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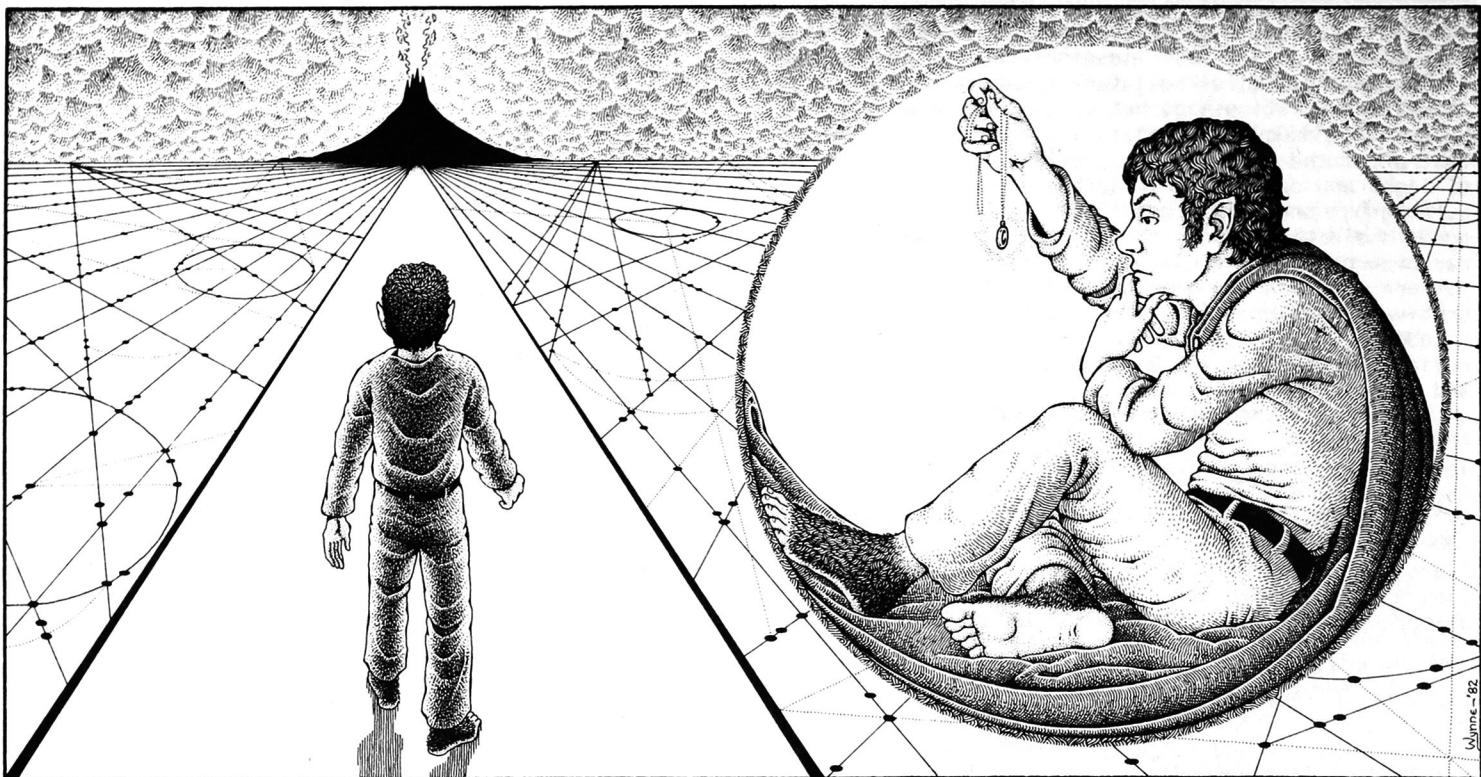


Abstract

Considers the complex interplay of the Ring and the Road (“linear progress and circular stasis”), along with other related motifs of lines, circles, intersections and crossroads, spirals and spheres, hands and eyes in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Additional Keywords

Geometry in *The Lord of the Rings*; Ring (symbol) in *The Lord of the Rings*; Road (symbol) in *The Lord of the Rings*; Stewardship in *The Lord of the Rings*; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*—Symbolism; Patrick Wynne



The Road and the Ring

Solid Geometry in Tolkien's Middle-earth

Mark M. Hennelly, Jr.

There on the pastoral downs without a track
 To guide me, or along the bare white roads
 Lengthening in solitude their dreary line,
 While through those vestiges of ancient times
 I ranged, and by the solitude o'ercome,
 I had a reverie and saw the past,

.
 . . . when twas my chance
 To have before me on the downy plain
 Lines, circles, mounts, a mystery of shapes

.
 . . . (imitative forms
 By which the Druids covertly expressed
 Their knowledge of the heavens, and images forth
 The constellations), I was gently charmed,
 Albeit with an antiquarian's dream,
 And saw the bearded teachers, with white wands
 Uplifted, pointing to the starry sky.

--The Prelude, 1805 ed.,
 XII, 315-50¹

The reader of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) encounters an enchanting yet enigmatic landscape patterned much like that which fascinated Wordsworth at Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain. Generally, those "vestiges of ancient times" recall Tolkien's own "antiquarian's dream" of Middle-earth, and the Druidical "bearded teachers" resemble shamans like Gandalf and Elrond. More to the present point, however, is the "mystery of shapes," the lines and circles or roads and rings which tease both Wordsworth

and Tolkien's reader out of thought and into "reverie" or fantasy. Whether or not the subcreator of Middle-earth patterned his figurative landscape after Stonehenge or any other of the nine hundred stone circles or "causewayed enclosures"² that dot the British Isles is moot. But certainly the competing road and ring geometry which measures Middle-earth is as spell-binding and profound a riddle match as the mystery of shapes at Stonehenge. Once more, these landmarks constantly challenge the reader to solve the riddle of their "imitative forms" and to discover what they "covertly express."

Much of this riddle cannot be systematically explained or decoded. Indeed Tolkien famously maintained that he "cordially dislike[d] allegory in all its manifestations," though he curiously admitted to his tale's "varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers" (I,12).³ The imaginative creator of the most popular fantasy work of this century,⁴ however, is also the incisive literary critic of *Beowulf*. And the conflict between these two personae unwittingly reveals itself in double talk to his publisher Stanley Unwin on the subject of literary meaning: "There is a 'moral', I suppose, in any tale worth telling. But that is not the same thing [as allegory]. Even the struggle between darkness and light . . . is for me just a particular phase of history, one example of its pattern, perhaps, but not The Pattern; and the actors are individuals--they each, of course, contain universals, or they would not live

at all, but they never represent them as such."⁵ This equivocation only further inspires the search for textual relevance in Tolkien, for solving the riddle of the hidden relationships between the pattern and The Pattern. Consequently, it is important to realize that after the diffusive but relatively simple motif of light and dark imagery in the work, the most recurring but profoundly complicated pattern is the analogous dialectic between the Road and the Ring, or linear progress and circular stasis. Not only does this pattern coordinate and unify various structural, figurative, and thematic levels of the text, but understanding its intricate variations also provides a reliable measure of The Lord of the Rings' poignant and hard-earned artistic success. For the reader soon discovers that the author himself, Tolkien the geometer, is the true model for his Ents who scrupulously "pay attention to every detail" (II,246). In fact, the recently published Unfinished Tales tells us geometrically what we might have already guessed symbolically of the descendants of "The People of the Stars," that their "land of Númenor resembled in outline a five-pointed star, or pentangle" (UT,p.165, see numbered page facing p.1 for Tolkien's illustration).

