

Orson Scott Card's Speculative Fictions: Blending Science Fiction and Fantasy

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ABSTRACT

A prolific author, Orson Scott Card has written works that encompass a range of genres including a large body of commentary, Mormon drama, science fiction, fantasy, and horror, and often melds elements of one into another. In particular, as John Clute notes, “a ‘feel’ of fantasy pervades much of his s[cience] f[iction] work.” In fictions such as *Enders Game*, *Treason*, and *Wyrms*, and stories like “The Originist,” his tribute to Asimov’s Second Foundation, he employs traditional elements of fantasy: its language in references to wizards, dragons, magic, and such characters as dwarves, a portmanteau of “elf” and “dwarf”; the episodic quest narrative of escalating perils undertaken by the protagonist, who moves from isolation to community; and the conventional, often medieval, fantasyscape of fabulous forests, rivers, and mountains. Through such a strategy Card establishes a heightened significance to human experiences that both genres address, and opens another portal to the sense of wonder that informs each. (WAS)

KEYWORDS: fantasy, magic, melding genres, Orson Scott Card, quest, science fiction

In “Between Science Fiction and Fantasy” (*How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy*), Orson Scott Card negotiates the tricky tight rope of distinguishing between genre boundaries in terms of narrative content, readership and reader expectations, publishing categories, internal logic or laws, and contradictions or exceptions (20-25). He leans toward a clear demarcation—science fiction follows the rules of our universe; fantasy does not—but hedges

his argument by asserting that the building blocks of different speculative fiction modes can help to structure and to bolster one another: “science fiction improves when it borrows the best techniques from fantasy; and fantasy improves when it borrows appropriate techniques from science fiction” (21).

Card offers a trove of examples of inter-genre mingling by science-fiction authors. For instance, Paolo Bacigalupi’s generipped eco-disaster, *The Wind-up Girl* with genetically modified crops, humans, and cats as well as ghosts, Buddhist *phii*, who punctuate the action with criticism and shrewd sarcasm in conversations with the unfazed living, resulting in a southeast-Asian magical realism. Larry Niven’s *Magic Goes Away* stories feature a cautionary ecological message on a past version of our Earth, in which magic exists as a natural resource, such as oil; when it runs out, whatever was created or supported by magic loses its powers, or ceases to exist. One minute a powerful mage appears to be a muscular young man, the next a “lean and slippered pantaloan.” The exterior narrative of Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Rocannon’s World* comes from the reports of ethnographer Gaveral Rocannon, who moves beyond detached scientific observation to develop a spiritual bond with the natives and the world he has been sent to study. The fantasy that absorbs him concerns the story of Semele, a noble lady, who undertakes an epic space voyage, which appears supernatural to her, for a dynastic jewel like Tolkien’s Arkenstone. This quest involves encounters with beings who straddle the line between science fiction and fantasy, such as an elven-like species, the non-technological Fiiia, cousins of the dwarves, the Clayfolk; alien or fantasy creatures such as the windsteeds, a crossbreed of gryphon and cat. Finally, relativity and time—magic to her primitive people—returns her still young to a world in which her coevals have all died, á la Thomas the Rhymer. Anne McCaffrey’s Pern series, a lost space colony tale, recounts the travails of a feudal society threatened by the Red Star, a seeming demon that rains unquenchable incendiary filaments. The denizens of this planet defend themselves through an alliance with fire-

breathing dragons, which readers discover have been bred from small flying lizards. As Card suggests, “[y]our ‘fantasy’ might end up with all seeming magic explained away as perfectly natural phenomena” (*How* 24).

In point of fact, the “fantasy” never was a fantasy, but the reader perceives such an orientation from the fantasy characters, motifs, symbols, and world building knit into the story. In an interview with Howard Mittelmark, Card maintains that switching genres was not a difficult thing for him. He believes that, ultimately, the difference between the two genres is largely on the surface. “Half joking, I was writing to Ben [Bova] about this very subject, and I said, look, fantasy has trees, and science fiction has rivets. That’s it, that’s all the difference there is, the difference of feel, perception.” Card’s admixture of different genres is a hallmark of his career, so his integration of fantasy conventions within science fiction is not to be wondered at. In some works he injects fantasy allusions or terms into science fiction and in others frames the narrative itself as a fantasy, even when the history and background are future science fiction.

