Where the Blue Flowers Grow:

Sehnsucht and Eucatastrophe in Christian Fantasy Literature

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Abstract

Sehnsucht is a longing for Heaven that cannot be fully described or fulfilled in this world. Eucatastrophe is an unexpected turn of events in a story that brings about incredible joy and a happy ending. This thesis examines how fantasy authors George MacDonald, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien explore both of these spiritual phenomena in many of their works. This thesis also discusses how *sehnsucht* and eucatastrophe appear in Scripture and can be used in stories to point readers to Heaven. Biblically, *sehnsucht* is a longing for Heaven, and eucatastrophe serves as the fulfillment of that longing. Fantasy offers a unique way to share the Gospel by allowing readers to experience other worlds and see familiar objects and ideas in a different light.

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Have you ever missed somewhere

That you've never been before

Like there's a memory there

Except you don't remember anymore? (The Gray Havens, "Endless Summer")

This question expresses the yearning in the human soul for a place never experienced, yet familiar. The soul desires "the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited" (Lewis, "The Weight of Glory" 3). This beautiful feeling is characterized by the term *sehnsucht*, the German word for a deep longing or ache for something beyond this world. Along with this longing comes an unexpected joy, known as eucatastrophe, that brings hope that this longing will one day be fulfilled. These suggestive movements of the human heart reveal a deep desire to be reunited with God and to experience the future joy that Christians look forward to in Heaven. Stories have a special ability to evoke these feelings as they can speak to the depths of the human heart and elicit powerful emotion.

While many types of stories have the power to portray truth, the genre of fantasy is especially helpful in promoting narrative expressions of *sehnsucht* and eucatastrophe which lead readers closer to God. Fantasy is a genre of fiction that often takes place in an imaginary world and can include magic and mythical creatures. Similar terms for these types of stories, such as myth, mythopoeia, and fairy-stories, will be used interchangeably with fantasy throughout this thesis. Because fantasy stories focus on new and unfamiliar settings, they can awaken both joy

and longing in readers for another world. Authors can appropriate this unique genre to reveal Christian themes and truth and point readers to Heaven, and some of the best authors to have done so are George MacDonald, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien. Through examining instances of *sehnsucht* and eucatastrophe in their stories, it is clear that this genre is valuable for teaching truth to both Christians and non-believers. Fantasy written from a Christian worldview is often especially successful at teaching truth since the worldview it portrays is founded on biblical truth. Christian fantasy unveils the insatiable longing of the human heart for something beyond this world and at the same time provides the hope for a joyful ending that brings the human soul to what it has always longed for—communion with God.

***Sehnsucht* in Fantasy**

The yearning that exists in every human soul can be summed up with the German word for longing—*sehnsucht*. The longing of *sehnsucht* is a deep ache for something beyond human experience, "an ardent yearning after a nameless, indefinable object" (Bruner and Ware, *Finding God in the Land of Narnia* 97). According to C. S. Lewis, who incorporated this longing into many of his works, *sehnsucht* is the desire that every soul has for Heaven and for eternity with God. He calls it "the inconsolable secret in each one of you—the secret which hurts so much that you take your revenge on it by calling it names like Nostalgia and Romanticism and Adolescence" (Lewis, "Weight of Glory" 2). Though this longing for Heaven is painful, Lewis also says that it "pierces with such sweetness" (2). As Alan Jacobs says in *The Narnian*, though *sehnsucht* "could in one sense be described as a negative experience, in that it focuses on something one cannot possess and cannot reach, it is nevertheless intensely seductive" (41). The fact that this desire is unattainable is what makes it at once painful and powerful. No one can

fully describe this longing because "it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience"; however, Lewis also believes that "our experience is constantly suggesting it" ("Weight of Glory" 2). No one can tell others about something they have not yet experienced, and mankind has not yet experienced the glory of Heaven. But God has made human souls to be eternal, yearning for their true home in Heaven, the place that "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined" (*ESV Bible*, 1 Cor. 2.9). This longing is so engrained in the soul that it cannot be hidden or ignored. The soul can catch glimpses of the world that is to come through moments in this world.

Stories, especially fantasy stories that take readers beyond this world, exist as one avenue to experience such glimpses of Heaven that awaken a longing for eternity. However, these stories in which this beauty can be glimpsed "are not the thing itself" (Lewis, "The Weight of Glory" 3). Lewis says that "the books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them, and what came through was longing" (3). Stories are not in themselves what humans are longing for; they can awaken this longing but never fulfill it. Stories allow people to begin to see this beauty that they long for, but Lewis explains that "we do not want merely to *see* beauty" (7). Instead, the desire of mankind is "to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it" (7). Mythic stories can awaken this desire to be one with beauty, and they also help readers to further understand this longing through such narratives' portrayals of *sehnsucht*.

Sehnsucht *in MacDonald's Works*

George MacDonald (1824-1905) used his characters' glimpses of and experiences with other worlds to arouse the same longing in his readers that his characters felt within their own

stories. His stories, especially his novel *Phantastes,* evoked *sehnsucht* in Lewis and greatly inspired Lewis in his own faith and writings. Lewis believed that the type of mythopoeic writing that MacDonald excelled in "arouses in us sensations we have never had before" ("Preface to MacDonald," par. 17). This makes his stories perfect as vessels for *sehnsucht* since it is a longing for what mankind has never experienced before. When discussing the impact of MacDonald's myth, Lewis says that it "hits us at a level deeper than our thoughts or even our passions" and "shocks us more fully awake than we are for most of our lives" (par. 17). The longing woven throughout such stories as "The Golden Key," *The History of Photogen and Nycteris,* and *Phantastes* awakens the reality and desire for Heaven that lives in every human heart.

