

SHIFTING FOCALIZATION AND THE STRATEGY OF DELAY

The Narrative Weaving of “The Fionavar Tapestry”

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LIKE ALL LONG NOVELS in the genre of high fantasy, Guy Gavriel Kay's *The Fionavar Tapestry* — a trilogy comprised of *The Summer Tree*, *The Wandering Fire*, and *The Darkest Road* — relies strongly on suspense. The resolution of the plot is uncertain until the end, even though the genre practically demands that the confrontation between Good and Evil end with a victory for Good. The problem with such a victory, as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* established over three decades ago, is that it is essentially pyrrhic; the Evil is overcome, but the cost is enormous. Part of a fantasy's suspense, therefore, is not whether Good will win, but how much will be sacrificed to achieve the victory; in high fantasy, which often depicts the end of an era, such sacrifice is invariably great. For Tolkien, the suspense is also, to a large extent, a function of space and geography; the One Ring must be carried, in great danger, to the land of Mordor, and the novel centres upon that journey. For Kay, to an equally large extent, suspense results from the technique known in narratology as shifting focalization.

Focalization is Gerard Genette's term, from *Narrative Discourse* (published as *Discours du récit* in 1972, with English translation in 1980), although Mieke Bal claims it as well, in *Narratology* (a 1980 translation of the second edition of *De theorie van vertellen en verhalen*). Interestingly, both theorists have similar reasons for adopting the term. Genette suggests that most discussions of point of view or perspective “suffer from a regrettable confusion between what I call here *mood* and *voice*, a confusion between . . . the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*” (Genette, 186). Almost identically, Bal rejects typologies of point of view or perspective on the grounds that “they do not make an explicit distinction between *those who see* and *those who speak*” (Bal, 101). Genette goes on to choose the “abstract term *focalization*” because it both solves the problems of “the too

specifically visual connotations of the terms *vision*, *field*, and *point of view*," and because it recalls Brooks and Warren's "focus of narration" (Genette, 189). Bal prefers *focalization* because *perspective* represents "both the narrator and the vision," because *focalization* can be easily turned into a verb (where *perspective* cannot), and because it is a technical term, "derived from photography and film," and thus fits well with the technical nature of narratological analysis.¹

I have chosen *focalization* as my operative term for several reasons. First, I agree with Bal about the problems with *perspective*, and I understand Genette's point about critical confusion in the terms *perspective* and *point of view*. More importantly, however, *focalization* carries with it, as Bal suggests, the notion of the lens; we perceive an event in a story *through* the senses of a character, in much the same way as we view a natural scene through the lens of a camera. *Focalization*, furthermore, has an advantage over *focus* (which carries similar photographic connotations) because *focus* is usually followed by the preposition *upon* while *focalization*, at least as Genette has established, normally takes the preposition *through*. When we write of a narrator focalizing *through* a character, we clearly distinguish *who sees* from *who speaks*. Of course, the term *focalization* does not adequately address the problem in narratology of the visual metaphor, but even in this regard it out-performs both *point of view* and *perspective*.

Three other terminological issues need explanation. First, I use *kernels*, as Barthes' *cardinal functions* or *nuclei* are sometimes called, to denote those events that "constitute real hinge points in the narrative" (Barthes, 265); by doing so I partially deny the strict rules of *kernel narratives* developed by Prince in *Narratology* (83f.). Second, I have changed Genette's *variable focalization* to *shifting focalization*, because *shifting* seems more accurate. *Variable focalization* seems to suggest a change not only in the character focalized through but also the type of focalization, of which Genette identifies three (Genette, 189-90). By changing *variable* to *shifting*, I place the emphasis where it belongs, on the character through whom the focalization proceeds. Finally, I use *focalizant* in place of Bal's *focalizer* (Bal, 102), because the latter term once again confuses *who sees* with *who speaks*. *Focalizer* suggests one who acts, and only the narrator acts; the *focalizant*, like the camera lens, acts primarily as a medium.

