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## A Single Leaf: Tolkien's Visual Art and Fantasy

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### Abstract

A look into Tolkien's thoughts on creativity, not just through "On Fairy-stories" and "Leaf by Niggle," as one might expect, but also through Tolkien's visual art. The authors discuss and demonstrate how MacLeod's own art was influenced by Tolkien's philosophy of sub-creation. Illustrated with six photos, sketches, and completed paintings by MacLeod.

### Additional Keywords

MacLeod, Jeffrey J. "Lúthien and Beren" (painting); MacLeod, Jeffrey J. "Smaug" (painting); Sub-creation; Tolkien, J.R.R. "Leaf by Niggle"; Tolkien, J.R.R. "Mythopoeia"; Tolkien, J.R.R. "On Fairy-stories"; Tolkien, J.R.R. Visual art



## SINGLE LEAF: TOLKIEN'S VISUAL ART AND FANTASY

JEFFREY J. MACLEOD  
AND ANNA SCODL<sup>1</sup>

IN HIS ESSAY "ON FAIRY-STORIES," Tolkien formulated ideas about fantasy and myth-making that are founded on the primacy of language and narrative art: "The incarnate mind, the tongue, and the tale are in our world coeval" ("On Fairy-Stories" ["OFS"] 41). Responding to the philologically based myth theories of Andrew Lang and Max Müller, Tolkien—also a philologist—defines mythopoesis in linguistic terms. And yet, Tolkien was an inveterate drawer, painter, and designer whose definition of "fairy-story" includes visual terms, not only in his essay but also in his poem "Mythopoeia" and, most obviously, in his allegorical fiction about a painter, "Leaf by Niggle."

Our exploration of Tolkien's ideas about myth-making focuses on visual aspects in his definition of fantasy. As an artist, Tolkien straddled the amateur and professional fields; much of his work was intended for personal and family use, though some of it, like his *Hobbit* illustrations, found their way into print during his lifetime. The integration of personal and professional interests marked all of Tolkien's endeavours: his fiction, his art, and his scholarship. For example, in exploring some ideas about the Old English poem "The Battle of Maldon," he expressed his views by writing an original verse drama, "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son." In his fiction, like *The Lord of the Rings*, he reworked passages from literature that he studied as a professional medievalist. And, to satisfy either his academic or his personal interests, he would often draw or paint. As his daughter Priscilla recounts, the Tolkien household was always well supplied with "paper and pencil and a wonderful range of coloured chinks, paintboxes and coloured inks. [...] we knew as we got older that these things gave *him* particular pleasure, and they continued to do so right through his life"

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<sup>1</sup> The authors are listed alphabetically; this is a co-written piece.

(P. Tolkien 6). For Tolkien, his personal passions, his artistic creativity, and his academic studies were closely interwoven.

With such a model in mind, then, we have entered into a discussion of art, myth-making, and the Primary World from a combined academic and artistic perspective. One of us, Jeffrey MacLeod, is a professor of Political Science, the other, Anna Smol, an English professor. Trained in the analytical and theoretical discourses of our respective fields in the social sciences and humanities, we see Tolkien's work through these lenses; at the same time, however, we respond to and participate in Tolkien's Secondary World as readers, viewers, and as creators. Taking as our premise Tolkien's belief that all human creativity is an inherently significant activity, we use MacLeod's personal account of his artistic process in the creation of two of his paintings, *Lúthien and Beren* (Fig. 1, p.123) and *Smaug* (Fig. 6, p.124), as a touchstone for our collaborative meditation on Tolkien's ideas about vision, art, fantasy, and their connection to our Primary World. In Tolkien's own terms, we have attempted to paint a single leaf—a framed instance of two interwoven voices—that we hope will momentarily allow us a better glimpse of the Tree of Tales.

For most critics, Tolkien's definitions of myth and fantasy have been primarily about language and story-telling, ideas embodied in his recurring image of the great Tree of Tales whose branches are "closely connected with the philologists' study of the tangled skein of Language" ("OFS" 39). But story-telling is rarely a purely verbal medium. Even in traditional oral story-telling, the tone of voice of the story-teller and the sight of his or her expressions or body language are part of the communicative act. In text-based narratives, we may hear the narrator's voice in our heads as we look at the visual presentation of the text between covers and, possibly, with illustrations. Some of our more subtle connection with narratives comes to us via music and visual images. These various media complement and reinforce each other, as contemporary films make evident in combining a text-based script, a musical score, and a moving "painting" to tell their stories.

Tolkien's ideas about narrative, specifically fantasy, also call on the complementary powers of sight and sound in words, music, and vision, but his definition of the Imagination as the "mental power of image-making" ("OFS" 59) foregrounds the visual. Verlyn Flieger discusses Tolkien's debt to Romantic ideas about the imagination, specifically Coleridge's statements on the subject. She points out, however, that Tolkien differed from Coleridge in the estimation of "Fancy." While Coleridge denies creative power to Fancy, Tolkien connects Fancy with the older word "Fantasy" and combines its power with that of the imagination (Flieger 24-25). Tolkien uses the broad term "Art," which could potentially include various media, to designate "the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation" ("OFS" 59). It is the inherent

ability of human language to be able to come up with “green” as an adjective for “sun,” according to Tolkien, but that linguistic ability is closely aligned with a visual capacity: “Many can then imagine or picture it” (“OFS” 61). Of course, Tolkien points out that to execute such an image successfully is difficult: “To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft” (“OFS” 61).

