or meditation. Another possibility is that it might be a variation of ordinary consciousness, which serves as a conduit for mystical experiences such as the one described by Symonds. These questions are explored further in this study, which will, if not answer them, at least add light to the subject.

Nell (1988) conducted a study on the sovereignty of the reading experience of spontaneous reading for pleasure (i.e., ludic reading). This was the final installment in a series of five studies on the psychology of ludic reading conducted over a period of 6 years. Thirty-three ludic readers completed two questionnaires on reading habits and mood, as well as two personality inventories: the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (Cattell, Eber, & Tatsuoka, 1970) and the Eysenck Personality Inventory (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1964). In addition, 4 readers participated in a 2-hour group discussion about their experience, which was transcribed and thematically analyzed. This sample of participants consisted of exceptionally avid readers. The average number of books of light fiction read per month by the group of participants as a whole was 16.9, and some participants read as many as one or two books a day.

It is not surprising that the results of the personality inventories indicated that the participants were introverted. Nell (1988) also discovered that readers value the rewards mediated by consciousness-changing mechanisms that may have an analog in hypnotic trance, which is consistent with Tellegen and Atkinson’s (1974) description of absorption. He also claimed that ludic reading is analogous to dreaming, especially daydreaming, and suggested that
imagery may be as much a prerequisite as the ability to read well. Also, the reader’s outlook on life may determine whether reading is used to heighten consciousness or to escape from an unhappy existence (i.e., to enhance self-awareness or block it). Nell concluded that readers heighten consciousness by using books for self-exploration (i.e., through awakening memories and goals) or by involvement with the books’ characters and situations. For the most part, this primarily qualitative study seems to have been conducted thoroughly. However, it should be noted that the participants had been a part of all five of Nell’s studies on the psychology of ludic reading, which might skew the results somewhat. In addition, the participants, who read several books of light fiction a week may not be representative of other ludic readers. Nevertheless, the study suggests that absorbed reading of fantasy for pleasure may be similar to dreaming and daydreaming and may be enhanced by vivid imagery. In addition, it may heighten the consciousness of readers who have a positive outlook on life.

Transportation. Green and Brock (2000) developed and validated a transportation scale, based on Gerrig’s (1998) research, that correlates moderately with the Tellegen Absorption Scale (Tellegen, 1982). The term transportation is used with regard to narratives and is defined as “absorption into a story” (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701) that involves imagery, affect, and focused attention. In addition, in order to determine whether transportation is a mechanism that changes the beliefs of narrative readers, they conducted a study with 97 undergraduates, divided into groups of 9 to 15. Each group was asked to read a short story, interpreting it as either fiction or nonfiction, and then complete a series of questionnaires in addition to recording a list of thoughts about the story. The study showed that, regardless of whether the readers interpreted the stories as fact or fiction, transportation enhanced their story-consistent beliefs and favorable evaluation of protagonists. In other words, the beliefs of transported readers were more likely to
be changed by the story and be consistent with the events of the story. In addition, transported readers were more likely to view the protagonist in a positive light. For example, transported readers of Tolkien’s (1954/2004) *The Lord of the Rings* might view Frodo, the protagonist, favorably and change their beliefs to be consistent with the events of the story (i.e., we must do the tasks that have been given to us no matter what the cost). However, unlike fantasy stories, the short story that was used to measure readers’ transportation in this study could be interpreted as either fact or fiction. This ambiguity makes it difficult to make a direct comparison with fantasy. Nevertheless, this study suggests that the story’s qualities (i.e., tragic, moving, shocking, and compelling), regardless of whether it was fact or fiction, were the primary reason readers were transported. Due to the fact that most of these qualities might also apply to fantasy literature, the conclusions of this study suggest that (a) transported or absorbed fantasy readers’ beliefs may change to be consistent with the beliefs expressed by the characters in the stories and (b) readers may be more likely to view the protagonists in a positive light. This study also suggests that transported or absorbed readers of fantasy may believe in the possibility of other realities.

Building upon previous work on transportation into narrative worlds (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002) by which individuals become cognitively and emotionally involved in the story and experience vivid mental images, Green (2004) conducted a study with 152 undergraduates (65 men and 87 women) between 18 and 21 years of age, who received psychology course credit for participation. The participants, who were asked to read a narrative about a homosexual man attending his college fraternity reunion, were randomly assigned to three groups, each with its own set of prereading instructions (i.e., transportation or relaxed leisure readers, elaboration or critical readers, and control). They rated perceived realism and story-related beliefs, as well as prior knowledge or experience with the subject matter based on a series of questionnaires (i.e.,
belief statements, perceived realism, and personal experience questionnaires). Transportation was measured using the transportation scale (Green & Brock, 2000), which has been shown to have good internal consistency and discriminant and convergent validity.

According to Green (2004), prior knowledge of the topic correlated with greater transportation into the story. However, highly transported readers showed more story-consistent beliefs, regardless of prior knowledge or increase in perceived realism. These results are consistent with previous research by Green and Brock (2000), in which a similar method and instruments were used. The replication of results between the two studies strengthens the validity of Green’s (2004) findings. In Green’s (2004) discussion of the possible limitations of this study, she pointed out that the participants did not consistently follow the prereading instructions for their group. She also suggested that this might have been because the participants found it hard to relax and read in a laboratory setting. These study findings suggest that the participants may not have been as transported as they might have been in a more natural setting, making it more difficult to draw conclusions from the data.

In Green’s (2004) discussion of possible future directions of transportation research, she pointed out that the reader’s method of choosing reading material might determine how transportation could be addressed. Reading assigned literature in a laboratory setting seems important to consider in understanding the results of this study. In addition, the literature used in this study was fiction but not fantasy literature. Nevertheless, this study suggests that readers familiar with fantasy stories or who have experience with the themes of fantasy stories (e.g., overcoming difficulties in life) may be more easily transported into the otherworlds of fantasy.

**Personal involvement.** Louwerse and Kuiken (2004) provided a brief literature review on the effect of personal involvement in narrative discourse. Sources of personal involvement may
be directly influenced by characters, setting, and plot, which may be affected by narrative structure (e.g., causing suspense) or narrative elements (e.g., enabling empathy of a character). Stylistic devices may influence appreciation and may also cause the reader to reread the book. In addition, stylistic devices, such as metaphors, may increase involvement by capturing attention, unsettling conventional meanings, and evoking feelings. Due to the fact that fantasy involves self-coherent narrative, these various avenues to involvement would seem to apply. In particular, involvement suggests that empathy with characters, sense of place (i.e., setting is special to the reader) and a plot that depicts struggle over obstacles with a happy ending might directly influence the reader of fantasy. It also implies that the use of metaphor, imagery, and symbolism in fantasy may influence reader appreciation, which may also cause readers to become so involved that they reread the book.

Flow and peak experiences. McQuillan and Conde (1996) conducted two studies of optimal experience or flow in reading. Flow is described as “intense engagement or complete absorption in a task” (McQuillan & Conde, 1996, p. 110). In the first study, they interviewed 2 children and 9 adults (6 males and 5 females) from a variety of academic and professional backgrounds on their experiences of flow in previously assigned and self-selected reading of fiction and nonfiction in the contexts of school, work, and pleasure. The participants were chosen to represent a wide range of ages (9 to 42) and anticipated amount of total reading (i.e., school reading, work reading, and pleasure reading). The interviews were coded and categorized based on the participant’s level of interest, the types of text (i.e., fiction or nonfiction), the context in which the text was encountered (i.e., school, work, pleasure), the perceived benefits of flow, the knowledge about the text prior to reading, and descriptions of how they felt while in flow.
To determine the circumstances under which the participants experienced flow while reading, McQuillan and Conde (1996) rated this interview data in terms of text type, purpose of reading the text, the setting, and whether text was assigned or self-selected. This cross-case analysis allowed the researchers to do a statistical analysis of this data that had a high initial interrater reliability classification. A “member check” (McQuillan & Conde, p. 118) was also conducted to verify the accuracy of the ratings.

McQuillan and Conde’s (1996) second study consisted of 76 adults (53 men and 23 women with mean age 28.5) from a variety of backgrounds (i.e., mostly university students, but also teachers, clerical workers, and other professionals). They were asked to complete a Flow Research Survey created by the researchers and based partly on the results of the first study. The survey asked participants to read a description of flow before making a list of books they had read that produced flow and before describing the conditions under which each book was encountered (i.e., school, work, pleasure), as well as responding to a set of questions about the relationship of the reader to the text (based on findings of the first study). The results of the survey were consistent with those of McQuillan and Conde’s (1996) first study.

McQuillan and Conde (1996) acknowledged that the studies had limitations with regard to sample size, composition, and the operational difficulties of measuring a highly subjective experience such as flow. However, they thought the methods used in the studies appeared to be valid. The studies used a variety of methods and data analysis with checks for reliability and accuracy, and the results were consistent between studies. McQuillan and Conde’s studies revealed that the majority of texts that facilitated flow experiences were those read for pleasure, and when a text was assigned in school, flow was more likely to occur when the participant had an interest in the book. Also, books that were perceived to give personal or intellectual benefit
were more likely to provide flow, and, of these, fiction was significantly more likely to generate flow than nonfiction. McQuillan and Conde’s studies suggest that readers who read fiction books of their own choice for pleasure and personal benefit are more likely to experience flow or optimal experience while reading. It seems that readers of fantasy would fall into this category because most would be choosing books for pleasure, which would benefit them personally.

Privette (1983) did a comparative analysis of literature on positive human experiences by focusing on peak experience, peak performance, and flow. The analysis consisted of interpreting and reducing the data from literature to arrive at detailed descriptions of the constructs, summarizing the most significant features of each, and comparing the constructs by their unique, varying, and common qualities. Privette defined peak experience as “an intense and highly valued moment” (p. 1361) and peak performance as an experience of “superior functioning” (p. 1361). Flow was defined as “an intrinsically enjoyable experience” (Privette, 1983, p. 1361), which is similar to the enjoyment or valuing of the peak experience, as well as the high functioning associated with the peak performance. Privette noted that flow does not necessarily share the heightened sense of joy or functioning of the peak experience or peak performance; however, it may include either or both. In fact, “deep flow” (Privette, 1983, p. 1362), associated with more complex behavior, may be accompanied by ecstasy. Maslow (1968) described peak experiences as “moments of highest happiness and fulfillment” (p. 73), as well as “very much akin to fascination or complete absorption” (p. 74). If deep flow is similar to absorbed reading, this suggests that absorbed readers of fantasy may experience ecstasy or peak experiences.

**Story and Therapy**

There is little empirical research on the experience of reading fantasy literature and its therapeutic benefits, especially related to the spontaneous rather than therapist-supervised
reading. Most of the research on fantasy literature or any type of fiction is based on literary analysis, discourse, criticism, and aesthetics. However, there are a number of studies related to the therapeutic benefits of reading fantasy literature in bibliotherapy, as well as studies in which fantasy literature is used as an adjunct to psychotherapy.

**Bibliotherapy.** Cohen (1994a) defined bibliotherapy as “the therapeutic use of literature with guidance or intervention from a therapist” (p. 426). Bibliotherapy is used usually as an adjunct therapy and is incorporated into or used within each psychotherapist’s theoretical orientation. Cohen (1994a, 1994b) claimed that there are two main approaches, one based on the psychotherapeutic work of Shrodes (1960) and the other on cognitive behaviorism. Shrodes used imaginative literature to diagnose and treat emotional problems. She claimed the process of interaction between the personality of the reader and the literature engages the emotions and frees them for conscious processing. “[T]he vicarious experience induced by reading involves identification, including projection and introjection, catharsis, and insight” (Shrodes, 1960, p. 314). Shrodes’ description of the experience induced by reading parallels the stages in psychoanalysis.

Cohen (1994a, 1994b) stated that this psychoanalytic approach has traditionally guided the practice of bibliotherapy. However, published research is scarce (Cohen, 1994a, 1994b; Marrs, 1995; McKinney, 1975; Pardeck, 1991; Riordan & Wilson, 1998). It also does not fit the cognitive or self-help approach, which is moving in the direction of using a single book of nonfiction, such as a self-help manual, and with little or no therapist involvement. The motivation for this type of self-help bibliotherapy is to provide a low-cost alternative to in-depth, long-term psychotherapy. Research on bibliotherapy offers preliminary support for the use of self-help, but not the use of fiction or imaginative literature (see, for example, Lampropoulos &
Spengler, 2005; Marrs, 1995; Pardeck, 1991; Riordan & Wilson, 1998). One reason is that the self-help literature lends itself to empirical scrutiny (Riordan & Wilson, 1998).

The self-help research focuses on a variety of conditions, including self-concept, depression, anxiety, assertion, sexual dysfunction, career, weight loss, studying, and impulse control (Marrs, 1995). However, it is beyond the scope of this proposal to comprehensively cover the research on self-help literature (see, e.g., Lampropoulos & Spengler, 2005; Marrs, 1995; Pardeck, 1991; Riordan & Wilson, 1998). Even though the practice of bibliotherapy has been in existence for centuries, research suffers from lack of a consistent and clear theoretical framework, definition of terms, and understanding of the phenomenon under study (Cohen, 1994a, 1994b; Marrs, 1995; Riordan & Wilson, 1998). Yet, in spite of its shortcomings in validation, increasing numbers of therapists are using books as adjuncts to therapy (Marrs, 1995).

Cohen (1994a, 1994b) conducted a qualitative study that attempted to understand the phenomenon involved in bibliotherapy. Her goal was to define the lived experience of spontaneous therapeutic reading (i.e., literature self-described by the reader as helpful without therapist guidance or intervention; 1994a). After interviewing 8 participants (aged 26 to 54 and highly educated), Cohen analyzed the data using a phenomenological method developed by Colaizzi (1978). She determined that the structure of the experience was the reader’s recognition of self that evolved into ways of feeling (i.e., shared experience, validation, comfort, hope, inspiration, and catharsis) and ways of knowing that include understanding and information gathering (Cohen, 1994a). The recognition of self is analogous to identification with the protagonist or story; however, the study indicated that there was no direct pathway to catharsis and understanding from identification, unlike the claim in Shrode’s (1960) theory.
Cohen (1994a, 1994b) also claimed that the crucial element in reading seemed to be the recognition of self, not how literature was classified. Her participants reported “identical experiences” (Cohen, 1994a, p. 435) whether they read fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or spiritual literature, She stated that the two main approaches of bibliotherapy differ in their concept of outcome, espousing it as either development of insight (i.e., psychoanalytic approach using imaginative literature) or learning process (i.e., cognitive behavioral approach using self-help literature); however, the data showed that there were both types of outcome occurring and suggested that the two approaches may be closer than was previously thought. Cohen (1994a) concluded that the overlap in the cognitive and emotional aspects of the experience of reading therapeutic literature suggested that the two research approaches were virtually the same.

Cohen’s (1994a, 1994b) method has validity; however, her conclusion may be questioned in regard to the reported experiences being the same regardless of the type of literature read. The list of books cited as helpful to participants does not include books of fiction or poetry (Cohen, 1994b). It would, therefore, seem that her conclusions could be valid only for the types of books listed, which included only nonfiction and spiritual literature.

Dent and Seligman (1993) conducted a qualitative study to understand what readers were doing psychologically when involved in reading a novel or story. The focus of the study was on styles of reading and on the inner fantasies that motivate and influence the experience of becoming and being involved in reading fiction. In addition, the study emphasized the act of reading and how it is influenced by readers’ needs and goals. The readers’ quality of imagination was also examined. There were 68 adult participants, who were “mostly women” (Dent & Seligman, 1993, p. 1254) and all self-proclaimed avid fiction readers. Most of the participants were not interested in popular fiction, such as romances or bestsellers. However, many
participants read mysteries and science fiction (Dent & Seligman, 1993). The majority had some college education and many had advanced degrees. All participants read consistently throughout the year. Few casual readers were represented. As a group, the participants were articulate, intelligent, and committed to reading. Dent and Seligman (1993) asked each participant to complete a lengthy questionnaire about their reading habits and the roles books played in their lives. They also asked the participants to write a short autobiography of themselves as readers, including memories related to books from each developmental stage: early childhood through adulthood (Dent & Seligman, 1993). The researchers analyzed the content of questionnaire and autobiographical data for unconscious themes and organized them according to their relation to the following categories: self-organization, relatedness, affect-regulation, and the repetitive working through of conflicts.

Dent and Seligman (1993) presented their detailed psychoanalysis of the data using this organization, including quotes and examples of the participants. In general, the presentation of this study lacked details, including the demographics of the participants, the method by which the themes were extracted from the data, the types of fiction the participants read, and how much fiction they read. However, Dent and Seligman’s conclusions seem credible as based on the information given.

The findings that emerged from Dent and Seligman’s (1993) study indicated that, for this group of avid fiction readers, deeply personal meanings pervaded the act of becoming absorbed in stories, which shaped the ways fiction was used in their lives (Dent & Seligman, 1993). One major finding was that each participant had a unique and largely unconscious relationship to the act of reading (Dent & Seligman, 1993). These relationships “expressed themes and addressed functions related to self-organisation, real and fantasized relatedness, affect regulation, and the
repetition or working through of conflict” (Dent & Seligman, 1993, p. 1265). Another major finding was the effect these unconscious themes had on the participants (Dent & Seligman, 1993). If the themes were rigid and unyielding, it appeared that readers derived “less newness, richness, and depth, though not necessarily less benefit, from their reading experience” (p. 1265). An example of this would be a reader who draws the same messages from books that are distinctly different from others he or she has read. Dent and Seligman (1993) claimed that, when the themes were more flexible, the reading took place in what Winnicott (2007) called potential space. Winnicott (2007) described potential space as “the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation ... an area that is intermediate between the inner reality of the individual and the shared reality of the world that is external to individuals” (p. 86). According to Winnicott (2007), potential space is “where we experience life” (p. 86). Dent and Seligman also claimed that, when the themes are more flexible, the readers are able to consciously appreciate the story for its own sake, as well as to allow the unconscious themes to play in the background. In this circumstance, the act of reading creates a new experience for the reader (Dent & Seligman, 1993). The more flexible readers were “able to use reading in ways they found richer, deeper, more varied, and more enduring, and their reading experiences in turn contributed to their breadth and potential for new discoveries” (Dent & Seligman, 1993, p. 1264).

More specifically, Dent and Seligman (1993) found that reading serves as a progressive function for some readers by allowing the reader to rework previous conflicts and open “windows to new experiences—both imaginary and actual” (p. 1262). They also claimed that “people often read in order to feel connected to others, and involvement in fiction elicits such feelings” (p. 1258). Dent and Seligman claimed that this involvement is due in part to fiction’s ability to evoke fantasies about people who are perceived by readers to be different from them.
The authors also stated that participants’ early experiences of being read to as children created a sense of comfort in their reading experiences. In fact, most participants in their study reportedly read for relaxation, comfort, and coping with stress (Dent and Seligman, 1993).

However, Dent and Seligman (1993) also claimed that some participants hoped to spark through their reading feelings of wonder, excitement, creativity, change, and new possibilities. Dent and Seligman also stated that enthusiastic readers have established a relationship between their inner lives and the act of reading by matching their inner worlds to the story world. In addition, the authors claimed that reading “bolstered” (Dent and Seligman, 1993, p. 1256) the participants’ sense of wholeness, continuity, and self-esteem, and that, for many participant readers, being a reader was part of their identity. This study of science fiction and mystery readers who regularly engage in absorbed reading suggests that absorbed readers of fantasy literature may experience positive benefits similar to those mentioned in this and previous paragraphs. In particular, absorbed readers of fantasy who have flexible unconscious themes may be more likely to have more meaningful, and possibly transformational, experiences.

**Fantasy literature and therapy.** The fantasy literature that has been used as an adjunct to psychotherapy has consisted primarily of fairy tales and one relatively modern fantasy, Baum’s (1900) *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Most of the research related to fantasy literature consisted of descriptive case studies. Therapists used techniques such as storytelling and acting out to communicate metaphors and symbols in fantasy stories as a means of enabling clients to understand themselves better.

Carmichael (2000) conducted a descriptive study of group therapy for tornado survivors, using Baum’s (1900) *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* as a metaphor for recovery. Fox’s (1989) descriptive study focused on using metaphor in therapy, which included telling fairy tales to
clients. Davies (1988) studied reframing using metaphor, in which myths and fairy tales were considered to be extensions of metaphor. It is easy to see the relationship between metaphor and fairy tales, for, as Von Franz (1996) pointed out, fairy tales represent the archetypes in their simplest form and mirror the basic patterns of the psyche more clearly. Dieckmann (1997) discussed various ways in which fairy tale motifs can appear in analytical therapy, such as in dreams, fantasies, and associations, as well as through the therapist’s amplifications. Kast (1991) described how associating a fairy tale with a dream can facilitate therapy: “The fairytale [as] . . . an image of the unconscious processes common to humanity … can . . . provide a point of entry for the . . . process of transformation” (p. 26). Robinson (1986) illustrated how fairy tales can be used in family therapy by role-playing the characters in the stories.

Miller and Boe (1990) described the Tears into Diamonds treatment program for psychotic children on the Children’s Inpatient unit of the McAuley Neuropsychiatric Institute of St. Mary’s Hospital and Medical Center in San Francisco. The Tears into Diamonds treatment program was just part of the entire treatment program for the Children’s Inpatient unit, and it included both sandplay and storytelling (e.g., fairy tales). “Stories wove their way though each day, and their universal language transcended not only barriers of age, income, and sex, but also barriers of culture” (Miller & Boe, 1990, p. 252). The stories provided distance from, as well as similarity to, the child’s own situation, which made it psychologically relevant yet indirect and nonthreatening at the same time. Herman (1997) discussed a case study of using videos of fairy tales, plus dramatization, to treat child sexual abuse trauma. Brandt (1983) discussed how the fairy tale, seen as a paradigm of the separation-individuation crisis of early childhood, can be used in the treatment of borderline adolescents. Hill (1992) described a framework that uses fairy tales as a treatment alternative for eating disorders. It involves client identification with the main
character of the fairy tale, connection with the fairy tale, introduction of the client’s conflicts, and the client’s proposed resolution of the conflicts. Hill noted that “Fairy tales offer possible solutions to transitional problems and anxieties by serving as external structures upon which the . . . client can project her desired identity and [from that] draw self-control” (p. 584).

The studies mentioned above, which use modern fantasy and fairy tales in therapeutic settings, illustrate the potential benefit of reading fantasy literature to aid in psychological and spiritual healing. Furthermore, even though these studies involve guidance by a therapist, it seems that the benefits associated with them could apply to spontaneous reading, as well. For example, reading a fantasy book may allow readers to work with their psychological problems in a nonthreatening way by allowing them to identify with the symbols or archetypes in the stories. In this way, the fantasy book and its story may serve as a therapist by helping readers work with unconscious conflicts. According to Bettelheim (1989), “fairy tales carry important messages to the conscious, preconscious, and the unconscious mind” (p. 6). In addition, these stories about universal human problems touch the psychological and emotional being more deeply than do other stories, especially for children.

Conclusion

The theoretical and empirical research discussed in this chapter is consistent with the idea that absorbed reading of fantasy literature may result in positive meaningful psychological and spiritual experiences. However, there is need for more research in the areas of the beneficial and therapeutic effects of reading fiction and fantasy literature, the effects of spontaneous reading in an absorbed state, the relationship of absorbed reading to transpersonal and spiritual experiences, and, most importantly, the absorbed reading of fantasy from the reader’s personal experience of
the story world. As Bruner (1986) claimed, the way to understand what happens when readers enter a story is to let them tell you *their* version of the story.

Fantasy is not nonsense. It comes from the depths of the unconscious, creating symbolic situations that give life a deeper meaning (Von Franz, 1996). Sometimes the stories that may or may not be true are the stories that humanity needs to believe in the most, because those are the things worth believing in, such as honor, courage and virtue (McCanlies, 2003). It is important to have writers who use alternative worlds to convey myth and mythic awareness and readers who understand this “language of the soul” (Wytenbroek, 2005, p. 199) that can be found most profoundly and clearly in fantasy. It also seems important to understand more about the experience of reading such stories.

Chapter 3 gives a detailed discussion of the method used in this study to understand positive meaning experiences of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state. A general description of the method is given. In addition, the details of the method specific to this study are discussed, such as solicitation of and selection of participants, type of data to be collected, data collection procedures, and presentation of data. An assessment of the method’s validity is also included.
Chapter 3: Research Method

Imagination embodies the faculty of transformation itself, so the area of our own imagination working on books is vital. What is created through reading is the individual soul coming into being because reading engenders in that most intimate part of ourselves the act of poiesis, a making, or a shaping something into newness, without which we would never achieve that state or condition of who we are.

—Dennis Patrick Slattery (2006, p. 317)

The purpose of this study was to explore positive meaningful experiences of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state. Qualitative methods allow for in-depth explorations of such complex meaningful human experiences, in contrast to quantitative methods, which limit what can be learned by observing experiences from a distance, using scientific methods (Mertens, 2005). The qualitative method that was used in this study is Anderson’s (1998, 2000, 2004, 2011) intuitive inquiry, which is a form of hermeneutical interpretation that involves both the objective and the subjective, and especially the researcher’s perspective, to more fully understand meaningful experiences. This chapter elaborates on the method of intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2011), as well as providing detailed descriptions of the procedures that will be used to collect and interpret data.

**Intuitive Inquiry**

The intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2011) method is a general approach for studying transformative experiences in which all aspects of research are informed by the rational and intuitive. Anderson (2000) defined intuition to include “novel thoughts and ideas … [as well as] … dream images, visions, kinesthetic impressions, a felt (or, proprioceptive) sense, an inner sense or taste accompanying contemplative practices and prayer, and spontaneous creative expressions in dance, sound, improvisation, writing, and visual art” (pp. 31-32). As based on observations in research, supervision, and life, Anderson (2004) identified five types of intuition that are part of the creative process:
1. Unconscious and symbolic processes.

2. Psychic or parapsychological experiences, including telepathy, clairvoyance, or precognitive experiences that take place at a distance.

3. Sensory modes of intuition that convey “subtle forms of information typically unavailable to the thinking mind” (p. 311). These include the five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch), proprioception (inner body senses), and kinesthesia (sense of movement).

4. The full spectrum of sensory awareness that accompanies empathic identification or placing oneself in the world of another person and seeing through the eyes of that person.

5. Wounds in the personality of the researcher. Anderson noted that “an individual’s intuitive style tends to settle along fault lines or wounds in the personality in a manner akin to the concept of the wounded healer” (p. 313). Exploring such wounds may invite transformation and change.

Intuitive inquiry originated from the hermeneutical perspective (Anderson, 2000). Bruns (1992) described hermeneutics as “a tradition of thinking or of philosophical reflection that tries to clarify the concept of verstehen, that is, understanding” (p. 1). In other words, “what is it to make sense of anything, whether a poem, a legal text, a human action, a language, an alien culture, or oneself?” (Bruns, 1992, p. 1). Mertens (2005) claimed that hermeneutical research involves the interpretation of meaning from a certain point of view. Romanyszyn (2007) stated that “the design of a method . . . reveals what the researcher already imagines about his or her subject” (p. 211). In intuitive inquiry, the researcher’s unique personal experience is at the heart of the inquiry (Anderson, 2000). Through active engagement with the phenomenon being studied
and the researcher’s own personal experience, researchers create a set of assumptions, or, lenses, through which to view and understand all research data (Anderson, 2000). According to Anderson (2000), the hermeneutical perspective assumes that we are continually influencing our environment and that, therefore, we cannot help interpreting our experiences subjectively, no matter how objective we wish to seem. Thus, this form of interpretation, intuitive inquiry, places the researcher and the researcher’s experiences at the center of the inquiry rather than bracketing them (Anderson, 2000). By using personal experience to more deeply understand the phenomenon being studied, the researcher may reveal something universal (Anderson, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2011).

Intuitive inquiry is also influenced by heuristics. Moustakas (1990) referred to heuristics as “a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis” (p. 9). Such inward searching is common to both intuitive inquiry and heuristic approaches. Anderson (2004) claimed that “intuitive researchers explore topics that claim their enthusiasm, honor their own life experiences as sources of inspiration, and invite the research process to transform not only their understanding of the topic but their lives” (p. 308). Similarly, Romanysyn (2007) stated that “research with soul in mind is re-search, a process of re-turning to and re-membering what has already made its claim upon the researcher through his or her complex relations to the topic” (p. xi). Moustakas (1990) described the heuristic process as “creating a story that portrays the qualities, meanings, and essences of universally unique experiences” (p. 13). It is a process of looking inward to find the essential meaning of an experience and at the same time being transformed (Moustakas, 1990). An important element in intuitive inquiry is its emphasis on the potential transformation of the researcher, the participants, and the reader of the research
findings (Anderson, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2011). Anderson (1998) claimed that, for both intuitive and heuristic researchers, the communication of a deeply understood experience speaks “directly to the inmost self” (p. 75) of the reader of the research. In other words, by speaking our own truths, we are able to transcend differences so as to understand and communicate universal truths (Anderson, 1998, 2011).

This study of the positive meaningful experiences of reading fantasy literature lends itself to intuitive inquiry because of its complex, subtle, and personal nature. Moreover, because intuitive inquiry emphasizes inward searching and personal descriptions, it is appropriate to try to understand such experiences by reflecting on the participants’ own stories. In addition, using the personal experience of the researcher to create the interpretive lenses helps clarify the essential aspects of the experience for the researcher and helps provide a guide for empirical research in a field where very little has been done. Finally, both hermeneutical and heuristic aspects of intuitive inquiry invite the researcher to have an intimate relationship with the experience being studied and to be open to the unexpected by gracefully allowing its deeper meaning to reveal itself on its own terms, thus making transformation possible.

Anderson (2004) acknowledged that intuitive inquiry is challenging; in order to do it well, the researcher must incorporate the following nine characteristics into the process:

1. Being rigorously subjective. It is important to be aware of and keep scrupulous records of internal processes and perspectives.

2. Telling the truth no matter what. Part of rigorous documentation is telling the truth about the research process, including recording “(a) mistakes made, (b) procedures and plans that did not work, (c) the researcher’s apprehensions and puzzlements, (d) the process and content of intuitive interpretation, and (e) what remains unresolved or
problematic about the topic or the method” (p. 325). Truth is also validated by the reader’s ability to assess and understand the research.

3. Avoiding circularity. Researchers are encouraged to find data that challenges rather than confirms their original perspectives. The process of the transformation of the researcher’s perspective is documented in Cycles 2 through 4, which will be described in the latter portion of the research method discussion.

4. Trickstering and auspicious bewilderment. The trickster is a metaphor for the unexpected, contradiction, confusion, paradox, and bewilderment that can lead to insight and transformation. Feelings of perplexity and bewilderment are part of, but not exclusive to, the process of intuitive inquiry. They are signs that the researcher is challenging personal perspectives.

5. Maintaining a process-oriented and inclusive perspective. Intuitive inquiry views conventional reality as a construction of the researcher’s life experience. Therefore, subjectivity is valued.

6. Writing in one’s own voice. Researchers are encouraged to write in a naturally engaging and compassionate manner that conveys the researcher’s experience of the topic to the reader.

7. Favoring the particular and the personal. Intuitive inquiry values the researcher’s unique experience and interpretations over common external patterns observed in others. The hermeneutical nature of intuitive inquiry actively utilizes the researcher’s personal point of view.

8. Imagining the possible. Intuitive inquiry provides detailed descriptions of findings, like all qualitative methods, as well as seeks to “speculate about the possibilities
implicit in the data” (p. 330). Anderson (2004) adds that “intuitive inquiry is both practical and visionay, allowing that research findings can provide new options for the world that is changing and manifesting anew in every moment” (p. 330).

9. Risking personal change and transformation. Intuitive inquiry’s hermeneutical process involving self-inquiry and a new worldview may be personally transforming.

The intuitive inquiry hermeneutical process requires at least five successive cycles of interpretation wherein the researcher’s internal perspective informs and is informed by external research data (Anderson, 2004). The five cycles of interpretation are related to the conventional hermeneutical circle of interpretation, which has a forward arc and a return arc (Anderson, 2004; Packer & Addison, 1989). The forward arc involves coming to an understanding of the researcher’s initial perspective (Anderson, 2004). The return arc involves transforming the initial understanding of the forward arc by incorporating external viewpoints. In this way, the researcher’s interpretation or understanding of the experience being studied is changed, refined, and amplified by each iterative cycle. Cycles 1 and 2 represent the forward arc and Cycles 3, 4, 5 (and any others) represent the return arc.

In Cycle 1, the researcher clarifies the topic by first identifying a text or image related to his or her research interests (Anderson, 2004). Anderson (2000) referred to this as “claim of the text” (p. 35), where the concept of “text” (p. 36) is broadly defined and may include written text and personal experience. The researcher then engages with the text or image daily and records inner processes and perceptions, as well as external data (Anderson, 2004). During this process, the researcher comes to be affected by the text and to understand its personal meaning. The result of this process is a focused research topic (Anderson, 2004).
Cycle 2 involves developing a preliminary set of interpretive lenses (Anderson, 2004). In order to accomplish this, the researcher “reengages the research topic through a different text (or set of texts) to identify the structure and accompanying values the researcher brings to the topic” (Anderson, 2000, p. 36). Along with an initial list generated by the researcher, various theoretical, research, literary, and historical texts are used to inform the preliminary lenses (Anderson, 2000). In addition, a review of the literature is often done concurrently. Anderson (2000) claimed that the “researcher’s initial structure and accompanying values become the preliminary lenses of interpretation, requisite for engaging with the texts of others and interpreting their understanding of the topic” (p. 36). Since the preliminary lenses shape the research, it is important that the researcher be rigorous in articulating and clarifying all conscious and unconscious preconceptions (Anderson, 2000). Once these preliminary lenses have been developed, the researcher may use them as guides along the research journey (Anderson, 2000).

In Cycle 3, original data is collected from research participants (or specific texts), processed, and summarized (Anderson, 2000). A target population is identified, and procedures are created to recruit a sample of participants (Anderson, 2000). In addition, the researcher defines selection criteria in order to determine the participants who will add to, rather than detract from, the understanding of the research topic (Anderson, 2000). In intuitive inquiry the researcher is free to “structure the research method, procedures, setting, and context to maximize (rather than minimize) the very gateway through which the researcher understands or is inspired by the experience studied” (Anderson, 2000, p. 34). The collected data (i.e., the body of the reported experiences of the participants) becomes the new text through which the research topic is understood (Anderson, 2000). Once collection is complete, the researcher may summarize the data in various ways, such as with descriptions, conventional thematic content analysis, stories,
and portraits (Anderson, 2004; Moustakas, 1990). In addition, the researcher is given the
flexibility to determine whether or not it is appropriate for his or her particular study to present
the data with a formal analysis (Anderson, 2004). For example, some stories may need to be kept
whole and not analyzed in order to preserve their integrity (Anderson, 2004). In such a case, the
story should be presented intact, without analysis, in Cycle 3 (Anderson, 2004).

In Cycle 4, researchers reevaluate and refine their preliminary lenses (Anderson, 2004).
Through the process of learning of others’ perspectives and presenting what was discovered in
Cycle 3, the researcher may reflect on the personal understanding and meaning discovered in
Cycle 1 and refine the preliminary lenses developed in Cycle 2. Anderson (2004) stated that “the
most important feature of interpreting data is intuitive breakthroughs, those illuminating
moments when the data begin to shape themselves with each fresh set of information” (p. 321).
In addition, the changes and refinements made between Cycle 2 and Cycle 4 illustrate the
researcher’s understanding of the topic (Anderson, 2004).

Cycle 5 requires the researcher to take a step back and look at all aspects of the study
with fresh eyes in order to integrate and understand the research topic (Anderson, 2004). As in
conventional empirical studies, the findings to date are integrated with the literature review
conducted at the beginning of the study (Anderson, 2004). In addition, intuitive-inquiry
researchers must evaluate the study itself to determine what is valuable about it and what is not,
in addition to what they’ve learned and what is undisclosed about the topic (Anderson, 2004).

Validity

Conventional research assumes that there is one reality and that it can be studied using
scientific methods (Kvale, 1996; Mertens, 2005). Objectivity is inherent in the conventional
approach, in which researchers distance themselves from the data as much as possible in order to
discover reality (Kvale, 1996; Mertens, 2005). Qualitative research, on the other hand, assumes that there are multiple, socially constructed realities (Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Mertens, 2005). Inherent in this approach is the interactive link between the researcher and participants, in which the researcher attempts to understand the meaning of complex lived experiences from the point of view of the participants (Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Mertens, 2005). Conventional and qualitative research methods also address validity in different ways. Conventional research tends to be more concerned with the accuracy of its scientific measurement tools and the generalizability of its conclusions, whereas qualitative research tends to be concerned with ensuring the openness and honesty of the researcher (as instrument) and the value of its findings to the readers of the study (Anderson, 2004; Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Mertens, 2005).

Conventional research, with its focus on one objective reality, tends to unnecessarily limit the content and approaches of human and social science research (Braud & Anderson, 1998). The conventional paradigm tends to create “tensions, or incompatibilities” (p. 4) between research and our own personal experiences (Braud & Anderson, 1998). Such tensions are more significant in transpersonal research, which concerns itself with consciousness, altered states of consciousness, exceptional experiences, and human potential and transformation (Braud & Anderson, 1998). Braud and Anderson (1998) claimed that, in order to conduct significant and satisfying research on all facets of human experience, we must “modify our assumptions about research and extend our research methods so that they become as creative and expansive as the subject matter we wish to investigate” (p. 4). Intuitive inquiry is an example of this type of method (Anderson, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2011).

The intuitive inquiry method is designed to continually check for validity by allowing the objective and subjective to inform one another (Anderson, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2011). Kvale
(1996) claimed that there is a type of validation that rests on the “quality of craftsmanship in research” (p. 240). In other words, validation rests partly on the “quality of craftsmanship during investigation, continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings” (Kvale, 1996, p. 241). Based on Kvale’s description of the “quality of craftsmanship” (p. 241), it would seem that this type of validity is inherent in the intuitive inquiry research process. As in all qualitative research, the intuitive inquiry researcher addresses internal validity by collecting detailed documentation with an attitude of openness to whatever might arise, in addition to writing with authenticity (Anderson, 2004; Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Mertens, 2005).

External validity in intuitive inquiry and qualitative methods in general concern the value of the findings to the readers (Anderson, 2004; Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Mertens, 2005). In order to increase the external validity of intuitive inquiry, Anderson (2004) proposed the principles of resonance validity and efficacy validity.

According to Anderson (2000), the principle of resonance validity is best described by an analogy of acoustic resonance, for which if someone “plucks the string of a cello on one side of a room, a string of a cello on the opposite side will begin to vibrate, too” (p. 33). In other words, it is a medium that has the capacity to immediately convey its deeper, more universal meaning to others (Anderson, 2000).

The research findings would resonate sympathetically with readers if they immediately apprehended or recognized the basic patterns described therein (Anderson, 2000). In addition to the five cycles described above, Anderson (2004) suggested the use of resonance panels as supplemental cycles. Resonance panels are composed of groups of people who report the degree to which they resonate with the research findings. Anderson (2000) claimed that “the validity of
findings is thus formed through consensus building that notes consonance, dissonance, or neutrality by participants representing different cultures or subgroups” (p. 33).

The principle of efficacy validity refers to the capacity for a study to inspire insights in, to transform, and to add value to the life of the reader (Anderson, 2004). In other words, the validity of a study is partly measured in its ability to create a meaningful experience that inspires readers to reflect on life. Communicative validity is a similar concept to efficacy validity, but it involves also human dialogue in addition to reading (Kvale, 1996). Anderson (2004) claimed that “research that inspires, delights, and prods us to insight and action is at least as valuable to the scientific enterprise as more technical reports that will inevitably follow” (p. 333).

The potential threats to validity in this study include conventional concerns, which have been discussed previously in the description of the characteristics of intuitive inquiry. The primary threats to internal validity are the researcher’s inherent bias and subjectivity, which are impossible to avoid. To minimize this risk, I will adopt the method, used by Shepperd (2006), Dufrechou (2002), and Esbjörn (2003) in their intuitive inquiry dissertations, of presenting the data intact. The purpose is to increase both resonance validity and efficacy validity. Using techniques that were successfully used in previous intuitive inquiry research also increases the validity of the current study.

**Cycle 1: Clarifying the Research Topic**

In my search for a dissertation topic, I volunteered to participate in Arthur Hastings’ psychomanteum research project at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (Hastings et al., 2002). The psychomanteum is primarily used for research on bereavement feelings and provides an atmosphere conducive to making contact with people who have passed on to the world of spirit; however, it is also used for research on creativity and self-awareness. Research
participants are taken through a three-stage process by trained facilitators, involving remembering a deceased loved one, sitting in a darkened room, gazing at a mirror while thinking of the departed spirit, and discussing and reflecting on the experience (Hastings et al., 2002). Participants have a variety of experiences, including quiet reflection, as well as visual images in the mirror, dialogue, sounds, light, and physical sensations (Hastings et al., 2002). Most participants experience a significant reduction in feelings of bereavement, such as grief, guilt, sadness, loss, and the need to communicate (Hastings et al., 2002).

Mirror-gazing has been used since the ancient Greeks to contact the spirits of the dead and seek answers to questions (Hastings et al., 2002; Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996). The psychomanteum research I participated in focused on creativity, which gave me the freedom to contact spirits and ask questions unrelated to bereavement. The process was essentially the same, except that my goal was to find answers to questions related to my dissertation. I had two questions going into the psychomanteum, namely What is my passion? and What is my dissertation topic? These were essentially the same question, for I knew my dissertation topic must be something I was passionate about, something that touched me deeply.

In the psychomanteum session, I made contact with a Celtic ancestor of whom I asked for guidance. At one point I had a visual and physical sense of a woman riding a white horse out of the ocean waves that appeared in the psychomanteum mirror, which acts as a “portal” to the spirit world. I identified with this strong warrior woman as she galloped past my left ear with a purpose. My ancestor then told me to follow her.

I puzzled over this message. It seemed to be the key to what I sought; yet I was doubtful that it could be so simple. I did not recognize the woman on the horse, but I had a sense she was a goddess I’d read about. However, after searching through my books I still could not identify
her. Then one day I was told the Irish legend of *Oisin in the Land of Youth* (Heaney, 1995). This story resonated with me at once. Somehow I knew the woman on the horse was Niamh of the Golden Hair from the tale. This was the second text that claimed me, the first being the image of the woman on the horse.

A synopsis of the story follows:

Niamh, of the Golden Hair rode a white horse out of the sea to find Oisin whom she had loved from afar and wanted for a husband. She was the daughter of the King of Tir na n-Og, the Land of Youth, which is under the sea, and Oisin was son of Finn, one of the famous Fianna warriors. Oisin and his companions were wandering in the beautiful countryside after suffering utter defeat from one last battle, when Niamh rode towards them. She told them who she was and what she wanted, namely to take Oisin back to Tir na n-Og with her, as her husband. She told him that he would never want for anything and would never get ill or die. He was so enamored by her beauty that he accepted and almost forgot to say goodbye to his father and companions before the two rode back to the sea.

Several years later, Oisin and Niamh had a family of their own and life was very good; however, he missed his family of origin and friends and told Niamh that he wanted to visit them. She discouraged him, for she knew that, if he left, he would likely never return, for 3 years in Tir na n-Og was equivalent to 300 human years. However, Niamh reluctantly gave him the white horse for his journey and warned him not to touch the ground during his visit, otherwise, he would die.

When he arrived back home, everything was changed and he could not find any of his family or friends. As he rode in search of his loved ones, he came across some people trying to lift a rock. They asked for his help and he leaned over to lift the rock; the strap holding the
horse’s saddle broke, and he fell to the ground. Within seconds, he turned into an old man, then a corpse, and, ultimately, ashes.

In working with this text, I used guided imagery and active imagination with the legend itself and watched a movie based on the tale titled, Into the West (Newell, 1993). I also experienced at that time several synchronicities related to white horses, which seemed to indicate that I was following the right path. The first occurred the same day I saw the vision of the woman on the horse, when, by chance, I happened to watch a television documentary on Cloud, a wild white horse. Others occurred over time as I encountered pictures of horses running through ocean waves. Also, in order to immerse myself more fully, I amplified the symbols of the woman and the horse by placing images of them in my home. At the end of this process, one day, out of the blue, I wrote, It’s about going home. This made perfect sense at some deep level, but I still did not completely understand what it meant. It seemed that there were many messages but that the heart of it was about going back to Tir na n-Og, the Celtic Otherworld or spirit world, as well as about going back to the homeland and family. Later on, the meaning became clearer.

I initially focused on researching exceptional experiences related to Celtic myth, legend, fairytale, and fantasy literature because this was directly related to my personal spiritual and healing experiences. However, I had the sense that this was not quite right, so I explored several other related topics focused around positive experiences from reading fantasy literature. Eventually I decided to follow my heart more than my head, which led me to simplify and broaden the topic to meaningful experiences related to reading fantasy literature. It was at this point that I decided to use the method of intuitive inquiry because I realized that I had naturally been using my intuition to find my topic.
I set aside my concern for making sense and returned to make-believe in order to understand why reading fantasy literature had such a hold on me. By this I mean that I returned to the fantasy stories that moved me most. I chose my experience of reading *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, by Tolkien (1954/2004), as my primary text. I also used two secondary texts, my experiences reading and amplifying the Irish legend of *Oisin in the Land of Youth* (Heaney, 1995) and the Earthsea series, by Le Guin (2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2003, 2004).

I had read Tolkien’s (1954/2004) *The Lord of the Rings* as a teenager during a time when I was undertaking what I perceived to be a life-threatening journey. If successful, the journey would give me back my freedom, which was linked with life, for without it there could be no future, no happiness. This was a trial I had been forced to meet almost completely alone. Most of my friends and family were not there to help me. Reading the books helped me get through my ordeal, to a positive conclusion. I did not choose to read the book for this reason—it chose me.

I identified with the main character, Frodo Baggins, who was responsible for destroying the one evil ring of power that could bring about the end of all that was good in Middle Earth, the world of *The Lord of the Rings*. In fact, I identified with the character to the extent that his experiences mirrored mine, which at times made me feel as if we were virtually one. I “lived” in Middle Earth while I was reading. I experienced the joyful shifts in consciousness, a sense of unity with spirit when visiting the elves or when hearing pearls of knowledge from my companions and wise guides, as well as the complete darkness, danger, and uncertainty of the journey to Mount Doom, the source of evil, to destroy the ring of power and free all beings. By feeling as if I was actually in the story, deeply identified with the main character, I was somehow able to get through my personal hardship. It was as if I was guided through it.
I tried to recreate the feelings I had experienced while reading in my bed long ago in almost complete darkness. I reread passages, watched the movies based on *The Lord of the Rings* (Jackson, 2002, 2003, 2004), and did active imagination exercises, meditation, and hypnosis. In addition, body sensations of tingling guided me to significant emotions. The secondary texts, as well as the significant dreams and exceptional human experiences associated with them, were also drawn upon to give perspective and deepen the process of discovery.

Once I started the process of going deep and reliving the experience of reading the books, I immediately thought *It was like going home*. Opening the book and entering the story was like walking through a door to a world that was safe, welcoming, supporting, and nurturing. I had the feeling that I was being held, even in the most dangerous places. There was always the knowledge that a friend was near or that others were working for me in far away places, always on my side.

This thought of *going home* was arrived at independently of the meaning I placed on my experience with the legend of *Oisin in the Land of Youth*; however, it did not take me long to remember the connection. The two texts informed one another and enriched my search for meaning. I realized that if I had simply followed my first instinct to focus on my experience with reading *The Lord of the Rings* using the method of intuitive inquiry from the very start, I might have saved myself some time. However, I’m not sure that I would have been able to know that it was the right path without taking the long way around.

I also realized other parallels between the two stories. The symbolism of spirit is common to both. In fact, Frodo was trying to return the ring to its source; after completing his task, he returned to the West, to white shores, and green grass. This was my image of the Ireland in the
legend, the entrance to Tir na n-Og. I realized that going home meant connecting with spirit, which is our source. In other words, reading fantasy literature was my connection with spirit.

Related to the feeling of going home was the sense of freedom. Somehow I could breathe more easily and felt less constrained. There was hope and possibility in the land of fantasy. I could be who I was meant to be and make choices that gave life meaning. Along with this, I felt a physical sensation of expansion in my heart chakra, as if I were overlooking a vista of a vast beautiful landscape.

In addition, dramatic shifts in perspective occurred at unexpected moments. Sometimes these were associated with exceptional places and events that took me completely out of my world; other times they were evoked by great words of wisdom. These were moments when I directly touched spirit. The following passage from The Lord of the Rings is one example of such words of wisdom:

“I wish [the return of the Dark Lord, Sauron] need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo. “So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.” (Tolkien, 1954/2004, p. 51)

Synchronicities between my life and the book also affirmed the significance of this experience; I was on the right track. One of these was the setting and atmosphere of the bedroom that Frodo woke up in after he succeeded in destroying the ring. The room was sunny and warm and there was a feeling of great happiness and the smell of wild flowers outside. This scene virtually matched my experience at the end of my struggle for freedom. I woke in the recovery room with the sun shining on me, having just dreamt of my mother cooking bacon and eggs. I was filled with joy and hope.

At the end of my first week of intense reflection on the primary text, I read a passage that sent chills up and down my spine for several minutes, thus indicating to me its importance. It
was about how we all live in a story or a tale that may or may not be written down and about how all stories are connected to one another somehow. This held great meaning for me and made me feel loved and honored. Later that day I was inspired to write: *This dissertation is about the experience of reading fantasy literature and becoming so involved with the story that you feel you’ve entered the story, that it’s your story. And your story is connected to other stories and other worlds.* When this happens, it is like going home to spirit, which heals all suffering.

**Cycle 2: Identifying the Preliminary Lenses**

My initial lenses, or, assumptions, are based primarily on my work with the preliminary texts of Cycle 1, as well as upon work on the introduction of the research topic in chapter 1, which included a preliminary literature review. The following assumptions were formulated in stages, using three texts. One consisted of notes from a brainstorm session occurring a week after the work on both Cycle 1 and chapter 1 was completed. Two other sets of notes based on carefully rereading Cycle 1 and chapter 1 to extract the assumptions from the texts were also created. These three texts were then combined, sorted into like categories, and then refined through several iterations to arrive at the following list of preliminary lenses:

1. **Identification with character.** When we connect with a character in a book, it enhances the experience of reading the story. It is as if we are walking in the character’s shoes.

2. **Story mirrors life.** When we identify with the story, it mirrors real life at some level, whether it be abstract or nearly literal. Our life story is similar to that of the character in the book.
3. Disidentification with ego. We disidentify with ego to enter the realm of spirit (i.e., to identify with the Divine). This often leads to empathy, compassion, enlightenment, and/or nondualism.

4. Reading is an altered state of consciousness. The more we become immersed in or identify with the story and its characters, the more altered the state of consciousness is from ordinary waking reality. In this extremely altered state we often forget that any world besides the story world exists.

5. Reading allows access to higher states of consciousness. Higher altered states such as empathy, compassion, and nonduality can be achieved partly through our connection with the story’s characters, as well as with the actual words on the page.

6. Spirit is eternal. We are pure spirit after death, as well as before we reincarnate.

7. Connection. All beings are connected through spirit and are, therefore, essentially one being.

8. Spirit is accessible but not graspable. The older we get the more we forget what it was like being in pure spirit form (i.e., before reincarnation). The years of dealing with hardships and problems make us see the world through a tainted lens, one in which the world may look darker and harsher than it really is. We lose touch with our essence, our spirit. When we touch spirit, as we can in reading fantasy literature, it is an unexpected gift, a very special and exceptional experience.

9. Reading is a way to reconnect with one’s spirit, as if returning to the source of all creation, the land of spirit.

10. Meaning. A meaningful experience is one by which we connect with our essence or spirit. It is truth experienced.
11. Reminder of values and priorities. Reading fantasy literature reminds us of our values and what is most important in life.

12. Reading fantasy literature is like going home, where home is the land of our spirit, our essence from which we came. It is like going back to our family, our roots, to a world where we belong, that is safe, welcoming, supporting, nurturing, and healing.

13. Literature is healing. All types of literature, not just fantasy, have the potential to heal and have been used for this purpose for a very long time. In other words, bibliotherapy is a term coined by psychologists for a phenomenon that has been in existence since the beginning of the story.

14. Therapeutic. Reading fantasy literature is therapeutic in that it acts or serves as a therapist. It does this through evoking empathy with characters, creating a safe place where you feel held, giving you the freedom to be yourself and make your own decisions. In other words, the fantasy world is especially conducive to bringing about regeneration and healing.

15. Challenging journey. Reading fantasy literature gives us the opportunity to find out who we were meant to be by meeting challenges and making decisions in the story world, a world that unfolds at a pace we can control. Away from our day-to-day stresses, we may embody the unlikely hero, an ordinary person called to a heroic task. This embodiment may bring personal growth.

16. Fantasy is a guide for life. Characters serve as companions and wise guides. They hold truths that connect us with spirit. These experiences guide us while reading, as well as in life.
17. Fantasy is essentially positive. Reading fantasy literature has the potential to heal, transform, focus attention on life’s meaning and values, give hope, and evoke the feeling of possibility for the future.

18. Transformative. Reading fantasy literature can change our lives for the better and/or cause psychospiritual transformation when major shifts in perspective or consciousness occur. For example, meaningful literary experiences (i.e., Exceptional Human Experiences [EHEs]) can be transformational.

19. Reality is fantasy. Reality is more like the experience one has when reading fantasy literature (i.e., nondual and peaceful). This is similar to the Buddhist concept of reality. In other words, the Western or scientific reality is called ordinary reality, and the Buddhist reality is an altered state in which one is close to unity with the Divine.

20. Complexity. Reading involves all aspects of our being, including our physical body, emotions, memories, and imagination. Focused reading could be considered to be a lived or embodied experience.

21. Doorways. Books are doorways to spirit, to different ways of seeing the world.

22. Balance. Reading involves active balancing with respect to our relationship between the story world and our everyday world, as well as our relationship with the characters with whom we identify. For example, our level of identification with characters or focus on the story is constantly shifting and being rebalanced.

23. Freedom. Reading fantasy literature gives us a sense of freedom. Within the fantasy world we are freed from the everyday world constraints and rules. We breathe more easily and are allowed to make choices that give life meaning.
24. Imagination. We must use our imagination to temporarily live in the fantasy world.

Imagination stimulates the creative dance of emotions, sensations, and thoughts involved in reading. Imagination is healing. Imagination is essentially spiritual or mystical.

25. Shifts in perspective. Dramatic shifts in perspective can be triggered by reading the fantasy story (i.e., by reading of exceptional places and events or great words of wisdom). This experience could also be described as new ways of seeing oneself and the world, or joyful shifts in consciousness.

26. Belief in other realities. Fantasy literature is different from other literature in that it enhances belief in other realities by taking one out of ordinary reality to nonordinary reality; it relaxes, frees, and envelops one with sense of place.

27. Exceptional Human Experiences (EHEs). Reading fantasy literature may trigger Exceptional Human Experiences, such as literary, synchronicity, and unity experiences, when connecting to spirit through reading fantasy literature.

28. Life is story. We all live in a story or a tale that may or may not be written down. All stories are connected to one another. All of our thoughts and views of the world are stories we make up. The only reality is in the present moment. Our thoughts or stories make our world what it is—from positive and hopeful to negative and hopeless. We are essentially storied beings.

29. Positive change. Fantasy can help us learn to create positive worlds to live in.

Entering a positive story through fantasy can cause positive life changes and outlook. For example, it may help stop depression’s downward cycle of negative story-making.
30. Soul sickness. Reading fantasy literature can heal soul sickness (i.e., stress, apathy, alienation, depression, and loss of connection with spirit or imagination) through reconnection with meaning and spirit. By doing so we reconnect with others and ourselves.

31. Story involvement. The quality of our involvement in reading fantasy literature is very important. The more immersed in the story, the more we forget where we are in the nonstory world. This makes positive benefits more likely to happen.

32. Sense of place. Fantasy stories that have a great sense of place are more likely to get us to enter their alternate worlds.

33. Enjoyment. Enjoyment or pleasure in reading is essential for us to become immersed in a story.

34. Fantasy is difficult to define. The world of fantasy literature is uncharted territory. There are many types of fantasy. The effectiveness of each is determined by the skill of the author and the reader’s preferences and taste.

Cycle 3: Collecting Original Data and Preparing Summary Reports

Narrative data. The third cycle of this study involved soliciting written narrative accounts of participants’ positive meaningful experiences of reading fantasy literature while in an absorbed state. There were several reasons to use this format as a means of collecting information. First, it gives participants more time to reflect, meditate on, and remember what was most meaningful about their experiences. Participants can also work on their narratives in a way that works best for them, possibly returning to make revisions. In addition, the intuitive inquiry approach invites the researcher to “maximize (rather than minimize) the very gateway though which the researcher understands or is inspired by the experience studied” (Anderson, 2000, p.
In this study, narrative allowed the researcher to better understand and sympathetically resonate with the experiences of the participants.

Narrative psychology research and theory suggests that narratives allow us to understand significant personal experiences and integrate them into our life stories. Sarbin (1986) pointed out how narrative is involved in different aspects of life:

Our dreams, for example, are experienced as stories, as dramatic encounters, often with mythic shadings. It is a commonplace that our fantasies and our daydreams are unvoiced stories. The rituals of daily life are organized to tell stories. The pageantry of rites of passage and rites of intensification are storied actions. Our plannings, our rememberings, even our loving and hating, are guided by narrative plots. (p. 11)

In addition, Sarbin (1986) claimed that “survival in a world of meanings is problematic without the talent to make up and to interpret stories about interweaving lives” (p. 11). Robinson and Hawpe (1986) observed that, when we reflect on experience, we construct stories in order to understand it. In addition, they stated that the successful outcome of “story making is a coherent and plausible account of how and why something happened” (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986, p. 111).

In addition, Murray (2003) claimed that we describe our world as a series of stories.

Intrinsic to the process of understanding and integrating experience is creating meaning. According to Polkinghorne (1988), narrative is “the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful” (p. 1). Baumeister and Vohs (2002) also stated that “putting thoughts and emotions into language facilitates one’s ability to construct meaning” (p. 614), because writing “forces structure onto thoughts and feelings that previously had not been clearly organized” (p. 615). The researchers also claimed that meaning-making involves several functions in which a negative event is reappraised to look for its positive aspects (i.e., benefit-finding), attributions are made in order to understand an event (i.e., sense-making), or belief systems or long-term goals are created that allow the event to make sense in a particular context (i.e., search for significance). In addition, Baumeister and Vohs’ research also revealed the benefits of mean-
making, such as helping to establish a person’s identity and affirming self-worth, as well as increasing overall physical and psychological health.

White’s (1992) research on exceptional human experiences (EHEs) focused on understanding their meaning in the context of peoples’ lives, rather than through scientific experimentation. To do so, our personal EHEs must be incorporated or woven into our self-concepts and life stories, which involves a process of remembering, acknowledging, and accepting personal EHEs. White (1994) claimed that we must work with them to undo the damage of our culture’s negative attitude towards such experiences. The result is a new cloth, a new life story, transformed by the weaving in of personal EHEs. This is similar to what happens in successful psychotherapy, in which therapists work with clients to create a more positive view of themselves and the world (Hillman, 2004; White, 1994). White (1994) also pointed out that each EHE has “its own potential story line—one uniquely fitted to ourselves and our circumstances” (p. 115).

White (1998) introduced the idea of writing a narrative account of personal EHE experiences, or EHE autobiography, in order to facilitate the process of finding the personal meaning of EHEs and incorporating them into one’s life story. White described the autobiography as a record of meaningful experiences that have profoundly affected the author. It is about the “wonder side of your life—the experiences associated with wonder and awe—and those that made you question the adequacy of the Western worldview” (White, 1998, p. 136).

White (1994) also stated that part of the process of transformation involved the disclosure of personal EHEs through narratives or stories. Palmer’s (1999) and Palmer and Braud’s (2002) research supported White’s observations, and cited numerous psychological and spiritual benefits associated with disclosing EHEs, through both writing and speaking. In addition,
Pennebaker’s (1989, 1997) research on the disclosure of significant traumatic and emotional experiences through writing showed significant benefits in physical health and well-being.

Research in chapters 1 and 2 of this study suggests that positive meaningful experiences of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state may range from normal psychological experiences to transpersonal ones (i.e., EHEs). In light of this, the above research suggests that writing narratives may allow us to understand these experiences by exploring them in the context of our own life stories. In addition, the process of sharing these experiences may be healing and possibly transforming. Therefore, it seems that, through writing narratives, the participants of this study would be able to benefit from, as well as to articulate, their positive meaningful personal experiences of reading fantasy literature.

Soliciting and selecting participants. In order to recruit participants, I distributed a flyer (see Appendix A) via the Internet to local graduate schools (e.g., California Institute of Integral Studies [CIIS], Saybrook Graduate School, John F. Kennedy University [JFK], and the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology [ITP]) and to electronic “chat-boards” related to fantasy literature (e.g., those associated with Tolkien fan websites), as well as via e-mail to personal friends for redistribution. In addition, flyers were distributed to local bulletin boards, such as schools and bookstores. Interested individuals were requested to contact the researcher. Potential participants were then screened through a brief telephone interview (see Appendix B: Screening Interview Questions). The screening interview assessed participants’ physical and psychological health, ability to describe the subtleties of their inner experiences, and willingness and ability to complete the requirements of the study. During the screening interview the participants were also informed that the study would be conducted primarily on-line and that they would be required to have access to a computer with Internet connectivity. In addition, the participants were informed
that they would need to use e-mail for communication and on-line survey software for completing the Informed Consent Form (Appendix D) and Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix E).

Eighteen participants, self-selected men and women (at least 18 years of age) who had had positive meaningful experiences of reading fantasy literature, were invited to participate in the study. At the time of the interview, they were all in good (self-reported) physical and psychological health, and willing to share their experiences in written form with some level of comfort, and all had time to participate in the study (see Appendix C: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria). The most important criterion in selecting the 18 participants was the description of their experience, provided the primary criteria were satisfied (Appendix C). In spite of my placing such importance on the description of the experience, the group of participants was very diverse, except for ethnicity (i.e., 17 of 18 were Caucasian).

Gathering the data. I screened the participants through a brief telephone interview (see Appendix B: Screening Interview Questions). If a participant was chosen for the study, I asked him or her to complete an Informed Consent Form (Appendix D) and Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix E). The survey system QuestionPro (2007) was used, in order to allow participants to complete these forms on-line. This was the preferred way to complete these forms for participants who have on-line access, because it was more convenient. This was the only feasible way for some participants to take part in the study, because it was open to any who have on-line access (i.e., world wide). The survey system QuestionPro (2007) has been used worldwide in thousands of research projects, including those of Fortune 100 companies. It adheres to the highest level of Internet data security and privacy standards. The survey system allows participant data to be accessed only by the researcher. The participant data was securely
transferred from the survey system to the my personal computer, where it was kept in a password encrypted folder that only I could access. The QuestionPro (2007) survey system provided access to the Informed Consent Form (Appendix D) and Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix E) by sending participants a message via e-mail with an on-line link to the survey system. Upon their completion of the Informed Consent Form and Demographic Questionnaire, participants were sent an e-mail message thanking them for their participation in the study and informing them that, if they agreed to the conditions of the Informed Consent Form and completed the Demographic Questionnaire, they would be sent further detailed instructions (Appendix F) for contributing to the study by this researcher via e-mail.

The Informed Consent Form (Appendix D) describes the study. It also explains that the study is conducted remotely so that participants may choose where to do the study activities. Participants are informed that they are required to use computers with Internet connectivity, which are used for e-mail communication and on-line access to the Informed Consent Form and Demographic Questionnaire. The participants were also informed of this need for on-line access in the Screening Interview Questions (see Appendix B). Information about potential benefits and risks of the study are also included in the Informed Consent Form. The benefits of participating in the study are therein indicated to include feelings of enhancement, deepening, or validation of their personal experiences. The potential participants are informed that participation may also make a contribution to the advancement of scientific knowledge. However, the participants are likewise informed that personal benefits are not guaranteed. Regarding the risks associated with the study, the participants are informed that the process of remembering and describing their experiences of reading may cause them distress, depending on the nature of their experiences and the life events associated with them. The participants are reassured that, if they have any
concerns or questions, the researcher will be available to discuss them and provide the participants with options for resolving their concerns. These options are indicated to participants and include referring them to their own personal therapist or providing them with a list of local therapists. They are also informed that the Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix E) collects information about the age, sex, marital status, ethnicity, religion and spiritual practice, highest education level of participants, as well as how to contact them.

The Letter of Instructions (Appendix F) provides detailed instructions for completing the requirements of the study. The letter first asks participants to create a list of positive meaningful absorbed reading experiences of fantasy. It suggests that each entry in the list include a brief description of what happened in the participants’ experience, the titles of the books they were reading, their age at the time of the experience, the number of times they’ve read the book described, and anything else that seems important to them. However, the letter states that the most important thing is to try to describe the essential aspects of their experience as closely as possible. It also informs them to include their most significant experiences along with those that may seem relatively insignificant to them. The purpose of this list is to get a more complete picture of the types of experiences the participants have had, as well as to help them remember all of their experiences. The letter of instructions also suggests that it may be helpful for them to continue adding to this list until they’ve completed the study materials.

The Letter of Instructions (Appendix F) also asks the participants to choose one experience to share in writing, once their list is complete. This may be any experience, provided it is personally meaningful and has had a positive effect on their life. The participants are also informed that the experience should pertain to one fantasy story (which could be contained in a series of books, such as Tolkien’s (1954/2004) *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy), rather than an
overview of experiences associated with multiple fantasy stories. The participants are encouraged to reread portions of the book, watch a movie based on the book, and/or record their memories in a journal in order to remember the details of their experiences. In addition to prose, they are encouraged to add other forms of creative expression, such as drawing, painting, collage, computer graphics, or recorded music. The letter of instructions also suggests that the participants think of the written description of their experience as their personal story.

The Letter of Instructions (Appendix F) also requests that the participant use a style of writing that is similar to descriptive writing (Goldberg, 1986) and embodied writing (Anderson, 2001). The letter asks the participant to remember and record as many details as possible, and, whenever possible, to try to represent the experience as it happened. The participants are also reminded that they may alter the details to preserve their privacy, as long as their description conveys the essence of their experience. Guidelines for the content of the writing are also given in the letter. In general, the participants are asked to recount the plot of the fantasy story and aspects of their life related to the experience, as well as their reading experience. The letter of instructions also provides the following list of questions to help guide the participants in writing their narrative description and asks them to elaborate upon these questions whenever possible:

1. What was the title and author of the book(s) you were reading? If you can not remember, please try to specify the type of literature or genre (e.g., myth, legend, fairy tale, folk tale, fantasy, and science fiction). Also, please briefly describe the plot.
3. What parts of the story were the most memorable? What makes them memorable?
4. What sensations were you feeling?
5. What emotions were you feeling?
6. Can you recall what your body felt like and how you related to your physical surroundings?
7. Did you have a sense of time passing during the experience?
8. What was your relationship with the character(s) of the story?
9. What did you feel about the setting of the story? Was there a sense of place?
10. Did you feel like you were part of the story, more like an observer, or somewhere in-between?
11. How long ago did you read the book(s) (e.g., weeks, months, or years ago)? How old were you when you read it?
12. Recalling the events of your life, are any related to reading the story (e.g., major life events, dreams, anomalous experiences)?
13. In particular, were any life events that occurred around the time you read the story related to your reading experience?
14. What meaning(s) did the experience have for you?
15. What positive effect did reading the story have on your life?
16. Did your life change in any way because of this experience? If so, how? Were they lasting changes?
17. How does your experience affect your life today (e.g., spiritually, outlook on life, interpersonal relationships, career, physical and mental health)?
18. Have you read the book more than once? If so, how many times?
19. How does your experience relate to the story type (i.e., was it specifically related to the fact that it was fantasy or could it have been any kind of fiction)?
20. Please add anything else that seems important to you.

The participants are also asked to write between 3 and 10 double-spaced pages using Microsoft Word software (version 2004 or earlier). If the participants did not have Microsoft Word (version 2004 or earlier) on their computers, they are told, possible alternatives would be discussed with them.

The amount of time it would take the participants to complete their contribution to the study is discussed in the Screening Interview Questions (Appendix B) and the Letter of Instructions (Appendix F), and is included in the Informed Consent Form (Appendix D). It is
estimated that it would take participants 2 to 3 hours to create the list, in addition to writing the initial description of the experience. The participants are also informed that, after receiving their descriptions, the researcher might ask them to modify the description in order to clarify certain aspects of their experience, and that this process might take an additional 1 to 2 hours of their time. In addition, the participants are informed that the researcher might edit the participants’ final descriptions for inclusion in the study. In this case, they are told, the edited versions would be sent to the participants for their approval. It was estimated that this review of the edited stories would take no more than half an hour of the participants’ time. The participants are also informed that their complete lists of experiences would be included in the dissertation, along with any photographs of art projects. In addition, the participants are assured that they would be provided with stamped self-addressed envelopes for sending their art projects to the researcher, if they chose to do so.

Participants are informed in these materials that all information received from them would be kept confidential and that, inorder to help ensure participants’ anonymity, they would be given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym to identify them throughout the study. If a pseudonym was not chosen by the participant, one would be selected for them. The participants’ real names would be known only to the researcher. All files and written material would be kept in either a password encrypted folder on the researcher’s personal computer or in a locked file cabinet under the researcher’s supervision. In reporting this research in published material, they are informed, any data that might identify participants would be altered to ensure their anonymity.

*Presenting the data.* The participants’ narrative descriptions of their positive meaningful experiences of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state represent the research findings for
this study. The narratives also represent summary data reports. Using participants’ narratives in their entirety is in alignment with the principles of intuitive inquiry. Anderson (1998, 2011) stated that the most effective method to convey universal principles and experiences may be through the expression of the personal and unique. I chose this approach in part to honor the participants’ experiences in their entirety as reflections of unique and personal experiences. Including the participants’ narratives as a whole also allows the readers to resonate with the findings and be transformed by them, thereby enhancing the study’s resonance validity and efficacy validity. In addition, the researcher was inspired by the dissertations of Shepperd (2006), Dufrechou (2002), and Esbjörn (2003), all of whom used intuitive inquiry and presented their participants’ narratives intact. By reading the participants’ narratives intact, the reader may come to a deeper understanding of positive meaningful absorbed reading experiences of fantasy literature.

Cycles 4 and 5: Transforming, Integrating, and Discussing the Data

Once the data collection was complete, I worked with the participants’ narratives individually and collectively, as well as with their lists of positive meaningful experiences of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state. This data, along with my personal reflections of Cycle 1, were used to refine the preliminary lenses developed in Cycle 2. In this way, the data collected in Cycle 3 is “spiral[ed] in,” allowing the researcher’s understanding of the topic to expand beyond his or her personal projections” (Anderson, 2000, p. 37). Ultimately, Cycle 4 consists of these refined lenses.

In Cycle 5, as is customary, I integrated the Cycle 4 lenses with the literature review in chapter 2. The intuitive inquiry method also requires the researcher to take a step back and look at all aspects of the study with fresh eyes in order to integrate and understand the research topic.
Finally, I evaluated the study as a whole for resonance validity and efficacy validity; the analysis is included in the discussion section.

**Conclusion**

Anderson (2004) described the qualitative method of intuitive inquiry as “an epistemology of the heart that joins intuition to intellectual precision in a hermeneutical process of interpretation” (p. 308). This chapter described the intuitive inquiry method in detail, discussed the validity of the method, and discussed how it is implemented in the current study. The five iterative cycles of interpretation were described, including my personal source of inspiration for the research topic, the preliminary set of interpretive lenses, the data collection and summary procedures, as well as the transformation, integration, and discussion of the data.

The following chapter presents the findings of this study, including the demographics of the participants, the statistics of participants’ reading, and the participants’ narratives describing their experiences of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state, along with related creative expression.
Chapter 4: Findings

No one in the world knew what truth was till someone had told a story. It was not there in the moment of lightning or the cry of the beast, but in the story told of those things afterwards, making them part of human life. Our distant savage ancestor gloried as he told—or acted out or danced—the story of the great kill in the dark forest, and that story entered the life of the tribe and by it the tribe came to know itself. On such a day against the beast we fought and won, and here we live to tell the tale. A tale much embellished but truthful even so, for truth is not simply what happened but how we felt about it when it was happening, and how we feel about it now.

—John Rouse (1978, p. 99)

This chapter presents the Cycle 3 data that were gathered to explore and understand the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state, especially, the positive meaningful aspects, such as its ability to heal, transform, or remind one of the meaning of life and one’s values. In essence, the data tell truthful tales of what happened while reading fantasy literature, as well as the feelings experienced during and after reading.

Four types of data were collected from 18 participants, as was detailed in chapter 3. The data were collected from the participants in the following ways: (a) from the demographic questionnaires; (b) from the lists of positive meaningful experiences of absorbed fantasy reading; (c) from the in-depth narratives describing one positive meaningful experience of absorbed fantasy reading; and (d) from the pieces of creative expression.

The participants were asked to generate a list of their positive meaningful absorbed fantasy reading experiences (see Appendix F). My original plan was to compile a list of types of experiences, envisioning that the list entries would be very brief and the essence of the participants’ experiences would be clear; however, most participants wrote more than had been anticipated, creating lists that were more like narratives or lists of narratives. For this reason I treated the lists more like narratives. I made edits and requested that participants make changes for clarification, as needed; however, I tried to make as few changes as possible in order to
preserve the participants’ personal styles. Most lists evolved over several iterations of questions and feedback. The final lists were approved by the participants. The complete collection of participants’ lists are in Appendix G. Only a subset of the participants’ lists are included as data, including these: (a) participants’ general statements about reading; and (b) list entries that correspond to participants’ narratives.

After the participants had completed their lists, they were asked to choose one experience to expand upon and to write in-depth narratives describing their positive meaningful experiences of absorbed fantasy reading. The narratives were treated much the same as were the lists. I edited the narratives and requested that participants make changes for clarification, as needed; however, I tried to make as few changes as possible in order to preserve the participants’ personal styles. Most narratives evolved over several iterations of questions and feedback. The final narratives were approved by the participants. The participants’ in-depth narratives describing their positive meaningful experiences of absorbed fantasy reading represent my primary original Cycle 3 data.

In order to help them recall as many details as possible about their positive meaningful absorbed fantasy reading experiences, the participants were encouraged to create expressive art pieces. While none of the participants chose to create expressive art pieces during the actual study, 4 participants contributed 12 pieces of original creative expression (i.e., writing, poetry, and images) that had been created prior to the study and had been inspired by the experiences described in their narratives. One participant contributed three photographs of nonoriginal cover art that were directly related to his reading experience. The 15 pieces of creative expression, collected from 5 participants, are presented immediately following the participants’ narratives. They are included as data but were not interpreted.
The findings of my study are presented in three parts. In the first, the participant characteristics are summarized from the data collected from the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E). The second part presents study statistics summarized from data collected primarily from the participants’ lists and narratives. The third presents the participants’ in-depth narratives of their positive meaningful absorbed fantasy reading experiences, along with their creative expression piece(s). Each participant is referred to by a pseudonym of his or her choice throughout the dissertation.

**Participant Characteristics**

At the time of the study’s data collection, the 18 participants ranged in age from 22 to 64. These included 9 women (30, 30, 37, 50, 50, 51, 58, 61, and 63) and 9 men (21, 30, 33, 39, 44, 46, 57, 57, and 62). The median age of participants was 50. Eleven of the participants live in the United States: 4 live in California and 7 live in other states (Illinois, New York, Colorado, Michigan, Kentucky, Georgia, and Washington). Seven of the participants live outside the United States: 1 in Poland, 2 in France, 2 in the UK, 1 in Italy, and 1 in New Zealand. Seventeen of the participants identified White/Caucasian as their ethnic heritage and 1 participant identified with Celtic heritage. Seven of the participants were single, 7 were married, 1 was a domestic partner, 1 was separated, 1 was divorced, and 1 was widowed.

The participants were well educated: all had completed at least some college work or earned a college degree. One had a postgraduate diploma, 2 had Doctoral degrees, 2 had some graduate school, 7 had Master’s degrees, 4 were college graduates, 1 had an Associate degree, and 1 had some college. The participants had a variety of occupations. One was an academic, 1 was a teacher, 1 was a graduate student, 1 was a librarian, 1 was a retired librarian/unretired writer, 1 was a freelance graphic/web designer, 1 was a software project manager, 1 was an
unemployed software engineer, 1 was a freelance writer/student, 1 was a publisher, 1 was a translator, 1 was a mathematician, 1 was retired from the Navy, 1 was an accountant, 1 was a holistic health science veterinary nurse, 1 was an administrative assistant, and 2 declined to state their occupation.

The demographic questionnaire also asked the participants to share their current religious/spiritual practices. Seven of the participants had no practice, 6 were practicing Christians, 2 were practicing Pagans, 1 was a practicing Taoist, 1 was a practicing Buddhist, and 1 practiced Baha’i.

Individual portraits of the participants based on demographic data will not be included with the original Cycle 3 data because they would compromise the confidentiality of the participants. The intent is that the participants’ narratives or stories, written in their own words, will give a sense of their individual characteristics, as well as a sense of their positive meaningful absorbed fantasy reading experiences.

**Study Statistics**

The study statistics are based primarily on data collected from the participants’ lists and narratives, including: (a) the books read by participants, (b) the number of times each book was read by participants, and (c) the age of participants at their first reading of a book. Demographic data (i.e., participants’ dates of birth) and reading genre were also included. The term *book* is used throughout the dissertation, unless otherwise specified, to refer to all types of literature read by the participants (i.e., short stories, chapters, books, collections, trilogies, and series).

The first three sections are based on list data and describe the books read by participants, including: (a) the number of books, (b) the book genres, and (c) the most frequently read books. The fourth section, based primarily on list and narrative data, gives an overview of participants’
Number of books read by participants. The participants’ lists in Appendix G describe a total of 172 positive meaningful absorbed fantasy reading experiences. Of the total 172 books read by participants there were 134 distinct books and 38 duplicate books. Duplicate books are either an exact match or are a subset of a distinct book, trilogy, or series read by a participant.

Book genres. All genres included in the study definition of fantasy (see chapter 2) are represented by the 134 distinct books read by participants. The genres are legend, myth, folklore, fairy tale, fantasy, science fiction and children’s literature (non-fantasy). The list of 134 distinct books and their genres can be found in Appendix H.

Over fifty percent (52.5%) of the books were fantasy: (a) 22% children’s fantasy, (b) 4.5% young adult fantasy, and (c) 26% adult fantasy. Nearly forty percent (38.5%) were science fiction: (a) 1.5% children’s science fiction and (b) 37% adult science fiction. The remaining nine percent of the books were comprised of (a) 1 legend, (b) 4 myths, (c) 1 folklore, (d) 4 fairy tales, and (e) 2 non-fantasy children’s literature. Of the 134 distinct books read by participants, only 2 children’s literature books could not be categorized as fantasy according to the study definition (i.e., the non-fantasy children’s literature). The terms children, young adult, and adult refer to the following age groups, respectively: ages 4-12, ages 12-18, and ages 18 and above. These age groups define the subgenres. Table 1 shows the number of books in each genre and subgenre.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Subgenre</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legend</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folklore</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairy tale</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young adult fantasy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science fiction</td>
<td>Children’s science fiction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adult science fiction</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s literature (Non-fantasy)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Children’s refers to books for ages 4-12. Young adult refers to books for ages 12-18. Adult refers to books for ages 18 and above.*
Most frequently read books. The most frequently read books (of the total 172 listed by participants) were the 16 distinct books read by more than one participant. These 16 books were read a total of 54 times, including the 38 duplicate books read by participants.

The top 3 most frequently read books were (a) *The Lord of the Rings*, by J. R. R. Tolkien (1954/2004), read by 61% of the participants; (b) *The Hobbit*, by J. R. R. Tolkien (1937/2007), read by 39% of the participants; and (c) the Harry Potter Series, by J. K. Rowling, read by 28% of the participants. Over sixty percent (62.5%) of the 16 most frequently read books comprised (a) fantasy (25% children’s, 12.5% young adult, and 25% adult) and (b) 37.5% adult science fiction.

Table 2 shows the most frequently read books, their genres, and the number of their participant readers. The books are ordered alphabetically by title within each frequency group (i.e., all books that were read by 2 or 3 participants are ordered alphabetically by title).
### Table 2

**Most Frequently Read Books \((N = 18)\)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Readers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Lord of the Rings</em></td>
<td>J. R. R. Tolkien</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Hobbit</em></td>
<td>J. R. R. Tolkien</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry Potter Series</td>
<td>J. K. Rowling</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Chronicles of Narnia</em></td>
<td>C. S. Lewis</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dune</em></td>
<td>Frank Herbert</td>
<td>Adult science fiction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Perelandra Trilogy (a.k.a. The Space Trilogy)</td>
<td>C. S. Lewis</td>
<td>Adult science fiction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Stranger in a Strange Land</em></td>
<td>Robert Heinlein</td>
<td>Adult science fiction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Wizard of Earthsea</em></td>
<td>Ursula K. Le Guin</td>
<td>Young adult fantasy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discworld Series</td>
<td>Terry Pratchett</td>
<td>Adult science fiction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dragons of Autumn Twilight</em></td>
<td>Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman</td>
<td>Adult science fiction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gate Series (a.k.a. Morgaine Saga)</td>
<td>C. J. Cherryh</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Left Hand of Darkness</em></td>
<td>Ursula K. Le Guin</td>
<td>Adult science fiction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Neverending Story</em></td>
<td>Michael Ende</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tehanu</em></td>
<td>Ursula K. Le Guin</td>
<td>Young adult fantasy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Silmarillion</em></td>
<td>J. R. R. Tolkien</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sword of Shanarrah</em></td>
<td>Terry Brooks</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* All books read by 2 or 3 participants are ordered alphabetically by title.
Overview of participant reading. This section presents an overview of participants’ reading with data summarized from participants’ list and narrative data, as well as from demographic and genre data. For each of the 18 participants, it indicates (a) the number of books included in the participant’s list (i.e., books read); (b) the book chosen for the participant’s narrative; (c) the genre of the narrative book; (d) the participant’s age at the first reading of the narrative book; and (e) the participant’s frequency of reading the narrative book.

The frequency of reading the narrative book was calculated using (a) the number of times the participant read the narrative book and (b) the time period from the first reading of the narrative book to the participation in the study. The time period was determined using: (a) the participant’s age at the first reading of the narrative book, (b) the participant’s date of birth, (c) and the date of participation in the study.

The number of books included in the participants’ lists of positive meaningful absorbed fantasy reading experiences ranged from 1 to 23, with a median of 9 books. Seventy-eight percent of the 18 books participants chose for their narratives comprised (a) fantasy (17% children’s, 6% young adult, and 55% adult), (b) 11% adult science fiction, and (c) 11% fairytales. Thirty-three percent of the participants chose J. R. R. Tolkien’s (1954/2004) *The Lord of the Rings* adult fantasy book for their narrative.

The participants’ ages at their first reading of their narrative books ranged from age 10 to age 50, with a median age of 20 at their first reading. The number of times participants read their narrative books, from their first reading to their participation in the study, ranged from 1 to 60 times, with a median of 4.5 times. The average frequency of the participants’ readings of their narrative books ranged from 4 times a year to every 20 years, with a median of every 3.4 years. Only 1 participant read his entire narrative book just once.
Five of the 18 participants gave additional information on their reading frequency. These 5 participants reread the book more frequently immediately after their first reading of it: (a) Jane initially read her book 3 times in 2 weeks, then 3 times a year for a few years, and once a year thereafter for about 40 years; (b) Ianárwen initially read her book 2 times a month for approximately 6 months; (c) Bella Jean initially read her book 4 times in one year; (d) D. L. S. Foster initially read his book 11 times in 4 years, then 25 times over 29 years; and (e) Dagger Scribe initially read her book 3 times in 2 years.

The overview of participant reading information is presented in Table 3. The reading information is based primarily on narrative data, but includes the following list data: (a) books read; (b) ages of Branwen and Etruscan King; (c) and the number of times Solaris and Ianárwen read their narrative books, which is included in their reading frequency. The list data for (b) and (c) are denoted by the symbol “*”. In addition, participants sometimes used words such as more or several to describe the number of times and frequencies of reading their narrative books. For purposes of the table’s presentation of data, the symbol + means or more and the word several has been replaced with 3+ for Iranor and Branwen (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2005). The symbol ** signifies where several was translated into 3+. 
Table 3

*Overview of Participant Reading (N = 18)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Books Read</th>
<th>Book Chosen for Narrative</th>
<th>Book Genre</th>
<th>Age at First Reading</th>
<th>Reading Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dagger Scribe</td>
<td>10</td>
<td><em>Flashpoint</em>, by Frank Creed</td>
<td>Adult science fiction</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3 times in 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>10</td>
<td><em>Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone</em>, by J. K. Rowling</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2 times in 11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranor</td>
<td>8</td>
<td><em>The Lord of the Rings</em>, by J. R. R. Tolkien</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20-25+ times in 40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More frequently at first: once/year for 3+** years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>16</td>
<td><em>Mists of Avalon</em>, by Marion Zimmer Bradley</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5 times in 28 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowspeaks</td>
<td>11</td>
<td><em>The Tales of Alderley: The Weirdstone of Brisingamen and The Moon of Gomrath</em>, by Alan Garner</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3 times in 41 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
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<th>Book Genre</th>
<th>Age at First Reading</th>
<th>Reading Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>Holes,</em> by Louis Sachar</td>
<td>Fairy tale</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12+ times in 7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Winnie-the-Pooh Stories: <em>Winnie the Pooh</em> and <em>The House at Pooh Corner,</em> by A. A. Milne</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3+ times in 30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solaris</td>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>The Lord of the Rings,</em> by J. R. R. Tolkien</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5* times in 19 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More frequently in first 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>20</td>
<td><em>The Lord of the Rings,</em> by J. R. R. Tolkien</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50-60 times in 42 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More frequently at first: 3 times in 2 weeks then 3 times/year for a few years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Later: once/year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Books Read</th>
<th>Book Chosen for Narrative</th>
<th>Book Genre</th>
<th>Age at First Reading</th>
<th>Reading Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ianárwen</td>
<td>23</td>
<td><em>The Lord of the Rings,</em> by J. R. R. Tolkien</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20+* times in 40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More frequently at first: 2 times/month for approx. 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etruscan King</td>
<td>7</td>
<td><em>The Worm Ouroborus,</em> by E. R. Eddison</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
<td>18*</td>
<td>10-12 times in 30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. L. S Foster</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>The Lord of the Rings,</em> by J. R. R. Tolkien</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36+ times in 33 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More frequently at first: 11 times in 4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Later: 25 times in 29 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedap</td>
<td>14</td>
<td><em>The Left Hand of Darkness,</em> by Ursula K. Le Guin</td>
<td>Adult science fiction</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2+ times in 15 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 3 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Books Read</th>
<th>Book Chosen for Narrative</th>
<th>Book Genre</th>
<th>Age at First Reading</th>
<th>Reading Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peregrin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>The Lord of the Rings</em>, by J. R. R. Tolkien</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6 times in 6-7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Dragons of Autumn Twilight</em>, by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1+ in 20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bella Jean</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Twilight</em>, by Stephenie Meyer</td>
<td>Young adult fantasy</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4 times in 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branwen</td>
<td>10</td>
<td><em>The Gate of Ivrel</em>, by C. J. Cherryh</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
<td>35*</td>
<td>3+** times in 29 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td><em>Once on a Time</em>, by A. A. Milne</td>
<td>Fairy tale</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2 times in 22 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The table is based primarily on narrative data, but includes the following list data: (a) books read, (b) ages of Branwen and Etruscan King, and (c) the number of times Solaris and Ianárwen read their narrative books. The list data for (b) and (c) are denoted by the symbol *+. The symbol + next to a number signifies or more. The symbol ** signifies where several was translated into 3+. 
Participant Narratives

The primary original Cycle 3 data consists of 18 narratives written by the participants describing a positive meaningful experience of absorbed fantasy reading. The participants’ creative expression piece(s) are included after their narratives, as appropriate. Each narrative is presented in the order in which it was completed and is preceded by the participant’s chosen pseudonym and narrative title. The intent is that the participants’ narratives or stories, written in their own words, will give a sense of their positive meaningful absorbed fantasy reading experiences. As you read the participants’ stories I invite you, as the reader, to reflect upon your own life and find what resonates for you.

