Fantastic Paradox: Secondary Belief and Peter S. Beagle's Metafantasy *The Last Unicorn*

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The 1950s saw the publication George MacDonald's *Phantastes,* J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, and C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The enormous success of these and other works of English fantasy in the decades that followed sparked a debate that continues to this day: what is "fantasy" literature? The broadest definitions encompass literature from *Beowulf* to Kafka, allowing anything that "deals with the evidently unreal" to be labeled as fantasy (Irwin 34). In contrast, other definitions are far too narrow. In light of such inconsistencies, frustrated author E.F. Bleiler concluded, "'fantasy may be almost all things to all men'" (Manlove 16)

In spite of its nature to defy definition, most critics agree that fantasy literature is best distinguished by its inclusion of the impossible or more specifically, its treatment of the supernatural as natural (Manlove 16). In the world of *Phantastes*, it is revealed that leaves, seemingly carried by the wind, are in truth carried by small fairies. In the land of Narnia, the White Witch holds her world in everlasting winter—without Christmas. Such supernatural events – supernatural being understood as anything unexplainable by empirical evidence – are a hallmark of fantasy. Works of fantasy branch away from the familiar (a term used in the paper to signify the empirical world of the reader) and establish credibility for the *in*credible, believability for the *un*believable. For example, when the Pevensie children first encounter Narnia, their initial disbelief and wonder are soon replaced by the reality of their experiences.

A work of fantasy is an imaginative space filled with extraordinary characters, worlds, and adventures—all presented with a sincerity suggesting an encounter, not with a marvelous work of fiction, but with an alternate, self-existing reality. If during a reader's encounter with the text he accepts this suggestion and temporarily believes in this alternate reality, Tolkien claims that that reader has adopted Secondary Belief and that the text has achieved a second essential quality of fantasy literature (61).

Secondary Belief, as described by Tolkien, does not require a reader to accept the existence of the supernatural outside of the text. The everyday world of the reader (what Tolkien terms the Primary World) may continue to be explained through natural phenomena, "natural" being the absence of anything divine or magical: anything *in*credible or *un*believable. Secondary Belief, which should be maintained throughout the reading experience, is an acceptance of the supernatural as natural only within the world of the text.

Secondary Belief, more specifically, is belief in the existence of a Secondary World (Tolkien 60). A Secondary World, the imagined fantastical world in which a story unfolds, must share some common attributes with the Primary World so as to maintain a basic level of familiarity with the reader. Equally important is that it abides by its own natural laws. As phrased by author John Fox, it must present history, events, and beings that maintain a world as "rigid as realism" (8). This inner consistency is crucial because it is this foundation upon which Secondary Belief is built.

Fantasy authors have often incorporated within their works various other modes of fiction. *The Chronicles of Narnia*, for example, is at once an instance of fantasy and an extended allegory of the Christian faith.

Other literary forms are antithetical to the nature of fantasy. For example, science fiction, while often presenting a "'situation that could not arise in the world as we know it,'" always provides a said or inferred "speculative possibility" for these events. Seemingly fantastic occurrences are given natural scientific explanations, thereby destroying the necessary inclusion of the supernatural (Irwin 96-97). Still, there are other forms of fiction that are at once complementary and adverse to fantasy. Metafiction is an example of such a literary style.

Metafictions gained popularity in the 1960s and are texts that are self-aware of their own fictional state. In a metafictional text, characters may refer to their own fictional roles or narrators may directly address the reader. Whatever the technique used, the reader's attention is directed toward the textuality of the text (i.e. its existence as language), the fictionality of the fiction, the artificiality of the art (Foust 9). While reading such a text, a reader must truly *will* himself to a "willing suspension of disbelief." After all, the text itself flaunts its fictional state.

In an extensive study of metafiction, Linda Hutcheon identifies its popularity as an expression of a post-modern culture obsessively preoccupied with its own self-awareness (xii). Metafiction, by incorporating itself as part of its subject, becomes "its own first critical commentary" (6). In doing so, it does not provide the reader with simple analysis of its organization and content. On the contrary, postmodern metafiction tends to "play with the possibilities of meaning . . . and form" (xiii). One result of this manipulation of meaning is that paradoxical relationships are formed within the text itself and within the relationship between the text and the reader.

