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Echoes in Age From the World of J.R.R. Tolkien

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Abstract

An author who encountered Tolkien at Oxford recounts a series of personal and literary responses after long familiarity with Tolkien's work.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R. The Hobbit—Personal reactions; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings—Personal reactions

Echoes in Age

From the World of J.R.R. Tolkien

E.L. Edmunds

Introduction

I did have the pleasure, once upon a time, of knowing rather well, if from a distance, both J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Both were at Oxford at the time. I took tutorials at Magdalen College from C.S. Lewis and heard lectures from Tolkien who was Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon at the University. For me, as a wide-eyed north country boy, they epitomized the great friendships of old times when they came together at the Beowulf soirees which C.S. Lewis organized for his students in his rooms. I remember receiving as a university prize a copy of *The Hobbit*, which is still one of my most treasured possessions.

Fifty years later and now "out to grass" so to speak in this so-called million acre farm of Prince Edward Island, I still read much of Tolkien but now with a different background, and obviously from a different vantage point.

1. The Association of Words, Phrases, Incidents

It is possible, of course, to read the works of Tolkien as straight-forward story. It is, as it were, like seeing a Shakespearian play first time. But after several readings, our appreciation begins to change. We accumulate those complex associations of memories and emotions which are sometimes called thoughts. Like a pebble dropped into a pool of still water, Tolkien's words for me now yield ever-widening ripples in the mind. They can never be fully shared with anyone else. Nevertheless, I propose to try and describe some of these widening ripples which may sometimes become so fascinating that I have to stop reading and simply ruminate, very much in the original meaning of that word.

2. The Art of Fabling: Parallels with Tolkien

Tolkien's interest in fabling was no passing whim. He liked to "spin a good yarn" as did the Anglo-Saxon scop of old, or the minstrel on the troubled border land between England and Scotland. Sir Walter Scott picks up something of this in "The Lay of the Last Minstrel." For him, you will recall:

The way was long the wind was cold,
The Minstrel was infirm and old;
His wither'd cheek and tresses grey
Seem'd to have known a better day;
The harp, his sole remaining joy,
Was carried by an orphan boy.
The last of all the Bards was he
Who sing of Border chivalry.

It is this mention of chivalry that sends echoes down my mind between Sir Walter Scott's minstrel

and Tolkien, because the world of both is full of its own ancient codes of chivalry. My mind wanders to King Theoden's funeral. You will remember he was laid upon a golden bier; and they passed through the city in silence.

Then the drums rolled loudly, and were silent.... But Merry stood at the foot of the mound and he wept and when the song was ended he rose and cried, 'Theoden king! Theoden king! Farewell! As a father you were to me, for a little while. Farewell!'

Then there is the funeral of Boromir, which in turn leads me back to the funeral of Balder Dead as described in Matthew Arnold's poem.

Alternatively, *The Hobbit* in particular can be read as a children's book. That delicious blend of curiosity, fantasy, and "played-out" fear of "things that go bump in the night"; though the "things that go bump in the night" in the world of Tolkien are not caused by such gentle folk as "the Borrowers," or by Masfield's "Midnight Folk," or by the wee, wee man in the ballad of that name, or those "wee folk, good folk trooping all together." I once read *The Hobbit* to my eight-year-old daughter and I was confident she would read it from the point of view of being safe-in-the-nursery when:

Some one came knocking
At my wee, small door;
Some one came knocking,
I'm sure-- sure-- sure;
I listened, I opened,
I looked to left and right,
But nought there was a-stirring
In the still dark night;
Only the busy beetle
Tap-tapping in the wall,
Only from the forest
The screech-owl's call,
Only the cricket whistling
While the dewdrops fall,
So I know not who came knocking,
At all, at all, at all.
["Some One" by Walter de la Mare]

In subsequent conversation, my daughter tells me that all went well until I came to Smaug and his "dragon talk" and the danger of picking up "dragon sickness." It kept her awake at night--in other words I frightened her.

Another association which never leaves me when I read the opening chapters of *The Hobbit* is Walter de la Mare's "Traveller." He may not be a Black Rider as in *The Lord of the Rings*, but nevertheless he has something of the character of a

barrow wight about him. He is, in fact, physically real.

"Is there anybody there?" said the Traveller,
Knocking on the moonlit door;
And his horse in the silence champed the
grasses
Of the forest's ferny floor:
And a bird flew up out of the turret,
Above the Traveller's head:
And he smote the door a second time;
"Is there anybody there?" he said.

Sometimes my mind wanders from Tolkien to the names of A.A. Milne and Kenneth Grahame. "The Wind in the Willows" may be regarded as a similar story to *The Hobbit* in that both make use of anthropomorphic creatures. But "Tigger" or "Winnie the Pooh" or "Mr. Toad" and his associates (as well as his enemies) are a far cry from the inhabitants of Mordor, Gondor, Mirkwood, and the Shirelands. "Smaug" has not a drop of blood relationship of any kind to the rather tinisely creature whom we call "the reluctant dragon" and created by Kenneth Grahame (though significantly, both like to indulge in lots of dragon-talk!)

