

379
N81
No. 4859

MODERNIZED MYTH;
BEOWULF, J. R. R. TOLKIEN,
AND
THE LORD OF THE RINGS

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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May, 1974

Simpson, Dale W., Modernized Myth: Beowulf, J. R. R. Tolkien, and The Lord of the Rings, Master of Arts, May, 1974, 103 pp., bibliography, 34 titles.

This study views J. R. R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy against its Anglo-Saxon background, specifically in light of Tolkien's 1936 Beowulf essay, and contends that the author consciously attempted to recreate the mood of the heroic poem.

Chapter I compares Tolkien's use of historical perspective in Lord of the Rings with that of the Beowulf poet. His recognition of the poet's artistic use of history is stated in the Beowulf essay.

Chapter II makes comparisons between Good and Evil as they are revealed in Beowulf and in the trilogy. Once again, much of the evidence for this comparison is found in Tolkien's Beowulf criticism.

Chapter III examines the comitatus relationship fundamental to the heroic poem and to Lord of the Rings. It is the major element in Tolkien's portrayal of Good.

Chapter IV concludes the study by asserting that the trilogy must be viewed as an heroic elegy, in exactly the same way that Tolkien viewed Beowulf. Thus, the theme of the trilogy, like Beowulf, is the mutability of man.

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CHAPTER I

THE ILLUSION OF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was an immensely popular author, much to his embarrassment. Even though he was a highly-respected, deeply-learned scholar--Professor of Anglo-Saxon language and literature at Oxford until his retirement in 1959--he is better known to the public as the author of The Hobbit and the three-volume masterpiece of adult fantasy The Lord of the Rings. An indication of their popularity is the fact that since their appearance in paperback edition in 1965, these books have sold at the steady rate of one million volumes a year,¹ and have been read by over ten million people.² Tolkien's vividness of description, his ability to make the landscape come to life, has resulted in critics' attempts to find autobiographical elements in his hobbit books. Indeed, there is some validity to this view. Tolkien himself admits to a certain amount of borrowing for the English landscape in his work. This is understandable, however, when considered against the events of his early life,

¹T[homas] W[eyr], "Paperbacks: A Booming Performance, A Spectacular Year," Publisher's Weekly, 203, No. 6 (February 5, 1973), 43.

²"Eucatastrophe," Time, 102, No. 12 (September 17, 1973), 101.

which had a profound effect upon his choice of profession and his literary career.

Tolkien was born January 3, 1892, in Bloemfontein, South Africa, one of two sons of Arthur Reuel and Mabel (Suffield) Tolkien, both originally of Birmingham, England. A sickly child, Tolkien and his brother were removed from South Africa by their mother when John was but four years old. His father remained in South Africa, where he died a year later. It was the move from South Africa back to the rural village of Sarehole, near Birmingham, that influenced his young mind greatly: "Tolkien's first reaction to England was a feeling of wonder-- toward the Midlands countryside that inspired the Shire of his trilogy and toward the Sarehole people, who are said to have resembled his Hobbits in their placid ways."³ In the pleasant rural peace of the Warwickshire village, Tolkien grew up in a rather solitary childhood, under the tutelage of his mother, his first teacher: "It was from his mother, he remembers, that sprang his love for romance and philology."⁴ She also told him tales from her strange past as a missionary among the women of the Sultan of Zanzibar.⁵

Tolkien entered King Edward VI Grammar School in Birmingham, "a Tudor foundation salvaged from the wreck of the

³"Tolkien, John Ronald Reuel," Current Biography, October, 1967, p. 416.

⁴William Ready, The Tolkien Relation (Chicago: Regnery, 1968), p. 9.

⁵Ready, p. 6.

monasteries during the Reformation of the 1530's."⁶ His mother died in 1904, and thereafter Tolkien and his brother were cared for by a guardian, Father Francis Xavier Morgan, a Roman Catholic priest of the Birmingham Congregation of the Oratory. Tolkien's education at King Edward's School led him to Exeter College, Oxford, on a scholarship, from which he was graduated with a B.A. in 1915. He was married to Edith Mary Bratt in 1916, before he went to the front as an infantry soldier in World War I. His feel for the mood of warfare may result from his own experiences in the trenches: almost fifty years after the conclusion of World War I he was to admit, "One has indeed personally to come under the shadow of war to feel fully its oppression."⁷ Perhaps the close-knit, almost embarrassing friendships in Lord of the Rings are results of Tolkien's loss in the war of all but one of his close friends by 1918 (I, xi).

After the war Tolkien returned to Oxford, earning his M.A. degree in 1919, and worked two years as an assistant in the compilation of the Oxford English Dictionary. He commenced his life of university teaching in 1921 as Reader in the English Language at the University of Leeds, and

⁶Ready, p. 9.

⁷J. R. R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), I, The Fellowship of the Ring, p. xi. Subsequent references to this work will be cited in the text according to volume number.

advanced to the prestigious rank of Professor in four years. He left Leeds for Oxford almost immediately after his appointment as Professor, and served for twenty years as Rawlinson Professor of Anglo-Saxon and Fellow of Pembroke College. From 1945 until his retirement in 1959 he was Merton Professor of English Language and Literature at Oxford.

Tolkien's scholarly publications are few, but of high quality. They include A Middle English Vocabulary (1922), designed for use with Kenneth Sisam's Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose; a collaborative edition with E. V. Gordon of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (1925), which made his name known in classrooms throughout the world; his most important and influential essay, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," read before the British Academy in 1936; his Andrew Lang lecture, "On Fairy Stories," delivered at the University of St. Andrews (Scotland) in 1938; Ancrene Wisse, his edition of Ancrene Riwe (1962); and a translation of The Pearl (1967). One of J. R. R. Tolkien's major concerns throughout his long and distinguished career, however, was with his creative work: the chronicles of Middle-earth. In the Foreword to Fellowship of the Ring, he acknowledged that the mythology and legends of the Elder Days had been taking shape for "some years" before his initial publication of The Hobbit in 1937 (p. viii). He worked at intervals from 1936 to 1949 on his sequel, The Lord of the Rings, during which time he also wrote (in 1938-39) a fairy-story,

Leaf by Niggle (published in 1947), which he combined with the revised essay "On Fairy Stories" and published in 1965 as Tree and Leaf. Lord of the Rings was at last published in three volumes: The Fellowship of the Ring (1954), The Two Towers (1954), and The Return of the King (1955). Tolkien also published Farmer Giles of Ham (1950), a mock-heroic adventure story somewhat on the order of The Hobbit; Smith of Wooten Major; and The Adventures of Tom Bombadil and Other Verses from the Red Book (1963). In recent years Tolkien had been readying for publication The Silmarillion, a narrative which reportedly contains much of the background material alluded to in Lord of the Rings and was written years before even The Hobbit. Tolkien's death on September 2, 1973, halted the project; however, the novel will be brought to its conclusion and published posthumously by Tolkien's son Christopher.

However divergent Tolkien's two major areas of endeavor seem, there is a correlation between Tolkien the scholar and Tolkien the author. His career as an eminent scholar and student of Northern literature and language cannot be underestimated as an influence on his fantasy novels. Although Tolkien was first and best known as an Anglo-Saxon scholar and literary critic, the publication of The Hobbit and Lord of the Rings in paperback editions transformed him into a cult hero and obscured his critical achievements beneath his new-found (but unsought) fame as the author of adult fantasies.

His fame in academic circles, however, rested largely upon the significant essay "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," which became a turning-point in the history of Beowulf criticism. The essay was composed, delivered, and published during the period in which The Hobbit was being prepared for publication, and at the time when Lord of the Rings was beginning to take shape. Recent Tolkien critics have recognized this link between Tolkien the Beowulf critic and Tolkien the author. One critic has even interpreted The Hobbit in the light of Tolkien's Beowulf essay.⁸ Tolkien's 1936 Beowulf essay, then, is significant not only as literary criticism, but also as a manifestation of the Anglo-Saxon influence upon Lord of the Rings: i.e., the trilogy reflects the same thinking and the same background in Northern lore responsible for Tolkien's critical outlook in "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics."

The Beowulf essay is an attack upon previous Beowulf scholars, who viewed the poem first for its historical content--as a record of Anglo-Saxon society--and last as a rather "confused" work of art. W. P. Ker had censured the Beowulf poet for ignoring a proper sense of proportion in

⁸Bonniejean Christensen's Ph.D. dissertation, "Beowulf and The Hobbit: Elegy into Fantasy in J. R. R. Tolkien's Creative Technique" (University of Southern California, 1969), explores The Hobbit as a recreation of Beowulf as Tolkien perceived it (See Dissertation Abstracts, 30 (1970), 4401A-4402A).

putting the "irrelevances [the monsters] in the centre and the serious things on the outer edges."⁹ Tolkien took issue with this judgment in his essay, and proceeded to prove why Grendel, Grendel's dam, and the dragon were essential to the poem. In the process, Tolkien found fault with the type of scholarship which ignores Beowulf as a poem and concentrates on the historical aspects of the work. He related a little allegorical tale to dramatize the approach of the previous critics:

A man inherited a field in which was an accumulation of old stone, part of an older hall. Of the old stone some had already been used in building the house in which he actually lived, not far from the old house of his fathers. Of the rest he took some and built a tower. But his friends coming perceived at once (without troubling to climb the steps) that these stones had formerly belonged to a more ancient building. So they pushed the tower over, with no little labour, in order to look for hidden carvings and inscriptions, or to discover whence the man's distant forefathers had obtained their building material. Some suspecting a deposit of coal under the soil began to dig for it, and forgot even the stones. They all said: "This tower is most interesting." But they also said (after pushing it over): "What a muddle it is in!" And even the man's own descendants, who might have been expected to consider what he had been about, were heard to murmur: "He is such an odd fellow! Imagine his using these old stones just to build a nonsensical tower! Why did not he restore the old house? He had no sense of proportion." But from the top of that tower the man had been able to look out upon the sea.¹⁰

⁹W. P. Ker, The Dark Ages (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1904), pp. 252-253.

¹⁰J. R. R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," pp. 4-5. (This is a separately printed edition of the article originally published in Proceedings of the British Academy, 22 (1936), 245-295). Hereafter cited in the text as BMC.

The tone of the "Allegory of the Tower" seems to suggest that Tolkien meant his little allegory to apply to a wider scale than Beowulf and its critics--it may be applied to all works of literature and their critics, as an appeal to consider art as art rather than as an indication of the culture in which it is created. Yet for Tolkien the application was evidently more personal: by late 1936 he was completing The Hobbit. To The Hobbit he had brought his rich background in Northern lore, and he was certainly aware of the prospective critics' tendencies to ignore his art in favor of analogues. If this was his fear, he was to have nothing to worry about until he published Lord of the Rings. The complexity, impact, and obvious adult appeal of Lord of the Rings put Tolkien and his work, including The Hobbit, in the position of the Beowulf poet in the allegory of the tower: "The chief matter of Tolkien is often neglected and rejected when the grand simplicity of the whole is turned up by malevolent or committed scholars and gaping admirers. . . . It is the allegory of the man and his tower that Tolkien propounded in his address on Beowulf to the British Academy all over again. This time, alas, it is his own grand structure that is under the fragmentation process. . . ." ¹¹ This ironic situation is at least one point of comparison that may be made between Beowulf and Lord of the Rings.

¹¹Ready, p. 109.

There are, however, several more important points of comparison between the Beowulf poet, about whom Tolkien was writing, and Tolkien himself. He describes Beowulf as "a poem by an Englishman using afresh ancient and largely traditional material" (BMC, p. 6). Thirty years after writing this statement about Beowulf, Tolkien said, "In The Lord of the Rings I have tried to modernize the myths and make them credible."¹² This study endeavors to focus upon several categories of the "ancient and largely traditional material" of Anglo-Saxon literature to which Tolkien calls attention. Among several ideas which Tolkien touches upon in his Beowulf essay, he discusses to some extent the following: the illusion of historical truth and perspective; the nature of Good and Evil; and the elegiac elements. An analysis of these categories reveals the extent to which Lord of the Rings is an outgrowth of the critical outlook of Tolkien the Anglo-Saxon scholar, and it reveals that the trilogy should be interpreted in the light of Tolkien's Beowulf essay.

Tolkien identified the source of the critical problems concerning Beowulf as the poet's "instinctive historical sense--a part indeed of the ancient English temper . . . of which Beowulf is a supreme expression . . ." (BMC, pp. 3-4). The poet's digressions and excursions into historical matters,

¹²Henry Resnik, "The Hobbit-Forming World of J. R. R. Tolkien," Saturday Evening Post, 239, No. 14 (July 2, 1966), 94.

which had been the stumbling block for most previous Beowulf critics, were seen by Tolkien as "largely a product of art" (BMC, p. 3). Therefore, his approach to the poem was to inquire what the poet did with the ancient and traditional matter, not "whence the material came and what its original or aboriginal nature was . . ." (BMC, p. 6). Tolkien's use of ancient and traditional material in the trilogy corresponds to the Beowulf poet's artistic use of antiquity, and their purposes are the same: to create a believable situation by historical allusion (or illusion).

The creative illusion of historical perspective is much more pronounced in Lord of the Rings than in its predecessor, The Hobbit, for two reasons: The Hobbit, a much simpler tale, does not require the depth of historical illusion that the more complex, more mature work requires; and, as he explains in the Foreword of the trilogy, Tolkien had not yet completed and set in order the mythology and legends of the Elder Days by the time of The Hobbit's release in 1937 (I, viii). The historical background which pervades Lord of the Rings is the culmination of many years' work.

One wonders why Tolkien found it necessary to devote so much space in the trilogy, especially in the appendices, to the mythology and legends of the Elder Days, the Second Age, and the Third Age. Two possible explanations are that the creation of historical background is necessary to making Middle-earth believable, and that Tolkien recognized a

special attraction in antiquity. The latter explanation requires a look into Tolkien's esthetic, which is to be found in his Beowulf essay and in the essay "On Fairy Stories." Early in the Beowulf essay he had called the Beowulf poet's instinctive historical sense "a part indeed of the ancient English temper" (BMC, p.4). The poet cast his time into the long-ago "because already the long-ago had a special poetical attraction" (BMC, p. 20), an attraction apparent in other Old English poems, such as "Widsith," "Deor," and "The Seafarer." Tolkien was to re-emphasize his point in "On Fairy Stories," when he recognized that behind the research into ancient customs central to fairy stories "there remains still a point too often forgotten: that is the effect produced now by these old things in the stories as they are."¹³ In addition, it was his own belief that "antiquity has an appeal in itself."¹⁴

Ultimately, then, the reason for the proliferation of historical perspective in Lord of the Rings is to a large extent due to Tolkien's recognition of that quality in fairy tales he had heard and read as a child. Speaking of the effect one particular tale had upon him during his childhood, he said, "The chief flavor of that tale lingering in the memory was not beauty or horror, but distance and a great

¹³J. R. R. Tolkien, Tree and Leaf (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965), p. 31. Hereafter cited as TL.

¹⁴Tolkien, TL, p. 31.

abyss of time" [italics mine].¹⁵

The distant past not only has an appeal for the reader who is looking back upon the time of the action presented in Lord of the Rings; it also appeals because of the great antiquity behind that action. Much of the material concerned with the "great abyss of time" in the trilogy is found in Volume I, The Fellowship of the Ring. Historical perspective is naturally more of a necessity in Fellowship of the Ring, as the foundation for the tale, than in the final two volumes, where history is no longer as much reiterated as it is being made.

Tolkien uses this historical matter to great advantage in Fellowship of the Ring. Although the entire chronicle of pre-history is elaborately detailed in the appendices at the end of Return of the King, that material is not part of the tale proper. Consequently, the emphasis of this study will be upon historical perspective developed within the narrative. Lord of the Rings exists in an environment of antiquity. There are two pivotal chapters in Fellowship of the Ring which contain a great deal of antiquarian data: Chapter 2 of Book One, "The Shadow of the Past," and Chapter 2 of Book Two, "The Council of Elrond."

The tale opens on a light-hearted, rustic note with the account of Bilbo Baggins' birthday party and the events

¹⁵Tolkien, TL, p. 31.

following it. But in Chapter 2 Tolkien changes the mood of the tale. "The Shadow of the Past" is an appropriate title for this chapter, for it suggests not only "the Shadow," who is Sauron, ruler of Mordor; it also suggests dark deeds and sorrow in the past. Bilbo has performed his planned disappearing act at his 111th birthday party by slipping on the magic ring he has secretly owned for over fifty years. At the wizard Gandalf's bidding, he reluctantly passes on his ownership of the Ring to his nephew Frodo. Bilbo leaves the Shire and leaves Frodo to the guardianship of Gandalf, who visits the Shire at intervals over the years to check on Frodo and his Ring. Gandalf had cautioned Frodo, "If you take my advice about it [the Ring] you will use it very seldom, or not at all" (I, 21). But during one visit to the Shire, Gandalf brings some unexpected and distressing news to Frodo: the Ring is dangerous. He tells of the Great Rings forged by the Elves in Eregion, and of the One Ring forged by Sauron, the Enemy of the West. Although Tolkien had begun the narrative with an appeal to antiquity in the Prologue ("Those days, the Third Age of Middle-earth, are now long past, and the shape of all lands has been changed . . .") (I, 21), he reveals the depth of that antiquity in Chapter 2, with Gandalf's tale.

