

SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION IN LITERATURE: SPECULATIVE FICTION AND ITS GOAL

By John Algeo

In his esthetic manifesto, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Wassily Kandinsky (one of the founders of modern art and an admirer of Helena Blavatsky) wrote about two kinds of art. We might think of them as “art of the eye” and “art of the heart”—to adapt the terms for the two doctrines or paths spoken of in *The Voice of the Silence*. The art of the eye is produced with “more or less skill, virtuosity and vigor”: “With cold eye and indifferent mind the public regards the work. Connoisseurs admire ‘technique,’ as one might admire a tight-rope walker, or enjoy the painting quality,’ as one might enjoy a cake. But hungry souls go hungry away” (p. 25). Of the other kind, the art of the heart, he writes: “There is another art . . . but it possesses also an awakening prophetic power which can have far-reaching and profound effect” (p. 26). This is the art of the spiritual life, which is, says Kandinsky, a form of cognition—a way of knowing—that translates our complex movement toward what is above and beyond us into the simplicity of understanding. Kandinsky’s comments apply to all forms of art, not just painting but literature too.

Kandinsky explained the rise of modern art, with its rejection of materialism and realism, as a result of the overthrow of old values in a time of change:

When religion, science and mortality are shaken . . . and when outer supports threaten to fall, man withdraws his gaze from externals and turns it inwards. Literature, music and art are the most sensitive spheres in which this spiritual revolution makes itself felt. They reflect the dark picture of the present time and show the importance of what was at first only a little point of light noticed by the few. [p. 33]

Literature and the other arts, Kandinsky says, turn inward from the material to the spiritual at a time of violent change in culture.

REVOLUTION IN OUR TIME

Of course all of us are likely to feel that we are living at a time of change, or revolution and transition. This world seems so confused that we think it must be just on the verge of becoming something very different—an old world struggling to give birth to a new one. And so it is, in a sense. In a sense, all times are times of change and of revolution. Doubtless as Adam and Eve wended their solitary way out of Eden, he turned to her and said, “My dear, it has just occurred to me—we are living in an age of

transition.” Adam would have been right. And so was Matthew Arnold, when in the later nineteenth century he wrote of

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born.

All times are times of revolution, for the old world is ever dying and a new world is ever being born. The only thing that varies is our reaction to the change: we may welcome it as offering new possibilities; we may reject it as threatening all we are comfortable with; or—like Matthew Arnold—we may feel lost in the change, alienated from both old and new worlds, not belonging anywhere.

“All things change,” said Ovid; and so impermanence, as the Buddha taught us, is one of the three marks of being. Thus our belief that we live in a time of transition is well grounded, indeed inescapable. And yet, we may say, there is something about this time that seems even more transitional and revolutionary than most other times in history. Marilyn Ferguson in *The Aquarian Conspiracy* has argued with great passion, if somewhat uncritically, that the 1980s may be a time of exceptional personal and social transformation. It may be only our own closeness to our time that gives us that impression; but, on the other hand, there may be good reason for it. There is a tradition that, during the last quarter of each century, a special effort is made to enlighten the world—to hasten the spiritual revolution of which Kandinsky wrote. The Theosophical Society was founded in the last quarter of the past century as the effort of that cycle (as Kandinsky observed, pp. 32–33). We are now in the last quarter of our own century, so we may wonder what effort is being made in our time. That effort is not being made, I suspect, in the form of an organization. There is a sense in which history repeats itself, but the forms of the historical process are infinitely varied, so we can expect the effort of this cycle to take a different form from that of a century ago.

If we look about us today, it is easy to see things that may be agents of the spiritual revolution of our time. There is the striking new view of physics that is written about in popular books like *The Tao of Physics* or *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*. And there are many other indications: our newly awakened conscience about ecology, advances in parapsychology, the concern with human rights on a global scale, and the women’s movement. Yet another of the revolutionary influences of our time can be found in a particular kind of literature that is old but has been gaining new popularity.

