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Abstract
Describes five "laws" underlying Tolkien's Middle-earth and how the action of *The Lord of the Rings* proceeds logically from them: the cosmos is ultimately providential; the result of an action is influenced by its intent; moral and magical laws are as important as physical laws; states of mind influence physical reality; and experience is the realization of proverbial truth or romantic convention.

Keywords
Realism; Secondary Belief; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings—Structure

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The Structure and Aesthetic of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings

by Randel Helms

The integrity of critical discussion of *The Lord of the Rings* is dependent on one's accepting at the outset that the aesthetic principles by which a fantasy world operates are different both from the laws of our own world of common-sense reality and from the aesthetic principles of realistic literature; if we do not allow this difference, we shall find ourselves praising fantasy for the wrong reasons, or attacking it for not being what it was not meant to be in the first place.

The world of fantasy is a world of desire fulfilled, of beauty past description, of goodness and wickedness past defiling or redeeming; reflection on this circumstance will quickly make clear that the literature of fantasy is always in perilous danger of sliding into mere wish fulfillment and sentimentality. For this reason among others the author of fantasy needs a self-discipline analogous to but opposite from that required of the author of realistic narrative. Of course realism (I use the term in the widest and most general sense) has its own kind of sentimentality (that found in Socialist Realism, for example, which presents character and action not for their own sake but for the sake of the cause the artist serves), and the greater the sentimentality, the closer "realism" comes to being fantasy. Similarly, fantasy is also subject to sentimentality, but of an opposite sort; for just as realism can degenerate into fantasy, so fantasy can degenerate either into realism (in the case, for example, of the dream-frame or time machine which the author feels is necessary to "explain" how his story could have happened), or into daydreaming (the "realism" of the self-indulgent imagination). The point here is that the realistic writer must always make clear (however indirectly) how such-and-so could have happened, for realism is based on an implicitly recognized ontology that grants reality only on a basis of cause and effect sequences. Fantasy, on the other hand, has a totally different ontology behind it, and the fantasy writer must always keep in mind that what happens in his work must accord not with his daydreams, and not with our own world's law of common sense, but in accord with fantasy's own peculiar ontology.

Tolkien himself has introduced the beginnings of a critical notion about the ontology behind fantasy in his essay "On Fairy Stories". Here, in his discussion of Coleridge's conception of romantic poetry and the necessity of the "willing suspension of disbelief," Tolkien counters Coleridge's idea by saying that "What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful 'sub-creator'. He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside." The reader of fantasy needs, in order to remain inside the Secondary World, says Tolkien, not a negative suspension of *dis*belief, but a positive form of "Secondary Belief" that is the product of the author's own art. For, Tolkien concludes, "The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside."[1]

The disciplined fantasist needs, therefore, in order to maintain Secondary Belief, to be always looking at the structural principles, the internal laws, of the world he is creating; for his is a delicate art, and perhaps more than any other has a set of limitations that must absolutely be respected. But of course the advantages concomitant to the limitations are equally great, perhaps the greatest of these being the enormous range in the *kind* of experiences the fantasist can present (fighting a dragon, becoming invisible, living forever); a strength that, like all others, has its attendant limitations, for the fantasist has very little freedom in the *way* his characters can react to those experiences.

Realistic art, of course, involves just the opposite sort of problem; it can present only the kinds of action that are "believable" according to our laws of common-sense reality--a limitation correspondingly recompensed by the tremendous range of available responses to the action, responses bounded only by the possibilities already built into the character who is reacting. All this results in two rather simple principles of narrative construction: in realism, action is limited, reaction infinite; in fantasy, action is infinite, reaction limited. Accordingly, the critic of fantasy will ask two questions: "What happens?" and "Why do things happen as they do?"

Since fantasy characters are going to react only as heroes or villains, wise men, knaves or fools, the value of a work of fantasy, it would appear, depends not on the possibilities of *reaction*, but on the richness and quality of its *action*. Now judging the richness (or multiplicity) of the action is not so difficult; even the most superficial reader can readily determine whether there is enough meat in a book to justify a continued perusal. More difficult, and what must fully engage the attention of the critic of fantasy, is the *quality* of the action. This paper is an attempt to show that the quality and value of the narrative in fantasy literature is dependent upon the richness and complexity of the interrelationships between the action, on the one hand, and the internal laws or structural principles of the created fantasy world, on the other. By "internal laws" I mean chiefly the physics and metaphysics of the Secondary World, and since every fantasy is a new creation, a new world limited only by the imaginative powers of its creator, each work of fantasy must be judged by its own internal complexities. It follows that the critic of fantasy must discover and formulate the internal laws of the Secondary World he is examining in order fully to understand the narrative principles of the fictional action and to judge the success with which it fulfills its aims. I begin this study of the structure and aesthetic of *The Lord of the Rings*, therefore, with a list of what I take to be the internal laws of Tolkien's own Secondary World, Middle Earth.

