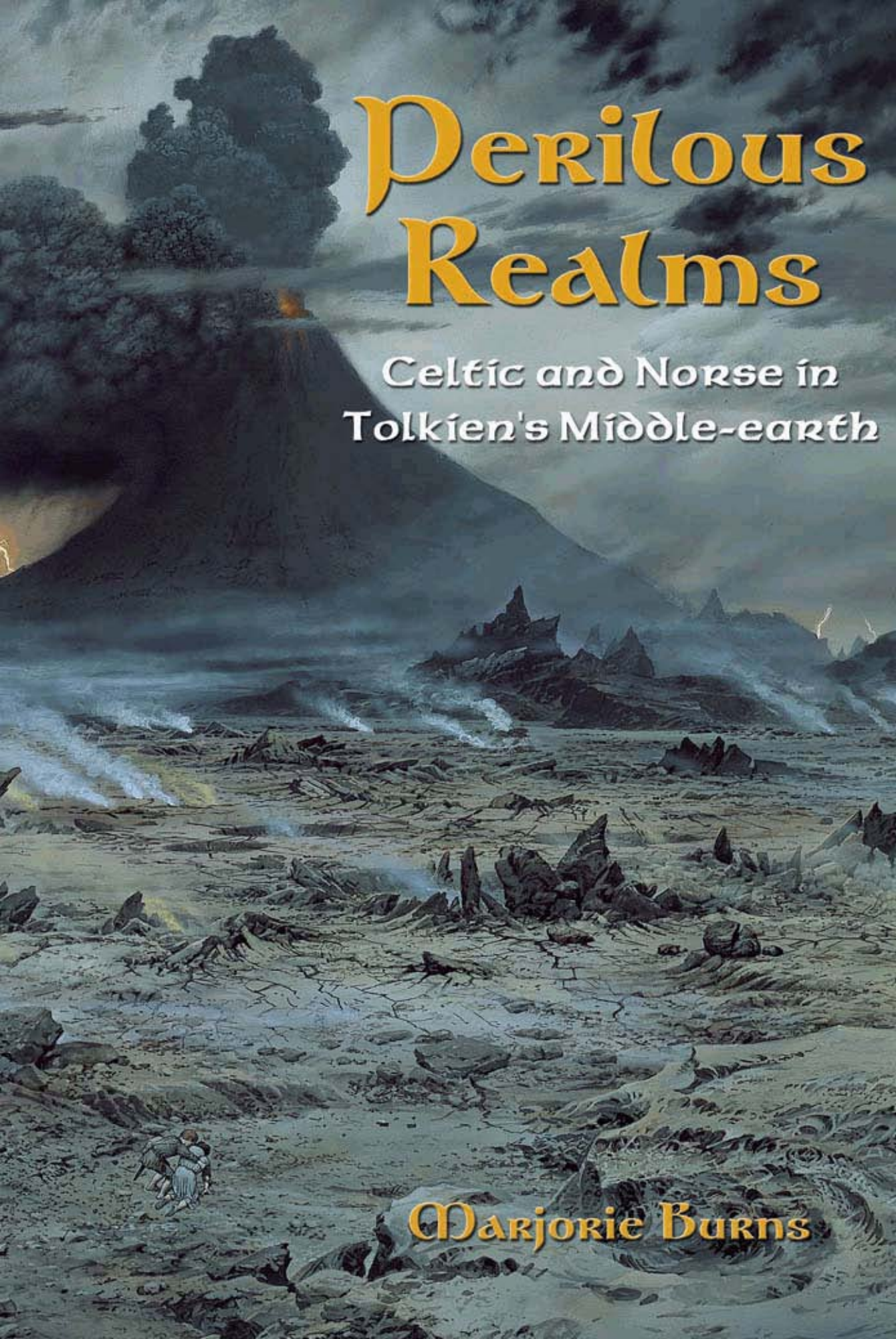
Perilous Realms
Celtic and Norse in Tolkien's Middle-earth
Marjorie Burns

PERILOUS REALMS: CELTIC AND NORSE IN TOLKIEN'S MIDDLE-EARTH

J.R.R. Tolkien (1892–1973) is increasingly recognized as the most influential writer of the twentieth century. Sales of his books remain exceptionally high, and Middle-earth fan clubs flourish around the world. The film version of *The Lord of the Rings*, released between 2001 and 2003, has only added to his popularity.

Throughout his life, Tolkien was acutely aware of the power of myth in shaping society, so much so that one of his earliest ambitions as a writer was to create a mythology for England. The Middle-earth of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* was to serve as a stand-in for Britain and northwestern Europe and is strongly based on a variety of influential literatures and beliefs, particularly the Celtic and Norse. *Perilous Realms* is the first book to focus consistently on the ways in which Tolkien balances these two ancient cultures and unites them in a single literature. Renowned Tolkien scholar Marjorie Burns also investigates the ways Tolkien reconciled other oppositions, including paganism and Christianity, good and evil, home and wayside, war and peace, embellishment and simplicity, hierarchy and the common man.

Even those who do not know *Beowulf*, the Arthurian tales, or northern European mythology come away from *The Lord of the Rings* with a feeling for Britain's historical and literary past. Those who recognize the sources behind Tolkien – and the skill with which he combines these sources – gain far more. *Perilous Realms* gives this advantage to all readers and provides new discoveries, including material from obscure, little-known Celtic texts and a likely new source for the name 'hobbit.' It is truly essential reading for Tolkien fans.

MARJORIE BURNS is a professor in the Department of English at Portland State University.

J.R.R. Tolkien (1892–1973), who once said, 'A pen is to me as a beak is to a hen.' This portrait, taken in 1961, was a favourite of both Tolkien and the photographer, Pamela Chandler. (The photograph is from the Pamela Chandler Photography Collection, © Diana Willson. The quote is from 'The Hobbit Man,' by Philip Norman, *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 15 January 1967.)

MARJORIE BURNS

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Ultimate Just Deserts.' Finally, thanks goes to Elizabeth Schweitzer, tracker of lost quotations, and to all my Tolkien friends who heard my ideas in early symposium form and gave me assurance, guidance, and nudges in new, appreciated directions.

A Note on Spelling

Since names in Old Norse have long been anglicized, I have given preference to commonly used English spellings, *Odin* for *Óthinn*, for example, or *Thiazi* for *Þjázi*. Celtic words have generally been left in Celtic forms, though Celtic spellings, like Old Norse spellings, can vary considerably. Tolkien's capitalization and plurals are yet another matter. *The Hobbit* has *elves*; *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* generally have *Elves*. The same is true of *dwarves* in *The Hobbit,* who mostly become capitalized *Dwarves* in subsequent works. Moreover, the plural Tolkien uses for *Dwarves* is not what the dictionary recommends; he is following a pattern found in *wolves*, *leaves*, or *loaves*, a pattern he admitted was 'just a piece of private bad grammar, rather shocking in a philologist.' Nonetheless, '*dwarves* goes well with *elves*,' he also recognized (*Letters*, 23 and 31).

I have followed Tolkien's preferences for his own invented characters, using *Dwarves* for all but Old Norse dwarfs, and using the lower case for *elves* and *dwarves* that appear in *The Hobbit*. It was also Tolkien's practice – with rare exception – to leave the hobbits themselves uncapitalized, in whatever book they appear. Here too I have followed Tolkien's lead.

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Abbreviations

H	*The Hobbit*
FR	*The Fellowship of the Ring*
TT	*The Two Towers*
RK	*The Return of the King*
Letters	*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*
UT	*Unfinished Tales*

The History of Middle-earth

The History of Middle-earth is a twelve-volume collection of drafts, fragments, and short pieces written by J.R.R. Tolkien but unpublished during his lifetime. After Tolkien's death, his son, Christopher Tolkien, accepted the task of compiling, arranging, and adding commentary to his father's extensive unpublished material, so creating *The History of Middle-earth*. The variant stories, poems, and outlines within these volumes reveal both the way in which Tolkien developed his material and the way in which he himself developed throughout his career. Volume I, *The Book of Lost Tales, Part One*, appeared in 1983; the final volume, *The Peoples of Middle-earth*, was published 1996.

I	*The Book of Lost Tales, Part One*
II	*The Book of Lost Tales, Part Two*
III	*The Lays of Beleriand*
IV	*The Shaping of Middle-earth*

V *The Lost Road and Other Writings*
VI *The Return of the Shadow*
VII *The Treason of Isengard*
VIII *The War of the Ring*
IX *Sauron Defeated*
X *Morgoth's Ring*
XI *The War of the Jewels*
XII *The Peoples of Middle-earth*

PERILOUS REALMS: CELTIC AND NORSE IN TOLKIEN'S MIDDLE-EARTH

'Faërie is a perilous land, and in it are pitfalls for the unwary and dungeons for the overbold.'

J.R.R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories'

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Introduction

Profundity, complexity, and depth of character are not usually associated with J.R.R. Tolkien's literary works. Tolkien was, after all, a writer of fantasy, a genre where good and evil are clearly delineated and easily recognized. Readers have no difficulty separating Tolkien's ideal characters from his morally weak or outright malevolent ones, and even his longest plots move along directly with no flashbacks or troubling structural twists. Nonetheless, Tolkien's writing is far from simplistic and far from lacking depth or structural intricacy.

On the most elementary level Tolkien reveals his complexity through double attitudes. Again and again he seems to offer us easy solutions or uncompromising beliefs; and yet, if we look carefully at all he describes, promotes, or defends, his outlook is often divided and his inclinations surprisingly mixed. Tolkien is, for example, both an egalitarian and an elitist. He believes in fellowship, but his fellowships are hierarchical, he readily admits a dislike of democracy, and he is strongly attached to the concept of inherited rule – to a 'line of descent that can't be questioned.'[1] And yet Tolkien's hobbits are far more appealing than any of his kings, some of his most admirable characters are those who separate themselves from society, and the right choice in his stories may well be the one that deviates from the rules. To borrow the coinage of Clyde Kilby, Tolkien works through *contrasistency*, 'a kind of consistent inconsistency.'[2]

The categories of Tolkien's double-sidedness are themselves

multiple. Tolkien appreciates and desires both the ornate and the unembellished, both the lofty and the vernacular, both cooperation and self-sufficiency, both action and tranquillity, both permanence and change, both home as well as the road. And this doubleness is also true of the ways in which Tolkien borrows from other literatures. He was, for example, familiar with a variety of mythologies; but rather than limiting himself to only one of these, he weaves together elements from several – most often drawing from Celtic and Norse belief for his stories of Middle-earth.

There is, of course, nothing particularly remarkable in Tolkien's double-sidedness. We all know the feeling of mixed emotions or mixed preferences, but Tolkien does more than allow for ambivalence and conflicting attitudes. He creates a world where contraries not only exist in highly conspicuous forms but are sometimes brought together in a single entity. The skin-changer, Beorn, for instance, is not only a contradiction in kind – a man who is sometimes a bear; he is also a homebody who ranges far and wide, a berserker who avoids weaponry, a loner who is not quite alone (if you think of his animals), and a misanthrope who makes an excellent host.

A less extreme but similar contrast of temperament and inclination (though greatly softened) exists in the hobbits as well. Like Beorn, hobbits are attached to garden and home; like Beorn, they have a heroic side; like Beorn, they make fierce fighters, under necessity. Bilbo, for example, is a Baggins by name, but he is also half a Took (therefore both a comfort-seeker and an adventurer). Bilbo looks like a grocer to the sceptical dwarves but serves as their burglar.

More subtly, Bilbo both leaves the Shire and keeps it with him on the way, evoking its image through his longing for Bag End and through thoughts of 'the kettle just beginning to sing' (*H*, 35). To add to this feeling of home maintained 'there and back again' (from the full title: *The Hobbit: or There and Back Again*), Tolkien gives us the Last Homely House and Beorn's rough but comfortable hall – just as in *The Lord of the Rings* he gives us a series of recuperative retreats and reminds us of home through Sam, who brings domesticity even into Mordor through his tending of

Frodo and through his beloved pots and pans. The balance, then, of home combined with wilderness is cleverly maintained.

Still, doubleness of this sort does little to dispel accusations that Tolkien's characters are too predictable. Once we know that Beorn shifts between man and bear, there is little to learn about his personality; and once we know that Bilbo may well be brave in a pinch, we are not so surprised when he acts courageously.

Tolkien's best characterizations, however, are based on more than two-sidedness and mixed attitudes. Their complexity derives instead from a shadowing and matching with other characters. It is easy enough to see the pattern once we are aware. Saruman is the fallen wizard Gandalf might have been; Gollum is the lost and blighted Ring-bearer Frodo could become; Denethor is a negative version of King Théoden, and even Galadriel has her antithesis in a monstrous, murderous form.

Often enough this form of characterization is further enriched by the way Tolkien borrows from traditional figures found in earlier literature and mythology. Tolkien was, after all, a philologist, an expert in literature, language, and the ways in which literature and language reveal cultural history. Old and Middle English were his primary focus. He specialized, then, in those forms of English that existed from its beginnings in the fifth century up until the start of the sixteenth (so including the eighth-century, Old English *Beowulf* and fourteenth-century writers of Arthurian tales). English that comes after this period is considered Modern (which means, for the record, that Shakespeare wrote in Modern English).

Writers after 1500 influenced Tolkien as well – from Edmund Spenser, who wrote *The Faerie Queene*, to the seventeenth-century Milton, and on up to include well-known writers from Tolkien's own period. But Tolkien's interests did not stop with English literature, or with the English language as it was spoken or written in various centuries. He was also familiar with a considerable number of other languages, particularly German, French, Spanish, Italian, and of course Latin and Greek. He knew something of Hebrew as well; he was familiar with Irish and Welsh in modern and medieval forms; he learned enough Finnish to read parts of

Kalevala (Finland's mythology); he had a working knowledge of modern Scandinavian tongues; he taught himself at least the basics of Russian; he mastered Old Icelandic; and he read and studied earlier forms of other Germanic languages (ones closely related to English and Scandinavian).

From 1919 to 1920, while still in his twenties, Tolkien worked for the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the most complete dictionary of the English language (one that both cites the historical uses of any English word and traces etymological connections to other languages as well). What his biographer Humphrey Carpenter notes about Tolkien's work on the *Dictionary* is indicative. The entry for *wasp*, only one of many words assigned to Tolkien, lists 'comparable forms in Old Saxon, Middle Dutch, Modern Dutch, Old High German, Middle Low German, Middle High German, Modern German, Old Teutonic, primitive pre-Teutonic, Lithuanian, Old Slavonic, Russian, and Latin.' Tolkien's 'mastery of Anglo-Saxon' (or Old English), Carpenter adds, was so impressive that his supervisor claimed he had 'never known a man of [Tolkien's] age who was in these respects his equal.'[3]

And beyond all this, Tolkien created his own languages, a 'secret vice,' to borrow his own phrase.[4] In both *The Lord of the Rings* and the invented mythology he began writing long before *The Hobbit*, samples of Tolkien's languages appear repeatedly – elegant, graceful languages with echoes of Finnish and Welsh (in the Quenya and Sindarin spoken by the Elves); the Dwarf language, with its Old Norse names but with words intentionally Semitic;[5] and Black Speech, the Dark Lord's language, a language that jars on the ear like the articulation of hate. Where no complete or fully developed language exists for a particular people or race, Tolkien suggests their speech by a sample phrase or two. The long-living, pondering Ents include in any single word a rich association of ideas; hence the Entish *a-lalla-lalla-rumba-kamanda-lind-or-burúmë*, as Treebeard tells Pippin and Merry, is only a part of his name for the rock shelf where he and the hobbits met.

Invention of this sort, however, is given little credit in the academic world. What was expected of Tolkien, as a serious Oxford professor, were scholarly works such as '*Beowulf*: The Mon-

sters and the Critics' (Tolkien's greatly influential publication on *Beowulf*),[6] his article on the medieval *Ancrene Wisse* (an instruction book for the female religious recluse),[7] his studies on the origin of single words ('The name "Nodens,"' for example),[8] or his translation of the medieval *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* into English of the twentieth century.[9]

No one can argue about the quality of Tolkien's published scholarship. What he wrote was well received. Nonetheless more academic publication would not have been taken amiss, and Tolkien was well aware that his colleagues had little appreciation for the time and effort he spent on his imaginary worlds. In his 1965 BBC interview with Denys Gueroult, Tolkien put the matter this way: after the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* it was as though people said, 'Now we know what you've wasted the last fourteen years upon. You can now get on and complete some of those professional tasks which you neglected.'

The financial compensation and the prominence Tolkien received for his fiction must have galled his colleagues as well, yet it was neither money nor public recognition that motivated Tolkien to write *The Silmarillion* and his stories of Middle-earth. It was more that he lived deeply within his own invented world and found a satisfaction there not so readily experienced in the world of the everyday, in the 'Primary World,' as Tolkien calls it in his essay 'On Fairy-Stories.'

There are reasons why this is so. Tolkien's early life was not a uniform or consistently happy one. He was born in 1892 in Bloemfontein, in what is now part of South Africa, but was then the Orange free State; he was christened John Ronald Reuel (and called Ronald within the family). When he was three, his mother left Bloemfontein to visit England with Ronald and his younger brother, Hilary. Their father, Arthur Tolkien, remained working in Bloemfontein and died there the following year, before his wife and sons could return.

At the time of his father's death, Ronald was four, and the only clear memory he retained of his father was of Arthur Tolkien painting the family name on the side of a trunk (a highly appropriate memory for someone who remained intrigued his entire

life both by words and the very process of writing words). Though Tolkien could barely remember the father he lost, his father's death had a deep effect. It was a loss any child would feel but one no doubt intensified by the importance his culture and age placed on patriarchy and male inheritance. Tolkien's interest in older, traditional forms of literature must have added to this as well. As a boy, he preferred stories set in places and times that emphasized kingship and inherited position even more than his own period did. In Tolkien's fiction, this emphasis on the male bloodline has clearly left its mark, so much so that characters are often most strongly defined through who their fathers were: Aragorn as 'Aragorn son of Arathorn,' Thorin as 'Thorin son of Thrain' and even Roäc, the Lonely Mountain raven, as 'Roäc son of Carc' (a pattern of patronymics still with us today in the Celtic *O* of O'Brian or the *Mac* of MacDonald or in the Norse addition of *son*, as in Erikson).

There was, however, a small concern associated with Tolkien's paternal line. His father's family was not purely English, and Tolkien would have preferred to be English irrefutably, to be English to the core. The first Tolkien (*Tolkiehn* or *Tollkühn* in the original German) arrived in England something over a hundred years before J.R.R. Tolkien was born. Though Tolkien insisted that the family had become 'extremely "British,"' by this time (and no doubt they had), it was nonetheless a matter he felt a need to explain (*Letters*, 377). What would also have contributed to a feeling that others were more firmly English than he (or at least more typically English) was the conversion of Tolkien's mother to Catholicism in 1900, a conversion that Ronald and Hilary undertook as well. This act of faith, in a country predominantly and often rigidly Protestant, alienated Mabel Tolkien from certain of her Suffield relatives and from some of the Tolkiens as well, though contact continued with others on both sides of the family through letters and occasional visits. But a worse loss lay ahead. Four years later, in 1904, Mabel Tolkien died of diabetes. At her request, Father Francis Xavier Morgan became the guardian of twelve-year-old Ronald and ten-year-old Hilary. Father Francis had first befriended Mabel Tolkien and her sons after they moved into

his parish in 1902, and his kindness and support continued during Mabel Tolkien's illness and after. He was, Tolkien wrote in 1941, 'a father to me, more than most real fathers' (*Letters*, 53); nonetheless, the guardianship was unusual enough to add still a further touch of unconventionality to Tolkien's early years.

It would be untrue to suggest that Tolkien suffered serious doubts about his rights to an English heritage, but it is also true that he gave more thought to the matter than other Englishmen. He remembered arriving in England from Africa; he remembered seeing it as something new,[10] and this sense of conscious recognition gave him a perspective that remained with him throughout his life, focusing and shaping the mythology he came to create, a mythology he initially hoped to 'dedicate' to England, 'to my country' (*Letters*, 144). There were difficulties, however, with what Tolkien had in mind. He had originally intended to create 'a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story.' It should include the 'tone and quality' of Britain and Northwestern Europe and possess the 'fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic' (*Letters*, 144). In 1937, however, a reviewer of the manuscript criticized Tolkien for using 'eye-splitting Celtic names' and reproducing that 'mad, bright-eyed beauty that perplexes all Anglo-Saxons in the face of Celtic art' (*Letters*, 25). Tolkien was stung. Over the years that followed, he returned to this accusation again and again, denying his early intentions and denying them vehemently.[11]

His reaction may seem excessive, but there is a historical explanation why he responded as he did. During the nineteenth century, the English had come increasingly to boast of their Teutonic roots, both the Norse and the Anglo-Saxon branches of their Teutonic roots. Perhaps because far more Norse literature has survived than Anglo-Saxon, the Norse became the most recognized and most celebrated of the two (hence the dominant use of *Norse* throughout this book). But at the same time that the English were emphasizing their Teutonic heritage (mostly through references to the Norse), they tended to ignore or underplay their Celtic heritage. Tolkien's wish to include that 'fair elusive beauty'

associated with the Celts therefore placed him at odds with popular sentiment.

Fortunately – in spite of his retractions and denials – the Celts remain strongly present in Tolkien's literature. An all-Teutonic world or an all-Celtic one would have far less appeal; but the two, working together, give Middle-earth both Celtic enchantment and Norse vitality. (This mixing of the two cultures is emphasized in chapters 1, 2, 3, and 5; chapter 4 is more purely Norse.) Moreover, since the Celts allow far more prominence to women than the early Teutons do, much of what is Celtic in Middle-earth also serves to idealize what is feminine (a claim which can be made for Catholic influence on Tolkien's writing as well). In *The Hobbit*, females are mentioned only in passing and only occasionally; *The Lord of the Rings* does better, but here too readers often find the scarcity of females curious and the treatment of females limiting, so much so that the Peter Jackson films greatly alter Arwen's role, making her active and heroic in ways that markedly differ from Tolkien's character.

But even without such tampering, Tolkien's women (though place bound, for the most part, and few) contribute significantly. There is Éowyn, a heroine with strong Anglo-Saxon roots, who has her warrioress moment on the Pelennor Fields; this, however, is something of an exception. More typically, Tolkien's praiseworthy females serve as magical, queenly figures endowed with Celtic enchantment, figures that represent the highest and best of Middle-earth and sometimes inspire reverence of a nearly religious kind. All of Tolkien's Elves, in fact, show characteristics often ascribed to women, characteristics that are also considered typical of the Celts and which predisposed them, some believe, to an easy acceptance of Christianity. (These Celtic propensities are addressed in chapters 6 through 8.)

Galadriel, who is the only fully presented female Elf in *The Lord of the Rings*, is also the most revered Elf in the book; she is, as well, one of the most developed and most complex of Tolkien's characters. Initially, in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, she may seem little more than a typical rendition of the good enchantress figure; but what Tolkien says about *The Hobbit* could be said about Galadriel too:

there are 'glimpses ... of things higher or deeper or darker' than the 'surface' at first reveals (foreword to *FR*, 5). Like Gandalf (who is strongly based on Odin, in Odin's better mode), Galadriel has multiple predecessors in mythology and half-forgotten tales. Like Gandalf, too, she has a shadow side.

And yet – as always in Tolkien's writing – this character complexity, this richness of literary association, is subtly and unassumingly conferred. Tolkien requires no prior knowledge on the part of his readers. He knows much and shares much, but unpretentiously. He gives even the most unaware reader a sense of *Beowulf* by revealing Beowulf's world. He takes us through predicaments and landscapes the Arthurian heroes knew. He leads us into the Celtic Otherworld and the hostile eddic North. He introduces us (unobtrusively) to forgotten forms of English verse and Anglo-Saxon words. He brings life to bygone heroes, to ancient stories, to lost and forgotten lands, and he does so with a generous and prolific simplicity.

Chapter One

Two Norths and Their English Blend

J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth is conspicuously and intricately northern in both ancient and modern ways. The name *Middle-earth* itself, as Tolkien is quick to explain, is not his own invention; it comes from 'the northern imagination' of the Germanic peoples, those inhabitants of Northwestern Europe, Scandinavia, and England who saw their world as existing 'between ice of the North and the fire of the South' and encircled by the 'Seas' (*Letters*, 283). There is no question that Tolkien saw England as rightfully part of this North; he concludes his essay, '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics,' by reminding us that *Beowulf* – a work northern to the hilt – was made in England and 'moves in our northern world beneath our northern sky.'[1]

This borrowing of an actual term, *Middle-earth*, for use in fantasy is indicative of Tolkien's ambitions, his wish to create the mythology England ought to have had: 'I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country; it had no stories of its own' (*Letters*, 144). But more than this, Tolkien's reference to fire, ice, and sea emphasizes the sense of unrelenting danger that shaped the Norseman's 'theory of courage,' that commitment to unyielding heroism in the face of inevitable doom.[2]

These two features of northern Teutonic courage – unyielding heroism and inevitable doom – permeate Tolkien's mythology and his stories of Middle-earth. Each of Tolkien's heroes struggles with private, momentous decision; each is confronted again and again by tests of strength and will. And though they succeed,

though Sauron is ultimately defeated, a mood of unrectifiable loss builds throughout *The Lord of the Rings*.

Tolkien's tribute to the North, however, encompasses more than this; there is another northernness in his Middle-earth literature, a Celtic northernness. Compared to the Germanic tribes or Scandinavians who settled on British shores, the ancient Celts may not seem markedly northern in geography or temperament; but in context of the Western World, the Celts are northern too.

It is nonetheless true that critics have tended to focus on the Teutonic, thereby missing a good half of what Tolkien had in mind. But even early on there were some who recognized the complexity of Tolkien's intentions, as Douglass Parker did in 'Hwaet We Holbytla ...,' an essay that appeared one year after the publication of *The Return of the King*. It is well worth quoting Parker's comments in full:

> Tolkien has made his world a reflection, or 'pre-reflection' of England before the triumph of Christianity, of the action and reaction between Celt and Teuton and their various branches. In doing so, he has ransacked the available mythologies, but reworked rather than borrowed, so that the result is almost a presentation of archetypes of existent myths. The elves are Celtic in language and fate, but their languages are somehow pre-Celtic, while their immortality in the Western Land, though very like the Gaelic *Tir na nOg*, is only one of several concepts presented which might have been conflated in the story of that island which sank beneath the wave. Men are mortal, though, and even the declining branch, which is Celt-like, has the fate and orientation of Teutons. Thus the malignant grave-spirits, the 'barrow-wights,' seem to prefigure the story of Glam in the Old Norse *Grettissaga*; thus the dead fight in one of the final battles – but in a much less glorious situation than would the heroes of a Christianized Valhalla: thus the final cataclysm itself is a Ragnarök, but not one guaranteed to come out all right. The Ring-quest is a fusion of elements from both sides: the Celtic *Voyage of Brann* and other Arthurian preliminaries, the Teutonic *Draupnir* (Balder's ring), Sigurth's treasure, and Siegfried's ring. And, though the marriage of Aragorn and Arwen is mainly Celtic in conception

> – it might be a clear statement of the mightily confused situation of Pwyll, or Manawyddan, and Rhiannon in the *Mabinogion* – , it brings the two races together in almost an Aeneas-Lavinia type of union.[3]

Interestingly, Tolkien himself speaks of 'fusion' in the same way Parker does – as a mixing and matching of Teuton and Celt. ('Fusion and confusion' are Tolkien's words.)[4] And this mixing and matching is England's heritage.

Of the two, the Celts appeared in Britain first. They began their migration to Britain in pre-history, at least as early as 1000 BC, long before the Anglo-Saxons or the Vikings did. In Tolkien's words, 'the Celtic occupation had probably some thousand years behind it' when the Anglo-Saxons arrived, 'a length of time as long as that which separates us from King Alfred.'[5] The word *Britain* itself is Celtic, but it is the Anglo-Saxons who gave their name to England and they who are seen as the power at Britain's core (so much so that *England* is still sometimes used for Britain in its entirety in spite of the political incorrectness of the term).[6] The Anglo-Saxons began their invasion from Germany in the fifth century AD; three centuries later they were themselves invaded and modified by a variation on the Nordic[7] theme, by the Scandinavians, who added their own version of Teutonic belief to Britain's cultural mix.

The story of ancient Britain is more complicated than this, of course, but for our (and Tolkien's) purposes, even the Romans were temporary imports easily dismissed; and in spite of their presence from 55 BC to AD 410, England can still be reduced to two dominant strains, a Celtic strain and a Germanic/Scandinavian one. The two together create that tension which Tolkien reproduces in his own literature, a peculiarly English tension described by Professor Babwater in a 1925 John Buchan novel entitled *John Macnab*. 'The Celt ... has always sought his adventures in a fairy world. The Northman was a realist, and looked to tangible things like land and cattle. Therefore he was a conqueror and a discoverer on the terrestrial globe, while the Celt explored the mysteries of the spirit.'[8]

It was these images of Britain's two cultures, the one seen as

ruthless but pragmatic, the other as a little maudlin, a little ineffectual, that Tolkien was most familiar with in popular English thought.[9] He had, of course, a deeper and differing understanding from his studies as a philologist; and in scholarly settings he could belittle thinking of this sort, calling it (in 'English and Welsh') 'a modern myth that still holds such an attraction for many minds.' There is 'no value at all,' he claims, to the image of the 'wild incalculable poetic Celt, full of vague and misty imaginations' and that of the Teuton as 'solid and practical when not under the influence of beer.' But Tolkien himself draws upon these same stereotypes; and in spite of his insistence that the two have blended considerably and that Celts and Teutons are not 'immutable creatures' fixed in 'innate and mutual hostility,'[10] he too speaks of Teuton and Celt as distinct entities.

The device of emphasizing the North, however, did not originate with Tolkien and deserves some history. It began in the eighteenth century, with scholars who collected and translated Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon, and Celtic texts, and it grew to a general popularity during the nineteenth century, largely through the influence of the Romantics (with their penchant for the ancient, the energetic, and the unsophisticated). Before the advent of Romanticism, the North was not so highly esteemed. Southern and Classical ties are what earned English respect, and so influential was this preference for the South that convention based Britain's foundation on heroes from Rome and Troy. (The opening stanza of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* makes such a claim.)

In nineteenth-century England, however, it was not just an idealization of the North that was called for; rejection of the South was required as well. Warmer, more southerly countries (whose histories and literatures had previously done much to shape England's culture and thought) were now seen as un-English, as decadent, feeble, and lacking in vigour or will. 'Languid' is the word John Ruskin applies. (Tolkien, a century later, will praise 'northern' potency and claim that 'southern imagination has faded for ever into literary ornament.')[11] Neither position – the belief that England essentially arose from the South or that it

solely arose from North – is just, of course. Culturally, linguistically, racially, Britain's ancestry is mixed; but northern Romanticism, with its longing for racial purity, and that human knack of denying what it chooses to ignore, now allowed the English to see themselves as inherently Northerners. The difficulty lay in which particular version of Northernness they would choose to emphasize.

Even within the Teutonic camp, choices were made and preferences confirmed. And more often than not it was the Scandinavians who prevailed. Being the last to arrive and the least adulterated of the northern cultures perhaps gave them something of an advantage. Perhaps, too, in their rejection of the now-disfavoured South, the English felt compelled to reach as far north as possible for a corrective counterpoint; and Scandinavia (most notably Iceland, with its recently popularized sagas, its *Edda* mythology, and its appeal to nineteenth-century sportsmen) particularly filled this role.[12]

Where, however, did this leave the Celts? The Germanic/Scandinavian Northerners could be telescoped into one general type (with the Scandinavians in highest esteem), but the Celts were a stickier problem and one that lay closer to home. The Irish (unquestionably Celtic and likely to be Catholic) were troubling enough; but the Welsh and the Cornish showed Celtic elements too. Even the dour Scots had their belief in second sight, and magical or superstitious thinking has always been suspect in the collective English mind.[13] The seventeenth-century Thomas Hobbes, for example, saw Satan in Oberon (the king of fairies) and soul-destroying superstition in the beliefs of the Catholic Church. Prejudices of this sort survived well into the twentieth century, placing Tolkien (Catholic and lover of fairy tales) in something of a cultural fix.

But more lies behind England's distrust of the fanciful and imaginative than religious scruples alone. There is as well something in the English character that responds with discomfort when faced with excess, irrationality, or emotional display; and in spite of the eighteenth century's expansiveness and the nineteenth century's sentimentality or growth in children's literature,

an ambivalence towards folk and fairy tales continued on into the twentieth century, as though such interests were insufficiently serious, insufficiently adult, or antithetical to Christian belief.

Perhaps as an antidote to this sense of frivolity, to this sense that fanciful stories and fairy-lore belong most fittingly to the nursery (an attitude Tolkien greatly deplored), the northernness movement in the nineteenth century became more and more focused on the combative and the muscular, that masculine ideal that the English, once again, attributed to the Norse. Though H.R. Ellis Davidson, in *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe*,[14] makes it eminently clear that the Celts were ever as fierce and contentious as the Norse and that the two cultures were far more alike and far more interrelated than generally believed,[15] popular thought (aided by the courtly love of Celtic-based Arthurian tales) has saddled the Celts with a milder image and allowed them to be seen as a people whose men are, if not quite effeminate, perhaps less fervently masculine than other northern males.

By the nineteenth century, of course, even England's Norsemen were no longer living as Norsemen. They had long since been assimilated into recognizable English types. On the other hand, the Celts (sometimes referred to as the Celtic fringe) still existed as distinct cultural groups; and these genuine representatives of a somewhat disfavoured people were permanent residents and had settled in Britain first. How, then, could the mainstream, centrally placed English continue to see outskirt Celtic regions as backward, superstitious, comically unedified, or (at the very least) less than fully polished, and yet claim kinship with their common British past? Historical distance was the answer, distance and a handy sleight of mind. By focusing on King Arthur and Arthur's Round Table knights (and on Teutonic elements within these tales), the nineteenth-century English found a means of conferring respectability on Camelot and making it their own. What had once been Celtic was now Arthurian and therefore English – so fully and fittingly so (in the minds of some) that Arthur's Celtic roots were as good as lost to view.[16]

This, of course, did little for contemporary Celts or for appreciation of Celtic attitudes – though one significant mid-century

exception needs to be recognized. In his 1867 *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, Matthew Arnold made an impressive case for restoring recognition to the Celts, claiming the English would benefit from Celtic 'quickness of perception' and that the magic, beauty, passion, and grace to be found in Celtic art could serve to soften England's Germanic hardness and Germanic devotion to fact. However, Arnold's emphasis on Celtic 'delicacy,' 'sentiment,' and passionate 'melancholy' was too suggestive of that taint of effeminacy and excessive emotionality that most middle and late Victorians fervently wished to avoid;[17] and in spite of Pre-Raphaelite reinforcement of medieval Celtic themes and the Irish Literary Revival, the Celts retained at best a shaky second place.

True to the prejudices of his time, Tolkien mostly downplays (and sometimes outright denies) his attachment to the Celts. The reviewer who called his 'Silmarillion' manuscript Celtic in name and tone, offended him to the core. Names in the 'Silmarillion' 'are not Celtic!' Tolkien responded in 1937. 'Neither are the tales' (*Letters*, 26). The strength of Tolkien's reaction may seem surprising, but Tolkien was not alone in reacting as he did. E.R. Eddison, whose works Tolkien read and enjoyed,[18] defended his own literary work, *The Worm Ouroboros*, even more forcefully than Tolkien did 'The Silmarillion.' 'I assure you,' wrote Eddison, 'that I have graduated in a hard school these 23 years – the school of the sagas, the most bare-rock mountain type of grand epic prose the world has ever seen. Those yelling, slobbering, blubbering, black-lipped, stare-eyed romanticisms of the admired Celt are, I fear, so far alien to my affections that I find it hard to do them bare justice.'[19] Tolkien, to his credit, went on to admit knowledge of 'Celtic things (many in their original languages Irish and Welsh)' but then weakens this confession by adding that he feels 'for them a certain distaste: largely for their fundamental unreason' (*Letters*, 26).

Of the two Celtic groups, the Irish, as always, fare worse.[20] Though Tolkien was a regular examiner for the Catholic University in Ireland and held an honorary doctorate from this same institution, he writes of finding the Irish language 'wholly unattractive' and the 'air of Ireland wholly alien,' adding however, with

characteristic equivocation, that 'the latter (not the language) is attractive' (*Letters,* 289 and 219). But even his reaction to the Irish landscape was not always so favourable. In a 1979 transcription of a discussion on J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, George Sayer tells a remarkable story about Tolkien describing Ireland as 'naturally evil.' He could 'feel,' Sayer relates, 'evil coming up from the earth, from the peat bogs, from the clumps of trees, even from the cliffs, and this evil was only held in check by the great devotion of the southern Irish to their religion.'[21]

In all fairness, Tolkien had preferences among Nordic types as well. Like others of his time (and before his time), he was not as fond of Germans as he was of Scandinavians. War with Germany added to this feeling in the twentieth century, but English resentment of the German race has a long history. As much as the folklore-hungry English had taken to the Grimm Brothers' tales (first translated into English in 1823) or to Wagner's Nordic-based extravaganzas,[22] and as warmly accepting as the nineteenth century had been of Queen Victoria's German-born husband, prejudice towards Germany remained; and the Scandinavians grew more and more to represent England's northern ideal. 'I think Scandinavian Paganism, to us here,' Thomas Carlyle wrote in 1840, 'is more interesting than any other.' 'It is, for one thing, the latest; it continued in these regions of Europe till the eleventh century ... It is interesting also as the creed of our fathers; the men whose blood still runs in our veins, whom doubtless we still resemble in so many ways.'[23] William Morris, thirty years later, echoed Carlyle by claiming that the 'Great Story of the North,' the 'Volsung Tale,' 'should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks.'[24] Tolkien would agree. As a boy, he preferred tales of the 'nameless North of Sigurd of the Völsungs' above all other tales ('On Fairy-Stories,' 40). And as an adult, he bitterly deplored Hitler's 'ruining, perverting, misapplying, and making for ever accursed, that noble northern spirit, a supreme contribution to Europe, which I have ever loved, and tried to present in its true light.' This northern 'spirit,' he adds, has nowhere been 'nobler than in England, nor more earlier sanctified' (*Letters,* 55–6). He would have been happier, however, if more of this northern spirit

had been available in Anglo-Saxon texts; but the Anglo-Saxons, though they gave their name to England, failed to provide their own version of Teutonic myth. Tolkien had no choice but to look primarily to the *Eddas* for his material.[25]

Given all this, and given Tolkien's professed uneasiness about the British Celts, it makes sense that his writing initially seems most influenced by the Norse, that readers are quickest to notice the Norse in his literature. Tolkien's dragons, dragon hoards, Dwarves, giants, eagles, and trolls all point this way. And readers with *Edda* or saga awareness see even more. They recognize how the Balrog is related to Surt (of the Norse fire realm); they see Beorn's antecedents in various saga tales; they see how Asgard's gods have infiltrated both Tolkien's Middle-earth and his Valinor.[26]

Nonetheless, in spite of periodic disclaimers and a more obvious use of the Norse, Tolkien was also capable of speaking well of the Celts – most often and most openly when the subject was Wales and the Welsh. 'I love Wales (what is left of it, when mines, and the even more ghastly sea-side resorts, have done their worst), and especially the Welsh language,' Tolkien wrote in 1958 (*Letters*, 289). But Wales had touched Tolkien personally; most of his boyhood was spent on the 'Welsh Marches' of England's West Midlands (a region he liked to think of as more strongly English than most). It was here where he first saw Welsh lettering on trucks and became linguistically enchanted. 'Welsh,' he writes in his essay 'English and Welsh,' is 'of this soil, this island, the senior language of the men of Britain; and Welsh is beautiful.'[27]

Most telling is Tolkien's conclusion to this essay, a conclusion that rises to a passionate crescendo in which Tolkien reveals his rather remarkable theory that we each have our own 'linguistic potential: we each have a *native language*,' a language independent of the language we first learned; and for most Englishmen, Tolkien insists, this language is ancient Welsh. 'For many of us it rings a bell, or rather it stirs deep harp-strings in our linguist nature. In other words: for satisfaction and therefore for delight – and not for imperial policy – we are still 'British' at heart. It is the native language to which in unexplored desire we would still go home.'[28] A statement of this kind – coming, as it does, from a man

who saw no good reason to separate language and literature, a man who claimed all of his fiction began with language and only later moved into story – is not one to be ignored. It knocks flat his denials of a Celtic affinity.

Beyond this, Tolkien worked – and worked by choice – with Celtic and Arthurian texts. He knew and deeply loved the fourteenth-century *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: he wrote about it, translated it into twentieth-century English, and published an annotated edition of it (in collaboration with E.V. Gordon). He was also well aware of *Gawain*'s Celtic roots, of how the tale uses elements from 'older fairy-story'[29] and how the 'adventures derive ultimately from Celtic legend.'[30]

In his own fiction Tolkien also borrowed extensively from Celtic settings, figures, attitudes, and motifs. In an Arthurian story of Irish influence, Sgilti Lightfoot runs along the tops of trees, much as Legolas runs with 'little imprint' over the top of snow. In *Lludd and Lleuelys*, three evils occur: an all-knowing race arises; a shriek goes annually over the land (incapacitating men, driving all others mad, and leaving animals, the earth, and even the waters barren); what little is produced from the fields survives only one day. All of this is easily matched in *The Lord of the Rings*: Sauron's threat lies over Middle-earth; the cries of the Nazgûl unman even the strongest warriors, piercing 'them with cold blades of horror and despair' (*TT*, 213); barrenness and sterility are on the increase, and even the notion of a disappearing harvest is suggested by the depletion of the Shire in *The Return of the King*.

Tolkien's emphasis on kingship is clearly more Celtic than Norse; Sindarin, the Grey-elven tongue, draws heavily from Welsh; his Red Book of Westmarch (compiled by Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam) is a play on the fourteenth-century Welsh *Red Book of Hergest*; his One Ring suggests the Stone of the Ring of *Luned* ('Whoever concealed that stone, the stone or bezel would conceal him');[31] his poem 'Imram' is based on Irish stories of St Brendan's voyage to the West; his immortal Elves (who, in fact, can die) are born again, like certain privileged figures from Celtic belief.[32] And Celtic touches may even slip in without Tolkien being aware – if Lady Charlotte Guest's note about the Arthurian 'Half Man

(Habit)' influenced Tolkien's Halfling hobbits unconsciously. 'The Welsh have a fable on the subject of the Hanner Dyn or Half Man, taken to be illustrative of the force of habit,' Lady Charlotte Guest wrote in 1849.

> In this allegory Arthur is supposed to be met by a sprite, who appears at first in a small and indistinct form, but who on approaching nearer increases in size, and, assuming the semblance of half a man, endeavours to provoke the king to wrestle. Despite his weakness, and considering that he should gain no credit by the encounter, Arthur refuses to do so, and delays the contest, until at length the Half Man (Habit) becomes so strong that it requires his utmost efforts to overcome him.'[33]

But most telling of all (for the Celtic argument), Tolkien's Elves are fairies under an alternate name. In his earliest *legendarium* drafts, *fairies* are what they are called.

> Now on a time the fairies dwelt in the Lonely Isle after the great wars with Melko and the ruin of Gondolin; and they builded a fair city amidmost of that island, and it was girt with trees. Now this city they called Kortirion, both in memory of their ancient dwelling of Kôr in Valinor, and because this city stood also upon a hill and had a great tower tall and grey that Ingil son of Inwë their lord let raise.
>
> Very beautiful was Kortirion and the fairies loved it, and it became rich in song and poesy and the light of laughter; but on a time the great Faring Forth was made, and the fairies had rekindled once more the Magic Sun of Valinor but for the treason and faint hearts of Men. But so it is that the Magic Sun is dead and the Lonely Isle drawn back unto the confines of the Great Lands, and the fairies are scattered through all the wide unfriendly pathways of the world; and now Men dwell even on this faded isle, and care nought or know nought of its ancient days.[34]

The word *fairy*, however, did not satisfy Tolkien long; he soon switched to *elf*. But here too Tolkien had his doubts,[35] though he praises Spenser for using 'Elfe' in 'the true tradition' in *The Faerie Queene* ('On Fairy-Stories,' 13).

The problem lay in the nature of 'true tradition' (always a slippery term, as Tolkien understood). 'English words, such as *elf*,' he wrote, 'have long been influenced by French (from which *fay* and *faërie*, *fairy* are derived); but in later times, through their use in translation, both *fairy* and *elf* have acquired much of the atmosphere of German, Scandinavian, and Celtic tales, and many characteristics of the *huldu-fólk*, the *daoine-sithe*, and the *tylwyth teg*' ('On Fairy-Stories,' 11n.). It is easy to feel his regrets. Tolkien's interests lay with older stories and interpretations rather than with the adulterated versions of 'later times,'[36] and to add to the problem, there is little about elves (or dwarves, for that matter) in ancient English or ancient Germanic tales. *The Prose Edda*, for example, refers to light-elves, a people 'fairer than the sun to look at.' Light-elves live in Álfheimr (Elf-home) and are generally associated with the gods, but there are dark-elves too, dwelling underneath the earth and associated with the dwarfs. These are 'blacker than pitch' and even more unlike the light-elves in nature than they are in their appearance.[37] Unfortunately, little more is known. 'There are no songs or stories preserved about Elves or Dwarfs in ancient English, and little enough in any other German language,' Tolkien wrote in 1961. 'Words, a few names, that is about all,' Tolkien laments (*Letters*, 314).[38] And yet *elf* appears in various forms in several languages, as *álfr* in Old Norse (Old Icelandic) and as *ælf* in Anglo-Saxon. (And, of course, variations of the word or concept still exist in modern Germanic tongues.) In all traditions and cultures, however, a division exists between the best and the worst of elves. In *Beowulf*, for example, elves – along with giants and demon-corpses – are descendants of Cain (a fact that Tolkien mentions in 'On Fairy-Stories'). But there are favourable expressions as well, such as the Anglo-Saxon *ælfscýne* ('elf-beautiful')[39] or Ælf for the start of a masculine name, as in *Alfred*, meaning 'Counsel from the Elves.'[40] In some ways, then, *elf*, was even more problematic than *fairy*, though *elf* nicely avoids the French *fay* association (a comfort to Tolkien, who was no lover of the French or their language).

Fortunately, Tolkien took pleasure in linguistic puzzles and linguistic complexity. It pleased him to make sense of shifts in meaning and form; and it pleased him to include, as much as

possible, variant accounts in his own literature. He makes a good attempt at this by borrowing from the Norse dark/light elves in *The Silmarillion*, where there are two primary races: the Elves of the Light (who journeyed to Valinor and saw Valinor's two light-bearing trees) and the Elves of Darkness (who remained in Middle-earth).[41] Though the divisions are not always clear, differences between Light and Dark Elves come to a head in the story of Eöl, 'named the Dark Elf' (*Silmarillion*, 132). Eöl has more liking for Dwarves than for his own Elven kin, and his story is not a happy one (he slays his wife in an attempt to kill their son). However, Dark Elves are not necessarily bad; nor are Elves of the Light all good, and there are Grey-elves (Elves of the Twilight), Green-elves, Deep-elves, the Wood-elves of Mirkwood, and even Sea-elves (all of which creates a link to Anglo-Saxon, where compounds of this sort are found).