In a novel of over one thousand pages and with eighty characters, constantly shifting the focalization of the narrative opens up the strong possibility of confusion. One typical chapter in *The Wandering Fire*, for example, Chapter 8, shifts the focalization four times, beginning with Sharra and moving through Kimberly, Loren, and Darien. Only three chapters in the entire trilogy are focalized through just one character, and one chapter, the eighth of *The Summer Tree*, shifts focalization twenty-one times. Obviously, shifting the focalization twenty-one times in twenty-four pages demonstrates either ineptness or strategy on the part of the author, and ineptness can be ruled out on two major grounds. First, the novel

works; the plot is complex, but at no point do the threads fall away from one another. Second, such rapid shifts of focalization are common throughout the *Tapestry*; chapter 8 of *The Summer Tree* is indicative of the novel's narrative technique, not an aberration of it, and as such it must be considered part of a total narrative plan.

Kay's plan is nothing as regimented as focalizing a given number of sections through each major character, or ensuring that all characters have the same number of pages dedicated to them. Nor, in fact, is there any evidence suggesting a planned order to the focalizations. Instead, the narrative strategy in *The Fionavar Tapestry* controls the speed and the manner in which we assimilate the culture of Fionavar, the progression of the plot, and the complexity of the novel's characters. In the absence of a Tolkien-like quest, the *Tapestry* demands a different kind of focus. That focus, it becomes quite clear, is on the interactions between the five primary characters (and us through them) and the world in which they find themselves.

Assimilating a secondary world through the mind of a naive character is scarcely a new concept in fantasy. We come to learn of Middle-Earth through Frodo and Sam in *The Lord of the Rings*, we grow with Thomas Covenant towards an understanding of The Land in Donaldson's *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant*, we experience the bizarre world of Wolfe's *The Book of the New Sun* simultaneously with Severian, the main character, and we comprehend the world of magic and wonder with the narrator in Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe*. But Kay's work owes much more to the richly populated Victorian novel than to the sparser contemporary novel; in fact, its closest correlation is to the thick historical novel of the Dorothy Dunnett tradition. Whereas the four fantasies mentioned above are focalized through one or two central characters, Kay's forces us to experience Fionavar as its many characters do. *The Fionavar Tapestry* employs twenty-six different agents of focalization (*focalizants*) and even adds, in a very few places, an unspecified omniscient focalizant. Our task is to piece together the world by understanding the focalizations.

The effect of the *Tapestry's* technique of shifting focalization is four-fold. First, as discussed, the shifts enable us to assimilate the world of Fionavar. Second, they form our knowledge of character; the technique of focalization, through its internalization, forces an understanding of the character of the focalizant. Third, the constant shifting moves the novel from incident to incident, and in fact makes possible the co-ordination of important events (*kernels* in Barthes' terminology). Fourth, and seemingly opposed to the third effect, the shifts delay the unfolding of the story; kernels that might occupy only a few pages if focalized through one character take several under the focalization of more than one. All four effects, it seems evident, have as their aim the reader's comprehension of a complex story, and all four point, as well, towards a rhetorical effect of grandeur and scope.

High fantasy might well fall under the genre of romance, but its aim is clearly the genre of epic. To this end, it considers mythology and apocalypse its proper study, with the conflict between Good and Evil forming the central focus of its plot. Typically, the battle against Evil will fall to the small, the naive, but by the end of that battle the small will have become part of the mythology of the world. This essential element of high fantasy, the idea of myth in the making, particularly the myth of the struggle against ultimate Evil, is accomplished only through the rhetoric of grandeur and scope. The battle is told against an ample backdrop, and its sweeps and movements are large and heroic. In Frye's terminology, high fantasy aims towards the mythic, even though it often settles for the high mimetic. The rhetoric of the battle between Good and Evil is identical to the rhetoric of grandeur and scope, and in *The Fionavar Tapestry* that rhetoric is partially the result of the shifting focalizations.

Assimilating the Secondary World

Helping the reader assimilate the novel's secondary world, certainly, is the most obvious purpose of the shifting focalizations. With each focalization, we learn something more about Fionavar; more than one is necessary because there is a great deal to assimilate. To demonstrate how the *Tapestry* achieves this effect, we need examine only two brief passages. Both are taken from the early chapters of *The Summer Tree*, because as the first volume in the trilogy its assimilative role is the most exacting. In the second and third volumes, our ability to assimilate grows precisely as the focalizant's understanding of Fionavar grows; thus, for example, we perceive the importance of Kimberly's freeing of the Paraiko in *The Darkest Road* because, like Kim, we have grown to understand the mythological meaning of the Paraiko's pacifism. In *The Summer Tree*, however, we know as little about Fionavar as do the five Torontonians, so what we come to know of the secondary world depends wholly on the experiences of the focalizants.