3. The Anglo-Saxon Connection

For Tolkien, *The Hobbit* could be regarded as a kind of prototype, a mock-up, testing-bed, if you like, even "mach-one" for the more fully developed, more highly structured history of "The Third Age" as portrayed in *The Lord of the Rings*. Arnold Toynbee speaks of some sixteen or seventeen previous civilizations that the world has known. But that portrayed by Tolkien predates them all for me. This is the world that never was, but such is his skill in "word spinning" it is a world that might well have been. But it is not the world of Beatrix Potter (whom I once met), nor is it the world of her child-like furry creatures as portrayed in her fables. It is, of course, true Beatrix Potter can suggest evil on rare occasions in just the same way as Tolkien can. But Tolkien suggests it more profoundly and more consistently. There are, for example, his descriptions of Sauron, of Saruman, of Shelob the spider. Tolkien's is a priestless, churchless world where the traditional virtues which we associated with Christianity find no place. Reading history, I am constantly appalled by man's inhumanity to man. As Wordsworth says:

And much it grieved my heart to think
What man has made of man.

Yet the code prescribes it. Beowulf exclaims, after the death of Aeschere,

'Ne sorga, snotor guma!	Selre bith aeghwaem,
paet he his freond wrece,	ponne he fela murne.
Ure aeghwyrc sceal	ende gebidan
worolde lifes;	wyrce se pe mote
domes aer deape;	paet bith drihtguman
unlifgendum	aefter selest

(Do not sorrow, wise warrior! It is better for everyone that he should aveng his friend than that he should mourn too much. Everyone of us must await the end

of this world's life. Let him work who may to achieve a reputation before he dies. That is far the best for a warrior to keep his name alive.)

There is a suggestion here that in both the world of the Rings and in the world of Beowulf, courage is what matters. It is found in most unlikely places. Sam would have killed Gollum, even unlikely places. Sam would have killed Frodo. Elsewhere, Sam says doggedly, "I must see it through." And there is Eowyn's advice to Merry: "Where will want not, a way opens." My mind wanders to Erendil and Gil-galad leading the last alliance of elves and men against Sauron. Both know they will perish; but never do they flinch.

Intermixed with this fatalistic attitude to life is an overtone of immortality. In the world of the Rings, mortals do in fact exist side by side with immortals. There is the constant echo of the world of Odin and Valhalla. Gandalf the White has a white beard and light beams from him "as if his blue mantle was only a cloud over sunshine." The love of Aragorn and Arwen is the love of the mortal for the immortal. Arwen is a beautifully tragic heroine, who gives up her "twilight" immortality for pure love of a mortal. "Her choice was made and her doom appointed."

4. Two Individual Words "Dark" and "Cold"

The intense, scarifying heat of the Jewish Gehenna has no place in the world of The Lord of the Rings or the world of the saga. It is worth noting that when Bede was translating the book of Genesis (in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*), he thinks of hell as a place of terrifying cold. Adam's great fear is that he will be transfixed in ice, away from the redeeming love of his Lord. The barrow in which Frodo and Sam so nearly meet their death is a place of darkness and coldness -- horrifyingly so.

Dark is one of those emotive words with both an intellectual and emotional connotation. I recall Sampson's cry in *Sampson Agonistes*:

Oh dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon
Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse
Without all hope of day!

My mind passes to Cleopatra's ominous sentence:

Finish good Eros! the bright day is done
And we are for the dark.

The dark tower of Sauron has affinities with so many other dark towers, e.g., the one to which Child Roland came. All kinds of fears are built into the dark. Bacon says, in one of his essays:

Men fear death as children fear to go into the dark; and as the fear of one is increased by tales, so is the other.

In the Icelandic saga, Grettir had the strength of four men and was almost invincible. But he feared the dark, and properly so. In *The Dream of*

the Rood, the cross says:

purhdrifan hi me mid deorcan naeglum
(They drove through me dark nails.)

"Deorc" is an Anglo-Saxon word; but it is also a Celtic word meaning red; dark brown. Thus the nails driven into Christ's hands and feet were not only dark nails but also red with the clotting blood of our Lord. Tolkien can build into the word dark the same overtone of sinister coldness, of evil. With the taming of Smeagol:

They faded swiftly and softly into the
darkness. Over all the leagues of waste
before the gates of Mordor there was a
black silence.

The word "cold" has similar ramifications of meaning. For me one of the most terrifying things about the barrows was their coldness. It was also part of the Anglo-Saxon world. There is the reference in the Battle of Maldon:

ongann ceallian pa ofer cald waeter
Byrthelmes bearn.

At that moment, the whole situation is shot through and through with impending tragedy: Byrthnoth will pay for his folly of course. This is part of the whole concept of the tragic hero.

