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**Ideology in *The Lord of the Rings*:
a Marxist Analysis**

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Abstract

Ideology in *The Lord of the Rings*: a Marxist analysis

A Marxist analysis of *The Lord of the Rings* reveals two major insights: firstly, Tolkien defends class division, one based on inheritance and, secondly, within the battles and courtly love themes, there is an embedded Catholicism.

Tolkien's formative years were marked by a decline in aristocratic values and, compounded by his experience of war, he lamented the passing of Edwardian England through myth. As with some Romantics and Pre-Raphaelites before him, he yearned for a pre-industrial past: this is evident when he compares the 'furnace' of the Dark Tower, with the 'woods and little rivers of the Shire'.

Fundamentally, however, Tolkien rejects the modern because its more rational approach to man's condition presented a serious challenge to his conservative, Catholic beliefs: when social relations become more developed, they undermine and contradict religion more sharply.

Tolkien's defence of lineage and hierarchy is expressed in his creation of Middle-earth, which is rigidly organised. Only the 'great' are capable of important deeds, and so it is the lords among men, the 'high' elves, and the wizard, Gandalf, representative of Eru, or God, who decide upon 'the perils of the world'; the 'lesser' figures, such as Gaffer Gamgee in the Shire – based on rural England – engage in pub triviality in *The Ivy Bush*. Within the Shire itself, there is a social structure, too, with its hobbits from 'poor families', and those of a higher status, such as Bilbo, and Frodo, the Ringbearer.

For Tolkien, the storyteller is a 'sub-creator' who assists in the enrichment of the Christian creation story, and he combines the fairy-tale aspects of his fantasy to the Gospels. His story encompasses the Seven Deadly Sins, and the themes of resurrection, pity, and trust in God.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Roma and Alex

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Notes on the text

Biblical references are taken from the following: the six volumes of the Old Testament: Holy Bible (1661) (London: Murray, 1880) and the three volumes of the New Testament: Holy Bible (1661) (Murray) London 1881.

Capitalisation of Him, His, and He refers to the Christian God and no other; references to other gods or 'prophets' are not capitalised.

The text is set in 12pt Arial and spacing is set at 1.5 lines, with footnotes at 10pt Arial single line spacing. Quotations of four lines or more are indented and set in the same font and size as the rest of the text with single line spacing.

Emphasis by way of italics is mine unless in quotation marks or paraphrased.

The text is written in British English; citations that use other versions of English or English spelling, have been left in their original form.

The use of 'man' throughout the text denotes Anglo-Saxon 'man', meaning 'person', that is, male and female, for ease of reading. It is understood by all readers and avoids the ungroomed use of men/women or men/women/children, he/she, him/her, his/hers. It is clear in the text where male or female is meant specifically.

The latest edition of Tolkien's *Letters* appeared in 2006. Citations from that source appear throughout these chapters with the year of publication (plus the page number) in order to avoid a repetition of *Letters*. Likewise, any 1988 reference to Tolkien refers to his lecture 'On Fairy-Stories', while that of 1977 refers to *The Silmarillion*.

References to *The Lord of the Rings* are taken from the HarperCollins (London) edition of 1993, published in three parts: *The Fellowship of the Ring* (part I); *The Two Towers* (part II); and *The Return of the Ring* (part III).

Marxist Literary Theory

Art and literature were part of the very air Marx breathed

- Eagleton *Marxism and Literary Criticism*

Marx's own literary technique

Marxist literary theory considers that if art is intrinsic to society as society is to art, in what way is it intrinsic? This thesis, while considering other ideas in addition to Tolkien's religious ideology, attempts an objective defence of the Marxist theory of the materialist conception of history to shed light on possible answers to this question.

Marxism has been at the centre of debates in literary theory for the past century, although Marx and Engels never wrote a formal theory of literature. Their writings are fragmented and inconclusive, and do 'not amount to a theory of literature or even to a theory of the relations between literature and society'. Nevertheless, their literary perspective, held together by their materialist conception of history, was 'coherent' (Wellek 1983: 238-9).

In his own polemics, Marx borrowed from the literature of the past and present and, in particular, he warmed towards Heine, Aeschylus, and Shakespeare: Heine's essay on Ludwig Marcus speaks of 'that fraternal union of the workers of all lands',¹ from which Marx appears to have concluded *The Communist Manifesto*: "Proletarians of all lands, unite!" (1930: 68), while in *Capital I*, the speeches of Goethe's Mephistopheles feature prominently to link 'evil' capitalism with diabolism. Occasionally, Marx calls upon *The Merchant of Venice* to make his point: in *Capital I*, he notes that employers resorted to 'legal

1 Similarly, Marx's term *Lumpenproletariat* to denote criminals, whores, social scum, and beggars seems to have been borrowed from Heine who speaks in his *French Connections* (19th April 1832) of Parisian *Lumpensammler* (rag-pickers). *Lumpen* suggests not only rags, but rogues (Prawer 1976: 202).

dodges' to avoid the 1844 Factory Act which restricted the hours of child labour and, alluding to Shakespeare's money-grubbing Jew, he likens them to a 'Shylock who clings to the letter of the law' (2003: 273).

Marx appropriates passages, phrases, and well-known quotations to add weight to his own views as in 'not something but *everything* is rotten in this state of Denmark' (*Collected Works* 1983: 21).² Likewise, in quoting from *Timon of Athens*, who defined money as the "common whore of mankind" (IV, iii. 43), Marx explains that money is the great leveller (*Capital I* 2003: 132). Thus, Marx uses literature to expose the deficiencies of capitalism, and to help build and reinforce his own outlook which pointed to a better future for the vast majority of the population. Marx is not always concerned with the context in which Shakespeare's protagonists speak, but their meaning is important. *Timon* is immediately followed in *Capital* by Sophocles' *Antigone*: "Money! Nothing worse in our lives, so corrupt, rampant, so corrupting" (1982: 73). Also in *Capital I*, Marx dramatises money and commodities which love one another, but as Lysander informs Hermia, 'the course of true love never did run smooth' (2003: 113).³ Marx offers them their own roles on stage to reinforce what he calls the 'fetishism of commodities' whereby commodities, including money, "appear as independent beings endowed with life" (2003: 77).

Marx employs rhetoric, imagery, metaphor, and parody, and changes original text to suit his purposes. In June 1848, Marx and Engels established the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*,⁴ and in one article⁵ Marx labelled Camphausen, the Prussian *Ministerpräsident*, 'the thinking friend of history' (*Collected Works* 1977: 30), a reference to the subtitle of von Rotteck's popular history book.⁶

2 Letter to Engels 24th January 1852; compare *Hamlet* I, iv. 89-90.

3 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* I, i, 134.

4 Published until 19th May 1849 when Marx had its final edition printed in a defiant red.

5 2nd June 1848.

6 *Allgemeine Geschichte vom Anfang der historischen Kenntniß bis auf unsere Zeiten. Für denkende Geschichtsfreunde bearbeitet von Karl von Rotteck* (Freiburg 1834).

Further into the article, he mocks Camphausen with an inverted allusion to *Richard III*: ‘A kingdom for a doctrine! A *doctrine* for a kingdom!’ (*Collected Works* 1977: 30).⁷ Similarly, he uses the mock-heroic tone of *Don Quixote* to draw parallels with his opponents as in his *The Great Men in Exile* (1852), aimed at discrediting German *émigrés* in England. He employs theatrical allusion, too: “Hegel remarks somewhere that all great, world-historical facts and personages occur, as it were, twice. He has forgotten to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce” (1934: 10).

Authors and class

For Marx, a writer ought to present his fictional characters as real and largely representative of the class to which they belong at any given historical period: a scowling murderer should speak like a scowling murderer regardless of the author’s own social class; the author should depict the ‘truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances’ (*Collected Works* 2001: 167).

Thus, Marxism generalises experience, emphasising not formal polish or style, but content. Engels, for example, expressed a dislike for propaganda in literature, stressing that the ‘message’ of a work ‘must arise from the situation and action’ (*Collected Works* 1995: 357).⁸ On the other hand, Marx criticised Lassalle’s *Franz von Sickingen* (1859) for giving the *aristocratic* representatives of revolution too prominent a role; they were ‘excessively preoccupied with themselves’, whereas ‘the peasants should provide a significant and dynamic background’. Lassalle needed to follow not the German poet, Schiller, who transformed individuals into ‘mere mouthpieces of their time’, but the ‘true to life’ world of Shakespeare (*Collected Works* 1983: 418).

Great writers can have insights which transcend an author’s own convictions.

⁷ Compare *Richard III*, V, iv. 6-7.

⁸ Letter to Minna Kautsky 26th November 1885.

Marx and Engels admired the work of the conservative royalist, Balzac, for his impartial depiction of social reality.⁹ Thus, while reviewing Balzac's *The Peasants* (1855), Marx explains how the small farmer keeps the favour of his creditor by performing all kinds of duties for him for free. Balzac shows how this sinks the small farmer deeper into financial ruin since he neglects work in his own fields, while the creditor saves spending on the small farmer's wages (*Capital III* 1998: 44).

This does not mean that Marx judged literature by the extent to which a writer's 'message' paralleled his own beliefs, since he admired Dante and Goethe: in *Capital I*, he describes the effect that the application of phosphorous in the manufacture of 'Lucifer matches' had on child labourers under 13-years-old. Marx ascribes the spread of lockjaw to this process, and comments that "Dante would have found the worst horrors of his Inferno surpassed in this manufacture" (2003: 236). There are cases, however, in which Marx was hostile to a writer's political views, such as his response to the journalist, Heinzen, in the *Deutsche-Brüsseler-Zeitung* in October/November 1847, and in his attack on the idealism of Proudon in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847).

It is doubtful that the older Marx became more 'mellow and tolerant' in his literary views as he grew older as Wellek argues (1983: 239),¹⁰ but he did become more engrossed in social, scientific, and economic issues. In his 'Chapter on Money' (Notebook I, part II) in *The Grundrisse* (1857-61), for instance, Marx seeks out Homer and Hesiod for examples of commercial practices and money in ancient Greece.

Marx was familiar, too, with biblical text, and in his *Critique of Political Economy*, he compares the French economist, Boisguillebert, to 'a fantastic Moloch who

9 In his letter to Margaret Harkness (April 1888), Engels wrote that he had learned more from Balzac about French society and history "than from all the professed historians, economists and statisticians of the period together" (*Collected Works* 2001: 167).

10 Hyndman, a regular visitor to Marx's home in 1880 and 1881 in London reports the following: "I said to Marx once that as I grow older I become more tolerant. 'Do you', he said, 'do you?' It was quite certain he didn't" (1911: 271).

demands all physical wealth as a sacrifice' (1970: 54).¹¹ Likewise, in his Preface to the Second Edition of the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1869), he rejects any comparison between the class struggle of ancient Rome and that of modern society: they had 'no more in common with one another than the Archbishop of Canterbury has with the High Priest Samuel (1934: 7).

As with Tolkien, Marx considered that 'original sin was everywhere' (*Capital I* 2003: 556), but whereas Tolkien defined original sin as man's betrayal of God (see chapter V), for Marx, original sin was borne of capitalism, capital accumulation, and the development of wealth (*Capital I* 2003: 556). Capitalism had replaced religion and wealth had replaced God: "Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets!" (*Capital I* 2003: 558).

None of Marx's biblical references point to an affiliation with his own religion, which he rejected passionately in 'On the Jewish Question'. In contrast to the 'Young Hegelian', Bauer, who had suggested that Jews could achieve political emancipation if only they were to abandon their religion, Marx understood that it was necessary to abolish the material conditions that gave rise to religion in order for Jews to be emancipated.

Function of art

Tolkien approves of the 'escapism' from the real world (see chapter I) that is associated with fantasy novels, and so he invites the reader to respond to Gandalf and Saruman and to take part in the adventures and songs of Middle-earth. Yet, if art, including literature, is an 'escape' from our present existence, might this signify inadequacies in our own daily life?

Tolkien's text projects the reader into a lost fantasy world – underscored by

11 Moloch, or Molech, was an ancient Semitic god, the 'abomination of the children of Ammon', and is referred to in the Bible in Kings I (11.7), Kings II (23.10), Jeremiah (32.35), and Leviticus (18.21).

religious values – that cannot exist and never has existed. This is not to say that Tolkien's book lacks a 'message', or tension, or challenges that the author hopes the reader will possess as his own; quite the contrary. However, the *Rings* invites the reader to detach himself from the 'condition' of earthly man using an earthly artefact, literature, in order to seek refuge from that 'condition' on a supernatural plane.

This is idealist in that while man often feels alienated from his society (see below), he still exists as part of a wider external world; he is 'a *Zoon politikon* [political animal] in the most literal sense' (Marx *Selected Works* 1977: 346), and he may comprehend this wider world through an appreciation of literature: 'art merges the individual with the whole' (Fischer 1963: 8-9).

Greek art

In *The Grundrisse*, Marx reflects on why Greek art, rooted in mythology¹² and the product of a slave society, still constitutes a source of aesthetic enjoyment and an 'unattainable ideal' (cited in Baxandall and Morawski 1973: 137).¹³ This admiration is suggested by the number of antiquities – over 100,000 objects – from the Classical world in the British Museum, London. It is clear that the aesthetic achievements of a society do not always correlate to its socio-economic and religious make-up, and Marx notes that some of the peaks of art do not correspond to the general development of society (1970: 215).

Marx responds that our admiration for Greek art is due to the 'charming art of Greek children' (1973: 105; 111) and the 'childish ancient world' (*Contribution to a Critique* 1970: 217). This explanation, however, is inadequate if only because it challenges Marx's own concept that the economic base of a society determines its superstructure (considered below). Moreover, there was nothing

12 Marx's admiration for Greek art does not negate his view that religion was a delusion.

13 Marx, K *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (1857).

'childish' about the craft of Homer, Aeschylus, or Sophocles. Praver explains that Marx honoured Greek art because it represented a 'beautiful state of humanity' (1976: 285), but this, too, is unconvincing not least because 'Greek beauty had its seamy and decadent side' (Fischer 1963: 12).

Our present day admiration for Classical art points to a recognition of past artistic accomplishment and a recognition that art is continually developing: in Athens "the greatest and most astonishing revolution in the whole history of art bore fruit", and Gombrich offers the example of the discovery of natural forms and foreshortening in painting: 'nothing of that kind had ever happened' (1950: 52-53). Additionally, Fischer maintains that man continues to admire Greek art for its universal and transcendental value: 'there are 'constants' even in time-conditioned art' (1963: 12). Art, then, speaks across generations: Aeschylus' Prometheus reflects man's struggle against fate in that he serves as a 'spokesman, or analogy' (Praver 1976: 24) for the experiences and aspirations of men, not gods, who live in different times and societies.

Art and artist as commodities

Under capitalism, authors are producers, people who buy books are consumers,¹⁴ and literature is a product to be bought and sold like other commodities on the market. During the Renaissance, artists had their own private clients, but in the developed marketplace the bourgeoisie "has robbed of their haloes various occupations hitherto regarded with awe and veneration. Doctor, lawyer, priest, poet, and scientist, have become its wage-labourers" (*Communist Manifesto* 1930: 28-29).

Patronage, then, has been superseded by a market in which art and literature are invested in order to realise surplus value. In addition, the creative Renaissance man combined many talents: Michelangelo was a painter, sculptor,

14 Borrowers of books from public libraries do not purchase a written work, but borrowing patterns are recorded to assist with book purchasing projects.

architect, poet, and engineer. Under capitalism, however, there is a marked division of labour whereby in publishing, for instance, the writer composes his text, an artist designs the dust cover; a proofreader corrects the text; one company is responsible for publishing; another for printing; others would market the publication.

In Tolkien's case, between 1950 and 1954, the author grew increasingly impatient with his publishers, Collins, and their rivals, Allen and Unwin, and the elements of this dispute sheds light upon how even the genre of fantasy fiction can be subject to economic considerations. The latter declined to publish the *Rings* together with *The Silmarillion* given that 'production costs were three times higher than before the war' (2006: 139), so Tolkien offered his books to Collins and, in a 10,000-word letter to the company, attempted to justify why the two books were 'indivisible' (2006: 143). Eventually, in spring 1952, Collins withdrew from negotiations due to the size of the book before Allen and Unwin renewed their interest in publishing the *Rings* without *The Silmarillion*, which Tolkien was obliged to accept (2006: 163).

However, the publishers worried about the proposed cover price of £3.10s, and there was much haggling between publisher and author over the division of the various books and their titles: Tolkien was unhappy about the name 'The Two Towers' (2006: 173), and described the design of Unwin's dust cover as 'tasteless and depressing' (2006: 182). Eventually, an improved cover design met Tolkien's approval – his opinion merely 'a formality' (2006: 182) – and the first volume of the *Rings*, 'The Fellowship of the Ring', was published in July 1954.

Financial remuneration is an important consideration for the artist as a producer and, in a letter to his publisher (10th December 1960), Tolkien was reluctant to accept Puffin Books' proposal to publish a paperback edition of *The Hobbit* 'unless the profit or advantage is clear' (2006: 302). Likewise, responding to an enquiry from a US film-maker about making an animated version of the *Rings*, Tolkien wrote to Unwin (19th June 1957) that given 'the glint of money', he would risk 'vulgarization' (2006: 257).

Thus, as did the Pre-Raphaelites (see chapter II), Marx considered that capitalism was not well-disposed towards art, or craftsmanship (yet, arguably, the greatest pieces of art have been produced under capitalism), except that the wealthy collected prestigious items to enhance their social status.¹⁵ Art had become a commodity whereby labour ‘loses all the characteristics of art’,¹⁶ and while Tolkien had a personal feeling for his work stating that it was written in his ‘life-blood’ (2006: 122), he also felt alienated from it once it had gone to market. This ‘separation’ between the artist and his art is characterised by the product’s ‘saleability’, that is, ‘the transformation of everything into a commodity’ (Mészáros 1970: 35), and this perhaps contributed to Tolkien’s ‘battered wits’ and ‘wretched literary affairs’ (2006: 166; 163) just prior to the publication of his book.

Future society

Marx’s socialist programme envisaged tapping the artistic talent of working people and their families and, while he was not specific as to how precisely this would develop, he understood that less toil in the factory could mean greater leisure time to develop artistic potential. In a class society, art – and artist – is used as a means to support particular (class) interests, whereas ‘in a communist society there are no painters but only people who engage in painting among other activities’ (*The German Ideology* 1976: 394). Indeed, ‘all-round man’ (Praver 1976: 113) would be freed from local and national limitations which express the division of labour, so it would not be necessary to be bound to one particular art.

This does not mean that artistic merit may only be nurtured in a socialist society: Marx consistently quotes Homer, Dante and, particularly, Shakespeare:

15 BBC News 18th March 2008: ‘An anonymous bidder recently paid £60,000 for a 1937 first edition of *The Hobbit*’.

16 Marx, K *The Grundrisse* (Notebook III) 29th November - c. mid-December 1857

great literature, as noted above, speaks to us of the societies and writers from which it originated and, in dealing with universal themes such as love, hatred, greed, and kindness, it transcends historical periods in that the modern reader is still able to identify with, and be 'touched' by, such themes when presented in a meaningful way.

According to Williams (1977: 46), 'literature is the result of formal composition within the social and formal properties of a language', but this 'dry' definition lacks the 'feeling' that great books offer readers. For Marx, literature is not only a means by which man expresses and satisfies himself; rather, aesthetic phenomena and men 'doing things' are interwoven to give literature a 'productive' function that makes us more 'rounded' human beings. Thus, cultural activity is related to how man produces and reproduces his material life, and how he expresses his life, so he is. Literature, then, is not 'autonomous' or devoid of any relationship with history or man's activity in the real world (see 'Critical Theory' below and chapter II); on the contrary, 'Art is a cultural activity within socio-historical processes' (Morawski 1970: 303).

Base and superstructure

In the *Preface of A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx writes that men enter into definite relations, independent of their will, when they engage in social production and these relations 'constitute the economic structure of society on which legal and political superstructures arise'. The mode of production¹⁷ 'conditions the social, political, and intellectual process of life . . . It is not the consciousness of men which determines their being, but their social being which determines their consciousness' (1970: 20-21). These often-quoted lines have been the subject of considerable controversy among

17 In historical materialism, the mode of production (*Produktionsweise*, or 'the way of producing') includes the productive forces (human labour power and skills, and the means of production, such as land, tools, and machinery) and the relations of production which, based on the ownership of property and codified in law, signify the relations between social classes.

scholars over the extent to which the economic base of a society determines consciousness, not least because Marx's proposition appears to challenge the notion of free will and individual autonomy.

Marx describes the relationship between base and superstructure using the architectural metaphor 'structure': the superstructure (ideology, law, politics, art, religion) 'arises' or 'rests upon' the base. He does not state that the base *causes* the superstructure; rather, he asserts that ideological values are not self-determining or self-ruling but, on the contrary, they are interwoven with the social and historical conditions in which we produce and reproduce our lives.

Arguably, it is possible to extract from this theory, at least in its most rudimentary form, a rather 'clockwork' interpretation of the base/superstructure relationship, since it takes little account of 'interaction' – the sense of changing and evolving phenomena – between base and superstructure that Marx and Engels had affirmed in *The German Ideology*, and which Shelley had anticipated in *Prometheus Unbound* (1820): "Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and, in another, the creations, of their age. From this subjection the loftiest do not escape".¹⁸

Haslett states that Marx's *Preface* does not allow for the role of the superstructure (such as political and religious ideas) to evade the dominant economic factor, meaning that literature can only ever mirror the economic basis of a society and not change it. On the other hand, art does not only belong to the sphere of ideas since art itself is 'material production' (2000: 19; 25): it is a commodity and it operates within an economic context.¹⁹ Indeed, it is ironic that the works of Marx and Engels themselves, around which

18 Machery disputes the term 'creator' since the author does not conjure up his text from nothing. Rather, the author 'discovers' the context in which his text will be formulated (1978: 41-2).

19 Watt, in his *Defoe as Novelist* (1960), cites Defoe in *Applebee's Journal* (31st July 1725) that 'writing had become a very considerable Branch of the English Commerce'.

conferences, book sales, and university funding are organised, cannot escape the commodification of literary theory.

Jameson, too, is unconvinced as to the metaphor of an edifice and its foundation which Marx implies here; rather, he prefers a railway analogy with its rolling stock and rails (1996: 46) where both trains and tracks require one another, but even this has a mechanical undertone to it; rather, a more appropriate metaphor would be a vehicle and its driver: a vehicle does not move of its own accord and a driver cannot motor from A to B without a vehicle: one is useless without the other. Materialism, then, is a philosophy rooted in matter, that is, one that does not explain concepts as originating in the mind. Reading and other mental constructions involve cognitive processes that are born in matter and interact with it. Thus, a literary text is determined by the social relations of production, and also helps shape that context: it is a dialectical relationship defined by Engels in 'Socialism: Utopian and Scientific' as follows:

To the metaphysician, things and their mental reflexes, ideas, are isolated, are to be considered one after the other and apart from each other, are objects of investigation fixed, rigid, given once for all. . . For him, a thing either exists or does not exist; a thing cannot at the same time be itself and something else. Positive and negative absolutely exclude one another; cause and effect stand in a rigid antithesis, one to the other.

At first sight, this mode of thinking seems to us very luminous, because it is that of so-called sound commonsense . . . [However] we find upon closer investigation that the two poles of an antithesis, positive and negative, e.g., are as inseparable as they are opposed, and that despite all their opposition, they mutually interpenetrate. And we find, in like manner, that cause and effect are conceptions which only hold good in their application to individual cases; but as soon as we consider the individual cases in their general connection with the universe as a whole, they run into each other, and they become confounded when we contemplate that universal action and reaction in which causes and effects are eternally changing places, so that what is effect here and now will be cause there and then, and vice versa (1991: 389).

This issue is considered further in the methodology chapter. Suffice to say here that Engels goes to great lengths to explain to Bloch (21st-22nd September 1890) that while economic necessity is the determining factor *in the last instance* – literacy is necessary to read texts and this implies an education which costs money, so our living standards ultimately define whether or not we are able to purchase books, go to the theatre, and so on – he rejects any notion of mechanical determinism:

‘the determining factor in history is, *in the final analysis*, the production and reproduction of actual life. More than that was never maintained either by Marx or myself. Now if someone distorts this by declaring the economic moment to be the *only* determining factor, he changes that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, ridiculous piece of jargon. The economic situation is the basis, but the various factors of the superstructure – political forms of the class struggle and its consequences . . . all these factors also have a bearing on the course of historical struggles’ (2001: 33-37).²⁰

In addition, in a letter to Mehring (14th July 1893), Engels admits that the *Preface* passage was “undialectical” and concedes that while previous work had stressed that ideological concepts were derived from economic facts, “. . . we neglected the formal side as against content: the manner in which these conceptions etc. came into being” (*Collected Works* 2004: 164). Thus, Engels clarifies any misunderstanding between determinism and the interaction of ideology and material conditions.

For Marx, in addition to providing enjoyment for both reader and writer, literature was a source of ‘spiritual sustenance’ and ‘polemical ammunition’ (Prawer 1976: 399). However, it was important not to confuse literature with philosophy, because literature appeals to the ‘total’ in a way that philosophy could not. For instance, Sue’s *Mysteries of Paris* must ultimately be judged as literature since, to do otherwise, would be contrary to ‘a concrete, complex, and formed vision of

20 Engels reiterates this in his letter to Borgius (25th January 1894).

reality' (Prawer 1976: 415). This explains Marx's censure of Ruge, a Hegelian political writer, as an 'old bounder' who had stated that Shakespeare could not have been a 'dramatic poet' because he had no 'philosophical system', whereas Schiller, as he supported Kant, was a truly 'dramatic poet' (*Collected Works* 1983: 356).²¹

Critical theory

Critical theory usually applies to those professional academics and sociologists who sought to fuse aspects of the work of, among others, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Weber, Lukács and Freud. It is, therefore, primarily a European social theory, and is associated with the Frankfurt School (part of the German Institute for Social Research), founded in the early 1920s (Bohman 2012).

The aim of critical theory is 'man's emancipation from slavery'. During the 1930s and 1940s, critical theory aimed to develop a theory of capitalist society that would 'build upon, update, and go beyond classical Marxism'. Critical theory, Horkheimer, the institute's director, argued must remain loyal to the idea of a 'future society as the community of free human beings' (1972: 245 cited in Kellner 1990).

Important early critical theorists included Horkheimer himself, Pollock, Adorno, Fromm, Marcuse, Benjamin, and Gramsci, while Althusser, who died in 1990, and Habermas, are latter-day critical theorists. This section takes a brief look at Althusser's work. More recent contributions have been made by Kellner, a 'third generation' critical theorist, while Jay has traced the history of the school itself up to 1950 in his *The Dialectical Imagination* (1973); Wiggershaus' *The Frankfurt School* (1994), described by Eagleton (1994) as 'a monumental work of scholarship', maps the school's history to the present day.

21 Letter to Engels 24th November 1858

The school originally sympathised with Marx's ideas: in his early *Zeitschrift*²² essays, Horkheimer accepted most of the tenets of *Capital* (Held 1980: 43), considering that capitalism was unable to satisfy workers' demands for 'justice, equality, and freedom', and that critical theory could raise greater awareness about contradictions in society and the need to improve human existence (1937: 162-4). Marcuse, likewise, had emphasised the importance of Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*, and wrote that the interest of the working class in its own liberation is also 'the general interest: it cannot free itself without abolishing itself as a class, and all classes' (1972: 124).

At the time of the formation of the school, many within Marxism considered that German workers would have embraced the revolutionary ideas of October 1917, following the Russian revolution. However, this did not happen because, writes Kellner (1990), a theorist in the Frankfurt School tradition, since 'revolutionary consciousness, culture, organization, and a clear notion of socialism seemed to be lacking'; moreover, he maintains, 'orthodox Marxism could not explain why revolutionary consciousness failed to develop, and could not point to how revolutionary consciousness and struggle could be produced'.

Between 1905 and 1917 objective conditions had also matured in Russia that were favourable for the overthrow of Czarism. However, objective conditions themselves are insufficient: workers and peasants lacked the cutting edge of Marxism in order to take power. This vacuum was filled by the Bolshevik Party principally under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky: "Just as a blacksmith cannot seize the red hot iron in his naked hand, so the proletariat cannot directly seize power; it has to have an organisation accommodated to this task" (Trotsky 1932c).

It would appear that Kellner has not read Trotsky, since he ascribes the lack of a revolution in Germany not to the absence of a Marxist leadership, but to the German masses themselves who, he warrants, 'did not understand socialism'.

22 *The Journal of Social Research*, the scholarly publication of the Institute of Social Research (first published in 1932).

Consequently, for the Frankfurt theorists at the time, Marxism itself had to be reappraised and a focus placed on the 'entire material and intellectual culture of humanity' (Horkheimer 1931) in order to 'carry through radical change' (Kellner 1989: 12).

Trotsky, however, explains that the task of a revolutionary party is to persuade, organise, and educate the mass of the population around a political programme – which requires the test of events and the approval of the majority in society – however long that takes. The party needs to understand its enemies and, shaking off notions of compromise, be determined to carry the struggle through to the end. Without a guiding organisation, he wrote, "the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston-box. But nevertheless what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam" (1932).

In relation to Germany specifically, and contesting Kellner's assertion that 'Marxism could not explain why revolutionary consciousness failed to develop', Trotsky (1932b) referred to Berlin's 'Spartacus Week' of January 1919: "The thing lacking was a Bolshevik party". It is an indication of the gulf between Marxism and the critical theorists, however, that in contrast to Trotsky's orthodox Marxist perspective, Horkheimer argued in his 1937 essay *Traditional and Critical Theory*, that "even the situation of the proletariat is, in this society, no guarantee of correct knowledge" (1972: 213). Kellner ascribes this to 'the fragmentation of the working class'.

The school may have originally empathised with the Marxist critique of political economy as noted above, but from the 1960s and 1970s the school's key figures downplay economic analysis, while conferring a priority to culture and psychoanalysis by interlinking sociology, the works of Freud, and Marxism, to produce a philosophy-based social science termed 'critical theory'. Its proponents felt that these aspects, which had an important influence in 1960s academia, had been 'neglected or downplayed' in classical Marxism (Bronner and Kellner 1989: 1).

In fact, this 'cultural turn' had begun with Horkheimer's 1931 inaugural address in which he spelt out that his 'new tasks' included a multidisciplinary approach to social theory that embraced science, art, religion, law, customs, fashion, public opinion, sports, leisure activities, and lifestyle. Kellner (1993) suggests that such cultural aspects, what he terms the 'missing parts of classical Marxism', had never before been incorporated into any Marxist analysis and that the Frankfurt School was unique in examining and elucidating such topics. Indeed, in his 1990 work *Critical Theory and the Crisis of Social Theory*, he explained: 'This research program is somewhat unorthodox for a Marxian social theory which in the past tended to neglect the dimension of individual and social psychology, and which also downplayed the study of culture and leisure'.

In fact, Trotsky's *Problems of Everyday Life* (1923) addresses a wide variety of such issues including family matters and personal relations as suggested by the articles included in his book: 'The Newspaper and its Readers'; 'Vodka, the Church and the Cinema'; 'From the Old Family to the New'; 'The Struggle for Cultured Speech'; and 'A few words on how to raise a human being'. Likewise, his analysis of culture, art, and morals in *Culture and Socialism* (1927) is rich and illuminating, prompting Fromm, himself a critical theorist as noted above, to describe his work as 'penetrating, alive and productive' (1958).

Moreover, in turning towards cultural issues, the critical theorists appear to have turned away from the traditional ideas of Marxism. For instance, in his *Negative Dialectics* (1973), Adorno claims that capitalism had changed significantly since Marx's day: exploitation had become more abstract than it was in the nineteenth-century, that is, 'more effective and pervasive'. According to Zuidervaart (2011), Adorno considered that Marx's interpretation of capitalist society was 'inadequate' and his critique was 'outmoded'. The root cause of human suffering, maintained Adorno, was the domination of extreme concentrations of wealth and power and this is what 'critical social theory' – a revised Marxism – needed to address (1973: 189-92).

It is true that capitalism has become more modern, global, and sophisticated since the time of Marx and this process has been aided by new technology,

global tax havens, a ‘chilling culture of greed and secrecy’, and sanction busting.²³ It is also true that capitalism no longer employs six-year-old girls to work at fustian dressing-machines;²⁴ however, the class relationship that compels workers to sell their labour power as a commodity – and through which the owners of the means of production appropriate surplus value – has not changed. Nor has the basic fact, foreseen by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848b), that the reason the bourgeoisie exists and exploits workers through low wages and unemployment is private property: ‘The essential conditions for the existence of the bourgeois class is the formation and augmentation of capital; the condition for capital is wage-labour’.

In addition, Adorno’s criticism of Marx’s philosophy as ‘inadequate’ because it is ‘outmoded’, seems to overlook the depth of Marx’s insight into capitalist development on a world scale:

Modern industry has established the world market. . . The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society . . . The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere (*Manifesto* 1848a).

One further, vital difference between the critical theorists and classical Marxists, is that the latter did not confine themselves to writing scholarly articles: Lenin and Trotsky were active leaders of the Bolshevik Party, while Marx himself established the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in June 1848 and, shortly after his arrival in London in May 1849, he participated in the German Workers' Educational Society and, in 1864, he became involved in the First International and became a leader of its General Council.

23 Melik, K 'Tax evasion aided by global inertia' (BBC News) 8th August 2012; BBC *Panorama* 'The Truth About Tax' 11th May 2012

24 Working Class Movement Library *Victorian Children at Work* 20th September 2012

In contrast, the Frankfurt School recruited intellectuals such as Marcuse, while Adorno had no ties at all with socialist political life. Moreover, the important works of critical theory (or Western Marxism as it is sometimes known), were written either in exile, such as Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), or in prison, as were Gramsci's *Notebooks* (1929-1935); Marcuse, who lived in the USA, had his *Eros and Civilisation* (1954) published at the height of McCarthyism.

However, the issue goes deeper than the role of individuals: in 1933, the Nazi party exiled the institute which relocated to the USA where it 'trimmed its materialist sails to the prevailing conservative winds' (Eagleton 1994), and when the institute returned to Frankfurt in 1949-50, Germany had become reactionary; critical theory then 'explicitly renounced' any link with socialist activity (Anderson 1976: 34). In addition, the absence of working class movements in Europe, and Stalinist prohibition of the free exchange of ideas and policy-making in European workers' parties, together with the dynamism of capitalism during the 1950s and 1960s pushed the school away from orthodox Marxism.

Marx and Engels were theorists, activists, and internationalists, while critical theory, a product of historic reaction, was characterised by a divorce from the 1930s onwards between Marxist theory and political activity. In addition, it displayed a '*lack of internationalism*': almost all the critical theorists were 'utterly provincial and uninformed about the theoretical cultures of neighbouring countries' (Anderson 1976: 68-69). This narrow focus on theory meant that socialism moved from the factory to the university, and this helps to explain the growing disillusionment among the key Frankfurt figures themselves as to the potential of the working class to transform society (Horkheimer 1935: 256). Indeed, most of the Frankfurt theorists became "relentless critics of orthodox Marxism" (Eagleton 1996: 10), yet Anderson acknowledges that the quality of their critique surpassed anything within classical Marxism: they 'contributed new emphases and ideas in their conception of theory and practice' (Anderson 1976: 78; 25). Lukács, for example, dedicated most of his life to literature, from

Goethe onwards; Adorno wrote on literature and literary critics, though music was his major interest; Benjamin's achievement in the 1930s was a study of the French poet, Baudelaire, and so on. Several following examples shed light on their work.

Homer's *Odyssey*

Adorno and Horkheimer discuss the themes of domination and exploitation in Homer's *Odyssey* in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (a 1947 critical theory 'core' text), to show how the struggle for self-preservation and autonomy is linked to sacrifice, renunciation, and repression. Odysseus strives for a life independent of the vicissitudes of fate and temptation taking, for instance, a drug called 'moly' which gave him resistance to Circe's magic, and this earns him respect since Circe agrees to bargain with him. Similarly, Odysseus' confrontations with the Sirens and Lotus-eaters represent continual challenges to his autonomy. He overcomes fate by 'rational calculation' (Held 1980: 401; 402); that is, by measuring his own sacrifice – he is detained for seven years by the goddess Calypso, before Poseidon, god of the sea, attempts to destroy him – he 'effectively negates the power to whom the sacrifice is made and so redeems the life he had forfeited' (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972: 50).

To survive, Odysseus pursues a policy of self-interest and taking risks: he is the 'prototype of the bourgeois individual', and this is underlined in the Sirens' episode. Odysseus delights in their song whose irresistible charm lured mariners to their deaths while the crew 'rowing with all their strength', plug their ears with wax. Put simply, the crew are his pawns and he is willing to sacrifice them on his return to his palace home in Ithaca (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972: 43; 34).

Mass and 'autonomous' culture

From the 1930s and 1940s, the Frankfurt theorists stressed that 'mass culture'

referred directly to the processes of production, exchange, and consumption: 'mass culture' was 'functional', that is, manufactured for entertainment and saleability. Thus, Eagleton notes that the development of post-war capitalism with the emergence of mass culture meant that "it was no longer just an economic system" (1994). But when was capitalism *ever* 'just an economic system'? The *Colonial Williamsburg Journal* reports that two-hundred years before the Second World War, demand grew for novels, playing-cards, sheet-music, children's books and toys, fishing equipment, and so on.²⁵

Eagleton (1994) proposes that it was the Frankfurt School which first turned serious attention to mass culture, and consequently informed the Cultural Studies discipline in many universities. Likewise, Kellner (1990) states that Adorno and Horkheimer theorised 'the end of the individual' due to the development of an increasingly developed and controlled society. This bold claim seems to disregard Marx's observation in the mid-nineteenth-century that

Owing to the extensive use of machinery, and to the division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him (*Communist Manifesto* 1848b).

Mass culture shared none of the features of genuine or 'autonomous' art, such as Joyce's prose or Picasso's *Guernica* (Horkheimer 1941: 294). According to Adorno, 'autonomous' art 'resists assimilation' to capitalist relations of production and enacts an alternative vision of the world by raising awareness of social contradictions (1945: 678). This was to be achieved through the use of a 'provocative' writing style to enable the reader to reappraise the world around him. Thus, reading a text required 'not mere contemplation but praxis' (Adorno 1967: 150). Consequently, he used cross-references, hyperbole, chiasmus, and repetition (Adorno 1974: 85-7), but this led to the tiresome complexity of language that characterises critical theory. Moreover, it expresses the gulf

25 Geist, C 'The Emergence of Popular Culture in Colonial America' Spring 2008

between the critical theorists and the general populace, prompting Anderson's censure of Lukács' 'cumbersome and abstruse diction', the 'gnomic brevity and indirection' in Benjamin, della Volpe's 'impenetrable syntax', and the 'sybilline rhetoric of elusion' in Althusser (1976: 54).

For Adorno and Horkheimer, 'mass culture' had become commodified or an 'industry' (1947: 158) that welded audiences to the dominant ideology: 'Ideology enforces *the status quo*' (Held 1980: 107). This is, perhaps, especially true in media where, say, a film or TV company relies on banks to finance projects, while banks depend on creative advertising to promote their own services.

Althusserian concepts

Althusser constructed a new perspective of ideology, one that E P Thompson defines as 'an inverted world of theological absurdity' (1978: 216). In his *Object of Capital* in *Reading Capital* (1968), Althusser breaks with Marxist historical materialism to declare that history is unknowable: '*the theory of history does not exist*' (emphasis in original).

E P Thompson suggests that one reason for history's 'lack of credibility' is that some Marxists envisaged the transformation of society along a pre-determined path of historical 'stages', and that this merited 'severe correction'. However, this 'correction' too often assumed its guilt 'without scrupulous enquiry into its practice', or 'it was then assumed that it invalidated the whole exercise' (1978: 212).

For Althusser, historical facts are invalid unless they are framed within a theory or ideology devised beforehand, since 'theory *invents* history' (1978: 214). Yet, Althusser also states, as noted above, that '*the theory of history does not exist*'. Just as Horkheimer and Adorno (1944) consider that "Everything derives from consciousness", Althusser assumes that knowledge emerges only through discourse and is not a consequence of history or experience. Indeed, historical

input (which he rejects as ‘empiricism’) only tarnishes knowledge. This runs contrary to classical Marxism in which historical events and the experiences of working people are not remoulded to comply with a theory, but are the soil in which theory emerges (see methodology chapter).

History may be limited in terms of what it informs subsequent generations, yet an examination of the log-book of *HMS Bounty*, for example, would reveal some details about conditions on board. The contents of Bligh’s 1789 log-book (2007) may be partial or subjective, and perhaps the events that occurred in 1789 and our present-day knowledge of those events do not correspond, but this does not mean that our present epoch need burn the bridge between them.

Thinking and being

Althusser (1968) states that Marx’s *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (1857) represents a ‘profound development on Marx’s *Poverty of Philosophy* (1847)’, in that it distinguishes between the *real* and *thought*. For Althusser (1968), ‘there is a relation between the *thought-about-the-real* and *this real*, but it is a relation of *knowledge*’, the distinction between a relation of knowledge and a relation of the real is fundamental, he maintains, to avoid falling into ‘empiricist idealism’. Marcuse, too, wrote of the historical process of society as expressing the ‘implication of the mind’ (1968: 94). According to Marx, however, the real-concrete is one thing, while thought about the real is another: “The concrete is concrete because it is the summing up of many determinations, thus the unity of the manifold. Therefore, it appears in thought as a process of summing-up, a result, and not the point of departure” (*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* [1859] 1976). These issues touch on what Engels, in his *Ludwig Feuerbach* ([1886] 1946), called ‘the great basic question of all philosophy’, namely, ‘the relation of thinking and being’.

Marxism argues that knowledge, or the imagination (discussed in chapter II), while processed through consciousness, does not simply involve cognition and

it is not autonomous. Thinking is a *practical* activity because man acts upon it within a social context; moreover, he acts upon it with his fellow man, cooperating in a certain way and mutually exchanging activities and ideas in order for production to take place (Marx *Wage-Labour and Capital* [1849] 1977: 256).

Thus, unlike the Frankfurt School's concept of ideology which was 'close to Freud's' (Held 1980: 80), or that of Althusser's concept of thought and discourse, Marxism sets out from men in the flesh, 'active men', and their ideology is bound to material preconditions (*The German Ideology*). Moreover, as these material conditions change, the superstructure tends to accommodate these changes to facilitate the interests of business. Hence, the introduction of laws such as the Computer Misuse Act 1990, which was only introduced – and could only be introduced – following the widespread development of IT in business.

Our mental dynamics, therefore, are linked to *social* premises. It is true that humans are born into pre-existing structures of thought and so, while making their own history, they do not do so as they please: they inherit conditions from previous generations, 'conjuring up past spirits and borrowed language to their service' (Marx *Eighteenth Brumaire* 1934). Nevertheless, the act of thinking and 'borrowed language' must presuppose being, because the human who can think without being has yet to be discovered.

The writer gains a knowledge of material objects that he abstracts from the real world; thus, Feuerbach states that he does not generate the object from his thought, but his thought from the object (1957: xxxiv). That is, our knowledge of the real is not prescribed by thought as Althusser warrants, but by the material properties of the real object that is external to its observer. Between an object's material attributes on the one hand, and the observer's mind on the other, there resides a 'dialogue' and Thompson offers the following example by way of illustration: a joiner aims to make a table from a piece of timber. He has in his mind an image of what the finished table may look like, but this is conditioned not by his thinking but by the real properties of the timber available (its quality,

size, grain, and so on) because even the best joiners are unable to make a table from sawdust or fresh air; it is the timber's attributes that determine into *what* it can and cannot be made: it cannot make itself and it cannot be made into a life-size model of the Queen Mary. However, recognising the timber's own properties which exist independently of any human perception, the joiner, according to his own experience and skill and the evolution of the tools he uses, may be able to fashion a table (1978: 210).

In Marxism, the brain does not reflect external objects as in a mirror; rather, it assimilates, processes, and transforms them from the outside world. Moreover, if social and historical conditions change, and historical materialism proposes that "circumstances are changed by men" (Marx *Theses on Feuerbach* 1976: 4), we can speak, too, of man's consciousness as changing: in changing his world, man changes himself. Thinking, or consciousness, is not enough: for change to materialise, ideas have to be transformed into deeds: man has to *act*.

Althusser and ideology

Althusser attempts to harmonise French structuralism with Marxism whereby society is considered as a system of interrelated structures that exercise economic, political, and ideological force. Thus, in his essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (1970), he argues that the state exercises power in repressive and ideological ways. An example of repression in literature may include the legal trials against *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in the 1950s and 1960s under various obscenity laws in the UK and overseas. The novel was condemned ideologically for depicting the intimacy between a married aristocratic woman and her gamekeeper. It also questioned the very real values held by members of the jury who were asked by the chief prosecutor if it were the kind of book 'you would wish your wife or servants to read'.

Althusser (1971) develops the idea of 'ideological interpellation' whereby states maintain their dominance over citizens – via education, the family, and religion – who, through the ever-present ideology we are born into, believe their function

in society is a natural one and so it perpetuates the status quo that is class society. An example of 'interpellation' is that of a policeman who, in calling upon citizens to obey him, 'interpellates' us into state subjugation. We contribute to this continuity because we do not distinguish between how we see ourselves in society and what our real function is. Thus, Althusser refers to 'the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (1984: 36). Ideology is not necessarily false, but it does conceal the real nature of the function of the state and our relationship to it. This does not mean, however, that the majority in society will succumb to such ideology.

Thus, the critique of *The Odyssey*, the elaboration of a theory of mass and 'autonomous' culture, the exploration of psychoanalysis, and the concept of 'Interpellation', are examples of the fresh approach, or 'radical novelty' (Anderson 1976: 78) of the critical theorists in generating original themes.

Internal differences

According to Bronner and Kellner (1989: 3), 'Critical theory is not a single, unified worldview'. However, the Frankfurt theorists did hold a systematic account of the nature of capitalist society (Held 1980: 25). Nevertheless, McLaughlin's article (1999) explores the 'bitter and contentious break' between Fromm on the one hand, and Adorno and Horkheimer on the other in the late 1930s, and with Marcuse in the 1950s. Apparently, Adorno even got personal, calling Fromm a 'professional Jew' (Wiggershaus, 1994: 266 – cited in McLaughlin 1999). The rupture occurred due to different interpretations of Freudian libido theory, with Fromm stressing culture and interpersonal relations (Burston 1991 – cited in McLaughlin 1999) – and over Horkheimer's control over the school's finances.