It was in Eregion "long ago" that the Elven-rings were made (I, 76). The beginnings of the tale, says Gandalf, "lie back in the Black Years, which only the lore-masters now

remember" (I, 81). Gandalf recites a verse "long-known in Elven-lore," which reveals to Frodo the importance of "his" Ring:

Three Rings for 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.

(I, 81)

The Ring is the One Ring, made by Sauron the Dark Lord to have dominion over all of the other Rings of Power fashioned by the Elves. Sauron waged war against the free peoples of the West, but the alliance of Men and Elves prevailed, although the victory was a costly one. Isildur, the son of Elendil, King of Westerosse, who had perished in the decisive battle, cut the Ring from Sauron's hand. But returning from the war against Sauron, he and his men were ambushed by the Orcs (goblins) at the Anduin River. "And there in the dark pools amid the Gladden Fields . . . the Ring passed out of knowledge and legend," says Gandalf (I, 83). He continues with a conjecture about Gollum's discovery of the Ring. Gollum, a thin, wiry, slimy, froglike hobbit, found the Ring long after the earlier events, "but still very long ago," Gandalf adds (I, 83). Gandalf's relation of antiquity had the effect upon Frodo (and the reader) of magnifying the import of the Ring. Considered a toy before, it is now revealed as a

dangerous object: a change brought about by the "distance and great abyss of time" in Gandalf's tale of history. The One Ring of Sauron, which has brought nothing but tragedy to its owners since its forging, appears to be modelled after the cursed ring of Andvari's hoard in the Volsunga Saga.

Material from The Hobbit is effectively integrated into Chapter 2. Lord of the Rings is consistent with The Hobbit, and Tolkien uses material from the latter to develop background for the former. The meeting between Bilbo and Gollum in the cave, and Bilbo's discovery of the Ring, take place in The Hobbit, and provide the background to Lord of the Rings. Elaborating on the relationship between the two works, Tolkien says in the Foreword to Fellowship of the Ring, "As the story grew it put down roots (into the past) and threw out unexpected branches; but its main theme was settled from the outset by the inevitable choice of the Ring as the link between it and The Hobbit" (I, 21).

Despite Tolkien's claim that "The Shadow of the Past" is the "crucial chapter" (I, x), Chapter 2 of Book Two, "The Council of Elrond," treats a wider span of history and a broader scope, drawing in all the races of free peoples into the debate over the Ring. Although he is probably not the only person living in Rivendell whose memory "reaches back even to the Elder Days" (I, 319), Elrond Halfelven is king of that line of people, and it is through him that much of the early story of the Ring is retold to the Council.

Elrond, born during the First Age (the Elder Days), is well over 6500 years of age, a figure arrived at by adding together the years of the Second and Third Ages. Because of his role as participant in the affairs of Middle-earth from the Elder Days onward, and because of his memory of ancient things, there dwells about him an aura, or spell. Frodo is filled with wonder at his first sight of Elrond, "of whom so many tales spoke": "The face of Elrond was ageless, neither old nor young, though in it was written the memory of many things both glad and sorrowful" (I, 299). He who can say, "I have seen three ages in the West of the world, and many defeats, and many fruitless victories" (I, 319) is most qualified to sit at the head of the Council and to tell the most ancient of facts. Elrond's speech is reminiscent of Tolkien's comments on the Beowulf poet: "Its maker was telling of things already old and weighted with regret . . . making keen that touch upon the heart which sorrows have that are both poignant and remote" (BMC, p. 34).

Not only does the reader sit in awe as Elrond casts a spell by recounting deeds of the Elder Days; so also do those assembled in Rivendell: "Then all listened while Elrond in his clear voice spoke of Sauron and the Rings of Power, and their forging in the Second Age of the world long ago. . . . And many eyes were turned to Elrond in fear and wonder . . ." (I, 318). In Elrond Tolkien presents in dramatic form the embodiment of a statement in his Beowulf essay: "The whole

must have succeeded admirably in creating in the minds of the poet's contemporaries the illusion of surveying a past, pagan but noble, and fraught with a deep significance--a past that itself had depth and reached backward into a dark antiquity of sorrow" (BMC, p. 26). Through Elrond this illusion is achieved in Lord of the Rings.

Tolkien's artistic opinion, defended in his Andrew Lang Lecture, "On Fairy Stories," and implied in his Beowulf essay, is that the land of Faerie, the mythical setting for all "fairy stories," has to be believed, and for it to be believed the author must develop an illusion of historical perspective. Faerie, long misconceived of as childish, becomes believable by the sheer depth of history, a background imparting a great distance of time between the present and the remote past. The link between the present and the past in Lord of the Rings is the One Ring, and it is the antiquity bound up in the Ring which sets the mood of the entire work.

Reference in Tolkien's work to ancient, renowned swords and other pieces of art also contributes to the illusion of historical depth in Lord of the Rings. The swords with names and with lineages stretching countless years into the past are the foremost examples of the special power of old treasures: Gandalf's sword Glamdring (II, 147), Frodo's sword Sting, Theoden's sword Herugrim (II, 157), and Aragorn's mighty weapon Anduril, or Narsil (II, 147). The concept of

the great ancient weapon with a name of its own comes from the passage in Beowulf in which Unferth lends Beowulf his sword for the hero's fight with Grendel's dam:

wæs þām hæftmēce Hrunting nama;
 þæt wæs ān foran ealdgestrēona;
 ecg wæs iren, atertānum fāh,
 ahyrded heaþoswāte; nāfre hit æt hilde ne swāc
 manna āngum þāra þe hit mid mundum bewand.¹⁶
 (1457-1461)

[The name Hrunting was on the hilted sword; that was the foremost of old treasures; the edge was iron, decorated with poison stripes, hardened by battle-sweat; it never failed in battle any men who grasped it with their hands.]

Also, the re-forging of the shards of Aragorn's sword Anduril (I, 362) is patterned after the welding together of the shards of the mighty sword Gram in Chapter 15 of the Volsunga Saga. As Gram, the old sword of Sigmund, is the only sword Sigurd desires to use in war, so also is Narsil, Elendil's famous sword, the only weapon which will do Aragorn justice in battle. Both warriors choose to re-forgo ancient, battle-hardened weapons rather than fight with lesser swprds of later make.

Another ancient treasure in Lord of the Rings is Frodo's ringed coat of mail which Bilbo had given him to use on his journey. Bilbo had himself received it as a gift from Thorin Oakenshield, King of the Dwarves, whom Bilbo had helped to kill a dragon in The Hobbit. The mail-coat, from the dragon's hoard of ancient treasure, is made of pure mithril, a precious metal of Middle-earth more brilliant and more valuable than silver; however, both Bilbo and Frodo are unaware of

¹⁶Friederich Klaeber, Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, 3rd ed. (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Company, 1950), p. 55. Subsequent references to Beowulf will be from this edition, incorporated in the text.

its true value. Gandalf once says that the corslet's worth is "greater than the value of the whole Shire and everything in it" (I, 414). Its worth and utility are proven in battle, when it protects Frodo's life in the great battle in Moria (I, 422-423). In Beowulf, the corslet Beowulf wears also is of great age, is battle-hardened, and has its own peculiar lineage. Beowulf declares that it is

beaduscrūda betst, þæt mīne brēost were
hrægla sēlest; þæt is Hrādlan lāf,
Wēlandes geweorc.

(453-455a)

[the best of war-garments, that protects my
breast, the best of corslets; it is the heir-
loom of Hrethel, the work of Weland.]

Weland, of course, is the famous smith of Germanic legend; thus, any armor wrought by him would be both very old and greater than those made by lesser men.

One sees, then, that not only the lands and the races of Middle-earth are very old; even the weapons of war are ancient in Lord of the Rings. Clearly, Tolkien has gone to great pains to develop a sense of historical depth in the trilogy.

To draw another analogy between the trilogy and Beowulf, the history of the Ring serves the same purpose in Lord of the Rings that the knowledge of ancient things served in Beowulf: "to give that sense of perspective, of antiquity with a greater and yet darker antiquity behind" (BMC, p. 31). And it is through the information in the two crucial chapters, "The Shadow of the Past" and "The Council of Elrond," that this perspective is achieved.

There is good reason to believe, with critic Douglass Parker, that the trilogy may be Tolkien's attempt to rewrite or recreate Beowulf, "as he understands it and has criticized it so well."¹⁷ Tolkien had written in 1936 the following: "When new Beowulf was already antiquarian, in a good sense, and it now produces a singular effect. For it is now to us itself ancient . . ." (BMC, p. 34). It appears to be Tolkien's purpose in the Prologue of Fellowship of the Ring to endow the trilogy with the same antiquarian temper, of being already old when new. In the section "Note on the Shire Records" he writes that the account of the end of the Third Age is drawn mainly from the Red Book of Westmarch, the most important source for the history of the War of the Ring (I, 37). He adds, "The original Red Book has not been preserved, but many copies were made . . ." (I, 37). Like the original Beowulf manuscript, the (fictional) original manuscript of Lord of the Rings has been lost. If Lord of the Rings is indeed Tolkien's recreation of Beowulf, the comments about antiquity in Beowulf would naturally be applicable to its modern recreation. The presence in both works of the antiquarian interest, the illusion of historical truth and perspective, and the element of distance and a great abyss of time proves Parker's contention.

¹⁷Douglass Parker, "Hwaet We Holbytla . . . ," Hudson Review, 9 (Winter 1956-57), 608.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURES OF GOOD AND EVIL

Much of the impact of Lord of the Rings is due to Tolkien's portrayal of the opposition between Good and Evil, the central concern of the trilogy. In the narrative he presents an expansive view of this opposition. Here, too, Tolkien makes a practical application of Anglo-Saxon concepts which appear in Beowulf. In fact, he seems to be closely paralleling in Lord of the Rings the Beowulf poet's understanding of Good and Evil. In the Beowulf essay Tolkien had defended the poet against the critics' charge that he was a "confused semi-pagan." He asserted that the Beowulf poet was rather a Christian writing of pagan times (BMC, p. 25). Christianity was still young in England, and pagan times were still remembered when the Beowulf poet was writing. Thus, Beowulf was created in a transitional period, and the subduing of both Christian and pagan elements within the poem seems to bear out this conclusion. Likewise, neither Christian nor pagan elements dominate in Lord of the Rings, although there are many occurrences of both in the work. Tolkien's presentation of the natures of Good and Evil is made on two levels: on the physical level of Middle-earth and on the supernatural, or spiritual level.

The physical plane is the battleground not only between armies of men, elves, and orcs; it is also the battleground

between the two forces behind the armies. The opposition between Good and Evil is exhibited in practical terms in Middle-earth by evidences from the lives of the characters. These evidences show a remarkable similarity between Tolkien's conception of Good and Evil and that of the Beowulf poet.

Evil in Lord of the Rings conforms exactly to the Beowulf poet's portrayal of it. There are several aspects of Evil in the trilogy which exhibit the extent to which Tolkien draws upon Anglo-Saxon concepts. One characteristic of Evil in Lord of the Rings is its perverse imitation of Good. Here Tolkien is making a practical application of one of the critical points in his Beowulf essay. Speaking of the Anglo-Saxon conception of manlike monsters, he said, "Monsters of more or less human shape were naturally liable to development on contact with Christian ideas of sin and spirits of evil. Their parody of human form . . . becomes symbolical, explicitly, of sin . . ." (BMC, p. 34). In Beowulf, Grendel has a "perverted human shape"--his grotesque manlike form signifies Evil as perverted Good. The poet calls him an "earmsceapen / on weres wæstmum" [wretched being in a man's figure] (1351b-1352a). Tolkien uses this conception of Evil as a perverted parody of Good as a basis for his evil manlike creatures in Lord of the Rings.

Evil's perversion of the divine-human form may be seen most readily in two races of evil creatures in the trilogy. Treebeard the Ent explains the origin and nature of Trolls and Orcs to Pippin and Merry: "Trolls are only counterfeits, made

by the Enemy in the Great Darkness, in mockery of Ents, as Orcs were of Elves" (II, 113). Later, Frodo tells Sam the nature of Orcs: "The Shadow that bred them can only mock, it cannot make: not real new things of its own. I don't think it gave life to the Orcs, it only ruined them and twisted them . . ." (III, 233). Like counterfeits, neither evil race can match its counterpart. Treebeard once fearlessly asserts, "We [Ents] are stronger than Trolls. We are made of the bones of the earth. We can split stone [of which Trolls are made] like the roots of trees, only quicker, far quicker . . ." (II, 113).

Another way Tolkien developps the Anglo-Saxon conception of Evil as perverted Good is through oppositions and contrasts between major characters in the trilogy--each heroic character has an evil, corrupt counterpart. Gollum, originally of hobbit kind, is the evil counterpart of Frodo. He is what Frodo would be if the Ring should ever overcome him. At several points in the narrative Tolkien clarifies the kinship and contrast between Frodo and Gollum. When Frodo and Sam first capture Gollum, Sam notices a likeness between Frodo and Gollum; he sees that "the two were in some way akin and not alien: they could reach one another's minds" (II, 285). In Rivendell, when Bilbo asks his nephew to show him the Ring once more, Frodo, under the spell of the Ring, sees his uncle in a strange way: "To his distress and amazement he found that he was no longer looking at Bilbo; a shadow seemed to have fallen between them, and through it he found himself eyeing a little wrinkled creature with a hungry

face and bony groping hands. He felt a desire to strike him" (I, 306). That Frodo saw his uncle Bilbo as a little Gollum-like creature is an indication of the contrast between the good hobbits and their corrupt parody, the fallen hobbit Gollum.

Gandalf, the most important major character, is opposed by his corrupt counterpart, Saruman. Both are Istari, or wizards, members of the order of five wizards sent to Middle-earth long ago "to contest the power of Sauron, and to unite all those who had the will to resist him" (III, 455). Saruman the White was chief of the wizards, but eventually he became corrupted as he advanced in the knowledge and lore of the East and of Mordor. By the time of the trilogy's beginning he has already become a threat and a menace to the West. The contrast between Gandalf and Saruman is not accidental--it seems to be Tolkien's intention to oppose the two wizards in order to clearly present the natures of Good and Evil. At one point in the narrative Tolkien's purpose is especially apparent. When Gandalf, who was earlier presumed dead, reappears to his companions in Fangorn Forest, his brilliant countenance moves Gimli the Dwarf to cry, "'Gandalf! But you are all in white!' 'Yes, I am in white now,' said Gandalf. 'Indeed I am Saruman, one might almost say, Saruman as he should have been'" (II, 125).

Aragorn, the heir to the throne of Gondor and field-general of the Host of the West, is the epitome of goodness: he is a strong, noble leader, and a great warrior. He, too, has a counterpart--the Witch King of Carn Dum, the Lord of the nine

Nazgul. He is the chief of the nine kings of men who wore the Rings of Power and so came under the influence of the One Ring of Sauron. Aragorn and the Witch King are contrasted in many respects. Aragorn is the captain of the armies led by Gandalf; the Witch King is the captain of the armies of Sauron. Aragorn leads by his noble example, and those who fight beside him do so out of love and respect for him; the Witch King "leads" his armies from the rear, "driving his slaves in madness on before" and ruling by terror (III, 112). Aragorn is a man, tall and proud and kingly, while the Witch King, though also tall, proud, and kingly, is only the invisible outline of what had once been a man (I, 263).

Sauron himself especially exemplifies the Beowulf poet's understanding of Evil. He not only contrasts with one of the heroic characters; he possesses a "perverted" manlike figure also. Although the Dark Lord is never seen or described accurately, except by the symbol of the Red Eye, Tolkien conceives of him as a perverted manlike being. Sauron had indeed once been a man, but after his earlier overthrow in the wreck of ancient Numenor "the bodily form in which he long had walked perished; but he fled back to Middle-earth, a spirit of hatred borne upon a dark wind. He was unable ever again to assume a form that seemed fair to men, but became black and hideous . . ." (III, 393). Sauron, like Saruman, appears to be also an evil parody of Gandalf, a contrast implied throughout Lord of the Rings by their opposition in titles and functions. Gandalf

the White is the leader of the West; Sauron the Dark Lord is the tyrant of the East. Gandalf himself admits the intended opposition between the two. Speaking to Aragorn after the overthrow of Sauron, he says, "The Third Age was my age. I was the Enemy of Sauron; and my work is finished" (III, 308).