Then again, in the saga of Burnt Njall, Gunnarr does exactly what Njall, who had the second sight, told him he must not do. He had killed twice in one family. True, he made atonement; and part of that atonement was that he should go away for three winters, thereby giving the feud time to heal. Gunnarr had no wish to go abroad at all, but he made ready for his self-imposed exile. But as he went down to the seashore, his horse accidentally tripped and threw him. As he stood up, he chanced to look back at the valley towards his home. It was fatal. Then he said:

Fair is the Lithe, so fair that it never
seemed to me so fair; the cornfields are
white to harvest and the home mead is
mown. I will ride back home.

So Gunnarr for the first, and the last, time in his life broke his word, leaving Kolekgegr to go alone. He rode back, knowing he was going to meet his death. But he chose that alternative deliberately, rather than leave his home. This is the world of the Rings. Doom, or judgement, is always there; but it never comes upon a man accidentally. The man contributes to it. This is the tragedy of man; whether it is Grettir the Strong, or Sigurd the last of the Voisungs, or Boromir the Magnificent. Not one of them bewails his fate. They might say with W.E. Henley:

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced or cried aloud
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Returning to the saga; Njall died without calling out when the fire engulfed the house. Skar-

phethinn says of his father, "Now he is a doomed man. But I am willing to please him by burning to death inside with him, for I am not afraid to die." And so he does. It was this kind of response from men which reflected the response of men and gods alike when faced by the last challenge from the giants and those other hideous creatures which dwelt away from Asgarth and Mithgardh, in Utgardh, or Nifheim. The giants dwell in a place of intense cold and darkness. They hated the light that shone in Asgarth, the home of the gods. One day they would attack it and extinguish the light, no matter how bravely gods and men might fight. I think of a famous Latin line; a mother's advice to her child:

Spartani nactuses,
Hank exorna

(You were born a Spartan,
See that you live up to that name.)

Much of this is reflected in *The Lord of the Rings*, though the prospect of another world (one not unlike that in the Arthurian), gives a mellow ending to the book. Men, dwarves, elves, hobbits, all alike, reflect an attitude of calm endurance, hard work, a fulfillment of all obligations, of living up to one's capabilities and responsibilities. At the same time there is always grief. Time and time again, Tolkien recaptures this atmosphere:

They look back. Dark yawned at the archway of the Gates under the mountain-shadow. Faint and far beneath the earth rolled the slow drumbeats: *doom*. A thin black smoke trailed out. Nothing else was to be seen; the dale all around was empty. *Doom*. Grief at last wholly overcame them, and the wept long; some standing and silent, some cast upon the ground. *Doom*. *Doom*. The drumbeats faded.

The Anglo-Saxon scop frequently picked up this same melancholy; as, for example, in *The Wanderer* or *Seafarer*. When Beowulf is speaking of what a man must do in life, he says:

to beflonne	-- No paet ythe byth
ac geseacan sceal	-- fremme se þe wille --,
nyde genydd,	sawberendra
grundbuendra	niptha bearna,
paer his lichoma	gearwe stowe,
swefeþ aester symle.	legerbedde faest

(Nor is that fate easy to escape from; let him try who will. But everyone of the dark warriors, of the soul bearers of those who dwell upon earth, compelled by hard fate must seek the place that is prepared for him. There his life's casket, bound fast in its narrow bed, sleeps after the banquet.)

T.S. Eliot dwells more philosophically upon this when he says:

Home is what one starts from. As we grow older
The world becomes stranger, the pattern more com-
plicated

Of dead and living.

Yet hope cannot die. The pale light which seems to shine from within Frodo as he sleeps recalls Havelock the Dane: the leader is still with us. At the end, the golden glow of the prospect of returning home warms the heart of Merry, Pippin--yes and Sam too, even without Frodo, though I think Sam would have just as cheerfully gone with Frodo. But there is no such homecoming for Frodo. Yet he too would like to:

Travel back
And tread again that ancient track

Dourly, he reflects:

but I have been too deeply hurt Sam. I tried to save the shire and it has been saved, but not for me. It must be often so Sam when things are in danger; someone has to give them up, to lose them that others may keep them. And so, for recovery, he must sail away from his much-loved Shire.

5. A Note on Some of the "Panoply of Array"

When I first read *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, I read avidly. I was anxious to know what would be the outcome of the battles which were surely forecast. Now, in age, I know the outcome and am suitably reassured. My mind can wander to other association; the Highland Reaper, for example, of whom Wordsworth asked:

Will no one tell me what she sings
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things
And battles long ago.

Some battles have presaged the end of an Order. Tennyson picks this up when he says:

So all day long the noise of battle rolled
Among the mountains by the winter sea,
Until King Arthur's table, man by man,
Had fallen in Lyonesse about their lord,
King Arthur.

