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Attainable Vistas: Historical Bias in Tolkien's Legendarium as a Motive for Transformative Fanworks

Cover Page Footnote

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Attainable Vistas:
Historical Bias in Tolkien's Legendarium as a Motive for Transformative
Fanworks
Dawn M. Walls-Thumma

"You came," Celebrimbor said upon turning and seeing me. His nose was running from the cold and the damp, and he sniffled loudly and wiped it with the back of his hand. He grinned at me. I proffered a handkerchief. "Here."

He took it and squinted at the monogram embroidered in the corner with three colors of thread. "Oh, I could not. It is yours."

"I don't want you handling my father's book with your hands ..." I fumbled for a polite way to allude to his crude behavior and had to settle for, "Like that," before arriving suddenly at the word, "Besmirched."

"You have brought it then?"

"Yes. My father does not know that I removed it," I said and, with Celebrimbor's wide-eyed delight, immediately regretted admitting.

"There is hope for you, Pengolodh!" he crowed.

"I wish you wouldn't say that. There is hope for me, yes, but not of the sort that you desire."¹

In a 1961 lecture series that became one of the most influential books written on historiography, historian E. H. Carr noted that "... when we take up a work of history, our first concern should not be with the facts it contains but with the historian who wrote it" (p. 22). J. R. R. Tolkien presented his stories as fictional histories and made that clear throughout his career as an author, creating frame stories, assigning imaginary historians, and presenting his stories as fictional records of a far-gone time. In a 1954 letter, Tolkien (2000) described his purpose as trying "to present a kind of legendary and history of a 'forgotten epoch'" (p. 186). As work progressed on his legendarium, attributions to and marginalia supposedly written by these imaginary historians littered his copy.

Writing to Christopher Tolkien, Tolkien despaired of his "fundamental literary dilemma. A story must be told or there'll be no story, yet it is the untold stories that are most moving" (p. 110). Corresponding with a reader, Tolkien evocatively described these untold tales as "the glimpses of a large history in the

¹ All fictional excerpts come from my story "Truth," part of an in-progress series of character studies of Pengolodh, the primary loremaster of Tolkien's legendarium.

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 journey there, he claimed, would "destroy the magic, unless new unattainable vistas are again revealed" (p. 333). The pseudohistorical context of the legendarium is one way that Tolkien created those glittering cities on the distant horizon. His fictional loremasters—eventually removed from the published *Silmarillion* by Christopher Tolkien—created unattainable vistas of a different sort. These loremasters' biases, implicit in the text, suggest perspectives on familiar characters, settings, and events unrevealed in the written stories. Even as their names were stripped from the published text, their biased viewpoints remain to be detected by readers.

A subset of Tolkien fans serves as the fandom's itinerants, journeying to explore what Tolkien intended to remain unattainable vistas: writers of transformative fiction or fan fiction. It is commonplace to recognize a major purpose of fan fiction as filling in the gaps left by the author. I would suggest that some fan fiction writers also respond to the biases of Tolkien's fictional loremasters, the echoes of which are implicit in the texts, even though Christopher Tolkien has since stricken these characters from the major works. Looking at how writers in the *Silmarillion* fan fiction community respond to the presence of bias in the texts and especially which writers make the most use of historical bias in the construction of their stories reveals a significant conflict in the fan fiction community. At the heart of this conflict, fans disagree whether they possess the authority to make changes to the legendarium as presented in the published texts or whether this authority rests solely with J. R. R. and Christopher Tolkien.

In his 1992 book *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins popularized a novel way of viewing fan cultures and fan activities like the writing of fan fiction. Fan fiction has enjoyed its share of aspersion cast by everyone from rights holders to academics to commentators on popular culture, and fan fiction writers have borne various labels of escalating degrees of malignity. At best, they are hacks too lazy or untalented to create original characters and world-building; at worst, they are criminals, thieves of others' intellectual property that do actual harm to perceptions of the cherished creations of the original author. At best, fan fiction indulges its writers' harmless if pathetic wish-fulfillment fantasies; at worst, it is a gross perversion of the original author's intent for his or her characters, world, and moral message that equals a reprehensible crossing of boundaries. What lies at the heart of these criticisms is authority, specifically who possesses the authority to imaginatively construct within the bounds of a fictional world. Conventionally,

this privilege belongs to the original creator, and fans who encroach upon this privilege are seen as occupying spaces where they do not belong.

Fan fiction writers, on the other hand, are generally assumed to reject the idea that the original creator's authority is greater than their own. As will be seen in the various ways *Silmarillion* fan fiction writers respond to the historical bias detectable in the texts, the views of participants in the Tolkien fan fiction community are not so simple. Some writers adhere to the typical view of fan fiction writers that, if their experiences or desires for the direction a story should take contradict that of the original creator, they still possess the authority to write the story as they believe it should have been written. Other writers, however, concede greater authority to Tolkien, believing that fan fiction based on his books should hold to the facts, worldview, and even morality that he uses them to present. In this sense, the Tolkien fan fiction community more closely resembles the paradigms described by Karen E. Kline's 1996 investigation of critical response to the film adaptations of novels rather than the typical freewheeling fan fiction community that rewrites its source text with apparent abandon. Like the film critics Kline describes, Tolkien fan fiction writers differ in the amount of deviation from the source text they are willing to tolerate in a successful Tolkien-based fan fiction. These differing views show in how fan fiction writers respond to the historical bias that Tolkien embedded in his work, and this response in turn influences which social groups, in the form of fan fiction archives, writers choose for sharing their work.

The Historian Who Wrote It: Historical Bias and the Legendarium

I had rivals among my cohort in Nevrast, of course, but none filled me with implacable irritation like Celebrimbor of Himlad, despite the fact that Celebrimbor and I competed in nothing. He only barely alluded to his work and his studies and he had shown me none of it. None of my people or his were even aware that we knew each other. His father's camp hovered at the verge of what Lord Turgon would tolerate, and all in Nevrast burned with the unspoken wish that Curufin and his son and their retinue would just go away. But there was something ... I was reminded of how magnets held wrong will fly apart. There is something inherent in their nature that they cannot tolerate the other. I suppose that's how it was with Celebrimbor and me.

With careful haste, he opened to the first page. "So this is—" There he stopped. His fingers lifted from the corners of the pages as though afraid his

touch alone might mar them. I saw his chest rise with a quick gasp of surprise. "This is what your people think of my people."

E. H. Carr's advice to consider the historian who wrote a text before considering the facts of that text becomes salient when analyzing Tolkien's legendarium, deliberately constructed as it was to mimic actual history. Before considering how historical bias influences fan fiction and fan fiction communities, it is necessary to briefly review some of the evidence demonstrating this bias.

Historical bias refers to the selection of historical data based on the interests and prejudices of either the historian or his or her culture. E. H. Carr acknowledges that historians inevitably work in a historical and social context of their own, which can distort how they select and interpret evidence. He also identifies the assignment of multiple causes for an event as a best practice for historians, although sources from ancient history often present a single and clearly biased perspective. Similar to ancient sources, in the pseudohistory of *The Silmarillion*, events are ascribed single causes: the Valar issued their invitation to the Eldar out of a desire to protect and love them, Fëanor and his sons behaved as they did for lust of the Silmarils, Túrin was unfortunate because he was cursed by Morgoth. These singular causes mimic the approach taken to history by ancient writers and indicate the possibility of historical bias.

There is no simple way to measure historical bias, no single procedure that can identify a work of historiography as biased or not. In my attempt to ferret out historical bias in *The Silmarillion*, I first looked at the level of detail given to a person or event as indicative of the historian's interest in that subject. Those subjects receiving lengthy, lavish treatment are those toward which the historian strongly biased, either positively or negatively (usually positively, in the case of *The Silmarillion*); those that he ignores are those toward which he feels mild negativity, apathy, or about which he is ignorant. Secondly, I look for depictions of characters and events that defy credibility, either for practical reasons, such as a loremaster reporting authoritatively on an event that he could not have witnessed, or due to their overwhelming and simplistic emotional coloring (extremely positive or extremely negative). In these latter instances, it seems likely that the historian has not achieved the level of objectivity needed to rise above his personal and cultural preferences and is using historiography to manipulate readers' perceptions of those subjects to better align with his own.

In his 2009 book *Arda Reconstructed: The Creation of the Published Silmarillion*, Douglas Charles Kane identified Christopher Tolkien's removal of the fictional loremasters as one of the five most significant editorial changes to the *Silmarillion* material because it eliminated unnecessarily "the contexts in which these stories were placed" (p. 253). Kane did not go so far as to suggest that Tolkien deliberately wrote his stories with the bias of their narrators in mind; however, he comes very close in his assertion of the importance that "the sense of *The Silmarillion* being a compendium of different sources ... should and could have been preserved" (p. 261).

Alex Lewis is, as far as I have been able to find, the first and only scholar to investigate the matter of historical bias in *The Silmarillion*. In a paper presented at the J. R. R. Tolkien Centenary Conference in 1992, Lewis documented how historical bias influenced the depictions of characters and groups of characters in *The Silmarillion*. Lewis traced the source of the bias to Elrond alone, whom he argued was likely a major source in Bilbo's writing of the *Red Book of Westmarch* that we know as *The Silmarillion*. He described the bias present in *The Silmarillion* as "essentially Noldorin but distinctly anti-Fëanorian," with positive regard given to characters who are related to Elrond in some way (p. 160). Especially given that he was working without access to all of the *History of Middle-earth* volumes, Lewis makes a strong case for Elrond as a possible source of bias in *The Silmarillion*, but my research suggests that the historical bias observable in *The Silmarillion* derives foremost from Pengolodh, a scholar of Gondolin to whom the authorship of most of *The Silmarillion* was attributed across much of its history.

Tolkien created many fictional narrators over the decades of his work on the legendarium. Pengolodh, along with Rúmil, is perhaps the most enduring and is certainly the most prevalent.² Pengolodh emerged in the 1930s, first appearing

² Douglas Charles Kane makes the argument that Tolkien eventually rejected Pengolodh as the primary *Silmarillion* loremaster in favor of a mortal, Númenórean tradition. Kane draws on the evidence presented in *Myths Transformed*, where twice in the late 1950s, Tolkien wrote of his intention that "the Mythology must actually be a 'Mannish' affair," handed on by the Eldar to the Númenóreans, who recorded it (1993, pp. 370, 401). Christopher Tolkien identified the confusion over the tradition as a "fundamental problem" that he solved by eliminating reference to the loremasters and tradition altogether in the published *Silmarillion* (p. 205). I disagree with Kane that these late notes are in any way definitive. To change the narrative point of view of the entire *Silmarillion* is no small feat, and while one can interpret the lack of mention of Pengolodh in *The Later Quenta Silmarillion II* (LQ2), which is contemporaneous with the notes in *Myths Transformed*, as evidence of Tolkien carrying his intentions to fruition, the same draft contains no

in the *Earliest Annals of Valinor*, published as part of the 1986 volume *The Shaping of Middle-earth*, and he would remain through to Tolkien's late work on *The Silmarillion*. For the next thirty years, he would continue to appear, often in the preambles to texts or in marginal or parenthetical notes ascribing authorship to him of certain parts of the text: a character who never lifts a sword or speaks a word, yet remains omnipresent through his control of how the events of *The Silmarillion* are imagined by readers. Figure 1 shows a more detailed breakdown of the roles of Rúmil and Pengolodh in the various drafts of the *The Silmarillion*. Looking at these characters' roles throughout the development of *The Silmarillion*, one can locate evidence that these characters were not only at the forefront of Tolkien's mind but guided how he wrote the story.

Tolkien developed Pengolodh and Rúmil into characters in their own right, and the texts they authored reflect the backgrounds he imagined for them. Rúmil is the elder loremaster, and his work covers the mythological material and the history of Aman until the Noldorin exile, when he chose to remain in Aman (1986). Pengolodh handles the historical matter of Beleriand, the philological texts, and amends Rúmil's work where appropriate. The latter function is of particular importance. Parenthetical asides in the *Annals of Valinor* add material "not known unto Rúmil" (1987; see *The Lost Road* pp. 125, 127, and 194-195 for examples of Pengolodh's emendations). These asides serve to show that Tolkien deliberately considered and assigned which loremaster was most appropriate for each text in his pseudohistory. It is also noteworthy that these asides were added during the revision of earlier manuscripts. When Pengolodh appears for the first time in the *Earliest Annals of Valinor*, he is credited for the entirety of the annals of both Valinor and Beleriand. Later, Tolkien revises this to assign the Aman material to Rúmil. For the later *Annals of Valinor*, he revises yet again to attribute material to Pengolodh that further consideration would have proved impossible for Rúmil to know. What seems to be happening here is that, as the backgrounds and the roles of the two loremasters coalesced in Tolkien's mind, he revised the

revisions that suggest a Númenórean narrator. In fact, two sections added to LQ2 represent a distinctively Eldarin point of view: *Laws and Customs among the Eldar* and *The Statute of Finwë and Míriel*. Both of these sections contain significant material concerning Elven views on eschatology. Given the Númenórean preoccupation with death, it defies credibility that, if Tolkien wrote this material with a Númenórean narrator in mind, that this narrator would be able to resist commenting on this material. Rather, what seems to have happened is what happened with other radical changes Tolkien contemplated in the writings collected in *Myths Transformed*: He contemplated them only, never progressing to the stage of modifying the mythology to actually reflect them.

texts to assign authors accordingly. This certainly suggests that he gave thought not only to his loremasters as characters but what they would have known, their interests, and their limitations.