Early in the trilogy, Paul Shafer sees the dog Cavall for the first time, and the narration focalizes the sighting through him:

So Paul lived, observed, oblivious, and after a time he drew a long breath and lifted his eyes from sightless fixation on the shadows below.

To see a thing none of the others saw.

High on the stone outer wall enclosing the garden stood an enormous grey dog, or a wolf, and it was looking at him across the moonlit space between, with eyes that were not those of a wolf or a dog, and in which lay a sadness deeper and older than anything Paul had ever seen or known. From the top of the wall the creature stared at him the way animals are not supposed to be able to do. And it called him. The pull was unmistakable, imperative, terrifying. Looming in night shadow it reached out for him, the eyes, unnaturally distinct, boring into his own. Paul touched and then twisted his mind away from a well of sorrow so deep he feared it could drown

him. Whatever stood on the wall had endured and was still enduring a loss that spanned the worlds. It dwarfed him, appalled him.

And it was calling him. Sweat cold on his skin in the summer night, Paul Shafer knew that this was one of the things caught up in the chaotic vision Loren's searching had given him. (*ST*, pp. 56,7)

Actually, neither Paul nor we know as yet that the grey wolf is, in fact, Cavall; not until considerably later do we discover the animal's identity. What is important in this passage is that the strict focalization both introduces us to the mystery that night holds for Fionavar and reveals something of Paul's character.

The sighting of Cavall occurs during the characters' first night in Paras Derval, and it represents the novel's first attempt at heightened mystery. The only way we can partake of the mystery is to be as ignorant as is Paul of the identity of the creature. The focalization *through* Paul ensures this ignorance. Further, the narration establishes a characteristic of Paul's, by stating immediately that Paul — and only Paul — sees the wolf. "To see a thing none of the others saw" simultaneously demands that we recognize the specificity of the focalization and points us towards Paul's unnaturally keen ability to perceive what others do not. At this point in the novel, in fact, Kay's focalizing technique is still being developed. This section of Chapter 4 contains an internal shift from Paul as focalizant to Kevin as focalizant, and it ends with what seems a further shift, to an unspecified observer watching the two men from outside.² After this scene, such shifts become rare, with sections separating most of the shifts and with only occasional shifts without an accompanying section or sub-section break. "To see a thing none of the others saw," then, becomes prophetic not only of Paul's perceptual abilities but also of the novel's future narrative technique.

The second passage is from Chapter 6 of *The Summer Tree*, and it narrates Eilathen's giving of knowledge to Kimberly:

She saw the shaping of the worlds, Fionavar at first, then all the others — her own in a fleeting glimpse — following it into time. The gods she saw, and knew their names, and she touched but could not hold, for no mortal can, the purpose and the pattern of the Weaver at the Loom.

And as she whirled away from that bright vision, she came abruptly face to face with the oldest Dark in his stronghold of Starkadh. In his eyes she felt herself shrivel, felt the thread fray on the Loom; she knew evil for what it was. The live coals of his eyes scorched into her, and the talons of his hands seemed to score her flesh, and within her heart she knew him for Rakoth the Unraveller, Rakoth Maugrim, whom the gods themselves feared, he who would rend the Tapestry and lay his own malignant shadow on all of time to come. And flinching away from the vastness of his power, she endured an endless passage of despair. (*ST*, 97)

The purpose of this passage is easy enough to determine: it demonstrates how Kim acquires the knowledge of Fionavar she needs to become Seer of Brennin. It is a chronological history of Fionavar, albeit a highly sensory one, and the focalization

through Kim provides us with an understanding both of that history and of the nature of Eilathen's magic. Interestingly enough, this focalization is, in one important sense, a "point of view"; a Seer *sees*, even if the concept of "seeing" is really an extension of the common metaphor that equates seeing with understanding.

