Inventing history: the rhetoric of history in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

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Declaration

I hereby declare that

Inventing history: the rhetoric of history

in J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings

is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Date

Abstract

As a scholar, Tolkien spent a great deal of time working from manuscripts. Likewise, as a storyteller, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien creates a narrative persona who bases his story on his compilation and translation of ancient manuscripts. This persona operates within his story's narrative frame as an analogue for Tolkien's own work with manuscripts. Readers have long sought for Tolkien's sources. The mythologies of medieval Northern Europe have been especially beneficial in helping us understand the influences on Tolkien. No study, however, currently exists that pursues the "manuscript sources" used by Tolkien's narrative persona. But a reading that attempts to pursue these sources may also prove beneficial. Just as Tolkien inserts himself, in the form of his narrative persona, into the framework of Middle-earth, so also is the reader invited to read *The Lord of the Rings* from within this same framework. Tolkien wanted to his story to be read from inside Middle-earth as an artifact of history.

This study will propose that—by simulating the kinds of phenomena around which a modern compiler of medieval manuscripts and stories has to work: fragmented manuscripts, lacunae, dittography, palimpsests, and variable texts—Tolkien has successfully distressed his story in such a way that it has gained the atmosphere of an ageing legend. The argument of this thesis is that Tolkien's imitation of classical and medieval manuscript realities is even ambitious enough to suggest that Tolkien's narrative persona has culled his story from the manuscripts of at least three major literary traditions, each of which is distinct in its interests,

concerns, iconographies, historiographies, and themes. In addition to revealing where and how Tolkien has distressed his narrative, this study will also seek to identify what portions of the narrative belong to which of the three major traditions and tease out the implications of the interactions between them.

Key Terms: J. R. R. Tolkien, manuscript studies, source-critical reading, textual criticism, historiography, narrative frame, elf-friend, ship-burial, burial mound, elegy, monumental historiography, palimpsest, lacunae, dittography, textual ruin

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Æ Ælfwine

FGH *Farmer Giles of Ham*

FR *The Fellowship of the Ring*

H Holbytla

LotR *The Lord of the Rings*

LXX Septuagint

ME Middle English

MT Masoretic Text

NCP *Notion Club Papers*

OE Old English (Anglo-Saxon)

OED *Oxford English Dictionary*

P Peregrin or Periannath

RK *The Return of the King*

SD *Sauron Defeated*

TH *The Hobbit*

TT *The Two Towers*

CHAPTER ONE

TOLKIEN'S ARCHAIZING MACHINERY IN *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

Tolkien's Time-Frames in the *Notion Club Papers*, and *The Lord of the Rings*

Tolkien's *LotR* is informed by an array of real-world sources. Borrowings from medieval (e.g., the *Beowulf*-poet, and Jordanes[1]) and modern (e.g., Rider Haggard,[2] William Morris[3]) sources already reveal themselves in novel ways and lend the work depth. But Tolkien's analogue, his narrative persona as a Middle-earth scholarly translator and compiler inside the story's frame, suggests that the story's "original" voices are buried beneath several strata of transmission. Tolkien scholars have long sought for these sources. The mythologies of medieval Northern Europe have been especially helpful in helping us understand Tolkien's influences. But no study that I am aware of currently exists that seeks the "sources" of Tolkien's narrative *persona*. Tolkien inserts himself and his ideal reader inside *LotR*'s frame. A reading that accepts Tolkien's challenge to the reader to step into the frame with him and read *LotR* from the "inside" could be helpful. Essentially, such a reading would have the advantage of viewing *LotR* not merely as well-told story, but also as a fictional artifact—a story rough-hewn from history. From this critical vantage, one could measure the degree to which Tolkien was able to achieve this artistic aim.

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[1] *The Origins and Deeds of the Goths*.

[2] e.g., *She*, *King Solomon's Mines*.

[3] e.g., *The House of the Wolfings*, *The Roots of the Mountains*.

The subject of a story's "age" and a suitable frame by which this age should be experienced was, for Tolkien, more than a passing interest. Time plays an active, central role in Tolkien's *LotR.* Time is not only the space in which the characters of Middle-earth live and move; time is also itself a "character" in the novel, actively seeking to lend the text an artificial text-ure, a patina of age.

Tolkien-the-author inserts Tolkien-the-compiler (and implied narrator) into the frame of his own mythology by suggesting that the latter is the story's final compiler, redactor, and translator (*RK* 1141). He also creates an implied reader for *LotR*, and this reader, like the implied narrator, is envisaged as a character within, not without, the narrative frame (*FR* 1; cf. *TT* 719-20). This method of inserting both the scholar-compiler and the reader within the world of the story speaks not only to the independence and completeness Tolkien sought to give his created world, but also to the lengths he went in order to charge his stories with a sense of history.

The *Notion Club Papers* (*NCP*), an experimental time travel novel Tolkien started but never finished, points to just how essential the subject of time may have been for him. The work not only experiments with the element of time by having its characters occupy, in the form of dreams and visions, two periods of time at once, but Tolkien also foregrounds time by framing the *NCP* as a work that comes into existence only through the efforts of a team of scholars who have collected, studied, and compiled the notes left by a somewhat obscure Oxford club several decades earlier.[4] As we shall see, this conceptual framework is very nearly the same as that

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[4] According to the *NCP*'s foreword, "These Papers have a rather puzzling history. They were found after the Summer Examinations of 2012 on the top of one of a number of sacks of waste paper in the basement of the Examination Schools at Oxford by the present editor, Mr. Howard Green, the

which informs Tolkien's *LotR*. Before launching, then, into an exploration of time's role in *LotR*, it will be helpful to look briefly at the intentions with which Tolkien approached the art of framing stories, and the way in which he integrated the elements of time and history in *NCP* in particular.

The *NCP* consists of the minutes taken of the Club's meetings. On "Night 60," the minutes record Ramer, one of the Club's members, reading aloud a story he has just finished writing (*SD* 161). The final "compiler" of the club's minutes notes that the transcript of Ramer's story is "lost," but he does record the discussion generated by Ramer's story. We can infer from this discussion that the story is of the space-travel science fiction variety; the protagonist travels by machine to another planet or star system.

Another club member, Guildford, complains that protagonist's mode of transportation is out of step with the nature of the story. He believes that mankind, because of his physical constitution and the realities of the universe, cannot exist beyond the orbit of the moon (*SD* 169). Only a "miracle," he argues, could get a man beyond the moon, but, according to Guildford, when an author tries to invent a machine that transcends a human being's inherent limitations, he is attempting to have it both ways: he sends a character to a place that can only be reached by a miracle, but at the same time, he tries to use mechanical, non-miraculous means to

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Clerk of the Schools. They were in a disordered bundle, loosely tied with red string. The outer sheet, inscribed in large Lombardic capitals…. The Papers, from internal evidence, clearly had no connexion with any examinations held or lectures given in the Schools during Mr. Green's many years of office…. The author appears in one or two passages, and in the occasional notes, to identify himself with the character called in the dialogues Nicholas Guildford. But Mr. J. R. Titmass, the well-known historian of twentieth-century Oxford, who has given all possible assistance to the present editor, has shown that this is certainly a fictitious name and…. Mr. W. W. Wormald of the School of Bibliopoly, and Mr. D. N. Borrow of the Institute of Occidental Languages, found their curiosity aroused by the published extracts…" (*SD* 155-6).

get the character there. In other words, the metaphysical nature of a frame must agree with the metaphysical constitution of the fantasy world. Tolkien could be quite conscious of the relationship between the nature of a fantasy's frame and the nature of the fantasy—whether that fantasy is a space-travel story or a pseudo-historical, but "magical," fantasy like *LotR*.

Other voices in the Club reply that an author ought to have the sovereign power and right to fulfill, by any means possible, a reader's desire to see faraway places. However, Ramer's story, for Guildford, lacks literary credibility; it is incoherent because the story-frame does not align with the content of the story. To pursue Guildford's logic a little further, the incoherent frame thwarts the very desire the story is supposed to fulfill. The author invents the machine for the sake of giving the story an atmosphere of probability; but, by transporting the human character to a place that no machine could possibly reach, the author has rendered the machine completely superfluous.

In sentiments that should remind one of Tolkien's use of the "Red Book of Westmarch" topos in *LotR*, the NCP's Ramer argues:

> A picture-frame is not a parallel. An author's way of getting to Mars (say) is part of *his* story of his Mars; and of *his* universe, as far as that particular tale goes. It's part of the picture, even it if it's only in a marginal position; and it may seriously affect all that's inside [emphasis his]. (*SD* 163)

In particular, for Guildford, the "scientifictious" (i.e., science fictional) frame practically demands that the rest of the story be a "spaceship-minded and scientifictious" adventure (i.e., plots involving ray-guns, blasters, "crystal torpedoes," etc.). In other words, if the frame refuses at the outset to engage with

the inherent difficulties of space travel, serious stories about life and humanity will inevitably devolve into juvenile techno-jargon. Guildford suggests an almost causal relationship between the frame and the content of the plot and story; the scientifictious frame tends to lead to a thoroughly scientifictious story. His critique is prescriptive: the author who chooses as a setting for his or her story this universe must abide by the rules of this universe. If the story flaunts these limitations, it negates the frame. Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing, the frameless story cannot induce the reading audience to perform the necessary act of suspending disbelief.[5]

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[5] The trouble with Guildford's theory is that he actually enjoys the content of Ramer's story. Speaking for all the members who attended that meeting, the first-person narrator notes:

> [A]pparently all of us, in some degree, had sensed something odd about [Ramer's] story, and now recognized that it differed from the norm like seeing does from imagining. I felt that it was like the difference between a bright glimpse of a distant landscape: threadlike waters really falling; wind ruffling the small green leaves and blowing up the feathers of birds on the branches, as that can be seen through a telescope: limited but clear and coloured; flattened and remote, but moving and real—between that and any picture. Not, it seemed to me, an effect to be explained simply by art. And yet—the explanation offered was nonsense outside the pages of a romance; or so I found that most of us felt at that moment. (*SD* 172)

If he liked the content of the story, while disapproving of the frame; and if indeed the DNA of a story is informed by the story's frame, then what does this say of Guildford's theory? It must mean either that his theory of frame-and-story continuity is flawed, or that Ramer is withholding something with respect to how he composed the story. Guildford concludes the latter: The story has the atmosphere of something genuine; but the frame is utterly false. Ramer must have had the story in hand, and then sought for a frame to tack haphazardly onto its edges (171).

The next night, Ramer confesses that he has indeed invented the frame in order to hide the true origin of the story (175). Embarrassed as he has been to share what proves to be the metaphysical, telepathic, almost theosophic origins of his story, he has invented a cheap (though more conventional) vehicle to give his readers access to his story. In reality, the story has come to him in a vision that would require—not in isolation—a combination of modes to articulate: dreams, memory, and incarnation (177-178). In essence, he had been able to access by what he calls an "incarnate mind" not merely his own body's memories, but also the memories of places and objects (182). He receives these visions in what could be described as waking dreams; he perceives them (like dreams) in the form of un-interpreted images, sounds, and fragments of decontextualized scenes. And thus when he articulates from waking memory the content of one of these visions, what he has to report of them is merely a "translation"—or what he describes at one point as "palimpsests"

While Ramer often seems to be Tolkien's mouthpiece among the members of the NCP (see Shippey, *Road* 297-298), Guildford's position (which is further strengthened by the discovery that it has ultimately exposed Ramer's false frame) gives some indication of the extent to which Tolkien himself had thought about the need for continuity between frame and story.[6] For Tolkien, it seems, the frame serves at least two key purposes: to provide a vehicle that will transport readers to the author's fictional world (and the more marvelous the fictional world, the more marvelous the vehicle will have to be); and, in connection with the previous purpose, establish just enough credibility to suspend a reader's disbelief.

The lack of a proper portal or frame through which to enter Tolkien's mythical world may account for what some, including Christopher Tolkien, believe to be the primary failing of *The Silmarillion*. When addressing the meaning and importance of *The Book of Lost Tales* (i.e., the early forerunner of *The Silmarillion*) to *The Silmarillion* and *LotR*, Christopher complains that "[t]he published work has no 'framework,' no suggestion of what it is and how (within the imagined world) it came to be. This I now think to have been an error" (*The Book of Lost Tales 1*, xii). *LotR*, however, is not saddled with this particular problem. The Middle-earth of *LotR* possesses a precisely calculated frame that mediates between the primary world and Tolkien's secondary world.

The reader who considers Ramer's discussion in Tolkien's *NCP* and then revisits *LotR* is likely to bring to his or her reading an informed consciousness of the

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(198), texts overlaying blurred or erased texts.

[6] Shippey notes that all the characters of the NCP serve in some fashion as reflections of Tolkien (*Road* 297).

importance Tolkien placed on the continuity between frame and story; such a reader might be inclined to ask two crucial questions: why does *LotR*'s frame consist of asking the reader to understand that the story has only reached us through scores of intermediary bards, traditions, scribes, translators, editors, redactors, and compilers and in what sense is this frame the appropriate vehicle for accessing *LotR*'s narrative?

To answer these questions, we may need to ask exactly what Tolkien himself was after in creating his secondary world. In his letter to Stanley Unwin dated 14 September 1950, Tolkien reveals that his imaginary world (Middle-earth and the cosmos to which it belongs) was the result of an initial desire to write a myth, a fairy story, a heroic legend "on the brink of history" (*Letters* 144). More importantly, he insisted that his fictional world was not pure invention:

> The mere stories were the thing. They arose in my mind as 'given' things, and as they came, separately, so too the links grew. An absorbing, though continually interrupted labour (especially since, even apart from the necessities of life, the mind would wing to the other pole and spend itself on the linguistics): yet always I had the sense of recording what was already 'there,' somewhere: not of 'inventing.' (*Letters* 145)

The content of his story is pseudo-historical; it is legend "on the brink of history"; and, like Ramer's visions, it is better described as somehow a translation of a "memory" rather than a pure invention. Tolkien wanted his story to possess the atmosphere of history; he therefore framed his story to be accessed in the way that, for him, history was best accessed: through "historical" texts that carried with them the kinds of philological and historical permutations that seem to promise the reader an exclusive and tantalizing glimpse of a lost past. Moreover, this glimpse is

made all the more inviting by the tenuousness of its existence; the legendary history in *LotR* is made to feel as fleeting and brittle as the fading manuscripts upon which it is written. The reader is thus made to recognize and remain dependent upon the skill of the compiler and the good fortune that has allowed so marvelous and irreplaceable a story to subsist upon such meager circumstances.

This dichotomy between the novel and Tolkien's work is readily seen in the difference between *LotR* and, say, C. S. Lewis's Space Trilogy (*Out of the Silent Planet*, 1938; *Perelandra*, 1944; *That Hideous Strength*, 1945). In stark contrast to Ramer's false frame, which, like Lewis's Trilogy, attempts to use futuristic technology to transport its characters (and readers) into his story-world, *LotR* uses a strategy that is quite the reverse.[7] In it Tolkien employs obsolete, archaic methods to transport his readers into a mythical past. He appeals ostensibly to "extratextual" authority (which, considering that the authority is entirely invented, turns out to be an intratextual authority). Like a clever forger of antiquities, he distresses his story so that it appears aged. The new metallic shine of the spaceship is replaced with a retrograde, origin-seeking, brittle, yellowed manuscript containing archaic script.

Tolkien's Rings and the Preservation of the Past

If the discussion of frames in the *NCP* sheds light on *LotR*'s "time-frame," the rings in Tolkien's mythology are themselves an even closer analogy to the role of

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[7] Jared Lobdell, in *The Scientifiction Novels of C. S. Lewis*, notices, however, that "It was Tolkien (in the person of Ramer, his "Ransom") who suggested that one could time-travel into Faerie (*The Notion Club Papers*, p. 172). It was Tolkien who succeeded in combining Faerie with traditional Christian doctrine, though only in a pre-Christian world very far from the world of Elwin Ransom" (28-9). It would seem that Lewis's and Tolkien's aims in creating fantasy were strikingly similar; their differences were mostly academic and centered on a philosophical disagreement over the frame (or, how characters and readers "enter" into the fantasy world).

time in *LotR*. The rings are unique for the way in which they interact with time. The Great Rings retard the aging process, giving its bearers long life. Gandalf says, “A mortal, Frodo, who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, but he does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues….” (*FR* 46). The elvish rings preserve the beauty of Rivendell and Lothlórien and stabilize artifacts of the past (*FR* 269). Due to the influence of Nenya, Galadriel’s ring, Haldir, an elf of Lothlórien, is able to introduce Cerin Amroth to the Fellowship with the impressive, “Behold! You are come to Cerin Amroth…. For this is the heart of the ancient realm as it was long ago… Here ever bloom the winter flowers in the unfading grass” (*FR* 351). Although the Ruling Ring and the elvish rings widely differ in the intent with which they are wielded, both preserve their wearers and thereby make the past accessible in the present. In this way they are analogous to Tolkien’s artistic work as a whole. His work displays a concerted effort to preserve lost or overshadowed mythologies and histories. *LotR* is itself a kind of archaizing “ring,” arresting the past’s rapid fade into forgottenness.

Mindful of Tolkien’s archaizing tendencies, scholars have combed through Tolkien’s works in search of classical and medieval antecedents. But most studies of this nature have sought simply to flesh out Tolkien’s use of archaic source-material, emplotment, syntax, typology, and myth-production. Book-length inquiries into Tolkien’s medievalism have been produced.[8] While each of these works is insightful

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[8] For instance, by Jane Chance (*The Mythology of Power*; *Tolkien’s Art*; *Tolkien’s Modern Middle Ages*; and *Invention of Myth*; *Tolkien’s Legendarium)*; Verlyn Flieger (*Splintered Light*; *A Question of Time*; *Green Suns and Faerie*; *Interrupted Music*); David Day (*The World of Tolkien: Mythological Sources*); Jason Fisher (*Tolkien and the Study of His Sources*); Elizabeth Solopova (*Languages, Myth and History*, *The Keys of Middle-earth*), Helmut Pesch (*Elbisch-Wöterbuch*, *Elbisch-*

and necessary to the forward momentum of Tolkien studies, the investigation of Tolkien's antiquarianism can be broadened still further. However, in most cases the focus tends to be upon Tolkien's use of medieval language, syntax, stories, myths, legends, and sources. A few scholars have suggested the kind of investigation I am pursuing in this study.[9] These studies, however, are limited in scope and suggestive rather than comprehensive; none of these investigations, due to their limited treatment, fully explores the possibilities of this approach to *LotR*.[10] This study will pursue such a treatment.

As I hope to make clear in this investigation, Tolkien seems to have wanted *LotR* not only to sound like a medieval story but also to feel like a medieval *text*. In terms of creating a text with a medieval *text*ure, the *Nibelungenlied* could serve as an authentic medieval analogy of what Tolkien may have tried to achieve. The lay ("lied") itself has come down to us today in many manuscripts (whole and partial). The three most important manuscripts, A, B, C differ widely at certain significant points, creating what Andersson calls a "text-critical impasse beyond which the editor cannot proceed." For Andersson, the reader must be content with three

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lern- und Übungsaufgaben, J. R. R. Tolkien: *Der Mythenschöpfer*); Ruth Noel (*Languages of Tolkien's Middle-earth*); and Carl Phelpstead (*Tolkien and Wales: Language, Literature and Identity*).

[9] Tom Shippey's *Road to Middle-earth* (see chapter nine "The Course of Actual Composition") and Gergely Nagy's essay "The Medievalist('s) Fiction: Textuality and Historicity as Aspects of Tolkien's Medievalist Cultural Theory in a Postmodernist Context" (in Chance and Siewers' *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages* 29-41). Also, Flieger, following Richard West's "The Interlace Structure of The Lord of the Rings," wrote an essay entitled "Tolkien and the Idea of the Book," which touches on this subject. Here she attempts to explain how and why Tolkien "adapted" medieval book practices for a modern audience (131).

[10] Michael Drout intends to publish a work he is calling "The Past in Tolkien's Works" (which, apparently, will be an essay in a work he is calling, *Tolkien: The Forest and the City*. But, again, not only is this work not yet published, but the fact that this inquiry will be limited to a single chapter warrants the need for a lengthy treatment of the subject. See http://wheatoncollege.edu/faculty/profiles/michael-drout/.

variations of the lay ("Nibelungenlied" 115). Not only does the modern editor have to navigate a text-critical "impasse," but the reader also has to consider that this epic's anonymous author seems to have tried to tie together two different legends. The poet's efforts have resulted in a story that is, at times, very difficult to understand. Unexplained non sequiturs and sudden illogical character transformations litter the text.[11] A much older heroic cycle, which Shippey calls "The Long Lay of Sigurthr" (*Road* 311), not only stands behind the stories of the *Nibelungenlied*, but it also informs the poems and epics of other medieval Norse and German traditions. The same stories of Siegfried can be found scattered across the Poetic Edda (*Sigurðarkviða in forna*, *Sigurðarkviða in meiri*, *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*, *Guðrúnarkviða*, I, II, III, *Atlakviða* and *Atlamál*), the *Vǫlsungasaga*, *þiðreks saga*, and *Lied vom Hürnen Seyfrid* (Andersson, 114). These authors all seem to have attempted in their own idiosyncratic way and according to the needs of their own times and places to "correct" the story as it came down to them. Their efforts, instead of leading to greater clarity, have actually confused the tradition beyond hope of reconstructing. But what we have now, in all of these texts combined, is a rather charming mosaic or pastiche. Shippey's aphorism on this subject is memorable: "the charm of [this story]...may in fact be created not by literary success but by literary failure" (*Road* 313). Indeed, the variations, flat-out contradictions,

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[11] Andersson lists a few of these: "Why does Siegfried, who is intent on winning Kriemhild's hand, issue a hostile challenge to her brothers the moment he arrives in Worms? Does Brünhild and Siegfried's mutual recognition on Island indicate a prior relationship such as we find in the Norse sources? Why does Brünhild beset Gunther with tears and threats because of what she perceives as a mismatch between the princess Kriemhild and the alleged vassal Siegfried? ….Why does Kriemhild change character so drastically in the second part of the poem and why, at the last moment, does her interest seem to shift from a desire for vengeance to a desire for Siegfried's treasure" (113). Tom Shippey also discusses these variations in *Road* 311-313.

missing motives, and inexplicable character metamorphoses all lend the story of Siegfried a historical texture; that is, the variations lend the story a sense of authenticity. The reader senses that the confused story possesses the added dimension of history; it bears all the signs of having made its way through history, though not unscathed.

This is precisely the dimension that Tolkien seems to have desired to add to his work, and *LotR* in particular. Though *LotR* is thoroughly coherent, there are indications in the text that suggest he wanted to fictionalize a "historical transmission" of *LotR* and make it a part of the reader's act of willingly suspended disbelief. What follows in this study will be a demonstration of these textual indications. To a great degree, the fictive historical transmission is believable, or at least plausible. *LotR* is, in many ways, true to the medieval tradition from which it draws its inspiration. While Tolkien called *LotR* a "feigned" history (*FR* xix), few have guessed just how deeply the illusion penetrates and informs *LotR*'s text. The success of the "history" of Middle-earth owes much of its depth, charm, and seductiveness to this method. To borrow from Shippey's aphorism (above), Tolkien successfully lends his work this historical dimension to the degree that *LotR* fails to be entirely consistent in tone, entirely coherent in facts, or entirely conscious of the medieval processes it is fictionalizing.

Tolkien's Larger Archaizing Apparatus

Since its publication, *LotR* has been a stunning success. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then Tolkien has been flattered like few others. Works like Brooks' *The Sword of Shannara* series, Paolini's *Eragon*, McKiernan's *The Iron Tower*

Omnibus, Donaldson's *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant* are all, more-or-less, unbashed imitations of Tolkien's novel. In addition to inspiring scores of board (e.g., Dungeons and Dragons) and video games (The Battle for Middle-earth, and many others), Peter Jackson's blockbuster film adaptation, in three parts, has proven extraordinarily popular (though it has not always garnered critical acclaim). Tolkien's son, Christopher, continues to release, one-by-one, his father's unpublished works, even though many of them are fragmentary (*The History of Middle-earth*, for instance, is a twelve volume work, consisting of his drafts for *LotR*, and experimental works, like *The Book of Lost Tales*, which reveals Tolkien's fantasy world at its earliest stages of conception). And though academia often ignored or even derided Tolkien's work in the first years after publication, it is now the subject of serious scholarship.

Shippey has already given a few important reasons for *LotR*'s success:

> Tolkien's real appeal rests not on mere charm or strangeness…, but on a deeply serious response to what will be seen in the end as the major issues of his century: the origin and nature of evil…; human existence in Middle-earth, without the support of divine Revelation; culture relativity; and the corruptions of and continuities of language. (A*uthor* ix)

But beyond these serious social and religious issues is the issue of the very human longing for the past. Thus a study that moves beyond Tolkien's explicit and implicit archaic *content* to the deeper archaizing *structure* of Tolkien's *LotR* may also be helpful in understanding *LotR*'s wide appeal. I do not therefore merely intend to explore Tolkien's attempt to make the text produce the effect of age. The aim of my research will be instead to demonstrate that Tolkien "ages" the text of *LotR* by

imitating certain conditions of medieval textual transmission. *LotR* is made to feel like a historical narrative of long ago, carefully crafted by the descendants of the history's original heroes, safeguarded and perpetuated in song and text by the scribes and bards of various cultures with their own unique interests and aesthetics. At the end of this long process of cultural development, Tolkien's artistry compels readers to believe that the *LotR* story was painstakingly pieced together, strand by strand, from the archives of these various cultures and methodically translated from ancient languages into English by a modern philologist. As a result, *LotR* produces the illusion of a text generated not by a single modern author, but, as is the case with many classical and medieval texts, a multivalent text shaped by its exposure to the accidents of history and crafted for the purposes of cultures widely scattered through space and time. In fine, *LotR* comes to the reader as an exile of time—a piece of an ancient ship's wreckage that has finally washed up on the distant shores of the present.

Tolkien set out to provide England with its own distinctive mythos (*Letters* 144). While he did not intend to write a historical novel set in England, it seems likely that he did at least attempt to capture in stories something of the historical essence of England and its inhabitants' traditional self-understanding. Andrew Lynch describes Tolkien's "insistent archaism" as a "cultural campaign to restore a sense of heroic potential to English life" ("Archaism, Nostalgia, and Tennysonian War" 81). Sir Walter Scott (the *Waverley Novels*), William Morris, Elias Lönnrot (*Kalevala*), and James Macpherson (*Fingal*) preceded Tolkien in successfully achieving the task of inventing national histories that sometimes bordered on fairy

tale and heroic legend.[12] Tolkien's invention, however, is far more elaborate and, to use Lynch's description: "insistent." Tolkien's story features an autonomous cosmogony, a complement of invented (functional) languages, a plausible historiography, and, as will be the focus of this study, a text that shows signs of deliberate "distressing."

Cultural revivals or awakenings, of the kinds that Tolkien desired to see in England, seem to feed off of founding myths, especially when those myths are stabilized in texts; the "written-ness" of a sacred text adds to the illusion of timeless, unchanging dicta. Romantics tended to romanticize the Middle Ages, and they sometimes fictionalized the medieval transmission and preservation of songs, epics, and the parchments of relatively isolated monastic scribes (Borges, *Professor Borges* 100-8). Tolkien, who in many ways revitalized Romanticist sentiment in the twentieth century, fictionalized these historiographical methods and circumstances in his work. Admittedly, these methods were not "methods" in the medieval period. They were born out of pure necessity: the relatively short and precarious life of manuscripts, the whimsical nature of human memory, and the politico-religious interests of a given milieu all complicated and severely limited access to reliable historical records. Sir Walter Scott, in his "Dedicatory Epistle" to *Ivanhoe*, complains:

> All those minute circumstances belonging to private life and domestic character, all that gives verisimilitude to a narrative and individuality to the persons introduced, is still known and remembered in Scotland; whereas in England civilisation has been so long complete, that our ideas of our ancestors are only to be gleaned from

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[12] Flieger lists other medieval manuscript books: The White Book of Rhydderch, the Black Book of Carmarthen, the Yellow Book of Lecan, and the Red Book of Hergest ("Tolkien and the Idea of the Book" 131).

> musty records and chronicles, the authors of which seem perversely to have conspired to suppress in their narratives all interesting details, in order to find room for flowers of monkish eloquence….The English author, on the other hand…can…only have the liberty of selecting his subject amidst the dust of antiquity, where nothing was to be found but dry, sapless, mouldering, and disjointed bones. (19-20)

Scott is, of course, using the persona of an antiquary writing to another fictional antiquary humorously named "Dr. Dryasdust." But these sentiments seem to be Scott's own. The contrast between Scott's disdain for the fragmentary nature of old textual histories and the way in which Tolkien's imagines the preservation of history, customs, and languages in the amber of the "dusty" manuscript is striking. Tolkien's characters (Bilbo and Frodo in particular) constantly fret over the journal they are writing—and these journals are to become the historical bases for *LotR*; the fragmentary nature of certain old texts often plays a role in heightening further a scene's suspense (e.g., in the Chamber of Mazarbul, *FR* 321; and Gandalf's recollection of Isildur's scroll, *FR* 253); and the story's characters often conceive of themselves as texts embedded in old books (particularly Sam: *TT* 719-20; *RK* 961-2).

But what is most telling, is that *LotR* begins and ends with discussions of the history of the story's transmission. The narrative's "bookend" shape is actually the frame around the story; it suggests the portal, or rather, the only condition upon which Tolkien would admit fantasy readers into his fictional world. As will be discussed at more length in what follows, we are told that a text, the Red Book of Westmarch, is the text upon which the story is based; and we are given to know at the end of the tale that "the last pages" of the story were assigned to Sam, who is the

first of many links in the story's long process of transmission. In other words, Tolkien seems to have been perfectly content with fictionalizing a "fragmented" textual basis for *LotR*; in fact, he allows the textual uncertainty that Scott's antiquarian complained of to become a vital part of his imaginative machinery. What Scott seems to have viewed as a hindrance to historical fiction, Tolkien saw as a space in which the reader's imagination could actively reconstruct the past.

The very obscurity of the past created by historical forces enhances our interest in it, and Tolkien, who is everywhere supremely conscious of the enchantment of inaccessible knowledge, consciously sets about providing his England with a myth "on the brink of fairy tale and history" which displays all the rhetorical characteristics of a story that has barely survived the medieval recording and editing process.

Methodology

As noted above, this study will consider *LotR* from within the frame (which also encloses the implied author, narrator, and reader). This does not mean that more traditional areas of research will be excluded from this study; Tolkien's use of real-world sources (e.g., *Beowulf*, Jordanes, Malory, etc.) provides significant insight into his artistic achievement. The discussion of these sources, however, will primarily focus on how certain themes, iconographies, and historiographies within these sources have a tendency to congregate around and inform "Tolkien-the compiler's" fictional sources within Middle-earth. For instance, I will argue that Tolkien's use of Anglo-Saxon and Gothic sources (with its horse, mound and ship burial iconography) in *LotR* tends to congregate around, and signal the presence of,

Rohirric sources, which I will call H.

Tolkien's frame encompasses the whole of *LotR*, encouraging the reader to view the story as a narrative history derived from and based upon two kinds of texts. The first kind are texts that have been historically compromised in some way; that is, texts that, as a result of a long history of transmission, are fragmentary, reconstructed from "lost" texts, improperly translated or copied by scribes and translators, or exist as palimpsests. Texts of the second kind are those culled from three distinct primary source traditions, which I will designate: Æ, H, and P.

In the next chapter (Chapter 2), I will discuss Tolkien's use of the first kind of text I have mentioned above. I will show how Tolkien ages the text of *LotR* by embedding in the narrative textual phenomena peculiar to the medieval transmission of texts. The following three chapters (Chapters 3-5) will explore Tolkien's use of a manuscript topos to create historical and mythological depth. In particular, I will show that the narrative of *LotR* can be read as a text constituted by three distinct "traditions" which have been brought together by a "modern" philologist and storyteller to form a coherent, but not seamless, whole.

Limits to the Investigation

The discussion of frames or discovered manuscripts is also relevant to "The Silmarillion"[13] material. In some cases, it would be an even more complex

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[13] I will use quotation marks as opposed to italics to distinguish between the select Silmarillion legendarium published by Christopher Tolkien and the larger Silmarillion legendarium, much of which was not published in *The Silmarillion*. The existence of a larger unpublished legendarium only lends further depth to *LotR.* Like the stories of Homer, the Gospels of the Evangelists, Luke and John (who indicated that their stories of Jesus were highly selective rather than comprehensive, Luke 1:1; John 21:25), and the *Beowulf*-poet, *LotR* imitates historical depth by actually being able to show that it is merely a selection from a more comprehensive legendarium.

discussion—since Tolkien's son, Christopher, and not Tolkien himself, "finalized" this material. In reality, Tolkien's son has done for *The Silmarillion* what I am proposing Tolkien attempted to create in fiction. What *The Silmarillion* is in our world—a work written, edited, emended, and redacted by a "tradition" or "community" of sorts (i.e., Tolkien's own family)—*LotR* is in Tolkien's secondary world. *LotR* is a work that fictionalizes a multi-generational transmission of a traditional story. However, because a discussion of *The Silmarillion*'s transmission would require a study of its own and would broaden the scope of this study beyond the mandate of a single thesis, I will focus primarily on the ample evidence of Tolkien's archaizing methods in *LotR*.

Since Tolkien's works have been closely and thoroughly examined on philological grounds, I will avoid making philological interests central to my study of historical tropes in Tolkien's work. The same is true of Tolkien's use of archaic vocabulary and syntax constructs. I am interested rather in showing that the archaisms (i.e., the occasional high rhetoric, the fairy tale imagery, and the portal-quest fantasy plot) are only a part of a larger archaizing structure.

It should also be noted that, in my exploration of Tolkien's archaizing structure, it has been tempting at times to assert dogmatically that my reading of the text should be the preferred reading; after all, Tolkien was a devoted medievalist and antiquarian, and there is plenty of evidence to suggest that he was extremely intentional and deliberate in giving the story an archaic atmosphere; there is even reason to believe that his admiration for medieval craftsmanship was so deeply ingrained that, at times, he unconsciously produced medieval forms. I will, however,

refuse this temptation in favor of offering what I merely believe to be *a* legitimate and genuinely helpful method of reading Tolkien's work.

Finally, I must address the question of literary theory and briefly explain why, aside from the sustained historical/source-critical methods I have employed throughout this thesis, an explicit theoretical framework is missing from the study that follows. While there are a number of theoretical approaches relevant to this study, I have, aside from my historical-critical method, consciously avoided the influence of theory. I have chosen this approach because my thesis is an attempt, insofar as it is possible, to recreate Tolkien's own intellectual world. As I mentioned above, Tolkien was a philologist and an antiquarian, both in temperament and training. He reconstructed texts and histories from old manuscripts, and *LotR*'s prologue and appendices suggest that he wanted his story to be understood as having been derived from the same kind of reconstruction he performed in his work as a scholar.

I also have another reason for not employing an explicit theoretical framework: I am not merely conducting a historical-critical study of a *fictional* work, as one might study, say, the compositional history of one of Shakespeare's plays, which would call for distinguishing between "fair" and "foul" copies, Folios and Quartos in order to establish an *ur*-text. I am instead attempting something that, to my knowledge, has not quite been done. I am attempting to perform a historical-critical, text-critical study of a fictional *text* and its fictional "sources": namely, *LotR*, as a composition derived from entirely fictional sources (i.e., Æ, H, and P). Like Alice, who, in approaching the looking glass, sees the line between the real and the

imaginary begin to blur, my thesis approaches this line. I am proposing something that is neither purely a product of the imagination nor wholly real. I am not focusing so much on Tolkien the author, but, for the most part, on his mirror-image: Tolkien's Middle-earth counterpart. Thus any significant step in the direction of theory is, I feel, a step away from a close and sustained focus upon Tolkien's illusion of having reconstructed a story from ancient source materials.

To use an example of how narrative theory can become a distraction in this study, narrative theorist Gary Morson argues: "Narrativeness is eternally present in the world and so a truly realist work must never have a point at which narrativeness ceases. there can be no denouement, no closure" (71). This seems like a promising theory for grounding a thesis like mine—a thesis in search of understanding a story that, by drawing attention to the story's transmission and recent compilation, rejects closure and stretches the narrative from ancient times to the present. Moreover, Morson makes this observation in light of Tolstoy's explanation for *War and Peace*:

> In printing the beginning of my proposed work, I promise neither a continuation nor a conclusion for it…. In order to explain to the reader what this present work is, I find it most convenient to describe how I began to write it. (Qtd. in Morson, 71)

Tolstoy's words sound very much like something in the spirit of Tolkien's prologue. But once Morson's "narrativeness" becomes a framework for a discussion of Tolkien's fictional sources, the focus shifts away from identifying the sources, to a discussion focused almost solely on the *effect* of Tolkien's method. The emphasis moves to the question of "closure," which is largely a readerly concern. This effect,

while important and, at points, germane to my study, is not the thrust of this approach and would require a separate thesis of its own to satisfactorily address the issue.

Having insisted on the illusory element in this study, I should say a word regarding the real. Though I offer this thesis as "*a* reading" of the text, I have, on much the same grounds, decided not to employ a theory that would, at first, seem to be the most natural fit for a thesis of this nature: namely, a reader-response theory. While I have in places briefly considered what roles the various manuscript traditions could have served for Middle-earth I"nterpretive communities," my reading is not really an interpretive response at all; my interpretation as a reader of Tolkien's text is, in this context, relatively unimportant. In terms of the manuscript "traditions" upon which the story is based, the prologue tells the reader *exactly* how the story's framework is to be understood. It is to be understood as a (fictionally) transmitted story, skillfully compiled by generations of scribes and storytellers. I have simply decided, whether wisely or foolishly (I leave this judgment to the reader), to follow Tolkien's suggestion and look for text-critical clues of transmission within the story itself.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MAKING OF AN ARTIFICIAL RUIN

The Ruin

A ruin is a palpable reminder of what is missing.[14] Where Phoebus Apollo's magnificent Temple at Delphi once stood, only the pediment and six of the original ninety Doric columns survive. These lingering remains tell of a glory that once was. We can imagine them still housing customs twenty-five centuries old, and reverberating with sounds strange to our ears. Here reside the memories of the oracle that assured Socrates he was the wisest man in the world, promised Solon the island of Salamis, and, like the "juggling fiends" of *Macbeth*, keeping "the word of promise" to his ears and breaking it to his hope,[15] convinced Croesus that if he warred against Persia he would destroy a mighty empire.

Today, the pillars uphold no roof, provide no shade for traveling inquirers, and offer no protection from the elements. Where they once bore the weight of a classical façade, they exist now for their own sake. Like Capote's "ghosts in sunlight,"[16] they beckon the mind, inviting the imagination to fill the lacunae and reconstruct the original edifice. A ruin, almost literally, is the presence of absence. In

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[14] I owe the following analogy to Michael Drout, who, in a Carnegie Mellon Lecture entitled "*The Lord of the Rings*: How to Read J. R. R. Tolkien," speaks of a ruin as a "broken reference estranged from its original context; a reference that is at least as broken in information and cultural terms as it is in physically. It makes concrete both loss and coherence," YouTube video 21:56-32:15; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lXAvF9p8nmM.

[15] *Macbeth* 5.8. 19-22.

[16] "Ghosts in Sunlight," *Portraits and Observations: The Essays of Truman Capote*, 336-346.

the present world, the columns positively exist; and that which is lost is negatively absent. But in the imagination, the situation is exactly reversed: the six columns form a negative space, and the rest of the Temple exists in the imagination as a positive construct. The ruin provides an almost visible glimpse of Time as an entity; we can see the remaining pillars; our imagination can infer what is missing. But we are left standing in a temporal "wormhole"—our eyes rest upon the present, but our imaginations see the world that was.

I will use the image of a ruin as a governing metaphor for this section. Tolkien's art, and particularly *LotR*, is often a vivid illustration of the beauty of ruins. *LotR* is a kind of "textual ruin" (Drout, 33:40-33:41). But Tolkien's method of "building" ruins is not confined to *LotR*. His *Farmer Giles of Ham* begins:

> Of the history of the Little Kingdom few fragments have survived; but by chance an account of its origin has been preserved: a legend, perhaps, rather than an account; for it is evidently a late compilation, full of marvels, derived not from sober annals, but from the popular lays to which its author frequently refers. For him the events that he records lay already in a distant past; but he seems, nonetheless, to have lived himself in the lands of the Little Kingdom. (In *Tales From the Perilous Realm* 101)

Like *FGH*, *LotR* is said to be based on a late compilation of fragmentary sources. Appendix A is called the "Annals of the Kings and Rulers" (*RK* 1045); the distinction between "sober annals" and "a legend…full of marvels" is pertinent to, and may well describe a similar polarity within, *LotR*. The term *preserved* describes *LotR*'s prologue concerning the careful transmission of its various manuscripts well.

For the purposes of this discussion, what particularly interests me in these opening lines of *FGH* is the phrase, "few fragments have survived." The phrase

embodies what seems to have been a habit of Tolkien's mind. In a letter to his son Christopher, he writes:

> There are two quit[e] diff[erent] emotions: one that moves me supremely and I find small difficulty in evoking: the heart-racking sense of the vanished past (best expressed by Gandalf's words about the Palantir); and the other the more 'ordinary' emotion, triumph, pathos, tragedy of the characters so near my heart, and is forced on me by the fundamental literary dilemma. A story must be told or there'll be no story, yet it is the untold stories that are most moving. I think you are moved by Celebrimbor because it conveys a sudden sense of endless untold stories: mountains seen far away, never to be climbed, distant trees (like Niggle's) never to be approached – or if so only to become 'near trees.' (*Letters* 110-111)

For Tolkien, then, the story or history that has survived only in fragmentary form beckons the mind, inviting the reader to participate in filling out the lacunae. It is interesting that he found "small difficulty in evoking" what he calls "the heart-racking sense of the vanished past." Perhaps he had so little difficulty in this area because it was an emotion that he felt with greater intensity than the emotions that (tellingly) he calls "ordinary" (i.e., "triumph, pathos, tragedy"). In other words, for Tolkien, fragmentary knowledge seems to have been preferable to full knowledge.

The spectral *presence* of what is lost to history provides the reader with vanishing horizons—thus answering what Tolkien seems to have viewed as a human need for the unapproachable, the "undiscovered country," the forbidden margins of experience. *LotR* creates a new ignorance; it, in some counterintuitive sense, "fulfills" without satisfying; in fact, it fulfills in direct proportion to its ability to create and then withhold satisfaction. When faced with the prospect of finally publishing and seeing the work nearest his heart, "The Silmarillion," fail in

comparison to the public's favorable reception of *LotR*, Tolkien wrote to a reader:

> I am doubtful myself about the undertaking [to publish 'The Silmarillion']. Part of the attraction of The L. R. is, I think, due to the glimpses of a large history in the background: an attraction like that of viewing far off an unvisited island, or seeing the towers of a distant city gleaming in a sunlit mist. To go there is to destroy the magic, unless new unattainable vistas are again revealed. (*Letters* 333)

For Tolkien, the visit to the enchanted horizons itself was no assurance that one would find Faërie. In fact, to do so was to domesticate and familiarize what was once an enchanted horizon. How then is one to encounter such an elusive phenomenon? How does one experience Faërie? And what is the purpose of telling a fairy tale—if the very act of bringing readers to the enchanted land ensures disenchantment?

The answers lie in the last clause of the above quote: "...unless new unattainable vistas are again revealed." This is precisely what Tolkien was able to do in *LotR*: push the horizons farther back. The story, as it were, transports the reader to the margins of experience—i.e., to the "unvisited island…the towers of a distant city gleaming in a sunlit mist"—and then expands the vision, thrusting the margins back so far that the reader may feel safely at home in a world again encompassed by "unattainable vistas." In particular, one of Tolkien's primary means of creating these new vistas is to give the reader the sense that he or she is being given only a glimpse of Middle-earth history, a small fragment of a much larger chronicle—most of which is lost, forgotten, and irrecoverable.

There are a number of classical and medieval manuscript tropes that Tolkien uses to create the archaic atmosphere of *LotR*: lacunae, variant readings, scribal

errors, origin-ality (or *auctoritas*), and lost or fragmented texts. I will discuss Tolkien's use of each of these tropes in *LotR*. These tropes give *LotR* the illusion of being a historical Middle-earth artifact, an object of source-critical study from within the Middle-earth frame. What follows in this exploration will not be exhaustive. I will not list every instance of a particular phenomenon; in most cases, such a list would require too much space. But I will seek to select a few representative examples of each trope, hoping to illustrate how they each contribute to Tolkien's larger archaizing structures.

Lacunae

Classical and medieval manuscripts (in papyrus or parchment form) survive, but they are often riddled with lacunae (gaps, holes, or fading). Woodworms, rodents, and unintentional scribal abuse irreparably damage old manuscripts (Clemens and Graham, 97). One fourteenth century book-collector, Richard de Bury complained about the conduct of scribes thus:

> You may happen to see some headstrong youth lazily lounging over his studies, and when the winter's frost is sharp, his nose running from the nipping cold drips down, nor does he think of wiping it with his pocket-handkerchief until he has bedewed the book before him with the ugly moisture. Would that he had before him no book, but a cobbler's apron! His nails are stuffed with fetid filth as black as jet, with which he marks any passage that pleases him…. He does not fear to eat fruit or cheese over an open book, or carelessly to carry a cup to and from his mouth; and because he has no bag at hand he drops into books the fragments that are left. (*Philobiblon* 157)

Other manuscripts have been damaged in fire or flood. In 1731, a fire at (tragically named) Ashburnham House in London damaged or destroyed many priceless

manuscripts. “Cotton Genesis,” a fifth century Greek text and the manuscript of the *Battle of Maldon* were completely burned. A bull issued by Pope Leo X and a “unique” copy of *Beowulf* were among the surviving texts, but they were badly damaged (Clemens and Graham, 99).

As an antiquarian and medieval scholar, Tolkien worked closely with compromised manuscripts. This is especially true of the *Beowulf* manuscript, Cotton MS Vitellius A XV, which also contains other works: St Augustine’s *Homily on St Christopher*, *The Marvels of the East*, the poem *Judith*, and others (. In places, fire damage has obscured Cotton MS. The edges of some of the pages are charred, and the words at the beginning of each line are either completely unreadable or missing altogether (see fig. 1). Lacunae often call upon a translator’s or copyist’s learning and imagination. But the resulting reconstructions are frequently wide-ranging reconstructions. And what the scribe used to fill the lacunae can greatly alter a reader’s perception of the history the text relates.[17]

[17] Brackets are now used to indicate the presence of a lacuna, but this was not always the case. For example, in the medieval period, copies of the minor works of Xenephon were often corrupt and lacunae existed, but these were largely unknown to medieval scholars; a sixteenth century Vienna manuscript, however, provided correct readings and revealed gaps in the text that had not even been known to have existed (Reynolds and Wilson, 196-7).

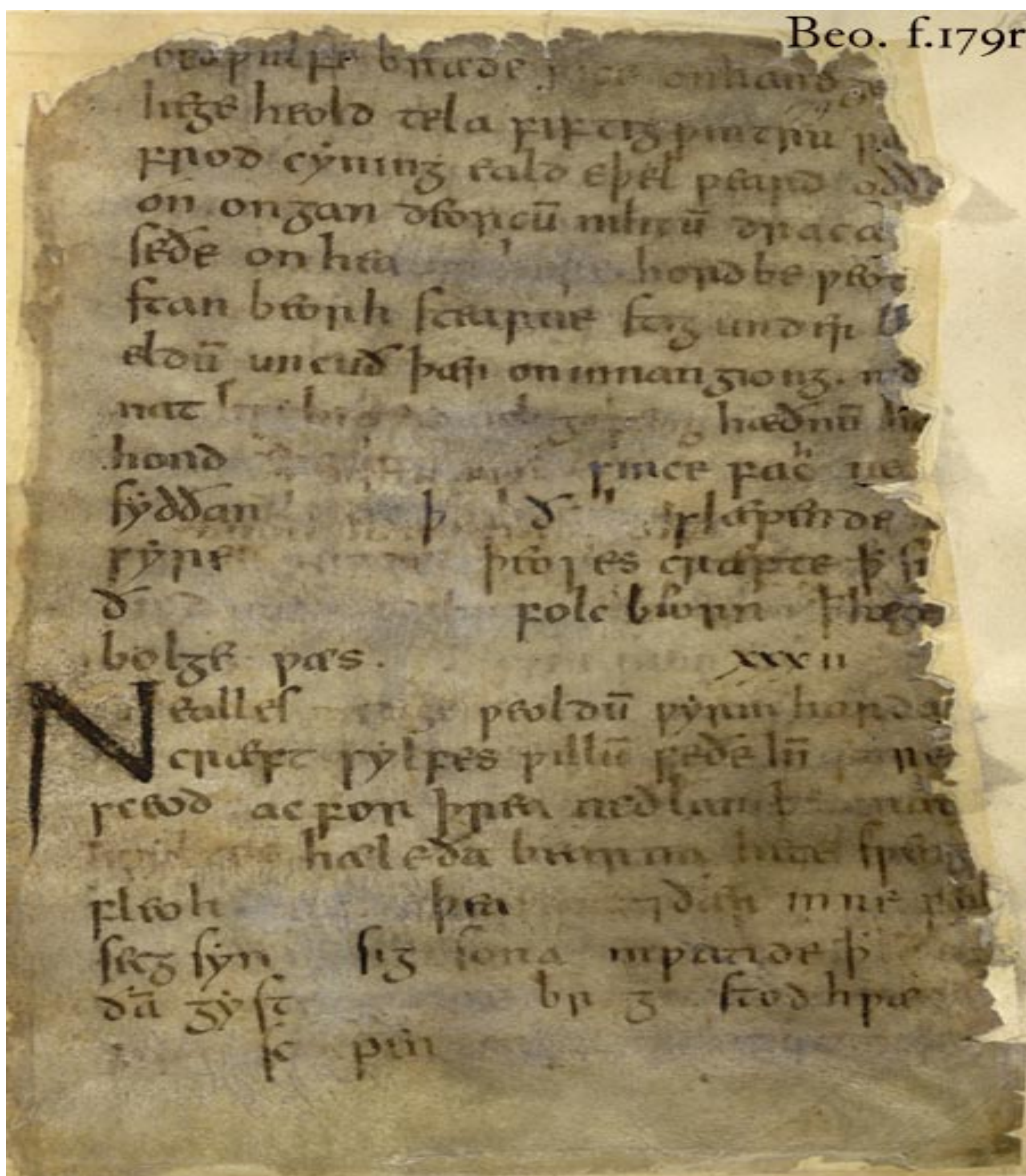

Fig. 1. *Folio 179, Beowulf Codex,* in the *Cotton MS, Vitellius A XV*. Ca. 1000. British Museum. Beowulf on Steorarume. Web. 22 November 2014.