Metafictions continually draw attention to their own natures as artifacts (Foust 9), and by doing so may be described as narcissistic in nature (Hutcheon 7). This inward focus on the text paradoxically draws the reader's attention outside of the text as a close examination of the story leads to a broader understanding of its condition as an object in the world (Hutcheon 7). Patricia Waugh summarizes the effect of metafiction as "'the construction of a fictional illusion . . . and the laying bare of that illusion'" (Pennington 12). Thus, the nature of the text itself is contradictory.

A second paradox is found in the reader's relationship with the text. Like all forms of literature, metafiction requires a reader to be actively involved in the creative process of bringing life to the characters, settings, and events of the story. The reader of metafiction, however, is continually reminded of the artifice of the text before him. He is asked simultaneously to acknowledge a work as fiction while "engage[ing] himself intellectually, imaginatively, and affectively in its co-creation" (Hutcheon 7). In other words, the reader is essentially asked to examine the fictionality of his real experience in which imagination grants reality to fiction.

It is in this complex metafictional form that author Peter S. Beagle wrote his fantasy novel *The Last Unicorn*. By employing metafictional techniques, Beagle does not destroy the possibility of Secondary Belief but rather alters the nature of that belief, which moves beyond belief in another world to belief in the meeting and blurring of two worlds: the fantastic and the familiar. Through the very act of reading a text, a person becomes co-creator of a story (Hutcheon 142). In the case of *metafantasy*, the reader joins the author in the creation of a Secondary World. The possibility of Secondary Belief is then rooted in the experience of the reader who becomes a medium by which the impossible is made possible: two mutually exclusive states (reality and fiction) collide and at moments

converge, allowing the fantastic to be made familiar and the familiar to be made fantastic. The reader's experience is modeled and supported by a series of coexisting contradictions at narrative, thematic, and linguistic levels of *The Last Unicorn*.

At the most foundational level, Beagle use of language contributes to the metafictional form of the story. The novel is "a hand book of figurative devices" and becomes "self-reflexive at the phonological level" (Foust 11). For example, alliteration is found throughout the work: "By the sorrow and loss and sweetness in the faces she know that they recognized her, and she accepted their hunger as homage" (23); "a friendly heart—however foolish—may be welcome as water one day" (44). Such a preoccupation with sound continually reminds the reader that the tale before him is of an artificial world removed from common everyday world of language, and thus from realism (Foust 11-12).

Beagle's story begins with the unicorn at home in her timeless lilac wood, listening as two hunters pass by and casually debate the existence of unicorns. They conclude that all unicorns, if there ever were such creatures, have long ago gone away. The unicorn, unwilling to accept that she may be the last of her kind, decides to enter the time bound world of men in search of others like her.

The significance of this opening scene is two fold: first, the hunters doubt the existence of fantastical beings; a doubt that understandably may be held by a skeptical reader. One hunter asks, "Would you call this age a good one for unicorn?" (4). The hinted question to the reader cannot be missed: Is *your* age a good age for unicorns? Secondly, the unicorn begins as an observer: "Time had always passed her by," but she chooses to insert herself into the story so that now, "it was she who passed through time" (6). The reader too has a choice: to follow the unicorn as a co-inhabitant into a fantastical world or to remain a casual observer.

Shortly into her journey, the unicorn meets a wandering butterfly who speaks to her through a series of allusions to literature, popular songs, and commercial slogans found in the Primary World of the reader. These allusions, as pointed out by literary critic David Becker, blur the lines between "the 'reality' of everyday experience and the 'illusion' of a story" (13). The confusion between reality and illusion is furthered because the allusions cross both culture and time, ranging from a line of William Shakespeare's *King Lear* to a twentieth century American Jazz song:

> Death takes what man would keep . . . and leaves what man would lose. Blow, wind, and crack your cheek. I warm my hands by the fire and get four-way relief . . . Won't you come home, Bill Bailey, won't you come home, where once he could not go. Buckle down, Winsocki, go and catch a falling star. (8)

The butterfly becomes a medium between the Primary and Secondary worlds. He conflates myth and reality into one seamless dimension (Pennington 13) and by doing so validates the coexistence of the fantastic and the familiar. The butterfly reaches outward to the world of the reader, and an unspoken question emerges: Will the reader reciprocate by reaching inward to the world of the unicorn so that he too will become a medium of worlds?

Within the first few pages of the story, Beagle has presented two cases of transcendence: the hunters who debate the existence of fairy tales, while they themselves are in one; and the butterfly who simultaneously exists in two realities (Pennington 13). This pattern of transcendence is one that persists throughout the novel and provides another parallel for the experience of the reader, who to adopt Secondary Belief must transcend his knowledge of the story's artifice as well as preconceived doubts regarding the coexistence of the fantastic and the familiar.