(1) The cosmos is ultimately providential. (2) The result of an action is the product of its intent; that is, Middle Earth's moral structure works according to a kind of "truth table": (+) x (+)=(+), (-) x (-)=(+). A good action with a good intent will have a good result; an evil action with an evil intent will also have an ultimately good result. (3) Moral and magical law have the stature and force of physical law. (4) Will, and states of mind, both evil and good, can have objective reality and physical energy. (5) All experience is the realization either of proverbial truth, or of romance convention, or of both. These laws, of course, overlap in their effects, and some may even be subsumed under others, but I have stated them separately for clarity. In the rest of this paper I hope to show that the structure of the fictional action in each of the six books of Tolkien's trilogy is dependent upon the workings of some or all of these laws; for things happen as they do in Middle Earth, as in our own world, in keeping with its physics and metaphysics. I shall examine each book in turn.

All the action in Book I, and consequently in the rest of the trilogy, stems from Bilbo's act of mercy and pity in *The Hobbit*--his sparing of Gollum's life, an act which sets up the possibility of Frodo's inheriting and bearing the Ring. The sense of an over-arching Providence is not strong in *The Hobbit*, appearing only at the end in Gandalf's remark to Bilbo that his adventures were not "managed by mere luck";[2] but in *The Lord of the Rings* the actions of Providence are basic to the fabric of the narrative, and begin to be felt quite early in the first book, when Gandalf tells Frodo that Bilbo "was *meant* to find the Ring . . . In which case you also were *meant* to have it."[3] This really is where, as we say, the plot thickens; for Gandalf's speech corresponds to that by Elrond in Book II, when he announces to Frodo that "this task was appointed for you" (I, 355). Frodo's response to the challenges to his will and courage and fellow-feeling given by the revelations of Gandalf and Elrond are indeed the formative moments, the seeds, from which the actions in Books I and II develop; for Frodo's Hobbit courage and self-effacement provide the moral force that sees him through the adventures of the first two books. In other words there are chiefly two laws of Middle Earth at work in Books I and II: Law 1 (the cosmos is Providential), and Law 2 (the result of an action is the product of its intent).

The rest of Books I and II flows from the possibilities set up by these laws; and, since such laws are clearly part of a romantic rather than a "realistic" cosmos, the two books are likewise structured according to the conventional pattern to be found in all works of quest romance. Northrop Frye has described the pattern in these terms: "as soon as romance achieves a literary form, it tends to limit itself to a sequence of minor adventures leading up to a major or climacteric adventure, usually announced from the beginning, the completion of which rounds off the story."[4] In Book I there are six of these minor, or "preliminary" adventures, as I call them; each involves a major threat to the Ring and the Ringbearer, and in each, Frodo is saved by the providential appearance or action of an outside force or helper. In the course of these adventures, however, he is tested and toughened, is first wounded and draws first blood; and in all this, Frodo learns within himself that he is indeed capable, has the moral and physical courage, to be Ringbearer: for in the first two adventures, Frodo learns enough courage and presence of mind that in the last four, his own strength of heart and will are partly responsible for the happy outcome. The purpose of all this is, of course, to allow Frodo to grow sufficiently in heroic stature on his own, and learn enough about himself and the world, that he will be able to make the fateful choice that he announces at the Council of Elrond. So in the big picture it was providential that Frodo had to go it alone from Hobbiton to Rivendell, without the aid of Gandalf, who later tells Frodo, "I was delayed, and that nearly proved our ruin. And yet, I am not sure: it may have been better so." (I, 290).

Since there is not time here for a close study of all the six preliminary adventures of Book I, I shall instead merely list and describe the six in order, and then carefully analyze just one of them: the adventure that takes place in the Old Forest, culminating in the encounter between Tom Bombadil and Old Man Willow and the Hobbits' stay at Tom's house.