LotR occasionally simulates the signs of being a text copied and translated from a manuscript that has been compromised in some way. The most obvious example of this is in *FR*'s "The Bridge of Khazad-Dûm." Beside the tomb of Balin, the

narrator states, "there lay the remains of a book." In time, the book's name will be the Book of Mazarbul. "It had been slashed and stabbed and partly burned, and it was so stained with black and other dark marks like old blood that little of it could be read" (*FR* 322). This state of this book very much resembles that of Cotton MS Vitellius A XV; both are severely damaged by fire and stained black. Moreover, if one compares the contents of the two manuscripts, it will be apparent that they both present the reader with a kind of bestiary. The *Marvels of the East* tells of two-headed snakes, horned donkeys, human beings with ears as big as fans, and other eight feet tall headless humans with eyes and mouths in their chests. The poem *Judith* depicts Holofernes (who is dispatched to a flaming, and yet dark, hell) and his Assyrian soldiers as monstrous and wicked human beings. And, of course, the world of *Beowulf* is full of monsters. The manuscript that the Fellowship has discovered serves, through its different lives in time, various purposes: it first serves as a chronicle for the doomed dwarves. For the Fellowship, it will later warn the company of the coming orcs and of "drums in the deep," which anticipate the Balrog, or primeval fire monster of the deep (*Letters* 180). Gimli will preserve it as a history of and for his people. And finally it is imagined as text that has been preserved in the Red Book of Westmarch.

As Gandalf does in a non-textual context when he earlier in the narrative makes "out Gollum's part…fitting it into the gap in the history" (*FR* 56), in this scene, Gandalf is tasked with textual reconstruction (and Gimli assists in translating one word); in order to determine what happened to Balin and his people, Gandalf looks through the book carefully and attempts to reconstruct lacunae:

> Gandalf lifted it carefully, but the leaves cracked and broke as he laid it on the slab. He pored over it for some time without speaking. Frodo and Gimli standing at his side could see, as he gingerly turned the leaves, that they were written by many different hands, in runes, both of Moria and of Dale, and here and there in Elvish script. At last Gandalf looked up. 'It seems to be a record of the fortunes of Balin's folk,' he said. 'I guess that it began with their coming to Dimrill Dale nigh on thirty years ago: the pages seem to have numbers referring to the years after their arrival. The top page is marked one – three, so at least two are missing from the beginning. Listen to this!' (*FR* 322)

The phrases "It seems…. I guess…the pages seem…. So at least two are missing" indicate the difficulty of Gandalf's task. Words in the subjunctive mood follow the initial description: "…I think…probably…I think…. I cannot read what…. I guess…. That seems to end a chapter…. and then something…. I suppose…. unless it ends in ester…. but I think I can read…. and then perhaps" (*FR* 323). The text with only Gandalf's emendations would read thus:

> [?We drove out orcs from the great gate and guard] [??room]; we slew many in the bright [?sun in the dale]. Flói was killed by an arrow. He slew the great [….] Flói under grass near Mirror mere. [….] We have taken the twentyfirst hall of North end to dwell in. There is [….] shaft. Balin has set up his seat in the Chamber of Mazarbul. [….] gold [….] Durin's Axe [?]helm. Balin is now lord of Moria.
>
> ***we found truesilver […] wellforged [mithril]. Óin to seek for the upper armouries of Third Deep […] go westwards […] to Hollin gate.
> [….]
> [….]
> [….]
> (In large, bold Elvish script) sorrow [...] [?yestre]day being the tenth of novembre Balin lord of Moria fell in Dimrill Dale. He went alone to look in Mirror mere. an orc shot him from behind a stone. we slew the orc, but many more […] up from east up the Silverlode. [….] [?we

> have barred the gates] [….] can hold them long if […] [?horrible…?suffer].
>
> We cannot get out. We cannot get out. They have taken the Bridge and second hall. Frár and Lóni and Náli fell there. [….] went 5 days ago. The pool is up to the wall at Westgate. The Watcher in the Water took Óin. We cannot get out. The end comes. […] drums, drums in the deep.
>
> (in a trailing scrawl of elf-letters) they are coming.

Gandalf's reconstruction and Gimli's translation (of Mazarbul) help the company locate itself and formulate the best way of exiting the chamber. Enough information is provided and supplied to construct the last days of the dwarves. But more importantly, the partial narrative creates suspense. The lacunae are spaces large enough for the monsters and goblins of the imagination. The hope of the uncertain text "we have barred the gates…can hold them long if" is crushed suddenly by the words "horrible" and "suffer": a terrifying adjective-verb combination in a nounless void. The heavily cadenced onomatopoeias: "The end comes…drums, drums in the deep" are all the more frightening for not being identifiable.[18]

The far-off island of Faërie is not inhabited only by saintly elves. Faërie, as Tolkien pointed out, is a "perilous realm" ("On Fairy Stories" 315). The bogeymen on the margins of the imagination play a crucial role in the Faërie experience. Tolkien's (successful) experiment with the Book of Mazarbul not only supplies the larger narrative with an archaic atmosphere, but it may also illustrate Tolkien's own

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[18] Tolkien may perhaps have borrowed here from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. In a dark and ominous moment in the play, the third witch, anticipating the entrance of Macbeth which will set him on the road to the tragedy that follows, hears a drum and says, "A drum, a drum— / Macbeth doth come" (1.1.28-29).

strategic use of textual lacunae. Well-chosen gaps in information give the imagination glimpses of the fairy monsters that play on the margins of experience.

The "Book of Mazarbul" refers to a manuscript that contains lacunae, but there are other instances of lacunae that are more deeply embedded in the text of *LotR*. For instance, the "Thain's Book"—the first and most important copy made of the Red Book—is said to have "contained much that was later omitted or lost" (*FR* 14). This, of course, is an admission on the part of the prologue's implied author that what material has passed into his hands is merely fragmentary. A comprehensive narrative is now no longer recoverable. But there are not only gaps in the history of the transmission of the story, but also in the historical knowledge needed by the characters. Aragorn refers to the period in which the Rohirrim, headed by Eorl the Young, migrated out of the North as the "Dark Years" and the "forgotten years long ago" (*TT* 433). Here, a period of time, particularly the time in which the men of Middle-earth tended to serve Sauron, is presented as a kind of lacuna. Glóin bemoans the fact that the secrets of his forefathers' metal-work are lost (*FR* 230). What happened in these years is similarly lost and forms a gap in the characters' knowledge of the period.

Also, the Council of Elrond could be viewed as an experiment with lacunae. The representatives of Middle-earth come to the Council because, in greater and lesser degrees, they know part of the story of the Ring, but none of them know all of it: "A part of [Elrond's] tale was known to some there, but the full tale to none" (*FR* 243). One of the purposes of the Council therefore is to fill in these gaps of knowledge. Elrond and Gandalf, the two foremost *auctoritates*, repair the partial

histories of the Ring.

If one thinks metaphorically about the role that lacunae play in *LotR*, the Ring is itself a lacuna. Though it is the center of attention, it forms a hole that is rarely filled in *LotR*. It is rarely worn, and when it is, it turns its wearer invisible to the eyes of Middle-earth. It calls upon the skill of interpreters and gives birth to the story; out of its nothingness arises an epic romance. For many years, the Ring is "lost but not unmade" (*FR* 245). Its power to omit, its ability to create a "gap" in reality reaches beyond even the text and into Tolkien-the-author's real world. Bilbo's fall into Gollum's lair in *TH* is fortunate; for it is there that Tolkien discovers Gollum—one of his greatest creations.[19] But Tolkien's discovery that the Ring was actually the evil Ruling Ring was even more fortunate, for there he found the narrative of *LotR*. Tolkien roots the world of *LotR* in the Middle-earth of "The Silmarillion" material; but there is a gap in between the Elder Days and the time that *TH* and *LotR* describe. These are the years in which the Ring is lost. When Bilbo finds the Ring, and especially when Frodo discovers its true nature, recorded history resumes.

This all resolves in a strange equation: when the Ring—which again is a kind of lacuna, formless, and making its wearer invisible—is lost, a lacuna in history forms; but when it is found, history becomes accessible and readable again. Not surprisingly, once the Ring is unmade, the history of Middle-earth comes to an end—its residue lingers just long enough to bring to an end the individual threads to which it has given rise. In a proposed sequel to *LotR*, "The New Shadow," Tolkien tried to continue the story into the Fourth Age, but he could not; he found that the

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[19] Tolkien arrived at the final version of Gollum, the Gollum of *LotR* and later editions of *TH*, only after a series of iterations (see Rateliff's *The History of the Hobbit* 166-168).

best he could hope to muster up after the destruction of the Ring would be a "thriller." But he decided it was "not worth doing" and so abandoned the idea (*Letters* 344). Lacunae, the lost histories, the gaps in history summoned the best of Tolkien's storytelling ability; without the Ring, the story could not go on. Indeed, even the Three Elven Rings lose their preserving power when the Ruling Lacuna is unmade (*FR* 269).

The Ring itself contains a hidden text that is revealed only when heated. Identifying the Ring, determining the script's author (which is written in elvish script but in the language of Mordor), and translating the text's meaning are quite literally at the center of Tolkien's fantasy. The hidden text of the Ring is an analogue of Tolkien's entire archaizing apparatus. As Gandalf's skill in disclosing the hidden text and interpreting its meaning makes the epic possible, so is Tolkien-the-compiler's skill in translating, reconstructing, and narrating from his sources the "heat" that makes the story appear.[20]

Like many classical and medieval manuscripts, *LotR* contains lacunae. Where Tolkien-the-author fictionalizes them, embedding them in the narrative so as to age the story, "Tolkien-the-compiler" works around these "gaps," creating glosses and reconstructing what is lost; but, more importantly, the latter leaves some of them unfilled, allowing the reader's imagination to creatively reconstruct the missing past.

Variant Readings

In a reading of *The Lay of Leithian*'s "Gest of Beren and Lúthien," C. S. Lewis

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[20] I owe this impressive and helpful suggestion to Dr David Levey.

experimented with the notion of variant readings in Tolkien's work. Commenting on line 4 ("his meats were sweet, his dishes dear"), Lewis writes:

> *Meats were sweet*. This is the reading of PRK. Let any one believe if he can that our author gave such a cacophony. J *His Drink was sweet his dishes dear*. L *His drink was sweet his dish was dear*. (Many scholars have rejected lines 1-8 altogether as unworthy of the poet. "They were added by a later hand to supply a gap in the archtype," says Peabody; and adds "the more melodious movement and surer narrative stride of the passage beginning with line 9 [*But fairer than are born to Men*] should convince the dullest that here…the authentic work of the poet begins." I am not convinced that H, which had better be quoted in full, does not give the true opening of the Geste. (*The Lays of Beleriand* 375)

Lewis, of course, is referring to completely imaginary manuscripts (PRKJLH) and to imaginary "scholars" (e.g., "Peabody"). Christopher Tolkien notes that Lewis's contrived "heavily academic commentary" in which he pretends

> to treat the Lay as an ancient and anonymous work extant in many more or less corrupt manuscripts, overlaid by scribal perversions in antiquity and the learned argumentation of nineteenth-century scholars…took the stink from some sharply expressed judgements. (C. Tolkien, *Lays* 185)

Contrary to Carpenter's assertions in *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography* that Tolkien did not emend his Lay upon reading Lewis's critique (145), Christopher states that his father marked passages that Lewis criticized for revision (*Lays* 185). Thus not only was Tolkien familiar with the subject of redaction in his scholarly work, but he was also the beneficiary of redaction in his own work.

Because important classical and medieval texts were often transmitted through an elaborate multi-generational, multi-ethnic scribal tradition, multiple textual witnesses often vie for the title of original text or reading; that is, the text

containing the correct or original reading. Reynolds and Wilson state:

> Since no autograph manuscripts of the classical authors survive, we are dependent for our knowledge of what they wrote on manuscripts…which lie at an unknown number of removes from the originals. These manuscripts vary in their trustworthiness as witnesses to the original texts; all of them have suffered to some degree in the process of transmission, whether from physical damage, from the fallibility of scribes, or from the effects of deliberate interpolation. (186)

The Stemmatic Theory of Recension—a theory postulating that a constellation of texts' features (especially their errors) can be used to work backward into the texts' "family" history and determine the textual archetype—was developed in the nineteenth century in order to reconstruct an ancient text's original form (Reynolds and Wilson 190). The focus of textual criticism tends thus to be upon the discovery of the "correct" reading. Even the hobbits of Middle-earth are prone to these kinds of assumptions: "they liked to have books filled with things that they already knew, set out fair and square with no contradictions" (*FR* 7). Perhaps because textual criticism was born out of the matrix of biblical and classical studies, scholars have often under-valued variant readings. Variant readings, however, have their own rich textual history; the "errors," interpolations, or material differences sometimes develop an aesthetically pleasing patina.[21]

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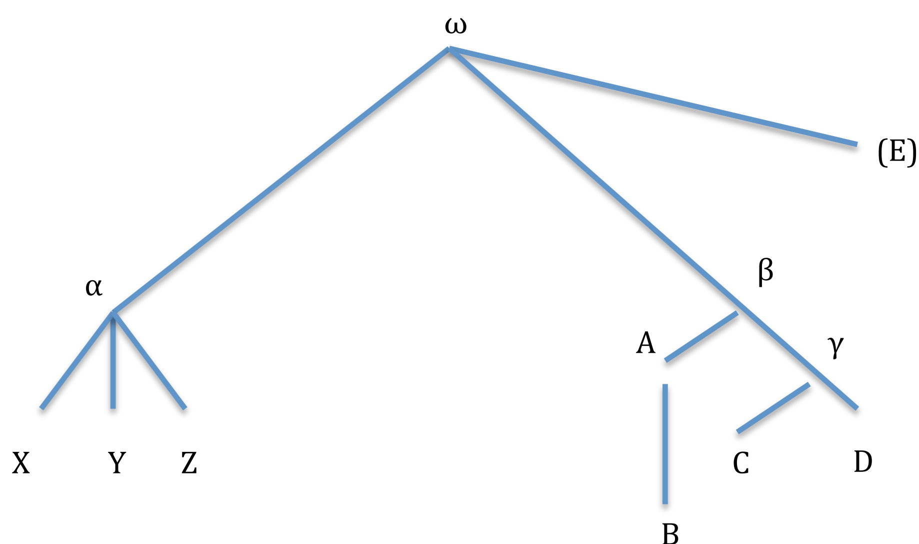
[21] One prominent example of this can be found in the book of Hebrews. In 10:5-9, the author has the incarnate Christ quoting from the ancient Psalter. However, since there were two primary versions of the Psalter then available to the author of Hebrews, and since the portion of the Psalter that will be quoted (English Ps 40:6-8; LXX Ps 39:6-8) is significantly different in the Hebrew and Greek texts, the question arises of which version is the "correct" reading? For some Christians, the question of the "correct" reading of the Psalm 40 text is built on the false assumption that at least one of the readings must be false. The problems with finding the "original" reading are legion. Who is to say that the LXX, which the author of Hebrews used, is not based on a superior textual tradition to that upon which the MT is based? The LXX reading is the more difficult reading; and on the principle of *difficilior lectio potior* ("the more difficult reading is preferable"), it would be a likelier candidate for the correct reading. However, is the search for an *Ur*-text even possible—or desirable? For those who believe that the Bible is divinely inspired, the

Before exploring Tolkien's use of variant readings in *LotR*, it may be useful to consider one medieval exemplum with which Tolkien would most likely have been familiar. *A Bok of Sweuenyng* (*A Book of Dreaming*), a Middle English text "catering to the perennial market for a user-friendly index of dream interpretations" (Philips, "Dreams and Dream Lore" 246), is based on a much older Latin book simply called, *Somnia*. There are several extant vernacular versions in medieval French, medieval Welsh, Anglo-Saxon, and Old Icelandic, and there are also multiple Latin versions of the *Somnia*. The many "lives" of this textual tradition have produced as many variants and "corruptions" of the original *Somnia* as there have been provincial purposes to serve through time. In "Dreams and Dream Lore," Philips draws particular attention to two lines in *Sweuenyng*, which she translates: "If you are eating thistles eagerly [in your dream], your enemies on every side are hurting you" (241). She notes that the word *carduos*/*cardones* (translated "thistles") is based on one family of manuscripts, but other Latin variants instead use *carbones* (coals), *cardines* (hinges), and *carnes* (flesh). It seems obvious that these variants are the result of the orthographical similarity between the terms. However, these variants ultimately became catalysts for new associations between these variant terms and the tradition of medieval dream interpretation. Where the use *carduos*/*cardones* once was meant to associate thistles with the sharp words of enemies, *carbones*, for instance, was rationalized to convey the idea of an enemy's ability to cause burning

question becomes: Is it possible for God to have inspired two distinct readings of what was once a single text? The variant reading (and both versions of Psalm 40 could be variants of a third tradition; we cannot know for sure) is now a patina; the MT reading uses a beautiful metaphor, depicting Yahweh as having used the psalmist's sickness to "dig" out an ear (i.e., to make him hear or become more sensitive to God's voice); the LXX reading describes the Son of God as having been given a body so that he could demonstrate the possibility of divine obedience in the face of human weakness.

pain (Philips, 242). The variants, made possible by medieval scribes' orthographical failures, produced creative results; and those who now have the privilege of having access to the many variants of this text can see it now as wearing a patina that is at once "corrupt" and yet "living."

There are at least a few instances where variant readings play a role in the narrative of *LotR*. At times, true dispute arises between variant readings, and discovering the *codex optimus*, or, better, *critical text*, is crucial to the well being of Middle-earth's inhabitants. But before examining any such readings, it will be helpful to explain and then apply the Stemmatic Theory of Recension referred to above. The theory of stemmatics argues that the errors scribes make in the transmission of texts "provide the most valid means of working out the relationships of the manuscripts" (Reynolds and Wilson, 190). Reynolds and Wilson provide a stemma diagram, which I will use here:



In the context of stemmatics, common scribal manuscript errors can be divided into two distinct kinds: (a) errors which demonstrate "that two manuscripts are more closely related to each other than to a third manuscript (conjunctive errors); and (b) those which show that one manuscript is independent of another because the second contains an error or errors from which the first is free (separative errors)" (Reynolds and Wilson, 190). In applying the stemma, the ω represents the archetype manuscript—which the textual critic tries to reconstruct by working backward from the extant manuscripts; the Greek letters α, β, γ represent intermediate lost manuscripts from which the surviving manuscripts (ABCDEXYZ) have descended. The E manuscript, in this hypothetical stemma, survives only in fragmentary form (Reynolds and Wilson 191). The logic of the stemma is as follows (I will again quote Reynolds and Wilson's numbered list):

1. If B is derived exclusively from A, it will differ from A only in being more corrupt. The first stage, therefore, is to eliminate B.
2. The text of γ can be inferred from the agreement of CD or from the agreement of one of them with an outside witness (A or α).
3. The text of β can be inferred from the agreement of ACD or of AC against D or of AD against C or from the agreement of either A or γ or α.
4. The text of α can be inferred from the agreement of XYZ or of any two of them against the third or from the agreement of one of them (provided the other two disagree with each other) with β.

5. When the text of the two hyperarchetypes (α and β) have been reconstructed, the readings peculiar to the individual witnesses ACDXYZ can be eliminated from consideration (*eliminatio lectionum singularium*).
6. If (α and β) agree, they may be assumed to give the text of the archetype (ω). If they disagree, either of the two readings may be the text of the archetype. It is the task of *examinatio* to decide which of these two variants is authentic.
7. If at some point in the text we have the evidence of a third independent branch of the tradition (E), then the principle of two against one will operate and the text of the archetype will only be in doubt if all three disagree or if two of them are likely to have fallen into the same error independently. (Reynolds and Wilson, 190)

Though the Stemmatic Theory cannot account for some complex manuscript difficulties, it can be used as a basic framework for examining a few "variant readings" in *LotR*. The first example I will mention came about as the result of necessity and the development of Tolkien's mythological world. The example I refer to is the story (or rather, stories) of Bilbo's discovery of the Ring, and his subsequent contest with Gollum for possession of the Ring. In this instance, it seems that Tolkien had no intention of deliberately creating a textual archaism, but the problem gave rise to a typically medieval solution: the variant reading.

For the less ambitious purposes of *TH* (relative to *LotR*), Tolkien had told the story straightforwardly. In the original manuscript version of the chapter "Riddles in the Dark," Bilbo discovers the Ring; and finds himself in a riddle-contest with Gollum. If Bilbo wins, he will get a gift from Gollum. The gift is to be the Ring, but

since Bilbo has the Ring and Gollum cannot find it, he has nothing to give; and Bilbo, of course, is happy with the arrangement. Gollum shows Bilbo a way out from under the mountain; the two part on good terms (see *The History of the Hobbit* 155-61). Tolkien's published version (1937) repeats this plot. However, once he began to write *LotR* and the subject of the Ring became darker and more central, he "fixed" the chapter in question and published a second version in 1951 (Scoville, 278). The second version has Gollum agreeing to show Bilbo the way out of the mountain (*TH* 70); he will now never knowingly give up the Ring to anyone.

Thus a variant reading in *TH* was created, as must often have been the case, out of a need to harmonize a later revelation with an older text. The problem, however, could not be entirely fixed by simply "correcting" *TH*. The problem followed Tolkien into the writing of *LotR* and demanded a solution there as well. The solution was fairly simple: create a competing, but authoritative, version of the story of how Bilbo acquired the Ring. At Frodo's prompting, Gandalf, the authoritative voice, tells the "true" story of what happened:

> 'How long have you known all this?' asked Frodo again. 'Known?' said Gandalf. 'I have known much that only the Wise know, Frodo. But if you mean "known about *this* ring," well, I still do not know, one might say. There is a last test to make. Bu I no longer doubt my guess. …. I wondered often how Gollum came by a Great Ring, as plainly it was – that at least was clear from the first. Then I heard Bilbo's strange story of how he had "won" it, and I could not believe it. When I at last got the truth out of him, I saw at once that he had been trying to put his claim to the ring beyond doubt. Much like Gollum with his "birthday-present." The lies were too much alike for my comfort. Clearly the ring had an unwholesome power that set to work on its keeper at once. That was the first real warning I had that all was not well. I told Bilbo often that such rings were better

> left unused; but he resented it, and soon got angry. There was little else that I could do. I could not take it from him without doing greater harm; and I had no right to do so anyway. I could only watch and wait. I might perhaps have consulted Saruman the White, but something always held me back…. The years passed. Yes, they passed, and they seemed not to touch [Bilbo]. He showed no signs of age. The shadow fell on me again…. And I waited. Until that night when he left this house. He said and did things then that filled me with a fear that no words of Saruman could allay. I knew at last that something dark and deadly was at work. And I have spent most of the years since then in finding out the truth of it' [emphasis his]. (*FR* 46-7)

It may be helpful to examine this statement by referring to the principal characters in the statement as "versions" of Bilbo's Ring. There are twelve potential sources here (though a few of them are only loosely linked to this particular scene). The first eight are the "extant" sources; that is, the sources that Gandalf can directly consult in order to arrive at the true text.

1. Bilbo's first text (B1). Gandalf refers to this version when he calls attention to Bilbo's use of the term "won."
2. Gollum's text (GLM). Gandalf refers to yet another version (Gollum's) when he says, "Much like Gollum with his 'birthday-present'"—Gollum justified taking the Ring by saying it was his present.
3. Saruman's text (S). Gandalf thought of consulting another "version" in order to cross-examine Bilbo's: he thought of going to Saruman the White. But Gandalf (rightly as it turns out) feared that Saruman had grown corrupt, self-interested, and thus untrustworthy.
4. Saruman's text concerning his belief that the Ring was lost at sea (S2). Gandalf, for a time, depended upon S2 (this will be explained below).

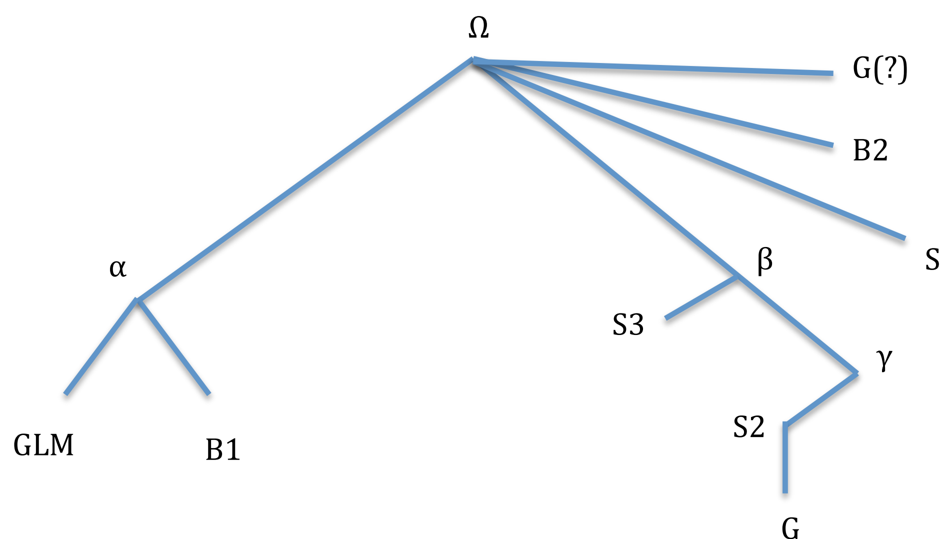
5. S2 leads to Gandalf having, for a time, a false version: (G)
6. Saruman's physical description of the Ring (S3). This version will help Gandalf confirm his suspicions regarding Bilbo's Ring.
7. Gandalf states that he does not "know" whether Bilbo's ring is the Ring (G?).
8. A version exists that lies outside of this particular scene (B3 = Bilbo's second version).

Below are the intermediate "hyperarchetype" sources; that is, the non-extant sources that can, however, be inferred from the extant sources (marked by capital Greek letters):

9. Ω = The "true" text (i.e., how did Bilbo really acquire the Ring, and is it really the One Ring?). This text will be revealed in the fireplace of Bag End (*FR* 49); it is the text that Gandalf and Frodo seek, and Bilbo, Gollum, and Saruman are unwilling or reluctant in some way to yield.
10. α = The text (which could be said to be the Ring's "influence") Gandalf eventually infers from GLM and B1 (i.e., the peculiar tales Gollum and Bilbo tell of their Ring). α, in conjunction with β, turns out to be the "authorized" version of the tale.
11. β = Gandalf, in light of S3, deduces β must exist (perhaps in the archives of Gondor). β, however, is unusual in that it turns out to be extant, but Gandalf only discovers it after having inferred it from other sources.
12. γ = The text that posits the theory that the Ring is lost, perhaps unrecoverable, and in no one's possession.

The stemma diagram, marking the constellation of variant sources that would

answer the question as to whether or not Bilbo has, in fact, the One Ruling Ring, would look something like this:



1. If G is derived exclusively from S2, it will differ from S2 only in being more corrupt. G is therefore eliminated.
2. The text of γ (the theory that the Ring is "lost") is inferred from the agreement of S2 with an outside witness: G(?). What Saruman does reveal "tells against" Gandalf's fears. Appendix B gives the content of this assurance: "Saruman feigns that he has discovered that the One Ring has passed down Anduin to the Sea" (*RK* 1099). This text is therefore a rival to α and β; two primary possibilities are before Gandalf for consideration: either α and β = Ω or γ = Ω.
3. The text of β can be inferred from the agreement of S3 with α. Gandalf speaks of a "truth" that he has "spent most of the years since then in finding." This

cryptic statement sums up decades of research on the wizard's part, but the key moment in this research comes when he visits Gondor and goes through its archives. Here he discovers the document that Isildur made; it bears the ancient king's journal entry, describing the Ring. Also, no doubt he knows, or has been informed by Elrond, that Isildur took the Ring as his own possession, stating, "This I will have as weregild for my father, and my brother" (*FR* 244). Weregild (*were* = man; *gild* = payment) (*OED* "Weregild" and "gild") refers then to the restitution that Isildur sought for the deaths of his father and brother. Thus the Ring inclines Isildur, like Gollum and Bilbo after him, to seek for some honorable justification for possessing it. In this way therefore, S3 agrees with α.

4. α can be inferred from the conjunctive relationship between GLM and BI.
    a. GLM: This version posits what is to Gandalf an obvious falsehood (that the Ring was a "birth-day present"; it is indicative of what Gandalf later finds to be a pattern of the Ring-bearer's tendency to distort the facts to justify his entitlement to the Ring.
    b. B1 (from the first edition of *TH*) is purely Bilbo's version. Bilbo's use of the word "won" when describing how he acquired the Ring causes Gandalf to be suspicious of this version. It demonstrates a "conjunctive relationship" with another "text"—namely, the GLM version. This term *ipso facto* makes the version suspect.

Thus the two texts together are conjunctively related; they are derived from a similarly flawed source. The "text" of the Ruling Ring appears to have

corrupted both sources.

5. The text of B2 occurs at the Council of Elrond when Bilbo reveals to the Council his knowledge of the tale of the Ring. He prefaces his narrative with a disclaimer:

   > 'But I will now tell the true story, and if some here have heard me tell it otherwise'—he looked sidelong at Glóin—'I ask them to forget it and forgive me. I only wished to claim the treasure as my very own in those days, and to be rid of the name of thief that was put on me.' (*FR* 249-50)

   This version contains yet a second motive not revealed to Gandalf in his "true" version, namely, that he wants to be rid of the reputation of a thief. Bilbo is liable to be lying here again; naming a desire to have a decent reputation as his primary motivation flatly contradicts both versions he gave to Gandalf and smacks of a face-saving interpretation rather than an honest assessment of his own actions. This text is therefore independent of the others, showing no familial relationship to them.

6. The text of S is independent of the others; it is the text that Gandalf decided not to pursue. Thus it is fragmentary.

7. Now that the texts of the two hyperarchetypes, α and β, have been reconstructed, the readings peculiar to the individual witnesses (GLM, B1, S3, S2, G, S, B2, G(?)) are eliminated.

8. α and β agree. They therefore give the text of Ω. Gandalf is thus led to confirm his reading by having the Ring put in the fire.

The development of *LotR* created the need to make Bilbo a liar. Putting quotation marks around *lie* touches on the ironic; but it is necessary: Bilbo's "lie"

opens the way for the narrative of *LotR*, and his "lie" is thus tangled up in the central threads of the story. Answering the questions that surround Bilbo's tale leads to much bigger things: among the more impressive portals, it is the small, unadorned, unassuming door that opens up into larger vistas. It is not surprising to see Tolkien engaged in manufacturing fictional variants. Observing well this tendency amongst romantic writers and their literary descendants, Cerquiglini argues that, because romantics glorified the "poet of genius" and things of the past, authors' manuscripts and drafts became valued once texts were fixed in publishable form (*In Praise of the Variant* 7). The production of variants not only fetishizes the philological and text-critical reconstruction of an "original" manuscript, but in creating the illusion of time and multi-generational transmission by the production of variants, Tolkien suggests the potential existence of a historical mystery surrounding a lost original manuscript. But to make this possible, Tolkien had to make the first edition of *TH* a variable text; and a great deal of the energy in *LotR* is taken up with the discovery of the true version of the events described in *TH*.

One more example of Tolkien's use of the variable text should suffice. The text that I will briefly discuss here will be raised again in Chapter Three, but in a different context. Here it will be mentioned in order to illustrate what appears to be a deliberately crafted variable text of a sacred hymn in Middle-earth.

As the great spider, Shelob, bears down on Sam as he attempts to enter Mordor with Frodo, Sam suddenly remembers that he is carrying the Phial of Galadriel:

> 'Galadriel!' he said faintly, and then he heard voices far
> off but clear: the crying of the Elves as they walked

> under the stars in the beloved shadows of the Shire, and
> the music of the Elves as it came through his sleep in the
> Hall of Fire in the house of Elrond.
> 'Gilthoniel A Elbereth!'
> And then his tongue was loosed and his voice
> cried in a language which he did not know:
> 'A Elbereth Gilthoniel
> o menel palan-diriel,
> le nallon sí di'nguruthos!
> A tiro nin, Fanuilos!' (*TT* 736-7)
> [O! Queen who kindled star on star, white robed from
> heaven gazing far, here overwhelmed in dread of Death
> I cry: O guard me, Elbereth!] (Tolkien's translation, in
> Swann's *The Road Goes Ever On* 64)

The grave peril prompts the memory of his first encounter with elves and the iconic phial that he is carrying. This text depicts a significant creative adaptation of the original context. The hymn Sam sings is, we are told, based on the elves' song in Rivendell which "came through his sleep" (*TT* 736):

> A Elbereth Gilthoniel,
> silivren penna míriel
> o menel aglar elenath!
> Na-chaered palan-díriel
> o galadhremmin ennorath,
> Fanuilos, le linnathon
> nef aear, sí nef aearon! (*FR* 238)
>
> [O Elbereth who lit the stars, from glittering crystal
> slanting falls with light like jewels from heaven on high
> the glory of the starry host. To lands remote I have
> looked afar, and now to thee, Fanuilos, bright spirit
> clothed in ever-white, I here will sing beyond the Sea,
> beyond the wide and sundering Sea.] (Tolkien's
> translation, in Swann, 64)

Forest-Hill observes here that Sam has changed *palan-díriel* to *palan-diriel* (losing the accent on the "i"), which means he has changed the past participle ("looked afar") to a present participle ("gazing far"); whereas the song in Rivendell depicts a singer who has "looked afar," Sam's version sings of Elbereth Gilthoniel "gazing far"

(104). This variable text can be explained as an adaption and appropriation of a past text for the new purposes of the present. In the context of Tolkien's use of the realities of medieval manuscript transmission, one can read this change as indicative of a scribal "corruption."

One of the realities of medieval writing practices is that medieval authors did not always verify their sources or references. Scrolls were notoriously difficult to use for quick reference, and even books in codex form were often not paginated, divided into chapters, or given line numbers. Thus authors tended to quote their sources from memory (Reynolds and Wilson, 198). The variable text of Sam's prayer can be accounted for on the basis of a later scribe's faulty memory—a free recitation and quotation of a sacred text.

It could also be explained that two equally sacred texts now exist (cf. footnote 21 above). At one point in the history of its transmission, there was one text; but at some point a variant was created and, since both were hymns that sacralized two important moments in history, a patina has developed; and now there are two sacred texts. Like many texts transmitted through the medieval manuscript tradition, *LotR* shows textual signs of being constituted by variant readings.

Scribal Errors

Considering the difficulty of copying accurately even a brief manuscript, it is a wonder that the typical medieval manuscript is not riddled with even more scribal errors. One of the primary reasons for the relatively faithful transmission of manuscripts was the scribal community's practice of having a copy reviewed by the more experienced members of a given scriptorium and compared with an exemplar

(Clemens and Graham, 35). The errors that persisted, however, tend to be frequent enough to have been assigned to categories of errors. Among the mechanical variants produced by scribes are: misreadings caused by faulty word divisions or a lack of word divisions, similarity of letters in some scripts, confusion of homonyms, transposition; omissions caused by haplography (omission of letters), *homœoteleuton* or *homœoarcton* (omitting words that have similar endings or beginnings); and dittography caused by the eye going back too far and repeating a line (Greetham, 280-1). Additionally, Clemens and Graham list "glossing" among the alterations that scribes routinely make (35).

Tolkien, being a *Beowulf* scholar, had to navigate similar difficulties in the extant *Beowulf* manuscripts. Line 63 of *Beowulf* reads: *hyrde ic þæt [...] elan cwen*. A careless scribe appears to have omitted a few words before and after the caesura; the missing words are represented by the brackets and ellipsis. Chickering's translation proposes: *hyrde ic þæt [Yrse wœs On]elan cwen*. He translates this line: "it is told that [Yrse was Onela's] queen." However, in his recently released translation of *Beowulf*, Tolkien (who provides only a modern translation with no Anglo-Saxon text) suggests that it should be read: "and [a daughter] I have heard that was Onela's queen." He seems closer to the original text than Chickering when he translates the line in the first-person ("I have heard" = *hyrde ic þæt*); and like Chickering, he works around the scribe's omission by supplying the verb *was* in order to identify the relationship that the *Beowulf*-poet seems to be trying to show between the "queen" and another figure. Chickering's *Yrse* and Tolkien's *daughter* are attempts to

reconstruct what is missing on the basis of what is extant. Commenting upon the passage, Tolkien writes:

> There is no lacuna and no sign of confusion in the manuscript; but that it is corrupt is shown (a) by *62 being metrically deficient, and (b) by the absence of a verb after *þæt*. At least we may be sure that *wæs* is part of what has dropped out between *elan* and *cwén*. We know also that more has gone, because *62 still does not scan with the addition of *wæs*, and *Elan* is an impossible name—as an almost certain first guess it is a genitive parallel to -Scilfingas (*as* = *aes* = *es*). We may therefore assume fairly safely that the missing part was (a) a woman's name, (b) *wæs*, (c) a man's name ending -*elan*. Also that the woman's name and her husband's obligingly alliterated: but we don't know what was the initial letter, as a princess's name did not necessarily begin with the dynastic letter (cf. *Fréawaru* sister of *Hréðríc* and *Hróðmund* sons of *Hróðgár*). To aid our further guessing we have Scilfingas. This was the name of the great Swedish house. This alliance may have been, and probably was, connected with the not far past enmity between Danes and Geats (you could not be friends with both Geats and Swedes!)– cf. 1554– 8 'Thou hast accomplished that between these peoples, the Geatish folk and spearmen of the Danes, a mutual peace shall be, and strife and hateful enmities shall sleep which erewhile they used' (*1855–8). The fact that the most famous of the Scylfings was Onela son of Ongentheow (2197, 2463; *2616, *2932) is so remarkable that any other name would have to have very strong evidence. But there is no other trace of this marriage of Onela. (*Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary* 156)

It is interesting to witness the various historical, philological, and poetic means Tolkien uses to reconstruct the passage. He puts a possible reconstruction in further doubt when he points out that one cannot even assume that the missing woman's name begins with the dynastic *Hr*. Chickering's interpolation was perhaps the result of simply following an earlier reconstruction, which suggested that *Yrse*

alliterates with *Onela* (Jack, *Beowulf* 31-32). The reason for Tolkien's decision is perhaps harder to discern; the Anglo-Saxon term for daughter is *dohtor*, *dohtru*, *dohtra* (*OED*, "daughter"). Thus Tolkien may have thought the line would have read: *hyrde ic þæt [sum*[22] *dohtor wœs On]elan cwen.* In this case, the alliteration (assonance) may have stressed the common sound among the vowels: *u*, *oh*, wœ, and Onelan. If this is indeed the basis of Tolkien's reconstruction, then in both cases the translators used the alliteration to reconstruct the lacuna. However, it is more likely that Tolkien's interpolation *daughter* was merely a sign of surrender to the unsolvable mystery created by the historical circumstances surrounding the transmission of this text. His reconstructive work only makes him certain that, in a list of Healfdene's offspring, among the sons, a daughter would be the last one listed.

Having spent his scholarly career navigating the difficulties of creating a critical version of old manuscripts, Tolkien's own work contains errors that call upon a reader's reconstructive abilities. *LotR* is a prodigious work; and the longer the work, the more likely a writer may be to allow errors to creep into the text. The errors in his work were probably accidental in most cases; however, in a work that so pervasively pursues the illusion of depth, distance, and the discovered manuscript topos, his errors can perhaps also be explained on other grounds. From inside the frame of Middle-earth, *LotR*'s embedded reader *could* read the text as a work transmitted by many generations of storytellers, scribes, and compilers. This is how he appears to have hoped his readers would understand the variants. His disclaimer in Appendix D anticipates errors of "transmission":

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[22] OE indefinite article.

> It is often difficult to discover from old tales and traditions precise information about things which people knew well and took for granted in their own day (such as the names of letters, or of the days of the week, or the names and lengths of months). But owing to their general interest in genealogy, and to the interest in ancient history which the learned amongst them developed after the War of the Ring, the Shire-hobbits seem to have concerned themselves a good deal with dates; and they even drew up complicated tables showing the relations of their own system with others. I am not skilled in these matters, and may have made many errors; but at any rate the chronology of the crucial years S.R. 1418, 1419 is so carefully set out in the Red Book that there cannot be much doubt about days and times at that point (*RK* 1115).

And yet even in the "carefully set out" calendrical concerns of SR 1418-19, there are notable errors. In *FR*, Gandalf dates his letter to Frodo, "Midyear's Day, Shire Year, 1418" (*FR* 170). Midyear's Day is the central day (Litheday) between 1 and 2 Lithe; all three days occur between the months June and July (or Forelithe and Afterlithe) (*RK* 1114). The letter states that Gandalf cannot wait for him and must leave at once; the wizard signs the letter: "Yours in haste, Gandalf." Yet, according to Appendix B, Gandalf leaves Bree on 1 October (*RK* 1101), months after the date the narrative gives. It is impossible to harmonize this error.

Another inconsistency with regard to the date of Aragorn's planting of the tree by the fountain of Minas Tirith can perhaps be explained with reference to misreadings caused by the "similarity of letters in certain scripts" (Greetham, 280). In *RK*, Aragorn plants the sapling, and "it began to grow; and when the month of June entered in it was laden with blossom" (*RK* 983). But Appendix B states that he only discovered the sapling on June 25 (*RK* 1106). Although the narrative suggests that it was planted before June, the appendix clearly states otherwise.

When reading *LotR* as a "ruin," these contradictions can be accounted for if a fictional scribe is considered to have read in his source: "and when the month of June entered in it was laden…" instead of what the exemplar may have actually read: "and when the month of June ended it was laden…." Again, Greetham mentions the misreadings caused by the similar shapes of certain letters within certain script families. For instance, the similarity between *s* and *f* (*s* and *f*) in certain scripts creates problems for the copying of words like *best* / *left; fecunditatem* / *securitatem; femina* / *semina* (280). The inconsistencies of handwriting only multiply these problems. If, for instance, the manuscript Tolkien-the-compiler "translated" from is imagined to have been written using an OE or ME alphabet and script, then the similarity of the Old English letter *ð* and the Modern English letter *d* could have led to some confusion. Chaucer's *House of Fame* (III. 19) reads, "Now entreð in my brest anoon." A translator who lives after the OE and ME "thorn" became obsolete could read ð and translate the word in the past tense "entered" instead of the present "entereth."

There are also what can be explained as scribal glosses in *LotR*. Clemens and Graham mention "lexical" glosses—that is, glosses that scribes will add to the text in order to translate or colloquialize a term that is less understood (39). Often, scribes would place the gloss above the text and place an *i* (abbreviation for *id est*) before the gloss. I will briefly mention only one instance in which the modern "translator" of the Red Book appears to have either preserved a late gloss that was already in the text, or put the gloss in himself. The narrator describes the place where the Fellowship stay the night on the outskirts of Lothlórien thus: "The branches of the

mallorn-tree grew out nearly straight from the trunk…and among these they found that there had been built a wooden platform, or *flet* as such things were called in those days: the Elves called it a *talan*" (*FR* 344). The gloss is not straightforward. The original word the narrator used may have been either *talan* or *flet*, but a scribe somewhere along the way may have provided the unvarnished "…built a wooden platform," but also decided, in characteristically antiquarian fashion, to retain the archaism alongside the modern translation.

Tolkien's apparent errors and inconsistencies thus actually work in favor of the idea that he may have been trying to replicate a manuscript tradition. Manuscript errors can be explained as scribal corruptions—signs that many hands were at work in the transmission of the text. The presence of similar possible corruptions thus strengthens the archaic framework of *LotR*.

Palimpsest

A palimpsest generally refers to a text that has been effaced in some way—erased, scraped, etc.—so as to allow a writer to write a new text. Palimpsests are particularly characteristic of the medieval period. Greetham notes:

> There is one type of bibliographical change during the move from pagan to Christian literature that is measurable, and that is the palimpsest…. Palimpsests…are almost impossible on papyrus, for the delicate medium cannot be scraped to remove enough of the original text so that a new one can be written on the writing surface. But palimpsests are possible on the sturdier surface of parchment, and there are many interesting textual examples of a pagan (classical) text in an early script (say, uncials) having been written over by a Christian text in a later script (ore of the nationals or Caroline). In cases like these, the evidence of medium (the parchment), appearance (the scripts), and content

> (the texts) are clearly very closely related, particularly where the old text is otherwise unavailable (*Textual Scholarship* 272).

Vat Lat 575 is a notable example of a palimpsest in which a Christian text has been written over a pagan text. Here St Augustine's *Commentary on the Psalter* overlays Cicero's celebrated dialogue, *De Republica*. Significant portions of the first three books of Cicero's dialogue exist only in the palimpsest (How, 24). Codex Guelpherbytanus, a manuscript Tolkien would almost certainly have been aware of, is another example. Here the ancient Gothic version of the Bible exists as a palimpsest under Isidore Hispalensis's *Origenes*, another Christian text (Metzger, 306).

Palimpsests provide a potentially useful way of thinking about Tolkien's work especially if the palimpsest is seen as a metaphor for the way in which ancient texts are preserved, and provide the foundation for later texts. The danger of the palimpsest is that the sub-text can go unnoticed beneath the visible text; but it is also true that the subject matter of the visible text can provide an aegis for the sub-text.

Tolkien the antiquary was hardly the first to attempt to capture and mythologize those elements of a nation's pagan past more in harmony with Tolkien's Christian worldview. Instead he stood in a line best represented by the *Beowulf*-poet and Snorri Sturluson, antiquarian authors who attempted to preserve the past, but yet navigate the choppy waters of a civilization that had only recently converted to Christianity. Snorri's and the *Beowulf*-poet's underlying texts are pagan; however, the pagan texts have been Christianized. What is visible are the

Christianized texts; the older text survives beneath them. In Snorri's case, with the advent of Christianity, skaldic poetry faced a bleak future. Moosbrugger claims that Snorri knew this, and though he was a Christian and seemed to have no desire to return Icelanders back to their native beliefs, he did desire

> to create a "poetological" companion for the skalds with the "material" information to keep the skaldic tradition alive. The old songs should be comprehensible for the coming generations, and future songs should be based upon the same technique; that is why Sturluson also developed kennings for Christ. (Moosbrugger, 109)

Having found the trickster Loki already embedded in the old mythology of his people, Snorri seems to have made use of Loki's attributes while adapting them to new purposes. In the *Voluspa*, which was written long before Snorri's *Prose Edda* and thus was probably closer to the original pagan version of the story (Moosbrugger, 109), the poet describes the death of Baldur thus:

> I saw Baldr, for the bloody god,
> Odin's child, his fate concealed;
> there stood grown—higher than the plain,
> slender and very fair—the mistletoe.
>
> From that plant which seemed so lovely
> came dangerous, harmful dart, Hod began to shoot;
> Baldr's brother was born very quickly;
> Odin's son began fighting at one night old.
>
> Nor did he ever wash his hands nor comb his hair,
> until he brought Baldr's adversary to the funeral pyre;
> and in Fen-halls Frigg wept
> for the woe of Valhall—do you understand yet, or what
> more? (Larrington's translation, stanzas 31-33)

Hod seems to shoot Baldur knowingly. The death of Baldur is narrated indirectly. The gods do not collectively weep (though the event is described as the "woe of Valhall'); only Frigg is seen mourning.

This is very different from Snorri's version. In the *Prose Edda*, Hödr, under the whispering influence of Loki, blindly throws the mistletoe at Baldur. The gods collectively mourn, and Ragnarok immediately follows (*The Eddas* 323-7). Moosbrugger sees in this adaptation a Christian reimagining of a pagan myth (114-5). Snorri's version seems to follow closely the Passion of Christ, the apocalypse, and the Christian restoration of all things. In the Gospels, Jesus dies at the hands of a blind crowd, unknowingly influenced by the trickster Satan. This is an example of the palimpsest metaphor to which I referred above. Pagan elements, names, allusions exist, but they are subsumed beneath a Christian text.