Despite the strict focalization of the passage, though, signs of an external narrator are much in evidence. When we are told that "she touched but could not hold, for no mortal can, the purpose and the pattern of the Weaver at the Loom," we have moved beyond Kim's perception. The passage does not, in fact, provide an explanation of the Weaver's pattern, and in that sense it maintains its strict focalization, but the fact that Kim perceives a pattern at all somewhat denies the focalization. What she is given, and what we are given as well, is the history of Fionavar as told by an immortal, one who knows that a pattern exists, even if he does not understand the pattern itself. For this passage, that narrator is Eilathen; the narrator's identity in other passages is much more difficult (and probably pointless) to determine.

The second paragraph of the passage re-introduces us (the initial introduction occurred in the Overture) to Rakoth Maugrim. Because he represents Fionavar's evil, and thus the source of conflict in the novel, Kim must understand his power and so must we. That we assimilate the immensity of his evil is especially important, because at the end of *The Summer Tree* Rakoth will rape Jennifer, and we must know something of him if we are to comprehend the scope of that crime. Of course, this paragraph, like the first, implies Eilathen as narrator, but what Kim assimilates is, here, fully within her power to know.

Understanding the Characters

Unlike much fantasy fiction (and genre fiction in general), *The Fionavar Tapestry* insists on the psychological development of its characters. Over the course of the trilogy, Kay's five Torontonians assume heroic, even god-like, stature, but their rise in stature is predicated on the human characteristics they possess when the novel opens. What they become, in other words, is an extension of what they were. But for us to understand the characters' elevation, it is necessary that we know their characteristics as well; the novel's shifting focalization is the central means by which we gain such knowledge.

For each character, one central incident demands our understanding most: for Paul, the self-sacrifice on the Summer Tree; for Kevin, the self-sacrifice to Dana; for Jennifer, the refusal to show love to Darien; for Kimberly, the decision not to bind the Crystal Dragon to her needs; for Dave, the decision to leave Fionavar at the novel's end. Interestingly, our understanding of important events centering on the non-Torontonian characters do not spring from focalizations through those characters. Diarmiud's death, Sharra's decision to marry the prince, Jaelle's ac-

ceptance of Paul, Ailell's willingness to allow Paul's self-sacrifice, Arthur's calling of Lancelot from the dead — we comprehend the sources of these events because of the focalizations through the Torontonians, not through the involved characters themselves. In accordance with the way in which the shifting focalization allows us to assimilate the secondary world, we understand the Fionavarians as we see them through Paul, Kim, Dave, Kevin, and Jennifer. Conversely, though, we learn almost nothing about those five from the focalizations through the Fionavarians. As perhaps the most blatant example of this, the focalizations through Ivor help us learn of the culture of the Dalrei, but they teach us very little about Dave himself.

One important instance of focalization determining our understanding of character is Kimberly's refusal, in *The Darkest Road*, to bind the Dragon of the Dwarves to her will. Earlier in this volume, Kim obeys the urgency of the Balraeth, her magical ring, and changes the culture of the Paraiko by bringing these giants out of their mythologically-imposed pacifism. Now, she has just witnessed the duel of crafting between Kaen and Matt end with the Dragon's reaffirmation of the rightfulness of Matt's kingship. Once more, the Balraeth demands that a myth be destroyed so that the war might be won:

She carried the Warstone again, the summons to war. And it was on fire to summon. To compel the Crystal dragon from its mountain bow. Kim had no illusions, none at all — and the sight of Matt's stricken face would have stripped them away from here, if she'd had any.

The Dragon could not leave the Lake, not if it was to be what it had always been: ancient guardian, key to the soul, heart-deep symbol of what the Dwarves were. What she was about to do would shatter the people of the twin mountains as much and more as she had smashed the Paraiko in Khath Meigol. (*DR*, 290)

But after crying out, "I don't have a choice!", she realizes that, in fact, she does have one. Consistent with the trilogy's single most dominant theme, the freedom of individual will, Kim slowly understands that nothing can force her to do what, in the end, she does not wish to do:

On her hand the Baetrath was pulsing now so wildly that the whole of the meadow and all the mountain crags were lit by its glow. Kim lifted her hand. She thought of Macha and Nemain, the goddesses of war. She thought of Ruana and the Paraiko, remembered the kanior: the last kanior. Because of her. She thought of Arthur, and of Matt Soren, who stood, not far away, not looking at her, lest his expressions plead. . . .