The effect he is trying to achieve is to create a sense of transcendence, a glimpse of the numinous, which orders people’s lives and times beyond the limitations of science or empirical thought, which cannot explain all phenomena; nor do they account for any higher purpose through which to see events and actions as they manifest themselves. In the conflict with entropy/chaos, the fantasy paradigm enlarges the protagonist’s role and choices in the restoration of order. In various works within his canon, Card weaves fantasy into science fiction to establish a heightened significance of experience and to open another portal to the wonder so crucial to both genres. There may be providence in the fall of a sparrow, but gravity exerts equal influence.

Critics and scholars have taken note of this tendency. Gary Westfahl argues that Card’s “science fiction can project the ambience of fantasy while his fantasy can have the

rigor of science fiction” (179), while John Clute points out that “a ‘feel’ of fantasy pervades much of his sf work” (“Card” *Encyclopedia* 166).¹ Brian Attebery’s definition of this mixed genre comes eerily close to Card’s own comment: “As a hybrid form, it can with equal justice be defined either as a form of fantasy that borrows from science fiction or as a subgenre of science fiction drawing inspiration from fantasy” (*Strategies* 106).² In “How Tolkien Means,” Card concludes that “All stories have to offer some common ground to at least some readers—some aspect of the worldview of the tale that feels true and right” (165).³

In Card’s fiction, this feel of fantasy sometimes pervades, as in “The Tinker” in *The Worthing Saga*, a series of primarily dystopic tales which take place over millenia and follow the exploits of the eponymous hero, Jason Worthing, who appears at times to have supernatural powers. “The Tinker” was Card’s first foray into science fiction: at least, he conceived of the story as science fiction when he submitted it to *Analog*; however, Ben Bova rejected it saying that the magazine “does not publish fantasy” (*Worthing* x). Card admits that the impression of fantasy comes from “medieval technology, lots of trees, and unexplained miracles” (x), a future medieval world in which the main characters are unlettered peasants—tinkers, smiths, coopers, carpenters—whose knowledge of the planet’s colonization and of Jason Worthing, whose name has become shrouded in dark mystery, has been lost, and who live simple, repetitive lives, never straying far from their village. They unwittingly illustrate Arthur C. Clarke’s Third Law that any advanced technology is taken for magic (36).

To them, the itinerant John Tinker signifies the existence of a higher, incomprehensible reality whose mental powers are marked by deep blue eyes, a trait of the Worthing line;⁴ he is referred to as “the magic man” no fewer than twenty times. When Sammy Barber observes that he is “a cold man,” Tinker’s cousin casts doubt on his humanity: “If he’s a man—”(434). The townspeople also call him John Bird because birds flock to him and he treats them as companions as if he were an animal mage; his affinity with birds and

beasts recalls the Pan figure of Dickon, the preternatural young boy in Frances Burnett Hodgson's *The Secret Garden*. In addition, Tinker's seeming magical powers anticipate those of Alvin Maker, the native American hero in another Card series, as he also demonstrates the uncanny ability to mend utensils so that little trace of any original break or flaw exists. After Tinker has repaired a pan, he holds it up to the innkeeper's similarly blue-eyed son, who wonders that "[t]here was no sign that there had ever been a hole in the pan" (437).

His talent as a healer is similarly occult. When he goes to the Coopers' house to heal their son's cancer, as he enters the room, "the monster leapt out, and it was terrible" (442). Cancer and pain metamorphose to monsters that only the magic man can slay. When he finishes, the child sits up as the sun shines through the window. Later, however, as a merciless winter sets in, he cannot save those who freeze and die so the villagers kick him to death for his failure this time. To these unlettered townspeople, the Tinker is a wizard or shaman. From the language of the story, which denotes their perception, it is easy to understand how Bova would have assumed the story to be a fantasy.

In the same collection, "Day of Pain," a tale of the Golden Age in which no one came to harm and violence was unimaginable, this Edenic existence comes to an unexpected and agonizing end; the fortunate fall has no clear origin or cause and appears as the work of magic or of an angry deity to both the characters in the story and readers alike. In the village, the unheard of occurs: the child Sala awakens crying that their grandmother has died. Puzzled, other family members recall her death and burial in the past; however, when Lared, her grandson and the central character, looks into her bed, he finds her corpse impossibly lying there. In the confusion, his father, growing angry at his wife, throws her against the wall, shocking the others as wonder takes a grim turn, because they had "never seen one human being do harm to another" (5). By the next morning, the villagers discuss with astonishment the various cuts and bruises which they had never experienced, and of which they had no