Though it lacks a Christian ending, *Beowulf* may also be a dual text. Tolkien argued that *Beowulf* is

> a poem by a learned man writing of old times, who looking back on the heroism and sorrow feels in them something permanent and something symbolical…. It is essentially a balance, and opposition of ends and beginnings. In its simplest terms it is 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. (*Monsters* 25, 28)

For Tolkien this story tended to suppress both Christian and traditional pagan elements (22); however, the bleak Northern outlook in which mankind fights only an inevitable defeat should not be taken to mean that the poet himself felt this despair. In fact, writes Tolkien, he was able to feel this darkness "poetically because he was himself removed from the direct pressure of its despair" (23). And furthermore, it is telling that the author did "not consign the heathen ancestors to perdition"; instead, he ennobled them (23). Tolkien thought that the *Beowulf*-poet's

"English temper" and love for tradition was inclined to "preserve much from the northern past to blend with southern learning, and new faith" (24).

Tolkien may have seen himself playing a similar role to Snorri and the *Beowulf*-poet. He turned this convention, however, on its head in *LotR*, in which the Christian elements are the subtext while the more explicitly (virtuous) pagan elements over-write the subtext. There are scenes in *LotR* that resound with Christian echoes. Tolkien, writing to a Catholic priest, insisted:

> The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like "religion," to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism. (*Letters* 172)

However, once again, Tolkien is being cautious about his text's subtext. His text tells a story that makes no explicit reference to the Christian God, the saints, or its sacraments.

Tolkien points to the explicitly Christian language of the "Arthurian world" as a "fatal" flaw in the myth; for Tolkien, direct religious references had no place in myth and fairy-story (*Letters* 144). When an issue arises in the narrative of *LotR* that would seem to require an explicit religious reference in order to satisfy the reader's need for an understanding of Middle-earth's moral and spiritual laws, Tolkien manages to resolve this need without compromising his larger vision. A primary example of this is in "The Council of Elrond." Here, the mighty representatives of Middle-earth sitting in council are deciding upon who should take the Ring to destroy it. There are several options: Elrond himself could take it, and Gandalf,

Glorfindel, and Aragorn would all seem to be good candidates. Frodo learns that Aragorn's forefather, Isildur, once owned the Ring. Relieved, Frodo is ready to give the Ring to its rightful heir, Aragorn. But Aragorn refuses, saying: "[i]t has been ordained that you should hold it for a little while" (*FR* 247). The phrase, "It has been ordained" is a rather obvious circumlocution for the will of a sovereign deity.

In order to avoid trifling with the Third Commandment (Exodus 20:7), ancient Jews preferred to use these kinds of periphrases when referring to Yahweh; the word שמים ("heaven") was substituted for יהוה ("Yahweh"). In St Matthew's Gospel, Jesus, whose words were translated into Greek, speaks repeatedly of the βασιλεία των οὐρανῶν ("kingdom of heaven.")[23] He, and the Apostles who narrated his life, often spoke of future events as events that "must come to pass" (Matthew 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9; see also John 4:7). In these constructs, the divine name is suppressed, but the sense of divine inevitability implies the will of a sovereign God who directs, unfolds, and ordains future events (Kittel, "οὐρανός" 520-52). Tolkien seems to be operating under similar (self-imposed) restrictions. I do not suggest that he feared violating the divine name; rather, it seems that he wished to avoid violating the myth he had created, while at the same time smuggling in the notion of divine inevitability.[24]

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[23] See especially St Matthew chs. 5-7.

[24] It is sometimes instructive to read Tolkien's commentary on his own works in his letters to fans and friends. In these letters, the Christian sub-text rises to the surface; little or no attempt is made to hide the tension between the two texts of *LotR*. For instance:

> But G[andalf] is not, of course, a human being.... I w[oul]d venture to say that he was an incarnate '*angel*'—strictly an *αγγελος*.... But in this "mythology" all the '*angelic*' powers concerned with this world were capable of many degrees of error and failing between the absolute

The duality of *LotR*'s text informs its characters' natures. In one place, Tolkien describes Gandalf as an "Odinic wanderer" (*Letters* 119). Frodo's name echoes that of Froði, a Norse contemporary of Christ who reigned during a period of unprecedented peace (see Shippey, *Author of the Century* 206). Galadriel reminds some readers of the Valkyrie (Donovan, "The Valkyrie Reflex" 106-132). The Ring as a character has pagan literary precedents. The Ring of Gyges (*Republic* 2.359a-2.360d), the "Ring of Andvari" (*Völsunga Saga*), and "Ring of the Nibelung" all resemble in some manner Tolkien's Ring. Similarly, the destruction of Númenor echoes the Fall of Atlantis (Plato, *Timeaus* 20b-25a).

The Christian resonances, however, lie beneath the surface. As seen above, Tolkien views Gandalf as an angelic figure. Frodo´s sacrificial quest (which begins on 25 December and ends on Good Friday, 25 March) resembles Christ's; Shippey makes a strong case for Frodo's echoing of Froda, a Christ-like pacific and "virtuous pagan"—a "hinge, a mediation…in its suspension between pagan myth and Christian truth" (*Author* 208). As for Galadriel, Tolkien acknowledged at least a plausible link

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> *Satanic* rebellion and evil of Morgoth and his satellite Sauron…. [Gandalf] is still under the obligation of concealing his power and of teaching rather than forcing or dominating wills, but where the physical powers of the Enemy are too great for the good will of the opposers to be effective he can act in emergency as an '*angel*'—no more violently than the release of *St Peter from prison*…. The Númenóreans thus began a great new good, and *as monotheists*; but *like the Jews* (only more so) *with only one physical centre of* '*worship*.'… Also when the 'Kings' came to an end there was no equivalent to a "*priesthood* [emphasis added]." (*Letters* 204-6)

Here the tension between the Christian and non-Christian, pre-Christian, or virtuous pagan language is obvious. Key characters and events are seen in terms of their explicitly Christian counterparts. He views the Istari as angels who occasionally exercise their power to release saints; he thinks of Morgoth as Satan; the Númenóreans are monotheists like the Jews, but without a priesthood. Within their fictional world, Tolkien's characters can exist for their own sake; Morgoth refers only to Morgoth. But Morgoth does refer, in some sense, to Satan in the primary world—or in the subtext.

between Galadriel and St Mary (*Letters* 172, 288, 407). The Ring, which, paradoxically, is both a "psychic amplifier" and an "external force," provides a platform for an illustration of a paradox in the Lord's Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (see Shippey, *Author* 141-143). Númenor, whose inhabitants are forbidden to approach the Undying Lands, hearkens to the ban God placed upon the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:17).

Beneath the pagan imagery and historical resonances a Christian text exists, providing a palimpsest for careful readers to see. Tolkien's *LotR* not only contains both texts, but it also mediates them. It is a unique alchemy, like Snorri's and the *Beowulf*-poet's texts, of seemingly mutually exclusive worldviews and cultures. The palimpsestic nature of *LotR* thus further enhances the experience of reading *LotR* as a "textual ruin."

Origin-ality

Tolkien employs and fictionalizes a medieval "attitude" toward writing in general; and he uses this attitude to frame and inform *LotR*. Elizabeth Scala observes that the medieval narrative, unlike the novel (which tends to privilege "originary newness—its novelty") privileges "originality"; that is, the origin or source of its material. Medieval storytellers, writes Scala,

> rarely invent their own stories; the act of narration is conditioned by an implicit call for authorization. Medieval texts must be authorized; that is, they must announce their authority—not who the narrator is, but from whom (*auctor*) or where (*auctoritas*) the narrator derived his material. (*Absent Narratives* 2)

C. S. Lewis adds to this observation that the medieval mind was "bookish." Medieval

people found it "hard to believe that anything an old *auctour* has said is simply untrue" (*The Discarded Image* 11).[25] At the outset of *LotR*, Tolkien, like his medieval storytelling predecessors, "authorizes" his work, insisting upon its *derivative* nature and naming its sources (*FR* 14-5). Before discussing Tolkien's own use of the "authorizing" trope, however, it may be helpful to cite a few examples of this medieval habit.

The anonymous *Nibelunglied* begins, "We have been told in ancient tales many marvels of famous heroes, of mighty toil, joys, and high festivities, of weeping and wailing, and the fighting of bold warriors—of such things you can now hear wonders unending!" (Hattow's translation, 17). This opening reference to older tales resembles the exordium that opens *Beowulf*: "Lo! the glory of the kings of the people of the Spear-Danes in days of old we have heard tell, how those princes did deeds of valour" (Tolkien's translation, lines 1-3). The unknown author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* felt the need to embed his story within the older "history" of Troy and Felix Brutus's founding of Britain (Tolkien's translation, lines, 1-17). *Sir Orfeo*'s author may have felt himself to be under a similar obligation:

> We often read and written find,
> as learned men do us remind,
> that lays that now the harpers sing
> are wrought of many a marvelous thing.
> Some are of weal, and some of woe,
> and some do joy and gladness know;
> in some are guile and treachery told,
> in some the deeds that chanced of old;

[25] This, according to Lewis, accounts for the "medieval synthesis" (or what Lewis calls "the harmonious mental Model of the Universe"). The medieval "library" of books was inherently heterogeneous (pagan, Christian, Judaic, Platonic, Aristotelian, etc.), and a system or "Model" was needed to synthesize and harmonize them in such a way that all of the old authors agreed with one another (11).

> some are of jests and ribaldry,
> and some are tales of Faërie.
> Of all the things that men may heed
> 'tis most of love they sing indeed.
> In Britain all these lays are writ,
> there issued first in rhyming fit,
> concerning adventures in those days
> whereof the Britons made their lays…. (Tolkien's translation, lines 1-16)

While noting that the fictitious "I" of Pearl and The Travels of Sir John Mandeville were both novel for their time, Tolkien writes:

> Tales of the past required their grave authorities and tales of new things at least an eyewitness, the author. This was one of the reasons for the popularity of visions: they allowed marvels to be placed within the real world, linking them with a person, a place, a time, while providing them with an explanation in the phantasies of sleep, and a defence against critics in the notorious deception of dreams. So even explicit allegory was usually presented as a thing seen in sleep. (*Sir Gawain* 14)

Tolkien thus viewed author-ity as so fundamental to the medieval habit of mind that he even saw in the private, by definition idiosyncratic, unverifiable dream-visions a medieval attempt to establish *auctoritas* in the individual dreamer himself.

Malory, for reasons that are still being debated, referred to a "Freynshe booke," which the reader is supposed to believe was Malory's source (see for instance, Malory, 311); at times, as Riddy observes, he will omit or greatly abridge narrative that would seem crucial or at least interesting so that he can inform his reading audience what his French source does not say (141). Malory's *The Tale of the Noble King Arthur That Was Emperor Himself* follows closely the alliterative *Morte Arthure* (Tolkien, *The Fall of Arthur* 85). Vinaver, whose own text of Malory

has recently been combined with Caxton's in Field's new translation,[26] believes this book to be the first book Malory wrote; and Vinaver argues further that Malory, contrary to conventional views, became acquainted with the Arthurian tradition not primarily through French sources, but through the alliterative version (*The Works of Thomas Malory*, I, xli). So why does he feel the need to cite a source in places where he is not relying upon it? Batt's answer seems as plausible as any:

> The credentials of the text and the translator are ambivalent, the relation between text, translator and reader not rigidly fixed. The focus is on reading rather than writing. Malory refers to a source-text, but our reaction to the idea of a source is more important than the source itself. A vernacular, instead of a Latin, source, it is for the reader to determine its status: the 'Frensshe book' is mentioned in the singular, which gives the impression of a homogeneous Continental tradition on which one can draw for information, but 'other bookis' (unspecified) also influence the translator's and reader's attitude to the subject matter. ("Malory's Question Beast" 143)

If Bratt is correct, then, while Malory probably used French sources, the "French book" is a fiction: no "homogeneous Continental tradition" existed). Mentioning the source-text serves purely readerly purposes.

Snorri Sturluson habitually referred in his *Edda* to older textual authorities. Among the authorities to which he refers are: Skald Bragi the Old (*The Eddas* 256), Thiodolf of Hvina (257), the *Havamal* (258), the *Hrimthursar* (259), the *Voluspa* (259, 70), Skaldi (279), and other anonymous sources ("As it is said….") (294, 296). These are merely his sources as a scholar of Icelandic mythology. But as a storyteller, his tales are largely framed as stories derived from his characters'

[26] P.J.C Field, trans., *Le Morte Darthur*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013. Print.

interrogation of authoritative characters. For instance, a significant portion of Snorri's *Edda* consists of questions Gangler puts to Har, Jafnhar, and Thridi—a trinity of divine sources.

The authoritative sources Snorri tends to call attention to in his narrative are typically poetic sources. Thus his narrative is often punctuated with older songs. Tolkien's *LotR* also employs this narrative style. His use of poetry and songs from older sources is particularly emphatic when his subject material is the Rohirrim.

To cite one important instance of this, in "The Muster of Rohan," Tolkien's narrator describes the mood of those of the Rohirrim who stayed behind while the knights went off to war, "Hearts were heavy and many quailed in the shadow." As the éored assembles to ride to Gondor, the narrator says,

> On down the grey road they went beside the Snowbourn rushing on its stones; through the hamlets of Underharrow and Upbourn, where many sad faces of women looked out from dark doors; and so without horn or harp or music of men's voices the great ride into the East began with which the songs of Rohan were busy for many long lives of men thereafter. (*RK* 812)

This passage is reminiscent of a scene in William Morris's *The House of the Wolfings*, right down to being prefaced by a Gondorian messenger delivering Théoden a "Red Arrow," signifying Gondor's need of aid (*More to William Morris* 15). And like the stay-at-home Goths who look out in silence upon their men mustering for a distant battle with heavy hearts (23-24), so does H's narrator describe the stay-at-home people of Rohan watching in silent gloom as their éored rides off to certain death. The narrator here takes in a larger view and steps out of the immediacy of the narrative. A song made long after the event it describes is anachronistically stitched

into the event itself. But it is an "old" song from the narrator's point-of-view. The manuscript conceit allows for every song or poem in the narrative to be the product of a later time anachronistically put into the mouths of earlier characters.

However, here the narrator does not "pretend" that the characters he describes are singing this song; he gives voice to characters not in the story. The "historical" Rohirrim rode in silence, but the narrator has them riding to the accompaniment of the songs of "many long lives of men thereafter." The expression, "many long lives of men" is alliterative, easing the reader into the alliterative verse that follows.

> From dark Dunharrow in the dim morning
> with thane and captain rode Thengel's son:
> to Edoras he came, the ancient halls
> of the Mark-wardens mist-enshrouded;
> golden timbers were in gloom mantled.
> Farewell he bade to his free people,
> hearth and high-seat, and the hallowed places,
> where long he had feasted ere the light faded.
> rode the king, fear behind him,
> fate before him. Fealty kept he;
> oaths he had taken, all fulfilled them.
> Forth rode Théoden. Five nights and days
> east and onward rode the Eorlingas
> through Folde and Fenmarch and the Firienwood,
> six thousand spears to Sunlending,
> Mundburg the mighty under Mindolluin,
> Sea-kings' city in the South-kingdom
> foe-beleaguered, fire-encircled.
> Doom drove them on. Darkness took them,
> horse and horseman; hoofbeats afar
> sank into silence, so the songs tell us. (*RK* 813)

The word "silence" is crucial here. The entire scene is skillfully constructed to sound in the ear and appear in the mind's eye as a moment instantly aged, hardened, and graduated into legend. There is a great bustle of activity: men and horses, women

and children waving goodbye and trying to capture a final image of their loved one; but the only sound that is allowed to penetrate the muted solemnity is a solitary trumpet. The effect of the scene is that of a chapel's stained glass window upon which reside the stock monochromatic figures of a battle whose memory is dimly preserved in this glass. Having been instructed by the song's introduction to read the song itself as a belated elegy, the reader might just assume that he or she is reading a chorus created by a community in reflection upon the "historical" ride. But the song's coda: "so the songs tell us" leaves the reader in doubt. Typically, OE alliterative verse alliterates on the first, second, third, but not the fourth stressed syllable (Cable, 8) (the stressed syllables are in bold): **s**ank into **s**ilence—so the **s**ongs **t**ell us. The coda completes the pattern established in the first half of the line, but, on the other side of a temporal chasm, it stands widely apart from the song's narrative. Whose song is it? A poem lifted from an *Ur*-text (created perhaps by one of Merry's descendants or disciples), with the last line appended by Tolkien the translator and compiler? A song composed by a Rohirric scop, with, again, the last line attached by Tolkien? Or a song composed entirely by a poet (perhaps Tolkien) based on a collection of belated nationalistic songs that were themselves based on the "historical" event?

The effect of the coda is to structure the text in such a way that it versifies the verse, to sing of singing. The text of the song is not merely framed by the introductory statement: the song swallows the framing device and incorporates it into its artistic presentation. The text of the song no longer serves as a window onto a pastime: it is a window that looks out upon a window.

As the older *Poetic Edda* contains the *ab initio* of Snorri's *Prose Edda* narratives, one can easily imagine this verse to be the actual seed of the narrative that follows. All of the key plot points are either here stated concretely or suggested: the location of the beginning of the ride, the key figures (king, captain, and host), a stop along the way to pick up additional riders, a painful goodbye (Éowyn, Merry, and the rest of his people), the oath to which he was responding (the Mark's loyalty to Gondor, which was signified by the Red Arrow), the length of the ride to battle, the direction of the ride, the number of riders, the location of the battle, the state of the ally's city when they arrived, the inevitability of the king's death brought on by Rohan's heroic spirit ("fear behind him / …fate before him. / …Doom drove them"). The old songs appear to be structuring the narrative. The heroes of Rohan tend to view their own exploits, whether past, present, or future, in terms of the songs that will be sung of them. The image they project onto the screen of "history" is the song-worthy image. They desire to see their future selves in the mouth of a future scop. Working backwards from this reality, one can imagine the Rohirric narrative—instead of being the framework into which its songs are stitched—as having been culled from the songs, or the "Poetic Edda," of Rohan.

However, the supreme point for this discussion is that Tolkien's *LotR* uses the medieval emphasis upon origin-ality. His is a work "derived" from his sources. It is ironic that in the age of the novel, the novelty of *LotR* is its fictionalized derivativeness. Small fragments of the elder days, ruins, variant readings, corrupted palimpsests have washed upon the distant shores of time. Tolkien-the-compiler, the storyteller, the antiquary, a Robinson Crusoe has collected what little remained and

made Middle-earth. In so doing, not only does he demonstrate his own genius for this task, but, more importantly, he reveals again how rich and generative the seeds of the past can be.

Lost or Fragmented Works

To mention one final distancing technique (which is part of the larger method of "distressing" his text), Tolkien's *LotR* periodically, and strategically, calls attention to "forgotten" histories, places, and peoples. Christopher Tolkien highlights his father's ability to "strongly evoke a sense of 'untold tales,' even in the telling of them" (*Book of Lost Tales* 1, xii). But this may perhaps be owed largely to the ubiquity of "lost" or "forgotten" history in Tolkien's tales.

Of the various textual bibliographical phenomena explored in this chapter, this particular instance bears the closest resemblance to the metaphor of the ruin. For in these instances, only a fragment of knowledge remains of what was once a much larger textual structure. Tolkien did not create *LotR* in a vacuum; it grew organically from the Middle-earth of "The Silmarillion" and *TH*. Although the lost or fragmentary-manuscript phenomenon is not exclusive to medieval and classical works, the phenomenon is more usual among the works of antique authors. The Book of Yasher referred to in 2 Samuel 1:18; the recollections of the Apostolic Father Papias referred to in Irenaeus's *Adversus Haereses* 5.3.4 and Eusebius's *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.39.1; the *Ur-Hamlet* alluded to in Thomas Nashe's preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon*[27] are works that exist only in fragmentary form or as

[27] Nashe, in 1589, eleven or twelve years before Shakespeare's Hamlet was staged, wrote,

mere references in later works. In Tolkien's own experience as a translator of medieval works, regarding *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Tolkien writes:

> Of this author, nothing is now known. But he was a major poet of his day; and it is a solemn thought that his name is now forgotten, a reminder of the great gaps of ignorance over which we now weave the thin webs of our literary history. But something to the purpose may still be learned of this writer from his works…. (*Sir Gawain* 1-2)

Tolkien then proceeds to give a description (which sometimes verges on the psychological) of the author based on what his works can tell of him. These fragments (and many more) tantalize readers with their seductive hiddenness. They beckon the mind to reconstruct what is lost. And if what is lost is to be recovered, it can only be recovered by the imagination.

When Sam departs with Pippin and Merry, leaving the Grey Havens for the Shire, readers often somehow sense that a place that never existed has somehow been lost. The characters and even forests and inanimate hills are imbued with a sense of lost histories. The Old Forest is described as "a survivor of vast forgotten woods" (*FR* 131). Our current text tells of this forest, but, apparently, no histories of the other forests of Middle-earth remain (aside, it would seem, from Mirkwood, Lothlórien, and Fangorn). Tom Bombadil, in his song of enchantment against the

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> It is a common practise now a daies amongst a sort of shifting companions, that runne through euery arte and thriue by none, to leaue the trade of *Nouerint,* whereto they were borne, and busie themselues with the indeuors of Art, that could scarcelie latinize their necke-verse if they should haue neede; yet English *Seneca* read by candle light yeeldes manie good sentences, as *Bloud is a begger,* and so foorth; and, if you intreate him faire in a frostie morning, he will affoord you whole *Hamlets,* I should say handfulls of tragical speaches [emphasis his]. (2)

Thus the version Nashe refers to is an earlier version of Hamlet, which may or may not have been written by Shakespeare (see Bloom, 41). Whatever the case may be, all we have of this earlier version is the tantalizing (and unflattering) allusion in Nashe.

Barrow Wight, commands: "Come never here again! Leave your barrow empty! / Lost and forgotten be, darker than the darkness" (*FR* 142). Ironically, the song assures the reader that the Wight will never be forgotten; but the possibility that he could be is part of the multi-dimensional, multi-temporal world Tolkien has created. Of the "foes of the Dark Lord," Tom says, "Few now remember then…yet still some go wandering, sons of forgotten kings walking in loneliness, guarding from evil things folk that are heedless" (*FR* 145-6). In "At the Sign of the Prancing Pony," the narrator speaks of the "old Kings" whose memory "had faded into grass"; their descendants were the Rangers, who were "now few and rarely seen"; they "brought news from afar, and told strange forgotten tales" (*FR* 149). At the Last Bridge, Strider refers to a race of evil men; they were destroyed in a war that "is now so long ago that the hills have forgotten them, though a shadow still lies on the land" (*FR* 202). Hills are commonly associated with extreme age (see Genesis 49:26 where hills are referred to as "everlasting" and Psalm 3:4; 24:3 refer to Yahweh's dwelling place as a "holy hill"); but the time when these men walked the earth is so remote that the even the hills have forgotten the time. Boromir informs the Council that what became of the Ring may have once been told in tales, but "it has long been forgotten" (*FR* 244). He also tells the company he had "wandered by roads forgotten, seeking the house of Elrond" (*FR* 247). At the same meeting, Gandalf conjectures that when the One Ring is destroyed the Three Rings "will fail, and many fair things will fade and be forgotten" (*FR* 269). After singing what he remembers of the song of Nimrodel, Legolas tells his hearers that he "cannot sing any more…. That is but a part, for I have forgotten much" (*FR* 342). Galadriel bemoans the fact that

"Lothlórien will fade, and the tides of Time will sweep it away. We must depart into the West, or dwindle to a rustic folk of dell and cave, slowly to forget and to be forgotten." Frodo sees that the Gates of Argonath "preserved through the suns and rains of forgotten years the mighty likenesses in which they had been hewn…. Great power and majesty they still wore, the silent wardens of a long-vanished kingdom" (*FR* 395).

In *TT*, Aragorn refers to the period in which the Rohirrim, headed by Eorl the Young, migrated out of the North as the "Dark Years" and the "forgotten years long ago" (*TT* 433). Treebeard calls the Nazgûl the "Nine forgotten Riders" (*TT* 475). Gandalf, after his return to Middle-earth as Gandalf the White, says, "I have forgotten much that I thought I knew, and learned again much that I had forgotten" (*TT* 499). Aragorn sings a Rohirric song to his companions and describing its origin says: "Thus spoke a forgotten poet long ago in Rohan, recalling how tall and fair was Eorl the Young, who rode down out of the North…. So men still sing in the evening" (*TT* 513). All that remains of the Rohirric scop's identity is the song he made; his song is the ruin. Háma, after Aragorn has revealed the Sword of Elendil, exclaims, "It seems that you are come on the wings of song out of the forgotten days" (*TT* 516). The Hornburg, which the narrator describes as a remaining structure built by the "sea-kings…with the hands of giants," is said to echo into the deeps of the mountain, "as if armies long-forgotten were issuing to war from caves beneath the hills" (*TT* 532). Men "almost" forgot the palantírí (*TT* 600). The "rotting reeds" of the Dead Marshes loom like "ragged shadows of long-forgotten summers" (*TT* 632). Faramir recalls Gandalf as having said he was called "Olórin…in the West that is forgotten" (*TT* 677).

Large "crevices and fissures blacker than the night, where forgotten winters had gnawed and carved the sunless stone" further scar the dreadful landscape of the Ephel Dúath" (*TT* 718). Trying to encourage himself and Frodo, Sam notes that those who abort their missions and turn back are "forgotten" (*TT* 719).

In *RK*, in an ironic twist (in light of what Sam had observed [see previous sentence]), Aragorn, quoting Malbeth the Seer's verse, sings,

> The Dead awaken;
> for the hour is come for the oathbreakers:
> at the Stone of Erech they shall stand again
> and hear there a horn in the hills ringing.
> Whose shall the horn be? Who shall call them
> from the grey twilight, the forgotten people? (*RK* 790)

Though, contrary to what Sam has supposed, the oathbreakers do indeed turn back, they are remembered. But they are only remembered as a forgotten people. Dark Dunharrow is called "the work of long-forgotten men. Their name was lost and no song or legend remembered it" (*RK* 805). The Black Captain "cried aloud in a dreadful voice, speaking in some forgotten tongue words of power and terror" (*RK* 838). Merry sees the resemblance between the Púkel-men stones and Ghân-buri-Ghân: "here was one of those old images brought to life, or maybe a creature descended in true line through endless years from the models used by the forgotten craftsmen long ago" (*RK* 842). Marginalized and "forgotten" roads (*RK* 842), mountains (*RK* 850), powers (*RK* 878), rhymes (RK 880), battles (*RK* 886) are centralized. The Mouth of Sauron has forgotten his own name (*RK* 899). Believing his life to be winging "away into forgetfulness," Pippin thinks he hears voices "crying in some forgotten world far above: 'The Eagles are coming!'" (*RK* 903). Sam assumes that the land surrounding the Tower of Cirith Ungol to be "a land of darkness where

the days of the world seemed forgotten, and where all who entered were forgotten too" (*RK* 907).

When Sauron is overthrown, the tide of forgottenness turns: Éowyn (*RK* 976) and Treebeard (*RK* 991) are comforted that they will not be forgotten. But, in a fascinating scene, the narrator states that if a wanderer "had chanced to pass" and seen Gandalf, Elrond, Celeborn, Galadriel (among other elves), "little would he have seen or heard, and it would have seemed to him only that he saw grey figures, carved in stone, memorials of forgotten things now lost in unpeopled lands" (*RK* 997). The elves and the wizard—characters out of a fairy tale—resemble in the imagination what Merry has seen in Pûkel-men: stony echoes, ruins of a once vibrant people, now fixed in the eyes and alive only in the imagination.

Barliman Butterbur, the forgetful innkeeper who "manages" The Prancing Pony, is a microcosm of the generative and creative power of the forgotten text. He forgets to follow Gandalf's instructions and send a letter of warning to Frodo in the Shire (*FR* 259). His failure of memory makes adventure possible; Frodo leaves the Shire late, which leads directly to his confrontation with the Nine Riders and an encounter with Strider.

This is a pattern that haunts the whole narrative of *LotR*. What little is present and visible points to a vast forgotten and absent past. Tolkien seems to have understood well that a sense of loss can be among the keenest experiences a reader can have. *LotR* is not (for now) a lost book; but it is a book of loss. *LotR*'s narrator says of the Pûkel men:

> Such was the dark Dunharrow, the work of long-forgotten men. Their name was lost and no song or

> legend remembered it. For what purpose they had made this place, as a town or secret temple or a tomb of kings, none in Rohan could say. Here they laboured in the Dark Years, before ever a ship came to the western shores, or Gondor of the Dúnedain was built; and now they had vanished, and only the old Pûkel-men were left, still sitting at the turnings of the road. (*RK* 805)

They are the ruin—all that remains—of a once magnificent edifice; they are not only marvelous in their own right, but they are marvelous for their ability to set the imagination to the work of reconstruction. And this in miniature is a picture of *LotR*. The book is itself a ruin, wonderful in its own right, but more wonderful still for giving the imagination room to envision histories that no longer exist (and never existed). Like the six remaining columns of the Temple at Delphi, the six books of *LotR* stand as a reminder of what once was. And if we stand nearby, we may hear the distant echoes of a lost world. The distance the reader feels from the events being narrated becomes a gateway to wonder.

CHAPTER THREE

MANUSCRIPT TRADITION IN MIDDLE-EARTH AND ÆLFWINE

Medieval Conceptions of Author and Text

After reading a translation that shows signs of interpolation or a loose typographical copy of a textual source, the contemporary textual critic is likely to consider the translation or copy "corrupt." This view, conditioned as it is by modern definitions of author and text, creates difficulties for the contemporary study of medieval literature. Most extant medieval manuscripts display a remarkable degree of diversity of origin and composition; in a given manuscript, an alarming number of the hands involved in its production seem to claim the liberties our sensibilities tell us belong solely to the individual author.

To begin with a text with which Tolkien would have been familiar, the history of the transmission of Boethius's (ca. AD 480-525) *De Consolatione Philosophiae*—a Latin text of late antiquity—is particularly revealing. It highlights the stark differences between modern and medieval attitudes towards author and text. One of the important medieval translations of *Consolatione* is Chaucer's *Boece*. What is interesting about Chaucer's translation is that it comes from a textual "source" that exists only in theory. Because of the singular importance of *Consolatione* to the Middle Ages, Boethius's text had been translated many times over, and a large corpus of commentaries had accumulated over the centuries. Chaucer may have used four major sources, which were themselves translations, commentaries, and

glosses upon diverse sources, in his translation. As Machan notes, for Chaucer, "the text he was transmitting was not static, but fluid, and he, as a translator, gave it a temporary shape" (155). *Boece* is thus not a single text but a compilation of select commentaries, which tend to be interpretations rather than translations of the older author's text. The fluidity of Boethius's text, however, does not end there. The scribes who copied Chaucer's text mirrored Chaucer's method and took what would appear to modern sensibilities to be considerable liberties with his text (Machan, 154).

For Machan, this process is representative of medieval attitudes towards important texts:

> the *Consolation* was not a fixed text but a living tradition. That is, perhaps due to the intensely personal, moral response which the *Consolation* might elicit in a reader, Boethius's text underwent continual revision, translation, and explication throughout the medieval period. (155)

In fact, states Machan:

> the majority evidently did not view the text they were copying as something sacrosanct: Chaucer's authorial intention was not their primary concern. Rather, their procedure suggests that they appropriated for themselves the power to give a shape to what they were transmitting—to act, in effect, as authors. (156)

This has radical implications for modern views of author and text. It is certainly true that fidelity to sacred texts was in certain cases prized. However, for the medieval scribe, the translator shared in the authorial role; and the "text" to be transmitted was not a stable text. Just as Bellini, Botticelli, Raphael, and other medieval artists translocated St Mary by depicting her in medieval clothing and surrounded by

medieval architecture (see fig. 2), so did the medieval text serve as a dynamic field that could include whatever contemporary social needs had called for its transmission in the first place.

Fig. 2. *The Virgin and Child*. 1490. Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, Massachusetts, *Google Images*. Web. 22 November 2014.

St Bonaventure, a man who was a vital part of the manuscript transmitting machinery of the Middle Ages, divided the role of the transmitter into four categories:

1. The one who writes another's words without making a single change is a *scribe* (Latin, scriptor).
2. The one who "supplements" a source's words with the words of another is a *compiler* (compilator).
3. The one who primarily writes a source's words, but, merely for the sake of clarity, supplements them with his own words is a *commentator*.
4. The one who uses a source's words and his own words, but merely supplements his own words, for the sake of clarity, with the source's words, is to be called an *author* (auctor).[28]

If one were to categorize Chaucer's translation of *Consolatione* according to St Bonaventure's classifications, it would, as Machan notes, have to be considered the work of a "commentator" (159).

This nicely delineated set of categories, however, is an expression not of the reality of the medieval textual situation but rather of its ideal—an ideal that was rarely realized; it is the product of an ideological age that attempted to systematize and harmonize even the most chaotic and contradictory facts of reality. Machan contends that "what scribes were told and what they produced do not necessarily agree, for the manuscript evidence of the *Boece* indicates that the scribes involved in

[28] See M. B. Parkes, "The Influence of the Concepts of Ordinatio and Compilatio on the Development of the Book," in J. J. G. Alexander and M. T. Gibson (eds), *Medieval Learning and Lierature: Essays Presented to Richard William Hunt* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1976), 126-127.

its transmission did not hesitate to alter substantively the texts they were copying" (158). Indeed, a medieval scribe tended to believe that fidelity to an older text merely required *understanding* the political, moral, or theological needs of the *present*; finding a hermeneutical bridge between the text and the present day (whether on the analogical, allegorical, or literal level); and finally "translating" what was considered edifying for the present context.

Coleman argues that what is important to the medieval historian is not the letters and grammars that constitute a given historical text—what is important is the text's *sententia* (or meaning): "*historia* is not necessarily about the past. *Historia* is the enshrining in words those experiences which would otherwise 'fly into oblivion.'" Thus the twelfth century historian emphasizes the pastness of the past, but then he dissolves its pastness by de-emphasizing the particularity of the past (its vocabulary and grammar, seeing them as accidental) and emphasizing, according to the needs of the present, the universality of its meaning.° All distinctions were to be harmonized. Once the past is enshrined in language, it becomes universal and timeless. "The written document was an artificial memory whose meaning was taken to be as relevant to the present as it was to the past" (Coleman, 293-294).

Notions of the universality of meaning and the nature of a "living" text critique modern assumptions of the meaning of author and text. The text is, as has been stated, fluid. There is little use in speaking of a single author of *Boece*. Chaucer's holograph does not survive; each of the twelve extant manuscripts is laden with "scribal alterations" (i.e., copying errors, morphological changes, expansions, interpolations, and modernizations) (Machan, 152). There is no single

efficient cause in the text, as it has come down to us today. Chaucer's translation of *Consolatione* was a unique mixture of the Latin text that was available to him, Jean de Meung's (ca. 1240-1305) French translation, the Anglo-Norman chronicler, Nicholas Trevet's (ca. 1257-1334), and the Burgundian scholar, Regimius of Auxerre's (ca. 841-908). These sources are themselves based upon a wide array of antecedent sources: Meung's work incorporates material from King Alfred's translation into Old English; Trevet's translation, according to Lodi Nauta, uses decidedly Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophical positions to interpret Boethius's Platonic views ("The *Consolation*" 264); and Remigius's translation appears to be little more than a gloss of Boethius's work (Machan, 155).

For the scribe of the Middle Ages, a text is not only to be translated "as is." The text, if necessary (and apparently it often was necessary), was to be "improved" upon. The liberties scribes took with texts would strike modern sensibilities as infringements upon the creative activities that are solely within the rights of an author. As C. S. Lewis states:

> For many of the texts [of the Middle Ages] there is no one human being who can really be called the author in the full sense. You may sometimes be able to pick out the bits added by the last writer and separate them from those which were already there in the text he touched up. You may decide that his are the best bits. But of course this does not make him responsible for that complex organization which the whole book now is. (*Studies* 38)

What Lewis wrote in reference to medieval ballads (which were often composed by communities over long periods of time) is true of the medieval manuscript tradition:

the medieval text is a product of the community—a “shared authorship” (*Studies* 38).

In his Introduction to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and Pearl—Sir Orfeo*, Tolkien writes:

> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Pearl* are both contained in the same unique manuscript, which is now in the British Museum. Neither poem is given a title. Together with them are two other poems, also title-less, which are now known as *Purity* (or *Cleanness*), and *Patience*. All four are in the same handwriting, which is dated in round figures about 1400; it is small, angular, irregular and often difficult to read, quite apart from the fading of the ink in the course of time. But this is the hand of the copyist, not the author. There is indeed nothing to say that the four poems are the works of the same poet; but from elaborate comparative study it has come to be very generally believed that they are. (1)

The medieval text is an authorial field—a space in which sometimes countless hands can be detected. Lewis also pleaded for special readings of medieval works:

> In my opinion, all criticism should be of books, not of authors. But when we are treating the Middle Ages it often must be. For many of the texts there is no one human being who can really be called the author in the full sense. You may sometimes be able to pick out the bits added by the last writer and separate them from those which were already there in the text he touched up…. But…this does not make him responsible for that complex organization which the whole book now is. (38)

What Lewis recommended in readings of medieval books should also be applied to readings of Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*—a “book” that fictionalizes the “complex organization” of the medieval book. Given Tolkien’s observation of this medieval habit, it is not surprising that something similar is in the works when Tolkien’s

narrator states: “Then [Bilbo] gave Frodo his mithril-coat and Sting, forgetting that he had already done so; and he gave him also three books of lore that he had made at various times, written in his spidery hand, and labelled on their red backs: Translations from the Elvish, by B.B” (*RK* 999).

Tolkien’s Prologue

In a note appended to the prologue of *LotR*, written at some unidentified time, remote from the historic events described in a late compilation, Tolkien-the-compiler states, “The original Red Book [which contained a history of the War of the Ring and the Elder Days] has not been preserved, but many copies were made, especially of the first volume, for the descendants of the children of Master Samwise” (*FR* 14). There are several features of interest in this note. First, in a single stroke, this note distances, or to use Brljak’s useful term, “divorces,”[29] everything we read from *TH*, *LotR*, and *The Silmarillion* from its “original manuscript” and thus attempts to place these works in the category of myth and legend. The best extant “manuscript,” which is an authorized copy of the original, is said to have been written 172 years into the Fourth Age, that is, 172 years after the events described in *LotR* (*FR* 14).

Second, the compiler appropriately uses the passive voice to speak of the Red Book’s fate. It “has not been preserved.” By its very nature, a document in Tolkien’s fantasy world (as in the primary world) is a passive entity, unable to preserve itself, regardless of its inherent value. It is completely subject to the interests of every

[29] Vladimir Brljak. "The Books of Lost Tales: Tolkien as Metafictionist." *Tolkien Studies* 7.1 (2010): 13.

generation; and even should it retain the interests of later generations, it still relies upon the caution, skill in preservation, and good fortune of its caretakers. Whatever the causes, from the compiler's vantage, the manuscript of the Red Book of Westmarch did not survive the ravages of time.

Third, the compiler (also in the passive voice) notes that *many* copies were made. Tolkien, an expert in manuscript studies, knows that copies are justifiably subject to suspicion. Each iteration and reiteration of an original increases the likelihood of scribal error and interpolation. Tolkien's own philological studies of Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale* made him acutely aware of how generations of editors tend to smooth out dialectal anomalies, standardize grammar, and interpolate idioms:

> [Chaucer's] scripts have been lost. Adam and his offspring have fortunately kept copies, it is true, but unfortunately they are unreliable on the very points we wish to scrutinize, less so perhaps in vocabulary, more so certainly in grammar, dialectal forms, and spellings. We are involved in the attempt to distinguish between Chaucer and his reporters; and a satisfactory comparison of the candidate's essay at 'dialect' with his 'normal usage' would require a more careful scrutiny of the individual habits (and the casual inadvertent evidence) of the manuscripts, both in the bulk of his work and in these special passages, than has, I believe, yet been made, at any rate with any such a purpose. The following study is merely tentative. For lack of time and opportunity it is based solely on the facsimile of the Ellesmere MS.; and on the Six-Text and the Harleian MS. 7334 (Hl) printed by the Chaucer Society. ("Chaucer as a Philologist" 116)

Tolkien noted that Chaucer's southern England (London) copyists tended to "southernize" spelling and dialect even where Chaucer (himself a Londoner) used northern forms to imitate the speech of his northern characters. Tolkien therefore reasoned that, in instances where one manuscript bore a northernism and the other

manuscripts bore a southern equivalent, he could work towards a critical text by giving greater weight to the northernism. However, the misfortune of having lost Chaucer's original becomes a boon for others when it not only calls for the expertise of a philologist (like Tolkien), but it also opens up creative space for later copyists.

In Tolkien's own fictional world, the phrase "many copies" suggests many versions. This becomes even clearer with the clause, "especially of the first volume"; for already special interests are at work; the copiers change the story by *choosing* to highlight certain passages or volumes and excluding the rest. Nevertheless, the compiler makes a valiant attempt to establish the copy's reliability: "Findegil, King's Writer, finished this work in IV 172. It is an exact copy in all details of the Thain's [Peregrin's] Book in Minas Tirith" (*FR* 14). Tolkien, however, forces his narrator to show reluctance still to guarantee even this copy's claim to perfect transmission when he adds, "That book was a copy, made at the request of King Elessar, of the Red Book of the Periannath, and was brought to him by the Thain Peregrin." The nearest that contemporary Middle-earth can come to making contact with the heroes of its past is via a facsimile of a copy of the original Red Book. The reader's experience of the authentic past is distanced; he or she can come no closer than the third remove.

Fourth, in an ironic mirror of these three removes, the reader is told that these copies were made "for the *descendants* of the *children* of *Master Samwise*" (emphasis added). A motive for the special interests that developed around these historical texts is established. Sam's family members tailored and domesticated the stories of the Red Book for their own purposes. This statement anticipates a later

passage in which Sam and Frodo, on the borders of Mordor, are depicted as conversing on the subject of Sam's legacy. Frodo says, "Sam…to hear you somehow makes me as merry as if the story was already written. But you've left out one of the chief characters [of a story that may be written about our journey]: Samwise the stouthearted" (*TT* 720). Then Frodo speaks in the voice of an imaginary future reader, who happens to be a child: "'I want to hear more about Sam, dad. Why didn't they put in more of his talk, dad? That's what I like, it makes me laugh. And Frodo wouldn't have got very far without Sam, would he dad?'" (*TT* 720).

This passage echoes the note in the prologue in two ways. Frodo here refers to Sam as "Samwise." His full first name is rarely used in the trilogy, but it is used in the (above) note in the prologue. Also, Frodo, in assuming the voice of a child who wants to hear of Sam's exploits from his father, is made to envision the very scenario to which the prologue refers.

The "Feigned Manuscript" Topos

In *Tolkien Mathomium*, Hooker, observing the narrator's discussion of the "Red Book of Westmarch" and the dissemination of the stories of Middle-earth through a complex manuscript tradition, notes that readers have often made the mistake of assuming that this trope, which he calls the "feigned manuscript topos," is "just a curious piece of decoration for his books" (177). Hooker seeks to rectify the false assumption. But the literary value that he assigns it is little better. He writes:

> The feigned-manuscript topos gives a work a sense of authenticity. Many of the authors who use it go on at length about the 'truth' of their works. A number of them—like Tolkien—assume the guise of a scholarly 'translator,' who is concerned with the technical

> minutiae of the 'manuscript's' origin, style, and history. Comments of this type make the 'translator' seem an objective observer whose opinion should be valued. The sense of authority that the scholarly 'translator' brings to the tale both reinforces the sense of authenticity and acts as a recommendation of the work. If an objective scholar thought the work worthy of translating, it must also be worth reading. (*Tolkien Mathomium* 154-5)

Having found that Tolkien's readers do not take the topos seriously enough, Hooker takes it much too seriously. Roger Sale, an early critic of Tolkien, thought that this trope was yet another example of Tolkien's silliness (*Modern Heroism* 237-8). And indeed it is silly—if Tolkien merely employed it for the sake of making his translator seem "objective" and one "whose opinion [or recommendation] should be valued." Tolkien, however, is not after objectivity; neither is he trying to give his framing device the task of recommending his story. Instead, Tolkien is trying to distance his readers from the story. He pushes the reader back so as to open up creative space in which his fiction can become an artifact unto itself. Just as importantly, he is attempting to fictionalize (or even "ritualize") the process by which the story has been transmitted. Tolkien deliberately (and painstakingly) attempted to follow medieval conventions (which often arose not for artistic reasons but for reasons of necessity) in which a text existed as a work of shared or communal authorship.

The feigned manuscript topos is the legacy of the medieval conflation of romance and history. But, to be more precise, the topos itself is not medieval; a topos only becomes a topos once it has shed the necessity that it once served and becomes a device in the service of literary mimesis. McKeon (who calls this device the "discovered manuscript topos") assigns it to Renaissance *romanzo* (*The Origins of the English Novel* 56). He argues that the topos became central at this time

because Renaissance romance attempted "to adapt to epistemological revolution and to keep itself honest." Some modern scholars see in this topos a Renaissance "critique" of historicity. McKeon argues, however, that it is "better understood as an implicit instance of that claim, the most conventional means by which 'modern' romance becomes conscious and skeptical of its own customary conflation of 'history' and 'romance'" (*Origins* 56). More importantly, McKeon notes: "In scribal culture, the retrieval of early manuscripts provides a protection against errors introduced by copyists, a protection that is outmoded by typographical reproduction" (56).

The manuscript topos in *LotR* also serves a more practical purpose: it provides a solution for the difficulties that arose in creating a sequel to a story that depicts its protagonist as having "remained very happy to the end of his days" (*TH* 288). Alastair Minnis states that only in the prologue did the medieval commentator view the book in totality (*Medieval Theory of Authorship* 14). Tolkien's prologue takes the largest possible view of his legendarium. Just as Tolkien was fortunate to "discover" *LotR*'s Sauron in a character (the Necromancer), whom he had originally created in *TH* merely out of a need to have some reason to pull the wizard Gandalf away from the company so that its members could mature, so did the obstacle of Bilbo's purported happiness represent a *felix culpa* for Tolkien's masterpiece. The manuscript topos not only solved the problem created by Tolkien's earlier conception of Bilbo as a provincial and traditional fairy tale hero, but it also ensured that *LotR* was written and read as a work of multiple authors, copyists, and compilers.

The Lord of the Rings: a Text of Shared Authorship

The prologue firmly establishes that the story the reader is about to read is the product of shared authorship. Tolkien inserts himself into his own mythology by suggesting that he himself is merely the "compiler" of a broad and very old collection of "historical" texts (*FR* 15; *RK* 1141). The question is: does Tolkien deliver on his promise in the prologue that the following story is the product of generations of distinctive storytellers, copyists, and translators, or does this information merely set a rather eccentric and unmanageable mandate upon the story? That is, does the nature of the main narrative of *LotR* bear signs of and deliver on the notion that it is the product of a long historical and mythological process?

It will be the contention of this chapter that indeed Tolkien's narrative (or rather narratives) does (do) deliver upon this assertion. What the reader reads is not a simple, straightforward narrative. It is instead a text that has the appearance of a highly refracted history that has gone through a thorough mythologizing process.

The material in *TH* and *The Silmarillion* will play a role in this discussion. However, because the manuscript topos prefaces only *LotR* and not *TH* and *The Silmarillion*, and due to the fact that my interest here is in the medieval "feel" of *LotR*, I will limit the scope of this study to the main narrative of *LotR*. The source-critical reading that follows will merely suggest an *approach* to textual and manuscript studies of *LotR*. The notion of distinct narrative traditions in *LotR* is, of course, wholly fictional. There is only one ontological author of *LotR*—but there are two qualifications to this rather bald and obvious statement: first, after reading *The*

Histories of Middle-earth series, one can easily see that there were virtually as many J. R. R. Tolkiens as there are versions of the narratives he wrote and rewrote (over long periods of time). *LotR*, like most other works of art, is therefore in theory a work of shared authorship. But in fiction, though the narrative of *LotR* is tightly woven, coordinated, and coherent, a source-critical reading will show that the narrative supports the prologue's assertion that it is the product of a tradition rather than the product of a single author.

