From Peterborough to Faëry

The Poetics and Mechanics of Secondary Worlds

edited by Thomas Honegger & Dirk Vanderbeke

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Essays in honour of
Dr. Allan G. Turner's 65th Birthday

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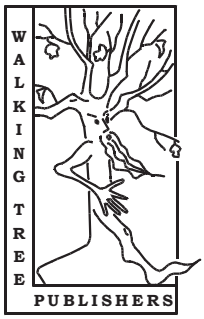

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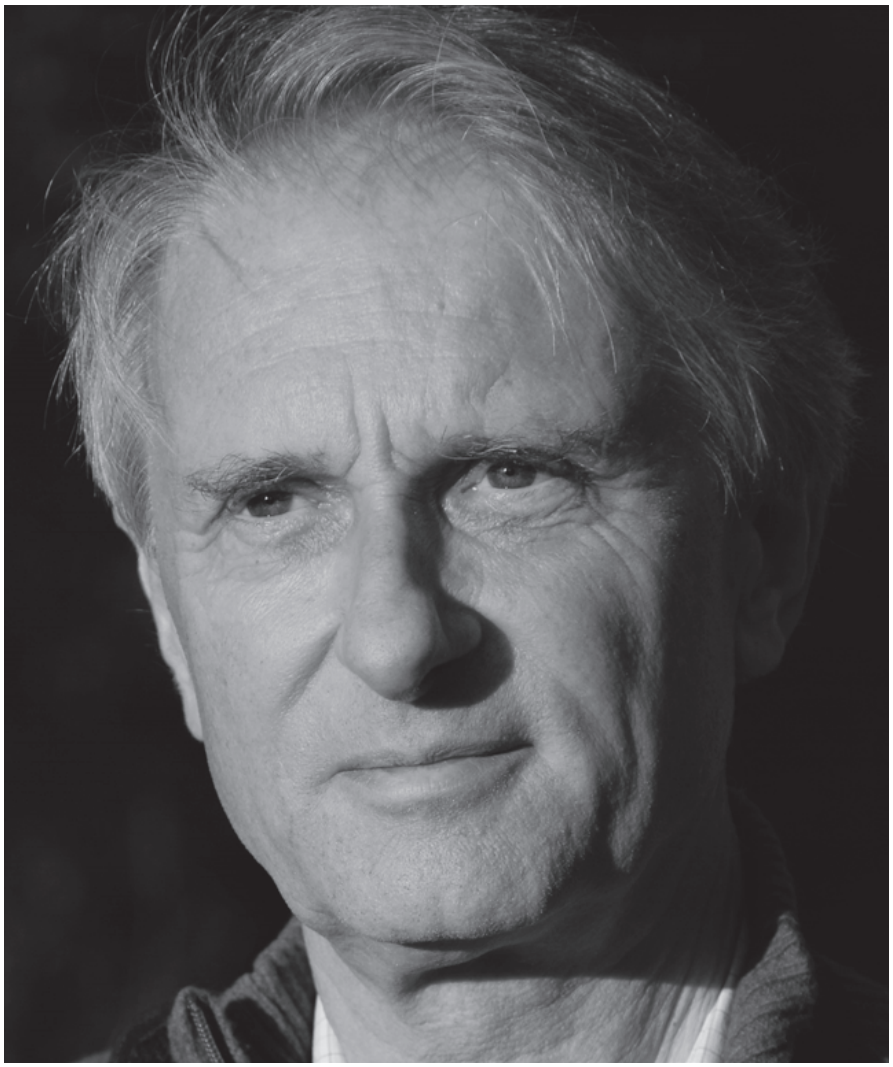

Allan G. Turner anno aetatis suae LXV
(picture courtesy of Anna Prosowska)

Thomas Honegger & Dirk Vanderbeke

Introduction

It all began with St Peter, fisherman and also patron saint of fishermen, the profession most often associated with high levels of imagination and almost unbelievable yarns. It is he who performed some of the fantastic deeds of the gospels, like walking on water, until he was caught in the trap that imperils both the religiously faithful and aficionados of fantastic literature, the Todorovian momentary hesitancy and loss of 'a willing suspension of disbelief'. And it was St Peter who finally became the archetype of one of the most important stock figures of fantastic literature, the gatekeeper who allows or denies access to the land of promise from which no man returns.

