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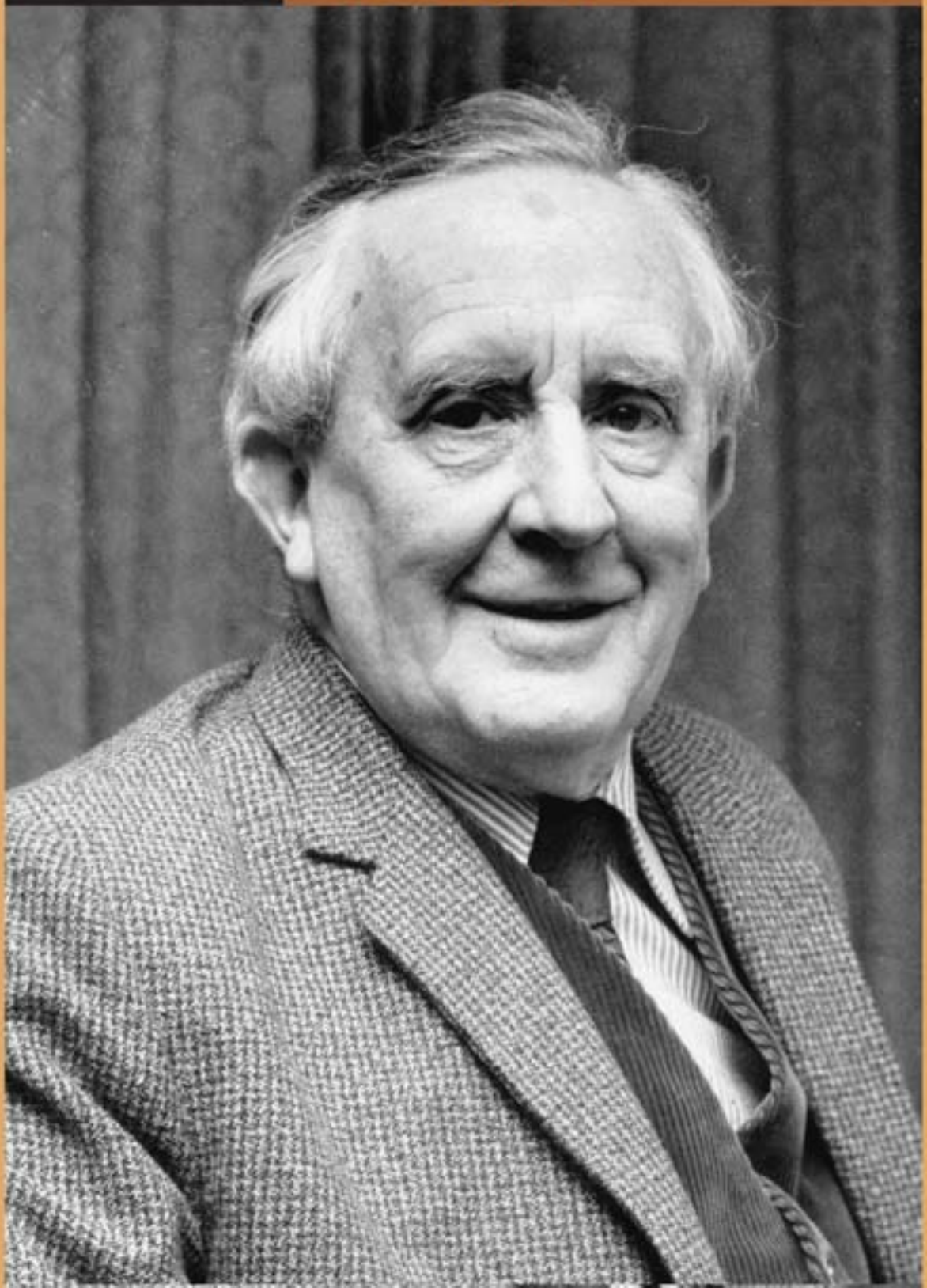
NEW EDITION

J.R.R. TOLKIEN

Edited and with an Introduction by
HAROLD BLOOM



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Bloom's Modern Critical Views

J.R.R. TOLKIEN

New Edition

Edited and with an introduction by

Harold Bloom

Sterling Professor of the Humanities

Yale University

BLOOM'S LITERARY CRITICISM

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Editor's Note

My Introduction happily reaffirms my affection for *The Hobbit*, which I continue to prefer to the rather overwrought *The Lord of the Rings*.

Charles A. Huttar learnedly traces the relation of *The Lord of the Ring* to epic tradition, while David and Carol Stevens find in *The Hobbit* Tolkien's major theme: the renunciation of power.

Bilbo Baggins is seen as a quester after maturity by William H. Green, after which George Clark studies Tolkien's nostalgia for the heroic age of *Beowulf*.

The contrast between the delightful Bilbo Baggins and *The Hobbit*'s pompous narrator is shrewdly analyzed by Jane Chance, while Jorge J. E. Gracia juxtaposes Sam and Gollum as types of the quest for happiness, with only Sam achieving the goal in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Tolkien's place in the history of ideas is ambitiously considered by Brian Rosebury, who risks a kind of inflation by invoking the formidable philosopher Thomas Hobbes.

Verlyn Flieger examines the uncompleted works in the Tolkien canon, after which Marjorie Burns examines the dual nature of Beorn in *The Hobbit*.

In this volume's final essay, John C. Hunter astutely states the problem of how Tolkien's work can be defended against charges of escapism.

HAROLD BLOOM

Introduction

J.R.R. Tolkien was a distinguished scholar of Anglo-Saxon literature, particularly of the epic poem *Beowulf*. His greater fame resulted from his fantasy-romance *The Lord of the Rings*, which I have reread with care and with considerable aesthetic reservations. Since I also have just reread *The Hobbit*, prelude to the larger work, with pleasure, and am more persuaded by it than by *The Lord of the Rings*, I will devote this Introduction only to *The Hobbit* (1937). My views on *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955), such as they are, constitute my Introduction to the volume on *The Lord of the Rings* in the Chelsea House series Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations, published simultaneously with *J.R.R. Tolkien* in Bloom's Modern Critical Views.

The Hobbit continues to be a story written for extremely intelligent children of all ages, and Bilbo Baggins seems to me easier to accept and like than is his heroic nephew, Frodo Baggins, the protagonist of the long and complicated *The Lord of the Rings*. Bilbo Baggins, though an admirable hobbit, is fortunately more a well-meaning burglar than he is a hero. I think we are fond of him because he is a hobbit to whom things happen. But Frodo Baggins makes things happen and is certainly heroic, and I, at least, don't always understand how I am to judge his heroism, even when I am instructed by Roger Sale, certainly the best of all Tolkien critics. But that is an argument for the Introduction to the companion volume of this book.

Bilbo Baggins's preferences for comfort and a sleepy existence persuade because of their universality. Warring against goblins may be an exemplary

occupation for others, but not for one's self, and it always seems better when goblins are kept away from the world of what Freud called reality-testing or the necessity for (eventually) dying. *The Hobbit* remains a rather funny book, so long as it gives primacy to Bilbo's good sense that adventures are "wretched, tiresome, uncomfortable." Dragons, I feel, ought to have no place in Bilbo's life; he is too amiable to be bothered by them. That is probably Tolkien's best joke in *The Hobbit*; we keep being rueful at all the perils Bilbo is dragged into, though without them there would be no tale to tell. If trolls and goblins are going about, we want Bilbo to be safe in his wonderfully comfortable hobbit-hole, and I am rather grateful to Tolkien that sometimes I want to be there with Bilbo, even though I know only a few trolls and no goblins whatsoever.

I suspect that *The Lord of the Rings* is fated to become only an intricate period piece, while *The Hobbit* may well survive as children's literature. Really good-natured fantasy is hard to come by, and one convincing personality at its center is all it requires. No other figure in *The Hobbit* can be called a personality, but Bilbo Baggins is so vivid and persistent that he makes up for all the others. The first thing we hear Bilbo say is "Good morning!" to the self-important wizard Gandalf, who is rude enough to overinterpret the remark. Bilbo's last exclamation is also to Gandalf, who has become more respectful and even fond of Mr. Baggins by the end of the book but still feels compelled to remind him that "you are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!" Charming as always, Bilbo comforts us with a laughing "Thank goodness!"

CHARLES A. HUTTAR

Tolkien, Epic Traditions, and Golden Age Myths

Epic typically lays before a contemporary audience a vision of lost glory, of an age when heroes walked the earth whose stature we may emulate but not equal. It may also hold out some hope for a reparation of loss, but not necessarily: we have epics whose mood is elegiac, such as *Beowulf* and the *Iliad*, as well as ones of more prophetic strain, such as the *Aeneid* and *Paradise Lost*. In some we find a more balanced mood: for Spenser, mutability reigns, but is not to be mistaken for decline; for Tennyson, Camelot passes, but the process of divine fulfilment continues.

Though written in prose, *The Lord of the Rings* is unquestionably heir to Western epic traditions, both classical and medieval-vernacular. The author explicitly thought of his work in terms of 'epic' (Tolkien, *Letters* 230–1, 31, 58). He loved Homer (*Letters* 172), and a recent study of the work's affinities with Virgil (Morse) has sought to bring greater balance into a line of scholarship which had previously emphasised such Northern influences as *Beowulf* and the Eddas. (I use the term 'influences', not 'sources': Tolkien's manner of working was not so much to imitate a model as to ladle his portion out of the great bubbling soup pot of mythopoeic motifs to which storytellers are always helping themselves [Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories' 53–6].) Critics interested in how *The Lord of the Rings* connects with the epic tradition have generally concentrated on Tolkien's concept of heroism, which they find

From *Twentieth-Century Fantasists: Essays on Culture, Society and Belief in Twentieth-Century Mythopoeic Literature*, pp. 92–107. Text ©1992 by Macmillan Press; editorial matter and selection ©1992 by Kath Filmer.

firmly rooted in epic, albeit revisionist in a way that reflects both Christian and contemporary sensibilities.[1] My own earlier study of one recurrent motif in Tolkien, the underground adventures of the hero, indicates the central (though not sole) place of the epic tradition in Tolkien's handling of this theme. We turn now to consider another, not unrelated motif, one widespread in the world's cultures[2] and, again, mediated significantly though not solely through Greco-Roman and other epic traditions. It is the idea that the world as we know it represents a woeful decline from a glorious remote past: a Golden Age, Atlantis, Elysium, Eden, Heorot, Camelot, the unspoiled wilderness and prairies. The differences among these myths are as important as their resemblances, for one cook may flavour what is taken out of the common soup pot with quite a different philosophy of history from that of another. And, as with his concept of heroism, the flavouring Tolkien gives to his myth of decline helps us define his place in the tradition of epic and, more particularly, of Christian epic.

What seems the most obvious echo of the Hesiodic and Ovidian myth of Four Ages proves on examination to be superficial. In Tolkien's history of Middle-earth there are four ages also, each ending catastrophically, and the dominant races are successively lower in the hierarchy of created beings: Valar, Elves and, finally, Men (LR 3:363, 365; *Letters* 146–60, 411). But for all that, Tolkien's four ages are not in essence distinct: they represent a continuous sweep of time, perhaps hundreds of centuries, dense with chronicle and demarcated into 'Ages' mainly by the restarting of the 'tale of years'. 'Year 1' always marks, to be sure, what is sensed as the end of an era and a new beginning—for example, Theoden foresees 'the great battle of our time, in which many things shall pass away' (LR 3.74)—and yet the chronology keeps count, in the last analysis, of *more of the same*, that is, the continuing struggle between good and evil. That struggle began—as in the Judeo-Christian myth—outside the entire scheme of earthly 'ages', with the rebellion of Melkor against the One at a time when the whole creation still existed only as music in the mind of the gods (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 15–22). But once the historical clock started running, it has continued in a single sequence—by our time, Tolkien suggests, for perhaps a half-dozen 'ages' (*Letters* 283n). Hesiod's scheme (*Works and Days* 106–201, summarised in Levin 14–15; Smith 69), in contrast, is radically ahistorical. There is no continuity between the human race of one age and that of the next; each race is a fresh creation. Each represents a state of life that lasts for an unspecified length of time and is begun and (in all cases but one) ended by a divine act—that is, from outside. The sole exception is the race of bronze, whose acting-out of their warlike nature must result finally in mutual destruction without any help from the gods; still, in merely behaving according to their nature, they too represent the principle of stasis which governs each of Hesiod's ages.

Any movement in the picture is of no more significance than the movement seen on Achilles' shield, which produces only an illusion of real life. There is no question, then, of historical process in Hesiod's succession of four ages,[3] despite the obvious decline in their metallic identifications. Further, although this is a moral decline—the men of silver are morally inferior to their predecessors of gold, and those of brass and iron each more so—yet the overall scheme is amoral, being powered by arbitrary innate distinctions rather than by good or evil choices. For Tolkien, on the other hand, good and evil are always present, in any age, as real possibilities: the nature of temptation does not change, nor do the roles played by ambition and greed, the tendency of power to corrupt, or the tension between submission to divine will and the lust to aggrandise one's own identity in terms of opposition to divine will. As readers of Tolkien we are, in short, much closer to the Christian world out of which an epic like *Beowulf* comes to us, wherein poet and audience may long for the paradigmatic peace and prosperity, maintained by a good king for fifty years, yet doomed; but remember that there were also wicked kings and foolish kings in olden times, and that it still remains within our power to be good or wicked according to the same moral laws. Even in Paradise, temptations exist and need to be rejected. Tolkien's heroes always resist the attractions of a Hesiodic fatalism. This moral stance is implicit in Tolkien's belief that 'all stories are ultimately about the fall' (*Letters* 147).

For writers of epic, a world of stasis or even a succession of such worlds is ultimately uninteresting. Thus a scheme of four ages tended to reduce itself to a simpler and more useful binary distinction between the Golden Age and all the rest, an unfallen and a fallen world (Smith 69). Even Ovid, who as a mythographer rather than epic poet is closest to Hesiod, treats more summarily the two ages occurring between the Golden Age and that of Iron and emphasises the idea of an irrecoverable lost paradise in which men lived happily without care, toil, ageing, sickness, greed or war (Met. 1.76–150). Now such an ideal is pleasant to imagine but at the same time safely remote from experience, locatable on no map. But the epic poets Homer and Virgil are both intensely interested in geography, setting their tales in the world their audience knows (by travellers' report, at least, in the case of Odysseus's and Aeneas's voyages), and even Spenser's Faerie, the name of which evokes unreality, nevertheless is recognisably the British Isles. Tolkien belongs very firmly to this tradition, so much so that scholars have attempted to match his world map with some precision to that of Europe and its neighbors as we know it.[4]

A writer to whom geographical and historical realism is so important, yet who wishes to keep something of the Golden Age mythos, must seek strategies. One is to devise certain places where paradise still exists, inaccessible except by supernatural means or by unrepeatable accident—such

as Spenser's Mount Acidale or the Garden of Adonis, or El Dorado in Voltaire's mock epic. Tolkien does it in Tom Bombadil's house, in Lothlorien and, to a degree, in Rivendell. Another is to downplay the 'paradise' part of the concept and simply contrast the world as we know it with a world that has been lost, one not strictly paradisal, yet exceedingly desirable by contrast with our own.

Tolkien's Shire represents a mingling of these two strategies. Though not inaccessible, the Shire is so far off the beaten track that its idyllic state is undisturbed—at least, until the events in *The Lord of the Rings* begin. It represents, from the viewpoint of the twentieth century, a time 'long ago in the quiet of the world, when there was less noise and more green' (Tolkien, *Hobbit* 13). In this demi-paradise, somewhat reminiscent of the agrarian ideal celebrated in Virgil's *Georgics* (2.458–74; cf. Morse 49–50), life is simple but comfortable and society maintains a reasonable degree of harmony with a minimal political structure: a 'quiet little land ruled only by the swing of the seasons', Helms calls it (60), much like the description of Latium that was given to Aeneas upon his arrival there (*Aen*. 7.202–4). Tolkien conceived his hobbits as essentially 'human' but 'more in touch with "nature"' and 'abnormally . . . free from ambition or greed of wealth' (*Letters* 158n), as well as having 'a feeling for "wild creatures"' (197n). In the story, their longing to return to prewar quietness illustrates how naturally the Golden Age mythos becomes reduced to a simple nostalgia for the 'good old days'. It had happened already in the development of pastoral poetry (cf. Smith 70). The feelings of loss parallel those Tolkien had in 'real life': to him, a world of motorcars, nuclear weapons and totalitarian techniques of mind control clearly indicated a decline from former times.[5]

A similar nostalgia, though without the bucolic element, appears in the account of ancient Athens which we find in Plato (*Timaeus* 24e–25d, *Critias* 108e–109a and 113b–121c), in a context that points to yet a third strategy. Plato praises the Athenians of an earlier time for the qualities which enabled them to hold off an overwhelming invasion force from Atlantis, a vast island located west of Europe. This empire, highly advanced in civilisation but morally flawed, was finally sunk beneath the sea by an earthquake. Plato's myth concerning tragic and irreversible loss is particularly germane to the present study because one of the central legends in all of Tolkien's vast mythology, the story of the fall of Numenor, was his 'personal alteration of the Atlantis myth' (*Letters* 361).[6] 'Of all the mythical or "archetypal" images this is the one most deeply seated in my imagination', he wrote (idem), and he believed that it also 'profoundly affected the imagination of peoples of Europe with westward-shores' (*Letters* 303; cf. 212). He thought of himself as 'Atlantis-haunt[ed]' (347), troubled 'for many years' (361) with (as he described it to Auden) a 'terrible recurrent dream . . . of the Great Wave,

towering up and coming in ineluctably over the trees and green fields' (213). In *The Lord of the Rings* he gave the same recurrent dream to Faramir (LR 3.240; cf. *Letters* 232). The lands which 'now . . . lie under the wave' exist only in loving and longing memory (LR 2.72). With Numenor, as with Atlantis, a civilisation of 'power and splendour' (3.316) was lost, and lost in much the same manner.

But Tolkien's version goes beyond the original legend to bind more closely together the two classical myths, Atlantis and the Golden Age, and wed both to the Judeo-Christian, by emphasising what the downfall of Numenor cost all future generations of humankind. 'Thereafter there is no visible dwelling of the divine or immortal on earth.' The world itself is transformed from flat to 'round, and finite' (*Letters* 156; cf. 197): no longer will sailing west bring one eventually to heaven (206). There is a note here of exile, resembling the expulsion from Eden or the dispersal of races after Babel in punishment for over-reaching. For the immediate cause of the cataclysm, as well, reminds us of Genesis: it is the violation of a Ban—in this case, stepping on to a forbidden shore (LR 3.317; cf. *Letters* 204). Here is a point where Tolkien's mythic world relates very closely to our real world as he understood it. 'Certainly there was an Eden', he wrote in a wartime letter to his son Christopher, serving in the RAF; 'our whole nature at its best and least corrupted, its gentlest and most humane, is still soaked with the sense of "exile". . . . We shall never recover it . . .; we may recover something like it, but on a higher plane' (*Letters* 110). To this theme of recovery my essay will return.

Tolkien combines the second and third strategies in a way that reminds us of Homer and Virgil, yet to a unique degree. He harkens back to past eras of our own world, already imperfect yet much closer to paradise than anything we have today; but he gives them a remoteness, an aura of great depths of time, which makes the word 'nostalgia' far too weak. This idea is primarily transmitted not through epic but through Genesis, firing the imagination of a poet such as John Donne or Henry Vaughan, for example, to depict even the first generations after the Fall as being, from a much debased modern viewpoint, almost a Golden Age—long-lived, of imposing size and strength and on familiar terms with divine and angelic visitations—and to lament the comparative degradation of modern life (Donne lines 111–71; Vaughan 196–7 ('Corruption' [1650]). Note also Vaughan's verse translation of Boethius on the Golden Age (119–20).) There are close parallels in Homer, who narrates legends out of a dim past when a hero might easily wield a stone so massive that two 'men such as men are now'—that is, in Homer's time—could barely lift it (*Iliad* 12.449), yet these heroes are told how far they come short of still earlier heroes: in his youth, Nestor relates, he had fought side by side with men against whom none 'now [that is, in Nestor's

time] alive upon earth could do battle' (*Iliad* 1.272). It is the same in Virgil. He tells his more sophisticated audience about heroes from a millennium before: Turnus who hurls a stone too heavy for a dozen moderns (*Aeneid* 12.896–902), Aeneas who wanders Italy and encounters many of the same topographical features that his audience knows well, and who hears in turn of marvels long before *his* time—how (for example) on this very spot, at this cave, Hercules with incredible strength slew the monster Cacus. Already in that world of ancient legend good must battle evil; but though a fallen world, not a Golden, it has a greatness which has since been lost. The landscape remains intact; men fade.

Such a mood is everywhere in Tolkien's epic, but heightened—as one might expect in the mid-twentieth century when even landscapes fade, sometimes almost overnight (to take an extreme case) by the mechanised felling of long-standing groves (Cf. LR 1.377–78.), and when Virgil's millennia have become scarcely ticks of the geological clock. Gandalf, who has already lived thousands of years and seen the downfall of Numenor, warns the Council that 'seas and lands may change' (LR 1.280): his perspective is spacious enough to allow for Continental Drift.[7] So pervasive in Tolkien's world as to be one of its defining qualities is the sense of almost unimaginable depths of time[8] coupled with the sense of impermanence and inevitable diminution. Soon after leaving their sheltered homeland the hobbits begin to apprehend ages (as well as places) beyond their ken. The Elf Gildor needs to correct them when they refer to the Shire as 'our own': 'Others dwelt here before hobbits were; and others will dwell here again when hobbits are no more' (1.93). The Old Forest is 'indeed ancient, a survivor of vast forgotten woods', and in it the hobbits 'begin to . . . feel themselves as the strangers' (1.141). When Tom Bombadil gives them daggers forged by Men of Westernesse, they envision a 'great expanse of years' past (1.157)—for them, a new concept. They grow to love tales and verses that have come down from 'the olden days' (1.203), when 'the world was young' which has now become 'grey' (1.329–30). They meet Elves and others whose lives and memories go back to those earliest times, and even whole societies, like the Wild Men led by Ghan-buri-ghan, whose way of life is a relic of bygone ages (3.105–6; cf. Ryan 8–11). They are awed by monuments like Durin's Stone (1.348) and the Stone of Erech, a relic from Numenor (3.62), which survive as reminders of almost forgotten history. In weathered statuary they can see the faces of people who lived and reigned ages ago (Pillars of the Kings, 1.409; Púkel-men, 3.67). They cross landscapes scarred by 'old wars' (2.259) and encounter ruins of ancient artefacts: once-mighty towers (1.197–9, 213–14, 412; 2.249–50), the stairs of Cirith Ungol (2.312–13), water-gardens (2.259), overgrown and barely discernible roads which once bore heavy traffic (1.217; 2.257–8; 3.108).

There is an aura of mystery about many of these things, and the hobbits are awed by the sheer depth of time they represent; but often accompanying that feeling is a profound sense of loss. Even in its latter days the city of Minas Tirith has a grandeur beyond anything the hobbits have known, yet they learn that the guards' helmets of mithril are 'heirlooms from the glory of old days' (3.25). No modern sword could have slain the Nazgul as did Merry's ancient blade (3.119–20; cf. 1.157), and his Dwarf companion acknowledges that 'in metal-work we cannot rival our fathers, many of whose secrets are lost' (1.241–2). In masonry, the oldest work is recognised as the best (3.149). Although in Gondor medical practice is remarkably advanced, yet 'all lore was in these latter days fallen from its fullness of old' (3.136). Longevity is greatly decreased (idem): here is a standard Golden Age motif, common to both the classical and Christian traditions (Hesiod lines 110–12; Genesis 5:3–32; 11:10–32; Donne lines 112–20). In Tolkien's myth the human descendants of Elves, however, still enjoy longer lives than ordinary humans (LR 3.315; *Letters* 193). Not everyone shares an appreciation for the old: some try to dismiss as mere folklore the 'old tales' (3.236) and proverbs about healing, which yet prove to be a legacy of much-needed wisdom (3.136, 140, 141). But from that experience and from others, a new respect is gained for ancient lore and craft, for artisans of old who could build such a redoubtable fortress as the Hornburg (2.133), or the road leading to Dunharrow, 'a road the like of which [Merry] had never seen before, a great work of men's hands in years beyond the reach of song' (3.67), or Dunharrow itself, 'the work of long-forgotten men. Their name was lost and no song or legend remembered it. . . . Here they laboured in the Dark Years, before ever a ship came to the western shores, or Gondor of the Dunedain was built; and now they had vanished, and only the old Púkel-men were left, still sitting at the turnings of the road' (3.68)—and badly eroded: 'Some in the wearing of the years had lost all features save the dark holes of their eyes that still stared sadly at the passers-by' (3.67). The 'great stone city' of Minas Tirith, which seems to Pippin 'more splendid than anything he had dreamed of', is actually

> falling year by year into decay. . . . In every street they passed some great house or court over whose doors and arched gates were carved many fair letters of strange and ancient shapes: names Pippin guessed of great men and kindreds that had once dwelt there; and yet now they were silent, and no footstep rang on their wide pavements, nor voice was heard in their halls, nor any face looked out from door or empty window. (3.24)

The diction and rhythms of that sentence, echoing as they do the weariness of the Preacher, skilfully reinforce the mood of lament for a greatly diminished

existence.[9] One of the marvels of pre-Numenorean art, a tree brought oversea to Gondor in ancient times, now stands withered in the citadel.

Perhaps the bitterest loss of all, in a Heroic ethos, is the lapse of memory itself and with it the end of fame. As a philologist Tolkien knew well that written records lose their effect once the language is forgotten (though it may sometimes by strenuous effort be relearned). It is a note frequently sounded in *The Lord of the Rings*. Even more forlorn is the condition of the losers in war—a prospect which Aragorn faces with a courage surpassing that of Achilles the glory-driven, or of Ben Sira who celebrates the fame of the illustrious dead (Eccleus. 44:10–14). 'A time may come soon', says Aragorn to Eowyn concerning the departing warriors, 'when none shall return. Then there will be need of valour without renown, for none shall remember the deeds that are done in the last defence of your homes. Yet the deeds will not be less valiant because they are unpraised' (LR 3.57–8); Eomer is of the same mind (LR 3.122).

In the classical Golden Age, everything required for human happiness was provided by nature, and there was no need for any of the arts. Trees were not felled to build ships, ores were not dug. Gold was the stuff men were made of rather than an object they possessed. For a later Age to develop mining and metalcraft was a sign of its decay. Yet the cosmogonic myths display a certain ambiguity about technology. In fact, two views of prehistory exist practically side by side in Greek writing: one of an idyllic beginning (Golden Age) and subsequent decline, aggravated by technological discoveries, and one of evolution from a weak and miserable state by means of practical arts which gave humans a degree of control over natural forces and processes (Lovejoy and Boas 24, 192–5, 200–21; Reckford 79–80). The polarity continues in the Roman tradition (Reckford 81–2). Lucretius, writing in the generation before Virgil, exemplifies the dilemma (*De rerum nat*. 5.998–1457). He rationalised the Hesiodic myth into a speculative account of primitive beings who lived content with what nature gave spontaneously because they had no means to get more, but who must endure miseries because they lacked such arts as the use of fire, political organisation for mutual aid, defence from predatory beasts, and healing. Then the quality of their lives steadily improved through discoveries and inventions—language, cooking, weaving, music, and so on; yet at the same time, freedom from the rigours of existence weakened them, social organisation led to competition and oppression, and new arts such as navigation and war exposed them to death in new and more frequent ways (Lovejoy and Boas 225–40). It was hard to decide (as it still is today) whether technology was blessing or bane. On one point, however, the two views agreed: technology was a later development, not present at the beginning.

There is ambiguity likewise in Tolkien's approach, but not in just the same way. His Golden Age societies, whether long ago or present but hidden, are premised on neither an idyllic nor a savage primitivism. Even his Wild Men, perhaps the closest to 'nature' of all his societies, possess much practical lore in, for example, hunting, scouting, and an effective number system (LR 3.106). But they are on the periphery: at the centre of Middle-earth history are the high civilisations of old, Numenor and its still greater antecedents. It was then that the wondrous Silmarils, Palantirs and Rings were created. These remain only fragmentarily in the diminished culture of Frodo's time; still less has the art of their making survived. Inventive genius—the quality that Tolkien would label 'sub-creative' (cf. *Letters* 145)—has itself declined. Such loss must be considered an unqualified impairment; yet the creative skill is not seen by Tolkien to have been, while it existed, an unqualified good. For it could be used to evil ends, doing harm to others, and, more perniciously, could become a means to the corruption of those who possessed it. The story of Feanor's fall, in which sub-creative power serves as a temptation to possessiveness and domination, is central to Tolkien's mythology and world-view (I use the terminology found in Tolkien's *Letters* 145 and 146n. The story of Feanor's fall is summarised in *Letters* 148 and told at large in *Silmarillion* 60, 65–90). He locates evil not in art or knowledge (much less in the objects they produce, such as the One Ring) but in the inordinate assertion of individual will in 'rebel[ling] against the laws of the Creator' and in 'coercing other wills' (145–6).

The concomitant 'desire for . . . making the will more quickly effective' (*Letters* 145) is what in Tolkien's view, leads to 'technology' in a narrower sense, the formulaic or mechanical repetition of what genius has created. 'The Machine is our more obvious modern form though more closely related to Magic than is usually recognised' (146). The revulsion Tolkien felt at what 'the Machine' had done to his beloved England—'the slums and gas-works, and shabby garages, and long arc-lit suburbs' (96)—and the apprehension he felt at its 'triumph' in World War II—'the Machines are going to be enormously more powerful' (111)—find abundant expression in *The Lord of the Rings*. Yet technology *per se* is not at fault (he dreams of being 'rich enough to have an electric typewriter built to my specifications, to type the Feanorian script' [344]); rather, the approach to making which, instead of respecting the integrity of persons and of the natural environment, reduces all persons and things to the status of objects. The desolation of Isengard, 'once . . . green and fair' but 'now filled with pits and forges' (LR 1.273), shows how far the landscape has fallen from a state of nature (or rather, a state of subcreative cultivation in a cooperative rather than coercive spirit). But behind the industrialisation is the person of Saruman, the 'traitor', one who has rejected relationships with other persons—'his face . . . became like

windows in a stone wall: windows with shutters inside'—and who 'does not care for growing things, except so far as they serve him for the moment' (2.76). He has interbred Orcs and Men to create more effective warriors (2.77). And the agent of this destruction has undergone equal internal damage, coming to have 'a mind of metal and wheels' (2.76). Saruman, later, is the one responsible for violating the idyllic Shire much as the Industrial Revolution had done, already as Tolkien was growing up there, to the Midlands of England (1.378; 3.283, 292–3, 296, 302; cf. Helms 73–4). Technology, then, not in the larger sense of invention and craftsmanship but in its debased and dehumanising form, represents an aesthetic and moral decline like that lamented during Tolkien's youth by such influential writers as John Ruskin and William Morris.

Closely related to the temptations of possession and domination is that of 'the prevention or slowing of *decay* (*i.e.* "change" viewed as a regrettable thing)' (*Letters* 152 (emphasis in original)). This was, in Tolkien's mythology, a temptation to which the Elves were especially susceptible. 'They were "embalmers". They . . . tried to stop . . . change and history . . . and they were overburdened with sadness and nostalgic regret' (197). Mutability is a fact of the universe. Without it there would be no history. As the Third Age draws to a close Gandalf says, 'My time is over' (LR 3.275). 'Mere *change* . . . is not, to Tolkien, "evil": it is the unfolding of the story and to refuse this is of course against the design of God' (*Letters* 236, emphasis in original). Such Elves as remain in Middle-earth at the end of the Third Age have proved victorious over their natural 'clinging to Time' (267) and accepted the fact that they are in 'the fading time' (LR 1.203). The paradise of Lothlórien is destined to fade, 'the tides of Time will sweep it away' (1.380; cf. Galadriel's song, 1.389). 'Beneath the Sun all things must wear to an end at last' (1.405).

This sombre elegiac mood is not, however, Tolkien's final word. It is one thing to accept mutability, it is something else to reject hope and choose despair. Faramir is in such a state when he first enters the story, reflecting honestly enough the prevailing ethos in the Gondor of his time (LR 2.286), but he recovers. Theoden voices a similar despair (2.144) and never quite overcomes it, but he responds courageously. Denethor, preferring the status quo over even a hopeful change, yields to despair and dies, and Gandalf's rebuke provides the moral perspective from which his sentiments are to be judged (3.129–31).

For the old order changeth, to be sure, but out of its wreck, even out of fading and irreparable loss, there can survive all that is needed for happiness. The distant past may relate to the present not only as the locus of longing for things lost, but as the unexpected source of help and renewal (the Oathbreakers, the Broken Sword). If the reign of Stewards comes to an end, it is because the King has returned.[10] The fires of Isengard can be put out and a garden made

(LR 3.257). The destruction of trees and homes in the Shire cannot be undone, but fences can be torn down and the land can become idyllic once more. Politically there is a new order under a benign ruler, Mayor Sam Gamgee, and the weather that first spring and summer is 'perfect', the flowers and fruits hypernaturally abundant. These are all Golden Age motifs (cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 1.126; Putnam 20 (Tibullus 1.3.43–4)), 80; Morse 49–50. 'A sapling burst into *golden* flowers. All the children had rich *golden* hair' (LR 3.303, emphasis added). It is even not wholly unthinkable that 'the lands that lie under the wave' might in time be 'lifted up again' (3.259).

It was the Augustan poet of epic and eclogue who, following Plato, firmly established within the myth the possibility of the Golden Age's return, and he did so, strangely enough, in language that joins the Biblical millenarian tradition with the classical (*Eclogue* 4; Isaiah 11:6–8; 55:13. See also *Eclogue* 5.60–1; *Aen*. 6.791–4. Cf. Smith 70; Plato, *Politicus* 269c–274d, especially 271c–272b concerning the Age of Cronus; Partin 186); but the *pax Romana* was all too short-lived. It is perhaps not only hindsight that warns us against trusting too implicitly in Virgil's vision, enticing as it may be. Tolkien shares the view common to Christian writers of epic, who have generally made more modest claims, either for a restoration of paradise on the subjective and personal level (*Purgatory* 27.133–28.144; *Paradise Lost* 11.829–38; 12.575–87) or for Good to have its share of victories in a world where the Blatant Beast, and other monsters, still remain at large. Both kinds of partial restoration are foretypes of the final, full 'eucatastrophe' (cf. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories" 83–4)—and though Tolkien might speak in a letter of our 'recover[ing] something like [Eden], but on a higher plane' (*Letters 110*), his *Lord of the Rings* could have no place outright for such a vision. John Milton, writing in an age of faith, might bring *Paradise Lost* to an apocalyptic climax with the prophecy of an 'earth . . . all . . . paradise, far happier . . . than . . . Eden' (12.463–5), but our twentieth-century fantasist, confining his epic to an earlier stage of the world's history, must be content with a hint.

Notes

1. Cf. Sale 284–8; Helms 61–6; Nitzsche 97–127, 143n2; Flieger, 'Frodo and Aragorn'; Purtill 45–73. Tolkien's rejection of the heroic ethos of traditional epic, operating like Milton's from within the genre, may be noted in *Letters* 215, 328.

2. Cf. Heinberg; Eliade 40–45, 59–72; Partin 185–8; Ries; Smith 70–72. For a comprehensive survey of Greek and Roman texts on the Golden Age, with supplements covering ancient Mesopotamia, Israel, and India, see Lovejoy and Boas.

3. It might be argued that the Age of Iron, being the age in which we live, obviously contains history; but if that is so, it is of no interest to Hesiod, whose sole concern is to portray a state of being. Later in the antique development of the myth, Ovid cleared up

the ambiguity by having the Iron Age in its turn come to a violent end, with the present human race coming into being only as humanity is created anew following a flood (*Met*. 1.398–415).

A fifth age in Hesiod, the Age of Heroes, has no metallic identification and, if not actually an interpolation by Hesiod into the original myth, is treated as such by Hesiod's successors, who drop it (Lovejoy and Boas 25; Levin 14).

4. Generally their identifications have emphasised northern Europe, beleaguered as it was in the Middle Ages by enemies to the south and east (Epstein; Kocher 3–18; Noel 44–5). Tolkien himself corroborates this (*Letters* 283, with a reference to LR 1.12) but warns against efforts to be too precise. 'There is no special reference to England in the "Shire"' (*Letters* 235). Morse 45–8 offers an alternative view, matching the world of LR to the later Roman Empire, despite Shippey's certainty that 'even Gondor is not very much like Rome' (293–4).

5. On motorcars, see Tolkien, *Letters* 77, 235; on nuclear weapons, 116, 165; on mind control, 234, 252, and perhaps 195 ('the calculated dehumanising of Men by tyrants that goes on today'); on pollution, 409; on a general sense of nostalgia for a world less mechanised and corrupted, *passim*. On the Shire as pastoral, see Burger.

6. Given at length in 'The Downfall of Numenor', *Silmarillion* 259–82; summarised in LR, Appendix A, 3.315–17. In Tolkien's letters he is many times explicit about this identification. Since the index to the edited *Letters* does not have an 'Atlantis' entry, I list here the pages where such references may be found: 151, 156, 186, 198, 206, 213, 232, 303, 342, 347, 361, 378. Specific Atlantean motifs in Tolkien's Numenor and Minas Tirith are noted in Pugh 12.

7. Tolkien was interested in geological change and regretted that he could not have incorporated it more precisely in his panorama of Middle-earth history (*Letters*). One of his landscapes includes 'a frowning wall, a last outlier of the great roots of the Starkhorn, cloven by the river in ages past' (LR 3.67).

8. Flieger points out that the 'illusion of depth' which we find in *The Lord of the Rings* is one of the qualities that Tolkien praised in *Beowulf* (*Splintered Light* xiii).

9. Cf. Eccles. 12:3–5, in both the Authorised and Douay versions. The elegiac effect resembles that which, as critic, Tolkien had identified in *Beowulf*, 'weighted with regret, . . . poignant and remote' (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 88; see also 72–3, 80).

10. Foreshadowed in a symbolic scene that brings together ruin and renewal: an ancient statue, eroded and vandalised but now adorned with wildflowers so that it seems 'the king has got a crown again!' (LR 2.311).

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DAVID STEVENS AND CAROL D. STEVENS

The Hobbit

"Now it is a strange thing, but things that are good to have and days that are good to spend are soon told about, and not much to listen to; while things that are uncomfortable, palpitating, and even gruesome, may make a good tale, and take a good deal of telling anyway."[1] So says J. R. R. Tolkien in *The Hobbit*, and he may well have had that admonition in mind when he composed the work. *The Hobbit* is filled with wondrous creatures, delicious fear for the reader, and a variety of hair-raising adventures. However, a close examination of the text reveals that *The Hobbit* is also filled with matter of a distinctly different kind. Tolkien has a strong didactic purpose, and he makes it clear through the use of elements that might be labeled *prosaic* as opposed to *fantastic*. In addition, humor is used throughout the work in ways that are quite different from Tolkien's use of humor in his other works. These three elements—the fantastic, the prosaic, and the humorous—are derived from Tolkien's understanding in 1930 of how best to communicate with his chosen audience of children. While later in his career he would repudiate the techniques used in *The Hobbit*—in particular the obtrusive narrator and the general tone of condescension[2]—when he composed the work he believed, as did the Victorians, that children must be talked down to and taught something while they are entertained.

From *J. R. R. Tolkien: The Art of the Myth-Maker*, pp. 59–67. © 1992 by Starmont House and ©1993 by David Stevens and Carol D. Stevens.

While *The Hobbit* began with no clear relationship to the world of *The Silmarillion*, as it developed, elements of Tolkien's mythology for England began to creep in. The elves, of course, made their appearance deep in Mirkwood (pp. 163–81), and with them went a few words of explanation that they never went to Elvenhome over sea with the other elves but remained in Middle-earth—a possibly confusing reference to the unpublished, and unfinished, mythology. A passing reference to the Necromancer, and another to Gandalf's fellow wizard Radagast, ties the two stories together more tightly. More importantly a significant change of tone occurs toward the end of the story, one that renders the structure of this tale of "there and back again" highly unusual and foreshadows the tone, theme, and structure of *The Lord of the Rings*. It is this change of tone that moves *The Hobbit* from the realm of the comic in the sense of laughter-provoking to the elegiac, in the process increasing the complexity of the tale and consequently its interest for the adult reader. The result is a work that is somewhat inconsistent, perhaps, but compelling for both adults and children.

The fantastic elements of the story are most easily traced. They are those plot devices, characters, events, and actions that are impossible in our universe but excite readers by fulfilling their desires for the impossible. Various forms of magic, for example, make their appearance. The "moon letters" of the dwarves' map cannot be seen unless the moon shines behind them, and then they can only be seen when the moon is in the same shape and position as when the letters were made (p. 64). The hero of the tale, Bilbo Baggins, finds, wins, or steals (depending on your point of view) a magic ring that makes him invisible and allows him to get out of several nasty situations (p. 92).[3] The ring, of course, belongs to Gollum, a slimy creature who proposes to eat our hero unless Bilbo can defeat him at a riddle game. Nor is Gollum the only scary creature Bilbo encounters; earlier, the hobbit and his dwarf companions encounter stone-giants, who create landslides and earthquakes for the fun of it (p. 69). The spiders in Mirkwood talk to each other as they plan their grisly meals of dwarf and hobbit. The goblins (who became Orcs in *The Lord of The Rings*) are huge, ugly creatures, who eat anything they can find, including such friendly animals as horses, ponies, and donkeys. Their cruelty is well-known, and Tolkien tells us that "they make no beautiful things, but . . . many clever ones. . . . It is not unlikely that they invented some of the machines that have since troubled the world, especially the ingenious devices for killing large numbers of people at once" (pp. 73–74). Of these machines Tolkien had had personal experience in World War I.[4] It is worth noting that as early as *The Hobbit* Tolkien had made explicit the fact that his mythical Middle-earth is in his mind our own world, at some earlier time.

Not all of the fantastic elements of the story are calculated to make the skin crawl. Children, of course, tend to anthropomorphize, and Tolkien

caters to this tendency with dogs and sheep that walk about on their hind legs and serve dinner (p. 131). These helpful creatures belong to one Beorn, a skin-changer who sometimes appears as a huge black bear and sometimes as "a strong, black–haired man with huge arms and a great beard" (pp. 121–22). We see Beorn in action at the Battle of the Five Armies, fighting in his bear shape, and he would be a formidable friend for any child.

The elves, too, are impossible creatures in the mundane world but highly desirable creatures to know. Even the smell of where they have been is good (p. 59). The elvish folk are described as harping and singing, with gleaming hair decorated with flowers, wearing precious gems, and obviously happy and untroubled (p. 160). Good magic lingers behind them, enough even to frighten away spiders in the forest (p. 171). Tolkien even hints as to their hierarchy ("Light-elves . . . Deep-elves (or gnomes) . . . Sea-elves . . . Wood-elves . . . were and remain . . . Good People," p. 173), although he leaves most of this differentiation for *The Lord of The Rings* and *The Silmarillion*.

One of the most memorable fantastic elements Tolkien employs in *The Hobbit* is relegated to a comic relief role. Burt, Bill, and Tom, the hapless troll trio that Gandalf conveniently turns to stone, are the first villains that Bilbo and company run across. Fortunately, they are easily overcome, even when Bilbo makes a serious error, because they cannot do anything right—even their purse speaks in a comic Cockney accent when Bilbo tries to steal it (p. 46).

In this episode it is Gandalf to the rescue, and Gandalf is one of Tolkien's greatest fantastic creations. While Tolkien endows his wizard with a number of stock-comic attributes, he also makes it clear that this magical grandfather-figure "could do a great deal for friends in a tight corner" (p. 77); his special talents include "bewitchments with fire and lights" (p. 101). But Tolkien does not just describe Gandalf's powers; he shows the wizard in action. When treed by the wargs, Gandalf sets pine cones on fire with his magic and shows his bravery by preparing to leap from the top of his tree into the middle of the band of goblins. Finally, just before the Battle of the Five Armies, he reveals his full majesty:

> 'Halt!' cried Gandalf, who appeared suddenly, and stood alone, with arms uplifted, between the advancing dwarves and the ranks awaiting them. 'Halt!' he called in a voice like thunder, and his staff blazed forth like the lightning. (p. 286)

It is surely no coincidence that such an epic figure later becomes a central character in *The Lord of The Rings*.