It is also true that 'gifts of delicacy and perfection' in Tolkien's Elves (Elves of whatever kind) place them high in the hierarchy of Middle-earth (*Letters*, 147). This suggests yet another connection to Norse mythology. In eddic accounts, light-elves are the ones associated with the gods. In *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*, Elves are the race who associate with the Valar (and the Valar are virtually gods). Though both Men and Elves are 'Children of Ilúvatar' in Tolkien's mythology, it is the Elves, rather than Men, who were created to be more like the Valar 'in nature' and who remain closest to Valinor (*Silmarillion*, 41). Nonetheless, this association of Tolkien's Elves with the divine, or near-divine, links them more satisfactorily to the Celtic *Tuatha Dé Danann* gods than it does to the light-elves of Norse belief. Like the accomplished, beautiful *Tuatha Dé Danann* – a race that came to Ireland from over the water – Tolkien's fair and gifted Elves came to Middle-earth from over the Western Sea, and we know that Tolkien once intended to use the *Tuatha Dé Danann* in a separate tale.[42] The fact is there was far more Celtic than Norse material available for Tolkien's use, far more about the Celtic gods that would serve well with his Elves. Tolkien, however, did what he could for the Norse: he slipped in the light-elves' name, beauty, and choice of company, and he created a story to explain why Elves can be either

Light or Dark. (In a similar spirit of inclusiveness, he borrowed *orc* and *ent*.)[43]

In the matter of the Celts, there is this as well: if we step aside from linguistic and literary speculation and apply an unscholarly test, most of us would agree that Tolkien's Elves *feel* far more Celtic than Norse, that they are deeply invested with Celtic ethereality and Celtic shiftings of time. Moreover, it is T.A. Shippey's belief that Tolkien (who 'gave greatest weight and longest consideration to single poems, tales, phrases, images') likely used the hunting king from *Sir Orfeo* for his Elven 'master-text.'[44] Certainly no other text feels as right or fits as well – though the haunting, magical fairy host appears to Sir Orfeo at noon, and Elven encounters in Tolkien's stories mostly occur when light is dim, as it is for the Wood-elves of *The Hobbit*, who 'took ever more and more to the gloaming and the dusk' (145).

The point is Celts and things Celtic are very much present in Tolkien's literature. He knew his Celtic languages; he knew his Celtic literature (ancient and medieval), and all this will become more evident when we look closely at the Elves in chapters lying ahead. But Tolkien's early intention had not only been to create a high-toned body of legend touched with Celtic beauty; he had also intended to make this body of work 'somewhat cool and clear ... redolent of our "air" (the clime and soil of the North West, meaning Britain and the hither parts of Europe)' (*Letters*, 144). These 'hither parts' of Europe (and Scandinavia) gave England its Teutonic heritage, and Tolkien wanted the Teutons as well as the Celts; he wanted their languages, their stories, and their places of origin, and he wanted it all to fit logically and believably within his Middle-earth.

Linguistically this was not so difficult. English has accommodated itself to (or developed from) a mix of languages, and with these languages came tales and beliefs that intermingled and grew. Geographically, however, Tolkien's ambition was not quite so simple. Even today England and all of Britain contain green and wooded regions where Tolkienian Elves could appropriately reside; but England lacks true mountains (in the Norse and Alpine sense), and Tolkien wanted greater landscape drama in his

Middle-earth. What he wanted, in fact, were settings and scenes that the Norse and Anglo-Saxons carried along with them to England within their mythologies: desolate reaches, vast rolling plains, and mountains of fire and ice;[45] and he solves his country's lacking most ingeniously.

Topographically speaking, Tolkien's Middle-earth includes Northwestern Europe and Scandinavia through a reconstruction that does not 'relate the shape of the mountains and land-masses to what geologists may say or surmise about the nearer past' (*Letters*, 220).[46] Such an act of geological revision served Tolkien in more than one way. It not only gave him a larger stage for his expansive and expanding tale, but it also diminished that pluralism which was in some ways so troubling to Tolkien, that sense that England has been peopled by foreign imports brought from other shores. In Tolkien's Middle-earth the reverse occurs; Middle-earth has reached outward to other shores and attached onto itself land formations that (in our reality) are divided from Britain by sea – so creating a unified land mass and greatly increasing the feeling that Tolkien's races rightly belong to a single, connected world.

Within this Middle-earth blend, the main focus and main tensions continue to exist between Celts and Teuton (and more than one type of these), but the English – a rather idealized, nineteenth-century, rural version of the English – are there as well, representing something that is neither Celtic nor Nordic but strongly connected to each. Since character and landscape are always closely related in Tolkien's literature, this means there are three basic terrains in his composite Middle-earth: a Northern European-Scandinavian wilderness, a Celtic twilight realm, and an English countryside. This last, the English setting, is most clearly represented in and near the Shire, but even after Tom Bombadil and Bree are far behind and the hobbits have entered a Middle-earth wilderness, something English never quite disappears.[47]

At the very edge of Mordor, there is a Robin Hood touch in Faramir and his men. In Fangorn Forest there is Treebeard whose language, when he is not speaking Entish, has a comfortable English ring ('There are Ents and Ents, you know; or there are Ents and things that look like Ents but ain't, as you might say'; *TT*,

68), and Treebeard's forest itself links us back to the Shire by reminding Pippin of an old, untouched, shabby room back home.

The most able, persistent, and appealing representatives of England, however, are the hobbits. Where they go, England is carried along. As Bilbo and the Fellowship move deeper and deeper into Norse and Celtic realms (moving back, as it were, to an earlier time as well), the Shire's hominess is maintained through the hobbits themselves; and their presence serves to reduce Middle-earth extremes. The high tone of Elven speech is saved from Celtic excess by the hobbits' comfortable ways – by Sam, especially, and Sam's homespun hobbit talk.[48] In the wreckage of Isengard, on the Stairs before Cirith Ungol, in the midst of Mordor itself, hobbit cheerfulness arises to soften heroic intemperance or to dispel, for a moment, a sense of impending doom. It is this quiet, unassuming fortitude that Tolkien admired in his own countrymen during the First World War, 'the indomitable courage of quite small people against impossible odds'; and hobbits, says Tolkien, are just 'rustic English people, made small in size' (Gueroult interview).

But having said this, there is another and less comforting way in which Tolkien inserts a present-day English note, and this note too has its connections to England's North. During the nineteenth century, England grew to be more and more divided between its aesthetically pleasing (though often financially poorer) agricultural South and its more polluted, bleaker industrial North. Tolkien's own testimony to the creeping invasion of industry and machine-made structures is poignant and deeply felt. 'It is not the *not-man* (e.g. weather) nor *man* (even at a bad level), but the *man-made* that is ultimately daunting and insupportable. If a ragnarök would burn all the slums and gas-works, and shabby garages, and long arc-lit suburbs, it cd. for me burn all the works of art – and I'd go back to trees' (*Letters*, 96).

In the Goblin tunnels of *The Hobbit*, where Tolkien describes the machines and instruments of the 'cruel, wicked, and bad-hearted' goblin race (60); in Isengard with its 'shafts' and 'hammers' and 'iron wheels,' its 'fires and foul fumes' (*TT*, 160, 173); on Mordor's fields of Gorgoroth, with its 'smoke' and leaking 'fumes' (*RK*,

200); and on Mount Doom with its 'furnaces far below' and its 'ash and slag' (*RK*, 175 and 217), Tolkien repeatedly identifies devastation with modern industry, a phenomenon as unfortunately English as its countryside, forests, or shires.

If there is a solution to this present-day English desolation created by Englishmen, it too lies within the English, in the best of English-kind. It lies in the courage and tenacity Tolkien admired in his fellow countrymen during the First World War; it lies in the English ability to recognize duty and carry resolutely through – accepting war, if war must be, and picking up and setting straight in the aftermath. The Ents, once awakened, march to Isengard; the Ents, after defeating Saruman, will make Isengard again the garden it once had been.

It is the same with the hobbits, who return and rebuild the Shire. Though it is their complacent and comfort-seeking qualities that stand out most consistently, a warrior's courage or an Elf's sensitivity can arise in hobbits as well. So it is that Sam, a hobbit's hobbit and a gardener, can be stirred to philosophy and poetry as well as to heroics and unwavering Teutonic resolve. It is this sense of two almost incompatible traits – neatly held in balance – that most significantly marks the hobbits. We see it in Bilbo, 'child of the kindly West,' who returns as an 'elf-friend' and versifier and who earns honour among dwarves and wears a dwarvish cloak. In a tale less gloomy than Frodo's, Bilbo faces risk and northern intensity and gains a sense of proportion, 'some courage and some wisdom, blended in measure' as the dying Thorin knows (*H*, 243 and 247). What Bilbo has acquired (or rediscovered within himself) is an Englishman's northern roots. He has gained an Anglo-Saxon self-reliance and a Norseman's sense of will, and all of this is kept from excess by a Celtic sensitivity, by a love of earth, of poetry, and of simple song and cheer. In *The Lord of the Rings* this same balance shows up in other configurations or in other characters (in Treebeard or in Pippin, Merry, and Sam); but for Frodo the balance is lost. He cannot regain the moderation that hobbits and the best of the English maintain. His burden and his trials have taken him too far; and though he too is a recipient of attributes both Celtic and Teutonic, he is a recipient in a less

happy, less modified way. He has become a figure of Celtic sorrow and a figure of Nordic doom, an English blend of England's two cultures without the balance and cheer.

This is how Tolkien, 'grieved by the poverty' of his own 'beloved' country, created England's mythology (*Letters*, 144). The body of 'legend' that he originally hoped to achieve is there in Middle-earth, in its variant Norths and in its hobbits and others who combine these Norths into an English one. Tolkien has taken the England he loved – forest and garden and town – and given it back its elemental past, a past dependent on the memories and tales of those early peoples who crossed sea and channel to reach England's shore.

And just as Tolkien brought together Britain's Norse and Celtic worlds (their settings, characters, and philosophies), he brought together more than one age, the Third Age of Middle-earth and the twentieth century of England, each an age where forests and waysides are lessening, where great and ruthless powers are spreading throughout the world, but each too an age where the strengths and virtues of Englishman, Norseman, and Celt (like Arthur himself) may arise.

Chapter Two

Skin-Changing in More than One Sense: The Complexity of Beorn

The most persistent criticism made of J.R.R. Tolkien's fiction is its moral simplicity, its tendency to follow firmly delineated lines of characterization, to slip into what Diana Wynne Jones would call a 'Goodies v. Baddies story.'[1] And certainly fantasy – freed, as it is, from 'the domination of observed "fact"' – has a particular capacity for unequivocal characterization and moral certitude ('On Fairy-Stories,' 45). Fantasists are more at liberty to fortify or justify their own biases; they can rig the game in ways less easily defended in other literary forms. They can more comfortably create a world where everything and everyone is clearly and properly in one camp or the other, where extremes in class, rank, and morality are just as the author sees fit.

Tolkien's fiction seems unquestionably to have been created along these lines. It is not difficult to identify Tolkien's likes and dislikes, his values and preferences, his sense of who belongs where. All the usual clues mark his partialities: light and dark, ugly and fair, black and white, high and low, up and down (plus a few that are somewhat more peculiar to Tolkien: the superiority of North over South, of West over East, and the unadorned over the ornate).

Even though this emphasis on opposition and dissimilarity persists throughout Tolkien's literature, it is important to realize that a good number of his contrasting viewpoints are not easily divided into absolute good or bad. Tolkien, often enough, finds himself drawn to more than one quality or trait, more than one culture or

attitude, and pronouncements made in one place may be countered by statements made elsewhere or at other times. Tolkien, for example, both rejects and makes use of allegory, both laments and idealizes the pagans, both scorns and reveres the Celts. He is strongly attracted to the loner, to independence of thought, and to singularity (qualities closely associated with the heroic North). At the same time, however, he is deeply committed to kingship, inheritance, and ritual, to the idea that blood will sooner or later tell (qualities far more English in their reliance on position and community). This same doubleness of attitude shows in certain tensions that occur throughout *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, tensions between garden and wilderness, home and wayside, security and risk, tradition and the need for change.

Inclinations of this sort, inclinations at odds with other inclinations, are in no way detrimental to Tolkien literature. To a large extent, it is the pull between differing beliefs, cultures, or ideals that saves Tolkien from the triteness of his imitators. He may appear to have easy solutions; he may create extremes based on exaggerated types, but the solutions and extremes Tolkien offers us are played out on so many levels and are linked in so many ways that his writing retains a richness beyond his surface simplicity.

Nonetheless – in spite of all this – Tolkien is typically criticized for dividing his characters into a too easily recognizable evil and a too obvious good. And, true enough, we tend to prefer those Tolkien characters who appear to be exceptions to this rule, those individuals who, initially at least, suggest moral uncertainty, individuals such as Aragorn, Treebeard, or Beorn, who fall on the side of good but who carry an aura of risk.

Often, however, Tolkien adds complexity to his best characters not so much by hints of a darker side but by his habit of intermingling opposing qualities or differing values drawn from more than one literary tradition or from more than one cultural base. And this particular form of character complexity (a complexity admittedly more literary than psychological) is not so easily recognized. Since Tolkien, for example, values both independence and dependence (both the freedom of the Viking North and the social constraints of England), it is not surprising that certain of his

characters exhibit both extremes. Usually these are individuals who display exceptional self-sufficiency and freedom of choice but who are equally capable of devoting themselves to a cause, when the time or need is right. Obvious examples are Tolkien's singular stewards and guardians (men or wizards), his Robin Hood 'outlaw' figures (English and free ranging at once), and those who prefer seclusion in isolated homes or halls – all those who live apart or travel apart and yet belong to the good.

To a lesser extent the 'bachelor' figures of Bilbo and Frodo belong to this type as well, as does Sam, in a modified servant-class way. These are individuals who more or less differ from others of their kind, who suffer from a certain poetic sensitivity and who live (like the characters in *The Wind in the Willows*) free from familial restraints. Through temperament and fate, these are the singled-out hobbits, Men, Wizards, Elves, and Dwarves who qualify for the quest, an undertaking which requires freedom and restraint combined.

The most striking of Tolkien's individuals, however, are his innate, one-of-a-kind loners, the honourable isolationists who dwell in secluded domains and who are presented as being distinctive, free, self-reliant but respectful of other lives and hostile only to those deserving hostility. They are, in order of appearance, Beorn, 'appalling' when angry, though 'kind enough if humoured' (*H*, 102); Tom Bombadil, ancient and knowledgeable but childlike and innocent of a large or consistent world-view; and Treebeard, righteous and sentimental, peaceable, ponderous and pondering and yet capable of violence when the cause is just. Each is a mixture of opposing qualities, and each is based on a variety of figures taken from various tales, figures well known to Tolkien and connected, one way or another, to Britain's rich and complex past. To Tolkien's credit, there is no sense that Beorn, Tom Bombadil, or Treebeard have been patched together. All three come across as temperamentally whole.

A sense of the 'good pagan' is particularly strong in each of these characters too, though Christianity (or at least its values) is never fully absent in anything Tolkien creates to exemplify the good.[2] Where the setting seems more Nordic (that is, either

generally Teutonic or specifically Scandinavian), the pagan element becomes pronounced; where a softer, more English climate prevails, Christian values are more likely to occur. And always, in one way or another, something borrowed from the Celts also leaves its mark on Treebeard, Beorn, and Tom Bombadil.

Of Tolkien's unique and isolated characters, Beorn best exemplifies Tolkien's ability to balance two cultural ideals in a single entity (in Beorn's case, primarily Norse and English ideals). At first reading, Beorn's character and the traditions that lie behind it appear to be simple enough. He is, after all, a character in *The Hobbit*, where the tone is far more elementary than it is in *The Lord of the Rings* and where explanations and details are less likely to occur. But there are a good number of contradictions and considerable intricacy connected with Beorn; and these, for the most part, hinge on the previously mentioned dichotomies: North/South, East/West, comradeship and solitude, freedom and obligation, forest and garden, home and wayside, risk and security.

Directional tension exists in the journey itself. The party (consisting of Bilbo, Gandalf, and the dwarves) reaches Beorn's isolated lodgings by travelling from Middle-earth's civilized and idealized West into the physical dangers of North and East, directions that, in Tolkien's mind and in Norse tradition, are always suggestive of risk. There is as well – within the character of Beorn – a Norse/English tension of considerable complexity. Our first impression is that Beorn, the skin-changer, belongs unquestionably to a Norse and pagan world. His name, his appearance, his attachment to violent forms of revenge all link him to the Scandinavian or Teutonic North, and his hall is specifically, intentionally Norse, both in Tolkien's illustrations and in his written word.[3] Nonetheless, Shire-like qualities also play their part, as do hierarchical and elitist elements that contrast with the initial image of pagan independence and northern solitude. Beorn is, after all, a double character, a *two-specied* character, one might say. And though he is rough and alarming (even when shaped like a man), outright dangerous (when wearing the shape of a bear), and committed to justice (admittedly harsh) in either outward form, there are

softer, more civilized aspects to him as well, aspects which are not specifically English or Christian but which suggest elements of both. He neither hunts nor eats other animals but 'lives most on cream and honey' (103). He uses no metal (in other words, no weaponry) except in the occasional household knife where exceptions must be made. His garden is full of flowers, in an English countryside way. Home seems all important and carefully maintained. And yet, of course, Beorn ranges great distances by night and returns from his private, ursine raid 'in a splendidly good humour' (115), having nailed a Warg's skin on a tree and having stuck a goblin's head on the outside of the gate, a nasty and highly Norse stunt (though the early Celts and Anglo-Saxons valued heads as well). He is, then, a being of two extremes: both ruthless and kind, bear and man, homebody and wanderer, berserker and pacifist in one.

This doubleness, this blending of the civilized English with the far more wilful Norse, has an honest history. Since the Anglo-Saxon invasion (beginning in the fifth century) and the Scandinavian invasion (beginning in the eighth), England has sustained a Teutonic undertone. Time and new outside influence (the Norman Conquest, for one) have softened this pagan edge. It has, however, never been fully dislodged, and those English literary works which most influenced Tolkien and which most contributed to the character of Beorn are ones in which the appeal of the North (the appeal of the not-fully-civilized) is easily recognized. There is much about Beorn, for example, that is suggestive of Bertilak de Hautdesert in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a fourteenth-century Middle English poem that Tolkien himself translated into Modern English in the early 1950s. Though *Gawain* is an Arthurian tale and Celtic in its origins (having 'many skilful combinations of elements of older fairy-story'),[4] both the *Gawain* poet and Tolkien take their heroes away from order and civilization – Camelot and the Shire – and thrust them into a deeply northern world of transfiguration and risk.

Gawain's first encounter with Bertilak, like Bilbo's with Beorn, is marked by a Norse magnitude and vitality:[5]

> Gawain gazed at the good man who had greeted him kindly,
> and he thought bold and big was the baron of the castle,
> very large and long, and his life at the prime:
> broad and bright was his beard, and all beaver-hued,
> stern, strong in his stance upon stalwart legs,
> his face fell as fire, and frank in his speech.[6]

Like Bertilak, the grim and outspoken Beorn lives in an isolated oak-wood with mountains a short distance away. Like Bertilak, Beorn takes in unexpected guests. Where Bertilak has a castle, Beorn has 'a great wooden house'; and we see him first standing before the hobbit, 'a huge man with a thick black beard and hair, and great bare arms and legs with knotted muscles' (103–4). Bertilak too is a changer of shape (as well as a changer of hue); and though he practises Christian formalities and Christian courtesies and speaks in the name of God, he, like Beorn, has a sturdiness, bearing, and stature far more appropriate to the sagas than anything to be found in the halls of Camelot or the burrows of the Shire.

In both works, journeys – northward into the wilds of Wales or north and eastward into deeper Middle-earth – are fraught with the sort of threatening encounters one expects in a fiercely pagan world, encounters that appear again and again throughout *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

> Many a cliff [Gawain] climbed o'er in countries unknown,
> far fled from his friends without fellowship he rode.
> At every wading or water on the way that he passed
> he found a foe before him, save at few for a wonder;
> and so foul were they and fell that fight he must needs.
> So many a marvel in the mountains he met in those lands
> that 'twould be tedious the tenth part to tell you thereof.
> At whiles with worms he wars, and with wolves also,
> at whiles with wood-trolls that wandered in the crags,
> and with bulls and with bears and boars, too, at times;
> and with ogres that hounded him from the heights of the fells.[7]

This is a British wilderness that the poet describes, from a time when forests and bogs were still untamed; and yet Brian Stone, another translator of *Gawain*, believes the poem creates 'an almost Norse sense of desolate nature.'[8] I would go further: the adversaries Gawain meets – dragons (worms), wolves, bears, trolls – are consistently Norse in kind and intensity.[9]

A deeply northern literature, then, left its mark on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. And *Gawain* in turn left its mark on Beorn – a perfect example of that literary cross-fertilization and blending that Tolkien, in his essay 'On Fairy-Stories,' refers to as 'soup.' Tolkien was a philologist, an expert in languages and literatures; he was, therefore, well aware that themes and motifs are exempt from border control and that all good stories are the result of plots and ideas that have been borrowed and rearranged since storytelling began. Though Beorn's ferocity, size, and posturing, his name and Norseman's hall, appear to be solidly based on saga convention and saga imagery, Beorn has been filtered through English literature and placed in a modified setting where the Norse and English combine. All of this brings him more in line with England itself and hence in line with Tolkien's concept of a Middle-earth based on components of ancient Northwestern Europe and England (meaning Britain as well) brought together as a continental whole.

The oak-woods that surround both Bertilak's castle and Beorn's large wooden hall are indicative. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the feeling given by these woods is entirely druidic and suggestive of that particular otherworldliness that appears in either Celtic tales or in the Celtic-based Arthurian tales that England took as its own. But the oak has a broader significance and thereby serves as a common denominator for Tolkien's synthesized Middle-earth. The oak existed in ancient forests in England, Scandinavia, and Northwestern Europe and was sacred there, as well as in Iceland (though trees of any kind are less common there and less impressive in size, and the concept in Iceland may have been imported by Norwegian settlers). The oak tree also bears the mistletoe, a plant living mysteriously between earth and air and therefore considered magical in both Norse and Celtic belief. It

was, we should remember, a shaft of mistletoe that slew Balder (the son of Odin and the Norse god most deserving of praise), and Balder was otherwise invincible.

But borrowings from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and references to shared English, European, and Scandinavian beliefs are not the only ingredients that Tolkien drew upon when he came to shaping Beorn. Influence from *Beowulf* (most likely written in the first half of the eighth century) is strongly there as well. Where *Gawain* is only partially Northern in its outward journey into a harsh, cold, pagan nature (replete with wildmen, monsters, and savage beasts), the earlier, Old English *Beowulf* is unrelentingly Northern – brutal, cold, heroic, and severe. It was written, says Tolkien, 'in a language that after many centuries has still essential kinship with our own, it was made in this land, and moves in our northern world beneath our northern sky, and for those who are native to that tongue and land, it must ever call with a profound appeal – until the dragon comes.'[10]

The influence of *Beowulf* on *The Hobbit* (which shows an obvious borrowing of monsters, dragons, dragon hoards, and a dragon's stolen cup) has been thoroughly described in Tolkien criticism before. What is less frequently and only briefly mentioned, however, are specific character similarities that link Beowulf and Beorn. Though Beowulf is not a shape-shifter like Beorn, something of an ursine nature is suggested in his name. *Beowulf*, in its literal translation, means *bee-wolf*; and, through the vagaries of poetic kenning (a form of metaphorical naming), *bee-wolf* stands for the one who is ravenous for honey and therefore represents the 'bear,' or, in its Anglo-Saxon form, *beorn*. It is for this reason that Tolkien, in his essay 'On Fairy-Stories,' refers to the young Beowulf as 'the bear-boy' (30) and in his essay 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight' writes of the 'Bear-boy' that lurks behind Beowulf.[11]

Like Beowulf, Beorn returns with dismembered pieces of his enemies and displays the grisly remains. He is, in fact, a berserker, or 'bearshirter,' as the word is often explained.[12] But *beorn* is also an Old English heroic word for *man*. (Compare the present-day tribute, 'He's a real tiger.') What we get, then, is Beorn the skin-changer, a highly domestic individual, a pacifist and bee-keeper,

settled in the midst of rather English-sounding flower fields and gardens, but an individual who is at the same time a figure of brutal strength and violence, who belongs to an ancient, northern, and carnivorous world and lives in a Norseman's hall.

In fact, if one were to draw concentric circles, with Beorn's hall or lodge as the central point, rings of mixed English and Norse characteristics emerge. Outside the low-lying, wide, Viking hall, with its open smoke hole in the roof, lies the courtyard with its flower garden coming 'right up to the steps' in a homey and English way. For Bilbo, these flowers appear to be a mixture of the familiar and the strange; 'he had never seen half of them before' (106).

Beyond the courtyard is the wider yard – patterned after the Old Saxon *gard* (*garðr* in Old Icelandic) – with its cluster of surrounding outer buildings, 'barns, stables, sheds,' all enclosed by a 'high thorn-hedge' (reminiscent of early English protective techniques). This is itself surrounded by a 'belt of tall and very ancient oaks' of a size and antiquity more appropriate to England's fertile soil than to the colder more barren North, but nonetheless suitable to both (104). Here as well lie flower fields established for the bees, 'all the same kinds growing together as if they had been planted,' mostly clover: purple clover, cockscomb clover, and 'short white sweet honey-smelling clover' (103). Further out, beyond this last indication of Shire-like horticulture, lie hilly slopes and dales with oak and elm trees in a distribution again more mindful of England than regions farther north, though here also are 'wide grass-lands, and a river running through it all' (100) on a scale that seems truer to Iceland than anything England can claim. Beyond this are the mountains, severely northern in their looming, bleak inhospitality and Norse in their goblin Mountain King.[13]

In Tolkien's writings, terrain alone is often enough to establish character or intent. And, indeed, the extremes of terrain displayed in the chapter on Beorn do much to establish who he is. We are, to tell the truth, given few facts about Beorn, little more than what is described or explained while Bilbo and his party stay in his hall. Tolkien, who often enough supplies long histories for his key characters, wisely leaves us with uncertainty when it comes

to defining Beorn. 'He' or '*Somebody*' or 'that Somebody,' is how Gandalf initially refers to Beorn. 'Some say that he is a bear descended from the great and ancient bears of the mountains that lived there before the giants came. Others say that he is a man descended from the first men who lived before Smaug or the other dragons came into this part of the world, and before the goblins came into the hills out of the North. I cannot say, though I fancy the last is the true tale. He is not the sort of person to ask questions of' (103). We learn too that Beorn has a past, one that entails a defeat. He has been heard to mutter to himself, on his lone and mountainous Carrock, 'The day will come when they will perish and I shall go back!' (103). But this and other peculiarities remain unexplained. 'Why is it called the Carrock?' Bilbo asks. Because, says Gandalf, that 'is his word for it' (102). (*Carrock*, or *carrecc*, however, is not an invented term but an Old Welsh and hence Celtic word for *rock*, giving us yet another example of Tolkien's cultural mingling.)

Tolkien brings Beorn back – an enigma to the end – for an encore at the Battle of Five Armies, 'alone, and in bear's shape,' appearing 'no one knew how or from where' and wrecking great havoc on goblins and wolves alike (244). Though we hear the Beorn later 'became a great chief' in his region (248) and that he had many descendants, we are not shown him in a family setting or in a voluntarily social state. What is mostly apparent is his wish to be left alone, a fact emphasized early on when we are told that Beorn 'never invited people into his house, if he could help it' and that the 'very few friends' he had 'lived a good way away' (110). The closest we come to an image of open hospitality in connection with Beorn is the mention made of 'Yule-tide' feasting held in his house on Bilbo's journey home.[14] But this festivity is as much an après-battle celebration as it is a domestic or social affair. Beorn's world is the typically masculine one of Norse/Teutonic tales, a world that suffers little or no female intrusion, a far cry from Camelot. Yet descendants, the Beornings, appear; so somewhere a mating occurs.

There is, as well, an interesting note to these descendants of Beorn. In *The Lord of the Rings*, occasional mention is made of

these Beornings as 'valiant' and 'trusty' men. But in *The Hobbit*, the Beornings are divided into two opposing categories, just as Beorn himself is divided into contrary character types. Some of Beorn's descendants 'were grim men and bad,' we are told, 'but most were in heart like Beorn' (248). Such splitting into opposing characteristics has its parallels in the Norse sagas, where children are not infrequently defined by such polarities. A particularly striking example comes from the *Saga of Egill Skallagrímsson*, where, as T.A. Shippey points out, the skin-changing ability of Kveld-Úlfr (Evening-Wolf) is remarkably close to that of Beorn.[15] But, more than this, the fate of the two skin-changers' offspring is also much the same. Kveld-Úlfr has two sons, one who is handsome, pleasant, and generous and one who is hard working but ugly and disagreeable; so too the Beornings, who divide even more precisely into evil and good.

Skin-changing, however, is by no means limited to Norse sagas or to eddic tales of shape-shifting giants and gods. The Celts and Northwestern Europeans in general all have their tales of those who can shift appearance and acquire the capabilities (wisdom or strength) of animals, fish, or birds. And these shared concepts about shape-changing (like those shared beliefs associated with the oak) help draw Britain, Northwestern Europe, and Scandinavia together in the manner Tolkien intended for his unified Middle-earth. Nonetheless, Beorn's particular form of skin-changing belongs to the Norse berserker tradition more than it does to any other form of the feat. His revenge on goblin and wolf, his 'scraping, scuffling, and growling' outside the door at night (115), come closest to the ominous, purposeful, carnal experience we see in Kveld-Úlfr or in the *Saga of Hrólf Kraki* where Biarki (Little Bear) fights in the Danish king's army in the form of a massive bear.

Beorn, then, remains strongly and predominantly Norse, and he remains so in our minds (in spite of some English mollification and a subtle Celtic link) not only because of the saga-like quality of his shape-changing and his sense of savage revenge but also because he seems the epitome of the independent man. Rather than the fixed social order of the English and Arthurian world

(evident and idealized elsewhere in Middle-earth), in Beorn we seem to have the exemplary Norse ideal, the individual on his own – grim, self-sufficient, expecting no good from the world, expecting no saving grace, loyal to those deserving, and, most telling of all, 'under no enchantment but his own' (103). This last, fierce, and uncompromising self-containment, this mastery of his own magic and acknowledgment of no other power, is very Norse indeed.

In the Icelandic sagas there is a commonplace question and a commonplace response which Shippey emphasizes to illustrate the Norseman's code of independence, self-aggrandizement, and unyielding fortitude. The question is 'What do you believe in?' 'I believe in myself' (*Ek trúi á sjálfan mik*) is the traditional reply.[16] Beorn, with all his suspicion, his night forages to check on Gandalf's tale, his self-made Norse *staðr* (or *stead*, as in the English *homestead*), and his single-handed/single-pawed, battle, represents the ideal Viking hero and fulfils what Tolkien refers to as the northern 'theory of courage.'

But it is not quite so simple. There are difficulties in the picture of Beorn that compromise this ideal, difficulties that conflict with the image of self-reliance and Northern solitude. And these bring Beorn more in line with Tolkien's English views. Full independence requires a certain amount of separation and self-sufficiency; when these are compromised, independence is as well. The ideal that Tolkien emphasizes in Beorn is the ideal of the lone and capable individual, the hero facing life with nothing to trust but himself. For all we know, there is only one Beorn, only one being in Middle-earth who shifts between man and bear. What could be more isolating than such singularity? But, in fact, something is amiss. Beorn, the isolated Norseman, is neither truly alone nor truly self-sufficient. He has around him an entourage of servants, easy to disregard in their farm animal forms – ponies, dogs, and sheep that serve him silently and intelligently, setting tables, carrying in food, and no doubt washing up after meals:

> Beorn clapped his hands, and in trotted four beautiful white ponies and several large long-bodied grey dogs. Beorn said some-

> thing to them in a queer language like animal noises turned into talk. They went out again and soon came back carrying torches in their mouths, which they lit at the fire and stuck in low brackets on the pillars of the hall about the central hearth. The dogs could stand on their hind-legs when they wished, and carry things with their fore-feet. Quickly they got out boards and trestles from the side walls and set them up near the fire. (110–11)

How ought we to judge this form of servant labour in context of the independent man? The ancient Norse had their serf class, descended, the story goes, from Thrall, the lowest and least valued of Heimdall's three earth-born sons. Ugly, twisted, but strong, Thrall and his equally unattractive children are the people destined for labour, for the cutting and hauling of wood, for digging, for herding goats and pigs, and for the spreading of dung in fields. But Beorn's clean, willing, animal servants resemble not thralls but something far more class oriented in a familiar, English way. They are, in fact, closer to personal or house servants, from what we see, though ones of a very exceptional kind. Like Sam, in his devotion to Frodo, these are willing attendants, protective of their position and born to their role, one feels.

This is invariably the case with Tolkien. His idealized independent figures are always somehow sovereign, and the solitude they experience is strongly bound to class. Tom Bombadil is (with some equivocation) called 'the Master' and Treebeard is 'the eldest and chief of the Ents' (*TT*, 164). These are the individuals who seem most free in Tolkien's structured world, but the freedom they experience has its other side. Beorn's animal servants, like all of Tolkien's more plentiful subject folk, are not quite as free as those to whom they are subject, not quite as free of someone else's enchantment or another's authority. 'The trees and the grasses and all living things belong each to themselves,' Goldberry explains in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. This sounds well enough; nonetheless Goldberry refers to Tom as 'Master' four times in quick succession. He is 'Master of the house,' 'Master of wood, water, and hill,' 'master,' and 'the Master,' and no one else is master over Tom (135).

For Tolkien this is as it ought to be. We are better, he feels, for hierarchical loyalties. 'I think (contrary to most people) that touching your cap to the squire may be damn bad for the squire but it's damn good for you,' said Tolkien in Denys Gueroult's 1965 radio interview. And yet the greatest evil for Tolkien is 'possessiveness,' a sin which includes not only materialism and greed but also domination, enslavement, and arbitrary control – qualities which may be as manifest in those who inherit power as they are in those who acquire it by force, deception, or stealth.

The answer for Tolkien is knowing your place, as Beorn and his animals do. Who else should be the master but this skin-changer who rules, as Adam does, the creatures of his domain? We feel the fittingness of Beorn in his solitary governing role; we are impressed by his extraordinary powers, by his sheer physical presence, and by the right he has to existence in both the human and the animal world. And it is only on reflection (a risky business at times) that we sense a double reality. Tolkien's self-reliant loners are never quite what they seem. For all his emphasis on independence, freedom of choice, and the call of the open road, Tolkien remains equally attached to hierarchical attachments and to traditional roles.

Chapter Three

Bridges, Gates, and Doors

It was C.S. Lewis who entitled his book of collected fantasy essays *Of Other Worlds*, but fascination with otherness – with other beings, other times, other states of mind – was, if anything, more a part of Tolkien's character than it was Lewis's. The worlds Lewis creates are both convincing and compelling; they are, however, strongly connected to the present. Without exception, Lewis's adventurers belong to the twentieth century and look upon the other worlds they encounter through twentieth-century eyes. This is clearly so in his science fiction trilogy (*Out of the Silent Planet*, et al.), but even in his Narnia books, with their borrowings from medieval England and classical mythology and with their well-developed Narnian characters, Lewis's effects and intent are not the same as Tolkien's. Narnia seems (and in fact is) highly dependent on active intervention from our world, highly dependent on visitation from twentieth-century sons of Adam and modern daughters of Eve.

This is not the case with Tolkien. His adventurers belong to the worlds he creates, and we experience Middle-earth through these people, almost as though we ourselves are citizens of their world, a world quite independent of twentieth-century awareness and in no way in need of its approval or its patronage. When the last book is finished and laid aside, there is a feeling that Middle-earth – its business, its history, its destiny – still moves on. And this is precisely what Tolkien wants us to feel. He wants us to believe in his world as an alternate reality, a reality as complete and as valid as the one we occupy.

Since we cannot, however, comprehend – much less appreciate – a world too removed from the one we know, Tolkien begins with the familiar; he begins by patterning Middle-earth, the *physical* Middle-earth, after our own world (what Tolkien refers to as 'the Primary World'). There are differences, of course. In Middle-earth, physical nature is awake; trees and mountains are capable of choosing sides, but the foundations of Middle-earth are nonetheless based on the 'clay, stone and wood' of the world we already know ('On Fairy-Stories,' 55). In a similar way, human nature (though weighted differently to suit the various races) remains unmodified. Even Tolkien's most godlike or monstrous beings are motivated by the same urges, compulsions, or restraints that drive the inhabitants of our own reality.

By themselves, however, these elements of familiarity are not enough. Though the consistency of their presence gives us a footing throughout, and though Tolkien begins in that region of Middle-earth most closely related to our own, he still needs to transfer us out of our own world and into his created one; and once we have made this transfer, he needs to move us further on in, until (so to speak) the entrance way is no longer in view and we have adjusted to the workings and possibilities of a greater Middle-earth. He does this in several ways: through the persuasive and transformative powers of both language and languages, through a supreme sense of pacing that allows us to adjust bit by bit to the less familiar and the strange, and through a variety of boundary markers and gateways (borrowed for the most part from tales of the Celtic Otherworld and from Norse mythology). Often enough, the three – language, pacing, and borders – work in unity.

As mentioned earlier, Tolkien knew, or was familiar with, a good dozen or so living languages (particularly European and Scandinavian ones) and at least as many of those we call dead. And he knew variations and stages of these languages – the ways they were spoken or written in different centuries and in different quarters of the Western World. In his literature, when he moves us further and further into Middle-earth's various regions and various secluded lands, he relies heavily on linguistic distinctions, on distinctions in tempo, stress, and tone. He was, after all, a philologist

and therefore well aware of the ways in which language serves both to express regional (and personal) differences and at the same time helps to shape these differences. By developing his own languages, Tolkien was better able to give substance to his Middle-earth peoples; and when he creates or suggests a shifting of language or speech, his readers are carried, by the power of word, into alternate states or realms.

It is almost too trite to speak of the creative and magical powers of language, a concept tiresomely applied to children's literature and poetry, and yet anyone who speaks more than one language with at least minimal fluency knows how much language affects both perception and the speaker's sense of self. When we speak another language, we enter into the culture and character of that language, becoming something other than what we were before. In a sense, we walk in an altered world, forming and delivering ourselves not only *in* but *with* another tongue. In a similar way, when we, as readers, hear the Elves speak of *yrch* or hear of the Uruk-hai (*Orc-race* in Black Speech), the very concept of Orcs, of *Orcness* itself, comes to us from a new perspective and is subtly shifted and changed.

In this way too, an understanding of languages and of language relationships can suddenly, almost miraculously, bridge barriers of time and culture, giving us insight into the past and restoring, as it were, civilizations and peoples that have faded from the earth. By seeing the way language groups evolve and diverge but still relate to one another, we can better see the kinship that various peoples share. This was a concept of extreme importance to Tolkien, and he offers his readers small but intriguing examples of language divergence and word evolution throughout his literature. Frequently, these offerings appear only in passing or are hidden in the isolated use of an unrepeated term, but – like certain houses that seem larger on the inside than their outside form suggests – a single word, once it claims our notice, can expand dramatically. Consider *attercop*, the insult an invisible Bilbo flings at Mirkwood's talking spiders. It means, simply enough, 'poison head' or 'adderhead,' from the Old English *attorcoppa* (*coppa* meaning *top*, *summit*, or *head*). In time, *coppa* by itself came

to mean *spider*; and *coppa*, used in this sense, is with us still in the *cob* of our word *cobweb* (Middle English *coppeweb*). But *coppa*, or *cop*, has still other – and possibly nastier – connections; it not only means *summit* or *head* but also *cup* or *vessel* (a hint, perhaps, of a time when skulls were drinking bowls). Like ancient tales, like the *twe tusend Johr* that Tolkien cites in 'On Fairy-Stories,' such revelations 'open a door on Other Time,' a door which may lead us, as Tolkien explains, 'outside Time itself' (32).

Even more to the point are the ways in which certain words referring to language, words suggesting song or story, are associated with magic and with those elements of evocative and creative power inherent in both religion and mythology. *Enchantment*, for example, is based on *chant*, just as *incantation* is based on a related word, *cant*, which means, among others things, a secret, specialized, or religious language, most familiar to us in *cantor*. It is all there in the Barrow-wight's 'incantation' or 'song,' where a 'formless stream of sad but horrible sounds' begins to shape itself into 'grim, hard, cold words, heartless and miserable,' words that grow in strength and clarity until they become, as Frodo perceives, an evocation of death (152). It is there as well in the essay 'On Fairy-Stories,' where Tolkien speaks of '*Evangelium*' and the 'Gospels' and does so – as T.A. Shippey points out in *The Road to Middle-earth* – well aware that the two are the same, that both come from the Greek *evangelion*, which speakers of Old English translated to *godspel* (meaning *good news* or *good story*). And there is more: within the word *Gospel* itself lies the word *spel* (or *spell*), meaning, Tolkien tells us, 'both a story told, and a formula of power' ('On Fairy-Stories,' 65–6 and 32). To add to this, *spell* is also related both to the more mundane and orthographical *spelling* as well as to *spiel*, a word for *word* or *talk*, thus furthering the connection between language, persuasion, and magical power.

All of this makes its way into Tolkien's literature – in scenes depicting enchantment and moments of creation. Much as Finnish mythology in *Kalevala* (a work well known to Tolkien) begins by celebrating the power of 'words,' 'verses,' 'music,' 'songs,' 'incantations,' 'riddles,' and 'charms' and tells how Väinämöinen, 'the ageless singer,' brings completion to a 'wordless land,'[1] Tolkien

has his Ilúvatar command 'Great Music' that brings the living World into being. The concept is Christian as well, most strikingly so at the opening of The Gospel of St John: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' In Adam too the concept is present, and Adam's role as the first man and namer of beasts is echoed in Tolkien's Tom Bombadil, the 'Eldest' (*FR*, 142), the 'oldest and fatherless' (*FR*, 278), living in his Old Forest Eden and bestowing on the hobbit ponies names they 'answered to ... for the rest of their lives' (*FR*, 155). Tom's power lies in language, in his distinctive song/speech. When he leaves the hobbits, he does so to return to his 'making,' and *making* (Tolkien would be pleased if his readers knew) is a Middle English term for poetic creation.

Since the two (language and magical transference) work together, when Tolkien's characters cross over into new states or new realms, language or intonation is likely to change as well. This occurs not only within the books but between the books. Names and characters reintroduced from *The Hobbit* take on a new seriousness in *The Lord of the Rings*. Gollum is now Sméagol; goblins are Orcs; the Elves have lost their frivolous side and are now capitalized; Bilbo's essentially uncomplicated 'magic ring' that 'made you invisible' (78) is now *the* Ring, the Dark Lord's Ring of Power. At the same time, language itself (written in the form of runes or spoken in the form of incantation or invocation) is often the means of disclosing the way, the means of revealing the spirit world or of finding and coaxing open hidden or recalcitrant doors. Bilbo's adventures begin, we should remember, with a single wizard mark on a firmly shut (but soon to be opened) door.

Language, then, is both catalyst and indicator, both a means of bringing about change and an indication that change has occurred, and it works hand in hand with Tolkien's sense of pacing and with his use of passages and gateways to bring us into his worlds. It is, for example, pure and typical Tolkien to evoke or suggest change through shifts of language and style; it is also pure and typical Tolkien to speak of such transference, or to indicate such transference, by moving his readers through a series of intensifying stages that indicate progression or change. Each stage

requires only a slight adjustment in our thinking or perception, but the accumulation of these small shiftings ultimately permits us to accept even the extremes of Mordor with adequately suspended disbelief. This method of bit-by-bit adjustment is best demonstrated in the long and relatively subdued opening of *The Lord of the Rings*. From the prologue through chapter two (some sixty pages in all), Tolkien stalls the action and uses this lull not only to ease us away from the lighter mood of *The Hobbit* and to introduce necessary background material but also to prepare us for the dangers that lie ahead, incrementally ratcheting us up to a higher, more anxious key. Years pass before Frodo leaves the Shire. Gandalf comes and goes, and with each return a more threatening mood is set.

Still, no matter what level of danger is to be reached, it is essential for *The Lord of the Rings* to begin with hobbits and in the upbeat, more familiar world of the Shire. Hobbits are our first contact with Middle-earth, and their similarity to us (a similarity Tolkien readily admits) helps ease the reader into Tolkien's fictional world. Hobbits are, in fact (in spite of their burrows, their size, and their furry feet), much more closely related to us than are Tolkien's Elves or Dwarves or even, for that matter, his Middle-earth race of Men. Not only are their personalities and interests closest to ours but their home terrain is comfortably English as well (in an idealized, countrified way) and so serves as an excellent jump-off point, an excellent gateway, into Tolkien's Middle-earth. We start off in an initially recognizable world, in an essentially English community where cakes and tea and troublesome neighbours are primary, familiar concerns;[2] and from here, we begin journeying – step by step – in hobbit company (and, in a sense, in hobbit guise) into regions increasingly less familiar, increasingly less like home. All along, the hobbits remain our primary point of reference, our link back to the ordinary, so that we experience the more dangerous regions of Middle-earth through them and see these areas through their eyes, confronting, as they do, the unexpected and the highly remarkable, and adjusting in stages, as they do, to the alien.

To create these stages and to set them off from what has come

before, Tolkien not only mentions (often repeatedly) the passing of time but also relies heavily on images of entrance, transference, and departure. These images – primarily bridges, gates, and doors – serve both to mark the moment of change and to indicate what shifts in perception, attitude, or place are likely to occur. Though bridges, gates, and doors are by no means the only visible structures or markers that Tolkien draws upon to suggest movement into, over, or beyond, they are the most obvious ones; and they are as well the ones most often used in Celtic and Teutonic tradition, in tales where the gods or mortals journey from one world into the next. The very presence of such forms gives substance to otherwise intangible moments, preparing us sometimes for the typically allusive but instantaneous shift into a Celtic otherworld and at other times readying us for the metaphorical solidity of journeys (spiritual or physical) as they are depicted in early Teutonic belief.

This use of demarcating structure is there from the opening scenes of *The Hobbit*, where first a door and a soon a bridge play subtle but meaningful roles. Our first outward glimpse of Middle-earth is framed by Bilbo's door; and true to Tolkien's method of intermixing the familiar with the outright strange, Bilbo's door is both commonplace and remarkable. The green paint and brass doorknob are normal enough, but the door is perfectly rounded 'like a porthole,' and the knob is in the centre (a positioning not unheard of but special all the same). When we look out this door, we see what Bilbo sees: the sun is shining; the grass is very green; an old man with a staff approaches. But the old man is Gandalf, and before two days have passed, Bilbo will find himself leaving his home and crossing The Water to join wizard and dwarves in a journey to the East.

In a nutshell, in highly simplified form (and enhanced by pacing and language), this is Tolkien's *modus operandi*, his most characteristic method of moving us away from the known and everyday. A door is opened; water is crossed, and the familiar gives way to the strange.

The pattern is somewhat less obvious in *The Lord of the Rings*, but even in *The Hobbit*, Tolkien's methods are rarely as simple or

straightforward as they initially seem. *The Hobbit* is full of references to borders and edges (as in the repeated phrase 'over the Edge of the Wild'). Mountains and water, as might be expected, play significant roles. Altogether, Bilbo will have two major encounters with mountains; and, on the outward journey alone, will come across (and, of course, literally *come across)* a good dozen rivers, lakes, or streams important enough to warrant mentioning. He will as well move through an almost uncountable number of doorways, passageways, gates, or arching entrances. Altogether, then, Bilbo and his party will enter mountains and leave mountains; they will cross water, ride on water, be immersed in water; they will open doors and shut doors, will seek to come in, and will seek to come out – over and over again. Some of these occurrences are dramatic, others deliberately underplayed. Only rarely are they merely incidental.

In *The Lord of the Rings* too, bridges, gateways, and natural barriers (as well as tunnels, arches, passes, crossings, hedges, and walls) appear again and again, in various forms and various circumstances, so that Tolkien has us enter not just one new world or state but a series of these – prepositionally conveyed, as it were, *into*, *over*, *under*, *beyond*, and *through*. In this work too, certain crossings or passages stand out as clearly significant, and those that do are likely to be packed with symbolic effect. Early in *The Lord of the Rings*, Bilbo jumps over 'a low place in the hedge ... passing into the night like a rustle of wind in the grass' (*FR*, 44). In an instant he has left Shire comfort and Shire safety behind. And Frodo's departure from Bag End is an exact parallel; he too jumps the hedge and passes 'into the darkness like a rustle in the grasses' (*FR*, 79).