Dagger Scribe

FLASHPOINT by Frank Creed

In Chicago of 2036, religion is outlawed. A Christian father kicks his two kids out of a moving car moments before he’s nabbed by anti-fundamentalist forces. The youngsters are picked up by an Underground movement, where they take on new identities and join the fight against injustice. To accomplish this, "mindware" is installed in their brains to enhance all their abilities and they can now interface directly, via thought, with computer systems and other gadgets. Calamity Kid and e-girl, as they are now known, are drawn into the very center of the movement’s activities—rescuing the oppressed, thwarting government forces, and hacking into the interwebs to find out where their parents have been sent for involuntary rehabilitation. After many hair-raising adventures, encounters in cyberspace, a nasty betrayal, and the shady reality of the city streets, they finally break their parents and friends out of captivity.

I read Flashpoint for the first time nearly two years ago (21 months, to be precise) and I was 28. While reading it, I forgot where I was, forgot that Chicago of the future is in fact completely foreign to me, forgot it was fiction.

Not knowing Chicago at all myself, I still felt transported there. The future world portrayed is bleak and partly ruined, and much of the story takes place in a shadowy underworld of sewer pipes and buried tunnels. This creates an eerie and very specific sense of place, using
some landmarks that exist today and some that are invented. Over a year later I visited real-life Chicago and recognized some street names and buildings from the story.

I sensed time passing, but it was not real time—it was the time as experienced in the book. Its events took place over a period of a few days. I read it in one evening, but that evening felt a lot longer because of the intensity of the experience.

I felt like I was in the skin of Calamity Kid, who tells the story. Everything he did or felt, I did also, as if I were perched on his shoulder as he ran through his adventure.

The fight scenes were the most memorable, because of the slow-motion choreography that made them a very visual experience. The cyberspace scenes were also memorable. In these scenes the characters interacted with a virtual environment without physically going anywhere at all; everything they needed (controls, commands, navigation etc) was literally within arm’s reach. While reading about this virtual environment I experienced a sensation like flying, and in my mind’s eye I saw the virtual world as a dark place shot through with brightly-colored information highways, intersections, and individual locations, all dotted with control interfaces, which the character activated by touching them "virtually."

Reading this book had a more physical effect on me than many others. I read the book in bed one night and I don’t think I turned over once during the whole time. Often, during action scenes or cyberspace interactions, my free hand would move in an imitation of what the characters were doing. Sometimes when a facial expression was described, I would imitate it, and speak lines of dialog aloud as if acting a part.

I felt the (imagined) sensations of the characters; how they adjusted to the unfamiliar mindware and their heightened awareness when using it, their adrenaline during fight scenes, their physical fatigue after incredible exertions. None of this was physical for me but it might as well have been. While I was not actually physically affected by any of this, the emotions I felt were as I might have expected them to be if I had really participated in the action described: satisfaction, the aftereffects of adrenaline, and at times, emotional exhaustion.

Emotionally I also felt the characters’ determination and confidence, and at times their doubts and fears; their hopes of finding their parents, their disgust at the betrayer; also a sense of satisfaction at the pure adventure I was drawn into in the reading.

"Calamity" is about 20 years old and so I felt like he was my kid brother. Knowing the author on a professional basis, I also felt his personality radiating from Calamity, rather like an
older brother at the same time. Calamity to me is an echo of a real person (the author) as well as a model to aspire to (in courage and determination). Since he is the center of the story, I felt related to other characters in the same way he did, i.e. his little sister became like my little sister and his Underground mentors became mentors to me.

Generally, when I read a book I feel as if I have interacted with the author. It's like going inside his or her imagination. Also, often there is a character that displays the author's characteristics, whether intended or not, but easy to recognize for a practised reader—so that character then "becomes" the author to me.

I had a long and involved dream that night after reading it. Some aspects of it appeared related to Flashpoint's story, because there was an oppressive government and a male protagonist, but the similarities ended there. I dreamed of a star system with seven planets, the first of which was called Monday, where a boy and his girlfriend, lost in an orbiting medical satellite city, accidentally stumble into an emergency escape shuttle, which then activates itself—they were to leave their home and lives of slavery and travel through all seven planets. In the dream I saw the seven planets clearly, had a sense of oppression regarding the life of the boy, and also viewed, as if in a movie, two fairly complete scenes: the two of them wandering lost in the satellite, and later, their arrival on foot at a city on a foreign planet where the ruler was expected to be benevolent to them.

When I woke up the next morning I wrote down the dream and was immediately seized by a strong desire to develop the idea and write its story, because it was so complete in my head and made an impact of emotional satisfaction similar to reading a good story. I felt strongly that such a story should not be lost in an easily-forgotten dreamworld, so I wrote down all I could remember and also did some schematic sketches and diagrams in my notebook.

It showed me the influence a story can have on the reader’s subconscious and ever since, I have desired to write such stories too. I believe the satisfaction I felt upon waking was a combination of the dream’s own effect, plus the residual memory of the highly satisfying reading of Flashpoint the preceding evening. The two worked together and birthed a compulsion to recreate an experience that would be able to give rise to the same satisfaction again, primarily for myself because it was so thoroughly enjoyable. Later I began to aim at my readers having the same experience in terms of enjoying a book. Influencing their dreams would be a wonderful accomplishment, though that result is probably more than unpredictable. When this book is
published, I may include some kind of questionnaire in the back for readers to respond to me on its specific effects.

At the time, I had been working on a story idea for a novel. However, when the dream came, it pushed the other idea back to second place, which turned out for the best, as the original novel required much further development to make it a feasible project. When I eventually came back to it a year or so later, after first completing the novel from the Flashpoint dream, it had matured enough to be written in a more complete manner. But that’s another story. Really.

The novel which was pushed back a year by the intervention of the dream was not science fiction, but rather a simple interpersonal story. Repeatedly I tried to write it, but could not get started, until I realized it would never work unless I set it in the future and added a techno thriller plot to the relational story. Once I did that, I wrote the first draft in just one month, faster than ever before. Therefore I have concluded that I am unable to activate my imagination without an aspect of science fiction. I have never tried to write fantasy.

I wrote the book that was spawned in the dream, which was no doubt inspired by reading. It is going to be published and there is going to be a sequel.

The novel that came from this dream became much longer and deeper than anything I had previously attempted, and at nearly 100,000 words is still the longest project I have ever completed. The dream furnished the barest framework and a page or two of notes and drawings—essentially, two main characters from planet Monday complete with their appearance and personalities, a necessity for them to journey to the other six planets, the concept of a supernatural being who initiated the journey, the two complete scenes I have already mentioned, and a vague idea that they would "save the worlds" as a result.

I then used my usual novel plotting procedure (the Snowflake Method) to expand this and invent the backstory, the aim, and the actual climax, none of which appeared in the dream itself. So while the dream was emotionally intense, a lot of work was required to create a reading experience of similar intensity to the dream. It took me nearly a whole year to complete the first draft, writing in intense bursts over weekends or for days on end when I had the time, with many long gaps of inactivity when the next section was always on my mind as I pondered where it would go from that point.

Looking back, I would guess that the intense experience Flashpoint gave me was a result of how I recognized its closeness to actual possibilities—the "this could be our future" factor.
The same factor was present in the dream and also in the resulting story I wrote, though it came out in a different form as my story is set in a much more distant future—say three hundred years as opposed to *Flashpoint’s* thirty or so. In *Flashpoint*, believers of all religions are branded terrorists and hunted down by the government. Many recent news headlines show a startling similarity to this scenario. In my story, a group of colonists had left Earth about two hundred years earlier, and had established a new society based on the abolishment of extreme emotions, which therefore limited the possibility of relationships and sentiments, whether interpersonal or of a religious nature i.e. towards the supernatural. During the story, the two main characters learn to free their emotions and use them appropriately while interacting with a supernatural being who guides their journey through the planets.

So as *Flashpoint’s* story frightens me, but also gives hope in the form of the underground resistance, my own story follows similar threads of oppression and freedom. Also like *Flashpoint*, my story includes conceivably possible futuristic gadgetry.

I adored *Flashpoint* because of the emotional experience I had while reading—better than any movie!—and also because of the book I wrote as a direct result of reading it. Writing that novel was the center of my life for over a year and continues to be significant as I prepare for publishing and marketing it. As a side effect, I entered into a personal friendship with the author and his wife and went to visit them near Chicago last year. His unstinting support for other authors has always been a positive example in my own development. *Flashpoint* taught me a great deal about effective writing, which I am still learning to apply to my own work. The repercussions from this one book continue to provide daily satisfaction: the book I wrote from the dream is to be published, the author calls me a colleague and has invited me to write in his storyworld and with his characters (because I told him of the dream and its effects), and I have fond memories of my trip to Chicago with his family, where I behaved like a crazed fan and embarrassed him somewhat, but that’s okay because he often doesn’t realize just how brilliant he is!

I have read *Flashpoint* three times. And I’ll be rereading it at least once or twice every year of my life if at all possible, to relive the intensity of the experience and gain new motivation to excel in my own writing. Sequels are planned by the author, so I hope they have a similar impact! This book is irreversibly intertwined in my life and writing career.
I do believe that only because it is science fiction, it was able to captivate my imagination, subconscious, and dreams as it did. This is the most extreme example of such influence in my life. On occasion it has happened to a smaller extent with other books—but only where science fiction or fantasy is involved.

I am a Christian, though I dislike church and praying. I believe in one God who likes us and wants to commune with us, and for me this experience is not found in traditional religious activity. I find God in nature, in every positive emotional experience (be it real or in a book or movie), and sometimes in listening to music, but most of all in inspiration as I write my stories. He is more real to me then than at any other time. Something magical and supernatural occurs when I sit down to write: I may have an idea for a story, but the specific words that form each narrative are always a surprise to me and often take it in a direction I do not anticipate—a gift from above, as it were.

The mindware described in Flashpoint provides a supernatural interface where the user is aware of communication from God, which is an idea that appeals to me very much. This theme is also obvious in the story I wrote, though the communication there is more of a paranormal/unexplained nature with the higher being. While Flashpoint is a blatantly Christian book with obvious dealings with the God of the Bible, my story is more subtle with no mention of "God" in that sense. However, readers familiar with Biblical concepts will likely recognise the parallels I draw. It could be called allegorical in a broad sense, or purely a paranormal flight of fancy to a non-religious reader. This reflects my own preference for subtlety and acceptance. Flashpoint's blatancy may be offensive to anti-religious readers, however I found the package as a whole to be cohesive and necessary—removing the Christianity from Flashpoint would destroy it since it is so integral to the story. Also, it is not preachy, which I would hate, but presented in an organic and natural manner in tune with the setting and characters. According to my personality and attitude, the story I wrote is similar to Flashpoint in many aspects, but not in the communication of its spiritual message.
Mario stopped counting after he’d repeated all the Words eleven times. And still he shot upwards. Still he spoke. It cleared his head of fear, though plenty of adrenaline remained. After an eternity of darkly whooshing tubes, he felt his direction change to horizontal once more and braced himself for whatever would come next.

The pod jolted to a stop. Feet first, Mario shot out of the dark tube onto a surface and came to rest on his back. Something attached to his face. He groped at it and felt a rubbery texture. Just like the painkiller patches he knew from the accident care centre.

He blinked in the sudden bright light and tried to look around. Fear tickled at his guts as he beheld the long, curved room full of tables, where still bodies lay. He laid his head down again.

“You are nothing!”
Mario’s eyes darted left and right, but he couldn’t make out where the words came from. “Nobody needs you! You are insignificant!”

The words caused a peculiar pain in his heart as he recognised their truth. He wanted to fight, but the neuroparalyser numbed his brain. He scratched at the edges but found no edge. “Nobody wants you, nobody will ever love you again!”

Mario struggled to rise. “That’s not true! Caitlin will love me!”

The only answer was a chilling growl that roared in his ears and dissolved his resolve. Then, although he had forgotten it entirely, the other Voice spoke again.

*Do not stop speaking!*

“All right, all right.”

Mario opened his mouth and spoke again the words of freedom. The fear dissipated, and he propped himself up to sit on the edge of the table. He reached up and tore the patches from his skin.

_You must never stop speaking as long as you are in this place. If you speak my words, the evil cannot destroy your soul._

Not allowing his speech to stop, he got to his feet and peered about. He took a cautious step, then another, taking stock of his surroundings as he spoke incessantly.

The evil voice still rattled in his ears, but the Words he spoke robbed it of power to hurt him. He rubbed at his temples where the patches had been. He hoped the numbness would pass quickly.

Mario trudged along at the foot-end of the tables arranged in a fan-shape within the rounded room. A few were empty; most held a hapless victim. As the evil words reverberated around the room, Mario saw some of the bodies twitching. Others groaned or shuddered; still others were deathly quiet.

Mario inched between the tables, hoping to get a glimpse out of a window. The sufferers’ hands grasped at him from both sides as he moved, but their glassy eyes afforded no understanding. He pushed by them and came to stand at the outer edge of the room. He looked back. The room—or hall—curved around to the right and left.

His knee on the ledge against the outer wall, he leaned towards the glass. His wide eyes came level with the window’s rim.

Night’s darkness—no—sparkles like diamonds in every direction. What was this? He pulled himself into a position where he could look downward.

A white curve lay below, blotting out the night. It looked like a cloud, but there was
something different about it. Perfectly round, curving gently to tip downwards at both ends, the whiteness filled the void beneath.

Mario caught his breath, then went on speaking. “I made stars. I made planets. I made Monday.” He paused. “You made Monday.”

I did.

“Is that Monday...down there?”

*I made the rock you call Monday, swathed in everlasting clouds.*

Mario gazed down at the rounded shape of his home planet and shivered. So far away.

Where was he?

A transport tube attached to the window. It popped open to the inside. He watched through the glass as the patient on the table was sucked out into space and the tube’s end closed over as it swallowed its victim. Leaning forward, he followed the tube’s line as it tapered to a hair’s breadth and vanished in the cloud cover. Other tubes moved here and there to various windows to load or unload human cargo. Just like the courtyard transport tubes, only longer. It reminded him of a many-legged insect. He shivered again as he continued to whisper the Words.

So this was the mindwipe base. In a satellite. The air in the room was a little chilly. Mario rubbed his arms.

*What are you doing? You need to find Caitlin.*

Caitlin. She had to be there somewhere. Mario surveyed the rows of tables. He picked his way among them.

He peered into each empty face as he passed by, stabbed by disappointment each time it was one he did not know. Looking up at the curve of the ceiling, he felt a sudden disorientation in the maze. If the room was a circle, had he been all the way around yet?

With a sigh, he made his way to a window and gazed again at the strange sight of the tubes attaching themselves to the satellite all around him. To the left, to the right, a little lower down, another above him to the left...Wait a second.

There was more than one level! He shoved back through the tables and prostrate bodies to the centre of the ring, where more round glass windows were set into the curved inner wall. Pulling at its rim, he found it swung open easily.

Alarms buzzed. “Anomaly alert!”

He leaned his head and shoulders into the blackness beyond.

At first he saw nothing but whirling lights, then felt the flow of air as if from far away. This had to be the satellite’s central shaft, connecting all levels. Above and below stretched row upon row of windows letting in the dim light from each rounded room. Where was Caitlin? And how could he use this shaft to reach another level?

*Do not fear. I will lead you. Climb through the window and reach to the side.*

Mario did as he was told and discovered cold metal beneath his fingers. A maintenance ladder. Gripping the nearest rung, he hauled himself by the arms into the chute and swung there for an instant before his feet found a place to stand. His window clanged shut, silence surrounded him, and he began to feel dizzy.

But the destroying words now left his ears in silence. He spoke again the good words from the Voice. He peered upwards at the circles of brightness.

*Climb up, child.*

Hand over hand, Mario groped his way up the ladder, keeping to the shadows between the portholes. Soon his eyes came level with the next row of windows. “Is this it?”

*Keep moving.*
He crawled upwards. Had any Monday-dweller ever been in here? Surely not. He paused at each level, but the Voice remained silent.

Through every window he saw identical tables, most occupied by workers in identical grey clothing. It was impossible to count how many levels he passed, or how far a distance he had come, or how many souls lay in torment all around him. He grew tired. There was no place to rest.

*Stop here. This is the place.*

Finally. Mario pushed at the window now before him. It opened with a soft pop. The blare of the alarms hit his ears. He slid his feet through the opening while holding his weight with his hands, but couldn’t reach the floor.

*Let go.*

Fear seized him, but he ignored it. The Voice had always been right so far.

He teetered on the rim for an awful moment before his flailing legs struck a table leg. Then he found the flat floor with his boot and slithered hurriedly out into the light, landing on his backside as the window’s spring-hinge pulled it shut behind him.

Blinking at the dazzle, he pulled himself upright by the table leg. After so long in the dark shaft, he needed to shade his eyes from the light as he squinted at the people laid out helpless before him.

“You are not wanted here!”

That guy’s voice recording again. Whoever it was. Probably a Baxter.

“In fact, you are not wanted anywhere. You could die and no one would care!”

*Speak my Words. And do not stop again until you have taken Caitlin away from here.*

Caitlin. His eyes darted around the room.

There was only one row of tables between the inner and outer walls. The outer one curved tightly inward like an attic ceiling. He proceeded from table to table, searching for Caitlin. And still he spoke, unceasing, enjoying the tingle of freedom each word brought to his soul.

The room was narrow, but its curve deceived and his search lasted longer than he expected. After an eternity of peering into unseeing faces, Mario straightened, placed his fists in the small of his back and stretched.

He thought he saw a flash of light as he stared into the distance of ever-receding tables. He squinted in that direction. It was gone, perhaps only a figment of his imagination, but in the place it had passed over, his eye caught a lumpy grey hood full of dreadlocks. “Caitlin!”

*Mario, speak my words. You must not stop.*

His footsteps pounded along the narrow space at the inner wall. He shouted the Words.

“Do not fear! I will give all that you need!”

Arriving breathless at Caitlin’s place of rest, he stared down at her, then shook her by the shoulder. Her eyes were open, but there was no consciousness in them. He ripped the anesthetic patches from her forehead and flung them aside.

Mario lifted his gaze and glanced along the row, taking in shudders, groans and stiff limbs as his fellow workers succumbed to the drugs and the evil words. Each one suffered as Caitlin did. He winced.

*Speak my words to her. I will save the others in good time, but first she must awaken and flee with you.*

He whispered the Voice’s litany in her ear; he threw his head back and shouted it; he spoke it gently, watching her face for signs of change. Her eyes closed, and she let out a gentle
groan as if she were waking from a good night’s sleep. Still he spoke.
Mario felt tension return to her slackened shoulder muscles. An instant later, she was
staring at him. He watched recognition come into her eyes.
She sat up, then put a hand to her forehead. Mario held her while the dizziness passed.
Caitlin’s eyes widened as she took in the surroundings.
Her breathing came faster. Mario refused to stop speaking. The Words had to carry the
two of them now.
*Unless she speaks them too.*
Mario began again. “Listen to me. I must be first.” He beckoned for her to speak. Her
brow creased, so he said it again. “Listen to me. I must be first.” Then he pointed at her in an
overdone gesture that she surely couldn’t mistake. Astonishment came to her eyes. They met his.
“You will be mindwiped every day!”
Caitlin flinched. Mario pointed at her again and waited, his mouth half-open. At last, she
began to mutter the words. The fear on her face lessened.
Her speech was slurred, but Mario spoke along with her, repeating each section until she
was able to say it. After a time, her voice became clearer. She pushed herself off the table to
stand by Mario. Together they spoke, a harmony of strength.
Caitlin pointed with both hands in several directions before raising them in a questioning
shrug.
Mario’s eyes shot here and there. Escape! But how? He glanced at the inner porthole.
Their only chance. He pulled at Caitlin’s hand, but she held back.
He yanked the hatch open. Caitlin’s eyebrows almost vanished into her dreadlocks.
Mario leaned into the black opening. He guided Caitlin’s hand to the ladder before
climbing up to give her room to join him.
Their voices echoed strangely in the deep shaft. Looking down, he could see her climbing
past the irregular light from the ports.
*Now climb out again.*
Mario pushed open the port beside him. A small, empty room. He pushed himself into it
head first.
He kicked against the ladder and slid out to roll over on his back, slightly dazed. New
alarms sounded.
“Maximum security alert! You will be found and punished!”
The canned threat surprised Mario. He spoke the Words again before fear could get into
his soul. Caitlin wriggled out of the round opening. They spoke on in unison and got slowly to
their feet to look around.
There was nothing in the room at all. No windows in the outer wall—only the black gap
of a pod standing open in an accessway. Mario moved towards it, aware of Caitlin’s footsteps
behind him. He squinted at the dark opening, unable to the pod inside—but surely it was, for the
oval shape of the entry was exactly correct.
With only one pod. They would have to go together. And hope it took them home.
“Now!” Mario interrupted the flow of words. They stepped into the gap.
Falling! This was no tube-pod. The force of the jump carried them out and down for two
awful seconds before hitting a cold, hard surface.
Mario expelled a gutteral cry. Caitlin’s hand gripped his shoulder there in the dark. “I
guess it wasn’t a transport accessway after all.”
The oval opening illuminated the room beyond. His feet were disinclined to obey him. He
staggered towards the light, Caitlin’s invisible hand trailing on his back.

Caitlin pushed past. A shadow on the back of her neck caught his eye. Another patch?
“I will destroy you!” The unfriendly voice sounded broken-up. Alarms roared in Mario’s ears so he could barely think.

Caitlin threw her hands over her ears and drew back. “I will destroy you!”
“No, it’s the drug.” Mario reached for her neck. His fingers found the rubber and worked an edge loose. He yanked it away.
“I will destroy you, and you will suffer great pain every day of your miserable life!”
Wait! If there was a patch on Cait’s neck...
Mario reached up under his scraggly back hair.
“No one will remember you or ever speak of you again!”
His hand encountered a patch and stiffened. Numbness crept over his body.
Nausea and grief poured into Mario. He lost control over his hands and arms. They began to jerk. He had to get the patch off.

You must close the door!

His hands wouldn’t do what he wanted.

Caitlin turned and took in his helpless state. Her lips moved. She’d kept herself safe with the Words.
He mumbled. “Cait, close the door! The Voice said so!”
His mind flickered. He fell backwards, vaguely aware of Caitlin moving around the opening.

Boom! A massive clanging sound jolted him awake.
What was this place, where he couldn’t feel the floor, nothing pressing against him?
Where was he?
“Mario!” Caitlin stared at him. “You’re floating!”
Lights flickered on around the room. Was that daylight coming in the window? Calm.
Beautiful. Caitlin’s hair writhed upwards. Floating...
He flailed stiff limbs. Caitlin leaned back against a curved wall and a curved door—very massive and very closed.
He struck out with his arms and legs and accomplished precisely nothing. His heart hammered in his chest. “My neck!”
Caitlin pushed up from the door and gave a small squeal as she realised she, too, was suspended in midair. Momentum carried her forward.

Her shoulder struck Mario’s. He was pushed back against a surface—the floor, or a wall?
An odd sensation filled his mind—up was not where he’d thought it was.
His limbs jerked. Caitlin reached for his shoulder and clenched a wad of his sweatshirt in one fist. Her touch on his neck probed for the patch. Mario tried to blink, but his eyes refused. His sight lost its focus.

A tearing sensation! Caitlin held the patch between finger and thumb. Movement returned to his muscles.

Groping along the flatness, his hand met a grip he could hold on to. He pulled himself towards it and looked around. A strange sight met his astonished gaze.

The room—was it a room?—was almost entirely round, except for a flat part at one end. Small lockers with latches were set into the walls. At the other end, knobs and dials lit up in various colours beneath a wide transparent pane. Other than that, there were two small round windows, facing each other across the width of the room. Mario discovered more handholds
attached to the walls and reached for one. One of the small windows was just arm’s length away.
He pulled himself hand over hand to look out.

A gasp escaped him. He saw not only the white curve of Planet Monday, but the form of
a giant many-layered satellite growing smaller by degrees. A satellite he knew all too well from
climbing up its insides only minutes ago.

*This is it.*

“Cait, we’ve escaped!”

She pulled herself up to peer out of the pane.

Mario looked at her face, now deathly pale. “Just like the Voice said we would!”

She curled herself into a ball. Short, desperate sobs burst forth. “Your Voice told you
we’re going somewhere, didn’t it?”

Mario could barely take his eyes off the view beyond the window.

“Yes, he did.”

Caitlin raised her red-rimmed eyes to his. “No! I never wanted this.” Her head shook
from side to side.

Mario blinked and flexed his arms, now that he owned them again. “Well, we’re on the
way for sure.”

The Voice was silent now, but smiling. Mario was sure of it. In spite of Caitlin’s shaken
state he grinned, and rubbed at his chin with the thumb of his free hand.

“Whether we want it or not.”
**Mike**

**Narrative Description of Experience**

The experience I had when reading *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* was literally a life-changing experience. This book, written by J.K. Rowling, is a fantasy story, the first of seven in a series. On publication, its intended audience was children. However, it described a world adults could readily identify with. As the original audience of children grew up with the series, the situations in the next six books became more and more mature.

The plot of the first book is rather simple. Harry Potter was a baby when the evil wizard Voldemort killed his parents. Voldemort, the most powerful evil wizard, was unable to kill the young Harry and lost his power and form when he tried. Harry is taken by the leader of the good wizards to live with his Aunt and Uncle, who are both “muggles”, people from the ordinary world that are unable to use magic. When Harry comes of age, he discovers he is a wizard by means of his invitation to start school at Hogwart’s school of magic. He leaves his muggle home with joy, starts school and begins the process of becoming a wizard. More important, he finds friends and joy in life that he did not have while living amongst the muggles.

This book was given to me as a present by the sales rep I was working for at a time when I was working as a sales assistant in the furniture industry. I was 33 years old. I had previously held two other jobs. In the first I was working part-time while I got my first BA and then took a full time position after graduating. I had intended to go on for my MA, but my senior year had me frustrated and needing a break. I worked there for six years. I was making good money, salary and commission. In my fifth year, they took away the commission, cutting my earnings by 60%. I tried to come up with ways to convince management that because the sales reps I worked for were both the absolute top reps in their divisions, the commission I was making was deserved and proof that the program worked. Management, of course, was not interested. I learned the modern business strategy is to simply bring a new person in for less money, regardless of any current success rate. As well, I truly came to know where sales skills are valued. Skills in administration and organization that allow reps to be free to work are highly undervalued, even though they are indispensable to success. I finally left the job and went to work for a dealer of the company I previously left. At this second job I was assisting a vice-president and made even more money than I had before the commission was taken away. However, the work was
unfulfilling and I did more work than the person I assisted. I left that job after four years for a job which lasted only a week. I found out that the company had hired me with the intention that the person I would replace would train me and then they would fire that person. After leaving I ended up at another dealer of my original company. I mention all this because for me, these types of situations define what “muggle” means: lack of integrity, rudeness, and lack of compassion for the employee. At my new position, which was exactly like the job I had just left, at least one of the sales reps I worked for was wonderful. She recognized I was underemployed, and she does not know that the gift of the Potter book changed my life. It is interesting to me now, looking back, that out of the eight or so people that I worked with, only one was actually concerned that I was doing something I liked. I had always been described as “really smart” by all the reps I worked for, and they implied that you had to be “really smart” to do the job. It was a job that they were unable to do, however, not inherently difficult, as the pay rate reflected their real beliefs. They all believed any unease I felt staying in furniture was silly and that I should just accept what I was “good” at. The woman that gave me the Potter book was very self-sufficient, very intelligent in her own right and saw that my work was done extremely quickly and accurately. She knew there was not more work to do, so I must get pretty bored. I left the job after a year, and have not spoken to her since, so she doesn’t know that the Potter book started a chain of events that finally separated me from the industry.

When I read a work of fantasy, if it is working for me, I am completely in the world of the story. This means that while I read, my mind builds a world in my head, with the written word combining with my own thoughts, making connections to my own real world. For instance, when I stop reading and look up and around my real world, if I am into the story, my thoughts are about the story world. Instead of seeing the window or the clock, I am just changing the backdrop of my sight so that I can focus my imagination better. Emotionally, the characters become like your friends and you feel emotion based on how you view them. That emotion is always being correlated with my own internal reality, so that if an emotion being written about is one that resonates inside myself, I see the characters as being relevant to my life. Time actually passes as it is written – in Potter books, there is a usually a year going by. At Christmas time in the book, there is part of my internal state that experiences the joys, perhaps sadness or seasonal cold, of the real Christmas time. Then on to the next scene. As well, I begin to delineate things (personality traits, ways to act, thoughts to have that will serve me well in reality) that are useful
in my own life. The very beginning of the book immediately describes the muggle family that Potter will be forced to grow up with, and it is not a flattering description. The muggles are rude, non-imaginative (even placing restrictions against imagining so that life will continue on as before and as ever) and generally mean. I immediately connected with the story because I realized I was working in a muggle world and though I did not feel I was a muggle, after all my meaningless work experience, I felt I was on my way to becoming one. In every story, there must be a resonance with my internal state in some way for me to care. In a good story, like this Potter novel, that resonance happens early. It could happen at any time – sometimes when I put a book down, I have come back to it, even years later and re-read it, finding a new resonance that may not have been there before.

The joy I felt in reading the tale corresponded with Potter’s own revelations that there was another world. In his case, the wizarding world. In my case, there was another way to view the world and other opportunities to pursue a life that might be more meaningful to myself. Though I had wanted to pursue my MA degree, after eleven years as a sales assistant making good money, I realized I would have to plan diligently to be able to escape my career. My first degree was in Anthropology. I realized I did not want to go back into this field, and would need to decide exactly what it was I wanted to do. Potter is lucky in the sense that he doesn’t really need to choose – magic over a muggle life is a pretty simple decision. But even there I took a lesson – I could look at the world as if it were magical. And it is when we look at it that way. It seems to me magic is a way of seeing, and the muggle/wizard dynamic is a great way to show it. If we choose to stifle imagination, we will see the world in a very shallow way. Imagination allows us to believe in a better life, the value of all creatures, the possibility of new discovery. If we do not use imagination, we believe the world is one way, the way we are living in it at the moment. If we believe life is set in stone – that things “are” and that they will always be that way – we lack the fire of imagination that is actual living. Discovery – learning something new about the world – is magic to me. A key to this discovery, the imagination that leads to magic, is that we are also adding our thoughts to these discoveries. If we simply accept things, they will become muggle things. If we think about them, adding insights and extrapolations, they become magical, possibilities and routes to explore rather than “realities”. In this sense, science is magic, except that many people see it as limiting the world rather than just the next step in discovery. Reading, because we add to the experience by “seeing” worlds in our mind and creating
possibilities where nothing is specifically written, is magic also. It opens routes, rather than setting things in stone.

I read this book probably in two nights. The immediate reaction was to realize that although I had read a lot of fantasy and myth as a child, I had stopped when I began college and never found fantasy again while working full time. I began to read new works of fantasy, as well as re-read many of the ones I had read as a child. I began thinking about how fantasy and the real world relate. I believe we correlate stories to our own lives, possibly looking for changes we can make to be more like the stories we admire, or at least gain insight into what we see in our real life from connections we make from a story. The heroes in fantasy are generally nicer people than those you meet in the real world, though not always. And I realized that the people I liked in the real world were those that were similar to the characters in fantasy – open-minded and able to imagine. They don’t necessarily read fantasy, but have inquisitive minds, understanding that life is better when it is fair and everyone is treated with respect. All of these are themes in the Potter series.

Reading this book directly changed my life, as I began to plan a way out of furniture. It took a while, as I tried to figure out what I wanted to do. My first idea was to open a comic art gallery, as comics were one of my first reading loves. I learned to read from Marvel and DC comics, circa late-1960’s and 1970’s. Marvel’s “The Mighty Thor” was my favorite and led me to reading a lot of mythology. As I planned this, I left my job for another in the same industry. Escape was difficult! The finances were proving to be difficult to open this venture. I had to leave another job, because there was very little work to do in furniture post-9/11. I found a position that needed my organizational skills badly, but really had very little work to do. I had a lot of time by myself though, so I decided to at least do something fun. I began a 2nd BA program in film. While completing this degree at night after work, I was able to intuit at least the direction I wanted to go in. Over the three years it took to earn my film degree at night, I had immersed myself in fantasy films and stories and I realized that myth, and how it related to the fantasy genre, was my major interest. Myth is a very unstable term. The meaning of what myth is seems rather fluid and volatile. However, what myth does hold are the thoughts of our unconscious, the archetypes that are so often used and explored in fantasy. They speak the same language, and my own interest is whether or not it is exactly the same language and we are just too close to modern fantasy to be able to read it in the same sanctified manner we often read myths. I believe that the
interest in story I developed as a child was something I came back to as an adult. There is something to be said, I think, for rediscovering what made you excited as a child if you had gotten away from it. I think growing up, in any society, often leads us down paths where we might think our interests as a child were childish, rather than understand that they are our foundation. We need to look at them as adults now. After finishing my film degree, I then started a PhD program in Mythological Studies. I quit my job and became a full-time grad student. I have never been happier, though my exact course of interest is still being determined. As I work fantasy and comics into my grad work, I realize that the comic art gallery may still be a possibility.

And in working on this narrative, I realized that *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, a present from someone who said she “knew I would like it,” actually changed my life because it made me realize how big the world is—how there is so much to know and how little any one person actually does know. In this sense, one example is that I have become very aware of different animals through all periods of history and such things as extinction. When you can watch old film footage of the very last Tasmanian tiger, you gain a sense of what the loss of magic in the world can mean. We all have choices to make. The easiest choice is hardly ever the right choice and though it took me nine years after reading the book, I was finally able to leave the muggle world to find what it was that would make me a “wizard,” which is a fine and fun profession to be in. I think we all need to find what it is that makes us want to push our own boundaries and be excited about something. Wizards change things. If we are excited about our lives, we will change things also. In my previous line of work, so many people told me that making sales was what really got them excited and how it really pumped them up. I found it hard to believe then, and now, that they ALL were telling the truth. Most acted like they were stuck and didn’t really want to be doing what their job expected of them, no matter what they said.

It was interesting when I went to re-read some of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* for this exercise how much I had not remembered. Because there are six more books and a movie series, the exact way in which Potter’s muggle family were so awful had become forgotten memory. In the movies, they are cartoonish, larger than life and semi-comical. In this book, they colored my perceptions of my reality because they are more real. I find written word descriptions to be more real because we process them in our own minds, adding images and details that work for us. When a film creates anything, it becomes a set image, rather than the
fluid image we may have in our own heads. The muggle family’s lack of imagination stands out as representing how I see many people in the real world, but their rude and really downright nasty behavior resonated so deeply that it made me seek the real world to find the magic that it was hiding. I literally began noticing birds and how many different species of bird are present if we just keep our eyes open to see them. This new vista of the natural world proved to me that magic was real. Magic is a way of seeing and feeling and discovering the world. We just need to be perceptive and able to accept it into our lives. In general, I think fantasy does this. Fantasy leads us to imagine possibilities that are not actually present yet. I believe that non-fantasy books do similar work in our heads, but only with the blocks of reality that we have and see in our lives. Fantasy allows us to create whole new blocks to use in creating. A created world allows us to see our world through the focus of the imagined world’s lens. Harry Potter is a wizard and his story is one of discovering that he is a wizard, what that means he is able to do, and then how he is going to use his new discoveries to actually live in the world. The reader takes lessons, or gains insights into their own life, along the same lines by asking themselves questions like who am I and what can I do to change into something I actually want to do or be? Or what am I able to do that maybe I am not doing right now? And how can I improve my own world and the world around me? I believe these questions are at the core of what reading fantasy does for us. Non-fantasy allows us to look at these things, but within the confines of the structures we are already living in.
The plot of this fantasy/romance is an inversion of the traditional Quest of myth and folk-tale. Instead of going in search of a treasure or of fame, Frodo Baggins, a Hobbit of the quiet land called The Shire, must travel over many hundreds of leagues of Middle-Earth to rid himself, and all who dwell therein, of a Ring of Power. The Ring was forged by Sauron the Dark Lord of Mordor and should he retrieve it, his power over Middle-earth would be disastrous and destructive. Every episode in the three-volume tale conduces toward Frodo’s objective, even those apparently restful interludes that may seem less germane to the plot. Hobbits are a small branch of humanity, physically half the height of elves and of larger humans, and of slighter build than dwarves. They are also on the whole deeply conservative and suspicious of adventures and of ‘foreign parts.’ Yet it is the deep strength in this rustic race that provides the endurance for the completion of the task, and the salvation of the world.

This success is qualified, however, by the knowledge that all such victories are only temporary, and Frodo himself is irreparably damaged by his experiences.

I first read *The Lord of the Rings* in 1968 at the age of 20, and for several years thereafter I read it annually. I must have read it 20-25 times, if not more. After this study is complete I plan to read it again.

The first element of my experience of this tale was surprise. I had actually seen the three volumes of the first edition sitting on the shelves of my school library, but the title of volume three – *The Return of the King* – had given me a vague feeling that it must all be something to do with Jacobites and Bonnie Prince Charlie, so I had left it alone. Finding myself inside a huge and elaborate fairy-tale, myth, epic or romance was disorientating. But since I had long enjoyed all these kinds of narrative, and here was a huge work incorporating the best aspects of each of them, the disorientation was a gateway to delight. It soon felt comfortable and familiar, not just because I had recently read the *The Hobbit* but because of earlier experience with the tales listed previously and with a wide range of speculative fiction. In particular, it felt like the Norse tales. In these pages I was finding the sense that those tales had given me, of strangeness and immeasurable northern distances, the same feelings engendered in me by the sight of the sea and
the wild spaces nearest my home when I visited them. A sense of personal ownership of that
strangeness and of infinite possibility in real life.

The reading did not take me long. When not absolutely constrained to eat, sleep, attend
lectures or write essays, I was reading it. I think I was through it in a week, and then I looked out
of the window and the world was changed. Not perhaps the world outside so much as my way of
looking at the world. I had grown up until University in non-bookish, although never hostile,
surroundings and even at school reading seemed to be a chore for many people, or at least they
would not admit to its being important to them. Inevitably I had learned to see my delight in
reading, especially in fiction, especially in non-‘realistic’ fiction, as something illicit, something
without value in terms of living in and with the ‘world of reality’. One reading of *The Lord of the
Rings* was enough to overturn that. I knew nothing of Tolkien, of why he wrote so deeply and
well, or whence came the sense of authenticity and importance that had enchanted me. I only
knew that *everyone had been wrong* – this was serious; this was real; this was part of who I was
going to be. Until then I had assumed that to be a person concerned with literature, say an
academic, teacher or librarian, you would have to value the canon, the ‘great’ writers, and decry
the ‘escapist’ – now I was at the beginning of accepting that I could value, study, learn about and
from, and maybe eventually write, this kind of literature – and it would have value. Although I
did not dream then how long that would take, to become that person or that it would be a journey
without a neat and tidy end. A journey like Frodo’s. To be ‘that sort of person’ does not except
us from the pains of life, and is only one aspect of who we are. This tale remained my
companion and guide through pain as well as success, and is still so today.

The pivotal and most deeply memorable moment of the story for me comes in the first
volume; *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Towards the end of the Council of Elrond, after it has been
determined that the One Ring must be destroyed, Frodo volunteers for the task, almost in a
dream. ‘*I will take the Ring,*’ he said, ‘*though I do not know the way.*’ This resonated with me
from the beginning, and became the title, many years later, of my M. Phil Thesis on children’s
fantasy tales. Many more years later I now see it as a statement directly opposed to Hamlet’s
wondering whether one should be or not be. Here Frodo perceives that one must *be*, must *act*,
must *take on responsibility*, even without being sure about where that acceptance will lead.
Indeed, as even more years pass, it seems to me that we never *do* know where our acceptance of
duty or responsibility may lead, but are not therefore excused from that acceptance. Just as Frodo
expressed himself willing to accept the Ring, and found that he had to endure inexpressible hardship and loss, so I have known times of stating that I am willing to do, to hear, to accept the knowledge of painful issues, only to find that the resultant sorrow can come close to being unbearable.

Sensations that I felt at the first reading have recurred at every other, and include a sort of all-over thrill or chill when deeply moved. The emotions this story evokes are many, and mixed up with physical sensation. The only awareness I can recall of my body, in fact, is the physical expression of the emotions; joy, hope, despair, nostalgia, laughter and tears, a sense of loss mingled with a sense of gain. As I write this I realize that it sounds like a case of possession! Possession by a book, and indeed that may be a fair description. I felt absorbed, caught up, excited, won over, enchanted.

I can’t recall that I had any awareness of my physical surroundings while I was reading. I know what they were—my small square room on the corner of the Hall of Residence with its views over the gardens of the Hall, and of the park across the road. But I was not aware of them while I was inside Middle-Earth. And my sense of passing time was the sense of the passing days and months inside the story – I returned to objective time only when I had finished reading, or had to stop reading for a while.

On first reading, the characters all brought a sense of familiarity with them; I felt that I got to know them very well very quickly. The same is true of the setting, Middle-Earth; although at that time I had no idea whether Tolkien intended it to be an imagined parallel universe or an imagined ancient past—(he intended the latter). I had the sense of knowing where I was, the sense of solidity. In some ways the relationship with the imagined world was deeper at first than that with the characters, although they have become like old friends as time has gone by. The world of Middle-Earth is so densely imagined and presented, that it literally felt as real as the world around me, and felt like the main embodiment of the fiction, of Tolkien’s vision.

It is hard to quantify the degree to which I felt involved in the unfolding events. The clearest way to put it is perhaps that I felt involved as an observer! But increasingly through that first reading, the me-observer seemed to be someone who was a denizen of Middle-Earth.

Regarding the effect of this absorption upon my life; that life falls into three distinct periods, and my relationship to this book parallels those periods. The first 21 years were a rather
sheltered childhood and adolescence, which I had not outgrown at the time I read *The Lord of the Rings* for the first time, even though I had become engaged to be married to my first husband. At my urging he also read *The Lord of the Rings* and seemed to be strongly moved by it. I assumed this meant he had been moved in the same ways as I had. He gave me my copy of *The Lord of the Rings* as a 21st birthday present, while the later volumes of Tolkien’s works are inscribed by my second husband; this is a practical, physical way in which the presence of these works in my life has paralleled its changes.

The second period, of the sixteen years of my first marriage, I was still reading in an absorbed way, every kind of fiction, but I feel in retrospect that much of this reading was an induced absorption due to a need to escape. Although I completed a Masters in Children’s Fantasy fiction, worked as a librarian, and taught Creative Writing and literature to adults, things were not well with me and I was retreating into reading rather than being nourished by it. Still, I read *The Lord of the Rings* annually at this time, and found consolation in it. Although I felt my own power over my own life and work was diminished, I rediscovered the potential for my true identity in the familiar story.

Throughout the 23 years since the breakup of that marriage and the period of my second marriage I have read more creatively, absorbed, but growing rather than shirking. Through the process of participating in this study, I have come to feel strongly that while it is by no means the case that ‘fantasy literature is escapist’; there are in fact two ways of reading absorbedly, whatever you may be reading. And one of those ways is escapist, while the other is nourishing.

I would say that during my early years I was overoptimistic and unnoticing of evidence that conduced to the contrary. I read *The Lord of the Rings* as a wholly triumphant story with a positive ending, promising similarly positive outcomes for me in the objective world. In the second phase I probably did not see a relevance to my own situation as I do now, but rather a chance to spend time in a more positive one. However, I was thereby undoubtedly blinded to aspects of reality about me.

Through the third phase of my life to date, *The Lord of the Rings* has been a guide and support as well as an escape; indeed, intellectually I have concluded that ‘escape’ into fiction is not at all a sign of maladjustment to primary reality, but a sojourn in an alternative reality that gives us strength for daily living. In this context, I could be defined as a person who 'follows Gandalf', although I believe the book about that is specifically Christian, I haven't read it and
can't recall the author. But I do tend to feel my moral, creative, intellectual and spiritual (in the broadest sense) choices are shaped by Tolkien, via Gandalf and I suppose the rest of the Fellowship, particularly Aragorn, Sam and Frodo, and by characters like Faramir and Théoden, who make right choices in spite of their circumstances. I suspect Tolkien and I would not agree on details of belief and theology, but the threads that run throughout his subcreation are those I find admirable and worthy of emulation in our world. Simple stuff when you look at it; keeping promises, loyalty to friends, resistance to temptation to do evil, the value of fellowship and indeed of food, fun, and hot baths. But these simple things are expressive of the nobility of spirit the characters display. Without intending to sound grandiose, this comes into my daily life in the continued effort to remember that, for example, mopping up the bathroom floor after that hot bath has its own importance, and my desire to open up my computer and immerse myself in my own fiction or some other literature-related activity, has to take its place alongside the duties.

This sounds all very fine, and the ‘happy ending’ tone needs to be adjusted strongly. I should say that over the past twenty-three years I have had to face up to and strive to overcome that early naivety and over optimism. I don’t wish to go into this in detail because it would impinge upon other people’s privacy, but I seem to myself to have come remarkably late to the understanding that it is what you do/fail to do, not your vague good intentions, that have effects and deep consequences and may hurt others. Because of that I find comfort now in the real message of the book, that all victories are partial, qualified and limited. This is not only because we all die, leaving behind us unfinished plans and works; it is also because the trials and problems that beset humanity come round again and again, and as Gandalf says, we can only do our best in the time that is allotted to us. In the wild optimism of youth, this seems cold counsel; now it seems deep and consoling wisdom. I have failed to ‘redeem the world for ever’ – well, so has everyone else!

I have always assumed that the benefits of fantasy fiction, myth and legend are greater than that of ‘realistic’ fiction, because those genres tend towards the universal and the general in tone and content. This is probably a matter of personal taste, though, and in truth it may be the degree of absorption, and whether or not it is a creative or escapist absorption, that matters. By ‘creative or escapist’ I mean that if you enter in that deep and absorbed way into what Tolkien called a ‘sub-creation’, you may well be in danger. You may become an addictive gamer or attender at the kinds of conference at which people dress up as fictional characters, and
sometimes seem to have no other interest in their lives at all. You may lose yourself in the attempt to live in what remains an unreal world, however excellently realised. If, however, you retain your sense of perspective, such absorption may provide the kind of nourishment otherwise attributed to meditation, talking therapies, chats with friends or a nice cup of coffee. I believe that in Vedic medicine, a common prescription is that one should listen to or read an appropriate tale for one’s need – something that makes perfect sense to me.

Any book may have deep and lasting impact upon you; sometimes in the form of specific learning of facts or ideas. Such books in my own childhood include Uncle Tom’s Cabin, and Black Beauty. Read for their stories, they opened up my knowledge. Other books, listed and discussed by me in this study, are among many that have opened up my imagination and my sense of the possible. Yes, a work of fiction may have deep and lasting effects upon one’s life.

Learning never stops.
One morning, a few months after his birthday, Perian woke up and realised that there was a chill in the air. He shivered, and snuggled more closely under his blankets. But he could not get back to sleep, so instead sat up resolutely, and flinched at the sharp stiffness in his shoulders. He looked around the familiar room. The walls were the same as usual, mellow golden stone just beginning to draw some richness from the waxing light of morning. The same trees were visible through the window. As Perian watched, a leaf detached itself and floated slowly down beyond his sight. He shivered again, pulled back his covers and lowered his feet to the floor. His knees hurt. His feet were cold. He noticed the thinness and pallor of his legs.

"I am old," he said aloud. "I am old."

He dressed, not calling his servants but hastily getting into whatever clothes came to hand, slipped cautiously through the still-quiet passages of the palace, saddled his own horse and rode out past the astonished, drowsy sentry towards the North Gate of the city. Here too the watchman was startled to see his king, but Perian gave him only a brief nod before heading away north as fast as Mela's morning eagerness could carry him.

Before the sun was well risen, before the air was truly warm, he was approaching the outskirts of the forest. He slowed down and began to look about him. It was becoming yet another of the smiling days they had come to expect that summer. There was peace in everything, in the heraldic blue of the sky, the soft lush green of the grassland, the deeper green of Skalwood ahead of him. Yet as Perian watched, the trees were tossed by a freak gust of wind sweeping in from the sea away to the east, and as they tossed they shed each a small flurry of yellow-gold leaves. He looked up at the strengthening sun, sighed, and rode, more slowly now, towards the forest.

Under the trees all was still, with hardly a sign of life. Perian followed a broad ride he had often travelled before, but after a while turned aside into the wildness of the trees. He crossed a stream. He sat for a while on a grey rock while his horse cropped the grass and a squirrel watched him covertly. He mounted again and rode ever deeper into the forest, where there were trees of great age and immense size, that blotted out more and more of the light and the sky.

Gradually Perian began to be aware of something between the trees away to his right. It was whiteness, or some light-source, and he saw it with the corner of his eye for several minutes before curiosity compelled him to turn his head and look straight at it. Finding that he still could not make out what it was, he turned his horse towards it.

The trees here were enormous, of great girth, many hollow and rotting below but still leafy far above. The ground underfoot was knotty with roots and made bad going, so that when he was drawing near the brightness between the trees, Perian was forced to dismount and lead his horse slowly, picking a way. This kept his attention focused on the ground, and he was startled when Mela suddenly stiffened his legs and neck and refused to take another step forward. Perian concentrated for some minutes on trying to coax the beast, forgetting entirely about the thing he was trying to examine. It was only exasperation with Mela's stubbornness that made him finally turn around and look at what the creature was worriedly regarding over his master's shoulder. And then he too was still.

Between and around the trees there swirled a thickness of grey-white mist or vapour, impenetrable to sight as a heavy velvet curtain. Perian stretched out a hand and tried to touch it, but the tendrils pulled away from him and left him grasping.
"What is this wonder?" he said. "Is anyone here? Show yourself!"

There was no reply, only a low, unhappy noise from Mela. Perian turned to him, soothed him, then led him a little way back into the trees before tethering him securely to a branch. That done, he came back to the edge of the mist and stood looking into it. After a few moments he stepped forward; but he had only taken one or two steps when the mist, solidifying as it moved, poured itself towards him and pressed against him, preventing his further advance. Perian halted, and watched in astonishment as the motion and fluidity of a moment before hardened into a flat, gleaming surface like glass or ice; and as the word 'mirror' came into his head, the rippling ceased and he saw himself reflected in a broad and crystal-clear expanse of adamantine hardness. His fingers made no impression on it at all. His face looked back at him, and he saw to his annoyance that he looked awe-struck and overwhelmed. He drew himself up and spoke again.

"Whose is this enchantment? Speak! Reveal yourself and your purpose!"

As if triggered by his voice, the surface of the mirror rippled again, and Perian cried out wordlessly as it showed him a scene he had not beheld with his own eyes for more than twenty years. There was the mountain, and the tree, and his mother's house; and running towards the house a small boy, perhaps seven or eight years old; and Perian saw that it was himself. Tears filled his eyes as he saw in the mirror his mother standing outside the old house, bending to embrace him.

"Mother!" But she could not hear him, and as he struggled with his tears, the picture dissolved and changed.

Now Perian saw the night-dark tangle of a thorn bush on the mountain-side, and himself, aged fourteen, kneeling rapt before it, gazing into its darkness at the flower that shone there. He leaned against a tree, trembling.

The picture, shimmering, changed to show him an icy mountain waste, through which his younger self staggered in an agony of effort, and he saw again where the crystal spring leapt joyous in the wasteland and felt the ecstasy of that triumph. He watched his own return to the place of the flower, where the wizard waited to greet him.

Faster and faster the images rolled by him, darkness in the desert and his wife's face laughing on their wedding day; the return of Prince Athellon with the dragon's head.

Perian cried out, "Stop, oh please, stop, leave me alone!" Obediently the mirror clouded over, dissolving back into a tumbling mist among the trees, before vanishing completely from Perian's sight. Mela let out a glad snort of relief; and Perian, looking up, found himself kneeling at the feet of the wizard.

The arms that raised and embraced him were still strong, the shoulders still broad, and the wizard's hair showed only a slight sprinkling of grey; Perian's was white as snow. The king leaned heavily against his friend and wept. When he grew calmer, the wizard encouraged him to sit down on a fallen tree, and sat beside him.

"Perian, my friend. It is good to see you again."

"I am glad to see you; that is, as far as I can be glad on this hideous day of fears and enchantments. Did you make that magic mirror? Did you mean to torment me? Who could be so cruel to me?"

"Not I. This is an ancient magic of these woods, neutral in itself but woken by whatever mood is in the one who seeks to enter the mist. You have brought forth the images of your own regret, Perian. I came to you, across many hundreds of miles, because I heard you cry out in your despair and sought to help you."
Perian gripped his friend's hand. "Then I thank you for your care of me. But what help is there for old age, loss, failure? For the running-out of time and the fear of death? All come to this moment, I suppose, and cry out against the time they have wasted, the journeys they have not taken, the love they have not given. But it is too late. Too late for me. Is it not?"

The wizard smiled. "It is never too late, they say. What would you do if you were free, Perian?"

"But I am not free. There is the kingdom to think of."

"Perian, you may set yourself free, by the custom of Lavrum. Abdicate, and let Magenta be queen. Athellon will be at her side."

Perian looked at him in silence. Then he said: "I never thought of that."

"Well then; where would you journey, and what would you seek?"

"Perhaps I should climb the mountain again and look upon the flower."

"That was a vision of your youth, Perian. You are too old to climb that mountain now."

Perian reflected. "Then I will go east." he said. "I shall journey to the sea, before it is too late, and look upon its wonders, and find out its secrets. Maybe I shall come to the springs of the morning, where light is born."

The wizard smiled again. "Maybe you will," he said.
Lynn


“For this is the thing that priests do not know, with their One God and One Truth: that there is no such thing as a true tale. Truth has many faces and the truth is like the road to Avalon; it depends on your own will, and your own thoughts, whither the road will take you...

For all the Gods are one God, and all the Goddesses are one Goddess, and there is only one Initiator. And to every man his own truth, and the God within.” The Mists of Avalon – Prologue.

The Mists of Avalon is a retelling of the King Arthur legend mostly from the perspective of the women in the story, specifically Arthur’s sister Morgaine and Gwenhwyfar, his Queen.

Bradley uses the story to weave together two completely different, seemingly contradictory religious traditions – the “old” pagan earth based religion, under which Morgaine is schooled, and the “new” Christian religion with its patriarchal hierarchy of priests, which Gwenhwyfar doggedly champions. The priests, with their absolute and stringent dictates, charge head-long into the old world matriarchal nature based traditions which they feel it is their holy mandate to obliterate.

But how different were they? Both had rituals and words of power. Many Christian celebrations are adaptations from early pagan folk celebrations. Both traditions include followers who believe, in their hearts, that there way is true and valid. To me, the difference is that the Christian religion, as dictated by the church, is exclusive and intolerant, whereas the pagan traditions – including the teachings of Jesus – are more balanced and sympathetic to the intertwined lives of all inhabitants of our earth.

I don’t remember holding the book, where I was when I first read it, or even exactly when. I know it was the early 80’s and believe I must have been around 23. But now, just seeing the book on the shelf or holding it in my hands, it gives me feelings of home and belonging and spiritual warmth which I suspect was my original feeling as well. I do recall that I was totally immersed in the story.

The most memorable thing about reading it was the common sense of many of the passages. I found myself saying – “Yes, that’s right” and “I agree with that” and “I never thought of it that way before, but that makes sense” and “Silly Christians – what makes them think they have all the answers?”
By the descriptions of rituals and the ring of truth in many of the passages, like the ones used in this narrative, the book made me realize that I'd always been pagan and not "Christian" as dictated by the hierarchy of the Christian church. I know I felt this over 25 years ago because I have a Christmas card that I sent to my fiancée in 1983 that has a delicate laser etched angel carrying a candle. In the card I said, "I'd rather consider this a priestess than an angel..." and I know now that I was already settling onto a pagan path, which would not really gel until almost 20 years later.

Just last week, as I worked on this paper, one of the online headlines was “Pope condemns sorcery, urges Angolans to convert.” – “Tens of thousands of Angola's Catholics lined the streets of the capital on Saturday for a blessing from Pope Benedict XVI, who urged the country's faithful to reach out and convert people who believe in witchcraft.""In today's Angola," he said at Mass in the capital, "Catholics should offer the message of Christ to the many who live in the fear of spirits, of evil powers by whom they feel threatened."

This book opened my eyes to realization that this is not the truth as I see it. This book gave me permission to question some of my early indoctrination into Christian “truths.” Some on the pagan fringe are indeed extreme, strange and even violent in the name of their religion, just as the minority few in Christianity, Judaism and Islam. But the vast majority of devout religious minded people have a profound, compassionate and gentle understanding of the holy within them and around them, by whatever name or method of expression. This book allowed me to feel that I was not alone in questioning why one religion would exclude all others. The author gave voice to my own misgivings and articulated how God could be thought of in a more humane and inclusive way.

Bradley was not pagan, but she captured the spirit of living close to the earth and the power of focused will and ritual. Having just re-read this book again (probably my 5th reading) I am struck by how accurately she describes my own spiritual experiences in ritual. “She will call you in a voice you cannot fail to understand. If you have heard that call, there will be nowhere in the world to hide from her voice.”

I had such an experience. On that day, I could no long call myself an agnostic. On that day, I knew in the core of my soul, that there is truly a spiritual essence that can connect to my human soul in my earthly body. In that connection is a partner, a comfort, and power. Not the power of a laser or punch of a fist, but a more subtle power of will and intent that can influence
the physical world and our connection to it. It is not the power to knock down a brick wall but the power to influence outcomes that are not yet set. It is the power to open our minds to possibilities and see opportunities through our blind, narrow minded assumptions.

Morgaine said of the Christians who escaped persecution from their own church dogma, “From these Christians who came to us to escape the bigotry of their own kind I learned something, at last, of the Nazarene, the carpenter’s son who had attained Godhead in his own life and preached a rule of tolerance; and so I came to see that my quarrel was never with the Christ, but with his foolish and narrow priests who mistook their own narrowsness for his.”

I believe this is possibly the way Bradley felt about her own Christian faith. I understand that she wrote a story, but to me, she was sharing her own thoughts through this story much as Jesus told parables. She was a prolific writer and I read many of her books. In all I have read she seems to have an understanding of the interactions of people and society. To me, she was a teacher.

“Even those who till the earth, when they are Christians, come to a way of life which is far from the earth; they say that their God has given them dominion over all growing things and every beast of the field. Whereas we dwellers in the hillside and swamp, forest and far field, we know that it is not we who have the dominion over nature, but she who has dominion over us.”

Amen, and Blessed Be
Crowspeaks

A Tale of Two (and then Several Subsequent) Books

In the early summer of 1968 at age 20, I was living hand–to–mouth in London, trying to make a living playing music and I suppose just generally ‘hanging out’.

At somebody's house I stumbled across a copy of Alan Garner's *Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, the first book in his series concerning Alderley Edge. I already knew what Brisingamen was from slight acquaintance with the tale as told in the ancient Icelandic myth-cycles, the *Prose* and *Poetic Eddas*. Though I'd not read these first hand (and I still haven't), I knew from brief mentions here and there citing them that Brisingamen, ‘The Flaming One’ as it translates, was the necklace of Freyja, the Norse goddess of beauty and nature, and that had been made for her by the Dwarves.

I sat down and pored through the book all afternoon long, as usual, completely cut off from what was going on around me and was doubtless very rude (not that anyone else noticed) in that I just sat there completely steeped in Garner's world, to find that here the necklace had been resolved down to a single jewel, the ‘Tear’, which had been given to a young girl as an heirloom. Evil powers were after it; powers of good, including the Wizard, Cadellin Silverbrow, guardian of the Sleeping King and the 140 knights asleep in his cave, were defending it.

This is exactly the sort of tale I love and I lapped it up seamlessly, probably, if memory serves, in a single session (the book is not very long, 180pp at most).

When I read, I read as though I'm there—not as a participant (unless it's a silent one who plays no direct part in the story as it unfolds), but definitely as a spectator, something that is not an ‘observer’, but not part of the tale either.. A ‘watcher’ might be a good word. I get completely swept up in the action of the tale and couldn't tell you where the story ends and the ‘real’ world begins if you asked me. I have no body except the insubstantial one of the watcher, and absolutely no sense of the passing of ‘clock’ time . . . The time I'm in is the time in the tale; the place I'm in is the place in the tale . . . This probably also explains why I object to people whose tales ‘fall down’ through bad telling. My relationship to the characters is to be completely taken in—I love the ones I'm supposed to love, hate the ones I'm supposed to hate and am wary of the ones I don't know yet (I might add that I read everything like this, even the most recondite Chinese and Tibetan philosophy—there is no credulity gap).
By the time I was done, however, I had already decided based on what I was reading that I was through with London and what it wasn't offering, namely a living as a musician, and that I would take to the roads with a sleeping bag and my guitar and see what kind fortune I might meet with there (be it said, unless people regard me as completely off my rocker, that I had received invitations to play at one or two clubs down on the South Coast—I was not just galloping off into the wild and it was 1968, after all).

Within a few weeks I was off on what was eventually to be quite a trip—probably one of the three most important things that have ever happened to me in my life.

A few days later, in Plymouth if I remember well, where I had wandered more or less haphazardly en route for Cornwall and Land's End, I found the second Garner book, *The Moon of Gomrath*, an unexpected (to me) continuation of the *Weirdstone*. I'd always had a passing interest in the phenomenon of 'magic' (Old and New) and of so-called 'black magic'. This book had far more of the latter with 'real' spells culled from actual grimoires at the British Library, and the foreboding mood and air of mounting evil is quite tangible, though, of course, good wins out in the end.

By the time I'd gobbled down this one my interest in an England outside the history books and Paleolithic sites had been stirred to a fever pitch and the first thing I did was to hitch-hike back to Stonehenge (the only Paleolithic site I knew of at that time apart from the Alderley Edge mentioned in Garner's books, but more of that later) and spend a day or two and a night there.

Through 'chance' meetings over the next couple of weeks—and by chance I mean unexpected and unexpectedly fruitful—I was given a commando dagger and a poncho made of a clan Campbell of Cawdor tartan blanket, so, armed as I was with a six foot ash staff and long, sweeping hair and beard, bedroll and guitar on my back I followed the fingers pointing back slightly north of the way I'd just come and visited Avebury and its environs. Avebury is the largest stone circle in the world, and, along with nearby Silbury Hill, a manmade hill of which no one can quite fathom the intent, and the West Kennet Long Barrow, all of this at the very start of the famed Ridgeway—the oldest known track in Europe—it constitutes quite an enthralling introduction to what prehistory in Western Europe might have been about all within the space of about 10 sq. miles. I then took off on foot up toward Chester and Manchester, in search of Ancient England and of Alderley Edge, which, I understood, was somewhere near the latter.
The walk, which zigzagged a bit and took several weeks to accomplish, took me past some interesting places including Oxford, what's left of Sherwood Forest and Robin Hood's Oak, and, ultimately, Jodrell Bank, the famed astrophysics centre, till, at last, I came to Macclesfield, the far-flung outskirts of Manchester and the place I sought.

Much of what is to be seen at Alderley Edge is the landscape of Garner's books (and—as I discovered later—this area and Manchester proper are the scene of much that he writes about). I spent several days hanging round the Edge (which was far more ‘populated’—not least with rather affluent-looking dwellings—than I'd been given to imagine in the books and therefore a little difficult at times), examining the caves and mines by day or wandering off into the landscape to look at other geographical details in the story and then sitting round in the gloaming, somewhat sheepishly hoping (my Dad was a scientist, after all!) the Wizard would appear. Needless to say, he didn't. Not so much as a passing dwarf or (luckily) svart (the hideous, maggot-white, evil dwarves of the morthbrood).

After a few days, I made my way down toward the pub called The Wizard, but when I arrived there, I was shocked to find that the pub sign held an image of a long-haired, bearded chap with a staff in his hand and a green poncho-like cloak who looked singularly like me! . . . Having already scared the wits out of some old ladies in a cigarette shop down south, I did not relish a repeat performance here and turned around and walked away.

A few weeks later, half way up Dungeon Gill in the Lake District where my wanderings had now brought me, I suddenly realised winter was coming on again, and, bethinking myself of home, quickly made my way back down to London and, from there, flew back to South Africa, shocking my parents as I emerged from the plane, long-haired and bearded, weighing 98lbs and with the ash staff still firmly clutched in my hand.

My interest in the Paleolithic has never abated since, and, as my mother now lives near Avebury, I am fortunate to be able to indulge it to a large extent.

Garner's later books (Elidor, Red Shift, The Owl Service and, latterly, Thursbitch), as well as those of many others (I think here, particularly, of Richard Cowper's Road to Corlay, The Custodians and A Dream of Kinship and of Keith Roberts's extraordinary Pavanne, although—of course—Tolkein, Lewis (particularly That Hideous Strength) and many other retellings of the Mabinogion and Tales of Arthur have a large part to play) have made it such that I never, to this day, visit post-Thatcherite England, but always find myself somewhere in either Albion or
Logres. What I mean by this is that, odd as it may sound, England is to me a sort of ‘Promised Land’ in much the sense of Blake's ‘green and pleasant’ one. I have garnered (if you'll excuse the pun) a fair old knowledge of English folksong and lore over the years, and the concerns of the England, of politics and economics (as theory as opposed to how they actually impact on the people ‘on the ground’—the ‘little man’, as it were), are of no interest to me at all . . . except as theory.

When I go to England, it's to resource myself—‘re–source’ myself—to get in touch again with the silence of its rolling hills and dales. As a long–time Buddhist and practitioner and teacher of various Taoist arts, I find this ‘coming back to square one’ a most profound and refreshing experience . . . a veritable spiritual cleansing.

I almost invariably go walking.

Alan Garner, in one wondrous way, has completely changed my life. I mean, I grew up a little white boy in apartheid South Africa, son of a first generation father and an Anglo–Irish ex–pat mother. . . . If you like, I grew up in the imaginary “home” of the ex–pat as it was recounted to me by my mother and Irish grandmother . . . When I arrived in England, I knew (from reading) the names of every bird and every bush and tree but had no idea which of the fauna and flora that confronted me they actually referred to!

Thanks to Garner, and others like him, I became more deeply involved in what is actually going on in the land on every level and particularly the spiritual, rather than just in people's heads . . . become more aware of the ‘local deities’, as it were.

I've read the Alderley series a few times, once out loud to my wife and again to my youngest kids, but then I like reading aloud and am a fair mimic of accents, so it's fun.

I particularly like tales, like Garner’s, that deal with the fuzzy edge between so–called ‘reality’ and realms that are almost, but not quite the same, or tales of realms that are not ‘consensus reality’ for all they seem the same. As I've said before, I like the tales to be well–enough written as to be ‘seamless’ when you enter into them. Neil Gaiman, for example, has some wonderful ideas but the only seamless tale he's written so far as far as I'm concerned is his Stardust. I do not like to see the underpinnings of a tale: the figures of speech, turns of phrase and clever grammar. And I do not like it when a story falls down. Either the writer speaks from his or her heart which is a realm beyond grammar (or even thought) or they're trying to earn a living or win a prize. I tend to scorn the latter.
I've mentioned before that I read almost anything I read (and, although fairly monomaniac, my reading is also fairly eclectic inasmuch as, within its limits it ranges from Tibetan Buddhist and Taoist philosophy and yogas flirting also with the Indian and Middle eastern on the one hand; Hermetic, alchemical and New and Old Testament apocrypha, via Kabalah and magic on another; Celtic and Norse myth and English folklore on yet another; fantasy and science fiction; novels dealing particularly with strange spaces or mental states; books on 16th and 17th century Europe, mediaeval Europe, prehistory, etc. etc. etc., and lots of poetry from all over the world) in much the same way—I expect to be carried off by it and shown what it wants to tell me, not have it ‘explained’ to me. The writer of a book or story–teller has a tale—even often one of the great tales—to tell. That's their job: to tell that tale as realistically as their craft allows. The reader is the one who breathes life to the words on the page (or in the ear) . . . This is their job. Imagination.

When the two meet in a perfect meld, there is hardly a greater pleasure.
I was 23 when I first read this book. I have read it cover to finish at least a dozen times over the past seven years (I am now 30). I have owned one hardback edition and four or five paperback editions. I do not currently have these copies, as I have given them all away to friends. This book has affected me more profoundly than any other book I have read as an adult.

When reading this book, I identified with the plight of the protagonist, 14 year old middle class Caucasian Stanley Yelnats. Stanley finds himself unjustly accused and convicted of stealing a pair of sneakers that were intended to be auctioned out to raise money for an orphanage. The sneakers happen to be those of his hero, a famous baseball player. Because it is his first offense, Stanley is sent to Camp Green Lake, rather than to prison or jail. Stanley discovers that Camp Greenlake is operated by dangerous, abusive, and outright criminal staff who sadistically torture their teenage charges in pursuit of monetary gain. This has been my experience. Down to the very details, as fantastical and bizarre as they are, this story reflects my experiences both very literally and metaphorically as well. Though, fortunately, I was never charged with or convicted of a crime.

I was in group homes, foster homes, and residential treatment centers between the ages of 13 and 20. I was in two foster homes, four group homes, three residential treatment centers, and I was hospitalized at a state mental hospital for four months when I was 17. These were all before I turned 18. I was a in a group home for young adults exiting the foster care system between 18 and 20. While reading *Holes* I related the people, places, and events of the story to very specific people, places, and events that I encountered during this seven year period. In other words, to ALL my experiences in the “System” in some ways, but more specifically the group home, where I lived between the ages of 19 and 20.

I felt like this story was written JUST for me, mine alone, and it was hard to imagine that others read it and shared it too. I felt like I was not observing or actually a part of the story, but that it WAS my story, completely my story, and I WAS Stanley and WOULD BE Stanley and that nobody else would ever understand, even though they were reading the very same book. I shared a special bond with the author and the characters. I wasn’t "in" the story as a separate
being, I was inside the characters so to speak. But only the campers. Never the counselors. And the fact that they were boys and I am female made NO difference.

Time seemed to exist outside of the story, and seemed to pass very slowly while I was reading, but then afterwards I would realize that the time that had actually passed was either a lot longer or a lot shorter than I had guessed (I would read for ten minutes, but it felt like an hour, or I would read for an hour, but it felt like ten minutes).

When I was reading I was totally oblivious of my body and my surroundings. Even afterwards, at times, just thinking about the story I became oblivious to my immediate physical environment. I experienced whatever the characters were experiencing, but was oblivious to my physical environment and to my own bodily experiences OUTSIDE the story (hunger, temperature, need to use the restroom, etc.). At times, more than actually feeling what the characters were feeling physically I remembered my own parallel experiences of heat, hunger, fatigue, and physically re-felt them. Other times I felt in my body what the characters were feeling, oblivious to my ACTUAL surroundings. The same was true when I felt the emotions of the characters.

While reading I felt the 115 degree heat of the desert (Camp Green Lake does not have a lake, nor is it a camp). Camp Green Lake is a treeless desert in the middle of the Arizona desert miles away from any roads or civilization. I also felt Stanley’s fatigue when he and the others were forced every day to wake at 5 a.m. to dig a hole in the hard ground, a hole that had to be exactly five feet deep and five feet wide. I felt the tediousness of the task, and the boredom, and the mindlessness of it all. I felt his need for sleep, the aching in his bones at the beginning and end of each day.

I felt his thirst, his chronic and constant thirst for water, as drinking water was rationed sadistically by the "camp counselors" (really guards). Stanley was fed the same meals everyday, and the author describes them in detail. I felt the intense relief and satisfaction of his one pint of cold "real" orange juice that was served with breakfast. I felt his disgust toward the same old warm bologna sandwiches on white bread, and stale, too sweet chocolate chip cookie and too salty potato chips for lunch. I felt the way he enjoyed "slurping" his canned peaches served for desert every evening, the way they slipped down his throat and the way he never tired of eating them.
When Stanley is allowed only one three minute shower per day (cold water only, and no privacy) I feel his relief at feeling the cold water on his back rather than the yearning for a warm shower. I feel his embarrassment at being watched while he is showering, and I feel his satisfaction at finally feeling clean and cold after a hot dirty days work.

I also experienced many emotions while reading *Holes*. When Stanley is unjustly convicted, I feel his shock, anger, and fear. When Stanley learns that he is only going to Camp Green Lake and not to jail, I feel his relief. When Stanley discovers that Camp Green Lake is not really a camp, and that it is actually in many ways WORSE than Jail, I feel his absolute horror and his terror and his dread. When Stanley lies to his mother in his letters, telling her that everything is "just wonderful", because the staff reads his letters and he’s afraid that if he tells her the truth he will be brutalized, I empathize with his deception. Also, Stanley doesn't want his mom to worry about him, and this bothers me, because I would have wanted my mom to worry about me.

When Stanley befriends Zero and asks Zero to dig his hole for him in exchange for Stanley teaching Zero how to read, I resent Stanley's selfishness (and my own). While Stanley is appalled that no education is occurring at Camp Green Lake, only multiple abuses and hard physical labor, he justifies his deal with Zero by telling himself that he himself shouldn't have to perform physical labor because teaching Zero how to read is more "noble". I understand his arrogance and the way in which he justifies his abuse of Zero. When Stanley comes to realize that if Zero is strong enough and determined enough to dig both their holes and still make the effort to learn how to read, he feels ashamed of asking Zero to dig his hole everyday and offers to continue teaching Zero for free. I too feel ashamed of the times in my life where I was lazy or arrogant and felt justified taking advantage of someone less fortunate than me.

When Zero finally has had enough of the horrific verbal and physical abuse inflicted upon him and others by staff (the actual incident that triggers his violence is when one of the counselors accuses him of being nothing, of being less than nothing, and of being stupid and illiterate, saying that he will die stupid and illiterate), Zero picks up a shovel and bashes the counselor in the head. I empathize with the violence that Zero commits, with his inability to continue enduring the abuse. When he then runs off into the desert because he is sure that the staff will turn around and kill him, I empathize with his fear and terror at how he will survive on his own, and his dread at what will happen to him were he to return to the camp. I empathize
with how Zero is between a rock and a hard place. If he returns to camp, the counselor will kill him. If he stays to wander the desert, he will either die of thirst or be bitten and killed by poisonous lizards that roam the desert.

When Stanley, later that night, musters up the courage to run away and search for Zero, I become determined to be as brave as him in my own life, and to emulate his courage in parallel situations. When Stanley finds Zero alive but barely (he is on the brink of death by dehydration) I am both relieved and afraid for them, and question if courage in my own life might be foolish. Stanley and Zero find some jars of peaches and drink them in order to survive. But Zero, of course, gets sick from food poisoning and Stanley does not. This makes me think of the many times where fate is just unfair, where I have been lucky and fortunate where others have not in identical situations. When Stanley has to carry Zero up a mountain where he sees a "mirage" or a waterfall, I wish I had been as courageous as he was. When Stanley arrives at the top of the mountain to discover that the mirage is not really a mirage, but actually a small stream of cool clear water, I hope that Zero is still alive (he is unconscious and on the brink of death) and will be revived by this water. I hope that I can be as strong as Stanley, as brave for my friends as he is for his. I wish I had been so brave for my friends when I was a teenager. When Zero comes to consciousness, I feel hopeful about the power of friendship and courage.

When the boys eat nothing but wild onions and spring water for a full week, trying to figure out what to do next, sitting on the mountain on top of the world, I identify with their both their peace and their turmoil. They finally decide that they have no choice but to return to camp or starve to death and I empathize with their despair and despondence. However, they have a glimmer of hope as Stanley remembers a bit of treasure that he found while digging one of his holes. He remembers where the hole was, and hopes to return and dig further to find more treasure. He and Stanley hope to sneak back into camp in the middle of the night and dig up the treasure before the staff catches them. Stanley never told the staff about the bit of gold he found because he knew that the staff would steal it for themselves. Rather, he reburied it and memorized the site. When Stanley refrained from telling staff where he had found the treasure, I didn't initially understand. Later I realized the importance of this metaphorically in the story, and I wished that I had been better able to guard my experiences in my past. I strove to keep those things (beliefs, feelings, experiences) that I treasured secret from those who would steal them or degrade them in my present and in my future. When Stanley and Zero return to camp in the
middle of the night and dig up what appears to be priceless gold and other valuables, I feel their disbelief at their good fortune. When they finish digging up the treasure, only to realize that they are surrounded by a nest of poisonous lizards, I feel their terror and hopelessness. I relate to their conclusion that the treasure was too good to be true, and feel grief at their resignation that they are about to be bitten and killed. Stanley’s life flashes before him as he says his goodbyes in his heart to his family and his goodbye to Zero. I cry every time I read this.

When the staff arrives moments later in their pajamas with rifles in their grip, they realize that the boys are about to be killed and argue with each other about what to do with the dead bodies. One of the staff insists that they should shoot the boys and bury them in the hole, but another staff insists that they should let the lizards kill the boys and bury them in the morning after breakfast. I feel the outrage at their actions, and at the actions of staff in my own past who have acted sociopathically in the same vein. A third staff says that they should shoot the black boy because he has no family and his social worker is a drunk who will never miss him, but they should allow the white boy to live because his family will sue if he dies. They try to rescue Stanley but are afraid of being bitten and killed themselves, so they figure they will have to just hire really good lawyers to defend themselves. While the staff argues, the boys hear them, and wonder why the lizards haven't bitten them yet. Finally, after several minutes, the staff starts to wonder the same thing. Finally, they figure the lizards are waiting for the boys to move (both are standing so still as to be barely breathing) and they return to camp to go back to sleep confident that the boys will be dead by morning. The boys stay paralyzed for several minutes after the counselors leave, but then finally lay down to die. When they lie down and realize that the lizards aren't biting them, they don't understand why they aren't dead yet. Six hours pass, and the boys begin to realize that the lizards aren't going to bite. They share with each other the stories of their lives, and how they arrived at Camp Green Lake. Turns out Zero stole the shoes because he needed a pair of shoes and didn't know they were being auctioned for charity. Zero didn't get caught, obviously, but he did get sent to Camp Green Lake because he had nowhere else to go and the children’s shelter or "orphanage" for which the shoes were being auctioned to raise money was "at capacity". Anyway, I deeply lived this irony in my own life as I read this book.

When the staff arrived the next morning and the kids were still sitting in the hole and obviously not dead, they planned to get their rifles and shoot them anyway. However, at this point Stanley’s mom and an attorney drive onto the scene because Stanley’s mom was worried
about Stanley’s letters in which Stanley was always happy and having a great time. SHE knew something must be terribly wrong because the Stanley she knew was never ALWAYS happy. Just before the counselors shoot the kids the attorney gets her cell phone and calls for the police, the sheriff, and the ambulance. The staff sees the treasure on which the kids are sitting, and claim that the kids stole it. Turns out the treasure belonged to Stanley’s great great grandfather, also named Stanley Yelnats, and the chest in which it is contained says Stanley Yelnats on it. His great great grandfather was robbed on a boat when there was actually a lake at camp green lake. The treasure sunk in the mud beneath the lake, and the counselors had been having the kids dig for it all along. They knew it was there somewhere, as the great great granddaughter of the woman who robbed Stanley’s great great grandfather was the owner of the camp. The camp gets busted, all the counselors go to prison, and Stanley and Zero walk away with a million dollars worth of treasure. Turns out all the onions they ate protected them from the lizards. Poisonous lizards don't like onions.

I felt every emotion intensely, related every metaphor to events in my own life and to very specific people places and events from my past. I also tried to apply the lessons in my present and planned to apply them in my future.

I was 26 when my attorney settled a lawsuit on my behalf against an organization that operated a terribly abusive group home, where I lived between the ages of 19 and 20. I have lived on my own, happily and successfully, ever since. I and three other residents of this group home were awarded several million dollars to be divided among us. After taxes and attorney fees, I walked away with a substantial amount of cash.

_Holes_ ends when an attorney investigates Camp Greenlake, discovers the crimes being committed, and shuts it down—freeing the children permanently. Stanley walked away from Camp Greenlake with a cool million dollars. He and his friend Zero shared the money, and the actions of both throughout the story were pivotal in their gaining their fortune and shutting the place down. Like Stanley, I played a pivotal role in the lawsuit that exposed the crimes committed by the organization that operated the group home where I and others were severely abused. Like Stanley, I walked away from this group home, both literally and figuratively, a free woman with a small fortune.

The weirdest, coolest aspect of _Holes_ was that it was very funny in places, and the irony throughout it was multi-leveled and complex. At Camp Greenlake, Stanley, although he is
innocent of the crime for which he has been convicted, discovers that he is guilty of being a selfish, lazy person.

Like Stanley, I was one of the few kids in the "System" to recognize that the treatment I and others received was undeserved, and not intended to help us, no matter what lies we were told, about how the "System" was intended for our "benefit." I always knew I was being screwed, and like Stanley, I felt very powerless to do anything about it.

At Camp Greenlake, Stanley discovers that his true crimes—his character flaws—are far more dangerous to society than stealing a pair of shoes. His selfishness and lack of discipline almost lead to the death of his friend Zero, whom Stanley ultimately rescues from staff who intend to shoot him. Stanley, during his nine month ordeal, becomes less selfish, more giving, and more disciplined in his character. I too, although I did not deserve the abuse I experienced, became less selfish, and more disciplined as I realized that these character flaws were my most serious crimes. When my lack of courage at the group home nearly got my friend killed by the sex offender who managed our house—I knew I had to be braver and go to the police and to the media to seek help. I also felt that it was my responsibility to get her out of danger, because it was my actions that almost got her killed.

Reading *Holes* provided me with a lot of hope for my future, but it also allowed me to put my past into a context that made it much more meaningful.

The fact that this book is a fantasy makes it much more palatable, so to speak. It would not have been as easy to "absorb" had it been written literally, rather than in so many metaphors.

I am very grateful to the writer, as I feel like HE knows ME, intimately, that he understands my struggles and wants me to succeed. I feel grateful that this story has been told so well, and to so many readers, because it lessens my own loneliness and isolation. Even though it was not written for me or in any way directed toward me, I truly feel that it is "My" story, and that this has been shared with so many readers, children especially, feels very healing.
Winnie-the-Pooh and The House at Pooh Corner

A.A. Milne’s Winnie-the-Pooh and The House at Pooh Corner are children’s fantasy books. They describe the adventures of a teddy bear and his friends. The teddy bear is known variously as Winnie-the-Pooh, Pooh Bear, and Mr. Edward Bear. He is sometimes described as a Bear of Very Little Brain, and a Silly Old Bear.

Pooh lives with his friends in the Hundred Acre Wood. Piglet is his closest friend, Rabbit is bossy and self important, Eeyore is a gloomy donkey, and Owl considers himself wise. Kanga and baby Roo are kangaroos, and Tigger the tiger provides extra energy. Christopher Robin is Pooh’s human, and plays only a marginal role in most of Pooh’s stories.

The plot consists of a series of very small adventures, which celebrate the characters’ personalities and imaginations. The stories are extremely simple. There is usually a minor, and sometimes imaginary, problem to overcome. The resolution is often accidental, and always involves much discussion along with a mishap or two. The problems and their solutions are reflections of the characters. The most memorable parts of the stories are the depictions of the characters’ thoughts and views of the world, because of their simplicity and charm.

One of my favorite stories is Piglet Meets a Heffalump. After a conversation with Christopher Robin and Piglet about heffalumps, followed by much small talk with Piglet, Pooh has a rare fit of ambition and decides to catch a heffalump. He informs Piglet, who wishes he had thought up this grand idea. Pooh has it all figured out. They will dig a hole for a heffalump to fall into while it is walking along, singing a little song and looking at the sky, and not noticing the hole until it is halfway to the bottom. The location of the hole is an important decision. Piglet suggests they dig the hole about a foot in front of wherever the heffalump happens to be at the time. Pooh vetoes the idea, saying the heffalump would get suspicious. No wonder it’s so hard to catch heffalumps! Pooh decides that a jar of honey will lure a heffalump into the hole, and starts daydreaming about honey. Piglet disagrees, and argues for haycorns as bait, but relents when he realizes that haycorns are his department, while Pooh would be responsible for supplying honey. Pooh fetches a jar of honey from home, but becomes concerned about the honey’s authenticity, so he eats most of the honey to make sure it’s not cheese in disguise. They put the nearly empty honey jar at the bottom of the hole, and go home after agreeing to meet the next day to count the
heffalumps they’ve caught. Pooh is hungry because he is out of honey, so has trouble sleeping. He tries counting heffalumps, but that doesn’t work. Every heffalump he counts goes to Pooh’s honey jar and eats the honey. Finally Pooh can stand it no longer. He jumps out of bed, goes to the hole, and eats the remaining honey. When Piglet wakes up, he is filled with worries about heffalumps. Are they fierce? Do they come when you whistle? He heads off with trepidation for his appointment with Pooh at the hole. Meanwhile Pooh’s head is stuck in the honey jar. Piglet sees Pooh thrashing about, and thinks he’s a horrible heffalump. He gets Christopher Robin, who comes back to the hole with Piglet. They see Pooh break the honey jar open on a tree root, and Piglet is so embarrassed, he runs home and goes to bed with a headache.