The distinction between reality and illusion is blurred when the unicorn is captured by Mommy Fortuna, an enchantress who places "spells of seeming" on ordinary creatures so that her customers mistake them for mythical beings— an ape for a satyr, a lizard for a dragon, a lion for manticore. These "spells of seeming" must also be placed on the unicorn as well, for though she is a genuine mythical creature, she is mistaken by all but a few as a simple white mare. In Mommy Fortuna's carnival, illusion becomes paradoxical in nature: it both blinds audiences to reality as well as reveals reality that would ordinarily be unnoticed.

A complex, mirroring pattern is established, in which fiction is found behind every reality, and reality behind every fiction. The reader participates in the creation of a fictional world. Within this world are "real" (i.e. non-fantastic) human characters who take part in the creation of another fiction: Mommy Fortuna's fantastical creatures. Behind these illusions, though, lie "real" creatures (i.e. the ape, lizard, etc.). In the case of the unicorn, however, the created fiction of the fantastic masks the reality of the fantastic. As an outside observer, the reader recognizes the "truth" of this situation: that the unicorn is real—which is very tricky considering the mythological status of the unicorn in the world of the reader. Reality and illusion can no longer be viewed as separate, conflicting states.

The reality of the Primary World and the illusion of the Secondary World continually reflect back to each other, creating a sense of mise-en-abyme. The term mise-en-abyme, which essentially means an endless mirroring process, was originally used to describe a shield's coat of arms containing a miniature picture of itself, which in turn contained an even smaller version of the coat of arms—so that were the coast of arms not limited by physical space, its pattern would regress into all eternity (Hutcheon 55). The mirroring

process in Mommy Fortuna's carnival is slightly different: within every instance of fiction is found reality, and within every reality fiction. What remains the same, though, is that that the reciprocating process is endless, never reaching a satisfying resolution.

This blurring of reality and illusion ultimately aids in the formation of Secondary Belief. Mommy Fortuna's carnival calls into question the foundational assumption that reality and illusion are contradictory states. In the case of the unicorn, an illusion allows characters to see a reality that they would otherwise miss, thereby granting (in at least one instance) a greater truth to illusion than reality. This perception of the world runs contrary to reader expectations and by extension offers credibility to the reality of the created "illusion" of a Secondary World within the mind of the reader. The fictional format of *The Last Unicorn* becomes but another illusion masking an alternate, self-existing reality, a Secondary World in which the reader may base Secondary Belief.

A later passage combines both the transcendence model found in the butterfly and the mise-en-abyme created by Mommy Fortuna's magic. Schmendrick, the bumbling magician now companion to the unicorn after aiding her escape from the carnival, is rather rudely introduced to Captain Cully, a boastful, would be self-made Robin Hood character.

Like the butterfly's allusion-filled speech, Cully brings the Primary World into the realm of fantasy. He proudly composes and sings songs about himself; songs which he hopes will one day be included in "the Child collection" (60). This reference is to Francis Child, a real man who gathered a well known collection of ballads in the 1800s, some of the most famous of which tell the story of the hero Robin Hood. Once again, an inhabitant of a fantastical realm has knowledge of, and

even expresses a desire to be part of, the Primary World.

Cully explains to Schmendrick his longing to be included in the Child collection: one always hopes "'to be collected, to be verified, annotated, to have variant versions, even to have one's authenticity doubted'" (60). For Cully, validation comes through a complex existence within both the Primary world (i.e. the world of the reader and Child) and the Secondary world (i.e. the world of the unicorn and Child). Cully has no problem combining the fantastic and the familiar, and his acknowledgement of Child allows Child's historical figure to simultaneously exist in both worlds; thereby providing a model of a transcendent character.

Matters are complicated when Schmendrick successfully creates real magic for the first time and causes Robin Hood, Marian, and his legendary companions to appear. Captain Cully, apparently threatened by the appearance of the "real" Robin Hood, casually dismisses Schmendrick's trick: "'Robin Hood is a myth'" (64). Cully's kitchenmaid Molly, however, corrects him: "'Nay, Cully, you have it backward . . . Robin and Marian are real, and we are legend'" (64). The complexity of this situation increases: the reader sitting in the Primary World reads of a Secondary World, and within this Secondary World – which must remain true to its own laws of nature – the "real" characters of the Secondary World observe "fictional" characters from the Primary World. Some characters accept this bleeding of the Primary World into their own as real while others reject it as mere illusion. So many contradictions lend support to the conclusion drawn by one of Cully's men: "'The universe lies to our senses . . . There may be truth somewhere, but it never gets down to me'" (72). A more positive interpretation of this scene is that it adds to the fantastical quality of the novel.

