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Mallorn

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August 2004

The Journal of the Tolkien Society

Mallorn XLII

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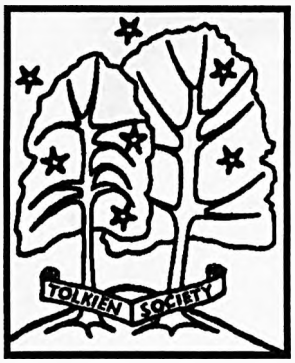
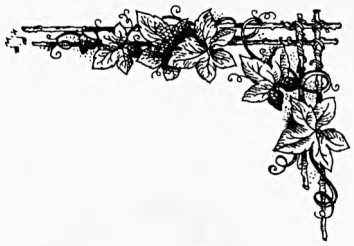


The Tolkien Society



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As well as *Mallorn*, the Society publishes a bi-monthly bulletin, *Amon Hen*.

In addition to local gatherings ('Smials') there are annual national meetings: the AGM and Dinner in the spring, Summermoot and the Seminar in the summer, and "Oxonmoot", a celebratory weekend held in Oxford in late September.
For further information about the society, please contact Sally Kennett, 210 Prestbury Rd, Cheltenham, Glos GL52 3ER or visit the Society's homepage:
http://www.tolkiensociety.org.

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ISSN 0308-6674

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Copy date for Mallorn 43 is November 30th 2004, and for Mallorn 44, April 30th 2005.

Editorial

We have lived with this thing, this monster of a film project, this almost-friend, for several years now. We have tutted at the cast proposals, then swooned at their reality. Well, some of us have swooned. I'm naming no names, pointing at no particular gender, but if there was a feminine form of the pronoun 'we' I would use it. We have followed the years of hyper-megahype (sorry, did I say hype? Of course I meant *preparation*) with scorn, envy, trepidation and anticipation. We have pumped reams of advice into the ether, to no discernible effect. The films were released and we devoured them. They weren't Tolkien, we said, but they were damn good fun. Now they have won quadzillions of Oscars, so now we know that officially they were astonishing cinematic achievements too. Well, all right, eleven oscars, but that equalled the record. And everyone in Hollywood duly queued up to kiss PJ's feet.

Of course, this is not the end. There is a long road ahead yet and the future promises many delights. The theatre version of *ROK* was promised for May, and duly arrived, and we can assume an extended version some months later, with an extended DVD option. We can also assume that there will be a combined DVD, of an unknowable length, at some unknowable distance into the future. After that, still more bites at the cherry; rumours abound of a 'director's cut' of Fellowship of five hours, which suggests fifteen hours for the whole saga. And at that length, Saga would be an appropriate sales medium, I think.

Now that we have all three films, I might as well say right up front that, like most of the reviewers, I enjoyed the films enormously, without ever feeling that I was compromised by their indubitable failure to be an interpretation of the epic satisfactory to the cognoscenti. And I might as well add that there's no question in my mind that picking the films to pieces, and (quite gently) mocking the efforts of their makers, is part of the fun. So let the fun begin ...

Interfering with a closely-knit complex story has its own traps. Jackson did not escape them all. He several times inadvertently prepared snares from which he could not then extricate himself satisfactorily. For example, he has an awkward scene in the court of Rohan where Theoden questions whether or not he should go to the aid of his old ally Gondor, because (sulk) *Gondor did not help them at Helm's Deep.* This has been invented for only one reason – to delay the ride to Minas Tirith. And this has to be delayed because of another intervention – Theoden does not learn of the attack on Gondor by the coming of the war arrow because that event has been deleted. Instead, Pippin gets a glimpse in the palantir (they found it in a puddle at Orthanc, as you do) of Sauron's plan to attack Minas Tirith. Now, absurdities abound. They are told what they must already know. Of course Sauron is going to attack Minas Tirith – where else would he attack first? – he wants to avoid the joining of Rohan and Gondor's forces. So why don't they ride for Minas Tirith straight away, do the very thing that Sauron fears? Why wait for the beacons? No sensible reason presents itself, so they have to invent a silly one, namely Theoden's supposed reluctance. Throughout, no convincing explanation is offered for why Denethor will not fire the beacons. But admittedly the firing does make a fine scene.

The interference with Faramir's character has been much remarked on. Certainly his voice coach was lax on a couple of occasions, making his man, whose natural accent is a pleasant Anzac, sound like a home counties debutante from Mrs Trimble's Elocution School for Nice Gels. But what can you say against a man whose role has been so thoroughly emasculated, despite his having once been voted the sexiest man in Australia?

One illuminating point is an explanation in the director's commentary that they decided to change Faramir's role because they felt the Ring would be fatally diminished in apparent power if Faramir resisted it, as in the book. But this is flawed reasoning. Faramir resists it for the same reason that Gandalf and Aragorn do - because of his lineage, his possession of Numenorean qualities. Jackson missed this point, at any rate he left it out, so naturally his audience would miss it. The team admit though that diminishing Faramir's character was perhaps not a wise decision, although it makes his later redemption possible. And it leads to another problem. If Faramir is so keen on the Ring, why does he not just take it? Why does he leave Frodo in possession of it and cart him around the countryside? In the book, of course, Faramir is full of uncertainty; and keeping Frodo in custody has the useful function of getting him away from the danger zone and a little further on his road. Not so in the film.

But in what is undoubtedly a stupendous cinematic achievement, this is just one of many errors, one or two of them gross errors. Having Frodo believe Gollum's lies and dismiss Sam on the way to Cirith Ungol is merely ridiculous. It is entirely unnecessary from a plot point of view, and adds very little dramatically. Frodo would have to be a complete fool to believe that the only reason Gollum might steal *lembas* is to eat it; and an even bigger one to trust Gollum above Sam. And his awareness that his craving for the ring and his perceived right to it is corrupting him into believing that any attempt on it is immoral and unlawful, present in the book, is crucially missing in the film. This is also the point where Jackson introduces us to the concept of Magic Crumbs, large scraps of *lembas* that Gollum drops on Sam's sleeping back to incriminate him. But Sam stands up, giving the crumbs their chance to crawl over his shoulder and on to his lapel where they stay put until Gollum brushes them off a few minutes later.

It is here that in the space of a few minutes we are treated to several of these horrors in succession. On the Stair, in a scene that rings more untrue with every second it lasts, Frodo tells Sam to leave him after uttering the ludicrous line 'he [Gollum] couldn't have taken it [the waybread] - he can't eat it' thereby proving himself too stupid to be trusted with doing up his own shoelaces, much less carrying the Ring. Then cut to Faramir doing his Nice Gel bit to Denethor. Straight away Faramir is ordered to ride out and attack Osgiliath (by the way, why would the Gondorians have built their two principal cities right next door to each other?), in full view of the gallery, in a reckless cavalry charge against the broken but heavily defended walls of Osgiliath. This is a tactic of such lunacy that a real strategist who devised it would be sacked in disgrace, and a field commander who ordered it would be sent to the funny farm, if he wasn't shot by his own men.

Military genius

It is all part and parcel of a far more pervasive flaw, one that results from a hopelessly inadequate grasp on the part of the film makers of even basic military principles. Throughout, it seems that the only tactic available to armies of Gondor or Rohan is the cavalry charge, one almost never used against defensive formations in the real world because it leads to disaster, as it did for example with the French charge on the British squares at Waterloo.

In LOR-the-Film it happens time and again, at Helm's Deep, at the flanks of the orc army on the Pelennor fields – both very stirring and both successful – and in the attempt to recapture Osgiliath. In the first, our boys get away with it because Gandalf produces a blinding light that induces the defending pikemen to drop their weapons. At the Pelennor the orcs simply panic and break their lines, for no particular reason other than implied cowardice. For this at least there is some warrant in the book's descriptions. At Osgiliath, in a manoeuvre invented for the film, the predictable disaster strikes. More unpalatable still, it comes from those silly little orc bows, firing arrows with blunt iron heads that wouldn't penetrate a bit of decent worsted trousering at more than five yards, much less armour plate, even if the wretched scraggy fletching could carry them true for that distance. In our world, hundreds of years of painstaking development went into the making of the first longbow, a weapon over six feet long that required such specialised strength and skill that its user was compelled to train from childhood. Its arrows could penetrate plate armour at a distance and it changed warfare radically. The orcs managed all this with a little bent stick and a piece of string. Now *there's* magic for you.

Slips showing

It is astonishing that a film which admittedly has much of the spirit of the book in it, and that was made with such extraordinary care, should have any errors of continuity, consistency and judgement in it, but there are many. On a casual re-visit I found three lapses in the Hobbiton sequences alone.

When Gandalf and Bilbo return to Bag End after the Party, why does Gandalf search the mantlepiece for the Ring, as if he doesn't know that Bilbo must have it on his person somewhere, which he must know, since he saw him use it a few minutes before and saw him come in straight from his prank in the party field?

'They've never forgiven me for living this long' says Bilbo to Frodo, as they hide during the Party from a vicious-looking Lobelia. What, *never*, even when he was, say, fifteen? It's a silly schoolboy error of syntax that slipped through the script editors' net. 'They can't forgive me for having lived .. ' would be ok. And why, on his later visit to Bag End, does Gandalf not realise that the Black Riders could be in the Shire already, since he has himself told Frodo that Gollum has been taken, and made to speak? But he doesn't, leaving Sam and Frodo to wander off across the Shire *on foot* and straight into danger.

Later we have the extraordinary shrinking Bilbo, who unfeasibly ages, for no discernible reason, to a shrivelled husk reminiscent of Davros. Ludicrously, he's still chirpy enough at the end to bounce up to Elrond and go with him hand in hand up the gangplank. (Would elvish boats have anything as prosaic as a gangplank, I wonder? More likely a blindingly tasteful portal lit up like a juke box). It looks absurd, like a grotesque parody of paedophilia, and quite spoils the effect of a rather good Grey Havens. But it's only four years or so since he went to Imladris, in the film's chronology, though of course not the book's where it is twenty years. How on Middle-earth did he get so old, even at the accelerated rate always wished on people in fantasies who have stolen a few centuries by drinking a potion, or bathing in unearthly light from a volcano shaft? And why didn't it happen to Gollum? On the same scale he should have been no more than a little pile of dust years before the action of the film even began.

Weakening Theoden was another unwise decision. His own admission in the book that he has not done as well as his forebears is turned, in the film, (and as a result in the minds of many critics who evidently have not read the book, including some who have submitted pieces to *Mallorn*) into having done very badly and being racked by guilt over it and over his resulting, mysteriously unspecified, treatment of Eowyn. This is absurd. In the book Theoden says he hasn't done as well as he hoped. The film says he's so weak that as soon as Aragorn comes along he surrenders command to him, crediting him with the victory at Helm's Deep in direct contradiction of what we have seen happen in the film.

Musical accompaniment

However good the music was as a sound track for *ROK* it makes a lousy CD. The Oscar-winning 'Into the West' is a passable song in the Enya/light folk mode, though very little to do with the spirit of Middle-earth, and unfortunately it's the best thing on the CD. I can't escape the uneasy conviction that they gave it the Oscar because by the time they got to minor matters like film score, handing the prize to ROK had become a reflex action. But this was film accompaniment in the same way that dots and commas accompany a piece of text. To the ear it was merely endless brassy punctuation. There were some pleasant reprises, and occasional moments of beauty not already heard in earlier film scores of the trilogy, but to earn them one had to endure hours of stair-climbing music. Mr Shore had clearly saved his best for first. I cannot recommend that you buy it.

But in one respect at least the flavour of the book was duplicated. The sense of gradual departure from the Shire and the world of hobbits, as the book proceeds, is preserved in the film, along with the sense of departure from the truest vision of Middle-earth, ie that represented by the hobbits; and that is certainly how I felt during the long defeat of watching the film. *LOR* is at its most enchanting in Part 1, possibly the reason that *FoR* is generally regarded as the best of the three parts, and this is true also of the films.

There is one more intriguing prospect. Peter Jackson has declared that he wants to make *The Hobbit*, using the same cast, or at least, those that are appropriate. It's a good thing Orlando Bloom has this alternative career (acting, if you're wondering) because he's far too expensive now for the *Hobbit*. Oh, they would have found a place for him. Glorfindel perhaps, in a flashback. Or swanning around in the background at dad's place, the Elven King's hall, then doing some breathtaking heroics at Five Armies. Tricky, though, since there is no indication in FOR-the-Film that he's met Bilbo before.

The age thing should be no problem. Having made Bilbo go from 50 (yeah, they said fifty, come on, let's be generous to a wonderful actor) to a wizened caricature of Yoda ('when 900 years old you are, look so good you will not ...'), ie ageing to about 720 in the first few weeks he spends in Elrond's health resort, making him look pre-Ring age would be child's play. But PJ ought to get a move on. No one's getting any younger.

Reasons for *not* liking Tolkien

Caroline Galwey

In many ways this is a good time to be a Tolkien fan. Sheer weight of numbers has at last begun to legitimise us. For decades, the literati confidently announced that the *Lord of the Rings* phenomenon was a craze, an accidental by-product of flower power; that the book would eventually pass into 'merciful oblivion' (Philip Toynbee), or at least become an historical footnote, 'an intricate Period Piece' (Harold Bloom). Well, it hasn't happened yet. One readers' poll after another, culminating in BBC TV's The Big Read in 2003, voted *The Lord of the Rings* Britain's favourite book; the publishers followed market signals, if not their personal inclinations, and brought out editions that looked like serious literature, not embarrassing fantasy. And into the midst of all this came the film, and its tie-ins and spin-offs, so that the quiet, respectable core of Tolkien enthusiasts was suddenly swollen by a great flood of showbizzy, cool types who follow whatever's big at the moment. Heady stuff.

But the fact that there are a lot of us doesn't mean we've won the argument yet. The Tolkien-haters are still out there, massing their forces, and they're angry. They are angry that we seem to think that our numbers mean we've proved the right of *The Lord of the Rings* to be taken seriously; to them, it's an 'occult system', a dangerous drug masquerading as a book. While the movie machine and the legions of fans smugly congratulate one another, the critics can represent themselves as the beleaguered voice of reason, seizing the moral as well as the intellectual high ground.

They seem to be deeply worried by the number of people who like Tolkien. Susan Jeffreys of the Sunday Times memorably rendered a colleague's verbal response to the news that *The Lord of the Rings* had won the Channel 4/Waterstone's readers' poll: 'Oh hell! Has it? Oh my God. Dear oh dear. Dear oh dear oh dear' (quoted in Andrew O'Hehir, 'The Book of the Century', salon.com, 4 June 2001). Tolkien's popularity has been greeted as if it were the ultimate proof of the degeneracy of our civilisation. And yet critics like these are not usually given to spluttering that 'the country's going to the dogs'. They don't worry too much about the effect of rap lyrics or child pornography. They know that the relationship between culture and behaviour is a slippery one; they can take such things in their stride. So why are they uniquely bothered by Tolkien? They themselves find it hard to explain. The London Review of Books found a valuable property in Jenny Turner, a former fan who was prepared to recant. In a piece entitled 'Reasons for Liking Tolkien' (15 November 2001), she stated with perfect truth: 'The quite funny one-liners abound, but it's much harder to find someone writing sensibly at length about what exactly is wrong with Tolkien's novel'. Unfortunately she then laid into it with all the detachment of a reformed alcoholic denouncing the Demon Drink, and left us little the wiser. I shall address her arguments in some detail, as they constitute one of the most thorough attempts so far to update Tolkien-bashing to the twenty-first century. But we cannot understand Tolkien-haters properly unless we go beyond their arguments to the things they do not say.

Tolkien-haters are much more inclined to mock than they are to ask themselves why. A good litmus test is Tolkien's prose style. If you read a sentence that begins 'Thus came Aragorn son of Arathorn, Elessar, Isildur's heir, out of the paths of the Dead, borne upon a wind from the Sea ...' and your automatic reaction is an embarrassed snigger, does that make you a fearless detector of humbug? Or are you merely being risk-averse, disconcerted by any language not strictly contemporary, and falsely modest about claiming grand words to suit grand feelings?

The style points the way to the real problem with *The Lord of the Rings*, which is also its greatest strength: the fact that, in spite of its twentieth-century concerns and its medieval background, in sensibility it is a (capital-R) Romantic work. The main achievement of Romantic music and literature, as of *The Lord of the Rings*, is to embody that elusive quality, the Sublime: what C.S. Lewis called Joy or Sweet Desire, the longing for a half-glimpsed source of beauty beyond reach, a longing which is itself a keener pleasure than the fulfilment of any other desire. Archaism and formal dignity go hand in hand with this quality. Wordsworth's 'trailing clouds of glory', Tennyson's 'horns of Elfland faintly blowing', Housman's 'blue remembered hills', are the company in which Tolkien's work belongs. 'Soggy, yearny nostalgia', 'a confection of pink sugar', 'the long toothache of the soul' - these are the phrases in which Jenny Turner seeks to dismiss his Romanticism, apparently so embarrassed by it that she won't even name it or admit that it has a pedigree.

True, there was a good historical reason for the reaction against Romanticism that occurred in the twentieth century. The Romantic poets thought it right and proper to go out and discover the Sublime in a patch of daffodils; but as the century progressed, literary critics came to feel that it was dangerous to think you could buy it so cheaply. 'Sublime' feelings were too easily diverted into dubious causes like political nationalism; and the scale of the sufferings of two world wars made the whole Romantic project seem at best intolerably self-indulgent. You could earn your experience of sublimity, ran the argument, only if you could face the death camps with your spirit intact; and, if this was impossible, the Sublime itself would have to go. At the most, it might be seen in glimpses from the top of an Everest of horror and suffering.

Unfortunately, this tough approach to literature demanded a level of moral courage and intellectual honesty that few could sustain. It did not translate well into popular culture, and, indeed, greatly deepened the divide between 'high' and 'popular'. In the hedonistic era of post-war prosperity, 'nothing matters unless you can confront your darkest depths' tended to become 'nothing matters, period'. 'Confronting your darkest depths' translated into the nihilistic gross-outs of the horror movie and the 'satanic' rock act - a pornography of

despair, lent a spurious aura of honesty and significance by the preoccupations of the elite - while the more up-beat manifestations of popular culture remained sugary and fake, and the Sublime was nowhere.

But the nightmare ends and life goes on. In gentler times, Romanticism creeps back, and people crave the Sublime, earned or unearned. The 'locking on of the hungry imagination' that Turner describes in response to Tolkien is both natural and inevitable, although the best part of a century of denigration has made it seem embarrassing. Many right-minded people resist it for the best of reasons. For them, the cure has not yet been long enough. They tend to detect a whiff of falsity and sentimentality about most Romantic literature and music. They sense danger in Tolkien's 'racism', and rightly fear the memory of the historical slide from Romanticism to nature-worship, hero-worship, social Darwinism and fascism; they worry that if one strand of this nexus is picked up, the whole tangle will come with it. But need it be so? At this vantage-point in time we can try to separate the good from the bad. Just as it has become possible for scientists to investigate the genetic component in human nature without turning back into eugenicists seeking to eliminate the 'unfit', so in the arts it may be possible to revive Romanticism without plunging on into fascism.

I respect those whose historical scruples say otherwise. They are austere people, like the medieval penitents who used to shed constant tears for the sin of the world; they value truth above all and would rather have no pleasure than one that might be unearned. There is no point in trying to argue them out of it, though one may privately think that they can't be having much fun. But one finds that this sort of Tolkien-disliker keeps quiet about it, only murmuring 'I could never quite get on with *The Lord of the Rings*', reluctant to hurt anyone's feelings. The loud Tolkien-haters have additional objections, which it is tricky to get to the bottom of. A recurring assumption in their arguments is that dislike of Tolkien is so obvious an attitude as not to need explaining, whereas to like Tolkien is so pathological as to need near-medical scrutiny. This is clearly evasive; and the situation isn't helped by the number of Tolkien-defenders who undermine themselves by seeming to accept their attackers' premises. Let us do a bit of the attackers' homework for them and probe the matter further.

Many critics find a pretext for disliking Tolkien in mistaken assumptions about the genre and aims of his work. One finds critics of *The Lord of the Rings* (and all too often its defenders) persistently referring to it as a 'novel', expecting its characters, its politics, its battle scenes even, to conform to the conventions of realistic fiction, and writing it down as a failure because they do not (or claiming fatuously that they do). This was understandable when the book was first published, when fantasy as a genre was barely recognised, but seems disingenuous now, when most critics admire at least some works of modern fantasy and no longer urge that the creation of an imaginary world is in itself an invalid or 'escapist' project. Their assumptions, by now inconsistently held, can be traced to Freud. It was Freud who dealt the first body-blow to the Romantic view of the artist as a gifted individual who could point his audience towards the Sublime. To him, any notion of the Sublime was (in the specialised medical spelling of his translators), mere 'phantasy'. In 1917, famously, he wrote:

> '[The artist] desires to win honour, power, wealth, fame, and the love of women; but he lacks the means for achieving these satisfactions. Consequently, like any other unsatisfied man, he turns away from reality and transfers all his interest, and his libido too, to the wishful constructions of his life of phantasy, whence the path might lead to neurosis.' (Standard Edition of the *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. & transl. James Strachey [24 vols., London, 1953-64], vol. 16, p. 376.)

That's us told: art is nothing more than wishful thinking. One can hardly bear to contemplate the boredom of a society in which everyone was psychologically 'healthy' in Freud's terms. Although his ideas on art in their extreme form have come to seem absurd, he had a strong influence on the critics who largely shaped twentieth-century ideas of 'good' and 'bad' literature. They reconciled their jobs as best they could with Freudian doctrine by arguing that a work of literature was better the more it engaged with the outer world, the more it resembled an action in human affairs - or, one might say, the more there was in it of work and the less of play. A novelist must struggle with the 'real', set his mind to work on his external experience of character and society, transforming it into art for the edification of others. It is in this artistic task that Tolkien fails, according to Jenny Turner. To her, his writing seems an evasion of the external troubles which dogged his life - his deracinated, orphaned childhood, his terrible experience of trench warfare, his arid marriage. Here is her peroration:

> 'Imagine him there, like Basil Fawlty, not thinking about the war, or about his mother, or about the miserable childhood that seems so present, but always beyond his grasp. Imagine him, looking out of the window at one of his beloved trees. He stares at the tree, and ìa fleeting glimpse of Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as griefî bursts out. He sits on, at his desk in his little study, puffing on his pipe. All around him, great dark pits open, with elves and orcs and hobbits emerging, ready to fight the great fight' (p.31).

You notice from Turner's choice of words how nearly she has slipped back into being impressed by Tolkien's art after all; her whole piece alternates in the same way between strained sneering and sneaking affection. But, overtly at least, she is denying that the claims of the inner life can be at least as important and legitimate as those of the outer. With Freud, she deplores 'the over-accentuation of psychical reality in comparison with material reality' (p.10), but who's to say how much respective accentuation the two deserve? What if Tolkien didn't actually suffer all that much? What if the joyful challenge of getting on with his inner 'game' was the most important thing for him - and if, in the process, he was able to address his external troubles fruitfully in the language of symbolism?

> Ursula Le Guin, herself a hugely creative writer of fantasy, has written the best vindication of Tolkien that I know. 'Fantasists are childish, childlike. They play games. They dance on the burning-ground. ... Even when they are making entire universes, they are only playing' ('Do-it-yourself Cosmology', in The Language of the Night, The Women's Press 1989, p. 106).

Musicians practise for hours each day, dancers devote their whole lives to that one perfect leap and turn, no matter what wars and disasters may be going on outside; Tolkien's game was to put the magic back into language. (Obsessive? Lucky man, rather, to find his life's work at such an early stage and

to be able to carry it through.) Turner derides Tolkien for his belief in the possible 'reality' of elves. She seems to forget that the intellectual life of his time was dominated by reductive materialism to the extent that it was difficult to find any intellectually credible words in which to affirm what the 'elves' represented for him: the sense of transcendence as a fact in human biology, as much as aggression or sexual appetite. 'Elves' and 'Faerie' were his metaphors for the special power of the 'peripheral vision' of language - new words, half-understood words, the gaps in the mesh of words: the power that these have to de-familiarise things, to refresh and renew them, and to hint at a sublime, because half-seen, meaning beyond. Tolkien might have probed all this in academic or scientific language, without writing an enormous fantasy. But who then would have experienced it? Even if the 'effect' is 'only' an accidental by-product of language, rather than expressing any mystical reality about the world, Tolkien was right to concentrate on the experience: its intensity must make it an important part of being human.

This aspect of *The Lord of the Rings* is pure play, but there was work to be done as well: to understand the nature of it one has to turn to Jung, rather than to Freud. It is obvious that Tolkien's War of the Ring is not an accurate reflection of political conflict in the 'real' world, but it is compelling as an account of internal conflict. As Jung realised, the Quest narrative in myth and fantasy represents an inner journey towards adulthood, and the characters in such a narrative stand for different aspects of one personality working out its destiny. Even the Dark Lord is not necessarily a personification of objective evil, but of the things that the self must struggle against in its progress towards wholeness: for instance, unquestioningly accepted parental authority. The 'inner story' of *The Lord of the Rings* might be sketched as follows. The Child (Frodo) must cast down the oppressive inner Parent (the Ring, the Dark Lord) with the indispensable help of the Shadow (Gollum), before his Adult self (Aragorn) can come into his inheritance and claim his bride. But when he has done so, childlike wonder and positive parental protection (the Elves, Gandalf), in fact the Child himself, must pass away - a dreadful, but inevitable cost. Tolkien himself would have resisted this interpretation; if one is oneself involved in the struggle it is only by seeing it as absolute that one can muster the energy to wage it. Symbols, also, are always richer and more suggestive than one simple interpretation can convey. But a good artist's work explains more, and explains itself more, than the artist consciously intends. Even if Tolkien couldn't resolve his problems in life (and how many of us can?), he knew in the language of symbols what they were. He realised, for instance, the real effect of his lifelong inability to defy his dead, sainted, un-confrontable mother and her Catholicism - one begins to see what the monstrous spider Shelob is all about. And he knew that his need to see himself as a 'good' person stood in his way - otherwise why should the 'good' Frodo ultimately fail in his quest, and the 'evil' Gollum succeed?

To see the characters in *The Lord of the Rings* as aspects of the psyche makes sense of some features of the book that worry neo-Freudian critics. For instance the 'painlessness', the lack of physical contact in the battle scenes, made much of by Turner. Perhaps Tolkien realised that intra-psychic conflict, although very demanding of energy, is low on blood and guts; he must have read the fourth-century Christian allegorical poem *Psychomachia* (as all medievalists seem to have to) and noticed the odd effect of, say, Chastity spattering Lust's face with warm brains. The question of Tolkien and sex deserves more extended attention. Nothing attracts more contempt from neo-Freudians than the absence of sex from Middle-Earth - when it is well known that sex, like exercise and a high-fibre diet, is essential to your health. Turner approvingly quotes Edwin Muir writing in the *Observer* in 1955: 'All the characters are boys masquerading as adult heroes. The hobbits, or halflings, are ordinary boys; the fully human heroes have reached the fifth form; but hardly one of them knows anything about women, except by hearsay ...'

Erm, excuse me, Edwin, some of your readers *are* women, and find the prospect of being 'known about', in that sense, resistible. Why do we suddenly get the feeling we're in a locker-room, overhearing two schoolboys? 'That little prune Tolkien, he doesn't even know what a ... (snort, snigger) is'. It is understandable that, writing when he did, Muir should have failed to realise that *The Lord of the Rings* is not a novel, and that its characters are not 'characters' in the realistic sense. I suppose it is even understandable that at the intoxicating dawn of the sexual revolution it was tempting to laugh at the buttoned-up older generation for avoiding the subject, and to assume that if anyone chose to write about a non-sexual or pre-sexual phase of life the only reason could be that they were repressed or pusillanimous. But by now one expects attitudes to have moved on. Turner shows that she at least understands the role, or non-role, of sex in fantasy better than Muir did, when she compares the work of Tolkien and C.S. Lewis with Philip Pullman's trilogy His Dark Materials:

> 'When, as in Pullman, sex is permitted, it is impossible to feel that soggy, yearny nostalgia you feel at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, with Frodo and pals passing through the curtain of rain, or at the end of Lewis's *The Last Battle*, with poor old Narnia dark and broken and Susan, with her disgusting lipstick and her nylons, shut out. Sex happens because it has to happen: there wouldn't be much of a human race without it. And the existence of sex acts like a sentry - like Milton's cherubim at the gates of Eden - preventing you from indulging that favourite fantasy that maybe what has been done can be undone' (p.21).

This is spot-on with regard to the effect of sex in literature, but is unfair to both Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Susan wasn't shut out of Narnia because she started having sex but because, as the nylons and lipstick reveal, she became sophisticated. Real sex is undignified and intimate. Nylons and lipstick stand for a carapace, a mask of sexuality, the point of which is not to gain intimacy but to gain status. In that game you have to play tough all the time, to deny that you were ever a child with the ability to marvel. Some anti-Tolkien-and-Lewis critics seem to use their self-styled sexual maturity as a

status weapon in very much the same way, which is perhaps why they don't notice how Lewis skewered them. And as for Tolkien, I can't see why Turner should accuse him of having a 'fantasy that maybe what has been done can be undone'. It is precisely Tolkien's point that, at the end of his story, nothing can be the same again.

In Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* books, which Turner admires, the wizard hero is able to enter into a sexual relationship only after he has spent his magical powers. Le Guin's magic, Tolkien's 'elvish craft': both imply a pre-sexual state of the imagination. To omit sex from *The Lord of the Rings* was a solid artistic decision, whether conscious or not. *The Lord of the Rings* is not so much a novel of character as it is an evocation - almost musical, an opera or symphony - of a mood and a time of life. The time of life is early adolescence, and the mood is Sehnsucht, Fernweh, nostalgia, Sweet Desire. The experience of reading the book is the experience of those spring days when one is thirteen or fourteen, when the wind seems to be blowing from somewhere beyond the end of the world, when life seems almost unbearably full of possibilities of romance and adventure, and yet also of a sense of loss: the sense that one's conscious personality is taking shape and acting as a filter to the immediacy of experience - life is actually, and inevitably, growing more ordinary. Yet in this pre-sex stage one's inner world still seems limitless. When one embarks upon one's first real love affair, one is brought up hard against the boundaries of one's own self and the irreducible claims of another's; as Rowan Pelling has put it, 'to be united with someone in this way means, inevitably, fissures in the fabric of a vividly solipsistic internal universe' (*The Independent on Sunday*, 12 May 2002). There is no going back. Accordingly, the magical world of *The Lord of the Rings* is one person's inner world, with no real, clashing, messy relationships between different selves; and, when couples wed at the end of the story, this world ends too: childhood and its magic have to pass into memory.

In their rush to look like mature, healthy Freudians, Tolkien's critics deny the legitimacy of writing about this stage of life. If Tolkien over-emphasised the losses of growing up compared to its gains, they go to the opposite extreme. But shouldn't we, as adults, attempt to keep a channel open to the world of childhood and adolescence, to the beauty and intensity of its experience? To dismiss such attempts as 'soggy, yearny nostalgia' looks suspiciously like a self-flagellating denial of the critic's own past. A snide, dismissive tone constantly creeps in: 'the elegiac, valedictory aspect of the novel perhaps speaks with particular power to the swotty teenager, sorry to be leaving the figments of childhood, but itching to get to a university library.' You see how one can talk down the whole experience of being a teenager - translate some of the sweetest feelings a human being is fortunate enough to have into something embarrassing and ridiculous? Why? It is the Tolkien-haters who need to justify their decision to do this.

Not content with finding Tolkien (and Tolkien-lovers) to be sexually repressed, Jenny Turner attempts to show that they are chronically depressed as well.

> 'Though ostensibly a book of action, it [*The Lord of the Rings*] is largely concerned with passive states' (p.25) ... 'Frodo's sufferings are wonderfully evocative of the self-pity and self-mythologisation that tend to come with depression ...*The Lord of the Rings* reads like a panoramic portrait of the depressive state. Depressed people report feelings of powerlessness to be an index of their condition; and just look at how power is distributed on Middle Earth. Aragorn has it, Gandalf has it, Galadriel has it, because of what they are (a king, a wizard, an elf-queen) rather than what they do ... In a politics like this, hobbits are in a subordinate position, always slightly left out ... In the end, hobbits are small and weak and furry-footed, and Tolkien has given tallness and strength and glinting grey eyes far too much weight in his world for this not to count. The politics of *The Lord of the Rings*, in short, comprises a familiar mixture of infatuation with power with [*sic*] an awareness of one's own helplessness beside it. One's best hope, really, is to suck up to the big people, in the hope they will see you all right. It's the perennial fantasy of the powerless. Things would indeed be hopeless were it not for your secret friend the Big Bad Elf-Queen, who will come along when you finally call for her and wreak revenge for you on all the nasty kids at school' (pp. 26-7).

