

Created in the Image of a Creator: Toward a Mormon Theology of World-Making

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What does it mean to be created in the image of a God who creates? And what does this act of divine creation have to do with creating worlds? These questions are particularly pertinent in light of King Benjamin's teaching that Christ, "the Creator of all things from the beginning" (Mosiah 3:8), invites humanity to become his "spiritually begotten" offspring who are commanded to "take upon [them] the name of Christ" (Mosiah 5:7-8), the Creator. When such teachings about identifying with Christ are read alongside accounts from the New Testament Gospels describing Christ's creation of fictional stories and imaginative parables, a possibility surfaces that may serve to shed light on what it means to be created in the image of a Creator: namely, that humanity can approach divinity through the creation of literary worlds. This paper will bring one particular Christian theology of creating literature into conversation with Mormonism to sketch the outlines of what a Mormon theology of literary creation might look like.

Generally speaking, in Western thought there has been an uneasy tension between deities and the human race. Stories abound in Greek literature showing how fatal it could be for mortals to try to emulate the gods.¹ Many Christian interpretations of Genesis align closely with this idea: there is an ontological chasm between God and humanity which is highlighted in the nature of Eve's temptation (that is, to partake of the forbidden fruit because "ye shall be as gods") and the

¹ The Greek story of Salmoneus is a textbook example: "[Salmoneus] pretended that he was Zeus. He had a chariot made in such a way that there was a loud clanging of brass when it moved. On the day of Zeus's festival he drove it furiously through the town, scattering at the same time firebrands and shouting to the people to worship him because he was Zeus the Thunderer. But instantly there came a crash of actual thunder and a flash of lightning. Salmoneus fell from his chariot dead" (Edith Hamilton, *Mythology* [New York: Back Bay Books, 1998], p. 312).

couple's subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden (that is, to prevent them from fully "becom[ing] as one of [the gods]") (Gen. 3:5, 22).

Mormonism is sometimes portrayed as resolving this tension between God and humanity by narrowing the traditional ontological divide – in the words of the King Follett discourse, “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!...If the veil were rent today,... you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man.”² However, there are still real tensions that exist within Mormon thought regarding the implications of humanity's divine heritage. What exactly does this mean in the hereafter? Will humanity have the ability to create in the same ways that God does, including the creation of worlds?

An official LDS statement has refuted the idea that Mormons will create worlds in the hereafter—in answer to the question “Do Latter-day Saints believe that they will ‘get their own planet’?”, this article posted on the Mormon Newsroom responds with an emphatic *no*. “This idea is not taught in Latter-day Saint scripture, nor is it a doctrine of the Church. This misunderstanding stems from speculative comments unreflective of scriptural doctrine.”³ The most recent official Church statement on the issue, the Gospel Topics essay “Becoming Like God,” also refutes this idea: “Latter-day Saints’ doctrine of exaltation is often...reduced in media to a cartoonish image of people receiving their own planets.” However, this article admits that the idea of resurrected humans creating planets is rooted in a creative impulse that Mormons associate with the doctrine of deification: “while few Latter-day Saints would identify with caricatures of having their own planet, most would agree that the awe inspired by creation hints at our creative potential in the

² Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), p. 345. For best academic source, see <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-king-follett-sermon>

³ “Mormonism 101: What is Mormonism” on Mormon Newsroom, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/mormonism-101>

eternities.”⁴ Clearly, tensions exist within Mormon thought as to how the concept of humanity’s creation relates to the concept of deification—in other words, if humanity is created in the image of a Creator God, what theological implications *does* this have?

Perhaps such reactions to the perceived absurdity of the idea that Mormons “get their own planet” have discouraged the development of alternative theologies of world-making. In what follows, I will briefly outline one particularly vibrant Christian theology of making worlds—namely through the creation of literary worlds—before exploring how such a theology could interact with and contribute to Mormon thought. For the purposes of this paper, I have chosen to focus on two Christian authors who ran in the same social circles during the mid-20th century and who seriously reflected on the theological nature of authorship: Dorothy Sayers, an Anglican (d. 1957) and J.R.R. Tolkien, a Roman Catholic (d. 1973).