In passing, I find Tolkien's concern with order fascinating. It was something the mediaevalists believed in implicitly. The first indication that Macbeth's kingdom is crumbling beneath him, for me at any rate, lies in Lady Macbeth's cry "stand not on the order of your going." I suppose today people would term it due process and the rule of law. But such concepts have no place in the domain of the Daerk Power.

Many novelists have described battles in sundry places: *Lorna Doone* and *War and Peace* may serve as two examples. Some poets have done likewise: Turnadot, for example, in *The Song of Roland*. But the world in *The Lord of the Rings* is a different one. There are certain rituals, certain codes to be observed. To meet the ancestral voices prophesying war," there is a whole narrative history of war-gear, shields, hauberks, and coat-of-mail like

"mithril" (one of these saved Frodo's life). There is the sound of horns, familiar to Anglo-Saxon ears:

Horn stundum song
fuslic (fyrð) leoo.

(Time and again 'the horn rang out
the ready battle son')

Then my mind wanders to the hordes of Genghis Khan whose noise of battle before the battle struck fear into the hearts of their opponents (and is it not a strange coincidence that the Chinese should similarly use horns in the Korean War in our own time?) Some battles are just slaughter. The Battle of the Somme in 1916 is almost too painful for me even to mention. By contrast, Tolkien poeticizes the attendant grief of battles he describes.

Frodo performs great "deeds of derring-do" with his sword Sting. There are other great swords in legend. In Sigurd the Volsung, Sigmund only fell in battle because Odin took back his sword -- a knavish trick, no matter how much he may have wanted Sigmund alongside with him in Valhalla. Skarphethinn had his axe; Roland his Durandal. The two most famous swords in Beowulf are "Naegling" and "Hrunting." The latter is described:

paet waes an foran	ealdgestreona:
ecg waes iren,	aertanum fah,
ahyrðd heaposwate;	naifre hit aet hilde ne
	swac
manna aengum -	para pe hit mid
	-mundum bewand.

(that was in former times part of an ancient treasure. Its blade was of iron, gleaming bright with damascening; hardened with battle sweat. Never did it fail any man of those who held it in their hands in battle.)

Actually there is here a suggestion that the blade itself might have been spider --poisoned. And if one regards it as unthinkable that swords could be poisoned you may recall that Gandalf said Frodo was very lucky that his last sword cut was not from a poisoned sword!

An elvin sword, Glamdring, had that invaluable quality in moments of danger of "shining with a cold light." One elvin sword in the story of the Rings is Orcrist"... but, perhaps enough has been said on swords. Other rituals attaching to swords include the peace strings, the damascening on the blade itself, the jewels inset in the scabbard, and the runes engraved on the hilt. Swords were only a total part of the wealth in which a Lord measured both his standing and his reward-potential toward his "heorthpegnas." This, in turn, calls vividly to my mind the lament of the Anglo-Saxon "Wanderer" who asks where now is his "mappum-giefa," his giver of treasure?

In short, the cause men fight and die for is the greatest -- survival of the goodness of a whole civilization. But change there will always be. In the refrain of the poet Deor:

Paes oferedoid; pisses swa maeg
 (All that age passed away So too will this)

6. A Note on Runes

Runes were set down in the lore and the lore was rarely wrong. They par-took of the nature of magical signs and were a hallmark of a particular society. Incidentally, they still are today, as for example with gypsies, tramps, beggars, and secret societies. In the disposition of the strips of land in the mediaeval open-field system, certain signs on the tallies had particular meanings.

But in the world of Tolkien, ability to read the runes meant a great deal. The dwarves could easily read Gandalf's rune when he put it on the door of Bilbo. More sinister were the runes on the barrows of the dead. So, the good companion was one who not only protected his friend in battle but also helped him read the runes. Hrothgar described Aeschere as "min runwita" -- my counsellor who could read the runes and interpret them. Such a lore Master was Gandalf.

7. A Note on Riddling

Riddling was a very serious business in the world of Tolkien and, indeed, in the modus vivendi of the Anglo-Saxon. It could even be a matter of life or death. Only Bilbo's quick wits save him from being eaten by Gollum in their riddling sequence. Again, my mind wanders to a riddle in the sagas;

Oh harken now, hesthrekning king,
 And what can this be now,
 Soft as down as hard as horn
 And white as glistening snow?

And back comes the answer:

Here thou this now. Guest the Blind,
 This riddle I understand.
 The Sea it is both soft and hard
 And flings white spray on the land.

The vividness of some of the descriptions in riddles is breathtaking. Thus, fog is described in one riddle in these terms:

What is that huge one that passes
 over the earth, swallowing lakes and pools?
 He fears the wind but he fears not man
 and makes war against the sun.

As mentioned elsewhere, however, there was a code in riddle guessing. As Tolkien tells us after Gollum has failed to answer Bilbo's riddle:

One thing Gollum had learned long,
 long ago was never, never to cheat at the
 riddle game, which is a sacred one and of
 immense antiquity.