I have quoted at some length from this section because at first I could hardly believe what I was reading; after reading it six times I convinced myself that she really was saying that, and could even just about understand how she could see it that way, but it wasn't an easy position to keep up. It's an uphill struggle to see 'infatuation with power' in a book in which power and control are treated as evils to be rejected at all costs. The way power is distributed in Middle Earth is that the Dark Lord has most of it. Far from being in a subordinate position and slightly left out, the little hobbit is right in the centre of the struggle. The big guys, Gandalf, Aragorn, Galadriel, need him more than he needs them. Gandalf may be a wizard, but he can give orders to no one. Aragorn is a king without a kingdom, who will never get his kingdom without Frodo's help. Galadriel is queen of a passive, fading realm. Only the hobbit can do what is necessary. Our psychic helpers, the Wise Old Man, the Hero and the Muse, naturally appear strong and beautiful when they are working for us, but they can take us only so far. Our small, vulnerable, inadequate self must take the vital step alone, with only the ruthless instinctual Shadow to help. This seems to me a thoroughly constructive message for a depressive reader. Maybe I'm like Frodo, Tolkien is saying, fifty years old and still an adolescent; maybe that terrifying Parent is still there, unfought; but I won't admit defeat yet: I may still find the right combination of courage and good luck and give up what has to be given up in order to make myself whole.

Turner sees the mythology of *The Lord of the Rings* as a product of the grandiosity that is the reverse side of depression: the self-dramatisation that comforts the depressed person without actually doing anything to help him throw off his condition. I, on the contrary, see this kind of myth-making as an essential tool in the integration of the self. It is not grandiose, it is grand: it has to be. Soul-building is a grand enterprise.

The Lord of the Rings can easily be defended against the charge of being (in Freudian terms) 'unhealthy'. That being so, why do Tolkien-haters persist in labelling his writing, as Jenny Turner inelegantly puts it, 'tit' (p.4) - not just basic flagrant tit-for-losers like Mills and Boon or James Bond, but tit-for-losers that pretends to be something more? It seems to me that this whole bundle of accusations comes under the heading of pretexts for disliking Tolkien; it does not reach the heart of the matter. It doesn't account for the fear. And this is where

The Land of Shadow *Lorenzo Daniele*

Reasons for *not* liking Tolkien

we came in. Why does Jenny Turner find Tolkien's appeal to her 'scary' and 'alarming'? Why does the 'infantile comfort' it offers seem to be something as extreme as a 'black pit' (p.4), when all we're talking about here is a naive, well-intentioned story about some furry little people and a magic ring?

One thing that Turner finds sinister about *The Lord of the Rings* is that 'it is a work written to keep the modern world at bay that the modern world adores'. Yes: unlike 'novels', it doesn't just add its little pinch of wisdom to the world we live in, it does a huge amount of compensating for things the modern world can't give us. The 'Tolkien Nearly Ate My Brain' school of thought seems to find this threatening - as though Tolkienites, if they got into Parliament, would construct a real-life Shire where cars would be forbidden and forelock-tugging compulsory. Oh come on. It's not going to happen, because at heart, in their saner moments, not even the most rabid Tolkienites want it to. They know that evil didn't come into the world with the internal combustion engine; that, if there was a real Shire, it would have dog-hanging and ergotism as well as beer and embroidered waistcoats; they know, if nothing else, that in a non-technological world they could never read the book, let alone see the movie, not least because in a non-technological world a Romantic awareness of nature is impossible. This does not make their love of the book hypocritical, any more than it is hypocritical in an agnostic to feel awed when he walks into Chartres Cathedral. It is no longer good for people to live in the bosom of Nature or within mythical systems, or even to pretend to. But it is good for them to remember how it may have felt, and that is one service that Tolkien provides. It is a psychological necessity to pay some sort of due to the things one has done away with, to assimilate what one has killed, to recall what has been lost. But for some modernists, it seems, the fact that we all inevitably progress from medieval to modern to post-modern, from birth through maturity to death, is not enough - we must look neither backwards, downwards nor sideways as we go. Perhaps if one had staked one's all on modernity, one would feel like that.

Tolkienophobia involves a fear of going backwards, and perhaps an equal fear of standing still, as is suggested by the Tolkien-haters' constant refrain of 'Child, you'll never amount to anything if you spend all your time daydreaming.' Tolkien-haters tend to be people in whom the Parental persona is over-represented - busy, bossy, responsible, very anxious for everyone to agree with them. It's an odd contradiction, on the face of it, that people who are mostly of a liberal persuasion - anti-authority, knowing and ironic - should be so concerned to be agreed with. But there is a difference in personality type that goes deeper than class or political allegiance, a difference between those who want to shape events and those who simply want to go their own way. The movers and shakers see all these people in anoraks lolling around in Middle-Earth, dreaming - what are they dreaming? That authority, the ability to control people, isn't everything - that to long for 'honour, power, wealth, fame, and the love of women' is really rather sad - that all these things are merely the ash from the volcano?

Perhaps that's what's scary.

Tolkien-lovers, admittedly, tend to be dominated by the Child persona - nice, dutiful, eager to please, excessively ready to see the other chap's point of view. They find Tolkien reassuring because they know that he, like they, had some growing-up to do. Even at their most truculent they defend him the way a child will react if his mother comes along and accuses him of time-wasting. 'I'm not, Mum, honest - I'm working! Look at all these books I've read and these lists I've made! I've really done my addiction-and-depression homework, look, Mum ...'. It's very difficult for the child not to accept the parent's premises - for him to say instead, 'Yes, I am time-wasting - so what? All the best things in the world have been done by people who waste time. And anyway, what business is it of yours? What's your problem?'

We Tolkien-lovers have to work at becoming adult; that might persuade the Parent types to climb down a bit. But that's still not the whole story. Tolkien-haters aren't mainly afraid that reading too much Tolkien will plunge us into a pro-Christian crusade or an illiberal dystopia; they know that fantasy readers are much too inward-looking and equivocal. They aren't afraid that it will rot the minds of the populace, because they believe the minds of the populace are about as rotten as they can get, anyway, and they're quite at home with that. No, it is Tolkien's happiness, not his depressiveness, that really scares them. It's an existential fear: a fear that one will be proved annihilatingly wrong, and made ridiculous; that the values that have shaped one's entire life will be undermined. Their culture has immersed them in the belief that, however well one's outer life may go, in one's inner life one must Face the Worst. The only true virtue is scepticism. One must never let down one's guard; if anything in the world of ideas seems glorious, there must be a catch somewhere. Joy, wonder, reverence, the Sublime - all these words are merely cues for hollow laughter: they can't really mean anything.

But what if there is no catch? What if there's a whole bright, elvish world out there, where pleasure and wonder come with no price attached? And this is the point of *The Lord of the Rings*: an invitation to experience joy, the 'Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief' that Jenny Turner works so hard throughout her article to dismiss. Yes, joy is 'infantile', and, no, you can't feel it and look clever at the same time. Joy is not *The Lord of the Rings*the answer' to evil, nor does it make up for suffering - if defenders of Tolkien claim this, they play right into his detractors' hands. But it stands alongside them, undiminished by them, as a fact in this world.

Tolkien-haters refuse joy for fear of being deceived. Their predicament was precisely rendered by that smarter-than-they-think writer C.S. Lewis: they are the Dwarfs who Refused to be Taken In. Sitting in a huddle in their imaginary dark prison while the sun shines and the green grass grows all around.

Now that really is scary.

Treebeard's roots in medieval European tradition

Edward Pettit

Ents are one of J.R.R. Tolkien's most striking creations, and, as Leslie Ellen Jones has observed, 'much of their power derives from Tolkien's masterly reworking of traditional themes and material.'[1] This article investigates the origins of Ents and of their leader, Treebeard[2]. It reviews what has been established and identifies Anglo-Saxon and Norse texts whose likely influence has been overlooked.

My aim in doing this is twofold. Firstly, to deepen the reader's appreciation of the 'rootedness' of this aspect of The Lord of the Rings, and to intimate how expertly Tolkien weaves new magic from disparate strands of medieval tradition. Secondly, to highlight old texts that should, on their own merits, appeal to admirers of Tolkien's work.

We should start with what the Professor himself said about Ents in three of his letters:

'As usually with me they grew rather out of their name, than the other way about. I always felt that something ought to be done about the peculiar A[nglo-]Saxon word *ent* for a 'giant' or mighty person of long ago — to whom all old works were ascribed. If it had a slightly philosophical tone (though in ordinary philology it is 'quite unconnected with any present participle of the verb to be') that also interested me.'

'I did not consciously invent them at all. The chapter called 'Treebeard' ... was written off more or less as it stands, with an effect on myself (except for labour pains) almost like reading some one else's work. And I like Ents now because they do not seem to have anything to do with me. I daresay something had been going on in the 'unconscious' for some time, and that accounts for my feeling throughout, especially when stuck, that I was not inventing but reporting (imperfectly) and had at times to wait till 'what really happened' came through. But looking back analytically I should say that Ents are composed of philology, literature and life. They owe their name to the eald enta geweorc of Anglo-Saxon, and their connection with stone. Their part in the story is due, I think, to my bitter disappointment and disgust from schooldays with the shabby use made in Shakespeare of the coming of 'Great Birnham wood to high Dunsinane hill': I longed to devise a setting in which the trees might really march to war. And into this has crept a mere piece of experience, the difference of the 'male' and 'female' attitude to wild things, the difference between unpossessive love and gardening.'

'I have no recollection of inventing Ents. I came at last to the point, and wrote the 'Treebeard' chapter without any recollection of any previous thought: just as it now is. And then I saw that, of course, it had not happened to Frodo at all.'[3]

To these observations must be added the words of Michael Tolkien, quoted by Daniel Grotta:

'The true explanation for the invention of ents ... is that Tolkien's son Michael asked that they be put in the story. "From my father I inherited an almost obsessive love of trees: as a small boy I witnessed mass tree-felling for the convenience of the internal-combustion engine. I regarded this as the wanton murder of living beings for very shoddy ends. My father listened seriously to my angry comments and when I asked him to make up a tale in which the trees took a terrible revenge on the machine-lovers, he said, 'I will write you one."'[4]

The following sections examine the three elements that J.R.R. Tolkien identified: philology, literature and life.

Early English Texts and the *Oxford English Dictionary*

The word 'Ent', then, comes from Old English – Tolkien's main field of academic study – where, in both literature and topographical names, it denotes some kind of mighty creature. Scholars usually translate Old English *ent* (plural *entas*) as 'giant', since the Anglo-Saxons used it to render Biblical Latin gigas and gigantes (Genesis 6, 4) and to describe the giant Goliath. They also used it of Hercules, the Cyclopes and Nimrod, the original warrior, hunter and city builder.[5]

The Anglo-Saxons considered entas to have been builders, especially of huge stone edifices, whether Roman or prehistoric. The words *eald enta geweorc* ('old work of 'ents'') are found in The Wanderer, an Old English elegiac poem, where they describe empty buildings:

Ypde swa pisne eardgeard ælda scyppend
oppæt burgwara breahtma lease
eald enta geweorc idlu stodon.
'Thus the Creator of men laid waste this dwelling-place
until, deprived of the sounds of city-dwellers,
the old work of ents stood idle.'[6]

In *The Ruin* - another Old English elegy - the 'work of ents' is not just empty, but ruined. The poem's description of what may be Roman Bath begins:

Wrætlic is pes wealstan! Wyrde gebræcon;
burgstede burston; brosnaþ enta geweorc.
'Wondrous is this wall-stone! Fated events broke it;[7]
the city buildings burst apart; the work of ents decays.'[8]

1. Jones (2002: 68).
2. I capitalize the first letter of the word 'Ent' when referring to Tolkien's creatures, to help distinguish them from their Old English forebears.
3. Carpenter (1981: 208, no. 157; 211, no. 163; and 231, no. 180).
4. Grotta (1992: 106).
5. See Bosworth and Toller (1898), Toller (1921), and, for the equation with Hercules, Bately (1980: 220).
6. Lines 85-87 in the edition of the Old English text by Klinck (1992: 78). Translations in this article are mine, unless otherwise indicated. For full translations of the Old English poems mentioned see Bradley (1982).
7. The second half of this line was also formerly rendered as 'the Fates destroyed it'.
8. Lines 1-2. Old English text from Klinck (1992: 103). Jones (2002: 63) mistakenly attributes the words *eald enta geweorc* to *The Ruin*.

Editor's note: the Old English character 'thorn' is throughout this paper represented by the letter *þ*.

Tolkien took this association with stone ruins and used it as part of the basis of the Ents' assault on the stones of Saruman's Isengard. The name of Saruman's tower comes from *Maxims II*, a third Old English poem containing the formula 'work of ents':

> *Cyning sceal rice healdan. Ceastra beoð feorran gesyne, orðanc enta geweorc, þa þe on þysse eorðan syndon, wrætlic weallstana geweorc.*
>
> 'A king must guard his kingdom. Cities can be seen from afar, the orðanc ['skilful'] work of ents, those which[9] are on this earth, wondrous works of wall-stones.'[10]

Ironically, though, Orthanc is not built by Ents, but comes into their possession through conquest.

The association of *entas* with old constructions is also made in the Old English *Andreas*. This poetic account of the ministry of St. Andrew describes roads as *enta ærgeweorc* ('ancient work of ents') and uses *eald enta geweorc* - the same words found in The Wanderer and, as we shall see, Beowulf - to describe a building's storm-beaten pillars.[11] The saint speaks to one of these pillars, and gets a river to burst from it to overwhelm his evil tormentors. Perhaps this contributed something to Tolkien's story of how the Ents breached the dams at Isengard.[12]

The elegiac epic *Beowulf* refers to *entas* four times:[13]

i. In line 1679 *enta ærgeweorc* describes the hilt of the giantish sword with which Beowulf slew the mother of the giant Grendel.

ii. In line 2717 *enta geweorc* describes the stone arch and pillars forming the entrance to the dragon's lair.

iii. In line 2774 *eald enta geweorc* describes either the dragon's hoard or its chamber.

iv. In line 2979 we find the only instance of the Old English adjective entisc 'entish' (whence Tolkien's Entish language): an *entiscne helm* ('entish helmet') worn by the Swedish King Ongentheow is broken by a blow from an ancient giantish sword (*ealdsweord eotonisc*).

Here, again, is the association of entas with ancient stone buildings. But what is otherwise unparalleled is the creatures' forging of sword and, apparently, helmet. Perhaps Tolkien got the idea from this — and the links with Hercules, Nimrod, the Cyclopes and the antediluvian giants — that Ents were formidable fighters.[14]

The *OED* - to which Tolkien contributed[15] - does not record Old English *ent*, as the word is not found again in English literature before Tolkien[16]. The *OED* does, however, record three other words spelt the same way, each with a distinct meaning and derivation. When Tolkien writes of the word's "slightly philosophical tone (though in ordinary philology it is 'quite unconnected with any present participle of the verb to be')", he is referring to the second of these. This obscure word, which came from Latin *ens, -tis*, meant 'existent' or, more specifically, 'The Ent, i.e. the existent unity ... which reason discovers behind the variety and mutability of things'. It may have suggested to Tolkien that Ents are somewhat removed from the quotidian matters of the world beyond Fangorn Forest. As Verlyn Flieger says: "Tolkien seemed to want to re-connect the word *ent* to the verb 'to be,' that is, to the primal notion of 'being' ... And so, while Treebeard, like many other characters in The Lord of the Rings, went through changes in the course of his creation, one idea behind him may be at least as old as nature itself."[17]

Tolkien also made use of the OED's third 'ent' word: the dialectal and colloquial variant of 'isn't' (compare 'ain't'). As Flieger again observes, this word lies behind Treebeard's punning explanation to Merry and Pippin that 'There are Ents and Ents, you know; or there are Ents and things that look like Ents but ain't, as you might say.'[18]

Given this, Tolkien would surely also have noticed the OED's first entry for 'ent': 'a scion or graft'. This 17th-century word comes, we learn, via French *ente* from, ultimately, the same source as Old English *impa* ('a young shoot of a plant or tree; a sapling; a sucker, slip, scion'), a word that came to be used of small devils and is now familiar as 'imp'.[19]

The word *impa* (or perhaps *impe*) was best known to generations of students of medieval English literature as the first part of the later compound noun *ympe-tre* ('grafted tree'), found in the Middle English romance *Sir Orfeo*. In this poem, the hero's wife Heurodis (Greek Eurydice) sits beneath an *ympe-tre*, goes to sleep and falls into the power of the fairies. This is a narrative motif - probably of Celtic origin - also found in other romances, notably the French *Tydorel*, which calls the tree an *ente*.[20]

This, I suggest, is one reason why Tolkien linked Ents with trees. Another is presumably the simple fact that, given time, tree roots can ruin stonework.[21] Tolkien may well also have been struck by a coincidental semantic likeness between the

9. Grammatically, the words translated 'those which' could refer to either the cities or the entas.
10. Lines 1-3. Old English text from Shippey (1976: 76).
11. Lines 1235 and 1495 in Brooks (1961).
12. Tolkien's account of the rescue of Frodo and Sam from the foot of Mount Doom recalls another memorable passage from Andreas. St. Andrew, having reached the far-off slopes of the evil kingdom of Mermedonia, wakes his weary followers who are lying beside him. They tell him that 'eagles came journeying in flight over the surging of the waves, exulting in their wings; they took the souls from us as we slept, happily ferried them aloft in flight' (lines 863-6). Compare Tolkien's description (1954-5: VI, 77): 'Side by side they lay; and down swept Gwaihir, and down came Landroval and Meneldor the swift; and in a dream, not knowing what fate had befallen them, the wanderers were lifted up and borne far away out of the darkness and the fire.'
13. Quotations are from Klaeber (1950).
14. For references to entas in Old English literature, see s.v. 'ent' in Bosworth and Toller (1898) and Toller (1921). The former also records the word *entcyn* ('ent-kin'/'giant-race'). The association of *entas* with buildings is, arguably, also seen in line 21 of the poem Elene; see Gradon (1977: 27).
15. See Gilliver (1995) and (2002).
16. Old English ent derives from an earlier, unrecorded form anti and is cognate with New High German enz ('monster'), according to Holthausen (1974). Note that ent is a different word from eoten (Old Norse iötunn), which also means 'giant' and appears in its later form Etten- in Tolkien's Ettendales and Ettenmoors.
17. Flieger (1993: 88). Compare Treebeard's words in Tolkien (1954-5: III, 72): 'well, I am an Ent, or that's what they call me. Yes, Ent is the word. The Ent, I am, you might say, in your manner of speaking.'
18. Tolkien (1954-5: III, 73).
19. Note also medieval Latin enta ('root, plant, sapling') in Latham (1965).
20. See Bliss (1966: xxxv-xxxvii). In his preface, Bliss acknowledges the debt his edition owes to Tolkien. The poem was best known from Sisam (1921), which includes Tolkien's 'A Middle English Vocabulary'. For Tolkien's translation see Tolkien (1975: 115-30).
21. Jones (2002: 63).

Treebeard's roots in medieval European tradition

OED's first 'ent' and one instance of Old English *ent*. In the first homily, titled *Sermo de initio creaturae*, of the late 10th-century Catholic Homilies by the monk Ælfric of Eynsham we read:

Da syððan wearð mancyn purh deofel beswicen, and gebiged fram Godes geleafan, swa pæt hi worhton him anlicnyssa, sume of golde, sume of seolfre, sume eac of stane, sume of treowe. And sceopon him naman, pæra manna naman pe wæron entas and yfeldæde, eft pa ða hi deade wæron. pa cwædan pa cucan pæt hi wæron godas, and weorðodon hi, and him lac ofredon. And comon pa deoflu to heora anlicnyssum and pæron wunedon and to mannum spræcon swilce hi godas wæron.[22]

'Then mankind became deceived by the devil, and turned from God's belief, so that they made themselves images, some of gold, some of silver, some also of stone, some of wood [*treow* 'tree']. And they gave them names, names of those people who were giants [*entas*] and wicked, after they were dead. Then the living said that they were gods, and honoured them, and offered them gifts. And then devils came to their images and dwelled therein and spoke to people as if they were gods.'

Here we see that Old English *ent* could, in this specific context, denote a tree - and a talking one at that. This instance of *ent* is so striking and prominent that it seems unlikely that Tolkien would have overlooked it. In fact, it is tempting to suggest that the homily's association of giantish *entas* with wickedness and deception, together with the later notion of abduction under an *ympe*-tree, contributed to Tolkien's earliest conception of Treebeard. This was as an evil forest giant who captured Gandalf and held him prisoner, and who deceived Frodo by feigning friendliness while being in league with the Enemy.[23]

The idea that Ents are in a sense grafted, hybrid creatures may add credence to Verlyn Flieger's argument that Treebeard owes something to the portrayal of the Green Knight in the Middle English romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, to which Tolkien devoted much scholarly attention.[24] The Green Knight - who, like Treebeard, is sometimes thought (rightly or wrongly) to be a manifestation of a vegetation-god or of the so-called Green Man common in church sculpture[25] - is described as 'half a giant' (*half etayn*).[26] And not only is he bright green, but he has a beard like a bush and carries a bundle of holly.

Old English texts contains several other instances of talking trees and plants. Though they are not linked to *entas*, they would have encouraged Tolkien to make his Ents members of a line that stretches back to antiquity. For, as one student of the Green Man observes: 'The tree that speaks has a long history in Western literature: from Virgil to the Wood of the Suicides in Dante's *Inferno*, from Spenser's *Faery Queen* to Paul Valéry's poem to the Plane, from George Macdonald's *Phantastes* ... to Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*'.[27]

The *Dream of the Rood* is an Old English poem that survives both in manuscript and, in part, in runes on the Ruthwell Cross in Dumfriesshire.[28] The former version describes Christ's Cross as a 'most wonderful tree' (*syllicre treow*), the 'best of woods' (*wudu selesta*), towering over the four corners of the Earth. The tree tells, among other things, of how it was cut down long ago and set up as a crucifixion cross; of how it dared neither bend nor - though it easily could - slay its enemies when Christ approached it; and of how it was wounded by the nails driven through Christ's body. In this poem, then, Tolkien learnt of a huge ancient tree that spoke,[29] suffered physical pain and mental anguish, had huge latent destructive power, but that was, above all, a force for the redemption of men. The parallels with Ents - and especially Treebeard - are obvious.

The *Nine Herbs Charm* is one of the most remarkable literary survivals from pre-Conquest England. This verse incantation is part of a collection of charms and prayers known as the *Lacnunga* ('Remedies'), other parts of which probably contributed to Tolkien's creation of Gollum, the Black Riders, the Witch-King's stabbing of Frodo, and his cure by Elrond[30]. The incantation concerns the properties and actions of nine (or so) plants. Some lines resist definite interpretation, but we need consider only part of the text here.

Gemyne ðu, Mucgwyrt, hwæt pu ameldodest,
hwæt pu renadest æt Regenmelde.
Una pu hattest, yldost wyrta;
ðu miht wið III 7 wið XXX,
pu miht wip attre 7 wið onflyge,
pu miht wip pam lapan ðe geond lond færð.

'Remember, Mugwort, what you declared,
what you brought about at the Divine Proclamation.
You are called One, oldest of herbs;
you have power against three and against thirty,
you have power against poison and against flying disease,
you have power against the loathsome one that travels throughout the land.'

22. Text from Clemoes (1997: 186), but with my punctuation, capitalization and silent expansion of abbreviations. The passage has 'no obvious source ... and it is not clear which Biblical period Ælfric is describing', according to Godden (2000: 13).
23. See Tolkien (1988: 363, 382-4); also Flieger (2000: 154).
24. Flieger (1993). For the Middle English text of the romance see Tolkien and Gordon (1967); for Tolkien's translation see Tolkien (1975). For studies of Tolkien's creative use of this poem see Shippey (1995) and Schlobin (2000).
25. In addition to Flieger, see Sibley (2002: 137). However, Brewer (1997: 181-2) and MacDermott (2003: 11-14) dismiss any link. There are many Green Men in Oxfordshire, including the University, where Tolkien spent much of his academic career: see Hicks (2000: 52-3); also Doel and Doel (2001: 148).
26. Note, though, that Middle English *etayn* derives from Old English *eoten*, not from *ent*.
27. Anderson (1990: 33). Tolkien would also have read about talking trees in Grimm (1883-8: II, 652-3).
28. For the texts see Swanton (1987). For translations see Clancy (1998: 121-5).
29. Allen and Calder (1976: 51-8) and Swanton (1987: 66) give other instances of trees and crosses that were thought to speak. The Cross actually claps in triumph in a famous hymn, the *Vexilla regis* ('King's Banners') by Venantius Fortunatus, sixth-century bishop of Poitiers; this hymn is thought to have influenced the Old English poet.
30. See Pettit (2001: II, 34-5) and (2002: 39-44).

Stune hætte peos wyrt, heo on stane geweox.
'This plant is called Resounding, it grew on stone.'
pis is seo wyrt seo wip wyrm gefeaht.
'This is the plant that fought against the snake.'

Gemyne pu, Mægðe, hwæt ðu ameldodest,
hwæt ðu geændadest æt Alorforda,
pæt næfre for gefloge feorh ne gesealde
sypðan him mon Mægðan to mete gegyrede.
'Remember, Camomile, what you declared,
what you brought to an end at Alderford,
that life should never be lost on account of flying disease
after Camomile was prepared for them as food.'[31]

Here, again, we find plants that can apparently talk and fight enemies. At least one of the plants is ancient; another resists stone; and a third acts to save the lives of men. Still more intriguing is the possibility that there was a meeting of plants - including, perhaps, the crab-apple tree and the alder - at Alderford, where they made a great proclamation against an evil in their land. All this brings to mind not just the Ents, but their Entmoot.

An 11th-century Anglo-Saxon translation of Halitgar's *Penitential* preserves yet more evidence for early English belief in talking plants:

Sume men synd swa ablende pæt hi bringaŏ heora lac to eorðfæstum stane and eac to treowum and to wylspringum swa swa wiccan tæcaŏ and nellaŏ understondan hu stuntlice he doŏ oðde hu se dæda stan oðde pæt dumbe treow him mæge gehelpan oðde hæle forgifan, pone he sylfe ne astyiriaŏ of pære stowe næfre.
'Some men are so blinded that they take their offerings to a stone made firm in the earth and also to trees and wells, just as witches teach them, and such a man will not understand how stupidly he acts or how this dead stone or that dumb tree can help him or give him health, when these things, for their part, can never move from that place.'[32]

As one commentator on this passage observes, "the words 'that dumb tree' (*pæt dumbe treow*) imply that late Anglo-Saxon backsliders believed that their trees could talk".[33] It would doubtless be going too far to argue that the passage also implies belief in walking trees, but, strange as it may seem, there is one early British poem that preserves this idea.

Battling Trees in Old Welsh

Leslie Ellen Jones has drawn our attention to the medieval Welsh *Cad Goddeu* ('The Army of the Trees' or 'The Battle of the Trees'), a startling poem that contains an account of trees going to war.[34] The following lines, taken from Patrick Ford's tentative translation, are especially striking:

'Alder, pre-eminent in lineage, attacked in the beginning;
Willow and rowan were late to the army;
Thorny plum was greedy for slaughter;
Powerful dogwood, resisting prince;
Rose-trees went against a host in wrath;
Raspberry bushes performed, did not make an enclosure
For the protection of life ...'[35]

If Tolkien knew this poem, whether at first hand or through a translation[36], it would surely have heightened his disappointment with Shakespeare's account of the movement of Birnham Wood to Dunsinane in *Macbeth*. It would also have strengthened his resolve to put the matter right. Hence, perhaps, the emphatic march of the Ents on Isengard.

Old High German and the Entwives

As at least one commentator has noted[37], Tolkien's word 'Entwife' probably represents Old High German *Enziwib*, a word recorded under *ent* in the standard dictionary of Old English.[38] This work refers us to Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie*, where the word appears as the proper name *Enzawîp*.[39]

An equivalent word is not, to my knowledge, found in Old English. This linguistic 'separation' may well have given Tolkien the idea that the Ents had 'lost' their Entwives.[40]

Old Norse Tree-Men and Treebeard

Another of Tolkien's early loves was Old Norse literature. This large body of texts preserves several instances of a close link between, or even a fusion of, trees and men (which is how the reader naturally thinks of Ents). However, commentators on Tolkien's sources seem to have overlooked them.[41]

Firstly, it was common for Norse poets to describe men as trees. To give just four examples out of dozens, a man can be called *askr* ('ash tree'), *viðr Báleygs* ('tree of Báleygr [the god Óðinn]'), *hlynr Gunnar* ('maple of Gunnr [a valkyrie]') and *sigrpollr* ('victory-fir').[42]

Secondly, according to an account based on the Eddic poem *Völuspá* ('Prophecy of the Seeress') in Snorri Sturluson's 13th-century *Prose Edda*, the first man and woman were 'trees' (*tré*) - perhaps, actually, logs or driftwood. They were brought to life by the three sons of Borr, one of whom is better known as the god Óðinn (Odin):

pá er peir Bors synir gengu með sævar ströndu, fundu peir tré tvau, ok tóku upp tréin ok sköpuðu af menn. Gaf hinn fyrsti önd ok líf, annarr vit ok hræring, priði ásjónu, málit ok heyrn ok sjón. Gáfu peim klæði ok nöfn: hét karlmaðrinn Askr, en konan Embla.
'As Borr's sons were walking by the sea shore, they came

31. Lines 1-6, 14, 18, 23-6. Text and translation adapted from Pettit (2001: I, 60-3). Tolkien could have known this poem from several sources, including Cockayne (1864-6: III), Grendon (1909), Dobbie (1942) and Storms (1948).
32. Text and translation from North (1997: 276).
33. North (1997: 277). 34. Jones (2002: 63-8).
35. Ford (1977: 184-5). These lines are also quoted by Jones (2002: 65).
36. Such as the mid-Victorian one by D.W. Nash, best known today from its use in Graves (1961). This translation, though unreliable, still conveys the sense of fighting trees.
37. Stenström (1993: 55 n. 5).
38. Toller (1921). 39. Grimm (1883-8: II, 524).
40. For Noel (1977: 124), though, 'the separation of the Ents and Entwives, each loving a particular type of land, recalls that of the Scandinavian god Njörd from his wife Skadi, daughter of the giant Thjazi.'
41. At least, they are not mentioned in any of the main works that discuss Tolkien's use of Northern sources in The Lord of the Rings: Bates (2002); Bryce (1983); Carter (2003); Chance (2003); Day (1994) and (2003); Flieger (1993); Harvey (2003); Heinemann (1993); Noel (1977); St. Clair (1995a); Shippey (1979), (1992) and (2000). I have not seen St. Clair (1970).
42. For lists see Meissner (1921: 266-72) and http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/ugm/kennings/warrior.html; cf. North (1997: 286).

At the Grey Havens — *Jef Murray*

across two *tré*, and they picked up the *tré* and made people out of them. The first gave breath and life, the second consciousness and movement, the third a face, speech and hearing and sight. They gave them clothes and names: the man was called Askr ['Ash'], and the woman Embla [?'Elm'].'[43]

This is suggestive of Tolkien's elves teaching the Ents to speak.