However, Tolkien's greatest fantastic creation in a novel filled with memorable creatures is surely Smaug the dragon, "the Chiefest and Greatest of

Calamities" (p. 228). Even the writing style alters when Smaug is introduced, no doubt because Tolkien himself "desired dragons with a profound desire."[5] This dragon is "a most specially greedy, strong, and wicked worm" (p. 33). Tolkien further describes Smaug when Bilbo meets him and shows him in action attacking the dwarves and the floating city. The dragon's intelligence, his "wily ways" (p. 227), his magical sense of smell (p. 228), and ultimately the overweening pride that leads to his downfall are revealed to the reader. If ever a fantastic creature inspired wonder in a youngster, surely Smaug the Magnificent does so. And it seems likely that Smaug was Tolkien's favorite character as well—it was probably no coincidence that Tolkien's writing of the story bogged down at the specific point that dealt with the death of the dragon.

All of these fantastic elements combine to create a story that is fascinating. They evoke an almost mystical sense of wonder that draws the reader into the story, yearning for a world where he or she, too, can do great deeds, outwit dragons, and mediate wars. And it is precisely for purposes of empathy and identification that Tolkien makes his hero a hobbit. Because Bilbo is small and not as highly thought of as he knows himself capable, the child reader identifies with him and experiences his adventures vicariously. The reader sees the story through Bilbo's eyes.

There are other elements than the fantastic in the story, however, and if the reader is drawn into the action by the fantastic elements, he or she also accepts what might be called the prosaic elements equally without question. Throughout the novel, Tolkien has introduced elements of polite or impolite behavior assumed to be proper or improper by the narrator and the characters, and thus by the reader. These elements of behavior tie the action of the story to the here-and-now just as the elements of the fantastic remove the action to some impossible wish-fulfillment world. Thus is teaching added to pleasing, as Tolkien fulfills the classical purposes of art.

Several examples will clarify our use of the term *the prosaic*. For one thing, Tolkien makes it clear that good manners include carrying a pocket handkerchief. He begins subtly enough, by having Bilbo forget his as he rushes off to join the dwarves (pp. 39–40). The forgotten pocket-handkerchief then forms a recurring motif, as Bilbo mentions it again before leaving (p. 40); Dwalin informs him he will have to manage without them (p. 40); Gandalf comes riding up with a good supply of them (p. 41); the narrator informs us that Bilbo had not had a pocket handkerchief for a long time (p. 220); and, the adventure concluded, Bilbo mops his face with a pocket handkerchief that he borrowed from Elrond since none of his own had survived. One can imagine a minor problem in a household with three young boys constantly forgetting to carry handkerchiefs and an exasperated parent taking an opportunity to

reinforce the idea in the nightly bedtime story—which is exactly the way *The Hobbit* began.

Nor is the pocket handkerchief the only recurring prosaic motif. Early in his adventure, Bilbo says, "I wish I was at home in my nice hole by the fire, with the kettle just beginning to sing," and the narrator informs us that "it was not the last time he wished that" (p. 41). That proves to be something of an understatement since Bilbo later wishes, to himself or someone else, that he were home no less than eleven times (pp. 56–57; 66; 72; 78; 117; 161; 180; 215; 227; 276; and 300).

The proper form of leave-taking is apparently of some interest to Tolkien since he includes nine instances of formal farewells, ranging from the fairly simple "I wish you all speed, and my house is open to you, if you ever come back this way again" (p. 139) to the more formal exchange with the eagles:

> 'Farewell!' they cried, 'wherever you fare, till your eyries receive you at the journey's end!' That is the polite thing to say among eagles.
>
> 'May the wind under your wings bear you where the sun sails and the moon walks,' answered Gandalf, who knew the correct reply. (p. 119)

That there *is* a correct reply is not surprising in the context of the novel, and the reader certainly cannot doubt that if eagles have proper forms of leave-taking and wizards know and use them, then he or she should use proper forms of leavetaking also.

The change of tone that occurs toward the end of the novel will be discussed more fully below, but one of the consequences of that change is that a form of courtly politeness in battle, even between enemies, is introduced. Ten examples may be found, ranging from the explicit statement of the narrator that there is a "polite and old-fashioned language" for such occasions (p. 284); to Bard's polite declaration of siege (p. 272); to the Elvenking's command that his dwarvish prisoners be unbound "for they were ragged and weary" (p. 178); to the grim explanation of the fate of the youngest dwarves: "Fill and Kili had fallen defending him with shield and body, for he was their mother's elder brother" (p. 296). The idea of a warrior's nephews (most often called "sister-sons") defending their uncle to the death, incidentally, is something of a commonplace in Anglo-Saxon and Norse poetry. One such reference may be found in "The Battle of Maldon," in which Tolkien was particularly interested.

In sharp contrast, the goblins are cruel to prisoners (pp. 75–76) and speak without courtesy, even to each other (p. 76). The spiders threaten to

eat the dwarves and hang their bones in the trees, hardly the polite thing to do to prisoners (p. 168). And of course the trolls are both cruel and without manners of any kind.

The general term *manners* is a good one to use to describe many of these prosaic elements. The most extended demonstration of proper manners, here of the good host and his guests, occurs in the first chapter, "An Unexpected Party." Throughout the chapter Tolkien emphasizes proper forms of address, introduction, and response. For example, when Dwalin appears at Bilbo's door, entirely unexpectedly, the hobbit pulls himself together sufficiently to invite the dwarf in for tea. The narrator tells us that the invitation was perhaps a little stiff but that Bilbo meant it kindly (p. 17). The next arrival (of Balin) flusters the hobbit so badly that he makes an incorrect reply to the dwarf's polite introduction (p. 18).

Having invited his unexpected guests to tea, Bilbo must serve them, and Tolkien makes another prosaic point when the narrator informs us that Bilbo is prepared to go without himself to please his company (p. 18). With a dozen ravenous guests, the polite host is kept hopping, filling glasses and offering cake (pp. 19–20). Bilbo, incidentally, apparently has a well-deserved reputation for politeness, for when Gandalf enters he remarks (with tongue in cheek) about how unlike Bilbo it is to keep callers waiting at the door (p. 20).

When Thorin Oakenshield, obviously not a common dwarf, enters, Bilbo is even more flustered:

> Thorin indeed was very haughty, and said nothing about *service*, but poor Mr. Baggins said he was sorry so many times, that at last he grunted 'pray don't mention it,' and stopped frowning. (p. 20)

Not only the host has duties; Tolkien makes it clear that guests, too, must fulfill society's expectations and lend a hand. After they have made a proper mess of Bilbo's home, the dwarves all pitch in and help clean (p. 21). After dinner, Thorin even makes a speech, in part complimenting Bilbo on his hospitality; the tired hobbit cannot even make the polite response (p. 26).

All of these polite forms are reiterated when Gandalf introduces the dwarves and the hobbit to Beorn, in a scene quite reminiscent of the earlier unexpected party (pp. 124–28). The skin-changer, at first hostile but ultimately charmed by the manners of his guests, finally offers them something to eat and a place to spend the night, two certain signs of acceptance (p. 131).

Throughout the text, the word *polite* and its variants are used so frequently as to be almost intrusive. All of the characters expect the other characters to know the correct (and polite) responses, and the good characters

are even polite to the bad characters when completely in their power. For example, when Thorin is captured by the Great Goblin, he says, from force of habit, "Thorin the dwarf at your service!" and the narrator informs us "it was merely a *polite nothing*" (p. 74, emphasis added).

Of course the "pleases" and "thank-yous" are constant and far too numerous to mention.

Other things that readers of *The Hobbit* learn about good manners are that it pays to keep an appointment book (p. 17); that one shouldn't ring the doorbell loud and long (p. 19); that grumbling about orders from an authority figure leads to trouble (p. 50); that calling names makes people mad (pp. 165–66); and that not wiping one's feet on the mat before entering a house is impolite behavior (p. 306).

As Claude Levi-Strauss points out in his seminal treatment *The Origin of Table Manners*, it is precisely by an individual's manners that we know he or she is like us.[6] In *The Hobbit* those characters whom the author would like his readers to emulate (the hobbit, the dwarves, Gandalf, the elves, Beorn, Bard) have good manners, and those characters he would not like his readers to emulate (the trolls, the goblins, Gollum, the wargs, the spiders, Smaug) have bad manners. Since readers identify with the "good guys," especially the hobbit, it follows that since they have good manners, readers should have good manners as well. Seen in this light, *The Hobbit* is a book about good manners for children. In other words, everyone should be a good little hobbit, and good little hobbits are polite little hobbits.

Stock-comic situations abound in the early pages of *The Hobbit*. At least three early incidents follow patterns similar to those of sight gags found in the classic sketches of slapstick teams and the plots of television situation comedies. The arrival of the dwarves in "An Unexpected Party" achieves humor through the use of incremental repetition. Dwalin's entrance, followed by Balin's "I see they have begun to arrive already," followed by Fili and Kili's offhand reference to an impending "throng" fluster Bilbo enough nearly to freeze him into a bewildered immobility that ultimately makes the arrival of one more group of five, followed by the popgun entrance of Bifur, Bofur, Bombur, Thorin, and Gandalf all the funnier. Later, in the "Queer Lodgings" chapter, this scene is repeated almost intact but with the addition of Bilbo to the troupe and the added spice of a shift in the point of view. Here Gandalf makes an assumption concerning Beorn that he had earlier made about Bilbo: that a combined sense of responsibility as a host and a desire for an adventure would intrigue him enough to make him want to help hobbit, wizard, and dwarves. Between these two incidents is another stock comic routine, the arguments among those "rude mechanicals" of fantasy fiction, Burt, Bill, and Tom. All of these incidents involve a form of humor that is allied to slapstick and

that requires enormous skill in exaggeration for its effect, but that is not necessarily associated with any particular elevation of tone.

In the more serious phases of the adventure, even such repetitions alter in significance. Consider, for instance, Bilbo's repeated teasing of the spiders in Mirkwood or the frustrated attempts of the dwarves to reach the fires of the wood-elves in the "Flies and Spiders" chapter. This alteration of superficially similar patterns does not yet begin to approach the attitudinal shift toward the main character as the story nears its climax. Before Smaug is overthrown and Thorin made King Under the Mountain, Beorn can refer to Bilbo as a "little bunny" getting "nice and fat on bread and honey" (p. 131). However, when the restored king succumbs with a deathbed speech elevated in style, he refers to the erstwhile "little bunny" as a "child of the kindly West" and an almost explicitly Christian "good thief" (pp. 272–73). There is an odd inconsistency here, not merely between the kind of humor found early in the book and later, but in the events at the very heart of the story, where the fundamentally comic restoration of the true king vies for reader attention with the loss and sorrow sustained by the three kindreds at the Battle of the Five Armies.

The Hobbit is a story about a quest, as its subtitle (*There and Back Again*) indicates. Like most juvenile quest stories, it is a straightforward parable of growing up. Tolkien's vision of Middle-earth, however, changed the nature of the quest in mid-novel. If it followed standard fairy tale form, *The Hobbit* would end with Bilbo and the dwarves achieving their goals, winning back the treasure, and retiring to live happily ever after. That does not happen; two of our favorites among the dwarves die defending their uncle, who becomes king but also dies. The main treasure, the Arkenstone, does not ultimately sit on Bilbo's mantel as a souvenir of his great adventure; instead, it is given away for the greater good of ending a useless war. This, as Randel Helms has pointed out,[7] is Tolkien's great invention in *The Hobbit*: the theme of the renunciation of power that was to be developed so completely in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Notes

1. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1937), pp. 61–62. Subsequent citations from this edition are found in the text.

2. Much of this chapter is based on two previously published articles: C. D. Stevens, "High Fantasy vs. Low Comedy: Humor in J. R. R. Tolkien," *Extrapolation*, 21 (Summer 1980), 122–29; and David Stevens, "Trolls and Dragons versus Pocket Handkerchiefs and 'Polite Nothings': Elements of the Fantastic and the Prosaic in *The Hobbit*," in *The Scope of the Fantastic—Culture, Biography, Themes, Children's Literature*, ed. Robert A. Collins and Howard D. Pearce. Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy 11. (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985), 249–55.

3. The entire concept of the ring was changed when *The Lord of the Rings* was written, and the subsequent second edition of *The Hobbit* is quite different from the first. For an excellent discussion of the differences between the two editions, see Bonniejean Christensen, "Gollum's Character Transformation in *The Hobbit*," in *A Tolkien Compass*, ed. Jared Lobdell (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1975), 9–28.

4. See Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977), pp. 72–86.

5. J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," in *Tree and Leaf* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964), p. 41.

6. Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, v. 3 of *Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

7. Randel Helms, *Tolkien's World* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p. 54.

WILLIAM H. GREEN

Bilbo's Adventures in Wilderland

A Larger Landscape

After the confined early chapter [of *The Hobbit*], taking place mostly indoors or in a circle of firelight, part 2 opens out to spectacular scenery and violent action. Bilbo crosses mountains and plains, explores caves and flies with eagles. He is taken prisoner, defends himself with a sword, and is almost burned alive and eaten by wolves. The episodes between Elrond's house and Mirkwood, with patches of strong fantasy description, display strengths that made Tolkien a master of heroic fantasy.

After days on crooked, cold mountain paths, Bilbo is again thinking of "safe and comfortable things" (54) when a frightful thunderstorm forces the company to shelter in a little cave that, unknown to them, adjoins a network of goblin-infested tunnels. Bilbo saves the dwarves this time, though in conjunction with Gandalf, when he awakens just in time to call a warning and prevent the wizard from being captured by goblins. But everyone else is captured and bound in chains, including Baggins and the baggage—the all-important food. Using one of the swords from the lair that Bilbo's key opened, Gandalf rescues the dwarves, and they flee down black tunnels, where a goblin ambush leaves Bilbo stunned and abandoned in the dark.

Waking, he crawls through the gloom until he touches a cold metal ring and puts it into his pocket. This is, says Tolkien, "a turning point in his

From The Hobbit: *A Journey into Maturity*, pp. 63–81. © 1995 by Twayne Publishers.

career" (65). His Baggins personality dominant, he sits down to think about bacon and eggs and is about to foolishly light his pipe when he discovers the elvish knife hidden under his clothes. The blade awakens something Tookish in him, and the hobbit becomes a reluctant warrior and explorer, a sword-boy trotting along with one hand gripping his weapon, the other feeling his way along the dark wall.

The tunnel dead-ends at a subterranean lake where Gollum, the fallen hobbit who will play a pivotal role in *The Lord of the Rings*, paddles about in the dark and eats whatever happens by. Like the goblins, he is a cannibal, for he eats goblins and wants to eat Bilbo. Because of Bilbo's bright sword, however, Gollum proposes a riddle contest. Bilbo, like Oedipus, must answer or die. When he luckily wins with the last question (not a riddle), "What have I got in my pocket?" (73), Gollum searches for his ring of invisibility and, failing to find it, guesses that it is in Bilbo's pocket. Gollum's mumbles reveal to Bilbo the powers of the ring he has found. The 1937 edition differs from the post–*Lord-of-the-Rings* edition at this point, but in both Gollum leads Bilbo to the exit (where he mercifully leaps over the little monster to avoid killing him after 1951). Bilbo invisibly dodges goblin guards and escapes into sunlight. He has passed through the mountains to reach the eastern slopes.

Bilbo has Tookishly determined to return for his comrades when suddenly he hears dwarf voices and discovers Gandalf and the dwarves safe nearby. Hurrying downhill to avoid goblin pursuit, the party is trapped in trees later that night by hundreds of strange wolves called Wargs. Gandalf scorches the Wargs with wizard fire, but the tables are turned when goblins appear and stoke fires around the trees. Suddenly, in a classic *eucatastrophe*, giant eagles—"not kindly birds" but noble enemies of goblins (93)—lift the company to the safety of their mountain ledges. The eagles feed the dwarves and set them down far from their pursuers and nearer their destination, on the plain beyond the mountains.

On the Carrock, a hill of rock in a river bend, the wizard says that he must leave the dwarves after he has seen them supplied at the house of Beorn, a burly vegetarian who can turn himself into a bear. Whereas Elrond was half elf, Beorn is (in effect) half bear. Just as the dwarves took refuge from trolls with elves, they take refuge from wolves with a bear, and it is consistent that birds carry them. The dwarves arrive a few at a time at Beorn's house as Gandalf tells of their adventures—a variation on the gradual approach that worked well at Bilbo's house and disastrously with the trolls. After a supper like none they had eaten "since they left the Last Homely House" (111), they sing and sleep, hearing the tramping of many bears in the courtyard outside. Beorn directs the dwarves to the Elf-path through the dark forest Mirkwood. They say goodbye to Gandalf at the edge.

The same basic structural elements are here, but doubled or tripled. There are three sets of foes—goblins, Gollum, and Wargs—and three distinct *eucatastrophes*. Again danger falls in conditions of darkness and hunger, at night or in caverns. As in part 1, the company is first saved by Gandalf, though Bilbo helps this time. Bilbo rescues himself, but no one else, from the second peril, and the third rescue is by the eagles, symbols of divine intervention when even Gandalf's powers are inadequate. The test Bilbo faces in part 2 involves simply his resolution to act alone in the dark, to use his sword and wits like a hero. Passing this test leaves him with a prize, a ring of invisibility, which allows him to become a genuine hero able to save the comrades and destroy a dragon. There is water again at crucial points of the story—the lake just before Bilbo meets Gollum and the Great River at the Carrock just before Beorn's hall. Again Bilbo and the others are trapped and bound, if not bagged. And here, for the first time, we have a solar night-sea journey, a passage through darkness under the earth from west to east, symbol of the cosmic cycle of death and rebirth at a higher plane.

A Storm and the Absence of Women

Part 2 begins with description that, while tinged with fantasy, is remarkably realistic. The author is recalling personal experience. In 1911 Tolkien hiked with a heavy pack through Switzerland, an episode he identified as the model for Bilbo's mountain crossing. A fierce thunderstorm in real life drove the party to shelter in a cattle shed, not a goblin cave, but boulders loosened by melting snow did roll among the travelers, barely missing Tolkien in one instance (*Letters*, 309). The slide down a rocky slope into pines west of the mountains (88) is also an incident from the Swiss trip, which involved cooking outdoors and sleeping "rough" (*Letters*, 392). Add goblins and Wargs to the Swiss trip, and you have a fair replica of Bilbo's mountain crossing.

One important difference, however, is that the older adult who conducted young Tolkien on the trip (the Gandalf-figure) was his botanist aunt (*Letters*, 308), and this suggests one obvious way of dealing with the absence of women in *The Hobbit*. Perhaps figures who would ordinarily have been women have been fictionally costumed and recast as men, without wholly losing their original character. The Swiss trek with his maiden aunt is a clear instance. The actual trip involved, in Tolkien's own words, "a mixed party about the same size as the company in *The Hobbit*" (*Letters*, 309). As the biographical event was transformed into fiction, the men and women became male dwarves. Tolkien's fiction may be said to dramatize the "common gender" value of the pronoun *he*, which until the 1970s was accepted as referring indifferently to either male or female persons. It is a man's world. One reason for this may be a desire to avoid sexual themes while dealing with close

relationships. Tolkien felt that in the "fallen world" sex spoils relationships between men and women: friendship is almost impossible because sex is the devil's "favorite subject" (*Letters*, 48). So presumably Tolkien shifts sexual identities to invent a sexless world.

The submerged feminine is particularly implicit in Gandalf, who doubles as surrogate mother and father to Bilbo and performs the transforming function that Jung attributes to a man's inner feminine image, or "anima." Biographically speaking, we know that a mature priest assumed the role of Tolkien's mother after she died. Mythologically speaking, we find Erich Neumann emphasizing the gender ambiguity of wizard figures. After noting their originally feminine character, Neumann says, "Even in a later period the male shaman or seer is in high degree 'feminine,' since he is dependent on his anima aspect. And for this reason he often appears in woman's dress" (Neumann 1963, 296). Gandalf does indeed dress as only a woman (or priest) would in Tolkien's England, in pointed hat, long robe, and silver scarf (13). Even his phallic fire-tipped staff is in modern stories associated more with fairy godmothers than wizards, more with witches than warlocks.

Gandalf's role parallels Merlin's in the King Arthur stories, but also Glinda's in *The Wizard of Oz*, the great-grandmother's in *The Princess and Curdie*, and Athena's in *The Odyssey*; and, of course, when Athena calls Telemachus to adventure, she is disguised as a man. Doubled gender is strikingly suggested by an illustration from E. A. Wyke Smith's 1927 *The Marvelous Land of Snergs*, which Tolkien read repeatedly to his children and modeled *The Hobbit* directly after (*Letters*, 215). This drawing shows a bearded figure looking like Gandalf riding a pony, but the actual subject is a disguised witch, Mother Meldrum, riding off with two good children trapped in baskets.[1] Here is a negative image of Gandalf doing what negative creatures do repeatedly in *The Hobbit*. So is Gandalf a positive mother? Indeed, he seems to function as Bilbo's fairy godmother, wand and all, and his actual physical form, though nominally masculine, is no less maternal than other fairy-tale proxies for the dead mother, such as the hazel tree cast in that role in the Grimm "Cinderella."

The absent feminine in Tolkien may, in other words, be present not only in Mother Nature and those dark caves but in the long-robed wizard with his stage beard, the androgynously glamorous elf-lord who is "kind as summer" (51), or the bearlike beekeeper who "loves his animals as his children" (119). It is possible to make too much of this, for even as characters act out the absent feminine, they remain literally male. Nevertheless, beyond being called *he*, Bilbo is scarcely more masculine than Dorothy. Though marginal female figures do appear in *The Lord of the Rings*, Bilbo's starkly womanless adventures can be explained by an unconscious or half-conscious pattern of alternation, pronoun shifts, and minor costume changes to "masculate"

characters whose roles might suit actresses better than actors. Female readers may identify with characters who transcend masculine pronouns and act out "feminine" traits.

Indeed, what is macho in *The Hobbit* is bad. Androgyny, a blend of masculine and feminine traits, is the hobbit-hero's character. Thorin, the conventionally masculine leader of the dwarves, given to formal speeches and territorial boasts, makes peace with Bilbo in a speech that affirms androgynous devotion to kitchen and parlor: "If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world" (243). The dying dwarf king repents his earlier macho posturing, his stiff-necked insistence on personal rights in defiance of the common good. Courage is essential, and Bilbo is not lacking it, but the androgynous hero's courage (like Dorothy's when she defends her dog from the Cowardly Lion, who has defeated her companions[2]) is a response to humane necessity, not an act of gratuitous masculine will. Bilbo cooperates and shares; he does not compete to establish personal dominance. His most powerful stance is invisibility, not the claiming of territory. Like Bilbo, Tolkien's true military heroes fight reluctantly and only to the extent needed to protect themselves and the good. Violence is justified by the ideal of peace.[3] Bilbo, with courage and wisdom "blended in measure" (243), is concerned at the end not with treasure but with "going home soon" (245).

Tolkien's Inferno

In part 2 we find the typical beginning. Hardship drives the company into danger; in this case a storm and falling rocks, a war between heaven and earth, drive them to a cave. Hardships, says Neumann, are often "stations on the road leading through danger to salvation, through the extinction of death to rebirth and new life" (Neumann 1963, 76). The cave in the mountain is at once the body of the Great Mother and the gate to the underworld, through which the solar hero must pass to be reborn. The great danger, of course, is that once he has taken shelter, subterranean forces will hold him forever. The danger of caves, Tolkien says, is that "you don't know how far they go back, sometimes, or where a passage behind may lead to, or what is waiting for you inside" (57). What is waiting, symbolically speaking, is the opposite of what we have labored to create in the world of sunlight, the inverse of the values we have chosen to affirm in conscious life. Under the earth is the world of demons.

So naturally, what comes out of a "crack" in the cave after Bilbo's company lapses into unconsciousness is a nonhuman species very much like the devils in Dante's *Inferno* and other Christian stories, a species symbolizing human vice. In *The Hobbit* they are called goblins, and though

their behavior is collective, they are bound together by hatred, fear, and hunger, not fellowship or sympathy. They talk to their prisoners only as a prelude to torture and cannibalism. Tolkien copied his particular breed of goblins, with few alterations, from those in George MacDonald's juvenile classic *The Princess and the Goblin*. Like MacDonald's, Tolkien's goblins are unredeemably evil but are still a mortal flesh-and-blood species, like plague rats in the cellars of the mountains.

Like MacDonald, he describes a mountain honeycombed with tunnels, some mined, some natural, and inhabitants who are grotesque and cunning and roam at night. MacDonald's goblins, like Tolkien's, speak the language of men, have their own king, and aspire to conquer the surface world. Sounds of goblin feet pursue Bilbo's party underground (63), and MacDonald's Curdie hears "the sound of many soft feet" while hiding from goblins.[4] MacDonald's goblins, like Tolkien's, have a great torch-lit throne-room not far inside the mountain, and both have kings who express an inverted moral logic—describing events in a topsy-turvy way that identifies the interests of the unruly, night-loving goblins with good and anything to the contrary with evil. For them a "sun-person" is "fresh meat" (MacDonald, 101). In the brief speech in which the Great Goblin calls Thorin's people spies, thieves, murderers, and (worst of all) "friends of Elves" (61), Tolkien tries out a gesture that MacDonald uses repeatedly in *The Princess and the Goblin*. There is even a river in the heart of MacDonald's mountain, and MacDonald's boy hero is trapped in the mountain after he, like Bilbo, is hit in the head during a goblin attack and loses consciousness. Much like Bilbo, Curdie is alone and helpless under the mountain, with improvised rhymes "his only weapons" (MacDonald, 104). These similarities, however, are only symptomatic; reading either book after the other produces déjà vu. Tolkien's goblins, as he admitted, are MacDonald's rewritten (*Letters*, 178).

It is easy, with the right reading list, to locate stories that resemble *The Hobbit*, stories that are part of the tradition out of which it grew and are perhaps even direct "sources," such as *Beowulf*, the Eddas, and MacDonald. If we stop with simply demonstrating that sources are indeed sources, however, we gain little. For interpretive understanding we must take a step farther and ask how a work is different from its sources: what parts of MacDonald's goblin myth Tolkien rejected. Because the line of least resistance is to continue imitating, deviations from MacDonald's goblin myth should be read as strong gestures.

Tolkien's goblins are more grim and sinister than MacDonald's, who are played for comedy and are easily overcome (until he slips up) by a miner's boy singing verses (they hate music). MacDonald's goblins are complex, but their complexity is whimsical or satiric, suitable to the facetious tone that Tolkien indulged early in *The Hobbit* but abandoned at Elrond's house.

MacDonald's tone is more like T. H. White's whimsical Arthurian court in *The Sword in the Stone* than Tolkien's increasingly serious Middle-earth. MacDonald's goblins are distinguished from "sun-people" by the fact that they have delicate ducklike feet with no separate toes and wear no shoes (except their queen, feared for her iron shoes). MacDonald's hero, Curdle, repels a crowd of goblins by stamping about, a scene that serves the purposes of MacDonald's story and may have allegorical purpose but is burlesque in mood, like the scuffling trolls early in *The Hobbit*.

Tolkien's goblins are grimly evil beings with none of the special sensitivities of MacDonald's, except sensitivity to sunlight, a trait of most evil things in Tolkien. So while MacDonald's goblins are so sensitive to rhyme that Curdie uses doggerel as an area weapon to clear tunnels, Tolkien's goblins sing their own cruel songs as they drag off victims. A dysfunctional goblin royal family is given pages of comic dialogue by MacDonald as Curdie eavesdrops, much like the comic troll dialogue in Tolkien's troll chapter. But Tolkien has turned a stylistic corner since then. His goblins are hysterical and collective but quite dangerous, capable of suicide attacks. They must be killed in the plain heroic way, with bloody swords. Goblins are demonic foes who, for all their lack of individual character, must be taken seriously.

While pruning down MacDonald's goblins, Tolkien does pause for almost half a page to describe goblin character in a way different from MacDonald. Cruel and disorderly, unable to make or enjoy beautiful things, Tolkien's are nevertheless gifted in the design and use of tools of destruction. They are blamed for the destructive inventions of the machine age, especially weapons of mass destruction, "for wheels and engines and explosions always delighted them" (60). Here Tolkien is projecting on MacDonald's goblins his own vision of twentieth-century evil, the tanks, explosives, and machine guns that made their devastating appearance in the Great War, where he saw action at the battle of the Somme. Though Tolkien disliked mainstream modern authors such as D. H. Lawrence, he shared with many of them a demonizing of technology.

The fictional link between goblins and war machines goes back to "The Fall of Gondolin," a manuscript often alluded to in *The Hobbit*. In this work, written while Tolkien was recuperating from trench fever, a great elvish stronghold is overcome, not only by "dragons of fire" and "serpents of bronze," but by "things of iron that could coil themselves around and above all obstacles before them." These iron things carried goblins in their "hollow bellies" (*Book*, 2:177). The Trojan horse is reinvented here for a century that Tolkien saw as blighted by the worship of machinery. Another manuscript that predates *The Hobbit* describes goblins as creations of Morgoth, Tolkien's Satan: "The hordes of the Orcs he made of stone, but their hearts of hatred. . . .

Goblins may they be called."[5] Tolkien's goblins are thus far from human, rather fleshy machines made from stone to serve evil.

Tolkien has often been accused of unrealistically polarized good and evil, and certainly the goblins represent a tendency to ascribe evil to entire groups. There literally is no good goblin but a dead one, and genocidal slaughter of three quarters of the mountain goblins at the end of *The Hobbit*, like a more wholesale slaughter in *The Princess and the Goblin*, means "peace" (245). The view here could be called medieval; like unconverted "pagans" in *The Song of Roland* and the shades of sinners in Dante's *Inferno*, goblins are creatures whose pain is occasion for moral pleasure. If Tolkien had thought thus about living people, he would have been a step away from Hitler. In fact, however, he did not confuse the moral clarity of his subcreated world with the ambiguity of the world in which he was a finite creature. And even in his subcreated world, where he saw into the deepest hearts of his characters, there are themes of free will and moral ambiguity. In a 1963 discussion of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien attributes a conscience to Gollum years after his meeting with Bilbo and speculates what would have happened if the little monster had repented. This, he suggests, was always a real possibility, and Gollum's failure to repent is "tragic" (*Letters*, 329–30).

Between the flanks of good and evil defined by Elrond on the one hand and goblins on the other (a moral conflict emblemized by the ancient battle for Gondolin) most of the other characters waver, choosing poorly or well. Beorn, though on the *side* of good, might have sent Bilbo's companions away to starve in Wilderland had he not been humored (102), and the Wood-elves, like the men of Esgaroth, are cruel or helpful according to their selfish purposes. Bilbo and the dwarves, though defined as good when they oppose evils such as goblins or a dragon, are morally flawed, and their leader dies after being possessed by evil. Only Thorin's repentance repatriates him to the good side after greed has driven him into making war on the good men and elves.

Goblins, also called Orcs, are a special fictional case. Creations of the devil, unredeemably bad, they correspond to no actual persons or ethnic groups. They do symbolize corrupt urges that possess collective and individual wills. Thus, human beings, by abuse of free will, can become *virtual* goblins, though like Gollum they always retain some ambiguity, some potential for good. Goblins are, Tolkien wrote to his son during World War II, "only a figure of speech." There are no "folk made bad by the intention of their maker" (*Letters*, 90). Tolkien maintained a crisp distinction between the created world, where his knowledge was flawed, and the subcreated world, where he was omniscient.[6] He was haunted by a grim sense of evil loose in the world (*Letters*, 80), but he was no simple-minded moralist, and certainly no bigot.

I Have a Little Shadow

The still-childlike Bilbo must be carried by the dwarves as they escape the goblins because he is too small to keep up. Accidentally dropped, he is again alone and in danger, as he is at least once in every section of the story. Here is a basic childhood fear, fear of sudden abandonment, but it is precisely through episodes of abandonment and his mature responses to them that Bilbo grows. Later in the story, he will twice lapse unconscious in the midst of crucial actions, once in spider-infested Mirkwood and once in the midst of battle.

This particular device, losing consciousness and waking up in a new situation, is common in adventure stories and supports the interpretation of such stories as narratives of deepening consciousness. In the Babylonian tale of Gilgamesh, nearly four thousand years old, the hero is exposed as a mortal because he cannot stay awake, but he does receive divine wisdom through dreams. Unconsciousness is death's twin, but intervals of unconsciousness are steps in the climb to maturation. One-sided consciousness standing by itself, the Baggins side of Bilbo in *The Hobbit*, is stagnation: Bilbo grows by falling into the buried Tookish side and raising parts of it into waking consciousness. A stable and secure ego (as opposed to a rigid one) can entrust itself to the powers of unconsciousness in sleep, danger, or the creative process (Neumann 1973, 44). Heroes mature through "the sleep of healing, transformation and awakening" (Neumann 1963, 300). In hero stories there is a powerful link between the ability to dream prophetically and the ability to stay awake.[7]

The hero is often defined in terms of staying awake, maintaining consciousness, yet lapsing at fated moments of transition. Leadership is dreaming outside the boundaries of sleep. Bilbo saves his companions by staying awake and dreaming in the dry cave. Slow to sleep, he dozes off to a nightmare of goblins, then wakes and shouts a real warning. His alertness establishes new parallels between him and the hero of *King Solomon's Mines*. Allan Quartermain's Kafir name means "the man who gets up in the middle of the night, or, in vulgar English, he who keeps his eyes open" (Haggard, 47). Reluctant middle-aged guide on a suicidal trek with an old treasure map, Allan is also knocked unconscious in the midst of a fight (wearing, as Bilbo later will, protective chain mail of ancient make) (Haggard, 208). At a similar crisis in Haggard's *She*, the narrator faints,[8] and MacDonald's Curdie, trapped in goblin caves, falls asleep for hours (MacDonald, 99). Sudden unconsciousness covers difficult transitions in Jules Verne's *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," and many other adventures, including *The Divine Comedy*, where Dante faints repeatedly. Bilbo is in good company.

Alone in darkness with only a knife, pipe, and tobacco—the same three articles with which Robinson Crusoe reaches the shore of his desert island[9]—Bilbo comes face to face not with Friday but with a dark side of his hobbit nature, a Hyde to his Jekyll. Gollum is identifiable with the part of the hero's personality that Jung called the shadow. This is not the same as the denied Took side of his personality, the side associated with adventures and elves. Even as the hobbit rejected a life of swords, mountains, and fireworks for himself, he admired it in others, and so Took traits suggest Bilbo's anima, his buried but beloved feminine side, associated with his mother and promoted by Gandalf. According to Jung's theory, the transforming power of the anima helps the conscious ego to meet and accept the shadow, which represents traits we dislike in others and are blind to in ourselves: "Such things as egotism, mental laziness, and sloppiness; unreal fantasies, schemes, and plots; carelessness and cowardice; inordinate love of money and possessions."[10]

The shadow, appearing in dreams as a human figure, represents traits we discarded to carve out a respectable identity early in life. Not all shadow traits are objectively bad; we become better, stronger people when we borrow some of the shadow's rejected powers. Though the shadow appears hostile, it may render valuable help, releasing hidden resources: Bilbo succeeds only through half-guilty use of the magic ring hoarded by his shadow. In fact, Jung repeatedly asserted that accepting the shadow (not acting out its raw impulses) is a prerequisite for achieving wholeness, the dynamic harmony of mind he called individuation.

Symbolism in the Gollum episode is strong. At a dead end in the roots of the mountain, symbolically the bottom of himself, Bilbo meets his double. Like Gollum, Bilbo lives underground, in tunnels, on a hill, at a dead-end, by water, and alone. Both creatures are resourceful, inclined to use cautious deception rather than violence, obsessed with food. Both are hobbits. The narrator in *The Hobbit* professes not to know what Gollum is (67), but in *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien reveals that Gollum is a degenerate hobbit (that is, a human being) who stole the magic ring centuries before and has been corrupted by the ring even as it has extended his life span. Association between invisibility and moral corruption is central to H. G. Wells's *The Invisible Man*, which became a hit motion picture in the years *The Hobbit* was being written.[11] The Gollum-like character of invisibility coincides with recent writings on the subject of personality types. For instance, virtual invisibility is sought in real life by a personality type that Helen Palmer calls "the observer"—associated with social isolation, secretiveness, greed, and compulsive collecting.[12] It is easy to see in these traits of Gollum the shadow personality of the hobbit we met alone outside his obsessively dusted and arranged home with its full pantry.

When Bilbo spares Gollum's life, this should not be taken as pacifism. As Jung pointed out in *The Undiscovered Self*, where he analyzed the destructive projections of the Cold War, we must be very careful how we oppose shadow figures, carriers of our own denied evils. The compulsion to project internal evil outward and fight whomever it is projected on is a mental disease. In the presence of a shadow figure (once demands of self-defense have been met) understanding may be wiser than indignation. Thus Bilbo is right to spare his shadow, to leap over the crazed little figure rather than kill it. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Gollum, though disgusting and dangerous, plays a role in the service of the good. Like Judas, he becomes an instrument of salvation. To kill a shadow may be to drive it underground and increase its power, much as the attempt to crush German imperialism after World War I served to strengthen Hitler.

Dark Words

The riddle contest with Gollum shows how effectively Tolkien imitated Old Norse literature, where word combats with deadly outcomes are common. Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* retells Norse mythology in the framework of a question contest between King Gylfi of Sweden and a figure named High One in Odin's court. Snorri's frame story is similar to Bilbo's encounter with Gollum. It tells of a mortal intruding into an uncanny place and being unable to "get out safe and sound" unless he wins the verbal combat by asking a question that cannot be answered.[13]

Norse combat of words, called *flytings*, typically involve swapping insults, as Beowulf and Unferth do in the Old English epic; but two poems in the *Poetic Edda* describe deadly quiz programs like Bilbo's encounter with Gollum. The *Alvissmol* describes Thor's questioning of a dwarf who wants to marry his daughter and who is destroyed when sunrise turns him to stone (Bellows, 184–94). More like Bilbo's contest is the *Vafthruthnismol*, which narrates Odin's visit to a giant's hall. His monstrous host declares: "Forth from our dwelling thou never shalt fare, / Unless wiser than I thou art" (Bellows, 70). To save his life, Odin propounds a series of questions, finally winning by asking a private question: What did Odin say in the ears of his dead son? With this, the giant recognizes his adversary and admits defeat (Bellows, 83). Like Odin's, Bilbo's "What have I got in my pocket?" (73) is a private question. And the *Vafthruthnismol* influenced a late saga that is another likely source of Tolkien's riddle contest, *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*.

Christopher Tolkien, a scholar and editor of his father's posthumous works, published a translation in 1960 of the saga bristling with parallels to his father's fantasy world. Most striking, however, is the younger Tolkien's

claim that *Heidrek* contains the only Old Norse mention of a riddle contest, even of riddles (*Heidrek*, xix). The contest has much in common with the one between Bilbo and Gollum, for one of the parties is declared to forfeit his life if he loses the contest, and the threatened party wins by asking a private question, not a riddle. In the saga, Odin takes the identity of a mortal and visits Heidrek to challenge the wise king to a riddle match. After a series of riddles, Odin concludes with the same question he used against the giant in the *Vafthruthnismol*: he asks what he said in his dead son's ear. With this, Heidrek recognizes Odin and slashes at him with a sword. The god escapes, pronouncing a curse on the man (*Heidrek*, 32–4). Not only the presence of a riddle contest, with its nonriddle conclusion, but the sword and the curse pronounced on the winner (though roles are ironically scrambled) connect the two tales. In Wilderland the riddle contest is a sacred tradition (74), but the contest limited to riddles is imitated from one medieval European source only, *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*.

There are riddles, however, in Old English, and Tolkien's riddles owe to these. His remarks on the subject are ambiguous. A 1938 letter, celebrating his new status as popular author, suggests that there is "work to be done here on the sources and analogues" and wonders if his characters (hence he) will be allowed to claim authorship of the riddles (*Letters*, 32). A letter to his publisher nine years later, however, claims authorship of all but two of the riddles. They are original poetry in an old style and method, "literary" work not to be reprinted without permission (*Letters*, 123). These stances may not be contradictory if we recognize in the first a teasing celebration of the medieval tradition that informed his work and in the second an impulse to defend personal property.

The English literary riddle, the short poem describing an unidentified thing in accurate but misleading terms, begins with three collections of Latin riddles attributed to English churchmen around 700: Aldhelm, Tatwine, and Eusebius. Ninety-five riddles in Old English, a few translated from Latin but most original, appear in the largest manuscript of Anglo-Saxon poetry, *The Exeter Book*.[14] The riddle was well suited to Old English verse, which used many *kennings*, or riddling namings of things (the sea was a "swan-riding," for instance, and a ship a "flood-timber"), instead of metaphors or similes. Discussing kennings, Tolkien says that "the riddle element is present" but its purpose is compression, not confusion. "Even among the actual verse-riddles extant in Anglo-Saxon, many are to be found of which the object is a cameo of recognizable description rather than a puzzle." Though the Exeter riddles may perplex readers unfamiliar with their methods, Tolkien asserts, their purpose is literary in the fullest sense.[15] They should not be confused with common jokes and puzzles. By Gollum's lake, Tolkien tries his hand at this long-neglected literary genre.

Bilbo's five riddles are not as interesting as Gollum's. The first, describing teeth as white horses, Tolkien acknowledges as traditional by saying "Gollum knew the answer as well as you do" (69). Bilbo's third riddle, describing an egg, is a condensation of a verse Tolkien credits to American nursery books (*Letters*, 123). Bilbo's fourth try, "No-legs," is traditional (a variation on the Oedipus riddle) and not in verse, and his winning question is, of course, not even a riddle. Bilbo's only riddle with literary claims is his second one, "sun on the daisies," a play on the word *daisy*, which was originally "day's eye" (*daeges eage* in Old English). The sun, too, is obviously "day's eye," and the little poem exploits this link. Tolkien's choice of riddles for Bilbo suggests an intellectual and literary lightweight, outclassed by the darker and more complex riddling of Gollum and saved only by luck.

Gollum's strong and memorable character is contained in his riddles, which loosely parallel several poems in *The Exeter Book* but are not translations. His lines read well aloud, as Tolkien once remarked (*Letters*, 164), but illustrators have found it difficult to capture the threat felt by readers (*Annotated*, 94). Although Gollum is small and man-shaped, the made-for-TV cartoon version by Rankin-Bass (1977), for instance, represents Gollum as a giant frog. This may be understood as a desperate effort to cartoon the sinister tone that Tolkien achieves through verses hissed under glowing eyes in the dark.

Gollum is terrifying because of the strength and perversity of his will, his mental depravity, shown through dark, densely written riddles. *Mountain*, *wind*, *dark*, *fish*, and *time*—the solutions to his riddles—are elemental things that in Gollum's riddles take on monstrous characters. If its elements are monstrous, the very universe must be hostile. Gollum's riddles suggest paranoid depression. *Dark*, like the riddler himself, is an invisible thing that hides under hills, destroying "life" and "laughter" (70), and as harmless a thing as a fish sounds like a cold and aggressive monster, invulnerable to natural limitations: in silent armor, it is alive but does not breathe (71). The wind is similarly monstrous; it cries, flutters, bites, and mutters (70). Time, for the little long-lived monster under the mountain, devours, gnaws, bites, grinds, slays, and ruins (72). What is so terrifying to Bilbo, and to the reader with him, is that Gollum's riddles caricature in dreadful terms terrifying features behind pale eyes in the dark.

The Conjunction of Opposites

Just over the line that Tolkien's map labels "Edge of the Wild" (256) is a realm of hybrids, creatures on borderlines between kinds. As mentioned earlier, goblins are man-shaped but not men; they are "stone" copies devised by Morgoth, the Satan of Tolkien's mythology (*Shaping*, 82). Gollum,

too, is humanoid but of unknown species in the text of *The Hobbit* (67), explained in *The Lord of the Rings* as an ancient hobbit given longevity by the magic ring and adapted—in a Lamarckian, not a Darwinian, way—to conditions of cave life. He is a throwback to animal drives, a sort of hobbit cave man. The Wargs blend species. They have language and government like human beings, indeed like the skin-changing men described in *The Saga of the Volsungs* who think like murderous men but look and speak like wolves (*Volsungs*, 44–45). Tolkien's account of the attacking Wargs is based on "The Battle of the Were-Wolves" in S. R. Crockett's *The Black Douglas*, a story in which the leader of the wolves is a shape-changing witchwoman (*Annotated*, 114–15). Besides being another example of Tolkien's masculating characters who were female in his sources, this clinches the implication that Wargs are semihuman and should be associated with that familiar hybrid, the werewolf. Beorn's status as a creature between species is obvious.

Even the noble eagles evoke dozens of myths and fairy stories in which people take on bird cloaks to fly,[16] especially after they acquire golden ornaments. The chief eagle, Tolkien adds for no clear reason, later became the king of birds and "wore a golden crown, and his fifteen chieftains golden collars" (101). In Old Irish tales a golden ornament is an infallible sign that a bird is a human under enchantment. In one case flocks of birds linked with gold and silver chains are actually a princess and her fifty maidens.[17] A woman under enchantment is found in her swan-shape among many birds with chains around their necks (*Cuchulain*, 120). An immortal escapes with his love by transforming into swans "linked together by a chain of gold" (Gregory, *Gods*, 95).