Other crossings are less noticeable and work more by accumulation to move us unobtrusively and almost subliminally deeper and deeper into Middle-earth's – and the book's – interior, into a world where inns and purchasable comforts (to borrow from *The Hobbit*) are further and further behind and where people, as Bilbo notices, speak strangely and sing songs he has never heard before. It is an effective technique, one that emphasizes distance and loss of familiarity at the same time it allows us to adapt to the unknown by degrees.

Though these individual structures – the bridges, passageways, gates, and doors that Tolkien takes us over and under and through – are often enough based on a combination of both Norse and Celtic traditions, one or the other of these two traditions will usually dominate, giving individual moments of entrance or departure a Norse or Celtic tone and a Norse or Celtic significance. When Tolkien wants his readers to experience the haunting and (usually) harmonious atmosphere of a Middle-earth Elven realm, he draws his imagery primarily from the Celtic Otherworld, with its suggestion of simultaneous realities and relatively easy interchange. When he wants to shift from this to scenes emphasizing physical courage, muscular endeavour, or exhausting battles of will, he borrows from the Norseman's world, with its sense of distance, hindrance, and unrelenting contention. Entrances into Tolkien's Celtic settings are indicated by water crossings (over sometimes strange, but rarely imposing, rivers or streams) or by archways of bending branches and trees or by shadowy descents into sequestered valleys. When the mood is primarily Norse, obstinate gates, hefty bridges, and inhibiting natural formations more typically lie in the way.

These distinctions in imagery and mood make geographical and cultural sense. We conceive and envision through what we know, and the world the early Norsemen knew was one that combined both vistas and obstacles. They knew what it was to face endless, weary expanse; they knew as well what it was like to be brought up short, to come firmly up *against*. Their world was one of water and rock, of wide sweeps of sea edged by rugged coasts, long, steep-sided valleys (confining and extensive at once), and high dividing mountains that share the crown of the world with vast, desolate uplands. Understandably, they built their myths on these visual and physical realities. It is a commonplace, of course, to envision supernatural beings as living at the extremes (in the heavens or under the earth), but the Norse gods and demons were placed at the extremes of a specifically northern world; journeys into their supernatural realms (and from one world to another) lead over high, rugged mountains, across torrential streams, or deep into the bitter cold of the darkest and most distant North.

The Celts, the British Isle Celts, belonged to another geography, and their stories and beliefs show appropriate differences. Though early settlers faced forests and swamps (tamed or absent today) Britain's weather, seasons, and topographical formations have always been less hostile to human endeavour than what the Scandinavians knew. Ups and downs are less extreme in the British Isles; and though the fairy-folk are described as dwelling underground, stories about their world lack that sense of depth or overhanging mass that Norse underworlds are likely to portray. Altogether, Britain's Celts were not in a position to experience elemental nature and lonely, uncivilized space to the extent the Norsemen did. There were fewer inaccessible regions and therefore fewer places that could be thought of as inevitably belonging to either monsters or gods. Only the sea offered an untameable distance comparable to what the Vikings knew; and it was over the sea that certain magical islands and godlike beings were traditionally said to be found (a concept touched upon in *The Lord of the Rings* and openly developed in *The Silmarillion*).

Understandably, then, the Celts were less inclined to speak of inaccessible distance when it came to housing their otherworldly beings; they conceived instead a spirit world shared and magically juxtaposed with the primary, everyday world. The Irish fairy folk, the Aes Sídhe, are a people present but invisible, a people living in a world coexistent with our own, if only we had eyes to see. Though *Aes Sídhe* means *people of the hills* (or *mounds*), the term is not intended to suggest physical separation from the rest of us so much as otherness or otherworldliness.

Perception, rather than tangible, measurable space, sets the boundaries in Celtic belief and in Celtic literature. Though the Otherworld is by no means regularly accessible, more often than not travellers in Celtic tales enter or leave the Otherworld without a struggle or jolt. In a moment the transfer is completed and the traveller has departed or arrived. In the story of how Cormac found his cup of gold, a mist falls and Cormac suddenly finds himself alone on a great plain. No sooner does Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed in the Welsh *Mabinogion*, lose his hunting party than he is confronted by a pack of strangely coloured hounds and a hunter clad in grey. As easily as this, with even less perceptible changeover

than the 'fade in' and 'fade out' of modern cinema, Pwyll's world and the Otherworld have crossed, for the grey-clad hunter is Arawn, King of Annwn, whose country is translated somewhat indecisively by Lady Charlotte Guest as 'Hades,' 'Hell,' or 'The Lower Regions';[3] by Alwyn and Brindley Rees as 'Great World,' 'Non-world,' or 'Underworld'; and by Tolkien (in 'English and Welsh') as 'the Underworld.'[4]

In Tolkien's stories the closest parallels to the Celtic Otherworld are Rivendell and Lothlórien. Like the Welsh and Irish Otherworld, Elven realms are not always easy to come upon, but for those who are welcome there, for those who are deserving or destined to find the Elves and their realms, the transfer is generally smooth and brief. A bridge is crossed, a light is struck, and the weary adventurer is transported into a haven of Elven hospitality and delight.

In the north, in Scandinavian tales – where severity, confrontation, and resistance are far more likely to occur – movement into supernatural worlds generally requires a breaking down of barriers and a disturbing test of strength and will, assisted, often enough, by shamanistic magic of a particularly northern kind. All of this appears in Tolkien, most obviously in those scenes where we witness an anxious working of runes or the revelation of hidden power, as we do in those wizard-at-the-gate or wizard-at-the-bridge episodes. And true to the Norse predilection for gloom, the supernatural world, once achieved, is anything but pleasant or comfortable.

If we look closely at those moments when Tolkien moves his readers, by bridges, gates, or doors, into realms that are Celtic-based or Norse-based, these differences become more defined. Bridges appear frequently in both Celtic tales and those that come from a more deeply northern world. Along with fords, ferries, and water crossings in general, literary or mythological bridges serve in either culture to represent spiritual transition, the traversing of space or time, of barrier or gap, that lies between two realities. On outward journeys in Tolkien's books, the crossing of water indicates either an intensification of Norse physical risk or an intensification of Celtic enchantment (which carries its own form of risk). As Tolkien's characters move further and further into the

wilds and into increasingly perilous realms, more and more waterways lie between them and the familiar, comforting Shire.

As always, the pattern is most easily seen in *The Hobbit*, where, early in the book, two rivers appear, the first unobtrusively Celtic in its effect, the second more typically (and more brazenly) Norse. It pays to look closely here. At the start of chapter 2, Bilbo begins his journey. He does so by 'running as fast as his furry feet could carry him' over a millstream called, simply enough, 'The Water.' On the other side lie the village of Bywater and thirteen impatient dwarves, who (rather neatly) are about to exchange the Shire's accommodating Green Dragon for one of a different kind. Aside from the presence of dwarves (an uncommon sight in the Shire), there is nothing remarkably different about Bywater, just as there is nothing particularly remarkable about Bilbo's crossing of The Water. We read only that he ran 'past the great Mill, across The Water' and on to the Green Dragon (a distance well over a mile) to arrive just in time (33).

If, however, we look carefully at earlier references to this millstream, the significance of its crossing becomes more evident. In the preceding chapter (chapter 1), the phrase 'across The Water' (or 'over The Water' or 'beyond The Water') appears repeatedly and in ways that indicate an association with the unusual or the dangerous. This association is most noticeable at the moment when Thorin strikes his harp and Bilbo finds himself 'swept away into dark lands under strange moons, far over The Water and very far from his hobbit-hole under The Hill' (21).

Bilbo's crossing of The Water, then, represents a far more significant transition than the depiction of the actual crossing suggests. To add to this, Bilbo has crossed not just any water but *The Water*, a stream with a clearly generic designation and a definite article flag – the significance of which is made evident in 'On Fairy-Stories,' where Tolkien tells us that anything entitled 'The Hill,' 'The River,' or 'The Valley' allows us to envision for ourselves the scene suggested, a scene most likely based on the first hill, river, or valley of our own childhood, our 'first embodiment of the word' (70). In the context of Bilbo's departure, this is a particularly clever means of naming the stream. Not only does the

stream's appellation emphasize the wateriness of the crossing, but it also signifies Bilbo's first step away from a narrow life, his first step away from the assurance of hobbit routine. He has passed – almost imperceptibly – into a region where a variety of waters will appear and where hazard and enchantment are likely to occur.

And they do. The party (now including Gandalf) travels for a number of undefined days through lands that give them no particular difficulty but are increasingly troubling and strange. Then one day the weather – which up until now had been uniformly pleasant and dry – takes 'a nasty turn'; a steady rain begins; they come to a swift and swollen river, its waters 'rushing down from the hills and mountains in the north.' And just as it is turning dark, they come to and cross 'an ancient stone bridge' (34–5). It is altogether a very Norse river, uncivilized and unnamed and quite unlike The Water.

Up until this point, the perception of danger has been mild, more a feeling of intensifying eeriness and isolation, more a sense of Celtic uncanniness, than a threat of actual harm. The weather too has been more appropriate to a Celtic world, 'as good as May can be, even in merry tales' (34) – and *merry* is a word Tolkien reserves mostly for his Elves, a people, we should remember, strongly based on the fairy tradition of Celtic literature and called 'fairies' in his earliest drafts. But all of this changes on the day the rains begin; the good times, 'pony-rides in May-sunshine' (36), are soon replaced by a dreariness and misery that intensify markedly once the Company crosses over the dismal second bridge and notices suddenly that Gandalf the wizard – that agent of reassuring magic – is nowhere to be seen. A pony takes fright; Fili and Kili are nearly drowned; food supplies are lost; the fire will not start; their camp is wet, and trolls are lying ahead.

What this means, to put it all together, starting again from the Shire, is that Bilbo begins with solid (and very English) comfort, moves across water (The Water) into regions of subtle but intensifying Celtic possibility, and then (once again crossing water) moves into a world of concrete discomfort and concrete physical threat, much more Norse in tone. From now on the Norse world remains the norm. The exceptions – primarily Rivendell and Mirkwood –

exist as pockets of Celticness, either as retreats in the form of Elven havens or as enclaves of Elven enchantment within a harsh and Nordic expanse. Trolls dwell on the far side of Bilbo's second river, coming down from northern mountains; and the mountains themselves, like those in *Peer Gynt*, are unpleasantly occupied. After the trolls, comes an uplands pony journey across 'a wide land the colour of heather and crumbling rock' (47), a highly Norse and perhaps specifically Icelandic terrain (as the following chapter explains). Next are the Misty Mountains, the goblin tunnels, the escape, the descent through mountain scree and tumbling rock, then wolves, accompanied by a further goblin threat, and the eagles of the north. Finally the party settles for a while with that saga-inspired skin-changer, Beorn, in Beorn's Norseman hall.

These two waterways – one known, named, and clearly civilized, the other unknown, unnamed, and imminently menacing – establish the way in which Tolkien uses water crossings to transfer both his characters and his readers into mythological worlds. The Shire bridge over The Water is mentioned so briefly it is easy to overlook the implication of its crossing; but an ancient stone bridge (built in the middle of nowhere, by who knows who, over a dark and threatening rain-swollen river) sticks in the memory. This is the sort of water boundary or water barrier that appears repeatedly in Norse eddic accounts, where landscape and landform play significant roles but where exact or consistent geography is rarely a concern.[5] What is important is not precise topography but the sense of boundary and danger such barriers suggest and the magnitude of hero it takes to travel such terrain.

When Hermod rides Odin's eight-legged horse, Sleipnir, to Niflheim (the Norse land of the dead), seeking Balder's return, there are both rushing torrents and the guarded, echoing bridge, Gjallarbru, to be crossed. Beyond this lies Hel-gate, open only to the dead; but Hermod, on the back of Sleipnir, leaps the gates and enters the halls of Hel.

Tolkien follows right behind. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the ultimate region of death and destruction is Mordor, the Dark Lord's realm. Its chill, its smell of rot, its grey desolation, are straight

from Norse mythology. Here too a bridge and gate confront the Ring-bearer, Frodo, as he approaches the outer walls. Like Hermod, Frodo avoids the gate – as though in both accounts such gates are only to be used by those who belong within, by those who are committed (in either sense of the word) to death and the kingdom of death.

The most striking bridge in the Norse world, however, is Bifrost, the rainbow bridge, a trembling pathway as well as a bridge of flame. It is described as extending downward to connect Asgard, the realm of the Aesir gods,[6] with the Norse middle-earth, and it represents (as does the squirrel Ratatosk, scampering up and down the World Tree)[7] a linkage between worlds, the very sort of spiritual passage a shaman seeks through trance. In its Tolkienian guise, Bifrost is most closely connected to the Bridge of Khazad-dûm, that bridge which the Fellowship must cross within the fiery heart of Moria.

It is not at first obvious that the two bridges belong to one tradition. Where Bifrost is a flaming rainbow bridge, stretching outward through the sky, uniting an upper world with one below, Tolkien's bridge lies within the earth and arches over a dark chasm in a vast underground hall. Yet both bridges span a gap, a space, rather than a river or stream. Both are affiliated with fire. Both bridges are similar in shape, curving in a high and perfect arch. Both are exceptionally narrow and not intended for everyday traffic or use. In Norse mythology, only the gods may cross Bifrost. In Tolkien's account, only warriors or those who are highly courageous cross the Bridge of Khazad-dûm. And where Bifrost links the god world with the Norse middle earth, the Bridge of Khazad-dûm allows the Fellowship to escape from Moria's underground realm to the surface world. In a sense, then, both serve to connect differing levels of creation in their own cosmographies. But far more telling than these similarities are correlations between the destruction of Bifrost at Ragnarok and the breaking of Tolkien's bridge. In both accounts the bridge brings together enemies from different planes and from opposing spiritual worlds; and in both accounts a horn is sounded before the attack begins. In the *Prose Edda*, the fire giant, Surt, and his followers from the

fire realm, Muspell), cause Bifrost to shatter as they cross its span to lead the attack on the gods. During the battle of Ragnarok itself, the gods are matched with adversaries of equal or near-equal power: Odin with the giant wolf, Fenrir; Thor with the World Serpent, Jormungand; and Freyr with Surt himself. In Tolkien's story, Moria's bridge is the primary site of battle; its destruction sends two adversaries, Tolkien's Surt-like Balrog (worker of 'dark fire') and the wizard Gandalf ('servant of the Secret Fire') plunging downward into deeper and deeper levels of the inner earth (FR, 344). Their continuing battle – a pitting of two equally matched fire spirits – represents only one of several decisive confrontations between good and evil in Tolkien's tale of Middle-earth's possible end.[8]

Both the bridge at Khazad-dûm and the rainbow-formed Bifrost are unworldly structures, unlikely in setting and unlikely in configuration. On their own they suggest unparalleled magic, unparalleled transitive powers, and yet both Tolkien and the recorders of the Norse mythology add further barriers and further impediments. Arrows fall among Tolkien's Fellowship as they race to Moria's bridge; the fiery Balrog appears; an exit gate, guarded by orcs, lies just ahead. In Norse accounts, Asgard is additionally protected, even in times of peace, by its walls and Heimdall, Asgard's watchman god.

This piling up of opposition is typical throughout Norse mythology, where savage dogs, persistent guardians, massive barriers, and a variety of unwelcoming gates appear with regularity – gates with iron rings, gates that hinge upward,[9] and barred gates, like those before Utgard, the giants' citadel (the very name, *Utgard*, suggestive of the inaccessible).[10] Walls have their own complexity. In The Lay of Svipdag, flickering flames surround Menglad's hall, and the walls surrounded by these flames are given a name: *Gastropnir*. ('Strangling the Intruder' is Lee Hollander's somewhat uncertain translation.) Menglad's gate is *Thrymgioll* ('The Loud-Grating'), and any who touch the gate are held by magical bonds. Within the hall two watchdogs, Gífr and Geri, prowl.[11] In yet another tale, Skirnir, sent by Freyr to seek the maiden Gerd, faces a ring of fire and savage dogs tied before a gate. And for Hermod,

on his journey to Niflheim, there is a bridge, a guardian, and Hel's gated wall.

Similar barriers appear throughout Tolkien's literature. In the tale of Beren and Lúthien, the bridged entrance to Sauron's fortress is guarded by a series of wolves, the last 'a dread beast, old in evil, lord and sire of the werewolves of Angband' (*Silmarillion*, 174). In *The Hobbit*, the Wood-elves protect their cavern by a bridge and magic doors. The approach to the Lonely Mountain's Front Gate at one time also included a bridge, and it still has its issuing stream, dammed by the dwarves so that access 'to the Gate was now only possible, without swimming, along a narrow ledge' (220).[12] Like the Front Gate stream of the Lonely Mountain, Moria's 'Gate-stream,' the Sirannon, has also been dammed to form a lake, and it is within this lake that the undefined Watcher lurks – giving Moria's entrance triple hindrance: ominous obstructing waters, the Watcher within, and highly resistant doors.

The addition of guardians (usually demonic or bestial) is increasingly evident as the Fellowship moves further east. The threat that lies beyond the entrance to the Paths of the Dead under the Dwimorberg mountain is accentuated by a stone shaped 'like a finger of doom' (*RK*, 59) and an aged guardian who speaks, 'as it were out of the ground,' warning the Eorlingas (Brego and Baldor), that, for them at least, 'the way is shut' (*RK*, 71). The Cirith Ungol pass is guarded by Shelob, with her appetite, her stench, and her will-debilitating powers. The gate into the Tower of Cirith Ungol has its Two Watchers, with their supernatural, force-field restraint.

In every case, darkness, intensified danger, and confrontation with actual or symbolic death lie on the other side. Like the Norse gods on their heroic or shamanistic quests (where rushing water, vast forests, towering mountains, massive doorways, or guardian figures intercede before they reach their challengers), Tolkien's heroes must overcome similar obstacles, similar impediments, before confronting their own versions of risk and enmity in highly eddic forms. In the confrontations that ensue, they (like Odin in his journeys to gain wisdom and power) will be required to sacrifice, to lose themselves before finding themselves and before gaining something in the end.

But what about Celtic bridges or waterways and Celtic versions of doors? Once Bilbo crosses that first wild, unnamed river in *The Hobbit*, once Frodo moves eastward beyond Bree (against the flow of Elves returning to the West), the milder climates of Celtic-based realms seem less likely to appear, and yet they do appear and in a way that allows them to hold their own in strength and in relevance. Though tucked into concealed corners of a more expansive, more prevalent Nordic world, Elven realms are little restricted by the realities of space. Like fairy worlds in Celtic tales, they are larger than mere acreage would seem to justify.

In the midst of Bilbo's barren, dreary upland journey, Rivendell's valley lies hidden. To enter Rivendell is to leave, for a time, the uplands' bleak, mountainous, northerly terrain. First comes the steep descent (more about descents later); pines are replaced by beech and oak; the air grows warmer; the first of the elves greet them with laughter and song, and then comes the inevitable water crossing that divides the rest of Middle-earth from the inner core of every Elven realm. Over the valley's fast-flowing stream curves a bridge, 'the only path across the water' (49). It is a slightly troubling bridge, narrow and lacking a parapet; and they cross, leading their ponies, slowly, one by one. Still, the passage is soon complete, without incident; and there, on the other side, lies the Last Homely House with food, song, storytelling, and kindly weather restored. We are among the 'Good People,' as Gandalf says, a term that clearly relates his Elves to the Celtic fairy folk.

In a similar way, the Mirkwood stream is rich with Celtic nuance. To cross its dark and fast-flowing waters is to risk enchantment, a somewhat perilous enchantment, a sleep of marvellous dreams that undermines the will. But crossing the stream also means the party is closer to the forest's eastern edge and therefore closer to the Wood-elves' underground hall, and the Wood-elves too are 'Good People,' though 'more dangerous and less wise' than the elves of Rivendell (144–5). It is only after the party reaches the far side of Mirkwood's midpoint stream that they hear the 'dim blowing of horns' and see an otherworldly hart, fleeing from hunters that never materialize – haunting, mysterious, and faintly disquieting (127).

All this is highly typical of the Celts, whose tales are full of Otherworldly encounters and of magical hunts where fairy folk cross paths with mortal beings, as they do in the poem *Sir Orfeo*, where an English king, searching for his lost wife, comes upon the fairy folk over a period of days.

> There often by him would he see
> when noon was hot on leaf and tree,
> the king of Faërie with his rout
> came hunting in the woods about
> with blowing far and crying dim,
> and barking hounds that were with him.[13]
>
> (lines 281–6)

Such meetings, such crossings of mortal and fairy worlds, occur most often at twilight, in the mist, or at the margin of rivers – during blurred, in-between moments and at bordering, in-between sites; so it is with Bilbo and the dwarves halfway through the twilight world of Mirkwood on the banks of an enchanted stream. And later (still within the boundaries of Mirkwood) Bilbo will cross water once again to enter the Wood-elves' hall and will be carried on an underground stream through a water-gate when he and the barrelled dwarves make good their getaway.

Though entrances (and sometimes departures) in Tolkien's river-guarded Elven settings are not without their risk, they lack menace and brutality. There is none of the abiding sullenness or hefty resistance that Norse borders impose. An Elven crossing – in almost every case – is more momentarily disturbing than deeply frightening. The same is true of encounters that occur at water boundaries in Celtic mythology, in watery meetings with enchantresses or in those scenes where battles and challenges occur at the water's edge – as they repeatedly do in the eighth-century Irish epic *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (The Cattle-Raid of Cuailnge). Bodies may be shattered with a single javelin blow, heads may be hewed from bodies in these accounts, but the effect is more hyperbolic than horrifying, and the threat, however deadly, is not that of raw

nature (or a personified figure of raw nature), the way it is in accounts from Norse mythology or in Tolkien's more *Edda*-based scenes.

Crossings at these Celtic water boundaries are typically tricky and likely to require special skill, but again the unyielding hostility of Norse passageways is not to be found. This is clearly so in the *Táin* when the hero Cúchulainn must cross Scáthach's uncanny bridge to reach the island where she holds her military training camp. The bridge, we are told, is made low at each end and high in the middle so that it flies up and throws off those who attempt to cross. Nonetheless we are not held long in suspense. After three brief false starts, Cúchulainn uses his famous salmon leap to gain first the middle and then the far end. Like exaggerated descriptions of Celtic battle scenes, the bridge's excesses are sheer convention. The scene is not intended to alarm but rather to amaze us, once again, with the hero's skill at surmounting the insurmountable.

This is altogether unlike Thor's crossing of the Vimur in the myth of Thor and Geirrod. Though both Cúchulainn and Thor contend with aspects of female power and both win out in the end, the difference in mood and tone is considerable. The forces Thor encounters are far more grim and far more brutal in their physicality: over the rushing torrent of the Vimur stands Gjalp, a personification of female nature and the daughter of the giant Geirrod. She is straddling the river and adding to 'spate' (to borrow from the Brodeur translation).[14] The rapid increase in the river's depth (from what is likely both urine and menstrual blood) threatens to drown Loki and Thor together, but Thor, with a well-aimed stone, stops Gjalp's effusion at its source. There is humour intended in this solution but a harsher humour than is typical of Celtic literature (where bodily functions tend to be treated with, if anything, even greater openness but also far more affably). With few exceptions, this difference between Norse and Celt attitudes remain throughout their literatures, the Norse committed to severity, and the Celtic siding with the eerie or the whimsical. As Peter Berresford Ellis writes, it is at times 'difficult to realise that

we are talking of a north-west European culture' when we speak about the Irish, 'the brooding bleakness that permeates Nordic myth' is so successfully avoided.[15]

These Celtic tendencies and Celtic differences are maintained throughout *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In every case, the sylvan world of the Elves is separated from and contrasted with the mountain haunts of Orc, dragon, or Dwarf; and the waterways that mark Celtic boundaries are consistently more suggestive of magical risk than they are of physical harm. In Lothlórien, water imagery and water boundaries are far more prevalent and more strongly emphasized than anywhere else in the books. Two significant rivers must be crossed (the Nimrodel and the Silverlode) before the Fellowship arrives, and another channel, or 'fosse,' must be crossed before they reach Caras Galadhon, the Elves' inner city of trees. On their descent down from the Dwarves' Kheled-zâram, following Moria, the Fellowship comes first to an 'icy cold' spring, the beginning of the Silverlode, which soon becomes 'a swift river,' gathering 'water from many other mountain streams' (*FR*, 348–9). This they follow downward throughout the day. Finally, long after dark has fallen, they come to and cross the Nimrodel, 'for ever blending its innumerable notes in an endless changeful music' (360). The next day they cross the Silverlode itself, and by doing so fully enter the realm of Lothlórien.

This extremely watery approach to Lothlórien is somewhat difficult to envision cartographically, but what is important is not precisely where individual named or unnamed streams are to be found – streams or rivers that have 'long defended' Lothlórien – but rather the way in which this stock-piling of rushing and plunging waterways emphasizes Lothlórien's inviolability and its otherness. None of the streams slows the travellers for long, but with each encounter, with each crossing, our sense of Elven/Celtic remove is heightened and we feel ourselves moving further and further and deeper and deeper into another world.

Though the Orcs and Gollum can at least partially invade Lothlórien (by forcing or stealing their way in), their penetration is limited. Of the outsiders, it is only members of the Fellowship who enter deeply into Lothlórien, and they require both permis-

sion and guidance. Assisted by Elves – first by Legolas, who helps them over the Nimrodel, and then by Elven guards, who lead them across the Silverlode – their entrance is achieved by a series of initiatory steps: they are confronted and questioned (though kindly), they are blindfolded and led (though carefully), but most of all they cross water or gap by a variety of means – wading, rope walking, and bridge.

The Nimrodel, cold but cleansing, is forded on foot; and, in doing so, Frodo feels 'the stain of travel and all weariness [wash] from his limbs' (*FR*, 353). On the following day they cross the Silverlode (or Celebrant) on a bridge constructed of two ropes, a tricky but not life-threatening bridge, a bridge worthy of Celtic tradition. The effect of this final crossing, the one that brings them into Lothlórien proper, is immediately apparent to Frodo. 'As soon as he set foot upon the far bank of Silverlode a strange feeling had come upon him.' This feeling deepens as he walks on, so that it 'seemed to him that he had stepped over a bridge of time into a corner of the Elder Days, and was now walking in a world that was no more' (364).

The last crossing comes when the Company enters Caras Galadhon in the innermost region of Lothlórien. Both a fosse and 'great gates' stand at the city's entrance, but the fosse and gate serve more as markers of transference than structural impediments. The Company's progression is inhibited by neither. A white bridge spans the fosse; at a word and a knock, the gates open 'soundlessly'; there are no signs of guards.

Though it is unclear whether or not the surrounding fosse contains water, the importance of water remains as evident within this inner 'city' as it had been at the boundaries of Lothlórien. Here all waters take on an association with Galadriel – appropriately so since it is she who possesses Nenya, the Ring of Waters, and thereby directs its powers. High up, at the centre of the city, stands a fountain from which a white stream issues and runs down into Galadriel's garden, and it is this water which is drawn up in a silver ewer and used in Galadriel's Mirror, that 'wide and shallow' basin which reveals in its reflection 'things that were, and things that are, and things that yet may be' (376–7).

Given the fertile and sylvan environment that Elves both exemplify and preserve, it is easy to understand why water plays a prevalent part in Lothlórien, why it is the key to Galadriel's power, and why the Naith (where the Silverlode and the Anduin join) is a favoured locality. It is easy to understand as well why doors and gates (or artificial barriers of any kind) are less in evidence in Tolkien's Elven realms. (The exceptions in *The Lord of the Rings* are Rivendell's halls and the 'great gates' of Lothlórien's Caras Galadhon.)[16] Elves live with nature and augment nature far more than they devise or construct, and in this once again emulate the Celts (or the Celts as they are popularly seen).[17] And yet at the start of every Elven region and all Elven realms, a sense of doorway or entranceway is consistently conveyed. (Mirkwood's 'gate,' for example, is referred to repeatedly, but no gate appears.) What we find instead of actual gates in these settings are natural archways, looming branches, or clefts that suggest threshold or opening. Along with water crossings, then, comes a sense of door or gate.

Typically, these thresholds are also associated with a descent (or the suggestion of descent); and in following this pattern Tolkien furthers his dependence on Celtic mythology. The Celts themselves associated their Otherworld, fairy world, with the defeated Tuatha Dé Danann, a people relegated to the underground regions of Ireland, while the winning Sons of Míl claimed the surface world. Each chief of the Tuatha Dé Danann is said to rule a mound; and these mounds (burial mounds, in fact) tie the Tuatha Dé Danann to the Celtic world of the dead. This link between the underworld (or fairy world) and the Celtic realm of the dead appears repeatedly in Tolkien's Elven scenes, subtly but consistently suggested through references to night-time, dusk, and the subdued colours silver and grey, or through various references to descent – sometimes obvious and sometimes underplayed.

In *The Hobbit*, the very name *Rivendell* already prepares us (both through its *riven* and its *dell*) for the downward placement of that Last Homely House, a point which is emphasized by the slithery, slippery descent that Bilbo and his party make 'in the dusk' down a 'steep fall in the ground' to the 'secret' elven valley (47–8). The

entrance into Mirkwood also suggests an under-ness, with its two great trees 'like a sort of arch leading into a gloomy tunnel,' its still, suffocating air 'down under the forest-roof' (123), and its daytime that seems as dark as night. In fact, the woods themselves seem in many ways more oppressively *under* and more oppressively enclosing than do the Wood-elves' underground halls, where the subterranean element is treated fairly casually. The halls themselves lie beneath a hill within a vast and natural 'cave,' a word Tolkien repeats three times before we learn that the cave is also a fortress and the king's underground 'palace,' a palace complete with 'portcullis,' 'halls,' and tricky 'magic doors.'

Once Bilbo has crossed the Wood-elves' bridge and entered the 'cavern-mouth,' little is made of the fact that the setting is underground. Wood-elf caves, Tolkien tells us, are 'not like those of the goblin cities'; they are 'smaller, less deep underground, and filled with a cleaner air' (148). Even the dungeons are treated rather casually, so that Thorin's cell, at the time of his rescue, is referred to only as his 'wearisome little stone room' (154). All of this is quite unlike what we find in Moria or the goblin caves; nor should we be surprised. These are, after all, *Wood*-elves, a very outdoorish term for a basically sylvan folk who 'loved best the stars' and who chose to wander 'in the great forests that grew tall in lands that are now lost' (144). In spite of the king's underground halls (and these halls constitute the only Elven habitation in *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings* to be literally underground), the Wood-elves hunt and mostly live 'in the open woods,' building their 'houses or huts on the ground and in the branches' (145). There is ultimately, then, an unfettered, open-air quality to their character.

This sense of openness is itself consistent with those Celtic tales in which caves or openings into mountains serve as entrances into the Otherworld. What is important is the threshold itself; once the traveller has moved beyond the passageway, with its magical, in-between powers,[18] the fairy world appears in full, and any sense of enclosure or of overhanging earth entirely fades, as it does for Sir Orfeo when he follows the fairy troop through a 'rocky hill' to a country 'as bright as sun in summer air.'[19] Though the sense of having entered an entire other world rather than a restricted cave

is less developed in Tolkien's Wood-elves' hall (he sticks closer to physical reality), the emphasis Tolkien places on the sylvan nature of the elves and on the entrance and approach to the cave, more than on any subsequent cave-ness beyond, is fully appropriate to Celtic tradition.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the underground placement of Elven realms is still strongly present but less obviously so. Frodo's arrival at Rivendell seems defined by his crossing of the Bruinen at its Ford, rather than by darkness and descent. Nonetheless, all the usual Celtic Otherworld markers – a dimming of light, movement downward and under (as well as a crossing of water) – are there for Frodo, as they were for Bilbo. The Fellowship's approach to the Bruinen is on a road that runs 'steadily downhill.' In the 'late afternoon,' we are told, the Road 'went suddenly under the dark shadow of tall pine-trees, and then plunged into a deep cutting' (*FR*, 224–5); at the end of this cutting, or 'tunnel,' the Road runs out into the open 'as if through a gate of light.' Below them, across a long flat, the Fellowship sees the Ford (at this point referred to as the Ford of Rivendell).

The approach to Lothlórien is much the same. First comes the quickly descending road that runs down from the mountains. (Words such as *down*, *deep*, *lower*, and *beneath* are prevalent in this section.) Then comes the final approach, with its 'night-wind' blowing 'chill up the valley to meet them,' its looming 'wide grey shadow,' and the description of tall trees 'under the night' arching over the road and stream (*FR*, 352). Though we are later told that Lothlórien, unlike the shaded and twilight worlds of other Elven realms, is 'sunlight and bright day,' a sense of shadow and fadedness, of night-time and ending, nonetheless remains. The gold of the mallorn trees is a 'pale gold.' The flowers in the grass are small, gold and shaped like stars, or white in colour and 'the palest green,' and they glimmer 'as a mist.' The 'sun of afternoon' casts 'long green shadows beneath the trees' (365).

The pattern of descent is so consistent in *The Lord of the Rings* that it appears even in the hobbits' first encounter with Elves, while they are still within the Shire. Though the Elves they meet have left their homes and are merely passing through the hobbit

lands, the approach to their temporary camp is touched with suggestions of downward movement and references to being under. The Elves are singing as they approach Frodo and his party, and the final words of their song are of Elbereth's 'starlight' and the land they are leaving, the land 'beneath the trees' (*FR*, 89). The camp itself is on a hill but a hill that stands 'out into the lower land of the river-valley,' and the hobbits are led there by first going through a wood that grows denser and thicker as they move through a lane running 'lower' and downward 'into a fold of the hills.' For a while they wind 'back up the wooded slopes'; then 'suddenly' they emerge, moving out of the shadows and into a 'wide space of grass, grey under the night' (90–1). We are given, then, both the Celtic sense of an Otherworld lying downward and under and at the same time a Celtic feeling of space and openness beyond the threshold edge.

Though there may be little (beyond darkness, movement downward, and a sense of being beneath) to suggest the Celtic world of the dead in Tolkien's Elven worlds, other Celtic traditions help to affirm the idea. One of the most conventional means of entering into Celtic fairy realms is through a *síd*, through those hills or burial mounds which are associated with the Tuatha Dé Danann and which therefore indicate a link to the magical, as the mound (or 'Green Chapel') does in the Arthurian tale of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

In Tolkien's writing, one such gateway appears in particularly dreadful form, a form far more suggestive of encounters with the Norse dead. This is in the Barrow-wight scene, where a hostile and hungering version of death draws the hobbits into its dark and cold confines. But a burial mound appears within Lothlórien as well, and this 'mound' of Cerin Amroth is quite devoid of horror. On their way to Lothlórien's city (appropriately approached at dusk), the Company is shown the 'great mound,' with its two circling crowns of trees that contain 'the heart of the ancient realm as it was long ago' (*FR*, 365). Here – much as when he first crossed the Silverlode – Frodo senses that he has 'stepped through' into a vanished world, 'a timeless land that did not fade or change or fall into forgetfulness' (365–6). It comes to Frodo that some

part of himself will still walk here after he has 'gone and passed again into the outer world'; and once he moves within the circle of trees surrounding the mound, Frodo hears 'far off' the sound of 'great seas upon beaches that had long ago been washed away, and sea-birds crying whose race had perished from the earth' (366). In a way that is haunting, sad, and yet not unconsoling, Frodo senses the presence of beings that lived before, and in doing so he himself temporarily enters the past and experiences the world of the dead. To add to this, when Aragorn leaves the hill of Cerin Amroth, we are told he 'came there never again as living man' (*FR*, 367), yet the implication is there: he may perhaps come again, though not as a living man.

Like the Celtic realms of the Tuatha Dé Danann, this is a realm where time moves differently, a realm less bound by the strictures of what is occurring now. In Lothlórien, the past maintains a presence and the future is not fully obscured; and it is this expanse of less restrictive time (plus Elven longevity) which largely allows Tolkien's Celtic enclaves to compete with the heftier weight and broader mass of his more Nordic regions and worlds.[20]

But where Tolkien's Elven entrances only suggest descents and where their realms only indirectly allude to the dead, Tolkien's death-confronting, Norse-based descents are vividly and violently portrayed. Force and raw energy are what are called for here, physical prowess, unflinching fortitude, and, in moments of spiritual or magical transference, shamanistic skill.

Shamanism itself derives from the belief that certain individuals, priests or foreseers – the terms *witch doctors* or *medicine men* are too restrictive – have the ability to enter other spiritual realms and to perceive as otherworldly beings do (all of which would have strongly appealed to Tolkien, a creator of alternate worlds and a man who wished to leave much of this world behind). The shaman, through a form of mystical revelation still used in parts of Asia and America today (and common in north-eastern Europe and Scandinavia up until fairly recent times), uses trance and visions to enter the spirit world; this may include upward journeys to a higher realm, a place of heavenly spirits, but more often what we hear of are descents into darkened realms of the dead. In

either case, the shaman generally returns from spiritual journeys having gained exceptional knowledge, retrieved a valuable object, or rescued a wandering soul. It is not an easy journey. In the process, likely enough, the shaman will have met an adversary and undergone a contest of strength or wit or will.

Of course, tales of difficult descents and ascensions, or of resistant gates leading in and out, are by no means limited to northern ritual and belief. Orpheus descends to Hades in search of Eurydice; and in Mesopotamian tales, the goddess Inanna-Ishtar must pass seven gates on her journey to the nether world. Nonetheless, in spite of certain similarities between these more southerly accounts and Tolkien's underworlds, the particulars of Tolkien's settings, characters, and incidents (plus his recurring use of runes) connect him firmly to the Norse – most clearly so through the stamina and sheer grit that journeys to Mordor require and in the raw and enduring courage it takes to withstand the Dark Lord's will. When Frodo enters Mordor, his journey into this cold, darkened, barren landscape is highly reminiscent of tales in which the gods enter realms of the dead and, once there, combat or withstand supernatural power or otherworldly force. Like Hermod on his journey to Niflheim, Frodo circumvents extraordinary barriers to seek a renewal of life. For Hermod (in an act remarkably unselfish for an Asgard god) this means the possible return of Balder; for Frodo there is the saving of Middle-earth.

In Tolkien's literature, however, it is the wizard Gandalf, with his strong connections to Odin, who most closely approximates the shaman's endeavour and role. Not only do Gandalf and Odin both make sacrifices and 'die' in otherworldly trials, but they both journey to their respective middle-earths from other worlds and journey there in disguise. Both travel as well on horses that are either supernatural (the eight-legged Sleipnir for Odin) or – in Gandalf's case – the virtually supernatural, earth-spunning Shadowfax. Both horses are associated with spiritual transference and passage between the worlds (a comparison developed fully in chapter 5).

Odin and Gandalf, however, share more than otherworldly horses. Both also rely on birds and the flight of birds – eagles and

ravens, birds that represent the sending forth of mind or spirit in symbolic form in Norse mythology. Odin's ravens bring him news from far over the world, a role which is paralleled by *The Hobbit*'s news-bearing raven and thrush. But for Tolkien, as well as for the Norse, eagles are the birds of choice.[21]

In *The Silmarillion* and *The History of Middle-earth*, eagles (particularly Thorondor, King of the Eagles) repeatedly save Tolkien's heroes from death and defeat. And throughout *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, eagles transport Gandalf and his associates back to the world of the living and away from impending death. It is the eagles of the northern mountains, 'the greatest of all birds,' that remove Bilbo and his party from the burning trees (*H*, 93); it is eagles that bring Sam and Frodo back from 'the end of all things' (*RK*, 225); it is Gwaihir, 'the Windlord,' who rescues Gandalf first from Saruman's tower and later from the high peak of Celebdil where he lies naked after his Moria battle 'under the living earth' (*TT*, 105–6).

This last rescue (of an almost translucent, somewhat amnesic, Gandalf, 'sent back – for a brief time' to see that his 'task' is done) comes after a descent exceptionally fraught with aggression, magic, and shamanistic overtones. In Norse mythology, Loki (a shaman god like Odin) travels with Thor to Utgard's giant hall; here the two of them confront (among other challenges) an extreme version of Loki, Utgard-Loki. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf battles the Balrog, his negative counterpart within Moria. As the 'flame of Udûn' (the Underworld), the Balrog is the antithesis of Gandalf, who is the 'servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor' (*FR*, 344), and the wearer of Narya, the Elven Ring of Fire – as well as (on a less dramatic level) the creator of both holiday fireworks and smoke rings of a highly cooperative kind. Similar confrontations with a shadow side occur during Gandalf's more psychological stands against Sauron and Saruman. What he defeats or withstands during these encounters is the self he admits to Frodo would emerge if he were to accept Frodo's offer of Sauron's Ring or the self he would become were he to accept Saruman's offer of a shared wizard rule.

It is an old tradition, of course, this belief that the ultimate

enemy for any of us is the enemy within and that the hero must defeat himself to rise above himself, much as the shaman traditionally must give of himself to defeat the shadow side. This is what Odin does, in a shaman's search for knowledge and wisdom, when he sacrifices himself, piercing himself with a spear and hanging himself on Yggdrasill, the World Tree, in precisely the way his own victims were killed. In effect, he gives himself to himself, kills himself for himself. In a similar way he gives up an eye to drink from the spring that bestows insight, the spring that rises from Yggdrasill's roots.

But Odin (though his knowledge may help preserve the gods) looks primarily to personal gain, and Tolkien, the moralist, is not content with sacrifices of this kind. His Dark Lord's willingness to yield 'a great part' of his power (*FR*, 61), to let it pass into the Ring, is a sacrifice of the self for the self alone, a sacrifice of the less favourable Odin sort and not to be taken as a Christian or Middle-earth ideal. To a large extent, then, success in Tolkien's world is based on motive and intention as much as on fortitude. Rather than warrior heroics, it is sacrifice for others, freely chosen sacrifice, that Tolkien most strongly advocates and holds his characters to. And while a pre-Christian god, such as Odin, might be excused for his ignorance of these philanthropic, latter-day aspirations, Tolkien's own fictional characters are held to a higher standard and treated accordingly. It is those who are true to this ideal, those who move beyond the barriers of self, that ultimately succeed. Mercy and compassion – the heart more than the mind – are what matter here. Those individuals who enter the dark so armed are the ones who succeed in casting off the dark. In such a state, even a hobbit, having responded with pity, may leap 'seven feet forward and three in the air' and so achieve the goblins' lower gate (*H*, 80). But when Tolkien's negative characters – from Sméagol to Shelob to the Dark Lord himself – enter the realm of the dark, they do so selfishly. They bring to the underworld a darkness of their own; and the dark, recognizing kinship, obligingly takes them in.

Descents of this sort and of this magnitude represent the consummate moment of a character's journey or quest. What comes

at this moment fulfils what came before. Having passed their earlier trials, Tolkien's adventurers are ready for what now occurs. Each previous journey in the dark, each previous temptation withstood, each previous barrier overcome has served to strengthen them. Nor is it Tolkien's characters alone who are readied and prepared. What Tolkien does for his characters he does for us as well. Each earlier crossing (over water or mountain), each passage (under arch, or through tunnel, gate, or door), each challenge vicariously endured has also helped prepare us for an increasingly remarkable world and for the confrontations that lie ahead, until, finally, we are ready to join Bilbo on his descent to Smaug's dark hole or to share in Frodo's struggle at Mount Doom's fiery edge.

This is how Tolkien's pattern of borders and barriers (both Celtic and Norse) build to his conclusion. This is how he moves us through his world, step by step, until we ourselves are fully transferred into Middle-earth and (like travellers who encounter the fairy folk or shamans on spiritual quests) have learned to perceive in new and deeper ways. In doing this, Tolkien himself has played a shaman's role, the role of one who moves through other worlds and brings the wisdom of other worlds back to those who would hear. He has done this by borrowing from the ancients, by entering the realms of the pagans and giving them life again. He has done this by opening gates and bridging worlds, by taking us into the darkness and guiding us out again.

Chapter Four

Iceland and Middle-earth: Two Who Loved the North

The influence of William Morris's romances, translations, and poetry on the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien has long been recognized. But what has not been properly considered is the effect of Morris's *Icelandic Journals* on Tolkien's Middle-earth. In *The Lord of the Rings*, influence from the *Journals* is mostly a matter of similarities in wasteland or mountain scenes. In *The Hobbit*, however, certain of Bilbo's adventures not only come remarkably close to experiences Morris described during his first Icelandic visit but Bilbo himself, in a number of ways, closely resembles the *Journal* persona that Morris chose to assume.

The *Journals* are unlike anything else Morris wrote; they are so clearly the voice of the private man rather than that of the social reformist, the translator, the critic, the poet, the artist, or the writer of prose romance. They are, as well, less widely known than Morris's other works, and are frequently omitted in brief accounts of William Morris's life. And yet, among connoisseurs of travel tales, *The Icelandic Journals* have remained popular for well over a century, and there are those who feel that they represent the best and the least self-conscious of Morris's extensive prose.

Long before he went to Iceland, Morris had been attracted to Iceland's history, literature, and society. He began learning Icelandic in 1868 and by 1869 was translating sagas under the guidance of the Icelandic scholar Eiríkr Magnússon. But it was not only his increasing familiarity with Iceland's language and literature that motivated him to travel to that country (first in 1871 and again in

1873). By the end of the nineteenth century, Iceland had become a popular destination for English travellers – for sightseers adventurous enough to forgo English comforts and amenities and for sportsmen attracted by Iceland's game birds and the abundance of fish.

Though Morris, in his mid-thirties, could not rightly be called either an adventurer or a sportsman, and though he had no real experience with the rough living Iceland required, he was not entirely unsuited for the journeys that he made. He was a competent fisherman and shot, and the idea of physical courage in the face of hardship and adversity had always appealed to him. (We have only to think of Robert and Jehane in his often anthologized poem, 'The Haystack in the Floods,' to realize this is so.) And, too, as his biographer J.W. Mackail remarks, Morris, though not a large man, was noted for 'his great bodily strength and superabundant vitality' (1: 215).[1]

But it is also true that Morris's reasons for visiting Iceland were both more literary than those of the usual visitor, and far more personal. He was not only eager to see for himself the land from which the sagas arose (and particular sites associated with particular tales), but he wished as well to remove himself for a time from difficulties at home, difficulties that arose from Dante Gabriel Rossetti's ongoing attachment to Morris's wife. Though Morris was not one to address the matter directly, there are comments in his poetry or letters that leave the reader wondering whether more is being implied, comments such as the one he made to Charles Norton about having been 'nervous & depressed and very much' wanting the 'rest' that Iceland gave.[2]

Morris was a socialist, and his socialism contributed to his idealization of Iceland and Iceland's society. It was his belief that the Middle Ages, particularly the fourteenth century, represented the height of European and English culture, both socially and artistically. At its peak (Morris believed), this was a period when character and individual skill could blur the social roles, a time when the plowman could reach for his sword and handle it like a king, and when the king was not limited by his class but had a yeoman's skill. Only during this period of English history (according to Morris)

had worker and artist properly been one; and only in Iceland did such a society remain – a society where art was still utilitarian and unpretentious and came from the people themselves, a society where 'equal personal rights' still belonged to all.[3]

Tolkien, born in 1892, fifty-eight years after Morris, shared this same ideal; he shared Morris's appreciation of a medievalism decidedly northern, and he shared Morris's tendency to idealize agrarian life, the pre-industrial life of a bygone age, the life depicted in the hobbits' Shire. Tolkien, however, never visited Iceland and felt no need to do so; in fact, nearly all of Tolkien's travel (before he wrote *The Lord of the Rings*) occurred at second hand, through literature and through accounts that others had made. Though he did not own the *Icelandic Journals*,[4] we know that Tolkien was quite familiar with Morris and that he highly valued Morris's works. We know, for example, that Tolkien used part of the five pounds of his 1914 Skeat Prize for English to purchase several of Morris's books: *The Life and Death of Jason*, *The House of the Wolfings*, and Morris's translation of the Icelandic *Völsunga Saga*.