The clothing of the *tré* described in the *Prose Edda* leads us to my third, and most striking, group of instances, which describe the Old Norse *trémaðr*. The literal English translation of this word - 'tree-man' - is found early in *The Lord of the Rings*, where it describes the story's only giant:

'All right', said Sam, laughing with the rest. 'But what about these Tree-men, these giants, as you might call them? They do say that one bigger than a tree was seen up away beyond the North Moors not long back.'[44]

Two naked tree-men receive clothing from (probably) Óðinn - and feel much better for them - in stanza 49 of the Old Norse Eddic poem *Hávamál* ('The Sayings of Hávi [Óðinn]'):

Vaðir mínar gaf ek velli at
tveim trémönnum;
rekkar þat póttusk er þeir rift höfðu;
neiss er nøkkviðr halr.
'In the country I gave my clothes
to two tree-men;
they thought themselves champions when they had clothing;
a naked man is shamed.'[45]

If these tree-men are not just scarecrows, they may well be wooden idols, possible precursors of which have been found in Danish bogs[46] and are reported by the Arab Ibn Fadlan, who met Swedish vikings on the middle Volga in 921-2.[47] That, at least, seems to be a meaning found elsewhere. In *Flateyjarbók* (1860-5: I, 403), for example, an idol associated with the fertility god Freyr is described by a Christian as *eigi kvikr maðr, heldr einn trémaðr* ('not a living man, but a tree-man'), though the pagans who worshipped it had thought differently. Elsewhere in the same collection, *porleifs páttr jarlsskálds* ('The Story of Thorleif Jarl's Skald') describes how a driftwood log was carved in the shape of a man, which, when animated by the insertion of a human heart, walked and talked to people. This wooden man also fought with a spear.

Most intriguing of all is the tree-man in the final chapter of *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar* ('Saga of Ragnarr Hairy-Breeches'). This saga, which was written down in the 13th century, has links with the well-known *Völsunga saga*, whose influence on Tolkien has often been noted.[50] The last chapter of *Ragnars saga* includes a stanza that brings to mind stanza 49 of *Hávamál*. But the chapter's striking parallel to Treebeard is the most important thing here.

Frá Ögmundi danska

Ögmundr er maðr nefndr, er kallaðr Ögmundr inn danski. Hann fór eitthvert sinn með fimm skipum ok lá við Sámsey í Munarvági. þá er þat sagt, at matsveinar fóru á land at gera mat til, en aðrir menn fóru í skóg at skemmta sér, ok þar fundu þeir einn trémann fornan, ok var fertugr at hæð ok mosavaxinn, ok sá þó öll deili á honum, ok ræddu nú un með sér, hverr blótat mundi hafa þetta it mikla goð. Ok þá kveðr trémaðrinn:
'þat var fyr löngu, er í leið megir
Hæklings fóru hlunnalungum
fram um salta slóð birtinga,
þá varðk þessa þorps ráðandi.
Ok því settumk svarðmerðlingar
suðr hjá salti, synir Loðbrókar;
þá vark blótinn til bana mönnum
í Sámseyju sunnanverðri.
þar báðu standa, meðan strönd polir
mann hjá þyrni ok mosa vaxinn;
nú skytr á mik skyja gráti,
hlyr hvárki mér hold né klæði.'
Ok þetta þótti mönnum undarligt ok sögðu síðan frá öðrum mönnum.

Which in English is:

About Ögmundr the Dane

'There was a man called Ögmundr, who was called Ögmundr the Dane. On one occasion he journeyed with five ships and arrived at Munavágr off Sámsey.[51] Then it is said that the cooks went ashore to prepare food, but other men went to a wood to enjoy themselves. There they found an old tree-man [trémann]. He was forty [ells] tall and covered with moss, and yet all his features were visible. Now they discussed among themselves who would have sacrificed to this great god. And then the tree-man says:

'It was long ago, when the sons of Hæklingr
went forth on their course in ships
across the salty track of fishes,[52]
that I became steward [*ráðandi*] of this habitation [*þorp*][53].
'And so warriors set me up
south by the salt-sea, the sons of Loðbrók;
at that time men were sacrificed to me
in the southern part of Sámsey.
'There they bade the man [i.e. the *trémaðr*] stand, as long
as the coast endures,
beside a thorn-bush, and overgrown with moss;

43. Text from Faulkes (1982: 13), with slight changes to spelling and punctuation. Tolkien would probably have read this text in Jónsson (1931: 16). For a full translation see Faulkes (1987).
44. Tolkien (1954-5: I, 58). It is unclear whether Tolkien's Tree-men are Ents. Christopher Tolkien entertains the idea in Tolkien (1988: 254), but also notes that "long before my father had referred to 'Tree-men' in connection with the voyages of Earendel". See also Stenström (1993). It may be worth noting that in the 1470s the Dutch artist Hieronymus Bosch made a drawing known as 'The Tree Man': see http://www.abcgallery.com/B/bosch/bosch1.html.
45. Text and translation adapted from an edition and translation of the *Elder Edda* that I am preparing. For published editions see Evans (1986); also Neckel and Kuhn (1983: 17-44).
46. See Glob (1969: chap. 6). Amusingly, modern artists are now producing distinctly Ent-like figures of Green Men - for example, in Stewart Park, Middlesbrough; see Harte (2001: 18).
47. See Evans (1986: 94). 48. See Evans (1986: 93-4).
49. See Bachman (1992: 28).
50. For example, by Shippey (1992) and St. Clair (1995b).
51. The Danish island of Samsø. 52. The sea.
53. The meaning of Old Norse *porp* is disputed here. The word usually means 'habitation, farmstead, hamlet', but might sometimes mean 'group'. The sense 'bare hillock' has also been proposed. See Evans (1986: 95-7).

now the tears of clouds[54] beat upon me;
neither flesh nor cloth protects me.'
And this seemed wonderful to the men, and they later told other people about it."[55]

There are, of course, differences between this tree-man and Treebeard. For example, unlike Tolkien's Ent, the Norse tree-man is apparently an idol, erected by men and worshipped with human sacrifice. But here, as usual with Tolkien's treatment of medieval sources, we are probably dealing with selective imaginative recreation, not wholesale borrowing. At least, the similarities between this *trémaðr* and Treebeard seem to far outweigh the differences. Both characters are:

i. Ancient 'tree-men'. Treebeard, the oldest living thing in Middle-Earth, 'looked almost like the figure of some gnarled old man, standing there'.[56]

ii. Guardians of a forest.

iii. Able not just to speak, but to recite verse.

iv. Tall. Treebeard is 'a large Man-like, almost Troll-like, figure, at least fourteen foot high'.[57] At an earlier stage in the story's conception he was 'about 50 feet high'.[58]

v. Moss-covered, but with visible features. Treebeard's beard was 'mossy at the ends',[59] and his eyes were memorable.

vi. At least partly unclothed. 'Whether [Treebeard] was clad in stuff like green and grey bark, or whether that was its hide, was difficult to say. At any rate the arms ... were ... covered with a brown smooth skin.'[60]

vii. Lonely, melancholy, largely forgotten, and very aware of the passing of time and of their world.

viii. Awe-inspiring creatures who take visitors to their woods by surprise.

One last text adds still more weight to the argument that Old Norse literature influenced Tolkien's conception of Ents. And it does so in a startlingly simple way. The early 13th-century *Orkneyinga Saga* ('Saga of the Orcadians') tells of a Danish Viking who died on Orkney. His name was *Þórir tréskegg* - 'Thorir Treebeard'.[61]

'... and Life'

In this article I hope to have cast new light on Tolkien's imaginative synthesis of philology and literature by supplementing the findings of Tom Shippey, Verlyn Flieger and Leslie Ellen Jones. In portraying the Ents and Treebeard, Tolkien seems to draw on all four English 'ent' words (the 'philology'), and to pull together ancient ideas about giants, sentient trees and tree-like creatures found in English, Welsh, German and Norse texts (the 'literature').[62]

The third element - Tolkien's experience of life - appears more straightforward, but no less important. Treebeard's 'Hrum, Hroom' sound is an affectionately comical take on C.S. Lewis's booming voice, and perhaps of Tolkien's liking for the clarinet.[63] But what is far more significant is that Ents are the main fictional manifestation of Tolkien's love and respect for trees. These feelings are also clear in his letters[64], artwork[65] and other fiction, especially *The Silmarillion* and *Leaf by Niggle*.[66] According to one of his friends, Ents reflect aspects of the Professor's character too: 'They are charming and lovable with, also, the sadness characteristic of the author, a sadness that underlies much of his humour.'[67]

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54. Rain.
55. My translation, based on the text of chapter 20 in Jónsson (1950: I, 284-5); see also, especially for difficulties in the text and interpretation of the second and third verses, McTurk (1991: 17-30). Tolkien would probably have read this chapter in Olsen (1906-8: 174-5 and 221). For an English translation of the whole saga, see Schlauch (1930:185-256), though this book puts the verses into rhyming form and cannot be relied on to convey their exact meaning. The first stanza is also found, in a different context, in the second chapter of the (?)14th-century *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* ('Saga of Hálfr and Hálfr's Champions'); see Jónsson (1950: II, 96-7) and Seelow (1981: 170).
56. Tolkien (1954-5: III, 70).
57. Tolkien (1954-5: III, 71).
58. Tolkien (1988: 410).
59. Tolkien (1954-5: III, 71).
60. Tolkien (1954-5: III, 71).
61. See Guðmundsson (1965: 10-11), and Pálsson and Edwards (1978: 28-9). Thorir Treebeard is also mentioned in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla; see Hollander (1964: 82). Cf. the Old Norse kenning *kinnskógr* ('cheek-forest'), which describes an old giant's beard in stanza 10 of the Eddic poem *Hymiskviða* ('The Lay of Hymir'); see Neckel and Kuhn (1983: 89).
62. Other medieval words and ideas may also be relevant to the origins of Ents and Entwives, though lack of space prevents detailed consideration of them here. Three examples: (i). the Old Norse *íviðiur* ('wood-giantesses'), best known from *Völuspá* stanza 2 (see Dronke 1997: 7, 110); (ii). various kinds of Germanic wood-spirit (see Grimm 1883-8: II, 478-87, 553, Noel 1977: 123-5, and Barber and Riches 1971: s.v. Woodwives); (iii). the Old and Middle English 'woodwose' (*wuduwasa, wodwo(s)*) — whence Tolkien's Woses — and the notion of 'wild men of the woods'; see Noel (1977: 89), Andrew and Waldron (1987: 235, l. 721), Shippey (1992: 60n) and (1995: 216), and Flieger (2003). The various wood-spirits of the Finnish *Kalevala* should also be mentioned. So too must the *vårdträd* ('guardian tree') found on Scandinavian farmsteads; it declared and exacted terrible vengeance on anyone who wronged it or cut it down (see Tolley 1996: 95).
St. Clair (1995a: 64) claims that Ents derive from the Norse concept of Yggdrasill, the world-tree. She also finds a Norse parallel to Old Man Willow's attempt to engulf Pippin.
63. See Carpenter (1977: 198), Pearce (1998: 70) and Ellison (2002).
64. See, for example, Curry (1995: 130) and (1997: 65), which cite a letter Tolkien sent to *The Daily Telegraph*: 'In all my works I take the part of trees as against all their enemies'.
65. See the many drawings and paintings of plants in Hammond and Scull (1995).
66. Tolkien (1977) and (2001).
67. Sayer (1995: 21).

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Seeing things

Lynn Forest-Hill

Listen to me! I never touched your goats, and it wasn't my fault your bridge fell down! I was only using a bit of rotten plank to defend myself Call off your hounds!'

And the smallest Billy Goat Gruff went trip trap, trip trap, over the rickety bridge that spanned the river that ran past the village that lay in the deep green valley.

'Don't stare at me like that, and don't whisper. There is no point in whispering to each other, I know what you're saying. I've heard you, down there in the village, and ... what are you gawping at? You came onto the mountain to find me, didn't you? Well here I am. Not what you expected, is that it? Worse, I suppose, yes, that's it, isn't it? To be better would be to be like you, and as you see, I'm not. So why haven't you run away at the sight of me? Never seen me like this before, have you, in full view out in broad daylight. In the past just a glimpse was enough to send the whole village into a panic. You all do a lot of shouting when one of you thinks he catches sight of me in the shadows. So much panic, so much gathering up of children, and loosing of hounds, nasty, mean brutes, and all that shouting: "It's a troll, it's a troll! Help! Help, it's that ugly old troll!" Never actually found me, though, did you? Not for all that crashing about in the thickets. Even your hounds couldn't find me down in the valley, and you'd never have found me up here with them or without them, if it hadn't been for that goat. Not so noisy now, are you! You or your hounds.'

And where do you think you're going? it asked ferociously.

'Long ago I used to wonder why your kind were so afraid of me that they behaved like that. When they arrived and made their dwellings all over the best hunting grounds and didn't want to share them I thought they were afraid because I was so much better at hunting than they were, and that when they called me 'ugly old troll' it was their way of speaking their fear. Then I thought it was because your kind are different. Just because I don't look like you, that's no excuse for jumping to conclusions about me. Do you think the rocks you are standing on are ugly, or the bark of the willows down by the river? I have never seen any of you shrink from them. Do you avoid looking at the long strands of weed that wave in the river current? Do you think your cats' claws are cruel when they catch rats, or your hawks' talons when they take mallards out of the sharp winter air.

I didn't want anyone to be afraid of me, but what would be the alternative? Well even if I could be, would I like to be pink, and smooth, like a piglet? I suppose you don't notice it if you're born that way, not unless someone points out that it isn't very practical. And would I want to be stretched out like you? You all look so uncomfortably stretched. And you keep changing your colour, like birds that moult and then forget what colour they were before, changing your plumage as the wind changes, as if you are never quite sure who you are. Why don't you say something?'

My brothers and I are going across the bridge to eat the sweet green grass on the other side, said the smallest Billy Goat Gruff.

'I know what it is, you didn't expect me to talk to you, did you? That's why you're struck dumb now. But since you don't understand anything else it's as well I can speak your language and I'm prepared to make the effort to communicate.'

And we're not afraid of any old troll!

'Old, you always call me old, why do you do that? Do you really think you're the measure of all things: that yours is the only language, your sight the only sight, your time the only time? Let me tell you, this language of yours isn't nearly enough to accommodate everything I have to say; and I see you as being almost inconceivably brief. Here and gone, only your prejudices have any duration, passed down from generation to generation like a squint, or a wryed back. You are so brief you don't have time to learn, to understand, to develop wisdom. Like butterflies that only have time to feed and breed and cease. Time changes you so rapidly I should pity you if it didn't make you so unpleasant. Ah, the things I could teach you: the language of the wind coming out of the west murmuring of fair days and soft rains, or crying in the cast of storms coming to the mountains all round the valley with great snows; or whispering over the grass the terrible news of Frost coming out of the north. Frost the mighty, Lord of the North, Frost my father. But you would not understand.'

Oh, please, don't eat me! begged the smallest Billy Goat Gruff. I wouldn't make much of a meal, but my brother is coming and he's much bigger.

'I must say I find your behaviour puzzling. After all these ages avoiding me you come running out of your village hol-

Seeing things

lering at your hounds and shouting that I demolished your bridge. You go frightening the animals in the meadows with your noise, scattering them and leaving them unattended. Easy prey, wouldn't you say, for any observant troll? Oh, don't look so nervous. I won't eat you! But this valley is my hunting territory, although you have quite never understood that. Now, in spite of your fears you come day after day, your voices echoing up through the forest and your clumsy feet clattering on the scree as you blunder onto the mountain. And who are you? The fat-faced butcher waving his knife so it catches the sunlight; the hoary handed rope-maker who talks faster than he runs; the filthy-handed blacksmith and his son, grimy with the smoke from the fire in their forge and carrying their hammers; beardless farmers' boys waving reaping hooks and blowing horns, and the weaver, the carpenter and the cobbler who have left their gloomy workshops to come blinking and panting in the bright clear mountain air. Oh yes, I know you all, as I knew all those who dwelt here before you, and you are not hunters.'

So the troll let the smallest Billy Goat Gruff go, and he went trip trap, trip trap over the bridge that spanned the river that ran through the deep green valley.

'Hunters! I hear you boasting of your successes around your hearths in the long winter nights, but I think I am the best hunter, being the quietest. Mind you, I will say, the things you make make good shadows, like the one under the bridge. I like to fish there. As my hair meshes with the weeds I become invisible. You look startled again. That's what I mean about the way you see things. There's nothing remarkable about being invisible, and more things seem to be invisible than visible to your kind, who seldom look closely at anything and for the most part only see what they want to see. If the colour of my hide, that you seem to dislike so much, does not blend well enough once I leave the dappled shadows under the trees, I have only to shake out my hair. As you see, it is long enough and dark enough for me to he able to move as hazy and silent as the shadow of clouds across the meadows, even on the brightest day. So it's easy to become just another shadow between your dwellings as the sun slips down behind the western peaks - to watch you and to listen to your chatter.'

The middle Billy Goat Gruff stepped up onto the bridge, and he went trip trap, trip trap, over the rickety bridge that spanned the river that ran past the village that lay in the deep green valley.

For pity's sake! This is an insult to my intelligence! Thirteen years I spent learning, my craft and what do these peasants want? Childish drivel, cheap entertainment, just so long as it doesn't disturb their complacent opinions of themselves.

'I have watched how your kind - men - hunted down those few from whom I learned and to whom I once spoke this stunted tongue of yours. I heard the screams and cries of those to whom I had talked in the shelter of the twilight and the trees. Tell me, why did you destroy them? Why should you leave one of your own hanging from a branch like a shrike's meal, or set it about with withering flames until its being has ceased? Is it because you are so easily made and destroyed that you value your own kind so lightly?'

Where do you think you're going? the troll demanded.

'We, that you name trolls, are very rare, did you not know that? Our being begins far to the north. There my mother the mountain rises up, with her sisters, fair and mighty, far beyond the sight of men. On nights when the stars glitter as crowns about their heads, the Frost comes, hard and penetrating. Then we, trolls if you like, begin, shattered from our mothers, but without being. For that there must be lightning. When lightning strikes a shattered fragment, in that moment we take on being, eyes opening to peals of thunder greeting the newly created. No other creature is so, so complete in its beginning. We are not taught, as other creatures are, and it is only through being that we come to knowledge. Nor do we begin and end in helplessness, but over many ages return again to rock without being, unless we too are pierced and split by the Frost, our father.'

I'm going across the bridge, said the middle Billy Goat Gruff.

'In the distant time before men came to this valley I lived here. Aurochs still grazed by the river then, and I thought after so many winters fleeing from the peril of the north, I had at last found a place where I would be able to live and hunt in peace, for here the power of the Frost is lessened.'

oh no, you're not, said the troll, threateningly.

'There were boars and deer in the forest, and pheasants and rabbits in the meadows, and fish of course, trout and pike. That's what I was doing in the river, in the shadow of the bridge, I was tickling trout, without success, I may tell you, because of those goats clattering overhead. You really should have done something about that bridge sooner, it's been falling to pieces for years. Why didn't you build it of stone in the first place? That never occurred to you, did it? But you must know that stone lasts, unlike wood. If you had made it again when it grew rickety you'd still have a bridge, and I would not have suffered this pain and ignominy.

But anyway, there I was up to my neck in the deep water and the deep shadow, absolutely still, as you have to be, when clatter, clatter, and bits started falling off the bridge. It completely ruined my fishing. I looked out to see what was happening and that's when I saw the first of the goats, so I thought since all the fish would have been scared away by the falling wood, I might as well have the goat instead, but it was just a skinny kid, so I left it.

How your storytellers delight in speaking of screams and struggles that never took place. And Oh! The bulging eyes and rivers of blood. Ha! One bite into the ridge-bone is all it takes, if your teeth are sharp. Children stuffed alive into sacks and

carried off struggling into the night? Don't be ridiculous, not even starvation would make me so careless. Let me tell you the real story.

In the time of the long famine much that had being then weakened, sickened and ceased its being. The land was cold and wet, flowers did not bloom, fruit did not ripen. Even the grass was blighted. Being was not easy in that time. I had moved long before, across the river from the pleasant woods and meadows around the village, up onto the mountain, away from the stones and the snarling hounds and men, only coming over the river to hunt, because you men make it so easy. Hens in the hayricks, pigs in the copses, sheep in folds and goats around the dairies. The village boys with their whistles and horns drowsed in the shade on hot summer days when the sun came out, just as they do today, and didn't hear me. But in the days of dearth there was no easy hunting. The forests were empty except for the wolves. Your kind, having nothing else, ate their plough horses and their hounds, and even their own kind. I starved too at that time, and I can tell you, you taste remarkably like pig, if cooked with care. But I wouldn't recommend it except in such straitened circumstances. Those that can be caught are usually too old and tough or too small to make much of a meal. Ah, you are not used to thinking of yourselves like this. Yes, it comes as a shock to know how others see you. The memory of that bitter time and its desperate need has almost been lost from your stories. In them it has been replaced by a fascination with the thought of being eaten which has its beginnings not in what the wolves and I did, but in those distant memories that the storytellers cleverly make invisible so they no longer disturb you.'

Oh, said the middle Billy Goat Gruff, you don't want to eat me, I'm really too skinny. My brother's coming and he's MUCH bigger.

'What was I saying ... pig, wasn't it? I was never fond of pig, gives me indigestion. But goat is quite in order: goat, sheep, chicken, duck in season, fish of course, nice plump, crunchy trout or pike.

Now, please don't think I'm doing anything threatening but I have to move. I am so uncomfortable wedged between this boulder and the rock face. You wouldn't believe how I'm bruised from being butted up here. I haven't been able to hobble far from where I landed over there. Six days, aching, trying to move away, and listening.'

Then the great big Billy Goat Gruff stepped up onto the bridge.

Call this a story? I've got the real story, here in my head, just as it happened, and no one wants to hear it!

'It is known among all creatures that while the right to prey may be contested, whatever may be caught is fair game. I continue to hunt my food as I have always done. I have never looked for trouble and confrontation with you men, and there would have been none now, if it hadn't been for that skinny, red-haired, capering storyteller with hide the colour of goose fat, lazing like a cat in the shade under the alder branches. Not much of a storyteller though, a gossip, wasting the seeds of wisdom in a flow of unproductive words. A tell-tale who could have been a great teller of tales.'

I know it sounds extraordinary, I was just sitting under the alders that shade the river on the far side of the bridge, working on a new tale, a nice undemanding story with a happy ending, when I saw the goats. It was the sound of their hooves on the bridge that made me look up.

'But - why can't I communicate with you without using that word! Anyway - that's better - anyway, there she was. I saw her as I looked out from under the bridge. I did not think she could see me, so I climbed out after the skittish kid and its companions, and she made no sign or sound. The little one I let pass, it was too small. The next one was larger. It was a female, but the big one was right behind it, hunting in his own fashion I fancy, because as soon as he saw me he put his head down in the most threatening posture. That was when I tore out a plank to defend myself. I was reluctant to stay on the bridge in daylight, as you can imagine, but I knew if I turned to get away the goat would attack. I was going forward expecting to scare it when it charged. I brought the plank down between its horns. If the wood had been sound I would have taken his head off, instead I was left with a handful of splinters, see ... very painful, but not as painful as being hit by those huge horns.'

I tell you, I couldn't believe my eyes when that thing emerged ftom the shadow under the bridge. At first I couldn't make out what it was. It started as just a movement in the water, like ripples in the shadow. Then I realised something was swimming out of the shadow towards the side of the bridge. It climbed out so quietly the goats never heard it. And the most amazing thing - it had such long hair, streaming with water all down its back. It wasn't more than four or maybe four and a half feet tall, and it was going after the second goat. I was close enough to be able to see the tips of its white fangs gleaming against its bottom lip, and its long curved claws flexing. I don't think it could have seen me, though, and I kept very still, not wanting to scare it away, because it reminded me of something I couldn't quite bring to mind. Bits of old stories from this part of the mountains that I had learned years ago began buzzing in my head. One was just a little rhyme, a silly bit of childish doggerel: 'little man, nimble man, not a man. Dapple fell, fangs as well, 'ware the strong jaws and curved claws. Over the meadow it moves like shadow.' Irritating stuff, doesn't scan. But that wasn't important. I knew at that moment, for the first time in my life I had a story, a real story! No more repeating meaningless words, reciting someone else's language as if it were mine. I had seen a troll!

No one has seen a troll for centuries. They say they see trolls, but when I say 'Tell me what it looked like,' they admit it was probably just a shadow shaken

by the wind, or the scrabble of a rat in the undergrowth. The last sighting in the valley that's recorded in any tale was six generations ago, in the year they burned Raggy Lyddi and hanged her cat because she had been seen talking to trees. Not that any sensible story- teller would mention that - not if she wants to eat. People don't like being reminded of their past barbarities, and to be fair, that was the last burning, though they seem to have hanged a few since then for talking out of turn.

'As if my discomfort and lack of success were not enough I have had to sit here for the last six days and listen to the story-teller's piping voice exaggerating the whole sorry episode and turning my misfortune into a joke. The sound carries a great distance in the mountains, you know. Trip trap, trip trap, and all that prancing around. I'm a troll, trol de rol, I'm a troll, trol de rol, and I'll eat you for supper! How embarrassing! And people laughing and clapping. Did you believe her? Did you really think I popped out and sang to those goats? Did you think I would make such ridiculous sounds?

That's why you've come, isn't it? The story-teller has made you think I'm stupid and nothing to be afraid of, not like the huge horrible trolls you have always told your children would come an carry them off and eat them if they were naughty. So her silly story made you brave.'

I ran back to the village - I haven't run like that since my father caught me - well, that's not important. What was important was the tale I had to tell. I told everyone I could find, but they didn't believe me! They called me a fool and told me to stop wasting their time. Then one of the farm lads turned up shouting that the bridge was down. I'd forgotten that in my excitement, but I told them: the troll went to hit the biggest goat with a plank it had wrenched out from the side of the bridge. I don't remember ever hearing that trolls used tools or weapons, but anyway, when it pulled out the plank the whole bridge shook, then when the goat charged and butted the troll the shock demolished the bridge completely. The goat ended up in the water. I saw it scrambling out on the far side of the river when I looked round from watching the troll sailing through the air. I felt rather sorry for the thing when it hit the mountain like that. I could see dust and stones fly up because the troll landed where the mountains are closest to the river as it bends past beyond the village.

The people heard and got agitated then. A village council was called. As an outsider I wasn't allowed to be there, but when it was over the blacksmith and the rope-maker came to the farm where I was lodging. They took me aside. Look, they said, whatever you saw, it couldn't have been a troll, everyone knows what trolls are like, big, ugly, nasty things, and if, after all these years of telling tales about big, ugly, nasty trolls, you go around saying you've seen a troll that was only four feet tall being knocked around by a goat, no one will believe you. It would sound ridiculous. Everyone knows what trolls are like and it won't do your livelihood any good.

'What is this murmuring, what have I said?'

I have been coming to this valley with its neat little village and hide-bound inhabitants for years. Now I had that one great story that would really mean something because it was new, and it was mine. A great story isn't put together, it's mined out of experience. A lot of dross and rubbish has to be cleared away and skimmed off until the form that was there all the time emerges. I thought I saw that happening when I saw the troll.

The men smiled at me when I told them that. You tell good tales, they said, you make us laugh, you make us cry, you scare us, and cheer us up, don't spoil things for yourself. And they went off to join the search party that was being organised.

I tried to tell them, don't go rushing up the mountain, it's still a predator, and you've no idea if the butt has injured it or simply made it angry and really dangerous. They took no notice of me, a whole band of hot-heads ran off, shouting and trying to catch up with their dogs.

'What are you looking at? Constantly shifting your attention from me? I thought at first you were still trying to avoid looking at me, I know your kind find me a disagreeable sight. What is it over there? Oh, the sunlight in the rocks - is that it? Didn't you know that some rocks have sunlight trapped in them? Pretty isn't it? Same colour as my eyes. Or like a patch of buttercups, if you prefer. It's useless, of course, you can't eat it, and nothing grows on it, not even lichen. That is where I landed, the rock split open when I hit it. As you see I haven't been able to move far.'

For five days they went scrambling around on the mountain, but when they came back down on the last evening they were chattering like old women. The blacksmith said they had heard me when they were up there, he congratulated me on doing a good job of keeping everyone amused while they were away.

'What are you whispering about now?'

I didn't give up that easily though, but like the rope-maker said, if the villagers told their friends and relatives in the other valleys that I was a troublemaker, how would I live then? So I made my troll story foolish enough to satisfy them, foolish enough for it to be obvious that there is more to it, if anyone has the wit to see it, or cares to mine for the buried treasure.

'More? Yes, there's more. Show you? Yes, I can show you, but the climb is difficult for your kind who don't see well and are not at all nimble. Goats? What do you mean 'goats for it'? You mean you'd give me goats for showing you pretty rocks? How strange you men are.'

'And one white tree':

the cosmological cross and the *arbor vitae* in J.R.R.Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*

Christopher T Vaccaro

Does the cross of Christ appear in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*? The answer to this question is complicated. Certainly, Tolkien would have expressed impatience with the allegorical implications presented by the argument that the cross does appear, however subtly. Though Tolkien conceded that his heroic epic remains, "a fundamentally religious and Catholic work,"[1] he insisted that, "the Third Age was not a Christian world."[2] The tree, for the inheritors of medieval Christian doctrine and typology, is (though not exclusively so) a Christian symbol. For this reason and because Tolkien had spent so much of his time working closely with early "germanicised" Christian texts, one can argue that a number of images in *LotR* ought to be read within an early Christian framework or may in fact correspond (both for its readers and for its author) to Christian symbols. Such a correspondence, I argue, does exist in the appearance of the White Tree of Gondor.

The image most cohesively appears towards the end of the novel [*Return of the King*, Book VI, chapter 5 "The Steward and the King"]. Aragorn, with Gandalf's assistance, enters a hallowed space, recovers a sapling of the then withered White Tree and plants it in the Court of the Fountain. Knowledge of the sapling is delivered by Gandalf:

> 'Verily, this is a sapling of the line of Nimloth the fair; and that was a seedling of Galathilion, and that a fruit of Telperion of many names, Eldest of Trees. Who shall say how it comes here in the appointed hour.'[3]

Within a few months, the sapling grows swiftly and by June, "it was laden with blossom."[4] That the sapling signifies the future fecundity of Aragorn's reign, and of the Fourth Age more generally, is foreshadowed earlier in the chapter in the last two stanzas of an eagle's triumphant song:

> Sing and be glad, all ye children of the West,
> for your King shall come again,
> and he shall dwell among you all the days of your life.
>
> And the Tree that was withered shall be renewed,
> and he shall plant it in the high places,
> and the City shall be blessed.
> Sing all ye people![5]

Tom Shippey astutely recognizes in this eagle-song echoes of specific Biblical Psalms, which endow the lines with a double meaning. The lines are at once about the coming of Christ and NOT about that at all, but about a situation entirely void of Christian elements.[6] Images and characters in LotR are open to numerous though not innumerable interpretations. Even a quick glance search through the Douay-Rheimes Bible, however, makes evident the close parallels between that text and the stanzas of the eagle's song. The Psalms contain a number of pronouncements to sing for joy while Ezechiel 17 contains a combination of images that loosely resembles the final scenes at Minas Tirith: there are eagles, and tender twigs of a young vine that are planted on a mountain high and eminent. A footnote reads the tender twig as Christ.

Beyond the passage on the sapling, the White Tree appears on the surcoats of the Guards of the Citadel along with many pointed stars, calling to mind the phrase emerging from Middle-earth folklore: "Seven Stars, Seven Stones, and One White Tree."[7] In the chapter "Minas Tirith," in Book 5 of Return of the King Pippin recalls these words of Gandalf as he sees for the first time the remains of the dead Tree of Gondor:

> A sweet fountain played there in the morning sun, and a sward of bright green lay about it; but in the midst, drooping over the pool, stood a dead tree, and the falling drops dripped sadly from its barren and broken branches back into the clear water. (25)

The power of the scene derives from the evocative description of the tree; it literally hangs there, broken and dead. Droplets of moisture fall from its head to pool at its feet. The spectacle itself calls for the tree's interment; however, it remains standing for all to see, an image of grief.

The White Tree most closely associated with Gondor's history specifically and the Second and Third Ages of Middle Earth more generally, is Nimloth, the sacred tree of Numenor, the land from which Elendil and his sons Isildur and Anarion fled. A history and interpretation of the White Tree would be better illuminated in the light of the source material Tolkien drew upon. As a practising Catholic, Tolkien would have been familiar with those texts in the Bible that spoke of the image of the divine tree. As a medievalist, this familiarity would have become a professional necessity. Located by the fountain of the shining white city of Minas Tirith after the coming of Aragorn,the new king, the rebirth of the White Tree resonates with Christian scripture and with influential and informative medieval texts, both Christian and pagan. Much of this material concerns the cosmological nature of the cross and its traditional link to the world pillar and *arbor vitæ* (the Tree of Life). These texts are full of images of the sacred tree whose branches stretch out into the heavens and whose roots reach into the world's centre. The tree's very presence signifies a community's faith in the presence of the divine within the materials of the earth. It suggests abundance, fecundity, and regeneration.