Tolkien's precedent for the opposition between characters is to be found in Beowulf. The Beowulf poet contrasts his concept of the good king (Scyld, Hrothgar, and Beowulf) with Heremod, his example of a bad king, in two digressions (901-915 and 1709-1722). The purpose of the two Heremod passages is, of course, didactic, but the important point is that the poet draws an unmistakable contrast between his good and bad kings. Tolkien has adopted this sharp opposition for his concept of Good and Evil in Lord of the Rings.

Another characteristic of the evil beings in the trilogy is their affinity with darkness and shadow. In Lord of the Rings the contrast between light and darkness is sharp, as sharp (and symbolic) as in Beowulf, where light is symbolic of Good and darkness is symbolic of Evil. The poet describes Grendel as "sē þe in þystrum bād" [he who dwelt in darkness] (87b). The monster attacked Heorot "syþðan niht becōm" [after night had come] (115b), and abode in Heorot "sweartum nihtum" [in the dark nights] (167b). Tolkien had recognized that the symbolism of darkness in Beowulf is so fundamental that there is no difference between the darkness outside Heorot and the shadow of Death or of hell (BMC, p. 36).

So it is in Lord of the Rings. Orcs and trolls are denizens of the dark; light terrifies or destroys them. The Ringwraiths, deadly even during the day, function best at night. Aragorn says of them, "They themselves do not see the world of light as we do, but our shapes cast shadows in their minds . . . and in the dark they perceive many signs and forms that are hidden from us . . ." (I, 255-256). Evil is repeatedly personified as "The Shadow": Mordor is the Land of Shadow (I, 526); the Ringwraiths are "shadows under [Sauron's] great Shadow" (I, 82); and those who fall under the sway of the Dark Lord are said to be under the Shadow. The Balrog, Gandalf's terrifying foe on the bridge of Khazad-dûm, "was like a great shadow, in the middle of which was a dark form, of man-shape maybe . . . and a power and terror seemed to be in it and go before it" (I, 488).

That darkness, shadow, night, and blackness suggest or personify Evil in Lord of the Rings is a natural outgrowth of Tolkien's immersion in Anglo-Saxon culture. The only sources of light in Middle-earth are natural (sun, moon, and fire). Like the Anglo-Saxons, the peoples of Middle-earth are agriculturally oriented, and they look upon sunrise and sunset in a different manner than do modern people. The fear of darkness and of solitary waste lands in early civilizations inspired the imagination and "induced a willing acceptance of tales of giants lurking in the fens."¹ Tolkien employs well the Anglo-

¹Herbert G. Wright, "Good and Evil; Light and Darkness; Joy and Sorrow in Beowulf," in An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), p. 257.

Saxon people's dread of darkness as a basis for the tone of his novel and for his conception of Evil.

Another characteristic of the evil beings in Lord of the Rings is their demand for self-gratification and their failure to achieve it. Satisfaction is not a trait of Evil. Consequently, evil creatures attempt to gorge themselves. This characteristic is also developed according to its model in Beowulf. Grendel, "grim ond grædig" [grim and greedy], slaughters thirty thanes the first night he visits Heorot. Grendel's greed and hunger show forth on the night he meets Beowulf in the hall. He arrives at Heorot fully expecting to make a meal of some warrior that night. Seeing the hall filled with sleeping warriors, he exults: "þā him ālumpen wæs / wist-fylle wēn" [then was come to him the expectation of a feast-fill] (733b-734a). Grabbing a sleeping warrior, he "slāt unwearnum, / bāt bānlocan . . . // synsnædum swealh . . . / eal gefeormod, / fēt ond folma . . ." [tore him un-awares, bit his bone-casings . . . in endless morsels swallowed him . . . all devoured, feet and hands] (741b-742a, 743a, 744b-745a). This urge to gorge Tolkien repeats in Lord of the Rings, using it exclusively to apply to evil creatures. The orcs are hungry creatures who devour other less wary beings. Saruman feeds his armies of orcs "man's-flesh" (II, 61); they eat other foul meat, too, and even each other when better food is unavailable (III, 233). Even Wormtongue, Saruman's miserable companion, practices cannibalism (III, 370).

Shelob, the giant spider of the caves of Cirith Ungol, is the most hideous example of Evil's urge to gorge. Totally evil,

although not in the service of the Dark Lord, like Grendel's dam she has lived countless years in her lair, "drinking the blood of Elves and Men, bloated and grown fat with endless broodings on her feasts . . . for all living things were her food, and her vomit darkness" (II, 422). She has fed upon even her own mates and offspring, as well as upon Orcs. She is bloated, but ever hungry: "long now had she been hungry, lurking in her den . . ." (II, 423). It pleased Sauron, who had no control over her, that "she should dwell there hungry but unabated in malice . . ." (II, 423).

Gollum, too, is continually seeking food, and he will eat anything to abate his ever-present hunger, except food prepared by Elves. To the people of the woods he was "a ghost that drank blood. It [Gollum] climbed trees to find nests; it crept into holes to find the young; it slipped through windows to find cradles" (I, 91). Gollum is illustrative of the unsatisfied hunger of the evil beings; his thoughts are continually on food, yet he remains emaciated.

Even the Ringwraiths, who are spirits, exhibit the characteristics of hunger, yet they remain unsatisfied. Aragorn, in describing the nature of the Ringwraiths, observes, "At all times they smell the blood of living things, desiring and hating it" (I, 256).

Tolkien's description of Evil in the foregoing examples points toward a quality that all evil creatures have in common: a feeling of incompleteness which results in their desire to

devour, to achieve self-satisfaction, or a feeling of completeness.² Sauron himself is the prime example of this quality. Not content with ruling the land of Mordor, his desire is to devour all of Middle-earth. Presumably only then will he be satisfied. Even Gollum is able to assess the desires of the Dark Lord. On one occasion he begs of Frodo, "Don't take the Precious to Him! He'll eat us all, if He gets it, eat all the world" (II, 310). Tolkien's use of ravening hunger to characterize Evil is consistent throughout the trilogy in all the major evil characters and races, as the foregoing examples show. The concepts of Evil as a corrupt parody of Good and of Evil's desire to devour are similar in one respect. Evil, the corrupt mockery of Good, can never approach its counterpart in strength and ability. Tolkien analyzes Evil as a negative entity which by nature yearns for completeness. Yet because of its nature Evil cannot experience completeness or wholeness. Therefore, the continual desire of Tolkien's evil beings is to devour.

The night of Grendel's battle with Beowulf, the Beowulf poet relates, the monster came to Heorot and "mynte . . . manna cynnes / sumne besyrwan" [meant to trap one of the race of men] (712-713a). The poet says further

	Pa his mōd āhlōg;
mynte þæt hē gedælde,	āþr þon dæg cwōme,
atol āglāca	ānra gehwylces
lif wið līce.	(730b-733a)

²Dorothy K. Barber, "The Meaning of The Lord of the Rings," Mankato State Studies in English, 2 (February 1967), 45.

[Then his heart laughed; he expected that he would separate the life from the body of each one before day would come.]

In this passage one can see the great pride of Grendel, his self-assurance within Heorot--he plans to accomplish his purpose for coming to the hall. The Beowulf poet may have in mind the Biblical principle of pride in the passage.

In Lord of the Rings Tolkien demonstrates that Evil is the result of pride and one's inordinate obsession with self. The evil beings are not only hungry and corrupt parodies of the good ones; they are also egocentric. The expression "Pride goes before a fall" implies also that Evil is Good corrupted by pride. There are many examples in Lord of the Rings which support this observation. The Dark Lord himself, whose power approaches that of Satan, has not always been evil. Elrond says once, "For nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so" (I, 351). He had been a servant of Morgoth in the Elder Days and had been corrupted by his master (I, 260). Gandalf, who knows the heart of Sauron, describes him: "For he is very wise, and weighs all things to a nicety in the scales of his malice. But the only measure that he knows is desire, desire for power; and so he judges all hearts" (I, 352-353). In the parley between the emissary from Sauron and the leaders of the West before the gates of Mordor, Sauron's servant refers to his ruler as "Sauron the Great" (III, 203-204).

The Nazgul were corrupted by Sauron, as previously mentioned. Extensions of the Dark Lord's malice in Middle-earth, they are as prideful as their master. They fear nothing, being themselves

Fear personified. The Lord of the Nazgul's fall in the battle of Pelennor Fields can be compared to Grendel's defeat in Beowulf. Not realizing his peril as he prepares to destroy the disguised princess Eowyn, he boasts, "Thou fool. No living man may hinder me." At that Eowyn throws off her disguise and boldly pronounces, "But no living man am I! You look upon a woman," and then becomes the instrument of his destruction (III, 141). This Macbethian twist is Tolkien's method of focusing upon both the interrelation between Evil and Pride and the fact that the height of Pride precedes an individual's fall.

The way in which the One Ring works upon its possessor is illustrative of this concept. At the Council in Rivendell, Elrond explains to Boromir the nature of the One Ring: "It belongs to Sauron and was made by him alone, and is altogether evil. . . . The very desire of it corrupts the heart. If any of the Wise should with this Ring overthrow the Lord of Mordor, using his own arts, he would then set himself on Sauron's throne, and yet another Dark Lord would appear" (I, 352). All who come in contact with the Ring experience a desire to wield it and to set themselves up as masters over others, some for altruistic purposes and others for more selfish reasons. But in the end, Elrond cautions, anyone who continually uses the Ring will be corrupted, until he finally becomes totally evil. Even the greatest leaders, such as Gandalf and Galadriel, experience the temptation to use the Ring, although they refuse to submit to its influence (I, 95. 473).

Bilbo and Frodo both experience some symptoms of the Ring's power over them when asked to show it or to part with it. Something ugly in Bilbo is brought to the surface when Gandalf asks him to pass on the Ring to Frodo (I, 59-60), and Frodo exhibits the same reaction when in Rivendell Bilbo asks to see the Ring once more (I, 306). In these and other cases the owners of the Ring become possessive and paranoid. Gollum, of course, is the outstanding testimony to the power of the Ring. It is his lust for the Ring which motivates his actions, and his sick, greedy mind and mumbling speech reveal the decay of the soul brought about by his desire for the Ring. It seems to be Tolkien's intention to use him to illustrate a principle about the Ring; other characters who come in contact with and desire the Ring become Gollum-like. In Rivendell Bilbo and Frodo are actually two little Gollums suspiciously eyeing each other over the Ring (I, 306). The slimy creature characteristically calls the Ring "My Precious." When Gandalf asks Bilbo to give up possession of the Ring, Bilbo snaps, "It is mine, I tell you. My own. My precious. Yes, my precious" (I, 59). When Boromir attempts to wrest the Ring away from Frodo, he speaks much the same as Gollum spoke on the day he killed his friend Deagol when the Ring was first found. Boromir cries, "It is not yours save by unhappy chance. It might have been mine. It should be mine. Give it to me!" (I, 516). At the Council in Rivendell, Gandalf instructs the assembly that the Ring's power over its possessor has been the same over the long span of years. He reads from a scroll written by Isildur, who had cut the Ring from Sauron's black

hand in the first War of the Ring long before. Isildur describes the Ring in the scroll, but toward the end he admits, "But for my part I will risk no hurt to this thing: of all the works of Sauron the only fair. It is precious to me, though I buy it with great pain" (I, 332).

It is significant that those who have possessed or have desired the Ring pay for that desire. Isildur, its first owner, was killed in an ambush of Orcs on his way home after the great war against Sauron (I, 83). Boromir, who yields to the temptation to own the Ring, is also killed by Orcs (II, 18). Gollum, whose mind has been eaten up by his desire for the Ring, dies a horrible death (III, 276). Sauron and all of his works, which owe a great deal of their might to the power within the Ring, are destroyed in the wake of its destruction. After Saruman's power is broken, he is treacherously killed by his companion, perhaps as a reward for his coveting of the Ring (III, 370). Even the Ringbearers Bilbo and Frodo are unable to forget their kinship with the One Ring, and finally they depart from Middle-earth.

Finally, Evil in Lord of the Rings is continually associated with chaos and destruction, as it is in Beowulf. Grendel is first stirred to wrath by the creation of Heorot, and particularly after the bard's song of the Creation (90b-98). For twelve years after the erection of Heorot Grendel "heteniðas wæg, / fyrene ond fæhðe . . . / singale sæce" [waged hateful enmities, crime and hostility, continual strife] (152b-154a). He is

"bealohydig" [baleful-minded] (723a); the night of his defeat, bent upon destruction, he consumes a sleeping warrior (739-748). The poet seems to be saying in these and other related passages that because Grendel is evil he is bent upon the destruction of all that is good in God's creation. Once again Tolkien borrows an idea from Beowulf and expands it in the trilogy. The Orcs fell trees for sport; they feed on man's flesh, and so destroy the divine-human form. Saruman destroys the countryside around his fortress Orthanc; he unleashes the destructive force of cannons ("blasting fire") upon the defenses of the Rohirrim at Helm's Deep (II, 182). Mordor is a land of waste and destruction, as Frodo and Sam see when they enter it for the first time (III, 245). Even the fear of Sauron and his Ringwraiths induces a chaos of the mind and spirit. All who hear the banshee-like cry of the Nazgul quail in a fearfulness approaching madness: some are "stricken dumb"; others cower with their hands pressed over their ears (III, 98); but none remain calm when they are assailed by that cry. As mentioned earlier, Shelob delights in the destruction of living things in the pass of Cirith Ungol. All that is evil in Tolkien's Middle-earth is devoted to wanton destruction of life and vegetation, so much so that even the vegetation is forced to come to life to defend itself (see II, chapters 4 and 9).

There are other characteristics of Evil in Lord of the Rings which are only indirectly related to Beowulf. For example, Tolkien did not borrow from Beowulf the slavery and bondage of evil beings in the trilogy. However, five major characteristics--

Evil's corrupt imitation of Good, its affinity with darkness and shadow, its unsatisfied hunger and greed, its inordinate pride, and its predilection for chaos and destruction--are borrowed to some extent from Beowulf and expanded greatly in Lord of the Rings.

The intensity of the battle between Good and Evil demands of the two forces a diametrical opposition. Tolkien is consistent in using Beowulf as a model for his conception of both. His basis for Good in the trilogy rests on two Anglo-Saxon stereotypes appearing in Beowulf: Good's identification with light and the Northern theory of courage.

The opposition between light and darkness, symbolic of Good and Evil in Beowulf, has long been recognized as fundamental both to the poem and to the Anglo-Saxon mind. As mentioned earlier, the fear of the unknown and the unseen impressed the pagan Anglo-Saxon mind, and after the introduction of Christianity this fear was easily identified with Evil and Sin. In the poem the "outer darkness" is everywhere outside the light of Heorot, so that darkness itself forebodes evil (BMC, p. 36). On the other hand, Good is early identified with light. The bard of Heorot, singing of the Creation, tells that God made the "wlite-beorhtne wang" [plain in bright beauty], and

gesette sigehreðig sunnan ond monan
 lēoman tō lēohte landbūendum . . .
 (93-95)
 [set the sun and moon triumphant, lights
 for light to the land dwellers.]

Heorot is first beheld by Beowulf and his men as they approach

it as "geatōlic ond goldfāh" [stately and gold-shining]: "Lixte se lēoma ofer landa fela" [its light shone over many lands] (308a, 311). Throughout the poem the brightness of golden light and daylight is coupled with descriptions of warriors in shining armor to create an association of goodness with light which is unmistakable. Moreover, light is also identified with God: it is "beorht bēacen Godes" [the bright beacon of God] (570a). After Beowulf kills Grendel's dam in the underwater cave, the poet says

Lixte se lēoma, lēoht inne stōd
 efne swā of hefene hādre scīneð
 rodores candel.

(1570-1572a)

[The light shone, light stood inside
 even as the sun of the sky brightly
 shines in the heaven.]

Tolkien repeats the association even more strikingly in Lord of the Rings. All those who are good bear some relationship to the light, either by means of color (usually white) or by intensity (brilliance). Far back in the Elder Days, Feanor, the greatest of the Eldar, had wrought the three jewels, the Silmarilli, and filled them with the radiance of the two trees in an Eden-like setting in the land of the Valar. Like Milton's Eden, the land of the Valar was illuminated by the radiance from the trees. Thus, before the corruption of the Silmarilli by Morgoth, light in Tolkien's world symbolized Good.