concept. A grave digger crushes his foot and bleeds to death; a young girl falls into a fire and dies from her burns (8). The sheltering laws which hitherto had governed their lives disappear without warning or explanation. A quasi-religious superstition rules these shocked people, for whom the past is so distant and murky; the clerk, when this Day of Pain arrives, refers to an old tome telling of violence and slaughter when “God was young and inexperienced” (5). Soon after, the inhabitants of a village upriver create a false idol of Pain, which they attempt to propitiate by sacrificing a volunteer, whom they put on a raft to be set ablaze. The reader similarly might conjecture that a dark power has arisen to plague their lives and subject them to an inexplicable curse.

But more is to come as two seeming angels—or demons—Jason and Justice, arrive to inspire the now young man, Lared, to write a holy story about the history of humans on the planet.⁵ When Lared first encounters them, he sees them walking across the river Endwater, an allegorical name which one would find in *Everyman* or *Piers Ploughman*, and which deepens the associations with both magic or miracles and the medieval world, in conjunction with other place names: Mount Waters, the Forest of Waters, and the Heaven Mountains. Over the centuries, the names “Worthing” and “Jason” have assumed ominous theological implications so that only adults can use them. In consequence, when Sara and Lared first utter Jason’s family name, Lared’s father rebukes Jason for causing his children to use “the dark name, the hidden word,” and strikes his son for explaining that he had seen “Worthing” in an old book as the name for the planet (19). That these two strangers speak only through the mind and at first only to the children gives them the aura of mages or wizards with impossible knowledge and powers.

In *Treason* and in *Wyrms*, Card fashions science-fiction colonization stories through the mode of fantasy. He acknowledges the influence of C. S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia* on *Treason*, a science-fiction novel painted on a fantasy canvas which begins with a map before

the first chapter, as in many fantasy works, and shows the geographical features of the planet with evocative and associative place names, such as Slashsea, Icelock Sea, Drywater Tongue, and so forth, which resonate of works by writers such as J. R. R Tolkien, Lewis, Le Guin, and Steven R. Donaldson.

Treason's protagonist, Lanik Mueller, narrates his episodic adventures while escaping escalating dangers as he crosses rivers, mountains, and mysterious forests, all inhabited by strange and wonderful peoples who have seemingly magical powers and abilities. *Treason* itself is a convict planet, a galactic Australia, where, long in the past, rebellious scientists were exiled. The setting, however, is the quasi-medieval setting of much fantasy governed by hereditary lords of fiefdoms, which take their names from the founding and ruling families of scientists, like Mueller or Schwartz, and war with neighboring powers for land and the precious commodity iron. Like a medieval prince, Lanik commands armies in order to expand the might of his homeland. Because of the limitations on technology, enforced by the off world government, warfare is thoroughly medieval: soldiers fight with swords, bows, and arrows, and all transportation is by laborious horse, foot, or boat. When Lanik leaves home, like all fantasy heroes, he begins a quest that will ultimately, as with *Patience*, the female allegorical protagonist of *Wyrms*, bring him into a final confrontation with a Dark Lord and, in the tradition of fantasy, he occupies the role of the Chosen, called to great decisions and destiny.⁶

The novel follows the episodic narrative paradigm of fantasy, beginning with Lanik hunted by his wicked stepmother 's soldiers, a distinctly fairy tale element He flees through a wasteland until he comes to Ku Kuei, from whose depths no one ever returns. In this perilous forest, protected by a mystical power which disorients and clouds the minds of intruders, time runs differently, and even the moons seem not to move from day to day. As befits the first stage of the fantasy quest, there is little physical threat, but the aura of the wood itself

discourages travelers and has engendered fabulous tales of unseen, marvelous powers. Clearly, Card is drawing on the magic wood of medieval romance and on Tolkien's Lothlórien in particular since a hidden people, like the Elves, inhabits the wood and casts a bewildering spell on anyone attempting to enter—travelers become both lost in the wood and mystified.⁷ Lanik arrives at Nkumai, whose inhabitants live in a gigantic tree city where he is led, like Frodo and Company, to a high platform to meet a (seeming) woman of great stature and authority whose aid he seeks. As in the stepped narrative of fantasy, dangers increase. The Nkumai discover that he is a spy and torture him; however, he escapes and continues his quest until he has passed through three of the four elemental tests common to fantasy: air, water, and earth; he has traveled through desert, mountain, forest, river, and wasteland where, after his tribulations, he receives wise counsel and unexpected aid as he heals and grows stronger. This part of the story also conforms to the adventure-respite pattern of fantasy.