Tolkien was an inveterate doodler. As his son Christopher recalls, "while doing newspaper crossword puzzles," his father "used to draw patterns such as those" arabesque and mandala figures, textiles, and heraldic devices reproduced in his collected illustrations.⁶ And the twin pillars of Tolkien's fantastic imagination are his attention to realistic detail and his insistence on such dialectical, often geometric patterns, like those created by the Road and Ring, underlying this detail. Moreover, the reader's confidence and delight in Tolkien's verisimilitude assures his acceptance of and belief in the dialectical reality of what Tolkien terms the Secondary World of Faërie. Thus, Tolkien rejects Coleridge's Romantic formula calling for the willing suspension of disbelief because "the moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed." If, on the other hand, readers naturally accept the reality of the Secondary World "for itself, they would not have to suspend disbelief: they would believe," since "creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it" ("FS," pp.37,38,55).⁷ One reason for Tolkien's realism is that he always "had the sense of recording what was already 'there', somewhere: not of 'inventing.'"⁸ At any rate, his tale deals literally with innumerable roads and rings, besides "the wonder of the things [in general], such as stone, and wood, and iron; tree and grass; house and fire; bread and wine" ("FS," p.59). As Douglass Parker writes, "fantasy must be buttressed, however skewly, on reality";⁹ and one of Tolkien's other champions, the fantasist Ursula K. Le Guin, is more specifically relevant: "As Pythagoras knew, the god [of inspiration] may speak in the forms of geometry as well as in the shapes of dreams."¹⁰ In the Beowulf poet, Tolkien himself similarly discovers that mimetic solid geometry can equally be fantastic or mythic geometry: "The significance of a myth is not easily to be pinned on paper by analytical reasoning. It is at its best when it is presented by a poet who feels rather than makes explicit what his theme portends; who presents it incarnate in the world of history and geography" ("BMC," p.63).¹¹

As the Road-Ring pattern reveals, Tolkien's imagination also works dialectically.¹² The Lord of the Rings strives toward the rhythmic modulation of polar extremes, each of which, like Tom Bombadil and Gold-

berry, can realize itself only through interaction with its complement: "they seemed to weave a single dance, neither hindering the other, in and out of the room, and round about the table" (I,183). Once again, Tolkien's reading of Beowulf is relevant to the allegro and penseroso movements in his own prose poem: "It is essentially a balance, an opposition of ends and beginnings. In its simplest terms it is a contrasted description of two moments in a great life, rising and setting; an elaboration of the ancient and intensely moving contrast between youth and age, first achievement and final death" ("BMC," p.81). As W.H. Auden puts it in his description of the Quest pattern in Tolkien, "Any image of this experience must be dualistic, a contest between two sides."¹³ Thus in the trilogy, the reader repeatedly witnesses "two powers that are opposed one to another; and ever they strive. . ." (I,456). Sometimes these "competing songs" (I,145) are external, like the "friends" and "foes" Elrond counsels Frodo about (I,360); sometimes, on the other hand, they are "warring duties" (III,159), internal conflicts like Sam's finding his love for Rosie pulling against his love for his master: "I am that torn in two." Frodo's response is crucial for understanding Tolkien's dialectical imagination: "But you will be healed. You were meant to be solid and whole, and you will be" (III,379). That is, although it often seems as if one side is right and one wrong, neither is really that self-exclusive. Each is a necessary complement to the other; and someone falls to evil, like Sauron and Saruman, only if he selfishly seeks to destroy the dialectic itself; "for," as Elrond advises, "nothing is evil in the beginning" (I,351). In fact, the genesis of the dialectic, Ilúvatar's providential Symphony in The Silmarillion, naturally incorporates (not conquers) the satanic "discord of Melkor":

And it seemed at last that there were two musics progressing at one time before the seat of Ilúvatar, and they were utterly at variance. The one was deep and wide and beautiful, but slow and blended with an immeasurable sorrow, from which its beauty chiefly came. The other had now achieved a unity of its own; but it was loud, and vain, and endlessly repeated; and it had little harmony, but rather a clamorous unison as of many trumpets braying upon a few notes. And it essayed to drown the other music by the violence of its voice, but it seemed that its most triumphant notes were taken by the other and woven into its own solemn pattern (S, p.5).

For Tolkien, Elves personify this synthesis of the dialectical pattern and thus provide the ideal resolution of Road and Ring traits. As he once wrote, "they are made by man in his own image and likeness; but freed from those limitations which he feels most to press upon him. They are immortal, and their will is directly effective for the achievement of imagination and desire."¹⁴ And fantasy itself, "commanding Secondary Belief," is "a kind of elvish craft" ("FS," p.49). Thus, Frodo learns that the counsel of Elves "will say both no and yes" (I,123) at the same time, and Sam finds them "so old and young, and so gay and sad" (I,127). This Elvish paradox is especially evident in Galadriel, as Sam's poetic "nonsense" describes her: "Hard as di'monds, soft as moonlight. Warm as sunlight, cold as frost in the stars" (II,365). And Faramir rightly captures her dialectical nature with the same oxymoron Tolkien uses for Faërie itself, "perilously fair" (II,366). Indeed, such elvish Children of the Twilight enjoy the best of both worlds: "They do not fear the Ringwraiths," explains Gandalf,

"for those who have dwelt in the Blessed Realm live at once in both worlds, and against both the Seen and the Unseen they have great power" (I,294). Consequently, Legolas epitomizes a harmonic Road-Ring rhythm because his internal and external life, his memory and motion, are both synchronous and synonymous: "resting his mind in the strange paths of elvish dreams, even as he walked open-eyed in the light of this world" (II,37).

This brings us to the task of generally defining Road and Ring tendencies before plotting the geometry of their dialectical configurations. Indeed Tolkien underscores their importance by repeatedly capitalizing the R in both words, suggesting that there is one archetypal Road and Ring reflected in numerous secondary figures, just as there is one universal Pattern reflected in various individual patterns. In his poem on "Mythopoesis" dedicated to C.S. Lewis, Tolkien converts such Platonism to Christianity by blessing:

Man, Sub-creator, the refracted Light
through whom is splintered from a single White
to many hues, and endlessly combined
in living shapes that move from mind to mind
("FS," p.54).

And the "living shapes" of the One Ring and the Road that Goes Ever On are duplicated on almost every page of the trilogy and provide the most profound example of Tolkien's dialectical imagination. In fact, the Ring's journey on the Road to the Crack of Doom, whether stage center or behind the scenes, is certainly the major interest in *The Lord of the Rings*: "with every step towards the gates of Mordor Frodo felt the Ring on its chain about his neck grow more burdensome" (II,300). And this geometric struggle progressively intensifies at the crucial junctures when Frodo's linear finger intersects the Ring's circle: "a finger still thrust within its circle" (III,275).

As suggested, the variety of roads (plus its synonyms, path or way) and rings (and its analogues, circle or hole) is staggering, but the epithets associated with these traditional literary figures determine their significance so naturally and unobtrusively as to go easily unnoticed. Thus the central "long grey road" (III,384) can bend into an "open road" (III,56), and "ancient path" (II,423-24), or a "beaten path" (II,241), besides turning into a "doubtful way" (III,260) or "cloven way" (II,339), or forming a crossroads or "way-meeting" (III,236). In context, each type of road records subtle thematic shifts in significance. It can be benevolent as "the path of wisdom" (I,339), "right road" (III,221), or "safe road" (I,526). But it may also appear ominously as a "misleading path" (I,161) or "dangerous road" (II,423), or malevolently sentient as an "evil road" (II,389), "deadly road" (III,67), "path of despair" (I,352), or "hard cruel road" (III,261). The ring pattern does not seem quite so variable, but its significance is actually more complicated. There is, of course, the One "Ring of Doom" (III,286) which finds linked analogies in a hostile "ring of foes" (III,115) and "gold rings" in the ears of the "wicked Men" (II,321) of Mordor, but also in the heroic "ring of hobbits" (III,358) which finally defends the Shire. The Watcher in the Water outside Moria sends out "great rings" (I,395) of threatening ripples, and foreboding dark shadows often "encircle" the Fellowship (I,262); but there are also the safeguarding circular walls of Minas Tirith, a frequent "great ring of trees" (III,196) wherein to rest from road weariness, and finally the bittersweet "circles of the world" (III,428), whose mortal boundaries must be accepted. Lastly, as Sam's typical description

of Mount Doom suggests, the road and the ring often combine naturally in the text: "above him he saw plainly a path or road. It climbed like a rising girdle from the west and wound snakelike about the Mountain, until before it went round out of view it reached the foot of the cone upon its eastern side" (III,269). In a meaningful sense, this kind of patterned geometry, or "earth measurement," is proleptic; it realistically cues and figuratively clues significant action in the books. Thus, the Road and the Ring are the ultimate emblems of one's destiny in Middle-earth as their pattern "held on its own sure course and guided them [Frodo, Sam, and Gollum] by the swiftest way" (II,326). But, as we will see, their dialectic can also reveal rhythms of free will's conquest of fate.