But then he is not only important for fantastic literature as a person but also as a name giver and patron of locations, and the places named after St Peter are usually also closely connected to the uncanny, the mysterious, the magical and the fantastic. First, of course, there is the Russian St Petersburg, a city as inexplicable, labyrinthine and unknowable as Prague or Venice, and home to the masters of fantastic literature Gogol and Pushkin. It is a place where noses detach themselves from bodies and ride in carriages or where a dead duchess reappears in the image of the queen of spades. In his book *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), Yuri Lotman included a chapter on "The Symbolism of St Petersburg" in which he writes: "The city hewn in the air and without foundation – this is Petersburg, the supernatural and phantasmagoric space" (Lotman, 196). He then evokes a "genre of the scary or fantastic story with a 'Petersburg local colour'" (ibid.), and suggests that in the time of Pushkin St Petersburg was "a place where the mysterious and fantastic was the norm" (ibid.).

In the Western hemisphere, there is yet another St Petersburg, home to all the fantastic stories that ever were written. It is a place where pirates roam and haunted houses are "dissected, plank by plank, and [their] foundations dug up

and ransacked for hidden treasure." It is a place of enchantment, where gangs of robbers swear oaths signed with blood, where magicians turn Arabs and elephants into a Sunday school picnic and where young boys who are willing to believe in all the fantastic yarns not only ultimately find the box of gold but also free a runaway slave, quite possibly the most fantastic element of all. And, what is best, the city itself is purely imaginary, the dream vision of eternal childhood where Mark Twain located his tales about Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn.

And then there is Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, a city that is certainly one of those places where the membrane between our world and the Perilous Realm is particularly thin and transparent. Just west of the fens, a region where earth and water mingle, this location has been inhabited since the Bronze Age. It was first mentioned in the eighth century by Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History*, when the town was still called Medeshamstede, and Hugh Candidus, a monk at Peterborough Abbey in the 12th century, wrote that it was founded in the territory of the North Gyrwas, the people of the fens.

Peterborough is also home to the *Peterborough Chronicle*. At first sight, this book does not really seem to belong to the genre of fantasy and imagination – among other things it tells how through the monks' "own carelessness, and through their drunkenness, in one night the church and all that was therein was consumed by fire", obviously a piece of early realism. But then medieval histories are also known for their flights into the realm of fancy and the supernatural, and the *Chronicle* also contains the first account of the Wild Hunt in English, an event that was interpreted as a bad omen when an obviously incompetent and greedy new abbot was appointed by the king:

> Þa son þaeraefter þa saegon & herdon fela men feole huntes hunten. Þa huntes waeron swarte & micele & laðlice, & here hundes ealle swarte & bradegede and laðlice, & hi ridone on swarte hors & on swarte bucces. Þis waes segon on the selue derfald in þa tune on Burch & on ealle þa wudes da waeron fram þa selue tune to Stanforde; and þa muneces herdon ða horn blawen þat hi blewen on nihtes. Soðfeste men heom kepten on nihtes; saeidon, þes þe heom þuhte, þet þaer mihte wel ben abuton twenti other þritti hornblaweres.
>
> Immediately after [Henry of Poitou came to Peterborough as a new abbot], several persons saw and heard many huntsmen hunting. The hunters were swarthy, and huge, and ugly; and their hounds were all swarthy, and broad-eyed, and ugly. And they rode on swarthy horses, and swarthy bucks. This was seen in the very deer-fold in the town of Burch [Peterborough], and in all the woods

> from that same town to Stamford. And the monks heard the horn blow that they blew in the night. Credible men, who watched them in the night, said that they thought there might well be about twenty or thirty horn-blowers.

Peterborough Cathedral, the original home of the *Peterborough Chronicle*, dates from the 12th and 13th centuries. It is only a brisk walk's distance (2.4 miles) from Dogsthorpe, a residential area of Peterborough, which in the 1960s became the new home of Deacon's Grammar School. The institution had been founded in 1722 in Cowgate with money assigned for this purpose in the will of the late Thomas Deacon. Maybe the wild hunt had passed this way on their ride through Peterborough and left some beneficial impression on the inhabitants. It is against the backdrop of this rich historical tapestry that we have enter Allan Turner, a young lad of tender age, to receive the benefit of an education at Deacon's School; an education that laid the foundations for his long and fruitful academic career. After taking his A-Levels in French, German, Latin and Music, he continued his education at the University of Reading where, after a BA (1st Class Honours) in German, he later received his M.Phil. for his dissertation consisting of an edition of a medieval German manuscript (*Christi Leiden*, MS Nürnberg Stadtbibliothek Cent. IV 31). In the following years he added additional strings to his academic and didactic rather than Elvish bow by studying for the Postgraduate Certificate of Education (with Commendation in Practical Teaching) at the University of Leeds and for an M.Phil. in Linguistics at St. John's College (University of Cambridge). At a later stage he rounded off his professional formation with the Cambridge/RSA Diploma in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language and a Ph.D. in Translation Studies at the University of Newcastle. It may not be amiss to add that Allan has been appreciated for his skill as both a choirmaster and a singer. Moreover, his research has taken him beyond philology into the Elysian Fields of oenology, although his book on German wine never did get finished.