The events in a work of fantasy do not need empirically sound explanations by Primary World standards. The fantastic should not be explained away like a magic show built upon the natural laws of science. The appearance of Robin Hood and the various reactions by other characters are not meant to "make sense" in the world of the reader; they belong to the world of the unicorn. And yet it is human nature to search for an explanation, to ask the "why" and the "how" questions, to label ideas as "possible" or "impossible." Fantasy literature resists such pigeonhole labeling and uncomfortably side steps any attempt to rationalize its fantastic moments. Some literary critics argue that it is this very effect of producing and maintaining uncertainty that brings the quality of the fantastic to a work of fiction (Foust 7).

A moment of simultaneous curiosity, confusion, and near credibility: these are marks of the fantastic. Fantasy critic Tzvetan Todorov argues that the heart of fantasy is a "hesitation" in which the reader resists concluding whether the world set before him operates under natural or supernatural laws. By this standard the quality of a fantasy text is measured by its ability to resist the reader's attempt "'de-fantasize'" the fantastic with "hermeneutical strategy" (Aichele 56). The magic of fantasy must by "taken seriously" and not simply "explained away" (Tolkien 39).

Becker explains how the scene with Robin Hood resists de-fantasizing strategists:

This episode [with Robin Hood] presents at once the real and the imaginary—the fictional present, the legendary past, the reader's memory, and true and false magic . . . the simultaneity of the fabulous, the fictionally real, and our own actual memories keep us shimming between skepticism and belief. (57-8)

Reality and illusion are blurred, and this blurring within the text parallels the "shimmering" of belief in the reader. Molly's

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claims that Robin Hood and Marian are "real" while she is "legend" are at once true and false. They are false in the sense that Molly and Robin Hood are essentially of the same stuff: people brought to life through an author's imagination; fictional characters who never walked in the Primary World. And yet within *The Last Unicorn* they occupy different dimensions of reality: Molly a self-proclaimed legend and Robin Hood an intrusion of the "real" Primary World through the magic of Schmendrick. A model is thus established in which fiction and reality, often viewed as incompatible opposites, are presented as simultaneous and fluctuating conditions. This model is analogous to the experience of the reader who must simultaneously accept the fictionality and reality of the fantasy world and its characters.

If one accepts the fantastic as a moment of hesitation, then Tolkien's position on Secondary Belief is called into question. As discussed earlier, Secondary Belief is a momentary genuine acceptance of an alternate fantastic reality. Confidence in the Secondary World's existence should be equivalent to confidence in the Primary World's existence. Far from a hesitation, Secondary Belief is most simply defined as a conscious decision to believe. This interpretation of Tolkien's ideas is limited, and a reading of *The Last Unicorn* is best understood by combining aspects of both Tolkien and Todorov's ideas.

Critic George Aichele suggests that the metafictional form of *The Last Unicorn* is best understood as a maintaining of a hesitation or "oscillation" between two worlds and that this "oscillation" does not allow "escape from one [world] to the other" (56). In other words, it is impossible to assume Secondary Belief, which would require an "escape" from oscillating belief in the fantastic world. This view is limited in its understanding because Secondary Belief in *The Last Unicorn* is not founded in the fantastic but in the meeting of the fantastic

and the familiar. Belief is never a quality of a text; it is a personal experience within the reader, who in the case of fantasy literature becomes the very medium by which Secondary and Primary Worlds converge. What makes *The Last Unicorn* unique among other forms of fantasy is that this meeting of worlds is more than a mutual coexistence: it is a blurring, a continually renewing conflation, so that at moments two become one. Belief in this union is complete and so may be called Secondary Belief. Hesitation is maintained, but it is different from Todorov's hesitation: one adopts Secondary Belief in two separate realities or in the converging oneness of these realities. Call it the reader's heart, mind, or imagination—within some intimate place, the reader accepts and experiences the merging of the fantastic with the familiar.