THE NATURE OF LITERATURE

To discuss that kind of literature, it is useful to follow the White King’s advice to Alice to “begin at the beginning”—namely, a definition of terms, starting with *literature*. The word *literature* is related to the word *letter*, and in one sense is anything

written, as when we talk about “political campaign literature” or “advertising literature.” But we also talk about “oral literature,” so literature doesn’t have to be written. *Literature*, in the sense I want to use the term here, is a special use of language—it is language that has a particular end, a purpose that makes it literature rather than some other kind of language.

To see what the purpose of literature is, let us consider the three characteristics of reality: sat, chit, and ananda. Those terms mean, respectively, “being” “awareness,” and “joy.” To them correspond the three marks of being—anatta (or non-self), anicca (or impermanence), and dukkha (or frustration)—the three paths of yoga—bhakti (or devotion), jnana (or knowledge) and karma (or action)—and also the three Platonic Ideas of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Sat or pure being, the One Self before which all illusory separate selves evaporate, is approached by the path of devotion because it is the primal Goodness. Chit or objectless awareness, in which the ever-changing objects of the mind disappear along with the separate subject, is approached by the path of knowledge because it is the primal Truth. And ananda “the joy which dwells at the heart of things” (as Besant calls it, *In the Outer Court*, p. 80), the antidote for every frustration, is approached by the path of action because it is primal Beauty that is to be done or made or acted out.

To each of these three characteristics corresponds also a special use of language. First there is the language that in the West is called *prayer* and in the East *mantra*; it is the language of devotion, whose end is to express the Good and thus serve pure being as opposed to merely selfish ends. Next there is the language that we call *scientific discourse* or perhaps *scholarship*; it is the language of knowledge, whose end is to express the True and thus to lead to pure awareness as distinct from relative and impermanent facts. Finally there is the language that we call *literature*; it is the language of action—language that does things or makes things by imitating the Beautiful and in the process creates joy out of frustration.

To be sure, the three kinds of language are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, they often combine in intricate ways. Poetry, for example, is a kind of literature with strong mantric value, in which the play of sound is dominant. The best historical writing is a kind of language that equally balances scholarship and literary value. If they work, the magician’s “barbarous words of evocation” (as W. B. Yeats called them) are a combination of mantra and scientific discourse. The shades and nuances of the possible combinations are innumerable. But we can still recognize just the three basic uses of language. They show humanity’s impulses to communion, communication, and play—the phatic, cognitive, and jocular aspects of our nature.

The language of literature, our special concern, is remarkable in associating the action of creating with the quality of Beauty. It is no accident that the word *poet* comes

from a Greek word meaning “the maker” or that the Old English word for “poet” was *scop*, which is related to our modern word *shape* and meant “he who shapes, creates, or makes something.” In Shakespeare’s day, the word *maker* was regularly used to mean “poet.” The poet is one who writes literature, and the association of the writing of literature with making or creating is an important one. The writer of literature creates a world, and in doing so he mimics the action of the Logos (which is, we should remember, literally the Word). The writer of the human word, like the Logos, the divine Word, follows the path of action to express the Beautiful and thus serve the ends of joy. The creative impulse that brings forth a Cosmos and the creative impulse that brings forth a work of literature are both responding to the same motive and serving the same end—the joyous creation of beauty. In Greek the word *cosmos* means not only “universe” but also “ornament”—a beautiful object (and from that latter

LANGUAGE AND REALITY			
Characteristics of reality:	Sat (Being)	Chit (Awareness)	Ananda (Joy)
Marks of being:	Anatta (Nonself)	Anicca (Impermanence)	Dukkha (Frustration)
Paths of yoga:	Bhakti (Devotion)	Jnana (Knowledge)	Karma (Action)
Platonic Ideas:	Good	True	Beautiful
Language:	Mantric	Scholarly	Literary
Aspects of human nature:	Communion	Communication	Play

sense, we derive our word *cosmetic*, that is, “serving to beautify”). So that is what literature is—language that serves the ends of beauty and acts to make a world in imitation of the great creative act that made the world we all live in.