Gandalf is Tolkien's prime example of light's association with Good. He masquerades his true mission in Middle-earth as a servant of the One (God) in the battle against the Dark Lord,

but the amazing feats he can perform with his staff are indications of his power. The hobbits of the Shire know only the tricks he can perform with fireworks (I, 51-52), but the members of the Ring Company know that the light he provides with the power in his staff protects their lives in dark places. The light of his staff leads them through Moria, and he saves them from a great pack of wolves by creating a "white radiance like lightning" from a burning brand (I, 390). His battle with the Black Riders on Weathertop created a thunder and lightning not seen there since the days of old (I, 346). Laser-like flashes of light emanate from his palms when he combats the Nazgul to save Faramir's life (III, 100). And when he throws back his cloak to reveal himself as Gandalf the White to the messenger of Sauron, "a white light shone forth like a sword in that black place," and the messenger recoils from the vision (III, 205).

Frodo, too, is associated with light, in spite of the Ring's evil influence upon him. It seems to Sam that an angelic light shines from within Frodo at times (II, 330). Light is also identified with the Elves, especially those of Lothlorien. The land of Lorien is illuminated by a supernatural type of radiance (I, 456). Upon entering Lorien for the first time, Sam marvels at its brilliance: "It's sunlight and bright day. I feel as if I was inside a song . . ." (I, 455). So that the reader may not miss his symbolism, Tolkien adds, almost as an afterthought, the statement that "On the land of Lorien there was no stain" (I, 455).

Tolkien's identification of light with Good and darkness with Evil is, of course, not exclusively pagan-Germanic in origin. He adheres to Christian tradition especially with respect to the oppositions of light and darkness and Good and Evil. In one passage he clearly paraphrases Scripture on the subject. In Lorien, Haldir takes Frodo to a platform, from which they can perceive the two powers which oppose each other. He tells Frodo, "And ever they strive now in thought, but whereas the light perceives the very heart of the darkness, its own secret has not been discovered. Not yet" (I, 456). This passage is an echo of John 1: 5, in which the writer says, "The light shines on in the darkness, and the darkness has never overcome it." Within the trilogy there is scattered evidence which shows the inherent superiority of the light over the dark: Orcs by nature are afraid of the sun; trolls are turned to stone by sunlight; Gollum can tolerate neither sunlight nor moonlight; Shelob retreats from the brilliance of the star-glass that Frodo and Sam wield in her lair. These instances point toward Tolkien's adoption of the Christian principle that darkness cannot overpower the light. Rather, the light pierces the darkness, or, as Gollum once says, "It shows you up" (II, 289).

Not all light in the trilogy is associated with Good, and neither is it always associated with Good in Beowulf. The poet describes the glint in Grendel's eyes as "ligge geflicost læoht unfāger" [a horrible light like fire] (727). The monsters' undersea home is lit by a "fýrlæoht . . . / blācne lēoman" [fire

light, a pale beam] (1516b-1517a). After Beowulf destroys Grendel's dam, a different, more brilliant light shines within the undersea cave. Here the poet makes a conscious contrast between two types of light--the fire-red, pale, horrid light signifying Evil, and the brilliant golden light of Good. In Lord of the Rings golden, silver, white, and blue light signifies goodness and purity, while red, green and pale light signifies corruption and Evil. In Mordor, at Isengard (Saruman's land), and at Helm's Deep the red light of furnaces, explosives, or natural disturbances suggests Evil. Gollum's schizophrenia is signalled by the pale green light which shines from within his eyes when his evil side assumes command. The barrow in which the hobbits are imprisoned by a grave spirit for a short time is lit by a pale greenish light (I, 94). Wormtongue, Theoden's evil counselor, has a pale face (II, 148, 149). Always paleness or pale light, a corruption of white light, symbolizes sickness or ghastliness. The Black Rider who stabbed Frodo "glowed with a pale light" (I, 263). Tolkien sharply contrasts the pale or dully glowing colors (red, pale green, and pale white), which connote anger, sickness, and death, with the brilliant colors (white, silver, gold, and blue), which connote goodness and health. Characters reveal their allegiance to either Good or Evil in part by their association with the opposing types of light.

Adherence to and identification with brightness is only one way in which Tolkien suggests the goodness of his characters in Lord of the Rings. He exhibits Good in a more comprehensive

way by imbuing his good characters with the Germanic theory of courage he freely adapts from Beowulf. His admiration for the Northern courage is apparent throughout his 1936 Beowulf essay, and is fundamental to the theme he draws from the poem. He views Beowulf as a poem about man at war with the hostile world, about "his inevitable overthrow in Time" (BMC, p. 16). Heroic lays had earlier shown the exaltation of undefeated will, which he says is doctrinally expressed in the words of Byrhtwold in the fragment, "The Battle of Maldon": "Hige sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre, / mod sceal þe mare, þe ure mægen lytiað"³ [Thought shall be the harder, heart the keener, courage the greater, as our might lessens] (312-313). According to Tolkien, the Beowulf poet devoted a whole poem to this theme. "Men with courage as their stay," he writes, "went forward to that battle with the hostile world and the offspring of the dark which ends for all, even the kings and champions, in defeat" (BMC, p. 16).

The coming of Christianity may have swept away the old pagan gods, but little else changed, except in concept: "A Christian was (and is) still like his forefathers a mortal hemmed in a hostile world. The monsters remained the enemies of mankind, the infantry of the old war, and became inevitably the enemies of the one God . . ." (BMC, p. 20). Whereas, before, the creed of unyielding will in a life doomed to death and final defeat was a man's only prospect, a new hope arose with the advent of Christianity. On this point Tolkien says

³E. V. Gordon, ed., The Battle of Maldon (New York: Apple-Century-Crofts, 1966), p. 61.

The tragedy of the great temporal defeat remains for a while poignant, but ceases to be finally important. It is no defeat, for the end of the world is part of the design of Metod, the Arbiter who is above the mortal world. Beyond there appears a possibility of eternal victory . . . and the real battle is between the soul and its adversaries.

(BMC, p. 21)

That shift, though, is not yet complete in Beowulf, where the author's concern is with man on earth. And on earth the monsters gain victory but no honor, while besieged man finds "a potent but terrible solution in naked will and courage" (BMC, p. 24). In Beowulf, then, man is assured that "his courage noble in itself is also the highest loyalty" (BMC, p. 25).

Tolkien's exaltation of "naked will and courage" in the face of despair is yet another area in which his novel is the practical application of his critical outlook in the Beowulf essay. In the poem, Grendel and his dam are the adversaries of man, yet the greatest enemy is the dragon. In Lord of the Rings, the Orcs and the Ringwraiths are adversaries, but the greatest adversary, the Enemy, is Sauron the Dark Lord, whose very name suggests the dragon.⁴ The doctrine of unyielding will is both implicit and explicit in Beowulf. After several night-time visits to Heorot, Grendel rules unchallenged in Hrothgar's hall; the poet refers to the deserting kinsmen of Hrothgar in a tone which implies their cowardice before the enemy: the monster

⁴The derivation of the name for Tolkien's most malignant villain is both intriguing and ingenious. That the author intends to identify Sauron with the dragon is evident from the root sauro- from Greek sauros, saura, 'lizard' or 'reptile.' Anglo-Saxon sar 'bitter' (adj.), 'pain, wound' (n.), sare 'sorely, grievously,' and sarig 'sad, mournful,' amplify the Greek root, although they are not cognate with it.

warred "āna wið eallum" [alone against all] and prevailed (145a). After Beowulf's death, Wiglaf contemptuously speaks to the cowardly thanes who refused to join him in the defense of their lord:

Dēað bið sēlla
 eorla gehwylcum þonne edwitlif!
 (2890b-2891)
 [Death is better for all men than
 a life of disgrace!]

This same sentiment is expressed in the trilogy by several of the enemies of Sauron. When the Ring Company sets out from Lothlorien, none are bound by oaths to remain with Frodo to any point along the way, but Gimli remarks, "Faithless is he that says farewell when the road darkens" (I, 367). Earlier Gandalf recounts to Frodo the First War of the Ring, telling him, "That is a chapter of ancient history which it might be good to recall; for there was sorrow then, too, and gathering dark, but great valour and great deeds that were not wholly vain" (I, 83). It would have been easy for Frodo to despair when he was held prisoner by the grave-spirit in the Barrow-downs: "He thought he had come to the end of his adventure, and a terrible end, but the thought hardened him" (I, 194).

Gandalf, always courageous, counsels the leaders of the West to challenge Sauron before the gates of Mordor: "We must walk open-eyed into that trap, with courage, but small hope for ourselves" (III, 191). Sam's courage develops as he and Frodo penetrate the fearful land of Mordor. His will hardens as he is forced to take on most of the responsibility for completing

the Quest, in the face of Frodo's mounting despair. Tolkien shows the development of Sam's courage in the Land of Shadow in descriptions like the following: "No more debates disturbed his mind. He knew all the arguments of despair and would not listen to them. His will was set, and only death would break it" (III, 267). Sam's experience in Mordor makes him a warrior that any Anglo-Saxon would have been proud to join in battle. It is as if he recalled the fight at Maldon in his moment of crisis:

But even as hope died in Sam, or seemed to die, it was turned to a new strength. Sam's plain hobbit face grew stern, almost grim, as the will hardened in him, and he felt through all his limbs a thrill, as if he was turning into some creature of stone and steel that neither despair nor weariness nor endless barren miles could subdue.

(III, 259)

Finally, Theoden, King of the Rohirrim, recognizes that "there are some things it is better to begin than to refuse, even though the end may be dark" (II, 53).

In these foregoing cases characters aligned on the side of Good display their veneration of unyielding will in the face of despair. The importance of will in the trilogy cannot be understated, especially that of free will. There are three types of will found in Lord of the Rings--the wills of the two absolutes, Good and Evil, and free will, the freedom of choice for all mortals of Middle-earth.

The rulers of the West emphasize the freedom to choose. They do not command; rather, they ask for allegiance by free will. Aragorn asks for volunteers to help him (III, 192). The

Ring company is not bound by any oath to Frodo; Elrond reminds them that they "go with him as free companions" (I, 367). At Orthanc, where Gandalf obviously can hold Saruman in his power, he tells the corrupt wizard, "You can leave Orthanc, free--if you choose. . . . free from bond, of chain, or command: to go where you will, even, even to Mordor, Saruman, if you desire" (II, 240). Wormtongue, who becomes Saruman's companion, receives the same type of choice from his former master, Theoden (II, 159).

Thus, each mortal has the power to choose between Good and Evil. And it is in the choice itself that the value lies. The choice is both an end in itself, in that it determines a person's character, and a means to an end, in that it determines his future choices and final end. The contrasting decisions and ends of Theoden, King of Rohan, and Denethor, Steward of Gondor, illustrate the value of choice. The coming of Gandalf and Aragorn to Meduseld rouses Theoden from his torpor and weariness: after hearing of the hope of the West, slim as it is, he regains his old strength, choosing to lead his warriors in battle once again. He declares, "'I myself will go to war, to fall in the front of the battle, if it must be. . . .' 'Then even the defeat of Rohan will be glorious in song,'" Aragorn replies (II, 156-57).⁵ Even at Orthanc,

⁵Aragorn's reply echoes Tolkien's observation in the Beowulf essay that "The worth of defeated valour in this world is deeply felt" (p. 21).

Theoden's will has grown so strong that he is able to resist Saruman (II, 236-237). Theoden's end, though, is the same as Beowulf's: "the wages of heroism is death" (BMC, p. 25). Theoden's death is the doom facing all valiant men: to face evil, and having chosen to oppose it, to taste defeat (III, 145).

Denethor, however, is a testimony of the failure to exert courage and will against Evil. Denethor in his pride believes he is being valiant as he prepares the city of Minas Tirith for Sauron's assault upon it. But his valor is buttressed greatly by his desire to get and use the Ring for his defense. The strength of his will, therefore, lies in an external object and is not internally motivated. All that is befitting of a great lord of nobility seems to be lacking in him as the assault on Minas Tirith opens. Unable to stand the tension, he gives in to mounting despair and takes his own life. Before doing so, he moans to Gandalf, "Battle is vain. Why should we wish to live longer?" Gandalf, though, rebukes him: "Only the heathen kings, under the domination of the Dark Power, did thus, slaying themselves in pride and despair." "Pride and despair!" Denethor cries. "Against the Power that now arises there is no victory. . . . It is time for all to depart who would not be slaves" (III, 157). By killing himself, Denethor chose to avoid the foe, and died a death honorable, perhaps, to the Romans, but disgraceful to the Anglo-Saxons. The irony, of course, is in the results of the two men's choices. Theoden

died a hero and Denethor died a coward; the wages of both sin and heroism, however, is the same--death.

Behind the affairs of men in Middle-earth there lies a higher plane upon which the struggle between Good and Evil is played. Lord of the Rings is a novel of will, and this is especially true in the supernatural sphere. Here, too, Tolkien uses an idea whose source is found in Beowulf, but he expands it in the novel. The Beowulf poet allows the will of God to decide the outcome of the hero's battle with Grendel's dam (1553b-1556). There are also hints and suggestions about the role of Fate spread throughout the trilogy. There are, in addition to the over-riding will of a benevolent Fate, some evil wills which are at work in some adventures in the trilogy.

In the Inn at Bree, Frodo puts on the Ring against his better judgment, and his disappearance causes a disturbance: "It seemed to him, somehow, as if the suggestion came to him from outside, from someone or something in the room" (I, 216). Later he wondered "if the Ring itself had not played him a trick" (I, 219). While hiding from the Lord of the Nazgul before Minas Morgul, Frodo again feels a will striving to make him put on the Ring (II, 401). On the hill of Amon Hen, he is aware of a struggle between two forces over him: "And suddenly he felt the Eye. . . . A fierce eager will was there. It leaped towards him" (I, 519). Finally, before the Crack of Doom, and at the end of his journey, he falters because "He

was come to the heart of the realm of Sauron and the forges of his ancient might, greatest in Middle-earth; all other purposes were here subdued" (III, 274).

There is also much evidence of a higher will motivating the side of Good. It seems that little in Lord of the Rings is left to chance. Frodo learns early that Bilbo was "meant" to find the Ring and that he (Frodo) was meant to have it next (I, 88). He accepts the revelation that he has been "chosen" for a perilous quest (I, 95). At the Council of Elrond, when he volunteers to bear the Ring to the Crack of Doom to destroy it, he wonders to hear his words, "as if some other will was using his small voice" (I, 354). At Amon Hen he chooses to obey the will which prompts him to take off the Ring and so save himself (I, 519). In Shelob's lair, the suggestion comes to Sam as "a light in his mind" to use the star-glass of light in order to drive away Shelob (I, 417-18). When Frodo speaks Elvish words after withdrawing the star-glass from his cloak "it seemed that another voice spoke through his . . ." (I, 418). On Orodruin Sam experiences a strange sensation: "Suddenly a sense of urgency which he did not understand came to Sam. It was almost as if he had been called: 'Now, now, or it will be too late!'" (III, 270).

The evidence of higher wills motivating the characters to choose between Good and Evil points toward Tolkien's dramatization of a great cosmic game of chess. In several places he uses chess imagery or chess terms to refer to the characters

or situations in Middle-earth. All of the characters are like playing pieces on a chessboard; Merry and Pippin are even called "pawns" (III, 35). The strategy between Good and Evil is rendered in chess terminology. Gandalf once says, "The board is set, and the pieces are moving. One piece that I greatly desire to find is Faramir . . ." (III, 35). Later he remarks, "It seems clear that our Enemy has opened his war at last and made the first move . . ." (III, 107). The strategy of the West is to feign an attack upon Sauron in order to leave an opening elsewhere for Frodo, as the chief piece, to get through. "We must call out his hidden strength," says Gandalf, "so that he shall empty his land" (III, 191).

The author's conception of Middle-earth as a great chessboard presupposes an anthropomorphic nature of the opponents, Good and Evil. The One, who resides in the Blessed Realm across the Sea, has acted to save Middle-earth in the First Age. He apparently sent the Istari (the wizards), of which Gandalf and Saruman are the chiefest, to contest the will of Sauron in Middle-earth (III, 455). And it is apparently He who chose a hobbit, Frodo, to be the Ring-bearer, rather than a great warrior or king, thus confounding the counsels of the wise and great (I, 354). Sauron himself, it is clear, is not the chief mover on the side of Evil, for he is "but a servant or an emissary" (III, 190). If Sauron disappears from Middle-earth, it will not be the end of Evil, for "other evils there are that may yet come," says Gandalf (III, 190).

The "pieces" themselves are assailed by suggestions from the sources of Good and Evil, but the decision of which direction they will move rests solely with them. However, if a character possesses a mixture of the good qualities (courage and an unyielding will against Evil) such as Frodo and Sam possess, Providence provides him with a way to succeed, in much the same way that God provides the sword which Beowulf uses to kill Grendel's dam. Yet there is other evidence in Beowulf to support this principle. Earlier Beowulf himself had pronounced boldly before Hrothgar

Wyrð oft nereð
 unfægne eorl, þonne his ellen dēah!
 (572b-573)
 [Fate often protects the doomed man when his
 courage is strong!]