It is no surprise, then, that Morris (in both general and specific ways) should have left his mark on Tolkien and on Tolkien's concept of a northern world. Like Morris – and following in Morris's footsteps – Tolkien studied Icelandic and knew Norse mythology as well as its history and lore. Northern elements throughout *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* have their counterparts in Morris's writing – most obviously in descriptions of Germanic battle in his *House of the Wolfings* (with its looming 'Mirkwood' forest) or of Nordic hall life in *The Story of the Glittering Plain*. And, according to T.A. Shippey, Morris's *The Roots of the Mountains* gave Tolkien 'a hint for Gollum' while his *The Wood Beyond the World* left its mark on 'the bewilderments of Fangorn Forest.'[5] Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien's biographer, adds yet another possibility. It is his belief that Morris's general approach to a northern fantasy world throughout his romances and the particular literary structure he used in *The Earthly Paradise* influenced Tolkien's writing, particularly early versions of his mythology. Letters Tolkien wrote early and late in his career show that he himself was well aware of the ways in which Morris influenced his work. In an undated letter

of October 1914, written to his fiancée Edith Bratt, Tolkien mentions his hopes of producing a 'short story somewhat on the lines of Morris' romances' (*Letters*, 7). Forty-six years later, in a letter written on 31 December 1960, Tolkien is more specific. 'The Dead Marshes and the approaches to the Morannon' may have been partially influenced by 'Northern France after the Battle of the Somme,' Tolkien explained to Professor L.W. Forster, but 'they owe more to William Morris and his Huns and Romans, as in *The House of the Wolfings* or *The Roots of the Mountains*' (*Letters*, 303).

Still, in spite of this close sharing of northern terms and images, Morris and Tolkien were in many ways quite dissimilar. They had differing tastes in a number of areas and held differing political views. Tolkien had little sympathy for any form of governance not based on inherited rule and felt it a triumph and a necessity to have a 'Return of the King.' Morris, on the other hand, was an outspoken egalitarian, a socialist who wrote extensively in defence of the working man. These areas of disagreement, however, did not necessarily result in dissimilar effects when it came to their literature. Though Tolkien was openly in favour of rank and royalty, though he considers it highly to the hobbits' credit that they remember the king and that they attribute to him 'all their essential laws' (*FR*, 18), he nonetheless appreciated independence of thought and open social exchange – attributes strongly valued in the heroic North. Within the Shire, for example, class differences, though not entirely absent, seem far less important than a sense of community; hobbit folks of all trades know and respect one another; gardeners are honoured; beer and homey comforts are given their proper due, and the hobbits themselves dislike all forms of coercion, from 'two-feather' Shirriffs to the inflexibility of machines.

Morris, though he decries hierarchical rule, was also clearly attracted to ceremony, position, and formality. This attraction shows in his art, in the medieval richness of his only extant easel painting, *La belle Iseult* (also known as *Queen Guenevere*); it shows as well in the illuminative ornateness of his designs; and it shows even more clearly in his literature, particularly in his poetry and his prose romances, in works where respect for all ranks may be

emphasized but where bloodline is nonetheless still an issue and deference plays a role. In Morris's *The Well at the World's End*, the king's son, Ralph, is a warrior, a hunter, and a craftsman from a small agrarian realm. He is a prince but a prince of all trades, and in this he resembles Tolkien's Aragorn, who is a hunter, woodsman, and healer (and who, again like Ralph, falls under the tradition of the wandering king-to-be).

Both writers also greatly valued fellowship, with all its implications of dedication, commitment, and community. Where Morris had his 'Brotherhoods' (both an Oxford Brotherhood and a Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, as well as his wish to maintain a closely bonded artists' firm), Tolkien had his Inkling friends; and earlier there had been the T.C.B.S., an unofficial literary group at King Edward's School in Birmingham,[6] a Viking Club at Leeds (based on beer-drinking and reading the sagas), and the *Kolbítar*, an Icelandic club at Oxford (based again on saga reading but including impromptu translation as well). Within his Middle-earth stories, Tolkien emphasizes unity, camaraderie, and cohesion – most clearly in Bilbo's 'party' or 'company' of fourteen and in Frodo's Fellowship of nine. For both writers, then, a balance is sought between freedom of action and formalized allegiance, between independence of choice and solidarity of cause. And for both men, Iceland seemed to offer an admirable blending of the two extremes.

Journeys North and East

The main population of Iceland huddles on the west, in and around Reykjavik, the capital, which was not much more than a village when Morris travelled there. It was from here that Morris began his two Icelandic journeys,[7] dropping at first a bit south on the 1871 route, but otherwise – on both occasions – moving noticeably east and north towards mountains, wastelands, and ice, a directional pattern that is also typical of Norse mythology, where Hel, the dark and frozen land of the dead, lies north, and the giants' land, Jotunheim, lies – with mythological inconsistency – either north or east.

Tolkien follows the same directional patterns when he sends his characters outward on their quests. Bilbo's party moves consistently east and north to Smaug and the Lonely Mountain; and Frodo's journey to Mount Doom must be thought of as an eastward one in spite of Mordor's somewhat southerly position on the map. Tolkien not only speaks of Mordor as belonging to the east but also consistently describes Mordor's dangers (its 'winds,' 'storms,' and 'blackness') as coming 'out of the East.' This eastern emphasis, according to Tolkien, came, from 'geographical necessity.' The North had already been used.[8]

But whether or not the pattern of Morris's journeys contributed to Tolkien's directional preferences, Tolkien's Middle-earth (with its roots in England, Northwestern Europe, and Scandinavia), still contains elements that belong to a deeper north, elements typical of Iceland's climate and its mountain scenes. This intensified north is clearly present in the ice crossings of the rebel Elves in *The Silmarillion*. It is suggested as well by Tolkien's Grey Mountains, Withered Heath, and numerous snow-capped peaks – though these last are also strongly indebted to Tolkien's 1911 walking tour of the Alps, where a thunderstorm and a close encounter with falling rocks left their mark on *The Hobbit* in the form of sun-loosened boulders 'galloping' down the mountain, storm giants at play, and landsliding stones after the goblin caves.[9] (In *The Lord of the Rings* there is Caradhras, sending a 'fall of stones and slithering snow' over the Fellowship's trail; *FR*, 307.)

The most telling and most distinctive geological connection between Iceland and Middle-earth, however, is a volcanic one. Tolkien's mountains, like Iceland's (and unlike those Tolkien knew in the Alps), have fire at their core. This is even true of the Lonely Mountain, where Smaug, with his fiery breath and mountain-shaking wrath, awakes like 'an old volcano' that has started 'eruptions once again' (185). In *The Lord of the Rings*, examples are more obvious yet. Mount Doom is conspicuously a fire mountain, and Moria has its red, burning fissure out of which flames and smoke emerge. Here Gandalf falls in combat with the Balrog, a figure strongly suggestive of the Norse fire demon, Surt (a name Morris, in his *Journals*, connects with the English word *soot*).

But Tolkien's indebtedness to Morris's Iceland is based on

more than geological similarities. What is most impressive are sections of *The Hobbit* that closely approach passages in the *Journals*. Early in Bilbo's adventure, the May pony-ride aspects of the trip disappear and Bilbo finds himself cold, miserable, hungry, and wet. 'It was pouring with rain,' Tolkien writes, 'and had been all day; [Bilbo's] hood was dripping into his eyes, his cloak was full of water; the pony was tired and stumbled on stones.' They attempt a camp and the miseries continue. 'The mischief seemed to have got into the fire. Dwarves can make a fire almost anywhere out of almost anything, wind or no wind; but they could not do it that night ... Then one of the ponies took fright at nothing and bolted' (35). The baggage he carries is lost. 'Of course it was mostly food.' The troll adventure follows; then, after a short and less than satisfactory pause, Bilbo, Gandalf, and the dwarves head outward again, over the high mountain plains (a strange, barren, and lonely region), looking for Rivendell, where comfort and elves reside.

At this point Tolkien's hobbit adventure and Morris's Icelandic one become increasingly alike. Bilbo's account begins with rain, a startled pony, lost equipment, a fire that will not light, a weariness (on the trolls' part) with mutton, and finally a move towards Rivendell. The chapter describing Morris's 1871 journey to Vatnsdale, or 'Water-dale' (Morris often mixes Norse and English forms), is very much the same. Shortly before the last approach to Water-dale, a pony, or 'horse' (Morris uses both terms), suddenly bolts.[10] 'We were like to have lost one of our pack-horses, who taking fright at something set off at score galloping furiously.' Finally one of the pony's boxes becomes unhooked and drags on the ground. 'Of course,' writes Morris (using a phrase and tone that Tolkien later uses as well), 'the lid flew open, and our candles and spare boots and a few other things strewed the soil of Iceland.'[11]

And the similarities continue on the following day, a day that begins with mutton, a failed fire, and rain. Here are Morris's words:

> I groaned and got up and went out into the bitterest morning, the wind NW and plenty of it and of rain; Magnússon and I made a desperate attempt at a fire, and failed of course; ... well, we de-

> camped and packed, and walked up and down eating our breakfast of cold mutton bones and cold water, and chaffing each other the while to keep up our spirits, and so, after a sloppy half-hour, to horse, and away into the very teeth of it. I don't like to confess to being a milksop: but truth it is that it beat me: ... as we rode now we could not see a rod in front of us, the rain, or hail, or sleet, for it was now one, now the other of these, did not fall, we could see no drops, but it was driven in a level sheet into our faces, so that one had to shut one eye altogether, and flap one's hat over the other. (86–7)

For Morris, Water-dale lies ahead; for Bilbo, Rivendell. Morris and company ride ponies, as do Bilbo and the dwarves. Morris travels over 'high upland-looking ground,' black, gray, and 'inky purple.' Now and then patches of 'green' or 'bright green' appear along the way (76–88 passim). There are sudden, steep clefts in the otherwise even terrain, clefts that remain invisible until the very edge. Tolkien's travellers cross 'a wide land the colour of heather and crumbling rock, with patches and slashes of grass-green and moss-green'; 'unexpected valleys, narrow with steep sides' open 'suddenly at their feet' (47).

Morris, on the last leg to Water-dale, nearly goes to sleep while riding and 'dreaming of people at home'; stones along the way leave the ponies 'cut and bleeding' (87 and 77). Bilbo, feeling 'more tired than he ever remembered feeling before,' thinks longingly of 'his comfortable chair before the fire in his favourite sitting-room in his hobbit-hole'; at the final approach to Rivendell, he nods off and bumps his nose on his pony's neck; his pony stumbles over 'roots and stones' (46–7).

Morris must cross 'a narrow ravine going down at right angles into the main gorge.' There is a stream 'thundering down it' and 'a cloud of spray from the waterfall' (88). Occasional clusters of flowers appear and 'swampy' or 'marshy' terrain. Shortly after they leave Water-dale, a horse 'sinks up to the girths' in one of these marshes, 'a most evil bog' (107). For Bilbo too 'There were gullies that they could almost leap over, but very deep with water-falls in them. There were dark ravines that one could neither

jump over nor climb into. There were bogs, some of them green pleasant places to look at, with flowers growing bright and tall; but a pony that walked there with a pack on its back would never have come out again' (47). And ultimately, for both Morris and Bilbo, one of these narrow, hidden valleys offers shelter, comfort, warmth, and cheer – for Bilbo an elven (and therefore Celtic) shelter, for Morris a typically Icelandic one.[12]

'Tea-time had long gone by, and it seemed supper-time would soon do the same,' writes Tolkien, when 'they came to the edge of a steep fall in the ground' and there was the valley below. Far beneath them they hear 'the voice of hurrying water in a rocky bed at the bottom' and they catch 'the scent of trees' in the air. The descent itself is particularly memorable: 'Bilbo never forgot the way they slithered and slipped in the dusk down the steep zig-zag path into the secret valley of Rivendell' (47–8).

Morris's Water-dale appears equally as suddenly, and after a day equally as long and miserable. There was 'no indication,' Morris writes, 'of this terrible gorge till one was quite on the edge of it; it grew very narrow as we went on, and the cliffs very steep ... till at last the narrow gorge widened into the head of Water-dale, that looked all green and fertile to us after the waste' (88). In much the same way that the weary Bilbo comes to 'an open glade not far above the banks of the stream' and finally 'to the Last Homely House' with 'its doors flung wide' (48 and 50), Morris rides 'swiftly down to the stead' and – to his great relief and gratitude – is there 'bidden in.' 'And as we sat quite out of the wind and rain in the clean parlour, drinking coffee and brandy, and began to feel that we had feet and hands again, I felt such happiness as I suppose I shan't feel again till I ride from Búðará to Grimstunga under similar circumstances' (89).[13]

From this point on, the two accounts (Morris's actual account and Tolkien's fictional one) become less precisely matched, less dependent on a specific string of events or a grouping of images. Nonetheless, distinct similarities remain, as though flashes or glimpses of Morris's Icelandic world have scattered themselves throughout Tolkien's Middle-earth. Both writers give us vivid descriptions of long days, foul weather, cutting winds, rough terrain,

and biting, bitter cold – now and then followed, for both Morris and the hobbits, by pipes, ale, and detailed accounts of highly welcome baths. There are rough-cut mountain steps, evil bogs, countless rivers or streams to cross, and rivers that run underground. There is a Myvatn (Midgewater) in the *Journals* and a Midgewater in *The Fellowship of the Ring*; there are Icelandic trolls as well, if only in place names such as Tröllakirkja and Tröllahals (Troll's Church and Troll's Neck). And for both Morris and Tolkien there are natural gates or upright marking-stones – for Morris, a 'gate-post rock' said to be 'elf-haunted' and another that he refers to as a 'Carline' (old woman), this last reminding him of still other such stones known as 'old men' (80 and 113–14). All are suggestive of the 'single stone,' like a 'guarding finger' or 'warning' on the way to the Barrow Downs (*FR*, 148) or the 'single mighty stone like a finger of doom' and the old man who appears to be stone himself outside Tolkien's 'Paths of the Dead' (*RK*, 59).

The caves that Morris visits, particularly 'Surtshellir' (Surt's Cave) with its 'ragged sort of porch,' 'vaulted hall,' and 'ledge of stone running at a regular distance all round like a bench' (83), have their counterparts in the various Dwarf-made mountain halls in Tolkien's Middle-earth. And, too, the 'narrow bridge-like rock' that Morris crosses ('over a terrible chasm, deep, straight-sided, and with water at the bottom') before reaching a 'grass-grown' plain (168), is reminiscent of the 'narrow bridge of stone without a parapet' that Bilbo and his party must negotiate as they enter Rivendell (50).

There are barren, dead lands in Iceland as well – sandy, ash-strewn regions that are matched in Tolkien by the Desolation of Smaug and by Mordor's sullen wastes. And both Tolkien and Morris have burial mounds with active, singing (though temperamentally opposed) spirits residing within. In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Frodo encounters the hostile, hungering Barrow-wight, singing its 'cold ... immeasurably dreary' song (152); in the *Journals*, Morris writes of Gunnar's Howe, a mound which is said to have opened, allowing Skarphedin and Hogni (in *The Story of Burnt Njal*) to see 'four lights burning' that cast no shadow and to hear the dead but 'merry' Gunnar, 'exceeding glad of countenance,' singing under the moon (49).

Tolkien and Morris are also masters at instilling a sense of mood and consciousness into the landscapes they describe. Light and shade, wind and cloud, rivers and valleys and mountains seem nearly alive, and the ways in which Morris and Tolkien create this effect are very much alike. Both make skilful use of verbs, active verbs; both describe their landscapes in vividly human terms and do so far more consistently than writers usually do. Rather than saying his party is approaching a mountain range, Morris writes that the range itself is approaching them, that the range is 'gradually drawing near.' A valley does not grow narrower but rather a spur 'narrows the valley.' A stream, with what seems proprietary intent, has 'cut for itself' a gorge. Cliffs 'fail' or 'fall away' or 'sweep round' Morris and his friends; hills 'sink' or 'look' outward into a meadow. Mountains 'thrust' themselves, 'shake' off encroaching clouds or 'swallow' what lies below, and – repeatedly – they show their 'jagged teeth.' All of this and the 'brows,' 'necks,' 'mouths,' 'tongues,' 'lips,' 'shoulders,' 'feet,' 'fingers,' or 'scars'; the 'tables,' 'screens,' 'roofs, 'corners,' or 'walls' and the clefts like 'horrible winding streets' add to the sense that life is almost present within Morris's rivers, rocks, and stones. This sense of quickening is so strong that when Morris mentions, for example, a 'bad and doubtful road' it is easy to feel the road had some choice in the matter, that the road's own hostility or indifference brought it to this state.

Tolkien does the same. Like Morris, Tolkien gives life to his landscapes though active, watchful verbs and through the use of human form (through the 'shoulders,' 'heads,' 'arms,' 'limbs,' 'knees,' and 'feet' of mountains and hills; through 'teeth,' 'jaws,' 'lips,' or 'yawning' openings). Like Morris, Tolkien creates a responsive world, with 'hurrying' clouds and 'listening' stones. But Tolkien, as a writer of fantasy, can go further than Morris does; there is more than metaphoric life in Tolkien's mountains, rivers, and woods. In the Old Forest, everything is 'very much more alive' (*FR*, 121). Paths shift; a tree drops a branch while hobbits are passing by, and trees can be awakened or sung back to sleep. Mountains are equally conscious. Caradhras (the 'Red-peak,' the 'Cruel') is full of malice, and the snow it sends to defeat the Fellowship comes from 'no ordinary storm.' In Hollin the stones

remember the Elves though the grass has forgotten them. Even something as unsubstantial as a silence may subtly be alive and 'dislike being broken' (*H*, 54).

And the similarities continue. Morris writes of Grimstunga, the homestead of Gunnlaug the Wormtongue[14] (a combination of names instantly familiar to any reader of Tolkien's works), and he mentions as well Slaying-Bardi, who, like Tolkien's Bard, heroically defended a garrison against attack. Even the name *Frodo* has its echoes. In his *Journal* entries of 10–14 August 1871, Morris variously refers to 'Frodá' and 'Fróðá (or Frodi's-river)' and 'Fróðarheiði.'[15] And throughout the *Journals* there are references to elves, trolls, giants, ravens, eagles, and, of course, ponies, all of which repeatedly appear in Tolkien – only more vividly created and certainly more involved.

Ponies play particularly significant roles in both the *Journals* and in Middle-earth. In *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, we meet favoured ponies such as Fatty Lumpkin or Bill (half-starved when he is first acquired, then lost at the gates of Moria, and later found again when the Fellowship returns). And we meet other ponies, ones that are less cooperative or ones that take fright 'at nothing' and run away. All of this correlates with Morris's *Journals*, in which a particularly rotund pony is nicknamed Stampa (or 'Buttertubs') and where over and again individual ponies wander off, bolt, refuse to be caught and yet are spoken of with great affection and treated with cheerful care. Morris, for example, took 'Mouse,' a favourite, back home with him, and there the pony grew comfortably lazy and fat. And, like Sam's Bill, one of Morris's ponies (a pony that was 'dead lame when we started from Reykjavík') disappears during the journey but makes its way back home, a distance of 'about fifty miles off, with some half-dozen of the biggest rivers in Iceland to be crossed' (61).

In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo and his party start their adventures 'jogging off from the inn ... on laden ponies.' It is all rather enjoyable for Bilbo at first – while the weather and roads are still good – but this changes before many days have passed, and Bilbo soon finds himself in less comfortable circumstances, moving through 'the Lone-lands,' where 'dreary hills, rising higher and higher' lie 'not

far ahead' (34). Morris's descriptions of his own first day out are clearly comparable: 'I find my poney charming riding and am in the best of spirits: certainly it was a time to be remembered; the clatter of paces and box-lids, the rattle of the hoofs over the stones, the guides crying out and cracking their whips, and we all with our faces turned towards the mountain-wall under which we were to sleep to-night ... Most strange and awful the country looked to me we passed through, in spite of all my anticipations: a doleful land' (28).

A still more striking example of animal borrowing (or, in this case, animal/human borrowing) is found in Tolkien's Beorn. In his *Journals*, Morris writes of 'Biorn the boaster,' a saga figure who displays much of the boisterous energy of Tolkien's shape-changing bear/man Beorn. Where Biorn has a homestead lying beyond Eyja-fell, Beorn has a hall just east of the Misty Mountains. Moreover, there is an anecdote Morris tells on himself that is paralleled by Beorn. After a side trip – on foot – to view the waterfall, Barnafóss, Morris writes: 'I came up panting, and threw myself down on the grass, and when the priest made an astonished face at me, explained that I was heavily clad and booted: he nodded his head, and then tapped me on the belly, and said very gravely: "Besides you know you are so fat"' (161). In *The Hobbit* it is Beorn who pokes Bilbo in the middle 'most disrespectfully' and says, 'Little bunny is getting nice and fat' (115).

The strongest and most consistent overlapping of characterization in Tolkien and Morris, however, is that of Tolkien's comfort-loving, untried Bilbo Baggins and the somewhat inept persona Morris created for himself in his *Icelandic Journal* accounts. Certainly the real, the historical Morris can only loosely, and only in the context of his Iceland journeys, be compared with hobbitkind, though it is true Morris was relatively short,[16] a little rotund, and affectionately called 'Topsy,' for his curly mop of hair. Still, much like Chaucer, who places a naive and inept version of himself within his own *Canterbury Tales*, Morris in Iceland often chooses to place himself in a comic light and to exaggerate his own ineptitude – so much so that James Morris, in his introduction to the 1969 edition of the *Journals*, appears to takes Morris too much at

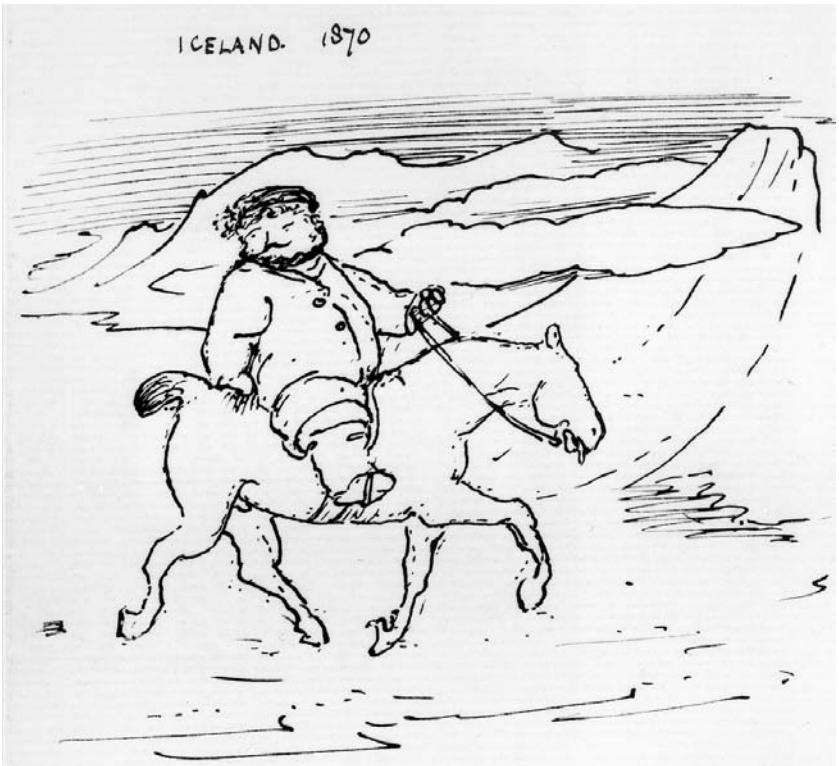

Figure 1. William Morris by Sir Edward Burne-Jones.

his word and describes him as 'plump and a little breathless' and quite out of place (xvii). We have as well Sir Edward Burne-Jones's rendition of Morris on pony back. Though James Morris's depiction is no doubt extreme and Burne-Jones's drawing is one of several similar cartoons poking fun at a friend, these exaggerated portrayals make excellent models for Tolkien's hobbit as he rushes 'very puffed' to the Green Dragon or jogs along behind Gandalf and the dwarves on his journey into the Wild.

'It is curious,' writes Fiona MacCarthy in her biography, 'how often Morris thinks of himself in terms of a Burne-Jones cartoon.'[17] If Morris does so in the *Journals*, however, he does so to

good effect. The absence of self aggrandizement and heroic posturing greatly adds to Morris's appeal. It is the same with the hobbits. We can come far closer to Bilbo than we ever can to Bard.

For both Morris and Bilbo it took something unexpected to push them away from home, to send them into what Tolkien, in his essay, 'On Fairy-Stories,' calls 'the Perilous Realm.' Bilbo begins by claiming that adventures are 'nasty disturbing uncomfortable things' (13), and the loss of civilized amenities is as difficult for William Morris as it is for Tolkien's character. Both Morris and Bilbo like their pipes and their baths and regular, well-cooked meals. Morris focuses much on food throughout the journey (complaining loudly about inferior cooking and proving himself the ablest cook on the 1871 expedition). And there is no question that hobbits are fond of food; they eat well and often, enjoying second breakfasts and hoping for dinner 'twice a day when they can get it' (*H*, 12). And Bilbo too is a cook. There are the seed cakes we hear of at the Unexpected Party, as well as his plea to the trolls: 'I am a good cook myself, and cook better than I cook, if you see what I mean' (39). Both are jabbed in the middle; both are proclaimed to be fat.

Neither, then, is presented as an obvious candidate for adventure. Bilbo, in the words of the sceptical Gloin, 'looks more like a grocer than a burglar' (24); and, according to James Morris, William Morris appears 'altogether an alien' in Iceland, a man

> Physically ill-designed for the environment, and temperamentally, one feels, born to stay at home.
>
> He was country-bred indeed, and dedicated to principles of rural roots and loyalties: but his idea of a native soil was the soft, damp, flowery soil of Kelmscott by the Thames, where he had recently acquired the lease of his manor house, and where the river flowed softly through fragrant meadows embowered in country calm. (*Journals*, xvii)

There is some truth in this. William Morris (in his party of four) was unquestionably the least suited and least prepared for what

Iceland would bring, just as Bilbo (surrounded by a wizard and twelve travel-worn dwarves) is clearly the novice on his journey over the Edge of the Wild.

Morris readily and repeatedly confesses his 'trepidation' and his longing for home. Unlike the others, he must be led over swollen streams (hanging on to the pommel of his horse's saddle). He feels at one moment a very unheroic 'self disgust' at his own anxiety and at another he sees himself as 'principally of use' as a 'mocking-stock' or an 'abusing-block' while his companions are competently at work. Bilbo too begins as the picture of homesickness and trembling ineptitude. He repeatedly needs to be carried – through tunnel, over river, up trees. He is no more able to 'hoot even once like any kind of owl' than he can 'fly like a bat' (36–7). During the Misty Mountains storm, he lies shaking 'from head to toe.' On the eagles' shelf, others must prepare the fire; others skin and cut up the meat.

Where Morris baulks at continuing through the rough cavern passages of Surtshellir, Bilbo, in a similar way, hesitates in Smaug's dark tunnels. There is a significant difference, however: Bilbo ultimately continues on ('the bravest thing he ever did'), on down to Smaug himself and the wonders of Smaug's vast and glittering hoard. In a sense, then, Bilbo fulfils the adventure that Morris failed to complete. 'I must confess I gave in,' writes Morris, who returned to the surface from the depths of Surtshellir to enjoy 'a most agreeable pipe.' But this yielding to comfort has its bitter price. To his 'great shame and grief,' Morris learns he has missed a 'great sight': an ice pillar 'that rises from floor to roof' and a frozen waterfall. 'Why didn't I try it?' he asks himself with regret and poignancy (84).

Though he may have failed in this one incident to meet the full challenge of his Icelandic adventure, Morris grows in confidence and understanding as the journey proceeds. In this, too, he and Tolkien's hobbit are much alike. By the end of the 1871 journey, Morris shows himself to be a far more comfortable traveller; he has grown familiar with Iceland's weather and ways, and he takes it all in stride. For Bilbo, 'the little fellow bobbing and puffing on the mat' (24), great changes have occurred as well. He has acted

heroically and proved himself time and again. 'My dear Bilbo,' Gandalf says as they return to the Shire, 'you are not the hobbit that you were' (253).

What unite Bilbo and Morris, then, are not merely the ways in which both enjoy pipes and comforts, song and baths and food, or the ways in which Tolkien allows Bilbo (and Morris allows himself) to appear slightly ridiculous, or the fact that each adventurer arrives – after similar miseries – at similar receptive havens. What is also of prime importance is that each has found himself through a journey and each has fulfilled a quest.

In the end, each returns again to home, where, as Tolkien tells us about Bilbo, 'the shapes of the land and of the trees were as well known to him as his hands and toes' (252), and each discovers that home has been renewed through its temporary loss. For Bilbo, 'the sound of the kettle on his hearth was ever after more musical than it had been even in the quiet days before the Unexpected Party' (254), and back at Bag End he will take to writing poetry and the memoirs of his journey, 'There and Back Again' – just as Morris once more in Kelmscott will again write poetry and will finish his *Journal* from notes taken on the way.

Though there were times when the reality of what Morris found in Iceland could not fully match his ideals, times when the dirt, poverty, and unattractiveness of individual farm holdings (and of those who lived on such holdings) greatly troubled him, he concludes his journal with deep gratitude. He returns, not merely (in the words of Burne-Jones) 'smelling of raw fish and talking of Iceland more than ever' but also 'obscurely fulfilled' (*Journals*, xxi). Morris's love of the medieval world, something of its art and much of its society, had come together in Iceland – in a bleak but nonetheless valid way. He had seen the land of the sagas and met the people of that land. He had shed something of his civilized nineteenth-century personality and gained a feeling for England's Norse and heroic past. He had, as well, found peace within himself. Here, in Morris's own words is the summary sense of it all: 'The glorious simplicity of the terrible and tragic, but beautiful land, with its well-remembered stories of brave men, killed all querulous feeling in me, and has made all the dear faces of wife

and children and love and friends dearer than ever to me ... surely I gained a great deal, and it was no idle whim that drew me there, but a true instinct for what I needed' (xxii).

Morris, like Bilbo, has been blessed by 'recovery,' and *recovery*, as Tolkien defines it, is the 'regaining of a clear view,' the freeing of objects or people from 'the drab blur or triteness or familiarity' ('On Fairy-Stories,' 53). Morris, returning from Iceland, and Bilbo, from beyond the Wilds, have renewed their attachments and regained an awareness of what they had before, and their greatest reward is one of coming home. In this – in the theme of recovery, as well as in setting, incident, and the shape of characters – there is much that appears in William Morris's *Icelandic Journals* that is echoed in Middle-earth.

Chapter Five

Spiders and Evil Red Eyes: The Shadow Sides of Gandalf and Galadriel

Though Tolkien's fiction is by no means as unsophisticated as critics often believe, it is still true that Tolkien preferred to separate his good characters from his bad. We have no doubt that Aragorn, even as Strider, is a man to be counted on and that Gollum, though 'he may yet be saved,' is a doomed and untrustworthy wretch. It is equally clear that Théoden belongs on the side of the good though he initially appears weak and floundering. Even Boromir, Tolkien's most deliberate attempt to create a morally troubled personality, gives us little difficulty. As the picture of a soul in doubt, he never quite succeeds. It is too easy to feel (and to feel without deep concern) that Boromir is destined to fall. Still, by creating characters of this sort, Tolkien knew exactly what he was doing. He was well aware that, in real life, good and evil are never so clearly defined as fiction permits them to be and that fantasy, even more than other genres, tends to present human nature in elemental, uncluttered forms.[1] At its best, such simplification allows for a clearer presentation of basic human types, but simplification of this sort may also leave the reader feeling hat reality has been sacrificed in the name of clarity.

How then can a writer, a serious writer deeply concerned with human intricacies and matters of bona fide moral choice, create fantasy characters who represent all the complexities and multiplicity of the human temperament? It is not an easy problem, and Tolkien attempts to solve it by more than one approach: by allowing for occasional moments of doubt, temptation, or irritability in

his good characters and by creating moments when his fallen characters waiver and reconsider the choices they have made, as Gollum does on the Stairs of Cirith Ungol when he looks upon the sleeping Frodo and Sam. But Tolkien's most common and most effective means of adding moral complexity is to link ideal characters with specific negative ones, thereby suggesting a darker, undeveloped side. By creating such connections and by having his negative figures shadow – and at times almost *stalk* – his most admirable individuals, Tolkien establishes character teams whose members, taken together, represent the intricacy and inconsistency that lies within any human being.

It is easy to see how Tolkien matches Frodo with Gollum, showing us, at one moment, Gollum in the guise of an 'an old weary hobbit' and, in another, Frodo speaking of his 'precious' and clutching at the Ring. There are times, then, when we are encouraged to see Frodo and Gollum as two opposing extremes of a single struggling soul, united by the burden and seduction of the Ring to the point where it makes good symbolic sense to have Faramir bind them with what are virtually marriage vows. In a similar way, Denethor and Théoden are another matched pair. One is a failed steward who wishes to be king; the other is a weakened king who regains his earlier powers. Their names too hint at a connection. A subtle shifting of syllables and the two are nearly the same.

Tolkien, however, also uses character splits and character multiplicity in far more complicated ways. This is particularly so for Gandalf and Galadriel. Like Frodo and Théoden, Gandalf and Galadriel are each matched with and balanced by negative figures from within Tolkien's own literature, Gandalf rather obviously with the wizard Saruman but also with Sauron, the Dark Lord (as well as with that fire spirit, the Balrog, in one brief scene). Galadriel, the giver of light and life, is more subtly matched – with 'Shelob the Great,' that proponent of death and darkness, 'an evil thing in spider-form' (*TT*, 332). The connections, however, are more intricate than this. Gandalf and Galadriel (and their negative counterparts) are not the products of Tolkien's imagination alone. They owe a good part of their presentation and behaviour to figures –

particularly highly ambiguous figures – drawn from mythology and from earlier literary works before Tolkien's time.[2]

Though the Arthurian figure of Merlin no doubt contributed to Gandalf, though Tolkien himself cited a painting, *Der Berggeist* (The Mountain Spirit), as an 'origin of Gandalf,'[3] and though Gandalf is not quite the same in *The Hobbit* as he is in *The Lord of the Rings*, it is Norse mythology that most consistently influenced his character. The very name *Gandalf*, taken from *The Poetic Edda*'s 'Catalogue of Dwarfs,' is a strong indication of Gandalf's Norse connections. But as far as character goes, it is Odin, the primary Norse god (an exceptionally ambiguous god), who is most consistently linked to Gandalf and who works in the background in multiple ways to add the greatest depth to Gandalf's personality.

This comparison to Odin may at first seem a highly unlikely one; Gandalf is unquestionably one of Tolkien's good, peace-seeking characters and Odin is best known for his role as a battle god. But it is important to realize that the Odin of Norse belief was by no means a consistently negative figure. It is more appropriate to say that he was perceived as an untrustworthy deity, one whose favour was uncertain and could suddenly be removed, as it is in the story of Harald Wartooth, who is first aided by and then killed by Odin through a blow from Harald's own weapon, or as it is in the account of Sigmund the Völsung, who initially seems favoured but whose death occurs on the battle field when Odin shatters his sword.

The titles or attributes (there are many) applied to Odin or substituted for his true name are indicative of the god's variable character. The most extensive list comes from *The Poetic Edda*'s 'Lay of Grímnir,' where Odin himself claims an impressive number of titles and attributes. The following are from Lee M. Hollander's 1928 *The Poetic Edda* (with Hollander's untranslated names included and his doubtful translations marked as such).[4] 'Grím is my name,' Odin begins, and then goes on to cite further names: Wayweary, War-god (?), Helm-Bearer, the Welcome one, the Third, Thuth, Uth, Helblindi, One-Eyed, the Truthful, the Changeable, Truthfinder, Glad in Battle, Hnikar, Bileyg, Fiery-Eyed, Bale-Worker, Wise in Lore, Grímnir, Glapsvith, The Much

Experienced, Long-Hood, Long-Beard, Victory Father, (Spear-) thruster, Father of All, Father of the Battle-slain, Attacker by Horse (?), Lord of Boat-loads, Ialk, Kialar, Inciter to Strife(?), Vithur, Óski, Ómi, Equally High, Biflindi, Bearer of the (Magic) Wand, Greybeard, The Wise, Ygg, Thund, Wakeful, Skilfing, Wayfarer, God of Gods, God of Goths (of men ?), Ófnir, The Entangler, He Who Lulls to Sleep or to Dreams.

A good many other names and other renditions could easily be added. Of particular interest are Paul B. Taylor's and W.H. Auden's 1969 translation of the *Elder Edda* (Poetic Edda) dedicated to J.R.R. Tolkien.[5] Taylor and Auden list Odin's names from 'The Lay of Grímnir' as follows: Grim, Traveler, Warrior, Helmet-Wearer, Agreable, Third, Thud, Ud, High-One, Hel-Blinder, Truth, Change, Truth-Getter, Battle-Glad, Abaser, Death-Worker, Hider, One-Eye, Fire-Eye, Lore-Master, Masked, Deceitful, Broad-Hat, Broad-Beard, Boat-Lord, Rider, All-Father, Death-Father, Father of Victory, Stirrer-of-Strife at Things, Equal-High, Shaker, Shout, Wish, Wand-Bearer, Grey-Beard, Wise, Sage, Ygg, Wakeful, Heavens-Roar, Hanged, Skilfing, Goth, Jalk, Unraveler, and Sleep-Bringer. From *Cassell's Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend*, which lists over 150 Odin names and titles, come the following additions or variant translations: One Who Rides Forth, Wanderer, Deceiver, Battle-Wolf, Raven God, Shaggy-Cloak Wearer, Truth-Getter, Drooping Hat, Treachery-Ruler, Terrible, and Gelding (an attribute that has given scholars much to puzzle over).[6]

A mixed review to say the least! Nonetheless it should already be evident that a number of these epithets (or ekenames or byenames) are strikingly appropriate for Gandalf, most obviously so Long-Hood (translated as 'Broad hat' in Taylor and Auden and as 'Drooping Hat' in *Cassell*), Long-beard, Greybeard, Bearer of the (Magic) Wand, One Who Rides Forth, Wayweary, and Wayfarer and Wanderer. In eddic tales these attributes are applied to Odin when he travels – as he frequently does – through his own middle-earth, the middle-earth of Norse mythology, disguised as a grey-bearded old man, carrying a staff and wearing either a hood or a cloak (nearly always blue) and a wide-brimmed, floppy hat. The cloak, the staff, the wide-brimmed hat, the figure of an old bearded

man are Gandalf precisely. Even the blue cloak makes an appearance by the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, most noticeably when Gandalf astounds the Bree folk 'with his white beard, and the light that seemed to gleam from him, as if his blue mantle was only a cloud over sunshine' (*RK*, 274), an image quite appropriate to Odin, who also dresses in blue and who – in addition to all else – is a god of the sky.[7]

For both Odin and Gandalf such manifestations serve as forms of disguise. Odin is a god masquerading as a grey-bearded but vigorous man; Gandalf is one of the Istari sent from Valinor 'in simple guise, as it were of Men already old in years but hale in body, travellers and wanderers' (*UT*, 393). He is, in Tolkien's own words, a figure of 'the Odinic wanderer' (*Letters*, 119). When Frodo describes Gandalf as 'an old man in a battered hat' leaning on 'a thorny staff' (*FR*, 375), he is giving us a purposefully limited description. He is depicting Gandalf the way Gandalf appears to those who do not know him well, to those who do not recognize his wizardry or his rank. When Gandalf first returns to Gimli, Legolas, and Aragorn after Moria, they see him not as Gandalf but as a grey-bearded old man, cloaked and hooded, wearing 'a wide-brimmed hat' and leaning on a staff (*TT*, 95–6). He is at that moment very much like Odin in Odin's wandering old man guise.

There are, of course, obvious limits to similarities between Gandalf and the Scandinavian Odin. For one, unlike Odin, Gandalf is not a god but an emissary of Manwë, the godlike chief Vala, who is himself based on an idealized Odin and who, like Odin and Gandalf, associates with eagles and is sometimes described as wearing a cloak of blue.[8] But what seems more to separate Gandalf from the Norse god are the sinister and negative attributes associated with Odin, attributes such as Inciter to Strife or Entangler (in Hollander) or Evil-Doer and Terrible (in *Cassell*), none of which seems in any way appropriate to Tolkien's admirable wizard (who – unlike the god Odin – invariably puts himself on the line for others rather than for personal gain). The remaining titles do not, however, go to waste. For one, in an ameliorated, modified way, certain of Odin's less desirable traits are still present in Gandalf's character. Though Tolkien more than once claimed that Gandalf is essentially

an 'angel,'[9] Gandalf is neither saintly nor always peaceable. There is a certain amount of self-satisfaction, irascibility, and sarcasm within Gandalf's character, all of which adds to his appeal. Under necessity, Gandalf shows a warrior side; and his wizard's staff, though innocuous in appearance, is in reality an object of power, as it is in Théoden's hall or in stands against Orcs and wolves. It is, then, like various sticks, wands, or staffs that the wandering Odin carries, a weapon in disguise. (In the Norse *Flateyjarbók*, for example, a hooded and disguised Odin hands Eric, King of the Swedes, a slender stick which becomes a javelin when thrown over his enemies.) Finally, those who misunderstand Gandalf's mission refer to him as a herald of war and evil times; 'Master Stormcrow,' Gríma Wormtongue calls him, and 'Ill-news' (*TT*, 117), titles far more appropriate to Odin in his role as promoter of war, the Odin whose ekenames include Raven god, Battle-Wolf, and Father of the slain.

There are, as well, particular characteristics associated with Odin that may not appear specifically in Gandalf but which appear in other characters within Tolkien's story, negative characters who are themselves connected with Gandalf and who therefore, in a roundabout, second-hand way, serve again to link Gandalf back to Odin and at the same time suggest moral failings that *might* have developed within Gandalf's character. These negative figures are the two primary villains in *The Lord of the Rings*, Saruman, the fallen wizard, who would emulate Sauron himself, and Sauron, the creator of the Ring. Much like Odin in his less savory role, but quite unlike Gandalf, Saruman and Sauron (with their significantly similar names) both exhibit ruthlessness and single-minded lust for power and control; they are both figures who deceive, figures who destroy rather than preserve. Sauron, as 'the Deceiver' or 'the Base Master of Treachery,' is particularly well matched by those aspects of Odin that name him as Deceiver or Treachery-Ruler. Nor is it merely a generalized preference for tyranny and destruction that connects Sauron and Saruman with the Scandinavian god. Certain animals, certain similarities in clothing (worn by Saruman), and certain fragmentary body images (affiliated with Sauron) also recall Odin. At the same time, these

shared animal associations (as well as the clothing) are also connected to Gandalf.[10]

More than once, Tolkien purposely confuses Gandalf and Saruman (both of whom dress, Odin-like, in cloak and wide-brimmed hat). After the escape from Moria and Gandalf's supposed death, the remaining members of the Fellowship are uncertain whether it is Saruman or Gandalf they have seen. 'Like, and yet unlike,' Gimli says (*TT*, 183). Éomer later describes Saruman as an 'old man hooded and cloaked, very like to Gandalf' (*TT*, 39), and Gandalf himself informs us that, in his new incarnation as Gandalf the White, he has indeed become Saruman – Saruman 'as he should have been' (*TT*, 98). (The ambivalence of grey, we should notice, has now been left behind.)

Links between Gandalf and Sauron and the Dark Lord are less obvious. Though Tolkien once considered a final confrontation between Gandalf and Sauron and claimed 'it would be a delicate balance' (*Letters*, 332), connections between the two are less blatant than they are between Gandalf and Saruman. Sauron is, after all, more concept than substance, less easily pictured and therefore (visually at least) less easily compared. After the drowning of Númenor, Sauron is deprived of the 'shape in which he had wrought so great an evil' and can 'never again appear fair to the eyes of Men.' Nonetheless, something of a physical presence remains: 'His spirit arose out of the deep and passed as a shadow and a black wind over the sea, and came back to Middle-earth and to Mordor that was his home. There he took up again his great Ring in Barad-dûr, and dwelt there, dark and silent, until he wrought himself a new guise, an image of malice and hatred made visible; and the Eye of Sauron the Terrible few could endure' (*Silmarillion*, 280–1).

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron is pictured in much the same nebulous or fragmented manner, as a 'shadow,' a 'black hand,' a 'finger,' an 'arm.' More than anything else, however, he is an eye, a single 'dreadful eye,' a 'lidless eye,' that projects its searching hostility westward over Middle-earth. Orcs in his service wear an emblem of the eye, and carvings or painted signs of the 'Red Eye' mark where they have been. 'The Red Eye will be looking towards

Isengard,' Aragorn says, referring to Sauron's watchfulness (*TT*, 169). To Frodo the Eye appears in Galadriel's mirror as 'rimmed with fire' (*FR*, 379).

If we remember that one of Odin's epithets is the fiery-eyed and that he, like Sauron, lost something of his physical self in his search for greater power, another link suggests itself. Where Odin gives up an eye to gain wisdom from the Spring of Mimir (thus earning the epithet, One-eyed), Sauron – in his efforts to 'make himself master of all things in Middle-earth' (*Silmarillion*, 289) – loses the greater part of his physical self (thus becoming little more than an Eye, a searching sleepless Eye). Beside the Red Eye or the Lidless Eye, Sauron is referred to as the Great Eye, the Eye of Barad-dûr, the Evil Eye, the Nameless Eye.

Both Odin and Sauron have rings with supernatural powers. In Norse mythology one of the few objects associated with Odin is the ring Draupnir, an arm ring that magically produces eight more rings, all equal in weight, every nine nights. In Tolkien's books, Sauron's One Ring has the power to dominate the three, seven, and nine lesser rings associated with the One.

Animal affiliations also tie Odin to Sauron – as well as to Gandalf and Saruman. The animals most closely associated with Odin are Sleipnir (his eight-legged, otherworldly horse) and the three beasts of battle that are traditional to northern literature: the eagle, raven, and wolf. Wolves sit at Odin's feet and are fed the flesh of the battle-slain; every day two ravens fly outward, gathering news of the world and returning with it to the god; in *The Poetic Edda* a hovering eagle and a wolf are associated with Valhalla, Odin's battle hall (where resurrected warriors feast and carouse through the night).[11]

The eagle associated with Valhalla has both positive and negative connotations, representing both the power and threat of war and the power of transference between spiritual states or worlds. In 'The Mead of Poetry,' Odin escapes back to Asgard (the world of the Aesir gods) from Jotunheim (the Middle-earth land of giants) by turning into an eagle; Suttung, the giant who pursues him, is also in eagle form. In 'The Theft of Idun's Apples,' the giant Thiazi disguises himself as an eagle in order to seize the goddess Idun and carry her away.

In similar ways, Tolkien's eagles rescue Gandalf and his associates in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*; in similar ways, worlds are bridged through the eagles' flight (most obviously so at Mount Doom when Sam and Frodo are lifted away from Mordor's realm of death). In *The Silmarillion*, Thorondor, 'King of Eagles, mightiest of all birds that have ever been' is the primary rescuer (110). It is Thorondor who transports Fingon to Thangorodrim (where the captive Maedhros is freed). It is Thorondor and his vassals who save Tuor and the remnant of Gondolin on a high mountain pass, and it is Thorondor who carries Lúthien and Beren away from Morgoth's dungeon-fortress (and away from a fiery setting reminiscent of Mount Doom).[12]

But eagles in Tolkien's worlds can be threatening and 'cruel' as well as helpful, and in this they come closer to the eagles of Norse mythology. In *The Silmarillion* (before the Drowning of Númenor), Manwë, the chief of the Valar (and the one who sends Gandalf to Middle-earth), warns the Númenóreans of their impending doom by sending visions of 'the Eagles of Manwë' or 'the Eagles of the Lords of the West' (277). And while the eagles we meet in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the 'proud and strong and noble-hearted' (*H*, 93) ancient race of the north, serve again and again for eleventh-hour rescues, they nonetheless remain creatures that understand violence and are quick to join battle or to seek out enemies. Even in their propensity for timely rescue there are hints of a darker side, a sense that they are at the least a race readily and almost supernaturally aware of death and events that threaten death – a quality they demonstrate by joining in the Battle of Five Armies after 'smelling battle from afar' (*H*, 244).