Bronner and Kellner (1989: 3) refer to the 'sharp differences' that existed between members of the school, and eventually its critical theorists 'sank steadily into disillusion'. The fact remains that despite their expressions of solidarity with those they claimed to represent, not a single member of the

Frankfurt School 'affected the life-style of the working class'. Indeed, 'they never abandoned the life-style of the *haute bourgeoisie*' (Jay 1973). This is in contrast to the tradition of classical Marxists, let us say, Lenin, whose lifestyle was meagre even after the 1917 Revolution:

In the Kremlin he [Lenin] still occupied a small apartment built for a palace servant. In the recent winter he, like everyone else, had had no heating. When he went to the barber's he took his turn, thinking it unseemly for anyone to give way to him (Serge 2012: 101 – cited by Sewell 2011).

In separating philosophy from 'all concern' with the working class, Adorno 'broke radically from Marx' (Bucks-Morris 1979: xiii); indeed, he was denounced as an 'armchair radical' by German students, while Jay (1993) describes him as a 'cultural elitist'; Marcuse sought consolation in high art in the Californian sun; and Horkheimer became an 'unashamed apologist for capitalism', writes Eagleton (1994). It would seem that the Holocaust, US consumerism, 'mass culture' and, ultimately, divorce from working people and their families, took their toll on the school's leading figures. In more recent times, however, Habermas has taken up the mantle. In addition, contemporary theorists, such as Kellner, have made scholarly contributions on issues such as US presidential elections, gun law, human cloning, and the music industry.

In terms of its usefulness, critical theory informs many disciplines within academia, while studies of consumer capitalism have been influenced by its analyses of needs, consumption, and advertising, while enlivening Hegelian and Marxist analyses of contemporary society. In addition, since it is 'open to development and revision', it offers an antidote to postmodernism which attacks 'all forms of thought in an undifferentiated manner' (Bronner and Kellner 1989: 2).

Critical theory and Tolkien

Critical theory advances the notion of modernity and progress – ideas that

Tolkien rejected – and aspects of critical theory may be applied to Tolkien's book.

Horkheimer looked on critical theory as an approach that would not only examine all aspects of social life (Kellner 1990: 2), but the role of the individual and wider community. In intellectual terms this meant working with ideas from philosophy, the social sciences, the arts, the humanities, and so on. Some of these traditions inform Tolkien's book, such as folklore, languages, and religion, as discussed in the following chapters.

The human condition is considered widely in Tolkien's book: there is the heroism of Frodo; the loyalty of Sam; the bravery of Aragorn; the wisdom of Elrond and Gandalf. Also featured are the negative aspects of the human condition: the evil of Sauron; the treachery of Wormtongue; the violent orcs.

For the Frankfurt theorists, as with Marxism, human nature – including individuality – was related to the historical conditions in which it emerged, and under capitalism it is 'repressed and distorted', as Fromm argued, since it imposes sameness and uniformity. For Fromm, the family plays an important role in an individual's development in that it brands the ideology of society, including notions of domination and submissiveness, onto its young: "the family is the medium through which the society or the social class stamps its specific structure on the child" (cited in Kellner 1991). This is reflected in Tolkien's fantasy, in the relationship for example between Bilbo and Frodo, Théoden and Éowyn, and Elrond and Aragorn. Fromm connects this traditional family hierarchy to acceptance of the pyramidal class structure in wider society.

According to Calhoun (1996: 517), critical theory also considered 'happiness, solidarity with others, and natural sympathies' as essential features of human nature, and this would have resonated with Tolkien. However, for Tolkien, if these qualities were characteristic of man's nature, it was on account of God who made man in His own image (Genesis 1:26). In their natural condition, men (or hobbits) lived collectively and, by and large, valued one another's company as in the paradisiacal Shire. Thus, if humans are good, it is on account of God.

It is God, not social and historical forces, who determines a person's character. However, the other aspect of Tolkien's Janus view of human nature concerns the sinful face of man which permeates his very being and is characterised by the evil orcs. In contrast, then, to Fromm's Marxist-Freudian view of human nature, Tolkien's writings are imbued with the teachings of the Bible.

Tolkien, popular culture, and Marxism

In the chapters that follow, this thesis traces the historical conditions from which the *Rings* emerged: as the Romantics before him, Tolkien valued imagination over rationality and longed for a rural past that had disappeared; and because it had passed he idealised it even more, delving further back into medievalism and the values it placed on inheritance and family pedigree. His invented languages epitomise his respect for the social difference that inheritance implies: the ceremonial Quenya is spoken by the skilled and proud Noldor who, as with the royal elf Galadriel, recall aristocratic Middle Age knights, while the corrupted orcs use a debased form of Westron, or Common Speech. Tolkien borrowed from various languages and from the works of Victorian writers such as William Morris – pointers to extensive linguistic and literary interests, and a middle-class education – and also brings to the tale his experiences from the Great War, as Sassoon, Owen, and other contemporaries did to their work (chapter I). Moreover, from childhood Tolkien was imbued with a Catholic conservatism and it is this religious idealism that inspires his text. Thus, he resists change – he appears to harbour the mistaken belief that the Middle Ages were a static epoch that did not undergo change – and new machinery which he associated with the evil of the Dark Lord.

The *Rings*, which is “one of the most popular and influential works in 20th-Century literature” (*The Daily Telegraph* 16th September 2009), and has been translated into almost forty different languages, expresses the rise in the popularity of mainstream culture since the 1950s when 'consumer capitalism' began to dominate Western economic and cultural issues. This popularity has been registered in academia: Cardiff Metropolitan runs online courses in Tolkien

and Fantasy, and in August 2012 Loughborough will host a 'Tolkien studies postgraduate symposium'. Similarly, the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and Exeter each have a Tolkien Society, which attests to the author's popularity.

In his *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (2012), Storey explores the difficulties in defining popular/mass culture. Often Marxists and socialists generally, tend to associate popular/mass culture with both commercialism and poor cultural standards such as those portrayed in the tabloid media. The *Daily Mirror*, for instance, features what it calls 'hottie men' (26th March 2011); then there is a plethora of sub-standard TV game shows; in fashion, unrefined, fluorescent shell-suits come to mind. In addition, it is not evident that popular culture raises cultural awareness, which is purportedly one aim of art. On the other hand, as this introduction has noted, Marx and Engels peppered their works with the gems of world literature, while figures such as Ruskin and Trotsky, among others, aspired to open the doors of high culture to the mass of the population.

Marxist theories have always been concerned with literary and artistic form if only because "art is an expression of man's need for an harmonious and complete life, that is to say, his need for those major benefits of which a society of classes has deprived him" (Trotsky, 1938). Ideally, what a Marxist reading does entail is its own wider political, economic, and philosophical theories alongside an acknowledgement of a work's own identity, fantasy or otherwise. Thus, it is not necessary to study a 'lower-class' writer whose prose renders a socialist message in order to consider a work from a Marxist perspective. Moreover, the popularity of Tolkien's work and the effect of the conservative and religious messages that it conveys, make it a necessary subject for Marxist analysis.

There is another reason why a Marxist approach to Tolkien's fantasy is justified: the *Rings* is written in tribute to the Christian 'message': "Tolkien created Middle-earth as an act of divine praise. The more convincing Middle-earth was as a real place, the purer that praise would be because it would more closely approach God's own act of creation" (Boffetti 2001). Not to offer a Marxist

critique would be to allow such religious doctrine to remain uncontested.

The following chapters approach Tolkien's text drawing on aspects of Western Marxism while foregrounding classical Marxism and, in so doing, the thesis denies that events are caused by supernatural phenomena, or that one explanation for their occurrence is as good as another, or that we must accept fate. The chapters argue, too, that while technology has cheapened labour and displaced older crafts as Tolkien maintains, this is not due to evil machinery in the hands of 'fallen' man.

The thesis rejects, too, Tolkien's notion that the imagination and art are divinely inspired – it proposes that they have social roots – and that nature is either 'good' or 'evil': nature, rather, obeys her own laws. The chapters consider why Tolkien dismisses anthropology and the origins of fairy-tales and, drawing on ecclesiastical and Arthurian sources, questions Tolkien's assertion that Christian virtue epitomised the English mind in the medieval period. Finally, consideration is given to the religious aspects of Tolkien's book and his idea of Christian hope or 'eucatastrophe'.

Machines

It is against the backcloth of nostalgia for a 'green' past that Tolkien opposes industrialism and machinery: in the hands of 'fallen man', he maintains, machinery was evil. Indeed, in the *Rings*, the Shire remained idyllic, and Lothlórien paradisiacal, until they were threatened by the evil of the Dark Lord and machine-driven Mordor.

In a socialist society, Marx envisaged a proliferation of art and literature since the use of technology could raise productivity to a level that would keep working hours to a minimum. Rather than consider this, however, Tolkien holds up a window to a lost past, one devoid of the clangorous rhythm of modern life with its speed-based innovation, pitiless traffic, and the wanton destruction of the earth's priceless resources. How much more attractive was the innocent

simplicity of medievalism and advanced weaponry?

The critical theorist, Benjamin, wrote that the 'aura' of art withers away in the 'age of mechanical reproduction' (1936), while in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer state that mechanical reproduction of art is symptomatic of how capitalism destroys art. This resonated with Tolkien who observed that modernisation only cheapened the work of the skilled labourer (see methodology).

Arguably, however, if cultural production loses something of value because it is mass produced, the majority of society would be denied access to art (or at least its reproduction), by private collectors and such exclusivity would maintain high prices in the art markets. Likewise, only the privileged could afford a night at the Royal Opera House whereas, with the mass production – and with it lower prices – of CDs, texts, visual images and digital equipment, listeners can delight in María Callas, Beethoven, and so on. Why should enjoyment of these artists be the prerogative of the 'educated'?

Religion

Finally, Fischer states that in a decaying society, art needs to show society as changeable and help to change it (1963: 48). Tolkien does show society as changeable in that the Third Age gives way to the Fourth, but Middle-earth is transformed not by men 'doing things' to improve their material life, but by 'good' supernatural powers defeating 'evil' supernatural powers.

The beings that appear on Middle-earth, such as the wizards and elves, are above man in Tolkien's hierarchy and are equipped with divine powers bestowed on them by God. On the other hand, when humans have power they are subject to corruption since, Tolkien argues, man is 'fallen'. There is, then, a latent pessimism towards man in Tolkien's fantasy.

In a letter to his father, the young Marx suggests that literature should stay close

to the realm of the real and actual and not fly off too far into ideal realms,²⁶ and this is consistent with Marxist opposition to religion. This early letter appears not so much as to deny God as to release man from religion, and to achieve this 'new gods had to be installed' (Marx 1975). Thus, while respecting that many hold deep-seated religious views, the following chapters challenge religious or mystical experiences – such as those that Tolkien presents to his readers – that claim access to supernatural truth: in literary theory, Marxism is concerned only with man as writer, reader, printer, and publisher, in his real, social and historical setting. Tolkien, on the other hand, refers to the spiritual inspiration behind art that contributes to God's own creative work (see chapter II), and his own fiction features almighty Eru in *The Silmarillion* and the Valar, his 'angels', in the *Rings*.

Just as Marx drew on Greek mythology, Heine, and Shakespeare, Tolkien draws on Norse and Anglo-Saxon mythology, *Beowulf*, Dante, and the Bible, refashioning them to underline his own Christian 'message'. Thus, nostalgia for a lost past is a thread that knits Tolkien's chapters together with references to long-forgotten songs and old wives' tales – and contempt for those who dismiss them as irrelevant. Many readers of Tolkien's fiction appear to share the author's romanticisation of the past, and perhaps its deeper religious intent, since sales of the *Rings* have peaked throughout the years and Tolkien enjoys something of a cult status.

26 Letter to his father In Trier dated 10th November 1837.

Marxism, religion, and the upside-down world of JRR Tolkien

Nothing exists outside nature and man

- Engels *Ludwig Feuerbach*

The objective of this thesis, noted in the introduction, is to consider Tolkien's 'medieval' fantasy, *The Lord of the Rings*²⁷ principally from the perspective of historical materialism, that is, classical Marxism. Since historical materialism may be summed up in the definitive statement 'social existence determines consciousness' this thesis considers Tolkien's social background, his Great War experiences, and his consequent defence of social hierarchy, and the role these play in the *Rings* (chapter I). Of importance is a consideration of Marxism's approach to religion, and to Catholicism in particular (chapter V), as an historical concept since Tolkien states that his work is "fundamentally religious" (2006: 172). However, the author also contributed reputable material on fairy-stories (chapter III) and medieval scholarship (chapter IV), and this will be examined, too. In this way, this thesis can make a valid contribution to scholarly work on Tolkien.

This chapter on methodology argues that religion has been important throughout the ages but, rather than standing above man, religion reflects his development. These issues touch on the philosophical question, noted in the introduction, of 'thinking and being', and the role of providence in both the *Rings* and wider society. Feuerbach, especially, challenges Tolkien's fatalism and provides a basis for Marxist materialism. Indeed, Marxism adopts a critical stance towards religion, stating that it is a product not of God but of history, arising at different times when people feel a need for religion (Engels *On Religion* 1975h: 172). Whereas the starting point of the religious individual, such

²⁷ Henceforth abbreviated to the *Rings*; it was begun in December 1937 (Tolkien 2006: 443 n5) while all references to Marxist or Marxism refer to classical Marxism.

as Tolkien, is faith in the omnipotence of God, Marxism uses rational, empirical methods of analysis and deduction to look at religion and religious issues. Finally, the chapter counterposes the 'exact' sciences to religious claims.

Historical materialism is the application of a Marxist analysis to historical development, and may be summarised as follows: "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence that determines their consciousness" (Marx, *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859)).²⁸ This proposition is the thread that runs through, and connects, the chapters in this thesis.

Marxism considers that historical events do not 'simply happen' as some postmodernists propose (Rosenau 1992), nor do they occur due to supernatural incidents or 'individual' events. That is, history has a 'coherence' in that each generation inherits the life activity – work, achievements, and experiences – of its predecessor: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past" (1934: 10). This history is then passed on to the forthcoming generation.

In his book *Following Gandalf* (2004), Dickerson examines the 'sacred ground' (2004: 17) of moral choice in Tolkien's fantasy. He emphasises the role of choice in Tolkien's book, rebuking materialists who 'deny moral responsibility' (2004: 15) because, for him, those who lack Tolkien's Christian values and the 'moral good' cannot have free will. Yet, materialists do have 'morals', and many materialists hold to them dearly; but they believe it unnecessary to subscribe to religious beliefs in order to be able to distinguish between right and wrong. Materialists also recognise that morals are subjective and socio-historical (this is considered at some length in chapter III which traces the origin of fairy-tales

28 This is expounded upon in Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), and the *Communist Manifesto* (1848).

and changing moral values).

Dickerson further asserts that there is no room in materialism for heroes (2004: 87) on the assumption that it preaches determinism, whereby the actions of people, who are 'simply complex machines', are 'determined by science' (2004: 83). Consequently, people are not accountable for their actions. Yet, the annals of the labour movement are replete with the deeds of 'heroes' who have helped change history. Furthermore, he maintains that Tolkien shows us just how important choice really is (2004: 91). He claims, by way of example, that the free choice which Frodo exercises makes him a hero (2004: 87). However, 'choice' in the *Rings*, a theme examined more fully in chapter V, is guided by a supernatural hand, consistent with the 'teachings' of Augustinian Catholicism.

One difficulty with the Church is that it appears to lean against science. For instance, it forbade Copernicus' teaching that the Earth daily rotates on its axis and revolves round the sun once a year. Luther, the founder of Protestant Christianity, called him an 'upstart astrologer' (Russell 1946: 515) for challenging the biblical notion that the Earth was the centre of the universe and that "it cannot be moved" (Ps. 93:1). Similarly, the Protestant Geneva governing council had Servetus, the first European to describe the function of pulmonary circulation, roasted alive for what Calvin termed his 'abominable blasphemies' (Owen 1874: 38n).

It was Kant's *Universal Natural History* (1755) that finally bored through the barrier of static science and, though he still spoke of the universe as 'the eternal idea of God', he observed its natural evolution and the 'stirring of nature' that began to take form. There was a dialectical aspect to this process, Kant recorded, because movements of matter conflicted with one another before producing a 'uniformity' (1900: 74-77). Thus, the 'first impulse' idea, which theorised that the solar system appeared 'suddenly', gave way to the discovery that it came into being over time. This was fundamental and revolutionary, and was followed by geological research that uncovered fossils and shells of extinct animals to confirm an evolutionary development of nature on earth, too. Other disciplines took it as their point of departure: had not plants, animals, climate,

and geography 'come into being'? Then came Darwin, and everything 'fixed' or 'static' evaporated. What had been regarded as eternal became transient, and nature was shown to be in constant motion. This supports Marxist historical materialism which advances, as did Heraclitus in ancient Greek philosophy, that nature is a *process*, a coming-into-being and passing away. Thus, Marxists argue that the mechanical materialism of the kind cited by Dickerson is *ahistorical*.

Marxism and nature

Man's interrelationship with nature is expressed in what we share with animals: we age; we require sleep, food, drink, and we die. Man builds his societies and satisfies his needs through his interaction with nature. As Marx explained in his *1844 Manuscripts*, 'man lives on nature because he is part of nature' (1975e: 276). This refers not only to primitive man who resorts to trapping water in a palm-leaf to quench his thirst, but to technologically sophisticated man who requires copper and aluminium for motherboards and servers.

Marxism argues that man is the architect of his own future because social conditions themselves are changed by man. If it were true that men are, on the contrary, simply automatons to omnipresent conditions, as Dickerson believes that materialism proposes, it would not be possible to explain how conditions change from one period to another. In short, man is both a product and a changer of his circumstances. Man produces his world by actively working on nature in order to satisfy his needs (Marx, *German Ideology* 1977: 48): mining metals for tools, drilling for fuel, and so on.

Tolkien's ideology

Marxism is not only concerned with social struggle however primary that may be, but with the whole process of human evolution. The socialist Pre-Raphaelite William Morris called it a 'complete' theory of human life (1994: 461), and this

explains why Engels, in his *Dialectics of Nature* (1883), can discuss issues such as heat, mechanics, and astronomy.

An important feature of man's condition is his religion, which Marx defined as man's 'opium' (*Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* 1970: 131)²⁹ and, since Tolkien states that the *Rings* is fundamentally 'a Catholic work' (2006: 172), his ideology is the antithesis of Marxism. From a Marxist perspective, therefore, dislodging Tolkien's religious views becomes a useful undertaking. Indeed, his religious outlook challenges the kernel of historical materialism which, as indicated above, argues that man, not God, makes his own history. A consideration of Tolkien's ideology, therefore, is warranted and, while the focus of the following chapters is on the author's Catholicism, much of the discussion is applicable to those other religions that consider man as subject to a divine being or 'prophet'.

It is the purpose of this thesis to show that Tolkien's Christian 'message' is not incidental to the *Rings* but, on the contrary, permeates his entire enterprise. Tolkien could have written a simple tale of medieval romance, without those core religious features that are considered in chapter V; but it might then be argued that, without these, his book would lack substance – and therein lies the argument of this thesis.

Class and consciousness

As noted above, historical materialism is the application of a Marxist approach to historical development. It is a means by which society and history are analysed, beginning not with what men think or imagine, but with how they produce and reproduce their lives. Class, social status, education, and family background – these material factors give rise to largely corresponding political,

29 In his *Blütenstaub*, Novalis had earlier described religion as that which functions merely as 'an opiate' (1967: 347). Presumably, this is the origin of Marx's more memorable expression.

social, and religious views: man's outlook does not determine his social existence, but his social existence determines his outlook (Marx *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* [1859] 1962: 363) as indicated in the introduction. This does *not* mean that men are 'simply complex machines' as Dickerson maintains, nor does it mean that each individual holds identical opinions on all subjects. But it does mean that, by and large, those who experience similar life conditions, be they miners or judges, are likely to share a certain common outlook on social issues.

This necessarily broad observation, made broad by the human material with which we are dealing, contrasts with the specificity of the natural sciences. In ornithology, for instance, the properties of a bird are closely observed by the researcher: its webbed feet shed light on its environment and food source. It flies and lays eggs whether it is studied by a London banker or a poor widow in west Belfast. Moreover, having analysed its behaviour, the ornithologist can accurately predict that it will lay eggs, build a nest, and feed its young in a certain way, in a certain environment, and at a certain time of the year.

In the social sciences, on the other hand, the ability to predict human behaviour, especially where it involves mass movements, is curtailed by the multitude of possible variables that do not exist in the natural world. Thus, Fulbrook argues that "There can never be a universally accepted equivalent of the 'Table of the Elements' for the social world" (2002: 96), due to its "mutually conflicting categories" (2002: 76). These 'conflicting categories', however, do not invalidate the basic premise that our outlook on life and the values we hold are shaped by our social conditions. On the contrary, it is who we are that shapes our perspective on life, because how we look at things and the beliefs we share with others largely depend on how we live our lives.

Religious idealism

As opposed to social relations, why not begin, as Tolkien does, with God as the

fundamental premise of all human existence? Of Tolkien's book, Dickerson states that Gandalf knows there is a 'seen' and an 'unseen' world, because reality includes a material and spiritual plane (2004: 12). He offers little evidence for this, however, which would seem to support Lefebvre's view (1968: 79) that religion uses 'illusions' that were in place before the development of knowledge and understanding.

Similarly, in her article on the *Rings*, Dubs argues that providence is divine reason itself, which human beings cannot know: the only thing we can know is fate, she says (1981: 36). This is a view that puts man at the mercy of the supernatural; thus, Gandalf, representative of the 'angels', has 'the final word' (I 404). Faramir says that Mithrandir (Gandalf) was "a great mover of the deeds that are done in our time" (II 347). That is, the supernatural has a direct input in the affairs of man. However, if this were the case, we could hardly speak of the sovereignty of people, or freedom, because man would be subordinate to, and dependent on, a divine being. Marx makes the point in his 1844 *Manuscripts* that a person who is indebted cannot be free because he owes his life to something else, especially if that something is the source of his life (1975e: 304). The religious views of Dickerson and Dubs, which likewise run through the veins of the *Rings*, not only deny man's purpose, but exalt God's as the only important one.

Dubs further states that we 'must believe' that divine providence persists and that 'we are part of it' (1981: 40). But why believe it? Why not believe, as Feuerbach (1957: 82) did, that the first object of man is man himself, as our fellow-man is the bond we have between ourselves and the world? Dubs' view has its origin in Augustine for whom faith comes first and understanding comes later.³⁰ Augustine explains in his *Tractates* that we ought not to understand God in order to believe in Him but, on the contrary, we need to believe in order to understand (1873: 405). This seems a rather misplaced proposition: if you do not believe, beforehand, you will not understand? Behind this 'rationale' is the

30 Compare: "Except ye believe, ye shall not understand" (Isa. vii:9).

notion that 'truth' is 'raised above' our minds (Matthews 2005: 89), because God Himself is the truth (Augustine 1993: 58).

If rational man knows nothing about God, or the 'truth of God', how can he be expected to 'believe'? This thesis argues that man does not depend on God or prophets; on the contrary, belief in God depends on man, and it is irrational to trust to an unproven and unscientific providence; indeed, nobody with a rational understanding of society would confer a role on the supernatural in man's affairs.

The Bible says so

Is the earth as the ancients perceived it, circular and flat, or is it spherical, as astronomy states? "The earth is flat because the Bible says it is flat, regardless of what science tells us", writes Scott (1997: 268) of the Flat Earth Society. If God says the Earth is flat, it is flat. Luther (1483-1546) and Augustine (354-430 AD) similarly argued that nobody could live on the underside of the flat Earth because they would be unable to see Jesus descend from Heaven at his Second Coming (Gardner 1957: 18-19). This prompts the question: did God create the earth from His mind, as Augustine and Tolkien maintain, or did it evolve out of matter? That is, as considered in the introduction, which is primary, thinking or being?

Citing the Flat Earth Society may be considered a somewhat extreme example, yet was it not Isaiah who called on God to move the sun backwards? For reasons unexplained, God complies with his request and "brought the shadow ten degrees backward" (II Kgs. 20:11). It may be argued that here the author of Kings replaces real matter with mysticism. Notwithstanding that the Bible is revered as a sacred text by millions of devotees, it contradicts all the laws of astrophysics to move the sun backwards.

Dubs states that the role man will play in the future is the privilege of fate, or 'unseen forces' which are not idle but, on the contrary, act as a motor behind the

destiny of man (chapter V). Tolkien employs this same device in his book, blaming evil cosmic powers for the blizzard on Mount Caradhras: Boromir believes it to be a 'contrivance' of the Dark Lord, because he governs the storms (I 376). Likewise, in Théoden's golden hall, Gandalf raises his staff and a 'roll of thunder' was heard (II 145).

Historical materialism rejects the fatalist explanation for which every event that is not readily explicable is put down to 'God works in mysterious ways',³¹ not least because it denies that we live in a society created by historic human activity.

Tolkien's idealism

Tolkien links his own vision of God and the 'spiritual' to machinery (chapter II). That is, his own opposition to machinery was not solely based on his experience of the horrific means to which technology was put during the Great War. Describing himself as a hobbit, he says that he likes farmlands that have not been mechanised (2006:288) while, in 1964, he denounced as 'monstrous' the hydrofoil (2006: 349) that had made a trial crossing from Calais to Dover. Even jive music, which echoes in 'empty heads', was corrupted by machinery (2006: 111).

Tolkien associates 'evil' mechanism with the craving for knowledge (see chapter II), and in one 1945 letter he confesses to believing in the thousand-year rule of the Saints who have never succumbed to the evil world,³² which he describes as 'mechanistic, scientific materialism, socialist' (2006: 110). He further states that machinery attempts to 'create power in the world', that is, a power that

31 "Fatalism is the only clue to history when we endeavour to understand its illogical phenomena" (Tolstoy 1911: 207).

32 Compare Revelation: "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison. And shall go out to deceive the nations" (20:7-8). For Tolkien, life is a never-ending battle against the Devil.

becomes even more evil when 'the Fall' is added to it (2006: 87).

From the few glimpses he offers, it is possible to glean that Tolkien opposes man's technological advances because he views them as a challenge to God in that they threaten to supplant God as the director of man's destiny: when man thinks for himself, when he relies on his own ability and creativity, he has less need to place a blind faith in God. The more man offers a cerebral response to his condition, for instance, the more he explains natural phenomena such as the *tsunami* and drought, of which his primitive ancestors were in awe, considering them acts of God, the more he challenges his own superstitions. In general, the more a society is developed – that is, the more it is governed by rationality – the more it gnaws at, and contradicts, religion.

For Marx, our ancient ancestors lived their lives through their 'imagination', that is, through their mythology (1971). This would suggest that man lived his life through fantasy, that is, in a kind of dream-like state, but this thesis argues that man was not so gullible. Religion is not only imaginative; it is a *social* phenomenon because it was, and is, accepted by large sections of the population. Man did have his superstitions and partly lived by them; no doubt the Icelandic fisherman of 900 AD appealed to his gods for a good catch, but that is not all he did: Norse man constructed bridges, built boats, navigated tides, and discovered America. And he did not do so only in 'imagination'.

Tolkien goes on to say that machinery creates labour of a lower quality (2006: 88), which is what William Morris also makes plain: machinery cannot carve the beautiful furniture, so lovingly made by a craftsman, of the past. On the other hand, machines, whether the 'monstrous hydrofoil', railways, telephones, or computers have transformed the way we live because of their efficiency. Even explosives, which Saruman has developed and which Aragorn denounces as 'devilry' (II 175), have their use in construction and mining. In fact, machines and technology in general are crucial, because in principle their expediency permits society to attain the high level of productivity necessary to eliminate social need.

Tolkien denounces 'scientific materialism', while insisting that all stories are, ultimately, 'about the fall' (2006: 147). The Christian, Tolkien regrets, is 'hemmed in a hostile world' (1936:22), because it is 'corrupt and unnatural' (2006: 64). It is 'fallen' because the devil is 'ingenious' (2006: 48). Though social conditions have changed throughout time, he laments that hard lust has stalked every street since Adam (2006: 48). Perhaps his source for this is Proverbs, which states that women 'lieth in wait [for men] on every street corner' (7:12).

There is a pessimism here which appears as a general undercurrent in religion, consistent with when Galadriel tells Frodo that evil will continue regardless of Sauron's fate (I 474). That is, evil always recurs because Tolkien sees it as part of the inherent, 'fallen' condition of man. Thus, he wrote to his son, Christopher, in 1944, of how depressing it was that 'iniquity' and 'dreary, endless wickedness' weighs down on human history (2006: 80).

In 'On Fairy-Stories',³³ Tolkien complains that the aeroplane 'cheats the flight of a bird' (1988: 60). Clearly, he sees a 'rivalry' between man-made artefacts and nature, that is, between science and technology on the one hand, and created nature, that he believes is God-given, on the other. Creativity for Tolkien was a mark of God's image in man: 'God poured the gift of creativity in man' (Pearce 2002: 88). In the real world, however, far from competing with animals, man learns from them, studying the flight of birds, for instance, to construct his aeroplane.

For 'believers', God the Creator is higher than all man's foolhardy sciences, because "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" (Cor.I 3:19). Man, therefore, need only have eyes for God. Thus, Tolkien loves not man, not 'creation', but the creator; this outlook serves to deny the advancement of man, for while man has his eye on Heaven, he looks away from the earth.

33 Published in *Essays presented to Charles Williams* (OUP) 1947. References here refer to the essay published in *Tree and Leaf* by Unwin Hyman in 1988.

Augustine and Tolkien's 'Genesis'

Tolkien, in common with many millions of 'believers', has an upside-down, idealistic view of the world in that he sees God as the creator of man, rather than man as the creator of God. Gods, however, do nothing: gods do not demand worship, or faith, or wars to be fought in their name; gods offer no refuge for the wasted lives of 'martyrs' who die in their name – there is no Heaven for them; gods know nothing of nature, or marriage, or virginity, or funerals; they know nothing of sacrifice or 'good merits'; nor do they anoint priests or popes, or bless children; gods have no respect for the living or the dead; so-called sacred places are not hallowed for gods; gods do not paint angry seascapes depicting their own wrath; this is the work of man who excites his gods with supernatural force: "*Man makes religion, religion does not make man*" (Marx *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* 1843).

However, Tolkien reveres his elves as 'God's children', the 'Firstborn', and his 'angels', the Valar, especially loved them (2006: 147). It is a measure of Tolkien's pessimism towards man that, as opposed to playing the role of teacher, elves teach men (I 25). From the point of view of Christianity, this appears to undermine Genesis (1: 26): 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over . . . all the earth'. Tolkien, however, has in mind the particularly Catholic view of man as 'fallen' for having betrayed God. Thus, he disparages man, and considers him to be the antithesis of God: God is almighty, man weak; God is perfect, man imperfect; God is good, man wicked; God is eternal, man mortal or 'doomed to die': 'the doom of men is mortality' (2006: 147).

Tolkien's views correspond to Hegel's 'Absolute Idea', in which ideas triumph over matter in assuming that God created the world. Hegel's 'Idea', as with Tolkien's 'God's design' (2006: 236), is what might be called providence, a grand scheme with principles and aims and around which man, a by-product, spends his life orbiting. This explains Tolkien's reference, through Gandalf, to

the 'tiny life' of man which is nothing but a 'passing tale'³⁴ (II 191) in the universe.

If Hegel's philosophy begins with his 'Idea', Tolkien's starting point is Augustine for whom God created the world only from His creative imagination:³⁵ 'you created this world out of nothing, because there is nothing that you cannot do' (*Confessions* 1966: 284).

This theme is recreated in *The Silmarillion* (1977), the posthumously published prequel to the *Rings* which portrays the history of the earlier ages: in the beginning was Eru, the One, who first created the Ainur, the holy angels from "the offspring of his thought" (1977: 15). Eru can do this because he is omnipotent. Eru is Tolkien's mythological god who exiled the evil Melkor, and determines the fate of men. Thus, in fantasy, religion not only exempts itself from the laws of science, but considers itself as elevated above those laws.

Feuerbach

34 Compare *Macbeth*:

"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing" (V, v, 24-28).

35 The Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* maintains God's creation of matter from nothing. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) declared that there is only one true God whose omnipotent power created spiritual and corporeal beings "out of nothing" (1990: 230).

In his own *Creatio ex Nihilo* (1994), May maintains that this doctrine was 'not demanded' by the Bible" (1994: 24); rather, it was a second-century theological innovation (1994: 2). Copan refutes this, citing the *Dead Sea Scrolls* and Psalms: "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made" (33.4).

Tolkien sold the manuscripts of *The Hobbit* and the *Rings* to the Catholic, Jesuit university, Marquette, in Wisconsin in 1958 for £1250; Marquette also holds Tolkien conferences such as that on Arwen and Aragorn in October 2004. Copan writes from the same university.

The fantastical supposition behind Augustine's belief that God created the world 'out of nothing', and which served as a model for Tolkien, was exposed by Feuerbach (1804-1872), that mighty thinker of materialist philosophy who had studied under Hegel in 1824 in Berlin. Brushing aside the idealism behind the creation story, the pupil instructs the master: "it remains absolutely inexplicable how a real material thing can spring out of a pure thought" (1957: 85). Thus, it was wholly delusory to imagine that the myth of creation explains the existence of the world.

Feuerbach's significance for Marxist materialism is clear. The soil we dig our fingers into, the wind that brushes on our face and the society into which we are born – this is the only real world. There was nothing offensive in what Feuerbach aimed to prove; rather, his intention was to change "friends of God into friends of man, believers into thinkers, devotees of prayer into devotees of work, candidates for the hereafter into students of this world" ('Lectures' 1967: 285).

Feuerbach, whose theories on God and religion go deeper than anything Marx or Engels wrote, argues that God did not create man in his own image, as Genesis states above; rather, man has created God as an idealised image of himself and worshiped that image: religion is a mirror image of human nature (Feuerbach 1957: 63). Shelley, too, wrote that the Creator's mind is a reflection of 'all other minds' (1977: 30). Man projects the image of God onto a screen – and wishes it were him. Feuerbach was not a Marxist, but his philosophical work is the foundation stone of Marxist materialism and, in 1844,³⁶ Marx stated that Feuerbach had provided a philosophical basis for socialism (1975i: 354).

Feuerbach argued that Christian man considers love, pity, and forgiveness as divine and so vests God with these qualities. God also issues prohibitions which Christian man considers 'holy': 'thou shalt not kill, steal, commit adultery, lie, or desire thy neighbour's wife' (Deut 5): break these commandments, and there is

36 Dated 11th August 1844, (*Collected Works* Vol III).

no Heaven for you. Christian man worships not the attribute of divinity, but the divinity of the attribute. It is the positive qualities of love, mercy, and respect for others which are revered, and not, strictly, the grandeur of being godlike. It was likewise in Greece: the Greek gods eat and drink, so eating and drinking becomes a divine pleasure. The gods, too, are strong because physical strength was revered; thus, Zeus has the attribute of being the strongest (Feuerbach 1989: 20-21).

God would cease to have value if He were divested of these ideal human qualities – Luther spoke of ‘Christ’s humanity’ in 1540. Without these *human* attributes, God would not be God. The key ‘player’ here is not God, however, but man, because religion is abstracted from man’s own world; indeed, it is only because religion is sourced from the society of man that it can be applied to man at all. Let us think about it this way, argues Xenophanes (570-480 BC), the Greek philosopher: ‘if cattle and horses or lions could draw, they would draw their gods like cattle and horses’ (cited in Kirk 1983: 169).

It is ironic, therefore that Tolkien, as noted below, condemns the classical gods because they have a human personality: personality, he argues, is derived from a person (1988: 26). Yet, the Christian God also possesses human attributes. Indeed, Christian man can only project his own ideally constructed personality onto his God, because that is the only personality he knows and values; this is what Feuerbach means when he refers to God as the human being ‘purified’ (1989: 14).

Marx had been among those young intellectuals who, in 1840s Germany, had opposed the feudal oligarchy, contesting the *religious* values to which it had clung. Now that Feuerbach showed the earthly origins of religion, it was only a short step to recognising the need to confront religion through *social* struggle, that is, by transforming those real world conditions that give rise to religion. Shortly afterwards Marx criticised Feuerbach for not seeing the external world as an historical product, the product of industry (*German Ideology* 1977: 62), but forty years later, in 1888, Engels still spoke fervently of Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity* (1843):

With one blow it placed materialism on the throne. Nature exists independently of all philosophy. Nothing exists outside nature and man. One must oneself have experienced the liberating effect of this book to get an idea of it. Enthusiasm was general; we all became at once Feuerbachians (*Ludwig Feuerbach* 1947: 21-22).

Old religions

The Genesis story is not unique to Christianity; ancient peoples, too, believed that intelligent and wise gods created the world solely by thinking, using what Eliade calls 'self-concentration' (1960: 133). Sometimes, as with the Mongols, the creator rules indirectly, through representatives, such as the Khans (Eliade 1996: 62). Tolkien's Gandalf, the wise wizard, is a Khan.

However, Tolkien dismisses the old religions, labelling them 'meteorological objects', such as the Roman Jupiter or Viking Thor. These astronomical creations, he states, are creations of man: the gods are colourful, he says, and beautiful, and full of the splendours of nature, but man abstracted these qualities for them 'from sun and moon and cloud' (1988: 26). It is fantasy, he writes, that men have imagined gods and worshipped them (1988: 51) because these gods – unlike his own, Catholic God – are incapable of 'illuminating' the world (1988: 26).

In the same vein, he says that the author of the early eighth-century Old English epic poem, *Beowulf*, knew that his days were 'heathen and hopeless' (1936: 22). The author was a Christian looking back upon a heathen-heroic past, Tolkien continues, while his theme that man is at war in a hostile pagan world confronting his 'inevitable overthrow' is one that Christians should not despise (1936: 18, 23).

His cynicism towards the old religions recalls that of the speaker in the epical *Christian Sibyllines* (180 BC-300 AD), who opens her oracle by warning 'defiled Man' (I 5) to heed the instruction of the Lord. She rejects 'false Phoebus' (IV 4,

6, 22) and the ‘shameless prophetess, daughter of Circe’ (III 813 – cited in Treu 1992: 661). Similarly, Tolkien refers to the tale of the Norse god, Thor, much beloved of farmers, the *boendr*, in the 900 AD poem ‘Thrymskvitha’, and concludes that it has no religious significance at all (1988: 27) – a claim that would certainly have shocked the Norseman.

Of gods and men

Who were these gods that Tolkien so vilified? Gods were leaders of men who were deified (Dronke 1997: 118). They have the attributes of rulers, and Hesiod, the eighth-century Greek poet, accuses them of exploiting labouring men, because ‘in one day, you [man] earned enough to keep you for a year’ (1959: 23). Here we have the reality that lies underneath myth and religion: the gods’ economic exploitation of man, together with their power to castigate, enslave, and exile as the tale of Prometheus shows, only mirrors the class divisions of ancient Greece.³⁷

Similarly, in the Norse Eddic poem, ‘Völuspá’, written in Iceland (c.1270) and which Tolkien sources for his own book,³⁸ there are two wars, both involving the *Æsir*,³⁹ the more noble divinities, against the *Vanir*, the ‘lower’ fertility gods; these are the first and final wars in the world. Since the *Æsir*, led by Odin,⁴⁰ represented warrior-aristocrats in Norse society, this war reflected a challenge to traditional rule; that is, it reveals a social division in the real world of men: the

37 The titan, Prometheus, stole the fire of Zeus and gave it to man; for his troubles, Zeus had him chained to a rock for all eternity for an eagle to peck at his liver.

38 However, the North “was the seat of the fortresses of the Devil” (2006: 376).

39 Tolkien substitutes the *Æsir* for his own ‘angels’, the *Valar* (Garth 2004: 86).

40 That a god may identify with a specific social class is asserted unequivocally in the Eddic ‘Hárbarðslióð’ (Dronke 1997: 189):

*Óðinn has the earls
who fall in the slaughter
while þórr has the tribe of thralls.*

‘mythical divine war expresses *class* discord among men’ (my emphasis) (Dronke 1997: 129).

In the *Rings*, Frodo, Gandalf, and others sail to Valinor at the end, just as the aristocratic-warrior class of Norse society went to Valhalla, a special heaven for warriors, as the picture stones carved in Gotland (Sweden) indicate. They depict ships that represent the journey into the next world, with the warriors accompanied by valkyries, female mythological figures, who serve them food and drink. In real life, this is what women were obliged to do (Jesch 1991: 127).

Again, this underlines social division, evidence for which we find today in graves. A slave or serf was buried with little, if anything, while at the highest levels of society stand the ‘mightiest grave monuments in northern Europe’ (Shetelig and Falk 1937: 279). There is, indeed, a distinct social hierarchy in ‘*Völuspá*’: the sibyl addresses her ‘Greater and humbler audience’ (cited in Dronke 1997: 7), and Tolkien continues this tradition with his division between the different beings in Middle-earth: Gimli bows low and stammers before Lady Galadriel, begging for a strand of her hair (I 488-89). It is difficult to imagine a more striking instance of servility, one indeed which makes ‘serpent’, silk-tongued Gríma look quite respectable.

There is division, too, in the hobbit world with its greater and lesser hobbits (see chapter III). Elves, too, are part of a hierarchy: the elegant, aristocratic elves are the ‘highest’, superior to ‘wild Elves, dwarves, and men’ (2006: 151), and they enjoy immortality like gods. They speak ‘high-elven’, which Tolkien says is akin to Latin, and they use it for ceremonial purposes (III 514); the ‘lower’ elves, on the other hand, speak Sindarin, or Grey-elven. Men are lower than elves and, unlike them, they are mortal – men die and never return (1977: 186) – as previously indicated.

Stanton (2001: 17) notes that the *Rings* is instinctively conservative in its insistence on ‘rightful rule’, and this is verified by Elrond who tells his noble gathering that Númenorean blood became ‘mingled’ with that of ‘lesser men’ (I 320), and that houses of ‘purer blood’ lived longer (III 160). Tolkien is attempting

here a biological justification for a social division between ‘better’ and ‘lesser’ men: it would seem that, for Tolkien, some men are superior to others on account of their blood group. As discussed below, however, in relation to John Ball, such an outlook negates the very Christianity that Tolkien purports to profess.

‘Völuspá’ also tells of how the gods built Norse society: ‘they built forges and fashioned wealth’ (Dronke 1997:8), while in ‘Hymiskviða’, from the tenth-century,⁴¹ the Ocean Giant, Ægir, “brews ale for the gods” (cited in Dronke 1997: 121). The gods do the work of man, because the gods were men. The Roman historian, Tacitus (c.56 AD–117 AD), noted that Germanic tribes turned women into goddesses (1970: 108), while Adam of Bremen, the eleventh-century German chronicler, observed that people worship heroes who they have made gods, and they ‘endow them with immortality’ because of their remarkable exploits (1959: 207).

This deification of man has played an historic role, because leaders have lent themselves to heroic and mythological deeds to add authority to their rule. The resurrection of Gandalf, reborn as Gandalf the White, similarly raises his profile in the eyes of Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli (II 116-19). His rebirth acts as a rallying cry in the battle against Sauron while, in contrast, the fall of the Balrog anticipates the demise of Mordor. Moreover, the deification of a ruler is set up against ‘lesser’ men; he becomes established as an independent ‘divine’ entity, and men are to obey *his* laws, bow down to *him*, and not vice versa. Thus, in the Norse religion, man is subordinate to fate; in Christianity he is subordinate to God.

There is something of this deification at work in Tolkien’s own book. After his death, Boromir is laid in a boat, in Viking fashion, alongside the weapons of those he has vanquished (II 14), before being borne away to the Falls of Rauros. In Gondor, in ‘afterdays’, it was long said that the elven-boat rode the

41 See 'Hymiskviða' for a short introduction to the poem.

falls and bore Boromir out into the wider sea (II 17), and this imagery enthralls Aragorn to sing: “*What news from the North, O mighty wind, do you bring to me today? What news of Boromir the Bold? For he is long away*” (II 18).

Stealing the Emperor’s Clothes

Tolkien’s views on heathen religions seem to ignore that Christianity shaped, and was shaped by, the ‘heathen’ tradition during the conversion of the Norse peoples. Engels observed, in his *History of Early Christianity* (1894), that the Nordic gods of the *Poetic Edda* were influenced by Christianity (1990: 469), and ‘*Völuspá*’ itself reflects this: the poet includes the theme of man’s moral degeneration, a theme characteristic of Christianity, but nothing fundamental to the pagan gods is conceded (Dronke 1989: 40). Thus, we might speak of early Christianity as a ‘transreligion’, an interrelationship of old and new religions.

The conversion was facilitated by commercial contact with other European cultures,⁴² which included the baptism of ‘heathen’ kings in exchange for trade deals or virgins – usually daughters or sisters of local Christian rulers. In addition, King writes that the conversion of England took place with little dramatic violence because the ‘barbarian kings’ had monarchical aspirations that corresponded closely to Christian teachings on government (1988: 151). That is, the gods were bartered, like any other commodity, because it suited the political aspirations of Norse rulers.

Thus, the royal houses of Kent, Wessex, East Anglia and others record the descent of their kings from Woden (the Norse god, Odin) (Chaney 1960: 200), while Edwin and Egrid of Northumbria and Edmund of East Anglia were baptised later so that they may become ‘popular saints’ (Chaney 1960: 212). In this way, both Norse and Christian rulers are linked to the divine: pagan and

42 Munch: ‘the Northern races received impulses from without which affected elements in their mythology’ (1926: 116).

Christian ideas of kingship ‘resemble one another’ (Dronke 1989: 40).

In addition to these political manoeuvres, both religions share similarities. As noted above in the cosmic battle between the Æsir and the Vanir, the concept of a ‘final conflict’ played a prominent role in Northern mythology – even the gods were subject to fate – so a Norse audience could accommodate Pope Gregory’s prediction in his first public homily in St Peter’s Square (602 AD) that the end of the world was near (McGinn 1979: 64). Similarly, the trinity of Norse pagan gods, namely, Odin, Tyr, and Thor, made it easier for the Christian trinity to be assimilated (Chaney 1960: 207). Christianity, it would seem, stole the emperor’s clothes: “there is no break in continuity between the ideology of primitive mystical experience and Judæo-Christian mysticism” (Eliade 1960: 70).

Resurrection, too, is found in early religions: it is related in the holy texts of the ancient Zends (modern Iran), where it is tantamount to a belief in immortality, and in pre-Christian myth with the birth and rebirth of the defeated god. Ultimately, the theme is rooted in nature that dies and is regenerated with the seasons, though the idea only became articulated in Luke (24) in the modern Christian age.