Miriam Y. Miller comments on how, in passages such as these, “Tolkien relies on color as a primary means of illustrating some of his observations on the nature of fantasy” (3). In fact, it is striking how often linguistic creation and visual image are closely related in Tolkien's ideas generally. In “Mythopoeia,” he imagines the process of time unrolling: “on page o'erwritten without clue, / with script and limning packed of various hue, / an endless multitude of forms appear” (85-86). Here, “script” and “limning”—writing and drawing, alphabet and image, the linguistic and the visual—appear side by side. The process of creation is a combined process of naming and seeing: “Yet trees are not ‘trees’, until so named and seen”—and Tolkien continues by describing language in terms of sound and vision: “and never were so named, till those had been / who speech's involuted breath unfurled, / faint echo and dim picture of the world” (“Mythopoeia” 86). Of course, Tolkien's creation myths in *The Silmarillion*, the *Ainulindalë* and the *Valaquenta*, recount how Ilúvatar's Great Music is the origin of creation, allowing the Ainur a vision of what they had made. In a passage in “Mythopoeia” describing human creativity and the origins of myth, the naming of the stars originates in a moment of perception that merges music and vision, conveyed in figurative language:

He sees no stars who does not see them first  
of living silver made that sudden burst  
to flame like flowers beneath an ancient song,  
whose very echo after-music long  
has since pursued. (“Mythopoeia” 87)

For Tolkien, art in its broadest sense not only defines our world, but also potentially goes beyond our mundane reality as well. In fact, Tolkien values more highly the kind of art that ventures into Secondary Worlds: “Fantasy [...] is, I think, not a lower but a higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent” (“OFS” 60). The Beren and Lúthien story, the subject of one of MacLeod's paintings, is particularly interesting in demonstrating the relationship between the Primary World and the Secondary World of the artist. We know from Tolkien's published letters that he drew on his experience with his wife Edith in his creative process. Tolkien explains to his son Christopher:

I never called Edith *Lúthien*—but she was the source of the story that in time became the chief part of the *Silmarillion*. It was first conceived in a small woodland glade filled with hemlocks at Roos in Yorkshire (where I was for a brief time in command of an outpost of the Humber Garrison in 1917, and she was able to live with me for a while). (*Letters* 420)

According to Humphrey Carpenter, Edith sang and danced for Tolkien in these woods on one of their walks (105). Inspired by this event, Tolkien developed a crucial scene in the poetic epic “The Lay of Leithian,” retold in prose in *The Silmarillion* chapter “Of Beren and Lúthien,” and alluded to in *The Lord of the Rings*. As he confides to Christopher, the story expresses the deep feeling between Tolkien and his wife, who “was (and knew she was) my Lúthien” (*Letters* 420); he describes how, throughout their long life together, “For ever (especially when alone) we still met in the woodland glade, and went hand in hand many times to escape the shadow of imminent death before our last parting” (*Letters* 421). When Edith died, Tolkien had the name “Lúthien” inscribed on her headstone; after his death, Tolkien was buried in the same grave with “Beren” added to the stone.

The alternation for Tolkien from personal to fantastical and then back to the personal demonstrates a kind of repeated “there and back again” journey between the Primary World and the Secondary World. But the story extends even further into the Secondary World by finding expression in *The Lord of the Rings* through the relationship between Aragorn and Arwen. The Aragorn—Arwen and John Ronald—Edith relationships are two versions of the Beren—Lúthien story, and as such they reveal how Tolkien thought of stories as repeated patterns. These stories may hit us, in C.S. Lewis’s words, “like lightning from a clear sky” (qtd. in Carpenter 222) because of their beauty or sadness or general applicability, especially if we are reading them for the first time, but they can still be recapitulations of other similar stories. Tolkien explains such recurrences in visual terms, talking about the design of the leaves that we see in the Tree of Tales: “Each leaf, of oak and ash and thorn, is a unique embodiment of the pattern, and for some this very year may be *the* embodiment, the first ever seen and recognised, though oaks have put forth leaves for countless generations of men” (“OFS” 66). The Aragorn-Arwen story is a recapitulation of the Beren—Lúthien tale: they are of the same pattern, though each story is still unique. In other examples, Frodo is in some respects a recapitulation of Eärendil: both sacrifice themselves, forsaking Middle-earth in order to save its inhabitants. Frodo even speaks as if Eärendil is talking through him in Shelob’s lair. We can see the pattern of a saviour-figure in Frodo and Eärendil, though each one is a unique embodiment of that pattern. Similarly, Shelob is a recapitulation of Ungoliant; Sauron of Melkor. Every embodiment, however, is a new creation;

Tolkien explains this using his tree metaphor: "The seed of the tree can be replanted in almost any soil" ("OFS" 66). The same idea finds expression in one of Tolkien's central visual images: light. Verlyn Flieger describes Tolkien's vision of the mythical process: "Humankind, splintering light to many hues and splintering original perception into many concepts and words, is using fantasy to particularize and make manifest fragments of original truth" (47).