Put most simply, the Road and the Ring are measures of biorhythms which reflect larger cosmic rhythms: the Road provokes action, the Ring provides contemplation. The Road is an aggressive offense; the Ring is a protective defense, a posture of rest and recovery. The Road generally provides opportunities for pity, the Ring for power and pride. Again, these tendencies should counterbalance one another: "a generous deed should not be checked by cold counsel" (III,35); and, "those who wish to continue the Quest must harden their hearts" (I,475). The Road focuses its attention on the present, the Ring on understanding and remembering the lessons of the past and planning for the future. The Road connotes profane, mutable experience, the Ring eternally sacred ritual. Tolkien nicely adumbrates many of these values in describing the rhythms of the splintered Fellowship's journey to Helm's Deep:

Night closed about them. At last they halted to make their camp. They had ridden for some five hours and were far out upon the western plain, yet more than half their journey lay still before them. In a great circle, under the starry sky and the waxing moon, they now made their bivouac. They lit no fires, for they were uncertain of events; but they set a ring of mounted guards about them, and scouts rode out far ahead, passing like shadows in the fold of the land. The slow night passed without tidings or alarm. At dawn the horns sounded and within an hour they took the road again. (II,166).

Here the time for rest from the ordeals of the road and, presumably, contemplation of future "events" is signaled by the "ring" and "great circle" as much as it is by the accompanying nightfall. Or better, nightfall is the cue for abandoning diurnal progress on the linear road and embracing static rest in a circular posture. As Pippin once suggests, "the road goes on forever . . . but I can't without a rest" (I,109). Often in the trilogy such circularity is evident in paired figures of tunnels and towers, since like the complementary hemispheres of The Mountain Caradhras and the caves of Moria, both concave and convex structures circumscribe and immobilize their denizens. At any rate, each constellation of geometric values has its season. When combined, their pattern is most natural, as suggested here by the "starry sky" and "waxing moon," which not only imply darkness complementing light and change resolved with permanence, but also a kind of mythic alignment with both the Star-Queen, Elbereth Gilthoniel, and the great luminous tree Telperion, darkened by Melkor but partially rekindled in the moon. Thus, the union of Road and Ring anticipates Frodo's promise of the union of Light and Dark after the apocalyptic crowning of the King: "Now not



"The hand and eye of Legolas"

day only shall be beloved, but night too shall be beautiful and blessed and all its fear pass away!" (III, 310). Moreover, the natural progress of the heavenly spheres across the firmament created a Pattern repeated in the pattern of this bivouac, as it is in the Ring's progress on the Road. Indeed, the Riders of Rohan naturally attack orcs in the battle formation of "a running circle" (II,41). (It should also be noted here that, miming the macrocosmic Pattern, Tolkien's architecture and cityscapes in the mesocosm of Middle-earth, especially at a founding city like Minas Tirith, often adopt the ground plan of the *quadrati circuli*, or squared circle, which geometrically combines roads and rings much like larger versions of his microcosmic heraldic devices.¹⁵) Finally, "at dawn," the Fellowship must break the circle and naturally take "to the road again."

Unnaturally, however, isolated ring characters lacking true fellowship, like the complacent hobbits in their holes or the proud, power-mad Denethor in his tower, fail to break their circle, take to the road, and practice its values. They remain stagnant and do not grow or change. In the extreme, such a polarized stasis is especially personified both in the "pride and rooted wisdom" of the dark trees of the Old Forest who are "filled with a hatred of things that go free upon the earth" (I,180-81) and also in that deep-rooted mountain Caradhras the Cruel, who has "little love for those that go on two legs" (I,378). Even the unpredictable huorns that Fangorn marshalls bear a qualified animosity toward road characters, especially orcs, "that go on two legs" (II,193). And the Evil Eye, who is prefigured in the equally circular Mouth of Sauron, anachronistically desires to arrest historical progress toward the Fourth Age and regress to a benighted cycle like the Dark Second Age. No wonder that Orthanc, the "ringed" tower of ratiocinative Saruman, means both "Mount Fang" and "Cunning Mind" in different tongues (II,204). Less harmfully, but still unnaturally, a polarized road character becomes a "stone doomed to

rolling" (III,340), that is, uprooted and unreflective, like the brawny warrior Boromir who desires the Ring only for its military might. Tolkien whimsically satirizes this kind of deracinated character in his musical poem "Errantry" as one who "must depart again and start again his/gondola, for ever still a messenger, a passenger, a/tarrier, a r/oving as a feather does,/a weather driven mariner."¹⁶

In the plot structure of *The Lord of the Rings*, more than anywhere else, the general growth potential measured by Tolkien's solid geometry is most clear.¹⁷ In fact, the "Quest" truly begins with Bilbo's famous Road Song (I,110), or better, recurring Hymn, which consecrates the correspondences between the Way, the Truth and the Light. Tolkien's gospel is that each of us must not hibernate eternally in our dark holes to be plagued and eventually damned by the tunnel vision of such an ostrich posture. Rather, we must take up our burden and "must follow" our own authentic destiny, the winding Road of life itself. As Mircea Eliade puts it, "Those who have chosen the Quest, the road that leads to the Center, must abandon any kind of family and social situation, any 'nest,' and devote themselves wholly to 'walking' toward the supreme truth."¹⁸ With Frodo the Walker, then, one must humbly whisper, "I will take the Ring . . . though I do not know the way" (II,354). In etymological terms, one must *ad + venio*, move out toward something new, or make an adventure. Even for Sam's pony Bill, once mistreated by Bill Ferny at Bree, "the journey in the wild . . . seem[ed] so much better than its former life" (I,267). In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins learned well Gandalf's lesson that "there is always more about you than anyone expects" (H, p.258) if you will only test and actualize this inner treasure by making a journey to new experiences; in Aragorn's words, if you "will adventure it. No other road will serve" (III,66). In the unfinished tale of "Aldarion and Erendis," the early unfallen Númenóreans even solemnified adventures and "formed the Guild of Venturers, that afterwards was renowned" (UT,p.176). And after Bilbo learns on "the path of wisdom" that nothing ventured is indeed nothing gained, he practices no self-centered treasure hoarding and "no tunnel-making" (I,46), though his insular and materialistic birthday guests still deride "the absurd adventures of his mysterious journey" (I, 53).¹⁹ Consequently, it is poetic justice that many of them are eventually imprisoned in the "old storage-tunnels" or "Lockholes" by Sharkey-Saruman, who himself doesn't "go outside the grounds" (III,356), "doesn't hold with folk moving about" (III,347), and erects barriers reading "NO ROAD" (III,346). The newly crowned Aragorn, that nominal road strider, however, "will soon put the roads in order" (III,330) and pave the way for new adventuring. Thus at the outset, Sam feels "his old life lay behind in the mists, dark adventure lay in front" (I,142); and finally at the end of the road, Butterbur compliments the once lowly hobbits: "you've come back changed from your travels and you look now like folks as can deal with troubles out of hand." And Gandalf seconds the motion: "You are grown up now. Grown indeed very high; among the great you are." But significantly, Gandalf also is wise enough to know it is now time to rest his own exemplary "running circle" at Tom Bombadil's circumscribed kingdom: "He is a moss-gatherer, and I have been a stone doomed to rolling. But my rolling days are ending" (III,339-40).

More specifically, a literary vector analysis of the trilogy's structure must plot the episodic and stadal development of the road as it wends its coursing and often split path relentlessly eastward and then

back westward in recurring geometric patterns more than 1800 miles long.²⁰ David M. Miller generally recognizes this traditional metaphor when he writes, "the setting of the three volumes is the road, a setting lending itself especially well to the narrative structure of the picaresque novel. Down this road a central character moves through adventure after adventure, perhaps learning and maturing as he goes, but encountering each experience essentially afresh."²¹ The largest of these patterns joins road and ring as the path east finally circles back west in a "there and back again" curve completed by Sam's final words, "Well, I'm back" (III,385).²² The point here is that the Nine Walkers cannot learn or earn the illuminating wisdom of the West unless they first surrender their innocence and assimilate the dark experience of the East. As the elf Gelmir tells the human Tuor in *Unfinished Tales*, "Through darkness one may come to the light" if one's feet are "guided on the right road" (UT,p.21). And Bilbo humorously employs the same geometric figure to suggest that his earlier itinerary from childhood to maturity in *The Hobbit* was a straighter, easier path than Frodo's present course from maturity to old age and beyond: "I evidently came back by much too straight a road from my trip. I think Gandalf might have shown me round a bit" (III,328). But then again at Lothlórien Galadriel muses that there is "a road that has no returning" (I,485), and thus Frodo discovers that "there is no real going back. Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same; for I shall not be the same" (III,331). That is, one cannot backtrack or retrace one's steps home again--one's innocence (and perhaps even one's life) is always sacrificed during the journey. Some things are utterly lost, while others are eternally gained by passing through the stages of the Quest. As Tolkien proclaims in "On Fairy-Stories":

The process of growing older is not necessarily allied to growing wickeder, though the two do often happen together. Children are meant to grow up, and not to become Peter Pans. Not to lose innocence and wonder, but to proceed on the appointed journey: that journey upon which it is certainly not better to travel hopefully than to arrive, though we must travel hopefully if we are to arrive. But it is one of the lessons of fairy stories . . . that on callow, lumpish, and selfish youth peril, sorrow, and the shadow of death can bestow dignity, and even sometimes wisdom (pp.44-45).