The six preliminary adventures, and the reasons of providence and courage for their happy outcomes, are these: (1) the pursuit by the Black Rider, in which Frodo is saved by the providential appearance of a party of Elves; (2) the calamity in the Old Forest, in which Frodo is saved by the rapidly-maturing Sam, and by the providential appearance of Tom Bombadil; (3) the episode of the Barrow-Wight, in which Frodo first acts with courage, in striking off the hand of the Wight, but in which Tom Bombadil is still necessary to get the Hobbits out of their fix; (4) the events at Bree, in which Frodo tries to act with dispatch in order to prevent the revealing of the Ringbearer, but disastrously lets the Ring slip onto his finger, and is saved only by the help of Strider, who providentially turns up just when he is needed; (5) the episode at Weathertop, where Frodo is foolish and courageous in about equal proportions, putting on the Ring but also fighting back to the end; and this alone is what saves him from being captured, while Strider's medicining manages to keep him alive to (6) the last adventure at the Ford of Bruinen, where both Frodo's courage--he refuses to put on the Ring, and cries defiance even as he is fainting--and the miraculous assistance of Glorfindel and Gandalf, keep the Ring and Ringbearer safe to Rivendell.

Now for a close look at the second preliminary adventure, in which both Frodo and Sam grow tremendously in stature. The Hobbits, attempting a shortcut through the Old Forest, allow themselves to be "forced" by the malicious will of Old Man Willow, into a "course chosen for them" (I, 162)--right into his hands. In this adventure Frodo learns by experience the wisdom Elrond is later to summarize at the Council: the "road that seems easier. . .must be shunned. . Now at this last we must take a hard road, a road unforeseen" (I, 360).

Here, as in the first preliminary adventure, Frodo is as yet unable to act in his own defense, but must receive help both from Sam and from Tom Bombadil. At the foot of the gigantic Old Man Willow, Frodo has been tipped into the river by a root which "seemed to be over him and holding him down, but he was not struggling" (I, 165), while Merry and Pippin have been ingested by the great tree. Sam, untouched by the tree's sleeping spell (he apparently is of sterner stuff), manages to rescue Frodo, but can do nothing for the other two. Frodo then panics, running "along the path, crying help! help! help!" Tom, who then comes immediately to the rescue, commanding the tree to release the Hobbits, had actually not heard the cry for help, but was merely returning that way from an errand. His arrival was purely providential, creating the possibility of a rescue and an aftermath that are absolutely necessary to the continuation of the Quest; for in the company of Tom Bombadil, Frodo learns another lesson that he must know, and that he could never have learned on his own in the entirely domesticated and well-protected Shire: he learns of the malice implicit in the cosmos, malice entirely independent of Sauron and of which he is only the personified, though immensely powerful, spirit. Just as Frodo had learned from the Elves after his first adventure that not even the Shire is safe from the inroads of Sauron's servants, so he learns from Tom that even in the realm of nature (nature that in the Shire seemed tame and friendly) there are both "evil things and good things, things friendly and things unfriendly, cruel things and kind things, and secrets hidden under brambles" (I, 180), and of the trees, especially, he learns that "countless years had filled them with pride and rooted wisdom, and with malice" (I, 181).

And more important even than Frodo's grasp of the duplicity of Nature, is his understanding of the necessary fact, in Tolkien's Secondary Cosmology, that the power of evil, that seeming principle in the universe personified in Sauron, despite its immense power, does not everywhere extend. The Ring cannot make Tom invisible; indeed he has the power to make it vanish and reappear at his will (I, 184-185). This moment in Book I parallels a later, and very important, scene in BookVI, when Sam, at one of his lowest moments, shares in this climactic insight, perceiving that among the stars of Elbereth there are places of purity Sauron (whose name means "filth") can never touch. (See III, 244).

Tom Bombadil, Frodo's mentor in all this, is Tolkien's version of the stock romance figure whom Northrop Frye calls the "Golux" (after Thurber's figure). A Golux is the one romance-figure who can "elude the moral antithesis of heroism and villainy" and who generally is one of the "spirits of nature. . . who represent partly the moral neutrality of the intermediate world of nature and partly a world of mystery which is glimpsed but never seen, and which retreats when approached."[5] Tom is the personification of nature's power for good, even as Old Man Willow is nature's power for malice personified. The Ringbearer must learn to deal with both faces of the non-human element in Middle Earth, the natural and the super-natural; his second adventure schools him well in this regard, so that by the time of the third he is ready, with his newly-awakened courage, both to strike off the hand of the Barrow Wight and to call for Tom Bombadil when he knows Tom is needed.