Elrond, the elven man, was a transition into a land where creatures are double-natured, where opposites merge and connections are made. It is appropriate that here Bilbo meets his shadow and acquires the power of the ring, for the ring is a natural symbol of connectedness. It is associated with the primitive world-serpent biting its tail (the Ouroboros) and with the Mandala, the four-part circle that Jung saw as an image of healing. Like all round things, a ring suggests the self, the inner wholeness of personality that is obscured at infancy and is rediscovered gradually through the elaborate maturing process called individuation. The self is not a person's conscious identity, not the "I" represented by the hero, not the individual ego. The self, unless approached wrongly, does not make one "selfish." It is a complex of mental energy that, among other things, coordinates conscious and unconscious minds and is always centered below the edge of consciousness, where it takes on magical or divine properties. So Bilbo's ring, found in dark caves after sleep, will magically assist him in his efforts to become a whole person, a hero.

It is good to build a personality around the self, the process of self-development, or individuation. This is what Bilbo is doing in *The Hobbit*, prodded by Gandalf and others who are agents of the urge to wholeness. It is most important, however, for the hero who discovers the self, through whatever symbol, not to identify personally with it. The danger, Jung wrote, "lies in the identification of the ego-consciousness with the self. This produces an inflation which threatens consciousness with dissolution."[18] Possessed by the idea of the self, a person becomes "inflated" by a chaotic inflow of raw energy, loses control, and becomes a tool of the infantile self, a golem. This is the danger facing Faustian dabblers in the occult or self-inflated leaders such as David Koresh and Adolf Hitler. This is what has happened to Gollum and what will happen to Thorin. Possessed by the self, they feel immortal and godlike and live in druglike animation, losing all moral proportion.

This same self is symbolically the Grail, the Christ, the World-Soul. Rightly followed, it is the way to fullness of life. The ring, if it does not possess the hero, gives him power to overcome the monsters of the subterranean world, the agents of the Great Mother who either initiates her children into adulthood or eats them alive (Gollum has been consumed by the ring and become a cannibalistic agent of the Devouring Mother). Bilbo's success depends, on the one hand, on his having the ring, his acquiring the connectedness with the self. On the other hand, it depends on his using the ring modestly, only when needed, remaining awake in his ordinary identity to resist temptation. As the protagonist in H. G. Wells's *The Invisible Man* says, invisibility gives a man the power to murder and terrorize,[19] but Bilbo instinctively uses the power within limits. Owning the ring causes him to grow into his real nature, to better fill his proper place, not to become twisted and alienated like Gollum.

The ring represents the unity of opposites—most obviously the union of Baggins and Took—and it is symbolically appropriate that it is found in Wilderland, the wilderness of bewilderment where creatures are hybrids of contradictions. The ring, as symbol of the self, links heaven, earth, and the underworld; spirit and matter; the conscious and the unconscious. It centers this panoramic episode in which Bilbo travels through the air and over and under the earth. He stands in inaccessible eyries, like Olympus in the clouds, and meets a dark double at the roots of a mountain. After the flamboyant synthesis of opposites in part 2, Bilbo will stand on his own as a hero. He has the ring and will not need Gandalf.

Notes

1. Reprinted in *The Annotated Hobbit*, 305.
2. L. Frank Baum, *The Wizard of Oz* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1963), 43.

3. The Rankin-Bass film (1977) oversimplifies the story of *The Hobbit* to an antiwar stance. While Tolkien does blame Thorin for his willingness to start a needless war, to fight for the letter of selfish prerogatives, the dwarf is redeemed by dying in a just and necessary war. Tolkien dramatizes the tragedy of all wars, but only condemns unjust ones.

4. George MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin and The Princess and Curdie* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 46; hereafter cited in text.

5. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Shaping of Middle-Earth*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 82; hereafter cited in text as *Shaping*.

6. Asked what his Elvish name was, Tolkien declined to give himself one, saying he did not belong inside his "invented history; and [did] not wish to!" See *Letters*, 398.

7. The power of the space between waking and sleeping is examined in Mary Watkins, *Waking Dreams* (Dallas: Spring, 1984).

8. H. Rider Haggard, *She*, ed. Daniel Karlin (New York: Oxford University Press), 105.

9. Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Michael Shinagel (New York: Norton, 1975), 39.

10. Marie-Louise von Franz, "The Process of Individuation," *Man and His Symbols*, ed. Carl G. Jung (New York: Dell, 1968), 174.

11. Bilbo's "horrible game of blind-man's-buff" with the goblin guards (81) is strongly reminiscent of several seriocomic crowd scenes in the brilliant 1933 Universal film *The Invisible Man*.

12. Helen Palmer, *The Enneagram: Understanding Yourself and the Others in Your Life* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 204–36.

13. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 31; hereafter cited in text.

14. *The Exeter Book*, ed. George Phillip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), lxvi–lxvii.

15. J. R. R. Tolkien, "Prefatory Remarks," *Beowulf and the Finnesburg Fragment*, trans. John R. Clark Hall, rev. C. L. Wrenn (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950), xii; hereafter cited in text as "Prefatory."

16. This is elaborated in chapter 5 of my 1969 Louisiana State University dissertation, "*The Hobbit* and Other Fiction by J. R. R. Tolkien: Their Roots in Medieval Heroic Literature and Language," *Dissertation Abstracts International* 30 (1970): 4944A.

17. Lady Gregory, *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 22; hereafter cited in text.

18. C. G. Jung, *Four Archetypes*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 79; hereafter cited in text.

19. H. G. Wells, *The Invisible Man* (New York: Bantam, 1970), 113–14.

GEORGE CLARK

J.R.R. Tolkien and the True Hero

Tolkien: The Heroes and the Critic

Many readers of Tolkien's fantasy fictions are unaware that the author of *Hobbit* and *LR* also wrote seminal studies of *Beowulf*, the most important surviving work of Anglo-Saxon or Old English literature, and of *The Battle of Maldon (Maldon*), often regarded as the purest surviving expression in (Old) English of the heroic ethos of the old Germanic world. Those critical studies are "*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*" ("*Monsters*") and "*The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son*" ("*Homecoming*") and in them, as in his fictions, Tolkien conducted his own quest.

Tolkien sought a true hero motivated by a heroic ideal consistent with his own religious and moral ideals, but he could not rid himself of his desire for the glorious heroes of old. In *Hobbit* he shares the search for the new hero with the wizard Gandalf, an alter ego, and they find Bilbo Baggins of Bag End. On their first encounter, Gandalf announces that he is looking for someone "to share in an adventure" and that takers are hard to find (12). Bilbo Baggins insists he has no interest in an adventure, but before the two of them part, Gandalf has promised it to the hobbit (14). In response to World War II, Tolkien renewed his and Gandalf's search, now an urgent quest for a moral meaning in a world of horrors. *LR* realizes in its fantasy narrative the experience of a world engaged in a terrible war (Timmons 115–18). The hero

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and the heroism Tolkien sought were meant to justify the ways of a hidden God to a world that had felt the power of evil.

One might wonder how Tolkien, a devout Catholic, could justify spending his most productive years writing a very long book that does not explicitly bear witness to his Christian faith. *LR* embodies a Christian worldview in a narrative with no explicitly Christian references. Tolkien followed the strategy, as he saw it, of the *Beowulf* poet and the authors of some of the Old Icelandic sagas. The saga authors, when telling the story of persons who lived before the conversion of Iceland, generally avoid anachronistic references to Christianity but sometimes attribute a kind of natural monotheism to favored heroes like Askel in *The Saga of the People of Reykjadal* (Hreinsson 4, ch. 7). The *Beowulf* poet makes his nobler characters explicitly monotheistic, but includes no explicitly Christian references and makes only one undoubted and two possible references to the Old Testament. The *Beowulf* poet whom Tolkien imagined was a learned Christian who re-created a heroic world and story in an implicitly Christian universe governed by a God whose existence and nature the poem's wiser characters intuit without the benefit of revelation. Tolkien's *Beowulf* poet was a version of himself, and his authorial persona in creating *LR* was a version of that *Beowulf* poet. Following his creative predecessor, Tolkien set *LR* in what can be seen as a time before the Incarnation, possibly even in the time of the patriarchs, yet the wiser characters in *LR*, as in *Beowulf* and some of the sagas, are aware of the presence of a force they cannot name.

Tolkien knew and loved the literature that preserved the heroic ethos of the old Germanic world, but he could not accept the heroic vision of man's fate or the traditional heroes represented in those literatures. His fantasy fiction rewrites heroic literature and the hero; so do his critical studies. "Monsters" and "Homecoming" ultimately separate *Beowulf* and *Maldon* from the heroic tradition and make those works critiques of heroic society, its values and heroes. Early in the text of "Monsters," Beowulf almost becomes the new hero—"something more than a standard hero is before us, a man faced with a foe more evil than any human enemy is before us" (*Essays* 17), but this contrast between Beowulf and the "standard hero" gives way to a comparison of Beowulf with the "standard" pagan warrior-hero later in the essay and appendices. The heroic world prized prowess, courage, and material success. More darkly, at least to some modern imaginations, avenging wrongs to members of one's in-group (by blood or association) had a positive value. In "Monsters" and "Homecoming," Tolkien leaves that motive for heroic action out of his analysis of texts which mention the duty of revenge explicitly and often. Nor do these essays take explicit note of the motive of material gain. In the Icelandic sagas, a

heroic venture is frequently said to be conducted *til fjár ok fraegðar* ("for wealth and fame"); Beowulf returns from Denmark with magnificent gifts from Hrothgar as well as fame and good report.

Tolkien's critical essays do, however, treat, and with increasing asperity, the heroic desire for fame. In the heroic age, on the literary evidence at least, a fierce competition for honor coexisted within group solidarity and an ideal of mutual loyalty between leaders and followers. The Anglo-Saxon adjective *hold* ("loyal") could describe the relationship of the leader to the follower, or the follower to the leader ("loyalty up, loyalty down"). Gifts strengthened loyalty up, and gift exchange cemented the loyalties of competitive and warlike men. The competitive pursuit of wealth and fame put the hero in harm's way; the heroic oath kept him on his dangerous course. The oath, vow, or promise bound the hero to a future course of dangerous action and was not a boast or exaggerated statement about past deeds. Oaths frequently admitted the possibility of failure, and death, in the attempt to keep the promise. The heroic world of early Northern Europe, in the pagan and in the early Christian era, was a "shame culture" in which a man's essential worth was defined by his reputation, his honor among his peers, the judgment passed on him by those qualified to judge (Jones 96–158).

Ideas of fate and luck were a prominent part of the heroic worldview. Heroic literature frequently implies that fate (or Fate) rules the hero's destiny, but that decisive role is sometimes ascribed to luck, which seems more erratic, capable of leaving the hero, for example, in the lurch on what may seem contingent considerations. Material success may depend upon luck or fate, but fame often blesses those doomed to die, or perhaps especially favors them. This fatalism might be characterized as "pagan," but it survived into the Christian era. Pierre Maury, the shepherd a reader might call the hero of Ladurie's *Montaillou*, resolved to follow his fate and live as he had always done rather than attempt to evade the inquisition that eventually claimed him (131–32). In the same spirit, Gunnar, the great hero of *Njal's Saga*, refused to go into temporary exile, which would have saved him from what he saw as his fate (Hreinsson 3, ch. 75). And fate or Fate rules in larger matters than the life and death of individual mortals: the gods themselves are doomed. At least in the Old Norse survivals of Germanic paganism, the gods themselves must die in battle against the forces of darkness. But wealth was mortal, too; fame was the spur and the hero's hope of immortality. Man's fate, the gods' fate, the world's fate was defeat and death. Sigurður Nordal wrote that near the end of the pagan era in Iceland "the old pessimism, the fear of an evil, hidden fate, the conviction that all would perish" still "hung over the minds of men" (120). Much as Tolkien loved the literature of the old heroic world, its faith and his were incompatible.[1]

Reading and Writing the Hero

Tolkien's readings mentally erased large portions of *Beowulf* and *Maldon*, but those erasures freed the space for his own writing. In "Monsters," Tolkien virtually erased Beowulf, a character too close to "the actual heathen *haeleð* [hero]" (27) or "standard hero" (17) for comfort, but in *Hobbit*, Tolkien attempted to rewrite the hero. In "Homecoming," Tolkien found the meaning of Maldon in his interpretation of two lines that he took as the author's moralization of his story, chastising the "standard hero" of that poem. The wise doctrine "Never trust the teller, trust the tale," had no influence on Tolkien's reading of *Maldon*, which indeed erased most of the story. For all Tolkien's skill at telling a story, his studies of *Maldon* and *Beowulf* read the texts as lyrics rather than narratives. In "Monsters," he describes *Beowulf* as "static" in structure and declares the poem is "not meant to advance" (*Essays* 28).

As *Hobbit* opens, the wizard Gandalf claims he has sought already for "a mighty Warrior, even a Hero" (31) but reports that "warriors are busy fighting one another in distant lands, and in this neighborhood heroes are scarce, or simply not to be found" (31). The quest for the dragon's treasure in times when warriors occupy themselves elsewhere and no heroes are here now depends on finding a new hero, an unpromising youth, or a timid fellow who will, in the pinch, prove to have the courage and strength required. Such heroes abound in folklore. Even Beowulf, one brief reference in the poem indicates, was once regarded as "slack" (Klaeber line 2087). When Gandalf assembles the dwarves at Bilbo's comfortable hobbit hole, Thorin grandly asserts that they will soon begin a journey from which some or all may not return. Bilbo shrieks and collapses, calling out "'struck by lightning, struck by lightning'" (25). Gandalf smooths over this contretemps: "Excitable little fellow . . . Gets funny queer fits, but he is one of the best, one of the best—fierce as a dragon in a pinch" (25).

Bilbo recovers in the parlor, creeps to the door, and hears Gloin scoffing at his alleged ferocity: "As soon as I clapped eyes on the little fellow bobbing and puffing on the mat, I had my doubts. He looks more like a grocer than a burglar" (28). Bilbo responds to the challenge: "He suddenly felt he would go without bed and breakfast to be thought fierce. As for *little fellow bobbing on the mat* it almost made him *really* fierce" (28). Bilbo opens the door and accepts the challenge in the pursuit of what Beowulf or his poet would call *lof* and *dom*, praise and good report. Gandalf preemptorily announces: "I have chosen Mr Baggins and that ought to be enough for all of you. If I say he is a Burglar, a Burglar he is, or will be when the time comes. There is a lot more in him than you guess and a deal more than he has any idea of himself" (29). The next morning, despite some qualms, Bilbo reaffirms

his commitment to the adventure when he accepts the letter setting out the terms of his adventure: "Terms: cash on delivery, up to and not exceeding one fourteenth of total profits (if any), all traveling expenses guaranteed in any event, funeral expenses to be defrayed by us or our representatives, if occasion arises and the matter is not otherwise arranged for" (38).

Accepting the letter, like making a formal vow, binds Bilbo to a venture that may cost him his life. His initial motives, to be thought fierce and to collect one-fourteenth of the profits arising from plundering a dragon's hoard, comically re-create the heroic ethos. Bilbo Baggins, like a hero of old, sets out *til fjár ok fraegðar*, for wealth and fame, his commitment to the adventure sealed by a contract as binding as a heroic oath confirmed with a drink of the bright mead. Besides the wizard Gandalf, Bilbo's partners in the adventure are twelve dwarves who hope to gain the dragon's treasure, and perhaps fame as well, but who also seek revenge on Smaug for the deaths of companions, kinsmen, and a late lord. The usual motives for heroic action are all present and accounted for: wealth, fame, revenge, an oath or vow, loyalty, and leadership impel these small heroes on to confront a dragon.

Naturally enough, the successful outcome of the adventure depends on Bilbo's physical and moral courage and on his moral choices, including a decision to give up his share of the treasure. Bilbo does not shoot the dragon Smaug or lead the victors in the battle of the five armies. The great exploits belong to more than life-sized figures: Bard the archer and Beorn who takes the form of a great bear to turn the tide of battle. But at the crucial moments, Bilbo's actions secure the success of the good cause, and he receives the praise and good report of true judges: "The Elvenking looked at Bilbo with new wonder: 'Bilbo Baggins!' . . . 'You are more worthy to wear the armour of elf-princes than many that have looked more comely in it'" (256); and "an old man, wrapped in a dark cloak [Gandalf in disguise], rose from a tent door where he was sitting and came towards them. 'Well done! Mr Baggins!' he said clapping Bilbo on the back. 'There is always more about you than anyone expects'" (257). In earning these praises, Bilbo has acted with physical courage, altruism, and loyalty to his comrades even as he attempts to stave off the war Thorin's desire for the dragon's whole hoard has made likely. Bilbo Baggins has grown thinner, stronger, braver in the long march from the comfortable Shire to the Lonely Mountain; danger makes a new hobbit of him, or rather, brings out the latent quality Gandalf had perceived in Bilbo long before.

In *Hobbit* and in Bilbo Baggins, Tolkien creates a new heroism and a new hero. The new hero is summoned to his dangerous mission by a nearly supernatural person who will brook no denial. In contrast, Beowulf, on hearing of Grendel's raids, abruptly orders a ship fitted out and, according to Tolkien, sets off to win *lof* and *dom* with his physical strength or *maegen*

(*Essays* 27). Beowulf, however, attributes his desire to visit the Danes to the Danish king's need of men (lines 199b–201); Hrothgar surmises that God has sent Beowulf to defend the Danes against Grendel (lines 381b–84a) and acknowledges that he will be obligated to reward Beowulf (lines 384b–85). An altruistic impulse to defend those under attack could easily be seen in Beowulf's actions. Similarly Beowulf's fight with the dragon has been taken as an instance of altruistic self-sacrifice (Klaeber 1–1i), but that reading is ignored in "Monsters" and rejected in "Homecoming" (17–18). Beowulf's physical strength borders on the superhuman, but Bilbo, the new hero, has no such prowess. He has a sense of honor, moral and physical courage, and the resolve to die, if need be, in the good cause.

Tolkien clearly wished to find an alternative hero in the text of *Beowulf*, hence Beowulf's surprisingly small part in "Monsters" and Tolkien's pointed comparison of Hrothgar, the King of the Danes, with Beowulf. Tolkien writes that the poet "turned naturally when delineating the great King of Heorot to the Old Testament. In the *folces hyrde* [shepherd of the people] of the Danes we have much of the shepherd patriarchs and kings of Israel, servants of the one God," whereas "the traditional matter in English, not to mention the living survival of the heroic code and temper among the noble households of ancient England, enabled him [the *Beowulf* poet] to draw differently and in some respects much closer to the actual heathen *haelep* [hero, warrior], the character of Beowulf, especially as a young knight who used his great gift of *maegen* [strength] to earn *dom* and *lof* [good report, fame] among men and posterity" (*Essays* 27). In Appendix B to "Monsters," Tolkien is still more negative about the poem's hero, noting that unlike Hrothgar, Beowulf "refers sparingly to God, except as the arbiter of critical events. . . . We have in Beowulf's language little differentiation of God and Fate" (40) and that as he lay dying, Beowulf thought "only of his barrow and memorial among men, of his childlessness, and of Wiglaf the sole survivor of his kindred" (39). But Beowulf, dying dragon-poisoned and in pain, assures Wiglaf that the treasures he has won will (presumably as rewards for warriors) serve his people's need (lines 2799–801a).

Despite Tolkien's admiration of the hapless King of the Danes, Hrothgar merits only one brief reference in part 2. No amount of critical goodwill can make a hero of Hrothgar. In "Monsters," the *Beowulf* poet himself nearly becomes a rival hero. Tolkien characterizes the poet as a Christian learned in the traditions and poetry of the pagan era, who expressed his Christian conception of the war between good and evil in the poem without allegory and without explicitly Christian language (13–14, 17, 23–7, 33). This description of the *Beowulf* poet and his work reads like Tolkien's idea of himself as a scholar—a Christian contemplating the nobility, the hopelessness, the beauty, and the tragedy of the pagan and heroic world

depicted in *Beowulf* and the literature of ancient Scandinavia. And, of course, his idea of the *Beowulf* poet's intention and means seems to reflect Tolkien's intention and means as author of *LR*.[2] In 1936 ("Monsters") and 1937 (*Hobbit*) Tolkien questioned entrenched critical opinion that the old literary texts, especially *Beowulf*, idealized an ancient heroism. In his scholarship and his fiction, Tolkien almost constructed a new hero and new heroism, but the old model and the "standard hero" were visible in the new heroism and in Bilbo Baggins, nor could Beowulf be utterly banished from his poem.

Tolkien's *LR* and "Homecoming" (1953 and 1954) rejected traditional heroism still more decisively, but Tolkien's love for the idea of heroes, men of prowess and courage fighting a desperate battle for the right against seemingly overpowering odds, makes one strand of the story told in *LR*. In the other strand of that epic, the heroic struggle is internal and spiritual. The heroic strand of *LR* resembles Raphael's history of the war in heaven, an extended metaphor for the spiritual reality of the conflict Milton's Adam (and Eve) would not have understood. The spiritual strand in *LR* is the story of the Ring-bearers' progress to Mount Doom and the only fire that can unmake the Ring of power. If that quest succeeds, victory over Sauron and his immense force is assured otherwise all is lost. Aragorn, the great leader of the heroic strand, and his followers, like the gods and heroes of Old Norse mythology, are prepared to fight to the death against "the monsters and the outer darkness" ("Monsters" 25) even if there is no hope of victory. The large heroes of *LR* do not aspire *til fjár ok fraegðar*; no desire for *lof* and *dom* motivates them. Their duty to the good cause calls them and they cannot, will not, refuse. The war pits the good against absolute evil, but the good appear, almost metaphorically, in the shapes and forms of the heroic age. The outcome of this vast struggle, however, depends completely upon the success or failure of two small figures, Sam and Frodo.

Tolkien's desire for heroes drove him to give the spiritual strand of the story its own heroic metaphor, heroic valor, violent heroic action, and a hero who feels the longing for *lof* and *dom* that guided Beowulf's life. The wisest members of the Council of Elrond, Gandalf and Elrond himself, mistook or misidentified the hero of their story. The successor to the place of the true hero, briefly occupied by Beowulf, then by Bilbo Baggins, is not Frodo Baggins, Bilbo's designated heir and Gandalf's choice for Ring-bearer, the chosen one for whom, according to Elrond, the task was "appointed" (*FR* 354). The unexpected hero, much like the unpromising youth of folktales or a future saga hero lazing by the fire and called a fool until called to great actions by great needs, proves to be Samwise Gamgee. The Council of Elrond recapitulates the earlier private conference on the Ring between Frodo and Gandalf, designates Frodo as the Ring-bearer, foreshadows the narrative shape of Sam and Frodo's story, and directs the audiences' attention to the

moral meanings of the spiritual strand of his trilogy. The foreshadowing does not fully match the action to come and, moreover, the instructions for reading the story's moral meaning are not in complete harmony with the story itself.

Contradictions between the substance of the Council of Elrond and subsequent revelations in Lorien and the story of Sam and Frodo demonstrate Tolkien's difficulty in creating the new hero and heroism he longed for over the opposition of his passion for those unsatisfactory, earthly "standard" heroes of old. At the Council, Elrond announces, "We must send the Ring to the Fire" (*FR* 349), just as Gandalf had said much earlier to Frodo, who agreed he wanted the Ring destroyed, but protested "I am not made for perilous quests. . . . Why was I chosen?" (91). That protest, "why me?" implies acceptance of the quest, which Frodo repeats on the way to Rivendell and confirms there. There Frodo formally accepts, under some external inspiration, the task of taking the Ring to Mount Doom, "wondered to hear his own words, as if some other will was using his small voice," and undertakes the quest though he does not "'know the way'"; Elrond responds, "I think that this task is appointed for you, Frodo; and that if you do not find a way, no one will. This is the hour of the Shire-folk, when they arise from their quiet fields to shake the towers and counsels of the Great" (354). Shortly thereafter Elrond advises that the Ring must set out shortly but "those who go with it must not count on their errand being aided by war or force" (359). The conflict, we must suppose, will be entirely spiritual. The Lady Galadriel, wisest of the wise, later confirms that impression when she warns the company, "your Quest stands on the edge of a knife. Stray but a little and it will fail, to the ruin of all" (*FR* 463).

Tolkien's readings of *Maldon* and *Beowulf* erased those texts' references to the institution of the heroic vow and his fiction explicitly disapproves of such vows. Yet a heroic vow is part of Sam's emergence as hero. An ancient story reported in *RK* runs that one Baldor son of Brego rashly vowed to enter the "Paths of the Dead" and was never seen again (79). Before the Fellowship of the Ring leaves Rivendell, Elrond tells Frodo's companions, "You may tarry, or come back, or turn aside. . . . no oath or bond is laid on you to go further than you will." Gimli protests that those who leave when the going is tough are faithless, but Elrond counsels against oaths, in sharp opposition to the traditions of the heroic world; Gimli objects again, declaring that "sworn word may strengthen quaking heart," but Elrond counters, "[o]r break it" (*FR* 366). But Sam has already sworn an oath or a heroic vow, and his faithful performance of his oath is crucial to the story of the Ring. Before the hobbits leave the Shire, Frodo warns Sam of the likelihood that neither of them will come back from the quest (which Frodo implicitly accepts even before the Council of Elrond), and Sam replies "[i]f you don't come back,

sir, then I shan't, that's certain" (123). Sam's immediate answer makes, in fact, a heroic oath or vow identical in substance to the vow that Offa made to Byrhtnoth before both died at Maldon.

When Sam and Frodo reach the land of Mordor, Sam rather than Frodo finds the way, leads and sometimes carries his master on the way, and gives Frodo most of their food and nearly all of their water. In his rescue of Frodo from the orcs, Sam is, briefly, the Ring-bearer; to escape detection he puts it on and overhears an orc report, "there's a large warrior loose, Elf most likely, with an elf-sword anyway" (*TT* 438). Metaphorically Sam becomes a large elf-warrior and relishes the identification. And though neither large nor an elf, Sam proves a warrior at need. Early in *LR*, Sam composes some comic verses about the stone troll (left over from *Hobbit*) and Frodo predicts that Sam will become "a wizard—or a warrior" (*FR* 277). Sam wounds and routs the monstrous Shelob with Sting the elf-sword (*TT* 424–26), and disarms (de-arms) an orc with it (*RK* 221), and on these violent and warlike actions, despite Elrond, the success of the mission depends. When Sam realizes the orcs have found what he supposes is Frodo's corpse, he abandons his plan to carry the Ring to Mount Doom by himself. Loyalty to Frodo is his first duty. As he rushes to battle the orcs and avenge his beloved master, he states: "'How many can I kill before they get me? They'll see the flame of the sword, as soon as I draw it, and they'll get me sooner or later. I wonder if any song will ever mention it: how Samwise fell in the High Pass and made a wall of bodies round his master'" (*TT* 433). To die valiantly and be remembered in a song is to win *lof* and *dom*. Sam unconsciously models his intended course of action on the heroic deaths of the heroes remembered in the song or poem *Maldon*. Among them was Offa who fell and "lay, as befits a thegn, near his lord" (line 294) precisely as Sam proposes to do. To avenge Frodo, Sam leaves the larger war out of consideration, and in that he follows the faithful heroes of *Maldon*, who say nothing about the war between Aethelred II and the Vikings but speak of their duty to avenge Byrhtnoth and of their intention to avoid the shame of failing in that obligation.

The Ring of power or the Great Ring or the One Ring in *LR* is merely magical in *Hobbit*. Some of the contradictions in the myth of the Ring arise from the necessity to account for the transformation of a ring of invisibility into the Ring. T. A. Shippey has ingeniously compared the Ring's power over its possessors to the action of an addictive drug (1992, 122–27), but the contradictions seem not to be defeated so easily. Gandalf (*FR* 72, 91), Elrond (350) and Galadriel (474–75) indicate that if a person of power gains the Ring and uses it to defeat Sauron, it will in time turn the possessor into another Sauron, but if a person without power attempts to use the Ring, it will betray the possessor to Sauron. To defeat the power of evil embodied in Sauron requires a "Ring-bearer" willing to destroy it and forgo the power and

glory a personal victory over Sauron would entail. In the event, this seems not to happen. On the way to Mount Doom, Frodo can hardly support the burden of the Ring; he is exhausted by the inward struggle, and completely dependent on Sam for his progress. At the Crack of Doom, the fissure down to the only fires that can destroy the Ring, Frodo recovers his strength and turns into a powerful figure as he loses the battle with the Ring and yields to its temptation. Sam sees Frodo standing "black against the glare, tense, erect, but still as if he had been turned to stone" and cries 'Master!'"; Frodo speaks "with a clear voice, indeed with a voice clearer and more powerful than Sam had ever heard him use, and it rose above the throb and turmoil of Mount Doom, ringing in the roof and walls. 'I have come,' he said. 'But I choose not to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!' And suddenly he set it on his finger" (*RK* 268–69). Frodo has failed the test and strayed more than a little, but the result is victory over Sauron after all. Providentially, Gollum bowls Sam over, bites off Frodo's ring finger, and dancing with joy at regaining his "precious," falls into the Crack of Doom. Sauron's great army collapses, and the victory of the age is achieved (270).

This hardly seems the spiritual victory we expected; the destruction of the Ring apparently depends on the providential intervention of Gollum, who intends to reclaim it for himself, and the surefooted Slinker's fortunate fall. The prescient Gandalf, on hearing of Gollum's escape from the elves, muses "he may yet play a part that neither he nor Sauron have foreseen" (*FR* 335), one of the many hints in the trilogy that an unseen but benevolent providence guides the Ring-bearers and the forces of right despite their errors and imperfections. But if Gollum's unwilling part is crucial, the triumph of the good seems undeserved, spiritual defeat is reversed by a *deus ex machina*. Galadriel's warning that if the company of the Ring-bearer should "[s]tray but a little" (*FR* 463), all would be lost, like some of Elrond's pronouncements, seems to miss the mark. In fact, the spiritual victory over the Ring's seductive power is Sam's and has been adumbrated first by Bilbo's resignation of the Ring—the first possessor ever to give it up according to Gandalf (*FR* 75)—and then by Galadriel's refusal of the Ring. In Lórien, Frodo offers the Ring to Galadriel, who has indeed contemplated possessing the Ring and using it. In that conference, she reveals herself as she would be at first if she accepted Frodo's offer of the Ring, then shrinks into "a slender elf-woman" and announces, "I pass the test. . . . I will diminish and go into the West and remain Galadriel" (*FR* 475).

Sam is Samwise, not Samuel as one might expect, and despite its meaning, the full name becomes an honorific in *LR*. The prefix *sam-* in Anglo-Saxon means "half," hence Samwise is "half-wise." One might think "half-witted," but the Old Norse wisdom poem *Hávamál* (*Sayings of the High One*), as Tolkien knew very well, advises that one should be "averagely wise

. . . never too wise" (Larrington, stanza 55). Tolkien characterizes Sam as dim before the beginning of the quest, but once it has begun, Sam is wise enough to see things as they are and himself as he is, wise to recognize the Ring's temptation and reject it. The change from Sam as dim, to Sam who sees as through a glass darkly, comes in his first meeting with elves, the people of his dreams and longings. As the hobbits set out from the Shire they meet a company of elves. Sam talks with some of the elves and absorbs their counsel and seemingly receives a portion of their wisdom. Sam sleeps while Frodo talks with the leader of the elves, but the next morning, Frodo is astonished to hear a changed Sam saying "after last night I feel different. I seem to see ahead, in a kind of way. I know we are going to take a very long road into darkness; but I know I can't turn back" (*FR* 124).

In Mordor, convinced that Frodo is dead, Sam passes the test under harder conditions than Galadriel's. As Ring-bearer, Sam feels

> that he had from now on only two choices: to forebear the Ring, though it would torment him; or to claim it, and challenge the Power that sat in its dark hold beyond the valley of shadows. Already the Ring tempted him, gnawing at his will and reason. Wild fantasies arose in his mind; and 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-dûr. And then all the clouds rolled away, and the white sun shone, and at his command the vale of Gorgoroth became a garden of flowers and trees and brought forth fruit. He had only to put on the Ring and claim it for his own, and all this could be. (*RK* 210)

Sam's "love of his master" and personal wisdom, "his plain hobbit-sense" assures him "he was not large enough to bear such a burden, even if such visions were not a mere cheat to betray him" (*RK* 210). Sam, like Galadriel, freely chose, despite the temptation to claim and use the Ring, to remain himself. In contrast, Frodo at Mount Doom indeed puts on the Ring and claims it as his own, whereas Sam had taken it off before and surrendered it to Frodo (*RK* 224). The spiritual victory is Sam's, his teacher in achieving it, Galadriel. Sam's free choice not to use the Ring, and indeed to will its destruction, is crucial to the great victory, but so is the hidden, benevolent fate or providence that rescues Frodo from his folly by the seemingly improbable instrument of Gollum and then trips Gollum up by the heels at the edge of the abyss (*RK* 270).

In *LR* a benevolent providence supplants that "evil, hidden fate" Nordal saw darkening the heroic literature of the north. Hobbits, dwarves, humans,

and, naturally, the evil or corrupted seem unaware of this hidden force in their world, but the supernaturally wise and good, Tom Bombadil, the leading elves, and Gandalf, share an awareness that some divinity or force shapes the course of events when hobbits, dwarves, and others encounter difficulties their own strengths cannot overcome. Gandalf repeatedly implies the operation of a benevolent purpose in the course of events as when he asserts "'There was more than one power at work, Frodo. . . . [T]here was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ringmaker. . . . Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. In which case you also were *meant* to have it'" (*FR* 84). Frodo does not agree this is an encouraging thought, but admits he does not understand Gandalf. In that first meeting between Frodo and the elves' leader, Gildor, he tells Frodo "[i]n this meeting there may be more than chance" (*FR* 121), and one consequence of the meeting is the change in Sam's vision and determination on which the success of the quest ultimately depends. Shortly thereafter, Old Man Willow threatens to end the quest prematurely, but Tom Bombadil providentially intervenes and subsequently assures the hobbits that "chance brought me then, if chance you call it" (*FR* 173–74), and obviously the hobbits should not. Elrond makes that point clear at his Council to which those present have been "called . . . though I have not called you to me . . . You are come and are here met, in this very nick of time, by chance it may seem. Yet it is not so" (*FR* 317).

The Subordinate Hero

Literary scholarship and creative writing merge in Tolkien's "Homecoming," which combines a play suited for reading rather than performance, and a critical essay "Ofermod" ("overmastering pride" in Tolkien's gloss). The play or closet drama and essay ostensibly make two ways of reading the poem *Maldon*, a minor masterpiece of Anglo-Saxon or Old English literature, but the whole can be seen as a revision of "Monsters" and an intensification of Tolkien's rejection of the heroic ethos. In "Homecoming," a young poet and an old farmer experienced in battle search among the slain for the body of Byrhtnoth (Tolkien's spelling of the name—Beorhtnoth—corrects the Anglo-Saxon poem), the commander of an English force defeated near the town of *Maldon*. Their darkling search through the battlefield and conversation re-create, from the perspective of the morning after, Tolkien's idea of the Anglo-Saxon poem and its meaning—or, indeed, its moral. The young poet idealizes war and battle, the old farmer deflates some of those illusions, but essentially both agree that the battle at Maldon was lost because Byrhtnoth allowed a Viking force to cross a narrow causeway from their island encampment to a pitched battle on even terms with the English. The old farmer's judgment is unequivocal: "Our lord was at fault

/ . . . He let them cross the causeway, so keen was he / to give minstrels matter for mighty songs" (10). In short, the desire for the *lof* and *dom* that heroic songs confer and preserve led Byrhtnoth to a wrong decision, one fatal to himself and his faithful followers. In Tolkien's view Byrhtnoth treated "a desperate battle" as "a sporting match, to the ruin of his purpose and duty" (15).

Tolkien asserts that Byrhtnoth was "chivalrous rather than strictly heroic" (15), that is, he sought honor for his valor rather than exercising his valor only and strictly in the service of his duty. Tolkien traces Byrhtnoth's fatal flaw to "a defect of character" ("pride" evidently) but a character "not only formed by nature, but moulded also by 'aristocratic tradition,' enshrined in tales and verse of poets now lost save for echoes" (15). Byrhtnoth's fault or tragic flaw, in Tolkien's reading, is both individual and social; in social terms, the hero's world and its poetry has taught him to seek *lof* and *dom*. That teaching has taken firm hold of Byrhtnoth because of his pride, his innate desire for praise and good report. In the event, as Tolkien saw it, Byrhtnoth erred in making a decision that promised to enhance his personal glory rather than subordinating the quest for honor to duty of defending the land against the Vikings. The young poet who shares the battlefield search for Byrhtnoth's body in "Homecoming" is, like Byrhtnoth, under the spell of the poetic tradition that conferred *lof* and *dom*, and a kind of immortality upon its heroes. In his commentary, however, Tolkien blames Byrhtnoth for "chivalry," a desire for "honour and glory" (*lof* and *dom*) which leads the flawed hero to act "beyond the bleak heroic necessity" (14–17). Though "Homecoming" comments directly on the meaning of *Maldon*, both parts of the work, the verse drama and the following critical essay, refer explicitly to *Beowulf*.

Having made his case for Byrhtnoth's tragic flaw—"chivalry" or an excessive desire for *lof* and *dom*—Tolkien applies his argument to *Beowulf*, which is, I believe, the real point of the work. In Tolkien's view, young Beowulf acts recklessly, chivalrously in the Grendel adventure, but he risks only his own life when he undertakes the mission and made his fight with Grendel a "'sporting' fight" between an unarmed man and an unarmed monster (14). In his old age and as king of the Geats, Beowulf's chivalry impels him to fight the ravaging dragon single-handedly and only the help of a subordinate saves the hero from a defeat that would have left the dragon "at large" (14–15). Even so, Beowulf is killed by the dragon's poison, and "the people lose their king disastrously" (15). In short, Beowulf ventures battle against the dragon, as he should not do (but he should also not leave the dragon "at large"). Beowulf's excess, Tolkien implies, was Byrhtnoth's: their desire for honor conflicted with the heroes' duty to their followers. Thus Tolkien, having written in 1936 that the last word in *Beowulf*, "*lofgeornost*,"

represented the "summit of the praise for the dead hero" (*Essays* 36), found in 1953 that the word struck "an ominous note" and compared its disapproving force to the "severely" critical meaning of "ofermod" in *Maldon*.

In "Homecoming," Tolkien rejects the heroic desire for *lof* and *dom* and the old heroes so strongly that even Samwise, who wonders if his last heroic stand will be remembered in a song, might seem liable to censure. But Samwise, seven times mayor of the Shire and celebrated in many songs, remains the true hero because he acts as a loyal subordinate serving his master, like the true heroes of *Maldon* who died to avenge their lord even though (in Tolkien's view) Byrhtnoth had blundered. To Sam's chagrin, he and not Frodo takes the hero's place of honor in the Shire. Frodo assures Sam's father that his son is "one of the most famous people in all the lands and they are making songs about his deeds from here to the Sea and beyond the great river" (*RK* 357). We may trust those imagined singers of tales for the true hero of the age, Samwise Gamgee.

Notes

1. Most of the elements of the heroic code (uncodified and subject to varying interpretations) are illustrated in *Maldon* and *Beowulf* and are discussed in this paper, but the curious reader might consult Alain Renoir's classic article for the heroic oath and the demand for revenge. Chapters 26–37 of the *Jomsvikinga saga* (Blake) tell a story of heroic oaths leading to danger, death, and some oath-breaking. The idea of fate dominates the "Greenlandic Lay of Atli" (Dronke 1, 77–98), and the idea of "luck" seems equally important in *Viga-Glums saga* (Hreinsson 2, ch. 6, 25) where the hero's fortunes depend on possessing his grandfather's gifts, which eventually he has to give up. As noted earlier, "The Sayings of the High One" (Larrington) make clear that fame is the one permanent value in a passing world; the first section of *Beowulf* asserts that the pursuit of fame is the precondition of success in all societies (lines 24–25), in the first part of the poem Hrothgar assures Beowulf that his victory over the Grendel–kin has won him worldwide fame (lines 1703–5): the poem's final lines assert that of all kings, Beowulf was the most eager to win fame.

2. T. A. Shippey argues ("Tolkien" 16) that Tolkien believed he was saying in "Homecoming" what the poet of *Maldon* meant to say—which modern critics had missed.

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JANE CHANCE

The King under the Mountain: Tolkien's Children's Story

> For in effect this is a study of a simple ordinary man, neither artistic nor noble and heroic (but not without the undeveloped seeds of these things) against a high setting—and in fact (as a critic has perceived) the tone and style change with the Hobbit's development, passing from fairy-tale to the noble and high and relapsing with the return.
>
> —J.R.R. Tolkien Letter 131, to Milton Waldman of Collins (c. 1951)

> A good fairy story by a Christian for a twelve-year old.
>
> —J.R.R. Tolkien to C. S. Lewis (cited by Clyde Kilby, *Tolkien and "The Silmarillion,"* p. 75)

A story about growing up or maturation, *The Hobbit* has been regarded by some critics as merely a work of children's literature[1] and by others as a badly muddled mix of children's literature and adult literature.[2] In part readers' confusion over its genre and meaning may have stemmed from its changing form, in that Tolkien revised *The Hobbit* three times: first in 1937, the year it was published in Great Britain; then in the second edition of 1951, with chapter 5—when Bilbo finds the Ring and participates in the riddle game with Gollum—having been revised earlier, in 1947, to create a transition to the "sequel" of *The Lord of the Rings*; and again for the third edition of 1966.[3]

From *Tolkien's Art: A Mythology for England*, pp. 48–73. © 2001 by the University Press of Kentucky.

Bonniejean Christensen notes that the alterations in the character of Gollum between the edition of 1937 and that of 1951 "clearly increase Gollum's role and remove the story from the realm of the nursery tale," in preparation for his "expanded role" later in *The Lord of the Rings*.[4]

Nevertheless, while other critical interpretations have revealed the psychological and literary underpinnings of the adult level of the work,[5] they rarely justify or even account for the children's level, specifically, the reason for the narrator, who sounds suspiciously like Professor Tolkien himself, and the children's story framework.[6] Tolkien himself has admitted that his own children disliked the tone and style in which it was written: "'The Hobbit' was written in what I should now regard as bad style, as if one were talking to children. There's nothing my children loathed more. They taught me a lesson. Anything that was in any way marked out in 'The Hobbit' as for children, instead of just for people, they disliked—instinctively. I did too, now that I think about it."[7] It is precisely the voice of the narrator of *The Hobbit* that Tolkien tried at first to re-create in "A Long-Expected Party," the first chapter of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, as a sequel to *The Hobbit*; in Paul Thomas's examination of the various drafts of the first chapter, it is clear that the narrator ultimately (and appropriately) vanishes altogether in the final revision.[8]

The reason, then, that Tolkien employed the children's story frame in *The Hobbit*, along with the patronizing adult narrator that offended even his own children, has to do with the *adult* level of the work: Tolkien's narrative technique constitutes part of the work's fiction, in the manner of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The narrator, like a tale-telling pilgrim, must be regarded as one additional character. The arrogant, unimaginative, and very "adult" narrator assumes this story about little Hobbits must be relegated to an audience of little creatures—children. The narrator's pride, patronizing attitude, and literalism betray his "oldness," in the Augustinian sense. So *The Hobbit* is a children's story only in the sense expressed in the 1938 Andrew Lang Lecture on fairy-stories, that fantasy appeals to the child in every adult; otherwise it is a genre as fictional and false as its narrator. As a critic who denies the artist's intention by deliberately misunderstanding the story and its characters, the narrator also personifies the critic whom Tolkien views as a monster in the *Beowulf* essay and against whom Tolkien, as heroic defender of the poem as a work of art, must battle.

In the seminal *Beowulf* essay, as we have seen, Tolkien revolutionized *Beowulf* scholarship by interpreting its previously ignored monsters as central thematically and structurally to the meaning of the poem; in addition, he poked fun at the critical "monsters"—the scholars—who had dismissed it as a work of art in their eagerness to trumpet its historical, philological, and anthropological importance. The essay also serves as a guide to how Tolkien

reads *The Hobbit* and many of his other works, for there are many other ideas and concepts in it that he fictionalizes in *The Hobbit*. The *Beowulf* lecture had been published as an article one year before *The Hobbit* (1937), indicating that Tolkien had been thinking about and teaching or writing about both works for some time.[9] Indeed, in a letter to the *Observer* on 20 February 1938, Tolkien admits that, for *The Hobbit*, "Beowulf is among my most valued sources; though it was not consciously present to the mind in the process of writing, in which the episode of the theft arose naturally (and almost inevitably) from the circumstances."[10] In this same letter Tolkien also admits, "My tale is not consciously based on any other book—save one, and that is unpublished: the 'Silmarillion,' a history of the Elves, to which frequent allusion is made."