Often Tolkien conveniently labels the larger road and ring patterns with phrases like "the next stage of their journey" (II,276), "the last desperate stage of his journey" (III,241), or "the last stage of the Quest" (I,526). Sometimes those cues even suggest a secular Way or Stations of the Cross, the critical experiences Christ suffered on the road to His Crucifixion at Calvary, which Tolkien's Catholic liturgy observes with a formalized penitential ritual. More appropriately, I think, the growth patterns shared in different degrees by all the members of the Fellowship reflect the related stages of the wasteland quest for purification and wholeness, which is completed by the final reunification of grail and lance and the discovery of a "Healing King" like Aragorn "the Renewer" (III,169), who will "rebuild and renew and remove all the scars of war and the memory of the darkness" (III,306).²³ The linear lance and circular cup are repeated in Aragorn's inherited "token[s] of our kinship," the "ring of Barahir" and "shards of Narsil" (III,421), the sword to be reforged, and in Frodo's thematic fusion of road pity and ring power, "stern pity" (II,285).

It is during the patterned stages of the Quest that this fusion progressively develops as the road intersects episodically with a series of ringed, occult kingdoms or tempting holes often locked by gates. These circular barriers, like the mound of the Barrow Wights or the Ring of Isengard, represent testing powers of increasing strength whose virtues must be overcome and assimilated so that the Walkers, and particularly Frodo, can grow through stages of developing prowess. Thus, successful road passage through each successive ring ordeal unlocks the repressed dark power and domesticates it by channeling it outward in the form of greater pity or "stern pity." For example, passive Frodo must be saved from drowning by Sam near the "lock[ed] . . . door" (I,165) of Old Man Willow, an image of natural force; he is more aggressive and calls for help inside the tunnel of the preternatural Barrow Wights; he stabs the supernatural Nazgûl near "the ruined circle" (I,254) of Weathertop; and scrambling from the captivating cosmic malevolence of The Eye at "the wide flat circle" of "the Hill of the Eye" when "the Ring was upon him" (I,517-18), Frodo finally asserts himself and saves Sam from drowning. Often, as at Lórien and Rohan, there is some appropriate ritual of gate-passing at these sacred, circular way stops; and as Faramir indicates at the hidden Window of the Sunset, profane time is temporarily abandoned and "no stranger . . . shall see the path we now go on with open eyes" (II,356). No wonder, then, that there is a motif of "daring the Door" (III,85) in the books and that Saruman severely punishes the self-liberating crime of "Gate-breaking" (III,343).

Tolkien's attitude toward "the last stage" or completion of the road quest, however, is more complicated and crucial. After the Numenorean culture fell to the satanic Sauron in the Second Age, "encircling seas" (S, p.354) surrounded the fallen universe now "made round"; and for mortals (not Elves) the "Straight Road" out of Middle-earth to Valinor, the paradisaical home of the angelic Valar, prohibitively turned into a "bent road" (S,pp.348-49). Still, however, the dying Aragorn promises his elf-turned-human queen, Arwen: "let us not be overthrown at the final test, who of old renounced the Shadow and the Ring. In sorrow we must go, but not in despair. Behold! we are not bound for ever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory" (III,428). Aragorn's unfounded but heroic hope is in line with Tolkien's own faith that the Road does go "ever on," that both life and death are inexhaustible experiences, and that "the Consolation of the Happy Ending," which is really a New Beginning beyond the "circles of the world," is the ultimate blessing of Fantasy. His gospel of the "Eucatastrophe," or "sudden joyous 'turn,'" boldly "denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief." This apocalyptic, "fugitive" circle may be earned only after much "sorrow and failure" on the road, which is "necessary to the joy of deliverance" ("FS,"p.68).²⁴ Tolkien's point here is as much a paradox as squaring the circle, for there is no terminal stage of life's "endless pilgrimage" (II, 193); but, on the other hand, "immortality" is not "endless serial living" ("FS,"p.68) either. Rest from the road is important in life, yet as the short tale "Leaf By Niggle" promises, there is always a new span of road in eternity, a "further stage" beyond the encircling Mountains.²⁵ Before he finally dozes off, Bilbo's last Road Song at Rivendell chants this paradox:

The Road goes ever on and on
Out from the door where it began,

Now far ahead the Road has gone,
 Let others follow it who can!
 Let them a journey new begin,
 But I at last with weary feet
 Will turn towards the lighted inn,
 My evening-rest and sleep to meet (III,329).

The repeated pattern of the crossroads or "way-meet" further complicates Tolkien's solid geometry. This motif of the "choice of roads" (II,238) works toward a thematic intersection of freedom and fate that allows one to accept humbly the common destiny of all life forms while still freely "forcing a path" (I,381), or marching to one's own unique drumbeat. Sometimes the choice is between vertical paths, whether, for example, to ascend Caradhras or descend into Moria. Tolkien's usual counsel is that true humility demands falling before one can rise. As Bilbo reveals to the dwarves at Lonely Mountain, "the only way out is down" (H,p.224). In fact, the descent into the dark bowels of Moria is an enlightening exploration of both hell and the unconscious, and the journey through its labyrinths and pits provides a microcosm of Tolkien's overall road and ring geometry. Gandalf self-sacrificially "chose the right way" through the mazes of Khazad-dûm, yet "it is a long way down to the Gates that open on the world" (I,410-11). The trajectory of his own fall with the Balrog into the fiery pit and his consequent ascension up the appropriate "unbroken spiral" of the Endless Stair (II,134) is one crucial example of Tolkien's usual ballistics. His climactic image, however, is that of the "rising, and falling" (III,275) action at the Crack of Doom where the Road ends with an almost primal combat over the Ring. The complex forces determining whether or not Frodo will freely act out his fate reveal themselves in his shifting vertical postures. He falls at the foot of Orodruin; but Sam, often seeming to personify his master's "will power," lifts and carries Frodo up "the climbing road" (III, 271). Gollum knocks him down again, but he rises and races through the "gaping mouth" of a "long cave or tunnel that bored into the Mountain's smoking cone" (III,273-74). Frodo then rises and falls a number of times on the edge of the precipice until his alter ego falls eternally to perdition with the Ring, thereby saving Middle Earth. Frodo then completely surrenders his will power to Sam, who guides him back down the "winding road" (III,281) until they both swoon to the ground. Whereupon the eagle Gwaihir, messenger of Manwë, the master of Frodo's destiny, "circled in the air" (III,282) in great spirals and lifts the hobbits, only to set them down again in safety below.