Book II [illegible] parallels the action of Book I, as the preliminary adventures of the Company continue. Both books begin in festivity (Bilbo's birthday party in I; the feasting at Rivendell in II), and continue with lengthy scenes of initiation information (Gandalf's telling Frodo all he knows of the Ring in I; the recital, at the Council of Elrond, of the full history of the Ring in II). After the revelation of the Ring (the test by fire in I; Frodo's revealing of the Ring to the Council in II), Frodo makes his fateful choice (in I, he decides he must, for the Shire's safety, depart with the Ring; in II, he volunteers to "take the Ring, though I do not know the way"). At this point in both books Frodo learns it is fated that he should indeed bear the Ring (Gandalf says it was "meant" he should have it; Elrond declares that "this task is appointed for" Frodo). Finally, the Ringbearer's companions are chosen (Merry, Pippin and Sam in I; the Nine Walkers in II). There follows, in the second half of each book, a sequence of the preliminary adventures of the Ringbearer and his companions on the road, ending in a final separation at a river.

The two sets of adventures on the road also parallel to a remarkable degree. The pursuit of the Black Riders in Book I is comparable (though here not exactly) to the pursuit of the Fellowship in II by a company of large black crows. The adventure in the Old Forest in which the Hobbits learn of the deep malice within nature (personified in Old Man Willow) closely matches Book II's account of the attempt of the Fellowship to cross the pass of Caradhras, in which again the deep malice of the mountain (independent of Sauron, like the Willow) endangers the life of the Ringbearer and his quest, and redirects the path of the Company. The episode of the Barrow Wight in Book I parallels in a very important way the passage through Moria; in both accounts Frodo exhibits great courage by stabbing with his sword, first at the hand of the Barrow Wight in I, then at the foot of the Cave Troll in II. In both scenes, Frodo is underground, apparently trapped, and terrified, and in both he saves the day with his courage and quick action. The stay at Bree, with its taking on of horses and supplies and the brief indoor rest, parallels the rest at Lothlorien in Book II, with its period of recuperation and refurbishing of supplies. Next, the episode at Weathertop in Book I in which Frodo disastrously puts on the Ring and just barely, and only because of his courage in fighting back, escapes being captured by the Ringwraiths, closely parallels the adventure at Amon Hen in Book II, in which Frodo again puts on the Ring in his attempt to escape the crazed Boromir and again barely escapes being caught by the spectral hand of Sauron. Finally, the adventure at the Ford of Bruinen, in which Frodo's will and courage are put to the final test in Book I, closely parallels Frodo's courageous decision on the Banks of the Anduin, in Book II, to go it alone. Entering or crossing a river is of course an ancient symbol of a final initiation, or last irreversible step, and both books end with Frodo's "crossing his Rubicon," giving conclusive evidence that he does indeed have the will and courage to be Ringbearer.

By the end of Book II, Frodo's preliminary adventures are over, and the real Quest, alone with Sam, begins in earnest. The adventures of Book I succeeded in stripping Frodo of his Hobbit complacencies, leaving him standing naked with his as-yet barely recognized Hobbit courage. Book II must strip him to an even greater nakedeness, as one by one the Nine Walkers of the Ring fall away: Gandalf vanishes in Moria, Aragorn is revealed as, for the moment, an indecisive leader, Boromir succumbs to his lust for the Ring's power, Merry and Pippin, we learn later, are being carried across Rohan. Frodo realizes in the end that the Nine cannot perform the Quest--only he can, along with the other half of himself, Samwise Gamgee. So in this final way also, Books I and II parallel, both ending with the lone courageous Hobbit facing Mordor.

The two parallel central plot-lines of Book III, the awakening of the Ents by Merry and Pippin to destroy Isengard, and the awakening of Theoden by Gandalf to do battle against Saruman's armies (two actions that result in the annihilation of the imitation Mordor and that clearly foreshadow the destruction of Sauron), are both structured by the laws of providential control and of the cause-and-effect morality (Laws I and II). And, true to the internal meanings of Middle Earth, the significance of all this is summed up by two analogous proverbs (realized in action as per Law 5) that occur toward the end of Book III---Gandalf's "Often does hatred hurt itself" (II, 243), and Theoden's "oft evil will shall evil mar" (II, 255). The shape of the action in the entire book can be deduced from these three laws of Middle Earth.

The two major victories of Book III, over Isengard and over the Orcs at Helm's Deep, are both the inevitable results, in a moral, providentially controlled and proverbially structured cosmos, of evil intentions upon innocent creatures; both, that is, stem from Saruman's greedy attempt to capture Hobbits at Parth Galen. For in the narrative structure of Book III, it is absolutely necessary that Merry and Pippin reach Fangorn in order to arouse Treebeard. On their own, however, they could not possibly have traversed the forty-five leagues from Parth Galen to Fangorn in the mere three days' time that they have. What does get them there, of course, is the reversed effects of the evil intent of Saruman, who has sent out a raiding party of Uruk-Hai to capture Hobbits and bring them back to Isengard. As it providentially turns out, however, the Orc-men, speeding