In "The Golden Key," Mossy and Tangle travel together through Fairyland and encounter many strange sights and creatures. They experience glimpses of beauty in their encounters with the rainbow of Fairyland and the shadow plains, and these glimpses reveal to them a personal longing that they cannot fully explain. When Mossy first sees the rainbow of Fairyland, its beauty captivates him, and "he stood gazing at it till he forgot himself with delight" ("The Golden Key"). But the rainbow's beauty is elusive, and the rainbow disappears when Mossy comes too close. He can only appreciate its beauty by standing "as near it as he might" ("The Golden Key"). The rainbow awakens *sehnsucht* in Mossy, and similar to how Lewis describes such intense longing, Mossy does not simply want to look at the beauty of the rainbow but wants to touch it and enter into the rainbow's beauty. Mossy can "see beautiful forms slowly ascending" inside the rainbow, and he wants to be one of those forms ("The Golden Key"). Just as this longing of *sehnsucht* can only be felt but not fulfilled in this world, Mossy feels this

yearning to enter the rainbow but cannot yet do so. His desire is both beautiful and painful as it can never be satisfied this side of Heaven.

A similar example of *sehnsucht* in "The Golden Key" occurs when Mossy and Tangle cross the shadow plain. On this plain, the shadows of many shapes and creatures appear, but they are not able to see what is creating the shadows. They find these shadows to be very beautiful, and "some of the things which pleased them most they never knew how to describe" ("The Golden Key"). This scene portrays the emotions many people feel upon being reminded by an object or moment in this world of something from another world that they cannot yet understand. Just as these people are reminded of this other place and their desire for it, Mossy and Tangle desire to see the place where the shadows come from, and this desire is so strong that they each "saw the other in tears: they were each longing after the country whence the shadows fall" ("The Golden Key"). Just like with the rainbow, they desire something outside of their experience that cannot currently be satisfied, and this leads to the painful yet beautiful feeling of *sehnsucht*.

MacDonald also explores *sehnsucht* in "The History of Photogen and Nycteris." Nycteris is a young woman who has lived in a dark room for her entire life, and she experiences *sehnsucht* during her first encounter with the outside world. When Nycteris is trapped in her dark room, she wants to escape and experience something more, but she does not have words to express this desire. Because what she wants is outside of her experience, "she did not know what it was, and the nearest she could come to expressing it to herself was—that she wanted more room" ("The History of Photogen and Nycteris" ch. 7). The single lamp in her room strengthens her longing as it gives her a hint of such light and room. When Nycteris looks at the lamp, "her heart would swell as she gazed. She would wonder what had hurt her, when she found her face wet with

tears" (ch. 7). Her longing for what the lamp signifies is so acute that it brings her to tears, revealing the element of emotional pain in *sehnsucht*.

When her lamp shatters, Nycteris finally finds her way outside and experiences the moon and the wind for the first time. When she sees the moon, "she fell on her knees, and spread out her hands" in awe ("The History of Photogen and Nycteris" ch. 9). She is overwhelmed by the aching intensity of *sehnsucht*, and "she could not in the least have told what was in her mind, but the action was in reality just a begging of the moon to be what she was" (ch. 9). Though she had felt longing before through the light in her lamp, the moon's greater light fills her with a much deeper longing. This new experience of light awakens in her the knowledge of another better reality that she does not yet possess but now desires to experience. She wants to be one with the beauty of that light, which is one aspect of *sehnsucht*. After this, she experiences the touch of the wind and feels "at one and the same moment annihilated and glorified" because of her connection with such beauty (ch. 9). Through this encounter with the outside world, Nycteris's longing is partially satisfied because of this new experience, but it is also deepened because she desires to unite with this beauty in a way that is impossible in her current existence.

MacDonald's novel *Phantastes* uses longing for Fairy Land to evoke *sehnsucht*. Anodos' intense longing for Fairy Land is awakened when a woman appears and tells him about this other place that he has never experienced. When he looks into her eyes, he feels "an unknown longing" and then has a vision of a sea that the woman tells him exists in Fairy Land (*Phantastes* 57-58). He later says, "I had often longed for Fairy Land," clarifying that this longing is for a place that he had not yet experienced, similar to how humans long for Heaven though they have not experienced it (78). Before seeing Fairy Land, Anodos did not know of its existence or what it

was like, but he nevertheless still longed for it in his soul because it was the place to which he belonged. When he stays in a farmhouse for a night on the outskirts of Fairy Land and considers not returning, he changes his mind when he looks out the window at the forests of Fairy Land. He says that as his eyes looked on Fairy Land again, "a gush of wonderment and longing flowed over my soul like the tide of a great sea. Fairy Land lay before me, and drew me towards it with an irresistible attraction" (101). This attraction to Fairy Land is the longing of *sehnsucht,* a longing for a place of beauty and wonder that Anodos has not yet fully seen.

Sehnsucht *in Lewis's Works*

MacDonald's mythic stories deeply affected C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) and further awakened the *sehnsucht* he had felt since he was a boy. He says that when he looked out of his nursery window at the Castlereagh Hills, the sight "taught me longing—*Sehnsucht*; made me for good or ill, and before I was six years old, a votary of the Blue Flower" (*Surprised by Joy* 18). This blue flower that Lewis mentions is a symbol of *sehnsucht* from German Romanticism, appearing in a story by the German writer Novalis in which a character "becomes obsessed by a vision of a blue flower" and deeply longs for the place where these flowers grow (Jacobs 41). This flower became a symbol of *sehnsucht* for Lewis, and he also felt the pull of *sehnsucht* through the stories of Beatrix Potter and Norse myths years before he ever discovered MacDonald (41-42). These stories revealed to Lewis how stories can communicate *sehnsucht,* and he sought to evoke this longing for his readers in many of his mythic works, especially *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

The Chronicles of Narnia is a beloved children's fantasy series with many moments that arouse *sehnsucht,* especially a longing for the land of Narnia itself. The doors that lead into