The Tree of Life is a central image in the Old and New Testaments. Genesis 2:9 describes the Tree of Life that stands at the center of the Garden of Eden: *"produxitque Dominus Deus de humo omne lignum pulchrum visu et ad vescendum suave lignum etiam vitae in medio paradisi lignumque scientiae boni et mali,"* [The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil].[8] Likewise, a great tree appears in King Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 4: 8-9 and is recognized as an image of the

king himself:

magna arbor et fortis et proceritas eius contingens caelum aspectus illius erat usque ad terminos universae terrae, folia eius pulcherrima et fructus eius nimius et esca universorum in ea. [The Tree was great and strong, and the height of it reached the heavens and it was visible even to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were most beautiful and its fruit exceeding much, and in it was food for all.][9]

Here, and again in Isaiah, a tree is interpreted as a king, usually Christ. In Isaiah 11: 1, the symbolic reference is to a rod that emerges from the root of Jesse: *"et egredietur virga de radice Iesse et flos de radice eius ascendet"* [And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root]. Root in this case denotes a familial branch. The messiah was to come from the family of David[10].

Similar trees appear in John's New Testament vision of New Jerusalem (Revelations 22:2):

in medio plateae et ex utraque parte fluminis lignum vitae adferens fructus duodecim per menses singula reddentia fructum suum et folia ligni ad sanitatem gentium. [In the midst of the street thereof, and on either side of the river, was the Tree of Life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruits each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations].

I do not wish to spend much time on the symbolic readings available in these passages. What seems to be most significant is the connection made between the nourishing fruit and or leaves of these trees and the health of the community. In the New Testament, this fruit is read as Christ. His birth and rebirth bring salvation to the world. A *LotR* correspondence is found in (Isildur-whose health returned with the blossoming of Nimloth's Scion, and) in Aragorn-whose restoration initiates the appearance of the sapling and the marriage of Gondor's king to Arwen.

Medieval English legends concerning the early history of Christ's cross most likely familiar to Tolkien make associations between the Tree of Life in Paradise and the beam of wood used to crucify Christ. One legend extant in Old and Middle English manuscripts recounts how Adam's son Seth buried his father along with seeds from the Tree of Knowledge in the spot [usually considered the center of the earth] where Christ would be hung. The tree that would grow from those seeds would eventually yield the very beam of wood used for Christ's cross. The irony of this history was not lost on medieval Christians. Ninth through to eleventh-century hymns influenced by the sixth-century cross hymns *Pange Lingua, Vexilla Regis,* and *Crux benedicta Nitet* of Venantius Fortunate often recognized that the Tree that initially condemned humanity and banished Adam and Eve eventually became the very "Tree" on which the Christian saviour would be suspended. *Pange Lingua* [or Sing, my Tongue] explains:

De parents protoplast fraud fact condoles,
quanta poi oxalis mortem moors corrupt,
ipse lignum tunic nativity, adman ligni at solve ret [4-6]
[Grieving at the harm done, to the first born of the creator, when he fell in death by the bite of the harmful apple, He (Christ) himself even then honoured a tree in order to undo the damage caused by a tree.]

And concerning the divine nature of this tree *Vexilla Regis* [Standard of the King] announces:

Impleta sunt que cecinit, David fideli carmine
dicendo nationibus: 'regnavit a ligno deus.' [13-16]
[It has happened as he told, David, in faithful song,
saying to the nations: 'god ruled from a piece of wood.']

Crux Benedicta Nitet [The blessed Cross Shines] speaks of the cross as a sweet and noble wood [*dulce et nobile lignum*] (9) whose leaves shine with a brilliant light:

to plantata micas, secus est ubi cursus aquarum,
spargis et ornatas flore recente comas.
appensa est vitis inter tua brachia, de qua
dulcia sanguineo vina rubore fluunt. [15-18]
[Planted near where waters flow, you shimmer,
and you spread wide your foliage adorned with
fresh flowers.
Between your branches the vine hangs, from which
comes sweet wines, red as blood.]

From the inclusion of these hymns into the liturgy, the cross came to be known as that Tree from which Christ, the salvific fruit, was hung.[11] Latin hymns were not the only source of inspiration, however. The Anglo-Saxon church historian, the Venerable Bede, supplied analogous Christian material concerning the cosmological nature of cross, its centrality. He wrote in his description of specific holy places (De Locis Sanctis) concerning the restoration of a man's soul by the cross in the center of Jerusalem. At the site of this resurrection stands a column, which casts no shadow on the summer solstice:

Unde putant ibi mediam esse terram et historice dictum: Deus autem rex noster, ante saecula operatus est salutem in medio terrae.[12]
[From this they reckon that the centre of the earth is at that spot and that literally true is the saying, but God our king, before the ages, effected salvation at the centre of the earth.]

The image persists in vernacular texts as well. The canonical Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood* in its display of germanicised Christianity, depicted Christ's cross as a shining tree in its opening lines.

puhte me pæt ic gesaw syllicre treow
On lyft lædan, leohte bewunden,
Beama beorhtost. (4-6)[13]
[I thought that I saw a wondrous tree,
spreading aloft, wound with light,
a most brilliant beam.]

The poem is a dream vision in which the cross appears as a shining tree that speaks to the dreamer concerning Christ's Passion. The poet uses Old English words for tree (treow, beam, and wudu) to refer to the cross nine times. What is most striking about the poem is its display of affective piety. As the dreamer looks on, he notices the blood issuing from the tree. When the rood-tree speaks, it speaks of its torment, its wounds given at the time of Christ's crucifixion: "Me those valiant men left to stand covered with blood; I was thoroughly wounded by sharp points" (61-62). Likewise, the tree is buried and at a later point retrieved. The rood experiences Christ's suffering at the time of the crucifixion and the dreamer by extension does the same.

One of the eighth-century riddles recorded in the eleventh-century *Exeter Book, Riddle 28* shifts ambiguously between images of a tree branch and the cross. I give the riddle in full as it appears in Craig Williamson's edition:

1 *Ic eom legbysig, lace mid winde,*
bewunden mid wuldre, wedre gesomnad,
fus forðweges, fyre gebysgad,
bearu blowende, byrnende gled.

The stairs of Cirith Ungol — *Lorenzo Daniele*

Ful oft mec gesipas sendap æfter hondum
pæt mec weras ond wif wlonce cyssaþ.
ponne ic mec onhæbbe, ond hi onhnigap to me
monige mid miltse, pær ic monnum sceal
ycan upcyme eadignesse.[14]

[I am troubled by fire, played with by the wind,
wrapped with glory, united with the storm,
ready for the journey, agitated by fire,
the blooming grove, the burning ember.
Very often friends pass me from hand to hand,
exultant men and women, in order to kiss me,
when I raise myself, and they bow to me,
many (people) with joy, there I shall for the men
increase the up-swelling of happiness.]

The riddle's presence underscores the popularity of the tree/cross image in medieval church culture. Moritz Trautman argues that the riddle first refers to a branch (lines 1-4) and then the cross (lines 5-9), and I am inclined to agree with him.[15] The fecundity embraced in the imagery provides a sense of the cross's transformation from a tree, harassed by the elements, to a cross, worshipped with joy (*monige mid miltse*), and ultimately ensuring the fertility of the earth (*ycan upcyme eadignesse*) and the health of the community. The health of the land as well as the salvation of souls was the jurisdiction of the *arbor vitae*.

Images from pagan Scandinavia analogous to the Christian *arbor vitae* image were influential as well. The most well-known is that of Yggdrasil, the great ash tree which stands at the centre of the world. Appearing in the *Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241), Yggdrasil was a divine tree that (as with the tree that grew form Adam's mouth) emerged from the cosmological centre of Middle-Earth:

> The ash is the best and greatest of all trees; its branches spread out over the whole world and reach up over heaven. The tree is held in position by three roots that spread far out; one is among the Æsir, the second among the frost ogres , and the third extends over Nifleim.[16]

Like the rood, Yggdrasil was known for bearing the weight of the god Odin who discovered the power of runes while suspended from the tree. Lastly, the Kalevala presents an image of an immense though evil oak tree whose high and thick branches cover the light of the sun and moon:

> Then the branches wide extended, and the leaves were thickly scattered,
> And the summit rose to heaven, and its leaves in air extended.
> In their course the clouds it hindered, and the driving clouds impeded,
> And it hid the shining sunlight, and the gleaming of the moonlight.
> Runos II, [81-89]

Interestingly, a great hero who emerges from the sea dressed all in copper armor wielding a great axe cuts the tree:

> Six the stones on which he ground it,
> Seven the stones on which he whet it. [Runos II, 163-64]

The warrior ground and sharpened his axe against seven stones before felling the majestic tree. Perhaps through his Cauldron of Story this very passage made its way into Tolkien's Numenorean folklore.

The last pagan image relevant to this subject is the Irminsul. The Irminsul was a holy pillar, often made of oak, thought to symbolize Thor's power and that of the sky. One saga in the thirteenth-century Icelandic *Landnámabók* tells of a great tree that washed ashore when a settler prayed to Thor for a "high-seat" pillar for his hall in Iceland. These pillars supplied luck and protection to the hall and bestowed on the community the power of the sacred grove. Such a tree-pillar appears in the *Volsunga Saga*, which Tolkien so greatly appreciated. After the birth of his fair children, Sigmund and Sigli, King Volsung built a hall for himself:

> So says the story that King Volsung let build a noble hall in such a wise, that a big oak-tree stood therein, and that the limbs of the tree blossomed fair out over the roof of the hall, while below stood the trunk within it, and the said trunk did men call Branstock.[17]

The cosmological cross and its Scandinavian analogues, like the sapling discovered by Aragorn, invoke the fecund powers of the earth and promote the growth of the community. A closer investigation into Tolkien's masterpiece will allow us to recognize the interesting parallels between it and the texts on the *arbor vitae*.

The history of the image within Tolkien's mythology goes something like this. It first appears in the Silmarillion when the goddess Yavanna engages in the sacred act of creation. Through her song, two shoots spring from the earth growing quickly into the two sacred trees of Valinor. Of the two [one shining gold, the other silver], it is the future and function of Telperion, the silver, that concerns us here. The Tree enjoys an a priori position as sacred object from the beginning of time:

> Telperion was the elder of the trees and came first to full stature and to bloom; and that first hour in which he shone, the white glimmer of a silver dawn, the Valar reckoned not into the tale of hours, but named it the Opening Hour, and counted from it the ages of their reign in Valinor.[18]

It is hard not to hear an distant echo of Genesis even at this early stage. A second version of the White Tree appears a short while later in the Elven city of Tirion atop the green mound Tuna. Yavanna offers it as a gift to those first children of Iluvatar newly arrived in Valinor:

> And since of all the things in Valinor they loved most the White Tree, Yavanna made for them a tree like to a lesser image of Telperion, save that it did not give light of its own being; Galathilion it was named in the Sindarin tongue. The tree was planted in the court beneath the Mindon and there flourished, and its seedlings were many.[19]

Tolkien continues to strongly associate the White Tree with the highest and most central court of each realm as we see here in Tirion; it becomes the center of each society. Its presence marks the degree of devotion to the gods and the height of a realm's glory. This is true of the human kingdom of Numenor as well.

From Celeborn planted in Tol Eressea, one of Galathilion's many seedlings, comes Nimloth to Numenor. The seedling is giving to Elros, the first king of Numenor, by the Eldar as a gift, and Elros plants the Tree in the King's court at Armenelos, "the fairest of cities"[20]

> And the Tree grew and blossomed in the courts of the King in Armenelos; Nimloth it was named, and flowered in the evening, and the shadows of night it filled with its fragrance[21].

Interestingly, Armenelos is located at the foot of the great mountain Meneltarma, "the Pillar of Heaven". Meneltarma is

the cosmological centre of Numenor and thus of the world of men. It is a hallowed site, "And it was open and unroofed, and no other temple or fane was there in the land of the Numenoreans."[22] The care Nimloth receives is a direct indication of the degree of faithfulness of the Numenorean kings[23]. Ar-Gimilzor, the twenty-second king, was the greatest enemy of the Valar and of the Faithful residing in Numenor. When mentioning the king, Tolkien quickly associates his rebellion with the Tree's abandonment.[24] Ar-Gimilzor's son, Inziladun, [adopting the Elvish titleTar Palantir], re-establishes the Tree's care and, "prophesied, saying that when the Tree perished, then also would the line of the kings come to its end."[25] During the reign of Ar-Pharazon, the twenty-fourth and last king, Nimloth meets this end for in bad judgment he had demanded that Sauron be seized and brought from his tower, Barad-dur, to the Isle of the Sea Kings, a move that Sauron was very willing to make. Very slowly Sauron successfully persuaded the elderly Ar-Pharazon that the Eldar and Valar had no intentions other than to keep men from enjoying the beauty and immortality of the Undying lands. Once the king was convinced, the Tree was in jeopardy despite the prophecy relating the Tree's health to the line of kings. However, before Sauron could persuade the king to cut down the White Tree, Amandil, leader of the Faithful, spoke to his son Elendil and his two sons Isildur and Anarion. His identity disguised, Isildur took the initiative, quietly entered the forbidden ground, and stole a fruit from the Tree. Having brought the fruit to his grandfather, Isildur collapsed. At this time, Tolkien makes a point to associate the health of the Tree with the life of the Faithful. Isildur was brought back to health, avoiding death when the scion of Nimloth was planted and began to blossom:

> But when its first leaf opened then Isildur, who had lain long and come near to death, arose and was troubled no more by his wounds[26].

Remarkably, the Tree is bound to the life of mortal men and displays potent salvific powers. Its blossoming restores the king's health.

The fate of Nimloth itself serves as a register of men's devotion to the gods. The king's decision to cut it down serves as a useful metaphor for the severing of loyalties, the triumph of irreverence exemplified in Sauron's very presence. The cut trunk of the White Tree was thrown first into the altar fires of the new temple to Sauron's Lord, Morgoth, which was set up in its place[27]. Tolkien tells us only that, "men marveled at the reek that went up from it, so that the land lay under a cloud for seven days, until slowly it passed into the west."[28] Numenor for all intents and purposes had become a nation of rebels and wicked tyrants. When Ar-Pharazon disregarded the Ban set against sailing to the Undying Lands and marched his soldiers to the base of Tuna itself, Numenor was condemned. The destruction was terrible and complete as the sea opened up to engulf the Island in a passage reflective of the legend of Atlantis and sharing a thematic resemblance to the first great destroying flood. In fact, Tolkien suggests as much in his letter to Robert Murray written in 1954. Referring to it as, "a kind of Noachian situation," Tolkien muses on the religious attitudes of the remaining Numenoreans. Very few escaped; only Elendil and his sons together with nine ships of faithful soldiers managed by the grace of Iluvatar to make it to Middle Earth, and as we might expect, "in the ship of Isildur was guarded the young tree, the scion of Nimloth the Fair."[29] Perhaps the tree is a suitable metaphor for those who were to inherit, in Tolkien's words, "the hatred of Sauron, the friendship of the Elves,(and) the knowledge of God." Speaking of the 'hallow' of God, Tolkien remarks:

> It later appears that there had been a 'hallow' on Mindolluin, only approachable by the King, where he had anciently offered thanks and praise on behalf of his people; but it had been forgotten. It was re-entered by Aragorn, and there he found a sapling of the White Tree, and replanted it in the Court of the Fountain[30].

"Only approachable by the king," must mean that the Aragorn as "the King Returned" had entered a space in which the dimensions of the divine and material worlds overlapped.

The Scion of Nimloth was planted at Isildur's citadel, Minas Ithil, as a "memorial of the Eldar and the light of Valinor in 3420."[31] When Sauron took the citadel in 3429, he destroyed the Tree once again, but not before Isildur [in a repeat performance] carried away yet another fruit. In 3440, Anarion was killed during the siege of Barad-dur; Sauron was defeated the following year. Elendil and Gil-galad were both slain. This marked the end of the Second Age.

Two years into the Third Age, Isildur planted the fruit of the Tree at the court of Minas Anor; he then traveled North with his new heirloom, Sauron's ring[32]. Anarion's offspring became more closely associated with the White Tree and the Court of Gondor once Isildur and his three oldest sons were killed on their way to Eriador. His fourth son, Valandil remained in North and became King of Arnor eight years later. The line of Anarion continued from Meneldil to Earnur who in 2050 was challenged, betrayed and captured by the Lord of the Nazgul, never to be seen again. During the reign of Anarion's line, the Tree does die during the Great Plague [1636-37] as does the King Telemnar and his two sons. Tarondor, the twenty-seventh King [1636-1798] planted a seedling of the Tree in the Court of the Fountain in 1640, and perhaps is responsible for the planting of the sapling Aragorn discovers. Despite the death of the last king in 2050, the White Tree does not die immediately. The relationship is not a tight one-on-one comparison. What is certain is that the Tree's fate continues to be connected to that of the kings. Appendix A tells of the Tree's fate in 2852:

> When Belecthor II, the twenty-first steward, died, the White Tree died also in Minas Tirith; but it was left standing 'until the King returns', for no seedling could be found[33].

With the return of the king to Gondor, the fate of the Tree will be resolved; restoration and fertility joined. The mournful presence of that dead Tree remained until that cold afternoon when Aragorn found its sapling. As seen in the passage from *The Return of the King*, the sapling's discovery at the 'hallowed' ideological center of Middle-earth is concurrent with the restoration of the King, the re-establishment of a kingdom faithful to the Valar and friends to the Eldar, the recovery of religious knowledge and the renewal of the earth. *The Silmarillion* covers the event in a similar manner:

> Thus peace came again, and a new Spring opened on earth; and the Heir of Isildur was crowned King of Gondor and Arnor, and the might of the Dunedain was

lifted up and their glory renewed. In the courts of Minas Anor the White Tree flowered again...and while it grew there the Elder Days were not wholly forgotten in the hearts of the kings[34].

The Tree symbolizes all that Tolkien considers virtuous in humanity. Its life connotes reverence and a perceptive understanding of not only the potential for humans to perform acts of goodness, but of their destiny within the scheme laid out by the Valar. Commitments made long ago are remembered as is the glory of humankind. Through its repeated deaths, the suffering of the world is made manifest. With its rebirth, wounds are healed and salvation is brought to Middle-earth.

Conclusion

I'll wrap up this argument with another passage from Tom Shippey who captures the appropriate and precise process of Tolkien's sub-creation. Referring to Tolkien's deliberate avoidance of undeniable Christian imagery, Shippey writes:

"Tolkien did right normally to avoid such allusions, to keep like the author of Beowulf to a middle path between Ingeld and Christ, between the Bible and pagan myth. The care with which he maintained this position (highly artificial, though usually passed over without mention)is evident, with hindsight, on practically every page of The Lord of the Rings."[35]

The tree/cross conflation was well established in the Middle Ages and, as a medievalist, Tolkien would have been very familiar with that. The White Tree is Yggdrasil, the Icelandic Irminsul, Volsung's Branstock, and a brighter version of the Kalevala's mighty oak. Maintaining an artful balance between the Biblical tradition and original fairy-story, Tolkien gives us an image that begs for Christian interpretation. The White Tree, as a cosmological artifact, supplies visible traces of attributes associated with the most significant Christian symbol. The White Tree is the world pillar of Middle-earth and register of one's faith in God. It shines brilliantly, resides at the cosmological centre of the community, and supplies the kingdoms with bounty and salvation and the promise of years of peace.

Notes

1. Letters 172.
2. Letters 220.
3. J.R.R. Tolkien, *Return of the King* (1955; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983) 250.
4. Ibid.
5. *Return of the King* 240.
6. Tom Shippey. *The Road to Middle-earth.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003) 200-01. A second example of this occurs with the date of Sauron's defeat. Tolkien chooses the twenty-fifth of March which was widely recognized as the date of the Crucifixion. Tolkien would remind us, however, that Sauron is not exactly the devil. March 25th is about the crucifixion and not about it.
7. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien.* (Ed.) Humphrey Carpenter. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000) # 163.
8. All Latin biblical citations are taken from Jerome's Vulgate version, *Biblia sacra: iuxta Vulgatam versionem* 2 vols. 2nd ed. B. Fischer et al. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1975.
9. The image of the Tree in Daniel appears in the Anglo-Saxon manuscript Junius 11 in an Old English translation.
10. I need to thank Matthew Dickerson of Middlebury College for bringing the image of "the root of Jesse" to my attention.
11. See Inge Milfull's *The Hymns of the Anglo-Saxon Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) and A.S. Walpole's well-known *Early Latin Hymns* (London: Routledge, 2000).
12. Bede, "De Locis Sanctis," Corpus Christianorum, *Series Latina* 175 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1965) 251-80b.
13. Michael Swanton ed., *The Dream of the Rood,* Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000. The translation is my own, though I found S.A.J. Bradley's translation [Anglo-Saxon Poetry, London: Everyman's Library, 1982] an invaluable guide.
14. Williamson, 85.
15. Numerous other critics have concluded the riddle's answer to be a ship, a cup, a log, and a harp...
16. Jean I. Young, *The Prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson,* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1964) 42-43.
17. William Morris. *Volsunga Saga* (New York: Collier Books, 1962) 91.
18. Christopher Tolkien, ed. *Silmarillion.* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1977) 34.
19. *Silmarillion* 62.
20. *Silmarillion* 324.
21. Ibid
22. *Silmarillion* 322.
23. Claudia Finseth. "Tolkien's Trees." *Mallorn* 35 (1997 September) 42.
24. *Silmarillion* 330-31.
25. *Silmarillion* 332.
26. *Silmarillion* 337.
27. *Silmarillion* 338.
28. Ibid.
29. *Silmarillion* 342.
30. *Silmarillion* 206
31. *Silmarillion* 362.
32. That Isildur leaves the White Tree at Minas Anor is perhaps an indication of the power of the ring already at work. A reader will quickly notice that Isildur has had a long history with the Tree and seemed always to associate it with his reign.
33. *Return of the King,* 334.
34. *Silmarillion* 377-78.
35. Shippey 201.

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Film reviews

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King.
Directed by Peter Jackson. New Lines Productions, Inc.

A missed opportunity

John Ellison

Now that the dust has settled, and we can all sleep in our beds safe in knowing that no one else is going to embark on filming *LOTR* during the lifetime of any of us, it would be well if we were to recall, while taking stock of the entire enterprise, that Christopher Tolkien delivered a warning to all and sundry, well before the first of these films was premiered, to the effect that *LOTR* is "singularly ill-adapted to reproduction in visual dramatic form." To quote Gandalf at the Last Debate, "I do not bid you despair, but to ponder the truth in these words."

The implication is that the opportunities *LOTR* presents for illustration in the form of spectacular visual display in set pieces and scenic effects, tempting though they may be, are, or should be, in the last resort, of secondary importance. The first essential is that the story be told as fully and coherently as can be managed within the time constraints of the medium, and that its outline, and the personalities and relationships of the characters be preserved as they were imagined and set out by the original author. The inherent difficulties are greatly increased by Tolkien's narrative method, which largely requires that tension be built up over long sketches involving relatively little action or incident, and which is more or less untranslatable in terms of "visual dramatic from". The cinema can show Frodo and Samwise and Gollum as they cross the Dead Marshes and approch the Black Gate of Mordor, but it cannot convey much idea of the long drawn out ordeal of the journey.

Most experienced readers of *LOTR*, no doubt, foresaw the huge problems that adaptation to the medium of film would present, and were ready to make allowances. So the response of many of us to the release of the first film seemed to be one of guarded approval; despite the inevitable foreshortening the outline of progress from the Shire to the breaking of the Fellowship seemed clear. With the second one, doubt and disappointment started to creep in; the "filleting" of Faramir and the invented Osgiliath episode suggested that the great project was starting to "come off the rails", and that the director was ceasing to trust Tolkien's structuring and shaping of the tale.

I have to say for my part that the concluding film did not entirely dispel this sense of disappointment. For all its formidable visual and scenic appeal it came across rather as a disconnected series of episodes in which the outline thread of the story itself, and much of its meaning, have been lost or obscured.

This is not entirely the outcome of the omission of certain episodes, some of which were expendable in the circumstances. The difficulty with the director's reliance on pure spectacle is that it is subject to the law of diminishing returns. If one is sated with scenic marvels and breathtaking effects the suspension of disbelief becomes impossible and one ends up being all too conscious of the technical wizardry displayed. The closing scene of the Quest in the Sammath Naur is so overdone that probability is left far behind; all three participants would have trembled into the fires of Orodruin as pre-

The Fellowship of the Ring

Octo Kwan

sented here. On the other hand the ascent of Mount Doom that precedes it is first-rate; here real tension is generated in a way that happens rarely elsewhere; significantly this is one place at which Tolkien's pacing and the film's appear to coincide. Elsewhere, the opportunity for suggesting the story's contrasting episodes of fast moving action and slow almost actionless periods of rising tension, was not noticeably taken; the ride of the Rohirrim did not make much impact - there was too much "hanging about" in Edoras before it started, and there was no feeling of "the race against time", which ends with the horns of Rohan sounding at cockcrow. Perhaps the situation could have been different if the various scenes of battle had been pruned somewhat in order to make way for more essential matter.

It may be that the source of some of our disappointments lay back in the original planning stages, before any actual filming had taken place. Decisions would have been taken then regarding the sections or episodes in the story that were to be included, shortened, or omitted, and their actual placing in the sequence. For example, the confrontation of Gandalf with Saruman at Orthanc was in the end omitted, although we now know that it was actually shot to be placed in the third film; some may feel that this centrally important scene should actually have been a centre piece of the second one. The most important decision of all was made to omit the Scouring of the Shire and the final confrontation of Saruman with Frodo, and this in the present writer's opinion was Peter Jackson's single most catastrophic error. The War of the Ring ends, not at Mount Doom, but outside the door of Bag End, and Frodo's personality is not complete until that point. " I do not wish him to be slain in this evil mood. He was great once, of a noble kind that we should not dare to raise our hands against." The nobility is missing from the one-dimensional view of Saruman in the film, impressive though he is in Christopher Lee's impersonation; a fallen being, but such a being has to fall from somewhere. The same applies to Denethor, who is portrayed as more or less of a wimp, whose ending, even when, like Tosca, he jumps over the parapet into space, fails to evoke any feeling of pity and horror in the spectator.

The Scouring could have provided a scene of battle more realistically true to life than any out of quasi-medieval epic; clubs and pitchforks could have been a refreshing change from swords, spears, and hordes of mumakil. All in all, it was unthinkably feeble of Peter Jackson not to have had a go at it; he seems to have thought, as Saruman put it, that the hobbits "could just amble home and have a nice quiet time in the country". The most damaging result of its absence was that, without it, the concluding scenes in the Shire and the Grey Havens became, at least to the present writer, almost unbearably sentimental, though this was partly the fault of the mawkish music that accompied them; "like a cross between Parsifal and Hymns Ancient and Modern", as I once heard someone, *a propos* of something else, put it. I would have thought that fifteen minutes cut from the interminable scenes of battle earlier on would have made room for the Scouring, and then the film, in its final stages, would reached its proper climax as drama, rather than more spectacle.

I finally have to join issue with Mr Jackson over the treatment of Gollum, which previously had been so successful. It seems incredible that anyone with understanding of Tolkien's moral outlook in *LOTR* could substitute, for Gollum's near-repentance before Cirith Ungol, an act of intentional mischief on his part. (There are two shades of irony here, for apart from Sam's insensitivity, which cuts off Gollum's change of heart, what would the outcome of the Quest have been if Gollum had repented?) In one of his letters Tolkien makes it clear that it is not up to him, or anyone, to presume to "judge", Gollum. All that is left is for Frodo to offer him forgiveness after the Quest has been achieved. "But for him, Sam, I could not have destroyed the Ring. The Quest would have been in vain, even at the bitter end. So let us forgive him!" Perhaps the most important line in the whole story. And Peter Jackson has left it out!

All of the foregoing has been written in the firm conviction that, "pondering the truth in these words," one can only conclude that a truthful realisation of *LOTR* in terms of cinema or any other medium is an impossible dream. However much one may think of ways in which the films could have been improved, it is probable that Peter Jackson could not have done very much better in conveying the spirit of the book than he has done, and that if anyone else were to try, wielding similar or even greater resources of technology and personnel, he or she would not achieve anything worthwhile beyond what he has given us. On his own terms he has, of course been immensely successful.

Almost any adaptation of original source material represents a travesty of it at some level or another. No one appreciates Shakespeare's history plays any the less for realising that they give a highly slanted view of the political and dynastic history of late medieval England; no one expects Wagner's *Ring* to replicate the spirit and atmosphere of the Germanic and Old Norse sources on which it draws. In any case such liberties as Jackson has taken with *LOTR* pale into insignificance in comparision with the enormities visited on musical and dramatic masterpieces by certain theatrical and operatic producers of the present day. What we have been enjoying represented, in essence, a splendid, spectacular extravaganza that has borrowed actors, scenery, costumes and props from *LOTR*, and that is all any of us had any right to expect. Now we have had our fun. It's time to get back to serious reading of, and discussion about, *LOTR* itself and Tolkien's legendarium in general.

In search of the Real Thing

Charles E. Noad

On the release of the first of the films constituting Peter Jackson's huge project of filming The Lord of the Rings, the concerns of many of those who had already read the book were largely about assessing Jackson's basic approach to it, how he made it look, especially the portrayal of the characters – in general, the 'feel' he gave to it. Now that the final film has arrived, we have become used to the 'look', and can concentrate on assessing the film on its own terms. Yet this may be the reason why, when I saw it, I had more or less given up on the task of minutely comparing what was on the screen with what was in the book and I just let the film run its own course, so to speak. Does this mean, then, that Jackson's cinematic version has 'won out' over the book? In a way, but only to the extent that seeing the three films as they have come out has been a process of familiarisation, and that this process has tended to separate the film from the book. I would

concede that in the eyes of a good many who have seen the films (having read the book), Jackson's treatment corresponds fairly closely with their own imaginations. However, for many other readers – and here I'm thinking of those who have lived with the book for several years or even decades – the film version is enough at odds with what they consider to be an authentic visualisation or dramatisation that they have simply ceased to expect too much. When they get around to seeing The Return of the King, they will enjoy the film as a spectacle and be wryly grateful if what they see on the screen sometimes coincides with their existing concepts.

It goes without saying that The Return of the King is an astonishing cinematic spectacle: the production values are extremely high, the special effects are state-of-the-art, the New Zealand landscapes make a splendid background, the attention to the minute detailing – very often the intensely gritty detailing – of the weaponry, clothing, architecture, and so on is painstaking, and the overall effect is to take the viewer into another world. As with the previous films the primary narrative mode is one of headlong adventure, punctuated with spectacular battles: it may not be the book, but it certainly works: I think that your palate would indeed have to be jaded not to find some entertainment here; but whether the world into which you are taken is Middle-earth is debatable.

One difficulty for this reviewer is that the world portrayed in the film is not anchored in time. With any dramatisation of an historical or even a legendary period (e.g., the forthcoming epic Troy) in the human past with which we are familiar, then we have an idea, even if only very rough, of when the story takes place. Admittedly the location and era in which The Lord of the Rings (i.e., the book) are set are not made precise: it takes place in a quasi-legendary period thousands of years ago ('Those days are now long past') in ancient Europe ('the North-West of the Old World, east of the Sea'). None of this comes through in the films: the world therein depicted has no relation at all to our world in space as well as in time. (There is also the matter that the films scarcely touch on the background mythology, making the world depicted even more rootless.) I think it would have helped viewers if a few hints had been given, for the benefit of non-readers, of the tale's 'historical' placement.

Having said that, I shall limit myself to just a few observations on the detail of the film. Certain of the images are impressive, such as the kettle-drum-beating trolls in the lead-up to the Battle of the Pelennor Fields (which involves yet more tens of thousands of digital orcs). The confrontation between Éowyn and the Chief Nazgûl is a scene from the book which just had to be in the film and which is, I think, quite well done – though I think Éowyn should have been taller ('slender and tall' in the book), especially given the size of her brother as played by Karl Urban. Bernard Hill gives a fine portrayal of Théoden, but this is not the Théoden of the book, who is 70 or 71 years old at the time, and has just recovered from the equivalent of a debilitating illness. The opening flashback to the finding of the Ring by a fairly Neanderthal Déagol and his subsequent murder for its possession by an equally brutal Sméagol had its moments. Shelob is a superb special effects creation, but she is only a giant spider, just that and no more – not the offspring of the primeval darkness embodied in Ungoliant.