Planting a new seed and splintering the light are two figurative modes of representing a recapitulation of an original, a repetition of a theme. Repetition is apparent in Tolkien's visual art as well. Hammond and Scull discuss two of Tolkien's favorite patterns for drawing, mountains and trees, the latter particularly evident in Tolkien's repeated drawings of the *Tree of Amalion* (*Artist & Illustrator* [A&I] 64-65). Tolkien explains in a letter, "I have among my 'papers' more than one version of a mythical 'tree', which crops up regularly at those times when I feel driven to pattern-designing" (*Letters* 342). In these drawings, Tolkien repeats the subject while creating differently shaped flowers and leaves in each visualization of the Tree. Repetition is also evident in his technique. For example, in his pen and ink illustrations for *The Hobbit*, he uses pointillism and basic cross-hatching, which require the artist to obsessively repeat the same patterns in order to complete the picture (A&I 90-151). Hammond and Scull also include many illustrations of Tolkien's pattern-making in the heraldic devices he created for his characters (A&I 192-97), in his repeated paisley designs (A&I 186-89), and in drawings such as his color pencil illustration *Numenórean Carpet* (A&I 190-91). Tolkien's choice of technique and subject reveal much about his interest in repeated patterns as an aesthetic.

While repeated patterns constitute a visual as well as a literary aesthetic for Tolkien, his ideas allow for the extension of these patterns to other sub-creators. "We make still by the law in which we're made" (87) states the speaker in "Mythopoeia," in a passage that is inserted also into "On Fairy-Stories" to argue that "Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker" ("OFS" 66). For Tolkien, every work of human creation is derivative only because it reflects the work of a divine creator. Otherwise, we are all capable of creating something unique even within pre-existing patterns. Tolkien again explains this in visual terms: "We do not, or need not, despair of drawing because all lines must be either curved or straight, nor of painting because there are only three 'primary' colours" ("OFS" 66-67).<sup>2</sup> Our

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<sup>2</sup> Commenting as a conscious visual artist, Tolkien uses the three primary pigment colors—red, blue, and yellow—to describe the most basic, given materials of creation. When he refers to green, as he does elsewhere in "On Fairy-Stories," he either sets it apart from the three pigment primaries or associates it with human creation, as in the idea of making a green sun. Green, of course, is created by mixing blue and yellow. Miriam Y. Miller

example of MacLeod's painting of *Lúthien and Beren*, or any artistic creation retelling their story, for that matter, is another embodiment of the pattern, something unique even if it uses familiar materials. The details in any of these creations—the design of the individual leaf—are what is of interest: the interpretation, the focus, the specific moments depicted. MacLeod, for example, chose to focus on Lúthien in his painting:

I had long considered executing a painting featuring Beren and Lúthien, yet the exact form and composition eluded me. Then, during one of my university classes where I should have been paying careful attention to a guest lecturer, I found myself sketching the design for my painting. Initially, I placed the male figure, Beren, in the foreground reaching out to the female figure, Lúthien—who dances seemingly oblivious to Beren's gesture. The first sketch was executed in black ink (January 2005) on the back of a class attendance sheet. I would go on to execute several more studies in graphite. However, considering the sketches later I decided to move the Lúthien figure closer to the viewer in the foreground, and place Beren as a much reduced figure in the background. Shifting the emphasis to Lúthien I felt was appropriate given the focus the poem places on her at their initial meeting (Fig. 1, p.123, following text of this article).

At one point in his essay, Tolkien asks a rhetorical question, "Who can design a new leaf?" His answer is that every design is a new one: "Spring is, of course, not really less beautiful because we have seen or heard of other like events: like events, never from world's beginning to world's end the same event" ("OFS" 66). A filmmaker, a musician, a fiction writer, or a visual artist might each try designing a new Beren and Lúthien, and each final product would be a unique embodiment of the pattern. MacLeod's choice of focus, for example, demonstrates how each sub-creator makes interpretive choices to focus and frame his or her creation, designing a new leaf every time.

In Tolkien's allegorical fiction "Leaf by Niggle," the painter Niggle struggles with this concept of a larger pattern and its individual parts. Niggle is good at "niggling" with the details of his subject: "He used to spend a long time on a single leaf, trying to catch its shape, and its sheen, and the glistening of dewdrops on its edges" ("Leaf by Niggle" ["LN"] 94). His ambitions, however, reach far beyond a single leaf to desire the whole pattern: "Yet he wanted to paint a whole tree, with all of its leaves in the same style, and all of them different" ("LN" 94). In the end, he cannot achieve that vision through his own efforts, and the only piece of his artwork that survives in the Primary World is a corner of a

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observes that in *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien almost always uses limited color terms. In contrast, his drawings and paintings use a full palette.



larger painting found by the schoolmaster Atkins depicting "a mountain-peak and a spray of leaves" ("LN" 117). Atkins preserves as much of the crumbling corner as he can: "one beautiful leaf remained intact. Atkins had it framed" ("LN" 117-118). Atkins is affected by the image, which affords him a glimpse of the larger vision that Niggle has gone on to experience, with the full tree and the mountains beyond it. That one leaf—one version of the pattern of a leaf—in itself suggests something larger of which it is a part.