Another favorite is *Eeyore Has a Birthday, and Gets Two Presents*. The story starts with Pooh visiting Eeyore, who is down in the dumps because his birthday is not being celebrated. Pooh hurries home to get a present for Eeyore. He finds Piglet jumping up and down trying to reach the knocker of Pooh’s door. Pooh helps by knocking on his own door. No one comes to the door, so Pooh eventually knocks again, and finally Piglet points out that it’s Pooh’s house. They go in, and Pooh fetches a small jar of honey to give Eeyore. Piglet goes home to get a balloon for a gift. Unfortunately Piglet has an accident with the balloon, and it pops. Meanwhile Pooh eats all the honey on the way to Eeyore’s place. He enlists Owl, who knows about spelling, to write Happy Birthday, or an approximation thereof, on the jar. Eeyore is excited when Pooh and Piglet wish him happy birthday, but is initially very disappointed by the popped balloon and empty honey jar. However he suddenly realizes that he can put the balloon in the jar, and take it out again, so all is well with the world.

Another story starts with Pooh counting his honey jars and getting very confused. Are there fourteen or fifteen? Very worrying. Rabbit shows up and announces that he is organizing a search for Small, one of Rabbit’s numerous friends-and-relations. Pooh says goodbye to his pots of honey, hoping there are fifteen. Pooh has no idea what Small looks like, so he decides to go ask Piglet for a description. He makes a mental list of things to do in his search, and decides that it all sounds like a lot of bother. He suddenly finds himself falling into a hole. The hole is the old, forgotten heffalump trap. He lands on top of Piglet, who had fallen in the hole earlier. They conclude that the heffalump has turned the tables and trapped them. What will happen when the heffalump comes? Piglet is very concerned, but Pooh explains a plan for outwitting the heffalump. Piglet concludes that Pooh has saved them. While they daydream about this and that,
the search for Small goes on all over the forest. Christopher Robin eventually shows up at the hole and says “Ho-ho”, which is exactly what Pooh and Piglet expect a heffalump to say. Piglet jumps with anxiety, thinking Christopher Robin is the heffalump. Pooh recognizes Christopher Robin, so all is well again. Piglet discovers Small (a bug) crawling up Pooh’s back, so their mission has been accomplished. A couple days later, Rabbit discovers Eeyore in the forest, still searching for Small. Eeyore’s world view is reinforced when he learns Small had been found two days earlier.

I discovered these masterpieces on a friend’s bookshelf over thirty years ago, at the age of twenty four. They were new to me, though I was dimly aware of the existence of the Disney interpretations. I opened them out of simple curiosity, wondering why my friend had children’s books. Within minutes, I was completely immersed in Pooh’s enchanting world. The profoundly happy and innocent world view was infectious. I savored the stories for about a week, and also read the accompanying books of poetry. I read fragments of the books again over the next year. This past year I read the complete story collection twice, after barely glancing at the books during the intervening years.

I was surprised by the extent of my affection for the characters in the stories. The childlike innocence and wonderful depictions of the characters affected me deeply. They represented life as it should be—a joyful experience. I found myself identifying with all of them. As I read, my body relaxed and I felt as though a glow went through my body. A gentle breeze seemed to blow. The world was a better and happier place. The stories brought me a new sense of peace and happiness. I viewed other people with greater affection and understanding, much like I viewed the characters in the books. These changes have persisted to some extent, with ups and downs, to the present day. In other words, my life perspective was improved by the experience. However I no longer seem able to view my own life with as much happiness and optimism, and the effect of the stories is lessened. It’s harder now to remind myself of Pooh’s world when I’m feeling down.

I had experienced significant career stress in the year or two prior to my first reading of the books, as I was attempting to do something extremely difficult and my path was hidden. Pooh played a definite role in popping the stress balloon, as my perspective became a bit more like the books. The impact of the stories faded over time, but they are still a part of me. At least
some of the time, I view life a bit like the stories. I am a different person than I was before immersing myself in the Hundred Acre Wood.

Time did not seem to pass while I was reading. I felt like I was part of the stories. They were very real to me. Sometimes I was in the story as a separate being, but sometimes I felt like one of the characters. In both cases I felt like I was living in their world. I was in the Hundred Acre Wood, participating in the stories and viewing life mostly through the eyes of Pooh, but sometimes through the eyes of other characters. I identified with them all except for Christopher Robin, who was pretty much irrelevant to my experiences while reading the stories. These characteristics are commonly present when I read other works of fantasy. I have found it increasingly difficult to read fiction that is not in the fantasy or science fiction genres. Fantasy and science fiction usually seem more captivating than other fiction. The atmosphere and themes tend to resonate more with me, as they take me out of this world and into one that seems special. They are frequently more meaningful to me. It is difficult to imagine a non-fantasy book affecting me in the same way.

As a child, I read books by flashlight under the bed covers at night. Life felt magical. Pooh restored some of that for me. Fantasies take place in their own world, and Pooh's is one of the nicest.
Solaris

Reading *The Lord of the Rings*

I first read it in Polish; I think it was early in the 1990s. I must have been about twelve; my big Tolkien-reading time was between twelve and fifteen. The book was already very popular then, but still very scarce, and people had to lend and borrow it. We borrowed from my sister’s schoolmate. When my sister read it a few years earlier, I was amazed by the book’s cover art, and I remember being disappointed that I could not read yet. So when I finally got the book for myself, it was quite a thrill, because I had been waiting for it. I had also read *The Hobbit* before, and my sister told me that *The Lord of the Rings* is similar, but much more serious, which was obviously very encouraging for me. Also during this time I watched the BBC Robin Hood on TV. It was one of the first cult series in Poland and the music by Clannad made a great impression too.

I distinctly remember the evening when I began to read the book. I curled myself on the floor, surrounded by pillows, and read by dimmed light of a small lamp. Somehow this seemed appropriate, because it reminded me of camping by the fire, and of dimly lit rooms in Tolkien’s fantastic world. This was great fun, and it helped me to imagine the scenes in the first chapters, before the adventure actually begins. While reading I felt disconnected, i.e. I did not pay attention to the rest of my room and to the physical discomfort of lying on the floor so long etc. I was on the adventure but not as any of the characters; I felt like a human, not a hobbit.

However, my imagination was more influenced by the cover art than by lying curled up on the floor. It is difficult to describe: a drawing, in different shades of grey, of a strange figure that is not similar to human beings, but not monstrous either. In the background there is a road and a desolate hilly landscape. This cover taught me, as it were, to imagine two worlds in *The Lord of the Rings*. In the first chapters it was the homelike world of the Shire, which was an idealized rural England I knew from movies. Very soon, however, it turns out that beyond the Shire there are great and mysterious lands, incredible events, threats, battles, etc. This is the impression I got when I read the conversations between Gandalf and the hobbits; there are hints about great things that the hobbits do not even realize. When I read, I was obviously more interested in the outside world beyond Shire. I think this is perhaps the impression most readers get.
The first part of the adventure is when they travel from the Shire to Rivendell. Although there are several dangerous encounters with the black riders (the hobbits are afraid of even talking about them), I still felt that they (the hobbits) are in a safe place, and the riders are intruders from the outside. The hobbits are walking along a road; there are houses and villages, bridges, etc. What I felt was impatience about following that road; I wanted the characters to get off the road, and walk into the mysterious lands. The road was too predictable. I did not think about safety and adventure, but was very curious about the rest of the map. What I often missed in Tolkien was background which would not be directly related to the adventure, e.g., villages or inns.

I also remember, and this is the most important thing about Tolkien for me, that most adventures happened in the darkness, either at night, or in a dark forest, or underground. I do not know if it is just my impression, but the land, especially in the chapters after Rivendell, always seemed deserted and dark. Even when the characters walked in daytime, I saw them under a grey, overcast sky. I also remember imagining them surrounded by a very close horizon, e.g., by hills or trees. At night, of course, they were surrounded by darkness. On many occasions, the world around the characters was simply a threat, e.g., when they are attacked by wolves near Moria (book two, chapter three). Most of the time, however, I felt that the surrounding mysterious world is amazing and somehow inviting, or calling. If they had made but a few steps into the darkness, or walked for several minutes into it, they would have seen a figure like that from the cover, or an object, or a scene, which would not be threatening, and perhaps not very beautiful, but somehow breath-taking and amazing. Sometimes it happens in the novel, for instance when they find the illuminated doors of Moria (surrounded by desolate hills), or when they meet elves on the road (not with the big names but with the rank and file, those who do not even know about Frodo’s mission and who are usually not very friendly), or when Galadriel talks to Frodo by the Mirror of Galadriel. I also felt this (surrounding mystery) when I looked at the map or when I simply imagined the landscape.

As it shows, I was most amazed by landscape and walking, and less by quest and adventure. It was very easy for me to reenact the traveling scenes from *The Lord of the Rings*, because I lived in a rather small town, in high-rise building (block of flats), on the top (eleventh) floor. (In Poland, even very small towns can have residential projects with tall buildings. My town was exceptional, though, because it was built almost from the scratch in the 1970s, as a sort
of booming industrial city around a really small and old town.) The town was actually not that small in terms of population, but it was geographically narrow and long, sprawling along a big river (by European standards) but not far from it, and only on one side. (This is no longer true nowadays.) What that meant was amazing views: I could see the city surrounded by rural landscape and by forests, and at night I could see city lights surrounded by darkness, with smaller lights of villages scattered on the horizon. It was also very easy to get away from the city; within thirty minutes (of walk) I could be on a riverside meadow, in the fields, or in a small forest. This is obviously a great advantage for everyone in the city, but *The Lord of the Rings* inspired me to take walks at night, and that was the most important fantasy-reading experience for me. These walks occurred during the time I was reading the book.

I would often read *The Lord of the Rings* by the window, thinking that if I walked long enough into the darkness, I would actually experience the same passage from an inside world (the Shire in the initial chapters) to the outside world (beyond Bree and definitely beyond Rivendell) there would be a road, last houses, last bridge, and then the road would disappear, and there would be just empty fields, meadows, and forests. This sounds like nothing much, but I expected to see strange things and encounter mysterious persons in the outside world I expected something Tolkien-esque, but did not expect anything or anyone in particular. It did not have to be a character from the book; it could be a character who could appear in the book. So I actually started to take evening walks; I suppose on many occasions there was a pretence, e.g., it was either because I had to walk the dog or I was coming back late from an afternoon walk in the countryside. Obviously, I could not read and walk, but at that time I constantly thought about scenes from the book. I remember three very important moments: a walk on a meadow island between two arms of the river, an evening walk on the riverbank in the town, and nighttime walk through fields to the south of the city In this narrative I always end up writing about landscapes and places, instead of writing about reading, but I hope it is all right, because the book really contributed to the experiences I am describing. I cannot tell if I read Tolkien immediately before or after a walk, but it must have been so.

The first place, the island, is a beautiful meadowland with several groves and rows of trees. A small part of it is artificially elevated land with bridges, the road and railway line, and a small district of the town. The rest of the island is uninhabited and unfarmed, because it is regularly flooded, which makes it a sort of wild nature reserve with deer and small mammals.
The island is surrounded by ordinary farmland and by the outskirts of the town. It begins just across the river from the town, and it is quite large; it takes about six hours to walk from one end of it to another. It is generally accessible, and many people go angling there, or do cross-country running, or drink beer next to their cars, etc. In more distant parts, however, the island is almost always empty and I remember that I felt uneasy (or even scared) of walking in the empty parts. Then it occurred to me that this fear is exactly what the characters must have felt in *The Lord of the Rings*, and I started to walk across the island pretending it is Tolkien’s Middle Earth. I did not actually fantasize during the walks, but I had an intense feeling that I was in a different world. I also remember that I was gradually getting rid of the anxiety and uneasiness about being alone there. Obviously, I would walk there with friends, or in organized school groups, but walking alone was an entirely different experience. Initially, the feelings were very intense: every sound (made by animals) made me scared, a short rain could bring a feeling of elation and immense joy, but most importantly, it was all somehow related to *The Lord of the Rings*. The feelings mirrored the feelings I had when I was reading. Sometimes I felt I was in the Middle Earth, as if I had gone through a passage between two worlds. There was not a feeling or moment or place of passage, but sometimes the landscape had nothing artificial in it, not even on the horizon, so I could forget which world I was in. I would walk or sit there, feeling amazed and slightly frightened, but also somehow invited to stay, or to see what was there behind a hedge, in a grove, or behind a row of trees. There was also a feeling of presence, a palpable personal presence, which I knew could be a religious feeling, but I thought of it in terms of Tolkien’s fantastic events and creatures (like those that surrounded the ordinary world of the Shire). This feeling was not fear, but not happiness either. It was a bit disturbing, and there was a slight anxiety or perhaps (better) alertness. I was more sensitive to sounds and sights (especially movements of plants and animals). I mean I could not ignore them. Everything made me stop, or start, or crouch etc. This was actually fun. The overall feeling was that someone was watching me (one of more watchers). It was an inexpressible feeling, and I felt that fantasy or religion could only be working approximations for sharing it with others. In the book, there are several moments which are very similar, e.g., when I read about a fox who is observing hobbits in chapter three (“Three is Company”), I thought it was a very important and mysterious encounter. (Even though it has nothing to do with the rest of the story.) It shows that there is much more going on in the Middle Earth than the war of the ring. This makes Tolkien’s world mysterious
and fascinating. Most of the walks in the island were in daytime, but I also experimented with early morning, dusk, and night. They all blur into a single and happy event in my memory.

The other important event was in the town; I think I was walking the dog when it happened. Where I lived then, buildings are surrounded by three parks, two with trees and one with big lawns and flower beds. There is also a small castle in the park with lawns, which was rebuilt so many times that it looks less like a castle, and more like a rich country house with a dungeon, and an open-air stage attached. (It is a museum and a culture centre.) At night, the castle is illuminated with dim orange light. On that particular evening, there was no event in the castle, and the parks were quiet and empty. I was standing next to the castle’s entrance gate, made of iron bars, and I was looking at the courtyard inside. In front of me, in the dark, there were those great lawns, and I could see movement in the darkness. I knew those shadows were simply people strolling with their dogs, but at the same time I felt as if I was in Rivendell (the castle) surrounded by the vast and open land (the lawns). I could almost distinctly hear the elves singing in the courtyard, which was wonderful and beautiful, but I was also drawn into the dark field in front of me. The darkness was warm, inviting, inhabited its unknown inhabitants, and walking through it would be like the beginning of Book Two of *The Lord of the Rings* (“The Ring Goes South”). I felt like I was reenacting the scene of departure from Rivendell, exactly like I imagined it when I read: leaving an illuminated place, and stepping into an open expanse of darkness. I expected to see unimaginable creatures, places and objects, unknown persons, strange figures, dangerous and safe, funny and tragic, repulsive and lovable, there in that darkness. It was a wonderful feeling of anticipation, and then, when I walked, of opening up and of being drawn into a new world. There was also a feeling of puzzlement, or confusion, about that new world; I did not know what to think, and I was not even very happy. I could not feel afraid or think about something else for several minutes, but then again I was not thinking about anything, I was just… (I was just there). All I could do was follow that call from the darkness, and contemplate whatever I would see there.

This was exactly the feeling which was evoked by reading the book and imagining scenes in the manner suggested by the strange cover art of the Polish edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, and this was how I imagined several events when I read about them, for instance the nighttime skirmish against wolves and Black Riders on the Weathertop. The hobbits are fighting with the Strider, who is very mysterious and not very friendly, and they do not even know why he is
helping them. Gandalf is away in the darkness, and nobody knows why. The skirmish, as I imagined it, was not very terrible or violent. I can still remember imagining Legolas shooting into the darkness; he did it very slowly and quietly, and the burning arrows made a big arch and then disappeared, almost like a slow dance. I remember the Strider and Gandalf were best in these initial chapters. When the Strider becomes the heroic Aragorn, and Gandalf becomes an all-powerful leader, they are not so mysterious anymore. What mattered to me when I read was mystery and anticipation, not threat or adventure.

The third event is also about walking; a long walk to the south of the town where I lived then. It was getting dark, the sky was overcast, and the clouds were heavy, different shades of grey, rolling very low and fast above an empty meadow. I lay down and looked at them, and suddenly I felt I was in the Middle Earth, in one of those nondescript plains to the south of Shire. Obviously, I knew where I really was, but at the same time I felt, with all certainty, that the place (the meadow) is out of this world, and that it was somehow transferred to the world of the book. The ground rose (rises) gently in almost all directions from the meadow, so that the horizon hides the city and villages. At that moment, if suddenly a group of Tolkien characters emerged from the other side of the high ground, I would not be surprised. I also felt that the place had always looked in the same way, and that the moment was somehow timeless. In practical terms, I thought that someone could look at the same view in the Middle Ages, but what I felt was that I was not here and now, but was in the book. There was something more, however, because I also had a wonderful sense of looking at my life from a very distant perspective: I could see myself living for so many years, doing so many things, then approaching death, and then not being there, but all my life was somehow brought together to the single place, to that meadow below the heavy, rolling clouds. I felt like I was just another person living here, visiting that place, and the place would never change. It was a very happy feeling. The emotion stopped suddenly, when I knew again where I was and where I was going.

One of those events is a composite memory of several walks, the other two were single events, but I remember them as three very important moments in my life. I think the first one made me less afraid or anxious in general, and it taught me how to concentrate on anything that happens around me, and how to enjoy it.

I do not really know what to think about the third walk. It was not depressing, but it was not a positive experience either. I think the third walk, when I think about it now, gave me an
acceptance of the fact (well, for me) that so many decisions and events have irreversible consequences. (This is a feeling everyone has sometimes, but the point is, I tend not to worry about it so much, when I think back about the third walk. The experience of timelessness and of being in another world makes it easier to accept uncertainty and irreversibility. I think detachment could be the right word to describe it. I have seen my life from that place, and that perspective seems to save me a lot of anxiety.) This, obviously, also applies to death, and to love (i.e. to feeling of guilt and grief about crises in relations with family and friends, even when I do irreversible harm). It may be a trivializing summary, but there is a place (and it is indeed an empty swath of Tolkien's Middle Earth), where nothing, absolutely nothing, matters.

The first and the third walks were not as important as the second walk. The second walk, the one in the dark, filled me with emotions (anticipation, puzzlement, quiet contemplative amazement) which I felt when I read, and which I could not really understand without referring to *The Lord of the Rings*. I was very happy that it could happen in real life, too. When I have a good day, I try to think of my entire life in these terms, that is I imagine it as a walk through a vast, dark space inhabited by amazing and incomprehensible things.

The emotions and situations I have described are a source of great pleasure. I tend to look for them, and usually do not find them in social and personal life (i.e. I do not find them among other people or at work). Most of the time when I am among people I tend to have no opinions, avoid conflicts and get things done as quickly and efficiently as possible, so I can go. This does not mean I am gloomy and taciturn (which makes people uncomfortable or angry), but I am very unassertive and I tend not to treat many things seriously (especially regulations and procedures or customs and manners of all sorts). I suppose it makes me a bit cold and inaccessible as a person, but I hope it also makes me tolerant and unassuming.

In mainstream literature I experienced something similar when I read Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, e.g., when she sleeps rough and encounters an elk, or in the final scene at the Stonehenge. When I read, I feel that Tolkien and Hardy evoke similar feelings, but somehow Hardy makes his darkness terrible and oppressing. So a book does not have to be fantasy for me to have similar experiences, but it could not be just any type of fiction. Ursula Le Guin’s *The Beginning Place* could be on the list, and it has a fantastic element in the setting, but then again, Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* is not fantasy, and it does similar things to me. It is about a setting, usually a natural setting, which is ordinary, but seems strange.
Cover art for a Polish translation of J. R. R. Tolkien’s, *The Lord of the Rings*
Cover art of the Polish translation of J. R. R. Tolkien’s, *The Two Towers* by Stasys Eldrigevicius
Cover art of the Polish translation of J. R. R. Tolkien’s, *The Return of the King* by Stasys Eldrigevicius
Jane

Narrative Description of Experience of Absorbed Fantasy Reading

The most powerful experience I have had of absorbed reading of a fantasy book was my first encounter with *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien.

This long novel recounts the quest of Frodo Baggins the Hobbit (a being about half the size of a human, but with mostly human qualities) to sneak into the realm of the evil Lord Sauron and climb the volcano of Mount Doom in a near-hopeless attempt to destroy the evil One Ring and thus render Sauron powerless. Frodo is helped along the way by a Fellowship consisting of the Wizard Gandalf, the mysterious Ranger Aragorn, Boromir the human warrior, the Elf Legolas, the Dwarf Gimli, and three other hobbits: Sam, Merry, and Pippin. After the Fellowship is broken apart after an attack by a band of evil Orcs, Frodo and Sam go alone into Mordor with only the strange creature Gollum as a guide, while the rest of their companies are caught up in other battles and events. All their different roads converge eventually in a climactic battle before the gates of Mordor as Frodo and Sam struggle up the last slopes of Mount Doom.

I was handed a battered paperback copy of the first volume of *The Lord of the Rings* when I was 15 years old, in the library of an old camp lodge on the beach. The camp director was also my English teacher from junior high school. As he gave me the book, he said “here, I think you’ll enjoy this.” This was an understatement. For the next two days, I hardly slept or took a break to eat or go to the bathroom. I spent most of that time in an armchair in the library, reading the three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings* as fast as I could. I was entirely caught up in the world of Middle-earth; I walked with Frodo, smelled the sweet scents of Ithilien and the choking fumes of Mordor, heard the rumbling of the volcano Mount Doom and the battle cries of the armies, and sobbed with Merry, Pippin, and Sam as the grey ship bore Frodo away from them.

It is hard to answer the question “what parts of the story were the most memorable?” For me, the entire book was a marvel. I was caught up in the story from beginning to end. But it was the Fellowship itself, a motley crew drawn from five different species of being, that I loved the most. I grieved when the Fellowship was broken and the individuals in it had to go their own ways. For a little while they were a band of brothers who formed a bond that would survive separation and death.
I do not remember what my bodily sensations were, because I was oblivious to my body and my surroundings while reading this book. I had no sense of time passing at all. I do remember my emotions, because they were powerful. I loved the characters, I admired their loyalty and endurance and courage, I envied their friendship, and I ached for them when they suffered pain and loss. I loved all of them as one loves a dear friend.

More than that, I longed to be one of them, to live in Middle-earth and to know such people. I was a lonely adolescent who hated the petty, spiteful mindset that seemed to be the norm in junior high. I wanted grandeur; I wanted nobility; I wanted people who were good through and through no matter what the circumstances. I found that in this story.

I also loved the writing itself, although on the first reading I was so engrossed in finding out what happened next that I didn’t really focus on it. Later on I would re-read the book simply to delight in Tolkien’s grasp of language. He brought Middle-earth completely to life for me. At every moment I could see what the characters saw around them, felt what the weather was, knew the time of day and year, and smelled what the air smelled like. I felt the characters’ weariness, shivered when they were cold, tensed up when danger was near, and relaxed every time they found a safe haven to rest in for a bit. Tolkien’s ability to evoke mood and place allowed me to feel as if I was there, walking along with Frodo every step of the way.

I was 15 when I read this book for the first time—42 years ago next month.

I cannot say that I’ve ever had an experience like Frodo’s of battling a great evil. I related more to the character Merry, who always made sure that everyone had what they needed, that all the supplies were ready, and who also took time to read the maps and orient himself. I am myself a very organized person who thinks of all the little things, and I love maps. And especially at the time I felt like no one appreciated this very much, as no one besides his closest friends ever seems to really appreciate Merry, even when he surprises everyone and turns into a hero. But Frodo’s endurance was inspiring to me. My family was going through a difficult time when I read the book, and there was little support for me. It helped me to think that I just had to soldier on for a while more, like Frodo kept on even when everything seemed hopeless. I think most adolescents don’t have the sense that it is possible to get through a hard time. You don’t know that until you’ve done it. But for me, having Frodo as an example of someone who did make it through was the next best thing. I did make it through my hard patch, in part because Frodo went before me.
And having once made it through a hard time, I never despaired when hard times came again, but just put my head down and walked through it. It affected my spiritual outlook, certainly, because now only those spiritual ideas, such as Buddhism, that allow life to contain both good and bad have any power to speak to me. It also affected my relationships in that I now held my friendships up to the standard of the Fellowship. I tried to be as honest and as loyal as they were, and I expected the same of my friends.

After that first reading I immediately re-read the book twice over because I could not bear to leave Middle-earth, and because I’d read it so hastily the first time, in my anxiety to find out what happened, that I missed a lot of stuff. I re-read the book several times a year for a few years there, but finally settled down to reading it, as a treat, every year around Christmas. I have now read it more than 50 times—it may be approaching 60 times. These days, I often read it with a specific purpose. For example, one time I read it keeping an eye out for Tolkien’s descriptions of the flora of each area. Another time, I didn’t read it in the same order as the chapters. Tolkien sometimes would follow one character or set of characters for a while, then return in time to pick up with another set of characters. I skipped back and forth through the chapters so that I could follow what was going on with all the characters at the same point in time. But no matter how I approach it, I inevitably get caught up in the story every time and find myself reading faster and faster as the book goes on!

I do think that the fact that this book is fantasy and set in another world enabled the depth of the experience I had with it. Had it been set in “our” world it would have limited my ability to enter into the story. If a story is based on something real that we know, I think there is a tendency to compare what the author says about that something “real” with our own ideas of it, and this takes us a little bit out of the story. For instance, I cannot read the Twilight books without quibbling with the author’s statements about the area around Forks, Washington – an area I know much better than she does! Every statement she made that I did not agree with removed me from the story. Also, the poor writing of that story took me out of it time and again. But in the case of The Lord of the Rings, the world of Middle-earth came entirely from the author’s imagination, complete with its own history, languages, denizens, and spiritual underpinnings, and it was so beautifully written that the words themselves took me deeper and deeper into that reality. I don’t know any Ents or anything like them here, so I must accept what Tolkien says about them.
Finally, *The Lord of the Rings* set me on a journey of my own, to study all forms of mythology, from the religions of our world to the current popular culture fascination with vampires. I discovered Joseph Campbell at one point, and realized that Frodo’s quest is a perfect example of the Heroic Quest Campbell talks about in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. I even wrote an essay on this subject that was published on one of the leading Tolkien fan sites. From here it was a short step to Jung, and eventually to my enrollment in the Mythological Studies with a Depth Psychology Emphasis program at Pacifica Graduate Institute, with an eye towards writing about modern pop culture mythology. I have a long and arduous journey ahead of me as I work towards my PhD, but with Frodo as my guide, I know I will get there.
Ianárwen

Experience of Reading *The Lord of the Rings*, by J.R.R. Tolkien

In late spring 1969, a few months before my 11th birthday, my Aunt gave me a very large paperback book as a gift, saying “I can’t get on with reading this at all – there are too many weird long names in it.” As I took the book from her, I saw the cover art and recognised the illustrator, Pauline Baynes, whom I had admired for several years. I felt a little thrill of excitement as I took the book and flipped through it to see if there were more illustrations inside.

Regrettably there weren’t, except for the maps, but I still admired the front cover’s gently verdant rustic land gradually turning into rolling downs and then tall mountains in the distance with nine little figures (four of them very small indeed) with a pony in the foreground. The back cover drew me in even more, with its barren rocky landscape and a pale stone citadel with a volcano flaring menacingly in the far distance. Just those two delicately coloured scenes made my fingers itch to open the book and start reading. First though, I went back to the map I’d seen and then to the enlarged sections at the beginning of the six books. My misgivings were rapidly fading as I looked at the inky mountain ranges, forests and Nordic-style writing and anticipated another world unfolding for me, one that could not be reached by hiding inside a wardrobe or by falling down rabbit holes.

Though I already had a reasonable experience of mythopoeic fantasy I had no clue that I was about to discover a world where a subtly different ‘magic’ was contained in ‘legends’ that had echoes of Norse or Celtic myth, but was unrecognisable from any other fantasy environment I had ever read. I opened *The Lord of the Rings* little knowing that my reading habits were about to be challenged and beguiled onto another level of sophistication and awareness; that I would read it again and again for the rest of my life; lose count of the times I had lived in the story; and discover more to love in the book every single time I read it.

People get too scared by the length of the Trilogy and say the story is too complex but in fact the plot is simple. A hobbit called Frodo inherits a mysterious Ring but discovers that it belonged to a wicked Dark Lord, Sauron, and is itself inherently evil. After 3,000 years Sauron is regaining his old powers and searches for his lost Ring so he can crush all the free lands of Middle Earth. The Ring must not fall into his hands and from thereon the story is a journey into adventure and danger. There are three phases and the first ends with Frodo rescued from the nine
spooky Black Riders who serve Sauron, as he reaches the Elven haven of Rivendell, where he is safe for a time.

The Elves decree that the One Ring must be destroyed. This can only be done by going secretly into the heartlands of the Dark Lord’s domain to throw the Ring into Mount Doom. Frodo has eight companions, a Fellowship, to help him on the next part of the dangerous quest. At the last Frodo succeeds in unmaking the Ring, but the Fellowship soon fails after catastrophes and betrayal, with the Ring almost destroying Frodo physically and mentally as he completes the final part of his terrible quest with only his friend and servant Sam to aid him.

Of course things are more complex than that, but essentially this is a tale of resolve through many horrendous experiences; the determination to act for the greater good, even if your courage falters and you cannot always hold on to hope. To do the job no matter what happens. No matter the cost.

Some books ‘grab’ you with their opening line. For me it was just two or three words – 'eleventy-first birthday’. A new counting word! Intrigued I read on and soon came to more new words – ‘tweens’ and ‘Hobbits’. Delighted with this playful approach, I carried on with no proper idea of what a Hobbit was. By the time the Unexpected Party started I was wrapped up in the tale, but found it a bit confusing with all these references to disreputable adventures that had happened earlier. So I did something I had never done before when reading fiction and went back to the foreword where the author admits that the ‘tale grew in the telling...’ and to the prologue with explanation in ‘Concerning Hobbits, and other matters’. Despite my eagerness to press on, I realized that I was missing some background nuance that might be helpful.

Finally I had skimmed enough information and I re-entered the party as an invisible guest and watched all the jolly, hungry hobbits and then the magic happened. Bilbo disappeared in front of his disgruntled, but well-fed friends and relatives and then re-appeared into a head-on shouting match with his friend Gandalf. I was still a bit confused, but utterly hooked and greedily romped through the remains of that chapter and into a whole different atmosphere in the next one—The Shadow of the Past. I still see this chapter as the single most important passage in the whole trilogy, only rivalled perhaps by The Council of Elrond. It began easily enough, but by the time Gandalf re-appeared I began to get ‘chills’ and as I listened to the wizard launching into his potted history lesson, I was glued to the pages and felt for Frodo’s anxiety and then his fear. My eyes could hardly take in the words fast enough, my breathing becoming shallow and quite fast,
as I watched Frodo hold the One Ring on his shrinking palm, expecting pain from the fire but seeing only fiery words of doom in a strange language flowing onto the hitherto flawless gold. I gobbled up the long chapter in one session and nearly went back and read it again, to make sure I had mastered all the various threads of the background, but I was feverish to know what would happen next.

Next some very different protagonists, the Nazgûl and the Elves were introduced. Suddenly malevolence oozed onto the page with the arrival of a mysterious Black Rider, although he did nothing more than rein his horse in and sniff rather obviously and, later as the sun set, was observed to get off his horse and ‘sway’ ominously in the twilight on the road. I gasped at behaviour so subtly threatening and wanted to yell at Frodo not to give in to his irrational urges to put on the Ring—something that Gandalf had warned him never to do. Just in time a band of Elves took the three Hobbits into safe custody for the night. As with the Black Rider being patently ‘bad’, despite little evidence to support this, it was equally clear that the Elves were vaguely other-worldly and powerful, but well-disposed towards Hobbits. They fed and guarded them and sang strange but beautiful songs. The whole interlude was æthereal and enchanting and I was disappointed that Gildor was evidently not going to join Frodo and the others the next morning.

By now I was jumping with fear every time the Hobbits took a wrong turn, or heard the eerie screeching of the Nazgûl, as they made for the Brandywine and the ‘safety’ of Buckland. Having left the Shire behind them, as they approached the Barrow-Downs, the tone again shifted and this section ‘spoke’ to me very strongly indeed. I lived very close to a large tract of moorland that had remains of Neolithic and Copper/Bronze Age settlements. The climate was often very foggy and so I found it easy to slip into the vivid pictures the words made in my mind. With ‘my’ moors literally on my daily horizon, I could feel the cold damp moisture as the fog descended upon the Hobbits; knew their fear as they became completely disoriented; and again felt the overwhelming panic as Frodo searched desperately for his friends, buried in the death chamber with the ghostly hand and sinister spell-singing. I read it quickly, simply because I was so afraid and I doubt I took in the full nuance, other than an overall cold dread, but of course this chapter set the tone for the rest of the first book.

Having escaped the barrow I was relieved when the Hobbits found surroundings that they thought they knew in Bree. Almost at age 11, I thought the Prancing Pony quite a jolly place and
Barliman Butterbur appeared kind, if forgetful. I smiled at Pippin’s socialising and Frodo’s hasty intervention, then at Frodo’s even bigger gaffe whilst singing a very silly song, but then totally shocked as he crashed onto the floor and disappeared to everyone’s consternation, especially mine. Strider’s swift intervention and initial overture gave me as much of a jolt as Frodo and his friends, but I loved how this part unrolled with Strider’s half-told history and Butterbur’s tardy production of Gandalf’s letter. It made me feel reassured yet angry and also intrigued with their unexpected new protector, guide and friend.

The attack at the Inn and the long walk to Weathertop held my interest as Strider proved himself a valuable companion, though I felt Sam was right to remain sceptical. However all suspicions vanished as the Black Riders struck suddenly and plunged the Hobbits and the Ranger into heart-stopping peril and again I was breathless with the drama and terror as Frodo, betrayed by the Ring’s compulsion, screamed under the Witchking’s cursed blade. I read on open-mouthed as Strider barely arrived in time to prevent further bloodshed and drove the terrible ensorcelled wraiths from the once strong, proud walls of his ancestors’ fortress with fire and steel. With all that drama, had I been sitting I would have been on the edge of my seat, but I was lying on my stomach in bed, book propped on the pillows and once again I could not turn the pages fast enough.

The ensuing trek to Rivendell, though uneventful until the Hobbits and Strider reached the Last Bridge, was exhausting with Frodo’s wounding sinking him further into the wraith-world. I was feeling a slow dread with the subtle tension as they found a mysterious green Elf-stone on the bridge and when they discovered the Trolls (for I had not yet read *The Hobbit*) that had me almost at screaming pitch until Strider hit one of them with a stick. And then another Elf, Glorfindel, a warrior lord sent out from Imladris by Elrond to search for the Hobbits, appeared with his swift Elf-horse and hope rose again, for Strider was so relieved to have such a palpably powerful ally join them. The description of the lordly Elf, whose body was infused with bright light, once more enthralled me and, though he could not help, the slight relief from the chilling pain Frodo felt as Glorfindel inspected his wound once more made me feel less anxious for all of them. But then they came closer to the Fords that marked the border of Rivendell and safety, all knowing the Black Riders were in close pursuit now. Then suddenly Glorfindel was yelling at his horse to run and the chase was on. As all nine shrieking Nazgûl appeared my heart was in my mouth as Frodo was borne with lightning haste to the river. Frodo’s fear once more
communicated itself, though his desperate courage seemed hopeless as the Elf-horse bore him across the river with only moments to spare and the almost comatose Hobbit tried to defy the wraiths as they exerted some evil compulsion for him to come back to him. And then there was eldritch roaring, tumbling, white flame-crested floodwaters, and inexorable white water warriors on mighty steeds that swept the soul-stealing creatures away. As Frodo’s rebellion withered into grey wavering unconsciousness I was left drained as the waters calmed, not knowing if the miraculous rescue had come in time.

So terror and confusion ended Book 1, and I rushed on to Book 2 where there was almost instant relief and calm in the house of Elrond Peredhel (Half-Elven). There was healing too for Frodo and a reunion with Gandalf and with Bilbo, Frodo’s uncle. But even as I felt relief for the Hobbits and Strider and wonder at the tranquil description of the Elven safe-haven of Imladris, Gandalf and Elrond still seemed anxious about Frodo’s wounding and were obviously contemplating the fate of many, as folk from all over Middle Earth converged on Rivendell with tales of foreboding and strife. As I read the Council of Elrond and learned more detailed history of the One Ring from those who had fought the Dark Lord in another era; of the true heritage of Strider, now revealed as Aragorn, heir of Isildur who had taken the Ring for himself after Sauron was slain; how the Black Riders had been seen in Erebor too, asking about the ‘thief’ Bilbo Baggins who was known to the Dwarves of the Lonely Mountain; and of strange dreams coming to the sons of the Steward of Gondor to seek the ‘sword that was broken’ and for counsel in their seemingly solitary struggle with the rising evil of Sauron. I found myself spellbound at the breadth and enormity of a tale that was nearly five thousand years long. Though it was mostly talk, the wars and suffering described branded themselves on my imagination.

Though there was no ‘action’ as such I was, more than ever now, hardly reading the book any more. I was becoming willingly ensnared in the story, a silent witness, watching the expressions flicker across their faces, listening to the angry or sad voices of all the Men, Dwarves, Elves and two small Hobbits discussing this almost nondescript trinket: feeling the palpable aura of their anger and fear as the talk turned to Isildur’s weakness and folly in not destroying it whilst he could have and Gollum’s accidental yet immediately unthinking, murderous corruption to possess it. I never really saw either of them as being ‘wrong’ and empathized with their entrapment and twisting as the true nature of the Ring’s power became clearer. As new characters were introduced, Legolas, Gimli and Boromir were chosen by Elrond
to form a Fellowship, with the four Hobbits, Gandalf and Strider, that was charged with helping Frodo on a seemingly hopeless Quest to finally destroy the Ring forever. I was watching them avidly, begrudging the need to leave the book to go and eat, or wash, or go to school, or sleep. Everything was compelling now and though the pace for the most part was slow, the writing was so good that I was ‘seeing’ everything almost like a movie, even picking up on emotional tone, as the Fellowship made their way south.

And then they entered Moria. Now they were all afraid, even and especially Gandalf and Strider, who knew full well why they should be so terrified. I’m mildly claustrophobic so I was immediately attuned to the horror of the place and was absolutely of the same opinion as Boromir that they should not be there at all. But they had no choice and so I joined them in my mind’s eye, scared and keeping close to the not quite reassuring cocoon of light around Gandalf’s staff with the rest, cringing away from the darkness of the abyss that was the Dwarrowdelf. The Black Pit.

There were other lights besides the Wizard’s staff, none of which comforted me. A diffuse double gleam came from the eyes of Gollum who was hiding in the mines after his rescue from Mirkwood. True sunlight was streaming with glistening motes through high carved windows into the Chamber of Mazarbul upon the tomb of Balin, Gimli’s kinsman, slain for his audacity in trying to take back the heritage of Durin’s folk, along with all of those who had followed him from Erebor into Moria. The light of fire from the depths too. As they fled Mazarbul, after Frodo survived a seemingly fatal spear thrust, I ran with them into the darkness, for that was less terrifying now than what pursued them, even though none of us, except perhaps Gandalf, knew the worst of it. The goblins and trolls were more than enough of a threat as they fled towards the Dimrill Gate and the long bridge to safety in the daylight. But their foes were too many and as they ran for the narrow stone bridge across a great chasm, the Balrog appeared and Legolas’, Gimli’s and Gandalf’s reactions were enough warning that a terrible doom had come upon the Fellowship. As the creature’s fiery mane, sword and whip lit up the huge cavern and Gandalf turned halfway over the bridge, screaming at the others to leave him and run, like them I could not move and watched with them in fear as the Wizard’s and the Balrog’s swords clashed and the whip crackled as words of power were uttered in defiance of the flaming Heart of Darkness. And the evocative words passing through my eyes into my cringing mind’s view were magnesium flares, progressively more horrifying, blazing white and freeze-framing the
bridge as it cracked under the creature’s feet. As the Balrog toppled into the black gulf below. As it swung its fiercesome whip upwards. As the flaming thongs coiled around Gandalf’s ankles. As the wizard was pulled down inexorably after his foe, vainly clutching at the stone of the severed bridge... crying out to his friends to ‘Fly, you fools!’.

And somehow I was breathing again as the others ran in raw, raging grief and fear out into the Dimrill Dale. But I couldn’t go with them, because I could not believe what I had just read. I went back and read that whole pursuit from Mazurbul again, to where he had fallen. And twice more. I was in shock and crying, but I could not get past what I had read, unable to bear what had happened. I had been reading this in bed and suddenly I couldn’t go on, so I switched the light off and cried myself to sleep.

Never before or since, have I been so shocked at the loss of a character in a book and as I forced myself to read it over and over again that first time I felt a terrible numb emptiness, knowing I couldn’t change the meaning of those words and their outcome. Of course it didn’t help that Gandalf was a major and crucial character, but it was more than that. I was an imaginative and sensitive child – the sort that cries easily when Lassie gets injured, or when the Dwarves think Snow White has died – but on this first reading, I had felt so close to all the Fellowship and what they were doing, so I guess the build up of fear and adrenalin, culminating in the bridge scene was too overwhelming for me. I couldn’t pick the book up again until the following night when I had gone to bed early and alone (I shared a bedroom with my younger sister). Subdued, I read the whole of The Bridge of Khazad-dûm through once more, crying silently again almost throughout and then at last I read on, weeping more strongly as the others joined me in grief, yet having to go on, for they were not yet out of danger and gradually I rejoined them in spirit, but this time at a distance for it still felt like my heart was being crushed.

They arrived in Lothlórien and still I felt numb, but I wondered why these new Elves were, like Legolas, so hostile towards Gimli. This was another nuance I did not yet understand, but I admired the way Aragorn interceded, and they were taken into the Golden Wood. Another dream began, one that promised to soothe the pain somewhat as they met with Galadriel and Celeborn, even though they seemed too high and untouchable. Galadriel inevitably made an impression as she picked thoughts from their heads and spoke to their minds without a voice. Though, like the mortal members of the Fellowship I felt awed by her uncanny scrutiny, I was also a little confused with the ‘invasive’ aspect, not quite liking that she could do this so easily,
though her cool, detached inspection was kind enough and offered comfort to the more innocent folk. But again she was obviously ‘good’ for all her ineffable power and her subsequent meetings with Frodo and Sam where they looked in her Mirror were æthereal, baffling yet still offering some balm of hope, though there were hard things to see in the still scrying waters. Galadriel’s famous dark queen ‘speech’ at the time did not impact on me too clearly for some reason. Maybe it was because I was still recovering from Gandalf’s apparent slaying and, as Frodo had seen him in the Mirror in what appeared to be the future, the dream-like feeling to the whole episode perhaps gave me some insulation from the drama and more negative aspect of the two Hobbits’ experience.

As they drifted out of the Golden Wood into the Great River I was still there, but as a bystander looking on, like them still sad at the loss of Gandalf, but determined to go on. The mood had turned sombre and serious but, as the currents took us through the Argonath, where the giant statues of Isildur and Anárion reached out unseeing towards the northlands, sentinels for the South Kingdom of Gondor that lay beyond the great Falls of Rauros, a new sense of destiny was manifesting within the Fellowship as their minds began to look to differing goals and horizons.

Trouble had already dogged them and they knew there were Orcs tracking them so all were apprehensive as they realized decisions as to their course had to be made and soon. I hardly knew where my sympathies lay, but Boromir’s dilemma seemed to be in crisis and when his resolve snapped and he attacked Frodo, I was taut as a bowstring as the Ringbearer was forced to flee the frenzied madness that the young Captain of Gondor had fallen into. When Frodo climbed into the Odin-seat of Amon Hen, scared, breathless, wanting to find a way to end the Ring’s tyranny that would not drive others of the Fellowship insane with desperate need to possess its corrupted might, I was by his side, like a shadow, as he looked out from the Seat of Sight. I felt strongly for his dismay as he looked out at the lands at war. As his gaze was pulled inevitably towards Barad-dûr, the Dark Tower of Mordor, chills were running down my spine at the powerful description of Sauron’s seat of power and my hope, with Frodo’s, failed at last, as together we realized finally what had to be faced. Where the Ring had to go.

The end of the Fellowship of the Rings segment, with the heroic death of Boromir as the Fellowship was broken, was a natural watershed as the action split in to the misadventures of Frodo, Sam and a terribly conflicted, vicious yet pitiable Gollum; the search for Merry and
Pippin; the miraculous return of Gandalf; and later on the sieges of Helm’s Deep and then of Minas Tirith. Perhaps because all these strands had their dramas and tragedies, or maybe that the trauma in Moria had been too much of an emotional blow to my earlier immersion in the story, even after Gandalf was restored, I became more detached as the tale of the war unfolded. Frodo and Sam’s misfortunes with Shelob and then, in Cirith Ungol as Sam briefly bore the Ring before realizing Frodo was still alive and set out on an almost suicidal rescue mission, did grip me with the sheer courage of the servant-gardener as he took on the incongruous role of bodyguard-warrior. However, this was more of an intellectual connection and admiration of the sort of courage I could not imagine myself ever possessing, which emerged again and more sharply, as Éowyn stood over her dying King and Uncle and furiously defied the Lord of the Nazgûl.

In 1969 this was something that was not exactly an alien concept, but having been raised on Ivanhoe defending Rebecca at the stake and Maid Marion staunchly aiding her Robin in a very lady-like and totally passive way, it was nevertheless very thrilling indeed. The concept of defending those you loved to such extremes struck a chord in any event and maybe for the first time made me think about the significance of deep commitment and conscious support over raw courage and gut-reaction derring-do. Here were small, not at all warlike Hobbits (namely Sam and Merry, for Merry too had his part in the slaying of the Witchking) and a young woman showing they were as capable and strong as a seasoned six-foot warrior, determined to play their part in battle or wherever danger threatened the purpose and well-being of their lords and people, regardless of the ultimate price they might have to pay. I felt humbled in both cases as I thought over the deliberate choice made by Sam in the evil cobwebbed hell of the Mountains of Shadow and of Eowyn and Merry in the gut-churning terror of the Battle of the Pelennor Fields. These two passages, together with the feral, mindless encounter between Gollum and Frodo in the Chamber of Fire deep in Mount Doom all stayed in my mind, though I had a less emotional response to these than to Gandalf’s fall in Moria. Having finished the book, the traditional happy ending seemed bitter-sweet and profoundly melancholic somehow, with endings like Aragorn’s marriage to Arwen sharply contrasting with Saruman’s fatal punishment for his transgressions in his attempted conquest of the Shire whilst Frodo and the others had been absent. These all culminated in Frodo’s joining the Elves and Gandalf to an oblique future in the West with the
prospect of healing for the ‘evil wounds’ he had taken in his perilous quest, the greatest of which had been wrought by the Ring itself upon his soul.

The tale still beguiled me after I had finished it and it was not long before I was reading the whole thing again and when I wasn’t reading, attempting my own illustrations of the story. I read it twice more during the long summer vacation between my leaving Junior school and starting Senior school in September. This was a crucial point for me, for I was leaving true childhood behind and moving into arenas that would prepare me for adult life, a career and maybe a family of my own. There were a number of life lessons I took with me from those first few readings of the Trilogy, mostly to do with the strength of friendship and purpose, but also with commitment to the ‘truths’ you hold most deeply and also in self-belief. Those latter concepts were, of course, not immediately formed at age 11, or only at an unconscious level of understanding, as I struggled to come to terms with being adolescent and in a much bigger school, with more emphasis on academic achievement and good exam results. Religious conviction too. I had a Roman Catholic upbringing and both schools I attended were run by nuns, so it seems ironic in a way, with Tolkien himself a devout Catholic, that I rejected formal church teachings at the age of 14, having found more meaning in the ethics of Middle Earth and other fantasy worlds, than in something that had supposedly been ingrained into me since I was 5 years old. Maybe that was the reason—that I had found the ethics of Middle Earth for myself and so they had more relevance.

The year 1969 was the ‘end of an era’ too. The Beatles had split, and the Swinging Sixties were well and truly over with hippy and drug culture challenging the ‘Establishment’, Vietnam, Palestinian terrorism (and Israeli retaliation no less violent), the world was changing. The parallels between Sauron’s dominion in Middle Earth and our own planetary woes sometimes loomed large and I still took refuge with the Fellowship at least once a year if not more, craving the reassurance of nobility and caring and just ‘doing the right, the honorable, thing’. The Shire may have seemed naïve and even ignorant, but it was a place with unseen steel as shown in the Scouring; and its people were for the most part honest and looking to be happy in the small concerns of family and friends. It was a place of fellowship too, less rarefied and chiseled than the Fellowship of the Ring perhaps, but there nonetheless and as strong and noble as any warrior race’s motivations.
I got a job, married and moved far away from home, but Tolkien came with me and I still read him quite frequently, sinking myself into the story with relief at times when the frustrations of life became too oppressive as the ‘givens’ I thought would be mine, mainly children of my own, eluded me. So I kept going, buoyed up in part by the examples and sacrifices of Frodo, Sam, Gandalf, Aragorn and the others, with mixed success in my work and private life. Gradually though, disillusionment and depression set in at work, but also in the home and my deepest relationships, though I refused to see that for a very long time, and in 2005 I had the latest and to date most debilitating nervous breakdown yet. I had to resign my job after re-locating 300 miles to be nearer family and friends and found myself at the bottom of a trench from which I seemingly had no will or reason to extricate myself. Tolkien however was still there and again I slipped into the book, needing to find solace and reassurance somewhere, and this it seemed was the one place that had never faltered or failed to inspire me in some way.

Through the clinical depression that engulfed me I found myself relating to Frodo more strongly again, having become vaguely irritated by his martyr-like stance over the years, and at last understood how the Ring had clawed away at his resolve and mental integrity. As I began to feel a little stronger after the work-related stress had been taken out of the equation, I began to look around and almost by accident stumbled onto a Lord of the Rings online forum community. Vaguely interested, as it had art and creative writing forums that drew me, I joined and somehow realized I had turned a corner and was amongst people who had related as strongly (or moreso) to the book as I had over the years. I had found a place and ‘real’ life people that came close to understanding me.

In a way, over the years I had gained strength and resolve from the book itself and now, as I drifted into the roleplay aspect of the forum, this spilled into my ‘creation’ of a character through which I could live in the world that now meant so much to me. This was more important to me than I knew, as I needed to regain the sense of self I had lost out in the real world. I had to find a way to go on in my head (as well as in the flesh) and exist without compromising my neglected natural inclinations and sense of self.

At first my chosen character had to be as close to the ‘real’ me as possible because I felt I had had to ‘be’ someone else in the ‘real’ world for so long and that was part of the reason why I felt so lost and powerless out there. In the end I became an Elf, though at first the thought of being a creature so different to how I felt about myself panicked me no end. Elves are mostly tall
ectomorphs and never have a bad hair day… They are also powerful and pure and confident in themselves—I was a real mess back then and had zero self-esteem. The friends I was making in the forum and very soon online with their real-life personalities, also gave me much joy and support in my creative abilities. Somehow I rediscovered that 16 year old who had all but disappeared over the years, and so my Elf was me effectively, a normal wood-Elf, not an enigmatic, powerful queen like Galadriel. She was an Elf physically, but her manners and mind were shaped by mortals and this exotic mix eventually found her the friends and family she had craved after mourning her mortal family for so long, when she finally found the courage to go and live with her true kin.

I had my Elf character lose everything and everyone she loved and treasured far away from the Elven lands. She physically had to travel about 1000 miles to find her true people, but also had first to realize she could not survive where she was anymore, living on the borders of Mordor. Her journey was physically as well as emotionally dangerous because of her exaggerated mourning and isolation (Elves had a lot of trouble handling the death of mortals as Elves mate for life and can re-incarnate in the West). Mordor was a rather predictable metaphor for the professional and suburban commuter life that I’d ‘surrendered’ to and strongly felt had contributed to my breakdown. Rivendell represented the haven I’d had to find for myself away from everything I associated with ‘losing’ myself.

In actuality I was making a similar journey to my Elf character’s, but not in physical distance. Her parallel struggle to ‘belong’ again in a place with her true kin helped with my own ‘reintegration’ of what I was about (or wanted to be about). My journey was a return to and fresh exploration and redefining of my creative and emotional life through writing, artwork and poetry. As I gained confidence in long atrophied skills, the forum’s Tolkien environment was giving me my life back in a way, as the underpinning foundation that helped release everything creative I had been walling away for so many years—finding my place again in the real world, by going back to activities I loved and was good at. Four years on, after glorying in roleplay as an Elven bard, moderating my own forum-based realization of Imladris and most recently in working with friends to build a Tolkien world and much more on a brand new site, I have come to a place where I feel whole and can exist happy and fulfilled in mind and in body as I draw on the strengths I have rediscovered in the spirit and inspiration of Middle Earth. It has been the channel that has given me the will and courage to move on and start to grow afresh. I feel I am
contributing in the real world as well as in cyberspace in a relevant, meaningful way, through mutually supportive relationships with the friends I’ve made online and now in real life, by sharing my thoughts and skills to make our imaginary world live and thrive.

In a very real sense, I am convinced that the insights and inspiration I have found through reading and knowing *The Lord of the Rings* so well has turned my life around and given me the commitment and strength to be happy and purposeful once more.
Ianárwen’s images and poetry inspired by J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*

*Mirkwood*

*by Ianárwen*
Dreamless Death

Imagination versus life should not be a choice
except in dreams perhaps given clarity,
when a broken mind flees in extremis,
having closed its heart to others reasonings.

Trapped by life, unhinged by duty and coin
looking for meaning and finding none.
Faith abandoned, dreams all dead,
nothing left of joy, just dread and ashes in my mouth.

Running from decisions imposed by ghouls,
losing the race for sanity and health.
All havens lost and no place else to turn,
Ill-prepared for the defeat of mercy and grace.

Maimed and mute, I walk the dreamless roads
seeing no one, wanting none for friend or foe.
Not looking forward and never back for misery
is all around and madness waits ever at my side.

I can see light, just out of reach that calls for me,
and a feathery darkness casts its case for peace,
with whisperings of finality and unending silence.
And my mind’s life wills me to come home to stay.

*by Ianárwen*

*Ianárwen’s Commentary. The second verse I had written since I was 15. It will not surprise you
to know that I was in a very bad place at the time. I wrote this with my forum character in mind
too (for she too was in a bad way, almost dying of grief and loneliness, without kin or friends to
turn to) but this was firmly rooted in real life with only the dreamless roads reference for her
world, as this is how Elves 'rest' in trance-like examination of memories, rather than in the free-rang-
ing dreaming and deep sleep of mortals.

I wished fervently that I had the same options as her and at the time longed for a night
without thoughts crowding in on me, keeping true sleep—the little death—at bay. In a way this is
an exercise in pushing misery to its limits—stating the worst possible case scenario and holding
up current status to see just how bad it was. These days my mental state mostly compares
favourably, but some days I'm only a breath away from this condition and anything might tip me
over the edge, so this weaving back and forth of each line of verse represents the instability I was
feeling and which was also a part of my created forum character.*
Weathertop

by Ianárwen
Forever Mortal

When mortal love has ended and the Elda left behind,
can the immortal bear the ending of their heart’s dear lover’s sigh
– or recall that precious moment of passion’s first soft touch?
Can the lost one’s face still smile at you, inside a memory?
Does it matter if the love was for a parent, friend or kin?
   Will it hurt less than a beloved soulmate,
   who was closer than your skin? Don’t ask, don’t dare
to think of differences,
   when the loss…
   is still…
   the end

Forever is too long for mortals. Your love must die one day
and leave you sad and lonely, far beyond all hope and pain.
The Eldar may endure great loss and conquer hurt ‘tis true,
but can you keep on holding fast a shade who once breathed love with you?
Better not have loved at all? Is a mortal worth that hurt?
You have no say, no guide - no shield against the pulse
that beats within you, so soft, yet strong and fierce.
   To love a mortal is both gift and curse…
   it stays on…
   and lives…
   in you

by Ianárwen

Ianárwen’s Commentary. This is a ‘personal’ one for my forum character, but also follows the recurring Tolkienesque theme of love between the Firstborn and the Secondborn Kindreds—between Elves and Men who are both the children of Eru Illúvatar. There are four couples in all who get this 'treatment'. These are the most important human-elven couplings and they are all related to Elrond of Imladris.

There was a fifth pairing, but much later in the Third Age, in Gondor where the first prince of Dol Amroth was born of an Elven mother who had wed Imrazor, a man of Númenorean descent. The Elf’s bloodline however was still apparent amongst the princes two thousand years later (Prince Imrahil)—at least to Legolas. My forum character is probably of that bloodline, but was brought up amongst mortals from an infant, and so to some extent she has more human traits than elven in her manner, though she is wholly an Elf in appearance and physicality.

It was a deliberate choice on my part to give my forum character this background and create the dynamic that she has to come to terms with. It is a case of nature and nurture and which wins out. In my character’s case her love for mortals is purely familial, not romantic and so this piece is very much her take on it. She was scarred with grief for her dead parents and brothers, in a mortal sense…. She was left completely alone, because she lived far away from any elven community and could not bring herself to leave the place where she had been happy and loved, even though they were not truly her blood kin…

In my forum character’s own words—if she had had the choice she would have followed her mortal family into true death—but this was before she fell in love with an Elf.
Lost and Found

Lost in fog. Unheard. Unseen.
No beginnings and no end.
All obscured in grey sorrow and soft tears.
It matters not if I am still
or walk aimlessly. To nowhere.
Towards nobody. Nothing will matter here.
There is nothing. Just the fog and me.

It lifts a little. Now and then.
The fog. And the light will enter.
If I let it? If I want it?
Is there a way to let it in?
I can find a reason given time.
If I want to. If I let myself think.

And then the wind changes, fresh and cruel.
It blows the fog away and I am exposed
to others view. Still lonely. Still silent.
Just not alone. I want to move but can’t.
Too hard. Too fast. Too soon.
I drift along to others speech.
I feel life around me, but not within.

And then I see you and hear your words,
as light does enter, and I let it,
and I want it more than I can say.
I find a reason to take your hand.
And another to follow where you lead.
Because I want to... now you have found me.

by Ianárwen

Ianárwen’s Commentary. One that suits both my forum character or myself at the beginning of our journey on the forums. This describes the feeling of before and after we arrived at a place where we felt safer and accepted and could begin to move on to the next stage where we wanted to let ourselves begin to be happy. I can get to a place where I don't care much what happens to me and lose interest in everything and everyone. Taking your own life hurts the people you love.... No matter how bad you feel, there is always someone out there, many someones even, who do care very much whether you live or die. So I won't do it, but getting the feeling out of myself helps, in this case by writing about it. And so, in a way I find a reason to take my own hand . . . and find my own way back from the brink. And this was the same for my forum character, who was finally able to leave her past life amongst mortals behind.
Fantasy view of Lothlorien and down the Anduin to Rauros

by Ianárwen
For Silen

I want to be alone with you
In beauty, quiet and fresh
Where all is green and sparkling blue -
A place where our pure souls can mesh

Your search was long but ends in me,
Our first meeting sealed our fate
And led us where our hearts roamed free -
Found in the other our true mate.

My heart had lost all hope of love,
Had long dwelt in misery.
In sleepy pools, clear skies above,
We found our bliss – our destiny.

You touched me as no other did,
‘Neath falling water shining,
Cool and bubbling, so well hid,
We found home in our hearts residing.

by Ianárwen

Falls

by Ianárwen

Ianárwen’s Commentary. For myself, with this verse, there came deep satisfaction and happiness that my forum character at last had found her true love and a caring, dedicated life mate. For me I had gained a complete literary match and a writing partnership which is still going strong after two years even after some major real life obstacles we had to overcome.
Etruscan King

Narrative: E. R. Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros*

It's 1970, give or take a bit. A throng of teenagers is crisscrossing an Illinois city on an all-day charity-fundraising hike. One of the smaller boys, in fact possibly the smallest male participant, has a length of steel conduit pipe with him; it serves the practical purpose of a defense against possible biting dogs on the march route … but in his mind, it is a sword. The sword belongs to King Gaslark, one of the secondary heroes of a high-fantasy novel written in 1922, some 15 years before Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* (1937): E. R. Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros*. (That's "Worm" in the archaic sense of a serpent or dragon, rather than slimy fish-bait; the Ouroboros was a Gnostic symbol for infinity.) I was that boy, carrying my wish-fulfilling daydream of swashbuckling prowess on the charity walk. The book which had roused me was a quasi-medieval heroic fantasy, set upon an unrealistically Earth-like version of the planet Mercury, with elements of Greek mythology and Shakespearean speechmaking mixed in. The plot revolves around a war between so-called "Demons" and "Witches," who are actually human, with the Demons being good guys despite the name. "Pixies" are allied to the Witches, and "Goblins" to the Demons. Complicating things is the evil King Gorice of Witchland, who keeps getting reincarnated as a full-strength adult every time the heroes kill him, with a different set of abilities in each life (at least once each as a swordsman and a wrestler, and twice as a sorcerer). There is only one way Gorice will ever stay dead, much like various fiends of mythology and folklore. He will only perish permanently if he dies twice through failures in his evil sorcery.

I will say one thing about *Lord of the Rings*, which I had read not long before this, for purposes of comparison. Reading it, I had been annoyed by all the arbitrary restrictions imposed on the good guys, all sorts of can't do this, can't do that. The powerful wizard Gandalf seldom really used his magic; and while the bad guys could freely use the *palantíri* to obtain information, it was a dreadful risk for the good guys to look into these seeing-stones. When I moved on to *The Worm Ouroboros*, it was liberating to see these heroes free to DO things, restricted only by honor and conscience. Their armies were not crushingly outnumbered, and Juss could devise counterspells to defend against curses from Gorice. Fighting the Manticore, for instance, a lion-like monster with a humanoid face and a stinging tail, they could hack and slash it without worrying about offending anyone's prissy sensibilities. My escapist thrills when
reading the action drew force from the frustrations of my slow, slow physical maturation (so slow, that around age 17 I had growth hormones prescribed). I was exhilarated at the thought that it might be possible to be something more manly than a timid, repressed midget. (Being a hobbit was never an ambition of mine; I had already had more than enough of being smaller than everyone else around me, thank you very much.) There was some sex in Eddison's story, too, enjoyed by both good guys and bad guys, but this added little to the experience for me—as I say, slow maturation.

Memorable sequences in the novel included the first introduction of Lord Juss and his kinsmen in Demonland; Gorice in one of his incarnations having a wrestling match against one of Juss' brothers; a banquet in Gorice's castle of Carce; a funeral dinner there much later in the story; and in between the dining scenes, the tremendous Battle of Krothering Side, which breaks the back of the Witches' attempted conquest of Demonland. What made them stick in memory was a combination of stimulating characters, colorful situations, and the author's clever choices of particular visual or tactile details to make the scenes come to life, almost like cinema. These details included architectural features and décor of castles, and the designs of the clothing and weapons belonging to characters. Juss never had to pay an electric bill for lighting; his castle's interior was illuminated by gems that emitted light magically.

Emotionally, reading *The Worm Ouroboros* made me impatient to grow physically to something resembling manhood. I can't say that I felt removed from my body during this, any more than in my other reading experiences; but I did sometimes lose track of the passing of time while re-reading the book for enjoyment late at night—or sitting on the toilet until my legs fell asleep!

When it comes to relating to the characters, Lord Juss, leader of the Demons, was the one I would most have liked to have as a friend. Somewhat like Aragorn in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, or Adzel in Anderson’s *Trader Team*, Juss was an admirable blend of strength, intelligence, decency and generosity who would make you feel safe with him. Juss was the most knowledgeable and educated of Eddison's heroes, even able to cast some magic spells of his own—yet not a wimpy bookworm like a certain reader of the story. As for imagining BEING a character in the story, I was not so presumptuous as to imagine being Juss; instead, I alternately imagined being either of two men from the Demons' allied nation of Goblinland: the aforementioned King Gaslark, and the morally-ambiguous (even treacherous for awhile)
philosopher Lord Gro. Gaslark, as a supporting hero, represented my modest aspirations in physical fitness and self-assertiveness; while I was on that all-day 25-mile "Hunger Hike" (which I did finish), I would say to myself, "King Gaslark doesn't get tired!" Gro, meanwhile, represented my wish to be appreciated for those intellectual gifts which I already did have even if I wasn't a football goober. In the story he falls in love with a virtuous Demon lady named Mevrian, cousin to Juss, who is unattainable for Gro; and once when experiencing a crush in college, I felt very much as if I were that unlucky philosopher. The girl I desired, being less wise than Mevrian, threw herself at a worthless bum; but Gro and I would have treated our respective desired ones like queens if they could have been ours.

The setting on Mercury was ridiculous, and Eddison himself seemed quick to forget any concern with specific placement in the Solar System. His introductory scene-setting device was to have an Earthman experience astral projection to travel to Mercury and observe events there; but the Earthman took no part in the action, and vanished after the first couple of chapters. Nonetheless, a few particular settings of the action had an evocative sense of place: above all, the aforementioned Carce in Witchland, surrounded by wetlands; and the haunted mountain which Lord Juss has to visit in search of his kidnapped brother (the same one who had vanquished Gorice at wrestling). I felt almost like a part of the story in some of the most colorful episodes, especially scenes where Gro or Juss was present. One such part for Juss was a grim survival situation: camping in frigid conditions with two companions, he stays awake all night, chafing and rubbing his own body and those of the other men to keep them from freezing to death. Another part, which involved Gro early in the story, was when Gorice in a sorcerous incarnation showed him various magical potions, magical books, and other wizardly equipment, in preparation for Gro to assist in conjuring a devil to menace the heroes.

I was about 18 years old when I first read *The Worm Ouroboros*. At this time, as a college student, I was reading a lot of ancient Greco-Roman literature and history, Virgil's *Aeneid*, for example. It was not lost on me that Eddison's battle scenes highlighted single combats like those in Homer’s *Iliad*; only, the Demons were fighting out of much more ethical and chivalrous motives than the motives which propelled Agamemnon and Menelaus against Troy. The Greeks besieged Troy over Menelaus' personal grievance for the stealing of his wife Helen, but Juss and his kinsmen fought for the freedom and well-being of all their people and allied nations. The “meaning” for me in Eddison’s story was just the encouragement to believe
that noble achievements were possible; that goodness was NOT necessarily already defeated before it could even get started. An additional "change" and "positive effect" on my life would be that this particular book did much to motivate my own ambitions as a writer, along with getting me more accustomed to thee-and-thou language. More importantly than the language, when I first attempted, about a year later, to write an otherworldly fantasy novel of my own, I imitated Eddison in designing the geopolitics of my story-world. I lined up the foremost good and evil nations, weaker allies of each, and various non-aligned realms with their own agendas.

But when it comes to "absorbed reading," much as I enjoyed the battle scenes, other parts drew me more completely inside the tale: eating, and facing deep fears. I should mention that eating was one physical thing that I could do as well as the jocks! In those days I never got fat. I would commonly be eating snacks when I was reading for pleasure, and be reading any time I ate lunch in sufficiently leisurely and solitary conditions. Thus, much of my original reading of The Worm Ouroboros was done concurrently with eating … and what should I find, but that both heroes and villains were ALSO to be found eating, with their food and wine so meticulously described that I could almost taste them. The most lavish banquet scenes listed so many different foodstuffs that a Golden Corral buffet restaurant would envy them; and Eddison even took the time to describe which characters preferred which items, and what sort of dishes and vessels they ate and drank from. Contrasting, yet in the same creative spirit, was one scene in which a common soldier in Juss' army fed humbly on barley-cakes with dark heather-honey.

I seem to remember that the great C.S. Lewis, in his book God in the Dock, remarked that a boy eating lunch meat might enjoy it better if he could imagine it to be wild game that he had hunted and killed. Similarly, my typical late-night snacks of cold roast pork or cold roast beef, either accompanied by crackers—food I enjoyed anyway, but which sticks in my memory because of this association—became for me part of the zillion-course feast in Carce, at which I sat near Lord Corund, the most relatively decent of the major Witchland characters. Nearly forty years later, I can remember the exact flavor and texture of my actual food selections on occasions when I was sitting at the kitchen table and reading that precise banquet scene. I also remember how I imagined the fictional foods would taste and look (all Earth-based, with no attempt by the author to portray alien foods native to Mercury), as well as some idea of how the voices of the characters in the scene would sound.
The other experience of “absorption,” which was rather less pleasant, could be said not to concern eating, but—BEING eaten. It was a deep, soul-puncturing look into the nature of how we face death.

As I said, in the story Lord Juss has to search for his captive brother on a haunted mountain. While he is searching this mountain, illusions of monsters menace him, trying to scare him out of completing his rescue mission. They have no success against his macho bravery. But then the evil forces play their trump card: a plain, cold inner voice telling Juss that whether violently slain or not, his life is nothing—"for all is nothing." That voice comes close to defeating Juss, before he rallies. This novel being written in an era of spiritual barrenness and soulless materialism (the very materialism against which C. S. Lewis was to rebel), probably reflected real existential pondering which E. R. Eddison had done on his own account—most likely in his bed at night, just like me.

In my agnostic youth, with no Heavenly assurances offered to me, I could have laughed bitterly at shallow preachers who, assuming everyone to be on the same page as they, would say, "You're afraid to die because you're afraid to meet God." They had it all wrong where I was concerned. I was afraid that there WAS no God TO meet; that only blank non-existence awaited after death, and that as a corollary, life meant nothing even while it lasted. Thus, I was right there with Juss, in the stony courtyard where he heard that taunting inner voice of despair. In connection with reading the “atheistic” science fiction of Poul Anderson (i.e. Trader Team and Satan’s World, included in my complete list), I recall that a sort of suffocating sensation came when I read about sympathetic characters dying; this choking was greater still as Juss and I together looked into a meaningless, uncaring darkness, contemplating the suggested extinction of ALL personality, all awareness, all memory, all being, all significance. I didn't get to participate in Juss' strength, but I got to participate in his moment of vulnerability.

When it came to it, Eddison was only admitting the presence of that metaphysical elephant in the living room, not inventing it. He was giving a name, albeit only the name of Nothing, to what most people avoid talking frankly about. I was already more familiar than I cared to be with the stifling dread of nothingness. And because I believed in intellectual honesty, I was most reluctant to seek comfort in any delusion—which meant that it was to take something other than fantasy to offer me any eternal hope. Only when I had studied ancient history and had become convinced that the Bible is a verifiable reporting of true events, did I have a hope that
imaginary swordsmen could never provide. Yet having that hope, I could return to enjoying fantasy—just not asking it to give me more than it was able to give.

I have read *The Worm Ouroboros* ten or twelve times. I would say, though, that its effects on me have long since been subsumed into my total life experience; I have not read it anytime in the last decade. I think that its impact on me was definitely tied to its being a supernatural fantasy set in an imaginary world, because this kept the enjoyment and stimulation uncontaminated by the frustrations of the real world. At least, until the real world grew too insistent. Serving a whole 20 year career in the Navy since those days—not to mention having two wives predecease me—has rubbed my nose in the fact that we all still have to face our limitations. Whereas Juss with a sword in his hand was ready for thrilling escapades, I often felt more imprisoned than empowered by the technology I had to work with in the Navy; and although God sent me comfort in my bereavements, He certainly did not grant me supernatural powers to prevent my loved ones from dying in the first place. Fantasies could inspire, but in the end they could not console.
D. L. S. Foster

The Lord of the Rings and Parental Replacement

Picture if you will a young man thirteen years of age, basically happy and ready to face life. Now throw the toxic sludge of life, which none of us can avoid, at the boy—a distant father, a mother with many psychological problems, and a few siblings with their own issues ranging from drugs to gang delinquency and beyond. That young fellow was me. In order to survive I had to create a safe space to protect myself within such a family. The daily stress of simply being under the same roof with them was too much. Fortunately I loved to read and had a yard with a big tree under which I could sit and get away from them. Books were the medium from which I created that protective zone. And in that space I was able to survive and eventually escape to safety. That is why I cherish books so highly in my life now.

The books that stand out above all others as my safety net were J. R. R. Tolkien’s The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. I was able to add The Silmarillion to my escapist world, but that came later. I found Tolkien’s works in 1976. At first I only had access to The Hobbit and I would read the story over and over, reveling in the small details of the hobbit hero Bilbo Baggins’ adventure away from his comfortable home with the Wizard Gandalf and his companions, the thirteen Dwarves. Any bickering in the story was amusing to me and so unlike my threatening family life fighting that I could actually laugh and enjoy the tale.

I had never had a comfortable home so I envied Bilbo’s dreamy hobbit hole complete with all the delicious foods it contained and lacking any parental characters. Of course along came Gandalf the Wizard who set Bilbo on his adventure to grow up and take responsibility for his life. Gandalf was a parental figure I could admire, so unlike my own parents. He was there to give Bilbo the not so subtle push to get him on his feet and out into the wide world, in other words, to grow up and take care of himself.

I did not immediately move into reading The Lord of the Rings. I savored the world of Middle-earth as I read and re-read The Hobbit throughout the summer of 1976 until I found the book A Guide to Middle-earth by Robert Foster. This encyclopedia of all things Tolkien opened my eyes to the further tales of Bilbo and his cousin Frodo, which could be found in The Lord of the Rings.
My home life had, if anything, grown worse as I entered High School. My mother’s mental health declined. My brothers grew worse with their petty theft and drug use. I felt very alone as shame of my family kept me from ever inviting friends to my house. I decided I would try to tackle the massive *Lord of the Rings* trilogy to distract myself from the hardships of bringing that loneliness to school. I almost did not read the books when I could not find the first volume and—when looking through the other two—did not see Bilbo Baggins as a major character. But Gandalf was there as were other hobbits, so I persevered and found the first volume and began reading.

Ah, good old Bilbo was there! I was able to firmly set myself in the story by finding my friend in the narrative.

Each time I sat down to read the books I left the everyday world behind. It did not matter if I was at lunch at school (all alone without friends) or at home with parents fighting or brothers raging, I was able to tune the world out and fall right into the story. The mission of a fellowship of varied peoples, Hobbits, Men, an Elf, a Dwarf, and of course Gandalf as their guide, to destroy a magical ring in the land of its making, dark Mordor, was appealing escapism. The quest was my salvation. It was better to battle Orcs than brothers, to escape the clutching giant spider Shelob than my clutching parents. I walked with the Fellowship all throughout their adventures as if I was right by their sides. It was much better to follow them on a heroic journey than to worry about anything else in the real world.

But then something terrible happened on the way to Mordor. I had much more invested in the story than I had thought. It wasn’t just escapism for me. There was something very deep that touched me in the character of Gandalf. I myself had identified with poor martyred Frodo and thought that was where all of my sympathies lay. But then in the story the Fellowship entered the horrifying underground Mines of Moria where Gandalf battled a demon of fire and shadow. And that was where Gandalf fell.

How could Gandalf die? I could not believe it. I had gone so deeply into the created world of Professor Tolkien that I was shaken to the core by this loss. My sorrow at the loss was profound; Gandalf, my fictional replacement for my own useless real-world parents, had just died. I fell into a terrible depression and I cried and cried. I had never experienced anything like this through a book before. I had been taken deeply inside the world created by Tolkien. There was no one I could talk to about this, no friends to share my pain with. I wanted to turn away
from the books. I felt betrayed and broken. I think I felt how Tolkien imagined his character of Frodo must have felt at the loss within the context of the story. Frodo, without parents other than his cousin Bilbo who was his guardian, looked to Gandalf as his own parental figure.

So, finally after a week of tremendous sorrow, I returned to the books. It was not easy. I did not take to the story again so quickly. I did not find the Elven woods of Galadriel healing as the characters in the story did. I was more like the disgruntled Boromir, the man who looked with suspicion on the Elves.

With that clever multiple usage of characters for what his readers needed, Tolkien was able to send out a life line to me. At that time I could not be Frodo. I could not be heroic Aragorn or kind servant Sam or any of the others. I had to see through the eyes of Boromir and, for that time, not be trusting. It was brilliant of Tolkien to supply such a character—to see the flawed nature of human kind and to know that not everyone would respond to situations the same way. Tolkien’s view was not of a fictional world but instead a perspective of a very real world filtered through myth. I later re-identified with Frodo as his own journey continued, but I was grateful that Boromir was there to help me. In the story Boromir gave his life to save two of Frodo’s companions and he also helped save me by allowing me to continue with the book.

I was the sort of sad kid that often ends up committing suicide. I often had thoughts of doing just that in school. But with this world to turn to I did not take that route. Tolkien’s world may have hit me in the gut with Gandalf’s death but it also offered me another path to continue on the journey—to continue with life.

Of course my delight in Gandalf’s resurrection (as Gandalf the White) later in the trilogy was something beyond what I can describe. When the characters in the story needed help most, Gandalf returned from the dead to help them. Tolkien might have had words for the lightness that came to me, the joy, the laughter, the relief! But I cannot create such poetic prose to express my feelings. Tolkien’s deft crafting of this return is, for me, one of the 20th centuries’ finest literary moments.

Most of the Tolkien friends I now know these many years later, found this resurrection very affirming in a Christian context. But I am not Christian and did not have this cultural context to work with. I felt Gandalf’s return on a different level. On a personal level that interacted with my feelings of parental neglect and abandonment. Gandalf was not only back, he was back better than ever before. My parents, sadly, never had such a rebirth. I, at that time in
my life, knew they never would either. But in this imaginary world I could experience this parental return. It was more than a reverse of the loss of Gandalf; it was a burst of light and joy. With Gandalf back I knew good would win within the story. With *The Lord of the Rings* as my secondary world I knew I could get through my troubles, both in school and in my home life. I did not need the escapism that my siblings found through drug use. I had a safe place on the pages of my beloved books.

Over the following four years during high school I read the books, as I had done with *The Hobbit*, over and over—going through them eleven times before graduation. They kept me sane and gave me a place to turn to that had sun and green grass, that had friends and heroes. I’ve never found this unique pleasure in any non-fiction book. Sometimes it takes fantasy fiction to draw out real world issues. While other genre fiction has its place, it was uplifting fantasy fiction that helped me in my time of need. I also enjoy other aspects of fiction, especially gothic horror, as well as non-fiction biography, but none of those stories touched me in such a positive way. A created character can do more and bring you to places of healing more than most real people could ever strive to do. Seeing characters and actions through the prism of mythology and folklore can, of course, create idealistic expectations, but sometimes that is what is needed in one’s life during trying times. There is a scene in *The Lord of the Rings* between Frodo and Gandalf that deeply resonates with me:

> ‘I wish it need not have happened in my time,’ said Frodo.
> ‘So do I,’ said Gandalf, ‘and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.’

I might wish my childhood had been different but it wasn’t. Gandalf wisely says to stop feeling sorry for yourself and make the best out of what we have. To this day *The Lord of the Rings* plays a very important part in my life. If a friend hasn’t read the books then they cannot understand the intricacies of the struggles that shaped my youth. The books came into my life at a crucial point and not only influenced me, as they have done for so many millions of people through their entertainment value, but also gave me the direction I needed in, what was for me, a morally directionless world. The books of J. R. R. Tolkien kept me alive and I have kept them by me ever after in eternal gratitude.
Detailed narrative essay: Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*

I read *The Left Hand of Darkness* when I was in my twenties. If I remember correctly, I was twenty-five years old; at the time I was a student at the university, a wannabe mathematician with the goal to change the world in some positive way (now, I am a mathematician with the hope of influencing some positive change in the world, which is quite similar but not the same). I discovered science fiction in that period of my life and I became a voracious reader. I devoured at least a book at week, sometimes one a day, beginning with the most classic space operas and gradually moving towards the science fiction of the 1970s.

The science fiction of the 1970’s is deeper, it is different from books we might refer to as “only science fiction,” such as the classic space operas, and much nearer to literature *tout court* (i.e. significant works of literature). This was a time in which science fiction was leaving the plots of the 1950s and 1960s, no more rockets to the queen ant planet or bug eyed monsters coming to the Earth to rape our girls. The scopes and the aims of this, so called “New Wave” of science fiction, were not to just implant a good story to one based on space travel or space exploration but to investigate the human inner side, focusing on basic human beliefs and reactions to the environment. Indeed, this is also called “psychological” science fiction.

Some of the important things about this New Wave of science fiction were the exploration of some topics never touched upon before, like sex, drugs, feminism, racism, war (e.g., the Vietnam war was during these years). Authors of this vein were influenced more by contemporary writing than by the classics; many female writers approached the world of science fiction as a step to mainstream literature. The New Wave also touched on some taboo topics, which helped people who were distant from writing to come out; this was true of female writers, as well as African American writers, and gay people. This changed the way science fiction was viewed; it was no longer considered to be a B-rated literature and was also included in the “university world.” Novels and short stories of the New Wave vein were certainly more deep and sophisticated than space operas. However, space operas came back again on the stage at the end of the 70s with the overwhelming success of the *Star Wars* movie trilogy.
There are many authors of New Wave science fiction mainly from the English-speaking countries, but a few also from some other countries. One of these is without doubt Ursula Kroeker Le Guin (1929 -).

Ursula K. Le Guin is a writer whose writings I really enjoy, and she’s known as one of the main authors of our times. She is like a painter who by adding just a few suggestions in the plot allows the reader to discover an entirely new, previously unimagined world.

I remember searching libraries and bookshops looking for her books; after a while I realized (with a sense of defeat) that I had already read all of her science fiction books, so I moved on to read her books for children and to her narrative writings. I’ve been like this with a few other writers whose books include genres other than science fiction. I was in love with the things they said, but mostly with the way they said those things. The same happens to me with music, which besides reading is one of my favourite hobbies.

During the time I was a student at the university I also wrote a few of my own short stories, which have been published, and each new book I read was, for me, a new spring of inspiration for my writing.

*The Left Hand of Darkness* has been one of the books that most captured my attention during reading. I felt very absorbed in reading the novel’s plot, and even after I left the book on the desk, I continued to interpret my surroundings in terms of the book. I felt so absorbed in the book during the first reading. I have reread this book and, even though I still consider it a good book and enjoy rereading it, the sensation of absorbed reading hasn’t happened again.

Ursula K. Le Guin wrote *The Left Hand of Darkness* in 1969 and the novel won both the Nebula and the Hugo prizes (the two most important awards for science fiction narrative books). This novel is also part of the New Wave of science fiction.

The plot of *The Left Hand of Darkness* is very deep, even if it is apparently based on a simple idea: there’s a world, a planet called Gethen (a very cold planet, its own name is simply Winter), where instead of two sexes, there’s only one, which is neither specifically feminine nor masculine (i.e. they are androgynous and bisexual). Gethenians react to each other during the “kemmer,” which is similar to the human monthly period, spontaneously assuming male or female sexual characteristics depending on the possible partner, but basically they have no male or female body distinction.
Humans get in touch with Gethen and send an ambassador there to ask the Gethenians if they want to join The Ekumen, which is an alliance of all the human planets. The ambassador is an Earthling named Genly Ai, and he is a man. Why do I specify that he is a man? It’s because he is seen by Gethenians as a *pervert* for being in a permanent kemmer.

While reading the book I was Genly Ai, a human in an unknown world that was partially nonsensical for him. And indeed he misunderstood some of the Gethenians’ actions, mainly the behaviour of his counterpart, or co-protagonist, Estraven, a high-ranking Gethenian. Estraven plays the part in the plot of someone who sees what Genly Ai came to propose to the Gethenians: the chance for Gethen to join The Ekumen. In his Gethenian role, which involves politics, Estraven acts in a way that does not openly declare his aims; this is unintelligible for Genly Ai, and only in the final part of the book does he understand how much of an ally Estraven has been for him.

There are many other aspects to the plot of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, but when I first read the book, even though I appreciated it as a whole, the gender theme was like an epiphany to me. I felt like Genly Ai in a world like Gethen. I saw the behaviour of Estraven, and Gethenians in general, as sort of similar to how we commonly see women (e.g., when they say yes, it really means no), and for the time of the reading I felt like an observer in an unknown world. *I* was the sexed in a world inhabited by unsexed people.

As far as I was concerned, the main aspect of the plot was the fact it points out how much sex determines our conduct in life. During this first reading I noticed how much our behaviour and our talking is influenced by sex, and how we discriminate (and are discriminated) by sex, even without wanting to, even when people are aware and conscious of this fact and make their best efforts not to do so.

Being in the position of observer I had a privileged point of view. The reading of the book gave me the chance to focus my attention on those kinds of behaviour mostly affected by sex, either in positive or in negative way. When a student smiled at a teacher I became able to understand whether it was for appreciation or to get a higher grade. When I saw a boy talking to a girl I became able to understand whether he was trying to openly find out more about her, or the opposite, by indirectly talking about the weather. What did I learn from this? Not the way to communicate to get a higher grade or to find out about a girl by talking about the weather, but to understand whether or not the person I am speaking with *is* doing so.
Language is, of course, also influenced by sex, and Italian more than English, because we
decline words not only by number but also by gender. This happens with both nouns and
adjectives; it also happens when verbs are used as adjectives by using them with tenses, such as
the partícipe tense, which is the same as the past tense in English. As an example, “this” and
“these” are translated in Italian as “questo” and “questi” in the male form, and as “questa” and
“queste” in the female form. Also, “loved” as a partícipe tense, is translated in Italian as “amato”
if male, “amata” if female.

While reading *The Left Hand of Darkness*, I started using language *without* terms
identified by a gender as much as possible. Why? Because language influences the way we think,
and at that time I had deduced that: “if I want to work for a society that doesn’t discriminate by
sex, I have to use a neutral language, or at least try to use it as much as possible.”

I was supported in this, even without talking about it, by some aspects of politics, which
is another topic important in my life. For instance, there’s a small but active anarchist movement
in Italy that is followed by a not so small amount of people, and one of their mottos is “Per una
società di libere e uguali.” This literally means “For a society of free and equal people,” but the
adjective “libere” or “free” is used here as a noun in its feminine form. In other words, this motto
has an undefined meaning, a double significance, because it uses the feminine form of the word.

My goal or aim was to make my language as neutral as possible, without the connotations
of male or female words, to the extent that a reader would not be able to know if I was male or
female. While reading, I frequently thought about the words I could use to achieve my goal, and
practiced talking with other people (not on this specific topic, talking about anything) as if I were
in front of a Gethenian.