Signs of Shared Authorship in the Narrative

The prologue names several contributors to the narrative of the Red Book and other related texts: Bilbo, Frodo, the great-grandson of Peregrin, Findegil, "the Thain" (i.e., Pippin), Elessar (Aragorn), Barahir (grandson of Steward Faramir), Meriadoc (Merry), the "scribes of Gondor" (presumably besides the aforementioned Findegil), and an unnamed complier at Great Smials. Additionally, Bilbo, the scribes of Gondor, and Merry serve as commentators and translators of older sources. Beyond the prologue, the main narrative of *LotR* itself, occasionally mentions its composers. In particular, Frodo is said to have appointed Sam to the task of completing the last chapter of one volume of the Red Book: "'I have quite finished, Sam,' said Frodo. 'The last pages are for you.'" And what Frodo bequeaths Sam is a text that is already, in its earliest stages, a work of shared authorship; Bilbo and Frodo's "memoirs" are said to have been "supplemented by the accounts of their friends and the learning of the Wise. Together with extracts from Books of Lore translated by Bilbo in Rivendell" (*RK* 1039). The principal period of the manuscript's compilation began in late 1491(S.R.) or early 1492 (*RK* 1106); and it is finally given

to Sam in late September of 1421. Thus Frodo is afforded a space of approximately two years to consult with the manuscript's contributors (Merry, Pippin, and others).[30]

Of the contributors who actually appear in the narrative of *LotR*, only Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, and Merry are explicitly named as having contributed in an authorial capacity. There is little reason to suppose that we are meant to read the narrative as a collection of faithfully transmitted and perfectly preserved documents. The narrator of Appendix F removes even this possibility when he writes:

> In presenting the matter of the Red Book, as a history for people of today to read, the whole of the linguistic setting has been translated as far as possible into terms of our own times. Only the languages alien to the Common Speech have been left in their original form; but these appear mainly in the names of persons and places. The Common Speech, as the language of the Hobbits and their narratives, has inevitably been turned into modern English. In the process the difference between the varieties observable in the use of the Westron has been lessened. Some attempt has been made to represent varieties by variations in the kind of English used; but the divergence between the pronunciation and idiom of the Shire and the Westron tongue in the mouths of the Elves or of the high men of Gondor was greater than has been shown in this book. Hobbits indeed spoke for the most part a rustic dialect, whereas in Gondor and Rohan a more antique language was used, more formal and more terse. (*RK* 1141)

Thus even if the precise words of Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam had been preserved until the time of this final compilation, Tolkien-the-compiler has not only stated that he has translated their words, but he has also confessed that the best he could do was "represent" the idiomatic, dialectical, and syntactical differences between Modern

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[30] I am indebted to Dr Jamie McGregor for this very important observation.

English and the Common Speech of Middle-earth. In transmitting his source, Tolkien uses his own words and merely supplements them on occasion with the source's words. According to St Bonaventure's categories, Tolkien-the-compiler has assumed the role, not of scribe, compiler, or commentator: he is (ironically in fact and fiction) its *author*.

However, this authorship is very much a shared authorship. As Brljak has cogently argued:

> One must infer…that the original Bilbo-Frodo-Sam volume was a text very different from *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. It was not a sustained literary narrative, or even a collection of shorter literary narratives, but rather a heterogeneous compilation—"memoir" or "chronicle" are perhaps acceptable approximations—aiming foremostly at recording the historical events with which it was concerned, as well as their background and aftermath. The transformation of the ultimate sources into the works translated as *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* may be presumed to have involved the shift to third-person narration, addition of dialogue and various other narrative detail, careful handling of the plot, and so forth—anything, in short, that would be involved in the literarization of a non- or at best a semi-literary text. (12)

We are not intended to imagine ourselves reading the words of Bilbo, Sam, and Frodo; or to see Tolkien, the final editor, necessarily interpreting their words. Instead, Tolkien presents himself as compiling and interpreting manuscripts from various *traditions*.

Methods for Delineating Between Traditions

LotR is crafted to imitate a product of multiple traditions. What Jacques Le Goff wrote of the study of medieval culture—namely that:

> [i]t makes sense to study traditions rather than sources or origins because the concept of a source implies a necessary and almost automatic development, a notion incompatible… with the reality of concrete historical situations. A tradition exists; it is not created. (*The Medieval Imagination* 28)

—seems almost a truism for an organic product of the literary imagination such as *LotR*. Tolkien's novel could be read as a narrative compilation based on three distinct hero narratives; stated differently, Tolkien has indeed left enough textual evidence for the reader to imagine three distinct manuscript "sources" that stand behind the *LotR* narrative. Each of these three "synoptic" sources narrates its hero's contribution to the War of the Ring; Sam is the hero of the first source; Merry, the second source; and Pippin, the third. I will use the letters Æ, H, and P to signify these sources. Æ = the community or tradition that originates with Sam Gamgee and his descendants; H = Holbytla, or the historical tradition that, beginning with Meriadoc, narrates Rohan's role in the War of the Ring; and P = Peregrin, or the Gondorian manuscripts, which Pippin and his successors are said to have collected while in Gondor. And the three main archives from which these traditions emerged—Undertowers (Æ), Brandy Hall (H), Great Smials (P)—correspond (respectively) to the areas of the Shire from which each of the three hobbits from the Fellowship (Sam, Merry, and Pippin) who remained in Middle-earth hails. In the following three chapters, I will attempt to divide *LotR* into the three traditions.

A case could be made that Æ, H, and P are labels not for individual manuscripts, but are rather labels for the three main archives mentioned in the prologue. The possibility of other self-contained stories (which, by virtue of being absorbed into the larger narrative, appear rather as "episodes" in *LotR*) sometimes

suggests itself in the narrative. From the Brandy Hall library (H), the Tom Bombadil episode could be considered a narrative derived from a stray source[31] that the final compiler came across and decided to "incorporate" into the larger narrative (no matter how disconnected it might seem from the story's main plot). Another source, "The Tale of the Three Hunters," which traces the adventures of Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli, their search for Pippin and Merry, and their role in the Battle of Pelennor Fields, could have been "discovered" in the same "archive." From the Great Smials archive (Æ): the narrative of the "Council of Elrond" (created and, for a time, kept in Rivendell before making its way to Great Smials, where Sam's descendants would add their own narrative material) could be derived from an "independent manuscript." From the Tuckborough archive (P): the developing romance between Faramir and Éowyn could be based upon a self-contained source entitled, perhaps, "The Tale of Éowyn and the Last Steward of Gondor"; and Aragorn's summoning of the spirits to battle could be imagined as belonging to a source named something like, "King Elessar's Journey to the Paths of the Dead."

I will, however, refrain from sub-dividing the narrative along these lines; instead, I will categorize a given episode or section according to the fictional archive to which it seems to belong. The reason for choosing "Æ" (pronounced "Ash"; the initial letter in Ælfwine, an important name in Tolkien's legendarium) will become clearer below; for now, it is sufficient to say that the material within this tradition demonstrates a pronounced propensity to fulfill the role Tolkien originally conceived in one of his earliest literary characters, Ælfwine. "Holbytla," which I will

[31] Similar to, but not the same as, *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, which Tolkien did not publish until 1962.

abbreviate to H, is one of the names by which King Théoden and the Rohirrim refer to Merry (*TT* 562; *RK* 810, 852). Moreover, the name, because it is Rohirric for "hole-dweller" (*RK* 1146), suggests Merry's later role as a historian of Rohan and also the Rohirric orientation of its narrative material. Pippin's people are referred to as "Periannath" in Gondor (see *FR* 16); thus I will use P to refer to the source that is linked to Pippin. The name reflects the idea that Gondor's more learned inhabitants preferred the Sindarin tongue (the primary language of the Elves in the Third Age and preserved in Gondor) for the names of its people (*RK* 1137), and it also reflects Pippin's role as a historian of Gondor and his Gondor-centric narrative material.

I will not attempt to suggest that we can *definitively* place each sentence or even each passage into neatly delineated Æ, H, and P categories; such a task has been found almost impossible even in a work like the Torah, which is now widely recognized among biblical scholars as a product of multiple, distinct ancient Jewish traditions (see Friedman, *The Bible: With Sources Revealed*, 1-2). No claim is made here that Tolkien always consciously asked himself, "What tradition is my narrative persona drawing upon in this sentence?" Tolkien's prologue indicates that he did, to some extent, think in terms of three traditions, but he may never have consciously attempted to delineate these traditions rigidly. However, I will suggest that the distinctions among *LotR*'s traditions are visible enough to warrant initial and basic boundaries and divisions within *LotR*. These divisions will merely serve as heuristic devices to illuminate the historical depth that Tolkien was able (consciously or unconsciously) to achieve in *LotR*. While I will not attempt to explain why, for example, a line or a passage that bears the distinctive features of Æ appears to be

"intruding" into a chapter that seems otherwise to belong to H, I will occasionally suggest that the narrative's sources do not always flow in a straightforward manner—narratives that have been translated, edited, and compiled over and over again never do. Since, however, Tolkien tended to maintain a consistency between the narratival features (i.e., themes, symbolism, tone, etc.) of a given narrative and the subject matter (e.g., Frodo and Sam's journeys; the adventures of Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli), I will generally follow Tolkien's own book and chapter divisions. They will serve as the *primary* arbiters, deciding which narratives belong to which traditions. However, the book and chapter divisions will not be *final* arbiters. In deciding which narrative belongs to a particular tradition, I will consider a combination of narratological tendencies (i.e., thematic, symbolic, poetic meter, and historical features of a distinct narrative) *in conjunction with* the book/chapter divisions. Occasionally, a distinctive tradition will cut across the book and chapter boundaries; a few chapters bear content that seems to belong more to a tradition other than the one the book/chapter setting would otherwise suggest.

Since Tolkien's fictional self appears in the story as a modern compiler and translator of various traditions, it will be unnecessary to attempt to identify a particular tradition by any distinctive syntactic features. We are assured in Appendix F that nearly every word in *LotR* is a modern translation of words that no longer belong to a living language: "Only the languages alien to the Common Speech have been left in their original form" (*RK* 1141). Syntax is consistently conditioned throughout *LotR* by setting. Characters from very old and cohesive cultures in Middle-earth (Rivendell, Lothlórien, Rohan, Gondor) occasionally use archaic

syntactical constructs; as does the narrator when describing a romance scene (such as the narrator's initial description of Arwen; his descriptions of Aragorn or Gandalf when they reveal their true heroic natures; or his narration of Faramir and Éowyn's initial romance). This study will look to detect more obvious identifying features. In sum, the given book/chapter divisions and the presence of certain narratological tendencies will be the primary factors in determining to which tradition a given narrative belongs.

It should also be noted that this reading is not the only natural reading of Tolkien's text. The themes and characteristics that I am using to distinguish between traditions could also be read as themes and characteristics arising merely out of the heroes' various encounters with other locales and focalized characters. However, a reading, like the one I am proposing, attempts to follow Tolkien's own fictional statement in the prologue concerning his story's composition; this reading pursues this suggestion by attempting to determine its execution in the story itself.

The traits I believe to be identifying features of a particular tradition have been chosen because they are general enough to be applicable across any of the traditions; I have not called attention to tendencies that merely arise in situations, settings, or character interactions that are entirely unique to one of the eponymous traditions' subjects. For example, one of the characteristic tendencies of the Æ tradition is an obsession with elves, elven culture, and elven stories. I could not use this trait as a defining characteristic of Æ material if the narrative of Frodo and Sam's journey was the only narrative that had its characters interacting with elves. The fact is that H and P both depict their main characters interacting with elves.

However, only Æ material reaches a pitch regarding the elves that could be described as dreamy, wistful, and nostalgic. On the other hand, I would not suggest that, say, arachnophobia is an identifying "tendency" of Æ. The narratives within the other two traditions do not depict their characters encountering spiders; thus this theme cannot be called a *tradition-defining* characteristic. The point is: I will draw attention only to traits that are broad enough to be applicable to any of the narratives within the three traditions.

Æ: Elf-Friend

As the Fellowship nears the gates of Moria, the narrative unfolds as follows:

> 'Well, here we are at last!' said Gandalf. 'Here the Elven-way from Hollin ended. Holly was the token of the people of that land, and they planted it here to mark the end of their domain; for the West-door was made chiefly for their use in their traffic with the Lords of Moria. Those were happier days, when there was still close friendship at times between folk of different race, even between Dwarves and Elves.'
>
> 'It was not the fault of the Dwarves that the friendship waned,' said Gimli.
>
> 'I have not heard that it was the fault of the Elves,' said Legolas.
>
> 'I have heard both,' said Gandalf; 'and I will not give judgement now. But I beg you two, Legolas and Gimli, at least to be friends, and to help me. I need you both.' (*FR* 304)

The important details of this passage are: the company is following an elven road that will eventually lead to the ancient kingdoms of Middle-earth; holly was planted here, near the gates of an underground kingdom, as a token of friendship and trust between the elves of Eregion (a smaller realm within the realm of Eriador) and dwarves; the door, from the dwarves' perspective, was a door that led into the West;

the company is headed East towards adventure; a dispute arises between an elf and a dwarf—both indirectly blaming the other for the state of distrust between the two peoples; and Gandalf then calls for a renewed state of friendship for the sake of the company's quest.

Although the subject of friendship is fresh in the mind of Gandalf at this point, he promptly fails to apply it to the riddle inscribed on the door that leads into Moria. The moon shines on the door, revealing it to the company, and the elven script now appears for Gandalf to decipher:

> 'The words are in the elven-tongue of the West of Middle-earth in the Elder Days,' answered Gandalf. 'But they do not say anything of importance to us. They say only: The Doors of Durin, Lord of Moria. Speak, friend, and enter. And underneath small and faint is written: I, Narvi, made them. Celebrimbor of Hollin drew these signs.' (*FR* 307)

Gandalf, following Gimli, assumes that the riddle is written in the conditional voice: "If you are a friend, speak the password, and the doors will open." Instead, however, after pondering Merry's question, "What does it mean by *speak*, *friend*, and *enter*?" Gandalf realizes that the script requires the reader to interpret the words in the imperative voice and leave the word "friend" untranslated. Gandalf then reads the script in the original elven language; upon saying "Mellon" (friend) the door opens.

The ancient engraver therefore prioritizes the elven script's enunciation. Anyone who merely translates the term into his or her own language will remain outside Moria; however, the one who reads the text on its own terms and vocalizes the elven word will be allowed to enter as a friend. In the company's case, speaking what Gandalf calls the "opening word" (i.e., the password) in the elven language is

essential to its quest. In fact, this word, which is symbolized by the secret and otherwise impregnable door, stands between them and their encounter with the Balrog, Lothlórien, Galadriel, Treebeard, Gondor, Sauron, and the peace of Middle-earth.

This narrative becomes particularly interesting in light of both Tolkien's theoretical work on the subject of fairy stories and the role he assigns "elf-friends" in his legendarium. The name Ælfwine (also known as Eriol and Alboin[32]) appears to be the genesis of the concept of a mediator between the primary world and Faerie. It means "elf-friend," and the original Ælfwine was a framing device for Tolkien's earliest (and abortive) tales. Ælfwine's travels take him to elven lands, and the boon that he brings back are the tales he learned from the elves. Thus the name "elf-friend" signifies, for Tolkien, one who has not only gone to great lengths for an encounter with Faerie, but who has also labored to bring others into contact with Faerie.

Frodo and Sam's first encounter with the elves on the borders of the Shire (at least within the framework of *LotR*) foreshadows and mirrors the later scene at Moria:

> 'I thank you indeed, Gildor Inglorion,' said Frodo bowing. '*Elen síla lúmenn' omentielvo*, a star shines on the hour of our meeting,' he added in the High-elven speech.
>
> 'Be careful, friends!' cried Gildor laughing. 'Speak no secrets! Here is a scholar in the Ancient Tongue. Bilbo was a good master. Hail, Elf-friend!' he said, bowing to Frodo. 'Come now with your friends and join our company!' (*FR* 79)

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[32] Scull and Hammond, "Eriol and Ælfwine," *The J. R. R. Tolkien Companion and Guide* 258.

As with the scene at Moria, Frodo and Sam find themselves on a road that the elves are taking; the two are headed East towards adventure; and a member of the company will speak the language of the elves, which will serve as both a sign of the speaker's friendship and as a ticket to the Faerie company.

Tolkien probably understood himself as serving in this role for his readers. Although Frodo is named "elf-friend" by the elves, it is Sam who, from beginning to end, mediates for the reader the awe evoked by the presence of elves; and it is Sam with whom Tolkien most identifies (*Letters* 105). Tolkien calls Sam his "most closely drawn character…the genuine hobbit…. Frodo will naturally become too ennobled and rarefied by the achievement of the great Quest, and will pass West with all the great figures; but S. will settle down to the Shire and gardens and inns" (*Letters* 105). In other words, if the inhabitants of the Fourth Age, who face a present almost void of elves, dragons, and wizards, are once again to experience Faerie, it will be up to Sam the gardener and storyteller to transmit the tales in his possession.

Verlyn Flieger argues that the term "elf-friend" in Tolkien's mythos denotes a "figure who is both inside and outside the story, who is both a character in the drama and a frame for the narrative" ("The Footsteps of Ælfwine" 184). This figure must not be an elf; he must be a friend of elves. She notes that, whereas an editor, collector, or scholar participates only in the world of normal human experience, the elf-friend is a participant in both worlds (184-185).

In this way, much more than Frodo, Sam is the quintessential elf-friend; however, his mediatorial position is deeply embedded in Æ and implicit. He is not anointed (or, as Flieger puts it, "elected") elf-friend within the narrative itself. But it

is Sam and Sam's relations who establish what is normative; the "normal" is necessary to the paranormal. Sam creatively interrogates the unknown; and his wonder becomes a surrogate for the reader's. It is Sam's very rusticity that gives the reader the proper vantage point from which to view the unfolding story.

Elf-Friend Mediation and Ineffability in Æ

I will first trace some of the more representative examples of Æ's elf-friend orientation before comparing this orientation to the material of the other traditions. Æ establishes the mundane early in its narrative—in Chapter 1, "A Long Expected Party." Sam's father—appropriately named "Hamfast," an OE name that literally means, "stay at home" (Hammond and Scull, *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader's Companion* 55)—holds court with an inquisitive stranger and an incredulous Ted Sandyman the miller. Hamfast states:

> '[Sam's] in and out of Bag Eng. Crazy about stories of the old days, he is, and he listens to all Mr. Bilbo's tales. Mr. Bilbo has learned him his letters—meaning no harm, mark you, and I hope no harm will come of it.
>
> '*Elves and Dragons*! I says to him. *Cabbages and potatoes are better for me and you. Don't go getting mixed up in the business of your betters, or you'll land in trouble to big for you* [emphasis his].' (*FR* 24)

The two worlds of the earthly and Faerie are rarely so clearly established and demarcated as here. Old "Stay at Home" contrasts cabbages and potatoes with elves and dragons; there is one kind of trouble for the likes of Sam, and another for the likes of his "betters." Sam's time with Bilbo, and the learning of letters, has somehow created a disconcerting bridge between the two worlds.

The subject of elves arises again in the next chapter—except this time it is Sam who sits in a pub, trying to fend off the barbed comments of the scoffing Sandyman. Sam is, at this early stage, outnumbered and outwitted:

> 'Queer things you do hear these days, to be sure,' said Sam.
> 'Ah,' said Ted, 'you do, if you listen. But I can hear fireside-tales and children's stories at home, if I want to."
> 'No doubt you can,' retorted Sam, 'and I daresay there's more truth in some of them than you reckon. Who invented the stories anyway? Take dragons now.' (*FR* 43)

The reader is moved to pity Sam for his valiant effort to sustain his argument against such dismissiveness; but Sam continues to bring the punishment upon himself by answering Sandyman's incredulity with less and less credible accounts.

Sam then tries unsuccessfully to convince him of dragons' existence. Ironically, this conversation is taking place in a pub named *Green Dragon*. It is difficult to imagine an establishment by that name (or one like it) existing anywhere else in Middle-earth besides the Shire; such a name would seem wholly alien in a place like Rohan, Gondor, or Dale (which the dragon Smaug, within recent memory, has destroyed). Even Bree's pub bears the more domestic name, *The Prancing Pony*. In Tolkien's fairy story, *FGH*, the village of Ham ceases to believe in dragons after not having been visited by any over a very long period of time; the village's old tradition of presenting dragon tails at feasts dies out and a new tradition of making dragon-tail cakes at birthdays takes its place (*Tales from the Perilous Realm* 115). In the same way, Sandyman and Hamfast's views are indicative of a community that, because it has been protected from such phenomena, has relegated dragons to the

nursery and the fireside. Northrop Frye called the process by which a mythological hero or plot settles down into the realism of the novel—the Odysseus of Homer becomes Ulysses of Joyce, or the Proserpine of Greek myth becomes Hero in Shakespeare's *Much Ado*—"displacement" (*Words with Power 130-1*). Tolkien himself may have preferred simply to call it "rationalization" ("On Fairy Stories" 318), but a similar process to what Frye describes has taken place in the Shire. Only when the concept of dragons has become thoroughly domesticated can it become the symbol of a pub. The name of the pub and the worldview of Sandyman mirror one another: Faerie has been thoroughly domesticated in both. Sam carries the burden of putting the two worlds into proper relation.

After failing to convince Sandyman of dragons, Sam moves to the subject of walking elm trees (Sandyman's rebuttal earns even the applause of the narrator). Finally, seeking more solid ground, Sam mentions the rumors he has heard regarding elf-sightings in the Shire. Sandyman only deflects Sam's attempt with indifference. The narrator, who still seems to doubt Sam's stories (though more gently), interjects:

> He believed he had once seen an Elf in the woods, and still hoped to see more one day. Of all the legends that he had heard in his early years such fragments of tales and half-remembered stories about the Elves as the hobbits knew, had always moved him most deeply. (*FR* 44)

Sam, if indeed he has been spending time learning from Bilbo, will have heard many fantastic stories—stories of dragons, wizards, dwarves and other figures of fantasy. But his heart seems to have chosen elves, and elves are his specialty. The narrative thread that follows Sam throughout *LotR* continues to assert

the privileged place of elves amongst the peoples of Middle-earth. When Gandalf catches Sam eavesdropping on his conversation with Frodo regarding the history of the ruling Ring, Sam, while holding his shears and grass-clippings, admits that he has heard a great deal about, among other things, elves: "I couldn't help myself, if you know what I mean. Lor bless me, sir, but I do love tales of that sort. And I believe them too, whatever Ted may say. Elves, sir! I would dearly love to see them. Couldn't you take me to see Elves, sir, when you go?" (*FR* 63). Sam's awe of elves has apparently overpowered and muted the true subject of Gandalf and Frodo's conversation. All of the terrors that might haunt a hobbit's sleep have been discussed, but not only has Sam registered them merely as a footnote in his thoughts, but he has also counted the sight of an elf worth more far more than the peril involved.

After Sam's first encounter with the elves on the borders of the Shire, Frodo asks Sam if he still "likes" them. He answers: "They seem a bit above my likes and dislikes, so to speak…. It don't seem to matter what I think about them. They are quite different from what I expected—so old and young, and so gay and sad, as it were" (*FR* 86). Sam's paradoxes are indicative of his newfound inability to locate the elves entirely within his world or the Faerie world. He has been forced to use what is for him figurative language; the qualifier, "as it were," shows his discomfort with such dizzying descriptions. Frodo, if he had come to the same conclusion, would not have felt the need to check his speech with such qualifiers. Frodo notices that Sam's maturation to a true appreciation of elves signals that he has gone from a belief in the goodness of elves to a belief in the "otherness" of elves. In essence, he is now in a

better position to speak of elves and teach the Sandymans of Middle-earth. The naiveté that invited incredulity has begun to fall away. His view of Faerie was always better than his critics' because, for him, it was real; however, though he did not dismiss elves as mere tales for children, he held a child's view of elves. But now the elves have migrated from the merely imaginary to the realm of real experience. As an elf-friend—one who will serve as an educator and mediator between the two worlds—he must realize that elves are perilous too. This narrative historicizes Sam's growth from the credulous, bad storytelling hobbit in the *Green Dragon* to elf-friend.

Sam will make the remarkable observation in the heart of Lothlórien that he feels as if he has suddenly been ushered to the "inside of a song, if you (Frodo) take my meaning" (*FR* 351). Again, Sam is keenly aware of his language; he tries desperately to be understood at all times; the world of the elves is difficult to navigate, and even more difficult to describe. But it is difficult to find, even amongst the many poetic expressions in *LotR*, a more apt description of joy and awe than in Sam's expression. Here he has been fully immersed in the inexplicable world of the elves, and yet he is depicted as managing to capture the full emotional range of this narrative in just a few words. Later in Lothlórien, where Sam has learned to distinguish between elves, he will once again resort to paradox in his description:

> [T]hey seem to belong here, more even than Hobbits do in the Shire. Whether they've made the land, or the land's made them, it's hard to say, if you take my meaning. It's wonderfully quiet here. Nothing seems to be going on, and nobody seems to want it to. If there's any magic about, it's right down deep, where I can't lay my hands on it, in a manner of speaking…. [Y]ou can't see nobody working it. No fireworks like poor old

> Gandalf used to show…. I've often wanted to see a bit of magic like what it tells of in old tales, but I've never heard of a better land than this. It's like being at home and on a holiday at the same time, if you understand me. (*FR* 362-3)

Here we have Sam reaching for three ideas, only to fall into paradox—followed by his typical request for the hearer to read him figuratively:

1. "Whether they've made the land, or the land's made them, it's hard to say, if you take my meaning"
2. "If there's any magic about, it's right down deep, where I can't lay my hands on it, in a manner of speaking"
3. "It's like being at home and on a holiday at the same time"
4. "if you understand me"

In the first, the fact that both the land and its inhabitant elves seem to possess the same quality of Faerie makes extracting one from the other impossible—and yet one must have preceded the other. In the second, the locus of the magic is, frustratingly for Sam, not external to him (where he would be able to possess it); it is rather within himself. In other words, conventional wisdom is turned upon its head; we are normally told that we can only control what is internal. However, Sam has discovered that he can only truly possess, control, and manage what is *external* to him; what is within him is beyond his reach. In the third idea, the opposites of home and away are combined to describe Faerie. Sam mediates for his reader the worlds of Faerie and the primary world by combining opposites from within the primary world.

What Tolkien might have meant by Faerie may have its equivalent in G. K. Chesterton's notion of the "spiritual order." Chesterton argued that, because the spiritual world is so dynamic and infinitely dimensional in contrast to the four-dimensional physical world, whenever the spiritual appears within the plane of the physical world the mind will only be able to perceive the spiritual as a paradox ("Thomas Carlyle" 26-7).

Sam's tendency to describe Faerie in paradox is not confined to Sam. Gradually, the paradoxical view of elves is given to other characters in Æ. For instance, as the company prepares to depart from Lothlórien, they sit upon the haunted shores with Galadriel, and the narrator shares the private thoughts of Frodo:

> The Swan passed on slowly to the hythe, and they turned their boats and followed. There in the last end of Egladil upon the green grass the parting feast was held; but Frodo ate and drank little, heeding only the beauty of the Lady and her voice. She seemed no longer perilous or terrible, nor filled with hidden power. Already she seemed to him, as by men of later days Elves still at times are seen: present and yet remote, a living vision of that which has already been left far behind by the flowing streams of Time. (*FR* 376)

In a vision strangely reminiscent of *Pearl*, Frodo sees an elf divested of all power—except for the power to be present in absence, already past while lingering in the present (perhaps the greatest power of all).

By this time we have arrived at the heart of Æ (and in many ways its true climax). Although Galadriel will make another appearance at the end of *LotR*, the narrator, perhaps overpowered by nostalgia and needing to speak for a view shared not by an individual but by generations, betrays his point-of-view; the reader is

compelled to view the elves through the eyes of "men of later days," with whom the narrator is presumably familiar. And if these "men" (presumably of the Fourth Age of Middle-earth) have this paradoxical view of elves, then it is the elf-friends like Frodo, Sam, and the crafters of Æ who have inclined them toward that view. Indeed, Frodo and these later men are said to *share* this view: "she seemed to him, as by men of later days."

The paradox becomes even more poignant as the company sails away—except that now the force of the paradox will be felt in the form of physical disorientation. As they sail away on the Silverlode, it will seem that it is the stationary Galadriel who is "floating away from them: "For so it seemed to them: Lórien was slipping backward." Just as Sam has a habit of rhetorical uncertainty when speaking of Elves (e.g., "if you understand me"; "as it were," etc.), the narrator qualifies his bold, counter-intuitive observation that the elf is floating away with a cautious "for so it seemed to them." This may suggest that, in addition to the reality that there is one author, Tolkien, the conceit of the common mind or tradition is at work in the voice of Sam, Frodo, and the narrator. But more importantly, the elf-centric and mediatorial position of the Æ tradition habitually asserts Faerie but yet maintains a foothold in the mundane.

In the next paragraph, Galadriel sings in the "ancient tongue of the Elves," and Frodo attempts to understand her words but cannot; the music is said to be fair but comfortless. The narrator states, "Yet as is the way of Elvish words, they remained graven in his memory, and long afterwards he interpreted them, as well as he could." What is the "way of Elvish words"? The narrator speaks as if their clinging

quality is a known and widely acknowledged property. The narrator, however, suggests that the reader is not necessarily to assume that Frodo and Sam's translation gives an accurate rendering of the song. As Sam's language is often strained to convey an experience with the elves and prompts him to qualify his attempt, so here does the narrator carefully qualify Frodo's experience with the song of Galadriel. The qualification is a conceit of course, but it serves an important thematic function and provides further suggestion of a linguistic habit within Æ. The Æ tradition consciously mediates the Faerie world, and one of the qualities of its ineffability. Attempts to articulate encounters with Faerie will leave one grasping for metaphors (of which, it seems, *LotR* is one—and perhaps the most successful); and attempts to "translate" its language will force the translator to confess that he has only done as "well as he could." A one-to-one, unequivocal translation is impossible.

Elf-Friend Mediation and a Credo in Æ

If Æ illustrates certain aspects of Tolkien's theory of fairy stories, so does the material in this source reflect certain aspects of Tolkien's Catholicism. The other traditions (H and P) depict their heroes as sharing many of the same ethical and spiritual assumptions as those in Æ. Æ, however, demonstrates a pronounced emphasis on "spiritual" or "religious" ideals in Middle-earth. By "spiritual" I mean a spiritual insight into the workings of Providence in Middle-earth. This calls attention to Æ's emphasis upon the role of elves in the religious and ethical assumptions of its narrative.

In Æ, although the elf-friend (or mediator between the world of Faerie and the human world) title is reserved for friends of elves and not elves themselves,

elves also serve in something like a mediatorial position. Indeed, Tolkien himself suggested that hobbits probably did not formally practice worship "unless through exceptional contact with the Elves" (*Letters* 193). While this is not an explicit affirmation that hobbits practiced a religion as such, it certainly suggests that Tolkien conceived of the possibility of elves having the capacity to provide the hobbits with a kind of religious experience. The trust, spiritual devotion, awe, and religious imagery that would normally be dedicated directly to the Deity is instead mediated through the elves. The elves occupy a realm parallel to that of the saints in a Roman Catholic worldview. They are the "icons," the visible images of a higher order. They are depicted especially in Æ as interceding in the affairs of humans and hobbits; their music, memory, counsel, amulets, and deeds of old (like the saints of both Testaments and extra-biblical tradition) dispel fear, strengthen resolve, guide action, undo the work of enemies, and contribute to human and hobbit self-understandings.

The incident recorded in "Three Is Company" has already been discussed in the context of Sam's initial encounter with elves. However, here it would be helpful to consider the event in terms of Æ's tendency to fill the margins of phenomenal existence with the memory of elves. Near the borders of the Shire, Frodo, Sam, and Pippin encounter a Black Rider. Although the Rider has not yet spotted the hobbits, he is near to doing so. While Sam is hiding behind a tree-bole (trunk), Frodo is crawling toward the lane to get a glimpse of the shadow that has dismounted and is, likewise, crawling towards them. Worst of all, Frodo begins to feel an urge to put on the Ring, which would, of course, expose him to the Rider. The narrator states that it

is at this moment that there comes "a sound like mingled song and laughter" (*FR* 77). The Black Rider flees, and the hobbits, for the time being, are safe. The sound they and the Rider hear is the singing of the elves. This moment becomes what Forest-Hill calls the "turning point" for Sam. She observes, "He has been introduced to the idea that Elves and their singing have a power to intervene against the most ominous presence so far encountered" ("Praise, Invocation and Prayer" 98).

This incident is ironically an inverted form of a scene in *Beowulf* where Grendel, who lurks behind Heorot, suffers pain from when he hears the sound of the scop singing a song of creation (probably from Genesis) and decides to murder thirty of Hrothgar's thanes (lines 115-123). But in *LotR*, the incident early in the narrative of Æ initiates in Sam what must be called faith. It is not necessarily the elves by themselves who "ward off evil"; the subject of their song, one of the Vala "Elbereth," wife of Manwë, seems rather to be the efficacious element. However, in Sam's mind, it is the prayer or song of the *elves*—like the prayers of the saints and Mary that a Christian might covet—that has proved effective. As the elves are said to have "awakened" some of the trees in the First Age and taught them speech, so here Sam and Frodo are awakened to a kind of spiritual language—a numinous invocation that can be expected to summon a good and friendly help in time need. Indeed, Frodo and Sam learn well the "formula" of the elves and, from here on, they will invoke the name *Elbereth* in distress.

On Weathertop, Frodo calls out to Elbereth when the Witch-king stabs him. The cry will not save him from being wounded (he has forsaken all counsel and put on the Ring), but Aragorn tells the hobbits later that it was the name *Elbereth* that

prevented the Witch-king from doing further harm. Much later, Sam finds himself in mortal combat with Shelob. With the giant spider bearing down on him, Sam remembers that he is carrying the Phial of Galadriel. Sam is here depicted as having appropriated the hymn/prayer and adapted it to his present crisis. In so doing, he has significantly altered the meaning of a hymn that, in its "original" form, expresses an exile's desire for home. In Sam's mouth, it shifts from a hymn of devotion and longing to an urgent, ejaculatory, but eloquent, plea and prayer for help in time of distress.

There is already a significant level of creative thematic adaptation at this point. An elvish hymn sung in the safety of Rivendell—depicting the Vala, Elbereth, in a somewhat passive relation to the speaker (the speaker is said to have done the looking, rather than Elbereth)—becomes a hobbit's prayer in distress, depicting a Vala who does the looking and guarding. It is significant that Sam, at the beginning of chanting this hymn, thinks of the elves in the Shire and in Rivendell. He has learned religious devotion from the elves, and the moment of distress brings first the elves and then Elbereth to mind. Of course, Elbereth is also an intermediary being (Ilúvatar is the high God in Tolkien's mythology), but, for Sam, the elves are the intermediaries who have taught him of a power that exists beyond present circumstances.

Here is an explicit demonstration of the creative relationship between elves and elf-friends. What has been expressed among the elves as worshipful longing for a higher being in a *remote* time and place becomes—without prompting or catechism—a belief in an active and immanent *presence* not just in the world, but in

the very darkness of a tunnel in the bowels of a forsaken land. The distance still remains; she is portrayed in Sam's prayer as "gazing far." But the Vala looks with intent for that which would elude the inattentive. The past becomes present; the merely wonderful to look upon is transformed into that which looks intently upon the affairs of the seemingly insignificant. The disposition of Elbereth in this context is ironic in light of the fact that the Eye of Sauron, during this time, is said to be fixated upon the mighty lords of the West who are marching upon his land. The Eye has missed its greatest peril—because it is small.

It is interesting to note that the use of the untranslated "holy" language of Middle-earth in Æ echoes in some ways the use of the Latin mass. Though the audience generally understands very little of what it repeats, the words are considered efficacious. They are believed to serve as a kind of amber in which ancient wisdom is preserved; the modern speaker, in reciting the mass, says more than he or she knows. There are several parallels to Sam's hymn in the Latin mass. Perhaps the closest is the so-called "Leonine Prayers after Low Mass," which plead:

> *Omnes*: Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen.
>
> *Sacerdos*: Salve Regina, Mater misericordiae, vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve. Ad te clamamus, exsules filii Evae. Ad te suspiramus gementes et fientes in hac lacrymarum valle. Eia ergo, Advocata nostra, illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte. Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis, post hoc exilium, ostende. O clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria.
>
> [*All*: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.
>
> *Priest*: Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To thee to we cry, poor

> banished children of Eve. To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this exile, show unto us the blessed Fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.] (Translated by the Canons Regular of St. John Cantius)

The themes of both the elves' song in Rivendell and Sam's cry of distress are here combined. Like Sam's song, the cantor prays to the "Holy Queen" for help in troubled times; and, like Sam, the cantor specifically prays that Mary would turn her "eyes of mercy toward us." And like the elves' version, whose song reflects the history of their separation and exile from Aman ("the Blessed Realm,"),[33] the mass reminds the Queen that we are "poor banished children of Eve. To thee do we send up our sighs." Chance observes that in Middle-earth "[l]anguage is restorative, recuperating the energy of the past" (*The Mythology of Power* 39). As the mass is believed to elevate the thoughts, language, and courage of its devotees, so do the elven songs ennoble and empower Sam and Frodo, the elf-friends.[34]

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[33] See *TT* 600.

[34] But there is a sense in which this narrative goes beyond a resemblance to the Latin mass. While the mass is recited from memory (the audience repeating the words of the priest), Sam's utterance in Shelob's tunnel is depicted as having been spoken without a prior hearing. Though it cannot be known if Tolkien had this echo in mind, this experience reminds one of St Luke's account of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-4:

> When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (NRSV)

The curious and multi-ethnic crowd, which gathers outside the room because of the commotion, is amazed to hear these early Jewish Christians speaking fluently in the crowd's diverse native languages. This event marks the beginning of the Christian movement, and it foreshadows in St Luke's Acts the Christians' successful evangelization of the gentile Roman world. As new mediators

Like the Anglo-Saxon Caedmon, who, without prior training or teaching, sang under divine inspiration an intricately versified song of creation (Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4:24), Sam speaks in a tongue he initially does not know; but in time, he learns it, translates it, and becomes the storyteller, or elf-friend, of the new age.

Soon after the narrative of Shelob's lair, when Sam and Frodo attempt to escape from the Tower of Cirith Ungol, the Watchers, using, apparently, dark magic to keep them from escaping, loom overhead:

> Frodo had no strength for such a battle. He sank to the ground. 'I can't go on, Sam,' he murmured. 'I'm going to faint. I don't know what's come over me.'
>
> 'I do, Mr. Frodo. Hold up now! It's the gate. There's some devilry there. But I got through, and I'm going to get out. It can't be more dangerous than before. Now for it!' Sam drew out the elven-glass of Galadriel again. As if to do honour to his hardihood, and to grace with splendour his faithful brown hobbit-hand that had done such deeds, the phial blazed forth suddenly, so that all the shadowy court was lit with a dazzling radiance like lightning; but it remained steady and did not pass. 'Gilthoniel, A Elbereth!' Sam cried. For, why he did not know, his thought sprang back suddenly to the Elves in the Shire, and the song that drove away the Black Rider in the trees.
>
> '*Aiya elenion ancalima*!' cried Frodo once again behind him. The will of the Watchers was broken with a suddenness like the snapping of a cord, and Frodo and Sam stumbled forward. (*RK* 925)

The references to Elbereth are not necessarily examples of *deus ex machina*; the Æ tradition does not credit these "prayers" as the deciding factors or sufficient causes of Frodo and Sam's success. The above narrative is the clearest iteration of the invocation of Elbereth "working" actively against evil. But even here, we do not

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between the spiritual and material realm and supernaturally fluent in unknown languages, they are able to navigate gentile culture and relate dynamically with a people with whom they have little in common.

know if "Elbereth" was efficacious; it is not until Frodo's cry (which invokes the human Eärendil, father of Elrond) that the Watcher's will is said to be broken. There are moments of greater peril in Æ where the prayer is never prayed. Moreover, even where Elbereth's name is invoked, Frodo and Sam are not absolved of the responsibility to act courageously. The narrator always leaves the reader in some doubt as to whether it is the prayer or the actions of the character that decides the outcome of an event. In fact, the reader is left with the impression that, while the episode could have turned out well even without the invocation of the Vala's name, the outcome could never have been achieved without the character's courage.

This suggests that Æ's emphasis on the spirituality of the elves is not so much a habit developed out of a sense of practicality or necessity. It is rather a tendency engendered out of pure devotion, wonder, and awe. The elf-centricity is aesthetic and artistic rather than utilitarian—though there is a degree to which the spirituality of the elves "works."

The Morning Star and Evening Star in Æ

Æ has a tendency to direct readers' imaginations to the stars throughout its narrative. This may reflect again Æ tradition's tendency to romanticize and reimagine distinctive elvish interests—one of which, according to *The Silmarillion*, is the subject of stars and their celestial movements. These celestial movements may be of such interest to Æ's writers, editors, and compilers that one its primary narrative threads—the story of Aragorn and Arwen—may be described as an astrological myth.

The "Quenta Silmarillion" narrates the story of the origin of elves:

> [A]t the bidding of Manwë Mandos spoke, and he said: 'In this age the Children of Ilúvatar shall come indeed, but they come not yet. Moreover it is doom that the Firstborn shall come in the darkness, and shall look first upon the stars. Great light shall be for their waning. To Varda ever shall they call at need.' …Then [Varda] began a great labour, greatest of all the works of the Valar since their coming in to Arda…she made new stars and brighter against the coming of the Firstborn. (*The Silmarillion* 37)

Now that Middle-earth has been made safe by the starlight for the appearance of the elves, the Firstborn are awakened:

> It is told that even as Varda (Elbereth) ended her labours, and they were long, when first Menelmacar strode up the sky and the blue fire of Helluin flickered in the mists above the borders of the world, in that hour the Children of the Earth awoke, the Firstborn of Ilúvatar. By the starlit mere of Cuiviénen, Water of Awakening, they rose from the sleep of Ilúvatar; and while they dwelt yet silent by Cuiviénen their eyes beheld first of all things the stars of heaven. Therefore they have ever loved the starlight, and have revered Varda Elentári above all the Valar. (37)

Ages later, the elves are portrayed as instinctually, religiously, and aesthetically devoted to this initial vision. The elves in the Shire sing, "O stars that in the Sunless Year / With shining hand by her were sown, / In windy fields now bright and clear / We see your silver blossom blown!" (*FR* 78). The "Sunless Year" refers to the time before the elves were awakened. However, the expression seems to serve primarily poetic purposes—since, according to the Silmarillion, the sun did not exist even after the elves were awakened. They only knew the starlight until the coming of the "atani" (elven for "human") (*The Silmarillion* 29). In Middle-earth mythology, the sun was made for humans for much the same reason that stars were made for the coming of the elves (*The Silmarillion* 37, 92-3): to protect them from Morgoth and

his servants. But the expression commemorates a time when the stars first blossomed and ruled the skies alone. Galadriel's song of farewell to the company sings wistfully of "the stars of Ever-eve in Eldamar…" (*FR* 375). Sam's limited experience with elves leads him at one point to conclude (mistakenly) that Elves are "all for moon and stars" (*FR* 351).

For the elves, starlight is sacred not only because it is the first thing they see upon becoming conscious: it is also holy because it is a reminder of the grace and protection of the Valar. Moreover, the stars, in Æ's mythos, are sacrosanct because they reflect the history of the elves. Eärendil the Half-elven, son of Tuor and Idril, after a successful but perilous mission to forbidden Valinor on behalf of enemy-besieged Middle-earth, sails his ship, Vingilot, into the western skies with a sacred Silmaril upon his brow. In the lore of Middle-earth, he becomes the Morning and Evening Star (our Venus)—a symbol of hope and a guide for mariners.

Eärendil is the ancestor of the elves of Rivendell and of the Númenórean kings (*FR* 195). Thus he is the grandfather of Arwen Evenstar and the ancestor of Aragorn, Thorongil ("Eagle of the Star"), king of Gondor (*RK* 1066). Cataloguing the mythologies of cultures from ancient Babylon to Skidi Pawnee (Native Americans from Nebraska) with regard to Venus, Larsen has convincingly demonstrated their relevance to the mythology surrounding Eärendil. In several mythologies, Venus, because of its unique orbit, interior to that of the earth's orbit around the sun, is conceived of as an elusive lover (sometimes, because of its distinct manifestations as Morning Star and Evening Star, elusive to itself). In one mythology, that of the

Pawnee,[35] the marriage of the Morning and Evening Star produces the first humans ("Sea Birds and Morning Stars" 69). Larsen connects these mythologies to Eärendil and his wife Elwing, but there is also a strong connection between the Venus mythologies and Arwen and Aragorn.

Both Arwen and Aragorn are descended from the same line; however, Elrond will not allow his elven daughter to marry Aragorn—that is, unless he claims and wins the crown of Gondor. In accord with Venus's elusive nature, Aragorn's task is seemingly an impossible, a Jasonian task. Near the end of *LotR*, however, he does indeed become king of Gondor and marries Arwen. As I will suggest in more detail below, the marriage of Aragorn and Arwen belongs to the Æ tradition. The marriage consummates the elf-friend theme in Æ by bringing together in the children of the Arwen and Aragorn the elves and the humans. The Evening Star heralds the night and the starlight that follows. As such, it may represent the time of the elves. The Morning Star, though it is the same "star," appears before the dawn and heralds the disappearance of the stars and the sun's rising (remembering that the sun is to humans what stars are to the elves). As such, it may represent the flight of the elves from Middle-earth and the Age of Mankind. Aragorn and Arwen's marriage indeed heralds these events for Middle-earth.

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[35] Tolkien may have been familiar with Native American mythologies; his biographer, Humphrey Carpenter, notes that Tolkien took greater delight in "Red Indian stories" than in the tales of Carroll, Stevenson, and Andersen (*J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography* 30). However, it is not essential that Tolkien was aware of this particular myth; it is only important that it is yet one more version of a common mythos surrounding the morning and evening star. And Tolkien's own story of Arwen and Aragorn is yet another.

Comparing the Role of Elves in Æ with the H and P Traditions

In Æ, the elves often serve as Sam and Frodo's moral compass. The elves of Rivendell and Lothlórien are nearly infallible guides to truth. Regarding Faramir with caution and wanting to make one last test of the trustworthiness of Faramir, Æ has Sam say:

> 'You don't say much in all your tales about the Elves, sir,' said Sam, suddenly plucking up courage. He had noted that Faramir seemed to refer to Elves with reverence, and this even more than his courtesy, and his food and wine, had won Sam's respect and quieted his suspicions. (*TT* 686)

This episode in *TT* describes well the moral compass of Æ. To refer to the elves with reverence and to include elves in one's stories is the litmus test—a window into one's character. To follow the conceit of multiple traditions, the reader can easily imagine that the maker(s) of the Æ tradition is (are) betraying his (their) own method and ethos of storytelling. Elves must be involved, and there must be a great deal about elves. Æ is just such a tale.

Moreover, the elves set the standard by which other peoples are judged. The Æ tradition uses elven language as passwords (see the discussion on the Moria gate above). As they plan how to climb down through the trap door in the tower, Sam says, "Now you draw up the ladder, if you can, Mr. Frodo; and don't you let it down till you hear me call the pass-word. *Elbereth* I'll call. What the Elves say. No orc would say that" (*RK* 923). Æ has arrayed the peoples of Middle-earth according to their relations with elves. To appreciate the elves is to be on the right side of things and vice-versa. Sméagol cannot bear the touch of elven rope or the taste of lembas

bread. Enemies, no matter how terrible or wicked, cannot endure wounds from Frodo's elvish blade.

H and P share many of the same interests, yet their differences from Æ, though sometimes subtle, are significant. In general, when Frodo and Sam face grave danger, an elvish prayer, amulet, cloak, or story plays a role in protecting them. In the Eastfarthing of the Shire, Weathertop, at the Ford to Rivendell (where Frodo is rescued by an elf, Glorfindel, an elf-horse, Asfaloth, and an elf-prayer to Elbereth and Luthien), Shelob's tunnel, Cirith Ungol (where the "elven-hoods" and memories of Galadriel protect them from the "Wraith-king" and despair), and Grey Havens (where Frodo is "rescued" from the sorrows of Middle-earth), elves are depicted as interceding on behalf of the hobbits. However, in H and P, the pronounced emphasis on the spiritual and magical property of elves is markedly muted. It is true that Legolas plays a large role, particularly, in H, but the focus of H is upon his more traditional heroic qualities as an elf-warrior—not as a spiritual, magical, artistic sage with an atmosphere of the other-worldly. It is also true that lembas bread aids Merry and Pippin outside of Fangorn once, and Pippin's elvish broach helps Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas track them. But, again, these examples, in their almost solitary and mild state, stand as exceptions that prove the rule. H will frequently tell of characters who, in time of distress, sing a brave anthem or invoke the name of a great ancestor. H and P do not chant elvish prayers when facing danger. Whereas Æ depicts Frodo invoking Elbereth while the Witch King bears down upon him, in H such a thought is apparently entirely foreign to Merry as he confronts the very same power. In H, Merry makes no plea; he merely stabs him, not with an elvish blade, but

with a sword made by the Númenóreans (who were, it is true, distantly related to the elves). Likewise, in P, Pippin faces the Witch King, and if he ever cried out in prayer for help, the story does not tell.

Also, unlike the H narrative, in which (as will be discussed below) its heroes yearn to be featured in future songs, Æ does not contemplate whether "songs" will be sung or minstrels will play of the hobbits' deeds. They do, however, entertain the notion that their journey will be told in a story. This leads to the next topic.