Knowing what we do of Tolkien's habits of revision and his frequent inability to finish work on time or at all, it is tempting to see him as Niggle, always worrying about not having time to finish his great painting. He admits in a letter that at one time he did think that he could accomplish "a majestic whole" in the creation of his legendarium, which is imagined in terms of visual art that he would "draw" and "sketch":

Do not laugh! But once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story [...]. I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama. Absurd. (*Letters* 144-145)

Tolkien's self-deprecation does not hide the fact that "other minds and hands" have taken up Tolkien's sketch and drawn parts of that whole just as he envisaged at one time.

Tolkien's Secondary World is an expansive one that elicits such creative responses, achieving the quality he calls "Enchantment," which "produces a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside" ("OFS" 64). It is interesting that instead of using "writer" and "reader," Tolkien defines these roles in visual terms: "designer" and "spectator." However they are defined, neither role is exclusive; Tolkien writes about both as "partners in making and delight" ("OFS" 64), who share the basic desire for fantasy, "the desire for a living, realised sub-creative art" ("OFS" 64). Tolkien sees this shared desire as stemming from his belief that all people are naturally makers, their acts of creation (or sub-creation) reflecting the original act of creation by a divine Maker. Not all of Tolkien's fans would hold the same Christian beliefs, of course, but his ideas about the natural human impulse to create and his views about the enchantment of successful fantasy for both designers and spectators correspond with what we know about Tolkien's readers: they are enchanted by Middle-earth and, becoming "partners in making and delight," many of them feel compelled to become creators

themselves. They inhabit Tolkien's Secondary World as visual artists, writers, filmmakers, dramatists, and musicians.

MacLeod offers one account of how that partnership in "making and delight" connects his vision with Tolkien's by describing how he responds to Tolkien's design through the selection of details to tell his own version of the Beren and Lúthien story:

I considered other elements of the work including the environment and symbols. In fact, I began the painting with a space for the Lúthien figure left blank, as "casting" this figure was proving an impediment to beginning the composition as a final painting. The search for references included examining images of hemlock and other flora and fauna, as well as large trees. It was especially important to include trees, given their narrative relevance to Tolkien's sub-creation (and I like trees). The second figure in the painting, Beren, proved much less difficult to render. This figure appears in the right-side of the frame, off in the background. He is emerging from bushes with his head bowed. I hoped to capture the precise moment immediately before he raises his gaze to see Lúthien dancing. As Beren is described as a wanderer, whose kin has been mostly slain by foul creatures from Angband, I have him dressed in a worn cloak and an unsheathed sword borne in his left hand. I have also included a small reference to the ring of Felagund, an heirloom of the House of Barahir, worn on the index finger of his left hand. Lastly, at this stage, I rendered an image of a giant eagle off in the distance; in the final painting it is very much obscured by the nighttime sky, but a careful observer can see its silhouette. Eagles are a constant presence in the fiction of Tolkien, appearing in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, for example, and they play a critical role in rescuing Beren and Lúthien from the reach of Morgoth and his servants.

MacLeod's use of elements of Tolkien's vision describes one version of the partnership of designer and spectator. This relationship is best exemplified in Tolkien's fiction through his depiction of Parish and Niggle in "Leaf by Niggle." When we first see Niggle, he resents Parish's interruptions, which call Niggle away from his art and force him to consider the real-life concerns of his neighbour. After Niggle achieves a Neoplatonic paradisaical state in which he is given the gift of his tree, fully realized, he rejects the idea of his art as a private past-time only: "This place cannot be left just as my private park. I need help and advice: I ought to have got it sooner" ("LN" 112). Once Niggle welcomes Parish, the two settle into working together as partners and achieving health in the process. They even seem to exchange places: "Oddly enough, it was Niggle who became most absorbed in building and gardening, while Parish often wondered

about looking at trees, and especially at the Tree" ("LN" 112). "Niggle's Parish" is the pun on which the story ends: in terms of the characters, Parish is someone who, in partnership with the artist Niggle, has been given a vision of the Tree and has assisted Niggle in creating the countryside around it. A "parish," of course, is the designation of a district of civil or ecclesiastical government; it is a word that connotes social and possibly religious bonds. In this sense, "Niggle's Parish" is the territory in which Niggle fulfills his social and religious obligations by looking beyond his private art and doing something to benefit others unselfishly. Niggle, who used to resent social obligations and desired a pension so that he could only think of his art, and Parish, who used to dismiss Niggle's art as unimportant next to his own real-life concerns, eventually become true "partners in making and delight." In their case, the spectator, Parish, becomes a designer, while the designer, Niggle, is eager to become a spectator in the distant mountains.