His professional and academic appointments took him to Basel, Trier, Greifswald, Marburg, and, finally, Jena, inspiring and motivating several generations of students. Simultaneously Allan made incessant excursions into the Perilous Realm, not of faculty meetings but of Faëry. The works of J.R.R. Tolkien as well as the medieval (and post-medieval) literatures and languages of Northern Europe, which inspired much of Tolkien's work, have had a profound and lasting

impact on his personal and professional formation. Thus his students could not only profit from his expertise in language teaching, but also from his encyclopaedic knowledge of things "English" in particular and things "cultural" and "folkloristic" in general. Less frequent, but still with a profound impact, have been his seminars on Tolkien and medieval literature and languages. Allan has also made a point of attending (and mostly enjoying) academic conferences on his favourite subjects, and his active and sustained involvement with the British and the German Tolkien Societies (TS and DTG respectively) has earned him a substantial reputation. This was particularly evident when the organiser of the 2008 DTG conference in Jena made the mistake of scheduling Allan's paper in competition with that of another scholar – who found himself lecturing to less than the proverbial handful since everybody else among the more than fourscore attendants wanted to hear Allan's paper.

Yet Allan has not only contributed to Tolkien and translation studies by means of his academic papers or his monograph *Translating Tolkien* (Peter Lang, 2005), but has also written numerous reviews for *Hither Shore* and acted as a sounding board for many of his colleagues' ideas and as a critical proof-reader of their papers. And, last but not least, we must mention his involvement with Walking Tree Publishers – variously as author, (co-)editor, and member of the Board of Advisors. Walking Tree Publishers were, predictably, very pleased to undertake the publication of this volume in his honour.

The eight papers of this volume focus on one specific aspect of his broad range of scholarly interests: the creation of secondary worlds in literature. The specification "in literature" – or maybe better: by means of poetic language – is a crucial one, since Allan is very much a man of the written and spoken (and sung) word. Others may find enchantment in pictures or movies, but for him it is the poet or *scop* unlocking the word-hoard who weaves the spells of enchantment. We have always suspected that Tolkien's description of the recitations in the Hall of Fire at Rivendell depicts quite accurately his idea of an ideal evening entertainment.

We cannot offer Elvish poetry, but the eight papers written by former and present colleagues make up for this by means of their thematic and chronological breadth. It is the "father of English literature" who stands at the head of our

volume and Wolfram R. Keller discusses the representation of the workings of imagination in Geoffrey Chaucer's works. He is followed by Andrew "Chunky" Liston, who takes a closer look at the supernatural in Burns's "Tam O'Shanter". Remaining within the Romantic period, Julian M. Eilmann's account of "Romantic world-building" discloses striking parallels between some of the central ideas of the Romantic movement and Tolkien's theory of "secondary worlds" and "sub-creation". The remaining papers focus on the literature of the 20th and 21st centuries. Tom Shippey's contribution introduces us to the astoundingly fertile imagination of Jack Vance, who has been one of the 20th century's most prolific world-builders. Terry Pratchett, another very productive and prominent author of fantasy, is the subject of Doreen Triebel's essay. She provides a close and informed eco-critical reading of Pratchett's fantasy-novel *Maurice and the Rodents*. The (narrative) mechanics and complications of multiple secondary worlds is the subject of James Fanning's contribution on Jasper Fforde's *Thursday Next* novels, and Thomas Honegger's study of the reception of H. P. Lovecraft's "anti-mythos" illustrates the strong mythologizing pull on secondary creations. The final paper by Dirk Vanderbeke investigates the role of London in some central texts of "urban fantasy".

We wish our readers – and Allan in particular – much pleasure in these excursions into the Perilous Realm.

Jena, March 2014

Thomas Honegger & Dirk Vanderbeke

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