FACT AND FICTION

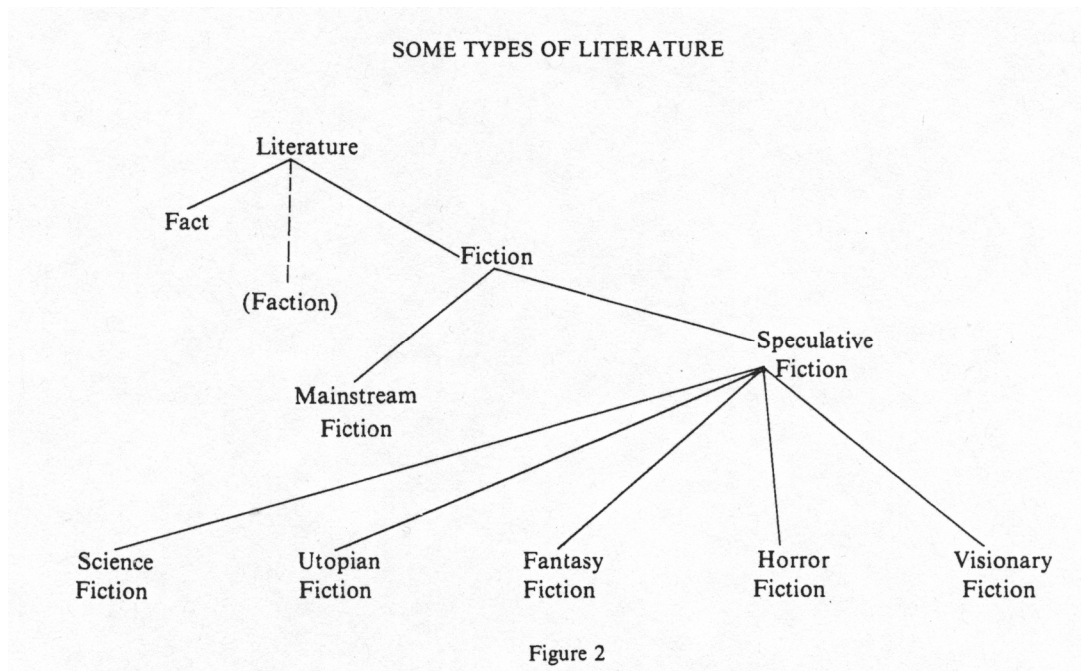
Having thus established what literature is, or at least one way of looking at the question, we can proceed to the next step—which is to analyze the subject into its constituent parts. All literature can be divided into *fact*, a statement of what “really” is, and *fiction*, a statement of the imagination—something that is literally a lie, but that tells the truth in a deeper sense. Now, here follows a warning that will appear one time only, although it applies to much of what follows.

The warning is that dichotomies are always false. Classifying things into two or more kinds is like sorting apples—we have two baskets, one for big apples and one for little apples. But what do we do with all the middle-sized apples? Getting a third basket for them won't help, because then we have to decide what to do with the biggish middle-sized apples and with the littlish middle-sized apples. If we add a new basket, we just increase the number of uncertainties we have in sorting. The problem is a basic one, caused by a discrepancy between the way the mind (that is, the *manas*) works and the way reality is. Reality is a continuum—a constantly flowing stream in which no two things and no two moments are ever exactly alike. The mind, however, insists on sorting things into categories, in which all things in one category are like one another and different from all things in every other category.

So in talking about literature here, we are using just two categories—fact and fiction—and putting all literary apples into one or the other of those baskets. Obviously, there are many instances when the apples don't easily fit into either category. It would be possible to make up a third, intermediate classification; and indeed such a category has been suggested and is called *faction* (a word that blends *fact* and *fiction*, thus neatly suggesting what the category is). Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* is a work of faction, and was the first book I am familiar with to be so called. Alex Haley's *Roots* is another, although it is more fiction than fact; and Virginia Hanson's *Masters and Men* is still another, although it is more fact than fiction. Already, you see, we have the problem of what to do with the apples that our baskets don't quite fit. "Fact" and "fiction" are just the ideal ends of a really endless continuum, which we pretend are discrete categories. Discrete categories are always unsatisfactory, but there is no way to make them perfect because of the discrepancy between how our minds work and how reality is. This warning, though given once only, applies also to all the other categories that follow.