Further evidence of the ‘continuity’ to which Eliade refers is the letter of Gregory, elected pope in 590 AD, to the Abbot Mellitus in 601 AD, in which he advised that pagan temples in England be used for the worship of God: they needed to be converted from places where the Devil is worshipped to the service of the ‘true God’ (Bede 1847: 56). It is likewise with the naming of barrows. These play a role in the *Rings*, too. The hobbits encounter the barrow-downs – such as those prehistoric burial mounds found in Wiltshire, England, and dating from 3600 BC⁴³ – where they felt increasingly trapped (I 189), before the wight, or undead, looks forward to Sauron’s victory:

43 The ‘Stone Pages’ website and its contents are © of Arosio, P and Meozzi, D 1996-2010

*Cold be hand and heart and bone,
and cold be sleep under stone...
till the dark lord lifts his hand
over dead sea and withered land* (I 193).

In demonising the vast traditions of myth (Noel 1977: 173) that surround these ancient burial mounds, Tolkien continues the zeal to replace pagan gods and superstition with the Christian fear of the Devil. He has various models, including the mound at Wansdyke, in Wiltshire, which the Anglo-Saxons named Woden's Dyke after their god, but later became the Devil's Ditch; other examples include the Devil's Den near Clatford, also in Wiltshire, and the Devil's Ring on Brightwell Heath in Suffolk (Grinsell 1936: 79).

Gregory understood that peasants frequently returned to those religious places to which they were accustomed (Bede 1847: 56), so he exploited the reservoir of faith in established religion to further the interests of his own superstitions: the peasantry were no longer permitted to offer beasts to the Devil, but they could kill cattle in the name of God (Bede 1847: 56). Thus, in Christianity, as Engels remarks in his *Book of Revelation* (1883), there is the 'heathen notion, that god, or the gods, must be propitiated by sacrifices, transformed into the specific Christian notion that Christ's death is the ultimate sacrifice' (1990: 114). In the *Rings*, Gandalf, Arwen, and Frodo, continue this tradition of sacrifice: Gandalf 'perishes' in Moria; Arwen sacrifices her own immortality for Aragorn; and Frodo gives up his beloved Shire.

Other, traditionally pagan features later adapted for Christianity, and which Tolkien uses in the *Rings*, include the use of fire. Gandalf was famous in the Shire for his skill with 'fire and lights' (I 44); the nine rings were forged in fire, and the one Ring is cast into the fire of Orodruin in Mordor. In *The Silmarillion*, Eru first made the Ainur, telling them that he had kindled them with the 'Flame Imperishable' (1977: 15), and in the *Book of Lost Tales* he says that he has set the 'Secret Fire' brightly within them (1994: 53). Aragorn's sword was forged anew in Rivendell and is called Andúril, the 'Flame of the West' (I 361). Fire is a dominant biblical theme, too: there are 'burnt offerings in the name of the LORD' (I Chron. 16:2) while, in Revelation, the 'seven lamps of fire' that burn before the

throne, are the 'seven Spirits of God' (4.5). Most famously, God appeared to Moses in a flame of fire in a bush (Acts. 7.30; Exod. 3.2). There is a further parallel with Tolkien's Doom of Fire, the destination of the quest, and the flaming sword that guards Eden (Gen 3:24). Fire symbolism is ancient and can be discerned in a number of pre-Christian shamanistic techniques: shamans throughout the world, as with Gandalf, are 'masters of fire' (Eliade 1960: 69).

Decline of religion

Despite advances in the natural sciences, it is in the sphere of the divine, the unknown and unknowable, that Tolkien is most insistent and final. In his *Letters*, he refers to the 'Blessed Sacrament', which he likens to romance, glory, honour, and loyalty, and as the 'one thing to love on Earth' (2006: 53-54). Again, there is little to support this view: it is simply opinion and conjecture.

Tolkien clearly held to the Eucharist dearly, but his commitment went much further: he insisted on regular confession to a priest and had a medieval approach to the role that female officiates play in the marriage ceremony; this is considered in the following chapter. However, he chose not to openly advertise his Catholicism in the *Rings* because the changing social conditions of his time rendered his views unacceptable to wide layers of the population; therefore, he is obliged to disguise them behind his text. If, instead of Galadriel, readers were presented with the Virgin Mary – Tolkien calls her 'Our Lady' (2006: 172), and 'Mother of Jesus' (2006: 354) – who is, apparently, the only 'unfallen' individual (2006: 286), it is difficult to conceive that the *Rings* would have been so popularly received: Tolkien knew that Christianity could only be conveyed in a secular, allegorical way, given that the 'changing referential framework' of values in capitalist society has compromised the Christian-Judeo tradition (Zipes 1979: 165).

It is that we no longer actively live through religion that Tolkien laments; we do not connect with it as part of a whole, vital life experience, and this compels him to adopt an indirect approach to reaching his audience. Perhaps he disguises it

too well since, in a letter to Houghton Mifflin, his American publisher, he complains that the only criticism of the *Rings* that annoyed him was one that it 'contained no religion' (2006: 218). Of Arthurian legend, on the other hand, he is critical because it is British (as opposed to English), and also because it is *too* explicitly Christian: 'that seems fatal' he says, though he does not elaborate (2006: 144).

The Christian element is necessary in a story, he says, provided it is not overt: myth and fairy-tales, he proposes, must contain religious truth, but it should not be 'explicit' or known in the real world (2006: 144). Still, of the *Rings*, he reassured his priest and close friend, Fr Murray, who proofread the typescript, that religion was 'absorbed' into his story (2006: 172).

Socialists and Christians

Fulbrook argues above that it is a mistake to equate research in the natural sciences with that of sociology and, indeed, some historians cannot even agree on what history actually is – as the introduction noted. Nevertheless, research into social history reveals two important constants: one is the exploitation, in all its guises, by a small minority, whether the Norse warrior-class, religious rulers, or modern capitalists, of the vast majority for its own gain; the second is man's historic resistance to this exploitation. Often, this does not take the form of a knee-jerk response to exploitation – sometimes a sore will fester for years – and it can express itself in many ways.

It is in this respect of resistance that Engels points to similarities between early Christianity and socialism: Christianity was originally a movement of the oppressed, appearing 'first as the religion of slaves and emancipated slaves, and of poor people deprived of all rights' (*Early Christianity* 1990: 447). Under Roman military might, small nations were crushed and their wealth confiscated, while the pressure of taxation on communities gave rise to riches for a few and grinding poverty for the rest. Virgil had suggested a way to the afterlife for patriotic Romans in his 'Aeneid' (book six), but for the slave there was no way

out, yet one was found – in Heaven. Eternal life had previously been perceived as a continuation of the hardship experienced in the mortal world; now, with the arrival of Christianity, came the reward of paradise.

However, by the Middle Ages, the ruling Catholic Church, which claimed to represent Christianity, and which was almost as powerful as the state, appears itself as unrepresentative of ordinary men and women: in the real world of Catholicism and money, the wealthy man could buy his place in Heaven. While the sins of the rich were pardoned for money by the Ecclesiastical Courts, the poor man was unable to read the Bible, let alone question it in order to improve his understanding. The religious orders would have considered such an idea as heresy, since all biblical teaching came through them, and only them. Moreover, it was bishops who gave permission as to who was allowed to read the Bible. For a price, the wealthy were allowed an English version, while its dissemination among the poor was prohibited, since they were considered heretical. Trevelyan, however, asks that if the Bible was meant for everybody, why was it necessary to obtain permission to read it? (1899: 130-31).

The Church, as an exploitative landlord, fleeced its peasant flock. Whereas the crudest superstitions were met with rude laughter in the towns, tricks and quackery were palmed off on the unfortunate rustic by the pope and his bishops (Trevelyan 1899: 138). This may be contrasted with the passage from Luke in which Jesus relates the story of the victim of thieves, leaving him for dead. On seeing him on the floor, the priest crosses over. So does the Levite. But a Samaritan shows him compassion and cares for him:

‘Which of these three’, Jesus asks, ‘was the better neighbour?’

‘And he said, he that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus, Go, and do thou likewise’ (10: 30-37).

On hearing this parable, the peasant would be forgiven for believing that biblical teaching and Catholicism were two different species, and he would not be mistaken. Speaking of the Church, Trevelyan states that the ‘husk remained’ but

the 'kernel had gone'. Catholicism had become a superstition (1899: 138). Other corrupt practices are outlined by Walker.⁴⁴

The Church, however, did not always have its own way, because it was used as a platform for early socialist ideas by protestors such as John Ball. Imprisoned for preaching the equality of man before God, Ball (c.1338–1381), the Colchester priest from St Albans in Hertfordshire, refused to be cowed. Militancy is born of defiance and, when the Archbishop of Canterbury forbade him to preach from the pulpit, he addressed villagers as they came out of their local churches:

My good friends, things cannot go well in England, nor ever will until every thing shall be in common; when there shall neither be vassal nor lord, and all distinctions levelled...Are we not all descended from the same parents...Adam and Eve? (Froissart 1842: 652-53).

Revolutionaries in the Middle Ages appear in a religious guise: men use whatever tools they have at their disposal to advance their material interests. Ball was sent to Maidstone prison before being released in June 1381 by the Kentish peasantry led by Wat Tyler. He then played a prominent role in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 (which is briefly considered with Tolkien's medievalism in chapter IV) and, to the relief of the Church, he was found guilty of high treason, and hung, drawn, and quartered in July 1381.

Historical materialism is 'in dispute' with religious ideas such as those held by Tolkien though, of course, the author had the right to advocate his views. The following chapters will consider what those views were.

⁴⁴ Walker, M *Corruption of the Church in the Middle Ages* 13th February 2008

Class, religion, and the Great War

'Manners check the wolf under our social skin' - Tolkien

For Tolkien, Edwardian⁴⁵ England was a green England, conservative, Christian, and a woman's place was at the hearth. However, those traditional values of hierarchy and the family crest, paternalism, manners, and harsh class rule, were fading – much to the regret of the young Tolkien and other writers. This chapter considers those values, together with the author's background and education.

Tolkien experienced life in the slaughter of the Somme during the First World War, and expressed it through myth. The chapter examines, in some detail, the ways in which he brings those experiences to the *Rings*, while drawing parallels with other, contemporary accounts and memoirs. Together with his Catholicism, these factors shaped his philosophy, reinforcing the need, as he saw it, for a rural Christian idyll.

There follows a brief discussion, too, of the female characters in his book, and the role that allegory plays in it.

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born of well-educated middle-class British parents in Bloemfontein, South Africa in 1892. He died in 1973. His mother, a 'former missionary' (Manlove 1975: 152), relocated to a modest cottage in Sarehole, England, a hamlet a mile south of industrial Birmingham in 1895, and whose pastoral quality would shape his portrayal of the Shire.

To her family's disgust, Tolkien's mother converted to Catholicism: her father was a Unitarian, and his daughter's conversion to Rome caused him outrage

45 The period 1900-14 is often dubbed 'Edwardian', even though George V succeeded Edward VII in 1910.

(Carpenter 1989: 31). For Tolkien it would be a life-changing decision and, when she died aged thirty-four (Tolkien was twelve), he became more absorbed in the Church: Tolkien felt that she had martyred herself (Garth 2004: 12) for her faith, and that her 'persecution' had hastened her death (2006: 54).

In 1900, Tolkien attended the best grammar school in the city, King Edward's, where sportsmanship, duty, and honour – echoes of Jane Austen who Tolkien admired – were emphasised: in one letter he complains that his son, Christopher, disliked the 'manners' of life 150 years ago as depicted by Jane Austen. Tolkien revered such values, because 'they held in check the everlasting wolf that lurks under our social skin' (2006: 72).

This, however, seems to contradict Jesus (Matthew 7:9) who said of the same social wolf at the door: 'Knock, and it will be opened to you'. The pope, too, Leo XIII, wrote in 1879 that all men were equal 'with respect to their nature and to original sin' (Aquinas 1967: 123). However, Tolkien's class outlook, evident in his work and letters, appears to have prevented him from conforming to Christianity's egalitarian sentiment.

Escapism

At school, Tolkien became attracted to the Catholic poet, Thompson (1859-1907),⁴⁶ who influenced his first attempts at poetry with the sylvan 'Wood-sunshine' (July 1910), in which he depicts fairy-spirits dancing on a woodland carpet. From 1911 he attended Exeter College, Oxford, and studied Old Norse. He read the *Poetic Edda*, which he draws on in the *Rings* and which is considered in chapter II. Indicative of his own early poetry, he wrote of an Oxford 'Proudly wrapt in mystic mem'ry overpassing human ken' in the college's *Stapleton Magazine* (December 1913): Oxford has a 'spirit' of its own, one that

46 According to Whitty, Thompson was influenced by Augustine (*National Catholic Reporter* 9th November 2007).

predates man and is given preeminence over him. This anticipates the *Rings* in which the world is created by a divine hand, and confirms that Tolkien was writing 'escapist' material before his experience of the Great War. He defends this as follows:

I have claimed that Escape is one of the main functions of fairy-stories, and since I do not disapprove of them, it is plain that I do not accept the tone of scorn or pity with which 'Escape' is now so often used In using Escape in this way the critics have chosen the wrong word, and, what is more, they are confusing, not always by sincere error, the Escape of the prisoner with the Flight of the deserter (1988: 55-56).

This, however, is not analogous: the prisoner who seeks to escape from his confinement seeks the refuge of his fellow man, that is, the environment of human society, of work, and social life; in Tolkien's fairy, man flees from this environment.

Fairy-stories and fantasy can be used to address important social issues. Orwell uses imaginary pigs in *Animal Farm* (1945) to challenge Stalinism; thus, it would be a mistake to consider that the object of all fantasy is 'escapist'. However Tolkien does 'escape' from human society, though not because he employs elves and wizards. Rather, it is 'escapist' since his remedy for the issues to which he refers, namely 'hunger, thirst, and poverty' (1988: 60), is bound up with the supernatural: real life does not involve a conflict against a horned demon, but a struggle for material existence – a daily battle to maintain an income and pay bills.

Tolkien saw the Great War not as the outcome of the struggle of imperialist powers for markets, but one which was inherent to the 'fallen' condition of man. Thus, he links the 'evil' machinery deployed in the war with a cosmic struggle between good and evil. In other words, he associates those profound problems he saw in his social life, such as war and technology, with the struggle against evil and this is what he aims to capture in the *Rings*. His interest in fantasy, he explains in 'On Fairy Stories', was 'quickened to life by war' (1988: 41).

Tolkien's world, then, is one in which material interests, economic, social, and political, are culled, and replaced by his own preoccupation with the Devil and his evil ways. In contrast, Marx argues that 'human beings are the actors and authors of their own drama' (*Poverty of Philosophy* 1976:170).

This thesis suggests that while people may find comfort in literary fantasy, such 'escapes' are only momentary. Man is not simply inert and spellbound by wonderful tales: man is practical. Life is activity, and man rolls up his sleeves and puts himself to work. Neither the fairy nor the religious tale can resolve social ills, and to suggest otherwise is rather fanciful. If Tolkien had seriously wished to rid the world of 'machine-guns and bombs' he needed to have made a contribution that addressed man, not God. However, since this would have entailed an active political struggle alongside his fellow man in the social world he rejected, it was easier for him to hold on to his Catechism and read his stories to the Inklings, an Oxford literary discussion group of which he was a member.⁴⁷

As a young man, Tolkien's friends were exclusively middle class, Oxbridge educated men. Wiseman was nurtured on Handel and Brahms, and Gilson on Florentine Renaissance sculpture, and in 1911 they formed a tiny literary clique, the Tea Club and Barrovian Society (TCBS), which Wiseman defined as a 'world-shaking power'.⁴⁸

In 1915, Tolkien earned a First in English and a year later married Edith Bratt, who he had first met in 1908. His guardian, Fr Morgan, had forbidden the eighteen-year-old from seeing Edith until he was twenty-one, denouncing their courtship as 'evil' (Carpenter 1989: 51), and these rather extreme assertions surrounded the young writer. Edith postponed her musical ambitions for

47 Further information is provided on 'The Inklings' Web site 2007

48 Wiseman to Tolkien 16th November 1914 (cited in Garth 2004: 137).

marriage and, although a practicing Anglican, she converted to Rome in Warwick in 1914 under Tolkien's instruction; over time, however, her anti-Catholic feelings hardened as she came to regret converting. Tolkien was unwavering about taking their children to church, and had a 'medieval insistence' on frequent confession, while Edith 'hated confessing to a priest' (Carpenter 1989: 160).

Tolkien himself moved up the career ladder: in 1918 he joined the staff of the *New English Dictionary* and in 1919 he worked as a freelance tutor. He went from tutor to professor at Leeds, before being appointed Professor of Anglo-Saxon at the University of Oxford in 1925. He was appointed Merton Professor of English at Oxford in 1945, and retired in 1959.

Historical context

Tolkien's formative years were marked by profound social changes, notably a shift from aristocratic values to industrialism, and the rise of labour. *Howard's End*, published in 1910, offers an insight into a nervous conservatism in love with country life and the past – and one conscious of impending dissolution:

'There are moments when I feel Howard's End peculiarly our own'.
 'All the same, London's creeping'.
 She pointed over the meadow – over eight or nine meadows, but at the end of them was a red rust.
 'Life's going to be melted down, all over the world'.
 (1998: 240).

Through the eyes of the protagonists, the reader enjoys *Faust* and *Tosca* at the Royal Opera in Covent Garden, and Beethoven, Wagner, and Monet, but there is contempt for the impoverished: "We are not concerned with the very poor. They are unthinkable, and only to be approached by the statistician or the poet" (1998: 35).

One of these 'very poor' was Robert Tressell (Noonan) (1870-1911), an Irish

housepainter who had come to England, like Tolkien, from South Africa. Published in the same year as *Howard's End*, his *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* is an explicitly political work and classic of British working-class literature. Based on his own experiences of poverty,⁴⁹ exploitation, and the prospect of the workhouse⁵⁰ for himself and his daughter Kathleen who he was bringing up alone, Tressell's book is a penetrating analysis of the relationship between workers and their employers. The 'philanthropists' of the title are the workers who acquiesce in their own exploitation in the interests of their employers. The timing of the book's publication was indicative of the mood in the country.

The Establishment was concerned about the poor or, rather, the threat that they posed to their privileges: trade union membership increased by 300,000 in 1911 and over 10 million days were lost in strike action in the same year; in 1912, this rose to a huge 41 million lost working days; in January 1912, 160,000 Lancashire weavers were locked out; there was a serious dock dispute on the Clyde, and in Liverpool, where 70,000 dockers were on strike, food supplies only passed through picket-lines with a military escort (Pearce 2002: 22). Tom Mann, introduced in the methodology chapter, was arrested in the port and charged with mutiny (and later released under public pressure).

Most important, a national strike by miners brought a million men out over the demand for a minimum wage. An editorial in *The Times* judged it to be the 'greatest threat to the country since the Spanish Armada' (26th February 1912). In response, the parlours and drawing-rooms of England spoke of *forcing* miners back to work (Dangerfield 1966: 237); such was the pressure from the coalfields, that Asquith, the Liberal Prime Minister, cried tears in Parliament.

49 During this period, infant mortality was 40% higher in the poorest than in the most well-to-do areas, while the degree of poor health among the poor is indicated by the fact that two fifths of volunteers for the Boer War were rejected as unfit for active service. There is little of Lawrence's 'clean world' here.

50 In 1912, there were 280,000 paupers in the workhouses of England. It was an 'all-time record' (Pearce 2002: 14).

Then, in October 1913, when a certain calm had returned to the mines, 439 men lost their lives in an explosion at the Senghenydd pit in Wales, for which the owners were fined £22. Tolkien was twenty-one years old during this period of ‘unprecedented class hatred’ (Dangerfield 1966: 192).

The Great War accelerated the decline of the aristocracy,⁵¹ and Ezra Pound and D H Lawrence understood that its time had come to an end. Pound regrets the passing of tradition: ‘the great carriage yard was now empty, and paintings had been sold to pay for taxes’ (1993: 535). Similarly, in August 1915, Lawrence complained to Lady Asquith of ‘an unclean world that had been superimposed on the clean world’ (1962: 358).

In the same vein, Tolkien complains in the *Foreword* to his book that the country in which he lived in childhood was being shabbily destroyed before he was ten (I 13). His ‘Kortirion among the Trees’ (1915) expresses his sadness at the fairies’ decline. Kortirion is Warwick, named after Kôr, the city from which the elves came over the western sea on their mission into the ‘hostile world’: “O fading town upon a little hill, / Old memory is waning in thine ancient gates, / Thy robe gone gray, thine old heart almost still” (1985: 33). It is the mood of this poem, writes Garth, that ‘underpins his entire legendarium’ (2004: 109). It suggests his craving for a disappearing world.

However, Wiseman criticised Tolkien’s ‘Kortirion’ as ‘freakish’, arguing that he had missed ‘the grandeur of the glare of the noon’; that is, his friend had failed to appreciate human endeavour in the universe. Wiseman speaks of *man* conquering science, albeit with God’s help, but Tolkien retorted that his verse expressed his love of *God’s* creation. His elves were better, warmer, and fairer to the heart than ‘the mathematics of the tide or the vortices that are the winds’ (cited in Garth 2004: 121).

51 In the mid-1800s, some 50% of the population lived in the countryside; fifty years later, when Tolkien was a boy, 75% live in the towns where brutal factory work was the most common labour.

Unlike other Great War writers, such as Owen or Sassoon, Tolkien expressed his experience of war through myth. He is not unique, however, since poets have mythologised conflict for centuries. In the Great War, Machen's 'The Bowmen' was first published a month after the Battle of Mons (August 1914), the first major engagement between the British and German armies. The British were forced back from Mons, but inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy, and Machen describes celestial archers from Agincourt supported by St George, firing their arrows upon the opposing ranks. Subsequently, stories of angels were reported in newspapers across the world in honour of the 'Angels of Mons'. Similarly, Graves' attachment to myth was an element in his poetry for fifty years, while Blunden was absorbed in country scenes, folklore, and his White Goddess.

It is partly understandable that Tolkien expressed himself through fantasy: he was nurtured on biblical tales and the deeds of saints and so, while Barbusse wrote *Under Fire* (1917) from within the violence of the trenches, Tolkien reaches for the 'sacred': It had always been there for him; it was safe and secure, and in 1916-17 he began to jot down ideas for *The Silmarillion* with its re-enactment of the Christian story of Creation. Thus, just as his Jewish origins provided some comfort for the Great War poet Rosenberg (Bergonzi 1965: 113), Catholicism was Tolkien's therapeutic norm.

The Great War

While thousands of the Midlands poor did their 'duty' when Kitchener, the British field marshal, called for 500,000 men to bolster Britain's small standing army, Tolkien opted to further his career: "The key to Tolkien's decision to defer enlistment lay in his pocket" (Garth 2004: 43). He enlisted in July 1915 after securing the possibility of a university career, got married in March 1916, and in June, with the 11th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, he was posted to the Somme. He became a Second Lieutenant signaller and, Garth notes (2004: 173), he attended Mass on 5th August in Bertrancourt. He fought at Beaumont-Hamel

and, in September 1916 at Schwaben Redoubt, but in October he caught trench fever and was evacuated to a hospital in Birmingham; his front line duties were over.

Tolkien, or 'Tollers' to his friends, 'the chaps', favoured class hierarchy: Tolkien affirmed, writes Zipes, the class structure as 'good and ordained by God' (1979: 149), and Carpenter, his biographer, quotes him as saying that "Touching your cap to the Squire may be damn bad for the Squire, but it's damn good for you" (1989: 133). It is 'damn bad for the squire' because it strengthens his own smugness, but 'touching your cap' is good for the 'inferior' because it reminds him of his rightful, lower place in God's social order. However, he opposed what Marxists term bourgeois democracy: he was 'not a democrat', he boasted, because humility and equality were spiritual principles corrupted by the attempt to 'mechanize and formalize them' (2006: 246). He considered that 'democracy' led to corruption (Shippey 2001: 115), and rather admires autocracy: "Give me a king whose chief interest in life is stamps, railways, or race-horses; and who has the power to sack his Vizier (or whatever you care to call him) if he does not like the cut of his trousers" (2006: 64). His admiration for kingship and bloodline is evident throughout his book, as the following chapters show.

Tolkien's class society was mirrored in the army, with the top brass drawn from the well-heeled and public-schooled, and the lower ranks drawn from the working class. Major General Essame provided an insight into this social division when he reminisced about the night trains 'on leave' in Victoria station awaiting the return journey to France. Along the departure platforms were six trains stationed side by side. The crowd of lower ranks, burdened by bulging packs, occupied the first five poorly lit trains. These regimental officers and ordinary soldiers were silent, preoccupied with thoughts of returning to the trenches. Meanwhile, those in the sixth train, high-ranking officers, took to their reserved seats, and by 6.30 "the waiters in the dining cars were already taking orders for drinks" (1972: 19).

This privilege of rank continued even after death: there are 2,500 British war cemeteries in France and Belgium, what Rosenberg in his poem 'Dead Man's

Dump', calls "the great sunk silences" (1974: 83), but the figure is misleading because while the headstones convey the impression that each soldier has his own individual place, often there are mass graves below. This caused some consternation among those who wished to keep the poor soldier at arm's length, because many officers' families assumed that 'their people' would be decently segregated from the lower ranks in the cemeteries (Fussell 2000: 197).

In view of his defence of class society, it is unsurprising that Tolkien's Middle-earth is rigidly and hierarchically organised. We glimpse this at the Council of Elrond where Frodo and Bilbo follow Gandalf quickly along the winding path back to the house; "behind them, uninvited and for the moment forgotten, trotted Sam" (I 313). In the Shire, the poorest hobbits lived in dark, primitive holes, while the well-to-do constructed more luxurious dwellings (I 24). 'Lesser' hobbits are those of 'poor and unimportant families' (I 40), and there is an incident following Bilbo's party, which recalls Essame's trains: carriages arrived for the important folk (I 59). 'Important' hobbits include Merry and Pippin who speak in upper-class tones imported from *Upstairs, Downstairs*: apologising, Merry says 'I am *frightfully* sorry . . . ever since that night at Bree' (III 173); similarly, 'What is the time?' 'Past supper-time now', said Pippin; 'though I *daresay* I could bring you something' (III 172).

Bilbo is unemployed, but as he has 'inexhaustible wealth' (I 39), he is considered 'respectable'. He is so self-assured that he even challenges the towering Gandalf, refusing to give his 'precious' away (I 56). Shippey notes that Bilbo is something of a snob, liable to draw a distinction between 'his sort' and other sorts (2001: 9).

In contrast, 'lowly' Sam is hopelessly cringing with his 'Yes, Mr Frodo, sir', 'No, Mr Frodo, sir'. This is not loyalty but, rather, class deference, expressed by a lack of confidence in his own ability and self-doubt – and which Tolkien insists on reinforcing: "I'll be sure to go wrong: that'd be Sam Gamgee all over" (II 429).

Tolkien plucked Sam from among the 'batmen' of WWI. The name, from the French *bât*, means 'pack saddle', so a 'batman' became he who took care of his

officer's baggage: a 'superior's' valet. Sam, then, had a duty to Frodo, and this corresponds to Tolkien's own view that Sam did not think of himself as heroic or brave, or in any way admirable – except in his loyalty to Frodo (2006: 329). Indeed, in Cirith Ungol, Sam tells Frodo that he would carry him on his back (III 233). In Shakespeare, Sam would be the clown, and Hooker compares him to Jeeves (2004: 128-129). The imagery, in fact, is much harsher, since Sam actually curls up at Frodo's feet (I 118). Sam not only undertakes those duties expected of him, but is keen to impress his master: preparing to leave Rivendell, he packs various belongings that his master had forgotten, allowing him to bring them out 'in triumph' when they were later called for (I 366).

Furthermore, Tolkien endows his 'lower' hobbits with a suspicion of education: "Mr Bilbo has learned him his letters - meaning no harm, mark you, and I hope no harm will come of it" (I 43), remarks the Gaffer. And so, while the Council of Elrond uses flowery language to discuss the important issues that affect Middle-earth, the drinkers in *The Ivy Bush* immerse themselves in pub triviality. In Gollum's society, too, there is social division: his family, from the Stoors, was wealthy and 'of high repute' (I 80). In contrast, the Gaffer warns Sam not to get mixed up in the business 'of your betters' (I 43); resist challenging the existing order, advises Tolkien.

Despite this hierarchy, there is no antithesis between rulers and ruled. In Tolkien's fantasy world, all 'good' beings in Middle-earth are united in confronting evil. In the real world, even during periods of nationalistic fervour, where the notion of an external enemy is set against 'one big happy family', evidence persists of conflict between those responsible for decisions and those subject to them. In the Great War, this was best captured in that popular refrain from the trenches of 'lions led by donkeys'.

The trenches

Early in Tolkien's book we encounter the Black Riders, the nine undead Ringwraiths who pursue the hobbits. Waddington-Feather⁵² relates how Tolkien, riding a good hunting horse, had managed to escape pursuing Uihans, German cavalrymen noted for their atrocities. They got so close that Tolkien could see their 'cruel faces' and skull-and-crossbone helmet badges. In the *Rings*, the company pass 'Nomanlands' (I 485) – a reference to the 'No Man's Land' at the Somme – which lies beyond heavenly Lothlórien: "What pestilence or war or evil deed of the Enemy had so blasted all that region even Aragorn could not tell" (I 494-95). The verb 'blast' refers to explosives and Tolkien brings his direct experience of the trenches to the fore here:

The Dead Marshes and the approaches to the Morannon owe something to Northern France after the Battle of the Somme. They owe more to William Morris and his Huns and Romans, as in *The House of the Wolfings* or *The Roots of the Mountains* (2006: 303).

With Sam and Frodo in tow, Gollum points south and east towards the marshes, and the 'reek' of them, 'heavy and foul', filled their nostrils (II 281). Similarly, Fussell (2000: 49) wrote of how the stench of dead horses and men at the Somme wafted over everything, and of how a soldier could smell the front line miles before he could see it.

The advance toward Passchendaele in July 1917 was particularly arduous and deadly, with 370,000 dead and thousands frozen to death and drowned in the mud (Fussell 2000: 16). Tolkien brings this imagery to his book: Gollum's song, 'Drowns on dry land' (II 282) captures something of this 'freezing' image:

The cold hard lands
they bites our hands,
they gnaws our feet.
The rocks and stones
are like old bones

52 Jardine, L *The Somme and Tolkien* (BBC News) 3rd July 2006.

all bare of meat (II 281-2).

Tolkien uses the word 'evil' quite broadly and it can only destroy: the erosion of the English countryside was 'evil'; building a car plant in the Midlands (providing jobs for thousands), was 'evil', just as Saruman's noisome mill in the Shire is 'evil'; modern life is 'evil', or 'Mordor in our midst' (Carpenter 1989: 220). In the *Rings*, the places we visit in the approach to Mordor have sunk into ruin, fields have withered, and the foundries of its Dark Tower are deafening. These wicked places provide a contrast to the green-gold groves and timeless harmony of Lothlórien, where the travellers lost count of the days and nights that they had passed there (I 481-82). Evil is expressed, too, in the vicious character traits of the orcs and in the internecine strife among them. The Lieutenant of the Black Gate has even forgotten his own name; thus, evil erases personality, whereas Eru's final victors are brightly delineated in fairy-tale tradition.

There are other features of the war that Tolkien appears to have drawn on. Despite the army's boast that the troops were better fed in the trenches than they were at home (Adam 1915: 93), there was rarely fresh meat: troops were fed a diet of corned-beef. Tolkien recollects this 'problem of food' (II 282) in the approach to Mordor when a dismayed Gollum asks: "We are famished, yes famished we are, precious,' he said. 'What is it they eats? Have they nice fisses?" (II 283).

In the marshes, the company encounters a 'Mere of Dead Faces' (II 296). Sam falls heavily on an old root, his hands sinking deep into the 'sticky ooze', and he is brought close to the surface of a pool before springing back in fright: 'there are dead faces in the water!', he exclaims in horror. 'Dead faces!' (II 291). Tolkien speaks for that survivor of the Ypres unable to forget 'this stinking world of sticky, trickling earth ceilinged by a strip of threatening sky' (Gladden 1967: 65). The anti-war satirical poet, Sassoon, too, remembers a pair of hands (nationality unknown) in the Hindenburg Outpost which protruded from the soil like tree roots turned upside down: the mask of a human face, detached from the skull, was floating on the surface of the flooded trench (1966: 208). Quigley likens his experience of the ghastly canal at Ypres with its horrible floating faces

(1928: 158), to the poisoned pool under William Morris' Dry Tree around which lay the bodies of men with dead leathery faces, faces in a kind of grimace, as if they had died in pain (1979b: 84).

Frodo and Sam were lost in a shadowy silent world (II 288) with only Gollum serving as a guide, and that lost feeling is what struck Major Isherwood who wrote to his wife in December 1914 about how he had repeatedly lost himself in the 'labyrinth' of trenches (1971: 305). Wilfred Owen, the Great War poet, also complained in a letter to his mother about how men stood in two feet of water in the Somme trenches (1967: 426);⁵³ the hobbits, likewise, "soon found that what looked like one vast fen was really an endless network of pools, and soft mires, and winding half-strangled water-courses" (II 289).

Added to this disorientation was the constriction of the trenches, meaning that the sky became an important variety in what Tolkien calls "the universal weariness of all this war" (2006: 10). Plowman recalls that by shutting off the landscape, the trenches compelled soldiers to take more notice of the sky (1928: 72). The sky tells a soldier that he is still alive, yet in both Tolkien and at the front, even the dead, facing upwards, stare at the sky.

There was little 'sky-awareness' in the eighteenth century but Ruskin, in his *Modern Painters* (1888), emphasised the pedagogical importance of the clouds which God sent to administer dew, and rain, and shade, and with which He adorns His heaven (1888: 227). Here, the war, later Romanticism, and Tolkien converge. Sunrise and sunset, established by the Romantics as symbols of peace and country charm, are reversed in Tolkien to heighten anxiety: the sky is darker, not lighter than when they had breakfasted (II 285), but it is not yet black, for there is still hope, albeit mixed with despondency: 'Frodo was the most weary of the three, and slow though they went, he often lagged . . . it was dreary and wearisome' (II 289). Major Pilditch, too, at the Somme in August 1917, felt burdened as the conflict seemed to go on forever and he had the idea

53 Dated 10th January 1917.

that children still at school would have to take over.

Pilditch further testifies, just before the attack on Loos (in September 1915), to a feeling of ‘unreality’ as if he were acting on a stage (IWM – see below). The experience of war is often fused with theatrical imagery though not, perhaps, by the soldier under fire. Tolkien adds this sense of drama to his own book. We might see the Council of Elrond as a war council, ruled over by the Valar or ‘holy powers’ (2006: 146), and Eru, the script writers and stage director respectively, who dictate the action. Sam and Frodo discuss the parts they act out. “‘Don’t the great tales never end?’ asks Sam. ‘No, they never end as tales’ said Frodo. ‘But the people in them come, and go when their part’s ended. Our part will end later – or sooner’” (II 403).

British phlegm, that reticent approach to the unpleasant, characterises much of the material that the war has bequeathed. In a letter to his sister, Clive Watts commented on how ‘interesting’ it was to be in the trenches that morning to see the effects of the shelling. Similarly, General Jack’s diary reads: ‘FEBRUARY 3RD: LA BOUTILLERIE . . . On my usual afternoon walk today a shrapnel shell scattered a shower of bullets around me in a most unpleasant manner’ (1964: 126). The lesser ranks latched onto this stoical style, first learnt by officers at public school, with Private Mitchell critical of the damp in the Hebuterne trenches (IWM).⁵⁴ In similar, unflappable tones, Bilbo remarks just before the Council of Elrond: “Fancy that ring of mine causing such a disturbance!” (I 303) while, faced with the insurmountable challenge ahead in the might of Sauron, Sam mutters: “A nice pickle we have landed ourselves in, Mr Frodo!” (I 354).

There is one major difference between the world depicted in Tolkien’s book and that of the Great War: the role of leadership. In Tolkien, a competent god conducts events against Sauron; in the real war, despite Haig (1861-1928),⁵⁵

54 Imperial War Museum papers (cited in Fussell 2000: 72; 192; 181).

55 In July 1916 he wrote: “I feel that every step in my plan has been taken with the Divine help” (Cooper 1935: 327).

Commander of British Forces, the officer hierarchy appears to have had little idea of strategy, or how to lead men in battle. Fussell suggests that one reason for the slaughter of so many was traceable to the class system and the assumptions it sanctioned (2000: 13). Tolkien, possibly, hints at this when the company have left Lothlórien. Floating steadily down the Anduin in boats through the desolate Brown Lands, heroic and loyal Sam, now cramped and miserable, could only stare at the grey water on either side: “Even when the paddles were in use they did not trust Sam with one” (I 497). Similarly, the British staff was contemptuous of working men who had volunteered, believing them too simple and animal to understand subtle tactics, such as advancing from trench to trench in darkness (Fussell 2000: 13).

This helps explain why a British attack on Vimy Ridge, began on 9th April 1917, gained only 7000 yards – almost four miles. At this rate, the Rhine would be reached ‘in one hundred and eighty years’ (Mottram 1927: 697). The cost was considerable, as usual: 160,000 killed and wounded over five days. The account is almost monotonous: in July 1917, in the attack towards Passchendaele referred to above, over four million shells were fired in ten days and, when the rain fell, it cut up the ground, turning it to mud. When the attack finally attenuated three months later, 370,000 British soldiers were dead. Similarly, in March 1918, the German army struck in the Somme area, their victory stunning: within a week 90,000 British had been taken prisoner, and 300,000 were killed. Everybody, it seemed, died.

Idyll

From what has been said above, it is unsurprising that many soldiers pursued the rural idyll, a prominent feature of pre-War poetry. Before going over the top, Sassoon wrote of the comfort of slipping a book into his haversack, because Thomas Hardy’s England was between its covers (1966: 68). Merry, of the Shire, also longed to shut out the ‘insupportable weight’ of Middle-earth by retiring in a quiet room by a fire (III 72). Williams states that from the 1800s there was a marked development of England as ‘home’ in a special sense of

memory and ideal (1993: 281-82); it is a sentiment that stretches back to Shakespeare and, under the ceaseless mutilation of trench warfare in a foreign land, it is not difficult to understand why many would romanticise about

This precious stone set in the silver sea
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands . . .
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England
(*Richard II* II, I, 46-50).

Tolkien lowers his bucket and draws from this well of nostalgia. The hobbits lived in the Shire – England – whose land in that pleasant corner of the world was rich and kindly, and there ‘they plied their well-ordered business of living’ (I 22-23). This recourse to ‘home’, a sanctuary from the calamities of war, has a restorative force (Kalstone 1971: 249) but its effect soon wears off and, occasionally, on reaching ‘home’, we wish we were elsewhere. Thus, Bilbo, tired of his relatives’ prying, declares to Gandalf that he wants to see mountains again, somewhere he can find rest (I 54).

Also important in Great War memoir is the English garden which, sandwiched between the noise of shellfire and what Poggioli calls a ‘pastoral oasis’ (1959: 687), had a cleansing effect. Thus, Quigley wrote from the front line in August 1917 of the carnations, hyacinths, marigolds, and poppies in his garden (1928: 78). The garden, certainly for the middle class⁵⁶ Englishman in the early 1900s, is appended to ‘home’. Eliot manages to combine war, or death - and life - in the following, grotesque lines from ‘The Waste Land’ (1922): “That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?” (1969: 63). In the *Rings*, Frodo, in the Mines of Moria, wished that he was back in the Shire, mowing the lawn, or pottering among the flowers (I 413). For Tolkien, too, the garden was soothing and, in a 1944 letter, he wrote of a family of tame bullfinches that had nested in his own garden, and how they entertained him when feeding their young outside his dining-room window

56 The terraced-houses of workers had back-yards.

(2006: 87).

On the same theme, he introduces supernatural powers: Merry reminds Pippin that though the soil of the Shire is deep, there are things deeper and higher without which a gaffer could not tend his garden in peace, whether he is aware of it or not (III 174). Similarly, in the Mirror of Galadriel, Sam the gardener witnesses the defacement of his 'pastoral oasis'. In the Shire, Ted Sandyman is felling trees: 'I wish I could get at Ted, and I'd fell *him!*' (I 470), Sam exclaims. This was 'devilry at work' (I 470). Tolkien is stressing the importance of environmental conservation, perhaps, but introducing the supernatural undermines legitimate discussion.

Medieval romance

Some well-read officers prepared to die identified with the hero of medieval romance, and Auerbach points to the key elements of this genre: the travels of the knight, or hero, are arduous, yet miracles and dangers await. He confronts perilous encounters through which he can prove his mettle, before enjoying the sunny calm that follows. Numbers are important: seven is a fairy-tale number. The backdrop is the charming landscape of fairy tale with its enchanted forest. The quest is 'absolute, raised above all earthly contingencies', and it gives those who are party to it the feeling that they belong to an elect community. Social arrangements are designed to culminate in 'pompous ceremonies'. There are two social strata, the privileged aloof, and the 'comical, grotesque, or despicable' (1953: 129, 134, 133, 127, 130, 129, 136-37, 139).

Today, many find this literary genre dull, but Tolkien identified with it: Frodo's journey is marred by weariness and danger as Sauron's allies pursue him. He is tempted by the Ring yet resists, at least until Mount Doom, and he 'grows' because of it. Following the chase to the Ford of Bruinen, he enjoys the sunny calm of Rivendell, where he discovered ready-made garments of clean cloth that fitted him perfectly (I 295).

The number nine is recurrent in the *Rings*. Gandalf tells Bilbo that he has given the Shire ‘something to talk about for nine days, or ninety-nine’ (I 54). The phrase links the *Rings* with *The Hobbit* whose final chapter speaks of Bilbo’s return as more than a nine days’ wonder (1988: 362). Similarly, the Black Riders are the Ringwraiths, the Nine Servants of Sauron, the Lord of the Rings (I 289), while the company that sets off from Rivendell were the Nine Walkers (I 360). There are nine rings for mortal men ‘doomed to die’. Tolkien perhaps borrowed the idea of ‘nine’ from the Nine Worlds of Norse society that were linked by the cosmic tree, Yggdrasil.

Mirkwood was not ‘enchanted’ in Auerbach’s sense; rather, it is bewitched; the elves call it the ‘forest of the great fear’ (III 524). Tolkien took his Mirkwood from Morris’ *The House of the Wolfings* (see chapter II), and he also read Morris’ *The Well at the World’s End*, a fantasy that affected other writers such as C.S. Lewis, Blunden, and Sassoon. For this generation terms such as heroism, decency, and nobility conveyed meanings that were secure, and Morris provided a heady read and an unforgettable source of images (Fussell 2000: 136). Tolkien’s own Old Forest is hostile: it is ‘queer’ at night, when things can be most alarming (I 153). Fangorn Forest, too, was hostile and tense, because it was threatened by a ‘machine-loving enemy’ (2006: 420).

The quest is absolute, writes Auerbach, and gives rise to a select few participants; we might call them “God’s elect” (Titus 1.1), and in the *Rings* his point is best understood by Elrond’s speech to his noble audience:

‘The Ring! What shall we do with the Ring? That is the doom that we must deem.

That is the purpose for which you are called hither. Called, I say, though I have not called you to me, strangers from distant lands. You have come and are here met, in this very nick of time, by chance as it may seem. Yet it is not so. Believe rather that it is so ordered that we, who sit here, and none others, must now find counsel for the peril of the world’ (I 317).

As to ‘pompous ceremonies’, the book ends with the crowning of Aragorn, the

man 'with a star on his brow', the star Elendilmir, which he had worn at the Battle of Pelennor Fields and at his coronation in Minas Tirith.

Auerbach further notes that social conditions are never explained in this genre (1953: 133) and, indeed, after six books we have little idea of how Tolkien's major characters, the hobbits, produce and reproduce their own lives. Monteiro, too, notes the absence of social, economical and political structures (1993: 636).

Daily religion

On 10th June 1944 Tolkien awoke at 5am for a Corpus Christi Mass (2006: 84), and his letters continue in this way in a consistent fashion. This was not a habit he had only lately adopted: thirty years earlier he had written, rather insensitively, to his Anglican fiancée about how much he enjoyed attending High Mass at St Aloysius (2006: 7). Indeed, in the same year, 1914, he spent a few days' holiday in Cornwall with his priest, Fr Reade (Carpenter 1989: 78).

He had an ear for a good sermon: 'Good sermons require some art' (2006: 75), and those he enjoyed were of the kind delivered by a rather agitated Fr Carter of St Gregory's who, in May 1944, called for Oxford to be wiped out with fire and blood in the wrath of God for the abominations and wickedness there perpetrated. 'We all woke up', Tolkien confesses: 'I am afraid it is all too horribly true'. These 'abominations' were those 'untutored robots' who did not pray to God (2006: 80).

This commitment to Catholicism prompts Birzer to compare Tolkien to St Augustine because he, Tolkien, confronted a world that was about to collapse (2002: 67). Certainly, Tolkien shared Augustinian views on women: the 'soul' of woman is 'in peril', he writes, because 'the sexual impulse makes her very sympathetic, very ready to enter into all the interests, including religion, of the young man'. The woman, he writes, does not deceive intentionally; it is just 'instinct: the servient, helpmeet instinct, generously warmed by desire' (2006:

48-49).

In his use of 'servient', there is something of the sultan's wife in Chaucer's *The Man of Law's Tale* (c.1390), described as a 'serpent under femininity'; the fickle love of woman, apparently the embodiment of promiscuous cunning, is contrasted to Christ's eternal love. Thus, tradition stresses the 'lower' nature of woman's carnal desire, contrasted to the 'higher' one of male intellect, and Rigby notes that this hierarchy was a tradition in Christian theology from the patristic period to the end of the middle ages (1995: 247). It was a hierarchy justified by woman herself for her betrayal of God in His own garden, and one that underlines the need for her to obey man: "Wommen are born to thraldom and penance, /And to been under mannes governance" (Chaucer 1957: 65).⁵⁷

Tolkien argues that although a female is instinctively loyal to her man,⁵⁸ the Devil is forever tempting her to be 'receptive, stimulated, and fertilized' by others (2006: 49). Thus, woman must swear obedience to one man in marriage, and before God, to help resist these evil, restless, seductive forces. In a 1943 letter to C.S. Lewis, Tolkien moralises on divorce, which he defines as the 'slippery slope to promiscuity'. He relates that he had attended a civil marriage ceremony during which there was no vow of fidelity or obedience and, consistent with his medieval approach towards marriage, he says that it was an abominable experience. This opinion seems inspired by Ephesians: "the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church . . . so let wives be subject to their husbands in everything" (5:21-24). Furthermore, a female registrar officiated at the ceremony, which, for Tolkien, added to the 'impropriety' of the occasion (2006: 62).

It is a measure of his conservative outlook that while the author of the fifteenth-century *Dives and Pauper* (1405-10) disapproves of the double standards

57 "Thy desire shall be to thy husband" (Gen. 3:16).