Their partnership speaks to the necessity in Tolkien's view of balancing private artistic visions with external concerns. Tolkien, however, is not advocating a simplistic political style of art, the kind of useful art that Councillor Tompkins approves of. Tompkins scorns Niggle's attempts to depict beauty: "He could not have designed a telling poster to save his life" ("LN" 116). While producing art with "No practical or economic use" ("LN" 116), Niggle is nevertheless able to represent a broader view than a "telling" poster rendered with narrow ideas about usefulness. In "Mythopoeia," for example, it is Tolkien's turn to pour scorn on Tompkins's idea of economically useful art, commenting that "Blessed are the legend-makers" for:

It is not they that have forgot the Night,  
or bid us flee to organized delight,  
in lotus-isles of economic bliss  
forswearing souls to gain a Circe-kiss  
(and counterfeit at that, machine-produced,  
bogus seduction of the twice-seduced). ("Mythopoeia" 88)

The wish-fulfillment offered by this kind of art is counterfeit; Tolkien finds truth in a different kind of fantasy that rests on a connection to the real world. He states that "Fantasy is made out of the Primary World" ("OFS" 68) and that in good fantasy, "simple or fundamental things [...] are made all the more luminous by their setting" ("OFS" 68-69). An artist who wants to represent Tolkien's Secondary World has to find ways to depict convincingly the "true" laws of that world, and most likely, the picture is going to be anchored in the Primary World. Whether focusing on workable details of armor and weaponry, or looking for just the right quality of landscape light, or searching for the right face, the visual artist more often than not connects his or her picture in some way to reality. This

is not to say that such art must be entirely mimetic, however. For example, Tolkien's *The Hills of the Morning* (A&I frontispiece), although a stylized, abstract depiction, nevertheless portrays sky, land, sea, and sun. And even though John R. Holmes comments that in Tolkien's various *Tree of Amalion* drawings, "No real tree, not even the most man-tormented hybrid, could realize such variety," he points out that such an imaginative expression still has elements such as its "branching curls" that suggest natural branches and leaves (32).

MacLeod explains how he searched for that connection to the real world, for a "layer of authenticity," in his representation of Lúthien:

For several months I struggled with how to render or "cast" this figure of Lúthien. My most advanced graphite study was completed near the end of April. It was based vaguely on "idealized" Elvish figures that have swirled in my imagination for some time, heavily influenced by Tolkien's Elvish lore. This drawing reference was loosely based on images of the actress Jennifer Connelly (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Jeffrey MacLeod, *Lúthien Study*. Rpt. in *Mallorn* 44 (August 2006):25.

Yet, I felt that this figure should have a connection to a real living person; to me, this suggests the linkage between elves and mortals and provides a layer of authenticity that strengthens the depth of the work. Thus, after some internal debate, I engaged in a search to find a suitable actress to play the part and serve as a live model for my painting.

I had the great fortune of finding Ms. Tracey Crabtree, a Halifax based actress/model, who to me seemed well suited to play Lúthien (Fig. 3). After several hours sketching and taking reference photos of her, I composed over the next few months several drawings (Fig. 4), and finally decided on the one that would be the primary reference for the final figure of Lúthien. After working on the figure for over a month and a half I invited Tracey back to my studio for another drawing/photo session. It was then that I completed final touch-ups to the Lúthien figure and resolved the final rendering issues that invariably crop up when working on such a complex composition. Finding Tracey was an immense stroke of good luck, as she embodies many Elvish characteristics in her own personality, including grace, intelligence, and kindness. Her personal comportment comes out on the canvas and adds much to the overall impact of the painting (Fig. 5).

In the final painting, Lúthien is looking away from Beren toward the West, perhaps foreshadowing the decision she will make to renounce her Elvish lineage. The painting bears the name *Lúthien and Beren* in contrast to Tolkien's story "Of Beren and Lúthien" in order to illustrate Lúthien as the focal point. Her Elvishness, for me, is a compelling subject.



Fig. 3, left. Jeffrey MacLeod, *Lúthien* reference photo, Tracey Crabtree

Fig. 4, right. Jeffrey MacLeod, reference sketches, Tracey Crabtree



*Fig. 5. Jeffrey MacLeod, Lúthien and Beren, 2005. Detail*

MacLeod's attempts to capture idealized qualities of Elvishness through the depiction of a real person demonstrate how the entry to Enchantment can be found through the real. Tolkien is careful to explain that a fantasist who discovers Enchantment "does not make things (which it may be quite rational to regard as bad) his masters or his gods by worshipping them as inevitable" ("OFS" 70). The relation of Enchantment to the Primary World is different from the relation of Magic, which "produces, or pretends to produce, an alteration in the Primary World" ("OFS" 64). Enchantment, on the other hand, when created in a successful fantasy, captures and heightens an essential quality of an aspect of the Primary World. Referring to his own and other myths, Tolkien explains: "By the forging of Gram cold iron was revealed; by the making of Pegasus horses were ennobled; in the Trees of the Sun and Moon root and stock, flower and fruit are manifested in glory" ("OFS" 68). Tolkien's vision of humans as "free captives undermining shadowy bars, / digging the foreknown from experience / and panning the vein of spirit out of sense" ("Mythopoeia" 86) is one example of his consistent notion that inherent in the Primary World is a greater truth; this world is a "mirrored truth" through which we can see "the likeness of the True"