Dorothy Sayers first explored the divine nature of human creative acts in her 1937 play *The Zeal of Thy House*, which was written to describe and commemorate the building of the Canterbury Cathedral. In its closing lines, the archangel Michael delivers the following speech:

Children of men, lift up your hearts...Praise Him that He hath made man in His own image, a maker and craftsman like Himself, a little mirror of His triune majesty, For every work of creation is threefold, an earthly trinity to match the heavenly. First: there is the Creative Idea; passionless, timeless, beholding the whole work complete at once, the end in the beginning; and this is the image of the Father. Second: there is the Creative Energy, begotten of that Idea, working in time from the beginning to the end, with sweat and passion, being incarnate in the bonds of matter; and this is the image of the Word. Third: there is the Creative Power, the meaning of the work and its response in the lively soul; and this is the image of the indwelling Spirit. And these three are one, each equally in itself the whole work, whereof none can exist without [the] other; and this is the image of the Trinity.

⁴ “Becoming Like God,” <https://www.lds.org/topics/becoming-like-god?lang=eng> . Incidentally, Richard Mouw recently lauded Latter-day Saint culture in what he saw as a distancing from concrete ideas of what deification will mean in the hereafter: <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/05/mormons-approaching-orthodoxy>

Look then upon this Cathedral Church of Christ: imagined by men's minds, built by the labour of men's hands, working with power upon the souls of men; symbol of the everlasting Trinity, the visible temple of God.⁵

Sayers soon returned to this idea, turning it into a full-length monograph, titled *The Mind of the Maker* (1941). In considering the scriptural declaration that humanity has been created "in the image of God," she acknowledges that this may perhaps refer to "his immortal soul, his rationality, his self-consciousness, [or] his free will," as previous theologians have argued. However, looking solely at the literary context of that statement within Genesis 1 itself, she writes:

Looking at man, [God] sees in him something essentially divine, but when we turn back to see what he says about the original upon which the 'image' of God was modeled, we find only the single assertion, 'God created.' The characteristic common to God and man is apparently that: the desire and the ability to make things.⁶

This emphasis on humanity's inherent capacity for creative acts was a central feature of J.R.R. Tolkien's theology of literary creation. In his essay on the literary theory of myth and fairy stories, he spoke of the authorial impulse to create: "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."⁷ He extends his line of reasoning in his poem "Mythopoeia" (or "myth-making"), in which he pits a worldview enlivened by myth against a cold scientific view of reality (a view once held by C.S. Lewis, to whom this poem was addressed): "Though now long estranged, / [from God] man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed. / Dis-graced he may be, yet is not dethroned, / and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned, / his world-dominion by creative act."⁸ In addition to humanity's creation in the image of a Creator God, Tolkien here identifies Adam's naming of the animals in

⁵ Dorothy Sayers, *Four Sacred Plays* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1959), p. 103.

⁶ Dorothy Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (New York: HarperCollins, 1987), p. 22.

⁷ J.R.R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), p. 56.

⁸ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, p. 87.

Genesis 2 (vv. 19-20) as a divinely sanctioned linguistic act of creation that, in part, demonstrated what it meant to be created in the image of a Creator. Moreover, he writes that this divine capacity of humans to create using language is a “right” that continued in humanity even after their expulsion from Eden: “[This] right has not decayed. / We make still by the law in which we’re made.”⁹ Just as God created the world through the use of language, humanity could also create by using language.

In particular, Tolkien describes the invention of the adjective as a sort of power that humanity could wield for creative ends (be they good or ill). He writes,

When we can take green from grass, blue from heaven, and red from blood, we have already an enchanter’s power...and the desire to wield that power in the world external to our minds awakes...We may put a deadly green upon a man’s face and produce a horror; we may cause woods to spring with silver leaves and rams to wear fleeces of gold, and put hot fire into the belly of the cold worm. But in such [writing]...new form is made;...Man becomes a sub-creator.¹⁰

Tolkien regularly refers to humanity’s ability to create using language as the act of “sub-creation.” This “sub-creation” differs from both “representation [*and*] symbolic interpretation of the beauties and terrors of the world.”¹¹ Rather, “sub-creation” is concerned with the creation of a world which does *not* exist in what Tolkien calls the “Primary World,” or the world we experience through our senses.¹²

This term “sub-creation” provides an explicit distinction from the term “creation” as it applies to God’s creative activity in the universe. While it is apparent that humans are unable to

⁹ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, p. 87.