58 'Woman was created for the man' (I Cor. 11:8-9).

applied to men and women,⁵⁹ Tolkien, half-a-millennia later, defends men's philandering: women "are instinctively, when uncorrupt, monogamous. *Men are not*...No good pretending. Men just ain't, by their animal nature" (2006: 51).

Tolkien's wife had set her sights on a career as a piano teacher, but those aspirations faded with marriage. Had she worked it would have raised eyebrows among Tolkien's peers as to whether or not he was able to maintain her. Moreover, he equated motherhood with a lack of intellect since, according to Carpenter, he did not encourage his wife to pursue any intellectual activity, because that was not part of her role as wife and mother (1989: 156).

Female characters

Middle class convention in the early 1900s had it that a man maintained his wife; she, too, expected a 'good' husband to 'protect' her. We do not see female characters in *The Green Dragon* or other pubs we visit in his book, since 'decent' women never frequented them. Moreover, his biography makes plain that he felt uncomfortable in female company: they were a financial responsibility, which preoccupied him, and they were best left to their own devices in the home.

We can gauge his approach to women in real life from the *Rings*. The absence of young Ents is due to the disappearance of the Entwives: even in Tolkien's 'natural' world, the author cannot contemplate motherhood outside wedlock, hence Entwives. Indeed, Tolkien presents his female characters, such as Arwen and Rosie Cotton, as chaste Catholic girls because that is how he perceived women in the real world. The exception to this is the unforgiving Shelob, the tale's wicked step-mother, who has 'miserable mates' and whose only contribution to Mordor is to feed on its occupants (II 418).

59 'You want your wife to conquer lechery, yet you are willing to be conquered like a coward. St Augustine says it is as great a sin in the husband as in the wife' (Blamires 1992: 262).

Galadriel, on the other hand, is Tolkien's princess, the greatest of Elven women (III 454). Standing at six feet four inches (*Unfinished Tales* 1993: 286) she is the giant elf-Lady of Lothlórien, 'the Golden Wood'. Galadriel was 'unstained', writes Tolkien, for she had committed no evil deeds (2006: 431) and, from the royal house of Finarfin, she is of noble stock (III 515). In the tradition of Solomon, she could see into the minds of others, 'but judged them with mercy and understanding' (*Unfinished Tales* 1982: 230).

All the female protagonists are of high social standing: Shagrat, the orc, even refers to Shelob as 'Her Ladyship' (II 437). Éowyn is King Théoden's niece who describes herself as a 'shieldmaiden' (III 62), from the Old Norse *skjaldmoer*. When the Riders depart for battle, she protests that she is to be left behind to mind the house, to prepare food and beds while the men win fame (III 62). Asked by Aragorn what she fears, she retorts: "A cage . . . To stay behind bars, until . . . all chance of doing great deeds is gone beyond recall or desire" (III 63). It is difficult to imagine, given his social background and outlook, that Tolkien would offer such confident and ambitious lines to a female character like 'lowly' Rose Cotton.

Parker excuses the lack of female characters because war is a masculine affair (1956: 607), but the story is more of a quest than a battle. More female characters could have been added to the story, though not to satisfy 'positive discrimination', but to add value to the story. The male predominance in the book, reflecting the role men played in Tolkien's own life, leads Zipes to note that men seem 'self-productive' (2002: 174). Tolkien, however, dismisses a 'community' of men and women 'in this fallen world' as impossible due to 'temptation'. It may be possible, he says, 'between saints' (2006: 48).

Perhaps the lack of female characters suggests the infertility of evil, especially as the fellowship closes in on the barren land of Mordor.⁶⁰ Keenan complains

60 Shelob has offspring – but she does not spare them.

that the trilogy lacks a mother with children. Those women who are shown, he maintains, are either not mothers or they are cold (1969: 71-2). Yet, at the end of the book Éowyn lowers her shield, pledging to 'love all things that grow and are not barren' (III 294). 'That is well', Faramir laughs, and offers to wed her, proposing that they 'make a garden in Ithilien for all things to grow'. The Shire, too, is finally restored to its 'natural order', and (hobbit) women become more prominent. Tolkien shows them empowered by their renewed fertility, and they become mothers.

Tolkien came alive in the company of intellectual men: Carpenter makes the point that he did not talk condescendingly to *them* (1989: 159). Edith, naturally shy, was unnerved by Oxford University, with its pretence of important-looking men in their gowns (Carpenter 1989: 157). She met Tolkien's friends, but conversation was awkward because, she said, these men did not know how to talk to women. Edith could not think of anything to say; their worlds just did not overlap, and eventually she came to resent them (Carpenter 1989: 157). It is apparent, too, that she was unhappy about the amount of time that her husband spent with C.S. Lewis though, most likely, this expressed her own wish for attention; for Tolkien, these emotional needs were often irritating but he bore them 'patiently' (Carpenter 1989: 160).

There is little here of Tolkien's admiration for 'chivalric honour' (see chapter IV), and at times he appears embarrassed by her: before marriage he hid Edith for over *four years*; he was over concerned about how his friends would respond to her (Garth 2004: 129). He misjudged them for his friends approved, while after marriage, he was uncertain that she could follow Oxford's strict etiquette (Carpenter 1989: 157).

Nationalism

In addition to his religious views, Tolkien the South African was an English xenophobe. He deplored the Norman conquest of 1066 and always tried to reverse the influence of French on English as far as he could (Shippey 2001: 9-10). Bilbo, for instance, lives in Bag End, an appropriate name for Baggins, but Tolkien chose the name to avoid using the more popular French *cul-de-sac* (Shippey 2001: 10).

He resented that

1/8 of the world's population speaks 'English' . . . If true, damn shame . . . I do find this Americo-cosmopolitanism very terrifying . . . I love England (not Great Britain and certainly not the British Commonwealth (grr!)) (2006: 65).⁶¹

Allegory in Tolkien

In the *Foreword* to the *Rings*, Tolkien denies 'any inner meaning', since the crucial chapter, *The Shadow of the Past*, one of the oldest parts of the story, was written long before 1939 when World War II broke out (I 11). The approaching war had influenced his text, but it was not an 'allegory' (2006: 41).

Some scholars have sidestepped his claim, with Fuller referring to allegorical 'possibilities' (1969: 31), while Shippey prefers 'discernible patterns' in the *Rings* that could be applied to 'recent history' (2001: 174). The Shire to which Frodo and company return, with its pipeweed shortage, resembles post-war England, familiar to most readers in the 1950s, despite the author's own denials (Shippey 2001: 166). Shippey's interpretation is that Tolkien is taking a swipe at the 1945 Labour government, when he has Hob tell Merry that bureaucrats confiscate most of the food grown in the Shire for themselves (III 338).

The Battle of Bywater between the hobbits and the ruffians, during which

61 "May the curse of Babel strike all their tongues" (2006: 65).

nineteen hobbits were killed and thirty wounded, may be added here. The dead were placed together in a grave and a memorial stone laid in their honour in a garden of remembrance (III 359), and feature which, as Reynolds observes, was common in many English villages after the First World War (1993: 50).

Middle-earth is not a Christian world (2006: 220) and, again, it has no topical, moral, religious, or political allegory (2006: 220). To support this, Tolkien writes that there are “no temples or ‘churches’ or fanes in this ‘world’ among ‘good’ peoples. They had little or no religion in the sense of worship” (2006: 193). However, the author includes in his book ‘all the materials’ necessary for religion (Spacks 1969: 90). Tolkien himself says that he had deliberately written a tale built on or out of certain ‘religious ideas’ (2006: 283), and he likens his character, Galadriel, to the Madonna: “I owe much of this character to Christian and Catholic teaching and imagination about Mary” (2006: 407). In Lothlórien, Galadriel’s ring issues a great light that illuminated her against a dark background, and Frodo sees her as ‘terrible and worshipful’ (I 475). Later, he considers her a queen, great and beautiful, and no longer terrible, but he bows before her, speechless (I 489-90). Having ruled out ‘any form of worship or prayer’ (2006: 193) in his book, Tolkien then states that hobbits may call on a Vala as a Catholic might on a saint (2006: 193).

Embedded in Tolkien’s text is a Catholic eschatology that governs Middle-earth; it is true that Númenor has no temple until Sauron introduced the Satanic cult of Morgoth (2006: 194) but the ‘Númenóreans were pure monotheists, and their Pillar of Heaven was dedicated to Eru, the One (2006: 193-94). Furthermore, Tolkien offered that he intended his story to be ‘consonant’ with Christianity (2006: 355).

Of allegory in general, Tolkien writes: “any attempt to explain the purport of myth or fairytale must use allegorical language” (2006: 145), while of Tom Bombadil he wrote that he did not mean him to be an allegory, but allegory was the only way he could exhibit certain functions of his character: ‘he is then an allegory’ (2006: 192).

Tolkien's book is ostensibly medieval, with small tradesmen, working on 'estates, farms, and workshops', that went unchanged for generations (I 28). There was no government to speak of: the acknowledgement of lordship has passed to the Took family, but 'Thainship' was little more than a token dignity (I 29): Families were largely independent, and managing crops occupied most of their time (I 28). Hobbits are 'clannish' (I 26) while their tradition is mainly oral (I 34).

Whether we call it 'allegory' or 'allegorical relation', the pastel colours of semantics mean little here: Tolkien's book is a product of its time. It is also a religious work, the product of the author's own peculiar education and upbringing, and one which he continued: he educated his own children in his religion (his son, John, was ordained a priest shortly after the war) and, as this chapter has noted, he frequently attended Communion because he considered it to be "a fleeting glimpse of an unfallen world" (2006: 67). It is, therefore, to be expected that he would imbue his text with his own religious values.

Melkor and Empire

In 1939, Tolkien considered Soviet Russia, for which he had a loathing (Carpenter 1989: 193), responsible for the Second World War. The USSR, a grotesque caricature of a workers' state which accommodated capitalism around the world, was nevertheless, on the basis of a planned economy, a budding world superpower and one that challenged the notion of wealth based on inheritance, privilege, and pedigree. Mordor, however, is not Moscow, nor do the orcs represent the Red Army. However, Garth remarks that Tolkien's Melkor, or Lucifer, appeared in 1916 'with remarkable timing'. Melkor entertained dreams of world domination and, argues Garth, with his huge armies, and his industrial slaves, he anticipated 'the totalitarianism of Bolshevik power that lay just around the corner' (2004: 223).

It is strange that Garth deplores Russia's aims at 'world domination' when many historians refer to the leading role that Britain still held on the world stage. For

two hundred years, Britain had occupied the United States, Africa, and Asia, and imposed its taxes and rule on their peoples. In many cases, Britain used colonial troops to fight its wars.

It was an age, Trotsky observed, when British imperialists “do their thinking in terms of centuries and continents” (1974: 39). He had in mind the ‘gigantic octopus’ of English imperialism which ruled over a third of the world’s peoples. London was the world’s banker, and the Royal Navy, with 240 ships crewed by 40,000 sailors was the biggest in the world, by far. The Empire is perhaps best symbolised by the fresco over the main staircase in Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, Queen Victoria’s favourite residence, depicting Neptune handing the crown of the sea to Britannia, attended by Industry, Commerce, and Navigation. This was the world’s greatest Empire bar none (Ferguson 2002: ix). It would seem that Britain, at least, already exercised the kind of ‘world domination’ that Garth refers to.

Influences on Tolkien

Art can only represent man

Tolkien mines the real, external world for the material that will become his fantasy Middle-earth. Apart from the natural environment, he was influenced by literary sources that include William Morris, Shakespeare, and Dante. Norse mythology, too, was inspiring.

The chapter introduces a Marxist approach to art, explaining that it is a social and historical product; Tolkien, on the other hand, believed that the Christian artist contributes to God's work of Creation, through which the reader may experience 'evangelium' in the real world. Both approaches are outlined below. Tolkien, furthermore, likened his literary club, the TCBS, to the nineteenth-century Pre-Raphaelites and there follows a discussion comparing and contrasting Tolkien's approach to machinery with that of the Pre-Raphaelites. The chapter also attempts to discover the underlying reasons for Tolkien's antipathy towards science, and draws on some historical material to illustrate the points made. Finally, the role of imagination in the creative process is considered.

Tolkien stated that fantasy is made out of the Primary World (1988: 54), reiterating that if the story-maker wishes to be a 'real maker' he has to 'partake of reality' (1988: 64). Thus, he quarries the 'Primary World' for his material: we recognise the seasons and days and nights; there is a sun and moon; star constellations are familiar: above Bree-hill, the Sickle, or Plough, was swinging bright (I 236). Middle-earth⁶² denotes the actual continent of Europe, with its familiar landscapes, vegetation, and animal life 'taken from reality' (Noel 1977: 7-8) while the Shire is based on rural England, and its toponymy and inhabitants go together and are meant to (2006: 250). Thus, the hobbits speak a language

62 The name is taken from the Old English *middan-geard* or its Old Norse equivalent *midgardr* (Grimm 1883: 794).

remarkably similar to English (2006: 31), as one would expect. The reader feels 'at home' in Middle-earth, and Tolkien uses the authority of realism to add credibility to his story.

Man-made sources

Tolkien also draws from a recognisable past and present society. The social order is based on 'medieval historical models' (Donnelly 2007: 17) where Rohan and Minas Tirith, representing divided kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England, were later united under one king during the Middle Ages. Thus, Tolkien sets his book in a fanciful pre-Christian yet 'medieval' Europe, one which features dwarves, Celtic elves, Trolls, and other beings derived from folklore, mythology, and Tolkien's own invention, hobbits. He borrows, too, from literature: he takes his orcs from the goblin tradition of George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin* (2006: 178), while the Nazgûl, which he described as a winged creature whose vast pinions were as 'webs of hide between horned fingers' (III 135), recalls Dante:

Two mighty wings, enormous as became
A bird so vast. Sails never such I saw
Outstretch'd on the wide sea. No plumes had they,
But were in texture like a bat; and these
He flapp'd I' th' air, that from him issued still
Three winds, wherewith Cocytus to its depth
Was frozen
(*Hell Canto XXXIV* 1908: 145).⁶³

In addition, his work contains numerous citations from *Macbeth* such as Butterbur's "what's done can't be undone" (I 226), despite his contempt for Shakespeare⁶⁴, and he was inspired by the use of archaisms to recreate the

63 The three winds produced by the wings are lust, pride, and avarice, 'sins' that are considered in chapter IV.

64 Tolkien laid "unqualified abuse upon Shakespeare, upon his filthy birthplace, his squalid surroundings, and his sordid character" (Carpenter 1989: 48).

aura of old legend and its imagined setting of time and landscape in Morris' *House of the Wolfings* (1888). In his book, Morris, a socialist pre-Raphaelite, has his Wolfings overcome invading Roman legions and combines historic and invented time, a device that Tolkien also uses, to allow him greater freedom to introduce myth into the story. The hero, Thiodolf, slays three Hunnish kings in battle, yet the story is set long before the arrival of the Huns in Western Europe. Nor is it accidental that Thiodolf's lover was one of the Vala (the 'gods' in Tolkien), who sacrificed her immortality for love, just as Arwen did in Tolkien's story.

Morris visited Iceland in 1871 and 1873, and the sources for his stories such as the dark forest, Mirkwood (which Tolkien also used), include the Nordic *Elder Edda*. Morris furthermore introduces a magic dwarf coat of mail: Thiodolf was clad in the 'dwarf-wrought hauberk' (1979: 51), and he realises that his coat can save him, but only at the cost of ruining the folk (1979: 105). Morris's concern is for the clan as a whole, and he pities those enslaved by the Romans whose thralls are treated no better than their 'draught-beasts' (1979: 43).

Tolkien dismisses Morris' socialist sentiments, but he borrows his hauberk coat. In *The Hobbit*, Thorin Oakenshield puts on Bilbo 'a small coat of mail that the elves call *mithril*' (1998: 289). In the *Rings*, precious mithril was akin to common silver, but its beauty did not tarnish or grow dim (I 413). There are other similarities: the *House of the Wolfings* features 'men of the Mark' (1979: 3), while Morris' Thiodolf, as with Aragorn, was loved by women. He was a warrior whose deeds went unrivalled among other men of the Mark, and the author relates how he would 'succour the wounded' (1979: 51), just as Aragorn does in the Houses of Healing.

Similarly, in Morris' *The Well at the World's End* (1910) we read of the fight between the Knight of the Sun and his black knight friend, before the Lady mounts her horse, 'swift Silverfax' (1979a: 141), which recalls Gandalf's Shadowfax. There is even a protagonist named Gandolf (1979a: 308) though, in Morris, he is the evil Lord of Utterbol, rather than Tolkien's 'good' wizard; there is a 'folknote', too, among shepherds whom the Elder addresses as 'champions

of the Dry Tree' (1979b: 235) which draws up war plans, just as Tolkien's Entmoot, the council of Ents, the tree shepherds, debate plans for war against Orthanc. Much in Tolkien is not as unique as it might first seem.

Norse mythology

As previously noted, Tolkien borrows from Norse mythology.⁶⁵ Gandalf's observation before the battle of Minas Tirith, for example, that the 'board is set, and the pieces are moving, and the enemy is to open his full game' (III 31) recalls the myth that tells of gods and giants who decide the fortunes of the universe over a game of *tafl*, or chess.

Writing in October 1914, Tolkien explained that his ambition was to turn a story from the Finnish *Kalevala* into a short story on the lines of the romances of Morris (2006: 7), and there are parallels, too, between the *Rings* and *The Saga of the Volsungs* in which the dwarf Andvari creates a cursed ring, Andvarinaut. As in Tolkien's story, it is linked to death drawing everyone who comes into contact with it to a 'treacherous and untimely demise' (Dubois 2002: 36).

In Norse mythology, female giants, the sworn enemies of men and the Æsir, loved darkness. They avoided daylight and were called 'Dark-Riders or Night-Riders' (Munch 1926: 39), just as Tolkien's own Black Riders inspire a fear that is greatly increased by darkness (2006: 272). Tolkien bases Éowyn on Norse mythology, too. The churchman Saxo Grammaticus describes female warriors in his *History of the Danes* (c.1200) in Viking Denmark as women who dressed themselves as men, and who cultivated soldiers' skills. They 'desired not the couch but the kill' (1979: 212).⁶⁶ Similarly, Éowyn adopts the name Dernhelm,

65 This does not mean, however, that he admires this mythology: "Nowhere", he remarks on the 'northern spirit', "was it nobler than in England, nor more early sanctified and Christianized" (2006: 56).

66 Jesch argues that Scandinavian 'women warriors' existed only in literature and art (1991: 109).

from *dern* 'secret, hidden' + *helm* 'helmet' (Scull and Hammond 2008: 542), her bright hair hidden under her helmet, to disguise herself. She slays the Lord of the Nazgûl after revealing her real identity to him: 'I am not a man! You look upon a woman' (III 136-37),⁶⁷ she tells him.

'Völuspá', as previously noted, follows a particular chronology in which ages are distinct, just as Middle-earth has had its First and Second Ages. The First Age was marked by the raising of the sun, and ended with the casting out of the Dark Lord, Morgoth (Melkor). At the end of the Second Age, Sauron, Morgoth's 'lieutenant', was defeated and, just as there are two wars in 'Völuspá', there is a history of war in the *Rings*. Similarly, Heimdallr, the 'prime mover' of procreation in men, and himself belonging to the most archaic of divine births (Dronke 1997: 31), recalls Eru, the One, in Tolkien's book, and his 'sole right to divine honour' (2006: 243). Like the Christian God, he shares his divine monopoly with no other.

In 'Völuspá', the sibyl's vast memory goes back to the earliest times and she speaks with authority about the history of the world; Elrond, too, speaks with foreboding of the peril of the world, and even Gandalf fell silent (I: 317; 328). His memory also goes back to the First Age of the world, and he relates the history of the One Ring, the lessening of the life-span of man, and the decay of Númenor.

At Ragnarök (*Ragnarøkkr*), or 'Doom of the Gods', Heimdall sounds his immense Gjallar-Horn to rouse the gods just as, in Tolkien, Boromir blows his great horn until the woods ran (II 53). In Norse mythology, the gods succumb before higher powers and a new age, that of man, is born just as the defeat of Sauron ushers in the Fourth Age. This pattern of cyclic renewal is not fundamental in Christianity, but Tolkien's emphasis is on drawing out moral

67 Feminist criticism of Tolkien has focused on why Éowyn needs to disguise herself as a *male* soldier in order to deceive the enemy. The reason is that in a real medieval army, the role of women was to provide sexual services to soldiers: 'they were present in armies as wantons' (Contamine 1984: 241).

worth, not copying the medieval Christian world.

There are parallels, too, between Tolkien's *Rings* and Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, with Ross announcing in *The New Yorker* that Tolkien had stole Wagner's ring. Apparently, the idea of an omnipotent ring must have come directly from Wagner, as nothing quite like it appears in the old sagas (22nd December 2003). When Wotan steals the ring, Alberich curses it, and he speaks of 'the lord of the ring as the slave of the ring', a principal theme in the *Rings* in that Sauron requires it for domination. Similarly, Tolkien's Ring is disposed of in the Doom of Fire to end the curse, while Wagner's is thrown into the German Rhine. At the end of his operatic epic, Wagner exposes myth itself and this appears to have angered Tolkien, since Carpenter remarks that he poured contempt on Wagner for his interpretation of myths (1989: 54). He studied Wagner, but insisted that both rings were round, and that there the resemblance ended (2006: 306).

Thus, Tolkien appropriates his raw material both from the world of nature and the society of man, and transforms it. Whatever the artist depicts, however fantastic, he can only transform the real world, in all its conjugations, at his disposal.

Marxism and Art

Having stated that fantasy is made out of the 'Primary World', Tolkien adds a qualification: "a good craftsman loves his material, and has knowledge and feeling for clay, stone and wood which only the art of making can give" (1988: 54-55). Shippey explains that Tolkien was such a craftsman, given the depth to which he went when considering particular words such as wraith and shadow (2001: 122, 128). This is not enough, however, since the 'art of making' rests on both the craftsman's ability and the external world in which he finds himself.

Presented with a subject such as a harvest or rural life, an artist might depict a charming idyll, that never-dying myth of 'the rural' as a refuge of peace, virtue,

and a more 'natural' past which Pope calls an 'illusion' (1961: 27). This tradition stretches back to at least 300 BC with Theocritus and continues in 'The Hock-Cart' (1648) when Herrick, rousing merry England, calls farm-workers to 'stout Beere' before they enjoy women: 'Then to the Maids' (1980: 29). It stands opposed to Wordsworth's first visit to London (in 1788), which he describes as that 'monstrous ant-hill' (1979: 235), though his mood changes during a second visit when order replaces chaos, and the city appears somewhat 'awful in its grandeur' (Durrant 1969: 140). Even so, he writes of the Lake District: "lovelier far than this, the paradise / Where I was reared" (1979: 275).

On the other hand, the artist might consider rural life through the eyes of that stoic heroine, Tess Durbeyfield, debauched by the rapacious son of a retired manufacturer. Or, perhaps, through those 'Swing' protesters who broke up farm-machinery in 1830 before being whipped, transported, and executed. Let us zoom in on those ragged and half-fed labourers, bent-double over the sickle because, even in the late nineteenth-century, most of the British corn harvest was still cut by hand tools (Collins 1969: 455). It was more profitable that way, since this was slave labour (Ashby 1961: 25).

Let us move among those figures in our harvest landscape; we will not find the beautiful Natasha Kinski here;⁶⁸ the real Tess has few teeth on account of a poor diet and, after a 14-hour shift, her exhausted face is coated in grime; she downs ale (water is unsafe) and shrieks and skirt-tucks when the rat-catching gets underway. Like other women in the field, she is again 'with child', because she spends her whole life conceiving and delivering future farm labourers. Despite the 'ease' allied to country life, the labourer was worked like a beast to further enrich wealthy landowners.⁶⁹

68 The actress played the title role in Roman Polanski's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1979).

69 When the Duke of Rutland came of age in 1799, kitchen staff worked for eighteen days to prepare the guests' food: 'six oxen, twelve sheep and twenty-one pigs, and the equivalent of another hundred sheep came dressed from the butchers'. Also consumed were over forty-six gallons of brandy, twenty three gallons of rum, while one brewer worked for over thirty-four weeks to produce several thousand gallons of beer. Those invited were put on "the road to social success or political influence and power" (Thompson 1963: 78; 107).

Which interpretation, then, does the artist render? The ‘knowledge and feeling’ of Tolkien’s craftsman cannot be neutral, because they are experienced through his own social and historical conditions and class outlook, and these largely determine the ‘art of making’. An artist might have that rare gift of great talent, but this does not divorce him from his own social circumstances. On the contrary, poets and writers, including Tolkien, respond to the social, political, and religious issues of their time. Art can only represent man. It is a visual, aural, or textual expression of man’s social reality, because it is the only reality that man knows: man’s art is limited by his own ‘three-dimensional world’ (Trotsky 1925: 175-176).

Marxism does not claim that art expresses the nuts and bolts of ‘economy’ as some of its opponents suggest, but it does reflect, however obscurely, material interests and these do have economic roots. Nineteenth-century landscape painting, for example, often depicts a landowner, vast acreage, farmhands, and animals. Stubbs, the great horse painter, made his mark here; this was not a class of art, but an art of class: the paintings exhibit the landowner’s wealth, which is why they were commissioned. Likewise, Constable’s *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* (1831) was painted with fears for Anglicanism, then threatened by Reform agitation, very much in his mind (Honour 1981: 236-7).

Art is often indirect as in Friedrich’s *Chasseur in the Forest* (1814), during the *Freiheitskrieg* (1813), the German liberation war against French occupation: a raven sings the death song to a French chasseur. Likewise, Shelley’s ‘Mask of Anarchy’ (1819) was an immediate response to the execution of campaigners at St Peter’s Field (Manchester’s Peterloo) in 1819, and in ‘The Call to Freedom’ of the same year he summons the masses to ‘rise like lions’ in political protest (1968: 372).

In contrast, Mingay (1989: 961) reports: “The productive achievements of this period [1750-1850] were secured at the expense of the hardship and deprivation of the more than 900,000 workers who laboured on the farms of England and Wales for meagre rewards”.

Occasionally, art is deceptive: Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (1830), that definitive image of the French Revolution, portrays Liberty, her full breasts exposed, flying the flag not of the French poor but the tricolour, symbol of French imperialism. Often art does not simply express radicalism or reaction – sometimes it combines both – in a fusion of political and artistic ideas. Artists of rare talent are thrown onto centre-stage to make a unique contribution to history, while they themselves are also products of history: artists are the creators and creations of their age.

It might be objected that Jane Austen, to take a notable example, does not explicitly refer to religiosity, the French Revolution, or the Napoleonic Wars in her fiction, so how can she be representative of her age or class? Nobody prays in her novels, no one is shown in church or 'seeking spiritual guidance' from God or a Church figure (Tomalin 1997: 140). For these reasons, it has 'not been the received view' that Jane Austen is a product of her time (Butler 1981: 98).

Yet Austen, though not uncritically, prizes the landowner, his 'authority', and her heroines all marry country clergymen. Yet as she writes Austen looks over her shoulder at a rising capitalism, that formidable and historically progressive class, and understands that, in *Mansfield Park*, history is to call time on the aristocracy. Maria Bertram sees Mansfield not as a home for genteel values, but as a property with a market value. Austen's religious values are embedded in the text, neither investigated nor questioned. Thus, in *Mansfield Park*, where she identifies with her virtuous heroine, she considers the use of Sir Thomas' chapel to stage a play as a violation of Christian morality. This we expect from a parson's daughter in the late eighteenth-century.

Does this mean that Marxism rejects the literature of Austen or, say, the religious paintings of Raphael? No, it does not. Marxism does not scorn moving verse simply because it was created by an Old Etonian, like Shelley. That is hardly the criteria of aesthetic evaluation and criticism. In art, it is for artists to challenge, say, religious themes in art and Marxism has something to say, politically, about such themes, but if art enriches our understanding of the world

around us, it has a contribution to make.

The religious imagination

According to Tolkien, when the good craftsman completes his work, new form is made, 'faerie' begins, and 'man becomes a sub-creator' (1988: 25).⁷⁰ The artist, then, does not simply express his interpretation of the external world through art in different, meaningful ways; rather, he makes a definite contribution to the creative work of God; it signifies, writes Rossi, that 'man is made in the image of God' (1984: 2): As Tolkien says himself: "The Christian . . . may now perceive that all his bents and faculties have a purpose . . . he may actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation" (1988: 66).

This view is not novel. Creation, the act of Genesis, became attached to the Romantic imagination after the 1750s, but in English criticism it was introduced by Sidney (1583) who considered the poet as he who 'made nature better' inventing new forms, such as heroes, demigods, and Cyclops (1904: 156). Similarly, Shelley speaks of 'forms' that are more real than living man (1973: 747-748). Thus, the poet became deified as a creator who could create a new heaven, a new hell, and a new earth, a world 'more real' perhaps than the actual one' (Smith 1925: 128).

Middle-earth is such a new heaven and earth, and corresponds to Tolkien's theory of man as 'sub-creator'. Likewise, for the Romantic, Coleridge, the imagination was a 'dim analogue' of creation (1956: 535),⁷¹ because he also believed it shares in God's creative activity. Arguably, however, this Christian spirit behind art may be alienating because the more divine something is, the less human and enriching it is.

70 The spelling *faerie* first appears in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* of 1590.

71 Letter to Richard Sharpe 15th January 1804.

'Mechanical' idolatry

In contrast to the creativity of God, some Romantics considered Greek mythology to be limited and finite: Coleridge wrote that 'all natural objects' were 'defunct, hollow, dead' (1956: 459).⁷² Wordsworth was harsher in 'The Excursion', denouncing "those weeds of Romish phantasy", honoured only by confused heathens of the past (1853: 147-148). They have lost their 'venom', Hartley Coleridge writes, (1851: 39), and because they are harmless, there is little harm in employing them for poetic purposes. In this way, the Romantics rejuvenated the deities of classic fame to suit their own agendas.

Keats's 'Ode to Psyche' (1819) provides an example: "O latest born and loveliest vision far / Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy". Psyche, or the 'soul', is the 'loveliest vision far', because she understands human suffering in a way that no Olympian could, and Keats pledges to keep an 'untrodden region' in the sanctuary of his mind for her (Sélincourt 1905: 196-97). Similarly, in contrast to the 'mechanical' idolatry of old, Coleridge praises the 'living *educts*' of the imagination in the Hebrew Bible whose own poets abhorred idolatry (1956: 865).

It is in this tradition that Tolkien also remoulds deities for his own purpose. In Sweden, the *näcken* (nude), or water-sprite, is mentioned in folktales dating to the twelfth-century and is often portrayed as a naked, treacherous man playing beautiful music to lure women to the water. Perhaps such a motif is too 'liberal' for conservative Tolkien, so he entirely reworked the water-sprite, Goldberry, described only as the 'River-woman's daughter'. In the 'Adventures of Tom Bombadil', a light-hearted poem Tolkien wrote for the *Oxford Magazine* in 1934, she maintains something of tradition, pulling Tom into the river. However, in the

72 Letter to Sotheby 10th September 1802

Rings, it is Old Man Willow, not Goldberry, who throws Frodo into the river. She is surrounded by traditional nature symbolism, purity and fertility (which, for Tolkien, define womanhood itself), and fitting water imagery: “About her feet in wide vessels of green and brown earthenware, white water-lilies were floating, so that she seemed to be enthroned in the midst of a pool” (I 170).⁷³ She is still powerful, since she can command the rain with her singing (I 178).

Notwithstanding this ‘taming’ of classical deities, for many Christians the claim that man, sinful and corrupt according to Tolkien, could elevate himself to a ‘creator’ may have seemed astounding in its profanity. Bowra, Harvard Professor of Poetry in the 1940s, explains that the Romantics considered the imagination to be a precious commodity and related to a ‘supernatural order’, which was a ‘tremendous claim’ (1961: 4).

Tolkien and the Pre-Raphaelites

In 1916, Tolkien associated his literary clique, the TCBS, with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.⁷⁴ When Tolkien was born, the leading figures of the Pre-Raphaelites, Millais, Burne-Jones, Swinburne, Morris, and Holman Hunt were still alive (Rossetti had died a year earlier), though their influence had waned; still, *The Well at the World's End* had not yet been published (1896), while Hunt only finished his *Lady of Shalott* in 1905.

Tolkien’s claim of kinship, however, appears inconsistent with what is known about the Pre-Raphaelites,⁷⁵ formed in 1848, the ‘year of revolutions’, and suggests a misunderstanding of them. They were a group of English painters

73 Water-sprites were recognised by the wet hem of their clothes. Note, too, Tolkien’s use of the water-lily: the German word for sprite is ‘nix’ or ‘nixe’, and in Scandinavia water lilies are called ‘nix roses’ or *näckrosor*.

74 Letter Wiseman to Smith 30th August 1916 (cited in Garth 2004: 14).

75 Tolkien told the TCBS that it was a ‘world-shaking power’ (cited in Wiseman to Tolkien 16th November 1914, Bodelian Tolkien family papers 2/2 – cited in Garth 2004: 137).

and poets brought together by Holman Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti who, just as the Romantics had done in poetry, rejected the traditional rules of composition which had succeeded Raphael and Michelangelo.

Tolkien did not challenge established rules as such, but he shares an affinity with the Pre-Raphaelite rejection of machinery, if not their motives.⁷⁶ Morris, discussed earlier, was not in favour of abolishing 'all machinery'; he explained to his Liverpool audience in 1881 that some things needed to be made by hand and others by machinery. Moreover, he explained, it was necessary to get rid of that great machine of 'commercial tyranny' which oppresses everyone (1901: 15). Tolkien, on the other hand, aspires to rid the world of machines because he sees them as an adversary to God's created nature:

up came fires and foul fumes: the vents and shafts all over the plain began to spout and belch. Several of the Ents got scorched and blistered. One of them, Beechbone I think he was called, a very tall handsome Ent, got caught in a spray of some liquid fire and burned like a torch: a horrible sight (II 215).

In rejecting industrialism, the Brotherhood took up themes of chivalry, Christian romance, and ancient legends in their work, which were in vogue during the mid-1800s following the death of Keats in 1821 and Shelley in 1822. It aimed to capture the nostalgia for medievalism, just as the Romantic Scott had done with *Ivanhoe* (1819); thus, Pre-Raphaelite paintings include Rossetti's *Sir Lancelot's Vision of the Sanc Greal* (1857) for the Oxford Union. In addition, Burne-Jones explored fairy-tales, painting sets of tiles telling the stories of 'Beauty and the Beast' and 'Cinderella'.

This longing for the past is evident in both the *Rings* and Tolkien's letters. During the defeat of Sauron's armies, 'Sharkey' (Saruman) and his thugs have

⁷⁶ It is ironic that it was that very industrialism which Tolkien rejected, helped stimulate his interest in linguistics: Carpenter relates how names on coal-trucks from Wales such as *Nantyglo*, *Senghenydd*, *Blaen-Rhondda*, *Penrhiwceiber*, and *Tredegar*, 'had a strange appeal to him' (1989: 33-4).

been busy defacing the Shire with their policy of hacking and burning trees (III 355). Nevertheless, on returning to the Shire, Sam and Frodo discovered that they cared for the Shire more than any other place in the world (III 343). Similarly, following a visit to his childhood home, Sarehole, in September 1933, Tolkien wrote in his diary of how the old miller's house was now a petrol station, and the elm trees had gone, and how he envied those not vulnerable to 'violent and hideous change' (Carpenter 1989: 124-25).

Moreover, Tolkien condemns war technology explicitly. In 1945, he described the Second World War as the 'first War of the Machines' which left millions maimed, dead, and bereaved. Only was thing triumphed, he writes: 'the Machines' (2006: 111). More correctly, Blunden denounced the Great War as a huge 'machine of violence' (2000: 53), but machines do not cause war: triggers do not pull themselves. Rather, as Clausewitz remarked, 'War is a continuation of politics by other means'. The root of the problem lies in why men go to war, rather than the type of war technology they use.

Crossley remarks that Tolkien had a 'Luddite arcadianism' (1982: 180), such was his resentment at the 'disfigurement' of his beloved England (2006: 89). How much more attractive was Gwendolen in the witch tower, the mystical search for the Holy Grail, and heraldic colour. In later pre-Raphaelite poetry, Morris shunned urban words, just as Tolkien wished he could purge Latin from the English language and shunned French as noted above.

Morris especially respected medieval craftsmanship, its sense of honest co-operative endeavour, in which the work of human hands and not inhuman machines had pride of place (Gaunt 1943: 19), and Tolkien echoes his sentiment: hobbits do not understand or like machines 'more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom' (I 17).

Myth of collective values

For the Pre-Raphaelites, medieval values represented real values, signified by the importance of communal life and, as the Romantics before them, they turned to folklore in search of a lost collective identity as Victorian industry swallowed village communities. Tolkien follows suit in the *Rings* where he stresses the beauty and isolation of the Shire: Frodo loved the woods and fields and little rivers (I 55), while maps made in the Shire showed nothing beyond its borders (I 67). Wordsworth might have called it a 'secluded glen' with its little family of men ('The Prelude' 1979: 269). This has only ever existed, however, in popular imagination: the village that kept itself in rural, isolated bliss, living on its own resources, has never existed, though it has fed romantic nostalgia (Dyer 2007: 141).

There could be no single, unified 'folk' since in real life peasants would have had little in common with their lord. In folklore we detect different, not collective, values. In the folk-song 'Des Knaben Wunderhorn' ('The Youth's Magic Horn'), the 'Song of Eternity' praises God, but the young bride stubbornly rejects the convent and the imposed virginity that accompanies it. In Tolkien's Shire, too, there is an ongoing dispute over the Baggins' inheritance, which implies property relations. Bilbo, who straddles both *The Hobbit* and the *Rings*, is considered odd because he has a fondness for travel, and the miller is not shy before his audience in *The Ivy Bush*: 'You can say what you like, Gaffer, but Bag End's a queer place, and its folk are queerer' (I 43).

Tolkien, too, emphasises craftsmanship: the Rings of Power were forged in Eregion, by master craftsmen, the High-Elves, and chief among them was Celebrimbor, meaning 'hand of silver' (Scull and Hammond 2008: 227). However, they have *too much* knowledge,⁷⁷ which Tolkien associates with machinery, science, and evil: the High-Elves always sided with 'science and technology' and wanted the knowledge that Sauron possessed (2006: 190).⁷⁸ At

77 Ecclesiastes: "he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (1:18)

78 The greed of the dwarves is considered in chapter IV.

the Council of Elrond, the reader learns that Sauron ensnared the eagerness of the high-elves for knowledge (I 317), and Gandalf warns that it is a peril 'for good or for ill' (I 346-7). Yet, Gandalf himself is one of the 'Wise', with specialist knowledge of fire, and is steeped in lore. Tolkien is stating that knowledge is not won through research, or 'science and technology'; rather, it is a gift and bestowed on those of whom Eru, or God, approves.

'Truth to nature'

Inspired by Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, the pre-Raphaelites aspired to a 'truth to nature', replicating it exactly. They had "a craving to paint every leaf with botanical accuracy" (Gaunt 1943: 12), as does Niggle, Tolkien's painter in 'Leaf by Niggle' (1938-39). Niggle laboured at a single leaf, trying to catch its shape, and its sheen, and the glistening of dewdrops on its edges (1988: 75).

Yet, art does not simply replicate nature. However exact art may be, nature is always more faithful and more superb. The artist often has something to 'say' even when he depicts nature itself. Thus, the Brotherhood painted nature not as it is, but in near-luminescent colours as if in answer to the metallic greys of the Victorian age, while Niggle finds his tree finished, a true part of creation. Note again the religious imagery:⁷⁹ the tree was shining like a flame and the artist went off with the shepherd (1988: 93).⁸⁰

There is, however, a difference in style between the Pre-Raphaelites and Tolkien, if painting may be compared to writing. The Pre-Raphaelites used to wet-white their canvasses to create the bright, sensuous luminosity characteristic of their work, so that even the minor elements would be viewed evenly in what Pinkney terms a 'democracy of objects' (1988: 7). Moreover, religious society was scandalised by Pre-Raphaelite paintings such as Millais'

79 See Exodus 3:2.

80 Tolkien likens his Church to a tree (2006: 394).

Christ in the House of his Parents (1850), with its stress on Jesus' humble origins which demystified traditionally revered subjects. In contrast, when Frodo asks why he was chosen for the quest, Gandalf is evasive; nor does the reader learn of Shelob's fate; and while hobbits are relatives of men,⁸¹ the relationship can no longer be discovered' (I 18): Tolkien enjoys these 'mysteries'.

The Pre-Raphaelites expressed their contempt for industrial capitalism which exploited workers and their families. This is depicted in paintings such as Millais' *The Blind Girl* (1856), which scorns vagrancy among children and the disabled, while Ford Maddox Brown gallantly recorded social struggle in his wall paintings for Manchester Town Hall. In contrast, Tolkien respected class division and had nothing in common with the political views of Morris who helped found the Socialist League in 1884 and wrote *News From Nowhere* (1890). In the novel, the narrator, Guest, falls asleep after returning from a meeting and awakens in a future society based on the common ownership of the means of production. Again, in contrast, Tolkien makes his views clear in his poem 'Mythopoeia': "I will not walk with your progressive apes, / erect and sapient" (1988: 100). Unlike the Pre-Raphaelites and the Romantics, Tolkien's first loyalty was to Heaven because, for him, social reforms were 'unfruitful' compared to the light of God's sun (1988: 100), that is, 'the Blessed Land', or 'God's picture' (1988: 101).

Mechanisation and fantasy

When the essayist, Charles Lamb (1775-1834), reviewed *King Lear* on stage he wrote of the 'contemptible machinery' by which the storm is mimicked when Lear goes out into it (1886: 205). Tolkien was equally opposed to representing 'fantastic' features on stage; fantasy could not be 'counterfeited' (1988: 47): mechanism to represent fantasy is tolerable, he maintains, only when no 'belief' is required (1988: 47). In a letter to W H Auden in June 1955, he explained that

81 Hobbits are meant to be a 'branch' of the human race – to show the 'pettiness of man, plain unimaginative parochial man' (2006: 158).

the part of the Ents in his story was due to his bitter disappointment from his schooldays with the use made in Shakespeare of the coming of 'Great Birnham wood to high Dunisane hill': he longed to devise a setting in which the trees might really march to war (2006: 212).

In *Macbeth*, Malcolm's army makes use of the leafy camouflage provided by Great Birnham wood in order to move against Macbeth, and this fulfils the third apparition's prophesy that Macbeth shall never be vanquished until the wood came to high Dunsinane hill against him (IV, i, 94). To have the wood itself move would not synchronise with the rest of the play and it was not Shakespeare's intention to dramatise an animated wood.

Behind both his opposition to Shakespeare and his rejection of 'mechanisation', Tolkien is emphasising that the audience, or reader, requires not the 'magic' of stage props or devices, but a simple belief that the story is 'true'. This will be considered in some detail in chapter III.

Science and art

Tolkien states that the sense of 'distance' between the real world and that of fantasy is *not* due to humans perceiving fantasy as unreal: it is the fault of science:

Fantasy does not blur the sharp outlines of the real world; for it depends on them . . . this 'sense of separation' has in fact been attacked and weakened in modern times not by fantasy but by scientific theory (1988: 72).⁸²

Thus, he subscribes to the view penned in 1789 in the *General Magazine* by 'GHM', who attributed the decline of poetry to the incompatibility of scientist and poet. As opposed to poetical description, 'a botanist is interested only in a

82 Note that for Tolkien, science is only 'theory'.

flower's internal construction, not its beauty' (1789: 532-4). Apparently, Newton was responsible for this since he 'destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow' (Haydon 1926: 269), since science was antithetical to poetry: when men philosophise, GHM maintains, they are less imaginative (1789: 532-4), a point also made by Keats in 'Lamia' (1820): "Do not all charms fly / At the mere touch of cold philosophy?" (1970: 41). Similarly, with commerce: 'Ledgers do not rhyme well', wrote the *Westminster Review* in 1825, before asking how the pursuit of poetry may help cotton-spinning or the abolition of the poor laws (1825: 166).

In the *Rings*, Tolkien supports Haydon: "the beauty of the melodies and of the interwoven words in elven-tongues . . . held him [Frodo] in a spell" (I 306), while Baradûr, the evil Dark Tower, is described as "that vast fortress, armoury, prison, furnace of great power" (II 199). This has a Romantic precedent in Novalis, who wrote in his 'Christianity or Europe' (1826) of the transformation of God's infinite, creative music into the monotonous clatter of a self-grinding mill (1966: 70).

Tolkien's antipathy towards science stems from these preoccupations of nineteenth-century criticism. Nevertheless, while some Romantics opposed 'mechanism', Romanticism did not wholly reject science. According to Wetzels, the natural sciences were an 'integral part' of early German Romanticism (1990: 199). Novalis enlisted as a student at the Mining Academy of Freiberg and romanticised caves in his novel, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802). In England, Davy, the Romantic poet, who proofread the *Lyrical Ballads* for Wordsworth and Coleridge, was also a chemist who invented the Davy Lamp and Coleridge participated in his experiments with nitrous oxide (Levere 1990: 297).

Tolkien, on the other hand, appears to bolt the door wholly to science. While he concedes that fantasy takes its material from the real world, he states that behind the fantasy real wills and powers exist, 'independent of the minds and purposes of men' (1988: 18). As suggested above, Tolkien believed that God gave man the gift of creativity and that man expresses this divine gift through his own sub-creation – 'sub' because it falls under the primary creativity of God:

from beginning to end, he says, the *Rings* is concerned 'with the relation of Creation to making and sub-creation' (2006: 188).

Let us recall that, for Tolkien, the 'distance' the audience or reader feels between the real world and fantasy is due to science, because fantasy 'depends' on the real world. But here, Tolkien is not referring to the real world at all because 'the physical world is a reality derived from God' (2006:236). This thesis argues that challenging the findings of science because they are inconsistent, or not quite proven, is acceptable; it is quite a different matter, however, to reject scientific research on supernatural premises that have no scientific basis.

Tolkien disapproved of the 'mechanical age' partly due to the 'industrialised ghastliness' (Fussell 2000: 87) of the Great War, which introduced tanks, flame-throwers, and acid gas into trench conflict. But it was the more general way in which his own historic period offered a rational, cerebral response to man's condition, a response unrelated to religious experience, which he rejected. The 'war to end all wars' simply accelerated and intensified his censure. When social relations become more developed, they undermine and contradict religion more sharply.

