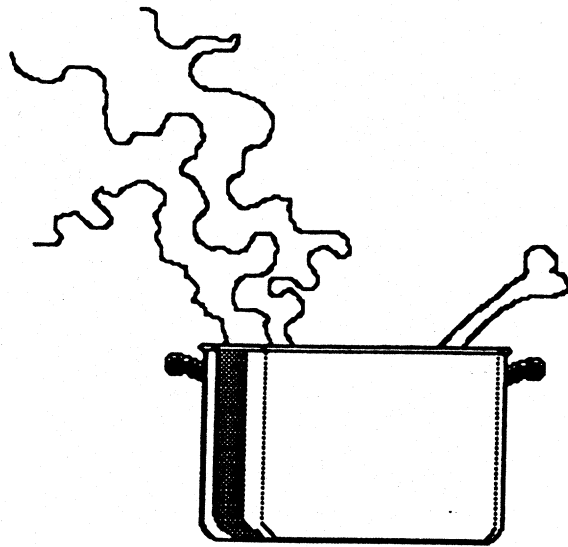


Tolkien's Cauldron:



Northern Literature and
The Lord of the Rings

Gloriana St. Clair

Preface

In the Spring of 1968 while I was studying the Old English poem Beowulf with Dr. Rudolph Bambas, my colleague and classmate Judith Moore suggested that I might enjoy reading a new work by J.R.R. Tolkien, known to us as the editor of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the author of that seminal article -- "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics." The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings delighted me that summer. In the fall, at the urging of another colleague, I enrolled in the Old Norse seminar. That conjunction of events proved to be the beginning of a lifelong study of Northern literature and its contributions to the cauldron of story which produced The Lord of the Rings, The Hobbit, The Silmarillion, and The Unfinished Tales. The first version of this study became my doctoral dissertation -- "Studies in the Sources of J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings."1

Throughout the years that followed while I was either teaching college English or working as a librarian, I have continued my research. The original study was based on about twenty-five sagas; that number has been tripled. Christopher Tolkien's careful publication of The Silmarillion, The Unfinished Tales, and six volumes of The History of Middle-earth has greatly expanded the canon available for scholarly study. Humphrey Carpenter's authorized biography has also been helpful.

However, the Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien have produced both the greatest joy and the greatest terror. Tolkien was an active and aggressive letter writer. In my original study, I had postulated a correlation between the wizard Gandalf and the Norse God Odin. Imagine my delight when I read Tolkien's letter to his publisher Sir Stanley Unwin about a proposed German translation: "He [the translator] has sent me some illustrations (of the Trolls and Gollum) which despite certain merits . . . are I fear too "Disnified" for my taste: Bilbo with a dribbling nose, and Gandalf as a figure of vulgar fun rather than the Odinic wanderer that I think of. . ."2 Imagine my dismay when I discovered that he thought source studies were "not very useful" (Letters, 150). Throughout my study, I have tried to abide by the conditions Tolkien set down in a letter to Peter Szabó Szentmihályi: "When

they [readers] have read it, some readers will (I suppose) wish to 'criticize' it, and even to analyze it, and if that is their mentality they are, of course, at liberty to do these things -- so long as they have first read it with attention throughout" (Letters, 414). The Letters also provide a number of prohibitions: Tolkien noted that the term trilogy is inaccurate (I have used three-part work); Tolkien disliked the word Nordic (I have used Northern 'and Norse); and so forth.

I have read and reread Tolkien's works and have worked with the texts closely at hand. My approach has not been that of a fan, although I do have a great love for his work, but that of a scholar of medieval literature. Yet, fans, rather than scholars, still write most of the books and articles on Tolkien. Many of these have some good ideas and insights but few reflect a careful knowledge of either Tolkien's work or of medieval literature. Ruth S. Noel's The Mythology of Middle-earth is one such work. If Tolkien had not been popular, he would now be given more serious consideration. When scholars do come to write about Tolkien's work, they frequently talk about what he did not accomplish rather than what he intended and produced. This book concentrates on placing Tolkien in a tradition of Northern literature.

Northern literature has lent its own problems to the progress of the study. The literature is not well known to English-speaking peoples, especially to Americans. I have provided a brief outline in Chapter 2. The names of the sagas in Icelandic are long and difficult to read; the Icelanders use shortened, formalized pet names, but I have settled on anglicized, Americanized titles to be used throughout. Generally for simplicity's sake, I have dropped the diacritics in Norse names but retained those in Tolkien's personal and place names.

Like other pieces of scholarship, this work is not finished. When I read more sagas and works derived from them and more volumes of the History of Middle-earth, I will find new correlations. However, I have compiled enough evidence to help the reader understand what Tolkien meant when he declared his literary purpose: "I have tried to modernize the

myths and make them credible?

A Texas A&M University Library research grant helped me to start towards the preparation of the current manuscript. Alice Osaji began the long process of additions and editing. Rosalind Clark, a colleague in the English Department, read the whole, offering helpful advice and constructive criticisms. Since I have never worked in one of the few libraries with an extensive Icelandic collection, the interlibrary loan network, one of the great prides of American librarianship, has been my constant benefactor. The Oregon State University Faculty Women's Writing Group has offered invaluable advice on scope, audience, and organization. The Oregon State University Research Council provided funds to finish the manuscript. My mentor and friend Jay Martin Poole has performed Herculean organizational chores: my Administrative Assistant Mary Steckel and our "Book Man" Scott Larsen brought a keen intelligence, incredible patience, and an unflagging sense of humor to preparation of the text. And my family (Glen and Doris Strange, Darla Strange Comeaux) and friends (whose numbers have increased over the twenty years of career mobility) have provided long years of encouragement.

NOTES

1 . Gloriana St. Clair, "Studies in the Sources of J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings", University of Oklahoma, Ph.D., 1970 (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, Inc.)

2. The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien, selected and edited by Humphrey Carpenter with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 198 1), 119. (All references are to this edition and are in the text as Letters.)

3. Henry Resnik, "The Hobbit-Forming World of J.R.R. Tolkien," in The Saturday Evening Post (July 2, 1966), 94.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The early reviews and criticisms of The Lord of the Rings make a persistent and provocative suggestion that in some way the essence of his work derives from the world of the sagaman -- Norse mythology, folklore, and literature. In a review in the New Statesman and the Nation, Francis Huxley notes Tolkien's familiarity with epic saga and suggests that the outline was based in saga.¹ In the Spectator, Elizabeth Leigh Pemberton calls The Lord of the Rings "the heroic saga of the imaginary world of Middle 'Earth [sic]. . ."² The Times Literary Supplement reviewer also used the term "saga" in describing Tolkien's work.³ Robert J. Reilly notes borrowings from Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, and Norse; Thomas J. Gasque acknowledges that Tolkien was steeped in Northern mythology; William Ready focuses on courage as a key element of Norse myth; and Patricia Spacks comments on the darker view of Northern mythology in Tolkien's work.⁴

Most of these studies focus on Norse mythology rather than on Icelandic literature, and most allude to influences instead of exploring the technical details of such influences. This book discusses the observations and references to Norse mythology made by this and other writers about Tolkien. However, the purpose of this book is to go beyond the mythology to explore the Icelandic sagas and their contributions to Tolkien's background in story and characterization, to his technique and style in composing tales about Middle-earth, and to his choice of themes, values, and motifs.

Colleagues and critics often pose three puzzles for Tolkien scholars. First, the colleagues want to know why so many millions of readers bought, read, and discussed The Lord of the Rings in the 1960s and subsequently. This book does not answer that question. Literary scholars interested in social commentary and observers of popular culture must assess the popularity of The Lord of the Rings to a wide audience in that decade of

American life. J.R.R. Tolkien: This Far Land edited by Robert Giddings contains several articles on the social influence, but since most of the critics writing for the volume do not like or admire Tolkien, their commentaries are biased and their conclusions tainted.⁵ No satisfactory explanation of this phenomenon has yet been produced.

The second puzzle is why Tolkien wrote these works rather than others. Colleagues understand how Faulkner reached his obsession with the mythology of Yoknapatawpha county, how Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene interested themselves in the themes of English Catholics, and how James Joyce devoted his talent to stories of the artist in Dublin. The colleagues do not understand how an Oxford don began to tell the tales of Middle-earth. They understand how Lessing could write Children of Violence but not how she conceived Canopus in Argos. Kingsley Amis is allowed Lucky Jim but not The Alteration. This book clarifies Tolkien's choice of materials. He fed his imagination on Northern literature, and Northern literature fostered the creation of his particular statement of mythic ideas, concepts, themes, and motifs.

The third puzzle is why does The Lord of the Rings continue to engage so many readers. C. S. Lewis was Tolkien's contemporary, friend, and fellow professor. Both were critics and researchers and both wrote three volume works of fantasy at about the same time. Certainly, Lewis's fantasy works--Perelandra, Out of the Silent Planet, and That Hideous Strength--still have an active following, but they have not had the impact on the public or on other writers that Tolkien's work has had. Similarly, the Arthurian works of Charles Williams, a third writer of similar background and orientation, have never been widely popular and are now virtually unknown Tolkien's works are better than those of his fellow fantasy writers because Tolkien was the greater craftsman. This book demonstrates Tolkien's craftsmanship in selecting materials and forging them into a single work of art, The Lord of the Rings.

This book examines the sources of Tolkien's inspiration. Tolkien had devoured the materials of Northern literature in the same way that Charles

Williams had devoured **Arthurian literature**. Some writers might have served up a banquet of raw vegetables from the feast. L. Sprague de Camp's lackluster retelling of Northern myths in The Incomplete Enchanter, and Michael Jan Friedman's modest fantasy featuring characters from Northern mythology, The Hammer and the Horn, are two works which use the same materials Tolkien used.⁶ In each of these works, the myths come to the reader almost directly. The old stories have not been digested, combined with other materials, and regenerated as part of a different cohesive whole. Similarly, Lloyd Alexander, the author of the five volume set Children of Llyr, immersed himself in Celtic literature and wove from it a lively and entertaining story, but without the dark power or the fine artistry of The Lord of the Rings. A study of the works of any of these authors would show a less thorough internalizing of the source materials and a greater correlation and fidelity to the mythology.

No such close correlations exist for the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. That Tolkien knew Norse mythology and literature is clear, that he used these works as a source of inspiration for the matter of Middle-earth is also apparent. But everything he used is changed and altered to meet the demands and needs of his original creation. Pieces of story, bits of character, descriptions of implements, themes and motifs, manners and customs are all borrowed, but nothing is left unaltered. In each instance, Tolkien changes materials to serve the needs of his own stories. The existence now of earlier versions of many of his works shows that he is one of the finest craftsmen of the century. He wrote, revised, and rewrote everything. He niggled over the details until he achieve perfection in story and style. He forged the raw materials of Northern literature into The Lord of the Rings with a level of craftsmanship that ranks him with top writers.

Tolkien's work is neither allegory nor novel with a key (**roman à clef**). Reciting a single story from Northern literature does not explain the inspiration for The Lord of the Rings in the same way that knowing the story of Huey Long's governorship of Louisiana explains the' inspiration, if not the artistry, of Robert Penn Warren's All the King's Men. Charles Moorman in

"The Shire, Mordor, and Minas Tirith" tantalizes his readers by suggesting that somehow if they knew enough about Scandinavian literature, The Lord of the Rings would be a novel with a key. He suggests that the foundations of the work lie "in the forests and mountains of the Nordic lands and in the sagas, lays, eddas, and fairy tales which the inhabitants of these lands sang and passed on to their **progeny**."⁷ He notes the common theme of courage in the three part work and the Old English poem Beowulf. In spite of Moorman's inaccurate allegations and his use of the adjective Nordic, which Tolkien disliked because of its association with the racial theories, Moorman concludes correctly "The greatest single influence upon Tolkien is the eddas and sagas of the **North**."⁸ ✓

Yet, this exhaustive study concludes that no description of Tolkien's sources of inspiration and study can provide a simple explanation of The Lord of the Rings or The Silmarillion or The Unfinished Tales. The value of this book is its emphasis on Tolkien as subcreator and craftsman. Here the master artist is seen at work, practicing his craft, engaging in the process described in that most original essay "On Fairy-story." Often, a discussion of the source character or incident will enhance understanding of Tolkien's characters and incidents. But most of all, Tolkien wanted to bring the power of Northern mythology and literature into modern times. He greatly valued the lessons that he had learned from his long and close acquaintance with Northern materials. Seeing the relationships between the matter of Middle-earth and the sagas and eddas will perhaps inspire other students of Tolkien to read Northern literature.

An examination of the materials which inspired the matter of Middle-earth aids in the understanding of its themes and motifs. In Chapter 9, "Beowulf and The Lord of the Rings", the claims of the many critics who believe the work has Christian overtones and connotations can be balanced against Tolkien's own assertion that the work is pre-Christian.⁹ In a letter to Mr. Rang, Tolkien says that "The Fall of Man is in the past and off stage; the Redemption of Man in the far future. We are in a time when the One God, Eru, is known to exist by the wise, but is not approachable save

by or through the Valar though He is still remembered in (unspoken) prayer by those of Númenórean descent” (Letters, 387). This study of their antecedents in Norse literature provides evidence for **the resolution of this** and other disputes about meaning in The Lord of the Rings, The Silmarillion, and The Unfinished Tales.

Finally, Tolkien’s friend and colleague C. S. Lewis also comments on the Northern qualities of the tale: “If we insist on asking for the **moral of the** story, that is its moral: a recall from facile optimism **and wailing pessimism** alike, **to that hard**, yet not quite desperate, insight into Man’s unchanging predicament by which heroic ages have lived, It is here that the Norse affinity is strongest: hammerstrokes but with compassion.”¹⁰ As the comparisons in this book show, the hammerstrokes are a common motif in Northern literature. While the sagas contain, compassionate incidents, the compassion in The Lord of the Rings is one of Tolkien’s many changes.

NOTES

1. Francis Huxley, "The Endless Worm", New Statesman and Nation, November 5, 1955, 587-88.
2. Elizabeth Leigh Pemberton, Spectator CXCIV (November 25, 1955), 704.
3. Times Literary Supplement, XIV (November 25, 1955), 704
4. Robert J. Reilly, "Tolkien and the Fairy Story", 135. Thomas J. Gasque, "Tolkien: the Monsters and the Critters", 152. Patricia Spacks, "Power and Meaning in The Lord of the Rings", 83-84. All in Tolkien and the Critics, edited by Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1968). William Ready, Understanding Tolkien and "The Lord of the Rings", (New York: Paperback Library, 1969).
5. Robert Giddings, editor, J.R.R. Tolkien: This Far Land (London: Vision and Barnes & Noble, 1983).
6. L. Sprague de Camp, The Incomplete Enchanter (New York: Pyramid Books, 1968). Michael Jan Friedman, The Hammer and the Horn (New York: Popular Library, 1985).
7. Charles Moorman, "The Shire, Mordor, and Minas Tirith" in Tolkien and the Critics, 201 .
8. "The Shire, Mordor, and Minas Tirith", 201, 212. The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien, selected and edited by Humphrey Carpenter with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 375. In a letter to Charlotte and Denis Plimmer who had interviewed Tolkien and written an article which he considered to be inaccurate, Tolkien said: "Not Nordic please! A word I personally dislike; it is associated, though of French origin,

with racist theories Geographically, Northern is usually better.”

9. Richard Purtill, Lord of the Elves and Eldils: Fantasy and Philosophy in C. S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1974).

Paul H. Kocher, Master of Middle-earth: The Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972) in Tolkien and the Critics.

10. C. S. Lewis, “The Dethronement of Power,” in Tolkien and the Critics, 15.

Chapter Two

'The Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story has always been **boiling**.'"¹

Tolkien's Background in Old English and Old Norse Language and Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to survey briefly Old English and Old Norse literatures and to discuss the depth of Tolkien's knowledge of them. Tolkien's reputation lies not only with his major works of fantasy -- The Lord of the Silmarillion, and The Hobbit -- but also with his major critical works -- "Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics", "On Fairy-stories," and his editions and translations of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and Pearl. Throughout his career, he studied and taught Old English language and literature. From 1925 to 1945, he was the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Pembroke College of Oxford University. In 1945, he became Merton Professor of English Language and Literature at Merton College of Oxford University.² Like most other scholars of Old English literature, he was professionally and personally interested in Old Norse literature.

Old English and Old Norse Language

Both Old English and Old Norse languages descend from a common Old Germanic ancestor. When the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes invaded England in the fifth and sixth centuries, they brought their language with them. As they conquered the island, their tongue replaced the Celtic language being spoken there. The Old English or Anglo-Saxon language remained the language of common people, government, and literature from 450 to 1150. In the 1066 Norman conquest, William the Conqueror, a French-speaking baron descended from Viking raiders, defeated the English King Harald at the battle of Hastings. This conquest and the subsequent use of the French language for government matters and for literature ended the Old English period. By the 1200s when English began

to regain its prominence as the national language, the language **had changed** so much that it was called Middle English, rather than Old English or Anglo-Saxon. The Middle English **period lasted from about 1200 to 1500** when another **set of changes created Modern English**, the language currently spoken in England, the United States, and their former colonies.³

Old Norse is a term used to **describe** the early forms of a common Scandinavian language. The eastern group includes Swedish and Danish: the western Norwegian and Icelandic. **Old Icelandic is the most important** of these languages for two reasons. First, the settlement of Iceland gave the Old Norse language an island environment, in which the remote locale reduced contact with other culture and languages and slowed the rate of change. Modern Icelanders are the only Scandinavians whose language has changed so little that they can read medieval literature without great difficulty. Second, Icelandic poets and saga writers created a body of heroic literature unsurpassed among Germanic peoples.⁴ The contents of this body of literature and Tolkien's knowledge of it are discussed below.

Tolkien knew Old English, Middle English, and Old Norse intimately. His professorial appointments required him to **give** lectures and to tutor students in these areas. He published translations of two important Middle English texts -- Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and Pearl. **And he wrote** a number of articles, such as "Ancrene Wisse and Hali Meithhad" and "Chaucer as a Philologist: The Reeve's **Tale**"⁵. He knew several other languages: Latin, Greek, Gothic, Irish, Welsh, Italian, Spanish, French, Finnish, and probably others [Letters, **12, 21, 26, 87, 223**]. He says repeatedly in the Letters that his inspiration for The Lord of the **Rings** and The Silmarillion was "fundamentally linguistic" [Letters, **2x19**]; the meaning of that statement and its impact on an understanding of Tolkien's works are not within the scope of this book. ✓

Old English Literature

Old English or Anglo Saxon literature is a small body of material created in England between the invasion of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes in

the fifth and sixth centuries and the Norman conquest in 1066. Anglo-Saxon literature consists of several masterful short heroic poems -- "Maldon", "Brunanburg", "Widsith", "Deor", "Wanderer", and "Seafarer"; the religious poetry of **Cædmon** and Cynewulf; several other religious poems, the most famous of which is "The Dream of the Rood"; a few secular poems including "The Wife's Lament"; the prose writings of King Alfred, Gregory, Bede, **Æthelwold**, **Ælfric**, and Wulfstan; and the masterpiece Beowulf. Many of these works deal with the same themes and motifs that Old Norse literature does: thus discussions of these Old English works have been included at relevant points. In particular, the contributions of the poem Beowulf, which tells the tale of a Danish prince in a Swedish court, to the creation of The Lord of the Rings appear in Chapter 9. Tolkien's use of Middle English literature as a source of inspiration is not within the scope of this book.

Tolkien's Knowledge of Old Norse Literature

Tolkien's familiarity with Old Norse literature is well documented. When he was only sixteen, his schoolmaster George Brewerton lent Tolkien an Anglo-Saxon primer. Tolkien moved on from the primer to the poem Beowulf. Then after doing some reading in Middle English, he began a study of Old Norse, reading the Volsunga Saga, the Norse version of the story of Sigurd and the dragon Fafnir in the original language. His love of language and literature continued as he learned Gothic, another part of the Old Germanic language family⁷. At King Edward's school, he delighted his friends in T.C.B.S. (the Tea Club, subsequently renamed the Barrovian Society) with tales from the Norse Volsunga Saga, and in **1911**, he read a paper to the school Literary Society on Norse sagas. At Oxford in **1913**, Tolkien changed his major subject from Classics to English Language and Literature. His special or secondary subject was Old Norse, which he studied with the well-known scholar W. A. Craigie. As Tolkien biographer Humphrey Carpenter comments, Old Norse literature and mythology "had a profound appeal to Tolkien's **imagination**"⁹.

Since the Oxford program is rigorous and Tolkien already had a good background in the area of Old Norse, it seems likely that he would have studied most of the sagas mentioned in Craigie's survey The Icelandic Sagas. Although Tolkien had not been a spectacular student in Classics, his interest in Old English and Old Norse was keener, and he did finish the program with a first class degree¹⁰. Craigie enumerates thirty historical sagas, three ecclesiastical sagas, three sagas of later times, eleven sagas about countries other than Iceland, and thirteen mythical and romantic sagas? Most of these sagas have been studied in preparation for this book about Tolkien's use of Northern literature in his work.

Tolkien 'continued his affection for Old Norse literature throughout his life. In 1925, with his colleague E.V. Gordon, he founded a **Viking Club** for undergraduates to drink beer, read sagas, and sing comic **songs**¹². Later at Oxford he would form a similar club composed of dons. The purpose of the Coalbiter club was to encourage the reading and discussion of Icelandic sagas in their original language. The club was named to reflect a habit of sitting so close to the fireplace that the reader could bite the **coals**¹³. Tolkien's own wide reading in Icelandic literature led him to propose that it be given more prominence in the syllabus for students of English language and literature? The Inklings, a literary society for manuscript reading, finally supplanted the Coalbiters in the 1930s, but only after all the principal Icelandic sagas and the Poetic Edda had been covered¹⁵. Since he had not only read the sagas for his own pleasure but had also translated and discussed them with his colleagues, his knowledge of them was profound. It is, therefore, fitting to assess what impact this intimate knowledge of the sagas had on his literary creations.

Old Norse Literature

Since few English-speaking people have studied Old Norse and Icelandic literature, a brief survey seems appropriate. Several histories of Norse literature are available: Stefan Einarsson's A History of Icelandic Literature, Halvdan Koht's The Old Norse Sagas, and E.O.G. Turville-Petre's

Origins of Icelandic Literature are good.¹⁶ However, since W.A. Craigie was Tolkien's tutor in Norse literature, Craigie's The Icelandic Sagas has been the primary source for this brief outline. The word saga means "something said," and the phrase "Icelandic saga" denotes a body of prose literature written in Iceland in the Icelandic language between the middle of the twelfth century and the beginning of the fifteenth century. The works vary greatly in length, value, and interest, but all have the outward form of historical or biographical narratives. In spite of their outward form, many are purely fictitious while others contain a blend of fact and fiction? The ways in which The Lord of the Rings and Tolkien's other works adhere to this model are discussed in Chapter 3 entitled "Generic Considerations."

Iceland was colonized from Norway and the other Scandinavian countries beginning in the middle of the 9th century. King Harald Fairhaired's expansion of his kingdom from a small district in the east of Norway throughout the entire country was a catalyst to move freedom-loving chieftains from Norway to Iceland, the Shetlands, and the **Færoes**. According to legend; the expansion began because a young woman refused to marry Harald until he brought all of Norway under his rule. His vow neither to cut nor comb his hair until the conquest was complete gained him the nickname Fairhaired. The details of the colonization of Iceland are recorded in the Landnamabok. A population explosion in the Northern countries, combined with the desire to escape the realities of King Harald as overlord, drove Scandinavians to colonize throughout the known Northern world. They were great travelers -- engaging alternately in trading expeditions and viking raids. Because of their emigration and travels, their language and literature were carried throughout the whole of Scandinavia and parts of Russia and England. These fiercely independent ex-patriot Norwegians governed Iceland democratically with local assemblies called things. Beginning in 930, a national general assembly, called the Althing, met annually in the spring and autumn?