Like his eagles, Tolkien's ravens represent both battle and transference; and, again like his eagles, they are for the most part given a positive role. As pure-bred members of the raven race (not to be confused with crows), they appear only in *The Hobbit*, where they are unquestionably useful, knowledgeable creatures, much like Odin's wise and far-flying, shaman-sent ravens, Huginn and Muninn (Thought and Memory). In this role they help to fulfil the quest that Gandalf promoted and arranged. It is the ancient raven Roäc (son of Carc) that informs Bilbo and the dwarves of Smaug's death but tells them as well that hosts of elves and carrion birds

'hoping for battle and slaughter' are already on the way (219), an announcement that firmly marks Roäc as a harbinger of war, part of the raven's traditional role in both Norse and Celtic belief.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, ravens (kindly or otherwise) are absent, but the darker side of their nature, their role as war or carrion birds, still remains and manifests itself in the raven's close relative the crow (giving us yet another example of how Tolkien tends to share out a mixed reputation and create two separate halves of a whole). We are already given a good idea of Tolkien's raven/crow split in *The Hobbit* when Balin explains to Bilbo that crows are 'nasty, suspicious-looking creatures,' name-callers and rude, but that ravens have excellent memories, 'hand on their wisdom to their children,' and have long been friends of the dwarves (217–18).

By *The Lord of the Rings*, the nastiness of crows has been greatly intensified. We now hear about 'the crows of Saruman' or Saruman's 'own crows' and spying 'regiments of black crows' that are known as *crebain*, 'a kind of crow of large size' (*TT*, 154, 186; *FR*, 298). The physical difference between these birds and the raven is negligible, a moral distinction more than anything else.

Saruman's spying crows are not expressly focused on Gandalf or watching him alone, and yet they too create an indirect connection between Gandalf and Saruman, a connection that circles back again to Odin and his carrion birds. In Rohan's golden hall, Gandalf is five times associated with the crow or with birds that eat the battle-slain. 'Troubles' will follow Gandalf 'like crows,' says Théoden; he then refers to the wizard as 'Gandalf Stormcrow.' The false counsellor, Wormtongue, continues the association, twice more applying the term 'Stormcrow' to Gandalf and claiming he is one of the 'carrion-fowl that grow fat on war' (*TT*, 117). Though the intent (most certainly from Wormtongue) is to insult or ridicule Gandalf and to undermine his warning of the coming 'storm,' these references to crows and greed and the promotion of war would be far more appropriate applied to Saruman, that overly ambitious instigator of war who keeps both crows and Wormtongue in his service – and both in spying roles. The link is subtle but significant. If Gandalf is a positive version of Saruman (Saruman 'as he should have been'), then it is fully appropriate that a

denigrated version of Gandalf be descriptive of Saruman. And the common factor, leading back again to Odin in this scene, is the image of the raven/crow carrion bird of war.

Wolves are the last of the traditional Norse war beasts associated with Odin, and Tolkien uses their characteristics in a particularly innovative way. In eddic accounts, Odin keeps and feeds two wolves, Freki and Geri (both names indicative of greed). The two are pets, though pets of a remarkably hostile kind. This fraternizing with wolves, however, does not immune Odin from their dangers; it is the giant, humanized wolf, Fenrir, that ultimately destroys Odin, devouring him in the apocalyptic battle of Ragnarok. Wolves, then, are both Odin's associates and his enemy, and both of these aspects occur in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Sauron and Saruman (with their attributes of a negative Odin) either keep wolves and Wargs[13] in their service or use the image of the wolf as a symbol of havoc and terror. The massive, black battering ram, Grond, that shatters Gondor's city Gate (a ram forged 'in the dark smithies of Mordor') is 'shaped in the likeness of a ravening wolf' (*RK,* 102). And Gandalf, escaping from Orthanc, is pursued by the wolves of Saruman.

In both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf takes the lead defensive role in scenes with Wargs and wolves. Like Odin (who is the first of the gods to rush into battle at Ragnarok and who does so to engage in battle with Loki's wolf-son, Fenrir), Gandalf responds dramatically and aggressively to wolves. In *The Hobbit*, Gandalf is the one who understands the 'dreadful language' of the Wargs (here defined as 'evil wolves over the Edge of the Wild'), and it is Gandalf who sends burning pine-cones 'whizzing down among the circle of the wolves,' setting them on fire (90–2).

This enmity with wolves is even more evident in *The Lord of the Rings* where the Fellowship is confronted by a lead wolf, the 'Hound of Sauron,' and his pack, and where Gandalf seems 'suddenly to grow,' becoming 'a great menacing shape,' and strides with a burning brand and a voice like thunder, crying, 'Naur an edraith ammen! Naur dan i ngaurhoth!' (*FR*, 312).[14] Though Tolkien turns the outcome around and allows Gandalf to survive,

the very suggestion that wolves are looking to devour Gandalf hints at Odin's fate. 'Whatever may be in store for old Gandalf,' says Sam, 'it isn't a wolf's belly,' a sentiment which he repeats immediately after the battle: 'What did I tell you, Mr. Pippin? ... Wolves won't get him' (*FR*, 311–12).

If we move beyond *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, there are more connections still. In *The Silmarillion* and the *legendarium* Christopher Tolkien published in the twelve-volume *History of Middle-earth*, wolves kept by both Morgoth and Thû (a variant name for Sauron) come even closer to eddic accounts. Morgoth, the prime force of evil in these accounts, sends demons in 'wolvish form and flesh' to hunt down enemies, and he keeps one wolf, Carcharoth, the Red Maw (sometimes called 'Everhungry' or 'Jaws of Thirst'), by his throne, just as Odin keeps Freki and Geri. Again, in a way highly reminiscent of Odin, Morgoth, 'with his own hand,' feeds Carcharoth on the 'flesh of Elves and Men' (III, 288). Sauron (who is called 'Lord of Wolves' and who imitates Morgoth in the *legendarium* much as Saruman imitates Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*) also keeps a favoured wolf (or werewolf) by his chair, and this wolf, Draugluin, is fed as well 'on flesh of Man and Elf' (III, 252).

One animal remains, Sleipnir, Odin's eight-legged otherworldly horse, born to the trickster, Loki (who temporarily assumes the form of a mare). Like Odin's other animals, Sleipnir has positive and negative sides, both of which appear in Tolkien's literature. Though Sleipnir is sometimes depicted in battle scenes (most frequently in art) and is a horse for heroes to ride, he is not so often associated with war as he is with transference between various planes and worlds, a shamanistic act that both Odin and Gandalf perform and which is indicated in eddic tales by Sleipnir's ability to carry his riders above the earth or away from Asgard and downward to lower worlds. In most such accounts, Sleipnir transports gods to and from the spirit world of the dead; and, likely enough, it is this persistent association with the underworld that gives Sleipnir his somewhat ambiguous character.

H.R. Ellis Davidson's interpretation of Sleipnir (an interpretation that is generally accepted today) speaks directly to Sleipnir's

underworld association. If Sleipnir's eight legs represent the eight legs of the four men who carry a corpse in its coffin on the way to burial, then a ride on Sleipnir's back represents a 'ride' into the land of death. And this explains why Odin has Sleipnir carry him to the depths of Niflheim to learn the meaning of Balder's dreams or why Hermod too rides Sleipnir to the underworld, seeking Balder's return from the dead.

It is not difficult to see the parallels in Gandalf's Shadowfax. Where Sleipnir is grey, Shadowfax has a coat that 'glistens like sliver' (*FR*, 276); he is described as 'a shade' or a 'shadow' and most often depicted at night or in scenes of mists and greys. His very name (shadow mane) suggests a twilight, darkened world. And Shadowfax's otherworldly powers are hinted at in a number of other ways. He is 'the chief of the Mearas,[15] lords of horses' (*TT*, 108). He is descended from a sire that 'knew the speech of Men' (*TT*, 38); and, like Sleipnir, he appears immune from terror and attuned to the world of the dead. 'Among all the free horses of the earth,' only he can withstand the Nazgûl horror, remaining as 'steadfast as a graven image' in Minas Tirith's street of tombs (*RK*, 103). The last we see of him is the leap he makes over a dike before racing – Gandalf on his back – 'like a wind from the North' towards the mists of the Barrow-downs (*RK*, 276).[16]

Though Shadowfax never literally runs above the earth or through the air as Sleipnir is capable of doing, he is described as having a 'flying' pace, and he is repeatedly associated with the wind (moving as 'a wind over the grass' or as swiftly 'as the flowing wind'). At the start of *The Return of the King*, after the beacons of Gondor are lit, this sense of a ride expressed in terms of otherworldly flight is particularly strong: 'Three riders swept up and passed like flying ghosts in the moon and vanished into the West. Then Shadowfax gathered himself together and sprang away, and the night flowed over him like a roaring wind' (*RK*, 20).

In Norse belief Sleipnir's ability to move through the air is depicted positively. In later beliefs, however, this same ability became associated with those terrifying storm-riders and lost souls who sweep through the night in the tradition of the Wild Hunt. And here again Tolkien separates the good from the negative.

Pleasing images of Sleipnir appear in Shadowfax, who can run like the wind, 'flying' over plains and 'spurning the earth'; negative images appears in the Nazgûl flying beasts that move through the sky bearing Sauron's key emissaries with a presence that reduces the staunchest warriors to impotent terror and, on one occasion, causing blindness (one of Odin's less commendable tricks).

Associations such as these, both positive and negative, greatly extend Gandalf's character, granting him a complexity, depth, and potentiality that would otherwise not have occurred. Through images from Norse mythology, Gandalf (the Grey Pilgrim, the preserver, the proponent of mercy, free will, and truth) is linked to and balanced by his negative doubles, by Sauron and Saruman (the destroyers, the unpitying proponents of war, slavery, and deceit). At the centre of all this splitting and reallocation lies Odin, the god who held the highest position in early Norse belief, the god who walked the earth as Gandalf and Saruman do, the god who associated with eagles, ravens, wolves, and a highly magical horse, the god who was known for his contrary, unreliable ways.

In much the same way that Tolkien adds to Gandalf's character through parallel figures from both his own and other literatures, Tolkien develops Galadriel beyond the strictures of her idealized role within *The Lord of the Rings*. For Gandalf (and his negative counterparts), the central ambivalent figure Tolkien borrows from is the Scandinavian Odin from Norse mythology; for Galadriel, however, Tolkien turns instead to Celtic tradition, drawing extensively from concepts of the early Celtic goddess in her multiple forms and from various enchantress descendants of these unreliable but often enthralling Celtic deities. Certainly, much of what is typical of Celtic goddesses and Celtic enchantresses is also typical of goddesses and enchantresses in other literatures; but the settings, characters, and incidents Tolkien imitates most closely suggest the Celts. And all of this is most prominent in the story of Galadriel.

Since an impressive collection of influential figures lies behind

Galadriel, her development (and the development of her negative counterparts) is considerably more complex than that of Gandalf, Sauron, and Saruman, who are primarily based on images of the Norse Odin alone. The particular complexity of Galadriel derives not only from the greater number of figures in her past but also from the greater number of literary and historical periods to which these figures belong. Nor is Galadriel the only magical or quasi-magical woman created by Tolkien and based on Celtic tradition. The Galadriel we meet in *The Lord of the Rings* is a late and fairly subdued interpretation of a Celtic type that Tolkien borrowed from throughout his writing career.

The Celtic goddess herself is the logical place to begin. Like Odin, she is not a simple personality. She is a proud, jealous, and vengeful goddess, a goddess who represents both fertility and war, a goddess who appears either alluring or hideous in the extreme. She is, in fact, a composite of several goddess figures (which accounts for much of her conflicting character), and these contributing figures are themselves likely to differ from tale to tale, from region to region, and most definitely over time – as various goddesses are confused with one another or are split into separate entities. With such a variety of shifting, syncretic material at hand, it is no surprise that explanations or interpretations differ to some extent from one scholar to the next; but among those scholars who were most renowned during Tolkien's career and who most influenced his thinking, there is, at least, a consensus about the nature of these early deities and a similarity of scholarly approach.

Among the most prominent and the most representative of these multiple Celtic goddesses are Dana, the Great Mother; Rhiannon, a horse and fertility goddess; and the troubling trio of Badb, Macha, and the Morrígan, three figures who primarily 'prophesied carnage and haunted battlefields.'[17] In spite of her title, *The Great Mother*, Dana has never drawn the attention of writers and scholars the way other goddesses, particularly war goddesses, have; and among the Celtic war goddesses, it is the Morrígan who dominates, so much so that the trio of Badb, Macha, and the Morrígan were known collectively under the plural *morrígna*. Because of her 'position of peculiar prominence'

(and because of her various powers and her legacy in Arthurian tales), the Morrígan is the Celtic goddess who most directly influenced Tolkien's Galadriel.[18]

At first, differences between the Morrígan, who often appears as a crow, and the fair, golden, peace-loving Galadriel may seem insurmountable. Where the sometimes alluring, sometimes hideous Morrígan is referred to as the Queen of Demons (in her more vicious and vindictive modes), Galadriel seems anything but demonic; she is, in fact, the most revered Elf in *The Lord of the Rings*, and the reverence she elicits can be measured by Tolkien's comment, in a 1963 letter, that he owed much of Galadriel's 'character to Christian and Catholic teaching and imagination about Mary' (*Letters*, 407). Nonetheless, the primary framework behind Galadriel, and behind the Elves in general, is not a Christian one (though Christian virtues prevail), and hints of the less-than-ideal do in fact hover around Galadriel's character. For one, her name is associated with fear, and those who have never met her tend to consider her perilous or worse. But it is not only rumours about 'the Sorceress of the Golden Wood' or 'the Mistress of Magic' that permit us to see Galadriel – however tentatively – in another, less reassuring light; there is, as well, one moment when Tolkien carries this image further and allows the possibility of Galadriel's rumoured demonic side to be revealed. This is when Frodo offers Galadriel the Ring and she briefly envisions herself as Middle-earth's Queen, 'beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightening! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!' (*FR*, 381).

Nor is this all. If we look beyond the boundaries of *The Lord of the Rings*, there are other indications of Galadriel's less than peaceable side. In *The Silmarillion*, we learn that Galadriel was the sole 'woman of the Noldor ... among the contending princes' who rebelled against the ruling Valar and departed for Middle-earth. Though she, unlike others, swore no oaths, she nonetheless 'yearned to see the wide unguarded lands and to rule there a realm at her own will' (83–4).

But Galadriel (or, to be more accurate, Galadriel as she developed in the drafts of Tolkien's *legendarium*) is even less consistent and less straightforward than this gelled version from the published *Silmarillion* would seem to indicate. Altogether, according to Christopher Tolkien, the inconsistencies surrounding Galadriel are 'severe' and the 'reasons and motives given for Galadriel's remaining in Middle-earth are various.' Furthermore, the story of her marriage is highly confusing, so that no part of the history of Middle-earth is 'more full of problems than the story of Galadriel and Celeborn' (*UT*, 225).

In a letter written in 1967 (four years before comparing Galadriel to Mary), Tolkien cited Galadriel as not only a participant but as one of the 'chief actors in the rebellion,' indicating she was far more directly involved than she appears to be in the *Silmarillion* (*Letters*, 386). And in a late draft that Christopher Tolkien feels was 'certainly written' after *The Road Goes Ever On*[19] (placing it in the mid- to late 1960s), an even more dissatisfied and forceful personality emerges than we see in *The Lord of the Rings*, in *The Silmarillion*, or in any *History of Middle-earth* account. We learn here that Galadriel's 'mother-name' (a name given in infancy or childhood through the insight of one's mother) was 'Nerwen' ('man-maiden'). She is described as 'strong of body, mind, and will, a match for both the lore-masters and the athletes of the Eldar in the days of their youth,' and her restlessness is extreme. Even in the Blessed Realm, she finds 'no peace'; and though deep within her a 'noble and generous spirit' remains, she is 'proud, strong, and selfwilled' and 'dreams of far lands and dominions that might be her own to order as she would without tutelage.' Because of her 'pride,' she rejects 'the pardon of the Valar' (offered to all who had fought against Morgoth) and is 'unwilling to return' or to 'relent' (*UT*, 225–8). Galadriel is, then (at least in this rendition), not merely the sole woman to join the rebels in either a passive or active role but a restless, ambitious, almost masculine individual whose desire to have her own way and establish her own rule adds to the disruption begun by Fëanor, the lead rebel Elf. In these ways she comes considerably closer to the strife-promoting, easily vexed Morrígan than we might initially believe.

But the Morrígan's powers are not limited merely to battle and disruption. Like Odin, she also manifests a number of positive attributes, 'notably' (in the words of Lucy Allen Paton) 'knowledge of the future, the ability to create effects of nature, and versatility in shape-shifting,'[20] attributes which may have their own elements of danger but which are far more likely to be seen as favourable. There are other indications of a better side as well. The Morrígan initially assists the Irish hero Cúchulainn (until he spurns her advances); and at the end of his life, when it seems clear he will die in battle, she attempts to change fate and to save him once again. These few acts of sponsorship and remorse are hardly enough to recommend the Morrígan's character, but there are other indications that the goddess once played a larger, more positive role. There is a well-known tale of her mating with the Dagda, the Good God, the god whose sack releases a river of grain and whose magical cauldron provides food and poetical inspiration and restores life to the dead. It is hard to imagine any union with the Dagda which is not an auspicious one; moreover, in her mating with the Dagda (which occurs at a waterway), in her seductress tendencies in general (again associated with waterways), in the existence of place names such as the Morrígan's Garden or the Paps of the Morrígan, there is good evidence that the Morrígan played a fertility role as well as a battle one.

Similar powers and similar images are attached to Galadriel, who likewise has her garden, who sees far (in both distance and depth), and who is strongly associated with water (most noticeably through her wearing of Nenya, the Elven Ring of Waters). If, in fact, Roger Sherman Loomis is correct that the Morrígan and her counterpart, the Welsh Modron, derived primarily 'from an ancient Celtic divinity of the waters,'[21] an element strongly associated with fertility, it is particularly appropriate for Galadriel (as a literary descendant of such a goddess) to wear the Elven Ring, Nenya, and to live in a realm heavily bordered by both rivers and streams.[22]

There are, however, clear limits to Galadriel's fertility role, and these limits should come as no surprise when we remember that Tolkien, though he died in 1973, was born in Victorian times. In

Galadriel the more fleshly aspects of the Celtic goddess figure have been conspicuously removed. And those early Celtic goddesses were unquestionably of the flesh. They are shown longing, mating, and even giving birth – a far cry from what *The Lord of the Rings* shows us of Galadriel, who, in her somewhat removed role as Arwen's grandmother, seems distanced from the biological by an intervening generation and not so much a creator or procreator as a preserver of what has been.

Or so it would seem. We have to watch Tolkien carefully here. As he does with Gandalf, Tolkien is quite capable of suggesting complexities that are easily overlooked if we are unaware of related literatures and mythologies or if we fail to read carefully. Before Galadriel is dismissed as an overly restrained fertility figure held back by lingering Victorian ideals, we should think for a minute about the box of soil that she gives to Sam, soil that sends out waves of riotous fertility throughout the Shire, in tree and grass, in vegetation in general, and – most significantly – in the birth of hobbit young. It may be a comfortable, distanced, domesticated manifestation of the flesh that Tolkien gives us here, but it is enough to show that the role of generative goddess nonetheless remains and in more than vegetative forms.

Now another step must be taken. It is generally understood that the Morrígan is a principal, if not *the* principal, mythological ancestress of the Arthurian fay (or fairy), a figure best exemplified and most familiar in Arthur's adversary and sister (or half sister), the strangely contradictory, evil/good, shape-changing enchantress Morgain la Fée, generally known in English tradition, as Morgan le Fay, a figure of such lasting importance that she is still referred to as 'Morgan the Goddess' (stanza 98), in the fourteenth-century *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a title that 'helps' link Morgan with the Morrígan, as Tolkien was well aware.[23] Like the Morrígan, who both aids and harms the Irish hero, Cúchulainn, Morgan both aids and harms Arthur; and again like the Morrígan, who fails in her attempt to seduce Cúchulainn, Morgan fails in her seduction of Lancelot, and there are scholars who believe she attempted (perhaps successfully) to seduce Arthur as well.[24]

The story of the Morrígan's evolution into this most notorious

and fascinating of Arthurian characters is not a simple one. It took several languages, several cultures, and a number of centuries to unfold. For our own purposes, it is important to realize that the shift was a phenomenon that deeply interested scholars early in the twentieth century, at the very time Tolkien was beginning to develop a mythology for England based on that 'elusive beauty' attributed to the Celts.

Here is how Lucy Allen Paton, in her highly influential 1903 book, *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance*, describes the fay (or 'fairy queen'): 'The fay of Arthurian romance is essentially a supernatural woman, always more beautiful than the imagination can possibly fancy her, untouched by time, unhampered by lack of resources for the accomplishment of her pleasure, superior to human blemish, contingency, or necessity, in short, altogether unlimited in her power.'[25] And Roger Loomis – in a passage more mindful of Morgan's two-sidedness – writes the following (1956): 'Morgain may be the most beautiful of nine sister fays, or an ugly crone. She may be Arthur's tender nurse in the island valley of Avilion, or his treacherous foe. She may be a virgin, or a Venus of lust.' He then quotes Mark Twain's Connecticut Yankee, who says, 'I have seen a good many kinds of women in my time but she laid it over them all for variety.'[26]

If we ignore Morgan's less pleasing traits, similarities to Galadriel are readily evident, some of them subtly different from what we saw in the Morrígan, others basically the same. The most obvious similarities are Galadriel's beauty, her power and superiority, and her escape from the effects of time. But the fairy queen's ability to overpower men is decorously suggested in Galadriel as well. In part this is implied by the lesser role Celeborn, Galadriel's husband, appears to play in the story. More indicative, however, is the way in which those males who meet her fall inevitably under her spell, a pattern of behaviour that Tolkien renders more acceptable by depicting its effects predominately though Gimli, an individual so removed from Galadriel by race and status (as well as stature) that any question of carnality can safely be put aside.

Certain other matters are significant. If we add Tolkien's early use of *fairy* instead of *elf* to his occasional use of *Queen* or *Elven-*

queen for Galadriel,[27] ties between Galadriel and the Arthurian fairy queen become still more evident. Furthermore, the Fairy Queen figure traditionally lives in an isolated, magical realm. This is where she takes her chosen males. It is to such a realm (the Island of Avalon) that Morgan le Fay takes Arthur to be healed of his battle wounds, for – at this point in Arthur's life – she is his benefactor rather than his enemy.

Lothlórien is clearly similar. Not only is Lothlórien 'an island amid many perils' (*FR*, 363), but Gandalf, at Galadriel's request, is carried there to be healed of his injuries after Moria. Though Tolkien does not specify that it is Galadriel who tends Gandalf, from all we have seen of Lothlórien and of Galadriel, there is no one else likely to fill this role, the role that traditionally falls to the Fairy Queen.[28]

And there is more. During the nineteenth century, interest in Arthurian themes underwent a considerable revival, a revival initially most evident in Victorian poetry. The best known and most influential of these poets was Alfred, Lord Tennyson, whose first notable success (an Arthurian collection entitled simply *Poems*) appeared in 1842 and whose *Idylls of the King* appeared in 1859. Other poets followed Tennyson's lead. In 1852 Matthew Arnold published his *Tristram and Iseult*; in 1858 William Morris began his Arthurian career with *The Defense of Guenevere*. By the 1880s, Algernon Charles Swinburne – who disliked Tennyson's Victorianized version of the tales – began his own Arthurian cycle with 'Tristram of Lyonesse.'

Artistic interpretation followed closely behind. In her book, *The Legends of King Arthur in Art* (1990), Muriel A. Whitaker notes that 'between 1860 and 1869 alone fifty or sixty paintings on Arthurian subjects were exhibited' throughout England (214). Among such paintings (or drawings, tapestries, glass windows, sculptures, woodcuts, and carvings) images of the enchantress had a particularly strong appeal. Morgan le Fay appears repeatedly, as does Merlin's nemesis, Vivian – also called the Lady of the Lake or Nimue (or variations on these names). And Tennyson's offshoot enchantress, the Lady of Shalott (an ingenious blending of the traditional tower-imprisoned maiden with the woman of disquieting power),

also instigated an impressive artistic flurry – mostly through depictions of her elegantly reposed body drifting to Camelot or scenes of her standing at her loom, where she often appears as unsettling as Vivian or Morgan le Fay.[29]

But fascination with enchantresses was by no means limited to works on Arthurian themes. The end of the century saw an increase in femme fatale figures in a variety of settings and forms. Among these man-confounding, latter-day enchantress figures (whose intensity increased as the century advanced), one *fin de siècle* seductress particularly influenced Tolkien's depiction of Galadriel – She from H. Rider Haggard's late-nineteenth-century book of the same name. Though She (or, more properly, Ayesha) appears in a novel set in nineteenth-century Africa,[30] rather than in an England of Arthurian times, she is nonetheless closely related to those Arthurian women of power who haunted the Victorian mind and who appeared again and again in Victorian poetry and Pre-Raphaelite art.

As John Rateliff explains in a 1981 article on Tolkien and *She*, Tolkien was quick to deny the influence of modern works yet openly admitted his early fascination with Haggard's book.[31] Even without this admission on Tolkien's part, the influence of *She* is undeniable. The novel clearly left its mark on Galadriel, as well as on Tolkien's Queen Melian (discussed below). Like Haggard's immortal ruler, whose beauty sends men to their knees, Galadriel inspires fear or devotion or sometimes a mixture of the two. Galadriel and Ayesha both see more deeply and know more than the men who encounter them on quests. Galadriel and Ayesha are both associated with weaving and oversee maidens trained in the art. Both have remained in isolated, sheltered realms, avoiding the changes of time. Both serve as preservers or healers; both allow those who visit them to look into a dish of water that shows scenes of what has occurred, what is presently elsewhere occurring, or (in Galadriel's case) 'things that yet may be' (*FR*, 377). And both deny that the working of these visions should rightly be ascribed to magic. The water in Galadriel's basin is drawn from a silver stream, flowing from a fountain on the hill of Caras Galadhon; and the visions that appear in this 'Mirror' are, as she tells Sam,

'what your folk would call magic, I believe; though I do not understand clearly what they mean' (*FR*, 377). Ayesha too explains that the images seen in her 'font-like vessel' are not produced by magic. 'There is no such thing as magic, though there is such a thing as knowledge of the secrets of Nature.'[32] In the end, each travels out of her sheltered and sheltering realm, and each as well loses power and diminishes (Ayesha literally shrinking and shrivelling in a highly dramatic scene).[33]

Galadriel, however, is not the only woman to whom Tolkien gives power based on water enclosed within a vessel or flowing from a fountain or stream. Goldberry, the River-Woman's daughter, is also a water enchantress. In Tolkien's 1934 poem, 'The Adventures of Tom Bombadil,' Goldberry is the 'little water-lady' and her home is in a 'deep weedy pool,' where Tom finds her sitting among the rushes 'singing old water-songs.'[34] In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, her singing is like 'glad water flowing,' and it brings visions to the hobbits, visions of 'pools and waters wider than any they had known' (143).

Goldberry is Tolkien's happiest interpretation of a woman imbued with watery powers (or, for that matter, imbued with any form of magical or near-magical power). Truer to the two-sided, perilous woman of fairy tradition is a water-enchantress who appears in another of Tolkien's early poems, 'The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun' (first published in 1945 but completed fifteen years before).[35] In this reworking of a Breton (hence Celtic) lay, a lord is destroyed by a 'Corrigan' or 'the Corrigan,' which T.A. Shippey cites as a Breton term for 'a witch, or fairy, or shape-shifter with malevolent powers.'[36] In Tolkien's rendition, the Corrigan sits before her cave, waiting by a fountain, 'the fountain of the fay' (line 284).[37]

Similarities between Tolkien's enchantress, the Corrigan, and the Irish goddess, the Morrígan, are suggested not only in the close spelling of their title-like names but also in their shared powers and potential viciousness. Like the Morrígan, Tolkien's witch, or 'fay,' is a shape-changer, a figure of either horror or beauty, a would-be seductress, and a source of both death and fertility. Like the Morrígan, she is associated with water and de-

picted near water. Her magic, described as a pale watery potion, is held in a glass phial of 'gleaming grace' (a phial much like the phial of Galadriel).[38]

But more needs to be said about the relationship between Ayesha, Haggard's nineteenth-century enchantress, and Tolkien's Galadriel. Though similarities in their beauty, their powers, and their visionary use of water are evident, there are obvious differences as well. Galadriel may diminish on Middle-earth, but nothing suggests she will be a lesser figure once she comes again to the West. There is a sense of near-divinity in Galadriel that evades Ayesha in spite of her powers and in spite of comments suggesting that Ayesha is, or almost is, divine. Where Galadriel is clearly on the side of the good, Ayesha is amoral at best; 'My life has perchance been evil, I know not – for who can say what is evil and what good?'[39] Where Galadriel maintains an aura of almost spiritual purity, Ayesha is strongly motivated by earthly love. Altogether, the golden-haired Galadriel is considerably upgraded from the saucy, spoiled, arbitrary, wilful, dark-haired, anima-figure, She, who is nonetheless one of Galadriel's prototypes.

Still, the division is not quite so simple. Once again, in a removed and inconspicuous way, Tolkien allows his source's negative qualities to remain, and once again he does so through a shadow character. Just as Odin is a prototype for both Gandalf and Sauron/Saruman, She (with her Celtic goddess attributes) is a prototype for both Galadriel and another character in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*: Shelob,[40] who lies waiting 'in spider form' in the tunnels of Torech Ungol (a character matching others have seen before).[41]

Just as Sauron and Saruman carry the burden of Odin's less admirable side (a side that cannot be openly developed in Gandalf's character), Shelob embodies those characteristics of Haggard's latter-day Celtic goddess, or latter-day Arthurian fay, that cannot be directly revealed in Galadriel – all of which strengthens and defines the best of Galadriel. The more she stands in opposition to Ayesha (at her worst) or to Shelob (who could hardly be worse), the more exalted and deserving Galadriel must appear.

Like Shelob, She – notice the similarity in names – has lived for

long, immortal years in the tunnels and caverns and passageways of Kôr, a mountain realm hollowed out by an ancient, now-departed race.[42] Both Shelob and She live in darkness, and both are strongly associated with death – Shelob desiring 'death for all others' and finding her greatest pleasure in the act of taking life, and She (who wears 'corpse-like wrappings,' who lives among the dead, whose eating room is an ancient embalming chamber) easily inflicting death upon those who oppose her will. Though Ayesha has remained a virgin, waiting for the reincarnation of her beloved (whom she murdered in a fit of jealous passion two thousand years ago), she is snakelike, seductive, and openly sexual in her approach, while Shelob, with her 'lust' and 'appetite,' suggests a particularly unattractive sexuality. Though Ayesha, unlike Shelob, is initially beautiful and has remained so for the extended years of her life, she ends as a species of horror, losing in a matter of minutes the girlish face and form she maintained for centuries.

A short aside seems called for here. It has been easy enough for critics to see a Freudian intent in Tolkien's description of Shelob, particularly (as certain critics have noted) in the 'bitter spike' of Sam's sword ('deep, deep it pricked') and in the graphic descriptions of Shelob's 'soft squelching' body with its 'shuddering belly' like 'a vast bloated bag, swaying and sagging between her legs' (*TT*, 334 and 338). But to go far with this, to reduce Sam's and Frodo's use of phial and sword against Shelob to a thinly disguised sexual encounter, seems highly unfair to Tolkien, who was, after all, not just exaggerating Ayesha's negative qualities to create his giant spider but was also borrowing from traditional confrontations with monsters that dwell beneath the surface of the earth – the Minotaur, Fafnir, Smaug, or Beowulf's dragon, for example – but more specifically from confrontations where the monster in question is female. Grendel's mother ('grim and greedy fiercely ravenous' (Beowulf, lines 1498–9), living in her high-roofed hall deep beneath the waters) is one such monster, as is Milton's personification of Sin, with her 'Caves' and 'Death' and vile broods of young (Book II of *Paradise Lost*). And behind Milton's seventeenth-century figure of Sin lies Edmund Spenser's sixteenth-

century figure of Errour, the 'monster vile,' half serpent, half woman, who appears early in Book I, Canto I of the *Faerie Queene* (stanzas 11–26). Both Errour and Shelob vomit (Errour expelling allegorical books and papers, frogs and toads, and Shelob merely 'darkness'); both excrete foul fluids from their wounds; both attempt to use a 'sting.' Like Shelob ('the mostly loathly shape' that Sam had ever seen), Errour ('most lothsome, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine') lives within a 'hollow cave' or 'darksome hole' and hates light 'as the deadly bale'; like Shelob, (whose ample procreation produced Mirkwood's spiders and more), Errour daily breeds 'a thousand yong ones.' And again like Shelob, Errour raises 'her beastly body ... high above the ground' before leaping upon her sword-wielding challenger, the Red Cross Knight, and binding him: 'That hand or foot to stirr he strove in vaine' (stanza 18).[43]

But still there is more. Spenser's monster is preceded by an even earlier British monster rushing out from her cave with the intent to kill, and this earlier account links us back again to the Celts and the Morrígan (and, likely enough, to Brittany's cave-dwelling Corrigan as well).[44] In 1903, and continuing until 1935, Edward Gwynn translated and published *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, from manuscripts dating back as early as 1160 and as late as the fifteenth century (though the stories themselves are much older this). Among the verses Gwynn translated is a poem lamenting the death of 'noble' Odras; 'a lady of the land was she, and mighty, deedful, radiant, danger-loving, the fair and shapely spouse of stout Buchat, lord of cattle.'[45] At the poem's culmination, the 'horrid' Morrígan, 'the envious queen,' 'the shape-shifting goddess,' emerges from the Cave of Cruachan, 'her fit abode,'[46] and with 'fierceness unabating' chants 'every spell of power' over the sleeping Odras. The images we are given of Shelob issuing from her 'black hole' with murderous intent and then 'bending over' the prostrate Frodo are intriguingly similar.

There is a distinction, however. Unlike Beowulf or Spenser's knight or Frodo and Sam, the one attacked by the monster in the Odras poem is female. Nonetheless, this distinction itself may be meaningful. If Tolkien did indeed borrow from the Irish story of

'Odras' for the monster he placed in opposition to Galadriel, then the open matching of the Morrígan in monstrous form ('fierce of mood' and 'full of guile') against a radiant, fair, deedful lady is perfectly suitable.

We need now to return to Tolkien's own literature and *The Lord of the Rings* to see what it is that forms a connection between Shelob and Galadriel and how this connection strengthens and defines the best of Galadriel. In spite of their clear physical separation on the map of Middle-earth, Tolkien does indeed develop a bond between the two, a bond created most obviously, but not only, through a balance of opposition. Where Galadriel preserves, where Galadriel sustains life in Lothlórien and extends this power to the Shire, Shelob brings death and desires death, 'mind and body,' for all. Where Galadriel, after one moment of imagining herself as a queen (a very Ayesha-like queen), chooses to dwindle, to diminish so that others may live and grow, Shelob wishes only to increase, to swell and bloat by feeding on the lives of other beings. Where Galadriel, whose name may be translated as 'Maiden crowned with gleaming hair' (*Letters*, 428), seems almost too removed from the physical to have borne a child, Shelob is all body, a foul bag of vile and oozing flesh; breeding 'bastards of the miserable mates, her own offspring, that she slew' (*TT*, 332). Galadriel gives light; Shelob is darkness itself. (Ayesha, as a pivotal, middle figure, merely avoids the light.) And the light that Galadriel gives through the gift of the phial is the light that Sam and Frodo use to counter the darkness of Shelob's lair.

But again – as with Gandalf's two shadow figures – it is not only opposition that matters here. Both Shelob and Galadriel have long histories that stretch back to the beginnings of Tolkien's mythology, histories that may be equally long. ('Galadriel,' wrote Tolkien in 1954, 'is as old, or older than Shelob' – *Letters*, 180). They both, then, have ties that connect them to the First Age, and they both settle into enclosed and limited domains on Middle-earth, domains where others come to them.

More striking, however, are specific titles and images that Tolkien applies to both. Each is referred to as 'lady' or 'her ladyship' (Shelob, ironically). In her spider form, Shelob is the epitome of

the entrapping female, 'weaving webs of shadow' (*TT*, 332) and 'great grey net' (*TT*, 331). In this she fulfils the negative rumours of Galadriel, who is herself a weaver, one whose powers are superstitiously misunderstood or purposefully misrepresented. 'Then there is a Lady in the Golden Wood, as old tales tell!' Éomer exclaims. 'Few escape her nets, they say.' Those in her favour, he adds, are 'net-weavers and sorcerers, maybe' (*TT*, 35). This sentiment is echoed by Wormtongue in Théoden's hall: 'Then is it true, as Éomer reported, that you are in league with the Sorceress of the Golden Wood? ... It is not to be wondered at: webs of deceit were ever woven in Dwimordene' (*TT*, 118).

Though Tolkien occasionally uses 'net' or 'web' to refer to male workers of sorcery (particularly the Dark Lord), spinning and the weaving of nets or webs have long been most strongly associated with female arts or powers. By granting the power of weaving to Vairë, the Vala 'who weaves all things that have ever been in Time into her storied webs' (*Silmarillion*, 28), by giving 'webs' and 'spider-craft' to his Corrigan, by creating Shelob and her vast webs, and by associating Galadriel with webs that both entrap and the 'web' of those garments she and her maidens weave, Tolkien is borrowing from the long-standing tradition of female spinning and weaving and the magic and danger these activities suggest – from the story of Arachne (changed to a spider through a goddess's jealousy), to the spinning, measuring, thread-cutting Fates (whose mother was Night), to Penelope (who repeatedly wove and unravelled her father-in-law's shroud), to the doomed 'fairy' Lady of Shalott (who 'weaves by night and day a magic web')[47] to Ayesha who has her weavings and whose entrapping powers are referred to as 'the web of her fatal fascinations.'[48]

Darkness and death are prevalent in these stories of weaving by female hands. Threads are cut; a shroud is woven; the fairy Lady of Shalott (spoken of in 'whispers') will leave her loom and die. In Tolkien's creation myth, Vairë, the Weaver, is spouse to Námo, keeper of the Houses of the Dead. In his Breton lay, the web-working Corrigan brings death to Aotrou and Itroun. In *The Lord of the Rings* the web-spinning Shelob, in her darkened, entrapping tunnels, desires death for all but her own beloved self; and even in

Lothlórien, though we are assured at length that the cloaks Galadriel 'herself and her maidens wove' are no more than fair, serviceable garments ('and the web is good'), something unsettling remains. 'It was hard to say of what colour [the cloaks] were: grey with the hue of twilight under the trees they seemed to be; and yet if they were moved, or set in another light, they were green as shadowed leaves, or brown as fallow fields by night, dusk-silver as water under the stars' (*FR*, 386).

The colours are somber, shifting, uncertain, and muted by twilight, dusk, or night. The brown described is the brown of fields, but the fields in question are 'fallow,' and the green is the green of 'shadowed' leaves. (Even the repetition of *under* is vaguely disquieting.)

Though Tolkien softens and diffuses passages of this sort by others in which Lothlórien is referred to as the Golden Wood, the land of 'sunlight and bright day,' the land where 'gold and white and blue and green' dominate (365), hints of a darker, more threatening side persist. We are told that 'on the land of Lórien no shadow lay' (364); yet shadows, 'deepening' or looming, persistently intrude, and the green hill of Cerin Amroth is the shape of a burial mound. In this way, what is bright, ageless, and secure in the land is countered and balanced by what is muted, ancient, and imperilled.

In the realms of (and characters of) Tolkien's other good or auspicious enchantresses, this sense of underlying peril, of troubling, twilight powers, is even more pronounced. The darkened, misty realm of his mysterious but helpful Faërie Queen is perilous to mortals in Tolkien's 'Smith of Wootton Major.' Even Tolkien's heroic Lúthien (also called Tinúviel) carries an air of danger, shadow, and risk; but it is Melian, Lúthien's mother, who is the most vivid of Tolkien's enchantresses. Melian (whose name is based on words meaning 'love' and 'dear gift') is a Maia who loved 'deep shadow' and who therefore left Valinor in the early days for the forests of Middle-earth (V, 220).[49] Melian is a dark, bewitching, and unapologetic worker of spells. She is, in fact, the most traditional enchantress in Tolkien's literature (and the one who will serve as Galadriel's final comparator).

Not only does the haunting, 'elusive beauty' of the Celtic world, with all its familiar perils, surround Melian as it does Galadriel, but her story and Galadriel's are significantly similar. Both Melian and Galadriel originate in Valinor, where Melian is initially described (in a 1917 draft) as a 'sprite' singing in the gardens of Lórien, the garden from which Lothlórien took its name (II, 8). Both Melian and Galadriel are drawn to Middle-earth, where each creates and protects an isolated, tree-filled realm. Both are healers and preservers. Both have great wisdom and foresight. Both allow *lembas* to be dispensed to strangers. Both, at moments, are seen as divine or nearly divine.[50] Each marries and remains more influential and more intriguing than her husband. Each husband has silver hair. Melian's daughter, Tinúviel, and Galadriel's granddaughter, Arwen, both love mortal men against the wishes of their fathers. Where Melian is 'Queen Melian,' Galadriel is 'like a queen' and now and then openly called a queen. Where Melian hopes 'to avert the evil that was prepared in the thought of Morgoth' (*UT*, 63) and comprehends the danger and lure of the Silmarils, Galadriel (who earlier opposed Morgoth) is an adversary of Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings* and is quick to recognize the dangers and attraction inherent in the One Ring. Both at last leave their protected realms in Middle-earth to return to the West, and each does so without her husband's company. (Thingol, Melian's husband, is no longer living; Celeborn chooses to stay behind.)

Their stories overlap in actuality as well as in parallel incident. Before establishing Lothlórien, Galadriel (in *The Silmarillion*) remains for a time in Doriath, Melian's enchanted realm. Here she meets Celeborn, and here Melian teaches her 'great lore and wisdom concerning Middle-earth.' The two of them 'speak together of Valinor and the bliss of old,' and Galadriel ultimately trusts Melian enough to reveal to her the story of the Silmarils (115 and 126). To add to this, Tolkien toyed with the idea of bringing their lives even closer together. In a rejected draft of *The Lord of the Rings*, Galadriel explains to the Fellowship that she came to Middle-earth during 'the days of dawn,' by passing 'over the seas with Melian of Valinor' (VII, 265). In yet another draft,

Tolkien temporarily considered making Galadriel 'a handmaiden of Melian the Immortal' (XII, 185).

Where the two mostly differ is in matters of intensity. A greater sense of otherworldly danger and beguilement surrounds Melian. Doriath, with its inner stronghold of Menegroth, The Thousand Caves, is unquestionably deeper, darker, and more foreboding than Lothlórien and comes closer, in these ways, to the hidden turbulent world of Haggard's enchantress, She. In fact, Melian's affinity with Ayesha is greater than Galadriel's in a good number of ways. In a *legendarium* draft written in 1917 (or shortly after), Melian, like Ayesha, is described as 'slender and very dark of hair' with skin that is 'white and pale.' Like Ayesha, Melian is overtly desirable. Her garments, like Ayesha's, are 'filmy' and 'most lovely,' and her singing and dancing is like 'strong wine.' When Thingol first comes upon her, she is (so it 'him seemed') 'lying on a bed of leaves' (II, 42). Such open hints of sexual attraction are not to be found in descriptions of Galadriel in any version or draft. Moreover, magic – suggested but denied in Lothlórien – is open and prevalent in Melian's realm. Galadriel is spoken of as a sorceress only by those who do not know her or by her enemies, but Melian is a 'fay' in the earliest renditions and remains an enchantress in all other accounts.

Even in the toned-down later drafts and the published *Silmarillion*, there is no question of Melian's powers. Her singing in the depths of a 'starlit wood' bewitches Elwë (later Thingol) for 'long years' (*Silmarillion*, 55). Through her, 'great power' is 'loaned' to Thingol; and after he and she become King and Queen in Doriath, she is the one who places a protective barrier, an 'unseen wall of shadow and bewilderment,' around the borders of their land (*Silmarillion*, 97). This 'girdle of enchantment, the Girdle of Melian' (*Silmarillion*, 340) is consistently spoken of in terms of magical weaving, so that in the earliest 'Silmarillion' (1926–30) 'fay Gwedheling the Queen' (as she is here called) had 'woven much magic and mystery' about the halls of Thingol (IV, 59) and in the published *Silmarillion* (somewhat weakened by the passive voice) 'the power of Melian the queen was woven about [the borders of Doriath]' (151).[51]

Malevolent female power is also matched against Melian. In her

story it is Ungoliant, in the shape of a light-devouring spider 'of monstrous form,' who weaves her 'black webs' and 'dark nets of strangling gloom' and so fills the role given to Shelob (Ungoliant's 'last child') in *The Lord of the Rings*. The two, Ungoliant and Shelob, are, in fact, nearly identical and not only in their malevolence, web making, and attachment to darkness; they also share a tendency to devour their own young and to pair themselves with villains (Ungoliant overtly with Morgoth in *The Silmarillion* and Shelob more loosely with Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*). They are, in fact, so much the same, that in Tolkien's earliest drafts of *The Lord of the Rings* it is Ungoliant, 'mistress of her own lust' (*Silmarillion*, 73), the 'Gloomweaver,' who confronts Frodo and Sam.[52]

Ungoliant's powers, then, are balanced against Melian's, just as Shelob's are balanced against Galadriel's. Nonetheless, there are important differences both in the staging and the outcome of these polarities. Galadriel and Shelob are never physically placed next to one another: they are never mentioned as known adversaries and are never openly opposed. But in Melian's story, monstrous female power and positive female power are obviously and quite intentionally set side by side. After Ungoliant parts company with Morgoth – driven off by his Balrogs – she lives in Ered Gorgoroth (the Mountains of Terror), where nothing but a 'no-land' (Nan Dungortheb, Valley of Dreadful Death) lies between her and Melian's magically guarded realm. The lines of opposition between Melian and Ungoliant are clearly defined, so clearly defined that confrontation would seem inevitable. Yet no confrontation occurs. Tolkien simply establishes a balance of female good and evil and leaves it at that.

It is not until *The Lord of the Rings* that Tolkien allows his lady-and-the-spider drama to unfold, and even then he fulfils the drama only symbolically. In this, however, Tolkien's instincts are correct. For one, by replacing Galadriel with a symbol of her power, Tolkien greatly increases the significance of the confrontation with Shelob. Galadriel's phial, in the words of Christopher Tolkien, is a 'huge power, a veritable star in the darkness' (IX, 13), and its history extends well beyond the boundaries of Middle-earth and well beyond the time period or characters we meet in

The Lord of the Rings. The phial that holds Shelob at bay contains the light of the Silmaril that adorned Eärendil's ship before Elbereth placed it in the sky as a star; and the light that came from this remaining Silmaril came first from the Two Trees of Valinor, the trees that Ungoliant destroyed by drinking up their light. The story of Galadriel's phial thus stretches from the days of creation to the end of the Third Age, adding not only far greater meaning to the confrontation with Shelob but bringing together forces from the highest level of Valinor to the hobbits of Middle-earth.

There is this as well: by using her phial (in hobbit hands) rather than Galadriel herself and by bringing her into the tunnels in visionary form, Tolkien allows Galadriel to participate in Shelob's defeat while at the same time saving her from the sullying horror that direct confrontation would bring:

> Then, as he stood, darkness about him and a blackness of despair and anger in his heart, it seemed to him that he saw a light: a light in his mind, almost unbearably bright at first, as a sun-ray to the eyes of one long hidden in a windowless pit. Then the light became colour: green, gold, silver, white. Far off, as in a little picture drawn by elven-finger, he saw the Lady Galadriel standing on the grass in Lórien, and gifts were in her hands. *And you, Ring-Bearer*, he heard her say, remote but clear, *for you I have prepared this.* (*TT*, 328–9)

Melian, on the other hand, is given no resolution at all (not even the surrogate resolution granted to Galadriel), and her story – even more than Galadriel's – can be seen as one of missed opportunity.