Science in general replaces Tolkien's 'Blessed Sacrament' with reason. Garth challenges this assertion, arguing that Tolkien's invention of languages in the *Rings* was based on 'scientific curiosity' and 'rigorous phonological principles' (2004: 123). Yet, Tolkien himself believed such creativity to be a gift from God, as shown above, and for this reason he does not credit science for the meticulous method that he employed in devising his languages. Moreover, his scientific approach to linguistics elevates the divine. Garth says it is also wrong to suppose that 'Tolkien's turned away from humankind' (2004: 123), and cites his work on language and beliefs. Yet, in many letters, and in his book, evil always recurs due to man's 'inner weakness' (2006: 154). In the *Rings*, this is expressed for instance by Frodo when his heart warns him against the choice that seems easier: he does 'not trust the strength and truth of men' (I 516).

The arts and sciences represent different aspects of knowledge, but they are not antithetical. Thompson (1727: 11), in his poem 'To the Memory of Sir Issac Newton', shows how, despite the detractors, the rainbow has even more poetic value now that its properties have been discovered: the rainbow melts on the field beneath it with its 'myriads of mingling dyes' to reveal an exhaustless source of beauty.

Wordsworth, too, maintained that the poet would be at the side of the 'Men of science' (Preface, 'Lyrical Ballads' 1991: 259), and Shelley denied any opposition between 'Science and her sister Poesy'. Indeed, some of art's best known works were produced during this period of tremendous scientific discovery, in part because science opened new doors for art.

Imagination

A contribution to the work of Tolkien cannot ignore the role of imagination in the production of the final artistic product. For the Romantics, the mind is divine because it is the source of imaginative inspiration. Thus, for Coleridge, "all its materials are from the mind, and all its products are for the mind" (1979: 254). Coleridge, Reid argues, is looking inside the mind, not at the 'inanimate cold world' (2006: 1) or, as Coleridge himself put it, 'a truth hidden within my inner nature' (1961: 2546).

However, when we talk of the mind and its imaginative power, we are talking not simply of brain matter, but the actual process of being and, as suggested earlier, being cannot be created from pure thought, however imaginative. Thought, enriched or impoverished, has never existed anywhere without being. Of course, the imagination is processed through the creative brain, but that brain is married to its external world which is its nourishment.

When Tolkien speaks sincerely of the importance of 'opening the door a little [on fantasy] and passing through it' (1988: 32), he replaces the real world with his

own imaginary one. The ingredients of his imaginary world have been abstracted from the real world, but what is imagined is no longer imagined for him – it has become real: “The image becomes reality” (Feuerbach 1966: 45-46).

Keats’ ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ (1819) warns against such an unruly trust in the imagination. In the poem, the speaker imagines leaving the world on the ‘viewless wings of Poesy’ (2007: 32) to follow the nightingale into the dim forest (2007: 19). Day remarks that this kind of imaginative reverie is ‘an escape from the actual world’ (1996: 173); it is actually deeper than that since the speaker’s eulogy to the imagination portends the tempting self-extinction that becomes explicit in stanza six: “Now more than ever seems it rich to die, / To cease upon the midnight with no pain” (2007: 55-56). ‘Nightingale’ submits that seeking refuge in an indulgent imagination can evade reality only temporarily: the speaker is soon frustrated by the painful realisation of lost earthly-bearings when he cannot see the flowers at his feet (2007: 41). Indeed, in the final stanza, the fantasy collapses as the speaker returns to his ordinary self, and the nightingale’s song recedes. Day calls it ‘a cheat, a deception’ (1996: 174).

When presented with such deception in the form of the ‘supernatural or, at least, the romantic’, Coleridge believed that a theatre audience must voluntarily exercise a ‘willing suspension of disbelief for the moment’ (1979: 6). That is, an audience wills itself to accept, for instance, the ghost of Hamlet’s father knowing, in reality, that it lacks objectivity. Tolkien dismisses this, arguing that Coleridge’s approach is a substitute for the genuine thing; in Tolkien’s opinion, a successful sub-creator makes a ‘Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is true’. The reader, therefore, believes it as if he were inside (1988: 36-7). To experience ‘true’ fantasy, therefore, even adults would have no need to suspend disbelief, because they would believe (1988: 37). ‘True’ fantasy is one in which those who experience it are so wholly consumed as to rule out any disbelief, especially where this new fantastic world maintains the reality of Tolkien’s ‘inner consistency’ (1988: 65).

Tolkien is obliged to defend his stance against Coleridge, because he has in

mind ‘the story of Christ...a myth that really happened’ (Carpenter 1989: 151), as he told C.S. Lewis. That is, if a myth is ‘true’, an audience has no need to will itself to believe.

Luria’s research

Historical materialism holds that man satisfies his everyday needs through ‘material practice’, or labour, and this fundamental human activity gives rise to the ideas which man has about his world. These ideas are not static, but changing: the primitive man who hunts venison does not share the same ideas about the world as the one who orders it online. With the development of man and his society, consciousness replaces the instinct of his predecessors; advances in man’s social development enable him to imagine, that is, to think in an abstract, creative way: consciousness refers to conscious existence, and the manner in which men lives their lives: “Life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life” (Marx *German Ideology* 1977: 47).

Thus, in contrast to idealism, Marxism presents imagination as being socially and historically determined. Noteworthy is the work of Luria, the Soviet psychologist who collected observational material from remote villages of Uzbekistan and Kirghizia in 1931-32, to observe cognitive changes among interviewees following the transition to a socialist society. Those peasant farmers – held back by religion and on the fringes of social change – had difficulty answering simple questions such as ‘what would you like to learn about other countries?’, typically responding with ‘I haven’t seen people in other cities’.

On the other hand, those participants actively involved in collective-farm life were able to abstract information from their wider world, and this pointed to ‘decisive changes in basic cognitive processes brought about by fundamental changes in social conditions’ (1976: vi). The 1917 October Revolution broadened personal experiences and pushed abstract reasoning to the fore: ‘when the creative imagination takes shape, man vastly expands his subjective

world' (1976: 163).

Luria's research undermines the centuries-old notion that perception, reasoning, and imagination are God-given, originate in the mind, and remain unchanged: Human mental life is a product of social history, and is subject to change when social practice is altered (1976: 164).

Tolkien and Fairy-tale

The Gospels contain a fairy-story . . . which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories

Tolkien 'On Fairy Stories'

The *Rings* has been hugely successful, at least in terms of sales, and a brief outline of Tolkien's quest is provided below. It shares some characteristics with classic European fairy-tales, and the chapter compares and contrasts the style and themes of the classic tale with the techniques that Tolkien employs. The chapter examines the evolution of one particular fairy-tale, 'Little Red Riding Hood', and looks at the way such tales have helped shape human behaviour. The origins of fairy-tales, however, are dismissed by Tolkien, who stresses instead the importance of their 'happy ending', which he links to the Gospels. Finally, the chapter briefly considers the role of fantasy in a 'postmodern' world from a Marxist perspective.

'The English-speaking world is divided into those who have read *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* and those who are going to read them'. So *The Sunday Times* summarised the unprecedented success of Tolkien's work and, despite protests from literary critics, feminists, and 'socialists', the claim is warranted: the *Rings* (1954–55) boasts astonishing sales figures,⁸³ leading Shippey to nominate Tolkien "*the author of the century*" (2001: xvii).

83 Wilson called it "a children's book which has somehow got out of hand" (*The Nation* 1956: 312) while, for Greer, the feminist, 'the bad dream has materialized' (*Waterstone's Magazine* Winter/Spring 1997). For keen Tolkien readers, many 'left' reviews of the *Rings* are disappointing: the 'socialist' Moorcock scorned "the little hills and woods of that Surrey of the mind, the Shire" (1987: 125), yet boasted that from his own window he could see 'limitless landscapes of great beauty unspoiled by the uglier forms of industry' (1987: 126). The irony appears lost on him.

The book has sold at least 150 million copies (in its three-volume format) over the past 50 years and, since 1976, in various polls conducted to determine 'the five books you consider the greatest of the century', readers have consistently voted for the book, second only to the Bible: "Tolkien's sales figures have always been an annoyance to his detractors" (Shippey 2001: xx).

Some observers are either overcritical of Tolkien's fantasy, or miss the author's purpose altogether. Included here are the 'socialist' Moorcock, who branded the *Rings* a 'Winnie-the-Pooh epic' (1987: 125), and Freedman who regrets that it lacked 'a single important instance of sexual desire' (2002: 263).

Sales do not necessarily infer artistic merit, but they do earn financial rewards: in May 2008 the *Rings* 'trilogy', a Hollywood 'blockbuster', was voted 'best ever film' claiming numerous Oscars and grossing a staggering £1.5 billion at the box office. A 'Google' search for 'Tolkien' brings up over 6 million results, while Saarikoski points to the important influence of the book on computer games (2005: 3).

Since the 1960s, the author has become a cult figure,⁸⁴ and recently Chance (Mooney 2001), a Professor of English at Rice in Texas, has stated – rather oddly – that she can see 'no difference between Tolkien and Shakespeare'. Likewise, contributors such as 'Glorfinel the Loremaker' post thousands of messages to Web forums such as the <http://www.thetolkienforum.com/> and <http://www.xenite.org/talk/tolkien.html> on every aspect of the author, his medieval adventures, invented languages, and mythology.

Tolkien's story

A magic sword forged during the Goblin Wars, wizards, a magic potion called *miruvor* (I 372), myth and song charm the *Rings*, a blend of faërie,⁸⁵ Celtic and Norse mythology, and medieval romance. Central to the book are the hobbits, a small, furry-footed folk, but otherwise similar to men (though shorter). They are

84 Following the publication of Tolkien's book, American students daubed 'Frodo lives' on university campuses and fans sent him photos of themselves dressed as characters from his book.

85 Tolkien takes this idea from that same pagan mythology which he decries. *Miruvor* is the nectar of his own gods, "made from the honey of the undying flowers in the gardens of Yavanna" (Tolkien 1967: 61). Faërie is "the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in that country...it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible" (1988: 14-15).

ancient, unobtrusive, and uncomplicated as noted above.

The story typifies the universal quest myth, in which a hero abandons his everyday world for one of supernatural wonder where he encounters fabulous forces before a marvellous victory (Campbell 1972: 30). The hero is the hobbit, Frodo, who has little knowledge of Sauron (a name taken from the Old Norse stem *saur-*, or unclean,⁸⁶ or evil), yet beyond the borders of the Shire, orcs, an evil breed of goblin, are multiplying; governing them all is Sauron, the Dark Power, the Lord of the Rings. Of the Twelve Great Rings wrought in an earlier age, Sauron lacks the one Great Ring that will grant him domination over all Middle-earth: 'One Ring to rule them all'. He knows the Ring has been found and he is exercising his formidable power to draw it to himself (I 90).

Gandalf, the wise wizard, narrates these details to Frodo whose uncle, Bilbo, had gained possession of this one Ring from Gollum earlier in *The Hobbit*. The Ring could not be broken – 'force was useless' (I 90) – or melted down (I 91), or used against Sauron himself since it possesses its wearer (I 72). Nor can it be removed from Middle-earth, because 'it belongs here' (I 348).

The quest, then, is not to gain 'treasure', but to lose it. Frodo sells Bag End and – with Sam, his gardener, and friends Merry, and Pippin – begins his mission. It is described as 'a flight into danger' (I 93), and the awful hazards of the quest comprise the tale. Ringwraiths, the ghoulish half-living Black Riders and dark counterpart of men who guard the Nine Rings for Sauron, immediately pursue the hobbits. With the help of Strider, a 'ranger' sent by Gandalf, the party arrives at Rivendell, dwelling of Elrond and the elves. Unlike man, they are 'uncorrupted' and enjoy a rich culture of song and poetry (men call them 'enchantments'). Here a 'fellowship of the Ring' comprising the hobbits, a man called Boromir, an elf, a dwarf, Gandalf and Strider (now revealed as Aragorn, heir of the warrior, Isildur, and rightful King of Gondor), is decided upon and

86 Derived from 'cloven hoof', this has religious connotations. In the New Testament Jesus drives out an 'unclean spirit' in a man who had challenged him (Deut. 18:15-20; I Cor. 7:32-35; Mark. 1:21-28; Luke. 4:33).

determines to cast the Ring into the Crack of Doom⁸⁷ in Mordor, in the dominion of Sauron himself.

Soon after leaving Rivendell, a snowstorm forces the fellowship into the Mines of Moria where Gandalf, battling the Balrog, a ferocious underworld demon, falls into the abyss. The remaining party press on to enchanted Lothlórien and Galadriel, the great elf lady of the forest; shortly afterwards, Boromir, falling to temptation, tries to seize the Ring for himself; he is unsuccessful, but the fellowship is broken. Frodo and Sam, now tormented by Gollum in pursuit of his 'precious', find themselves lost in barren Eryn Mui. The company approaches Mordor, the land that has been increasingly poisoned by Sauron and, recalling the Christian story, Gandalf is resurrected. Together with Aragorn, he commands the forces of 'good' against the vast armies of the Dark Lord.

As the story reaches its climax, Shelob, a giant spider-like creature and devourer of all living things, takes Frodo prisoner. The strands of her web might be like rope (II 416) but, incredibly, Frodo is freed by Sam. The Ring is disposed of, the battle won and Frodo, and the other hobbits, return to the Shire triumphantly, while Aragorn is crowned king and a new age dawns: this is the Fourth Age, which man will inherit.

Tolkien's book as fairy-tale

Although Tolkien's work has spawned its own genre of sword-and sorcery epic, its own ancestry clearly lies with the fairy-tale. The *Rings* borrows from fairy-tale in several ways that this chapter will itemise below, before considering other aspects of fairy-tale such as its evolution.

- **Sharply defined 'action' images**

87 Compare: "What, will the line stretch out to th' crack of doom? (*Macbeth* IV, i, 117).

'Impact' images have a more powerful effect on the reader than a long-winded and moralising tale, or an excursion into scripture. As Trotsky remarks, fables, songs, and folk-rhymes express knowledge 'in graphic form', and they throw light on the past and generalise experience (1962: 105).

It is precisely because they are not detailed, not investigative, but simplistic, vivid, and colourful, that 'impact' images appeal to our senses.⁸⁸ In Grimm's 'The White Snake', for instance, a servant embarks on seeing the world, and one day he came to a pond where three fish were caught in the reeds, gasping for water. They were about to perish when the servant dismounted and returned the fish to the water. The fish leapt in delight and, sticking their heads above the surface, they cried to him 'we will remember you and repay you for saving us'.

Many in childhood, especially, will be receptive to this type of imagery and may well be more sensitive towards the animal kingdom than those who have grown up without such influences. In the *Rings*, Sam's unlikely duel with Shelob is an example of the 'impact' image aimed at highlighting his dedication to his master, Frodo, as the book draws to a close.

This does not mean that Tolkien attempts no character analysis at all: he explores inner conflict in the duel between schizophrenic Déagol (meaning 'secret, hidden' in Old English)/Sméagol (Old English for 'burrow'). Sméagol (Gollum) has murdered his brother, Déagol, for the Ring, a tale that recalls the murder of Abel who killed his brother, Cain, out of jealousy in Genesis; Cain was exiled from Eden by God, just as Tolkien withdraws Gollum from the world (I 81). Frodo also suffers from an inner struggle with the Ring, 'to put it on or not?' To do so would have placed him in the greatest danger (I 291) because he would have been half in the wraith-world himself. On Amon Hen, he feels the Eye of the Dark Lord, and he struggles between good and evil: "The two powers strove in him. For a moment, perfectly balanced between their piercing points,

88 Similarly, Marx (in *Vorwärts!* 7th August 1844) likened the German working class to Cinderella (1977: 434).

he writhed, tormented” (I 521).

Such personality probing, however, is largely subordinated to the imagery through which the author raises his prime ideological concerns: life, death, and immortality, and how they relate to what Tolkien calls the ‘consolation’ – again, that religious echo – of the ‘joyful happy ending’ (1988: 62). That joy is symbolised, for instance, by the ray of Eärendil, the Evening Star, that was so bright that its ray glanced upon *Nenya*, one of the Three Rings, on Galadriel’s finger, which glittered like polished gold in silver light while a white stone in it ‘twinkled like the Even-star resting on her hand’ (I 473). The imagery here is Disney-like, despite Tolkien deeply loathing Disney productions (2006: 17).⁸⁹

Another such image is Galadriel’s antithesis: Shelob. Tolkien maintains that his book was inspired primarily by his linguistic interest (I 9), but he moulds this interest to suit his Catholic purpose. Thus, the female *She*-lob descends from the Anglo-Saxon *lobbe* for spider and Tolkien uses Shelob’s antiquity and predatory nature to present a creature of terrifying authority. He also makes her a *she*, a mother who devours her own brood; Tolkien taps into popular misgivings about spiders and disgust that a mother, especially, would ever harm her own offspring. It is a rather simple technique, but the book sales testify to its popularity.

Tolkien’s emphasis, then, is on visual, tactile and auditory images: the defeat of Sauron, the coronation of Aragorn, and Frodo sailing away to collect his supernatural reward. The author’s focus is on deed and the physical challenges involved in combating evil, rather than an analysis of how each protagonist psychologically resists the Ring’s accumulative lure. Just as in fairy-tales, his characters are symbols as opposed to real ‘people’. Similarly, the fairy-story tends not to dwell on introspection or the moods of its characters; occasionally, they feature a sulking princess, but the story soon heralds action and purpose.

89 He considered Disney “vulgar” (2006: 119, 311). As previously indicated, some critics claim the same of Tolkien’s own book.

- **Role of Time**

Neither fairy-tale nor Tolkien is duly concerned with time, or rather, accurate time: both ‘Once upon a time’ and ‘happily ever after’ suggest an indeterminate time, so the ‘moral’ of the fairy-tale, which occurred at some time in the past, remains applicable to the present and future. In Tolkien’s book, the Ring itself is able to ‘arrest time’ (Zimbardo 1969: 106) in that it prolongs longevity; Gandalf notes, for instance, that Gollum has lived far beyond the ‘span of his years’ due to the strength of the Ring (I 332).

Unlike fairy-tales, which offer a moral in a world portrayed as timeless (that is, outside any particular historical period), Tolkien sets his story in a distant pre-Christian era and, in his *Prologue*, he informs us that the forthcoming events were gathered from *The Red Book*, *The Thain’s Book* and other Shire records which had survived the distant ages of the world. Note, however, the anachronism: the hobbits have umbrellas and wear waistcoats. Middle-earth is set “long ago in the quiet of the world, when there was less noise and more green” (*The Hobbit* 1998: 14); ‘long ago’ is vague, but it is certainly before the nineteenth-century, yet Bilbo takes out ‘his morning letters’, routinely delivered, which must place him after 1837 when the postal service was introduced. Likewise, as Shippey notes, the first steam railway in England opened in 1825, yet Bilbo shrieks ‘like the whistle of an engine coming out of a tunnel’ (2001: 6). These steam trains occupy the same Middle-earth as the tribal Rohirrim, an anglicised horse-people who wear ‘shirts of mail that hung down to their knees’ (II 35).

Tolkien, in fact, dispenses with accurate time on the first page of his book when Bilbo is celebrating his 111th birthday;⁹⁰ later we learn that the elves live forever; Aragorn and Arwen reign for 120 years. Perhaps somewhat bizarrely, Pippin is nearly twenty-nine years old (III 43) but he is treated like a baby – maybe to

90 It is also Frodo’s thirty-third birthday, when hobbits ‘come of age’. Christ also died when he was thirty-three.

emphasise hobbit innocence – such as when Gandalf gently carries him back to his bed (II 249). These are fairy-tale elements, yet Tolkien also offers scrupulous genealogies at the end of his book to add a sense of realism and depth to his story. This is important because the reader enters the story after the passing of the First and Second Ages, and at the end of the Third Age. There is detail, too, in the passing of the seasons, in Bilbo's ageing, and there is a sense of development throughout the book; that is, Tolkien combines his 'fantastic' time with a more 'historic' time.

One further comparison with Tolkien's work and fairy-tale is not so much time, as timing: protagonists intercede at the right moment. In 'The Three Spinners' a mother, overwrought with anger, beats her idle daughter because she refuses to spin. The girl begins to weep loudly: "Now at this very moment the Queen drove by . . ." (Grimm 1892: 59). In Tolkien, too, as Raffle notes, there is a tendency towards last minute '*deus ex machina* rescues' (1969: 242). In this, the author fulfils the fairy tale's need for precision in that every moment is used to harmonise with the exact delineated action elsewhere in the tale.

There is one particular difference concerning time between fairy-tales and Tolkien. Whereas in the fairy-tale there is a 'close' to the moral of the story, Tolkien's 'ages' are reborn as in Viking mythology. This is because "Always after a defeat and a respite, the Shadow takes another shape and grows again" (I 78), which serves to underline a certain religious cynicism.

- **Role of prohibitions**

Fairy stories, as in 'Little Red Riding Hood', have a predilection for prohibitions (Tolkien 1988: 19). Fairy-stories may not be real, but many still have a moral. In Tolkien, prohibition centres on the temptation to wear the Ring: it can be perilous especially for those who already possess power, because the desire for it 'corrupts the heart' (I 350). Such stipulations delineate the story, presenting a 'framework' that characters are not expected to overstep. The 'tests' are included in order to be mastered, because in fairy all things are possible; indeed, especially possible is the impossible.

Yet, prohibitions are not always overcome: Cinderella is caught by the midnight chimes, while Celeborn reprimands Boromir for not respecting the 'lore of old wives' whose memory 'the wise' often needed to draw upon (I 486). Boromir pays the ultimate price for his 'transgression' when the Ring ensnares him, and he confesses to having tried to take the Ring from Frodo: "I am sorry. I have paid" (II 12). Storytellers, then, use the theme of prohibition, allowing it to be undermined (or not), in order to invest their own moral views into the story.

- **Evil consumes evil**

In one fairy-tale after another evil is shown to 'consume itself' (Lüthi 1970: 64). Thus, in 'Hansel and Gretel' the wicked witch is shoved into her own oven while, in Tolkien, the Ring disappears into the fires of Mount Doom. Similarly, Sauron creates the Ring and is obsessed by it. Tolkien shows evil as having wisdom, or guile, yet unable to correct itself. Thus, while Sauron is 'very wise', yet calculating, he appreciates only the desire for power and judges other characters to be the same (I 352). It never occurs to him that the West would refuse the Ring, or seek to destroy it, rather than squabble over possession of it, just as he does not realise that Frodo and Sam may use the road that he has built on Mount Doom.

- **Death and the spiritual**

The most recognisable image representing death in mythology, art and literature is that of the Grim Reaper, the skeleton wielding an hourglass, or the apocalyptic rider on the pale horse of Death in Revelation (6.8). In the early versions of 'Snow White', the heroine is not merely sleeping but dead, and she awakens only when her prince returns home from battle. Likewise, Gandalf returns to life from 'death'.

In 'Death and the Maiden' by Claudius (1740-1815), Death is powerful, yet sympathetic, and visits a young woman to claim her for no apparent reason.

She pleads for her life, offering gold and jewels, but he gently explains that she must accompany him that very night:

The Maiden:

Go by, oh, go by
harsh bony Death!
I am still young. Go, my dear,
and do not touch me.

Death:

Give me your hand, fair gentle thing.
A friend I am and do not come to punish.
Be of good cheer. I am not harsh.
In my arms shall you sleep soft!
(Fischer-Dieskau 1976: 135).

Death here is personified, as it is in Tolkien with his Black Riders. However, in Claudius death is indiscriminating, as death is, whereas in the *Rings* it is conditional, determined by whether or not the author approves of his protagonists' morals and faith. Tolkien imposes his own religious values on the text, dismissing those who do not 'see the light'. Some 'good' characters do die, such as Théoden who fell into lethargy in the struggle against evil, but they 'redeem' themselves. Tolkien shows Boromir, for instance, regretting trying to snatch the Ring, putting his head in his hands and grieving (I 525). Likewise, it is 'good' Gandalf who is resurrected, not the 'evil' Balrog, and this expresses Tolkien's faith not only in 'good', but in godliness.

- **Heroes**

Often in fairy-tales, neither the hero nor heroine questions why certain major episodes occur in their lives. At the end of the 'Juniper Tree', a bird drops a millstone on the wife's head and she is crushed by it. The father and daughter, Marlinchen, leave their house to see what has happened, before the long lost son took the hand of his father and Marlinchen, and the three of them went into the house for dinner, and ate (Grimm 1892: 190). The father never asks about the bird, or the millstone, or his wife, or the reappearance of his son.

Likewise, Frodo does not quiz himself about the power relations behind the conflict he is thrown into. He is content to be led through a dangerous, unfamiliar world where he receives supernatural help as at the crossing of the Ford of Bruinen. Nor does he question his mysterious helpers, such as Bombadil, a Pan figure; he simply accepts their 'grace' as natural. Even at the Council of Elrond when he offers to take the Ring (and when the reader might applaud him for standing on his own two feet), 'another force was using his small voice' (I 354): Frodo is one of Heaven's favourites. If you believe that the supernatural has created you, and guides you, you are indebted to it; you depend on it and worship it. In contrast, Hansel and Gretel, for example, escape from certain death by their own independent craft and this makes them more admirable.

Miracles do happen regularly in fairy-tales, but they are caused by spells or fairy godmothers, rather than those with religious power. Throughout their quest, the hobbits hear 'encouraging voices', and depend on Gandalf and the elves, who are Eru's 'messengers'. Crucially, Sam can only defeat Shelob with divine help, in the Phial of Galadriel; that is, Tolkien's hobbits depend on the supernatural, the One, and this undermines any autonomous role they might otherwise have played. Tolkien is implying that without religion, the hobbit, or man, is inadequate to combat 'evil'. Thus, his is not only a fairy-tale with a simple moral message, such as 'beware of strangers'; he proposes a whole religious schemata.

- **Help of other beings**

Helpful beings and animals play an important role in fairy-tales, as with the kind dwarves in 'Snow White'. Tolkien's tale is no different: there is Gandalf's horse, Shadowfax, and the friendly eagles led by Gwaihir the Windlord.

The Nazgûl, on the other hand, are evil beings. In *The Silmarillion*, they are the most terrible servants of the Enemy (1977: 289), while Shelob is a law unto herself. In Tolkien's papers in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, he describes her as being black except for the underpart of her belly, which was 'pale and luminous'

with corruption (cited in Hammond and Scull 2008: 493).⁹¹

- **Riddles**

Fairy-tales do not present a coherent picture of man's world, but they do have a charm: they shout courage, kindness, ingenuity, and wickedness. Riddles, too, are a common theme. In 'The Peasant's Clever Daughter', the protagonist outwits the king who then agrees to marry her; likewise, *The Hobbit* relates how Bilbo deceives Gollum in the riddle-game, whose source is the test of wisdom (Shippey 2001: 24) between Solomon and Saturn, which allows Bilbo safe passage through the Misty Mountains. Gollum's riddles are 'evil', cruel and dark and belong to the underworld, while those of innocent, eccentric Bilbo come from traditional nursery rhymes; thus, even in this 'playful' theme, Tolkien is making a religious point.

- **Nostalgia**

Some fairy-stories, such as 'Hansel and Gretel', use nostalgia for home to emphasise the importance and security of the hearth, and Tolkien employs the same technique when Frodo feels homeless and in danger, and wished bitterly that fortune had left him in the quiet of the Shire he adored (I 253).

Similarly, fairy-tale heroes are sometimes 'underprivileged' or 'undervalued': Hansel and Gretel are abandoned children, while Frodo is an orphan. This device is aimed at winning the sympathy of the reader, and making the challenges ahead of these protagonists more monumental.

- **Differences**

At the centre of fairy-tale stands man, man in his rags or wearing his crown. In

⁹¹ She is corrupt because she is 'sown' to the flesh, to lust, and not the heavenly spirit (Gal. 6:8).

the original story, *Sleeping Beauty* gives birth to twins, awakening only when her babies breastfeed. Her conceiving, followed by birth, survival, and death, depicts the life-cycle of man. Poverty, too, is a recurrent theme and the happy ending represents social progression for the story's 'hero'. Fairy tales may be unreal, Lüthi remarks, but they are not untrue because they reflect the essential condition of man (1970: 70). Despite this, the theme of poverty never features in the *Rings*, or Tolkien's letters, or his scholarly work.

On this theme, 'Cinderella' is a classic tale and, in an early version, one of the sisters hacks off her own toes to make the glass slipper fit (Yolen 2001). In some tales, the heroes are adventurers out to seek their fortune; in others, children are dispatched from the hearth into the world when parents were too poor to keep them. In the Grimms' version of 'Hansel and Gretel', the wife proposes to her husband that they abandon the children to the forest; if not, 'you may as well plane the planks for our coffins': following the 'great dearth' that fell on the land there was not enough food for all four.

This has a real-life basis: impoverished peasants in Ireland and Scandinavia sold their children to relieve debt and starvation, and this might explain why many step-parents and step-children inhabit fairy stories. The twelfth-century Norwegian law codex, the *Gulathing*, for instance, grants that a man may honour his debt in exchange for his child if it done 'at the ale-house or church' (Holm 1986: 330-331). In fairy-tales, then, the protagonist is often the underdog, and so the story expresses the dissatisfactions of average people, and for that reason it remains a powerful cultural force among them (Zipes 2002: 158). It relates something important, too, about class. In 'The White Snake', the servant declares himself a suitor of the king's daughter, but when she realises that he was not her equal in birth 'she scorned him'.

Tolkien, likewise, defends class division: he refers to what he calls a 'recurrent' theme in his book, namely the "deeds of virtue of the apparently small, ungreat, forgotten [hobbits] in the Places of the Wise and Great". He explains that the moral of his story is that "without the high and noble the simple and vulgar is utterly mean; and without the simple and ordinary the noble and heroic is

meaningless” (2006: 160). It is true that the hobbits in the book are not ‘divine’ as in the case of Gandalf or the elves, but the leading hobbits are not small, ungreat, or forgotten: Bilbo is rich; Frodo is a landowner; Sam a tradesman; and Merry and Pippin are heirs to Brandybuck Hall and Took Hall: the Took family was especially respected because of its extreme wealth (I 29).

If fairy-tales pose the question, ‘What is man, what is the world?’, Tolkien does not provide an answer since, if the reader removes the ‘marvellous’ from his book, he is left only with the residue of the author’s religious superstition, and for this reason Raffle calls him “a narrative moralist” (1969: 225).

In chapter I, the clear social hierarchy in the Shire was noted: there is a material gulf between Gaffer Gamgee and Bilbo in terms of wealth, aspirations, and speech. Ted Sandyman and others supping in *The Green Dragon*, are poorer hobbits (I 61), ordinary hobbits (I 68), and rustic hobbits (I 69), whose speech suggests illiteracy: ‘All the top of your hill is full of tunnels packed with chests of gold and silver, *and* jools, by what I’ve heard’ (I 42). In fairy-tales, these ‘ordinary’ characters often play a leading role, such as Jack in ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’. Not so in Tolkien: they regard Bilbo as strange on account of his adventures, and have little to do but engage in suspicious gossip; thus, while the ‘important’ characters have a knowledge of history, geography, and other cultures, the Bree-hobbits were astonished when Frodo reveals, in *The Prancing Pony*, that he intended to write a book (I 211).

According to Donnelly, Tolkien portrays a society where the needs of the individual are subjugated to that of the ‘common good’ of the whole society (2007: 18). However, there is little ‘common good’ here. When vassals remain vassals ruled over by a king, selected by his bloodline, can we really speak of the ‘common good’? In real medieval society, rulers dispossessed vassals of their arms in case they turned them on their oppressors and it is difficult to see where the ‘common good’ is here.

Apparently, Sam is happy in his role as a labourer and Frodo’s servant, because

he 'knows his place' (Donnelly 2007: 20). Or perhaps Sam represents Tolkien's own values in that he opposes the 'destructive potential' of those who refuse to accept the place 'assigned to them' (Donnelly 2007: 18). Donnelly does not explain why the real vassal would not reject the role 'assigned' him when that role is based on subservience to the lord. Yet, this is an artificial role which states that a tiny handful of wealthy men have more right to privileges than the majority. Indeed, the majority must labour to provide the best in life for their 'betters'.

Donnelly further argues that Sam's 'humility' protects him from the Ring, and humility can be a welcome trait. Yet, what Donnelly and Tolkien define as 'humility', which applies to the simple medieval field labourer or the gardener of the Shire (2007: 21), is the subjugation of 'lesser men' to their 'superiors'. Thus, from a Marxist perspective, Sam's 'humility' is more like servility.

Disloyalty to a single lord *is* acceptable, even commendable, Donnelly argues, if continued loyalty means that the interests of wider society are disregarded, since the lord would then be unworthy of loyalty (2007: 22). Thus, she praises the disobedience of Pippin towards Denethor, because it "saves a nation" (2007: 22). Again, disobedience may be 'commendable', but in the *Rings* this quality ultimately serves Aragorn, an unelected king who remains faithful to the author's religious values.

In the real world, Tolkien promoted social division: 'lesser' people (or hobbits) achieved little, and so the author makes Sam question his own intellectual ability: "Don't trust your head, Samwise, it is not the best part of you" (II 44). Later, he will tell Frodo that important plans are not for the likes of him (II 403). It would be considered inappropriate for a 'high' figure such as Elrond to use this style of speech. In other words, the more humble, 'lower' characters in Tolkien's book exist only as foils for his more upper crust protagonists, since only they may determine 'the perils of the world'. It is only high-ranking individuals, that is, members of the 'chivalric-courtly society' who are allowed to shine in adventures and, in general, only they have important experiences and

make a real difference to the outcome of events. This applies, too, in the *Rings*, though Sam did, with Galadriel's help, rescue Frodo in Shelob's lair. Again, as a general rule, outside the ruling elite of people, other characters appear as mere 'accessories' and their role is often a comic one: "we are dealing with a conscious exclusiveness within a group characterized by class solidarity" (Auerbach 1953: 139).

In fairy-tales, folk learn, as in 'Jack and the Beanstalk', that the giant can be defeated, or their lot improved through the courage or guile of the hero. Even in the implausible end to Grimm's 'Little Red Riding Hood', it is man, a huntsman who saves the young girl and he does so of his own volition: he requires no divine hand. This is not the case in the *Rings* because while Frodo's struggle to Mount Doom may be admirable, Sauron is defeated only with the aid of spiritual intervention.

- **Artefacts**

Barber states that readers are attracted to true fairy-stories because they are about 'fundamental human life', by which she means 'not telephone poles, but trees' (1967: 39). The former are 'man-made' products that Barber does not consider 'fundamental' to 'human life'; yet this would imply that 'Cinderella' with the poor girl's glass-slipper and 'Hansel and Gretel', with its cottage of 'bread and cakes and windows of clear sugar', are not 'true fairy-stories'.

Yet telephone poles and, more recently, modern high-speed fibre-optic cables *are* part of 'human life'. Anything built by man, from the Great Wall of China to the most miniature computer processor – man's culture broadly speaking – *is* part of human life. They are achievements built by the endeavours of man working on nature. Moreover, it seems somewhat false to compare a tree with a telephone pole, because they have different properties and perform different functions; we might, however, compare a real healthy heart with an artificial one. The former is better suited to its natural purpose, but when it ceases to function only an irrational patient would reject an artificial heart.

Tolkien appears to agree with Barber, since he cannot conceive that the roof of Bletchley station is more 'real' than the clouds. Indeed, as an artefact, he finds it less inspiring than the "dome of heaven" (1988: 57). He, too, considers that a man-made product is inferior to nature, which he sees as being synonymous with God. Tolkien seems to suggest that if a 'product' is not natural, then it is a shoddy impersonation of the natural.

Yet, hobbits, who are represented as being consonant with nature, that is, the soil, plants and animals (2006: 158), do not use the natural cycles of the agricultural calendar to measure time, but their own artefact: Shire-Reckoning. The ancient hobbit month had been fixed to lunar cycles, but since these were unreliable (III 484), hobbits adopted a calendar that better suited them (III 487). Indeed, Gandalf imposes a calendar wholly alien to nature; he tells Sam after the defeat of Sauron that in Gondor the New Year will henceforth always begin on the twenty-fifth of March (III 277). This date is Good Friday, the date of the Crucifixion and, in old tradition, the Annunciation.⁹²

Similarly, Tolkien speaks affectionately about his childhood village, Sarehole, and its mill; but these are man-made, too. Moreover, religion has its own artefacts, including churches, goblets, rituals, and 'sacred texts', and nothing like these exist in nature. There is subjectivity at play here, since it would seem that while some man-made objects are acceptable from Tolkien's point of view, others are not.

Evolution of fairy-tales

Classic fairy-tales have an honest simplicity that is colourful and charming. Throughout history, however, they have been written and rewritten to instil

92 The quest begins on 25th December. Thus, the author's chronology underlines his commitment to the religious story.

particular values through an ‘entertaining’ medium. Tolkien’s tale corresponds to this purpose, but whereas fairy-tale aims to offer and alter moral attitudes and behaviour in a broad sense, Tolkien links his tale to religious premises.

Fairy-tales were told as folk-tales to adults and children alike and were part of a rural narration, as the following insight from ‘Dick Whittington’ indicates:

When the village people talked of London, they spoke of it as a wonderful place. They said that all the people in the city of London were rich. They even said that the streets of London were paved with gold. Dick listened to these tales and he longed to go to London.

This oral tradition has a literary parallel in the *legenda*, which are both the written tales of heroic saints and more secular ‘local tales’, though the two can overlap. The adaptable eleventh-century story of the two friends, Amicus and Amelius, has versions in both miracle-plays and secular romance because it blends myth and folk-tale with stories of religious miracles and historical anecdote (Le Saux 1993: 1). In one religious version, God afflicts Amicus with leprosy and instructs Amelius that he must kill his own two children and wash his friend in their blood to be cured.⁹³ Amelius then beheads his children, and Amicus is restored to health. As a reward for his ‘faith’, Amelius later discovers his children playing, and they have a ‘fine red scar around their neck’ (Le Saux 1993: 108). In that final phrase we see the reduced simplicity of classic fairy.

The oral tradition helped cement communities and give them an identity. It is an ‘unofficial’ ideology expressed through folklore in feudal societies, and later romanticised by skilled orators and told at court, just as Elrond narrates the story of the Ring in his ‘court’. The classic tales often bear a cultural or national stamp, and they are no more than a thousand-years-old (there are no ancient tales). Some descend from oriental and Christian sources, though others include Greek and Roman mythology. They are often similar, especially in terms of plot, prompting Trotsky to remark on the limitations of the ‘human imagination’

93 The twelfth-century Latin prose *Vita Amici et Amelii carissimorum*.

(1925: 174).

The similarity, rather, points to commercial, cultural, and religious interaction among countries and peoples. Tales were carried across borders by travelling merchants and fighting soldiers, while the 'legends' share an identity because the Church, as landowner and 'guardian of morality', controlled learning and law-making. For centuries, much of the art and culture of medieval Europe was dictated by the Church; therefore the same religious story was told to the congregation for centuries (Gaster 1887: 344-5). Thus, similarities in tales are unrelated to the 'limitations' of the human imagination.

Propp (1968) breaks down fairy-tales into tiny narrative units, or 'narratemes', to analyse Russian fairy-tales, hoping to apply a formula to all tales. He introduced thirty-one functions, some of which apply to Tolkien's book, such as 'interdiction', which is a warning to the hero: "Don't go a-meddling with old stone or cold Wights or prying in their houses" (I 184), Bombadil warns the hobbits. Another is 'mediation' whereby the hero hears a call for help. On the barrow-downs, Frodo hears a cry "that sounded like *help, help!* often repeated" (I 190). This type of formal analysis has its uses, but it seems insufficient: Trotsky argued that counting alliterations and vowels in proverbs enrich knowledge of folk art, "but if you don't know the peasant system of sowing, and the life that is based on it . . . you will have only understood the outer shell of folk art" (1925: 180).

Tolkien's dismissal of fairy-tale origins

Tolkien disregards the origin of fairy-tales. For instance, he cites, "*Puss-in-Boots, Cinderella, or Little Red Riding Hood*", rather disparagingly as "these French things" (1988: 16). In addition, he dismisses anthropological research into the evolution of fairy-stories as 'scientific' (1988: 21), and opts to avoid how they may have materialised (1988: 23), citing Dasent, the Scandinavian scholar: "We must be satisfied with the soup that is set before us, and not desire to see the bones of the ox out of which it has been boiled" (1988: 22). This is a rather

disappointing proposal from a professor of linguistics and puzzling, too, because the appendices to the *Rings* detail how his own story has evolved, complete with the genealogy of his characters, the Shire calendar, and language development. Indeed, Tolkien undertook systematic historical investigation for his lectures in Old Icelandic at Leeds University: he constructed intricate tables of familial words in Gothic, Old Norse, and various Old English dialects, 'to demonstrate the sound shifts that had produced the divergent forms' (Garth 2004: 34). For this reason, Carpenter considers him a kind of linguistic detective who had a talent for grasping linguistic patterns and their relationships (1989: 140).

Thus, Tolkien himself desired to see 'the bones of the ox' and, in the *Rings*, he uses 'bones' from 'Völuspá', as noted earlier. He is critical of anthropologists who conduct serious research into fairy-tale "as a quarry from which to dig evidence" (1988: 21), yet he embarks on a similar approach for a work of fantasy. It would seem that what he was privy to, he would deny others.

Tolkien concedes that fairy-tales are very old, and are found throughout the world. He defends the idea that only elves can 'unravel' their complexity (1988: 23), arguing that the most important aspect of fairy-tales is not their origin, but the effect they have (1988: 32).

Anthropology discovers the hand of man as the author of fairy-tale and, for Tolkien, this robs it of its 'mystery': science in general tears at 'mystique' to make the 'unknowable' knowable, whereas what excites Tolkien is the opposite, the 'unclassifiable' details of a fairy-story (1988: 21):

to take the extreme case of *Red-Riding Hood*: it is of merely secondary interest that the retold versions of this story, in which the little girl is saved by the wood-cutters, is directly derived from Perrault's story in which she was eaten by the wolf. The really important thing is that the later version has a happy ending (1988: 21-22).

A 'rescue' as in 'Little Red Riding Hood', or an improvement in the lifestyle of the

protagonist, such as Cinderella, is what many consider to be a 'happy ending',⁹⁴ but Tolkien has a different interpretation: he sees in the 'happy ending' of fairy a spiritual function; indeed, this is the "highest function" of fairy-tale because it offers what he calls 'miraculous grace', which gives a glimpse of eternal joy (1988: 62). The 'happy ending' of the fairy-story is not real, Tolkien admits, but we would feel joy if it were and Christian joy, 'the Gloria', is the same (1988: 65).

Fairy-stories, Tolkien maintains, are not concerned with 'possibility', but with 'desirability' (1988: 39); he means that the enchantment of fairy creates a 'Secondary World' (1988: 49) which offers both a 'consolation' for what he calls 'the sorrow of this world', and 'evangelium' in the real world which, he believes, is the basis of truth (1988: 64). Then he knots this 'truth' to the New Testament:

The Gospels contain a fairy-story...which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories...They contain many marvels...'mythical' in their perfect, self-contained significance; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe...The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy (1988: 65).

Thus, unlike fairy-tale, the Christian story knows real joy because 'it is true. God is the Lord of men and elves. Legend and History have fused' (1988: 65-66).

This thesis suggests that in the *Rings*, with its 'Legend and History', Tolkien attempts to offer such a Christian glimpse of joy. If this were not the case, his book, seventeen years in the making, and with each part meticulously considered (2006: 160), would have little meaning: the destruction of the Ring, the symbol of temptation and evil, would be an accident (Barber 1967: 38), and other key features, such as Frodo's pity for Gollum, would be coincidental. It would mean, too, that the 'eucatastrophe' he refers to above is nonsense or does not apply in this case.

94 However, fairy-tale rarely shows a transformation of man's *general* social conditions.

The *Rings* is a fairy-tale inside a fairy-tale. It is Catholic fiction disguised as epic-fairy, decorative pagan fantasy interwoven with serious theological intent, and the author is well aware of his 'mission': "Do you think 'The Ring' will come off", he asks his son, "and reach the thirsty?" (2006: 98). If for Blake, the mystic Romantic, imagination was defined by Jerusalem, for the Oxford professor it is the Resurrection. For Tolkien, imagination expresses not the creativity of man in his real world, but the harmony of fairy and the divine.

Tolkien does not prohibit criticism of the 'soup as soup' (1988: 22-23), but the reader must accept the value of the story today 'as the author tells it' (1988: 22-23). This is unsatisfactory, since the reader who has bought the story, or expended his time reading it, need not be content with the author's version: he is entitled both to sample the soup, and to discard those ingredients he finds distasteful. This is precisely what Tolkien himself does in his *Foreword* to the *Rings* when he criticises those reviewers of his book who found it "boring, absurd, or contemptible . . . since I have similar opinions of their works" (l 11).

Perrault's 'Little Red Riding Hood'

Even if we were to accept the story's 'happy ending' as the most important aspect of fairy-tale, that does not preclude an anthropological or historical analysis. Such an analysis of fairy-tale origins is indeed important from a Marxist viewpoint, because it sheds light on the development of classes and society.

Let us briefly consider, then, the 'bones' of 'Little Red Riding Hood', first penned by Perrault in 1697.⁹⁵ It is a tale that warns children of the danger of speaking to strangers, though some Christians offer a religious interpretation: Burns

95 Perrault's 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge' ('Little Red Riding-Hood') first appears in *Contes de ma Mère l'Oye*, offered to Élisabeth Charlotte d'Orléans, the niece of King Louis XIV, in 1695. The tales were intended to be read aloud, as the introduction refers to 'those who listen'.

considers that the character of Red Riding Hood is the counterpart of day, light, and 'innocent gaiety', while the wolf symbolises the devil (1972: 30-1). In addition to Burns' biblical view, the feminist sees 'enticement' in the young girl's red cloak. Neither of these contributors poses the important question, however, of historical materialism: why *this* tale at *this* particular time?

Historical documentation unearthed by Rumpf (1955) reveals a likely source: during the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, there were many thousands of trials against men in France accused of being werewolves and killing children. This suggests that the tale's oral traditions were taken from real events with which Perrault was familiar, and Zipes considers that the tale is derived from stories about werewolves that were circulating in Touraine where his mother grew up (1983: 4).

This fairy-story, then, does not involve a 'Satanic' wolf against a 'saintly' or 'provocative' young girl. However, neither does it simply report contemporary events, because Perrault, part of the royal civil service (Zipes 1983: 11), shapes popular folklore to suit the more 'civil' standards of a noble audience. In his *Contes en vers (Complete Fairy Tales in Verse and Prose)* (1695) he observes that those people who 'put on an air of gravity', that is, the nobility, understood that the tales were not simply 'trifles', but contained a moral lesson 'to instruct and entertain at the same time' (2003: 3). He reiterated this theme in his dedication to Mademoiselle D'Orléans in his *Histories ou contes du temps passé (Tales of Past Times)* of 1697, in which he remarks that children of 'inferior families' imagine stories as part of their 'instruction', or education:⁹⁶ 'Yet who but those persons whom heaven has destined to lead people are most suited to learn how children live?' (1967: 89). It is ironic that the tales told among the rural poor would later be used to help cement the rule of that same class who kept them in bondage.