In the *Lhammas*, Pengolodh adds an alternative account about the origins of the Dwarves that contradicts the account offered by Rúmil (1987). While Tolkien's characterization of the Dwarves was an attempt, in Tom Shippey's (2000) words, to "save the evidence" of the contradictory accounts presented in the sources that inspired his work, he adapts it cleverly here to the framework he has established with his fictional loremasters (p. 229). The two accounts allow Tolkien to work in disparate evidence, but here, for the first time, we also see the loremasters revealed as fallible: There are multiple origin stories for the Dwarves because Rúmil (and Pengolodh as well, by implication) is *not* all-knowing. In *Quendi and Eldar*, sources of information on the Valarin language and their limitations are explicitly addressed (1994). While these examples stop short of explicitly admitting the possibility of historical bias, it certainly makes it difficult to argue that Tolkien didn't think deeply enough about his loremasters as characters to admit this possibility. It also makes it unlikely that the loremasters are mere pseudohistorical ornamentations meant to create an illusion of historicity. Instead, glimpses of the loremasters' limitations and fallibility show that Tolkien considered how his loremasters would be inclined to view particular characters and situations, given their own personal backgrounds.

Pengolodh is an interesting choice as the source of much of the *Quenta Silmarillion* material. Pengolodh's character is described in the essay *Quendi and Eldar* as "an Elf of mixed Sindarin and Ñoldorin ancestry, born in Nevrast, who lived in Gondolin from its foundation" (1994, p. 396). His birth in Nevrast ensures that he missed all of the Eldarin history in Aman, the rebellion of the Noldor, the journey to Beleriand, and the early tumults after the Noldorin arrival. Instead, he is plunked into the story during a time of relative calm, when the princes of the Noldor have each decamped to their respective far-flung kingdoms. Nor does he remain even in this relatively serene era for long: In the Year 64, according to the *Grey Annals*, Turgon took a remnant of his people to establish Gondolin (1994). Pengolodh, then, was at most a young man—even a child—when he went to the hidden city, severing contact with the outside world for the next several centuries.

Quendi and Eldar credits Pengolodh with having "rescued a few ancient writings, and some of his own copies, compilations, and commentaries [during the

destruction of Gondolin]. It is due to this, and to his prodigious memory, that much of the knowledge of the Elder Days is preserved" (1994, p. 396). One can imagine a frantic Pengolodh scrambling to collect books and documents from the library of Gondolin as one of the greatest stores of Elven knowledge east of the sea teeters on the verge of annihilation. That the preservation, memory, and interpretation of an entire people's history rests on the recollection and sagacity—and limitations and biases—of a single man is troubling on its own. That he came from Gondolin adds additional complexity to the history.

Gondolin, the hidden city, is largely defined by its isolation. Much as the great achievements of the Valar in Aman came at the cost of estrangement behind the Pelóri from the rest of the world and its problems, according to *The Silmarillion* (2001), Turgon would never be able to realize his objective to "build there a fair city, a memorial of Tirion upon Túna" under the stresses of ongoing war with Melkor (p. 145). It is illustrative that the three greatest cities of the First Age—Menegroth, Nargothrond, and Gondolin—all existed in isolation and, to varying extents, neglected to participate in the larger affairs of Middle-earth. It was within such a context that Pengolodh spent most of the First Age.

After Gondolin's fall, Pengolodh lived amid the refugees at the mouth of Sirion, where he "collected much material among the survivors of the wars ... concerning languages and gesture-systems with which, owing to the isolation of Gondolin, he had not before had any direct acquaintance" (1994, p. 397). So far isolated as to remain ignorant of the languages spoken outside Gondolin, Pengolodh was surely naïve as well to the historical events that comprised the majority of the First Age, which in *The Silmarillion* only "came to [the people of Gondolin] faint and far" (p. 288). How, then, did he come into this knowledge?

In most instances, he likely had no other choice but to come by his knowledge through oral transmission. While in Gondolin, he must have relied on sources who witnessed (or had spoken to eyewitnesses about) the major events of the Years of the Trees and early First Age, prior to his birth. Here, again, the context of Gondolin complicates things. Turgon, King of Gondolin, is described as "unappeasable in his enmity for Fëanor and his sons" due to the loss of his wife, Elenwë, while crossing the Helcaraxë (1996, p. 345). While certainly not a tyrant, Turgon's rule is depicted in *The Silmarillion* as rather autocratic: His law forbidding exodus from Gondolin is almost unbendable, and within the walls of

| Text | Approximate Date | Loremasters Attributed |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| <i>Earliest Annals of Beleriand</i> | before 1930 | Pengolod ³ : attributed authorship of entire <i>Annals of Beleriand</i> (1986) |
| <i>Earliest Annals of Valinor</i> | around 1930 | Pengolod: attributed authorship of entire <i>Annals of Valinor</i> ; later revised so that he continues <i>Annals of Valinor</i> from Rúmil after the departure of the Noldor from Valinor Rúmil: attributed authorship of the portion of the <i>Annals of Valinor</i> that occurs in Aman (1986) |
| <i>Ambarkanta</i> | after 1930 | Rúmil: attributed authorship (<i>Shaping</i> 288) |
| <i>Later Annals of Valinor</i> | 1930-1937 | Pengolod: amended work by Rúmil on the <i>Annals of Valinor</i> to add material from Beleriand during the Time of the Trees; continues <i>Annals of Valinor</i> from Rúmil after the departure of the Noldor from Valinor Rúmil: attributed authorship of the portion of the <i>Annals of Valinor</i> that occurs in Aman (1987) |
| <i>Ainulindalë</i> (B text) | 1930-1937 | Rúmil: attributed authorship (1987) |
| <i>Lhammas</i> | 1930-1937 | Pengolođ: attributed authorship but used the existing work of Rúmil; amends the work of Rúmil to add alternate accounts; authored "shorter account" <i>Lamasethen</i> Rúmil: wrote the work later used by Pengolođ (1987) |
| <i>Quenta Silmarillion</i> | 1930-1937 | Pengolod: attributed authorship but used materials written by Rúmil for sections on the history of Valinor and languages; elaborated on the work of Rúmil Rúmil: wrote the original materials used by Pengolod in writing about the history of Valinor and languages (1987) |
| <i>Ainulindalë</i> (C text) | 1948-1951 | Pengolođ: told Rúmil's tale to Ælfwine and adds information heard from "loremasters of the Noldor in ages past" (p. 17) |

³ Tolkien varied the spelling of the name *Pengolodh* in different texts. I have preserved the spelling used in each text.

| | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| | | Rúmil: wrote the text Pengolođ recited (1993) |
| <i>Ainulindalë</i> (D text) | before 1951 | Pengolođ: told Rúmil's tale to Ælfwine along with added information Rúmil: wrote the text Pengolođ recited (1993) |
| <i>Later Quenta Silmarillion I</i> | 1951-1952 | Pengoloth: attributed authorship Rúmil: attributed authorship of sections (1993, 1994) |
| <i>Tale of Years</i> | 1951-1952, revised alongside the <i>Annals of Aman</i> (1958) | Pengolođ: Originally attributed authorship, but this was eventually removed (1994). |
| <i>Annals of Aman</i> | 1958 | Pengolođ: "enlarged" Rúmil's text with additions, often with historical information from Beleriand; attribution of Pengolođ's contribution was struck from a second version of the title page and Rúmil was given sole credit, although Pengolođ's additions remain in the text Rúmil: attributed authorship (1993) |
| <i>Grey Annals</i> | 1958 | Pengolođ: There are no direct attributions and the <i>Grey Annals</i> are credited to the Sindar, but Christopher Tolkien speculates, "Perhaps it should be supposed that both sets of Annals, as received, derive from the editorial work of Pengolođ in Tol Eressëa" (1994, p. 107). |
| <i>Akallabêth</i> | around 1958 | Pengolođ: attributed authorship that was removed in the published <i>Silmarillion</i> by Christopher Tolkien (1996) |
| <i>Quendi and Eldar</i> | 1959-1960 | Pengolodh: Cited as a source of linguistic information; his fallibility is acknowledged Rúmil: cited as a source by Pengolodh for knowledge of Valarin through his "sayings of Rúmil" (1994) |
| <i>Dangweth Pengolođ</i> | 1951-1959 | Pengolođ: attributed authorship (<i>Peoples</i> 395) |

Figure 1. Loremasters credited for various texts.

Gondolin, we see the only example of capital punishment among Elves in *The Silmarillion*. In a study of historical bias among ancient historians, T. J. Luce (1989) notes that the targets of bias among the ancients were typically autocratic rulers whom historians feared to anger. It is a stretch to suggest that Pengolodh would have feared Turgon, but after coming up from early youth in Gondolin without a reputation to ensure his place, it is possible that Pengolodh would have relied on Turgon, at least in part, in achieving prestige. It seems likely as well that affection for his king could have deepened Pengolodh's empathy for Turgon's feelings toward the Fëanorians. It is also possible that Turgon's staunch hatred of the House of Fëanor would have created an intellectual climate that did not exactly encourage looking too sympathetically upon the motives and actions of the Fëanorians, but even if we grant Turgon the magnanimity to grant complete intellectual freedom in Gondolin, one is still left to wonder if Pengolodh would have risen so high—and so quickly—in Turgon's esteem for challenging the status quo.

Likewise, Pengolodh would have come to bear an understandable ill will toward those characters whom he assigns the most direct blame for the fall of Gondolin: Maeglin, Eöl, and Aredhel. Living in an isolated community that was highly partisan on the subject of certain people, Pengolodh was steeped in a worldview that attributed many of the struggles of the First Age to the greed and pride of Fëanor and his sons and the downfall of Gondolin to a series of unwise and malicious decisions by Aredhel, Eöl, and Maeglin. These are not unreasonable views, but they also very likely produced a profound bias.

After the fall of Gondolin, Pengolodh is no longer constrained by isolation, and his access to living and eyewitness sources expands as a result. *Quendi and Eldar* states that he learned about language from the refugees at Sirion's Mouth. It is not a stretch to infer that he very likely learned much about history from these sources as well. Yet, like his sources in Gondolin, it is doubtful that they are impartial. Many were refugees from Doriath, and Thingol disliked the Fëanorians almost as deeply as Turgon did. Furthermore, the survivors at the mouth of Sirion had been recently attacked and displaced by the Fëanorians. Their accounts of the First Age were unlikely to be sympathetic to the House of Fëanor and possibly served also to reinforce Pengolodh's existing biases toward the Fëanorians, leading to a circumstance where corroboration among disparate sources lends the sense that their shared conclusions are more just and factual than perhaps they actually are. Finally, Pengolodh was almost certainly present

when the Fëanorians attacked Sirion. At last, he was an eyewitness to the history he wrote, and his firsthand knowledge again reinforced his prior beliefs. If we make our first concern, as Carr suggests, the historian behind the *Quenta Silmarillion*, we are left to conclude that most of that history was compiled by a loremaster who directly witnessed almost none of it and relied upon sources who corroborated his deep cultural bias.

The World According to Pengolodh: Evidence for Bias in *The Silmarillion*

He shut the book and handed it back to me.

"It is a beautiful book, Pengolodh," he said. "I know of your mother; I have heard my father speak of her, and he always does so in praise." He stopped there and bit his lips between his teeth as though forcibly restraining himself from speaking further.

"But it is full of lies," he said after a moment. His eyes—silver like starlight—burned into mine. "It is a book of lies. None of your people could know what happened at Losgar. You were not there—was not your absence the entire point? And I will not argue in favor of what was done that day, but this—" he stabbed his finger at the book that I sheltered beneath my cloak—"is lies! It is a book of beautiful lies!"