The rock of the world, like that in Donaldson's *Land*, is sentient; it senses and feels what occurs on its surface, suffering grievously from wounds and from the senseless slaughter of its inhabitants. During his initiation into its mysteries, Lanik "heard the agony of rock being cut and torn in a thousand places . . . wept at the thousand deaths of stone and soil" as he learns to speak to it in its own language (137-38). The Schwartz, who seem to be spirits of the earth sent to aid him, teach Lanik their ecological power until he can summon water from under the sand, sink into the rock to hear the currents of what is happening far away, and ask its participation in his quest—parallels to the Alvin Maker novels. If John Tinker's extra-human rapport is with the birds of the air, Lanik's bonds are to the geological strata of the planet.

He also learns to delve into his own body and to heal himself of his hereditary genetic affliction. Thereafter, he returns with his father and intended wife, Saranna, to the forest of Ku Kuei and confronts its concealed inhabitants, whom he discovers have learned, in utter

contravention of the laws of physics, their scientific field, how to speed up or slow down time, creating the befuddlement of outsiders. Like the Schwartz, they teach him their ability, endowing him with the final quasi-magical power he will need to confront the shadowy Illuders. Although Lanik does not accumulate the conventional periapts the fantasy hero often receives—a ring, magic sword, cloak of invisibility, seven league boots, and the like—these mental and physical aptitudes offer enabling parallels.

In the end, Lanik must battle the hitherto undetected Illuders, kin to the figures of evil sorcerors, who possess the ability to put a glamor or spell on others and misuse this talent to manipulate rulers and thus cause chaos. Uncovering their machinations with the help of a solitary, historian/wisdom figure, he defeats them. The threat averted and his quest achieved, he returns home and reunites with Saranna, and both settle peacefully into the community and live happily ever after—which they are, in fact, capable of doing because of the superrational/supernatural powers that he has acquired.

In *Wyrms*, Card constitutes a science-fiction fable and allegory with links to both *Ender's Game* and to *Speaker for the Dead* on Imakulata, a planet which had been settled 5,000 years in the past by human colonists.⁸ Patience, the daughter of Lord Peace, is attended and aided by characters such as his emissary Angel, maids Nails and Calico. She is a constant danger to King Oruc (orc?), the usurper, for not only is she the legal heir to the throne, but also the figure who fulfills an ancient prophecy that the “seventh seventh seventh daughter” would become the Kristos and save the world (20).⁹ Armed with a periapt of power, she embarks on a lengthy fantasy quest, similar to Lanik's, to defeat a monstrous enemy, the Unwyrms, which brings her to many wonderful and beautiful, but menacing places with evocative names like Crossriver Delving and Lost Soul's Island, inhabited by species such as the dwelfs, a portmanteau construction of dwarf and elf.

Consistent with the seeming blend of science and magic, over the centuries, the native plant life of Imakulata has adapted by exhibiting the appearance of the native Earth plants brought by the colonizers so that it appears that the latter have replaced the former. An adaptive gene has allowed the original flora and fauna a form of protective mimicry, which Patience apprehends through a dream filled with images from ancient folklore:

She pictured the secret self of an oak as a hideous, deformed baby leering wickedly at her from the heart of the tree. Changelings, a world of changelings, all conspiring against us, lulling us into complacency, until the moment that they finally begin to replace us, too (216).

Again, the atmosphere of the perilous wood and the threats by the inhuman creatures it conceals arise, complicated by the source of the dream visions, here the Unwurm. The medieval vision, from Dante to Chaucer, figures heavily in modern fantasy as some dark lord, whether Sauron, Lord Foul, or Voldemort, attempts to confuse, mislead, or dominate the mind of the hero or heroine.¹⁰ The denouement finds Patience and her company in the mountain, a high place of mystery, confronting the alien monster/Dark Lord. Her most powerful servant sacrifices himself to save her, and Patience undergoes a horrific ordeal but, with aid unlooked for, defeats her enemy, resulting in the recovery of lost lore and her eventual and proper restoration to home, throne, and peace, the ending of high fantasy.