The parallels between the two works have not been generally recognized, even though scholars may have related the work to other medieval concepts, especially of Northernness.[11] Bonniejean Christensen comes closest to recognizing the parallelism between Tolkien's children's story and his scholarly lecture when she notes that *The Hobbit* can be interpreted as a retelling of *Beowulf*, "from a Christian rather than a pagan point of view."[12] However, Tolkien scholar Christensen prefers the idea of *Beowulf* editor Friedrich Klaeber about the poem's four-part structure to Tolkien's own interpretation of *Beowulf*'s dual structure, to show that *Beowulf*'s sections (comprising the monsters, the descendants of Cain, the episodes and digressions, and the dragon) parallel *The Hobbit*'s.[13] The uncomfortable result is that Grendel in *Beowulf* shares the same structural position as that of the Trolls and Goblins in the first section of *The Hobbit*, and Unferth and Grendel's Mother as that of Gollum in the second section.

The view of the structure of *Beowulf* in the lecture that seems more closely linked to that of *The Hobbit* perceives the poem as portraying two moments, rising and falling, in the hero Beowulf's life, with three adversaries—Grendel and Grendel's Mother in the first part, and the dragon in the second—battled by the hero. Tolkien describes the poem as "a contrasted description of two moments in a great life, rising and setting; an elaboration of the ancient and intensely moving contrast between youth and age, first achievement and final death. It is divided in consequence into two opposed portions, different in matter, manner, and length: A from 1 to 2199 (including an exordium of 52 lines); B from 2200 to 3182 (the end)."[14] In the similarly structured *Hobbit*, Bilbo also battles with his two adversaries, Gollum and Smaug the dragon, at various rising moments only, for it is a story of spiritual maturation and not of spiritual death.[15] If, instead, *Beowulf* is understood to have a tripartite structure, focusing on the monstrous adversaries of Beowulf rather than the hero—Grendel, Grendel's Mother, and the dragon—then it can be said to be more focused on monstrous failure (as represented by the three monsters)

than Bilbo's heroic maturation. Indeed, it is also possible to recognize a tripartite structure in *The Hobbit*, or even a six-part structure.[16]

The major difference, then, between Tolkien's conception of Beowulf as hero in the essay and his conception of Bilbo as hero in *The Hobbit* is Bilbo's success in combating literal and internal monsters, in contrast, at least for Tolkien, to Beowulf's final failure. This difference affects the genres of the two works. Tolkien regards *Beowulf* explicitly as an elegy, defined as "tragedy" in the 1938 Andrew Lang Lecture on fairy-stories because of its unhappy ending (dyscatastrophe) and hence its link with the primary world, and *The Hobbit* implicitly as a "fantasy" because of its happy ending (eucatastrophe) and hence its link with the secondary world of sub-creation.[17] Their different genres affect the nature of the dual levels in each: the explicit Germanic-heroic ethic and culture of *Beowulf* masks a very Christian purpose, just as the explicit children's story framework of *The Hobbit* masks a more "adult" and serious purpose.

The monsters Grendel and the dragon were for Tolkien not only fierce enemies of the Danes and Geats against whom Beowulf fought but also, in a more symbolic fashion, projections of spiritual and political flaws in Beowulf himself. Aged and yet still boasting of his youthful prowess in battle, King Beowulf fights the dragon in an ill-advised move that will result in his death and the betrayal of his people, for the Swedes among other tribes will attack the leaderless Geats after he dies. Beowulf manifests that same pride in his own ability and greed for dragon gold as does the dragon, and although he wins the battle with the monster (with the help of Wiglaf), he loses the one with himself. "For it is true of man, maker of myths," Tolkien declares, "that Grendel and the dragon, in their lust, greed, and malice, have a part in him" ("Beowulf," p. 76 note 23).

Tolkien's ideas about kingship in *Beowulf*, which he also employed in *The Hobbit*, were perhaps influenced by a scholarly study of the poem published in 1929 by Levin L. Schücking, "The Ideal of Kingship in *Beowulf*."[18] Schücking defines the true and wise king and his antithesis, the false and tyrannical king, by using Augustinian terminology: "In contrast to such a 'rex justus' [just king] who always appears as a good *shepherd* and with the *qualities of a father*, is the 'tyrannus' or 'rex iniustus,' who is ruled by the 'radix vitiorum' [root of vices], 'superbia' [pride] or 'amor sui' [love of self]. . . . Out of *amor sui* spring all other vices, such as 'invidia, ira, tristitia, avaritia, and ventris ingluvies' [envy, wrath, sadness, avarice and gluttony]" (Schücking, p. 39). The vices of the bad king can be recognized as five of the seven deadly sins—pride, envy, wrath, avarice, and gluttony.

More generally Tolkien's ideas about the sins of the king find expression in the thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse*, "Guide for Anchoresses," a work that first captured Tolkien's interest in a 1929 linguistic study and later in the

preface to Mary Salu's translation in 1956 (of which he approved) and in his own critical edition of 1962.[19] These sins assume the shape of animals and monsters in the *Ancrene Wisse*; wild beasts inhabit the wilderness we must all travel on the way to the Heavenly Jerusalem, or the Kingdom of the Elect: "But go with great caution, for in this wilderness there are many evil beasts: the Lion of Pride, the Serpent of venomous Envy, the Unicorn of Wrath, the Bear of deadly Sloth, the Fox of Covetousness, the Sow of Gluttony, the Scorpion with its tail of stinging lechery, that is, Lust. These, listed in order, are the Seven Deadly Sins" (Salu, *Ancrene Wisse*, p. 86).

The connection between the sinful king and the monster in *Beowulf* and the *Ancrene Wisse* reappears in *The Hobbit*. Tolkien calls his dragon Smaug "King under the Mountain" because under a mountain he guards a treasure that he wrongfully stole from previous Dwarf-kings. The epithet serves to link this inhuman monster with similar monsters—and monstrous kings or leaders—elsewhere in *The Hobbit* through four major significations. First, it refers to the monsters of the work as a whole: Smaug guards his treasure under the Lonely Mountain while Gollum hides his magic ring under the Misty Mountains. In addition, there are other monsters like the Trolls, Goblins, Wargs, and giant spiders. Second, there also exist Elf, human, Dwarf, and Hobbit "kings" or leaders who, like Beowulf, succumb to various monstrous vices, chiefly pride and greed. These include the Elvenking, the Master of Dale, the Dwarf-king Thorin, and even Bilbo, who rules Bag End located in Underhill, Hobbiton. Third, the epithet symbolizes the position of the narrator who dominates the narrative through his frequent, usually critical interjections intended to undermine the artist's tale. Finally, the phrase suggests the children's game of "King of the Mountain," in which various combatants try to topple a hill's resident "king." The epithet appropriately evokes the children's level of the novel used by Tolkien to mask his more serious purpose.

Furthermore, the idea of the good prince that Schücking sees in the Germanic and heroic Old English *Beowulf* resurfaces in the modern English *Hobbit*. Eventually Bilbo develops into a type of the good "king" when he tests his courage, justice, prudence (wisdom and intelligence but also awareness of moral good), and finally temperance or *mensura* (the bridling of emotions by moderation) in battles with those monsters. For Schücking, an exemplar of such a king is the hero Beowulf, as when he humbly and wisely refuses the crown offered by Hygd "in favor of his relation; thus, he becomes a member of the virtuous society which supports the ideal of temperance" (Schücking, p. 48). But Tolkien, as we have seen, perceives Beowulf, and hence Bilbo, whom he models in part upon this king, as more flawed and monstrous than does Schücking. For Tolkien, the ultimate model of the good king that Bilbo must become, after vanquishing his internal monsters of the deadly sins of

pride and greed, is Christ. This king's monstrous adversary is the Devil, whose role in perverting humankind from good is "to incite us to the venomous vices such as pride, disdain, envy, and anger, and to their venomous offspring," according to the *Ancrene Wisse* (Salu, *Ancrene Wisse*, p. 85). In this same work Christ as a "good shepherd" with the "qualities of a father" is portrayed as a true and good king or knight of the Kingdom of the Elect. When the soul is attacked by demons and devils, Jesus proves his love and performs chivalric deeds in tournament play so that his shield (his body, which disguises his Godhead) is pierced on the cross. The parallel continues: "After the death of a brave knight, his shield is hung high in the church in his memory. And so is this shield, the crucifix, set in the church, where it may be most easily seen, that it may remind us of Jesus Christ's deed of knighthood on the cross. Let His beloved see by that how He bought her love, allowing His shield to be pierced, His side open, to show her His heart, to show her how completely He loved her, and to win her own heart" (Salu, *Ancrene Wisse*, p. 174).

Christ's love for humankind surpasses the four kinds of human love—friendship, sexual love, mother–child love, and love between the body and the soul. It also suggests the love of God (*amor Dei*) that Saint Augustine contrasts with the self-love (*amor sui*) of the tyrant. It is this love that Bilbo emulates as he completes his spiritual maturation in the course of *The Hobbit* through the tests with the monsters.

We turn now to a closer examination of these ideas, beginning with the monsters in *The Hobbit*, turning next to Bilbo, and concluding with the narrator—all "Kings under the Mountain."

I. The Monsters: Kings under the Mountain

If *Beowulf* is understood to have a two-part structure, then the hero basically clashes with two different monstrous adversaries: Grendel (and his mother) at the "rising moment" of Beowulf's life, during his youth, and the dragon at the "setting moment," in his old age.[20] Further, if the balanced two-part structure of *The Hobbit* (Chapters 1–8 and 9–19) mirrors that of *Beowulf*, then its two parts must differ in emphasis because the two monsters differ. In the *Beowulf* lecture Tolkien explains: "If the dragon is the right end for Beowulf, and I agree with the author that it is, then Grendel is an eminently suitable beginning. They are creatures, *feond mancynnes* [foe of humankind], of a similar order and kindred significance. Triumph over the lesser and more nearly human is cancelled by defeat before the older and more elemental" ("Beowulf," p. 86).

In *The Hobbit*, Gollum assumes Grendel's place and, thus, epitomizes the "lesser and more nearly human" vices, as Smaug assumes the dragon's place in the second part and thus epitomizes the "older and more elemental"

vices. It is the *Ancrene Wisse* that characterizes the inward temptations as "bodily in the case of lechery, gluttony, and sloth, spiritual in the case of pride, envy, and anger, and also of covetousness" (Salu, *Ancrene Wisse*, p. 85). The lesser sins are certainly the "bodily" ones, which Gollum represents, just as Smaug represents the "old and more elemental" spiritual ones.[21]

Gollum, who enters the story in the middle (chapter 5) of the first half (chapters 1 to 8), expresses "bodily sin" chiefly through his perpetual hunger. Gluttonous even when young, Gollum taught his own grandmother to suck eggs.[22] His name resembles the sound of swallowing associated with gulping food. Because his stomach remains in his mature years his sole concern, Gollum values himself above all, addressing himself as "My Precious." He represents that love of self (*amor sui*) specifically directed toward lower or bodily functions. The ring (not yet the Ring) as a birthday present to himself symbolizes the narcissism of the self turned too much inward. It produces an invisibility of self in the external world as if the self had been pushed one step past mere isolation into nonbeing.

This ring links Gollum with the dragon Smaug in the second part when Bilbo uses the ring to burgle the dragon's hoard of a cup, the loss of which arouses Smaug's anger (p. 208). But here the invisibility caused by the ring allows Bilbo to function as a better burglar: for Bilbo, the alter ego of the perverted Hobbit Gollum, invisibility symbolizes that self-effacement requisite in loving one's neighbor for the sake of God. Thus, he forgets his own fears, remembers the Dwarves' mission, bravely steals the cup, and even tricks the dragon into revealing his vulnerable spot.

Smaug enters the story near the middle (chapters 11 to 13) of the second part (chapters 9 to 19) and expresses "spiritual sin" chiefly through his pride, although he also manifests wrath, avarice, and envy. After Bilbo has stolen his cup Smaug nurses his avarice with the thought of revenge. Unfortunately, Smaug's pride leads to his fall. When Bilbo unctuously flatters him with the admission, "I only wished to have a look at you and see if you were truly as great as tales say" (*Hobbit*, p. 212), Smaug begins showing off. He inadvertently reveals his vulnerable spot along with his diamond-studded underbelly while Bilbo exclaims, "Dazzlingly marvellous" (*Hobbit*, p. 216). The dragon's avarice leads to his death, just as the *revelours*' search for the treasure leads to death in the *Pardoner's Tale*: "Radix malorum est cupiditas" (The root of all evil is avarice), as Chaucer's Pardoner tells it. Gold is death: in *The Hobbit*, when the fools of Dale spot a heavenly light, they assume the gold is on its way as legends had predicted and rush forward to—their deaths. For it is the fiery dragon himself, in a highly symbolic scene, who lights up the heavens.

The two monsters Gollum and Smaug are set apart from the other monsters by their isolation in central chapters within each of the two parts.

Nevertheless, the adversary in the first part derives its essential nature from Gollum as bodily sin as the adversary in the second derives its essential nature from Smaug as spiritual sin. The "bodily sins" of gluttony and sloth (lechery omitted because this is a children's story) plus the sin of anger are portrayed in the monsters of the Trolls, Goblins, Wargs, and giant insects and spiders. The more "spiritual" sins of pride, envy, covetousness, and again anger are portrayed in the "monsters" of the Elvenking, the Master of Dale, and the Dwarf-king. In each part the hierarchy of monsters begins with the least dangerous and evil and climbs to the most dangerous and evil.

In the first part, the Trolls resemble Cockney-speaking humans, followed by the Goblins or Orcs who pervert the species of Elves, the wolflike Wargs, and on the least rational level, the insects and spiders. The Trolls introduce the theme of gluttony in the appropriately entitled chapter "Roast Mutton." The mutton they roast on spits illustrates as well their laziness, for they actually detest it but are too lazy to seek out the "manflesh" they prefer. When Bilbo's carelessness allows them to capture the Hobbit and the Dwarves, they quarrel angrily over the best cooking method for Dwarf flesh and forget that dawn is nigh. The coming of the sun turns them to stone as if to symbolize their spiritual numbness and "death."[23] The Goblins are the second monstrous adversary, encountered in chapter 4, "Over Hill and under Hill." As interested in food as the Trolls ("they are always hungry" [*Hobbit*, p. 70]), they even capture the Dwarf ponies lodged in one of their caves. But they seem less civilized than the Trolls, possibly because of their greater anger and sadism. They savagely flick whips as they herd the captured Dwarves into the hall of the Goblin-king, and they build cruel machines of torture for innocent victims. The Wargs[24] of chapter 6, "Out of the Frying Pan," resemble wolves in their shape and their brute anger. The night when they surround the Dwarves they intend to kill whole villages of woodmen except for a few prisoners left alive for their Goblin allies, merely because these woodmen had encroached upon their forests. Finally, the "Flies and Spiders" in chapter 8 exemplify uncontrolled gluttony and anger on the lowest level. After tying the Dwarves up in trees, one spider notes that "the meat's alive and kicking" (*Hobbit*, p. 156). Their gluttony is used by Bilbo to trick them: he lures them away from the captured Dwarves by describing himself as "far more sweet than other meat" (*Hobbit*, p. 158). Bilbo also invokes their anger. By calling them insulting names like "Attercop" and "Tomnoddy," he makes them so "frightfully angry" that they follow the sound of his voice while the invisible Hobbit doubles back to untie the Dwarves and then battle with the returning, stupidly angry giant pests.

The "chain of evil being" traced in this first part is also used in the second. In the second part, the less physically dangerous "monsters" threaten instead the various societies surrounding them through their obsession with

treasure and social position, in effect revealing the flaws of avarice, envy, and pride. Hence they operate behind the mask of the king or leader who occupies the highest social and political position in the community. It is for this reason that the chain of evil being in this part is one of individuals, rather than of species as in the first part. It begins with the most noble and least dangerous, the Elvenking, and progresses to the most ignoble and dangerous, the Dwarf-king Thorin, with Man—the Master of Dale—occupying a medial position. Interestingly, their dwelling places reflect this hierarchy through their distance from the earth—the Elven treehouse, the human house, the Dwarf hall under the mountain.

The Wood-Elves and the Men of Dale team up like the Wargs and Goblins of the first part to fight the Dwarves; both are inordinately fond of gold. When the Elvenking "strongly suspected attempted burglary or something like it" from the Dwarves (*Hobbit*, p. 192), he imprisons them. The Master, less generously, "believed they were frauds who would sooner or later be discovered. . . . They were expensive to keep, and their arrival had turned things into a long holiday in which business was at a standstill" (*Hobbit*, p. 193). The pragmatism of the Master reflects the concerns of trade and business that preoccupy Dale, for in the distant past, "they had been wealthy and powerful, and there had been fleets of boats on the waters" (*Hobbit*, p. 185). If the Wood-Elves with their king and ceremonious feasting function as an aristocracy, the Men of Dale with their master and practical gatherings of townspeople function instead as a bourgeoisie. The lowest social class of criminals and thieves in one sense is comprised of the Dwarves—but all of these kings and leaders spiritually, if not socially, betray avarice and pride that group them together as sinners. The Elvenking as a burglar steals the Dwarves from Bilbo just as the Master of Dale as a fraud steals from his own people many years later. Each suspects the Dwarves of that crime of which he and his people are most guilty.

Yet Thorin, king of the Dwarves, does reveal most blatantly the sins of avarice and pride. He fulfills the predisposition of his people to such flaws: "Dwarves are not heroes, but calculating folk with a great idea of the value of money; some are tricky and treacherous and pretty bad lots; some are not, but are decent enough people like Thorin and Company, if you don't expect too much" (*Hobbit*, p. 204). Like the greedy dragon whose role as "King under the Mountain" he assumes after his death, Thorin refuses to share the hoard with "thieves" and "enemies" such as the deserving Men of Esgaroth or even his own comrade Bilbo: "[N]one of our gold shall thieves take or the violent carry off while we are alive!" (*Hobbit*, p. 245). In addition, Thorin's pride leads him into error. He ignores the wise raven Roäc who advises him that "[t]he treasure is likely to be your death, though the dragon is no more!" (*Hobbit*, p. 253). The treasure is his death. Indeed, Thorin refuses to listen

to anyone else but himself, although his apology to Bilbo at the moment of death rejuvenates him spiritually if not physically.

In a sense, the last "King under the Mountain" is a legal trio introduced at the end of the novel. The tunneling names of Grubb, Grubb, and Burrowes illustrate their literal and figurative positions as "kings" or monsters under the mountain, in this case the comfortable tunnel belonging to Bilbo in Underhill. These dragonlike lawyers guard a treasure appropriately named Bag End that they intend to auction. A less frightening adversary than the others and therefore more easily overcome, nevertheless this Hobbit trio forces Bilbo to realize that a "King under the Mountain" may be a neighbor Hobbit—or even oneself.

II. Bilbo: Baggins of Underhill

At the very beginning of *The Hobbit* Bilbo acts as a "King under the Mountain" when he hoards his wealth—food in the Hobbit world—against depletion by strange intruding Dwarves. Later, in a cryptic riddle, Bilbo will describe himself as a foil for Smaug: "I come from under the hill, and under the hills and over the hills my paths led" (*Hobbit*, pp. 212–13). Because this "King under the Mountain" must defeat himself before attempting to defeat other monsters, the real battle in *The Hobbit* might as well take place at home in the Shire. It is for this reason Tolkien subtitled the work "There and Back Again," to draw attention to the geographical location of the major battle: not the Lonely Mountain, as a careless reader might assume, but "There"—the Shire—and "Back Again," as the first and last chapters precisely indicate.

That is, in the first chapter, the Dwarves and Gandalf arrive at the Shire to interrupt an irritable host for an "Unexpected Party"; in the last chapter the Dwarf Balin and Gandalf return to the Shire to interrupt a pleased host for a smaller but still unexpected party in "The Last Stage." It is Bilbo's attitude toward food that changes: at the beginning he complains to himself about the amount of food Dwarves require, but at the end he generously and unasked hands Gandalf the tobacco jar, laughing because he now realizes the joy of community and the love of neighbor. For food provides not only physical sustenance and continued life but also on a higher level the renewal of spiritual life, as in the Christian Mass of the Eucharist. The absence of food, the interruption of feasting, or the refusal to feast with others—all communicate interference with the life force, the life of the community, and symbolically spiritual life, or virtue. On the Germanic level, as in *Beowulf*, feasting celebrates the concern of warrior for warrior and lord. The raids on Heorot by Grendel symbolize the dark forces on earth against which man must fight to preserve his hall-joy and brotherhood. Tolkien describes the situation beautifully in the

Beowulf essay: "A light starts . . . and there is a sound of music; but the outer darkness and its hostile offspring lie ever in wait for the torches to fail and the voices to cease. Grendel is maddened by the sound of harps" ("Beowulf," p. 88). Thus, Bilbo's attitude toward the food used in feasting and the money used to buy that food becomes important in resolving his own inner conflicts and in battling against his monsters.

The contrast between feasting and battle, or the hero and the adversary, is incorporated into *The Hobbit* in three ways: thematically through the confrontation between Bilbo and various monsters, structurally through an alternation of party chapters with battle chapters, and symbolically through the internalization of the conflict within the hero. Structurally, the alternation of feasting with battling chapters begins with "An Unexpected Party," followed by the more unpleasant interruption of the Trolls' "party" in "Roast Mutton." In chapter 3, "The Short Rest" at Elrond's Last Homely House enables them to battle with Goblins, Gollum, and Wargs in the next three chapters until they rest at Beorn's "Queer Lodging" in chapter 7. Battles with flies and spiders, Wood-Elves, and Raft-Elves leave them grateful for the "Warm Welcome" by the feasting Men of Dale in chapter 10. Subsequent battles with the dragon, the Dwarves, and then of the Five Armies weary them until the last two chapters where they return to Beorn's and Elrond's houses in "The Return Journey" and to Bilbo's Bag End in "The Last Stage."

Symbolically, the conflict between the hero and adversary is internalized within the split self of the protagonist. Bilbo, for example, is both Baggins and Took: he "looked and behaved exactly like a second edition of his solid and comfortable father," a Baggins, but he had "got something a bit *queer* in his makeup from the Took side, something that only waited for a chance to come out" (*Hobbit*, p. 17; my italics). The chance is provided by the visiting Dwarves, who invite him to accompany them on their adventure as a professional burglar. The Tookish imagination in Bilbo, which is inherited from renegade Hobbits who have themselves experienced adventures sporadically (*Hobbit*, p. 16), is swept away by the sound of Thorin's harp "into dark lands under strange moons" (*Hobbit*, p. 26), so that he begins to yearn for the adventures he has earlier in the evening spurned (*Hobbit*, p. 18). His dormant imagination, expressed previously only through a love of neat smoke rings, flowers, and poetry (*Hobbit*, pp. 26, 19), awakens completely: "As they sang the hobbit felt the love of beautiful things made by hands and by cunning and by magic moving through him, a fierce and jealous love, the desire of the hearts of Dwarves. Then something Tookish woke up inside him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pinetrees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking-stick" (*Hobbit*, p. 28).

This adventuresome imaginative self fully dominates Bilbo by the novel's end, for when he returns to the Shire, "[he] was in fact held by all the hobbits of the neighborhood to be 'queer'" (*Hobbit*, p. 285). But the conflict between the Tookish side and the Baggins side begins much earlier. When he is accused of looking more like a grocer than a burglar by Gloin the Dwarf on this same night, he realizes, "The Took side had won. He suddenly felt he would go without bed and breakfast to be thought fierce" (*Hobbit*, p. 30). It is indeed the grocer side of him he has defeated: the solid comfortable side appropriately named "Baggins" as if in description of "The Bag," both a pouch for storage of money or food and, of course, the stomach, which Bilbo will later call an "empty sack" (*Hobbit*, p. 103). Even Bilbo's house is called "Bag End." It is almost as if the Baggins side represents the temptations of the body as the Took side represents the desire for fulfillment of the soul. This desire is expressed through the image of the burglar that the Took side of Bilbo is asked to become.

Because burglars usually take things unlawfully from others, it is at first difficult to see how burglary will fulfill the spiritual or Took side of Bilbo. Yet it is more than a pun ("take"/"Took") for Bilbo: to steal requires physical dexterity and courage, some cunning and forethought, and in this particular case a love of his fellow creature. For Bilbo as burglar will merely retrieve for the Dwarves that treasure that has been previously stolen from them by Smaug. Thus, the dying Thorin will describe Bilbo as possessing "some courage and some wisdom, blended in measure" (*Hobbit*, p. 273). The quality the Dwarf-king admires is temperance, that Augustinian moderation that almost seems Virtue itself. Indeed, when Bilbo renounces the arkenstone he has stolen, he resembles the greatest burglar, the *rex justus* Christ who gave up that humanity he had appropriated in order to redeem humankind.

Although Christ never actually appears in *The Hobbit*, still, a type of Christ is provided in the figure of Gandalf. In *The Lord of the Rings* Gandalf dies as the "Gray" and is reborn as the "White" to suggest through color imagery a parallel with Christ's own death and Resurrection. In *The Hobbit* Gandalf acts as a guide and teacher for Bilbo. Leading them through Rivendell and over the Misty Mountains up to Mirkwood, the Wizard protects them all from danger by supernatural means, mainly fire and magic wand, and encourages Bilbo by sparking the Hobbit's enthusiasm for the adventure with a few tales. Like any good parent, though, Gandalf realizes he must depart (in chapter 7) in order for Bilbo to develop his own physical, intellectual, and spiritual qualities as a burglar. When Bilbo achieves these, Gandalf returns as a deus ex machina (in chapter 17) to congratulate his pupil and to aid in the great Battle of the Five Armies.

Bilbo learns his trade as a burglar by defeating various monsters who collectively represent *amor sui*, but individually "bodily" temptation and

"spiritual" temptation, as we have previously seen. In the process his initial physical bumbling changes to real dexterity, then skill, and is finally aided by the courage of the newly confident Hobbit. The way that Bilbo defeats these adversaries in almost every case involves a type of burglary, as if in practice for the final and most crucial theft of the arkenstone. The first phase begins in the Troll episode of the second chapter and concludes with his maturation as a brave burgling warrior in chapter 8, "Flies and Spiders."

In the first phase, Bilbo fails as a burglar in the Troll episode because of poor timing and clumsiness. "'Silly time to go practising pinching and pocketpicking,' said Bombur, 'when what we wanted was fire and food'" (*Hobbit*, p. 52). Bilbo was asked by the Dwarves to investigate the source of the light shining among the trees, not to put on the magic ring and pick the Trolls' pockets. Still, the Hobbit does "steal" by accident the key to the Troll cave. This shelter will afford them food and treasure (scabbards, hilts, sheaths) that they will "steal" as they will later steal the cup and arkenstone from the dragon. In the second (Gollum) episode Bilbo is slightly more successful. He "steals" Gollum's ring, again by accident, and he withstands Gollum's efforts as a mental burglar to discover "What have I got in my pocket?" (the ring, of course [*Hobbit*, p. 85]). This theft is important because it provides Bilbo with the means to perform the burglary of the dragon's hoard—the invisibility caused by the ring. In addition, it heightens Bilbo's confidence in his new vocation. This allows the Hobbit to demonstrate real heroism and leadership as a "burglar" in chapter 8, "Flies and Spiders." Bilbo first shows purely physical skills: his keen sight spots a hidden boat that will let them cross the magic water; he prevents the other Dwarves from falling in the water by snatching the rope they have been pulling; he climbs a tree to determine their location, thereby displaying his farsightedness and his light feet. But then Bilbo manifests more abstract qualities like courage. Asked to investigate a fire in the forest, he eventually saves his friends not from the Elves whose festivities they have spotted but from the giant spiders who capture the Dwarves while he sleeps under the Elven spell. The first battle changes Bilbo: "Somehow the killing of the giant spider, all alone by himself in the dark without the help of the Wizard or the Dwarves or of anyone else, made a great difference to Mr. Baggins. He felt a different person, and *much fiercer and bolder in spite of an empty stomach*" (*Hobbit*, p. 154; my italics). With this new boldness, Bilbo "steals" the captured Dwarves, untying them after using his voice to lure the spiders away. He has learned from Gandalf's ventriloquism in the Troll episode. Bilbo also kills six of the spiders with his sword, Sting, while rescuing Bombur—its new name a projection of the spiderlike quality he now possesses after defeating the giant spider.

In chapters 9 to 13, Bilbo's burglaries depend more on his intellectual efforts than on his physical ones. After he becomes invisible to enter the

Elvenking's castle where the Dwarves are imprisoned, he devises the ruse of shutting them in wine barrels to allow his "booty" to escape in the underground stream. Later, in chapter 11, "On the Doorstep," Bilbo can be a burglar only after he figures out a way of breaking into the tunnel leading to the dragon's lair. Much thinking and sitting take place before the thrush knocks at the gray stone, reminding Bilbo of the rune letters on the map that explain the setting sun on Durin's Day that will illuminate the keyhole into the rocky door. Finally, Bilbo uses both his imagination and his wit to trick the dragon into revealing its only vulnerable spot. After the Hobbit steals the cup from the hoard he realizes that he "had become the real leader in their adventure. He had begun to have ideas and plans of his own" (*Hobbit*, p. 211). Part of these ideas involves posturing as a wise riddling poet to the dragon, for "[n]o dragon can resist the fascination of riddling talk and of wasting time trying to understand it" (*Hobbit*, p. 213). Further, Bilbo's flattery diverts the dragon so that the monster even shows off his magnificent diamond-studded waistcoat with its bare patch when the Hobbit wonders whether dragons are softer underneath.

Now both courageous and wise, the Hobbit becomes a burglar in the third and spiritual sense when he battles against that proud and avaricious monster inside himself. The dragon tempts Bilbo as Smaug's serpent forefather tempted Adam in Eden: the dragon intimates that the Dwarves will never pay Bilbo a "fair share." Bilbo succumbs, stealing the precious arkenstone to ensure that he is paid for his work: "Now I am a burglar indeed!" he cries (*Hobbit*, p. 226). Only in chapter 16, "A Thief in the Night," does he forget about himself in his concern for others—the Elves, Men, and Dwarves who may die from the approaching winter, starvation, or battle. Bilbo then relinquishes to the Dwarves' enemies (the Elves and Men) the arkenstone he has stolen from them so that the Dwarves may bargain with Thorin and end the dispute. This highly moral act redeems Bilbo: "I may be a burglar— . . . but I am an honest one" (*Hobbit*, p. 257). The Hobbit acts like the *Pastor bonus* Saint Augustine describes as the true king. Indeed, Bilbo now renounces all he has previously demanded in payment, taking away only two small chests of treasure and even making reparation to the Elvenking whose Dwarf prisoners he has stolen and whose bread he has eaten: "Some little return should be made for your, er, hospitality. I mean even a burglar has his feelings" (*Hobbit*, p. 277).

In giving to his "host," Bilbo proves himself more than a guest, and the opposite of the burglar. In fact he becomes a host as well as an artist when he returns to the Shire, each role an expression of one of two sides, Baggins and Took. As the Baggins-grocer has demanded good financial terms for his work and his food in the very first chapter, so the new Baggins-host offers freely his tobacco and fire, physical commodities, to his friends. And

as the Took-burglar has taken what is not his but also given it to someone else who needed it, so the new Took-artist offers freely what is never his to keep (experience and talent as expressed in poems and memoirs) to his future readers. The artist as hero is ultimately typified in Bard the Bowman, who saves Esgaroth by bravely killing the dragon but who continues to subordinate himself to the Master of Dale (*Hobbit*, p. 240). So Bilbo unifies his selves.

When Gandalf declares at the end that Bilbo has succeeded not because of personal luck but because of the general scheme of things—"You are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all"—Bilbo exclaims, "Thank goodness!" (*Hobbit*, pp. 286–88). In this last line of the novel Bilbo thanks the goodness of God as a universal and providential force for his selflessness, his littleness. The Hobbit is indeed a "child of the kindly West" living that life of the spirit characteristic of the Augustinian New Man, or *novus homo*. Bilbo has progressed from the chronological maturity of a fifty-year-old "grown-up" (Hobbit, p. 17) to the state of wonder and joy common to the child—and the Christian. The cranky "adult" Bilbo at the beginning snaps at Gandalf for interrupting his tea party and chastises his "child" Thorin once he emerges from his closed barrel: "'Well, are you alive or are you dead?' Bilbo asked quite crossly. . . . 'If you want food and if you want to go on with this silly adventure—it's yours after all and not mine—you had better slap your arms and rub your legs'" (*Hobbit*, pp. 186–87). At the end this cranky adult is transformed into the joyful, laughing, childlike Bilbo who welcomes his visitors Gandalf and Balin with a round of tobacco. As a child or childlike Hobbit Bilbo must resemble those comprising the audience of *The Hobbit*—literal children, if the narrator's patronizing remarks are any indication.

III. The Narrator: The Critic under the Mask of the Children's Storyteller

The narrative intrusions—direct addresses to children, use of the first person singular, foreshadowing of later events, joking tone, plot clarifications, and sound effects intended for entertaining children[25]—have annoyed readers and critics. Yet they all constitute devices to create a narrative persona that functions as a character himself. Primarily the character personifies the critic of the *Beowulf* lecture, or the adult or fairy-story teller (that is, Andrew Lang) in the fairy-story lecture. This critic assumes that fairy-stories attract only children and probably function best as a bedtime narcotic to quiet restless boys and girls. As a tale-teller the critic contrasts sharply with the wonderful Gandalf ("Tales and adventures sprouted up all over the place wherever he went, in the most extraordinary fashion" [*Hobbit*, p. 17]) and with the artist Tolkien, who is analogous to Chaucer the poet

creating the character of Chaucer the pilgrim to introduce the Canterbury pilgrims—themselves tale-tellers.

As a narrator the critic patronizes his audience. He reminds them of details they may have forgotten, as when Bilbo crosses "the ford beneath the steep bank, which you *may remember*" (*Hobbit*, p. 282)—but probably have forgotten, as it was crossed two hundred and fifty pages back. Like a literary critic the narrator helps them understand the characters by delving beneath the surface: "You will notice already that Mr. Baggins was not quite so prosy as he liked to believe, also that he was very fond of flowers" (*Hobbit*, p. 46). This narrator adopts a falsely jovial tone, as when Bilbo has difficulty guessing Gollum's riddle: "I imagine you know the answer, of course, or can guess it as easy as winking, since you are sitting comfortably at home and have not the danger of being eaten to disturb your thinking" (*Hobbit*, p. 83).

As a character the critic prides himself on his superior wisdom and status as an adult. He is too busy to tell them even one or two songs or tales the Dwarves heard at Elrond's house (*Hobbit*, p. 61). He belittles the silliness of legends like the one announcing a Took Hobbit marriage to a fairy wife (*Hobbit*, p. 16). He expects the characters to emulate his adult wisdom and social decorum. Thus, the critic applauds Bilbo's intelligent handling of Smaug by speaking riddles, but he criticizes Bilbo's growing reputation for queerness that results from visits to Elves and poetry writing (*Hobbit*, p. 285). A conformist socially, the critic especially dislikes signs of immaturity: when the Dwarves ring the doorbell energetically he compares the action pejoratively to the mischievous pulling-off of the handle by a "naughty hobbit-boy" (*Hobbit*, p. 22). The critic automatically assumes that his audience is the same size and shape as he, rather than four feet tall and light-footed like Hobbits. He describes the Hobbits, for example, as a "little people, about half *our height*" who "disappear quietly and quickly when *large stupid folk like you and me* come blundering along, making a noise like elephants which they can hear a mile off" (*Hobbit*, p. 16; my emphasis). To be smaller than the critic is to be abnormal: "You must remember it [Gollum's tunnel] was not quite so tight for him [Bilbo] as it would have been *for me or for you*. Hobbits are not quite like ordinary people" (*Hobbit*, p. 77; my emphasis).

As a tale-teller the narrator also behaves more like a critic when he laughs at or disapproves of his characters, expressing neither pity nor terror at the plights that he relives vicariously. First he criticizes Bilbo's unprofessional burgling in the Troll episode: "Either he should have gone back quietly and warned his friends that there were three fair-sized trolls at hand in a nasty mood, quite likely to try toasted dwarf, or even pony, for a change; or else he should have done a bit of good quick burgling. A really first-class and legendary burglar would at this point have picked the trolls' pockets—it is nearly always worthwhile, if you can manage it—pinched the very mutton

off the spits, purloined the beer, and walked off without their noticing him" (*Hobbit*, pp. 46–47).

In this critical attack and avaricious advice the narrator resembles the Dwarves who initially disbelieve in Bilbo's capabilities as a burglar, unlike Gandalf who trusts him implicitly from the beginning. When Bilbo does not see the edge of the forest as he peers from a tall tree just before they are captured by spiders, the narrator accuses him of lacking sense (*Hobbit*, p. 148). And when the Dwarves worry about finding the entry to the Lonely Mountain and become depressed and demoralized—only Bilbo has more spirit than they have—the narrator finds this "strange." He even underestimates the Dwarves by labeling them as "decent enough people . . . if you don't expect too much" (*Hobbit*, p. 204). For this reason he is not prepared for Thorin's charitable retraction at the moment of his death.

Perhaps most terribly, the narrator lacks compassion for and understanding of others. He reveals his cruelty when he confides that "you would have laughed (from a safe distance), if you had seen Dwarves sitting up in the trees with their beards dangling down" (*Hobbit*, p. 104). For the narrator, the Dwarves ready to be eaten are chiefly sources of amusement, not objects of pity. He also imagines that the audience laughs at the weak spot in Bilbo's plan when the hero forgets there is no one to place the lid on his barrel so that he too can escape the Wood-Elves (*Hobbit*, p. 177). The narrator's lack of compassion renders him cruel and mean.

Loving only himself, in this pride and lack of charity the narrator becomes a monster like the dragon Smaug and the critic, who desires to be godlike in his acquisition of knowledge. This last King under the Mountain, under the mask of the storyteller, seems to triumph, undefeated by any Hobbit hero. Yet Bilbo does have the last word, when Gandalf reminds him at the end that he is "only quite a little fellow in a wide world" (*Hobbit*, pp. 286–87), and Bilbo thanks goodness for this. Perhaps the reader now notices the difference between the unobtrusive Hobbit and the usually obtrusive narrator. Or perhaps the wordy and pompous narrator himself has learned something from this mere "children's story." So quiet now, maybe the narrator is mute with wonder at the humiliating possibility that the small, childlike, queer Bilbo is "right," after all.

Notes

1. See, for example, Mary R. Lucas, review of *The Hobbit*, *Library Journal* 63 (1 May 1938): 385: "It will have a limited appeal unless properly introduced and even then will be best liked by those children whose imagination is alert." More recently Randel Helms viewed it as intended "for children and filled with a whimsy few adults can accept," in *Tolkien's World* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p. 19.

2. For a discussion of the children's story elements, primarily the narrative intrusions, plus those episodes that foreshadow incidents in *The Lord of the Rings* (a work that, in contrast, "stretches the adult imagination") (p. 19), see Paul H. Kocher, *Master of Middle-earth: The Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), pp. 19–33.

3. See *The Annotated Hobbit*, annotated by Douglas A. Anderson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), p. 321; also the excellent and careful cataloguing of differences among editions by Wayne G. Hammond, with Douglas A. Anderson, in *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies; New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Books, 1993), esp. pp. 4–71 (just on *The Hobbit*); and Bonniejean Christensen's excellent analysis of the various changes in Gollum as a result of Tolkien's revisions, but with awareness of the awkward mixture of the two levels, children's and adult, in Bonniejean Christensen, "Gollum's Character Transformation in *The Hobbit*," in *A Tolkien Compass*, ed. Jared Lobdell (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Press, 1975), pp. 9–28.

4. Christensen, "Gollum's Character Transformation," p. 27.

5. Dorothy Matthews, "The Psychological Journey of Bilbo Baggins," in Lobdell, pp. 29–42, views Bilbo's maturation in Jungian terms; Helms, *Tolkien's World*, pp. 41–55, interprets it in Freudian terms and the whole work, in addition, as a microcosm of *The Lord of the Rings* (pp. 19–40); and William H. Green provides an incisive psychoanalytic study of this bildungsroman in *"The Hobbit": A Journey into Maturity* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994).

6. The narrator seems to have the voice of Tolkien, according to Paul Edmund Thomas, who draws on Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* for his critical terms, in "Some of Tolkien's Narrators," in *Tolkien's Legendarium: Essays on "The History of Middle-earth,"* edited by Verlyn Flieger and Carl F. Hostetter, Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy, no. 86 (Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood Press, 2000), p. 163. Tolkien's role as narrator in *The Hobbit* is discussed in terms of "teasers," glosses on the action, shifter of viewpoints, and describer of events (pp. 161–81).

7. J.R.R. Tolkien, quoted by Philip Norman in "The Prevalence of Hobbits," *New York Times Magazine*, 15 January 1967, p. 100.

8. Thomas, pp. 161–81. The early drafts of "A Long-expected Party" have been published by Christopher Tolkien in *The Return of the Shadow*, vol. 6 of *The History of Middle-Earth*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, 12 vols (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983–95; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984–96).

9. According to penciled notes by Tolkien on a letter of 18 January 1938 from G.H. White of the Examination Schools, Tolkien began writing *The Hobbit* after he moved to 20 Northmoor Road in 1931, although his children had heard some episodes from it before 1930. Michael Tolkien, according to Anderson, *The Annotated Hobbit*, p. 1, recalls that the first sentence was written in 1928 and portions of the remainder in 1929. The typescript (except the last chapters) was shown to Lewis in 1932 and the work was retyped for Allen and Unwin in 1936.

10. Tolkien, letter to *The Observer*, 20 February 1938, p. 9.

11. Tolkien critics have, curiously, ignored his own *Beowulf* article as a possible parallel to *The Hobbit*, although they have adduced parallels between the novel and other medieval works, including *Beowulf* itself. For the names of the Dwarves derived in part from the *Eddas*, see Patrick J. Callahan, "Tolkien's Dwarfs and the Eddas," *Tolkien Journal* 15 (1972): 20; for the antecedents of Gandalf, the Dwarves, the Elves, the Ring, and other elements in Norse mythology, see Mitzi M. Brunsdale, "Norse Mythological Elements in *The Hobbit*," *Mythlore* 9 (1983): 49–50; and Lynn Bryce, "The Influence of Scandinavian Mythology in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien," *Edda* 7 (1983): 113–19. See also Richard Schindler's

fine analysis of the medieval sources informing some of Tolkien's artistry in *The Hobbit*'s illustrations, especially in relation to Beorn's hall and the town of Dale, in "The Expectant Landscape: J.R.R. Tolkien's Illustrations for *The Hobbit*," in *J.R.R. Tolkien: The Hobbit* Drawings, Watercolors, and Manuscript (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 1987), pp. 14–27.

12. Christensen, "Tolkien's Creative Technique: *Beowulf* and *The Hobbit*," *Orcrist* 7 (1972–73): 16.

13. For the influence of *Beowulf* on *The Hobbit*, see also Bonniejean Christensen, "*Beowulf* and *The Hobbit*: Elegy into Fantasy in J.R.R. Tolkien's Creative Technique," *Dissertation Abstracts International* 30 (1970): 4401A–4402A (University of Southern California) (the dissertation from which her essay, "Tolkien's Creative Technique," was derived).

14. J.R.R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 22 (1936): 245–95, reprinted in *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), pp. 51–103. All citations refer to the Nicholson reprint (here, p. 81).

15. See Green, "*The Hobbit*": *A Journey to Maturity*.

16. For another view of *The Hobbit* as four-part in structure, see also William Howard Green, "*The Hobbit* and Other Fiction by J.R.R. Tolkien: Their Roots in Medieval Heroic Literature and Language," *Dissertation Abstracts International* 30 (1970): 4944A (Louisiana State University). Green catalogues medieval analogues for *The Hobbit*'s characters, events, and symbols; his work, like Christensen's, is important because it reveals Tolkien's indebtedness to medieval literature in *The Hobbit* and other works.

17. On eucatastrophe and fantasy, see J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," in *Tree and Leaf* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), pp. 68–73, reprinted in *The Tolkien Reader* (1966; reprinted New York: Ballantine, 1975). On *Beowulf* as an elegy, see Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," p. 85. See also Christensen, "Tolkien's Creative Technique," p. 16.

18. Levin L. Schücking, "Das Königsideal im *Beowulf*," *MHRA Bulletin* 3 (1929): 143–54, reprinted and translated as "The Ideal of Kingship in *Beowulf*," in Nicholson, pp. 35–49.

19. J.R.R. Tolkien discusses the dialectical features of this work in "*Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad*," *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association* 14 (1929): 104–26; applauds the translation of *The Ancrene Riwle* by M[ary]. B. Salu (London: Burns & Oates, 1955), in his preface to it (p. v); and himself edits *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwle: Ancrene Wisse* for the Early English Text Society, no. 249 (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1962).