KINDS OF FICTION

But, to return to the analysis: fiction can also be divided into two kinds. One kind is often called *mainstream fiction*; there isn't any generally used term for the other kind, but it is sometimes called *speculative fiction*. (A term like "tributary fiction" or "back-water fiction" would keep the metaphor more consistent, but those terms are too uncomplimentary in their associations.) *Speculative* comes from the Latin root in *speculum* "a mirror" or *specula* "a watchtower" (both from the verb *specere* "to look at"). It is a good term, because this kind of literature mirrors back its readers to themselves or provides them with a watchtower from which they can spy out coming events in the kingdom of the spirit.



Mainstream fiction represents the world just as it is usually supposed to be. Mainstream fiction might be mistaken for factual writing, for biography or history or psychological case studies. It violates none of the usual assumptions of our culture about what reality is like. The modern mainstream novel began in the eighteenth century by disguising itself as biography (like *Joseph Andrews*) or travel narrative (like *Robinson Crusoe*) or published correspondence (like *Pamela*). The mainstream novelist pretended that he was just giving the facts—writing a true story. Consequently nothing in his story could be at odds with what the readers would think of as “normal.” Speculative fiction is different in just that respect. It contains characters or settings or situations that the sensible man-in-the-street would immediately reject as not part of his world. Speculative fiction is in some sense not-this-worldly. It somehow changes reality, and so it is the kind of literature that speaks especially to the sense of change in our time.

SPECULATIVE FICTION

There are four main kinds of speculative fiction that are widely recognized today, and a fifth kind that seems important to me. The four generally recognized types are *science fiction*, *utopian fiction*, *fantasy fiction*, and *horror fiction*. Science fiction deals not with the world as it is, but with the world as it might become, given the laws of nature

and the technology of science. It is usually set in the future, and almost invariably deals with a society that is more technologically advanced than ours. Jules Verne and H. G. Wells were early science-fiction writers; Ray Bradbury, whose *Martian Chronicles* was done a few years ago in a dramatic adaptation on television, is one of the good recent practitioners, and another is Ursula LeGuin, whose award-winning novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* is an exceptional example of the genre. Science fiction is often a what-if fiction. It conducts what in science is called a “thought experiment,” by changing a single fact or two of nature and then asking what results would follow from the change. For example, in the LeGuin story, a world differing from ours in two basic ways is imagined: it is in an ice age and all its human beings are androgynous. The author asks what the society of such a race in such a climate would be like. *The Left Hand of Darkness* is the answer.

Utopian fiction presents a society whose cultural and political institutions are strikingly different from those we know. An early example of this kind of fiction, and that from which the genre takes its name, was Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia*. A much earlier one was Plato’s *Republic*. H. P. Blavatsky was fond of Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*, a late nineteenth-century example; and a more recent one is B. F. Skinner’s *Walden Two*. In a pure utopia, the imaginary society is better off than ours. A sub-variety of the type, sometimes called a *dystopia*, deals with societies that are worse off—a prime example is George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty Four*. The word *utopia* was invented by More from Greek *ou* “no” and *topos* “place” (an etymology reflected by Samuel Butler in his utopian novel *Erewhon*, which is nowhere spelt backwards). More himself, however, punned on the word as from *eu* and *topos*, that is, “good place,” and so its complement is obviously the *dystopia*, from *dys* “bad.” In both cases, the fiction is concerned with societies that are not just different, but either better or worse than the one in which we live.