I believe that the way we think influences the way we speak, which influences the way
we behave, which in turn influences the way we think, as in a circle. And with the word
“politics” I mean it in its original sense: living in a society. As I said at the beginning, my aim
was to influence some positive changes in the world, so I saw using a language free of sex-
related terms as a first possible step towards achieving this aim.

I have always thought to conduct a test similar to the Turing Test, in which, instead of
determining if the opponent is a human or not, the aim is to determine if the opponent is a male
or female by judging only by the words he or she writes.
Now I’d like to tell you an anecdote to illustrate such a test, even if it happened by chance, that proves my language is now free of sex-influence: while playing an online game, where interactions between players are reduced to messages they may send to each other, my sex-free language (i.e. the absence of male adjectives in my statements) led another player to believe I was a girl trying to hide her sexual identity. So I have had the strange feeling of being courted as if I was a girl. And all my claims that I was not a “she,” only made the other player more convinced that I was a girl who was trying to deny it.

I think that the fact that this book had a positive effect on me may be related to the fact that it is of the New Wave science fiction genre, but I strongly think that this vein of science fiction was specifically intended to make people think. In other words, a different genre might have had the same positive effect on me. For example, I’ve had positive experiences reading other authors of fiction, which I don’t consider to be science fiction or fantasy, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Jean Paul Sartre, and Manuel Scorza. In my opinion a positive change and/or the sensation of absorbed reading may happen not only with fantasy books.
Peregrin Took

Narrative: J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*

During the time when summer starts to wane, the slight chill of fall seeps into the air and the colors of trees begin to change. Tea is always on the kettle, and during the early hours of the morning you are comfortably wrapped in a cozy blanket watching the cold sunrise. You step outside in appreciation of the day, and you take a deep breath. Life is renewed within you, and you feel ready to start your day. When night comes, you curl up comfortably once more, but this time you lose yourself next to a burning fire of red and gold. The fire sings to you with sweet melodies, and as you reflect upon your day it touches you with warmed fingers. You never want to leave the fire.

This is the best way that I can describe in words the *feeling* I get from J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. This feeling of comfort, of spiritual awakening and of guidance has thankfully been bestowed upon me ever since I first read Tolkien’s masterpiece in 2002-2003, when I was about 15 years old. I have read *The Lord of the Rings* in full about six times, and I constantly re-read certain passages and/or certain chapters whenever I find the time. Since childhood I’ve always had an indescribable affinity with nature, and I’ve always been a Tolkien lover. In fact I first came in contact with Tolkien via film; when I was about eight years old and my father and I watched Ralph Bakshi’s animated version of Tolkien’s classic. This *feeling* of spiritual consciousness and love for nature existed within me before I read *The Lord of the Rings*—however, it was not until my early teenage years when I finally read Tolkien’s masterpiece that I was able to find where this feeling was coming from. I became aware of it. I was able to locate it, to greet it, and to explore every inch of it.

All of this was possible because of J. R. R. Tolkien, his Middle-earth, and all of his characters that went with it. *The Lord of the Rings* helped me locate my spirit and shape it into what it was meant to be. Aside from my beautiful parents, Tolkien has been the biggest influence in my life—and continues to be so into my present day. Once I became *aware* of my spirit, I was able to find out that I was an environmentalist, and I owe every bit of it to Tolkien. *The Lord of the Rings* in itself is very connected to nature. You have the land of the Hobbits—the Shire—a glimpse of paradise, a land where folk are at peace and enjoy the finer, simpler things in life. Farming and gardening is their choice of work—what a nice way to live. Of course, Tolkien
based the Shire off of England’s rural countryside that prevailed in a time long ago. Although based on a real world setting, the Shire is the ultimate haven of peace, encompassed by nature, living off and for the land.

You also have the Ents, who dwell in Fangorn Forest, and their rival—the tainted wizard Saruman—who felled many trees (many of them Ents) to create his industrial haven of malice at the once fertile fortress of Isengard. The Ents eventually marched on Saruman and destroyed everything he had worked for—the ultimate story of nature striking back. Even Saruman, a defeated wizard but one with many skills, could not halt the march of the Ents.

Toward the end of the story you have “The Scouring of the Shire” in which a displaced and bitter Saruman brings evil men, or “ruffians,” to the beautiful Shire and fells all of its trees and turns the Shire into an industrial hell. The four main hobbits—Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin—return to their home after their long journey to find Saruman’s mess, and it is their job to oust him and his bad company from the Shire and restore what is green and good in their land—back to normal. Once this deed is done concluding the Battle of Bywater, Samwise remembered that the Lady Galadriel gave him one mallorn seed (a type of tree that only grew in Lorien) for his garden. He planted it once Saruman’s stench had been blown away, and the Shire started anew.

All of these events and more that are contained within The Lord of the Rings have shaped me into a committed environmentalist. I believe that if we take from our earth, we should surely give back to it as well. A balance is needed. Without balance, there will be nothing but ruffians about, destroying the land and poisoning our water. There is a quote from Tolkien’s main wizard, Gandalf, within the pages of The Lord of the Rings that has always made itself known to me concerning The Lord of the Rings and nature:

Yet it is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they shall have is not ours to rule.

My “Tolkien-owed” environmentalism was put into action for the first time during my early teenage years. One day my friends and I had a computer that blew out and became unusable. So, we thought it would be fun to take it into my back woods and throw it off a dirt mound. We did so, it smashed, and then we threw it down the hill where it found its home behind a mound of grass. I felt so terrible about doing it from the moment it happened. Thus, the very
next day I went back there with a garbage pail, went down to the mound, and picked every piece of it up. I brought it back to my house and disposed of it properly. I couldn’t bear to let that piece of junk sit and pollute nature’s beauty. The whole time I was picking up the mess, my favorite character from *The Lord of the Rings*, Peregrin “Pippin” Took, was right beside me.

Peregrin “Pippin” Took is my most favorite character in *The Lord of the Rings* and one day I noticed that we shared an incredible bond, even though he is fictional. There is no sole day for this realization. Perhaps it happened when I picked up the computer from the dirt, or maybe it happened before that. Whenever the time was, this realization has been with me for quite some time and always brings a smile to my face. My life’s journey mirrors Pippin’s in many ways.

His personality and character is very similar to mine. I’m easy to get along with, and I try to see the brighter side of things—most of the time! I love food; I love nature and long walks; I love music; I love my family, friends, and my land. Naturally, I also love my ale, and smoking is a rare delight! I’m quite foolish at times and sometimes say foolish things. I’m usually the one calling for rests or for food when I go walking with my friends, as Pippin did at the beginning of his journey. I can completely identify with Pippin. His initial fear of being out in the wide world—outside his Shire—is what I'm going through right now—finding my place in the “real” world, both physically and spiritually. I can relate to Pip's whole story, leaving the Shire rather immature and passing through many dangers, and coming back hardened and completely ready for the world around him—this is also my journey. I hope that I can become just as hardened as Pippin became.

By “hardened” I mean completely ready for my life’s journey. Passing through such incredible dangers as Peregrin did in such a short amount of time proved to be a major peak of maturity in his life. Thus, I myself can only hope that I will also gain maturity and have an overall grasp on adulthood when my main journey is over, just as Pippin did.

When I read *The Lord of the Rings* I become completely absorbed. Within my heart and mind, Middle-earth is real and I am walking with the characters through all of their perils. Aside from Tolkien’s characters, I also become absorbed in the environment that is described. I have actually felt the same feelings that the characters were experiencing in their respective environments. For example, during one of my rereads of *The Lord of the Rings*, I actually felt extremely parched while I read about Frodo and Sam’s dry, waterless journey through Mordor. I felt so thirsty that I had to take a break in reading to get a glass of water. It was like I was in
Mordor with Frodo and Sam, having no water to drink and parched. Sometimes I feel as if I am Pippin in the story, or that I am Pippin reading the story when he is not in it. Other times I’m there as an invisible person, walking along Mordor with Frodo and Sam, thirsting for water.

I must say that I live my life through Middle-earth. If I am not walking in the Shire, I am off on some sort of adventure in the lands beyond, with Peregrin of course—be it in the Old Forest, Fangorn, Gondor, or elsewhere. When I go canoeing I am on the Great River. My tales are endless—Middle-earth and all its characters are alive in me. There are many times when I have based my decisions off of asking myself questions such as, “What would Pippin do?” or “What would Gandalf or Aragorn tell me to do?”

In my leisure time I am always keeping Middle-earth and its inhabitants in my thoughts. When I am on the Internet, I frequent daily The Lord of the Rings Fanatics Plaza website and post on the forums—the largest community of Tolkien scholars on the web that I have seen. I am the webmaster of a webpage dedicated to Peregrin Took. I have dressed up as characters from Middle-earth and taken pictures in the woods. My friends and I, on every occasion we hang out, make some sort of Tolkien reference. We go on long walks into the forest daily, and always refer to our walking group as “The Fellowship.” I once attended “ELF,” a Tolkien convention. I have endless collectibles that I always seek pertaining to Middle-earth. I will be attending a live performance of Howard Shore’s “The Fellowship of the Ring” score. If there is anything that relates to Tolkien going on, I always want to be a part of it.

It is hard for me to describe in words how much J. R. R. Tolkien's work (in specific *The Lord of the Rings*) has impacted me. His tales and characters have played a pivotal role throughout my daily life ever since I came in contact with them. *The Lord of the Rings* is not just a book to me—it's not just an amazing story. Tolkien's epic reaches down deep into my soul, and plays my heart strings beautifully. It is little shock that Tolkien’s medievalism led me to pursue my own innate love for the Middle Ages in college. There are so many fundamental truths and moral lessons within Tolkien's work—so much imagination and beauty—one can become so heavily engrossed in Middle-earth that it is hard to get back to the “real world.” Middle-earth, Pippin, and all of Tolkien’s characters will continue to dwell with me for my whole life.
In the Shire, the grass grew green.  
This is what your childhood had seen.  
By the Brandywine where the waters flowed,  
That is where you loved to go.  
You were swallowed by a tree,  
And captured by a Barrow-Wight before Bree.  
You were one of the nine that departed from Rivendell,  
Before the great Mithrandir fell.  
You marched with the Ents,  
And brought justice to the West.  
You looked into the seeing stone,  
And saw the great eye watching aglow.  
You served in the White Tower,  
Where you again showed your power.  
You saved the Steward's son,  
Where the bloody war was won.  
You marched to the Black Gate,  
Where you slew a great troll filled with hate.  
With the Dark Lord beaten,  
You returned home with your friends undefeated.  
Your abilities shined when you saved the Shire,  
From mindless ruffians obsessed with fire.  
You married Diamond of Long Cleeve,  
And had a son with a friend's name.  
You became the Took and Thain,  
And your happiness never waned.  
In your last years you traveled with no fear,  
Back to the Kingdom of Men.  
And in the end you were placed in a bed,  
Beside your best friends,  
Forever remembered by all who came,  
Peregrin Took, that was his name.

by Peregrin Took
Pippin's Valour

He made his stand
Amongst his friends,
Against tall foes.

His heart was low,
His spirit sank,
Yet his sword rang.

Through the villains
His steel did pierce,
Black blood sprang forth.

And then he saw
A vile sight
A big, strong troll.

With all courage,
He thrust his blade
Through the tough skin.

Smothered he was,
The troll fell hard,
The end was near.

Then voices spoke!
Orcs started running!

The thought rang clear in his head!

"The Eagles are coming!"

by Peregrin Took
A Hobbit's Encouragement

Dark are the times you've come to see,
Mindless ruffians travel through the Shire and Bree.
They want to decay the roots and poison the land,
But you must endure and stand! Stand! Stand!
Don't let them get the best of you,
Your heart will surely pull you through.
Out of the darkness and into the light,
Stand up for what is right, against the orcs of the world-
It's worth the fight.

by Peregrin Took

Lament for Boromir

Seeking the meaning of a dream,
You left from your White Tower,
Journey of one hundred and ten long dangerous days.
Loth was he to give you leave,
But your will was strong,
But now your banner won't fly anymore.

Lament for Boromir,
Steward's son.
Lorien awoke the lust that had already begun.
Faithful journey, perils past.
But at the last you saved yourself.

Horn sounding overhead!
Sword clashing like the tide!
And they'll look to his coming anon,
But he won't come again.

by Peregrin Took
I read *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman when I was fourteen years old and a freshman in high school, this would be around twenty years ago. The Dragonlance series of books became something of an obsession for me as a teenager. *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* is the first book in what has become a massive quantity of books set in the world of Krynn and penned by many different authors. It is the first book in the Chronicles trilogy which along with the follow-up trilogy, Legends, comprises the core canon for the larger series.

The basic story of *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* starts in a world where the gods and dragons have abandoned Krynn a long time ago. Diverse companions have separated in search of a crystal staff that channels the powers of a god. Meanwhile the evil goddess and queen of evil dragons, Takhisis, seeks to return and has sent her armies across the continent. The companions are sent out in order to reestablish the connection with the gods and to stop Takhisis.

While I read many books in the Dragonlance series, the actual experience of reading stands out the most with this particular one. Reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* is perhaps one of my strongest memories of ease, comfort, warmth, even though it’s definitely not the best fantasy novel I’ve read, and it’s probably the weakest in the series by these authors. I’ve reread parts of it, but never the whole thing through again. I started again many years later, but did not get too far along. Nevertheless the actual experience of reading stands out more than any of the other books in the series and maybe as much or more than any other book I’ve read.

I remember reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* on a cold Saturday during the winter when I spent most of the day snuggled under the blankets of my bed with the book. The feelings I remember having were of an almost absolute comfort and warmth. I was wrapped up in my blankets and enclosed in my small bedroom with the door closed for the majority of the day. Thinking back the experience seems almost womb-like. There was a sense of almost complete absorption and contentment as I read. I suppose I did need to take breaks for meals and for the bathroom, but there was the feeling that nothing outside the confines of my bed and my book seemed to have any real weight. I seem to recall that the day slipped by quickly. I don’t remember anything in particular about my experience of time from when I was actually reading.
If I had to describe it, I would say that there was little or no consciousness of the passage of time while reading. I just remember it coming as something as a surprise when evening came and that the day seemed to have passed so quickly.

While *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* is the first book in the series, I had read the books out of order. The first Dragonlance novel I read was the first book of the Tales trilogy which I followed up with the Legends trilogy, the sequel of the Chronicles trilogy including *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*. This being the case, I already knew most of what would happen in the story as well as having a familiarity with the characters. Nevertheless, I was enraptured reading this book. When I read it, there was a sense of returning home with old friends while I was literally returning back to the beginning of the story. There was a bit of excitement at getting to know all the little details of the story that I wasn’t able to pick up from the later books, but there was also a sense of possibility in the return to the beginning. This sense was mirrored in the opening scenes of the book as old companions were being reunited after several years of separation on individual quests. There was something peaceful in seeing everyone back together again.

Of all the characters, the one that was of most interest to me and the one whom I identified with the most was Raistlin Majere. In the Dragonlance world, magic-users are aligned with one of three major schools wearing white, red, or black robes that signify good, neutral, and evil. At the beginning of the Chronicles trilogy, Raistlin wears the red robes and is considered to be a supremely gifted mage. He has recently undergone an initiation into the order of mages that has left him profoundly changed. As a result of his trial, he is left very weak and sick, and is often coughing up blood. His skin has turned a golden color and the pupils of his eyes have become the shape of hourglasses. As a result of this change, he sees the effect of time upon all things, cursed to watch everything around him decay and fall apart. He has gained a boon of great magical power, but his physical weakness has left him dependent on his much stronger twin brother, Caramon. At the end of the Chronicles trilogy, his ambition leads him away from the other characters including his brother. Though he assists in helping his friends succeed in their ultimate goal, he takes on the black robes and leaves to pursue his own dreams of power.

For me Raistlin is a character that taps into fantasies of personal potency. I think that he represents a dream of potency gained through a mental or, at least, non-physical prowess. While I was not sickly, I was never particularly popular in middle and high school, and was somewhat socially isolated following a move between elementary and middle schools. The quality I did
possess was intelligence and this seemed the one thing that made me stand out from other people and potentially have some influence and recognition in the world. On some symbolic level, the idea of wielding magical power paralleled the influence of intelligence. One is able to effect change not through physical strength or charisma, but through a force of will alone.

I suppose that, like Raistlin, this was something that often separated and even put me at odds with the people around me. Some of this separation was imposed. I was in “advanced” and “gifted” classes from an early age. I was often separated by the sorts of things I was interested in as a child and teenager. Certainly, reading science fiction and fantasy fiction was not a popular past time at my high school. I think that, as a result of being labeled as “gifted” or “intelligent,” a certain arrogance developed within me. I don’t know that I was ever cruel or particularly haughty in word or deed, at least not intentionally, but there was a sense that I was in some way qualitatively better than the majority of my peers.

Being separated and recognized as gifted from an early age, at least for myself, fostered this sense of being different and somehow better. At the same time, it’s hard to deny that I was more intelligent, at least in the sense of being able to excel at schoolwork, than the vast majority of people around me. Of course this sort of intelligence was not a quality that was very highly valued among my peers, particularly those who were excluded from all these advanced classes. So this created a state of affairs where I believed that I was special, but this was not recognized, and sometimes even denigrated, by my peers. It certainly didn’t make me popular, get me dates, or get me invited to parties.

So for me, the idea of wielding magic appeared as a sort of extension of intelligence that would have a real, tangible effect on the world. I believe that magic often serves as a symbol for internal resources and empowerment through nonphysical means. While there certainly is a positive aspect to this in seeking empowerment in some tangible way, much like Raistlin, I believe that it was my gifts and the belief that I was somehow special that often separated me from the people around me. At the time, I wanted to believe that these gifts would someday allow me to stand apart from my peers. At the time the sense of what tangible form this use of my internal resources would take was very vague, and I still haven’t figured it all out, but there was a conviction that this use of resources would lead to a personal empowerment and freedom that would differentiate and give status among my peers.
I’m still ambivalent about how to cast the experience of reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* and the larger, consequent interest in the series and fantasy literature as a whole as “positive” and “meaningful.” My first instinct in describing an experience as positive and meaningful is to focus on the transformative value of the experience. Of course it is positive in the sense that I did enjoy and receive pleasure from reading the book. However, I have a hard time saying how this experience changed me. It did spur me on to do more self-guided reading and reinforced an interest in fantasy literature, but I can’t say that I gained any life changing insight or inspiration. Ultimately and in retrospect, I believe that the value and meaning of the experience is more revelatory than transformative.

I believe that to find something interesting or to have an experience stand out is more or less equivalent to saying that it is meaningful. Hence, interests and remembered experiences are anything but arbitrary in their importance. Looking back, the fact that the experience of reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* should stand out so sharply in my mind, inclines me to question why the book’s content was so fascinating to me. At the time and for years later, if you asked me why this experience should stand out so much, it’s likely that I would have simply said that it was because I thought it was cool. Now I can see that it functions as something of a snapshot of who and where I was when I first encountered this book.

On the same note, and to address your question about how my experience of reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* relates to the story type, I have to ask why fantasy literature was and continues to be a source of fascination for me. Specifically, with regard to the question of genre, I don’t think that if the story had been from another genre that I could have been so absorbed in the experience of reading. While the Dragonlance series held a particular sway over me, it seems more likely to me that a similar experience might have arisen from a different fantasy story than from a very similar story with analogous characters and themes occurring in a different genre.

I have difficulty nailing down why fantasy should be more absorbing because my interest in fantasy media seems to have arisen at such an early age. I would have been less than two at the time, but I swear that I can remember my parents taking me to see *Star Wars* in the theater; going to see the animated version of *The Hobbit* stands out as well. All through elementary school, I took an instant liking to anything that involved swords, magic, dragons and such things.
This interest seems to have subsided somewhat in my middle school years (age 11-13) but never totally went away.

As I mentioned earlier *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* was not the first book in the Dragonlance series that I had read, but it came very soon after I had started reading this series and full-length fantasy novels. Throughout middle school, I read mostly Stephen King novels in my free time. So this experience of reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* came at a point where, to some extent, I was rediscovering my interest in fantasy. I even remember trying to recreate this experience with other books with only limited success.

It seems to me that a number of factors contributed to the specific experience of reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*. These factors include the nature and quality of the story, my mood, an absence of any real obligation, and the cold weather contrasted against the warmth in my bedroom. However, if I had to point to one factor, I think it would be the overall newness of the experience in that I was finding a new outlet for an interest that had been somewhat latent for several years.

If I had to characterize the experience of reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* as a whole, based on my feelings and sensations and where I was in my life, I would say that it seems something of a rebirth. It seems a bit grandiose to call it such, mainly because I’m not sure into what I was being born. I have never really thought about this experience in these terms until writing this narrative, and it may take a bit of processing to be able to fully put this into it’s proper place. Still, there is the nature of the experience in feeling warm and enclosed, the sense of returning home and reuniting with old friends, and the renewal of interest in fantasy media. In reading this for the first time there was a feeling of returning to undifferentiated beginnings, which included a time before Raistlin lost his way.

My first thought is that the experience of reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* is a part of a larger transition in my life. Moving from middle school into high school was a fairly major change as I lost touch with pretty much all of my friends in middle school and was introduced to an entirely new crowd of people. In high school the divisions between students of varying academic performance levels seemed to become much more pronounced. I was no longer taken out of the regular classes once a week or so for Program Challenge. I was taking classes that were taught specifically for gifted students and taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses for the college bound. Many of the people I associated with in middle school had gone to other high
schools or were in the vocational programs. More and more, I would see mostly the same faces in my classes. Life after high school, which was always presented to me as college with the freedom and choices it promised, was starting to become a reality rather than some far away event in my mind.

Along with all of this came a need to redefine myself, at least in part. My resurgent interest in fantasy, and to a lesser extent science fiction, was to become a significant part of my redefined identity. It became easy to have an instantaneous connection with people who shared an interest in fantasy and sci-fi media. It wasn’t a requirement for my friendship, but I often found myself gravitating to these people. In the sense that reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* played a role in precipitating part of my personal and social identity, the experience might be construed as transformational.

Still, I’m at a loss to say how the bounded experience of reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* (the particular feelings and sensations, immediate reactions to the plot and characters) changed me, in the sense of giving me life changing insight or inspiration. Rather, I think the experience is indicative of, or an element of, a larger movement and change, including the need to redefine myself, that was occurring in my life.
Experience of Reading *Twilight* by Stephanie Meyer

I am an avid reader. I love to read and have lived in the world of books since I was very young. Some of my earliest memories involve reading. I have always loved the education and the sense of wonder coming from the written word. I don’t have a specific style of writing that I favor but, on the whole, I don’t read a lot of science fiction or fantasy, and I tend to shy away from the supernatural.

However, one day I was in Border’s book store—my personal Heaven—looking for something light and enjoyable to read—I didn’t want something deep but something to get lost in. After not finding anything I looked at a display of Stephanie Meyer’s Twilight series. The series of young adult fantasy books includes *Twilight, New Moon, Eclipse,* and *Breaking Dawn.* I had seen them in the bookstores and I am not sure why I hadn’t bothered to look at them before for they had held a place of honor at various bookstores for quite awhile, and they were obviously enormously popular. I looked at the first book *Twilight* and read the synopsis of the book series and was surprised to find that it was about a love story between a human girl and a vampire. I was intrigued and decided to purchase all three of the books in the series that had already been written; I purchased the last one, *Breaking Dawn,* as soon as it was released! I was 50 when I read all the books in the series and have read each one three times in the year since I purchased them. I have chosen to write about my experience of reading *Twilight,* the first book of the series, as it was the most meaningful.

As soon as I had the time to sit down and read, I picked up *Twilight.* I had not been reading very long when I realized the story line, about a young girl starting her sophomore year at high school, was written for a teen audience. I’d never really read teen literature, at least not since I was a teen, so I was upset that I had jumped the gun and bought all the books. Heck, I hadn’t even read the Harry Potter books, though I knew a lot of adults read them and loved them. However, I chose to get a bit further into *Twilight* before deciding that I had actually made a mistake.

It took no time to get into the first book of the series once I had read a bit further. I had no sense of time passing while reading *Twilight.* I read it cover to cover in hours! I remember being excited, happy, and feeling the passion and joy of first love. I felt just a lot of fun while
reading. I didn’t feel like I was part of the story; however, I felt like an observer that really really related to the main character of the story.

It did not take me long at all to identify with the main character, Bella. In fact, in no time at all I felt she and I had many many things in common. The book starts with Bella moving to a small town to live with her father whom she had not actually lived with since her parents had divorced. Bella felt she was doing this to help her mother, as her mother had just remarried and needed to be with her new husband that traveled for his job. She felt very protective of her mother and most of the time felt she was the adult, not the other way around. I identified on so many levels immediately. I had moved to new towns many times, as my father was in the construction business. I also moved many times due to my parents’ divorce. My childhood had been greatly influenced by the fact that my parents should have divorced years earlier than they did; my three siblings and I were very unhappy with our parents fighting, which I knew even then was childish and selfish behavior on their part.

Reading about Bella moving to this small town, into a new house and new school, I was transported to the many times this had happened to me. I felt the apprehension and the excitement of starting a new chapter. I remembered how many times I had gone into a new room in a house and wondered if this would be the place I would be happy and settled. Bella’s first day at her new school in Forks was as familiar to me as any other experience in my childhood; I could not count the number of schools I attended. She, as did I, wanted to blend in but also hoped to fit in. I remember vividly the anxiety of getting the new classes, finding my locker, remembering the combination, finding the classes on time, and knowing that everyone was looking at me. I have had reoccurring nightmares up until I turned 40 of being back in school, not being able to open the locker, not getting to my classes or knowing where they were. Bella and I had so many things in common—she was very shy, awkward, and was known for not being graceful! She hated gym as she knew that she was not good at team sports. I loathed gym as well and do not have any good memories of gym class—I was the girl that could not catch, throw, or dribble. She was an above average student and so was I, so in that sense we were confident in starting most new classes. I could list even more things that Bella and I have in common. It was uncanny how my life experiences paralleled Bella’s. All of these feelings came up as I read. I felt transported to my high school years.
It may sound as if the memories brought up by reading *Twilight* were all negative. Yet, as I read and re-experienced these feelings, I also realized that some of the best things in my personality have been formed due to these experiences. I have a great ability to talk to just about anyone and the ability to make others comfortable in social situations. I have learned to accept the fact that as diverse as people can be in different areas of the country, or the world, we all have the same human needs and feelings. I am empathetic and am often the person people go to talk to, as they know I will listen and often provide feedback that is not judgmental. Hopefully, this helps them think things through in different lights. These are the positive things I think that came from being like Bella. I knew that I had these positive attributes before reading Twilight, however the book helped me realize that how I had grown up, similar to Bella, had contributed to the way I behave today.

As the *Twilight* story progresses Bella meets an unusual family, the Cullens, that she will later learn are vampires. She is immediately attracted to 17 year old Edward Cullen, although she was told that he didn’t date any of the high school girls. I didn’t really think of it the first time I read the book, but I too would most likely have been very attracted to the Cullens because they were outsiders, as I was in my teens. I also always wanted to know about those that seemed to have a different cultural background. Edward is stunningly handsome—now tell me who didn’t pine for the unattainable handsome guy in class? In some ways it was safer to pine for the unattainable guy because he couldn’t really hurt you for you would just love him from afar.

Edward is attracted to Bella in ways that he can’t understand—she is human, he stays away from humans because he is a vampire. He and his family have adopted drinking the blood of animals instead of humans, yet they don’t develop any close ties with humans so as to not be tempted. Edward describes drinking from animals as similar to humans eating tofu—nourishing yet not really satisfying. When Edward meets Bella he finds that he has never in his vampire existence wanted another human’s blood as much as he wants her blood—her blood is his “brand of heroin.” This is devastating to him in so many ways—first of all he wants to kill her. Edward also considers himself a monster that has been in control and this girl comes along and disrupts his life; yet in spite of this he is oddly protective of her.

Edward and Bella eventually fall in love. He finds he can’t stay away from her and she decides it really doesn’t matter what he is, she loves him and they will find a way to work it out. Part of the dilemma is that they love each other but must be very careful around each other. He is
afraid to kiss her, much less ever be able to make love, as his strength would most likely kill her—if he didn’t kill her by drinking all of her blood first. The easy solution of Edward making Bella a vampire is not an option, as he believes he is a soulless monster and will not take her human life to make her like him. Essentially, Twilight is another take on the classic story of “girl falls for the handsome bad boy,” or Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*—one of star-crossed lovers.

I fell in love with Edward right along with Bella. He was beautiful to look at; he had super strength and powers unlike any normal boy. He was a gentleman (other than the part about his having to keep himself from killing her). He adored her and wanted nothing more than to be her protector and love. She could hardly believe that he picked her!

Although *Twilight* is a fantasy story, it brought to me the feelings of the joy and passion of first love—the intensity of longing and of the hormones that you don’t quite know what to do with, the yearning for that first kiss, wanting more but knowing that there would be dire consequences in doing so. I was raised strict Southern Baptist and later joined the Mormon Church and I remember feeling that I was constantly fighting what my body wanted and the eternal damnation of acting upon those feelings—boy could I put myself in their place! I was always a sexual person that felt I shouldn’t be. Of course all kids feel like that, I guess. But it was stronger for me with my background, so in this way I identified more with Edward’s thinking—*if we give in to our desires we will be damned*. Yet, nothing was more exciting than a first kiss and the intense love, like that of Bella and Edward—*you and me against the world*. As a teenager I had a very idealized concept of love. I wanted the knight in shining armor that would take care of me and believed that our love would solve all of life's problems. I also was all consumed with the boy—very like Bella. Bella felt Edward was her whole world and was willing to give up everything, including her mortal life and possibly her soul. This is something that, as an adult, happily married woman, I still would love to feel again. Reading *Twilight* I was able to actually experience those feelings again, which was euphoric.

I have gotten many positive things from reading *Twilight*. I’ve experienced the joy in reliving some of the exciting parts of adolescence as well as remembering some of the angst and being happy those days are behind me. I also realized that many positive aspects of my personality were formed during adolescence.

In trying to understand why these books stirred up so much emotion in me, I went online and found a group of women over the age of 21 that had formed an online website dedicated to
adult fans of the Twilight series, whose reactions to the books were similar to mine. One of the best things that has come from this experience is that I have a new group of friends that not only talk about their love of the Twilight series but about other books, dieting, hobbies, movies, current events, families, and other topics of mutual interest. It has been a fun part of my life since I began reading the series. I have never been involved in a group like this, wrapped around a series of books and finding it wonderful. It has been an opportunity to make friends that I would not normally have made.

Reading Twilight brought back the thrill of first love and lust! I am happily married but swoon when I remember those first stages of falling in love. The wanting someone so badly that you feel you can overcome any obstacles. Falling in love with Edward has been a safe way to re-experience the joy and passion of first love and to feel young again. And, in turn, these feelings have helped to rekindle my relationship with my husband.

I believe my experience of reading Twilight was related to the fact that it is a fantasy. I think that the fantasy of Edward being a vampire did affect me. The thought of always being young, beautiful and vital is the ultimate fantasy—and the danger—yes, the danger most definitely made Edward even more tantalizing. Perhaps the fantasy part hit me even more now, as I’m not thrilled that I’m now in my fifties.

As far as Bella and Edward, well, she was attracted to him right away and she didn’t know he was a vampire. But, the fact that he was actually not even nice to her in the beginning is interesting—was it the wanting what is unattainable? I know she thought he was different right away and I felt that intrigued her—it definitely made her want to know more about him. By the time she realized that he was a vampire, she wasn’t afraid of him and just felt he wouldn’t hurt her. And for Edward, the fact that she was the only human whose mind he couldn’t read was very frustrating for him. I think for once he actually had to get to know someone, and her blood was irresistible to him. After Bella finds out that he’s a vampire and they have declared their love for each other, it’s Bella that wants to try to be more intimate with Edward, while he is afraid he’ll hurt her and follows the sexual morals from the time when he was human. So, I feel the fact that they were different from each other, he a vampire and she human, was a large part of their attraction for one another, and this had a powerful affect on me.

At this time I can't recall reading another book quite like Twilight. I've read many a love story that has moved me, but the ages, the fantasy, and the intensity of Bella and Edward's love
was different. So I don’t think I could’ve had the experience I had reading *Twilight* with any other book of fiction. Other stories have moved me, but not in the same way.
Branwen

Branwen’s Narrative

*The Gate of Ivrel* by C.J. Cherryh is science fiction with a flavor of fantasy because the world in which it takes place has a culture that resembles medieval Europe. I read it in the late seventies or early eighties, when I was in my mid thirties. If I remember correctly I bought the book in Brentano’s in Paris, Avenue de l’Opera, an English language bookshop, one of my favorite stops on our trips to and from Cameroon. I enjoyed the story and the author’s style so much that I bought the other books in the series and have reread them several times over the years.

Morgaine is considered a witch by the inhabitants of the planet she is on because she possesses and uses advanced tools from another world. Also because when she enters the story she is a legend, last seen over a hundred years ago. Vanye is a warrior outlawed and banned by his own father for having killed his half-brother. He is starving and desperate when he encounters Morgaine and accepts to become her slave for one year.

Morgaine, the last survivor of fifty agents, has the mission of saving the universe by closing the Gates that permit travel from world to world, but have created havoc because they can also be used to travel through time. Because of his oath Vanye must give his life if necessary to protect his mistress, but Morgaine makes it clear that she is prepared to sacrifice both their lives to accomplish her mission. The two, who seem so different, survive a series of harrowing adventures and gradually come to respect and trust each other. The story is told from the point of view of Vanye, who does not understand Morgaine’s decisions or motivations, which adds to the suspense.

One of the most memorable scenes in the story is when Morgaine and Vanye meet. It is winter, bitter cold, Vanye has not eaten for days and has nowhere to go for shelter or help. His enemies have put a price on his head and are hunting for him. He tries to shoot a deer with his bow and arrow, wounds a buck and sees it disappear in Morgaine’s Tomb, one of the mysterious Gates that his people fear and avoid. Then he sees Morgaine appear in the Gate, exactly as she is described in the legends. He is terrified, for the legends hold her responsible for the deaths of hundreds of warriors, her allies.
Morgaine takes Vanye to a cave she knows of and they wait out a storm that Vanye realizes would have killed him if he had been out in the open. Then Morgaine looks for something she had hidden in the cave and finds nothing but moldering dust. She asks Vanye how long she has been absent and he feels pity when he tells her it has been over a hundred years. So there is fear and pity, respect and horror in his feelings for her from the beginning.

I shared Vanye’s feelings as I read the story, though I trusted that she would not turn out to be as evil as he feared. Morgaine is driven, driven by the urgency of her mission, which does not always allow her the luxury of compassion. Only gradually does Vanye come to understand this. Like Vanye, I was fascinated by the character of Morgaine, her seeming mixture of gentleness and terrifying determination, unwilling to take the slightest chance that would endanger her mission. When Vanye pleads with her to spare the life of his kinsman, I understood his fear, and her steely resolution.

I have no memory as to what my body felt like or what my physical surroundings were, even when I reread the story. I was so absorbed in the story that I tuned out everything else. My family often complains that when I’m reading I don’t hear them speaking to me, or realize that the telephone is ringing. Of course, many stories don’t absorb me that much, but The Gate of Ivrel’s spell works every time. As a matter of fact, I was recently reading the book for at least the fourth time in the airport of Bordeaux. I had arrived early to meet two cousins coming from the States. It was their first trip abroad, they are seventy-three and sixty-four and speak no French. I found myself a seat opposite the door they would arrive by, ordered a Coke and took out my book. By my watch I had almost an hour’s wait.

You can guess the rest of the story. I heard someone calling my name, not for the first time, and there were my cousins standing in front of me. Since no one had met them, they were looking for a telephone to call me and saw someone with her nose in a book that looked like me. I was with Vanye, fighting to protect Morgaine’s life from powerful enemies. I had no idea that over an hour had passed since I sat down.

I felt closer to Vanye in the story, partly because it is written from his point of view. We know what he is thinking and feeling, whereas we know of Morgaine only what she tells us. Vanye is sensitive to her facial expressions and hesitations, so we can guess some of what she does not say and like Vanye, we have to guess when she is telling the truth and when she is not. But Vanye has blind spots and is not completely reliable. Although he repeatedly proves his
courage and honor, he considers himself a dishonored coward. The reader learns to understand his sense of failure and to take it into account.

The setting of the story is absolutely credible, which is to be expected in any story by C.J. Cherryh. Physically it resembles earth, but the cultures she evokes are both similar and different. Vanye’s code of honor is close to that of the Japanese Samuraï and he could be considered a ronin, a masterless warrior, when he meets Morgaine. There are no long explanations of the code that makes him prepared to die for her, but references throughout the book make it what it is to him, the only possible way to measure honor. The sense of setting is important because the wild nature and the ecological system that Vanye knows, understands and loves, is being polluted by weird creatures that come through the Gates from other worlds. Some die immediately and some are monsters that prey on the indigenous life forms.

I felt close to Vanye, as if I was watching the story from his side, an observer but not a neutral observer, someone who cared very much for him and Morgaine, who feared for their lives and prayed for their success.

I think this book and the others in the series resonated with me because of the role reversal. Le Guin, in The Left Hand of Darkness, imagined a world in which people are genderless most of the time. Cherryh created a woman who gives orders to her male slave, a handsome hulk. A lesser author might have left it at that, but Cherryh explores their relationship and gives her readers a lot to think about. At the end of the story Morgaine goes through the Gate that will be sealed forever in a few seconds. Vanye has regained his honor and fulfilled his oath to her, but with little more than an instant’s hesitation, plunges through the Gate to follow her, not knowing where they were going or what they would find. Vanye’s devotion is that of a man who demands nothing and gives everything.

To be perfectly honest, it would be hard not to love such a man. I married a man who shares two cultures, French and Cameroonian, and in both the man “wears the pants.” And my own parents were pretty typical of marriages in the 40’s and 50’s. My father, a Navy officer, worked and brought home a salary; my mother was a homemaker and although she had been trained as a nurse, did not work because my father thought it would mean he wasn’t making enough money. My father was often absent at sea for long periods and my mother had full responsibility at those times, but when he was home he represented the parental authority. I grew up being told that men and women were equal, but rarely saw a marriage in which that appeared
to be the case. Yet all through school I got better grades than any of the boys in my classes, and I saw no reason why I should take orders from someone who was not necessarily more intelligent than me.

Of course, when you are madly in love, you don’t ask who’s going to be the boss. And in general, when my husband and I don’t agree, we are able to talk things over and try to find a solution. Yet, like many women, I’ve learned to choose my battles and to bring in outside support, to be just a bit manipulative if you like, so as not to bruise that male ego. So the character of Vanye, who obeys without ever questioning Morgaine’s authority, yet is undeniably masculine, is wonderfully refreshing. Like time travel and ships that fly to other galaxies, he doesn’t exist, but it’s a beautiful, inspiring idea, that a man can obey a woman’s orders without losing his dignity and self-respect. And I have to admit to feeling a bit wistful every time I read Vanye’s story. I’d like to have the luxury of telling men what to do without having to argue, convince and negotiate each step of the way.
Lucy

Experience of Reading *Once on a Time* by A. A. Milne

It used to astonish me that although reading fantasy sent dragons hurtling through my mind, other people did not notice this intense experience. The narratives would build a sense of the story world bit by bit, and it was as if I were reading an historical account rather than a fiction made from whole cloth. I would become absorbed to the point that I wouldn't notice ringing phones and such. For the most part, I was simply a reader but as I continued to read, I felt at times like a close observer. The arch conversational style of narrative that A. A. Milne used appealed to me, and drew me into the world of the story more readily than intricate political description or exhaustive description of the exotic landscape.

By the time I was in my early teens, I had read all the collections of fairy tales I could find: for example, the series by Ruth Manning-Sanders, *The Tales of Silver Lands* by Charles Finger, and the color fairy books that Andrew Lang edited. I began searching for fairy tales as full-length novels. The first book of this kind I found was Milne’s *Once On a Time*.

The summer I was 15, my family moved from rural Tennessee to southern California. I was a bit lonely and worried about the new school. I was homesick for the karst landscape of the cave region of Kentucky. Karst is the topography of landscape created by the groundwater dissolving sedimentary rock such as limestone. The rain—an average rainfall of 54 inches per year—mixes with carbon dioxide in the air and creates a weak acid called carbonic acid to which the limestone is vulnerable, creating hollows in the limestone strata. The common features of a karst landscape include springs, caves, sinkholes, sinking streams, natural bridges, and seeps. There are roughly 1,000 sinkholes per square mile in the cave region. I was not sure that I would like the dryer environment of my new home.

One day while visiting the library, I found a copy of *Once On a Time*. I had enjoyed Milne’s *Winnie-the-Pooh* series as a kid as well as his literary fairy tale, *Prince Rabbit*, and was willing to try a title that was new to me; also, its jacket description as being a ‘fairy tale for grownups’ attracted me. Over the next few days of reading it, the story drew me in more and more. I found myself trying to make it last long by only reading it in the morning and right before bed. Since I read it over a period of several days, there were often interruptions but I
managed to return to the world of the story easily. However, I immersed myself in the story by the final third of the book.

It's interesting that some people feel as though they are part of the story. In general, when I read novels, there is a definite barrier between me and the story. It is fiction and I am continually aware of it. This is not to say that I am not absorbed by the book, to the point that I don't notice ringing phones and such. Sometimes I become immersed in the story to the point where I feel that I am watching a tale unfold rather than reading it, as in the final third of *Once on a Time*. However, I never feel that I am part of a story or a character in it.

According to the afterward in the 1988 edition of *Once on a Time*, Milne wrote the manuscript for the novel during his regimental training in World War I. Later, he transferred to the Ministry of Defense to generate propaganda. Evidently, he became opposed to war after these experiences. If this novel is any evidence, he became cynical about ostentatious military display.

The novel moves in tone between farce and fairy tale adventure, which neatly determines the fate of every character. The main characters represent the kingdoms of Barodia and Araby. The characters from Barodia include a dull witted king named Merriwig, his tractable daughter Hyacinth, Wiggs the attendant to the princess, and the conniving Countess Belvane. The prince of Araby is the self-centered Udolpho and his companion, Coronel, a duke of Araby.

The fantasy kingdoms of Barodia and Euralia go to war over a petty quarrel. It begins with the King of Barodia setting out on a constitutional while wearing his seven-league boots and passing over the castle of Euralia. King Merriwig of Euralia retaliates by commanding his archers to shoot at the King of Barodia on his return. After a series of “Stiff Notes,” war is declared. Both kings are dim and timid, so the war takes some time to conduct. King Merriwig triumphs over the King of Barodia by shaving off his whiskers late one night. In mortification, the Barodian king abdicates and takes up the occupation of swineherd.

The primary plot concerns the efforts of Princess Hyacinth to foil the intrigues of Countess Belvane. Belvane intimates and tricks Hyacinth into granting her large sums of money for fictitious organizations. Finally, Hyacinth learns that that Belvane’s eventual aspiration is to become queen of Euralia. Hyacinth sends for reinforcements in the person of Prince Udo of Araby. To thwart Udo’s potential authority, Belvane steals a magic ring from Hyacinth’s attendant Wiggs and makes an evil wish that transforms Udo into a chimera animal made of rabbit, lion, and wooly lamb. Although Udo discovers that Belvane is responsible for his state, he
forgives her once a wish restores him to his true form. Furthermore, Udo allows Belvane to sway him into disloyalty to Hyacinth. Luckily, Hyacinth finds a companion and suitor in Coronel, a Duke of Araby. After a few nonsensical measures and countermeasures, Hyacinth and Coronel, Belvane and Merriwig pair off.

In a subplot, Hyacinth’s attendant Wiggs has a ring that will grant her one good wish if she behaves well for an entire day and one bad wish if she behaves badly for an entire day. Belvane steals the bad wish but Wiggs did not want it anyway. Wiggs’ strongest desire is to dance gracefully. She manages to behave flawlessly all day long yet she gives up her wish to restore Udo. In a bit of poetic justice, the magic ring grants her the gift of dancing like a fairy.

Years later in my twenties, I remembered Milne’s book as a fine example of a novel-length literary fairy tale. I had remembered Udo becoming a rabbit instead of the amalgam he became. On the other hand, I had remembered Coronel and Hyacinth’s romance and Countess Belvane and her diary a bit more clearly. There is some derision in Milne’s treatment of her diary writing which I had softened in my memory. Although I hunted, I could not find copies in the library or in used bookstores, and gave up the search eventually. Evidently, I must have discussed the story at length with a friend of mine, though I cannot remember doing so. At any rate, a friend bought it for me from an online seller. I recall reading the book only once when I was 15 and once again in my twenties when my friend bought it for me, about 12 years ago.

Some aspects of the story stand out in memory. All of the scenes set in the forest were memorable to me. In one of these scenes Wiggs dances; it is Wiggs’ dearest wish to “dance like a fairy.” I think a theory of magical powers in fantasy stories, is that they are the wish for gaining skills without effort. It is a common sort of wish fulfillment. Here, however, wishes are rewards for good or bad behavior. Wiggs behaves well and gains the ability to dance with more than human grace, like a fairy. When her wish comes true and Milne unexpectedly launches into prose poetry, it is a heady moment in the novel. I felt as though I were observing a real scene and that it was a timeless moment. The forest is also the setting for Coronel and Hyacinth to meet and fall in love, and plan their revenge on the Countess Belvane and Prince Udo.

The Countess Belvane and her charming manners and devious scheming made her a mild sort of femme fatale. I liked that she was mockingly clear-sighted about other people’s troubles, although she was not clear-sighted about her own troubles, and that she triumphs in every one of her goals. She was the amiable, morally gray character that later became my favorite kind.
Belvane is something of a sympathetic femme fatale, which is a character type I enjoy. The villainess in traditional fantasy generally has more range of personality and is more proactive than the heroine.

Scattered throughout the novel are amusing conversations and authorial asides, which were great fun. At one point, Udo tells Belvane a dull story from his dragon fighting days, “to which Belvane was listening with an interest which surprised even the narrator.” Near the end of the novel, King Merriwig informs Coronel that he will have to perform an act of cunning rather than valor to prove he is worthy of marrying Princess Hyacinth and “Coronel did his best to summon up a look of superhuman guile into his very frank and pleasant countenance.”

I was emotionally involved to the point that I was concerned over Wiggs’ eventual fate and worried that someone might discover the Countess Belvane’s perfidy. Otherwise, I think I simply enjoyed the romp and wished I could be as clever as Belvane. Another aspect of the book that pleased me, which I previously mentioned, was Milne’s confidential asides and digressions.

As far as the characters were concerned, I did my best to identify with the princess because she was close to my age and everything is better with princesses. However, I was only successful in feeling a kinship with the Countess Belvane and with Wiggs. Belvane kept a diary, which endeared her to me because I had kept a diary since I was eleven years old. Fortunately, her penchant for writing light verse meant little to me. Belvane writes a considerable amount of poetry throughout the novel, all of which is atrocious. I enjoy reading poetry but I have read a fair amount of bad poetry, which is a painful experience. Wiggs’ earnestness and general lack of panache was easy to relate to in real life. I was intensely sincere about everything and not particularly charming about it, much like Wiggs in this story. All of the rest of the characters were ludicrous and hard to imagine in any other setting aside from fairyland.

During the time I was reading the book I experienced a couple of real life events that were related to the story. The first such event was a dream about small, fussy rabbit who reminded me to polish the cutlery. Other than Udo being the rabbit and the cutlery being the unpacking I was doing, I could not think of any significance. However, on reflection, perhaps this dream was about how unsettled I felt at the move and how nothing was quite right with my new home.

There was another instance where my real life related to the story. My parents had friends in the area whom we visited when we arrived in California. They had a daughter who was 16 and
who appeared to be haughty and self-important in the way Belvane appeared to the princess. I resented her at first but we slowly became friends and still email each other once in awhile. In retrospect, I think my perception of her attitude had more to do with her painful shyness and the fact that she had many after school activities and was not used to having much free time to unwind.

The sense of place I felt was strongest when reading the forest scenes. I liked the forest scenes because I was missing the environment to which I was accustomed. My imagination helped create a sense of place in the forest scenes, since I found on rereading it, that Milne put little effort into developing the setting. This was not his intent in any case.

The way I felt about Wiggs’ success prompted me to realize that there is much satisfaction in helping other people achieve their dreams. This is so even if you would not want that dream for yourself.

A small effect of reading the book was that it encouraged me to continue writing in my diary. I did not know anyone else who kept a diary, and in fiction, diaries seemed only to be a catalyst for revealing damaging secrets. This took place long before blogs and social networking sites made journaling a common practice. The diary was comforting to me in dealing with unsettling events in my life, much as Belvane’s was for her. In particular, I remember the time when my brother had to have corrective surgery on his leg and I did a lot of worrying about him. I did not want to upset my sister by talking about it so I wrote long entries into my diary.

There was a cumulative effect for me in reading this novel and others, in realizing that everyone thinks they are acting reasonably. While *Once on a Time* is perhaps too fluffy, in that all of the conflict is either superficial or has a facile resolution, to convey that everyone has distinct point of view, it was more meaningful to me than other didactic fiction I had read previously.

*Once On a Time* also played a part in helping me to slowly learn the concept of listening to other people and giving them the liberty to tell as much of their story and with as much enthusiasm as possible. It became important to me to employ this approach as often as I could.

Since fairy tales were my favorite kind of fiction at the time, I was amused and delighted by the parody and still hold it as standard for light fantasy fiction. I do not think I would have reacted the same way to another genre of fiction because I would not have been familiar with the
tropes and conventions, the figurative use of language and the literary practices established by usage, of another genre at the time.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue.

—Henry James (1888, p. 388)

This chapter presents the integration of Cycles 4 and 5 of the intuitive inquiry process. I will begin with an overview of the study’s objectives, followed by a presentation of my final interpretive lenses, which represent my current understanding of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state. I will elucidate the meaning of each lens, including references to relevant literature and the participants’ original writing, as well as discuss the ways in which my understanding of the topic has changed over the course of the study. In conclusion, I will comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the intuitive inquiry method, discuss the implications of this research, and make suggestions for possible future research.

Initially, the goal of this study was to explore and understand the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state. I also wondered about the positive meaningful aspects or benefits experienced by readers and whether they were affected psychologically or spiritually. Personally, I wished for insights into my own meaningful yet mysterious and elusive experiences of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state. The memories of these experiences beckoned me to explore their meaning during the long process of formulating and articulating my research topic in Cycle 1 of the intuitive inquiry process.

My understanding of the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state has evolved over the course of this study. I have repeatedly cycled around the hermeneutic circle by identifying my assumptions in the forward arc, then modifying them through engagement with some new source of knowledge in the return arc. By allowing myself to be informed by both
subjective (personal) and objective (external) sources of knowledge in this way, I developed an intimate relationship with the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state, one that revealed its deeper meaning to me, making transformation possible.

This study has involved five iterative cycles of interpretation. In Cycle 1, I clarified my research topic. I then wrote a formal literature review and an explanation of my personal relationship to the topic to help develop my preliminary understandings of the topic in Cycle 2. These understandings were represented by a set of preliminary lenses. Next, in Cycle 3, I collected a set of data and provided summary reports: the original writing and creative expression from 18 participants’ experiences of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state. In this chapter, I will present the Cycle 4 final set of lenses developed from my engagement with the participants’ stories. Then in Cycle 5 I will integrate the findings with relevant literature, as well as evaluate the research process as a whole.

Looking back over the transformation in my beliefs and assumptions from the preliminary lenses to the final lenses, I realize that the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state has become clearer and better defined. After working with the data, I came to a deeper awareness of the complex and mysterious nature of the topic. The participants’ written stories of their experiences of reading fantasy literature are incredibly rich in detail and recount a variety of situations, inner experiences, and personal meanings. At first, the wealth and complexity of details seemed overwhelming, much like the interconnected threads of a spider’s web. I engaged with the details until the common threads, or patterns in the woven cloth of stories, became apparent. Ultimately, I realized that the deeper meaning of the stories would only be revealed by stepping back and engaging with them from a distance, waiting for the big picture to emerge. My understanding has deepened in many ways, especially with regard to the nature of
imagination; how readers interact with story images to create their own unique versions of the
story, the nature of the altered state associated with absorbed reading of fantasy literature and
how this facilitates readers’ development, and how the experience inspires creativity in readers. I
will elaborate further, as appropriate, when I discuss the final lenses.

After working with the stories of the 18 participants, my overall understanding of the
experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state is that it is essentially a spiritual
experience that facilitated transformation for these participants, especially at critical junctures
and times of transition. The experience is spiritual in the sense that absorbed readers seem to be
in an intermediate world, the world of the story, which straddles the physical and the spiritual
worlds. While in this intermediate world or imaginal world, absorbed readers may also
temporarily experience a sense of unity with Divine spirit. The experience is complex and multi-
layered.

Absorbed readers of fantasy literature experience an altered state of consciousness similar
to focused meditation, dreaming sleep, and shamanic journeys. Like meditation and dreaming
sleep, this altered state involves focused concentration on images from the imaginal realm of the
story, as well as processing unconscious images that arise while reading. The altered state is also
similar to shamanic journeys in which readers obtain knowledge or healing through imagination.
In addition, shamanic journeys and fantasy literature have initiatory structures; readers are
influenced by story archetypes, especially the hero’s journey and the Self or Divine.

While in this absorbed state of consciousness, readers experience various levels of
imaginative involvement in the story, intense emotions, vivid images, distortions of time and
perception, a sense of the ineffable and the noetic, as well as a feeling of transformation. The
altered state of absorbed fantasy reading seems to bring about transformation by altering readers’
perceptions and conceptual thoughts to reveal a different way of seeing themselves and the world. Readers who are experiencing critical junctures or transitions in their lives, such as times of change, difficulties, exploration, or recovery, may especially benefit from reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state due to the initiatory nature of the altered state of consciousness. Transformation seems to be tailor-made for their growth and development, providing what readers’ need, whether it be guidance, knowledge, comfort, or healing. The experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state is essentially spiritual, for there is movement, growth, and transformation throughout. Once readers engage with the imaginal realm of the story, they experience a sense of openness and freedom, a sense of spirituality and creativity. The final lenses representing this overall understanding are presented in Table 4.

The final lenses have been placed into three categories: new, change, and seed lenses (Esbjörn, 2003). Seed lenses relate to the researcher’s earlier understandings and may simply be refined or elaborated to express a deeper understanding. Change lenses have evolved to reflect a shift in the researcher’s understanding. Finally, new lenses are unanticipated understandings that either are new and surprising for the researcher or have been made more conscious and explicit through engaging with the data.

The preliminary lenses, from Cycle 2, are presented in Table 5 to make it easier for the reader to view the changes from the preliminary to the final lenses. My perspective on absorbed reading of fantasy literature has subtly changed and deepened since I began this research. Initially my exploration of the data followed the guideline questions (see Appendix F), which most participants used in writing their narratives. I alternately looked at the narratives in minute detail and as whole stories. Ultimately, I realized that, even though, I had learned much from the
details, I needed to stand back to see the bigger picture. As the patterns of my findings began to emerge I compared them to the preliminary lenses.

For the most part, it seemed as if my findings and the preliminary lenses were essentially equivalent, yet richer in meaning. I focused on the overall experience of absorbed fantasy reading as an *altered state of consciousness*, as well as its essential aspects. The deeper I delved into the data, the more I was able to articulate the essential aspects of the altered state (i.e. *relationship to story, intense emotions, vivid images, distortion of time and perception, and ineffable*), in addition to other characteristics (i.e., *transformation, healing, story mirrors life, story is teacher, guide and companion, sense of home, sense of freedom, escape, creative inspiration*). As a result of the deepening of my understanding of the experience as an altered state of consciousness, the definition of absorbed reading of fantasy literature, from chapter 2, deepened as well.

Through the process of discovering the final lenses, I realized that some preliminary lenses did not resonate with me as they once had. Through the course of data analysis, delving deeper into the topic, I came to understand that my overemphasis on the positive nature of fantasy no longer felt authentic (i.e., (17) *fantasy is essentially positive*, and (29) *positive change*). Many of the narratives illustrate the aspects of joy and suffering as part of transformation. Other preliminary lenses, such as personal beliefs, may be true but did not seem appropriate to include in the final lenses (i.e., (6) *spirit is eternal*, (7) *connection*, (8) *spirit is accessible but not graspable*, (19) *reality is fantasy*, (26) *belief in other realities*, and (34) *fantasy is difficult to define*). Also, due to the volume of data, many preliminary lenses might be appropriate to include under different circumstances. For example, preliminary lens (27) *Exceptional Human Experiences (EHEs)* was not included because to do so would require
further analysis of the data with EHEs as the focus, which was not feasible for this study; however, this is a potential topic for future research.

Therefore most of the 34 preliminary lenses, which overlapped to a large degree, were subsumed by others in clarifying and defining the final 14 lenses. The final lenses are constellated around the most fundamental aspects of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state. The participants’ stories provide flesh to the final lenses, giving a richness and complexity to them.
Table 4

*Cycle 4 Final Lenses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lens Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Lenses</td>
<td>Intense emotions. Absorbed fantasy readers may experience intense emotions, including joy, ecstasy, possession, love, grief, and fear. Readers may also feel carried away by the story, read voraciously, and feel strong emotions (e.g., grief, love, friendship) toward characters, as if they were people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vivid images. Absorbed fantasy readers may imagine they are in the story world and vividly imagine story world details. Readers may also desire to go beyond the boundary of the story as written.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Escape. Absorbed fantasy readers may temporarily escape from life’s responsibilities, but the escape is ultimately healing and transformative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creative inspiration. Absorbed fantasy reading may inspire readers to create works of art or writing (poetry and prose).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Lenses</td>
<td>Altered state of consciousness. Absorbed fantasy reading is an altered state of consciousness that is similar to focused meditation, dreaming sleep, and shamanic journeys. Readers enter this altered state through imagination. Different aspects of involvement, including relationship to the story, intense emotions, and vivid images, are characteristic of readers’ absorption in the story. Readers may also have experiences ranging from distortion of time and perception to mystical or profoundly altered states of consciousness. These experiences facilitated transformation for the study participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship to story. Absorbed fantasy readers may experience different categories of imaginative involvement, representing the relationship of the reader to the story. The three categories are (a) observer of the story, (b) participant in the story, and (c) identified with a character in the story. The three categories represent continuous levels of imaginative involvement, ranging from least to most involvement (i.e., from least engaged observer to complete identification with a character). Readers may experience one or more of these levels of imaginative involvement during reading, either consecutively or simultaneously. The level of involvement seems to influence the quality of readers’ experiences.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lens Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change Lenses</td>
<td>Distortion of time and perception. Absorbed fantasy readers may experience distortion of time and perception.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ineffable. Absorbed fantasy readers’ experiences may seem ineffable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seed Lenses</td>
<td>Transformation. Absorbed fantasy reading facilitates transformation in readers by altering their perceptions of themselves and the world, as well as by facilitating their transitions through life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Healing, consoling and validating. Absorbed fantasy reading may be healing, consoling, and validating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Story mirrors life. Fantasy literature may mirror the lives of absorbed readers at some level, whether it be metaphorical or nearly literal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Story is teacher, guide and companion. Fantasy literature may play the role of teacher, guide, and companion for absorbed readers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of home. Absorbed fantasy readers may experience a sense of home, including memories of home, as well as a spiritual sense of belonging in relation to the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of freedom. Absorbed fantasy reading may give readers a sense of freedom from everyday constraints and rules.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 5

*Cycle 2 Preliminary Lenses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lens</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Identification with character. When we connect with a character in a book, it enhances the experience of reading the story. It is as if we are walking in the character’s shoes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Story mirrors life. When we identify with the story, it mirrors real life at some level, whether it be abstract or nearly literal. Our life story is similar to that of the character in the book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Disidentification with ego. We disidentify with ego to enter the realm of spirit (i.e., to identify with the Divine). This often leads to empathy, compassion, enlightenment, and/or nondualism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reading is an altered state of consciousness. The more we become immersed in or identify with the story and its characters, the more altered the state of consciousness is from ordinary waking reality. In this extremely altered state we often forget that any world besides the story world exists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Reading allows access to higher states of consciousness. Higher altered states such as empathy, compassion, and nonduality can be achieved partly through our connection with the story’s characters, as well as with the actual words on the page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Spirit is eternal. We are pure spirit after death, as well as before we reincarnate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Connection. All beings are connected through spirit and are, therefore, essentially one being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Spirit is accessible but not graspable. The older we get the more we forget what it was like being in pure spirit form (i.e., before reincarnation). The years of dealing with hardships and problems make us see the world through a tainted lens, one in which the world may look darker and harsher than it really is. We lose touch with our essence, our spirit. When we touch spirit, as we can in reading fantasy literature, it is an unexpected gift, a very special and exceptional experience.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lens</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Reading is a way to reconnect with one’s spirit, as if returning to the source of all creation, the land of spirit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Meaning. A meaningful experience is one by which we connect with our essence or spirit. It is truth experienced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Reminder of values and priorities. Reading fantasy literature reminds us of our values and what is most important in life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Reading fantasy literature is like going home, where home is the land of our spirit, our essence from which we came. It is like going back to our family, our roots, to a world where we belong, that is safe, welcoming, supporting, nurturing, and healing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Literature is healing. All types of literature, not just fantasy, have the potential to heal and have been used for this purpose for a very long time. In other words, bibliotherapy is a term coined by psychologists for a phenomenon that has been in existence since the beginning of the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Therapeutic. Reading fantasy literature is therapeutic in that it acts or serves as a therapist. It does this through empathy with characters, creating a safe place where you feel held, giving you the freedom to be yourself and make your own decisions. In other words, the fantasy world is especially conducive to bringing about regeneration and healing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Challenging journey. Reading fantasy literature gives us the opportunity to find out who we were meant to be by meeting challenges and making decisions in the story world, a world that unfolds at a pace we can control. Away from our day-to-day stresses, we may embody the unlikely hero, an ordinary person called to a heroic task. This embodiment may bring personal growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Fantasy is a guide for life. Characters serve as companions and wise guides. They hold truths that connect us with spirit. These experiences guide us while reading, as well as in life.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Lens</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Fantasy is essentially positive. Reading fantasy literature has the potential to heal, transform, focus attention on life’s meaning and values, give hope, and evoke the feeling of possibility for the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Transformative. Reading fantasy literature can change our lives for the better and/or cause psychospiritual transformation when major shifts in perspective or consciousness occur. For example, meaningful literary experiences (i.e., Exceptional Human Experiences (EHEs) can be transformational.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Reality is fantasy. Reality is more like the experience one has when reading fantasy literature (i.e., nondual and peaceful). This is similar to the Buddhist concept of reality. In other words, the Western or scientific reality is called ordinary reality, and the Buddhist reality is an altered state in which one is close to unity with the Divine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Complexity. Reading involves all aspects of our being, including our physical body, emotions, memories, and imagination. Focused reading could be considered to be a lived or embodied experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Doorways. Books are doorways to spirit, to different ways of seeing the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Balance. Reading involves active balancing with respect to our relationship between the story world and our everyday world, as well as our relationship with the characters with whom we identify. For example, our level of identification with characters or focus on the story is constantly shifting and being rebalanced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Freedom. Reading fantasy literature gives us a sense of freedom. Within the fantasy world we are freed from the everyday world constraints and rules. We breathe more easily and are allowed to make choices that give life meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Imagination. We must use our imagination to temporarily live in the fantasy world. Imagination stimulates the creative dance of emotions, sensations, and thoughts involved in reading. Imagination is healing. Imagination is essentially spiritual or mystical.</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>Lens</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Shifts in perspective. Dramatic shifts in perspective can be triggered by reading the fantasy story (i.e., by reading of exceptional places and events or great words of wisdom). This experience could also be described as new ways of seeing oneself and the world, or joyful shifts in consciousness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Belief in other realities. Fantasy literature is different from other literature in that it enhances belief in other realities by taking one out of ordinary reality to nonordinary reality, relaxes, frees, and envelops one with sense of place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Exceptional Human Experiences (EHEs). Reading fantasy literature may trigger Exceptional Human Experiences, such as literary, synchronicity, and unity experiences, when connecting to spirit through reading fantasy literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Life is story. We all live in a story or a tale that may or may not be written down. All stories are connected to one another. All of our thoughts and views of the world are stories we make up. The only reality is in the present moment. Our thoughts or stories make our world what it is—from positive and hopeful to negative and hopeless. We are essentially storied beings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Positive change. Fantasy can help us learn to create positive worlds to live in. Entering a positive story through fantasy can cause positive life changes and outlook. For example, it may help stop depression’s downward cycle of negative story-making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Soul sickness. Reading fantasy literature can heal soul sickness (i.e., stress, apathy, alienation, depression, and loss of connection with spirit or imagination) through reconnection with meaning and spirit. By doing so we reconnect with others and ourselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Story involvement. The quality of our involvement in reading fantasy literature is very important. The more immersed in the story, the more we forget where we are in the nonstory world. This makes positive benefits more likely to happen.</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>Lens</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Sense of place. Fantasy stories that have a great sense of place are more likely to get us to enter their alternate worlds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Enjoyment. Enjoyment or pleasure in reading is essential for us to become immersed in a story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Fantasy is difficult to define. The world of fantasy literature is uncharted territory. There are many types of fantasy. The effectiveness of each is determined by the skill of the author and the reader’s preferences and taste.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, I will explore each of the final lenses, including the participants’ stories and relevant literature. I will also reflect how these lenses relate to the literature, presented in chapter 2, and introduce new literature when appropriate. My discussion of the final lenses is closely related to the events that occur while reading a story from beginning to end (i.e., what happened before, during, and after reading), to ease the flow and increase the clarity of the material. Also, due to the complexity of the topic, some participants’ experiences may apply to more than one lens. For this reason, there are many duplicate participant quotations. To further aid clarity, the names of the participants are listed here: Dagger Scribe, Mike, Iranor, Lynn, Crowspeaks, Liz, Andrew, Solaris, Jane, Ianárwen, Etruscan King, D. L. S. Foster, Bedap, Peregrin Took, Sam, Bella Jean, Branwen, and Lucy. The first lens to be discussed likens the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state to an *altered state of consciousness*. The remaining final lenses will then be discussed in the following order: relationship to story, intense emotions, vivid images, distortion of time and perception, ineffable, transformation, healing, story mirrors life, story is teacher, guide and companion, sense of home, sense of freedom, escape, and creative inspiration.

*Altered State of Consciousness*

*Final Lens 1: Absorbed fantasy reading is an altered state of consciousness that is similar to focused meditation, dreaming sleep, and shamanic journeys. Readers enter this altered state through imagination. Different aspects of involvement, including relationship with the story, intense emotions, and vivid images, are characteristic of readers’ absorption in the story. Readers may also have experiences ranging from distortion of time and perception to mystical or profoundly altered states of consciousness. These experiences facilitated transformation for the study participants.*

There are many and varied altered states of consciousness, which are discretely different from the state of ordinary waking consciousness; they include dreaming sleep and hypnotic states, states induced by psychoactive drugs, states centered on strong emotions (e.g., rage, panic, depression and elation), and states induced by meditation and shamanic practices (Ring, 1992;
Tart, 2001; Vaughan, 2005; Wade, 1996). I have come to the understanding that the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state is similar to the experience of altered states of focused meditation, dreaming sleep, and shamanic journeys. I will discuss each of these altered states, in turn, and how they relate to the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state. Examples from participants’ experiences will not be included here, for this discussion is an overview of concepts needed to understand them. They will be included in the discussion of the other final lenses of Table 4.

Common characteristics of nonordinary or altered states of consciousness, are a sense of loss of control of consciousness accompanied by wide emotional fluctuations (e.g., ranging from elation to despair); changes in sense of time (e.g., slowing down or speeding up); disturbances in thought or perception (e.g., images or thoughts may become more or less vivid, suggestibility may be heightened, and body perception may be distorted); as well as a sense of the ineffable, which is often accompanied by a feeling of renewal or transformation (Haule, 2011). These characteristics are consistent with the following study lenses, which I discovered independently while working with the data: imaginative levels of involvement, intense emotions, vivid images, distortions of time and perception, ineffability and transformation. I will discuss these lenses here, as appropriate, and later on in the chapter in the order they appear in Table 4.

Practitioners of focused meditation concentrate on an object to the point of complete absorption with the object, in order to transcend it. By continually focusing on an object, meditators experience a sudden and total break with ordinary consciousness and sublimely rapturous feelings. In such experiences, meditators disidentify with ego and experience a pervading sense of unity with the object and the world (i.e., unity with the Divine) (Goleman, 1988; Wade, 1996). Such experiences of nondual awareness are referred to as mystical altered
states, as well as mystical experiences (James, 2004; Wade, 1996). The ultimate goal of focused meditation is to facilitate development to higher stages of consciousness, the highest being unity consciousness. As meditators progress toward their goal, they are constantly being reborn to a new level of experience. In the process, meditators’ life perspectives and conceptual thinking are transformed; this transformation includes increased feelings of aliveness, joy, freedom, gratitude, loving kindness, empathy, compassion, alleviation from suffering, and a sense of oneness with all (Goleman, 1988; Wade, 1996; Wilber, 2000, 2006).

Such transformative experiences are not limited to practitioners of focused meditation. Anyone may have spontaneous mystical experiences at any level of development. Peak experiences are the most commonly studied; they allow individuals to temporarily experience higher states of consciousness and experience another reality. These experiences are then integrated into ordinary consciousness at the experiencer’s current level of development (Maslow, 1987, 1993, 1999; Wade, 1996; Wilber, 2006). Such temporary mystical altered states do not immediately bring about enlightenment; however, they gradually destabilize world-views and open the door to significant change (Ruale, 2011). In other words, everyone is able to experience mystical altered states, whether triggered intentionally through the practice of focused meditation or spontaneously by some other activity. Any transformation that occurs is dependent on the experiencer’s developmental level.

In a manner similar to that of practitioners of focused meditation, absorbed readers of fantasy literature focus or concentrate on story images, identifying with the story at various levels. In other words, readers’ become involved with the story by identifying with or imagining themselves to be part of the story world, to varying degrees, whether it be with a specific character or a place, or as a denizen of the story world. When readers are most involved (e.g.,
completely identified with a character) it seems that they may temporarily forget themselves, or disidentify with ego, and experience a sense of unity within themselves and with the Divine. When recounting their experiences, participants expressed feelings of empathy, compassion, joy, ecstasy, freedom, and a sense of opening up and of infinite possibilities, as well as ineffability and a noetic quality. These feelings are consistent with the positive effects of mystical experiences associated with focused meditation. This suggests that the participants of this study had mystical experiences while reading fantasy literature that are related to the changes in their life perspectives and conceptual thinking.

The research of James (2004) and Maslow (1987) also supports the premise that experiences of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state are mystical experiences. Their research includes absorbed reading on a continuum of mystical experiences ranging from the everyday experiences of absorption (e.g., absorbed reading) to profound religious mystical experiences (e.g., unity consciousness). Absorbed reading is associated with experiences on both ends of the continuum; it is a mystical experience on the lower end of the continuum (i.e., distortion of time and perception), but it can also trigger mystical experiences on the higher end of the continuum (i.e., a sense of unity with the Divine). In this sense, absorbed reading of fantasy literature is an altered state of consciousness that ranges from everyday to profound mystical experiences.

James (2004) primarily defined mystical experiences by the following characteristics: ineffability and noetic quality. He placed the wide range of mystical experiences on a continuum from the simplest, with little or no religious significance, to those with extreme religious significance. James’ examples of the simplest mystical experiences are those in which a sense of deeper significance overtakes the experiencer. The following passage, which includes
experiences of reading poetry, as well as religious scriptures, seem to resonate with my participants’ experiences of absorbed fantasy reading:

The simplest rudiment of mystical experience would seem to be that deepened sense of the significance of a maxim or formula, which occasionally sweeps over one. “I’ve heard that said all my life,” we exclaim, “but I never realized its full meaning until now.” “When a fellow-monk,” said Luther, “one day repeated the words of the Creed . . . I saw the Scripture in an entirely new light; and straightway I felt as if I were born anew. It was as if I had found the door of paradise thrown wide open” . . . This sense of deeper significance is not confined to rational propositions . . . Single words . . . conjunctions of words, effects of light on land and sea, odors and musical sounds, all bring it when the mind is tuned aright. Most of us can remember the strangely moving power of passages in certain poems read when we were young, irrational doorways as they were through which the mystery of fact, the wildness and the pang of life, stole into our hearts and thrilled them . . . [fetching] vague vistas of a life continuous with our own, beckoning and inviting, yet ever eluding our pursuit. (pp. 283-284)

The following example illustrates how reading may trigger mystical experiences. James (2004) reported that John Addington Symonds described a recurring trancelike mood (i.e., a state of profound absorption) that occurred “suddenly at church, or in company, or when I was reading” (p. 285). Mr. Symonds’ experience led to an ecstatic state in which he felt “the sense of an underlying or essential consciousness acquired intensity. At last nothing remained but a pure, absolute, abstract self. The universe became without form and void of content” (James, 2004, pp. 285-286).

Maslow (1987) defined peak experiences to be mystical experiences divorced from religion and the supernatural (i.e., considered to be natural phenomena). In his writings on the creative attitude he described peak experiences as being on a continuum, ranging from mild to intense absorption, including experiences of absorbed reading and experiences of the numinous. Maslow (1987) described a numinous peak experience, consistent with James’ (2004) examples of non-religious mystical experiences:

Limitless horizons, opening up to the vision, a feeling of being simultaneously more powerful and more helpless than ever before, great ecstasy and wonder and awe, loss of placing in time and space, and finally the conviction that something extremely important
and valuable had happened, so that the subject is to some extent transformed and strengthened even in his daily life. (p. 137)

Maslow (1993) also studied nadir experiences that give insights into death, tragedy and ultimate aloneness. Nadir experiences can be as transformative as peak experiences. It seems that many of my participants have experienced something similar to either the peak or nadir experience.

Dreaming sleep is another altered state of consciousness that is similar to the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state. Sleeping dreamers leave behind their gross body (i.e., physical, material, sensorimotor body) and occupy a subtle body of light, energy, emotional feelings, as well as fluid and flowing images (Wilber, 2006). In this state, dreamers experience worlds that seem sensorially real (Tart, 2000). Wilber (2006) gave an example of the dreamer’s experience, which is similar to the experience of absorbed readers of fantasy literature:

The mind and soul are set free to create as they please, to imagine vast worlds not tied to gross sensory realities but reaching out, almost magically, to touch other souls, other people, and far-off places, wild and radiant images cascading to the rhythm of the heart’s desire. (p. 16)

Both sleeping dreamers and absorbed readers of fantasy literature experience an intermediate world of the subtle or psychic plane (Corbin, 1999; H. Smith, 1992). Corbin (1999), Islamic scholar and mystic, named this world the mundus imaginalis, or imaginal world, a reality corresponding to a mode of perception. The imaginal world includes archetypal images; mythology, universal symbols, and the recurrent motifs in stories and legends; spirits recently departed from the terrestrial plane, including our subtle bodies; forms of works accomplished, as well as of thoughts, desires, presentments of reality, and behavior (Corbin, 1999; H. Smith, 1992). Corbin claimed that this is also the realm of the soul, which links body and spirit, without which we would not be able to access spirit. He also noted that the imaginal world is essential for understanding mystical experiences, including visionary accounts and dreams: places formed by intense meditation and inspired imaginative visions. He claimed that the imagination is the
imaginal world’s faculty of perception, which is as real as the faculties of sensory perception or intellectual intuition. Through activating the imagination, one may experience worlds as ontologically real as those of the senses and the intellect. This occurs when internal spiritual states are transmuted into external states, causing space, proximity, distance, and remoteness to exist in spiritual space (Corbin, 1999). Hillman (1992) described this phenomenon as follows:

Paradoxically, at the same time . . . images are in us and we live in the midst of them. The psychic world is experienced empirically as inside us and yet it encompasses us with images. I dream and experience my dreams as inside me and yet at the same time I walk around in my dreams and am inside them. (p. 23)

The imaginal world is accessed through altered states of consciousness (Ring, 1992); dreamers enter through sleep and readers through absorbed reading of fantasy literature. Like sleeping dreamers, absorbed readers of fantasy literature experience internal images of the story world as external to themselves. In other words, the images of the story may seem as real as if the reader is actually in the story world. Absorbed readers of fantasy are, for the most part, aware of their physical body and their surroundings and have control of their experience. For this reason, they are more like lucid dreamers who realize in the midst of a dream that they are dreaming and “that the seemingly active and compelling things that are happening are taking place while we are physically asleep and quiescent” (Taylor, 1983, p. 196). When we realize we are in a lucid dream we become consciously aware that all we behold in the dream is a mirror in which our own interior being is reflected in metaphoric form. . . . [What we are seeing] are aspects of our own being. . . . The identity of “me, the dreamer” is known and understood to be co-equal with all that is experienced in the seemingly “external” reality in the dream. (Taylor, 1983, 196)

Both absorbed fantasy readers and lucid dreamers are able to influence their experiences. Lucid dreaming has been an important part of religious and meditative disciplines in the East for the past 2,500 years. For the Tibetan Buddhists, dreams reflect the condition of our soul: If we were to die while asleep, our dream would simply continue (Taylor, 1983).
Absorbed readers of fantasy literature engage with the imaginal world of the story and the unconscious images that arise. Guided by the narrative, absorbed readers weave together story images and arising unconscious images and emotions to create a unique story world. Readers’ memories fill in missing story details, archetypal images act as mirrors of readers’ lives, and story images provide guidance for readers. Such engagement with the imaginal has the potential to promote individuation and self-realization in study participants.

This weaving of the story and readers’ unconscious psyches is called “mimesis” (Slattery, 2006, p. xx). Slattery (2006) described his experience of mimesis:

I let the literary sea voyages I was reading merge with my own experience. I realized from this reading and writing that if stories could so illuminate and deepen my own understanding of my voyage that this indeed was a subject worth studying…. These classic works enhanced, deepened, and made more graspable the mystery of the voyage…. I learned that something imaginal had the potency to reverberate in and even change the geography, if not the climate, of one’s soul. (pp. xix-xx)

Fergusson (1966) gave an example of Aristotle’s sense of this phenomenon in his introduction to *Aristotle’s Poetics*:

When we recognize the movement-of-spirit ‘imitated’ in a play or poem, we get the satisfaction of knowledge and understanding. The joy of Romeo when he hears Juliet’s voice saying his name, the despair of Macbeth when he sees that his mad race is lost, seem to confirm something we half-knew already. The creatures of the poet’s imagination do not literally represent anything in our own experience; it must be that through word, character, and situation we glimpse something common to men in all times and places. That is why Aristotle writes, … ‘Poetry … is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.’ (p. 33)

Lewis (1982) also seemed to make a similar statement about mimesis and myth: “A myth points, for each reader, to the realm he lives in most. It is a master key; use it on what door you like” (p. 85). Therefore, it seems that fantasy, which is related to myth and involves mimesis, is likely to help absorbed readers discover personal or universal truths that invite transformation.
Absorbed readers are affected by the imaginal world of the story in ways that are often inexplicable and mysterious. They may feel awed, surprised, puzzled, confused, or emotionally moved. Readers may also have vivid experiences of archetypes, which Jung (1968) associated with mystical experiences.

The experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state is similar to the altered state of consciousness experienced in shamanic journeys. Shamans use imagination to journey through the imaginal world with the intention of healing (Achterberg, 1985). Harner (1990) described a typical shamanic journey in the “Shamanic State of Consciousness” (p. 21) as follows:

The shaman typically experiences an ineffable joy in what he sees, an awe of the beautiful and mysterious worlds that open before him. His experiences are like dreams, but waking ones that feel real and in which he can control his actions and direct his adventures. . . . He is often amazed by the reality of that which is presented. He gains access to a whole new, and yet familiarly ancient universe that provides him with profound information about the meaning of his own life and death and his place within the totality of all existence. During his great adventure . . . he maintains conscious control over the direction of his travels, but does not know what he will discover. He is a self-reliant explorer of the endless mansions of a magnificent hidden universe. Finally, he brings back his discoveries to build his knowledge and to help others. (pp. 21-22)

Harner’s (1990) description is mirrored in participants’ narratives of their absorbed reading experiences. Excerpts of the narratives will be discussed in connection with future lenses.

The shaman’s journey has an initiatory structure similar to the archetype of the hero’s journey (Campbell, 1973, 2002; Eliade, 1985). As absorbed readers of fantasy journey through the imaginal world of the story, they are influenced by the archetypes of the shamanic and the heroic journey, which, in turn, brings about transformation and healing. Much of fantasy literature is related to the archetype of the hero’s journey, in which the protagonists or heroes give themselves over to the call of the journey, face many trials, reevaluate values, learn many
lessons along the way, and return transformed (Campbell, 1973, 2002; Clute & Grant, 1997).

Eliade (1963) claimed that the origins of the fairy tale were linked to shamanic initiation rituals:

It is true . . . that the tale always comes to a happy conclusion. But its content proper refers to a terrifyingly serious reality: initiation, that is, passing, by way of a symbolic death and resurrection, from ignorance and immaturity to the spiritual age of the adult. The difficulty is to determine when the tale began its career of pure fairy tale emptied of all initiatory responsibility. . . . We could almost say that the tale repeats, on another plane and by another means, the exemplary initiation scenario. The tale takes up and continues “initiation” on the level of the imaginary. . . . All unwittingly, and indeed believing that he is merely amusing himself or escaping, the man of the modern societies still benefits from the imaginary initiation supplied by tales. (pp. 201-202)

While absorbed readers of fantasy literature may not intend to read stories in order to change their lives, they are reminded of values, find more meaning in life, and thus ultimately have the potential to be transformed and healed. Brody (2001) stated that “Stories that are believed and dreams that act as guides . . . take us to other places and times. . . . [Storytellers] take us on spirit journeys” (p. 130).

Relationship to Story

Final Lens 2: Absorbed fantasy readers may experience different categories of imaginative involvement, representing the relationship of the reader to the story. The three categories are (a) observer of the story, (b) participant in the story, and (c) identified with a character in the story. The three categories represent continuous levels of imaginative involvement, ranging from least to most involvement (i.e., from least engaged observer to complete identification with a character). Readers may experience one or more of these levels of imaginative involvement during reading, either consecutively or simultaneously. The level of involvement seems to influence the quality of readers’ experiences.

The categories of involvement represent readers’ relationships to the story. For example, a reader who is involved as an observer feels as if he or she is observing what is happening in the story. A reader involved as a participant feels as if he or she is in some sense part of the story but not one of the characters. A reader involved as a character feels as if he or she is one of the characters. These are not absolute categories. Readers may experience different categories during the course of reading. There may be a progression from observer to character as the reader
gradually becomes more involved in the story, as well as a shift from character to observer.

These levels of involvement are similar to, what Watkins’ (2003) referred to as, “different kinds of imagining” (p. 114), in relation to waking dreams.

Lucy experienced two levels of observer involvement while reading *Once on a Time*, the reader who is outside the story looking in, and the close observer, who is observing while virtually within the story:

For the most part, I was simply a reader but as I continued to read, I felt at times like a close observer. . . . It’s interesting that some people feel as though they are part of the story. In general, when I read novels, there is a definite barrier between me and the story. It is fiction and I am continually aware of it. This is not to say that I am not absorbed by the book, to the point that I don’t notice ringing phones and such. . . . However, I never feel that I am part of a story or a character in it.

This excerpt from Jane’s narrative on reading *The Lord of the Rings* is an example of the participant level of involvement:

At every moment I could see what the characters saw around them, felt what the weather was, knew the time of day and year, and smelled what the air smelled like. I felt the characters’ weariness, shivered when they were cold, tensed up when danger was near, and relaxed every time they found a safe haven to rest in for a bit. Tolkien’s ability to evoke mood and place allowed me to feel as if I was there, walking along with Frodo every step of the way.

Andrew experienced both participant and character involvement while reading *Winnie-the-Pooh* books:

I felt like I was part of the stories. They were very real to me. Sometimes I was in the story as a separate being, but sometimes I felt like one of the characters. In both cases I felt like I was living in their world. I was in the Hundred Acre Wood, participating in the stories and viewing life mostly through the eyes of Pooh, but sometimes through the eyes of other characters. I identified with them all except for Christopher Robin, who was pretty much irrelevant to my experiences while reading the stories.

**Intense Emotions**

*Final Lens 3: Absorbed fantasy readers may experience intense emotions, including joy, ecstasy, possession, love, grief, and fear. Readers may also feel carried away by the story, read voraciously, and feel strong emotions (e.g., grief, love, friendship) toward characters, as if they were people.*
Dagger Scribe describes her satisfaction with and enjoyment of reading *Flashpoint*:

It showed me the influence a story can have on the reader’s subconscious, and, ever since, I have desired to write such stories, too. I believe the satisfaction I felt upon waking was a combination of the dream’s own effect, plus the residual memory of the highly satisfying reading of *Flashpoint* the preceding evening. The two worked together and birthed a compulsion to recreate an experience that would be able to give rise to the same satisfaction again, primarily for myself because it was so thoroughly enjoyable. Later I began to aim at my readers having the same experience in terms of enjoying a book.

Liz says, “The weirdest, coolest aspect of *Holes* was that it was very funny in places, and the irony throughout it was multi-leveled and complex.” Solaris describes the fun of his first evening of reading *The Lord of the Rings*:

I distinctly remember the evening when I began to read the book. I curled myself on the floor, surrounded by pillows, and read by dimmed light of a small lamp. Somehow this seemed appropriate, because it reminded me of camping by the fire, and of dimly lit rooms in Tolkien’s fantastic world. This was great fun, and it helped me to imagine the scenes in the first chapters, before the adventure actually begins.

Branwen says of her experience reading *The Gate of Ivrel*, “I enjoyed the story and the author’s style so much that I bought the other books in the series and have reread them several times over the years.” Mike shares his feelings about reading *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*:

The joy I felt in reading the tale corresponded with Potter’s own revelations that there was another world. In his case, the wizarding world. In my case, there was another way to view the world and other opportunities to pursue a life that might be more meaningful to myself.

Iranor describes her experience of reading *The Lord of the Rings*:

Finding myself inside a huge and elaborate fairy-tale, myth, epic or romance was disorientating. But since I had long enjoyed all these kinds of narrative, and here was a huge work incorporating the best aspects of each of them, the disorientation was a gateway to delight. . . . I knew nothing of Tolkien, of why he wrote so deeply and well, or whence came the sense of authenticity and importance that had enchanted me. I only knew that everyone had been wrong—this was serious; this was real; this was part of who I was going to be.