toward Saruman's tower, are overtaken by a band of Rohirrim, bent upon destroying the trespassers on their land. In the ensuing battle, it seems inevitable that Merry and Pippin will die as Orcs, save for one thing--and again an evil action has a good result--the greedy act of Grishnakh. Seeing that his Orcs are surrounded, and anxious for his own gain, he secretes the two Hobbits away from the battle under his arms, only to be providentially killed by an arrow "guided by fate" (II, 75), allowing Merry and Pippin to enter nearby Fangorn and go about their unwitting task. As Gandalf says later, "So between them our enemies have contrived only to bring Merry and Pippin with marvelous speed, and in the nick of time, to Fangorn, where otherwise they would never have come at all" (II, 128).

Treebeard, having made friends with the Hobbits, takes them home with him; and there his hospitality plays a major role in their future, for the drink he gives the Hobbits is part of their later greatness in Book VI, where they lead in the scouring of the Shire. As Treebeard says, "I can give you a drink that will keep you green and growing for a long, long while" (II, 87). Little do they know that his meaning is literal; the Entdraught causes Merry and Pippin to grow even taller than the Old Bullroarer, the only Hobbit ever to top four feet, ride a horse and fight in a war. Here, in Book III, begins Merry and Pippin's growth, both literally and metaphorically, to heroic stature.

The second major victory of Book III, the destruction of Saruman's army at Helm's Deep, parallels the first both in onset and outcome. Just as Merry and Pippin providentially arrive at just the right time to awaken Treebeard from his Entish unhastiness, so Gandalf appears, returned from death with the still greater powers he must have to conquer the will of Saruman, and at precisely the proper moment, to awaken Theoden to battle the army of Isengard. Together, with Gandalf's help, the Huorns and the Rohirrim win the first battle of the great war, a battle set precipitously in motion by the greedy haste of Saruman.

The final action of Book III that relates to the theme of the effects of greedy haste and evil intent, and that is to be so important to the rest of the Trilogy, is Wormtongue's flinging the palantir from Orthanc in a final effort to destroy Theoden. It is of course this action which prompts Theoden's proverb summarizing the action of Book III, "oft shall evil will evil mar." This last desperate act indeed sets off a chain of events that not even Gandalf could have predicted; and in fact the major events in Gondor in Book V stem from this one moment. The Great War of Gondor was precipitated by a combination of Wormtongue's viciousness and Hobbit curiosity. Pippin, unable to resist looking into the stone, discovers its meaning. Aragorn then takes what is his, and decides later to reveal himself to Sauron. Unnerved by what he sees, Sauron turns his attention from his own land, and before his armies are fully ready, strikes at Gondor in the hope of a quick destruction of its newly returned king, thus allowing Frodo and Sam to slip unnoticed into Mordor and begin their long trek across the Plain of Gorgoroth. Oft shall evil will evil mar.

Like Book III, the fourth book of *LOTR* is structured after the second internal law of Middle Earth: the effect of an action is the product of its intent. For, just as in Book III it is absolutely necessary that Merry and Pippin cross Rohan in three days and reach Fangorn, and just as they do so because of the providentially-reversed effects of evil will, so must Frodo and Sam cross the Dead Marshes to the borders of Mordor, and cross those borders by one of the two entrances on the south and west. But of course it is impossible for them to do so *without* the help of Gollum and Smeagol, the twin inhabitants of the foul and wizened body of a former owner-victim of the Ring.

Tolkien sets up his theme for Book IV with Frodo's words to Sam while they are yet on the seemingly impassable ridges of the Emyn Muil; "It's my doom, I think, to go to that Shadow yonder, so that a way will be found. But will good or evil show it to me?" (II, 266). As it turns out, *both* good and evil, both Smeagol and Gollum, show him the way.

Gollum's lust for the Ring has kept him doggedly on Frodo's trail since the Company entered Moria on January thirteenth. He follows Frodo and the Ring across the Emyn Muil until the night of February twenty-ninth (the same day that Merry and Pippin meet Treebeard), when in the darkness he slips and falls right into Sam's arms. And the time is propitious. The Ringbearer knows that he has gone the wrong way, that he should have "come down from the north, east of the River and of the Emyn Muil, and so over the hard of Battle Plain to the passes of Mordor" (II, 266); but it is too late now, for the east side of Anduin is now lined with prowling Orcs. Frodo's hope is indeed dim, until into his very hands, drawn by his lust for the Ring, falls the only creature in all Middle Earth who knows the "one way across the Dead Marshes between the North-end and the South-end" (II, 286). Gollum falls among them, Sam grabs him, and Frodo finds himself with the same opportunity to kill the wretched creature that Bilbo had seventy-eight years before. And once again, just as Bilbo's pity and mercy have, in Gandalf's words, "ruled the fate of many, Frodo's not least" (I, 93), so too will Frodo's pity for the gangrel wretch now "rule the fate" of the Quest; for Gollum, in return for his life, agrees to "come with them. Find them safe paths in the dark" (II, 281). And so for a while, "The hobbits were. . .wholly in the hands of Gollum" (II,294).