Science fiction and utopian fiction imagine a technology and science or a government and society different from that of our everyday world, but suppose that the fictional world itself—with its natural laws and the kind of creatures in it—is an otherwise familiar one. Fantasy fiction, on the other hand, is set in a world that is in some respect radically different from ours. The world of High Fantasy (to give it a more precise label) tends to have an old-timey feeling about it—it is often medieval in tone and is almost always technologically simpler than our society; in those respects fantasy is the opposite of science fiction. Another characteristic of fantasy is that it is peopled by creatures that our common sense tells us cannot exist—dragons and hobbits, for example. Most important, its world is governed by natural laws that our common sense tells us are make-believe only—magic is a normal thing in fantasies. The greatest fantasy of our time is certainly J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*. That novel is set in the misty past of Middle Earth; it is populated by dwarves and elves

and wraiths and wizards and hobbits, as well as by men; magic and enchantment are as common in it as computer science and the marvels of technology are among us.

Fantasy is set in a different world from ours. Horror fiction is set in our world, but concerns the contact between us and another sort of existence—invariably a mysterious, spooky, and usually malevolent world. Unfortunately this kind of writing is often called “occult” fiction in bookstores that stock it, with a consequent debasement of the word *occult*. It consists of stories about ghosts, witchcraft, diabolism, possession, and other such gruesome matters. Its aim is to frighten the reader—to give that delicious shiver of the spine that accompanies a sense of contact with the otherworldly. It is Halloween fare. Recently popular examples that have been made into highly successful movies are William Blatty’s *The Exorcist* and Stephen King’s *Carrie* and *The Shining*. Blavatsky liked this kind of story and wrote a number of them herself, such as “The Ensouled Violin.” In horror fiction, an alien, evil reality penetrates our world—generally because we have given it an opening—and the problem is to plug up the hold through which it seeps before it destroys us. Horror fiction is sometimes criticized for its grossness and immorality, but Stephen King (p. 30) maintains instead “that the horror story is really as conservative as an Illinois Republican in a three-piece pinstriped suit. Its main purpose is to reaffirm the virtues of the norm by showing us what awful things happen to people who venture into taboo lands.”

VISIONARY FICTION

In addition to the four sorts of widely recognized speculative fiction just mentioned, there is a fifth sort that I am calling, after a suggestion by Renee Weber, *visionary fiction*. This kind of story is generally set in our own world—the everyday existence of cornflakes for breakfast, eight hours at the office, and an evening with friends or in front of the television. But visionary fiction reveals aspects of this world that are sharply at variance with the common assumptions of the man-in-the-street about what his world is really like. It helps the reader to see the world in a new light, to recognize dimensions of reality that we commonly ignore. It transforms our vision of ourselves and our environment. For this reason, it can well be called *visionary fiction* and for this reason it can be interpreted as one of the signs of spiritual revolution in our time.

Although this kind of speculative fiction has not been generally recognized as a distinct type, it is not recent in the history of literature. Indeed, the only Latin novel to have survived whole from ancient times—*The Golden Ass* by Lucius Apuleius—is an instance of visionary fiction. There have been a good many other such nonmainstream novels throughout the history of literature. In the nineteenth century, Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s novels *Zanoni* and *A Strange Story* fall into the category of visionary fiction, as does (to mention a quite different kind of example) the perennial favorite, Lewis

Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. But despite the fact that there are early and continuing examples of the genre, visionary fiction seems to have become more popular in our time and to be increasing in its abundance and influence as we move through the last quarter of the century. It is for that reason that it is worth examining as one of the current signs of spiritual revolution.

SOME EXAMPLES

As illustrations of visionary fiction, we can take just a few recent popular novels, with a quick look at their plots and themes. To start with, there is a novel that is very close to mainstream fiction: *The Reincarnation of Peter Proud* by Max Ehrlich. Not long ago it was made into a film that adhered closely to the basic plot of the novel, although it simplified many of the details. In the story, Peter Proud, a young anthropologist working on the dream lore of an American Indian tribe, begins to have recurring dreams or visions in which he sees himself living and dying in a different place at an earlier time. His work with Indian dream lore suggests to him that if he is to free himself of the visions, which begin to obtrude more and more insistently on his waking consciousness, he must discover their source and consciously experience their settings. His quest takes him to a New England town, where he discovers that his dreams reflect events of a generation earlier. He is in fact remembering in his dreams the experiences of this former life, including his own murder by his former wife, who is still living in the town, having made his death appear as an accident. Peter Proud's need to reexperience the events of that life remembered in his dreams leads to a surprise ending that I will not reveal, so as not to spoil the story.