In Perrault, Red Riding Hood falls victim to the ensnaring wolf, and there is the

96 They are called children's fairy tales, because children are the principal characters in them.

famous exchange about the wolf's eyes, ears, and teeth. It is easy to imagine the storyteller raising her voice before the seated village community, children open-mouthed in amazement as she related 'Grandmamma, what great teeth you have!' to which the wolf replies 'all the better to eat you with', before promptly gobbling her all up.

However, Perrault expurgated those aspects of the oral tradition which the 'polite society' he wrote for would have found distasteful, if not shocking. Delarue has shown that this tradition was vibrant during the late Middle Ages, particularly in France, Tyrol, and northern Italy, and that it preceded Perrault's more refined version of the tale. Moreover, Delarue restored the earlier folk tradition to show that the wolf, or werewolf, originally killed the grandmother before putting her 'meat' in a cupboard and a bottle of her blood on the shelf. When her granddaughter arrives at her cottage, 'granny' invites her to the 'meat' and 'wine' and she takes up the invitation, the wolf remarking: 'A slut is she who eats the flesh and drinks the blood of her granny' (1957: 373-4).

During this period, western European societies were reinforcing higher standards of behaviour in all spheres of life, and the changes which Perrault makes to oral tradition in his own 'Little Red Riding Hood' reflect the need for these more 'strict class codes' (Zipes 1983: 9). The nobility began to express itself in a more refined manner and the 'civilising' of children, which Erasmus discusses in his 1530 treatise 'On civility in children', is part of this process.

Fairy-tales and conduct

The rule of the knight, who had accrued immense wealth during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, was based on highly localised and largely independent manorial and feudal units while, from the war booty, he took possession of labour, land, horses, jewellery, and wealthy, fertile women for breeding. Vauchez refers to lords who lived for years in 'debauchery', engaging in the worst kinds of violence (1993: 90). The knight's word was law and, with his social position secure, he felt little need to moderate his behaviour towards others: only other

knights threatened him.

He eventually lost his power, displaced by a centralised nobility of which he became part, when society emerged from the clutches of the Church with the development of markets – as historical materialism explains – and the division of labour which enmeshed greater numbers of people over larger areas into mutual dependence. Consequently, the conduct of people became more attuned and accountable to that of others and, among the nobility, the importance of manners and sensitivity towards others of one's own circle became supreme: behaviour became conditioned and conditioning.

It was noted in the methodology chapter that in changing his circumstances, man changes himself. This 'civilising' among the elite, where the passion of the sword gave way to experience, with its calculation, intrigue, and the empirical, affected the entire personality structure of the individual. It shaped his behaviour and outlook while rational thinkers pushed the process further; thus, society gives birth to this civilising process and is itself a product of it.

Textual evidence notes these changing social processes: It is 'unseemly' to blow your nose into the tablecloth, informs the fifteenth-century 'Ein spruch der ze tische kêt' ('On Behaviour at Table') (cited in Elias 1994: 118). Likewise, the 1475 *Babee's Book on Medieval Manners for the Young* (1868), instructed the young nobleman on how to hold his carving knife at the table; to keep spitting out of sight; and not to pick his nose, teeth, or nails at meal-time (2000: ix, 70, 3). A century later, there is a different tone. Erasmus (1560) advises that wiping one's nose using a hat or gown was 'filthy' and he recommends using a handkerchief and to turn away if an 'honest [honourable]' man is present. It is likewise with spitting: 'Do not spit across the table', advises Zarncke (1852: 137 – cited in Elias 1978: 153). By 1714 this had become: "*At the houses of the great, one spits into one's handkerchief*" (*Civilité français* 1714: 67, 41 - cited in Elias 1994: 127).

Privacy undergoes a change, too. In the poor medieval dwelling families shared the same bedroom, while noble women undressed before their male servants:

they were little more than donkeys doing donkey-work (Brandes 1923: 340). Similarly, women attended to the knight, or lord, in his bath. Extramarital relationships were unconcealed (Elias 1994: 145), though this begins to disappear in the 1600s with the 'privatisation' of relationships, especially among the nobility.

More rigorous standards of behaviour were demanded, shown outwardly in clothing and furniture – this all became part of the informal and formal schooling of noble children and visible marks of distinction. Then the nightdress appears – yesterday's nudity is indecent today – at the same time as the fork and handkerchief, symbols of luxury and changing social processes throughout society.

Importantly, this process extends the 'distance' between adult and child, inviting an enhanced role for fairy-tales, with their morals and prohibitions, in cultivating 'appropriate' values among young nobles. Increasing emphasis was placed on children's education specifically with more and more attending schools, as children began to constitute an educational group of their own, with its own standards of behaviour (Ariès 1969: 15).

Refined noble conduct bred confidence, disarmed the opponent, and intimidated lesser mortals. Alternative behaviour was vulgar and unfitting for the rule of a civilised, governing elite. This helps to explain the outrage of the French-speaking upper classes of Europe towards Shakespeare for dramatising the 'other side' of the nobility. Who else goes to the palace for his drunkards, whores, and murderers? Thus, Frederick the Great condemns him for putting 'baseless porters and gravediggers' on stage alongside the 'tragic grandeur' of kings and queens: how can such a 'jumble' of low buffoonery and grandeur be 'touching and pleasing?', he asks (1883: 22).⁹⁷

Thus, the nobility raided the tales and moulded them for their own purposes.

97 "Comment ce mélange bizarre de bassesse et de grandeur, de bouffonnerie et de tragique, peut-il toucher et plaire?"

Later, the Grimms would further polish Perrault's already refined tale: in their version, Little Red Riding Hood survives, its former 'cruelty' purged to conform to the ideology of the rising *Biedermeier* (or Victorian) image of children. Moreover, in the tradition of German Romanticism, with its nationalistic flavour, Grimms' *Tales* (1812) aimed at reenergising a cultural unity among the German middle class based on folk tradition. In doing so, they censored the more coarse expressions from fairy-stories, making them more 'palatable' to the middle-class nursery (Lowry 2006: 19). Thus, many of the Grimms' two hundred tales⁹⁸ were narrated by young ladies who 'filtered' them so that they could be recounted in 'educated households' (Dollerup 1995: 101). This is one aspect of how classic European tales evolved and, as with all art, they reveal the changing social history of man.

Lüthi (1970: 142, 147), in addition, shows the input of great poets in the origins of fairy-tales: he refers to the 'initiated', or religious, poets in whose work we find the wonderful deeds of gods and men who have been deified. An example might be the Norse-Celtic *Rígsþula* (c.1100-1200), in which the poet presents the myth of Heimdallr, the progenitor of all mankind, as previously noted. In the tale, he visits three women of different ages, producing a son with each: the stunning, young female produces Jarl, a nobleman, while Karl, son of the vigorous middle-aged woman, is a farmer; Þræll is a serf and son of the older, though still virile, woman. And so the three classes of Norse society were born.

This myth might relate to an eighth-century Hebridean text, which relates that while the king had no wife of his own, he took one woman after another (Chadwick 1907: 342). Similarly, Jarl Hákon (d.995), who restored Norwegian independence in the tenth century, ordered the wives and daughters even of noble men to be brought to him (Dronke 1997: 204). We may safely assume, assures Chadwick, that the mythic versions of these stories have their origin in the real world of men (1955:110).

98 As with the *Rings*, they draw substantially on Norse mythology.

Marxism, fantasy, and the real world

In compiling his *Checklist*, Bleiler remarked that since fantasy meant all things to all men, he would be unable to define it. He often wishes, he says, that he had written something more objective such as a book on minerals or plants (1948: 3). Nevertheless, the literary broad term ‘fantastic’ is dominated, despite Tolkien,⁹⁹ by the peerless *Alice* books in which there is a ‘reversal’ of the ground rules (Rabkin 1976: 14). Similarly, CS Lewis defined fantasy as a narrative that deals with ‘impossibles and preternaturals’ (1961: 50).

Tolkien believed the fantastic, which is pastoral and anti-technological (Manlove 1982: 30), to involve things that are not only ‘not actually present’, but which are indeed not to be found in our ‘primary’ world at all (1988: 45). Yet his orcs, for instance, *are* recognisable. It may not be possible to understand “Uglúk u bagronk sha pushdug Saruman-glob búbhosh skai” (II 53), but the alphabet is familiar and there is a sentence structure. Orcs also bore tunnels and till the acres beneath Isengard (II 196), that is, they labour. Furthermore, Shippey writes that they value brotherhood and a sense of group cohesion (2000: 186). These are features and values of our own world.

A fantasy author is writing for readers, so his ‘impossibles’ cannot be overtaxing on them. We would not, for instance, expect to see Strider in *The Prancing Pony* at the same time as William Munney guns down Little Bill,¹⁰⁰ or to find Éowyn sharing a bottle of *Gordon’s* with Snow White beside the hearth. Such ‘impossibles’, inconsistent with the context already established, would be more absurd than fantastic.

Wolfe, however, asks: “How do we recognize the impossible when we

99 Tolkien dismisses the *Alice* stories as “a mockery of unreason” (1988: 66).

100 From the film *Unforgiven* (1992) with Clint Eastwood and Gene Hackman.

encounter it in a work of art?" (1982: 2), before quoting from Green's autobiographical account of her own schizophrenia:

The Kingdom of Yr had a kind of neutral place which was called the Fourth Level. It was achieved only by accident and could not be reached by formula or an act of will. At the Fourth Level there was no emotion to endure, no past or future to grind against (1964: 9).

This passage *is* recognisable 'Kingdom' is understood while, in the context given, a 'neutral place' could mean 'indifferent' or 'nondescript'. Children learn ordinal numbers, such as 'third' and 'fourth'; 'achievement' here means 'to arrive at', while 'by accident' might mean 'by mistake', and so on. Green's account does not reflect the real world, yet it is possible to feel the real world beneath Green's unfortunate illness. This is what Trotsky means what he says that art is limited to the world of three dimensions as noted in chapter II.

Compare, too, the following:

Second Witch

Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the cauldron boil and bake:
Eye of newt and toe of frog,
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg and howlet's wing,
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

All

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

This 'fantastic' verse from *Macbeth* (IV I) is dazzling in its creativity. On stage, especially, these dramatic scenes featuring the weird sisters are mightily impressive. (In Denmark, too, Shakespeare's fantasy would be impoverished without the ghost of Hamlet's father.) The cauldron's ingredients are familiar: 'eye', 'newt', 'toe', 'frog'. This is the 'base line'. Yet, the context is not real to a

modern audience; indeed, it is unbelievable. However, if the audience disregards the context, that is, if it 'suspends its disbelief', as Coleridge put it, a 'tension' is created that constitutes the 'special delight' that fantasy offers (Zanger 1982: 226).

Tolkien, too, speaks of the 'inner consistency of reality' (1988: 46) as noted in chapter II; thus, the hobbits smoke not tobacco, with its American Indian origins, but *pipe-weed* or *leaf*, from *Nicotiana* (I 26). It would be pointless, too, if the reader did not understand the language in which the text is written. In addition, literature must concern itself with 'men doing things', to cite Aristotle. This could be extended to hobbits doing things, since they are not spirits or animals but people as noted above (Shippey 2001: 5).

Some critics might argue that in this 'postmodernist' world authors can write what they please, that they are not constrained by that 'metanarrative' of the outside world beyond the study; and, that if there are impossibilities, it is because authors have determined them. A case in point might be the Aleph in Borges' short story of the same name (1949), in which one of the points in space contains all other points: it is the only place on earth where all other places are. Through the Aleph, Borges sees everything from every possible angle, every grain of sand in equatorial deserts and a woman in Inverness. Borges can arrange his material however he pleases, of course, but 'sand, the equator, deserts, women, Inverness', these he takes from the world of man.

However fantastic the plot, or extraordinary the events, however bizarre the characters, or the author's style, the text has to mean something to the reader in order to engage and retain his attention. Therefore, when an author declares that he can write whatever 'impossibles' he pleases, that in 'his world' he is in charge of everything, that his work somehow stands above life and social division, his claim is subject to qualification. Fantasy and 'postmodernist' works may appear abstract, but this only conceals their real-world origins: it does not mean that they are absent. Monteiro makes it clear that fantasy literature is a social and cultural creation (1993: 636).

A successful 'sub-creation', according to Tolkien, is one that the reader accepts as 'true'. However, unlike Shakespeare's witches or Borges' 'equatorial deserts', Tolkien's subject matter, namely, the Valar, heavenly elves, and other divine powers which govern the 'perils of the world', are presented as a theological package that may prevent many readers (such as the literary critics cited above), from considering Tolkien's story as 'successful'. Not all readers will agree with Dubs who, in her article on the *Rings*, states that the only thing we can know is fate (1981: 36). Gandalf, for instance, was "a great mover of the deeds that are done in our time" (II 347), but such a view suggests that the supernatural has a direct input in the affairs of man. If this were the case, we could hardly speak of the sovereignty of people, or freedom. This is one reason why some readers, Marxists certainly, would feel Tolkien's text, in which Eru guarantees the quest, to be alienating: it stresses that rather than God needing man to be believed, man needs God.

Fantasy is entertaining as its continued popularity attests. However, in general, the more that fantasy relates to the earthly experience of man, the more worthy it is; the portrayal of man is always more inspiring than that of any god, who is only a distorted image of man himself, as Engels explained in his *Condition of England* (1843) (1975: 465).

Tolkien's idealised medievalism

All the veiled are not virgins, believe me

- Erasmus

Tolkien considered Christian virtue to be representative of the English mind in the medieval period, while the language of the court was characterised by a high, patriarchal stylisation. These are two elements of 'realism' that Tolkien brings to his fantasy. However, he is discriminating in the material that he brings to his work. To help put medievalism in perspective, therefore, and drawing on detailed literary and historical material, this chapter paints a less quixotic picture of lords and ladies, presenting them in the flesh; in addition, it introduces the medieval peasant whose own dignity is largely disregarded by Tolkien and the anonymous author of *Sir Gawain*.

Furthermore, the chapter considers two medieval authors, Langland and Gower, and discusses how their work on the Deadly Sins may be applied to Tolkien's book. There is a brief look, too, at *Beowulf*, which provided a source for Tolkien's own fiction. Finally, there is a scrutiny of Tolkien's defence of archaism, and his claim that medieval priests were 'honourable'.

Tolkien is drawn to medievalism for its apparent chivalric,¹⁰¹ Christian, and romantic traditions. The values of Sir Gawain, the protagonist in the late fourteenth-century *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which Tolkien translated from Middle English with E V Gordon in 1925, appeal to Tolkien. Gawain, he argues, is 'a virtuous man who preserves Christian morals and marital fidelity' (1975: 16-17).

101 Chivalry in Europe dates from 1100 to the early 1700s (Keen 1984:1).

Sir Gawain is an account of chivalric idealism in a century when notions of knighthood were becoming decadent, and it pays tribute to the Christian knight: bravery, decency, a sense of honour and faith in God; in prayers, Gawain celebrates his devotion to Mary, the Virgin (Tolkien 1975: 16), and proves his chastity by resisting the earnest advances of his host's wife who frequents his bedchamber. Gawain is obliged to receive her ardour to avoid offence; however, ultimately he refuses her and the story centres on his struggle between 'worldly' discourtesy and his Christian honour. Tolkien praises Gawain because he chooses 'Christian virtue over worldly courtesy' (1975: 16) and, in doing so, he becomes 'a real man'. Moreover, Tolkien argues that Gawain 'represents the English mind in the fourteenth century', that 'our conduct has derived from him', and that 'he is the knight of the highest moral order who refused adultery and sin' (1975: 16-17).

It could be stated that *Sir Gawain* is another of those fictions which Shadwell calls a 'wilde Romantick tale', one that strains love and honour so much that it becomes 'Burlesque' (1668: 150). These are fanciful works, which indicate what chivalry may have been like, rather than what it was in reality (Kaeuper 1999: 33).

Gawain weakens, accepting the wife's lusty girdle as a gift, but he confesses his sin to a priest and is absolved. However, when his impropriety is discovered he feels saddened by the 'sleights of women' (Stone 1959: 120), though he pledges to wear the girdle himself as a reminder of his own role in this 'dishonourable' farce. It is this 'Christian honesty', and the story's directive to women to value 'modesty', that thrills Tolkien.

Gawain's 'decency' may sit comfortably with Tolkien, but that is not the same as claiming that Gawain *represents* a single ideological position in literature. Agravain, for instance – a prominent Arthurian knight in the thirteenth-century *Story of Merlin* – discloses that he would satisfy his 'mad cravings' for his host's daughter 'if she were here now'; if he did not, it would be an 'intolerable loss to his own honour'. Such a man would be the 'butt of jokes', and people would think 'less of him' (Lacy 1993: 361-2).

In the real world, high-born women made themselves available to men who proved themselves in tournaments or battle: following a night with Gawain, the daughter of the King of North Wales admits in *Lancelot* that she had what she had always desired (Lacy 1993: 212). This indicates that the courtly romance that Tolkien idealised did not exist. Noteworthy is that the peasant woman rarely comes into the picture at all: she held no prestige and, besides, the noble could enjoy her whenever he pleased; she was, after all, his property.

As opposed to Gawain, Tolkien scorns Guinevere in Malory's *Morte Darthur* (1469-1470) in which infidelity is a major theme. Arthurian writers often sympathise with the queen because she was locked in a marriage to Arthur while in love with another man. Indeed, Brewer excuses Guinevere's adultery since ladies of 'high rank' are permitted to be honourable and unchaste (1968: 29). Thus, Brewer intertwines honour with material power. Since peasant wives were criminalised for their adultery (Brundage 1996: 42), this would seem to confirm the orthodox Marxist view that women from the lower orders shared more in common with men from the same class, than they did with noble women.

While Tolkien supports feudal hierarchy, his religious convictions intrude and, in his only imaginative incursion into the Arthurian cycle, his unpublished 1930's work 'Fall of Arthur' spurns Guinevere: "lady ruthless, / fair as fay-woman and fell-minded, / in the world walking for the woe of men" (Carpenter 1989: 171).

Tolkien's 'representative' of the 'English mind' is his idealised noble, the courtly Gawain. Tolkien appears too detached from wider society to mix it with the feudal serf or step inside his slum of wattle and daub, and this shapes his conservatism. It is also a sweeping generalisation to draw conclusions about an entire century from one book, one with 'polite' French origins and aimed at the nobility (since only they could read). St Bernard (1090-1153), in contrast, heaped scorn on Tolkien's 'representative': "You cover your horses with silk . . . your bridles and your spurs you adorn with gold and silver and jewels" (*De Laude Novae Militiae* 1977: 1128-1131). No less critical was the *Policraticus*

(1159) of John of Salisbury (c.1115-1180) who mocked 'noble blood' for its 'lofty lineage' and for 'trampling' on others (1972: 391). Likewise, Etienne de Fougères, chaplain to Henry II, accuses knights of abusing the fruits of peasant labour, turning chivalry into debauchery, of not cooperating with the Church and misuse of the sword (cited in Kaeuper 1999: 79). This contradicts the 'ideals of Christian conduct' which Tolkien mistakenly believed were held by the knight.

Unlike *Morte Darthur*, there is no 'love-triangle' involving Aragorn, Arwen, and Éowyn in the *Rings*; nor does Rosie Cotton indulge while Sam is away. Tolkien cannot consider 'hallowed' chastity as a theme for entertainment, since too ingrained in his morality is the teaching of the Franciscan monk, Thomas Hales, who spelt out in his thirteenth-century 'Luue Ron' ('Love Rune') that 'a woman must adore her virginity' (1872: 98). Woman, however, at least the aristocratic version, was far more practical.

Tolkien's notion of 'virtuous' knights and 'modest' ladies runs contrary to all available historical evidence. He needed only to stroll from Gawain's bedchamber to that holy institution, the monastery – of all places – to hear the scandalous goings-on which frequently breached sacred morality. Many abbesses, frequently aristocratic women and well-off widows (Hallissy 1993: 135-161),¹⁰² displayed such a passion for men that the volumes of injunctions on monastic conduct were "a losing battle" (Daichman 1986: 26). With some understatement, Power speaks of that revered virgin, the mother superior who led a most 'unmonastic' life (1922: 73). It would seem that these wealthy women were accustomed to getting their own way.

Likewise, noblemen had access to nuns. Sir Gawain's fellow knight in Lydgate's 'Tale of the Three Suitors' tells the mother superior that he has often desired to have 'his intent' under her 'comely cowl' (1840: 110). In Easebourne, Sussex, in 1478, another knight, Sir John Senoke, regularly enjoyed at least two nuns at the priory while on a prolonged stay. His later visits there are reported to be

102 Daughters from poor families were barred from climbing the Church's career ladder.

'frequent' (Power 1922: 415).

Perhaps Sir John's model was the Bible itself: II Chronicles (21:13) speaks of the inhabitants of Jerusalem who 'go a whoring', while in Kings (I 11.1) Solomon loved many women (I Kgs. 11:1). Rehoboam had eighteen wives (Chron 11.21), and Abijah 'waxed mighty' with his fourteen wives (II Chron. 13:21). Similarly, John Stafford, Archbishop of Canterbury no less, had a nun when he was Bishop of Bath and Wells (in 1443), prompting Gascoigne, Chancellor of Oxford University, to speak publicly about it (Power 1922: 447).¹⁰³ His denunciation fell on deaf ears, since the bishop impregnated his nun frequently.

Erasmus, in his 'Virgin Averse to Matrimony', discusses the prospects of chastity with a seventeen-year-old who has pledged herself to a nunnery against her parents' wishes, in order to avoid marriage. She says she would prefer to die rather than abandon her 'resolution of virginity' (1725: 149-150). Erasmus respects her wish, but argues that she is more likely to preserve it at home rather than with those 'swill-belly'd Monks' who are 'fathers' in more ways than one (1725: 150). Still, the girl protests that it is safer to be in 'Virgin's Company', to which Erasmus replies 'All the veiled are not virgins, believe me' (1725: 151).

The records support him, reporting liaisons between priests and nuns, their 'swelling wombs' and abortions, heavy drinking,¹⁰⁴ and nuns deserting monasteries (which was common), and the 1298 curfews which Pope Boniface VIII imposed on nuns: 'wayward nuns' were common in the Middle Ages, writes Daichman (1986: 162). Many of the 'wayward' were those same daughters who were forced into the religious life as young girls by their parents for social, economic, or political reasons. In the Spanish poem 'Las doze Coplas Moniales' ('The Twelve Verses of the Nun'), a poor oblate denounces the captive life

103 Gascoigne 1881: 231.

104 In the thirteenth-century, the prioress of Ramsey Abbey complained that "the nuns frequent taverns" (Liveing 1906: 218).

“sepultada estoy aquí” (‘entombed I am here’). Significantly, her protests coincide with her becoming ‘a woman’ (1974: 264): our nun has other desires to fulfil.

Much of this evidence, from ecclesiastical records, would appear to undermine Tolkien’s claim as to fourteenth-century morality, and it is clear that both noble and senior Church figures were guilty of breaching what Catholicism terms the Cardinal, or Deadly Sins, among which feature lust and greed. They are cardinal because they destroy grace within a person – this will be discussed more fully in chapter V – and therefore invite eternal damnation;¹⁰⁵ they also attract a number of venial, or secondary, sins which may be pardoned through. . . .the Church.

The sins have evolved over time, and are aimed at educating and instructing followers as to the tendency of ‘fallen man’ to commit sin. The following section examines how they may be applied to the principle characters in the *Rings*.

Tolkien’s Seven Deadly Sins

Tolkien’s purpose in writing medieval adventures, he says, is “the elucidation of truth, and the encouragement of good morals in this real world” (2006: 194). He follows the tradition of medieval writers whose characters personified the Seven Deadly Sins, a tradition designed to bind the peasant to the confessional and the Church. In *Piers Plowman* (c.1385), Langland presents the sins as Pride, Envy, Anger, Lechery, Avarice, Gluttony, and Sloth, and these may correspond to Tolkien’s characters: Pride - Man; Envy - Elves; Anger - Orcs; Lechery - Wormtongue and Shelob; Avarice - Dwarves; Gluttony - Hobbits; Sloth - Ents.

Pride, which goes before destruction (Prov. 16:18), is the most ancient of evils

105 See I Cor (6:9-10).

and the worst of offences.¹⁰⁶ For committing this ‘crime’, sinners were broken on the wheel: it was the sin of Lucifer, and Adam and Eve who would be like gods (Gen 3.5). Pride is the sin of men who consider themselves important enough to change the world without God, so it is to be expected that Tolkien would devote considerable time to this ‘offence’. Thus, Saruman aspires to be another Dark Lord, demanding power to order all things as he wishes (I 339).

For Dickerson, the kings of Rohan were guilty of pride because they had ceased to believe in the ‘wisdom of old tales’, believing themselves to be more important than they really were (2004: 34, 36). Keenan notes that Théoden’s pride isolates his people and allies them with Saruman (1969: 65). However, contact with the Ents reminds Théoden that the lives of men are a ‘small matter’ against the ‘broad sweep of time’, while his new found allies give him hope to fight for a more important cause (Dickerson 2004: 36).

Denethor is guilty of pride, too, when he dismisses Gandalf: the Lord of Gondor was not to be made the tool of other men’s purposes, ‘however worthy’ (III 29). Éowyn, similarly, feels that waiting upon an old man is somehow beneath her: “ignoble” (III 169). It is also worthwhile noting Boromir’s suspicion of Galadriel: he tells the company that he is unsure about her purposes, which provokes Aragorn’s stern imperative about speaking ‘no evil’ of the lady (I 465). Tolkien appears to state in this exchange that if one criticises the ‘righteous’, he is guilty of pride.

In Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* (1390), which Tolkien read (1988: 12-13), pride is accompanied by disobedience; thus, Boromir is deaf to instructions never to handle the Ring and, at Amon Hen, he attacks Frodo (I 519). Saruman, likewise, abandons his own role to aid the struggle against Sauron in order to further his own interests. An accompaniment to pride is complaint and, again, Boromir is

106 Social events impact on the cloister: the sin of avarice replaced pride as the chief of vices under the rise of the money economy between the European eleventh and fourteen centuries (see Little, L K *Pride goes before avarice: social change and the Vices in Latin Christendom* in *American Historical Review* (LXXXVI), 1, 1971: 16-49).

guilty of labouring the suffering of his city while defending the Southern Kingdom. Presumption also attends pride and Wormtongue provides the best illustration. Supposedly the king's counsellor, he acts as if he were already on the throne, giving orders to Éomer and imposing restrictions on court visitors.

Envy and, in Gower, the denigration of others is personified by the elves. In *The Hobbit*, Thranduil (Elvenking), Legolas' father, is envious of the treasures of his ancestors (2001: 158), while in the *Rings* they speak with disdain of hobbits – 'hobbits are so dull, they laugh' (I 115) – and dwarves: Haldir tells Legolas that dwarves are not allowed to enter their land (I 445).

Immortality makes the elves envious. Galadriel tells Frodo that if the quest fails elves will be 'laid bare' to Sauron and, if it succeeds, their power will diminish (I 474). In *The Silmarillion*, the Valar perceived that immortality was not a gift in a mortal world, and this is why the final parting of Arwen and Elrond is so bitter – because it is forever – and it manifests itself in a vice that Gower associates with retreat. Hence, Treebeard complains that his kind is neglected even by the elves (II 89). The elves are aloof from mortals and withdrawn from Middle-earth; Nelson sees them as 'exiles' (2000: 89), confirmed when Gildor Inglorion tells the hobbits bluntly that elves have their own sorrows and are unconcerned with hobbits or other beings in Middle-earth (I 121).

In *Piers Plowman*, wrath is depicted with his 'two whyte eyes' rolled back in anger. He sows discord (1978: 114) and, in Tolkien, it is personified by the orcs who direct their rage against other beings and one another. In Cirith Ungol, Shagrat directs his rancour at Gorbag, springing on his fallen body, and trampling it in fury, before stabbing and slashing it with his knife (III 218). They only understand mistrust and violence, despite an apparent solidarity, and their internecine feud allows Frodo to escape from their custody. They have the opportunity to repent: at Helm's Deep, Aragorn orders them to withdraw or suffer the consequences (II 178). They refuse and the result is death.

Lechery 'enslaves a man' (Bloomfield 1952: 142). Shelob's lust has been previously noted, but Wormtongue also casts lecherous eyes over Éowyn;

Gandalf accuses him of ‘haunting her steps’ (II 153). He is also offered the chance to repent, but refuses each time. Eventually, three hobbit archers shoot him down after he murders Saruman at Bag End (III 365).

Avarice, or greed, plagues Middle-earth. In *The Hobbit*, Thorin Oakenshield craves the great jewel, Arkenstone (2001: 251), while in the *Rings*, the dwarves mined deep for *mithril* (silver), the precious metal ‘beyond price’ (III 438), and their greed in the Mines of Moria disturbs the Balrog who slays their king (I 315). Consequently, the importance of Moria dies away (III 439). Similarly, Saruman hopes to control all the lands around Orthanc, while Sauron aims to possess all of Middle-earth; Gollum, too, has an insane attachment to the Ring. All three will perish before Tolkien completes his tale.

Next comes the glutton, he who ‘makes a privy of his throat’, writes Chaucer in his fourteenth-century ‘Pardoner’s Tale’ (1894: 558), and the hobbits exhibit this trait in abundance: after Bilbo announced that he was leaving the Shire, extra food and drink were ordered to allow the guests time to digest his news (I 52), and their recurrent gluttony explains their “well-fed faces” (I 23).

Tolkien’s Ents embody Slowthe or Idleness (Gower 1980: 206). Treebeard has long been indolent (II 89-90), and this accounts for why the Ents have been forgotten by other peoples of Middle-earth. Of the trees cut down by the orcs, Treebeard laments that many were his friends and admits to having been idle (II 91). Sloth is associated with ‘forgetfulness’, a result of inertia, and Treebeard has trouble remembering the old lists of Middle-earth creatures. Pippin and Merry’s story prompts him into calling an Entmoot, or council and, angry at Saruman’s treachery, he rouses his fellow Ents against the wizard (II 106).

Sloth also afflicted the Men of Númenor: they fell in love with darkness and the ‘black arts’, and some allowed themselves to fall into idleness (II 357), and they were conquered by the wild men. Similarly, Faramir confesses to Frodo that Gondor was responsible for its own decline, believing that the enemy was asleep when it had only been driven out and not destroyed (II 357).

In the tradition of medieval writers such as Gower or Langland, Tolkien shows the moral worth, or otherwise, of his characters in order that his readers may develop an understanding of what is right and wrong (Nelson 2000: 94). In incorporating the Seven Sins into his work, which he does subtly, Tolkien is reminding readers of Christian values.

Aragorn

In chivalric literature, the focus is on knights and their ladies and, ultimately, the king. Aragorn is such a knight, his hereditary status granted by what socialists would term 'an accident of birth'. Furthermore, he is religious and saintly: in Lothlórien, Frodo finds him as still and silent as a tree and there was a light in his eyes; dressed in white, he seemed like a 'young lord tall and fair' (I 456-7).

As with the knights of old, his religious world cannot be divorced from war. He is descended from Elrond's brother, Elros, the first King of Númenor, and is the rightful heir to Gondor and Arnor. The broken sword he carries (I 232) is an heirloom of his house (I 323), a theme Tolkien may have borrowed from the Norse 'Völsungasaga' (Hammond and Scull 2008: 161).

His name means 'Kingly Valour', and he is everything Tolkien deems a 'real man' to be, since he seldom speaks of his own private emotions (Kocher 1972: 137). However, there is an arrogance about him: "I serve no man" (II 37). An imposing figure at six-foot six inches tall¹⁰⁷ the man we know initially as Strider – he is 87-years-old when the hobbits first encounter him in Bree¹⁰⁸ – labours alone heroically in the wilds against evil, before befriending Gandalf. He returns from the perilous Wilderland (I 87) where he has proven his bravery, and Gimli wonders if he ever feels fear (III 66). He earns prestige and honour in battle,

107 Tolkien Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford - cited in Hammond and Scull 2008: 229).

108 Hammond and Scull (2008: 159).

and before he departs for the Paths of the Dead, Éowyn reminds him that he is a 'stern lord' who is 'resolute', and that is how men like him 'win renown' (III 62).

Aragorn is decisive and skilful (I 232, 239, 242, 245) and, as is required in hierarchy, he defers to his superiors: despite his own healthy abilities, he prays: 'Would that Elrond were here, for he is the eldest of all our race, and has the greatest power' (III 165). His lineage has earmarked him for great deeds, with Elrond foretelling that the span of his life would be greater than the 'measure' of other men (III 417). This prophecy comes true following Aragorn's coronation when the crowd gazed at him in silence, and there was a 'light about him' (III 298).

In this image of religious medievalism, we can feel how deep the old ways are buried, how religious they were, and how remote they are from us and, from a socialist perspective, how thankful we are that they are remote.

Brutal medievalism

Tolkien's linguistic contribution to *Sir Gawain* is valuable in that it sheds light on the values of the medieval author, his interests and his literate, noble audience, his class roots, and the social conditions at the time. It is also possible to ponder on what the Gawain author does not say, and the reason for his silence. For instance, while a socialist critique of medieval conditions is not expected, the author never even glances at the ingrained inequality that characterised the Middle Ages: 'there was nothing egalitarian about the feudal era', comments Bloch (1962: 283). As with Tolkien, the author is too absorbed in the apparent Christian values at court to notice wider social issues. Furthermore, it is possible to compare and contrast the language of *Sir Gawain*, its style, tone, content, and morals with other features of that society.

Tolkien sees only the honourable knight, Aragorn or Sir Gawain, and not Sir John Senoke. He sees the knight's mount, Gandalf's Shadowfax, but not the blacksmith who shoes it. He sees the elven heroine, Arwen, and not the nun

enjoying her wheelwright behind the cloister wall. Tolkien spends much time in his book stressing the importance of trees, yet never shows the peasant dangling from them.¹⁰⁹

It might be argued that depicting the brutal life of the peasantry would be an inappropriate feature in Tolkien's book, and such a view holds weight. Tolkien is not attempting to replicate medievalism: instead, he proposes a 'fantastical' sacrament. He provides the minimum for the reader to 'get a feel' for the period with its primitive weapons and wizards and, in *The Hobbit*, dragons. In addition, as considered below, his use of language is archaic.

On the other hand, Tolkien emphasises tradition and lineage since, in his view, only the good and high-born are truly capable of great deeds. He speaks, for instance, of the sceptre of Annúminas as the principal sign of royalty in Númenor (III 394), and kings who bear the Star of Elendil, a white gem, on their brows, and Aragorn's 'line'. That is, Tolkien is prepared to paint the colour of medieval *rulers*, and the glory of their rule without showing, at all, the basis of that rule: the exploitation of the peasant: he is selective in his choice of material, filtering what suited his purposes, and this means that his presentation of 'medieval' life is lopsided. As in chivalric-courtly society, Tolkien's is a world of one class which stands above other classes in society (Auerbach 1953: 132).

The *Prologue* to the *Rings* explains that in the Shire there are 'millers, smiths, and cartwrights' (I 24), and the Shire employs 'Shirriiffs', or police, to maintain order (I 29). This might be taken from real life, as in some English parishes sheriffs were employed to drive away young jobless men to prevent them from falling on the parish. Tolkien offers the simplest of occupational descriptions without social commentary, but it is evidence enough that the world of Rose Cotton is not that of Arwen.

109 The *Medieval Handbook* (1480) shows a peasant in the stocks, while another hangs from the gallows. He will soon be joined by another who is attended to by a priest.

As author, Tolkien can include and exclude whatever 'real' features he wishes. He does not have to allude to the military spending of Edward I and, in fact, Éomer tells Aragorn that Saruman has claimed lordship over his land (II 41) which was a feature of medieval society. However, in the *Rings*, such 'injustice' is not a product of class interest and property relations as in real medieval society, but of evil. Middle-earth is a world characterised by clerics, namely Gandalf and the Elves, and laypeople, those of the Shire and Gondor, who shared the conviction that Middle-earth was the battleground for continual warfare between the forces of good, identified with Eru, and those of evil, incarnated by Sauron. It is a heavenly conflict between God and the Devil, which is the basis of the author's ideology since, he claims, man's concerns are petty in the face of his higher obligations to the divine.

Tolkien claims to write medieval adventures for 'the elucidation of truth', and feels that this is expressed in the divine. In a work of fantasy this may be so, but this chapter has attempted to show that truth can only be found, and confronted, in the real world of man.

It is partly understandable that Tolkien, emulating the Romantics and Pre-Raphaelites, wishes to contrast medieval 'simplicity' with that of the complexities of modern life with its noise, pollution, 'evil' technology, and so on. This idealisation, however, ignores the real brutality of the age. Disease was frequently fatal (Henry V's army at Agincourt was weakened by dysentery); while food, clothing, and housing were crude; work, for those who did it, was backbreaking. Violence and murder were rife. Waugh notes that the murder rate in medieval towns was significantly higher than that of modern American cities, 'in Oxford by four to six times' (1991: 158). Crime in general surged during the disastrous harvest years of the early fourteenth-century, while corruption was rampant among officials. It is difficult to recognise Tolkien's medieval ideal here, his "universal smallness and humility" (2006: 246).

Peasants' Revolt 1381

Gawain may have been 'representative of the English mind' in a work of fiction, a nobleman who spends his time defending his 'honour' from ravenous women. The real Gawain, Richard II (1367-1400) believed, was a treacherous English knight: from 1215 to 1415, five of eight kings fought wars with their subjects, four were either captured or deposed, and two were killed. According to Valente (2003: 2), such violence was characteristic of relations between medieval nobles and kings.

The real knight represented only his own class of interests and, while he made merry with the ladies, three-fifths of the English peasantry (of a total population of 5-6 million) were enslaved to him from cradle to grave. With no right to migrate, the peasant was bound to the land and he and his family could be sold with it. In legal documents his children were *sequela*, brood or litter (Coulton 1949: 76-77), and when a daughter left the manor for marriage her father was obliged to pay the lord a fine, or *merchet*, compensation for her producing her own 'litter' off-manor. In addition, he was subject to the most basic standards of russet clothing in case he got ideas above his station, and had to eat and drink 'in the manner fitting to him, that is, not excessively' (Jewell 1990: 67).

The 1351 Statute of Labourers reduced wages to 1346 levels, while stocks were erected in towns for those who refused to take an oath of obedience to their lord.¹¹⁰ This was followed by a 1377 statute that allowed landlords and 'Church figures' (Trevelyan 1899: 193) to seek action against peasants demanding their freedom.

Overseen by the bailiff's rod, the peasant, or villein, gave four days of labour to the lord every two weeks (Dunn 2002: 17): the peasant gave and the lord took. Any surplus was met with a tax, usually on beer, and when death finally came the village priest charged a 'mortuary fee'. There is evidence, too, of Church corruption: in the fourteenth-century drunken monks and priests sought sexual

110 This Act failed because imprisoned men 'cannot reap a field' (Trevelyan 1899: 187, 189, 188).

favours while, for the right price, couples could be wed and holy relics bought and sold (O'Brien 2004: 7-8).

Not all priests were swindlers: some fought alongside the peasantry, and John Ball, who was briefly considered in the methodology chapter, drew that important conclusion five hundred years before Marx that the labour of the majority supports the pomp of landowners (Froissart 1842: 653).

At about the time *Sir Gawain* was written, perhaps during the 1380s, a combination of factors – fiscal, economic, military, and political – caused the 40,000-strong Peasants' Revolt which broke out in June 1381 in the villages of Kent and Essex, though Froissart states that there were risings throughout the land (1842: 656). However, its main immediate cause has been traced to the Poll Tax of 1380.

Churches and monasteries, which took 10 per cent of all peasant income (O'Brien 2004: 7), were considered symbols of exploitation and ransacked throughout England. Moreover, for three days, peasants occupied London before being defeated and dispersed. The Archbishop of Canterbury (and chancellor), Simon de Sudbury (Tibold), was beheaded as were a number of others (Froissart 1842: 659). Attacks focused on the Temple, perceived as the hearth of corrupt lawyers, and JPs in the countryside; manors were looted and knights killed in local risings. The peasants demanded a fixed rent, free employment, and the elimination of all distinction between social ranks, as well as the abolition of villeinage. This is one of the earliest socialist programmes in history, as peasants claimed that nobles did not represent the community (Valente 2003: 170).

Medievalism in the *Rings*

The *Rings* combines fairy-story, medieval heroism, honour, adventure, and

courtly love,¹¹¹ features that Cervantes had ridiculed in *Don Quixote* in his tales of eccentric nobles who yearned for an irrecoverable past. Likewise, some critics of literary fantasy might argue that in Tolkien's book, there is something 'fantastic' about a 600,000-word work which ends with a 3,000-year-old virgin elf-princess enjoying the pleasure of her 90-year-old king still 'in the flower' of manhood (III 298).

In chapter II it was noted that the tournaments, knights, damsels, and 'colour' of the Middle Ages caught the imagination of the Romantics and Pre-Raphaelites. Lord Dunsany's *Fortress Unvanquishable* (1908) continues this tradition, blending the myths of the 'Arabian Nights' with chivalric legend and the 'dragon-lore' of the North. It features the sword Sacnoth, Thok, the dragon, and beautiful women who require a knight to 'protect' them and, as in Shelob's lair, a huge spider that looked at Leothric, son of Lorendiac, with sinful eyes.

Tolkien writes that he 'desired dragons profoundly' (1988: 40), and in the late 1920s he created one of his own in the tale of *Farmer Giles of Ham* (1949). Giles is the heroic farmer who disposes of a giant for invading his fields and, just as Beowulf had received much treasure from Hrothgar, the king, when he slaughters the monster, so Giles' bravery is rewarded by his own monarch with the renowned Tailbiter, a sword which refused to be sheathed. With it he captures the dragon, Chrysophylax, confiscates his treasure, and proclaims himself king. In *The Hobbit*, too, Tolkien explored the dragon-hoard theme when Bilbo burgled Smaug to steal his great two-handled cup (2001: 202).

It is a theme that Tolkien shares with the Old English early eighth-century epic *Beowulf*, which Tolkien acknowledges to be one of his most important sources (2006: 30). In the *Rings*, Sméagol – having strangled Déagol for the One Ring that he had found in the Anduin (I 81) – took to thieving and his family expelled him from the family hole. In time, he came across a cave before worming his way 'like a maggot' into the heart of the hills, and vanishing (I 82). He shares an

111 Tolkien describes the *Rings* as "heroic romance" (2006: 414).

association with the dragon, Grendel, an offspring of Cain, in *Beowulf*, who also lives in a cave. Just as Gollum put his knowledge of the Ring to evil purposes (I 81), so Grendel ‘works his wickedness’ on the Scyldings, who are fond of gift-giving, drinking and parties, just as the hobbits are: at Bilbo’s party the gifts were exceptionally good, with many eating and drinking continuously (I 47). Similarly, Tolkien sources *Beowulf* for evil in his own story: the dragon personifies malice and greed (1936: 17), while Gollum’s heart was evil and full of treachery (I 31).

In *Beowulf*, the dragon discovers that his cup has been stolen and can hardly control his rage, and at night he blasts the countryside with his breath (Sisam 1958: 135). Likewise, in the *Prologue* to the *Rings*, Tolkien summarises how Bilbo deceived Gollum to keep his Ring in *The Hobbit* and, as with the *Beowulf* dragon, Gollum loses all sense of control when he realises Bilbo has his Ring. His screech terrified Bilbo and there was a green flame of murder in his eyes (I 32).

High medieval style

Tolkien uses a patriarchal style in naming his characters, one that emphasises lineage through which fame and fortune pass. Thus, in *The Hobbit* Thorin introduces himself in stilted fashion: “I am Thorin son of Thrain son of Thror” (2001: 184), and in the *Rings* “Fréaláf, son of Hild, Helm’s sister” (III 431). Similarly, Thengel ‘took no wife’, but in 2943 ‘he wedded Morwen’ who ‘bore him three children’ in Gondor, and two more daughters in Rohan. The youngest was Théodwyn, ‘the fairest’ (III 435). This is a distinctly archaic style which today sounds both unfamiliar and patriarchal.

Other examples abound: marriage ‘binds’ the wife to her husband (III 419), while girls are ‘maid-children’ (III 525). Lobdell (1978: 330-1) furthermore, cites Tolkien’s use of the proverb “May the third time prove the best!” (II 307), meaning ‘third time lucky’, to indicate his debt to medieval language and literature, since it also occurs in *Sir Gawain* (I, 1680) as “Now prid tyme prove

best”.

Tolkien moulds his linguistic interest to his ideology. Following the light-hearted approach early in his book, his style becomes grave – the *Rings* is ‘not for bed-time reading’ (2006: 41) – to underline the weight of the challenges ahead. It is a style suited to a mighty tale, one of God and epic. If there were an inconsistency between theme and style, Tolkien writes of *Beowulf*, that style would ‘not be as beautiful or would be false’ (1936: 13). Likewise, of the anonymous author of *Beowulf* he writes of his ‘mind lofty and thoughtful’ as evidenced in the ‘high tone and sense of dignity’ in the work (1936: 12). This ‘high tone’ is expressed in Elrond’s sombre warning about how the ‘Shadow draws nearer’ (I 316). As noted previously, the authoritative style employed by the book’s ‘aristocrats’, especially as the sense of battle and ceremony intensifies, appears more elevated when set against the rustic speech of Gaffer Gamgee and Tolkien’s other ‘unimportant’ characters.

Tolkien’s defence of archaism

Tolkien defends his tales by stating that the reader or story-maker should not be ashamed of the ‘escape of archaism’, or of preferring not dragons, but horses, castles, and bows and arrows. This he extends to include elves, knights, kings, and priests. Rather, he maintains that the ‘rational man’ will condemn ‘progressive things like factories, machine-guns, and bombs’ he maintains (1988: 58).

Tolkien felt personally bereaved by the Great War, not least because by 1918 most of his close friends were dead (I 12). Yet, he supported war when necessary, and the *Rings* narrative is caught up in conflict, and in ferocious battles against ‘evil’. Faramir defends war in order to protect lives against a destroyer who would otherwise ‘devour everything’ (II 349). Of the hundred orcs who follow the company into Lothlórien, Haldir makes it clear that none will ever leave (I 448). Similarly, at Helm’s Deep, Aragorn warns the orcs that if they do not withdraw, none will be spared (II 178). There is, indeed, value in exacting

retribution: at Death Down, following the battle at Helm's Deep, the 'strange trees' took their revenge on the orcs and dug a huge pit for their corpses (II 196). Tolkien defends the need to take up arms because, as Gandalf counsels, Sauron is only 'a servant or emissary' (III 185) and evil will always need to be fought. Even after Sauron's defeat, Tolkien tells Fr Carter that a future tale, set a hundred years after Aragorn's death, would tell of men practicing their dark cults in secret societies (2006: 419).