More frequently, Tolkien coordinates such ethical geometry with the horizontal crossroads which score Middle-earth and are usually accompanied by a circular retreat that provides an opportunity for deliberation before choosing the correct path. For example, when the alliance frontally attacks Mordor to divert Sauron's attention from the Ringbearer, "the horsemen pressed on and ere evening they came to the Cross Roads and the great ring of trees" (III,196). Although the road generally offers the freedom of traditional adventure, while the ring provides the encircling net of destiny, individual circumstances are often more complicated than this simple paradigm. For instance, at the Paths of the Dead, Aragorn argues: "We must ride our own road." But Théoden replies that "It is your doom, maybe, to tread strange paths that others dare not" (III, 60-61), thus seeing the road as one's fated but unique course. Sometimes a general "course [is] chosen" (I, 162), and "one must tread the path that need chooses" (I,387), though "few can foresee whither their road

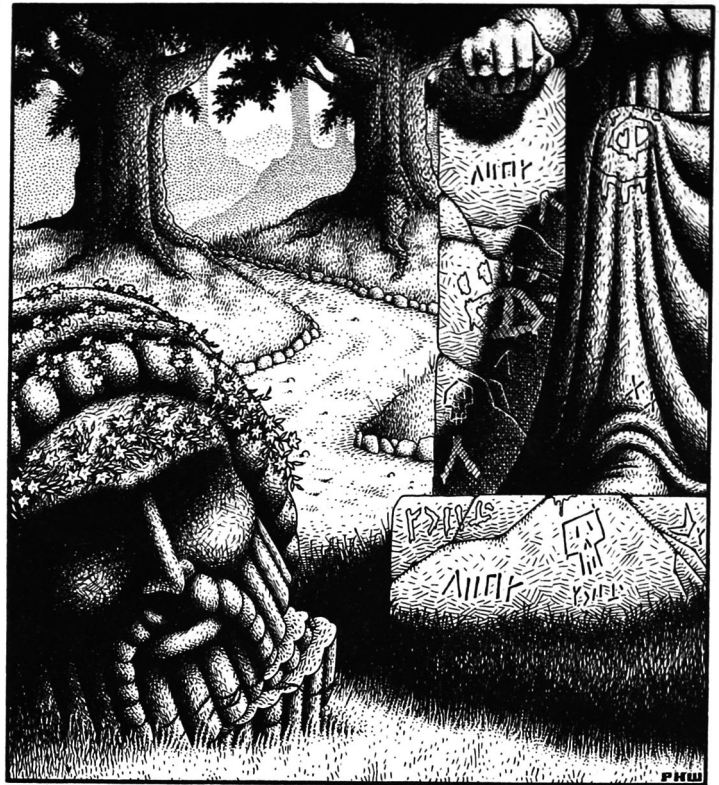
will lead them, till they come to its end" (II,121). Still, Gildor informs Frodo that the time of "choice is yours: to go or wait," and he refuses to believe "the road will prove too hard for your courage" (I, 123), thereby implying the value of individual free effort. Faramir similarly upholds choice, feeling that the "wise man trusts not to chance-meeting on the road in this land" (II,337). While the Road does often enjoin self-defining choices, the Walkers use their respite on the River Anduin, here a winding parody of road values, to postpone the "day of choice" of the true "straight road of the Quest" and so to "float down the broad tide" of the river-road (I,475-76). Perhaps, however, Tom Bombadil's baffling explanation of rescuing the hobbits near the winding Withywindle best articulates the dialectical paradox of coinciding freedom and fate: "all paths lead that way," but "chance brought me then, if chance you call it. It was no plan of mine, though I was waiting for you" (I, 175). Less profoundly but perhaps more lucidly, we might conclude that Tolkien holds for a healthy measure of both freedom and fate, grace and good works, in any human act; but true to his Catholic heritage, good works seem finally more significant and self-defining in his ethical geometry of roads and rings. In fact, Frodo's pity on the road for Gollum saves the creature for his unwitting act of redemption and thus saves Frodo himself from the sin of his final obsession with the Ring. As Elrond describes the "Quest of Mount Doom," all the Walkers, except the Ringbearer, go forth as "free companions, to help him on his way. You may tarry, or come back, or turn aside into other paths, as chance allows. The further you go, the less easy it will be to withdraw, yet no oath or bond is laid on you to go further than you will. For you do not yet know the strength of your hearts, and you cannot foresee what each may meet upon the road" (I,367).²⁶

Besides providing the pattern for the dialectic between freedom and fate, the Road and the Ring also reflect the related importance of both fellowship and isolation in one's life. Generally speaking, the Road carries one to encounters with fellow creatures: "it chanced that several companies came together at the road-meeting" (III,256); while the Ring imposes barriers of lonely isolation. Tolkien sees an individual life, then, as serial alternations between the demands of socialization and isolation, both of which are intimately related and can equally enjoin moments of heroism. For example, in an isolating instant of self-sacrificial choice, Pippin leaves his orc captors on the road to drop his precious elven brooch in a "wide shallow depression" (II,65) as a sign to his trailing companions. Aragorn later commends this unselfish and liberating act of fellowship: "One who cannot cast away a treasure at need is in fetters" (II,215). Gandalf also advises Frodo on the value of fellowship: "I think after all you may need my company on the Road" (I,102); and he later counsels the isolated Théoden, who wears "a thin golden circlet set upon his brow," that "all friends should gather together, lest each singly be destroyed" (II,148-49). This alludes to the comparable divide-and-conquer treachery of both Saruman entrenched within the Ring of Isengard and Sauron perpetually isolated in his Dark Tower. Subtly, Tolkien relies on the road figure to unite the fortunes of the divided Fellowship when, at the end of Book III, Gandalf urges Shadowfax on the road to Minas Tirith with the cry of "Hope is in speed!" (II,262); while at the beginning of Book IV, a few pages later, alienated Frodo laments taking "the wrong way" with the desperate and echoing *cri de coeur* of "What hope we had was in speed" (II,266).

It is more difficult to understand the value of isolation than the value of fellowship in The Lord of the Rings, since so many of Tolkien's ring tropes are those of self-insulating despair. In fact, as parodies of Manwë's eagles, the Ring-wraiths persistently "circle like vultures," and their most desperate remedy is to have the "roads . . . cut" and the orcs at besieged Minas Tirith catapult what looks like "small round shot," but actually is the heads of fallen comrades "branded with the foul token of the Lidless Eye" (III,116-17). It is little wonder, then, that their lord is dubbed "the Captain of Despair" (III,112), and such paralyzing horrors outside the gates portend Denethor's own isolating despair within the surrounded, circled city. Moreover, Gollum's road quest, like that of the Nine riders, is a mockery of true adventure, since his goal is to possess, not give up; he is self-centered, not self-sacrificial. Such innate circularity is prefigured in his early, isolated retreat with the Ring under the roots of convex mountains: "he tunnelled into green mounds; and he ceased to look up at the hill-tops, or the leaves on trees, or the flowers opening in the air: his head and eyes were downward" as "he wormed his way like a maggot into the heart of the hills" (I,84-84). Faramir later reviles the symptoms of such a repressive retreat from the Road: "There are locked doors and closed windows in your mind, and dark rooms behind them: (II,379). Still, Frodo's coinciding isolation within the Ring's "wheel of fire" (III,272) ultimately purifies him and thereby brings final enlightenment. This is what in the Beowulf essay Tolkien celebrates as "a potent but terrible solution in naked will and courage," since the isolating "wages of heroism is death" ("BCM,"p.77). In his "radio play," The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son, Tolkien's existential geometry is more explicitly Christian, for the isolating burden of the Ring becomes there "the cross [that] is heavy," which in turn becomes "the body's weighty! / Dead men drag earthward."²⁷ That is, the road journey of the pall bearers is an image of one's own funeral procession through life, naked of trappings but weighed down by corruptible clay, toward the isolated still point of grave and beyond.

When Gimli blesses "the hand and eye of Legolas" (I,502) after the elf's arrow shoots down a Nazgûl steed, he reminds the reader that Tolkien's dialectic extends to the physical geometry of his creatures and to the significance of hand-eye coordination. The linear arm, hand, and fingers, especially when wielding a sword, primarily practice road values,²⁸ while the circular eye participates in ring themes. Often Tolkien starkly integrates such imagery as, for example, when the loss of Sauron's ring finger leads ineluctably to his disembodied personification as the Lidless Eye, which extreme fragmentation is itself "almost like a finger" (I,519). Thus as Beren's severed hand clutches a Silmaril to win "the hand" of Lúthien (S,224,226), so too anyone can sacrifice a hand out of pity or love; but like Frodo even, if one sins with his hand, or ring finger, it can be cut off. Similarly, as Galadriel suggests of the eye's visionary power, "seeing is both good and perilous" (I,470).

Consequently, both hands and eyes articulate provocative body language in the trilogy, and if the dialectic between them is reciprocating, the result can be Legolas's model of self-actualization. At their worst, hands grasp rapaciously to possess and hoard; at their best, they demonstrate affection like that continuously practiced by Sam and Frodo: "Frodo said nothing but took Sam's hand and pressed it" (III,249); and "Sam went to him and kissed his hand" (III,264).