As usual, the changes brought about by adapting the narrative into a visual medium and compressing it into the allotted time span mean all kinds of alterations to the narrative thread: doubtless a professional screenplay-writer would be able to provide a justification for each change, but those who are not film-buffs might find some of them difficult to appreciate. Thus, we lose the death of Saruman (partly for structural reasons, it seems, because it couldn't 'fit' into the existing screenplays either of The Two Towers or of the present film, and partly because of time); and then there is the peculiar matter of Arwen's life becoming bound to that of the Ring and so, somehow, losing her vitality and health as the Ring nears its destruction, which seems wholly pointless and unjustifiable to this reviewer. (Doubtless we shall have the former item restored in the Director's Cut, and find a bit more information on the latter.) Frodo's banishing Sam, because of Gollum's lies, when they are climbing up the Ephel Dúath out of Minas Morgul, telling him to go home to the Shire, seems incongruous, to say the least (Sam is to pack his bags and trudge all the way back to the Shire, just like that?). And why does Gandalf have to physically attack Denethor to take over military command of Minas Tirith? (Still, John Noble at least looks plausible as Denethor.) And Elrond only at this stage in the narrative gives the reforged Andúril to Aragorn, mainly it seems so that he can summon the Army of the Dead with it to attack the besiegers of Gondor (we lose the business at Pelargir).

The two main narrative movements are well orchestrated in the film, the great battles and the manoeuvrings of the armies contrasted with the lonely quest of the hobbits to Mount Doom. The battles are awesome. The siege of Minas Tirith by the Orc-hosts of Mordor is raised by the charge of the Rohirrim (although this isn't heralded by a dawn cock-crow; and the confrontation of Gandalf with the chief Nazgûl is apparently reserved for the Director's Cut). However, the build-up to battle is well done: the feeling among the Rohirrim as they prepare to charge is very much along the lines, 'This is it lads, this is the big one!' But this battle and indeed most of the battles throughout the films point up another difficulty: the forces of evil are just so overwhelming that it seems quite impossible that the good guys could ever win. Somehow they do, but their victories never seem quite convincing for that reason.

The physical scale of some of what we see seems to jar. Minas Tirith hardly looks big enough to serve as the capital city of a great realm of Men. In the Last Battle by the Black Gate of Mordor, when the Gates are opened, there are both the Dark Tower, surmounted by Sauron's Eye, the beam of his attention pointing to the battle, and Mount Doom in what seems the fairly near distance. Sure, it looks good, but it poses certain problems in geography and geometry. (I was sorry not to see the Mouth of Sauron at this point – another scene for the Director's Cut?)

I have no problems with the several 'endings' to the film. We do need to return to the Shire (even if it needs no scouring), to see Sam and Rosie married, and finally to see the hobbits' arrival at the Grey Havens and Sam's return home.

As noted, many of the changes from the book to the film are the result of the changes that go with converting from one medium to another, as well as the compression, but they are

also the result of the judgement of professional screenplay-writers as to what will 'work' in the new medium. However, such a process is not mechanical. It is shaped by the target being aimed at, the type of screenplay required by the producers. In this case, the kind of film aimed for was essentially a headlong action-adventure – and this is not how a good many of its readers conceive of the book. The makers of the film have, I think, succeeded magnificently in what they wanted to accomplish, but what they wanted to accomplish is by no means what (I suppose) many T.S. members would have desired. One might say that the film is a dramatisation of The Lord of the Rings not as Tolkien wrote it, but as it might have been written by a modern, professional fantasy author, the kind of writer who can turn out a product that matches the demands of the market at least once a year. This choice was, one suspects, driven by the enormous cost of the film: the resulting films just had to do well at the box-office. We might speculate that the next attempt to film the epic will be more cerebral and keep much more closely to the text: something to look forward to, although I doubt if I'll be around to see it.

With the exception of the Director's Cut (still to come at the time of writing), the extraordinary saga of this attempt to film *The Lord of the Rings* is now at an end. Although there are many ways in which the result could be criticised, the ride has been entertaining. I could wish that the book had been more faithfully adhered to, but I would rather have had these films than no films at all. Even if Peter Jackson's version in several ways disappoints, it will at least have lead some people, who might not otherwise have done so, to read the book, where they will get the Real Thing; and the remainder would never have read the book anyway (although there may be a small minority who might have read the book one day but have now been put off doing so by the film: let's hope that they are a small minority). I don't think that it has spoiled my own images of the book: where such images were pretty clear to begin with, then they haven't changed. Likewise, where the film's characterisations were entirely acceptable in any case (such as Ian Holm's Bilbo), then I am quite happy for them to 'take over'. It is only in those areas where my own imagination was vague that there has been some 'contamination' – but I certainly shan't be adding the pointed ears of the films' elves and hobbits to such characters when next I read the book.

Crowning glory

Susanne Stopfel

So we have come to it at last. Just occasionally you come across something that rewrites and reboots your programming, as it were, leaving you with a whole new set of associations and images and ideas you hadn't known before. It happened to me many years ago when I read *The Lord of the Rings*. It may just have happened again, now that I have seen this thing in its entirety.

After the grace and sheer heartrending beauty of the first part and the raw, relentless dynamism of the second this one has been coming in like a slowly building wave that has finally toppled and crashed to shore. That creepy, startling prologue, the deceptively quiet beginning as the movie picks up its strands just where it left them a year ago, the slowly gathering speed as all roads run together towards the coming war, culminating in one of the most stunning sequences I have seen in my life – the beacons of Gondor bursting into flame, flare after flare against the rising dawn, calling a continent to arms. And after that it never flags.

Somehow the movie seems to have regained its balance after Towers. Yes, the battle scenes are spectacular – as they should. It will be a long time before we see anything like the ride of the Rohirrim again. And yes, of course the movie is visually breathtaking. Nobody would have expected anything else, even though the sheer splendour of the images still took me by surprise. Gandalf clattering up the streets of Minas Tirith is a thrilling moment. Shelob is a nightmare. Grond has a horrible beauty. And Faramir's charge is magnificent and heart-stopping in equal measure. But this time the focus is firmly where it belongs, and the movie is the better for it. This time the plotlines are tightly interwoven, and nobody loses sight of the real story. "No news of Frodo?" – "There never was much hope – just a fool's hope." – "In Ithilien, not two days ago." And Aragorn's glorious, suicidal epitaph – "For Frodo!" What was my main complaint about Towers has been put to rest now.

But that isn't what made this one for me; that's just the foundations. So Return is truer to Tolkien here than Towers was, and the visuals and direction and pacing – those are some of the hallmarks of a magnificent film. But this is the conclusion of The Lord of the Rings, and visual splendour and brilliant direction wouldn't have been enough. Neither would Howard Shore's soundtrack, which is all that it should be and then some. Or even that script which takes on the all but impossible and succeeds – not flawlessly as it did in Fellowship but with integrity, intelligence and grace.

Of course, part of it is the love and dedication that shines through in every one of this movie's two hundred minutes. It is literate even in its most openly spectacular moments, referring back to Tolkien in a hundred ways and further back to the history he drew on. "Six thousand spears" says Théoden of his mustering troops, and "to Sunlending" adds the viewer's memory. There is the equestrian statue of Elendil with Narsil at his side, and the Púkel-men at Dunharrow and the sudden yearning in Gandalf's voice as he describes what to Pippin's mind is death. And Frodo still wakes "in the keeping of the King", sheltered by the Tree of Gondor embroidered on the coverlet. And there are many moments when I wish I could stop and take a closer look at the solid reality and pulsing life of this Middle-earth, at the briefly glimpsed alleys and workshops of Minas Tirith, the little courtyard where Gandalf sits and listens to the bell tolling, or at that device with the magnifying glass on Elrond's table. But lovely as they are, these things provide just a background, a glimpse at layers and layers of history; they are the story's trappings, not the story's core.

Perhaps it is that things I would have believed too hoary and corny and clichéd for words somehow work – breathtakingly, as if I was seeing them for the very first time. Arwen's vision of her grey-haired husband and unborn son is one such. All the hope and loss and joy and agony of that love captured in one image – and like the Rohirrim arriving on a hilltop at dawn, like any of this story's too-familiar, done-to-death visualizations of some age-old concept this could have crashed and burned but somehow, through somebody's utter conviction and consummate skill, didn't.

Or it may be the way the actors are the characters, people

of flesh and blood doing the best they can in a collapsing world. Merry taking leave of Pippin hurt to watch, and Denethor filling his plate and sending Faramir to his death is a small acting miracle. Boyd's desperate courage, Hill's sheer human decency, Astin's fierce love and resolve, Wood's fragile, indomitable strength, Mortensen's quiet ardour, the warmth beneath McKellen's ruthless drive – watching what is going on in those faces, under the grime and tears and brave shows, is watching Middle-earth come to life. This is for real.

And then there is something else, some ineffable quality that captures the spirit of the tale with shattering perfection. There are things in there that make the heart leap. And break. Théoden riding out to meet the doom of his time, and his own; Pippin singing for Denethor; Gandalf comforting Pippin; Aragorn's "Be at peace", echoing another moment of redemption two movies earlier. Frodo's tired, matter-of-fact, devastating "I have to destroy it, for both our sakes"; Frodo dragging himself up Mount Doom, clawing at ash and stones with the last of his strength; Frodo standing high above the Cracks of Doom with the fumes from down below swirling around him in what is nearly a ring, tentatively and almost reverently. Aragorn going down on one knee before the hobbits, and all Gondor with him, and you suddenly realize again how small they are. That lovely, wrenchingly sad moment towards the end when those four veterans silently acknowledge both their bond and the fact that they are irrevocably changed. And that incredible, bittersweet farewell.

Some of these moments are in the book, some aren't. On this level it doesn't matter. At their worst changes or additions can be a distraction, even an irritant. At their best they are simply the tools of a master storyteller telling another master's story in a different medium. It's still the same story, in all the ways that count. Most importantly, perhaps, in this: it isn't afraid of its own nobility. No fashionable cynicism; no fashionable anything. No watering down of its high epic tone. This stands by its grand gestures and passionate earnest and searing emotion. This wears its heart on its sleeve – to shoot at if you dare. It is enough to leave you humbled.

And what about things I don't like, then? Oh, yes, there are a few. Nothing fundamental as in Towers but moments when the storytelling falters a bit and the seams show. Gollum's attempt at framing Sam is lame – couldn't he have thought of something better than those lembas? Arwen's impending death is a non sequitur, and one that doesn't even serve a purpose. Both Gandalf's and Elrond's mysterious knowledge of those black ships leaves me puzzled. And there are a few minor continuity issues. And yes, some CGI moments are not on a par with others. And in the end none of it matters. Looking back on the impossible thing I've witnessed I'm just not going to waste time chalking up a few flaws and discordant notes and go out of my way to find fault with something that prevails in such glory.

Because I could just as well do the same with the book I've loved for all those years, if I wanted to. Yes, Aragorn should have had his moment of temptation by the Ring like any other major player. And I wish he wouldn't boast so much, and that I wasn't expected to believe he fought the forces of darkness for sixty years with a broken sword. And Éowyn's desertion shouldn't have been passed over like that. And parts of "The Field of Cormallen" make me cringe. And I prefer not to imagine Gandalf with eyebrows sticking out beyond the brim of his hat. And there are a few more things of similar weightiness. So what? So nothing. They are small irritants that pale into insignificance against all the things the story does pull off.

So where does that leave me? After the tears and laughs and sheer stunned disbelief – on top of the world. I didn't believe it could be done, and I was wrong. Not because we have just seen movie history being made, although we have. And not because it is flawless, for it isn't. This is something better than that: an adaptation that does justice to its source yet holds its own, a courageous, intelligent celebration of the book and a great work of art in its own right. It is literate and brilliantly acted. It is fierce and passionate and hauntingly beautiful. And it sounds like *Lord of the Rings* to me.

Am I supposed to rate this? I did try to rate the first two instalments, and in itself Return is magnificent, but it has now become all but impossible to view this as three separate movies. And viewed as one huge film it leaves me but one choice. This thing really is greater than the sum of its parts. It's ten out of ten, and may well be eleven out of ten come this autumn.

The banner with the strange literary device

Kensington Prallop

Usually, I don't much like reading books that have been written from film scripts, (in the trade we call them 'novelisations') but in this case I was prepared to stretch a point, especially as I happen to know that the film's author, JRR Jackson, was using a *nom de plum* when he wrote the book script under his real name of JRR Tolkien.

So I read it, and in honour of the occasion we attended the film premiere *'en famille'*. The third Mrs Prallop came with me, as did my present wife. I won't say I was disappointed, but it wasn't as good as I was expecting.

For those of you who don't know what *LOR* is about or haven't read it, as I have, it's about the trials and tribulations and fantastical allegorical adventures along the way of an ordinary hobbit, the sort of person any one of us might have lived next door to or met at a lap dance, as he goes on a long and laborious journey with his hobbit cousins to return a defective Ring (entirely realistic for those of us who have ever tried to get a duff VCR replaced during the lifetime of the technology) he has foolishly come by, to its manufacturer Sauron, all against a backdrop of giant Hollywood sets and vast swathes of religious, social and mystical symbology. The poor hobbits can barely make any progress as they wade through the waist-deep swamp of religious metaphors, literary devices, and social similes that they run into at every turn. I don't know if the vast and serried ranks of ruthless literary and filmic devices frightened the orcs, but by heaven! they frightened me.

Along the way he meets a fantastic collection of humans,

demi-gods, and giant sized fauna and flora as well as a sprinkling of everyday elves, dwarves, trolls, goblins, heirs-to-the-throne-of-Gondor and Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Ring is defective because it is Magic, which was especially annoying because he had purposely ordered a magic-free one when he found out the shop only stocked rings made by the evil god of the underworld, Sauron, a bit of a clue. Since nineteen of these had already been bought by assorted men, dwarves and elves, there is only One left, so he takes it, little suspecting that it will turn out to have enormous magical power - the power of never being recognised or even seen by anyone he knows, of turning his body into a shrivelled scrap of rag and bone hundreds of years old and giving him the enviable right to have vital parts bitten off and die in unspeakable agony in a lake of molten lava. Naturally he tries to get rid of it, but the Ring has a will of its own and drags him along looking for its former master, leading him straight into danger and constantly dragging him across the road without watching out for oncoming traffic.

Before I was even three quarters through the film I had begun to recognise similarities of plot lines and ideas in the book and film versions. I think now I have detected and unravelled the strange history of the book on the one hand and the film on the other. Although I had not read JRR Tolkien's novelised version as assiduously as I would have liked (my job as curator of the Milwall Supporters Club philosophy library collection of early Sumarian first editions takes up nearly all my time) I realised that he had pulled off a master stroke when he wrote it by simply cutting from the original film script anything that he considered too 'novelish' or literary. As a result the book dashes along with real panache, barely a page going by without words on it, while the film is bogged down from the very start by its relentless sequencing of action, followed by lots more scenes of frantic action, immediately followed by a spot of activity.

Hidden symbolism

Some have said that the greatness of the work is shown in its symbolism. There were many examples in this film. The quagmire of filmic devices liberally dotted with laborious tufty metaphors obviously represented the Dead Marshes. Frodo's inability to crack a smile, his little fit of melancholy which lasts from September 25th through to the spring of four years later, is symbolic of actor's inhumanity to man. Bilbo ageing from 50 to 3,120 years old in a few months is clearly the whole history, conflict, decline and final departure of the elves, encapsulated in one glorious existential statement of astonishing butality and power. And one that eluded me for a while, the way the King of the Dead's nose grows back for his final scene on Pelennor field, I now realise is a masterfully understated symbol of his redemption.

Personally I've always been fond of a good chunky metaphor, symbolism in general being a confusing medium. All in all, JRRJ does us proud in the metaphor stakes, able as he is to show every finely drawn subtlety of joy, suffering and treachery using as his medium no more than a routine genocidal holocaust or a gigantic battle running with rivers of blood.

But the battle scenes on the whole were sensitively handled, and very much in the modern mode. The orcs in particular, with their nasty orcish trick of running away in panic every time the odds weren't twenty five to one in their favour, showed uncommon good sense.

This seemed appropriate. After all, the great triumph of Tolkien's work is that he is able to express all the infinite subtlety of the human condition in terms of simple everyday objects such as 200-foot-high elephants and armies of homicidal ghosts. But after all the build up Tolkien gave the film in his novelised version of it - I think it was a mistake to publish it first - I found the film a little tame. Sometimes ten or even fifteen seconds would crawl by without a major battle or the appearance of a flying slavering monster the size of a 747. These longeurs could so easily have been edited out. Frankly this is not the continuous bloodfest I was led to expect from my reading of the 'book'. And what about all the feasting? I was looking forward to loads of rabid face-filling, a regular feast of gluttony, the kind of stuff that Tolkien filled his book version with. But no. Sometimes the poor hobbits have to make do on no more than five or six square meals in a whole day.

I came, I saw, I copied ...

Tolkien is a writer well known among a legion of commentators for having invented almost nothing of his own in his stories, and they have proved it by finding well known works such as *Martha Vandella's big book of Trappist rug-making* which Tolkien would certainly have read and borrowed from. Some of the references indeed turn up not just in one source, but several different ones, proving that the Professor also had a poor memory. This borrowing of elements of older folk tales and even real places and geographical features etc is true also of the film. A great many of the story ideas and locations, if not all of them, are clearly places and references that the producer has come across in his own life, and copied for his story. There are many hills, so he has clearly seen a hill somewhere. We see the dark dungeons of Moria, and we know instinctively he has been to Pittsburgh. We wonder at Treebeard, and realise that our author has been in a wood and seen the trees walking about, probably enjoying picnics or taking out unwanted splinters or having quiet tree moments of their own.

But I wouldn't want you to think that I didn't enjoy the film and some parts really stick in the mind. Favourite episodes? Probably those that have for some unaccountable reason been left out of the book, for example Frodo's brutal dismissal of Sam when he discovers that his rural accent is fake: the battle between the Rohans (with a couple of Gondirrhim) and the wargs, in which the wargs sportingly 'play dead' as soon as their riders are hit: the frontal cavalry charge on Osgiliath, exhibiting so well Jackson's grasp of the basics of military principles - he clearly knows that cavalry horses are at their best when charging flat out at solid stone walls and piles of rubble: Arwen rescuing Frodo from the Black Riders, and giving him her life-force, an effort so draining that later she finds out that she alone of all the elves is connected directly to the fate of the Ring, and is dying - all episodes handled so well by JRRJ in his film.

Then there were the masterly strokes of strategy by Aragorn, for some unknown reason transferred to Gandalf in the book. Gandalf comes back from death revealed as a demi-god in all his power, but he is no match for Aragorn who outthinks him at every turn.

But having seen the tremendous film, I can only express astonishment at the huge volume of material left out by Tolkien in his book version, and the swathes of material he added, such as the lengthy and pointless passage about someone called Tom Bombadil, not a name you would find in *my* local phonebook. Frankly, he has a lot to learn from Jackson.

Warm beds are good:

sex and libido in Tolkien's writing

Ty Rosenthal

"The devil is endlessly ingenious, and sex is his favourite subject." – J.R.R. Tolkien[1]

This essay is an attempt at a scholarly analysis of sexuality in the Middle-earth writings of J.R.R. Tolkien, with an examination of how Tolkien's cultural context shaped his - at times surprisingly frank - approach to the issue, and how modern readers react to it.

'Sex' and 'Tolkien' may seem like mutually exclusive terms. It is often believed that Tolkien's works as a whole are sexless, boyish and innocent, based on the lack of sexual content in his novel *The Lord of the Rings*. This is not true. Sex and libido are present in Tolkien's vision of Middle-earth; indeed, it's inevitable in such a complete portrait of an imaginary world. Sex is marginalized in *Lord of the Rings*, is a destructive undercurrent in *The Silmarillion*, and is given rare, yet frank mentions in Tolkien's extensive backstory of Middle-earth. Passionate love, transgressive desire, denied sexual fulfilment, and rape are plot points in several stories. Libido and sexual love are even portrayed positively, when they take place within the proper moral bounds. This essay is an attempt to unearth and review the role of sex in Tolkien's writing, and to analyse how modern readers react to it.

Tolkien: old-fashioned in his day

"This is a fallen world. The dislocation of sex-instinct is one of the chief symptoms of the Fall...Allas! Allas! That ever love was sinne! As Chaucer says." J.R.R. Tolkien, commenting on sex in Letter 43[2].

The events of Tolkien's life and times illuminate his reticence and rare direct statements about sex. Morally, he was more a more Victorian than Edwardian or truly modern, due directly to his upbringing.

Tolkien's genteel upper middle-class upbringing was entwined with his strong Catholic faith. He was born in 1892. When he was four, his father died; at the age of 12, in 1904, his Catholic mother died and he became the ward of Father Francis, a conservative Catholic priest. When Tolkien fell in love for the first time at the age of 17 with a young woman named Edith Bratt, Father Francis' disapproving reaction was to forbid him to see Edith again until he was 21. Many young men might have rebelled against this or moved on from this first young love. Tolkien did neither. He and Bratt were married in 1916, when Tolkien was 24, the wedding taking place partly in response to Tolkien's military activity in World War One. There is no evidence of the least jot of impropriety[3] when he was separated from Edith, during the war or when studying at university.

After WWI, Tolkien took up his first professorship, working at several universities before settling into a chair at Oxford. The university milieu he inhabited for 24 years, from 1925 to 1959, had strong bohemian elements. Oxford in the 1930s was one of the few refuges in British culture for gay subcultures. The forbidden, intellectually sophisticated gay lifestyle evoked "...positive interest among rebellious students in the thirties, as in the division in Oxford, for example, between hearties and aesthetes.[4]" Tolkien could not have been further from the gay cliques on campus. By his dress and his choice of religious and extra-curricular activities, Tolkien aligned himself with the hearties, and against the aesthetes[5]. His letters in the 1940s firmly express his belief that conservative sexual conduct was right and proper, writing vehemently against divorce and second marriages[6].

Tolkien's sexual stodginess was not the norm for British society or British literature during his lifetime. What did Tolkien see during the years he was working on his Middle-earth stories, from 1915 to his death in 1973? There were censorship and academic scandals about sexually controversial books: Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928)[7] and the novel *Lady Chatterly's Lover,* published in 1928 and the subject of an obscenity trial in 1960[8]. Outside the spotlight of controversy, popular and acclaimed British novelists, such as H.E. Bates[9] and Nancy Mitford[10], incorporated sexuality into their works. Socially, World War II loosened sexual restraints, and bohemianism in the late 1950s and early 1960s reached its apotheosis in the Sexual Revolution[11].

If Tolkien was moved by the works of other British authors and the events of his day, it was to be all the more steadfast to

1. Carpenter, Humphrey. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien.* Houghton Mifflin Co., 1995. Letter 43.
2. Carpenter, Humphrey. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien.* Houghton Mifflin Co., 1995. Letter 43.
3. Carpenter, Humphrey. *J.R. R. Tolkien: A Biography.* HarperCollins, 1977, p. 21 – 77.
4. Haggerty, George E. Gay *Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia.* Garland Publishing Inc., 2000. p. 471
5. Carpenter (Bio), p. 167
6. Carpenter (Letters), *Letters* 43 and 49
7. Souhami, Diana, *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall,* Virago Press 1999, chapters 21-23. Radclyffe Hall's novel The Well of Loneliness is a sympathetic portrait of a butch lesbian in the years before, during, and after World War I.
8. Parker, Derek, *An Anthology of Erotic Prose,* The Bath Press, 1981, p. 180
9. Bates, H.E., referring to his shorter works, especially the anthology Seven by Five, a collection of his stories from 1926 to 1961 which include stories about lesbianism, adultery, and seduction. There was also his popular "Larkin Family" series, written from 1958 to 1963, four books laden with juicy ribaldry and affection for rural England. The central family, the Larkins, are strikingly like Tolkien's hobbits in their innocence, adoration of their rural home, and appetite for food.

his own beliefs. He was open-minded enough to appreciate intellectually works that discussed homosexuality in an appropriate historical context, such as Mary Renault's groundbreaking novels set in ancient Greece, *The King Must Die* and *The Bull from the Sea*[12]. But with regard to his own myths, he became even more conservative as he grew older. During his later life, he often went back and revised or censored earlier versions of his Middle-earth stories. In the two letters in which he discusses his beliefs about sex and marriage, he comes across as conservative to the point of being a prude. And yet, he shows that he was profoundly conscious of the power of sexuality, viewing it as something overwhelming. Sexual tension was a perpetual interference barring true friendship between men and women; from one side or the other, the sex-instinct would rear its head[13].

Central concepts of sex in Tolkien's writing

"Marriage, save for rare ill chances or strange fates, was the natural course of life for all the Eldar." Laws and Customs of the Eldar[14].

Throughout the 17 books of Tolkien's published works, certain concepts of sex emerge:

• Sex belongs in marriage. Good sex takes place within marriage; bad sex takes place outside of marriage, or breaks the rules that govern marriage. Honourable characters do not try to engage in sexual activity outside of marriage. It is telling that Sam Gamgee needs to be called to join Frodo at his departure from Bag End not because he has his hand down Rosie's blouse, but because he is saying good-bye to the beer barrel[15].

• Within marriage the desire for sex is normal and healthy. The desire to be married and have children is laudable. Sam's attention to Rosie in this regard after their marriage seems to leave no room for criticism. Characters who do not desire marriage and/or sex, even though they might, such as Boromir and Frodo, have something wrong with them.

• The desire to reproduce reflects racial health and rightness. It is tempting to include a long apologia, explanation, and criticism of Tolkien's views of race and eugenics, but that is outside the scope of this essay. What matters is that a healthy race, be it an individual species like the Ents or an ethnicity within a species, like the Dúnedain, was one that had children.

• The figurative image of the male authority figure. Drawn directly from Tolkien's life, this occurs again and again; a male authority figure giving or withholding approval for marriage. This appears in all his great romances; Idril and Tuor, Beren and Lúthien, Aragorn and Arwen, Aldarion and Erendis.

• The cultural separation of women and men. Most women in Middle-earth live constrained by, even happy with, the limits of their culture and with traditional gender roles. There are a few exceptional women: Lúthien, Eowyn, Galadriel. Lúthien is semi-divine; Eowyn and Galadriel have aspirations that are traditionally male, Galadriel to rule, Eowyn to be a hero. But most remain in their own niches and thus do not appear in Tolkien's stories of adventure and war.

Libido as reward in *Lord of the Rings*

"When things are in danger, someone has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them. But you are my heir; all that I had and might have had I leave to you. And you have Rosie..." Frodo speaking to Sam at the end of *Return of the King*[16].

For most of *Lord of the Rings*, sex is a non-issue. It emerges briefly in *The Two Towers*, with Eowyn's infatuation with Aragorn, and Treebeard's story of the gender separation and reproductive decline of the tree-people the Ents, but is subsumed and ignored as war takes centre stage in the story. Sex and romance appear at last in Return of the King when the story reaches and passes its Biblical climax of the destruction of the Rings and begins its long denouement.

The kisses of Eowyn and Faramir upon the walls of Gondor, part of the climactic events, are a powerful and approving foreshadowing of the sexual unions to come. Their first kiss upon the walls seems chaste – Faramir kisses Eowyn's forehead. Nonetheless, it is marked by the one sensual device Tolkien allowed himself throughout his writing; beautiful hair. "Their hair, raven and golden, streamed out mingling in the air." Later in the chapter, Faramir declares his love for Eowyn and their kiss is even more intimate, "and he cared not that they stood upon the walls in the sight of many. And many indeed saw them..."[17] After the passionate peak reached by Eowyn and Faramir, pairings that follow in the denouement seem cool and perfunctory.

Via its one acceptable road, marriage, sexual fulfilment is part of Happily Ever After for Tolkien. Other characters who are good and who succeed – Aragorn and Sam – receive sex and love as a reward within the narrative. In the appendix

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10. Mitford, Nancy E., referring to almost everything she wrote, alive with a sly awareness of sex, but specifically referring to the novels *The Pursuit of Love* (1945) and *Love in a Cold Climate* (1949).
11. Brecher, Edward, *The Sex Researchers*. Specific Press, 1979, p. 325. This book includes virulent commentary throughout that shows that the cold grip of Victorian repression, and ideas of sexual health formulated at that time, were still having a profound effect sixty-six years later. "I believe that our culture is gradually recovering from a debilitating disease: Victorianism." "Much of the sexual misery and inadequacy in Western culture today stems directly from the methods of child rearing urged by Dr. Blackwell and other Victorians..."
12. *Letters* 294. Mary Renault was one of Tolkien's favoured students at Oxford, and her treatment of historically accurate homosexuality in the novels cited here caused some controversy at the time. The novels were historically and folklorically accurate on many levels, in a firmly pre-Christian setting. Thanks to Philosopher At Large for this reference and related information.
13. Carpenter (Letters), *Letters* 43. It is greatly tempting to quote this letter in its entirety. One comment leads to another; first men are castigated, then women, "You may meet in life women who are flighty, or even plain wanton..." then men again. "Each of us could healthily beget, in our 30 odd years of full manhood, a few hundred children, and enjoy the process." The letter concludes with a realistic analysis of marriage in general, then his own marriage and the exhortation to love "the one great thing to love on earth: the Blessed Sacrament."
14. Laws and Customs Essay (LACE), *Morgoth's Ring*, p. 210
15. Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Fellowship of the Ring* (FOTR), Ballantine Books, 1954, p. 79
16. *The Return of the King* (ROTK), J.R.R. Tolkien, Ballantine Books, 1955, p. 345.
17. *ROTK*, events in the chapter The Steward and The King.

Warm beds are good ...

"The Tale of Years", other "good" characters, Merry, Pippin, and Eómer, also are paired off with eligible women. His strongest indicator of this rewarding fulfilment may be earthy Sam having thirteen children[18]. Characters who are evil and fail are either depicted as asexual (Denethor, Saruman, Gollum) or de-sexualized. Grima, who had desired Eowyn, is depicted at the end as a whimpering worm of a man.

If sex is a reward, why are other good characters, Gimli, Legolas, Treebeard, Gandalf, and Frodo denied it? They are not married or reunited with lovers. They are all ascribed asexuality. And none of these characters, or their respective races, belong in Middle-earth any more at the end of the narrative. Their lack of sex is a denial of their continued existence into the Fourth Age, the Age of Men. Legolas, the Elf, is the strongest indicator of this disconnection. Gimli is linked to him both in awareness of his own race's decline in Middle-earth and in his connection to the Elves, via friendship and his courtly love of Galadriel. For in *Lord of the Rings* the time of the Elves is done; they are leaving or fading (literally withdrawing from physical existence). The only elf/elf love story discussed in *Lord of the Rings*, that of Amroth and Nimrodel, ends with the death of Amroth and the disappearance of Nimrodel related to an unsuccessful journey to go over Sea, almost a criticism of their inappropriate earthly passion[19].

The most poignant moment related to this linked sexual denial and "fading" is Treebeard's farewell to Celeborn and Galadriel in the *Return of the King* chapter "Many Partings." Treebeard's goodbye words to these two Elves translate as "Fair ones begetters of fair ones." It is a sad note from one race with its sexuality in the past to another race in a similar situation, even as it acknowledges the good fortune of the elvish couple's contribution to Aragorn's line, which will continue into the future[20].

Yet in Tolkien's world sex is not the ultimate reward. The divine is. Frodo, one of the great heroes of the story, has an interval in which he might attempt libidinal fulfilment, his time in the Shire after the Quest's end, but it is not for him. He soon goes over Sea with the Elves, a direct connection with the divine that has for him a chance for true healing. Sam, after the death of his wife, goes over Sea, to partake briefly of the healing there. Aragorn chooses to die when his span is passed, as an act of free will, and in Tolkien's world the death of mortal men is supposed to bring about a form of union with God[21].

Where does this leave Arwen, who remained in Middle-earth for the sake of her love and passion for Aragorn? She seems punished, somehow. Aragorn's choice of death plunges her into a sad understanding of human denial of death and leaves her without reason to live. Arwen's decision to stay in Middle-earth and love Aragorn, motivated by passion, becomes hollow, in the end. "I must indeed abide the Doom of Men, whether I will or I nil; the loss and the silence."[22] This evokes the results of passion-based decisions in *The Silmarillion.*

Sam and Frodo: gay? or Victorian?