Metafiction in Æ

Æ demonstrates a proclivity for highly self-conscious or metafictional storytelling. The most important instance of this storytelling technique occurs in Æ's description of Frodo and Sam's ascent to Shelob's tunnel. In a last quiet moment—a kind of "last homely house" before their entrance into the dreaded Mordor—Sam, perhaps prompted by a foreboding sense that these are his final hours, begins to consider what his life and journey will mean beyond death:

> [W]e shouldn't be here at all, if we'd known more about it before we started. But I suppose it's often that way. The brave things in the old tales and songs, Mr. Frodo: adventures, as I used to call them. I used to think that they were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting and life was a bit dull, a kind of a sport, as you might say. But that's not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually – their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn't. And if they had, we shouldn't know, because they'd have been forgotten. We hear about those as just went on – and not all to a good end, mind you; at least not to what folk inside a story and not outside it call a good end. You know, coming home, and

> finding things all right, though not quite the same – like old Mr. Bilbo. But those aren't always the best tales to hear, though they may be the best tales to get landed in! I wonder what sort of a tale we've fallen into? (*TT* 719)

It is as though Sam has suddenly conceived of the vast difference between the experience of hearing a tale and living a tale. The needs of a story-hearer and story-maker are mutually exclusive. The character of a "comfortable" story is a bore to follow; the hearing of an enjoyable tale is the character within that story's worst nightmare. Frodo answers Sam's question: "I wonder…. But I don't know. And that's the way of a real tale. Take any one that you're fond of. You may know, or guess, what kind of a tale it is, happy-ending or sad-ending, but the people in it don't know. And you don't want them to." Frodo's words, "And you don't want them to [know]" are important because they speak to the essential mortality of the human being in Middle-earth. Sterling argues that:

> behind the fictional story of Middle-earth lies a clear message, a Christian message. As Tolkien saw it, although God intends that we love the world…yet He also intends that we see death…as a blessing…. The immortals do not die, but it is also true that they are bound to the world for better and for worse. Mortal men must die and venture into the unknown, but they should see that Ilúvatar does not do anything without a purpose. ("The Gift of Death"19)

The necessity of the character's ignorance mirrors the humans' (or hobbits') march toward mortality. In Frodo's reply, just when it appears that the characters in this story are coming dangerously close to self-consciousness of themselves *as* characters in a story that is, even now, being read, Frodo proscribes the limits of the art of storytelling. The illusion of ignorance must be maintained; naiveté is essential

to the nature of good stories. This line of thought cannot bring comfort. It brings only wisdom—the wisdom to carry on without the promise of being remembered.

Sam concedes the wisdom of Frodo's answer; but, relentlessly, he recalls that Beren, who performed the Herculean labor of recovering a Silmaril from Morgoth, faced even more impossible odds. This in turn leads him to remember that the light in the Phial he holds contains the only remaining light from the Silmarils. He is therefore carrying a living remnant of a very old tale.

Sam indeed penetrates the veil between character and reader when he wishes for his story to be read to children from a great book with red and black letters. The reader suddenly realizes that he or she is holding and reading a book by that very description. Sam has detected the reader and becomes more than a character; he is now also his own reader.

Hobbits are generally described as being uninterested in such speculations.[36] Yet Sam is depicted as possessing a far-reaching, historical perspective, and his perspective echoes that of the elves themselves. Elves are essentially immortal in the world (though they can be killed). They live in Middle-earth as long as they can bear to live there. They watch the march of generations of peoples appear and disappear from the world. Elrond speaks of having seen many "fruitless victories" (*FR* 245). Elves possess a somewhat dispassionate perspective on mortal humans.

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[36] "A love of learning (other than genealogical lore) was far from general among them, but there remained still a few in the older families who studied their own books, and even gathered reports of old times and distant lands from Elves, Dwarves, and Men….The genealogical trees at the end of the Red Book of Westmarch are a small book in themselves, and all but Hobbits would find them exceedingly dull. Hobbits delighted in such things, if they were accurate: they liked to have books filled with things that they already knew, set out fair and square with no contradictions" (*FR* 3, 7).

They sometimes invest in the lives of men, but they often tend to show little concern for the affairs of humans.

Sam and Frodo's exchange uniquely embodies the contrasting worldviews of elves and humans. In contrast to elves, Ilúvatar has granted the "gift of death" to men—a gift strange and mysterious to the elves. Death does not necessarily mean the annihilation of the person; the human's ultimate destination is kept hidden from everyone but Ilúvatar. Reading stories, especially ones that seem to continue as "roads that go ever on and on," represents a critical distance, a dispassionate, "larger" view of life. At one point Legolas states:

> for the Elves the world moves, and it moves both very swift and very slow. Swift, because they themselves change little, and all else fleets by: it is a grief to them. Slow, because they need not count the running years, not for themselves. The passing seasons are but ripples ever repeated in the long long [sic] stream. (*FR* 391)

Just as the elves remain constant, standing still in a world that passes by and changes drastically over time, so does the reader remain a constant while the pages are turned and the story progresses. Sam's musings reach for this larger, readerly, elvish perspective. The self-consciousness of the characters is a distinguishing emphasis in the narrative of Æ.[37] The narrator in Æ, after the small company of the Ring has left Bree under a cloud of suspicion, observes that they "made such a tale as would last for many uneventful years" (*FR* 181). And as Frodo and Sam stand on the slopes of Mount Doom, awaiting their imminent death,

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[37] Bilbo's conversation is seldom without a reference to the "book" he is finishing, the song he is inventing, his story's new ending, or the diary he is keeping. Even Aragorn gets involved in this in Æ when he is depicted as helping Bilbo write a poem (*FR* 233).

> Sam still holding his master's hand caressed it. He sighed. 'What a tale we have been in, Mr. Frodo, haven't we?' he said. 'I wish I could hear it told! Do you think they'll say: Now comes the story of *Nine-fingered Frodo and the Ring of Doom*? And then everyone will hush, like we did, when in Rivendell they told us the tale of Beren One-hand and the Great Jewel. I wish I could hear it! And I wonder how it will go on after our part.' (*RK* 961-2)

As a character in Æ, Sam's mind compares all experiences to his experiences with the elves.

H often exhibits a tendency towards a subtler form of metafiction. Because Rohan and its culture (which is based on Anglo-Saxon epic and poetry) is the dominant subject of H, H's characters often speak of their deeds as being worthy or unworthy of songs sung by later generations. However, the performance of song-worthy deeds is a common motif of traditional Northern heroic narrative. Where these instances occur, the characters are being far less ironic; a genuine Northern cultural meme is being expressed.

Other Characteristics of Æ

There are several additional traits accompanying and distinguishing Æ from the other traditions. I will mention them here briefly. The Æ narrative is liberally sprinkled with dreams and visions. Dreams are rarely mentioned in the other two traditions—and when they are, the reader is not given enough content to discern the narrative of the dream. But in Æ, dreams are a significant feature; the reader is privy especially to Frodo's dreams. Le Goff has argued, "In the Middle Ages, the dream was one of the primary battlegrounds on which God contended with the Devil for the possession of man's soul" (16). Reflecting this convention, in Æ, dreams

and visions reveal a struggle for the soul of the individual. Frodo's dreams are filled with images shifting dizzily between the poles of good and evil. Dreams do not make their way into the narrative because telling his dreams is part of Frodo's personality. Nor do we learn of his dreams because they play a part in moving the plot of *LotR* forward. Instead, the distinct narrator of Æ gratuitously reveals the content of Frodo's dreams. The reader is left to guess at what reasons the narrator has for mentioning them. Perhaps the most plausible theory may be that dreams possess a quality of timelessness—and the effect they produce can be similar to the otherworldly effect that Lothlórien has upon the Fellowship.

But most importantly, dreams relate to a significant name in Tolkien's legendarium: the name Eriol, or "one who dreams alone." Eriol is the elvish name for Ælfwine, the first elf-friend in Tolkien's legendarium. Frodo, as Flieger notes, is endowed with what remained of Tolkien's earlier ambition to create a time-travel story (*A Question of Time* 167); like Eriol, whose access to the dream world of Faerie gave him insight into the wider world of space and time, Frodo dreams and provides prophetic insight into the world beyond appearances.

Æ also displays a strong preference for marking time calendrically. The narrator frequently marks time by mentioning specific dates, holidays, and birthdays. The calendar Æ uses is, of course, Shire Reckoning. No such dates are used within the other two traditions. They merely use the sun, moon, weeks, and days to mark the time. One of the clearest instances of this phenomenon is at the beginning of Book Six in *RK*. To this point in *RK*, there have been no references to a

date in the previous book; but no sooner do we shift from the H and P narratives to Æ than we are told that:

> [Sam] wondered what the time was. Somewhere between one day and the next, he supposed; but even of the days he had quite lost count. He was in a land of darkness where the days of the world seemed forgotten….Out westward in the world it was drawing to noon upon the fourteenth day of March in the Shire-reckoning, and even now Aragorn was leading the black fleet from Pelargir, and Merry was riding with the Rohirrim down the Stonewain Valley, while in Minas Tirith flames were rising and Pippin watched the madness growing in the eyes of Denethor. (*RK* 907-8)

In Æ, there are references to "Midyear's Day," the middle day of the three days in between June and July. Bilbo and Frodo's birthdays are mentioned repeatedly throughout Æ. Gollum uses his birthday as a justification for using all possible means—including murder—to wrest the Ring from his friend.

The emphasis on calendars, birthdays, and holidays in Æ mirrors the calendrical emphasis often seen in liturgical traditions. One can easily imagine the specific dates in Æ as serving a "religious" purpose in the Shire of the Fourth Age. According to *LotR*'s prologue's conceit, *LotR* is a late manuscript based on much earlier manuscripts, we should imagine that Frodo's, Bilbo's, even Gollum's birthdays perhaps serve as "founding myths" and are celebrated as holidays among the hobbits of later generations; the day that Frodo set out from the Shire, the day that Sauron was destroyed, the day that Frodo and Bilbo departed Middle-earth could become holy-days. The Fellowship sets out from Rivendell on its quest on December 25 (Christmas), and the Ring is destroyed on March 25 (Easter). In spite of Tolkien's explicit denial that these dates were chosen in order to resonate with

those holidays in the primary world, the coincidence is too great not to have played a role in Tolkien's thinking. The dates in Æ fictionally reflect a later liturgical calendar.

Conclusion

The reader is thus subtly encouraged to feel that over a period of generations, a community of authors, scholars, copyists, and a final compiler and translator produced Æ. Speaking from *within* Tolkien's conceit of the multi-manuscript composition of *LotR*, behind the mythological notion that Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam composed Æ lies a potential kernel of truth—but only a kernel. These three distinguished hobbits seem to have existed and written an extended diary of their great adventures. But Tolkien makes certain that the reader knows he or she is not actually reading their words. The reader reads instead a highly refracted history that has gone through a thorough mythologizing process.

To hazard a psychological profile of this distinct Æ community, Æ's material suggests, in comparison with the H and P communities, that its scholars are far more provincial, theoretical, and theological than their counterparts. This postulate will become clearer once the other two traditions have been fully treated. Suffice it to say, Æ reflects the more theoretical side of Tolkien—perhaps the Tolkien that we see in "On Fairy Stories."

The other two traditions certainly contain elements of historical and mythical England, they tend to reflect Tolkien's scholarly historical and philological interests. However, Æ is not so much interested in lost words and languages as it is interested in human psychology. Le Goff is surely correct when he writes, "tradition

presupposes a collective as well as individual effort of appropriation, modification, or rejection" (28). In the context of *LotR*, the various traditions or communities alter and reimagine "historical" data once the data is deemed useful for its narrative. Elves appear in each of the major traditions suggested by Tolkien's prologue, but they take on a distinct atmosphere in *Æ*. The duality suggested by the elf-friend concept—or man of two worlds, the primary world and Faerie—haunts (and greatly enhances) *Æ*'s narrative. Gollum is split into two personalities: Sméagol and Gollum. The One Ring makes its wearer an inhabitant of Middle-earth and a phantom world of wraiths. Elves stand in the world, but the characters often catch glimpses of their present past-ness. Dreams and mirrors pull characters out of time, but one eye always somehow remains on the calendar month and day. The Evening and Morning star are physically represented by two characters, Aragorn and Arwen, who, in the end, become one and rule Middle-earth. As if to show that the moral polarity between Frodo and Sauron is compromised and not as wide as the reader would like, nine-fingered Frodo shares a distressing resemblance to nine-fingered Sauron; both are maimed while grasping for power. Finally, Frodo and Sam, in a sense, together constitute one elf-friend, but in the end this "elf-friend" or mediator between men and elves is split in two: Frodo sails to the land of the elves while Sam remains behind to tell the stories and fulfill the human side of the elf-friend equation.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE HOLBYTLA COMMUNITY IN MIDDLE-EARTH

Reading H into *LotR*

The Prologue's description of *LotR* as a work based on an assemblage of manuscripts created, recorded, redacted, interpolated, translated, and compiled reaches perhaps its most palpable level in the narrative I refer to as *H*. If the faux-historical preface had not stated that *LotR* is the product of multiple manuscript traditions, the content of H could still be sufficiently distinct to give rise to such a reading. The H narrative—or the narrative apparently derived from Meriadoc, the Buckland hobbits (Meriadoc's relatives), and generations of Rohirric loremasters—reveals a community with interests and cultural foci distinct from Æ and P.

LotR's prologue refers to three of his works: *Old Words and Names in the Shire*, *Reckoning of Years*, and *Herblore of the Shire*. Tolkien-the-compiler even quotes an excerpt from *Herblore*, which is based on Merry's "'observations…made on my journeys south'" (*FR* 8). This statement, coming where it does in the narrative, anticipates Merry's role as an author and researcher in the south (Rohan and Gondor); moreover, the title, *Old Words and Names in the Shire*, foreshadows the philological interests that Merry's adventures in Rohan and Fangorn (which is on the border of Rohan) will exploit. It is not a coincidence that the subjects of *Herblore* and *Old Words* mark Merry's first encounter with Théoden: "'Hobbits?' said

Théoden. 'Your tongue is strangely changed; but the name sounds not unfitting so. Hobbits!'' (*TT* 562). Merry then begins what is to Gandalf an alarmingly tiresome discourse on pipe-weed: "it is an art which we have not practised for more than a few generations. It was Tobold Hornblower, of Longbottom in the Sourthfarthing, who first grew the true pipe-weed in his gardens…" (*TT* 563). Merry's love of history becomes obvious here; it is a small step from here to a recognition of Merry as the founding author of H.

While maintaining a degree of consistency with the narratives of the other traditions, the H narrative is distinct in voice, political interests, poetic meter, historiography, and iconography. And these distinctive characteristics are significant enough to draw attention to and support the Prologue's assertion that *LotR*'s narratives are the result of shared authorship.

To give a rough outline, the narrative of H begins in the Old Forest just outside Buckland (Merry's homeland). Outside the Old Forest, the hobbits enter a barrow, modeled on those used in the pre-Christian burial rites of Western Europe; H resumes at the death of Boromir, which is followed by a depiction of a Norse ship burial similar to those described in *Beowulf* (see, for instance, lines 3095-3165). From there, the narrative moves to the borders of the horse-lords (the riders of the Riddermark) where four members of the Fellowship—Gandalf, Aragorn, Legolas, and even Gimli, who "would rather walk than sit on the back of any beast" (*TT 441*)—suddenly find themselves continuing their quests on horseback. H then draws two other members of the quest, Merry and Pippin, into Fangorn forest. Here the reader witnesses the mobilization of a forest and the imprisonment of Saruman,

who has proven a menace to both the horse lords and the surrounding forests. The narrative also follows the cavalry of Rohan into the Battle of the Pelennor Fields. H reaches its climax with the ensigns of Rohan's horse and the Dúnadain tree joined together, flying victoriously over the field of battle. And it reaches its conclusion, appropriately, with the burial of Théoden, the eulogy of Gléowine, and Treebeard's elegiac farewell to Galadriel.

It is significant that nearly halfway through the main narrative of *LotR*, Tolkien divides Merry and Pippin and has them carry the burden of two separate but related narrative threads. In Frodo and Sam's case, this would have been unthinkable. The creative chemistry and symbiosis between the two would have been lost. A similar relationship seems to be developing between Merry and Pippin when they are suddenly and inexplicably separated. One reason for this decision seems to have been that Tolkien may have wanted to underline the importance of both the Gondor and Rohan narrative threads. He not only distinguishes between the narratives by giving Pippin and Merry each the task of mediating the respective narratives of Gondor and Rohan, but by establishing the notion that Merry and Pippin became historians and residents in Rohan and Gondor Tolkien also suggests the distinctiveness of each of these cultures.

The following study will attempt to flesh out these distinctive features. As the hagiographical ideals of the elves inform the content and structures of Æ, so do certain iconographic features—specifically the equine, arboreal, and barrow and ship burial imagery—inform and permeate H. The persistence of these images in narrative relating to Rohan should not be surprising, especially considering that

Merry, we are told, swears fealty to Rohan. The Rohirrim, at least before Merry's arrival, are described as "wise but unlearned, writing no books but singing many songs, after the manner of children" (*TT* 433). Since space will not permit me to discuss at length all of H's potentially distinctive features, I will focus primarily on the unique iconographical and historiographical implications of these characteristics.

This inevitably means that certain distinctives will be excluded. For instance, one of H's distinctives is its music; from Tom Bombadil and Treebeard to Gandalf and the Rohirrim, H's characters (and later storytellers) are noticeably musical. Along the same lines, H, because of its analogous relationship to the historical Anglo-Saxons, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, contains most of *LotR*'s alliterative poetry. This aspect of H could be discussed at great length. However, Shippey has, to some extent, covered the subject of Tolkien's alliterative poetics already ("Tolkien's Development as a Writer of Alliterative Poetry in Modern English" 11-28). To deal with the subject fully would require an entire study of its own. Thus I will confine this investigation to the iconographical horse, tree/forest, and pre-Christian funerary motifs and how they tie together the H narrative and suggest a distinct Rohirric manuscript tradition.

I will begin by discussing the iconography of the horse in medieval history and imagination, and the implications of this for its role in H. Next, I will draw attention to instances in which the horse and tree/forest are iconographically combined. I will then investigate the tree and forest in the medieval imagination and the role of these in H. Finally, I will explore Northern European pre-Christian and

Christian burial customs, their depiction in medieval literature, and Tolkien's use of these customs in H's narrative.

Horses, Anglo-Saxons, and Goths

Characters and Their Horses in H

Equine imagery fills the pages of H. In Æ, Gandalf tends to walk from place to place—though, in times of desperation, he rides an eagle. But in H, perhaps echoing Odin and his horse Sleipnir, he takes the horse Shadowfax and becomes "the White Rider"—a kind of Rohirric god who rides with the warriors his Valkyries have claimed in the apocalyptic Ragnarok, battling the forces of chaos and despair. Gandalf discusses his relationships with Shadowfax in "The Council of Elrond"—a narrative that would seem to belong to an Æ tradition; however, this story seems to have been told there only in order to make it possible for Gandalf to have come all the way from Rohan to Bree in less than the amount of time it took the hobbits to traverse the much shorter distance between the Shire and Bree. Moreover, not only could Gandalf's recollection at the Council have been an insertion by an H storyteller, but it is significant that in *TT*, Shadowfax is reintroduced in a paean similar to his description at the Council (*FR* 263; *TT* 508). A double introduction and description could suggest multiple authors. He also rides his horse in P. He rides with Pippin to Gondor; heroically rescues Faramir from the clutches of the Witch-king; and faces the Nazgûl in the gates of Gondor while on Shadowfax. However, the modulation from walking, wandering, staff-carrying wizard to the White Rider dramatically occurs in H. The P tradition could be said merely to accept H's

transformation of Gandalf. A similar modulation occurs, though to a lesser degree, with other members of the Fellowship in H: Aragorn, who walks wherever he goes and is thus known in Æ by the (literally) pedestrian name "Strider," becomes a rider in H, as does Legolas. And, strangely, Gimli is also horsed. The incongruity of a horse-riding dwarf is so well-established that when he is placed on a horse in H, the storyteller has one of the men of the Riddermark, Éothain, voice the incredulity that later generations of Rohirric readers would have felt at the comic image of a dwarf riding one of their horses: "'It may be well enough for this lord of the race of Gondor [Aragorn], as he claims,' he said, 'but who has heard of a horse of the Mark being given to a Dwarf?'" (*TT* 441).[38]

Most tellingly of all, Merry, the historian of Rohan, makes his very first appearance in *LotR* riding a horse: "As [Merry] came out of the mist and their fears subsided, he seemed suddenly to diminish to ordinary hobbit-size. He was riding a pony, and a scarf was swathed round his neck and over his chin to keep out the fog" (*FR* 95-96). In this scene, the other hobbits are in a wagon that is being pulled by a horse (*FR* 94); and Bilbo is remembered as having, in his youth, ridden a pony laden with treasure on his return from the Lonely Mountain (*FR* 94). But Merry is the first hobbit the reader sees actually riding a horse. This is probably significant—in light

[38] Gimli seems to create some difficulty for H. He does not ride horses and must be forced into the arrangement. But just as difficult is the weapon for which he is known. The forest and trees are also dominant images in H; they speak, tell romances, and create poetry. But what Mjölnir is to Thor, the axe is to Gimli—the weapon used to cut down trees. Treebeard growls: "Then Orcs came with axes and cut down my trees. I came and called them by their long names, but they did not quiver, they did not hear or answer: they lay dead" (*TT* 486). Gandalf has to warn Gimli: "Certainly the forest of Fangorn is perilous—not least to those that are too ready with their axes" (*TT* 503). Gimli fits somewhat more comfortably in the world of Æ; dwarves are at the center of *The Hobbit*—they lead the quiet hobbit on adventures. But in H, the lands are already lands of the strange and adventurous. The H narrator therefore places Gimli in the mediatorial role that the hobbits play in Æ and P. He is mismatched among the horsemen; and, as an axe-toting dwarf, he is a liability in the living forests.

of the emphasis upon horses in the narratives concerning Rohan and its distinct culture.

Furthermore, in one of Tolkien's proposed endings for *LotR*, Elanor, Sam's daughter, looks at the pages of the Red Book and sees the questions she has asked her father about the book's characters. Among them she reads: "*Q. Horses*. Merry is interested in these; very anxious for a pony of his own. How many horses did the Riders lose in the battles, and have they got some more now? What happened to Legolas's horse? What did Gandalf do with Shadowfax?" (*SD* 123). Merry's anxiety over a horse is listed next to a question about Rohan's horses. Elanor's questions do indeed lie outside the narrative of *LotR*; however, her question does suggest that, in the mind of Tolkien, Merry and horses were somehow associated.

Anglo-Saxons and Horses

Tolkien insisted that the reader was not to think of the Rohirrim as equivalent to the Anglo-Saxons (see the footnote at *RK* 1144). However, opposition to this claim has come from quarters no less formidable than the preeminent Tolkien scholar, Tom Shippey, and Tolkien's own son, Christopher. Both have soundly rejected the elder Tolkien's denial (see Shippey, *Road*, 123; C. Tolkien, *Treason* 66). They have demonstrated that the names of the people and places of Rohan are Anglo-Saxon and that the descriptions of the inhabitants' physiology, accouterments, values, poetry, and history also evoke these people.

Noad has accurately noted that "Tolkien seemed to say that Middle-earth was not our world at a different era, but at a different stage of imagination" ("On the Construction of the Silmarillion" 51). In the same vein, Paul Bibire argues:

> Tolkien manifestly felt the imaginative pull of these lost literatures, of what must have been. His scholarly caution…warned him against confusing what is with what might have been….He is also remarkably careful to dissociate his recreative from his scholarly activities, and the legends of the Rohirrim and their ancestors and cousins of Mirkwood are not those of the early English, or of their continental Gothic of Norse cousins: rather, he creates an analogue of such a body of legends, as it might have developed in the different cultural and geographical circumstances of Rohan and Gondor. ("Sægdre se þe cuþe: Tolkien as Anglo-Saxonist" 124-5)

These historical sources shed more light on Tolkien's art when they are viewed as possible matrices out of which historical analogues—analogues surprisingly combined and reimagined—may have been born. To use the metaphor he himself uses to describe the *Beowulf*-poet's relation to his pagan and Christian sources, Tolkien's sources are merely the bones of an ancient ox that flavors the soup—his stories (*Monsters 9*).

Goths

The Huns' fierce westward incursions into Europe in the fourth and fifth centuries AD started a chain of events that would result in the gradual fall of the Roman Empire. More importantly, the nomadic Huns created restlessness in many of Europe's "barbaric" inhabitants. In fact, the rise of the Huns contributed to the *volkerwanderung*, that is, the migration of peoples. A pan-Germanic movement, including the Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Vandals, Allemani, Burgundians, Herules,

Franks, Lombards, Jutes, and the Angles and Saxons found themselves looking for settlements outside of their native homeland (Straubhaar, "Goths" 254-255).

The names of the two figures most responsible for the Anglo-Saxon migration from western Germany to what is now England are Hengest and Horsa, or "stallion" and "horse" (Shippey, *Road* 102). This may explain why the horse reaches the status of icon in the mythos of Middle-earth. This is not to say that Tolkien intended a one-to-one comparison between Anglo-Saxon history and Rohan (the reasons for this will be explored in more detail below); but it is worth noting that the historical roles of two men bearing equine names played a creative role in the development of Tolkien's mythology.

In the *Book of Lost Tales*, Heorrenda (which is curiously also the name that Tolkien assigned to the anonymous *Beowulf*-poet [see Flieger, "Frame Narrative" 217]) is a brother of Hengest and Horsa; he is said to be the author of the "Golden Book of Tavrobel" (or the "Golden Book of Heorrenda") (Tolkien, *Book of Lost Tales 2* 296). He assumes the role Tolkien originally conceived for Ælfwine, or elf-friend (see Flieger, "Frame Narrative" 217) although in contrast to Ælfwine, his role seems not to have been to mediate between the primary world and Faerie, but rather to mediate between history and the present.

Ironically, given the names of the two founders of Anglo-Saxon culture in England, the Anglo-Saxons did not fight on horseback.[39] They sometimes rode to battle on horseback, but would often dismount and fight on foot. Shippey notes that

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[39] Some archeologists argue that, at least for a few centuries after the *Adventus Saxonum*, they were a "farming people" who were more apt to herd swine and sheep than to dedicate poetic staves to their horses (Crabtree, "Sheep, Horses, Swine, and Kine" 205).

the Battles of Maldon and Hastings are indicative of their attitudes towards horses: the *Battle of Maldon* "begins, significantly enough, with the horses being sent to the rear. Hastings was lost, along with Anglo-Saxon independence, largely because the English heavy infantry could not (quite) hold off the combination of archers and mounted knights" (*Road* 124).

Medieval aristocrats used seals as symbols of status, but significantly equestrian seals seem not to have been used in England until the time of the Norman king, William I. Again, the Conqueror's use of cavalry against an Anglo-Saxon infantry proved decisive in the Battle of Hastings (ca. 1066).[40] The exalted status of the horse in Rohan thus seems out of keeping with the historical reality of the Anglo-Saxons. For a closer historical equivalent to Rohan's mastery of the horse in battle, one would have to look to a broader, pan-Germanic precedent.

The primary place to find a medieval equine-centric culture is in the German east—namely among the Goths. The meaning of the name *Goth* is not entirely certain, but it was understood by some in Tolkien's time to mean "Horse-folk" (Shippey, *Road* 127). The Goths seemed to have identified with horses so closely that *Gotar*, according to Straubhaar, "can refer to fine-bred Gothic horses, as well as generic (human, male) warriors" (255). For Germanic tribes as far west as Iceland,

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[40] It may be that this seal was a vivid (and perhaps painful) symbol of the Norman military might. After William, the equestrian seal and symbol became the symbol of choice amongst the English aristocracy who wished to identify themselves with the ruling class (see McEwan, "Horses, Horsemen, and Hunting" 84).

alongside the ordinance against the practice of infanticide is an ordinance against the "eating of horse-flesh."[41]

In contrast to the Anglo-Saxons, the Gothic tribes were frequently on horseback (Shippey, *Road* 126-7). Tolkien certainly had the Goths in mind when writing "The Battle of the Pelennor Fields." Jordanes, a Gothic historian, describes a scene in which the Visigothic king Theodrid, embroiled in a kind of civil war with the Ostrogoths, whom Jordanes says were fighting on behalf of the Huns at the time, was killed in battle when his horse fell on top of him (*The Origin and Deeds of the Goths* 4). This of course immediately calls to mind H's description of Théoden's death on the Pelennor Fields, when his horse, Snowmane, falls and crushes him (*RK* 850).

Whatever the degree of calquing, the Riders of the Mark are novel and historical at the same time. What Chesterton wrote in his Prefatory Note to *The Ballad of the White Horse* could be said of Tolkien's Riddermark:

> This ballad needs no historical notes, for the simple reason that it does not profess to be historical. All of it that is not frankly fictitious, as in any prose romance about the past, is meant to emphasize tradition rather than history. King Alfred is not a legend in the sense that King Arthur may be a legend; that is, in the sense that he may possibly be a lie. But King Alfred is a legend in this broader and more human sense, that the legends are the most important things about him. (i)

Indeed, the Anglo-Saxons were not horse-lords in history; but they often are in popular imagination (or legend). What is a lie to history may yet be important to

[41]: "The old laws should stand as regards the exposure of children and the eating of horse-flesh…[but] a few years later, these heathen provisions were abolished, like others" (Ari Thorgilsson, *Íslendingabók, Kristni Saga: The Book of the Icelanders, the Story of the Conversion* 9).

memory. As Shippey perceptively contends, "This is what adds 'reconstruction' to 'calquing' and produces fantasy, a people and a culture that never were, but that press closer and closer to the edge of might-have-been" (*Road* 127). The horse iconography fuses Tolkien's interest in Anglo-Saxon England and the history of the Gothic peoples. The Rohirrim speak the language of the Anglo-Saxons, but their devotion to the horse closely resembles that of the Goths. This proves to be a highly creative fusion. The Rohirrim are therefore a purely theoretical or mythological group of people embedded in H and built out of the features of two distinct historical groups.

As influential as the Goths were in the conception of the "horse-lords," it would be remiss to fail to mention one other potential influence on the formation of H. The white horse of the Christian apocalyptic vision may be responsible for Tolkien's use of the horse icon. The words of Revelation 19:11-12 set a literary precedent for the association between the white horse and the eschaton:

> And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. (KJV)

In Tolkien's youth, G. K. Chesterton also associated white horse imagery with proto-English nationalism; but additionally he added Catholic apocalypticism to the connotations of the image.

Chesterton seems to have taken the white horse as a symbol of national and Catholic courage and purity.[42] His *Ballad of the White Horse* conflates English nationalism and Catholicism. The opening lines of the poem's iambic tetrameter almost seem to imitate the sound of a galloping horse:

> Before the gods that made the gods
> Had seen their sunrise pass,
> The White Horse of the White Horse Vale
> Was cut out of the grass.
>
> Before the gods that made the gods
> had drunk at dawn their fill,
> The White Horse of the White Horse Vale
> Was hoary on the hill.
>
> Age beyond age on British land,
> Aeons on aeons gone,
> Was peace and war in western hills,
> And the White Horse looked on.
>
> For the White Horse knew England
> When there was none to know;
> He saw the first oar break or bend,
> He saw heaven fall and the world end,
> O God, how long ago. (I:1-16)

His epic pits the invading Danes against an early coalition of Britain's disparate natives (Chesterton highlights the Irish, the Welsh, and the Anglo-Saxons), led by a mythologized King Alfred, who was born in Wantage, a village in the district of the White Horse Vale. The Danes are allegories of modern nihilism; Alfred represents orthodox Christianity. The White Horse, carved into the hillside of Berkshire, comes to symbolize the constant vigilance, faith, courage, and orthodoxy that are required to maintain a peaceful England:

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[42] Queen Victoria (1837-1901), who reigned during Chesterton's childhood and early adulthood, was the last official monarch of the House of Hanover. Hanoverian heraldry features a white horse.

> And when [Alfred] came to White Horse Down
> The great White Horse was grey,
> For it was ill scoured of the weed,
> And lichen and thorn could crawl and feed,
> Since the foes of settled house and creed
> Had swept old works away. (III:32-38)

Conversely, then, to allow weeds to spread and dim the chalked outline of the Horse, which may have existed long before Alfred's time, represents, in Chesterton's poem, a yielding to the temptation of despair and a failure to maintain Christian faith and the happiness of the land.

It is interesting to note one of Tolkien's letters to Christopher regarding Chesterton's poem:

> P[riscilla].... has been wading through The Ballad of the White Horse for the last many nights; and my efforts to explain the obscurer parts to her convince me that it is not as good as I thought. The ending is absurd. The brilliant smash and glitter of the words and phrases (when they come off, and are not mere loud colours) cannot disguise the fact that G.K.C. knew nothing whatever about the 'North,' heathen or Christian. (*Letters* 92)

This letter was dated 3 September 1944, or, while Tolkien was in the middle of writing *LotR*. More specifically, in letters dated the same year, 23-25 September and 30 September, he mentioned that he had completed the chapters "Of Herbs and Stewed Rabbit": "Faramir"; "The Forbidden Pool"; "Journey to the Crossroads"; "The Stairs of Cirith Ungol"; "Shelob's Lair"; and "The Choices of Master Samwise"; he also added that his chapter "King of the Golden Hall" is now "old enough for a detached view" (*Letters* 92, 94). In other words, by the time he had revisited Chesterton's poem, he had already written most of the material for Book III, which contains most of the H material, and was now working his way through Book IV, which traces the

journeys of Frodo and Sam. His evaluation of Chesterton's work infers that before he had written and while he was writing a great deal of the H material, Tolkien had remembered the story as a good story with "brilliant" words and phrases. It was only after writing Book III that he arrived at the conclusion that Chesterton was quite mistaken in his views of medieval Northern pagans and Christians. This would therefore not preclude a Chestertonian influence on his vision of Rohan.

As the White Horse symbolized courage, vigilance, and resisting the temptation of despair in Chesterton's vision, Tolkien's vision of the horse-lords has them courageously defending without hope against, in Théoden's words, "such reckless hate" (*TT* 543). Not only does Théoden lead his thanes into battle on a white horse, but so does Gandalf rally Rohan to its own defense while riding white Shadowfax. Gandalf, or the "White Rider," says to Théoden, after the latter's long malaise and stupor, "Your fingers would remember their old strength better, if they grasped a sword-hilt" (*TT* 521). The wizard rides his white horse in H from place to place, counseling kings and giving courage to the weak.

But the clearest suggestion of Chesterton's influence on H is Éomer's response to the temptation of despair on the Pelennor Fields. As will be discussed again in a different context below, the second marshal of the Mark says:

> Stern now was Éomer's mood, and his mind clear again. He let blow the horns to *rally all men to his banner* that could come thither; for he thought to make a great shield-wall at the last, and stand, and fight there on foot till all fell, and do deeds of song on the fields of Pelennor, though no man should be left in the West to remember the last King of the Mark. So he rose to *a green hillock* and there set his banner, and the *White Horse ran rippling in the wind* [emphasis added]. (*RK* 857)

A closer parallel to Chesterton's White Horse is hardly conceivable. The new *de facto* king rallies, like Alfred, disparate and dispirited troops to a banner; and on the banner is a White Horse, which is now thrust into a "green hillock." The éored now see a White Horse on a hill and are called to rally around it.

The horse iconography that permeates H may hold a sentimental value similar to that evoked by the White horse in Chesterton's epic. Chesterton writes:

> For the end of the world was long ago,
> And all we dwell to-day
> As children of some second birth,
> Like a strange people left on earth
> After a judgment day. (I:18-23)

He is of course referring to a Wagnerian "twilight of the gods"; the "we" who "dwell-to-day" live in the post-eschaton of that twilight.

The same could be said for the vantage point from which Tolkien would like his readers to view the events his narrative describes. From this vantage point, the Battle of the Pelennor Fields happened long ago; in fact, it took place at an "end of the world." After setting the White Horse banner in the hill, Éomer cries:

> Out of doubt, out of dark to the day's rising
> I came singing in the sun, sword unsheathing.
> To hope's end I rode and to heart's breaking:
> Now for wrath, now for ruin and a red nightfall! (*RK* 858)

Tolkien's fictional readers are readers of the Fourth Age; they read of events that are said to have taken place at the end of the Third Age. One could very well imagine that an H community is here capitalizing, as Chesterton did, on the national symbolism of the White Horse. The horse iconography thus serves an apocalyptic

role in H. It symbolizes the idealized Anglo-Saxon, fighting courageously against despair.

Horses are sacred in H. And H carefully guards this sanctity with all the fervor with which Éomer guards his own horses. H seals the depravity of orcs when it portrays them eating "horseflesh" (*TT* 454)[43]; this would be something akin to sacrilege and horror within the H community. The closest historical analogue to Tolkien's orcs is the Huns; Jordanes describes the Huns[44] in much the same way that Tolkien describes the orcs (*Letters* 274). Honegger calls them "Huns without horses" ("The Rohirrim" 129). It is thus strange that orcs do not ride horses in H. Perhaps they do not ride horses because the horse symbolism is carefully guarded.[45] In Æ, the Ring-wraiths ride horses, but not in H where they have been shifted onto winged, dragon-like beasts. At the Battle of Pelennor Fields, the Rohirrim and their friends ride horses; their enemies, however, are not seen fighting from their horses; and the few references to the enemy horsemen are so obscured that they are virtually non-existent. Medieval warfare generally pitted cavalry against cavalry, and, in a battle the magnitude of Pelennor Fields, there should have been vast numbers of horsemen on both sides; but in the H narrative this is not how the battle

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[43] According to Fields (*The Hun: Scourge of God, AD 375-565*), the Huns' habit of eating horseflesh "made them vile to the Graeco-Romans," 28.

[44] "There the unclean spirits, who beheld them as they wandered through the wilderness, bestowed their embraces upon them and begat this savage race, which dwelt at first in the swamps—a stunted, foul and puny tribe, scarcely human, and having no language save one which bore but slight resemblance to human speech. Such was the descent of the Huns who came to the country of the Goths" (*Origins*, trans. Charles C. Mierow, 38-9).

[45] The Southrons do employ horsemen in H, but the few references to their horsemen are always buried beneath the lasting image of the Southrons' primary weapon: the mûmakil, or "oliphaunts." And Wormtongue, a Rohirric traitor, does indeed ride a horse. However, in both cases, in H, these riders are human and therefore redeemable.

is portrayed. It is perhaps significant that while narrating the scene in which the Lord of the Nazgûl confronts King Théoden, the text reads:

> The new morning was blotted from the sky. Dark fell about him. Horses reared and screamed…. The great shadow descended like a falling cloud. And behold! it was a winged creature….Upon it sat a shape, black-mantled, huge and threatening….To the air he had returned, summoning his steed ere the darkness failed….But Théoden was not utterly forsaken. The knights of his house lay slain about him, or else mastered by the madness of their steeds were borne far away. (*RK* 850)

"Steed," a term generally referring to horses, here signifies both the fell beast of the enemy and the knights' horses. The presence of this term in reference to the fell beast could be read as an indication that this narrative originally belonged, at least in part, to one of the other traditions. P or Æ's version of this battle would not have had any objection to reporting that, at Rohan's finest hour, Rohan's king and the Witch King met in battle on horseback. In such a case, "steed" could be a lingering relic of an "earlier" Æ or P manuscript that was "accidentally" copied by a later scribe and passed into the otherwise carefully guarded H source.

The H source could be said to be marked by a carefully perpetuated and guarded tradition that celebrates Middle-earth's horse lords. The degree of sanctity the Rohirric historians felt for horses can be felt by the degree to which it transfers Æ and P's heroes to horseback (even at the risk of creating incredulity when it horses Gimli) and unhorses H's villains. This phenomenon suggests a distinct regard within *LotR*'s narrative and could justify a source-critical reading of the story.

Trees and Forest in Literature, History, and H

The pervasiveness of trees and forests throughout *LotR* should not surprise us. The tree was sacrosanct for Tolkien the medievalist. One of Tolkien's friends, George Sayer remembered that Tolkien's "greatest love seemed to be for trees….He would often place his hand on the trunks of ones that we passed" ("Recollections of J. R. R. Tolkien" 22). It would be difficult to overstate the powerful effect that forests and trees had upon the imagination. The Germanic Odenwald, the Roman's Hercynian Forest, Gilgamesh and Enkidu's Amanus (Cedar Forest), the Norse Myrkvðr (which Tolkien borrows for Mirkwood), Robin Hood's Sherwood Forest, Shakespeare's Forest of Arden, Wace's Brocéliande, Spenser's Forest of Error, Dante's *una selva oscura*, and, more recently, Tangle's forest and Winnie the Pooh's Hundred Acre Wood have roots in both history and fantasy. They are forests of the world and of the mind. In the medieval imagination, the tree could be envisioned cosmologically, as was the case with Yggdrasil, the world tree of Norse mythology.[46] "Its branches," says Jafnhar (or Even-high), a manifestation of Odin, "spread over the whole world, and even reach above heaven. It has three roots very wide asunder. One of them extends to the Æsir, another to the Frost-giants…. Everyday they ride up hither on horseback over Bifröst (the rainbow)" (Snorri, *Prose Edda* 271). It could even be used as a personification, as it is in the "Dream of the Rood." Here, the Tree is a semi-divine warrior-hero who helps to effect salvation for believers.[47] In a

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[46] I know an ash standing Yggdrasil hight, a lofty tree, laved with limpid water: thence come the dews into the dales that fall; ever stands it green over Urd's fountain (trans. by Thorpe, *Voluspa* 19).

[47] "Then, in happy spirit and with much fortitude I worshipped that tree there where I was, alone with little company. My spirit was aroused to the onward way and experienced many longings. It is now my hope of life that I be allowed to approach the tree of victory…and honour it abundantly.

dream-vision, the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet gives voice to the Tree that was cut down by violent men and used to crucify Christ.[48]

LotR's trees possess many of these same qualities, and this is especially true in the H narrative. In H, stories and histories proceed from and orbit around an arboreal epicenter. Two trees form the heart of his legendarium: Telperion and Laurelin ("Silver Tree" and "Gold Tree") light Valinor and are the greater predecessors of the sun and moon (which are to be viewed wherever they appear in the narratives of Middle-earth as gracious, but diminished, shadows of a purer light

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Determination for that is great in my mind and my support is directly in the Cross." (*Anglo-Saxon Poetry* 163)

[48] While the allure of relics—especially the relic of the True Cross—may be at work here: the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* claims that the *lignum domini*, a fragment of the Cross, was given by Pope Marinus to Alfred the Great in 883. However, the poet may also be thinking historically. Elizabeth Dodd sees in the Rood the enfolding of the "pattern of Christianity's destruction of the older, pagan world." The forests, she writes, were felled to "silence their inhabiting gods" so that the Tree of Christianity could tower over the now silent lands ("The Scribe in the Woods" 12). She seems to have a valid historical argument. According to Willibald, in approximately 724, during the reign of Charles Martel, Saint Boniface used a sacred tree, Donar's Oak, as a demonstration of the pagan gods' incomparability to the Christian God:

> With the advice and counsel of these last, the saint attempted, in the place called Gaesmere, while the servants of God stood by his side, to fell a certain oak of extraordinary size, which is called, by an old name of the pagans, the Oak of Jupiter. And when in the strength of his steadfast heart he had cut the lower notch, there was present a great multitude of pagans, who in their souls were earnestly cursing the enemy of their gods. But when the fore side of the tree was notched only a little, suddenly the oak's vast bulk, driven by a blast from above, crashed to the ground, shivering its crown of branches as it fell; and, as if by the gracious compensation of the Most High, it was also burst into four parts, and four trunks of huge size, equal in length, were seen, unwrought by the brethren who stood by. At this sight the pagans who before had cursed now, on the contrary, believed, and blessed the Lord, and put away their former reviling. Then moreover the most holy bishop, after taking counsel with the brethren, built from the timber of the tree wooden oratory, and dedicated it in honor of Saint Peter the apostle. (Robinson's translation in *The Life of Saint Boniface* 63)

In a stroke the tree becomes what it always was: a house of God. No attempt is made here to suggest that the pagans had mistaken the sanctity of the tree. They had only misidentified to whom it was truly sacred.[48]

now extinguished) (*Silmarillion* 26). The Silmarils that structure the plot of the "Valequenta" ("The Silmarillion" proper) take their light from these trees; and a last residue of their light fills the phial of Galadriel, which Frodo carries (*TT* 720). Tree-imagery is not confined to one tradition in *LotR*.

The H tradition, however, *highlights* Tolkien's love of trees. In medieval England, a tree, in the form of the Rood, could become a suffering but victorious hero; but the term "rood" not only signified Christ's cross. At some point "rood" became animated enough in the imagination to double in language as "face."[49] For Tolkien's H, trees have faces. H's narrator expresses the hobbits' surprise at seeing Treebeard: "he found that they were looking at a most extraordinary face. It belonged to a large Man-like, almost Troll-like, figure….The lower part of the long face was covered with a sweeping grey beard, busy, almost twiggy at the roots." In a line further suggestive of the medieval gloss, among Treebeard's first words are: "Turn round and let me have a look at your faces" (*TT* 466).

In the beginning, the Old Forest resembles Mirkwood in *TH*; it is dangerous and yet a necessary matrix of adventure. The hobbits of Buckland have a history of needing to keep the trees from overtaking Buckland. Old Man Willow is wicked. However, there is a significant shift in H's narration of trees. Frodo's walking song: "O! Wanderers in the shadowed land" is interrupted ominously (and tellingly) by "For east or west all woods must fail…" (*FR* 111). In H, the forest becomes more than a stage prop and place of adventure; it becomes a character itself. After their

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[49] Now goth sonne under wod: / Me reweth, Marye, *thy faire rode*. / Now goth sonne under Tre: / Me reweth, Marye, thy sonne and the [emphasis added]. Davies (ed.), *Medieval English Lyrics*, lyric 6, 54.

encounter with Old Man Willow, whom Tom Bombadil merely treats as an obedient, but undisciplined watchdog (*FR* 120), the trees assume a more positive role in the story.

Bombadil is something of a personification of nature and the talking trees. He sings as much as, or more than, the Rohirrim; and he is as uninvolved and provincial as Treebeard when the hobbits meet him. In fact, he may have been a prototype of Treebeard. In *Treason of Isengard*, the reader will notice that, in Tolkien's thinking, Treebeard and Tom Bombadil appear to have been closely linked. One of his drafts of a conversation between Pippin and Treebeard goes as follows:

> 'What about Tom Bombadil, though?' Asked Pippin. 'He lives on the Downs close by. He seems to understand trees.'
>
> 'What about whom?' said Treebeard. 'Tombombadil? Tombombadil? So that is what you call him. Oh, he has got a very long name. He understands trees, right enough; but he is not an Ent. He is no herdsman. He laughs and does not interfere. He never made anything go wrong, but he never cured anything, either. Why, why, it is all the difference between walking in the fields and trying to keep a garden; between, between passing the time of a day to a sheep on the hillside, or even maybe sitting down and studying sheep til you know that they feel about grass, and being a shepherd….' (*Treason* 416)

On the draft of this passage, Christopher Tolkien speculates:

> It would be interesting to know why Treebeard's knowledge of and estimate of Tom Bombadil was removed. Conceivably, my father felt that the contrast between Bombadil and the Ents developed here confused the conflict between the Ents and the Entwives; or, it may be, it was precisely this passage that gave rise to the idea of that conflict. (*Treason* 419-20)

Tom Bombadil seems like an aberration in *LotR*. He plays no role in the plot; and while many delight in his musical and whimsical prose, he can seem like a side-trail that Tolkien wrote for his own amusement.[50] But if he is viewed as one of the characters of H, the reader will notice that he foreshadows Treebeard and the Ents. The Ents—who, like Bombadil, are shepherds of their forests—are also visited by the hobbits and asked to assist in the War; but unlike Bombadil, the Ents do not refuse to play a role in the war against evil. Nevertheless Bombadil and the Ents are in many ways mirrors of each other.

In Æ, the Party Tree is a sentimental placeholder. Beneath this tree, Bilbo gives his birthday speech and then disappears (*FR* 30). The sadness with which the hobbits' return to the Shire at the end of the tale becomes especially palpable when they see the Party Tree cut down (*RK* 1029). On their journey to the Grey Havens, Sam points out the same tree-bole in the Green Hills that Frodo hid behind while being stalked by the Black Rider at the beginning of their story (*RK* 1039). Reinforcing the sense of "return" that is so essential to quests, these trees in Æ form an *inclusio*. Both Æ and P make use of the mallorn tree. In Æ, Caras Galadhon, the city built within, and out of, the mallorn-trees at the center of Lothlórien, is one of Middle-earth's great spectacles. The White Tree (a mallorn tree) heralds the kings of Númenor and Gondor. However, it is only in H that trees, or tree-like figures, talk. This is especially unusual, considering that the trees of Lothlórien belong to Æ's elvish mythology. Elves were said to have taught trees how to speak (*TT* 475). One would assume therefore that the trees which serve as home to the Wood Elves

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[50] Whenever I teach Tolkien literature, students invariably make this observation.

would know how to speak and would be depicted as speaking. But they do not. Instead, it is the trees of the Old Forest and the Forest of Fangorn (which are not said to be inhabited by elves) that do the talking. A source-critical reading of *LotR* would explain this oddity by simply suggesting that the talking tree belongs solely to the imaginative lore of the H community.