The Cross-roads from The Two Towers

In his finest moment, even Gollum abandons his Ring obsession and, seeing that upon the sleeping Frodo's "white forehead lay one of Sam's brown hands . . . slowly put[s] out a trembling hand, very cautiously he touched Frodo's knee--but almost the touch was a caress" (II,411). When motivated by vision and insight, hands finally hold a spiritual and aesthetic significance for Tolkien, what he usually refers to as their power of "making." Thus the artisan Sador "finger[s]" his carved chairs and tells Túrin that "the joy in the making is their only true end" (UI,p.72). And in "Mythopoesis," Tolkien explains his aesthetic of subcreation in the last line: "we make still by the law in which we're made" ("FS,"p.54). He further suggests that fantasy itself "seek[s] shared enrichment, partners in making" from its audience. That is, "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" ("FS," pp.53,55). But again, it is the Elves who incarnately resolve this subpattern of the road-ring dialectic. As one of their leaders in Lórien describes elven handicrafts, "we put the thought of all that we love into all that we make" (I,479).

When motivated by pity, the eye can provide insight and prophetic vision as suggested by Galadriel's circular Well and the globular palantíri or seeing-stones. When driven by pride and power, on the other hand, it becomes "the Eye turned inward" (III,245), a brooding, self-centered circle that is often associated with a devouring mouth. Then, it is an object of "mockery," like the carved handle of orc weapons, rather than of true making: "it had been shaped like a hideous head with squinting eyes and a leering mouth" (II,117). Often such figurative geometry is writ large upon the landscape and architecture, as, for example, at "the Teeth of Mordor," whose two towers built in "pride and power" and dotted with "dark window-holes," which are "full of sleepless eyes" (II,308). These eyes reappear in the series of voyeuristic "Watchers"

that guard occult, circumscribed kingdoms like Moria, Mordor, and especially that "mouth of despair," Torech Ungol (II,421), the home of the "bloated bag" Shelob (II,425) with her "two great clusters of many-windowed eyes" (II,419). When Wormtongue and the Lidless Eye himself indulge the greedy appetite of such blood-swollen vampires, they reveal it is ultimately self-devouring. Like the "ring" of "broken bones and skulls" (II,328) Sam finds, cannibal Sauron is "becoming a mere spirit of malice that gnaws itself in the shadows, but cannot again grow or take shape" (III,190). But then again the reader must remember that the mouth, like the eye, can be fair as well as perilous. As Sam, Tolkien's spokeshobbit for natural creature comforts, constantly preaches to Frodo, a hearty appetite can save him from disembodiment in the wraith world. Thus "taters" are his "Gaffer's delight, and rare good ballast for an empty belly" (II,332), for "where there's life there's hope, as my Gaffer used to say; and need of vittles You have a bite, Mr. Frodo, and then a bit of sleep" (II,392).

Understanding the dialectical nuances between the Road and the Ring and their attendant figures can also help the reader to evaluate properly Tolkien's characters, who often reveal themselves in their responses to this geometry. Tom Bombadil and Treebeard are particularly fine representative examples here because they are two of the most enigmatic denizens of Middle-earth and often even seem gratuitous. Both call themselves "the Eldest," and thus both contribute to the repeated theme of "arousing" or energizing the elderly, which correlates the fortunes of Gandalf, Saruman, Old Man Willow, Théoden, and Denethor, besides Tom and Treebeard. Tolkien may even be teasing us into comparing the two since both bear the same initials.

Tom Bombadil functions as a kind of Nature god, or benevolent Pan.²⁹ If among its other properties, the Ring implies the burden of self-consciousness by promising the unique, self-indulgent wish-fulfillments of each wearer, Tom remains visibly unaffected by the Ring (I,184) because he is really preconscious. Thus his natural counsel to Frodo is "Take off your golden ring! Your hand's more fair without it" (I,185). But one cannot consciously discard self-consciousness, and consequently Tom's natural innocence is most unnatural for postconscious beings like hobbits and humans. He continues: "Tom must teach the right road, and keep your feet from wandering" (I,185), yet Tom himself cannot adventure outside his own circumscribed kingdom, which seems to be shrinking and to be rooted, anachronistically, in past Ages: "Out east my knowledge fails. Tom is no master of Riders from the Black Land far beyond this country." In the words of his poem, "Tom's country ends here: he will not pass the borders" (I,203). Consequently, Gandalf reveals at the Council of Elrond that Tom "is withdrawn into a little land, within bounds that he has set . . . and he will not step beyond them" And then Galдор reaffirms that the "Power to defy out Enemy is not in him, unless such power is in the earth itself" (I,348). We have already heard Gandalf bless Tom as a "moss-gatherer," and even his refrain of "Ring a ding dillo!" (I,179) heralds the environment of this curious creature as a restful haven of healing, but he is certainly no road-tested knight errant.

Treebeard is a different story. His eyes, much like Galadriel's, reflect his dedication to both the memory of the past and service to the present: "One felt as if there was an enormous well behind them, filled up with ages of memory, and long, slow, steady thinking; but their surface was sparkling with the

present" (II,83). Though he refuses to become "hasty," the Ent eventually "rouses" himself from "treeish" slumber and then, in turn, arouses his dormant comrades. Unlike Tom, Treebeard tells Merry and Pippin that "Our roads go together" (II,97), and "I can set you down outside my country at any point you choose" (II,87). His "ent-strides" (II,104) travel down the path unwearily until the predestined "ring" as "round as a bowl" (II,105-06) is reached, and it is appropriately time for counsel. Here it is decided to march to Orthanc "though," as the Ent chant, or "ringing shout" (II,111), goes, "Isengard be ringed and barred with doors of stone" (II,112). Treebeard believes that this "last march of the Ents" on the road is a worthy self-sacrifice because "we may help the other peoples before we pass away" (II,114). Yet Fangorn can feel pity for the captured Saruman and Wormtongue and free them on the road; as he tells Gandalf, "You should know that above all I hate the caging of live things, and I will not keep even such creatures as these caged beyond great need" (III,319). He finally admits that "I must be getting hasty--growing backwards towards youth, perhaps" (III,244). This is not regression like Tom's, however, but real rejuvenation, the kind that makes him and the other Ents truly Elven, that is, perfect incarnations of a Road-Ring resolution: "we train and we teach, we walk and we weed" (II,89).

Such biorhythms introduce Tolkien's major theme, that of stewardship which is also significantly defined by road and ring values. In Tolkien's translation of *Sir Orfeo*, the departing King proclaims: "I here do name/my steward high before you all/to keep my realm, whate're befall." And after Orfeo and his Queen finally die, the long faithful steward inherits the care of the realm: "and king was the steward in their stead." ³⁰ This doctrine of a serial hierarchy of stewards, or "Guardians," or shepherds like the Ents pervades Tolkien's work and presumably is a legacy of his Catholic and Medieval heritage. Thus, the Valar, Wizards, early Númenóreans, later Rangers, the House of Stewards, and Healing King are all stewards, as is each individual creature whose road mission must preserve the values of the past besides guarding lest that very past paralyze the present and thereby prevent the natural unfolding of the future. As Frodo explains this repeated adventure of self-sacrifice to his successor, Sam: "I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: someone has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them. But you are my heir: all that I had and might have I leave to you" (III,382). Bad stewards, however, self-enclosed by ring-hoarding, desire to get rather than give. In *Unfinished Tales*, for example, Gwindor tells the tragic overreacher Turin that "You think of yourself and of your own glory, and bid us each do likewise; but we must think of others beside ourselves, for not all can fight and fall, and those we must keep from war and ruin, while we can" (UT,p.156). Similarly, the fall of the Numenóreans occurs when, unlike the Ents, "they appear now rather as lords and masters and gatherers of tribute than as helpers and teachers" (S,p.329). Subsequently, the House of Stewards rules in their stead until the end of the Third Age, when Denethor's lust for the Ring deems he must lose his stewardship to Gandalf temporarily and then ultimately to the crowned Aragorn. As Gandalf charges Denethor: "the rule of no realm is mine, neither of Gondor nor any other, great or small. But all worthy things that are in peril as the world now stands, those are in my care. And for my part, I shall not wholly fail of my task, though Gondor should perish, if anything passes through this night that can still grow fair or bear fruit and flower again in

the days to come. For I also am a steward. Did you not know?" (III,33-34). But the steward who best resolves Road and Ring geometry is Aragorn the Strider who also has compensatory "deep roots" (I,231): "it is a thing passing strange . . . that the healing hand should also wield the sword" (III,291). Indeed, Strider is like the steward Rider in "Smith of Wootton Major," who similarly "was a great traveller: he had seen many things and could do many things before he settled down."³¹ Thus, for Gandalf Aragorn's stewardship heralds a new heaven and a new Middle-earth: "This is your realm, and the heart of the greater realm that shall be. The Third Age of the world is ended, and the new age is begun; and it is your task to order its beginning and to preserve what may be preserved. For though much has been saved, much must now pass away; and the power of the Three Rings also is ended" (III, 307-08).