Later the poet, speaking of Grendel, says

swā hē hyra mǣ wolde,
 nefne him witig God wyrð forstōde
 ond ðæs mannes mōd.
 (1055b-1057a)
 [so he would have killed more of them, if
 wise God and the man's courage had not
 withstood fate.]

However, statements about a Christian God or a Primal Cause are kept to a minimum in the trilogy.

Altogether, then, Tolkien seems to be imitating the Beowulf poet's presentation of Good. Both Christian and pagan elements appear in Beowulf, but the poet allows neither to dominate the poem. He was a Christian writing of pagan times; Tolkien, too, is a Christian writing of pre-Christian times. Nevertheless, he allows some Christian motifs (or rather, motifs

which pre-figure Christianity, to avoid an anachronism) to appear in Lord of the Rings. The load Frodo must bear for all of Middle-earth pre-figures the load Christ had to bear. Gandalf is an obvious Christ figure; his mission, death, resurrection, and reincarnation parallel loosely those of Jesus. The existence of the One, a Blessed Realm, and the promise of eternal life for the Ring-bearer and some of those who followed him are other Christian parallels. Despite the presence of these parallels, Tolkien places more emphasis upon the specifically "pagan" aspects of Middle-earth. He is, with the Beowulf poet whom he seems to be consciously imitating, primarily concerned with man on earth, and he is especially in line with the Anglo-Saxon tradition in his conception of Good and Evil. In the trilogy, Evil, corrupted Good, is inimicable to man. The only antidote to the inevitable victory of Evil over man in this world is, for Tolkien, as it was for the Beowulf poet, "naked will and courage." This is the standard by which Good and Evil are known in Lord of the Rings.

CHAPTER III

THE COMITATUS IN LORD OF THE RINGS

Thus far this study has been concerned with elements in Lord of the Rings which are outgrowths of matters Tolkien discussed in his Beowulf essay of 1936. Historical perspective and the Anglo-Saxon conceptions of Good and Evil are fundamental to Lord of the Rings, as they are in Beowulf. Tolkien's immersion in Anglo-Saxon culture is so complete, however, that the trilogy, as a dramatic re-creation of that culture, naturally is more complete in its scope than is his Beowulf essay. Therefore, Tolkien includes much in the trilogy that because of his purpose he omitted from the Beowulf essay. In the latter, he says little about the comitatus relationship in Anglo-Saxon times and in Beowulf, yet this relationship receives a major emphasis in Lord of the Rings. The comitatus (the Roman term for the companions of a Germanic chieftain) was the result of a bargain struck by oaths between the chieftain and his followers. As a characteristic of Germanic society, the comitatus relationship could as easily have been discussed in the preceding chapter on Good and Evil, since in the Anglo-Saxon world it was the ideal relationship, embodying the qualities associated with Good: honor, courage, fidelity, loyalty, and truth. However, since the comitatus is a complex matter in itself, it is here treated separately.

Before looking at Tolkien's presentation of the comitatus in Lord of the Rings, one should consider the heritage of the system in Anglo-Saxon society and its expression in heroic poems such as Beowulf and the fragment "The Battle of Maldon." Perhaps the earliest mention of the Germanic comitatus is in the Germania of Tacitus (c. 98 A.D.), the Roman statesman and historiographer of the first and early second century. There still lingers the unanswered question about Tacitus' purpose for writing a monograph on Germany--whether it was because he recognized the potential threat of the Germanic peoples or because (from an ethnological point of view) he found the Germanic people interesting. Whatever the reason, he was so intrigued by the Germans that he decided to pass on the results of his researches to the educated Roman aristocracy.

In the Germania, Tacitus, dwelling on the military orientation of the Germans, describes the nature, makeup, and purpose of the comitatus:

Particularly eminent birth or great achievements of their fathers win the rank of chieftain even for very young men; but they attach themselves to more mature men who have reputations of long standing, and it is not a matter of shame to be seen in their entourage. Nay, the entourage itself has ranks, in accordance with the judgment of him whom they are following; and thus there is great rivalry among a man's followers, who has the leading position with their chief, and among the chieftains, who has the largest number of followers and the fiercest. This constitutes their honor and strength, always to be surrounded by a great band of chosen young men; this is prestige in peace and protection in war.

And each one has this renown and glory, not only in his own tribe but also among neighboring states, if he excels by reason of the size and bravery of his entourage.¹

The bond which unites the entourage to the chieftain, says Tacitus, is its obligation to fight for and to protect the chieftain and to guard him in war, in exchange for "that glorious war horse, that renowned framea [spear] which will be bloodied and victorious; for banquets and provisions, not luxurious yet abundant, serve as pay" (p. 47). Even the boys receive a military education: the first honor of young manhood for a young man is to receive the shield and spear. Tacitus observes, too, that the generals win favor by the example they set, rather than by the power they wield (p. 43), an observation that suggests that the generals lead willing men into battle rather than force their armies into conflict.

The entourage's complete bond of allegiance to its chieftain is evidenced by the obligation under which the men fight:

When they have come into battle, it is shameful for the chieftain to be excelled in valor, shameful for the entourage not to match the valor of the chieftain. Furthermore, it is shocking and disgraceful for all of one's life to have survived one's chieftain and left the battle. . . . [the entourage] credits their own brave deeds to his glory: the chieftains fight for victory, the entourage for the chieftain.

(p. 47)

This system of obligation and inspired mutual devotion of

¹Cornelius Tacitus, Agricola, Germany, Dialogue on Orators, trans. Herbert W. Benario (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), p. xiv. Subsequent references to the Germania will be incorporated in the text.

chief and warrior, says Francis Gummere, "was evidently one of the great moral factors in Germanic life and achievement."² In the comitatus relationship courage and unyielding will, of course, were virtues, but they were "no more prominent than fidelity, loyalty, and truth."³

When the Germanic tribes overran England beginning in the middle of the fifth century, the comitatus was still the fundamental Germanic institution, and it continued to flourish. "The phrases in which Tacitus describes the retinue of a first-century chief," says Sir Frank Stenton, "can be applied to the companions of King Cynewulf of Wessex in the eighth century and to those of Earl of Byrhtnoth of Essex in the tenth."⁴ Its predominance in Germanic-English society is attested by the fact that the comitatus relationship is a characteristic motif of earliest Germanic and English literature. "There is no doubt that this literature represented real life," asserts Stenton.⁵ Much of the earliest English literature of the pre-Christian era has been lost, but there survive two later Anglo-Saxon works which present a clear picture of the relationship--Beowulf and a fragment, "The Battle of Maldon."

²Francis B. Gummere, Founders of England (New York: G. E. Stechert Co., 1930), p. 261.

³Gummere, p. 261.

⁴Frank M. Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1943), p. 299.

⁵Stenton, p. 299.

Very early in Beowulf, the poet relates how Hrothgar came to his present status:

þā wæs Hroðgāre herespēd gyfen,
 wīges weorðmynd, þæt him his winemāgas
 georne hýrdon, oðð þæt sēo geogoð geweox,
 magodriht micel.

(64-67a)

[Then was war-success given to Hrothgar,
 glory in war, so that his retainers eagerly heard
 him, until the young warriors grew, a great
 band of young retainers.]

Hrothgar has Heorot built as a hall in which he would "distribute among young and old all which God gave unto him," thus fulfilling in part his obligation as a lord of men. He is described frequently as "bēaga bryttan" (ring-giver).

Beowulf, prince of the Geats and thane of Hygelac, chooses as his entourage fourteen of the boldest thanes of Geatland for the expedition across the sea to cleanse Heorot. This kind of expedition to foreign lands evidently was not uncommon among the earlier Germans, for according to Tacitus:

If the state in which they were born should be drowsing in long peace and leisure, many noble young men of their own accord seek those tribes which are then waging some war, since quiet is displeasing to the race and they become famous more easily in the midst of dangers and one would not maintain a large retinue except by violence and war. . . .

(p. 47)

Neither was this "foreign intervention" uncommon during the seventh and later centuries, when Beowulf was recorded and transcribed.

Many scenes and much dialogue in Beowulf involving gift-giving to thanes, oaths, and the protection of lords allude

to the lord-thane relationship. However, two passages stand out as the poet's strongest affirmation of the ideal relationship: Beowulf's fight with Grendel's dam underwater, and his final fight with the dragon.

Before plunging beneath the waves to seek Grendel's mother, Beowulf speaks to Hrothgar, reminding him

gif ic æt þearfe þīnre scolde
aldre linnan, þæt ðū mē ā wāre
forðgewitenum on fæder stǣle.
Wes ðū mundbora mīnum magoþegnum,
hondgesellum, gif mec hild nime. . . .
(1477-1481)

[If I should lose my life for your need, that you were always, to me departed, in the place of a father. Be a protector to my retainers, my comrades, if battle takes me.]

Also, he asks Hrothgar to send his treasure on to Hygelac so that the king of the Geats can see that Beowulf "gōdne funde / bēaga bryttan" [found a good distributor of rings] (1486b-1487a).

While Beowulf battles underwater, the group of Danes and Geats awaits upon the shore. When the water begins to boil and surge with blood, the Danes, including Hrothgar himself, lose hope and return to Heorot, thinking they have seen the last of Beowulf. Yet Beowulf's retainers, the fourteen chosen thanes, remain behind, sick at heart, but faithful to their lord. They are rewarded for their vigilance, and soon the company, led by Beowulf, returns to Heorot bearing the head of Grendel.

The scene at the water's edge contrasts with the events which happen fifty years later, when Beowulf, the now-aged

king, leads a band of twelve thanes to challenge the dragon which has been ravaging his country. Although Beowulf warns them that he alone is to battle the monster, his thanes forsake him in his need:

Nealles him on hēape handgesteallan,
 æðelinga bearn ymbe gestōdon
 hildecystum, ac hȳ on holt bugon,
 ealdre burgan.

(2596-2599a)

[Not at all his hand-companions, sons of princes, stood about in battle-valor, but they fled to the wood, to save their lives.]

The poet uses Wiglaf, however, as his vehicle for affirming the virtue of the lord-thane relationship. Wiglaf encourages his fellow thanes to protect their lord when he calls to mind the favor Beowulf had bestowed on him and the lands and rights his father possessed (2606-2608). He urges:

Ic ðæt māl geman, þār wē medu þēgun,
 þonne wē gehēton ūssum hlāforde
 in bīorsele, ðē ūs ðās bēagas geaf,
 þæt wē him ðā gūðgetāwa gylðan woldon,
 gif him þyslicu þearf gelumpe,
 helmas ond heard sweord.

(2633-2638a)

[I remember that time when we were drinking mead, when we vowed to our lord in the beer-hall, who gave us these rings, that we would repay him the war-gear, the helmets and the hard swords, if there came to him such need as this.]

Yet the cowards remain in the wood, and Beowulf dies at the feet of the weeping Wiglaf.

The ten thanes return from their hiding in the woods, "tȳdre trēowlogan" [dastardly faith-breakers], as the poet calls them (2847a). Wiglaf's verbal abuse of the faithless

thanes presents in forceful terms the poet's strongest argument for the comitatus relationship. Scornfully Wiglaf says to the thanes that Beowulf could not boast of his comrades in fight because no retainers were ready to help when the prince had need of them (2873-2874a, 2882b-2883). He predicts a grim future for the Geats, one in which ring-giving, armor-giving, and comforts will pass away:

londrihtes mōt
 þære mægburge monna æghwylc
 idel hweorfan syððan æðelingas
 feorran gefricgean flēam eowerne,
 dōmlēasan dād. Dēað bið sēlla
 eorla gehwylcum þonne edwītlīf!
 (2886b-2891)

[Each of the kinsmen must wander deprived of land-rights, after nobles from afar hear of your flight, the inglorious deed. Death is better for all men than a life of disgrace!]

The comitatus theme is by no means confined to Beowulf. It is equally well-expressed, though in fewer words, in the fragment "The Battle of Maldon," which is perhaps the most intense argument for the virtue of the comitatus. Based upon the actual battle of 991, it is evidence of the persistence of the early Germanic institution in almost pure form, and is very close to Tacitus' first-century appraisal of the Germans. There are many statements in "Maldon" which testify to the still-strong presence of the comitatus idea in late tenth-century England.

Near the beginning of the poem the author relates that Eadric, one of Byrhtnoth's thanes,

polde . . . his ealdre zelæstan,
 frean to zefeohte

 beot he zelæste
 þa he ætforan his frean feohtan sceolde.⁶
 (11-12a, 15b-16)
 [wished to help his leader, his lord, in
 battle. . . . He carried out his boast
 that he should fight before his lord.]

Later, after the earl Byrhtnoth falls in battle, protected to the end by two of his thanes who also give their lives defending him, his retainers resolve "lif forlætan oððe leofne zeprecan" [to depart from life or to avenge the loved one] (208). This supreme loyalty is nothing more than was expected of the thanes who survived their lord in battle. In The Beginnings of English Society, Dorothy Whitelock cites several examples of this loyalty to one's lord, among them the following one: "In 685 King Ecgfrith fell at Nechtanesmere, 'all his bodyguard having been killed,' and the absence of any comment on or any elaboration of the incident may indicate that it was what was normally expected."⁷

No words in the "Maldon" fragment epitomize more the duty of vengeance or death a thane owes to his fallen lord than do Leofsunu's words:

Ic þæt zehate, þæt ic heonon helle
 fleon fotes trym, ac pille furðor zan,
 precan on zepinne minne pinedrihten.

⁶E. V. Gordon, ed., The Battle of Maldon, pp. 42-43. Subsequent references to the poem will be incorporated in the text.

⁷Dorothy Whitelock, The Beginnings of English Society (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1952), p. 32.

Ne þurfon me embe Sturmere stedfæste hælæð
 pordum ætpitan, nu min pine gecranc,
 þæt ic hlafordæas ham siðie,
 pende fram pige; ac me sceal pæpen niman,
 ord 7 iren.

(246-253a)

[I vow that I will not flee hence a footstep,
 but I will go forward, avenge in battle my
 friendly lord. The steadfast heroes around
 Sturmere will not have cause to reproach me
 with words, now that my friend has fallen,
 that I journey home lordless, turn away from
 the fight; but the weapon shall take me,
 spear and sword.]

The poet later shows that Leofsunu's boast is only typical of
 a thane's duty to his lord. When Offa falls during the battle,
 the writer approvingly adds: "He læg ðegenlice ðeodne gehende"
 [He lay dead near the prince, as befits a thane] (294).

The poet's approval of Offa's death contrasts with his
 words of contempt for the cowardly retainers of Byrhtnoth who
 flee from the battle:

godric fram zuðe, 7 þone godan forlet
 þe him mænizne oft mear gesealde.

(187-188)

[Godric fled from battle and left the brave
 one who often gave him many a horse.]

Many others also fled with Godric from the battle,

manna ma þonne hit ænig mæð þære,
 3yf hi þa geearnunga ealle gemundon
 þe he him to du3uþe 3edon hæfde.

(195-197)

[more men than it was fitting, if they all
 remembered the rewards that he (the lord)
 had given them for help.]

The Cowardice of Godric and his followers in "Maldon" compares
 with that of the ten thanes who deserted Beowulf at his time
 of need.

Both Beowulf and "The Battle of Maldon," then, as representatives of heroic poetry, show the central position which the institution of the comitatus held in Anglo-Saxon times. Naturally, Tolkien's life-long study of Northern literature influenced his fiction; the presence of the comitatus in Lord of the Rings attests this fact. Many of the social relationships in the trilogy show the influence of the Northern comitatus upon the world of Middle-earth.

Several major characters in Lord of the Rings who are leaders exercise their responsibility as both treasure-givers and feast-givers. They represent the major free kingdoms of Middle-earth--Elrond, king of Rivendell; Galadriel, queen in Lothlorien; Theoden, king of Rohan; and Denethor, Steward of Minas Tirith. Two of these leaders, Elrond and Galadriel, are rulers of Elves, whom Tolkien clearly intends to represent a nearly perfect earthly human state. Although there certainly exists a close bond between the Elvish rulers and their subjects, it is not military in nature; thus, their social bonds are not true to the Germanic conception of the comitatus, either in nature or purpose. Nevertheless, both Elvish rulers prove to be gracious hosts to the Ring Company.

Among the mortals of Middle-earth, Denethor and Theoden hold the highest positions as the rulers of Gondor and Rohan, respectively. Both leaders command a chosen retinue of noblemen, and both are treasure-givers and feast-givers in normal situations. Because of the suspension of normal civilities

within besieged Minas Tirith, Denethor does not dispense many gifts to either his followers or to Gandalf and Pippin when they enter his city. His table fare is also scanty, but Denethor does provide such food and armor to his visitors as he can spare. In exchange for Pippin's proffered service, Denethor outfits the hobbit in the livery of the Tower of the Guard, the "elite" of Denethor's knights (III, 96).