Card's insertion of fantasy terms and allusions also intrudes where one might least expect it. In "The Originist," Card's version of Isaac Asimov's future history with its emerging psychohistory, characters refer to one another as if they were actors in epic fantasy. However, these are no young space adventurers careening off through the galaxy, or sword- or ring-wielding heroes; these are wisdom figures, venerable men and women conducting

campaigns of intellect, summoning vast powers of science that others do not recognize or comprehend. The primary setting is the greatest of libraries, that of Trantor. There Chandrakar Matt scolds Hari Seldon himself for his ongoing charades as he maneuvers the establishment of the Second Foundation. When Matt refers to Seldon's art, perhaps implying artifice more than art, Hari archly replies, "My *science*," at which point, Matt retorts, "Your meddlesome magical *craft*, you old wizard" (225). The etymological connection between the terms underscores the blending of genres: "science" comes from the Greek root for to know or to discern; the *OED* offers the following for "craft": "Intellectual power; skill; . . . In these and the following senses, *art* and *craft* were formerly synonymous and had a nearly parallel sense-development, though they diverge in their leading modern senses: a. Skill, skillfulness, art; ability in planning or performing, ingenuity in constructing. . . ." Scientist or wizard, each adept employs the same abilities and talents, whatever they might be named.

In fact, Seldon's new and controversial discipline, highlighted by holographs of his posthumous appearances and accurate predictions, appears little distant from the numinous Oracle of Delphi and the mysteries of the Greek sibyls. Seldon, the fabulous (in both senses) scholar-mage, delivers incantations that explicate the unknowable, the impossible, or so it seems. His acolytes exhibit similar insights. A legend arises in "the magic hero tale" with which one librarian regales the others, raising one of their own to the status of "the prophetic librarian of Trantor," whose possession of lost, arcane knowledge from a deep past about an uprising at Misericordia, with its medieval, religious connotations, averted a disaster (226). These seminal members of the Foundation Seldon refers to as "Artists. Wizards. Demigods" (226), reminiscent of Le Guin's Earthsea series with its college for wizards on Roke and the legend of its greatest Archmage, Ged/Sparrowhawk. As on Roke, in the great Trantorian library, the laws of time and space are suspended by anti-gravity and shifting rooms so that it is referred to in wonder and amazement as a fairyland (247). One enters this concealed realm

through a portal that the librarian designates “the Golden Archway,” which is its only constant element (245). Magic and science collide in the genesis of this new salvific organization which, like a polder of high fantasy, exists as detached, undiscoverable, unknowable, until its mighty occupants emerge to fulfill their purpose.

In *The Folk of the Fringe*, a series of stories set in a post-catastrophe world 50 or 60 years after a late twentieth-century war, Card includes “America,” the fallen world of fantasy which must be recovered. The war has created shortages of everything, and the heroine, Anamari, desperately needs medical supplies—syringes, gauze, AIDS medications, penicillin—to help her people.¹¹ Transportation is scarce and supply chains overtaxed and unreliable, a situation made all the worse by the small-minded, petty bureaucrats who infest human culture in any age. In addition, vestiges of the past cataclysm are evident as regional biological warfare continues. For instance, the Venezuelans buy a “hardy and virulent strain of syphilis on the black market” (268). That such weapons survive, or are manufactured, bespeaks the incessant savagery of an extrapolated future.

Despite its science-fiction framework, however, “America” shades into magical realism and would not be out of place in the Alvin Maker tales. Like the latter and fantasy, it conveys a strong ecological warning and message about human despoliation of the Earth and the blind eye of capitalism. The protagonist, young Sam Momson, who will one day be the leader of Deseret, the Mormon nation that is the last outpost of the United States, finds himself torn by his parents’ divorce and the disconnection between the native Indians of the Amazon of Brazil, where the story takes place, and the hard-headed and -hearted oilmen, cousins of orcs, whose only goal is to extract as much crude as they can, regardless of the despoliation. His father’s lust and adultery present a clear parallel to the greed with which the oilmen take what they want, creating for Sam a two-pronged alienation. When confronted with the plight of the locals, the Yanquis simply turn away: “They just didn’t give a damn.

They were there to make money” (242). His father is likewise detached from Sam and his family.