Narnia attract readers because they imply something beyond current experience that is just out of reach but could potentially be discovered by anyone (*Finding God in the Land of Narnia* 27). While many readers long to experience Narnia, characters in the books long for Narnia as well. In *The Horse and His Boy*, Shasta says, "I've been longing to go to the North all my life" (14). The lands of Narnia and Archenland lie to the north of where Shasta has always lived, and he has always longed for those lands even though he does not know them. Bree also says that Shasta is from one of these northern countries, revealing that Shasta is actually longing for his true home (14). Bree also yearns to return to his lost home of Narnia, repeating the phrase "Narnia and the North!" with longing (23). This longing for the North was a desire that Lewis himself had felt ever since he was young. The Norse myths he read as a boy filled him with a longing for "northernness" that he carried with him for much of his life (*Surprised by Joy* 88). However, he later recognized that this longing for "northernness" was really for something much greater, and this realization affected his writing profoundly (194). Narnia, with its air of northernness, is an object of *sehnsucht* for many characters, but just like Lewis, it is not the ultimate place that they long for throughout the series.

Sehnsucht is also seen in *The Chronicles of Narnia* as a longing for Aslan's country. This land exists beyond Narnia, and many characters desire to travel there. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the mouse Reepicheep especially has a longing for Aslan's country. When he was young, a dryad spoke a verse over him about finding all he seeks in the East where Aslan's country is, and he says, "the spell of it has been on me all my life" (*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* 21-22). As the ship sails toward the East, he often gazes at the eastern horizon with longing (32-33). Though he loves Narnia, he is willing to leave it behind because of his desire to

see Aslan's country. Near the end of the story when Ramandu tells how to break the enchantment over the three lords, Reepicheep says that to "go on into the utter east and never return into the world" is his "heart's desire" (208). This longing for another world drives Reepicheep forward throughout the story to finally cross the wave at the end of the world and enter Aslan's country. His journey to the east to find Aslan's country is a physical representation of the journey of life and finding the object of one's longing upon finally crossing over into a new life. The children also long for Aslan's country as they can see the tops of beautiful mountains over the wave and feel a breeze from that country that brings "both a smell and a sound, a musical sound" that they never forget (243). This glimpse whets their desire for Aslan's country which they yearn to enter one day.

When the Pevensies and others finally do enter Aslan's country in *The Last Battle,* the sense of longing is still present at first. When a centaur runs past them and calls "further up and further in," they do not understand what he means, but "the words somehow set them tingling all over" with longing and expectation (*The Last Battle* 176). Later, Peter says that Aslan's country "reminds me of somewhere but I can't give it a name" (192). In a sense, they already know Aslan's country because that is what their hearts have been keenly desiring all their lives. Finally, they realize that Aslan's country is actually the real Narnia, and the Narnia they knew "was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia" (195). This scene echoes MacDonald's shadow plains in "The Golden Key" as Mossy and Tangle could only see the shadows of the place that they longed for but could not reach. Similar to Mossy and Tangle, what the characters in *Narnia* thought they were longing for in the Narnia they knew was actually the real Narnia that they had

never experienced. This longing for Aslan's country was the longing for the place where they truly belonged, their true home.

Lewis also uses longing in some of his other mythic works, such as *The Great Divorce* and *Till We Have Faces*. In *The Great Divorce,* Lewis is attempting to portray Heaven and to stimulate "a desire for it among readers" (Hein 216). When they are on the outskirts of Heaven, it feels as if the characters have gotten "'out' in some sense which made the Solar System itself seem an indoor affair" (*The Great Divorce* 20). One aspect of *sehnsucht* is a longing for something beyond current experience, and this journey to Heaven brings the characters outside of the only places they have ever known. They can see that Heaven is far greater and more real than anything they have experienced before because they are only ghosts in comparison to the people and objects in Heaven (20-21). If the ghosts choose Heaven and the new reality offered to them, they can fulfill the longing in their souls for a place far beyond what they knew in this world. This moment portrays *sehnsucht* as the ghosts see the place their hearts secretly long for and have a chance to satisfy their desire. In *Till We Have Faces*, Lewis includes a beautiful expression of *sehnsucht* in Psyche's longing for beauty and the Mountain:

> It was when I was happiest that I longed most. It was on happy days when we were up there on the hills, the three of us, with the wind and the sunshine … Do you remember? The colour and the smell, and looking across at the Grey Mountain in the distance? And because it was so beautiful, it set me longing, always longing. Somewhere else there must be more of it. Everything seemed to be saying, "Psyche come!" … The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing—to reach the Mountain, to find the place where all the beauty came from. (85-86)

The beautiful moments that Psyche experiences early in her life give her a glimpse of something even more beautiful than her current existence and awaken *sehnsucht* in her. She knows that there must be something else out there, beyond her current experience, and the Mountain becomes a symbol of this beautiful place that she so greatly desires. She does not simply desire the Mountain itself; instead, she has a "longing towards the eternally Good" (Hein 237). This longing is so intense that it becomes the most important part of Psyche's life, even to the point where her desire to go to the Mountain overcomes her fear of death. Psyche's longing to experience something more and to find the source of all beauty perfectly embodies *sehnsucht*.

Sehnsucht *in Tolkien's Works*

J. R. R. Tolkien (1892-1973) was another fantasy writer who believed that *sehnsucht* was important for fantasy stories because they are meant to awaken transcendent desire for beauty and for a place to which the reader has never been. He says these stories are "not primarily concerned with possibility, but with desirability. If they awakened desire, satisfying it while often whetting it unbearably, they succeeded" ("On Fairy Stories" 19). Desire is an essential element of these stories, and it is a desire for the beauty of another world, a world Tolkien called Faërie. He says that he "desired dragons with a profound desire" because dragons belonged to this "Other-world" (20). The human soul longs for another world because its true home is in that other world, and this longing is both satisfied and increased through experiencing other worlds through fantasy. Tolkien believed that there are many desires satisfied and evoked through fantasy stories, but that the most important one "is the oldest and deepest desire, the Great Escape: the Escape from Death" (33). Fantasy stories allow a glimpse of how these desires can be satisfied, though there can never be full satisfaction in this world. Tolkien evokes *sehnsucht* in

the world of Middle-Earth through his portrayal of beauty and a deep longing for the blissful land of Valinor in the West.