"I didn't ought to have left my blanket behind," muttered Sam; and lying down he tried to comfort Frodo with his arms and body." Mount Doom, *Return of the King*[23].

Any discussion of sexuality in Tolkien is incomplete without a discussion of the loving dynamic between Sam and Frodo. From Sam's refusal to let Frodo leave the Fellowship without him at the end of Fellowship of the Ring to the intense physical closeness they fall into on the hard roads of Mordor in *Return of the King*, even to the final notes of the book in which Sam follows Frodo over Sea, their intimacy is exceptional. Modern readers often interpret their deep affection and love for each other as being on the edge of homosexuality.

It was in no way Tolkien's intent to present Sam and Frodo as homosexual. To clarify his intent with these characters, we need to examine the Victorian and medieval ideals of friendship. The relationship between Sam and Frodo harks back to pre-20th century ideas of male friendship as an ultimate expression of companionship. "In previous centuries "friends" would write to each other in emotional tones that would be read in modern society as indicating sexual interest."[24] These ideals can be traced in literature from the time of the ancient Greeks. One of Tolkien's most inspirational folkloric texts, the Finnish epic poem *The Kalevala*[25], has a poignant invocation

18. *ROTK,* events detailed in Appendix B, The Tale of Years.
19. *FOTR,* page 353.
20. Through Celeborn and Galadriel's granddaughter Arwen, married to Aragorn.
21. *ROTK,* Appendix A, The Tale of Aragorn and Arwen.
22. *ROTK,* Appendix A, The Tale of Aragorn and Arwen.
23. *ROTK,* Mount Doom, p. 241
24. Haggerty, p. 778
25. Lönnrot, Elias, translated by Magoun, Francis Peabody, *The Kalevala or Poems of the Kalevala District,* Harvard University Press, 1963. Lines 6 through 12 of Poem 1, noted as an expression of male friendship, are as follows:
"Beloved friend, my boon companion, my fair boyhood comrade,
start now to sing with me, begin to recite together
now that we have come together, have come from two directions.
Seldom do we come together, meet one another
On these wretched marches, these poor northern parts.
Let us clasp hand in hand, fingers in fingers,
So that we may sing fine things, give voice to the best things."

of such male friendship in its beginning stanzas[25]. In the 19th century, same-sex relationships were often termed "romantic friendships" and included various expressions of homoeroticism without becoming actively sexual. This changed at the turn of the century, but in the United Kingdom it was tempered by the literary reaction to the war-related deaths of World War I. "The massive loss of life in World War I produced a literary outpouring of grief that made poems by both homosexual and heterosexual authors seem overwhelmingly homoerotic."[26]

Lord of the Rings was written during and after World War II. It is possible that Tolkien's depiction of Sam and Frodo's partnership was in part influenced by the events of the day re-evoking the elegies of World War I. Tolkien noted that the character of Sam was partly based on other soldiers he knew during World War I[27].

Tolkien's male friendships, some intense enough to cause conflict with his wife, were an important part of his life. His friendship with C.S. Lewis has attracted much attention, both because they were both writers and because of Lewis' own essay on friendship. Tolkien's biographer Carpenter notes the historical role and that such friendships were "not homosexual...yet it excluded women. It is the great mystery of Tolkien's life, and we should understand little if we attempt to analyse it...we can find something of it expressed in *The Lord of the Rings*."[28]

It says a great deal about how much our society has changed in the 50 years since *LOR* was written that Tolkien's ideals and experiences of male friendship are now a historical phenomenon that require clarification. When the *Fellowship of the Ring* film was released, the emotional and physical closeness between Sam and Frodo was even commented on in gay and lesbian media[29]. Tolkien would not have been very pleased by the attention he was receiving from the aesthetes.

The censored Silmarillion

"But as she looked on him, doom fell on her, and she loved him; yet she slipped from his arms and vanished even as day was breaking. Then Beren lay upon the ground in a swoon, as one slain at once by bliss and grief..." Of Beren and Lúthien, *The Silmarillion*[30].

Compared to *Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion* has much more romance and sex. Sexual transgression influences two major stories, that of Turin, who married his sister Nienor, and that of Maeglin, who desired his overly-close cousin, the elf princess Idril. (Both of these transgressions have a tragic ending. Turin's tale has the double suicide of both siblings after the revelation of their incest, and Maeglin betrays an elf stronghold to evil, hoping to gain Idril for himself.) The entire story of the mortal Beren and the semi-divine beauty Lúthien is laden with references to Lúthien's desirability. She even uses her sexual appeal to lull the evil power Morgoth, offering her services as a minstrel, and it is implied that Morgoth plans to rape her. These events, and other glimmers of sexual frankness in *The Silmarillion,* are all couched in the most Biblical terms.

Couched; or, in some cases, rephrased. The original drafts of Tolkien's material for *The Silmarillion* are often far more sexually frank than the version that was published. Tolkien worked on *The Silmarillion* for 56 years, and many sections went through multiple drafts. At times, Tolkien would amend items he had written in his more passionate youth, censoring himself. For example, in the original draft of *The Silmarillion* chapter "Of Maeglin," the Dark Elf Eöl comes upon the straying elf-lady Aredhel in the woods and "takes her to wife by force,"[31] Tolkien's favourite euphemism for rape and unwilling marriage. In a later draft, he changed this so that Aredhel was drawn to Eöl by Eöl's enchantments and "was not unwilling."[32] Another significant change is that of Lúthien's approach to Morgoth. In an earlier draft Lúthien did not sing for Morgoth; she danced for him, and the entire encounter was more sexualised[33].

Yet another story that had extensive sexual elements removed was the tale of Turin. These editorial changes were probably made by Christopher Tolkien, Tolkien's son and literary executor. *The Silmarillion* version retains the incestuous union of Turin and Nienor and an elf's deadly sexual insult to Turin's female kin, "If the Men of Hithlum are so wild and fell, of what sort are the women of that land? Do they run like deer clad only in their hair?"[34] The long version of this story, Narn î Hin Húrin, published in the book *Unfinished Tales,* includes sexual details that round out the setting of a nearly-medieval world torn by war and its crude realities. There is a sympathetic view of a woman, Aerin, forced into marriage with her conqueror; greater emphasis on the elf-maid Finduilas' attraction to Turin; and an incident where Turin, living in outlawry, rescues a woman from being raped by a member of his gang, and the woman has a shockingly libidinal reaction: "Then the woman rose to her feet and laid her hand on Turin's arm. She looked at the blood and she looked at Turin, and there was delight in her eyes. "Kill him, lord!" she said. "Kill him too! And then come with me. Larnach my father will not be displeased. For two 'wolf-heads' he has rewarded men well." It is implied that she is making herself sexually available to Turin. Turin's response is to say, "I will not cut off the heads of my fellows to buy his favour, or aught else." Later on, another outlaw is perplexed by Turin's restraint, and shows his own corrupt nature in his interpretation of the incident: "The woman liked that well, and offered to go with him...But he did not want her, and sped her off; so

26. Haggerty, p. 1023
27. Humphrey (Bio) p. 114 "My Sam Gamgee is indeed a reflexion of the English soldier, of the privates and batmen I knew in the 1914 war, and recognized as so far superior to myself."
28. Carpenter (Bio), p. 194. Carpenter pulls no punches in his cold analysis of Tolkien's relationship with his wife, and we may assume that he is making informed and accurate statements here.
29. *The Advocate,* Dec. 25, 2001, "The Gay Guide to Middle Earth."
30. Tolkien, J.R.R., *The Silmarillion*, edited by Christopher Tolkien, Ballantine Books, 1977.
31. Tolkien, J.R.R. *The War of the Jewels* (WOTJ): The Later Silmarillion Part Two, Volume 11 of The History of Middle Earth, J.R.R. Tolkien, edited by Christopher Tolkien. Houghton Mifflin Co, 1994. p. 409.
32. *WOTJ*, p. 322.
33. Shippey, Tom, *The Road to Middle-Earth*, HarperCollins, 1992, p. 279.
34. *The Silmarillion*, p. 244.

The House of Elrond *Jef Murray*

what grudge he had against the captain (the rapist) I cannot guess."[35] In the published version of *The Silmarillion,* this event is deleted in its entirety, edited down into one sentence, "But Turin abode long among the outlaws, and he became their captain; and he named himself Neithan, the Wronged."[36]

Because the more explicit material was released later, in *Unfinished Tales* and the *History of Middle-earth* series, it does not seem likely that C. Tolkien's intent was to bowdlerize the original. C. Tolkien was probably excluding this for editorial considerations of length and style. Much of the explicit material is very different in style or format from the Biblical style of the *Silmarillion* corpus. For example, the Turin rape-rescue incident is presented in immediate third-person dialogue, a more intimate pacing with a wider range of characters. And Tolkien's two most sexually explicit pieces, "Laws and Customs of the Eldar" and "Aldarion and Erendis," while part of the materials intended for *The Silmarillion*, were both incomplete and tangled in format. Tolkien might not have been pleased at their exclusion on stylistic grounds, but he might have approved on moral ones.

Laws and customs among the Eldar: everything under control

"Seldom is any tale told of deeds of lust amongst them." – Laws and Customs Among the Eldar[37].

After LOTR, in which three kisses between men and women take place within a 1000-page novel, and the pious tone with which *The Silmarillion* sterilises sexual transgressions, Tolkien's essay "Laws and Customs Among the Eldar" seems dizzyingly explicit. It discusses elf marriage and the "begetting," bearing, and raising of children.

This essay is the ultimate expression of Tolkien's idealizations of love and sex. The title itself indicates the role of sex in Tolkien's ideal world. It is "Laws and Customs," not "Lives and Loves" that control the Elves in these matters. The second part of the essay is a long, morally tortured discussion, centred around a judgement and debate, of why second marriages are unnatural.

Sex equals marriage for the Elves. "It was the act of bodily union that achieved marriage,"[38] not the ceremony itself. This is taken directly from Roman Catholic doctrine[39]. There was social pressure to have the ceremony under normal circumstances; it incorporated extensive parental expressions of approval. Surprisingly, marriage also equals sex. "Marriage is chiefly of the body, for it is achieved by bodily union, and its first operation is the begetting of the bodies of children....And the union of bodies in marriage is unique, and no other union resembles it."[40] Once this is taken care of, however, "the desire soon ceases, and the mind turns to other things. The union of love is indeed to them great delight and joy,....but they have many other urges of body and of mind that their nature urges them to fulfil."[41] Sex is both exalted and contained. It is appropriate in its brief time, place, and role; the early part of marriage.

The spiritual side of marriage, the idea that the two spirits are also joined in eternal union after the physical act, is the focus of the second half of Tolkien's essay (which is choppy and uneven, still in draft form.) All of this information about elvish sex/marriage has been given to the reader to provide a moral frame for a tragedy. An elvish king, Finwe, was married to the elf-woman Miriel; after she had her first child, she declared herself weary of physical existence, wishing "to escape from the body," and chose to die. Finwe, specifically saying that he was "young and eager, and desiring to have more children," was given leave by authority (in this case, the godlike Valar) to marry a second time, the elf-woman Indis. In subsequent years, the strife between his first son Feanor and his later children creates a tragic rift amongst the Elves and makes them vulnerable to evil[42]. Libido and reproduction are entwined in Tolkien's euphemisms. Thus it is Finwe's persistent libido that draws him into a moral sin; he is an example of Tolkien's personal belief that "Men are not [monogamous]....No good pretending. Men just ain't."[43]

The essay bogs down at this point into interminable moral discussions about the nature of marriage, the core idea being that souls (*fea*) are eternally bound together through marriage, and just because one partner is not in a body (*hroa*) does not mean that the marriage is ended, thus remarrying after being bereaved is a sin. In this realm of ideals, divorce is not even possible, though separation is. The decision to allow Finwe to remarry is seen in the long run as flawed, and remarriages are henceforth discouraged among the Elves. One cannot fault C. Tolkien's decision to exclude the second part of this essay, distilling it into a few paragraphs and including the mitigating sentence, "But the children of Indis were great and glorious, and their children also: and had they not lived, the history of the Eldar would have been diminished."[44]

The Great Tolkien Sex Story: Aldarion and Erendis

"How can I dismiss you, when I look on you again, fair as the sun after winter!" – Erendis speaking to Aldarion, "Aldarion and Erendis".

Where "Laws and Customs" describes Tolkien's ideals

35. *Unfinished Tales*, Narn i Hin Hurin, p. 92 – 94.
36. *The Silmarillion*, p. 245.
37. Every time I read this quote, I can't help but think that this is no longer true with the advent of Tolkien fanfiction on the Internet! Tales of lust indeed. Tolkien, J.R.R., Morgoth's Ring: The Later Silmarillion Part One, Volume 10 of The History of Middle Earth, edited by Christopher Tolkien. Houghton Mifflin Co, 1993. The full essay title is "Of The Laws and Customs Among the Eldar Pertaining To Marriage and Other Matters Related Thereto; Together With the Statute Of Finwe and Miriel And The Debate Of The Valar At Its Making." It is abbreviated for reference as LACE.
38. *LACE* p. 212
39. Personal communication, Philosopher at Large. This writer noted that Catholic marriage exists when four conditions are met; the parties are not previously married, wish to marry, understand what marriage entails as a commitment before God – and that they have sex. The private vow and acknowledgement before God are sufficient for the banns, and the rest is social formality.
40. *LACE*, p. 226
41. *LACE*, p. 213
42. *LACE*, p. 237
43. Carpenter, (*Letters*), Letter 43 again.
44. *Silmarillion*, p. 70.

Warm beds are good ...

about sex and marriage in the abstract, the story "Aldarion and Erendis" explores them via a failed relationship between a distracted mariner-king and his resentful wife. "Aldarion and Erendis" is the quintessential Tolkien sex story; one in which hardly any sex takes place, and yet all the actions are influenced by desire unfulfilled or withheld. Their marriage is unwise, based greatly on Erendis' animal attraction to Aldarion. But the greater evil comes in their allowing resentment to come between the desire they feel for each other. They set up a cycle of denial and bad examples.

In a way Aldarion is Tolkien's ideal man; a venturer, strong, handsome, politically minded, and allied with the Elves. Also, he is not swept away by desire. Although he admires Erendis, his "sex psychology" is all too firmly under control, and neither libidinal fulfilment or marriage are high priorities for him. The woman who loves him, Erendis, is less rarefied, more understandable in her unrequited love, and also more fallible. She is not an ideal woman, but she may be a quintessential one for Tolkien; more involved with Aldarion than he is with her, home-bound, concerned with small matters, specifically of lesser kin than Aldarion. She cannot compete with the world and voyages that tempt Aldarion to leave her again and again.

Healthy sexuality is repeatedly defined throughout this story. In reversal of the male authority figure trope, Aldarion is under considerable pressure from his father Melendur to marry Erendis. Once they are engaged, Melendur is astonished that Aldarion waits for three years and more, implying criticism of his son's lack of libido. "I marvel that you could endure so long a delay."[45]

It is in their rare expressions of desire that the characters reach romantic greatness and inspiration. Erendis is smitten with Aldarion when she sees him on parade. In a gesture of closeness (and enabling) Erendis brings Aldarion a token of good luck for his journeys, a green branch, that the King forbids him to have. Later, Aldarion is smitten in turn when he comes upon Erendis roaming beneath the trees, wearing the jewel that he gave her. Their marriage at last is a cause for national celebration, and is even blessed by the presence of Elves at their final celebration. The Elves give Aldarion and Erendis a symbolic gift of birds: "They mate for life, and that is long." That very night, Erendis arises from her marital bed, and the two elven-birds are sitting on the windowsill, a sign of approval for their bed and its activity.

After several years, the couple have a falling-out when Aldarion goes venturing again, and Erendis retreats entirely into a world of women, living out of sight of the sea in a household attended by women only. Significantly, she sends the elven-birds away. "Sweet fools, fly away!' she said, "This is no place for joy such as yours." She and Aldarion never have sex again.

When Aldarion finally returns from his venturing, she does not fly to his arms, treating him instead as a guest in a way that makes clear her sexual refusal of him. "A guest-room is made ready for you, when you will. My women will wait on you. If you are cold, call for fire." Aldarion leaves in a fury the next morning, and never returns to her. Erendis later refuses the King's decree to return to Aldarion, using terms that express her abdication from sexuality: "Here then permit me to remain in my solitude..." Aldarion, upon hearing of this, says, "Rather a beautiful Queen to thwart me and flout me, than freedom to rule while the Lady...falls down into her own twilight." He is mourning the renunciation of her sexual power, and her emotional connection to him as well. Even if she was tormenting and bewitching him, it would have shown that she cared.

After this renunciation, the story exists in draft form only. But there is startling fall-out from this dissolution of desire, and the story reaches its peaks of sexual frankness. Their daughter, Ancalime, has learned from her mother to intensely dislike men. Erendis says to her, "All things were made for [men's] service...women for their body's need, or if fair to adorn their table and hearth." Ancalime, destined to be Queen since there is no male heir, wreaks political havoc with her refusal to marry. Eventually she marries the noble man Hallacar, and endures just enough sexual attention from him to have a son. In spite afterwards, she withdraws Hallacar's family lands from him, saying that she will not have her husband as a farm-steward.

The final note of the story is the most explicitly sex-positive incident in all Tolkien's writing. Ancalime has forbidden her serving-women to marry, although they had lovers. Her husband Hallacar "in secret arranged for them to be wedded." He held a feast and invited Ancalime, and she attended with all her women.

> "She found the house all lit and arrayed as for a great feast, and men of the household attired in garlands as for their weddings, and each with another garland in his hand for a bride. "Come!" said Hallacar. "The weddings are prepared, and the bride-chambers are ready. But since it cannot be thought that we should ask the Lady Ancalime, King's Heir, to lie with a farm-steward, then alas! She must sleep alone tonight."....and Ancalime would not come to the feast, but lay abed listening to the laughter far off and thinking it aimed at herself."

This event brings together all of Tolkien's sexual themes. There is the bucolic group marriage as a wrong amended, and the approval of marital sex in the near-ribald idea of the bride-chambers. At the same time, there is Hallacar's public defiance and sexual negation of Ancalime, noted as her comeuppance for using her powers of sexual denial not only in her own marriage but to block the marriages of others. Hallacar is the male authority figure enabling the marriages to take place, usurping Ancalime for one night. "But she pursued Hallacar with hatred afterwards."

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45. All quotes in this section sourced from *Unfinished Tales*, Aldarion and Erendis: The Mariner's Wife, p. 181 through 222.

Modern readers' reactions: updating the myths

"Many young Americans are involved in the stories in a way that I'm not." – J.R.R. Tolkien, in response to a question about his books' popularity in the U.S.A[46].

It seems that the majority of Tolkien fans are content with Tolkien's own limits on sexuality. Amongst other things, this ensures his works' continued popularity amongst Christian conservatives. Many fans are purists, and many others seek libidinal thrills in fantasy worlds closely related to Tolkien's, derivative novels such as the Terry Brooks' Shannara series or role-playing games.

For a substantial minority of Tolkien fans, the asexuality and martially proscribed libidos of Tolkien's Middle-earth seem aberrant. It seems wrong, missing, childish, a marked absence. Literary critics have noted this[47]. At the same time, far removed from Tolkien's Victorian ideals of male friendship, the emotional closeness between male characters is now often viewed not as boon companionship but as sublimated homosexuality. This latter has been commented on extensively as *Lord of the Rings* hits popular culture anew in the early part of the 21st century, thanks to Peter Jackson's films. Parodies and fan fiction written by modern Tolkien fans sexualise Tolkien's world and characters to lesser or greater degrees, with satire, self-insertion, and relationships between the characters, invented desire or emphasized romances. The Peter Jackson film adaptation is the best example of this popular culture sexualisation; the role of Arwen is considerably enhanced, and scenes with her and Aragorn are added to give the tale "more romantic interest."

Why sexualise *LOR*?

The answer is that Tolkien's goal of creating a mythology for England[48] was successful beyond his wildest dreams. For many readers, Tolkien's worlds have been a substantial part of their inner landscapes and fantasy entertainment since childhood. The excitement of having "entered" the book can be profound; a critical reader notes, "The kicks I used to get from *The Lord of the Rings* were sensual, textural, almost sexual, a feeling of my mind being rubbed by the rough edges of the different layers."[49] This has been emphasised even further with the recent *Lord of the Rings* film project, which has catapulted Middle-earth into fully realized Surroundsound laden with powerful images. Tolkien's world is now part of the mythology of popular culture and looks to remain so for some time.

Living myths do not remain the same. They are updated. The pagan gods became Christian saints; Christian and Confucian religious beliefs have varied based on translation and the political expediencies of the day. For centuries Christ was depicted based on the attractive ideals of the day, dressed in current clothes. Many Tolkien fans are updating Tolkien's myths using the vehicles of modern folklore, most widely the Internet and the dissemination of humour, satire, and revisionary works it enables. For better or worse, sexualising Tolkien is how many Tolkien fans update Tolkien's myths and place them in their own context. Within the subcultures of Tolkien fans, some disapprove of this strongly, especially if homosexuality is brought into the picture. Others approve provided that the reframing and fan works are done in a way that is respectful of, and accurate to, Tolkien's depictions of his world. Some fans sexualise Tolkien's characters for parody, humour, or expression of personal fantasies – and the final results are often barely related to Tolkien.

Tolkien imagined worlds and epics with sex confined to a respectable margin. But the modern audience cannot[50]. The libidinal force that Tolkien acknowledged, and tries to negate, is swept in by the reader in the present.

Conclusion

One reviewer, Turner, has commented that sex was literally an impossibility in Tolkien's world. She posits that the maturity and satisfaction of true libidinal fulfilment would destroy Tolkien's misty atmosphere of quests and male camaraderie[51]. This opinion was based on *The Lord of the Rings* alone, not the full corpus of Tolkien's work. As we have seen, sex was considered, was part of Tolkien's Middle-earth. His views on sex and romance were shaped by a combination of history and personal circumstances, as are those of his readers today.

A final important aspect of sex and relationships in Middle-earth is that Tolkien himself did not consider them in a modern context, but as part of his invented history. He deliberately did not place modern sexual dynamics or mores into Middle-earth. In response to a criticism that Eowyn and Faramir fell in love extraordinarily quickly, Tolkien sums up how he pictured sexuality in his created world. "In my experience feelings and decisions ripen very quickly…in periods of great stress, and especially under the expectation of imminent death…This tale [*LOTR*] does not deal with a period of 'Courtly Love' and its pretences; but with a culture more primitive (sc. less corrupt) and nobler."[52] It is a vision of a world less stressed by sexual and romantic complications, where desire is both fulfilled and restrained, powerful yet moral; a hint of what might have been, in Tolkien's view, if the world was purer than it is today.

Special thanks are due to the following: editors Aayesha and Suzana, and especially to Finch and Philosopher at Large for their contributions to the Mary Renault and Catholicism-related information noted here, with a later note of thanks to Dmitriy V. Ryaboy for a correction regarding The Kalevala.

46. Carpenter (*Letters*), Letter 279.
47. Shippey, p. 123, quotes a British review that "There is not enough awareness of sexuality." Turner (London Review of Books, "Reasons for Liking Tolkien," v. 23, #25) echoes this by noting the pre-pubertal quality of several characters.
48. Shippey, p. 268.
49. Turner, 2001.
50. Turner, 2001 provides an example of this: "Though one always wonders about Merry and Pippin, and Legolas the wood-elf's prejudice-busting closeness to Gimli the dwarf."
51. Turner, 2001.
52. Carpenter (*Letters*), Letter 244.

The chronology of Middle-earth

Tony Steele

Despite Tolkien's meticulous attention to dates and chronology as evidenced by the appendices to *The Return of the King*, at no time was he prepared to admit precisely how this chronology can be tied into our own. In other words, when did all his stories take place? On the few occasions that he was prepared to be drawn on the issue, Tolkien gave vague and contradictory answers, ranging from the Ice Age, to just a few thousand years ago. As we shall see, both statements are correct, because the First Age of Middle-earth did indeed coincide with the Ice Age, whereas the Fourth Age began just over five millennia ago.

One of the reasons, it may be speculated, that Tolkien was so unwilling to admit the true chronological setting of his stories is possibly because by doing so, he would have had to admit his interest in a system of occult philosophy known as Theosophy. Nevertheless, it is clear that he had studied it, or at the very least had taken an interest in some of its ideas.

According to Theosophical doctrine, the last vestige of the once mighty continent of Atlantis sank beneath the waves in 9564 BC[1]. Much later, the Kali Yuga (or Fourth Age of the present World Cycle) began in 3102 BC[1]. These two events, therefore, are separated by 6462 years. Now it turns out that the sinking of Beleriand (not Númenor) is separated from the beginning of the Fourth Age of Middle-earth by precisely the same time span, 6462 years. The maths is simple – Beleriand was destroyed in the final year of the First Age, the Second Age lasted 3441 years, and the Third Age lasted 3020 years (plus a couple of months or so). 1+3441+3020=6462. The chances of Tolkien hitting on this number by accident are infinitessimally small, especially when in both the Middle-earth mythology and Theosophical doctrine this period is opened by the submergence of a huge landmass, and is closed by the beginning of something called the 'Fourth Age'. We can now, without further ado, peg the first year of each age of Middle-earth as follows (the First Age will be dealt with later):

Second Age:	9563 BC
Third Age:	6122 BC
Fourth Age:	3102 BC

What about Númenor, which was destroyed in 3319 Second Age – surely that was Atlantis, rather than Beleriand? Well, yes it was. But the destruction of Beleriand was a much greater catastrophe, at least in terms of land area sunk (the Change of the World was another matter, of course!). The ancient Sanskrit myths which were the basis of Theosophical doctrine may have remembered the greater catastrophe and forgotten the lesser, or at least confused the two events. On our chronology the sinking of Númenor occurred much later, in 6245 BC (3319 Second Age).

Do these dates contradict what Tolkien himself has said on the issue? In *Letters*, #211, he says:

> *... I hope the, evidently long but undefined, gap(*) in time between the Fall of Barad-dûr and our Days is sufficient for 'literary credibility', even for readers acquainted with what is known or surmised of 'pre-history'.*

(*) I imagine the gap to be about 6000 years: that is we are now at the end of the Fifth Age, if the Ages were of about the same length as S.A. and T.A. But they have, I think, quickened; and I imagine we are actually at the end of the Sixth Age, or in the Seventh.

Can approximately 5100 years be said to be 'about 6000'? It really depends on the context, and perhaps Tolkien was trying to tell us that the events in question should not be pushed back millions or hundreds of thousands of years, as some readers were no doubt tempted to do. As an indication of his imprecision on the matter, compare the following quote from *The History of the Lord of the Rings:*

> *The moons and suns are worked out according to what they were in this part of the world in 1942 actually... I mean I'm not a good enough mathematician or astronomer to work out where they might have been 7,000 or 8,000 years ago, but as long as they correspond to some real configuration I thought that was good enough.*

Here we have not 6000 years, but 7000 or 8000! It is clear that Tolkien himself had no intention of being more precise, and if he was prepared to be vague by as much as two millennia, then we should not be overly concerned that our own figure is apparently too recent by a mere few centuries. The rest of the evidence for our dates is so compelling as to render such considerations of little or no importance.

So far, using the Theosophical data, we have been able to determine the first year of each age of Middle-earth. Yet there is far more information to be gleaned from Tolkien's writings, and incredibly, we are able to pinpoint

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all the events in *The Lord of the Rings* to the exact day! The astute reader may have already worked out how this is possible. The whole chronology of Middle-earth can be pinned down to the precise day by reference to one single astronomical event that occurred on the night of 8/9 Narvinyë 3019 Third Age (i.e. 8/9 Afteryule on the Shire Calendar), when Frodo and company left Hollin - namely, a full moon. Furthermore, it was a full moon that occurred roughly nine or ten days after the winter-solstice, because the solstice occurred at the start of the calendar year. Since we already know what year this must be (two years before the beginning of the Fourth Age), then the full moon in question can be none other than that which can be calculated to have occurred at 11:20 UTC (i.e. GMT)[2] on the following date:

Monday 31 December 3105 BC[3]

(In a break with historical convention I have given all BC dates according to the Gregorian Calendar, because it is more seasonally accurate than the Julian. The notes at the end give the Julian Calendar equivalent, and also the Julian day count, which is often employed by chronographers.) The fact that this particular full moon occurred about nine or ten days after the winter-solstice is further confirmation that we have found the correct year, and implies that Tolkien had consulted astronomical tables – despite his statement quoted above! Since the moon was at its most full during the middle of the day, then it follows that 31 December must be equal to either 8 or 9 Narvinyë. Can we choose between the two? As a matter of fact, yes we can.

The mathematics of the Ages

But first of all, for the mathematically minded, I shall summarise what we know of each age. The Second Age is the simplest – it consists of exactly 3441 years. Leap-years occurred every fourth year, except at the end of a century. At the end of each millennium there was what we might call a double-leap-year, i.e. the year had 367 days in it. Tolkien doesn't state this in so many words, but we know it must be true because he tells us that the millennial deficit of the calendar against the astronomical year was 4 hours, 46 minutes, and 40 seconds. Since, as can be calculated, one millennium on his calendar totalled 365,242 days (including the double-leap-year), and one thousand astronomical years add up to 365,242.2 days, that extra 0.2 of a day is very close indeed to Tolkien's stated deficit. The upshot of all this is that the entire Second Age lasted for 1,256,797 days. The Third Age is slightly more complex, but not inordinately so. The basic rules were exactly the same, except that they were tampered with a number of times. Two extra days were arbitrarily added to the year 2059, making it a double-leap-year, and one extra day was added to 2360, which also therefore became a double-leap-year (it was already a leap-year of course). On the other hand, the year 3000 was not a double-leap-year (nor even an ordinary leap-year), because the authorities neglected to add the two extra days. The only other thing we have to take into account is that the Third Age was terminated, in Gondor, part of the way though the year 3021 – after just 85 days of it in fact, or just under three months. Although the official start of the Fourth Age was delayed in other parts of Middle-earth, we are following Gondor here, the seat of the kings. The complete total for the Third Age therefore turns out to be 1,103,117 days.

Critical dates

So let us return to choosing between the two dates mentioned above for the full moon of 31 December 3105 BC - either 8 or 9 Narvinyë 3019 Third Age. The answer lies in days of the week. The following analysis is rather complex, not to say somewhat speculative. But since its sole purpose is to choose between just one of only two days, even without it we have already determined a degree of accuracy that far exceeds that of the chronology of Ancient Egypt, for example. Now, as far as the Hobbits are concerned, weekdays are of no use, because they did not have a continuous week. But the other peoples of Middle-earth certainly did, and for them the week began on a Saturday (Elenya). Incidentally, Saturday is also the first day of the week as far as ancient astrologers were concerned, perhaps another indication of Tolkien's Theosophical research. We are told that the Númenoreans, who first devised this calendar, originally inherited the Eldar week of six days, but later (we are not told when) increased the number to seven. However, in actual fact, since Númenor was not colonised until the year 32 Second Age, both the seven-day week, and the calendar itself, were almost certainly proleptic (i.e. retrospective), at least for the first thirty-two years of their putative operation. It seems highly likely that the Númenoreans would have retrospectively made the first day of their newly-devised calendar a Saturday (on their newly-invented seven-day-week). It turns out that if

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Yestarë (New Year's Day) of the first year of the Second Age fell on a Saturday, then 9 Narvinyë 3019 Third Age would be a Monday (as indeed was 31 December 3105 BC). The alternative would have the first day of the Second Age fall on a Friday, which is much less satisfactory. We can now, therefore, offer the following exact dates for the first day of each age:

Second Age:	Saturday 26 December 9564 BC[4]
Third Age:	Tuesday 24 December 6123 BC[5]
Fourth Age:	Wednesday 18 Mar 3102 BC[6]

The first two of these dates, despite appearances, are almost exactly the winter-solstice – the Gregorian Calendar gets slightly out of synchronisation with the seasons when projected that far back. The last is a few days before the spring-equinox.