This novel deals with the nature of dreams and memory; it raises questions about the persistence of personality and about karmic justice; but most of all it assumes the fact of reincarnation—a fact only gradually accepted by the characters of the novel, including the main protagonist. The view of reincarnation is that to be found in some of the readings of Edgar Cayce and in the researches into apparent cases of reincarnation by Dr. Ian Stevenson of the University of Virginia. Thus the fiction is based on factual evidence. The visionary purpose of the novel is to lead the reader to examine his own life in a new way and to think about events that happen to him now as possible connections with other lifetimes and other personalities of his own.

Another, much less mainstream, example of visionary fiction is *The Education of Oversoul Seven*, by Jane Roberts. It deals with four lives—a prehistoric cavewoman called Ma-ah, a seventeenth-century painter called Joseph, a contemporary poet named Lydia, and a twenty-third-century boy named Proteus. The four lives are personalities of the same individual—Oversoul Seven. In the novel, the Oversoul is being examined to see how well he can relate to the experiences of each of his four personalities and how well he can correlate them with one another. In addition to the

obvious theme of reincarnation, the novel treats the nature of reality, dream versus waking consciousness, the levels of “self” such as personality versus individuality, the nature of time and causality, and the concept of psychic wholeness. Each of the four personalities is a fragment of a complete and well-integrated individual, and the overall plot of the novel traces their development as contributions to a state of total integration.

A third example of visionary fiction is Richard Bach’s novel, *Illusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah*. It is about two aviation barnstormers who meet and team up—one of them a fully developed wonder-worker, a genuine master of mental mechanics who can accomplish the seemingly miraculous, and the other a learner, a messiah-in-training. The novel treats such themes as adeptship and initiation, dharma and free will, karmic links, the nature of reality, the power of thought, the world as maya (the “illusions” of the title), the problem of evil, and the purpose of life—rather a tall order for a slim volume. Richard Bach, who is himself an aviator, has used the image of flight in several of his works—notably in the most popular of his books, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*.

Illusions is a thin airy book that touches, however lightly, upon some of the weightiest problems and puzzles that mankind has to solve. The setting is a thoroughly prosaic one: the American Midwest, where aviators give sight-seeing rides to the rural folk; but that ordinary setting affords the reader a vision of an extraordinary country of the mind. Part of the delight of the book is the juxtaposing of the familiar and the surprising, as in the opening words, which are also the concluding words of the story: “There was a Master come into the earth, born in the holy land of Indiana, raised in the mystical hills east of Fort Wayne.” Can any good come out of Nazareth? Can any mysticism come out of Fort Wayne? Such use of the ordinary to reveal the extraordinary is a hallmark of visionary fiction.

It would be easily possible to go on listing works that belong to the same category as the three just mentioned. There are the novels of C. S. Lewis and of Charles Williams—two writers who belong to the same literary group of Tolkien. There is *The Flight to Lucifer: A Gnostic Fantasy*, by Harold Bloom, a leading member of the influential Yale School of literary criticism. There is *Two Tales of the Occult*, by Mircea Eliade, a distinguished professor of the history of religions at the University of Chicago. Many of the novels of the Nobel-Prize-winning author Hermann Hesse fall into the category of visionary fiction, as does much of the fiction of other Nobel-winners and internationally renowned men and women of letters: the Irish poet William Butler Yeats, the Jewish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer, the Greek Nikos Kazantzakis, and the Danish Isak Dinesen. It is significant that the authors just mentioned are all academic people of sterling reputation or major authors of

twentieth-century literature. There is also fiction by lesser, albeit well-established, lights in the literary firmament, such as Lord Dunsany and George Russell (best known by his pen name "A. E."). There are other early twentieth-century works like *Lost Horizon*, by James Hilton, and *The Magician*, by Somerset Maugham. Visionary fiction may be a form of speculative literature, but it is produced by indisputably mainstream writers.