("Mythopoeia" 90). Tolkien's Christian Neoplatonism—thoroughly medieval in spirit—encourages him to think of the human condition as an imprisonment, and escape from that condition as a positive endeavour that strives to bring us closer to an understanding of providence and of a spiritual level of truth that exists beyond experience in time and the sensual world. Readers who might not recognize or accept these Christian beliefs may still agree, however, with Tolkien's vision of enchantment as a heightening of reality that allows glimpses of better worlds, even if one strives to achieve these visions in this life rather than in an afterlife.

In fact, Tolkien's ideas are compatible with political action in this world. In his essay, Tolkien discusses how critics sometimes confuse "the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter" ("OFS" 69). Associated with real Escape, according to Tolkien, are "Disgust, Anger, Condemnation, and Revolt" ("OFS" 69), qualities that he illustrates with an example of someone who, disgusted with products of the "Robot Age" ("OFS" 70) such as mass-produced electric street-lamps, excludes them from a work of fantasy. Such an escapist rejects "the acquiescence of the 'quisling'" and demonstrates "the resistance of the patriot" ("OFS" 70). The crucial distinction lies in where one decides to place one's loyalties: the deserter abandons a worthwhile cause; the escapist rejects a worthless one. Tolkien admits that the escapist might even influence the actions of others: "he might rouse men to pull down the street-lamps" ("OFS" 70).

Tolkien's powerful defense of the escapist qualities of good fantasy, however, is not applied as strongly to visual art as to literature. He states that "Fantasy is a thing best left to words, to true literature" ("OFS" 61) because "In painting [...] the visible presentation of the fantastic image is technically too easy; the hand tends to outrun the mind, even to overthrow it. Silliness or morbidity are frequent results" ("OFS" 61). Tolkien connects these qualities of "silliness" and "morbidity" more explicitly in an endnote to his essay with surrealism, a mode of modern art that he did not seem to appreciate. But even in that endnote, Tolkien distinguishes between all visual art, which "imposes one visible form," as opposed to "true literature," which "works from mind to mind" ("OFS" 82), allowing hearers of the words to form their own pictures in their imaginations.

However, our knowledge of Tolkien's own approach to the creative process and his conception of fantasy in visual terms provide significant qualifications of this idea. Hammond and Scull believe that a lack of confidence in his own published *Hobbit* illustrations underlie Tolkien's statement that Fantasy is best left to words (*A&I* 187). As they point out in various examples throughout their book, visualization, for Tolkien, often precedes language in the creation and development of a story. For example, among his symbolic "Ishnesses" sketched between 1911 and 1913, Hammond and Scull point to "Wickedness," "Before," and "Afterwards" as containing persistent elements of

Tolkien's imagination, commenting that "it is tempting to view these pictures as visual precursors of passages in *The Book of Lost Tales* written a few years later" (A&I 36). Similarly, in the early painting of *Tanaqui*, associated with the poem *Kôr*, "Tolkien illustrated details not in the related poem but which were later expressed in words" (A&I 47). Drawings not only precede the telling of stories, but they also occur while a story is being developed, aiding in working out details in architecture and landscape. For example, Hammond and Scull note, "The fair valley of Rivendell, like Hobbiton, was more fully developed in Tolkien's pictures than in his text" (A&I 109), and John Ellison comments that Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* stylized landscapes have "the air of a kind of visual 'shorthand' as though Tolkien was not so much trying to produce fully 'composed' versions of the scenes involved as trying to get 'total impressions' of them clear in his own mind" (26).

Another kind of visual source, maps, also allowed Tolkien to develop his mythology. Alice Campbell provides an overview: "The maps in J.R.R. Tolkien's fiction show the shape of Middle-earth, and in turn they helped shape the writing of the stories" (405); furthermore, she describes how a visual source like a map can tell a story to a viewer differently from words: "While the story unfolds line by line over hours of reading, the map allows the entire story to be recalled at a glance, producing a rich tapestry of associations" (408). Hammond and Scull discuss another way in which illustration can free the imagination; in examining Tolkien's *Hobbit* illustrations, they comment that many of his drawings, mostly landscapes, provide backgrounds "on which readers can paint their own mental pictures, directed by a text but not constrained by too specific an image" (A&I 98). Hammond and Scull analyze ways in which some of Tolkien's art draws the viewer's eye into the picture or beyond it through the depiction of winding roads or rivers. A much less sophisticated and more playful strategy to make viewers use their own imaginations can be seen in Tolkien's children's story, *Mr. Bliss*, where a picture of a party sitting outside an inn at tea-time includes to the left of the scene a circle with an arrow pointing to it, and the explanation "The car is just here (and the ponies and donkey) but I am tired of drawing it" (26). Whether drawing for himself or for others, Tolkien uses art to express his visions of a Secondary World and to allow others to enter imaginatively into that world. As Hammond and Scull argue: "Tolkien's art deserves to be as well known as his writings. The two were closely linked, and in his paintings and drawings he displayed remarkable powers of invention that equalled his skill with words" (A&I 7).