Andrew shares his experience of reading *Winnie-the-Pooh*: “The profoundly happy and innocent world view was infectious.” Solaris experienced *The Lord of the Rings* through reading, as well
as by activating his inner sensorium of the story, while walking in nature. The inner sensorium is essentially Solaris’ imaginal memory of reading *The Lord of the Rings*. The term inner sensorium originates from the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, in which novitiates read scriptures in a meditative and imaginative way in order to help them understand God on a human level (De Nicolas, 1986). This is an excerpt from his narrative in which Solaris describes his experience:

Initially, the feelings were very intense: every sound (made by animals) made me scared, a short rain could bring a feeling of elation and immense joy, but most importantly, it was all somehow related to *The Lord of the Rings*. The feelings mirrored the feelings I had when I was reading.

D. L. S. Foster describes his feelings when reading of Gandalf’s return in *The Lord of the Rings*:

“Tolkien might have had words for the lightness that came to me, the joy, the laughter, the relief! . . . It was more than a reverse of the loss of Gandalf; it was a burst of light and joy.” Sam says, “I was enraptured reading [*Dragons of Autumn Twilight*].” Bella Jean recalls her feelings while reading *Twilight*:

I remember being excited, happy, and feeling the passion and joy of first love. . . . Nothing was more exciting than a first kiss and the intense love, like that of Bella and Edward—you and me against the world. As a teenager I had a very idealized concept of love. I wanted the knight in shining armor that would take care of me and believed that our love would solve all of life’s problems. I also was all consumed with the boy—very like Bella. Bella felt Edward was her whole world and was willing to give up everything, including her mortal life and possibly her soul. This is something that, as an adult, happily married woman, I still would love to feel again. Reading *Twilight* I was able to actually experience those feelings again, which was euphoric.

Readers may also feel carried away by the story (passive), read voraciously (active) and feel strong emotions towards characters as if they were people (e.g., grief, love, friendship).

Dagger Scribe shares the emotions she felt while reading *Flashpoint*:

Emotionally I also felt the characters’ determination and confidence, and at times their doubts and fears; their hopes of finding their parents, their disgust at the betrayer; also a sense of satisfaction at the pure adventure I was drawn into in the reading.
Iranor describes her experience of being caught up in reading *The Lord of the Rings*:

Sensations that I felt at the first reading have recurred at every other, and include a sort of all-over thrill or chill when deeply moved. The emotions this story evokes are many, and mixed up with physical sensation. The only awareness I can recall of my body, in fact, is the physical expression of the emotions; joy, hope, despair, nostalgia, laughter and tears, a sense of loss mingled with a sense of gain. As I write this I realize that it sounds like a case of possession! Possession by a book, and indeed that may be a fair description. I felt absorbed, caught up, excited, won over, enchanted.

Andrew says, “Within minutes, I was completely immersed in Pooh’s enchanting world.” Jane says, “No matter how I approach it, I inevitably get caught up in [*The Lord of the Rings*] every time and find myself reading faster and faster as the book goes on! Ianárwen shares her experience of reading *The Lord of the Rings*:

The back cover drew me in even more, with its barren rocky landscape and a pale stone citadel with a volcano flaring menacingly in the far distance. Just those two delicately coloured scenes made my fingers itch to open the book and start reading. First though, I went back to the map I’d seen and then to the enlarged sections at the beginning of the six books. My misgivings were rapidly fading as I looked at the inky mountain ranges, forests and Nordic-style writing and anticipated another world unfolding for me, one that could not be reached by hiding inside a wardrobe or by falling down rabbit holes.

D. L. S. Foster says, “I had been taken deeply inside the world created by Tolkien.” Etruscan King comments on what drew him in reading *The Worm Ouroboros*: “But when it comes to ‘absorbed reading,’ much as I enjoyed the battle scenes, other parts drew me more completely inside the tale: eating, and facing deep fears.” Bedap describes his experience of being caught up by reading:

*The Left Hand of Darkness* has been one of the books that most captured my attention during reading. I felt very absorbed in reading the novel’s plot, and even after I left the book on the desk, I continued to interpret my surroundings in terms of the book. I felt so absorbed in the book during the first reading. I have reread this book and, even though I still consider it a good book and enjoy rereading it, the sensation of absorbed reading hasn’t happened again.

Sam says,
While the Dragonlance series held a particular sway over me, it seems more likely to me that a similar experience might have arisen from a different fantasy story than from a very similar story with analogous characters and themes occurring in a different genre.

Lucy describes her experience of being drawn in to reading *Once On a Time*:

One day while visiting the library, I found a copy of *Once On a Time*. I had enjoyed Milne’s *Winnie-the-Pooh* series as a kid, as well as his literary fairy tale, *Prince Rabbit*, and was willing to try a title that was new to me; also, its jacket description as being a “fairy tale for grownups” attracted me. Over the next few days of reading it, the story drew me in more and more. I found myself trying to make it last long by only reading it in the morning and right before bed. Since I read it over a period of several days, there were often interruptions, but I managed to return to the world of the story easily. However, I immersed myself in the story by the final third of the book.

Four participants indicated that they read their books rapidly or voraciously. Crowspeaks describes reading *Alderly Edge*:

By the time I’d gobbled down this one my interest in an England outside the history books and Paleolithic sites had been stirred to a fever pitch and the first thing I did was to hitch-hike back to Stonehenge (the only Paleolithic site I knew of at that time apart from the Alderley Edge mentioned in Garner’s books, but more of that later) and spend a day or two and a night there.

Jane recounts her first reading of *The Lord of the Rings*:

As he gave me the book, he said “Here, I think you’ll enjoy this.” This was an understatement. For the next two days, I hardly slept or took a break to eat or go to the bathroom. I spent most of that time in an armchair in the library, reading the three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings* as fast as I could.

Ianárwen similarly describes her reading of *The Lord of the Rings*:

My eyes could hardly take in the words fast enough, my breathing becoming shallow and quite fast, as I watched Frodo hold the One Ring on his shrinking palm, expecting pain from the fire but seeing only fiery words of doom in a strange language flowing onto the hitherto flawless gold. I gobbled up the long chapter in one session and nearly went back and read it again, to make sure I had mastered all the various threads of the background, but I was feverish to know what would happen next.

Bella Jean recalls how rapidly she read *Twilight*: “I read it cover to cover in hours!”

Many participants felt strong emotions, including grief, love and friendship, for characters, as if they were people. Mike shares his experience of reading *Harry Potter and the*
Philosopher’s Stone: “Emotionally, the characters become like your friends and you feel emotion based on how you view them.” Iranor describes of her experience of reading *The Lord of the Rings*: “In some ways the relationship with the imagined world was deeper at first than that with the characters, although they have become like old friends as time has gone by.” Crowspeaks’ relationship to the characters of the *Alderley Edge* series “is to be completely taken in—I love the ones I’m supposed to love, hate the ones I’m supposed to hate and am wary of the ones I don’t know yet.” Liz has strong feelings for the characters in *Holes*:

When Stanley and Zero return to camp in the middle of the night and dig up what appears to be priceless gold and other valuables, I feel their disbelief at their good fortune. When they finish digging up the treasure, only to realize that they are surrounded by a nest of poisonous lizards, I feel their terror and hopelessness. I relate to their conclusion that the treasure was too good to be true, and feel grief at their resignation that they are about to be bitten and killed. Stanley’s life flashes before him as he says his goodbyes in his heart to his family and his goodbye to Zero. I cry every time I read this.

Jane also feels strong emotions for the characters in *The Lord of the Rings*:

But it was the Fellowship itself, a motley crew drawn from five different species of being, that I loved the most. I grieved when the Fellowship was broken and the individuals in it had to go their own ways. For a little while they were a band of brothers who formed a bond that would survive separation and death.

I do remember my emotions, because they were powerful. I loved the characters, I admired their loyalty and endurance and courage, I envied their friendship, and I ached for them when they suffered pain and loss. I loved all of them as one loves a dear friend.

Ianárwen experienced all stages of grief while reading *The Lord of the Rings*:

And somehow I was breathing again as the others ran in raw, raging grief and fear out into the Dimrill Dale. But I couldn’t go with them, because I could not believe what I had just read. I went back and read that whole pursuit from Mazurbul again, to where he had fallen. And twice more. I was in shock and crying, but I could not get past what I had read, unable to bear what had happened. I had been reading this in bed and suddenly I couldn’t go on, so I switched the light off and cried myself to sleep.

Subdued, I read the whole of *The Bridge of Khazad-dûm* through once more, crying silently again almost throughout and then at last I read on, weeping more strongly as the others joined me in grief, yet having to go on, for they were not yet out of danger and gradually I rejoined them in spirit, but this time at a distance for it still felt like my heart was being crushed.
Etruscan King experienced admiration for a character in *The Worm of Ouroboros*:

When it comes to relating to the characters, Lord Juss, leader of the Demons, was the one I would most have liked to have as a friend. Somewhat like Aragorn in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, or Adzel in Anderson’s *Trader Team*, Juss was an admirable blend of strength, intelligence, decency and generosity who would make you feel safe with him. Juss was the most knowledgeable and educated of Eddison's heroes, even able to cast some magic spells of his own—yet not a wimpy bookworm like a certain reader of the story.

D. L. S. Foster felt friendship for the characters in *The Lord of the Rings*:

Ah, good old Bilbo was there! I was able to firmly set myself in the story by finding my friend in the narrative.

Over the following four years during high school I read the books, as I had done with *The Hobbit*, over and over—going through them eleven times before graduation. They kept me sane and gave me a place to turn to that had sun and green grass, that had friends and heroes.

Sam also experienced a sense of “returning home and reuniting with old friends” when reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*. He says, “When I read it, there was a sense of returning home with old friends while I was literally returning back to the beginning of the story.” Bella Jean fell in love with a character in *Twilight*:

I fell in love with Edward right along with Bella. He was beautiful to look at; he had super strength and powers unlike any normal boy. He was a gentleman (other than the part about his having to keep himself from killing her). He adored her and wanted nothing more than to be her protector and love. She could hardly believe that he picked her!

Branwen is wistful in recounting her experience of reading *The Gate of Ivrel*:

To be perfectly honest, it would be hard not to love such a man. I married a man who shares two cultures, French and Cameroonian, and in both the man “wears the pants.” And my own parents were pretty typical of marriages in the 40’s and 50’s. My father, a Navy officer, worked and brought home a salary; my mother was a homemaker and although she had been trained as a nurse, did not work because my father thought it would mean he wasn’t making enough money. My father was often absent at sea for long periods and my mother had full responsibility at those times, but when he was home he represented the parental authority. I grew up being told that men and women were equal, but rarely saw a marriage in which that appeared to be the case. Yet all through school I got better grades than any of the boys in my classes, and I saw no reason why I should take orders from someone who was not necessarily more intelligent than me.
Of course, when you are madly in love, you don’t ask who’s going to be the boss. And in general, when my husband and I don’t agree, we are able to talk things over and try to find a solution. Yet, like many women, I’ve learned to choose my battles and to bring in outside support, to be just a bit manipulative if you like, so as not to bruise that male ego. So the character of Vanye, who obeys without ever questioning Morgaine’s authority, yet is undeniably masculine, is wonderfully refreshing.

Vivid Images

Final Lens 4: Absorbed fantasy readers may imagine they are in the story world and vividly imagine story world details. Readers may also desire to go beyond the boundary of the story as written.

Many participants experienced vivid images while reading, almost as if they were in the story world. I include a few of the most explicit examples. Mike recounts his experience of Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone: “Reading, because we add to the experience by “seeing” worlds in our mind and creating possibilities where nothing is specifically written, is magic also. It opens routes, rather than setting things in stone.” Dagger Scribe experienced vivid imagery while reading Flashpoint:

Not knowing Chicago at all myself, I still felt transported there. The future world portrayed is bleak and partly ruined, and much of the story takes place in a shadowy underworld of sewer pipes and buried tunnels. This creates an eerie and very specific sense of place, using some landmarks that exist today and some that are invented. Over a year later I visited real-life Chicago and recognized some street names and buildings from the story.

The fight scenes were the most memorable, because of the slow-motion choreography that made them a very visual experience. The cyberspace scenes were also memorable. In these scenes the characters interacted with a virtual environment without physically going anywhere at all; everything they needed (controls, commands, navigation, etc.) was literally within arm’s reach. While reading about this virtual environment I experienced a sensation like flying, and in my mind’s eye I saw the virtual world as a dark place shot through with brightly-colored information highways, intersections, and individual locations, all dotted with control interfaces, which the character activated by touching them “virtually.”

Iranor experienced images from home while reading The Lord of the Rings:

It felt like the Norse tales. In these pages I was finding the sense that those tales had given me, of strangeness and immeasurable northern distances, the same feelings engendered in me by the sight of the sea and the wild spaces nearest my home when I
visited them. A sense of personal ownership of that strangeness and of infinite possibility in real life.

Liz experienced remembered sensations and emotions while reading *Holes*:

At times, more than actually feeling what the characters were feeling physically I remembered my own parallel experiences of heat, hunger, fatigue, and physically re-felt them. Other times I felt in my body what the characters were feeling, oblivious to my ACTUAL surroundings. The same was true when I felt the emotions of the characters.

Solaris seems to have a desire to go beyond the boundaries of *The Lord of the Rings*:

Most of the time, however, I felt that the surrounding mysterious world is amazing and somehow inviting, or calling. If they had made but a few steps into the darkness, or walked for several minutes into it, they would have seen a figure like that from the cover, or an object, or a scene, which would not be threatening, and perhaps not very beautiful, but somehow breath-taking and amazing. Sometimes it happens in the novel, for instance when they find the illuminated doors of Moria (surrounded by desolate hills), or when they meet elves on the road (not with the big names but with the rank and file, those who do not even know about Frodo’s mission and who are usually not very friendly), or when Galadriel talks to Frodo by the Mirror of Galadriel. I also felt this (surrounding mystery) when I looked at the map or when I simply imagined the landscape.

Jane’s experience of *The Lord of the Rings* was of walking in the story world:

I was entirely caught up in the world of Middle-earth. I walked with Frodo, smelled the sweet scents of Ithilien and the choking fumes of Mordor, heard the rumbling of the volcano Mount Doom and the battle cries of the armies, and sobbed with Merry, Pippin, and Sam as the grey ship bore Frodo away from them.

Ianárwen’s experience of reading *The Lord of the Rings* also includes vivid imagery:

The climate was often very foggy and so I found it easy to slip into the vivid pictures the words made in my mind. With “my” moors literally on my daily horizon, I could feel the cold damp moisture as the fog descended upon the Hobbits; knew their fear as they became completely disoriented; and again felt the overwhelming panic as Frodo searched desperately for his friends, buried in the death chamber with the ghostly hand and sinister spell-singing.

As the creature’s fiery mane, sword and whip lit up the huge cavern and Gandalf turned halfway over the bridge, screaming at the others to leave him and run, like them I could not move and watched with them in fear as the Wizard’s and the Balrog’s swords clashed and the whip crackled as words of power were uttered in defiance of the flaming Heart of Darkness. And the evocative words passing through my eyes into my cringing mind’s view were magnesium flares, progressively more horrifying, blazing white and freeze-framing the bridge as it cracked under the creature’s feet. As the Balrog toppled into the black gulf below. As it swung its fiercome whip upwards. As the flaming thongs coiled
around Gandalf’s ankles. As the wizard was pulled down inexorably after his foe, vainly clenching at the stone of the severed bridge . . . crying out to his friends to “Fly, you fools!”

Etruscan King experienced extremely vivid imagery of *The Worm Ouroboros*:

> What made [scenes] stick in memory was a combination of stimulating characters, colorful situations, and the author’s clever choices of particular visual or tactile details to make the scenes come to life, almost like cinema. These details included architectural features and décor of castles, and the designs of the clothing and weapons belonging to characters. Juss never had to pay an electric bill for lighting; his castle’s interior was illuminated by gems that emitted light magically.

Much of my original reading of *The Worm Ouroboros* was done concurrently with eating . . . and what should I find, but that both heroes and villains were ALSO to be found eating, with their food and wine so meticulously described that I could almost taste them. The most lavish banquet scenes listed so many different foodstuffs that a Golden Corral buffet restaurant would envy them; and Eddison even took the time to describe which characters preferred which items, and what sort of dishes and vessels they ate and drank from. Contrasting, yet in the same creative spirit, was one scene in which a common soldier in Juss’ army fed humbly on barley-cakes with dark heather-honey.

I seem to remember that the great C.S. Lewis, in his book *God in the Dock*, remarked that a boy eating lunch meat might enjoy it better if he could imagine it to be wild game that he had hunted and killed. Similarly, my typical late-night snacks of cold roast pork or cold roast beef, either accompanied by crackers—food I enjoyed anyway, but which sticks in my memory because of this association—became for me part of the zillion-course feast in Carce, at which I sat near Lord Corund, the most relatively decent of the major Witchland characters. Nearly forty years later, I can remember the exact flavor and texture of my actual food selections on occasions when I was sitting at the kitchen table and reading that precise banquet scene. I also remember how I imagined the fictional foods would taste and look (all Earth-based, with no attempt by the author to portray alien foods native to Mercury), as well as some idea of how the voices of the characters in the scene would sound.

D. L. S. Foster’s experience of reading *The Lord of the Rings* was vivid with respect to images of Gandalf’s return saying, “It was a burst of light and joy.” He also seemed to see the story world:

> Over the following four years during high school I read the books, as I had done with *The Hobbit*, over and over—going through them eleven times before graduation. They kept me sane and gave me a place to turn to that had sun and green grass, that had friends and heroes.

Pippin Took experienced *The Lord of the Rings* as if he were in the story world:
When I read *The Lord of the Rings* I become completely absorbed. Within my heart and mind, Middle-earth is real and I am walking with the characters through all of their perils. Aside from Tolkien’s characters, I also become absorbed in the environment that is described. I have actually felt the same feelings that the characters were experiencing in their respective environments. For example, during one of my rereads of *The Lord of the Rings*, I actually felt extremely parched while I read about Frodo and Sam’s dry, waterless journey through Mordor. I felt so thirsty that I had to take a break in reading to get a glass of water. It was like I was in Mordor with Frodo and Sam, having no water to drink and parched. Sometimes I feel as if I am Pippin in the story, or that I am Pippin reading the story when he is not in it. Other times I’m there as an invisible person, walking along Mordor with Frodo and Sam, thirsting for water.

Bella Jean felt transported to her youth while reading *Twilight*:

I felt transported to my high school years. . . . Reading about Bella moving to this small town, into a new house and new school, I was transported to the many times this had happened to me. I felt the apprehension and the excitement of starting a new chapter. I remembered how many times I had gone into a new room in a house and wondered if this would be the place I would be happy and settled. Bella’s first day at her new school in Forks was as familiar to me as any other experience in my childhood; I could not count the number of schools I attended. She, as did I, wanted to blend in but also hoped to fit in. I remember vividly the anxiety of getting the new classes, finding my locker, remembering the combination, finding the classes on time, and knowing that everyone was looking at me. I have had reoccurring nightmares up until I turned 40 of being back in school, not being able to open the locker, not getting to my classes or knowing where they were.

Lucy’s “imagination helped create a sense of place in the forest scenes” of *Once on a Time* with memories from home:

I was homesick for the karst landscape of the cave region of Kentucky. . . . The sense of place I felt was strongest when reading the forest scenes. I liked the forest scenes because I was missing the environment to which I was accustomed. My imagination helped create a sense of place in the forest scenes, since I found on rereading it, that Milne put little effort into developing the setting. This was not his intent in any case.

*Distortion of Time and Perception*

*Final Lens 5: Absorbed fantasy readers may experience distortion of time and perception.*

All participants experienced altered states of consciousness with distortions of time and perception (i.e., hearing, body, place). The following examples are from participants who were most explicit.
Dagger Scribe shares her experience:

While reading *Flashpoint*, I forgot where I was, forgot that Chicago of the future is in fact completely foreign to me, forgot it was fiction. Not knowing Chicago at all myself, I still felt transported there. . . . I sensed time passing, but it was not real time—it was the time as experienced in the book. Its events took place over a period of a few days. I read it in one evening, but that evening felt a lot longer because of the intensity of the experience.

Mike says,

Time actually passes as it is written—in Potter books, there is a usually a year going by. At Christmas time in the book, there is part of my internal state that experiences the joys, perhaps sadness or seasonal cold, of the real Christmas time. Then on to the next scene…. When I read a work of fantasy, if it is working for me, I am completely in the world of the story. This means that while I read, my mind builds a world in my head, with the written word combining with my own thoughts, making connections to my own real world. For instance, when I stop reading and look up and around my real world, if I am into the story, my thoughts are about the story world. Instead of seeing the window or the clock, I am just changing the backdrop of my sight so that I can focus my imagination better.

Iranor describes her experience reading *The Lord of the Rings*:

The only awareness I can recall of my body, in fact, is the physical expression of the emotions; joy, hope, despair, nostalgia, laughter and tears, a sense of loss mingled with a sense of gain. . . . I can’t recall that I had any awareness of my physical surroundings while I was reading. I know what they were—my small square room on the corner of the Hall of Residence with its views over the gardens of the Hall, and of the park across the road. But I was not aware of them while I was inside Middle-Earth. And my sense of passing time was the sense of the passing days and months inside the story—I returned to objective time only when I had finished reading, or had to stop reading for a while.

Crowspeaks recounts his experience reading the *Alderley Edge* series:

I get completely swept up in the action of the tale and couldn’t tell you where the story ends and the “real” world begins if you asked me. I have no body except the insubstantial one of the watcher, and absolutely no sense of the passing of “clock” time. . . . The time I’m in is the time in the tale; the place I’m in is the place in the tale.

Lynn says, ”I was totally immersed in the [*Mists of Avalon*].” Liz recounts the details of her experience reading *Holes*:

Time seemed to exist outside of the story, and seemed to pass very slowly while I was reading, but then afterwards I would realize that the time that had actually passed was either a lot longer or a lot shorter than I had guessed (I would read for ten minutes, but it
felt like an hour, or I would read for an hour, but it felt like ten minutes). . . . When I was reading I was totally oblivious of my body and my surroundings. Even afterwards, at times, just thinking about the story I became oblivious to my immediate physical environment. I experienced whatever the characters were experiencing, but was oblivious to my physical environment and to my own bodily experiences OUTSIDE the story (hunger, temperature, need to use the restroom, etc.).

Andrew says, “Time did not seem to pass while I was reading. I felt like I was part of the [Winnie-the-Pooh] stories.” Solaris shares how he began reading The Lord of the Rings:

I distinctly remember the evening when I began to read the book. I curled myself on the floor, surrounded by pillows, and read by dimmed light of a small lamp. Somehow this seemed appropriate, because it reminded me of camping by the fire, and of dimly lit rooms in Tolkien’s fantastic world. This was great fun, and it helped me to imagine the scenes in the first chapters, before the adventure actually begins. While reading I felt disconnected, i.e. I did not pay attention to the rest of my room and to the physical discomfort of lying on the floor so long, etc. I was on the adventure but not as any of the characters; I felt like a human, not a hobbit.

Jane says, “I do not remember what my bodily sensations were, because I was oblivious to my body and my surroundings while reading [The Lord of the Rings]. I had no sense of time passing at all.” Etruscan King recounts his experience of reading The Worm Ouroboros: “I did sometimes lose track of the passing of time while rereading the book for enjoyment late at night—or sitting on the toilet until my legs fell asleep!” D. L. S. Foster describes his experience reading The Lord of the Rings:

Each time I sat down to read the books I left the everyday world behind. It did not matter if I was at lunch at school (all alone without friends) or at home with parents fighting or brothers raging, I was able to tune the world out and fall right into the story.

Sam shares his experience of reading Dragons of Autumn Twilight:

There was a sense of almost complete absorption and contentment as I read. I suppose I did need to take breaks for meals and for the bathroom, but there was the feeling that nothing outside the confines of my bed and my book seemed to have any real weight. I seem to recall that the day slipped by quickly. I don’t remember anything in particular about my experience of time from when I was actually reading. If I had to describe it, I would say that there was little or no consciousness of the passage of time while reading. I just remember it coming as something as a surprise when evening came and that the day seemed to have passed so quickly.
Bella Jean says, “I had no sense of time passing while reading *Twilight*.” Branwen describes her experience of *The Gate of Ivrel*:

I have no memory as to what my body felt like or what my physical surroundings were, even when I reread the story. I was so absorbed in the story that I tuned out everything else. My family often complains that when I’m reading I don’t hear them speaking to me, or realize that the telephone is ringing. Of course, many stories don’t absorb me that much, but *The Gate of Ivrel*’s spell works every time. As a matter of fact, I was recently reading the book for at least the fourth time in the airport of Bordeaux. I had arrived early to meet two cousins coming from the States. It was their first trip abroad, they are seventy-three and sixty-four and speak no French. I found myself a seat opposite the door they would arrive by, ordered a Coke and took out my book. By my watch I had almost an hour’s wait . . . You can guess the rest of the story. I heard someone calling my name, not for the first time, and there were my cousins standing in front of me. Since no one had met them, they were looking for a telephone to call me and saw someone with her nose in a book that looked like me. I was with Vanye, fighting to protect Morgaine’s life from powerful enemies. I had no idea that over an hour had passed since I sat down.

Lucy recounts her experience of reading *Once on a Time*: “I would become absorbed to the point that I wouldn’t notice ringing phones and such.”

*Ineffable*

*Final Lens 6: Absorbed fantasy readers’ experiences may seem ineffable.*

All participant narratives have various qualities of mystery and transformation; however, the following examples illustrate experiences that seem ineffable, mystical or profoundly altered in nature. Mystical experiences are unitive experiences and, are often, characterized by a sense of ineffability, a noetic quality and a feeling of oneness with all. Profoundly altered refers to meaningful states that are not unitive. Solaris described three “events,” or “walks in the dark” where he attempted to recreate his experiences of reading in nature. He claimed that these walks in nature represented how he felt when he was reading *The Lord of the Rings*:

I also remember, and this is the most important thing about Tolkien for me, that most adventures happened in the darkness, either at night, or in a dark forest, or underground. I do not know if it is just my impression, but the land, especially in the chapters after Rivendell, always seemed deserted and dark. Even when the characters walked in daytime, I saw them under a grey, overcast sky. I also remember imagining them surrounded by a very close horizon, e.g., by hills or trees. At night, of course, they were
surrounded by darkness. On many occasions, the world around the characters was simply a threat, e.g., when they are attacked by wolves near Moria (book two, chapter three). Most of the time, however, I felt that the surrounding mysterious world is amazing and somehow inviting, or calling. If they had made but a few steps into the darkness, or walked for several minutes into it, they would have seen a figure like that from the cover, or an object, or a scene, which would not be threatening, and perhaps not very beautiful, but somehow breath-taking and amazing. Sometimes it happens in the novel, for instance when they find the illuminated doors of Moria (surrounded by desolate hills), or when they meet elves on the road (not with the big names but with the rank and file, those who do not even know about Frodo’s mission and who are usually not very friendly), or when Galadriel talks to Frodo by the Mirror of Galadriel. I also felt this (surrounding mystery) when I looked at the map or when I simply imagined the landscape.

*The Lord of the Rings* inspired me to take walks at night, and that was the most important fantasy-reading experience for me. These walks occurred during the time I was reading the book.

I would often read *The Lord of the Rings* by the window, thinking that if I walked long enough into the darkness, I would actually experience the same passage from an inside world (the Shire in the initial chapters) to the outside world (beyond Bree and definitely beyond Rivendell) there would be a road, last houses, last bridge, and then the road would disappear, and there would be just empty fields, meadows, and forests. This sounds like nothing much, but I expected to see strange things and encounter mysterious persons in the outside world. I expected something Tolkienesque, but did not expect anything or anyone in particular. It did not have to be a character from the book; it could be a character who could appear in the book. So I actually started to take evening walks; I suppose on many occasions there was a pretence, e.g., it was either because I had to walk the dog or I was coming back late from an afternoon walk in the countryside. Obviously, I could not read and walk, but at that time I constantly thought about scenes from the book. I remember three very important moments: a walk on a meadow island between two arms of the river, an evening walk on the riverbank in the town, and nighttime walk through fields to the south of the city. In this narrative I always end up writing about landscapes and places, instead of writing about reading, but I hope it is all right, because the book really contributed to the experiences I am describing. I cannot tell if I read Tolkien immediately before or after a walk, but it must have been so.

The first place, the island, is a beautiful meadowland with several groves and rows of trees. A small part of it is artificially elevated land with bridges, the road and railway line, and a small district of the town. The rest of the island is uninhabited and unfarmed, because it is regularly flooded, which makes it a sort of wild nature reserve with deer and small mammals. The island is surrounded by ordinary farmland and by the outskirts of the town. It begins just across the river from the town, and it is quite large; it takes about six hours to walk from one end of it to another. It is generally accessible, and many people go angling there, or do cross-country running, or drink beer next to their cars, etc. In more distant parts, however, the island is almost always empty and I remember that I felt uneasy (or even scared) of walking in the empty parts. Then it occurred to me that this fear is exactly what the characters must have felt in *The Lord of the Rings*, and I
started to walk across the island pretending it is Tolkien’s Middle Earth. I did not actually fantasize during the walks, but I had an intense feeling that I was in a different world. I also remember that I was gradually getting rid of the anxiety and uneasiness about being alone there. Obviously, I would walk there with friends, or in organized school groups, but walking alone was an entirely different experience. Initially, the feelings were very intense: every sound (made by animals) made me scared, a short rain could bring a feeling of elation and immense joy, but most importantly, it was all somehow related to *The Lord of the Rings*. The feelings mirrored the feelings I had when I was reading. Sometimes I felt I was in the Middle Earth, as if I had gone through a passage between two worlds. There was not a feeling or moment or place of passage, but sometimes the landscape had nothing artificial in it, not even on the horizon, so I could forget which world I was in. I would walk or sit there, feeling amazed and slightly frightened, but also somehow invited to stay, or to see what was there behind a hedge, in a grove, or behind a row of trees. There was also a feeling of presence, a palpable personal presence, which I knew could be a religious feeling, but I thought of it in terms of Tolkien’s fantastic events and creatures (like those that surrounded the ordinary world of the Shire). This feeling was not fear, but not happiness either. It was a bit disturbing, and there was a slight anxiety or perhaps (better) alertness. I was more sensitive to sounds and sights (especially movements of plants and animals). I mean I could not ignore them. Everything made me stop, or start, or crouch, etc. This was actually fun. The overall feeling was that someone was watching me (one of more watchers). It was an inexplicable feeling, and I felt that fantasy or religion could only be working approximations for sharing it with others. In the book, there are several moments which are very similar, e.g., when I read about a fox who is observing hobbits in chapter three (“Three is Company”), I thought it was a very important and mysterious encounter. (Even though it has nothing to do with the rest of the story.) It shows that there is much more going on in the Middle Earth than the war of the ring. This makes Tolkien’s world mysterious and fascinating. Most of the walks in the island were in daytime, but I also experimented with early morning, dusk, and night. They all blur into a single and happy event in my memory.

The other important event was in the town; I think I was walking the dog when it happened. Where I lived then, buildings are surrounded by three parks, two with trees and one with big lawns and flower beds. There is also a small castle in the park with lawns, which was rebuilt so many times that it looks less like a castle, and more like a rich country house with a dungeon, and an open-air stage attached. (It is a museum and a culture centre.) At night, the castle is illuminated with dim orange light. On that particular evening, there was no event in the castle, and the parks were quiet and empty. I was standing next to the castle’s entrance gate, made of iron bars, and I was looking at the courtyard inside. In front of me, in the dark, there were those great lawns, and I could see movement in the darkness. I knew those shadows were simply people strolling with their dogs, but at the same time I felt as if I was in Rivendell (the castle) surrounded by the vast and open land (the lawns). I could almost distinctly hear the elves singing in the courtyard, which was wonderful and beautiful, but I was also drawn into the dark field in front of me. The darkness was warm, inviting, inhabited its unknown inhabitants, and walking through it would be like the beginning of Book Two of *The Lord of the Rings* (“The Ring Goes South”). I felt like I was reenacting the scene of departure from Rivendell, exactly like I imagined it when I read: leaving an illuminated place, and
stepping into an open expanse of darkness. I expected to see unimaginable creatures, places and objects, unknown persons, strange figures, dangerous and safe, funny and tragic, repulsive and lovable, there in that darkness. It was a wonderful feeling of anticipation, and then, when I walked, of opening up and of being drawn into a new world. There was also a feeling of puzzlement, or confusion, about that new world; I did not know what to think, and I was not even very happy. I could not feel afraid or think about something else for several minutes, but then again I was not thinking about anything, I was just . . . (I was just there). All I could do was follow that call from the darkness, and contemplate whatever I would see there.

This was exactly the feeling which was evoked by reading the book and imagining scenes in the manner suggested by the strange cover art of the Polish edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, and this was how I imagined several events when I read about them, for instance the nighttime skirmish against wolves and Black Riders on the Weathertop. The hobbits are fighting with the Strider, who is very mysterious and not very friendly, and they do not even know why he is helping them. Gandalf is away in the darkness, and nobody knows why. The skirmish, as I imagined it, was not very terrible or violent. I can still remember imagining Legolas shooting into the darkness; he did it very slowly and quietly, and the burning arrows made a big arch and then disappeared, almost like a slow dance. I remember the Strider and Gandalf were best in these initial chapters. When the Strider becomes the heroic Aragorn, and Gandalf becomes an all-powerful leader, they are not so mysterious anymore. What mattered to me when I read was mystery and anticipation, not threat or adventure.

The third event is also about walking; a long walk to the south of the town where I lived then. It was getting dark, the sky was overcast, and the clouds were heavy, different shades of grey, rolling very low and fast above an empty meadow. I lay down and looked at them, and suddenly I felt I was in the Middle Earth, in one of those nondescript plains to the south of Shire. Obviously, I knew where I really was, but at the same time I felt, with all certainty, that the place (the meadow) is out of this world, and that it was somehow transferred to the world of the book. The ground rose (rises) gently in almost all directions from the meadow, so that the horizon hides the city and villages. At that moment, if suddenly a group of Tolkien characters emerged from the other side of the high ground, I would not be surprised. I also felt that the place had always looked in the same way, and that the moment was somehow timeless. In practical terms, I thought that someone could look at the same view in the Middle Ages, but what I felt was that I was not here and now, but was in the book. There was something more, however, because I also had a wonderful sense of looking at my life from a very distant perspective: I could see myself living for so many years, doing so many things, then approaching death, and then not being there, but all my life was somehow brought together to the single place, to that meadow below the heavy, rolling clouds. I felt like I was just another person living here, visiting that place, and the place would never change. It was a very happy feeling. The emotion stopped suddenly, when I knew again where I was and where I was going.

The first two events seem to be profoundly altered states in which Solaris experienced what might be considered another dimension of reality (i.e., the imaginal world) through his

The third event seems to have the qualities of a “nature mystical” (Wilber, 2000, p. 14) experience due to its timeless and unitive nature. All three experiences had lasting impacts on Solaris’ life. In Solaris’ words:

I think the first [walk] made me less afraid or anxious in general, and it taught me how to concentrate on anything that happens around me, and how to enjoy it.

I think the third walk . . . gave me an acceptance of the fact (well, for me) that so many decisions and events have irreversible consequences. (This is a feeling everyone has sometimes, but the point is, I tend not to worry about it so much, when I think back about the third walk. The experience of timelessness and of being in another world makes it easier to accept uncertainty and irreversibility. I think detachment could be the right word to describe it. I have seen my life from that place, and that perspective seems to save me a lot of anxiety.) This, obviously, also applies to death, and to love (i.e., to feeling of guilt and grief about crises in relations with family and friends, even when I do irreversible harm). It may be a trivializing summary, but there is a place (and it is indeed an empty swath of Tolkien's Middle Earth), where nothing, absolutely nothing, matters.

The second walk, the one in the dark, filled me with emotions (anticipation, puzzlement, quiet contemplative amazement) which I felt when I read, and which I could not really understand without referring to *The Lord of the Rings*. I was very happy that it could happen in real life, too. When I have a good day, I try to think of my entire life in these terms, that is, I imagine it as a walk through a vast, dark space inhabited by amazing and incomprehensible things.

D. L. S. Foster may have had a “deity mystical” (Wilber, 2006, p. 93) experience while reading about Gandalf’s return in *The Lord of the Rings*. He experienced sudden joy and light accompanied by a sense that he would overcome his troubles:

Of course my delight in Gandalf’s resurrection (as Gandalf the White) later in the trilogy was something beyond what I can describe. When the characters in the story needed help most, Gandalf returned from the dead to help them. Tolkien might have had words for the lightness that came to me, the joy, the laughter, the relief! But I cannot create such poetic prose to express my feelings. Tolkien’s deft crafting of this return is, for me, one of the 20th centuries’ finest literary moments.

Most of the Tolkien friends I now know these many years later, found this resurrection very affirming in a Christian context. But I am not Christian and did not have this cultural context to work with. I felt Gandalf’s return on a different level. On a personal level that interacted with my feelings of parental neglect and abandonment. Gandalf was not only back, he was back better than ever before. My parents, sadly, never had such a rebirth. I,
at that time in my life, knew they never would either. But in this imaginary world I could experience this parental return. It was more than a reverse of the loss of Gandalf; it was a burst of light and joy. With Gandalf back I knew good would win within the story. With *The Lord of the Rings* as my secondary world I knew I could get through my troubles, both in school and in my home life. I did not need the escapism that my siblings found through drug use. I had a safe place on the pages of my beloved books.

Andrew’s life perspective changed dramatically when reading *Winnie-the-Pooh*; his feelings of stress were transformed to feelings of joy, peace, happiness, relaxation, and altruism. This seems like a mystical experience, due to the profound self-expanding nature (i.e., increased compassion and empathy) of his transformation:

I was surprised by the extent of my affection for the characters in the stories. The childlike innocence and wonderful depictions of the characters affected me deeply. They represented life as it should be—a joyful experience. I found myself identifying with all of them. As I read, my body relaxed and I felt as though a glow went through my body. A gentle breeze seemed to blow. The world was a better and happier place. The stories brought me a new sense of peace and happiness. I viewed other people with greater affection and understanding, much like I viewed the characters in the books. These changes have persisted to some extent, with ups and downs, to the present day. In other words, my life perspective was improved by the experience. However I no longer seem able to view my own life with as much happiness and optimism, and the effect of the stories is lessened. It’s harder now to remind myself of Pooh’s world when I’m feeling down.

Lucy describes watching a scene in the forest of *Once on a Time* as a “heady” and “timeless moment.” This seems to be a mystical experience since it had a unitive and self-expanding effect (i.e., increased compassion and empathy).

In one of these scenes Wiggs dances; it is Wiggs’ dearest wish to “dance like a fairy.” I think a theory of magical powers in fantasy stories is that they are the wish for gaining skills without effort. It is a common sort of wish fulfillment. Here, however, wishes are rewards for good or bad behavior. Wiggs behaves well and gains the ability to dance with more than human grace, like a fairy. When her wish comes true and Milne unexpectedly launches into prose poetry, it is a heady moment in the novel. I felt as though I were observing a real scene and that it was a timeless moment.

The way I felt about Wiggs’ success prompted me to realize that there is much satisfaction in helping other people achieve their dreams. This is so even if you would not want that dream for yourself.
Mike also seems to have experienced a peak or mystical experience while reading *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*. The story acted as a mirror of his current and future life. He experienced joy, insight, and hope for the future, which caused a dramatic change in his life perspective, as well as his direction in life. Such sudden transformations are indicative of mystical experiences (Wilber, 2006).

I immediately connected with the story because I realized I was working in a muggle world and though I did not feel I was a muggle, after all my meaningless work experience, I felt I was on my way to becoming one.

The joy I felt in reading the tale corresponded with Potter’s own revelations that there was another world. In his case, the wizarding world. In my case, there was another way to view the world and other opportunities to pursue a life that might be more meaningful to myself. Though I had wanted to pursue my MA degree, after eleven years as a sales assistant making good money, I realized I would have to plan diligently to be able to escape my career. My first degree was in Anthropology. I realized I did not want to go back into this field, and would need to decide exactly what it was I wanted to do. Potter is lucky in the sense that he doesn’t really need to choose—magic over a muggle life is a pretty simple decision. But even there I took a lesson—I could look at the world as if it were magical. And it is, when we look at it that way. It seems to me magic is a way of seeing, and the muggle/wizard dynamic is a great way to show it. If we choose to stifle imagination, we will see the world in a very shallow way. Imagination allows us to believe in a better life, the value of all creatures, the possibility of new discovery. Though I had wanted to pursue my MA degree, after eleven years as a sales assistant making good money, I realized I would have to plan diligently to be able to escape my career. My first degree was in Anthropology. I realized I did not want to go back into this field, and would need to decide exactly what it was I wanted to do. Potter is lucky in the sense that he doesn’t really need to choose—magic over a muggle life is a pretty simple decision. But even there I took a lesson—I could look at the world as if it were magical. And it is, when we look at it that way. It seems to me magic is a way of seeing, and the muggle/wizard dynamic is a great way to show it. If we choose to stifle imagination, we will see the world in a very shallow way. Imagination allows us to believe in a better life, the value of all creatures, the possibility of new discovery. If we do not use imagination, we believe the world is one way, the way we are living in it at the moment. If we believe life is set in stone—that things “are” and that they will always be that way—we lack the fire of imagination that is actual living. Discovery—learning something new about the world—is magic to me. A key to this discovery, the imagination that leads to magic, is that we are also adding our thoughts to these discoveries. If we simply accept things, they will become muggle things. If we think about them, adding insights and extrapolations, they become magical, possibilities and routes to explore, rather than “realities”. In this sense, science is magic, except that many people see it as limiting the world rather than just the next step in discovery. Reading, because we add to the experience by “seeing” worlds in our mind and creating possibilities where nothing is specifically written, is magic also. It opens routes, rather than setting things in stone.

These ineffable experiences of Solaris, D. L. S. Foster, Andrew, Lucy and Mike may also be classified as exceptional human experiences (EHEs), which “is an umbrella term for many types of experiences generally considered to be psychic, mystical, or encounter-type experiences … [and] … can be life changing” (White, 1993, p. 138).
Transformation

Final Lens 7: Absorbed fantasy reading facilitates transformation in readers by altering their perceptions of themselves and the world, as well as by facilitating their transitions through life.

All participants experienced some type of transformation. Most participants experienced a change in life perspective. In general, the participants experienced a sense of opening up, a sense of possibility, and increased empathy and compassion, as well as peace and wellbeing. Participants also experienced a sense of discovery and recovering what was lost in order to move forward. Often transformation involved healing.

The following excerpts illustrate the primary transformation of each participant.

Dagger Scribe experienced a creative transformational dream after reading Flashpoint, which served as inspiration for her creative writing. As Taylor (1993) claimed, “the archetypal creative impulse given shape in our dreams provides creative energy and innovation” (p. 28).

I had a long and involved dream that night after reading it. Some aspects of it appeared related to Flashpoint’s story, because there was an oppressive government and a male protagonist, but the similarities ended there. I dreamed of a star system with seven planets, the first of which was called Monday, where a boy and his girlfriend, lost in an orbiting medical satellite city, accidentally stumble into an emergency escape shuttle, which then activates itself—they were to leave their home and lives of slavery and travel through all seven planets. In the dream I saw the seven planets clearly, had a sense of oppression regarding the life of the boy, and also viewed, as if in a movie, two fairly complete scenes: the two of them wandering lost in the satellite, and, later, their arrival on foot at a city on a foreign planet where the ruler was expected to be benevolent to them.

When I woke up the next morning I wrote down the dream and was immediately seized by a strong desire to develop the idea and write its story, because it was so complete in my head and made an impact of emotional satisfaction similar to reading a good story. I felt strongly that such a story should not be lost in an easily-forgotten dreamworld, so I wrote down all I could remember and also did some schematic sketches and diagrams in my notebook.

It showed me the influence a story can have on the reader’s subconscious, and, ever since, I have desired to write such stories, too. I believe the satisfaction I felt upon waking was a combination of the dream’s own effect, plus the residual memory of the highly satisfying reading of Flashpoint the preceding evening. The two worked together
and birthed a compulsion to recreate an experience that would be able to give rise to the same satisfaction again, primarily for myself because it was so thoroughly enjoyable. Later I began to aim at my readers having the same experience in terms of enjoying a book.

Mike shares how his experience of reading *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* changed his life:

The experience I had when reading *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* was literally a life-changing experience.

And in working on this narrative, I realized that *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, a present from someone who said she “knew I would like it,” actually changed my life because it made me realize how big the world is—how there is so much to know and how little any one person actually does know.

Iranor’s experience of reading *The Lord of the Rings* changed her perspective on life, helped her through difficult life transitions, and gave her a sense of possibility:

The reading did not take me long. When not absolutely constrained to eat, sleep, attend lectures or write essays, I was reading it. I think I was through it in a week, and then I looked out of the window and the world was changed. Not perhaps the world outside so much as my way of looking at the world. I had grown up until University in non-bookish, although never hostile, surroundings and even at school reading seemed to be a chore for many people, or at least they would not admit to its being important to them. Inevitably I had learned to see my delight in reading, especially in fiction, especially in non-“realistic” fiction, as something illicit, something without value in terms of living in and with the “world of reality.” One reading of *The Lord of the Rings* was enough to overturn that. I knew nothing of Tolkien, of why he wrote so deeply and well, or whence came the sense of authenticity and importance that had enchanted me. I only knew that *everyone had been wrong*—this was serious; this was real; this was part of who I was going to be. Until then I had assumed that to be a person concerned with literature, say an academic, teacher or librarian, you would have to value the canon, the “great” writers, and decry the “escapist”—now I was at the beginning of accepting that I could value, study, learn about and from, and maybe eventually write, this kind of literature—and it would have value. Although I did not dream then how long that would take, to become that person or that it would be a journey without a neat and tidy end. A journey like Frodo’s. To be “that sort of person” does not except us from the pains of life, and is only one aspect of who we are. This tale remained my companion and guide through pain, as well as success, and is still so today.

The second period, of the sixteen years of my first marriage, I was still reading in an absorbed way, every kind of fiction, but I feel in retrospect that much of this reading was an induced absorption due to a need to escape. Although I completed a Masters in Children’s Fantasy fiction, worked as a librarian, and taught Creative Writing and
literature to adults, things were not well with me and I was retreating into reading rather than being nourished by it. Still, I read *The Lord of the Rings* annually at this time, and found consolation in it. Although I felt my own power over my own life and work was diminished, I rediscovered the potential for my true identity in the familiar story.

Lynn realized her true spiritual beliefs while reading *The Mists of Avalon*:

By the descriptions of rituals and the ring of truth in many of the passages, like the ones used in this narrative, the book made me realize that I’d always been pagan and not “Christian” as dictated by the hierarchy of the Christian church. I know I felt this over 25 years ago because I have a Christmas card that I sent to my fiancée in 1983 that has a delicate laser-etched angel carrying a candle. In the card I said, “I’d rather consider this a priestess than an angel . . .” and I know now that I was already settling onto a pagan path, which would not really gel until almost 20 years later.

Just last week, as I worked on this paper, one of the online headlines was “Pope condemns sorcery, urges Angolans to convert.”—“Tens of thousands of Angola's Catholics lined the streets of the capital on Saturday for a blessing from Pope Benedict XVI, who urged the country's faithful to reach out and convert people who believe in witchcraft. In today's Angola,” he said at Mass in the capital, “Catholics should offer the message of Christ to the many who live in the fear of spirits, of evil powers by whom they feel threatened.” This book opened my eyes to realization that this is not the truth as I see it.

Bradley was not pagan, but she captured the spirit of living close to the earth and the power of focused will and ritual. Having just reread this book again (probably my 5th reading) I am struck by how accurately she describes my own spiritual experiences in ritual. “*She will call you in a voice you cannot fail to understand. If you have heard that call, there will be nowhere in the world to hide from her voice.*” I had such an experience. On that day, I could no longer call myself an agnostic. On that day, I knew in the core of my soul, that there is truly a spiritual essence that can connect to my human soul in my earthly body. In that connection is a partner, a comfort, and power. Not the power of a laser or punch of a fist, but a more subtle power of will and intent that can influence the physical world and our connection to it. It is not the power to knock down a brick wall but the power to influence outcomes that are not yet set. It is the power to open our minds to possibilities and see opportunities through our blind, narrow-minded assumptions.

Crowspeaks set off on a journey to see Alderley Edge and Manchester, England, the setting of the *Alderley Edge* series. This was a life-changing experience for him:

By the time I was done, however, I had already decided based on what I was reading that I was through with London and what it wasn’t offering, namely, a living as a musician, and that I would take to the roads with a sleeping bag and my guitar and see what kind fortune I might meet with there. . . . Within a few weeks I was off on what was eventually to be quite a trip—probably one of the three most important things that have ever happened to me in my life.
Alan Garner, in one wondrous way, has completely changed my life. I mean, I grew up a little white boy in apartheid South Africa, son of a first generation father and an Anglo-Irish ex-pat mother. . . . If you like, I grew up in the imaginary “home” of the ex-pat as it was recounted to me by my mother and Irish grandmother. . . . When I arrived in England, I knew (from reading) the names of every bird and every bush and tree but had no idea which of the fauna and flora that confronted me they actually referred to!

Thanks to Garner, and others like him, I became more deeply involved in what is actually going on in the land on every level and particularly the spiritual, rather than just in people’s heads . . . become more aware of the “local deities,” as it were.

Liz’ experience of reading Holes was like reading her life story, for it mirrors her personal experience of being in the “System.” Reading a story so similar to her own traumatic experiences helped her to put these experiences in a more meaningful context and feel validated:

I was in group homes, foster homes, and residential treatment centers between the ages of 13 and 20. I was in two foster homes, four group homes, three residential treatment centers, and I was hospitalized at Napa State for 4 months when I was 17. These were all before I turned 18. I was in a group home for young adults exiting the foster care system between 18 and 20. While reading Holes I related the people, places, and events of the story to very specific people, places, and events that I encountered during this 7-year period. In other words, to ALL my experiences in the “System” in some ways, but more specifically the group home, where I lived between the ages of 19 and 20.

I shared a special bond with the author and the characters. I wasn’t “in” the story as a separate being, I was inside the characters so to speak. But only the campers. Never the counselors. And the fact that they were boys and I am female made NO difference.

I felt every emotion intensely, related every metaphor to events in my own life and to very specific people, places, and events from my past. I also tried to apply the lessons in my present and planned to apply them in my future.

I was 26 when my attorney settled a lawsuit on my behalf against an organization that operated a terribly abusive group home, where I lived between the ages of 19 and 20. I have lived on my own, happily and successfully, ever since. I and three other residents of this group home were awarded several million dollars to be divided among us. After taxes and attorney fees, I walked away with a substantial amount of cash.

Holes ends when an attorney investigates Camp Greenlake, discovers the crimes being committed, and shuts it down—freeing the children permanently. Stanley walked away from Camp Greenlake with a cool million dollars. He and his friend Zero shared the money, and the actions of both throughout the story were pivotal in their gaining their fortune and shutting the place down. Like Stanley, I played a pivotal role in the lawsuit that exposed the crimes committed by the organization that operated the group home.
where I and others were severely abused. Like Stanley, I walked away from this group home, both literally and figuratively, a free woman with a small fortune.

At Camp Greenlake, Stanley discovers that his true crimes—his character flaws—are far more dangerous to society than stealing a pair of shoes. His selfishness and lack of discipline almost led to the death of his friend Zero, whom Stanley ultimately rescues from staff who intend to shoot him. Stanley, during his 9-month ordeal, becomes less selfish, more giving, and more disciplined in his character. I, too, although I did not deserve the abuse I experienced, became less selfish, and more disciplined as I realized that these character flaws were my most serious crimes. When my lack of courage at the group home nearly got my friend killed by the sex offender who managed our house—I knew I had to be braver and go to the police and to the media to seek help. I also felt that it was my responsibility to get her out of danger, because it was my actions that almost got her killed.

Reading *Holes* provided me with a lot of hope for my future, but it also allowed me to put my past into a context that made it much more meaningful.

I am very grateful to the writer, as I feel like HE knows ME, intimately, that he understands my struggles and wants me to succeed. I feel grateful that this story has been told so well, and to so many readers, because it lessens my own loneliness and isolation. Even though it was not written for me or in any way directed toward me, I truly feel that it is “My” story, and that this has been shared with so many readers, children especially, feels very healing.

Andrew’s life perspective changed because of reading *Winnie-the-Pooh*:

I had experienced significant career stress in the year or 2 prior to my first reading of the books, as I was attempting to do something extremely difficult and my path was hidden. Pooh played a definite role in popping the stress balloon, as my perspective became a bit more like the book’s.

I was surprised by the extent of my affection for the characters in the stories. The childlike innocence and wonderful depictions of the characters affected me deeply. They represented life as it should be—a joyful experience. I found myself identifying with all of them. As I read, my body relaxed and I felt as though a glow went through my body. A gentle breeze seemed to blow. The world was a better and happier place. The stories brought me a new sense of peace and happiness. I viewed other people with greater affection and understanding, much like I viewed the characters in the books. These changes have persisted to some extent, with ups and downs, to the present day. In other words, my life perspective was improved by the experience.

Von Franz (1996) stated that,

The child is an apt symbol of the Self—of an inner future totality and, at the same time, of undeveloped facets of one’s individuality. The child signifies a piece of innocence and wonder surviving in us from the remote past, both that part of our personal childishness
which has been by-passed and the new, early form of the future individuality. Seen in this light, the saying “The child is father to the man” has deeper significance. (pp. 192-193)

Andrew’s dramatic, long-lasting transformation from reading the Winnie-the-Pooh stories may be related to identifying with the innocent characters from the books. Perhaps in doing so he was awakening a piece of innocence and wonder from his past to transform his current life perspective and individuation. Solaris’ life was profoundly affected by reading The Lord of the Rings and taking walks in nature using his inner sensorium to re-experience the story. He describes the benefits of these walks:

I think the first [walk] made me less afraid or anxious in general, and it taught me how to concentrate on anything that happens around me, and how to enjoy it.

I think the third walk . . . gave me an acceptance of the fact (well, for me) that so many decisions and events have irreversible consequences. (This is a feeling everyone has sometimes, but the point is, I tend not to worry about it so much, when I think back about the third walk. The experience of timelessness and of being in another world makes it easier to accept uncertainty and irreversibility. I think detachment could be the right word to describe it. I have seen my life from that place, and that perspective seems to save me a lot of anxiety.) This, obviously, also applies to death, and to love (i.e., to feeling of guilt and grief about crises in relations with family and friends, even when I do irreversible harm). It may be a trivializing summary, but there is a place (and it is indeed an empty swath of Tolkien's Middle Earth), where nothing, absolutely nothing, matters.

The second walk, the one in the dark, filled me with emotions (anticipation, puzzlement, quiet contemplative amazement) which I felt when I read, and which I could not really understand without referring to The Lord of the Rings. I was very happy that it could happen in real life, too. When I have a good day, I try to think of my entire life in these terms, that is, I imagine it as a walk through a vast, dark space inhabited by amazing and incomprehensible things.

Shamans often journey in the dark (Harner, 1990). Solaris’ second walk seems as if it may have been such a journey. Jane’s experience of reading The Lord of the Rings influenced her life perspective, including her spiritual outlook and relationship standards:

I was entirely caught up in the world of Middle-earth I walked with Frodo, smelled the sweet scents of Ithilien and the choking fumes of Mordor, heard the rumbling of the volcano Mount Doom and the battle cries of the armies, and sobbed with Merry, Pippin, and Sam as the grey ship bore Frodo away from them.
It was the Fellowship itself, a motley crew drawn from five different species of being, that I loved the most. I grieved when the Fellowship was broken and the individuals in it had to go their own ways. For a little while they were a band of brothers who formed a bond that would survive separation and death.

I do remember my emotions, because they were powerful. I loved the characters, I admired their loyalty and endurance and courage, I envied their friendship, and I ached for them when they suffered pain and loss. I loved all of them as one loves a dear friend.

More than that, I longed to be one of them, to live in Middle-earth and to know such people. I was a lonely adolescent who hated the petty, spiteful mindset that seemed to be the norm in junior high. I wanted grandeur; I wanted nobility; I wanted people who were good through and through no matter what the circumstances. I found that in this story.

I also loved the writing itself, although on the first reading I was so engrossed in finding out what happened next that I didn’t really focus on it. Later on I would reread the book simply to delight in Tolkien’s grasp of language. He brought Middle-earth completely to life for me. At every moment I could see what the characters saw around them, felt what the weather was, knew the time of day and year, and smelled what the air smelled like. I felt the characters’ weariness, shivered when they were cold, tensed up when danger was near, and relaxed every time they found a safe haven to rest in for a bit. Tolkien’s ability to evoke mood and place allowed me to feel as if I was there, walking along with Frodo every step of the way.

Frodo’s endurance was inspiring to me. My family was going through a difficult time when I read the book, and there was little support for me. It helped me to think that I just had to soldier on for a while more, like Frodo kept on even when everything seemed hopeless. I think most adolescents don’t have the sense that it is possible to get through a hard time. You don’t know that until you’ve done it. But for me, having Frodo as an example of someone who did make it through was the next best thing. I did make it through my hard patch, in part because Frodo went before me.

And having once made it through a hard time, I never despaired when hard times came again, but just put my head down and walked through it. It affected my spiritual outlook, certainly, because now only those spiritual ideas, such as Buddhism, that allow life to contain both good and bad have any power to speak to me. It also affected my relationships in that I now held my friendships up to the standard of the Fellowship. I tried to be as honest and as loyal as they were, and I expected the same of my friends.

Ianárwen experienced transformation in different ways. *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954/2004) was a life-long influence of her values and spirituality and was also a place of refuge in times of distress. The most dramatic transformation involved redefining herself by, essentially, rewriting her life story in terms of *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954/2004) (i.e., through role-
play in a Tolkien forum). This enabled her to reclaim aspects of her life from childhood, such as
her creativity (Hollis, 1993), which helped turn her life around after a deep depression:

The tale still beguiled me after I had finished it and it was not long before I was reading
the whole thing again and, when I wasn’t reading, attempting my own illustrations of the
story. I read it twice more during the long summer vacation between my leaving Junior
school and starting Senior school in September. This was a crucial point for me, for I was
leaving true childhood behind and moving into arenas that would prepare me for adult
life, a career and maybe a family of my own. There were a number of life lessons I took
with me from those first few readings of the Trilogy, mostly to do with the strength of
friendship and purpose, but also with commitment to the “truths” you hold most deeply
and also in self-belief. Those latter concepts were, of course, not immediately formed at
age 11, or only at an unconscious level of understanding, as I struggled to come to terms
with being adolescent and in a much bigger school, with more emphasis on academic
achievement and good exam results. Religious conviction, too. I had a Roman Catholic
upbringing and both schools I attended were run by nuns, so it seems ironic in a way,
with Tolkien himself a devout Catholic, that I rejected formal church teachings at the age
of 14, having found more meaning in the ethics of Middle Earth and other fantasy worlds,
than in something that had supposedly been ingrained into me since I was 5 years old.
Maybe that was the reason—that I had found the ethics of Middle Earth for myself and so
they had more relevance.

I got a job, married and moved far away from home, but Tolkien came with me and I still
read him quite frequently, sinking myself into the story with relief at times when the
frustrations of life became too oppressive as the “givens” I thought would be mine,
mainly children of my own, eluded me. So I kept going, buoyed up in part by the
examples and sacrifices of Frodo, Sam, Gandalf, Aragorn and the others, with mixed
success in my work and private life. Gradually though, disillusionment and depression set
in at work, but also in the home and my deepest relationships, though I refused to see that
for a very long time, and in 2005 I had the latest and to date most debilitating nervous
breakdown yet. I had to resign my job after relocating 300 miles to be nearer family and
friends and found myself at the bottom of a trench from which I seemingly had no will or
reason to extricate myself. Tolkien, however, was still there and again I slipped into the
book, needing to find solace and reassurance somewhere, and this it seemed was the one
place that had never faltered or failed to inspire me in some way.

Through the clinical depression that engulfed me I found myself relating to Frodo more
strongly again, having become vaguely irritated by his martyr-like stance over the years,
and at last understood how the Ring had clawed away at his resolve and mental integrity.
As I began to feel a little stronger after the work-related stress had been taken out of the
equation, I began to look around and almost by accident stumbled onto a Lord of the
Rings online forum community. Vaguely interested, as it had art and creative writing
forums that drew me, I joined and somehow realized I had turned a corner and was
amongst people who had related as strongly (or moreso) to the book as I had over the
years. I had found a place and “real” life people that came close to understanding me.
In a way, over the years I had gained strength and resolve from the book itself and now, as I drifted into the roleplay aspect of the forum, this spilled into my “creation” of a character through which I could live in the world that now meant so much to me. This was more important to me than I knew, as I needed to regain the sense of self I had lost out in the real world. I had to find a way to go on in my head (as well as in the flesh) and exist without compromising my neglected natural inclinations and sense of self.

In a very real sense, I am convinced that the insights and inspiration I have found through reading and knowing *The Lord of the Rings* so well has turned my life around and given me the commitment and strength to be happy and purposeful once more.

Etruscan King’s experience of reading *The Worm Ouroboros* helped him to temporarily alleviate his suffering due to slowed growth. However, the most profound influence of the book was his frightening experience of facing death while reading. This is also known as a nadir experience or profound experience of facing death (Maslow, 1993), which was influential in his finding his true spiritual path:

My escapist thrills when reading the action drew force from the frustrations of my slow, slow physical maturation (so slow, that around age 17 I had growth hormones prescribed). I was exhilarated at the thought that it might be possible to be something more manly than a timid, repressed midget. (Being a hobbit was never an ambition of mine; I had already had more than enough of being smaller than everyone else around me, thank you very much.) There was some sex in Eddison's story, too, enjoyed by both good guys and bad guys, but this added little to the experience for me—as I say, slow maturation. . . . Emotionally, reading *The Worm Ouroboros* made me impatient to grow physically to something resembling manhood.

The other experience . . . which was rather less pleasant, could be said not to concern eating, but—BEING eaten. It was a deep, soul-puncturing look into the nature of how we face death.

As I said, in the story Lord Juss has to search for his captive brother on a haunted mountain. While he is searching this mountain, illusions of monsters menace him, trying to scare him out of completing his rescue mission. They have no success against his macho bravery. But then the evil forces play their trump card: a plain, cold inner voice telling Juss that whether violently slain or not, his life is nothing—“for all is nothing.” That voice comes close to defeating Juss, before he rallies.

In my agnostic youth, with no Heavenly assurances offered to me, I could have laughed bitterly at shallow preachers who, assuming everyone to be on the same page as they, would say, “You’re afraid to die because you’re afraid to meet God.” They had it all wrong where I was concerned. I was afraid that there WAS no God TO meet; that only blank non-existence awaited after death, and that as a corollary, life meant nothing even
while it lasted. Thus, I was right there with Juss, in the stony courtyard where he heard that taunting inner voice of despair. In connection with reading the “atheistic” science fiction of Poul Anderson (i.e., Trader Team and Satan’s World, included in my complete list), I recall that a sort of suffocating sensation came when I read about sympathetic characters dying; this choking was greater still as Juss and I together looked into a meaningless, uncaring darkness, contemplating the suggested extinction of ALL personality, all awareness, all memory, all being, all significance. I didn’t get to participate in Juss’ strength, but I got to participate in his moment of vulnerability.

When it came to it, Eddison was only admitting the presence of that metaphysical elephant in the living room, not inventing it. He was giving a name, albeit only the name of Nothing, to what most people avoid talking frankly about. I was already more familiar than I cared to be with the stifling dread of nothingness. And because I believed in intellectual honesty, I was most reluctant to seek comfort in any delusion—which meant that it was to take something other than fantasy to offer me any eternal hope. Only when I had studied ancient history and had become convinced that the Bible is a verifiable reporting of true events, did I have a hope that imaginary swordsmen could never provide. Yet having that hope, I could return to enjoying fantasy—just not asking it to give me more than it was able to give.

D. L. S. Foster’s experience of reading The Lord of the Rings helped him through a traumatic adolescence, living in a dysfunctional family. Gandalf was a parental figure (possibly a father or deity archetype) who guided him safely through adolescence and gave him confidence that he would be all right. The experience literally saved his life:

I was the sort of sad kid that often ends up committing suicide. I often had thoughts of doing just that in school. But with this world to turn to I did not take that route. Tolkien’s world may have hit me in the gut with Gandalf’s death but it also offered me another path to continue on the journey—to continue with life.

Of course my delight in Gandalf’s resurrection (as Gandalf the White) later in the trilogy was something beyond what I can describe. When the characters in the story needed help most, Gandalf returned from the dead to help them. Tolkien might have had words for the lightness that came to me, the joy, the laughter, the relief! But I cannot create such poetic prose to express my feelings. Tolkien’s deft crafting of this return is, for me, one of the 20th centuries’ finest literary moments.

Most of the Tolkien friends I now know these many years later, found this resurrection very affirming in a Christian context. But I am not Christian and did not have this cultural context to work with. I felt Gandalf’s return on a different level. On a personal level that interacted with my feelings of parental neglect and abandonment. Gandalf was not only back, he was back better than ever before. My parents, sadly, never had such a rebirth. I, at that time in my life, knew they never would either. But in this imaginary world I could experience this parental return. It was more than a reverse of the loss of Gandalf; it was a
burst of light and joy. With Gandalf back I knew good would win within the story. With *The Lord of the Rings* as my secondary world I knew I could get through my troubles, both in school and in my home life. I did not need the escapism that my siblings found through drug use. I had a safe place on the pages of my beloved books.

They kept me sane and gave me a place to turn to that had sun and green grass, that had friends and heroes. I’ve never found this unique pleasure in any nonfiction book. Sometimes it takes fantasy fiction to draw out real world issues. While other genre fiction has its place, it was uplifting fantasy fiction that helped me in my time of need.

I might wish my childhood had been different but it wasn’t. Gandalf wisely says to stop feeling sorry for yourself and make the best out of what we have. To this day *The Lord of the Rings* plays a very important part in my life. If a friend hasn’t read the books then they cannot understand the intricacies of the struggles that shaped my youth. The books came into my life at a crucial point and not only influenced me, as they have done for so many millions of people through their entertainment value, but also gave me the direction I needed in, what was for me, a morally directionless world. The books of J. R. R. Tolkien kept me alive and I have kept them by me ever after in eternal gratitude.

Bedap experienced an epiphany related to the influence of gender in society while reading *The Left Hand of Darkness*. It seems that, through identification with the protagonist, Genly Ai, he was transported to the story world, experiencing it as if he were the protagonist. This inspired him to change his behavior to reflect a neutral attitude towards gender:

> There are many other aspects to the plot of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, but when I first read the book, even though I appreciated it as a whole, the gender theme was like an epiphany to me. I felt like Genly Ai in a world like Gethen. I saw the behaviour of Estraven, and Gethenians in general, as sort of similar to how we commonly see women (e.g., when they say yes, it really means no), and for the time of the reading I felt like an observer in an unknown world. I was the sexed in a world inhabited by unsexed people.

As far as I was concerned, the main aspect of the plot was the fact it points out how much sex determines our conduct in life. During this first reading I noticed how much our behaviour and our talking is influenced by sex, and how we discriminate (and are discriminated) by sex, even without wanting to, even when people are aware and conscious of this fact and make their best efforts not to do so.

I believe that the way we think influences the way we speak, which influences the way we behave, which in turn influences the way we think, as in a circle. And with the word “politics” I mean it in its original sense: living in a society. As I said at the beginning, my aim was to influence some positive changes in the world, so I saw using a language free of sex-related terms as a first possible step towards achieving this aim.
Peregrin Took’s experience of reading *The Lord of the Rings* influenced his life in several ways; it gave him comfort and guidance as he transitioned through adolescence. His life perspective or identity was changed in that he became an environmentalist. However, it seems that his experience was essentially one of opening up to life, of spiritual awakening:

During the time when summer starts to wane, the slight chill of fall seeps into the air and the colors of trees begin to change. Tea is always on the kettle, and during the early hours of the morning you are comfortably wrapped in a cozy blanket watching the cold sunrise. You step outside in appreciation of the day, and you take a deep breath. Life is renewed within you, and you feel ready to start your day. When night comes, you curl up comfortably once more, but this time you lose yourself next to a burning fire of red and gold. The fire sings to you with sweet melodies, and as you reflect upon your day it touches you with warmed fingers. You never want to leave the fire.

This is the best way that I can describe in words the feeling I get from J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. This feeling of comfort, of spiritual awakening and of guidance has thankfully been bestowed upon me ever since I first read Tolkien’s masterpiece in 2002-2003, when I was about 15 years old.

All of this was possible because of J. R. R. Tolkien, his Middle-earth, and all of his characters that went with it. *The Lord of the Rings* helped me locate my spirit and shape it into what it was meant to be. Aside from my beautiful parents, Tolkien has been the biggest influence in my life—and continues to be so into my present day. Once I became aware of my spirit, I was able to find out that I was an environmentalist, and I owe every bit of it to Tolkien.

Peregrin “Pippin” Took is my most favorite character in *The Lord of the Rings* and one day I noticed that we shared an incredible bond, even though he is fictional. There is no sole day for this realization. Perhaps it happened when I picked up the computer from the dirt, or maybe it happened before that. Whenever the time was, this realization has been with me for quite some time and always brings a smile to my face. My life’s journey mirrors Pippin’s in many ways.

His personality and character is very similar to mine. I’m easy to get along with, and I try to see the brighter side of things—most of the time! I love food; I love nature and long walks; I love music; I love my family, friends, and my land. Naturally, I also love my ale, and smoking is a rare delight! I’m quite foolish at times and sometimes say foolish things. I’m usually the one calling for rests or for food when I go walking with my friends, as Pippin did at the beginning of his journey. I can completely identify with Pippin. His initial fear of being out in the wide world—outside his Shire—is what I’m going through right now—finding my place in the “real” world, both physically and spiritually. I can relate to Pip’s whole story, leaving the Shire rather immature and passing through many dangers, and coming back hardened and completely ready for the
world around him—this is also my journey. I hope that I can become just as hardened as Pippin became.

By “hardened” I mean completely ready for my life’s journey. Passing through such incredible dangers as Peregrin did in such a short amount of time proved to be a major peak of maturity in his life. Thus, I myself can only hope that I will also gain maturity and have an overall grasp on adulthood when my main journey is over, just as Pippin did.

Sam’s experience of reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* seemed to be intertwined with his redefinition of himself during adolescence. It seems that the story’s archetypal images (i.e., the hero’s journey) influenced his life seamlessly, without his realizing it at the time. As he recounted his experience, he attempted to understand various aspects of it, including a sense of possibility, transformation, renewal, and rebirth. Ultimately, he determined that his experience of the story was an element of a larger movement and change occurring in his life:

There was a bit of excitement at getting to know all the little details of the story that I wasn’t able to pick up from the later books, but there was also a sense of possibility in the return to the beginning. This sense was mirrored in the opening scenes of the book as old companions were being reunited after several years of separation on individual quests. There was something peaceful in seeing everyone back together again.

My first thought is that the experience of reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* is a part of a larger transition in my life. Moving from middle school into high school was a fairly major change as I lost touch with pretty much all of my friends in middle school and was introduced to an entirely new crowd of people.

If I had to characterize the experience of reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* as a whole, based on my feelings and sensations and where I was in my life, I would say that it seems something of a rebirth. It seems a bit grandiose to call it such, mainly because I’m not sure into what I was being born. I have never really thought about this experience in these terms until writing this narrative, and it may take a bit of processing to be able to fully put this into its proper place. Still, there is the nature of the experience in feeling warm and enclosed, the sense of returning home and reuniting with old friends, and the renewal of interest in fantasy media. In reading this for the first time there was a feeling of returning to undifferentiated beginnings, which included a time before Raistlin lost his way.

Along with all of this came a need to redefine myself, at least in part. My resurgent interest in fantasy, and to a lesser extent science fiction, was to become a significant part of my redefined identity. It became easy to have an instantaneous connection with people who shared an interest in fantasy and sci-fi media. It wasn’t a requirement for my friendship, but I often found myself gravitating to these people. In the sense that reading
Dragons of Autumn Twilight played a role in precipitating part of my personal and social identity, the experience might be construed as transformational.

Still, I’m at a loss to say how the bounded experience of reading Dragons of Autumn Twilight (the particular feelings and sensations, immediate reactions to the plot and characters) changed me, in the sense of giving me life-changing insight or inspiration. Rather, I think the experience is indicative of, or an element of, a larger movement and change, including the need to redefine myself, that was occurring in my life.

Bella Jean’s experience of reading Twilight helped her feel young again at age 50. Her experiences of joy and first love with one of the main characters helped to bring passion back into her life. This seems to have been a successful midlife transition (Hollis, 1993) in that she found what she left behind in her youth, something necessary for her to move forward in life:

Reading Twilight brought back the thrill of first love and lust! I am happily married but swoon when I remember those first stages of falling in love. The wanting someone so badly that you feel you can overcome any obstacles. Falling in love with Edward has been a safe way to re-experience the joy and passion of first love and to feel young again. And, in turn, these feelings have helped to rekindle my relationship with my husband.

I believe my experience of reading Twilight was related to the fact that it is a fantasy. I think that the fantasy of Edward being a vampire did affect me. The thought of always being young, beautiful, and vital is the ultimate fantasy—and the danger—yes, the danger most definitely made Edward even more tantalizing. Perhaps the fantasy part hit me even more now, as I’m not thrilled that I’m now in my fifties.

Branwen experienced what seems like a temporary transformation while reading Gate of Ivrel. She described the story as “refreshing” due to the role reversal, which was meaningful to her, and that she was “wistful” when she finished reading; however, her perspective did not seem to be significantly changed by her reading experience. Lucy’s experience of reading Once on a Time seemed self-expanding in that she gained wisdom about human nature and developed compassion and empathy for others:

The way I felt about Wiggs’ success prompted me to realize that there is much satisfaction in helping other people achieve their dreams. This is so even if you would not want that dream for yourself.

There was a cumulative effect for me in reading this novel and others, in realizing that everyone thinks they are acting reasonably. While Once on a Time is perhaps too fluffy,
in that all of the conflict is either superficial or has a facile resolution, to convey that everyone has a distinct point of view, it was more meaningful to me than other didactic fiction I had read previously.

*Once On a Time* also played a part in helping me to slowly learn the concept of listening to other people and giving them the liberty to tell as much of their story and with as much enthusiasm as possible. It became important to me to employ this approach as often as I could.

**Healing, Consoling and Validating**

*Final Lens 8: Absorbed fantasy reading may be healing, consoling and validating.*

Readers may experience the story world as a safe place that protects them from harm and allows healing to happen. They may also feel consoled by the story, giving them hope for the future, as well as reassurance and confidence that everything will turn out all right. The story may also give readers a feeling of validation. Often, readers experience healing transformation.

Liz experienced hope for the future and a feeling of validation while reading *Holes*:

Reading *Holes* provided me with a lot of hope for my future, but it also allowed me to put my past into a context that made it much more meaningful.

The fact that this book is a fantasy makes it much more palatable, so to speak. It would not have been as easy to “absorb” had it been written literally, rather than in so many metaphors.

I am very grateful to the writer, as I feel like HE knows ME, intimately, that he understands my struggles and wants me to succeed. I feel grateful that this story has been told so well, and to so many readers, because it lessens my own loneliness and isolation. Even though it was not written for me or in any way directed toward me, I truly feel that it is “My” story, and that this has been shared with so many readers, children especially, feels very healing.

D. L. S. Foster experience of reading *The Lord of the Rings* gave him a safe place to escape from the harmful environment of his dysfunctional family, which allowed healing to happen. He also found the guidance that he needed in order to transition through adolescence. This saved his life, gave him hope for the future and reassurance that he would be all right:

In order to survive I had to create a safe space to protect myself within such a family. The daily stress of simply being under the same roof with them was too much. . . . Books
were the medium from which I created that protective zone. And in that space I was able to survive and eventually escape to safety. That is why I cherish books so highly in my life now.

Gandalf was a parental figure I could admire, so unlike my own parents. He was there to give Bilbo the not so subtle push to get him on his feet and out into the wide world, in other words, to grow up and take care of himself.

Each time I sat down to read the books I left the everyday world behind. It did not matter if I was at lunch at school (all alone without friends) or at home with parents fighting or brothers raging, I was able to tune the world out and fall right into the story. The mission of a fellowship of varied peoples, Hobbits, Men, an Elf, a Dwarf, and of course Gandalf as their guide, to destroy a magical ring in the land of its making, dark Mordor, was appealing escapism. The quest was my salvation. It was better to battle Orcs than brothers, to escape the clutching giant spider Shelob than my clutching parents. I walked with the Fellowship all throughout their adventures as if I was right by their sides. It was much better to follow them on a heroic journey than to worry about anything else in the real world.

They kept me sane and gave me a place to turn to that had sun and green grass, that had friends and heroes. I’ve never found this unique pleasure in any nonfiction book. Sometimes it takes fantasy fiction to draw out real world issues. While other genre fiction has its place, it was uplifting fantasy fiction that helped me in my time of need. I also enjoy other aspects of fiction, especially gothic horror, as well as nonfiction biography, but none of those stories touched me in such a positive way. A created character can do more and bring you to places of healing more than most real people could ever strive to do. Seeing characters and actions through the prism of mythology and folklore can, of course, create idealistic expectations, but sometimes that is what is needed in one’s life during trying times.

The books came into my life at a crucial point and not only influenced me, as they have done for so many millions of people through their entertainment value, but also gave me the direction I needed in, what was for me, a morally directionless world. The books of J. R. R. Tolkien kept me alive and I have kept them by me ever after in eternal gratitude.

With *The Lord of the Rings* as my secondary world I knew I could get through my troubles, both in school and in my home life. I did not need the escapism that my siblings found through drug use. I had a safe place on the pages of my beloved books.

Ianárwen experienced healing and consolation reading *The Lord of the Rings*. The story world was a place of refuge in times of distress, as well as instrumental in turning her life around after a deep depression:

The parallels between Sauron’s dominion in Middle Earth and our own planetary woes sometimes loomed large and I still took refuge with the Fellowship at least once a year if
not more, craving the reassurance of nobility and caring and just “doing the right, the
honorable, thing.” The Shire may have seemed naïve and even ignorant, but it was a
place with unseen steel as shown in the Scouring; and its people were for the most part
honest and looking to be happy in the small concerns of family and friends. It was a place
of fellowship, too, less rarefied and chiseled than the Fellowship of the Ring perhaps, but
there nonetheless and as strong and noble as any warrior race’s motivations.

I got a job, married and moved far away from home, but Tolkien came with me and I still
read him quite frequently, sinking myself into the story with relief at times when the
frustrations of life became too oppressive as the “givens” I thought would be mine,
mainly children of my own, eluded me. So I kept going, buoyed up in part by the
examples and sacrifices of Frodo, Sam, Gandalf, Aragorn and the others, with mixed
success in my work and private life. Gradually though, disillusionment and depression set
in at work, but also in the home and my deepest relationships, though I refused to see that
for a very long time, and in 2005 I had the latest and to date most debilitating nervous
breakdown yet. I had to resign my job after relocating 300 miles to be nearer family and
friends and found myself at the bottom of a trench from which I seemingly had no will or
reason to extricate myself. Tolkien, however, was still there and again I slipped into the
book, needing to find solace and reassurance somewhere, and this it seemed was the one
place that had never faltered or failed to inspire me in some way.

Through the clinical depression that engulfed me I found myself relating to Frodo more
strongly again, having become vaguely irritated by his martyr-like stance over the years,
and at last understood how the Ring had clawed away at his resolve and mental integrity.
As I began to feel a little stronger after the work-related stress had been taken out of the
equation, I began to look around and almost by accident stumbled onto a Lord of the
Rings online forum community. Vaguely interested, as it had art and creative writing
forums that drew me, I joined and somehow realized I had turned a corner and was
amongst people who had related as strongly (or moreso) to the book as I had over the
years. I had found a place and “real” life people that came close to understanding me.

In a way, over the years I had gained strength and resolve from the book itself and now,
as I drifted into the roleplay aspect of the forum, this spilled into my “creation” of a
character through which I could live in the world that now meant so much to me. This
was more important to me than I knew, as I needed to regain the sense of self I had lost
out in the real world. I had to find a way to go on in my head (as well as in the flesh) and
exist without compromising my neglected natural inclinations and sense of self.

In a very real sense, I am convinced that the insights and inspiration I have found through
reading and knowing The Lord of the Rings so well has turned my life around and given
me the commitment and strength to be happy and purposeful once more.

Branwen’s experience of reading Gate of Ivrel seems healing. She resonated with the male and
female role reversal in the story and found the character of Vanye “wonderfully refreshing”: 
I think this book and the others in the series resonated with me because of the role reversal. Le Guin, in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, imagined a world in which people are genderless most of the time. Cherryh created a woman who gives orders to her male slave, a handsome hulk. A lesser author might have left it at that, but Cherryh explores their relationship and gives her readers a lot to think about. At the end of the story Morgaine goes through the Gate that will be sealed forever in a few seconds. Vanye has regained his honor and fulfilled his oath to her, but with little more than an instant’s hesitation, plunges through the Gate to follow her, not knowing where they were going or what they would find. Vanye’s devotion is that of a man who demands nothing and gives everything.

To be perfectly honest, it would be hard not to love such a man. I married a man who shares two cultures, French and Cameroonian, and in both the man “wears the pants.” And my own parents were pretty typical of marriages in the 40’s and 50’s. My father, a Navy officer, worked and brought home a salary; my mother was a homemaker and although she had been trained as a nurse, did not work because my father thought it would mean he wasn’t making enough money. My father was often absent at sea for long periods and my mother had full responsibility at those times, but when he was home he represented the parental authority. I grew up being told that men and women were equal, but rarely saw a marriage in which that appeared to be the case. Yet all through school I got better grades than any of the boys in my classes, and I saw no reason why I should take orders from someone who was not necessarily more intelligent than me.

Of course, when you are madly in love, you don’t ask who’s going to be the boss. And in general, when my husband and I don’t agree, we are able to talk things over and try to find a solution. Yet, like many women, I’ve learned to choose my battles and to bring in outside support, to be just a bit manipulative if you like, so as not to bruise that male ego. So the character of Vanye, who obeys without ever questioning Morgaine’s authority, yet is undeniably masculine, is wonderfully refreshing. Like time travel and ships that fly to other galaxies, he doesn’t exist, but it’s a beautiful, inspiring idea, that a man can obey a woman’s orders without losing his dignity and self-respect. And I have to admit to feeling a bit wistful every time I read Vanye’s story. I’d like to have the luxury of telling men what to do without having to argue, convince, and negotiate each step of the way.

*Story Mirrors Life*

*Final Lens 9: Fantasy literature may mirror the lives of absorbed readers at some level, whether it be metaphorical or nearly literal.*

Downing (1991) claimed that “archetypal images reveal a rich mirroring of our inner experience and our interactions with the world outside ourselves” (p. xi). The fantasy literature read by participants often mirrored their lives at some level, be it metaphorical or literal. Stories become intertwined with readers’ lives in the sense that their experiences (e.g., physical,
thoughts, emotions, memories, and imagination) may be unconsciously woven into their reading of the story, making it uniquely theirs.

Dagger Scribe’s “intense experience of *Flashpoint*” was a result of recognizing “its closeness to actual possibilities—the ‘this could be our future’ factor. . . . In *Flashpoint*, believers of all religions are branded terrorists and hunted down by the government. Many recent news headlines show a startling similarity to this scenario.” Mike realized, while reading *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, how the “muggle world” mirrored the furniture industry:

The very beginning of the book immediately describes the muggle family that Potter will be forced to grow up with, and it is not a flattering description. The muggles are rude, nonimaginative (even placing restrictions against imagining so that life will continue on as before and as ever) and generally mean. I immediately connected with the story because I realized I was working in a muggle world and though I did not feel I was a muggle, after all my meaningless work experience, I felt I was on my way to becoming one.

Iranor’s life was similar to the character Frodo’s in *The Lord of the Rings*:

Many more years later I now see it as a statement directly opposed to Hamlet’s wondering whether one should be or not be. Here Frodo perceives that one must be, must act, must take on responsibility, even without being sure about where that acceptance will lead. Indeed, as even more years pass, it seems to me that we never do know where our acceptance of duty or responsibility may lead, but are not therefore excused from that acceptance. Just as Frodo expressed himself willing to accept the Ring, and found that he had to endure inexpressible hardship and loss, so I have known times of stating that I am willing to do, to hear, to accept the knowledge of painful issues, only to find that the resultant sorrow can come close to being unbearable.

Lynn had begun to question the patriarchal and matriarchal religious traditions before reading *The Mists of Avalon*. The story is a mirror of these questions in that it illustrates the struggles between the pagan earth-based religion and the Christian religion:

This book gave me permission to question some of my early indoctrination into Christian “truths.” Some on the pagan fringe are indeed extreme, strange and even violent in the name of their religion, just as the minority few in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. But the vast majority of devout religious minded people have a profound, compassionate and gentle understanding of the holy within them and around them, by whatever name or method of expression. This book allowed me to feel that I was not alone in questioning
why one religion would exclude all others. The author gave voice to my own misgivings and articulated how God could be thought of in a more humane and inclusive way.

Crowspeaks’ experience of reading the *Alderley Edge* series had a mirror-like aspect to it in the sense that his “imaginary home” was the setting of the story, as well as the place he actually journeyed to. Liz felt that *Holes* mirrored the traumatic events of her life in the “System”:

I was in group homes, foster homes, and residential treatment centers between the ages of 13 and 20. I was in two foster homes, four group homes, three residential treatment centers, and I was hospitalized at Napa State for 4 months when I was 17. These were all before I turned 18. I was in a group home for young adults exiting the foster care system between 18 and 20. While reading *Holes* I related the people, places, and events of the story to very specific people, places, and events that I encountered during this 7-year period. In other words, to ALL my experiences in the “System” in some ways, but more specifically the group home, where I lived between the ages of 19 and 20.

I was 26 when my attorney settled a lawsuit on my behalf against an organization that operated a terribly abusive group home, where I lived between the ages of 19 and 20. I have lived on my own, happily and successfully, ever since. I and three other residents of this group home were awarded several million dollars to be divided among us. After taxes and attorney fees, I walked away with a substantial amount of cash.