The efficacy, as it were, of Frodo's pity and mercy for Gollum lasts to the eastern edges of the Dead Marshes; Gollum remains Smeagol, that is, until he comes again to the borders of Mordor and the evil of that land re-infects his heart. Just before the three wanderers do pass into Mordor, a Ringwraith flies overhead, on some mission of evil, flinging them to the ground with the force-field of terror that surrounds his person; and "from that time on Sam thought that he sensed a change in Gollum again" (II, 300). After this point, the Ring grows heavier around Frodo's neck, Smeagol gives way to Gollum, and Gollum begins forming his plan to deliver the Ringbearer over to Shelob: "She might help. She might, yes" (II, 305).

Up to this point, the "good" that Frodo hoped for on Emyn Muil has led them; now the evil must do so--the evil of Gollum's plan for Shelob's help. Having entered Mordor, the Ringbearer sees Morannon Gate and knows it is impossible to enter there. Then Gollum, his Smeagol-part now defunct, whispers "there is another way" (II, 311), the way through Shelob's Lair. And this is of course quite literally the only other possible way into Mordor, a way that could only be imagined by the evil will of Gollum, who hopes desperately that when "She" throws away the empty clothing of the Hobbits, she will also discard the One Ring. Ironically, and in accord with the second internal law of Middle Earth, Gollum's intent is reversed; Frodo, though apparently dead, does enter Mordor, carried by Orcs, and the Quest continues. "Oft shall evil will evil mar."

The major action of Book V is the war of Gondor. The narrative, however, is not centered around the great defenders of that land, nor even around the most powerful characters of the trilogy, Gandalf and Aragorn, but around the two weakest and indeed most foolish characters, Merry and Pippin. This book of *The Lord of the Rings* is continuing to fulfill the words of Elrond: "This is the hour of the Shire-folk, when they rise from their quiet fields to shake the towers and counsels of the great" (I, 354). Book V is Merry's and Pippin's much the way Book III has been; indeed the events of V stem directly from Pippin's peering into the palantir in III; the great war of Gondor was precipitated by a Hobbit, even as was the war of Rohan.

The major plot-line of Book V is in fact two parallel lines, each following the career of Merry and Pippin, both of whom swear fealty to a king (Pippin to Denethor and Merry to Theoden), and both of whom through that fealty save the life of the king's child and heir (Merry, Faramir, and Pippin, Eowyn; and then, most fittingly, Faramir and Eowyn marry, uniting the two lines saved by the Hobbits).

The secondary plot-line of Book V follows the master strategy of Gandalf and Aragorn: to continue fighting and distracting Sauron, keeping the Eye ever away from its own land and the hopeless pair creeping toward Orodruin. This strategy, in turn, is the working out, in narrative form, of the same two proverbs that also stand as the core of meaning in Merry and Pippin's careers with their respective lords Denethor and Theoden (whose names, incidentally, are anagrams of each other, except for the "r" of Denethor). The proverbs are stated by Gandalf and Eowyn; their "realization" as action (according to the fifth internal law) stands at the narrative heart of Book V: "Generous deed should not be checked by cold counsel" (III, 35); "where will wants not, a way opens" (III, 93).

The two proverbs stand initially as the comments of Gandalf and Eowyn to Merry and Pippin on the moral implications of their respective gifts of fealty to the lords Denethor and Theoden. The gift scenes are parallel, and the proverbial commentary applicable to the implications of both acts and their ultimate good results. (See III, 30, Pippin's oath of service, and III, 59, Merry's).