Thus, Anamari articulates for the boy the fall from the idyllic world of the past in mythological and religious terms, describing a “god of the land” who once provided for all people (261), a scenario that recalls the Golden Age of Worthing. The fundamental ontology of fantasy envisions a unity of humankind with nature in which the ills that assail one affect the other; unlike in science fiction, the created world and the setting itself function as a character with its own needs and powers, articulating another orientation to life. In *Lord of the Rings*, Sauron never appears, but readers understand his warped spirit through the blasted industrial wasteland of Barad-dûr and Mordor, a place similar to what the oilmen are creating. So when peoples such as the Incas and Aztecs turned from its beneficence, the land called to Columbus to punish them with disease and slavery. Here the world, again like Donaldson’s, or that in *Treason*, becomes a reified, sentient force with its own power and resolution to protect and to cure itself of the ills visited upon it. It has suffered “a thousand different poisons” from industry and desires to return its stewardship to the natives (262). It, therefore, chooses Anamari, the new Mary, and Sam as the avatars of its salvation. His path through the rain forest from the camp turns into a portal to a secondary world’s separate laws and ontology.

The element of dream vision reappears since both have prescient dreams: Anamari foresees the coming of the bulldozers and oil derricks while Sam envisions her. Such divinations violate the cause/effect formulations of science fiction and add a numinous dimension beyond cognitive estrangement to the tale, especially in view of the cultural belief in true dreams. One internal law that supports the fantasy framework in this tale is that such dreams occur only in nature and cease in the sterile concrete and steel of a city (257). Consequently, Sam comes to Anamari in the jungle, and she is drawn to the boy because he is

“the first European she ever knew who dreamed true dreams” (248). This addition of another plane of reality, of a superimposed moral and ethical structure, such as the Balance in Le Guin’s Earthsea novels and its environmental centrality, commingles conventional fantasy world building with the anti-rational culture beliefs embedded in magical realism. The land, therefore, calls to Sam during an afternoon nap to father upon Annamari the man who will help “save me, save me, save me” (264). As though possessed, the boy walks naked through the jungle to fulfill the god’s request. Card uses the ancient Irish word “geis” to accentuate the natural and supernatural imperative behind the action. The *OED* offers for “geis” (“geas”) a “solemn injunction, prohibition, or taboo; a moral obligation,” the last of which stipulates what humans owe their environment as its inhabitants and stewards. When Sam fulfills his quest, he must leave the magical realm to fulfill yet another salvific role as the prime mover of Desert, the recovery inherent in all high fantasy.

Finally, one of the mysteries of *Ender’s Game*, Card’s best known science-fiction novel, has a distinctive fantasy air. A crucial experience for the young soldiers in this space opera is the portal/quest computer game known as the Giant’s Drink (an encounter similar to that in Jack and the Beanstalk), which takes place in a beautiful fantasyscape with rivers, mountains, castles, and weird and wonderful places; and it too is alive, constantly metamorphosing and creating new challenges for the players. Each cadet must overcome increasingly difficult obstacles and pass a guardian who protects the passage to a mysterious place where the hero will be rewarded. Along the way, he encounters magical creatures, talking animals, and physical transformations. Children fall through a playground slide as if it were immaterial, transmogrify to wolves which tear Ender apart, and sizzle him to death after he solves this part of the puzzle. There are echoes of *The Wizard of Oz*, *Alice Through the Looking Glass* and *Alice in Wonderland* when Ender follows “an ancient brick road” through a forest and arrives at a well where a sign says “Drink, Traveler” (77). At the bottom of the

well, he finds “THE END OF THE WORLD” in emerald and is transported to a lightsome castle on a floating cloud. Card is, no doubt, also drawing from William Morris’s *Well at the World’s End* (1896), an allegorical fantasy that relates the tale of the youngest son of Peter, the King of Upmeads, and contains a place called Swevenham, or Dream Home.

In addition to the furniture of fantasy, its language intrudes as Ender replays the game, seeking to pluck out the heart of its mystery. The officers assume the game is unwinnable; until Ender does so, no one has finished or won it. (A student suicide is even attributed to the stress the game effects.) W. R. Irwin in *The Game of the Impossible* asserts that fantasy is “an elaborate game based on the recognition of and acceptance of authority” (76). Such recognition articulates the orientation of Battle School where no one can challenge the authority of the officers, or of the game, which the commanders use as an evaluative tool. Once a player solves puzzles and survives the increasingly lethal challenges, he arrives at the Giant’s Drink, the apparent culmination where any decision results in a gruesome death of one kind or another. Ender refuses the drink choice and clammers into the Giant’s eye, tearing at its cheesy substance until it dies and a bat lands, welcoming him to Fairyland. When he finds out what Ender has accomplished, the commander of Battle School, a parallel figure to the wizard, Colonel Graff, comments, “Isn’t it nice that Ender can do the impossible?” followed by “he won the game that couldn’t be won” (71).