20. For a rather confusing six-part structure based on the two monsters, Gollum and the dragon, in *The Hobbit*, see Paul Bibire, "By Stock or Stone: Recurrent Imagery and Narrative Pattern in *The Hobbit*," in *Scholarship and Fantasy: Proceedings of the Tolkien Phenomenon, May 1992, Turku, Finland* (special issue), ed. K.J. Battarbee, Anglicana Turkuensia, no. 12 (Turku: University of Turku, 1993), esp. pp. 203–16. Bibire says, "The Matter of the Mountain thus consists of a large three-fold structure (Bilbo's descents into the dwarf-mines), and a large binary structure (potential and actual war), framing a central unitary episode (the death of Smaug). It sums up the narrative structure and motifs, imagery and characters of the whole of the rest of the text" (p. 214). See also the diagram provided by Green, "*The Hobbit*": *A Journey to Maturity*.

21. For a more recent discussion of the deadly sins in *The Hobbit*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *Silmarillion*, see Charles W. Nelson, "The Sins of Middle-earth: Tolkien's Use of Medieval

Allegory," in *J.R.R. Tolkien and His Literary Resonances: Views of Middle–earth*, ed. George Clark and Daniel Timmons (Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp. 83–94.

22. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*; *or, There and Back Again* (1937, 1938; rev. ed. London: Allen and Unwin; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 83.

23. For the stone-giants in *The Hobbit* and an analysis of their etymological origin, from Greek *gigas* (rebellious giants who assaulted Mount Olympus), from *eoten* in Old English, and even, in Middle English, from *ent*; and for the appearance elsewhere in Tolkien of the word giant (especially in relation to the Númenóreans of Gondor, the Ents, and the Giant in *Farmer Giles of Ham*), see the fine analysis by Anders Stenström, "Some Notes on Giants in Tolkien's Writings," in Battarbee, pp. 53–71.

24. On the Wargs, see J.S. Ryan, "Warg, Wearg, Earg and Werewolf," *Mallorn* 23 (1986): 25–29.

25. Kocher, *Master of Middle-earth*, pp. 19–23.

JORGE J.E. GRACIA

The Quests of Sam and Gollum for the Happy Life

Tolkien's heroes and anti-heroes are extraordinary beings. Think of Gandalf the Grey and Saruman the White, the good and bad wizards who wield enormous magical powers; of Aragorn, a man greater than life and a king of old; and of the Dark Lord Sauron the Great, the very embodiment of evil. Even those who, like Bilbo and Frodo, are not quite extraordinary in themselves, are vested with unusual qualities by their heroic quests. As narrated in *The Hobbit*, Bilbo goes on to defeat Smaug, an evil dragon with plenty of resources and cunning. Frodo engages in the most difficult task that anyone could possibly undertake: the destruction of the Ring of Power coveted by Sauron. And at the end of the story the ultimate reward of both Bilbo and Frodo is to sail, in the company of Gandalf, on a ship into the Uttermost West (RK, p. 339). These are beings whose lives transcend ordinary bounds, and it is for this reason that it is difficult for us to learn anything from them that can directly apply to our lives. Yes, we accompany them in their quests, observe their difficulties, desires, and temptations, and approve or condemn their actions. But we do this only at a distance, for we are too removed from the reality in which they exist to understand fully what they are about, or to empathize with their successes and failures.

Not everyone in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* has the same heroic stature, however. There are many characters that are closer to our size,

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and it is from them that we can more easily learn something suitable to our situation. They are good and bad in ordinary senses we can grasp, and their search for a happy life, whether successful or in vain, is also within our limited understanding. They are not wizards, kings, or mighty warriors; they are ordinary beings who succeed and fail, just like us, and who have to make do with ordinary resources. In particular, I have in mind two characters who are cut very much from our mold. They play key roles in Tolkien's epic, but their roles are not heroic, and their qualities are made of a stuff to which we can relate. They are Sam Gamgee and Sméagol (also known as Gollum because of the peculiar noises he makes with his throat).

Of the two, Gollum is the more fascinating character. In director Peter Jackson's New Line Cinema movies, Gollum is brought to life as an ugly but humane computer generated character, whose own psychology drives much of the plot. He represents the good gone bad, something which is always intriguing for those of us who are struggling to stay with the first. Sam represents the good that stays good even under temptation. Both Sam and Gollum want the same thing: to be happy. Both work hard at it. But only one of them succeeds: Sam reaches his goal and Gollum ends in disaster. Why? This is the momentous philosophical question, because it concerns the nature of the good life, the life of happiness. We need to answer it, because in answering it we can perhaps also learn something important about how to achieve happiness for ourselves.

Two of a Kind

Sam and Gollum present us with significant and useful contrasts and similarities because they share the same nature. If it is true that happiness depends on one's nature, the kind of being one is—as Aristotle claimed—then it would not be very helpful to compare the happiness of beings that are naturally different. It would not make sense, for example, to compare how elves and wizards are happy, for it is quite possible that what makes them so are quite different things. But Sam and Gollum are both hobbits. The first came from the Shire and the second is descended from a branch of hobbit-kind "akin to the fathers of the fathers of the Stoors" (FR, p. 57).

But not only do they have the same hobbit nature, they also have a similar culture. True, Gollum has forgotten much of it as a result of his solitary lifestyle, and the Stoors lived a wilder and more primitive life than the hobbits from the Shire (L, p. 290), but the culture of both has the same roots. As Gandalf explains to Frodo when he is recounting the story of the original encounter between Bilbo and Gollum: "There was a great deal in the background of their minds and memories that was very similar. They understood one another remarkably well, very much better than a hobbit

would understand, say, a Dwarf, or an Orc, or even an Elf" (FR, p. 59). When Bilbo runs into Gollum in the caves of the Misty Mountains, they both know how to engage in a game that was going to prove tragic for Gollum, the Riddle-game (H, pp. 73–80). Indeed, they both know the same riddles, and it is Bilbo who breaks the rules of the game by asking a question rather than posing a riddle when he runs out of ideas. Bilbo is pressed to challenge Gollum in order to escape: "What have I got in my pocket?" (H, p. 78) Gollum's mistake, which he realizes when it is already too late, is to accept the question and to try to answer it. "Not a fair question. It cheated first, it did. It broke the rules" (FR, p. 63). Like the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, Gollum should have said that the question was not allowed by the rules, and therefore he was entitled to reject it. But once he accepted the question and tried to answer it, even though he demanded three guesses, which is unusual, he was bound by his promise. Gollum, like all hobbits, attaches great weight to riddle contests.

We are also told that he used to like tales, as Sam and other hobbits do (TT, p. 364; FR, p. 70). And Gollum, on at least one occasion, withstood great pain, "as a hobbit might" (FR, p. 60). So Sam and Gollum have much in common, and this is why it makes sense for us to ask how they can be happy and whether we can follow a similar path.

The Pursuit of Happiness

Let us begin with an assumption that does not seem far-fetched, namely, that we all want to be happy. It is not far-fetched because a good number of philosophers, beginning perhaps with Aristotle, have in fact pointed out that this is exactly what we all want. When it comes to living well, Aristotle writes, "the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that it is happiness, and identify living well and faring well with being happy . . ."[1] True, if we ask ordinary persons what their aims in life are, what they ultimately desire, not all are likely to say happiness. Some might say that they want power, others that it is fame, others pleasure, still others money, and a few, I am sure, will say that they want to be virtuous. There might even be some who speak about a desire to serve God, to conquer the world, to advance science, or to know as much as there is to know. But if we prod them further, I think they will come around to Aristotle's conclusion, namely, that what they really want is to be happy. Their disagreement is not about this ultimate end, but rather about what it means to be happy and how one gets to be so.

So let us assume that Sam and Gollum both want to be happy. What we need to know, then, is what they think this consists in, how they think they can get there, and whether in fact they do. Moreover, whether they

reach their goal or not, we need to know why they succeed or fail. Here we shall find the moral of the story and what we hope to learn from this tale.

We know that Sam ends up happy, and Gollum ends up not just in misery but in destruction. Indeed, it is one of the interesting facts about Tolkien's tale that, even though he undergoes all kinds of travails, Sam is not unhappy. At times, Sam is troubled, worried, hungry, exhausted, afraid, sad, frustrated, and even in pain. But Tolkien never tells us that he is unhappy or that he is ever seriously tempted to turn back from the Quest that brought him into difficulties. Just the contrary. He is single minded and steadfast. And even in the greatest crisis he faces, when he thinks Frodo is dead and he is all alone, rather than considering cutting his losses and running, his main thought is to complete the task he and Frodo had undertaken, to "*see it through*" (TT, p. 386).

The situation with Gollum is just the reverse. He seems to be in a permanent state of unhappiness. He suffers, like Sam, from all sorts of difficulties, but the source of his misery is not these. He is dissatisfied, vulnerable, and unable to find peace and relief in life (RK, p. 238). Gandalf describes him to Frodo as "altogether wretched," and this even when he had the Ring, which for him was the ultimate object of desire. He lives a lonely, sneaky, miserable life, which arouses pity mixed with horror in Bilbo when he first encounters him. It is a life constituted of "endless unmarked days without light or hope of betterment . . ." (H, p. 87).

So what is it that Sam and Gollum consider their overall aim, the goal that they think will bring them happiness? Consider Gollum first: What does he want? The answer is unambiguous: the Ring of Power, his Precious. "We wants it, we wants it, we wants it!" he repeats to himself in a kind of frenzy (TT, p. 268), an expression of his insatiable desire and lust for it. And what does the Ring provide? One thing is escape from Him, Sauron, who had subjected Gollum to torture in Mordor, and who also wants the Ring (FR, p. 64). "He'll eat us, if he gets it, eat all the world" (TT, p. 273). Regaining the Ring would give Gollum strength to fight Ringwraiths, and thus presumably security; prestige and fame, which being Lord Sméagol, Gollum the Great, and *The* Gollum would bring; and food, particularly fresh fish from the sea, juicy and sweet (TT, p. 268). But above all he just wants to have the Ring, for without it he feels lost. Life without the Ring is nothing. Close to his destruction, he confesses that "when Precious goes" he will "die, yes, into the dust" (RK, p. 237).

And what does Sam want? He wants neither to be a wizard nor a warrior. Originally, before he and Frodo set out on their quest, he wanted adventure and to see elves and exotic creatures like Oliphaunts (FR, p. 70; TT, p. 283). But more deeply, what he really wants is to be back in the Shire, the place he cares for more than any other. This is what he is "hoping for

all the time" (TT, p. 363), for then he can see Rosie again, and share a life with her and his friends. The Shire is never very far from his mind, and is the only place where he would like to be. When Lady Galadriel looks into his innermost desires, they are revealed to consist in "flying back home to the Shire to a nice little hole—with a bit of garden . . ." (FR, p. 401).

A most important difference between the desires of Gollum and Sam, then, is that Gollum wishes for the possession of his Precious by himself, alone, whereas Sam's desires involve others: Frodo, Rosie, and his friends in the Shire. There is a social dimension to the happiness of Sam that is completely lacking in the happiness that Gollum pursues. Sam's happiness includes others of his kind, but Gollum's happiness excludes everyone. Gollum hides in an isolated place at the roots of the Misty Mountains, at the bottom of a tunnel, in a solitary island of rock in a cold lake frequented only by occasional goblins, which he eats when he gets the opportunity by catching them by surprise. His very survival depends on the destruction of others and his enjoyment of solitude, since he was "driven away, alone, and crept down, down, into the dark under the mountains" (H, p. 73). He lives away from his land, time, and kin. After finding the Ring, he became unpopular and was finally expelled from the community on orders from his own grandmother. So "He wandered in loneliness" (FR, p. 59), having as his only companion the thing he coveted and hid because of the fear that someone else would take it away from him.

By contrast, Sam is always giving. We should not be surprised at his attitude toward the master he loves, but his generosity does not stop with him. His loving nature is revealed when Sam realizes the power of the seed-box Lady Galadriel had given him at Lothlórien. Instead of keeping it for his garden, as even Frodo suggests, he uses it for the restoration of the whole Shire to its former splendor after it had been devastated by Saruman and his minions (RK, p. 330). His thought is always for others.

There are consequences to the desires of Gollum and Sam. Gollum's condition deteriorates. He becomes dark and slimy. His eyes enlarge and become pale and luminous to allow him to see in the dark and catch the blind fish that live in the lake. He talks to himself and sometimes makes no distinction between himself and his precious Ring. The confusion about who he is goes even deeper, for at times there seem to be two halves of one person, conversing with each other. One is Sméagol, the remnants of the old hobbit, where there is still some good left; the other is Gollum, the slave of the Ring who will do anything to have it and keep it and is consumed with wickedness. Sam calls these two halves Slinker and Stinker (TT, p. 274). Neither name is flattering, for Sam dislikes and is suspicious of both, but the Sméagol half is not altogether lost to evil and treachery. He wants to save his "nice master," Frodo, and when Faramir says that Gollum is wicked, Frodo

responds: "No, not altogether wicked" (TT, p. 338). Indeed, when Gollum uses "I" to refer to himself, this "seem[s] usually to be a sign, on its rare appearances, that some remnants of the old truth and sincerity were for the moment on top" (TT, p. 280).

The consequences of Sam's desires are of a different sort. He is slowly transformed from a rather immature and simple hobbit in search of adventure into a resourceful servant, a loyal companion, a fierce guardian, and a loving friend. There is also an important difference between how Sam and Gollum pursue their respective goals. Because Gollum's mind is set on recovering the Ring which in his view was first stolen by Bilbo, he puts no conditions on this task. He engages in whatever activity he thinks will bring about the desired effect. And treachery against Frodo and Sam is never far from his mind. Director Peter Jackson emphasizes this point by choosing to end *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* with Gollum's treacherous plans rather than Tolkien's ending in Shelob's cave.

The case with Sam is very different. He also has an ultimate goal—to live in the Shire with those he loves. But this goal is mediated by another goal that he puts in between: helping Frodo destroy the Ring. He never considers leaving Frodo alone and going back to his dear country. Indeed, although he is not particularly smart, he outwits Frodo in order to accompany him when Frodo decides to abandon the other members of the Fellowship (FR, p. 456). Why? Because his first and foremost attachment is not to an object, but to a person. His goal is not possession, but fellowship. He loves Frodo. And this love translates into loyalty, unlike Gollum's distorted "love" for Déagol and weak feeling for Frodo, which both end up in betrayal.

Like Gollum, Sam also has two halves between which he feels "torn." But the two halves in question have to do with his relation to the two people he loves most, Rosie and Frodo. And when Frodo tells him that he is "as happy as anyone can be," this refers to the fact that Sam is engaged in the life of the Shire, surrounded by his family and friends (RK, p. 338).

Sam's happiness is not unmixed with sadness. He, like his friends Merry and Pippin, is "sorrowful" at Frodo's parting. But, like them, he has "great comfort in his friends" on his way back from the Grey Havens (RK, p. 340). Upon his return, "Rose drew him in, and set him in his chair, and put little Elanor upon his lap. He drew a deep breath. 'Well, I'm back,' he said" (RK, p. 340). These lines close Tolkien's story, because Sam, like Aragorn, is a wanderer who has returned to his land, and his return is the end of his quest, a quest for happiness which is answered with the fellowship of family and friends.

Gollum also loves something. He loves the Ring, but the Ring is the only thing he loves. The Ring is "the only thing he had ever cared for, his

precious" (H, p. 87). And this is not a person; it is merely a thing, even if it is magical and possessed of extraordinary powers. Indeed, Gollum's desire for the Ring makes him betray the love he was supposed to have for his friend Déagol, whom he murders in order to steal the Ring (FR, p. 58). His misunderstanding of love is clear in the encounter in which he repeatedly calls Déagol his love, even while he is strangling him.

So now we know what both Sam and Gollum think about happiness. For them, happiness consists in two different things: For Gollum it is possession of the Ring, and for Sam it is a life of fellowship in the Shire.

The Importance of Friendship

Gollum is not all bad, nor is Sam all good, however. Both are tempted by opposite passions: Gollum by the love of Frodo, and Sam by his jealousy of Gollum. And both are attracted, like almost everyone else, by the power of the Ring.

Even after Gollum had planned to take Frodo and Sam to the giant spider Shelob and in that way revenge himself against Sam, whom he hated, and recover the Ring from Frodo's remains, there is a moment in which his good side could have overcome the bad. The origin of this extraordinary possibility was prompted by affection, the stirrings of love for his "nice master." His expression changes, his eyes become old and tired-looking, he shakes his head as though debating inwardly:

> Then he came back, and slowly putting out a trembling hand, very cautiously he touched Frodo's knee—but almost the touch was a caress. For a fleeting moment, could one of the sleepers have seen him, they would have thought that they beheld an old weary hobbit, shrunken by the years that had carried him far beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starved pitiable thing. (TT, p. 366)

The moment is crucial, and Tolkien calls it "the most tragic moment in the Tale" (L, p. 330), but unfortunately Sam destroys the possibility for regeneration it has opened for Gollum. Of course, we do not know whether there was enough fellow-feeling in Gollum to overcome the temptation for treachery in order to recover the Ring. But certainly Sam provides the excuse to make sure that it could not happen. When he wakes up and sees Gollum touching Frodo, his first reaction, prompted by jealousy (L, p. 235), is to challenge him: "Hey you! What are you up to" (TT, p. 366)? Sam is suspicious and he calls Gollum a sneak and villain, something Gollum resents deeply, for his feelings toward Frodo at that moment had been of

a finer kind. He responds with bitter irony: "Sneaking, sneaking! Hobbits always so polite, yes. O nice hobbits! Sméagol brings them up secret ways that nobody else could find. Tired he is, thirsty he is, yes thirsty; and he guides them and he searches for paths, and they say *sneak*, *sneak*. Very nice friends, O yes my precious, very nice." After this he withdraws into himself and the green glint of malice in his eyes reappears. Tolkien notes, in despair: "The fleeting moment had passed, beyond recall" (TT, p. 366). A new venom surfaces, motivated by the bitterness resulting from misunderstanding and rejection. Sam understands it and feels remorse, but he cannot but distrust Gollum.

In his letters, Tolkien speculates that, had Sam not acted as he did, Gollum might still have done all he could to recover the Ring, either by stealing it or taking it by violence, but once he had it, he would have sacrificed himself for Frodo's sake, voluntarily casting himself into the Crack of Doom (L, p. 330). This certainly would have been a dramatic turn of events, but it is doubtful that it could have happened in spite of some indications early on that he wanted to save both his Precious and Frodo. There was not enough time for Gollum's feelings for Frodo to grow strong enough in order for Gollum to overcome his desire to keep the Ring forever. But the issue is unclear in that, from the very beginning, Gandalf does not see Gollum's regeneration as hopeless. He tells Frodo that there is little hope that the evil part of Gollum can be conquered by the good one. "Yet not no hope" (FR, p. 60). And he repeats the point later: "I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it" (FR, p. 65).

The power of the Ring is a temptation to both Sam and Gollum, to which Gollum gives in completely. After Gollum's moment of hesitation, there is nothing left for him to do but to proceed with the planned treachery. Sam, on the other hand, is tempted by the Ring when Frodo is paralyzed by Shelob, and he takes the Ring from Frodo in order to escape from the orcs that teem in the area. All of a sudden he desires the Ring for reasons similar to the ones we saw in Gollum. He sees himself as "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-dûr" (RK, p. 186). He sees a transformation in the world brought about by him, Gorgoroth changed into a garden of flowers. He could do it, just put the Ring on and claim it for his own, and this fantasy would become a reality. How could he resist? Gollum could not. They are both hobbits and thus endowed with a plain sense of their limitations, but Sam resists and Gollum gives in. What makes the difference? Sam's love of his master, Tolkien tells us. It is the love that Sam has for Frodo that makes it possible for him to resist temptation.

There is another episode that shows that the great difference between Sam and Gollum lies precisely in their fellow feeling. The reason that the Ring got hold of Gollum in such a way as to have destroyed his will can be traced precisely to how it was acquired: by betrayal, murder, and, most important, the corruption of love. Gollum, as we saw earlier, kills his friend Déagol to get it. By contrast, the reason that Bilbo was never under the complete power of the Ring is precisely that when he acquired it, he was moved by the fellow feeling of pity and spared Gollum's life (H, p. 87).

Gollum cannot resist the desire for the Ring because he has no resources, no friends. One reason, perhaps, why Gollum has no friends is because he has no love for himself. As Aristotle reminds us, "Friendly relations with one's neighbours, and the marks by which friendships are defined, seem [to proceed] from a man's relations to himself."[2] A man who likes himself makes friends easily, and a man who has good friends is more easily prevented from going astray. Gollum lacks this self-love. Even Frodo's friendship is treated with suspicion and scorn because of his own self-doubt. In the face of an enemy with this kind of power, Gollum (like you or I) would have needed a little help from his friends.

Recall that Bilbo nearly did not give the Ring up, and it was only through Gandalf's insistence that he did. Frodo himself became too attached to the Ring and in fact failed to do with it what he meant to do. Instead of throwing the Ring in the fires of Mount Doom, he took possession of it at the last minute: "I have come . . . but I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine" (RK, p. 239)! Had not Gollum bitten off Frodo's ring-finger and fallen to his doom with it, it is difficult to envision that Frodo would have come to his senses. But Sam was able to resist the Ring's power, and the reason was his feelings for Frodo. When Sam took the Ring from Frodo in Shelob's cave, he was tempted to keep it, but he did not because his first thought was for his master rather than for himself. Love gave him the strength to resist.

All You Need Is Love

One lesson of Tolkien's saga is clear: For ordinary people like you or me, happiness is achievable only in a social context and its key is love. And love expresses itself in loyalty and sharing, not in possession. Departing from the rule that love prescribes for us leads to misery.

For humans as well as for hobbits, happiness requires fellowship with others, and it is in love for others that we can maintain our course toward it and achieve it. It is by forgetting ourselves that we earn the good life and it is by giving that we receive. This is the old truth illustrated by the lives of Sam and Gollum.[3]

Notes

1. *Nichomachean Ethics*, translated by W. D. Ross, in Richard McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of* Aristotle (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 937, 1095a17–20.

2. *Nichomachean Ethics*, p. 1081, 1166a1–2

3. I am indebted to Leticia Gracia for an important suggestion concerning the key to happiness in Gollum and Sam.

BRIAN ROSEBURY

Tolkien in the History of Ideas

Much depends, of course, on what precisely Tolkien's work is earnest about. In the three sections of this chapter, which examines Tolkien as a thinker, and a figure in the history of ideas, I want to consider how his writing responds to its time; to examine and evaluate some applications, or appropriations, of his work for particular ideological purposes; and to show that there is an underlying coherence in his thought.

The idea that as a literary artist he should be required to 'respond to his time' is one that Tolkien himself might have questioned, for all his admission of certain influences from personal experience in the Foreword to *The Lord of the Rings*. One reason is that he was unsympathetic to many preoccupations of the modern world, and disinclined to serve its agenda. A number of commentators have complained, for example, that his work ignores or underplays the role of the erotic in human life.[1] Actually his work is not quite so indifferent to the erotic as may be supposed, though it may involve a different conception of the erotic from that of Joyce or Lawrence (see, for example, my discussion of *Smith of Wootton Major* in chapter 3 . . .); but in any case, since the role of the erotic in human life is fairly extensively explored by other twentieth-century writers, one should not be too disappointed to find a writer who deals with something else. A second reason is that Tolkien disclaimed, at least for his fiction, any attempt to expound or promulgate

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explicit ideas, rejecting any suggestion that the events of *The Lord of the Rings* offer a comment on twentieth-century history, and remarking in connection with *Beowulf* that 'a myth . . . is at its best when it is presented by a poet who *feels rather than makes explicit* what his theme portends' (italics added).[2]

Perhaps the deepest reason, however, is that Tolkien's most earnest commitments were to values which he believed to be independent of specific historical circumstances. By conceiving for his major works of fiction a historical situation quite different from that of the twentieth century, and expecting his readers to be moved, if they were moved, without having to translate the action into twentieth-century correlatives, Tolkien signalled his conviction that the most fundamental psychic and moral values are not relative to particular societies or periods of history. When Éomer, in *The Two Towers*, asks 'How shall a man judge what to do in such times?', Aragorn replies, 'As ever he has judged. . . . Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house' (*TT*, 40–1). It is one of Aragorn's more stiltedly priggish speeches, but it does serve to make explicit (given Aragorn's authoritative status and the fact that Éomer equably answers 'True enough') Tolkien's rejection of the moral relativism which became increasingly fashionable during his lifetime. (It emphatically does not follow from this view of Tolkien's—though this is what a belief in moral absolutes is sometimes imagined to entail—that exactly the same behaviour is called for in any society or at any period. It merely follows that right conduct, whatever varied forms it may take in different contexts, must be traceable back to certain fundamental principles.)

The literary-critical equivalent of this confusion so far as Tolkien is concerned is the attempt to deny the imaginative autonomy of Middle-earth by translating Sauron as Hitler or Stalin, the Nazgûl as the Nazis, the Shire under Saruman as the post-war Labour government, and so on: interpretations which infuriated Tolkien, the more justifiably since these are essentially conjectures about covert intentions on the author's part. His narrative is not a kind of coded satire or polemic: its aim is to present certain essentially desirable and undesirable forms of life with maximum imaginative lucidity for a modern readership. In particular, the war against Sauron is not intended to represent any real war, least of all those against Germany in which Tolkien and his country were engaged during his lifetime. To spell out a necessary distinction which many critics ignore: *influence by* X is one thing; *representation of* X is another. That Tolkien drew on the private soldiers he commanded in the First World War for some aspects of Sam Gamgee, or on his experience of battle for some images of the Dead Marshes, does not mean that the imaginary war is supposed to *represent* either of the real world wars. That his letters show he detested Hitler does not mean, as Colin Wilson

and Martin Dodsworth suggest, that the forces of Sauron are designed to represent those of Nazi Germany, pitted in a patriotic allegory against plucky little Britisher-hobbits.[3] Quite apart from his general repudiation of topical allegory in his Foreword, Tolkien's statements elsewhere show that such an application would have been unacceptable to him. 'I've never had those feelings about the Germans', he protested to Philip Norman in 1967. 'I'm very anti that sort of thing.'[4] His comments in letters on the international politics of the 1940s are anything but chauvinistic ('I know nothing about British or American imperialism in the far East that does not fill me with regret and disgust');[5] and in an incomplete, posthumously published essay he shows a mature understanding of the moral complexities of war, and of the distinction between the justice of a cause and the justice of the actions used to further it.[6] For similar reasons it is superfluous for J. R. Watson to protest that 'the unassuming good are as likely to be found among the slag-heaps of Mordor-Leeds as in Minas Tirith'.[7] Mordor is not Leeds, which Tolkien, as it happens, seems to have liked—certainly he respected the Yorkshire students, from 'home backgrounds bookless and cultureless' he taught there—and the orcs are not industrial workers in disguise.[8]

If even a basically sympathetic reader like Colin Wilson is tempted to look for topical allegory, unsympathetic commentators on Tolkien, sensing his non-subscription to the secular-left consensus, and indifferent to his declared purposes, have found construing his work as a coded right-wing polemic even more helpful. To Nick Otty, for example, Mordor simply is 'Wigan or Sheffield in the 1930s', while Aragorn is 'like a Tory cabinet minister'.[9] To John Carey, as we have seen, the hobbits are 'gentlemen' and the orcs 'working-class'.[10] Germaine Greer picked this theme up in her televised outburst with her assertion that the villains of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (movie version) are 'the dwarves', who live in mines and 'actually do the work', while the hobbits are 'a leisured class'.[11] All these 'readings' exemplify a tendency endemic in twentieth-century literary criticism, with its unresolved confusions over meaning and authorial intention: the tendency to use the licence of the critical reader ('what it means to me') to assign a crass and reductive meaning to a text, and then to hold the author responsible for having written a crass and reductive work.

Greer's remark is particularly sad; not so much because, after seeing the film and (presumably) reading the book, she still confuses mine-working dwarves with mine-wrecking orcs, as because so ideologically aware a critic ought to be capable of recognising in Tolkien's invention, even if she disagrees with it, an attitude to work which is close to John Ruskin's, and not too remote from Marx's. All the benign peoples in Tolkien have a distinctive kind of productive work. The hobbits are essentially farmers; the fact that Bilbo and Frodo have no occupation—except 'burglary' and

writing books, neither of which ties them to one place—is a narrative convenience, like their being bachelors. The Dwarves are essentially miners and craftsmen, the Elves are essentially creative artists. In every case, work is inseparable from enjoyment, and from love and respect for the materials of the world. Orcs, in contrast, do not in this sense *work* at all: what they typically do is destroy the products of other people's work, and if they and Sauron's other servants sometimes labour, it is as slaves under threat of death or torture. There is no evidence in Tolkien of the aristocratic idea that a life of idleness is to be commended, and much evidence of the more modern view, a dominant one since the Romantic period, that expressive work (as contrasted with alienated labour) is a basic fulfilment for human beings. Ruskin remarked that 'it may be proved, with much certainty, that God intends no man to live in this world without working: but it seems to me no less evident that He intends every man to be happy in his work. It is written, "in the sweat of thy brow," but it was never written, "in the breaking of thine heart," thou shalt eat bread.'[12] Freud said that psychological health was the ability to love and work; Marx that we should not be reduced to the condition in which we work only in order to live.[13] And a recent exponent of Marx summarises his view—with a slightly Ruskinian gloss, I think—as follows:

> A living being which has once begun to make nature his own through the work of his hands, his intellect, and his imagination, will never stop. Every achievement opens the door to unconquered territory. . . . But when labour is destructive, not creative, when it is undertaken under coercion and not as the free play of forces, when it means the withering, not the flowering, of man's physical and intellectual potential, then labour is a denial of its own principle and therefore of the principle of man.[14]

Lest there be any doubt about Tolkien's adherence to this tradition, two other stories, 'Leaf by Niggle' and *Smith of Wootton Major*, have the joy of productive work at their very centre: only the centrality of war in *The Lord of the Rings* pushes it to the margins. Where Tolkien's view of work diverges very drastically from Marx's is in the morally inert role Marx assigns to the natural world, as the material of human self-realisation through labour.[15] To Tolkien the coercion of nature was as suspect as the coercion of people—a point which both section II and section III below will revisit.

The temptation to seek in *The Lord of the Rings* direct allusion to contemporary events and conditions, as if only such allusion could give it moral credibility, is itself a symptom of the disbelief in lasting values to which the work is implicitly a reply. For Tolkien himself, such values were

ultimately grounded in God: there existed, in fact, eternal moral values, as well as eternal principles governing *eudaemonia*, the sources of possible happiness. Of course he would not have suggested, and no critic should suggest on his behalf, that his works embody such values perfectly. It is sufficient, for the works to be aesthetically effective, that they should evoke the kind of emotional response in readers which indicates that some widely shared values have been powerfully tapped. Those of us who have no religious beliefs may still take the view that moral and 'eudaemonic' values can be derived from the unchanging elements of human nature:[16] such as reflective self-consciousness, the capacity to imagine and to reason, susceptibility to pleasure and pain, interdependence with other persons, interdependence with a non-human environment; or from elements which, if not invariable, represent such strong general dispositions that they can weigh heavily in moral and practical reasoning. Values so derived may not, on a humanist view, be eternal, but they are lasting for all practical purposes, however varied the circumstances of their possible embodiment.

The modernity of Tolkien's work, from the point of view of its content, lies not in coded reference to specific contemporary events or phenomena, but in the absorption into the invented world—no doubt a partly unconscious absorption—of experiences and attitudes which Tolkien would scarcely have acquired had he not been a man of the twentieth century. Some are obvious enough. *The Lord of the Rings* describes a continental war, in which the survival of whole peoples and cultures is at stake. The undertow of apocalyptic dread is familiar to anyone who has lived in the nuclear age, but its primary biographical source must greatly predate Hiroshima: almost certainly it lies around 1914–15 when Tolkien, in common with millions of young men, discovered that he would have to go to war. The successive international crises of the Thirties and Forties can only have reinforced this impression of secular imperilment. Naturally Tolkien would have been more aware than most people of pre-modern analogies: the fall of the Roman Empire, the bare survival of Christian civilisation in the age which produced *Beowulf*, the lively expectation of world's end that obsessed some medieval and Reformation believers. But that historical awareness is itself a modern, even a modernist, attribute.

At a deeper level, there are in Tolkien's 'political' vision, especially in *The Lord of the Rings*, elements which are markedly modern. So far from attempting to resurrect in the twentieth century the heroic ethic of *Beowulf*, Tolkien explicitly warns against it in his 1936 lecture on the poem, making, indeed, what looks like an allusion to the revival of a pagan warrior-ethic in contemporary Germany.[17] His fiction reiterates an anti-'heroic' theme. The sorrows of the Elves in Beleriand, in *The Silmarillion*, stem from Fëanor's vengeful decision to pursue the crimes of Melkor with war. 'The

Homecoming of Beorhtnoth' criticises the sacrifice of military prudence to the heroic code. Bilbo Baggins and Farmer Giles are reluctant—in effect, conscripted—heroes, and as much stress is laid on their fear as on their courage. The warmly sympathetic Smith (of Wootton Major) falls on his face in terror before elvish warriors. In *The Lord of the Rings*, for all its pre-modern setting, only Gimli and Éomer could be said, at moments, to rejoice in battle, the former because of the long-standing hatred between Dwarves and Orcs and the latter because Rohan is indeed a 'heroic' culture of sorts (and to that extent inferior to Gondor, with its inheritance from the Elves and from Númenor). None of the other principal antagonists of Sauron, not even Faramir or Aragorn, is interested in warfare for its own sake, or as a sphere in which to win 'honour': for Aragorn, as for Sam (and for Tolkien in 1915–16) war is a necessary evil which delays, and threatens to forestall, marital happiness; Faramir too finds a partner in Éowyn, who renounces her warrior role. Above all, the hobbits are embroiled in war against their own wishes, and fight only when immediately attacked. They are essentially 'civilian' temperaments, unsuited to combat and danger yet forced into them by circumstance: a common twentieth-century fate. They are, precisely, anti-heroes, in the pointed sense that their deeds of physical courage do not express their intrinsic characters (which are pacific and self-effacing) but are performed in spite of them. We admire them for their aversion to fighting, not their love of it. Sam is tempted by the Ring to imagine himself as 'Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age' (*RK*, 177): but he resists. Frodo's salvation is achieved by sparing Gollum's life, and by abstaining from the use of the potentially most powerful weapon of all, the Ring. By the time of his return to the Shire he has renounced the use of force: though the other hobbits do fight to expel Saruman's Men, and there is an implication that Frodo's renunciation is untenable for others, a personal privilege earned by his earlier sacrifice, his pacifism expresses a yearning to have done with the taint of bloodshed which innumerable men and women returning from war in 1918 or 1945 must have felt. The failure of the Shire-folk to honour Frodo—and the sense that this does not ultimately matter—rings far truer than the songs of praise to him performed by the minstrel on the field of Cormallen.

These preoccupations are inseparable from Tolkien's historical period: an English writer even a few years older, or a couple of generations younger, would be very unlikely to have had Tolkien's military experiences, or his perception of the virtual normality of total war. That Tolkien absorbed these ingredients into 'fantasy' rather than the social-realist novel might seem remarkable or idiosyncratic, were it not for the fact that, as Tom Shippey has recently demonstrated, several of Tolkien's contemporaries did the same: George Orwell, William Golding, Kurt Vonnegut, T. H.

White, C. S. Lewis.[18] The thrust of Shippey's argument is that the problem of 'how one resists evil without becoming it' presented itself with such hideous directness to these writers—of whom all but White were combat veterans—that they were obliged to construct new myths to articulate it: neither social realism nor the existing 'myth-kitty' (to borrow Larkin's phrase) seemed adequate. One's first response is that the concept of fantasy has to be stretched a bit to accommodate the diversity of Shippey's examples. But there are indeed some similarities of theme and approach among these writers. A contemporary political dystopia like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* seems a long way from the Arthurian makeover of *The Once and Future King*; but as a matter of fact, White's romance does contain a very Orwellian episode, in which the communications within an ant nest suggest the mind-numbing, language-perverting propaganda system of a totalitarian state. Merlyn's education of Arthur through exposure to other species, like Golding's dislocating shift from Neanderthal consciousness to *homo sapiens* consciousness half-way through *The Inheritors*, shows us a writer making sense of the configuration of human nature by imagining a perspective from outside it, as Tolkien also does.

Shippey has also pointed out that the central donnée of the plot of *The Lord of the Rings*—the comprehensively corrupting power of the Ruling Ring, so infallibly effective in the long term that even benevolent leaders such as Galadriel and Gandalf dare not possess it—implies a distinctively modern view of the psychology of political power.[19] Earlier writers had distinguished good rulers from bad, strong from weak, legitimate from illegitimate. Nero and Caligula, everyone agreed, were evil rulers, but Julius and Augustus Caesar, no less powerful, were virtuous. In Shakespeare, Macbeth and Richard III are bad kings because they are usurpers, who persist, in power, with the methods by which they gained it; Lear and Richard II are bad kings because they exert their power insufficiently or misguidedly. There is little trace of the notion that power is in itself prone to corrupt; as for truly absolute power, it was scarcely conceivable (in practice, as distinct from constitutional fiction) until relatively modern times. Lord Acton's assertion, five years before Tolkien was born, that 'absolute power corrupts absolutely' has a compelling resonance, after a century of totalitarian dictatorships ruling through systematic terror, that Acton himself can scarcely have foreseen: the disparity between the reality of these regimes and the ostensibly altruistic principles on which many were founded could hardly be better symbolised than by the Ring's power to bring forth tyrannical evil out of good intentions.

This suspicion of the corrupting effect of power might be expected to suggest to a twentieth-century mind a liberal-democratic theory, of constitutional checks and balances, individual rights, and so forth, designed to restrict the accumulation of power in one or a few hands; and I imagine

that many readers assimilate *The Lord of the Rings* to this view. They are not wholly wrong, for the work has a liberal temper: it invests high value in the joyful acceptance of diversity, in the contemptuous tearing up of unnecessary Rules, in resistance to those who 'like minding other folk's business and talking big' (*RK*, 281). And by comparison with many twentieth-century writers, from Pound on the right to Brecht and Sartre on the left, to say nothing of the massed ranks of minor intellectuals sneering at 'bourgeois' liberal humanism, Tolkien himself can be acquitted of admiration for illiberal causes—though he did, when presented with a choice between two ultimately illiberal forces in the Spanish civil war, sympathise with Franco, not as a Fascist but as the protector of the Catholic Church and clergy. Tolkien's own political attitudes have, indeed, to be understood as conditioned by, and integrated with, his religious convictions. Tolkien would almost certainly have reflected that Acton's maxim is implicit in the myth of the Fall: that created beings are always liable to abuse whatever power is given to them, and that the distinctive feature of the twentieth century is simply that the technological resources available to the abusers of political power have been unprecedentedly great. 'I am not a democrat,' he wrote, 'if only because humility and equality are spiritual principles corrupted by the attempt to mechanize and formalize them, with the result that we get not universal smallness and humility, but universal greatness and pride.'[20] On this view, only personal moral action, founded on self-effacement rather than the competitive assertion of one's own interests, can create the society of free and equal beings to which democracy aspires: and in a fallen world such a society cannot actually be attained, though fiction, with its distillation of values, can give us a glimpse of the realised ideal. It is a view not far removed from Tolstoy's; and in the final section of this chapter I will return to it, and will try to show how consistent, and how fundamental, is the integration of religious, moral, political and aesthetic values in Tolkien's thought.

II

If Tolkien was unwilling to assume the mantle of a prophet for the twentieth century, he did recognise and accept that what he had written would be applied by others to their own experiences and perceptions. In the Foreword to the revised edition of *The Lord of the Rings* (1966), he addressed himself as follows to the commentators who had read his work as an allegory on contemporary events.

> I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and have always done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. . . . I think that many confuse 'applicability' with

> 'allegory'; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author. (*FR*, 7)

The idea of *applicability* is not quite as transparent as it looks. With a very simple narrative, such as the traditional tale of the shepherd boy who cried 'wolf!', one can see how different readers might find applications of it in their own experiences. A parent might apply it to a child who repeatedly faked illness at school-time, for example. For the thought to be an application of the tale, however, it must be an application of a correct memory of the tale, not of a distorted memory of it. If a politician campaigning against the admission of foreign refugees said, 'The time has come to cry "wolf!" before we are overrun', he would have missed the point of the tale, and could not be said to be applying it. If another politician said of his opponents, 'they are like boys crying "wolf!" ', this would only be an application of the tale if there were in fact some correspondence between the pattern of his opponents' utterances and the pattern of the boy's utterances in the tale; if there were no such correspondence, he might be said to be *appropriating* rather than applying the tale, enlisting the prestige of its supposed wisdom on behalf of his own views.

With a much more complex narrative like *The Lord of the Rings*, it is harder to draw such a clear line between application and appropriation. Precise applicability of the entire narrative seems impossible, since nothing outside *The Lord of the Rings* could match every detail of it (what would be the equivalent of Will Whitfoot's transformation into a floured dumpling?),[21] or even every detail of one of its main themes or plot-lines. (A reader might, for example, find herself as she reads 'applying' the story of Éowyn to the progress of her own emotional life, but this 'application' would be unlikely to involve an exact equivalent to all such details as, say, Aragorn's departure on the Paths of the Dead, or the intervention of the Warden of the Houses of Healing in Minas Tirith. Only a reader very confused about the role of fiction in human life would then start hunting for equivalents of those missing elements in order to make the application work. The relationship in such a case between the reality and the fiction might more often, perhaps, be expressed the other way round: the reader's personal experiences are part of what enables her to respond to this element in the story.) The application, then, must at best be of some selected part of the narrative, or aspect of it, and it is difficult to say in an absolutely determinate way when precisely such selectiveness amounts to distortion, and leads to mere appropriation or enlistment.

When it comes to political applications, the search for direct equivalents is even more likely to degenerate into appropriation, based on false or partial readings. As Tolkien himself pointed out, the fact that he did not *intend* to

represent the closing phases of the Second World War in *The Lord of the Rings* could be seen from the fact that the story could not even be *applied* to it: in order to do so, it would have had to show Gondor and its allies using the Ring to defeat Mordor with the aid of Saruman, who would then forge a Ring of his own, so dividing Middle-earth between two superpowers.[22] It is of course always possible to think of oneself and one's friends or political allies as being like the good guys in a novel or romance, but the supposed resemblance cannot be pressed without an element of arbitrariness becoming apparent, quite apart from the distorting effect of one's own interest in appropriating the most favourable role. (Tolkien hints at this when Sam, discussing the tale that may be made of the hobbits' exploits, wonders whether Gollum thinks of himself as the hero or the villain.)[23] All applications to definite moral or political contexts exterior to the work itself are likely to be, at best, the selection of some reasonably suitable element of the narrative as the text for a sermon.

Nevertheless, we can distinguish differing degrees of fidelity to the original along this application/appropriation spectrum. Tolkien's fiction is not a blank page on which anything can be written: there are ideas implicit, and occasionally explicit, within it. The central conflict within *The Lord of the Rings* is not between two morally or politically undifferentiated sides, and there are, as I tried to show in my analysis in chapters 1 and 2, values embodied within that work that are inseparable from its aesthetic and emotional power. Some of the shorter works are in part satirical or allegorical; various characters in the fiction express opinions, with more or less authority. A number of recent commentators have built intellectual edifices upon these elements, though with different resources of ingenuity, boldness and architectural skill, and I will devote the rest of this section to discussing three examples.