It seems difficult to sustain Tolkien's own argument against using visual art to illuminate his Secondary World, then, since he engaged so fully in the enterprise himself and hoped that others would do the same. As he noted in his letter to Milton Waldman, he at one time hoped that other people would



engage with his legends in various media, “wielding paint and music and drama” (*Letters* 145). As we all know, this situation has come to pass. His mythology has inspired not only fiction and art by both professionals and fans but also drama, the most recent example being the *Lord of the Rings* musical play directed by Matthew Warchus that was produced in Toronto and then in London. Musical interpretations of Tolkien's work have been created in a variety of styles, from the Donald Swann settings of Tolkien's poems, to the opera *Leithian* staged in New York, to rock lyrics. Filmmakers, from Rankin and Bass, to Ralph Bakshi, to Peter Jackson, have created versions of Tolkien's stories, while in newer media, the “other minds and hands” have included even video game designers.<sup>3</sup> To use another one of Tolkien's metaphors, he provided many of the ingredients for the “Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story” (“OFS” 44) which “has always been boiling” (“OFS” 45) and out of which cooks have selected bits. Tolkien himself did so in his own fiction, mixing in bits from the *Kalevala*, or *Beowulf*, or the *Poetic Edda*, for example. And although Tolkien's Cauldron image refers to stories per se, it seems a logical extension to include the way in which bits of the soup have been cooked up in other forms of creation, such as film or music or visual art. Just as storytellers reuse ingredients from other tales, so do other artists working within an historical and cultural context. Tolkien drew dragons, for example, based on his readings of northern mythologies and his viewings of medieval art. That ingredient in the Cauldron inspired not only his own fictional dragons but also his visual ones (*A&I* 50-53). John Garth summarizes various artistic influences on Tolkien's work, including William Morris, Arthur Rackham, and other illustrators, as well as calligraphic handbooks and historical and scientific illustrations (36-37). Just as these visual sources inspired Tolkien's imagination, so too Tolkien's visual creations, such as the painting of Smaug, do not so much “impose one visible form” on viewers as inspire other visualizations of the same subject, for those so inclined.

MacLeod's painting of Smaug (Fig. 6, p. 124, following the text of this article) provides an example of a visual image inspired but not constrained by

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<sup>3</sup> See “Adaptations” in Scull and Hammond's *Reader's Guide* for an account of other dramatizations based on Tolkien's work. In the *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, entries under the headings of “Popular Music,” “Film Scripts, Unused,” “Jackson, Peter,” “Rankin/Bass Productions, Inc.,” “Bakshi, Ralph,” “Fan Art,” “Fan Fiction,” and “Fandom” provide relevant information on the work of “other minds and hands.” Brian Rosebury provides an excellent overview of film adaptations in his chapter “The Cultural Phenomenon: Relabelling, Assimilation, Imitation, Adaptation” in his book *Tolkien: A Cultural Phenomenon*. Other recent books dealing with the phenomenon of Tolkien adaptations include *Tolkien on Film*, edited by Janet Brennan Croft; *The Lord of the Rings: Popular Culture in Global Context*, edited by Ernest Mathijs; and *The Frodo Franchise* by Kristin Thompson.

Tolkien's own visual depiction of the dragon. MacLeod explains the genesis of the image in Tolkien's painting:

Depicting Smaug, perched in his "stolen" hall in the Lonely Mountain, pays homage to this iconic classic dragon figure, as relayed to us by Tolkien. Ultimately, the main inspiration for my painting comes from Tolkien's own illustration of Smaug in *Conversation with Smaug* (*A&I* 140). This picture was the cover illustration for the paperback copy of *The Hobbit* I owned as a child.

Initially, I composed several sketches for *Smaug* in the fall of 2001. I considered placing the dragon in an outdoor environment; my first composition situated him assaulting Lake Town. And I transferred this drawing to the canvas, but I did not start the painting for almost two years. Eventually, I changed my composition to match more closely Tolkien's illustration, and once I had settled on placing Smaug in his cavern lair the painting process was begun and completed in a three-month period, during the fall of 2003.

The painting features Smaug perched on several broken pillars overlooking his treasure hoard. A figure is approaching the dragon hoard bearing a long-staffed torch. I never intended to illustrate Tolkien's Bilbo Baggins's conversation with Smaug scene directly. In fact, the figure in my painting is clearly not a hobbit, but someone of human size—perhaps a man of Dale come to confront the dragon, or a traveler who has unwittingly come upon this lair. As Tolkien himself admitted, trying to depict Bilbo in his invisible form wearing the Ring proves to be an artistic challenge (*Hammond and Scull, A&I* 138). My solution was not to illustrate that exact scene at all, but rather to depict a similar scene.