The existence of fictional loremasters is not the sole proof of the bias present in *The Silmarillion*. A closer look at the text of *The Silmarillion* itself not only shows evidence of historical bias but bias that is in keeping with what one would expect from Pengolodh.

One of the approaches I took to identify negative bias, as described above, is to look for characters and subjects that receive little attention compared to other people and topics in *The Silmarillion*. A relative lack of detail about disfavored characters is fairly easy to quantify. I simply counted the number of times major characters were mentioned in the narrative itself to see which characters received the most attention from the fictional loremasters. The results are shown in Figure 2 below. The number of times a narrator mentions a character seems a reasonable mark of his interest in that character. In addition, characters whose points of view and motives received deep analysis would likely receive more attention from the narrator than those whose points of view are ignored and motives unexplored. The characters I investigated were those included in the family trees in the Appendix

of *The Silmarillion*.⁴ In tabulating my totals, I did not count mentions of characters in the Index of Names. I did count mentions of characters' names in chapter titles and when used to identify groups of characters, places, or objects (e.g., sons of Fëanor, March of Maedhros, or doors of Felagund) since a character's name being used in this sense is itself a form of recognition of that character's importance. Finally, I did attempt to count all of the possible names used for the various characters, but when two names were used in conjunction with each other, I only counted that as a single mention. For example, *Túrin Turambar* would be counted only once, although it uses two of Túrin's several names.

Figure 2 below shows a clear partiality in *The Silmarillion* for characters affiliated in some way with either Gondolin or Doriath and a bias against the Fëanorians. Only one of those top ten slots is held by a member of the House of Fëanor: Fëanor himself. (The construction *son/sons of Fëanor* accounts for 47 of Fëanor's mentions; even excluding these, he remains the third most mentioned character.) Indeed, for a character described in *The Silmarillion* as "the mightiest of the Noldor, of whose deeds came both their greatest renown and their most grievous woe," nothing less should be expected (p. 122).

The sons of Fëanor are largely overlooked except when reporting on their offenses. Likewise, having an amiable relationship with the House of Fëanor leaves one susceptible to being written out of history. Lewis notes that, considering his valiant deeds, Fingon receives a surprisingly small amount of attention in the texts and attributes this neglect to his close affiliation with the House of Fëanor. As will be seen, Fingon's relative lack of attention compared to the boldness of his actions will surface again.

These observations are consistent with authorship by a character with Pengolodh's background. The ten most-mentioned characters incline sharply toward those for whom Pengolodh might be expected to have an interest or preference. The emphasis placed upon Turgon is consistent with a historical record written by one of Turgon's subjects. Turgon's father was Fingolfin, and his close friend Finrod Felagund, perhaps explaining the attention these characters receive. Thingol, Beren, Lúthien, Túrin, and Húrin are all characters affiliated with Doriath and for whom Pengolodh's sources at the mouths of the Sirion might be expected to show preference.

⁴ I added Haleth and her father, brother, and nephew since, oddly, they were absent from the family tree for the eponymous People of Haleth.

| Character | Mentions | Character | Mentions | Character | Mentions |
|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-------------|----------|
| Fëanor | 208 | Aredhel | 33 | Indis | 6 |
| Túrin | 202 | Elwing | 32 | Amrod | 6 |
| Thingol | 178 | Bëor | 30 | Amras | 6 |
| Beren | 146 | Galadriel | 29 | Belegund | 6 |
| Lúthien | 137 | Brandir | 28 | Rían | 6 |
| Húrin | 115 | Maglor | 27 | Haldir | 6 |
| Turgon | 112 | Gil-galad | 26 | Aegnor | 5 |
| Fingolfin | 98 | Idril | 26 | Bregolas | 5 |
| Finrod | 96 | Caranthir | 24 | Halmir | 5 |
| Melian | 95 | Dior | 24 | Celebrimbor | 4 |
| Maedhros | 74 | Nienor | 24 | Nimloth | 4 |
| Eärendil | 72 | Hador | 23 | Handir | 4 |
| Fingon | 66 | Huor | 21 | Haldad | 4 |
| Celegorm | 52 | Olwë | 19 | Haldar | 4 |
| Finwë | 51 | Elros | 18 | Eärwen | 3 |
| Maeglin | 49 | Orodreth | 17 | Gundor | 3 |
| Curufin | 45 | Finduilas | 16 | Hareth | 3 |
| Eöl | 43 | Galdor | 16 | Emeldir | 2 |
| Morwen | 41 | Haleth | 15 | Bregor | 1 |
| Finarfin | 40 | Angrod | 12 | Glóredhel | 1 |
| Tuor | 40 | Míriel | 10 | Haldan | 1 |
| Barahir | 38 | Baragund | 7 | Celebrían | 0 |
| Elrond | 36 | Marach | 7 | | |

Figure 2. Number of mentions in *The Silmarillion* of characters from the family trees.

The attention Pengolodh gives to the establishment of realms, one of the most important activities in the early chapters of the *Quenta Silmarillion*, also subtly betrays his bias. Achievement of a culturally and aesthetically rich settlement that is safe from the enemy appears to be a strong metric of a particular character or culture's success—itsself perhaps indicative of a cultural bias that attaches great importance to architecture and art verging on opulence. One of the first activities of the newly arrived Noldorin princes is to separate to respective realms, and the activity of constructing lavish cities and halls is looked upon favorably—however unusual while under active assault from a dangerous enemy—perhaps as a symbol of security and an attempt to adhere to a notion of innocence and beauty held apart from the fallen world, similar to the motives of the Valar. Lewis notes discrepancies in the amount of time the various realms in *The Silmarillion* are given relative to each other but does not attempt to quantify

this statement. As I investigated the establishment of realms, I copied and counted the words each time a character in Beleriand settled a new realm, as well as any subsequent description of any building activity in that realm, the architecture of the settlement, or the natural features of the realm. I looked only at the *Quenta Silmarillion* and only at the realms of Beleriand and did not include Aman.

Figure 3 below shows the number of words employed to describe each realm in Beleriand. The evidence for bias here is striking. Overwhelming attention is given to the three hidden realms: Gondolin, Doriath, and Nargothrond. Combining the passages for all of the realms of all of the sons of Fëanor (541 words) still falls shy of any one of these three. Of course, these are the three realms with which Pengolodh and his sources at the mouths of the Sirion would have been the most familiar and felt the most affinity.

Number of Words Used to Describe Realms in *The Silmarillion*

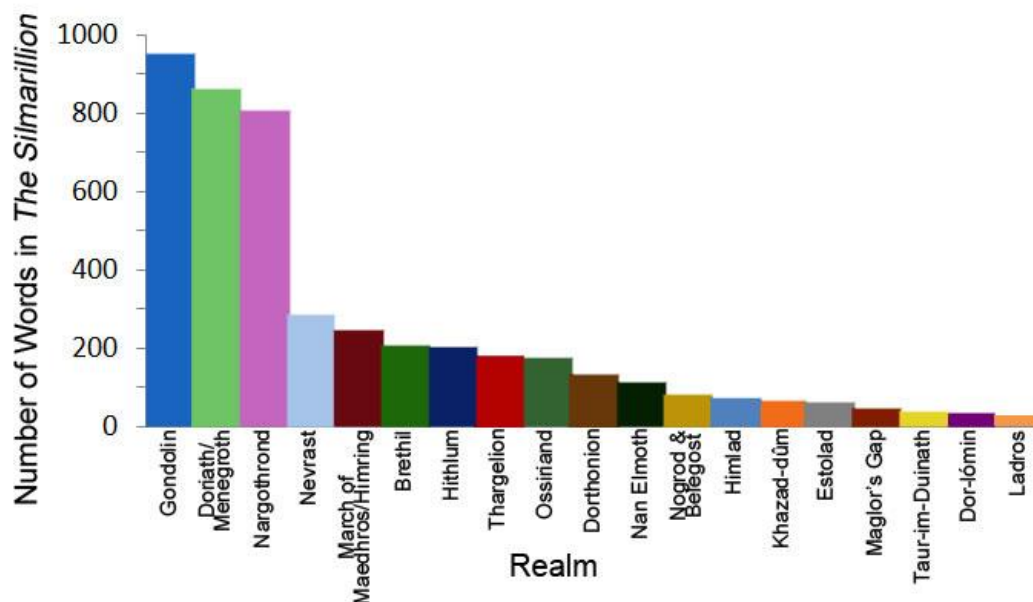


Figure 3. Word counts of Beleriandic realm descriptions.

Nevrast receives an amount of attention that seems unusual unless one recalls Pengolodh was born in Nevrast, and it is one of the few places that he can describe from firsthand experience. Likewise, realms and settlements belonging to the Edain, Dwarves, and Avari receive little or no attention, unless they are allies of Doriath—Ossiriand, Belegost, and Nogrod (the latter two of which are never

described separately from each other)—in which case, the attention is perfunctory. Interestingly, Khazad-dûm isn't even located in Beleriand yet receives almost as much attention as Belegost and Nogrod combined—but it was for a while the residence of Pengolodh during the Second Age (1994).

Again, Fingon is the recipient of silence on the subject of his realm that is hard to justify except as a result of bias brought on by a relationship between two brothers that wasn't entirely warm. Hithlum receives a modest amount of attention, as the realm jointly held by Fingolfin and Fingon. Dor-lómin, described as the portion for which Fingon was responsible, is never described until it is given to Hador, at which point it is given small attention.

Finally, as with the number of times a character was mentioned in *The Silmarillion*, contrasting the attention given to the most-discussed realms with that given to the settlements of the Fëanorians suggests a bias against the Fëanorians. *The Silmarillion* makes clear that the sons of Fëanor took upon themselves the most dangerous lands of Beleriand where incursion from Melkor was most likely to occur. The map of Beleriand shows these lands as lacking natural fortifications and providing open access to Doriath and the realms of western Beleriand. Despite the importance of these settlements, the lands of the sons of Fëanor receive almost no discussion in *The Silmarillion*, and that which they do receive is predominantly confined to descriptions of the natural features of their lands. Hidden cities that Pengolodh could not have visited himself earn sumptuous descriptive detail while Fëanorian realms that admitted high levels of traffic go unrepresented.

The lack of description of the eastern realms—whether due to innocent ignorance, cultural bias, or a bit of both—serves to emphasize the achievements of hidden realms that, on the whole, contributed little to the struggle against Melkor. Gondolin, Doriath, and Nargothrond offered little in the way of significant participation in the major wars of Beleriand—each realm, at one or more points in its history refused participation outright—and none of these three realms contributed at all to the everyday defense, which made the long intervals of peace possible that allowed or at least facilitated the longevity of the three hidden kingdoms. For the sons of Fëanor in particular, the blank space in the text that represents much of their existence in the history of the First Age only serves to throw into relief their malicious deeds at the end of the First Age—described in relative detail but, as argued above, hardly characteristic of their habitual conduct—and nullify their positive contributions to the history of the First Age.

Imaginative Understandings: Historical Bias as a Motive for the Creation of Transformative Works

My heart thundered in my chest, and I had to force my tongue against the back of my teeth to keep from speaking, but I was determined that he should reveal what I knew must be true of him. I desired greatly the excuse to loathe him, he who was as skilled, eloquent, and beautiful as his illustrious bloodline would suggest.

He rose from the rock and, rescuing his boots from the edge of the surf, pulled them on. He had a more difficult time with the boots than he should. Nor did he seem to notice that they were sodden through. "I hope that you will fix what has been done between our people, Pengolodh. I will tell you the truth, if you will only listen, and I trust you will write what I tell you with justice to your people and to me, your friend."

I started. Friend? My tongue had loosened but, with that single word, all hope of letting it sculpt an eloquent stream of speech that would render Celebrimbor silent and chastised abruptly died.

Lewis proposed that historical bias in *The Silmarillion* makes it seem like a realistic work of history. Fans and scholars of Tolkien recognize his skill in creating a sense of historical depth as one of his books' primary appeals. Although Tolkien certainly never acknowledged it—and perhaps never even considered it—his use of pseudohistorical presentation and, particularly, historical bias creates precisely those "new unattainable vistas" that he despaired of destroying with the publication of the *Silmarillion* materials. *The Silmarillion* has been published for thirty-eight years as of this writing, and enthusiasm remains unflagging for Middle-earth as depicted there or in the books whose appeal Tolkien worried depended too much on the stories of *The Silmarillion* lingering untold. Getting to finally pass through the gates of that distant city, then, does not destroy the magic, and historical bias is one means that renews the sense that there are ever more stories to be told, just over the next rise in the road.