It is, of course, also produced by authors who are not part of the literary establishment. There are the novels of Violet Firth, written under the pen name of Dion Fortune, who is best known for her books on the modern Kabbalah. There are novels by the less well-known Charles Finney, such as *The Circus of Dr. Lao*, which was charmingly filmed a number of years ago. There is *The Strange Life of Ivan Osokin*, by P. D. Ouspensky, better known for his factual exposition of the teachings of Gurdjieff.

FICTION, FAIRY TALES, AND SPIRITUALITY

There is no reason to go on with such lists. The category of visionary fiction is large and varied; among its contributors are both less well-known writers and some of the giants of modern literature. What these works have in common is that they all present some aspect of the Ancient Wisdom in fictional guise.



They teach through entertaining. And what they teach is a vision of reality that can make a spiritual revolution in the individual and in society. They are, one might say, subversive literature, for they present ideas that a reader may accept in fiction, which the reader would be afraid to consider in "factual" writing.

Visionary fiction is a modern, sophisticated version of the fairy tale. Indeed, J. R. R. Tolkien gave a talk, an Andrew Lang Lecture at St. Andrews in 1938, in which he used the term *fairy story* for the kind of fiction here called *fantasy*, a near relative of the visionary novel. Blavatsky anticipated him in recognizing the mature significance of that genre often wrongly associated only with children. In *Isis Unveiled*. (2:406) she wrote:

Fairy tales do not exclusively belong to nurseries; all mankind—except those few who in all ages have comprehended their hidden meaning and tried to open the eyes of the superstitious—have listened to such tales in one shape or the other and, after transforming them into sacred symbols, called the product RELIGION!

Here Blavatsky recognizes three levels of reaction to the fairy tale (levels that apply to visionary fiction also). First is that of the unsophisticated child who accepts the marvelous as a simple story. Then there is the semisophisticated adult who misinterprets and literalizes the tales into religious dogma, as fundamentalists have done with the Jewish and Christian scriptures. Finally there is the truly wise person who understands the hidden meaning of the tale. But how does one come to the inner meaning of the fairy tale, or of visionary fiction? Blavatsky answers that question in an essay called “What Is Theosophy?” first published in volume 1 of *The Theosophist* and reprinted in the *Collected Writings* (2: 88). She says that the Neo-Platonists, who were early theosophists, were called “‘Analogists,’ on account of their method of interpreting all sacred legends, symbolical myths and mysteries, by a rule of analogy or correspondence, so that events which had occurred in the external world were regarded as expressing operations and experiences of the human soul.”

That is as good a description of how visionary or all speculative fiction operates as we can hope for. Speculative fiction deals with a transformed world, and that world is an analog of the human soul, transformed by spiritual revolution. Speculative fiction depicts in a symbolic way the possible changes in the psyche. It holds up a mirror in which we see reflected back, not the prosaic image of our everyday selves, but a magically transformed vision of what can be. It is a watchtower from which we catch glimpses of a reality not yet here, but marching certainly out of the future. The basic subject of speculative fiction is the human spirit and how it becomes whole. It treats symbolically or analogically the mysteries of our past and the promise of our future. It probes the secrets of the human heart.

We do live in a time when religion, science, and morality are being shaken. So, as Kandinsky said, it is a time when at least some of humanity can be expected to undergo a spiritual revolution by withdrawing attention from externals and turning inwards. The literature of our time—and none more than the speculative fiction we have been considering—is a way of knowing which translates external complexities into internal simplicity, if we read it aright. It may begin as “only a little point of light noticed by the few” amidst “the dark picture of the present time.” But rightly read, it is a prophetic art that can have the “far-reaching and profound effect” Kandinsky envisioned—nothing less than the spiritual awakening of humankind.

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