This pattern follows that of the Christian saints who brandished the sword of God against the infidel. In his critique of *Beowulf*, Tolkien calls for these same 'old heroes' to be esteemed since they were caught in the 'chains of circumstance', sacred duty, and died with their backs to the wall (1936: 17).

In defending archaism, however, Tolkien betrays a simplified and idealised view of 'horses, castles, sailing-ships, bows and arrows' and their role in medieval war. There was nothing romantic even about these basic instruments of war which were viewed as the 'progressive' war technology of their day. In Tolkien's own book, the Phial, *mithril*, and Sting, Frodo's sword, were 'progressive' in that they conferred an advantage over those who did not possess them.

In the real world, medieval weapons were used to great effect, with bows and arrows accounting for the slaughter of the French armies during the One Hundred Years War (1337-1453). At Agincourt, where horses maddened with pain ran amok amid the yells and debris of limbless men, Henry ordered 'no prisoners' – and none were spared. Tolkien states that we need not be ashamed of the 'escape' of archaism, but who would want to escape here? There is no 'romance', simply the clinical tactics of brutal war.

The castles to which Tolkien refers required constant improvement to resist the progression of instruments of war of the kind the orcs used to cast missiles during their assault on Minas Tirith (III 111). Nothing stands still; thus, with the introduction of gunpowder, which Saruman developed in the *Rings*, ditches were introduced after the fourteenth-century to prevent canon from approaching the keep.

Tolkien romanticises his horses, too: he relates how ‘noble’ Eorl (Bloch 1962: 289), tames the proud horse, Felaróf, who understands all that he says (III 429). In the real world, horses were hardly ‘romantic’. The Inca, unfamiliar with the Spanish horse, was trampled underfoot in the conquest of Peru. Horses were bred for war (White 1962: 62) and as the requirements of war changed, so did saddlery, armour, and biting which became more ‘scientific’ (Hyland 1998: 8).

Medieval technology

In chapter III, it was noted that Middle-earth was set in the world when ‘there was less noise and more green’, yet White refers to an industrial revolution during the Middle Ages (1962: 89). The seven hundred years after 1000 AD were decisive in developing mechanisms for human purposes, yet even in the tenth and eleventh centuries there is evidence that water and wind power were used for purposes other than grinding grain. The *Doomsday Book* refers to ‘ii molini . . . ii plumbas ferri’, that is water-power used at forges in Somersetshire as early as 1086 (James 1862: xii). Mills were used to operate the bellows of blast furnaces, and to drive grindstones to produce weapons and armour (White 1962: 89).

The development of ‘fire-arrows’ and rockets is still another aspect of the late medieval interest in the force of expanding vapours and gases (Guttman 1895: 2-11). It is ironic, given Tolkien’s ‘fondness for dragons’ and his scorn for ‘mechanism’, that the increasing power-conscious culture of the later Middle Ages exploited the fiery dragon which ‘made the rocket possible’ (White 1962: 98).

Whichever epoch Tolkien peers into, he is scorched by the furnace-blast of man’s development. The general line of advance is that under economic need, animal labour replaces human labour, water and wind replace animal labour, and these later give way to heat energy and mechanics.

Honourable priests?

Finally, Tolkien refers to the honour among medieval priests in his defence of archaism, so it is permissible to enquire as to which Christian values they actually embodied.

Much research is required to understand the relationship between the clergy and the local populace, and the historian may wish to take into account the peasant oral tradition, and not rely solely on Church records. Often, however, these records stress that an important goal of the priesthood was to eradicate those 'erroneous beliefs' (Vauchez 1993: 104) to which the Church did not subscribe. Such a priority might point towards evidence of widespread non-conformity.

'Erroneous beliefs' included those made public by the Dominican friar, Stephen of Bourbon, in his thirteenth-century text *On the worship of the dog Guinefort*. Here the author speaks of the 'offensive superstitions' prevalent among the populace of Lyon (France) that 'honours demons' that are 'offensive to God', and he gives the example of Lord Villars' estate which the local peasantry believed was a place of healing.

A myth had evolved around the lord's greyhound that had defended his baby from a snake, but the dog was mistakenly killed and his grave became a site to which the local people brought their own sick or dying children to be saved. For Stephen, this was little more than devil worship (cited in Schmitt 1983: 5), and so he had the dog disinterred and, with the lord's consent, declared that any repetition of similar practices would lead to a seizure of villagers' possessions. This, perhaps, is an example of Marx's general assertion in the *Communist Manifesto* that 'the parson has always embraced the landlord' (1998: 44), that is, one acts in the interests of the other.

This uneasy, or hostile, relationship between the peasantry and the priest made it a greater challenge for the Church to spread its own religious dogma, despite

this imperative having been a dominant theme of papal rulings until the end of the Middle Ages. One solution was that the priest became a recruitment-sergeant to enlist the peasant into the Church and, by the 1500s, most laypeople made confession at least annually (Vauchez 1993: 104).

As in Tolkien's book, where lore was the speciality of Gandalf and Saruman (I 74, 84), the privileged clergy enjoyed an unrivalled level of knowledge and culture over the peasantry because they guarded the monopoly of learning as briefly mentioned in chapter III on early fairy-tales, or *legenda*. However, while they may have been respected among adherents, they encountered hostility beyond the church doors, so many clergy engaged in a *fuga mundi*, a retreat from the real world to their cells. Occasionally, they did consider the destiny of Christians, and the construction of churches testifies to this, but generally they were more concerned with parishes than parishioners (Vauchez 1993: 97).

In converting the peasantry, the Church was in for the 'long haul', so pastoral care for knights and, in time, aristocrats, was prioritised and this explains the absence of saints from among the 'lower orders'. Besides, those wealthy enough were in a position to bequeath land and property to the holy orders and the representations of Christian nobles and knights found in church stained glass windows during this period bear witness to this, (although much of the Church art of the period was inspired by earlier figures such as St George).

The 'lower orders', whom the Church deemed illiterate because they did not know Latin (Schmitt 1983: 1), could not relate to this privileged ecclesiastical hierarchy with its awe-inspiring churches, and whose structure, with its bishops and archbishops, appeared to reflect the privileged social hierarchy outside. Even those interested in the teachings of Christianity, must have felt alienated from God because until the sixteenth-century, 'only the clergy had access to sacred books' (Vauchez 1993: 102).

In addition, it must have been difficult for the newly converted to identify with, and understand, the priest at the altar who denounced lechery while keeping a

concubine at home (Vauchez 1993: 101). Kaeuper speaks of priests who 'could not tolerate leaving their mistresses or cope with chastity' (1999: 66), while Langland makes clear that they were also cheats who paid off a trifle from a dead man's estate in exchange for a prayer for his soul, while keeping the rest for themselves (1978: 373). In this way, the dead man was still in debt for his 'unpaid' sin. Priestly fraud was not new. John of Salisbury, once a confidant of Henry II and friend of Thomas Beckett, condemned the tyranny of the priesthood (1990: 194) whose motives were 'leisure, vanity, and ambition' (1990: 197).

This is not to say that there were no 'honourable priests' as Tolkien puts it, but it seems to be the case that the Church was, in fact, decaying and Langland fiercely denounced the entire ecclesiastical hierarchy from the Pope to the lowliest priest on account of their greed. Priests had betrayed the notion of apostolic poverty and prostituted the office of confession to bring the Church to the brink of destruction. He is joined by Wycliffe, former Master of Balliol College, Oxford, who advocates the abolition of the entire Church structure including the office of pope – and the crowds gathered to applaud him.

Religious Dogma in *The Lord of the Rings*

The devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world:
'All these I will give you, if you fall down and worship me'

- Matthew

This chapter examines the religious ideology that is embedded in the *Rings*. There is a brief sketch of Tolkien's re-creation of the universe, as explained in *The Silmarillion*, focusing on the battle between Eru and Melkor (God and Lucifer). This is related to the doctrine of Original Sin, which is discussed below in some detail, since it lies at the root of Tolkien's philosophy. The chapter, furthermore, examines the rationale behind Catholic doctrine on predestination and free will as outlined by the 'Church Fathers', and discusses how Tolkien applies these two apparently opposing themes in his book. Other biblical themes in the *Rings* include resurrection, healing, hope, pity and, in particular, temptation. However, the *Rings* is primarily concerned with immortality and how to achieve it, and this, too, is considered below.

Tolkien poses this question: 'What is the purpose of life?' and answers in Latin as follows: "Laudamus te, benedictamus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te, gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam".¹¹² In short, man exists to worship God. Tolkien's Catholic devotion, expressed through his fiction and letters, consoled him after the death of his mother and through the trauma of the Great War but, Carpenter writes, it also "made him into a pessimist . . . Nothing would last" (1989: 31). This theme is apparent in his book in which defeated evil always recurs, and in his *Letters*: in March 1941 he wrote to his son, Michael, of

112 We praise you, we call you holy, we worship you, we proclaim your glory, we thank you for the greatness of your splendour (2006: 400). In his school *Chronicle*, Tolkien favours returning to English 'something of Saxon purity of diction' while, in 1910, he speaks of the "English goodness of speechcraft", that is, "a language purged of Latin and French derivatives" (December 1910: 95 - cited in Garth 2004: 52). Apparently, this did not apply to the use of Latin in the Church: when English replaced Latin in the liturgy, it "pained him deeply" (Carpenter 1989: 133).

the darkness of his life and, frustrated, he proposes the ‘greatest thing to love on earth: the Blessed Sacrament’ (2006: 53).

As a young man, the Birmingham Oratory became his home and, when he could not attend confession, he became spiritually depressed (Carpenter 1989: 39). There is hardly a page in his *Letters*, which span from October 1914 to August 1973 that does not mention God, or priests, or Christianity. Augustine termed this *fruitio Dei*, a perpetual absorption in the divine.

In 1917 while recuperating from trench fever, Tolkien appears to have started *The Silmarillion* (originally the *Book of Lost Tales*),¹¹³ which provides the mythological backcloth to the *Rings*. In it he recreates the Christian story of creation: in the beginning was Eru,¹¹⁴ the One, who created the angelic Ainur, ‘the holy ones’, out of nothing. Tolkien follows Augustinian teaching that angels were created before ‘measured time’ if measured time began with the creation of the sky.¹¹⁵ Eru, who is never seen,¹¹⁶ declared that the Ainur were to make a harmony of ‘Great Music’ using harps and lutes to proclaim the beauty of creation. Similarly, in the Bible trumpeters and singers with cymbals made one

113 The *Rings* is part of an “entire cycle” of Tolkien mythology, which also includes *The Hobbit* and *The Silmarillion*. The latter, and not the *Rings*, was “the work of his heart” (Shippey 2001: 226). Tolkien struggled to get it published because it lacked popular appeal; it is more ‘core religious’ and provides the background to his bestseller. After Allen and Unwin had declined to publish the *Rings* with *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien wrote a 10,000-word letter (2006: 143-161) intended to demonstrate to his new publisher, Collins, how both texts “were interdependent and indivisible” (2006: 143). It is possible to read the *Rings* without reading *The Silmarillion*, but reading both provides a deeper understanding of his major fantasy or, as Tolkien himself put it, writing the *Rings* would have been easier if *The Silmarillion* had been published first (2006: 130). “My tale is not consciously based on any other book - save one, and that is unpublished: the ‘Silmarillion’” (2006: 31).

114 In Tolkien’s invented language, Quenya, Eru means ‘he that is alone’.

115 According to Augustine, creation began with the angels before ‘measured time’, which began on the fourth day (Gen. 1:14-19). God created light and day on the first day, Heaven on the second, and the earth and trees on the third. It is difficult, however, to see how these creations were accomplished *before* ‘measured time’ when Genesis measures them in *days*. Augustine answers that the first three days of creation were not what we understand days to be: “What kind of days these are is difficult or even impossible for us to imagine” (2003: 436).

116 Tolkien borrows from pre-Christian mythology: Eru’s ‘remoteness and silence is typical of primitive theology’ (Miesel 1968: 210).

sound to praise the Lord (II Chron. 5:13).

However, a power rivalry emerges between good and evil when Melkor, “the greatest of the Ainur” (1977: 16), just as Lucifer was the glory of the archangels, sought to increase his own eminence and master elves and men (1977: 18). His evil is so all-pervading in the *Rings* that no character, including Frodo, ever seems quite free from temptation. Even the resurrected Gandalf admits to his loyal followers in Fangorn that while he is Gandalf the White, ‘Black is mightier’ (II 126).

Eru created Melkor – just as God created Lucifer: God ‘made peace and created evil’ (Isa. 45:7) – which makes Middle-earth, and our real world, a battleground, or plaything, of supernatural beings through which men are ‘tested’ or, as Shakespeare put it, ‘man is mere sport of the gods’ (*King Lear* IV, i, 32–37).

Melkor aspired to replace Eru, to be called Lord, to have subjects and servants, and master other wills (1977: 18) and, his “discord rising in uproar”, he brought disharmony into Eru’s cosmic symphony of creation. Thus, two different sets of music played simultaneously and Eru arose, his face terrible to behold, and a struggle follows between both powers over control of the wills of elves and men and, before long, Melkor departs to other regions: ‘when he could not possess light for himself, he fell through fire and wrath into the darkness, a spirit wasteful and pitiless’ (1977: 31).

Tolkien traces his own fiction from the Bible in which the Devil, he who shakes nations and makes the earth tremble, falls from heaven. Lucifer, son of the morning, is ‘cut to the ground’, because he said ‘I will exalt my throne above the stars of God and be like the highest’ (Isa. 14:12).

In Christian teaching, Lucifer’s primary sin is that of pride, a conviction that he could challenge God’s divine rule. The Ring, too, is guilty of this sin because it symbolises usurping the power of the One. In addition, it suggests deception since its wearer becomes invisible.

Tolkien: ‘Christ’s faithful witness to our times’

Scull believes that one interpretation of the *Rings* pleads for ‘more tolerance, more open-mindedness’ (1995: 151), yet Tolkien snubbed his friend, C.S. Lewis, the Protestant boy from Belfast, as an “Everyman’s theologian” (Carpenter 1989: 155).

Lewis had traded his agnosticism, not for the grandeur of Rome, but for the rather more humble Anglican building at the end of his street. Tolkien was disgusted because he loathed the Church of England which he considered to be ‘pathetic’, and a ‘shadowy medley of half-remembered traditions and mutilated beliefs’ (Carpenter 1989: 73). There is no happy family of Christians for Scull’s ‘tolerant’ man, since he was wholly devoted to the ‘Marian dogmas and papal infallibility’ which he considered as ‘nonnegotiable’ criteria for eternal life (Wood 2003: 324).¹¹⁷

In the *Rings*, the ruling supernatural powers of Middle-earth – called the Valar, or “Guardians of the World” – are explicitly stated (III 380, 381, 382, 384, 385) and give Middle-earth a polytheistic feel, which is why Tolkien’s tale does not appear didactical. However, Tolkien likens them to Catholic saints, as suggested in chapter I, who undertake God’s work. Thus, the Marian and papal dogmas to which Wood refers above, came to Tolkien’s work naturally: Tolkien admits that he ‘consciously planned very little’ because his faith, which he got from his mother who ‘clung to her conversion’, had ‘nourished and taught him’ all that he knew (2006: 172). This religious ideology resides within the kernel of his book, prompting Morrow to label him as a ‘faithful witness of Christ to our times’

117 The elves revere Elbereth, Galadriel’s heavenly patroness, and Queen of the Stars and lady of the Valar who transmits heavenly light (I 114): ‘Snow-white!.../ O Queen beyond the Western Seas!’. The verse recalls a popular Catholic hymn to Mary, ‘Star of the Sea’, from Tolkien’s boyhood (Caldecott 2003: 57): ‘Hail, Queen of Heaven, the ocean star, /...Mother of Christ, star of the sea’.

(2005: 177).

Thus, Tolkien does not merely present the ‘good’ wizard, Gandalf,¹¹⁸ as a counterweight to the ‘evil’ Saruman in his project; nor is his book limited to a simple ‘good-light’, ‘evil-dark’ dichotomy (which he labours). Rather, he interweaves his fantasy with the whole religious schemata of Catholicism which, he felt, required epic form. For Pearce, professor at the Ave Maria University (Florida), the allegory is clear when Tolkien describes the war between Melkor and Manwë, who ‘plays the role of the archangel Michael’ (2002: 90).¹¹⁹

Immortality

The *Rings* is a chessboard on which the pieces battle it out as good versus evil, and what is at stake is the prize of immortality since the real war is not against men of bone and muscle, but ‘against the ruling powers of darkness’ (Eph. 6:12). That is, Tolkien’s book is primarily concerned with man’s desire for everlasting life (2006: 262), and how to achieve it is the thrust of the author’s ideology: while the elves are bound to the world as long as it lasted (1977: 42), there is no escape from death for man, but there is hope beyond the ‘circles of the world’.

In *The Silmarillion*, men listened to the evil of Morgoth (Melkor)¹²⁰ and fell into ‘Darkness’ (1977: 259), and Faramir tells the story in the *Rings* of how they worshipped the black arts and began to fight one another (II 357). There is a precedent for this in Revelation in which men worshipped the dragon, thus offering strength to the beast (13:4). Others in Middle-earth, however, aided the

118 Gandalf was an ‘istari’: ‘emissaries from God’ (2006: 207).

119 Pearce refers to Jude (1:9) where Michael, the archangel, ‘contends’ with the Devil over the body of Moses.

120 Aragorn refers to “the Great Enemy, of whom Sauron of Mordor was but a servant” (I 259). This is Melkor, “He who arises in might” in Quenya. The elves will not mutter his name and instead call him Morgoth, the ‘Dark Enemy’ of the World (1977: 31).

elves in their war against Melkor, and the Valar rewarded them with both extended longevity and the land of Númenor. Men were never permitted to visit the Valar in the West, and the latter had no authority to remove God, or Eru's, 'gift to man' – death (III 382). However, Sauron, a fallen angel like Lucifer, and divine representative of Melkor, replaced worship of Eru with a Satanic religion and a large temple (2006: 205). He persuaded Ar-Pharazôn, last king of the Númenoreans, who knew his days were coming to an end (III 385), to launch an armada against the Blessed Realm to wrest eternal life for men from the Valar. Men wondered why a blind trust was required of them, 'a hope without assurance', while the elves and Valar enjoyed immortality (1977: 265).

Tolkien argues that this was a 'Satanic lie' because the Blessed Realm did not confer immortality to men, and that any rebellion against this 'natural order' was wicked, indeed, 'unnatural' since 'Death is the Gift of God' (2006: 205) and the envy of elves (as noted in the previous chapter). Before the revolt, Sauron discovered that of all the beings on Middle-earth, men were the easiest to influence (1977: 287), but once Ar-Pharazôn had set foot upon the shores of the Blessed Realm, Eru, the One, changed the world: 'Númenor was cast down and swallowed by the Sea' (III 385). In the same way, God threatened to reduce Israel to 'waste' for challenging Him (Ezek. 5:14).

Spacks (1969: 89) remarks that this reference to 'the One' is all the reader has as evidence that Tolkien's universe has a ruler, but at least it informs the reader that beings have been sent to Middle-earth for a particular purpose. This is not quite true, since Damrod, soldier of Gondor, invokes these 'beings' when Faramir's party engages the Southrons: 'May the Valar defeat them' (II 335).

The theme of man's apparent longing for immortality (III 383) provides the background to understanding the *Rings*, and to achieve it man must trust his fate to God. It is evil for men to seek immortality (or longevity) through the One Ring, because it is ultimately deceptive: the wearer would become a ghoul, or Ringwraith.

Moreover, such deception 'leads the small being to become like a Gollum, and

the great to become a Ringwraith' (2006: 286). Tolkien appears to believe that social division is prolonged after death: the 'small' or 'lesser' being becomes a Gollum when corrupted, while the Witch-king of Angmar¹²¹ became chief of the Ringwraiths. It is, however the case that in Christianity what differentiates between people is not their class or status in society, but their commitment to Jesus.

A good man, according to Tolkien dies trusting in God without being compelled (2006: 286), as Aragorn did. Aragorn had the 'grace' to die at his own will, trusting in God. He reassures Arwen on his deathbed that 'beyond the circles of the world there is more than memory' (III 424-25),¹²² which implies eternal life. Following his death, there is no question of remarriage for Arwen: her virginity cannot be regained, and she laid down in a green grave 'until the world is changed' (III 426).

In Middle-earth, Tolkien replaces man, the real author of human society – it is man who changes his own circumstances – as this thesis has argued, with Eru, the divine puppet-master who orchestrates events throughout the quest. As indicated in the methodology chapter, such a doctrine assumes that man is 'fallen', weak, and nothing without the supernatural: Tolkien sees man as 'alienated in a hostile world, engaged in a struggle that he cannot win while the world lasts' (1936: 27). This pessimism recalls the German Romantic, Novalis: "Muß immer des Morgen wieder kommen?" ('Must morning always come again?') (1967: 78). Twenty years later, Tolkien reiterates his despair saying that he is indeed a Roman Catholic, so he expects nothing from history save a 'long defeat' (2006: 255).¹²³ This sense of despondency towards man is present throughout the *Rings*: man is "dull and uncouth" (I 204), "kind and stupid like Butterbur; or stupid and wicked like Bill Fenny" (I 289); or untrustworthy, like

121 Again the reference to mechanism: in Sindarin, (one of the author's 'Elvish' languages), *ang* means 'iron' (Hammond And Scull 2008: 20).

122 Compare Isaiah: "the circle of the earth" (40.22).

123 Paganism, too, is "the shadow of despair", with men perceiving their "inevitable ruin" (1936: 23).

Sam (I 497).

Catholic predestination

Despite his rejection of anthropologists who ‘quarry’ fairy-tale as noted in chapter III, Tolkien borrows from the Bible and ‘Church Fathers’. This section considers the role these sources play in his book, beginning with the theme of predestination and free will.

Augustine’s ‘teachings’ (affirmed by the 529 AD Synod of Orange) provide the basis for Catholicism on predestination and free will. Augustine considered that man’s life is little more than a pilgrim’s journey to the land of his heavenly Father and so, in 1955, Tolkien travelled to Italy, recording that he had returned from exile to Christendom, the land of his fathers (Carpenter 1989: 225).

Tolkien upholds the Augustinian view that man must love, not creation, (*cupiditas*) but the creator (*caritas*). For Augustine, the creation, or *cupiditas*, is evil; only *caritas*, or the creator, is true love (Hägglund 1968: 120), and Tolkien absorbs this creed eagerly: ‘the universe in itself was *not* worshipful, though a study of it was one of the ways of honouring God’ (2006: 400) (my emphasis).

God destines man for eternal life.¹²⁴ According to Aquinas (c.1225-1274), God wishes for ‘all men to be saved’ (1967: 119),¹²⁵ because He loves everything that exists (Book of Wisdom 11:24). How is man to be ‘saved’? Augustine writes that man was first created in Eden with free will, one given by divine grace; this free will, to choose between good and evil, was key to man’s own ‘salvation’. However, of his own accord, man chose evil which, Tolkien believes, represented his rejection of free will (2006: 286). As punishment, man ‘In the sweat of thy face’ was to eat bread until he died (Gen. 3:19), that is, he was to

124 Feuerbach dismisses this as “the fools’ bridge of the future” (1980: 15).

125 God “will have all men to be saved” (I Tim. 2:4).

labour until the end of his days, while of woman God was to 'greatly multiply' her pain in childbirth (Gen. 3:16). In *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien follows suit: Eru (or Ilúvatar) willed that men would never find rest in the world (1977: 41). For Augustine, this choice of Adam and Eve defines 'original sin': their disobedience turns man away from God.

'Original sin', man's betrayal of God in Eden, what Tolkien terms 'the Fall', condemns all offspring by propagation: generation after generation, man and woman naturally produce a corrupt species born into sin, and if anyone believes, canons three and four of the council¹²⁶ stipulate, that sin was Adam's alone and ought not be passed to the new born, he is 'anathema'. Nor are those who embrace God necessarily spared because even in the baptised there is still lechery and an inclination to sin.¹²⁷ This chapter poses, then, the following: if man is genetically corrupt, how can he be expected to recognise the goodness of God? If man is perverted through his parents, how can he embrace the 'holy'? Indeed, how may he distinguish between good and evil? Similarly, in Tolkien's book, Saruman's 'foul craft' has bred orcs for evil (II 174); in what sense, then, can we speak of orcs as having *chosen* evil?

The difficulty, however, with the specifically Catholic invention of 'original sin' is that it *contradicts* the Bible: while Augustine condemns perverted and lustful man as *Massa peccati* ('mass of sin') (cited in Seeberg 1977: 338), God reassured Abraham that in his seed the kindreds of the earth are to be blessed (Acts. 3:25) while, of woman, God was to love her, and bless her, and bless the fruit of her womb (Deut. 7:13).

The scholar concerned with consistency between the Bible and Catholicism will not find it here. In fact, the Bible never mentions 'original sin' at all. This,

126 Fifth Session of the Council of Trent (1546).

127 The 'Decree Concerning Original Sin' by the Fifth Session (Waterworth, J trans 1848) implies that Christ's sacrifice on the cross to absolve man of 'original sin' is insufficient. It is the official doctrine of the Church today.

however, is of little interest to Augustine who stated that if it were not for the Catholic Church he would not believe in the Gospels (Schaff 1890: 159). This seems to be an extraordinary, if not blasphemous, claim since if Catholicism has any credibility surely it derives it from the teachings of Jesus and not from any pope? It is hardly surprising that Feuerbach observed that the Church interpretation of the Bible is a 'monstrous departure and disfigurement of the Gospel' (1980: 13-14). Moreover, if Augustine is to be believed, the Christian is entitled to ask: why observe the Bible at all, when believers can simply read the works of. . . Augustine?

What repercussions do Augustinian 'teachings' have for the 'free will' of man to choose between good and evil? Man still possesses free will after Eden, Augustine states, but he retains a compulsion to sin (*necessitas peccandi*). Tolkien concurs and in *The Silmarillion* he states that 'man multiplied and turned to evil because Sauron was at work' (1977: 286). Thus, whenever man is tempted, he obliges and, due to this weakness, he needs divine assistance, the *adiutorium* of God, if he is to perform good acts. Again, Tolkien reinforces this message, depicting man as disconsolate under the burden of free choice without divine aid: even Aragorn, the 'healer', exclaims that an ill fate is on him and all that he does 'goes amiss' (II 12).

Since man is bound to sin, it is beyond him to achieve immortality through his own endeavours: man is saved only by the gift of God, and not by his own 'works'. He does not save himself, "lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2.8-9; also Titus. 3:5; Rom. 8.28; Acts. 13.48). Rist states that Augustine repeatedly stresses that God's grace is not a reward for man's good deeds (1969: 426), and there is biblical authority on Augustine's side: God predestinates and calls (Rom. 8:30). If God's grace is withdrawn, man is incapable of acting in a good way. In sum, salvation is not somehow 'earned', like Brownie points, through one's own good merits: man is not free and cannot exercise free will, without God: if you have not been 'predestined' for immortality, your good merits are worthless; and, if you have been predestined, it is not for you to boast: your own good merits never came into consideration (Augustine 1925: 104). Augustine's point is confirmed in John: 'without me you can do nothing' (15:5).

The Old Testament book, Haggai, emphasises the omnipotence of God, explaining that He will ‘shake the heavens, and the earth’ and ‘all nations’ (2:6-7). Aquinas further states that God loves all men (1967: 115). This, then, raises the question: why does God allow evil? Can all-powerful God not create a world containing free beings who never commit evil? The short answer to this, in Augustinian terms, is ‘no’. If God had created beings who acted freely yet always chose right, they would not be free to refrain from evil; they would reject evil but not freely, and he who sins freely is ‘more excellent’ than he who does not sin because he is not free (Augustine 1993: 81). In short, a world of genuine free will in which evil features, has more value than a world which lacks free will and is thus devoid of evil. In his *City of God*, Augustine states that even an all-good and all-powerful God could not make creation perfect, so He created the world in such a way that its imperfections were reduced to a minimum (2003: 1088-9). This response, however, seems unsatisfactory when referring to a supreme power. If Augustine is correct, it means that God’s omnipotence, or supremacy, is limited.

Nobody can know whether or not he is to be ‘saved’. Tolkien calls this ‘unguaranteed hope’ (2006: 237), and the Council of Trent (1545-63) established that nobody can be certain as to his own ultimate fate. Moreover, God is selective because He wills some for eternal salvation, while rejecting others (Aquinas 1967: 119). If the question is then posed ‘why some and not others?’, Augustine replies, again rather unsatisfactorily – just as Gandalf responded only vaguely to Frodo – that God’s ways are ‘unfathomable’ (1925: 31),¹²⁸ and he defers to Romans: the judgements of God are ‘unsearchable’ (11:33).

However, the council's sixth session (1547) undermined Augustine when it extended the importance of man’s own merit in seeking immortality: if anyone says that the good works of man, which he performs through God’s grace and

128 Those who did insist on answers were “corrected and converted” (II Pet. 85:189 – cited in Frend 1984: 671).

the merit of Jesus, does not extend the attainment of eternal life, he is 'anathema'.¹²⁹

Indeed, Augustine's views were considered controversial throughout the Middle Ages. The Semi-Pelagian school led by Cassianus (c.365-c.433) accused him of fatalism, and argued that man is potentially good; if man exercised his free will he could either reject grace or pursue it and this is what the Catholic lord, Alton, says in his article 'JRR Tolkien, Catholicism and the use of allegory' (February 2003): 'we all have a destiny and the free will to embrace it or reject it'. As early as the second-century, Origen (185-254 AD) had offered that salvation was to be achieved by God influencing man's free will; similarly, Gregory (c.540-604 AD) accepted Augustine's doctrine that while 'merit' does not precede grace when considering salvation, it cooperates with free will (Hägglund 1968: 149). Job provides a source for this: God works with man to rescue him from the pit (33:29-30).

In Genesis, too, God tells Abraham that through his son, Issac, his seed shall 'be called' (21:12), yet Issac and his wife, Rebekah, were childless, so Issac appealed to God on behalf of his barren wife. God listened and Rebekah conceived (25:21). Thus, Issac's intercession influences God and, according to Gregory, it affirms that God's plans for predestination are fulfilled by prayers (*Dialogues* 1911: 31), especially the prayers of Catholic saints, the 'elect servants' of God (1911: 30).

The free will-predestination controversy raged on (and continues to do so), centring principally on the greater or lesser ratio that man has a say in his own fate. The Bible offers support for Augustine and predestination: 'before you came out of the womb, I ordained you to be a prophet to the world's nations' (Jer. 1:5). Similarly, in Luke, Jesus says that he must preach God's word because that is why he was sent (4:43). Even evil people are created with a purpose in mind because God made all things for himself, even 'the wicked' (Prov. 16:4).

129 The Sixth Session (1547): 'Decree on Justification' (Waterworth, J trans) 1848

Other passages, however, contradict Augustine in that they highlight the relevance of free will: for instance, ‘choose life’, so that you and your seed may live (Deut. 30:19), and in Mark (16:16): ‘He who believes and is baptised shall be saved; if not, you will be damned’.

The Council of Trent was charged with resolving such doctrinal weaknesses by bringing the warring factions to the table. Famously, however, it disregarded the controversial issues, so the doctrine we have today, and to which Tolkien subscribed, is an assortment of opposing views and manoeuvring, “church politics and diplomatic refinements” (Seeberg 1977: 431). Church ‘teaching’, then, is a patchwork of inconsistent, indeed contradictory, ideologies roughly sewn together. This is hardly surprising since over the centuries men have brought to Catholicism something of their own changing social times, but the infallible voice of God it is not. The coexistence of free will and predestination is a paradox for Catholicism – and Tolkien: the proofs are indecisive on both sides, writes Ott, and the difficulties prove that predestination is an ‘unfathomable mystery’ (1966: 243-44).

Free Will in Tolkien

As with the Bible, Tolkien’s book combines both doctrines, so that predestination and free will govern Middle-earth.

There are numerous examples of free will in the *Rings*, and Nietzsche argues that Frodo needs to exercise free will in choosing between good or evil (1979: 109); that is, Frodo must choose to resist the temptation of the Ring or bow to its lure. On the Barrow-downs he contemplates putting it on to escape from the barrow-wight: he wavered and fought with himself. This represents a mini-victory over the Ring, and Gandalf compliments him on his strength (I 288). However, between these two episodes there is an Augustinian ‘compulsion’ at work because resisting the Ring has become ‘unbearable’ (I 262), and he puts it

on.

The Ring itself has its own free will: it 'slipped' from Isildur's finger (I 79), while in Bree, Frodo is puzzled about how it got on his finger; he learns, too, that it changes size: he felt it becoming thicker and heavier (I 76). Its major power is its own forceful will, which breaks the will of others: Gollum both loved and hated the Ring, and was so absorbed by his 'precious' that he could not dispose of it: he had no will left to resist (I 83). Tolkien's 'message' here is that evil destroys free will, and in a 1954 letter he equates 'bad magic' with the desire to dominate other 'free wills' (2006: 200).

At Amon Hen while being pursued by Boromir, Frodo slips the Ring on his finger (I 521), and at the summit he undergoes a tug-of-war within his own psyche, crying out "*Never, never! Or was it: Verily I come, I come to you?* He could not tell", before another thought: "*Take it off! Take it off! Fool, take it off! Take off the Ring!* Now, unlike at the ford where he is rescued by Glorfindel, he masters himself: Frodo was 'free to choose', and he takes the Ring off his finger (I 521). Likewise, in *The Last Debate*, the members of the fellowship decide to sacrifice themselves, if necessary: they each alone act as freely, spontaneously, and charitably as did Merry and Éowyn towards Théoden earlier (Nitzsche 1979: 123).

'Those who follow me', Aragorn tells Éowyn as he rides out to the Paths of the Dead, do so 'freely' (III 61). Likewise, free will allows Théoden to throw off his delusions and fight for 'good', while the hobbits decided to retain their own laws 'of free will' because they were old and based on justice (I 28). The fact that Arwen, too, chooses to give up her immortality for marriage is another example of free will.

Through making the right choice, based on free will, Tolkien's protagonists, notably Frodo, become increasingly virtuous. His 'Christian charity' towards Gollum, an act of 'free will', determines not only his own 'fate' but the outcome of the story. Tolkien navigates Frodo, through the various stormy straits and whirlpools of evil; he examines and strengthens him, before his hero arrives at

that safe harbour of Christian understanding, of knowing what is right and wrong. Just as Frodo is 'exiled' from the Shire, there is a parallel here of exiled Tolkien journeying to Rome, the 'home' of his Christian fathers.

Tolkien makes an additional point about this theme. Commenting on the animated film 'treatment' of the *Rings*, Tolkien complains that Zimmerman treats Saruman's voice as if it were hypnotic. Tolkien explains that it was 'not hypnotic but persuasive', because it was possible to reject Saruman based on free will (2006: 276-77). Similarly, Legolas tells Gimli that he, Gimli, suffers on account of his own free will, since he could have chosen another path (I 492).

Frodo's choice and predestination

On the other hand, there is abundant evidence for predestination in Tolkien's fantasy. The first reference to it is made not in the *Rings*, but in *The Hobbit* when Gandalf reminds Bilbo on the final page that his adventures and escapes did not occur through simple chance (1998: 365).

In the *Rings*, the events that bring the council together do not take place by accident. Elrond informs Frodo that his task has been 'appointed' for him (I 354). Events were preordained and Frodo was fated to undertake the quest, a task that Pearce describes as the "Carrying of the Cross" (2002: 92). For Spacks, Frodo has a 'cosmic responsibility' which is only justified by 'a vast power for good' (1959: 35), and this explains Gandalf's remark to Frodo in the chapter *Many Meetings*, that fortune or fate has helped him (I 291). Dubs, too, refers to the 'fortuitous' appearance of Strider in *The Prancing Pony*, and the appearance of the elves who just 'happen by' early on in the story. These illustrate the work of providence when they guide the hobbits to safety (1981: 38).

Tolkien's angels are Valar, from the Norse 'vala' meaning seer/seeress. The sibyl who relates the creation of the world and its fated destruction and rebirth in 'Völuspá' was such a seeress/seer or vala. According to Noel, Tolkien opted for

a name that would suggest the ‘omniscient and fate-determining’ powers of the Valar” (1977: 102).

When he looks into Galadriel's mirror, Frodo sees many scenes that swiftly pass before him and he realises that he has become involved in ‘a great history’ (I 472). Those who choose to remain in Lothlórien may remain but, says Celeborn, whatever they choose nobody can be assured of peace. There is little choice here, he says, because ‘we are at the edge of doom’ (I 477). Similarly, Galadriel informs the fellowship that the paths that it will tread have already been mapped out (I 479). At Amon Hen, Aragorn states that it is not for anyone to influence Frodo one way or another about which path to take; in any case, nobody would succeed because other, far stronger powers, are ‘at work’ (I 524-25).

Against this textual evidence for predestination, some critics argue that Frodo did have free will because he could have rejected the fate chosen for him: Barber states that Gandalf ‘asks’ Frodo to be Ringbearer, before Frodo decides (1967: 46). Dickerson similarly argues that Tolkien's writings emphasise choice (2004: 84) and this makes the *Rings* ‘heroic’. Frodo, he insists, has the freedom of choice (2004:86). He then adds, however, the following interesting rider: the ‘Wise’ of Middle-earth have faith in a higher or supernatural power and this ‘aids them’ in making the right choices (2004: 93).

Choice, then, is allied to divine assistance and this parallels Augustine's *adiutorium*. Yet, as noted in the methodology chapter, if we are unable to choose without seeking the ‘aid’ of a ‘higher power’, indeed, if we are unable to reject any offer of divine assistance, we cannot speak of free choice.

It was *not* Frodo's qualities that made him the favourite to bear the Ring; even if he enthused about the quest – and he did not – it was not for *him* to decide. Gandalf tells him that he was chosen though not because others did not possess any merits (I 91). This is an example of divine assistance, or Dickerson's ‘aid’, though coercion may be a more appropriate term. Indeed, Frodo objects to what has been fated for him, insisting that he was not made for

'perilous requests' and wishes that he had never seen the Ring (I 91). Despite his protests, and contrary to Barber, Gandalf *obliges* him to accept the quest during his 'ours is not to reason why' instruction.¹³⁰ Here, divine intervention *denies* free choice.

'Choice' was *foisted* on Frodo – and choice dictated is no choice at all: Frodo was *decreed* Ring-bearer. Noteworthy, is Aragorn's religious terminology when he tells Frodo that he has been 'ordained' to hold it for a while (I 323). To Frodo's legitimate enquiry, "Why was I chosen?" (I 91) Gandalf turns to Augustine: "Such questions cannot be answered" (I 91). Frodo stands his ground, begging the wizard to take the Ring himself, before Gandalf springs to his feet and tells him 'no!' (I 91). Later, Frodo felt bitter that he was not at home (I 253).¹³¹

In Catholic terms, if Frodo had rejected the role of Ringbearer, it would *not* have demonstrated his own free will; it would only have proven that his free will had become 'imprisoned', that is, acting against its own interest, as the doctrine of original sin teaches (Wood 2003: 333). This seems to be is a case of 'heads I win, tails you lose': if you accept God you do so of your own free will; if you do not, your free will has been perverted by the Devil. Describing the dwarves, Tolkien wrote that they were not evil 'by nature', and few of them ever served the Enemy 'of free will' (III 521). That is, those dwarves with free will naturally make the right choices and, if they do not, they are corrupt.

For Barber, Providence directly helps to guide and assist the hobbits (1967:47). Gollum bites Frodo's finger off to seize the Ring and both he and the Ring perish in the Doom of Fire: Providence knew this outcome, she maintains

130 There is a parallel in *The Hobbit* when the dwarfs doubt Bilbo's abilities: "He looks more like a grocer than a burglar!" (1998: 31), to which Gandalf retorts: "I have chosen Mr. Baggins and that ought to be enough for all of you" (1998: 33).

131 In the *Rings*, the author states of Frodo: "he had taken it [the quest] on himself in his own sitting-room in the far-off spring of another year" (II 313). Later, however, Faramir remarks that Frodo took the Ring "unwilling, at others' asking" (II 362).

(1967: 48). Similarly, Spacks sees the final twist at the end of the quest – when Frodo declares the Ring his own – as free will aligned to fate (1969: 95). It is part of a structured Christian universe, she states, in which ‘true freedom’ may only be attained by submitting to God (1969: 86). That is, it is not enough to make the right choices in life, to respect one’s fellow man and so forth, but that to do so man must accept God. Moreover, if you turn away from God or embrace evil, as the orcs did, you necessarily accept a loss of freedom. Thus, Spacks argues that our freedom to choose good is granted only if we accept religion, specifically Christianity (1969: 95).

Thus, once man has embraced God, he may enjoy ‘freedom of choice’. Is it possible, however, to reject evil while not accepting God? Tolkien does not allow the reader the luxury of such free choice: he permits only an ‘us or them’ option; Eru or Melkor? Elves or orcs? Gandalf or Saruman? and at the root of these dilemmas is the overriding one: God or the Devil? This explains why, for Spacks, the past, present, and future is framed by religion. ‘Freedom of choice’, then, is a conditional freedom in the *Rings*.

Moreover, it is difficult to see why doing moral good – which is a subjective concept in that a ‘good deed’ by one person may not be perceived as ‘good’ by another – is related to God’s grand design. If an individual, despite threats to his person, single-handedly apprehends a vicious human-trafficking gang, for example, he might be considered ‘good’, certainly courageous, but it could be argued that that does not necessarily mean he is closer to Heaven. Such a view, from the perspective of Marxism, implies that God – and not man – is the final adjudicator; as explained in the methodology chapter, this is to turn the world upside-down, since God, who man has created, raised, and worshipped, only expresses those qualities that man himself venerates, and esteems, and considers worthy.

Other examples of predestination include the plight of the elves: it is Eru’s will that they will ‘fade’, as noted previously. Eru also willed that men could shape their own life, ‘amid the powers of the world’ (1977: 41), but this ‘shaping’ is conditional on men recognising Eru’s rule. Men can use all that they find in

Middle-earth – subject to accepting Eru (1977: 45). Augustine likewise states that man's will is 'divinely aided' to behaviour righteously (1925: 38), but this gift is not unconditional: "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

Man creates an image and that same image expects that man is subservient to it. For Marxism, this is one of the more 'fantastic' aspects of religion. Having condemned men to 'no rest' in the world, Eru allows men the free choice to lead their own lives within the confines of what is permissible and what is not, though this does not extend to immortality, since men are 'doomed to die'; hence, elves call them guests (or strangers) (1977: 42).

The Valar determined that the Ring must remain in Middle-earth (I 348), and not be brought to the West. Gandalf explains to Frodo how Bilbo acquired the Ring from Gollum: 'Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker, Sauron. You were also meant to have it, and that is encouraging' (I 84). This is a further aspect of predetermination, but it is disappointing that Frodo never pursues the obvious: *who* meant Bilbo to find it, and what is the reasoning behind it? Instead, Frodo appears as a docile recipient of whatever Gandalf instructs him: Tolkien does not permit his protagonists to pull at the veil – let alone tear it down – between events on Middle-earth and those supernatural beings who direct events from the heavens.

Other examples of predestination include Bombadil's rescue of the hobbits: 'Chance brought me' he tells them, 'if you want to call it chance' (I 173-74); likewise, when Pippin is beheld in the palantír by Sauron he is saved by 'good fortune', though he cannot rely on it again (II 249). On the stairs of Cirith Ungol, Frodo and Sam believe they are part of a cosmic drama 'read from a book' (II 403), and part way up Mount Doom Sam feels a sense of urgency, which he does not understand, to get to the top: 'It was as if he had been called: 'Now, now, or it will be too late!' (III 264). In other words, Eru and the Valar, the supernatural in Tolkien's book, play a real role: they are a driving force.

The real test for Frodo and Sam takes place in Shelob's lair, and Gandalf's

heart almost fails when he discovers that the hobbits will encounter her (III 102). Shelob is gatekeeper to Mordor; unlike Sauron, who is a slave to Melkor, Shelob has no master and Tolkien shrouds her origins in mystery. How she came to be in Mordor the author does not say, but she was there before Sauron. She descends from Ungoliant, the primeval devourer of light (2006: 180), a tale which recalls ‘Völuspá’:

I remember giants
born early in time,
who long ago
had reared me.
(Dronke 1997: 7).

Shelob serves only herself, and everything that breathes is her food. Sam’s encounter with her is Tolkien at his most intense. She dwells ‘in filth and impenetrable darkness’ (II: 410): this is the pessimistic voice of the author, one fearful of the dark and the Devil. In ensnaring and half-killing him, Shelob teaches Frodo that *she* rules here: none can rival Shelob the Great (II: 418).

Sam, the humble gardener,¹³² too, in a reworking of the David and Goliath myth, sees his own death in Shelob’s eyes just before a ‘remote voice’ speaks to him (II 425) and he takes out the Phial of Galadriel. There follows what may be termed a Disney portrayal of Sam who hears elves crying (II 425), before he cries out in a language he did not know:

*A Elbereth Gilthoniel
o menel palan-diriel,
le nallon sí d’inguruthos!
A tiro nin, Fanuilos!*¹³³

132 Jesus was mistaken for a gardener in John (20:15). Tolkien is stressing the biblical message about not being deceived by appearances: the Ring is alluring, but deceitful; “*All that is gold does not glitter*” (I 232), says Strider. He is not a ‘ranger’ at all, but a future king: “the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (I Sam 16:7).

133 O Elbereth Starkindler
from heaven gazing-afar,
to thee I cry now in the shadow of death!
O watch over me, Everwhite!

His verse recalls the imprisoned Paul and Silas (Acts. 16:25-6) whose midnight chants forced open their prison doors. In Sam's case, the phial burns the darkness and Shelob, her eyes singed with 'intolerable light' (II 425), is beaten back. Tolkien does not explain whether Shelob lives on, but the suggestion is that she does, if only to plague the new age of man.

At the end of the quest, on Mount Doom, Frodo the 'chosen one' collapses before the power of the Ring and he claims it for himself: "I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!" (III 269). Tolkien needs Frodo to fail so that he can reveal that God's 'design' is involved in our lives:¹³⁴ Eru intervenes both to save Frodo and roast Gollum for the evil role he has played throughout the story: 'The Other Power, who is never absent and never named, then took over' (2006: 253). This recalls Job: "He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light" (33:28).