"No," said Kimberly Ford quietly, with absolute finality. "I have come this far and have done this much. I will go no farther on this path. There is a point beyond which the quest for Light becomes a serving of the Dark." (*DR*, 290-1)

Both the Dragon and the Paraiko incidents are focalized strictly through Kimberly, a strictness necessary for our comprehension of both the significance of the events and the strength of Kim's character. In *The Summer Tree*, as examined

above, a focalization through Kim allowed us to assimilate, for the first time, the major elements of Fionavarian mythology. In *The Darkest Road*, the focalization through Kim lets us assimilate the mythology of the Paraiko and the Dwarves, while simultaneously providing insight into Kim's character. In effect, the novel's technique here merges two major functions: with one focalization, we further our understanding both of Kim and of Fionavar.

Moving the Scenes Along

In a novel *filled* with major events, or *kernels* in the terminology of Roland Barthes, one of the author's greatest challenges is in simply getting the story from one point to the next. From the reader's standpoint, much of the success of a kernel-filled book is precisely the effectiveness of this movement. Furthermore, if the novel is populated by several major characters, the difficulty intensifies. Each character might influence each kernel, and therefore co-ordinating the characters' activities, and demonstrating that co-ordination through a workable narrative, is essential to the novel's effectiveness.

All authors of fantasy fiction have a single standard by which their efficiency in moving from kernel to kernel is judged. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* confronts the problem of co-ordination by concentrating first on one set of characters, then on another, and sometimes on a third, drawing each group towards a climax that does not always wait for the appearance of all individual focalizations. The Battle of the Pelennor Fields, in fact, during the trilogy's final volume, begins without our knowing the whereabouts of Aragorn, who will ultimately turn the tide, and who will only later share with us what happened while he was absent. In fact, most of the considerable rhetorical strength of Aragorn's arrival on the battlefield stems from the fact that we have not seen him for quite some time; we do not know of his battle with the Corsairs of Umbar, and thus we are as surprised as Eomer, through whom we see Aragorn's arrival, when the coming of the black ships signifies hope rather than despair.

Kay seems determined *not* to have important events surprise us in this way; he arranges the story's kernels in a more tightly-knit fashion than does Tolkien, mainly through a much more frequent shifting of our attention from one character to another. In only one instance is an extended portion of the trilogy given over to a sequence of events covering the activities of one character over a relatively lengthy period of time. This is Part III of *The Summer Tree*, "The Children of Ivor," in which Dave Martyniuk moves from newcomer in Fionavar to accepted rider with the Dalrei. Chronologically, "The Children of Ivor" removes the tale from the present established with the death of Paul on the Summer Tree, forcing us into the past, to the moment of the crossing of the Torontonians into Fionavar. The nar-ratological purpose of the chronological disruption is clear enough — it gives us a

partly advantageous position from which to observe the sceptical Dave's initiation into Fionavar — but the technique is never used again. Not even the sailing to Cader Sedat in Chapter 16 of *The Wandering Fire*, one of the longest unbroken episodes in the trilogy, demands this degree of chronological reorientation; the sailing is a continuation of an already established event, not the beginning, as is "The Children of Ivor," of an entirely new sequence.

How, then, does the technique of shifting focalization help the story's kernels unfold? First, because the characters are separated from each other geographically, and each character is part of a different kernel, the shifting is necessary if we are to observe the kernels directly, instead of having them related by direct speech or another kind of sub-narration. More importantly, though, the movement from kernel to kernel is, in essence, equivalent to the movement from character to character, hence from focalization to focalization. Put another way, the trilogy's focus upon characterization makes character growth and plot progression both simultaneous and of equal narrative value. As one example, Jennifer is central to several kernels: the rape by Rakoth, the second crossing to Fionavar, the birth of Darien, the awakening of Arthur and resurrection of Lancelot, the turning of Darien towards his father (with the resultant downfall of Rakoth), and the resolution of the Arthur-Guinevere-Lancelot triangle. Each kernel is not only the result of, but is also dependent upon, the growth of Jennifer's character. Rakoth's rape nearly destroys Jennifer's capacity for love, but only by regaining that capacity — albeit with an unprecedented coolness — can she both guide Darien and re-enact the Arthurian triangle. And only through the re-enactment, as can be traced through a series of kernels, can the overall plot resolve itself as it does.