As mentioned earlier, the kingdom of Rohan is based upon the Anglo-Saxon civilization. This observation is especially apparent when one considers Theoden and his retinue. The King of the Rohirrim is a good ruler, according to the Anglo-Saxon standard of the lord as a good provider for his followers. At his first meeting with the small company led by Gandalf, he provides both food and gifts to his visitors, and takes them into his friendship (II, 160-162). Later, after their joyful return from the destruction of Saruman's realm, Theoden provides food at his board for his companions (II, 83).

The retainers' loyalty to their lords is emphasized on several occasions in the trilogy. The thane is both a fighter for and protector of his lord. This responsibility is implied in the oath of allegiance which Pippin and Denethor swear to each other:

'Here do I swear fealty and service to Gondor, and to the Lord and Steward of the realm, to speak and to be silent, to do and to let be, to come and to go, in need or plenty, in peace or war, in living or dying, from this hour henceforth, until my lord release me, or death take me, or the world end. So say I, Peregrin son of Paladin of the Shire of the Halflings.'

'And this do I hear, Denthor son of Ecthelion, Lord of Gondor, Steward of the High King, and I will not forget it, nor fail to reward that which is given: fealty with love, valour with honour, oath-breaking with vengeance.'

(III, 31)

This oath is similar to the following one from the later, more Christianized Old English period:

By the Lord, before whom these relics are holy, I will be loyal and true to N, and love all that he loves, and hate all that he hates, (however) in accordance with God's rights and secular obligations; and never, willingly and intentionally, in word or deed, do anything that is hateful to him; on condition that he keep me as I shall deserve, and carry out all that was our agreement, when I subjected myself to him and chose his favor.⁸

When the company led by Gandalf first arrives at Meduseld, they are instructed by Hama, Theoden's doorwarden, to lay aside their weapons at the door before entering the hall (II, 146), a scene reminiscent of Beowulf, 397-398, in which the visiting Geats are asked to leave their weapons outside the door of Hrothgar's hall before they can speak with the king. In the battle of the Pelennor Fields, the wounded Theoden is protected from the Lord of the Nazgul by his thanes, Dernhelm (his niece Eowyn disguised as a warrior) and Merry (III, 142-143).

In a later passage, which recalls the rhetoric of the "Maldon" fragment, the new king of Rohan, Eomer, prepares for his last stand: "Stern now was Eomer's mood, and his mind clear again. He let blow the horns to rally all men to his banner that could come hither; for he thought to make a great shield-

⁸Whitelock, p. 33.

wall at the last, and stand, and fight there on foot till all fell, and do deeds of song on the fields of Pelennor, though no man should be left in the West to remember the last King of the Mark" (III, 149). Tolkien, in describing the climactic battle before the Black Gate of Mordor, notes that the warriors form rings about their lords, Aragorn and Imrahil (III, 206).

Denethor's servants, too, remain obedient to their lord even when he becomes irrational and prepares to cremate himself and his wounded son Faramir. They obey Denethor's insane commands (III, 155) because they have sworn oaths of service similar to Pippin's, even though they may be doubtful that what their lord commands them to do is morally right. Denethor succeeds in suicide, in spite of Gandalf's attempt to reason with him. Afterwards, Gandalf admonishes the servants to put away their enmity, telling them, "You have been caught in a net of warring duties that you did not weave. But think, you servants of the Lord, blind in your obedience, that but for the treason of Beregon, Faramir, Captain of the White Tower, would now also be burned" (III, 159). "Blind obedience" was, nevertheless, a thane's obligation of his lord.

Of course, Frodo is not Lord of the Ring, although Pippin once innocently greets him as such (III, 298), but the Fellowship of the Ring is nonetheless a type of mock comitatus. The irony in the relationships of the individuals in the Fellowship centers around Frodo, the "unhero" who finds himself the most important member of a company, five of whom are infinitely

stronger, wiser, and more valiant than he.⁹ Frodo can offer nothing but danger to those who accompany him for his protection, yet all eight choose to travel with him. He is hardly a valiant leader; in fact, he is not the leader of the expedition to Mordor--Gandalf and Aragorn are leader and guide, respectively. Yet the Fellowship is obviously a comitatus of sorts.

Finally, the relationship between Frodo and Sam shows elements of the Anglo-Saxon influence. It is a relationship bound by sacrificial love, at least on Sam's part. He voluntarily defers the mastery to Frodo, although without his strength and leadership in Mordor, his "master" would not have achieved the Quest. Sam is an ideal thane: he rouses Frodo's sagging will in Mordor several times, as Beowulf does Hrothgar's (1384 ff). Sam even carries Frodo for some distance when it appears that his master's strength and will are spent. He gives Frodo his own share of the dwindling rations, and once risks a fire to cook a special meal for Frodo. He also fights the Orcs to rescue his master from the tower of Cirith Ungol. Although their relationship may not be a true comitatus, the bond between the two hobbits shows the influence of the Anglo-Saxon institution.

⁹Discussions of Frodo as the "unhero" or "anti-hero" can be found in Alexis Levitin's "The Hero in J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings," Mankato State Studies in English, 2 (February 1967), 25-37, and W. H. Auden's "The Quest Hero," Texas Quarterly, 4 (Winter 1961), 81-93.

The bond between retainer and lord conferred a certain amount of order upon Anglo-Saxon society. Failure of a lord or a thane to practice his obligation often resulted in chaos, as the prophecy of Wiglaf suggests and as Hrothgar asserts in his advice to Beowulf concerning the evil king Heremod:

brēat bolgenmōd	bōodgenēatas,
eaxlgesteallan,	oþ þæt hē āna hwearf,
māre þēoden	mondrēamum from,
.
.
Denum æfter dōme;	nallas bēagas geaf
þæt hē þæs gewinnes	drēamlēas gebād,
lēodbealo longsum.	weorc prōwade,

(1713-1715, 1719b-1722a)

[enraged, he killed his table-companions, his comrades, until he, the famous prince, went alone from the joys of men. Not at all did he give rings to the Danes after glory; joyless he dwelt, so that he suffered distress of strife for it, a great affliction to his people for a long time.]

As mentioned in the last chapter, one of the elements of Evil, besides its chaotic state, which is suggested above in the breakdown of the comitatus at Heremod's court, is its mockery of Good. This is true even in respect to the comitatus in Lord of the Rings. Sauron and those that he rules exhibit the perversion of the order of good society. Tolkien's commentary on the goodness of the comitatus is strengthened by his portrayal of its perversion in the Land of Mordor.

First, Sauron mocks the lords of the West by portraying himself as a ring-giver and favor-giver. Gloom the Dwarf tells the council of Elrond of visits to his home in Moria from a Black Rider who reported that Sauron the Great desired their

friendship: "Rings he would give for it, such as he gave of old" (I, 316). Sauron had at one time given rings to nine lords of Numenor (II, 382). The basic contrast between Sauron and the lords of the West in their roles as treasure-giving lords is in his perversion of the intent of gift-giving: he does not give treasures as ends, rewards for service; he gives them as means to an end, so that he may utterly dominate those to whom he gives gifts, especially Rings of Power, over which his One Ring has the mastery. In the words of Faramir, he devoured those to whom he gave the Rings of Power--the Nazgul (II, 382).

There is nothing in the nature of Sauron which suggests any of the qualities of a good lord: he is neither noble, brave, nor valiant, nor does he lead by example. His retinue, the nine Nazgul, are merely extensions of his own hatred and malice. Completely controlled by his will, they are devoid of any volition, and thus their service to the Dark Lord is a perversion of the comitatus ideal, which stresses the thane's voluntary subjection to his lord. As for the rest of Sauron's allies, they are perceived by the West as either slaves driven in madness by fear, or as dupes deceived by the Dark Lord, destined for betrayal later.

The fundamental importance of the Germanic comitatus to the background of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings should now be apparent. Its place as the bond of society among the mortal men of Middle-earth is evidenced by the relationships between

lords and their warriors, particularly in the examples of Denethor's and Theoden's warriors. Of the relationships cited in this discussion, that of Theoden and his men most closely approaches the Anglo-Saxon ideal found in Beowulf and the "Maldon" fragment. This institution is to be expected among the Rohirrim, for whom Tolkien obviously used the Anglo-Saxon civilization as a model. The warriors of Rohan are ideal retainers who exhibit the virtues Tacitus reported to the Romans in the first-century, and their lord and king, Theoden, is the ideal lord, noble and courageous, and generous with his gifts. In the words of the Beowulf poet, "þæt wæs gōd cyning."

CHAPTER IV

THE HEROIC-ELEGIAC PERSPECTIVE

Historical perspective, Good and Evil, the comitatus relationship--these three areas of correspondence between Beowulf and Lord of the Rings require a context in which they take on their fullest meaning. Thus far it has been shown that there are indeed many intentional parallels between the two works. Tolkien recognized historical perspective in Beowulf; he used it in Lord of the Rings. The problem of Good and Evil is treated in much the same way in both works. The comitatus relationship is fundamental in both the Old English poem and the modern English novel. It follows, then, that there should be the same type of unifying element apparent in Beowulf and the Ring trilogy. "Unity" as used here does not mean the balance of elements within both works. "Unity" in this study implies the working together of the various elements through perspective: i.e., the way in which the works must be viewed. Although neither work lacks internal unity, this restrictive use of "unity" implies an external rather than consistent internal cohesiveness.

Tolkien has shown in his Beowulf essay that the author's intended purpose, coupled with the reader's perspective, is the means by which both the unity and meaning of the poem may

be derived. Near the end of the essay, he offers a unique and better assessment of the poem:

Beowulf is not an 'epic,' not even a magnified 'lay.' No terms borrowed from Greek or other literatures exactly fit: there is no reason why they should. Though if we must have a term, we should choose rather 'elegy.' It is an heroic-elegiac poem; and in a sense all its first 3,136 lines are the prelude to a dirge . . ., one of the most moving ever written.

(BMC, p. 31)

By assessing Beowulf as an "heroic-elegiac" poem, Tolkien thus moved the poem into the same realm as the traditional Old English elegies, represented by such poems as The Wanderer, The Ruin, Wulf and Eadwacer, The Husband's Message, The Wife's Lament, and others. Thus what could be said of the elegies must also be true of Beowulf. The final point of this study is to show that Lord of the Rings also falls within this category ("heroic-elegiac") that Tolkien supplied for Beowulf; it derives from the Old English elegiac tradition as Tolkien perceives it in Beowulf. Yet before one assumes that Tolkien's purpose was to write an "heroic-elegy," it would be helpful to review the characteristics of the Old English elegy.

The traditional English elegy, like Milton's Lycidas, is usually a lament for the dead, yet it does not always confine itself only to this. One can usually find some philosophical commentary in the elegy, and this is true also of Anglo-Saxon elegies. One distinctive feature of Old English elegies is that they oftentimes have to do with some form of exile. The speaker is often an exile who "looks back to happier times

which have vanished,"¹ which make the present state of loss more poignant. This "Golden Age" theme, found in ancient Latin and Greek elegies, is often joined by another classical motif, the ubi sunt ("where are they?") passages, which is closely aligned with the "Golden Age" theme. The speaker or poet expresses sorrow and regret because of the present state of loss, and sometimes these elements lead to philosophical commentary on the transient nature, the mutability, of human life and achievements. Another distinctive feature of Old English elegies is their universality. Anglo-Saxon poets were fond of generalizations, even in specific settings, such as in the elegies found in Beowulf: "Universal in their significance, they illustrate typical human situations to which they give immediacy by portraying them through the eyes of individuals."²

As Tolkien has already shown, Beowulf should not be considered an epic. In this respect he agreed with another of the major Beowulf critics, Friederich Klaeber, who had said earlier, "Beowulf is not an English Iliad, not a standard Germanic or national Anglo-Saxon epos."³ Seemingly digressive and collage-like in nature, Beowulf includes varying elements in its structure, one of which is the elegy. There appear at

¹Robert K. Gordon, ed., Anglo-Saxon Poetry (New York: Dutton, 1954), p. x.

²R. F. Leslie, ed., The Wanderer (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), p. 1. Subsequent references to the poem will be from this edition, and incorporated in the text.

³Klaeber, p. cxix.

least two major elegiac passages in the poem, in addition to the Geats' lament for the dead King Beowulf at the close of the poem. The following discussion will show how these elegies conform to the general pattern of the Old English elegy, and in a later discussion it will be shown that the entire work should be viewed as an elegy.

Both elegiac passages--the "Elegy of the Last Survivor" (2231b-2270) and the "Lament of the Father" (2444-2462)--occur in connection with the figure of the aged King Beowulf and the dominating image of the dragon found in the latter third of the poem. These passages are instrumental in setting the mood, which contrasts sharply with the earlier section recording Beowulf's youth. The first passage, the so-called "Elegy of the Last Survivor," relates the plight of the last survivor of a once-proud race of warriors, who is burying the "ǣrgestrēona" (ancient treasures), which formerly belonged to that race, in a burial mound. The poet is vague about the fate of the warriors, except to say, "Ealle hīe deað fornam / ǣrran mælum . . ." [Death had taken them all in former times] (2236b-2237a). As he completes the burial of the "ǣrgestrēona," the survivor laments:

Heald þū nū, hrūse,	nū hǣleð ne mōstan,
eorla ǣhte!	Hwæt, hyt ǣr on ðe
gōde begēaton;	gūðdeað fornam,
feorhbealo frēcne	fýra gehwylcne
lēoda mīnra	þāra ðe þis [līf] ofgeaf,
gesāwon seledrēam.	Nāh, hwa sweorð wege
oððe fe(o)r(mie)	fāted wāge,
dryncfæt dēore;	dug(uð) ellor s[c]ēoc.

Sceal se hearda helm	(hƿ)stedgolde,
fǣtum befeallen;	feormynd swefað,
þā ðe beadogriman	bywan sceoldon;
gē swylce seo herepād,	sio æt hilde gebād
ofer borda gebræc	bite irena,
brosnað æfter beorne.	Ne mæg byrnan hring
æfter wīgfruman	wīde fēran,
hæleðum be healfe.	Næs hearpan wyn,
gomen glēobēames,	nē gōd hafoc
geond sæl swingeð,	nē se swifta mearh
burhstede beateð.	Bealocwealm hafað
fela feorhcynna	forð onsended!'
Swā giomormōd	giohðo mænde
an æfter eallum,	unblīðe hwe(arf)
dages ond nihtes,	oð ðæt dēaðes wylm
hrān æt heortan.	

(2247-2270a)

[Now, earth, hold the property of earls, now that men cannot. Lo, brave men obtained it before from you; war-death took them, a terrible deadly evil took all the men of my people, who gave up this life. They saw joy in the hall. I have none who might carry the sword or who might polish the gold-plated vessel, the precious cup. The old warriors have departed elsewhere. The hardy helmet, adorned in gold, shall be bereft of its gold-plates; the polishers sleep who should polish the battle-mask; likewise the mail-coat, which in battle endured the bite of iron swords over the crashing shields, it decays after the men. Nor may the coat of mail widely go by the side of the warriors after the passing of the war-chiefs. There is no joy of harp, the joy of glee-wood, nor does the good hawk fly through the hall, nor the swift horse tramp the court. Baleful death has sent away many of the race of men.' So, sad of mind, uttering sorrow, alone after all the others, he unhappily moved about, day and night, until death's surging touched his heart.]

In the foregoing passage there are several elements which mark it as a representative, and particularly moving, elegy. It is significant that the scene opens with the poet's description of the "ǣrgestrēona" [ancient treasures], "swa hƿ on gēardagum . . . þær gehƿdde" [that he hid there in days gone by] (2233a, 2235b). This appeal to antiquity is sounded in

The Wanderer by the speaker's lament for his dead lord, whom "siþpan geara iu . . . / hrusan heolstre biwrah" [the darkness of the earth covered since former years] (22-23). The last survivor's reference to "geardagum" [in yome-days] and "ærran mælum" [in former times] testifies to the importance of the past in the elegy. In this elegy, as in all Old English elegies, the "geardagas" were days of joy and renown--in other words, the "Golden Age." The poet recalls the "sele dream" [hall-joy] and the "hearpan wyn" [joy of the harp], and the joys of battle and armor, all of which have passed away. In The Wanderer, the speaker recalls the happy days which are no more--"Wyn eal ge-dreas" [the joy has all perished] (36). The rulers lie low, "dreame bedroren" [bereft of joy] (79a), and the wanderer asks, "Hwær sindon seledreamas?" [Where are the hall-joys?] (93b).