Sehnsucht is in one sense a yearning for beauty and to be one with beauty, and Tolkien's world certainly draws out this longing. Lisa Coutras says that "transcendental beauty emanates from every aspect of his created world" (*Tolkien's Theology of Beauty* 1). She further states that "because human beings were originally created for Eden, there remains in human nature an inexplicable longing and sense of dislocation, a yearning for a world in the wholeness of its original design" (19). When humans experience transcendental beauty like that of Tolkien's world, it "awakens this longing, stirring an inborn 'memory'" (19). This beauty is seen especially in the creation story of Middle-Earth. When Ilúvatar, the creator of Middle-Earth, creates the Ainur, who are spirits acting like lesser gods, he gives them themes of music to sing that help to call forth the created world (*The Silmarillion* 15). This music is so wonderful that "the beauty of their music is that for which all creation yearns" (*Finding God in the Lord of the Rings* 38). However, evil enters the world when Melkor, one of the Ainur, creates a discordant theme, and the beauty of Arda is marred (*The Silmarillion* 16). This loss introduces a deep longing into Middle-Earth for the music at the beginning of time, and this longing for what has been lost continues throughout the world's history.

Even after the original creation is damaged, there is still beauty in the land of Valinor with the light from the Two Trees, Laurelin and Telperion. However, Melkor poisons these trees and much of their light is lost (*The Silmarillion* 76). Though some of their light is saved, there is still a deep longing for the lost Trees. The inhabitants of Middle-Earth also have a longing for Valinor itself, and this is especially keen among the Noldor, the group of Elves who were exiled

from Valinor because they rebelled against the Valar. Many Elves long to return to the beauty of Valinor, such as Legolas when he experiences the Sea and hears the voices of his people who have already passed over it to Valinor (*Return of the King* 935). The beautiful land of Lothlorien also evokes longing for Valinor by providing a glimpse of the Elder Days (Hein 189). The Elves are not the only ones with this longing; the Men of Middle-Earth also feel it as they "perceive the light within creation and *remember*, yet the memory is elusive. It is a memory of a memory, an unplaced desire for 'some other dearer thing'" (Coutras 79). This memory is *sehnsucht* for Valinor and the original beauty of creation that they have not experienced.

Eucatastrophe in Fantasy

Fantasy stories also excel in employing eucatastrophe as a literary device to illustrate the power of redemptive joy. The word "eucatastrophe" was created by Tolkien and essentially refers to a "good catastrophe" ("On Fairy Stories" 33). He describes it as "the joy of the happy ending" and "the sudden joyous 'turn'" in a story (33). When this moment comes, it provides "a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief" (33). Eucatastrophe is tied up with this experience of incredible joy, but the joy is always unexpected. Tolkien describes it as "a sudden and miraculous grace, never to be counted on to recur" (33). This element of surprise is what gives eucatastrophe its power in stories. When done well, it gives readers "a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart" as they experience the joy it brings (34). However, this joy would not be possible without the prior presence of sorrow.

A major aspect of eucatastrophe is that it accepts the reality of pain and loss in the world. Tolkien is clear that eucatastrophe "does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure" but only denies "universal final defeat" ("On Fairy Stories" 33). He affirms that the

possibility of sorrow, loss, failure, and hardship "is necessary to the joy of deliverance" (33). This joy "depends precisely on the expectation of defeat" because there can be no deliverance from defeat, sorrow, and loss unless these things are possible and even expected (Coutras 159). This connection between joy and sorrow is essential to understanding both eucatastrophe and Tolkien's world of Middle-Earth as he continually wove this dynamic into his world. Though he still believed other genres could evoke joy, Tolkien viewed fantasy stories as the most important medium to communicate this joy of the eucatastrophe. In his world of Middle-Earth, Tolkien explored the various aspects of eucatastrophe and used it to communicate transcendent Christian truth.

Eucatastrophe in Tolkien's Works

In Middle-Earth, one of the most powerful ways Tolkien demonstrates the joy of eucatastrophe is through the character of Tom Bombadil. Bombadil physically embodies joy in his cheerful appearance and his constant laughing and singing (*The Fellowship* 117). Bombadil's arrival is also a moment of eucatastrophe for the hobbits as he unexpectedly comes just in time to save them from Old Man Willow (118). When they follow this joyful new friend back to his home, they soon learn the power of his joy in helping to resist evil. Bombadil functions as "the light of joy who teaches the hobbits how to create one's own light in times of darkness and despair by expressing joy, the fearless joy required to overcome Sauron" (Chapman-Morales 65). Bombadil is able to save the hobbits from Old Man Willow and the barrow-wight because his joy makes him unafraid. His joy even prevents the Ring from having power over him since he can remain visible while wearing it (*The Fellowship* 130-131). The hobbits witness the power of this fearless joy that denies defeat, and it helps them throughout their quest, especially in moments

when it seems like there is no hope. They are able to fully experience the joy of the eucatastrophe later by first seeing it expressed by Bombadil.

Other examples of eucatastrophe exist in scenes where characters experience the return of lost friends or allies at the moment they expected to be overwhelmed by enemies. One example of this is when Gandalf returns in *The Two Towers*. His companions had seen his defeat and fall in Moria and never expected him to return, so it was an unexpected act of grace when Ilúvatar sent him back to Middle-Earth. As this moment was divinely orchestrated, it reveals the miraculous nature of eucatastrophe and how moments like this can never be counted on but will always bring joy and victory when they do occur. Gandalf's return brings joy to each member of the Fellowship as they meet him again throughout the story. Sam's reaction to seeing Gandalf alive again especially reveals joy as he was "between bewilderment and great joy" and later "his tears ceased, and his laughter welled up, and laughing he sprang from his bed" (*The Return of the King* 930-931). Gandalf is also a catalyst for more joy later in the story, such as when he leads an army to save Rohan at the Battle of Helm's Deep. Between this victory he orchestrates for Rohan and the beautiful reactions of his friends, his return serves as a pivotal moment of unexpected joy.