First Age chronology

For the sake of completion, it would be nice if we could say something about the chronology of the First Age. As it happens, we can say quite a lot of things, but much of it is highly technical and based on certain assumptions. Chief amongst these assumptions is that we can use recently published material to supplement *The Silmarillion*. The consensus amongst researchers seems to be that we can indeed, as long as it does not contradict the 'canonical' writings, and that we must also take Tolkien's latest word on any particular subject. We know that there were approximately six hundred years of the sun during the First Age, and this is confirmed by the now published figure of 597 years (Annals of Beleriand). Tolkien tells us that these years, as reckoned by the Eldar, were counted from the spring-equinox. Yet the calendar of Númenor starts with the winter-solstice. In other words, the last year of the First Age was only three-quarters of a year long, at least for our purposes – though in fact, of course, the Elves continued their calendar without interruption. We are told that in 3021 Third Age the Elven New Year's Day fell on 6 Astron in the Shire Calendar (5 Víressë Old Style, Gondor). Calculating backwards, and based on the Reckoning of Rivendell as described in The Return of the King, it turns out that the year 597 of the sun was truncated after 277 days, with day 278 becoming the first day of the Second Age. The total number of days for the years of the sun during the First Age was 217,961. In brief, the calendar rules for the Reckoning of Rivendell are as follows – leap-years occurred every twelfth year, and were always treble-leap-years (368 days). 144 years made a yén, and in the last year of every third yén the three extra days were omitted. We can therefore state with confidence that the first uprising of the sun occurred on the following date:

25 March 10,160 BC[7]

Which was either on or very close to the spring-equinox in that year. And, of course, no earlier dates are possible on the Gregorian Calendar, because without the sun marking the days and the years, the calendar simply cannot function, and to project it backwards would be meaningless. Note also that the day of the week has not been given, because during the First Age the seven-day-week had not yet been invented (for the curious, if the week-days are projected backwards, it happens to be a Thursday, but this has no bearing on our calculations). On the six-day Eldar week, of course, it was Elenya (Saturday). There is one further item of interest with regard to this date. Tolkien tells us that the moon arose before the sun, and crossed the sky seven times before the sun arose, which can only mean seven nights. It can be calculated that a full moon occurred the equivalent of six days before the above mentioned date (at 08:11 UTC on what would have been 19 March)[2], which, counting inclusively, is of course seven nights (i.e. we are counting the night of 18/19 March as the first night, as it is closest to the full moon. 24/25 March is therefore the seventh night). In other words, when the moon first arose, it was showing its full face to the earth, which seems singularly appropriate.

The Valian year

Prior to the uprising of the sun, we now know that there were 5000 'Valian Years' – each of which lasted for the equivalent of 84,000 of our hours (Annals of Aman). Each Valian Year therefore works out to be the equivalent of about 9.5826823 astronomical years – nearly a decade long in our terms! Since the Gregorian Calendar is inoperative prior to the creation of the sun we cannot give a meaningful equivalent date for any of these. Just for fun, however, and simply to get a perspective on it, we can calculate that there were the equivalent of 17,500,000 of our days during this lengthy period before the creation of the sun, and that the first Valian Year began on what would have been the following date – had the sun actually been in existence at the time:

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10 November 58,074 BC[8]

Projections

As a final aside, many will no doubt be wondering if we can project any of these calendars forward into our own time. It would be a relatively easy task to project the Fourth Age calendar forward as far as we liked, but unfortunately such a thing would give a false impression because Tolkien stated that the ages have probably quickened, in other words got shorter. We are, therefore, no longer in the Fourth Age, but on current evidence have no way of knowing when the Fourth Age ended – presumably sometime BC. Furthermore, if the Third Age is anything to go by, it is perfectly possible that the calendar rules for the Fourth Age were tampered with at some unknown date. In other words we are doubly in the dark. The same comments could equally apply to the Shire Calendar, which was synchronised to that of the Third Age. On the other hand, the Reckoning of Rivendell, being an Elven calendar (and, indeed, the only one we know the rules for), is much more likely to have remained stable and unchanged. Given this assumption, we can state categorically that the first day of the sixty-eighth year of the eighty-fifth *yén* is equivalent to the following date:

Tuesday 30 March 2004 AD[9]

Which falls on the third day (Isilya, i.e. Monday) of the Eldar six-day-week. For more information on the Reckoning of Rivendell please consult *The Return of the King*. It will be noticed that this date is about eight or nine days after the spring-equinox. In other words, the Reckoning of Rivendell, as described by Tolkien, does not keep in step with the seasonal year over such vast amounts of time. Tolkien knew this of course, but he also stated that if any further corrections were made to the calendar, these are not known about. So we have assumed here that there weren't any. We have also assumed that the six-day-week has run continuously since the beginning without any interruption.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it may come as a surprise to some that the Fourth Age of Middle-earth began around the same time as the founding of the kingdom of Egypt. And yet in Europe at this time we have archaeological remains of a large and sophisticated civilization, the Megalithic Culture, which could so very easily correspond to Tolkien's kingdoms and peoples of Middle-earth. If we take Hobbiton to be Tolkien's own childhood home of Sarehole, Worcestershire (now West Midlands), and Barad-dûr to be the island-volcano of Stromboli off the west coast of southern Italy (as Tolkien once stated), then the rest of the geography falls into place. As for the fact that Britain is now an island, this clearly indicates that the flooding of the North Sea occurred later than the events described in *The Lord of the Rings* (the same applies to the western Mediterranean). As it happens, there exists a mysterious manuscript known as the *Oera Linda Book*, which was discovered in the Netherlands in the 1860s[10], just a few dozen miles from what is now the Belgian town of Bree (north-east Flanders). This manuscript tells us that the flooding of the North Sea occurred in the autumn of 2194 BC, which works out as the year 909 Fourth Age.

Notes

[1] Arther, James, Occult Chronology (The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, India, 1943)
Reprinted from The Theosophist of November 1940, and August, September, October, and November 1941
[2] Moontool for Windows, Version 2.0 (© John Walker, 1999)
[3] 31 Dec 3105 BC Gregorian = 26 Jan 3104 BC Julian (587712.5 Julian day)
[4] 26 Dec 9564 BC Gregorian = 10 Mar 9563 BC Julian (–1771394.5 Julian day)
[5] 24 Dec 6123 BC Gregorian = 10 Feb 6122 BC Julian (–514597.5 Julian day)
[6] 18 Mar 3102 BC Gregorian = 13 Apr 3102 BC Julian (588519.5 Julian day)
[7] 25 Mar 10,160 BC Gregorian = 11 Jun 10,160 BC Julian (–1989355.5 Julian day)
[8] 10 Nov 58,074 BC Gregorian = 20 Jan 58,072 BC Julian (–19489355.5 Julian day)
[9] 30 Mar 2004 AD Gregorian = 17 Mar 2004 AD Julian (2453094.5 Julian day)
[10] Sandbach, William, The Oera Linda Book (Trübner & Co., London, 1876)

The morality of military leadership

Janet Brennan Croft

"I was brought up in the Classics, and first discovered the sensation of literary pleasure in Homer."[1]

"This is War. This is what Homer wrote about."[2]

J.R.R. Tolkien was 'caught in youth by 1914' and served in France during the Battle of the Somme[3]. He signed up for a programme that allowed him to complete his BA at Oxford while taking officer's training, and when he graduated in 1915 he was assigned to the Lancashire Fusiliers as a second lieutenant. He was trained in signalling and appointed battalion signalling officer. Tolkien was posted to France in June 1916, and survived a number of engagements, though all but one of his closest friends died. In October 1917 he came down with trench fever and was shipped home to England. He spent the rest of the war shuttling between hospitals and training camps.

Because Tolkien had been an officer in wartime, he was able to invest his depictions of military leadership in Middle-earth with the authenticity of personal experience. His literary criticism and letters show that he thought long and deeply about heroism and leadership as depicted in the Greek and Roman classics and in the Northern literature that became his specialty. As George Clark points out, "[h]is fantasy fiction rewrites heroic literature and the hero; so do his critical studies"[4]. In his criticism, particularly of *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon*, Tolkien considered how such early literary conceptions of heroism and leadership could be reconciled with Christianity and his real-life experiences and observations of war. In his fiction he depicted different leadership styles, and offered his own judgments about their moral worth.

One of the clearest conclusions we can draw from Tolkien's fictional examples of military leadership is that he felt the proper place for a leader was in the forefront of his troops, sharing their danger in battle and setting an example of courage and character for them to follow. As John Keegan suggests in *The Mask of Command*, '[I]n front - always, sometimes, never? - is [...] the question which must lie at the heart of any commander's examination of conscience'[5]. In the way Tolkien clearly divided his war leaders into front-line warriors and 'chateau generals,' and in his depiction of King Théoden reborn and leading his cavalry into battle, we can see Tolkien's preferred answer to this question. Modern, technology-reliant methods of war make it increasingly difficult for a leader to do a good job of managing the flow of information and directing the action without being at some distance from his front-line troops. It follows logically that Tolkien's preference for on-the-spot leadership is closely tied to his distaste for the modern 'war of the machines' and preference for ancient models of heroism and methods of warfare.

Leadership in the forefront of battle is a moral duty for generals and other leaders in Middle-earth. Leaders who are at the head of their own troops in battle are legitimised by the risks they share with their men, as seen in the examples of Aragorn, Eomer, Théoden, and Faramir, and even Sam, Merry, and Pippin at The Battle of Bywater. Matthew B. Ridgway asked which leader is most likely to be followed:

> Is it the one who has failed to share the rough going with his troops, who is rarely seen in the zone of aimed fire, and who expects much and gives little? Or is it the one whose every thought is for the welfare of his men, consistent with the accomplishment of his mission; who does not ask them to do what he has not already done and stands ready to do again when necessary; who with his men has shared short rations, the physical discomforts and rigors of campaign, and will be found at the crises of action where the issues are to be decided?[6]

It is not just the risk to himself that a commander must be willing to face in the field - he must also have sufficient faith in his purpose and firmness of will to ask others to face death with him - to take on the dreadful burden of feeling responsible in his soul for what happens to them, yet still push forward to his goal. Consider General George B. McClellan during the American Civil War - he was 'so solicitous' of his troops that he 'refused to risk their lives in battle, an apparently ironic fault which soldiers are quicker to perceive as such than members of less dangerous professions'[7]. A leader has to inspire his followers 'to risk their lives for some greater end,' and more importantly, he has to 'have himself the courage to demand that they do so. It is of course in this particular that military leadership differs from other kinds' [8].

In *The Lord of the Rings*, all leaders who direct from behind the lines are either on the side of the enemy or under his influence. Sauron broods in Barad-dur and sends the Witch-king out to direct his battles; Angmar in turn rules them with fear, 'driving his slaves in madness on before' [9]. Saruman empties Orthanc of his troops, watching his 'splendid army' march out, but remains behind himself in what he thinks is a safe stronghold. The Steward of Gondor, in the high tower of Minas Tirith, strives with Sauron through the palantir and believes he sees the course of battle clearly, all the time falling under the enemy's influence of despair. Denethor offers pragmatic justifications for leading from behind, comparing himself to Sauron: 'He uses others as his weapons. So do all great lords, if they are wise [...]. Or why should I sit here in my tower and think, and watch, and wait, spending even my sons?'[10]. Denethor may be on the side of the allies against Sauron, but his adoption of the enemy's method of leadership leads to fatal misjudgments. Even Lotho 'Pimple' Sackville-Baggins holes up in Bag End, leaving the running of his little socialist empire

This paper has now been published in War and the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien, *Greenwood Press, 2004, by the same author*

to his ruffians until he is made their prisoner, and Sharkey (who also stays in Bag End and is never seen in public) takes over. And in *The Hobbit,* the Mayor of Laketown cravenly flees the stricken city in his 'great gilded boat'[11] and leaves its defence to others.

Leading from behind is morally suspect in Middle-earth, and tactically flawed as well, for a lack of first-hand knowledge of conditions in the field leads to blunders like leaving the Ents out of one's calculations or not noticing two weary hobbits crawling across Mordor. Such a leader rules by fear rather than example. If the actions of Sauron and Saruman inspire anyone, it is only those who see easy profit in dominating the weak and powerless. Under the influence of Wormtongue, Théoden is persuaded of the folly of trying to lead his own men in battle and sits bent with age on his throne; the purpose of his healing by Gandalf is a spiritual redemption that will make him fit to command again. Gandalf tries to heal Denethor's spirit as well; when the Steward of Gondor threatens self-immolation in the Tombs, Gandalf reminds him: "Your part is to go out to the battle of your City, where maybe death awaits you. This you know in your heart"[12]. But Denethor is too deep in prideful despair to listen.

Can a leader hold power legitimately in wartime if he is unwilling to lead his troops in battle? As Keegan puts it, ' ... [t]hose who are led ask "Where is our leader? Is he to be seen? What does he say to us? Does he share our risks?"'[13]. Keegan points out that in a theocratic society a ruler is under no obligation to prove himself fit to command, since his authority is direct from the gods and therefore not to be questioned. However, leaders in secular societies can offer no such 'moral exemption'. They have a fine line to walk - "They must therefore either go in person or else find the means of delegating the obligation without thereby invalidating their right to exercise authority outside the battlefield and in times of peace"[14].

Ancient models of leadership

In spite of Middle-earth's underlying theology and Tolkien's own religious preferences, the societies encountered in *The Lord of the Rings* are strictly secular. Sauron's enslavement of orcs and men may verge on the theocratic (since he is a Maia, an angelic power in Tolkien's mythology), but otherwise even the High Elven societies of Lorien and Rivendell have no priestly class or divinely anointed rulers. Aragorn may have the advantage of his Numenorean ancestry in advancing his right to the throne, but this in itself is not strong enough to support his claim - he must also prove his worth through word and deed. The wizards or Istari could have claimed to rule through theocratically supported right, since they were sent to Middle-earth by the Valar (the gods) after the end of the Second Age[15], and in fact Saruman is hubristic enough to try to play the 'high and ancient order' card with the unco-operative Gandalf[16]. However, in the contrasting characters of Gandalf and Saruman we see that even a claim at this level must be legitimised by moral action and earned authority.

But does Tolkien really prefer the ancient models when it comes to leadership and heroism? His criticisms of Beowulf and Beorhtnoth show that he did not fully accept their values, and in some ways his war leaders and their leadership styles are anachronistic and far more modern that their settings. For example, compared with his sources in the heroic literature of the ancient and medieval world and with his earlier writings, like 'The Fall of Gondolin', Tolkien devotes little time in *The Lord of the Rings* to describing the arms and armour of his war leaders. For the most part, leaders are distinguished only by carrying a banner or having it carried near them by a standard-bearer. As Keegan points out, those who lead "in the precise sense of the word," that is, in front of their troops, "needed to be seen and to be recognised instantaneously'[17]. Those leaders who maintained an "unostentatious appearance" on the battlefield, like Wellington or Grant, had a managerial rather than heroic leadership style and generally stayed further back from the front line of battle. Leaders like Alexander the Great, however, made sure they could be seen by their troops and by the enemy at all times by wearing conspicuous armour or riding a distinctive horse. Even in the early days of World War I, British officers in the field wore uniforms with an extravagant silhouette consisting of 'melodramatically cut riding breeches [and] flare-skirted tunics with Sam Browne belts'[18]. However, they soon discovered that their jodhpurs and flashy trim made them easy targets for enemy snipers. They quickly adopted a uniform style more like that of the Other Ranks, using shoulder tabs to indicate rank instead of sleeve bands, for example. Modern field uniforms now generally follow this pattern of camouflage and subtle (to a civilian) rank distinctions.

What then do we make of Aragorn? At the Battle of the Pelennor Fields he is distinguished only by the Star of Elendil on his brow and by the sword Anduril, but Elladan and Elrohir also wear similar circlets and might easily be mistaken for him, having the same dark hair and grey eyes. At Helm's Deep, too, there is nothing to distinguish him from others but his sword, and at the Black Gate he wears only the 'piece of elvish glass,' the eagle brooch given to him by Galadriel. Tolkien here depicts a king who wants to maintain solidarity with his followers by living and dressing like one of them. As his actions after the victory at Minas Tirith demonstrate, Aragorn's policy was always to refuse to claim more than he felt was his due. This is a far more modern attitude than one might expect in his place and time, a world that Tolkien implied was pre-Christian[19], but it demonstrates his humility or 'lowliness,' one of the 'king-becoming graces' Shakespeare listed in *Macbeth*[20]. Faramir too dresses exactly as his men do in the woods of Ithilien, and though he has a silver goblet, it is plain and he drinks the same wine as his troops. The Riders of Rohan, however, are as traditional in the dress of their leaders as they are in other matters: King Théoden bears a golden shield, Erkenbrand has a red one, and ...omer wears a horsetail on the crest of his helmet that makes him visible from far off. The Rohirrim are described as less advanced than the men of Gondor, and these visual divisions between the leaders and the led stand in contrast to the behavior of the men who will lead Gondor into the Fourth Age.

The archetypal example of the value placed on personal and highly visible battlefront leadership in the Western world is the career of Alexander the Great. Tolkien was well aware that this kind of leadership requires the 'Alexander-touch,' but he felt that taking it too far 'orientalised' Alexander: 'The poor boob fancied (or liked people to fancy) he was the son of Dionysus, and died of drink'[21]. In his analysis of the Beorhtnoth incident from *The Battle of Maldon*, Tolkien shows his distrust of the kind of charismatic, over-reaching leadership that allows a man drunk with dreams of glory and fame to lead his men to probable slaughter. As Clark points out, what Tolkien rejected about Beorhtnoth was his 'decision that promised to enhance his personal glory rather than subordinating the quest for honour to [his] duty of defending the land against the Vikings'[22]. For Tolkien, heroism had to be

about something more than the quest for fame and glory; it needed to be about the fulfilment of a worthwhile duty through morally acceptable means.

Effects of Tolkien's own experience

What kinds of leadership did Tolkien witness and experience as a soldier during World War I? Unfortunately there is no evidence in his published letters of his assessments of his commanding officers, so we must rely on the analysis of historians for a general picture. But given Tolkien's emphatic identification of 'leading from behind' with the enemies of all that is good in Middle-earth, it is likely that he was well aware of the problems caused by the relatively recent pattern of generals establishing their command posts many miles behind the front lines. And as a signalling officer, he is sure to have been all too familiar with the difficulties of getting accurate and timely information to and from headquarters even with the most modern equipment available.

John Keegan offers this cogent analysis of the strategic factors that led to this innovation:

> The trend of weapon development had for several centuries been acting to drive commanders away from the forward edge of the battlefield, but they had nevertheless resisted it. What occurred at the end of the nineteenth century was a sudden acceptance by the generals of all advanced armies that the trend could no longer be gainsaid and that they must abandon the post of honour to their followers.
> [...] Fifty years later, their descendants - French and German indiscriminately - were not to think of quitting their headquarters at any time. [...] It was from those secluded places that the great slaughter of the trenches would be directed, totally out of sight and, unless for a trick of the mind, also out of sound of all the headquarters responsible for it.[23]

At first glance, locating headquarters well out of the danger zone seems a sensible precaution and a reasonable "compromise between prudence and exposure"[24]. It was an 'understandable reaction' to the development of long-range weapons. However, 'its effect on the relationship between leaders and led was so deadening that even the most arrogantly insensitive of generals should have taken steps to ameliorate it"[25]. In any case, the French command settled in 'chateau comfort' at Chantilly, the Germans at the resort town of Spa in Belgium, and the British in the walled town of Montreuil.

But psychologically this was an unfortunate step. Mystification can be an important ingredient in the charisma of a commander, and a sense of distance, very carefully calculated, can lend him an aura of untouchable prestige and power. 'Distance lends enchantment,' as Juan Peron sings in the musical Evita[26]. But this same distance also prevents him from sharing his soldiers' danger and thus legitimising his right to command. Keegan strongly criticized the 'chateau generals,' pointing out that every commander needs to be able to

> [C]onvey an impression of himself to his troops through words, to explain what he wants of them, to allay their fears, to arouse their hopes, and to bind their ambitions to his own. It is a mark of the depths to which the art of command fell in the era of chateau generalship that this need was served barely, if at all, by any of the generals of the First World War. Their armies were, by an ironic twist of social and constitutional development, the most literate and politically conscious mass forces ever to have taken the field. By an equally ironic twist, the Staff College culture which informed their leadership had, by a bogus scientism, so sanctified the importance of purely theoretical principles of warmaking, and consequently so depreciated the importance of human emotion, that the common soldiers were not thought worth the expenditure of their commanders' breath.[27]

Sauron and Saruman would never see any reason to address their troops personally; after all, they were only expendable orcs and enslaved men. (Saruman's speeches to his army in Peter Jackson's *The Two Towers* were inserted by the scriptwriters.) Denethor, and Théoden before his redemption, are depicted speaking only with their commanders and never directly to their troops.

There are other ways of creating and maintaining distance. The rigid class structure of Great Britain at that time is an example of them. Officers were mostly drawn from the upper classes, and were given special privileges like the services of batmen to look after their physical needs and reserved railway carriages while on leave in England. At the highest level of command there was an impression of lack of concern for the common soldier. W. A. Senior recounts General Douglas Haig's reaction to the carnage of the first day of the battle of the Somme, in which 58,000 British soldiers died: 'such losses would not be "sufficient to justify any anxiety as to our ability to continue the offensive."' Senior continues, 'It does not require a long leap from Haig's statement to the Witch King of Angmar, Lord of the Nazgul, driving his own troops to slaughter before the walls of Minas Tirith and trampling them as he approached'[28].

During World War I, the 'simulated absolute monarchy of chateau generalship'[29] was one of the contributing factors that provoked uprisings among all the armies that suffered from it. While at the start of the war, most European armies treated the soldier 'as an object rather than an agent,' by the end of 1916, commanders began to realize that '[m]odern mass armies [...] were found to be teeming with assertive individuals who resisted the prescribed roles for which they had been cast'[30]. Grievances about 'pay and allowances, clothing and comforts, shelter, warmth, and rest [...] leave and family income support'[31] were all exacerbated by the gulf between the leaders and the led. Parts of the French army revolted in May 1917; the Belgians in the summer of 1917; the Russians in October 1917; the Italians in November 1917; the Germans in September 1918; and even the British in September 1917 and March 1918[32].

> At the root of all these spiritual crises lay a psychological revolt by the fighting soldiers against the demands of unshared risk. [...] [O]rders had emanated from an unseen source that demanded heroism of ordinary men while itself displaying heroism in no whit whatsoever. Far from it: the chateau generals had led the lives of country gentlemen, riding well-groomed horses between well-appointed offices and residences, keeping regular hours and eating regular meals, sleeping between clean sheets every night [...]. Meanwhile those under their discipline, junior officers and soldiers alike, had circulated between draughty billets and dangerous trenches, clad in verminous clothes and fed on hard rations, burying their friends in field corners [...]. The implication of such disparities can be suppressed in the short term [...].
> Yet [...] hierarchy and discipline cannot suppress the implications of risk disparities forever.[33]

Unlike Tolkien, and in spite of his criticism of the chateau generals, Keegan sees 'sometimes' as the correct answer to the question of when to lead from the front. Alexander's rashness put his mission and his whole army at risk every time he took the field. On the other hand, Hitler and his staff unwisely adopted the strategy of the chateau generals and chose never to lead from the front, putting their faith in the 'artificial vision' granted by the telegraph and telephone. But their reliance on intelligence at a remove from the actual situation led to fatal errors in their analyses of battlefield situations. Keegan points out that "[t]he 'sometimes' generals [...] achieved a notably more consistent record of success than the 'always' or 'nevers'"[34]. Two other generals Keegan examined in his book, Wellington and Grant, as well as other legendary leaders like Julius Caesar, used a pragmatic mixture of leadership styles:

> Sometimes a commander's proper place will be in his headquarters and at his map table, where calm and seclusion accord him the opportunity to reflect on the information that intelligence brings him, to ponder possibilities and to order a range of responses in his mind. Other times, when crisis presents itself, his place is at the front where he can see for himself, make direct and immediate judgments, watch them taking effect and reconsider his options as events change under his hand.[35]

But Tolkien does not show any of his war leaders taking this middle path. For them, the choice is 'always' or 'never,' or perhaps 'when I was young and reckless, but not now in my age and despair' - but never 'sometimes.' For Tolkien, a leader must be legitimised by his position in the front lines on the battlefield.

Notes

1. Tolkien, Carpenter, & Tolkien, 2000, 172
2. Lewis, 1955, 196
3. Tolkien, 1965a, 7
4. Clark, 2000, 40
5. Keegan, 1988, 328
6. Ridgway, 2000, 7
7. Stokesbury, 2000, 147
8. Stokesbury, 2000, 152
9. Tolkien, 1965b, 92
10. Tolkien, 1965b, 92
11. Tolkien, 1966, 261
12. Tolkien, 1965b, 129
13. Keegan, 1988, 314
14. Keegan, 1988, 312
15. Tolkien, 1965b, 365
16. Tolkien, 1965c, 186
17. Keegan, 1988, 61
18. Fussell, 2000 (1975), 50
19. Tolkien et al, 2000, 237, 287
20. Shakespeare, 1993, IV:iii
21. Tolkien et al, 2000, 64
22. Clark, 2000, 50-51
23. Keegan, 1988, 331-333
24. Keegan, 1988, 332
25. Keegan, 1988, 331
26. Rice & Webber, 1979
27. Keegan, 1988, 319
28. Senior, 2000, 175
29. Keegan, 1988, 334
30. Englander, 1998, 93
31. Englander, 1998, 201
32. Englander, 1998, 196-7; Keegan, 1988, 334
33. Keegan, 1988, 335
34. Keegan, 1988, 328
35. Keegan, 1988, 328

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Perspectives on reality

in *The Lord of the Rings*

Gerardo Barajas Garrido

Three Rings for the Elven-kings under the sky
Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone
Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,
One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.
One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.

Tolkien's universe

'There was Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Iluvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made. And he spoke to them, propounding to them themes of music; and they sang before him and he was glad' (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 15). These words represent the kernel of *The Lord of the Rings*. J. R. R. Tolkien was a writer of imaginary history; and therefore a writer of myths.

The Lord of the Rings is like a musical theme emerging from *The Silmarillion*; and to deeply understand and appreciate the former it is essential to know the latter. After reading both books one realizes that *LOR* takes place in a universe and world already defined by the imaginary mythology and legends of *The Silmarillion* ; a place which is not constructed to fit the events of *LOR*. On the contrary, *LOR* is permeated with the elements of this already existing universe.

This constructed cosmos helps to make the *LOR* a polyphonic work in the sense that Elves, Dwarves, Humans, and thus each specific Order of Being created by the author has its own perspective on reality. Each of these beings was not created in order to fit the plot of *LOR*; each already possessed a distinct, personal perspective of reality. It is their differences, however, that give the text a feeling of depth, a past. Elves in Middle-earth, for example, have a deep yearning for an elven Paradise, a peaceful and beautiful place that will not fade. They dream of Valinor - which is also part of the West, or the Undying Lands, where the Ainur, called the Valar, founded their abode, without any 'corruption or sickness in anything that lived; for the very stones and waters were hallowed' (*Silmarillion* 38). That is why Galadriel says: 'Lothlorien will fade, and the tides of Time will sweep it away' (Tolkien, *LOR*-I 472). She knows the Undying Lands will never fade, and she would like the same for Lothlorien. This is not just a wish to keep something that is beautiful; she regrets that Middle-earth, and therefore her forest, will change while other places will not. However, it is in *The Silmarillion* that the author depicts the Elves' relation to Valinor. Though this text will not be studied here, it is essential to remember its relation with *LOR*.

Tolkien's cosmos is the construction of one human being; his own ideas and beliefs permeate the work. These include his attitude towards nature and machinery, his ideas about a 'primary world' and a 'secondary world', as well as his Catholicism and his appreciation of some elements of pagan belief. But first of all, Tolkien's opinion of his own work is that 'Middle-earth is not an imaginary world. . . . The theatre of my tale is this earth, the one in which we now live, but the historical period is imaginary' (Tolkien, Letters 239). And an imaginary history needs a mythology. However, Tolkien constructed his own mythology because he wanted 'to restore to the English an epic tradition and present them with a mythology of their own' (231).

The only way a mythology can affect reality is if it reflects the truths, or at least the beliefs, of the real world. Tolkien's work must be judged like the work of other mythological writers. He argues that his mythology is as valid as any other. Even when the author's works present imaginary deeds, we must understand that they are talking about veracities which have affected human nature - death, power, nature, beauty. These fundamental bases of experience have always been present in the history of humanity - though, when Tolkien deals with them, he does it in his own unique style.

Tolkien wanted to create language of his own. When he wrote *LOR* he realized that 'a language requires a suitable habitation, and a history in which it can develop' (375). He goes 'back to fundamental dynamics, to the creative power of language itself, in that the myths and legends of the elves came after his construction of a language and orthography for them' (Knight 129). As post-structuralism says - language shapes thought because signification is unstable. Tolkien creates a coherent mythology because he had already created a coherent language for it. Concepts in Tolkien's world are dependent on the connotations or meanings of English, as modified by Tolkien's own created languages.

Tolkien's concern's about 'truth' are everywhere evident: 'I think that fairy story has its own mode of reflecting "truth"' (Letters 233). *LOR* 'is a fairy-story, but one written . . . for adults' (232-33). His invented languages and his mythology - which implies the need of a history - drove Tolkien to become a story-teller on the grand scale. They are the foundation of his work.

One 'voice' or many?

When Tolkien is dealing with different races, places or situations, all of them are of course subject to the central truths that the author imposes on the text. This does not mean uniform beliefs throughout, but that the text must 'within its own imagined world be accorded (literary) belief' (233). This accorded literary belief stands for what in the real world would be labelled as 'reality'. Tolkien, regardless of a character's own perception of reality, works with some truths he considers fundamental, such as the Christian fusion of free will and fate, the Christian idea of the fall of humanity, his own view of magic and enchantment and the Catholic perception of good and evil.

This paper is the first part of an MA Research Essay, original title "Art. power, nature, beauty, death: perspectives on reality in JRR Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, ***submitted in 1999. Part II is scheduled to appear in the next edition.***

However, the differences among Levels of Being in *LOR* should not be compared to the differences between different peoples in the real world, what Tolkien called the 'primary world'. As he says, the polyphony within the text works according to its own necessities: 'there must be some relevance to the human situation (of all periods). So something of the storyteller's own reflections and values will inevitably get worked in' (233). *LOR*'s polyphony (ie single voice) is based on Tolkien's way of setting and resolving situations according to his own 'inklings of truths in the primary world' and his secondary world's own structured truths.

In his essay *On Fairy-stories* Tolkien states that each author is a sub-creator and what he builds, through art, is a secondary world. The real world is the primary world and - in the mythos of the Judeo-Christian world - God has created it. He explains it as this: a good writer '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. You are then out in the Primary World again' (Tolkien, *Fairy* 132).

The influence of religious ideals

Tolkien builds his secondary world according to his own personal attunement to reality and his ideology influenced his work. Good, for Tolkien, as a Roman Catholic accords with the Commandments 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole soul and thy whole mind.... And the second, its like, is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments all the law and the prophets depend' (Matthew 22:37-40). This is the basis of goodness. To 'inherit eternal life' (Luke 10:25), the sign of having done good, it is necessary to follow these commandments and their implications.

To love others as we love ourselves is the best way to define goodness in human terms - God's goodness is perfect while human's goodness can be affected by the subjective views of each person. To do evil, in these terms, is to treat others in a way in which we do not like to be treated. Evil, then, is the corruption of good and cannot exist by itself - it needs, first, the existence of goodness so that it will be able to corrupt it. Satan was first an angel 'created naturally good by God' (Catechism 88), but he and the other demons who followed him 'became evil by their own doing' (88). Satan brought evil into the existence, but the only way to do it was by corrupting what existed already. As Tolkien puts it in *LOR*, evil cannot create, it can only corrupt. Frodo explains it to Sam when he talks about Orcs: 'The shadow that bred them can only mock. It cannot make: not real new things of its own. I do not think it gave life to the Orcs, it only ruined them and twisted them' (*LOR*-III 233).

Orcs are not a creation of Eru but a corruption of Elves, perpetrated by Melkor - the Ainur who represents the Devil in Tolkien's mythology. All the Elves 'who came in the hands of Melkor . . . were put there in prison, and by slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved; and thus Melkor bred the hideous race of the Orcs in envy and mockery of the Elves' (*Silmarillion* 50). Orcs are therefore evil because they are the corruption of Elves. In a similar way, Trolls are counterfeits of Ents. (*Letters* 190-91) Thus, the tragedy of Orcs and Trolls is that they do not possess free will; they cannot choose between being good or evil; 'they cannot know good. They are mindless and committed to an evil course through no choice of their own' (Harvey 56). On the other hand, Melkor and Saruman still have the choice of doing good, even if they never opt for it.