¹⁰ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, pp. 22-23.

¹¹ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, p. 23.

¹² Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, pp. 47-48.

physically create *ex nihilo*,¹³ the creative work of an author is different. Sayers writes that “The components of the material world are fixed; those of the world of imagination increase by a continuous and irreversible process, without any destruction or rearrangements of what went before. This represents the nearest approach we experience to ‘the creation out of nothing.’”¹⁴ So, while there *is* a degree of overlap between the creative acts of God and human literary creative acts, the two are by no means identical. Tolkien makes this clear in his aforementioned poem: “man, sub-creator, the refracted light / through whom is splintered from a single White / to many hues, and endlessly combined / in living shapes that move from mind to mind.”¹⁵ Thus, even the most imaginative of authors must still draw in some way from the world (and from the mind)¹⁶ which God created in the first place.

For Sayers and Tolkien, the creation of a literary world should not involve the indiscriminant use of language and imagination; rather, literary “sub-creation” “is a rational[,] not an irrational activity.”¹⁷ Tolkien argues that this “sub-creation” “certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, or obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and clearer is the reason, the better [literary world] will it make.”¹⁸ According to Tolkien, work that is “sub-creative” in the most divine sense of the word will achieve what he describes as “the inner consistency of reality.”¹⁹ “The story-maker proves a

¹³ Sayers explains: “We are very well aware that man cannot create in the absolute sense in which we understand the word when we apply it to God. We say that ‘He made the world out of nothing,’ but we cannot ourselves make anything out of nothing. We can only rearrange the unalterable and indestructible units of matter in the universe and build them up into new forms” (*The Mind of the Maker*, p. 27).

¹⁴ Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, p. 29.

¹⁵ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, p. 87.

¹⁶ “The urgent desire of the creative mind is towards expression in material form. The writer, in writing his book on paper, is expressing the freedom of his own nature in accordance with the law of his being; and we argue from this that material creation expresses the nature of the Divine Imagination” (Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, p. 42).

¹⁷ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, p. 48, fn. 1.

¹⁸ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, p. 55.

¹⁹ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, p. 47.

successful ‘sub-creator’ [if] he makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed.”²⁰ In other words, the Creator—God—created the Primary World from nothing, while sub-creators—humanity—create or organize “Secondary Worlds” to be experienced in the mind of another using elements from the Primary World. As I hope to demonstrate in the remainder of this paper, such a theology of “sub-creation” can provide a lively conversation partner for developing a Mormon theology of creating literary—instead of strictly literal—worlds.

So, how might Mormon theology’s view of the Godhead, co-eternal intelligences, and the eternality of matter inform a primarily Catholic and Anglican theology of “sub-creation” (and vice versa)? The language Sayers and Tolkien use to express a particularly Trinitarian form of creativity is worth noting: as mentioned above, Sayers describes the Godhead as manifested in the threefold aspect of the Creative Idea, the Creative Energy, and the Creative Power, while Tolkien alludes to a similar threefold division of the “mind, the tongue [or language], and the tale.”²¹ These three elements are described as separate actions and aspects of God and creation, and yet somehow exist simultaneously when a literary world comes into being. However, neither author explains in a satisfactory way how these three separate aspects of the Godhead or literary creation interact.

Joseph Smith’s description of the Godhead in Nauvoo, however, provides a possible framework for understanding such divine and creative interaction: “Everlasting covenant was made between three personages before the organization of this earth, and relates to their dispensation of things to men on the earth; these personages, according to Abraham's record, are

²⁰ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, p. 37.