Another example of eucatastrophe comes during the Battle of the Pelennor Fields. The ships sailing up the river to the battle arrive not with fresh troops defending Mordor but carrying Aragorn leading an army of Gondor's allies (*The Return of the King* 829). When Aragorn set out on the Paths of the Dead accompanied by Legolas, Gimli, and the Rangers, most of Rohan expected to never see them again. Thus, their friends are filled with joy on seeing that they have made it to Gondor and are still alive, especially Éomer, as "wonder took him, and a great joy;

and he cast his sword up in the sunlight and sang as he caught it" (829). In addition, all of Rohan and Gondor experience the eucatastrophic turn of emotions from despair at seeing the ships to joy and hope when they see Aragorn's standard with the Tree of Gondor displayed. When defeat was expected, this joyful moment brings victory and more hope in their fight against Mordor.

Further eucatastrophic moments come at the climax of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. When Frodo and Sam finally reach their destination of Mount Doom, it seems at first that everything is lost and Sauron will triumph when Frodo claims the Ring for himself (*The Return of the King* 924). But the unexpected moment of eucatastrophe comes from Gollum. He bites the Ring from Frodo's hand and destroys both it and himself by falling into the fire (925). This turn of events was completely unforeseen by the Fellowship, but it leads to Sauron's final defeat and unexpected victory for Gondor and her allies. It illustrates the unpredictable nature of eucatastrophe and the redemption that it promises in the midst of the darkest moments. In addition, even though Frodo and Sam believe that they are about to die, Sam still finds joy in the fact that Frodo has been saved from the Ring. When Sam sees Frodo as himself again, "in all that ruin of the world for the moment he felt only joy, great joy" (926). This moment illustrates the full nature of eucatastrophe as Sam does not deny defeat but finds joy even in the face of expected death.

After the Ring is destroyed, there is another moment of eucatastrophe when Frodo and Sam are saved. Though they expect to die as Mount Doom erupts, Gandalf arrives with the eagles just in time to bear them away from the fire (*The Return of the King* 930). Just as the eagles serve as a eucatastrophic device in this story by arriving just when the battle at the gates of Mordor looks hopeless, they also serve the same function in *The Hobbit*. When the Battle of

the Five Armies seems like it will end in defeat for Bilbo's friends, Bilbo looks up and gives "a great cry: he had seen a sight that made his heart leap, dark shapes small yet majestic against the distant glow" (*The Hobbit* 260). Bilbo sees the eagles arriving to help, and it stirs a sense of joy and hope in his heart because he sees a chance to escape the death and defeat everyone expected that day and instead to achieve victory. The arrival of the eagles is an unexpected act of grace in both stories, serving as a powerful moment of eucatastrophe.

One of the most beautiful instances of eucatastrophe in Middle-Earth is the death and eventual rebirth of the Two Trees of Valinor. The presence of defeat is essential to eucatastrophe, and when Melkor extinguished the light of these trees, it represented one of the greatest disasters in the history of Middle-Earth (*The Silmarillion* 76). Though the Valar could not revive the trees, their seeds created new trees that provided some of the light and joy that had been lost. This paves the way for these trees to eventually be reborn. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Aragorn and Gandalf discover a small sapling of a white tree before Aragorn's wedding (*The Return of the King* 950). This tree is descended from Telperion, one of the Two Trees, and it becomes a symbol of hope as the future new White Tree of Gondor. The other of the Two Trees, Laurelin, is also reborn through the mallorn. The mallorn trees that exist in Lórien are golden and resemble Laurelin, and Galadriel gives Sam a gift that includes a mallorn seed. When Sam returns to the Shire and sees the destruction there, he wants to bring new life by using this gift, and the seed becomes a beautiful mallorn that brings new life and prosperity to the Shire (1000). Both of these trees are reborn out of destruction and bring new life and joy to their lands, serving as an example of the necessity of sorrow to experience the full joy of eucatastrophe.

Tolkien also uses trees to symbolize eucatastrophe in his short story "Leaf by Niggle." Niggle is a painter captivated by a vision of a beautiful tree that he is trying to paint, but he is unsatisfied with it and runs out of time before he must leave for a journey. This journey symbolizes death, and eventually Niggle finds himself in a beautiful grassy area that looks familiar. At one point, he looks up and sees "the Tree, his Tree, finished… 'It's a gift!' he said" ("Leaf by Niggle" 7). Niggle finds incredible, unexpected joy in discovering that this tree that had only lived in his imagination and on canvas was now a reality, and even better and more complete than he had sought to paint it. He left his painting in despair because it would never be finished; now, he miraculously experiences his tree alive and more beautiful than he could have ever created it. While looking at it, he sees that "all the leaves he had ever laboured at were there, as he had imagined them rather than as he had made them; and there were others that had only budded in his mind, and many that might have budded, if only he had had time" (7). This moment is a miracle for Niggle as he never could have expected for his painting to become a reality, and it reveals the beautiful gift of joy that moments of eucatastrophe bring.

Eucatastrophe in MacDonald's Works

Just as MacDonald evoked *sehnsucht* in his mythic stories, he also included many eucatastrophic moments. In "The Golden Key," Mossy and Tangle experience eucatastrophe when they are reunited at the end of the story. Because they did not know if they would see each other again or if the other one was still alive, this unexpected reunion brings them great joy. They greet each other "with delight and astonishment" and are "as happy as man and woman could be" ("The Golden Key"). Their joy is all the greater because of how they have grown and changed throughout the story. As they continue the last stage of their journey together, they find

themselves trapped in the cave and unable to find the way out. This opens the door for another moment of eucatastrophe when Mossy finally discovers the keyhole and unlocks it "to the sounds of Aeolian music" ("The Golden Key"). They escape from the dark cave and can ascend the rainbow staircase to a better country.