If this is true of Jennifer, it is no less true of Paul, Kevin, Dave, or Kim. Paul's characteristics send him to the Summer Tree, and the resultant change ultimately allows the ship Prydwen to reach Cader Sedat. Kevin's personality urges him towards his self-sacrifice to Dana, and this kernel opens the way towards Cader Sedat and begins the joining of the sky and earth magics in the battle against Rakoth. Dave's character causes the intercession in the war of the goddess Ceinwen, while Kim's brings the Paraiko into battle, enables the reunification of the Dwarves, and allows the important heroism of Tabor.

The shifts in focalization among the characters, therefore, essentially create the story's kernels, because the characters' psychological changes, which we understand *only* through these focalizations, inspire new events. Furthermore, by carefully co-ordinating the shifts in focalization with the unfolding of events, the narration establishes an equivalence in importance between character and kernel. Kernel prompts character growth, which in turn creates new kernel, which prompts further character growth, and so on. Note that, in this discussion, I freely use Barthes' idea of *kernel*, but not his concept of *actor*. Barthes' implication in "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" is that a narrative's char-

acters are simply agents that allow the plot to proceed. Here I treat characters as part of a bi-partite function, with kernels, of narrative progression. It is unsurprising, given this bi-partite function, that Kay's trilogy ends with the return to the primary world of Kim and Dave, the two characters who have experienced the greatest character growth. The story's final kernel is thus also its strongest statement on the importance of its focus on character.

The Strategy of Delay

The shifts in focalization move the plot from kernel to kernel, but they also, seemingly paradoxically, delay the individual climaxes. In other words, the strategy of shifting both advances and impedes the story's events. To some extent, the delays serve Kay's obvious desire for the kind of long tale appropriate to the genre of high fantasy, but their value from the standpoint of literary criticism is more interesting. By delaying the climaxes, again and again, Kay builds slowly towards a final event — the death of Darien — that is both the narrative climax and the rhetorical climax of the trilogy. As narrative climax this kernel represents the final victory over evil; as rhetoric climax it epitomizes the novel's basis in pathos. The language of Darien's fall differs from that of the story's heroic climax (the last battle) in that it is pathetic in both the classically rhetorical sense (the appeal to the emotions) and the more commonly used sense (pity for a seemingly small action) of the word.

Following the story of Darien offers the most useful example of this process. Darien first appears early in *The Wandering Fire*, but his first focalization does not occur until almost one-third of the way through that volume. This passage, like most of the Darien plot, contains a rhetoric of the sentimental, with the narrative concentrating almost solely on pathos. "Finn was his brother and he loved Dari most of all and he was the most wonderful person in the world and knew everything besides" (*WF*, 117), part of the scene reads, and the attempt at child-like thought is obvious. Our next sight of Darien is at Finn's departure for the Longest Road (*WF*, 133-4), and the pathos here is stronger, even though the focalization is through Finn and, later, Vae. Through Finn: "He had said it ["I love you"] so often, though, had meant it so much. Surely it had been enough in the little time he'd had. Surely it would be enough?" Through Vae: "What broke her in the end was to see that Dari, moving quietly in the snow, was tracing his flower neatly with a thin branch in the growing dark while tears were pouring down his face without surcease" (*WF*, 134). Coming after the calm of the Darien-Finn passages, and combined with Darien's inability to comprehend, this scene establishes the novel's central pathetic appeal.

Darien's next scene is one of the trilogy's most significant kernels. Paul and Brendel lead Darien to the Summer Tree in Mornirwood, where he experiences an instantaneous maturity from childhood into adolescence. Yet, even though only

one night of story-time has passed between Paul's arrival at Darien's home and the maturation scene, sixty pages of narrative have transpired. In those pages, Arthur has reunited with Cavall, Jennifer has come to realize the significance of her role as Guinevere, Kim has used the Baelrath and the strength of the others to learn of the Cauldron at Cader Sedat, Kevin and Dave have hunted the boar, Diarmiud has proposed to Sharra, and Kevin has sacrificed himself to Dana. In other words, the primary kernel of the *Tapestry*, the event that will ultimately lead to the climax of the conflict between good and evil, to the narrative's strongest rhetorical moment, has been delayed by a succession of no fewer than half a dozen other significant kernels.