The same sentiment is expressed in The Ruin:

meadoheall monig mondrēama full,
 oþ þæt þæt onwende wyrd sēo swiþe.⁴
 (23-24)
 [Many a mead hall was full of the
 joys of men, until Fate the mighty
 overturned that.]

Another ubi sunt theme the poet deals with in the last survivor's lament is that of death. Although this passage does not mourn an individual's death, it does deal with the survivor's lament for his friends, because "Ealle hīe deað fornam" [Death had taken them all] (2236b). He mourns:

⁴R. F. Leslie, ed., Three Old English Elegies (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961), p. 51. Subsequent references to The Ruin will be to this edition.

feorhbealo frēcne gūðdēað fornam,
 fýra gehwylcne
 lēoda mīnra þāra ðe þis [līf] ofgeaf
 (2249b-2251b)
 [War-death, the terrible evil, has taken every
 man of my people, who gave up this life.]

Here again the survivor's words recall ideas found in The Wanderer. The speaker becomes an exile because his lord dies; the days of joy are dead. This death theme appears more emphatically in The Ruin:

 Eorðgrāp hafað
 waldenwyrhtan, forweorone geleorene,
 heard gripe hrūsan, oþ hund cnēa
 werþēoda gewitan.
 (6b-9a)
 [The grasp of the earth, the stout grip of the
 ground, holds its mighty builders, who have
 perished and gone; till now a hundred generations
 of men have died.]

The Ruin poet next re-emphasizes the point: "swylt eall fornām secgrōf[ra] wera" [death swept away all the bravery of men] (26). The last survivor's final words parallel those previously cited from The Ruin. He mourns

 Bealocwealm hafa
 fela feorhcynna forð onsended!
 (2265b-2266)
 [Baleful death has sent forth many of
 the race of men.]

Much of the last survivor's sorrow stems from his loneliness; his state is a type of exile. He is called "an æfter eallum" (literally, "one after all," but rendered "the last left of all"), because death has taken every man of his people. There is no one left who can wield the sword or polish the golden vessel, because "dug(uð) ellor s[c]eoc" [the old warriors

elsewhere have departed] (2254b). That loneliness (or exile from the comitatus) was a condition dreaded by the Germanic warrior is a fact expressed in Old English elegies, especially in The Wanderer. The wanderer is "anhaga" [a solitary man] "eðle bidæled, / freomægum feor" [sundered from my native land, far from noble kinsmen] (20b-21a). The tragic condition of loneliness--often loneliness resulting from exile, which the Anglo-Saxon warrior feared most--can be understood best when one reconsiders the nature of the comitatus, which represented a familial unit, headed by the lord. The warrior who was a member of the comitatus received not only physical rewards, but also psychological and emotional security. To have been cast out of the comitatus or to have lost the benefits of comradeship undoubtedly was for the warrior a horrible punishment, to judge by the appearance of this motif in The Wanderer and in Beowulf.

Finally, a distinctive feature in the "Last Survivor" passage is its philosophical commentary on the mutability of man and his achievements, expressed by the poet's use of such "traditional" motifs as the "Golden Age" ideal, the ubi sunt ("hwær cwom"), and the sic transit gloria motifs, all intricately related. With a profound regret and sorrow the last survivor mourns the end of a noble race; the poet of The Ruin describes with regret the ruined city; and the wanderer mourns his sorry fate:

Hēr bið feoh lāne, hēr bið freond lāne,
 hēr bið mon lāne, hēr bið mæg lāne;
 Eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð
 (Wanderer, 108-110)

[Here possessions are transitory, here friendship is transitory, here man is transitory, here woman is transitory; all this firm-set earth becomes empty.]

This theme appears in the "Elegy of the Last Survivor" with the realization that the "ǣrgestrēona" has far outlasted the race of men to whom it once belonged.

The "grieving father" passage related by Beowulf (2444-2462) also manifests the elegiac tone, although it is not as broad in scope as that of the earlier elegiac passage:

Swā bið geōmorlic gomelum ceorle
 to gebīdanne, þæt his byre rīde
 giog on galgan; þonne hē gyd wrece,
 sarigne sang, þonne his sunu hangað
 hrefne tō hrōðre, ond hē him helpe ne mæg
 eald ond infrōd ænige gefremman.
 Symble bið gemyndgad morna gehwylce
 eaforan ellorsīð; ðores ne gýmeð
 tō gebīdanne burgum in innan
 yrfewardas, þonne se ān hafað
 þurh dēaðes nýd dāda gefondad.
 Gesyhð sorhcearig on his suna būre
 wīnsele wēstne, windge reste
 rēote berofene,-- rīdend swefað,
 hæleð in hoðman; nis þār hearpan swēg,
 gomen in geardum, swylce ðār iu wāron.
 Gewīteð þonne on sealman, sorhlēoðgaleð
 ān æfter ānum; þūhte him eall tō rūm,
 wongas ond wīcstede.

(2444-2462)

[So it is sad for an aged man to experience, that his son should young swing on the gallows; then he utters a tale, a mournful song, when his son hangs as a joy for the raven, and he, aged and full of years, can not give him any help. Ever he is reminded each morning of his son's death; he does not care to await another heir in the court, when the one has experienced evil deeds by means of death's distress. Sorrowfully he beholds in his son's home the wasted wine-hall, a windy resting-place bereft of joy--the horsemen sleep, the heroes in graves; there is no

music of the harp, mirth in the courts, as there was before. He goes then to his bed, sings a song of sorrow one man for another; all seemed to him too spacious, his fields and home.]

This elegy is occasioned by the death of the father's first born son; thus it is narrower in its application to all men, and does not attain the "generalization" to which Leslie calls attention in his introduction to The Wanderer.⁵ It is, however, unmistakably elegiac. This passage concerns the death of and lamentation for someone dear, an only son who swings on the gallows. The old man's remembrance of former, happier years in the hall, when his son was younger and full of vigor, feeds his sorrow, for now the hall is a "windge reste / rēote berofene" (2456b-2457a) [windy resting place bereft of joy]. The poet states further

gomen in gearðum,	nis þār hearpan swēg, swylce ðār iū wāron. (2458b-2459)
[there is no sound of harp, mirth in the courts, as there was before]	

Present in the passage are the "Golden Age" theme and the ubi sunt motif, in addition to the father's overwhelming grief and regret.

It was Tolkien's assertion that the first 3136 lines of Beowulf are a "prelude to a dirge" (BMC, p. 34). The forty-third canto (3137-3182) indeed records the funeral and eulogy of Beowulf. Yet Tolkien said that the entire work is an elegy. There appear clues within the poem which suggest the poet's

⁵Leslie, The Wanderer, p. 2.

purpose may have been to write an heroic elegy. One of them is Wiglaf's prophecy to the cowards who fled Beowulf's side at the dragon fight, in which he foretells doom to the Geatish people (2864-2891). Another clue appears in the last canto, which includes the old prophetess's words at Beowulf's funeral. According to the passage, she

(song) sorgcearig sǣde geneahhe,
 þæt hīo hyre (hearmda)gas hearde (ondrē)de,
 wæffylla worn (wīgen)des egesan,
 hȳ[n]ðo (ond) h(æftnȳ)d.

(3152-3155)

[sang in sadness a dirge, declared heavily that she sorely dreaded the onset of evil days, many slayings, a warrior's terror, his humiliation and captivity.]

Thus it is that the poet of Beowulf was viewing an earlier, heroic age, a Geatish "Golden Age" dominated by Beowulf, which came to an end soon after the death of the great hero. The Geatish kingdom apparently was either in decay or had been long dead at the time of the poet's writing or singing. Tolkien had suggested that the theme of Beowulf should be "lif is læne: eal scæcað leoht and lif somod" [life is transitory: everything passes away, light and life together] (BMC, p. 16). Tolkien would agree with a recent critic's comment that the unknown Beowulf poet reared the entire structure of the kingdom of the Geats to be destroyed, "that we may regret it."⁶

The presence of similar elements in Lord of the Rings and Badwulf suggests that the author's intent and the perspective

⁶Parker, p. 609.

presented in the trilogy are exactly the same as Tolkien perceived them to be in Beowulf. This study has asserted that Tolkien borrowed Anglo-Saxon elements exemplified in the heroic poem and reworked them to produce in Lord of the Rings a tale owing to Beowulf, though not directly corresponding to it. This observation is particularly supported by Tolkien's use of the Anglo-Saxon elegy. There appear isolated elegiac passages within the main story of the trilogy, as in Beowulf, and the whole work is an elegy, like its Anglo-Saxon model.

For the purpose of classification, the isolated elegiac passages generally fall into two categories: those which are peripheral to the main story, and those which are fundamental. Tolkien apparently inserted the peripheral elegies to broaden coverage of Middle-earth's diversified civilizations, while he added the elegies which concern matters directly bearing upon the main story to add depth to the tale.

Among the peripheral elegies, several are particularly moving. The "Tale of Tinuviel" (I, 258-261) is, in Aragorn's words, "a fair tale, though it is sad." It tells of the meeting of the man Beren and Luthien, an immortal Elf, the daughter of an Elven-king. Their love story is bound up in the great war over the Silmarils, the three "brightest of all jewels," between the Great Enemy Morgoth and the alliance of Elves and Men. Together Beren and Luthien conspired to steal one of the Silmarils from the iron crown of Morgoth. The Enemy was later overthrown, but Beren was killed, leaving his immortal lover to mourn him.

Luthien forsook her immortality to join him in death. The tale ends on a happy note, though, since the two lovers are joined in the after-life, but it is fraught with sorrow because of Beren's untimely death and Luthien's sad choice to join him.

Bilbo's song of Earendil (I, 308-311), the longest and among the best of the poems in the trilogy, recalls The Wanderer in some respects. It relates the wanderings of the mariner Earendil who, with the power of the Silmaril, came to the Blessed Realm across the Sea, where "speaking as an ambassador of both Elves and Men [he] obtained the help by which Morgoth was overthrown" (III, 389). However, Earendil was not permitted to return to mortal lands, and his ship bearing the Silmaril was set to sail the heavens as a star, as the song relates:

But on him mighty doom was laid,
till Moon should fade, an orb'd star
to pass, and tarry never more
on Hither Shores where mortals are.
(I, 311)

Here is described the doom of wandering as an exile, sundered from land and companions, which was especially horrifying in The Wanderer. Even before the doom of eternal exile was laid on him, Earendil is characterized as one who "wandered far from northern strands;" and "fled / from west to east and errandless" (ll. 22, 34-35), descriptions which may suggest the influence of The Wanderer.

Another peripheral elegy in the trilogy is the poem and story of Durin, the legendary forefather of the ancient kingdom of the Dwarves (I, 411-413). The story's descriptions

resemble those of the "Last Survivor" passage in Beowulf. When the Ring company passes through the mountain kingdom of Moria, Gimli is moved to sing of his ancient kinsman, Durin. The first thirty-six lines of the song tell of the splendor in ancient Moria, against which the last six lines contrast sharply:

The world is grey, the mountains old,
The forge's fire is ashen-cold;
No harp is wrung, no hammer falls:
The darkness dwells in Durin's halls;
The shadow lies upon his tomb
In Moria, in Khazad-dum.

(37-42)

This passage contains the "Golden Age" motif--the death and decay of the present contrasted to the glory of the former years--and the sorrow and regret inherent in the poem's lament. The yearning of the Dwarves to regain their lost kingdom of Moria is a strain which runs throughout Lord of the Rings.

Another among the peripheral elegies in the trilogy is the haunting story of the Ents and the Entwives, recounted by Treebeard (II, 99-102). A sad tale of the failing and finally lost love of the Ents and their Entwives, it is an elegy sung by the Elves, for, according to Treebeard, "It was never an Entish song, mark you: it would have been a very long song in Entish! But we know it by heart, and hum it now and again" (II, 101). The Elvish song itself is not strictly elegiac, but the story Treebeard tells to supplement it is certainly elegiac in nature. He recalls the happier, earlier days: "When the world was young and the woods were wide and wild, the Ents and the Entwives . . . walked together and they housed together" (II, 99). But the

Ents tended to the hills and forests, while the Entwives cared for the gardens and meadows. Soon they were more apart than together. When they were forced further apart by the wars of the Elder Days, the Ents lost the Entwives forever, and the beautiful gardens of the Entwives were wasted by the ravages of Sauron: "Men call them the Brown Lands now," Treebeard relates. Not only do the Ents lament their lost wives; their present condition is even more serious--their race is dying. Because there have been no Entwives for ages, there are no young Ents. They are a doomed race caught up in the ravages of a senseless war.

The elegies in Lord of the Rings most like their Anglo-Saxon models, however, are those which are sung by Men, specifically those of the warrior kingdoms of Gondor and Rohan. One of these is the lament Aragorn and Legolas compose for their fallen comrade Boromir (II, 23-24). Not only the elegy conforms to its Anglo-Saxon model but also the funeral rites observed by Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli (II, 21-22). Specifically, the setting adrift of the funeral boat containing the dead hero and his weapons conforms to the custom presented in Beowulf, 32-52.

The Men of Rohan owe much of their characterization to the Anglo-Saxons: their names are most often Anglo-Saxon words, their customs and culture derive from those of the Anglo-Saxons, and their poetry is inspired by Anglo-Saxon models. The poem on King Theoden's ride to Minas Tirith (III, 92) is rich in

alliteration and battle imagery. Theoden's fall in battle before the Gates of Mordor inspires the elegy sung by people in Rohan long after. It begins

We heard of the horns in the hills ringing,
 the swords shining in the South-kingdom.
 Steeds went striding to the Stoningland
 as wind in the morning. War was kindled.
 There Theoden fell, Thengling mighty,
 to his golden halls and green pastures
 in the Northern fields never returning,
 high lord of the host. . . .

(III, 153)

Theoden's death makes bitter-sweet for Rohan their participation in the crushing defeat of Sauron's realm. For the Rohirrim it was a victory dearly bought, full of sadness.

The nearest Tolkien approaches an Anglo-Saxon elegy is the following poem on Eorl the Young, who founded the Kingdom of Rohan:

Where now the horse and the rider? Where is the horn
 that was blowing?
 Where is the Helm and the hauberk, and the bright
 hair flowing?
 Where is the hand on the harpstring, and the red
 fire glowing?
 Where is the spring and the harvest and the tall
 corn growing?
 They have passed like rain on the mountain,
 like a wind in the meadow;
 The days have gone down in the West behind the
 hills into shadow.
 Who shall gather the smoke of the dead wood
 burning,
 Or behold the flowing years from the sea returning?

(II, 142-143)

To this Aragorn adds, "Thus spoke a forgotten poet long ago in Rohan, recalling how tall and fair was Eorl the Young, who rode down out of the North. . . ." (II, 143). This poem seems to be

a conscious echo of the ubi sunt or "Hwær cwom" passage in

The Wanderer:

Hwær cwōm mearg? Hwær cwōm mago?
 Hwær cwōm maððumgyfa?
 Hwær cwōm symbles gesetu? Hwær sindon
 seledreamas?
 Eala beorht bune! Eala byrnwiga!
 Eala þeodnes þrym! Hū sēo þrag gewat,
 genap under nihthelm swā heo no wāre.
 (92-96)

[Where went the horse, where went the warrior?
 Where went the treasure-giver? Where went
 the seats of the feasts? Where are the hall-joys?
 Alas the bright cups, alas the mail-coated
 warriors, alas the majesty of the lord! How the
 time went, vanished under the night cover, as if
 it had never been.]

Comparison of the two poems demands little, if any, commentary.

Quite obviously Tolkien had The Wanderer, 92-96, in mind when he was composing the elegy "Where now the horse and the rider?"

However important may seem the peripheral elegies in Lord of the Rings, they are of small significance within the work when they are regarded in the context of Tolkien's overall use of the elegiac mood. Doubtless his express intention was that Lord of the Rings be written and regarded as an heroic elegy, in the same manner as its Anglo-Saxon model Beowulf. There are several elegies within the narrative which suggest this observation. Interwoven within the tale is the significant historical background of the Elder Days, the First and Second Ages of Middle-earth. One of the distinguishing marks of Tolkien's work is that it does not present a unilateral time-scheme. It continually looks to the past as it bears upon the present and possibly upon the future. David Miller has

recognized this time-relationship in an important study, in which he says of Tolkien, "Essentially he sees the world as deteriorating, moving ever further from the 'Uttermost West' where resides the 'One.' The history of Middle-earth is, as Galadriel says, a 'long defeat' which must be fought lest worse turn to worst."⁷

When Frodo first learns of the import of "his" Ring, Gandalf provides for him a rough outline of the first War of the Ring, which culminated in the end of the Second Age. He advises, "That is a chapter of ancient history which it might be good to recall; for there was sorrow then too, and gathering dark, but great valour, and great deeds that were not wholly vain" (I, 83). The Second Age, which itself had lost the splendor and glory of the Eden-like First Age (see Appendices A and B in Return of the King), nevertheless is to the Third Age a kind of "Golden Age" of valor, in which the great alliance of the powerful Men of Westerosse and the great Elves defeated Sauron and took possession of the Ring. Yet the price of that victory was the loss of Gil-galad, the Elven-king, and Elendil, king of Westerosse, and later Isildur, Elendil's son, who had cut the Ring from Sauron's hand. A lay of the Elves, The Fall of Gil-galad, captures the elegiac strain:

Gil-galad was an Elven-king.
Of him the harpers sadly sing;

⁷David Miller, "The Moral Universe of J. R. R. Tolkien," Mankato State Studies in English, 2 (February 1967), 52.

the last whose realm was fair and free
between the Mountains and the Sea. . . .