Literature flourished in this freedom-loving society. By the second half of the tenth century, the skalds, as Scandinavian poets were called, were

mostly Icelanders rather than Norwegians. They recited poems' about famous historical exploits until they had themselves witnessed new heroisms, which they straight away incorporated into poems carried back to Iceland. Skaldic poetry mingled with this new tradition of saga telling and became the chief entertainment among the Icelanders **of the period**. The sagas themselves recount many incidents of sagas being told at various gatherings. Scholars believe that many of the stories which became the great written sagas of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were present in this oral tradition for many **years**¹⁹.

In the year 1000 after considerable debate, the Icelandic Althing embraced Christianity as the country's official religion. With Christianity came medieval learning, including first reading and writing in Latin and then in the vernacular, perhaps following on English models. In England, a similar process of Christianization had eradicated the native religion and mythology, but in Iceland the old mythology, an essential tool of the skaldic poet and the saga-teller, was retained. Although pagan practice was forbidden in public, individuals were allowed to continue pagan rites in private. The pagan spirit lived on in Iceland even though the letter of the law was Christian. In the winter of 1117/48, the Icelandic law, which had previously been recited by the law speaker at the Althing, was written down. Shortly thereafter in 1130, Ari Thorgilsson composed the Islendinga-bók, or the "Book of the Icelanders". Ari made special efforts to fix exact dates for historical events; thus, the episodes covered in the surviving short version of his work may be dated accurately. Ari stands as a great link between the oral saga age, which ended about 1130 and the literary period which begins?

The transition from a period when many saga stories existed in oral tradition to a period when the stories began to be written down may be responsible for the anonymity of most of the major sagas. While a certain carelessness about authorship exists in all middle ages literature, its prevalence in Iceland remains remarkable. Perhaps the first writers of the sagas **did not add much** to the story as it stood in oral tradition and

therefore did not wish to claim authorship. The Icelanders of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were abridging or expanding, combining or interpolating, re-writing and rearranging their own works and those of their predecessors. This practice may have made it difficult to assign authorship?

Icelandic Family Sagas

The Icelandic family sagas give an amazingly clear and vivid picture of the details of early Scandinavian history and also throw much light upon the history of England during several centuries. Through the sagas, readers know much more about the hundreds of real Icelandic men and women whose actions are recorded than they do about the kings of England during the same time period. In addition to their historical matter, the sagas also record all that is known about Germanic religion, mythology, and beliefs in the supernatural. The student of culture and folklore has an enormously rich resource in Icelandic saga **literature**²².

During the written saga period in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries, many different kinds of sagas were written. The best known group includes the sagas of the Icelanders, those stories written about the great men and distinguished families of the island. The action of most of these sagas takes place between the middle of the tenth century and the first quarter of the eleventh. The thirty or so more authentic of these works would fill a book about 3,000 pages long and provide a fairly comprehensive picture of life in the heroic period in Iceland. Some of these are shorter sagas with a variety of story lines, many of them dealing in typical themes of honor and revenge, others telling stories of thwarted love, and still others featuring poets as heroes?

Five sagas stand out not only for their length -- twice that of the shorter workers -- but also for their excellence. These are the Eyrbyggja saga, Egils saga, Laxdale saga, the saga of Grettir the Strong, and Níals Saga. While Egil's Saga seems to have contributed some facets to The Lord of the Rings, fewer correlations exist than with the others. Each of these other

sagas made a special contribution to the matter of Middle-earth and has been discussed in the chapters that follow. However, in order to provide the reader with some understanding of the stories that make up the heart of Icelandic literature, the content and nature of four major sagas are outlined here.

Eyrbyggja Saga

Eyrbyggja Saga tells the story of **Thórólf** who brought the timbers from Thor's temple in his home district in Norway to be re-erected in his new home. From this saga, readers learn almost all that is known about the worship of Thor among Norwegians and Icelanders. After **Thórólf's** death, the main narrative revolves around Snorri and his strong rival Arnkel. The contest between these two continues until Arnkel dies at the hands of Snorri and his blood brothers. Stories of berserkers, sorcery, and hauntings occur in the saga, and the tale of the death of the witch woman Thorgunna and the subsequent marvels is interesting and well-written?*

Kinslaying ties this saga firmly into Tolkien's work, as discussed in Chapter 7 on Customs. Most of the conflict within the saga is among people who share kinship, although sometimes remotely. Both of the families feuding in Iceland descend from Ketil Flat-Nose; thus the slaying in the saga constitutes kinslaying, like that which occurs in The Silmarillion. Further, Arnkel provides a model of the virtues expected of a leader. A comparison of this model with the Faramir's character traits demonstrates Faramir's adherence to Icelandic standards of conduct as discussed in Chapter 8.

Laxdale Saga

The Laxdale Saga is one of the greatest of the Icelandic family sagas. The story begins with Unn the Deep-minded's settlement in Iceland, relates the stories of her favorite grandson Olaf Feilan, her great-grandson Hoskuld, and their descendants. The central part of the story revolves around the imperious but beautiful Gudrun and her marriages. The long denouement of the saga involves the revenge of **Bolli's** sons for their father's

death. Since **Bolli** has **killed** his foster-brother and cousin Kjartan for the sake of Gudrun, the theme of the kinslaying is a major one. Throughout the saga, fate wars with character for control: both of these are constrained **by** the prevailing concept of honor and its requirements for revenge. While Craigie criticizes this romantic work as being more nearly a historical novel than a history, he does concede its high merits as saga and its great popularity.²⁵

Like Craigie, Tolkien was more interested in stories of courage and great deeds than in stories of the heart, but the Laxdale Saga is a memorable one. Certainly, the character of Unn the Deep-minded, the great progenitor of the men and women of **Laxdale**, may have been influential in Tolkien's creation of Galadriel, especially in those parts of her story which appear now in The Silmarillion and The Unfinished Tales. This kinship is discussed in Chapter 8. Further, in her introduction to a translation of the Laxdale Saga, Margaret **Arent** praises the **artistry** of the saga. She demonstrates how the sagawriter used prophecy and fulfillment, repetition in lexical terms, and units of three to reinforce a tripartite division to give the story unity and cohesion.²⁶ Tolkien also used these devices in his story-telling as noted in Chapter 7.

Grettir the Strong

The saga of Grettir the Strong deals almost exclusively with the life and adventures of Iceland's most famous outlaw. Grettir's story is a classic one, in which his strength and nobility of spirit contend with his lucklessness to determine his fortunes. In the first half of the story, Grettir overcomes his typical folklore-hero's unpromising youth and establishes his reputation by killing berserkers, bears, barrow wights, and those who taunt him. Then he endeavors to help out a farmer who is greatly troubled by an aftergoing-man, a malevolent spirit who rides the roof and kills the livestock. As Grettir and the ghost struggle, the malicious Glam curses Grettir foretelling that his strength will lessen, his deeds will turn to evil, and his guardian-spirit will forsake him. Grettir's uncle Jokull had warned

the hubristic hero that luck and brave deeds were not equivalent, and after the curse, Grettir's fortunes decline. More and more frequently, his life is like that of a western movie gunfighter who is challenged by every young gunslinger wishing to make his reputation. Finally, Grettir suffers a self-inflicted axe wound while trying to chop an ensorcelled log into firewood. While he is ill and near death, his enemies gain access to his island and slay him in his house. He had been nineteen years an outlaw and would have been allowed to live within the law again had he lived a few months longer.²⁷

This saga's most notable contribution must be the relationship between Glam, the un-dead thrall, and Tolkien's most original villain Gollum (Chapter 4). In addition, the concept of noble outlawry, the landscapes, and the use of pithy statements in the face of danger also exist in the materials written about Middle-earth (Chapter 6). The idea of a man who has great heroism and strength but who has bad luck is a fascinating one. Tolkien's story about **Túrin** in The Silmarillion and The Unfinished Tales employs this powerful theme. In both stories, the hero's own character contributes to the tragic consequences of his lucklessness (Chapter 10). Further, Humphrey Carpenter uses the translation of this saga as an illustration of a typical meeting of the Coalbiter's club. The official biographer's selection of this saga as an illustration adds to its interest as a possible source.²⁸

Njáls Saga

In the opinion of Craigie and other Icelandic scholars, **Níál's Saga** is the pre-eminent example of the saga form. The first third of this saga tells the story of Gunnar of Hlidarend, **Njál's** friend and neighbor. Gunnar's ill-fated attempt to regain the dowry of his kinswoman Unn gains him the undeserved hatred of her son Mord Valgardsson, whose blazing malevolence brings about Gunnar's untimely end. Gunnar's unwise marriage to the beautiful but arrogant Hallgerd sorely tries the hero's friendship with his neighbor **Njál**. **Njál's** wife Bergthora and Hallgerd begin a killing match, in which seven men die before **Njál** can negotiate a settlement. When Mord

finally succeeds in having Gunnar outlawed, Gunnar defies the sentence and remains at his farm until his defeat after an epic defense. The sons of **Njál** now become the chief actors of the saga, and Mord stirs their hatred against their foster brother Hoskuld. In spite of **Njál's** repeated efforts to achieve weregild settlements,, a party finally arrives to destroy **Njál's** sons. After several are killed, the attackers determine to burn the house. Both **Njál** and Bergthora refuse to leave the burning house: **Njál** because he cannot live without his honor: Bergthora because she agreed to share **Njál's** fate. In the final third of the saga, **Njál's** son-in-law Kari avenges the family.²⁹

The clearest contribution from the **Njál's Saga** to the cauldron that produced the materials of Middle-earth is the character of **Njál** and the incident of his burning. The attributes that **Njál** shares with Denethor are enumerated in a section on that difficult person (Chapter 8). Hallgerd's refusal to give Gunnar a strand of hair for his bow during his last defense may have inspired a similar interchange between Galadriel and the dwarf Gimli (Chapter 4). Other contributions include a number of landscapes (Chapter 6), weapons (Chapter 5), and saga characteristics (Chapter 3).

Historical Sagas

Historical sagas about Icelandic families were not the only ones that went into Tolkien's stories. Sagas, many of which may have been written by Icelanders in exile, were also composed about the adventures of Scandinavians in other countries. The Heimskringla relates the history of the Kings of Norway, the **Foerevinga Saga** and the **Orknevinga Saga** detail the stories of those islands, and the **Jomsvikinga Saga** chronicles parts of Danish and Norwegian history. Various bits and pieces of these sagas and others of like kind may be found in Tolkien's descriptions of customs, landscapes, and battle gear.

Lyingg a s

In a typical lying saga, a generic Norse youth will meet dragons, trolls, geniis, and miscellaneous monsters. He will travel on magic carpets, seek

treasures to exchange for elegant but enchanted princesses, and will end up marrying the woman he has won. A casual observer might conclude that Tolkien's Middle-earth fantasies, which are not based on historical persons and events, would have a greater likeness to this type of saga than to the family saga. Such a conclusion is not accurate. The great storytellers of Iceland's heroic period took the adventures of their local heroes as inspiration for the best sagas. Later sagawriters had to invent more fanciful tales about adventures in other lands. The better the saga the greater impression it seems to have made 'on Tolkien. Many more correlations and parallels exist between the great family sagas and The Lord of the Rings than those between the lesser lying sagas and Tolkien's own works.

Sagas of Olden Times

Certain other sagas are grouped together under the title Fornaldarsjgur or sagas of olden times. Generally, these sagas relate stories of early Scandinavian history. These sagas, although not as artistically composed as the family sagas, tell powerful stories with great legendary and mythic content.³⁰ The Volsunga Saga and its other version the German Nibelungenlied fit into this category. Tolkien expressed his fondness for the story of Sigurd the Volsung and the troublesome ring many times in his letters.³¹ The influence of the two versions of Sigurd's story on the four versions of Tolkien's story of Turin are elaborated in Chapter 10. Another of these sagas, the Hervarar Saga, which tells primarily the story of **Hervör's** son King Heidrek, has been translated into English by Tolkien's son Christopher and was a family favorite. Two other sagas of olden times -- Hrólf kraki and King **Hrólf** and his Champions -- seem to have been simmering in the cauldron, too.

Other Types of Sagas

Three other types of sagas -- Latin source sagas, Ecclesiastical sagas, and sagas of later times -- have generally contributed little to the imaginative basis for the matter of Middle-earth. The tension created by the imposition

of Christianity on paganism did interest and inspire Tolkien, but that tension shows itself more clearly as it works itself out in the actions of specific Icelandic heroes than it does in the more purely Ecclesiastical works. The sagas of latter times show a society in decline, rather than in the heyday of its creative period. For instance, the lengthy Sturlunga Saga contained no materials reminiscent of the deeds and themes of Middle-earth. Tolkien knew classic Greek and Roman works from his education in an English Public School. Sagas telling the same stories he had read in the original Greek and Latin were unlikely to have brought him fresh inspiration.

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NOTES

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2. Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien: A Biography (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 111, 200.
3. Bambas, Rudolph C., The English Language: Its Origin and History (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980) and Baugh, Albert C., A History of the English Language, 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1957). Either of these books provides a readable survey of the history of the English language.
4. History, 36.
5. Biography, 268-75.
6. History, 3-105.
7. Biography, 34-37.
8. Biography, 46, 49.
9. Biography, 65.
10. Biography, 77.
11. W. A. Craigie, The Icelandic Sagas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913; New York: Kraus Reprint Company, 1968), *passim*.

12. Biography, 105.
13. Biography, 119-20.
- 14.** Biography, 137.
15. Biography, 149.
16. Stefan Einarsson, A History of Icelandic Literature (New York: The Johns Hopkins Press for The American Scandinavian Foundation, 1957). Halvdan Koht, The Old Norse Sagas (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, W.W. Norton, 1931; New York: Kraus Reprint Company, 1971). E.O.G. Turville-Petre, Origins of Icelandic Literature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).
17. Icelandic Sagas, 1.
18. Icelandic Sagas, 2-9.
19. Icelandic Sagas, 9-18.
20. Icelandic Sagas, 24-25.
21. Icelandic Sagas, 26-27.
22. Icelandic Sagas, 33-34.
23. Icelandic Sagas, 37-59.
24. Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards, trans., Eyrbyggja Saga (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973).

25. Icelandic Sagas, 63-65.
26. A. Margaret Arent, trans., The Laxdoela Saga (Seattle: University of Washington Press; New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation), 30-31.
27. G. A. Hight, trans. and Peter Foote, ed., The Saga of Grettir the Strong (New York: Dutton, 1968).
28. Biography, 120.
29. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Palsson Harmondsworth, trans., Njáls Saga (England: Penguin, 1960). 1986 printing.
30. Icelandic Sagas, 94-104.
31. Letters, 150, 306, 314-15. Tolkien admits the relationship: "There is the Children of Húrin, the tragic tale of **Túrin** Turambar and his sister Niniel -- of which Turin is the hero: a figure that might be said (by people who like that sort of thing, though it is not very useful) to be derived from the elements in Sigurd the Volsung, Oedipus, and the Finnish Kullervo."

CHAPTER THREE

“By ‘the soup’ I mean the story as it is served up by its author or teller, and by ‘the bones’ its sources or materials” (“Fairy-Stories”, 23).

Generic Considerations

Various critics have designated The Lord of the Rings as a fairy- story, a romance, an epic, a novel, and a saga. In the Letters, Tolkien himself called the work a fairy-story, a romance, and a saga. In this chapter, the applicability of these assignments will be discussed. Then the saga form will be defined and its pertinence to the structure and spirit of The Lord of the Rings demonstrated. In the definition, the affinity of the saga to the North Atlantic peoples -- the Scandinavians and their heirs in Iceland, Greenland, and England -- has been incorporated. The subsequent pages of this book mark other instances of this affinity for The Lord of the Rings and Tolkien's other major works.

Throughout this chapter, genres have been assigned only as they are illuminating to the work and only when the full connotation of the generic term, as well as its skeletal definition, aids in that illumination. It soon becomes clear that two or three genres apply in more than one way. In a home library, the reader might want to have several copies of The Lord of the Rings to shelve in each of the applicable sections, one with fairy- stories, one with romances, and one with sagas. Here a librarian's game --that the reader has only one copy and must select one genre as the better place to shelve the copy -- has been played. Tolkien's. own comments on the genre of the work are enlightening if not perhaps authoritative. In general, Tolkien's pattern in replying to inquiries was to agree with the allegation of the letter writer to a limited extent. For instance, Michael Straight was planning to pen a review calling The Lord of the Rings a fairy-story, and in **1956**, he wrote to Tolkien asking several questions. In his response, Tolkien accepts the fairy-story label emphasizing its proper audience of

adults and its “mode of reflecting ‘truth’ which differs from those of allegory, satire, or ‘realism’ (Letters, 232-33). In the same, letter, Tolkien mentions the quest and its failure as an integral part of the story; he does not seem to have a problem in associating the quest or journey motif with more than one genre (Letters, 234).

In a 1961 letter to his aunt Jane Neave, Tolkien elaborates a little on the ‘relationship between the fairy-story essay and. The Lord of the Rings: “I must say I think the result [of giving the lecture at St. Andrews on fairy-stories] was entirely beneficial to The Lord of the Rings, which was a practical demonstration of the views that I expressed.. It [The Lord of the Rings] was not written ‘for children’, or for any kind of person in particular, but for itself”(Letters, 310). Certainly, the relationship between the essay and The Lord of the Rings claims serious attention for a fairy story assignment. Talking about The Hobbit, Tolkien distinguishes between a fairy-story written for adults and one written for children. In a lengthy 1951 letter to Milton Waldman, Tolkien notes that he extracted The Hobbit material because he thought it was “susceptible of treatment” for a fairy-story for children (Letters, 159). But in another letter, he calls The Hobbit a saga.

Yet, other genres also have Tolkien’s approval; the evidence for the romance is strong. In a 1944 letter to his son Christopher who was serving in the air force in Africa, Tolkien employs the term romance to refer to part of The Lord of the Rings as the “Fourth Book of that great Romance” (Letters, 103). He also uses this term in a 1950 letter to Unwin: “I have produced a monster; an immensely long, complex, rather bitter, and very terrifying romance, quite unfit for children (if fit for anybody)” (Letters, 136). **Again in** 1956 in a letter to Joanna de Bortadano, he calls the work “a high romance.” Tolkien’s background as a medievalist gave him a positive and precise definition for medieval romance. Whether he is using the term technically here or merely as a convenient alternative to less desirable terms, such as novel, is not entirely clear.

Later in writing to his publisher Sir Stanley Unwin and to his potential

publisher Milton Waldman, he begins to call the work a saga associating that word with the length of the work. In both cases, he labels his works the Sagas of the Three Jewels and the Rings of Power, referring to The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings respectively (Letters, 138-39). To Waldman, Tolkien says that he thinks Unwin will decline to become involved “in this monstrous Saga” (Letters, 139). In each instance, he is discussing the 600,000 word text and the problem of dividing it into artificial segments.

Tolkien employs the term saga again in a 1957 letter to Caroline Everett. In explaining to her how he solved the problem of bringing Aragorn to the Siege and informing the reader about Aragorn’s adventures to that point, Tolkien remarks that he had to cut down the whole episode. To have told the events in full would have necessitated his writing a longer tale with another focus. He declares that the whole episode would have constituted a Saga of Aragorn Arathorn’s Son rather than The Lord of the Rings. Although he is willing to hold up the action to tell this tale in Chapter 9, he could not aesthetically allow the delay earlier in Chapter 2 or in Chapter 6. He admits that by the third volume, he had built up a large number of “narrative debts” (Letters, 258). These “narrative debts” had to be paid off with brevity to keep from holding up the main action of the story. Clearly, pacing and length were important to Tolkien in discussing genres, and he considered the saga a form with magnitude.

The other saga aspect that Tolkien considered important was its pretention to history, one of his own devices. In a 1965 letter to Rayner Unwin, he criticizes The Hobbit’s old blurbs, which he believes destroy the ‘magic’ by emphasizing its petite charm. He reminds Unwin of The Hobbit’s claim to history: “The Hobbit saga is presented as *vera historia*, at great pains (which have proved very effective)” (Letters, 365). Tolkien seems to think that the claim to history is typical of the saga and that it improves the effect of the work. These opinions about the importance of history or a claim to history as a key element in a saga mirror his mentor W. A. Craigie’s published analyses in Icelandic Sagas.

As genre assignments, the epic and the novel do not fare so well. In another **1944** letter to his son Christopher, he discusses the success of Kenneth Grahame's posthumous First Whispers of the Wind in the Willows, lamenting about his own working schedule: "It is a curse having the epic temperament in an overcrowded age devoted to snappy bits!" (Letters, 90). The context of the quotation suggests a concern with length and scope of The Lord of the Rings and The Silmarillion rather than genre. Although he discusses many works of epic nature, he does not call The Lord of the Rings an epic.

Novel as generic assignment fares even less well. Replying to a letter from Peter Szabó Szentmihályi, Tolkien denies the applicability of the author's biography to his works and states a lack of interest in the history and situation of the English 'novel': "My work is not a 'novel', but an 'heroic romance' a much older and quite different variety of literature" (Letters, **414**). The tone of exasperation in the letter is rare, equaled perhaps only by a similar tone in the long response to the plans for a movie. Nevertheless, Tolkien did seem to conceptualize his major works as romances, fairy-stories, or sagas, rather than as epics or novels. Since it is impossible to know from these scattered references in letters where Tolkien might have placed a single copy of The Lord of the Rings in his own library, some further discussion of the claims follows.

The Fairy-Story

In **1938**, J.R.R. Tolkien delivered, as an Andrew Lang Lecture, an essay "On Fairy-Stories," which was later printed in Essays Presented to Charles Williams ("Fairy Stories", 11). The natural desire to measure a man's artistic achievement by his own critical commentary has not escaped Tolkien's critics. In "Tolkien and the Fairy Story," R.J. Reilly states "I will try to 'place' the trilogy in its proper genre -- the fairy story mode as Tolkien conceives it."¹ In a review, Mark Roberts notes "Now it seems clear that The Lord of the Rings is fairy-story according to Professor Tolkien's understanding of the term."² And Dorothy K. Barber in "The Meaning of The

Lord of the Rings” also refers to Tolkien’s essay with its theory of the sub-creator and its doctrine of **Eucatastrophe**.³

Their argument for The Lord of the Rings as a fairy-story follows the structure of Tolkien’s essay. Michael Straight, another advocate of this theory, especially defends The Lord of the Rings as an illumination of the essay’s doctrine of the sub-creator and thus of “the inner consistency of reality.”⁴ Reilly and Barber also believe that Tolkien has created in The Lord of the Rings a Secondary World, which is believable and which has its own laws. They apply Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, and Consolation, elements that Tolkien says the fairy-story usually offers, to the three part work.

Fantasy

However, Reilly’s discussion of Fantasy employs only half of Tolkien’s definition which is, “For my present purpose I require a word which shall embrace both the Sub-creative Art in itself and a quality of strangeness and wonder in the Expression, derived from the Image: a quality essential to fairy-story. I propose, therefore, to arrogate to myself the powers of Humpty-Dumpty, and to use Fantasy for this purpose . . .” (“Fairy-Stories”, 44). Reilly, and other admirers of The Lord of the Rings, agree that it contains a Secondary World, which is both consistent and credible. Tolkien also requires a special kind of presentation for the fairy-story; he demands “a quality of strangeness and wonder in the Expression.” This quality of strangeness, which typifies fairy-story, does not characterize saga or The Lord of the Rings.