Consequently, the officers puzzle over “The End of the World,” which was never programmed into the game, the Giant’s Drink being its termination. In the mirror on the castle wall at The End of the World, Ender encounters his brother Peter’s face, but a recent image of it which, as far as anyone can tell, the computer should not and cannot have access to since someone would have to requisition such records and documents.¹² Virtual reality takes on the un-real. The Todorovian notion of the hesitation that produces the fantastic intrudes at this point: is the computer’s behavior an emanation of the marvelous, a dislocation of consensus

reality, or does it reflect the uncanny, the seemingly supernatural that finds rational, empirical explanations? For this situation Kathryn Hume offers an apposite definition of fantasy that melds concepts of fantasy with science fiction: “Fantasy is any departure from consensus reality, an impulse native to literature and manifested in innumerable variations, from monster to metaphor.” It includes transgressions of what one generally takes to be physical facts such as human immortality, travel faster than light, telekinesis, and the like” (21). The latter is, apparently, the result. Although it becomes clear later that the nascent AI Jane has begun her infiltration into Ender’s life, at the time the computer’s procedure, or behavior, tilts toward the un-possible for the technology as everyone understands it. Tim Blackmore underscores this fantasy intrusion in *Enders’ Game*: “the military is firmly webbed to the future—specifically technology. The military sees technology as a mystical force allowing basic laws of nature to be revoked, such as gravity and time” (127-28). The null gravity of the Battle Rooms and the instantaneous communications of the ansible come from Formic science, but they might as well be magic to the humans who rely on them as Clarke’s Third Law noses back in.

Ender’s acceptance of Peter/the snake, his embrace of his dark half, recalls such psychomachic confrontations as Bilbo’s with Gollum, or Ged’s with his Shadow. In “The Child and the Shadow,” Le Guin explains this balance of opposing parts, the monster as indivisible element of the person: “The shadow is one with the other side of our psyche, the dark brother of the conscious mind. It is Cain, Caliban, Frankenstein’s monster, Mr. Hyde” (59). Peter, the potential fratricide, is heir to all these, and Ender can free himself and jettison his fear of becoming his brother only by recognizing that possibility, which then gives him the power to transcend the dark part of his soul. As Donaldson comments in *Epic Fantasy in the Modern World*, “magic is a metaphor which expresses . . . the transcendent and destructive side of what it means to be human.” Thus, the “magic” of the Giant’s Drink and the impossible End of the World function as an interior landscape which allows a resolution to the

conflict between the Peter-in-Ender and the Ender who loathes that portion of his being yet needs, as he fears, its power and potentiality.

After the resolving kiss, when the snake transforms into Valentine and the two descend a regally carpeted stairway with cheering crowds, a hint of Faerie trespasses again, but more importantly, the two creatures who guard the final portal are a dragon and a unicorn, the rapprochement of two fantasy creatures who symbolize war and destruction, loyalty and love. On the one hand, this scene depicts the reunion of two siblings, long parted, whose beings are intertwined. On the other, the connection recalls Tolkien's definition of consolation, or Eucatastrophe, in "On Fairy-Stories." It is the good catastrophe—Ender's destruction of the Buggers—that does not deny "sorrow and failure," but does deny "universal defeat," and results in "Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as Grief" (68). Ender's and Valentine's journeys will, in fact, take them to many worlds beyond the walls of their past lives and will continue to play out over thousands of years, again a seeming immortality made possible by relativity. The consolation evident here also provides closure to the heroes' quests as in *The Worthing Saga*, *Treason*, and *Wyrms*. This important fantasy trope insists that, after long sorrow and consuming smart, the protagonists achieve an inner peace and easement that balance the external recovery they have suffered to bring about.

As Hume asserts, "[t]o answer questions about the nature of the universe without using fantasy is practically impossible" (121). Science fiction offers one platform for this investigation, fantasy another, using parallel but distinct elements as Excalibur morphs into a laser sword, mad scientists replace wicked witches, the troll under the bridge becomes the alien on the bridge, and the Isle of Roke develops into the laboratory complex at U.S. Robots and Mechanical Men, Inc. The fusion of the two grants fresh perspective and associations as science and technology change people's lives and the world around them, prompting new questions, and issuing in new challenges and puzzles. The frequency with which he employs

this science-fiction/fantasy *mélange* bespeaks a conscious approach by Card, who is concerned primarily with story and its relevance to his audience, not with pure genre, and thus he works his enchantment.