Another aspect of riddling was death-naming. If you could find the name of your adversary, he was within your power, "in thrall," so to speak. Smaug very nearly ensnared Bilbo in this way, through his crafty, smooth, questingly sinister

dragon talk. Piercing the anonymity of a person was like breaking an enemy's code--and less difficult. In a sense, runes could be riddles and had to be unfathomed -- and sometimes they never were unfathomed. I am reminded of Robert Louis Stevenson's ballad of *Ticonderoga: A Legend of the West Highlands*:

With many a man he counselled
 Of high and low degree,
 With the herdsmen on the mountains
 And the fishers of the sea.
 And he came and went unweary,
 And read the books of yore,
 And the runes that were written of old
 On stones upon the moor.
 And many a name he was told,
 But never the name of his fears--
 Never, in east or west,
 The name that rang in his ears:
 Names of men and of clans;
 Names for the grass and the tree,
 For the smallest tarn in the mountains,
 The smallest reef in the sea:
 Names for the high and low,
 The names of the craig and the flat;
 But in all the land of Scotland,
 Never a name like that.

8. A Diversion on Monsters

Just as the Traditional Epic has invited the creation of the Mock Epic, as for example in *The Rape of the Lock*, or *Butler's Hudibras*, so the monsters of J.R.R. Tolkien now bring to my mind certain mock-relatives, though equally grotesque creatures. To match the Balrog or Shelob or the orcs and the trolls, there is the Australian Bunyip. The Bunyip in Australia is very similar to Jenny Greenteeth in Lancashire, England; both are malignant water creatures who attack and drown the unwary. The only sign of Jenny Greenteeth's presence is a green scum on the top of the water. Then there are the Merrows who live in the Irish Sea; that is to say they live on dry land below the sea, passing through the water by means of enchanted caps. It is understood the women are very beautiful and are often known to be eager to marry human males. This is hardly surprising as the men or male Merrow are "red-nosed and pig-eyed with green hair and teeth and a penchant for brandy." I have never yet met an Eiler woman who, I am told, "is a very beautiful woman, who would be absolutely perfect were it not for the fact that she has a hollow back." Nor have I met the rather dangerous Hoopenake which sticks its tail in its mouth and goes along the American prairie at a great many knots. Then there is the most pathetic creature of all: the Squonk which, if frightened, is "liable to dissolve entirely, leaving only tears and bubbles."¹

The reluctant dragon of Graham Green therefore is no new discovery; though perhaps the jabberwock has some affinities. Actually, Tom Bombadil describes other creatures:

they are fond of strange words and
 of rhyming and metrical tricks... they are
 also, at least on the surface, lighthearted

and frivolous, though sometimes one may uneasily suspect that more is meant than meets the ear.

I am tempted to add a couple of references of my own. Once I thought I saw the Loch Ness monster, and:

Once, as sure as I'm alive
I saw a mermaid...
Calling, soft-like, 'Sam, Sam.'

Beautiful she was, and (going off on another tangent):

Pure as a bubble sprung
Out of a linnets' lung.

Nevertheless, I have not lost the horror I still feel for the monsters of Tolkien. Gandalf is describing what befell him in Moria:

We fought far under the living earth,
where time is not counted. Ever he
clutched me, and every I hewed him, till at
last he fled into dark tunnels. They were
not made by Durin's folk, Gimli son of
Gloin. Far, far below the deepest delvings
of the dwarves, the world is gnawed by
nameless things. Even Sauron knows them
not. They are older than he.

Banquo and Macbeth have a glimpse of such creatures when Banquo describes the three witches:

The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
And these are of them.

9. A Note on the Songs

If I had to point to a single, specific example of maturation in Tolkien's writing, it would be to the songs. Those in *The Hobbit* are good -- straight-forward, metrically balanced, contributing much to the atmosphere of the story and yet very much interludes in it. Occasionally they "smell of the lamp."

But, in *The Lord of the Rings*, the songs have become much more an integrated part of the evolving pattern of the story. They are more imaginative. They arise more naturally out of the story. They walking and the drinking songs uplift our spirits, and yet are so very much in character of the singers: Tree Beard's Song, for example, or Sam's Rhyme of the Troll, or the Byronic, Swinburnish swagger of Tom Bombadil's songs. The songs of the four hobbits truly reflect:

The hobbit children
The laughing folk
The little people.

Indeed, it is their "nice little voices" that saved them from being trodden on as little orcs by Tree Beard . But there are other songs too: the stentorian Battle Cries; the Elves' Song--Beyond the Sea; or Legolas' Song of the Sea, so reminiscent of Gaelic folklore: "Cuimhnich air na daoine bho'n d'

thanaig thu." (Remember the men you came from.) The sea is never far from Hobbit imagination as the preface to the adventures of Tom Bombadil reminds us. The best songs in *The Lord of the Rings* are sad, melancholy, fate-conscious. Bilbo busily prepares to leave home for what (unbeknown to us and to him) is to be for the last time:

The road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the road has gone
And I must follow if I can
Pursuing it with eager feet
Until it joins some larger way
Where many paths and errands meet
And wither then? I cannot say.