In The Mythology of Middle-earth, Ruth Noel counters these allegations about strangeness and wonder. For her, Middle-earth is not **Faërie**, not a remote, inviolable land of indescribable beauty, except perhaps in **Lórien**. Quite correctly, Noel finds little of supernatural in the geography of Middle-earth.⁵ Indeed, one of Tolkien’s most effective methods for creating the sense of reality present in The Lord of the Rings is the matter-of-fact, chronicle-like reporting of events. No imaginative storyteller has spun or invented or embellished this tale. Tolkien presents the tale to

the reader as a narrative history of events recorded in the chronicle, Red Book of Westmarch. This invocation of the aura of history is, as will be discussed later, characteristic not of fairy-story but of saga.

Escape and Recovery

After introducing the term Fantasy in the essay "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien defines Recovery as the regaining of a clear view and Escape as the constructive ability of the prisoner to focus his attention on something outside his prison rather than as the cowardly flight of the deserter to avoid Real Life ("Fairy-Stories", 50-59). Even though the critic Roberts says that he can find no value or clear view in The Lord of the Rings, he charges this inadequacy to the writing style, which offends his tastes and prevents his participation.⁶ Despite Roberts' opinion, these terms do seem to apply to The Lord of the Rings, and equally well to many types of literature other than the fairy-story. Thus the mere existence of elements of Recovery and Escape in The Lord of the Rings serves not as an argument for the fairy-story as genre but as an affirmation of the high quality of The Lord of the Rings.

Eucatastrophe

The critics mentioned above and many others all agree that the long work ends happily in Eucatastrophe, the antithesis of tragedy. In "On Fairy-Stories" Tolkien describes the typical happy ending: "it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief" ("Fairy-Stories", 60). However, Tolkien's definition of Eucatastrophe does not explain the ending of The Lord of the Rings. Although the One Ring has been destroyed, Gandalf warns that evil is not destroyed. If the story had ended with the great climax consisting of the Ring's destruction and the subsequent rescue of Frodo and Sam, then the ending might be considered joyful. Yet the story continues. Evil is discovered thriving in the Shire. This evil is, in turn, overcome, and the magic dust that Galadriel gave Sam erases its scars. At this point, too, the

story might have ended happily, if not joyfully. But the ending Tolkien chose for the story shows Gandalf and Frodo with Elrond and the other Elves setting out for the Grey Havens. Those characters who are the most valiant and imaginative can no longer linger in the world of Middle-earth: the Third Age is at an end.

Now the critics who claim a Christian interpretation for the work see in the Grey Havens the Heavenly City. Thus, they interpret the ending as the joyful ascension, without death, of the heroes into heaven. However, in "The Hobbit-Forming World of J.R.R. Tolkien," Henry Resnik reports that "Tolkien's long acquaintance with Norse and Germanic myths inspired the chillier, more menacing landscapes of Middle-earth, and he makes no secret of having deliberately shaped the two major interests of his life -- rural England and the Northern myths -- to his own literary purposes."⁷ In the prefatory notes for The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien says "I have tried to modernize the myths and make them credible." The ending of Northern myths is unlike that of Christian doctrine. If the hero's voyage to Grey Havens is to be associated with Valhalla rather than the Christian Heaven, then the ending must reflect that interpretation. The Valkyries take the heroes from this life to Valhalla, to a magnificent banquet, sports, and fighting. But Valhalla is not an eternal refuge, only a waiting place until that final confrontation between good and evil. The Gods and the heroes will fight valiantly, but they will fall. The joy of Valhalla is the promise of one more battle, not the infinite Gloria of Christian salvation and everlasting life. The voyage to the Grey Havens is not a eucatastrophic event. This problem of whether or not the ending is a happy one will be discussed further in Chapter 9.

Time

Another difference between the fairy-story and The Lord of the Rings is the concept of time. Of fairy-stories, Tolkien says that "they open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe" ("Fairy-Stories", 33). For

the reader, time in his world may be suspended when he sits down with the three volumes. But inside The Lord of the Rings, time marches inexorably. The days from Bilbo's birthday on 22 September 3018 to the farewell at Rivendell on 25 December 3018 rush past. The days Frodo spends in the Dead Marshes and within the gates of Mordor drag. The effect is different from that in The Silmarillion where centuries pass without the reader's awareness.

Tolkien comments further on time in the fairy-story in a note on Andrew Lang's "The Terrible Head": "Namelessness is not a virtue but an accident, and should not have been imitated; for vagueness in this regard is a debasement, a corruption due to forgetfulness and lack of skill. But not so, I think, the timelessness. That beginning ['once upon a time'] is not poverty-stricken but significant. It produces at a stroke the sense of a great uncharted world of time" ("Fairy-Stories", 70). The fairy-story, as Tolkien sees it, is a world outside of time: yet an awareness of time pervades The Lord of the Rings and its appendices. Tolkien even supplements the natural time sequence of the story proper with time-oriented appendices, such as "A" "The Annals of the Kings and Rulers," "B" "The Tale of Years (Chronology of the Westlands)," "C" "Family Trees," and "D" "Shire Calendar."

Length

A final disparity between Tolkien's prototype of the fairy-story and The Lord of the Rings is the length. Tolkien draws the examples in "On Fairy-Stories" mainly from Andrew Lang's Fairy Books, Jakob Grimm's Fairy Tales, and George Dasent's Popular Tales from the Norse. The longest story in Lang's The Brown Fairy Book is forty-seven pages, in a translation of Grimm's work fifteen pages, and in Dasent's volume twenty pages while The Lord of the Rings in three volumes runs 1,215 pages including the appendices.⁸ Apparently, Tolkien recognized this problem, for in discussing how to get the 600,000 words of The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings published, he does not call them fairy-stories but sagas (Letters, 138-39).

With his essay on the fairy-story, Tolkien had printed "Leaf by Niggle" noting that the two are related "by the symbols of Tree and Leaf, and by both

touching in different ways on what is called in the essay 'sub-creation'" ("Fairy-Stories", 5). Niggle's story, which seems to display Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, and Consolation, covers twenty-five pages. However, "Smith of Wootton Major" may be the best example, among Tolkien's works, of his fairy-story thesis. The story takes place, as Tolkien says it should, in the realm of **Faërie**, both geographically and metaphorically. Tolkien creates a Secondary World and tells the story with some wonder. The fairy-story takes place in a "remarkable village," and its events are received with "surprise," "astonishment," and "dismay." The old cook explains to himself the transformation of Alf the Apprentice into a King as a dream. But this rationalization is within the story; it is not a frame like the one Tolkien dislikes in *Alice in Wonderland*. Tolkien's story "Smith of Wootton Major" offers Escape, Recovery, and the Consolation of a tearfully happy ending. Unlike The Lord of the Rings, this story is outside of time: "not very long ago for those with long memories nor very far away for those with long legs? And the tale runs about fifty pages.

Among Tolkien's other works, the accompanying story "Farmer Giles of **Ham**" pretends to be a history. This pretense complicates its generic status as a fairy-story. The Silmarillion functions as a compendium of mythology and cannot be called a story, per se. The Unfinished Tales and the volumes of The History of Middle-earth contain many nuggets of story which Tolkien could have shaped into fairy-story or some other genre, but which remain as fragments. Certainly, some of these tales have frames which indicate that they are being told to children. The existence of such a frame suggests that Tolkien may have intended them to be fairy-stories, but he was such an aggressive reviser and reshaper that forms frequently changed under his creative force.

Although Straight calls The Hobbit (280 pages) "the classical fairy story," "O the manner of presentation, concept of time, and length again present serious difficulties for this generic assignment. The fairy-story cannot be pedantically limited to a fixed number of pages. However, the shortness of its many instances constitutes a formal characteristic which

must exclude both The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. Thus, because the style of the three-part work does not follow Tolkien's suggestion for the style of Fantasy, because the ending is not Eucatastrophe, because it is in time, not outside of time, and because the work is far beyond the usual length of the fairy-story, both The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings should be placed on the reader's library shelf with some genre other than the fairy-story.

The Romance

Another genre considered in connection with The Lord of the Rings is the traditional romance. Tolkien calls the work a "high romance" (Letters, 247). William Blissett in "The Despotism of the Rings" calls it a heroic romance and charts some of its similarities to the Wagnerian Ring of the Nibelung.¹¹ In "The Lord of the Rings as Romance," Derek S. Brewer emphasizes the differences between the novel and the romance. He stresses romance's affinity with myth, folktale, dream, and religious **cult**.¹² In "The Lord of the Rings: The Novel as Traditional Romance," George H. Thomson does a more comprehensive study of the motifs and structures of the three part work in terms of those of the romance. His thesis is that "With respect to its subject matter, the story is an anatomy of romance themes or myths: with respect to its structure, the story is a tapestry romance in the Medieval-Renaissance **tradition**."¹³ Using the six phases of romance identified by Northrop Frye in Anatomy of Criticism, Thomson notes the major occurrences of themes quite effectively.

However, Thomson's designation of The Lord of the Rings as "an anatomy of romance themes or myths" is compatible with the claim that the three part work is a saga.¹⁴ Northrop Frye apparently considers the saga a variation of the romance. He says that "The romance, which deals with heroes, is intermediate between the novel, which deals with men, and the myth, which deals with gods. Prose romance first appears as a late development of Classical mythology, and the prose Sagas of Iceland follow close on the mythical **Eddas**."¹⁵ The Icelandic sagas relating the deeds of

heroes are prose romances in Frye's terms. Because the distinction between poetic works and prose works, as set forth in the discussion of the epic, is important, those differences should continue to be observed in a generic assignment.

Romance Elements of Lying Sagas

As Margaret Schlauch in The Romance in Iceland demonstrates, the romance actually accounts for two types of sagas: the sagas of olden times, which deal with the old Norse gods and heroes, and the lying sagas, which are mainly retellings of romances imported from the Mediterranean **area**.¹⁶ These lying sagas naturally display the six phases of traditional romance. In the chapter "Recurrent Literary Themes," Schlauch takes an imaginary hero Helgi and suggests what the typical course of his adventures might have been in one of these sagas. He is frequently jeopardized at birth by being exposed or offered as a sacrifice to a god. His innocent youth may be spent as a menial; at best he is slow-witted and will not work. His innocence may be threatened by an amorous and evil stepmother whose advances he stoutly refuses. His quest may involve love and/or fortune and/or fame, and he will have to deal with dragons, trolls, and miscellaneous monsters. Since his dangerous quest forms the main part of the saga, the happy, comedic phases as defined by Frye, are frequently quite brief. But the conclusion is usually merry with the traditional proliferation of marriages of the hero and his companions to numerous rescued princesses. Helgi is left, then, "happily married to a princess whom he has won with great effort, and serene in the assurance that his descendants will be no less famous than **he**."¹⁷ His adventures have followed the pattern that Frye establishes for the traditional romance. ¹⁸

Birth of a Romance Hero

However, these romance phases are not limited to the lying sagas. Somewhat more sparingly, romance elements also occur in the heroic sagas and in the family sagas. Perhaps a few examples from the sagas and The

Lord of the Rings will illustrate relationships to Northrop Frye's stages of romance. In The Saga of Gunnlaug Wormtongue, Thorstein orders his daughter Helga exposed because he dreams that two famous men will meet their death in combat over her.¹⁹ This action places the romance protagonist in peril at birth, fulfilling the first stage of a romance. Also, in the Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway, Snorri Sturluson associates Olaf Tryggvason's birth with peril on water since his mother flees in a boat to escape Queen Gunnhild and her sons just before Olaf is born.²⁰

Saga writers often report plentiful crops and an unusual number of twins among the livestock accompanying the birth of a famous hero. Tolkien's use of this frequent romance convention at the end of The Lord of the Rings is important. If Tolkien had planned to take the story on into the fourth age rather than back into earlier ages, the year of twins and other bountiful fruits could signal the birth of a new hero. Instead, Tolkien uses this device as a setting for the hero's disappearance, for the year 1420 prepares the reader for Frodo's departure. Following the practice of Shakespeare, Tolkien establishes the restoration of order before his hero sails to the West. The reader knows that all will be well in the Shire until evil arises again. Tolkien alters this important romance convention to serve his own purposes: the Shire is safe and stable, but it must enjoy its prosperity without its hero. Tolkien underlines the need for continuing sacrifices to be made to provide a secure environment for the hobbits.

Romance Hero's Youth

The innocent youth of the hero, Frye's second stage of romance, appears most often in Icelandic sagas as an unlikely or unpromising childhood. Glum is so described in Viga-Glum Saga: "Glum does not concern himself with the household. Opinion holds that he was difficult in his youth. He was always taciturn and reserved and grew into a tall man. His eyebrows were somewhat slanting; his hair was fair but straight. He was slender, and, opinion holds, slow-witted; he did not go to the gatherings of men."²¹ In Grettir the Strong, the sagawriter notes that Grettir was "very

hard to manage in his bringing **up**."²² When he is told to **mind the geese**, he kills them; when told to rub his father's back, he scrapes it with a **wool** comb; when told to watch the horse, he shaves her hair off. Similarly, Tolkien emphasizes Frodo's youthful adventures with Farmer Maggot, whose mushrooms have led Frodo to moonlight raids.²³

In the saga romance, idyllic friendships, a part of the youth of the hero, are also numerous especially among brothers or **cousins**: the brothers Thorolf and Egil of Egil's Saga, the cousins Kjartan and Bolli of Laxdale Saga, and Helgi and Hroar of The Saga of Hrolf Kraki. The Shire conspiracy for Frodo's departure with the Ring includes his cousins Merry and Pippin. The idyllic friendship of these hobbits so impresses Elrond that he allows them to accompany Frodo as part of the Fellowship of the Ring, even though they are young and inexperienced as warriors.

The Quest

Frye's third phase of romance, the quest, deserves particular attention since W.H. Auden has so thoroughly established its relevance to the structure and meaning of The Lord of the Rings. However, Thomson correctly insists that the quest is not a genre in itself but is rather a most "frequent and important form of the romance **story**."²⁴ But this quest form is not limited to the romance or even to the lying sagas. The quest also occurs in the heroic sagas of olden times and the family sagas. Fitting Auden's essential elements of the typical quest to a heroic saga, such as The Saga of Hrolf Kraki, and to a family saga, such as Kormak's Saga, substantiates this idea.

Precious Object

Auden first requires a precious object -- either immediate or far-reaching, specific or philosophical -- and/or person to be found or married.²⁵ In the "Uppsala Ride," part of The Saga of Hrolf Kraki, Hrolf's patrimony, which is being withheld unethically by King Athils, is such an object. In Kormak's Saga, Kormak first sees Steingerd's feet, then her face; he begins to make poems about his new love and to visit her. Her love

becomes the object of his quest. Similarly, in The Hobbit, the quest is for the Dragon's treasure, which is Thorin's inheritance. In The Lord of the Rings, the object is more philosophical. The destruction of the Ring will break the power of Sauron and avert his conquest of Middle-earth.

Next, the object must be difficult to achieve because of the distance. In some instances, the distance to be conquered expresses itself as time rather than space. The hero's pursuit of the object takes a long time rather than covering a forbidding distance. While Hrolf rides off across a long distance with his champions and men, Kormak devotes his life to pursuing Steingerd's love. In Tolkien's works, both Bilbo and Frodo travel across their known world in pursuit of their objects. Both spend months and return so altered by their experiences that they can no longer remain in their world.

Hero's Character

Auden says that the hero of the quest must be a special person with exactly the right breeding and character: King Hrolf is the son of King Helgi and his daughter-wife Yrsa. Kormak, who is described as "big and strong and of an aggressive disposition," is a skillful, if skeptical, skaldic poet.²⁶ Tolkien makes much of Bilbo and Frodo's descent from the unconventional but extraordinary Tooks. Unlike respectable hobbits, the uncle and nephew have adventurous moods.

Tests of the Hero

The fourth part of the quest form requires its hero to undergo one or more tests. Hrolf and his champions are first subjected to severe cold, then to terrible thirst, and last to a great storm. **Hrolf** sends all but his twelve champions home. When the company arrives at King Athils' palace, dark fog conceals the pitfalls and armed men in the hall. Next a fierce fire and then a great troll in the likeness of a boar try the company. Tolkien's heroes are also tested. Bilbo faces trolls, goblins, spiders, and Smaug. Frodo is tried by Gandalf, cold, storms, thirst, **orcs**, **Ringwraiths**, Galadriel, Boromir,

Gollum, **Shelob**, and Sauron.

In Kormak's Saga, Kormak's mother insists that he borrow Skeggi's sword Skofnung; then Kormak is wounded in a duel because he refuses to follow the taboos connected with **the** sword. Steingerd's relatives **betroth** her to Bersi. Kormak fails a second test when he interrupts the witch Thordis before she can slaughter a third goose. She tells him that 'You are certainly a hard person to help, Kormak. I had **wanted to** overcome the evil fate which Thorveig has called down upon you and Steingerd; and you two could have enjoyed each other's love if I had been able to slaughter the third goose without anyone's seeing it."²⁷ Yet, Kormak is still able to defeat Steingerd's husband Thorvard in two single combats. Although The Lord of the Rings does not concern itself much with love, Elrond has specified that Aragorn must regain his throne before he can marry **Arwen**. Thus, some of Tolkien's heroes meet the same kinds of tests of strength and courage that heroes endure in the sagas of olden times, and his main romantic lead Aragorn suffers not only the challenges of heroism but also those of the family saga love story protagonist.

Guardians

Guardians who must be overcome before the object can be attained are Auden's fifth quest element. King Hrolfs mother, Queen Yrsa, gives him his inheritance including the ring **Sviagriss**. King **Athils**, the guardian of the treasure, pursues them with his troops, but King Hrolf slows them by strewing gold in their path. Hrolf makes King Athils stoop to pick up the ring; then **Hrolf attacks** and finally forces King Athils to return home without the treasure, "and it is not recorded that they ever met again **thereafter**."²⁸ The quest hero must overcome the guardians to succeed.

. Steingerd has several guardians as her story progresses. Her father, Thorkel, and her brother, Thorkel Toothgnasher, both dislike Kormak. Although Narfi, Thorkel's thrall, taunts Kormak and later attacks him with a scythe, Kormak's most potent enemy is the witch Thorveig. After Odd and Gudmund, her sons, attack Kormak at Thorkel's egging, Kormak kills them

and drives their mother from the district. She curses him: "Likely enough that you succeed in making me move from the district, with my sons unatoned for: but I shall pay you back and tell you that you will never have **Steingerd**."²⁹ Later when his brother twits him for always reverting in his poetry to Steingerd but for not going to the wedding when it had been arranged between them, Kormak replies "More was this the work of ill **wights** than due to my own **waywardness**."³⁰ While Thorveig's witchery is not typical of the treasure guardian, her spells have the effect of preventing Kormak from accomplishing his quest.

In The Lord of the **Rings**, Tolkien has created a most unusual guardian for his object, the Ring. Gollum does not appear impressive in size or fierceness, but he is tenacious in his desire to possess the Ring again Faramir would have killed Gollum at Henneth **Annûn**, except for Frodo's pleading. Frodo also restrains Sam from killing Gollum. Tolkien's clever use of this unusual guardian provides an ironic ending. Gollum, the guardian, accidentally destroys his precious object when he falls into Mount Doom. The Ring had wrought a desire for power in Frodo, who lost his will to cast it into the flames and thus failed to fulfill his quest. The irony of the guardian actually destroying the object is an extraordinarily fine use of the quest mode.

In The Silmarillion, Beren spends years in a quest for one of the famous stones. Tinuviel's father demands a silmaril before he will allow his elven daughter to marry a mortal and forsake her immortality. When the Elves sing this story in Rivendell before the Fellowship forms, the reminiscence of Beren's wars underscores the typical quest demands that the elven father Elrond makes for his daughter Arwen. As David Harvey points out in The Song of Middle-earth: **J.R.R. Tolkien's Themes, Symbols and Myths**, Aragorn and Beren share the attributes of the Quest Hero: act of withdrawal, imposition of impossible task, self-realization, symbolic death and passage, and apotheosis.³¹ However, the heroine as quest object repays the hero's suffering with a high price; like her ancestor Tinuviel, **Arwen** will marry the mortal Aragorn and finally forgo her immortality. The

parallelisms between the stories of **Beren/Tinúviel** and **Aragorn/Arwen** are one of many highly crafted enhancements that **Tolkien** brought to the materials in his cauldron of story. No such careful construction of two complementary stories exists in the sagas.

Helpers

Auden's final element for a quest is the helpers who aid the hero with their prowess or their magic. King Hrothgar has the aid of the farmer Hrani, whom Hrothgar identifies too late as Odin himself. His champions, especially Svipdag and Bothvar, his hound Gram, and a penniless man Vogg, who **first** calls the hero Hrothgar "**Kraki**" or pole-ladder -- all these assist at various times.

As a company of champions, the Fellowship of the Ring has unusual characteristics. Although in its original conception, all members were hobbits, in the finished version it contains representatives of each of the peoples of Middle-earth: Gimli for Dwarfs; Legolas for Elves; Gandalf for Wizards; Frodo, Sam, Merry, and **Pippin** for **Hobbits**; and Boromir and Aragorn for Men. At the end of the first volume, Frodo leaves the company to pursue his quest to destroy the Ring. Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas pursue a corollary quest to bring Aragorn to the throne of his fathers through the defeat of Sauron.

In **Kormák's Saga**, Kormak always nullifies the efforts of those who try to help him. He refuses to obey the taboos associated with the sword. Skofnung, and he negates **Thorveig's** magic spell with his curiosity. At the end of the saga, Kormak rescues Steingerd and her husband Thorvald from the viking outlaws, but she refuses to go with him. The sagateller comments that "Kormak also thought that fate would hardly grant them (to live together) and said that evil spirits, or else a contrary fate, had prevented that from the **start**."³² Kormak fights a magically endowed giant in Scotland, and each is the other's bane. Kormak has been unable to achieve his quest, to marry Steingerd. Unlike Kormak, Aragorn does regain his kingdom and marry Arwen. His quest is successful because Frodo's task has been accomplished. The conjunction of these two different types of quests in one

story is another **example** of **Tolkien's** artistry. The sagas are more single minded in their presentation of story. In no single saga would the successful outcome of one quest be dependent on another quest.

As illustrations of the six parts of a quest have shown, the quest form may appear in saga as a prose romance. All the quest elements also appear in The Lord of the **Rings** and some appear in the related works, The Hobbit and The Silmarillion. Thus, the third phase of romance, the quest, is a form as possible within the saga genre as within the romance genre.