Elrond, Galadriel, and Círdan are willing to give up their precious "gift" of each of the Three Rings, and by extension Middle-earth itself, and take the "Straight Road" to Valinor in order to preserve the cycle of natural change. Their ability to give up a gift freely is the highest act of individual stewardship. In Tolkien's Catholic Mass, one seasonal "Prayer over the Gifts" significantly reads:

Lord,
receive our gifts in this wonderful exchange:
from all you have given us
we bring you these gifts,
and in return, you give us yourself.³²

This kind of "wonderful exchange" is parodied, however, by the self-serving Sauron who idolotrously names himself "Annatar, the Lord of Gifts" (S,355); and Númenor, "the Land of Gift" (UT,p.165), is deluged by "encircling seas" as soon as its people fall to ring-hoarding. But in "Smith of Wootton Major," the true gospel of gift-giving is wonderfully summed by Alf, the Fairy King, when he explains to his vicar, Starbrow, why he must give up his gift of the fairy star: "[Some things] are free gifts and given for remembrance. But others are not so given. They cannot belong to a man for ever, nor be treasured as heirlooms. They are lent. You have not thought, perhaps, that someone else may need this thing. But it is so. Time is pressing!"³³ For, Tolkien would add, are we not all stewards?

Indeed, he makes his readers' stewardship of the gift of fantasy abundantly clear throughout his works; and this notion of "shared enrichment, partners in making" is perhaps Tolkien's most joyful celebration of fused Road and Ring values. In "Leaf By Niggle," for instance, little Niggle contemplates his magically realized painting this way: "It is a gift!" he said. He was referring to his art, and also to the result; but he was using the word quite literally.³⁴ That is, his vision is a gift which the artist can only pass on to each successive reader and generation of readers, who then must reciprocally share that gift with others. As Sam and Frodo discover during their wonderful excursion on fantasy (II,407-09), the gift of "adventures" is almost unavoidable in life: "Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually--their paths were laid that way." As a matter of fact, or of fantasy, Sam believes he and Frodo have landed in a subsequent episode or stage of Beren One-Hand's legendary adventure with the Silmarils: "Why, to think of it, we're in the same tale still! It's going on. Don't the great tales ever end?" And Frodo's reply reveals his understanding of stewardship and the relation between the individual pattern and the Universal Pattern: "No, they never end

as tales But the people in them come, and go when their part's ended. Our part will end later--or sooner." Sam concludes, anticipating the cyclic return to ring stability and security in their "holes" back home: "And then we can have some rest and some sleep." Here the identifying reader is urged to an identical act of extrapolation, discovering that he or she, too, is recalling the tale of The Lord of the Rings, which is itself but a prologue or prelude to the reader's own adventure, or tale of life. As Roger Sale describes reader participation in Tolkien, "We are in a story, but we have . . . no storyteller, only ourselves."³⁵ Consequently, for Tolkien the Primary World of the reader and the Secondary World of the fantastic tale are one indivisible Middle-earth. Both hobbits and humans must be heroic stewards over this supreme gift, which is the legacy of life itself. In Gerald Monsman's words, "fantasy may become one with reality in a redeemed world."³⁶

In "The Golden Key" by George MacDonald, one of Tolkien's favorite tale-tellers, Tangle's road quest takes her to the cave of the Old Man of the Fire, who appears as "a little naked child. . . playing with balls of various colors and sizes, which he disposed in strange figures upon the floor beside him." Tangle feels "there must be an infinite meaning in the change and sequence and individual forms of the figures." She knows, moreover, that these are somehow related to the goal of her quest, and "flashes of meaning would now pass from them. . . and the longer she looked the more an indescribable vague intelligence went on rousing itself in her mind."³⁷ The effect here is much like that of the "mystery of shapes" which teased Wordsworth at Stonehenge and also like that of Tolkien's own solid geometry. It may be debatable whether roads and rings provide the golden key to understanding Tolkien's tale, but they certainly provide significant landmarks along the way, "flashes of meaning" even more reliable than MacDonald's "indescribable vague intelligence." Apocalyptically, they even provide a telltale clue to the final whereabouts of the missing Ent-wives, whom Treebeards (and the reader) desperately seeks and whose rambling path crisscrosses that of the Ents in a conflicting alteration of road and ring patterns (II,99-100). Their poignant tale or legend ultimately looks forward to the day when "Together we will take the road that leads into the West./And far away will find a land where both our hearts may rest"(II,102). Undoubtedly, the Shire is port of entry to that Western haven. For the very beginning of the trilogy whispers an unnoticed promise that this desired union will occur only after the road has circled there and back again to the Shire. As that true believer Sam innocently reports, a giant, like a tree, or even "bigger than a tree was seen away beyond the North Moors" (I,73). Thus, Tolkien's reader will indeed continue to "walk in legends" (II,45), like his characters, long after the books themselves are finally closed. For the Straight Road to the Circle of Valinor stretches ever on, somewhere between memory and desire in the reader's heart. Frodo's final Road Song is a paean celebrating the paradox of this geometric Eucatastrophe:

Still round the corner there may wait
A new road or a secret gate;
And thought I oft have passed them by,
A day will come at last when I
Shall take the hidden paths that run
West of the Moon, East of the Sun (III,381).

Notes

¹William Wordsworth, The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850, eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York and London: Norton Critical Edition, 1979), p.454.

²Aubrey Burl, The Stone Circles of The British Isles (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1976), p.23. Burl is the most well known authority on the enigmatic stone circles, and much of his archaeological research is surprisingly relevant to the topography of Middle-earth.

³All citations to LotR are taken from the Ballantine editions of The Fellowship of the Ring (Vol. I), The Two Towers (Vol. II), and The Return of the King (Vol. III) (New York, 1965) and are indicated by volume and page number in the text. References to The Hobbit are from (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965) and are identified as H in the text. References to The Silmarillion are from (New York: Ballantine Books, 1979) and are identified as S in the text. References to Unfinished Tales are from (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980) and are identified as UT in the text. References to Tolkien's essay, "On Fairy Stories" are from The Tolkien Reader (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966) and identified as "FS" in the text. References to Tolkien's essay on Beowulf, "Beowulf: The Monster and The Critics," are from An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame, Indiana: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1963), and are identified in the text as "BMC." The essay first appeared in Proceedings of the British Academy, 32(1936), 245-95.

⁴For various accounts of Tolkien's place in popular culture, see Lin Carter, Tolkien: A Look Behind "The Lord of The Rings" (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969), pp. 1-6; Bruce A. Beatie, "The Tolkien Phenomenon," Journal of Popular Culture, 3(1970), 689-703; Gerard O'Connor, "Why Tolkien's The Lord of The Rings Should Not Be Popular Culture," Extrapolation, 13(1971), 48-55; in response is Colman O'Hare, "On Reading of an 'Old Book,'" Extrapolation, 14(1972), 59-63; and the classic attack on the trilogy as popular "juvenile trash" is Edmund Wilson, "Oo, Those Awful Orcs!" The Nation, 182(1956), 312-14.

⁵Quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien: A Biography (New York: Ballantine Books, 1977), 229.

⁶Pictures By J.R.R. Tolkien. Forward and Notes by Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), note to Plate 43; see plates 43-47 for examples of these "patterns."

⁷For discussions of the impact of Coleridge on Tolkien, see Jan Wójcik, S.J., "Tolkien and Coleridge: Remaking of the 'Green Earth,'" Renascence 20(1968), 134-39, 146; and Clyde S. Kilby, "Tolkien and Coleridge Orcrist," 3(1969), 16-19.

⁸Carpenter, p.103.

⁹"Hwaet We Holbytla . . .," Hudson Review, 9 (1956-57), 599.

¹⁰"Introduction" to The Left Hand of Darkness (New York: Ace Books, 1976), p. iv.

¹¹For a discussion of the centrality of this to Tolkien's thought and how it reveals the conflict between Tolkien the critic and Tolkien the fantasist,

see Jane Chance Nitzsche, Tolkien's Art: A 'Mythology for England' (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979).

¹²For an insightful Jungian discussion of Tolkien's dialectical temper, see Timothy R. O'Neill, The Individuated Hobbit: Jung, Tolkien and the Archetypes of Middle-earth (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).