In a sense, both stories fall short – if each story is looked at alone. When both are taken together, however, and seen as two parts of a single, though variable, tale, each version gains in depth and possibility. Galadriel's participation (symbolized through her phial and vision) gives Tolkien a means of moving beyond the impasse he created with Melian and Ungoliant; and Melian's story, with its blatant positioning of the enemy, clarifies Tolkien's concept of female power in its two moral extremes: the power that affirms life and the power that takes life away.

With their shared opposition to spiders and villains, their similar strengths and working with webs, their histories and settings and connections to Valinor, Melian and Galadriel are very much two interpretations of a kindred character. In Melian, however, all the contributing figures of power (with their various twists and traits) are more easily discerned, all the goddesses and enchantresses, all the female monsters (*monstresses*, we might say) are far more evident. Darker, more dynamic, more openly magical than her Lothlórien counterpart, Melian is both Tolkien's most authentic portrayal of a ruling Celtic fay and the final key to Galadriel. Through Melian, Galadriel's story is all the better revealed – revealed but not simplified. Galadriel's literary history remains a highly difficult one, a history so widespread and multiply connected that it makes good sense to end with the following summary.

Beginning with Galadriel – the Galadriel of *The Lord of the Rings* – and moving backwards (initially tracing only the good that makes up her character), we come first to Tolkien's Melian of the Thousand Caves. Behind Melian (enchantress and sometimes fay) lie the more auspicious traits of Haggard's enchantress She (living in the tombs of Kôr), a woman of immortal power whose better side was inspired by both Victorian and medieval versions of Morgan le Fay, as Morgan appears in her wise, cooperative guise, a guise which is itself based on the Celtic Morrígan's favourable attributes of perception, regeneration, and fertility.

Now – after a moment's pause – we start over again, this time moving forward from the Morrígan's dark, destructive side, which is manifested in the Corrigan of Brittany and in the negative aspects of Morgan le Fay, keeping in mind that Morgan le Fay was one of the prime seductive enchantresses to haunt the Victorian mind, a haunting which created Ayesha (or She), whose destructive side and association with darkness and death appear in both Ungoliant and Shelob, who (circling back again to an earlier stage) share much with the 'Odras' Morrígan, a type that may well have influenced Spenser's Errour and Milton's Sin, two figures that clearly left their mark on Tolkien's Shelob the Great. And there you have it in a nutshell (of large coconut size), the mixing and matching of goddess, fay, and beast in Galadriel's family tree.

Without all this background, without an awareness of all that Tolkien wrote and knew and repeatedly drew upon, it would be easy to miss connections between Shelob and Galadriel, to limit, at best, our perception to their extreme disparity; and yet what Tolkien has created in these two is a striking, ingenious bond that allows him not only to exalt Galadriel and intensify Shelob's corruption but also to suggest – ever so slightly – the possibility of transgression and degeneration within Galadriel.

Chapter Six

Wisewomen, Shieldmaidens, Nymphs, and Goddesses

There is no doubt that Tolkien idealized the masculine world of camaraderie, fealty, and fellowship, a world best depicted through high-minded adventure, through battle and quest and united opposition against evil in all its guises and in all its various extremes. Though hearth and home are idealized within this world as well (and are idealized all the more in their absence), they represent an ideal which the hero must relinquish in order to protect those who are in need or unaware and in order to gain, through individual sacrifice, the higher spiritual perception that Tolkien's heroes achieve. This means that the comforts and security customarily associated with domesticity, household, and family (and therefore with mothers, sweethearts, and wives) must be put aside – or, more fittingly, must *appear* to be put aside, since, in truth, Tolkien never fully removes either the feminine or the domestic from the core of his tales. Tolkien, in fact, does a far better job of honouring the feminine and celebrating the domestic than nearly all other fantasy or adventure writers have managed to do before or after him.

Let me be clear. It is not a masculinizing or a liberating of the female Tolkien advocates (or achieves) but a celebration of qualities traditionally ascribed to women and found in the best of his characters, male and female alike. Nonetheless it is still true that Tolkien is more restrained in his presentation of female characters than he is with his males, and this makes it easy to understand why readers are likely to feel that Tolkien (by today's standards, at

least) fails to do justice to the female sex and relies too readily on easy convention and the usual stereotypes.

In *The Hobbit*, for example, only one female is mentioned by name, Bilbo's 'remarkable' mother, Belladonna Took, and she never appears within the tale itself; once the adventure proper begins, there is little to suggest females exist at all, little beyond the requisite 'maidens' mentioned in passing as a dietary favourite of Smaug, allusions to Gollum's grandmother (learning to suck eggs), or the brief indication of the feminine in such collective phrases as 'hobbit-boys and hobbit-girls,' 'nephews and nieces,' 'lads and lasses,' or the lake-town 'women and children' who are 'being huddled' into boats.

The Hobbit was originally written for Tolkien's three young sons in the early 1930s. (Priscilla, Tolkien's only daughter, was still an infant at the time.)[1] This in itself could explain *The Hobbit*'s lack of female characters. But in the more adult *Lord of the Rings*, with its larger audience (and with its greater number of individuals and races and more fully developed societies), the relative scarcity of females is less easily justified. We have – as representatives – Arwen, Galadriel, Goldberry, Éowyn, Rose Cotton, Lobelia, and Shelob, and that's about it. Each is presented as a single type, as a lone example detached from others of her sex; each, at the same time, is excluded from the fellowship (or Fellowship) of males, though each lives with, among, or, at the very least, in close proximity to males.

We see no women at all in Bree. In Minas Tirith, wives, mothers, and sisters have been sent away before the battle begins. Altogether, we become acquainted with only one female Elf, Galadriel (Arwen remains too distant). We meet no female Dwarves (Tolkien has created a world where few exist); the Entwives have long since vanished; the race of Men appears to be almost literally a race of men; and, excepting Shelob, even the forces of evils are uniformly male.[2]

And yet the feminine is there. While Tolkien's Middle-earth books may be short on female characters, they are not lacking in those nurturing, homey attributes that are most often associated with the female sex. The two races we come to know best are the

Elves and the hobbits, and both exhibit traits that are typically thought feminine, the one on a more ethereal level, the other on an earthly plane. In the hobbits these traits may not be immediately obvious. They are, after all, sturdy, tobacco-loving, and furry of foot; nonetheless hobbits exhibit a good number of characteristics traditionally seen as feminine – a love of domestic comforts and an appreciation of parties, cooking, and brightly coloured clothing. (Bilbo has a plurality of 'kitchens,' 'pantries,' and 'dining-rooms' and 'whole rooms devoted to clothes.') In Sam the domestic shows in still another way. It appears in the nature of his tenderness to Frodo, particularly during the final stages of the quest when Sam's servant role takes on a quality we more often expect in the attentiveness of parent or spouse.

The Elves are a more distant and more retiring race. For them, it is sensitivity and an almost rarified beauty and grace that suggest the feminine. Equally significant is the Elves' role as healers and preservers of Middle-earth. They are a people who desire not 'strength or domination or hoarded wealth, but understanding, making, and healing, to preserve all things unstained' (*FR*, 282), fulfilling yet another popular idea associated with the Celts, the idea that the 'sensibility of the Celtic nature, its nervous exaltation, have something feminine in them, and the Celt is thus peculiarly disposed to feel the spell of the feminine idiosyncrasy; he has an affinity to it; he is not far from its secret.'[3]

None of this, however, is a matter of race alone. Male individuals from races and cultures less openly domestic than the hobbits or less refined than the Elves also demonstrate nurturing or homey instincts, sensitive consideration for others, and a desire to preserve, protect, and heal. Tolkien's most favourable and most deserving males, in fact, are as likely to be depicted as protectors or nurturers as they are fighters, rulers, or planners of strategy. Even Beorn has his softer side. For all the masculinity he exudes, either as man or bear, he is also a homebody, a vegetarian, a cultivator of flowers and bees, a thoughtful, attentive host, and someone who 'loves his animals as his children' (*H*, 119). Similarly, Aragorn and Faramir are woodsmen and warriors, leaders or heroes, but caretakers and healers as well.

To add to this, Tolkien is highly critical of much that is traditionally considered inherently masculine. While his ideal males frequently display qualities that society tends to regard as most appropriately feminine, his least desirable species (trolls, Orcs, and Balrogs) are – in the worst sense of the term – excessively and brutally male (and excessively Norse as well). Even in the depiction of Tolkien's Fellowship, something of this pattern appears. The two Fellowship races that most clearly fit traditional conceptions of males are the races of Dwarves and Men; and among the Fellowship nine, it is Gimli (the Dwarf) and Boromir (the Man) who are most devoted to battle and arms and who are most aligned with the Norse. They are the ones who tend to be disgruntled, contrary, or defiant; and though they remain heroes and on the side of the good (Boromir less steadily), they are not quite heroes of the highest degree. (For Tolkien, true heroism is reserved for those who embody all that is best in humankind, the best of Nordic determination and Celtic sensitivity, the best of male and female combined.)

This inclusion of the feminine in Middle-earth's most admirable males served Tolkien in more than one way. It not only allowed him to emphasize the importance of service, compassion, and hospitality; it allowed him to do so in a world overwhelmingly male, a world relatively safe from certain complexities that female characters might be thought to add. Tolkien was, after all, a Victorian by birth, and the particulars of his upbringing – the loss of his mother when he was twelve, his years spent as the ward of Father Francis Morgan, the traditionally male education he received – no doubt gave him a more than usually rigid concept of the female role. It seems as well to have left him with a particularly exacting pedestal to place his best women on.

Since it is easy to idealize the unfamiliar and at the same time to feel uncomfortable in its presence, and since veneration of this kind depends to a large extent upon distance and scarcity, it is understandable that Tolkien might find himself wishing to exalt the feminine while restricting the number of females in his books. Here is where the convention of the quest worked particularly well. It allowed him to focus on a fellowship; and it allowed him to

keep this fellowship mostly on the move in regions and situations where females were not likely to be found.

There is more behind Tolkien's use of the quest than this, of course. Both his preferences in literature (early and modern) and his professional work also made the quest a likely literary choice. Tales of medieval romance – where knights ride outward, away from civilization into combat, risk, and uncertainty – strongly influenced his writing, but well-known late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century authors also left their mark on Tolkien's various quests, and these later writers (writers such as William Morris, Robert Louis Stevenson, H. Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, and John Buchan) altered the emphasis and structure of the convention to suit their particular age. While the medieval hero has no qualms about weeping or waxing emotional, in a Victorian or Edwardian adventure tale, English understatement and English restraint are far more typical. (In Tolkien – a modern medievalist – both emotional displays and emotional restraint are likely to occur.) While knights in medieval romances tend to face their challenges alone, adventurers in more modern renditions of the quest are, as Jared Lobdell says, 'in general, not solitary' and are more likely to work as a 'band.'[4] (In Tolkien, there are both solitary and group endeavours.) While knights who leave Camelot and civilization typically come to other realms, other castles, and other households, where women – either seductresses or women in need – are likely to be found, the Victorians and Edwardians, in their rediscovery and idealization of the Arthurian world, generally took the Round Table concept of a masculine society considerably further. The quest in its nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century guise is, if anything, even more likely to avoid the presence of females or to portray those women who do appear on the scene as harmful, destructive, or at least inhibiting. (All of this appears in Tolkien as well, though with greater depth than most modern writers show and with greater variety.)

But whatever the differences between earlier and later forms of the quest, a consistency remains. Whether the main character is a knight riding away from Camelot in a medieval or Victorian tale, an Edwardian hero departing Britain for the heart of Africa, or a

hobbit leaving the Shire in the company of Dwarves, there is a basic pattern to the quest and certain expectations of character, setting, and incident within the standard frame of a journey outward and a journey back again. These expectations almost invariably place restrictions on female characters.

Since convention requires those who undertake a quest to endure severe physical difficulty, and since it requires them to move freely through the world as well, the quest undertaken is far more likely to be seen as appropriate for males. Certainly Tolkien saw it this way. When Denys Gueroult asked Tolkien, in his 1965 BBC Radio interview, why women and sex 'play very little part' in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien pointed to the sheer difficulty of the quest: 'After all, these are wars, and a terrible expedition to the North Pole, so to speak!'

Exceptions occur, most often in folk and fairy tales, with their oral tradition and greater likelihood of having had female creators. But even in fairy tales the main character is most often male, and in all quests the same basic framework inevitably appears. The quester leaves home (the familiar, the static, the secure) and moves into a world of action, danger, and susceptibility. By the end, the quester has returned home, or to a new version of home, having grown, advanced, and gained knowledge or some form of reward. Along the way, the male quester may encounter females, but they remain nearly always in restricted settings – in towers, caverns, or halls, in situations as static as the one the quester left behind. This pattern suited most of Tolkien's immediate predecessors quite nicely and it suited Tolkien as well – at least in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. (*The Silmarillion* and other of Tolkien's more mythological writings allow greater latitude.)[5]

Typically, then, the quester moves through a world where romantic fulfilment, if it plays a part at all, remains allusive until the story's end. Although obtaining the loved one is often presented as the primary goal of a quest, and although the reward of marriage (with its suggestions of a society reunited and healed) frequently appears at the end of a quest, the main action takes place during the journey itself, while the 'lady,' in W.H. Auden's words, remains 'in wait ... either at the start or the end of the road.'[6] In

medieval tales and certain Victorian or Edwardian adventure novels, attempts on the hero's chastity (and hence on his commitment to the quest) may occur along the way, but these seductive encounters, rather obviously, do not represent the romantic ideal, with its reward of a concluding and sanctified marriage for the deserving adventurer.

It is also true that in tales emphasizing male cohesiveness the introduction of women or romantic love (if they are allowed to become more than distant ideals) inevitably threatens masculine unity, as Guinevere threatens the cohesiveness of Camelot or as Ayesha threatens the equilibrium and coherence of the Englishmen in H. Rider Haggard's *She*. There is this as well: romantic love is not only too easily disruptive of group loyalty; it is also too limiting, too exclusive in its focus. Even though Tolkien's final book, *The Return of the King*, ends with three major marriages and we are told that the year 1420 (in Shire Reckoning) was 'famous for its weddings' (304), Tolkien is more concerned about allegiance and service on a broader scale than he is about courtship and romantic devotion; he is more concerned about the ways in which friendship and dedication draw us out of ourselves – beyond the merely personal – and bring us to a larger, more encompassing vision and a more selfless goal.

Even when the quest does not move towards a matrimonial conclusion or does not allow for an occasional female figure along the way, it is obvious why writers feel that the hero must be unmarried or in some way freed from familial obligations in order to undertake a quest. Household and comfort, the domestic world with its feminine implications, must be left behind without compromising the hero, who must not appear negligent or irresponsible. So it is that Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, Pippin, and Merry are all bachelors; that the Dwarves we meet have no domestic bonds; that Legolas, Boromir, and Faramir are deserting no one by moving beyond the borders of their realms; and that Aragorn is a man with neither kingdom nor wife.

A passage from *Unfinished Tales* openly addresses this matter.[7] Gandalf is explaining why Bilbo was chosen for the original hobbit adventure:

> I found that he was 'unattached' ... I learned that he had never married. I thought that odd, though I guessed why it was; and the reason that I guessed was *not* the one that most of the Hobbits gave me: that he had early been left very well off and his own master. No, I guessed that he wanted to remain 'unattached' for some reason deep down which he did not understand himself – or would not acknowledge, for it alarmed him. He wanted, all the same, to be free to go when the chance came, or he had made up his courage. (332)

By way of meaningful contrast, there is Tom Bombadil who has no lasting sense of the world beyond his immediate terrain and who has his tamed water nymph, Goldberry (the River-woman's daughter). In part it is Tom's nature to be indifferent to events beyond his realm, but his indifference also comes from his commitment both to Goldberry and to his land. Similar domestic restrictions will fall upon Sam once he is back at the Shire, once he is married and mayor.

In Tolkien, however, bachelor freedom is not quite as liberating from everyday obligation as it might initially seem. Since Tolkien values the domestic and the humble as well as the adventurous and heroic, and since he gives highest credit to those who perform consistent duty, give unfailing service, and are willing to sacrifice their personal comfort and security so that others may live in peace, Tolkien creates a wizard who is both a Grey Pilgrim and a steward guardian, Rangers who are healers and protectors, and hobbits who are heroic and home-loving at once – hobbits such as Bilbo, who combines the roles of adventurer, burglar, and cake-baking, bustling host.

For Tolkien, then, the quest is not a holiday from nurturing duties and simple homey tasks in the way so many Victorian and Edwardian adventure stories would have it appear, stories where domestic issues have little or no place and where routine obligation is, in fact, rather gratefully set aside. Tolkien not only demands consistent responsibility from each of his primary characters, whatever their position or race; he also maintains – mostly through his hobbits – a sense of the domestic at every stage of the journey.

The opening of *The Hobbit*, with its tribute to easy-going but tidy bachelor indulgence, sets a pattern that continues into *The Lord of the Rings*. Though the comforts of Bag End and Shire are relinquished by undertaking the quest, home in one form or another reappears along the way. It reappears in each of the warm, welcoming farms or halls or havens that offer shelter to weary travellers. In *The Hobbit* Beorn's 'wide wooden halls' (117) are conveniently there at a time of dire need. In *The Lord of the Rings* the same is true of Tom Bombadil's house, of Rivendell, of Faramir's cave, and of Lothlórien. Where houses and homes and halls are not available, there are temporary and sometimes unexpected refuges – at the very least hollows or circles of stones that remind us of the need for shelter and hearth and the urge to shut out the world, to enclose the self, to cook up something hot, to converse, to tell stories, and to bring out pipeweed and pipe. The concept of home, in fact, not only remains a central image throughout the books but is, in some ways, the true object of the quests: the home lost and regained, the 'back again' of Bilbo's 'there and back again' and the West to which the Elves at last return.

In the moments of greatest misery, Bilbo harkens back to his hobbit hole, to images of 'his comfortable chair before the fire' (*H*, 46) and the kettle beginning to sing. And the hobbits not only talk about or reminisce about the Shire; they also, as much as possible, recreate the Shire wherever they go. Even in the wreckage of Isengard, Pippin and Merry are capable of making themselves fully at home, just as Sam is capable, near the threatening boundaries of Mordor, of turning his full attention to the cooking of rabbit stew. Later, when he is forced to sacrifice his beloved cooking gear (his last linkage with home), the 'clatter' of pans dropping into the dark will be 'like a death-knell to his heart' (*RK*, 215).

What Tolkien gives us, however, is a masculine version of domesticity. Females rarely appear in these homey scenes or shelters, and those that do generally have little to add. Beorn's hall, with its mead, log fire, and serviceable straw mattresses; Treebeard's home of earth, water, and overshadowing trees; Faramir's hidden cave (like the homes of Ratty, Mole, and Badger in *The Wind in the*

Willows) are maintained solely by males and yet are fully comfortable. Throughout the books, household duties that would customarily fall to a wife are, with one or two exceptions, fulfilled by other males – by servants or companions or by the homeowner himself. From Bilbo to Beorn, from Fatty Bolger to Faramir, males (nearly always single males) are most likely to supply meals and baths and beds. Even Goldberry seems overshadowed in her hostessing role by what Tom, her husband, does. Though she is present at both evening meals and though we are told she busies herself 'about the table' and that – along with Tom – she brings in 'food and vessels and lights,' it is Tom who wakes the hobbits in the mornings and directs them to their meal, and it is Tom who is heard 'about the house, clattering in the kitchen, and up and down the stairs' (*FR*, 135, 140, and 143). At night it is Tom who leads the hobbits to their bath and beds.

In Rivendell, in the Last Homely House, there is even less of the feminine – nothing beyond passing references to Arwen to suggest the female sex. Only in Lothlórien do we find a female figure central to the scene, but Lothlórien serves more as a spiritual respite than it does a domestic interlude; there are in Lothlórien no pots and pans, no stony hearths, no tubs and steaming baths.

Moreover, like other writers of heroic literature, Tolkien is highly concerned with bloodline and patriarchal inheritance. He therefore weighs his families heavily in favour of sons. (Daughters are a far rarer breed.) And yet, in spite of this masculine emphasis, Tolkien's most significant households and peoples tend to have in their past a single, significant ancestress whose marriage into the line elevates the family and changes the pattern of Middle-earth history. As Timothy O'Neill points out in *The Individuated Hobbit*, 'the greatest historical reversals of Middle-earth have always been accompanied by the romance of human hero and Elf-maiden.'[8] Beren's marriage with Lúthien and Tuor's with Idril in *The Silmarillion* set the pattern, a pattern which is completed by Aragorn's marriage to Arwen at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*. It is the female line, then, that introduces Elven powers or quasi-magical powers into Tolkien's male-oriented families, just as it is Belladonna Took[9] who bestows on Bilbo his latent desire for

adventure, a desire that is said to have originally entered the family when an earlier Took married a fairy wife. This means that Tolkien's heroes tend to marry 'up,' as heroes tend to do in fairy tales (and as they occasionally do in the adventure stories popular during Tolkien's youth), and in doing so unite what is magical, sensitive (and Celtic) with what is heroic and masculine (and Teutonic).

Nonetheless, there are, in Tolkien's hobbit books, almost no mothers or references to mothers. Mrs Maggot and the young Maggots are little more than background figures. Lobelia's relationship with the odious Lotho hardly counts; and the 'women and children' sent off to Helm's Deep are a catchphrase and nothing more. Altogether, Rosie Cotton is the only female we see in the act of mothering, and this is only briefly touched upon and comes only at the end.

The parenting that we do see, when we see anything of it at all, is almost entirely restricted to fathers. The picture of Sam receiving young Elanor on his lap is the most specific example of family life we have in *The Lord of the Rings*, and the emphasis is mostly on Sam. We have the good father, the understanding and supportive Beregond; we have Denethor, the failed father, betting on the wrong son. We have, as well, numerous substitute fathers in both *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, males who are unmarried, widowed, or separated from their wives and who adopt or raise various younger males, as Bilbo does Frodo, or Elrond, Aragorn.[10]

There are literary and historical bases for this emphasis on substitute fathering. Most obvious is the medieval tradition of fostering, a tradition that serves Tolkien in more than one way. Its presence in his books not only heightens the medieval and heroic tone of his literature, but it again allows Tolkien to emphasize the importance of nurturing and parenting without the complexities of adding female characters. The very number of father figures in Tolkien's works (far more than are typically found in quests) is indicative of how important the idea of parenting, particularly male parenting, is to Tolkien, who lost his father at the age of four and at the age of twelve became the ward of a priest.

What would seem to be missing from such masculine parenting

roles (substitute or otherwise) are those forms of tenderness and open displays of affection mothers are expected to bring. But tender, nurturing emotions are by no means missing from Tolkien's works. They appear repeatedly in his writing – most obviously in the generous emotional warmth the best of his males, particularly his Fellowship males, show to one another. On one level such attachment may be seen as nothing more than strongly felt, strongly expressed fealty, as it is in Merry's warm and loyal relationship with Théoden, who, for a short time, is 'as a father' to him (*RK*, 51). This is the sort of demonstrative alliance that occurs with some frequency in medieval tales but which almost never appears in modern works – where man-to-man relationships are far more likely to avoid the emotional. Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, however, members of the Fellowship show a consideration for each other that goes a good way beyond the basic expectations of camaraderie or the traditional allegiance demanded of fealty. Tolkien's heroes display a level of tender, consistent devotion, a sympathetic everyday caring, that does not depend upon the dramatically charged, emotionally liberating moments of battle to be revealed or expressed. Consider the words Éomer addresses to Aragorn: 'Since the day when you rose before me out of the green grass of the downs I have loved you, and that love shall not fail' (*RK*, 247). Sentiment of this sort is likely to strike modern readers as exceptionally direct.

We see something of this same increased sensitivity in Aragorn's compassionate attendance at Boromir's death, though Aragorn's words of reassurance also suggest the benediction and absolution of a priest. Even more telling are the numerous scenes of bedside care, where the long hours of watching and tending described by Tolkien are carried out by males. Particularly evident are the four nights and three days Sam spends at Frodo's bedside in Rivendell and Aragorn's solicitous care of Faramir, Éowyn, and Merry in Minas Tirith's Houses of Healing. The sporadic and chatty presence of the 'old wife,' Ioreth, in this last scene no more changes the fundamental pattern of male attendance and male healing than does Tolkien's intimation that Galadriel plays a part in Gandalf's restoration after Moria.

The clearest example of a personal affection that reaches beyond camaraderie or simple allegiance is Sam's commitment to Frodo. Here something of the affection and care that we generally associate with marriage or with the parenting of young children clearly enters in. Sam's untiring consideration and concern for Frodo – the care he brings as cook, nurse, and companion, and his way of combining familiarity with unfailing deference – is not all that different from what might, in another setting, be expected from a wife. During the final days before Mount Doom, however, Sam's behaviour takes on a more parental tone, in both maternal and paternal ways. Even though Sam continues to address Frodo as 'Master' or 'Mr. Frodo,' we now see an increase in his tenderness, in his way of urging Frodo to take more food and drink or in the handholding and reassurance he gives to the dream-haunted bearer of the Ring: 'Now you go to sleep first, Mr. Frodo ... It's getting dark again' (*RK*, 199). Finally, at the very end of the quest, Sam carries Frodo up the slopes of Mount Doom, as if 'carrying a hobbit-child pig-a-back in some romp on the lawns or hayfields of the Shire' (218).

Even Sméagol – who, temporarily and in his own way, also serves as a member of the quest – is touched by a similar affection. We see this in his moment of near redemption, his moment of reaching out with 'trembling hand' to the sleeping Frodo ('but almost the touch was a caress' (*TT*, 324). Though Gollum's momentary feelings are genuine, more than mere affection draws him to Frodo's side. There is a bond between Gollum and Frodo that comes from their shared destinies, their related roles as bearers of the Ring. Gollum, who looks like 'an old weary hobbit' (*TT*, 324), is what Frodo could become; and Gollum may yet be redeemed. They are aspects of one another, aspects of what each might be; and the binding that Faramir formalizes between Frodo and Sméagol (who are already bound by a Ring) seals the relationship with echoes of marriage rites. 'Do you take this creature, this Sméagol, under your protection?' Faramir asks; and Frodo answers, 'I do take Sméagol under my protection' (*TT*, 300). Faramir's closing pronouncement (beginning with 'Then I say to you ...') adds to the Biblical tone of the ceremony, as does his repetition of

whither ('whither would you go?'), with its echo of Ruth's vow, 'Whither thou goest, I will go,' a vow often borrowed for weddings and pledges of fidelity (Ruth 1:16).

Real or overt amorous attachment is a more difficult issue in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Though the bindings and commitment of love in all its manifestations are highly important to Tolkien, he is restrained from detailed descriptions of male/female interaction both by the quest's convention of placing romance at the extremes of the tale (as inspiration or reward but not as intervening material) and by his essentially Victorian tastes in matters of this sort.

Perhaps because of their more formal, more mythological and hence more distancing tone, *The Silmarillion* and *The History of Middle-earth* are not quite as constrained. Here Tolkien can write of Morgoth conceiving 'an evil lust' for Lúthien (*Silmarillion* 180) or of looking upon her as 'a pretty toy for an idle hour' and threatening to 'taste the honey-sweet' of her lips (III, 300). But the closer Tolkien comes to the Primary World, to the one he and his readers know and occupy, the more he becomes confined by the proprieties of his upbringing and age, and the Middle-earth of Tolkien's hobbit books is much more like our world than any scene in *The Silmarillion*. Therefore, rather than directly addressing issues of passion or sexual rivalry in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien found it easier to formalize and abbreviate Éowyn's courtship, to hint only darkly at Gríma's secret desire, and to allude only faintly to Aragorn and Arwen's romance, suggesting it mostly through parallel incidents from the ancient story of Beren and Lúthien. Though Aragorn must become 'King of both Gondor and Arnor' (*RK*, Appendix A, 342) before he can marry Arwen, first-time readers often fail to recognize his attachment until somewhere near the end. The entire concept of romance, in fact, works in much the way the figure of Arwen does in Elrond's council hall; both hover indistinctly and unobtrusively in the background, never disrupting the basic story line, never distracting from the focus of the quest, never quite fully forgotten, never quite fully in view.

Even in those rare moments when Tolkien allows romance to come out of the shadows and become an acknowledged issue, his

males tend to keep firm control of their emotions, so much so that they often appear either impervious to romance or only passively involved. From the little we see, it is more often females who do the pursuing. It is Éowyn who approaches Aragorn and the outspoken Rosie Cotton who manoeuvres Sam into a matrimonial frame of mind. 'Well, you've wasted a year, so why wait longer?' is what Sam reports she said (*RK*, 304). By giving this line to Rosie, Tolkien is subtly borrowing from the tradition of the overbold female, a figure who, like Bertilak's wife in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, appears with fair regularity in Arthurian tales and who reappears as part of the fin de siècle femme fatale image and makes her way into occasional Victorian or Edwardian adventure novels (particularly in Morris's or Haggard's books).

Certain religious beliefs are at work here – the belief that the physical body is a sign of our lower state, that sexuality in particular keeps us from developing our spirituality. Because of this belief, the willingness of medieval or Renaissance heroes to set romance (at least temporarily) aside is a clear indication of their focus on a higher cause; and the Victorians, in a more prudish way, held to a similar ideal. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the highest ranking individuals are the slowest to wed and the least likely to have offspring. Even among hobbits this is so. The well-to-do and unmarried Bilbo finds an heir through adoption; and Frodo, that heir, is himself a bachelor. It is Sam, the gardener's son, who will do the most fathering. It is also significant that those who serve or represent nature on a symbolic or quasi-magical level are the least likely to have children, as though the duties they fulfil as caretakers or guardians of the land replace the parenting role. Goldberry has her housewifely 'washing' of the world by rain and Tom has his 'mastering' and 'making.' Both tend their world but have no young to rear. Similarly, the Elves of Lothlórien seem to hold back time, preserving what already is, more than they produce or reproduce.

And yet this failure to bear young is by no means an indication of what Tolkien would prefer. Reproduction may not be a comfortable topic for Tolkien, but he also sees the inability to create new life as a loss, as a form of deterioration, a sign of weakened

vitality, or the result of misdirected ambition. Minas Tirith is a nearly empty city.[11] There will be no more Entlings on Middle-earth. The Elves are fading, returning to the West. 'They became sad,' writes Tolkien, 'and their art (shall we say) antiquarian, and their efforts all really a kind of embalming – even though they also retained the old motive of their kind, the adornment of earth, and the healing of its hurts' (*Letters*, 151–2). Rejuvenation, then, must be found in those hobbits and men who accept the necessity of change, who accept the cycle of generation and death and remain fully attached to what Tolkien calls 'ordinary life,' the life of 'breathing, eating, working, begetting' (*Letters*, 161).

All of Tolkien's mixed appreciation and uneasiness, his valuing of nurturing and fertility or of the feminine (woven together with highly traditional and rather Victorian attitudes about male and female roles), all of this tension between the earthly and the spiritual becomes particularly intriguing when we look at Tolkien's writing with specific female characters in mind. In Tolkien's world of mostly womanless households, of greatly distanced romance, of male fellowship and nearly unanimous male jurisdiction and activity, how, for example, are we to view Éowyn, the 'shieldmaiden,' who comes from an Anglo-Saxon (and therefore heroic) culture, who is to preside 'as lord over the Eorlingas' during her uncle's absence (*TT*, 128), who joins the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, and who plays an active, essential role in defeating the Nazgûl Lord?

Tolkien did not have to look far to find models for Éowyn's character. The image of the warrior woman has existed throughout history, in mythology, legend, literature, and reality: the Greek or Latin Amazons, the Celtic Mauve, the Valkyries of Norse belief, Britomart from *The Faerie Queene*, Sorais in Haggard's *Allan Quatermain*, and history's Joan of Arc. Still, more than fact or literary convention lies behind Éowyn's character. The impassioned speeches she makes protesting her bitterness at remaining behind while the Riders 'win renown' (*RK*, 57–8) and Gandalf's words justifying her longings and praising her 'spirit and courage' (*RK*, 143) are written with a conviction that indicates how deeply

Tolkien sympathized with Éowyn and with her chaffing role. For Tolkien, in spite of his strong sense of established order and predetermined place, also had considerable sympathy for those whose lives are restricted and for those who are confined. Like Treebeard, who frees Saruman and who prefers wild plants over tame, or the Elves, whose willingness to grant Gollum a greater range of movement allows him to escape, Tolkien greatly values freedom. His empathy for those whose movement is limited would seem to include even the Old Forest trees with their 'hatred of things that go free upon the earth' (*FR*, 141).

Tolkien understands too the desire to participate, the desire to play a part in the momentous events that occur. This is most clearly indicated by Pippin's and Merry's laments at being left behind and by their fears of being mere 'luggage' or 'bags' even when taken along. 'What good have I been?' Pippin thinks to himself after he and Merry have been captured by Orcs, 'just a nuisance: a passenger, a piece of luggage' (*TT*, 48). In a similar way, Tolkien eloquently and more than once expresses Éowyn's hopes of playing a significant role and her fears of not being allowed to do so. This does not, however, change the fact that he would prefer to save both the hobbits and Éowyn (particularly Éowyn) from the taint and stigma of war. For that matter, Tolkien is never eager to rush any of his best characters into battle. As much as possible those on the side of the good should remain free of any suggestion that they seek battle over peace. Only when justification is strong enough, when the sword must at last be drawn, are warriors (Tolkien's full-sized, male warriors) occasionally granted a certain *joie de guerre*, a battle exuberance, the extreme of which is expressed by the host of Rohan, singing 'as they slew' (*RK*, 113).

Certainly the hobbits and Éowyn are not to experience exhilaration of the kind Rohan's warriors do. The closest Tolkien comes to suggesting battle exuberance in a hobbit is when he describes the 'fire' smouldering in Sam's eyes as he slays his Orc in Moria. Beyond this, Pippin and Merry may become military saviours of the Shire (*RK*, 289), but they too fight only from necessity. And Bilbo and Frodo, Tolkien's most prominent hobbits, contribute

even less to war than Pippin and Merry do. The Battle of Five Armies was 'the most dreadful of all Bilbo's experiences' but also 'the one he was most proud of, and most fond of recalling long afterwards' (*H*, 238), yet this is not a battle in which he plays an active role. Bilbo removes himself from the battle early on, puts his ring on his finger and vanishes from sight. He is even saved from witnessing the dramatic climax by an accidental blow to the head. Frodo, who learns far more about evil, is far less accepting of war. As *The Lord of the Rings* progresses, he becomes increasingly opposed to violence of any kind, urging there be 'no killing' in 'The Scouring of the Shire' (*RK*, 289) and allowing no revenge when Saruman makes an attempt on his life.[12]

The restrictions placed upon Éowyn are somewhat different and more strongly emphasized. Though she speaks of having taken joy in 'songs of slaying' (*RK*, 243), though she insists on her position as a shieldmaiden and expresses considerable pride in her skill with weapons, Tolkien uses a variety of techniques to soften her warrior role. In spite of her training in arms, she has never experienced battle before the Pelennor Fields; and when her moment comes, there is no exuberance but only grim determination and grief. Her eyes are 'hard and fell' but tears lie on her cheek (*RK*, 116).

The very use of the term 'shieldmaiden' adds to this softening. Though *shieldmaiden* is a fully legitimate term, with four *Oxford English Dictionary* listings (all from the nineteenth century), it is also a somewhat oblique way of labelling Éowyn's connection to warfare and seems more suggestive of protection, restraint, and perhaps even chastity, than it does of proficiency with arms.

Given this sheltering attitude towards hobbits and Éowyn, it is quite ingenious of Tolkien to use a halfling and a maiden (innocence in two forms) to defeat the Nazgûl Lord – the pitting of these two unlikely warriors against the greatest adversary of the Battle of the Pelennor Fields so effectively increases the horror, the poignancy, and the final victory. But in spite of the intensity and drama of the Nazgûl Lord's defeat, Tolkien still manages to save both Éowyn and Merry from war's full tainting effect. For one, theirs is a joint effort, and this in itself helps to reduce the

warrior image. It helps too that their destruction of the Nazgûl Lord is a bloodless one, that he is never physically slaughtered but unbodied and dispersed. And it helps that Éowyn and Merry's encounter comes early in the battle, that Éowyn (like Bilbo in the Battle of Five Armies) loses consciousness, and that neither Merry nor Éowyn sees more of the battle after their part is played. Their stay in the Houses of Healing also helps to lessen the battle image: passivity follows immediately after activity.

But here again Tolkien's tempering falls mostly on Éowyn. The debilitation which follows the battle lasts longer for her, and far more is made of it. This too helps reestablish her femininity, a device common in Victorian literature, where the heroine, if she acts with physical courage and on her own, typically collapses after the crisis is past, as Miss Halcombe does in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* or as Margaret Hale does in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*. And too, Merry and the other hobbits receive recognition for what they achieve, but Éowyn – within the text of *The Lord of the Rings* – is never publicly praised.

It may be that Tolkien's reluctance to place Éowyn in the public eye comes from the motivation he ascribes to her, but this motivation itself is indicative of how he perceives the female role. For all her stated desires to be a shieldmaiden and her wish to stay by her uncle's side, Éowyn's actions appear to be most strongly driven by her infatuation with Aragorn. Even Boromir (though his motives are strongly mixed with a desire to increase his own glory) is seen as more genuinely dedicated to defeating the Dark Lord than Éowyn ever is. Boromir, like the warriors of Rohan and Gondor, and like the other members of the Fellowship, undertakes risk for a larger cause.

Though Tolkien deeply values personal commitment and loyalty, his heroes are expected to move beyond the personal. This is less true of Éowyn. What motivates her – almost without exception – is the personal.[13] Éowyn has gone into battle as 'Dernhelm' at least as much from suicidal despair over unrequited love as from a desire to play a warrior's part and to stay by Théoden. Unlike Aragorn (who places Middle-earth's needs above his love for Arwen), Éowyn's act is not fully a sacrifice. She is not so much

willing to die as desirous of death. In an acceptably feminine way, her inspiration is too much based on the private and emotional; it is too much a commitment to passion rather than a commitment to a fellowship, a people, a world, or even a principal. Her failure, then (though given a feminine framework and certainly less extreme), shares certain qualities with Denethor's; he too is motivated by an improper ambition and by a somewhat misplaced affection; he too desires death. Denethor loses all he has and all he hoped to gain; Éowyn, in spite of her part in bringing down the Nazgûl Lord, is no longer a shieldmaiden after the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, nor is she given a warrior's acclaim.

There is another concern as well: in order to join the warriors, Éowyn has disregarded her duties to the throne and has slipped away to war. It may be that in doing so she has forfeited her right to praise. But we need to be careful here. The entire matter of obedience and disobedience is of extreme importance to Tolkien and appears repeatedly throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. All of this is closely bound up with his concern for both allegiance and choice, for both loyalty and free will; and since Éowyn is not the only character who chooses to disregard orders, it is important to see the ways in which her disobedience differs from the disobedience of others.

Beregond leaves his post to save Faramir from the funeral pyre. Éomer allows Gandalf, Legolas, and Gimli to go free, contrary to the law of his land. Even Háma's decision to let Gandalf keep his wizard's staff is a breach of responsibility. But most pertinent to Éowyn is Merry's decision to disregard orders and follow the Riders to war. 'But why, lord,' Merry protests (in words much like Éowyn's), 'did you receive me as swordthain, if not to stay by your side? And I would not have it said of me in song only that I was always left behind!' (*RK*, 77).

In each case good comes from these independent, well-intended choices, even though a form of token punishment may also occur. And, in each case, recognition or public honour follows afterwards – with the exception of Éowyn. Instead of praise for what she achieved, regret is expressed for what she endured. 'Alas! For she was pitted against a foe beyond the strength of her mind and

body,' Aragorn exclaims in the Houses of Healing. 'It was an evil doom that set her on his path' (*RK*, 142). Certainly regret for her suffering is understandable, but the failure to mention her success, in this or in following scenes, seems a little unfair. Only in the Appendices following *The Lord of the Rings* is there mention of honour given to Éowyn, but honour in an appendix is honour diminished and deferred.[14]

It is easy to believe that Éowyn's sex is the main factor here, that Tolkien refrains from giving Éowyn the high praise that others receive simply because he was not quite at ease with the idea of women stepping into the public light and receiving public acclaim. The time comes when Frodo and Sam are repeatedly praised 'with great praise' and when the story of 'Frodo of the Nine Fingers and the Ring of Doom' is sung to 'lords and knights and men of valour unashamed, kings and princes, and fair people of Gondor, and Riders of Rohan, and ye sons of Elrond, and Dúnedain of the North, and Elf and Dwarf, and greathearts of the Shire, and all free folk of the West' (*RK*, 232). The time comes as well when Strider Longshanks is finally crowned as King of the West, when Éomer is hailed as King of the Mark, and when Beregond (after brief reprimanded) is given his reward. Even Boromir (though posthumously and in far smaller company than he would have preferred) is given high honour in song and burial. And Merry, who, like Éowyn, fears insignificance, becomes a 'Rider of Rohan,' 'Holdwine of the Mark,' a halfling who is held in honour in Minas Tirith and who, along with Pippin ('Prince of the Halflings'), receives great homage back at home – so that Shire-historians, writing about the Battle of Bywater, place the names of Captains Meriadoc and Peregrin 'at the top of the Roll in all accounts' (*RK* 295). Sam too is honoured in the Shire; he is seven times chosen as mayor. But Éowyn, by the end, is mostly cloistered away.

Until the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, when both Arwen and Galadriel travel away from their respective, sheltering realms, Éowyn is the only female we see who leaves home and household behind. She is the only woman in *The Lord of the Rings* to undertake physical risk, but in the end she is restricted and confined and seems less than she was before. Here again, however, we need

to proceed carefully. Éowyn's conclusion is in many ways not so very different from what Tolkien expects of his males. The best among them also favour healing over battle; and they too, by the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, lay down their swords and take upon themselves the less dramatic duties of peace. But Éowyn, in relinquishing her ambitions, gives up more than the others do, becoming a figure closer to Arwen (as Arwen is presented in the text of *The Lord of the Rings*), a shadowy, uncertain figure, removed not just from the battlefield but from the world as well. She is no longer even a proxy ruler or a guardian; she is herself guarded and regulated and handed from the care of the Warden to 'the care of the Steward of the City, until her brother returns' (*RK*, 243). And this brother, Éomer, is praised for giving her to Faramir, for giving 'thus to Gondor the fairest thing in [his] realm' (*RK*, 255).

All this – to say it once again – is fully understandable, given Tolkien's background and his age. The strong association of the female sex with passivity, retirement, and family duties made it next to impossible for him to conceive of a positive, enduring role for Éowyn outside of marriage and the home. A woman who leaves hearth, household, and designated position is seen as relinquishing her role as a giver and preserver of life. Such desertion brings disruption and sterility, as the Entwives' desertion does.

Tolkien ends by altering Éowyn's personality and by settling her a bit too suddenly into a suitable marriage. The appropriateness of Faramir cannot be questioned, but we are given neither time enough nor information enough to make her conversion and new attachment seem fully believable. There is something too convenient and too hurried about it all, as though Tolkien at this point merely wishes to get Éowyn off the stage and properly settled in an acceptable but – alas – far less interesting role.[15]

And yet ... and yet, the shieldmaiden Éowyn is still one of Tolkien's most impressive characters. Éowyn protesting her limited life and passionately crying out that she is 'of the House of Eorl, a shieldmaiden and not a dry-nurse' (*RK*, 57) is unforgettable. Éowyn laughing grimly and raising her sword to meet the Nazgûl horror is splendidly conceived. For this Tolkien deserves

considerable praise, and any sins he may have committed in latter-day readers' eyes should be judged with understanding and forgivingly.

What then about Galadriel, the one other Middle-earth female who contributes to the fall of Sauron, the one other female who initially seems to avoid the limitations placed on female characters? Where Éowyn belongs to a basically Anglo-Saxon and therefore Teutonic race, Galadriel is an Elf, with Celtic power and Celtic enchantment working behind the scenes. In every way, Galadriel appears to be a figure of great and merited authority; she is wise, self-confident, compelling – an exceptional representative of an exceptional race. Nearly all who meet her fall under her spell. She sees far, both in distance and in depth. She wears Nenya, the Ring of Waters, and uses it to preserve Lothlórien. It is her gift that renews the ravaged and plundered Shire. Galadriel's significance, in fact, extends beyond Middle-earth into the realm of Tolkien's outer mythology; she is, therefore, an even greater figure than is made obvious in the text of *The Lord of the Rings*.

There are reasons why Tolkien should feel comfortable in allowing Galadriel a far more enduring and influential role than he gave to Éowyn. Much of this has to do with her Elven blood and links to Valinor, as well as with certain religious associations Tolkien brings to her character. But in spite of the acknowledgment and honour she receives and the benefits she bestows upon the Fellowship, the Galadriel we meet in *The Lord of the Rings* still remains true to Tolkien's female ideal. All the feminine virtues of service, supportiveness, patience, grace, purity, and preservation of life – properly contained within a limited community – are clearly displayed through her character.

And Galadriel's character is a particularly complex one. The Elves as a race are a contradiction of youth and age, lightness and solemnity, but in Galadriel these qualities are particularly strong. She is, Sam Gamgee claims, 'sometimes like a great tree in flower, sometimes like a white daffadowndilly, small and slender like. Hard as di'monds, soft as moonlight. Warm as sunlight, cold as frost in the stars. Proud and far-off as a snow-mountain, and as

merry as any lass I ever saw with daisies in her hair in springtime' (*TT*, 288). Her girlish qualities and vulnerability, however, are never revealed to us; in spite of Sam's description, what Galadriel mostly inspires is awe. Her speech is consistently formal, and those who have audience with her are formal in return and mindful of how they behave. She seems, then, a figure of almost daunting power but one who is nonetheless well contained – both in her bearing and in her locality. Like the Old Forest that Goldberry tends, Lothlórien is in many ways Galadriel's domestic domain, the place she maintains and preserves and the place that shelters her. But within this domain, Galadriel (aside from her moment with the Ring) seems restrained and subdued in a way that Melian or Goldberry do not. Goldberry ranges at will within her own nature preserve, as does Tom (though he, when he wishes, crosses beyond their land); and Melian seems more openly decisive than Galadriel and freer to move about. When at last Galadriel finally leaves the confines of Lothlórien at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, she does so in a civilized fashion, accompanied by an entourage. She does not, like Éowyn, head out into certain or even probable risk. She does not undertake a quest or enter the Middle-earth fray. The good she does is done without leaving home.

These are exactly the limitations and qualities one would expect Tolkien to bestow on a female as ideal as Galadriel; and yet there is far more to Galadriel than appears in *The Lord of the Rings*. Those who have read the Appendices or *The Silmarillion* or Christopher Tolkien's compilation of his father's manuscripts, *The History of Middle-earth*, know that Galadriel came to Middle-earth as an exile and a rebel, as one of the Elves who resisted the authority of the ruling Valar and were therefore forbidden to return to the Blessed Realm. In her early days, she was 'of Amazon disposition,' writes Tolkien (*Letters*, 428), a warrioress, proud and defiant, as Éowyn would like to be.

Even in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien has ways of suggesting that Galadriel is not inevitably or merely a figure of unwavering virtue and high purity. Not only is she tempted by the offer of the Ring, which her 'heart has greatly desired' (*FR*, 381), so that she sees

herself for an instant as a 'beautiful and terrible' queen; but, as discussed in chapter 5, Tolkien also expands her character by matching her with Shelob and characters of mixed reputation from other literatures. And just as links to Shelob or to other less ideal figures (literary or mythological) suggest the possibility of moral failing or of greater physicality, certain higher figures beyond the frame of *The Lord of the Rings* are also associated with Galadriel, allowing her character to reach a higher plane and to be touched with something that approaches divinity.