Just as importantly, the proverbs stand at the basis of the two parallel secondary plot lines, the strategies of Gandalf and Aragorn to distract Sauron's Eye away from Mordor by doing battle outside the Dark Land. Aragorn's force of will, and his generous deeds, in Book V, are responsible, ultimately, for the victory on the fields of Pelennor. Just before he decides to look into the palantir and reveal himself to the Enemy as King Elessar, Aragorn providentially receives a message from Elrond that he is to "remember the Paths of the Dead: if he is in haste (III, 56). Now at this time, there is, in Aragorn's mind, no particular reason why he *should* remember the Paths of the Dead; he plans simply to accompany the Rohirrim on their ride to Gondor. But Elrond, owner of one of the palantiri, knows something Aragorn does not know and will not until he himself uses his own seeing-stone: that a huge army of Haradrim is heading north toward Gondor and will reach it long before the Rohirrim; Aragorn *must* take the swiftest way, and this will require both great generosity and the willingness to die ("I have no help to send, therefore I must go myself"--III, 63), and tremendous force of will (as Legolas later says to Merry and Pippin, "such was the strength of his will in that hour that all the Dunedain and their horses followed him"--III, 70). The only force that keeps the awakened oath-breakers in marching order is, again, Aragorn's will; as Legolas says to himself at the time, "Even the shades of men are obedient to his will. . They may serve his needs yet" (III, 184).

Providentially, Elrond's sons have not only brought to mind the Paths of the Dead, but the "*words of the seer*" also: words of the "forgotten people," the "oathbreakers." For as it turns out, the only quick way to the coastlands

and the Enemy's southern army, is also the only way to find allies sufficient to conquer that army. And as I said, it was only Aragorn's will that brought them to where they were needed.

Again, just as Eowyn's proverb about will lies behind Aragorn's success, so does Gandalf's saying that generous deed should not be checked by cold counsel. Aragorn's decision to risk his own life on the swiftest path south was countered by the "cold counsel" of Eomer, but fortunately for all, Aragorn heeds it not: "Alas! Aragorn my friend,' said Eomer, "I had hoped that we should ride together; but if you seek the Paths of the Dead, then our parting is come, and it is little likely that we shall ever meet under the Sun'" (III, 61).

Finally, Gandalf's "generous deed", to risk all with an assault on the Morannon Gate with a mere 7,000 men, in order to distract Sauron from the real threat, is a matter involving tremendous force of will and generous willingness to die in the mere hope of helping the distant and unknowing Frodo and Sam; and is, finally, not checked by "cold counsel", even though Imrahir calls the idea "the greatest jest in all the history of Gondor" (III, 194).

Book VI of Tolkien's trilogy brings together the two major plot-strands of the novel--the adventures of the two pairs of Hobbits (the major pair and the minor pair, as I call them)--and presents the final adventures of each. We recall that the first five books of LOTR deal with the preliminary adventures of each pair of Hobbits. The first two present in mirror images the preliminary adventures of the Ringbearer. Book III presents the first set of preliminary adventures of the minor pair of Hobbits. Book IV finds the major pair seeking a way to enter Mordor. The fifth book shifts again to the minor pair, showing them finally attaining full maturity, each saving the life of an heir to a throne. Recall now Frye's description of the structure of romance: "a sequence of minor adventures leading up to a major or climacteric adventure." Book VI presents the climacteric adventure of each pair of Hobbits: Frodo and Sam struggling toward Mt. Doom to destroy the Ring, Merry and Pippin leading all the Hobbits in the Scouring of the Shire. As these final adventures proceed, we shall observe the realization in action of the force of all five internal laws of Middle Earth. We look first at the minor pair.

The final adventures of Merry and Pippin have been prepared for by the magical effects of the Entdraught (Law 3), by the objectified force of their own will toward heroism (Law 4), and most importantly, by the overarching Providence which, as we shall see, has "trained" them for their last great task. As Gandalf says, chiefly to Merry and Pippin, just before the Hobbits re-enter the Shire on October 28: "you must settle its affairs yourselves; that is what you have been trained for. Do you not yet understand? My time is over. . .And as for you, my dear friends, you will need no help. You are grown up now. Grown indeed very high" (III, 340). This last is of course Gandalf's humorous allusion to the great height of the minor pair, who, under the influence of the Entdraught, are approaching four feet, and still growing. By this time, Merry and Pippin have learned the tricks of warfare, have earned great courage, and are ready now to lead in the scouring of the Shire. And they do lead, of course; Frodo draws no weapon and takes no role in this final cleansing, except to save life whenever possible, for his task has already been completed with the destruction of the Ring, and since March 25 he has been gradually fading, gradually moving toward the time when he must depart westward.

In the Frodo-Sam strand of Book VI, three major actions must take place: Frodo must be rescued from the tower of Cirith Ungol, the major pair must cross Gorgoroth and scale Mt. Doom, the Ring must be thrown into the fire. The event, in each case, is the realization in action of the effects of all five laws.