As documented above, historical bias in *The Silmarillion* is extensive and pervasive, giving readers the sense that they are hearing only part of the story, with other stories unknown or even deliberately withheld by the narrator. Shift the point of view and an entirely different tale results. Pengolodh's take on Aredhel's marriage to Eöl would be different if told from Aredhel's perspective, for instance. Stories left untold due to the loremaster's ignorance or deliberate

exclusion of a story that place positive emphasis on a disfavored character invite fan fiction: the Fëanorians' years in Mithrim, for instance, or the laws and customs of the Avari. Clearly biased depictions, likewise, beckon readers to envision the story from the perspective of those disfavored. How would a son of Fëanor write the death of Fëanor, for example? What might Maeglin have to say about his mother's murder, his father's execution, and confusion of emotions he surely experienced afterward?

The enduring popularity of Tolkien-based fan fiction demonstrates that writers of such fiction are attracted by these untold stories. Tolkien-based fan fiction is at least as old as *The Lord of the Rings* and has show no signs of abating in the sixty-six years since the first Tolkien-inspired fan poem appeared in a fanzine in 1959 (Hunnewell, 2010). Sustained for decades through the publication of fanzines, the advent of the Internet provoked a surge in the popularity of fan fiction even prior to the release of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* movies, and fifteen years later, there are over a dozen online archives and countless groups on social media devoted to Tolkien-based fan fiction, and stories about Middle-earth command a significant share of space on multifandom archives (Organization for Transformative Works, 2014). Those "unattainable vistas" doubtlessly explain the half-century endurance of transformative works based on Tolkien's books, and, as I will show, historical bias creates a motive for many *Silmarillion* fan fiction writers to step forward imaginatively into those settings and perspectives just barely glimpsed and engage creatively with the texts.

To investigate the role that historical bias plays in the creation of Tolkien-based transformative works, I looked specifically at *Silmarillion*-based fan fiction. My first source of data came from fan fiction archives that both host a significant number of *Silmarillion*-based stories and are also searchable on basic criteria, such as major characters featured in the story. The archives I used also represent diverse approaches to how their authors use the texts to create fan fiction. Figure 4 summarizes the key traits of each of the five archives.

My second source of data comes from fan fiction readers and writers themselves. Beginning on 24 December 2014 and ending on 30 November 2015, I conducted a survey of Tolkien fan fiction readers and writers concerning a variety if their reading and writing habits.⁵ Author motives for writing Tolkien-based fan fiction were a major area of investigation in the survey. In July 2014, as part of

⁵ The survey was approved by the Institutional Review Board of American Public University on 23 December 2014.

| Archive | Archive Details |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Silmarillion</i> Writers' Guild silmarillionwritersguild.org</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Silmarillion</i> fan fiction archive • 2,187 stories in the archive • established in 2007 • open posting for all members and minimal posting requirements • open-minded approach to the canon that encourages unusual or "heretical" interpretations as well as more traditional approaches |
| <p>Stories of Arda storiesofarda.com</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolkien fan fiction archive • 5,268 stories in the archive⁶ • established in 2003 • authors are screened before being allowed posting privileges • conservative approach to the canon; guidelines exclude adult-rated stories, slash, modern-day characters, crossovers, and other popular fan fiction genres (Stories of Arda, "Guidelines") |
| <p>Many Paths to Tread lotrgfic.com</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolkien fan fiction archive • 633 stories in the <i>Silmarillion</i> category⁷ • established in 2009 • open posting for all members • genfic archive; does not accept stories above an R-rating or containing graphic content; no specific genres (e.g., slash, crossovers) are banned • author guidelines are constructed to allow creative and interpretive freedom |

⁶ Stories of Arda does not classify stories by source text, so the number of *Silmarillion* stories is unavailable.

⁷ The categories on Many Paths to Tread are organized by source text with all texts available to choose from. Authors can also select multiple source texts as categories or from categories that aren't associated with a particular source text (e.g., Artwork or Nonfiction). Given this, the number of *Silmarillion*-based stories on the site is likely slightly higher.

| | |
|---|---|
| Faerie efiction.esteliel.de | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolkien fan fiction archive • 1,370 stories in the archive⁸ • established in 2011 • open posting for all members and minimal posting requirements • regarded as a safe space for authors to post adult-rated stories or stories that challenge the canon |
| Archive of Our Own archiveofourown.org | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • multi-fandom archive • 4,435 stories in the category "The Silmarillion and other histories of Middle-Earth - J. R. R. Tolkien"⁹ • established in 2008 • open posting for all members • site policies explicitly designed to allow open expression |

Figure 4. *Silmarillion* fan fiction archives. Data collected on 8 September 2015.

preparing this survey, I posed the following question on my blogs on LiveJournal, Dreamwidth, and Tumblr: *Why do you write Tolkien fanfic?*

The responses I received from this inquiry were used to generate the series of statements concerning motives for writing fan fiction that were included in the survey (see Appendix 1). The survey was available online using Google Forms and was promoted on archives and social media groups for Tolkien-based fan fiction. After answering a series of basic demographic questions, participants were shown a series of statements about reading and/or writing Tolkien-based fan fiction and allowed to select one of five options for each: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, and No Opinion/Not Sure. I did not ask any questions directly about historical bias because it is a term that participants

⁸ Faerie does not classify stories by source text, so the number of *Silmarillion* stories is unavailable.

⁹ Authors on Archive of Our Own can select multiple categories for their stories, and there are multiple Tolkien-based categories available, including a general "TOLKIEN J. R. R. - Works & Related Fandoms" category. Given this, the number of *Silmarillion*-based stories on the site is likely higher.

unfamiliar with historical scholarship might not know. Participants could skip any questions that they did not want to answer.

It is worth emphasizing that the Tolkien fan fiction community is far from monolithic in its values, attitudes, and practices. Furthermore, the fact that Tolkien fan fiction writers do not universally gather in any single place made it impossible to reach everyone, and groups that were more reachable than others make the data potentially biased. For example, the ease of reblogging on Tumblr made it possible for others to share my announcement about the survey widely. Other groups—most notably FanFiction.net—were almost unreachable because making and sharing announcements is impossible.

When the survey was closed, 1,074 participants had submitted responses.¹⁰ A majority of participants wrote as well as read fan fiction, with 642 participants (61.0%) identifying as authors. Participants could enter any response for their gender, and a large majority (88.5%) identified as women, with the second largest group entering nonbinary gender identities (6.0%). Only 3.6% identified as male, and 1.9% of participants left this field blank. The median age of participants was 24 years, but participants ranged in age from 13 years to 74 years.

Untold Stories I: Character Representation and Fan Fiction

There are many reasons why fans of Tolkien's world choose to write fan fiction about it. In my experience as an author and archive owner in the Tolkien fan fiction community, I often hear authors remark that one of the reasons they write fan fiction is to "breathe life into" characters whom Tolkien introduced into his works but did not fully develop. *The Silmarillion*, especially, is full of such characters, whose personalities are often left open to inference on the basis of a handful of actions. Among the characters I used in my study of historical bias, only seven were mentioned more than 100 times in the entirety of the book, excluding appendix and index materials.

Prior to analyzing any data, I expected that two possible factors would predict which characters authors preferred to write about: the amount of coverage a character receives in the text and whether or not the character is subjected to negative historical bias. I expected that the number of stories written about a character would be inversely proportional with the number of times he or she is

¹⁰ Twenty-two participants were removed from the data set: twenty-one because they neither read nor wrote Tolkien-based fan fiction (which was a stated requirement for taking the survey) and one who did not consent to participate. The number of participants in the final data set is 1,052.

mentioned in the book, meaning that characters mentioned less often would have a greater number of stories written about them than the characters mentioned more often in the text. Especially since historical bias tends to result in fewer mentions of a character in the book, in order to show that historical bias motivates authors to write about particular characters, I would need to eliminate the possibility that authors were writing about these characters because they are "blank slate" characters whose minimal coverage in the texts invited development of their stories.

Figure 5 shows several questions intended to measure the number of authors who identified characterization of minor characters as a motive for writing fan fiction. As I expected, authors overwhelmingly perceive the development of minor characters or groups of characters as a major motive for writing fan fiction.

To accompany this data, I also looked at character popularity¹¹ on the five fan fiction archives, identified above, that host stories based on *The Silmarillion*. Here, the question of how a character's coverage influences whether she or he is written about by fan fiction authors becomes more complicated.

By computing a Pearson correlation coefficient (r), I measured how well a character's coverage in *The Silmarillion* predicted his or her popularity on fan fiction archives. A Pearson correlation coefficient expresses how well one variable predicts the value of a second variable. For example, according to my prediction, a character who receives little coverage in *The Silmarillion* should inspire more stories than a well-developed character like Fëanor or Túrin who receives frequent attention in the text. A Pearson correlation coefficient of ± 1.0 expresses a perfect correlation, while a value of 0 shows no relationship between the variables. If a character's *lack* of mentions in the text resulted in more stories written about him or her, a negative correlation coefficient would result.

¹¹ Since Stories of Arda, Many Paths to Tread, and Archive of Our Own also host stories based on *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, characters who appear in one of these works as well as *The Silmarillion* were not included in the data set for these sites. Because of their appearance in more popular works about which more fan fiction is written, the number of stories about them was extremely high. Haldir was also removed from the Archive of Our Own data set because there was no way to distinguish between Haldir of the First Age (measured here) and Haldir of the Third Age, who is a popular character in *Lord of the Rings* fan fiction.

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | No Opinion/ Not Sure | n |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| Writing fan fiction lets me develop characters that Tolkien didn't fully develop. | 51.1% | 41.7% | 2.8% | 0.2% | 4.2% | 636 |
| Writing fan fiction lets me see more and learn more about characters Tolkien didn't focus on. | 58.9% | 36.8% | 1.6% | 0.0% | 2.7% | 638 |
| Writing fan fiction lets me develop cultures that Tolkien didn't fully develop. | 47.3% | 38.2% | 3.8% | 0.6% | 10.2% | 639 |
| Writing fan fiction lets me see the story from points of view not used in Tolkien's books. | 64.7% | 31.4% | 0.5% | 0.0% | 3.4% | 641 |
| Writing fan fiction helps me to feel like I am extending the story in new directions. | 42.3% | 47.7% | 3.3% | 0.0% | 6.7% | 639 |

Figure 5. Authors' perceptions of motives for writing fan fiction.

The scatterplots shown in Figure 6 shows that, on all five archives from which I collected character popularity data, a character's coverage in *The Silmarillion* is not strongly predictive of his or her popularity on that archive. The Pearson correlation coefficients, shown below, for all four sites show only a weak positive correlation, suggesting that characters who are mentioned more in *The Silmarillion* are just slightly more likely to be the preferred characters of fan fiction writers, the opposite of what I predicted.

***Silmarillion* Writers' Guild:** $r = 0.30$

Stories of Arda: $r = 0.16$

Many Paths to Tread: $r = 0.22$

Faerie: $r = 0.15$

Archive of Our Own: $r = 0.32$

Therefore, while developing minor characters may serve as a motive for some writers, they also spend a lot of time writing about characters who are fairly well developed in the book, and a character's coverage in *The Silmarillion* was not as predictive of that character's popularity in fan fiction as I expected based on survey responses. Clearly, when an author chooses a character to develop in a fan fiction story, there is something more at work than that character's perceived openness to development in fan fiction.

Untold Stories II: Historical Bias and Fan Fiction

I also predicted that characters who receive negative historical bias from the in-universe narrators would be more popular subjects of fan fiction than those who are depicted positively or neutrally. The predominating negativity to which these characters are subjected would lead to a perception of injustice and a sense that only part of the story was being told, inspiring writers to explore how the characters receiving negative bias might themselves have perceived their actions and motives.