Other Phases of Romance

However, Northrop Frye's last three phases of the myth of romance, those that the romance shares with the comedy, are rarely dwelt upon in the lying sagas and even less frequently in the other types of sagas. The fourth phase involves the depiction of a happier society: the fifth describes a reflective, idyllic view of society: and the sixth marks the end of the movement from the active adventure to the contemplative one.³³ If the saga centers on a hero, it usually ends with his death, followed by a short coda naming those distinguished men who descend from him. For instance, in Viga-Glum's Saga, Glum dies a Christian, and his son is a distinguished man who has Glum's remains moved to the church.³⁴ Grettir the Strong does not end before Grettir can be avenged by his kinsman Thorstein, who then has a fortunate adventure with the lady Spes, and in the last chapter, Sturla the Lawman praises **Grettir**.³⁵

Njál's Saga's ending is closer to that of the typical romance, Kari carries out a long and thorough revenge, but he is finally reconciled to Flosi, the best of the men who burned **Njál** and his family. Kari marries Flosi's daughter Hildigunn, and both Flosi and **Kari** then have full lives and renowned offspring.³⁶ Similarly, the Jomsvikings saga has a satisfactory ending for most of its cast. Although Earl Hakon is murdered and Bui becomes a dragon, the other principals, Sigurd Cape, Bjorn, and **Sigvaldi** settle down to rule and procreate. About another character Vagn Akason, the sagateller says that "in spring he journeyed south to Denmark to his

possessions in **Funen and** managed them for a long **time**. And many men of renown are descended from him and Ingeborg, who was considered a most outstanding woman.”³⁷ Thus, even though the last three phases are greatly slighted, the full configuration of the myth of romance, as Frye **describes** it, is possible within the saga form.

Likewise, Tolkien portrays the comedy of Sam’s **wedded** life with Rose, the joys of their children, and Sam’s growth as an eminent person in the community only in a short passage in Appendix B: “Later Events Concerning the Members of the Fellowship of the Ring” (III, 377-78). Perhaps Sam partakes of the sixth, contemplative phase as he readies himself for his journey to the Havens, but this progress is beyond the story proper. Tolkien does not include this happier ending in the main part of the work. Generally, the sagas are action oriented. Tolkien liked these active brawling stories much better than other more contemplative philosophical works, from which he might have drawn inspiration. Consequently, like the saga writers, he reduces the time spent in recounting comedic phases.

Tapestry Format

In addition to arguing that The Lord of the **Rings** is an anatomy of romance themes or myths, Thomson notes that the structure of the story is a tapestry romance. Thomson defines the tapestry tradition as “a series of interwoven stories each of which is picked up or dropped as occasion and suspense require” -- a technique certainly not restricted to the romance.³⁸ However, he does not commit The Lord of the **Rings** **completely** to the tapestry tradition; he suggests that Tolkien **falls** somewhat short of total involvement in the form. Thomson says that “Tolkien has allowed himself a certain neatness of plot at the beginning and end, but the entire central section -- over half the novel -- is in the tapestry **tradition**.”³⁹ Tolkien reveals his awareness of the tapestry tradition and its attendant problems for the author in the letter about the Saga of **Aragorn**, son of Arathorn. Because Tolkien expresses his concern with narrative debt using the word “saga”

rather than “romance,” it is clear that he understood this writer’s conundrum to be prevalent in saga as well as in other genres (Letters, 257-59).

For instance, Snorri uses this skillful movement from one center of interest to another effectively in the Heimskringla.⁴⁰ In fact, in the sagas, the story teller often handles these movements consciously. He presents his ‘cast by starting with the basic “There was a man called Authun” or “Bjarni was the name of a man” or “This man is named to the saga.” Transitions to already established situations are signaled by phrases like these: “That is said” and “Now is there to speak of what happened at **Bergthorsknoll**.” And departure from the scene is also handled with dispatch: “And Oddbjorg is out of the saga.”

In “Tolkien: Formulas of the Past,” James L. Hodge demonstrates that the author-intrusive style of The Hobbit is analogous to that used by medieval authors for telling long, complicated stories. He concludes that in The Hobbit Tolkien practiced the stylistic **idiosyncracies** of the oral story-teller.⁴¹ The same criteria might be applied to The Silmarillion with the same result, for Tolkien there adopts some saga strategies and wordings like those noted above. In his master work The Lord of the **Rings**, Tolkien also moves quickly back and forth from one center of action to another, but with careful practice of chapter endings and paragraph spacing, he abjures the author intrusive technique. As discussed earlier, this movement from one part of the story to another did present problems of “narrative debts,” which were inclined to slow the action (Letters, 257-59). However, Tolkien is obviously extremely successful in resolving these problems -- in bringing the reader up to date with the appropriate amount of detail. The magnitude of Tolkien’s readership, now over five million, attests to his skill as a story-teller.

Since these techniques are shared, the saga form could also be called a tapestry. The saga form more fully explains the mechanics of the beginning and ending of the three-part work than the romance form does. Because the saga, like The Lord of the **Rings**, pretends to be history, the saga is

preferable to the traditional romance as a generic designation. Furthermore, the connotations of the romance (a work in poetry related to the Mediterranean culture) are less applicable to the three-part work than those of the saga (a prose work related to the North sea culture). However, The Lord of the Rii does fit conventional definitions of the romance **genre**; the reader who shelves the work with romances does not **err**.

Traditional Epic

Another genre suggested for The Lord of the **Rings** is the traditional epic. In "Folk Tale, Fiction, and Saga in J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the **Rings**," Bruce A. Beatie argues that the three-part work is a traditional epic: "That is, a work of the genre which includes the Epic of Gilgamesh (from the third millennium B.C.), the Homeric poems and perhaps the Aeneid, the Medieval epics Chanson de Roland and Nibelungenlied, the Russian bylini recorded in the nineteenth century, and the Servo-Croatian tradition of oral epic song studied by Milman Parry in the nineteen- thirties . . ."42 Beatie's statement is filled with inconsistencies **and** inaccuracies as will be discussed later. Further, Beatie notes that all these works belong to "a living oral tradition," but he does not define "the exact nature of an oral tradition."

Parts of The Lord of the **Rings** were read to the Inklings, a group which included C.S. Lewis, W.H. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Charles **Moorman**. About these meetings of the Inklings, C.S. Lewis comments that "No one ever influenced Tolkien -- you might as well try to influence a bandersnatch."43 But reading to a small group in a tavern from a prepared manuscript does not constitute a "living oral tradition." None of Tolkien's works seem to fit the definition of a work of art passed from generation to generation in oral form with no attendant written record. Tolkien was familiar with sagas which were written down after two or three hundred years in oral tradition and would **not** have made such a claim for his work.

Beatie bases his conception of the traditional epic more on Rhys Carpenter's Folk Tale, Fiction, and Saga in the Homeric Epics than on the examples he cites above. Carpenter distinguishes the elements in his title

as follows: "Saga, which purports to be true fact and happening held fast in popular memory; fiction, which is the persuasive decking out of circumstance with trappings borrowed from contemporary actuality; and folk tale, which is utterly unreal but by no means utterly irrational -- all these can be sewn together in the rhapsody's glittering fabric."*** The rhapsody here is the epic, a combination of saga, fiction, and folk tale. Carpenter theorizes that the more details a poet of the oral tradition includes in his work, the more he is inventing. Carpenter assigns this principle to the Greek historian Ephoros, who said that "In the case of contemporary happenings we think those witnesses the most reliable who give the greatest detail,, whereas in the case of events long ago we hold that those who thus go into detail are the least to be believed, since we consider it highly improbable that the actions and words of men should be remembered at such length."⁴⁵ Since the great epics contain details, they must be poetic accounts rather than narratives of actual happenings.

From this reasoning, Carpenter concludes that several important distinctions **between** the saga and fiction exist. The saga derives itself from the past while fiction depends on the future for its existence. The saga is relayed from generation to generation becoming more vague, more confused, less accurate with each relay. Fiction is created at the moment from everyday experience and the surrounding environment, It becomes more up-to-date and real if it is altered.⁴⁶ What Carpenter designates as saga might more accurately be called remembered history.

It is significant that Carpenter mentions only two sagas (Grettir the Strong and Volsunga Saga) in his entire book. These examples of two very different kinds of saga can offer only the sketchiest view of the saga as genre. His use of the word saga apparently derives from early critical opinion which held that all but the most fantastic portions of the sagas were to be regarded either as historical or as only slightly exaggerated. Critics no longer consider this theory about the complete authenticity of saga content valid. Sagas are now seen to participate in the blending of actual event, history, mythology, and the author's imagination. While Tolkien's tutor, W.A. Craigie

did place great value on the historical accuracy of the saga as discussed in Chapter 2, Tolkien probably valued sagas as works of art, rather than as historical documents. Tolkien's defense of the poem Beowulf as a work of art rather than a document of history would support this point of view.

However, Carpenter seems to be somewhat **aware** of the distinction within a particular saga of the elements of fiction, folk lore, and history/saga. He comments that Grettir the Strong can serve as an accurate geographical guide to its Icelandic setting probably because its author had both the two and a half century old story of Grettir and his own experience to fashion into a saga. Carpenter also says that "Being based on oral tradition, it [Grettir the Strong] deals with actual men and makes their doings vivid by a firsthand knowledge of the country and direct appeal to a culture still familiar to the sagateller. But though many of the events may be real, the chief characters have surely grown in dramatic stature and taken on heroic proportions for good and evil. . . . Folk tale and historic saga and literary fiction all blend harmoniously into the reality of the bleak Icelandic world wherein the sagateller lived."⁴⁷ Thus, if Grettir the Strong is a blend of folk tale, fiction, and saga as the Iliad and Odyssey are, then The Lord of the Rings can as properly be called a saga as a traditional epic. Beatie relies for definition on Carpenter who relies on only two examples of saga; one example Carpenter uses may be applied as easily to saga as to epic. The whole argument for The Lord of the Rings as epic simply evaporates.

Yet, Carpenter's theory of a blending of elements gains importance as appreciation for the creativity of the author of Grettir the Strong increases. Peter Foote in his "Introduction" to The Saga of Grettir the Strong notes that the author of the saga was indebted to the Landnámabók and five other sagas. Grettir the Strong's author also attributes to Grettir tales, verses, and anecdotes told from the literature of romance and from other heroes including Beowulf. Folktales about other heroes get mixed in with historically accurate deeds. The saga writer "tells anecdotes that smell of the Icelandic **farmstead**, where a rebellious son ironically caps his acts with hard-headed peasant proverbs," and "he entertains us with naive notions of

giants and half-giants and sweet-water valleys hidden among the harsh glaciers of the **interior**."⁴⁸ Through all this embellishment, the **author** is preoccupied with the problem of **Grettir's lucklessness** and how this handicap causes the downfall of the famous outlaw.⁴⁹ Fiction, folk-tale, and truth blend into **story**, in the same way that Tolkien blended elements into his works.

If saga and traditional epic are both blends of folklore, **fiction**, and historical background, then both terms should apply equally to The Lord of the Rings. But Carpenter's definition is not quite representative of all concepts of the epic genre. For instance, M.H. Abrams in A Glossary of Literary Terms defines epic as "a long narrative poem on a serious subject, related in an elevated style, and centered about an heroic figure on whose actions depends to some degree the fate of a nation or a **race**."⁵⁰ The definition seems relevant except for the three-part work's style, which, despite critical defense of its verse and prose, is not epic. Thus, while The Lord of the Rings does have the characteristics of the traditional epic, the epic is also a form in poetry. The distinction between prose (even that which contains some poetry) and poetry must be kept intact especially since the high ceremonial poetic style seems so germane to the conventions and traditions of the epic. Despite the many affinities between the contents of some epics, the reader's copy of The Lord of the Rings should not be shelved with the epics.

The Novel

Even though Tolkien denied its applicability to The Lord of the Rings, **no** investigation of the genres assigned to the three-part work could be complete without a discussion of the prevalent twentieth-century prose form, the novel. As a genre, critics have most frequently defined the novel as fitting cultural standards of reality and truth. Hence, in the ranking of genres, the novel accrues status as an imitation of nature.⁵¹ Consideration of the three-part work as a novel may invite pointless criticisms. For instance, Giddings expects The Lord of the Rings to shape perceptions about the

modern world in terms of a social criticism with political, economic, and ideological significance. He desires instruction about how to alter current society. Giddings refuses to accept Tolkien's work as a genre other than the realistic novel.⁵² The Lord of the Rings does not exist as a critique of British society but as a statement of broad values. Yet, unfortunately, most British critics continue in the kinds of dissecting criticism which necessitated Tolkien's composition of "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics." In the article, Tolkien chastises critics for viewing the work as history, mythology, or archaeology, rather than as a poem.

Definitions

Definitions of the novel range from E. M. Forster's pronouncement in Aspects of the Novel that "any fictitious prose work over 50,000 words will be a **novel**,"⁵³ to Northrop Frye's declaration that since we have no word from the Greeks for prose fiction, the term "novel" has been used for everything and has thus lost its only true meaning. The terms Frye finally suggests are novel, romance, autobiography, and Menippean satire.⁵⁴ Handbooks, such as Abram's Glossary of Literary Terms and Thrall and Hibbard's A Handbook to Literature, supplant definition with discussions of predecessors, of types, and of elements. One critic defined the novel, with some dissatisfaction, as follows: "**A** novel is an ordered sequence of primarily imaginative events which interprets human life in extended prose form: a good novel so patterns its vitality as to create an illusion of significant **reality**."⁵⁵ Some **definitions** are more complex. For instance, A.A. Mendilow in Time and the Novel defines the genre as follows:

The novel is a fictitious narrative in prose which seeks to illustrate and illuminate human experience and behavior within the limitations imposed by the medium of language and by the necessities of form, by approximating as closely as possible to what we apprehend as reality. The test of its immediate success is its power to evoke the feeling of presentness (in a double

sense) in and at that reality; this assumes that the reader will cooperate with the author to the extent of accepting the conventions on which the illusory reality of fiction is based, by yielding to "the willing suspension of disbelief." Its more lasting value may be estimated, firstly by the degree to which the discriminating reader feels the whole work as a symbol of something wider and deeper than the actual theme, something that sets up in him reverberations **that** invest the particular human problem treated with universal significance; secondly, if the discriminating reader can recognize in the relations of the parts to one another and to the whole some underlying, formal principle, corresponding so closely to the conception of the theme as to appear inevitable. The theme, the form and the medium of the novel should be but three aspects of something that is one and indivisible -- that intangible that we may call the author's vision.⁵⁶

Obviously, various definitions of the novel differ not only in length but also in rigor.

Clearly, The Lord of the **Rings** qualifies as a novel under Forster's definition of prose length. And if the modern analysis of the fictitious nature of most of the sagas is accurate, then they qualify as novels, too. Similarly, the second definition may or may not fit The Lord of the **Rings** depending on the critic applying it. The work's admirers would defend its ability to "create an illusion of significant reality" while its detractors claim that it neither interprets human life nor creates an illusion of reality. However, the **Volsunga Saga**, too, is primarily imaginative, interprets human life, and creates an illusion of reality.

A key phrase in Mendilow's definition requires the novel to imitate "as closely as possible to what we apprehend as reality." This phrase suggests that the only reality possible is that of our everyday lives. He apparently denies the ability to imagine or participate in any level of reality other than

the conventional. Mendilow might also disqualify The Lord of the **Rings** as having a theme treated in other works of literature, such as romance or epic, and thus not inextricably unique to the form and medium of the work.

Novel Qualities of Sagas

Nevertheless, major sagas, such as Grettir the Strong or Laxdale Saga, would also meet the terms of the definition. Both are to some degree fictitious; yet both must approximate what is known of the reality of their age. Each unfolds according to a simple but formal principle. And in each, the theme, form, and medium seem indivisible. Certainly, the saga writer focuses our attention on a central problem or vision in each. As Peter Foote points, out in the "Introduction" to Grettir the Strong, the author is preoccupied: "Why was Grettir, a man of immense strength and courage, quick-witted and essentially good-natured, famous for killing savage men and laying malevolent spirits, forced to live long desolate years as an outlaw and finally to die wretchedly at the hands of his enemies? The author seeks the causes of **Grettir's** downfall, and his interpretation is decisive for the construction of the saga in its middle part and for the epilogue with which it **closes**".⁵⁷ In Grettir the Strong, the **sagaman** so engages the reader that there is a great desire to reach in and shake Grettir, to try to prevent him from another meaningless encounter. Foote, in fact, attributes to the saga narrator "a freedom of stylistic resource like that allowed to a modern **novelist**".⁵⁸ Similarly, Laxdale Saga might be viewed as a psychological novel about **Gudrun**.

Heroic Fantasy Novel

Furthermore, Lin Carter's creation of a sub-genre, which he calls alternately "the heroic fantasy novel" and "the epic, heroic fantasy romance," snarls the generic problem.⁵⁹ First, Carter's subdivision of the novel does not illuminate the nature of The Lord of the **Rings**, and his comparison of Tolkien's three part work to the works of William Morris, E.R. Eddison, and others is equally fruitless. If fantasy indicates, as Thomson suggests, "a

phenomenon of displacement” rather than a **genre**,⁶⁰ then Carter’s designation is meaningless. Carter would merely be arguing that Morris, Eddison, and Tolkien had written novels with a powerful element of fantasy. In fact, Carter’s own lengthy discussion of fantasy elements in classical **epic**, Chanson de Geste, and medieval romance substantiates the idea that fantasy is displacement, not genre. However, the romance tradition, especially a prose romance such as **Malory’s Morte d’Arthur** rather than the novel, best illuminates Morris’s works. Like Tolkien, E. R. Eddison was devoted to saga. He translated the Egil’s Saga, wrote a saga set in the Viking age, and also created a multivolume fantasy work.

Edwardian Adventure Novel

Jared Lobdell’s assignment of The Lord of the Rings to the adventure story in the Edwardian mode is more productive. In England and Always: Tolkien’s World of the Rings, **Lobdell** first establishes Tolkien’s knowledge of the Edwardian adventure story, such as Sir Henry Rider Haggard’s She from biographical sources and from **textual** evidence. Next, **Lobdell** more tenuously traces a set of connections between Tolkien’s essay “On Fairy-Stories” and the works of G.K. Chesterton. Third, **Lobdell** cites a hand-written entry in “Notes on the Nomenclature of The Lord of the Rings” to trace Tolkien’s use of the works of Algernon Blackwood, author of The Wind in the Willows.⁶¹

Lobdell characterizes the Edwardian adventure story as a story in which the adventure leads the author into the book. Unlike the fairy-story, the adventure tale is time specific, but quickly moves from familiar surroundings to lost lands. Nature, such as the willows, has a character in these tales, not always a good one. The adventure is not solitary, but the narrative is in the first person. The narrative tone is self-deprecating, deriving from British understatement. The actors are stock Englishmen, who set off to see strange sights and have strange adventures. The framework of the story is there and back again, with the back again frequently skimmed.⁶²

In an in-depth comparison of **Conan** Doyle's The Lost World and Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, **Lobdell** finds that, the four types (desiccated professor, eccentric omniscient, sportsman, Irish **rugger**) compare with the Nine Walkers (master and man, enthusiastic but fallible assistants, warrior, king-in-exile, elf, dwarf, eccentric omniscient **Gandalf**). Nature attacks these protagonists, and a theme of the past alive in the present pervades both works. **Lobdell** believes that Tolkien should be titled "the last Edwardian" because he brought the branches of the sundered lines of "there" and "back again" together.⁶³

Lobdell also lists the particular characteristics of the Edwardian mode: "the aristocratic view, the black-and-white morality, the lack of interest in character development (certainly more extreme in this mode than in others), the movement of 'there and back again,' the emphasis on 'we few, we happy few' (related to, but not altogether the same as, the aristocratic view), the fascination of the past alive in the present, the undercurrent of mystery (or even malignity) in nature? In the particular characteristics the whole argument unravels. Only one of the nine walkers, **Aragorn**, can be classed as an aristocrat; three are quite egalitarian hobbits. While critics often find the morality black and white, the ideas about the existence and persistence of evil are complex, and the happy ending touted for the work is not in fact joyous. Character development is lacking, and the "there and back" movement occurs, but the "happy few" are vocally unhappy about suffering the evils of Sauron in their time. Malignant aspects of nature are a feature, but the emphasis is on the events of the Fourth Age, rather than the glories of the past.

Further, The Lord of the Rings is much grander in its conception than the typical Edwardian adventure. **Lobdell** suggests that this generic application reflects Tolkien's reading during the beginning of the century. At about that same time, Tolkien began reading the Norse saga, a form which also embodies lack of interest in character development, clearly defined morality, and other relevant modes. The saga appears to have been more influential on the generic direction of The Lord of the Rings than the

Edwardian adventure story.

Thus, a work of the unusual nature of The Lord of the Rings only complicates the long-standing problem of defining the novel. And a knowledge of the sagas further confuses both the definition of the novel and that of The Lord of the Rings. A workable definition of the saga itself will distinguish the sagas from the novels and will illuminate the nature of The Lord of the Rings. The reader will find little reason to consider shelving a single copy of The Lord of the Rings in the novel section,

The Saga

Unfortunately, not all the confusion between the saga and the novel lies in definitions of the novel. Saga specialists have also made the comparison. For instance, Margaret Schlauch in the preface to her translation of the Volsunga Saga says that "In taking over this variegated material from the poems of the Edda and transforming it into a prose saga -- the equivalent of a modern novel -- the Sagaman shows no little literary skill."⁶⁵ Halvdan Koht in The Old Norse Sagas speaks of two kinds of popular stories, "pure fiction and historical novels."⁶⁶ And, in the "Introduction" to Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Lee M. Hollander's translation of Njáls Saga, the editors refer to "the medieval novels we call sagas . . ."⁶⁷

Just as the variety of possible forms complicates the definition of the novel, so the many types of sagas confuse the description of the saga. Even though Icelanders wrote most of the best sagas, they frequently chose to write about people and events away from their island home. Thus, although Iceland never had a king, Kings' sagas, biographies infused with fiction and myth, were popular. Some single lives of kings such as Abbot Karl Jonsson's Sverris Saga and Oddr Snorrason's Olaf Trygvason were done, and others were collected in the Morkinskinna and the Fagrskinna. Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway is the pinnacle of its kind. Sagas of bishops and saints perhaps represent a displacement from the interest in rulers as heroes to a concern with holy men as heroes with the Olafs saga Helga, whose hero is both a ruler and a saint, as the transition.⁶⁸

The Icelanders, who had left Norway partly to escape the tyranny of their new king Harold Fairhair, rather naturally turned to writing stories of their own first families. These, too, told of a single hero, such as Grettir, Gisli, or Viga-Glum, or sometimes of a group of people such as those in Eyrbyggja, Laxdale Saga, or Vatnsdale Saga. The realism of these works led scholars to believe that they were historical documents, but the tendency now is to credit the author of the saga with creating the story from various sources including historical documents, other sagas, and his own imagination. Thus, sagas like Hrafnkel, the Priest of Frev once considered "a perfectly reasonable-looking, realistic saga" are now thought to be almost purely fictitious.⁶⁹

The other two main types of sagas, the heroic sagas or sagas of olden times and the lying sagas (borrowings from the Mediterranean romance tradition), have already been discussed in relation to the traditional romance. The problem, then, is to evolve a definition that will encompass most of the sagas in all four of these categories -- kings, family, heroic, and lying sagas.

Definition

While handbook definitions, such as the one by Thrall and Hibbard, stress the place and period of creation rather than the characteristics of the form, authorities like Stefan Einarsson in A History of Icelandic Literature devote a chapter to the problem of definition. However, in order to show how The Lord of the Rings fits the saga form, a statement of what a saga is must be compiled. Here is a working definition: A saga is an extended, prose, chronological narrative with these conventions: a concrete impression of location, a protracted interest in genealogy, a zeal for capsule character description, an abundance of action and adventure, and some pretensions to a historical basis. The term "saga" connotes an affinity for the cultural heritage of the North Atlantic peoples.⁷⁰

Although such a definition should ideally be supported with as many examples as possible, for economy, illustrations of these conventions will be

confined mainly to some critical commentaries and to the family saga, Níál's Huga, and the heroic saga, The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise. At the same time, corresponding examples from The Lord of the Rings will also be provided. Then, the reasons for **excluding** certain other conventions from the **definition** will be discussed.