²¹ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, p. 22.

called God the first, the Creator; God the second, the Redeemer; and God the third the witness or Testator.”²²

There appears to be significant overlap in these three formulations by Smith, Sayers, and Tolkien: 1) God the Creator, the Creative Idea, and the mind, 2) God the Redeemer, the Creative Energy, and language, and 3) God the Testator, the Creative Power, and the tale. But when Joseph introduces the idea that these three parts of God are united and bound by “everlasting covenant,” a social framework can be established wherein the three creative parts of God (Idea, Energy, and Power or mind, language, and tale) can interact and react in a dynamic way that is difficult to conceptualize if these parts of God are either consecutive or if they are not discrete. Thus, instead of understanding the divine creative process in a modal sense that is essentially linear—moving from Idea to Energy to Power, from mind to language to tale—or in seeing these divine concepts as always existing simultaneously, Joseph’s covenantal framework allows for the possibility of a dialogic interaction wherein creative potential may be amplified with each exchange.

As for this particular Catholic and Anglican view that humanity’s creations will always be, in some sense, derivative because everything in the universe—including the human mind—was wholly created by God, some statements in Mormon scripture and by Joseph Smith seem to challenge such a claim. One passage in Doctrine and Covenants section 93 hints toward such a challenge when we read in one verse that “I [Jesus] was in the beginning with the Father” and then “Ye were also in the beginning with the Father” (vv. 21-23). This idea of the human spirit’s co-eternality with Jesus’s spirit is amplified in Abraham 3, wherein Abraham sees “the intelligences that were organized before the world was...And God saw these souls that they were good, and he

²² Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 190. Quoted by William Clayton, reporting an undated discourse given by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois; in L. John Nuttall, “Extracts from William Clayton’s Private Book,” pp. 10–11, *Journals of L. John Nuttall, 1857–1904*, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; copy in Church Archives.

stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good” (vv. 22-23). Joseph’s statement in the King Follett discourse takes this idea in Abraham even one step further:

“Intelligence is eternal and exists upon a self-existent principle. It is a spirit from age to age and there is no creation about it...The first principles of man are self-existent with God. God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself.”²³

If there is something within each person that is uncreated and co-eternal with God, then this would call into question the claim that because the existence of humanity is wholly contingent upon the creative act of God, humans cannot create anything “original”—that any element used in the creation of a “new” work of literature would have been made using elements that had their ultimate origin in God. From the perspective of this particular strand of Mormon thought, however, humanity could, in theory, create something “original” because some part of the author exists independent of God, and which may have the potential to inform their creations (literary or otherwise).

However, this idea would need to be tempered by the fact that Mormon scripture *also* claims that humanity was in some sense “created” by God before being born. Ether 3:15, for example, draws upon the language of God creating humanity in Genesis 1, but also seems to push God’s creation of humanity back before the creation of the world: “And never have I (Jesus) showed myself unto man whom I have created...Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? Yea, even *all men* were created *in the beginning* after mine own image.” Similarly, Moses

²³ Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 354.

3:5 reworks the language of creation in Genesis: “I, the Lord God, had created *all* the children of men; and *not yet* [was there] a man to till the ground; for *in heaven* created I them.”

One final example that complicates the idea of the human spirit’s independence from the essence of God is an unattributed document entitled, “Sang by the gift of Tongues & Translated” in the Kirtland Revelation Book. It records a vision of Enoch that describes the origin of the human race in the following: “He saw the begining the ending of man[,] he saw the time when Adam his father was made and he saw that he was in eternity before a grain of dust in the ballance was weighed[,] he saw that he emenated and came down from God[.]”²⁴ While this passage was never canonized, it *was* used as the basis for a hymn that appeared in the *Evening and Morning Star* in May 1833, which reworked the aforementioned text in this way:

He [Enoch] saw before him all things past / From end to end, from first to last;
Yea, things before the world began / Or dust was fashion’d into man.
The place of Adam’s first abode / While in the presence of his God:
Before the mountains rais’d their heads / Or the small dust of balance weigh’d.
With God he saw his race began / And from him emanated man,
And with him did in glory dwell / Before there was an earth or hell.²⁵

This hymn preserves the idea that human spirits in some way “emanated” from God, suggesting that there are, at the very least, traces of God’s being that exist within each spirit. So, in light of this small sampling of passages, there is ample evidence in Mormon scripture that the spirits of humanity are—in some unspecified way—the creation of God. Therefore, we cannot be absolutely certain that human creations could ever be “original” in the sense that their creative acts are