Because of the difficulty of quantifying historical bias, it was challenging to measure whether historical bias in *The Silmarillion* produced more fan fiction about that character. As noted above, I did not ask any questions about historical bias in my survey. Because this is an academic term, I would not expect many fan fiction writers to know what it means or to have an understanding of how it functions in Tolkien's works, even if they implicitly perceive and are motivated to

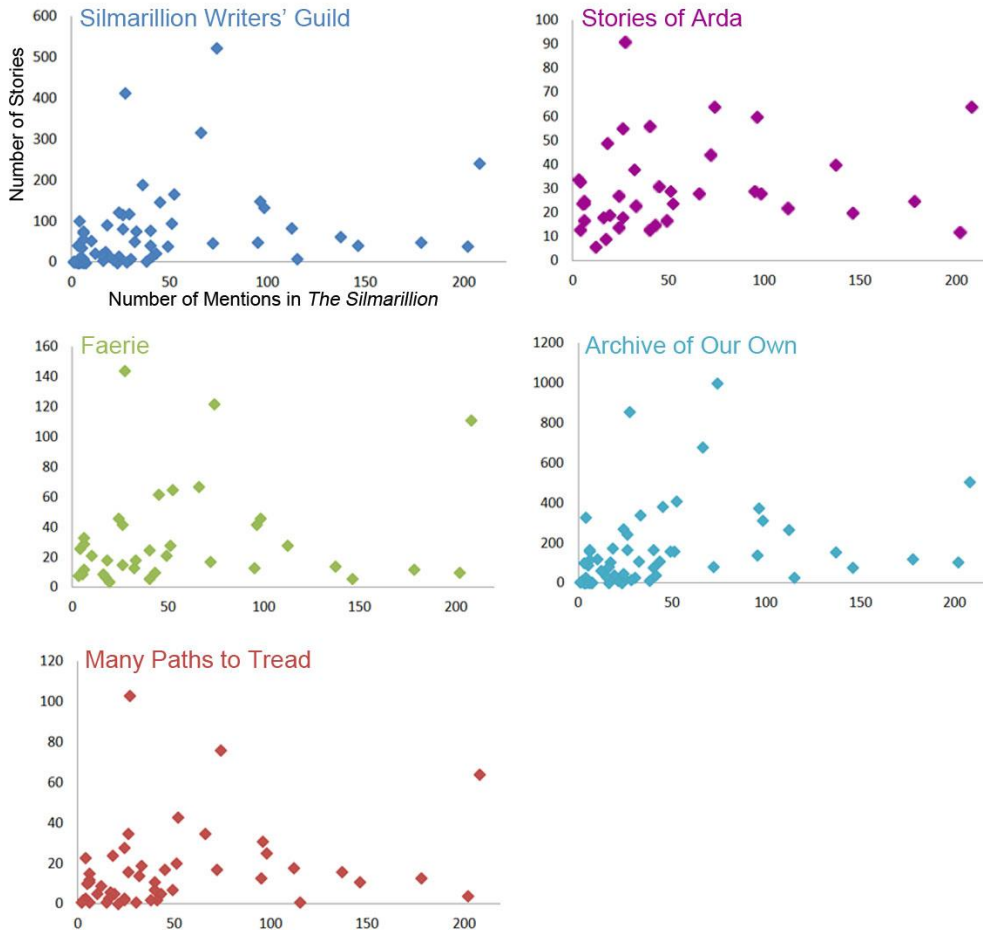
Effect of Coverage in *The Silmarillion* on a Character's Popularity with Fan Fiction Writers

Figure 6. Popularity in fan fiction as a function of a character's coverage in *The Silmarillion*.

write because of it. Also, none of the authors who replied to my initial inquiry about why they wrote Tolkien-based fan fiction indicated that correcting historical bias was a motive, corroborating my sense that my "pet interest" was not an explicit concern of the fandom at large. The statement in the survey that comes closest to assessing historical bias as a motive reads, "Writing fan fiction lets me see the story from points of view not used in Tolkien's books." As Figure 5 shows above, 96.1% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, 0.5% disagreed, no one strongly disagreed, and 3.4% answered "No Opinion/Not Sure." These numbers are similar to those for the other statements about characterization of

minor characters as a motive, and as seen in the section above, once one looks at which characters are actually being written about, these motives are not so straightforward, and other factors influence which characters authors write about most often.

To get a picture of how bias against a character impacts his or her popularity, therefore, I chose to look at the popularity of various characters on the five archives used in my study. I first removed from the data all characters who received fewer than twenty mentions in *The Silmarillion*. Many of these characters are little more than names and have few or no stories about them. Every site except for the *Silmarillion* Writers' Guild failed to even include at least some—often many—of them on the character list that authors could select from when posting their stories. As noted above, characters who also appear in *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings* were removed from the data sets for sites that host stories based on those works, since it is impossible to easily distinguish between *Silmarillion* stories using that character and stories based on Tolkien's more popular works using that character, and the latter stories significantly inflated the results. Characters were then classified as recipients of bias or no bias. Using the above analysis of historical bias in *The Silmarillion*, ten characters were placed in the bias group: Fëanor, Maedhros, Maglor, Celegorm, Caranthir, Curufin, Fingon, Aredhel, Eöl, and Maeglin.

A point-biserial correlation coefficient (r_{pb}) was calculated for each archive. A point-biserial correlation coefficient is used to determine the relationship between two sets of data when one of the sets is a dichotomous variable, or variable with only two possible values. (In this case, the values were *Bias* or *No Bias*.) Like the Pearson correlation coefficient described above, the relationship is expressed on a scale of 0 to ± 1.0 , with ± 1.0 indicating a perfect correlation and a 0 indicating no relationship. *No Bias* was the first data set, and *Bias* was the second data set, so if characters receiving historical bias were the more popular subjects of fan fiction, then a positive correlation coefficient would result. The point-biserial correlation coefficients for each of the five sites are shown below.

***Silmarillion* Writers' Guild:** $r_{pb} = 0.58$

Stories of Arda: $r_{pb} = 0.17$

Many Paths to Tread: $r_{pb} = 0.04$

Faerie: $r_{pb} = 0.62$

Archive of Our Own: $r_{pb} = 0.67$

The results vary based on the site. Three of the sites (*Silmarillion* Writers' Guild, Faerie, Archive of Our Own) show moderate positive correlations, indicating that characters subjected to negative bias tend to be more popular subjects of fan fiction. However, the two other sites (Stories of Arda, Many Paths to Tread) showed low or almost no correlation, suggesting that bias plays little role in determining which characters authors on those sites prefer to write about.

Negative historical bias, therefore, is a stronger predictor of a character's popularity among fan fiction writers than that character's status as a "blank slate" character who is underdeveloped in the book. However, this is true only on some sites. On other sites, a character's receipt of historical bias has little to no effect on whether that character is a frequent subject of fan fiction. Interestingly, none of the sites had a negative correlation coefficient, which would have indicated that characters that receive positive bias or who are neutrally presented are the more popular subjects of fan fiction. Lastly, I do not believe that the discrepancy between sites here is insignificant; in fact, I believe it to be quite meaningful and to illustrate the conflict over the proper use of the texts in creating fan fiction, specifically the extent to which fans possess the authority to make changes or additions that Tolkien likely would have disapproved of. This conflict has historically divided the Tolkien community.

Fandom Fragmentation and Site Cultures

Tolkien's works inspire a singular devotion that, among some of his fans, verges on evangelical. Conflicts over correct interpretations and respectful uses of Tolkien's text have long afflicted the Tolkien fandom and have created a fandom landscape that is fragmented along ideological lines. Nor is this confined to those fans who write fan fiction. John Lennard (2013) notes that, as the number of Tolkien fans increased as a result of greater access to *The Lord of the Rings* following the release of the unauthorized Ace Books version in the United States, early Tolkien fan groups were often established to counter what they perceived as inappropriate responses to Tolkien's works by other fans. Tolkien's works have always been lauded and used as inspiration by fans that uphold Tolkien's conservative, Catholic worldview and simultaneously by fans who discern in them support for progressive causes such as environmentalism, antiwar advocacy, and feminism. The fan fiction community displays similar tendencies toward widely variant interpretations of the same texts, often accompanied by umbrage toward those fans who, through fan fiction, advocate for a different interpretation.

Camille Bacon-Smith's (1992) study of pre-Internet fanzine culture reveals that newcomers were slowly initiated into well-established science fiction fandoms under the guidance of a mentor and granted access to the more unconventional genres only gradually and once they were believed ready to interpret those genres correctly within the fandom culture. Internet fandom upended this practice, as well as the high level of guardedness Bacon-Smith found when writers agreed to show their work—particularly the more controversial genres—to outsiders. Through the Internet, groups with divergent interests and approaches that previously could remain physically separated and thus nominally unaware of each other were granted a new level of access to each other's writings and, traditional boundaries eroded, often occupied the same online spaces. Rather than training newcomers through a curated program of reading under the guidance of a more experienced fan, newcomers were treated to full access to nearly anything posted online. As Bacon-Smith warns, this more "esoteric" material can "shock the sensibilities of a [new] reader who has not yet learned to decode the messages embedded in the community's product" (p. 93).

And were there newcomers. As shown by the Tolkien fandom timeline maintained on the Organization for Transformative Work's Fanlore wiki, the rise of Internet Tolkien fandom occurred almost simultaneously with the release of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003). The popularity of the films injected newcomers into the fan fiction community who were uncertain of community norms and how to read and interpret the more unconventional genres of fan fiction but were empowered through the growing ease of online publishing to share their own stories with the world. This welter of approaches to working with Tolkien's texts and experience with both the legendarium and the writing of fan fiction intensified the tensions that exacerbated the fragmentation of the community. Even more than a decade after the surge in Internet fandom participation brought on by the Jackson films, I expect that the differences in how historical bias is used by authors on different archives largely derives from these early ideological divisions.

Early Tolkien Internet fan fiction groups often defined themselves on the basis of whether or not they accepted slash fan fiction, a term for stories that pair two same-sex characters romantically or sexually. Slash was a controversial genre that often stood for the broader differences in the amount of authority fans felt they possessed when writing fan fiction. To what extent, for example, was the writer beholden to Tolkien's moral values? To what extent could blanks in the text

be filled with the writer's own speculation? An obscure footnote to an obscure essay in the *History of Middle-earth* series, for example, remains known to nearly every writer of fan fiction about Maedhros: "Maedhros the eldest appears to have been unwedded" (1996, p. 318). Does this—along with the strict sexual mores described in the essay *Laws and Customs among the Eldar*—obligate writers to only represent him as being single? Or are they permitted to give him a heterosexual lover? Does this obscure note permit writers to pair Maedhros with his (also dubiously wed) male cousin Fingon? Different fans drew the line in different places.

Although many works of fan fiction had these questions at their cores, none did so blatantly as slash fan fiction, and of the myriad fan fiction groups documented on the Organization for Transformative Work's Tolkien fandom timeline as arising in the early 2000s, few of them were silent on the issue of slash. Numerous mailing lists and sites for slash fan fiction arose, and sites that didn't allow slash often presented themselves as standing against the tide. The splash page for the Open Scrolls Archive, for example, takes a nonjudgmental but firm stance: "This fan fiction archive is strictly non-slash. While we have nothing against the genre, we noted that there are many exclusive sites for slash but not so for het.¹² Therefore, Open Scrolls was created to provide het writers a place to host their work."

While slash became a convenient proxy for the bigger debate about the proper use of Tolkien's works, slash was not the only type of fan fiction against which early fan fiction groups and sites took a stand, and many banned adult-rated stories or even stories that were not morally consistent with the books as Tolkien wrote them. Stories of Arda (2007b), a venerable and popular site that accepts neither slash nor adult-rated stories, equates upholding Tolkien's moral views with respect for his work:

Stories of Arda was created as an archive for stories based on and consistent with the world Tolkien created. ... Stories on this site should reflect a respect for Tolkien's work, both the overriding themes as well as the events he wrote about. ... Stories that distort the moral basis of Tolkien's world are not an acceptable form of [alternate universe].

¹² The term "het" is short for "heterosexual" and refers to stories in the romance or erotica genres where the primary pairing is opposite-sex.

The Middle-Earth Fanfiction Awards, which ran from 2004 until 2011, likewise disallowed adult-rated content from participating in their awards program. Perhaps illustrative of the force of the conflict between authors who felt that respectful use of Tolkien's works demanded moral consistency with his worldview and authors who did not recognize such constraints, when the Middle-Earth Fanfiction Awards ended prior to the start of the 2012 season, the precipitating incident was a conflict over the rules concerning adult-rated stories (Doc Bushwell, 2012; Organization of Transformative Works, 2012).

Nor was adult-rated (usually sexual) content the sole focal point of the conflict. Fans who knew little about Tolkien's books—often new fans brought in by their enthusiasm for the films—were sometimes accused, again, of disrespecting Tolkien's creation through their ignorant use of it in fan fiction. Stories of Arda (SoA), shortly after equating canon compliance with respect for Tolkien's world, warns, "If you have not read Tolkien, this is not a good place for your stories" (2007b). SoA (2007a) and the Henneth-Annûn Story Archive (2003) both employed gatekeeping measures, requiring stories to pass a form of review before becoming publicly available on the site. On both sites, canon compliance was a key component of the story's acceptance or rejection. An early version of the Henneth-Annûn Story Archive (HASA) review guidelines asked, "Is the spirit of the canon source present ...?" Kristi Lee Brobeck's (2004) survey of HASA members documents that many of them felt that, while the site technically allowed all content, its review system functioned to keep out stories that were objectionable to or not to the taste of reviewers. Arguments over everything from textual trivia to broad questions of interpretative frameworks sparked regularly on fan fiction-related mailing lists and sites, and authors who strayed too far from Tolkien's books were frequently accused of disrespecting or sullyng his imagined world.