Extended Prose

In the body of the **definition**, the term “extended” is, of course, open-ended. No one wants to say precisely how many pages would be necessary, but in general, scholars call shorter pieces of Icelandic literature *thaettir*. The sagas can be quite long: Níál's's Saga, a trilogy of sorts, is 390 big pages and the Heimskringla: The History of the Kings of Norway is **854** pages. The three volume **1,215** page The Lord of the Rings must **qualify** as extended. Similarly, both the sagas and the three-part work are in prose, although most of the sagas, and The Lord of the Rings, too, are embellished with short verse. However, as verse is absent or minimal in some kings and family sagas (parts of the Heimskringla and Hrafnkel, The Priest of Frey for example), it is not required as a characteristic in the **definition**.

Chronological

Further, the saga author tries to keep his story as chronological as possible. Naturally, when he uses more than one strand, he must go back in time to the point where he can join the other story line. Tolkien uses this technique especially in volumes two and three where various members of the Fellowship are separated from each other. However, he does not go back to follow **Gandalf's** adventures with the Balrog in Moria but rather lets Gandalf tell his adventures to the others. The problem of resolving accrued narrative debts has been discussed in the section on romance.

And, even though aphoristic phrases and bits of dialogue do come from their speakers, the saga is, in its essence, a story being told. Tolkien, who notes in his essay “On Fairy-Stories” that drama and fantasy are

incompatible, **uses the the** same technique ("@airy-Stories", 467). The **effect** in **both** the sagas and The Lord of the Rings **is** frequently dramatic, but much in both might prevent them from being a **successful** play or movie. Although no counting of pages devoted to dialogue and pages of narrative has been attempted, the relative space seems consistent among the sagas and The Lord of the Rings. The word "narrative" in the definition would exclude much that the novel genre may encompass. For instance, Faulkner's As I Lay Dying and Joyce's Ulysses are not primarily narrative. The sagas and The Lord of the Rings are stories told as stories without apology.

Concrete Impression of Location

The first convention of the saga is the importance of the location to the telling of the story. Rhys Carpenter notes that many years **after** Robert Louis Stevenson wrote Treasure Island, Stevenson mentioned in a preface to the book the importance of an imaginary map of his imaginary island to his plot. Stevenson was particularly critical of Walter Scott's blunders in geography because Scott failed "to equip himself with the essential cartographic insurance? Stevenson wrote that "It is my contention . . . my superstition, if you like -- that he who is faithful to his map, and consults it, and draws from it his inspiration, daily and hourly, gains positive support, and not mere negative immunity from accident. The tale has a root there: it grows in that soil; it has a spine of its own behind the words . . . The author must know his countryside, **whether** real or imaginary, like his hand; the distances, the points of the compass, the place of the sun's rising, the behavior of the moon, **should** all be beyond **cavil**."⁷² Carpenter compares Stevenson's theory with Grettir the Strong's **authorial** concern with the accuracy of his setting. Stevenson is one of those Edwardian novelists whose works Tolkien probably read as a youth, and the saga translator/fantasy writer E. R. Eddison also discusses Stevenson in his preface to a translation of Egil's Saga.

Obviously, when an Icelandic saga writer was telling a tale about Norway, about the past, or about foreign lands, mistakes in location did

occur. **However**, the author usually **tried** to make the location **as real** as his sources would allow. Thus, in The Saga of King Heidrek, Uppsala, the Island of Samse, an anchorage on the island, a forest and a river in **Gardar**, and **the** forest Mirkwood and its adjoining plain are all important to the story. Locations for this saga of olden times vary from familiar towns to more generic and symbolic geographical features, such as the forest Mirkwood.

Many of the Icelandic **family** saga writers lived in the area they wrote about. Their audience would have immediately noticed any errors in geography. Modern foreign editions of the sagas **inevitably** contain maps so that the reader can more easily follow the movement of the story. Njáls's Saga, for instance, has a map of Iceland and on the verso a larger scale map of Southwest Iceland. Similarly, The Fellowship of the Ring provides its readers with a two page map of Middle-earth and an enlarged map of the Shire. The Two Towers repeats the map of Middle-earth, but The Return of the King has an enlarged map of Gondor, Rohan, and Mordor. The Hobbit has two maps, "Thor's Map" of the Lonely Mountain and a map of Wilderland. All these maps and the large 1960s **poster** map of Middle-earth show the path taken by the adventurers just as the map of **twelfth-century Iceland** in Gordon's Introduction to Old Norse shows the routes of **Hrafnkel** and Sam to **Althing**.⁷³ Tolkien believed in cartographic insurance against the terrors of imprecise geography. His niggling over details of geography, names, **and** time are a part of his devotion to the quality of his work that sets him above other writers of like stories.

In "The Cartography of Fantasy," RC. Walker extols Tolkien's maps and their contribution to a heightened "sense of place." He argues that the fantasy writer makes his setting more real for us through a wealth of detail. Conversely, he notes the typical science fiction author concerns himself with convincing us with the details of his technological invention. Walker praises the opportuneness of the setting: '@The Lord of the Rings could not be laid in any setting other than **Middle-Earth[sic]**. It is inextricably tied to its setting. Thus the creation of a convincing setting in which the events to be narrated will take place may be seen to be a basic act in the art of writing

fantasy."⁷⁴ It is interesting to remember that in the time of enormous cult interest in this work, the place Middle-earth was perhaps better known even than the name Tolkien or the title The Lord of the Rings. Walker is correct in his praise for the creation of Middle-earth; he should have incorporated other quality issues into his discussion of Tolkien's power to convince readers.

Many critics of Tolkien view Middle-earth as the actual continent of Europe. Others see only features from the English countryside, and to a lesser degree from **continental** Europe. Tolkien assures us that Middle-earth is not an **imaginary** world but our earth: "The Lord of the Rings may be a 'fairy-story', but it takes place in the Northern hemisphere of this earth: miles are miles, days are days, and weather is weather" (Letters, 272). To represent our world in another time required that its features be placed in the cosmic cauldron along with other imaginative, mythopoeic products. Tolkien's dippings from this cauldron created Middle-earth. His imaginative genius gave it both the substance and the flavor that make his work great art.

In spite of his copious use of maps, Tolkien occasionally slipped on the details. A note in the front of The Hobbit reports that the text on pages 32 and 62 has been made to correspond with the runes on **Thrór's Map**. His letters also record the correction of various errata in The Hobbit (Letters, 28).⁷⁵ The publication of earlier versions of stories in The History of Middle-earth makes it possible for the scholar to see how extensively Tolkien revised. His conceptions of peoples (gnomes become elves) and heroes (see the discussion of Turin and his progenitors in Chapter 10). All changed extensively. The thoroughness with which he managed consistency in changes is a credit to his craftsmanship.

An Interest in Genealogy

A second convention, the interest in genealogy, may seem tedious to modern readers, but the Icelanders' love for genealogies is shared, Tolkien assures us, by the hobbits. "All Hobbits were, in any case, clannish and

reckoned up their relationships with great care. They drew long and elaborate family trees with innumerable branches. In dealing with **Hobbits** it is important to remember who is related to whom, and in what degree . . . The genealogical trees at the end of the Red Book of Westmarch are a small book in themselves and all but Hobbits would find them exceedingly dull" (I, 16- 17). The Silmarillion also contains several family trees.

Nevertheless, the **hobbits** would have loved Njál's Saga, for it begins with "Mord, Hoskuld, and their Kin" and mentions families for most of its cast. Bayerschmidt and Hollander have called the genealogies in Knúts Saga "excessive even for an Icelandic saga." Those of the heroic sagas are also plentiful; the author of The Saga of King Heidrek devotes some twenty pages to the exploits of the King's ancestors. In one manuscript of King Heidrek and also in the Heimskringla, the saga writer traces the genealogy of the King back to the giants and men of Asia. Thus, the Appendix C "Family Trees" of The Lord of the Rings has its natural parallel in the genealogical appendices which modern editors frequently supply for the sagas. The importance of genealogy in the sagas is that kinship determines who can be drawn in to support a revenge action. Many of the men who bled Njál's in his house are only attached to the party because of their kinship. Kinship is not a motivating force in The Lord of the Rings, but in The Silmarillion many background actions derive from a crucial kinslaying. Galadriel would not be in Middle-earth to play her part in the destruction of the Ring except for an early feud.

Capsule Characterization

A special type of characterization is a third convention of the saga. Although some characters are studied in great psychological depth (**Gudrun** in Laxdale Saga, **Grettir**, and **Glum** are examples), most are limited to a brief treatment. In his introduction to the Saga of the Jomsvikings, Lee Hollander¹ describes this technique:

The family sagas present us with a wealth of sharply etched and

individualized portraits; but this author, in consonance **with** the highly fictive nature of his work, gives us characters **which** are types rather than individuals. Thus, **Bui**, Vagn, **Sigvaldi** are all seen in the one plane of their dominant traits -- manly intrepidity, reckless heroism, foxy shrewdness, respectively. Only one character may be said to **exemplify** all the ideals of heathen Norse antiquity: Palantoki, warrior and born leader, founder and kingmaker. But contrary to most of the purely **fictitious** sagas of the North, and in agreement here with the cool objectivity of the family sagas, there is no one "hero" around whom events are centered and whose part we take. Our sympathies are not exclusively engaged on one side, even in the great battle, but veer now to the one, now to the **other**.⁷⁶

Hollander contrasts the types for most characters with the better developed character of Palantoki and of the main actors in Icelandic family sagas.

Much that Hollander observes about ~~The Saga of the Jomsvikings~~ also fits other sagas and The Lord of the Rings. For instance in Njál's Saga, Gunnar, Njál, Kari, and to a lesser extent Hallgerd, Bergthora, **Flosi**, and Skarphedin, all share the great downstage center of the saga. It is a story of a group of less complex characters rather than an extended study of one character. Similarly, in King Heidrek, the actions of the king's tempestuous mother, Hervor, almost overshadow those of the king. Three successive protagonists **named Angantyr** appear to prevent any sluggishness in the action. In ~~The Lord of the Rings~~, Frodo, Aragorn, and Gandalf are the central characters, but Meriadoc, Peregrin, Samwise, Legolas, Gimli, Boromir, Éowyn, Faramir, and others are each heroes in separate spheres. Thematically, Tolkien requires heroism on all levels, not just from the main two or three characters.

With so many important characters, the individualized portraits must be handled rather summarily. For instance, in Njál's Saga, the **sagaman** describes Skarphedin: "Now Njál's sons must be named. The oldest was

Skarphedin. He was tall, strong, and well **skilled** in arms. He swam like a seal **and** he was an excellent runner. **Skarphedin** was quick **in his** decisions and absolutely fearless. He spoke **trenchantly**, [but often] **rashly**. Yet for the most part he kept his temper well **under** control. He had brown curly hair and handsome eyes. His features were sharp and he had a **sallow** complexion. He had **a** hook nose, his teeth were prominent, and he had a rather ugly mouth, but he looked every **bit** the **warrior**."⁷⁷ Skarphedin seems more a blend of typical warrior than he does an individual.

In the heroic sagas where action predominates, descriptions of characters are necessarily less incisive; the emphasis is on action rather than introspection. In King Heidrek, the **sagaman** compares the King with his brother: "Both of them were beautiful in face, and bigger and stronger than other men: both were wise in understanding and men of the greatest accomplishment. **Angantyr** was like his father in nature, and wished everybody well; his father loved him deeply and he was much liked by the whole people. But as much good as **Angantyr** did; so much more mischief than any other man did Heidrek do: and **it was him** that Hervor loved the **more**."⁷⁸ Here two major characters are **described in** a short paragraph. The **sagaman** provides only a physical description, assessment of strength, extent of wisdom, and nature of accomplishment.

Although Tolkien does not give the trenchant clues to character often supplied by the **sagaman**, he does suggest something of the manner of the man along with his initial description of the character's appearance. For example, at the Council of Elrond, Tolkien reveals something of Boromir's character: "And seated a little apart was a tall man with a **fair** and noble face, dark-haired and **grey-eyed**, proud and stern of glance. He was cloaked and booted as if for a journey on horseback; and indeed though his garments were rich, and his cloak was lined with fur, they were stained with long travel. He had a collar of silver in which a single white stone was set: his locks were shorn about his shoulders. On a baldric he wore a great horn tipped with silver . . ." (I, 253). Boromir's most important characteristic -- his hubristic thirst for power -- develops through the action and dialogue of

the story. **But** Tolkien does somewhat foreshadow it by mentioning Boromir's **pride**. Like the **sagaman**, Tolkien provides a physical description including the clues from his clothing, a **comment** on noble nature, and a hint of a journey. The horn in the description is an important token.

Of the saga characters, **Gudrun** in the Laxdale.Saga and Grettir in-Grettir the Strong have greater character development than other saga personages. The extended view provided in The Silmarillion and The Unfinished Tales for Galadriel shows that Tolkien might have developed a story with the complexity of the Laxdale.Saga about her as discussed in Chapter 8. **Túrin's** lucklessness rivals Grettir's, and had that story been **fully** developed, the psychological depth would have been comparable as outlined in Chapter 10. While **Frodo** and others do have personal dilemmas in The Lord of the Rings as described in Chapter 9, Tolkien emphasizes their actions, not their emotions.

Abundance of Action

The fourth convention, the abundance of action and adventure, needs little documentation in either the sagas or The Lord of the Rings. In Njáls Saga for instance, sea voyages, fights, murders, battles, revenge, stealing, horse **fights**, ambushes, escapes, and burnings follow in close sequence. Perhaps the most famous scenes in the saga are the ones that contain the most violent actions: **Skarphedin's** decapitation of **Thrain** as **Skarphedin** slides past **him** "with the speed of a bird" on an ice floe, **Gunnar's** heroic defense by **bow**, spear, and sword when he is attacked at Hlidarenda, and **Njál's** sons' long resistance in the burning house, from which **Kari** alone escapes. Likewise, in The Saga of King Heidrek, **duels**, berserk-fury, battles, viking expeditions, barrow descent, beheading, fratricide, exile, murder, suicide, revenge, and war -- all keep the reader from boredom. Action and **adventure** predominate in The Lord of the Ring, too. There, land and sea journeys, barrow descent, storms, raids, escapes on horseback, mountain climbing, caving, fire, battles, wars, suicide, and attacks by monsters are numerous.

Lack of any emphasis on love or **sex** is almost a corollary to **that** much adventure. Even sagas, such as Kormak's Saga and Gunnlaug's Saga that are primarily love stories, emphasize **neither** sex nor sentiment. Along with the love story, duels, battles, **viking** raids, and sea voyages form a major part of the story. In E.R. Eddison's imitation of a saga, Styrbiorn the Strong, Sigrid's seduction of Styrbiorn is one of the two scenes that seem completely false.⁷⁹ Similarly, although The Lord of the Rings ends with a triple marriage (Aragorn and Arwen; Faramir and Éowyn; and Sam and Rosie), sex and romance are not explored. In fact, several critics have commented uselessly on the stiffness both of the women and of the love scenes.

Pretense to History

Finally, the saga conventionally pretends to be history. Students of the saga have argued long and fervently about which sagas are historical and to what degree the historical ones are accurate. For stories that have perhaps boiled long in the cauldron of "oral tradition," the answer must always be a relative supposition. However, even the blatantly artificial sagas pretend to be historical. Einarsson comments on the less historical knights' tales and lying sagas: "These types [*riddara sogur* (knights' tales) and *lygi sogur* (lying tales)] range from pure history to wild fiction, but practically all the fictitious sagas **purport** to be historical and deal with semi or pseudo-historical figures."⁸⁰ Thus, every Norse story from the settlement of Greenland to the wildest adventure with a genie in Asia presents itself as history.

Einarsson's statement on the historical pretenses of the saga writers renders Beatie's blatant dismissal of the "saga-aspect of Tolkien's work" ridiculous. Beatie says that "The saga-aspect of Tolkien's work can be dealt with more briefly. The purportedly true facts behind The Lord of the Rings are, to be sure, the product of an incredibly fertile imagination. Whereas for the Nibelungenlied the 'saga' consists in the historical destruction of the Burgundians by the Huns in the year 437, for the Chanson de Roland in Charlemagne's expedition to Spain in the year 778, for the Beowulf in

obscure **Dano-Swedish** quarrels of the late **fifth century**, there is no such kernel of historical 'truth' in Tolkien's work."⁸¹ Ironically, none of **Beatie's** three examples **is** a saga, which is by definition a prose work.

Nibelungenlied is an Old German heroic epic poem; Chanson de Roland, an Old French epic poem; and Beowulf an Old English elegy (Tolkien's generic assignment) or epic (Klaeber and other Beowulf critics' choice for a genre). Further, a kernel of historical truth is not evident for The Lord of the Rings in the way it would be if the work were a novel with a key or an allegory. Yet through its relationship with the Volsunga Saga, Beowulf, and Icelandic sagas, Tolkien's work partakes of the same historical truth which has created great works of heroic literature throughout the ages. The truth **is** that chaos approaches and the heroes must stand against it.

Tolkien has a broader perspective on the nature of history than the critics would allow. In the "Foreword" to the revised' edition of The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien confesses his preference for history: "But I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers" (I, 7). His belief that history had its fictitious elements reflects his theories of how stories are created in the cauldron of myth. And, in fact, he has gone to some lengths to feign a historical basis for his work. In the "Note on the Shire Records," Tolkien discusses the relationship between the three-part work and its' sources: "This account of the end of the Third Ages is drawn mainly from the Red Book of Westmarch." He explains that the origin of the Red Book was Bilbo's diary, which Frodo brought home from Rivendell and supplemented with his own account of the war. The Red Book, like the two compilations of Icelandic literature, the Morkinskinna [rotton skin] and the Fagrskinna [fair skin], is named for its binding, a red leather case.

Tolkien continues the "Note" with a discussion of the copies of, redactions of, additions to, and repositories of the Red Book, and then he launches into a discussion of supplementary sources such as Meriadoc's

Herblore of the Shire, Reckoning of Years, and Old Words and Names in the Shire books, and others from the library at Great Smials, were used in compiling the **appendices** for the story of the war of the Ring (I, 23-25). Icelandic **scholars** would undoubtedly be **grateful** to have such a clear statement of the use of the Landnámabok, other chronicles, and older sagas in the composition of one of the surviving family sagas.

Clearly, as the "Note on the Shire Records" and Appendices A to F show, Tolkien has created a historical **framework** as real as that of many of the sagas. He took great pains to keep it intact, for in his writing of The Lord of the Rings he found that the story of Bilbo's tiding the Ring had to be altered in The Hobbit. In a letter to Sir Stanley **Unwin**, Tolkien discusses whether to regard the first as having "come out pretty well in the wash" or to account for the existence of two versions (Letters, 141). **This** accommodation occurs in the Prologue. "This account Bilbo set down in his memoirs, and he seems never to have altered it himself, not even after the Council of Elrond. Evidently it still appeared in the original Red Book, as it did in several of the copies and abstracts. But many copies contain the true account" (I, 22). This pretension to history is perhaps one of the conventions that places The Lord of the Rings most convincingly in the saga form. Tolkien took great pains to establish and maintain a pretense of history because he believed that history was one key element in the cauldron of story. The saga writers, whose works he loved and admired, had succeeded in teaching lessons **about** courage and courtesy through a pretense at history. His imitation of this technique obviously worked because his works have captured more imaginations than those of other fantasy writers.

Other Conventions

While the five conventions already discussed are typical of the saga, they do not **fully** describe or explain the phenomena of the Old Norse saga. Several other elements also characterize some or all sagas. Perhaps a discussion of why certain other conventions were not included in the

definition will be helpful.

Exponents of the Free **Prose** theory would probably be shocked by a definition of the saga that does not refer to oral tradition. Yet, the Free Prose/Book **Prose** controversy is far beyond the scope of this work. Furthermore, Beatie's attempt to comment on "oral tradition" seems a little foolish, even though Icelanders continue to take their oral tradition seriously. The sagas are known to most twentieth-century readers as written documents only. Thus, an analysis of their form without reference to their possible origin seems more sensible.

Further, the many occurrences of supernatural elements in the sagas also seem beyond consideration. Little concrete evidence exists on the extent and **viability** of the original Icelanders' belief in the supernatural -- from the troll of popular swearing to the All-Father himself.⁸² Tolkien's dragons and dwarfs may be more fantastic to the twentieth-century readers of The Lord of the Rings than they were to the thirteenth-century audience of the Volsunga saga. Certainly, if medieval saga readers considered them fantastic, then the supernatural elements of the sagas would be a powerful link between the sagas and Tolkien's three-part work. Thus, as some excellent sagas, such as Hrafnkel, the Priest of Frey, have no supernatural elements and since it cannot be determined which elements were fantastic and which credible, any mention of the supernatural has been omitted from the definition.

Discussions of saga conventions **also** often mention a lack of suspense. Dreams, portents, and foreknowledge predict all important events. Yet as Bayerschmidt and Hollander suggest in the "Introduction" to Njáls Saga, this knowledge does not diminish our interest: "On the contrary, our curiosity is if anything whetted more keenly to see if what is foretold really will come to pass, and **how**."⁸³ Indeed, how things might come to pass becomes infinitely interesting to the keen reader. The workings of dreams, portents, and foreknowledge in The Lord of the Rings have been discussed in the chapter on Customs. Curiosity seems to play a key part in the effect of The Lord of the Rings, but those who have read it more than once find that

already **knowing** how it ends does not mar the enjoyment. Moreover, suspense seems to be in some ways, a function of quality and of manner. Some sagas, such as Frithiof the Bold, have little suspense. Since the operations of individual taste ultimately determine the degree of **suspense** present in an individual work, its relative presence or absence has been omitted from the **definition**.

Style

Finally, definitions of generic terms frequently demand a **specific** style. The epic, for instance, **requires** a formal, 'elevated style. But the style of the **individual** sagas varies from the crude to the imitative to the sublime. Further, the problem of judging and comparing the style of a medieval Icelandic work with that of a twentieth-century British one seems overwhelming and terrifyingly subjective. In his translation of The Saga of Gisli, George Johnston comments on his own difficulties in trying "to make a twentieth-century telling of the saga that would be as readable as a novel." He reports that "After several attempts Peter Foote asked Ian Maxwell in Melbourne to read the version we then had, and because of his criticisms I decided to rewrite the translation from start to **finish**, following the Icelandic as closely as I could. The version that came out seemed livelier, subtler and more readable, slightly outlandish in tone, the style directly geared to the **telling** of the story. I wrote in twentieth-century words, however, and kept out archaisms, which would have seemed quaint or **remote**."⁸⁴ If one phrase had to be chosen to describe Tolkien's controversial prose style, Johnston's phrase "the style directly geared to the telling of the story" would be selected. Although the style is magnificent in its economy, its descriptive power, and its richness, the reader is conscious of the story rather than of the style itself.

Thus, The Lord of the Rings fits most satisfactorily into the saga genre definition. It is an extended, prose, chronological narrative. Tolkien is most careful to provide a concrete impression of the location: Middle-earth stands as the greatest of the created fantasy worlds. The work does indicate

a protracted interest in genealogy. In comparison with the psychological works of Henry James and his followers, Tolkien practices capsule characterization in conjunction with an abundance of action. And, The Lord of the Rings does claim to be a historical document. The work's affinity to peoples of the North Sea will be proven in the rest of this book. Thus, the reader will find great reason to shelve The Lord of the Rings with other sagas.

NOTES

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CHAPTER FOUR

"I desired dragons with a profound desire" ("Fairy-Stories", 40).