²⁴ Kirtland Revelation Book 2, February 27, 1833, pp. 48-49. Although the evidence is ambiguous, one scholar argues that this song was received and translated by Frederick G. Williams, whose handwriting recorded this item. See Frederick G. Williams, “Singing the Word of God: Five Hymns by President Frederick G. Williams,” *BYU Studies* 48:1 (2009), pp. 57-88. However, David Golding has convincingly argued that David W. Patten sang this passage, which was then translated by Sidney Rigdon (<http://juvenileinstructor.org/sang-by-the-gift-of-tongues-and-translated/>).

²⁵ Listed under the heading “Songs of Zion” in the *Evening and Morning Star*, Vol. 1, No. 12, May 1833.

generated independently from God or from material that God created (or organized) prior to any human act of creation. In this *sense*, then, a Catholic and Anglican theology of “sub-creation” could be appropriately adopted by Mormon theologians hoping to form a theology of literary creation.

Finally, there *is* one point on which Mormon thought may not be reconciled with the theology of “sub-creation” set forth by Sayers and Tolkien. For them, God is the only true creator because only God can create *ex nihilo*. In this way, there is an insurmountable barrier between the creative potential of God and that of humanity. However, according to Joseph Smith’s statement in the King Follett discourse,

The word create [in Genesis 1]...does not mean to create out of nothing; it means to organize...Element had an existence from the time He had. The pure principles of element ...may be organized and re-organized, but not destroyed. They had no beginning and can have no end.²⁶

Thus, for a theologian working with this idea of God, there are certain limits to the use of a Catholic and Anglican theology of “sub-creation.” From a Mormon perspective, this idea that even God must work with pre-existent material in order to “create” brings the categories of God’s physical creative work and humanity’s literary creative works much closer together than is possible in Sayers and Tolkien’s theological framework.

That being said, a theology of “sub-creation” may prove particularly helpful in providing ways to understand difficult passages of Mormon scripture. For example, Tolkien’s theology of “sub-creation” focuses on the making of Secondary Worlds—imaginary places that exist in the mind—within the Primary World. This particular idea of “sub-creation” provides a possible way to approach the enigmatic statement in Doctrine and Covenants section 88:37 that “there is no

²⁶ Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 350-352.

space in the which there is no kingdom; and there is no kingdom in which there is no space.” Through the lens of “sub-creation” we may see here the existence of Secondary Worlds within the Primary World, as well as the potential for humanity to create those Secondary Worlds. In fact, a significant portion of Doctrine and Covenants section 88 is concerned with the laws that govern different kingdoms (vv.20-63), just as Tolkien is concerned with the laws used to create and govern Secondary Worlds—remember, actions within these Worlds must accord strictly with a set of laws so as to convey “the inner consistency of reality.”²⁷ Could these different kingdoms in the Doctrine and Covenants be compared to different types of Secondary Worlds (or stories) within which only certain types of characters (or humans) can exist?

Now, returning to the question of what it might mean to be created in the image of a Creator with which this paper began—Tolkien’s theology in particular may provide a way to bridge the gap between the creation of Secondary Worlds through literature (in the present) with human creation in the hereafter. In his semi-autobiographical short story “Leaf by Niggle,” Tolkien suggests that “sub-creative” works or Secondary Worlds which are created with an awareness of and as a response to God’s glory may—in some sense—become realized in the next stage of existence. In this story, the main character spends his life perfecting his painting of a tree. After his death and a period of “rehabilitation,” he come across what appears to be a glorified version of this very tree as he travels toward the “mountains” of Heaven.²⁸

This character then works alongside his former neighbor to further beautify and develop the tree and the surrounding landscape before leaving for his final destination (the aforementioned

²⁷ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, p. 47. This discussion of degrees of laws and conformity to those laws in different kingdoms in D&C 88 could also provide a way to analyze and evaluate Secondary Worlds in literature (e.g. The Secondary World of Middle Earth = Celestial, the Secondary World of Harry Potter = Terrestrial, the Secondary World of Narnia = Telesial, and the Secondary World of Twilight = Outer Darkness).