He paused silent for a moment; then without another word, he turned away from the lights and voices. . . He jumped over a low place in the hedge at the bottom and took to the meadows, passing into the night like a rustle of wind in the grass. Gandalf remained for awhile staring after in the darkness. 'Goodbye my dear Bilbo--until our next meeting,' he said softly, and went back indoors.

So too at the end of the story, this song is repeated, in Greek-chorus fashion, now as a valedictory:

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 now begin,
But I at last with weary feet
Will turn towards the lighted inn,
My evening-rest and sleep to meet.

And as Bilbo murmured the last words, his head dropped on his chest and he slept soundly.

For one hobbit at least the revels were ended however much he might retain that opportunity nostalgic interest older folk do have, as they listen for "the voices at the door." The purpose of Tennyson's Ulysses may be to "sail beyond . . . the western stars;" but not so Bilbo. His poetic fire is in embers. Well he might say:

I warmed my hands before the fire of life
It sinks and I am ready to depart.

10. A Note on Tolkien's Style

To comment fully on Tolkien's style in a paper of this kind would be impossible. Suffice it to say that, for me, his least happy moments are with the thugs of Sharkey and Co. Their direct speech embarrasses me. But there are many more infinitely acceptable styles. The appendix on writing and spelling and the appendix on the language and peoples of the Third Age are given in a deadpan style of delivery which is all too familiar among university academics. Here is the professional philologist speaking. But elsewhere he "speaks out

loud and bold." His style has echoes of the Sagas, of the rhythms of the Old Testament. "I hear nothing but the night's speech of plant and stone," says Gimli in Galadrim. The weary company hear a tale of elves and Mirkwood: "of sunlight and starlight upon the meadows by the great river, before the worlds was gray." They are lulled to sleep by "the early night wind whispering among many leaves." There is the nightmarish description of the Balrog of Morgoth, "an evil of the ancient world it seemed, a creature both a shadow and a flame." Then there is the whole catching of breath when Gandalf shows Frodo the ring. At the end:

he paused and then said slowly in a deep voice, 'this is the master ring, the one ring to rule them all. This is the one ring that he lost many ages ago, to the great weakening of his power. He greatly desires it—but he must not get it.'

Frodo sat silent and motionless. Fear seemed to stretch out a vast hand, like a dark cloud rising in the east and looming up to engulf him. . .

If I had to equate Tolkien with any one writer, it would be William Morris. Both have that same ability to produce a neutral atmosphere, a world of pastel shades of gray, green, blue. Morris catches it in his ballad "Shameful Death":

There were four of us about that bed;
The mass-priest knelt at the side,
I and his mother stood at the head,
Over his feet lay the bride;
We were quite sure he was dead,
Though his eyes were open wide.
He did not die in the night,
He did not die in the day,
But in the morning twilight
His spirit passed away,
When neither sun nor moon was bright,
And the trees were merely grey.

But elsewhere, Tolkien has a kind of incantation which recalls Ossian for me. At times he can recapture the atmosphere of the good old Pickwickian "pub." In fact, the scenes where Bilbo, or later Frodo, get inebriated are among the funniest in the book. But the length and breadth of Tolkien can be measured by the way he can leave this style, and capture that dreadful atmosphere of stench and filth enveloping Shelob's Lair. How penetrating is his use of the word "reek" to describe that odor.

Again, elsewhere in single phrases, Tolkien can evoke a whole past as, for example, "ent-moot," "funeral boat," "the paths of the dead" and "dragon sickness." "Never laugh at live dragons," says Bilbo. Fill and Kili die defending Thorin "for he was their mother's older brother." Here is a reference to that most important of all blood relationships for the Anglo-Saxon, namely that of uncle and nephew. Tacitus mentions it as a characteristic of the Chatti; and it is referred to more than once in Beowulf.

11. Memorabilia

I suppose in youth we have all marked our textbooks with what we think are relevant, important passages. The surprising thing is in age, I now do it with Tolkien. There are the peat bogs "where flowers grow bright and tall" as we approach the pass into Mordor. At its mouth lie "great heaps and hills of slag and broken rock and blasted earth, the vomit of the maggot folk of Mordor." I have marked the fury of the curse of the Goblin King: "Take them away to black holes, full of snakes, and never let them see the light again." With this curse, I recall another from the Ballad of *Semmerwater*:

He has cursed aloud that city proud
He has cursed it in its pride. . . .
He has cursed it into Semmerwater
There to bide.

In turn, the "weed and reed in the gloom" of *Semmerwater* recall a period in Frodo's journey when "dead grasses and rotting weeds loomed up in the mists like ragged shadows of long-forgotten summers." So many other echoes ring down the corridor of my mind.