But long ago he rode away,
and where he dwelleth none can say;
for into darkness fell his star
in Mordor where the shadows are.

(I, 250)

At the Council in Rivendell Elrond spends the greater part of the morning recounting the events of the Second Age:

A part of his tale was known to some there, but the full tale to none, and many eyes were turned to Elrond in fear and wonder as he told of the Elven-smiths of Eregion and their friendship with Moria, and their eagerness for knowledge, by which Sauron ensnared them.

(I, 318)

The magnitude and depth of that tale, which took several hours to tell, is nowhere within the confines of the narrative, although relevant parts of it are revealed from time to time, and thus the reader tends to undervalue its importance to the present action. However, when one examines the detailed history Tolkien provides in Appendices A and B, he will understand the importance of the earlier Ages to the present situation in Middle-earth. Then he becomes aware of the meaning of decay imagery in Lord of the Rings.

There is indeed much "waste-land" imagery in Tolkien's work. Elrond, who has seen three ages of the world, is sadly aware of his present world's decay. Recalling the great times of battle in ancient days, he rather wistfully says, "Never again shall there be any such league of Elves and Men; for Men multiply and the Rixstborn decrease, and the two kindreds are

estranged. And ever since that day the race of Numenor has decayed, and the span of their years has lessened" (I, 320).

Other ancient races have decayed, too. As the Ring company feels its way through the blackness of Moria, the ancient kingdom of the Dwarves, Gimli tells Sam, "This is the great realm and city of the Dwarrowdelf. And of old it was not darksome but full of light and splendour, as is still remembered in our songs" (I, 411). Earlier, at the gates of entrance into Moria, Gandalf, speaking of the lost friendship between Elves and Dwarves, had said, "Those were happier days, when there was still close friendship at times between folk of different races, even between Dwarves and Elves" (I, 395). It is clear, then, that the Dwarves once enjoyed a "Golden Age" of splendor, to which the decay of the present age is contrasted.

The kingdoms of Men in Middle-earth also are in a state of decay. In the land of Rohan, when Aragorn, Gandalf, Legolas, and Gimli approach Meduseld, Theoden's golden hall, the following conversation takes place between Aragorn and Legolas:

'Many long lives of men it is since the golden hall was built.'
 'Five hundred times have the red leaves fallen in Mirkwood in my home since then,' said Legolas, 'and but a little while does that seem to us.'
 'But to the Riders of the Mark it seems so long ago,' said Aragorn, 'that the raising of this house is but a memory of song, and the years before are lost in the mist of time.'

(II, 142)

Tolkien reinforces the image of decay as the travellers arrive in the court. Tapestries hang from the walls of Meduseld,

and over their wide spaces marched figures of ancient legend, some dim with years, some darkling in the shade. But upon one form the sunlight fell: a young man upon a white horse. He was blowing a great horn, and his yellow hair was flying in the wind. The horse's head was lifted, and its nostrils were wide and red as it neighed, smelling battle afar. Foaming water, green and white, rushed and curled about its knees.

'Behold Eorl the Young!' said Aragorn.
'Thus he rode out of the North to the Battle of the Field of Celebrant.'

(II, 148)

The valorous deeds of Eorl nearly five hundred years earlier and the splendour of newly-built Meduseld hardly could have been equalled or approached in Theoden's time.

The most decayed of the realms of Men are those which continued the line of Numenor in Middle-earth, the kingdoms of Arnor and Gondor. Of Arnor little is said within the tale, yet enough information is provided by Tolkien that one can draw a picture of its downfall. Speaking of Arnor, Elrond says,

In the North after the war and slaughter of the Gladden Fields the Men of Westnesse were diminished, and their city of Annuminas beside Lake Evendim fell into ruin; and the heirs of Valandil removed and dwelt at Fornost on the high North Downs, and that now too is desolate. Men call it Deadmen's Dike, and they fear to tread there. For the folk of Arnor dwindled, and their foes devoured them, and their lordship passed, leaving only green mounds in the grassy hills.

(I, 320-321)

Aragorn and the band of nomadic men called the Dunedain are all that is left of the line of Arnor in Middle-earth. In Appendix A Tolkien says of them:

It was the pride and wonder of the Northern Line that, though their power departed and their people dwindled, through all the many generations the succession was unbroken from father to son. Also, though the length of the lives of the Dunedain grew ever less in Middle-earth . . . many of the chieftains of the North still lived to twice the age of Men, and far beyond the days of even the oldest of us.

(III, 402)

Though some of the majesty of ancient Numenor was retained in the longevity of their descendants in the North, the descendants of Arnor still remember the lost glories of their Golden Ages in Numenor and in Middle-earth through the line of Elendil and Isildur.

Gondor too owes its lineage to Numenor. Elrond says of it, "In the South the realm of Gondor long endured; and for a while its splendour grew, recalling somewhat of the might of Numenor, ere it fell" (I, 321). Yet Elrond adds that Gondor too has fallen from its old glories. There is no king on the throne in Gondor; the kingdom has been ruled by Stewards in the absence of the heir to the throne for "many lives of men" (I, 321). Tolkien uses extensive decay imagery in his descriptions of the physical, political, and spiritual aspects of Gondor, Minas Tirith (its chief city), and Denethor, Steward of the city. His purpose seems to be to evoke a sense of sadness and regret over Gondor's lost and waning heritage. This purpose is evident from his first description of Minas Tirith.

Pippin gazed in growing wonder at the great stone city, vaster and more splendid than anything that he had dreamed of. . . . Yet it was in truth falling year by year into decay; and already it

lacked half the men that could have dwelt at ease there. In every street they passed some great house or court over whose doors and arched gates were carved many fair letters of strange and ancient shapes; names Pippin guessed of great men and kindreds that had once dwelt there; and yet now they were silent, and no footsteps rang on their wide pavements, nor voice was heard in their halls, nor any face looked out from door or empty window.

(III, 26)

In the midst of the court in Minas Tirith there stands a white tree beside a pool, symbolic of Gondor's waning power:

drooping over the pool stood a dead tree, and the falling drops dripped sadly from its barren and broken branches into the clear water . . . it looked mournful. . . .

(II, 27)

Inside the great hall, the overwhelming mood is one of solemnity, sadness, and desolation:

No hangings nor storied webs, nor any things of woven stuff or of wood, were to be seen in that long solemn hall; but between the pillars there stood a silent company of tall images graven in stone.

Suddenly Pippin was reminded of the hewn rocks of Argonath, and awe fell on him, as he looked down that avenue of kings long dead. At the far end upon a dais of many steps was set a high throne under a canopy of marble shaped like a crowned helm. . . . But the throne was empty.

(II, 28)

These passages and many others show that much of Tolkien's Middle-earth is in a state of decay and is continually dying the further it is sundered from ancient days. For nearly all the free peoples of Middle-earth the war against Sauron represents an appeal to renew the glories of the past in an effort to avoid its complete obliteration under Sauron's dominion.

Their elegiac view toward the past fuels their present effort, and much of the desolation of Middle-earth ends, in part a result of the renewed valor that the glorious past effects.

The process of decay is forestalled, even reversed, at the tale's end. As a result of Sauron's complete annihilation Rohan flourished anew, the King reigns and the White Tree blooms in Gondor, the ancient kingdom of Arnor is established, the Dwarves re-enter and cleanse Moria, and even the Shire is rejuvenated. All peoples in Middle-earth become blessed, and peace reigns. A new Golden Age is ushered in, which all will remember in the future as a truly happy time--all, that is, except the Elves.

For the Elves and Half-Elven folk of Lothlorien and Rivendell the story of Lord of the Rings is fraught with sorrow. It is ironic that they, who have provided much of the counsel and spiritual guidance to the major characters and who really may be responsible for the destruction of the One Ring and the final victory over Sauron, stand to lose everything in Middle-earth as a result of that victory. They have little choice. If Sauron regains control of the One Ring, everything wrought with the help of the Elves' Three Rings of Power would be laid bare to Sauron's corrupt designs, yet the destruction of the Ruling Ring could mean that everything wrought with the help of the Three Rings might also pass away. Elrond once voices this opinion:

But maybe when the One has gone, the Three will fail, and many fair things will fade and be forgotten. That is my belief.

(I, 352)

But the Elves altruistically view the distressful situation:

'Yet all the Elves are willing to endure this chance,' said Glorfindel, 'if by it the power of Sauron may be broken, and the fear of his dominion be taken away for ever.'

(I, 352)

Elrond's fear becomes justified: Mortal Men gain by the victory over Sauron, but the immortal Elves must pass away from Middle-earth, they and their works to be forever forgotten. Two passages show this. Celeborn and Galadriel meet Treebeard in a forest after Sauron's defeat, and Treebeard, who is sensitive to their doom, says, "'It is sad that we should meet only thus at the ending. For the world is changing: I feel it in the water, I feel it in the earth, and I smell it in the air. I do not think we shall meet again'" (III, 320-321). Later in their travels, the company in which Celeborn and Galadriel are riding overtakes Saruman, the broken wizard. In cruel mocking he addresses himself to the Elves, and gloats, "You have doomed yourselves, and you know it. And it will afford me some comfort as I wander to think that you pulled down your own house when you destroyed mine" (III, 323).

The Three Rings pass away and the Elves depart from Middle-earth for the Blessed Realm, Bilbo, Frodo, and Gandalf in their company. Yet the full realization of sadness at the disappearance of "many fair things" is never developed within

the tale itself. One must turn to the appendices, particularly to the fragment from the "Tale of Aragorn and Arwen" (Appendix A, v) to realize the full significance of Elrond's prophecy that "many fair things will fade and be forgotten." Arwen, Elrond's daughter, who had renounced her immortal state as an Elf to marry and remain in Middle-earth with Aragorn, lives to see her husband die. Grieving, she forsakes Gondor and journeys to Lorien, formerly the land in Middle-earth where "the ancient things still lived on in the waking world" and the land on which "no shadow lay" (I, 453). However, in the once-blessed land in which she used to dwell the trees faded, and after the departure of the Elves "the land was silent" (III, 428). Tolkien's words concerning her death in Lorien may also be applied to the Elves as a race: "and all the days of her life are utterly forgotten by men that come after, and elanor and niphredil [beautiful flowers that grew only in Lorien] bloom no more east of the Sea" (III, 428). Lord of the Rings is, then, an elegy and a eulogy for the Elves.

Critics have argued the meaning and purpose of the trilogy, some seeing Free Will as a major concern of Tolkien's,⁸ and others viewing the "raw struggle between Good and Evil" as the major theme.⁹ Other critics have isolated the familiar

⁸Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Power and Meaning in The Lord of the Rings," in Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil D. Isaacs (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 81.

⁹Edmund Fuller, "The Lord of the Hobbits," in Books With Men Behind Them (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 178.

Quest theme,¹⁰ the concept of the hero,¹¹ or the readily apparent Christian elements. None of the critics seem to be willing to admit that the author's purpose in telling the tale could be as uncomplicated as Douglass Parker's assertion that

it is the story of the end of an age, an age which the author has gone to a fantastic amount of effort to make specific, to make real. And it is from the varied reactions of races and individuals to this end and to other ends of other ages, past and future, that the meaning of the work arises.¹²

What is remarkable about Parker's assessment of Lord of the Rings is that it bears a striking resemblance to Tolkien's assessment of Beowulf, especially to the following statements:

The author of Beowulf showed forth the permanent value of that pietas which treasures the memory of man's struggles in the dark past. . . . When new Beowulf was already antiquarian, in a good sense, and it now produces a singular effect. For it is now to us itself ancient; and yet its maker was telling of things already old and weighted with regret, and he expended his art in making keen that touch upon the heart which sorrows have that are both poignant and remote.

(BMC, pp. 22, 34)

The passages above provide the key for explaining why Tolkien added in the Appendices the almost irritatingly detailed historical information concerning the Three Ages of Middle-earth. Simply stated, his purpose was to write an elegiac work, an observation strongly supported by evidence in the following dialogue

¹⁰W. H. Auden, "The Quest Hero," Texas Quarterly, 4 (Winter 1961), 81-93.

¹¹Marion Zimmer Bradley, "Men, Halflings, and Hero Worship," in Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil D. Isaacs (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), pp. 109-127.

¹²Parker, p. 603.

between Gandalf and Aragorn:

And Gandalf said: "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 is also ended. And all the lands that you see, and those that lie round about them, shall be the dwellings of Men. For the time comes of the dominion of Men, and the Elder Kindred shall fade or depart."

'I know it well, dear friend,' said Aragorn, 'but I would still have your counsel.'

'Not for long now,' said Gandalf. 'The Third Age was my age. I was the Enemy of Sauron; and my work is finished. I shall go soon. The burden must lie now upon you and your kindred.'

(III, 307-308)

All that Gandalf says in the foregoing passage becomes fulfilled eventually, and his prophecy is realized in the Prologue by the author's declaration that "Those days, the Third Age of Middle-earth, are now long past, and the shape of all lands has been changed" (I, 21). Obviously, the evidence points toward the conclusion that the purpose of Lord of the Rings is to present in elegiac form the end of an age.

Finally, Tolkien's purpose for Lord of the Rings may be deduced from the books' supposed origin in the fictional Red Book of Westmarch, of which Tolkien speaks in Fellowship of the Ring, pp. 37-39. In a description which parallels that of the Winchester Chronicle, the author postulates the probable origin and compilation of the Red Book, informing the reader that "the original Red Book has not been preserved, but many copies were made" (I, 37). In Appendix F, II, "On Translation," he rather pedantically details the process of rendering the Common Speech

used by the Hobbits in their annals into modern English. Also, the title page of each volume even contains the legend, "The Lord of the Rings, translated from the Red Book," written in runic letters, a clear indication to the reader that, even before beginning the story, he must assume that he is at several removes from the original manuscripts. Thus, he is looking at an age so remote and hopelessly lost to modern man that he is expected to feel at once a sense of joy at the triumph which signalled the end of the Third Age, and a sense of sorrow and regret that the beauty and nobility of the Eldar were lost forever to the Fourth Age. For now, as the reader knows, dwarves and elves are to men only legends or fairy stories. For a summary of the meaning of the trilogy, one should turn again to Parker, who said

Like the kingdom of the Geats, Tolkien's whole marvelous, intricate structure has been reared to be destroyed, that we may regret it . . . and for this meaning, the heroic elegiac meaning of The Lord of the Rings, we may well use the words that Tolkien himself borrowed from Widsith and applied to Beowulf: "Lif is læne: eal scæceð, leoht ond lif so-mod"--"Life is fleeting: everything passes away, light and life together."¹³

One should now be able to see how inseparable were Tolkien's art and his literary criticism, especially during the period (1936-1937) when he was composing the Beowulf essay and publishing The Hobbit, which he was to call in the trilogy a "selection from the Red Book of Westmarch" (I, 19). Much of his critical view of Beowulf found its way into his developing fictional chronicle of Middle-earth, an assessment clearly

¹³Parker, p. 609.

apparent by regarding the trilogy through the medium of the landmark Beowulf essay. Tolkien recognized the artistic use of historical perspective in the Anglo-Saxon poem, a technique he was to use in Lord of the Rings. The Northern concept of the natures of Good and Evil he incorporated in the trilogy. And the basic theme of Beowulf, "Lif is læne, eal scæceð," he made the theme of Lord of the Rings.

Tolkien called Beowulf "an heroic-elegy"; so too is his trilogy. Parker has stated that Tolkien essentially recreated Beowulf when he wrote Lord of the Rings. More specifically, he has recreated the values, the moods, and the theme of the Anglo-Saxon poem--he has recreated in more complex form what Beowulf is about, i. e., the impermanence and the futility of man's existence. Even though Beowulf in dying slew the dragon, it is clear that evil was not destroyed. Only one heroic man died, and great calamity would ensue shortly for the Geatish nation. And even though the Third Age ended in better-sweet victory and ushered in a new Golden Age, one knows that the War of the Ring was not a war to end all wars, for the Fourth Age is the Age of the dominion of Man. This, then, is the kinship to be found between Beowulf and Lord of the Rings.

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