²⁸ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, pp. 109-111.

heavenly mountains). But instead of disappearing after the two depart, this particular landscape remains and serves several divine functions: it provides “a holiday, and a refreshment” for those undergoing purgatorial rehabilitation, and “for many it is the best introduction to the Mountains [of Heaven].” Because its subsequent visitors “seldom have to come back” for more rehabilitation after interacting with this tree, the God figure(s) send “more and more [people] there” after their deaths.²⁹ Thus, Tolkien holds open the possibility that, through some sort of divine midwifery, human literary “sub-creations” (such as Secondary Worlds) may be birthed through grace into God’s Primary World as an “effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation.”³⁰

Moreover, in Tolkien’s poem *Mythopoeia*, he argues that the human creation of these Secondary Worlds—of literature, story, and perhaps something more—will not cease after mortality. Because of humanity’s creation in the image of a Creator God,

Salvation changes not, nor yet destroys, / garden nor gardener, children nor their toys... In Paradise they look no more awry; / and though they make anew, they make no lie. / Be sure they still will make, not being dead, / and poets shall have flames upon their head, / and harps whereon their faultless fingers fall: / there each shall choose for ever from the All.³¹

Thus, for Tolkien, at the very least, being created in the image of God means that humanity will be able to continue and advance in “sub-creating” after this life, which “sub-creations” may attain a certain degree of reality that can ultimately serve God’s greater purposes.

Further developing a Mormon theology of literary “sub-creation,” therefore, would not only shed light on one particular aspect of what it could mean to “become like God” in Mormon thought, but it may also provide different approaches to Mormon theologies of God’s creative activities. In the interest of time, I can only suggest one possible area for exploration: the creation

²⁹ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, p. 118.

³⁰ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, p. 73.

³¹ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, p. 90.

account in the Book of Abraham. In chapter four, the gods go down “at the beginning” to “organize” and “form” the heavens and the earth (v. 1). They engage in this act of creation by using language to “order” the elements in different ways and then “watched those things which they had ordered until they obeyed” (v. 18). In this chapter, it is possible to see the gods creating—through language—a pattern of what creation could become, with the elements themselves then choosing to obey and conform to that pattern. Viewed through the theological lens of literary creation, we can see the following: divine authors composing and then telling a story of creation to an elemental audience. In so doing, these narrators create a Secondary World so compelling that this audience begins to enact the story themselves, thus creating the Primary World in which we now live.³²

I’ve only hinted here at some of the ways in which Mormon thought can benefit from a rigorous dialogue with theologies of literary creation. Based on these few examples, it is apparent that there is ample room in Mormon theology for the concept of world-making through literary “sub-creation.”³³ By putting the theology of literary creation articulated by Dorothy Sayers and J.R.R. Tolkien into conversation with Mormon thought, we can begin to glimpse a theology where, in some way, literary “sub-creations” can someday flower into more mature, more divine creations. And, if fully fleshed out, perhaps we could even succeed in developing a theology of humanity creating worlds...without creating planets.

³² Incidentally, this concept is similar in many regards to a model described by Tolkien in the creation myth for his own Secondary World of Middle Earth, including the participation of several semi-divine beings (see the Ainulindale in *The Silmarillion* [1977]). Orson Scott Card suggests a somewhat similar idea in *Xenocide* (1992), which can be seen as addressing how discrete intelligent particles (*philotes*) joined together through patterns (*aiua*) to form objects or spirits (see especially ch. 15). And a variation on this theme appears in Jorge Luis Borges’ story “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” in *Ficciones* (1993), where a group of scholars create a Secondary World so compelling that this Secondary World begins to become real through the actions of its readers.

³³ Spencer W. Kimball’s “The Gospel Vision of the Arts” (*Ensign*, July 1977) would be a good starting point. While his main point is that Mormons (who have a knowledge of the Restoration and a fullness of the Spirit of God) should be able to produce works of art that surpass all others, he does state the need for Mormons “who can dream of things that never were, and ask, ‘WHY NOT?’”