*Holes* ends when an attorney investigates Camp Greenlake, discovers the crimes being committed, and shuts it down—freeing the children permanently. Stanley walked away from Camp Greenlake with a cool million dollars. He and his friend Zero shared the money, and the actions of both throughout the story were pivotal in their gaining their fortune and shutting the place down. Like Stanley, I played a pivotal role in the lawsuit that exposed the crimes committed by the organization that operated the group home where I and others were severely abused. Like Stanley, I walked away from this group home, both literally and figuratively, a free woman with a small fortune.

At Camp Greenlake, Stanley discovers that his true crimes—his character flaws—are far more dangerous to society than stealing a pair of shoes. His selfishness and lack of discipline almost led to the death of his friend Zero, whom Stanley ultimately rescues from staff who intend to shoot him. Stanley, during his 9-month ordeal, becomes less selfish, more giving, and more disciplined in his character. I, too, although I did not deserve the abuse I experienced, became less selfish, and more disciplined as I realized that these character flaws were my most serious crimes. When my lack of courage at the group home nearly got my friend killed by the sex offender who managed our house—I knew I had to be braver and go to the police and to the media to seek help. I also felt that it was my responsibility to get her out of danger, because it was my actions that almost got her killed.
Peregrin Took realized that his life’s journey mirrors the character Pippin’s in *The Lord of the Rings*:

Peregrin “Pippin” Took is my most favorite character in *The Lord of the Rings* and one day I noticed that we shared an incredible bond, even though he is fictional. There is no sole day for this realization. Perhaps it happened when I picked up the computer from the dirt, or maybe it happened before that. Whenever the time was, this realization has been with me for quite some time and always brings a smile to my face. My life’s journey mirrors Pippin’s in many ways.

*Story is Teacher, Guide and Companion*

*Final Lens 10: Fantasy literature may play the role of teacher, guide and companion for absorbed readers.*

Stories teach and guide readers on moral practices and values. Characters may serve as role models and friends, as well as alter egos. Readers may learn lessons about honesty, loyalty and caring for others.

Dagger Scribe describes what she learned about herself after reading *Flashpoint*:

The novel which was pushed back a year by the intervention of the dream was not science fiction, but rather a simple interpersonal story. Repeatedly I tried to write it, but could not get started, until I realized it would never work unless I set it in the future and added a techno thriller plot to the relational story. Once I did that, I wrote the first draft in just one month, faster than ever before. Therefore I have concluded that I am unable to activate my imagination without an aspect of science fiction. I have never tried to write fantasy.

Mike realized several things about himself and the world while reading *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*:

Though I had wanted to pursue my MA degree, after 11 years as a sales assistant making good money, I realized I would have to plan diligently to be able to escape my career. My first degree was in Anthropology. I realized I did not want to go back into this field, and would need to decide exactly what it was I wanted to do. Potter is lucky in the sense that he doesn’t really need to choose—magic over a muggle life is a pretty simple decision.

I read this book probably in 2 nights. The immediate reaction was to realize that although I had read a lot of fantasy and myth as a child, I had stopped when I began college and never found fantasy again while working full time.
And I realized that the people I liked in the real world were those that were similar to the characters in fantasy—open-minded and able to imagine. They don’t necessarily read fantasy, but have inquisitive minds, understanding that life is better when it is fair and everyone is treated with respect.

Over the 3 years it took to earn my film degree at night, I had immersed myself in fantasy films and stories and I realized that myth, and how it related to the fantasy genre, was my major interest.

Iranor found life-long companionship and guidance reading The Lord of the Rings:

This tale remained my companion and guide through pain as well as success, and is still so today. . . . Through the third phase of my life to date, The Lord of the Rings has been a guide and support, as well as an escape; indeed, intellectually I have concluded that “escape” into fiction is not at all a sign of maladjustment to primary reality, but a sojourn in an alternative reality that gives us strength for daily living. In this context, I could be defined as a person who “follows Gandalf,” although I believe the book about that is specifically Christian, I haven’t read it and can’t recall the author. But I do tend to feel my moral, creative, intellectual, and spiritual (in the broadest sense) choices are shaped by Tolkien, via Gandalf and I suppose the rest of the Fellowship, particularly Aragorn, Sam and Frodo, and by characters like Faramir and Théoden, who make right choices in spite of their circumstances.

Lynn learned from the author of The Mists of Avalon as if she were her teacher:

I believe this is possibly the way Bradley felt about her own Christian faith. I understand that she wrote a story, but to me, she was sharing her own thoughts through this story much as Jesus told parables. She was a prolific writer and I read many of her books. In all I have read she seems to have an understanding of the interactions of people and society. To me, she was a teacher.

Liz experienced Holes as her story, which helped her reflect on and process traumatic life experiences:

Stanley refrained from telling staff where he had found the treasure, I didn’t initially understand. Later I realized the importance of this metaphorically in the story, and I wished that I had been better able to guard my experiences in my past. I strove to keep those things (beliefs, feelings, experiences) that I treasured secret from those who would steal them or degrade them in my present and in my future.

At Camp Greenlake, Stanley discovers that his true crimes—his character flaws—are far more dangerous to society than stealing a pair of shoes. His selfishness and lack of discipline almost led to the death of his friend Zero, whom Stanley ultimately rescues from staff who intend to shoot him. Stanley, during his 9-month ordeal, becomes less selfish, more giving, and more disciplined in his character. I, too, although I did not
deserve the abuse I experienced, became less selfish, and more disciplined as I realized that these character flaws were my most serious crimes.

Ianárwen learned a number of life lessons related to honesty, loyalty and caring for others from reading *The Lord of the Rings*, which influenced her spirituality:

There were a number of life lessons I took with me from those first few readings of the Trilogy, mostly to do with the strength of friendship and purpose, but also with commitment to the “truths” you hold most deeply and also in self-belief. Those latter concepts were, of course, not immediately formed at age 11, or only at an unconscious level of understanding, as I struggled to come to terms with being adolescent and in a much bigger school, with more emphasis on academic achievement and good exam results. Religious conviction, too. I had a Roman Catholic upbringing and both schools I attended were run by nuns, so it seems ironic in a way, with Tolkien himself a devout Catholic, that I rejected formal church teachings at the age of 14, having found more meaning in the ethics of Middle Earth and other fantasy worlds, than in something that had supposedly been ingrained into me since I was 5 years old. Maybe that was the reason—that I had found the ethics of Middle Earth for myself and so they had more relevance.

The concept of defending those you loved to such extremes struck a chord in any event and maybe for the first time made me think about the significance of deep commitment and conscious support over raw courage and gut-reaction derring-do. Here were small, not at all warlike Hobbits (namely Sam and Merry, for Merry, too, had his part in the slaying of the Witchking) and a young woman showing they were as capable and strong as a seasoned six-foot warrior, determined to play their part in battle or wherever danger threatened the purpose and well-being of their lords and people, regardless of the ultimate price they might have to pay. I felt humbled in both cases.

D. L. S. Foster found the guidance he needed reading *The Lord of the Rings*:

The books came into my life at a crucial point and not only influenced me, as they have done for so many millions of people through their entertainment value, but also gave me the direction I needed in, what was for me, a morally directionless world. The books of J. R. R. Tolkien kept me alive and I have kept them by me ever after in eternal gratitude.

Peregrin Took found “guidance” reading *The Lord of the Rings*, especially with regard to becoming an “environmentalist” and the role model of character Pippin:

My life’s journey mirrors Pipinn’s in many ways. . . . I can completely identify with Pippin. His initial fear of being out in the wide world—outside his Shire—is what I’m going through right now—finding my place in the “real” world, both physically and spiritually. I can relate to Pip’s whole story, leaving the Shire rather immature and passing through many dangers, and coming back hardened and completely ready for the
world around him—this is also my journey. I hope that I can become just as hardened as
Pippin became.

By “hardened” I mean completely ready for my life’s journey. Passing through such
incredible dangers as Peregrin did in such a short amount of time proved to be a major
peak of maturity in his life. Thus, I myself can only hope that I will also gain maturity
and have an overall grasp on adulthood when my main journey is over, just as Pippin did.

While reading *Twilight*, Bella Jean had realizations about her personality:

Yet, as I read and re-experienced these feelings, I also realized that some of the best
things in my personality have been formed due to these experiences. I have a great ability
to talk to just about anyone and the ability to make others comfortable in social situations.
I have learned to accept the fact that as diverse as people can be in different areas of the
country, or the world, we all have the same human needs and feelings. I am empathetic
and am often the person people go to talk to, as they know I will listen and often provide
feedback that is not judgmental. Hopefully, this helps them think things through in
different lights. These are the positive things I think that came from being like Bella. I
knew that I had these positive attributes before reading *Twilight*, however the book
helped me realize that how I had grown up, similar to Bella, had contributed to the way I
behave today. . . . I also realized that many positive aspects of my personality were
formed during adolescence.

*Sense of Home*

**Final Lens 11: Absorbed fantasy readers may experience a sense of home, including
memories of home, as well as a spiritual sense of belonging in relation to the story.**

Iranor experienced a sense of her home while reading *The Lord of the Rings*:

It soon felt comfortable and familiar, not just because I had recently read the *The Hobbit*
but because of earlier experience with the tales listed previously and with a wide range of
speculative fiction. In particular, it felt like the Norse tales. In these pages I was finding
the sense that those tales had given me, of strangeness and immeasurable northern
distances, the same feelings engendered in me by the sight of the sea and the wild spaces
nearest my home when I visited them. A sense of personal ownership of that strangeness
and of infinite possibility in real life.

Lynn associates “feelings of home and belonging and spiritual warmth” with *The Mists of
Avalon*:

I don’t remember holding the book, where I was when I first read it, or even exactly
when. I know it was the early 80s and believe I must have been around 23. But now, just
seeing the book on the shelf or holding it in my hands, it gives me feelings of home and
belonging and spiritual warmth which I suspect was my original feeling, as well.
Crowspeaks in some sense discovered the “imaginary ‘home’” he “grew up in” because of reading the *Alderley Edge* series:

I mean, I grew up a little white boy in apartheid South Africa, son of a first generation father and an Anglo–Irish ex–pat mother. . . . If you like, I grew up in the imaginary “home” of the ex–pat as it was recounted to me by my mother and Irish grandmother. . . . When I arrived in England, I knew (from reading) the names of every bird and every bush and tree but had no idea which of the fauna and flora that confronted me they actually referred to!

Thanks to Garner, and others like him, I became more deeply involved in what is actually going on in the land on every level and particularly the spiritual, rather than just in people’s heads . . . become more aware of the “local deities,” as it were.

D. L. S. Foster found an alternative home while reading *The Lord of the Rings*, one that provided guidance and friendship:

Picture if you will a young man 13 years of age, basically happy and ready to face life. Now throw the toxic sludge of life, which none of us can avoid, at the boy—a distant father, a mother with many psychological problems, and a few siblings with their own issues ranging from drugs to gang delinquency and beyond. That young fellow was me. In order to survive I had to create a safe space to protect myself within such a family. The daily stress of simply being under the same roof with them was too much. Fortunately I loved to read and had a yard with a big tree under which I could sit and get away from them. Books were the medium from which I created that protective zone. And in that space I was able to survive and eventually escape to safety. That is why I cherish books so highly in my life now.

The books that stand out above all others as my safety net were J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. . . . I had never had a comfortable home so I envied Bilbo’s dreamy hobbit hole complete with all the delicious foods it contained and lacking any parental characters. Of course along came Gandalf the Wizard who set Bilbo on his adventure to grow up and take responsibility for his life. Gandalf was a parental figure I could admire, so unlike my own parents. He was there to give Bilbo the not so subtle push to get him on his feet and out into the wide world, in other words, to grow up and take care of himself.

My home life had, if anything, grown worse as I entered High School. My mother’s mental health declined. My brothers grew worse with their petty theft and drug use. I felt very alone as shame of my family kept me from ever inviting friends to my house. I decided I would try to tackle the massive *Lord of the Rings* trilogy to distract myself from the hardships of bringing that loneliness to school.

Each time I sat down to read the books I left the everyday world behind. It did not matter if I was at lunch at school (all alone without friends) or at home with parents fighting or
brothers raging, I was able to tune the world out and fall right into the story. The mission of a fellowship of varied peoples, Hobbits, Men, an Elf, a Dwarf, and of course Gandalf as their guide, to destroy a magical ring in the land of its making, dark Mordor, was appealing escapism. The quest was my salvation. It was better to battle Orcs than brothers, to escape the clutching giant spider Shelob than my clutching parents. I walked with the Fellowship all throughout their adventures as if I was right by their sides. It was much better to follow them on a heroic journey than to worry about anything else in the real world.

Sam experienced a sense of “returning home” and “returning to undifferentiated beginnings” while reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*:

I already knew most of what would happen in the story, as well as having a familiarity with the characters. Nevertheless, I was enraptured reading this book. When I read it, there was a sense of returning home with old friends while I was literally returning back to the beginning of the story. There was a bit of excitement at getting to know all the little details of the story that I wasn’t able to pick up from the later books, but there was also a sense of possibility in the return to the beginning. This sense was mirrored in the opening scenes of the book as old companions were being reunited after several years of separation on individual quests. There was something peaceful in seeing everyone back together again.

If I had to characterize the experience of reading *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* as a whole, based on my feelings and sensations and where I was in my life, I would say that it seems something of a rebirth. . . . I have never really thought about this experience in these terms until writing this narrative, and it may take a bit of processing to be able to fully put this into its proper place. Still, there is the nature of the experience in feeling warm and enclosed, the sense of returning home and reuniting with old friends, and the renewal of interest in fantasy media. In reading this for the first time there was a feeling of returning to undifferentiated beginnings.

*Sense of Freedom*

*Final Lens 12: Absorbed fantasy reading may give readers a sense of freedom from everyday constraints and rules.*

An example of this lens is Lynn’s story, where she feels she is being given permission to question her beliefs and choose between Christian and pagan religious traditions. This sense of freedom to choose one’s path in life is also found in the stories of Mike, Etruscan King, Ianárwen and others.
Escape

*Final Lens 13: Absorbed fantasy reading may allow readers to temporarily escape from responsibilities and is both healing and transformative.*

There seem to be three types of escape: empowering, respite, and semi-permanent. After reading, readers may either feel more empowered to execute their responsibilities, feel restored and better able to continue their responsibilities, or feel they do not want to or are not able to continue with their responsibilities. In the semi-permanent case, readers may either reread the story, join online communities that allow them to make friends with others who are passionate about the story (i.e., continue to “live” in the story world), or act out the story with friends or by themselves.

Dagger Scribe seemed to experience empowering escape, for she was better able to perform her duties as a writer because of reading *Flashpoint*:

> I have read *Flashpoint* three times. And I’ll be rereading it at least once or twice every year of my life if at all possible, to relive the intensity of the experience and gain new motivation to excel in my own writing. Sequels are planned by the author, so I hope they have a similar impact! This book is irreversibly intertwined in my life and writing career.

Crowspeaks experienced empowering escape from reading the *Alderley Edge* series and journeying to the part of England where the story was set. Even though he immersed himself in the story world in this way (i.e., semi-permanent escape), it was an extremely meaningful experience, one that changed his life for the better. It was both healing and transformative:

> When I go to England, it’s to resource myself—“re-source” myself—to get in touch again with the silence of its rolling hills and dales. As a long-time Buddhist and practitioner and teacher of various Daoist arts, I find this “coming back to square one” a most profound and refreshing experience . . . a veritable spiritual cleansing.

Ianárvwen’s experience of reading *The Lord of the Rings* was initially intense, for she reread the book many times within a short period, and, more recently, she became involved with a Tolkien forum (i.e., both could be considered semi-permanent escapes). However, regardless of the
intensity of her involvement in Tolkien’s (1954/2004) world, she has for the most part been transformed and healed by her experience (i.e., empowering escape):

Though I already had a reasonable experience of mythopoetic fantasy I had no clue that I was about to discover a world where a subtly different “magic” was contained in “legends” that had echoes of Norse or Celtic myth, but was unrecognisable from any other fantasy environment I had ever read. I opened *The Lord of the Rings* little knowing that my reading habits were about to be challenged and beguiled onto another level of sophistication and awareness; that I would read it again and again for the rest of my life; lose count of the times I had lived in the story; and discover more to love in the book every single time I read it.

D. L. S. Foster’s experience was an escape to salvation, healing and transformation. He read most frequently during his high school years (i.e., semi-permanent escape), yet this was the way he survived. It seems that it was because he spent so much time in Middle Earth that he survived adolescence and felt assurance that he would be all right:

The mission of a fellowship of varied peoples, Hobbits, Men, an Elf, a Dwarf, and of course Gandalf as their guide, to destroy a magical ring in the land of its making, dark Mordor, was appealing escapism. The quest was my salvation.

Branwen’s experience of the *Gate of Ivrel* seemed primarily an escape of respite. Like a vacation, she found reading the book “refreshing” and was “wistful” when it ended. In other words, she seemed to feel restored and better able to continue her responsibilities.

*Creative Inspiration*

*Final Lens 14: Absorbed fantasy reading may inspire readers to create works of art or writing (poetry and prose).*

One third or more participants were creative writers, poets and artists: Dagger Scribe, Iranor, Ianárwen, Peregrin Took, Etruscan King and D. L. S. Foster. This suggests that absorbed reading of fantasy literature may inspire readers to do creative projects based on their reading.

*Reflections on the Study: Strengths and Limitations*

Reflecting on my inquiry into the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state, I realize how meaningful it has been for me. It has been personally valuable to take the
seed of an idea and, bring it to fruition, using the method of intuitive inquiry. It is satisfying to look back and see how far I have come since the beginning of my journey. I started with vague memories of my own meaningful reading experiences and a desire to understand them at a deeper level in Cycle 1 to seeing in Cycle 5 the detailed articulation of the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state. This has been a long but rewarding journey that has involved finding the deeper significance within myself, as well as exploring how others view the topic. At journey’s end this knowledge was woven together through intuitive knowing, clarifying the topic as if seeing the pattern of a tapestry. It is very satisfying to understand the deeper meaning of reading of fantasy literature in an absorbed state for me personally and to be able to share this with others. I also feel a heart connection with the community of absorbed readers of fantasy literature, whose existence this inquiry has helped to reveal. Engaging deeply with reading and stories, especially fantasy stories, has become an integral part of my life.

The process of intuitive inquiry addresses internal validity by collecting detailed documentation with an attitude of openness to whatever might arise, in addition to writing with authenticity (Anderson, 2004). In this way, the primary threat to internal validity, which is the researcher’s inherent bias and subjectivity, may be minimized. External validity concerns the value of the findings to the readers (Anderson, 2004). In order to increase the external validity of intuitive inquiry, Anderson (2004) proposed the principles of resonance validity and efficacy validity.

The principle of efficacy validity refers to the capacity for the study to inspire insights, transform, and add value to the life of the reader (Anderson, 2004). In other words, the validity of a study is partly measured in its ability to create a meaningful experience that inspires readers to reflect on life. Anderson (2004) claimed that “research that inspires, delights, and prods us to
insight and action is at least as valuable to the scientific enterprise as more technical reports that will inevitably follow” (p. 333).

In intuitive inquiry, efficacy validity is determined by the value of the findings rather than their generalizability. The efficacy validity is strengthened when the researcher is transformed, for it is hoped that readers and research participants will experience greater understanding as a result of reading and/or participating in the study. In addition, the fact that participants wrote descriptions of their experiences may increase the potential for this research to be meaningful, useful, and possibly transformative in the lives of the participants and readers. Several participants noted that the process of reflecting on their experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state during the course of this study was personally meaningful.

A number of participants gave me feedback on their experience of the study. Participants shared that it was enjoyable. Lynn said, “I enjoyed doing it.” However, for Iranor, unpleasant memories were brought to the surface: “I have enjoyed this, although it has brought me closer than I expected to painful things.” Dagger Scribe, who was used to writing book reviews, found it interesting:

   It was very interesting, thinking in a different direction than I ever have before, but one I now consider important within the fabric of my own writing and the effects I want to have on people. Most book reviews are more objective than this, though there’s certainly personal opinion in there—but yours was totally subjective and I found it refreshing to approach it from this angle. By subjective I mean that the actual quality of the book was less important than how it was received.

Mike said, “I look forward to the dissertation—this actually gave me a lot to think about.”

Several participants told me they benefited from their experience. For example, Ianárwen wrote:

   Yes I am getting a lot out of it in fact. For a long time I’ve been doing a lot of thinking about how my mental health has been affected over the years by allowing myself to overcompromise over material concerns. Also by neglecting parts of my creative abilities, which I did address practically in my mid-thirties by going back to college and then promptly forgot all about that after I’d found work I loved and then stupidly abandoned it for the career ladder.
This study is therefore making me realise more than ever how much I need to write and carry on making images. I was anyway convinced that I’m right to follow a path that allows me to make my way without letting my creative nature lapse, just because I need to earn a living. Taking part in your study has highlighted how deep-seated this really was and so why it means so much to me now.

Solaris shared this:

I must say it has been a great pleasure to write for you, because I never had an opportunity to describe those experiences in so much detail; conversations cannot do what a detailed narrative can. Perhaps I should start writing a diary.

Andrew said, “The recollection of my encounter with *Winnie-the-Pooh* helped me to relive the experience. I remembered that life is good and the world can be a happy place.”

A couple participants shared that they appreciated certain aspects of being a part of the study.

D. L. S. Foster contacted an author that he greatly admired because of a question I had:

Thanks for the opportunity to add some artwork to my writing. I have a unique style that has already been published in the Tolkien community so I don’t think I will submit anything. It would too easily remove my anonymity! I look forward to the next step in the project’s process when you are ready later in the year. I’m glad you began researching Anne Rice. She is a fascinating person and a talented writer. She puts her life on the page. For me, getting reconnected to her via the e-mails over the past few days has been a real pleasure (and I have you to thank for that since seeking info on that inaccurate quote was what prompted me). Good luck with your project—I look forward to hearing back from you later.

Peregrin Took appreciated having his creative expression included: “I love how you’re allowing some pieces of creative expression related to my entry! I have many poems that I have written pertaining to *The Lord of the Rings*.”

Resonance validity is an important measure of internal validity in intuitive inquiry. If resonance validity is high, the study has the capacity to immediately convey its deeper, more universal meaning to others (Anderson, 2000). The fact that the participants’ experiences are included intact increases resonance validity. This method has been used in many intuitive inquiry dissertations, including Shepperd (2006), Dufrechou (2002), and Esbjörn (2003). While reading the participants’ detailed stories, I felt a deep sympathetic resonance and I imagine that
many readers of this study will also resonate with the participants’ narratives. Hopefully, this will help readers to understand the experience of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state through the context of their own experience.

This study also has the following delimitations and limitations. Using narrative accounts of the positive meaningful experiences of reading fantasy literature in an altered state restricted the population to those who were comfortable using the written word as a means of expressing themselves. This process may have excluded potential participants who preferred to talk about their experiences, such as in an interview setting or other modality. In addition, some potential participants may have been intimidated by the idea of writing and so avoid participating due to shyness or lack of confidence in their writing skills. However, narrative was chosen based on my belief that narrative data would provide richer and higher quality data than would other modalities, such as interview data. Also, the requirement that participants use computers with Internet connectivity might have excluded participants who did not have access to computers. Nevertheless, I chose this as the primary method of communication in order to reach more participants and make it easier for them to participate in the study. Finally, intuitive inquiry research is not likely to be replicated, which limits its ability to be externally validated. However, I chose this method for its potential to go deeper into the experience of reading fantasy in an absorbed state, as well as its potential for personal growth and expression.

**Implications and Applications of the Study**

This study contributes to the multidisciplinary research on the psychology of reading, which seeks to understand the experience of reading and its psychological effects. The present study adds to this knowledge base by researching spontaneous experiences of absorbed reading of fantasy literature and by using the narrative accounts of readers’ experiences to understand the
psychological effects. This inquiry, which uses the self-reports of the spontaneous experiences of readers, helps us see how absorbed reading of fantasy literature facilitates finding meaning in life. As Miall (2007) claimed, “a literary text engages with the reader’s own experience and … helps the reader to think about it afresh, even to reconfigure it and understand it in a new light” (p. 17). This study also validates research that highlights the influence of absorbed reading on emotions, vivid images and story consistent beliefs, as well as the similarity of reading and dreaming.

This study contributes to the field of depth psychology, which focuses on the unconscious processes of the psyche. Absorbed readers of fantasy literature weave their unconscious complexes, memories and associations with that of the imaginal world of the fantasy story while reading, creating their own version of the story (i.e., mimesis). This may facilitate transformation or healing in readers at the unconscious level, even without the aid of a psychotherapist; however, there are potential applications for reading fantasy literature and writing about the experience as an adjunct to depth psychotherapy. For example, depth psychotherapists may incorporate clients’ reading of fantasy literature and writing about their experiences of reading, which can be discussed in therapy sessions. This may facilitate working with the clients’ unconscious, helping the client to realize personal truths, new perspectives, and find meaning in life. As this study suggests, the use of reading fantasy literature in depth psychotherapy may be especially helpful to clients experiencing transitions and critical junctures in life. Von Franz (1996) claimed that fantasy comes from the depths and “constellates symbolic situations,” (p. 103) which give life a deeper meaning.

This study contributes to the fields of transpersonal psychology and imaginal psychology, through its understanding of the absorbed reading of fantasy literature as an altered state of
consciousness, similar to focused meditation, dreaming sleep and shamanic journeys. The field of transpersonal psychology focuses on states of being that go beyond the personal and individual in order to reconnect us with the spiritual. The field of imaginal psychology focuses on understanding the imaginal world, an ontologically real world of subtle bodies, that exists between the senses and the intellect; it also enables us to connect to spirit. This inquiry contributes to the research on altered states of consciousness by combining transpersonal and imaginal states of being, which include unitive experiences (e.g., peak or mystical experiences), dreaming sleep (e.g., lucid dreaming), and initiatory journeys (e.g., shamanic and hero journeys). This study also furthers our knowledge of transpersonal and imaginal ways of knowing and supports the idea that the imagination is another path to the Divine.

The use of detailed narratives in this study helped readers of the dissertation to better understand and resonate with the participants’ stories of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state. As I have previously shared, the experience of writing these stories was an effective tool for participants to recollect and find meaning in their experiences. Using intuitive inquiry in this study supports the use of intuitive inquiry as a method for complex, subtle or transpersonal experiences. This dissertation contributes to the body of intuitive inquiry research that incorporates participants’ written experiences.

In summary, this study contributed to the research in the areas of beneficial and therapeutic effects of reading fantasy literature, the effects of spontaneous reading in an absorbed state, the relationship of absorbed reading to transpersonal and spiritual experiences and the imagination, the absorbed reading of fantasy literature from the reader’s personal experience of the story world, and intuitive inquiry. My hope is that the readers of this dissertation see reading
as a spiritual experience, one in which the imaginal and the transpersonal take the reader in hand for a meaningful journey of transformation and healing.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Future research may extend this study to focus on various populations, such as readers who have read fantasy literature over a lifetime (e.g., 20 years or more); readers who are heavily involved in role play; and readers who exercise their inner imaginal sensorium of the fantasy story world in nature or other nonreading settings. For each of these populations of fantasy readers, I’m curious as to whether there are differences in the nature and quality of their personal insights, as well as their imaginations. For example, research on the relationship between absorbed reading of fantasy literature and the ability to vividly imagine, while reading, might help us understand how to strengthen the imagination. Similarly, there might be a study focused on the practice of absorbed reading (e.g., spiritual exercises that stimulate the readers’ inner imaginal sensorium) to understand how to learn how to consciously enter the state of absorption.

Finding out more about the personalities of absorbed readers of fantasy by using standardized inventories, such as the Tellegen Absorption Scale (Tellegen, 1982), might be helpful to psychotherapists in understanding how to incorporate reading fantasy literature in their practices. In addition, more indepth case studies of absorbed readers’ lives would be helpful in understanding the meaning of absorbed reading experiences. Further studies, might also focus on understanding more about the healing powers of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state. In particular, how might it help those suffering from trauma, midlife transitions, as well as sudden and dramatic changes (e.g., job loss). In general, I would like to see more studies that illuminate how the transpersonal and the imaginal realms interact with absorbed readers to influence and change lives.
Finally, this study, with its vast amount of data, made it difficult to give equal attention to all areas of potential investigation. Future studies may extend this study to further understand the data through the lenses of the state of flow as well as Exceptional Human Experiences (EHE), which have not been given enough attention in this study, due to time constraints. In addition, there was insufficient data to understand the lenses related to the relationship between writer and reader. For example, is the writer/reading relationship symbiotic and, if so, how might writers convey their embodied feelings to readers? There was also insufficient data for inquiring into the unique nature of fantasy literature and the readers’ reasons for choosing fantasy over other types of books.

*Reflection on The Hero’s Return*

Campbell (1973) described the “Return” (p. 193) as a crucial and central part of the hero’s journey. There seems to be an inherent difficulty in returning from mythic journeys, from worlds that feel like home, whether it is returning from a story world or returning from a researcher’s internal contemplation of the meaning of his or her data. However, by returning to this world the hero has the potential for healing his or her psychic splits, or wounds, and finding wholeness.

This difficulty in returning, or tension of opposites, is addressed by Jung’s (1927/1981) transcendent function, which is related to active imagination and his concept of individuation. He also warns that, even though engaging with images of the unconscious has potential for psychological growth, there are potential dangers if one becomes overwhelmed by them. Therefore, caution must be used when engaging with unconscious images, as well as the imaginal world of fantasy literature.
In Cycle 1, I recounted my experiences of working with unconscious images, finding them informative, engaging, and essential to my journey as a researcher. I can appreciate Jung’s note of caution, for engaging with unconscious images is a powerful tool for growth. The experiences I described in Cycle 1 included mirror gazing, which I employed to determine which direction I should follow for the dissertation topic. The mirror revealed a Celtic ancestor who came out of the ocean waves on a white horse and rushed past my left ear saying follow me. That was my call to the journey of studying the experience of reading fantasy literature.

The Irish legend of Oisin in the Land of Youth (Heaney, 1995) related to and validated my mirror gazing experience. At the time it seemed to be telling me that reading fantasy literature was about going home, to Tir na Nog, a mythical land of youth in the imaginal world. I now realize that there was a hidden message in the legend that relates to Oisin’s attempt to return to Ireland and how he dies in the attempt. This seems significant to me now as the study draws to a close, for I am finding it difficult to fully return from my research, which has essentially been my home. My research is, in a sense, like Tir na Nog; it is a place of deep contemplation and peace that gives me a sense of creativity and endless possibilities. I must admit that in some sense I fear the return to land for it seems that I too would die without creative work. One of my participants, Peregrin Took, shared:

There are so many fundamental truths and moral lessons within Tolkien's work—so much imagination and beauty—one can become so heavily engrossed in Middle-earth that it is hard to get back to the “real world.” Middle-earth, Pippin, and all of Tolkien’s characters will continue to dwell with me for my whole life.

Whenever I think about my study participants and their stories I, too, feel strong emotions. I have often wondered what this means. Jabobi (1967) claimed that through the transcendent function or the union of opposites, such as spirit and matter, the Divine child is born. This child represents a third thing that both bridges dissociated parts of the psyche and
parts of the opposites. This Divine child seems to hold the key to my returning from my journey as researcher of reading of fantasy literature. The opposing forces that I must transcend seem to be related to the dissertation and, as Peregrin says, the “real world”. In one sense, the dissertation is my child and I, as the mother, have difficulty letting go. More importantly, I do not want to let go of the creative and deep experiences that have been part of my research. If I could talk to my Celtic ancestor from the mirror, I believe she would tell me to let your children leave home, for you cannot live with them forever. They have lives of their own to live. It is time for their stories to be shared with the world. This is not the end of your creativity, it is just the beginning. Return home to appreciate and integrate this rich experience into your psyche, so that you may start a new journey.
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Appendix A: Flyer

*Have you ever been lost in a fantasy or science fiction book and felt like the story world was real?*

My name is Sheree Campbell, and I am a doctoral student at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. I’m doing research about people who have had positive meaningful experiences of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state of mind. In this study, fantasy literature is broadly defined and includes myths, legends, folktales, and fairy tales, as well as modern fantasy and science fiction.

I am looking for people who

- are 18 years of age or older,
- have read fantasy literature in an absorbed state of mind and have been positively affected or transformed by the experience,
- are willing to write about their experiences for use and publication in this study,
- are willing and able to communicate primarily via e-mail.

Participants in this study will

- write about their positive meaningful experiences of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state of mind.

*Please share your stories with me!* If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at xxx/xxx-xxxx (cell phone) or xxx@xxx (email address).
Appendix B: Screening Interview Questions

1. Are you 18 years of age or older?

2. How would you rate your overall physical health?

3. How would you rate your overall psychological health?

4. Are you currently receiving medical treatment for any major illnesses that might prevent you from fully participating in this study?

5. Have you participated in research studies in the past?

6. If you answered yes to the question above, how many did you complete?

7. What is your level of comfort with computers?

8. This study will be conducted primarily on-line. You will need a computer with Internet connectivity for communicating via e-mail, and completing a consent form and demographic questionnaire via on-line survey software. Do you have access to a computer with these capabilities?

9. This study will take approximately 4 to 10 hours of your time over a period of 5 to 8 weeks. Would your schedule allow for this type of time commitment?

10. What is your name, address, e-mail, and phone number(s)?

11. What is the best way to reach you? What are the best time(s) to reach you?

12. Have you had any experiences related to reading fantasy literature in which you were completely absorbed (e.g., losing track of where you were)?

13. If you answered yes to the question above, were any of the experiences meaningful in a positive sense (i.e., did you feel that your life changed for the better or was transformed in any way)?

14. If you answered yes to the previous question, what is your level of comfort in sharing these experiences?

15. If you feel comfortable sharing your experiences, could you give a brief description of one or more that you consider to be most significant?

16. What level of detail would you be able to remember regarding these experiences?
17. Would you be willing and able to share these experiences in writing?

18. After receiving written descriptions of your experiences, I may need to ask you to modify them for clarity. This may take a total of two to four iterations for a two-part writing project. For example, if I wanted to know more about certain aspects of your experience, would you be willing to revise your work in this way?

19. After receiving your final written description I may need to edit it for inclusion in the dissertation. This would involve only minor editing for flow and grammar. I may also need to edit the description for confidentiality reasons or ask you to change things to more general terms (i.e., change San Francisco to Bay Area of California). The edited version would be sent to you for your approval. Would you be willing to allow me to edit your work for these reasons? Would you be willing to change things to more general terms?

20. The description will need to be typewritten using Microsoft Word (version 2004 or earlier). Do you have access to this software? If not, would you mind if your text was put in Microsoft Word format for purposes of this research?

21. The themes found in the written descriptions will be part of the research results. Would you be willing to review these themes and provide feedback as to whether they resonate with your personal experiences?

22. You will be asked to complete a consent form and demographic questionnaire (~ half hour) and two-part writing project. The project consists of creating a list of experiences (i.e., at least a few items, and at most 10 double-spaced typewritten pages) and a detailed narrative description of one experience (i.e., 3 to 10 double-spaced typewritten pages) (~ 2 to 3 hours), plus modification of your original writing for clarification (~ 1 to 2 hours). Reflection and preparation for writing (e.g., rereading portions of books, watching movies based on books, journaling, or creative expression) is encouraged, but not required (~ 1 to 3 hours). Your writing may also be edited for grammar, flow, and confidentiality reasons, which you will need to review (~ half hour). Finally, you will be asked to review themes found in the written descriptions and provide feedback (~ 1 hour or less). As mentioned earlier, the total amount of time to complete these activities is estimated to be 4 to 10 hours. This will be over a period of 5 to 8 weeks in order to give you time to reflect and to remember the details of your experiences, as well as to write. What is your level of interest in participating in these activities?

23. Why are you choosing to participate in this research study? What do you hope to gain from your participation?

24. Are there any additional comments you would like to make or anything else you would like to add?
Appendix C: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria for Study Participants:

1. Adults, 18 years or older.
2. Currently in good health or able to fully participate in the study.
3. Self-reported good psychological health.
4. Willingness to share experiences in writing.
5. Able and willing to meet time commitments of the study (i.e., approximately 4 to 10 hours).

Exclusion Criteria for Study Participants:

1. Younger than 18 years old.
2. Currently in poor health, experiencing major illness or surgery that would not allow full participation in the study.
4. Psychological diagnosis or history that could compromise participation in the study.
5. Unable to meet the commitments of the study.
6. Fantasy reading experience associated with stories whose sole intent is to frighten and terrify the reader (e.g., most works of horror).
Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study that will explore the positive meaningful experiences of absorbed reading of fantasy literature. Fantasy literature is defined broadly and includes myths, legends, folktales, and fairy tales, as well as modern fantasy and science fiction. Absorbed readers are so completely involved in the story that they are unaware of their immediate surroundings. Positive meaningful experiences are ones in which you perceive that your life has been changed for the better or been transformed in some way. However, the positive nature of this type of experience does not preclude the negative aspects. I invite you to share and explore all feelings related to your experience. The purpose of this research is to understand these experiences and how they affect people’s lives.

As a participant in this study, you will agree to create a list of positive meaningful absorbed reading experiences of fantasy. Once you have completed the list, you will choose one experience to share in writing. It may be any experience, provided it is personally meaningful and has had a positive effect on your life. The experience will pertain to one fantasy story, rather than an overview of experiences associated with multiple fantasy stories. In addition to prose descriptions, the use of other creative forms of expression (e.g., drawing, painting, collage, computer graphics, or recorded music) is encouraged. The study will be conducted remotely so that you may choose where to do these activities. As a participant in this study you will be required to use a computer and have access to the Internet. You will also be required to use e-mail for communication and QuestionPro on-line survey software to complete this Informed Consent Form and the Demographic Questionnaire. Due to the on-line requirements of the study, no transcription of any data will be required.

The list and written description of your experience will be created using Microsoft Word (version 2004 or earlier). If you do not have this software on your computer, possible alternatives will be discussed. The list will be at least a few items, and at most 10 double-spaced typewritten pages. The written description will be between 3 and 10 double-spaced typewritten pages. The amount of time it will take you to do this will vary. It is estimated that preparation for writing, if needed, may take approximately one to 3 hours. In addition, it will take approximately 2 to 3 hours to create the list and write the description of your experience. After receiving your descriptions I may ask you to modify them in order to clarify certain aspects of your experience. This process may take one to 2 hours of your time. I may also edit your final description for grammar, flow, and confidentiality reasons. If this is the case, the changes will be sent to you for your approval. This should take no more than half an hour of your time. The complete list of your experiences and the complete written description of one of your experiences will be included in the dissertation. In addition, photographs of any art projects completed will be included in the dissertation. The themes found in the written descriptions will be shared with all participants, and feedback will be requested. This may take up to an additional hour of your time. Overall a moderate amount of effort will be required to complete these projects, which are estimated to take from 4 to 10 hours over a 5 to 8-week period. I will send a more detailed letter of instructions to you via e-mail once the on-line Informed Consent Form and Demographic Questionnaire are completed.
For the protection of your privacy, all information received from you will be kept confidential and your identity will be protected. All material pertaining to this study will be kept under my supervision, in password-protected computer files or a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home office, and only the researcher will have access to it. A pseudonym of your choice will be used, instead of your name, to identify you in this study. If you do not specify a pseudonym, one will be chosen for you. In reporting this research in published material, any information that might identify you will be altered to ensure your anonymity.

Potential benefits of participating in this research study may include feeling a sense of validation of your experiences. In addition, participating in the study may enhance or deepen the personal experiences you describe and make a contribution to the advancement of scientific knowledge. However, personal benefits are not guaranteed.

This study is designed to minimize potential risks to you. The process of remembering and describing your experiences of reading may cause you distress, depending on the nature of your experiences and the life events associated with them. If at any time you have concerns or questions, I will make every effort to discuss them with you and discuss options for resolving your concerns. These options may include referring you to your own personal therapist or providing you with a list of local therapists.

If you have any questions or concerns, you may call me at xxx/xxx-xxxx or e-mail me at xxx@xxx. You may also call Genie Palmer Ph.D., Chairperson of my dissertation committee, or Kartik Patel, Ph.D., Chairperson of the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, at 650/493-4430.

Your full cooperation is essential if you choose to participate in this research study. This means completing the list and description of your experience(s), the Demographic Questionnaire, as well as reviewing the themes and providing your feedback. Your signature on the Informed Consent Form indicates that you are comfortable with the use of your experiences in this study. If necessary, to preserve your privacy you may alter the details, as long as your description conveys the essence of your experience. The on-line survey system QuestionPro adheres to the highest level of Internet data security and privacy standards and will only allow your data to be accessed by the researcher. In addition, your data will be securely transferred from the QuestionPro survey system to a password-encrypted folder on the researcher’s home computer, which can only be accessed by the researcher. The QuestionPro survey system should have sent you a message with an on-line link to this Informed Consent Form and the Demographic Questionnaire via e-mail. Upon completion of this Informed Consent Form and Demographic Questionnaire, you will be sent an e-mail message thanking you for your participation in the study and informing you that additional detailed instructions for contributing to the study will be sent to you by me via e-mail. There is no charge for using the on-line QuestionPro survey system. In addition, a stamped self-addressed envelope will be provided for any art project you may wish to send.
If you decide to participate, you may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty or prejudice. In the event you need to withdraw, please notify the researcher as soon as possible. You may request a written summary of the group research findings by providing your mailing address with your signature.

I attest that I have read and understood this form and have had any questions about this research answered to my satisfaction. My participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and no pressure has been applied to encourage participation. My signature indicates my willingness to be a participant in this research.

________________________________________________  __________________
Participant’s Name (Please Print)      Date

________________________________________________  __________________
Participant’s Signature       Date

Pseudonym (a name to identify you in this study):______________________________________

Mailing Address (if you want a written summary of group research findings):

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

Researcher’s Signature

Sheree Campbell
xxx@xxx
xxx/xxx-xxxx
Appendix E: Demographic Questionnaire

Name: _________________________________ Date of Birth: _________________

Phone: ____________________ E-mail: ___________________________________

Profession/Occupation:__________________________

Sex (Choose one):

Male  Female  Transgender  Other:________

Relationship Status (Choose one):

Married  Widowed  Divorced  Separated  Single  Domestic Partner

Ethnic Heritage (Choose one):

Asian/Asian-American  Black/African-American

First Nations/Native American  Latino/Hispanic  Pacific Islander

White/Caucasian  Please specify if not listed:________

Current Religious/Spiritual Practice (Choose one):

None  Buddhist  Christian  Hindu  Jewish  Muslim

Please specify if not listed:________

Highest Level of Education Completed (Choose one):

Some High School  High School Graduate  Some College  Associate Degree

College Graduate  Some Graduate School  Master’s Degree  Doctoral Degree

Other:________
Appendix F: Letter of Instructions

Dear Participant,

Thank you for the time you are giving to this study. It is greatly appreciated.

This research consists of three required projects and one optional project. The required projects are creating a list of your positive meaningful absorbed reading experiences of fantasy, writing about one experience in detail, and reviewing themes from the descriptions of all participants’ experiences. The optional project includes any activities you may choose to help you prepare for writing, for example, creating an expressive art piece. Instructions for each of these are detailed below.

There are time limits for each project. Two weeks is allowed for the completion of the list of experiences. If your list needs clarification, you will be given extra time to modify it, if necessary. An additional 2 weeks is allowed for completion of the detailed narrative description. The completion of the detailed narrative description may also involve additional steps depending on the clarity of its content. If I request further clarification regarding the narrative description, you will be given one week to add clarifying text to the narrative. Similarly, if I edit the final draft of your narrative description, you will be given one week to review it. In addition, one week is allowed for the optional project involving activities to help prepare for writing, including creating an expressive art piece. One week is also allocated for the project involving reviewing the themes. If at any time you feel you need extended time, please contact me via e-mail, xxx@xxx. We can arrange for a telephone conversation to discuss your situation.

The projects also need to be completed in a certain order. The first project that needs to be done is the creation of the list of experiences. The purpose of this list is to get a picture of the types of experiences you have had, as well as to help you remember as many of your experiences as possible. The second project to be completed is the detailed narrative description of one of your experiences. As part of this second project you may find it helpful to continue adding to your list of experiences, because this may help you remember more aspects of your experiences. In addition, you are encouraged, but not required, to prepare for writing by rereading parts of books, watching movies related to books, journaling, and/or creating an expressive art piece. These activities are best done before writing your detailed narrative description because they may also enhance your memory of the experience. The final project is the review of the themes found in all participants’ narrative descriptions. If for any reason the instructions provided for the projects are not clear to you, please contact me via e-mail with your questions. We can arrange a time for a telephone conversation, and I can further clarify any areas that may not be clear.

List of Experiences

Create a list of positive meaningful experiences of your absorbed reading of fantasy. For each experience on the list give a brief description. If possible, please include a brief description of what happened in the experience, the title of the book you were reading, your age at the time of your experience, the number of times you’ve read the book, and anything else that seems important to you. Include your most significant experiences along with those that may seem
relatively insignificant to you. Keep in mind that these are guidelines and that the most important thing is to try to describe the essential aspects of your experience as best as you can. This list will contain at least a few items and at most 10 double-spaced typewritten pages in Microsoft Word (version 2004 or earlier) and will be sent to me via e-mail as an attachment. If you do not have Microsoft Word (version 2004 or earlier) on your computer, please contact me via e-mail and we will make arrangements to speak on the phone. We can discuss a possible alternative to using the Microsoft Word (version 2004 or earlier) program.

The purpose of this list is to get as complete a picture as possible of the types of experiences you have had, as well as to help you remember as many of your experiences as possible. For this reason you may choose to add to this list while completing the rest of the research requirements. This is a suggestion, not a requirement. However, if you do add to the list, please send the updated version to me via e-mail as an attachment when you feel it is complete. The complete list of your experiences will be included in the dissertation.

After receiving your list, I may ask you to modify it in order to clarify certain aspects of your experience. I may contact you via e-mail to make arrangements to speak to you on the phone regarding what needs to be clarified. Once you’ve made the necessary changes, you will send me the modified file via e-mail as an attachment.

Preparation for Writing Narrative Description

It is important to recall as many details about your experience as possible. Before writing, allow yourself time alone and undisturbed to reflect on all aspects of your experience. You may also want to reread portions of the book, watch a movie based on the book, and/or record your memories in a journal in order to remember the details of your experience. This is the best time to do the optional expressive art project, because it may further enhance your memory of the experience.

Expressive Art (Optional)

You may use one of the following forms of the expressive arts: drawing, painting, collage, computer graphics, or recorded music. Through the use of these mediums you may choose to use visual images, symbols, color, tactile quality, and/or auditory quality to express your experience and the feelings you associated with the experience.

If you would like to share your expressive art piece, please contact me via e-mail and we will make arrangements to speak on the phone. We can discuss the best way to send it to me. There will be no charge to you. This is not required; however, it would provide another way of expressing your experience. If you do send it to me, a photograph of it will be included along with your narrative in the dissertation.
Narrative Description of Experience

Once you have completed the list, please choose one experience to share in writing. It may be any experience, provided it is personally meaningful and has had a positive effect on your life. The experience should pertain to one fantasy story, rather than an overview of experiences associated with multiple fantasy stories. However, a fantasy story can be contained in one or more books. For example, J. R. R. Tolkien’s fantasy story, *The Lord of the Rings*, is contained in three books (a trilogy). Think of it as “your story.”

For the content of your narrative description, please follow the guidelines below. As best you can recall and in as much descriptive detail as possible, recount your experience. Whenever possible try to capture the experience as it happened. However, if you feel it is necessary to preserve your privacy you may alter the details, as long as your description conveys the essence of your experience. Please recount the plot of the fantasy story, aspects of your life related to the experience, as well as your reading experience. The following is a list of guideline questions to help you in writing your narrative description. Please elaborate whenever possible.

1. What was the title and author of the book(s) you were reading? If you cannot remember, please try to specify the type of literature or genre (e.g., myth, legend, fairy tale, folk tale, fantasy, science fiction). Also, please briefly describe the plot.


3. What parts of the story were the most memorable? What makes them memorable?

4. What sensations were you feeling?

5. What emotions were you feeling?

6. Can you recall what your body felt like and how you related to your physical surroundings?

7. Did you have a sense of time passing during the experience?

8. What was your relationship with the character(s) of the story?

9. What did you feel about the setting of the story? Was there a sense of place?

10. Did you feel like you were part of the story, more like an observer, or somewhere in-between?

11. How long ago did you read the book(s) (e.g., weeks, months, or years ago)? How old were you when you read it?

12. Recalling the events of your life, are any related to reading the story (e.g., major life events, dreams, anomalous experiences)?

13. In particular were any life events that occurred around the time you read the story related to your reading experience?

14. What meaning(s) did the experience have for you?

15. What positive effect did reading the story have on your life?
16. Did your life change in any way because of this experience? If so, how? Were these lasting changes?

17. How does your experience affect your life today (e.g., spiritually, outlook on life, interpersonal relationships, career, physical and mental health, or otherwise)?

18. Have you read the book more than once? If so, how many times?

19. How does your experience relate to the story type (i.e., was it specifically related to the fact that it was fantasy or could it have been any kind of fiction)?

20. Please add anything else that seems important to you.

The narrative description of your experience should be from 3 to 10 double-spaced typewritten pages in Microsoft Word (version 2004 or earlier) and sent to me via e-mail as an attachment. If you do not have Microsoft Word (version 2004 or earlier) on your computer, please contact me via e-mail and we will make arrangements to discuss a possible alternative to using Microsoft Word (version 2004 or earlier; if we have not already done so).

After receiving your narrative, I may ask you to modify it in order to clarify certain aspects of your experience. I may contact you via e-mail to make arrangements to speak to you on the phone regarding what needs to be clarified. Once you’ve made the necessary changes, you will send me the modified file via e-mail as an attachment.

Your complete narrative will be included in the dissertation. For this reason, I may edit your final narrative for grammar and flow. If this is the case, the changes will be sent to you for your approval via e-mail as an attachment. Once you’ve reviewed the changes, you may choose to modify the file to your satisfaction. If you do so, you will then return the file via e-mail as an attachment.

Review of Themes

Once all of the participants’ lists and narratives have been completed, I will read the descriptions looking for themes or interpretations of all experiences. This set of themes will be shared with all participants. You will be asked to read these themes and respond with written feedback. This feedback will address the extent to which these themes represent your experience. This feedback will be from one to 3 double-spaced typewritten pages in Microsoft Word (version 2004 or earlier) and sent via e-mail as an attachment. If you do not have Microsoft Word (version 2004 or earlier) on your computer, please contact me via e-mail and we will make arrangements to discuss a possible alternative to using Microsoft Word (version 2004 or earlier; if we have not already done so).
Again, I want to thank you for your willingness to be a part of this study. Your contributions are very important to the further understanding of the positive meaningful experiences of reading fantasy literature in an absorbed state and of the impact they have on people’s lives. If at any time you have questions or concerns during this process, please contact me via e-mail, xxx@xxx, and we can arrange a telephone conversation.

Sincerely,
Sheree Campbell, MA
Doctoral Student
xxx@xxx
Appendix G: Participant Lists

*Dagger Scribe*

**EMPYRON** by Stephen Lawhead—Science Fiction—A research team sent to investigate the recent disappearance of a planetary colony arrives there 3000 years in the future via a wormhole anomaly and find themselves at the centre of a war between the planet’s two nations.

**My Experience:** I was about 15 when I first read this book. I have read it at least five times, possibly ten.

**Essential Aspect:** Mindblowing

This book blew my mind by letting me think outside of the realms of anything I’d ever considered before, which creates a whole new set of possibilities. I believe this experience enriched my own powers of imagination. Once my mind had "journeyed that far" in this story, it became possible to pursue parallel or opposing trains of thought that are totally different except that they take me just as far away as this story. In the space of a few years on Earth, another world had passed 3000 years, which allowed it to build up a considerable culture separate from its origins. I suppose it is in essence a time travel scenario, but very believable due to the huge distances involved and the intertwining of time with space as in distance being measured in light years. More than nearly any other book ever, this one dragged me inside itself so that I felt what the characters felt: their shock at setbacks, their relief at solutions, their learning process as they entered into the new world. I also felt empathy with their physical and emotional experiences, such as crossing a huge desert and running out of water, and the comfort given by telepathic fish, as alien as these scenes are to real life.

**TALIESIN** by Stephen Lawhead—Historical Fantasy—When the continent of Atlantis is destroyed, a handful of survivors escape by ship to Britain and a romance develops between an Atlantean princess and a Welsh druid.

**My Experience:** I was about 11 when I first read this book. I have read it at least five times and possibly ten.

**Essential Aspect:** Character Traits—personal bravery in the face of apocalyptic events

This was my very first experience of being moved by a book to this degree. It was more than a narrative—it was a real experience with imagined sensual input from the descriptions, meeting deep and well-formed characters. Though I did not feel particular kinship with the two main
characters, I was attracted to them, and drawn in by the way their worlds forced them to act in a
certain way—she as a royal princess, though she wanted to rebel against the constraints of
society, and he was forced to become a warrior through necessity due to raiders, even though he
was only ever meant to be a bard and that was all he wanted. I felt these were amazing, strong,
principled, charismatic, passionate, enduring, good, steadfast people I would like to meet
personally. Despite the expectations of their respective societies, they pursued their romance in
the face of opposition and pressure. As I read I often wondered if I could show such strength of
character, and I have often thought that I have gained a degree of such strength by reading of
these people. The end of the story is particularly moving, marking a tragedy and chronicling the
immense grief of the mourners in a way that speaks to the memories of my own losses, and often
makes me cry.

FLASHPOINT by Frank Creed—Science Fiction/Cyberpunk—Chicago 2036, a totalitarian
regime has outlawed religion and banished believers to the Underground where they carry out
resistance by hacking the interwebs and fighting the evil Neros with nonlethal weaponry.

My Experience: I first read this book when I was about 28. I have read it about three times.

Essential Aspect: Fear—chillingly realistic

This book’s impact for me lay in its closeness to actual possibilities—the "this could be our
future" factor. Believers of all religions are branded terrorists and hunted down by the
government. Many recent news headlines show a startling similarity to this scenario. This means
that the story frightens me, but also gives hope in the form of the underground resistance. Many
technological gadgets described are of a kind that could become reality very soon. In the virtual
reality scenes where a hacker wears goggles and sensory clothing to move through and
manipulate a 3D environment representing the internet, I found it very easy to visualise what was
happening and imagine doing it myself. For example, when the character reaches out to activate
a virtual control panel, I often find my own hand reaching out too.

NOR IRON BARS A CAGE by Caprice Hokstad—Fantasy/Sword Opera—On the planet
Byntar, the kingdom of Latoph, Elva Duke Vahn is determined to rescue his son from the
clutches of his traitorous wife. His trusted Itzi (dwarf) servant girl is sent to pose as a runaway
slave and glean information, while at home, his own rule faces a threat beyond imagination.

My Experience: I read this book when I was 28. I have read it twice.
**Essential Aspect:** Realism of style / immersion in the storyworld- This one is really tough. Have you ever read a book where the author was so invisible that you did not just read a book but just experienced its happenings as if for yourself? As if that were your own world and not some imagined construct; as if the real world were only a dream and the story reality.

This book absorbed me because of the invisibility of the author. She writes so well that I barely noticed I was reading. It was like actually experiencing the events of the story. Mrs. Hokstad is the finest writer I have ever read, but unfortunately she receives no recognition for this fact. Each word is like a finely-cut diamond, shaped perfectly for impact and emotion, each in its own rightful place in the design. While the storyline is compelling in its own way, I suspect I would not like it at all if someone else had written it. So in this case it’s all about the style and skill of the author and not much to do with the story. This experience inspired me as a writer to work hard to attain the same effect in my own work.

**ARENA** by Karen Hancock—Science Fiction/Allegory—A struggling artist agrees to participate in a research project which unexpectedly yanks her into an alien world, where she must overcome incredible barriers to make it out alive.

**My experience:** I first read this book when I was 27. I have read it at least three times.

**Essential aspect:** Determination

This story throws a young woman into a situation she is utterly unprepared for. I witnessed and observed her survival in my mind’s eye, due to the very visual style of the author, and was amazed at the way humans can adapt and get through nearly anything. There was a wrench when her lover forgot they’d ever met, but I was very satisfied to see them connect again in the epilogue even though he didn’t remember her. Her hard work and determination to survive in the Arena paid off in a successful artistic career upon her return home, which has reflected into my own life: if I am determined and work hard, I too will succeed.

**THE DIDYMUS CONTINGENCY** by Jeremy Robinson—Science Fiction/Time Travel—

While working on the first true time travel machine, a rabid atheist gets drunk and activates the system so he can go back and disprove the resurrection of Jesus. His Jewish colleague follows after to stop him ripping a hole in the time continuum, and both get more than they bargained for when they end up witnessing Bible events first hand.

**My experience:** I first read this book when I was 27. I have read it two or three times.
Essential aspect: Spirituality—It increased my faith

This book explores many issues but the most significant one for me was to do with two modern men coming face to face with Jesus Christ. Sure, it’s just speculation, but I was impressed by Jesus speaking perfect English and of course knowing all about the two travellers. When the bad guys from the future come back chasing them, Jesus ends up catching bullets in his bare hands. A funny situation, yes, and I laughed plenty, but there are truths to be found which I do not find in the Bible but they are true nonetheless. If people from today were to meet the Jesus of the Bible in his own time and on his own turf, then this is likely close to how he would behave. Just think about it. Jesus was this really good guy who could do miracles, therefore this story is a logical extension of his character—a "what if" situation where I found his behaviour (as written by this author) to line up completely with what we know of his character traits and abilities from other sources which are actual historical texts as opposed to the fictional nature of this novel. I felt like I knew him better afterwards.

THE RESTORER by Sharon Hinck—Fantasy—A suburban mother is whisked into a fantasy world through a portal in her attic, and discovers she is that world’s promised Restorer to bring peace once again. But she doesn’t even know how to wield a sword...

My experience: I first read this book when I was 28. I have read it twice.

Essential aspect: Source of strength

At first the heroine is convinced she cannot accomplish the tasks required of her. Yet she finds strength in completely unexpected places, such as when her real-world husband reveals that he comes from the fantasy world, and in mysterious and comforting magics, such as the supernatural power the people of the land can call down when they sing. And as the Restorer, she is gifted with the ability to heal quickly from her (physical) wounds, which I find to be a very profound statement: The true proof of your strength is how you deal with your hurts (admittedly I am not thinking of physical wounds, but parallels can be drawn). My true life lesson from this is that I should never give up, even in impossible circumstances—because the solution that comes is probably one I’d never dream of.

THE SHADOW AND NIGHT by Chris Walley—Science Fiction/Fantasy—The year is A.D. 13581. On the colony world of Farholme, an unexpected and insidious enemy slips into society. A simple forester finds himself on the forefront of an epic battle between good and evil.
**My experience:** I read this book when I was 29. I have read it once (it’s a very big book!)

**Essential aspect:** Good vs. Evil—the one, ultimate story type that sets up a huge clash between the darkness and the light, and how ordinary people get caught up with it.

The story shows the creep of evil into a totally innocent society that has lived so long in harmony that it knows nothing else. The author has described evil as it is slowly recognised by the people for what it is—and it is not what I thought. Evil is much more subtle than that. Evil can be in just one thought, or tiny action, which opens the floodgates for more and larger examples of badness until the actual enemy appears. The way he did it was very creepy and scary and it often sent a chill down my back. I guess the lesson it drove home for me was that there is only black and white, and no room for gray. In the story, all the mass of evil began with a white lie that I would never have considered bad, and it made me see that even the tiniest "harmless" lie (or other action) can have these huge consequences. It has made me more aware of my own behaviour and what it means to try and be a good person.

**OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET** by C.S. Lewis—Science Fiction—A professor is abducted by ex-colleagues and taken to Mars, supposedly as a human sacrifice. But once he arrives he realises the intentions of the natives in requesting his presence were not exactly what his countrymen believed.

**My experience:** I first read this book when I was 27. I have read it three times.

**Essential aspect:** Theology—the field of study and analysis that deals with God and his attributes and relations to the universe; study of divine things or religious truth.

Fantasy beings on Mars inform the hero that Earth is the only planet to be conquered by evil. This has resulted in me being quite open to this idea, although there are no beings on Mars—but if there is life elsewhere, perhaps they are not tainted by war and hate and all these other things. That is a very hopeful thought and a humbling one—what if Earth is not the pinnacle of the universe, but rather the cesspit?

**THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE** by C.S. Lewis—Fantasy—Four children enter another world and are appointed to save it from the evil witch’s endless winter, with the help of the great lion Aslan and an army of talking animals.

**My experience:** I first read this book myself when I was five. It had been read aloud to me earlier than that. I have read it more than a dozen times and in three languages.
**Essential aspect:** Hope in justice

No matter how bad things look, justice will prevail. I am convinced of that in part due to this story. Yes it’s fantasy, but its images are easy to apply to real life. Sometimes there is a "wicked witch" enemy seemingly ruining my life, making it "forever winter", but there is always an "Aslan" usually in the form of help from an unexpected person. Just as Aslan is "the son of the Emperor over the sea" in the book, so these personal helpers act out of the goodness in their spirits which I believe is of supernatural origins, from something or someone far away which I may not understand but I see the results of it in the help that I receive.
Mike

In general, all of my reading of fantasy is absorbed, in which I try to only be involved with the writing, what is on the page. If I find the writing good, this easily happens and the world I am sitting in slips away, with only the world of the writing “in my head”. If the writing – or story – is not something that interests me, this does not happen. In this case, I do not finish the story. This rarely happens, but has in the past. I am finding that my positive, meaningful experiences are mostly about changes in my intellect – new connections, new thoughts, new outlooks on the world.

- **Nordic Gods and Heroes** by Padraic Colum is a simplified book of Norse Mythology, in which the stories are all strung together in a narrative that starts with the gods building their home in Asgard and ends with Ragnarok, and includes the tale of Sigurd and Brunhilde. It is very comprehensive. I was utterly entranced by this book as a child, I would check it out of the library every few months or so probably from age 7 to 10. My experience, in general, was to simply lose touch with any external thoughts unrelated to the stories I was reading—by immersing myself in this world of gods, I tried, even as a child, to let this new world become my world while I read. By trying to understand and piece together each story, because they are all linked somehow, I do believe my intellect grew. I recently was given this book as a gift and was pleasantly surprised to see it was not a children’s book and every bit as a good a read today. I had assumed that since I read this from ages 7 -10 or so, it would be a simple book for children. What it is in fact is a book in which the Norse tales are strung together, taking separate stories and fitting them together in a comprehensive narrative. The Norse tales, and Germanic myth as a whole, is often hard to fit together.

- **Arthur C. Clarke’s Fountains of Paradise** is a book about the development of a space elevator, in which a payload could be raised on wires, or something similar, all the way into space. I don’t remember much else. I read this when I was age 14. I can trace a realistic, yet positive, attitude toward the real universe – space – to this book. While I would guess it was not the first time this happened, the simplicity of Clarke’s writing and ideas stayed with me. It was the first connection I remember making to the real possibility of how humans may be able to extend into space. I began to believe that
humanity’s future was optimistic, because we had the capabilities to eventually get into space. I began to understand that though we probably have too many people on Earth, there is little that can be done to change that. Space gave me hope in the possibility of colonizing other places so the load on Earth could be lessened. Clarke’s space elevator idea stuck with me the rest of my life. It was simply a cheap and effective way to raise things into Earth’s orbit, but was a symbol of new ideas and possibilities to come. I have only read this book once.

- Robert Heinlein’s *Stranger in a Strange Land* is a novel in which, I believe, a young man born on Mars comes back to Earth, and is hailed as a savior. He sticks in my mind as possibly a flower child, some sort of hippie preaching love, but in a way that everyone got it and believed it. I read it once as a teenager, probably between ages 13 and 16. The protagonist is a character that led me to understand that science fiction is simply fiction that extrapolates ANY science, not just technology. The social sciences, people, were fair game to speculate about, and led to understanding that people change, cultures change, and in the process of this change, we also have hard scientific change. I do not have specific examples in my memory, but recall understanding that the text was about how cultures and societies can change, not just technology. I recall my entire outlook on the world changed, as I had always wanted to be a scientist. To some extent, I realized I could study human beings, and eventually received my degree in Anthropology. I realized the dogmas of my upbringing were just that – an upbringing by someone who believed something. I have only read this book once.

- Terry Brooks’ *Sword of Shannara*, similar to Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, is an epic in which a band of characters, both including humans, dwarves, elves and some sort of smaller person (Hobbits in Tolkien, but not sure of what in *Sword of Shannara*) unites in order to prevent some evil in the world. I read this when I was 12, after I had read Tolkien’s *The Hobbit and Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Oddly enough, I have no specific memories of reading Tolkien – just a sense that the work was phenomenal. A recent re-reading of both confirms that they are masterworks, foundations for my fantasy education, but still no moments of meaning that I can recall, though I do have a memory of meaning from the day I saw the animated *Lord of the Rings* movies on the first night it
opened when I was also 12. (The memory is of a man dressed as a wizard for the premier night showing, which made me realize that others took the type of reading I did seriously enough to get into it with that type of enthusiasm. Often, when I was growing up, you might feel weird because you might get ostracized if someone knew you liked this type of story. The man in the wizard costume gave me, at least that night, the feeling that life was fun, and meaningful, as were the stories I liked.) I mention all this because though I was absorbed in Brooks’ book; I clearly remember thinking it was exactly like *Lord of the Rings* with new names. And then – there was a scene in which a machine proved to be the enemy, and implied that perhaps this story was taking place on an Earth that had been devastated and reverted back to magic and swords. I don’t know if this is the case because I never read any of Brooks’ work again. I had realized that I am able to choose the way I want Fantasy to work. There is fantasy that is grounded in reality, usually based on extravagant detail, which creates a world that is easy to become absorbed by, and there is fantasy, such as this story, that throws something harder to believe at you – the machine went against convention, but also against what I was willing to believe in this type of story. Magic could never develop from our world – this was one reason I read these stories: I wanted something I could never have. When the author used this plot piece, I was not absorbed any longer: the world he created made little sense to me. I had my own set of rules – which I only saw because one had been broken – that made me decide if a work was interesting to me or not.

- J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* is the tale of a young wizard who does not know he is the most famous, and perhaps most powerful, wizard in the world. He does not even know he is a wizard. This book introduces him as a young wizard, growing up in a world of Muggles (the “real” world) and how he gets introduced to the wizarding world. I read when I was 33. The book was given to me as a gift, and was the first book of fantasy I had read in a number of years. I have now read it twice. On the first reading, throughout the book, I recall being simply overjoyed that fantasy had found its way back in to my head. After some thirteen years in the world of contract furniture sales, I felt like a Muggle. The world of fandom – loosely, the connections between readers of fantasy, SF, and all sorts of media stories in these genres, had become something from my childhood. Harry Potter was such a great symbol of why fantasy does
not need to be left behind that I was simply overjoyed to be involved with the type of 
created worlds that used to give me such pleasure and ideas. I don’t believe I realized at 
first that it was meant for younger readers, but was thoroughly captivated. It was a key 
book for me as an adult because it made me reconsider, with finality and a seriousness 
that had been missing, what I was doing in my career. The sense of wonder in my head as 
I read was counterbalanced by thoughts I could not articulate at the time – what I would 
venture to say were from my unconscious. Those thoughts were along the lines of 
“Fantasy is real in the real world, if we choose to see things that way.” This is hard to 
express – the awe of fantasy worlds in our literature somehow allow us to see the world 
outside our door with new eyes, awe-some eyes, in which we rediscover how truly 
amazing the world can be. I also rediscovered that I wished there were more people in the 
“real” world that acted as the protagonists of fantasy stories did – true to their values, 
kind, even if they had to struggle to do so. Characters are often much nicer than real 
persons, and readers of this literature are often, not always of course, some of the nicest 
“real” people you will meet. Muggles was the term that caused me so much joy and 
concern, because muggles were all around me at the time. I knew, most certainly, that I 
was not one, but I was being pulled into being one. As above, at this point I was in a 
brain-numbing world of selling furniture and not leading the life I had ever imagined. 
This book directly led to my earning a 2nd BA degree in film, which led me to Pacifica 
Graduate Institute. Neither has, yet, completely satisfied my desire to understand how 
fantasy can become real if we choose to see it that way.

- J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* is the seventh book of the Potter 
series, in which Potter finally defeats the evil wizard Voldemort, with help from all of his 
friends, including some he didn’t really think were his friends. I read this when I was 41 
years old. My identification and admiration grew for Snape —one of these friends Harry 
ever knew he had. Snape was a teacher at Harry’s school and it was never clear if he 
was good or bad, mostly because he treated Harry as any student, for the most part. The 
reader always knew Harry was the hero, so Snape’s treatment of him was always 
suspicious. In the fifth and sixth books, we learned more about Snape’s boyhood at the 
same school Harry went to. Snape was an odd boy, made fun of by Harry’s father as a 
boy. Snape was befriended and had a crush on Harry’s mother as a girl. His treatment by
Harry’s father was truly awful, just as sweet as Harry’s mother’s treatment of him was. As we learned more about this, we understood that Snape really was doing what was the “right” thing to do, even if he was angered every time he saw Harry because Harry acted more like his boastful father than his sweet mother. My admiration for someone who did the right thing, even though it pained him so, is still very huge. I actually shed a few tears writing in this additional comment. Anyway – in the sixth book, Snape murders the father figure of Dumbledore. In a cliffhanger, we wonder if Snape is bad or good until the seventh book came out – probably at least a year, maybe more. I also thought Snape was still good, there was a reason for what he did, and he would be shown as a hero. The seventh book had me crying while reading. I had been extremely nervous about whether Snape was on the side of Dumbledore or on the side of Voldemort since the last book had ended. My only interest was to see what happened to him, not to Harry. I completely identified with his disgust for those who had made fun of him, yet was proud of his ability to put that aside and do the right thing. I read this book in one night, staying up till the next morning, sobbing over his vindication. I have not re-read this book, but still see him as the real hero of the whole series. As above—he was more loyal to Dumbledore than anyone else, and he gave his life for a cause he personally had a hard time with. I was so damn proud of him. Just shed another tear!

- Richard Adams Watership Down is a tale of rabbits forced out of their home by encroaching human development. It follows their journey to find a new place to live and their attempts to grow their group size, particularly by attracting female rabbits. I probably read when I was about 10, but re-read probably when I was 33 or 34. The animal point of view, even though written by a man, held me as if the natural world itself was telling the story. A sense of sympathy with animals, as if we need to understand the way they understand the world and honor it by letting them be and do as they need to, was with me throughout the reading. We cannot state anything with certainty. Well – rabbits don’t speak English, but because they don’t it is hard to know how they actually function, feel and think. In the growing discipline of Animal Studies, the question of man’s relationship to animals is proving to be so much more complicated than mainstream society has ever discussed. The rise in vegan lifestyle is one example – and though I am not vegan, I am thinking more and more about animal rights issues. Having
characters from this book that I have spent time with as thinking and feeling beings, as much so as people, and in a story in which their lives are shown to be destroyed by people, has made me more sympathetic and able to consider such real life issues. When it comes to animals and nature, I felt interconnected, and disconnected, a common bond with animals, and yet, knowing how we destroy animals, after re-reading this story.

- Andre Norton – I believe the book is called *Star Hunter* – I remember reading this and simply being thrilled. I was with the characters as they sped around some planet on a rocket sled and have always recalled how this story made me happy and excited – it took me out of my world and kept me firmly on a strange planet that I did not know existed. I wanted to stay there. I would guess I was between 9 and 12 years old.

- Peter Beagle story *Two Hearts* – I was 40 when I read this story, a sequel of sorts to Beagle’s *The Last Unicorn*. The story of love simply brought tears to my eyes. When I read this, I cried, as normally we do, for the good things in life. A man and a woman express their love for each other by believing in each other and helping each to foster goals that they had. At the same time, they were able to help a young girl find family and solutions to problems in her life. The old wizard found purpose and a woman found that what she wanted to happen for those she loved was what happened. In fantasy, things happen that we often feel SHOULD happen, but maybe do not happen so often in the real world. These things are the truths, morals, beliefs we hold about – all the good things we are brought up to believe in that don’t always happen in real life. When I read a story in which they do happen, I sometimes cry. And when I do, it is usually big deep sobs, in which my chest begins to hurt – but in a good way. It is a purely physical reaction to the right thing happening to people who really deserve the right thing to happen to them.

- Paolo Bacigalupi stories – *Yellow Card Man, The Calorie Man, The People of Sand and Slag, Pop Squad, and Tamarisk Hunter* – Bacigalupi’s work puts me into the same mindset no matter which story I have read. I feel an overwhelming disgust for our current world and the way history has brought us to this point. I also develop a fear, pessimism, that the worlds I enter in his writing are possible. I emerge from the wastelands in these stories with grim determination that we need to change in so many ways to avoid such scenarios. These stories present a future Earth in which water has run out and is the
scarcest resource on Earth; people are killed for getting pregnant and having too many children; the calories you can eat are extremely scarce and limited, even though the rich may still have all they want. Basically extrapolations about the worst that can happen in our world, based on the environmental and economic problems we are facing.
I began this exercise by discovering that I have been lying about my childhood reading for most of my life. It has been my habit to claim that I read no children’s books as a child, only Dickens and detective stories, coming to children’s fiction only during my Librarianship training. How quickly this notion fell apart when I began to look seriously at my earliest experiences of fantasy fiction. My memories of sharing books with my parents go back to the age of two and under, and I remember a huge fairy book, a wide and tall book that is I think still in my son’s possession. I remember the pictures of the fairies but have lost the stories. However between the ages of 7-12 approximately, I was riveted to the first four works listed below. I have no copies and have not been able to re-read, but have searched out some details on the Internet. All of these were library books borrowed from a small neighbourhood library that lay on the route of our walk between our house and my grandmother’s house, which my parents and I walked every Saturday. I recall the very smell of my Grandma’s front room, the football matches on the TV and the soft family conversation around me while I read. We were allowed four books at a time and my mother said every week, “Save some of them for later!” They were usually all read by the time we left for home. If not, I read them in the living-room of our small ‘pre-fab’ (imported from the USA to house returning heroes!) or in my bed before and after sleep. I was reading all the time. But these, now I look back, are what led me to fantasy.

E C Eliott’, (Reginald Alec Martin) – Kemlo and the sky horse, 1954. [aka Rex Dixon, author of the Pocomoto Western novels for children]

Only while researching for this study did I realise that the same man wrote so many other of my favourite childhood books. I could go on at length about Pocomoto, which I also read in an absorbed way, but Westerns are not true fantasy, though they took me to realms beyond my ken.

Kemlo lived on Satellite K, sometime in our future when earth is ringed by satellites and a whole generation of children has been ‘born in space’ and can therefore breathe in space but not in the satellites’ artificial atmosphere. The children born to the colonists of Satellite K are all named with exotic futuristic names beginning with K – Kemlo, Kerowski, Kartin.

What was it that absorbed me? The 15 novels were all about the kind of boys’ adventures that recur in Pocomoto, Just William, or Famous Five books. But the deeper fascination lay in the setting and concepts. I never questioned the born in space notion, but felt so deeply for
Kemlo and his parents as they communicated across airlocks, never able to touch or eat together or sleep in the same quarters. I lived it, that suffering for the sake of human destiny. The sky horse tale was a wonderful blend of Kemlo with Pocomoto – the horse was mechanical, a space-flying machine-Pegasus, that carried Kemlo on his adventures just as Pocomoto’s Palomino carried him. (How did its wings beat in space? Did I care?). I wanted horses and I wanted to be a boy – boys had it better in those days, and maybe still do. In these books I lived that ownership of horses – a Star Horse! And lived that freedom of the boy I was not. I remember coming up out of a book if called for tea or for the journey home, as if from another land. And reaching the end, bereft but knowing I would read it again before the following week’s trip to the library.

W.E. Johns – The Edge of Beyond, Hodder & Stoughton. 1st ed. 1958. (Author of Biggles as well as a of 10 Science Fiction novels.)

I did read a Biggles or two, but they did not become favourites. I was beginning to hanker after Fantasy, although I had not heard that name and it may not have been current in the 1950’s/1960’s. Johns was a master of the evocative title, an advance on Kemlo tales which were all called Kemlo and the—. Apart from the Edge of beyond, there were, for example, Kings of space; Return to Mars (return!); Now to the Stars. In these tales a rather odd crew wanders about the universe, discovering new planets, and new life.

What absorbed me, as I read my way onward, almost oblivious to that beloved family life around me, almost unable to speak when someone kindly asked whether it was a good book I was reading?

I doubt if it was the science, although I did spend a few years fascinated by astronomy and the basics of what we then knew about ‘Space’. Probably it was the whole business of the alien. Johns introduced me first to the notion that on a strange planet at an unimaginably distant part of the galaxy, our hero might meet a huge, shambling, alarmingly strong-looking being who might reach out a great grasping paw – and save him from his predicament. I loved it. I have never since been able to stomach the kind of SF (soi-disant) that consists of us slaughtering them. (Well, OK, Independence Day was fairly good.)

That scene I recall being lost in? Rex the boy hero is on a planet with areas of magnetic rocks, and because of metal in his space-suit is stuck to a cliff-face, oxygen running out, a particularly hot sun about to rise – then the fearsome alien appears, and with a grunt heaves Rex
off the cliff and carries him to a safe distance. How totally absorbing is the thought that we might meet with kindness out among the stars. (Tears almost come now, as I wish I could read it again.)

**Rosemary Sutcliff—*Sword at Sunset (1963)*

Sutcliff is an exemplar of *history as fantasy* – although that is not of course what I felt as I read my way through her works at nine or ten. I saw the magical, the significant, in everything. Her tales are set firmly on this earth, yet through them I fell into strange lands, remote in time and in imagination. I recall meeting King Arthur for the first time in her sequence, and reading them all the way though, although some of them were ‘adult’ and I had to have special permission from the nice library lady to take them out from the small back room of the library. (I had by then mostly read the contents of the small front room).

King Arthur! (Too many! in this list, but that’s how it feels now I am looking back.) What to say about King Arthur? The title says it all, describing the embattled world in which Sutcliff sets her tales, leading me in to experience that loss of ‘civilisation’, the sweeping movements of cultures and peoples, the light that plays about the figure of Arthur as he tries to draw together the forces of order and hold back the oncoming dark. Not to mention the emotional tangles, the magic, the magician, the sense of the ‘fey’ playing in and out of everyday life, was it true, was it real? For the rest of my life I have insisted on and believed in the notion of Truth as something greater than Fact—truth is in myth and legend and proverbs and folk-beliefs, in the tales of old wives, as well as in DNA and particle physics. I can never trace the source of this quotation, but I live by it – “For much is true that doth not happen; and much that happens, gaineth not in verity because of blind occurrence.”

**Barbara Leonie Picard—*Tales of the Norse Gods and Heroes*, 1963**

This came upon me as the first rebirth I ever experienced by reading a book. By rebirth I suppose I may mean something similar to Epiphany—a moment when we are turned upside down and sideways and realise that the world is quite other than you have assumed- that there are infinite other possible ways of looking at things and understanding them. I did not know until I read C.S. Lewis’s *Surprised by joy* that I had been infected with ‘Northernness’, but that is what had happened. Lewis writes movingly in *Surprised by Joy* of how he read in Longfellow's
"Saga of King Olaf" – ‘I heard a voice that cried/Balder the beautiful/is dead, is dead’ – “I knew nothing about Balder, but instantly I was uplifted into huge regions of northern sky, I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described (except that it is cold, spacious, severe, pale and remote)”. I can’t easily put it into words, but I was lost in the tales of the gods and gripped by those of the heroes. I had by then read some classical myths, but they did not hold me—in thrall—as these did. Images still dwell in my head and heart, Loki bound for eternity beneath the serpent’s dripping fangs, while his much-betrayed wife sits beside him catching the drops. The sad giantess who thought that by choosing the god with the prettiest feet, she would be sure of marrying Baldur, but found herself pent up in a lonely seaside tower with the sea-god Njord instead. (The Giantess fell in love with Balder, and since the Gods of Valhalla owed her or her father a favour, she was allowed to choose which god she would marry; however, she had to wear a blindfold adjusted so that she could see only the feet of the gods as they stood in line. Assuming that Balder would have the loveliest feet, she choose the smoothest, fairest pair, but these belong to Njord, who frequently walked along the shore with his feet in the little waves. His keep was a remote seaward tower, and she was lonely there. He let her return to her father's house.) How kind of him to let her go home to her family!

§

These books I read over and over again, even while moving on to new things – they are, I see now, the foundation of who I am, what I can do, what I am interested in. They explain why I found in the next two authors, so much that I recognised. Not to mention – for there is no space or time – T.H. White, Tennyson, Roger Lancelyn Green, Malory, and a host of etceteras.

The last three books listed below came much later in my life, after a teenage spent reading what I claimed to have read in childhood – Dickens, Jane Austen, adult SF (written for adults, not in the modern misuse of that term), Brontes, and crime – Sherlock Holmes, Perry Mason, Dashiel Hammet.

At university, I let slip to my friends that I had never read: Winnie-the-Pooh, Narnia, or Tolkien. A crash course on all three followed. For the purposes of this study, it is Narnia and Middle-Earth I have to return to (insofar as I ever leave Middle-Earth).

The *Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, retells the Christian sorry of Christ's sacrifice, resurrection, and the redemption of His Creation, through the tale of Aslan the Lion in Narnia.
Four children from our world enter Narnia via a magic wardrobe, and play important roles in the struggle between Good and Evil. I was aware of the allegory on first reading, but friends who read it as children say they were not. The seven Chronicles of Narnia encompass the whole creation, existence and ending of that Universe under its creator.

*The Hobbit* is subtitled 'There and back again' and tells of the Quest journey of the rather unadventurous Bilbo Baggins, a hobbit from the Shire, who finds himself accompanying thirteen dwarves and a Wizard on a quest to reclaim dwarven treasure from a fire-breathing dragon. *The Lord of the Rings* takes Bilbo's cousin and adopted heir, Frodo Baggins, on a longer quest to a more dangerous and fierier mountain, not to find a treasure but to destroy one, and evil gold ring that belongs to the dark Lord Sauron. This quest saves the world from that dominion, but at great cost to Frodo, who cannot ever again dwell in peace.

**Clive Staples Lewis – *The chronicles of Narnia***

During the second year of my BA I was living in the attic of a house in Kensington, sharing with a friend. She was a Narnia person, and so was the lady we rented from. I recall Mrs. C. had three sets of Narnia in her amazing front-room on the ground floor, a library double-stacked from floor to ceiling on all sides. The earliest volume I saw there was a first edition of Johnson’s dictionary. The rest of the house was full of books, but it was from the library that Mrs. C. took the seven paperbacks that she presented to me as a gift, and which I still have, except for *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, which had to be replaced when it collapsed.

Going back through the wardrobe slightly saddens me now, because I read all those books one after the other, and absorbed their world and the world-view of Lewis, so closely did it fit my view of myself then, as a Christian. I was Christian from about 1968 to 1994—my father's death killed it for me. Lewis and Tolkien were part of the sustenance of my faith when I had it, but now that dimension of their work matters less to me. Yet fantasy still leads me to a sense of the numinous. This is tied up with painful stuff about my first marriage so I may not go into it very closely. Now in my post-Christian times, with a less adulatory view of Lewis and his works, I cannot quite get that back, although the tales still move me. The absorption was so deep that it became domination for a while. I remember reading them in my attic bedroom (large and well-lit, in fact) as the sun went down in the summer term. I remember living the adventures, and feeling every moment of triumph and pain. I questioned nothing. I gave copies to everyone for
Christmas, at one time had three sets in my house because my children had to have a set each, and in spite of my altered relationship to them, bought another set for my granddaughter. Good stories, lost world. At the time it enhanced my own spiritual practice and the way I related to others. Now it enhances my intellectual life—but see reference above to numinous.

**J.R.R. Tolkien**


But this was it. This was really it at last, the true next step along the way that Loki had pointed to. The road to fair Elfland. This I read in my room in hall at college, third year and everything when I should have been revising for exams. (In those days it seemed unquestionable that reading a children’s book followed by a three-volume adult fantasy novel could not have any relationship with *real literature* even though it was Tolkien’s edition of *Gawain* that we were using – how times have changed.

What fun *The Hobbit* was; how exciting it was; how deeply it reached into my heart. How right everything seemed, the dwarves embodying what dwarves had truly been all along, Gandalf such a real wizard, the goblins so very goblinish. Hobbits were just an extra bonus, like Beorn. It felt like coming home. It felt familiar. I think, given what I now know of Tolkien’s desire to create a legendarium for his own land, that this means he succeeded with me! (Tolkien spoke of his desire to create a mythology for England, his own beloved land whose traditions he felt had been lost. Like Lewis, he looked to Northern Germanic tradition for inspiration, to The Gods of Asgard and to Finland's *Kalevala*. *The Lord of the Rings* is one small part of his total creation, as published by his son Christopher in the 12 volumes of *The History of Middle-earth*.)


In that same final year of my freedom, I read right through *The Lord of the Rings* without stopping, or so it seems to me. I must have eaten, slept, gone to lectures and written essays, but they are all gone. I remember the moment I finished, and moved, weeping, to the window to look out over Regent’s Park. A plane went over, casting a huge shadow on the grass, and my heart nearly burst with fear of the greater Shadow– not vanquished, but scattered for a time. The greater shadow of evil, incarnate in Sauron during the third age of M-E, in Morgoth in its First
Age, was in Adolf Hitler in our twentieth century. I knew this was about reality. My reality, as well as everyone else’s. Tolkien was telling the truth. A truth. All truths.


In the seventies and eighties I did a great deal of escapist reading (not in a very positive sense) in crime, SF, and fantasy. I never sank to reading fiction in an unabsorbed way, but I had a lot to retreat from. My thesis studied the work of Le Guin, Alan Garner, Jane Louise Curry and Joy Chant, all still favourites, along with my later discoveries, Terry Pratchett (for which much thanks to my son) and Stephen King (ditto to my daughter). The two latter show that it is possible to be absorbed while giggling hysterically, and while shuddering with terror.