Robin Anne Reid documents this tendency as well in a 2007 article that looks at the discourse style of the informational pages for HASA and SoA, as evidence of the factionalism to which the Tolkien fan fiction community is inclined. HASA, she concludes, presents itself with an academic, formal, distanced, and masculine, while SoA uses an amateur, informal, nurturing, and feminine discourse style. These discourse styles attract fans for whom that style of communication was familiar and comfortable. Having participated as an author and a moderator on several fan fiction archives (including writing informational pages like those Reid examined in her study), I would go a step further and

suggest that the more academic, distanced style employed by HASA also served to discourage authors of certain genres of fan fiction from feeling their work was acceptable for the site. It is easier to be receptive and magnanimous in tone when one is screening authors at the door, as SoA does; HASA's discourse style allowed it to be tolerant of far-reaching interpretations of the texts and writing styles while simultaneously subtly discouraging those authors at the fringes from feeling truly welcome there. As a result of explicit rules and more subtle discourse styles, both aimed at excluding certain writers, the Tolkien fan fiction community became more divided, and each archive developed its own community norms concerning the appropriate use of the source texts.

In this conflict, the Tolkien fan fiction community patterns closely after the critical response to film adaptations of novels. Karen E. Kline identifies four critical paradigms used to evaluate film adaptations of novels; three of them are relevant to fan fiction. In the translation paradigm, fidelity to the source text is paramount. While the common accusation of "disrespect" is not present in any of the examples that Kline cites, critics do tend to resort similarly to emotionally charged language—for instance, the word "betray" appears in two examples—that presents the source text as something that can be harmed by an adaptation and unfaithful adaptations as a misuse of the original work. Similarities between texts are valued over differences, and the source text is granted precedence; the success of the adaptation as an independent work of art is irrelevant if it does not remain faithful to the original text. This paradigm closely resembles the approach taken by some Tolkien fan fiction writers, who view the author's primary responsibility as creating a story that is cohesive with Tolkien's books and worldview. Deviating from what Tolkien wrote—whether morally or due to ignorance of particular details—necessarily makes the story unsuccessful as Tolkien-based fan fiction.

Kline's next two paradigms grant more leeway to writers wishing to stray from the source material. Again, they can be seen as representative of the attitudes of some in the fan fiction community as to the appropriate relationship between Tolkien's books and the fan fiction inspired by them. The pluralist paradigm allows the adaptation to exist independently of its source while adhering to the "spirit" of the original. This describes the approach of the majority of authors of Tolkien-based fan fiction, who generally express a love for Tolkien's world and a desire to enlarge it through their own stories but also enjoy building settings, developing characters, and enlarging events that Tolkien only hinted at. At the opposite extreme from the translation paradigm, the transformative paradigm

privileges the adaptation over the original text, which becomes "mere raw material." The adaptation exists independently of its source, may bear little resemblance to the original book, and often functions to criticize the source text. A contingent of Tolkien fan fiction writers use an approach very similar to this paradigm, enlarging the roles of women, characters of color, and queer characters—even if characters must be assigned to those identities by the author—to expose and sometimes correct the white, male, and heterosexual point of view that undergirds Tolkien's world.

Although I did not design my survey with Kline's paradigms in mind, certain questions show a rough correspondence to her critical paradigms. I asked three questions that might be seen as showing a writer's affinity for the translation paradigm: privileging Tolkien's books over the author's interpretation and evaluating a story's success based on its adherence to the original texts. The responses for these three questions are as follows:

It is important to me to write stories that I think Tolkien would have approved of. (n = 635)

Strongly Agree/Agree: 15.1%
Strongly Disagree/Disagree: 65.5%
No opinion/Not sure: 19.4%

It is important to keep my stories consistent with Tolkien's moral beliefs. (n = 640)

Strongly Agree/Agree: 21.5%
Strongly Disagree/Disagree: 62.2%
No opinion/Not sure: 16.4%

When writing fan fiction, it is important to me to stick to the facts that Tolkien gave in his books. (n = 636)

Strongly Agree/Agree: 49.9%
Strongly Disagree/Disagree: 35.8%
No opinion/Not sure: 14.3%

Likewise, I asked a series of questions intended to measure authors' willingness to use fan fiction as a means to criticize or even correct perceived problems with Tolkien's world. This approach roughly corresponds with Kline's transformation paradigm. Questions and responses are as follows:

Writing fan fiction lets me criticize Tolkien's world. (n = 634)

Strongly Agree/Agree: 50.1%
Strongly Disagree/Disagree: 29.5%
No opinion/Not sure: 20.3%

Writing fan fiction lets me challenge Tolkien's worldview. (n = 636)

Strongly Agree/Agree: 52.1%
Strongly Disagree/Disagree: 25.0%
No opinion/Not sure: 23%

Writing fan fiction helps me to correct problems with race, gender, and sexuality that I see in Tolkien's books. (n = 637)

Strongly Agree/Agree: 61.9%
Strongly Disagree/Disagree: 21.7%
No opinion/Not sure: 16.5%

Writing fan fiction lets me fix parts of the story that I think Tolkien did wrong. (n = 638)

Strongly Agree/Agree: 40.9%
Strongly Disagree/Disagree: 41.2%
No opinion/Not sure: 17.9%

I believe that these differences in approaches, described by Kline's paradigms, explain why some sites showed a correlation between historical bias and character popularity and others show no relationship. Stories of Arda and Many Paths to Tread—the two archives where no correlation was found—are both genfic archives, meaning that they accept stories that do not emphasize romantic or sexual relationships or contain graphic content. As evidenced above, SoA is plainspoken in its distaste for stories that do not use Tolkien's morality as their foundation. Many Paths to Tread, while making an effort to accept a broad range of work and welcoming both slash and fiction containing non-graphic adult content, originated as a mailing list with far stricter content guidelines.¹³ To confirm the cultural differences present between the different archives, I pulled out the responses to the questions above by participants who identified each of the five archives as a place where they post their work. As Figure 7 shows, there are obvious—sometimes dramatic—differences between the views of authors who

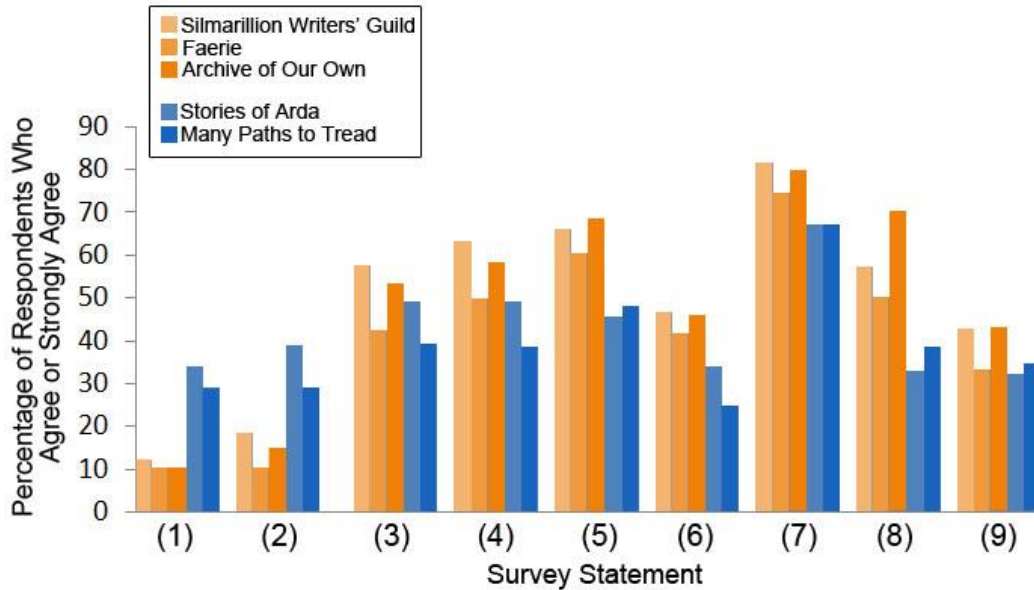
¹³ Full disclosure: I am a moderator on Many Paths to Tread and assisted in developing the guidelines for the archive. I had no involvement developing the guidelines for the mailing list.

post to the two genfic archives and those who post to the archives that do not focus on a particular genre.

One could argue that taking the perspective of characters who are clearly depicted as malicious or evil in the books—even if that depiction is produced by historical bias—undermines the moral basis of Tolkien's work. If he meant the Fëanorians to be seen as malevolent, for example, then readers should take the theme and moral of the book from that portrayal rather than questioning its veracity. To do otherwise is to, at best, create fan fiction without enough of a connection to Tolkien's world to be enjoyable for readers whose preferences align closely to the translation paradigm: The story is a failure as a work of Tolkien-based fan fiction. At worst, taking the part of characters disfavored by bias can be seen as distorting Tolkien's intended moral message and, therefore, neglectful of or even harmful to his intent as an author. It can be seen as a fan trespassing upon territory where she does not have the authority to encroach. Likewise, it is possible that writers who believe that fan fiction should adhere closely to the source text are most attracted to the stories and characters that Tolkien himself valued: the tale of Beren and Lúthien, for instance, or of Eärendil. This increases their interest in characters who are not subjected to negative bias.

Writers who approach stories in a manner similar to Kline's pluralist and transformation paradigms, on the other hand, are more likely to find stories that explore the perspectives of characters maligned by historical bias to be not only acceptable but a rewarding creative and intellectual exercise. These writers view themselves as possessing the authority to use fan fiction to comment upon and even alter the fictional world Tolkien created. My survey results show that many Tolkien-based fan fiction authors view their motives for writing fan fiction as in line with these paradigms. That three archives—including the two archives with the most *Silmarillion*-based fan fiction—showed moderate correlations between historical bias and a character's popularity suggests that, while certainly not a universal for all Tolkien fan fiction writers and communities, historical bias does motivate the creation of fan fiction for many writers.

Critical and Reparative Motives for Writing Fan Fiction by Archive



Survey Statements

- (1) It is important to me to write stories that I think Tolkien would have approved of.
- (2) It is important to keep my stories consistent with Tolkien's moral beliefs.
- (3) Writing fan fiction lets me criticize Tolkien's world.
- (4) Writing fan fiction lets me challenge Tolkien's worldview.
- (5) Writing fan fiction helps me to correct problems with race, gender, and sexuality that I see in Tolkien's books.
- (6) Writing fan fiction lets me fix parts of the story that I think Tolkien did wrong.
- (7) Fan fiction allows me to explore the perspectives of female characters.
- (8) Fan fiction allows me to explore the perspectives of LGBTQ+ characters.
- (9) Fan fiction allows me to explore the perspectives of characters of color.

Figure 7. Differences in motives for writing fan fiction based on archive.

Achieving the Unattainable Vistas: Historical Bias, Fan Fiction, and Justice

There is another sense in which this operation of re-enactment is important. Many historians, especially today, see their activity as one of redressing certain imbalances, of rediscovering or retrieving what has been lost, forgotten or covered over. The lives of those excluded from the

stories of the past or relegated to their margins, those selected out of the standard narratives of both historical agents and later historians, are to be reinstated in our historical consciousness. And the first task is to give them back their own voice if possible, let them tell their own stories ... (Carr, 1994).

Fan writing is a literature of reform, not of revolt. (Jenkins, 2006)

The quotes above suggest that there exists an unexpected crossroads between contemporary historiography and the writing of fan fiction in the Tolkien fan community, and David Carr's exhortation to use historiography to give voice to people marginalized or erased by history is very similar to the use many Tolkien fan fiction writers make of historical bias as an entry point for their stories. The sense that the entire story isn't being told or is being covered up by a biased narrator invites writers to utilize approaches akin to Kline's transformation paradigm, assume the perspective of the maligned character or erased culture, and imagine the story anew. This mimics the processes of both historiography and fan writing as they have been traditionally understood. E. H. Carr identifies as a "neglected truth" that historians must attain an "imaginative understanding" (pp. 22, 24) with the subject of his or her study, while Camille Bacon-Smith remarks that "[f]anwriters tend to write from the assumption that there are as many stories as there are people in the scene to see the events and interpret them" (p. 65). In Tolkien's legendarium, wrapped as it is in the trappings of pseudohistory, that the multifaceted approach Bacon-Smith describes should arise from and directly address such pseudohistory is not surprising.