We see something of this already in the adoration Galadriel inspires, an adoration devoid of worldly implication and most vividly depicted through the sudden and almost fierce devotion of Gimli the Dwarf. This 'cross' attachment, Dwarf to Elf, not only emphasizes the power of Galadriel's compassion and her appeal across the great disparity of their contending races; it also has the advantage of being unquestionably restricted to the ideal. Gimli devotes himself to Galadriel in much the way a medieval knight devotes himself to his lady (an image of courtly dedication which in its highest form is transferred to *the* Lady, to Mary, the mother of Christ).

This idealized distancing and lack of corporeity give us (in both a medieval and a Victorian way) the clearest indication of Galadriel's high connections and finest qualities. In Tolkien's mythology, the most revered and most ideal female of all is Varda (called Elbereth by the Elves); and Varda, who dwells in Valinor and who is symbolized in a star, is a highly distant figure from the perspective of Middle-earth. In spite of her physical distance, Varda is also the Vala most closely associated with the Elves, the one who is most compassionate, the one who seems most concerned. It is to Elbereth, rather than to her celestial spouse, Manwë (Lord of the Valar) that the Elves sing their hymns, as they do when Frodo's party meets them on the edge of the Shire, or as they do in Rivendell. It is to Elbereth (or Varda) that Galadriel sings as the Fellowship moves down the Great River, away from Lothlórien; and the song that Galadriel sings speaks of loss, separation, and the hope that they may someday find the realm of 'Valimar' (here the equivalent of Valinor).

All this is quite compatible with Tolkien's Catholic belief, as Tolkien himself clearly recognized. In his 1965 BBC interview with Denys Gueroult, he speaks of the Valar as being 'in some ways' equivalent to the Saints. 'They take the place of the invocations to the Saints which are lesser angels. Obviously many people have noticed that appealing to the Lady, the Queen of the Stars, is just like Roman Catholic invocations to Our Lady.' For Tolkien, it is fully appropriate that Varda be lower in rank than Manwë but still be the one to hear supplications, the one most attuned to petitioners.

But conventional ideas about male/female roles also contributed to Tolkien's creation of Varda and to her positioning. Even in his earliest writings, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, Tolkien assigned gender to the Valar (who are closely based on the Asgard gods). Over time he came to feel that their gender was better seen as a matter of personality rather than one of physical attributes, but his attitude towards what is appropriately female and appropriately male still remained. Of the fourteen Valar (seven of whom are 'male' and seven of whom are 'female'), the highest ranking ones are nearly always male. Like the Norse gods Tolkien borrowed from, male Valar hunt or battle and hold sovereignty over land and sea; and, with the exception of the fleet-footed Nessa (a huntress figure who never actually hunts), females are far more static, far more focused on service and providing what others need. They weave, heal, or grow, and one (Nienna by name) is the communal mourner, weeping 'for every wound that Arda [the Earth] has suffered' (*Silmarillion*, 28).

In her attentiveness to Middle-earth, Varda clearly fits this female role. She is the one who sits far off in Valinor on Oiolossë, the 'uttermost tower of Taniquetil, tallest of all the mountains upon Earth' (*Silmarillion*, 26) and faces eastward towards Middle-earth, hearing supplications or prayers.[16] This means, as Timothy O'Neill points out in his book on Tolkien and Jung, that Varda is looking in the direction of the Dark Lord's Tower, even as the Dark Lord keeps his gaze directed on the West. In this, O'Neill sees a balance of forces, with Varda (the White) serving as the feminine symbol, as a 'distillation of what is benevolent in the

divinity,' while Sauron, the Dark Lord, is 'the masculine symbol, the essence of evil.'[17]

All of this is indicative for Galadriel as well. She is, after all, the highest Elf of an ideal race, a race endowed with feminine sensitivity and spirituality. Before coming to Middle-earth, Galadriel lived in Valinor, in the Blessed Realm. When she comes to Middle-earth, she seems to carry with her something of Varda's role. From what we see, it is mostly through Galadriel that Varda interacts with Middle-earth. The phial which Galadriel give Frodo (the phial which drives back Shelob and gives fresh courage to a faltering Sam) is filled with the light of the star of Eärendil, the Mariner;[18] but it is Varda who is the ruling spirit of light, and it is she who creates and places the stars in the sky.[19] The light that Galadriel gives Frodo, then, ultimately came from Varda, 'maker of the stars' (*Silmarillion*, 40).

Though both Frodo and Sam at various times call on Elbereth, it is first Galadriel's name and then Elbereth's that Sam calls out when he touches the phial. It is as well to the 'Lady,' to the absent Galadriel, that Sam addresses his request for water and light in the Land of Shadow, a request that might equally have been addressed to Elbereth (and one that seems strongly Catholic in its tone). For Tolkien, the female principle, embodied in Varda of Valinor and Galadriel of Middle-earth, most clearly represents the charitable Christian heart.

Given Varda's status and compassion, and Galadriel's influence and her parallel role, it is difficult to believe that Tolkien saw female influence or female contributions as trifling or merely decorative. What is equally, if not more, impressive are the ways in which Tolkien manages to include so much of the feminine in his stories and to see the feminine not only as an essential part of the human character but as an indication of the highest moral state.

It is true that Tolkien was most comfortable restricting even his most influential females in *The Lord of the Rings* to limited spheres away from the pomp of the world, but his own strong attachments to home, his joyful praise of domesticity, and his clear preference for those peoples and individuals who honour – above all else – the simple comforts of household and the pleasures of familiar

terrain should go a long way towards answering those who believe Tolkien neglected the feminine. Though his age, his upbringing, and the literature he knew and read contributed to the concept of quests, freedom of movement, and fellowships as properly belonging to males, though he depicted females as a less prevalent gender, Tolkien also held an idealized view of womanhood, more so by far than most writers of his time; and it is this – along with his deep commitment to quiet dedication, humble service, and compassionate nurturing – that tells us best what Tolkien in truth believed.

Chapter Seven

Eating, Devouring, Sacrifice, and Ultimate Just Deserts (Why Elves Are Vegetarian and the Unrefined Are Not)

Twenty-eight days after conception, before we have gained features or limbs or any indication of lungs, while we are still only half a centimetre in length, our embryonic selves – in anticipation of a lifetime of eating – have already developed a beginner's digestive tract. It will lie there for eight more months before we face the world, a clear indication that we are, in essence, creatures of appetite almost from the first, little Shelobs and Gollums, waiting for a meal.

There are few matters in life more elementary than food and few that so neatly cut both ways. We are eaters or we are eaten; we are feeders or we are food, and our simplest, earliest stories are based on these twin concerns. Little Red Riding Hood carries a basket of goodies and meets a devouring wolf. The wisest of the three little pigs (in daring versions) dines on the wolf that previously ate his brothers. Hansel and Gretel nibble on the house of what Tolkien calls a 'cannibal witch' ('On Fairy-Stories,' 32). And, as Goldilocks learns, it may be agreeable to indulge in free porridge but not so agreeable to be found by three hungry, vandalized bears.

It is hardly necessary to point out the extent to which Tolkien was aware of this basic narrative concept and the extent to which eating permeates his Middle-earth stories, particularly in *The Hobbit*, where the greatest pleasures are the pleasures of food and drink and the greatest risks are those of being devoured. But Tolkien's writing, on any topic, works on multiple levels; and his references

to food reach far beyond the pleasures and fears innate to nursery tales. For Tolkien, the very concept of eating encompasses a complex range of ethical issues and themes, and once again Tolkien creates a moral split where the highest and most virtuous are Elves (or those aligned with the Elves).

Food as a means of alluding to moral issues is hardly unique to Tolkien; it is a device as old as the story of the Fall, and it allowed Tolkien to introduce a Christian code of behaviour into his Norse and Celtic world. But, where the Eden story is concerned primarily with obedience and the consequences of breaking rules, Tolkien's stories focus more on the nature of excess, on the ways in which the misuse of ambition or of appetite destroys the very self it seeks to embellish or feed. It is the term *misuse* that is important here. In Tolkien's moral scheme, appetite and selfhood are not in themselves objectionable and even extravagance has its place.

Appetite, selfhood – and large doses of both – are inseparable from life; and Tolkien, for all his sense of morality, is by no means opposed to the fitting satisfaction of healthy appetite. Though *consuming* and possessiveness are, in Tolkien's typical usage, strongly negative terms (particularly applicable to dragons), Tolkien nonetheless understands the pleasures that consuming and possessing bring. We see this in his celebration of food, drink, and pipe-weed, and in his obvious appreciation of decorative items, clothing, crafts, and well-wrought armour and swords. And just as Tolkien believes in gratifications of this sort, he believes as well in desire. It is for this reason that he gives highest praise, in his essay 'On Fairy-Stories,' to those tales that succeed in awakening desire. There are risks, of course; desire or appetite or ambition (like the Land of Faërie itself) are highly 'perilous.' They lead all too easily to covetousness, rapacity, and self-deceiving pride.

Still, just as the fault lies not in our longings, nor in our physical natures, nor in the awakening and satisfying of desire, but rather in our failure to avoid excess, so too the solution belongs to us individually and alone. It is the self that matters here, the self, of its own volition, choosing for good or ill. It is the self – swayed by narcissism, ambition, and greed – that causes insurrection and

sin. It is the self – tempered by fellowship, commitment, and kindly consideration – that allows for moral good.

For this reason the citizens of Bree can belong 'to nobody but themselves' (*FR*, 161) and Beorn can be 'under no enchantment but his own' (*H*, 103) and still be admirable. Independence of this sort does not preclude consideration of others or loyalty to others. Aragorn, Faramir, Galadriel, Beorn: each has his or her own preferences, thoughts, and desires; and yet each is capable of foregoing pleasure or security for the sake and safety of others and for a greater good. They belong fully to themselves but serve – by choice – a larger order as well. In Tolkien's world, these are the individuals who ultimately succeed or who ultimately become fulfilled. But those others, the ones who consistently seek more than their due, those who demand more and more for the self and for the self alone, are the ones whose reward is – paradoxically – only an emptiness, a hungering, an endless negation and a final devouring void. 'Lost, lost' (in Gollum's own words). 'No name, no business, no Precious, nothing. Only empty. Only hungry; yes, we are hungry' (*TT*, 298).

This contrasting of greed and generosity, of selfishness and sacrifice, appears again and again throughout *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Greed (with its failure to acknowledge the rights or existence of others) shows itself not only in Smaug's hoard, the lusts of Shelob, or the nihilistic corruptions of Sauron but also in the simple excesses of hobbit nature, young Frodo's passion for mushrooms, for example, or Lobelia's propensity for acquiring Bilbo's spoons. So, too, sacrifice (expressly undertaken for others) appears in a variety of forms, from Bilbo's 'painful' recognition that he, as host, 'might have to go without' cake (*H*, 16) or Fatty Bolger's Crickhollow ordeal, on up to those wrenching oblations of self, those sacrifices of life, limb, or peace of mind that Frodo, Aragorn, or Gandalf most clearly exemplify.

Not all of this – not high-level sacrifice at least – may appear related to the theme of consumption and food, and yet the connection between food and dedication is often subtly there. In matters of moral choice, we are givers or we are takers, and our words for expressing these concepts are rich with gastronomic

suggestion and food metaphor. When we deny the urgings of ego or flesh, when we sacrifice our own interests and *cater* to someone else, when we *foster*, *pamper*, *nurture*, or *nurse*, we are devoting ourselves to others through words based on food (though the original sense of feeding others may no longer be obvious). But in the act of taking or taking over, we feed only ourselves; we *assimilate*, *incorporate*, or *absorb*, as *corporate* businesses do. In Tolkien's world, consumption of this sort is most apparent in those beings or beasts that seize and devour and in doing so possess and annihilate those they come upon. In its extreme, this is the isolating self-indulgence that Shelob, the spider, embodies – desiring 'death for all others ... and for herself a glut of life, alone' (*TT*, 333).

Though the morality of consuming or not consuming is the same in everything Tolkien wrote, it makes sense that the risk of being eaten, of being literally ingested, occurs far more frequently in *The Hobbit*, a book written mostly for children, than it does in *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien understood the fascination children have with things that might gobble you up. And he also understood (as did Lewis Carroll) the child's fascination with food, with breakfasts, dinners, teas; with cakes, tarts, pies, and those intriguing wines and ales that belong to the world of adults.

So it is that Bilbo's hobbit hole has not just one kitchen, one dining room, and one pantry but 'kitchens, dining-rooms,' and 'pantries (lots of these).' The very roundness of hobbits, and even the roundness of their tunnels and doors, adds to this image of well-fed prosperity. But this indulgence quickly disappears once the adventures begin. Security and plenty are replaced by anxiety and privation, by the fear of doing without and the fear of becoming food. Again and again, on the long weary trail, Bilbo dreams of buttered toast, bacon and eggs, and 'the kettle just beginning to sing.' Again and again, this champion of second breakfasts, this hobbit who was saving two seed cakes for his 'after-supper morsel,' faces the possibility of becoming another creature's meal. He confronts, in order of appearance: trolls, goblins, and Gollum; wolves, spiders, and Smaug, each of them mightily hungry, each of them eager to feed.

There is a certain basic pattern to these fear-of-being-eaten scenes. When the dwarves and Gandalf and Bilbo are troubled or weary or suffering most acutely from hunger themselves, the threat is most likely to occur. 'We must just tighten our belts and trudge on – or we shall be made into supper, and that will be much worse than having none ourselves,' says Gandalf to the desperately hungry Bilbo after the goblin caves (87). In incident after incident, misery leads to carelessness, and carelessness leads to the strong possibility that they may be consumed.

Chronologically, the first fear-of-being-eaten occurrence is the troll adventure – and to borrow from an anonymous medieval text, 'not much is worse than trolls.'[1] Temptation comes through the trolls' alluring fire and the 'toothsome' smell of roast mutton. This in turn leads to the dwarves' captivity and the possibility of being roasted, boiled, or squashed into jelly.

Next comes the Misty Mountains, where the cave that should have sheltered them from cold and wind and weather opens the way to goblins, an 'always hungry' breed. For Bilbo, there is Gollum as well and Gollum's quickly returning appetite: 'Is it juicy? Is it scrumptiously crunchable?' (71–2). Not only does Bilbo's fate – to be eaten or escorted out – depend on the riddle game that Gollum instigates, but the nature of the riddles themselves accentuate the theme. Of the nine riddles asked (discounting Bilbo's dubious pocket question), three – the egg and the two fish riddles – deal directly with food; three others speak of teeth and biting and devouring. Equally suggestive are the contents of Gollum's pockets: 'fish-bones, goblins' teeth, wet shells, a bit of bat-wing, a sharp stone to sharpen his fangs on' (73). And Gollum's very name comes from the 'horrible swallowing noise' he habitually makes in his throat (68). Throughout all of this, Bilbo is terribly hungry himself. Nor does his ultimate escape from Gollum and the goblin tunnels offer much relief. Wolves are soon on their trail, as are a second instalment of goblins, gleefully singing about roasting them 'alive' or stewing 'them in a pot' (95).

The pattern continues in Mirkwood, where the rapid depletion of the party's stores is contrasted both by Bombur's sumptuous dreams and the increasingly more lavish feasts that tempt them

off the trail and into the spiders' domain. And after the spiders comes Smaug, a devourer of maidens and ponies, 'the Chiefest and Greatest of Calamities,' who knows 'the smell (and taste) of dwarf – no one better' (190–1).

In *The Hobbit*, in fact, the threat of being eaten is so dominant that even the eagles and Beorn, decent sorts who give the Company food and shelter and fellowship, are likely to be touched with carnivorous possibility. The eagles, Bilbo learns to his relief, do not intend to tear him up 'for supper like a rabbit' after all (97). But rabbit is precisely what the eagles do bring them for supper, and the notion that rabbits and hobbits have something in common is one that appears repeatedly. 'Little bunny is getting nice and fat,' says the-not-entirely-safe Beorn, poking Bilbo in the stomach and so reinforcing the rabbit association and the vulnerability it implies (115).

This threat and vulnerability are accentuated in a number of other ways. The trolls tie the dwarves up in sacks previously used for mutton; the spiders wrap them up in webbing and leave them dangling, 'a dozen bundles' hanging in a row. 'They'll make fine eating, when they've hung a bit,' says one spider. 'Kill 'em now and hang 'em dead for a while,' another suggests (136). The dwarves thus become a form of bagged provision, swallowed up by sack or web in anticipation of being swallowed up in actuality. In *The Lord of the Rings* the 'jaws' of Old Man Willow (closed tightly on Merry) work in a similar way, preparing us for the greater engulfing and the ominous spell that occurs on the Barrow-downs.

At times, in fact, it seems as though all nature in Middle-earth hungers and all nature feeds. Trees, barrows, and openings of every kind engulf, swallow, and consume. Hallows and dells have 'lips'; entrances have 'mouths,' and these mouths (of tunnels, caves, gullies, or passageways) typically gape or yawn. Given Tolkien's propensity for tunnels that lead downward to goblins, Gollum, or Smaug (tunnels that continue on to distant exit points), it is even possible to see such journeys in alimentary terms. And when Tolkien describes the 'green gums' and the 'jagged teeth' of the Barrow-down episode, the image of a living, devouring, underworld force is unmistakable.

Particularly intriguing in this context is the word *Mordor*, a word clearly dependent on the Anglo-Saxon *morþor* (murder, deadly sin, torment) and meaning 'Black Land' in Tolkien's Elven language, Sindarin, but a word also suggestive (through Latin roots) of both devouring and death (*mordant* and *mortuary* are representative English terms). At the beginning of Cirith Gorgor (Mordor's Haunted Pass),[2] the death and eating images implied in *Mordor* are heavily emphasized. The 'mouth' of this pass into the Dark Lord's land is guarded by the Black Gate, Morannon, and by two towers, the Teeth of Mordor (Carchost and Narchost). No one, unless summoned by Sauron, can move past the towers without feeling 'their bite' (*TT*, 244).

Though overt threats of being eaten – a constant concern in *The Hobbit* – have mostly disappeared by *The Lord of the Rings*, the possibility of being 'devoured,' when it does occur, is a far more serious one. In *The Hobbit* we are told that goblins not only eat 'horses and ponies and donkeys' but also 'other much more dreadful things,' a delicate reminder that the two-legged are quite possibly in danger too (60). In *The Lord of the Rings*, however, Tolkien moves beyond comic-horror possibility and speaks directly of Saruman awarding his Orcs, the fighting Uruk-hai, with 'man's-flesh to eat' (*TT*, 49), an act that represents the ultimate betrayal, the ultimate disregard of other fellow beings.

Orc speech is packed with such reference and threat. 'You're cooked,' the Isengarder Orcs taunt their rivals. 'The Whiteskins will catch you and eat you' (*TT*, 56). And this cannibalistic note is made stronger by hints of Orcs eating Orcs as well. Even if Tolkien's allusions to Orc-eat-Orc behaviour are only intended as savage banter, as forms of orcish jeer, the level of brutality is significantly increased by comments of this kind. 'You must go, or I'll eat you,' Shagrat threatens Snaga (*RK*, 182). 'It's orc-flesh they eat,' the evil-voiced Grishnákh says of the Uruk-hai (*TT*, 49). Finally, however, the most vivid intimation of Orcs eating their own kind comes not so much from threatening speech as from the image of Shagrat stabbing again the already wounded Gorbag and then pausing to lick the blade.

Orcs have been fittingly intensified over the goblins we encoun-

ter in *The Hobbit*, but Gollum/Sméagol, on the other hand, has to some extent and in certain ways been tempered by the time we meet him again. In *The Lord of the Rings* he no longer actively appears to be seeking hobbit flesh or even Orc for that matter, though there are rumours of a blood-drinking ghost that clearly refer to Gollum, and Sam suspects him of being 'not too dainty to try what hobbit tastes like' (*TT*, 228). For the most part, however, and from what we actually see, he now lives primarily off lower life forms (beetles, snakes, fish, and worms), things snared in the water or dug from the earth, particularly wet earth, and possibly out of the grave, as his comments on not being able to touch the dead forms in the marshes indicate to Sam. Gollum has become less of an eater of fresh meats and something more of a grubber in bogs and pools, something more of a ghoul – hardly an appealing image but a less openly violent one. In part this shift is indicative of a slow degeneration, but his apparent (and perhaps only temporary) willingness to forego hobbit flesh also makes sense in another way. Tolkien intends us to gain a measure of sympathy for Gollum in his improved Sméagol form. He is not yet fully lost, and he is tied to Frodo through more than simply the Ring. Hobbits, we learn, are the closest remaining links to Sméagol's own lost, 'hobbit-like' race (making Gollum a 'Proto-Frodo,' to quote a student of mine); and it is only at the final moment at the chasm of Mount Doom that he bites and maims his hobbit counterpart.

Like the Orcs, Sméagol also uses the term 'eating' to suggest defeat or extermination, but only in connection with the Dark Lord and 'His' destruction of other lives and other individual wills. 'He'll eat us all, if He gets it [the Ring], eat all the world' is Sméagol's cry to Frodo (*TT*, 245), an opinion that is by no means Sméagol's alone but which is nowhere else expressed with such simplicity. Though Faramir speaks of the 'destroyer who would devour all' (*TT*, 280) and Gandalf claims Saruman will be 'devoured,' if Sauron reaches out to Isegard (*TT*, 190), Sméagol's reduction of the Dark Lord's intentions to mere 'eating' effectively reveals the basic similarity between goblin/Orc voracity and the more abstract cravings that Sauron himself represents. That the sins of this now mostly disembodied but still formidable being

can be reduced to a display of excessive appetite, to something like greed at table, places Sauron, for a moment, in the same category as any mortal who contrives to gain more than his or her fair share.

And just as Sméagol's way of reducing the Dark Lord's devastation to a simple act of eating reveals both the elemental nature and the baseness of Sauron's transgressions, so too Shelob's role as a lesser but parallel figure accentuates the Dark Lord's greed and pettiness. The swollen, engulfing existence that Shelob desires is not all that different from the expanding reaches of Mordor that the Dark Lord's destruction creates. Each brings darkness. Each brings death. Each wishes for no other power than his or hers alone. Each is an example of appetite run amuck. 'All living things' are Shelob's 'food' (*TT*, 332), and Sauron 'would devour all.'

From the Sackville-Bagginses' yearning for Bag End to the Dark Lord's lonely, raging emptiness, the drive is essentially the same – the drive, that is, but not the degree. However much Tolkien may believe in a parallel cheapness of soul in all those who sin by acquisition or by an excessive yearning for more, he is also highly aware of position and the difference position makes. Lobelia, Gollum, Wormtongue, Saruman, Denethor: each is capable of rising only so far. Each has a limit in ambition, influence, or even in ill intent. For this reason, Gandalf explains, the One Ring could not give Gollum unlimited power but only 'power according to his stature' (*FR*, 63). Unlike Sauron, Gollum can only do harm in a narrow locality. At most he sees himself as 'Gollum the Great,' '*The* Gollum,' and eating fish every day (*TT*, 241).

Since virtue or corruption – applied to whatever rank – is also measured though dietary preferences, what Gollum chooses to eat marks his character. Most telling are Gollum/Sméagol's inability to tolerate Elven food, his disgust for cooked rabbit and herbs, and his preference instead for things raw, for cold fish, worms, or 'something slimy out of holes' – all of which accentuate his regression, his devolution back to a primordial world of 'black mud,' wetness, and a 'chewing and slavering' state (*TT*, 231–2). Equally telling is the proposal that Gríma Wormtongue ate Lotho after

stabbing him in his sleep. 'Worm,' says Saruman, 'has been very hungry lately' (*RK*, 299). To put it simply, the baddies eat bad and the goodies eat good. This is why, in *The Hobbit*, food taken from the trolls' larder must be examined and chosen with care and why Pippin, in *The Two Towers*, wisely rejects the 'flesh flung to him by an Orc, the flesh of he dared not guess what creature' (*TT*, 54).

For certain of his negative characters, Tolkien adds yet another element of horror. For the Orcs and Shelob (and for Sauron, the devourer of souls), the repulsion we feel over what they eat is magnified by the pleasure each takes in the wilful infliction of pain. This above all is what gives spice to Orc or Shelob meals. In a chapter full of cannibalistic hints, we hear the Orcs' regret that the hobbits are to be delivered alive, that there will be no chance for 'play'; so too Shelob and the Dark Lord both desire the consciousness of those they torture or consume. Shelob, though she may wish for no other existence but her own, does not 'eat dead meat, nor suck cold blood' (*TT*, 350). She wants her victims alive and 'plays' like a cat with those who become her food.

Sauron's desire for unwilling, agonized slaves is really much the same. When the Dark Lord's emissary, the Mouth of Sauron, is sent to mislead and demoralize the Army of the West, we are told that Sauron 'had a mind first to play these mice cruelly before he struck to kill' (*RK*, 164). In a similar way, the Nazgûl Lord's threat to Éowyn includes both torment and consuming death. '"Come not between the Nazgûl and his prey! Or he will not slay thee in thy turn. He will bear thee away to the houses of lamentation, beyond all darkness, where thy flesh shall be devoured, and thy shrivelled mind be left naked to the Lidless Eye"' (*RK*, 116).

These are the pleasures of Tolkien's most powerful villains when they feed on flesh or suffering. But Tolkien's idealized characters are no less defined by what and how they eat. Decent, appropriate foods, shared with others in warm fellowship, designate those who belong to the good. The inn at Bree has 'good plain food, as good as the Shire could show, and homelike' (*FR*, 166). Beorn, for all the danger he exudes, eats no meat but lives 'most on cream and honey' (*H*, 103). Tom Bombadil's table, laden with 'yellow cream,

honeycomb, and white bread and butter' (*FR*, 132), the meal eaten with Faramir in 'The Window on the West,' and even Treebeard's rich, invigorating water are really much the same.

Each of these individuals has similar, fleshless (or nearly fleshless) diets. We hear only now and then of hobbits eating meat; Strider speaks of 'berry, root, and herb' to be found along the way and mentions only as a secondary possibility his 'skill as a hunter at need' (*FR*, 203). The highest and the best eat no meat at all; and the Elves, we are told, have an 'appetite for music and poetry and tales,' which they seem to like 'as much as food, or more' (*FR*, 250).[3] Their drinks (and Tom Bombadil's) have the qualities of wine, while the less ethereal hobbits serve mostly ale or beer.

The value of Elven food, however, goes beyond dietary decency. The Elves' lembas (or waybread), carried by the Fellowship, has a symbolic meaning as well. Lembas feeds both the will and the body and is touched with eucharistic qualities. It is 'given to serve ... when all else fails' (*FR*, 386), and in the Elven language, Quenya (where the word is *coimas* rather than *lembas*), it means 'life-bread' or 'bread of life.' In the shadow of Cirith Ungol, before their journey 'down into the Nameless Land,' Frodo and Sam share what Tolkien twice refers to as a 'last meal,' the last perhaps they will 'ever eat together.' It consists of some food from Gondor, but more telling are the 'wafers of the waybread of the Elves' and the water they sparingly drink (*TT*, 320). It is lembas that gives Frodo the strength necessary to continue on his march towards death, burdened like Christ with the object of his own torture. Later, in the parched 'Land of Shadow,' communion is suggested again. Though the water they now drink is 'bitter and oily,' it comes to them comes through Sam's call to 'the Lady' (to Galadriel), and his call is virtually a prayer. It becomes, then, a form of Elven drink after all, a drink 'beyond all praise' (*RK*, 198). Taken with the remaining fragments of Elf wafer, and with memories of Galadriel herself, it constitutes a form of communion extended along the way.

For Tolkien, in fact, all such yearning towards the ideal and all charitable thoughts serve as virtual prayer. Repeatedly, throughout the grim and seemingly hopeless chapters of *The Return of the*

King, memories of the good and compassionate thoughts of others are what confer the strength to endeavour and persevere – a communing, if not a communion. It is the combination of 'understanding' and 'pity' that Bilbo feels for Gollum that allows him, 'quite suddenly,' to achieve his leap in the dark (*H*, 79–80). After the Fellowship is separated, we hear repeatedly that their thoughts turn to one another. Merry thrusts down 'his own dread' through thoughts of Pippin's ordeal (*RK*, 107). At the Tower of Cirith Ungol, Sam forces 'himself to think of Frodo, lying bound or in pain or dead' (*RK*, 180). With this he finds courage to go on. Each kind and unselfish thought brings strength and greater resolve. In a similar way, Sam gains heart from the thought that he and Frodo are part of the great story, that they too are part of the Ring's history and on the side of the good; others have been brave before them, and brave for the sake of others; so they must be as well.

Even Gandalf's final chiding to Bilbo, not to disbelieve prophecies he helped to bring about and not to imagine it all had occurred for his benefit alone, makes a comparable point. In our own small way, Tolkien believes, each of us inexorably belongs to the story and can play a hero's or a villain's part. And if we choose correctly, we become part of the communal body, part of the communal whole.

It is there in *The Hobbit*, where Bilbo endangers himself to rescue or benefit his companions. When Bilbo decides it is 'his duty' to go back into 'the horrible, horrible, tunnels and look for his friends' (*H*, 83), when he rushes among the spiders, taunting and throwing stones, he is heightening the risk of being devoured to save others from being so. It is there as well in Gandalf facing the Balrog, in his falling and rising from death; it is there in the Rangers, who, unacknowledged, continue to protect the Shire; in Faramir at his remote Ithilien post; in Galadriel choosing for the benefit of Middle-earth rather than personal gain; even Butterbur, though only 'on the edge of very great troubles,' contributes to the cause (*RK*, 272). 'I also am a steward,' Gandalf says (*RK*, 31); and, in truth, we are all stewards, those of us who serve the good and give of ourselves through willing service and aid.

The contrast with Shelob's blubbering over the wound Sam

gives to her 'beloved flesh' or Gollum's 'whistling and gurgling' self-pity, 'horrible to listen to' (*H*, 77–8), is sharp and indicative. The use of *beloved* in reference to Shelob's own flesh (like Gollum's evoking of 'Precious') has almost a religious ring, a Biblical and devotional tone; and Shelob is indeed her own deity, a goddess of self. 'Her Ladyship,' say the Mordor Orcs, and quite appropriately, for Shelob is a distorted queen, a ruler of darkness and death, the antithesis of the Lady Galadriel, whose position and demeanour carry their own religious associations, who is a bestower of light and life, and who willingly accepts her own and her people's diminishing for the sake of a greater good.

Sacrifices, such as the one Galadriel makes in rejecting the Ring and relinquishing her position in Lothlórien and Middle-earth, must be freely bestowed. Circumstances may urge an undertaking or a renunciation, but the choice must always remain the individual's own. At the same time, relinquishings of this sort – whether they entail physical loss or a surrendering of glory and power – do not mean a weakening or a lessening. When Galadriel rejects the Ring and speaks of diminishing, this is not a diminishing of self or soul. Like Milton's Eve, she has been tempted by the title of 'Queen'; but she, unlike Eve, passes the test; in renouncing the Ring's invitation, she will 'remain Galadriel' (*FR*, 381). In doing so she becomes more than she was before and may now return to the West.

It is only Pippin and Merry who grow in actuality, whose moral advancement through service and hardship for others is marked by a representative increase in size. But all those who give and serve and nourish others gain or grow in one sense or another. Gandalf the Grey is now Gandalf the White. Aragorn is king. Faramir is the Steward of Gondor and marries Éowyn; and Frodo, who has suffered the most, who has lost his easy hobbit joy and who has been outwardly (and almost ritualistically) marked by the loss of a finger, has grown too, as Saruman bitterly remarks. Frodo will have his reward; he has gained something of an Elvish nature and will go to the West and heal.

Those who give, then, gain; those who take less for the sake of others ultimately become more. Unlike the insatiably and ruth-

lessly ambitious, they are the ones who find the best in life. It is this that the dying Thorin has learned when he speaks of valuing 'food and cheer and song above hoarded gold' (*H*, 243). Like Boromir, Thorin chose a path that seemed to offer justified, warranted power but one which ultimately led to disruption, to moral failings, and to an early death. Both Boromir and Thorin are souls in balance; both falter and fail, but both as well – at the moment of death – turn again to the good.

This sense of a soul in balance also applies to Gollum and greatly increases the significance of his character. For all his slow degeneration, he too is not fully lost; he too may yet be redeemed. He is, as well (in his degenerate form), an indication of what Frodo may become, of what Frodo at moments nearly does become. Gollum serves, then, as a warning, as a reminder, that we are all capable of good but that the drive to seize and consume is ever with us, that failure or sin or moral deterioration is ever possible. We cannot have it otherwise. For good or ill, we are of the body; for good or ill, we are born with hungers and desires.

It is for this reason that Tolkien, in his sequel to *The Lord of the Rings*, the fragment entitled 'The New Shadow,' speculates about the Orc within us all, about the ways in which we must inevitably appear as destroyers and adversaries to those other forms of life we destroy or feed upon. 'To trees all Men are Orcs,' Tolkien writes. 'Do Men consider the fulfillment of the life-story of a tree before they cut it down? For whatever purpose: to have its room for tilth, to use its flesh as timber or as fuel, or merely to open the view? If trees were the judges, would they set Men above Orcs, or indeed above the cankers and blights? What more right, they might ask, have Men to feed on their juices than blights?' (XII, 413).

Tolkien did not carry this fragment far. It was, he felt, 'sinister and depressing,' too focused on human failures and flaws. 'Not worth doing,' he wrote to Colin Bailey in 1964 (*Letters*, 344). It was better to end his Middle-earth story with the victory and hope that follow the Dark Lord's defeat. Yet even at the end of *The Return of the King*, a small touch of pessimism is subtly conveyed. In the midst of Tolkien's exhilarating description of the regenerated Shire, one brief but nonetheless chilling image threatens the

otherwise idyllic scene. This image – innocent enough on the surface – is that of hobbit children sitting surrounded by abundance, eating countless plums, and piling up the stones like 'the heaped skulls of a conqueror' (*RK*, 303). Certainly, a hobbit child, amassing the skulls of vanquished plums, is a long way from becoming a Sauron or an Orc, but the instincts of conqueror and devourer, as Tolkien is well aware, are there just the same.

Tolkien wants us to recognize this; he wants us to recognize that we are – everyone of us – creatures of appetite and ego and that simple, instinctive gratification can lead to overstepping, to excess, to claiming as our own whatever comes our way. Each of us has the makings of a brute; the 'everlasting cat, wolf, and dog' lurks 'at no great depth under our social skin' (*Letters*, 72). But the picture is not unrelentingly grim. Tolkien wants us to remember as well that we are more than egos and appetites. We can choose to give as well as to receive; we can learn to relinquish as well as to possess. And if we stretch ourselves beyond our earthly natures, if we serve and share and sacrifice in small ways and in great, we, like Middle-earth's small and larger heroes, shall received our rewards and be more than we were before.

Those who take – those who seize, hoard, and consume and consider only the self – will be served otherwise. Their reward will be a hollowness and a void. They wished for distinction and singularity, a power theirs *alone*, and they end with singular loneliness. In Tolkien's world, they end (often enough) by a literal undoing, by a dispatching through fire or a sudden dispersing by wind.

We see this first with the envying, hungering Barrow-wight that Tom orders to shrivel like 'cold mist' and whose 'long trailing shriek' fades away 'into an unguessable distance' (*FR*, 153–4). Throughout *The Return of the King*, Tolkien replays this scene with small variety. The Nazgûl Lord, who rises over Éowyn moments before his defeat, falls into instant nothingness. His cry fades to a 'shrill wailing, passing with the wind'; it becomes 'bodiless and thin,' then dies and is 'swallowed up' (*RK*, 117). Later, as Mordor itself crumbles, steams, and melts, the last of the Nazgûl tear 'like flaming bolts' through the sky, utter a piercing cry, and then

crackle, wither, and go out (*RK*, 224). In much the same way, the spirit of Sauron rises into 'a vast threatening' but impotent shadow that fills 'all the sky' before it is taken by the wind and 'all blown away' (*RK*, 227). Even Gollum, with his final 'shriek' and 'wail' fading into the fiery depths of Mount Doom, comes to a similar end. And, finally, Saruman – in imitation of Sauron to the last – gathers into a grey mist that rises 'like smoke from a fire,' then bends away in the wind, with a 'sigh' that dissolves 'into nothing' (*RK*, 300).

These are the just deserts. The eaters are unbodied, the devourers 'swallowed up.' Those who would have more and everlastingly more end by becoming less. Those who would serve none but themselves end by being alone. This is as true of the Master of Dale, deserted by his companions and starving in the wilderness, as it is of Sauron or Saruman. But those who follow the path of service and fellowship, those who give of themselves so that others may be blessed, gain blessings of their own – gain peace, honour, gratitude, and renewed community.

Chapter Eight

Three Questions by Way of Conclusion

I began this book by saying Tolkien is far more complex than people mostly assume; my conclusion will only confirm that belief. The more I work on Tolkien the more I realize there is no easy list of Tolkienian truths that I can print up and pass on with equanimity. But – by way of conclusion and putting a cap on things – let me set out three questions that should help address the nature of Tolkien's genius and his complexity. The questions are:

1. Who wins, Norseman or Celt?
2. Is it fusion or confusion we come to in the end?
3. J.R.R. Tolkien, Christian believer or crier of Nordic doom?

Before I take on question one, let me pause for a moment to look back at things Celtic and Nordic, to summarize how they are seen. Remember that what is Nordic (though not called Nordic by Tolkien) includes the Scandinavians, the Anglo-Saxons, and all those speakers of Germanic tongues who arrived on the shores of what we now call Great Britain (though Tolkien disliked the term). Remember too that the Scandinavians – specifically the Icelandic Scandinavians – were looked to by Tolkien and his contemporaries as the leading example of Teutonic belief. And remember that Tolkien sometimes uses *Saxon* for England's Teutons at large, much as he sometimes uses *England* comprehensively.

Among the Celts, the Welsh had Tolkien's blessing; this was typical of his age, and of the Victorian Age that he caught the tail

end of. When Tolkien speaks of Celts, he sometimes uses 'Welsh' to cover the entire field. As unjust as this may seem, his usage is lexicographically acceptable and not merely a personal whim. (*Welsh*, like *England* and *Saxon*, is sometimes made to carry more than its fair share of meaning.)

On the other hand, when Tolkien speaks of the Irish, he means only the Irish, and all too often he singles them out as a Celtic negative, as the shadow manifestation of what a Celt ought to be. Beyond this, as far as Celtic peoples go, Brittany shows up now and then, but Cornwall and Scotland are pretty much ignored. None of this is simple, and it adds to the difficulty of weighing Norseman against Celt, the difficulty of deciding which it was Tolkien in truth preferred.

The Norse, says Tolkien (and Carlyle and Morris and Eddison, and many more we could add), are the strength and pride behind England; from them come England's heroic roots, its manhood, its determination, its stamina. Since the eighteenth century, writers have held up the Norse as an English ideal, and writers are still singing their praise. What writers do not do, however, is defend the Norse. It is the Celts, not the Norse, who need defenders – which makes it easy enough to see who the underdog is. Matthew Arnold defends the Celts; Lady Charlotte Guest defends them; Charles Squire defends them; Francis Grierson defends them; William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory dedicated themselves to defending and promoting the Celts; and Tolkien himself stood up for the Celts, though he (like others he knew) remained something of a 'secret drinker' at the Celtic spring.[1] There are organized movements for Celts, movements, like the Irish Revival (a telling expression in itself), where enthusiasm is drummed up and a cause gets underway. Not so the Norse. They stand well enough on their own, and their feet are planted wide.

Norsemen (or Teutons), it would be easy to say, win hands down. But the discussion does not stop here. Other arguments need to be considered, and other points of view. The Norse, for example, have some unsavoury tendencies. They have a capacity for 'malice, greed, destruction (the evil side of heroic life).' For all their glory in deeds, they have a dragon and 'bestial' potentiality.[2]

And the Celts? Well, Celts have charm; they have sensitivity and imagination. They have an affinity for the spiritual and see beyond this world, 'dealing with the eye of the mind rather than the eye of the body.'[3] And these qualities, already present in the early Celts, made it easy (some claim) for them to advance towards Christianity. Mysticism and receptiveness, once refined, emerged as spiritual devotion, inner reflection, and quiet servitude, and these are the qualities Tolkien praises most. We could, then, just as well say the Celts are the ones who win; and to this we could add that they do so with seemly, chivalric restraint, avoiding all the chest-beating and Beowulfian boasting that Teutons so enjoy.

But can we really settle the argument? Would Tolkien want us to? I don't know. Probably not. Tolkien valued both branches of English-kind, both the Celtic and the Norse; and he valued variations and relations that fall in between. The truth is (I suppose) Tolkien would not have known, and would not have wanted to know, which it was that called to him most. To make such a choice would be disloyal, like proclaiming a preference for one beloved parent over the other, though we choose to follow tradition by using our father's name.

There is this to consider as well: What sort of story would Tolkien have written if his world had been unrelentingly Norse? – a saga, a latter-day eddic thriller, hewed out by 'mallet and axe' (to borrow Francis Grierson's words)?[4] But then again what sort of tale would it have been if Tolkien looked only to the Celts and to Celtic sentiment? Something rambling and dreamy like a William Morris romance, a work of untarnished beauty at a cloyingly even pace? But this is not what happened. Tolkien gives us both together, the soft and the hard, the flower and the stone, the Celtic and the Norse. We are given both mother and father of England's heritage; and such mingling, sharing, and coming together is all to the good.

Or is it? We should consider this carefully. Does Tolkien (do any of us?) truly want things brought around to a balanced and consistent impartiality? (This, you may have noticed, brings us to question two.) In the end, is it unity or contraries, fusion or confusion, we are looking for? The answer has basically been given, but bear

with me just the same and let me speak first as an advocate for unity, for the mingling and merging of opposites and the blending of differing things.

In 'English and Welsh' Tolkien rejects the idea that Celt and Teuton (or Celt and Saxon) are really so at odds. They have mixed their blood, their languages, and their tales; and the result is something richer and better than what was there before, something much like the literary 'soup' Tolkien writes about in 'On Fairy-Stories,' a soup into which 'new bits, dainty and undainty' have been added over story-telling time (28). This is the soup from which Tolkien himself drew stories and the soup to which he added new bits in return. And Tolkien's own story ends with a happy blending of peoples and a triumphant unity. Middle-earth has gained a king; and this king has Elven blood, an Elven upbringing, and an Elven wife. A glorious coming-together has unquestionably occurred! We cheer it on, as we do the friendship of Gimli and Legolas, age-old enemies, Dwarf and Elf, who move to a middle ground – Legolas becoming a dedicated, seasoned warrior and Gimli becoming chivalrously enamoured of Galadriel.

And yet Tolkien has little love of amelioration that takes what is special away. He speaks with considerable bitterness about government efforts 'to destroy Welsh on earth as well as in Heaven' in the name of efficiency. Languages are 'the chief distinguishing marks of peoples,' Tolkien says in 'English and Welsh.' When 'languages perish, ... the peoples perish too.'[5] More pointed yet is a letter Tolkien wrote to Christopher Tolkien in 1943, a letter intentionally overstated but serious just the same:

> The bigger things get the smaller and duller or flatter the globe gets. It is getting to be all one blasted little provincial suburb. When they have introduced American sanitation, morale-pep, feminism, and mass production throughout the Near East, Middle East, Far East, U.S.S.R., the Pampas, el Gran Chaco, the Danubian Basin, Equatorial Africa, Hither Further and Inner Mumbo-land, Gondhwanaland, Lhasa, and the villages of darkest Berkshire, how happy we shall be. At any rate it ought to cut down on travel. There will be nowhere to go. So people will (I opine) go all the faster. Col. Knox

> says 1/8 of the world's population speaks 'English,' and that is the biggest language group. If true, damn shame – say I. May the curse of Babel strike all their tongues till they can only say 'baa baa.' It would mean much the same. (*Letters*, 65)

However much Tolkien may speak of alliances and favourable mixing of blood, his defence of the singular and the endangered shows another side.

And what about the hobbits, who begin as balanced mixtures of Nordic steadiness and pleasure-loving Celt? Where others move towards a centre, away from cultural extremes, the hobbits move outward, away from middle ground. They become more Norse in their heroics and more Celtic in how they perceive; they are awakened to their ancestral past, and this awakening (for all but Frodo) is undeniably good. And yet, throughout it all, hobbits remain hobbits, Elves remain Elves, and Gimli is still a Dwarf.

What Tolkien prefers, I would guess, is interaction rather than reduction disguised as equity – interaction of the Fellowship kind, where Wizard, Elf, Dwarf, Man, and four uninitiated hobbits work as an almost perfect team. The *almost* is essential. If we are going to have a story, we need disruption in one or another form. We need a snake in every garden, a Melkor or Loki in every pantheon, and a Boromir in every Fellowship. This is not a cheerful realization, but it is a valid one – valid in life as well as in literature.

With that we arrive at question number three: Is Tolkien an optimist or a pessimist, a believer in salvation or a believer in pagan doom? Let me begin with the positive and say right off that Sauron and Saruman are defeated and that – once Sauron's power is gone – his minions (his Orcs, trolls, and 'spell-enslaved' beasts) run off in mindless disarray and cast themselves into pits. Not only is evil dispelled; what is good has made a return. The Shire is restored. There are golden-haired, Elf-touched hobbit young that were never there before. Bilbo, the Elf-friend, is allowed to travel West, and Frodo will go there and heal. Peace has come to Middle-earth, and Middle-earth is cleansed. Yet it is not that simple or that comforting. An imbalance exists between what is evil and good. The Orcs are not all gone; trolls and other beasts

are hidden in the hills. And the Elves are moving on, never to return. The best of Middle-earth is diminished and will continue diminishing. Soon there will be no more Elves and no more Lothlórien. Already there are no more Entwives and no more Entling young.

Evil, however, returns, and evil invariably grows. There is always a 'hang-over' from 'one age to another,' Tolkien says, and such hangovers are usually 'evil' (*Letters*, 180). Worse yet, these hangovers are not dependent on Sauron or revitalized Orcs. There is evil enough already within humankind. Is man 'meeting up to the promise that he might have had at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*?' Henry Resnick asked Tolkien in 1966. 'Oh, but he wouldn't,' said Tolkien. 'Of course he'll go bad because he's sick of peace ... After one hundred years of peace and prosperity, people would all be going into every kind of madness.'[6]

This is 'The New Shadow' Tolkien is speaking of, the story he began after *The Lord of the Rings* but soon put aside, a story based on the 'most regrettable feature' of human nature, 'their quick satiety with good' (*Letters*, 344). The 'New Shadow' is not really new but rather the same old business taking shape again. It is ready and waiting, biding its time, at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*. 'One friend of mine said he only read [the book] in Lent, because it was so hard and bitter,' Tolkien admitted to Denys Gueroult; it is not 'a happy story.'

In this life, Tolkien seems to be saying (by the conclusion of *The Lord of the Rings*), endings are inevitable, change will always come, and evil is never deposed. The best any of us can do is simply that: our best, though it means leaving hearth or burrow or forest preserve for a greater good (knowing all along that – whatever we achieve – the monsters will finally win, that 'the monsters do not depart, whether the gods go or come,' that 'man, each man and all men, and all their works shall die').[7]

Though it may in some ways be less obvious, the Celtic worldview coincides with this Germanic one. There is a haunting sense among the Celts that nothing can stay the same. Tír na nÓg, the Land of Youth, was surely invented to defy this certitude, as was the Elves' Lothlórien, Tolkien's 'timeless land,' where 'no blemish

or sickness or deformity could be seen' (*FR*, 365). The difference is in attitude; Norsemen (John Buchan claims) are realists, but Celts look to mysteries. For Tolkien, both positions are true. Mysteries gave the Celts an answer that lies beyond this world, an answer compatible with Tolkien's own. On this plane, Tolkien believed, a Christian, like his forefathers, is still 'a mortal hemmed in a hostile world,'[8] a world where 'history,' most likely, is only a 'long defeat' (*Letters*, 255). But for Christians there is something more – call this hope or call this certainty. 'The tragedy of the great temporal defeat remains for a while poignant, but ceases to be finally important. It is no defeat, for the end of the world is part of the design ... Beyond there appears a possibility of eternal victory (or eternal defeat), and the real battle is between the soul and its adversaries.'[9]

Tolkien, finally, is a pessimist and optimist both. There is no in between. He is a Christian believer whose answer lies in a 'beyond' (a beyond that may as well be thought of as westward over the Sea). At the same time – on this plane – Tolkien is very much a Norseman and adheres to a Norseman's creed. His message, then, is a double one. It speaks of doom and inevitable battle and it speaks of eternal peace.