Trees in H, unlike their counterparts in Æ and P, serve as educators and caretakers. The forest of Fangorn is at once a world-class library of memories and a philological academy. Its inhabitants mourn the decay of the world, the loss of fellow trees, and the gradual, but inexorable, silencing of what was once a babel of voices, languages, and "lists" amongst the savant tree-herders. Here in the forest where the trees can speak, H meditates upon the power latent within words to work back-*words* from word to language, from language to legend, and from legend to history. Shippey notes how Tolkien has inverted a more typical creative process by beginning with a word:

> Tolkien did not draw [the Riders of Rohan] into a fiction he had already written because there they might be useful, though that is what he pretended. He wrote the fiction to present the languages, and he did that because he loved them and thought them intrinsically beautiful. Maps, names, and languages came before plot. Elaborating them was in a sense Tolkien's way of building up enough steam to get rolling; but they had also in a sense provided the motive to want to. They were 'inspiration' and 'invention' at once, or perhaps more accurately, by turns. (*Road* 117)

It may be significant that Fangorn forest lies on the border of Rohan, the land of the horse lords. More importantly, it should be remembered here that LotR's prologue mentions that one of Merry's principal works is *Old Words and Names in the Shire*

(*TT* 563). What the elvish words over the Moria gate (as discussed in the previous chapter) are to Æ, the forest—and specifically Fangorn—is to H. It is a gateway to adventure and discovery. The Old Forest, which lies on the border of the familiar Shire, launches the Fellowship into adventure; and Fangorn Forest introduces Merry to the people for whom he will soon serve as historian.

Leaf by Niggle*, the Tree of Amalion, and Treebeard in H*

When Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli (the "three hunters") pursue the hobbits who have been taken by the orcs, an elven brooch in the form of a tree-leaf cunningly left on the ground as a breadcrumb by Pippin tells a story and leads the hunters to the men of Rohan. The discovery of a leaf tells a story and leads to a series of stories—or to a larger story. This would be a familiar pattern for a philologist, who meets the past and uncovers lost histories in the etymologies of single words. This is precisely what Tolkien believed he had done when he discovered that Attila the Hun's name was in fact not a Hunnish term, but was instead a Gothic term for "father" (*Letters* 264). For Tolkien, this opened a whole new vista onto the history of the ignominious Hun (Shippey, *Road* 16). The episode of the three hunters' discovery is part of a larger pattern; it may be a microcosm of H as a whole. The hobbits' entry into the Old Forest and Fangorn open the horizons to larger histories. Treebeard is both a philologist of sorts and a gateway for Merry to Rohan.

A discussion of the "organic" nature of Tolkien's art, and specifically of the material that informs what I am calling "H," may be brought into sharper focus by a discussion of what may be Treebeard's direct artistic predecessors: the tree in *Leaf*

by Niggle and the "Tree of Amalion," or the "Tree of Tales."[51] *Leaf by Niggle* (originally entitled *The Tree*) is an allegory of the individual artist—a preoccupation of Romanticism (Ellison, "The 'Why' and 'How': Reflections on 'Leaf by Niggle'"). Tolkien, of course, denied that it was an allegory (he made a habit of denying the obvious); though he confessed, "some elements are explicable in biographical terms," he preferred to call it "mythical," since it is "meant to be a real mixed-quality person [Niggle]" (*Letters* 320-1). However, Shippey, being less averse to allegory than Tolkien, calls it a "little allegory" (*Road* 43). Tolkien wrote this story just as he had begun to write *LotR* (approximately 1939). He had intended to continue and finish his expansive Silmarillion mythology, but then in the process of creating a sequel to *TH*, he found the horizons of his legendarium expanding ominously into unknown regions. Confronted by this, along with the continued everyday burdens of holding an Oxford chair and the horror of WWII now in full swing, he began to suspect that he would never be able to complete, much less perfect, the work of his heart.

Perhaps to illustrate this frustration he created Niggle, a somewhat pathetic figure, who is never appreciated for his art—neither in life nor after his death. The image with which his work begins is a simple "leaf caught in the wind." However, this image is merely the seed of a vision that expands to encompass never-ending horizons. He paints the leaf, but in order to capture the true beauty of the leaf he

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[51] This tree appeared on the cover of Tolkien's *Tree and Leaf* in 1964 (Hammond and Scull, *Artist and Illustrator* 64-67), and Tolkien seems to have directly alluded to it in "On Fairy Stories": "It is easy for the student to feel that with all his labour he is collecting only a few leaves, many of them now torn or decayed, from the countless foliage of the Tree of Tales, with which the Forest of Days is carpeted" (371).

must paint the tree to which it belongs. And this of course leads him to consider the tree's context: the forest, the countryside, the sun in the sky, and the mountains in the distance. He never seems to be able to find closure for his vision. He either loses interest in his "older pictures" or tacks them to the edges of his now giant canvas.

If Niggle's vision has, much to his regret, no limits, his life certainly does. He must go "on a journey." And this (terminal) journey ever presses upon him; he knows it must be taken soon, but while his time is decreasing his vision grows. At last he runs out of time and goes on his "journey," which turns out to be a period of convalescence and healing, followed by an eternal exploration of the vision he has constructed in life. The striking aspect of this allegory is the generative power of the leaf and tree. In nature, the leaf comes last; for Niggle, it comes first. The leaf is the root of the tree.

The leaf and tree symbolize the inherent connectedness of stories within the fabric of the western world. Kocher states:

> Figuratively [Niggle's leaf] stands for any single story taken out of a greater connected body of narratives; and also for this one story of Tolkien's…seen in detachment from the whole body of his writing. The other symbol, 'Tree,' stands sometimes for that same whole body of Tolkien writing, but more often for the living, growing tradition of fairy stories in general…. (*Master of Middle-earth* 162)

The leaf (folium) represents the page, or more broadly, a single story, a thread, narrative, or poem. The tree then links and sustains the various leaves on the tree. Niggle's attempt to portray a single leaf results in him portraying many leaves; the storyteller, in order to tell his or her story well, discovers the presence of other leaves. The "Tree of Amalion" is a figure that artistically signifies the

interconnectedness of literature (see fig. 2). In a letter to Rayner Unwin, Tolkien wrote:

> I have among my 'papers' more than one version of a mythical 'tree,' which crops up regularly at those times when I feel driven to pattern-designing. They are elaborated and coloured and more suitable for embroidery than printing; and the tree bears besides various shapes of leaves many flowers small and large signifying poems and major legends. (*Letters* 342)

Fig. 2. *The Tree of Amalion*, by J. R. R. Tolkien. 1928. Google Images. Web. 22 November 2014. (See Hammond and Scull, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Artist & Illustrator* 64-5.)

The end of the letter—though it seems to allude to other business in Tolkien's mind and ties up a loose thread for the letter's recipient—illustrates exactly the kinds of troubles that haunted Niggle:

> Yes—the Silmarillion is growing in the mind (I do not mean getting larger, but coming back to leaf & I hope flower) again. But I am still not through with Gawain etc. A troublous year, of endless distraction and much weariness, ending with the blow of C. S. L.'s death. (*Letters* 342).

Tolkien's legendarium is coming into sharper focus here and "putting forth leaves"; however, other related duties are pressing upon him. And worst of all, in the death of his lifelong friend, he is given a fresh reminder that "the journey" is drawing nigh for him as well.

Like Niggle's leaf and the Tree of Amalion, Tolkien's Treebeard ably represents the record-keeper, the taleteller, the historian, and the lexicon for the languages of Middle-earth. One could almost think of him as Niggle's tree and leaf; or better yet, the Tree of Tales: the subject that ultimately draws other objects into its orbit or leads from story to a tradition of stories. Rivendell is the great library of Middle-earth for Æ; but Fangorn is the hall of records for H. When asked who and what he is, he says,

> [W]ell, I am an Ent, or that's what they call me. Yes, Ent is the word. *The* Ent, I am, you might say, in your manner of speaking. Fangorn is my name according to some, Treebeard others make it. Treebeard will do. (*TT* 467)

His adaptability and dexterity with language is clear from the beginning. Hobbits speak Westron, or the Common Speech, a "Mannish" language; however, their

vocabulary retains snatches of the hobbits' own ancient native language, which is also a Mannish language, but it is the language of the "upper Anduin," that is, the same region of which the Rohirrim are native (*RK* 1138). Thus there is some degree of familiarity between the Rohirric language and the particular dialect of the two hobbits' Common Speech; Appendix F states that the two languages closely resembled one another primarily in the names for their days, months, years, personal names, place-names, and "several other words of the same sort (such as *mathom* and *smial*)" (*RK* 1138).

When Théoden finally meets the hobbits, he exclaims, "Hobbits? …Your tongue is strangely changed; but the name sounds not unfitting so. Hobbits! No report that I have heard does justice to the truth" (*TT* 562). In other words, the king of Rohan recognizes in the hobbits' speech traces of his own language. So when Treebeard has heard the hobbits speak, he identifies himself in the language of Rohan: "Yes, Ent is the word. The Ent, I am, *you* might say, in *your* manner of speaking [emphasis mine]." Ent is an Anglo-Saxon word; or, within Middle-earth, a Rohirric word. He seems to have recognized, after having heard their conversation for only a few minutes, the distant link between the language of the hobbits and that of the Rohirrim. Treebeard then names himself in Sindarin (*Fangorn*) and in the Common Speech (*Treebeard*).

He educates the hobbits. In the words of the Ent, "Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to in my language, in the Old Entish as you might say." He fuses name and history in surprising ways. Names, which are given at birth, do not usually reflect the history of the ones who bears them. But "real" names, he

insists, add, evolve, grow with time. And in iterating the full "real" name, the length of the name imitates, or suggests, the length of the name's life. Likewise, attenuated names connote "fading": "Do not risk getting entangled in the woods of Laurelindórenan! That is what the Elves used to call it, but now they make the name shorter: Lothlórien they call it. Perhaps they are right: maybe it is fading, not growing" (*TT* 47). Tolkien's friend and fellow Inkling, Owen Barfield captures the living nature of language when he writes: "full meanings of words are flashing, iridescent shapes like flames—ever-flickering vestiges of the slowly evolving consciousness beneath them"(*Diction* 75). This is an apt description of H's "unhasty" Treebeard.[52] Like the leaf that leads the three hunters to their great adventures, so do Treebeard and the forests of H serve as the gateway to its histories.

Old Tales Come to Life

For Tolkien, words lived dynamically within a continuum. Words are the amber in which not only history is preserved, but words also preserve lost linkages between realities that are now estranged from one another but once formed a creative whole.[53] This animated, or rather re-animated, quality of language springs

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[52] Treebeard is not always accurate—as books, tales, or even collections of tales are not always accurate. For instance, his "old lists," which, like the lists in the Anglo-Saxon poem, "Maxim II" (*Anglo-Saxon Poetry* 512-15), seems to promise a rational and comprehensive record of (among other things) earth's creatures, their traits, and their proper dwellings, fails to record the existence of hobbits—who not only will be responsible for saving the forest by awakening it to the reality of its coming destruction, but who will also likewise save Middle-earth. However, he teaches the hobbits of the great antiquity of Middle-earth, its peoples, its forests; he acquaints them with its languages, alludes to many of its tales, and tells them of the time when wizards first came.

[53] Barfield also stated, "in a word here and a word there we trace but the final stages of a vast, age-long metamorphosis from the kind of outlook which we loosely describe as 'mythological' to the kind which we may describe equally loosely as 'intellectual thought'" (*History in English Words* 88).

to life in Treebeard, and it characterizes H as a whole. H's description of Gandalf's mortal combat with the Balrog is charged with the poet's power of re-animation:

> 'There was none to see, or perhaps in after ages songs would still be sung of the Battle of the Peak.' Suddenly Gandalf laughed. 'But what would they say in song? Those that looked up from afar thought that the mountain was crowned with storm. Thunder they heard, and lightning, they said, smote upon Celebdil, and leaped back broken into tongues of fire.' (*TT* 506)

Is it Gandalf this theoretical audience sees? Is it lightning? Or both? In terms of the character Treebeard, the reality that once associated *leaf* (Latin: folio) with the *page* (folio) or poetry (in the word folio), and *beech* with *book* has in the course of time allowed these concepts to grow estranged from one another; but in Treebeard they come suddenly together. In the Middle-earth of H, the book, the page literally speaks again. Many years of neglect by the good peoples of Middle-earth, the axes of the orcs, and treacherous Saruman's tree-fed fires have shaped the Ent's voice into that of a sometimes sullen, but still good-natured, rambler. It is as if the oldest book in a pile of books gathered to be burned has been given a voice. If it were to speak, perhaps it would speak as one abandoned by the world around it; and when asked why the other books in the pile do not speak, it might answer, as Treebeard does, that they have gone "tree-ish." That is to say, they have lost the potent mythopoeic magic that once allowed leaf and poem, *beech* and *book* to be one and the same thing. They have resigned themselves to the categories created by the purely intellectual side of human speech, which demands that trees are trees and books are books, and never shall they meet.

But in H, Pippin and Merry have found their way into this forest. If Treebeard teaches them a thing or two about the world that once was, the hobbits become catalysts for the trees' re-entry into the present—and participation in the great apocalyptic events of their latter days. When the hobbits first enter the forest, they meet a moping and moribund Ent who gathers bits and pieces of news of the world outside the forest; but he has, much to the detriment of his kin, become rather narrow and merely defensive: "I am on nobody's side because nobody is on my side."[54] The Ents are withdrawing from the world.[55] But with the arrival of the

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[54] Worst of all, Treebeard has resigned himself to the fact that, "[s]ome of my kin look just like trees now, and need something great to rouse them: and they speak only in whispers" (*TT* 471). Middle-earth, for all its richness, is much the poorer for this. Like histories or poetry written in barely understood languages or faded and brittle with time, these record-keepers of Middle-earth have been reduced to "whispers." The hobbits, however, will serve as catalysts, compelling them to re-engage their world.

Writing of the epistemological revolution reflected in the advent of the novel, Bakhtin states,

> The epic past is called the "absolute past" for good reason: it is both monochronic and valorized (hierarchical); it lacks any relativity, that is, any gradual, purely temporal progressions that might connect it with the present. It is walled off absolutely from all subsequent times, and above all from those times in which the singer and his listeners are located. This boundary, consequently, is immanent in the form of the epic itself and is felt and heard in its every word. (*The Dialogic Imagination* 15-16)

In contrast to this, when the epic (and older genres) encounters the sweeping vortex of the novel: "the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)" (14). Bakhtin would later describe this process as an engagement with "reality itself in the process of its unfolding." The arboreal metaphor "unfolding" is particularly germane in the context of the function that trees serve in H. What Bakhtin writes of the "epic past" could be said of Fangorn forest. Many of its speakers are going "treeish" and losing their voices; and even those who continued to speak have allowed their language to become inaccessible to the present.

[55] Their story of withdrawal and re-engagement with the world resembles King Orfeo's withdrawal and re-engagement in *Sir Orfeo*. Dominique Battles demonstrates that the poet who composed this poem, apart from re-imagining the old legend in a late thirteenth or early fourteenth century context, in telling his story, drew upon a non-classical source. That source, he claims, was King Alfred's Old English translation and adaptation of the aforementioned Boethius's *Consolatione*, which contains an adaption of Ovid's story of Orpheus and Eurydice. Battles's chief support for this claim is the fact that *Sir Orfeo*'s protagonist responds to the loss of his wife by going into voluntary exile in the forest (or wilderness). This significant detail is without precedent in any version of the

hobbits, who are at once modern and strange legends from the past, the forest re-enters the present and makes "living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality." In H, Merry embarks upon a kind of philological study in Fangorn before discovering the mythology and history of Rohan. Symbolically, the student of history—especially the student of a vanquished culture like the Anglo-Saxons—must embark first upon a study of language. Philology becomes a vector or effective approach to history.[56]

In H, the songs adults in Rohan teach "only to children, as a careless custom" (*TT* 554) roar back to life: "Though Isengard be strong and hard, as cold as stone and bare as bone, / We go, we go, we go to war, to hew the stone and break the door!" (*TT* 569).

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tale of Orpheus—with the exception of King Alfred's version of the tale: "Then that harper grew so sad that he could not be among other men, but withdrew to the forest and sat upon the hills both day and night" (Battles, "*Sir Orfeo* and English Identity" 198-199).

[56] The metal-minded, cutting-edge, technocrat Saruman, with his machines and legions of genetically enhanced and mutated Uruk-Hai, will find himself overwhelmed by an awakened forest. The hobbits ride the Ents like horses into Isengard and cleanse the land of all that is destructive. In what may have been something of a personal fantasy of Tolkien, symbolically, the now novelized communicative epic past (what Bakhtin calls "extraliterary heteroglossia")—its poetry, its values, its languages—is reimagined and reawakened; and in the process, it proves more than capable of reasserting its right to exist against the destructive forces that march under the banner of "progress."

The old tales had, like old forests, found themselves cut down and used to feed the fires of Middle-earth industrialization. Something very much like this was happening in Tolkien's day. For Tolkien, the Nazis had hijacked Norse mythology and used its tales to mobilize Germans and conquer much of Europe. They appropriated Norse myths (as told by mythmakers from Snorri to Wagner) and adapted them, as McClatchie observes, to serve as allegories, symbols, soundtracks, and propaganda for the Third Reich ("Götterdämerung, Führerdämmerung?" 190). Pictures of panzers plowing through peaceful farmlands and rolling over the carcasses of the horses and their Czechoslovakian riders who had ridden out to engage them blazed into the nightmares of British citizens. Tolkien was no fonder of the idea of meeting technological prowess with equal prowess. The Fellowship must not use the Enemy's weapon. It was hoped something more primal would arise and avenge so lopsided a reality. In Middle-earth, anyway, Tolkien's "legends" have their revenge

Horse and Tree Pairings in Literature and Tolkien's Fiction

In spite of his later discomfort with the connection between Rohan and the Anglo-Saxons, Tolkien insists on retaining a loose tether between history and his fictive world by tracing the ancestors of Rohan to someone with a (Latinized) Gothic name, Vidugavia. Appendix A describes this figure as an ancient king of Rhovanion and a friend of Romendacil, king of Gondor. Under the leadership of Vidugavia's descendant, Eorl, the Éothéod (that is, the people who would later be called the Rohirrim) migrate to Rohan (*RK* 1075). Fisher notes that the name *Vidugavia* denotes "forest-dweller" and his wife's name "Marhari," "contains the Gothic element *marh = "horse (123-124). The horse and forest themes come strangely together again, suggesting that the two symbols were somehow associated in Tolkien's mind and played a significant role in creatively generating the narrative of H.

There is some precedent for this literary crystallization. It occurs curiously in the name of the Cosmic or World Tree of Norse mythology: Yggdrasil. There is some dispute over the etymology of the word, but it has commonly been interpreted as *Odin's horse*. The *OED*'s etymology of the word, though indicating its obscure origins, continues to perpetuate this definition in the following entry: "Old Norse *yg(g)drasill*, also *askr yg(g)drasils* lit. ash-tree of *Yggdrasil* (*Yggr* name of Odin + *drasill* horse; but the formation is obscure" ("Yggdrasil," *OED* Online). The *OED*'s definition is further confirmed by stanza 138 in the *Elder Edda*'s *Hóvamól*:

> I know that I hung on the windy tree
> Nine nights throughout,
> Wounded by spear, sacrificed to Odin,
> Myself to myself,

> On the mighty tree, of which men do not know
> From what roots it springs. (Sivert N. Hagen's translation, "The Origin and Meaning of the Name Yggdrasil" 59)

The "windy tree" is taken to refer to Yggdrasil, but it has also been theorized that this stanza is responsible for giving rise to the name. Snorri may have created a new kenning (or made use of an already existing one) out of the image of Odin hanging from a tree. *Horse* is often a kenning for *gallows* in skaldic poetry (Hagen, 60). Snorri, or even the earlier author(s) of the *Elder Edda*, could have very easily then smuggled in the idea of Christ's self-sacrifice and envisioned the tree upon which Odin hung himself as a pagan equivalent of Calvary or the Tree of Life. If so, *Odin's horse* would refer to the world-tree—or the tree that upholds and sustains the universe. It is also possible that the translation is based on some anonymous Norseman's misunderstanding of Latin texts containing stories of the Christian cross (Hagen, 67-8). Ironically, in this story Odin's horse goes by another name. It is to the third root of Yggdrasil that Odin rides along with the other gods to sit in judgment. The name of Odin's eight-legged horse is *Sleipnir*. Snorri carefully enumerated the other horses as well: Gladr, Gyllir, Glær, Skeidbrimmir, Silfrintoppr, Synir, Gils, Falhofnir, Gulltroppr, and Lettfeti (*The Eddas* 271). Whatever its relevance to the identity of Odin's horse, Tolkien surely would have been aware of this kenning, and it may have contributed to the frequent pairing of these ideas in H.

The horse and forest symbols are most clearly crystalized in one particular reference in H to Tolkien's *Silmarillion* mythology. On the Pelennor Fields, just as Merry discovers that Rohan has arrived too late to save the burning city of Gondor,

morning comes, the wind changes direction, and an unexplained sound rumbles over the Field. At this, the narrator states:

> At that sound the bent shape of the king sprang suddenly erect. Tall and proud he seemed again; and rising in his stirrups he cried in a loud voice, more clear than any there had ever heard a mortal man achieve before:
>
> *Arise, arise, Riders of Théoden!*
> *Fell deeds awake: fire and slaughter!*
> *spear shall be shaken, shield be splintered,*
> *a sword-day, a red day, ere the sun rises!*
> *Ride now, ride now! Ride to Gondor!*
>
> With that he seized a great horn from Guthláf his banner-bearer, and he blew such a blast upon it that it burst asunder. And straightway all the horns in the host were lifted up in music, and the blowing of the horns of Rohan in that hour was like a storm upon the plain and a thunder in the mountains…. Suddenly the king cried to Snowmane and the horse sprang away. Behind him his banner blew in the wind, white horse upon a field of green, but he outpaced it…. and the front of the first éored roared like a breaker foaming to the shore, but Théoden could not be overtaken. Fey he seemed, or the battle-fury of his fathers ran like new fire in his veins, and he was borne up on Snowmane like a god of old, *even as Oromë the Great in the battle of the Valar when the world was young*. His golden shield was uncovered, and lo! it shone like an image of the Sun, and the grass flamed into green about the *white feet of his steed* [emphasis added]. (*RK* 847-8)

Not only do we have here an extremely rare reference in the main narrative of *LotR* to one of the demiurgic gods of Middle-earth, but we also have a human manifestation of a mythological narrative. In *The Silmarillion* (specifically the "Valanquenta"), Oromë is first described as a "mighty lord who:

> loved Middle-earth, and he left them unwillingly and came last to Valinor; and often of old he passed back east over the mountains and returned with his host to the hills and the plains. He is a hunter of monsters and fell beasts, *and he delights in horses* and in hounds; *and*

> *all trees he loves*, for which reason he is called Aldaron, and by the Sindar Tauron, the Lord of Forests. Nahar is the name of his horse, white in the sun, and shining silver at night. The Valaróma is the name of his great horn, the sound of which is like the upgoing of the Sun in scarlet, or the sheer lightning clearing the clouds [emphasis added]. (17)

The parallels between Théoden's ride and the description of Oromë are as follows: Both ride a white horse; both hunt "fell beasts" (Théoden will soon face the Witch-king on a fell beast); they frequent hills and plains (Rohan is described as such a place); they are described as using a horn before battle; and both compel their narrators to conjure up similes of the sun to express their martial ferocity (Théoden, who rides with the sunrise toward his enemies, bears a shield that shines "like an image of the Sun"; Oromë's horn is said to signal the "upgoing of the Sun"). Why Oromë is said to spend his time in Middle-earth on the "hills and plains" and is yet called "the Lord of Forests" goes unexplained. More importantly, "hills and plains" well describes the land of the Rohan—a land that is bordered by the great forests of Middle-earth.

The final words of H are, appropriately, the words of Treebeard to the Fellowship, which is on horseback: "Well, good-bye….And don't forget that if you hear any news of the Entwives in your land, you will send word to me." Then he waved his great hands to all the company and went off into the trees" (*RK* 994). Such is the end of this tradition's contribution to *LotR*. Having begun with the hobbits' entry into the Old Forest and hearing the trees talk, the story ends with a talking tree, or the "Tree of Tales," who, after saying goodbye to humans and elves, disappears forever into the silent forest.

The horse and forest iconography embody two important loci through which Tolkien chooses to explore his historical and philological interests. The mythology he intended to provide for England is brought to fruition in H. Rohan is not England—it is rather mythical England, or, more precisely a part of mythical England. In Rohan, the Old Forest, and Fangorn, the dangerous and yet essential medieval forests combine with the heroic equine culture of barbarian pan-Germania to create an England that never quite existed—except in the imagination.

Ancient and Medieval Funerary Christian and Pagan Practices and Funerals in H

Tolkien claimed that death is the overarching theme of *LotR*: "the mystery of the love of the world in the hearts of a race 'doomed' to leave and seemingly lose it [and] the anguish in the hearts of a race 'doomed' not to leave it, until the whole evil-aroused story is complete" (*Letters* 186). Though death is the prevailing theme of the work as a whole, H narrates the theme in sharp distinction from the Æ and P traditions. While sadness overshadows death in H, H also "celebrates" and solemnizes death in a way that the other traditions do not. The emphasis upon memory and celebration of the dead in H is so important that its narrator will bring all other action to heel in an effort to highlight funerary practices.

In Æ, the Fellowship gathers in the Chamber of Mazarbul and sees Balin's tomb. The memorial for the fallen dwarf consists solely of Gimli pulling his hood over his face in sorrow (*FR* 321). In Æ, Frodo, Sam, and Gollum pass through perhaps the largest graveyard in Middle-earth, the so-called Dead Marshes, but

when Sam asks the identity of the dead, Frodo answers appropriately, "I don't know"; only Gollum knows anything about them:

> All dead, all rotten. Elves and Men and Orcs. The Dead Marshes. There was a great battle long ago, yes, so they told him when Sméagol was young, when I was young before the Precious came. It was a great battle. Tall Men with long swords, and terrible Elves, and Orcses shrieking. They fought on the plain for days and months at the Black Gates. But the Marshes have grown since then, swallowed up the graves; always creeping, creeping. (*TT* 634)

This is in sharp contrast to the Rohirric minstrel who knows the names and epithets of those who died long ago: "Then a minstrel and loremaster stood up and named all the names of the Lords of the Mark in their order: Eorl the Young; and Brego builder of the Hall; and Aldor brother of Baldor the hapless…" (*RK* 989).

In Æ, hobbits die in defense of the Shire ("The Scouring of the Shire"), but there is no elaborate funerary practice to adorn the narrative:

> At last all was over. Nearly seventy of the ruffians lay dead on the field, and a dozen were prisoners. Nineteen hobbits were killed, and some thirty were wounded. The dead ruffians were laden on waggons and hauled off to an old sand-pit nearby and there buried: in the Battle Pit, as it was afterwards called. The fallen hobbits were laid together in a grave on the hill-side, where later a great stone was set up with a garden about it. So ended the Battle of Bywater" (*RK* 1028).

In P, the slain are buried—but unceremoniously. Denethor dies wreathed in flames; all that is said in eulogy is, "So passes Denethor, son of Ecthelion" (*RK* 865). There is of course no body to bury; neither is there time at present for a eulogy: the city is being besieged. However, if some funerary ritual took place later, the reader is never made aware of it. While seeking the City of the Dead, Aragorn comes to the Haunted

Mountain; and, upon entering the Door of the Dead, he sees a mail-clad corpse (which we later learn is that of Baldor son of Brego, who apparently died quite literally a prisoner to his own rash vow). His skeleton lies against the Door through which he could not escape. The narrator says:

> Aragorn did not touch him, but after gazing silently for a while he rose and sighed. 'Hither shall the flowers of simbelmynë come never unto world's end,' he murmured. 'Nine mounds and seven there are now green with grass, and through all the long years he has lain at the door that he could not unlock. Whither does it lead? Why would he pass? None shall ever know!' (*RK* 797)

Thus a few words are said for the dead man, but Aragorn's words speak more to the corpse's solitude. This could be read as either an H or a P eulogy. I would suggest that it is part of a P narrative. But given its distinctly Rohirric arrangement ("nine mounds and seven," an arrangement that will be discussed below), it could instead be read as an insertion by the compiler Tolkien from his H sources.

In Æ, the elves of Lothlórien mourn Gandalf, chanting, "Mithrandir, Mithrandir, O Pilgrim Grey!" But, as Forest-Hill has observed, Legolas refuses to translate their songs. While they chant, a eulogy to Gandalf takes shape in Frodo's mind, but, again, his song is "inhibited and curtailed" (Forest-Hill, "Boromir, Byrhtnoth" 83):

> When evening in the Shire was grey
> his footsteps on the Hill were heard;
> before the dawn he went away
> on journey long without a word.
>
> From Wilderland to Western shore,
> from northern waste to southern hill,
> through dragon-lair and hidden door
> and darkling woods he walked at will.

With Dwarf and Hobbit, Elves and Men,
with mortal and immortal folk,
with bird on bough and beast in den,
in their own secret tongues he spoke.

A deadly sword, a healing hand,
a back that bent beneath its load;
a trumpet-voice, a burning brand,
a weary pilgrim on the road.

A lord of wisdom throned he sat,
swift in anger, quick to laugh;
an old man in a battered hat
who leaned upon a thorny staff.

He stood upon the bridge alone
and Fire and Shadow both defied;
his staff was broken on the stone,
in Khazad-dûm his wisdom died. (*FR* 361-2)

There are no funeral practices described here (though, again, there is no body to cremate or bury). It is the lengthiest memorial outside of H, and it stands in contrast to the practices commonly described in H in which the language of grief is given its fullest expression.

There are primarily two basic forms of burial in H: ship burials and mound burials. In H's imitation of Anglo-Saxon cultural forms, elaborate and deeply emotive eulogies tend to accompany these burials. When H depicts a funerary scene, the symbolism is chiefly borrowed from pagan practices and attitudes—though, as we shall see, a few Christian rites appear just beneath the surface.

Burial rites in pre-Christian Northern Europe are more difficult to explicate than those of medieval European Christianity. These early cultures primarily transmitted their traditions orally (though, as we shall see, some basic information has come down to us today from runes left on grave markers), so we have relatively

few written sources to tell us exactly what comprised a pagan funeral. Our primary sources of information come from archeology and literary Christianized renderings and re-imaginings of pagan rites. However, there is enough information to reconstruct at least a rudimentary understanding of some pre-Christian Neolithic, Saxon, and Viking funerary rituals. What little is known of these ancient rites can shed light on the beliefs that may have informed these practices, and it can provide a framework for the emphasis of funerary rites in H. In what follows, therefore, I will discuss some of the ancient and medieval burial forms pertinent to Tolkien's fiction. But before investigating pagan funerary practices and Tolkien's borrowing from them in H, I will work in reverse chronological order, first exploring medieval Christian practices in order to determine whether and to what extent Christian rituals also inform his work.

Christian Burial in the Middle Ages

For St Augustine, the dead Christian is under divine protection. Although sacrifices and prayers offered on behalf of the dead can work to some (unspecified) benefit of the dead, an honorable burial has no final impact upon the dead. Burial, argues Augustine, is for the living. Not only should a proper burial be performed because the body is a holy vessel and inseparable from the ontological nature of man, but it should also be practiced because memorials are conducive to exercising the memory of the living ("De Cura" 541). In response to a fellow bishop's (Paulinus) question regarding whether or not a dead man benefits from being buried near the memorial of a saint, Augustine replies, in essence, that, though there may be some benefit in being buried near a memorial to a martyr, there is no ultimate benefit to

such a burial. A soul's final destination is determined in life. Although Paulinus's concern is specific, however, Augustine goes on to address the larger issue of the body's fate after death. He had addressed this issue to some extent as part of his apologia in *De Civitate Dei* (1:12), but images of the "sack of Rome" and the heaps of unburied Roman Christians are apparently still fresh in Augustine's mind ("De Cura" 540). Moreover, his reference to "Maro" (or Vergil) suggests that a pagan, and specifically Vergilian, anthropology may have been lingering in the background of contemporary Christians' views of the body ("De Cura" 540). He therefore seeks to debunk these views and put in their place what he considers to be a biblical view of death and burial rites.

In Vergil's *Æneid*, the priestess Sybil explains to Æneas:

> Anchisa generate, deum certissima proles,
> Cocyti stagna alta vides Stygiamque paludem,
> di cuius iurare timent et fallere numen.
> hace omnis, quam cernis, inops inhumataque turba est;
> portitor ille Charon; hi, quos vehit unda, sepulti.
> Nec ripas datur horrendas et rauca fleunta
> transportare prius quam sedibus ossa quierunt.
> Centurm errant annos volitantque haec litora circum;
> tum demum admissi stagna exoptata revisunt. (6:322-31)
>
> [Anchises' son, sure offspring of the gods,
> Cocytus' deep pools and the Stygian marsh
> Here thou discernest, by whose power the gods
> Fear to swear falsely; helpless, tombless all
> This crowd, which thou behold'st; yon ferryman
> Is Charon; those that cross have found a grave.
> But o'er the dread banks and hoarse-sounding flood
> Waft them he may not, till their bones have rest.
> A hundred years about these shores they flit
> And wander, then at length, their ban removed
> The longed-for pools revisit.] (Rhoades' translation, in *The Poems of Virgil*)

Augustine refers to these lines and promptly dispenses with this notion, pointing to Christ's Resurrection as proof that "Christians might lie down without a fear" ("De Cura" 540). Burial or no burial, factors other than burial practices determine the soul's fate. To demonstrate that one's actions and beliefs in life make this determination, he quotes St Paul's words, "For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Cor 5:10 NRSV).

Reynolds notes that the Middle Ages inherited patristic attitudes—of which Augustine's is typical—towards death and burial practices ("Death and Burial, in Europe" 118). God, with the assistance of the angels and the Church, safely guided the Christian soul to its *requiem aeternam*. As the Middle Ages continued, new "emphases," however, developed including a "growing disdain" for the human body (Reynolds, 119). This, Reynolds argues, led to an "atmosphere of fear" surrounding the subject (119). Images of "Gehenna, darkness, and the judgment to come" began to dominate the liturgical formularies. Prayers and offerings for the dead and "a new emphasis" on confession and absolution were "intensified." The book of hours of the Master of Catherine of Cleves, for example, depicts an angel and a demon contesting each other's claim to a dead body (Reynolds, 119).

Though practices continued to develop, certain burial and post-burial rites were maintained throughout the Middle Ages. For instance, as the body was being prepared for burial, the soul was commended to God, and psalms and antiphons were sung. The body was dressed according to the Christian's rank; and, in order to ensure that the Christian would stand without shame before God, he or she was to

be fully clad (Reynolds, 120-121). Prayers and antiphons also accompanied processions to the grave; the body of the Christian was carried "by men of equal rank of dignity." Among the antiphonal songs mourners sang the *Dirige* (Direct) for the Office of the Dead, which followed a call and response format. To quote a few lines from the Dirige:

> Antiphon:…Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine:
> et lux perpetua luceat eis.
>
> Psalmus 7: Nequando rapiat ut leo animam meam,
> dum non est qui redimat, neque qui salvum
> faciat.
>
> Verse: A porta inferi.
>
> Response: Erue Domine animas eorum.
>
> [A: Eternal rest give unto them O Lord: and let perpetual light shine unto them.
>
> Ps: Lest peradventure he may catch my soul as a Lion, whilst there is none which may redeem it, or which may save it.
>
> V: From the gates of hell.
>
> R: Deliver O Lord their souls.][57]

The sentiments and attitudes expressed in these practices make their way into the literature of the period. One example of this should suffice. On the subject of Launcelot's death, Malory's Sir Bors says:

> Than Syr Launcelot sayd wyth drery steuen / syr
> bysshop I praye you gyue to me al my ryghtes that
> longeth to a chrysten man / It shal not nede you sayd
> the heremyte and al his felowes / It is but heuynesse of
> your blood ye shal be wel mended by the grace of god to

[57] Latin text and Gunhouse's translation at: http://www.medievalist.net/hourstxt/deadmatb.htm

> morne…. Truly sayd the bysshop here was syr Launcelot with me with mo angellis than euer I sawe men in one day / & I sawe the angellys heue vp syr Launcelot vnto heuen & the yates of heuen opened ayenst hym / It is but dretchyng of sweuens sayd syr Bors for I doubte not syr Launcelot ayleth no thynge but good / It may wel be sayd the bysshop goo ye to his bedde & than shall ye proue the soth / So whan syr Bors & his felowes came to his bedde they founde hym starke dede / & he laye as he had smyled & the swettest fauour aboute hym that euer they felte / than was there wepyng & wryngyng of handes / & the grettest dole they made that euer made men / & on the morne the bysshop dyd his masse of requyem / & after the bysshop & al the ix knyghtes put syr Launcelot in the same hors bere that quene Gueneuere was layed in tofore that she was buryed / & soo the bysshop & they al togydere wente wyth the body of syr Launcelot dayly tyl they came to Ioyous garde / & euer they had an / C / torches bernnyng aboute hym / & so within xv dayes they came to Ioyous garde. & there they layed his corps in the body of the quere / & sange & redde many saulters & prayes ouer hym and aboute hym / & euer his vysage was layed open & naked that al folkes myght beholde hym / for suche was the custom in tho dayes that al men of worshyp shold so lye wyth open vysage tyl that they were buryed. (858)

To name the practices here that reflect western Christian burials. The bishop gives last rites; anxieties over the question of Launcelot's eternal fate are settled by visions of angelic pallbearers bearing him to heaven; a requiem is provided; there is a long procession to Joyous Garde; fellow knights (or men of equal rank) bear him to the grave; they sing and "redde many saulters"; and they pray many prayers "for hym and aboute hym." In other words, though Malory, following Chrétien, narrates a story that looks back to a time before Christianity was firmly established throughout Britain, Launcelot's funeral is explicitly and thoroughly Christian.

Christian Burial Themes in H?

In contrast to storytellers like Chrétien and Malory, Tolkien tends to avoid overt Christian symbolism in *LotR*. This is even more the case in H's narrative, which usually reflects a pre-Christian state. Having discussed Christian funerary rituals, it is difficult to argue that any directly or indirectly inform H's depictions of funerary rites. In H, there are funeral chants, wakes, processions, inhumation, and visions of a form of afterlife (though perhaps only an afterlife in heroic song). However, all of these rites were common to pagan burials as well (see Reynolds, "Death and Burial" 118-122). Absent are distinctive Christian rites such as: prayers for the dead, readings from sacred books (though, as will be seen, the heroic elegies in H are presented as songs that may have become sacred in the aftermath of the War of the Ring), Christian doxologies and benedictions.

Aside from the dirge sung for Boromir, which, because of its call and response form, could be classified as an antiphon, there is one other major exception to this rule. In one passage, the death of Boromir, the rituals of confession, absolution, *requiem aeternum*, and the question of the sinner's eternal fate are clearly expressed. Aragorn administers a form of the last rites for the fallen warrior. Because pagan rituals equally inform this scene and will thus be discussed at more length below, I will not yet explicate the ship burial scene; I will instead confine my remarks to the explicitly Christian element: namely, Boromir's confession to Aragorn and Aragorn's absolution.

In the scene, Boromir has just defended Merry and Pippin against orcs, who have, nevertheless, succeeded by strength of numbers and taken the hobbits captive. Aragorn, having heard the horn of Boromir, follows the sound:

> A mile, maybe, from Parth Galen in a little glade not far from the lake he found Boromir. He was sitting with his back to a great tree, as if he was resting. But Aragorn saw that he was pierced with many black-feathered arrows; his sword was still in his hand, but it was broken near the hilt; his horn cloven in two was at his side. Many Orcs lay slain, piled all about him and at his feet. Aragorn knelt beside him. Boromir opened his eyes and strove to speak. At last slow words came. '*I tried to take the Ring from Frodo*," he said. "*I am sorry. I have paid*.' His glance strayed to his fallen enemies; twenty at least lay there. 'They have gone: the Halflings: the Orcs have taken them. I think they are not dead. Orcs bound them.' He paused and his eyes closed wearily. After a moment he spoke again.
>
> 'Farewell, Aragorn! Go to Minas Tirith and save my people! *I have failed*.'
>
> 'No!' said Aragorn, taking his hand and kissing his brow. '*You have conquered. Few have gained such a victory. Be at peace!* Minas Tirith shall not fall!' Boromir smiled. 'Which way did they go? Was Frodo there?' said Aragorn. But Boromir did not speak again. 'Alas!' said Aragorn. 'Thus passes the heir of Denethor, Lord of the Tower of Guard!' [emphasis added] (*TT* 416)

Boromir has confessed his sin: "I tried to take the Ring from Frodo"; and he has expressed sorrow for the act: "I am sorry.... I have failed." The phrase "I have paid" reflects the language of penance. Aragorn, a king and healer, grants a form of absolution: "No. You have conquered. Few have gained such a victory. Be at peace!"

Forest-Hill has observed the similarities between Boromir's death and the death of Pierre Terrail, Seigneur de Bayard—as told in Jacques de Mailles's 1527 biography. Here, the knight, remembered in history as *le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*, falls in battle and, like Boromir, spends his final moments propped up

against a tree. A non-priest hears his confession (Forest-Hill, "Boromir, Byrhtnoth" 81). We cannot know if Tolkien knew of this biography, but all of the elements—excepting viaticum—of Christian last rites occur in the death of Boromir. There is even the suggestion of the Seal of the Confessional. Aragorn refuses to divulge the contents of Boromir's confession; he keeps it from Legolas, Gimli (*TT* 421), and Gandalf, who suspects that Aragorn is keeping back the truth (*TT* 500).

In sum, there are elements of Christian funerary rites in Boromir's death. A form of last rites is offered; the language of penance and absolution rise to the surface of Tolkien's fiction. However, this may be as near as Tolkien comes to an explicitly Christian rite. It should not be too surprising that it comes in H, where a variety of burial rituals are depicted. The actual "burial" of Boromir, along with the remaining funerary rituals in H, will, however, reveal pre-Christian ritual hegemony.

Ship Burials in Medieval Literature and History

According to Albany Major, the ship-burial custom (as well as variations of this custom, such as a grave dug in the shape of a ship) can be linked to a belief that a body of water—be it a sea or a river—divided the realm of the living from the realm of the dead. Transportation to the other world was therefore necessary:

> In its crudest form this was done by setting the corpse adrift in a vessel, to find its way to the other world, the vessel in addition being set on fire where cremation was in vogue. Where earth burial was the fashion, burial in an actual vessel met the needs of the dead. But, as a higher conception of the future life developed, it was thought sufficient to provide a symbolical vessel for the voyage of the spirit to the spirit world. (Major, "Ship Burials in Scandinavian Lands and the Beliefs that Underlie Them" 116-117)

In earth burials, the ship was either turned upside down, serving as a cover for the dead, or the corpse was laid in a chamber of a buried ship (Major, 118). Sometimes stones were erected inside the grave in the shape of a ship, but more often these stones were placed outside of the grave in the shape of a ship. These stones were frequently marked with depictions of the death-ship that they represented and the dead one's reception in the spirit world (Major, 118). Grave-goods are often found with the dead, and these goods are often gender specific: jewelry, amulets, and household items for females; weapons, accouterments, amulets, and precious metals for males. However, there is some evidence that while grave-goods represented women, men—because they were memorialized by oral paeans and skaldic poetry—were frequently represented by runic markings (Andrén, "Places, Monuments, and Objects: The Past in Ancient Scandinavia" 278-279).

In 1939, ship-mound graves were discovered at Sutton Hoo, which is on the Suffolk coast of the ancient Anglo-Saxon kingdom of East Anglia. One of the barrows housed the remains of a large ship. The corpse that was laid in the center, or *bearm*, of the ship had almost completely disintegrated; however, the iron helm, shield, sword, royal insignia, jewelry, silver bowls and spoons, Frankish coins, lyre, and gaming pieces remained to suggest that a king was buried there. H. M. Chadwick first proposed that the king was Rædwald, who reigned over the East Angles in the early years of the seventh century (Chadwick, "The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial. VIII. Who Was He?" 76-87). The grave-goods appear to be somewhat syncretic. The silver spoons (which appear to be of Byzantine origin) are engraved with the names SAULOS and PAULOS; the engravings may indicate that the bowls and spoons were

Christian baptismal gifts (A. C. Evans, "*Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*"). However, the use of cremation in the other graves—as well as what appears to have been the sacrifice of a horse—argues for the presence of pagan practices.

Much has been discovered through the findings at Sutton Hoo and Vendel. However, a great deal can also be learned regarding ship burial rituals from the literature written not long after Northern Europe's Christian conversion. I will mention a few exemplary accounts (probably legendary but containing glimpses of historical customs) of these rituals. Saxo Grammaticus mentions that Frode enacted a law in which it was stated that a high-ranking soldier or official should be burned on a pyre made up of his own ship. Earls and kings should be burned in a ship of their own (5:156). In the *Volsunga Saga*, Odin, disguised as an ordinary man, takes Sigmund's dead son, Sinfjotli, in a boat and vanishes from Sigmund's sight (ch. 10 "The Ending of Sinfjotli").

Ship Burials in the Elder and Younger Eddas

In Snorri's description of Baldur's funeral (*Prose Edda*, ch. 57 "The Death of Baldur"), Frigga, his mother, asks who will journey to Hel to find Baldur and ask Hela (Death) for his release. Hermod, his brother, volunteers and rides his father Odin's horse, Sleipnir to Hel. Meanwhile, Baldur's funeral is beset with complications. He is laid in his ship, Hringhorn, and carried to the sea; but, confusingly, the ship is so large that, once it is put on the sea, it cannot be launched by any of the Æsir (gods). A wolf-riding giant, Hyrrokin, is summoned to do the job. She thrusts the ship out, causing an earthquake (and possibly the premature firing of the ship). Baldur begins to burn; his wife, Nanna, throws herself on the burning

pyre. Short-tempered Thor gets angry with the dwarf, Litur, who has made the mistake of staying too long underfoot; the hammer-wielding Æsir kicks the dwarf onto the fire, and he is consumed. All the gods, except Loki, pay their respects to Baldur, leaving grave-goods on the ship.

Hermod rides for nine days, but Baldur is already in Hel before his brother can reach him (the way of the sea is obviously shorter). Modgudur—the virgin who guards a gold-covered bridge that spans the river, Gjoll—stops him to check his credentials. Hermod tells her that he rides to Hel in search of Baldur; the grieving brother asks her if she has seen the beloved god. She answers that he has already passed over the bridge and headed north (the traditional direction of Hel). Once he comes to the high, barred gates of Hel, Sleipnir, in a valiant leap, is able to cross them. He finds Baldur in Hela's palace. She agrees to release him—upon condition that all things weep for him. In response, all the gods, men, living things, water, and stone weep—except for Loki, who is disguised as an old woman.

For the purposes of this discussion, a few things should be noted in this telling before moving on to other instances of pagan burials: the legal custom mentioned in *Heimskringla* (*Ynglinga Saga* I, ch. 8) could be based on the burial of Odin's son, Baldur. If so, the custom may reflect a desire to imitate and reenact the god's death. A dwarf is left out of the funeral ceremony (and unwillingly becomes a shipmate on Baldur's death-voyage). The gods leave grave-goods (gold rings, etc.). Hermod inquires into his dead brother's whereabouts; the virgin answers that she only knows the direction in which he was going. Also, and perhaps most significantly, there are two paths (by sea and by land) and two modes of

transportation to the afterlife described here: Baldur's ship and Odin's horse. In the end, gods (excepting Loki), men, and nature weep in concert over Baldur's death. These elements will increase in significance when discussing Boromir's ship-burial in H.

One further instance of ship burials in the *Prose Edda* occurs in the context of Ragnarok. Here, at the end of time, the Midgard-serpent seeks to gain the shore, and the "hosts of Hel" come sailing on a ship made out of the fingernails of corpses and steered by the giant Hyrm. Loki is the steersman (*Voluspa*, stanzas 50-51)). In the *Heimskringla*, Snorri reports that a certain King Hakon buried one of his captains who had died in battle in a ship, which was then taken to land and heaped over with stones (ch. 27). The *Svarfdaela Saga* mentions that Thorgerd laid Karl in a ship and surrounded him with treasure; and then the ship was launched out into a river (ch.26).

***Ship Burials in* L'Morte *and* Beowulf**

Perhaps the two ship burials most relevant to this discussion are Malory's narrative of Arthur's burial and the burial of Scyld in *Beowulf*.[58] After "the hand" takes back Arthur's sword, Sir Bedivere

> toke the kyng vpon his backe and so wente wyth hym to that water syde / & whan they were at the water syde / euyn fast by the banke houed a lytyl barge wyth many fayr ladyes in hit / & emonge hem al was a quene / and al they had blacke hoodes / and al they wepte and shryked whan they sawe Kyng Arthur. /Now put me in to the barge sayd the kyng and so he dyd softelye / And there receyued hym thre quenes wyth grete mornyng

[58] Although Tennyson's *Idylls* also romanticizes the ship burial, Tolkien seems to have been influenced far more by Malory, the *Eddas*, and *Beowulf*.

> and soo they sette hem doun / and in one of their lappes
> kyng Arthur layed hys heed / and than that quene sayd
> a dere broder why haue ye taryed so longe from me /
> Alas this wounde on your heed hath caught ouermoche
> colde / And soo than they rowed from the londe / and
> syr bedwere behelde all tho ladyes goo from hym /
> Than syr bedwere cryed a my lord Arthur what shal
> become of me now ye goo from me / And leue me here
> allone emonge myn enemyes / Comfort thy self sayd the
> kyng and doo as wel as thou mayst / for in me is no
> truste for to truste in / For I wyl in to the vale of
> auylyon to hele me of my greuous wounde. And yf thou
> here neuer more of me praye for my soule / but euer
> the quenes and ladyes wepte and shryched that hit was
> pyte to here. (849)

Though Arthur is still "alive" at this point, some of the elements of Boromir's burial are here: Arthur is laid on a ship and sent to an unknown location (the legendary Avalon); three queens (like Boromir's three friends) mourn him; and a friend watches the barge sail out of sight.