Crossing the dead marshes. . . . 'Who are they? What are they?' asked Sam shuddering, turning to Frodo who was now behind him.

'I don't know,' said Frodo in a dreamlike voice, 'but I have seen them too. In the pools when the candles were lit. They lie in all the pools, pale faces deep under the dark water. I saw them: grim faces and evil, and noble faces and sad. Many faces proud and fair, and weeds in their silver hair. But all foul, all rotting, all dead. A fell light is in them.'

Here, for me, is also the Ancient Mariner's nightmare:

The many men, so beautiful!
And they all dead did lie:
And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.

One other passage I have marked as an echo of the passing of King Arthur:

Then Legolas built a grey ship in Ithilien,
and sailed down Anduin and so over the Sea;
and with him, it is said, went Gimli the Dwarf.
And when that ship passed an end was come in the middle-earth of the Fellowship of the Ring.

12. Conclusion

For me, then, Tolkien recaptures the spirit of an earlier world in a manner so consistent as to induce that familiar "willing suspension of disbelief." Genus has been called an infinite capacity for taking pains and Tolkien clearly does this to perfection. Even the common speech is worked out in fine structural detail—indeed, I understand that some people have attempted to

revive it as a language, though perhaps revived in the wrong term as, obviously, it was never really spoken. But it is, nevertheless, interesting to note the use of the word because some people would like to think it had been used and could be used again!

Tolkien's World of the Rings is a hard world. Death came certainly, often very suddenly. Death came eventually in any case. All that mattered was courage and friendship in adversity. The description of the battle of Asanulbizar partakes more of the nature of Ragnarok or of the coming of the anti-Christ which was popularly supposed to precede the Day of Judgement. The apocalyptic writings of the first-century B.C. and the first-century A.D. are full of forebodings followed by a renewal of hope.

And as the Captains gazed south of to the land of Mordor, it seemed to them that black against the pall of cloud, there rose a huge shape, a shadow, impenetrable lighting crowned, filling all the sky. Enormous it reared about the world, and stretched towards them a vast threatening hand, terrible but impotent; for even as it leaned over them, a great wind took it, and it was all blown away, and passed; and then a great hush fell.

I recall I was once talking about the Book of Revelation and a student asked me if I could give a modern equivalent to describe Heaven. I quoted Frodo's wonderment when first stepping in Cerin Amroth:

It seemed to him that he had stepped through a high window that looked on a vanished world. A light was upon it for which his language had no name. All that he saw was shapely, but the shapes seemed at once clear cut, as if they had been first conceived and drawn at the uncovering of his eyes, and ancient as if they had endured forever. He saw no color but those he knew, gold and white and blue and green, but they were fresh and poignant as if he had at that moment first perceived them and made for them names new and wonderful. In winter here no heart could mourn for summer or for spring. No blemish or sickness or deformity could be seen in anything that grew upon the earth. On the land of Lorien there was no stain.

I like to think I might even meet an evergreen Treebeard there, older than the forests and saviour of the little group of hobbits whom he snatched from the edge of disaster. In that event, I might even be able to return one of his own greetings to him: "A vanimar, vanimailon, nostari!"; or in modern Westron parlance, "it's a long time since we saw you around."

13. Last Farewells

Perhaps it is simply because I myself approach my threescore years and ten that I feel an intuitive sympathy, a warmth, an inner feeling of

comfort for the dignified way Tolkien handles those who have grown old. In some Orders of Chivalry, as for example the Knights Hospitaller of St. John, such men were given a special name, prud'hommes. Their helpful advice was always most keenly sought. So too with Tolkien. When Frodo and Company arrive at the Grey Havens in the long Fifth of Lune, it is Ciridan, the shipwright, who comes out to greet them:

"Very tall he was, and his beard was long, and he was grey and old, save that his eyes were as keen as stars; and he looked at them and bowed, and said: 'all is now ready.'

Parting is always a time of sorrow for young or for old. Yet it can be a time which is "blessed and without bitterness." I recall Mr. Valiant-for-Truth's magnificent farewell speech in *Pilgrim's Progress*; or that of Kent in *King Lear* who can say, in declining an invitation to help rule the kingdom:

I have a journey, sir, shortly to go.
My master calls me, I must not say no.

Again, there are those last few moments when Brutus and Cassius are together before the battle. Brutus turns to Cassius and says:

If we do meet again, we'll smile indeed;
If not, 'tis true this parting was well made.

As for me, I too sit beside the fire, as did Bilbo. I hum the words of a song in High Elvish (learned quite phonetically I should add). It was sung by the lady Galadriel as Frodo is leaving Lorien. The song ends with the wish:

Namarie! Nai hir uvalye Valimar.
Nai elye hir uva. Namarie!
(Farewell! Maybe thou shalt find Valimar.
Maybe even thou shalt find it. Farewell!)