"Creatures*"

In Middle-earth as in Mithgarth of Norse literature, **more reasoning** beings than just men are alive--moving and talking. Over thirty-five types of mortals, immortals, and monsters characterize the busy world of **Middle-earth**.¹ Some of the creatures are well-developed in the Norse myths, hints for others may come from Northern literature with greater impetus from other traditions, and even inversions and displacements from Northern materials seem significant. In this category as elsewhere, Tolkien does not imitate other pieces of literature without change. In each case, he has altered the content of the source to serve his story's needs.

Thomas Gasque in "Tolkien: The Monsters and the Critters" argues that Tolkien bases his creations on two traditions, "the common heritage of the whole culture, such as the Elves and the dwarves, and his main adaptation of this is his ordering of the tradition, his creation of a credible organic system on which to structure his story. Second, he has adapted certain flexible traditions, like the wild man, to his own thematic pattern of good and evil, and to this extent he creates a **tradition**."² Gasque thinks that where these creations are outside of the organic traditional pattern, they fail "because they seem to be in another plane of existence." However, Gasque does not seem to realize that mythology usually includes a joining of elements from different time periods. Thus, Jan de Vries in "Contributions to the Study of Othinn Especially in his Relation to Agricultural Practices in Modern Popular Lore" argues that Odin evolved from an older corn god **called Othr**, who already had the characteristic of mental excitement and intellect.³ The processes of mythology are extremely complex and this complexity reflects itself in the variety of instances which may have contributed to individual species in **The Lord of the Rings**.

Tolkien had read material from many cultures and from diverse time periods. In addition to the combined mythologies of several cultures, he had the mythology that he had created for England. From these amalgamated materials he put together a complete chain of being for Middle-earth. For some of the creatures described, he elaborated on allusions in Northern mythology; for others, he borrowed from the inspiration of his own landscape. Generally, he balances his chain of being with good and bad examples of each species. Part of this task of describing species, he integrates into the plot of The Lord of the Rings.

The less ancient creatures of Middle-earth with their possible Old Norse antecedents, both the ones that Tolkien has made like the sources and the ones that he has varied from the sources, are here divided by species. Those that show some affinity with the Northern myths and folk traditions are 1) Hobbits, 2) Elves and Orcs, 3) Dwarves, 4) Wizards, 5) Tree-kin, 6) Birds, 7) Dragons, 8) Wargs, 9) The Eye, and 10) Ancients. When Sauron could not corrupt any of the members of a species, such as the Elves, he made an imitation, such as the orcs. Both the original, natural creature and Sauron's mockery of it are treated in the same section. Thus, trolls appear with Ents, the original creature Sauron could not bring to evil, in the section called Tree-kin.

Hobbits

The hobbits are Tolkien's unique contribution to the peoples of Middle-earth. How he came to dip them out of his cauldron of mythological soup may be beyond his ability to explain or our ability to understand precisely. Certainly, for the reader, it was a fortunate ladling. In his letter to his potential publisher Milton Waldman, Tolkien summarizes the essence of the view the hobbits bring to his story: "As the Legends of the beginning [The Silmarillion] are supposed to look at things through Elvish minds, so the middle tale of the Hobbit takes a virtually human point of view -- and the last tale [The Lord of the Rings] blends them" (Letters, 145). All who have read the work recognize the value of hobbits whose timid natures have

almost eradicated any heroic spark. That creatures of their nature should have the courage to engage in the War of the Rings opens participation to every reader of the work. This unique view of the doings of heroes through the eyes of a patent stay-at-home is an important element in the overall success of The Lord of the Rings.

In The Mythology of Middle-earth, Ruth Noel notes the hobbits human nature, their unsatisfactory record as heroes, and their appeal as little things. She attributes **Bilbo's** failure to kill Smaug and Frodo's inability to throw **the ring into** Mount Doom to the hobbits not being "part of the mythic milieu." These conclusions do not fit with the text: Bilbo has no opportunity to kill Smaug and Frodo fails to throw the Ring into Mount Doom not because he lacks courage but because the evil of the Ring has overcome him. She does, however, acknowledge that mythology enters into stories about hobbits even though they are not creatures of myth. She recounts the parallels between Bilbo and Beowulf and their dragons, an underground golden hoard, a precious cup theft, and a dragon's recognition of its loss. She praises Tolkien's sense of justice in the telling of his dragon story. Bilbo, the Dwarves, and Bard deserve their rewards of treasure and recognition because Smaug did not truly own the treasure.⁴ All in all, though, little is offered to aid in an understanding of hobbits.

Hospitality

The parallels between hobbits and Northern heroes can be helpful in knowing more about The Lord of the Rings. Perhaps one of the most unlikely comparisons possible is between the short, fat, meek hobbits and the tall, strong, daring vikings. Yet, the two peoples do share some traits. For instance, one of the first things that Tolkien mentions about the hobbits is their fondness for visitors. Naturally, in a country as sparsely populated as medieval Iceland was, visitors were always greeted with enthusiasm. Even beggar women were received and immediately questioned about the news. Storytelling was held in particular demand, and Icelanders were in great favor as skalds and **sagamen** in Scandinavian courts. The hobbits apparently

have a tradition of storytelling also, for Bilbo recollects stories told about Gandalf at the beginning of The Hobbit, Sam refers sentimentally to the great stories without ends when he and Frodo are deep in Mordor, and in almost his last conversation with Frodo, Sam mentions Frodo's probable fame in the storytelling of the Shire. In fact, throughout Middle-earth, an oral tradition of stories and songs thrives even though many Middle-earth inhabitants can read and write, talents which often bring oral tradition to an end.

Along with visitors and stories went wonderful meals both in the Shire and around the North sea. Bilbo's main concern in the first chapter of The Hobbit is with the hollow that the good hospitality he feels obligated **to offer** to the thirteen dwarves and Gandalf is making in his well stocked pantry. The "Havamal" -- a poetic statement of the North sea ethical code -- defines the largess **proper** for a lord and the temperate conduct expected of a guest. Saga writers, who may have been perennial guests, frequently mention freeness or stinginess with food in descriptions of kings and noblemen: In Njáls Saga, Gunnar's wife, the beautiful Hallgerd, is notable for being lavish. In order to maintain her reputation, she has her servant steal food from Otkel to keep her table supplied during a bad winter. This theft eventually involves the death of many men and hastens Gunnar's **fall**.⁵ While the love of a good meal does not have such dire consequences in Tolkien's works, Bilbo's repeated longing for fine food is a continuing reminder of his obsession with the comfortable life. Many readers can identify with this hobbit need.

Kinship

Hobbits and **Norsemen** also share other **personality** traits: both loved to reckon their ancestors. Tolkien refers especially to Bilbo's mother "the fabulous Belladonna Took, one of the three remarkable daughter of the Old Took, head of the hobbits who lived across The Water ... It was often said (in other **families**) that long ago one of the Took ancestors must have taken a fairy wife."⁶ Likewise, in Hrólfr Kraki, not only did King Heidrek trace his

ancestry back to the elven folk, but King **Hrólf** also has a famous daughter by an elf woman. While the bonds of kinship are essential to understanding alliances in the revenge slayings of the sagas, they play little part in The Hobbit. In The Lord of the Rings, kinship does play some roles: Merry and Pippin join the Fellowship because of **their kinship** with **Frodo**; Faramir's actions are controlled by his kinship with Denethor and **Boromir**; and Rohan musters more quickly because of a kinship-inspired treaty with Gondor.

Clothes

Furthermore, both hobbits and Vikings were vain about their dress. Hobbits dress “in bright colours (chiefly green and yellow)” (Hobbit, 10) and often have “whole rooms devoted to clothes” (Hobbit, 9). Ornamented tunics of red or blau (blue or black) silk, elaborate fur cloaks, and armor are often described in sagas. Egil is so fond of the silver and gold gown that his friend Arnbjorn had given him that Egil broods for days when his tie, Asgerd, allows his son, Thorstein, to wear it without **Egil's** permission. Like good food, rich clothing was an outward symbol of a prosperous and comfortable life. The chieftains of Iceland had a certain dignity, which they underlined by dressing for the **Althing** and for legally-justified revenge encounters. Hobbits had a like need to be dressed in a manner suited to their dignity. Tolkien's comment about Mayor Whiffoot's not looking the part of mayor after his incarceration echoes this concern.⁷

Fear

Even the fear Bilbo shows when he begins to sense the nature of his unrequested journey is not unknown in the sagas. The coward who must be converted to bravery is almost a conventional character. **Kari's** companion Bolli is one example from the Laxdale saga. In Hrólf Kraki, Bothvar's friend Hott provides a more accurate parallel to Bilbo **Baggins**. On his journey to King Hrólf's court, Bothvar has lodged for a night with Hott's parents, who entreat him not to hurt their son. After Bothvar comes to King **Hrólf's** meadhall, he sees Hott's hand come up out of **the** bone pile in the comer.

Bothvar goes over, pulls Hott out, **and** takes him to the table. The **sagateller** reports that he was so afraid that he shook in every **limb**.⁸

Similarly, after **Thorin** begins to talk of the dangerous adventure, Bilbo is sitting on the hearth as frightened as **Hott**. Tolkien says that “the **poor** little hobbit could be seen kneeling on the hearthrug, shaking like a jelly that was melting” (Hobbit, 25). This sudden removal from the world behind the shieldwall of bones (literally for Hott, metaphorically for Bilbo) to the world of champions and adventures has a similar effect: “Hott is so frightened that he takes neither food nor drink and thinks nearly every moment that he will be **lost**.”⁹ Bilbo’s “appetite was quite taken away” (Hobbit, 20) by the unaccustomed experience, and the words “may never return” make him shriek (Hobbit, 25). Bothvar kills the monster, called the greatest troll, which ravages King **Hrólf’s** land every Christmas while Hott lies trembling nearby -- too scared of the monster to stay but too frightened of Bothvar to attempt to leave. Bothvar makes Hott drink the blood and eat the heart of the monster; then Hott can boast in typical Norse fashion: “I will not fear them [**Hrólf’s** champions] **anymore** nor will I fear you from now on”.¹⁰

Bilbo has a like experience. When Bilbo overhears Gloom call him “the little fellow bobbing and puffing on the mat,” the hobbit is determined to “be thought fierce” and to participate in the great adventure. Like Hott, he boasts “Tell me what you want done, and I will try it, if I have to walk from here to the East of East and fight the wild Wereworms in the Last Desert” (Hobbit, 26-27). Bilbo’s anger may be somewhat explained by the terms of the insult -- to call a Norseman “a little man” was the ultimate condemnation. Both stories end happily for the once cowardly character. King **Hrólf** accepts Hott and rechristens him Hjalte because he is able to carry the sword Gullinhlata [goldenhilt] which no cowardly man could wield. Bilbo completes his adventure and is afterwards known as Bilbo the Magnificent, Elf-friend.

Frodo

Much critical comment has been generated about Frodo already. His name has been associated with King Frothi of the Heimskringla, with Frodo in the Domesday Book, with Froda in Beowulf, with Anglo Saxon frod, “wise,” and with Old Norse frothi, “wise.”¹¹ However, in “The Cult of Freyr in the Evening of Paganism,” E. O. G. Turville-Petre compares the legendary King Frothi in Saxo with the Swedish god Freyr. While “the Peace of Frothi” was during the reign of Augustus Caesar around the time of Christ’s birth, in Sweden this same period of peace and plenty is attributed to Freyr. The Flateviarbob summarizes the situation: “The great peace which prevailed in Sweden in his day was attributed [i.e. by the Swedes] to Freyr, but the Danes attributed it to King Frothi who ruled over Denmark, and they called it ‘Frothi’s Peace.’”¹² Turville-Petre then considers the name “Frothi” or “Frodo.” The adjective frothr meaning “wise” existed, and at the same time another adjective frothr meaning “filled with generative power,” “fertile,” and “fruitful” was also in use. This theory clarifies the use of the adjective in the Skirnismal where Freyr is twice called einn frothi, a surprising name for a fertility god if frothr can only mean “wise.” The alternative interpretation of frothr as fruitful is more appropriate as a nickname for a fertility god.¹³

The significance of relating Freyr to Frodo is that it gives Frodo an added dimension, that of fertility. This aspect of Frodo’s nature explains why his gardener accompanies him everywhere and why during Frodo’s term as mayor, the Shire blossoms as it never has before. At the end of Faramir’s interview with Frodo at Henneth Annûn, Faramir comments on Frodo’s courage to take the Ring and not use it. Reflecting on the values of the Shire, Faramir declares that “there must gardeners be in high honour.” Frodo agrees but fears that not all is well in his homeland. Then in a bit of subtle foresight, Faramir mentions that people grow weary, even in their gardens and bids Frodo good night.¹⁴ Frodo himself will weary of the shire and sail to the Grey Havens for solace. Faramir’s wisdom is dual: he recalls Bilbo and Frodo’s assent to adventure and their subsequent need to leave their old home.

Linking Frodo to the corn god places him in the company of Beowulf

and other heroes who have fertility aspects. Like them, Frodo suffers and finally sacrifices himself to save the world from the sterility of Mordor. The corn god with his sacrifice and its subsequent generative power is a cornerstone of mythology and folk lore. To attach Frodo to this ancient archetype is to place him in high company indeed. Thus, looking at possible antecedents aids the reader's understanding of The Lord of the Rings as a contribution to a tradition of mythopoeic literature.

Elves and Ores

In "On Fairy-stories," Tolkien discusses the current conception of elves. While the notion of diminutive size is a leading one in modern times, he maintains that "The diminutive being, elf or fairy, is (I guess) in England largely a sophisticated product of literary fancy". (Fairy-Stories", 13). Tolkien blames Shakespeare and Drayton for part of the change. Tolkien charges that if Dray-ton's Nymphidia is considered as a fairy-story, that is a story about fairies, then it is "one of the worst ever kitten" ("Fairy-Stories", 14). However, in the sagas and eddas that precede Shakespeare and Drayton, elves are not diminutive but human size.

In the olden days, elves ruled alongside men and were able to marry with men. The beginning of a supplementary text for King Heidrek relates that:

There was a king named Alfar [elf, fairy], who ruled over Alfheimar [elfhome]; he had a daughter named Alfild. In those days the region between Gautelf and the Raumelf was called Alfheimar. One autumn a great sacrifice to the Disar [guardian spirits, perhaps dead members of the family] was being held at the house of King Alf, and Alfild conducted the rites; she was more beautiful than any other woman, and all the people in Alfheimar were fairer to look on than any others in those days. But during the night, when Alfild reddened the altar with blood, Starkad Aludreng carried her off, and took her home with him. King Alf called upon Thor to seek for

Alfhild; and afterwards Thor slew Starkad and allowed Alfhild to return home to her father, together with Grim the son of Herugrim.¹⁵

The supplementary text continues with a euhemeristic explanation of Odin's acquisition of leadership in the North lands. Similarly, in "Sogubrot af Nokkrum Fomkonungum i Dana ok Svía Veldi," Ragnar, a legendary Norse hero, looks like his mother, Alfhild. The saga writer reports great friendship between the race of men and that of elves, and the genealogy of the sons of Ragnar includes Gandalf's son.¹⁶

The Elves of the North land and of Middle-earth were like men in many ways, although the elves were fairer. For instance, Tolkien describes an Elf-lord and the Elf-king: "Glorfindel was tall and straight; his hair was of shining gold, his face fair and young and fearless and full of joy; his eyes were bright and keen, and his voice like music; on his brow sat wisdom, and in his hand was strength. The face of Elrond was ageless, neither old nor young, though in it was written the memory of many things both glad and sorrowful. His hair was dark as the shadows of twilight, and upon it was set a circlet of silver; his eyes were grey as a clear evening, and in them was a light like the light of stars" (I, 239). Although Tolkien has been criticized for the contradictions ("neither old nor young"), these descriptions agree with the comment Snorri Sturluson makes on the fair appearance of elves: ". . . Alfheimar is one [of the abodes of heaven] where dwell the peoples called Light-Elves; but the Dark-Elves dwell down in the earth, and they are unlike in appearance, but far more unlike in nature. The Light-Elves are fairer to look upon than the sun, but the Dark-Elves are blacker than pitch."¹⁷ Tolkien retains the idea of light and dark elves, much altered.

Tolkien treats the complexity of Elf kind at length in The Silmarillion. Before the Elves awoke in Middle-earth, the Balrog, Shelob, and Sauron already dwelled there. The Elves called themselves Quendi, but the Valar Oröme called them the Eldar, people of the stars. Melkor hated them, captured them, corrupted them, and enslaved them until they became the

hideous race of **Orcs**. The **Valar** then called the Elves home **from** Middle-earth. Three hosts passed into the West: ' **Vanyar** (Fair Elves), Noldor (Deep Elves), and Teleri (Sea Elves). Elves who passed into the West were collectively called the Calaquendi (Elves of the Light) and those who remained were called the Moriquendi (Elves of the **Darkness**).¹⁸ The inspiration from Snorri's Edda with **its light** and dark elves seems apparent.¹⁹ It is clear that while Tolkien got some inspiration. from the Eddas and from the lying sagas and sagas of olden times, the complexity of his elves did not come from Northern literature. His concerns with the problems of immortals--their tendencies to embalm experience, their choices between Middle-earth and the Havens, and their interactions with short-lived men--are for the most part beyond the scope of Northern literature.

Orcs

While The Lord of the Rings was begun to satisfy Allen and Unwin's desire for a sequel to the popular Hobbit, Tolkien soon strayed from the entertainment of the young back into the creation of legends and mythology for England. In The Silmarillion, he had begun to set down accounts of people living in Middle-earth. As the story of the ruling **Ring** progressed, he drew needed creatures from his mythology. His two purposes--telling the story of the **Ring** and creating the mythology--converged as characters began to emerge from his creative cauldron. For instance, Treebeard tells Merry that "Trolls are only counterfeits, made, by the Enemy in the Great Darkness, in mockery of Ents, as **Orcs** were of Elves" (II, 89). When the theology of this statement was questioned on the grounds that evil has no creative power, Tolkien defended his allegation by pointing out that these creatures and the **orcs** are ruined, twisted versions of the true elven beings (Letters, **19 1**). Just as the light Elves are fair of face and of heart, the arc-elf burlesques are as black of face and "Blacker than pitch" in their hearts? Here Tolkien may have based his creation on the phrase about light and dark Elves from Snorri's myth. The usual interpretation of the phrase in

Northern literature is that the black Elves were supposed to be dwarves. However, this interpretation may come from the association of dwarves with dark things like tunnels and smithing, for dwarves are not usually described as having black skin. Tolkien already had dwarves in his story, but his need for evil equivalents to elves led to the further creation of **orcs**.

Tolkien describes the **orcs**: "There were four goblin-soldiers of greater stature, swart, slant-eyed, with thick legs and large hands. They were armed with short broad-bladed swords, not with the curved scimitars usual with **Orcs**; and they had bows of yew, in length and shape like the bows of Men" (II, 17-18). At some point in his earlier work on the materials of The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien clarified his terminology for these evil creatures: the term "goblin" used in The Hobbit almost entirely disappears. The term "**orc**" appears almost exclusively in The Lord of the Rings. In a letter answering questions from a member of the Allen and Unwin editorial staff, Tolkien notes his divergent usage of terms and credits the inspiration for **orcs** to "The goblin tradition . . . especially as it appears in George MacDonald" (Letters, 178). George MacDonald, the author of several works which purportedly inspired C. S. Lewis, wrote The Princess and the Goblin. In Old English, **orc** is the word for demon, and Ruth Noel notes that both **orc** and **ogre** may derive from Orcus, the Roman underworld deity. She **also** mentions that **orc** is the Irish word for carrion-eating swine from the underworld. These associations are appropriate for the evil, **cannibalistic orcs**, but Noel does not tie them into the **goblin/orc** tradition.²¹ Again, while this goblin creation has some associations in Northern literature, its main sources are elsewhere.

Favorable Comparison

Moreover, Snorri also states that, as a poetic technique, comparison of a human character with the "names of elves is held to be **favorable**."²² The ability of men and elves to intermarry (Beren and Luthien in The Silmarillion and Arwen and Aragorn in The Lord of the Rings and Sigurth Hring and Alfild in King Heidrek and King Helgi and an elf-woman in

several heroic sagas) substantiates the kinship between humans and elves. From Beren and Luthien Tinuviel and from Sigurth Hring and Alfild, races of great kings descend. The relationships between the kindred have been preserved through the creative process.

Healing

Both in The Lord of the Rings and in Northern literature, the elven folk have the gift of healing. Elrond heals Frodo's wound from the black rider's magic knife. Galadriel employs the ring Nenya primarily for healing. Apparently, the Icelanders also attributed some power over illness to the Elves. For example, after Kormák injures Thorvard in a duel, Thorvard heals very slowly, and Thórdís, the witch, tells him to get the bull that Kormák sacrificed after the duel and redden the "hillock in which the elves live. . . and [Thorvard] made a sacrifice of his meat to the elves." Kormák will sell the bull only for a ring of Steingerd's, but Thorvard makes the bargain, carries out the sacrifice, and recovers.²³

Smiths

Elves are talented smiths in both traditions, too. During the Council of Elrond, Elrond reports that the elven smiths of Eregion made the one Ring after Sauron had used their eagerness for knowledge to corrupt them. In the "Volundarkvitha," the poet uses "the alfs folk-warrior," "thou lord of alfs," and "thou alfs' leader" as kennings or poetic comparisons for the Norse smith god Volund. The King's men steal a gold ring from Volund, and the King binds him to craft arms for him. When the King's sons play around the smithy, Volund kills them and makes jewelry out of their skulls. Volund has further safe-guarded himself against the King's anger by begetting a child on Bothvild, the King's daughter.²⁴

Thus, Tolkien has built his own elves on what is known of elves in North sea literature. Both sets of elves are man-sized, capable of intermarrying with men, are healers, and sometimes become smiths. Since little was known about elves of old, Tolkien has invented details about them

to make them complete and credible characters, an integral part of his mythology for England. Together with the ores, they provide a great inventive pairing as part of the chain of being in Middle-earth.

Dwarves

Many critics have already noted the relationship between the dwarves of The Lord of the Rings and those from the eddas. The names of sixteen of the dwarves in The Hobbit are part of the "Dvergatal" [Catalogue of Dwarves] from the 'Voluspa', one of the poems in the Poetic Edda.²⁵ Two more names are in the Prose Edda: the name "Gandalf," which Jean Young translates "sorcerer-elf," is in both eddas.²⁶ Thorin's surname, "Eikinskjalði" [oakenshield], appears as a separate name in the Poetic Edda. Young translates Dvalin as "One lying in a trance", Nárr as "Corpse", Ori as "Raging one", Fundin as "Found one", and Thorin as "Bold one," a good name for the brusque leader of the burglary company in The Hobbit? In the notes to an unsent letter, Tolkien acknowledges his use of the Edda: "Thus the names of the Dwarves in The Hobbit (and additions in The Lord of the Rings) are derived from the lists in Voluspa of the names of dverggar [dwarves]. . . ." (Letters, 383). He also records that Gandalfr (the Old Norse masculine nominative form of the name Gandalf) is a dwarf-name in the "Voluspa".