But it is Le Guin who absorbed my heart from the moment I started to read about Ged. She feels as true as Tolkien, Earthsea is as real, and I feel I am there when I read its tales. But the tale of Ged confronting the truth about himself, in that fearful scene when he comes face to face with the Shadow, was no easy experience of absorption. Nor were the succeeding tales of Tenar’s liberation from the dark, and of Arren crossing the Dark Land living. Along with annual re-readings of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, these truthful fictions eventually refused to let me be absorbed in them without paying attention to what they were telling me. And their message was of fear as well as hope. (Tenar had been imprisoned in the temple complex since early childhood, and fear was her first reaction to the incursion of Ged before being liberated from the dark.) No-one needs to stay in the dark, but you have to take up the ring and get going. So I came out of my first marriage, not without painful consequences that still reverberate. And reading, understanding, living, being absorbed in fictions of this kind and this quality, helped me to do it.
Almost all these books have been read multiple times over a period of 30-35 years and currently reside in my husband’s and my cherished alder bookcases that were our eleventh anniversary present to each other. We both Love books. Most books are part of a series and I've listed the first book in the heading. Since many of my first reads of these books were at least 25-30 years ago, it's hard to remember exactly when I was introduced to the books or where I first read them. When I have remembered, I've stated it.

Reading has enhanced my life and given me much of the context I have for living and thinking today. These books are special to me and the fact that I keep them and continue to remember them so fondly is a life experience in itself. Other books referenced within the discussion of a specific book are for context only.

Dune—Frank Herbert—Copyright 1965.

Estimated initial reading—1973-75. Age—15-17—High School. I've read the 6 books of the series completely at least twice and Dune at least 3 times, most recently last fall. I've also read several of the "prequels" co-authored by Frank Herbert's son and friend.

My best friend in high school got me started with science fiction and fantasy. Until then I'd mostly read biographies and animal stories, such as Anna Sewell's Black Beauty (classic about the life of a horse), Sterling North's Rascal (a boy and his raccoon), and James Harriot's All Creatures Great and Small (about an English veterinarian). I know I borrowed many of her books and was an avid reader, but Dune was one of the first. I loved how Herbert constructed a complete other world with detailed social, economic, environmental and religious structures consistently tied together with the characters.

I was raised in a moderate Christian environment and had spiritual experiences, though my mind often rebelled against dictates that did not seem right to me. (Only one God. All other religions are wrong. Go to church and pray and you'll get what you want...) While reading Dune, my own misgivings about the structured Christian religion were beginning to take hold and build another theory of spiritual reality.
I have read parts of the Bible – the King James version, *The Living Bible* and a few other translations, mostly in middle school and early high school. I've never read all of it. It's amazing, really. Compared with other books and book series, it's not that big. But it doesn't hold together as a story.

I don't remember ever buying into the notion that the King James Bible was the actual, literal word of God, but I was taught that this was true. One of my most beloved gifts was a white leather zipped *Bible*, with "the words of our Lord" in red. My grandfather gave it to me when I was baptized. I was 12.

Yes, I still have it. It sits on a bookshelf, next to my father's *Bible* (he died when I was 4), Robert Fulghm's *All I Ever Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* (a compilation of short essays on daily life), Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* (Greek and Roman) and Patricia Montley's *In Nature's Honor—Myths and Rituals Celebrating the Earth* (an earth based look at life). I never could quite put it on the same shelf as Doreen Valiente's *Witchcraft for Tomorrow* (considered one of the founding books on modern witchcraft) Margot Adler's *Drawing Down the Moon* (another witchcraft book) or Scott Cunningham's *Wicca—A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner* (solo witchcraft ritual guide). I still am unable to put anything on top of a *Bible*. My grandfather taught me that nothing should be higher than the *Bible*. I still always throw salt over my left shoulder when I spill it, too.

I believe there are many social and moral truths elaborated on in the *Bible*, with the actual words attributed to Jesus not quite aligning with many other dictates described. Even though it cannot as a whole be looked at as a work of fantasy, I now believe that The *Bible* is a collection of myths, stories and fables, which were culled from a larger oral and written tradition by self-serving groups with political and economic motives. I also believe that Jesus was an historical figure and prophet who would roll around in His grave (if He were still in it) to see how many have interpreted His teachings. No matter what religion one follows, the influence of this book permeates our social and political lives—and mine as well.

Another book that has influenced me is *Chariots of the Gods* by Erich von Daniken—1968. I read it around 1975 when I was in high school. It was published as a theory, but mostly debunked. This book got me to look at things from a different perspective. It touts evidence pointing to, if not extraterrestrial seeding of the earth, at least extraterrestrial visitations. Though this is not a fantasy novel, this book influenced some of my travel in England, going to see the
carvings of horses in the chalky hills of Wiltshire. You don't have to be in a plane to see them, so it seems unlikely that they were meant specifically for prehistoric airborne travelers.

When I was 19 years old I remember reading *The Shining* by Steven King – 1977. I was in college, working part time, living with my sister and her 2 year old daughter. I can vividly picture our living room and the couch I was laying on while reading. My sister was at work on the evening shift at the hospital and I was with my niece, who was sleeping. Toward the end of the book, there are a series of eerie events in and around a shrubbery maze. Several of the shrubs are shaped into the form of animals. In my mind's eye, I can see the moving shrubbery and feel my sense of unease. There was some noise in the apartment building and I jumped off the couch, heart pounding, pulling myself back to mundane reality. This is one of the most vivid absorbed experiences I can remember. I mention it here because of this memorable experience, even though it cannot be included in this study because it is a book of horror.

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Read when it came out and many, many times both in book and audio book form. It is a fantasy that it takes place in a pre-historical setting, in a world supported in some ways by archaeological research but with the culture and reality totally created from the author’s imaginings. It was a gift by some co-workers for my birthday—I must have been 22. The first book is number one on my favorite book list.

It's the story of a Cro-Magnum girl who lost her family in an earthquake when she was 5. She was found hurt and close to death by a small Neanderthal clan, healed by their medicine woman and raised as one of them, though she was "ugly" and different. She was one of "The Others." Somehow I really related to her struggle to fit in, her curious mind and the complete dependence and connection with the natural world. There are plenty of assumptions in the story, but nothing supernatural or magic. It is a fascinating story and, though the later books are a bit repetitive and not nearly as fresh in concept, they are still great reads.


Initially read around 1975 in high school. I was about 17. I have to say, though I enjoyed reading *The Hobbit*, it was to be over 25 years before I would finally read the full *The Lord of*
*The Rings* trilogy. I tried many times to start but it always reminded me of other books I'd read. I didn't make it through *The Lord of the Rings* until the Peter Jackson directed movie came out in 2001. Someone told me once, "I envy you for being able to read those books for the first time." Now I get it. The depth of the characters and middle earth history is amazing. And though the descriptions are elaborate, when I could finally immerse myself in the world I was totally carried away. I've read the books 2-3 times and the audio book 2-3 times more. I include it in this list because it is unusual that someone who loves fantasy and epic novels had so much trouble reading it initially.

**A Spell for Chameleon**—Piers Anthony. First Xanth novel (34 in the "trilogy" and counting) – 1977.

My initial reading was in 1984, the year I was married. I was 26. I re-read it at least 5 times along with many others in the series until about book 22. *Ogre, Ogre* (book 5) was the first fantasy novel I read to my daughter when she was 5 or 6. At 19, she still fondly remembers me reading it to her. This book is fifth on my best book list.

These whimsical, nonsensical fantasy books got me through Calculus. After beating my head against the imaginary wall of what I considered to be fuzzy math, I retreated into the world of Xanth full of mixed mythical creatures, humans with absurd magical talents and puns. The map of the land looks just like Florida and the King is the sorcerer with the most powerful and flexible magical talent (One king could concur storms, the next could transform living things from one type animal to another—including humans. No body messed with him!) Though the sexism is a bit much, I still pick one up to read when I just want something light. I have fond memories of my tromps through the land of Xanth, and across into Mundania (our reality).

**Sword of Shanarrah**—Terry Brooks—1977.

First read around 1980. I was about 22. This book was recommended by my boss at the time. He was an avid reader with science fiction and fantasy his favorite genres. This book absolutely spoiled Tolkien for me at the time. It is such a marvelous epic quest novel with elves and dwarfs and long treks that *The Fellowship of the Ring* seemed like an overly descriptive copycat. Of course, Tolkien inspired Brooks.

This was the first in the 5 book Belgariad series, followed by the 5 book Malloreon series and others. I first read it around 1982 when I was about 24. This is another epic travel fantasy book recommended by my boss. It’s not too heavy and it’s an enjoyable tromp through quests and destiny.

**Lord Foul's Bane**—Stephen Donaldson—1977.

First read around 1984/85 when I was 26 or 27. *Thomas Covenant—the Unbeliever* "trilogy" that spanned 6 books, and now I see there were 2 more with 2 additional ones planned. I've read the initial 6 books twice and the first book 3 times. It's a dark series with a reluctant hero in a "dream" world that seems all too real. He's seen as the only hope of a people that he does not know and who do not particularly like him. It's very well written, but very dark.


First read in 1997 when I was 39 and re-read Many times, especially on audio book. What a terrific yarn. It has nothing to do with current day magic and witchcraft but it is totally immersed in the most fun, “realistic” fantasy story of a young wizard. Our daughter was 8 when these books started coming out and this is the first series of fantasy books that we read in parallel.

**Dragons of Autumn Twilight**—Tracy Hickman and Margaret Weis—1984.

First read in the late 1990's when my daughter introduced me to them. I was in my late 30’s. This series was inspired by the popular role-playing game Dungeons and Dragons, which I've played off and on for years—now electronically with online and standalone computer software. I'm not sure how many books are in world, but a quick google shows me a list of over 50 by various authors. The world is pre-industrial revolution with might and magic the rule of law. The characters are deep and the back story is expansive, in the tradition of *The Lord of the Rings* world. As I said, I have played Dungeons and Dragons for years and we put together a game with our extended family of close friends when our daughter was about 13. We played about once a month for a couple of years. Everyone wrote their own back story to give our characters more depth. Our daughter is in college now and we've all been busy with our separate and geographically distant lives, but it is a time I know we all cherish. These books are an immersion in another world and a joy to read.
**Dragon Flight**—Anne McCaffrey—1968.

Read the first time in the late 1970's or early 80's. I was in my early 20’s. This is another off-world series as was *Dune*. This is less dark and deals with Dragon Riders who fight fiery "thread" that falls from the sky in periodic, but irregular episodes. The series started when the thread hasn't fallen for many decades and others are grumbling that they are supporting these dragon riders, and their meat eating dragons, who are no longer needed. Of course, it is a natural gap and thread again falls. It's a good exercise in looking at societies and their priorities. We've had a generation who has been told to spend money and everything will always go up. Guess what? That was an anomaly. Reality strikes again. I've read this series a couple of times.

**A Sound of Thunder**—Ray Bradbury—Short story first published in 1952.

Read around 1985 when I was about 27 and re-read several times. It's the story of a safari company that uses a time machine to take clients back in time to shoot big game (think dinosaurs) just moments before its fated death. In order to not change history, as the ripple effect could be magnified over the centuries, they build a suspended path from which none should stray. Of course, someone does and the changes are subtle. It's a powerful story. I like most of Bradbury's writings, as they seem to strum common threads of community and humanity. But this is the story I vividly remember and recommend.

**The Moon is a Harsh Mistress**—Robert Heinlein—1966.

Read around 1985 when I was about 27. Heinlein is one of my husband's favorite authors and he had over 20 of his books when we married in 1984. I've read many, including *I Will Fear No Evil* and *Stranger in a Strange Land*, but "Moon" is my favorite. I've read it at least 3 times. It's about a rebellious penal colony on the moon. My most vivid memory was thinking about the logistics of supporting such a colony and the technology they used to catapult minerals and ore from the moon to the earth.

**Seventh Son**—Orson Scott Card—1987.

Initially read in the early 90's. I was in my early 30’s. When I was in high school, I read several historical novels by Allan Eckart starting with *The Frontiersmen*. It was a story centered around the Ohio River valley and westward from the mid 18th to the mid 19th centuries. *Seventh Son*, and its sequels, is an alternative history fantasy set around the same time and place, with
some of the same historical figures. It's a great story, but what touched me was the premise that folk magic was real and especially strong in this "seventh son of a seventh son." I've re-read this once or twice but it’s on my list to read again.


No matter his topic, Card is an amazingly diverse and engaging writer. This story, which is part of a series, takes place in a space based battle school where they are training brilliant young minds (6-12) to lead squadrons of ships against an off-world threat. This book is probably 4th on my best books ever list. This book was a totally absorbing read. I re-read this book at least three times.

**On a Pale Horse**—Piers Anthony—1983.

Book number 3 is on my best books list. I read it because I liked the Xanth fantasies so much, but it’s a very different kind of book. Yes, it's fantasy but it deals with serious subjects and moral considerations. Death is an office, like Time, Fate, War and Nature (and Good and Evil too—books 6 and 7). Death goes to people whose good and evil are in almost perfect balance in order to analyze the soul as to whether it should go to heaven or hell. Souls that are not in such balance sink or rise as is appropriate of their own accord. The 8-book storyline is interesting, but it is the individual death visits, which are short mini-stories, that challenge you to consider your own beliefs and system of judgment.


Though this book is actually second on my favorite book list, it has greatly influenced my spiritual life. I have read this book many times and see something new with each reading. I read this originally in the early 80's as a struggling Christian trying to make sense of the contradictions. I was about 22.

"Mists" describes two completely different, seemingly contradictory religious traditions—the "new" patriarchal, one God, absolute and stringent Christian religion charging headlong into the old world matriarchal nature based traditions. But how different were they? Both had rituals and words of power. Many, many "Christian" celebrations are adaptations from folk festivals. This book made me realize that I'd always been pagan and not "Christian" as dictated by the hierarchy of the Christian church. I have a Christmas card that I sent to my fiancée in 1983 that
has a laser etched angel carrying a candle. In the card I said, "I'd rather consider this a priestess than an angel..." and I know now that I was already settling onto a pagan path, which would not really gel until almost 20 years later.

Bradley was not pagan, but she captured the spirit of living close to the earth and the power of focused will and ritual. Having just re-read this book again I am struck by how accurately she describes my own spiritual experiences in ritual. "All gods are one god," said the Merlin. And that I truly believe.
My earliest memory is (around the age of 7 or 8) of being shocked and then intrigued by the fact that the Hardy Boys (in the eponymous series by Dixon) never seemed to stop to go to the loo. I found this most convenient but singularly odd, however, the first time I ever actually became aware of how ‘pictorial’ my reading was when I suddenly discovered myself speaking with a West Country accent while reading Kipling's *Stalky and Co*. By ‘pictorial’, what I really mean is that the process of reading for me is, and always has been, virtually cinematic—I see the pictures rather than read the words, and, rather like with cinema, I am completely swept up in them. The outer world is no longer there.

The next really major experience (I'd had many of complete transposition into the book with many other texts, fantasy and otherwise) was reading Tolkien’s single-volume *The Lord of the Rings* for the first time. I must've been 17 or 18 years old at the time and I gobbled it down in a little over 48 hours without even stopping to sleep. It subsequently (especially after several rereads and study of the surrounding literature, the studies of Elvish—which I learned and used—and so on) came to colour my entire life, I had a silver pendant with the ‘G’ (for Gandalf) rune on it made and wore it round my neck for many's the long year, wore eight or ten silver rings and my nickname, ‘The Wicked Hobbit’, probably came from the fact that I was actually a Hobbit but with wizardly pretensions. Much of my early art was influenced by this period as well.

The next major explosion—having my mind completely blown—was reading Elias Canetti's *Auto da Fé*. *Auto da Fé* is the tale of a mad bibliophile, Professor Peter Kien, who wouldn't believe what he was looking at—what was actually going on in front of his eyes—unless he'd already read it and how he was taken under the wing of a dwarf called Fischerle (the self-professed chess champion of the world) who helped him ‘unpack’ his library from his head each night and ‘load it up’ again in the morning, screwing him for every penny the while, after he fell into progressive madness when his library was burnt in a fit of uncaring rage by a housekeeper he'd married because she dusted his books and he
imagined she venerated them as much as he did. The idea that I might be a bit like Kien scared the living daylights out of me for a while, not least in that there were many in my entourage who couldn't understand my reading (I grew up in South Africa, not exactly famous for its intellectual pursuits). I finished it (on a train, as I recall) declaring that, inasmuch as it had made me reflect deeply on myself and what I was up to, along with the *I Ching* and *Lord of the Rings*, it was probably one of the most important books I'd come across to date.

- Then came *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov… This is a multi-faceted tale which, on one level, is the story of Satan's visit to Moscow at the turn of the last century in search of just one just and honourable man and of the man he found, the eponymous Master, who is imprisoned in a mad house and writing a ‘revealed book’ on the life of Christ, Margarita, the girl who loves him, and the philistinism of the general Russian public. On the other, it's the actual tale the Master is writing and the key role played in it by Judas who knows he will have to hand this inflated fool of a Jesus whom he loves so dearly in to the authorities and hates himself for doing so. I must've been about 23, and, like many who had chosen ‘the path less travelled’, was well-aware of what it felt like to be a ‘traitor’ to other people's hopes and dreams, so this, too, coloured my life for some years and still does to a degree (I note that I recently bought and began to read *The Gospel of Judas*—an addition to my library of Gnostic and Hermetic texts and Old and New Testament apocrypha—in my continued search into my Judeo—Christian roots). I wrote both a song and a poem based around ideas in this and in Borges' *Three Versions of Judas* published in his collection *Labyrinths* which treats of much the same matter as the Master's tale.

- Peake—everything he wrote, but, of course, particularly *The Gormenghast Trilogy*, each volume of which I awaited with bated breath as it was slowly published by Penguin in the early 70s. His mad universe of totally self-absorbed players on a stage circumscribed by the law of lore is still very close to me… my universe and the way I see is very Peakean—gently yet firmly critical, yet revelling in the bizarre details.
Crowley's *Little, Big*. I guess because I really am a non–repentant hippie, this tale of a family half fairy and a domain that is endlessly bigger and more complex inside than it is outside (which is a fair description of the mind, no?) stirred so many half–memories, hopes, dreams and sadesses in me. Another one I could hardly put down and gobbled through in a few days (which is quite a feat in this latter day and age where I generally accord myself very restricted time for reading—a few minutes in the loo and briefly before going to bed if my wife hasn't already put out the lights). I would love to read more—his *Aegypt*, for example—and share in more of his universe but have not been able to lay hands on it for the nonce. Other tales in same vein are Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Tales of Elfin*, and Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, both of which have a similar, darkly sinister view of what ‘Faery’ actually is in relation to ‘our world’.

Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* and *Unpleasant Profession of Mr. Jonathan Hoag* pleased me enormously, the former for its outsider view of what it is to be—or not be—human, and the latter for the wonderful idea of a junkman of ‘junked universes’. A. E. van Vogt (especially his *Null-A* books and *Book of Ptath*) also intrigued me for his strange ideas on the teleportative power of the word and on interconnectedness and universality.

Bramah’s Kai Lung (*Kai Lung Unrolls his Mat*, *Kai Lung’s Golden Hours*, *The Wallet of Kai Lung*—and apparently there are also three more but I have never come across these) for being “the sage of yore, who behind him a pigtail wore”. I am, after all, amongst other things, a translator of Tibetan and—to a much lesser extent—Chinese. Kai Lung is a Chinese storyteller whose travels and exploits serve mainly as excuses to introduce substories. He is a man of very simple motivations, most frequently animated by a desire for enough tales to be able to feed and clothe himself. Otherwise, his main motivation is love for his wife, Hwa-mei, and he seeks nothing more than a simple, sustainable lifestyle. Generally, he does not intrude in other people's affairs unless he thinks it necessary to teach them the rudiments of classical proportion with one of his
fables which often brings him into conflict with barbarians, bandits, and other people not classically educated, as well as with various unscrupulous individuals who are intent on taking away his property.

- Retellings of the ancient tales, and the ancient tales themselves are always very close to me and I grew up with many of them as tales told as well as read. Being of Celto-Jewish descent, I feel very close to the myths and legends of what was once Logres (the ‘Britain’ that was King Arthur’s realm), and, indeed, in the late 60s, Alan Garner's *Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and *Moon of Gomrath* (two fantasies inspired by ancient tales of the Manchester–Macclesfield area) set me off on an extended wander round the British Isles with a sleeping bag and a guitar from one ‘high place’ to the next. One of the greatest experiences of my life. Most recently (a few weeks back) I read his novel *Thorsbitch* in two sittings and was impressed again by the fact that there is no—one in England that I know of with as profound a knowledge of the history of the ‘people on the ground’—the common folk—along with their beliefs and their lore. Others is this vein: Evangeline Walton's exciting retelling of the *Mabinogion*, Garner's own *Owl Service* which is a recasting of the tale of Llew Llaw Gyffes, T. H. White's wondrous *The Once and Future King* so sadly banalised by Disney, the *Tain bo Cuailgne* and tales of Fionn Mac Cumhaill (for whom my youngest son is named). On one level, as a ‘romantic Celt and wannabee gipsy’ I daily live in these. No doubt my alchemical translations from the Old French and (occasionally) Latin stem from this.
As a child and as a teenager, many of my experiences were invalidated by my adult caretakers. I was led to believe that my emotions, my perceptions, my opinions, and even my belief systems were wrong and or/bad. I was led to believe that I was crazy/wrong/and or bad for believing the things I believed, feeling the feelings I did, and perceiving my experiences as I perceived them. Fiction/fantasy novels have served to validate all of these experiences that have not been validated in my real world. Through identification with Characters, both heroes and villains, and with identification with plots and stories, I have gained a better understanding of myself, of others and of the world around me. I have come to love myself, and appreciate and validate my own experiences. A list of these novels and experiences follows.

- Madeline L’Engle: *A Wrinkle in Time*

Meg, the teenaged protagonist of this fantasy novel, is both loved and close to her parents and youngest brother, and yet estranged from her peers and from her twin middle brothers. Meg must travel through space and time to rescue her father, a man who had been kidnapped by evil forces. The power of her love for her father, and for the rest of her family, is the force that finally allows her to find, rescue, and bring home her missing father. Meg is faced with many challenges and must overcome her awkwardness, her fear, and her self doubt in order to fully embrace and express this love. Meg is the not the smartest girl in her family, nor is she particularly attractive. She is not "outstanding" as is her intellectually gifted younger brother, or her "objectively beautiful" mother. She is not socially adept, as her twin middle brothers. She struggles to believe that she is good enough, despite that she is not "gifted" in these areas, as are other members of her family. But she comes to conclude that her courage, perseverance, and love for her family and for all of humanity is what makes her unique, and thus she is lovable despite her self-perceived deficits.

The unconditional love Meg receives from her mother and youngest brother, I myself experienced while reading and after reading this book. I did not experience unconditional love in the real world, but was able to experience it through Meg and her family. I did feel I wasn’t good enough because others were smarter or more attractive than me, but I came to feel better about myself just because I was me, and I strove to be more courageous and loving like Meg. I valued my strengths and accepted my weakness as Meg did.
I was 8 when I first read *A Wrinkle in Time*, and 10 when I first read the sequel: *A Wind in the Door*. I have since reread both of these books on countless occasions.

- **Madeleine L’Engle: A Wind in the Door**

In *A Wind in the Door*, Meg and Charles (her youngest brother) once again travel through time and space to save the Universe (and ultimately themselves) from an evil force that is simply creating "nothingness" where "somethingness" once existed. This force does not cause obvious pain or suffering in its wake, it simply erases from existence that which was in existence. Because this evil force does not cause pain or suffering in its wake, it is initially difficult for Meg and Charles to identify where, how, or even why this force is operating. Meg and Charles agree to fight this force, not on account of themselves, but on behalf of a tiny creature that resides in one of Charles' mitochondria. Meg travels inside of Charles, meets this creature at risk of nothingness, and values her relationship with it, no matter that it is so small that no human microscope can see it. The "somethingness" that Charles and Meg come to value is themselves and other creatures, their own uniqueness, their very existence. The nothingness that threatens them is their own uncertainty of themselves. In order to save the universe and themselves from nothingness, they must fill themselves with themselves, with their own identities, or else become prey to the nothingness. Meg and Charles must also value the existence of all "creation" (no matter how small) and help this "creation" value itself that it does not become prey to the evil nothingness. Meg and Charles conclude, in the end that the most important thing in the universe is their own souls, which they must fully own and operate, and which they learn to take full ownership of. Moral of the story: If any creature is less than 100% itself, this leaves a vacancy where nothingness can creep in and destroy it.

As a kid, this resonated with me particularly in relationship to Anorexia and Bulimia. Because I suffered from severe self-doubt and self-hatred, Anorexia and Bulimia promised to provide a self-assured and self-loving identity: If only I were skinnier, I would be lovable. If only I could eat as much as I wanted and not gain weight (purge after bingeing) I would be happy. From this novel, I came to understand that Anorexia and Bulimia did not want to provide me with an identity; reversely, they wanted to erase me. Destroy me. Kill me. Take me out of this universe. Anorexia and Bulimia wanted me dead. My uncertain identity was the "vacancy" through which
the "evil force" could enter and rob me of myself, replacing it with nothing. Even if I didn't literally die from Anorexia and Bulimia, my soul would die and I would be left with nothing. I believe that *A Wind in the Door* saved me from developing an eating disorder. I dabbled and experimented with bulimia and anorexia (even many otherwise healthy girls do) at the ages of 12 and 13 but ultimately it was my ability to identify it as an evil force that let me to abandon these tendencies in favor of healthier lifestyle, and to identify Anorexia and Bulimia as "thieves" that promised me "Something" but would leave me with "nothing>" (i.e. less than nothing). Like the evil force in *A Wind in the Door*, Anorexia and Bulimia would steal me from myself, literally and metaphorically. If I died, there would be nothing on this earth to replace me, and if I lived, I wouldn’t have "myself". This forced me to identify my own interests, goals, talents, beliefs, etc so that Anorexia and Bulimia could not steal them from me.

I believe I was in the second grade when I first read this book. I must have read it at least 25 more times between 2nd and 6th grade, and I cried every time.

- Katherine Paterson: *Bridge to Terabithia*

*Bridge to Terabithia* revolves around two fifth graders, a girl and a boy, who, over the course of one school year, create and share a secret place that they name "Terabithia". The rules are this: the girl creates the creatures and landscapes, the boy draws and paints these, and they only travel there together (never alone). They travel to this world crossing a river via a makeshift rope swing. The land on the far side of the river (which crosses both their backyard properties) is Terabithia. The boy is poor and his parents are uneducated, but it is clear that he is loved. The girl is wealthy—her parents are University professors and famous artists but clearly not interested in her. Near the end of the school year, the children's fifth grade teacher accidentally discovers the boy’s secret drawings and artwork—depictions of Terabithia—she immediately concludes that he is extraordinarily gifted.

The last weekend of school before summer break, on a Saturday, the teacher picks up the boy from his house and drives him several hours away—a one-on-one field trip to a famous art museum. They leave without his parent’s permission, and without inviting the girl. The teacher doesn't invite the girl because she believes the girl is already privileged and the boy doesn’t want the girl invited because he wants the teacher to himself (he has a crush on her, as she is young, pretty, and smart). When the teacher and the boy return late that night, they discover the girl
missing. They send out a search party, and discover her dead in the river, having fallen from the rope swing and having hit her head on a river rock attempting to cross to Terabithia by herself. The boy knows in his heart that he has betrayed his friend, as have her parents, his parents, and his teacher especially. In his grief, the boy does not turn to his teacher or to his or her parents (all of whom he forgives, as they are grief stricken as he is), but rather to his younger sister, who is also a talented artist and who looks up to him as a role model. The boy, upon learning that his friend is dead, takes down the rope swing from which his friend fell, and recruits his sister to help him build a sturdy wooden bridge. The brother introduces his little sister to the world of Terabithia—they will travel by bridge to create and paint their world together.

In this story, a young boy and girl experience betrayal on multiple levels—and in multiple shades of gray. The boy comes to understand that betrayal does not have to be malicious or intentional to be deadly—that unintentional negligence, misperceptions, and selfishness are also forms of betrayal. Also, the boy forgives himself and the adults who betray him, vowing not to make the same betrayal again.

As an adult, on multiple occasions I have consciously moved forward from painful betrayals by identifying intimately with the boy of *Bridge to Terabithia*—even pretending that I am him to help me distance myself from my pain and make less impulsive (thus wiser) choices. When I am accused of betraying another or find that I have been betrayed, I review the history of the betrayed relationship. When misperceptions, negligence, or selfishness are at play—as opposed to willful malice—I try to forgive the person or people who betrayed me. As the betrayer, I vow to be less selfish and more attentive in my present and future relationship—that I might see others and myself more accurately.

- **Louis Sachar’s *Holes***

I first read *Holes* the year it was first published. I was 23 years old. I have read this again at least ten more times since, and even watched a terrible Disney movie based on this book (terrible, but hilariously terrible adaptation of the book, so bad it was almost good!).

This book has affected me more profoundly than any other book I have read as an adult. Between the ages of 13 and 20 I was forced to live in foster homes, group homes, residential treatment centers, and other children's shelters of various sort. As an adult, between 18 and 20, I lived in two halfway houses for young adults. Between these years, I was psychiatrically hospitalized on
more than 25 occasions, for brief periods of time. Fortunately, I was never involved in the
juvenile justice system, as I was never charged with or convicted of a crime.
The ordeal that Stanley Yelnats, age 14, undergoes in Camp Greenlake in many ways reflects
many of my experiences in the foster care/group home system as a young teenager and young
adult. Stanley discovers that Camp Greenlake—a place where he is sentenced to be rehabilitated
for a crime he was convicted of but did not commit—is operated by dangerous, abusive, and
outright criminal staff who sadistically torture their teenage charges in pursuit of monetary
gain. This has been my experience. Down to the very details, as fantastical and bizarre as they
are, this story reflects my experiences both very literally and metaphorically as well.
I was 26 when my attorney settled a lawsuit on my behalf against an organization that operated a
terribly abusive group home. This group home, where I lived between the ages of 19 and 20, was
the last group home I ever resided in. I have lived on my own, happily and successfully, ever
since. The suit, filed when I was only 21, dragged in court for five years before settling on the
eve of the day it was going to go to trial. The story broke headlines in the local newspaper and
made the second page of a newspaper that covered the major metropolitan area. I and three other
plaintiffs (other residents of this group home) were awarded several million dollars to be divided
among us. After taxes and attorney fees, I walked away with a substantial amount of cash.
_Holes_ ends when an attorney investigates Camp Greenlake, discovers the crimes being
committed, and shuts it down—freeing the children permanently. Stanley walked away from
Camp Greenlake with a cool million dollars. He and another boy at the camp shared the money,
and the actions of both throughout the story were pivotal in their gaining their fortune and
shutting the place down. Like Stanley, I played a pivotal role in the lawsuit that exposed the
crimes committed by the organization that operated the group home where I and others were
severely abused. Like Stanley, I walked away from this group home, both literally and
figuratively, a free woman with a small fortune.
The weirdest, coolest aspect of _Holes_ was that it was very funny in places, and the irony
throughout it was multi-leveled and complex. At Camp Greenlake, Stanley, although he is
innocent of the crime for which he has been convicted (stealing a pair of shoes from a famous
baseball player, shoes which were to be auctioned to benefit a shelter for homeless children)
discovers that he is guilty of being a selfish, lazy person.
Stanley and his friend Zero, unlike the other kids, are the only ones to recognize that no matter what crimes they and others have committed, their abusive treatment is undeserved. The rest of the kids, having known nothing but neglect and abuse in their lives, are brainwashed to believe that they deserve the punishment that Camp Greenlake is dishing out. WORSE—they buy the LIE that the punishment at Camp Greenlake is meant to help them.

Like Stanley, I was one of the few kids in the "System" to recognize that the treatment I and others received was undeserved, and not intended to help us, no matter what lies we were told, about how the "System" was intended for our "benefit." Many of my peers believed that they deserved the abusive treatment they received, and the system was only trying to help them. Like Stanley, I never believed this, even for a second. I always knew I was being screwed, and like Stanley, I felt very powerless to do anything about it.

At Camp Greenlake, Stanley discovers that his true crimes—his character flaws—are far more dangerous to society than stealing a pair of shoes. His selfishness and lack of discipline almost led to the death of his friend Zero, whom Stanley must ultimately rescue from staff who intend to shoot him and bury him in a hole that Stanley has dug. Stanley, during his nine month ordeal, becomes less selfish, more giving, and more disciplined in his character. I too, although I did not deserve the abuse I experienced, became less selfish, and more disciplined as I realized that these character flaws were my most serious crimes. When my lack of courage at the group home nearly got my friend killed by the sex offender who managed our house—I knew I had to be braver and go to the police and to the media to seek help. Also, it was because of MY actions at that group home that my friend almost got killed (I won't go into details here, but I definitely set her up for the assault, intentionally or not) and it was MY responsibility to get her out of danger.
Andrew

- *The Hobbit* immersed me in a magical world, and gave me a sense of wonder. The setting is Middle Earth, an imaginary place with wizards, elves, dwarves, dragons, and other fantastic creatures. Middle Earth is magical because of the wonderful atmosphere created by Tolkien. The hobbit is Bilbo Baggins, a homebody who is persuaded to join a wizard and a band of dwarves on a marvelous quest. They travel through many lands, and must deal with trolls, goblins, elves, and a dragon. I first read it at the age of 18, during my first semester of college, and have read it several more times since then.

- *Lord of the Rings* is also set in Middle Earth. The evil wizard Saruman is preparing to destroy Middle Earth. The main character is Bilbo’s nephew Frodo, who embarks on a perilous journey to Mount Doom, where he must cast a magic ring into the fire. Good can triumph over evil only if Frodo succeeds in his quest. *Lord of the Rings* is an epic story, and is both deeper and darker than the *Hobbit*. The book affected me deeply and hinted at deep meanings in life, including higher purpose, connections to antiquity, and a common struggle of good against evil. I read it shortly after finishing *The Hobbit*.

- *Starman Jones* is a coming of age science fiction novel, in which a young hillbilly goes to space and realizes his dream to become an astrogater. It resonated strongly with me and gave me optimism. My first reading of *Starman Jones* was at the age of 19, as I was embarking on a new life adventure at college. I’ve read the book at least a dozen times, and it still has some of the same effect on me.

- A.A. Milne’s *Winnie the Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner* invited me into an enchanting world, and brought me peace and happiness. Pooh’s world contains charming, gentle creatures who find adventure and happiness in the simplest of activities. I discovered these books on a friend’s bookshelf when I was 24 years old. I soon read them and the related books of poetry. I read some of the poems and fragments of the stories again over the next year. I reread *Winnie the Pooh* and *The House at Pooh* twice within the last year.

- J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series was very captivating. It tells the adventures of Harry and his friends at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Harry is an orphan whose destiny is intertwined with that of the evil wizard Lord Voldemort. Harry must eventually
defeat Voldemort in order to survive. I’ve read each book at least twice, and was completely lost in his world, which is populated by vivid characters, both good and bad. Life is a mixture of humor, adversity, and adventure. All things seem possible when I’m in his world. My favorite Harry Potter books are probably the first, third and last. The first book is *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, in which Harry discovers he’s a wizard and escapes a life of misery. I like the book because of its portrayal of his difficult life, the delightful manner in which he discovers his true identity, and his passage of discovery upon entering his new world. The third book is *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, which had an air of mystery for me. The series finale was *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, which consisted of a quest for the main characters and made anything seem possible.
Solaris

J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*
J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Silmarillion*
C.S. Lewis’s *Out of the Silent Planet*
Cordwainer Smith’s science fictions stories (collected)
Stanislaw Lem’s *Tales of Pirx the Pilot*

- I first read *Lord of the Rings* in Polish. The first Polish edition was not illustrated, but it had cover art by Stasys Eidrigevicius; that cover fascinated me when I was a child, long before I read the book. So when I read, the most important thing was imagining Middle Earth in the way suggested by the cover. It was very different from our reality: the land was dark and full of unknown, empty landscapes. The most important image in the book for me was a path leading through dark, empty fields. But the land was not depressing or threatening; its most important quality was mystery and anticipation. When I read, characters and objects emerged from the dark, and then departed. I remember that they (characters and objects) somehow refused to be meaningful, i.e. they did not have the meanings intended by Tolkien: Gandalf was not good, the hobbits were not friendly, and the bad guys were not really bad or threatening. Instead, they were all somehow fascinating and enigmatical, i.e. I did not know what to think about them, but I felt some very important mystery in them. So I started to do walking at night (late evenings, more likely, but I do not remember), to experience the same thing. I remember not being afraid of darkness then, and I remember the same intense feeling of anticipation and excitement I had when I read Tolkien. Those were very important moments for me. I remember talking about it to my sister, who had similar feelings about it. She said it was the only interesting thing about fantasy for her, and she refused to read *The Silmarillion*, or any other fantasy book, because it did not bring such feelings and visions.

Since then, I have an enduring feeling that my life is a walk in the dark, but the dark is not threatening; there are no horror movies in it. What I feel is rather some sort of a call from the darkness; it is inviting and mysterious at the same time. And it is vast, an incredibly vast, empty space. There is a bright side to life, too, like social life and family, but it seems unimportant, tedious and absurd in comparison with that darkness.
Sometimes I feel that music and visual arts could explain it better than words, but reading Tolkien made it most vivid. I also remember that the feeling was less intense every time I read *Lord of the Rings*.

The positive experience: any of those walks in the dark. These were isolated experiences. Later on, walking in the dark did not bring the same positive emotions again. Nowadays I walk in the dark only when I have to. But the walks had a long term effect, because I remember them as some of the most important and happy moments in my life. I remember those emotions (amazement, elation, a quiet joy, a touch of fear). Sometimes I feel the same when I do some intellectual activity which involves a mystery, i.e. when I must concentrate and understand something incomprehensible, especially in science or in a complicated text. But the emotion is weaker then. I think enchantment is a good word; I feel amazed and petrified at the same time, and then the feeling ends, or disappears, suddenly. Music does it, too. I think those walks taught me a certain type of joy of thinking: the ability to find the world (even very ordinary things) amazing, mysterious and extraordinary. The attitude is not only intellectual, because it extends on people; I may not be a good friend, but I listen very carefully and I am usually amazed, even when I do not sympathize or understand.

No. of times reread: three times in Polish and two or three in English, not counting shorter passages.

- Reading *Silmarillion* was much more conventional, i.e. I did not so much concentrate on images and darkness. Instead, I read for characters and plots. I also remember that the images I saw when reading were very similar to the commonly accepted vision of fantasy world, i.e. they looked like ordinary heroic fantasy art, or like American fantasy movies. But I did not mind, because what was important for me were the love stories and the eventual downfall of Beleriand. (The *Silmarillion* is a series of stories, like legends, with different characters and themes, but all linked to the downfall of Beleriand, a country threatened by evil forces and eventually unable to defend itself because of feuds and hereditary curses. The downfall lasts several generations, and has several temporary reversals. The general story is bleak and incongruous, rather like an Icelandic saga. Individual legends are very different, but more or less related to the general theme.) I experienced very strong emotions: joy, pride, elation, self-assurance (as if I was fighting
a winning battle), but also despair, fear, and sadness. I remember that I did not have to
read whole stories, the intensity of those feelings did not depend on following entire
plots. Sometimes it took a few lines, a description of a character, or a narrative comment
about the background. I think Silmarillion created much of my emotional life, the
sentimental side of it. I also think it made me believe in destiny and doom, both in
personal and collective life.

The positive experience: I remember when I realized that those things will never ever
happen to me, no matter what. By events I mean events in the book. No particular events,
although love plots were perhaps more important than other ones. Even when I was a
teenager, I genuinely believed that somehow it would be possible to live in that world. I
believed there is a passage or door of sorts, somewhere. I really wanted somehow to
travel to Beleriand and live an exciting life there, taking part in great battles, traveling
across the land, and finding the love of my life. Then almost immediately I came to the
obvious conclusion that I can have very similar emotions in my real life, which was a
solace of sorts. Most of those legends were about love or about heroism. Obviously, with
time I would get a fair share of both, like most people do in everyday life, and I was
beginning to realize that in my late teens.

No. of times reread: two times in Polish and three in English, but I read fragments of it
time and again for years. Reading Silmarillion in English was very difficult initially, but
it taught me to read slowly and patiently for the beauty of language.

- Reading C.S. Lewis always had religious undertones for me; the Narnia books were
  actually recommended by priests who taught religion instruction when I was a kid. I
  remember I did not like the Narnia books, not because of any anti-religious sentiment, but
  because I just did not like them; they were boring. But Out of the Silent Planet was
different. I read it when I was nineteen; I was losing my religion. The book did not bring
back any religious feeling, but I remember an intense admiration for the faith and belief
shown in the book. I think the most important moment was when I read about the space
flight and landing on Mars. I remember that feeling of falling, actually falling down,
through interplanetary space. (Usually when I think about space travel, it’s obviously
about going up and flying, but somehow Lewis managed to describe it as helpless falling
down. In terms of physics, I suppose, it is one and the same thing.) Then, when they land
on Mars, I remember that terrible brightness which blinds them. My feelings, when I read that, were religious; it was a kind of awe. At that stage, reading for the first time, I did not realize that the human characters are going to meet angels and some sort of God on Mars (i.e. that the novel is a Christian allegory). I just felt awe confronted with the ominous and mysterious landscape described by Lewis. When Ransom and the others encounter the angels, the awe was still there, but then I sort of felt that this awe is deteriorating into making friends with angels. In subsequent sections of the novel, there are many conversations between humans and different orders of angels. In many of those conversations, the angels are described in ecstatic terms, as wonderful and extraordinary beings beyond human understanding, and beyond human capacity for wonder. This made an impression on me, too, but not as much as the landscape, because the angels were too human, and the ecstatic descriptions were not convincing. This is how I felt: the author was cheating, trying to convince me that very ordinary characters are extraordinary. So, since then I feel that awe, even though I am not a religious person. When I think about this novel now, and having talked about it with other readers, I know that this was probably C.S. Lewis’s intention: God and angels are similar to people. Consequently, religious persons tend to treat other people with reverence and respect, and interpersonal contact for them is similar to religious worship (to an extent, of course, but still). This, at least, is true about the other readers I talked to. They were not impressed by landscapes so much.

The positive experience: the religious revelation, as described above. I have never had any other religious revelations. I envy people who do. There are friends who tell me they have their doubts, but choose to believe because it makes them better, stronger persons. I wish I could choose in this way. I have great respect for all religions and religious persons, including individual and sectarian differences within one religion. They have something I am missing, and I think they are more mature persons, or more complete persons.

No. of times reread: two times, only in Polish.

- Reading Cordwainer Smith I had the feeling that he was my kindred spirit. His imagination and emotions are very similar to mine. (Though the real author, in biographical documents, does not seem like me at all, and I would probably not like him
Reading Smith was again about images, e.g., a planet with atmosphere so turbulent than animals and plants actually float in it like in the sea, and two astronauts who cling to the ground get swallowed by a flying whale. I do not know, what is so fascinating about this image and other bizarre images, but somehow they made me feel delighted, and made my real life somehow less significant, so that I look at ordinary events (including stressful ones) with more distance. Much of Smith’s images are about disfigured bodies and physical torture, and about fear of damage to the body. This was very important for me; I have personal reasons I can share in a longer piece of writing. (Nothing unusual; it was about going and not going to the dentist.)

The positive experience: it gave some meaning to my fear of dental treatment and to physical suffering I experienced. The meaning came years after the suffering; the book did not help me through it, but it helped me to think about it and to give it a meaning. This is difficult to explain. The meaning of dental treatment is to cure a disease. But what was the meaning of overcoming the greatest fear I could imagine? Did it make me a better person? Did it teach me courage? Believe it or not, such answers seem trivial and irrelevant when I remember that fear; it was really maddening and it took me beyond myself, beyond language, beyond understanding.

It was a very bad experience, but it was also an extraordinary one, possibly the most extraordinary thing that ever happened to me. I had to go through that fear repeatedly: usually I would postpone dental treatment until it was too late (this meant a year or so), and the remnants of a tooth had to be removed surgically. Obviously, I had to dissimulate, hide my pain and decaying teeth. I have no idea how I managed to fool my parents for so long and so many times. Eventually it cost me four teeth. This must sound terrible for you (you being American), and it is equally frightening for most people in Poland, too. The important point is, however, that when I write about fear and extraordinary experience, I mean the relatively short time of a dental surgery, not the years of losing my teeth. (Losing my teeth was a different, wider story, and it has nothing to do with reading Cordwainer Smith.)

When the fear was gone (when I was 19 I realized that it was somehow gone), I thought it best not to think about it again. And then I found this American author who wrote about exactly the same fear (very intensive fear of surgical intervention in one’s own body). For
Smith, terrible surgeries and maddening fear are necessary parts of space travel. In other words, he wrote that through those terrors people would go to the stars. I thought it was a wonderful idea. Of course, it can be expressed in more sophisticated terms: I have learnt deep secrets of my soul, or extended my consciousness. But the analogy with science fiction really captured my imagination. I have had my own personal space travel; I have been through a great adventure. This is a positive meaning of this experience.

No. of times reread: five or six, plus many more times for individual stories.

Pirx is my hero and role model even today. He is more or less like Joseph Conrad’s heroes: unassuming, loyal, modest, a bit obtuse, hard-working, emotionally withdrawn, brave. A man, but not a macho. Or so I thought. Nowadays I think he is impossible (both logically and to be with), but I still like him. There are ten stories in the cycle, which begins when Pirx is a cadet and ends shortly before his retirement. His career is rather uneventful, but he has several strange adventures, which leave him puzzled and perhaps saddened. For instance, some stories are about robots that behave like people. In many stories Pirx saves his life by reacting irrationally, relying on emotions and premonitions, or uncanny feelings, and by doing odd things. Usually the conclusion is that he does not know why he reacted in a particular way, and he does not understand what happened to him in the critical moments. One thing about Pirx still matters for me, though: he is immensely curious and unprejudiced. He is ready to accept irrationality, to try absurd solutions, to rely on intuition and emotion, and it saves his life on numerous occasions. Irrationality and emotions notwithstanding, he tries to understand the world and himself afterwards (i.e. he tries to understand what happened and why he acted the way he did).

Reading the Pirx stories was not only because of the fascination with the character. In every story there is a riddle, which cannot be solved rationally, or a danger, which kills rational people, and Pirx finds a solution or survives because he answers with unknown to the unknown. The one unknown is a situation, or external world in general, and the other is intuition, emotions, and irrational impulses, which influence his decisions. For instance, in one story he does internship on a base whose previous crew died in an unexplained accident. There are only two people in the crew. At one moment, Pirx notices that his companion is missing, and wants to search for him outside. But before he does, he realizes that the kitchen looks exactly like it did after the accident, when the
previous crew was found dead outside the base. So Pirx starts to hesitate, and says to himself he must do something nobody sensible would do now, because the dead crew probably did the sensible thing. He does not do anything impressive or clever, but he manages to save his and the other astronaut’s life. These moments are fascinating, and I keep rereading them. This book had a great influence on me; I wanted to be scientist or technician (or a pilot) because of the book. I spent two years studying physics and mathematics because of this book, but somehow I was not cut out to be a scientist, so I chose a different career. This is probably the most important book of them all for me, but it is so exotic that I it might be useless for an American reader. (There is an English translation, though.)

The positive experience: maybe my first year at the technical university. I say maybe, because that was a year when many great new things were happening in my life, and the joy of being like Pirx was only one of them. The effect of reading Pirx is long lasting because it shaped my attitudes. I believe that chance and intuition (or instinct) are as important as predictability and logic, even (or perhaps especially) in science and technology. This is philosophical, intellectual, but it also works in everyday life. For example, sometimes I tend to rely on things working out well by themselves, especially when there is no time or a situation is too complicated. Or, in similar conditions, I tend to rely on chance, and make irrational, illogical decisions, or I suddenly do something that seems totally irrelevant. Sometimes this approach works, like a touch madness which turns out to be just the right solution afterwards. When people I work with find something ‘obvious,’ ‘common sense,’ or ‘logical,’ I tend to say ‘hey, wait...’. This attitude tends to work well with machines (I mean mechanical ones, not computers) and inanimate objects, e.g., when I do house chores or work in the garden. It also works well in my research work.

No. of times reread: more than ten times.
In every one of these cases, reading the book caused me to lose sense of time and become completely part of the world I was reading about. I could see everything the author described, felt I knew the people, loved traveling the world, and did not want to leave.

- My first encounter with fantasy: at age 15, my English teacher handed me J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and said “here, I think you will like this.” I read it straight through in two-and-a-half days, hardly stopping to eat or sleep. I then immediately started it over and read it through again, and when I finished that reading, read it again. Basically I read the book for two weeks. I was entirely caught up in the world of Middle-earth and did not want to leave. It seemed so beautiful there, and the people were honest and loyal and brave – a sharp contrast to junior high school.

- My first encounter with sci-fi: reading Frank Herbert’s *Dune* the same summer. The same teacher lent it to me. Again, I was totally caught up in another world, the desert world of Dune, home to giant sandworms and storms that etch flesh from bone, and also the only source of the psychoactive spice mélange, the key to a galactic empire. I was intrigued by Herbert’s ability to extrapolate from our current society to one hundreds of thousands of years in the future.

- I was in high school when I encountered Ursula Le Guin for the first time and read *A Wizard of Earthsea*. From the first I loved her spare yet poetic language and her ability to evoke character. I fell a little bit in love with Ged, the young wizard who learns a vital lesson about how pride can bring down even the most powerful, and I loved her take on magic: that it is the power of the Word. As a budding writer myself, that idea had great appeal to me. Later I came to appreciate the Jungian and Taoist undertones to the story; I wasn’t consciously aware of them at 17, but they resonated regardless. Ged’s most important battle is not with an Evil Lord or a dragon, but with his own shadow; he must learn to embrace his own dark side in order to be whole.

- Le Guin’s *The Lathe of Heaven* was the next book I read of hers. I still regard the opening paragraphs as some of the most beautiful imagery I have ever come across. Le Guin is also a poet, and her prose often reads like poetry. The opening paragraphs of *Lathe of Heaven* are
one long metaphor likening the sleeping mind to a jellyfish floating through the ocean of night, and awakening to being stranded in the hard light of day. The concept of the story—that a man could change reality through dreams—was fascinating.

- Apparently Le Guin and I share a deep fascination with journeys over snow. I found out later that she—like me—loves to read about polar exploration. I encountered her *The Left Hand of Darkness* in college in the early 70s. I was a feminist then and I found the idea of a hermaphroditic society intriguing, but it was the long journey the protagonists take across a barren waste of snow and ice that riveted me. I was there, pulling the sled for hours each day with them, lying in the tent at night hearing the snow rasp against the tent wall.

- Apparently it’s not just the sound of snow on a tent, but rain on the windows too. I often re-read Le Guin’s “Two Delays on the Northern Line” in *The Compass Rose* to help me fall asleep. There is one paragraph where the protagonist goes to sleep in a glassed-in porch with rain beating on the windows, and this never fails to help me sleep.

- When Le Guin’s *Tehanu*, the fourth book in her Earthsea series, came out in 1990, my marriage was on the rocks. I identified with Tenar (the young priestess whom Ged had rescued from a bleak and hopeless life in the second book of the Earthsea series, *The Tombs of Atuan*) and fell even more deeply in love with Ged’s integrity and compassion. I still love him. In *Tehanu*, Ged’s and Tenar’s love story finally is fulfilled—with a lot of musings on the difference between male and female “magic.”

- Sometime in my 30s, it must have been, I came across Vonda McIntyre’s *Dreamsnake*. I loved the heroine, a healer who uses snakes in a post-apocalyptic world. She was feisty and intelligent and very believable. It didn’t hurt that there was a nice love story there too.

- Tanith Lee’s *Birthgrave* series also sucked me in when I was in my 30s. I can’t say I liked any of the characters, even the protagonists, but the world and the characters of the unnamed heroine, the men she met and loved, and her son Vazkor were so vivid to me I could picture it all clearly, and the storyline kept me turning pages until I was done. Briefly, a woman awakes inside a volcano not knowing who she is, slowly realizes through a series of
adventures that she is the last of a lost race of godlike beings, abuses her powers, eventually learns humility, and in so doing comes to know and accept herself.

- Joan Vinge’s *The Snow Queen* was another can’t-put-it-down book. I loved all the different plot threads that are skillfully woven together for an exciting climax. Moon seems to be a simple peasant girl but turns out to be the clone-daughter of the evil reigning queen of a backward planet that is really controlled by a galactic bureaucracy only interested in exploiting the planet. Accidentally kidnapped offworld, Moon sets in motion a series of events that will free her planet and place her on the throne, while at the same time solving the centuries-old mystery of the mysterious, apparently omniscient sybils and the seal-like mers that live only in Tiamat’s seas and have been hunted almost to extinction. I cared about Moon, her lover Sparks, the offworld police officers Jerusha and BZ, the ecologist Miroe Ngenet, the sybils, and indeed most of the characters. Must have read this in my 40s.

- John Varley’s *Titan* series was pure fun and hard to put down. Centaurs in space and three very spunky female heroines who overthrow the “goddess” who controls a small planet – terrific. Varley’s imagination is impressive and he writes wonderful, believable heroines. Must have been in my 40s for this one too.

- C.J. Cherryh’s *Gate* series also enthralled me, mostly for the love story at the center (although Cherryh is extremely oblique and only drops tiny hints about it – one has to read between the lines with her) between an extremely likable strong hero and an enigmatic heroine. As a Star Trek fan I enjoyed how Cherryh envisioned her gates as a twist on the idea of warps through space and her exploration of the consequences of using them for time travel. Again, read in my 40s.

- I discovered Terry Pratchett in my 50s. Pratchett’s fantasy is tongue-in-cheek and shot through with wisdom. And he writes fantastic women that one can believe in completely. *Wyrd Sisters* is a lovely twist on witches that I couldn’t put down and re-read often. Granny Weatherwax, the head witch, is beautifully pictured as a no-nonsense old lady who lives quietly and only demonstrates her astonishing powers when there is a real need for them; Nanny Ogg is hilarious as her sidekick, a raucous, bawdy old lady who finds the dirty
entendre in everything and incidentally can whip up a mean charm when needed; and their apprentice Magrat, who means so well but has a lot to learn, is a delight.

- After Tolkien and his ilk, finally someone wondered, what if Elves aren’t nice? Steven Brust’s *Taltos* series, which I found in my 50s, explores a world in which humans are second-class citizens in a society dominated by tall, thin, long-lived, and arrogant beings with magical powers. The human hero, Vlad Taltos, is snarky and likeable, and I buy each new book in the series as soon as it comes out and wait eagerly for the next.

- Marlowe meets Merlin: Jim Butcher’s *Dresden* series is another new series and I jump on each new book even more eagerly than I do on Brust’s. Harry Dresden is a wizard-slash-private eye who spits out wisecracks as easily as he throws spells, and is even more likeable for the soft gooey heart under the wisecracks. I’m a bit in love with Harry, frankly.

- Going back in time a bit: Mary Stewart’s *Crystal Cave* series re-imagined the Merlin story so beautifully. I read them all as they appeared in my 20s. The first book especially was impossible to put down. I was back in Arthurian Britain the entire time.

- Dan Simmon’s *Hyperion* sucked me in a few years ago. On a world where the deadly Shrike roams, a 9-foot-tall being of metal spikes who tears its victim to pieces, six very different pilgrims set out to find the secret of the Time Tombs, mysterious buildings that are traveling backwards in time. Meanwhile galactic society is threatened by Outsiders, humans who have been living out in space so long they have evolved into something not so human anymore, and by the artificial intelligences of the Core, a futuristic Internet. I couldn’t wait to find out what would happen, and loved all the many witty cultural references (one character is a clone of the poet John Keats, and many of the other characters have names that are taken from Keats’s poems or people he knew). I was intrigued by the future Simmons imagines, where everyone is constantly connected to the Core through implants, people can walk from planet to planet through “farcaster” doors (the rich even have them in their houses and have rooms on different planets), some spaceships are giant trees surrounded by a forcefield, and Earth was destroyed years ago – or has it only been kidnapped?

- I’ve also read all of J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series – not the best-written books, but who cares when the world she created was so believable and the characters so wonderful? I want
to be able to shop in Diagon Alley, and wish I could have gone to Hogwarts (the school for wizards and witches). I can believe they actually exist.

- Naomi Novik’s *Temeraire* series that has just come out in the last couple of years is a wonderful revisioning of the Horatio Hornblower stories – England is fighting the war with Napoleon, but in addition to ships and armies, they also have an air corps of men riding giant dragons! That talk! Who wouldn’t want to live in that world? I do!

- Jacqueline Carey’s *Kushiel* series is another amazing new series. Carey’s grasp of mythology is amazing as she creates an alternate medieval Europe/Near East/Africa with wonderful characters and intricate, satisfying plots. Phedre is an *anguisette*, a courtesan who gets pleasure from pain. She also picks up languages quickly and has a gift for intrigue, all of which draws her into plots at the highest levels. She has adventures that take her to the farthest corners of her world, and survives trials no ordinary human could bear – thanks in part to her constant companion Joscelin the warrior-priest, whose vows make him the one man Phedre can’t seduce. I’m in love with Joscelin, and I wish I could have dinner with most of the characters Carey draws and perhaps, go worship with them in a temple of Elua. Just visiting their world is a delight. Not only that, but Carey’s take on Jesus made me more of a Christian than I have ever been.
Ianárwen

*The Tale of Peter Rabbit, Mrs Tiggywinkle, Squirrel Nutkin etc* (Beatrix Potter); *Magic Faraway Tree/Pixie type books, The Brer Rabbit books* (Enid Blyton).

Date/Age read: 1963-7/(5-9 yrs). Times read: Mostly once, some 2-5 times.

The *Peter Rabbit* books were the first ‘proper’ story books I was exposed to at school and they were a major motivation for me to learn to read. I fell in love with the book layout itself, as they were just the right size for a 5/6 year old hand, not too long, not too many hard words and the most beautiful pictures on every page spread. I cannot think of a nicer way to begin to appreciate books and reading even now.

One of my favourites was *The Tale of Mrs Tiggywinkle*. This was because there was a little girl in the story and she had blonde hair – like me. There was no horrible Mr McGregor wanting to put Peter Rabbit in a pie, just a nice laundry lady who looked after Lucy and gave her tea and cakes – I was enchanted and that’s where my predisposition for fantasy began, with talking animals and small children having unlikely adventures. The physical and aesthetic quality of the imagery too was influential and today my tastes still include natural landscapes and animal forms – although they’re mostly not anthropomorphic anymore.

I preferred Enid Blyton’s fairy stories to the school books or the *Famous 5* or *Secret 7* series. One fantasy short story does stand out as I loved to draw and this was about two children who were in trouble at school because they couldn’t ‘do’ patterns. The children had a dream where Jack Frost gave them magnifying glasses so they could look at snowflakes—and of course when they went to class, they both did lovely patterns.

I got really excited about this, as I used to like kaleidoscopes too, so as I read I was seeing snowflakes in frosty pale colours like faintly coloured glass and I think I may have dreamed about something similar too around that time. I felt really happy ‘watching’ all these really pale colours and shapes floating in front of my face. Snowflakes are also a motif I’m still fond of using as an adult making Xmas cards etc.

The *Brer Rabbit* books are a bit blurry but I remember the *Briar Bush* story in particular. I remember it because it was possibly the first time I laughed out loud whilst I was reading. I loved how Brer Rabbit outwitted Brer Fox and/or Bear and I read it to my younger sisters.
sometimes, which was also a first, so I suppose that also started me off on wanting to share a
good book with others.

**Fairy Tales (mainly Brothers Grimm, some Perrault. All in anthologies).**

Date/Age read: 1964-7/(6-9 yrs). Times read: Favourites approx. 5-10 times.

These were all illustrated children’s books or had lovely covers and I like looking at the pictures. When I could read myself I used to sit down with my younger sisters and we’d read the books together. I sometimes used to draw scenes or characters, often chosen by one of my sisters. We all grew up enjoying our reading, although naturally our tastes started to differ as we grew older.

Reading became my hobby effectively and I found myself increasingly wrapped up in books instead of playing with other kids in my free time and as I got older (8 onwards) I preferred to spend my school holidays in my bedroom reading, rather than riding bikes or going to the park. I didn’t need to go out in a way, because I had far better playgrounds, based on the illustrations sometimes, but also in my own head. I began to, not copy the picture books exactly, but I often wanted to draw parts of a story that weren’t illustrated, so I began to make my own drawings and paintings and then, as my reading got more sophisticated and the illustrations less common I drew characters mostly but landscapes too.

**Classical Greek Mythology: Odyssey & Iliad** (various anthologies and adaptations from Homer). Date/Age read: 1965 on/(Age 7 on). Times read: Between 3-10 times.

Similar situation to the fairytales really and of course as I learned more of the subject and the cultures, I began to make connections between mythology and folktales and also some Bible and Christian fables.

*Some of the mythical beasts particularly Centaurs, Pegasus (lots of flying dreams here) and the Kraken I found enthralling and I devoured every book I could find. Stories like Odysseus and Circe or the Sirens, the goddess Athene, Hades and Persephone, and the heroes Heracles, Theseus and Perseus legends fired my imagination and also had me reaching for my sketch books. The exotic animals drew me in most of all. Aside from the art aspect I was also drawn to the hero archetypes and as I studied history the Trojan War was more an academic interest, but I still preferred myths to facts.*
Norse & Celtic Mythology (various anthologies); Arthurian legend.
Date/Age read: 1965 on/(Age 7 on). Times read: Between 3-10 times.

These seemed more raw and powerful, especially the Nordic ones. Again my reading gave the historical side a boost and the myths seemed ‘grittier’ as the Viking fact and sagas fantasy seemed to mix better for me.

I was drawn to Woden, Thor, the Midgard Serpent, the Rainbow, Asgard and Valkyries. I was fascinated with the thought of these people in small wooden vessels sailing the cold seas to Iceland and beyond – more heroism and physical ‘bravery’.

The Celtic myths were more akin to fairytales to me with giants like Fin Mac Cool, Leprachuans/Sidhe, Bran the Blessed, Cú Chulainn and the Children of Lir. That tale of transmogrification was spookily beautiful but comforting in a way as the swans stayed together so the children were not on their own.

Arthurian legend and the knight’s code for the Grail Quest were also highly attractive and noble. Merlin and Morgan Le Fey and their ambiguous loyalties and ability to disguise their own or other people’s appearance enthralled me. The darker and incestuous side of the story didn’t impact on me at first, as the stories were adapted for young reader consumption.

I lived in SW England, so that also made the stories vivid.

Water Babies (Charles Kingsley). Date/Age read: 1965-7/(7-9yrs). Times read: Twice, maybe 3 times.

Water Babies in retrospect had a big effect on me though I found it thoroughly bewildering in places and was aghast when Tom was abused and drowned. From there it was mesmerising as the caddis flies befriended the Water Baby Tom. I read it ‘straight’ as a piece of fiction and though I was aware of the reformist themes (the chimney sweep element and when Tom cries because the girl says he’s dirty were heart-rending) and I was much more taken with the natural history aspects – even the description at the very beginning when Tom and his master are walking to the mansion in the dawning completely wrapped me up, so I could ‘see’ the dew and pink/golden clouds and hear the birdsong.

The moral tone did of course sink in and Mrs Bedonebyasyoudid was a bit scary but ultimately reassuring – it certainly made me more conscious of being ‘good’ and aware that I should never knowingly be nasty to others. So a good influence there.
**Chronicles of Narnia: All 7 volumes (C.S. Lewis)).**

Date/Age read: 1966-73/(8-15yrs). Times read: Between 10-15 times (all).

Our teacher read to us most afternoons from *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*. I thought it was a very silly name for a book and compared to most of the others I still think it is – but it didn’t matter. I got my own copy from the library and by the time our teacher had finished reading it to us I was halfway through *Voyage of the DawnTreader* and thoroughly hooked on CS Lewis, who became my favourite author overnight virtually.

*I read them all over and over. They had all the elements I liked—Dryads, Centaurs, Dragons, talking animals (Reepicheep was my favourite although I also loved Bree and Hwin in *The Horse and His Boy*), trees too, and, for the first time—Marshwiggles!*

*In the summer I used to read them long past bedtime poking myself under the curtain by my bed until it got too dark to see the words. The Silver Chair and The Last Battle were my eventual favourites.*

*I liked the Silver Chair because of Puddleglum the Marshwiggle because he was so miserable but still a hero, just by being a loyal friend to Eustace and Jill. What clinched it was when he began to act very ‘cheerful’; he knew he was enchanted and deliberately burned his foot in the fire, so the pain would cancel the evil spell – I could almost smell the burnt skin and I cringed and had to stop reading for a few moments when I first got to that part as I felt a bit sick! The descriptions of their escape from the Underlands and the imps returning to their fiery homes were also very vivid.*

The Last Battle I took a while to get into, but it was the only one of the Chronicles that I seriously took in as a kind of morality tale. With the end of the world theme, one part struck me as a ‘just’ concept – of there being a heaven for everyone with a good heart, not just the followers of Aslan, but also the ‘evil’ deity Tash. There was an encounter with a ‘true believer’ who had served Tash with honour and he too was admitted to their version of paradise. And at the end of the book all the people from our world who had been to Narnia (except Susan who had decided it was a game) made it to Aslan’s Country. It was a comforting thought for me at the time, because I was beginning to have the rumblings of a crisis of faith as I prepared to go up to senior school.
The Lord of the Rings (J.R.R. Tolkien). Date/Age read: 1969 on/(Age 10 on). Times read: Lost count – more than 20 times.

My Aunt Jan, who was my reading mentor, gave me this huge paperback, as she couldn’t get on with all the weird names”. The cover artwork was by Pauline Baynes and so I took it and flipped through the pages – it wasn’t illustrated except for some maps and a couple of pages in the first part of the book, but that didn’t matter too much. I read the first chapter and got caught up very quickly, except for the references to a previous story, so I stopped and read the Foreword and the Prologue – something I had never bothered to do at all or not until after I had read a book. That explained it some more and so I went back to the book and I read Shadows of the Past and still I was confused with all the history, but it had gripped me then and I had to find out what Frodo was going to do with this horrible ring.

I was a quick reader but it took me a while to finish it and then I went straight back and read it again and then again.

Things that stood out in those first readings were the Elves flickering in and out of the story like stunningly bright ghosts—calm and noble and wise and brave; the Black Riders, who didn’t do anything that awful—just oozed malice and dread; the creepy moors with barrows – Dartmoor was on my doorstep and I found it very easy to picture the hobbits lost in the fog and the suffocating death-chamber; Moria – the darkness and the dreadful Watcher locking them in – the bones of Dwarves and Orcs – the fight around Balin’s Tomb and Frodo almost slain – the awful flight to the Bridge over a terrifyingly deep chasm; and then the Balrog . . .

I couldn’t put the book down, but when Gandalf fell I couldn’t go on. I was completely stunned, so I went back and read it again, four times in all before I could finish the remaining pages of that chapter. I cried with the Hobbits, Dwarf, Elf and Men. I put it down and cried myself to sleep and couldn’t pick it up again until the following evening. I was with them all the way now and wept for poor Boromir too, as he selflessly paid in blood for his fall into temptation, Gandalf’s return was miraculous, the Riders of Rohan were tough and brave, Gollum was as ruined and pitiable as he was vile and self-serving, Sam was the truest friend and Frodo so determined in his exhausted delirium, Eowyn was passionate and stubbornly brave in her despair, the Pellennor, awful and magnificent as the White City was burning and crumbling, The Morgul Vale, Cirith Ungol and Gorgoroth all so interminably horrible that I was amazed the two Hobbits could breathe let alone walk to the Cracks of Doom in the fire-mountain.
I fell in love and in dreadful empathy. I was in awe of the story, the characters and the landscapes that were painted and took on a life in my head and in my heart too. I read it over and over again quickly, then more slowly, lying on my bed and reading it quietly but aloud to myself, savouring the words and dialogue during one long summer holiday.

I’ve read better written books since, more exciting, more relevant to the world around me or more unusual, fey or better reasoned, but none of them spun the sheer magic and drew me down into the words and conjured images in quite the same way as this book has.

LotR became the cornerstone of my adult reading life that summer in 1969 and for a very long time nothing could match it. From 2005 my relationship to JRR Tolkien’s books changed significantly. I consider it more of a continuing expansive process, specifically involving online communities, but also in normal ‘one on one’ socialising and collaboration in daily off-line life and also in my professional interests. In a very real sense, the insights and inspiration I have found through reading and knowing LotR so well has turned my life around after a debilitating clinical depression and given me the commitment and strength to be happy and purposeful once more.


I read The Hobbit (TH) just under a year later after a new friend who had read that, but not LotR said it was ‘good’ so we both read the books on those recommendations. I was disappointed overall, but I was intrigued with some of the elements that tied in with LotR. This in the main related to some characters – Bilbo himself, Gandalf, the Eagles and Elrond in the prequel and in LotR. Bilbo not so much, as it was easy to recognise the party Bilbo in his first appearance but Gandalf and Elrond were different in nature in the first book, Elrond especially; he was simply an Elf-friend in TH rather than a top Elf, though he was still knowledgeable and powerful. I began to realise that there was a lot of background in both and how important language was to the author.

One thing that didn’t disappoint were the illustrations, which were by Tolkien himself and done in a very stylistic manner that suited the books – and he had done all the maps. This added another layer of interest for me that focussed on Tolkien himself rather than his writing. With TH I recognised the Nordic Myths influence more easily somehow and so I wasn’t too disappointed
that the story was just that. After the impact *LotR* had had, it was inevitable that I thought *TH* below my reading age, but reading them in the order I did set me off on looking at the mechanics of writing creatively and at stylistics. Tolkien was the first author I knew who could write well in several styles and, admiring him so much now, was at first overawed into thinking I would never be able to write so well, but then came to seriously study plots, motivation and background and how to fill a story, with texture and undertones that were emotive or descriptive.

*That was all intellectual of course. I did get taken up by the story – certainly with the Riddle Game with Gollum slotting into its rightful significance and Mirkwood, with the spiders and the Elves behaving far less benevolently than in *LotR*. Other highlights were the Trolls – horrible but funny. The action at the Lonely Mountain intrigued me as well, with how Bilbo, though seemingly disloyal to the Dwarves, did a brave and intelligent thing in taking the Arkenstone to the Men and Elves and tipping the balance of the hostilities in the nick of time when the Orcs and Wargs arrived. Beorn and his animal servants were also delightful though they were not anthropomorphic and far gentler than in Narnia, as Beorn, though still their Master, worked with them not over them.*

*The Pedestrian* (Ray Bradbury).

Date/Age read: 1974/(Age 16). Times read: Twice.

After my 16th birthday in between taking School Leaving Certificate exams and the summer holidays we were left at liberty and I gravitated to the School Library. I’d never used it much for fiction, but that last summer I started to look at other sections. Bored, I ended up in the sci-fi section as I’d ‘done’ the fantasy collection or didn’t like the authors. I took out an anthology and found a classic – *The Pedestrian* by Ray Bradbury that really appealed to me.

*It was such a banal concept, but I found it fascinating that behaviour that was entirely natural could become ‘outlawed’ – going out for a walk at night, when nobody else did. This was in 1974 and with 1984 only a decade away, Orwellian concepts were in vogue. I had realised that fiction didn’t have to be melodrama all the time and that mundane activities could take on meaningful or sinister aspects with undercurrents within the detail becoming important. The Pedestrian ‘spoke’ to me as I walked alongside the ill-fated hero through dark streets with silence all around, where humans sat absorbed in the flicker of TV screens and was outraged at the robot police who took the hero into custody for being so ‘strange’.***

A year later on my first non-family holiday and out of reading material, I picked up a book by Asimov – I, Robot. I skimmed the first paragraph (my acid test), liked it and had read half of it by lunchtime. The same day I bought The Rest of the Robots and Asimov was on my preferred list of authors.

With these short stories it was of course the humans who held my interest, but I’d never known a person like Susan Calvin – the nearest was Mr Spock and that analogy was fitting as robots are logical machines. Successful sci-fi literature, when it becomes real, proves its influence—we now live in a world with a robotics industry. Asimov’s writing, in contrast to some other authors I’ve listed, is coarser in some respects and more direct but it’s also humorous and sage. So Susan Calvin and Donovan and Powell were great companions in discovering his robot stories. Robopsychology proved an insightful concept and as we move towards AI in reality, prophetic too.

Another of Asimov’s invented sciences, psychohistory, from the Foundation Trilogy was also quasi-prophetic. Hari Seldon and The Mule were the two outstanding characters. The later novels were also intriguing in examining Hari Seldon’s youth. The cyclic aspect of history inevitably invites a psychological aspect for people don’t change too much in their physical and emotional motivation, no matter where technology takes them. This convinced me that you should never ignore the emotional and social needs of people and made me aware of the tendency to ‘dehumanise’ or expect people to fall into neat little boxes at work or play. I’d prefer the future to be less predictable and allow more freedom of expression and individualism.

So much for intellectual and conceptual takes. A specific Asimov story that shook me in one way or another was Nightfall, a short story in another collection, on another planet with several suns. This meant they always had a degree of daylight, except once every 6,000 yrs when there was a total eclipse. Their civilisations tended to last roughly as long. The basic concept was sound and of course the astrophysics was linked into the cultural catastrophes, as the planet literally went up in smoke as it fell into terrifying darkness. I got the shivers as the people who’d never had need of artificial lighting began to burn whatever they could lay their hands on….

The Gods Themselves was a novel-sized story that intrigued. The concept of a tri-morphic alien race caught my imagination with a fusion of three separate pupal and larval stages. Using
a Freudian approach with the Intellect, Emotion and Instinctual parts of the merged personality coming together in the final stage to make a combined Adult entity. This idea had appeal since the three components were equally important, as the transition to each level of growth was only achieved by all three contributing fully in the merging. The hero alien was in meltdown because all its components were unusual in taking on some of their fellows’ aspects. The Emo (female) was also very clever, the Intellect (male) had ungovernable urges and the Instinct (androgynous/parental) had emotional outbursts. I like my Aliens to be Aliens, not vaguely humanoid and found this a truly cerebral solution, despite the disappointing stereotyping.

Another short story in a different anthology, Stranger in Paradise, was also memorable, but also horrible. This told of a robotic brain development and involved a profoundly autistic child. The child’s brain was connected to the robot, destined for a hostile environment on Mercury where robots had to work unsupervised on the surface. The solution pointed to using organic brain relays. Pre-Robocop by several decades, the concept was repulsive yet humane too – the child at last had control of a ‘body’ in which he could finally function. The final passage showed the cyborg happily labouring away, freed from logic patterns and broken neural pathways. It was chilling to read but also merciful, even though a draconian method was used to solve a very human tragedy. This got me thinking that our experience of existence is not the only one that may be viable or justifiable...

Saga of the (Pliocene) Exiles, Intervention & Galactic Milieu Trilogy (Julian May).

Date/Age read: 1984 on/(Age 25 on). Times read: More than 5 times.

I found the mix of a future multi-cosmopolitan terran-alien culture with time travel into Earth’s prehistoric times (the Pliocene), where a barbaric metapsychic alien race (with heavy duty mind-powers) held human time-travellers in technological and procreative servitude, compulsive. Julian May became one of only two other authors I’d put on a par with Tolkien because of how her worlds are structured and well-woven into the real world; aside from the mental superpowers, the physics and social dynamics are dangerously close to believable, if the technology became possible. The mental superpowers were the key of course – there was telepathy with Farsensing; Psychokinesis; Coercion; Redaction – healing psychic powers sometimes warped into torture; and Creativity – illusions, shape-shifting and making fireballs out of thin air. This was a heady mix with powerful protagonist factions, mingling sci-fi and
fantasy. The most interesting aspect were these barbaric racially dimorphic hominid aliens. The ascendant prehistoric alien faction were tall and beautiful like the old gods and indeed had similar names – Velkonn, Epone, Thagdal (and his grandson Dagdal), Morigel, and twins Fian and Kuhal. The other aliens were less mind-powerful and had an aversion to humans. They were much smaller, gnome-like in appearance, or tall and over-muscular – like Ogres.

What Julian May achieves in essence is a sci-fi/fantasy theory on how our European mythologies and fairytales originated (and some Chariots of the Gods influence) with some aliens inter-breeding with time-travellers during the Pliocene where, in evolutionary terms, our ancestors were at super-chimpanzee level. And this caused the beginnings of not only a Fairy Tale society, but also an accelerated evolutionary path for Homo Sapiens and a possible explanation for the psychic abilities within the human race, which is developed in the later books that are all set in the future… The tetralogy is ‘inspiring’ as the genetic truth plays out imaginatively in the Saga and how they tie in with Celtic and other European myths and some mystic Christian and Buddhist alternate reality with the myths/fairy resolution made plausible.

The dynamics between each distinct group, including the enslaved humans, is fascinating and the odd geological calamity – like how the once dry Mediterranean was flooded, helps the plot along. The entire series is masterly in the way it combines true geology, timelines and social dynamics amongst the aliens and the humans, all Exiles in time and space. The mind powers themselves are beguiling and aspirational and, if possible, I’d find it hard to choose which ability I’d like most.

The attraction is that I get to blast mountains, make people do what I want when I want them to and fly around the world in 10 minutes—just with my mind. I wish!

**The Discworld series (Terry Pratchett).** Date/Age read: 1984 on/(Age 25 on). Times read: Lost count – some more than 10 times.

This is the other author who I put on the same level as Tolkien and parallels with Tolkien; Pratchett says that Discworld is Middle Earth with a sense of humour 500 years on… This is satirical fantasy with everything that is in Middle Earth – and also Vampires, Werewolves and Zombies, Bogeymen, Witches of the wise woman/midwife type and Wizards who would not impress Eru Illuvatar (nor indeed Albus Dumbledore). It is almost like *LotR* but written by the *Cheers* scriptwriters.
By Book 5 Pratchett’s themes are beginning to mature with recurrent characters who now seem like friends. He never fails to make me laugh.

The Discworld is impossible but, because it’s magic, it works. The Disc is carried through space on top of four big elephants who, in turn are standing on an enormous turtle – an image from Hindi/Oriental myth and as it’s very magical odd things can be explained easily. But sometimes they’re not and then the multi-layered parodies of duller spherical worlds kick in and laughter comes thick and fast. So, in one of my favourite books Moving Pictures he parodies early Hollywood with an ending that is catastrophic and has a huge ‘Dungeon Dimensions’ monster chasing the heroine up a very high and crumbly wizards tower. Any similarity to large apes doing the same in rather more prosaic skyscraper territory is purely in your head—because this is ‘proper’ magic! The plots are consistently and compulsively funny and make you feel you’re there and laughing.

In another one – Small Gods – is about religious manipulation and martyrdom. The deity concerned is a tortoise called Om who, in his heyday manifested in a magnificent angry bull aspect or a rather splendid 100 foot high Djinn and accordingly he got plenty of smiting under his belt. Now he’s down on his luck and only has one true believer called Brutha who’s had his faith beaten into him by his psychopath granny. Brutha’s also incredibly stupid but has a photographic memory and remembers everything he sees and hears and so knows the holy books backwards . . . Prepare for invented yet familiar belief systems having the hot air let out of them and generally have their administrations and functionaries held accountable for how badly they warp the original intention of their various prophets—or tortoises. It’s in essence an exposé of how a good idea – like being nice to everyone – gets trampled into the dirt by ordained power brokers who know a good twisted way to social domination when they see it…

The themed series are also intensely funny – there’s the Watch run by a recovering alcoholic Raymond Chandler-esque Commander and a six-foot six hero type who has unconscious charisma and claims he’s a dwarf—as they brought him up. His girlfriend and sergeant is a werewolf who doubles as the police sniffer dog and the Other Ranks are more like the Keystone Cops. Suffice to say you have to be a real misery not to find the books amusing—even at my lowest, I can always find a smile when I re-read them.

I can walk the streets of Ankh-Morpork and breathe in stinky muddy river air; I can find my way around Unseen University – the Wizard college (long before Harry Potter) and make sure
the Bursar takes his dried frog pills (Disc Valium); and go to the Library to visit the Librarian (an ex-wizard who’s now an Orang-utan and won’t change back) where the more dangerous books are securely chained to the shelves. The whole thing is ingrained now and works within integrated threads that weave all the books together. It’s very cleverly observed and gently sends up the absurdities of life in general. For me it is literally a place to go and be laughed out of obsessing over the petty little vagaries of life that frustrate and keep you in line for the sake of a quiet society—and to reassure yourself that bean-counting, narrow-mindedness and injustice does not have to be the norm.
My first example of a reading experience involves the science-fiction novel *Trader Team* by Poul Anderson, with its sequel titled *Satan's World*. The two stories depicted a future civilization in which private enterprise still flourished; the hero was an ambitious young human merchant named David Falkayn, who travelled across the galaxy with a female catlike extraterrestrial named Chee Lan, and a male dragonlike extraterrestrial named Adzel. They were seeking to establish trade agreements with newly discovered alien civilizations. One important aspect of reading these novels was that the first of them was the very first novel I ever read that seriously and intelligently speculated about interstellar travel, as opposed to space travel inside our own Solar System.

One of the first things I experienced in reading the fiction of Poul Anderson (who was a man very well educated in the physical sciences) was an impression that science could make sense of existence. As a boy both physically small and psychologically insecure, I had long felt that life was unpredictable and beyond my control; but reading the adventures of David Falkayn, I could imagine facing even interstellar perils with confidence. Because Falkayn and his comrades were scientifically knowledgeable, I could identify more with them than I ever could with the shallow-minded football jocks to whose society I had no access due to my dwarfish stature.

The most memorable scenes for me in these related stories were: (1) Falkayn's swashbuckling escape from a dungeon in a medieval-level civilization on the planet Ikrananka in the first book; (2) Adzel, carrying an artillery piece on his back, rescuing Falkayn from a more modern enemy stronghold in the second book; and (3) the three adventurers hiding their mutual affection beneath rude banter while preparing to fight some really nasty imperialistic aliens, also in the second book.

A prominent sensation for me when reading Anderson's fiction, besides plain excitement for the adventure, was a sensation at once repugnant and fascinating. Being the son of effectively atheist parents, I had at the time no spiritual faith to uphold me in the face of mortality; and when Anderson's characters confronted the prospect of death for themselves or for others whom they cared about, I sometimes felt as if I were suffocating. It was not a pleasant experience, to be sure; yet I still was drawn back to re-read the same scenes, because I intuitively perceived that
Anderson was making a determined attempt to process something that all of us have to deal with whether we like it or not.

Emotionally, I loved and hungered for the Musketeer-like loyalty and companionship, which Anderson's heroes enjoyed in defiance of that shadow of mortality. Anderson was definitely not offering any promise of life after death; but like his Viking ancestors, he promoted a rugged, stoical vision of courage and honor that might stiffen someone's spine up to the moment of death.

I never felt as if transported out of my body when reading these novels, nor did I lose the general awareness that time was passing, though I tended not to notice the exact time when reading. I remember feeling envy for people who, in the future, might have the satisfaction of really visiting exotic planets as David Falkayn did in fiction. As for a sense of relating with the characters, my favorite was the huge and powerful but kindhearted Adzel. I always felt that if I could have been big and strong, I would wish to be like him: slow to anger, and gentle toward the weak and powerless.

The sense of place was very strong in Anderson's stories, as he was highly convincing when describing how a planet's environment would be affected by factors like the size of the star around which it orbited. Though not actually forgetting where I was, I could always vividly "see" the alien landscapes and creatures depicted. So I was more an observer than a participant in the story, but a very interested observer.

I first read Trader Team in the early summer of 1965, before my sophomore year of high school (when I was 13); Satan's World, something like two years later. I read these two novels about half a dozen times each. As for connections with life events, the outstanding fact is that, at the time I read Trader Team, my family had just lately moved out of the only home I remembered, to a smaller house in an unfamiliar neighborhood that didn't seem to contain any boys my own age. The ordeal of real-life displacement made it the more natural to be reading about space flights to unfamiliar planets.

What the experience of reading Anderson's novels meant for me (besides the simplistic wish-fulfillment of imagining heroic exploits) was the blending in my mind of the physical hugeness of interstellar space with the huge mystery of death. In the end, I had to look elsewhere than science fiction to find answers about eternity; but in the meantime, seeing real science woven
into Anderson's narratives was to help me be more attentive and active in science courses in high school, even in college.

If longer-term changes to my life were to be looked for, they would be a matter, not of my finding answers, but of at least becoming more aware of the questions. Now that I am a born-again Christian, I can see more clearly how Poul Anderson might have been torn between his heart's desire for something spiritual, and his materialistic insistence that physical substance was all. I can pity him. Still, he gave me a gift of sorts; only science fiction, what they call "hard" science fiction with real scientific speculations, could have given me the peculiar sense I got of the intellect extending its reach and trying to understand whatever was really out there.

_Galactic Patrol_ by E. E. "Doc" Smith

My next example is also science fiction, but not such "hard" sci-fi as Poul Anderson's. This was closer to supernatural fantasy (a field I was not to become strongly involved with until I read _The Hobbit_ by J. R. R. Tolkien). I speak now of _Galactic Patrol_ by E. E. "Doc" Smith. It is what used to be commonly called "space opera": dashing melodrama set in space and on far-off worlds, with the settings created less for the sake of conjecturing what might really be found in the universe, than for the sake of the comic-bookish plot. In _Galactic Patrol_ and its sequels, we meet super-duper cosmic aliens of the essentially godlike sort, which were to be made popular by the _Star Trek_ television programs. One set of "magical" aliens, the Arisians, used all their powers to help younger intelligent races develop and advance; their evil adversaries, the Eddorians, wanted simply to conquer and rule all worlds. In _Galactic Patrol_ we meet the Lensmen: precursors of the _Star Wars_ movies' Jedi Knights, defenders of a vast alliance of civilized planets. In the course of the story, some of the Lensmen combatted a major force of corrupted humans and aliens who served the Eddorians, while also learning more about the Arisians who supported the good guys' alliance.

By the time I read _Galactic Patrol_, though doing okay in science, I had experienced considerable difficulty in mathematics courses. This diminished the likelihood of my ever having a career in technology—which in turn made magical wish-fulfillment fantasies more appealing. And the Jedi-like powers of the Lensmen were close enough to magic. For that matter, the descriptions of space battles between interstellar warships had a magical feel to them, as each side attacked with beam weapons and defended with force-field screens. It was more like wizards casting spells at each other, than like a gunfight.
The most memorable scenes for me in *Galactic Patrol* were scenes in which Lensman Kimball Kinnison, the main hero, used his mind powers to infiltrate enemy bases and keep the villains unaware of his presence. I really got into this; it would have been SO gratifying to have super-powers and outmaneuver all the jocks who thought they were superior beings merely because they had large bodies.