So evil enslaves while good bestows freedom, even the freedom to reject good and do evil. Tolkien presents a Middle-earth that was created by one god, Eru or Iluvatar. There are 'angels', which take shape as divine entities such as the Ainur or wizards: 'It appears finally that they were as one might say the near equivalent in the mode of these tales of Angels, guardian Angels' (*Letters,* footnote 159). Nevertheless, there are pagan elements that get worked into *LOR*. There 'is much evidence of an active animism . . . . 'the mountain Caradhras shows his displeasure by snowing heavily to block the company's way' (Curry 110), and Legolas hears the rocks when the party is nearing Caradhras: 'Only I hear the stones lament them: deep they delved us, fair they wrought us, high they builded us; but they are gone' (*LOR*-I 371).

Catholicism and paganism blend together in a harmonic balance. Eru is God, and God created the Ainur and together they created music, which was directed, planned and controlled by Eru. This music gave origin to Middle-earth. The pagan element comes into Tolkien's mythology when Dwarves are created. Even when Eru planned to be the only creator of people, such as Elves and Humans, Aule, one of the lesser deities, created the Dwarves, as if he would be God. Aule, however, never pretends to match Eru (*Silmarillion* 43).

Eru controls everything. The Ainur are also creators , but everything they create turns out to be according to Eru's plan. All this is said in *The Silmarillion*, but it has repercussions in *LOR*. All those at the Council of Elrond agree that there is a Higher Will that brought them all together: 'You have come and are here met, in this very nick of time, by chance as it may seem. Yet it is not so. Believe rather that it is so ordered' (*LOR*-I 318). Nobody doubts these words. All believe that they are fulfilling a greater plan of God even though they never say it. This silence is referred to obliquely by Tolkien in what he says about religion in *LOR*: 'I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like religion, to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism' (*Letters* 172).

Another Christian element which works as a truth that cannot be denied, from which nobody can escape, because it exists in the imaginary world of Tolkien is the blend of fate and free will. Despite someone's unbelief in these elements, they nevertheless exist. But the wise know that both are real, that they are part of the truth of the universe. Gandalf explains to Frodo 'that Bilbo was meant to find the Ring' (*LOR*-I 88). Catholicism teaches that all humans are free but it speaks about God's will too. The world is following an already established plan by God. This is called Divine Providence: 'The universe was created in a state of journeying (*in statu viae*) toward an ultimate perfection yet to be attained, to which God has destined it' (Catechism 73). In *LOR*, the suggestion is that plan of 'some higher will is for Bilbo to find the ring - but he had the choice of taking it or not.

People are free within their own limits. They cannot fly, or breathe under water. God's plan is that people are beings who live on the earth and take oxygen from the air, but they can throw themselves from a cliff if they want to. They can choose their friends and where they go, but they cannot decide where they will be born or if it will rain or not. So, their actions are the result of their use of this freedom, but at the same time God's will intervenes in the affairs of people: 'God is sovereign master of his plan. But to carry it out he also makes use of his creatures' cooperation'. (74).

This influence is evident in the Council of Elrond where

The Lonely Mountain ***Jef Murray***

everyone goes because they have decided to, though there is a Higher Will at work that is unfolding a plan of its own and wants the fellowship of the ring to be formed. This is not predestination. Moreover, as Patrick Curry says: 'there is no question of 'luck' or 'chance' interfering with the exercise of free will' (107). This free will can be used for good or evil. The fact that people live in a fallen world makes everything more complicated.

Tolkien believed that the fall from a state of grace into a lower state is a truth for all human beings, that it exists everywhere and is not only a Christian idea or interpretation of reality: 'After all I believe that legends and myths are largely made of 'truth', and indeed present aspects of it that can only be received in this mode; and long ago certain truths and modes of this kind were discovered and must always reappear. There cannot be any story without a fall - all stories are ultimately about the fall' (*Letters* 147).

The Christian idea is that because of the fall of humanity from Paradise it is easier to do evil acts than to follow a life of virtue, and this influences *LOR*. It implies that the 'essence of a fallen world is that the best cannot be attained by free enjoyment, or by what is called 'self-realization' . . . but by denial, by suffering' (51). It is difficult to suffer willingly, however, even if it is for a final good. In order to enjoy an unpolluted Shire, the Hobbits have to sacrifice the commodity that the exploitation of the machine would have provided them with.

The machine vs art and nature

The machine is the enemy of nature and because of the fallen state of the world it work against those who try to use it. *LOR* takes place in a world where nature reigns and can display its unpolluted beauty. There are cities, such as Minas Tirith, but these are not like Mordor. Mordor is the only polluted and ugly 'city'. The Shire would have become like an industrialised city, with ugly mills and excessive rules, but it was prevented from falling to this lower state. Hobbits keep their pastoral machinery. They destroy the new mills and reconstruct their old ones that produce neither as much nor as fast as the new and improved mills. On the other hand, Sauron takes all the advantages that the machine can provide him with and, as a consequence, destroys the beauty of the land, pollutes it and turns it into a nightmare. Besides, the machine is an extension of what Tolkien calls magic. He says that the machine 'attempts to actualize desire, and so to create power in this World' (*Letters* 87), and that magic 'produces, or pretends to produce, an alteration in the Primary World. . . . it is not an art but a technique; its desire is power in this world, domination of things and wills' (*Fairy* 143). Both are closely related because both can shape the 'primary world'.

On the contrary, enchantment and art alter only the 'secondary world'. However, art is for humans and the other races; enchantment is for Elves. Tolkien defines art as: 'the human process that produces by the way (it is not its only or ultimate object) Secondary Belief' (142-43). The 'elvish craft', which is more potent, is called enchantment (143), and it 'produces a secondary world in which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside; but in its purity it is artistic in desire and purpose' (143). The better art works the more it approaches enchantment (143). There is no

enchantment that alters the primary world and because of this the Elves cannot keep Rivendell or Lothlorien. Their powers cannot change their primary world - Tolkien's secondary world.

Finally, we arrive at Tolkien's position with regard to the already mentioned fundamental basis of experience. Tolkien's love for nature is evident as is his dislike for machinery: 'The savage sound of the electric saw is never silent wherever trees are still found growing' *(Letters* 420). Nature is a fundamental basis of experience that the author has tasted. Having lived through industrialisation and drastic changes in mechanisation in his own lifetime, he had a benevolent attitude towards the natural world. He liked nature, wild, pastoral or tamed, as in gardens. Trees were special to him. He appreciated nature not only for its beauty but also for its presence. It is a creation of God, a living being. When Frodo places his hand on the trunk of a mallorn he feels 'the delight of the living tree itself' (*LOR*-I 455). However, nature is under the threat of industrialisation and the machine. Tolkien's favoured world was vanishing quickly. For example, the apotheosis of the horse was from 1815 to 1914, but after that year car numbers began to increase and 'the lorry or truck began to take over from the ox-wagon, the bullock-cart, the horse and cart, and, in the end, the railway as a means of carrying merchandise' (Thomas 358-59).

While Tolkien was writing *LOR*, aeroplanes and cars were part of the scenery of daily life. During the Second World War, technology had already taken over agriculture too, using tractors, pesticides and chemical fertilizers (401-406). In contrast, Tolkien spent his childhood in 'Sarehole . . . . in the English countryside' (Carpenter 20) submerged in a rural ambiance, for four years that were the most formative part of his life (24). During those years and later, in his youth, he lived without the technology that surrounded him during the Second World War. He could see the drastic change that the land had suffered. Nature was being polluted by the machine, and after both World Wars it was clear that humans could inflict serious damage to nature. Tolkien detested this: 'How real, how startlingly alive is a factory chimney compared with an elm tree: poor obsolete thing, insubstantial dream of an escapist!' (*Fairy* 149).

All of the above aspects of Tolkien's own beliefs and perceptions inform his book. Does this mean *LOR* is simply an allegorical picture of the modern world? *LOR* is not allegorical: 'The darkness of the present days has had some effect on it. Though it is not an 'allegory' *(Letters* 41). Tolkien saw how much nature can be injured and he protested against this. It is not a coincidence that in *LOR* beautiful places are always close to nature. Tolkien connects beauty with a healthy nature, purity and deep knowledge. In the *LOR* beauty is a consequence of goodness. He based his notion of beauty on the Virgin Mary: 'Our Lady, upon which all my own small perception of beauty both in majesty and simplicity is founded. *The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work' (172).

Evil may disguise itself and appear to be beautiful, but eventually its masquerade must be exposed, as Saruman was. In *Smith of Wootton Major* Tolkien depicts beauty as the result of a gift from fairy-land: a place where, even though evil lurks, knowledge and goodness abide. The smith has a beautiful voice and makes wonderful metalwork because he has received this gift from the good fairy king. And Elves, who become Tolkien's symbol for beauty and goodness, are so beautiful because they are purer than humans: 'elves are early men, not yet fallen entirely from a paradisal condition, hence their great beauty and supreme skill in arts and crafts' (Knight 114). The Virgin Mary's influence is overriding. She is beautiful because she is pure.

The attitude of Tolkien towards power can be summed up in his letter to his son Christopher on the 29 of November 1943. There he says that he likes anarchy 'philosophically understood, meaning abolition of control' (*Letters* 63) and that the desire for power should not be fulfilled, that those who are not interested in exercising power should be those who must be given power. This is the only way we can escape from the ruler's desire to control. Compare with Gandalf, who possesses enormous power but whose chief concern is the well-being of Middle-earth, ruled by its own people. Humans live in a fallen world, therefore power, according to the Christian ethos, will tend to become a tool of oppression rather than an instrument to do good. Power must be given only to those who can control it.

Immortality

Tolkien portrayed death not as something negative but as a gift, the end of suffering, the ability to throw away the burdens of life, and for a Catholic, a way to Heaven. Despite the Christian idea that death can be a consequence of sin, Tolkien says that a 'divine punishment is also a divine gift, if accepted, since its object is ultimate blessing, and the supreme inventiveness of the Creator will make punishments (that is changes of design) produce a good not otherwise to be attained' (286).

Nevertheless, Tolkien admits the human desire to be immortal. He calls it 'the oldest and deepest desire, the Great Escape: the Escape from Death' (*Fairy* 153). However he adds that trying to fool death is absurd: 'Death is not an Enemy! I said, or meant to say, that the 'message' was the hideous peril of confusing true immortality with limitless serial longevity. Freedom from Time, and clinging to Time' (Letters 267). Even 'an attempt to halt time' (267) is a mistake, it does not grant freedom from Time.

Reality and Power

Each Level of Being has a different perspective on reality, but what is reality? When Tolkien speaks about a primary world and a secondary world he is implying that there is an outside world that all beings perceive. The philosopher George Berkeley's well known argument is that only our sense-impressions and our ideas are real (Hospers 64); all things immediately perceived are ideas, and ideas cannot exist without the mind; their existence therefore consists in being perceived (Yolton 150).

Berkeleyís view about reality does agree with that of Tolkien who believed that the world exists even if nobody perceives it. John Locke's approach applies better to *LOR*. Locke believed that physical objects have what he called primary qualities and secondary qualities (Hospers 90). The former are qualities that exist in the object 'such as are utterly inseparable from the body, in what state soever it be; and such as in all the alterations and changes it suffers (qtd. in Hospers 90). The latter are 'such qualities which in truth are nothing in the objects themselves but powers to produce various sensations in us by their primary qualities' (qtd. in Hospers 90).

The primary qualities are in the object even if no one perceives them. The secondary qualities depend on the perceiver, but there is also a power inherent in the object that can 'produce certain sense-experiences under certain conditions (conditions of the organism, and of the perceptual environment)' (Hospers 90). So, fire causes pain only if there is someone who puts his/her hand in it. The idea of pain is in the person who touches the flame, but the quality of heat is in the fire. But even if no one is there to perceive it, fire always generates heat. The primary qualities exist in the objects themselves even if we can never be sure of how they are because our senses, being the channels through

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which we perceive the world, can deceive us.

No matter how subjective our senses, the 'power' inherent in objects that affect perceivers make everyone identify the same objects in the same way: for example, water is always a liquid substance that can be drunk. A modern psychologist who agrees with Locke's realism is James J. Gibson. He says that the quality of an object belongs to the object and the sensation does not. The sensation is subjective and belongs to the person perceiving it (Yolton 25). In *LOR*, when the fellowship of the ring arrives to Lothlorien it enters into a different world, which Frodo perceives in the following way: 'As soon as he set foot upon the far bank of Silverlode a strange feeling had come upon him, and it deepened as he walked on into the Naith: it seemed to him that he had stepped over a bridge of time into a corner of the Elder Days, and was now walking in a world that was no more' (*LOR*-I 452-53).

This is clearly a notion of reality closer to that of Locke. Frodo experiences a new world, distinct from what he has known before. If reality were confined to Frodo's inner world, his ideas, why would he perceive the world, in this case the trees, suddenly in a different way? He already has his ideas about trees, but out of the blue he realises that 'never before had he been so suddenly and so keenly aware of the feel and texture of a tree's skin and of the life within it. He felt . . . the delight of the living tree itself' (455). He is aware of a new reality because it existed independently from his. Even when Frodo experiences Lothlorien according to his senses, the primary qualities of that place are such that Frodo perceives them, through the power inherent in that spot, as different from other places.

We can now attempt to analyze how each Order of Being has a different perspective on reality, and we will begin with Power. First of all, power is a truth that exists and according to Descartes, the possibility of objective truth is not cancelled just because each person has a personal truth. To think and to be are truths, which are not personal but universal, and they do exist. Power is a fundamental basis of experience that each Level of Being has to face, having a different perspective about it. It is a truth because it does exist and each Order of Being has to deal with it, whether it wants to or not.

Foucault defines power as follows: 'Power in the substantive sense, ... does not exist. ... In reality power means relations, a more-or-less organised, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations' (*Confession* 198). It can be an instrument for repression or production (*Truth* 119), and it is strong 'because . . . it produces effects at the levels of desire and also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it' (*Body* 59). This knowledge can be on personal level or non-personal, which means that power can be given to something, for example: the machine - or Sauron's ring: 'And much of the strength and will of Sauron passed into that One Ring' (*Silmarillion* 287).

Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon is a clear example of how the machine can hold power. The Panopticon is the prison where all prisoners are watched at all times but they cannot see the person watching them. It has the power to control those in the cells by exposing them at all times. Even when the watcher may be the one punishing prisoners, he does not have the power to expose them; he becomes an instrument of the machine. Sauron's eye is like the Panopticon. It is difficult to escape its gaze and nobody can see him. The difference is that in Sauron is both watchman

and Panopticon. At Mount Doom he is able to see Frodo as soon as he puts on the ring: the 'Dark Lord was suddenly aware of him, and his Eye piercing all shadows looked across the plain to the door that he had made' (*LOR*-III 275).

The Ring is part of Sauron's Panopticon and part of Sauron. Sauron's watcher is the Panopticon itself: Sauron himself. And in the relation Frodo-Sauron, the latter is stronger. As Foucault says, 'power means relations'. So, why does power mean relations? Peter Morriss says that power is 'a concept referring to an ability, capacity or dispositional property' (13). Someone who has power can influence someone or something - a sculpture is the marble influenced by the artist's capacity to sculpt - but that does not mean that he or she will be able to influence everybody or everything. That person will exercise influence only in the kind of relation where his or her power will have an effect.

Power is the union of these three qualities: capacity, influence and relations. A capacity is the cause or enablement of power, the influence that power has over something or someone is its effect, and it manifests itself in relations. 'Following Max Weber . . . a relationship is at base the existence of a substantial probability of interaction between two persons' (McCall 4). We can extend this definition to the interaction between a person and an object. So, the relation between someone and an object is the point where power manifests itself. Even if power exists, it needs to interact with others in order to be noticed, to exercise its qualities.

Individual power

When Saruman, Gandalf and Sauron - spirits on the same Level of Being - exercise power they do it through a relationship with others. Their perspective on power is that it is a way to control others' wills, or a tool to obtain their desires by controlling or influencing the free will of others. As Tolkien says, each person has his or her own free will and nobody should control it. However, these Spirits can oblige someone to do whatever they want. For Saruman and Sauron this is an advantage that they use only for themselves, for Gandalf it is always a temptation that he has to control.

On the other hand the Hobbit perspective on power is that it is a tool to obtain private comfort, not through exercising control over someone's free will but through personal satisfaction. Sauron's view of power is so strongly based on a desire to control the free will of people that he is unable to think that his enemies would plan to destroy the One Ring - which will helps its user to control others: 'But the only measure that he knows is desire, desire for power; and so he judges all hearts. Into his heart the thought will not enter that any will refuse it, that having the Ring we may seek to destroy it' (*LOR*-III 353). Moorcock and Leiber's accusation that Tolkien 'does not explore the mind of the villains' is mistaken. Sauron's mind works as the council says and the proof of it is that the Ring is destroyed. In fact, we know Sauron's main drive: his desire to conquer all places and become the master of all those who are under his power.

Tolkien condemns this desire as the desire to become God. Aule creates the Dwarves and Eru tells him: 'the creatures of thy hand and mind can live only by that [your] being, moving when thou thinkest to move them, and if thy thought be elsewhere, standing idle. Is that thy desire? / Then Aule answered: 'I did not desire such lordship. I desired things other than I am, to love and to teach them' (*Silmarillion* 43). Eru allows Dwarves to exist because Aule does not pretend to become God or to command the Dwarves' free will. This reminds us of Satan, who in his vanity thought he could match God and who seeks to enslave people's free will through sin (*Catechism* 371). Curiously enough, Sauron's perspective on power makes him do exactly that which Eru condemns: Sauron is the owner of the free will of his minions.

Sauron is evil because he loves himself but not Eru. If he loved Eru he would accept his goodness and respect the free will of others. At Mount Doom Sauron directs all his will towards Frodo and Sam, and - as a reminder of Eru's words - his minions seem unable to move without his will: 'From all his policies and webs of fear and treachery, from all his stratagems and wars his mind shook free; and throughout his realm a tremor ran, his slaves quailed, and his armies halted, and his captains suddenly steerless, bereft of will, wavered and despaired' (*LOR*-III 275). For Sauron power means total control of others' free will.

Saruman wants the same kind of control, but he is not as powerful as Sauron. When assailed in Orthanc, Saruman's intention is to take over the free will of his enemies: for those 'who listened unwarily . . . it was a delight to hear the voice speaking, all that it said seemed wise and reasonable, and desire awoke in them by swift agreement to seem wise themselves' (*LOR*-II 228). Nevertheless, Gandalf is there and does not allow Saruman to take control of those listening to his charm, as he has done with Theoden and Grima Wormtongue.

In the relationship between Saruman and Gandalf, Saruman's power cannot influence Gandalf. Saruman does not lack power; but the event shows that it is in a relationship that the nature and capacity of power becomes apparent. Saruman has too much conceit in his own abilities and uses power to show how mighty he is. Therefore, when he is defeated he goes to the Shire to hurt the Hobbits, even when there is no real gain for him: 'I have already done much that you will find it hard to mend or undo in your lives. And it will be pleasant to think of that and set it against my injuries' (*LOR*-III 368). Saruman could have gathered new strength but he seems to despair.

When Sauron uses power he does it to obtain a benefit other than the mere pleasure of confusing his enemies' lives and is an example of how the critics' accusations that Tolkien simplifies good and evil is mistaken. There is polyphony even between the two principal villains of *LOR*. Saruman wastes his remaining power in a childish whim, but Sauron vanishes and even when he is 'reduced to a shadow, a mere memory of malicious will' (*Letters* 153), Gandalf's warning remind us that perhaps Sauron will acquire new power to do evil: 'As Gandalf repeatedly stresses, all one can do is combat evil when and where one is, and there is no permanent solution' to be reached in this world (Curry 101).

This is not the first time Sauron has been defeated. The Necromancer of *The Hobbit* 'is Sauron *redivivus*, growing swiftly to visible shape and power again' (*Letters*, footnote 158). In contrast, Saruman becomes a beggarly vagabond who rules the Shire for a while just to revenge himself on Hobbits. We never 'see' or know Sauron as well as we come to know Saruman. While Tolkien shows us Saruman, he wants Sauron to remain as a shadow that we cannot fully know. H. P. Lovecraft argues that in the

> true weird tale . . . [a] certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain - a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (349-50)

Tolkien wants Sauron to remain a mystery. Sauron's power

is like that of the Panopticon. He has to remain unseen in order to exercise his power and influence people. He uses fear as a way to control them, and as Lovecraft says, what remains unknown is more terrible than what can be named. To name something is to explain it. The more terrible people imagine Sauron to be, the more power he has. To argue that Sauron does not show himself because he is just a bodiless spirit does not work. Even when Sauron has no body his spirit abides in Mordor, where only his minions can see him. One cannot expect to know more about Sauron. He is a mystery meant to be almost unknown, except as a ruthless ruler.

The power of the Ring

Gandalf's temptation to control others' free will reminds us of Tolkien's opinion that the ability to boss people must not be given to those looking for it (*Letters* 64). In the same way Gandalf tries to avoid governing others. His role is to be a guide for them, without obliging them to act in one or another way. Even when he does not want to control others he does want Middle-earth to be safe from evil. He knows his desire and that is why he remains a guide but not a ruler, (c.f. Aragorn), and that is why he rejects the ring so vehemently when Frodo offers it to him: 'No!' cried Gandalf, springing to his feet. . . . 'Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good. Do not tempt me!' (*LOR*-I 95).

Gandalf can oblige Bilbo to give him the Ring, but he would not do it. However, he knows how important it is to destroy it. Therefore, he almost forces Bilbo to deliver it: 'Gandalf's eyes flashed. 'It will be my turn to get angry soon,' he said. 'If you say that again, I shall. Then you will see Gandalf the Grey uncloaked.' He took a step towards the hobbit, and he seemed to grow tall and menacing; his shadow filled the little room' (60). He has the capacity to influence Bilbo so much that he could control Bilbo's free will, but he does not; he is almost threatening him but this relationship in which power manifests is not based on the element of force but of attachment. As McCall says, a relationship based on ascription is one that focuses on social positions and a relationship based on attachment focuses on role-identities (6-8). So, Gandalf is not only a powerful wizard but a friend too. Bilbo is a friend, not only a simple hobbit.

Because Bilbo and Gandalf are friends, it is easier for Gandalf to be a guide rather than a ruler; he is able to persuade Bilbo to leave the Ring and to overcome his own temptation of ruling others' free will in order to obtain what he wants. In fact, Hobbits are not interested in ruling others' free will. For them, power is something personal. They receive pleasure when they do things for themselves, not when someone does everything for them. The Ring tempts Sam with power and glory, but he sees power as a way to provide him with happiness in a personal way:

> he saw Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age, striding with a flaming sword across the darkened land, and armies flocking to his call as he marched to the overthrow of Barad-Dur. . . . but also deep down in him lived still unconquered his plain hobbit-sense: he knew in the core of his heart that he was not large enough to bear such a burden, even if such visions were not a mere cheat to betray him. The one small garden of a free gardener was all his need and due, not a garden swollen to a realm; his own hands to use, not the hands of others to command. (*LOR*-III 216)

Sam wants power to use 'his own hands' not 'the hands of others to command'. And as Tolkien says, Sam is 'the genuine hobbit' (*Letters* 105). Sam speaks for all Hobbits, their perception of power. He has been among other Orders of Beings and has been influenced by their views about reality; as Frodo has been influenced too. That is perhaps the reason for Sam's thoughts about glory and commanding power. Nevertheless, he is able to remain the 'genuine hobbit'. If he had had the Ring before he was influenced by other views of power, he would perhaps have done what Bilbo and Gollum did when they possessed the Ring: use it for themselves, affecting only themselves.

Gollum uses the Ring 'to find out secrets' (*LOR*-I 85) by himself, not through others. At the Misty Mountains he thinks that he will find out 'great secrets buried there which have not been discovered since the beginning' (85). Therefore, he goes there himself; he never tries to send someone to do it, (cf Sauron sending the Nazgul to find the Ring). Bilbo uses the Ring when he does not want to be molested, as when he avoids the Sackville-Bagginses (149), instead of obliging others to go away. In short: they are Hobbits.

Nevertheless, Frodo cannot resist temptation and he briefly loses his Hobbit-view of power. Frodo is able to resist temptation as long as he has his own free will, but there comes a moment when the Ring strips him of his free will and controls him, forcing him to put the Ring on his finger. But Gollum bites off his finger and falls into the Crack of Doom and the Ring is destroyed. This is a moment where we can see the influence of Christianity in *LOR*, how it blends free will and fate. Even when Frodo, Gollum and Sam act according to their own free wills, Fate seemed to decide that the One Ring will be destroyed. Although Frodo, at the last on Mount Doom, did not have any free will left, at the first he freely took on the task of destroying the Ring, and he freely decided to let Gollum live. So, Eru's plan is fulfilled through the free will of his creations.

The Ring was created by Sauron; therefore, it works under the same view of power that Sauron has. The Ring's power is 'the power to dominate other wills, to enslave others. Even if the power were supposedly exercised for the good of others, its use would be evil: one cannot make others good by dominating their wills' (Purtill 60). Evil cannot be used to fight evil. This does not provide a desirable result or a desirable process to fight evil. Gandalf and Galadriel reject the Ring because they know its power, which cannot bring real good. As evil is the corruption of good, domination is the corruption of free will. The Ring and Sauron's power are evil because they corrupt free will; they dominate it. While having the Ring, the desire of Bilbo and Gollum to dominate, exercise control over something, increases. Bilbo wants to preserve his privacy so much that he risks the secret of the Ring by using it on a road only to avoid the Sackville-Bagginses (*LOR*-I 149). Gollum tries to satisfy his own ends even if it means living in a dark cavern deep in the mountains.

The choices of the Good

Contrary to the desire to command others's free will, Elves - who see power as a tool to heal, and to create and preserve beauty - are well known for their respect for others' free will: 'And it is also said,' answered Frodo: 'Go not to the Elves for counsel, for

they will say both no and yes' (*LOR*-I 123). Gildor is reluctant to advise Frodo, and he does it only out of friendship. However, he knows that 'advice is a dangerous gift, even from the wise to the wise, and all courses may run ill' (123). Galadriel too respects Frodo's free will. She does not advise him even when he looks into her Mirror (470). Nevertheless, Galadriel is tempted to take the Ring. How can this be? If in *LOR* all heroes, as Aldiss says, are good, and without evil, why are they tempted by evil?

In Roman Catholic belief the Virgin Mary was never tempted by evil because she did not have any evil within herself that could be called by an outer evil tempting her; she was, according to Pope Pius IX, 'from the first moment of her conception . . . . preserved immune from all stain of original sin' (qtd. in *Catechism* 108). Then, those who are tempted by evil have the inner seed of evil within them that an outer evil can water and make grow, what the Catholic Church calls: original sin and concupiscence. Original sin affects 'the human nature . . . . It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind' (*Catechism* 91). Baptism erases this original sin but human nature is left with 'an inclination to evil that is called concupiscence" (91). Then, even heroes suffer temptation and are able to do evil deeds: Boromir wants to take the Ring from Bilbo, Legolas and Gimli engage 'in a kind of bloodthirsty competition' (Otty 173), Treebeard and the Ents slay Saruman's minions 'without a flicker of remorse or pity' (173). Saruman was once the head of the Council; Theoden had become a tyrant of sorts and Denethor himself becomes one.

All these heroes have a concupiscence within themselves that enables them to do evil acts. Free will is also the capacity, allowed by God, to do evil (*Catechism* 74-75). So Tolkien's world is not divided into unambiguous evil and unambiguous good. Sam does not treat Gollum nicely, but Frodo does, and when Faramir has his men ready to shoot him for having come to thepool Sam wishes they would kill him (*LOR*-II 366). Even the Wild Men, or Woses, behave in an ambiguous manner. They help Sauron's enemies pass through their land but, as Treebeard does, they seem to do it because it will benefit them if Sauron is defeated, because if not he will conquer them in time. The Wild Men do not help Theoden because they share his views on the conflict. They help him because it suits their interests, merely.

Even Elves can be tempted to do evil and their interests can be ambiguous. *The Silmarillion* recounts how because of the Silmarils Elves slay each other (*Silmarillion* 87). The Elves of Mirkwood wanted part of the dragon Smaug's treasure, (*The Hobbit),* and are ready to fight for their claim. Similarly, the Elves of Lothlorien threaten to kill Gimli if he does not acquiesce to their desire to blindfold him: 'You cannot cross the rivers again, and behind you there are now secret sentinels that you cannot pass. You would be slain before you saw them' (*LOR*-I 450). They do not hinder the Company's entrance into their territory, because Legolas is with them (444). A non-elven stranger would not have had the warm welcome that the Company had. Gimli, a Dwarf, is not treated as the rest of the Company is. Elves - despite their benevolence - did not want him to pass into Lothlorien. Only when it is agreed that Legolas and Aragorn will guard him do they allow him to continue with the rest of the Fellowship (445). However, we remember that Tolkien refers to Elves as 'early men, not yet fallen entirely from a paradisal condition, hence their great beauty and supreme skill in arts and crafts' (Knight 114). This Order of Being is special, and so is its view of power. This may be a reason they respect others' free will: they are closer to God. Although, through their concupiscence, elves too can be tempted towards evil.

The Elves' closeness to God can be seen in their healing powers. When Frodo is in pain owing to the wound made by the Nazgul, Glorfindel's touch eases his pain (*LOR*-I 281). Aragorn is a healer, for 'it is said in old lore: The hands of the king are the hands of a healer. And so the rightful king could ever be known' (*LOR*-III 166) - words which remind us of King Arthur and the Grail - but not even Aragorn possesses the Elves' power to heal Frodo's wound. He admits it: 'there is some poison or evil at work that is beyond my skill to drive out' (*LOR*-I 272-73).

Nevertheless, Rivendell's Elves heal Frodo. They are the only people that can do so because their view of power as a tool to heal has made them direct their knowledge towards healing. Their closeness to God is not enough; they also need to have this view of power. Elrond cures Frodo, but not only through his touch; he has to apply his abilities, and it takes days to have effect. As Gandalf tells Frodo: 'he has tended you for days, ever since you were brought in. . . . I suspected that there was some fragment of the blade still in the closed wound. But it could not be found until last night. Then Elrond removed a splinter. It was deeply buried' (292).

While Sauron wants to preserve his dominion over others' wills and Gandalf wants to preserve Middle-earth's freedom, Elves use power to heal, and to create and preserve beauty. Elves do not use power to dominate: for example they teach Ents to talk and set them free, without making them servants (*LOR*-II 84). Rivendell and Lothlorien are places that had been created through the elven view of power. Both are very beautiful, conveying a feeling of tranquillity and goodness. Frodo experiences Lorien as if

> he had stepped through a high window that looked on a vanished world. A light was upon it for which his language had no name. All that he saw was shapely, but the shapes seemed at once clear cut, as if they had been first conceived and drawn at the uncovering of his eyes, and ancient as if they had endured for ever. . . . No blemish or sickness or deformity could be seen in anything that grew upon the earth. On the land of Lorien there was no stain (*LOR*-I 454-55).

Sam feels as if he is 'inside a song' (455). Using their knowledge, Elves created these places which are so beautiful. When the rings of power were created, the Elves 'made Three supremely beautiful and powerful rings, almost solely of their own imagination, and directed to the preservation of beauty' (*Letters* 152). Those 'who had them in their keeping could ward off the decays of time and postpone the weariness of the world' (*Silmarillion* 288). Lothlorien and Rivendell's characteristics are owing to the power of the rings that Elrond and Galadriel possess; each has one of the three elven rings. They use power to preserve these places: the beauty of them and all the knowledge that was necessary in order to make them.

As Elrond states: the elven rings 'were not made as weapons of war or conquest: that is not their power. Those who made them did not desire strength or domination or hoarded wealth, but understanding, making and healing, to preserve all things unstained' (*LOR*-I 352). Haldir's words at Cerin Amroth indicate that the Elves' perception of power has created Lothlorien and that only through that perception could it have been created, for when he shows Cerin Amroth to Frodo and Sam, its beauty overwhelms them: 'He smiled. You feel the power of the Lady of the Galadrim' (455). This is not simple beauty but a special kind of beauty, one that Tolkien's art enables the reader to comprehend.

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Hobbits on the shores of Middle-earth

John Ellison, after Caspar David Friedrich