J.S. Ryan in "German Mythology Applied--the Extension of the Literary Folk Memory" notes that the Arkenstone's name means "peerless stone" and that the name Gimli suggests "gimlet," "an appropriate notion of boring for a delver and rock cutter."²⁸ Further, Gimli is the only dwarf to pass over the sea to the Grey Havens. Certainly, Snorri's description of a hall called Gimle from the Poetic Edda was in the soup pot: "At the southern end of the heaven is that hall which is fairest of all, and brighter than the sun; and it is called Gimle."²⁹ If the dwarfs name has been suggested by Northern literature, so has his character. Gimli's flowery statement, ". . . the Lady Galadriel is above all the jewels that lie beneath the earth," epitomizes the typical concerns of a dwarf with the treasures of the earth.

In general, Tolkien's work with the **dwarves** has been to use from the eddas, the **Sigfried** legend, and other heroic sagas. their traditional. forms and habits-short stature with long beards, love for treasure, skill as **smiths**, and rather bad tempers. He has employed all these characteristics, yet his dwarves have been molded into charming individuals.

Behavior

In Romance in Iceland, Margaret Schlauch summarizes the appearance and talents of the traditional dwarf. She records their appearance as the most usual helpers in the lying sagas. In those works, dwarves cure wounds (as in Haralds saga Hringsbana and Egils saga Einhenda), forge magic weapons (as in the Ans saga Bogsveigis), take the part of a hard-pressed warrior in a battle (as in the Andra saga Jarls), help in invaluable ways in the carrying out of a difficult quest (as in the Kara saga Karasonar), and create jewels (as in the Villifers saga Froekna). Schlauch suggests that one method of winning the help of a dwarf is to toss a gold ring to him, or even better, to his child. Rescuing the dwarf or his child from a dangerous eagle, or from drowning or similar danger is also effective. The person in need can compel a dwarf to help against his will by standing between him and **the** entrance to the 'rock' in which he lives. The dwarfs promise should be exacted as a price of his **entry**, for dwarves, like giants, trolls, and other supernatural persons, are faithful in carrying out such promises.³⁰

The heroic sagas offer little variation in dwarf behavior. For instance, in King Heidrek, Durin and Dvalin are held from their great stone by King **Svafrlami's** grave sword. He commands them to make a golden sword and scabbard that "must never fall and never rust, must bite into iron and stone as **if** into cloth, and that victory must always come to him who carried it in battles and single combats." When the dwarves deliver the sword **Tyrfing**, they curse it: whenever **Tyrfing** is taken from its scabbard, it must kill and it will do three hateful deed and be the bane of its **owner**.³¹ In a similar adventure with a dwarf, An of Ans saga Bogsveigis, requests a golden horn.³²

Thorstein of Thorsteins saga Vikingssonar gets a knife and advice concerning a duel from a dwarf named **Sindri**.³³

In Hogni and Hedinn, Freyja sleeps with four dwarves--**Alfrigg**, Dwalin, Berling, and **Grerr--as** a price for a gold collar they have **smithed**; both Freyja and the dwarves are part of a **euhemeristic account** of the gods. They live East of Vanaquisl in Asia with Odin. The **sagaman** says of his dwarves that they were men "so wise in craftsmanship, that they laid skillful hands on all matters: and such-like men as they were did men call dwarfs. In a rock was their dwelling, and in that day they mingled more with menfolk than as now they do."³⁴ Tolkien records this idea of a vanishing people in the prologue to The Lord of the Rings, but not for his dwarves. He says that hobbits are "**very** ancient people, more numerous formerly than they are today. . . Even in ancient days they were as a rule, shy of 'the big folk,' as they call us, and now they avoid us with dismay and are becoming hard to find" (I, 10). The dwarves of the sagas and the hobbits of Middle-earth share a shyness about the company of men.

Female Dwarves

One aspect of Tolkien's dwarf lore in "The Annals of Kings and Rulers" interprets the extant Norse myths. Turville-Petre says that "Poets and **saga**-writers frequently mention female deities of a kind called disir (sing. **dis**), and although they never describe them clearly, they give some idea of their place in religious life? But Tolkien has connected these mysterious female guardian spirits with the dwarves, for he names the daughter of Thrain II, Dis. The association may have been suggested by a woman **named** Dis in Thorsteins saga Vikingssonar, in which **Halfdan** meets a dwarf Lit. Lit asks what **Halfdan** wishes. **Halfdan** says that he wishes to have the good horn of Dis, Kol's daughter. Lit argues that it would be his bane to try to gain the horn, but he eventually brings it.³⁶ Like the Norse disir, Tolkien's dwarf women were little known in the world, for they stay at home and travel only in men's clothes, indistinguishable from the dwarf men. Thus, in the manner of dwarves, Tolkien has not only drawn on the Northern stories, but

he has also interpreted obscure parts of them. The lack of detail about interesting creatures such as dwarf women convinced Tolkien of the need to create a mythology.

In The Unfinished Tales, Tolkien also names the proud wife of **Tar-**Aldarion, Erendis, again employing the dwarf name as part of the compound. The story of the Scandinavian god **Njörd** and his wife Skadi seems relevant. **Njörd** wishes to live in his home by the sea but Skadi protests that the screaming seagulls keep her from sleeping. Similarly, **Njörd** does not like the mountain wolves howling in Skadi's home Thrymheim: he misses the song of the seaside swans.³⁷ Aldarion cannot live without the sea while Erendis would perish with it. The scene in which Aldarion rides up from the haven of Andunie, looks back over the sea, and succumbs to the **sea-**longing recalls a similar scene in the Níál's Saga. Gunnar has been exiled and prepares to take ship from Iceland, but riding down to the ship, his horse stumbles, he looks around at the land, sees that it is fair, and determines to stay.³⁸ **Aldarion** continues in his love of the sea and Erendis in her proud disdain for his trips. **She does** indeed have a dwarfish stiff neck.

The story of the dwarf **Mîm** from The Unfinished Tales could have appeared in a saga without the reader's adverse notice. Turin and his fellow outlaws are having a difficult summer fighting the **orcs**. The watchman calls when he sees three hooded shapes with great sacks; two escape from **Andróg's** arrows, but a third is caught and bites **Andróg**. As in the sagas, the outlaws have stopped a dwarf from obtaining his home. Turin's pity prevents the dwarf's death, but Turin demands a safe place to sleep as ransom. The dwarf **Mîm** is particularly stiff-necked; he wishes to go on home that night but refuses to leave his sack as surety. The outlaws further infuriate **Mîm** by binding him, but Turin promises that will not happen again. **When** the outlaws come to **Mîm's** dwelling, it is a towering rock-wall, **flat-**faced and sheer, a dwarf rock. entrance, Turin stands close to guard against **Mîm's** disappearance into the rock.

Inside, the outlaws find that **Mîm's** son died from **Andróg's** arrow. Had

Mîm not been bound, he could have healed him. **Túrin** offers heavy gold as token of his sorrow. **Mîm** accepts; then in typical dwarf fashion, he curses **Andróg** never to take bow and arrows again. Androg in turn curses the dwarf to die with a dart in his throat. **Mîm** exemplifies the dwarves of the sagas: he is proud, has healing power, loves gold, curses freely, lives in a stone home, and barterers shrewdly.

The complexity of Tolkien's dwarves far exceeds that of the common Walt Disney characters from the movie Snow White. They are a marvelous extension of existing dwarf lore in Northern literature. Dwarf characteristics, personalities, and skills appear with **similar** results in sagas and in Tolkien's canon. Many stories and incidents concerning dwarves could be moved into Tolkien's works from the sagas or vice versa without disrupting the integrity of the works. However, the large role that **dwarves** play in The Hobbit is **more** extensive than any story told in Northern literature. As with men, Tolkien had no need to create a separate creature to balance the dwarf on his chain of being, for the dwarves were capable of evil. Sauron could pervert them to his will.

Wizards

Although Tolkien **does not devote** a section in "**The** Annals of the Kings and Rulers" to the five wizards, he describes their order in "**The** Tale of Years." "The Istari or wizards came out of the Far West and were messengers sent to contest the power of Sauron . . . but they were forbidden to match his power with power or to seek to dominate Elves or Men by force and fear (III, 365). Other material about wizards **also** now appears in "Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age" of The Silmarillion. Further in The Unfinished Tales, the section "The Istari" lays forth additional details about Tolkien's wizards. The two who play no role in The Lord of the Rings were clad in sea-blue, called Ithryn Luin 'the blue wizards,' and apparently passed into the East, never to return. The three who play parts in The Lord of the Rings are Saruman, who may have come first and who was the acknowledged leader; Radagast, who was clad in earthen brown and who

seems to **fall** out of the story; and Gandalf, who will become "the **white**".³⁹

Heimdallr and Merlin as Sources

Ryan says that "Gandalf, inevitably suggests the God Heimdallr, the White God, as warden magician and rallier of the forces of good." And a few pages later, he also notes that in his dealings with raven and eagles and in his disguise as an old man, Gandalf may be associated with **Odin**, "but it is only in wisdom and power that the war god influences the wizard's character."⁴⁰ Ryan's deductions about Gandalf's origins serve as just a beginning for an investigation of this much beloved and discussed character. In The Mythology of Middle-earth, Ruth Noel draws a lengthy parallel with **Malory's** Merlin. Both are powerful, prophetic, and inscrutable, but human wizards; both like surprises and dramatic suspense; and both form a future king to rule the nation.⁴¹ Green summarizes the deficiency in this comparison: "Merlin's corruptibility, service to low purposes, and skill at creating illusions resemble more the qualities of the **fallen** wizard, Saruman, than those of the suffering but uncorrupted **Gandalf**."⁴² Although Merlin is a powerful and appealing wizard in many literary works, Merlin does not appear to be a source for Gandalf.

Odin as Source

In the 1969 Tolkien: A Look Behind "The Lord of the Rings", Lin Carter has an explanation for **Gandalf**: "I suspect that Gandalf the Grey Wizard . . . is Tolkien's version of Odin, the Father of the Gods, Lord of **Asgard**, and is actually one of the **Valar**."⁴³ Carter cites Gandalf's disguise as a man, his different **names**, and his ability to pass through death. In 1969 dissertations, Green and I also published likenesses between Odin and Gandalf. Some readers balk at the association of Gandalf with Odin, for they believe that Odin is an evil, cruel, vicious god. But for the Norse warrior, he was a great god -- the epitome of strength, courage, intelligence, poetic spirit, and power. He was the all father, the author of victory who sent his **Valkyrie** daughters to pull heroes from the battlefield and who provided

them with everlasting joy as warriors in Valhalla. Green separates Odin's worse traits into those of the Plutonian Odin and connects these traits with Sauron. Sauron shares many attributes with this dark Odin: ageless immortality and the titles Necromancer, god of the dead, maker of strife, and author of the kin-slaying. They have both undergone the loss of an eye.⁴⁴ Odin has left his eye at **Mimir's** Well as a pledge while he drank the waters of wisdom.⁴⁵ While it is convenient and tidy to think that Sauron traded his eye for the Ring of Power, this perception is not quite correct. Sauron creates the One Ring in secret while he is working with elven Smiths. During this period, "his hue was still that of one both fair and wise" (Silmarillion, 287). In the time that follows, Sauron rules men with the nine rings and **dwarves** with the seven, but now he must wear a mask to deceive men about his appearance (Silmarillion, 289). As the Exiles of **Númenor** establish themselves, Sauron returns to Mordor. Tolkien reports: "There now he brooded in the dark, until he had wrought for himself a new shape; and it was terrible, for his fair semblance had departed for ever when he was cast into the abyss at the drowning of Numenor. He took up again the great **Ring** and clothed himself in power: and the malice of the Eye of Sauron few even of the great among Elves and Men could endure" (Silmarillion, 292-93). This transformation is much more complex than Odin's exchange of his eye for knowledge. With the less obvious change in Sauron's appearance, Tolkien avoids simplistic interpretations and establishes a basis for undertaking a more complex discussion of the ontology of evil (Chapter 9).

Odin's Powers

The name "**Gandalf**", sorcerer-elf, applies to Odin as Snorri describes him in "The Saga of the **Ynglings**": "Odin had the skill which gives great power and which he practiced himself. It is called seith [Sorcery], and by means of it he could know the fate of men and predict events that had not yet come to pass: and by it he could also inflict death or misfortune or sickness . . . Odin knew about all hidden treasures, and he knew such magic

spells as would open for him the earth and mountains and rocks and burial mounds; and with mere words he bound those who dwelled in them, and went in and took what he wanted. Exercising these arts he became very famous. His enemies feared him, and his friends had faith in him and in his power.”⁶ Gandalf uses all these powers in Middle-earth. He frequently knows or suspects what may happen next; he kills wargs, orcs, trolls, and others; he knows much about Smaug’s treasure although Gandalf hasn’t time to go after it himself; he opens the gates of Moria with a magic spell; and he has a hypnotic power, especially when he wants to hear the truth as in the case of Bilbo and the Ring and Pippin and the palantir; he is known by many names in many lands; and while all evil creatures fear and hate him, his friends sincerely believe in him and desire his help when he is away or thought dead.

Further, Tolkien makes Gandalf look rather like Odin, and some of their epithets are similar. Turville-Petre thinks that Odin’s most frequent disguise was that of a tall, old man with a long grey beard and a broad hat.⁴⁷ Yet, in The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason, Snorri Sturluson reports the use of this disguise: “It is told that one evening when King Olaf was being entertained at Ogvaldness an old and very wise-spoken man came in. He wore a hood coming low down over his face and was one-eyed.”⁴⁸ In The Hobbit, Gandalf has “long bushy eyebrows that stuck out further than the brim of his shady hat” (Hobbit, 12), and in The Two Towers, Saruman, impersonating Gandalf, appears: “They could not see his face: he was hooded, and above the hood he wore a wide-brimmed hat, so that all his features were overshadowed, except for the end of his nose and his grey beard” (II, 96). Sithhotttr (“broad hat”) is one of Odin’s names. Gandalf also fits Odin’s name, Havi (“tall”), for when Bilbo does not want to give Frodo the Ring, “he [Gandalf] seemed to grow tall and menacing” (I, 42). Gandalf is called the Greyhame and Mithrandir, the Grey Pilgrim; Odin, Vegtamr (“Road-practiced”) and Harbathr (“Grey-bearded”), and Gandalf’s sobriquet, Stormcrow, may be derived from Odin’s pet ravens.⁴⁹ Odin’s name Gondlir “Wand-bearer” may have helped to create Gandalf’s staff.⁵⁰ The princes and kings engaged in

the War of the Ring select Gandalf as their leader while Odin **is the god** of war and called Sigfathir (“Father of victory”) and Sigrhofundr (“author of victory”). Like Odin, and most of the other gods, Gandalf understands the language of birds.

Distinguishing between the Plutonian Odin and the Promethean Odin, Green cleverly observes that in The Volsunga Saga, when Odin comes in his Promethean phase, he is described with a long beard; in his Plutonian with one eye. Thus, the long-bearded Odin helps Sigurd select the best horse, a grey one, from the stock of King Hjalprek. Similarly, Gandalf chooses the best horse, the grey Shadowfax from the stock of King Théoden. Both horses will allow only one man to ride them. Odin himself rode the famous horse Sleipnir, a grey who was “the swiftest of horses, galloping through the air and over sea.”⁵¹ Sigurd’s grey owns Sleipnir as a legendary sire while Shadowfax derives from a famous horse brought from the West over the Sea. These horses go where others would not dare: Sleipnir into Niflheim carrying Odin to query the seeress about Balder’s dreams of death and Shadowfax into battle against the Nazgûl, from whose fierce power other steeds shrink. Shadowfax’s name relates to Skinfaxi “Shining-Mane,” Hrimfaxi “Frosty-Mane” who lead in the dawn and the night, and Gullfaxi “Gold-mane,” who races with the giant Hrungnir against Sleipnir.⁵²

Transformation

The most important connection between **Odin** and Gandalf is their transformation through death. Odin is the God of the Hanged because he hung himself on the tree to gain a knowledge of runes and magic. “The Rune Poem” portion of the “Havamal” explains that:

I wot that I hung
on the wind-tossed tree
all of nights nine,
wounded by spear
bespoken to Odin,

bespoken myself
to myself,
[upon that tree
of which **none** telleth
from what roots it doth rise]. .
Neither horn they upheld
nor handed me bread;
I looked below **me--**
aloud I **cried--**
caught up the runes,
caught them up wailing,
thence to the ground fell again.

. . . .

Then began I to grow
and gain in insight,
to wax eke in wisdom:
one verse led on
to another verse,
one poem led on
to the other poem.
Runes wilt thou **find**,
and rightly read,
of wondrous weight,
of mighty magic,
which that dyed the dread god,
which that made the holy hosts,
and were etched by Odin **53**

Resemblances between Odin's hanging and Christ's **crucifixion** are numerous. The English poets and people thought of Christ hanging on a rood-tree in the wild wind, Christ was thirsty and drank vinegar, the soldiers pierced Christ with a sword, and the cross, like Odin's tree, had no

roots. Turville-Petre concludes that “If the myth of the hanging Odin did not derive from the legend of the dying Christ, the two scenes resembled each other so closely that they came to be confused in popular tradition? Thus, if Tolkien wished Gandalf to undergo a learning, purifying **transformation** such as Odin’s, yet did not wish to make Gandalf an identifiable Christ ‘figure, then Tolkien would have to alter radically the circumstances of the transformation. Readers and critics are quick to spot Christ figures; having a hero suffer or change without suggesting Christ is almost impossible, but Tolkien was successful.

Therefore, in the mines of **Moria**, the **orcs** and a horrible ancient creature, the Balrog, are chasing the company over the last bridge. Gandalf commands the others to go on and then breaks the bridge behind them. **And** “With a terrible cry the Balrog fell forward and its shadow plunged down and vanished. But even as it fell it swung its whip, and the thongs lashed and curled about the wizard’s knees, dragging him to the brink. He staggered, and fell, grasped vainly at the stone, and slid into the abyss. ‘Fly, you fools,’ he cried, and was gone” (I, 345) . When Gandalf rejoins Aragorn, Gimli, and **Legolas**, who are searching for **Pippin** and Merry, Gandalf is dressed in white: **Aragorn** proclaims him “The White Rider,” for “He has passed through the fire and the abyss, and they shall fear him” (II, 104) . Gandalf explains that he fought with the Balrog at the bottom of Moria “beyond light and knowledge.” Gandalf puts out the Balrog’s fire, and it becomes “a thing of slime, stronger than a strangling snake.” Gandalf pursues it through the tunnels “far under living earth” and finally the Balrog springs out of Moria onto the mountain Celebdil and bursts into flame. They fight until Gandalf throws down the Balrog. And the wizard says that “Then darkness took me, and I strayed out of thought and time, and I wandered far on roads that **I** will not tell. Naked I was sent back -- for a brief time, **until** my task was done. And naked I lay upon the mountain top . . . I was alone, forgotten, without escape upon the hard horn of the world. There I lay staring upward, while the stars wheeled over, and each day was as long as a life-age of the earth” (II, 10506). The tie with the Promethean aspect of

Odin seems unmistakable. Tolkien's technique here is quite successful. Through an extremely careful selection of events and adversaries, he is able to remove the leader from the Fellowship. The effect of this removal is to underscore the theme of the courage required of less heroic characters. The narrative debt incurred is quickly discharged by Gandalf's brief recitation of his experience when he meets Aragorn and the others. Because the triggering event for the transformation is an ancient but **killable** creature, many associations with Christ figures, hanged gods, and other scape-goat deaths are avoided.

Fire

Two of Odin's names, Bolverkr ("Evil-doer") and Baleyr ("Fire-eyed"), suggest that **Gandalf's** name does share a strong kinship with the Balrog. A relationship of fire binds Gandalf and the Balrog, two ancient creatures. Both wield fire -- Gandalf the "flame of **Arnor**", the Northern kingdom, and the Balrog the "flame of **Udûn**", the valley before Sauron's gate.⁵⁵ Odin could, of course, both create and quell fire.⁵⁶ Gandalf uses fire to save the company from an attack of **wargs**. Through this encounter with the Balrog, Gandalf has gone beyond fire and rock and storm. Like Odin, he has passed through death, gained a greater knowledge of magic, and now is peerless. Gandalf says to Saruman, "Behold, I am not Gandalf the **Grey**, whom you betrayed. I **am** Gandalf the White, who has returned from death" (II, 188-89). Gandalf's passage through the fiery center of the earth inevitably recalls Christ's Harrowing of Hell and Aeneas' Descent into Hades, but at least the main Christian-interpretation critics have not yet labeled Gandalf a Christ figure.

One-Eyed

Yet, if Tolkien based Gandalf on Odin, then Gandalf should be one-eyed like **Odin**. However, Tolkien might have had at least two motives for not making Gandalf one-eyed. First, Tolkien's practice in using any character or object from myth has been to make that person or item an integral part of

The Lord of the Rings. Any obvious inclusion of a name or a character can become an end in itself and not a contribution to the story. Tolkien understood the process of alteration through the cauldron. Second, eye images are consistently used to reveal a character's evil nature throughout the three-part work. Characters as diverse as Frodo when he is obsessed and Sauron, The Eye, share the image pattern. If Gandalf had only one eye, the reader would assume that The Eye had been his -- this assumption would give Gandalf a greater significance than he has now. He would be the sole repository for both good and evil, instead of a wizard, one of five, with somewhat limited powers and a job description of mitigating the evil of Sauron. However, the latter makes a more exciting story and follows Northern mythology where the gods are limited in power and do die. The dependency between good and evil is not overlooked, for Gollum, though evil, aids good as Gandalf predicts, and when the evil Ring fails, the three good rings fail, too. Tolkien's conceptions of good and evil were complex and required great control of both story elements and symbols. The Eye and its proliferations are discussed later in this chapter.

The best evidence for the validity of an allegation, such as the relationship between the character of Gandalf and the Norse god Odin, must come from the works themselves. But the intentions and interpretations of the author are also welcome evidence. In letters and interviews, Tolkien was often asked if Gandalf were an angel since Gandalf transcends death. He answered "yes" because Gandalf's nature was like that of the common conception of angels. But in a one 1946 letter to his publisher Sir Stanley Unwin, he comments on a proposed German translation with 'Disnified' illustrations of "Gandalf as a figure of vulgar fun rather than the Odinic wanderer that I think of. . ." (Letters, 119). The many Tolkien readers who had pondered over the accuracy of the Odin/Gandalf association read the published letter with overwhelming joy.

Saruman

If Gandalf is based on Odin, then by extension, Saruman and Radagast

should also be related to the Norse gods. In opposition to **Gandalf the Grey** is Saruman the White or Saruman the Many Colored. . For his name, Ryan suggests Old English **searu**, “device, design, contrivance, **trice**”: but Old Norse **sar**, “wound” might also .⁵⁷ Noel stresses his relationship to the medieval sorcerer with similar accouterments: a stargazing tower, a magic staff, and a prophetic globe. She equates his quest **for** the Ring with that of an alchemist for the Philosophers’ stone.⁵⁸ Her interpretation **fits** with her correlation between Merlin and Gandalf, but misses the larger **mark** of offering one explanation for all the wizards.

Saruman is the head of the Wizard council, but he becomes evil, tries to capture the Ring, and wars on Rohan. Just **as Gandalf** may be based on Odin, Saruman resembles **Loki**. Snorri says that “Also reckoned amongst the gods is one that some call the mischiefmonger of the Esir and the father-of-lies and the disgrace-of-gods-and-men. He is the son of the giant Farbauti and his name is Loki or Lopt. . . . Loki is handsome and fair of face, but has an ‘evil disposition and is very changeable of mood. He excelled all men in the art of cunning, and he always cheats. He was continually involving the Esir in great difficulties and he often helped them out again by guile.”⁵⁹ Like Loki, Saruman abandons the council (gods) for evil (the giants).