But will he? At the time we are left wondering. For part of Frodo's charm is that he remains throughout such a reluctant hero. On one occasion, he says he feels it is such a pity that all this should happen in his time and to him. Gandalf replies philosophically: "So do all who live to see such times. . . All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us." Evil exists: evil has to be overcome. There can be no Valimar for Frodo until the land is cleansed of Sauron, Saruman and his minions. Cleansed it finally is, thanks to his "courage never to submit or yield." But his wound will never really heal.

Yet Tolkien does not leave us disconsolate. Our tears (and Gandalf wisely recognizes "not all tears are an evil") are sublimated into something richer and rarer. Frodo stands on deck on a night of rain and:

smelled the sweet fragrance in the air and heard the sound of singing that came across the water. And then it seemed to him. . . he beheld white shores and beyond

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Though Barrie's notes show that he toyed with other Peter Pan-related topics (including a fascinating title fragment, "Peter Pan Grown Old"), this speech is the only published writing of Barrie's to deal with the subjects of his most successful work in "Captain Hook at Eton," which has been collected in the book *M'Connachie and J.M.B.* Barrie constructs a delightful and entertaining talk relating the career of the young Captain Hook at Eton. In this witty speech, we learned that Hook's school days showed a passion for "poetry, especially that of the Lake School," and that he was athletically unnotable at Balliol.

It notes the curiosity that "when hurt on the football field, he 'bled yellow.'" Barrie speaks of Hook's Aunt Emily and her collection of school caps belonging to the great pirate. It suggests that he was elected to the prestigious Eton Society, or Pop, by manipulation of the voting results. Barrie informs the boys who were the top 100 Eton scholars that Hook was one of their number in the First Hundred, but indicates strongly that Hook's contribution to the *Eton Journal* was a plagiarism from Charles Lamb, "A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig."

More material on Hook's school days indicate he was long bound to Eton: "A search made of the cabin of his floating hulks brought to light that throughout the years of his piracy, he had been a faithful subscriber to the *Eton Chronicle*. Hundreds of copies of it, much thumb-marked, were found littering his boat."

Nonetheless, young Hook was not popular with his classmates. But the speech concludes with a fascinating and entertaining glimpse of Hook returning to Eton for a last visit. This last visit was to destroy evidence that he had a member of the Eton Society in order to "obliterate the memory of himself from the tabernacle he had fouled."

"In that moment, was he not a good Etonian?" Barrie asks. The speech concludes with a paragraph that, on the eve of the annual crucial cricket match, must have earned a big ovation indeed: "Perhaps it was just that at Oxford, he fell among bad companions — Harrovians."

The speech, then, brings Barrie's concept of Captain Hook as one intimately connected with public school education to a full circle. The pirate turned schoolmaster of 1904 first draft of the play was revived in 1927 as the schoolboy turned pirate.

Barrie, however, never returned to most of the ideas found in this lost last act. While the crocodile and the little house of Neverland reappear in the busy final scene of this unused last act, most of the rest of it disappeared from the final drafts of *Peter Pan*.

All readers and viewers of *Peter Pan* will doubtless agree that this unused first-draft ending lacks the emotional depth and bittersweet resonance of the separation scene Barrie finally did use.

But Peter Pan was a work that grew steadily over several years: from Barrie's first creation of him as a story to the young Llewellyn-Davies boys, George, Jack, and Peter, in Kensington Gardens, to the first published episodes of a baby Peter Pan's adventures in Kensington Gardens in *The Little White Bird*, to the 1904 stage version and 1911 novel version, even to Barrie's little-known but brilliant speech, "Captain Hook at Eton," delivered to that school's First Hundred in 1927. His notebooks show that late in life, he toyed with a tormenting and provocative title, "Peter Pan Grown Old," but apparently did not pursue the project.

And his very first draft has this happy ending, which allows triumph for both the Neverland and London sides of the story. It may be less fine than the version Barrie finally settled on. But it is nonetheless fascinating to scholars of this most enigmatic work, the story of the boy who could never grow up, bless and cursed with eternal youth.

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them a far green country under a swift sunrise.

Lady Galadriel's wish for him was about to come true!

By contrast, Sam Gamgee is to find his Valimar in his own beloved shireland; and it is reached in a characteristic fashion for him. His wife, Rose, plumps little Elanor upon his lap, as soon as he gets in the house. Whereupon he draws a deep breath and says, no doubt very phlegmatically, "Well, I'm back."

So to a last fond farewell. May memory hold the door as I hear down the wind again the strains of distant bagpipes. They are playing for Frodo, poignantly, nostalgically, MacCrimmon's Lament:

Cha til mi tuille
(Never more shall I return)

Nor will Frodo. Nor will Bilbo. For with their departure over Sea with the three Keepers, the Third Age is come to an end. *

¹ With acknowledgements to R. Barber and A. Richards, "A Dictionary of Famous Beasts", Macmillan.