In "The History of Photogen and Nycteris," the moment when Nycteris finds her way outside and sees the moon functions not just as an example of *sehnsucht*, but also of eucatastrophe. Though she longs for more, she still is filled with joy at the sight of the moon and the feel of the wind. When she first glimpses the vast space outside and the amount of light the moon radiates, she is "in a maze of wondering perplexity, awe, and delight" ("The History of Photogen and Nycteris" ch. 9). She never imagined that the moon would be so beautiful, and she is both overwhelmed and joyful at the gift of its unexpected beauty. When she feels the wind a moment later, she thinks that it is "like a spiritual wine, filling her whole being with an intoxication of purest joy. To breathe was a perfect existence" (ch. 9). Her time trapped in her dark room increases the potency of this moment; for so long, she never expected to escape and see the outside world, and now, her wish is fulfilled. Just as a eucatastrophe can never "be counted on to recur," Nycteris knows that this gift of joy she is experiencing may not be repeated if she cannot escape from her dark room again ("On Fairy Stories" 33). However, its memory still gives her joy even in her room as "her heart was full of glory and gladness; at times she had to hold herself from jumping up, and going dancing and singing about the room. When she slept, instead of dull dreams, she had splendid visions" ("The History of Photogen and Nycteris" ch. 9). Her new joy transforms her and gives her hope even as she remains a prisoner.

Eucatastrophe in Lewis's Works

Lewis included many instances of eucatastrophe in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. One of the first moments is the return of Father Christmas to Narnia, bringing gifts, joy, and the hope of spring (*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* 105-109). The Pevensies and the beavers expected to be caught by the White Witch, especially as they hear the sound of jingling bells and think she is close. When Mr. Beaver leaves to investigate, they hear voices and fear the worst; however, they quickly learn that the bells belong not to the White Witch but to Father Christmas. His unexpected arrival fills them with surprise and joy. Soon after he comes, the snow begins to melt, bringing another moment of eucatastrophe as Narnia awakens into a beautiful spring (120-124). Everyone had begun to believe that winter would never end, and they joyfully embrace this gift of new life. Later, an even greater moment of eucatastrophe occurs after Aslan's death. When he gives himself up in Edmund's place and is killed on the Stone Table, Susan and Lucy despair at his death because they believe he is gone forever (157). But in the morning, they see the Stone Table broken and Aslan standing there, "shining in the sunrise" (162). They can hardly contain their joy at his return from death, and his joy is even greater as he has overcome the White Witch's power and is now experiencing new life. Throughout the rest of the series, Aslan's arrival always serves as a moment of eucatastrophe, a joyful reminder that victory will inevitably come instead of defeat.

Biblical Integration

These themes of *sehnsucht* and eucatastrophe are powerful on their own, but together they portray important biblical truth. As briefly discussed above, *sehnsucht* is a longing specifically for Heaven. Lewis describes it as a "desire for our own faroff country" that has not

been seen but that the human soul recognizes as its home ("Weight of Glory" 2). Though many moments can reveal this longing, these are only hints of what the human soul truly longs for in Heaven. Eucatastrophe connects to *sehnsucht* because this longing for Heaven is partially fulfilled in the joy of the eucatastrophe. Just as *sehnsucht* is a longing for something beyond this world, eucatastrophe provides "a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world" ("On Fairy Stories" 33). This joy outside the world is the joy of Heaven and satisfies the yearning for Heaven in each human soul. However, as this joy cannot be fully experienced outside of Heaven, this longing cannot reach its complete fulfillment in this world. Moments of eucatastrophe in this world can only provide glimpses of the future eternal satisfaction of *sehnsucht*.

The Bible contains the greatest moments of *sehnsucht* and eucatastrophe and reveals what these literary devices point toward in every human heart. Ever since humanity was banned from Eden, there has been a longing for Heaven and an aching desire to regain communion with God. This longing is seen in Scripture's statement that those who consider themselves strangers in this world "desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (*ESV Bible,* Heb. 11.16). Throughout the Old Testament, this longing was present first in the Israelites' desire for the Promised Land, and later in their desire for future salvation and the coming Messiah. Their longing for salvation and the Messiah is fulfilled in Christ's coming, described by Tolkien as "the greatest and most complete conceivable Eucatastrophe" ("On Fairy Stories" 35). He says that "the Birth of Christ is the Eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the Eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy" (35). Christ unexpectedly rising from the dead to overcome death and defeat is the ultimate moment of eucatastrophe that other moments in stories

are simply modeled after. However, even with His resurrection, there is still a future longing that will only have its complete fulfillment in Heaven when Christ comes again.

Even with the hope of the resurrection and the desire for a Savior fulfilled, the human soul still cannot be fully satisfied until it experiences the glory of Heaven. *Sehnsucht*, in its purest form, is "our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside" ("Weight of Glory" 7). Lewis says that "to be at last summoned inside" this door that the human soul has always longed to go through but has never been allowed to enter would be "the healing of that old ache" (7). To enter Heaven would be the cure for *sehnsucht*, the complete satisfaction of human longing. Though humans cannot experience this now, Lewis says that "some day, God willing, we shall get *in*" (7). There is hope in the future joy of Heaven that all those who love God will one day experience. Joy, the joy of the eucatastrophe of Christ's resurrection in saving mankind, will abound in Heaven as "the whole man is to drink joy from the fountain of joy" (8). The happy ending of the eucatastrophe is truly the consummation of all history when we are reunited with God and experience eternity with Him. This future fulfillment of heavenly longing is what stories point toward when they feature these evocative moments of *sehnsucht* and eucatastrophe.