At this point in the story, indeed, the importance of Kevin's sacrifice easily supersedes that of Darien's maturing. This sacrifice, too, has been long delayed by shifts in focalization. But Kevin's death is structurally important only as a prerequisite for the destruction of Metran and the Cauldron, which is in turn a prerequisite for the events in *The Darkest Road* leading to the final battle, which are in turn prerequisites for Darien's confrontation with Rakoth Maugrim. With Rakoth's death, the defeat of evil is assured, even though the story has a few more twists to play out. Thus, all of the trilogy's kernels lead towards the Darien-Maugrim kernel, and none leads away from it.

Darien's last appearance in *The Wandering Fire* shows him looking down upon Jennifer and Matt as they return to Paras Derval (*WF*, 224). Not until two hundred pages later does he return to the story, this time in *The Darkest Road*, where he takes the dagger Lokdal and the Cirlet of Lisen. In the meantime, once again, a great deal has happened, the central kernels being the destruction of the Cauldron, the resurrection of Lancelot, and the corruption of the Paraiko. Despite the grandeur of these kernels, it is Darien's theft of Lokdal, an incident treated almost casually even during the Kim-Darien scene, that matters the most to the resolution of the plot. As before, the constantly shifting focalization produces a framework for the narrative and rhetorical climax.

From this point on, the story is predominantly *about* Darien, even though events transpire that do not seem to reflect Darien's progress. Darien meets Jennifer (*DR*, 118f.), then begins his long march to find his father. We encounter him in Pendaran Wood, watching the battle between Lancelot and Curdardh, but this scene is focalized through Flidais, not Darien. Darien disappears from the story for all of Part III of *The Darkest Road*, returning a full 100 pages after the Lancelot-Curdardh battle, and 130 pages after his previous focalization, for a focalization (*DR*, 302-5) that confirms both his desire to visit Rakoth and his sense of isolation. During the 100-page interlude, Kimberly has seen Matt proven King of the Dwarves; after Darien's short focalization, the last battle begins and Diarmiud dies at the hand of Uathach. Part IV begins with a two-page focalization through Darien, ending with the predictive, "Then he heard the sound of his father's laugh" (*DR*,

329); but the laughter's effect is delayed throughout the chapter, as focalizations through Dave (twice), Kim (twice), Leila, Paul, and Tabor (twice) keep returning us to the battle. Finally, in Chapter 16, Darien's plot is resolved, and the entire chapter is focalized through him.

From the kernel in which Darien, at the Summer Tree, experiences his sudden maturation, until his death in Starkadh, Darien's story directly occupies very few actual pages. Furthermore, three of this story's kernels — the maturation, the theft of Lokdal, and the meeting with Jennifer — are not focalized through him at all. During Darien's search for Rakoth, the narrative shifts focalization eighty-seven times, with Darien as focalizant only nine of those times, usually in brief passages.

The effect of the delayed resolution of Darien's story is to heighten the rhetoric of the trilogy's climax. Unlike Diarmiud, whose death is watched by many and, accordingly, is focalized through several different characters, Darien dies alone in the presence of his father, and the pathos of the scene is possible only because it is focalized through Darien. Previous focalizations through Darien have established his alienation. He feels abandoned in turn by his brother Finn and his mother Jennifer, and thus the betrayal by his father Rakoth Maugrim, because Rakoth completes the family unit, confirms in his mind the impossibility of his belonging. Darien's suicide, then, is much more an act of despair than of heroism, and thus the pathos is established. But only the sweep and grandeur of the rest of the trilogy's plot has enabled the pathos at all, because Darien's inability to understand his world contrasts sharply with the purposeful actions of the other major characters. Unlike those characters, Darien is alone, frightened, and utterly self-centered, traits that strike us because of their basic humanity.