The escape from the tower is managed chiefly in accordance with the positive and negative sides of Law II, the law of the truth-table morality. Tolkien sets up the escape this way:

> Sam listened; and as he did so a gleam of hope came to him...there was fighting in the tower, the orcs must be at war among themselves... Faint as was the hope that his guess brought him, it was enough to rouse him. There might just be a chance. His love for Frodo rose above all other thoughts, and forgetting his peril he cried aloud: "I'm coming, Mr. Frodo"! (III, 213)

A combination of the Orcs' own wickedness and greed for Frodo's mithril-coat, and Sam's own love for Frodo, gets the major pair safely out of the tower and onto the road to Orodruin.

There is something else to be mentioned here, however; Sam could never have got into Cirith Ungol save for the effects of the two most important physical laws of Middle Earth, Law 3 (moral and magical law have the stature and force of physical law), and Law 4 (the objective reality of the force of will, evil or good). Sam cannot penetrate the force -field that invisibly guards the entrance to the tower; it stands as an impenetrable wall of evil will extending between the Two Watchers (and is clearly analogous to the force-field of terror that extends for a great distance around the Ringwraiths). The only power that can break that wall is the Elvish magic contained in the phial of Galadriel, which Sam had faithfully removed from what he believed was the corpse of Frodo; then, in his moment of need, "because he could think of nothing else to do," he holds out the phial, and the wall of malice evaporates (III, 218), Sam enters, and the major pair are soon on their way to Gorgoroth.

This second major action closely parallels what happens to the minor pair in Book III; for just as Merry and Pippin must cross Rohan in three days but are incapable of doing so without the reversed effects of the evil intention of Saruman's Orcs, so must Frodo and Sam cross Gorgoroth in the ten days between March fifteenth and March twenty-fifth in order to forestall the destruction of the armies of the west at Morannon (though they, of course, know nothing of the impending battle). But they cannot cross Gorgoroth from the west, for the plain is filled solidly from Cirith Ungol to Orodruin with the encamped armies of Sauron; they must go north, then east, then south, around the encampments west of Mt. Doom--a journey on foot of more than a hundred miles. And providentially, like Merry and Pippin, they are picked up as Orc stragglers, forcibly marched north at great speed, covering the fifty miles to Isenmouth in twenty-four hours, a speed they could never have attained without the help of the Orcs' whips; as the Orc-captain says, "where there's a whip, there's a way" (III, 256) Mordor's cruel parody of the proverb basic to both Books V and VI, "Where will wants not, a way opens."

The structuring force of proverb is even more apparent in the next episode, the scaling of Mt. Doom. Utterly exhausted, and with weakening will, Frodo and Sam (now carrying his master) would never have reached Sammath Naur, but for one thing, Sauron's own road to the Chambers of Fire, Tolkien's providential realization of the proverb "Our Enemy's devices oft serve us in his despite" (III, 133). And last of all, of course, the Ring would never have been destroyed but for the reversed effects of Gollum's lust for the Ring, "My Precious! O my Precious!"

This brief study of The Lord of the Rings has been, as I hope is by now evident, an attempt to show two things: first, that one can arrive at a valid critical judgement of a work of literary fantasy only on the basis of a grasp of the nature and significance of a "Secondary Cosmology"; to show, in other words, that in this as in all cases, only relevant critical principles, applied with insight, will yield relevant critical statements. Second, I hope I have shown that The Lord of the Rings is indeed a work of remarkable thematic and structural coherence, and of a richly sufficient internal complexity that well justifies Tolkien's own judgement (one with which I wholly concur) that fantasy at its best is "story-making in its primary and most potent mode."[6]

FOOTNOTES

1. J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," The Tolkien Reader (New York, 1966), p. 37.
2. J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit (New York, 1965), p. 286.
3. J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings (New York, 1965, 3 vols.,) I, 88. Future references will be identified in the text.
4. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (New York, 1967), pp. 186-187.
5. Ibid., p. 197.
6. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," p. 49.

On the Natures & Histories of the Great Rings

by Virginia Dabney

> "Three Rings for the Elven-kings under the sky,
> Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone,
> Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,
> One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne
> In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.
> One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
> One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them
> In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie."

The Great Rings, whose history touches on so much of the history of the Second and Third Ages of Middle-earth, have been a source of continual fascination and peril. Even in these latter days interest in the lore of the Great Rings remains, though they are all lost, or destroyed, or passed away, and none are left here who know the secrets of their forging.

The term properly refers to one of the Twenty Rings listed in the Verse of the Rings, the Three, the Seven, the Nine, and the One. These Rings were forged in the Sixteenth Century of the Second Age by the Elven-smiths of Eregion and by Sauron. The Elven-smiths reached the height of their power in 1500[1] when they began the forging of the Great Rings, completing the three in 1590. There were at the same time, or somewhat earlier, other