The personal experiences of those writers with bias in their own lives makes it even less surprising. As discussed above, fan fiction is often viewed as a genre of expanded permissiveness, where the experiences and wishes of the reader achieve parity with the original creator in terms of authority. Conventionally, if a detail from a fictional world contradicts a reader's experience of how the world works, that reader must nonetheless accept the author or editor's authority as greater than that of their own experience and accede to the author's view. Jenkins' theories presented fanworks not as an act of trespass but of shifting authority from the author alone to including readers and fans as well: Specifically, readers' personal experiences and the knowledge borne of those experiences give them authority to interpret the fictional world through that lens and depict it

accordingly in their own stories (Jenkins, 2013). These readers reject the notion that the institutional authority of an author (like J.R.R. Tolkien) or editor (like Christopher Tolkien) grants absolute authority over how they must view a fictional world and instead affiliate with the texts to "[rework] borrowed materials to fit them into the context of lived experience" (Jenkins, 2013, p. 51).

On the particular issue of historical bias, personal experience perhaps explains why historical bias invites a significant amount of fan fiction in the Tolkien community. Tolkien's readers do not have to be aware of historical bias as a feature of historiography to have had personal experience with it. Nearly everyone has had the experience of finding herself or himself misrepresented by another party possessing either more authority, the ear of someone in authority, or access to a wider audience. This basic experience of injustice parallels the bias one observes in *The Silmarillion*, where Pengolodh, for example, is granted a platform to speak on the characters, actions, and motives of people whom he never or barely met—the Fëanorians, Fingon, and Eöl—and to provide an authorized version of events that he more often than not did not witness. One does not need to delve deeply into the *Silmarillion* materials found in the *History of Middle-earth* volumes, nor to be acquainted with Pengolodh's personal history, to nonetheless perceive, as one is accustomed to when intuiting favoritism or bias in everyday life, that certain characters are preferred over others. Jenkins (2013) identifies what he calls "rough spots of the text" that invite "fans' elaborations of [the text's] world and speculations about characters" (p. 74). The biased treatment of certain characters in *The Silmarillion* is one such rough spot that attracts fans' efforts to make sense of it.

Furthermore, a significant number of fan fiction writers belong to groups who are typically the recipients of bias in social, educational, and vocational settings. As noted above, in my survey, 88.5% of respondents identified as female, and 6.0% belonged to nonbinary gender minorities, leaving only 3.6% males (1.9% chose not to respond; it is also worth noting that six of those men, or 15.8% of the male group, self-identified as transgender). While I did not ask about race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, data on gender alone suggests that the vast majority of fan fiction writers have likely experienced some degree of gender bias, placing them in a unique position to both perceive and comment upon the effects of bias in Tolkien's legendarium.

Furthermore, the selective championing of certain privileged groups in the historical record and the erasure of groups that lack access to social or political

power can be observed in *The Silmarillion*. Lewis observed that *The Silmarillion* favors the Noldor, the Sindar, and the Vanyar. The Avarin Elves and the Dwarves receive especially cursory treatment. The characters who control the historical record are those whose achievements tend to receive emphasis; the Avari and the Dwarves enter the narrative only when their actions intersect with the interests of the Noldor and Sindar. Only six Dwarves and two Avari are named in *The Silmarillion* (which means that there are more named canines than Avarin Elves). Mortal Men receive attention commiserate with their affinity for the Elves: Several Edain closely affiliated with the Elves receive ample attention in the text, while those who reject alliance with the Elves are either deemphasized except when they are brought unwittingly into the stories of preferred characters (the Haladin) or ascribed outright villainy (the Easterlings). As many fans have observed, women are also sidelined: a rarity to begin with—only 18.8% of characters in "Index of Names" to *The Silmarillion* are women—and when permitted to enter the narrative, given diminished roles and frequently left unnamed. It is unsurprising that *The Silmarillion* is wholly gender binary and heteronormative, but to a modern audience accustomed to greater diversity in terms of gender identity and sexual orientation, this nonetheless becomes a glaring inconsistency with how many readers have come to understand how the world works.

This becomes a rough spot. Readers either have to accept that the only interesting stories and significant achievements belonged to an extremely narrow subset of the population of Middle-earth that is largely defined by gender and ethnicity—and their experiences here are likely to contradict this—or there must be something else at work. The rough spot can be smoothed only through the addition of stories that eliminate the discrepancy between lived experience and textual depiction. These additions very often occur in the form of stories that expand the narrative to include characters erased from the original narrative and to approach something more akin to parity with respect to important achievements.

In a recent article, Tolkien fan fiction writer and scholar Una McCormack (2015) discussed how women writers of Tolkien-based fan fiction use "reparative reading" to create spaces for themselves in texts where women are often glaringly absent. McCormack writes that "the fanfiction writer is arguably reinscribing a history that has somehow been lost in translation or transmission," similar to the real-world process by which women's experiences and contributions are excluded

from the historical record (p. 312). McCormack looks at several stories set in Gondor that were written by women authors about female characters, concluding that these writers exploit the implausibility of so few women in Gondorian society—the rough spot—to either expand the roles of canon characters or create new characters to introduce into the story.

Likewise, my survey pointed to the importance many fan fiction writers attach to telling the stories of characters whose gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation left them excluded from Tolkien's works. I asked participants three questions related to this motive for writing Tolkien-based fan fiction. The percentage of writers who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement is shown below.

- Fan fiction allows me to explore the perspectives of female characters:
78.3% (n = 635)
- Fan fiction allows me to explore the perspectives of LGBTQ+ characters:
60.1% (n = 633)
- Fan fiction allows me to explore the perspectives of characters of color:
42.0% (n = 634)

The popularity of various characters in fan fiction also confirms the interest of writers in female characters. (Since few characters are explicitly described as characters of color and no characters are described as queer—authors who write about characters of color and queer characters tend to assign those identities to them—it is impossible to measure if writers' expressed interests match with the characters they actually write about.) Figure 8 below shows that on the *Silmarillion* Writers' Guild and an Archive of Our Own,¹⁴ female characters are better able to resist the dampening effect that positive bias has on their popularity with fan fiction writers. The women included on the graph in green receive a mere median number of 20 mentions in *The Silmarillion* compared to a median number of 37 mentions for the men¹⁵ included on the graph; some of them (like Eärwen and Indis) are mentioned only a handful of times and primarily with respect to

¹⁴ I looked only at these two archives because most of the rare characters of *The Silmarillion*—which includes most of the female characters—were not available as character choices on the other three archives.

¹⁵ Furthermore, as I have argued elsewhere, the men in the positive bias group who have high numbers of stories written about them are closely affiliated with characters who receive negative bias, e.g., Fingolfin, Finrod, and Finwë. Characters who lack this affiliation—even if they are active, complex characters in their own right, such as Túrin, Thingol, and Húrin—receive relatively little interest from writers (Walls-Thumma, 2015).

their relationship to male characters, yet they have a relatively high number of stories written about them. When a male character garners the favor of the narrator, fan fiction writers tend to lose interest in his character. This is not true of women characters. This suggests that writers actively seek to tell the stories of women, even when those women are not subject to the same bias against their characters that often seems to demand redress. Rather, the bias these characters experience simply for being women—evident in their diminished roles in the text—serves to keep writers interested in them.

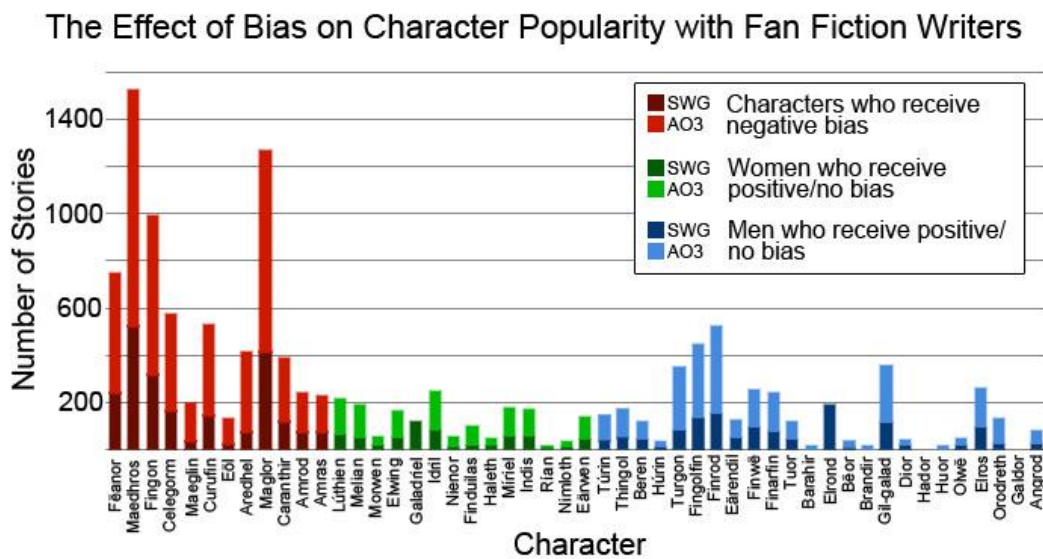


Figure 8. Character popularity with fan fiction writers as a function of character gender and subjection to bias.

Historical bias as an inroad to fan fiction is far from a universal in the Tolkien community. Interest in justice and representation is far from universal as well. The vast differences between archives within the same fandom with respect to the popularity of characters who receive negative bias shows that different fans and different groups would place themselves at various points on that continuum. Likewise, in response to the three statements above, 8.0%, 17.3%, and 14.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed for female characters, characters of color, and LGBTQ+ characters, respectively. A significant number—if minority—of authors in the Tolkien fan fiction community judge successful fan fiction in accordance

with Kline's translation paradigm: in terms of its fidelity to the source texts and respecting the ultimate authority of the original creator. Nonetheless, among a majority of Tolkien fan fiction writers, utilizing historical bias as an impetus to engage in a degree of critical or revisionist writing appears to be the norm.

Historical bias is clearly observable in *The Silmarillion*. Whether this bias was intentionally created by Tolkien or simply a corollary of lifetime steeped in literary interests that are themselves often deeply biased, the historical bias in *The Silmarillion* has the interesting effect of taking a story that is chronologically and geographically expansive and yet making it feel as though only a small facet of that story becomes immediately accessible to the reader. What lies beyond are the unattainable vistas that Tolkien despaired of losing if he said too much about the history in the background of *The Lord of the Rings*: journeys of thousands of years and hundreds of miles by characters whose actions are reported but points of view unrepresented. To step into one of those points of view is to not only enter that distant, glittering city but to duck down its alleyways and plumb its catacombs for the stories only hinted at in the published narrative.

The longevity of Tolkien-based fan fiction—an avocation ongoing for decades, whose practitioners sometimes spend years honing their craft¹⁶—attests to the success of historical bias in creating the depth that Tolkien desired for his imagined world. Writers and readers routinely create and enter the vistas that this depth presents. Historical bias also serves to maintain the relevance of Tolkien's world for a twenty-first-century audience that is more diverse than Tolkien likely ever envisioned. Bias amounts to fallibility in the in-universe narrator. While the appropriate role of the author's authority remains a source of disagreement and even conflict in the Tolkien-based fan fiction community, the presence of historical bias in the texts sanctions the shift of authority from the author (and his fallible narrator) to the fan: After all, if Tolkien wrote from a deliberately biased perspective, that brings with it the implicit acknowledgement that myriad other perspectives are equally possible and valid. The interest many authors show in writing about characters disfavored by the in-universe narrator and characters erased from the story shows that bias provides an entry point for these writers to provide a more just and egalitarian vision of Middle-earth. Fans who might otherwise feel that their experiences are excluded from the narrative—that the story "isn't about me"—are able to use fan fiction, the transformation paradigm,

¹⁶ In my survey, the median number of years writers had been writing was 4 years, and almost 30% of writers had been writing a decade or more (n=622).

and the authority both grant them to achieve a greater inclusiveness and, with that, a sense that Middle-earth remains relevant even in modern times, even for readers who are certain they don't belong in the audience Tolkien envisioned.

"Elenwë died! And others ..."

"I know!" shouted Celebrimbor. "I know I know! I do not and have never denied it, or the wrongness of what was done! I am not asking you to sweep sand over that truth, but neither should you sweep sand over the truth that we are not evil villains but were only doing what we thought had to be done! And that decision was far from unanimous. Your book, I note, does not mention that my Uncle Maedhros stood aside, and with him a contingent of like-minded folk, although I have told you that truth. Do your people not know the value of marginalia, or do you let one man's flawed story stand, unchallenged, for the whole of time? Your book is wrong because you were not there, but you will pretend that you were there in order to take empty solace in the lie that my grandfather's people thought of yours only with malice. That pardons your hatred of us. You are allying against the wrong enemy, Pengolodh."