Darien's is not the only plot that lingers because of the trilogy's shifting focalization, but it is certainly the central one. All other plots are subordinate to it. Yet in the number of pages it is given, the number of focalizations it receives, and even its style, it *seems* subordinate to the more self-consciously glorious plots of Kim, Diarmiud, Kevin, and the Arthurian triangle. Compare, for example, the style of Darien's passing with that of the departure of Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere. First Darien:

Darien was lying on the floor. There was a bright blade in his heart. With fading sight he looked out the high window and saw that the fighting had stopped on the plain so far away. It became harder to see. The window was trembling, and there was a blurring in front of his eyes. The Circlet was still shining, though. He reached up and touched it for the last time. The window began to shake even more violently, and the floor of the room. A stone crashed from above. Another. All around him Starkadh was beginning to crumble. It was falling away to nothingness in the ruin of Maugrim's fall. (*DR*, 366-7)

Sentences are short, description is concrete. Except for the first two and the last sentences, the scene is restricted to Darien's sensory perception. The tone, moreover, is matter-of-fact. By comparison, the departure of the Arthurian trio is much more magnificent:

It had come. Under the silver shining of the moon, that long slender craft caught the rising of the wind and it carried them away, Arthur and Lancelot and Guinevere. Past the promontory it sailed, and from that solitary height Shahar raised one hand in farewell, and all three of them saluted him. Then it seemed to those that watched from the plain that that ship began to rise into the night, not following the curving of the earth but tracking a different path. (*DR*, 394)

Like the language of many other passages in the *Tapestry* (cf. Kevin's death, Paul's death on the Summer Tree, Diarmiud's death), the language here is an obvious attempt at rhetorical "high style." It represents, of course, myth in the making, but for Fionavar the incident is less mythically significant than Darien's death. The difference lies in the focalization. The departure of the Arthurian trio is one of several brief passages in the trilogy that shifts to an unspecified focalizant, to omniscience, to what Genette calls *zero focalization* (Genette, 189). By contrast, Darien's death is focalized squarely through him, because in his case there are no observers. The departure of the trio is more magnificent because it is perceived by minds capable of comprehending magnificence.

The Darkest Road completes many separate plot-lines, some of which began in *The Summer Tree*, some others in *The Wandering Fire*. Regardless of where they begin, however, the key to understanding the narrative of the trilogy is that each plot-line has been delayed until its appropriate culmination by the technique of shifting focalization. Shifts in focalization allow us to assimilate the trilogy's fantasy world, and to grow and understand the characters, but more interestingly they both advance and delay the plot-lines. All four effects are, of course, interrelated and interdependent. Our first task is to assimilate the world, and we do this by perceiving the world through the characters' focalizations. This perception, in turn, enhances our understanding of the characters themselves, as well as our comprehension of the characters' growth. Character growth, furthermore, is the essence of the trilogy's plot; thus, the plot moves according to the focalization through the characters. But because the characters' actions are spread over both time and space, and because the major characters are, for the most part, separated from one another geographically, the story's focalizations must shift among them, and the effect is to delay the resolution of each character's plot-line. This delay permits all plot-lines to culminate at the appropriate time: specifically, during the last battle. Such culmination, the final defeat of evil, is integral, of course, to the rhetoric of high fantasy.

NOTES

- ¹ Whatever the reasons for the similarities of Genette's and Bal's discussions, the real point is the recognition of *focalization* as an important term in narratology. Gerald Prince does not mention *focalization* in his brief study called *Narratology* (in fact, he discusses only *point of view*), but the term is given relatively lengthy discussion in his recent *Dictionary of Narratology*. Roland Barthes offers very little discussion of the problem in his "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," seeing *person* only from the standpoint of "personal and apersonal" (Barthes, 283). Wayne C. Booth's "Types of Narration" chapter, from *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, obviously cannot be overlooked, but his typology represents precisely the difficulty Genette finds in the published literature on perspective (see Genette, 182). Genette finds similar problems with the categories developed by F. K. Stanzel in *A Theory of Narrative*, who cites the inconsistency with which *point of view* has been used by critics from Henry James forward (see Stanzel, 9) to put forth his theory of narrative situations, a concept developed differently by Barthes (285f.). Stanzel himself uses *focalization* rarely (see 71), but he clearly disagrees with Genette in several areas.
- ² By "section" here, and throughout this paper, I mean a part of the chapter separated by a graphic symbol taken from the painting on the jacket. The trilogy uses the following system: Books are divided into Chapters, Chapters into Sections, and Sections into Subsections. Books and Chapters are numbered, Sections are distinguished by a graphic symbol, and Subsections are prefaced by a blank space on the page. The three volumes of the trilogy I will refer to as Volumes.

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