Of these, Joseph Pearce's *Tolkien: Man and Myth* (1999)[24] is the most fluent and well-organised, and in some ways the most convincing in that it focuses on the elements that are traceable to, or at least consistent with, Tolkien's Catholicism, the importance of which in forming his imagination cannot be doubted. Pearce points up well, for example, the Christian elements implicit in some of the shorter fiction, from the Purgatorial allegory of 'Leaf by Niggle' to the mockery of sceptical secularism in the figure of Nokes in *Smith of Wootton Major*. However, Pearce's strategy of specific Catholic applications is less convincing when applied to the far more complex, and at the same time more self-sufficient, world of *The Lord of the Rings*. Some of these seem to assimilate Tolkien to an implausibly specific polemical agenda. Pearce claims, for example, that Sam's reflection, as he approaches the Tower of Cirith Ungol, that 'the one small garden of a free gardener was all his due . . . his own hands to use, not the hands of others to command' (*RK*, 177), succinctly expresses 'the Distributist *credo* that private property should be enjoyed by as

many of the population as possible, so that people could be freed from the wage slavery of Big Business or State Monopoly'[25]—Distributism being the early twentieth-century alternative to socialism espoused by the polemical Catholic writers Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton, on whom Pearce has also written. Here one can seriously question whether the text contains the materials for the application. Conceivably Tolkien would have sympathised with the Distributist theory—his writings are silent on the matter—but we need to remind ourselves that in its context in *The Return of the King* the point of Sam's reflection is to resist the megalomaniac visions induced by the Ring, which he has just been wearing: the moral point of the passage concerns the refusal of power, not the superiority of an economic system. Similarly Charles Coulombe, quoted approvingly by Pearce, says that the Shire 'expresses perfectly the economic and political ideals of the Church, as expressed by Leo XIII in *Rerum novarum*, and Pius XI in *Quadragesimo anno*. Traditional authority . . . popular representation . . . subsidiarity . . . minimal organization and conflict.'[26] Here we need to recall that the 'half republic half aristocracy of the Shire', as Tolkien called it,[27] is only one, and not necessarily the most admired, community of Middle-earth (are we sure that the Elves, for example, have private property, or popular representation?), and that its harmony is a consequence of its sheltered prosperity and of the virtue of its inhabitants.[28]

Pearce is on safer ground in suggesting that the sacrificial element in Frodo's quest is Christian in spirit. Tolkien's remark in 'On Fairy Stories' that the prototypes of 'eucatastrophe' are the incarnation and resurrection of Christ provides additional encouragement to this application.[29] Even here, though, one can have reservations about the fitness of the fictional text to the analogy suggested for it. Frodo is not the Son of God, but an originally much more insignificant person: his (and Sam's) indispensable role in saving Middle-earth is an ennoblement rather than a condescension. And it is difficult to think of Frodo as imitating Christ, since the myth of Arda does not really contain any comparable element: if Frodo is imitating anyone, it is Bilbo. As for the authorial sources of the hobbits' heroism, these may be traceable not so much in Tolkien's Catholicism as in a more secular observation he once made. 'I've always been impressed that we're here, surviving, because of the indomitable courage of quite small people against impossible odds: jungles, volcanoes, wild beasts. They struggle on—almost blindly, in a way. . . . I thought that the wisest remark in the whole book was that where Elrond says that the wheels of the world are turned by the small hands because the great are looking elsewhere, and they turn because they have to, because it's the daily job.'[30] When Pearce says, 'the parable of Frodo's burden may even lead us to a greater understanding of Christ's burden',[31] one notices that the literary text has become subservient to the

sacred one, and that the reader's assent to the latter is being tacitly assumed. Such an approach leaves us with the puzzle of Tolkien's profound appeal for the non-Catholic, and indeed for the unbeliever, who tends eventually to sense himself excluded by Pearce's analysis.

Christopher Garbowski's *Recovery and Transcendence for the Contemporary Mythmaker* (2000) lacks Pearce's unified focus, but it is an important example of the response to Tolkien outside the Anglo-American mainstream of critical commentary. (Garbowski is a Polish-Canadian living in Lublin, Poland.) The reception of Tolkien in Poland has, naturally enough, been influenced by the Christian elements in his work: essays by writers such as Tadeusz Olszański and Garbowski himself take the theology of Arda with absolute seriousness, but are more willing than Pearce to treat it as an exploratory discourse, rather than moving swiftly to resolve it into Catholic doctrine. They probe, in particular, its treatment of the nature of evil: as understandable a preoccupation, perhaps, for a post-holocaust, post-Stalinist society as for Shippey's combat veterans. Olszański's paper, in fact, gives some support to Shippey's view that a hint of a dualistic, Manichaean element can be traced in Tolkien's conception of evil: he points out that before the Creation begins in *Ainulindalë*, there exists not only God (Eru), but 'the Void . . . a "space" where objection to God, a seed of evil, could appear and develop'.[32] The Void is not nothing, since Melkor (Morgoth) is able to go into it, and it is there that his estrangement from Eru and from the other immortals begins. While evil remains negation, and God does not create evil, it is not incomprehensible that good should become evil when God countenances the existence of a state outside himself. Olszański also suggests that in an ultimately abandoned element of his mythology, the 'Second Prophecy of Mandos' (see *The Lost Road*, p. 333) Tolkien toyed with the idea of universal salvation.

In his monograph Garbowski deploys a complex and eclectic apparatus of explanation and application of Tolkien, drawing especially on the psychological theory of the concentration camp survivor Viktor Frankl. Frankl explains human motivation primarily as a quest for meaning, a response to the 'pull' of discerned values, rather than as determined by the 'push' of instinctual drives to sex or power: through this quest, human 'growth' is possible even in the most dire circumstances. Such features of Tolkien's work as his theory and practice of 'eucatastrophe', and his conception of art as a mode of 'recovery', whereby the too-familiar known world is seen afresh 'as we were meant to see it',[33] are assimilated to this ethic of growth, as is the exploratory, 'dialogic' quality Garbowski finds in Tolkien's myth-making. Though the line of Garbowski's argument is often circuitous, its effects are clear enough: without doubting Tolkien's orthodoxy, to free his vision from any strict reduction to Catholic doctrine, bringing out its general human

persuasiveness, and to offer the *evangelium* of his later work as an alternative to Adorno's post-holocaust pessimism about the possibility of art.

There is also an important political element to Garbowski's commentary. Unlike Patrick Curry, whose work I will discuss in a moment, he avoids any explicit 'application' of the conflict in *The Lord of the Rings* to the impact of Soviet communism in Eastern Europe, and focuses instead on the general characteristics of Tolkien's vision of the good social life.

> In *The Hobbit*, along with its residents, Tolkien discovered the Shire, the almost archetypal small homeland, a geographical unit that adorns the entire Middle-earth of the Third Age from the Grey Havens to Fangorn Forest and beyond. The geographical distances may be reminiscent of Europe … but the social geography is based on what the Germans call *Heimat*. . . . Large as the Kingdom of Gondor is, it actually constitutes a federation of small states rather than a uniform one. The only large state can be said to be Mordor, which is centralist to say the least. . . . Milosz writes that 'in comparison with the state, the homeland is organic, rooted in the past, always small, it warms the heart, it is as close as one's own body'. . . . Different homelands introduce genuine diversity, while the large state, whether benign or threatening imposes uniformity.[34]

A lot depends here on the validity of the claim about Gondor, which might perhaps be under suspicion of being a large nation-state. And there is evidence to support Garbowski's view. When the forces of the outlying regions troop in to Minas Tirith in *The Return of the King*, they do so under their own captains, and are markedly differentiated from one another by their dress and gear: the people of the city hail them as friends, rather than taking their conscription for granted (*RK*, 43–4). The ability of Denethor to command their allegiance perhaps owes more to feudalism than to 'subsidiarity', but it is true that Gondor is much more like the Polish-Lithuanian republic, say, than it is like the bureaucratic state of the nineteenth-century Tsars, or the Soviet Union.

A great strength of Garbowski's analysis is that (in contrast here to Pearce) he can see the limitations of the small homeland as well, and since these are also intimated in Tolkien's story, the application of the latter seems entirely appropriate.

> Not that the small homeland is without faults. A well-known example is the all too familiar division of orbis-interior/orbis-exterior, where those who are from outside the community are

> frequently the unwanted *other*, to be treated with suspicion. . . . Even within the Shire there is a mistrust of citizens from far flung parts; Breelanders consider hobbits from Hobbiton strange and vice versa. . . . Much of the conflict between elves and dwarves can be considered along this orbis-interior/orbis-exterior fault line . . .
>
> A journey develops, or at least requires, openness and brings with it the risk of change . . . The journey [in *The Lord of the Rings*] often leads from one small homeland to another. The Heimats of the *other* are the repositories of values that often challenge cherished beliefs of the traveller, and lead to an awareness unavailable from the limited perspective of home. . . . Dialogue is in fact a precondition for the survival of the free peoples who must overcome their isolation if they are to adequately deal with the danger facing them.[35]

Another commentator who has pointed out the 'multicultural' diversity of the benign peoples in *The Lord of the Rings* is Patrick Curry.[36] But Curry is best known for his combative appropriation of the 'green' elements in Tolkien's work, and the radical anti-modern agenda he constructed around them in his *Defending Middle-earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity* (1997).[37]

> There are (mainly) young people trying, as I write, to defend the remaining countryside outside Newbury, Berkshire, against yet another destructive, expensive and futile bypass. Their principal means of resistance is to put themselves, with extraordinary skill, determination and humour, up trees, underground, and literally in the way of an army of security guards, bailiffs and police, not to mention bulldozers and chainsaws. And among them, I found only one person out of dozens who hadn't just read *The Lord of the Rings* but know it, so to speak, inside out. . . . It is no coincidence, then, that an early supporter of one such bypass, running through Dartmoor, slammed his opponents as 'Middle Earth hobbits'! Nobody can tell me that Tolkien's books do not encourage such ecological activism; nor, for that matter, that he himself would not have been firmly on the side of the trees and their protectors.[38]

One should perhaps be more cautious about presuming the support of an author for specific actions in specific historical circumstances twenty years after his death, but in substance Curry is right on both his final points. Not only did Tolkien personally criticise a bypass proposal in the early 1950s, and

repeatedly complain about the impact of new roads on the landscape,[39] but in the march of the Ents on Isengard in *The Two Towers* his work dramatises the retribution of trees against their assailants. Indeed of all the sceptical responses to the modern world which are manifest in Tolkien's work, this romantic protest against the despoliation of nature is the one which has gained greatest retrospective force since his death, as well as the one which has the deepest roots in his personal life, and the one which most comprehensively informs his work. Gandalf's advocacy of 'uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till' (*RK*, 155) is at once metaphorical (Sauron's tyranny threatens to blight the freedom of speaking-peoples throughout Middle-earth) and literal (Sauron and Saruman actually pollute the soil, poison watercourses, pour smoke into the atmosphere, cut down trees, create deserts where grass once grew). It rejects the defeatism which regards such developments as irreversible, affirms the resilience of the earth (the physical aspect of that Middle-earth which is at once the unifying conception of *The Lord of the Rings* and the most general object of the reader's quickened desire), and calls on the present generation to take thought for the generations that are to come.

No doubt this aspect of Tolkien's work has biographical origins in the move of 1900 from Sarehole to Moseley, and in subsequent involuntary experiences of the contrast between urban squalor and green fields: but it is precisely characteristic of Tolkien's response to modernity that he should not directly and literally record private experience, but should move ambitiously towards conceptions which may incarnate lasting values. On this point at least, history seems to be (for the moment) on his side. Even at the end of Tolkien's life, it seemed more plausible than it does now to stigmatise his firm repugnance against the environmental damage caused by industrialism as a quietistic retreat into Edwardian nostalgia, or as politically 'reactionary' in terms of a historical model which identifies industrialisation as 'progressive'. J. R. Watson comments on the chapter 'The Scouring of the Shire' that 'our preference for the little houses with thatched roofs and bulgy walls is taken too much for granted',[40] as if some obligation of even-handedness (or modern-mindedness) required us to see the virtues of grassless fields, treeless roads, piles of refuse and stinking effluence. John Carey complains that Tolkien shows 'a childish identification of heavy industry with wickedness'.[41] I am not sure what purpose 'childish' serves except to intimidate the reader, but if the claim is that, in Tolkien's view, some forms of heavy industry were quite a good way of polluting the earth, Tolkien would no doubt plead guilty. Certainly he shows Saruman using that means to achieve that end: what other means could have been made credible? In *The Hobbit*, too, the narrator attributes to the goblins the invention of 'the ingenious devices for killing large numbers of people at once' (60). There is, however, no reason

to suppose that Tolkien deplored industry for any other reason than that it scarred and poisoned the natural world, including (through pollution, and by mechanising labour) the natural life of human beings: in 'Leaf by Niggle', indeed, Niggle actually enters his paradise by a 'pleasant little local train'. ('The sleepers gave off a delicious smell of fresh tar in the warm sunshine.')[42] Needless to say, both Watson (implicitly) and Carey (explicitly) draw the inference that Tolkien was prejudiced against the industrial working class, but it is hardly a logical inference from the condemnation of an environmental affliction to the condemnation of its most immediate victims, and neither critic brings forward any evidence to support it.

The worldwide decline of heavy industry in the last quarter of the twentieth century, and the contemporaneous rise of 'green' movements, have done much to counteract the prestige of modernity once enjoyed, if I can put it this way, by the Moseleys at the expense of the Sareholes. A world in which 'there was less noise and more green' (*The Hobbit*, 13) has become a live contemporary aspiration which it is no longer fashionable to sneer at. (One explanation of Tolkien's rapidly burgeoning popularity in the 1960s may be his appeal to 'green' values at a time when these were somewhat disdained: literary fashions, especially fashions which bewilder the critics, may paradoxically be grounded in what is unfashionable and therefore repressed.)

Where Curry's own anti-modern polemic can be mapped fairly closely on to statements by Tolkien himself, it is generally plausible both in its own terms, and as an 'application'. For example, Curry rightly distinguishes between the purely scientific impulse to understand the world for its own sake (an impulse which Tolkien grouped with the artistic and the aesthetic, as the three principal motives of the Elves), and the impulse to use the findings of science to coerce the world in the service of one's own power, through technological warfare, reckless consumption of natural resources, misuse of advanced methods of communication, or 'brainwashing'. As Curry says, Tolkien sometimes equates the latter with 'magic', a term which Galadriel notes the hobbits apply to 'the deceits of the Enemy' (*FR*, 377). In contrast, Tolkien gives the name 'enchantment' to the 'Art, delivered from many of its human limitations' achieved by the Elves.[43] Many of the evils of the modern world, for both Tolkien and Curry, arise from the rampant power of coercive technological 'magic'. The problem is that Curry now embarks on a series of improvisations around the idea of *enchantment* which lose touch with Tolkien's fundamental point: that enchantment belongs to the secondary world of imagination, in which our deepest desires can be realised; the attempt to actualise desires in the primary world is precisely what leads to coercion.[44] Perhaps, as 'Leaf by Niggle', the Epilogue to 'On Fairy Stories' and—as we shall see—the creation myth of *The Silmarillion* imply, in Eternity the enchantment of art can become actual, but this possibility only makes sense if one retains a sense of the categorical

difference between the two worlds, the actual world which is the object of pure science, and the imaginative world of art. The post-modernist dictum that 'we can be sure of nothing but story' (which Curry quotes from Brian Attebery with apparent approval) fogs this distinction, and I can find nothing in Tolkien's writing which suggests that he would have accepted it.[45] With Curry one is left with an uncomfortable sense that 'enchantment' denotes a practical mode of life, or social being, proposed for *this* world, in which case it needs a lot of explaining.

Invoking Tolkien's idea of 'recovery', Curry calls for the 'rekindling of the wonder of the natural world' and 'a resacralization of nature'. This sounds like an attractive idea, but one asks whether—setting aside the power of art to defamiliarise one's perceptions—we can have that sense of rekindled wonder without accepting some definite religious view which justifies us in seeing natural things as more than material objects. Curry, however, wants 'collective spirituality', rather than a new (or old) religion. Attacking Cartesian science, rationality and 'humanist utilitarianism' on the basis of their worst perversions, he laments 'the modern loss of myth-consciousness', but does not explain what a revival of myth-consciousness would be like (over and above the appreciative reading of Tolkien).[46] In short, Curry is sweeping in his critique of 'modernity', but less successful in bringing into focus his ambitious alternative. Tolkien's critique is more cautious in what it rejects—as an orthodox Catholic, Tolkien is never less than respectful towards rationality, or science as a mode of knowledge, whatever its abuses—and much more cautious in what it proposes.

III

Tolkien did, nevertheless, give voice to some surprising opinions for a man widely regarded as 'conservative' in temperament. On 29 November 1943, he wrote to his 18-year-old son Christopher, then serving in the Royal Air Force,

> My political opinions lean more and more to Anarchy (philosophically understood, meaning abolition of control not whiskered men with bombs) or to 'unconstitutional' Monarchy. I would arrest anybody who uses the word State (in any sense other than the inanimate realm of England and its inhabitants, a thing that has neither power, rights nor mind); and after a chance of recantation, execute them if they remained obstinate! If we could get back to personal names, it would do a lot of good. . . . If people were in the habit of referring to 'King George's council, Winston and his gang', it would go a long way to clearing thought . . .

> The most improper job of any man, even saints (who at any rate were at least unwilling to take it on) is bossing other men. Not one in a million is fit for it, and least of all those who seek the opportunity. . . . The medievals were only too right in taking *nolo episcopari* as the best reason a man could give to others for making him a bishop. Give me a king whose chief interest is in stamps, railways, or race-horses; and who has the power to sack his Vizier (or whatever you care to call him) if he does not like the cut of his trousers. And so on down the line. But, of course the fatal weakness of all that—after all only the fatal weakness of all good natural things in a bad corrupt unnatural world—is that it works and has worked only when all the world is messing along in the same good old inefficient human way. The quarrelsome, conceited Greeks managed to pull it off against Xerxes; but the abominable chemists and engineers have put such a power into Xerxes' hands . . . that decent folk don't seem to have a chance. We are all trying to do the Alexander-touch—and, as history teaches, that orientalised Alexander and all his generals. . . . The Greece that was worth saving from Persia perished anyway, or became a sort of Vichy-Hellas. . . . There is only one bright spot, and that is the growing habit of disgruntled men of dynamiting factories and power-stations; I hope that, encouraged now as 'patriotism', may remain a habit. But it won't do any good, if it is not universal.[47]

This is as much an outburst as an argument, with more than a trace of mischievous overstatement (at least one hopes that Tolkien did not literally wish to execute anybody); and we have to remember that it is a private letter, written probably in haste at the end of a long day, and that Tolkien is not offering a considered summary of his political ideas. Nevertheless, the letter seemed to me, when I first came upon it, to make explicit certain attitudes to power that are also embodied in Tolkien's fiction. The sympathy towards 'Anarchy' it expresses corroborates a view I've already hinted at, that Tolkien belonged to a type of Christian quasi-anarchist who rejects the claims of secular politics, even 'liberal' or 'democratic' politics, because he believes that political institutions are intrinsically coercive, and that only uncoerced obedience to the will of God by individuals can produce a good society. The best-known, greatest and most persuasive example is Tolstoy, but I think there are traces of this attitude in partially secularised form in Dickens and perhaps other English writers such as D. H. Lawrence.

In Tolkien's fiction this 'anarchist' suspicion of political processes and institutions manifests itself in a number of hostile portrayals of smooth-

talking demagogues and political operators (Wormtongue and Saruman in *The Lord of the Rings*, the Master of Lake-town in *The Hobbit*, Sauron in 'Akallabêth' are examples); and more significantly in the way his benign imaginary societies are conceived. The Hobbits' rustic homeland, 'The Shire', for example, has virtually no government, apart from an elected mayor whose main duty is to preside at banquets; the rudimentary police force is 'more concerned with the strayings of beasts than of people' (*FR* 18). However, this Arcadian society is possible because hobbits are better (uncoerced) than most of us: if we are not told in so many words that hobbits freely obey the will of God, we are told that they 'attributed to the king of old all their essential laws, and usually they kept the laws of free will, because they were the Rules (they said), both ancient and just' (*FR* 18). Other benign societies of Middle-earth tend to be what Tolkien calls 'unconstitutional monarchies', that is systems of direct personal rule, but their command structures seem to be largely confined to military purposes, and to depend in any case on personal loyalties and on oath-keeping rather than on any formalised apparatus of government. Malign societies—Mordor, Saruman's rule at Isengard, and the Shire under occupation by Saruman's agents—are, of course, brutally and comprehensively coercive in intent: their objective is a state whose subjects cannot make any free choices at all.

According to Christopher Tolkien,[48] Tolkien several times expressly said that one of the underlying themes of *The Lord of the Rings* was 'the machine', a term which Tolkien used in an extended sense to signify the attempt to actualise our desires by coercing the world, and other wills, into satisfying them. In this sense the technological 'machines', alluded to in Tolkien's advocacy of the universal dynamiting of factories and power-stations, are simply a special case of such coercion. Christopher Tolkien's formulation enables us to see the harmony between the 'anarchism' of Tolkien and his more widely recognised 'green' sympathies, his repugnance at the damage inflicted on the earth by human attempts to transform it to serve the actualisation of impious human desires, such as the desire to travel at very high speed or to have limitless supplies of luxury goods or to destroy one's enemies in large numbers.

The use of both literal and extended senses of 'machine' here, though confined in Tolkien's case to letters and private conversation, reminds us of Matthew Arnold's use of 'machinery' to disparage not only his Victorian contemporaries' over-valuation of technological progress but their faith in instrumental political devices such as the extension of the franchise. While Arnold opposes 'machinery' to 'culture', in Tolkien there is a more emphatic sense that the impropriety of the attempt to enforce one's will by means of the machine lies in the fact that it refuses submission to limitations that Nature (or the will of the Creator) imposes on human fulfilment. The machine is

contrasted with the other characteristic product of human labour: art, which gives expression to those desires which transcend the possibilities of human life, but holds back from the hubris of seeking to realise them; God, it is implied, retains, and might exercise, the power to realise human, or mortal, imagination.

As Christopher Tolkien again says, the supreme 'machine', in the extended sense, in Tolkien's fiction is the Ring of Power itself: 'it is the ultimate machine, because it is made for coercion'. Not only does it empower its owner to coerce others, it slowly—but the more quickly the more it is used—seduces its owner into the nihilistic pride and malice which is the defining quality of its maker. It cannot therefore be used against Sauron, since to be used with the necessary force to overthrow Sauron would suffice to turn its owner into something just as bad as Sauron himself, or worse. The Ring therefore embodies the insight Tolkien expresses in his letter through the example of Alexander: in assailing the Persian tyranny to defend Greece, Alexander, according to Tolkien, degenerated into a tyrant himself, and contributed in the process to the cultural and political degeneration of Greece (much as, Tolkien believed, the coercive triumphs of British and American imperialism, to say nothing of Soviet imperialism, would deteriorate the world in the process of overthrowing the Nazi tyranny). Tolkien's implied position here is not far from that of Tolstoy, who rejected violence even when used in defence of innocents: for Tolstoy a good person would cease to be good in and by acting violently, and only the example of submission to the (pacific) will of God could lead the world towards salvation.[49] Tolkien in fact drew back from Tolstoy's conclusion. He did not reject war against Germany, and in *The Lord of the Rings* he gives an anti-pacifist speech to an authoritative character ('It needs but one foe to breed a war, not two . . . and those who have not swords can still die on them' says the warrior princess Éowyn (*RK*, 236), though her interlocutor is allowed to sigh and shake his head.)[50] Tolkien recognised that a very heavy price would be paid for failing to organise efficient political and military power against aggression, but also recognised the moral price of using such power, and came close to regarding both outcomes as equally lamentable. *The Lord of the Rings* dramatises this tragic dilemma, but whereas in the real world Tolkien despaired of a solution, in the fiction he allows a (partially) happy ending: the benign forces use some violence in self-defence, but hold back from the ultimate coercive act of wielding the Ring, and indeed achieve their triumph by renouncing and destroying it.

In the first edition of this book in 1992 I treated what I called Tolkien's 'theological anarchism' somewhat apologetically and marginally, as if it would be better cut away, but I now believe that it is essentially related to

Tolkien's overall ethical vision, and that that vision is a compelling one. Explaining it will also, perhaps surprisingly, help to resolve another puzzle which has troubled a number of Tolkien's readers: what was Tolkien doing, as a believing and practising Christian, in writing a version of the myth of the creation of the world which diverges in some respects from that of Christianity?

In the previous chapter I made the general point that, since around the eighteenth century, Christian writers have been increasingly unable to assume a readership ready to take for granted explicitly Christian doctrines or myths. Tolkien aims to achieve an expression as a literary artist which is *compatible* with Christian doctrines, but which can speak persuasively to readers without actually invoking those doctrines. He certainly believed that if the deliverances of his imagination had value it would be derived from their underlying 'truth', even if readers whose responses showed that they recognised that truth would not necessarily assent to a Christian formulation of it. 'The LOR is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work' (he wrote to Robert Murray, S. J. in 1953); 'unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have cut out practically all references to anything like "religion," to cults and practices, in the imaginary world. The religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism.'[51]

In *The Lord of the Rings*, God is mentioned a couple of times in the Appendices to the main narrative (as 'the One'), but the firmly terrestrial perspective of that work, set in a pre-Christian era, makes it relatively easy for Tolkien to avoid contact or direct comparison with the Judaeo-Christian myths and scriptures. In other writings, however, he aims to present an account of 'the beginning of days'—indeed of the origins of the world itself—and cannot avoid writing, for the Elves who are his main protagonists in these texts, an equivalent of the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis. This is 'Ainulindalë' or 'The Music of the Ainur', which we will revisit and consider in more detail in a moment.

The Creation and maintenance of the World by God can be conceptualised in at least two ways: as an exercise of power, or as a creative process. (It is, of course, both, but its rhetorical and imaginative presentation can emphasise one or the other aspect.) Before looking at *Ainulindalë*, I want to set up for purposes of comparison another text in which the creation and maintenance of the world are firmly conceptualised as an exercise of power. This is chapter XXXI of Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651).

Hobbes, one can safely say, was not an anarchist. In *Leviathan* he argues that human beings in civil society are obliged to obey the actually existing Sovereign authority, because they may be supposed to have made a pact or contract with one another to surrender their individual rights in favour of that authority. (Hobbes does not, of course, literally claim that

such a pact has historically been made in his own or any other society, but he believes that given the conditions of human existence on earth, it would be rational for human beings to have made it.) For Hobbes, the state of nature, that is, human existence without an acknowledged sovereign power, would be incomparably worse than the rule of even the worst sovereign: it would be a condition of perpetual war by every man against the lives and property of every other.

Like many political philosophers, Hobbes uses the concept of a natural Right in order to give a moral, and ultimately religious, foundation to his theory of just government. (By a natural right we mean a right that is not conferred by any human law, but is possessed by its owner simply by virtue of his or her natural being.) Hobbes's Sovereign is shown to have, and retain, the *right* to govern, and where necessary to punish or otherwise coerce his subjects; while the subjects themselves, according to Hobbes' theory, originally *had* natural rights, which they all surrendered when they contracted among themselves to obey the Sovereign.

What is the ontology of these natural rights? Where do they come from? Lesser philosophers than Hobbes prefer not to answer this question. Hobbes's answer is a very clear and rather chilling one, and it directly connects the human right to power with the creation and maintenance of the world conceived as acts of power. He begins by rejecting the idea that God's rights over his creatures are grounded upon their debt of gratitude to him.

> The Right of Nature, whereby God reigneth over men, and punisheth those that break his Lawes, is to be derived, not from his Creating them as if he required obedience, as of Gratitude for his benefits; but from his *Irresistible Power*. . . . Seeing all men by Nature had Right to All Things, they had Right every one to reigne over all the rest. But because this Right could not be obtained by force, it concerned the safety of every one, laying by that Right, to set up men (with Soveraign Authority) by common consent, to rule and defend them: whereas if there had been any man of Power Irresistible; there had been no reason, why he should not by that Power have ruled, and defended both himselfe, and them, according to his own discretion. To those therefore whose Power is irresistible, the dominion of all men adhaereth naturally by their excellence of Power; and consequently it is from that Power, that the Kingdome over men, and the Right of Afflicting men at his pleasure, belongeth Naturally to God Almighty; not as Creator, and Gracious; but as Omnipotent . . .
>
> This question, *Why Evill men often Prosper, and Good men suffer Adversity*, has been much disputed . . . *Job*, how earnestly does

> he expostulate with God, for the many Afflictions he suffered, notwithstanding his Righteousnesse? This question in the case of *Job*, is decided by God himselfe, not by arguments derived from *Job*'s Sinne, but his own Power. For whereas the friends of *Job* drew their arguments from his Affliction to his Sinne, and he defended himselfe by the conscience of his Innocence, God himselfe taketh up the matter, and having justified the Affliction by arguments drawn from his own Power, such as this, *Where wast thou when I layd the foundations of the earth*, and the like, both approved *Job*'s Innocence, and reproved the Erroneous doctrine of his friends. Conformable to this doctrine is the sentence of our Saviour, concerning the man that was born Blind, in these words, *Neither hath this man sinned, nor his fathers; but that the works of God might be made manifest in him*. And though it be said, *That Death entred into the world by sinne*, (by which is meant that if Adam had never sinned, he had never dyed, that is, never suffered any separation of his soule from his body,) it follows not thence, that God could not justly have afflicted him, though he had not Sinned, as well as he afflicteth other living creatures, that cannot sinne.[52]

In brief, Hobbes is saying that natural right simply is power, or rather power rationally understood. God has the right to afflict us, however innocent we are, because he has the power to do so. God could justly have afflicted Adam, even if Adam had not sinned. Equally, every human being has (in the state of nature) the natural right to afflict anyone else to the full extent of his or her power. (And Hobbes might have added that the spider has the right to afflict the fly, the lion the lamb, and so on.) But because this world in which everyone has a right to afflict everyone else is a nightmare, it is rational for us to establish civil society, in which almost all of us lay down this right and only one person or agency retains it.

Whether Hobbes's analysis is good theology or good politics is unimportant for our present purposes. The relevant point is that the universe it presents to us is a deeply unattractive one to most present-day sensibilities: it is a universe in which moral value is not (as we generally like to think) something which questions and limits power, but is itself ultimately derived from, or at least closely implicated with, power. And the God who says to the unfortunate Job *Where wast thou when I layd the foundations of the earth*? is the Creator God conceptualised merely as irresistible power (so far as Hobbes's use of the quotation is concerned).

One difference between presenting the Creation as power and presenting it as creativity is that the former emphasises the dependence of the thing or

person created, and the latter its independence. (Again, it is necessarily both, since any created thing or person is both initially dependent and ultimately at least to an extent independent, but the relations between creator and creature can be presented with different kinds of emphasis.) If you conceptualise the Creation as power, and if your political vocabulary is based on rights derived from Nature, that is from God, you move easily with Hobbes to the vindication of a coercive politics. 'To those therefore whose Power is irresistible, the dominion of all men adhaereth naturally by their excellence of Power.'[53] It is true that Hobbes strongly upholds such traditional non-coercive virtues as justice, gratitude, mercy, modesty and equity, since these are conducive to 'peaceable, sociable and comfortable living', and any action which so tends is *ipso facto* virtuous.[54] But most conducive of all to peace, and so pre-eminently virtuous according to the logic of Hobbes's argument, is the surrender of one's rights in favour of the Sovereign's, and an obedience to him which is qualified by little more than the right of self-preservation *in extremis*.[55]

I would like to be able to show that Tolkien read and criticised Hobbes, but unfortunately I know of no evidence that he did. However, I think we have seen enough of Tolkien's political views to prepare us to recognise the legitimacy of the contrast I am now about to draw. In Hobbes, a vindication of the authoritarian state is derived, by logical steps, from a conception of God as original Power: the fundamental currency of political legitimacy is the Right, and the fundamental Right is the Right to use one's power. The Sovereign must be obeyed because he is the only human being who remains in possession of that Right once civil society has been established. In Tolkien, a deep suspicion of the state, a near-anarchist attitude towards political power, is connected to a conception of God not as original Power but as original Artist: an essential feature of an artist, on Tolkien's conception, being the renunciation of power over one's creatures, the delegation of power to others. In *Ainulindalë* he preserves the essential features of an Augustinian Christianity, while pulling the basic myth of creation firmly towards the 'creative' pole. Moral value will be seen to have its origin, or at least prototype, in the renunciation of power. And in certain later episodes of the mythical and legendary narrative set out in *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien follows through with impressive consistency his prioritisation of creativity over power.

'The Music of the Ainur' was one of the earliest components of Tolkien's mythical narrative to achieve a more or less stable form, around 1920: its foundational role for the subsequent narratives is indisputable.[56] In the published *Silmarillion*, *Ainulindalë* begins with God (Eru Ilúvatar) creating the Ainur, the 'offspring of his thought', and causing them to sing before him.

> For a long while they sang only each alone, or but few together, while the rest hearkened; for each comprehended only that part of the mind of Ilúvatar from which he came, and in the understanding of their brethren they grew but slowly. Yet ever as they listened they came to deeper understanding, and increased in unison and harmony. (*S*, 15)

At length Eru declares a 'mighty theme' to the Ainur, and calls upon them to create a Great Music around it. In a passage reminiscent of the Psalms, this is magnificently evoked, until

> it came into the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar. . . . He had gone alone often into the void places seeking the Imperishable Flame; for the desire grew hot within him to bring into Being things of his own, and it seemed to him that Ilúvatar took no thought for the Void, and he was impatient of its emptiness. Yet he found not the Fire, for it is with Ilúvatar. But being alone he had begun to conceive thoughts of his own unlike those of his brethren. (16)

Melkor's discords disrupt the Music, which Ilúvatar restores to euphony with two additional themes. Finally, after silencing the Music with one tremendous chord, Ilúvatar takes the Ainur out into the Void, and shows them their Music in visible form, as a spherical world. It begins to unfold its history; and the Ainur see, arising from the third theme of Ilúvatar, Elves and Men, the 'Children of Ilúvatar', entering the World which their own Music has formed. Perceiving the joy of the Ainur at this vision, Ilúvatar says 'Let these things Be!' (20), the World comes into existence, and many of the Ainur, including Melkor, descend into it to fulfil their part in the realisation of its history.

The structural resemblances here to the Christian myth are already clear enough: Eru Ilúvatar is God, the Ainur are like angels, and Melkor is clearly shaping up for the role of fallen angel, Satan or Lucifer. The basic Augustinian apparatus in which nothing is created evil, but evil arises from the free will of created beings, is in place. But the differences are equally striking.

Firstly, in this myth the Creation of the World is carried out partly through intermediaries. The world is not (directly) God's music, but the music of his creatures, the Ainur, composed by them, though based upon the themes He propounds and given being—that is, translated from imaginative conception into historical reality—by Him. And the Ainur are not simply

tools or extensions of God's power, as puppets or zombies or machines would be: as independent minds, they have to learn gradually what to do and how to collaborate (hence the emphasis on the slow growth in understanding of their brethren). Though each of them is invested with native powers by Ilúvatar, their music is not a product of the aggregate of those powers, but of the synthesis of their powers which they achieve. Their function is therefore deliberately made to resemble human creativity, with its requirements of learning and discipline and intuition as well as direct divine 'inspiration', and its necessarily collective and traditional aspects. They are in fact 'sub-creators', to use Tolkien's own term for human artists.

One consequence of the use of intermediaries is that highly specific features of the world are conceived as the outcome of both intentional and unintentional collaboration among sub-creators.

> And Ilúvatar spoke to Ulmo, and said: 'Seest thou not how here in this little realm in the Deeps of Time Melkor hath made war upon thy province? He hath bethought him of bitter cold immoderate, and yet hath not destroyed the beauty of thy fountains, nor thy clear pools. Behold the snow, and the cunning work of frost! Melkor hath devised heats and fire without restraint, and hath not dried up thy desire nor utterly quelled the music of the sea. Behold rather the height and glory of the clouds, and the everchanging mists; and listen to the fall of rain upon the Earth! And in these clouds thou art drawn nearer to Manwë, thy friend, whom thou lovest.' (19)

The distinctive feature of Tolkien's myth here is that, from the point of view of Ulmo and Manwë, the first snowflake is at once a product of their own actions and a delightful surprise, and this is a deeply attractive picture of creation—more attractive, I think, than the production of the snowflake by God's immediate *fiat* would be.

Secondly, the media of creation, or the metaphors for Creation, are themselves artistic. The process begins as music, is converted into a vision (and initially it is an imaginative vision) of the world 'globed amid the void'—one imagines something like the outer panels of Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*—and it finally realises itself as a narrative. The Ainur are called upon to enter into the world, and to fulfil, with others, the unfolding history that is their 'minstrelsy'. Later there is a certain amount of forceful engineering of the physical universe (see the passage from the end of *Ainulindalë* quoted in chapter 3), but this is delegated to the Ainur rather than carried out by Ilúvatar. As readers of *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* will know, Eru takes a back seat from this point onwards: if he retains overall narrative

direction—and there are a few very elusive and delicate hints to this effect—his creatures do not perceive it, and independently act out the history as free agents, God intervening directly only on extremely rare occasions. This is like a consummation of the fiction-writer's ideal: the author maintains overall supervision, but enjoys a sense of delighted discovery as characters act for themselves.

Thirdly, we should note the role played by the Imperishable Flame or 'secret Fire' in giving reality to what was previously merely art. Here, if you like, God's supreme power is manifest—no one else can give Being to the imagined. But this function is not only separated out from the imaginative work, but placed chronologically later. The artistic creativity comes first: the making real comes later.

Fourthly, it is worth remarking that even Melkor's rebellion is initially creative in nature ('desire grew hot within him to bring into being creatures of his own . . . it seemed to him that Ilúvatar took no thought for the Void, and he was impatient of its emptiness'). Arguably, indeed, this has to be the case given the artistic nature of the angelic culture Ilúvatar has created. Melkor cannot 'make war' against God—for how can he know that there is such a thing as war? Milton's Satan can do so, and can speak in metaphors of warfare, because Milton's heaven is militarised. We notice too that in Tolkien's version Melkor's rebellion is as much a rebellion against the harmony and unison of his peers as against Ilúvatar directly. Milton's Satan can plausibly conceive God as a tyrant; Melkor cannot.

The spectacle of Melkor as frustrated genius points us to an important qualification of the simple polarity 'Power Bad, Creativity Good'. Melkor begins as an impatient creative spirit; as the myth proceeds, his activity becomes progressively more destructive, because it has been tainted from the beginning with pride of power and self-glorification: his desire to create other beings for his glory rather than for delight in their independent life degenerates into the desire for servants of his own will, and finally into hatred of all other wills and all products of others' creativity.

This theme of the temptations of creativity is sustained later in the narrative through such figures as Fëanor, who becomes enamoured of the Silmarils he has created, and leads his entire people into an unwinnable war when they are stolen from him by Melkor. Indeed both the Elves, who are superhuman artists, and the Dwarves, who are superhuman craftsmen, are characterised in the tragic narratives of *The Silmarillion* by their inability to let go of the products of their skill: this is, if you like, their distinctive way of sinning. The crucial distinction between good and bad attitudes to creativity is spelt out in a particularly moving episode in *The Silmarillion* which seems designed to stand as a benevolent counterpart to Melkor's rebellion. The Ainu Aulë, whose special talent is for working with the

mineral world, secretly fashions the Seven Fathers of the Dwarves in a hall under the mountains. Ilúvatar reproves his blasphemy, pointing out that these creatures lack independent life, and only move when Aulë thinks to move them: they are machines, wholly subservient to his will. (Only God can create new living beings.) Aulë replies that 'I did not desire such lordship. I desired things other than I am, to love and to teach them' (43); and, weeping, he takes up a hammer to destroy them. But the Dwarves flinch from the hammer, and beg for mercy. The Dwarves' actions show, of course, that Ilúvatar has conferred independent volition upon them, and this is the consummation of Aulë's desire. In contrast, when at the end of *The Lord of the Rings* Sauron is overthrown, the dependence of his creatures, and the reduction of his servants to 'machines', is, as we have seen, vividly displayed:

> His armies halted, and his captains, suddenly steerless, bereft of will, wavered and despaired … the creatures of Sauron, orc or troll or beast spell-enslaved, ran hither and thither mindless; and some slew themselves, or cast themselves in pits, or fled wailing back to hide in holes and dark lightless places far from hope. (*RK*, 223, 227)

To summarise, then, we have a God who acts through the direct exercise of power to the absolutely minimum possible extent, who creates a universe of independent beings for freedom not for domination, and expects them in turn to sub-create in the same spirit. Those who do so may have reality conferred on what they imagine; conversely those who seek power over their creations (or others' creations), who treat created things and persons as 'machines' in the extended sense, are themselves diminished.

Tolkien's sympathy for 'Anarchy, meaning abolition of control' is therefore rooted in his moral conception of the universe itself. Contrary to Hobbes's view, the natural right to power is precisely what we do not have, and if God has it, his natural inclination is to forgo it as far as a benign Creator can. There is a text—the discursive poem 'Mythopoeia'—in which Tolkien seriously uses the concept of a God-derived right, and the relevant lines run as follows:

> Though all the crannies of the world we filled
> with elves and goblins, though we dared to build
> gods and their houses out of dark and light,
> and sowed the seed of dragons, 'twas our right
> (used or misused). The right has not decayed.
> We make still by the law in which we're made.[57]

For Tolkien the fundamental derived human right is the right to create. The idea, with its romantic exaltation of the creative artist, its implied rejection of the classical notion of art as imitation, has its immediate roots in Coleridge, whose celebrated but cumbrous jargon of Fancy and Imagination Tolkien makes a bold attempt to improve upon in 'On Fairy Stories'.[58] But Tolkien saw perhaps more clearly than Coleridge that creative power was as capable of corrupting its owner as any other gift. His view of artistic 'sub-creation', both as a self-conscious artist himself and as a depictor of artists in his work, is at once a continuation of the romantic tradition and a critique of it.

What difference does all this make to our understanding, or evaluation, of Tolkien?

Firstly, and speaking for myself, I now view the 'anarchist' elements more sympathetically than in my earlier work on Tolkien. I still regret Tolkien's expressed indifference to what I called in 1992 'the necessity of those unaesthetic political structures which, however imperfectly, curtail the concentration of power', but I can see that his anti-political stance, like Tolstoy's, rests on a considered and consistent metaphysic, and is more than just the indulgence of a pious wish that everyone would act rightly without any need of politics.

Secondly and conversely, I feel better placed to explain to the sceptical why 'The Music of the Ainur' is more than a mere pastiche, an exercise in 'playing at the Old Testament'. I hope to have shown that the metaphorical structure it employs is neither arbitrary nor merely ornamental, but motivated by an expressive purpose of considerable seriousness.

Finally, I believe the analysis harmonises closely with Tolkien's best-known statement of what he was doing in his fiction. If I am right, his rejection of the author's 'purposed domination' over the responses of the reader is much more than an acceptance of the modernist truism that a literary text, once published, becomes an item of 'public property' which anyone can interpret or misinterpret; rather, it is an intentional adoption of the creative ethic of Ilúvatar himself, and is in absolute harmony with the moral and political values which pervade Tolkien's work.

Notes

1. An example is John Carey, in his contribution to *J. R. R. Tolkien; An Audio Portrait*, presented by Brian Sibley, BBC Worldwide Ltd 2001.

2. '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics', *The Monsters and the Critics*, p. 15.

3. C. Wilson, *The Strength to Dream* (Gollancz, 1962), p. 150n. Dodsworth claims that *The Lord of the Rings* is 'a shamefully self-glorifying account of how little England defeated the ogre Hitler' (in P. Rogers (ed.), *An Outline of English Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 405.)

4. 'The Hobbit Man' (interview with Philip Norman), *Sunday Times Magazine*, January 15, 1967, p. 36.

5. *Letters*, p. 115.

6. 'Notes on W. H. Auden's review of *The Return of the King*', *Letters*, pp. 242–3.

7. J. R.Watson, 'The Hobbits and the Critics', *Critical Quarterly*, XIII, 3 (1971), p. 258.

8. See chapter 2, p. 82 above.

9. N. Otty, 'The Structuralist's Guide to Middle-earth', in R. Giddings (ed.), *This Far Land* (Vision Press, 1983), pp. 166, 172.

10. *J.R.R. Tolkien: An Audio Portrait*, presented by Brian Sibley, BBC Worldwide Ltd 2001.

11. BBC's *Newsnight Review*, 14 December 2001.

12. John Ruskin, 'Pre-Raphaelitism', *The Complete Works of John Ruskin* (Bryan, Taylor & Co., 1894), XV, p. 237.

13. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), tr. J. Strachey (W.W. Norton Co, 1962); Marx 'Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*' (1844 ms) in L. Colletti (ed.), *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, trans. by R. Livingstone and G. Benton (Penguin, 1975), pp. 277–8.

14. E. Fischer, *How to Read Karl Marx* (Monthly Review Press, 1996), p. 54.

15. Or so at least I interpret Marx's view. See David McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx* (Macmillan Press, 1971), pp. 138–50 for some relevant passages.

16. Or from elements which could not change without raising the question whether 'human' remained the appropriate name for the altered species.

17. '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics', *The Monsters and the Critics*, pp. 25–6.

18. See Shippey, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, pp. vii–viii, xxx–xxxi, 115–28, 157–9.

19. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, pp. 104–5.

20. Quoted in Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien*, p. 128.

21. See *FR*, p. 168.

22. See *FR*, pp. 6–7.

23. See *TT*, p. 322.

24. J. Pearce, *Tolkien: Man and Myth* (HarperCollins, 1997).

25. p. 161.

26. Charles A. Coulombe, unpublished ms., quoted in Pearce, p. 160. Coulombe's essay subsequently appeared as '*The Lord of the Rings*: A Catholic View', in J. Pearce (ed.), *Tolkien: A Celebration* (Ignatius Press, 2001).