MacLeod's explanation reveals ways in which he took Tolkien's image in his own direction:

Tolkien, in his illustration, ignores the problem of light as his picture is bathed in light even though it is an underground cavern with no clear light source; in his textual description, the lair is quite dark and those of us without dragon sight, or a light source to guide us, would be rather blind in this situation. I resolved the lighting problem by placing a torch in the humanoid figure's hand, and by placing another torch in the hands of the decorative statue, beside the dragon's treasure hoard; this helps to illuminate the undercarriage of the dragon and some of the features of the hall.

Some of the details in MacLeod's painting respond to other visual contexts. His account of several influences outside of Tolkien's work highlights the intertextuality of the creative process in the realm of visual art:

The form of the figure of Smaug is an invention of mine, based loosely on Tolkien's rendering. I also reference two other paintings; the alcoves and stairs in the lair are based on Tolkien's illustration, but I also considered similar structures rendered in Rembrandt's *The Song of Simeon*, 1631. Furthermore, I based my rendering of the torch-bearing statue on Michelangelo's sculpture *Angel Bearing a Candlestick*, 1495. Admittedly, depicting such a statue may not seem directly applicable to *The Hobbit*, yet I felt that placing a symbol which pays homage to Tolkien's strong Catholic beliefs would be useful and appropriate. The artistic technique is similar to that of *Lúthien and Beren* with countless layers of acrylic paint built up over a carefully rendered drawing. Several acrylic glazes and mediums were added to paint to create the gloomy and dark mood.

Tolkien's visual art inspires another version of the scene; instead of imposing a single form on the artist, Tolkien's painting is capable of suggesting new forms and even new stories to the visual artist, just as his fiction suggests images and stories to a reader and writer. MacLeod elaborates:

The final painting, completed in early December 2003, is intended to be reminiscent of Tolkien's *Conversation with Smaug*, but not an exact duplication of that scene. I consider it a depiction of an encounter that perhaps occurred some time before *The Hobbit*, when Smaug was younger and his hoard less imposing. The scene is menacing in that the dragon sits perched waiting for another victim who likely is distracted by the wealth apparent in the dragon's hoard. In the end, my nod to this classic character from *The Hobbit* stands as a warning of the peril to those that covet unearned wealth, for both mortals and dragons (recall Smaug was ultimately slain as a direct corollary of his greed). For a brief time, I considered calling the painting *Greed* but decided against it in favour of a name more applicable to Tolkien's fiction, hence: *Smaug*. (Figure 6, p. 124, following text of this article.)

To have given the painting the allegorical title of *Greed* would have been to move the painting one step closer to Councillor Tompkins's idea of a "telling poster." The actual title and the execution of details, however, connect to a more open-ended depiction of the dragon than a narrow, didactic presentation. *Smaug* draws on our recollections of Tolkien's story, with its wily, egotistical, vengeful dragon, and to thoughts of the people who oppose him; through Tolkien's Smaug, we might glimpse the *Beowulf*-poet's dragon, enraged at the theft of a

cup from his hoard, or we might envision medieval interlaced animal decorations that inspired some of Tolkien's other dragon pictures, or we might recall stories from other mythologies about dragon greed. MacLeod's suggestion of another story involving Smaug, pre-Bilbo, is further evidence of how visual art can stimulate other forms in spectators' minds without imposing its own. Both verbal and visual artists, in other words, work within the context of other creations. In this instance, MacLeod's dragon is one embodiment of the dragon pattern, relayed to us most immediately through Tolkien but also through previous creations of this leaf on the Tree.

When considering the two paintings discussed here, MacLeod's *Lúthien and Beren* and *Smaug*, we might ask how they provide real Escape as defined by Tolkien. Set in the Primary World, they depict flowers, trees, stone, light and dark, a beautiful woman—fundamental elements of the real. The successful artist of a fantasy world hopes that these elements will provide the spectator with a glimpse of another world. In a successful fantasy, enchanted by visions of Middle-earth, the spectator and designer together escape to a world where, for example, love, loyalty, bravery, greed, pride, power, and domination are foregrounded and experienced—not as easy desertions from the difficulties of real life but as the complex, subtle qualities of the best and worst of human existence.

Tolkien, both storyteller and visual artist, advocates for the right of all to sub-creation, and contributes significantly to the "effoliation" of the Tree of Tales himself ("OFS" 79). Through such activities, he believes that we can achieve Recovery, which he defines in visual terms as a "regaining of a clear view" ("OFS" 67). The Escape offered by successful fantasy brings us back to the basics of our Primary World, offering Recovery and Consolation. Tolkien's definition of the view afforded by fantasy also serves as a basic admonition for all, whether designers or spectators, and typically, he expresses that view in the terms of a visual artist: "We should look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red" ("OFS" 67).



*Fig. 1. Jeffrey MacLeod, Lúthien and Beren. 2005. 36 x 48 in. Acrylic, private collection.*



*Fig. 6. Jeffrey MacLeod, Smaug. 2003. 33 x 27 in. Acrylic, private collection. Rpt. in Mallorn 44 (August 2006): 11.*

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