By including these mythopoeic scenes in their works, authors not only create powerful stories that impact readers at the deepest levels, they also impart biblical truth. Though readers may not understand that the longing or the joy that these stories evoke is related to Heaven, they are still drawn closer to Heaven by having these feelings stirred. MacDonald, Lewis, and Tolkien all use these devices throughout their stories in a way that points readers to Heaven. Many of the

previously mentioned examples from their works hold a deeper meaning that illuminates the connection between the human soul and its true home. The longing and the joy that the characters in these stories feel, though seeming at times to be directed toward other objects, are ultimately directed toward Heaven.

MacDonald reveals how *sehnsucht* and eucatastrophe point to Heaven in "The Golden Key." When Mossy and Tangle experience *sehnsucht* from seeing the shadows, the place that they are longing for represents Heaven. This scene beautifully depicts "the fascination for and yet gradual disillusionment with this life… together with their growing desire for eternity" that many Christians feel as they yearn for Heaven (Hein 77). Mossy and Tangle no longer care as much for their world because their longing for the next one is so intense. When Mossy and Tangle eventually complete their journey, this longing is finally satisfied as they can now ascend the rainbow with the "beautiful beings of all ages" and enter Heaven ("The Golden Key"). This joyful ascension is a moment of eucatastrophe for them because they can now experience the place they have longed for but thought they could not reach, and it mirrors the way that Heaven is the satisfaction of human longing.

Biblical connections to such instances of unexpected joy and longing additionally abound in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The joy that Susan and Lucy feel at Aslan's return to life is the same joy present in the eucatastrophe of Christ's resurrection. Just as the resurrection is the greatest moment of joy in this world's history, Aslan's return to life is the true eucatastrophe of the book, greater even than the final defeat of the White Witch. Aslan's victory over death captures the true meaning of the unexpected joy of the eucatastrophe and potently communicates this feeling to readers. When looking at *Narnia* from a biblical perspective, it is also clear that

such instances of *sehnsucht* are longings for Heaven. Since Aslan represents Christ, Aslan's country is Narnia's Heaven. When the characters long to see Aslan's country, it is a picture of the Christian desire to experience Heaven. Reepicheep's desire in particular reveals the "model of the true Christian disciple" who wholeheartedly seeks Heaven and God above everything in this world (*Finding God in the Land of Narnia* 79). Reepicheep's reward, like that of all Christians, is to eventually pass over into this heavenly country and experience the fullness of its beauty.

When Lucy, Edmund, and Eustace watch Reepicheep cross the wave into Aslan's country, they long to follow him but know that it is not their time. However, they eventually do enter Aslan's country in *The Last Battle*, leading to a beautiful picture of the consummation of Christian joy in Heaven. When they realize that all of their past longing, especially for the Old Narnia, was actually a longing for the new Narnia in Aslan's country, readers can understand that human longing for objects in this world is actually disguised longing for Heaven. This new Narnia is far more wonderful and deeper than the old one, and Jewel the Unicorn puts words to the joy the characters feel when he says, "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here! This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this" (*The Last Battle* 196). The joy he expresses upon discovering that Aslan's country is also his country is the same joy Christians will experience upon reaching Heaven, their true home. This joy is further seen in *The Last Battle* when King Tirian finally sees Aslan and "is at the end of all his longing" (Miller 17). Because Tirian experiences the joy of being with Aslan in Aslan's country, he no

longer feels *sehnsucht* since it has finally been satisfied. The ultimate eucatastrophe of the Christian life—reunion with God in Heaven—satisfies human *sehnsucht*.

Lewis also uses Psyche's longing and Orual's rebellion in *Till We Have Faces* to point to human longing for God. Psyche's longing for the Mountain is in reality a longing for a heavenly home and a relationship with God. When Psyche is about to be sacrificed, she fears that the God of the Mountain who she longs for does not exist and that she will be left tied to a tree to die (*Till We Have Faces* 80). Her marriage to the God of the Mountain dispels this fear and serves as a eucatastrophic fulfillment of her longing and a representation of the Church's future marriage to God in Heaven. Psyche understands that her longing for the Mountain is really for something greater than the Mountain itself. Her sister Orual, on the other hand, rebels against her own feeling of *sehnsucht* and "is unable to see the mythic reality that Psyche sees because she refuses to see it" (Hein 238-239). Just as people in this world rebel against God and ignore the *sehnsucht* meant to guide them to Him, Orual fights against the gods for her entire life, trying to deny their authority. However, when she is eventually in the presence of the God of the Mountain, she feels a "new terror, joy, overpowering sweetness" and is "pierced through and through with the arrows of it" (*Till We Have Faces* 350). This moment of joy is a eucatastrophic moment of change for Orual. She finally finds the answer she was searching for in her rebellion as she says, "I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away. What other answer would suffice?" (351). Being in the presence of the God of the Mountain is her answer and the fulfillment of the longing against which she had been rebelling. Her story reveals that God is the answer to human longing as his presence fulfills all desire.

The themes of *sehnsucht* and eucatastrophe in *The Lord of the Rings* also work together to point readers toward Heaven. The longing in Middle-Earth for the lost beauty of Valinor is the longing for paradise before it was lost. Coutras compares Valinor to the Garden of Eden when she discusses how the memory of Eden "is imprinted on the human heart. Human nature intrinsically yearns for Eden, experiencing momentary visions of its beauty throughout human experience" (17). The memory of Valinor stamped on the hearts of those in Middle-Earth echoes the memory of paradise for those in this world. The people of Middle-Earth "are remembering their true home, the world for which they were created: Arda Healed" (79). People in this world also instinctively long for the world to be healed at the end of time and to find their true home in Heaven, so this *sehnsucht* for Valinor guides readers to the truth about their own longing.