The literary echo is even stronger in the *Beowulf*-poet's description of the burial of King Scyld:

> Him ðā Scyld gewā tō gescæp-whīle
> fela-hrōr fēran on Frēan wære.
> Hī hyne þā ætbæron tō brimes faroðe,
> swæse gesīþas, swā hē selfa bæd
> þenden wordum wēold wine Scyldinga
> lēof land-fruma lange āhte.
> Þæ æt hyðe stōd hringed-stefna,
> īsig ond ūt-fūs, æþelinges fær.
> Ālēdon þā lēfne þēoden,
> bēaga bryttan, on bearm scipes,
> mærne be mæste. Þær wæs mādma fela
> of feor-wegum, frætwa, gelæded;
> ne hyrde ic cymlīcor cēol gegyrwan
> hilde-wæpnum ond heaþo-wædum,
> billum ond byrnum; him on bearme læg
> mādma mænigo, þā him mid scoldon
> on flōdes æht feor gewītan.
> Nalæs hī hine læssan lācum tēodan,

þēod-gestrēonum, þon þā dydon,
þe hine æt frum-sceafte forþ onsendon
ænne ofer yþe umbor-wesende.
Þā gyt hī hīm āsetton segen gel denne
hēah ofer hēafod, lēton holm beran,
gēafon on gār-secg; him wæs geōmor sefa,
murnende mōd. Men ne cunnon
secgan tō sōþe, sele-rædende,
hæleþ under heofenum, hwā þæm hlæste
onfēng. (lines 27-54)

[Scyld then departed at the appointed time.
Still very strong, into the keeping of the Lord.
His own dear comrades carried his body
To the sea´s current, as he himself had ordered,
Great Scylding lord, when he still gave commands;
the nation's dear leader had ruled a long time.
There at the harbor stood the ring-carved prow,
noble's vessel, icy, sea-ready.
They laid down the king they had dearly loved,
Their tall ring-giver, in the center of the ship,
The mighty by the mast. Great treasure was there,
Bright gold and silver, gems from far lands.
I have not heard of a ship so decked
With better war-dress, weapons of battle,
swords and mail-shirts; on his breast there lay
heaps of jewels that were to drift away,
brilliant, with him, far on the power of the flood.
No lesser gifts did they provide him,
the wealth of the nation, than those at his start
who set him adrift when only a child,
Friendless and cold, alone on the waves.
High over his head his men also set his standard,
gold-flagged, then let the waves lap,
Gave him to the sea with grieving hearts,
Mourned deep in mind. Men cannot say,
Wise men in hall nor warriors in the field,
Not truly, who received that cargo.] (Chickering's translation in *Beowulf*)

It is necessary to discuss some of the elements in the background of this passage in *Beowulf* before developing the connection between Boromir's ship burial in H and Scyld's burial. In the above passage, the narrator, to use Paul Dean's

description, “telescopes” Scyld’s burial and initial voyage (“On History and the Passage of Time” 92): Scyld departs from the world in virtually the same manner in which he came. Just three lines (þon þā dydon, / þe hine æt frum-sceafte forþ onsendon / ænne ofer yþe umbor-wesende), tucked into a description of the Scyldings’ funeral rites, are needed to explain his origins. The *Beowulf*-poet has either adopted and transposed the circumstances surrounding the legend of the origins of Sceafa into the circumstances of his son’s (Scyld’s) origins, or he himself has established the legend and later writers have transposed them. In the late tenth century, the Anglo-Saxon historian Æþelweard, writes:

> Ipse Scef cum uno dromone aduectus est in insula oceani que dicitur Scani, armis circundatus, eratque ualde recens puer, et ab incolis illius terræ ignotus. Attamen ab eis suscipitur, et ut familiarem diligenti animo eum custodierunt, et post in regem eligunt; de cuius ordinem trahit Aðulf rex. (*Chronicon Æthelweard*, 32-3)
>
> [And this Sceaf arrived with one light ship in the island of the ocean which is called Skáney, with arms all round him. He was a very young boy, and unknown to the people of that land, but he was received by them, and they guarded him with diligent attention as one who belonged to them, and elected him King. From his family King Æþelwulf derived his descent. (A. Campbell’s translation)

In the twelfth century, William of Malmesbury (*De Gestis Regum Anglorum*) agrees with this account; but he also attempts to provide an etiological explanation of the name *Sceaf*: *posito ad caput frumenti manipulo, dormiens, ideoque Sceaf nuncupatus* (121).[59]

[59] “A handful of grain was placed by his head; therefore he was named Sceaf” [my translation].

Tolkien himself seems to have been fascinated by this legend. In the *NCP*, two of the club's members, Guildford and Markison,

> have an argument about Corn-gods and the coming of divine kings or heroes over the sea, in spite of various frivolous interjections from Lowdham, who seemed curiously averse to the turn of the talk.
> 'The Sheaf personified,' said Guild…. (*SD* 227)

At this point, for whatever reason, Tolkien did not continue Guildford and Markison's conversation. The manuscript tantalizingly ends there. However, Tolkien does later have Loudham recite a poem concerning "King Sheave." In this poem, Sheave is from some unknown location set adrift on the sea and arrives "without oar or mast" (*SD* 273) on the shores of the Longobards (Lombards). The Longobards have been living in terror of some nameless fear: "laughter they knew not, light nor wisdom, shadow was upon them." They look into the boat and see the child: "his limbs were white, his locks raven golden braided…his sleeping head was softly pillowed on a sheaf of corn shimmering palely, as the fallow gold doth from far countries west of Angol." They take him ashore, and the next day he awakens and begins to play the harp. His singing brings joy; "their need he healed, and laws renewed long forsaken" (*SD* 274). Perhaps in reference to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*'s suggestion that Sceafa was Noah's fourth son and born on the ark (annal entry 885), Sheave ultimately becomes the "sire of princes," the founder of the "Sea-danes and Goths, Swedes and Northmen, Franks and Frisians, folk of the islands, Swordmen and Saxons, Swabians, Angles, and the Longobards" (*SD* 276).

In the *Beowulf*-poet's Scyld the cycle that initiated Sceafa's mysterious arrival from the unknown is completed. The theme of the dying-and-rising god, common to

the myths of Osiris, Baldur, Adonis, and Persephone, seems to be at work in King Sheave. On the subject of the *Beowulf*-poet's intentions here, Tolkien stated:

> the poet is not explicit, and the idea was probably not fully formed in his mind—that Scyld went back to some mysterious land whence he had come. He came out of the Unknown beyond the Great Sea, and returned into It…. In the last lines, 'men can give no certain account of the havens where that ship was unladed' we catch an echo of the 'mood' of pagan times, in which ship-burial was practiced. A mood in which the symbolism (what we should call the ritual) of a departure over the sea whose further shore was unknown; and an actual belief in a magical land or otherworld located 'over the sea,' can hardly be distinguished. (*Lost Road* 96-96)

Whether it was Tolkien's intention or not, Tolkien's drawing of Boromir's ship burial captures something of this "mood" as well.

Ship Burials in H

There is only one ship burial in *LotR* (unless one wishes to include the doubtful case of Frodo's departure from Middle-earth by ship), but, as Scyld's burial is the beginning of the epic and makes way for the heroics of the warrior Beowulf, so does Boromir's ship burial launch the heroics of the three hunters: Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli.

Wanting to bury Boromir and yet needing urgently to pursue the orcs who have taken Pippin and Merry, Legolas says, "We have not the time or the tools to bury our comrade fitly, or to raise a mound over him. A cairn we might build" (*TT* 417). But knowing this to be impractical, Aragorn says,

> Then let us lay him in a boat with his weapons, and the weapons of his vanquished foes…. We will send him to the Falls of Rauros and give him to Anduin. The River of

> Gondor will take care at least that no evil creature dishonours his bones.

There are pressing matters here—not only for Tolkien's characters, but also for Tolkien the author. By having Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli take the time at such a moment not only to arrange a funeral but also to send him off with a resounding and carefully composed elegy, Tolkien the author risks introducing an element of implausibility into his story. It would seem, however, that Tolkien gladly accepted that risk. There is literary precedent, a "mood" that is best conveyed in literature by the funerary rite. Two prominent ship-burials may have guided Tolkien's narrative here.

Just as the *Beowulf*-poet foregrounds an ancient funerary rite by beginning with the ship-burial of Scyld Scefing, so does Tolkien make prominent the same rite by beginning *TT* with Boromir's ship-burial. The arrival of Sceafa/Scyld brought healing to the land and signaled a founding myth, so does the funeral of Scyld herald the arrival of Beowulf and the dispelling of the Danes' fear. H's narrative echoes this sequence: the death of Boromir is prelude to the exploits of Aragorn, of whom Éomer will say,

> Strider is too poor a name, son of Arathorn…. Wingfoot I name you. This deed of the three friends should be sung in many a hall. Forty leagues and five you have measured ere the fourth day is ended! Hardy is the race of Elendil! (*TT* 439)

As Hrothgar, the latest ruling scion of the Sceafings, sends for the hero's aid in driving out the fearful Grendel, so does Éomer entreat Aragorn: "Come now!.... The Heir of Elendil would be a strength indeed to the Sons of Eorl in this evil tide. There is battle even now upon the Westemnet, and I fear that it may go ill for us" (*TT* 439).

Scyld's *swæse gesīþas*, or dear companions, carry his body to the *brimes faroðe* (the salty sea's waves: i.e., the shore) (lines 28-9); for Boromir, "they carried the body of their companion to the shore" (*TT* 418). Scyld's mourners lay beside him his *hilde-wæpnum ond heaþo-wædum*, *billum ond byrnum* (battle-weapon and war-dress, sword and mail-shirt [my translation]) (lines 39-40); Boromir's his elven-cloak, helmet, horn, broken sword, and the swords of his enemies. Loudham describes Sheave's hair when he arrives as a child in Lombardy as "locks raven golden braided." For Boromir, "They combed his long dark hair and arrayed it upon his shoulders" (*TT* 419). Scyld's mourners are said to have given him "to the sea with grieving hearts"; Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli row "sadly along the shore…. Sorrowfully they cast loose the funeral boat" (*TT* 419).

Most importantly for this discussion, the "mood" set by the *Beowulf*-poet, as Tolkien sees it, is the elegiac celebration of the king's "return" to the unknown. In Boromir's death, the H narrative seems to take aim at a "return" akin to that of Scyld's. Tolkien specifically singles out (and translates) the last lines of the Scyld's funeral (quoted above). And it is this last line that seems to have had the biggest impact on Tolkien's description of Boromir's funeral. As Scyld is taken back from whence he (or his father Sceafa) came, so will the Anduin River take Boromir back to his place of origin, Gondor. However, the River will carry him beyond: "But in Gondor in after-days it long was said that the elven-boat rode the falls and the foaming pool, and bore him down through Osgiliath, and past the many mouths of Anduin, out into the Great Sea at night under the stars" (*TT* 419).

Three songs, resembling an antiphon, follow the theme of the final sea-voyage to the unknown. In the first, the speaker asks the West Wind if it has seen Boromir. The Wind answers that he has seen him, but only until he "passed away / Into the shadows of the North." The South Wind likewise has no answers. Finally, the North Wind is asked for news; to which it can only report that it has heard "his cry" and seen how he has been sent off in burial (*TT* 420). Aragorn and Legolas have sung, calling upon the North, West, and South winds; the East wind remains, and Gimli has yet to sing. The narrator simply moves on: "So they ended," leaving Gimli out of the dirge. This may remind the reader that the hapless and unfortunate dwarf in Baldur's procession is forcibly removed from the procession. The dwarf and the East wind are silenced.

In establishing resonance between Boromir's ship-burial and that of the larger tradition characterized by the *Beowulf*-poet, Malmesbury, the *Anglo-Saxon* chronicler, and the anonymous author of the *Chronicon De Abingdon*, H has here the "mood" of which Tolkien spoke. But aside from the mysterious destination of Boromir, what constitutes this mood? Mystery is a characteristic of many moods; if mystery alone creates this mood, then there is nothing distinctly pagan, or pre-Christian, about it since mystery has long been a feature of Christianity.

The answer may lie both in the repetition of the three songs and the narrator's observation when at last Boromir's boat has disappeared out of the mourner's sight: "Rauros roared on unchanging." Where it is given, this is a stunning line. It expresses the narrator's, and by extension the mourners', quiet horror at the waterfall's failure to pause, if only for a moment, its ceaseless roaring to pay its

respects to the son of Gondor's steward. In other words, the narrator seems to half-expect nature to imitate the mourners and the narrator, who have taken time they do not have to build a bier tenderly, comb the deceased one's hair, dress him, set him adrift, and construct an elaborate elegy to his memory. The River shrugs its shoulders, rejects the Pathetic Fallacy, and rolls on: indifferent to the mysteries that otherwise hush human activity.

C. S. Lewis has drawn attention to a similar phenomenon in what he calls "Primary Epic," or, oral, oracular poetry originally performed for and solemnized by the community in courts, ceremonies, and feasts (*Preface to Paradise Lost* 19). In Homeric and Beowulfian poetry, the patterned repetition of the now-famous epithets—*οἶνοψ θαλάσσης* (wine-dark sea), *ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἠώς* (rosy-fingered Dawn, *ἐνοσί-χθων* (Poseidon shaker of earth), *γλαυκ-ῶπις Ἀθηνα* (gray-eyed Athena); *hringed-stefna* (ring-prowed ship), *onband beadu-rūne* (unbound a battle-rune), *ofer swan-rāde* (across the swan's riding)—provide a sense of the steady rhythm of life. According to Lewis, they

> emphasize the unchanging human environment…. The diction also produces the unwearying splendour and ruthless poignancy of the Homeric poems. Miserable or even sordid events may happen; but the brightness of the sun, the 'leaf-shaking' largeness of the mountains, the steady strength of rivers, is there all the time, not with any suggestion (as it might be in a romantic poet) of the 'consolations of nature' but simply as a fact. Homeric splendour is the splendour of reality. Homeric pathos strikes hard precisely because it seems unintended and inevitable like the pathos of real life. It comes from the clash between human emotions and the large, indifferent background which the conventional epithets represent. (*Preface* 22, 23-24)

This would not be the last time a critic would discern such disparities of feeling in Homer's epics. George Steiner uses an even more memorable image to portray Homer:

> The poet of the *Iliad* looks on life with those blank, unswerving eyes which stare out of the helmet slits on early Greek vases. His vision is terrifying in its sobriety, cold as the winter sun.... The narration proceeds with inhuman calm. The sharp directness of the poet's vision is never sacrificed to the demands of pathos. In the *Iliad* the truth of life, however harsh or ironic, prevails over the occasions of feeling. (*Homer* 8)

Steiner then confirms the strangeness of this image with a striking illustration taken from "the night encounter of Priam and Achilles":

> There is a stillness in the midst of hell. Looking upon each other, the bereft king and the slayer of men, shadowed by his own near doom, give voice to their great griefs. Their sorrows are immeasurable. Yet, when they have spoken they feel hungry and sit down to an ample meal. For as Achilles says of Niobe, "She remembered to eat when she was worn out with weeping." No other poet, not even Shakespeare, would have run the risk of so humble a truth at such an instant of tragic solemnity. (*Homer* 8)

Moreover, Lewis views *Beowulf* not only as a Primary Epic but also as inhabiting this same sphere of sentiment. Lewis also cites the line that Tolkien drew special attention to concerning Scyld's final whereabouts. He translates it, "Men knew not to say for a truth, the talkers in the hall knew not, warriors under the sky knew not, who received that cargo" (*Preface* 26). Whereas Virgil treats the fall of Troy as an apocalypse, for Homer and the *Beowulf*-poet such happenings are merely "all in a day's work." In *Beowulf*:

> Once the king is dead, we know what is in store for us:
> that little island of happiness, like many another before

> it and many another in the years that follow, is submerged, and the great tide of the Heroic Age rolls over it. (Lewis, *Preface* 31)

Both Lewis and Steiner, then, attribute the seeming indifference of the world in *The Iliad* and *Beowulf* to the Primary Epic poets' mimesis: to their "unswerving eyes" which prize above all else single-minded fidelity to the vision of the cold reality of life in this world. However, Lewis finds in Homer's rapid and repetitive "diction" and *Beowulf*'s steady "blows from a hammer" (*Preface* 26) a "pattern imposed on the mere flux of our feelings by reason and will, which renders pleasures less fugitive and griefs more endurable" (*Preface* 22).

It is no coincidence that after the terror of the line, "Rauros roared on unchanging" H, which follows closely themes, characterizations, and "moods" in Anglo-Saxon poetry, proceeds immediately to ritual, "which renders…griefs more endurable." The three ten-line poems in heptameter create a kind of cradle effect for the reader. The repeated summons to the Winds and their steady replies artistically project onto the screen of nature an arrested nature—a responsive nature that sees and hears, a nature that looks after men; but a nature that, in being unable to track Boromir, is ultimately forced to confess that the fate of the dead lies far beyond the ken of even the wide ranging winds of Middle-earth.

In Æ and P, the death of an important figure leaves wounds on the characters: wounds that are healed only by the passage of time and acts of valor. In Æ, after Gandalf falls, Aragorn becomes the undisputed leader of the Fellowship; in P, after learning of Boromir's death, Faramir finds himself on a suicide mission in an attempt to please his father. But in H, the utterance of elegiac words is the salve.

Poetry is said to be the "gift of Odin" (Snorri, *Prose Edda* 331-334), and it is certainly used as a divine gift in H. Even on a battlefield, before the outcome is decided, Rohirric warriors suspend their crisis and do what nature will not: eulogize man and horse. The steady and unsympathetic rhythm of the world must be superseded—if only in art—by human rhythms.

Beowulf comes to a close with two laments for the fallen hero. First, as the smoke from Beowulf's burning body rises from its pyre, an unnamed Geatish woman, with, the poet says, *bunden-heorde (*her "hair bound up"), weaves a *song sorg-cearig* (a sorrow-song). What little of her lament the poet preserved for us deals not with the memory of Beowulf's heroics; we are left only with her concerns:

> ...Sæde geneahhe
> þæt hīo hyre hereōgeongas hearde ondrēde
> Wæl-fylla worn, werudes egesan
> Hynðo ond hæft-nyd. Heofon rēce swealg. (lines 3151-4)
>
> […Over and over
> She said she feared the attack of raiders,
> Many slaughters, the terror of troops,
> Shame and captivity. Heaven swallowed the smoke.] (Chickering's translation)

Watching the indifferent flames devour her protector´s *bān-hūs* (bone-house, kenning for "body"), she repetitively sings her song; not appealing to heaven for help. She has, it seems, accepted her fate. Seamus Heaney uses poetic license when he (brilliantly) translates *Sæde geneahhe* ("Over and over again she said") as "she unburdened herself," which capitalizes on a potential antithesis with *bunden-heorde*. What his translation may lack in fidelity to the manuscript, it makes up for in perspicuity. The elegy is an unburdening of sorrows. The unthinkable has become inevitable. She trembles with fear. But, as with the cold reality of Tolkien's line,

"Rauros roared on unchanging," the *Beowulf*-poet needs only a few words to show that her fears are caught between a hungry fire and an equally hungry sky: *Heofon rēce swealg* ("Heaven swallowed the smoke"). Yet she sings.

However, there is perhaps something of an inconsistency in Tolkien's vision of nature. In spite of occasional suggestions of nature's indifference, and in spite of Treebeard's confessed neutrality—"I'm on nobody's side because nobody's on my side"—nature does at other times take sides. This modification is already suggested in Aragorn's and Legolas's appeal to the Winds for news of Boromir. Nature is not altogether unconcerned with human affairs. In H's Middle-earth, nature seems to be playing a clandestine role in the events that shape the course of history. Though the narrator noted the River's indifference, Aragorn believes that nature's routine is somehow shaped by providence onto the River: "let us lay [Boromir] in a boat with his weapons, and the weapons of his vanquished foes…. We will send him to the Falls of Rauros and give him to Anduin. The River of Gondor will take care at least that no evil creature dishonours his bones" (*TT* 417). As the company (Gandalf, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli) approaches Meduseld, the narrator states, "At the foot of the walled hill the way ran under the shadow of many mounds, high and green. Upon their western sides the grass was white as with a drifted snow: small flowers sprang there like countless stars amid the turf." He then explains that these flowers are called *simbelmynë* ("evermind"). They mark the graves and "grow where dead men rest" (*TT* 511). Trees in H sometimes talk, and, though they do so for their own purposes, they assist Rohan in ridding the land of Saruman.

One instance of a change in nature's response to human affairs is in "The Road to Isengard" (which will be mentioned again in another context below). Hearing hungry wolves howl, the heavy-hearted company rides into the place where some of the Riders of the Mark have fallen in battle. The narrator comments:

> The road dipped between rising turf-banks, carving its way through the terraces to the river's edge, and up again upon the further side. There were three lines of flat stepping-stones across the stream, and between them fords for horses, that went from either brink to a bare eyot in the midst. The riders looked down upon the crossings, and it seemed strange to them; for the Fords had ever been a place full of the rush and chatter of water upon stones; but now they were silent. The beds of the stream were almost dry, a bare waste of shingles and grey sand (*TT* 555).

There are similarities between this narrative and Jordanes's account of Alaric's burial, in which the river Busentus was diverted so that the Visigoths could bury their leader (*Origins* 158)[60] In Tolkien's fiction, Éomer asks, "What sickness has

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[60] The German poet, August Graf von Platen, commemorates Alaric's burial in his "Das Grab im Busento":

> Nächtlich am Busento lispeln
> bei Cosenza dumpfe Lieder;
> Aus den Wassern schallt es Antwort,
> und in Wirbeln klingt es wieder!
>
> Und den Fluß hinauf, hinunter
> zieh'n die Schatten tapfrer Goten,
> Die den Alarich beweinen,
> ihres Volkes besten Toten.
>
> Allzu früh und fern der Heimat
> mußten hier sie ihn begraben,
> Während noch die Jugendlocken
> seine Schulter blond umgaben.
>
> Und am Ufer des Busento
> reihten sie sich um die Wette,
> Um die Strömung abzuleiten,
> gruben sie ein frisches Bette.

befallen the river? Many fair things Saruman has destroyed: has he devoured the springs of Isen too?" Where earlier, at Boromir's death, Rauros "roared on unchanging," here the springs of a river do stop where the dead men lie. The Riders do not know that the Ents have changed the course of the Isen. At this point, neither does the reader know this. The trees have had their own reasons for redirecting the river, and the men of Rohan suspect a work of malice is responsible for the dry riverbed. However, with the previous funeral rite performed by a river in mind, this correlation of a burial site and a river that has ceased momentarily to run compels the careful reader to note the change. What has happened in the interregnum is Merry and Pippin's entrance into the Forest of Fangorn. Once there, there is no longer a monolithic "nature." Nature is now divided into two camps: the wolves and carrion-fowl on one side and the trees and rivers on the other. The question then

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In der wogenleeren Höhlung
wühlten sie empor die Erde,
Senkten tief hinein den Leichnam,
mit der Rüstung auf dem Pferde.

Deckten dann mit Erde wieder
ihn und seine stolze Habe,
Daß die hohen Stromgewächse
wüchsen aus dem Heldengrabe.

Abgelenkt zum zweiten Male,
ward der Fluß herbeigezogen:
Mächtig in ihr altes Bette
schäumten die Busentowogen.

Und es sang ein Chor von Männern:
"Schlaf in deinen Heldenehren!
Keines Römers schnöde Habsucht
soll dir je dein Grab versehren!"

Sangen's und die Lobgesänge
tönten fort im Gotenheere;
Wälze sie, Busentowelle,
wälze sie von Meer zu Meere! (*Introduction to German Poetry* 100-5)

would be: which is the "historical" account of nature in H? Is it the account of trees talking and rivers stopping or is it the account in which *Beowulf*'s "mood" is captured in "Rauros roared on unchanging" and Tom Bombadil, a personification of nature, shows no concern for that which shakes all of Middle-earth? The ship burial captures this enigmatic mood. On the one hand, the sea (or in this case the river) returns the hero to his origins; but on the other, the mourners are left to ponder the seeming indifference of life and nature. H balances these claims; and its variety of funerals gives each full expression.

Ancient and Medieval Mound Burials

Major argues that the ship burial custom—which, even in the days of its use, was the exception to conventional burial practices rather than the rule—was an innovation arising from the older barrow (or mound) burial custom. He notes that the Gothonic peoples largely inhabited inland regions; thus their funerary customs included more traditional sites for the burial of their dead ("Ship Burials in Scandinavian Lands" 142). When the men of North central and Eastern Europe came into contact with Southern Europeans the Northerners assimilated some of their counterparts' customs. The notion of the river Styx dividing the living from the dead and the ferryman Charon guiding souls to the other side prompted the Gothonic people to begin burying their dead in ships designed to cross such a river (Major 143). Once the *volkerwanderung* began and they were driven to the coasts of Europe, the custom of ship burial followed them; but now they could indeed set their death-ships out upon the sea (Major, 143-144).

However, Major states, their original burial customs were based upon what appears to be conflicting beliefs: they seem to have believed both that the dead needed transport to the afterlife and that they lived on inside the barrow and were prevented from escaping by a henge (146). Thus, on the one hand, horses and chariots were buried in barrows with the dead, who were often provided with "hellshoon" (or shoes that enabled the dead to walk in Valhalla once there) (142), while, on the other, stones were piled up in cairns or made to stand erect outside the barrow as if to imprison the dead (146).

Andrén dates the ship-shaped stone model to prototypes erected in the Late Bronze Age (1100 – 500 BC) ("Places" 262). This would put Major's theory regarding a possible Southern European influence in some doubt. However, for the purposes of this discussion, the fact remains that strong hints of the barrow-as-a-prison-of-the-dead appear in Tolkien's description of the barrow in "Fog on the Barrow Downs." This will be discussed further below.

Regarding the construction of barrows themselves, though later mounds or tumuli were built to house individuals, earlier barrows in northern and western Europe appear to have been originally designed for mass burials (Bogucki, "Bronze Age" para. 33). The mounds that have survived are generally megalithic mound tombs. In Great Britain, there are at least two kinds of barrows with which Tolkien himself would probably have been familiar: the long barrow and the round barrow. The oldest examined barrow in Britain is believed to have been constructed near the end of the Neolithic Age (in approximately 3400 BC). The height and length of the mounds vary from tomb to tomb. In older barrows, burial chambers or niches line

both sides of the earth-covered entrance, which is often located on the eastern side of the barrow. Some long barrows, however, have a false eastern entrance; the real entrance is concealed—perhaps in an attempt to frustrate would-be grave robbers who were not sufficiently frightened by the curses pronounced upon intruders. Round barrows are often enclosed by what appears to be ritual shallow ditches; the tops of round barrows can be either in a disc or a bell shape ("Barrows" paras. 1-6).

Large monoliths were sometimes erected in a circle around the barrow and enclosed by a ditch. These stone monuments not only marked the tomb, but they also appear to have been used to mark locations that were already sacred ("Neolithic Age" para. 8). As was the case with ship burials, wealth and memorabilia were often extracted from the "world of the living" and placed in these houses of the dead as grave-goods. These mounds were generally erected in locations where the living could be continually reminded of their dead ancestors (Bogucki, para. 33).

A final, but perhaps significant, note regarding barrows is that in Celtic mythology, the Aos Sí, or the Sidhe people ("people of the fairy mound," *OED* "Sidhe"), are said to have been driven underground by human settlers. According to this tradition, they inhabit barrows, and occasionally the female Sidh, with their terrible fairy-like beauty, persuade men to do their bidding (Berthelot, "Enchantresses, Fays (Fées), and Fairies" paras. 4-6). The fay figures of medieval romance, beautiful and dangerous women of the Other World, Morgan (Malory's *Le Morte*), Sybil (*Paradis de la Reine Sibille*), Nivière (Lady of the Lake in Malory's *Le Morte* and in the *Post-Vulgate Merlin*), Mélusine (*Roman de Mélusine*) are often depicted on the model of the earlier Celtic Sidh tradition, as seducing and sapping

the strength of knights and wizards. Nivième, for instance, imprisons Merlin in a stone coffin (*Merlin* 188). But in Malory's story, she provides Arthur with Excalibur and then brandishes it three times when Sir Bedivere throws it back into the Lake.

This tradition continues up to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Yeats's *The Wind Among the Reeds*,[61] and it appears to be echoed in Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci."[62] Tolkien surely would have been familiar with this tradition. Though he was somewhat ambivalent at times about his relationship with Celtic

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[61] This work begins with "The Hosting of the Sidhe":

> The Host is riding from Knocknarea
> And over the grave of Clooth-na-bare;
> Caolte tossing his burning hair
> And Niamh calling *Away, come away:*
> *Empty your heart of its mortal dream.*
> *The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round,*
> *Our cheeks are pale, our hair is unbound,*
> *Our breasts are heaving, our eyes are a-gleam,*
> *Our arms are waving, our lips are apart;*
> *And if any gaze on our rushing band,*
> *We come between him and the deed of his hand,*
> *We come between him and the hope of his heart.*
> *The host is rushing 'twixt night and day,*
> *And where is there hope or deed as fair?*
> *Caolte tossing his burning hair,*
> *And Hiamh calling Way, come away.* (Yeats 2)

[62] What Keats's knight sees while in the "elfin grot" is eerily reminiscent to what Frodo sees inside the barrow (*FR* 140):

> She took me to her elfin grot,
> And there she wept, and sigh'd fill sore,
> And there I shut her wild wild eyes
> With kisses four.
>
> And there she lulled me asleep,
> And there I dream'd—Ah! woe betide!
> The latest dream I ever dream'd
> On the cold hill's side.
>
> I saw pale kings and princes too,
> Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
> They cried—"La Belle Dame sans Merci
> Hath thee in thrall!" (Lines 29-40)

mythology, he stated in a lecture the day after *RK* was published that he had just completed a "large 'work'" containing, "in the way of presentation that I find most natural, much of what I personally have received from the study of things Celtic" (Carpenter, *Biography* 226). Indeed, many of the names of the Bucklanders—of whom Meriadoc, the eponymous historian responsible for beginning the H tradition, is one—are of Celtic origin (*RK* 1143). The invasions of "Luthany" in *Book of Lost Tales*, as Fimi has noticed, are based on the structure of the Irish "Book of Invasions" ("'Mad Elves' and 'Elusive Beauty'" 161-164). Also, the Celtic influence on the atmosphere of the chapter "Fog on the Barrow Downs" is readily seen.

To highlight the features of mound burials most germane to the discussion of funerals in H: older mounds are mass graves; more recent barrows housed individuals. Barrows were generally built with entrances facing east. Large stone monuments sometimes circled and marked sacred burial mounds. And grave-goods accompanied the dead buried in them. Additionally, as discussed in the above section regarding ship burials, but needing to be brought into this discussion on mound burials, Major's theory that these stone monuments acted as a kind of ominous feudal lord, tying his dead tenants to the land, should be taken seriously—regardless of the historical veracity of the claim. In the making of fantasy, legend is often as "true" as history. Finally, it is necessary to remember the Celtic tradition of barrows being inhabited by restless spirits, who, on the one hand, seduce and destroy; but, on the other, can also furnish the hero with a deadly sword.

Mound and Cairn Burials in H

Fog on the Barrow Downs

The first description of a burial in H is set in "Fog on the Barrow-Downs." Frodo, riding a pony with his company in the Barrow-downs outside of the Old Forest, suddenly sees, "towering ominous before him and leaning slightly towards one another like the pillars of a headless door, two huge standing stones" (*FR* 138). Once inside the line of the stones, Frodo notices that the "darkness seemed to fall round him." "The Adventures of Tom Bombadil" provides additional information on the barrow:

> You'd forgotten Barrow-wight dwelling in the old mound
> up there on hill-top with the ring of stones round.
> He's got loose again. Under earth he'll take you.
> Poor Tom Bombadil, pale and cold he'll make you!" (*Tales from the Perilous Realm* 179)

This is a fairly close description of the barrows in England that are marked by stone monuments. Shippey notes that "Barely fifteen miles from Tolkien's study the Berkshire Downs rise from the Oxfordshire plain, thickly studded with Stone Age mounds, among them the famous Wayland's Smithy, from which a track leads to Nine Barrows Down" (*Author* 61).

As mentioned above, as discoveries at Sutton Hoo and the story of Baldur's funeral testify, living horses were sometimes buried with their riders inside the barrows. Here, perhaps recalling this fact, Tolkien notes that Frodo's pony, "reared and snorted… bolted into the mist and vanished." Frodo follows a voice and finds

himself climbing "steeply uphill." He comes to the top of the hill; and there he sees a barrow, which "loomed against the westward stars." A mound-inhabiting spirit, or "barrow-wight" appears and touches him with an "icy touch" that freezes his bones. The next thing he knows, he is inside the barrow:

> As he lay there, thinking and getting a hold of himself, he noticed all at once that the darkness was slowly giving way: a pale greenish light was growing round him. It did not at first show him what kind of a place he was in, for the light seemed to be coming out of himself, and from the floor beside him, and had not yet reached the roof or wall. He turned, and there in the cold glow he saw lying beside him Sam, Pippin, and Merry. They were on their backs, and their faces looked deathly pale; and they were clad in white. About them lay many treasures, of gold maybe, though in that light they looked cold and unlovely. On their heads were circlets, gold chains were about their waists, and on their fingers were many rings. Swords lay by their sides, and shields were at their feet. But across their three necks lay one long naked sword. (*FR* 140)

This is the second time in H that a hobbit has been pulled underground. The first time Pippin is caught and dragged under by "Old Man Willow" (*FR* 118). Now an even more menacing presence has pulled all of the hobbits into a grave. There may be more than one historical (or mythological) influence at work here. According to Appendix A, this may be the final resting place of "the last prince of Cardolan, who fell in the war of 1409" (*RK* 1053). Frodo enters this barrow on 28 September 3018 (*RK* 1101); he has thus found himself in a chamber approximately a millennium and half old. Jordanes, describes the burial of Attila the Hun thus:[63]

> His body was placed in the midst of a plain and lay in state in a silken tent as a sight for men's admiration. The

[63] Attila also died some fifteen centuries before Tolkien wrote *LotR*.

> best horsemen of the entire tribe of the Huns rode around in circles, after the manner of circus games, in the place to which he had been brought and told of his deeds in a funeral dirge…. When they had mourned him with such lamentations, a *strava*, as they call it, was celebrated over his tomb with great reveling. They gave way in turn to the extremes of feeling and displayed funeral grief alternating with joy. Then in the secrecy of night they buried his body in the earth. They bound his coffins, the first with gold, the second with silver and the third with the strength of iron…. They also added the arms of foemen won in the fight, trappings of rare worth, sparkling with various gems, and ornaments of all sorts whereby princely state is maintained. And that so great riches might be kept from human curiosity, they slew those appointed to the work.[64] (Charles C. Mierow's translation, in *Origin* 80-81)

The imagery and atmosphere of the barrow in H resembles that of Attila's barrow. In Tolkien's barrow there are swords, shields, and, even the menacing presence of a cruel spirit. Shippey argues, "Barrow-wights are familiar in Norse saga as ghosts, or more accurately walking corpses, coming out of their grave-mounds for vengeance on the living. There is little trace of this belief in English folklore" (*Author* 61). I would disagree, however. While Norse conceptions are likely part of the imaginative matrix, he may have missed the Sidhe mythology that has made its way into English folklore through figures like Morgan le Fay and the Lady of the Lake. In fact, these conceptions appear to be dominant in this scene. Once Tom Bombadil rescues Merry, Merry will recall that he had a dream of the "men of Carn Dûm" (*FR* 143). These men are evidently the evil spirits dispatched by the Witch-king to the barrows—one of which has captured them.

[64] Also according to Jordanes, the Visigoths buried Alaric the Goth in the riverbed of the Busentus. The pit in which he was buried was filled with treasures (*Origin* 158).

The pale and cold posture of the hobbits while in the barrow, as well as the disoriented awakening outside of it, resembles that which the knight-at-arms, upon waking, vaguely remembers having seen when he was dreaming "on the cold hill's side." Like the knight in "La Belle Dame sans Merci," Merry saw "pale kings and princes too, / Pale warriors, death-pale were they all" (lines 35-40). The Barrow-wight chants:

> Cold be hand and heart and bone,
> and cold be sleep under stone:
> never more to wake on stony bed,
> never, till the Sun fails and the Moon is dead.
> In the black wind the stars shall die,
> and still on gold here let them lie,
> till the dark lord lifts his hand
> over dead sea and withered land. (*FR* 141)

He is of course referring to the state of the dead here. The menacing "cold be sleep *under* stone: / never more to wake *on* stony bed" is suggestive of a prison that entraps them above and below. The narrator states, "Frodo felt as if he had indeed been turned into stone by the incantation" (*FR* 141). In some cases, stones are used to memorialize the dead; but, as Major's theory suggests, the stones also imprison the dead. And this is certainly the case here: the barrow-wight says that the stone restraints are so strong that they will outlast even the lives of the Sun, Moon, and stars.

While it is difficult to ascertain from the description whether this was a long or round barrow, there are a few important details to glean from the description. As is discussed above, many burial mounds have eastern entrances. The barrow in which the hobbits find themselves is similarly situated. As the sun rises in the East, Tom Bombadil approaches:

> There was a loud rumbling sound, as of stones rolling and falling, and suddenly light streamed in, real light, the plain light of day. A low door-like opening appeared at the end of the chamber beyond Frodo's feet; and there was Tom's head (hat, feather, and all) framed against the light of the sun rising red behind him. (*FR* 142)

Thus this mound has an opening on its eastern side. Tom opens the entrance that has long been shut and covered by stones. Interestingly, though it does not appear that corpses' feet are laid in any particular orientation in the mounds of England, Tolkien has Frodo's feet pointing toward the East—like the feet of a dead Christian Crusader.

The name *Carn Dûm* signifies the primary fortress of the Witch-king in Angmar. But the term *carn* is a Gaelic word signifying a "heap of stones." These stones were used as sepulchral monuments or boundary-markers (*OED* "cairn"). The spirit that imprisons the hobbits is thus identified, much like the Sidhe people, with his macabre dwelling place. More importantly, Tolkien has used the Gaelic spelling of the term (see *OED* "carn") instead of the more common modern Scottish cairn (which Legolas does use when deciding how to bury Boromir). This may indicate that Celtic mythology surrounding burial and barrows influenced Tolkien's thinking in this scene. Ironically, the name by which Rohan knows Merry is "Holbytla": "hole-dweller." Indeed, *TH*'s famous beginning could well have been the beginning of a story about the Sidhe people: "In a hole in the ground, there lived a hobbit."

When the hobbits emerge from the mound, they find themselves dressed like some of the ancient corpses. They are wearing thin white rags, crowned and belted

with pale gold, and jingling with trinkets (*FR* 143). In other words, they have been carefully, and ritualistically, prepared for burial, suggesting that the barrow-wight in some way craves a revival of old shamanistic rituals and new souls to imprison.

Ultimately, however, the hobbits' experience will pay dividends later. The Sidhe tradition that seems to have influenced the conception of medieval characters like Morgan le Fay, Mélusine, and Nivière is used in surprising ways in this episode. Tolkien has a tendency either to split an archetype and divide its characteristics between multiple characters, or to conflate the characteristics of multiple archetypes and deposit them into one of his characters (Burns, "Gandalf and Odin" 221). Here he conflates the dangerous Sidhe archetype who cruelly imprisons her victims underground and the Nivière archetype, who lives on the margins of the story but furnishes the hero with Excalibur. Merry, the eponymous historian who founds the H tradition, (along with the other hobbits) is given:

> a dagger, long, leaf-shaped, and keen, of marvelous workmanship, damasked with serpent-forms in red and gold…wrought of some strange metal, light and strong, and set with many fiery stones. Whether by some virtue in these sheaths or because of the spell that lay on the mound, the blades seemed untouched by time, unrusted, sharp, glittering in the sun. (*FR* 145)

As Excalibur, along with its scabbard, magically protects Arthur from losing blood, so are the hobbits' daggers and their sheaths said to carry magical properties. Indeed, Merry's dagger destroys the very Witch-king who has sent the Barrow-wight to inhabit the mound.

The King of the Golden Hall

As Gandalf, Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas approach Meduseld, Gandalf directs the company's attention to the "great barrows where the sires of Théoden sleep." Aragorn then counts the total: "Seven mounds upon the left, and nine upon the right…. Many long lives of men it is since the golden hall was built" (*TT* 511). This scene is reminiscent of certain graves found in Northern Europe. Davidson notes: perhaps the most impressive graves found are those of Vendel in Sweden, where a line of chiefs has been buried, for the most part in their ships, in a series of graves which seem to date in unbroken succession from the sixth century to the tenth" (*Road to Hel* 10). The succession is depicted in the approach to Meduseld where it is indeed broken. Hammond and Scull observe that the division between the two ranks "marks a break in the line of descent: the ninth king having left no surviving son, he was succeeded by his sister's son" (*Reader's Companion* 398). When Théoden dies later in the narrative, he will be covered by an eighth mound on the left; but after him, a third row will be needed—for he, like the ninth king on the right row, has no direct heir: Éomer, the next king of Rohan, is his nephew.

What is important to note here is that, as mentioned above, historically, older barrows were communal; barrows built in more recent times were individual. Tolkien has followed this archeological discovery. The barrow in which the hobbits are imprisoned earlier in H is a communal barrow that has not been used in approximately 1,500 years. These Rohirric barrows, however, are individual burial sites, and the rows are being added to in the present.

The Road to Isengard

After the battle at Helm's Deep, the task of burying many warriors puts a strain upon the need to mention burial rites. There is also an urgent need for the narrative to shift to Isengard. However, H spends ample time discussing burial arrangements. Two mounds are raised; one for the men of the Westfold; the other for the men of the East Dales. There is even concern over what to do with the dead orcs (*TT* 549).

In H, even Gandalf becomes a gravedigger. He tenderly buries the dead soldiers of the Mark, piling a barrow on an eyot of a river, and setting a stone ring and spears around them. This barrow is more of the makeshift cairn variety that Legolas proposed earlier for the burial of Boromir. The stones placed round the cairn do not suggest the menacing presence of an eternal prison guard as seen earlier in the Barrow-wight episode. Here they are clearly intended to serve only as honorable memorials of those slain in battle. Éomer says, "Here let them rest!... And when their spears have rotted and rusted, long still may their mound stand and guard the Fords of Isen" (*TT* 555).

The Battle of the Pelennor Fields, the Mounds of Mundburg and Many Partings

On the Pelennor Fields, Rohan's soldiers stop in the middle of the fighting to take seven men of the king's household who have fallen in battle and set them apart, partitioning them off with spears from the bodies of their enemies. Then H's narrator pauses to mention a memorial that is set up later in honor of Théoden's horse Snowmane: "Faithful servant yet master's bane, / Lightfoot's foal, swift Snowmane" (*RK* 854).

Théoden has now fallen. And Éomer looks to the nearby River—Anduin, the same river that carried Boromir's body earlier in the narrative—and, to his great dismay, sees it bringing what he believes to be an overwhelming enemy force. Knowing he will now fall too in battle, he resolves to take a last stand. He "rode to a green hillock and there set his banner, and the White Horse ran rippling in the wind" (*RK* 857). The song he sings seems to be about his own exploits:

> Out of doubt, out of dark to the day's rising
> I came singing in the sun, sword unsheathing.
> To hope's end I rode and to heart's breaking:
> Now for wrath, now for ruin and a red nightfall! (*RK* 858)

However, the "Riders of the King's House upon white horses" sing these same "staves" (with some alteration) for Théoden at the end of the War of the Ring. Here, the song is attributed to Gléowine, Théoden's minstrel:

> Out of doubt, out of dark, to the day's rising
> he rode singing in the sun, sword unsheathing.
> Hope he rekindled, and in hope ended;
> over death, over dread, over doom lifted
> out of loss, out of life, unto long glory. (*RK* 989)

If this were a historical document, the textual critic would probably attribute the song to a minstrel who has had the time to create and properly scan this alliterative verse. The earlier iteration of the song—which is perfectly balanced according to the rules of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse—sung in the heat of the battle would probably be considered a clear case of putting words in the mouth of a hero.

The song seems appropriate in Éomer's mouth at the time. Not because it is realistic, but because it suggests that the H tradition is so used to couching its narrative in the language of elegy that, first, it has Éomer singing his own eulogy, and, second, it anticipates the narrative's closing eulogy. In both iterations of the

eulogy, the sun is said to rise, and the warrior laughs and sings. The sun does not prevent the slaughter that ensues. But, in calling for "a red nightfall," the eulogizer has called for nature not to interfere, but to become part of the listening audience and recognize and sympathize with what has taken place on the battlefield. The eulogizing tendency in H does not so much reflect the steeling of the warrior's resolve as demonstrate his desire to be remembered ("everminded"), to transcend through poetry the indifference of time and nature, and to construct a nature responsive to human exploits.

Once the battle is over, H's narrator states, "a maker in Rohan said in his song of the Mounds of Mundburg":

> We heard of the horns in the hills ringing,
> the swords shining in the South-kingdom.
> Steeds went striding to the Stoningland
> as wind in the morning. War was kindled.
> There Théoden fell, Thengling mighty,
> to his golden halls and green pastures
> in the Northern fields never returning,
> high lord of the host. Harding and Guthláf,
> Dúnhere and Déorwine, doughty Grimbold,
> Herefara and Herubrand, Horn and Fastred,
> fought and fell there in a far country:
> in the Mounds of Mundburg under mould they lie
> with their league-fellows, lords of Gondor.
> Neither Hirluin the Fair to the hills by the sea,
> nor Forlong the old to the flowering vales
> ever, to Arnach, to his own country
> returned in triumph; nor the tall bowmen,
> Derufin and Duilin, to their dark waters,
> meres of Morthond under mountain-shadows.
> Death in the morning and at day's ending
> lords took and lowly. Long now they sleep
> under grass in Gondor by the Great River.
> Grey now as tears, gleaming silver,
> red then it rolled, roaring water:
> foam dyed with blood flamed at sunset;
> as beacons mountains burned at evening;

red fell the dew in Rammas Echor. (*RK* 859-60))

The alliterative dirge, which Shippey calls Tolkien's finest alliterative poem ("Tolkien as a Writer of Alliterative Poetry" 25), commemorates the fallen by name.

The first words, "We heard" appear to be a rough translation of the first word of *Beowulf* "Hwæt." Tolkien believed the whole of *Beowulf* to be an elegy rather than an epic ("Monsters" 31); it begins with a call to attention, narrates the names and adventures of its heroes, and reaches its main purpose in the line near the end of the poem: *Him ða gegiredan Geata leode ad on eorðan unwaclicne* ("the Geatish people then built a pyre on that high ground, no mean thing") (*Beowulf* lines 3137-8). Of Beowulf's pyre, the poet says, *Geworhton ða Wedra leode hlœw on hoe, se wæs heah ond brad weg-liþendum wide gesyne* ("Then the men of the Weders built on that cliff a memorial barrow that was high and broad, to be seen far off by ocean travelers") (Chickering's translation, lines 3156-8). Thus the burning pyre could be seen from afar; and even without the fire it could be seen from the sea. The end of H's elegy also speaks in simile of the bloodied waters of the Great River: "as beacons mountains burned at evening." By using *Beowulf*'s opening words for his own elegiac verse and its closing imagery, not only is Tolkien making a critical statement for the elegiac nature of *Beowulf*, but he is also telescoping, as the *Beowulf*-poet does, a longer history and transforming it into a relatively short elegiac poem. The Beowulf-poet considers the elegy a fit historiographical instrument to capture and narrate history. The fictional H community shares this view. The elegy is therefore at the center, rather than on the fringes, of H.

Finally, Théoden is laid to rest in an individual barrow. It is described thus:

> For after three days the Men of the Mark prepared the funeral of Théoden; and he was laid in a house of stone with his arms and many other fair things that he had possessed, and over him was raised a great mound, covered with green turves of grass and of white evermind. And now there were eight mounds on the east-side of the Barrowfield. (*RK* 988)

Tolkien adds one last Beowulfian touch to this funeral scene. In *Beowulf*, riders circle the mound: *Þa ymbe hlæw riodan hilde-deore, æþelinga bearn, ealra twelfe* ("Then round the barrow twelve nobles rode, war-brave princes") (Chickering's translation, lines 3169-70). Tolkien writes:

> Then the Riders of the King's House upon white horses rode round about the barrow and sang together a song of Théoden Thengel's son that Gléowine his minstrel made, and he made no other song after. The slow voices of the Riders stirred the hearts even of those who did not know the speech of that people; but the words of the song brought a light to the eyes of the folk of the Mark as they heard again afar the thunder of the hooves of the North and the voice of Eorl crying above the battle upon the Field of Celebrant; and the tale of the kings rolled on, and the horn of Helm was loud in the mountains, until the Darkness came and King Théoden arose and rode through the Shadow to the fire, and died in splendour, even as the Sun, returning beyond hope, gleamed upon Mindolluin in the morning. (*RK* 988)

A dirge is sung as Théoden is interred; though the words of the song are not quoted, the reader is given the sense of the traditional Northern heroic elegy.