27. *Letters*, p. 241.

28. See pp. 40–1 above.

29. 'On Fairy Stories', *Tree and Leaf*, p. 65.

30. *J. R. R. Tolkien: An Audio Portrait*, presented by Brian Sibley, BBC Worldwide Ltd 2001.

31. p. 112.

32. T. A. Olszański, translated by Agnieszka Sylwanowicz, 'Evil and the Evil One in Tolkien's Theology', in P. Reynolds and G. GoodKnight (eds.), *Proceedings of the J. R. R. Tolkien Centenary Conference* (Mythopoeic Press, 1995), pp. 298–300; C. Garbowski, 'Eucatastrophe and the *Gift of Ilúvatar* in Middle-earth', *Mallorn* XXXV (1997), pp. 21–7.

33. See 'On Fairy Stories', *Tree and Leaf*, pp. 52–4, 62.

34. C. Garbowski, *Recovery and Transcendence for the Contemporary Mythmaker* (Marie Curie-Sklodowska University Press, Lublin, 2000), pp. 180–1.

35. pp. 182–3.

36. P. Curry, 'Tolkien and His Critics; A Critique', in Thomas Honegger (ed.), *Root and Branch: Approaches Towards Understanding Tolkien* (Walking Tree Publishers, 1999), pp. 94–5. Aryk Nusbacher, whose contributions I have found the most valuable part of the Cromwell Productions/EagleVision videotape *J. R. R. Tolkien: Master of the Rings* (2001), argues persuasively that the tensions among the benign peoples reflect Tolkien's awareness of the frictions of 'coalition politics' in the 1930s and 1940s, and the need to overcome them.

37. P. Curry, *Defending Middle-earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity* (HarperCollins, 1997).

38. p. 54.

39. See *Letters*, p. 235, and note to letter 181, p. 446; and Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*, p. 238.

40. 'The Hobbits and the Critics', p. 258.

41. 'Hobbit-forming', *The Listener*, 12 May 1977, p. 631.

42. 'Leaf by Niggle', *Tree and Leaf*, pp. 87–8.

43. Curry, p. 73; *Letters*, p. 236; 'On Fairy Stories', *Tree and Leaf*, p. 49.

44. I am indebted here to Christopher Tolkien's exposition of his father's ideas in *J. R. R. T: A Film Portrait of J. R. R. Tolkien* (videotape), The Tolkien Partnership /Visual Corporation Ltd, 1992.

45. Curry, p. 142, quoting Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (University of Indiana Press, 1992).

46. Curry, pp. 80, 138, 154, 161.

47. *Letters*, pp. 63–4.

48. In *J. R. R. T.: A Film Portrait of J. R. R. Tolkien*.

49. See L. Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, trans. by Constance Garnett (University of Nebraska Press, 1983), *passim*. I am indebted here to T. Hopton, 'Tolstoy, God and Anarchism', *Anarchist Studies* 8 (2000), pp. 27–52.

50. Cf. *Letters*, p. 243.

51. *Letters*, p. 172.

52. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part II, chapter 31, 'Of the Kingdome of God by Nature', ed. R. Tuck (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 246–8.

53. This sentence seems to me to undermine the less illiberal reading of the 'Job' passage offered by Alan Ryan, 'Hobbes and Individualism', in G. A. J. Rogers and A. Ryan (eds.) *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes* (Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 94–7. According to Ryan, Hobbes is concerned here to emphasise the *difference* between the right of God and that of the earthly sovereign, not the analogy between them: God, on this view, can do what he likes with us because he is 'the author of our being and therefore without further ado the author of our actions'; earthly sovereigns in contrast 'can only claim authorship of our actions when we have granted them that right over us' (96–7). But I think this interpretation is unconvincing. Hobbes writes not of the authorship of another's actions, but of the power and right to afflict another who is in fact capable of independent thought and action. (That some contemporary readers believed Hobbes to hold the heretical idea that God is the author of our sins should not, I think, constrain unduly our reading of the passage.) Moreover, Hobbes makes pointedly clear that the sovereign's right to afflict is not granted to him by others: like the others, he had it all along, but in his case, uniquely, it is 'not taken away' by the contract to obey.

54. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. R. Tuck (Cambridge University Press, 1991), XV, p. 111. For an illuminating discussion of this point, see Q. Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 316–26.

55. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. R. Tuck (Cambridge University Press, 1991), XIV, p. 98.
56. See *LT1*, pp. 61–2.
57. *Tree and Leaf*, p. 99.
58. *Tree and Leaf*, pp. 44–5.

VERLYN FLIEGER

An Unfinished Symphony

"*The Lord of the Rings* before all else"

In any event, none of this ever became a fixed part of the structure. Time travel, serial reincarnation, the nesting of book within book, the connecting of the two frames, all languished unfinished while Tolkien worked to complete and publish *The Lord of the Rings*. This latter book instead became the de facto frame for the mythology that itself had been Tolkien's intended frame for *The Lord of the Rings*.[1] The Otherworld then became Valinor, not Tol Eressëa or Númenor or a mythic past. The voyager to the Otherworld became Frodo Baggins, the final Elf-friend and recorder, and neither his voyage nor his arrival was ever made a reality within the fiction. Fortunately for the reading public, that work (after long genesis) was brought to completion and published. Less fortunately, both the Eriol-Saga and his two tries at the time-travel Atlantis story were left unfinished at Tolkien's death.

It could be argued, then, that the whole question of the Atlantis story and the Eriol-Saga is not just moot but irrelevant, since Tolkien never followed through either by completing *The Notion Club Papers* as a self-contained work or by effecting the enormous shift in perspective and psychology (let alone reader response) that presenting it as science fiction and "doing" Atlantis as the frame and entry point for the whole mythology might have brought about. The change was never carried out. This was a pity,

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and the Tolkien canon thereby suffered a great loss, first, because the shift from mythic fantasy to science fiction in the Atlantis story would have added a narrative style and direction hitherto untried, and, second, because each venture had, in a different way and at a different period in its author's creative life, explored uncharted narrative ground—the Eriol-Saga by marrying actual history and real-world myth to a fictive mythology, and the Atlantis stories by using memory as a vehicle for time travel.

What we have is what we get, and what we get is an unfinished symphony whose implications outrun its execution. Fragmentary, uncompleted, a vision often interrupted by its own fictive branchings, and kept from total fulfillment at least as much by its author's endless revision, the Silmarillion legendarium is at once a monument to one man's imagination, and as close as any one author has come to a mythology that might be called English. The entire concept could be restated in the words Tolkien used to describe the work of the *Beowulf* poet. It is

> an historical poem about the pagan past, or an attempt at one—literal historical fidelity founded on modern research was, of course, not attempted. It is a poem by *a learned man writing of old times* [my emphasis], who looking back on the heroism and sorrow feels in them something permanent and something symbolical. (*Monsters and Critics* 26)

Like Tolkien's profound and scholarly but also highly personal vision of *Beowulf*, his own mythology is meant to give its readers "the illusion of surveying a past,[2] pagan but noble and fraught with deep significance—a past that itself had depth[3] and reached backward into a dark antiquity of sorrow"[4] (27).

It is only partially a flaw that Tolkien was only partially able to complete his grand design. True, he set his name in runes as the compiler of *The Hobbit*; subsumed *The Hobbit* within *The Lord of the Rings* by means of an editorial prologue; provided the latter book with scholarly appendices that were annalistic, calendrical, narrative, paleographical, and linguistic; and fitted *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* to the Shire. Still, these devices notwithstanding, his death left unfinished and unpublished one promising and innovative science fiction novel, and left tacitly unframed the work that started the whole idea, the Silmarillion in all its untidy and unfinished glory.

To Christopher Tolkien fell the task of assuming in reality a role that his father had only imagined fictively, that of a sort of real-life Mr. Howard Green. He became at once the editor of the papers, the man who effected the transfer from materials in manuscript and typed drafts to a book (actually fourteen books: *The Silmarillion*, *Unfinished Tales*, and the twelve continuous

volumes of the History of Middle-earth) in print. It is not difficult to imagine that Tolkien, if he could have known of it, would have been more than satisfied with the final product.

"A sad tale's best for winter"

First conceived as the 1914 war was breaking over an England in many ways still complacently Edwardian yet stirring with uneasy apprehension of the world that was to come, Tolkien's great mythological song, though it never wavered in intent, changed as it grew, inevitably reflecting the color, flavor, and mood of the changing world around it. Begun as one era was ending, it took shape in another and found its audience in yet a third. It looked back with nostalgia and regret at the first, around with weary disillusionment at the second, and ahead with apprehension toward the world that seemed poised to arrive.

If Tolkien's legendarium as we have it now is a mythology for England, it is a song about great power and promise in the throes of decline, racked by dissensions, split by factions, perpetually threatened by war, and perpetually at war with itself. It seems closer to Orwell's *1984* than to the furry-footed escapist fantasy that detractors of *The Lord of the Rings* characterize that work as being. Tracing an arc from the Song of Creation in the *Ainulindalë* to the lay of Frodo of the Nine Fingers and the Ring of Doom and its aftermath in the Scouring of the Shire, the Music begins in imperfection and stops (for Tolkien never fully reached the end) with a decisive yet explicitly temporary defeat of the forces of evil and a healing of some but not all wounds. Along the way, as Theoden predicts to Gandalf after the Battle of Helm's Deep, much that is fair and wonderful passes forever out of Middle-earth, including Theoden himself, although he finally gets his song, the brief elegy given him by Éomer on the Pelennor Field.

The chief function of any mythology, real or feigned, is to mirror a culture to itself, giving it a history and identity as well as a connection to the supernatural or transcendent. The stories of gods and heroes that make up the bulk of any primary mythology reflect the worldview of the society that generates them and interpret the contending forces that society perceives as governing its world. True of any primary mythos, it is no less true of Tolkien's secondary, invented mythology. What, then, is the worldview of this mythology and how do the contending forces play out? Who are the gods and heroes of his invented world, and how do they enact its story?

Tolkien borrowed from the myths of northwestern Europe for the flavor of his stories, and much has been written about his debt to existing mythologies from Scandinavia to Sumer. Over against that, he wrote to Father Robert Murray that *The Lord of the Rings* was "a fundamentally religious and Catholic

work" (*Letters* 172), and one might assume that nothing in the legendarium as a whole would contradict that. Nevertheless, a quick comparison between Christianity and Tolkien's mythos reveals some fundamental differences and not just on the level of doctrine or creed. Tolkien's is a far darker world than that envisioned by Christianity and lacks the promise and the hope that the older story holds out. Unlike the Judeo-Christian story with which it is so often compared and that tells of a world fallen through human willfulness and saved by sacrifice, Tolkien's mythos as a whole begins with a fall long before humanity comes on the scene and is saved (but only temporarily) twice—once by Eärendil and once by Frodo. Imperfection enters the song in the very singing of creation with the disharmony of Melkor, and this Music sets the tone for all that is to follow.

The supreme godhead, Eru (Ilúvatar), is neither the Judaic God of Hosts who alternately punishes and rewards his people nor the traditional Christian God of love and forgiveness. Rather, he is a curiously remote and, for the most part, inactive figure, uninvolved, save for one exceptional moment, in the world he has conceived. The lesser demiurgic powers, the Valar, have only partial comprehension of the world they have helped to make. The primary heroes, the Elves, are highly gifted beings caught in a web of pride, power, and deceit that blights or undoes every effort they make to get free of it. The secondary heroes, Men (and Hobbits), are brave but shortsighted blunderers with little sense of history and less comprehension of their place in the larger scheme of things. The greatest hero of all, Frodo Baggins, is also the most tragic. He comes to the end of his story bereft of the Ring, denied in his home Shire the recognition he deserves, and unable to continue his life as it was before his terrible adventure.

The whole narrative of the Silmarillion is a story of enterprise and creativity gone disastrously wrong. From the first rebellious theme of Melkor, Tolkien's invented world is characterized by strife and dissension wherever there should be harmony. The Music becomes discordant and operates as Fate. Fëanor's creation leads to his downfall. His Silmarils, the last of the light, are stolen by Melkor to become the Jewels in the Crown. Instead of shedding light, they engender darkness. They are the proximate causes of pride, possessiveness, and lust. Desire for them leads Fëanor to the Oath that binds him and his sons to pursue anyone who holds a Silmaril. This is the Fall of the Elves, resulting in theft, betrayal, kinslaying, and war and, finally, resulting in the violent death—without ever regaining the Silmarils—of Fëanor himself.

Even after his death, the story of the Elves in Middle-earth is a history of beleaguered strongholds like Gondolin, Doriath, and Nargothrond. It is an account of successive battles—Dagor-nuin-Giliath, the Battle under Stars; Dagor Aglareb, the Glorious Battle; Dagor Bragollach, the Battle of

Sudden Flame; and Nirnaeth Arnoediad, the Battle of Unnumbered Tears. These names of battles are strung on Elven history like beads on a string. Some battles are won and some are lost, but all are part of the struggle that shapes Elven lives in Middle-earth.

Tolkien's Men fare little better. Of his major heroes, one, Beren, loses his hand in obtaining a Silmaril for the Elven king Thingol, who is first corrupted and finally killed by his desire to possess it. The price Beren pays for the Silmaril seems to have bought little more in the end than the price paid by the thousands of Tolkien's generation who lost their lives on the Somme in 1916 in "the war to end all wars." Another hero—and in terms of characterization a far more memorable one than Beren—is the hapless Túrin Turambar, who careens from disaster to disaster and bad choice to bad choice, finally killed by his own sword after his discovery of all the havoc his actions have wrought. Turin's was one of the earliest stories in Tolkien's legendarium, and his desire to write it goes back to his discovery while still in school of Kullervo, the equally hapless and doomed hero from the Finnish epic *Kalevala*. Weaving Kullervo into a mythology for England must certainly say something about Tolkien's notion of what England might need to know about itself, but it does not suggest that he had much hope for the future of his country.

And, finally, there is Frodo, plodding his slow, painful way to Mordor, struggling with all his strength against the pull of the Ring, falling more and more under its spell, and losing his battle utterly at the Cracks of Doom. What Tolkien does to Frodo provides the bleakest outcome of the entire history. He is infected with the darkness of the Morgul knife, stung by Shelob, and his finger is bitten off by Gollum in a cruel echo of Beren's hand bitten off by the wolf Carcharoth. The peace won for Middle-earth through his efforts is not his to enjoy, and he gets no recognition of his achievement on his return to the Shire he saved. Worst of all, he has lost the Ring he carried for so long and that has left its indelible mark on him. "It is gone forever," he tells Sam, "and now all is dark and empty" (*LOTR* 1001). Its loss cannot be made up, and Frodo is bereft of more than a finger. He is like the thousands of returning servicemen from both wars—from any war, really—who come back to a world that has no way to understand where they have been or what they have been through. In 1916 they called it shell shock. In 1945 they called it battle fatigue. Now we call it post-traumatic stress disorder, and we still have found no way to prevent it and no sure treatment that will heal it.

If Tolkien was trying to show his country something through his mythology, what was it he wanted the England of the twentieth century, a country battered by two disastrous wars, to know about itself? This epilogue, "A Cautionary Tale," is on the model of Hilaire Belloc's *Cautionary Verses*,

one of which advises children to "always keep a-hold of Nurse, for fear of finding something worse." Tolkien's advice, put just as pithily though somewhat less poetically, would have been not to keep hold but to let go, since there is no surety in clinging to any thing too long or too hard.

This is, of course, just what Frodo could not do with the Ring—nor could Fëanor with the Silmarils, nor the Elves of Middle-earth with their time in the world, nor England, except reluctantly and finally, with its empire, nor many another nation-state from the fourth century to the twenty-first. It is the advice of Ulmo the Vala to Turgon the Elf, "Love not too well the work of thy hands and the devices of thy heart" (*Silmarillion* 125). It is sound advice to give to any nation at any time, although states, even less than people, are in the habit of heeding it.

Notes

1. I am indebted to Douglas A. Anderson for pointing out that as late as the mid-1960s Tolkien was still pondering possible ways to get the Silmarillion into print. He told Henry Resnik in an interview on March 2, 1966, "I am hoping to get it [the Silmarillion] out next year. Because of the market and the interest I shall try to publish it bit by bit" (42). In a later interview from November 1966, Tolkien told Richard Plotz that he was "considering making use of Bilbo again" and suggested that the Silmarillion "will appear as [Bilbo's] research in Rivendell. Professor Tolkien is also thinking about the possibility of publishing the Silmarillion as a series of small books, the first of which might come out within a year" (Plotz 92).

2. This sense of the past and its importance to and effect on the present may say as much as anything he wrote on the subject about Tolkien's penchant for time travel rather than space travel, and the implications of the outcome of his "tossup" with C. S. Lewis.

3. See Shippey's discussion of "depth" in *The Road to Middle-earth*, 272–81.

4. Michael Drout points out in *Beowulf and the Critics* that Tolkien's A Text draft of his essay states,

> "Beowulf" is not an actual picture of historic Denmark and Sweden circa 500 A.D. But it is with certain defects, of course, at a general view, a self-consistent picture, an imaginative construction. The whole must have succeeded admirably in creating in the minds of the poet's contemporaries the illusion of surveying a past, pagan but not ignoble and fraught still with deep significance—indeed a past that had itself depth and reached back into the mists. This last is an effect of and a justification of the use of episodes and allusions to old tales—which are all notably darker more pagan and despairing than the foreground. (75)

Tolkien's B Text, which is closer to the published essay, expands this:

> *Beowulf* is not an actual picture of historic Denmark or Gautland or Sweden circa A.D. 500. But it is (with of course certain defects here and there of minor detail) at a general view a self-consistent picture, an imaginative construction.

> The whole must have succeeded admirably in creating in the minds of the poet's contemporaries the illusion of surveying a past, pagan but not ignoble and fraught still with a deep significance, a past that *itself had depth* and reached back into the mists of countless human sorrows. This impression of depth is an effect and a justification of the use of episodes and allusions to old tales—which are all notably darker, more pagan, and despairing than the foreground. (139)

It scarcely needs pointing out that in writing about the *Beowulf* poet Tolkien was also writing about himself, that his clear intent in his own work was not to give "an actual picture" of the pre-historic mythic past of England, but rather "a self-consistent picture, an imaginative construction."

MARJORIE BURNS

Skin-Changing in More than One Sense: The Complexity of Beorn

The most persistent criticism made of J.R.R. Tolkien's fiction is its moral simplicity, its tendency to follow firmly delineated lines of characterization, to slip into what Diana Wynne Jones would call a 'Goodies v. Baddies story'.[1] And certainly fantasy—freed, as it is, from 'the domination of observed "fact"'—has a particular capacity for unequivocal characterization and moral certitude ('On Fairy-Stories,' 45). Fantasists are more at liberty to fortify or justify their own biases; they can rig the game in ways less easily defended in other literary forms. They can more comfortably create a world where everything and everyone is clearly and properly in one camp or the other, where extremes in class, rank, and morality are just as the author sees fit.

Tolkien's fiction seems unquestionably to have been created along these lines. It is not difficult to identify Tolkien's likes and dislikes, his values and preferences, his sense of who belongs where. All the usual clues mark his partialities: light and dark, ugly and fair, black and white, high and low, up and down (plus a few that are somewhat more peculiar to Tolkien: the superiority of North over South, of West over East, and the unadorned over the ornate).

Even though this emphasis on opposition and dissimilarity persists throughout Tolkien's literature, it is important to realize that a good number of his contrasting viewpoints are not easily divided into absolute good or bad.

From *Perilous Realms: Celtic and Norse in Tolkien's Middle-earth*, pp. 30–43. © 2005 by Marjorie Burns.

Tolkien, often enough, finds himself drawn to more than one quality or trait, more than one culture or attitude, and pronouncements made in one place may be countered by statements made elsewhere or at other times. Tolkien, for example, both rejects and makes use of allegory, both laments and idealizes the pagans, both scorns and reveres the Celts. He is strongly attracted to the loner, to independence of thought, and to singularity (qualities closely associated with the heroic North). At the same time, however, he is deeply committed to kingship, inheritance, and ritual, to the idea that blood will sooner or later tell (qualities far more English in their reliance on position and community). This same doubleness of attitude shows in certain tensions that occur throughout *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, tensions between garden and wilderness, home and wayside, security and risk, tradition and the need for change.

Inclinations of this sort, inclinations at odds with other inclinations, are in no way detrimental to Tolkien literature. To a large extent, it is the pull between differing beliefs, cultures, or ideals that saves Tolkien from the triteness of his imitators. He may appear to have easy solutions; he may create extremes based on exaggerated types, but the solutions and extremes Tolkien offers us are played out on so many levels and are linked in so many ways that his writing retains a richness beyond his surface simplicity.

Nonetheless—in spite of all this—Tolkien is typically criticized for dividing his characters into a too easily recognizable evil and a too obvious good. And, true enough, we tend to prefer those Tolkien characters who appear to be exceptions to this rule, those individuals who, initially at least, suggest moral uncertainty, individuals such as Aragorn, Treebeard, or Beorn, who fall on the side of good but who carry an aura of risk.

Often, however, Tolkien adds complexity to his best characters not so much by hints of a darker side but by his habit of intermingling opposing qualities or differing values drawn from more than one literary tradition or from more than one cultural base. And this particular form of character complexity (a complexity admittedly more literary than psychological) is not so easily recognized. Since Tolkien, for example, values both independence and dependence (both the freedom of the Viking North and the social constraints of England), it is not surprising that certain of his characters exhibit both extremes. Usually these are individuals who display exceptional self-sufficiency and freedom of choice but who are equally capable of devoting themselves to a cause, when the time or need is right. Obvious examples are Tolkien's singular stewards and guardians (men or wizards), his Robin Hood 'outlaw' figures (English and free ranging at once), and those who prefer seclusion in isolated homes or halls—all those who live apart or travel apart and yet belong to the good.

To a lesser extent the 'bachelor' figures of Bilbo and Frodo belong to this type as well, as does Sam, in a modified servant-class way. These are individuals who more or less differ from others of their kind, who suffer from a certain poetic sensitivity and who live (like the characters in *The Wind in the Willows*) free from familial restraints. Through temperament and fate, these are the singled-out hobbits, Men, Wizards, Elves, and Dwarves who qualify for the quest, an undertaking which requires freedom and restraint combined.

The most striking of Tolkien's individuals, however, are his innate, one-of-a-kind loners, the honourable isolationists who dwell in secluded domains and who are presented as being distinctive, free, self-reliant but respectful of other lives and hostile only to those deserving hostility. They are, in order of appearance, Beorn, 'appalling' when angry, though 'kind enough if humoured' (*H*, 102); Tom Bombadil, ancient and knowledgeable but childlike and innocent of a large or consistent world-view; and Treebeard, righteous and sentimental, peaceable, ponderous and pondering and yet capable of violence when the cause is just. Each is a mixture of opposing qualities, and each is based on a variety of figures taken from various tales, figures well known to Tolkien and connected, one way or another, to Britain's rich and complex past. To Tolkien's credit, there is no sense that Beorn, Tom Bombadil, or Treebeard have been patched together. All three come across as temperamentally whole.

A sense of the 'good pagan' is particularly strong in each of these characters too, though Christianity (or at least its values) is never fully absent in anything Tolkien creates to exemplify the good.[2] Where the setting seems more Nordic (that is, either generally Teutonic or specifically Scandinavian), the pagan element becomes pronounced; where a softer, more English climate prevails, Christian values are more likely to occur. And always, in one way or another, something borrowed from the Celts also leaves its mark on Treebeard, Beorn, and Tom Bombadil.

Of Tolkien's unique and isolated characters, Beorn best exemplifies Tolkien's ability to balance two cultural ideals in a single entity (in Beorn's case, primarily Norse and English ideals). At first reading, Beorn's character and the traditions that lie behind it appear to be simple enough. He is, after all, a character in *The Hobbit*, where the tone is far more elementary than it is in *The Lord of the Rings* and where explanations and details are less likely to occur. But there are a good number of contradictions and considerable intricacy connected with Beorn; and these, for the most part, hinge on the previously mentioned dichotomies: North/South, East/West, comradeship and solitude, freedom and obligation, forest and garden, home and wayside, risk and security.

Directional tension exists in the journey itself. The party (consisting of Bilbo, Gandalf, and the dwarves) reaches Beorn's isolated lodgings by travelling from Middle-earth's civilized and idealized West into the physical dangers of North and East, directions that, in Tolkien's mind and in Norse tradition, are always suggestive of risk. There is as well—within the character of Beorn—a Norse/English tension of considerable complexity. Our first impression is that Beorn, the skin-changer, belongs unquestionably to a Norse and pagan world. His name, his appearance, his attachment to violent forms of revenge all link him to the Scandinavian or Teutonic North, and his hall is specifically, intentionally Norse, both in Tolkien's illustrations and in his written word.[3] Nonetheless, Shire-like qualities also play their part, as do hierarchical and elitist elements that contrast with the initial image of pagan independence and northern solitude. Beorn is, after all, a double character, a *two-specied* character, one might say. And though he is rough and alarming (even when shaped like a man), outright dangerous (when wearing the shape of a bear), and committed to justice (admittedly harsh) in either outward form, there are softer, more civilized aspects to him as well, aspects which are not specifically English or Christian but which suggest elements of both. He neither hunts nor eats other animals but 'lives most on cream and honey' (103). He uses no metal (in other words, no weaponry) except in the occasional household knife where exceptions must be made. His garden is full of flowers, in an English countryside way. Home seems all important and carefully maintained. And yet, of course, Beorn ranges great distances by night and returns from his private, ursine raid 'in a splendidly good humour' (115), having nailed a Warg's skin on a tree and having stuck a goblin's head on the outside of the gate, a nasty and highly Norse stunt (though the early Celts and Anglo-Saxons valued heads as well). He is, then, a being of two extremes: both ruthless and kind, bear and man, homebody and wanderer, berserker and pacifist in one.

This doubleness, this blending of the civilized English with the far more wilful Norse, has an honest history. Since the Anglo-Saxon invasion (beginning in the fifth century) and the Scandinavian invasion (beginning in the eighth), England has sustained a Teutonic undertone. Time and new outside influence (the Norman Conquest, for one) have softened this pagan edge. It has, however, never been fully dislodged, and those English literary works which most influenced Tolkien and which most contributed to the character of Beorn are ones in which the appeal of the North (the appeal of the not-fully-civilized) is easily recognized. There is much about Beorn, for example, that is suggestive of Bertilak de Hautdesert in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a fourteenth-century Middle English poem that Tolkien himself translated into Modern English in the early 1950s. Though *Gawain* is an Arthurian tale and Celtic in its origins (having 'many skilful combinations

of elements of older fairy-story'),[4] both the *Gawain* poet and Tolkien take their heroes away from order and civilization—Camelot and the Shire—and thrust them into a deeply northern world of transfiguration and risk.

Gawain's first encounter with Bertilak, like Bilbo's with Beorn, is marked by a Norse magnitude and vitality:[5]

> Gawain gazed at the good man who had greeted him kindly,
> and he thought bold and big was the baron of the castle,
> very large and long, and his life at the prime:
> broad and bright was his beard, and all beaver-hued,
> stern, strong in his stance upon stalwart legs,
> his face fell as fire, and frank in his speech.[6]

Like Bertilak, the grim and outspoken Beorn lives in an isolated oak-wood with mountains a short distance away. Like Bertilak, Beorn takes in unexpected guests. Where Bertilak has a castle, Beorn has 'a great wooden house'; and we see him first standing before the hobbit, 'a huge man with a thick black beard and hair, and great bare arms and legs with knotted muscles' (103–4). Bertilak too is a changer of shape (as well as a changer of hue); and though he practises Christian formalities and Christian courtesies and speaks in the name of God, he, like Beorn, has a sturdiness, bearing, and stature far more appropriate to the sagas than anything to be found in the halls of Camelot or the burrows of the Shire.

In both works, journeys—northward into the wilds of Wales or north and eastward into deeper Middle-earth—are fraught with the sort of threatening encounters one expects in a fiercely pagan world, encounters that appear again and again throughout *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

> Many a cliff [Gawain] climbed o'er in countries unknown,
> far fled from his friends without fellowship he rode.
> At every wading or water on the way that he passed
> he found a foe before him, save at few for a wonder;
> and so foul were they and fell that fight he must needs.
> So many a marvel in the mountains he met in those lands
> that 'twould be tedious the tenth part to tell you thereof.
> At whiles with worms he wars, and with wolves also,
> at whiles with wood-trolls that wandered in the crags,
> and with bulls and with bears and boars, too, at times;
> and with ogres that hounded him from the heights of the fells.[7]

This is a British wilderness that the poet describes, from a time when forests and bogs were still untamed; and yet Brian Stone, another translator

of *Gawain*, believes the poem creates 'an almost Norse sense of desolate nature.'[8] I would go further: the adversaries Gawain meets—dragons (worms), wolves, bears, trolls—are consistently Norse in kind and intensity.[9]

A deeply northern literature, then, left its mark on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. And *Gawain* in turn left its mark on Beorn—a perfect example of that literary cross-fertilization and blending that Tolkien, in his essay 'On Fairy-Stories,' refers to as 'soup.' Tolkien was a philologist, an expert in languages and literatures; he was, therefore, well aware that themes and motifs are exempt from border control and that all good stories are the result of plots and ideas that have been borrowed and rearranged since storytelling began. Though Beorn's ferocity, size, and posturing, his name and Norseman's hall, appear to be solidly based on saga convention and saga imagery, Beorn has been filtered through English literature and placed in a modified setting where the Norse and English combine. All of this brings him more in line with England itself and hence in line with Tolkien's concept of a Middle-earth based on components of ancient Northwestern Europe and England (meaning Britain as well) brought together as a continental whole.

The oak woods that surround both Bertilak's castle and Beorn's large wooden hall are indicative. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the feeling given by these woods is entirely druidic and suggestive of that particular otherworldliness that appears in either Celtic tales or in the Celtic-based Arthurian tales that England took as its own. But the oak has a broader significance and thereby serves as a common denominator for Tolkien's synthesized Middle-earth. The oak existed in ancient forests in England, Scandinavia, and Northwestern Europe and was sacred there, as well as in Iceland (though trees of any kind are less common there and less impressive in size, and the concept in Iceland may have been imported by Norwegian settlers). The oak tree also bears the mistletoe, a plant living mysteriously between earth and air and therefore considered magical in both Norse and Celtic belief. It was, we should remember, a shaft of mistletoe that slew Balder (the son of Odin and the Norse god most deserving of praise), and Balder was otherwise invincible.

But borrowings from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and references to shared English, European, and Scandinavian beliefs are not the only ingredients that Tolkien drew upon when he came to shaping Beorn. Influence from *Beowulf* (most likely written in the first half of the eighth century) is strongly there as well. Where *Gawain* is only partially Northern in its outward journey into a harsh, cold, pagan nature (replete with wildmen, monsters, and savage beasts), the earlier, Old English *Beowulf* is unrelentingly Northern—brutal, cold, heroic, and severe. It was written, says Tolkien, 'in a language that after many centuries has still essential kinship

with our own, it was made in this land, and moves in our northern world beneath our northern sky, and for those who are native to that tongue and land, it must ever call with a profound appeal—until the dragon comes.'[10]

The influence of *Beowulf* on *The Hobbit* (which shows an obvious borrowing of monsters, dragons, dragon hoards, and a dragon's stolen cup) has been thoroughly described in Tolkien criticism before. What is less frequently and only briefly mentioned, however, are specific character similarities that link Beowulf and Beorn. Though Beowulf is not a shape-shifter like Beorn, something of an ursine nature is suggested in his name. *Beowulf*, in its literal translation, means *bee-wolf;* and, through the vagaries of poetic kenning (a form of metaphorical naming), *bee-wolf* stands for the one who is ravenous for honey and therefore represents the 'bear,' or, in its Anglo-Saxon form, *beorn*. It is for this reason that Tolkien, in his essay 'On Fairy-Stories,' refers to the young Beowulf as 'the bear-boy' (30) and in his essay 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight' writes of the 'Bear-boy' that lurks behind Beowulf.[11]

Like Beowulf, Beorn returns with dismembered pieces of his enemies and displays the grisly remains. He is, in fact, a berserker, or 'bearshirter,' as the word is often explained.[12] But *beorn* is also an Old English heroic word for *man*. (Compare the present-day tribute, 'He's a real tiger.') What we get, then, is Beorn the skin-changer, a highly domestic individual, a pacifist and bee-keeper, settled in the midst of rather English-sounding flower fields and gardens, but an individual who is at the same time a figure of brutal strength and violence, who belongs to an ancient, northern, and carnivorous world and lives in a Norseman's hall.

In fact, if one were to draw concentric circles, with Beorn's hall or lodge as the central point, rings of mixed English and Norse characteristics emerge. Outside the low-lying, wide, Viking hall, with its open smoke hole in the roof, lies the courtyard with its flower garden coming 'right up to the steps' in a homey and English way. For Bilbo, these flowers appear to be a mixture of the familiar and the strange; 'he had never seen half of them before' (106).

Beyond the courtyard is the wider yard—patterned after the Old Saxon *gard* (*garðr* in Old Icelandic)—with its cluster of surrounding outer buildings, 'barns, stables, sheds,' all enclosed by a 'high thorn-hedge' (reminiscent of early English protective techniques). This is itself surrounded by a 'belt of tall and very ancient oaks' of a size and antiquity more appropriate to England's fertile soil than to the colder more barren North, but nonetheless suitable to both (104). Here as well lie flower fields established for the bees, 'all the same kinds growing together as if they had been planted,' mostly clover: purple clover, cockscomb clover, and 'short white sweet honey-smelling clover' (103). Further out, beyond this last indication of Shire-like horticulture, lie

hilly slopes and dales with oak and elm trees in a distribution again more mindful of England than regions farther north, though here also are 'wide grass-lands, and a river running through it all' (100) on a scale that seems truer to Iceland than anything England can claim. Beyond this are the mountains, severely northern in their looming, bleak inhospitality and Norse in their goblin Mountain King.[13]

In Tolkien's writings, terrain alone is often enough to establish character or intent. And, indeed, the extremes of terrain displayed in the chapter on Beorn do much to establish who he is. We are, to tell the truth, given few facts about Beorn, little more than what is described or explained while Bilbo and his party stay in his hall. Tolkien, who often enough supplies long histories for his key characters, wisely leaves us with uncertainty when it comes to defining Beorn. 'He' or '*Somebody*' or 'that Somebody,' is how Gandalf initially refers to Beorn. 'Some say that he is a bear descended from the great and ancient bears of the mountains that lived there before the giants came. Others say that he is a man descended from the first men who lived before Smaug or the other dragons came into this part of the world, and before the goblins came into the hills out of the North. I cannot say, though I fancy the last is the true tale. He is not the sort of person to ask questions of' (103). We learn too that Beorn has a past, one that entails a defeat. He has been heard to mutter to himself, on his lone and mountainous Carrock, 'The day will come when they will perish and I shall go back!' (103). But this and other peculiarities remain unexplained. 'Why is it called the Carrock?' Bilbo asks. Because, says Gandalf, that 'is his word for it' (102). (*Carrock*, or *carrecc*, however, is not an invented term but an Old Welsh and hence Celtic word for *rock*, giving us yet another example of Tolkien's cultural mingling.)

Tolkien brings Beorn back—an enigma to the end—for an encore at the Battle of Five Armies, 'alone, and in bear's shape,' appearing 'no one knew how or from where' and wrecking great havoc on goblins and wolves alike (244). Though we hear the Beorn later 'became a great chief' in his region (248) and that he had many descendants, we are not shown him in a family setting or in a voluntarily social state. What is mostly apparent is his wish to be left alone, a fact emphasized early on when we are told that Beorn 'never invited people into his house, if he could help it' and that the 'very few friends' he had 'lived a good way away' (110). The closest we come to an image of open hospitality in connection with Beorn is the mention made of 'Yule-tide' feasting held in his house on Bilbo's journey home.[14] But this festivity is as much an après-battle celebration as it is a domestic or social affair. Beorn's world is the typically masculine one of Norse/Teutonic tales, a world that suffers little or no female intrusion, a far cry from Camelot. Yet descendants, the Beornings, appear; so somewhere a mating occurs.

There is, as well, an interesting note to these descendants of Beorn. In *The Lord of the Rings*, occasional mention is made of these Beornings as 'valiant' and 'trusty' men. But in *The Hobbit*, the Beornings are divided into two opposing categories, just as Beorn himself is divided into contrary character types. Some of Beorn's descendants 'were grim men and bad,' we are told, 'but most were in heart like Beorn' (248). Such splitting into opposing characteristics has its parallels in the Norse sagas, where children are not infrequently defined by such polarities. A particularly striking example comes from the *Saga of Egill Skallagrímsson*, where, as T.A. Shippey points out, the skin-changing ability of Kveld-Úlfr (Evening-Wolf) is remarkably close to that of Beorn.[15] But, more than this, the fate of the two skin-changers' offspring is also much the same. Kveld-Úlfr has two sons, one who is handsome, pleasant, and generous and one who is hard working but ugly and disagreeable; so too the Beornings, who divide even more precisely into evil and good.

Skin-changing, however, is by no means limited to Norse sagas or to eddic tales of shape-shifting giants and gods. The Celts and Northwestern Europeans in general all have their tales of those who can shift appearance and acquire the capabilities (wisdom or strength) of animals, fish, or birds. And these shared concepts about shape-changing (like those shared beliefs associated with the oak) help draw Britain, Northwestern Europe, and Scandinavia together in the manner Tolkien intended for his unified Middle-earth. Nonetheless, Beorn's particular form of skin-changing belongs to the Norse berserker tradition more than it does to any other form of the feat. His revenge on goblin and wolf, his 'scraping, scuffling, and growling' outside the door at night (115), come closest to the ominous, purposeful, carnal experience we see in Kveld-Úlfr or in the *Saga of Hrólf Kraki* where Biarki (Little Bear) fights in the Danish king's army in the form of a massive bear.

Beorn, then, remains strongly and predominantly Norse, and he remains so in our minds (in spite of some English mollification and a subtle Celtic link) not only because of the saga-like quality of his shape-changing and his sense of savage revenge but also because he seems the epitome of the independent man. Rather than the fixed social order of the English and Arthurian world (evident and idealized elsewhere in Middle-earth), in Beorn we seem to have the exemplary Norse ideal, the individual on his own—grim, self-sufficient, expecting no good from the world, expecting no saving grace, loyal to those deserving, and, most telling of all, 'under no enchantment but his own' (103). This last, fierce, and uncompromising self-containment, this mastery of his own magic and acknowledgment of no other power, is very Norse indeed.

In the Icelandic sagas there is a commonplace question and a commonplace response which Shippey emphasizes to illustrate the

Norseman's code of independence, self-aggrandizement, and unyielding fortitude. The question is 'What do you believe in?' 'I believe in myself' (*Ek trúi á sjálfan mik*) is the traditional reply.[16] Beorn, with all his suspicion, his night forages to check on Gandalf's tale, his self-made Norse *staðr* (or *stead*, as in the English *homestead*), and his single-handed/single-pawed, battle, represents the ideal Viking hero and fulfils what Tolkien refers to as the northern 'theory of courage.'

But it is not quite so simple. There are difficulties in the picture of Beorn that compromise this ideal, difficulties that conflict with the image of self-reliance and Northern solitude. And these bring Beorn more in line with Tolkien's English views. Full independence requires a certain amount of separation and self-sufficiency; when these are compromised, independence is as well. The ideal that Tolkien emphasizes in Beorn is the ideal of the lone and capable individual, the hero facing life with nothing to trust but himself. For all we know, there is only one Beorn, only one being in Middle-earth who shifts between man and bear. What could be more isolating than such singularity? But, in fact, something is amiss. Beorn, the isolated Norseman, is neither truly alone nor truly self-sufficient. He has around him an entourage of servants, easy to disregard in their farm animal forms—ponies, dogs, and sheep that serve him silently and intelligently, setting tables, carrying in food, and no doubt washing up after meals:

> Beorn clapped his hands, and in trotted four beautiful white ponies and several large long-bodied grey dogs. Beorn said something to them in a queer language like animal noises turned into talk. They went out again and soon came back carrying torches in their mouths, which they lit at the fire and stuck in low brackets on the pillars of the hall about the central hearth. The dogs could stand on their hind-legs when they wished, and carry things with their fore-feet. Quickly they got out boards and trestles from the side walls and set them up near the fire. (110–11)

How ought we to judge this form of servant labour in context of the independent man? The ancient Norse had their serf class, descended, the story goes, from Thrall, the lowest and least valued of Heimdall's three earth-born sons. Ugly, twisted, but strong, Thrall and his equally unattractive children are the people destined for labour, for the cutting and hauling of wood, for digging, for herding goats and pigs, and for the spreading of dung in fields. But Beorn's clean, willing, animal servants resemble not thralls but something far more class oriented in a familiar, English way. They are, in fact, closer to personal or house servants, from what we see, though ones of a

very exceptional kind. Like Sam, in his devotion to Frodo, these are willing attendants, protective of their position and born to their role, one feels.

This is invariably the case with Tolkien. His idealized independent figures are always somehow sovereign, and the solitude they experience is strongly bound to class. Tom Bombadil is (with some equivocation) called 'the Master' and Treebeard is 'the eldest and chief of the Ents' (*TT*, 164). These are the individuals who seem most free in Tolkien's structured world, but the freedom they experience has its other side. Beorn's animal servants, like all of Tolkien's more plentiful subject folk, are not quite as free as those to whom they are subject, not quite as free of someone else's enchantment or another's authority. 'The trees and the grasses and all living things belong each to themselves,' Goldberry explains in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. This sounds well enough; nonetheless Goldberry refers to Tom as 'Master' four times in quick succession. He is 'Master of the house,' 'Master of wood, water, and hill,' 'master,' and 'the Master,' and no one else is master over Tom (135).

For Tolkien this is as it ought to be. We are better, he feels, for hierarchical loyalties. 'I think (contrary to most people) that touching your cap to the squire may be damn bad for the squire but it's damn good for you,' said Tolkien in Denys Gueroult's 1965 radio interview. And yet the greatest evil for Tolkien is 'possessiveness,' a sin which includes not only materialism and greed but also domination, enslavement, and arbitrary control—qualities which may be as manifest in those who inherit power as they are in those who acquire it by force, deception, or stealth.

The answer for Tolkien is knowing your place, as Beorn and his animals do. Who else should be the master but this skin-changer who rules, as Adam does, the creatures of his domain? We feel the fittingness of Beorn in his solitary governing role; we are impressed by his extraordinary powers, by his sheer physical presence, and by the right he has to existence in both the human and the animal world. And it is only on reflection (a risky business at times) that we sense a double reality. Tolkien's self-reliant loners are never quite what they seem. For all his emphasis on independence, freedom of choice, and the call of the open road, Tolkien remains equally attached to hierarchical attachments and to traditional roles.

Notes

1. Diana Wynne Jones, 'The Shape of the Narrative in *The Lord of the Rings*,' in *J.R.R. Tolkien: This Far Land*, ed. Robert Giddings (London: Vision Press Ltd, 1983 and Totoway, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1984), 95–6.

2. Tolkien chose not to bring Christianity openly into his mythology, claiming to do so would be 'fatal': nonetheless he realized his own religion could still 'be deduced,' as it is

by those who recognize parallels between Galadriel and Catholic ideas of Mary (*Letters*, 144 and 288).

3. Tolkien's pencil-and-ink drawings of Beorn's hall are closely modelled after an illustration of a Norse hall interior done by his colleague, E.V. Gordon, and included in Gordon's 1927 *An Introduction to Old Norse*. For a comparison, see Wayne Hammond and Christina Scull, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 122–3.

4. 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,' the essay, (80).

5. It was important to Tolkien that the unknown author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* used 'the ancient English measure which had descended from antiquity, that kind of verse which is now called "alliterative"' (Christopher Tolkien's Introduction to J.R.R. Tolkien's translation of *Gawain*, 14). This is the same form of verse the *Beowulf* poet used; and *Beowulf*, though written in Old English, is a Scandinavian tale.

6. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, trans. J.R.R. Tolkien, 46.

7. Ibid., 42–3.

8. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, rev. ed., ed. and trans. Brian Stone (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1964), 9.

9. Though the quoted passage is from Tolkien's translation, both Stone and Tolkien use *trolls* where the poem has *wodwos* (savage or wild men), a decision that adds to the northern effect beyond the original. On the other hand, *etaynez* is an Anglo-Saxon word for *giant*, and yet both Stone and Tolkien translate *etaynez* as *ogre*, a word of French origin and therefore a word less appropriately northern but more typical of Arthurian tales.

10. 'Beowulf,' 33–4.

11. 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,' the essay, 73.

12. This interpretation was well known by the latter half of the nineteenth century and was therefore familiar to Tolkien. For additional accounts of 'bear shirt' or 'wolf-coat' transformations among Norse warriors, and for related traditions among the Celts, see Davidson, *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe* (80–1).