The unicorn travels on in her journey with Schmendrick and Molly. Together they enter the land of King Haggard, who they have been told is responsible for the disappearance of the unicorns. They stop awhile in the town of Hagsgate, whose wealthy citizens are themselves living contradictions. Fearing a curse that one of their own will someday day cause the loss of their wealth, the people prosper in all that they do but are never content. In each moment of their lives, fear of loss destroys joy of gain. One citizen, fearing a newborn child would be the prophesied fulfillment of the curse, left the baby outside to die from exposure. The child (conveniently) disappeared, and King Haggard (mysteriously) announced the adoption of a son a few days later.

Appalled by the town's tale, Molly hastily declares, "They deserve their [miserable] fate" (91). Schmendrick is quick to come to the town's defense: "Haven't you ever been in a fairy tale before? . . . a hero has to be in trouble from the moment of his birth . . . we are in a fairy tale, and must go where it goes" (91-92). This conversation is the first of many in which characters indicate knowledge

of their role in an unfolding fairy tale. A traditional technique used in metafiction, dialogues such as these remind the reader that the unfolding tale, its characters and its setting, are purely fictional fabrications.

In defense against the loss of Secondary Belief, Beagle has before this time repeatedly blurred the Primary and Secondary worlds. Only a few pages before the reader is introduced to Hagsgate, they are told of a young maiden reading a magazine next to a prince eating from a lunch pail. Like these objects of the familiar brought into the world of the unicorn, Schmendrick's talk of fairytales, which exist as real texts within the world of the reader, is but another insertion of the Primary World into the realm of the fantastic. In addition, direct references to the unfolding fairytale here and throughout the text are made by characters and not by the narrator. When a narrator refers back to the reader's Primary Word, the reader is reminded that an outside authority is simply recounting a fictional story and "the reality of the secondary world" is necessarily broken (Fox 7). Instead Beagle allows his fictional characters, characters who live in a world filled with magic and fantastic, to allude to the Primary World. In this particular scene, Schmendrick not only indicates a knowledge of the Primary World but also demonstrates an understanding of the governing principles our world applies to its works of fantasy. Beagle breathes life into his fictional characters through their knowledge of the real world. The fantastic quality of the Secondary World is no longer based solely on the inclusion of the mythical creatures and magical spells: fiction and reality have become one, and such a meeting can be called nothing but fantastic. Having once again reaffirmed the Secondary World, the novel allows Secondary Belief to be both maintained and strengthened.

Upon approaching Haggard's castle, the unicorn encounters the Red Bull, Haggard's fearful tool used to drive unicorns into the nearby sea. In a desperate attempt to save her, Schmendrick uses real magic for a second time, transforming the unicorn into the human Lady Amalthea. The Red Bull, no longer interested in the transformed creature, returns to Haggard.

In the aforementioned conversation when Schmendrick stated his awareness of the unfolding fairytale, he also made the claim that the unicorn transcended the unfolding story: "we are in a fairy tale ... But she is real. She is real" (92). This claim adds to the blurring of the fantastic and the familiar, for Schmendrick places the unicorn outside the text, suggesting an existence within the same dimension as the "real" reader. By transforming the unicorn into a mortal woman, Schmendrick effectively inserts the unicorn into the myth (Pennington 13). In a similar way, through the magic of creativity and imagination, the reader is "inserted" into the fairytale throughout the reading process.

Schmendrick's actions have a second significance, for he trapped an immortal being within a mortal body—paradoxically creating a mortal immortal. It is later revealed that Schmendrick, born a mortal, has spent his adult life under a spell making him immortal until he acquires the use of true magic—paradoxically making him an immortal mortal. The experiences of both characters are analogous to that of the contradictory experience of the reader who adopts Secondary Belief within a mind that is fully aware of the world's fictional state.

Beagle continues to employ metafictional techniques in the chapters that detail Amalthea's stay at the castle. Haggard's son Lir, for example, purposefully becomes a mythical hero in an attempt to win the love of Lady Amalthea; however, it is Beagle's treatment of the theme of time in these chapters that most strongly supports the possibility of Secondary Belief.

Exploration of time is intimately connected with the tradition of fantasy literature. Tolkien names it as an essential element in any work of fantasy and suggests that the author's treatment of time should "open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our time, outside Time itself maybe" (50). Beagle accomplishes the creation of "Other Time" primarily through the experiences of the unicorn and the words of an old, talking skull located in the hall of the castle.