Gandalf had earlier prophesised that Gollum's fate is bound up with the destiny of the Ring. Bilbo's earlier pity towards Gollum would be decisive in determining the fate of many, including Frodo's (I 89). Then, offering Frodo a lesson in Christian mercy, he explains to Frodo that Gollum is old and wretched and a prisoner of the Wood-elves who treat him kindly. At the Crack of Doom, Gandalf's prophecy comes true. Tolkien states that Frodo was "an instrument of Providence" (2006: 326), and that the torment that Frodo had suffered was 'rewarded by the highest honour'. That is, the patience and pity that Frodo had shown Gollum throughout the quest¹³⁵ 'gained him Mercy' and his lapse on Mount Doom is 'redressed' at the end of the book (2006: 326).

Combining free will and predestination

134 Similarly, Gandalf seldom left the Shire 'unguarded' (I 233).

135 Frodo has Gollum spared at the 'forbidden pool' (II 368).

Like Ott, Tolkien considered free will and predestination a mystery (2006: 76); thus, he combines both sides of the paradox in his story. This is perhaps best expressed by Galadriel when she tells Frodo and Sam that they have chosen their path – an expression of free will – and now ‘the tides of fate are flowing’ (I 475), which suggests predetermination. Similarly, while peering into the Mirror of Galadriel, the Ringbearer sees images of those events still to occur, that is, he sees the predetermined future. When Sam looks into the mirror, he sees ‘devilry in the Shire’ (I 470) as noted in chapter I, and determines to return there. Galadriel, however, reminds him that not everything which the mirror shows has yet taken place; some things never take place, she explains, unless those that see them abandon their path to prevent them from happening (I 471). Here she underlines the role of free will.

Huttar (1975: 121) argues that when Frodo decides at the Council of Elrond to accept the burden of the quest, he is exercising ‘a real choice’. It is true that Elrond tells Frodo at the council that his choice is right if he decides ‘freely’ (I 354), yet he also declares that it has been ‘ordered’ that the council, and nobody else, must determine on the peril facing the world (I 317). And at the end of the council, when Frodo ‘volunteers’ to take the Ring, he does so “as if some other will was using his small voice” (I 354).

Light

Tolkien’s quest is the canvas on which he arranges his darks and lights as good and evil fight it out to the finish. The association of light with the divine is very common. In both Tolkien and the Bible light, ‘the sacramental dimension of symbol’ (Barth 2001: 142), symbolises ‘good’, and there is an overt reference in the *Rings* to John¹³⁶ when, in Lórien, Haldir takes Frodo to a high platform. From there, Frodo was able to see the two opposing powers striving against one another; but whereas the light can see into the very heart of the darkness,

136 “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (1:5).

the darkness cannot discover the secret of the light (I 456).

When they reach Mordor, Sam recalled how, in the house of Elrond, a light had seemed to shine faintly within Frodo as he rested, but now it was stronger than ever (II 324). On the other hand, evil Gollum hated the light because it pained him (I 83).

The Riders' black horses can see in the dark, while the Riders themselves perceive many signs and forms that are hidden from normal sight in the dark (I 255). Light also burned Shelob, and the orcs and trolls find it intolerable. On the other hand, the power of the One is affirmed by Frodo: 'in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach' (III 238). However, Tolkien's book is not limited to the simple light-dark dichotomy that pervades his text.

Good and Evil

If darkness cannot discover the secret of light, it is because evil cannot comprehend goodness. Titus (1:15) speaks of those who are defiled and unbelieving and for whom nothing is pure, because 'even their mind and conscience is defiled'. Likewise, Sauron cannot imagine that the West would want to cast him down, and *not* replace him, and it never enters his 'darkest dream' that the fellowship would try to destroy the Ring (II 122). It would be 'incompatible', Fuller states (1969: 28), with Sauron's nature not to believe that the West will keep the Ring for itself. Thus, Tolkien follows Augustine's idea that darkness feasts on good that has been 'perverted', since "nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so" (I 350).

In general, in the *Rings* each kind of being has a dark opposite: Ringwraiths of men, great orcs of elves, lesser orcs of dwarves, trolls of Ents, Gollum of hobbits, and the Nazgûl steeds of honest horses such as Shadowfax. Sauron, the Dark Lord, was himself once a Valar, who became corrupted by Melkor as

was noted above. Eru gave him the opportunity to repent, but Sauron felt too humiliated. Thus, he was guilty of pride, the great sin of Lucifer who confronted God as discussed in chapter IV; Sauron would later become the main protagonist of evil (2006: 190).

Christianity does not recognise other gods, or ‘prophets’, and the foremost of biblical commandments is to worship the one true Christian God; all other gods are pretenders. If you do not love the Christian God, He will set his face against you (Ezek. 6:5). Tolkien, then, does not ‘create’, or ‘sub-create’, this idea: he takes it from the Bible; thus, Sauron’s greatest ‘sin’ was that he challenged Eru (God) and his monopoly on ‘divine honour’, while ‘the Eldar and the Númenoreans believed in The One, the true God, and considered worship of others abominable’ (2006: 243).¹³⁷

‘Death’ of Gandalf

Shortly after departing from Rivendell, a snowstorm forces the fellowship into the Mines of Moria where they encounter the Balrog,¹³⁸ something monstrous in the darkness of the earth (III 438-9). On the bridge of Khazad-dûm, Gandalf confronts the pursuing demon in striking Christian imagery:

His enemy halted again, facing him, and the shadow about it reached out like two vast wings. It raised the whip, and the thongs whined and cracked. Fire came from its nostrils. But Gandalf stood firm. ‘You cannot pass’, he said. The orcs stood still, and a dead silence fell . . . ‘Go back to the Shadow! You cannot pass’ (I 429).

They struggle and both fall, passing through the flames and into the abyss (II

137 “There is only one ‘god’: God, Eru Ilúvatar” (2006: 205).

138 *The Book of Lost Tales* explains that Balrogs are “demons with whips of flame and claws of steel” (1992: 169).

128), a source for which we find in Daniel: “I beheld even till the beast was slain and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame” (7:11). Gandalf lands in deep, dark water that it was so cold it almost froze his heart (II 128). Cocytus, referred to in chapter II, is the ‘river of wailing’ in Greek mythology and, in Dante, whom some may consider the guardian of medieval Catholicism, the ninth and lowest circle of Hell “where numbing cold / Locks up Cocytus” (1908: 133). Dante explains that he continued trembling through an ‘eternal chillness’ to Hell (1908: 137). The river is a lake ‘locked’ by the cold, so we might link Gandalf’s reference to ‘passing through the fire’ to the casting of death and Hell “into the lake of fire” in Revelation (20:15).

The parallels continue: far below the deepest dwarf mines, Gandalf warns, live things without names (II 128). Compare here the ‘things that dwell under the earth’ in Philippians (2:10). There are similarities, too, in Christ’s descent to the underworld, though Jesus, at least in the early texts, only ever preaches in Hell and never engages with the Devil. The myth is known from at least the second century and is implied in Ephesians: “Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?” (4:9).

Catholicism takes its source material from the earliest records in which primitives visit not Hell, but Hades, through entrances in the ground to free loved ones from torment. As suggested earlier, divine heroes (or saints in Catholicism) later replace men as worship was transferred onto gods. In Christianity, there are records of visits to Hell and Purgatory that have been taken from pagan or Jewish sources. According to MacCullough (1930: 10), this borrowing is most marked in the description of the different divisions of Hades and in the frequent mention of the ‘narrow Bridge of the Dead’

In his *Dialogues*, Pope Gregory tells of a soldier on the point of death; his soul has seen a bridge over a filthy river, while on the other side there were pleasant flowery meadows (1911: 224-25). This inspired the Venerable Bede’s legends of Fursaeus and Drythelm, and influenced Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Tolkien may have derived the bridge of Khazad-dûm, to which he devotes a whole chapter, from such imagery. The bridge symbolises a crossroads: the godly pass over to

the sweet-smelling meadow – just as Frodo and company move on to Lothlórien – while the sinful fall into the stinking river.¹³⁹

Purgatory

For those who rejected medieval Catholicism, there was little mercy. Wright quotes an early fifteenth-century song in which a youth visits his father who had deserted his wife for the love of other women, in purgatory. The youth relates the torment he saw there, how ‘sowlis [souls] were in gret payning [great pain]’ and how he saw his ‘fader [father] brent [burnt]’ (1844: 85). This is a Catholic slant on biblical interpretation where the Devil is considered Lord of the Underworld, unlike earlier religious texts where he is the ‘prince of the air’ (Eph. 2:2) and, in II Corinthians, the ‘god of this world’ (4:4).¹⁴⁰

For lay people, the dead lingered in a state of ‘amortality’, occasionally returning to settle old scores, which is the source of the belief in ghosts (Vauchez 1993: 86). This prompted dancing in cemeteries to drive the dead back from whence they came. Here, as ever, Church policy is moulded not by God, but by social events: it was religious decision-makers who concocted the idea of purgatory (it is never mentioned in the Bible) and a special mass to shorten the time the dead spent in atonement. These stories were aimed at both culling the traditional beliefs of local populations, and driving them into the arms of the Church.

‘Resurrection’ of Gandalf

Gandalf survives his clash with the Balrog and is resurrected: he made the

139 Gandalf’s ‘death’ pushes Aragorn to the fore: he needs to prove he is worthy of kingship. The bridge therefore, symbolises the transition of power from the wizard to the future king.

140 The opening lines of Job suggest the Devil is on personal terms with God, but subject to Him.

ultimate sacrifice himself and returned enhanced (2006: 202), reborn in glory for the great confrontation with Sauron that lay ahead. In Revelation, the final book of the Bible which tells of the Apocalypse, we read of the Son of Man whose head and hair were as white as snow and his eyes are described as a flame of fire (1:14). In the *Rings*, the resurrected Gandalf is described as having hair as ‘white as snow in the sunshine’ and the eyes under his deep brows were ‘as piercing as the rays of the sun’ (II 119).

In *Mythlore*, Abbot sympathises with this weary old man pitted against a ‘larger, ageless adversary’ (1989: 25). This seems to be a one-sided view, since Gandalf was an eternal spirit who adopted a visible physical form (2006: 332). He is one of the Istari, a wizard of great power and wisdom, sent to challenge Sauron, and at the Battle of Helm’s Deep, he drove the enemy to madness (II 181).

The Istari could be ‘tempted’, as Saruman was, but Gandalf alone passes the ‘tests’: he was locked up on the highest platform of the tall tower in Orthanc, a feat which recalls that of Symeon who spent 40 years on the top of columns, depicted in the fifth- or sixth-century relief at Qal’at Sim’ān in northern Syria. No suffering was too great. Gandalf is fully aware of the power of the underworld; thus, when confronted by the Balrog, he instructs the rest of the party to flee: ‘This foe is beyond you all’ (I 429). This may suggest Tolkien’s own fears of the underworld speaking through Gandalf.¹⁴¹ It is a fear that is underlined by the resurrected Gandalf when he reassures Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas of his own, rejuvenated power: Gandalf the White, he explains of himself, is more dangerous than anything any of them will ever meet – ‘unless you are brought alive before the Dark Lord’ (II 125).¹⁴²

141 It is a fear reinforced even by Gollum who reminds Frodo about the Dark Lord: “He’ll eat us all, if He gets it [the Ring], eat all the world” (II 304).

142 There is some biblical ‘justification’ for Tolkien’s fear: the Devil is portrayed as almighty in the Bible, not least because he has “the power of death” (Heb. 2:14).

Gandalf's resurrection stipulates the continued need for him to guide events on Middle-earth and, upon his return, he momentarily forgets his real (Middle-earth) name when he meets Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas in Fangorn forest. The *Rómenna Meeting Report* compares this episode to the biblical story of Christ on the road to Emmaus, where three of the disciples met the risen Jesus and did not recognise him until he chose to reveal himself (22nd September 1985: 1).

Tolkien is not suggesting that Gandalf is Jesus; rather, he is pointing to what may be possible if only readers *believe*. Let us recall that Tolkien dismissed Coleridge's need to 'suspend disbelief': in a successful story, the reader 'enters' it believing it to be 'true'.

Tolkien may link his story of resurrection, that of life arising from death, to the Gospels, but it would be more correct to see its origins in those same pre-Christian beliefs for which he had so little regard. It has its roots in primitive agricultural societies which understood that nature is cyclic. The Incas, for instance, believed that their god, the sun Inti, was reborn daily, descending below the horizon before emerging again the following morning: it is a story of rebirth.

Mordor

Apart from the Mines of Moria, there are other associations with Hell. Mordor is not simply a war-torn geography corresponding to Tolkien's recollections of the Somme; nor is its description as 'furnace of great power' simply a negative statement concerning technological advance. It is an altogether evil place: Baradûr, the Dark Tower of Sauron inside Mordor was immeasurable in its strength, pitiless, and proud (II 199).

Its name, *Mordor*, means murder in Anglo-Saxon (Nitzsche 1979: 29), or 'Torment' or 'Mortal Sin'. Unlike, say, Bree, the name itself is strange to an English ear and Tolkien cultivates this to foster a fear of the unknown: he concatenates low and back vowels such as 'a' and 'u' and plosive and sibilant

consonants (s, z, g, k, p, b) to alienate the reader from Mordor. He does the same with orc-speech, which was cited in chapter III: ‘Uglúk u bagronk sha pushdug Saruman-glob búbhosh skai’ (II 53) sounds ugly to listen to. As Rossi points out, there is not an agreeable sound in the entire sentence: it is a world that resists any knowledge we may want to have of it (1984: 129).

Houses of Healing

There is a Celtic gloss to the ‘Houses of Healing’ scene in *Return of the King* with its references to the herb-master and old folk who use herbs for headaches; likewise, the appearance of Aragorn wrapped in the grey cloak of Lórien above his mail, and bearing the green stone of Galadriel before announcing that he is *Elessar*, the Elfstone (III 164). In addition, he asks for *athelas*, a healing plant which the Men of the West brought to Middle-earth (I 265).

However, Loreth, the wise-woman of Gondor, announces in distinctly biblical tones that the rightful king will be known by his hands, which are the hands of a healer (III 164). The manner, too, of Aragorn’s entrance is in the same vein: he steps into the light and Loreth announces that the rightful king ‘has come’ (III 164).

In the Houses of Healing, Aragorn cures Faramir. He held his hand on the sick man’s brow and called his name, each time more faintly as if he were walking in a ‘dark vale’, calling for someone who was lost (III 167). This seems to be taken from Psalms (23:4): “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me”.

Faramir recovers and, with the sense of duty epitomised by Sir Gawain (chapter IV), Aragorn determines that he must leave because others need him (III 168). He attends the ‘dead’ Éowyn in a scene reminiscent of ‘Snow White’ – Tolkien describes her as a ‘fair maiden’ (again that patriarchal tone noted in chapter IV)

and ‘white as a lily’. At that moment, a clean, young, fresh wind blows through the window from snowy mountains under a starry sky (III 171). Some readers have pointed to divine intervention here, since the wind suggests the ‘agency of Manwë’ (Scull and Hammond 2008: 582), chief of the Valar, who directs the wind. Aragorn brushed the sap from two leaves of *athelas* on Éowyn’s brow (III 170)¹⁴³ and, upon kissing her, she opens her eyes (III 169-71).

Important here is not so much *athelas*, as the spirit of he who uses them: “less lore and more wisdom” (III 167), Gandalf tells Aragorn. In short, Aragorn can heal because he is not a real man, but a king descended from immortal Lúthien (2006: 200) whose father was an elf, too, while her mother was akin to Tolkien’s angels, the Valar (Hammond and Scull 2008: 173). Again, there is a biblical parallel in that Jesus was a healer. Matthew relates that when Jesus entered Peter’s house, he saw that his wife’s mother had a fever. Jesus touched her hand, the fever departed, and she sat up (8:14-15). Acts, similarly, speaks of Jesus as he who went around healing those who were oppressed by the Devil, because God was with him (10:38).

Paths of the Dead

According to MacCullough, Christ went to the underworld ‘to enlighten the dead, or to release them’ (1930: 13),¹⁴⁴ and this appears to be the motive for Tolkien’s use of the same theme. Aragorn summons the dead at the Black Stone of Erech to join him, just as Jesus preached to the spirits in prison (I Pet. 3:19).

There is nothing in the New Testament to substantiate the view that Christ

143 Psalms (23:5): “thou anointest my head with oil”.

144 The editors of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiæ*, which has received the ‘official appointment’ of the Church as ‘the framework for Catholic studies in systematic theology’ (1963: xi), reject Augustine’s view that Christ descended to preach to those men punished by the flood: ‘Whatever Augustine had in mind...his position has been abandoned completely’ (1963: 213).

descended to Hell to wrest the souls the Devil held captive (Aquinas 1963: 213). Indeed, Aquinas states that Christ did not descend to Hell to save men – he had done that on Calvary – or to empty it of its prisoners: he descended in spirit (1963: 155) to ‘redeem the just’ (1963: 214). Aragorn, likewise, reveals those Christian qualities of justice and forgiveness when he promises the spirits that, when the land is cleansed of Sauron, they will forever have peace and depart (III 69).

The Bible appears to borrow from the Greek Hades in which no life was permitted to enter and from which none ever returned: dead sinners are roasted in burning heat, and the young man, the virgin, the baby, and the grey-haired destroyed (Deut. 32:24). Thus, when Aragorn declares to her that he is to ride by the Paths of the Dead, a tormented Éowyn warns him that the dead will not permit the living to pass through (III 61). On the other hand, in Revelation, Christ states that he has the keys to hell and death (1:18). It appears that Aragorn, too, has the ‘keys’ so that the dead “might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit” (I Pet. 4:6), since the dead followed him (III 70).

Tolkien’s Eden

With Gandalf locked in combat with the Balrog demon, the rest of the company makes its way through secret passages in Moria to paradisiacal Lothlórien, where time did not fade or change (I 455). Thus, unlike Genesis, which has a certain chronology, Tolkien’s Eden is ahistorical.¹⁴⁵ When his blindfold is removed in Lothlórien, Frodo has to catch his breath: “there was no stain” (I 454-55). It is unstained because man does not dwell here. For Tolkien, man is Midas in reverse: everything he touches turns to dirt. This is the author’s idealised Eden before the ‘Fall’, before ‘stained’ man.

145 “I can’t count days in Rivendell” (I 357), says Bilbo.

Frodo felt that he had crossed a bridge into a vanished world (I 453), and while the rest of the company cast themselves on the ground before Eru's created nature, Frodo stood there lost in marvel. A light shone on this world and Frodo did not have the language to describe its beauty (I 455). There was no blemish or sickness or deformity, and Frodo could make out shapes that became clearer as if for the first time he perceived them and made new and wonderful names for them (I 455). Thus, he feels like Adam who names the animals: "and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name" (Gen. 2:19). Thus, Tolkien borrows the authority of Genesis to legitimise his own tale.

Some readers, perhaps, will find this idyll charming; Tolkien adherents may discover 'sub-creation' here; others may weigh-up the author's debt to a mystic Eden. Though there are more antique parallels in Theocritus as indicated in chapter II, this longing for a rural, non-existent past arguably represents a yearning that seems to affirm the inability of man to shape his own future.

The methodology chapter indicated the common threads that link early mysticism and Christianity (it might be termed 'late mysticism'). It appears again here as the same 'longing for Paradise' (Eliade 1960: 71), with Sam revealing that he felt as if her were inside a song (I 455). Tolkien here reiterates the desire of archaic societies to 'return to the past', in order to 'wash away' the sins inherited by 'fallen' man, and feel at one with God's Creation' (Eliade 1960: 48).

Chapter II refers to Tolkien's 'opening the door a little on fantasy and passing through it' (1988: 32), and this is a further example: he wishes to entice the reader through the door of Eden-Lothlórien by depicting nature blissfully as his painter Niggle does. Frodo perceives the 'shapes' in Tolkien's Eden and Niggle, too, tries to "catch its shape, and its sheen" (1988: 75). Once the reader also captures those shapes of 'true myth', he will believe it (1988: 36-7).

Furthermore, in Lothlórien, Galadriel holds each of the company with her eyes and looks at each one in turn. Sam's face reddens and he bows his head (I 463). Asked shortly afterwards by Pippin if he had a guilty conscience, Sam

replied that he felt naked under her stare (I 464), before wondering if Galadriel had been tempting him away from the quest and back to the Shire with his own little garden (I 464). This last utterance is interesting not only due to the 'refuge' which the garden had in Great War memoir noted in chapter I, but it also recalls the temptation scene in Eden. In Genesis, Adam tells God that he heard His voice in the garden and that he was afraid because he was naked, and he hid himself (3.10). Unlike Adam, Sam does not succumb to temptation – he has a loyalty to his master, Frodo – but the biblical theme, of an angelic spirit in Galadriel, temptation, the garden, and nakedness seems to be at play here.

'Divine' Nature

Fairy-stories often feature talking beasts and birds, and Tolkien argues that this expresses one of man's 'primal' desires: the urge to 'hold communion' with other living beings (1988: 19). This desire features in the *Rings* – Gandalf has a bond with Shadowfax and Gwaihir the Windlord – just as in the Bible God loves all animals: on the fourth day, He created everything that moves, swims, flies, and creeps upon the earth. God was pleased (Gen. 1:19-24) and spoke of the 'covenant' between Himself and every living creature on earth (Gen. 9:16).

This desire for friendship with animals and for an understanding of their languages symbolises a universal paradise myth which goes beyond fairy-tale and Christianity. Eliade argues that the shaman is 'taken out' of the condition of 'fallen' man by the 'vital experience' of his friendship with animals, thus enabling him to enter the '*illud tempus*' or mythical time of the paradise myths (1960: 63).

Noel claims that 'Tolkien loved the natural world intensely' (1977: 46), and in chapter I mention was made of the delight he took in watching the young bullfinches in his own garden. However, in his book, he allies his creatures and beings to religious purposes. Treebeard speaks of the "Great Darkness" (II 84), and of Saruman having "evil ways"; 'evil' Old Man Willow attempts to drown Frodo, while the 'good' eagle, Gwaihir the Windlord, rescued Gandalf from the pinnacle of Orthanc (I 342) after his imprisonment.

This thesis suggests that nature does not require divine assistance to enhance its beauty or strength, but Tolkien confers morality on nature in his book and he has a precedent for this in Revelation where it is said that creatures, on the earth, under it, and in the sea, praise the honour, glory, and power of the Lamb (5:13).

Bombadil, who cannot be tempted by the Ring, draws his power from the earth itself. Elves, too, are close to nature, and Legolas understands the language of trees. On the other hand, as Frodo and Sam push towards Mordor, nature, contaminated by evil, is barren.

Temptation

The chief source of temptation is the Ring itself: on Weathertop, Frodo was overcome by a desire to put on the Ring. He struggled with himself, as noted in chapter III: he thought of nothing else and longed to surrender (I 261-62). It is ironic, too, that on Mount Doom, just when Frodo believes he has possession of the Ring, the Ring possesses *him*, bending his will to its own.

The Ring has many powers, allowing its wearer to become invisible and it extends longevity as in the case of Gollum and Bilbo: having given it up, Bilbo has clearly aged when he meets Frodo again at Rivendell before the Council of Elrond. The Ring is the 'forbidden fruit', the 'One Ring to rule them all', just as the serpent charmed Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge offering her the possibility of 'ruling them all': "ye shall be as gods" (Gen 3:5). Gandalf and Galadriel would become dangerous if they were ever tempted to use it for their own purposes. It is a double-edged sword that enslaves and destroys those who possess it; yet it is also an object of power and desire, and each principal character is tempted in proportion to his strength and according to his role. Thus, the Ring dominated not only the 'little people', such as Sméagol/Gollum or Boromir, but could tempt the minds of the 'great', filling them with delusions of power. If *they* had accepted the Ring, they would have become other Saurons,

ving for power: the great elves, such as Elrond and Galadriel, would have simply emulated the thirst for power in the way that Sauron does (2006: 332).

Isildur, Gollum, the Nazgûl, Boromir, and Saruman all fall to the temptation of power that the Ring offers. Even Sam, with the Ring hanging by its chain around his neck and otherwise protected by his 'humility' as Donnelly argues above, envisions himself as the strong hero of his time, holding aloft his flaming sword in the darkness (III 210).¹⁴⁶ Isildur and Boromir have good intentions and aim to use the Ring for good purposes, but they become helpless victims to its corruption, and they perish.¹⁴⁷ If a character does not adhere to Tolkien's own values, he is not simply left to fall by the wayside: he is punished forthwith and written out of the script. On the other hand, Faramir, as with Sir Gawain in chapter IV, rejects worldly values, or personal glory, in favour of 'higher', spiritual concerns. He claims that he would not take the Ring if it were lying in the road, not even if Minas Tirith was falling into ruin and only he could save it. He refuses the Ring because he understands that it would only glorify darkness (II 348-49), and at the end he is rewarded with the hand of Éowyn in marriage. Ultimately, Frodo is Tolkien's hero because his Christian stature increases as the challenges before him intensify: 'there is a rise in the specific Christian virtues that he embraces' (Spacks 1959: 37).¹⁴⁸

With divine assistance, Frodo manages the hurdles the author places before him. Since he left the Shire, he has had some 'schooling', remarks Sam (I 524). Frodo comes to understand the value of the gifts bestowed on him, such as the mithril coat and Sting, by those who represent godliness. He becomes aware of Gollum, and of his own responsibility in accomplishing his task, and following his experience with Boromir and the visions on Amon Hen when he confronts the 'Eye' of Mordor, he decides to go it alone: 'I will do what I have to do' (I 522).

146 The Lord sent man forth from Eden and he placed at the east of the garden "a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24).

147 The Ring is called Isildur's Bane, because "he was betrayed by it to his death" (I 319).

148 Tolkien refers to the "spiritual enlargement" (2006: 331) of his protagonists.

After the quest, he thanks Sam for being with him until the end (III 271) and, finally, he gives up his beloved Shire and it is this sacrifice specifically that makes him a Christian figure of heroic magnitude.

The role that the Ring plays recalls, too, the Devil's temptation of Jesus in Matthew, and Aragorn, notably, resists it. Aragorn is not meant to be Christ any more than Gandalf is, and Tolkien is probably sincere when he states, "The Incarnation of God [Jesus] is an infinitely greater thing than anything I would dare to write" (2006: 237). Rather, Aragorn exists to suggest Christ-like qualities.

Hope

Pessimism pervades the world of man in Tolkien's tale; after all, he is 'fallen'. On his way to visit Théoden, King of the Mark, in his golden hall Aragorn chants softly of the deeds of men who "have passed like rain on the mountain, like a wind in the meadow". It is a song, as Legolas remarks, that carries with it the sorrow of mortal man (II 136). Tolkien continues this theme in his description of Théoden himself, who is so bent with age that he is 'like a dwarf' (II 142). The king lives under the weight of Wormtongue's¹⁴⁹ deception, unwilling to challenge Sauron, because he has lost hope.

In contrast, Tolkien's 'eucatastrophe', or divine hope, opens the door to joy. Of *The Hobbit*, Tolkien wrote that he suddenly felt 'eucatastrophic' when Bilbo exclaimed: "The Eagles! The Eagles are coming!" (2006: 101), recalling God's reminder to Moses: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself" (Exod. 19:3-4).

Before the company takes its leave of Lothlórien, Celeborn and Galadriel offer

149 His name evokes imagery of the serpent's 'subtle' seduction of Eve in Eden (Gen. 3:1).

the travellers seven gifts – perhaps corresponding to the seven sacraments:¹⁵⁰ Aragorn receives a sheath, Boromir a belt of gold, Merry and Pippin small silver belts, Legolas a bow, Sam a box of ‘holy’ earth for his garden, three of her own golden strands for Gimli, and a crystal phial for Frodo in which “is caught the light of Eärendil’s star” (I 489), and with which Shelob would later be overcome. They eat a final supper together where the mystical *lembas*, or elvish bread, is shared, and they all drink from a “cup of farewell” (I 486)¹⁵¹ in a scene comparable to the Last Supper.

For Tolkien, man’s world is characterised by deceit, sadness, pride, and greed. When man abandons hope, he invites despair as epitomised by Denethor’s suicide. On the other hand, when man links his fate to the angelic world, hope is in abundance. Hope, indeed, is one of the three divine virtues,¹⁵² divine because God implanted it in the human soul: the Christian mission is to present Jesus as he presented himself: ‘as Saviour and Hope’ (Häring 1971: 21).

This ‘divine hope’, is sewn into the fabric of the *Rings*. In Rivendell, before the company sets off on its perilous quest, Gandalf, agent of God on Middle-earth, tells the council that despair is only for those who accept defeat: “We do not” (I 352). Similarly, Galadriel tells the company in Lothlórien that if the company remains true to the quest – ‘true’ here means demonstrating loyalty to Christian values – there is still hope (I 463). And Aragorn’s childhood name was Estel, ‘hope’ in Sindarin.

Pity

150 That is, baptism, confirmation, Holy Eucharist, penance, holy orders, matrimony and extreme unction.

151 “And he [Jesus] took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves” (Luke. 22:17).

152 Faith and charity are the other two: I Corinthians (3:13).

At Isengard, Gandalf bemoans that what was so good in Orthanc, now rots (II 237), yet he is merciful to Saruman, despite the latter's treachery. Similarly, earlier in the book Frodo tells Gandalf that it is a pity that Bilbo did not stab Gollum, that 'vile creature', when he had the opportunity. Bilbo's sympathy for Gollum in *The Hobbit* gave him a certain immunity from the adverse affects of the Ring when he possessed it, but Frodo insists that Bilbo ought to have avenged Gollum because he hated Bilbo and cursed his name (I 86).¹⁵³ Gandalf, however, replies to Frodo that it was pity that held back Bilbo's hand. Gandalf further elaborates that perhaps Gollum does deserve death for his treachery, but so do others. On the other hand, there are those who die, yet they deserve life. "Can you give it to them?" Gandalf asks. "Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement" (I 89). Afterwards, Frodo shows consistent pity towards Gollum even though Gollum often attempts to betray him, and this pity enables Gollum to play the decisive role he does at the end. Gandalf's point is that it is not 'our' role to exact revenge and, again, this 'revenge-mercy' duality is a major biblical topic:

Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.
Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst,
give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of
fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome
evil with good (Rom. 12:19-21).

An example of this 'heaping of coals' is shown clearly at the end of the book when Frodo, now raised considerably in Christian status, shows compassion towards Saruman, even though the old wizard has just tried to stab him. Saruman's blade snapped on Frodo's mail-coat and a dozen hobbits fling the wizard to the ground. Frodo instructs Sam not to kill him, before Saruman rises to his feet with respect and hatred. 'You have grown, Halfling' says Saruman, and accuses Frodo of being both wise and cruel because the hobbit has robbed him of sweet revenge: "now I must go hence in bitterness, in debt to your mercy. I hate it and you!" (III 364).

153 In *The Hobbit*, 'pity' prevented Bilbo from killing Gollum (I 32).

After achieving victory, both Théoden and Aragorn pardon men who had fought against them (the Dunlendings, Easterlings, Haradrim) and make peace. At the end of the book, Gandalf, Théoden, and Aragorn do not wish to kill Gríma (Wormtongue), despite his betrayal of Rohan, in the hope that he may turn away from Saruman. In the same way, Frodo tells Sam that it is pointless to 'meet revenge with revenge', because it does not achieve anything (III 363). This is taken from the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus contrasts the Old Testament teaching of an 'eye for an eye' in favour of forgiveness: "whosoever shall smite you on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt. 6:38-39).

There are further references to the author's religious values. In the chapter *The Pyre of Denethor*, Gandalf tells Denethor that he is not permitted to order his own death: only despairing 'heathens' took their own lives (III 152). It is 'not permitted', because in biblical terms the decision on when to die is God's and God's alone. Suicide rejects the possibility of salvation through Christ and is the work of 'the thief' (the Devil) who comes only 'to steal, kill, and destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly' (John 10:10).

Finally, on the brink of achieving their quest, Sam carries an exhausted Frodo, overburdened by the Ring, to Mount Doom just as Simon, the Cyrenian, bears the cross of Jesus to Golgotha (Mark. 15:21-22). At the end of the quest, with Frodo saved and the Ring and Gollum cast into the pit, Sam falls onto his knees and, in "all that ruin of the world for the moment he felt only joy, great joy. The burden was gone" (III 271). This represents Tolkien's eucatastrophe which, as noted in chapter III, offers that glimpse of Christian joy that denies 'final universal defeat' (1988: 62).

Conclusion

The *Rings* is a colourful, swashbuckling adventure that features lords and

ladies, courtly romance, wizards, elves, songs, and battles between the forces of Gandalf the White and the vast armies of the Dark Lord, Sauron. Tolkien's fantasy is a journey, led by Frodo the Ringbearer, to Mordor, fortress of Sauron himself, where he is to dispose of the One Ring in the Doom of Fire. During the quest, he and his faithful servant, Sam, encounter the murderous Gollum who is bent on possessing the Ring, his 'precious', for himself, and lustful Shelob, a giant spider-like creature who has no rival on Middle-earth.

Generations of younger readers, especially, have been thrilled by the book's action scenes, characteristic of the classic European fairy-tale, such as Gandalf's rescue from Orthanc by the great eagle, Gwaihir the Windlord. Other episodes are enthralling, too, such as the Ent scenes, and the Battle of Minas Tirith. Consequently, Tolkien has become something of a cult figure for his fantasy works, and both *The Hobbit* and the *Rings* are huge bestsellers, while large-scale films and computer games have earned millions of pounds in sales. In the academic world, Tolkien's contribution to medieval languages and literature are widely respected.

Religious themes

However, Tolkien's story is not simply a 'medieval' adventure that combines elements of the classic European fairy-tale with its colour and sharply delineated characters. This thesis submits that the text of the *Rings* is interwoven with the author's own religious views, which are based on his specifically Roman Catholic outlook. This can be gleaned, too, from a consideration of his non-fictional, academic works such as those on *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

The *Rings* is set in a fanciful pre-Christian world, yet the themes it discusses – such as resurrection, mercy, forgiveness, and faith – are consistent with those found in Christianity. The thesis has revealed some of the parallels between the fantasy epic and its biblical sources. Middle-earth is presided over by the Valar, or 'holy angels', which Eru, the One, created 'out of nothing' – a notion

consistent with the Augustinian teaching of the Christian story of creation.

Against these supernatural powers stands another, Sauron the Dark Lord and emissary of Melkor (whose name the elves, the 'teachers of men', are too frightened to even utter). Melkor is a Lucifer figure who challenged Eru for dominance in *The Silmarillion*, a fantasy that the author began during the First World War, and which provides the mythological background to the *Rings*.

Tolkien sees evil as recurring, regardless of the fate of Sauron on Middle-earth, and this is consistent with the pessimism of Roman Catholicism which considers man as corrupt, or 'fallen'. Such a view explains references in the *Rings* to the 'little life of Men' which is only a 'passing tale' in the wider universe of far greater cosmic powers.

For Tolkien, God, or Eru, is almighty; man weak. It is a view that denies that we live in a society created by historic human activity. From the point of view of Marxism, this thesis argues to the contrary, that man, not God, makes his own history by calculating out of reasoning. As such, it challenges Tolkien's supposition that the supernatural has a direct input in the affairs of man: it is wholly irrational to trust to an unproven and unscientific providence. Nobody with a rational understanding of society could possibly confer a role for the supernatural in man's affairs: gods do nothing. This is not to say that religion is unimportant, or a spent force; far from it; but its own development reflects that of man's society. Religion, therefore, is not eternal, but historical and transient.

The thesis further considers that Tolkien addresses an important question in Catholicism: is man's fate determined by a 'greater power'? That is to say, has God foreordained every event throughout eternity, including the final salvation of mankind (the doctrine of predestination, or preordination)? Or does man possess free will, allowed by the 'grace' of God, to make his own decisions? In discussing this issue, the thesis refers to relevant passages in Tolkien's book, in addition to citing theological contributions on the subject made by the 'Church Fathers'.

Furthermore, in his medieval work and his letters, Tolkien, on the one hand, describes the heathen religion as 'hopeless', unlike his own; and on the other, he offers the Blessed Sacrament, Marian dogma, and papal infallibility as the greatest things to love on earth. Thus, not for the first time in religion, this thesis argues, do we come across 'prophets' such as Tolkien, who offer fanciful solutions to man's condition while denouncing their forebears.

One difficulty for this research is that Tolkien's 'message' in the *Rings* is fairly subtle, and a sensitive reading of his text is required. Indeed, it has been necessary to draw upon other sources, such as his *Letters* and bibliography, to help see his religious 'message' as an overall picture. Tolkien is deliberately subtle in the *Rings*, because he understood that offering readers a blatant Catholic 'message' was inconsistent with an increasingly rational, scientific world that has undermined religious tradition. Future research would benefit if Tolkien's private papers in the Bodleian Library were made available.

Social division

A further contribution of the thesis is its examination of Tolkien's defence of class division on Middle-earth. As with his eighteenth-century predecessor, the Catholic reactionary landlord, Burke, Tolkien saw class structure as natural and blessed by God – a notion of which this thesis is critical. Middle-earth is structured hierarchically with its lords on the one hand, and foot soldiers on the other. There are social divisions, too, between the more important hobbits, such as Bilbo and Frodo who own immense wealth, and the lesser hobbits. These latter constantly frequent pubs and engage in gossip about local trivia, while their 'betters' pronounce on the 'peril of the world'.

Other beings, too, are divided: the elves, for example. There are the cultured higher elves, who speak Quenya (based on Finnish but used in ceremony, song, and important matters 'as with Latin'), while the lower elves speak Sindarin, or Grey-elven, which has Welsh roots. Tolkien maintains that linguistics was a primary concern when writing the *Rings*, but he moulds that

interest to his ideology, with the book's aristocrats speaking in lofty, sombre tones, while his lower characters use rustic speech.

Moreover, this hierarchy is never challenged. On the contrary, there is unity against Mordor. What is evil in the *Rings* is Sauron, and not the fact that the ordinary men of Gondor, and the hobbits of the Shire, simply accept as 'given' their role as breadwinners and tillers of the land, while a tiny minority – including Théoden, Denethor, Arwen, and Aragorn – enjoy elite privileges.

Medievalism

In both the *Rings* and his more factual work, Tolkien idealises this nobility. He uses an archaic and patriarchal style to praise saintly Aragorn as 'a young lord tall and fair', one who resists sin and evil and who declares that he serves no man. Similarly, in the fourteenth-century *Sir Gawain*, Tolkien sees the Christian knight as a 'real man', one 'representative' of his age, because he upholds Christian virtue. Both Aragorn and Gawain reject 'worldly values': Aragorn is never tempted by the Ring, while Gawain resists the passion of his hostess.

Unfortunately, Tolkien never reveals to the reader the basis of their noble rule: the exploitation of the peasant. However, this thesis has attempted to lift the veil on the apparent Christian virtue of the medieval age. The amount of drunken, pregnant nuns, those they seduced and those who seduced them – with the Bible itself as their model – at least partly undermines any claim to chastity and Christian honour. Gawain is a parody of the Christian knight, someone who contemporary religious figures denounced as abusive of peasant labour and one too keen with his sword.

In his medieval work, Tolkien does not consider the status of the peasant, his legal bondage, nor how he attacked churches and monasteries, those symbols of abuse during the same century to which Tolkien refers. That is, in focusing on the high-born Gawain, Tolkien filters the material bequeathed us by the Middle Ages to suit his own purposes.

Tolkien defends his escape into archaism, preferring the medieval weapons that his favoured characters use, such as the bows and arrows of the elves and Frodo's sword, Sting. He contrasts these to the 'progressive' bombs and machine-guns of the modern era. Marxism, too, condemns war, such as the Great War, during which millions perished under the tank, trench gas, and other 'advances' in technology. At the same time, this thesis argues that there was nothing 'romantic' in medieval technology, of which the One Hundred Years War provides ample evidence. Moreover, he defends the 'honourable priests' of the medieval period, a myth that this thesis goes to some lengths to undermine: many broke their vows of chastity, and were fraudulent during an age when the Church was openly corrupt. On a related theme, the thesis further explores how the Seven Sins, the subject of medieval writers such as Langland and Gower, may be applied to the *Rings*. These include the envy of elves, the wrath of the orcs, and the gluttony of hobbits.

It is clear from Tolkien's early poetry onwards that he yearns for a long lost past – which can never be reclaimed – while rejecting what many would consider to be advances in modern life: the hydrofoil, the motor car, 'democracy', modern marriage ceremonies, fashionable music, and so forth. This pessimism appears to have been shaped by his rigorous Catholic upbringing, but it was aided, too, this thesis suggests, by the passing of many traditional values to which he clung. In the *Rings*, these values are symbolised by the gift-offering hobbits and the seclusion of the Shire, which are threatened by dark, vicious orcs, bred in the foundry of desolate Mordor. Tolkien aspires to persuade the reader to embrace a pastoral, Christian, hereditary order, and to reject technology. Tolkien wished to escape the growing complexity of his own society, one marred by the slaughter of the Great War, intense class conflict, and a waning of religion.

There is another issue here: Tolkien opposes 'industrialism' and he attempted to identify with the Pre-Raphaelites in view of their rejection of machinery. Both considered that machinery produced 'worse labour', and both looked to the colour and figures and legends of medievalism for artistic inspiration. But there the similarity ends. The Pre-Raphaelites expressed their contempt for industrial

capitalism and its oppressive machinery because it 'tyrannised' the worker – this sort of socialist language is wholly alien to Tolkien. He opposes machines – his hobbits did not understand them - because he sees them as countering God's created nature: 'the aeroplane cheats the bird'.

Fundamentally, he appears to reject the science behind technology because it challenges the irrational and fatalism, and threatens to supplant God as the director of man's destiny: when man thinks rationally for himself, without God, he compromises religion.

Sources and the creative imagination

Tolkien quarries the material for his book from the real world of man – what he calls the 'Primary World'. He could have written a romance, or narrative verse, about the psychological effects of trench warfare as some of his contemporaries did, which this thesis has noted. Instead, he chose to express his own experience of war through myth. This is not surprising, since the poetry he wrote shortly after enlisting, such as 'Kortirion among the Trees', speaks of 'Fairy Realms' and elves 'holy and immortal'.

However, the direct, ugly experience of World War One that he brings to the *Rings* is remarkably realistic. On the approach to Mordor, across the marshes, we read of the stench, freezing mud, hunger, and floating corpses of trench warfare. Other sources are borrowed from literature: including MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin*, Dante, Shakespeare, the pre-Raphaelite William Morris, and Norse mythology. Elrond's speech to the council, during which he displays his vast memory of previous ages, is reminiscent of that of the sibyl in the epic 'Völuspá'. The end of the *Rings*, when the Third Age is replaced by the new, Fourth Age, recalls Norse mythology following the battles of gods and giants.

In 'On Fairy-Stories', Tolkien echoes the Romantic poet and thinker, Coleridge: 'the artist makes a contribution to God's creative work' since man's creative

imagination is 'a gift from God'. This might appear, at first glance, to contradict his earlier claim that to be a 'real maker', the artist has to 'partake of reality'. However, for Tolkien God *is* part of this Primary World and there are numerous examples of this in the *Rings*: in Shelob's 'many-windowed eyes', Sam sees his own death before a 'remote voice' spoke to him. There is also Bombadil's 'chance' rescue of the hobbits. Tolkien's point here is Augustinian: 'believe that God is always with you, as a very real part of this life, and you will understand'.

Marxism, on the other hand, as Luria's research indicates, proposes that such a divine input is unrealistic. Man's imagination is shaped by his own social and historical conditions: the gifted Brontë sisters, to take an example, could not have conceived of the internet, or keyhole surgery, or Mars probes. Thus, artists are products, and producers, of their age.

The *Rings*: a happy ending?

Critics have long debated the conclusion of the *Rings*, and it is tempting to see a pessimistic ending to Tolkien's book: Frodo and Gandalf depart, soon to be followed by the elves. Aragorn and Arwen will die, while Boromir and Théoden are both already dead. Earlier, Strider had anticipated the end of the *Rings* with his sad story of Tinúviel, 'sad as all stories of men'.

This thesis has compared and contrasted Tolkien's story with classic European fairy-tales, and noted that one major difference between them is that the fairy-tale often ends in a 'they-lived-happily-ever-after' scenario, or on a particular moral note as in 'Little Red Riding Hood'. The end of Tolkien's book, however, is not so clear. It is true that Sauron is defeated but, as in the Great War, only with staggering losses – Middle-earth was no quiet, rural idyll. The Third-Age, then, ends in a Pyrrhic victory for Eru's forces. In addition, the victory of good over evil can never be final, according to Tolkien, since evil always reappears after a respite, and others will be called upon in the future to make great sacrifices.

Yet, faced with this chilling prospect, men are obliged to think and rethink the

direction of their lives. Through the various Christian themes considered in the *Rings*, and the subsequent rebirth of man in the new, Fourth Age, Tolkien creates what he calls a 'Secondary World', the door through which the reader is invited to pass to glimpse the joy of eucatastrophe – that is, the hope of the New Testament – in the real world. There is, then, a happy ending of sorts: dwarves and elves are reconciled; loyal Sam is made mayor; Rosie Cotton becomes a mother; and the Ring has been destroyed. Tolkien's heroes sacrifice what is important to them so that others may benefit and, for this reason, the Third Age ended in Christian hope and victory. The Shire is to be protected, and even the orc wastelands will be made useful. Moreover, with Aragorn on the throne, the tale ends in something like the re-establishment of an effective Catholic dynasty based in Rome (2006: 376).

This ending is not made explicit in the *Rings* itself, however, since not only would it have been inconsistent with the rest of the book in which religion is not overtly mentioned, but it would have alienated a section of readers. Even theologically, it is highly unsatisfactory, if not discredited, not least because for many Christians the Holy Land, the birthplace of Jesus, is modern-day Israel not Italy.

Tolkien has inspired other works of fantasy; indeed, he has helped create a new fantasy genre. However, Tolkien's more serious themes – a defence of religion and class society – stand against man and history, and this is a yardstick as to how far man has come in developing his society. The importance of lineage and bloodline, which he stresses throughout the *Rings*, has value today only in period drama entertainment.

Tolkien arms nature with Christian values. Yet, nature is not the creation, or slave, of any imagined divine power. Nature is many things, superb, awesome, unrivalled, or overwhelming and fearless, but it knows no heavenly morals. Nature obeys its own laws, and is oblivious to the fable of divine truth.

There is no sacred text, no ultimate message from on high, which resists the scrutiny of man. This is not because all passages in the Bible, or other religious

texts, are disagreeable (though we are entitled to feel that way if we wish); rather, it is because these texts collapse before rational analysis. This is not to say that the knowledge we have at present is beyond examination, but there are some formal principles of knowledge, as this thesis has indicated.

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