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Notes

¹ “Apologists such as fellow Mormons Michael Collins and Eugene England . . . see Mormon culture and Card’s faith as the driving forces in his work; whereas science-fiction and fantasy scholars like Westphal, Clute, or Attebery, focus on innovation and Card’s ability to create an atmosphere that crosses genres” (Senior “A Study” 23).

² Card also contends that “Each time the cross is made, the result is a fictional form able to make use of the conventions of science fiction and those of genre fantasy to comment on one another and on the worldview implied by each form of storytelling” (*How* 106).

³ This is not to argue that Card writes what is often labelled as “science fantasy.” Uncertainty is the only certainty when it comes to defining what science fantasy is exactly, and almost everyone who discusses the matter quotes Darko Suvin’s dismissal of science fantasy as a marketing category: “A misshapen subgenre born of such mingling [of SF and the supernatural]” (“On What”). According to Carl Malmgren, “These two narrative forms, SF and fantasy, do have a locus of intersection, which we will term science fantasy, an unstable hybrid form combining features from each subgenre” (“Toward” 260). Gary Wolfe essays the following: “a genre in which devices of fantasy are employed in a ‘science fictional’ context (related to but distanced from ‘the real world’ by time, space, or dimension” (*Critical* 107). He quotes Algys Budrys, who observes that science fantasy is characterized “by its

introduction of fantasy elements . . . and claims that it is usually a blend of fantasy and ‘science adventure’ or ‘Space Opera.’” For perhaps the fullest description, see Attebery, “Science Fantasy.”

⁴ A nod to the deep blue-in-blue of *mélange* spice of the Atreides clan of Herbert’s *Dune* series.

⁵ Jason means “healer” in Greek, linking him to John Tinker and suggesting, perhaps, a mythological connection to the far-traveled Jason of the Argonauts, who encountered many marvels in his quest for the Golden Fleece.

⁶ The traditional hero, such as Frodo, Ged, Thomas Covenant, or Harry Potter, works within an organic existence whose ethical appeal designates him as the appointed one: “In fantasy the horns of this causal dilemma are two: the hero or character is selected by the force which orders and oversees the world and its history and then must choose his own course of action within the overall pattern” (Senior, “Medieval” 40).

⁷ The word “bewilder” in its different parts of speech pervades modern fantasy, and apprehends more than its current meaning. For a fuller discussion, see Shippey, *The Road to Middle Earth* (81ff), especially in terms of Bilbo and the journey to the Lonely Mountain.

⁸ Attebery sees another connection: “The parallels between *Wyrms* and *Seventh Son* suggest that Card may use his science-fiction skills to avoid the authoritarian and patriarchal turn taken by the metanarrative of the Mormon Church. Although the tale of Alvin Maker is not science-fiction, it shares with Card’s science-fiction novels a certain skepticism toward its own outcome” (“Godmaking”). It is quite evident that there is a clear cross-pollination between the two works.

⁹ In the Hatrack River series in *Seventh Son*, published in the same year as *Wyrms*, Alvin Maker is the seventh son of a seventh son, a numinous birthright which endows him with supernatural abilities and a deep rapport with the natural world. Like him and Patience, his

kin, his companions have religious, allegorical names such as Vigor, Faith, Wastenot, Wantnot, Calm, and Guester.

¹⁰ George MacDonald—who is considered the father of modern fantasy and who was a major influence on such noted fantasy writers as Lewis Carroll, Charles Williams, Tolkien, Lewis, and Madeleine L'Engle—used the dream vision in such works as *Phantastes* and *Lilith* as one of the foundations of wonder in the genre. Like Card's, his novels frequently deal with the remarkable adventures of equally remarkable children.

¹¹ Elements of this dystopic tale in ways anticipate and parallel the appalling situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 and the American lack of preparedness and response, particularly in light of the millions of dollars thrown at corporations while millions of people suffer.

¹² The mirror itself, the *speculum vitae*, is another traditional fantasy trope that functions on many levels, imparting not just reversals, but also alternate possibility. Examples abound from Snow White to the vampire's inability to appear in mirrors, to Alice's looking glass, to Frodo's gaze into the fraught potentialities blazing from the Mirror of Galadriel, to the Mirror of Erised that mesmerizes Harry Potter with what might have been.

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