13. *Goblin*, however, is not Norse but is probably Anglo-Norman with Latin roots. After *The Hobbit*, Tolkien substituted the more linguistically appropriate *orc*.

14. Yule was originally the Viking version of a mid-winter feast, one which later came to be associated with the birth of Christ. 'There is nothing I dislike about Christmas particularly,' Tolkien is quoted in the *Oxford Times* (22 December 1972); 'I just divide it into two. There is Yule—which means presents and Christmas trees and things; and there is Christmas which is the religious festival and peace.'

15. See Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, 235.

16. Ibid., 74.

JOHN C. HUNTER

The Evidence of Things Not Seen: Critical Mythology and The Lord of the Rings

> Having set myself a task, the arrogance of which I fully recognized and trembled at: being precisely to restore to the English an epic tradition and present them with a mythology of their own: it is a wonderful thing to be told that I have succeeded, at least with those who still have the undarkened heart and mind.
>
> —J. R. R. Tolkien, in a letter from 1956 (*Letters* 231)

The mythic nimbus around *The Lord of the Rings* has been strongly insisted upon by its author, many critics, and thousands of ordinary readers. Together with the novel's mass appeal and the many-headed culture industry it has begotten, this would seem to make it a useful site for an analysis of what the "mythic" signifies in contemporary culture, especially given its historical appearance after the monuments of high modernism such as *Ulysses* but before "Magic Realism" and full postmodernity. With the exception of comparative religious studies, however, the question of how the mythic can be accommodated to the other categories of contemporary theory has never been satisfactorily addressed, at least partly because of lack of interest. From the high-water mark of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), we have reached a point where at least one eminent scholar of religion can ask "Is Myth Obsolete?" (Ellwood). Any analysis of the mythic has to acknowledge that it is nowadays most often used as a means to mark the distance of a given text

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or phenomenon from its cultural context rather than any useful connections to it. Because it is "mythic," therefore, sympathetic critics can locate *The Lord of the Rings* outside the familiar frameworks of post-war fiction. Because it is "mythic," its immense popularity can be read as a sign that it gives its readers access to something that contemporary culture usually represses. To study this novel in these terms is to analyze one of the most widely-articulated responses to it and, simultaneously, to leave the orthodox terms of critical analysis behind. This seems odd in a postmodern critical environment which is neither shy about commercial success nor subject to a restrictive hierarchy of critical methods, especially given that this disruptive power of the mythic was harnessed by many mid-century artists and intellectuals. Just a few years before *The Lord of the Rings* was published, Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* appeared with the thesis that turning points in the intellectual history of the West often coincide with a futile repression of the mythic (Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic* 24, 1–25). Though it would be hard to imagine two more dissimilar texts, they both share a fascination with myth and the historical forces that try to replace it with rational discourse. Read in this context, it becomes clear that *The Lord of the Rings*' tremendous staying power in mythic terms is derived from the way it appears to resist the repression of the mythic in modern life while actually embodying it. The seductive appeal of a naïvely "timeless" form of myth is very present in the text but, as all too few critics have realized, only as a temptation that we must either voluntarily or forcibly forgo.

The main problem with the term "mythic" in general is its diffuseness. More than most categories, its definition is reinvented with each application. There is no general consensus about the limits of its signification and very little regret about this state of affairs. The term is applied to everything from the religious narratives of archaic societies to the ideological justifications for contemporary social arrangements to deliberate lies, and the contradictions inherent in this multiplicity do not seem to interfere with each specific use.[1] There have been several unheeded calls to establish some terminological common ground but, for this issue, rigorously identifying the problem does not suggest any workable approaches to solving it. In any case, as Ivan Strenski has observed, too many scholars are content to remain "intentionally innocent of theory and satisfied to employ 'myth' [. . .] without necessarily having to probe conceptual foundations" (2). The benefits of being associated with the "mythic" in a vague or idiosyncratic way seem to outweigh the loss of analytic force that this category inevitably suffers as a result.

So perhaps we no longer expect the mythic to definitively explain or identify anything. After two centuries of intense theoretical activity on this subject, postmodernity has witnessed the end of the grand narratives of myth that have flowed from Vico, Herder, and Schelling to Müller, Frazer, Lévi-

Strauss, and Eliade and seems comfortable without a new one (Patton and Doniger 2–4; Nagy).[2] While this has given myth scholarship the flexibility to adopt and respond to the new topics, methods, and concerns of critical theory, it has also allowed the "mythic" to become (in some cases) an intellectual smokescreen behind which more intractable issues can be concealed. What makes this especially problematic is that, despite the theoretical confusion around the term, the cultural capital and resonance of anything that can be successfully designated as "mythic" has carried over from the nineteenth century and high modernism, especially in popular culture and the media.[3] For it cannot be assumed that, because there is no stable definition of the mythic, it cannot therefore be misused. Quite the contrary: like the rhetorical use of terms like "politically correct," the rhetoric of the "mythic" can be used as a means to head off more productive avenues of thought with a vague set of associations that often ignore the specifics of the situation under examination. The amorphous signification of the term simply means that it is contradictions in its use, rather than deviation from established norms, that will mark its misapplication. The point here is not to vainly presume to identify what myth "really is," but rather to investigate one salient example of its rampant and obvious misuse.

The task of this essay will thus be to see how habitual contradictions in the discourse of the mythic are both expressed and opened up for critique in the response to *The Lord of the Rings*. These contradictions organize themselves around two recurring oppositions that are almost always depicted in mythic terms: (1) myth as a "timeless" narrative without traceable origins versus time-bound, contingent forms of narrative; and (2) myth as the narrativization of a shared communal identity and spirituality versus the fundamental social heterogeneity and alienating materialism of modern culture. These two could, of course, be rewritten more prosaically as debates about historical continuity in the fields of representation and cultural identity respectively, but these more workaday categories are arrived at in Tolkien scholarship (if at all) only by way of the endlessly protean shapes of the mythic. Examining these conflicts together reveals a pattern in which the vagaries of the mythic are sustained by critical and popular desires for the novel that are flatly contradicted by the representation of the mythic in the novel. In particular, many critics imply that the "timelessness" of myth in Tolkien is an effect of its narrative content whereas the novel depicts the signifying power of myths and legends to be radically fluid. Myth is also depicted as the (sometimes elusive) trace of some transhistorical communal identity or lost spiritual wholeness, whereas the novel insists upon the contingent, uneven process of historical identity formation. Refuting these claims, however, does not require that this analysis be aligned with the ongoing effort to dismiss Tolkien's novel as a regressive piece of escapism, for it is the text itself that points the way past

such escapism. The false glamour of the mythic may be an interpretive red herring in Tolkien criticism, but the point must always be to explore why it is so attractive and what it conceals. To use this line of thought as a pretext to banish the novel from academic criticism (as a mere superficial "best-seller") is to lose the chance to explore a timely and productive insight.

To Look on a Vanished World: Myth and Time

The contrast between historical experience and a mythic experience that both predates history and returns to disrupt it is a major preoccupation of *The Lord of the Rings*.[4] The text represents its very production as something enabled by Bilbo's retirement to Rivendell, a place removed from the flow of history, to write and translate. "Time doesn't seem to pass here," he observes of his Elvish home, "it just is" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 225).[5] This sense of stasis is complemented by Frodo's impressions of Lothlórien as a "high window that looked on a vanished world" where "ancient things still lived" (2.6.340–41). Like Frodo, we can read these places out of time as points on a scale of escape from the contingent: Rivendell effectively stops time and allows time-bound creatures to think in a properly historical way (as witnessed by the copious literary and historical output which Bilbo bequeaths to Frodo to complete); Lothlórien, however, is something else, a kind of time machine that enables one to experience the past directly and, by consequence, that completely disables causal historical understanding (as exemplified by Frodo's chaotic vision in the Mirror of Galadriel) (2.7.352–54). Each place provides a respite from the world for the Fellowship but, while Rivendell renews their strength for the struggle, they leave Lothlórien simultaneously refreshed and in tears, not wishing to return to the fallen world (2.8.369).

These experiences outside ordinary historical time are not unique to the homes of the immortal Elves alone, but features of several places in Middle-earth; in the same way, they are capable of creating both positive and negative effects on the beings that encounter them. Tom Bombadil's singing can transport the hobbits "out into ancient starlight, when only the Elf-sires were awake" (1.7.128), but he is a unique being, uninvolved in the War of the Ring and incapable of even understanding it in ordinary terms. The Paths of the Dead (5.2.770), Shelob's lair (4.9.702), and Mordor, a "land of darkness where the days of the world seemed forgotten, and all who entered were forgotten too" (6.1.877), stop the measurable flow of experience just as effectively as Rivendell, but in ways that destroy rather than enable understanding. The Balrog, described by Gimli as "that which haunts our darkest dreams" (2.7.346–47), is a direct, traumatic experience of the legendary past bursting into the contingent present for both Elves and

Dwarves; Aragorn's army of the dead is just as frightening a materialization of legend for the besiegers of Minas Tirith (5.9.858–59).[6] Finally, the transformation of experience into myth can trivialize rather than intensify it, with the hobbit tendency to reduce all historical events from the outside world into legendary narratives characterized as a juvenile refusal to face reality which the Fourth Age rectifies with "several libraries that contained many historical books and records" (1.Prologue.13).

Experiences of what is carelessly called "mythic timelessness" are thus complicated and profoundly ambivalent in Middle-earth. Rivendell and Lothlórien are at once outside the ordinary experience of time and fated to pass away whatever the outcome of the War of the Ring; the Shire's prelapsarian insularity about its place in the wider world can likewise never be regained. Even after Sauron's defeat, the desolate ground of Mordor will still be "a land defiled, diseased beyond all healing—unless the Great Sea should enter in and wash it with oblivion" (4.3.617). Even as the supreme victory is proclaimed, when the Ring's destruction is felt at Minas Tirith as a moment in which "time halted" and a "sound like a sigh went up from all the lands about them," history intervenes to cast a shadow over the triumph, as Faramir spontaneously thinks of Númenor and "'of the land of Westernesse that foundered'" (6.5.941). Time has, of course, experientially and historically stopped, as the Fourth Age begins just after this pause in the flow of experience. Even in the first moment of triumph, though, the historical memory of the past failures of Gondor's line bursts unbidden into Faramir's mind and the text of the novel. The present renewal of the kingdom cannot erase its history of decline and the possibility that it could happen again. Nor should we imagine that a Fourth Age historical sense that transforms the old legends should be a new timeless universal in myth's stead. As Faramir observes about Númenor:

> "Death was ever present, because the Númenoreans still, as they had in their old kingdom, and so lost it, hungered after endless life unchanging. Kings made tombs more splendid than houses of the living, and counted old names in the rolls of their descent dearer than the names of sons." (4.5.662)

Denethor's death is often read as the symbolic passing of this Númenorean *thanatos*, but it reappears in his son's mind at the very moment at which one might expect it to be purged from consciousness forever. The historical struggle of mankind is not allowed to fade into cozy oblivion. The desire for "endless life unchanging" and an escape from the flux of history is once again represented not as a wish for some unifying continuity of human experience but as a ruinous delusion.

Despite this thoroughgoing ambivalence about "timeless" experience in the novel, the critical response has tended to insist that anything mythic can be only a positive source of importance. This insistence takes several forms. The simplest is the presumption that the enormous variety of mythic material that Tolkien made use of as source materials somehow gives a necessarily mythic (in this case meaning "authentically archaic") impact to the novel itself (Hostetter and Smith 282ff., Shippey, *Road* 148–58). Unfortunately for assertions of this kind, generations of narrative scholarship have made clear that it would be very hard to find any literary product of Western culture, from a Greek tragedy to a contemporary comic book, that does not use narrative structures deriving from some myth or legend (White 44–45). Some critics try to make a virtue of this by creating categories like Richard L. Purtill's "literary myth" to denote something that is almost (but never quite) the same as archaic myth (Purtill 1–4). To allow *The Lord of the Rings* the fullest possible mythic impact, however, these distinctions are always quietly undone when necessary. Purtill, for example, is forced to claim that fans dressing in costumes and re-enacting scenes from the novel are manifestations of a "restore[d] mythic dimension to their consciousness" (Purtill 7, 44). Claims like these not only invite dismissive pathologizations of Tolkien fans, but also ignore the explicit operations of the mythic within the text itself and deliberately uproot Tolkien's novel from any contemporary contexts that would disturb them. Many writers in Tolkien's day reached back to ancient texts for source material: Robert Graves's best-selling historical novel *I, Claudius* (1934) is as full of accurate period detail about early imperial Rome as *The Lord of the Rings* is full of northern European myth and legend, yet makes no claims to have the same impact as Tacitus and is not described as inherently "Roman"; T. H. White's *Once and Future King* (1958) reworks Arthurian legend but with no pretense to being a legend itself. A similar kind of wish fulfillment operates in the many attempts to read Tolkien's novel as a Christian allegory. It is obvious that Tolkien's novel reflects the narrative forms of Christian redemption, but this could also be said about texts as diverse as pagan fairy tales and television soap operas. Such narratives neither originate with nor confine themselves to Christianity.[7] Writing a novel that is informed by myth and writing something that works as myth are very different activities. The temptation to conflate them and to treat *The Lord of the Rings* as a special case, however, has been too much for many Tolkien critics to resist.

In its more sophisticated incarnations, this reification of the mythic is sometimes associated with modernism and its use of the mythic. Tom Shippey, to cite a salient example, unconvincingly argues that Tolkien fits many of the criteria for a modernist writer and that *The Lord of the Rings* makes use of the same kind of mythic method that T. S. Eliot analyzed in

Joyce's *Ulysses* (Shippey 310–15).[8] The key difference between the two, as Shippey recognizes, lies in the status of myth for the two critics. Eliot viewed Joyce's novel not as a myth but as a brilliant application of myth that helps to solve some very historically-contingent artistic problems:

> In using the myth [of Odysseus], in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him [. . .] It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. [. . .] Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art [. . .] (Eliot 177–78)

There is no claim for any sort of "mythic authority" for Joyce, nor is Eliot suggesting that modernist artists should be creating myths as such. Myth is simply a method of shaping the artistic representation of reality at a cultural moment in which realism was discredited in avant-garde artistic circles. Moreover, no less a myth scholar than Carl Jung called *Ulysses* an "infernally nugatory" book that "begins in the void and ends in the void" (Jung 7) and that represents the objectifying, empiricist world-view of "white-skinned man who believes in the object, who is cursed with the object" (Jung 20).[9] The salient mythic allusions and frameworks in *Ulysses* clearly do not make it a myth in any sense of the term. Many of Tolkien's readers rightly see *The Lord of the Rings* as an attempt to respond to the same "futility and anarchy" in contemporary Western life (Shippey 161–68), but, for Shippey, the myths are present in Tolkien's work "not because he thought it was an interesting method but because he believed that the myths were true" (315).

Again, however, the text does not support this critical or, if indeed Tolkien did believe it, authorial wish. The "truth" and importance of the mythic (as cultural heritage and a form of timeless pre-history) in Tolkien's novel do not make it permanent, appealing, or even bearable to the characters who encounter it directly. In this sense, *The Lord of the Rings* can, in fact, be compared to *Ulysses*, but not for the reasons that Shippey has suggested. Like Joyce, Tolkien represents a disjunction between what myths are and how they affect those who are shaped by them. There is no consistency to their impact and no presumption that they will produce the same meaning at all times in all contexts. The variations in the experience of time in both texts are not designed to reproduce a mythic ideal of timelessness but to make the reader aware of how unstable our patterns of understanding events are when faced with radical difference. By the end of *The Lord of*

the Rings, the only permanent site of mythic time is Elvenhome, a place that is permanently out of history and experience altogether. Middle-earth is left with the new dispensation (the Fourth Age) which is the historical world as we already know it, and the disruptive intrusions of the mythic are exiled, defeated, or subsumed into history. Tolkien's belief in the truth of myth may well have been sincere, but it is also much more nuanced than his interpreters have allowed.

The most common occasion for the misuse of "mythic timelessness" in Tolkien criticism is, however, the need to explain the book's vast popularity. One aspect of this, which will be taken up later, is the (conscious or unconscious) yearning for the mythic that is often ascribed to our desacralized, materialist contemporary lives. The other is a critical contradiction revolving around experience that is supposedly timeless rather than explicitly time-bound. This involves making a strong claim for the novel's impact as somehow equivalent to that of a myth, while simultaneously praising it for a profusion of historical, linguistic, and ethnographic detail which cannot coexist with "mythic timelessness." In a very early American appreciation of the novel, for example, Patricia Meyer Spacks sees this contradiction, but cannot relinquish her claim for the novel's mythic effect: "The force of his trilogy" she asserts "comes from its mythic scope and imagination, its fusion of originality with timelessness" (Spacks 96). Only a few pages later, however, she concedes that "paradoxically the richness of detail which makes the world of Frodo and Gandalf convincing also weakens the literary effectiveness of the trilogy by detracting from its mythic authenticity [. . .]" (Spacks 97). This example could stand as the paradigm for those that follow, as the specificities of the novel's historical effects are praised, but made to give way in the face of a vaguely-defined "fusion of originality and timelessness" which leaves the status of both terms undecided and undecidable. It is a choice that is replicated in Tolkien scholarship again and again, and all too often the misty vagaries of the "mythic" are privileged over the concretely readable effects of Tolkien's immense historical frame of reference.

What this choice keeps running up against is the immiscibility of mythic narrative with detailed historical context, and the result is that the historical elements paralyze the very mythic analysis that they were meant to enable. The mythic, in consequence, is either misapplied or invoked only to be ignored. Jane Chance opens her excellent book *Tolkien's Art: A Mythology for England* with the thesis "Tolkien wished to construct an overarching mythology that was embedded in all his published fiction [. . .]" (vii). Only a few pages later, she also asserts that "the seeds for this 'mythology' sprang from those medieval literary, religious, and cultural sources [. . .] in which his life was steeped" (3). The quotation marks around "mythology" suggest her discomfort with a category that she feels compelled to mention, but does

not really wish to use. The rest of her very useful study unpacks these various sources and analyzes the marvelous array of internally consistent, well-developed cultures that we find in Middle-earth; it contains some of the best close readings of Tolkien's work in print. But it never returns to the category of the mythic that her title and preface announce for the simple reason that it can't: all of the realistic detail and minute ethnographic description in Tolkien are precisely what myth, in even the loosest classical or modern senses, cannot allow.

The reason for this is that no narrative can completely transcend its historical context if it has either a traceable point of origin or a framework of cultural details that are necessary to understand it. To be as portable as myths are required to be, in other words, they must be narratives that can move beyond whatever specific conditions gave rise to them. The Oedipus myth, to use a familiar example, has been retold as contemporary literature from classical Greece to the present, and this is possible precisely because the archaic story (in its several incarnations) never gives us any cultural specifics about, say, the costumes, architecture, artistic forms, or economic activities of Thebes. For the story to be so long-enduring and portable, such details cannot matter. As Hans Blumenberg observes in his account of how myth endures in modernity, "The Greek *mython mytheisthai* [to tell a myth] means to tell a story that is not dated and not datable, so that it cannot be localized in any chronicle, but a story that compensates for this lack by being 'significant' [*bedeutsam*] in itself" (149). Compare this to, for example, the plays of Aristophanes, with their wealth of contemporary in-jokes and allusions, which are not performed as often as the mythic tragedies precisely because they are so imbricated in their original context. Tolkien's historical-fictional detail is thus completely corrosive to mythic "timelessness," but Chance obviously thinks that she needs to invoke the mythic (albeit within quotation marks) to reinforce the importance of her claims. This same desperation is much more evident (and much less productive) in the chapter entitled "The Mythic Dimension" in Shippey's *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*. With no clear focus or goal, it wanders through some possible sources in Anglo-Saxon myth and Shakespeare, strains to show how Tolkien creates a "myth of the stars" when it is at best a motif (203–05), invokes Frye's fifty-year-old categories from *The Anatomy of Criticism*, and ends by seeing the novel "reaching out towards universal and mythic meaning" (225) without any explanation of what that might be. One does not have to be suspicious of universal categories in general to find this impossibly vague and deliberately mystifying. Only once in all this does Shippey specifically define what myth does, and his claim there (that it resolves contradictions) is at complete odds with Tolkien's novel where, as we have seen, it is much more likely to embody them (Shippey 179–80).

Shippey's meandering, fragmented argument and obvious unease with his putative subject best represents the status of the mythic in the response to Tolkien—a strong conviction of its importance with no clear sense of what it does or why it matters. And the more forcefully the mythic is insisted upon, the larger the contradictions become: "There is something in Professor John Ronald Reuel Tolkien's works," Ruth Noel writes, "that lies deeper than fantasy or escape. This quality is the same as that found in authentic myths and folk tales, a sense generated by the nearly forgotten but potent beliefs and traditions that form the skeleton of old lore [. . .]" (3). Four pages later, the other shoe drops: "The success of Tolkien's works is based on the vividness, dimensionality, and evocative qualities of Middle-earth" (7). In other words, the book succeeds precisely because of what makes it readable as a historical narrative and what most pointedly excludes the mythic. The critical ambiguity and diffidence about mythic narrative, conceived as something timeless and sustaining, thus arise because myth in this sense is finally an absence rather than a sustaining presence in the text. A naïve belief in the palliative power of myth has been used to block the ambiguities that the mythic events in the novel present, and the material historicism of Tolkien's world is championed as if it were evidence for the power to transcend historical change and speak to the "pre-historic" parts of our consciousness. More than anything else, this response stands as a confirmation that, since the Enlightenment and the rise of the novel as a form, Western culture has lost the capacity to represent experience that transcends the contingent without recourse to theological categories; as Horkheimer and Adorno put it, "Enlightenment regresses to the mythology it has never been able to escape" (*Dialectic* 20). Lacking the conceptual vocabulary to discuss the spiritual or the eternal in secular terms, we are left with a superstructure of desires bolted artificially upon a base that cannot (and does not try to) sustain them. In the end, *The Lord of the Rings* makes a strong statement about the impermanence of all human culture as human beings experience it, while its redemptive romance elements make us wish that it didn't.

Memroies of Númenor: Myth, Nation, and the Individual

The reification of a communal sense of identity as something mythic in Tolkien's work originates with Tolkien himself. As the epigraph to this essay shows, the mythic presence in *The Lord of the Rings* was bound up in Tolkien's mind with an attempt to somehow recover a lost heritage of Englishness. Fifteen years later, his sense of being the discoverer rather than the creator of a lost world that is also our own world was just as strong (*Letters* 412–13). Tolkien's self-proclaimed mission was to "restore" (the verb is his) to England

a body of myth analogous to the Finnish *Kalevala* (1835) or Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835), and, in keeping with this goal, the most widely-quoted and over-determined passage from Tolkien's letters in the criticism is, by a wide margin, his lament over England's lack of a fully-developed body of indigenous mythic narrative. This passage needs to be rehearsed again here because it is the point of departure for all of these discussions and because it has attained a kind of mythic status in its own right:

> I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands. There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish (which greatly affected me); but nothing English [. . .] Do not laugh! But once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story [. . .] which I could dedicate simply to England; to my country. (*Letters* 144)

It is a passage that would not be out of place in the mouth of Edward Casaubon, the deluded myth scholar in *Middlemarch*, but it stands for many Tolkien scholars as an important interpretive matrix for his fiction. Despite Tolkien's confident tone about his national identity, the meaning of "England" as a nation here is not at all obvious.[10] As Tom Shippey has pointed out, there is nothing like a continuous tradition of "Englishness," even for pre-Conquest times. When Tolkien describes England as a nation with no stories "bound up with its tongue and soil," it is not at all clear what the precise referents for "it," "tongue," or "soil" might be since, as with most national identities, the physical, linguistic, and cultural definitions of Englishness have been mobile and heavily contested over the centuries. "Nevertheless," Shippey continues, "Tolkien would have liked to create a 'mythology' for his own people, to anchor it in the counties of the West Midlands, and simultaneously to preserve in it what scraps remained of the myths and legends there must once have been" (*Tolkien* 233). Shippey is both perceptive and coy here. He rightly sees that the holistic narrative of Englishness that Tolkien desires to recover is really a threadbare patchwork of scanty fragments that can be given form only through fiction. His protectiveness about Tolkien, however, a trait shared by many of Tolkien's academic admirers, prevents him from pursuing the implications of this artificial mythology that must (once again) live within quotation marks, even though he knows perfectly well that "there is no original telling of a myth" (Patton and Doniger 6). A "myth" that does

not appear spontaneously is not a myth, and Tolkien's insistence that he is the discoverer of Middle-earth rather than its creator is best understood as a tacit acknowledgment of his contradictory position. His "own people" can likewise only be a purely imaginary group within the category of the English, one with much more tribal coherence and historical continuity than the real history of England records.[11]

Tolkien's interest in reanimating the ancient myths, histories, and languages of the British Isles is usually represented as an idiosyncratic enthusiasm that sets him apart from his contemporary writers, even by sympathetic critics (Shippey, *Tolkien* 231). A cursory glance at post-war British poetry, however, shows that nothing could be further from the truth: digging up the words, relics, and traditions of the ancient cultures of Britain is one of its most important recurring themes, represented by (among others) David Jones's *Anathemata* (1957), Basil Bunting's *Briggflats* (1966), Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns* (1971), R. S. Thomas, Sorley Maclean, and Seamus Heaney (especially "North," "Bone Dreams," and *Beowulf* (2000)). These are influential, canonical voices, and the theme of national identity and how it is constituted is vital to all of them. Some of them even make use of the same materials that Tolkien employed: Hill's Mercia, in particular, is the Anglo-Saxon kingdom that included Tolkien's West Midlands, and the poem's central character is King Offa, the first monarch to claim rulership of all of England; it also insists on a strong (albeit highly ambiguous) connection between the Saxon past and the modern present by weaving Offa's presence into the life of its twentieth-century speaker (Hill 105, 124, 126). Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*, the poem that Tolkien recalled from critical exile through his famous essay "*Beowulf*: The Monster and the Critics," is equally alert to the distinctiveness of Old English and its lingering presence in modern English and Irish vernaculars (Heaney xxiv–xxx). But *The Lord of the Rings* cannot be productively read as the prose counterpart to this verse tradition. As the examples from Hill and Heaney show, these poets are interested in the conditioning influence of the "word hoard" of language and tradition on present questions of identity (personal and national), language, history, and the cultural role of poetry. Tolkien deliberately avoided the Fourth Age history that would have had to explore the direct connections between Middle-earth and our present world that he insisted upon throughout his writing. The poets' exploration of what it means to be Welsh (Thomas), English (Hill), Scottish (Maclean), and Irish (Heaney) is also far more nuanced and detailed than Tolkien's passion for a nebulously iconic "England." The inscription of Tolkien's interest in English national identity under the sign of the mythic is thus, once again, the result not of a presence in *The Lord of the Rings* but of an absence. That Tolkien initiated this discussion of national identity in his fiction but provided no framework for developing it signals that this is a

desire rather than a fully-fledged idea on his part, and the critical attempts to pursue it in detail have produced only absurdities like Lobdell's claim that speaking a common language infuses people with a common consciousness. In this reading, native English speakers who read *The Lord of the Rings* are "inheritors of Tolkien's English mythology, heirs through that grace of his kingdom" (Lobdell 88–89). The whole weight of twentieth-century thought and experience, from Saussure's structural linguistics to the post-colonial writing of Derek Walcott and Salman Rushdie, speaks against this idea and reminds us that a language always acts reciprocally with its different cultural contexts.

More alarming, because it is better supported, is Tom Shippey's call to find the "True Tradition" in Tolkien's sources:

> Tolkien was conscious of many centuries of discouragement which had suppressed native tradition in England [. . .] He valued what was left the more highly. In much of what he wrote and read one can see him trying to return to the time before confusion set in, when the traditions of the Shire and the Mark were uncorrupted. (*Road* 226)

Defining the historical evolution of a nation through time and encounters with other cultures as "corruption" and "confusion" is the vocabulary of only the most intolerant, xenophobic forms of nationalism, but it has direct and regrettable analogues in *The Lord of the Rings*: one thinks of the narrator's disparagement of those who are reckoned citizens of Gondor even though "their blood was mingled," to say nothing of the "short and swarthy folk among them" who have even more dubious origins; Prince Imrahil, however, "was of high blood, and his folk also, tall men and proud" (5.1.734). Shippey also remarks that Tolkien "was in some ways what would now be called an 'ethnic' writer, though the rule for 'ethnicity' seems to be that anyone can have it *except Anglo-Saxons*" (*Road* 226). Neither Tolkien nor Shippey would (one hopes) ever endorse any real-world versions of this ethnocentric approach to human identity, but such naïve and unpleasant nonsense is inevitable whenever one tries to reify a nation based on linguistic or ethnic lines.[12] Even with the best of intentions, the quest for a "pure" Englishness (or any other cultural identity, for that matter) can proceed only by ignoring the brute fact that all cultures are mixtures. As Mary Poovey and many others have shown, the very idea of a national identity is possible only at certain historical junctures and it depends upon a ceaseless and uneven process of differentiation (of the "national *us* from aliens") and displacement (of other ideas that could threaten the idea of the nation) (Poovey 55–56, 1–25). Tolkien's carelessly-expressed patriotic zeal therefore needs to be cloaked in

the veil of "myth" and "tradition" precisely because Anglo-Saxons do "have ethnicity" in all of its untidy historical complexity. Only the deployment of the mythic can head off further exploration of the real historical exclusions that his restored Englishness would require.[13]

As was the case with "mythic timelessness," however, the experience of national identity in the novel is much more complex than its critics and (in this case) its author presents. The three "nations" that the reader directly encounters are the Shire, Rohan, and Gondor, and each is distinctly different in its self-understanding and its relations with the "Englishness" that Tolkien wishes to recover. Of these, the Shire and Rohan are the most explicit versions of Englishness, being recognizable as a fantasy version of the rural English Midlands (*Letters* 235, 250) and of Anglo-Saxon culture (Shippey, *Road* 93–100) respectively. Notably, they are also presented as the most immature of the fictional nations in the text as well, both having fallen into a kind of solipsistic trance about the changing world around them. This is especially true of the Shire. Once a part of the kingdom of Westernesse, it has long since lapsed into a prosperous forgetfulness about "the labours of those that made possible the long peace of the Shire. They were, in fact, sheltered, but they had ceased to remember it" (1.Prologue.5). The hobbit life is a perfect patrician fantasy of traditional rural English contentment, with little or no crime, no resentment of economic imbalances, and a purely ceremonial political structure. As idyllic as life in the Shire seems in Book One, though, Tolkien makes it clear that this is a dream and that the whole Shire needs to awaken from it. As the Elf Gildor pointedly observes to Frodo, the hobbits need to remember their mortality and accept the flux of mortal life: "'you can fence yourselves in, but you cannot forever fence [the world] out'" (1.3.82). The fall into consciousness of their place in the world (through the Black Riders and Saruman) is traumatic for the hobbits, and even the restoration at the close of the novel cannot completely undo the sense of loss that accompanies it. Frodo's last direct speech to Sam in the novel implores him to "read things out of the Red Book, and keep alive the memory of the age that is gone, so that people will remember the Great Danger" (6.9.1006) because a proper historical sense of loss and change is something they can no longer pretend not to need. As the Prologue of the novel makes clear, however, this was still not enough. This most fantastically English part of Middle-earth is also the most unable to adapt to modernity and technology, and thus hobbits are "more numerous formerly than they are today" (1.Prologue.1). Whatever Tolkien may have said about recovering a myth for England outside the novel, inside it the life of the Shire is represented as a fantasy that cannot last. The novel's depiction of the old life in the Shire makes it tempting to mourn its passing, but it was only ever a delusion.

Rohan, the ancient ally of Gondor, is similarly disposed to isolationism, despite its periodic wars and central location in Middle-earth. They are, as Aragorn puts it, "'wise but unlearned, writing no books but singing many songs, after the manner of the children of Men before the Dark Years'" (3.2.420). They live now as they have always lived, and Faramir reinforces Gondor's sense of the Rohirrim as a culture in a prolonged infancy: "they remind us of the youth of men, as they were in the Elder Days" (4.5.663). This happy sense of cultural continuity is exactly what Tolkien desires to recover through his "mythology of their own," but the text makes it clear that it is an artificial and untenable form of happiness that must come to an end. Like the inhabitants of the Shire, they have lost touch with the world around them and their knowledge of Elves and Ents has been reduced to superstitions and stories for children. As it was for the hobbits, their reengagement with the world will be a traumatic one. As Théoden says:

> "I have lived to see strange days. [. . .] We cared little for what lay beyond the borders of our land. Songs we have that tell of these things, but we are forgetting them, teaching them only to children, as a careless custom. And now the songs have come down among us out of strange places, and walk visible under the Sun." (3.8.536–37)

He understands that this coming into history must be experienced as a loss, and the narrator has preempted him in this realization by remarking earlier that Théoden's army is the "last host of Rohan" that "rode thundering into the West" (3.6.513). The kingdom will go on, but irretrievably changed by its encounter with the world. All its legends will materialize into historical fact, and its way of life will never be the same again.

The two most "English" cultures in the novel are thus the two that must face the impossibility of any unchanging way of life or identity. In stark contrast to Tolkien's stated desire to recover some enduring ancient spark of Englishness, his fictional incarnations of that identity are made to confront their own mortality and a world that is remaking itself. Gondor, which has a culture of writing and which has already experienced a rise and fall in its long past, has already learned that lesson (although Denethor has repressed it) and it is no coincidence that it is the best-developed polity that we experience in the novel. Even here, though, oblivion is starting to creep in. Even as he boasts of Gondor's store of ancient books, Faramir must admit that: "Some none can now read; and for the rest, few ever unlock them" (4.5.655). Rohan and the Shire are about to experience for the first time the sense of loss and alienation that comes from cultural change, but Gondor has experienced it before. Much of the action of the novel actually

takes place amid the ruins of the past glories of Westernesse, from the monuments on the Barrow Downs (1.7.142) to Weathertop (1.11.181) to Amon Hen (2.10.391) and the defaced statue of an old king at the crossroads that leads to Mordor (4.7.687). The fragments of Gondor's past have been laid out before the reader ever since Frodo left the Shire, and one way to understand the unfolding narrative is as the process of working out a way to gather them together into one kingdom again. But, once again, things are not, and cannot be, what they were. Aragorn may repeat the words of Elendil at his coronation (6.5.946), but Gandalf is on hand to remind him that "though much has been saved, much must now pass away" (6.5.949). The fantasy of maintaining one imperishable communal identity perishes, ironically, with the Ring. Tolkien's readers and critics have preferred to believe that the ideas that nourish a community can endure more or less unchanged despite the inevitability of change in the text, but this is the same willful refusal of time and change from which everyone in Middle-earth is forcibly awakened. The voices of Heaney, Thomas, Hill and the other post-war writers who have engaged with the subject of national identity have all insisted, much more persuasively, upon the inevitability of change and contingency and have done so without flirting with any fantasies of permanence.

Conclusion: "Some Mysterious Need . . ."

A strong analogue to this desire for the renewal of the community through contact with its mythic past is the desire for the renewal of individuals through a spiritual reconnection that the novel can supposedly effect. This is the last main occasion for the discourse of the mythic in the response to *The Lord of the Rings*, and (understandably) by far the hardest to follow. Everyone seems to agree that modernity has deprived us of some essential spiritual experiences, and many readers of Tolkien's work have felt that the novel partly restores or substitutes for them. No-one, however, seems to be able to say precisely what this entails.

Sarah Beach, for example, asserts that "[Tolkien's] works waken in [readers'] hearts the awareness of Elvish magic in the world the readers are living in: the crispness of autumn days, the sound of falling water [. . .]" (35) as if the Romantic idea of "communion with nature" was a transhistorical commonplace. Tom Shippey claims that "[m]any people have remarked, and even more have felt, that *The Lord of the Rings* is in some way or other a 'mythic' work" (*Tolkien* 179), but he follows this up by explaining more about how myth worked for Tolkien than about how it operates for readers. At the end of his balanced, insightful, and generally excellent volume introducing Tolkien and his work, Charles Moseley falls back on a similarly woolly sense

of contemporary spiritual emptiness that is totally at odds with the precision of his writing as a whole:

> The welcome given to [his fiction], and the many attempts of readers to articulate what it meant, suggests that Tolkien had hit some mysterious need. [. . .] Destroy or abandon one mythology, or one religion, as has been done in the last few decades, and another, which might be very much worse, will take its place. Tolkien seems to have spoken to this spiritual need. This mythology of and for England seems fundamentally religious [. . .] (78–79)

A "mysterious need" is being satisfied by something unique in the text, a need for something "spiritual" to replace everything that post-war Western culture has called into question and, at least provisionally, to stop our implicit descent into something antithetical to the spirit that can never be specifically identified. As with so much else concerning the mythic dimension of this novel, this lack of clarity is much more reassuring than any specificity could be. This way, the reader is free to project his or her own personal bogey into the role of villain, and Tolkien's work has thus been appropriated for political positions ranging from conservative Christianity to radical environmentalism. We may not be able definitively to explain the problem, but Tolkien's works can combat it (in ways that the equally idiosyncratically English and mythically-astute Harry Potter novels apparently can't; at least, no-one has mounted that argument yet). One feels for Moseley et al. here, because the vocabulary of spirit is a difficult one to deploy in the contemporary academy, and he is obviously trying to avoid the massive oversimplifications made in some of the overtly Christian readings of the novel that have appeared over the past few decades. But by now we can see this unfolding pattern for what it is—not a reflection of the fundamental mysteriousness of the mythic, but of our desire to preserve a space where the most pressing spiritual and material problems of modern life cannot plague us. None of the critics who invoke the mythic affect of the novel can produce any coherent account of it, and this is the last and most telling absence for which the mythic is the sign. At the same time as Tolkien was composing his novel, the Frankfurt School was constructing a model for understanding the ways in which modern art has lost its power to reconceive reality and fled into escapism (Horkheimer, "Art and Mass Culture" 276–79). If the dismissal of *The Lord of the Rings* as mere escapism is ever to be effectively countered, the onus is on Tolkien's readers and critics to fill in the absence marked by the mythic with an adequate account of its transformative power. If this is not possible, then they will have failed to match Tolkien's textual engagement with the necessity of confronting historical change.

Notes

1. For an astute summary of the range of meanings which the term "myth" now encompasses, see Day 3–32.

2. For detailed examinations of the modern evolution of thinking about myth, see Lincoln 47–75, Vernant, and, especially, Von Hendy.

3. See, as one of many possible examples, Conlogue.

4. The best pieces of criticism on this process, to which I here record my debt, are Basney and Stenström.

5. All textual citation to *The Lord of the Rings* will hereafter be made by volume, chapter, and page number from the second edition listed in the Works Cited.

6. This can also apply to chthonic forces like Caradhras and the Old Willow.

7. For a representative Christian reading of the novel, see Birzer. For good arguments against the necessity of such readings, see Rosebury 152–54 and Shippey, *Tolkien* 174–82.

8. See Esty 117-27 for a much more convincing counter-argument that Tolkien is part of a determined anti-modernist tradition.

9. I owe this reference to Professor John Rickard.

10. Jed Esty points out that Tolkien's vigorous nationalism connects him with other important colonial or expatriate writers (such as Kipling and T. S. Eliot) who were more determinedly "English" than many of their native English counterparts (Esty 122–23).

11. For a further exploration of the historical contexts of Tolkien's desire, see my "Reanimation of Antiquity and the Resistance to History: Macpherson—Scott—Tolkien," forthcoming in *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages*. Ed. Jane Chance and Alfred K. Siewers. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005.

12. Jane Chance has correctly pointed out that the heroes of *The Lord of the Rings* are all somehow of mixed race (*Lord* 1–26, 95–128), but this in no way cancels out the discourse of racial purity that recurs in the text as well.

13. Even sympathetic critics of *The Lord of the Rings* have had to admit that the novel contains some "troubling racial attitudes" (O'Hehir), but they must be balanced against some notable expressions of tolerance in the letters (e.g. *Letters* 37–38, 73).

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Chronology

1892	John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, called Ronald, is born in Bloemfontein, Orange Free State (now South Africa), on January 3. He is the first son of Mabel Suffield Tolkien and Arthur Tolkien.
1894	Brother, Hilary Arthur Reuel, is born.
1895	Goes with mother and brother to England, where parents had lived earlier, to visit family.
1896	Father dies of rheumatic fever in Africa.
1900	Ronald enters King Edward's School.
1904	Mother dies in November. Father Francis Morgan is designated the boys' guardian.
1910	Awarded a scholarship to study classics at Exeter College, Oxford.
1913	Transfers from classics to English and formally studies Old Norse.
1914	Engaged to Edith Bratt.
1915	Receives degree in English from Oxford. Enters the army.
1916	Marries Edith Bratt. Participates in the Battle of the Somme. Sick with trench fever, returns home in November.
1917	First son, John, is born.
1918	Joins staff of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.
1920	Becomes reader in English language at Leeds University.

	Second son, Michael, is born.
1924	Promoted to professor of English language at Leeds. Third son, Christopher, is born.
1925	Along with E.V. Gordon, edits *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* which is published. Leaves Leeds for Oxford, where he becomes Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon.
1929	Daughter, Priscilla, is born.
1932	Continues to publish poems and articles.
1937	*The Hobbit* is published.
1945	Named Merton Professor of English Language and Literature at Oxford University.
1949	*Farmer Giles of Ham* is published.
1954	First two volumes of *The Lord of the Rings* (*The Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Two Towers*) are published.
1955	Last volume of *The Lord of the Rings* (*The Return of the King*) is published.
1959	Retires from Oxford University.
1962	Publishes *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil.*
1964	*Tree and Leaf* is published.
1967	*Smith of Wootton Major* is published.
1971	Wife dies.
1972	Becomes resident honorary fellow at Merton College, Oxford. Receives honorary doctorate from Oxford and is honored by the queen.
1973	Dies on September 2.
1976	*The Father Christmas Letters* is published.
1977	*The Silmarillion* is published.
1983–1996	Twelve volumes of *The History of Middle-earth* are published.

Contributors

HAROLD BLOOM is Sterling Professor of the Humanities at Yale University. He is the author of 30 books, including *Shelley's Mythmaking*, *The Visionary Company*, *Blake's Apocalypse*, *Yeats*, *A Map of Misreading*, *Kabbalah and Criticism*, *Agon: Toward a Theory of Revisionism*, *The American Religion*, *The Western Canon*, and *Omens of Millennium: The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams, and Resurrection*. *The Anxiety of Influence* sets forth Professor Bloom's provocative theory of the literary relationships between the great writers and their predecessors. His most recent books include *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, a 1998 National Book Award finalist, *How to Read and Why*, *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds*, *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited*, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, and *Jesus and Yahweh: The Names Divine*. In 1999, Professor Bloom received the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Letters Gold Medal for Criticism. He has also received the International Prize of Catalonia, the Alfonso Reyes Prize of Mexico, and the Hans Christian Andersen Bicentennial Prize of Denmark.

CHARLES A. HUTTAR is professor emeritus at Hope College in Michigan. He is the editor of *Imagination and the Spirit* and coeditor of *Word and Story in C. S. Lewis*.

DAVID STEVENS is the author of *The Gothic Tradition* and *Romanticism*. He has also edited an edition of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

CAROL D. STEVENS teaches English at Eastern Illinois University. Her scholarly writing has appeared in such journals as *Femspec, Children's Literature Review*, and *Utopian Studies*.

WILLIAM H. GREEN teaches at Western Kentucky University. He has published many poems and short stories, as well as a novel.

GEORGE CLARK is a professor at Queen's University in Canada. He has published a book on *Beowulf,* written many essays, and been a consultant reader for journals such as *PMLA*, *Speculum*, and *English Studies in Canada*. He also is a translator.

JANE CHANCE is a professor at Rice University. She is the author of several titles, including The Lord of the Rings: *The Mythology of Power,* and has edited *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth: A Reader*.

JORGE J.E. GRACIA is SUNY Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the State University at Buffalo. He is the author of many titles, including *Philosophy and Literature in Latin America* and *A Theory of Textuality*.

BRIAN ROSEBURY is Principal Lecturer in English Literature in the Department of the Humanities, University of Central Lancashire in the U.K. He is the author of *Art and Desire: A Study in the Aesthetics of Fiction*.

VERLYN FLIEGER is a professor at the University of Maryland. She has done much work on Tolkien and is the author of, among other works, *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World* and *A Question of Time: J. R. R. Tolkien's Road to Faërie.*

MARJORIE BURNS is a professor at Portland State University. She is the coeditor of *On Tolkien: Interviews, Reminiscences, and Other Essays*.

JOHN C. HUNTER teaches in the Comparative Humanities Program at Bucknell University. He is a coeditor of *Renaissance Literature: An Anthology.*

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