What did he ask me to do? Turn my back on the wall bordering the sea where, before even the first building was raised in Nevrast, our sculptors had carefully written each name of the lost? And offer my hand in friendship—to what? To follow Truth's shining lantern, but to what end?

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Appendix 1:
Tolkien Fan Fiction Survey Questions

Do you read and/or write Tolkien-based fan fiction, or have you done so in the past? YES NO

An answer of YES allows the participant to proceed with the survey. An answer of NO discontinues the survey and redirects the participant to a page thanking them for their participation.

What is your age? _____

What is your gender? _____

Do you write Tolkien-based fan fiction, or have you done so in the past? YES
NO

An answer of YES allows the participant access to questions for Tolkien fanfic writers.

For how many years have you been writing Tolkien-based fan fiction? _____

Approximately how many works of Tolkien-based fan fiction have you written? _____

Approximately how many of these works have you shared publicly or semi-publicly online? _____

Do you write fan fiction for other fandoms? YES NO

Please list other fandoms you write or have written for. _____

If you write fan fiction for other fandoms, would you define the Tolkien fandom as your primary fandom?

YES

NO

I do not write for other fandoms.

Which sites have you used or do you use to post Tolkien-based fan fiction? Please check all that apply.

- Adult-Fanfiction.org
- Archive of Our Own (AO3)
- Axe and Bow
- Borderland
- Dreamwidth
- Elf Fetish
- Faerie
- Fanfiction.net
- Faramir Fiction Archive
- Henneth-Annûn Story Archive
- Last Ship
- Library of Moria
- LiveJournal
- LOTRFanfiction.com
- Many Paths to Tread
- Mirrormere
- Naice a Nilme
- Of Elves and Men
- Open Scrolls Archive
- Parma Eruseen
- Quills and Ink
- Silmarillion Writers' Guild
- Skyehawke
- Stories of Arda
- The Trees Remember
- Tolkien Fan Fiction
- Tumblr
- West of the Moon
- Yahoo! Groups
- Other _____

What sources do you base your fan fiction on? Check all that apply.

The Hobbit

The Lord of the Rings

The Silmarillion

The History of Middle-earth

Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* movies

Peter Jackson's *Hobbit* movies

Other _____

Select the best option with respect to your experiences writing Tolkien-based fan fiction.

I have learned more about Tolkien's world by writing fan fiction.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I take my writing seriously when writing Tolkien-based fan fiction.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me develop cultures that Tolkien didn't fully develop.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I identify myself as a genfic writer.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

There are sites or archives where I don't post my stories because I don't feel welcome there.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me see the story from points of view not used in Tolkien's books.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Feedback from other fans has helped me to improve my writing.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction is a form of escape for me.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction helps me to explore my spirituality.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me express my views or interpretations of Tolkien's world.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction has helped me to feel like I am part of a community.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I enjoy creating original characters in my fan fiction.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I identify myself as a femslash writer.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me see more and learn more about characters Tolkien didn't focus on.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Tolkien's realistic world-building encourages me to write fan fiction.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Sometimes writing fan fiction causes me to learn incorrect information about Tolkien's world.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction allows me to explore the perspectives of female characters.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I have a site or archive that I view as my Tolkien fandom home.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I write fan fiction to create stories that I know other fans would like to see.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Fan fiction has encouraged me to write original fiction.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

It is important to keep my stories consistent with Tolkien's moral beliefs.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction has helped me to improve as a writer.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction helps me to feel like I am extending the story in new directions.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction has helped me to make new friends.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Fan fiction has encouraged me to read texts by Tolkien that I might not have read otherwise.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I write fan fiction to entertain myself.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I identify myself as a het writer.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction helps me to form my own opinions about Tolkien's world.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction helps me to correct problems with race, gender, and sexuality that I see in Tolkien's books.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Peter Jackson's movies have encouraged me to write Tolkien-based fan fiction.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me explain inconsistencies or things that don't make sense in the texts.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me feel like I can spend more time in Middle-earth.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Tolkien's characters inspire me to write fan fiction.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction allows me to explore the perspectives of characters of color.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction helps me to better understand the characters in Tolkien's works.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I write fan fiction because I don't want the stories to end.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I write fan fiction as a way to give something back to the Tolkien fan community.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction helps me to interpret or analyze Tolkien's books.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me feel like I am realizing Tolkien's dream of creating a realistic myth.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me fix parts of the story that I think Tolkien did wrong.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction allows me to explore or enjoy my sexuality.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me see more and learn more about the cultures of Arda.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction is a way to explore my wishes, dreams, and desires.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction has given me more confidence socially.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me challenge Tolkien's worldview.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

The gaps Tolkien left in his stories are an inspiration for me to write fan fiction.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction allows me to explore the perspectives of LGBTQ+ characters.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I use characters, details, or interpretations developed by other fan fiction writers in my fan fiction.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Fan fiction has encouraged me to do more research on Tolkien's world than I would have done otherwise.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me develop characters that Tolkien didn't fully develop.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I identify myself as a slash writer.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction helps me to correct what I view as mistakes in Peter Jackson's movies.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction helps me to see connections within Tolkien's universe.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I enjoy writing fan fiction to explore fun or silly scenarios.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I enjoy writing crossovers (stories that combine Tolkien's world with the fictional world of another author).

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

When writing fan fiction, it is important to me to stick to the facts that Tolkien gave in his books.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction helps me to connect with others who have a deep understanding of Tolkien's world.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me relate Tolkien's world to my own experiences.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me criticize Tolkien's world.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Comments from and interactions with other fans encourage me to write fan fiction.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

It is important to me to write stories that I think Tolkien would have approved of.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me explore what relationships might have been like between characters.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction has helped me to become a more confident writer.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I enjoy pairing characters together romantically or sexually that were not paired in the books.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction helps me to correct what I view as mistakes in other fan fiction writers' portrayals of Tolkien's world and characters.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I write fan fiction because it is how I express my love for Tolkien's books and his world.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me explore racial and cultural relations in Tolkien's world.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me tell the story how I wish it had been told.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

There are sites or archives where I don't post my stories because I don't agree with the approach writers there tend to take toward Tolkien's books.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me explore gender and sexual roles in Tolkien's world.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I enjoy using popular fan interpretations or fanon in my fan fiction.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction helps me to connect more deeply to Tolkien's stories.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I enjoy trying to combine Tolkien's universe with our real-world history.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me try out alternate storylines or endings.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction helps to keep Tolkien's world and his vision alive.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Writing fan fiction lets me add sexuality to Tolkien's world.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Do you read Tolkien-based fan fiction? YES NO

An answer of YES allows the participant access to questions for Tolkien fanfic writers.

Approximately how many hours per week do you spend reading Tolkien-based fan fiction? _____

Do you leave comments or other feedback on Tolkien-based fan fiction stories?
YES NO

Estimate the percentage of Tolkien-based fan fiction stories that you leave comments or other feedback on. _____

Do you read fan fiction for other fandoms? YES NO

If you write fan fiction for other fandoms, would you define the Tolkien fandom as your primary fandom?

YES

NO

I do not write for other fandoms.

Please list other fandoms you read fan fiction for. _____

Which sites have you used or do you use to read Tolkien-based fan fiction? Please check all that apply.

Adult-Fanfiction.org

Archive of Our Own (AO3)

Axe and Bow

Dreamwidth

Elf Fetish

Faerie

Fanfiction.net

Faramir Fiction Archive

Henneth-Annun Story Archive

Last Ship
Library of Moria
LiveJournal
LOTRFanfiction.com
Many Paths to Tread
Mirrormere
Naice a Nilme
Of Elves and Men
Open Scrolls Archive
Parma Eruseen
Quills and Ink
Silmarillion Writers' Guild
Skyehawke
Stories of Arda
The Trees Remember
Tolkien Fan Fiction
Tumblr
West of the Moon
Yahoo! Groups
Other _____

Select the best option with respect to your experiences reading Tolkien-based fan fiction.

I have learned more about Tolkien's world by reading fan fiction.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like to read stories that are consistent with Tolkien's moral beliefs.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like reading fan fiction about characters of color.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I enjoy reading slash stories.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I think it is appropriate to leave constructive criticism in public comments on stories.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like to read stories with original characters.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Most Tolkien fan fiction is of a poor quality.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

There are sites or archives where I don't read because I don't agree with the approach writers there tend to take toward Tolkien's books.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Reading fan fiction has helped me gain a better understanding of the cultures of Arda.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like stories that explore fun or silly scenarios.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I try to comment or leave some form of feedback on most of the stories I read.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I enjoy reading het stories.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Fan fiction has encouraged me to read texts by Tolkien that I might not have read otherwise.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like to read stories about characters that Tolkien didn't focus on.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I will read a story if the summary sounds interesting.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Reading fan fiction allows me to explore or enjoy my sexuality.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

A lot of Tolkien fan fiction is good enough to be published.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I rarely or never comment on the stories I read.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like reading stories that criticize Tolkien's world.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I have a site or archive that I view as my Tolkien fandom home.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Reading fan fiction has helped me gain a better understanding of the relationships between characters.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

There are sites or archives where I don't read because I don't feel welcome there.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like reading stories based on Peter Jackson's movies.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Reading fan fiction is a form of escape for me.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I sometimes want to leave a comment but am not sure what to say.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like reading fan fiction about female characters.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Reading fan fiction lets me feel like I can spend more time in Middle-earth.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like reading stories that try out alternate storylines or endings.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I have flamed or harshly and publicly criticized a story I didn't like.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like reading fan fiction that addresses social justice issues such as racial and gender equality.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Commenting on stories I've read has allowed me to make new friends.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I enjoy reading stories that use interpretations, details, and characters that were developed by more than one author.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I read fan fiction for entertainment.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like to read stories that don't stray too far from the details that Tolkien gave us in the books.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I hope the comments I leave on stories help the writers to improve.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like reading crossovers (stories that combine Tolkien's world with the fictional world of another author).

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Reading fan fiction helps me to connect more deeply to Tolkien's stories.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Most Tolkien fan fiction is well written.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like reading stories that fix parts of the story that the author thinks Tolkien did wrong.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I hope the comments I leave on stories encourage the writers to keep writing.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I will read a story if it was written by a friend.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Sometimes reading fan fiction causes me to learn incorrect information about Tolkien's world.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Reading fan fiction is a way to explore my wishes, dreams, and desires.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I enjoy reading femslash stories.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like to read stories that fill in the gaps in Tolkien's stories.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I think it's important for readers to leave comments and other feedback on the stories they read.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like to read stories that develop Tolkien's characters in new and surprising ways.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I read fan fiction because I don't want the stories to end.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like reading stories that challenge Tolkien's worldview.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

When I comment publicly on fanfiction, I only say nice things about the story.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like stories that pair characters together romantically or sexually that were not paired in the books.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Too much Tolkien fan fiction uses popular fan interpretations or fanon.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Commenting on stories I've read has helped me to deepen my understanding of Tolkien's world.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I will choose to read a story if it is about a character, pairing, or time period I enjoy.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like reading stories that correct or criticize the Peter Jackson movies.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like reading fan fiction about LGBTQ+ characters.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I have left one-click feedback such as likes or kudos on stories I enjoyed.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I read fan fiction because I like seeing the different ways that fans view and interpret Tolkien's books.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Reading fan fiction helps me to see connections within Tolkien's universe.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Reading fan fiction helps me to explore my spirituality.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I think that more sites should have rules about the quality of fan fiction they accept.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Commenting on stories I've read has allowed me to feel like part of a community.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like to read stories that have an unusual or thought-provoking interpretation of Tolkien's world.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I want to leave comments and other feedback more often on the stories I read.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like reading stories that explore what sexuality might have been like in Tolkien's world.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I sometimes want to leave a comment but think that my comment might not mean much to the writer.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Fan fiction has encouraged me to do more research on Tolkien's world than I would have done otherwise.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Commenting on stories is a way to give something back to the authors.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like to read stories that explain inconsistencies or things that don't make sense in the texts.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I enjoy reading genfic stories.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

I like reading stories that correct or criticize popular fan interpretations of Tolkien's world and characters.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure

Reading fan fiction has helped me gain a better understanding of the characters.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree No Opinion/Not Sure