Notes

Introduction

1 J.R.R. Tolkien, interview by Denys Gueroult, British Broadcasting Corporation, Oxford Studio, 20 January 1965.
2 Clyde Kilby, preface to *Tolkien and The Silmarillion* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1976).
3 Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), 101.
4 J.R.R. Tolkien, 'A Secret Vice,' in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London, Boston, and Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 198–223.
5 Dwarf words are 'Semitic, obviously – constructed to be Semitic,' Tolkien said to Gueroult in his 1965 BBC interview. In a letter written ten years earlier, he mentions thinking of the Dwarves 'like Jews: at once native and alien in their habitations, speaking the languages of the country, but with an accent due to their own private tongue' (*Letters*, 229).
6 J.R.R. Tolkien, '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics,' in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, 5–48. Subsequent footnote citations will appear as '*Beowulf*.'
7 J.R.R. Tolkien, 'Ancrene Wisse and Hali Meiðhad,' *Essays and Studies* 14 (1929): 104–26.
8 J.R.R. Tolkien, 'The Name "Nodens,"' *Report on the Excavation of the Prehistoric, Roman, and Post-Roman Sites in Lydney Park, Gloucestershire*, Appendix I, Report of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London, 9 (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), 132–7. This short but impressive commentary traces how a Celtic god became first an Irish hero, then a Welsh hero, and ended as Shakespeare's King Lear. For a full account, see

T.A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, 2nd ed. (London: Grafton, 1992), 32–3.

9 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo*, trans. J.R.R. Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 25–88. This translation was first published in 1975, two years after Tolkien's death and some twenty-five years after its completion.

10 At times Tolkien seems to ignore his Orange Free State/South African start. In a transatlantic telephone interview with Henry Resnick (2 March 1966), Tolkien refers to Northwestern Europe as 'where I was born,' then corrects himself by adding, 'well, I wasn't born there actually.' From 'An Interview with Tolkien,' *Niekas* 18 (Late Spring, 1967): 41. In his 1965 interview with Denys Gueroult, Tolkien mentions his South African birth but follows this up by saying 'I was very young when I got back,' as though his coming to England was not an arrival but some form of return.

11 Thirty years later, Tolkien guardedly admitted 'The Silmarillion' did in fact retain the Celtic character 'misdescribed' in the Allen and Unwin report, 'as does much of *The Lord of the Rings*' (*Letters*, 374). See also *Letters*, 176.

Chapter 1: Two Norths and Their English Blend

1 '*Beowulf*,' 33–4.

2 '*Beowulf*,' 20.

3 Douglass Parker's 'Hwaet We Holbytla ...,' *Hudson Review* 9 (Winter, 1956–7): 606.

4 J.R.R. Tolkien, 'English and Welsh' in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, 169. This essay was originally presented as an O'Donnell Lecture at Oxford on 21 October 1955, one day after the publication of *The Return of the King*. In 'Mid-Century Perceptions of the Ancient Celtic Peoples of "England,"' *Seven* 9 (1988): 57–65, John Sprott Ryan points to 'English and Welsh' as a work of great importance for Tolkien scholars, particularly for matters of 'Gondor history, the elvish history, and the Numenorian chronicles,' with their Celtic echoes of a British past that occurred 'over the 1,000 years prior to the Germanic incursions.' This '"Welsh"/Celtic strand to Tolkien's writing,' says Ryan, 'must be given the serious attention hitherto accorded only to his Old English and Old Norse analogues and borrowings' (63).

5 'English and Welsh,' 174.

6 'I love England (not Great Britain and certainly not the British Commonwealth (grr!)),' Tolkien wrote in 1943 (*Letters*, 65); yet he himself sometimes used *England* in a larger, inclusive sense.

7 Tolkien disliked the term *Nordic* for its French origins and for what he saw as its association with 'racialist theories' (*Letters*, 375). *Nordic*, however, is a serviceable word for the Scandinavians and Northern Europeans combined and will appear occasionally.
8 John Buchan, *John MacNab* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), 126.
9 For a further indication of attitudes of the times, see Francis Grierson's 1901 essay 'The Celtic Temperament,' in *The Celtic Temperament and Other Essays* (London: George Allen, 1901), 27–43. 'What a difference there is between the manner of the Teutons and the manner of the Celts!' Grierson exclaims. The Celts have 'imagination, sentiment,' 'melancholy and passion.' The Germans are 'militant, vehement,' and 'command the world's attention as much as a great flood or a calamitous battle' (28–9 and 36).
10 'English and Welsh,' 171–2.
11 '*Beowulf*,' 26.
12 For a fascinating study of England's infatuation with the Scandinavian north, see Andrew Wawn's *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000).
13 Chaucer's Wife of Bath, in her fourteenth-century tirade against the fairy-exterminating 'lymytours' and 'holy freres,' knew the problem well (*The Canterbury Tales*, line 840), as did the seventeenth-century Richard Corbet, who wrote 'The Fairies' Farewell.'
14 H.R. Ellis Davidson, *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988).
15 Even Iceland – valued for its Nordic purity – had been influenced by Christianity and by contact with the Celts.
16 The belief in Arthur's solid Englishness (his name, in fact, is Welsh) was so prevailing that Lady Charlotte Guest, in her 1849 translation of *The Mabinogion* (a translation Tolkien knew well) felt it necessary to remind, or inform, her readers that Celtic origins lie behind Arthurian tales. Chivalry, she claims (in an attempt to explain the problem), formed a bond for 'warriors of France, Spain, and Italy, with those of pure Teutonic descent.' This bond, however, did not include the Celts, who had been pushed to the outskirts of Britain and who did not want 'brotherhood' with their conquerors. See *The Mabinogion*, ed. and trans. Lady Charlotte Guest (London: J.M. Dent and Company; New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1906), 5.
17 Matthew Arnold, 'On the Study of Celtic Literature,' in *Lectures and Essays in Criticism*, ed. R.H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 383 and 342–3.
18 'I once met [Eddison],' Tolkien wrote. 'I heard him in Mr. Lewis's room in

Magdalen College read aloud some parts of his own works ... He did it extremely well. I read his works with great enjoyment for their sheer literary merit ... Incidentally, I thought his nomenclature slipshod and often inept. In spite of all which, I still think of him as the greatest and most convincing writer of "invented worlds" that I have read' (*Letters*, 258).

19 E.R. Eddison in a rough draft of an unpublished letter to his brother-in-law, Keith Henderson, written 5 February 1923 (Ms. Eng. Letters c. 231, item 18, E.R. Eddison Correspondence, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford). The letter appears to be in response to a conversation Henderson and Eddison had the previous day. Eddison makes similar statements in a draft of a 'Note' for his book, *Styrbiorn the Strong* (published 1926). 'The spirit of the North, to inheritance of which I believe ... our own country largely owes her greatness, is embodied in its purest form in the prose epic, the Icelandic sagas of the classical age.' He continues on to claim these Icelandic works have no 'Keltic twilight,' 'no embroidery,' 'no boggling at truth' but are instead full of 'shrewd insight into character' and show much 'philosophy of hard and manly life' (SRQ 823.91 ED 23, Correspondence Relating to *Styrbiorn the Strong*, Leeds Public Library, Leeds).

20 Even that champion of the underdog, Frederick Engels, believed 'the sensuous and excitable nature of the Irish prevents them from undertaking tasks which require sober judgment and tenacity of purpose.' They should 'stick to farming – and farming of a very primitive kind,' Engels claimed in 1845; *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, ed. and trans. W.O. Henderson and W.H. Chaloner (New York: MacMillan Company, 1958), 309.

21 'A Dialogue,' *Minas Tirith Evening-Star* 9, no. 2 (January 1980): 21. The dialogue included Humphrey Carpenter and Dr Clyde S. Kilby, as well as Professor George Sayer, and was recorded 29 September 1979 at Wheaton, Illinois. For further commentary on the way in which Tolkien saw earth or soil as closely involved with national character, see Michael Drout's introduction to J.R.R. Tolkien, *Beowulf and the Critics*, ed. Michael D.C. Drout (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), 10–16.

22 Tolkien, however, disliked Wagner's presentation of northern myths and resented being compared to him.

23 Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and The Heroic in History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1900), 14.

24 William Morris, preface to *The Story of the Volsungs and the Niblungs in The Collected Works of William Morris*, vol. 7 (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), 286.

25 As T.A. Shippey demonstrates in *The Road to Middle-earth*, Tolkien's early

attempts to bring Old English (Anglo-Saxon) elements into his mythology, show 'how difficult it has become to create a "mythology for England" out of pure English material!' (271). For Shippey's analysis of Tolkien's compositional problem, see 268–71.

26 In 1969 alone, three critics noted the presence of Norse mythology in *The Lord of the Rings*: John Sprott Ryan in *Tolkien: Cult or Culture?* (Armidale, New South Wales, Australia: University of New England, 1969); Lin Carter in *Tolkien: A Look Behind* The Lord of the Rings (New York: Ballantine, 1969); and William H. Green, '*The Hobbit* and Other Fiction by J.R.R. Tolkien: Their Roots in Medieval Heroic Literature and Language' (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1969).

27 'English and Welsh,' 189.

28 Ibid., 190 and 194.

29 J.R.R. Tolkien, 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,' in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, 80.

30 Introduction to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knigh*t, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon (1925; repr. with corrections, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), xii. See as well Tolkien's essay 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight' in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, 72–108.

31 *The Mabinogion*, ed. and trans. Lady Charlotte Guest, 372.

32 It is the Elves' 'doom,' Tolkien wrote in a 1951 letter, to 'last' while the world lasts, 'never leaving it even when "slain," but returning' to life again (147). See as well *The Silmarillion*, 42.

33 *The Mabinogion*, 322. In connection with 'Habit,' see Tolkien's comments about a letter to *The Observer* from 1938; this letter, which mentions a creature called 'The Hobbit,' was signed, oddly enough, 'Habit' (*Letters*, 406–7). For other possible sources of *hobbit*, see Douglas A. Anderson, *The Annotated Hobbit*, rev. ed. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 9. Given Tolkien's professed dislike of allegory 'in all its manifestations' (*FR*, foreword, 7), the possibility of his having unknowingly taken *hobbit* from an allegorical 'Habit' is rich with irony!

34 From the introduction to a 1915 poem, 'Kortirion among the Trees' (I, 25). See as well Tolkien's 'The Cottage of Lost Play' (I, 13–44), written, according to Christopher Tolkien, no 'earlier than the winter of 1916–17' (I, 13).

35 In a 1954 letter to Hugh Brogan, Tolkien wrote that he 'now deeply' regretted his choice of *Elves* since the 'disastrous debasement of this word, in which Shakespeare played an unforgiveable part, has really overloaded it with regrettable tones, which are too much to overcome' (*Letters*, 185).

36 Elf or fairy accounts from 'later times' were far less likely to have influenced Tolkien, who was looking to a pre-Christian world. Moreover, in their

demeanour and intentions, Tolkien's Elves have little in common with the German *Elfen* of today or the Icelandic *huldu-fólk*. The same is true of the Danish *elver* (and the Norwegian *hulder* and the Swedish *huldror*), who are sometimes helpful and sometimes beautiful but give themselves away by sporting cow tails or having hollow backs.

37 *Edda*, trans. Anthony Faulkes (London and Melbourne: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1987), 19–20.

38 For a full study of Norse or Teutonic elves in Tolkien's literature, see T.A. Shippey's 'Light-elves, Dark-elves, and Others: Tolkien's Elvish Problem,' *Tolkien Studies* I (2004): 1–15.

39 'Ides Ælfscýne' (Elf-fair Lady) is the title of one of thirteen poems Tolkien wrote and contributed to *Songs for the Philologists*, which were published in 1936, some ten years or more after they were written. The poem is in Old English and can be found in Appendix B of Shippey's *The Road to Middle-earth* (with a translation by Shippey included). The word *ælfscýne* not only appears in the title but is repeated in each of the six refrains.

40 In one of his attempts to include more Anglo-Saxon elements in his mythology for England, Tolkien introduced the character 'Ælfwine of England' (first called Ottor the Wanderer and later Eriol) in his early 'Silmarillion' drafts. Ælfwine means 'Elf-friend' but Ælfwine (Ottor, Eriol) could not be made to fit satisfactorily into Tolkien's history and does not long endure. See Christopher Tolkien's commentary (I, 22–7) on what he calls one of 'the knottiest and most obscure matters in the whole history of Middle-earth' (I, 23). The name Ælfwine and variations on it also appear in 'The Lost Road' (V) and 'The Notion Club Papers' (IX), works that Tolkien generated in the late 1930s and mid-1940s but also failed to complete. For a thorough analysis of these two works see Verlyn Flieger, *A Question of Time: J.R.R. Tolkien's Road to Faërie* (Kent, OH and London: Kent State University Press, 1997).

41 For an explanation of the first division among the Elves and for a chart depicting the full complexity of Tolkien's Elven race, see *The Silmarillion*, 309 and 52. See as well Verlyn Flieger, *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World*, rev. ed. (Kent, OH and London: Kent State University Press, 2002), esp. chapter 10.

42 See *The Lost Road*, V, 77, where Christopher Tolkien cites 'tantalizingly brief' notes his father made for individual tales that were never written. The fourth notation states only: 'a Tuatha-de-Danaan story, or Tir-nan-Og.'

43 Just as with the light-elves of the Norse, there was little to work with in the Anglo-Saxon *orc* and *ent*, or in the Anglo-Saxon name, *Ing* (which Tolkien also used); but, where information was short, Tolkien could invent. In doing

so he was able to give life to the limited literary material of his 'own beloved country' (with its Anglo-Saxon past), a country sorely lacking in stories that are 'bound up with its tongue and soil' (*Letters*, 144). For *orc*, *ent*, and other Anglo-Saxon terms or names rejuvenated by Tolkien, see Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, 60n. and 119. For *Ing*, see II, 304; Clive Tolley, 'And the Word Was Made Flesh,' *Mallorn* 32 (September 1995): 9–11; and once again Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, 271.

44 Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, 57.

45 In a 1944 letter to his son Christopher, Tolkien made the following proclamation: 'Much though I love and admire little lanes and hedges and rustling trees and the soft rolling contours of a rich champain, the thing that stirs me most and comes nearest to heart's satisfaction for me is space, and I would be willing to barter barrenness for it: indeed I think I like barrenness itself, whenever I have seen it. My heart still lingers among the high stony wastes among the morains and mountain-wreckage, silent in spite of the sound of thin chill water' (90–1).

46 In a 1967 letter Tolkien also claims that Middle-earth is not based purely on the 'North-west' of Europe (including England) but reaches in equivalent latitude to the 'north shores of the Mediterranean' (376). These more southerly regions never directly enter the story; nonetheless, it is intriguing to realize that 'Mediterranean' (though for a different philological reason) can itself be translated as 'middle earth.'

47 In *The Road to Middle-earth*, Shippey makes a convincing argument that Tom Bombadil's domain came from the England Tolkien knew. The sun-dappled Withywindle, with its Old Man Willow, is reminiscent of the Cherwell, 'meaning probably "the winding river."' *Withy* itself, says Shippey, is a local word for *willow*, and *windle* means *winding brook* (98).

48 Tolkien himself refers to the 'Englishry' of Sam, 'this jewel among the hobbits,' and regrets he did not give all hobbits 'very English names' (*Letters*, 88).

Chapter 2: Skin-Changing in More than One Sense: The Complexity of Beorn

1 Diana Wynne Jones, 'The Shape of the Narrative in *The Lord of the Rings*,' in *J.R.R. Tolkien: This Far Land*, ed. Robert Giddings (London: Vision Press Ltd, 1983 and Totoway, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1984), 95–6.

2 Tolkien chose not to bring Christianity openly into his mythology, claiming to do so would be 'fatal': nonetheless he realized his own religion could still 'be deduced,' as it is by those who recognize parallels between Galadriel and Catholic ideas of Mary (*Letters*, 144 and 288).

3 Tolkien's pencil-and-ink drawings of Beorn's hall are closely modelled after an illustration of a Norse hall interior done by his colleague, E.V. Gordon, and included in Gordon's 1927 *An Introduction to Old Norse*. For a comparison, see Wayne Hammond and Christina Scull, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 122–3.
4 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,' the essay, (80).
5 It was important to Tolkien that the unknown author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* used 'the ancient English measure which had descended from antiquity, that kind of verse which is now called "alliterative"' (Christopher Tolkien's Introduction to J.R.R. Tolkien's translation of *Gawain*, 14). This is the same form of verse the *Beowulf* poet used; and *Beowulf*, though written in Old English, is a Scandinavian tale.
6 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, trans. J.R.R. Tolkien, 46.
7 Ibid., 42–3.
8 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, rev. ed., ed. and trans. Brian Stone (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1964), 9.
9 Though the quoted passage is from Tolkien's translation, both Stone and Tolkien use *trolls* where the poem has *wodwos* (savage or wild men), a decision that adds to the northern effect beyond the original. On the other hand, *etayneȝ* is an Anglo-Saxon word for *giant*, and yet both Stone and Tolkien translate *etayneȝ* as *ogre*, a word of French origin and therefore a word less appropriately northern but more typical of Arthurian tales.
10 'Beowulf,' 33–4.
11 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,' the essay, 73.
12 This interpretation was well known by the latter half of the nineteenth century and was therefore familiar to Tolkien. For additional accounts of 'bear shirt' or 'wolf-coat' transformations among Norse warriors, and for related traditions among the Celts, see Davidson, *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe* (80–1).
13 *Goblin*, however, is not Norse but is probably Anglo-Norman with Latin roots. After *The Hobbit*, Tolkien substituted the more linguistically appropriate *orc*.
14 Yule was originally the Viking version of a mid-winter feast, one which later came to be associated with the birth of Christ. 'There is nothing I dislike about Christmas particularly,' Tolkien is quoted in the *Oxford Times* (22 December 1972); 'I just divide it into two. There is Yule – which means presents and Christmas trees and things; and there is Christmas which is the religious festival and peace.'
15 See Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, 235.
16 Ibid., 74.

Chapter 3: Bridges, Gates, and Doors

1 *Kalevala*, a prose translation by Aili Kolehmainen Johnson (Hancock, MI: Book Concern, 1950), 17–22 passim. A poetic version is also available as *The Kalevala: Or the Poems of the Kaleva District*, trans. Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr (Cambridge, MA, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1963).
2 In his interview with Denys Gueroult Tolkien admits that you cannot 'really have such a sort of mixed culture as I describe: which includes tobacco, umbrellas, and other things,' but he 'wanted people simply to get inside this story and take it in a sense as actual history.'
3 *The Mabinogion*, 14 and 289; Alwyn and Brinley Rees, *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1961), 42; 'English and Welsh,' 173.
4 In a tale of St Collen cited by Lady Charlotte Guest, a tale that combines Christian and Celtic belief, King Arawn of the fairy realm and his splendid castle on a hill are banished in an instant by Christianity, 'so that there was neither castle, nor troops, nor men, nor maidens, nor music, nor song, nor steeds, nor youths, nor banquet, nor the appearance of any thing whatever, but the green hills.' *The Mabinogion*, 311.
5 The World Tree Yggdrasill is said to connect, support, and separate the Norse tiered trio of worlds, but journeys between higher and lower worlds often include no traveling up or down. The giants (themselves largely representative of natural forces or formations) seem to shrink and expand with mythological whim, and rivers appear or disappear almost randomly.
6 Not all of Asgard's gods are Aesir. Some originally belonged to the Vanir race of gods but came to Asgard as hostages in settlements of war. It is worth noticing that Tolkien follows the Norse pattern of an initial *A* and *V* and a concluding *r* (plural form) for the Ainur and Valar of his own pantheon.
7 Among the numerous animal or insect titles that are applied to Gollum is that of a 'black squirrel,' swiftly climbing the Ithilien trees (*TT*, 283). And whether or not Tolkien had the Norse Ratatosk in mind when he applied this attribute to Gollum, it is evident that Gollum serves as a messenger or a intermediary between various regions within Middle-earth: from the depths of the Misty Mountains to the death-realm of Mordor to the paradisiacal Lothlórien.
8 Ragnarok imagery also appears in *The Silmarillion* and various 'Silmarillion' drafts, most obviously so in Tolkien's references to 'the last battle of all' in Volume IV of *The History of Middle-earth* (40).
9 This top hinging system is typical of Old Norse doors.
10 See the *Prose Edda* tale Of Thor and Loki's journey to Utgard.

11 Geri shares a name with one of Odin's two wolves (Geri and Freki). All three names – Geri, Gífr, and Freki – are representative of greed.
12 For Tolkien's own illustrations combining bridges and gates, see Hammond and Scull, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator*, 124–8.
13 Tolkien's translation of *Sir Orfeo* (along with *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Pearl*) was published in 1975 shortly after his death. See *Sir Orfeo* in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo*, trans. J.R.R. Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978).
14 Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, trans. Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur (New York: American-Scandinavian Foundation; London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 123.
15 Peter Berresford Ellis, *A Dictionary of Irish Mythology* (1987; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 9.
16 In *The Silmarillion*, there is also the great Elven city of Godonlin with its high walls, towers, and gates.
17 According to Matthew Arnold, Celts have 'a peculiarly near and intimate feeling of nature and the life of nature.' The Celt's 'sensibility,' Arnold goes on to say, draws him towards 'natural beauty and natural magic' which he is then able to 'half-divine' ('On the Study of Celtic Literature,' 347). In Francis Grierson's words, the 'moods' of the Celt 'are akin to the changes and fluctuations of nature' ('The Celtic Temperament,' 35).
18 Magic is strongest, according to Celtic belief, at boundaries and thresholds and at twilight, when things are in-between. See Rees and Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, 344–5. Among a number of other potent ambiguities, Aywyn and Brinley Rees list the mistletoe, which is neither shrub nor tree; half-done bread, which is neither raw nor baked; and dew, which belongs neither to night or day.
19 *Sir Orfeo*, lines 349 and 352. (It is worth noting that Sir Orfeo follows Celtic tradition by encountering the fairy host precisely at midday – between morning and afternoon.)
20 For an analysis of Lothlórien time, see Flieger, *A Question of Time*, chapter 4.
21 Eagles in Norse mythology are likely to be gods or giants in shape-shifted form, typically a god or giant who is transgressing on another's rightful plane, as the giant Thiazi does to acquire Asgard's apples or as both Odin and the giant Suttung do when Odin steals the Mead of Poetry.

Chapter 4: Iceland and Middle-earth: Two Who Loved the North

1 J.W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, vol. 1 (New York and London: Benjamin Blom, 1968), 215.

2 William Morris, *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, vol. 1, 1848–80 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 153.
3 See in particular the following three essays: 'The Early Literature of the North – Iceland,' where Morris describes how 'the greatest men lent a hand in ordinary field and house work,' mending gates, sowing corn, sailing ships, or working as smiths (184); 'Early England,' where he writes of King Sigurd 'found in his hayfield,' working at harvest time (169); and the 'The Gothic Revival I,' where he extols fourteenth-century art, its beauty, freedom, and availability – all three essays in William Morris, *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, ed. Eugene D. LeMire (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), 179–98, 158–78, and 54–73.
4 According to Christopher Tolkien, there was too little money for such expenditures, and his father's usual pattern was to borrow from lending libraries the books he could not afford to buy, including various books by William Morris. (Conversation with Christopher Tolkien, 26 July 1987.) Though Christopher Tolkien did not remember his father specifically reading the *Icelandic Journals*, he assumed that he had. In any case, the large number of close parallels between *The Hobbit* and the *Journals* should remove any doubts.
5 *The Road to Middle-earth*, 301. An accidental amalgamation occurs here. Shippey's *The Road to Middle-earth* gives Morris's title as *The Wood at the World's End*, a blending of Morris's *The Well at the World's End* with his *The Wood Beyond the World*, which is certainly the romance intended. The date cited (1894) and the book's forest setting make this clear.
6 See Humphrey Carpenter's biography (45–7) for details about this whimsically named organization and its members.
7 Morris's fellow travellers were Charles Faulkner, a partner in his firm and a friend since their Oxford days; W.H. Evans, a 'soldier and sportsman'; and Eiríkr Magnússon, Morris's Icelandic tutor and friend.
8 'The original stronghold of Evil was (as traditionally) in the North,' Tolkien wrote; and, 'as that had been destroyed, and was indeed under the sea, there had to be a new stronghold, far removed from the Valar, the Elves, and the sea-power of Númenor' (*Letters*, 307). He felt, as well, that the 'east' has its own traditional danger and that those who have a 'North-western temper and temperature' will envision 'the endless lands (out of which enemies mostly come) to the East' (*Letters*, 212).
9 The walking tour consisted of 'a mixed party of about the same size as the company in *The Hobbit*,' Tolkien wrote in 1961. At one point 'we were nearly destroyed by boulders ... rolling down a snow-slope. An enormous rock in fact passed between me and the next in front. That and the "thunder-battle"

– a bad night in which we lost our way and slept in a cattle-shed – appear in *The Hobbit*' (*Letter*s, 309).

10 Icelandic ponies, referred to as 'horses' by Icelanders (but falling between horses and ponies in size), are capable of surviving the Icelandic winters on their own. Unlike other saddle horses, they have a fifth gait, the *tölt*, an extremely smooth four-beat gait which can be performed at any speed from a walk to a fast gallop. In AD 930, Iceland's parliament passed laws forbidding the importation of any horses into the country. Even today a horse that leaves Iceland is not allowed to return.

11 William Morris, *Icelandic Journals* (Fontwell, Sussex: Centaur Press Ltd, 1969), 79. Throughout this chapter, quotations from the *Icelandic Journals* will be indicated parenthetically with the abbreviation *Journals*.

12 Hidden retreats in Norse literature have a different ambiance. The outlaw Grettir is taken in for the winter by Thórir (a half-giant or half-troll); but Thórir's thermally warmed valley of fat sheep (there for the eating) shares little beyond warmth and seclusion with Rivendell or with any Elven haven.

13 I have chosen to follow Morris's spelling, though it sometimes differs from Icelandic spelling today. Morris also frequently uses Anglicized or half-Anglicized forms.

14 'The Story of Gunnlaug the Worm-Tongue and Raven the Skald,' jointly translated by William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon, was published in the *Fortnightly Review* 11 (January 1869): 27–56.

15 For T.A. Shippey's full explanation of Frodo's name, its Norse origin *Fróthi* ('the wise one') and its English form *Fróda*, which appears in *Beowulf*, see *The Road to Middle-earth*, 184–9.

16 'I ... am but five foot six,' Morris states (*Journals*, 40).

17 Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (London: Faber, 1994), 293.

Chapter 5: Spiders and Evil Red Eyes: The Shadow Sides of Gandalf and Galadriel

1 In 'real life' (Tolkien wrote to his son Christopher during the Second World War) things are not 'as clear cut as in a story' (*Letters*, 78). Shortly afterwards (still in May of 1944) he again wrote Christopher, this time saying that in real life 'men are on both sides: which means a motley alliance of orcs, beasts, demons, plain naturally honest men, and angels' (*Letters*, 82).

2 Clive Tolley presents an excellent example of the 'enticement' Tolkien feels for 'ambiguous character' in 'And the Word Was Made Flesh,' 13–14. What

Tolley shows, among a good number of other things, is the way in which Tolkien re-apportions conflicting traits among his own characters by taking the complex, morally compromised figure of Unferth from *Beowulf* and turning him into the consistently treacherous Wormtongue. (Another likely source, though not an ambiguous source, for Wormtongue's character is Bikki, the wicked counsellor of the aged king Jörmunrekk in the eddic poem *Sigurdarkvida in Skamma*.)

3 For information about and a copy of this painting by the German artist Josef Madlener, see Anderson, *The Annotated Hobbit*, 38.

4 *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas, 1928), 72–4. It is difficult to know which translation to use. Scholars translate Odin's names in different ways, and we do not have a translation by Tolkien or know what translation he would have preferred; he read in the original Old Norse. I have settled on Lee Hollander's somewhat old-fashioned 1928 translation. Hollander published a revised edition in 1962, but the earlier book seems more consistent with what Tolkien might have known.

5 *The Elder Edda: A Selection*, trans. Paul B. Taylor and W.H. Auden (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 69–70.

6 *Cassell's Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend*, ed. Andy Orchard (London: Cassell, 1997).

7 As early as 1966, John Sprott Ryan noted Gandalf's Odin-like attire and his Odin-like dealings with ravens and eagles, in 'German Mythology applied – The Extension of the Literary Folk Memory,' Folklore XXVII (Spring 1966): 45–59. The most perceptive early critic, however, was William H. Green, who (in his 1969 dissertation) not only recognized similarities in Gandalf's and Odin's old man guises and in their connections to eagles but also in their horses and battles (Moria and Ragnarok). Green, though he does not elaborate on Tolkien's tendency for moral division, was also the first to note that certain of Odin's negative characteristics are allotted to the Dark Lord.

8 The connection between Odin and Manwë is one Tolkien himself alludes to in early notebooks cited in *The Book of Lost Tales* (II, 290). Here Tolkien writes that the 'fairies' (who later became the Elves) 'identified' Odin with Manweg (Manwë). A detailed account of Odin imagery and Odin references in *The Silmarillion* and *The History of Middle-earth* (and the ways in which Gandalf is a Middle-earth representative of Manwë) can be found in Marjorie Burns's 'Gandalf and Odin,' *Tolkien's* Legendarium*: Essays on The History of Middle-earth*, ed. Verlyn Flieger and Carl F. Hostetter (Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 2000), 219–31. A comparison of the full Norse pantheon with Tolkien's individual Valar appears in Marjorie Burns's

'Norse and Christian Gods: The Integrative Theology of J.R.R. Tolkien,' *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth: A Reader*, ed. Jane Chance (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky 2004), 163–78.

9 See, for example, *Letters*, 159n. and 202.

10 Interestingly enough, Norse mythology itself plays with similar doubling. As H.R. Ellis Davidson suggests, there are ways in which 'Loki as the ambivalent mischief-maker' can be seen 'as a kind of Odin-figure in reverse,' 'a kind of shadow Odin,' a parody of Odin. When we look at Loki from this perspective, much about this enigmatic, trickster god – his shamanism, his shape-changing, his journeys and links to the dead, his role in Sleipnir's creation, and his fathering of the giant wolf Fenrir (destroyer of Odin) – makes a kind of mystical, backhanded sense (181). And beyond Loki is Loki's own parody, Utgard-Loki, the giant, ultra-version of Loki that Thor and Loki confront in one of the eddic tales. H.R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1964), 181.

11 Lee M. Hollander, in his translation of *The Poetic Edda*, interprets the *Edda*'s somewhat cryptic allusion to eagle and wolf to mean their 'carved images' decorate 'the gable ends' of Valhalla, so symbolizing Odin's 'warlike activities' (64).

12 *The Silmarillion*, 110, 182, and 243.

13 For the origins of Tolkien's *Warg* in the Old Norse *vargr*, meaning both 'wolf' and 'outlaw,' see T.A. Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 30–1.

14 Ruth S. Noel interprets 'Naur an edraith ammen!' as a 'spell producing fire' and translates 'Naur dan i ngaurhoth!' to mean, more specifically, 'Fire take the werewolves!' in Ruth S. Noel, *The Languages of Tolkien's Middle-earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974, 1980), 37–8.

15 *Mearas* is Anglo-Saxon for 'horse,' appropriately so since the names of the Rohirrim (the Rohan people) are based on 'forms like (but not identical with) Old English' (*Letters*, 175).

16 In a 1965 letter, Tolkien wrote that Shadowfax is 'an Elvish equivalent of ordinary horses' and that he 'certainly went with Gandalf [across the Sea], though this is not stated' (354). To add to this, in a rejected epilogue to *The Lord of the Rings*, Sam explains to his children that Shadowfax went on the ship with Gandalf. 'Of course,' says Sam, 'Gandalf couldn't have a' left him behind' (IX, 120).

17 Rees and Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, 36.

18 Lucy Allen Paton, *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance*, 2nd ed., ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (New York: Burt Franklin, 1960), 11. Paton's book was first published in 1903.

19 J.R.R. Tolkien and Donald Swann, *The Road Goes Ever On: A Song Cycle*, 2nd ed. (London, Boston, and Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1978).
20 Paton, *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance*, 12.
21 Roger Sherman Loomis, *Wales and the Arthurian Legend* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1956), 126. Though Loomis makes broad theoretical sweeps, he draws together much of the prevalent thinking of Tolkien's time. Tolkien knew Loomis's work and cites him in the introduction to the Tolkien and Gordon edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (xii).
22 It matters little that, in early drafts, Galadriel holds the Ring of Earth rather than the Ring of Water. Either will do to suggest fertility. (See VII 260 and 265.)
23 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. Tolkien and Gordon, 115. *Morrigu* or *Morrigain* are how Tolkien and Gordon render her name.
24 Lucy Allen Paton cites a late-nineteenth-century Breton tale relating how 'Morgain became enamoured of Arthur,' carried him to Avalon, and 'made him forget Guinevere' (*Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance*, 34n.).
25 Paton, *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance*, 4–5.
26 Loomis, *Wales and the Arthurian Legend*, 105.
27 See, for example, *Letters* (146), *The History of Middle-earth* XII (185), or *The Two Towers*, where Gimli refers to 'Queen Galadriel' (152). Elsewhere Tolkien insists she should not be called a queen (*Letters*, 274, for example).
28 A further reference to Galadriel's likely role in the healing of Gandalf appears in a 1954 letter, where Tolkien links Gandalf's recovery with 'Galadriel's power' (*Letters*, 203).
29 Muriel A. Whitaker, *The Legends of King Arthur in Art* (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1990), 214. See as well Debra N. Mancoff, *The Return of King Arthur: The Legend Through Victorian Eyes* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1995), and Debra N. Mancoff, *The Arthurian Revival in Victorian Art* (New York: Garland, 1990) for excellent examples (in text and plate) of the Victorians' fascination with the Arthurian world and its enchantress fays. Particularly indicative are William Holman Hunt's well-known renditions of the Lady of Shalott (his illustration of 1857 and the 1886–1905 reworking in oil), Frederick Sandys's *Morgan-le-Fay* (brush point rendered into oil in 1862–3) or his splendid *Vivian* (1863), and Sir Edward Burne-Jones's paintings of Vivian with Merlin (1861–74) or his paintings of Morgan le Fay appearing dangerous and scheming in an 1862 watercolour and attentive and helpful in an 1880–98 oil of the queens who watch over the wounded Arthur.
30 H. Rider Haggard, *She*, in *The Works of H. Rider Haggard* (New York: Walter J. Black, Inc., 1928).

31 John Rateliff, '*She* and Tolkien,' *Mythlore* 8, no. 28 (Summer 1981): 6–8. Tolkien's statement that *She* interested him 'as much as anything' when he was a boy can be found in 'An Interview with Tolkien,' 40 (by Resnick).
32 Haggard, *She*, 256.
33 The 'fairy' Lady of Shalott also shares a number of traits and images with both Ayesha and Galadriel: she too lives in isolation – on a protected, enchanted island. She too sees through her mirror ('shadows of the world'). She too is a weaver and a woman of great beauty and power, a woman spoken of as dangerous and strange. She too is depicted (in Hunt's well-known renditions) with dark, free-flowing hair, hair as abundant and uncontained as Ayesha's rich 'masses' of 'raven black.' She too relinquishes power, as Galadriel does, and, like Ayesha, her life as well (though Haggard later resurrected Ayesha and used her in further books).
34 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil and Other Verses from The Red Book* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963), 11 and 15. The story of Tom's wooing of Goldberry first appeared in the *Oxford Magazine* in 1934 and was later republished in a 1962 British edition and again in *The Tolkien Reader* (1966).
35 J.R.R. Tolkien, 'The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun,' *Welsh Review* Vol. 4, no. 4 (December 1945): 254–66.
36 Shippey, *Author of the Century*, 293.
37 The original Breton lay and other similar tales and lays appeared in collections published in the late nineteenth century, collections that Tolkien most certainly knew. See Jessica Yates, 'The Source of "The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun,"' *Leaves from the Tree: J.R.R. Tolkien's Shorter Fiction* (London: Tolkien Society, 1991), 63–71. Though variations on the tale are found as far away as Scandinavia, the Breton version discussed by Yates is the one that appears most directly connected to Tolkien's Corrigan.
38 William Morris has his own fountain enchantresses. In *The Wood Beyond the World*, there are two magical women – one, 'the Mistress,' whose dwelling is an artificial Paradise with a fountain of gold in its centre, the other 'the Maid,' who is discovered within a circle of oak trees near a natural fountain. The Mistress casts 'her net' to entrap the hero (and others); the Maid, who is called 'the land's increase,' is the one who sets him free. If we remember that Galadriel ('the Lady in the Golden Wood' and the preserver of Lothlórien) also has a fountain in the centre of her realm and that Éomer, in his ignorance, believes that 'few escape her nets,' it seems likely enough that Morris also influenced Tolkien's Galadriel. *The Complete Works of William Morris*, vol. 17 (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966).

39 Haggard, *She*, 255.

40 Since *lob* is an obsolete word for spider (*lobbe* in Old English), *Shelob*, means, simply enough, *she-spider*.

41 In 1974 essay, comparing G.K. Chesterton's poem *The Ballad of the White Horse* with *The Lord of the Rings*, Christopher Clausen commented on Galadriel's light and the image of Galadriel that comes to Sam within Shelob's tunnels. See Christopher Clausen, '*Lord of the Rings* and *The Ballad of the White Horse*,' *South Atlantic Bulletin* 39, no. 2 (May 1974): 10–16. Five years later, two other critics went a step further by noting the ways in which Galadriel is not just opposed to Shelob but matched and contrasted with her in several precise capacities. See Anne Cotton Petty, *One Ring to Bind Them All: Tolkien's Mythology* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1979), 53; and Peter Damien Goselin, 'Two Faces of Eve: Galadriel and Shelob as Anima Figures,' *Mythlore* 6, no. 3 (Summer 1979): 3–4.

42 In early drafts of *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien himself uses the name 'Kôr' (diacritical mark and all) for his City of the Elves and for the hill where that City lies. See Volume I, throughout.

43 That the Red Cross Knight and Sam both use swords (so giving fodder to Freudians) is inevitable. What other weapon would they be likely to use? This is not to deny sexuality is present. It is, if only in the vile and excessive breeding both monsters display, but sex itself does not take place with Errour or Shelob, anymore than it does when Beowulf kills Grendel's mother with a mighty sword. For a thorough response to those who misunderstand sexuality in Tolkien, see Daniel Timmons, 'Hobbit Sex and Sensuality in *The Lord of the Rings*,' *Mythlore* 23, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 70–9.

44 The Celts, however, do not have it all; in a 1989 article on Tolkien's monsters, Joe Abbott notes that the hero of the *Ala Flekks Saga* encounters the 'troll-woman Night' within a cave as dark and foul as Shelob's. See Joe Abbott, 'Tolkien's Monsters: Concept and Function in *The Lord of the Rings*. (Part II) Shelob the Great,' *Mythlore* 60 (Winter 1989): 41.

45 *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, Part IV, trans. Edward Gwynn (1924; repr., Dublin: W. and G. Baird Ltd, 1991), 196–201.

46 The Cave of Cruachan, also called the Hell's Gate of Ireland, is a familiar gateway to the Otherworld, one that appears repeatedly in tales where magical beings or magical animals (generally highly destructive ones) enter into our world. In one account, the hero, Nera, is shown a horrifying vision of severed heads that lie within the cave; in other accounts, destructive birds or pigs emerge from the Cave of Cruachan, and in yet another tale, magical cats are set loose from the cave and attack three warriors. A similar image

of murderous, cave-dwelling cats appears in Tolkien's 'Lay of Aotrou and Itroun.' (See Rees and Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, for further details on the Cave of Cruachan and other supernatural caves.)

47 See lines 37–8.

48 Haggard, *She*, 272.

49 The Maiar and Valar are both 'Holy Ones,' created by Ilúvatar, 'Father of All,' before the making of the World. The Maiar, however, are of lesser degree than the Valar.

50 Sam, for example, prays, or as good as prays, to Galadriel, 'the Lady,' asking for 'light and water' on the way to Mount Doom, and Melian (in the earliest 'Silmarillion' of 1926–30) is given an almost goddess-like role as one of the 'divine maidens of the Vala Lórien' and as the 'divine mother' of Lúthien. (See IV, 13, 23, and 55.)

51 Both the titles *fay* and *queen* and the names Tolkien originally considered for Melian are good indications of an Arthurian heritage. In early drafts, she is variously referred to as Wendelin, Gwendeling, Gwenniel, Gwenethlin, Gwendhiling, and Gwendelin, as well as Gwedheling, names with a clear Arthurian ring (II, 244).

52 See I, 152–3, II, 160, and VIII, 196–9.

Chapter 6: Wisewomen, Shieldmaidens, Nymphs, and Goddesses

1 In 'The Road Goes Ever On,' a 1974 unpublished commentary on Tolkien, Priscilla Tolkien states that it was 'something of a myth' that her father read *The Hobbit* aloud to his children. 'I think he may have read some of it to my older brothers, but he certainly did not to me, as far as I can remember.'

2 Tolkien had a propensity for creating female spiders. In *The Silmarillion*, Ungoliant, the first and greatest of all spiders, is female. It is she who aids Melkor in the destruction of the Trees of Valinor; and it is her name, instead of 'Shelob,' that Tolkien originally used in drafts of *The Two Towers*. (See VIII, chapter 8.) Moreover, according to John Rateliff, the very earliest draft of the Mirkwood episode has female pronouns for the spiders rather than the unspecified 'they' or 'it' of the published book (from conversation and correspondence with John D. Rateliff, July 2002).

3 Arnold, 'On the Study of Celtic Literature,' 347. Francis Grierson, though he never quite calls the Celts effeminate, comes close to doing so in his reference to Celtic 'charm,' 'mystical depth,' 'beauty,' and 'sentiment' (Grierson, 'The Celtic Temperament,' 30).

4 Jared Lobdell, *England and Always: Tolkien's World of the Rings* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 16.

5 See in particular the story of Lúthien, who more than once escapes bondage and who rescues her lover, Beren, from Sauron's dungeons ('Of Beren and Lúthien' in *The Silmarillion*); the story of Aredhel, who grows weary of 'the guarded city of Gondolin' and rides outward into 'the wide lands' to seek her missing brother ('Of Maeglin' in *The Silmarillion*, 131); and the story of Elwing, mother of Elrond, who escapes the destruction of Doriath and later flies far over the sea in the form of a bird to join Eärendil ('Of the Voyage of Eärendil and the War of Wrath' in *The Silmarillion*).

6 W.H. Auden, 'The Quest Hero,' in *Tolkien and the Critics: Essays on J.R.R. Tolkien's* The Lord of the Rings, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 49.

7 This passage – originally intended to accompany Appendix III of *The Lord of the Rings* – was cut from the final version, writes Tolkien, in order 'to lighten the boat' (*UT*, xxi).

8 Timothy R. O'Neill, *The Individuated Hobbit: Jung, Tolkien and the Archetypes of Middle-earth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 143.

9 An amazing and intriguing name, *Belladonna*, signifying, as it does both *beautiful lady* and *deadly nightshade*!

10 This technique of creating all male families is not unique to Tolkien. Haggard puts it to good use in his novel *She*, where the bachelor misanthrope, Holly, rears and later travels with his adopted son, Leo. It is intriguing as well to realize how frequently the same stratagem appears in twentieth-century comic book characters, in the stories of Donald Duck and his nephews, for example, or in Batman and Robin.

11 Minas Tirith, with its House of the Dead and its Rath Dínen, (Street of Silence), shares much with the Númenóreans, whose 'desire to escape death produced a cult of the dead' (*Letters*, 155).

12 'Frodo's attitude to weapons was personal,' writes Tolkien. 'He was not in modern terms a "pacifist." Of course, he was mainly horrified at the prospect of civil war among Hobbits; but he had (I suppose) also reached the conclusion that physical fighting is actually less ultimately effective than most (good) men think it!' (*Letters*, 255).

13 In a 1941 letter to his son Michael, Tolkien writes the following: 'The sexual impulse makes women ... very sympathetic and understanding, or specially desirous of being so (or seeming so), and very ready to enter into all the interests, as far as they can ... of the young man they are attracted to ... Under this impulse they can in fact often achieve very remarkable insight and understanding, even of things otherwise outside their natural range: for it is their gift to be receptive, stimulated, fertilized (in many other matters than the physical) by the male. Every teacher knows that. How quickly an

intelligent woman can be taught, grasp his ideas, see his point – and how (with rare exceptions) they can go no further, when they leave his hand, or when they cease to take a *personal* interest in *him*' (*Letters*, 49).

14 In the middle of a section outlining Éomer's position and life as king of Rohan, the following Appendix sentence appears: 'In that day Éowyn also won renown, for she fought in that battle, riding in disguise; and was known after in the Mark as the Lady of the Shield-arm' (*RK*, 351) – hardy a full discloser of all that she achieved!

15 In a draft of a letter, written likely in 1963, Tolkien defends himself against those who have been critical of 'the speed of the relationship' between Faramir and Éowyn. The 'stress' of (war and death) has always allowed feelings to 'ripen very quickly,' he claims (324).

16 It helps to realize that Tolkien did considerable work on the *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad*, two early English treatises on the role of women within the Medieval Christian world. Both, it is interesting to note, speak to the value of rendering service while distancing the self from the physical world.

17 O'Neill, *The Individuated Hobbit*, 106–8.

18 For the story of Eärendil see *The Silmarillion*, 241–2 and 246–55. See as well Carpenter, *Tolkien*, 64 and 71.

19 This act of star-creation has a direct parallel in Norse mythology, where Odin and his brothers place sparks from the fire realm into the heavens very much the way Varda (in early drafts of 'The Silmarillion') creates stars from silver sparks, setting some firmly in place but allowing others to wander on 'mazy courses.' See *The History of Middle-earth*, I, 113–14 and 181–2.

Chapter 7: Eating, Devouring, Sacrifice, and Ultimate Just Deserts (Why Elves Are Vegetarian and the Unrefined Are Not)

1 *Málsháttakvæði*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, 2A (København: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1967), 133.

2 *Gorgor* is itself linguistically intriguing, suggesting both *gore* and *gorge*. *Gor* is Anglo-Saxon for *filth*; *gorge* is late Middle English for *throat* (from french and Latin roots).

3 In *The Hobbit*, there is brief mention of elven 'roast meats' that tempt Bilbo and the dwarves off the trail (132). How do we explain this in light of Elven purity? For one, the first definition of *meat* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is food in general. *Meats*, then, may not mean flesh, though the word *roast* is suggestive of flesh. (Nut meats are a possibility.) There is this as well: even if these 'meats' are indeed flesh, we never see the Wood-elves eating flesh. The

whole affair may have been illusion, after all, as Bombur's 'Dream-dinners' are. And beyond all this, *Hobbit* elves are not *Lord of the Ring* Elves. In the later books they become more refined.

Chapter 8: Three Questions by Way of Conclusion

1 'English and Welsh,' 163.
2 'Beowulf,' 17.
3 Arnold, 'On the Study of Celtic Literature,' 354.
4 Grierson, 'The Celtic Temperament,' 31.
5 'English and Welsh,' 164 and 166.
6 'An Interview with Tolkien' (Resnick), 42.
7 '*Beowulf*,' 22–3.
8 Ibid., 22.
9 Ibid.

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