I had none of the sensation of cosmic emptiness that I had experienced when reading Anderson's novels. There were no vast spaces in Smith's universe; there was always another inhabited planet to land on, and the interactions with extraterrestrials both friendly and hostile were the substance of the story. There was, again, the thrill of a vicarious adventure, reinforced by a greater consciousness of good versus evil, but no extraordinary changes in my body. I seem to recall, though, that I grew more neglectful of time with this novel than with Anderson’s *Trader Team*; I may have stayed up very late on a few occasions reading it and later the other Lensman books.

As for relating to the characters: Kimball Kinnison was in some respects like an idealized version of my own father, a World War Two Air Corps pilot. (Kinnison never seemed like a really young man to me, not even when he was supposed to be a freshly graduated cadet.) Though unable to be like Kinnison either in muscular prowess or in mechanical skills, I felt I would like to meet him because he was an altruistic hero, out to uphold civilization against violent predators. My other favorite character in *Galactic Patrol*, coincidentally, was a dragonish alien somewhat comparable to Adzel in Anderson’s *Trader Team*, huge and powerful, but kindhearted. (I was always fond of reptiles.) I was also fond of the Arisian leader Mentor, who guided the Lensmen like Master Yoda with young Jedi in the *Star Wars* movies; Mentor would have been infinitely preferable to some of my high school teachers.

There was certainly some sense of place in *Galactic Patrol*, but not as much as in Anderson's novels. Smith dwelt less on the peculiarities of particular planets, and more on the slam-bang action; he was writing earlier in the history of sci-fi than Anderson, and so it seems had a less sophisticated audience that wanted raygun fights and monsters. When Smith was effective with place descriptions, it was usually when depicting artificial environments such as the interiors of starships. I again felt like an observer—but one with a greater stake in wishing to be part of the action. Anderson didn’t let his heroes have magic; Smith did; so I had more of an escapist motive to wish to be a Lensman, than to be an explorer for an interstellar merchants' league.
I first read *Galactic Patrol* in either 1966 or 1967, at about the age of 15. As for life events tying in: my earlier-mentioned small bodily stature was linked with a slow sexual maturation, and this colored my view of the story. At an age when many boys would already have girlfriends, I had not yet begun to have any strong interest in girls. The only way I could feel any enjoyment at romance being included in a novel would be if both the man and the woman had likeable personality traits entirely apart from sexual attractiveness, so that I could wish happiness to them. It so happened that Kimball Kinnison's love interest, heroine Clarissa MacDougall, was a character who was brave, loyal and smart, not only desirable; so I could root for her to win Kinnison's heart, because I liked her as a person—she was someone I could have been friends with.

A less profound, but an interestingly odd effect of reading *Galactic Patrol* had to do with the "magical" space-battle scenes to which I have referred. The whole beams-and-screens scenario stuck in my imagination for years, and surfaced in the midst of human interactions that had nothing to do with weapons or outer space. When I would witness any kind of confrontation between people, I would imagine whoever was more aggressive as shooting out energy beams, while the person under pressure was putting up defensive screens.

As for the meaning of the experience, Doc Smith's views on what we would now call multiculturalism caused me to think more seriously about whether morality really was relative, or whether there were laws of right and wrong that were binding on ALL planets. This question, too, awaited resolution in a higher court than science fiction; but meanwhile, at least one positive spiritual repercussion came my way. One of Lensman Kinnison's ways of psychically overcoming villains was to play on their guilty conscience, making them see and feel all the horror of the evil they had done to innocent victims. This was my first vivid introduction to the principle of reaping what you sow.

I read *Galactic Patrol* countless times as a boy. I can’t say, after all these years, if it has left much effect on me beyond the stimulation of thought already mentioned. Much of my enjoyment of this novel was not really strictly dependent on its being sci-fi. But there is this: the power of the Lensmen to see inside the personalities of intelligent beings and infallibly distinguish the good from the evil is something I sure would like to have in this day when so many public figures are accused of treachery, and surely some are guilty while others are innocent. Think how much good could be accomplished by such a power—but of course, only if it were used FOR
good! Which was why the Arisians would make Lensmen only of those candidates who showed superb moral integrity.

*The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien

James Ronald Reuel Tolkien has been meaningful in my life, but *The Hobbit* had the greatest absorbing effect on me. I first read *The Hobbit* when I was about 15, around the same time as I read the sci-fi novel *Galactic Patrol*; this represented an important transition for me. I was already familiar then with “canonical” Norse and Greek mythology; and largely thanks to comic books and movies, I was also familiar with simplistic heroic fantasies where dashing heroes foiled nasty villains and monsters. But not until I read *The Hobbit* did I see good-versus-evil melodrama seamlessly blended with a mythic mood (considering that the traditional Norse and Greek myths are frankly rather amoral). You might say that here was a saga with brains AND brawn AND heart. I was hooked, and this reading experience was “training” me to appreciate future reading experiences.

For anyone who doesn’t already know, *The Hobbit* recounts how Bilbo Baggins, one of the little people of “The Shire,” joined an expedition of Dwarves who were out to reclaim their treasure from the dragon Smaug who had stolen it, along with the powerful wizard Gandalf. Their plan was narrow and short-term in scope, but the success they achieved against the forces of evil was destined later to help the civilized realms of Middle-Earth survive in the great war, which *The Lord of the Rings* describes.

Mr. Tolkien scarcely bothered trying, in *The Hobbit*, to make a “real” place out of the hobbit-village where Bilbo had grown up; he was much more concerned with getting his protagonist out into the wilderness. Once the adventure was underway, several of the locales projected a very strong sense of place: the Elf stronghold ruled by the noble Elrond, the caves in the Misty Mountains, the house of the superhuman hermit Beorn, the ominous forest of Mirkwood, and the Lonely Mountain where Smaug had made his den. All of these took shape very vividly in my imagination.

As for how I related to the characters: having been condemned by genetics to be a puny boy, I liked the idea of powerful characters who DIDN’T bully the small and weak. Thus it was easy for me to like Gandalf and Beorn. I could without distaste imagine BEING Bilbo, since although he was physically smaller even than the Dwarves, at least his intelligent mind was allowed by the author to accomplish some good for the party. In this novel, the good guys were not yet
manacled by all the insufficiently explained taboos and restraints, which burdened the heroes of *The Lord of the Rings*.

One of the most memorable parts of the story for me was how Bilbo discovered the dragon’s one weak spot, how this information enabled the heroic warrior Bard the Bowman to slay the otherwise unstoppable Smaug…. and how Bilbo went unacknowledged and unthanked for this particular achievement, though he did get recognition for other deeds. This rang very true for me; even at a time when I did not yet have a faith in God, I already knew that good is not always rewarded in this world. Near the end, when some characters made the admission that Bilbo had done more good than he was publicly getting credit for, was probably the time when I most powerfully felt myself “inside” the story.

I was still in high school when I first read *The Hobbit*, and I have probably read it about a dozen times in all. It seemed so perfect a story to me that I actually postponed reading *The Lord of the Rings*, for fear of finding that the follow-on books would somehow spoil the effect of what I had read. In the end, *The Lord of the Rings* didn’t spoil *The Hobbit* for me, but neither did it ever quite sweep me up in the same way *The Hobbit* had done.

E.R. Eddison’s *The Worm Ouroboros*

Before Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* (1937) came another British author of his generation, E.R. Eddison, with his eccentric saga *The Worm Ouroboros* (1922). (That's "Worm" in the archaic sense of a serpent or dragon, rather than slimy fish-bait.) It was a quasi-medieval heroic fantasy, set upon an unrealistically Earth-like version of the planet Mercury, with elements of Greek mythology and Shakespearean speechmaking mixed in. The plot revolves around a war between so-called "Demons" and "Witches," who are actually human, with the Demons being good guys despite the name. Complicating things is the evil King Gorice of Witchland, who keeps getting reincarnated as a full-strength adult every time the heroes kill him; there is only one way he will ever stay dead—which, of course, is important to the plot.

For purposes of comparison I will say one thing about *The Lord of the Rings*, which I read before this book. I had been annoyed by all the restrictions imposed on the good guys, all sorts of can't do this, can't do that. So when I moved on to *The Worm Ouroboros*, it was liberating to see these heroes free to DO things, restricted only by honor and conscience.

Memorable sequences in the novel included a banquet in Gorice's castle of Carce, and later the tremendous Battle of Krothering Side, which breaks the back of the Witches' attempted
conquest of Demonland. What made them stick in memory was a combination of stimulating characters, colorful situations, and the author's clever choices of particular visual details to make the scenes come to life almost like cinema. My sensations—playing upon my slow, slow physical maturation—were sensations of exhilaration at the thought that it might be possible to be something more manly than a timid, repressed midget.

Emotionally, reading The Worm Ouroboros made me impatient to grow physically to something resembling manhood. I can't say that I felt removed from my body during this, any more than in my other reading experiences; but I did sometimes ignore the passing of time while re-reading the book for enjoyment late at night.

When it comes to relating to the characters, Lord Juss, leader of the Demons, was the one I would most have liked to have as a friend. Somewhat like the non-human character Adzel in Anderson’s Trader Team, Juss was an admirable blend of strength, intelligence, decency and generosity who would make you feel safe with him. He was the most knowledgeable and educated of the heroes, even able to cast some magic spells of his own—yet not a wimpy bookworm like a certain reader of the story, namely me. As for imagining BEING a character in the story, I was not so presumptuous as to imagine being Juss; instead, I alternately imagined being either of two men from the Demons' allied nation of Goblinland: King Gaslark, and the morally-ambiguous philosopher Lord Gro. Gaslark, as a secondary hero, represented my modest aspirations in physical fitness and self-assertiveness; when I did something physically strenuous, I would say to myself, "King Gaslark doesn't get tired!" Gro, meanwhile, represented my wish to be appreciated for those intellectual gifts, which I already did have even if I wasn't a football goober. Also, in the story Gro falls in love with a Demon lady who is unattainable for him, and once when experiencing a crush in college, I felt very much as if I were Gro.

The setting on Mercury was ridiculous, and Eddison himself seemed quick to forget it. But a few particular settings of the action had an evocative sense of place: above all, the aforementioned Carce in Witchland, and the haunted mountain that Lord Juss has to visit in search of his kidnapped brother. I felt almost like a part of the story in some of the most colorful scenes, especially scenes where Gro was present.

I was about 18 years old when I first read The Worm Ouroboros. At this time, as a college student, I was reading a lot of ancient Greco-Roman literature and history, for example, Virgil's Aeneid. The meaning of the experience for me was just the encouragement to believe that noble
achievements were possible; that goodness was NOT necessarily already defeated before it could even get started. An additional change and positive effect on my life would be that this particular book did much to motivate my own ambitions as a writer.

I have read *The Worm Ouroboros* ten or twelve times. I would say, though, that its effects on me have long since been subsumed into my total life experience; I have not read it anytime in the last decade. I think that its impact on me was definitely tied to its being a supernatural fantasy set in an imaginary world, because this kept the enjoyment and stimulation uncontaminated by the frustrations of the real world.

**John Milton's *Paradise Lost***

The last read of my five examples was by far the earliest written: John Milton's 17th-century epic poem *Paradise Lost*. Though based on Biblical events, which in my opinion serious Christians believe to be factually true, Milton’s book-length saga is a fantasy filled with mythic flourishes that transplants the Homeric mood of legendary narrative to Christian subject matter. I note in passing that my VERY first exposure to *Paradise Lost* had come well before a complete reading; this was at the hands of an amateurish high school English teacher, who parroted the false notion (easily refuted if only one actually READS the whole story) that Milton regarded Satan as heroic.

Milton's epic narrates how Lucifer first became Satan through his prideful ambition; how he tried and failed to overthrow God; how after his defeat and expulsion he tried to keep his army of corrupted angels united, giving them a purpose by seeking to invade Earth; and how Adam and Eve lost their place in Eden by letting Satan trick them into disobeying God. The timing of my coming upon *Paradise Lost* was appropriate; as a college student, I had been stimulated by a Western Civilization course to read the Bible and study related history, so in Milton I could find emotional flavor in a sphere I was already investigating intellectually.

The most memorable parts of the saga for me all concerned the strikingly envisioned war in Heaven. There, at least, noble goodness could be seen defeating evil. The parts about Adam and Eve were—in fact, still are—terribly downbeat for me, since they lead up to the human race's first moral failure, followed by its unhappy consequences.

My sensations and emotions were much like a loftier, more exalted version of what I experienced when reading *The Worm Ouroboros*. I should say that while I had always liked imaginative stories, this was not the same thing as imagining them to be concretely real events. (I
never ever believed in Santa Claus; I knew that flying reindeer were absurd.) Only now, in college, as I was beginning to stumble toward the Living God of history (i.e. Jesus Christ), did such an admitted work of imaginative storytelling bear the imprint of reality.

I still can't point to a special bodily sensation, and there was LESS forgetting of time than with my earlier examples of reading; but there was an explorer's kind of excitement, the feeling of a wider world unfolding before me.

The connection to what I believe to be true events notwithstanding, the character I most identified with was the only major character NOT found in the Bible: the righteous angel Abdiel, whom the poet, Milton, portrays as trying to talk Satan out of rebelling against God. I have memorized portions of Abdiel's dialogue, along with a speech by God commending Abdiel's loyalty. After a boyhood and adolescence of agnosticism, the idea of resolute faithfulness to God was a novelty to me, and Milton had made it a most lively dramatic element (while crushing into dust the Satan-as-hero nonsense, as Abdiel specifically refutes the better-to-reign-in-Hell argument).

As for sense of place, though I enjoyed scenes in Heaven more, the scenes in Hell were more compelling as a visual setting. Various disagreeable cellars, dirty factory interiors and poorly lit corridors were probably sifting upward from subconscious memory in response to this realm. Still, it was back with Abdiel in Heaven that I most felt myself INSIDE the story; for like Abdiel, I had already known in my young life the experience of myself being in fact right about something, but unheeded by stupid people.

To the best of my recollection, I was 19 years old when I first read *Paradise Lost*; I began it near the end of my sophomore year in college, and finished probably only weeks before the date on which I received Jesus Christ as my Savior. I benefited by the positive effect of the story, especially Abdiel's part—for I was embarking on the experience of seeing people try to dismiss my Christian conversion as the unreasoning impulse of a naïve boy, when in reality it was the outcome of a careful intellectual search.

Besides the explicitly spiritual impact of Milton's work, it was this reading experience that established my love of iambic-pentameter verse. Even before this, I had seen, even acted in, plays by Shakespeare; but iambic pentameter can so easily be treated like ordinary speech (especially when unrhymed) that Shakespeare's dialogue flows naturally and one can overlook its being verse. It was when Milton's lines were visibly arrayed before me on a page that I could see
clearly the rhythmic structure. It was because of this that I took to writing profusely in iambic pentameter, sonnets and occasionally longer works. It has been my sonnet writing that has introduced many young acquaintances to this form.

*Paradise Lost* being a fantasy made its religious content more accessible to me, but of course the part about getting into iambic pentameter wasn't strictly dependent on the fantasy. I have read the complete work perhaps two or three times, but have read just my favorite parts much more often.

C. S. Lewis’ *The Perelandra Trilogy*

About six years after I first read *Paradise Lost*, I read a more modern work of Christian fantasy by C. S. Lewis: *The Perelandra Trilogy*, written before he wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia*. This “Space Trilogy” involved other planets, but was more supernatural fantasy than science fiction. Creatively, Lewis aimed to find a home for mythic-flavored versions of God’s angels in the scheme of our Solar System; philosophically, he aimed to counteract the coldly materialistic thinking expressed in the science fiction of H. G. Wells.

The unifying hero of the trilogy is a scholar named Elwin Ransom, a Christian character, in some respects like Lewis himself. In the first volume of the trilogy, he is kidnapped by a militantly atheistic scientist named Weston, who has invented a spaceship and wants to make use of Ransom as a “sacrifice” in establishing relations with the inhabitants of Mars. But Weston, full of Wells-like notions of heartless extraterrestrials, fails to realize that the Martians are worshippers of the God Whom Weston rejects; so the Martians side with Ransom, and an angel of God who is a shepherd to the Martians causes both men to be returned to Earth, with Weston deprived of his spaceship.

In the second volume, angels transport Ransom to Venus, where he discovers that this world (imagined as inhabitable) has its own Adam and Eve. Ransom has the opportunity to prevent the Venusian Eve from being corrupted by the Devil, succeeds, and is sent home to Earth again—but this time, to combat evil ON Earth. The third volume takes place entirely in Britain, where Ransom and his friends oppose a wicked conspiracy, which is like a warmup for the predicted reign of the Antichrist.

I read *The Perelandra Trilogy* at about the age of 24; thus, I was much more mature than in any of the other absorbed-reading cases I have related. Both the meaningful and the memorable elements in the books revolved around the conflict between true and false IDEAS—
because Mr. Lewis understood well that ideas have consequences. In Volume One, Ransom has to try to help the Martians understand Weston’s perverted view of scientific progress, a sort of social Darwinism which doesn’t care who gets hurt in the name of societal evolution. In Volume Two, Ransom has to prevent the Venusian Eve from being tricked by the cunning evil spirit who seeks to persuade her to disobey God. In Volume Three, a number of characters HAVE been tricked by evil spirits, and we see the way this happens to them before we see the saintly Ransom intervening. The villains revive the legendary wizard Merlin, thinking he will help them in their anti-God, anti freedom plot; but as with Weston on Mars, they fail to understand what they are dealing with. Like the Martians in Volume One, Merlin sides with Ransom.

The best sense of place in the trilogy was in descriptions of Venus, with believable plant and animal life to flesh out the picture of a paradise, which still has a chance NOT to be lost. As for my own sensations while reading, I don’t recall any loss of time or feeling lifted out of my body; but my intellect was vigorously stimulated.

I have read the trilogy right through only twice, though I have re-read some favorite parts. This work affected my life, above all, by impressing deeply upon me the fact that ideas are not neutral, and all ideas are not equally valid or innocent, because some ideas are used as excuses for merciless tyranny. The fantasy part was really only window dressing compared to this vital message.
D. L. S. Foster

J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*.

I first read *The Hobbit* when I was 13 years old then went on to read the story many more times after that. I would estimate that I’ve gone through the book in excess of 20 times over the years. I reveled in the small details of the hobbit hero Bilbo Baggins’ adventure away from his comfortable home. I had never had a comfortable home so I envied Bilbo’s dreamy hobbit hole complete with all the delicious foods it contained and lacking any parental characters. Then Gandalf the wizard set Bilbo on his adventure to grow up and take responsibility for his life. Gandalf was a parental figure I could admire, so unlike my own parents. Reading *The Hobbit* helped protect me from my unhappy family life and school life.

J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*.

I first read *The Lord of the Rings* when I was 14 years old. I read and re-read the story eleven times before graduation from high school. After that I’ve long since lost count but would estimate having read the books over 25 times. I walked with the Fellowship all throughout their adventures as if I was right by their sides. But then something terrible happened on the way to Mordor, where they were to destroy the evil ring of Sauron. There was something very deep that touched me in the character of Gandalf who I identified as a parental character. I realized then that it wasn’t just escapism for me. I was shaken to the core by his death and was overjoyed by his resurrection. I also identified with Frodo who also looked to Gandalf as his own parental figure. *The Lord of the Rings* helped me get through my troubles, both in school and in my home life. It was my salvation.

J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Silmarillion*.

I eagerly awaited the release of this book and read it when I was 15 years old. I recall fondly seeing the displays in a bookstore when I had gone shopping with my grandmother. But it was my parents that actually got the book for me in an attempted to encourage my love of reading. I remember vividly how happy I was when they actually took an interest in reaching out to me through literature. With this deeper view of Tolkien’s mythology of Middle-earth I expanded my
passion for his works into more academic areas—studying the languages and tracing the migration of peoples in Middle-earth. I have read the book about five times.

**Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*.**

I first began reading the works of Anne Rice when I was 23 years old. While I have read *Interview*, *Lestat*, and *Queen of the Damned* many times, I have only read the later books in the series once or twice. While some might not view the works of Anne Rice in the context of fantasy fiction I actually do. They are more than simple Gothic horror. Mrs. Rice did something with her saga far beyond what typical writers of horror have done. She strove to subcreate a mythological universe of her own. Her vampire mythology, while not as complex as that of Tolkien, is comparable in its depth. That strength of creation, spanning thousands of years within the series of books she later wrote, was very appealing to me. And the more adult themes of the world of her vampires were also more along the lines of what I needed as a young adult beyond Tolkien’s world of Hobbits and Elves. Here was sensuality and passion mixed with violence and the supernatural that was not magical but instead otherworldly, based solidly within a believable construct. I fell in love with the city of New Orleans through Rice’s books and broke the chains that held me in my home town by traveling there. Rice’s books helped to not just show me the door to freedom (as Tolkien’s works had done) but to also push me out into the world and into the sunlight that her vampires so loved and feared.
I felt absorbed in reading, to the point of interpreting my surroundings in terms of the book, with at least the following books. For instance, when I stopped reading, I still felt that I was in that world or expected people to react to my actions in terms of the book world.

**J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings***

I didn’t expect to meet hobbits, of course, but the feeling was to see the world well divided in white and black armies; who is with the Fellowship of the Ring and who on the other hand is with the Eye of Sauron. There’s more to say because I interpreted the whole *The Lord of the Rings* in terms of a rejection of power, to me the meaning was political. I read it when I was 18 years old, my political beliefs and my critical views were at that time only in nuce; this book, with this specific interpretation, together with some other readings (e.g., *The Mage*, by Ursula K. Le Guin), made me realize that having power is not necessarily one of the aims of life. This opinion of mine is still ongoing and I would say that it began with *The Lord of The Rings*. I’ve seen and read many other possible interpretations of this book, mainly religious, but I still think that for me the interpretation is political.

**Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed***

As I said before, the meaning is political. Here it is much more obvious than in *The Lord of the Rings*, which has been investigated in many ways. In *The Dispossessed* the author wanted to point out how our western society is based on property and how in a fantasy world, the meaning of property may be non-existent. I’ve been so absorbed in this book that I started a campaign of Lending-And-Borrowing books—I was graduating during that time. Just after reading it I bought a car, together with a friend of mine, which for me was an experiment to see if a luxury good, like a car, could be a shared property among a group of people. In my opinion the experiment was successful; the property sharing lasted for some years and continued even when we started different lives.

**Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness***

In this case, the main topic was the differences among males and females in a world where there is only one sex. The book points out how much sex determines our conduct in life. During this reading I noticed how much language is influenced by this—Italian more than English, because
we decline many words by gender (i.e. male/female) that English doesn’t. This happens with nouns and adjectives and, in verbs, and with some tenses like participe, which is the same as the past tense in English, when used as an adjective. The words *this/these* are translated with *questo/questi* in the male form and with *questa/queste* in the female form. *Loved*, as a participe tense, is translated as *amato* if male, *amata* if female. So I started using language as much as possible without terms identified by a genre.

**Joanna Russ, *The Female Man* (novel) and *Whileaway* (short story)**

I discuss these two together. The author for both, Joanna Russ, has been a strong feminist supporter. *The Female Man* is an oneiric (or dreamlike) novel about four female alter egos of the author, whose names were all similar to Joanna and whose lives were revealed to be in different worlds but their were some unrealistic twists (like a character from one of the four subplots would meet the character of another one, etc); and none of them has any need for a man. *Whileaway* is a short story about a world where males died ages ago, and life continues with females “alone” because when a male expedition came back to the planet and claimed “don’t worry, we’re back, now we’ll protect you”, the females realized that they didn’t need any protection. I got so absorbed while reading both of these works by Joanna Russ that each time I met a girl or woman I felt nervous. So I started using language as much as possible without terms identified by a genre, just as I did after reading Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

**Frank Herbert, *Dune***

This one is in this list for a different reason: in the planet of Arrakis, the setting of *Dune*, everything was scarce and needed to be recycled. During the reading I tried my best to recycle everything.

**Philip José Farmer, *Siddo Lovers***

In this novel there’s a character that, without knowing it, makes love with a strange kind of alien species, which is a sort of bug. The alien species, which is unable to reproduce with its own species, must simulate the aspect of females of other species to reproduce, but when they get pregnant they return to their bug form. So the character thought he was making love with a girl but instead he was making love to a bug. During that time I was roleplaying in *Star Wars* Role Playing Game (RPG) and I played, by my choice, an alien like the one in the book. The character in the book helped me to better understand some of my reactions. The character *reacts* to the
other species in its surroundings, needs another being to get pregnant and would be unable to do it by itself. It’s not male or female, like in the Le Guin’s *Left Hand of Darkness*, it just reacts to the other species. Once again, from a political point of view, if we could see a being not in a female/male duality (and not in terms of white/black or caucasian/not caucasian etc.), it could lead to a better society. If I hadn’t read Le Guin’s book, most probably I wouldn’t have seen it as more than a sensual unusual plot (unusual for the year of publication (1952), at least).

**Michael Ende, The Unending Story**

This one is MADE to absorb the reader. In the plot a young boy read a book called . . . *The Unending Story*, and at some point he got involved in the plot, meeting the other characters. The World of Fantasia is mined by a menace: the void is eating it, one piece at a time and the Empress can’t do anything to save Fantasia; this is the zero-level. At level-one a reader (Bastian, a 12 year old boy, in the Italian edition) reads and get involved in the quest to save Fantasia. Step by step Bastian notices that whatever he thinks or does in some way enters into the book, and the character are aware of him. Basically Fantasia cannot be saved because it is a World made of human dreams, and only the level-one reader of the book can save it by reinventing it. Now the fact is there’s also a level-two reader: the one who is reading the actions of Bastian who is reading the book. So the reader—me—is like a meta-character of the book. After the reading it I wrote a short story (I’ve always liked to write) in which four-levels of reading where involved. The four readers at some point met each other, but they deduce that a fifth one should have existed: the one who was reading the short story. This idea, together with the basic idea of another book (*Flatland*, by Edwin Abbot Abbot) took me awhile to feel (I know: it’s weird) as if I was a character in a book, with the eye of a reader over me: anyway, I consider this experience to be positive, because if one is observed, or if one thinks one is observed, then one behaves in a better way.

**Robert A. Heinlein, Stranger in a Strange Land**

In this novel Mike, a martian, came to Earth. Martians are no different from earthlings, except in the way they think. This baffling novel is a sort of milestone of hippies, for Mike is seen as a sort of *ante litteram* hippie (i.e. a hippie before the time of hippies), even though the author is usually considered right winged, mostly because of another novel (*Starship Troopers*). Anyway my reason for being absorbed was the very singular approach that Mike had with water: being a rare
thing on Mars, water is a precious element and not a single drop should be wasted. And so I had
the same approach to water during the time of reading (i.e. I tried not to waste it).

Isaac Asimov, *The Caves of Steel*

In *The Caves of Steel* people on Earth live very close together because of overpopulation. Also
there is a scene where Asimov describes how random personal touches are avoided in any public
place. The city where I live is crowded enough to let me feel the same way, but I became aware
of this (I would say *obsessed*) only during the reading of the novel. Reading this book made this
closeness more tolerable. Also, the consciousness that our world is going toward this condition,
helped me in see some minor things in the right way (like for instance noticing trash).

Isaac Asimov, *The Naked Sun*

To explain in what way this book made me feel absorbed I have to tell an anecdote. In the book
the main character, Elijah Bailey, an earthling detective, is in a foreign planet inhabited only by a
few thousand people but millions of robots. On this planet people never get really in touch (they
only use screens to chat, and even sexual acts are made only by sending the semen in a vial via a
robot-deliverer), so when a female character took a shower in front of Bailey, having forgotten
that she wasn’t alone, my mind in some way remembered the scene of this girl naked (I was
thirteen, I think). Once I was at a schoolmate’s house (a girl), I don’t remember why, I guess for
homework, and I don’t remember why she mentioned a shower, but I do remember so vividly
that I felt as if I was going to see her naked that I still blush. This was one of the most absorbing
experiences because of how I felt in that situation, as if I was somehow “part of” the story.

Philip José Farmer, *Jesus on Mars*

In this novel an expedition to Mars finds a human community under the sand. Everything
suggests that the people are Jewish and that they escaped from Earth more or less two thousand
of years ago, and among them the expedition meets Jesus Christ. I think my fascination for the
person Jesus came also from this novel. I wrote an adventure for an RPG in which the players
replay the same expedition. I’m agnostic. Ever since I can remember, whether I’ve admitted it or
not, I’ve always been agnostic (NOT atheist, which is a very different thing); anyway, this book
(as well as the reading of the four evangelists and the apocripha of the evangelists) helped me to
see the historical Jesus, as well as the mythical (or religious) Jesus. And I found that if I’d met
such a man, I would have been fascinated. This helped me a lot in dividing, like with a scissor,
historical main characters for what they were and for what they meant (to that age, to that century, etc).

**Fritz Leiber, *SpaceTime for Springers* (short story)**
The main character is a cat, named Gummitch. This cat studies humans and deduces that young cats become humans as they grow up, while baby humans become cats as they grow up. In other words, Gummitch believed that young cats evolve into adult humans, and young humans evolve into adult cats. He deduced this by confronting adult humans and young kitties and saw how smart they are, while baby humans and old cats are both goofy and clumsy. So he expected to *switch* at some point of his life to become a human. I spent half of my life living with cats, with one in particular named Arturo, after the star *Arcturus* (Arturo in Italian) and each time I looked at Arturo I thought of Gummitch. I mean very much in saying this: in the short story Gummitch has a whole world in his kittie head, he wrote books, he learned things and he was waiting only to assume his human form to publish and use human instruments. Looking at Arturo I looked and tried to understand how many books he could have written. The sensation passed after a while since the time I read the short story, but my fondness of Arturo remained. He died in July 2005, and since that time I can really say I live alone (no matter how many girlfriends I may have had, HE was my roommate . . . oh, by the way he showed real jealously each time I took a girl home).

**Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris***
*Solaris*, like *The Unending Story*, is also MADE to let the reader feel absorbed. The author is a Polish writer, one of the best in my opinion. In the novel three people in a space research station above the planet Solaris, which is covered by an intelligent ocean, become conscious of physical manifestations of their dreams and their memories because the ocean acts like a catalyst with their minds. In the period that I read this I felt as if my memories could do the same to me as those of the characters in the book. It wasn’t like “if I think this, it will happen”; it was more like “if I can’t avoid thinking this, sooner or later I’ll have to confront this”. Basically it was a pain, because in the first form a wish came true, but in the second form a nightmare came true. People can’t control each single thought in their minds. Anyway they can manage it, at least a bit. And this is what I learnt.
I’d also like to point out that I’ve also felt absorbed while reading other books of fiction, which I don’t consider to be SciFi or Fantasy: Jorge Luis Borges, *El Aleph* (Spanish title), Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones* (Spanish title), Jean Paul Sartre, *L’età della Ragione* (not sure about the French title; I believe *The Age of Reason* is the English title), and Manuel Scorza, *La Danza Inmovil* (Spanish title; about being forced to choose the integrity of one’s political views, or to compromise for a love). I have even been absorbed with movies sometimes.

I read all of these books for the first time when I was under 30 years old, and I felt absorbed during the first reading. I have reread many of them, but most of the time I didn’t feel absorbed when I read them again. I don’t exclude the possibility that I might feel absorbed in reading them again in the future, even though I admit that it has seldom happened after age 30. The only book I have read being absorbed after 30 is Manuel Scorza’s (not included in the list of fantasy books). If possible I’d like to say more about *Left Hand of Darkness*, one of the two books of Ursula K. Le Guin’s in the detailed narrative, which is the one, in my opinion, that got me more absorbed.
Peregrin Took

All of the following experiences, feelings, and revelations have come from and continue to come from J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. I first read the book in 2002–2003 and I have since read it in full about five to six times, although I constantly read random parts of the book at various times. The following is a list of experiences, feelings, and revelations that I owe to Tolkien.

**Tolkien made me an environmentalist**

There was not really a specific moment or feeling that brought upon my deep love and care for nature, for it manifested itself with the help of Tolkien. This bond with nature was always there within me, and Tolkien set it loose and started me on what is my life journey. Since childhood, I have always had an interest in knights, castles, and a time long past (the medieval age). Falling in love with *The Lord of the Rings*, and Middle-earth in general, completely brought out this innate passion for medieval times and nature.

*The Lord of the Rings* in itself is very connected to nature. You have the land of the Hobbits —the Shire—a glimpse of paradise, a land where folk are at peace and enjoy the finer, simpler things in life. Farming and gardening is their choice of work—what a nice way to live. Of course, Tolkien based the Shire off of England’s rural countryside that prevailed in a time long ago. Although based on a real world setting, the Shire is the ultimate haven of peace, encompassed by nature, living off and for the land.

You also have the Ents, who dwell in Fangorn Forest, and their rival—the wizard Saruman—who felled many trees (many of them Ents) to create his industrial haven of malice at the once fertile fortress of Isengard. The Ents eventually marched on Saruman and destroyed everything he had worked for—the ultimate story of nature striking back.

Later on in the story you have “The Scouring of the Shire” in which a displaced and bitter Saruman brings evil men, or “ruffians,” to the beautiful Shire and fells all of its trees and turns the Shire into an industrial hell. The four main Hobbits, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin return to their home after their long journey to find Saruman’s mess, and it is their job to oust him and his bad company from the Shire and restore what is green and good in the world—back to normal. Once this deed is done in the Battle of Bywater, Samwise remembers that the Lady Galadriel
gave him one mallorn seed (a type of tree that only grew in Lorien) for his garden. He planted it once Saruman’s stench had been blown away, and the Shire started anew.

All of these events and more that are contained within *The Lord of the Rings* have shaped me into a committed environmentalist. I believe that if we take from our earth, we should surely give back to it as well. A balance is needed. Without balance, there will be nothing but ruffians about, destroying the land and poisoning our water.

I’m not proud of everything I did as a youngster in my pre-teen phase, but to give you an early example of putting my “Tolkien-owed” environmentalism to action, let me tell you a story. One day my friends and I (we had to be around 16 at the time) had a computer that blew out and became un-usable. So, we thought it would be fun to take it into my back woods and throw it off a dirt mound. We did so, it smashed, and then we threw it down the hill where it found its home behind a mound of grass. I felt so terrible about doing it from the moment it happened, and the very next day I went back there with a garbage pail, went down to the mound, and picked every piece of it up. I brought it back to my house and disposed of it properly. I couldn’t bear to let that piece of junk sit and pollute nature’s beauty. The whole time I was picking up the mess, my favorite character from *The Lord of the Rings*, Peregrin “Pippin” Took, was right beside me.

**Realizing Pippin’s journey is the same as mine**

Peregrin “Pippin” Took is my most favorite character in *The Lord of the Rings* and one day I noticed that we shared an incredible bond, even though he is fictional. There is no sole day for this realization, but it has been with me for quite some time and always brings a smile to my face. My life’s journey mirrors Pippin’s.

Indeed his personality and character is very similar to mine. I’m easy to get along with, and I try to see the brighter side of things—most of the time! I love food; I love nature and long walks; I love music; I love my family, friends, and my land. Naturally, I also love my ale, and smoking is a rare delight! I'm quite foolish at times and sometimes say foolish things. I'm usually the one calling for rests or for food when I go walking with my friends, as Pippin did at the beginning of his journey. I can completely identify with Pippin. His initial fear of being out in the wide world—outside his Shire—is what I'm going through right now—finding my place in the “real” world, both physically and spiritually. I can relate to Pip's whole story, leaving the Shire rather immature and passing through many dangers, and coming back hardened and
completely ready for the world around him—this is also my journey. I hope that I can become just as hardened as Pippin became.

**Becoming completely absorbed in Tolkien**

When I read *The Lord of the Rings* I become completely absorbed in it. Within my heart and mind, Middle-earth is real and I am walking with the characters through all of their perils. It happened the first time I read the book, and it still happens today. Tolkien has a true power over his readers, and over me. His descriptions are so rich and detailed that I have actually felt the same feelings that the characters were experiencing. For example, during one of my rereads of *The Lord of the Rings*, I actually felt extremely parched while I read about Frodo and Sam’s dry, waterless journey through Mordor. I felt so thirsty that I had to take a break in reading to get a glass of water. It was like I was in Mordor with Frodo and Sam, having no water to drink and parched. The power of Tolkien is amazing!

**Living my life in Middle-earth**

I must say that I live my life through Middle-earth. If I am not walking in the Shire, I am off on some sort of adventure in the lands beyond—be it in the Old Forest, Fangorn, Gondor, or elsewhere. When I go canoeing I am on the Great River. My tales are endless—Middle-earth and all its characters are alive in me. There are many times when I have based my decisions off of asking myself questions such as, “What would Pippin do?” or “What would Gandalf or Aragorn tell me to do?” Middle-earth will continue to dwell with me for my whole life.
Sam

_The Eyes of the Dragon by Stephen King:_

This book is significant for me because it is both the first novel written for an adult audience and the first real modern fantasy novel I read. Prior to this, I had an interest in fantasy through movies such as _The Hobbit, Star Wars_ and I had read some of the Dungeons & Dragons Endless Adventure series. I believe I was ten years old when I read this, though I may have been nine. I remember having my parents purchase this for me before leaving on a vacation to the beach in Florida. I made short work of this good sized novel, finishing most if not all of it within a single day. I recall being absolutely engrossed in reading and recall only flashes of being in a motel room in the cold AC and being at the beach in the hot sun. I believe this book to be most significant for me in terms of primacy. I don’t recall much specific about the story, as I only read the book the one time. I do remember that it was very light on fantastic elements with the titular dragon being a mere hunting trophy. It could have easily been a historic piece had the dragon been some more mundane animal. As I recall, the focus was on a conflict between two brothers, princes, one of whom had fallen under the sway of an evil advisor (who may have been a magician) and was plotting against the king. Nevertheless, I felt the draw of entering this alternate world. Even though the story was not particularly fantastic, it occurred against the backdrop of a world where larger conflicts between good and evil were subtly hinted at, magic had potency, and fantastic beasts existed. This book really got me reading novels on my own and solidified an interest in fantasy that had started with movies and TV.

_Dragons of Autumn Twilight by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman:_

I believe I was fourteen when I read this one. I remember reading it on a Saturday during the winter. I was off from school and I remember lying under the blankets most of the day reading this book. This one stands out as perhaps my most “absorbing” memory. Thinking back on it, it is perhaps one of my strongest memories of ease, comfort, warmth. Definitely not the best fantasy novel I’ve read, and it’s probably even the weakest in the series by these authors. I reread parts of this, but never the whole thing through again. I started again many years later, but did not get too far along. Nevertheless the actual experience of reading stands out more than any of the other books in the series and maybe as much or more than any other book I’ve read. While
this is the first book in the first trilogy, I had read the second trilogy prior to starting this book. There was a sense of returning home with old friends in reading this book about beginnings. It starts with a reunion of friends who had been separated for several years before the action commences. I knew how most everything in the plot would turn out as well as what would happen after. I already knew who would die and what would become of the survivors, but it seems there was something peaceful in seeing everyone back together again.

*The Two Towers* by J. R. R. Tolkien:

I remember reading this for the first time when I was fifteen I believe. Not much specific here, but I do remember being rather intent on it while I was at my Grandmother’s house and mostly ignored my family while reading this. As with most fantasy readers, *The Lord of the Rings* is near and dear to me, but this is probably the only specific memory I have of the experience of reading these books. I’ve read the series three or four times over the years since along with seeing the movies quite a few times. I remember enjoying this the first time through as a teenager, but as I have gotten older, the poetry of the language has come to appeal to me much more. The story itself has come to be more meaningful as I appreciate the hero’s tale with themes of dedication in the face of almost certain defeat, emphasizing qualities of friendship and loyalty. I particularly like that it is the hobbits’ dedication to a simple way of life that makes them resistant to the evil influence of the Ring. The bucolic life in Hobbiton stands in contrast to the greed and cruelty embodied in the Ring, which I read as a broad metaphor for materialistic striving and lust for worldly power. In my own life, it reminds me to take refuge in the simple pleasures (ale and pipeweed), and that it is the quality of the people around me and my relationships that make my life good and meaningful and determine the success or failure of my own quests.

*Dragon Wing* by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman:

I believe I was fifteen or sixteen reading this one as well and this was the only time I read it. Reading rather deeply on a car trip back from the beach in late summer. I remember I stopped with my parents for lunch in Savannah, Ga. I’m not sure if it was food poisoning or car sickness, but I got quite sick after sitting in the back seat reading this for a few hours. Not sure how positive or meaningful this book is to me. I enjoyed the series, but I don’t recall much in the way
of meaningful impact. I just remember being absorbed with this and the particular experience stood out so I thought I would include it.

*A Game of Thrones* by George R. R. Martin:

I don’t recall much of the surrounding experiences of reading this book for the first time. I have an image of sitting in my chair at home for the most part. I do recall a certain thrill of excitement centered around a particular part that encapsulates the larger excitement I felt on reading this series for the first time. Since then, I believe I’ve read this book three more times and read the series twice more. Early on, an exiled prince is taking his younger sister to be betrothed to a barbarian warlord in exchange for an army. The sister voices some concern over the arrangement and the prince replies something to the effect that he would let the warlord, all his men, even all his horses — her in order to receive his army. I do find this exchange disturbing, but at the same time it was thrilling to recognize that I was reading the rarity of a well written high fantasy story that was clearly intended for an adult audience. Whether the sex and violence are gratuitous is debatable, and I believe the author may push the line at a few points. I find most fantasy literature to be overly sanitary with characters that fall into easy divisions of good and evil, never curse, and rarely if ever have sex. I think that this is one of very few fantasy series or novels that is adult not simply in content, but in the complexity of themes. Characters don’t fit the easy categorization of good or evil and when evil occurs, it is more human in terms of greed, cruelty, and even misguided intent to do good rather than some dedication to the abstract ideal or some embodiment of evil. Reading this at twenty-eight, I appreciated a bit more subtlety in my fiction and it was exhilarating to find it within my own beloved genre. I have no particular reservations to lighter fare, but this synced quite well with my mind at the time. I think there is a certain “literariness” that encourages a multiplicity of thematic interpretations here that is lacking in most fantasy literature. As an example, one of the central characters of the first book is presented as noble, honest, and dedicated to principles of honor. Later, it is his unwavering honesty that gets him killed, ultimately leads to his family’s downfall, and to a major war. This begs the question of whether what is typically considered virtue may actually be a flaw or whether it was a necessary sacrifice in pursuit of doing the right thing.
I am an avid reader but do tend to shy away from the supernatural for the most part; however one day I was in my personal Heaven (Border’s Book Store) and just had not seen anything to strike my fancy. I had seen *Twilight* highlighted in the store for quite some time. I finally picked it up and read the outline. It did sound interesting so I bought it. I got home, got comfortable and started reading, only to be dismayed to find out that it was written for teens and I am FAR FAR away from that category! I decided I’d spent the money on the book; I’d better give it a fair shake.

It took no time at all to get into the book once I had read a bit further. I immediately felt an affinity with the character of Bella. She is a new girl at a high school in a small town. I was always the new girl. My father was in the construction business. I can’t count all the schools I went to. I understood her awkwardness, wanting to blend in, hoping to make friends. On the positive end, I think being in the situation of having to get to know people did help me. I try to make others feel comfortable, getting them talking about themselves. In the long run it helped me get to know all different kinds of people and have the ability to fit in most social settings.

The book gets interesting when Bella meets the Cullen family. They are outsiders in the school as they tend to stay in their group and not hang around with the other students. Bella, as well as all the girls in the school, is immediately attracted to Edward Cullen. In actuality he is a vampire and she is his “singer.” Her blood sings to him—he describes her blood as his “brand of heroin.” He wants to kill her, but at the same time wants to be her protector.

It becomes the classic girl falls for the handsome bad boy. Only in this case he can kill her. To make a long story short, he decides he can’t stay away from her and she decides it really doesn’t matter what he is, she loves him and they will find a way to work it out.

I found that the book brought back the thrill of first love and lust! The wanting someone so badly that you feel you can overcome any obstacles. I fell in love with Edward right along with Bella. He was beautiful to look at; he had super strength and powers unlike any normal boy. He was a gentleman (other than the part about his having to keep himself from killing her). He adored her and wanted nothing more than to be her protector and love. She could hardly believe that he picked her!

*Bella Jean*

*Twilight*, by Stephanie Meyer. Read at age 50. Reread three times.
I have gotten many positive things from reading *Twilight*. I've experienced the joy in reliving some of the exciting parts of adolescence as well as remembering some of the angst of adolescence, and being happy those days are behind me. I have also realized many positive aspects of my personality were formed during adolescence. I am happily married but swoon at when I remember those first stages of falling in love.

I, to my delight, went online and found a group of women and men *not teenagers* that love the books as well as I do. I have found a place that we can discuss the book(s), the characters, and our feelings. The website allows us to get involved in other activities as well, such as a “biggest loser” diet club. It is an opportunity to make friends that I would not normally have made. We discuss current movies, other books we love, current events. We share our hobbies, families. It has been a lot of fun.

Falling in love with Edward has been a safe way to have these feelings and feel young again. *New Moon*, the second book in the Twilight Saga by Stephanie Meyer. Read at age 50. Reread three times.

As the second book in the Twilight saga begins Bella is unhappy that she is turning 18, as Edward will always be 17! She wants him to turn her into a vampire so she can live with him forever. He does not want to do so because he believes he has no soul and does not want to take her life and condemn her to certain hell. Neither believes they can live without the other and are trying to adjust to their differences.

To make a long story short, Edward decides that he loves Bella too much to continue to put her life in danger. He makes up his mind that he must leave her. The next day Edward takes Bella for a walk. He tells her that he no longer loves her and that he and his family are leaving Forks. He tells her she will get over him, that he will make sure there is nothing to remind her of him, that it will be “as if [he]’d never existed.” Bella is devastated—as was I!!! I had fallen in love with this character as well, and could not believe he was doing this!

The final pages of this chapter, titled “The End,” had only one word, every other page, namely October, November December, January. I have to say that affected me more than any words could have. Those empty pages broke my heart. I literally felt the pain, emptiness and devastation Bella felt. Few of us have gone through life without having our hearts broken. I went through a divorce in which I felt exactly that empty. I felt all my dreams for my future had been taken away. I have often said that physical pain is much easier to deal with than emotional pain.
Those empty months in Bella’s life were very devastating in bringing back the worst pain of my life.

At the end of *New Moon*, Edward is mistakenly told that Bella is dead. He calls the Swan household and is told that Charlie, Bella’s father, is at a funeral. The funeral was for his friend, not Bella.

Edward decides that he cannot live in a world without Bella. He goes to Italy to seek the Volturi, the oldest vampire coven. The Volturi are the ruling “family” of vampires. Edward goes to the Volturi asking to be killed. Alice, Edward’s sister, goes to Bella—knowing that only by Edward seeing Bella in the flesh—will he believe that she is alive and not do what he has planned. Thus, just in time, of course, Bella and Edward are reunited! It comes at a cost, however, as the Volturi cannot have a human that knows about the vampires and they extract a promise that Bella will soon be turned, which leads to the next books in the saga.

Suffice it to say, I was thrilled at the reunion; I was also in league with Bella, in wanting the outcome that she would be a vampire, and be with Edward forever. The romantic in me wanted this. Who wouldn’t want the dream of being with your love for eternity—all the while staying young and beautiful—never aging? Turning 50 this past year was not fun for me, maybe that is another reason the story hit me harder than it would have normally. I can’t say for sure. I just know that I had started feeling, as Bella, the sadness of my youth being gone, never having those new love experiences. But I was able to feel all of that in this book, as well as others in the series.
Branwen

- *City of Illusions*, by Ursula K. Le Guin.

  I probably read it for the first time in 1973, when I was 27 or 28 years old. I was living in Cameroon in Africa at the time, and had ordered everything and anything by Le Guin. It was difficult to get books in English there and I had to order them through my family who shipped them on to me. I’m sure I read it again during the eighties, and again in 1989 as part of the work for my master’s from the University of Bordeaux. I probably read it again at some point. *City of Illusions* is considered a minor work by most of Le Guin’s critics, and it doesn’t have the depth of her later Hainish novels. Yet the image of the beginning of the book has stayed with me for all these years. A grown man stumbles out of the forest. The villagers, some of whom can read minds, discover that his is empty. One of them says, “A jumble – a void. He has no mind.” Although they fear he may be a tool of the Shing, they decide to let him live, to see if he can be taught. Thus Le Guin places a mind as empty as a new-born infant’s in the body of a grown man. The concept fascinated me, perhaps because I was watching my own babies become conscious beings, learning to interact with the world around them. Is existence without a mind, without language and without memory possible? Through the character of Falk, we realize how terrifying it is to live in a world you don’t understand, where nothing has meaning, as every infant first experiences it. Le Guin seems to be saying that without a mind, man is not truly human, that it is only when we fill our empty minds with learning that we become true human beings.

- “Betrayals,” a short story by Ursula K. Le Guin, from *Four Ways to Forgiveness.*

  I think I read this for the first time around 1998, when I was fifty-three. I had forgotten the details of the story, but remembered a feeling of solemn tolerance for others. At the beginning of the story, Tikuli, a pet kit, a foxdog, dies of old age. The species exists only in Le Guin’s imagination and I don’t believe it’s described elsewhere in her other stories. Yet there is so much truth in his dying, a truth shared by everyone who has lost a beloved pet, that I experienced grief and sadness at his death. Later Aberkam and Yoss are brought together when Aberkam, who does not like animals, risks his life to save Yoss’ spotted cat from the burning house. He doesn’t understand her attachment but, as he said, “I thought how you cried when the other one died.”
Because he could understand and feel compassion for her grief, they are able to recognize their shared humanity—“Brother, I am thou.”

- “Forgiveness Day,” a short story by Ursula K. Le Guin, from *Four Ways to Forgiveness.*

  I read this at the same time as the previous story and had forgotten all about it. I had forgotten everything but the fact that the four stories in the collection had left me with a feeling of being wrung out, and confronted with an enormous intellect. Today I began rereading it and didn’t want to put it down. I resented any intrusion on my reading and had tears in my eyes when I put it down. Solly and Teyeo have totally different characters and cordially detest each other until they are forced to share a prison cell. In spite of all their differences, they share a basic integrity that each comes to respect and honor in the other. It’s a love story, but a love story that seems to encompass the entire human race in all its varieties as imagined by Le Guin. It made me take a close look at the man in my life, beyond the little frictions which pile up after forty years of living together, and see his inner self which is as honorable and wonderful and worth loving as it was forty some years ago.

- *Gifts,* by Ursula K. Le Guin.

  I read this in 2007, when I was 62 years old. It deals with an adolescent boy’s stubborn refusal to be what his father wants, caused by his fear of his own inadequacy—“I drew away, into my furious shame, my stone tower, and stood mute inside it.” And I felt like I was fourteen again, furious at the world and furious at myself because I wasn’t able to explain my fears. Then, in a moment of anger, the boy unintentionally kills an annoying pet dog. He is told that he has the wild gift, a power he cannot control. His father has a destructive power that he uses but sparingly in order to protect his family. The boy cannot call upon his own power when he wishes, but it comes unbidden in moments of passion and anger. Le Guin’s skill as a writer drew me completely into his fear and frustration, so common among young people struggling to grow into adults, to learn to use their powers in ways that are not destructive. I am a teacher and this story has helped me to better understand their often gawky incoherencies.


  I read it in 1972, when I was 27. The hero, Ged, has unintentionally loosed a monster on the world. After running and hiding from the nameless shadow and almost dying, he returns to his former master, Ogion, who suggests that instead of running, he should become the hunter and
confront his enemy. When he does so, the monster flees to the furtherest edges of Earthsea. “He hunted, he followed, and fear ran before him.” He eventually comes ashore on Iffish and finds his friend Vetch who continues the hunt with him. And after many days of pursuit on the uncharted open sea, where men have never gone and returned, they catch up with the shadow. All along, Ged has known that the only way to defeat the shadow he has allowed into the world is to discover its true name. The monster knows his, but he does not know what the evil thing is. During the long hunt he has had many days to meditate and try to discover its name. Le Guin describes his final confrontation with the monster.

_It drew together and shrank and blackened, crawling on four short taloned legs upon the sand. But still it came forward, lifting up to him a blind unformed snout without lips or ears or eyes. As they came right together it became utterly black in the white mage-radiance that burned about it, and it heaved itself upright. In silence, man and shadow met face to face and stopped. Aloud and clearly, breaking that old silence, Ged spoke the shadow’s name and in the same moment the shadow spoke without lips or tongue, saying the same word: “Ged”. And the two voices were one voice._

This confrontation amazed me and left me stunned. Rereading it for this project, I could see how the author prepared the reader. Yet the idea that the evil monster is actually within us, something that we can master when we recognize it and name it and accept it as part of ourselves, was a powerful eye-opener. And it has helped me throughout my life, to be honest about the cause of my problems, to avoid playing the blame game, and to find the courage to confront my problems rather than run from them.


I read this in 1972, when I was 27. The description of the dark forest, “_pitch-dark – not what you call pitch-dark, but really pitch; so black that you really could see nothing,_” is mesmerizing, the stuff of nightmares. The gloom and the dark, the evil sounds, the black squirrels—going on day after day with short rations, unable to drink the black water of the only stream they cross. As I read this I was totally absorbed in the horrible atmosphere and then there were the monstrous giant spiders, all the more terrible because they can talk. “_Kill ‘em, I say,_” hissed a fourth; “_kill’em now and hang ‘em dead for a while._” I remember the horror of the forest to this day. Mirkwood the Great finds itself in my nightmares and makes me grateful for the tame beauty of the woods where I live.

I read Tolkien for the first time in 1972. I had been living in Cameroon for the last five years and on a visit home I discovered that my former English professor was teaching a course on Science Fiction and Fantasy. He gave me the reading list for the course and I discovered that the science fiction books I had bought in the local drug store were now considered worthy to be discussed in a college “literature” course. From the same list I discovered Le Guin and Tolkien, and it was like a light going on. The fairy tales that I had loved as a child had grown up. In this chapter Aragon goes deep into the mountain’s roots to summon the ghosts of the oath breakers to redeem their pledge to Isildur, his ancestor, to fight against Sauron. Much of the passage is seen through the eyes of Gimli the Dwarf, “who had walked unafraid in many deep places of the world,” but who is terrorized by the Paths of the Dead. The eerie terror of the long journey in the dark followed by an army of whispering ghosts is perfectly rendered. When Aragon summons the phantoms, “there was no answer, unless it were an utter silence more dreadful than the whispers before.” I think what moved me in this passage and has made me remember it is that Aragon does not conquer the palpable terror with a heroic feat of arms, but with quiet, determined courage. He says, “I do not go gladly; only need drives me.” When his companions warn that no horse will enter the evil door, Aragorn replies, “But we must go in, and therefore the horses must go too.” He then led the way, “and such was the strength of his will in that hour that all the Dúnedain and their horses followed him.” The lesson I retained was that determination can vanquish all fears.

• *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, by William Morris.

I must have read this book for the first time in the mid-seventies. At that time I was living in a small port in French-speaking Cameroon. An addicted reader, I often found it hard to find something new to read in English. I was able to order books from the States. In those pre-Amazon days my family shipped them to me and it often took the package six months to reach me. I had also inherited two or three book lockers from former Peace Corps Volunteers, but I had been living there for over six years and had read just about everything in them. I borrowed some from missionaries who were passing through and reread my favorites in periods of drought. Then I discovered a treasure trove in Douala, the large city 200 km away, where we went to buy goods and supplies about once every three months. There was a large French language book store there,
and in the back, where there were no windows, there were three shelves reserved for books in English. Of course there were the usual Agatha Christy mysteries, which are often the only English language books to be found in a French bookshop. But there were also some very strange books, recent science fiction titles by some of the best writers and some marvelous fantasy from Lin Carter’s Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series. *The Children of Llyr, The Worm Ouroboros* by E. R. Eddison. *The Well at the End of the World*, and *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* by William Morris. Each trip to Douala meant a new book or two and I often found the same books, as if the stock wasn’t frequently renewed. Eventually it occurred to me that the books hadn’t been chosen for their commercial value, that the person who was ordering them made their choices to suit their own personal taste. I tried to find out who was ordering the English books. I was told the owner of the shop asked a Jesuit priest to give him lists of titles in English to order. I was never able to find out his name or to meet him, but will be eternally grateful for the books he helped me discover.

I often have trouble remembering the title of this book, but I think of it as the book of Birdalone, the heroine. The opening chapter describes how she was kidnapped as a small child by a witch and raised in the evil forest with no other company or playmates than the goats and the animals of the forest. To fit the “medieval” setting of his story, William Morris uses an archaic form of English, which may put off many modern readers. His language and style are not more authentic than the medieval style of the Pre-Raphaelites, and his socialist ideas are evident in much of the story. Birdalone is beautiful, but born to craftsmen rather than aristocrats. She is also intelligent, strong and skilled at swimming, woodcraft, archery and embroidery. In many ways, she is the first feminist heroine. If she faints a little too often for my taste, she’s always strong when she has to be. I’ve reread the book at least three or four times, always carried away by the enchanting character of Birdalone, her courage and her integrity. There are knights, brave and dashing, in the story, and even fairies, but Birdalone outshines them all. Her instinctive refusal of all that might be evil or even small-minded is inspiring. When I started reading it for this project, I didn’t intend to read all of the book, but once I had entered the world of Birdalone, I couldn’t leave it. My mind can pick out the weak points in Morris’ 19th century plot; there are moments when my “suspension of disbelief” is stretched a bit thin, but my heart believes implicitly in Birdalone. She’s an ideal, perhaps an ideal I have tried to approach in my actions at various times.
The Gate of Ivrel, by C. J. Cherryh.

I may have read this in 1980, when I was about 35 years old. It might have been earlier or a little later, but I think I bought it in an American bookstore in Paris. What struck me about the story is that a very strong, masculine man finds himself the slave of a woman that he fears because of her unknown weapons, resents because she is using him to achieve her own goals, and gradually comes to respect because of her courage and honesty. Morgaine, like Birdalone in Morris’ The Water of the Wondrous Isles, is a strong woman, a true warrior who fights men with their own weapons. Vanye honors her as he would a man, but loses none of his own virility by accepting her as his lord. Perhaps this is part of the magic of science fiction, making believable things that would seem incredible in our society. I've reread The Gate of Ivrel several times. Sorry I can't be more precise, but this is one of those books I know I can pick up and have a good read. I ordered the other books in the series and found it interesting to reread the entire series. Still hoping there'll be another book.

Tehanu, by Ursula K. Le Guin.

Like many of Ursula K. Le Guin’s fans in the eighties, I was very excited to learn that there was a fourth book coming out in the Earthsea trilogy. She had written the first three books in the sixties and they were marketed as fantasy for teen-agers. The hero of the three books was Ged, who is a young man in the first book, A Wizard of Earthsea, then just slightly older, then an old man in the third, which is told from the viewpoint of a young boy. I read the three books in the summer of 1972 when I was 27 years old and have been a Le Guin fan ever since. I read Tehanu almost as soon as it came out in 1990 or 1991, the copy I had was hardback and I don't believe the paperback version was available. So I would have been in my mid-forties. I read it at least twice, probably no more than three times.

Le Guin’s publishers were in a dilemma with the fourth book, because its themes, death, women’s role in society, and child abuse, could hardly be considered suitable for the young readers’ market. But her fans, like Le Guin, had grown older and wiser during the interval. She had also become much more aware of how her earlier fiction failed to question the role of men in her imaginary society. Men with magical powers were wizards and went to the school for wizards. Women with magical powers were mere village witches, ignorant and unschooled.
So Téhanu is told from the viewpoint of the girl Ged rescued in *The Tombs of Atuan*. She has married someone else (wizards give up their sexual potency) and led a simple life of wife, housewife, mother and grandmother. Now she is a widow and the story begins with her sensing that Ogion, Ged’s first master, is calling her. She goes to him and finds him dying. She cares for him as best she can, making him comfortable, and stays with him as he dies. This scene deeply impressed me. Death is always portrayed as either something sinister and horrible, the end of everything, or a passage into another world that no one has ever returned to describe. Le Guin portrays it as natural, part of the world we live in, and gives it both dignity and realism. Ogion knows that he is dying and accepts death as the long expected outcome of his life. He asks to be taken outside, so he can feel nature around him, and of course death is a natural process. This passage remains with me and if, like Ogion, I have time to see death approaching, I’ll certainly want to read it over and over.
*Lucy*

The number of times I’ve read any of the titles is only approximate since I often reread my favorite ones.

*Interior Life* by Katherine Blake. Age 35. Read one time.

**Synopsis:** Sue, an ordinary suburban housewife, starts imaging a fantasy world occupied by a destroyer. The fantasy world takes on a life of its own, as she confronts her real-world problems. In the real world, Sue organizes her house, the PTA, and her husband’s career.

   In the fantasy world, two women begin by organizing a castle, much like Sue. However, as the story progresses, they become part of struggle of epic portions. The deities of the realm join the final battle between the two forces. The princess is the catalyst for the confrontation. Moreover, the outcome of the battle and the world depends upon her. She finds herself wielding enormous power she had not guessed she possessed.

**Experience:** It is refreshing to read fantasy that is not a coming of age tale. Sue is an adult protagonist: her purpose is to reinvigorate herself and to change the course of her life. Makeovers entertain me, especially when they are as thorough as hers is. She does not stop at a new wardrobe but alters her community as well.

   I read Blake’s novel and a biography of the Brontës roughly at the same time. The Brontë family has intrigued me for years, and I have read five or six biographies of the four notable siblings. A fundamental component of their lives was their imaginary world that they created on receiving toy soldiers as gifts. Between them, the isolated children created a paracosm. They invested much time and effort in detailing their world, complete with geography, history and an abundance of characters. The game continued until they were separated by education and work. To varying degrees, their juvenilia inspired the sisters’ novels.

   Due to social pressure, Charlotte began to give up her imaginary world as she sought publication. Biographers note that there were signs that Charlotte’s husband was beginning to encourage her to give up her writing altogether.

   Though I had not analyzed it before writing about these experiences, it seems that reading about women imagining a fantasy world is rare enough for me to treasure each instance. Joanna Russ, in *How to Suppress Women’s Writing*, states that the first traditional barrier against minority groups is prohibition. If a person is not permitted to imagine any world other than the
one presently inhabited, then there is no possibility of sharing this vision. Blake writes the story of a woman whose fantastic imagination is clearly beneficial in her mundane life. Blake’s story is comforting to me because it sanctions women’s imagination which is something rare in popular culture.

*Just So Stories* by Rudyard Kipling. Age 8-9. Read 5 times.

**Synopsis:** Kipling’s collection of twelve pourquoi tales covers animal anatomy, the alphabet, and the sea’s tides. The titles I discuss are “The Elephant’s Child” and “How the Rhinoceros Got His Skin.”

In the world of the first story, “The Elephant’s Child,” elephants have short noses of limited movement. A young elephant “who was full of ‘satiable curiosity” asks what a crocodile eats, of his extended family. They spank him for annoying them, which prompts him to quest for the answer. The crocodile the Elephant’s Child discovers attempts to eat him for dinner. However, the Elephant’s Child manages to pull himself free and discovers that his nose is prehensile. He revenges himself on his extended family by spanking each of them with his new nose.

In “How the Rhinoceros Got His Skin,” the bad mannered rhinoceros steals and eats a man’s cake. Later, the rhino removes his skin to bathe and the man fills his skin with crumbs. The rhinoceros scratches the folds in his skin while trying to ease the itching.

**Experience:** While the story of “The Elephant’s Child” was a bit rough for my taste, I favored it. It was not till I was much older that I began to appreciate poetic justice (the elephant punishing his incurious relatives) and revenge tales.

The greedy and gluttonous Rhinoceros in “How the Rhinoceros Got His Skin” suffered the mild consequences; I hated wearing itchy clothes though so I sympathized a with his plight.

The best part of the stories was Kipling’s use of innovative, rhythmic language. It’s doubtful that I would have taken poetry courses in college, if it were not for Kipling. An example from the first story: “the banks of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever-trees.”

Examples from the second tale: “he baked it till it was all done brown and smelt most sentimental” and “his hat, from which the rays of the sun were reflected in more-than-oriental splendor.”
**Little Witch** by Anna E. Bennett. Age 10-12 & late 20s. Read 4 to 5 times.

**Synopsis:** Minx, whose real name is Minikin, wishes that she was not a witch’s child. One day she goes to school, and that action begins her emancipation from the witch. The witch turns some of her friends into flower pots, and threatens a worse fate for Minikin.

**Experience:** As a child I preferred fantasy to be internally consistent. Rule-based magic was one sign that the writer could be trusted not to pull in a deus ex machina. Minikin uses trial and error to find out how to conjure a fairy and how to rescue the enchanted children.

Things seemed to go so badly for Minikin that I could hardly believe her supremely happy ending. In sum: the witch is foiled; a delightful and eccentric family adopts Minikin; town officials beg for broom rides, and she discovers her true heritage as the daughter of a fairy queen.

It seems I enjoy stories with ‘dark night of the soul’ episodes and endings that are eucatastrophes. Although I refer to the poem by St. John of the Cross, I do not mean that the protagonist is necessarily suffering a purging of the soul that leads to a union with God, though I do not rule it out either. I am chiefly referring to a period of personal suffering for the protagonist which prepares him or her to fulfill the mission. Typically, this kind of storyline leads to the protagonist saving the world from destruction. By eucatastrophe, a term coined by J. R. R. Tolkien, I mean a sudden and poignant turn from grief to joy.


**Synopsis:** Bastian is bullied by classmates until he takes refuge in reading a book about Atreyu’s quest to save Fantastica from the Nothing. As the story progresses, Bastian finds himself drawn into the action of the story. He joins Atreyu on his quest to recreate Fantastica, a task given to imaginative peoples throughout history.

**Experience:** I only read this story once but it impressed me for its different colored ink symbolizing the different storylines (the bullies and Bastian and the Nothing and Atreyu).

This novel is another validation of the fantastic. Ende most eloquently posits that creativity is true magic. Thus, if we forget to develop our imagination, our lives become empty. In the dénouement, Bastian attempts to bring his father some of the Waters of Life which restore one’s original nature. He thinks he has failed until he sees tears in his father’s eyes for the first time.

**Synopsis:** Barodia and Euralia go to war over a petty quarrel. Princess Hyacinth deals with would-be suitors and counters the machinations of the ambitious Countess Belvane. In a subplot, Hyacinth’s attendant Wiggs has a ring that will grant her one wish if she behaves well for an entire day. Her strongest desire is to dance beautifully.

**Experience:** Although Robert Aspirin and Terry Pratchett have done their best to leaven the genre, fantasy remains rather grim. The gentle parody of fairy stories amused me. It appealed to me that the stuffy characters come to ludicrous ends, such as the King who failed his second career as pig keeper. The minor characters have a few moments of grace, especially young Wiggs who only wants to dance well. The moment when her wish is granted is transformative and is the most poetic passage in the book.

**Ozma of Oz** by Frank L. Baum. Age 10-11 & age 15. Read 5 times.

**Synopsis:** Dorothy and a hen are washed overboard a ship and find themselves in Oz. Queen Ozma and party mean to rescue the royal family of Ev from the Kingdom of the Nomes (sic).

**Experience:** Baum adds much whimsy and adventure to this series entry. The woman who exchanged heads instead of clothes impresses. I enjoyed the thrills of the characters passing beneath the giant pounding hammer and outwitting the evil Nome King with his knick-knack collection.

However, Bill the hen was my favorite character. She was no-nonsense, completely self-confident and really was the one who defeated the king instead of the humans. At the time I felt that the sidekicks in fairy tales and fantasy stories had more fun than the protagonists. Bill solidified my opinion. The irreverent talking hen manages to follow her routine and triumph over her enemies with one morning egg.

Here is a passage from the book on the matter of renaming Bill:

“My name is Bill,” said the yellow hen, somewhat gruffly.

“Bill! Why, that’s a boy’s name.”

“What difference does that make?”...

“But it’s all wrong, you know,” declared Dorothy, earnestly; “and, if you don’t mind, I shall call you ‘Billina.’ Putting the ‘eena’ on the end makes it a girl’s name, you see.”
Dorothy is unable to accept a masculine name for a hen and renamed her companion. This is strange since she easily accepts even stranger customs in the course of the series. Nevertheless, Bill deserves more respect.

**Pink Motel** by Carol R. Brink. Age 9-11 & age 34. Read 3 times.

**Synopsis:** Kirby and his family move to a motel in Florida. It turns out to be painted pink. Kirby investigates a mystery among the roster of eccentric guests.

**Experience:** This novel is a juvenile version of a gentle read (i.e. a book which takes the reader back to a gentler, less complicated time). When I realized that the weather vanes symbolized each of the motel guests, I was delighted. The windblown Miss Ferry stays in the Flying Duck room. Mr. Carver, the genial woodworker, stays in the Crowing Rooster room. The snobbish, dog owner, Miss P. DeGree has the prancing pony. The busy, sun-tanning Browns have the Airplane; Mr. Marvello, the magician stays in the leaping dolphin room. Finally the pair of thieves, Jack & Jimmy Black are placed in the room with the two men sawing wood.

Though Kirby is nonplussed by meeting people he considers unusual to him, he quickly adjusts. Each person fit neatly into the temporary society. One disappointment from Brink was that she did not assign a weather vane to every character. I imagined what the rest of the characters would receive.

**Princess and Curdie** by George MacDonald. Age 8-10. Read 4 times.

**Synopsis:** This is the sequel to *The Princess and the Goblins*. Curdie, a miner, is sent by a mysterious old woman to save Princess Irene from danger.

**Experience:** Irene’s grandmother who is also called the Lady of the Silver Moon has a slightly different character here than she had in the first book. She’s powerful and stern, yet ultimately kind to Curdie. She orders Curdie to put his hands into a fire made of roses, and he gains the ability to know each person’s nature by touching their hand. In short, if the person is greedy, their hand feels like a pig’s foot, or if they are gentle, they might have skin that’s baby soft. Their inner nature can be at complete odds with their outer appearance. This ability is even better than telepathy because people can lie even to themselves.

I later learned that the grandmother was modeled after MacDonald’s concept of Eve. She is the primordial feminine; and something of a triple goddess since she appears as young as a
preadolescent child and as ancient as the Earth in other guises. The grandmother was the first introduction I had to a female deity within a Protestant Christian context.

*Shadow Castle* by Marion Cockrell. Age 8-9 and age 25. Read 4 times.

**Synopsis:** Lucy follows a dog through a tunnel and meets Michael who tells her stories about fairyland. In the first story, Prince Mika, a fairy, rescues the human princess Gloria from a horrible marriage. In the second story, Prince Robin is about to marry Princess Bluebelle but he suspects something is wrong. In the final story, the fairy princess Meira and the human prince Julian rescue the harmless dragon Branstookah from death.

**Experience:** My favorite of the tales was the one in which the goblins and fairies battle. The mystery and love story made this story more complex than the other two. Later on, I forgot the author’s name and couldn’t find the book for a long time. I even tried to recreate it in writing when I was in my teens. Finally, I found a copy on Amazon and bought it for my sister’s birthday.

*Snow Queen* by Hans Christian Andersen. Age 9-10. Read 2 times.

**Synopsis:** The Snow Queen lures Kay from home. Gerda sets out to rescue him from imprisonment in the wicked queen’s palace of ice. (Note: I used the spelling “Kay” from the 1945 edition I read.)

**Experience:** I think this story was most important to me because it seemed the most magical of Andersen’s tales. The cold palace of snow and ice is beautifully written, and it’s easy to picture little Kay slowly freezing to death in the vast rooms. Kay is trapped inside the Snow Queen’s palace while trying to place shards of ice into the word “eternity.” At the time, his situation was pretty much my idea of hell.

Gerda actually undergoes most of the trial, since she travels alone at great distances and befriends all kinds of creatures so that she may find her friend Kay. However, it is Kay’s struggle in fitting the pieces of ice together to win his freedom from the Snow Queen that captured my imagination. Gerda’s appearance causes him to cry which washes the cursed splinter of ice from his eye. In fact, in my memory, the initial capture of Kay and Gerda’s rescue comprised the whole story.
**So You Want to Be a Wizard** by Diane Duane. Age 35. Read one time.

**Synopsis:** Nita finds a book entitled, *So You Want to Be a Wizard?* while hiding in a library from bullies. Nita takes the Wizard’s oath and joins another wizard Kit in preventing the maker of darkness from destroying Manhattan.

**Experience:** The story is quite serious despite the title. It is all about honor, sacrifice and the meaning of life. Moreover, it has a suspenseful story line and solid characters.

Nita is able to communicate with plant life but she finds her conversations with the trees most educational. She learns that humans are indebted to trees for their sacrifice in bringing peace to Earth. Eons ago, the trees defeated the maker of darkness and freed humans for a prosperous existence. This indebtedness is based on the mythology the author has created; nevertheless, it is a poignant method of dramatizing the dependence that animal life has on plant life.

**Story of Babar** by Jean de Brunhoff. Age 6-7. Read 3 to 4 times.

**Synopsis:** The orphaned Babar is sheltered by the Old Lady. When he is grown, he leads his fellow elephants in victory against their enemies and builds a utopian elephant city.

**Experience:** Babar’s utopian elephant village impressed me greatly. The efforts the elephants made to foster peace between species were appealing. The curving architecture and the comfortable, slow-paced lifestyle charmed me just as much. I followed the series for a while, hoping to learn more about daily life in Barbar’s kingdom. I was influenced by reading these books into organizing a “happiness club” with my siblings—the meetings only lasted as long as we didn’t fight.

**Sylvester and the Magic Pebble** by William Steig. Age 8-9. Read 5 times.

**Synopsis:** Sylvester finds a wishing pebble. A lion frightens Sylvester into wishing he were a rock. Unfortunately, rocks cannot speak.

**Experience:** My favorite scene was the picnic that Sylvester’s parents had on the rock, which was his enchanted form. I empathized with Sylvester’s desperation to communicate with his parents and I sympathized with his parents mourning their lost son. I remember crying almost every time I read it: it was a pleasant catharsis, emotional purging in reaction to emotions roused by art.

**Synopsis:** In this sequel to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice goes into a world based on the game of chess. Alice is a pawn in the game and must reach the final space to become Queen.

**Experience:** This book began with Alice walking through a mirror that turns to mist. For years afterward, I thought about it when walking in fog.

It also had “The Jabberwocky” which I could probably still recite. This was the second influence that had me reading poetry and taking poetry classes in my youth. Alas, it did not influence me to learn chess.

The Looking-Glass story had more heart than Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, particularly her conversation with the wooly-headed White Knight. For once in both books, Alice is able to help and explain things to the denizens of the world. She helped the messy White Queen improve her appearance as well.

In my early teens, I read the annotated version, which contains both books, helped me understand the portmanteau words and the original works that Carroll parodied. Carroll, more than any other author, developed my appreciation for word play and logical jokes.

**Velveteen Rabbit** by Margery Williams. Age 8-9. Read 5 times.

**Synopsis:** A plush rabbit adores his human owner. He also longs to become real which he learns can be done if he is loved. The boy contracts scarlet fever and the rabbit is his favorite toy during the illness. By this time, the Velveteen Rabbit is worn out and he is due to be burned for being contaminated. He has almost given up hope of finding the magic called Real, when a fairy turns him into a meat rabbit (i.e. a rabbit of flesh and bones).

**Experience:** The Velveteen Rabbit meets an aging horse who imparts wisdom to the newcomer:

“What is REAL?” asked the Rabbit….

“Real isn't how you are made”, said the skin Horse….

“When a child loves you for a long, long, time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real.”

I took the part about loving things until they become real very seriously. I mulled over how the rocking horse was real without the fairy’s help though. I finally decided that the fairy was making the rabbit different not real. This was a favorite for a long time, though I did not approve of the poorly written ending.

**Synopsis:** A white seal searches for a home for his herd, far from preying humans. He succeeds in finding the perfect place.

**Experience:** I think this story was the most affecting ecological fantasy I’ve read. I completely identified with the seal protagonist and his troubles. It was more poignant and clearer than Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. Carson’s book is an elegant piece of nature writing but it failed to make the issues personalized. I remember it clearly because of an assignment in which I was to find and summarize all the key points in the book.

The seals make it to a safe haven by the end, but their wretched lives before they found shelter stayed with me.

*Wolves of Willoughby Chase* by Joan Aiken. Age 9-10, & 22. Read 3 to 4 times.

**Synopsis:** Temporary caretaker, Miss Slighcarp sends meek, ladylike Sylvia and her vivacious, rich cousin Bonnie, to a horrible orphan school. They escape and rout their enemy.

**Experience:** Sylvia, being more sensitive and ill-nourished, suffers far more than her cousin in these circumstances. The character’s most painful experience was her struggle to behave in a ladylike way, when her compartment is attacked by wolves. Sylvia’s courageous journey from a pale and spineless young lady into a self-sufficient and strong young woman is one of the novel’s most inspiring aspects.
Appendix H: Books and Genres

Genres were assigned to the 134 distinct books read by participants, where books refer to all types of literature, including short stories, chapters, books, collections, trilogies, and series. The primary resources used to determine the genres of the books were the research of Clute and Nicholls (1994), Clute and Grant (1997), Mathews (2002), *Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature* (1995), and Pinsent (2002). Additional resources were descriptions of the stories (i.e., from publishers or book reviews) and my first hand experiences of reading the books. The genres were legend, myth, folklore, fairy tale, fantasy (children’s, young adult and adult), science fiction (children’s and adult), and children’s literature (non-fantasy). Table 6 shows the 134 distinct book titles and authors read by participants and the genres assigned to them. The terms children’s, young adult, and adult refer to the following age groups respectively: ages 4-12, ages 12-18, and ages 18 and above.
Table 6

*Books and Genres (N = 18)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Genre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard Adams</td>
<td><em>Watership Down</em></td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan Aiken</td>
<td><em>Wolves of Willoughby Chase</em></td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hans Christian</td>
<td><em>Snow Queen</em></td>
<td>Fairy tale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andersen</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poul Anderson</td>
<td><em>Trader Team</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Satan's World</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piers Anthony</td>
<td><em>On a Pale Horse</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>A Spell for Chameleon</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac Asimov</td>
<td><em>The Caves of Steel</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foundation Series (Volumes 1-3)</td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Gods Themselves</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Naked Sun</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Nightfall</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>I, Robot</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Rest of the Robots</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Genre</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jean Auel</td>
<td><em>The Clan of the Cave Bear</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank L. Baum</td>
<td><em>Ozma of Oz</em></td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Beagle</td>
<td>“Two Hearts” (Short Story)</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna E. Bennett</td>
<td><em>Little Witch</em></td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine Blake</td>
<td><em>Interior Life</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enid Blyton</td>
<td>The Brer Rabbit Books</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Magic Faraway Tree</em> (and other Pixie type books)</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray Bradbury</td>
<td><em>The Pedestrian</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“A Sound of Thunder” (Short Story)</td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion Zimmer</td>
<td><em>The Mists of Avalon</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradley</td>
<td><em>Kai Lung Series</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(<em>Kai Lung’s Golden Hours, Kai Lung Unrolls his Mat, The Wallet of Kai Lung</em>)</td>
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<thead>
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<th>Genre</th>
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<tr>
<td>Carol R. Brink</td>
<td><em>Pink Motel</em></td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Brooks</td>
<td><em>Sword of Shannara</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven Brust</td>
<td><em>Taltos Series</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikhail Bulgakov</td>
<td><em>The Master and Margarita</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Butcher</td>
<td><em>Dresden Series</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elias Canetti</td>
<td><em>Auto da Fé</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orson Scott Card</td>
<td><em>Ender's Game</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Seventh Son</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacqueline Carey</td>
<td><em>Kushiel Series</em></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis Carroll</td>
<td><em>Through a Looking-Glass</em></td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. J. Cherryh</td>
<td>Gate Series (a.k.a. Morgaine Saga)</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur C. Clarke</td>
<td><em>Fountains of Paradise</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marian Cockrell</td>
<td><em>Shadow Castle</em></td>
<td>Young adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padraic Colum</td>
<td><em>Nordic Gods and Heroes</em></td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Creed</td>
<td><em>Flashpoint</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Crowley</td>
<td><em>Little, Big</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jean de Brunhoff</td>
<td><em>Story of Babar</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Frank W. Dixon</td>
<td>The Hardy Boys Series</td>
<td>Children’s Literature (Mystery)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephen Donaldson</td>
<td><em>Lord Foul's Bane</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diane Duane</td>
<td><em>So You Want to Be a Wizard</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>David Eddings</td>
<td><em>Pawn of Prophecy</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. R. Eddison</td>
<td><em>The Worm Ouroboros</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>E. C. Elliott</td>
<td><em>Kemlo and the Sky Horse</em></td>
<td>Children’s science fiction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael Ende</td>
<td><em>The Neverending Story</em></td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philip José Farmer</td>
<td><em>Jesus on Mars</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Siddo Lovers</em></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan Garner</td>
<td>The Tales of Alderley:</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Weirdstone of Brisingamen</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Moon of Gomrath</em></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers Grimm</td>
<td>Fairy Tale Anthologies</td>
<td>Folklore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Hancock</td>
<td><em>Arena</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
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<th>Author</th>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Heinlein</td>
<td><em>The Moon is a Harsh Mistress</em></td>
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<tr>
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<td><em>Starman Jones</em></td>
<td>Children’s science fiction</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Stranger in a Strange Land</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Unpleasant Profession of Mr. Jonathan Hoag”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Short Story)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Herbert</td>
<td><em>Dune</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharon Hinck</td>
<td><em>The Restorer</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caprice Hokstad</td>
<td><em>Nor Iron Bars a Cage</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
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<tr>
<td>W. E. Johns</td>
<td><em>The Edge of Beyond</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephen King</td>
<td><em>The Eyes of the Dragon</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles Kingsley</td>
<td><em>Water Babies</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rudyard Kipling</td>
<td><em>Just So Stories</em> (“The Elephant’s Child” and</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“How the Rhinoceros Got His Skin”) (Short</td>
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<td>Story)</td>
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<td><em>Stalky and Co.</em></td>
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<td>(School Story)</td>
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<td><em>The Jungle Book</em> (“The White Seal”) (Short</td>
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<td>Stephen Lawhead</td>
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<td><em>Taliesin</em></td>
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<td>Tanith Lee</td>
<td>Birthgrave Series</td>
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<td>Ursula K. Le Guin</td>
<td><em>City of Illusions</em></td>
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<td><em>The Compass Rose</em> (“Two Delays on the Northern Line”) (Short Story)</td>
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<td><em>The Dispossessed</em></td>
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<td><em>Four Ways to Forgiveness</em> (“Betrayals”) (Short Story)</td>
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<td><em>Four Ways to Forgiveness</em> (“Forgiveness Day”) (Short Story)</td>
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<td><em>Gifts</em></td>
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<td><em>The Lathe of Heaven</em></td>
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<td><em>The Left Hand of Darkness</em></td>
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<td><em>A Wizard of Earthsea</em></td>
<td>Young adult fantasy</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Tehanu</em></td>
<td>Young adult fantasy</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Genre</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fritz Leiber</td>
<td>“Space-Time for Springers” (Short Story)</td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanislaw Lem</td>
<td>Tales of Pirx the Pilot</td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Solaris</td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Madeleine L’Engle</td>
<td>A Wrinkle in Time</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
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<td>A Wind in the Door</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. S. Lewis</td>
<td>The Chronicles of Narnia</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Perilandra Trilogy (a.k.a. The Space Trilogy)</td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne McCaffrey</td>
<td>Dragon Flight</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>George MacDonald</td>
<td>Princess and Curdie</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vonda McIntyre</td>
<td>Dreamscape</td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George R. R. Martin</td>
<td>A Game of Thrones</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julian May</td>
<td>Saga of the (Pliocene) Exiles Series</td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Galactic Milieu Trilogy (including Intervention)</td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Genre</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Stephanie Meyer</td>
<td><em>Twilight</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>New Moon</em></td>
<td>Young adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. A. Milne</td>
<td><em>Once on a Time</em></td>
<td>Fairy tale</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Winnie-the-Pooh Stories:</em></td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
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<td><em>Winnie-the-Pooh</em></td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td><em>The House at Pooh Corner</em></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Milton</td>
<td><em>Paradise Lost</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Morris</td>
<td><em>The Water of the Wondrous Isles</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andre Norton</td>
<td><em>Star Hunter</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi Novik</td>
<td>Temeraire Series</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine Paterson</td>
<td><em>Bridge to Terabithia</em></td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mervyn Peake</td>
<td>The Gormenghast Trilogy</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Perrault</td>
<td>Fairy Tale Anthologies</td>
<td>Fairy tale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Leonie Picard</td>
<td><em>Tales of the Norse Gods and Heroes</em></td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatrix Potter</td>
<td>Beatrix Potter Books</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(*The Tale of Peter Rabbit, Mrs Tiggywinkle,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Squirrel Nutkin</em>, among others*)</td>
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Table 6 (continued)

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<tr>
<td>Terry Pratchett</td>
<td>Discworld Series</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Rice</td>
<td><em>Interview with the Vampire</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy Robinson</td>
<td><em>The Didymus Contingency</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. K. Rowling</td>
<td>Harry Potter Series</td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanna Russ</td>
<td><em>The Female Man</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
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<td>“Whileaway” (Short Story)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis Sachar</td>
<td><em>Holes</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dan Simmon</td>
<td><em>Hyperion</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cordwainer Smith</td>
<td>Science Fiction Stories (Collected)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. E. &quot;Doc&quot; Smith</td>
<td><em>Galactic Patrol</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary Stewart</td>
<td>Crystal Cave Series</td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
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<tr>
<td>William Steig</td>
<td><em>Sylvester and the Magic Pebble</em></td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosemary Sutcliff</td>
<td><em>Sword at Sunset</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. R. R. Tolkien</td>
<td><em>The Hobbit</em></td>
<td>Children’s fantasy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Lord of the Rings</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Silmarillion</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
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<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>John Varley</td>
<td>Titan Series</td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan Vinge</td>
<td><em>The Snow Queen</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Walley</td>
<td><em>The Shadow and Night</em></td>
<td>Science fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Weis &amp; Tracy Hickman</td>
<td><em>Dragons of Autumn Twilight</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td><em>Dragon Wing</em></td>
<td>Adult fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margery Williams</td>
<td><em>Velveteen Rabbit</em></td>
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<td>Arthurian Legend</td>
<td>Legend</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Celtic Mythology Anthologies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Classical Greek Mythology Anthologies</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norse Mythology Anthologies</td>
<td>Myth</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Odyssey and Iliad</em> (Adaptations from Homer)</td>
<td>Myth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Children’s refers to ages 4-12; Young adult refers to ages 12-18; and Adult refers to ages 18 and above. The two Children’s Literature books listed are not considered to be fantasy by the study definition.