From the opening to the closing pages, the unicorn is associated with time. She leaves her timeless forest and willingly walks into a time bound world of men: "Time had always passed her by her forest, but now it was she who passed through time" (6). Later it is the passage of time that allows her immortal spirit, trapped within a mortal body, to both fall in love with Lir and nearly forget her quest to fine the other unicorns. Only Haggard's evil confession that he has trapped the unicorns "forever" in the sea provides the unicorn with needed push to fulfill her mission.

Molly and Schmendrick, ever at work to help Amalthea, attempt to solve a riddle that will allow them to locate the Red Bull's lair. For help they have only the sarcasm of a talking skull, Haggard's old henchman gone bitter after execution. Desperate to find the Red Bull before Haggard decides to take Amalthea as he had the others, they beg the merciless skull, who casually informs them:

> When I was alive, I believed—as you do—that time was at lest as real and solid as myself, and probably more so. I said 'one o' clock' as though I could see it, and 'Monday' as though I could find it on the map . . . Like everyone else, I lived in a house bricked up with seconds and minutes, weekends and New Year's Days, and I never went outside until I died, because there was no other door. Now I know I could have walked through walls . . . You can strike you own time, and start the count anywhere. When

you can understand that—then any time at all will be the right time for you" (169).

Moments later Amalthea and her companions, joined the last minute by Lir, symbolically escape from Haggard by running through a clock, identified by the skull as the passage to the Red Bull. No explanation is offered to explain how physical beings can pass through a physical clock—only the suggested truth that time truly may be transcended.

A climatic battle follows: Lir gives his life to save Amalthea, who is returned to her immortal form by Schmendrick, who having at last learned true magic is made mortal again. The unicorn, filled with rage and love, drives the Red Bull into the sea, frees her immortal people from their watery prison, and restores life to Lir. Over and over again, time is manipulated as characters weave in an out of mortality, and this manipulation destroys any boundaries of time: two worlds, the eternal immortal and the temporal mortal, become so entangled within each other that the two realms are seen as one (Norford 103). Thus the reader who adopts Secondary Belief in the world of the unicorn by extension adopts belief in the possibility of contradictory worlds meeting and at times, as represented by the unicorn herself, converging into one fantastical union.

Beagle supports all of the aforementioned narrative and thematic contradictions with his unconventional use of language. One of his favorite devices is the anticlimax. For example, when the unicorn faces the Red Bull for the first time, Schmendrick stood "menacing the attackers with demons, metamorphoses, paralyzing ailments, and secret judo holds. Molly picked up a rock" (94). Several pages later, after having turned the unicorn into Lady Amalthea, the pride-filled Schmendrick is humbled by Molly: "'I am a bearer [of magic] . . . I am a dwelling, I am a messenger—' 'You are an idiot'" (104). Such moments not only add humor to the novel but also undermine the expected order

of events and language, thus adding another contradictory element to the novel.

At times Beagle also conflates prose and poetry. For example, Schmendrick uses doublet and triplet rhymes, supported by multiple instances of alliteration, to kindly admonish the unicorn's initial judgment of his magical abilities: "'we are not always what we seem, and hardly ever what we dream. Still I have read, or heard it sung, that unicorns, when time was young, could tell the difference 'twixt the two—the false shining and the true, the lips' laugh and the hearts rue'" (30). This conflation of poetry and prose mirrors the conflation of the Primary and Secondary Worlds.

Fantasy literature is human exploration and creativity pushed to their literary limits. It is true that good works of fantasy create worlds "as rigid as realism," but it is equally true that those good works grant possibility to the impossible. Fantasy speaks to the human desire for more than the empirical world of the familiar, and *The Last Unicorn* satisfies that desire by allowing the fantastic to at times meet and blur with the everyday world of the reader. The novel's metafictional form and its paradoxical situations produce the fantastical event of the Primary and Secondary worlds becoming indistinguishable from each other, thereby allowing the reader to adopt Secondary Belief in the transcendence of the division of the fantastic and the familiar.

While writing poetry Lir casually asks, "'how many *r*s in "miracle?"'" Schmendrick answers him without hesitation, "'Two . . . It has the same root as 'mirror'" (144). This casual conversation, tucked deep into the heart of the novel, simply but powerfully reveals the essence of fantasy: miracles (i.e. fantastic situations) found in tales of fantasy are but mirror reflections of human desire. We humans desire dragons, unicorns, and curious hobbits because our imaginations beg us to transcend the ordinary. Beagle, in his humble tale about a unicorn, has granted us that desire.

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