The relatively wide range of funerals that we have seen in H suggests an interest distinct from other traditions in *LotR*. Tolkien has created the illusion of a distinct Rohirric history; a community that uniquely transmits its culture through centralized memorials and elegiac language. Bakhtin's observation:

> In ancient literature it is memory, and not knowledge, that serves as the source and power for the creative

> impulse. That is how it was, it is impossible to change it: the tradition of the past is sacred. There is as yet no consciousness of the possible relativity of any past…. Absolute conclusiveness and closedness is the outstanding feature of the temporally valorized epic past" (*Dialogic* 325-6).

Gléowine, the king's official "biographer" and minstrel—one of the early founders of the H tradition—tellingly ceases to make songs after his elegy for Théoden. There is nothing further for him to say. He has fulfilled his role and spoken for all time. Bakhtin's terminal language "conclusiveness" and "closedness" is perfectly illustrated here. In a culture where noble death is celebrated in elegiac song, Gléowine has reached the apex of his career. His song immortalizes Théoden and makes spectators of all succeeding generations: "the words of the song brought a light to the eyes of the folk of the Mark as they heard again afar the thunder of the hooves of the North."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE THAIN PEREGRIN COMMUNITY IN MIDDLE-EARTH

P: Peregrin

LotR's prologue states that Pippin, "Thain Peregrin," as he is called in Gondor, brought to Gondor, at the request of "Elessar," a copy of the Red Book of Westmarch. This was called the "Thain's Book." Regarding its contents, the prologue states:

> [It] was thus the first copy made of the Red Book and contained much that was later omitted or lost. In Minas Tirith it received much annotation, and many corrections, especially of names, words, and quotations in the Elvish languages; and there was added to it an abbreviated version of those parts of The Tale of Aragorn and Arwen which lie outside the account of the War. (*FR* 14)

Furthermore, we are told that "[n]one of them was written by Peregrin, but he and his successors collected many manuscripts written by scribes of Gondor: mainly copies or summaries of histories or legends relating to Elendil and his heirs" (*FR* 15).

Thus one final textual tradition is proposed in the prologue; I will refer to this source as P (Peregrin or Periannath). It should be noted that we are given some guidance as to the source's interests: elvish terms, the romance between Aragorn and Arwen, and histories and legends relating to Elendil and his heirs. Also, it should be noted that the Thain's Book contains "much that was later omitted or lost." Thus

there should be an expectation that at least some of P's material is distinct and that the source contains stories and scenes that pertain primarily to its interests.

The Red Book encompasses not only the *LotR* and Hobbit narratives but also "The Silmarillion" material; and it would seem that the reference to the Gondorian scribes' annotation and translation of elvish terms pertains mostly to "The Silmarillion" narratives—since it is said that Findegil's copy of the Thain's Book bears the only extant version of Bilbo's "Translations from the Elvish" (*FR* 14). Therefore, though there are translations of elvish hymns and lore (and texts that are imagined as annotations and corrections) in *LotR*, I will not explore this phenomenon. The Tale of Aragorn and Arwen would seem to belong to a P tradition, and would therefore seem to deserve discussion in this chapter. However, Tolkien himself excluded it from the *LotR* narrative, relegating it to the appendices. One possible reason for this exclusion is that Tolkien may have wanted to foreground instead the developing romance between Faramir and Éowyn. The Tale of Aragon and Arwen, though a P text, like "The Silmarillion" material, lies outside the scope of this discussion.

I will, however, take as a suggestion the prologue's indication that the source is composed of a collection of Gondorian manuscripts, and is concerned chiefly with "Elendil and his heirs." Aragorn is the heir of Elendil, and, in a source-critical reading, we can imagine that P's contribution to *LotR* deals chiefly with Aragorn, his path to the throne of Gondor, and the Stewards of Gondor, Denethor and Faramir. I would propose that P is marked by two primary themes surrounding these

characters: competing virtues and the proper use of history. A P source should therefore be detectable in the nexus of Gondorian matters and these two themes.

Warring Duties and Temptation in P

Warring Duties and Temptation in P in Contrast to Other Traditions

Narrative directly related to Gondor (P) frequently shows its characters in conflict with cultural codes of honor, manners, and ethics. To cite a few examples, Faramir, Gondor's Steward-to-be, is forced to decide between loyalty to his father and what Denethor spitefully describes as Faramir's habit of "gentleness" (*RK* 821). Beregond, Guard of the Citadel, has to decide between his duties to Denethor and his duties to Faramir; Pippin between his duty as a sword-thain to Denethor and the life of Faramir. Aragorn is made to decide between riding with the Rohirrim or following the almost certainly fatal Paths of the Dead.

Narratives within the other source traditions, Æ and H, also deal with the subject of competing loyalties or virtues. In Æ, Sam has to choose between showing mercy towards Gollum and the preservation of his master, Frodo; in H, Éomer has to choose between following the codes of Meduseld and trusting the assurances of Aragorn and Gandalf. However, the primary difference between these two traditions and the tradition seen in P is the way in which P introduces the element of strong temptation. P presents its characters facing two actions that seem equally honorable or obligatory, and as being entirely vulnerable to the consequences of their decision. It is true that in Æ Frodo is tempted by the Ring; but when we he finally does succumb to this, we discover that the tempting motive is pure self-interest; he wants

the Ring for himself—and the potentially redeeming attraction to the Ring for the sake of Middle-earth is completely absent. It is also true that Sam is tempted to destroy Gollum for the sake of his master, but this option is made unappealing by the fact that not only would he have to face the soul-tarnishing reality of having destroyed Gollum merely for what he might do, but he would also have to face his own master's scorn. Yes, Galadriel and Gandalf are "tempted" to take the Ring for themselves; however, their temptation is not made to feel like a strong temptation. In Æ and H, characters tend to be compelled to embark upon their journeys by necessity: Frodo and Sam could turn back, but then they know the Shire will eventually perish; the Rohirrim could stay in Helm's Deep, but then they are fully aware that eventually their people will perish; the Ents could refuse to meddle in the affairs of others, but then they are cognizant that their forests will soon disappear.

The Æ narrator frames the "temptation" of Galadriel in a very different manner from the way a hypothetical P narrator tends to frame temptations. Although Galadriel speculates about the power she could have if she had the Ring, she seems quite above stooping to such measures. She knows that her possession of the Ring would end the threat of Sauron, but the temptation is minimized for the reader when she utters the almost incantational speech:

> In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!" (*FR* 368)

In these words, there is little, if any, sense that she is experiencing the delusion or

deception which normally accompanies temptation. First, the subtle decision to frame her frightening vision with the notion that little Frodo will be the one to give her this power disarms the reader: "In place of the Dark Lord *you will* set up a Queen." But more importantly, her rhetoric suggests that she has long before rejected a desire for the Ring. No sooner does she claim the self-aggrandizing benefits of possessing the Ring than she offsets these benefits with a darker truth: "beautiful as the Morning—terrible as the Night; fair as the Sea, Sun, and Snow—dreadful as the Storm and Lightning; all shall love me—and despair." In other words, she is under no delusion; she knows fully that the Ring will be the ruin of her soul. For her, the choice is easy. Knowledge and wisdom are all that is required for her to choose rightly. She has only to choose between becoming a lord more terrible than Sauron or fading with the integrity of her soul intact.

But in P, simply possessing true knowledge of the eventual result of a decision is not enough. This tradition's characters are often placed in circumstances where the dilemma is not so much in knowing what, or what not, to do; the question is not so much between right and wrong as it is between choosing the lesser of two evils or the greater of two goods. There are instances of temptation and competing virtues throughout *LotR*, but, outside of P, characters tend not to be made to rise or fall on the basis of a decision between what seem at first to be equally valid options. In a reading that attempts to take seriously Tolkien's simulation of found antique manuscripts, it is as if a distinct P (or Gondorian) tradition has shaped its stories in such a way that several of its main characters have to endure strong temptation and resist the claim of a lower good that often presents itself as the more urgent and

immediate claim.

“The Higher Law Must be Obeyed”: Sir Gawain and Conflicting Duties in P

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, an anonymous medieval romance translated by Tolkien, shows a similar structure. Gawain is constantly compelled by his own fidelity to certain ideals to adjudicate between the sometimes mutually exclusive claims of chivalric, courtly, and moral ideals. A summary of the story’s plot with a focus on the theme of temptation follows: Sir Bertilak, in the guise of a Green Knight, challenges the courage of King Arthur’s court; Gawain is therefore compelled to defend the honor of his King’s court, so he answers the challenge and cuts off Bertilak’s head. The Green Knight’s head, however, turns out to be as strange as his hue. He picks up his head and reminds Gawain to meet in a year in the Green Chapel, where Bertilak will administer a return blow.

At this point, both Gawain and the reader become aware that this is no longer a story about the strength and prowess of knights. Gawain has just used the full extent of his human strength and power, but to no avail. It is now fully apparent that the story is a fairy tale. And often in fairy tales, a knight’s physical strength is not tested as much as his moral resolve is. The honor of Logres now lies not in Gawain’s physical prowess but rather in his willingness to honor the agreement he made when he accepted Bertilak’s challenge.

Gawain sets out to find the Chapel and finds instead a castle inhabited by a lady “more lovely than Guinevere” (Tolkien’s *Sir Gawain* 59) and a seemingly generous but sporting baron. As a guest of Bertilak, Gawain is under obligation to agree to participate in the game of returning any “prize” he wins while he stays in

the castle. The fair lady tempts him for three nights. Gawain cannot simply refuse her requests in the name of loyalty to her husband; to do so would be to lecture her discourteously and imply that her own loyalty is wanting. The first night, he resists her overtures not by suggesting that he is too good a man to stoop to adultery; but rather by suggesting that he is not good *enough* to have a woman such as herself (*Sir Gawain* 71). On the second night, she appeals to the legitimacy of his knighthood by suggesting that he, as a true knight, should be able to teach "by signs and examples the science of lovers" (*Sir Gawain* 82). Again, Gawain rebuffs her approach by saying that she is too worthy to be his pupil—when he should be her servant (*Sir Gawain* 83).

Thus far he has managed to juggle the competing claims of courtly love and loyalty to his host; he has remained pure while continuing to practice courtesy with the lady:

> He cared for his courtesy, lest a caitiff he proved,
> yet more for his sad case, if he should sin commit
> and to the owner of the house, to his host, be a traitor.
> (*Sir Gawain* 91-92)

On the third night she answers his initial rejection by saying that she has been offended, unless he is rejecting her in favor of another woman (*Sir Gawain* 92). He is forced to say that this is not his reason for staving off her advances: "lover have I none" (*Sir Gawain* 92). She accepts his answer but offers gifts for him to take. Upon hearing that her girdle will protect him from death when he meets the Green Knight, he takes it (*Sir Gawain* 95). Each night he has returned to his host the kisses he accepted as consolations. But he fails to live up to the agreement when he withholds the girdle from Bertilak.

Gawain's encounter with the lady in the empty castle perfectly brings competing values into focus, and Gawain has to decide which is the more important. Tolkien believed that temptation was the story's *raison d'être* (*Sir Gawain* 74). Commenting on the tale's author, Tolkien writes:

> There were for him, it seems clear to me from his handling of this tale, three planes: mere jesting pastimes, such as that played between Gawain and the lord of the castle; 'courtesy,' as a code of 'gentle' or polite manners, which included a special mode of deference to women, and could be held to include, as it was by the lady, the more serious, and therefore more dangerous, 'game' of courtly love-making, which might compete with moral laws; and finally real morals, virtues and sins. These might compete one with another. If so, the higher law must be obeyed. From the first arrival of Sir Gawain at the cast situations are being prepared in which such competitions, with dilemmas in conduct, will occur. The author is chiefly interested in the competition between 'courtesy' and virtue (purity and loyalty); he shows us their increasing divergence, and shows us Gawain at the crisis of the temptation recognizing this, and choosing virtue rather than courtesy, yet preserving a graciousness of manner and a gentleness of speech belonging to the true spirit of courtesy. ("Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," in *Monsters* 95)

Ultimately, Gawain goes to the Green Chapel, which turns out fittingly to be a barrow. Once there, he finds it to be a court higher than that of either Arthur or the castle. Gawain is exposed for having breached the agreement he made with his host. Gawain receives judgment from the Green Knight, but also a large measure of mercy. And the knight returns to Logres humbled.

There are a number of similarities here between *Sir Gawain*'s treatment of temptation/conflicting duties and Tolkien's story. If *LotR* were to be read as a compilation of sources rather than a novel written by a single author, a P source

could be said to begin its influence in Bree, where two of its favorite subjects intersect: the subject of Aragorn, soon-to-be king of Gondor, and the subject of the hard choice. In Bree, the hobbits have to determine the authenticity of Strider's offer to guide them to Rivendell. Frodo, still seeking confirmation that Aragorn is trustworthy, says:

> 'I don't see why you should warn us to take care, and yet ask us to take you on trust. Why the disguise? Who are you? What do you really know about—about my business; and how do you know it?' 'The lesson in caution has been well learned,' said Strider with a grim smile. 'But caution is one thing and wavering is another. You will never get to Rivendell now on your own, and to trust me is your only chance. You must make up your mind.' (*FR* 167)

The expression, "You must make up your mind" is the spoken and unspoken channel into which many of P's characters are funneled. Frodo and Sam have learned caution, but they are going to have to decide how much caution is too much. No codes of discernment can help them be certain of Strider's claims. In the end, not even Gandalf's letter can give them epistemological certainty. The hobbits are left to trust their instincts:

> I believed that you were a friend before the letter came…or at least I wished to. You have frightened me several times tonight, but never in the way that servants of the Enemy would, or so I imagine. I think one of his spies would—well, seem fairer and feel fouler, if you understand (*FR* 172).

Fearing that his inexperience will make a fool of him, Frodo hesitates at the end of every statement he makes in the indicative. Truth in this narrative is not a code that can be decrypted by casuistry. The hobbits are, at the same time, tempted to trust and tempted to distrust; but Frodo's "seem fairer/feel fouler" demonstrates some

knowledge of the nature of evil. Trusting one's own moral intuition—however untried—is the way forward.

Later, Aragorn is made to choose between breaking his oath to safeguard Frodo and abandoning Pippin and Merry to the orcs of Isengard. He also has to choose whether he will ride with the Rohirrim to Gondor at Théoden's bidding or follow the ominous Paths of the Dead (this scene will be discussed at more length below). He is made to choose between permanently uniting with an important ally, Rohan, through a potential marriage to Éowyn or staying true to Arwen, whose people are leaving the shores of Middle-earth forever. Marrying Arwen means that he will first have to endure a kind of quest for the "golden fleece" (or, in Tolkien's fictional world, Beren's quest for the Silmaril) and win the crown of Gondor.

Faramir has to choose between foolishly allowing Frodo and Sam to retain the Ring and follow Gollum to Cirith Ungol, or taking them into custody, winning the favor of his father, and putting some hope in the slim chance that his wise father can overcome his own temptations. Neither choice is ideal; both entail extreme risks. And in connection with Faramir, Frodo is left with the choice of allowing Gollum to die for trespassing at the Forbidden Pool or, in saving Gollum, causing Gollum to distrust Frodo for the duration of their journey. He chooses to offer what he knows Gollum will take as a false assurance in order to spare his life. Here Frodo is not given the choice between competing virtues so much as he is left to choose between competing evils. Aragorn, though he has flown the flag of his house on the battlefield already, has to choose whether to uplift Gondor's sagging spirits by flying his flag in the city or, in observance of conventional protocol, putting the flag away in

deference to the Stewards when entering the city (*RK* 872). Gandalf, speaking to Beregond and Denethor's servants, makes an explicit reference to conflicting duties when he says,

> And so pass also the days of Gondor that you have known; for good or evil they are ended. Ill deeds have been done here; but let now all enmity that lies between you be put away, for it was contrived by the Enemy and works his will. You have been caught in a *net of warring duties* that you did not weave. But think, you servants of the Lord, *blind in your obedience*, that *but for the treason of Beregond* Faramir, Captain of the White Tower, would now also be burned [emphasis added]. (*RK* 865-6)

Gandalf himself is caught in a net of warring duties when the Mouth of Sauron, on behalf of Sauron, offers to surrender Frodo in exchange for meeting Sauron's demands. Interestingly, even the Mouth of Sauron hides behind the unwritten rules of courtesy when he says, "I am a herald and ambassador, and may not be assailed!" Gandalf replies: "Where such laws hold… it is also the custom for ambassadors to use less insolence…. You have naught to fear from us, until the errand is done" (*RK* 900). Peter Jackson's adaptation of *The Return of the King* unintentionally mangles this tension when he has Aragorn proceed to take off the ambassador's head. However, in P, a terrible enemy is spared because he is protected by the invincible but invisible good will of law-abiding men. After the Mouth of Sauron gives the terms of Sauron's offer, Gandalf's affection for the hobbits makes this a more difficult choice than at first it may seem.

P repeatedly critiques "blind obedience." A source-critical reading of *LotR* could suggest that, whatever the initial histories and legends recorded of these events, at some point a Gondorian storyteller has "shaped" them in such a way as to

demonstrate where codes of honor/courtesy and moral virtue diverge. The P narrative material makes a necessity out of some form of "treason." The "right thing to do" almost always comes at the cost of something just as dear.

The Beheading Game and the Paths of the Dead

The *Gawain*-poet's Beheading Game threatens to abort the tale before it ever gets underway; and it threatens a second time to turn the comic nature of the tale[65] into something more serious when Gawain's head is on the block. The tale quite literally depends upon the heads of its two chief characters. The game, however, turns out to be just that—a game. The Green Knight's immortality (at the beginning of the story) and his mercy (at the end) completely alter an ordinary understanding of the ominous term "beheading." Here the seemingly contradictory "beheading" and "game" become coherent. What sounds like a terminal action to both the characters and the reader turns out to be the beginning of a journey into Faerie.

Aragorn's journey along the "Paths of the Dead" creates a similar ambiguity of terms. Elrohir, son of Elrond, quotes the words of an ancient poet, "Malbeth the Seer," urging Aragorn: "'I bring word to you from my father: The days are short. If thou art in haste, remember the Paths of the Dead.' 'Always my days have seemed to me too short to achieve my desire,' answered Aragorn. 'But great indeed will be my haste ere I take that road'" (*RK* 784).

The reader at this point is just being introduced to these "paths"; and the ambiguity of the phrase leads the reader to assume that "Paths of the Dead" is being

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[65] Benjamin La Farge makes this point ("Comic Romance" 31). He notes that the game is used to lightheartedly mock the courage of Arthur's court; the Green Knight's two taunts: "What is this Arthur's house" and "You are not Gawain the Glorious" bookend the tale and create a comic effect.

used as a metaphor for Aragorn's death; the phrase could be a poetic, euphemistic petition for Aragorn to seek his own death in a final battle. His answer to Elrohir does little to disabuse reader of this interpretation; Aragorn's answer could be an equally poetic one. But if Aragorn understands the full meaning of "Paths of the Dead," other characters seem to share to some degree in the reader's ignorance.

Éomer says to Aragorn: "'I had hoped that we should ride to war together; but if you seek the Paths of the Dead, then our parting is come, and it is little likely that we shall ever meet again under the Sun" (*RK* 788). Éomer's words indicate that the name is not merely a metaphor but refers to a literal path of some kind, but he also assumes the path means Aragorn's literal death. Gimli's response to the name indicates even less understanding: "The Paths of the Dead!" said Gimli. "It is a fell name; and little to the liking to the Men of Rohan, as I saw. Can the living use such a road and not perish? And even if you pass that way, what will so few avail to counter the strokes of Mordor?" (*RK* 789-90). Aragorn tells Éowyn:

> "Tomorrow I shall ride by the Paths of the Dead." Then she stared at him as one that is stricken, and her face blanched, and for long she spoke no more, while all sat silent. "But, Aragorn," she said at last, "is it then your errand to seek death? For that is all that you will find on that road. They do not suffer the living to pass." (*RK* 792)

Again, the characters assume "Paths of the Dead" refers to a journey towards one's death. Théoden halts Merry's oath to follow these paths, "Speak not words of omen! …For there may be more roads than one that bear that name" (*RK* 810). The play on words continues.

P reverses some of the elements of the *Gawain*-poet's plot. Indeed, Aragorn's

agreement to ride the Paths of the Dead parallels Gawain's agreement to seek what seems to be his certain death in a "Green Chapel" (i.e., a burial mound). Like Gawain, who embarks upon his mission in defense of Logres, Aragorn, for Gondor's sake, honorably chooses to pursue this path whatever the consequence.

Also, where Gawain's journey is a response to the Green Knight's challenge, in P this is exactly reversed. Actually, Aragorn's journey resembles more closely Sir Bertilak's journey to Camelot in order to interrogate its honor and courage. Aragorn, called "Elfstone" by the people of Gondor because of the green stone in his ring (*RK* 874), rides to the Paths, questioning the honor of the King of the Dead. Sir Bertilak, in the form of the Green Knight, is called an "elvish man" (*Sir Gawain* 49); as Aragorn disappears onto the Paths of the Dead, the narrator observes the bystanders' response:

> But none of her folk saw this parting, for they hid themselves in fear and would not come forth until the day was up, and the reckless strangers were gone. And some said: 'They are *Elvish wights*. Let them go where they belong, into the dark places, and never return. The times are evil enough' [emphasis added]. (*RK* 795)

If the green-stone knight, Aragorn, resembles Sir Bertilak, Gimli shadows the more conventional portrait of Gawain. In spite of the grim words of omen, Gimli follows Aragorn out of loyalty, believing that he is going to a certain death. Éowyn tells Aragorn, "They go only because they would not be parted from thee—because they love thee" (*RK* 794). If Gimli goes with Aragorn, he cannot be sure that he will be able to fight for Gondor. The difficult choice is before him, and he chooses the virtue of friendship over riding to battle with the Rohirrim. Though the theme of conflicting virtues does not reach its climax here (as it does with the narrative of

Denethor and Faramir), this is one narrative in a series of narratives in P that echoes Sir Gawain and its experiment in temptation.

In *Sir Gawain* the poet dramatizes the division between external rules and an internal code of neighborly love. Guided by love, Gawain kindly resists the lady and remains faithful to his host. Ironically, the reduction of a comprehensive list of rules that become more complicated still when the context changes to one single dictum does not simplify things for characters like Gawain. Actually, the law of love is more complex than a code of honor: in the latter, Gawain could have failed in love by pursuing a code of "courtesy" towards his temptress; in the former, however, since the law of love stands above all other codes, its adherent bears the responsibility of choosing between codes of courtesy and codes of loyalty.

In the stories told by Gondor, P, the codes of honor, courtesy, and gamesmanship are often poor guides for personal conduct in complex situations. A lord's decision cannot ultimately protect his servants from mortal sin. Denethor's stewardship is no guarantee of his sanity. With respect to the Ring, Faramir, and the future, Denethor is wrong in every way and following his orders will prove fatal. But neither can we simply assume that P questions authority *qua* authority. In Gimli's case, following Aragorn is crucial. It is Gimli's decision to disobey his own survival instincts and *follow* Aragorn that leads him to honor.

Tolkien seems to have viewed *Sir Gawain* as a textual field in which, in complex settings, the distance between courtesy and virtue can be accurately measured. In P, a similar measurement occurs. Beregond is obligated to be loyal to Denethor and Faramir, but when Denethor attempts to slay his own son, Beregond's

loyalty to Denethor becomes mere "courtesy," a code which, like Gawain's courtesy towards the Lady, is authoritative only in normal circumstances. On the other hand, Beregond's loyalty to Faramir remains loyalty, a virtue to pursue regardless of the situation, even in the event that loyalty is called "treason." When being pursued by Éowyn, Aragorn, though he is aware of how difficult it will be for her to accept his refusal, in the end must refuse. Courtesy to her cannot compare to the virtue he owes to Arwen. Faramir, keenly aware of his father's preference for Boromir, allows Frodo to continue on a fool's mission with the Ring. His duty to his father, in this unprecedented context, becomes a lesser one than his responsibility to bring peace to Middle-earth. When codes and virtues come into conflict, as Tolkien observed in his essay, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," "the higher law must be obeyed" (95).

Ofermod **and Monumental Historiography in P**

On the reverse side of honor, courage, and chivalry in the face of difficulty is what Tolkien calls "misplaced chivalry"—an "excess" of chivalry that, "even if it be approved by contemporary opinion, ...not only goes beyond need and duty, but interferes with it" ("Homecoming" in *Tree and Leaf* 144). This is Tolkien's evaluation of the actions of Beorhtnoth, the earl who led native Englishmen into battle with the Danes in AD 991; and, Tolkien argues, it is an evaluation he shares with the anonymous author of the fragmentary *The Battle of Maldon*. The poem describes the earl allowing the vikings, at their request, to cross the causeway and fight on land: *Ða se eorl ongan for his ofermode alyfan landes to fela laþere ðeode* ("Then the earl in his overmastering pride actually yielded ground to the enemy, as he should not have

done."[66] Being given a "sporting chance," they gladly leave the position in which they are at a disadvantage, cross the bridge, and proceed to slaughter the English.

Tolkien draws attention to the poet's term *ofermod*, arguing that it demonstrates the antique poet's severe criticism of Beorhtnoth's actions. The excessive chivalry, for Tolkien, was particularly shameful because it was an action that unnecessarily imperiled his subordinates, his *heorðwerod*, those dearest to him ("Homecoming" 146). It is one thing, he argues, for a subordinate to act in an excess of chivalry, for he endangers only himself; Gawain—who responds, always too eagerly, to any challenge to his lord's honor—is an exemplar of this kind of excess ("Homecoming" 149). Tolkien thought that this defect in Beorhtnoth was a "defect of character…moulded by…'aristocratic tradition,' enshrined in tales and verse of poets now lost save for echoes" ("Homecoming" 146). Thus, for Tolkien, the songs of poets, singing of the heroes of the past, can be (though not necessarily) directly responsible not only for inspiring great deeds, but also for fostering the irresponsible pride of leaders.

This critique finds its way into *LotR*, and I would suggest that it is most present in P, or Gondorian, material, which seems to emphasize difficult choices and codes of honor. Where we see a Gawain-like ability to vindicate codes of courtesy while also paying heed to even higher laws in Faramir, Aragorn, and Beregond, we also see in P the corruption of honor, especially in Denethor, whose actions are rooted not in a love for others but in the deadliest form of the seven mortal sins: the sin of self-love or pride. In particular, Tolkien's observation that Beorhtnoth's

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[66] Tolkien's translation, in "Homecoming" (143).

ofermod was the result of an "aristocratic tradition" and its tales of the past lingers as a temptation for some of P's characters.

"Let the Dead Bury the Living": Nietzsche, Monumental Historiography, and P

To demonstrate how distinct historiographies in Middle-earth can justify a source-critical reading of *LotR*, it is helpful first to discuss Nietzsche's three modes of history.[67] Two of these modes of history appear among the characters of *LotR*; of particular importance to this chapter on the P source, is the mode that Nietzsche called "Monumental History." The German philosopher proposed that history "belongs to the living person" in three respects: as an "active and striving person," as one who "preserves and admires," and as a "suffering person in need of emancipation" (*The Use and Abuse of History* 7).[68] He says that these three kinds of historically-minded people correspond (respectively) to three methods of history: monumental history, antiquarian history, and critical history (*Use and Abuse* 7).

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[67] It is unknown how familiar Tolkien was with Nietzsche's work; there do not seem to be any explicit references to him in Tolkien's published letters, lectures, or books. Regardless of this, Nietzsche's historiographies, however, are still useful in categorizing three very basic attitudes towards history. Nietzsche helpfully shows how each historiographical attitude exhibits specific identifying behaviors.

[68] It would be justifiable to question the wisdom of relying upon the historiographical categories of a philosopher and historian who was once described by a contemporary scholar, Ulrich von Wilamowitz Moellendorff, as a writer who "shunned source criticism, neglected linguistic analysis, couldn't be bothered to footnote, was generally ignorant of archeology, and 'revile[d] the historical-critical method…" (cited in Jensen, *Friedrich Nietzsche: Philosophy of History*, "Basel" para. 5). I should, however, answer in three parts: (1) this charge was made two years before Nietzsche's *Use and Abuse* (published in 1874), during which time (2) Nietzsche "[a]lmost immediately after [publishing *Birth of Tragedy* in 1872] rescinded his artistic-mystical view about the historian's ability to intuit the real Ideas, in Schopenhauer's technical sense, of the nature of tragedy beyond the mediated observation of the past through historical evidence…. His increasingly skeptical attitude toward the mystical aspect of Schopenhauer's philosophy led Nietzsche to revise major aspects of his own thought" ("Physiognomy and Teleology" para. 1). And (3) even if Nietzsche's historiography remained unreformed when writing *Use and Abuse*, it is important to note that I am not availing myself of his historiography at all; his view of history is not my concern. I am instead dealing with his non-historical observations and evaluations of his fellow historians: how they processed history. Nietzsche, however flawed his work as a historian might have been, was a keen and penetrating observer of human nature.

When the three modes of history are balanced and mature within their indigenous climates, they are healthy and serve present life. However, when there is an "excess of history" and/or a transplanting of these methods in non-native soils, these modes become "destructive weeds" (*Use and Abuse* 10)

In a healthy monumental history construct, the past serves the life of the present by prompting active people to consider that "whatever once was able to expand the idea of 'Human being' and to define it more beautifully must constantly be present in order that it always keeps its potential"(Nietzsche, 7). In other words, the one who is inclined to monumental history looks to the past for exemplars, hoping to find teachers who will help the living repeat the greatness that once was. When the present seems to give little hope of repeating former glory, the monumental historian "runs back away from resignation and uses history as a way of fighting resignation." We will find examples of this historiography in P.

Monumental history, however, takes a destructive turn when there is a general resistance to the notion that greatness eternally arises. This unhealthy form of historiography appears as a strong temptation in P. According to Nietzsche, the public takes the notion of greatness quite literally and notices that "greatness," by definition, is uncommon, isolated, and unique. In other words, an "excess" of this method of perceiving history reveals the bitter end, the problem at the heart of monumental history: namely that "It will always bring closer what is unlike, generalize, and finally make things equal. It will always tone down the difference in motives and events, in order to set down the monumental *effectus*, that is, the exemplary effect worthy of imitation, at the cost of the *causae*" (Nietzsche, 9).

Greatness is thus seen as a causeless effect; that which must arise to *become* great cannot be viewed as having true greatness: “The dull habit, the small and the base, filling all corners of the world, like a heavy atmosphere clouding around everything great, casts itself as a barrier, deceiving, dampening and suffocating along the road which greatness has to go toward immortality” (Nietzsche, 8).

Condemning the “artistically inert types,” who “have solemnly proclaimed the canon of monumental culture,” Nietzsche, in what could almost sound like a description of Denethor’s appraisal of his contemporaries, argues that:

> they are knowledgeable about culture because they generally like to get rid of culture. They behave as if they were doctors, while basically they are only concerned with mixing poisons. Thus, they develop their languages and their taste, in order to explain in their discriminating way why they so persistently disapprove of all offerings of more nourishing cultural food. For they do not want greatness to arise. Their method is to say: "See greatness is already there!" In truth, this greatness that is already there is of as little concern to them as what arises out of it. Of that their life bears witness. Monumental history is the theatrical costume in which they pretend that their hate for the powerful and the great of their time is a fulfilling admiration for the strong and the great of past times. In this, through disguise they invert the real sense of that method of historical observation into its opposite. Whether they know it or not, they certainly act as if their motto were: let the dead bury the living. (*Use and Abuse* 10)

In other words, though monumental history, practiced moderately, sets out to bridge the divide between the past and the present, its inherent weaknesses expose it to an excess, in which the present is completely cut off from the past which, in a kind of reverse palimpsest, buries and erases it.

Antiquarian history, in its healthier form, compels a person to see him or herself as a flowering of his or her own past. The antiquarian admires the past and roots the individual and "justifies" his or her own existence. This person is served by a history that "links the less favored races and people to their home region and home traditions, keeps them settled there, and prevents them from roaming around and from competition and warfare, looking for something better in foreign places" (Nietzsche, 11).

Nietzsche argues, however, that, once again, such a view, as healthy as it may be, requires history to suffer in service to life or the antiquarian studies all past things in total isolation; thus he cannot distinguish between past things. They are all equally important and valued not on their own merit but simply and exclusively because they are past. The antiquarian model therefore is constantly in danger of turning its adherents into hoarders: "the wretched drama of a blind mania for collecting, a restless compiling together of everything that ever existed. The man envelops himself in a moldy smell" (Nietzsche, 12). He knows not how to generate life; he is instead an expert mummifier—he knows only how to preserve. Antiquarian history, like monumental history, "hinders the powerful willing of new things." Again, in its excessive form, life suffers in service to history.[69]

The elves in Æ could be described as pursuing an antiquarian mode of history. They preserve the past, but do not generate a new present. They preserve

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[69] The critical method of history, which I mention here because it is not as germane to the discussion of P's historiographies, describes the individual who seeks freedom from both the tyranny of the past and the present, and thus he or she brings both the past and the present to judgment and condemns them equally. In its excessive form, it cuts the present off from the past and orphans culture; but, needing to acknowledge one's relationship to the past, the critical method is therefore liable to invent an alternative past.

histories, languages, icons, religious devotions; but they are in the process of leaving Middle-earth; as a culture, they do not grow. Like the Ents, there seem to be no children among them. However, their historiography seems to be the result not of an excess of history but rather an acknowledgement that their role has ended and must yield to mankind's role.

In this respect, Gimli and Legolas's conversation regarding human beings' new role in Middle-earth is fascinating:

> 'That is a fair lord and a great captain of men,' said Legolas. 'If Gondor has such men still in these days of fading, great must have been its glory in the days of its rising.' 'And doubtless the good stone-work is the older and was wrought in the first building,' said Gimli. 'It is ever so with the things that Men begin: there is a frost in Spring, or a blight in Summer, and they fail of their promise.' 'Yet seldom do they fail of their seed,' said Legolas. 'And that will lie in the dust and rot to spring up again in times and places unlooked-for. The deeds of Men will outlast us, Gimli.' 'And yet come to naught in the end but might-have-beens, I guess,' said the Dwarf. 'To that the Elves know not the answer,' said Legolas. (*RK* 883)

This scene takes place, not surprisingly, in the halls of Gondor—the epicenter of the P source. Legolas asserts that greatness among men still exists—though there are perhaps fewer men of such quality today. Gimli suggests, however, that greatness is unsustainable amongst men: what good arises in an earlier generation is never continued in the next. It all comes, to use Aragorn's term above, to naught.

In Denethor, the excess of monumental history reaches its fullest expression. He boils, as it were, his living son in the cauldron of his dead son's memory. The memory of the past always keeps him from recognizing what stands before him in the present. Nietzsche argued that the "inactive and impotent empower themselves

with [monumental history] and serve it" (*Use and Abuse* 9). They direct their weapons at "hereditary enemies," usually "stronger cultural spirits" (Nietzsche, 9). The "creative man always stands at a disadvantage with respect to the man who only looks on and does not play his own hand, as for example in all times the political know-it-all was wiser, more just, and more considerate than the ruling statesman" (Nietzsche, 10). This is precisely a description of Denethor and Gandalf's relationship. While the rest of the allies, led by Gandalf, make their feeble attempts against the enemy, risking all, Denethor stands back and scoffs at every measure. He scorns Gandalf's and Faramir's decision to allow the hobbits to take the Ring to Mordor in order to destroy it; he mocks those who defend his city; he minimizes the worth of a potential initial victory against Sauron; he even scorns those who, in the last resort, flee the battle—"why do the fools fly?" Yet, he offers no countermeasure of his own; he crosses his arms and pouts over not having possession of the Ruling Ring. He thus uses what little power he has against the stronger spirit, Gandalf. Re-enacting Ar-Pharazon's irreverence and treason against the Valar (see *The Silmarillion* 277-279), he invokes the customs of the "heathen kings" (*RK* 834), who, thousands of years before, in service to Sauron, began to worship regressive, naked power and despair.

When asked what he would have, if he could have his way in this war, Denethor responds chillingly:

> I would have things as they were in all the days of my life…and in the days of my longfathers before me: to be the Lord of this City in peace, and leave my chair to a son after me, who would be his own master and no wizard's pupil. But if doom denies this to me, then I will

> have naught: neither life diminished, nor love halved,
> nor honour abated. (*RK* 865)

Interestingly, in "all the days" of his life, he has lived in the growing shadow of Mordor; he has never ruled the city in peace. But monumental historians, in Nietzsche's theory, tend to round off the sharp edges of reality, smooth out the differences, and invent analogues. Once again, the word "naught" is used in a discussion of history (see Gimli's and Aragorn's use of the term above). This present time, Denethor supposes, should be just like former times—as if nothing at all had the right to interpose itself and create new situations. If he cannot have his "longfathers'" life, then he will have "naught"—quite literally, "not anything" (*OED* "naught").

Regarding Denethor's use of the term, Shippey states:

> As *The Lord of the Rings* was coming to the end of its gestation it became possible for the first time for political leaders to say they wanted nothing and make it come true. Denethor clearly will not submit to the Enemy, as Saruman did, but he also cares nothing in the end for his subjects…. 'The West has failed,' he says. 'It shall all go up in a great fire, and all shall be ended! Ash! Ash and smoke blown away on the wind!' He does not say 'nuclear fire,' but the thought fits. Denethor breaks his own staff of office as Saruman does not. He mingles an excess of heroic temper—the ancient Ragnarök spirit, one might say, which Tolkien with significant anachronism twice calls 'heathen'…with a mean concern for his own sovereignty and his own boundaries. (*Road* 172-3)

No doubt this excess of Northern "heroic temper" intersects with Nietzsche's idea of excessive monumental history. The peace of the past thus chokes the life that exists in the present. Either things must stay the same, or they must not exist at all. If he had the Ring, he supposes, then he would be inclined to fight. The only battle worth

fighting is the one in which he is guaranteed to win. The realm worth ruling is the realm that does not need defending.

Denethor uses an old model for perceiving the world around him—namely a palantir. The palantírí, we are told, once served the purpose of allowing rulers to communicate over wide distances (*RK* 1051-2). He assumes that, although there are no other allied kings with whom to communicate, this relic will give him insight into the present. Again, the analogy he develops between the past use of the palantírí and their present use proves to be harmful. For things are very different in Denethor's day.

Faramir, a character Tolkien sometimes uses to critique the historical mode Nietzsche labeled as excessive monumental historiography, describes the lifestyle and habits of kings under its influence:

> It is not said that evil arts were ever practised in Gondor, or that the Nameless One was ever named in honour there; and the old wisdom and beauty brought out of the West remained long in the realm of the sons of Elendil the Fair, and they linger there still. Yet even so it was Gondor that brought about its own decay, falling by degrees into dotage, and thinking that the Enemy was asleep, who was only banished not destroyed. Death was ever present, because the Númenóreans 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. Childless lords sat in aged halls musing on heraldry; in secret chambers withered men compounded strong elixirs, or in high cold towers asked questions of the stars. And the last king of the line of Anárion had no heir. (*TT* 684)

These may be the kings that Denethor calls "heathen"—though the term has no point of reference in a world that has never seen Christianity. But it is this

constructed past that he projects onto the screen of history and has chosen to use as an appropriate guide to living—or more precisely, dying—in the present. Faramir might as well have summed up the lives of these kings in Nietzsche's phrase: *let the dead bury the living*. Faramir is convinced that the hunger for "endless life unchanging" has been the culprit in this decay. This is a fair description of the dis-ease of monumental history: the desire to subdue historical change. Since death appears to be the only phenomenon that does not change, it is immortalized. It should then be no surprise that Denethor's last act is not only to kill his only son and commit suicide, but also to do so in the most macabre fashion possible. It is almost an idolatry of death—a final acknowledgement of the sovereign power of despair.

Unlike H, P critiques glory-seeking, a historically conditioned form of *ofermod*. In the name of future glory, Théoden, a key hero in H, prods his warriors into a hopeless battle (*RK* 848). But *glory* is a more ambiguous term in P. It is as if P were written in an age (like our own) of propaganda; in such times, people tend to be much more suspicious of terms like "glory" and "honor." Faramir, though he operates under a (healthier) form of monumental historiography himself, suggests that Boromir's desire for Gondor's victory was motivated by a pursuit of "his own glory" (*TT* 678). In contrast to Boromir, Faramir professes to reject the pursuit of glory: "Not were Minas Tirith falling in ruin and I alone could save her, so, using the weapon of the Dark Lord for her good and my glory" (*TT* 678). Once again in a narrative directly related to Gondor, the subject of the "hard choice" arises. Faramir ties together the common concerns of P in making (in theory) the hard choice to allow something good to die in order to avoid a greater evil; in rejecting the claims

of heroic glory; and in allowing a distorted view of ancient grandeur to stifle the living:

> I would see the White Tree in flower again in the courts of the kings, and the Silver Crown return, and Minas Tirith in peace: Minas Anor again as of queen among other queens: not a mistress of many slaves, nay, not even a kind mistress of willing slaves. War must be, while we defend our lives against a destroyer who would devour all; but I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory. I love only that which they defend: the city of the Men of Númenor; and I would have her loved for her memory, her ancientry, her beauty, and her present wisdom. Not feared, save as men may fear the dignity of a man, old and wise. (*TT* 678-9)

Here Faramir sets two images side-by-side: the Argonath and an anti-Argonath. The ominous and awe-inspiring Argonath appears as a "mistress of many slaves" and the love of war for its own sake. Next to this image is the city that is loved for "her memory, her ancientry, her beauty, and her present wisdom." If she is to be feared, then she is to be feared not for her power but for her "dignity." The present is not depicted here as being cut off from the grandeur of the past; the city, as Faramir would have it, is to be loved for both its past greatness and its present wisdom.

In the Houses of Healing, Aragorn fulfills the saying: "The hands of the king are the hands of a healer." A proverb from the past this time gives guidance that heals. Monumental history, as Nietzsche noted, is not itself harmful to life; so long as it continues to provide a bridge between the past and the present, it can serve life. Whereas Denethor refuses to believe that a greatness strong enough to resist the enemy still exists (he rejects Aragorn's claim to any such nobility [*RK* 865]), Aragorn's ability to heal the sick is a sure sign that greatness does indeed continue

into the present. Here a healthy form of monumental historiography serves as a direct antidote to a city that, as symbolized by the dying White Tree, had been dying from its excess of history. As a text heavily influenced by elvish aesthetics, one would expect P to retain symbols that elevate the idea of a willing fading, a voluntary relinquishing of the present, a willingness to allow the past to become the irretrievable past. And the White Tree could well represent an elvish illustration of the elves' fading concurrent with the rise of mankind.

In tracing the narratives of Aragorn, particularly at Bree, the Argonath, the Paths of the Dead, and the Houses of Healing, Faramir, and Denethor, a source-critical reading of *LotR* would suggest that a P source creates scenarios in which competing virtues and historiographies come together. Gondorian figures, as subjects of the P narrative, are often faced with a "hard choice" and a temptation to misuse history. P's largest contribution to *LotR* as a whole is its keen moral and historical sense: it interrogates its characters' ability, like Sir Gawain's and Beorhtnoth's, to distinguish higher laws from lower laws, and to choose healthy forms of historiography over corrupting uses. As such, P puts new life into old tales and new hope into old histories and provides corrective exemplars, who demonstrate grace in their hard choices and proper balance in their use of history.

CONCLUSION

Discussing "The Council of Elrond" and Tolkien's ability to create distinct voices,[70] Shippey writes:

> The continuous variations of language within this complex chapter tell us almost subliminally how reliable characters are, how old they are, how self-assured they are, how mistaken they are, what kind of person they are. (*Author* 76)

He might have added that these "variations" also present the possibility of the kind of reading I have offered in this study. Tolkien's talent for distinct voices is an extension of his ability to create distinct cultures and manuscript traditions. At once, he is able to make the past feel distant, as if we were clinging to it by the faintest of markings on an ancient manuscript, while at the same time drawing the reader into the framework of Middle-earth to hear long-gone traditions reawakened.

The purpose of this study was to discuss how Tolkien "ages" his text and to show that "Tolkien's artistry compels readers to believe that the *LotR* story was painstakingly pieced together, strand by strand, from the archives of these various cultures and methodically translated from ancient languages into English by a modern philologist" (12, above). Tolkien imitated certain realities of medieval textual transmission; and this reading suggests how the narrative of *LotR* can be conceived of as a text based upon three major textual traditions: Æ, H, and P.

As a last order of business, I will suggest an initial (but surely incomplete and experimental) delineation of the text traditions in *LotR*. The manuscripts that

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[70] For instance, Shippey notes that Elrond's voice is archaic, the dwarves habitually use appositives, the Gaffer's speech indicates "psychological unpreparedness" (*Author* 70-4).

represent each tradition could be essentially synoptic. In this case the narratives of each tradition would vary in terms of emphasis and point-of-view, while the same basic plot would govern the narrative of all three. Or the manuscripts upon which *LotR* is based could tell vastly different stories and have different heroes. I would suggest that the three traditions would be loosely synoptic, having the same set of heroes but foregrounding and backgrounding them according to each tradition's own interests. And, in this reading, each tradition would have its own starting and concluding points. However, an attempt to rigidly assign each section (or more ambitiously, each sentence) to a particular tradition would defeat the spirit of this reading, which has sought to establish a heuristic device that further illumines the historical depth Tolkien was able to achieve in *LotR*. The delineations that follow suggest an approach to such a reading.

I propose that most of Books I and II belong to Æ. The Æ narrative could be said to be interrupted at the end of I:4 ("It was five miles or more from Maggot's lane to the Ferry," *FR* 95) when Merry, the historian of Rohan, is introduced on horseback. Æ shares the narrative content of I:5, "A Conspiracy Unmasked," through I:10, "Strider." Intermittently, these chapters, as will be explained more below, lay foundations for ideas, symbols, and concerns that are developed further in H and P. I:11, "A Knife in the Dark" through II:8 would be an Æ narrative, describing Frodo's journeys to elven Rivendell and Lothlórien. Because they describe the beginnings of Frodo and Sam's journey to Mordor, Aragorn's ancestors (Isildur and Anárion), and Aragorn and Boromir's temptations, the narratives of II:9-10 would be drawn from the manuscripts of the Æ and P traditions.

With the exception of III:11, "The Palantir," which focuses on Pippin and P's talismanic palantir, Book III consists primarily of the H tradition. This book, beginning with a ship burial and ending with Treebeard's promise to imprison Saruman (*TT* 590), tracks the adventures of the "three hunters" (Aragorn, Gimli, Legolas), the adventures of Merry and Pippin, and introduces the reader to the mores of Rohan.

Book IV is almost entirely drawn from Æ. The historical and thematic concerns of P, Gondor's history and hard choices, obtrude into Frodo and Sam's journey in IV: 5-7. Book V alternates between the narratives of H and P. Book V:1-2 narrate Gondor's and the king of Gondor's preparation for battle. Book V:3, 5, and 6 are H; they narrate Rohan's rescue of Gondor. V: 4, 7-10 narrates P's history of the War, the fall of the stewards, and the ascendency of King Aragorn. The narrative of Æ begins again in VI: 1, "The Tower of Cirith Ungol," and continues to VI:4, "The Field of Cormallen." The continuous flow of this thread is interrupted by most of VI:5, "The Steward and the King," which displays distinct features of P. Æ begins again, however, near the end of the chapter after Éowyn says to Faramir, "Now I must go back to my own land and look on it once again, and help my brother in his labour; but when one whom I long loved as father is laid at last to rest, I will return" (*RK* 981). At this point, the narrator begins, offering what sounds like a "seam" statement and reintroducing one of Æ's traits—the emphasis upon exact dates: "So the glad days passed; and on the eighth day of May the Riders of Rohan made ready, and rode off by the North-way, and with them went the sons of Elrond" (*RK* 981-2). Æ constitutes the remaining narrative of *LotR*.

Tolkien's Art

Homer said that Odysseus, in order to communicate with the dead, had to pour out libations on the floor of Hades. Among the precious substances to be poured out, Circe instructs Odysseus to offer the blood of a ram and a black ewe (*Odyssey* 10.581). Wine and milk are not dear enough to provoke the dead to speak. The dead crave the blood of the living; and upon receiving it, speak freely.

Perhaps this is a kind of parable of Homeric art. If the past is to be given a voice to speak to the present, it must be offered nothing less than the energy, the hope, the substance, the "blood" of the living. Whoever "Homer" was—an individual poet or many generations of singing-poets—he successfully re-animated long-dead characters and legends and overcame the natural silence of the past.

There is something of Odysseus's offering in Tolkien's art. In *LotR*, a work that, after nearly seventy years, seems to grow increasingly iconic with every passing decade, readers hear and uniquely experience the past. The historical depth, the mimetic variety of voices, the incarnation of its fantasy, the almost tactile nature of Tolkien's illusion suggest that, much as Sauron poured his identity and energy into his Ring, Tolkien thoroughly invested and immersed himself into *LotR*. His immersion into Middle-earth is such that he not only peopled it with distinct races, living languages, customs, histories, artistic forms, but he has also offered Middle-earth his own astute services as a scholar and compiler of ancient manuscripts. Middle-earth, the world of Tolkien's "heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history," is presented as a historical fantasy, an English past-time, made to speak through the conscious efforts of Tolkien's narrative persona. Through Tolkien's

mediatorial "offering," readers experience a "lost" mythic past that has been recovered, or given a voice, by the skill of a careful Middle-earth scholar.

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[71] The works listed here are not comprehensive, but I have listed them because they have influenced this study in a general way, though they are not cited directly in the thesis itself.

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