The eucatastrophic moments in *The Lord of the Rings* reveal the hope of Heaven. Ralph Wood explains that "such hope is not a general optimism about the nature of things, nor a forward-looking confidence that all will eventually be well. Instead, it is hope in a future that God alone both can and will provide" (143-144). The joy that many of these characters feel does not result from their own circumstances. Instead, it comes from hope in a power beyond what they can understand. Even in the darkest moments, they understand that there will always be beauty and goodness in the world that the Shadow can never destroy (*The Return of the King* 901). This enduring hope is the same confidence that Christians have through their suffering in this world. Though Christians will experience trials and hardship, they can find joy in Christ's words to "take heart; I have overcome the world" (*ESV Bible,* John 16.33). The joy and hope that those in Middle-Earth have in a good future reveals the same joy that Christians have as they place their trust in a God who will eventually bring them back to their true home in Heaven.

Value of Fantasy to the Christian Life

These mythic stories powerfully portray the Christian themes of *sehnsucht* and eucatastrophe and reveal how storytelling is a valuable tool for Christians to use to both learn and portray Christian truth. While truth can be communicated through many literary genres, fantasy is especially valuable for Christians as it provides a unique way of portraying these themes through unfamiliar settings outside of the real world. The creativity needed to imagine these fictional worlds also glorifies God as writers imitate His creativity. Tolkien believed in the value of these creative stories and "claims that creativity, and especially mythmaking, is an activity inherent to human nature derived from God himself. God is the creator of existing reality, and human beings 'sub-create' in imitation of the Creator" (Coutras 21). Though this sub-creation allows writers to glorify and imitate God, some object to fantasy on grounds that it can lead to escapism, deceive readers, or be put to evil uses. Tolkien and Lewis both push back against these claims and hold that, even if fantasy is sometimes put to evil uses, creating these mythic stories is still part of human nature. Tolkien eloquently affirms that "fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker" ("On Fairy Stories" 27). The value of these stories is grounded in the character of God and his desire for mankind to imitate Him.

Because fantasy stories occur in other worlds, they provide an unfamiliar setting that can give readers a new perspective on old truths. Lewis states that "the value of the myth is that it takes all the things we know and restores to them the rich significance which has been hidden by 'the veil of familiarity'" ("Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*" 77). The mythic quality of these stories allows objects and events to take on deeper meaning outside of a story because "by

putting bread, gold, horse, apple, or the very roads into a myth, we do not retreat from reality: we rediscover it" (77). However, these stories do not only shed a new light on common objects. This rediscovered importance that appears through myth also applies "to good and evil, to our endless perils, our anguish, and our joys. By dipping them in myth we see them more clearly" (77). This clearer sight only occurs because of an unfamiliar setting that exposes the unchanging quality of truth across different times and places. It especially allows readers to see the biblical truth embodied in the expressions of *sehnsucht* and eucatastrophe as these experiences are by their nature connected to mythic stories.

One important aspect of mythic stories is that words do not ever truly capture and express them. While these stories are often constructed of words, they also contain what Lewis calls an "extra-literary quality" (*An Experiment in Criticism* 27). When discussing the power of myth, he says, "What really delights and nourishes me is a particular pattern of events, which would equally delight and nourish if it had reached me by some medium which involved no words at all" ("Preface to MacDonald" par. 16). Words do not fully contain myth, and this is the same for the feeling of *sehnsucht*. Though *sehnsucht* can be partially explained through words, it cannot be fully understood until one has experienced this longing. Myth is important because it **"**is one of the few means by which to understand and possess the blue flower, Sehnsucht, infinitude" (Hein xii). Words alone cannot capture *sehnsucht*, but they can express or evoke *sehnsucht* in the reader's heart. Because myth is also not just captured in words but in a special pattern of events that resonates deeply with the reader, this form of story is especially suitable for portraying *sehnsucht*.

Mythic stories also hold a special connection to eucatastrophe because these stories do not ring true without the anticipated joy of the happy ending. When discussing the necessary elements of these stories, which he terms "fairy-stories" rather than myth or fantasy, Tolkien mentions the "Consolation of the Happy Ending" ("On Fairy Stories" 33). This consolation is the eucatastrophic joy that comes when expected defeat turns into a surprise victory. Tolkien believes that "all complete fairy-stories must have" this consolation and that "the eucatastrophic tale is the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function" (33). Eucatastrophe is essential to these stories because they portray truth about reality, and the deep truth of the world is that there will be a happy ending with unimaginable joy.

These stories are also valuable to the Christian life because Christianity itself has a mythic element. Lewis explains that "the heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact. The old myth of the dying god, without ceasing to be myth, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history" ("Myth Became Fact" 3). The pattern of events in the Gospel is a mythic story, though a true one. In fact, the Gospel is the one true myth from which other myths derive their power. Tolkien says that "the Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories" ("On Fairy Stories" 35). The most powerful mythic stories will invariably echo the message of the Gospel, drawing readers closer to biblical truth.

Conclusion

Story is, and always has been, a valuable medium to portray truth, and *sehnsucht* is perhaps the deepest truth of the human soul. Through these mythic stories, MacDonald, Lewis, and Tolkien reveal the longing for Heaven. While no words can perfectly explain *sehnsucht*,

these stories capture moments of pure longing and allow readers to be more open to feeling *sehnsucht* themselves. They are drawn closer to Heaven because the object of this longing is eternity with God. They long for the perfect relationship with God that has been lost. These stories do not leave readers always longing for what they cannot have; they also show them the joy of having this longing fulfilled through moments of eucatastrophe. Fantasy, and especially strong Christian fantasy, does not end with a longing for something unattainable but rather with mankind's deepest desires being satisfied. It helps readers to understand that their longing for Heaven will be complete one day as they can see small glimpses of that future moment of joy. These mythic stories teach people to search for the truth about Heaven, about a place beyond what they can imagine, just as Lewis did through the stories he read. Every human soul cries out for the satisfaction of its *sehnsucht*, saying, "I just wanted to know/ If there was anything to any of the stories/ Where the blue flowers grow" ("Wide Awake"). And the response is a joyful yes. The mythic stories that teach about the blue flower point to the answer to all human longing.

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