¹³"The Quest Hero," in Tolkien and the Critics, eds. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame, Indiana: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p.45. The essay first appeared in The Texas Quarterly, 4(1962), 81-93.

¹⁴In Carpenter, p. 105.

¹⁵For a relevant treatment of the quadratic circuli, see Aniela Jaffe's "Symbolism in the Visual Arts," in Man and His Symbols, ed. Carl G. Jung (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964), esp. pp. 240-48.

¹⁶The Road Goes Ever On, music by Donald Swan (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969), pp. 51-52.

¹⁷Three insightful discussions of the trilogy's plot structure are Randel Helms, Tolkien's World (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), pp. 82-108, Richard West, "The Interlace Structure of The Lord of the Rings," in A Tolkien Compass, ed. Jared Lobdell (La Salle, Illinois: Opne Court, 1975), pp. 77-94, and David Miller "Narrative Pattern in The Fellowship of the Ring," in A Tolkien Compass, pp. 96-106.

¹⁸The Sacred and the Profane, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), p. 184. This passage is also cited by William Dowie, "The Gospel of Middle Earth according to J.R.R. Tolkien," in J.R.R. Tolkien, Scholar and Story-teller: Essays in Memoriam, ed. Mary Salu and Robert T. Farrell (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979), p. 270.

¹⁹See Plate 20, "The Hall at Bag-End, Residence of B. Baggins Esquire," in Pictures By J.R.R. Tolkien for a graphic illustration of Tolkien's circular geometry as it defines a hobbit hole.

²⁰Georgs H. Thompson has computed Frodo's mileage. See "The Lord of the Rings: The Novel as Traditional Romance," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, 8 (1967), 57.

²¹Miller, 95. Later Miller suggestively muses that "a great deal might be learned by examining the contrapuntal structure of the spirals of movement east and west of the river" Anduin, 100. Neither his study nor the present one, however, chooses to examine the logistics of Tolkien's mapped journey that closely.

²²For a general discussion of this curve as a controlling matrix in fantasy, see Mark M. Hennelly, Jr., "The Dream of Fantasy: 'There and Back Again: A Hobbit's Holiday,'" The Sphinx, III (1979), 29-43.

²³Many critics, in passing, have noted Tolkien's reliance on general wasteland imagery, but none have worked out this mythology in any detail. See, for example, Auden's essay, and Hugh T. Keenan, "The Appeal of The Lord of the Rings: A Struggle For Life," and Charles Moorman, "The Shire, Mordor, and Minas Tirith," both of which appear in Tolkien and Critics, pp. 62-80, esp. p. 72, and pp. 201-17, esp. p. 216, respectively. See also Ruth S. Noel The Mythology of Middle Earth (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), passim, and Anne C.

Petty, One Ring To Bind Them All: Tolkien's Mythology (University, Alabama: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1979), esp. p. 62, and p. 100 where Petty notes the relevant significance of circles for the old Sioux medicine man, Black Elk. Finally, for a complete discussion of Aragorn's significance, see Paul H. Kocher, Master of Middle Earth: The Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien (New York: Ballantine Books, 1977), pp. 121-151.

²⁴ For a valuable discussion of Tolkien's concept of joy and other fantasy themes, see Robert J. Reily, "Tolkien and the Fairy Story," in Tolkien and the Critics, pp. 128-150, esp. 147-150. This essay originally appeared in Thought, 38 (1963), 89-106.

²⁵ In The Tolkien Reader, p. 105.

²⁶ For other discussions of the freedom-fate dialectic in Tolkien, see Gunnar Urang, Shadows of Heaven: Religion and Fantasy in the Writings of C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and J.R.R. Tolkien (Philadelphia: A Pilgrim Press Book, 1971), pp. 157 ff., and Willis B. Glover, "The Christian Character of Tolkien's World," Criticism, 13 (1971), 39-53.

²⁷ In Tolkien: Tree and Leaf, Smith of Wootton Major, The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth (London: Unwin Paperbacks), pp. 158-59.

²⁸ For a more general and complete discussion of the hand imagery, see Marion Perret, "Rings Off Their Fingers: Hands in The Lord of the Rings," Ariel: A Review of International English Literature, 6 (1975) 52-66.

²⁹ For other discussions of Tom Bombadil, see O'Neill, pp. 120ff., and Gordon E. Slethaug, "Tolkien Tom Bombadil, and the Creative Imagination," English Studies in Canada, 4 (1977), 341-50.

³⁰ Sir Gawain and The Green Knight, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo, trans. J.R.R. Tolkien, intro. Christopher Tolkien (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980), ll. 204-06, 596, pp. 138, 148.

³¹ In Tolkien: Tree and Leaf, Smith of Wootton Major, The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth, p. 135.

³² Celebrating the Eucharist, Advent-Christmas Season: November 30 to January 30, 1980-81 (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1980), p. 94.

³³ In Tolkien: Tree and Leaf, Smith of Wootton Major, The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth, p. 134.

³⁴ In The Tolkien Reader, p. 104.

³⁵ Modern Heroism: Essays on D.H. Lawrence, William Empson, and J.R.R. Tolkien (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 1973), p. 235.

³⁶ "The Imaginative World of J.R.R. Tolkien," South Atlantic Quarterly, 69 (1970), 275. See also Barton R. Friedman's approach to the relationships between history and fantasy or myth, "Fabricating History: Narrative Strategy in The Lord of the Rings," Clio, 2 (1973), 123-144. Finally, the interested reader should also consult an untitled poem of Murray Bodo, O.F.M. which rather remarkably approaches the general dialectic between internal and external reality using the symbols of the "road" and "wheel" to stand for the "Journey and the Dream." Thus, finally, "The Journey and the Dream/Are one balanced act of love."

See Francis: The Journey and the Dream (n.p.: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1972), pp. 167-68.

³⁷ In Phantasmagoria: Tales of Fantasy and the Supernatural, ed. Jane Mobley (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1977), p. 76.

Editorial Notes

In this issue we observe two anniversaries: the 15th of the founding of The Mythopoeic Society, and the 150th of the birth of Lewis Carroll. To mark the oldest, Joe R. Christopher and Ruth Berman have written articles on Carroll, a man who continues to be specially appreciated as a pioneer in literature and fantasy.

Also with this issue, Mythlore has reached that special number to Hobbits -- 33. This is a time to briefly pause and evaluate its "adolescence" and look forward to what lies ahead. The prospects are good. In the last year its circulation has increased almost 20%. We are not yet to where we want and can be, but the recent growth has not been accidental. Many factors have made this possible, not the least has been the reader's support in renewals and passing the word. We have changed with this issue to a more satisfactory printer, and hope in the near future to increase the number of pages. Further on, dependent on further growth, we hope to see typesetting and the use of color. This will only be possible with your individual effort to let those know who would be quite interested if they but knew of Mythlore's existence. This includes both individuals and libraries. In the last issue a poll was enclosed as to how you both now see Mythlore and would like it to be. On a spectrum of "fan publication" at 1 and "serious journal" at 9, the responses average out to 6.52 as to how the readers see Mythlore now, and 7.59 as to what they would like it to be. If Mythlore is to increase its outreach it must attempt to please as best it can both its current and potential readers. As has been said before, it is not possible to please everyone in all respects, despite our efforts. I personally see Mythlore as a journal with a human personality, intended to serve those who share a deep and abiding enthusiasm for the journal's interests. To put it another way, Mythlore is for the "literate fan" (a term I did not originate). It is possible to be an enthusiast with critical standards, as the readership of Mythlore clearly demonstrates. I usually avoid terms such as "fan," "fannish," vs. "serious," "literate," and "scholarly," because they belong to somewhat dangerous territory, and are slippery terms to deal with. They do not mean the same thing to everyone, and a great deal of fuss and bother can be created when they are used. I personally feel much of this results from semantic disagreement and misunderstanding of what others may mean when these terms are employed. Although these terms are mistakenly mutually exclusive to some, and are made demonstrably so in some quarters, I believe in the context of Mythlore one can find a common ground for both which is mutually enriching.

Some have written asking why we don't publish more on a certain area or author(s). The honest answer is that we have received no submissions on that area or author at this point. As C.S. Lewis said in effect about some of his books, he wrote them because he wanted to read them, and no one else had yet written them. In this light, perhaps some readers will want to write on that which they would like to see in Mythlore. See page 13 of Mythlore 30 for some topics in which others have expressed interest.

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