If Saruman is not as handsome as Loki, at least he is not ugly as the other evil creatures -- orcs, trolls, wargs -- are. “They looked up, astonished, for they had heard no sound of his coming; and they saw a figure standing at the rail, looking down upon them: an old man, swathed in a great cloak, the colour of which was not easy to tell, for it changed if they moved their eyes or if he stirred. His face was long, with a high forehead, he had deep darkling eyes, hard to fathom, though the look that they now bore was grave and benevolent, and a little weary. His hair and beard were white, but strands of black still showed about his lips and ears” (II, 183). Saruman proceeds to lie, to dissemble by promising each of them what he most desires. Just as they begin to be enthralled by Saruman’s cunning, Gandalf breaks the spell with a laugh. Saruman has used guile to establish his

empire; he has lied to the council as **Loki** did to the gods; and he has pretended to study ancient lore of men while he looked for references to the Ring. He has taken the tower and built a fortress, **Orthanc**.⁶⁰ Just as **Loki** engineered the building of the walls of **Asgarth** by the giant, so **Saruman** has wrought a little copy of the Dark Tower. As **Loki** is the father of the **Fenris** wolf, **Saruman** has stables of evil wargs and wolves for his **orcs** to ride.

Loki was capable of bending the other gods to his will. Thus, he gave a fellow god, the blind **Hoth**, a piece of mistletoe and helped him throw it at **Balder's** vulnerable heel. **Loki** is the rathbani or instigator of **Balder's** murder.⁶¹ **Saruman** uses his fellow wizard **Radagast** cunningly, too, for he sends **Radagast** with a message to **Gandalf** that **Saruman** will aid in the battle against **Mordor**. When **Gandalf** comes, **Saruman** tries to involve him in a plot to capture the Ring. When **Gandalf** refuses, **Saruman** imprisons him. **Saruman** is contemptuous of **Radagast**: ““**Radagast the Brown**”, laughed **Saruman**, and he no longer concealed his scorn. “**Radagast the Bird-tamer! Radagast the Simple! Radagast the Fool!**”” (I, 272). Both **Loki** and **Saruman** dupe their simpler colleagues into aiding their murderous plans.

Some folklorists believe that **Loki's** name may be an alternate form of logi (“flame”). Thus, **Saruman** would be strongly associated with fire. Since this trait is common to both **Gandalf** and **Saruman**, it may derive from their origin—as **Maia**, Holy ones of a lesser degree than the **Valar**. This connection could explain the effectiveness of **Treebeard** and **Gandalf's** method of keeping **Saruman** captive in **Orthanc**. They surround the tower with water, and **Saruman** does not attempt to swim across it. In fact, he does not escape until **Treebeard** allows it. After **Balder's** death, the gods chain **Loki** with a serpent dripping poison on him. A serpent ends **Saruman**, too, for his devious servant **Wormtongue** cuts his throat. The understanding of the origins of characters reveals **Tolkien's** care in creating a complex story about good and evil. Both **Gandalf** and **Saruman** are creatures of equal power sent to Middle-earth to accomplish a single purpose--the control of **Sauron**. Each has an equal opportunity to accomplish the goal. **Gandalf** puts his energies into caring for the less grand peoples--hobbits--while **Saruman**

involves himself in the affairs of ruling men. Saruman's close study of the Ring leads him to covet it for himself and subsequently, to fall under the power of Sauron. Gandalf, whose temptation is much greater since the Ring is literally at hand, resists and contributes to the eventual defeat of Sauron.

Radagast

Of Radagast little is told, only that Saruman calls him the simple and the fool. And Gandalf says that "Radagast is, of course, a worthy wizard, a master of shapes and changes of hue; and he has much lore of herbs and beasts, and birds are especially his friends" (I, 270). If Radagast is from Old Norse radgast, "to take counsel," then this description could **fit** many gods, for all were shapechangers and most were friends with birds and beasts. However, if "the brown" is a disguise to keep the wizard from picking up some unwanted associations, and if Radagast is related to Old Norse rautha "red" with "**gast**" meaning ghost or spirit, then of course, he might be based on Thor.⁶² Actually, **Loki** does talk Thor into going on a journey to Geirroth, the giant. **Turville-Petre** notes that ". . . his faithless friend Loki, had urged the thunder-god (Herbrumu Gautr) to visit the house of Geirroth, telling him that green paths lay all the way."⁶³ Thor's journey is not prudent. Green paths do not lie all the way, and Thor leaves without his belt of strength and his hammer. On another journey to giant land, he is deceived into trying to lift the Mithgarth serpent, to drink up the ocean, and to wrestle with old age. In the "**Thrymskvitha**," he is made to dress in **Freyja's** clothing and go as a bride to giant land. Thor's proclivity for getting involved in fruitless ventures seems to parallel Radagast's.

The evidence in "The **Istari**" section of The Unfinished Tales does offer one or two pieces of information which may connect Radagast more closely with the Old Norse God Frey than with the attractive Thor. Radagast, who is clad in earthen brown, does not remain faithful to his mission to defeat Sauron. He **is** called "tender of beasts" and "became enamored of the many beasts and birds that dwelt in Middle-earth and forsook Elves and Men, and spent his days among the wild creatures"

(Unfinished Tales, 390). Some of Tolkien's other jottings suggest that Radagast was allowed to come because Yavanna begged that he be included (The Unfinished Tales, 388-93). Yavanna, the giver of fruit, loves all things that grow in the earth. If she were the one who begged for the wizard's inclusion, then the most likely assignment must be to the god whose interest paralleled her own -- Frey the god of fertility. In this configuration, a third person of equal power and strength falls from the assigned task because concerns for birds and beasts outweigh the battle against the spread of evil. Tolkien adds another dimension to his analysis; some distinction must be made between giving in to sentimentality about little issues and pursuing the bigger problems. This pitfall, too, Gandalf manages to avoid, even though he has concerned himself with what Saruman considers to be the "little" issues of the Shire.

It seems likely, then, that the three wizards in The Lord of the Rings Gandalf, Saruman, and Radagast are based more than casually on Odin, Loki, and Frey. Thus, if the five wizards of the council are representatives of the major male members of the Norse pantheon, the other two wizards are probably kin to two of the three gods, Heimdallr, Balder, and Thor. Further, each of the wizards seems to have some kin under his special guard. Gandalf, seemingly chosen by Manwë, specialized in the Elves while Saruman, chosen by Aulë studied deeply in the lore of men at Minas Tirith. Radagast, chosen by Yavanna, must have specialized not only in birds as Saruman jeers but also in trees and other earth-grown things. In Middle-earth's chain of being, the Istari were sent from beyond the sea to aide men and elves in their fight against the tyranny of Sauron. They were an order of beings with powers beyond those of men and Elves. Yet Sauron was able to corrupt them to his uses. Of the five who arrived, two vanished into the East and did not complete their mission. Radagast fell from the mission because he neglected the purpose for which he was sent. Saruman, the seeming chief among them, was drawn by Sauron into evil, lost his embodied form, turned to the West, and then dissolved into nothing. Only Gandalf, to whom Frodo says "Will you not take the Ring?", withstands the

temptation of evil and remains true to his purpose (I, 70). The power of evil to attract even these high beings is potent indeed.

Tree-kin

When the hobbits -- Merry, **Pippin**, Sam, and Frodo -- begin their journey through the Old Forest, they **quickly** find out that it is not a usual place. Tom Bombadil explains to them: "It was not called the Old Forest without reason, for it was indeed ancient, a survivor of vast forgotten woods; and in it there lived yet, ageing no quicker than the hills, the fathers of the fathers of trees, remembering times when they were lords" (I, 141). Likewise, Snorri accounts for the antiquity of the trees with his creation story. The High One in answer to Gangleri's question about how the universe and man were created recounts that 'When they were going along the sea-shore, the sons of Bor found two trees and they picked these up and created men from them. The first gave them spirit and life; the second, understanding and power of movement; the third, form, speech, hearing and sight. They gave them clothes **and names**. The man was called Ask [Ash- tree] and the woman Embla [Elm]; and from them sprung the races of men who were given Mithgarth to live in."⁶⁴ Norse cosmography evidences the antiquity and importance of trees, for the world was a circular disk held up by the roots of Yggdrasil, the world ash. The traditions of the Norse creation myth and the world ash combine in one of the creation stories in The Silmarillion. There the Two Trees of the Valinor provide the light for Middle-earth until the great spider Ungoliant sucks it out (Silmarillion, 38).

Tree Traps

In The Fellowship of the Ring, the forest makes the travelers weary, and Merry, **Pippin**, and Frodo lie down for a nap under a big willow tree while Sam goes to look after the ponies. Sam hears a splash and runs back to find Frodo being held under the water by one of the tree roots. They discover that "Pippin had vanished. The crack, by which he had laid himself, had closed together, so that not a chink could be seen. Merry was

trapped: another crack had closed about his waist; his legs lay outside, but the rest of him was inside a dark opening, the edges of which gripped like a pair of pinchers" (I, 128-29). This startling event has precedences in Norse literature.

The Saga of Thidrek of Bern contains one story about a man inside a tree. Velent, who has studied smithing with the dwarf Mimir of Volsunga Saga fame, will be killed by the dwarfs unless his father Vadi comes for him on the appointed day. Vadi foresees difficulties and conceals a sword for Velent to defend himself with in case something prevents Vadi's arrival, which his death by earthquake accomplishes. Velent uses the sword to dispatch the murderous dwarves, gathers his tools, gold, and silver, and heads for Denmark. When he reaches the great river Visara, he hollows out a tree trunk, installs a glass window, fills it with his tools, treasures, and provisions, and drifts for eighteen days across the open ocean. King Nidung's fishers ensnare the tree trunk in their fishing nets, and all wonder if the carved trunk might be some kind of a treasure chest. When Velent calls out, the fishers think he must be a troll, but Velent's handsomeness convinces them that he is a man.⁶⁵

Margaret Schlauch reports that in the lying sagas trees may be either evil or beneficent. She relates the following story in which the tree is used to restore youth, but although the tree is not evil, as the Old Willow is, the action is analogous. The magician in the Magnus saga first causes a large tree to grow in the courtyard: Then he lies down near it wrapped in his cloak and while the courtiers are laughing at him, "he draws near to the tree and enters it head first, stopping not until he had vanished within, and it closes up again beneath his feet . . . " One of the earls says "That must have been a troll, and he has vanished into the earth." But soon they hear sounds from the tree "and out of the foot of the tree there appeared a man's foot, **and his** body up to the middle, in such a manner that they saw the tree contracting at intervals, most like a woman in travail, and finally the tree drew itself together into a knot. Then Vithforull shot out some distance away from the tree and lay there as one dead." The king and his courtiers

are surprised to find the old magician now a young man, although he was shorter now.⁶⁶ In The Lord of the Rings, Tom Bombadil comes and sings to the Old Willow. The ending of Merry and **Pippin's** adventure with the tree is similar to that of the magician, for “out of it [the tree] **Pippin** sprang, as if he had been kicked” (I, **131**). In both cases, a person is slowly pulled into a tree; at one point a person is partly inside, partly out; the tree ejects the ingested person forcefully.

Ents

Just as Tolkien presents evil hobbits like Gollum, evil men like Wormtongue, and evil wizards like Saruman, he also gives us evil trees -- the Old Willow and the trolls. But the evil in his ethical system is balanced with some good. Thus, he introduces good creatures of the same kind, the mighty Ents. In line with Tolkien's dark vision of his cosmos, the Ents, who prove a powerful force for good in this story, are among the great and wonderful creatures whose existence in Middle-earth is coming to an end. There will be no more Ents. Treebeard is especially reminiscent of fading Yggdrasil of Norse mythology, for Treebeard is The Ent just as Yggdrasil is The World Tree.

Treebeard explains to Merry and **Pippin** the place of Ents in the cosmos of Middle-earth: “Maybe you have heard of Trolls? They are mighty and strong. But ‘Rolls are only counterfeits, made by the Enemy in the Great Darkness, in mockery of Ents, as **Orcs** were of Elves. We are stronger than Trolls. We are made of the bones of the earth. We can split stone like the roots of trees, only quicker, far quicker, if our minds are roused!” (II, 89). **As** will appear later, trolls are manlike, and Ents, too, are manlike in their own Entish way. Merry and **Pippin** hear a strange voice,, then

They found that they were looking at a most extraordinary face. It belonged to a large Manlike, almost Troll-like, figure, at least fourteen foot high, very sturdy, with a tall head, and hardly any neck. Whether it was clad in stuff like green and grey bark, or

whether that was its hide was difficult to say. At any rate the arms, at a short distance from the trunk, were not wrinkled, but covered with a brown smooth skin. The large feet had seven toes each. The lower part of the long face was covered with a sweeping grey beard, bushy, almost twiggy at the roots, thin and mossy at the ends. But at the moment the hobbits noted little but the eyes. These deep eyes were now surveying them, slow and solemn, but very penetrating. They were brown, shot with a green light (II, 66).

Those Ents who have not become treeish are not only human looking but also have many human characteristics: they have councils, Entmoots: they go to battle; they can become angry: and they mourn the loss of a lovely Entmaiden, Fimbrethil, and sing about her just as the Elves do about Elbereth.

In The Mythology of Middle-earth, Ruth Noel praises the creation of the Ents as an example of Tolkien's "making of an imaginative extrapolation from the most sparse accounts in myth." She finds in the Ents the dignity and pathos of a "forgotten race remet shortly before they are to vanish."⁶⁷ This assessment represents a sensitive recognition of Tolkien's power as a creator. Noel also sees an interesting parallel between the Ents and **Entwives** and the Scandinavian god **Njörd** and his wife Skadi, as discussed above in the section on **dwarves**.⁶⁸ Like Skadi and **Njörd** whose living preferences are diverse, the **Entwives'** choices about domestic arrangements do not agree with the Ents'. The wives separate themselves to live in a land of domestic plants and agriculture while the Ents prefer wilder woods. Ryan notes that Ent is Old English for "giant." He sees a Druidic twist to Tolkien's creation with a special relationship between the Ent's attack on **Saruman's** fortifications and the Old English phrase "**enta** geweorc." He applies the phrase to the destruction of Orthanc, although in the original context of the poem the phrase apparently referred to stone ruins of Roman buildings.⁶⁹ The "geweorc" seems more descriptive of

Saruman's constructions than of the Ents' destruction. Zimmermann also believes this phrase inspired Tolkien?

What **Ryan, Zimmermann**, and Noel all suggest but do not explain is a relationship between the word Ent (Old English for giant) and the concept of the giant in Norse mythology. Noel mentions two **or** three examples of attractive and agreeable giants, but in **the main**, the giants were the adversaries of the gods and the instruments of an impending chaos. Crossly-Holland defines the gods as aspects of natural and social order which the giants subvert and seek to overthrow. Clearly, Tolkien was not thinking of the giants of Norse mythology when he created Ents. The passage from the Old English poem "The Wanderer" is powerful. The poem contributes more than just the word "**ent**" to The Lord of the **Rings**. The phrase "**Middle-earth**" appears twice: "So each day this Middle-earth fails and **falls**" and "The wise warrior must observe how ghostly it will be when all the wealth of the world stands waste, as now here and there through this Middle-earth, walls stand blown by the wind, covered with frost-fall, the dwellings storm **beaten**."⁷¹ Further, the poem's theme is one of exile and loneliness by a retainer who has lost his lord. Tolkien liked the word and the concept of active trees; he uses these in connection with the world weariness and fading away illustrated by the Ents. He associated the two in the same way the historical Bertha became attached to the goose girl of the **Märchen** ("Fairy-Stories", 30).

Trolls

Trolls, the evil counterpart of the Ents, appear in numerous sagas. Being called a troll or the lover of a troll-wife is a common insult. For example, in **Heitharviga saga**, Thorbiorn is fighting against **Bardi** and taunts him by saying "Troll, no iron will bite on thee." Thorbiorn now turns to fight with Thorod, who cuts off Thorbiorn's foot before Thorod is killed. When Thorbiorn turns back to fighting with **Bardi**, **Bardi** insults him: "What! a very troll I deem thee, whereas thou fightest with one foot off. Truer of thee that which thou spakest to me." Thorbiorn denies the charge: *Nay . . . nought

of trollship is it for a man to bear his wounds, and not to be so soft as to forbear warding him whiles he may. That may be accounted for manliness rather; and so shouldst thou account it, and betroll men not, whereas thou art called a true **man**."⁷² Apparently, trolls were thought of as giant men with enormous power in battle, for in Níál's Saga, Starkad says when he finally flees from **Gunnar**, "Let us flee now; we are fighting trolls, not men." And when Asgrim and the sons of **Njál** are seeking assistance for their case at the Althing, they go to Skapti's booth, and Skapti comments on Skarphedin -- 'Who is that man . . . fifth in line, tall and sallow, with the look of one who is ill-fated, grim and troll- like?"⁷³ Skarphedin, a giant of a man who is, at this point, indeed fey, laughs at the insult. Incidentally, Skarphedin calls his famous axe "Battle-Troll." Tolkien's conception of trolls is in this tradition; his trolls are big and vicious -- not the small creatures who live under bridges. In The Silmarillion, he tells of their counterfeiting by **Morgoth**, the Great Enemy who also arranged for the Balrog and the **Orcs**.

In The Hobbit, Tolkien describes trolls as "Three very large persons sitting around a very large fire of beech logs. . . . But they were trolls. Obviously trolls. Even Bilbo, in spite of his sheltered life, could see that: from the great heavy faces of them, and their size, and the shape of their legs, not to mention their language, which was not drawing-room fashion at all, at all" (Hobbit, 43-44). Even the incident itself has a close parallel in Oddr Snorrason's Olafs saga Tryggvasonar: "And it is said one time that King Olaf went north to Halgoland. There was much curiosity concerning this: to know whether it would be true that trolls went most in that district. One night part of the king's bodyguard went from the king's ship. They walked not long in the dark until they saw a fire burning before a cave, and they scurried thence, and when they approached the fire, they saw that it burned before a cave and there sat several trolls. They talked there **together**."⁷⁴ In both instances, the trolls sit before a fire in front of a cave and talk. Both groups of trolls are complaining about ill treatment. The trolls in The Hobbit are dissatisfied with their food stores, and Oddr's trolls are griping

about persecution by Christians. The hearthmen, who overhear the trolls in Naumdale, return to the ship to report to King Olaf. King Olaf deals with the trolls by further persecution: He takes his Bishops and troops over the whole district with crosses and relics. Holy waters are sprinkled on rocks, crags, dales, and hills, and naturally, the monk author of the saga reports that the evil spirits were exorcised and the people freed.⁷⁵ Bilbo is not as fortunate as King **Olaf's** bodyguards. Bilbo is caught trying to pick a troll's pocket. His twelve dwarf companions are soon collected in bags. Gandalf, imitating the voices of first one and then another of the trolls, starts and maintains an argument among the trolls. Preoccupation with the quarrel allows dawn to surprise the trolls. Of course, they are turned into stone.

Here Tolkien has taken the troll, a character which frequently does evil in Norse literature, and balanced him with a creation of his own, perhaps inspired by Norse creation myths, the World Tree, and the lively trees of the lying sagas. Tolkien loved trees. When the Scandinavian rock organist Bo **Hansson** produced "Music inspired by The Lord of the **Rings**", a **Snowdon** photograph of Tolkien **seated happily** in the roots of an enormous tree accompanied it.⁷⁶ Tolkien looks enormously satisfied, as well he might, for out of his cosmic cauldron, he has produced most wonderful creatures related to the tree-kin. The success of the Ents, paired in the chain of being with trolls, has been enormous.

Birds

Other than eagles, birds in The Hobbit and The Lord of the **Rings** do not play a large role. However, Tolkien uses the eagles as a deus-ex-machina device to extricate his heroes from seemingly impossible situations. In The Hobbit, wild wargs have treed Gandalf, the dwarves, and Bilbo, and the trees are now on fire. Fortunately, the Lord of the Eagles comes to investigate the flames and has his company pick up the stranded hobbit and dwarves. In The Fellowship of the Ring, Gandalf reports at the Council of Elrond that when he had come to meet **Saruman**, the wizard had tried to persuade him to take the Ring and rule the world with him. When

Gandalf refuses, Saruman has him. placed on the pinnacle, guarded by wolves and orcs. Gwaihir, the Lord of the Eagles, spots him there and carries **him** to Rohan. Gwaihir similarly picks him up after his battle with the Balrog. The company of eagles also arrives at the battle of **the** Five Armies and later at the battle on the Field of Cormallen. The eagles turn the tide of both battles. From **Cormallen**, Gandalf then goes with the eagle lord Gwaihir and two of his companions to rescue Frodo and Sam from the Mountain of Doom.

Eagles

Part of the significance of the eagles as a Middle-earth equivalent of the Calvary of the American west lies in the association of **Gandalf** with Odin. The Saga of King Heidrek contains a riddle contest between King Heidrek and Odin in a disguise. When Odin asks an unanswerable riddle, Heidrek strikes at him with a sword. Odin escapes by turning himself into a hawk and flying away.⁷⁷ Similarly, after Odin has drunk the three vessels of Sutting's mead, the dwarf mead that made anyone who tasted it a man of poetry and learning, Odin escapes by changing into the eagle's shape and flying off.⁷⁸

In his dissertation on The Hobbit, William Green also observes the relationship between the eagle's appearances and those of Norse gods -- not of Odin but of **Loki**. Since the eagles do not find Bilbo in the fiery tree, the hobbit escapes only by clinging to one of the dwarfs legs and being pulled up with him. Bilbo's position is like that of **Loki** who is carried aloft on a stick by an eagle. **Loki** has been striking the stick at an eagle who was stealing his food. When the eagle latches onto the stick and flies away, Loki thinks his arms may be torn off while Bilbo cries "my arms, my arms" (Goblin, 118) hypothesizes that Tolkien considered the eagles to be skin-changers because both shape-shifters and the eagles wear gold ornaments, a sign of enchantment in Irish tales.⁷⁹ The likelier explanation is that Tolkien's narrative purpose limited his use of shape-shifting creatures.

Since Tolkien did not think that shape-changing into the form of a

bird would be credible in his conception of **Middle-earth**, he took the trait from his cauldron and objectified the ability of Odin and of the other gods to change shape. To solve problems similar to those of the gods, Tolkien employs a separate creature, the eagle, who could still function as a means of escape by arriving at the last moment. -Obviously, for The Lord of the Rings, this latter method is preferable. It allows the heroes to be held in tight places from which they could easily have escaped had they been shape-shifters. For instance, the battle with the Balrog in the Mines of Moria could not occur had Tolkien let Gandalf be a shape-shifter himself, for Gandalf's escape would be too easy. Yet at the same time, the eagles can appear when no other means of escape is available. In The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien does, however, observe the strictures of his possible myth source -- the eagles do not come unless Gandalf/Odin is there.

The eagles' function as the agent of rescue and aid occurs under less constrained circumstances in the earlier works. For instance in The Silmarillion, Manwë has set the Eagles to be a watch against the evil of Melkor/Morgoth (Silmarillion, 110). Thorondor, the Eagles' king, rescues Maedhros from the chains Morgoth had placed on him (110). Thorondor also slashes Morgoth's face (154), rescues Húrin and Huor (159), saves Beren and Luthien (182), brings tidings of the fall of 'Nargothrond (240), and bears Glorfindel's body from a Balrog encounter just as he later does with Gandalf (243). Because he conceptualized his audience for The Lord of the Rings more succinctly, Tolkien reduced the range of some of his more unusual creations. The eagles are among these. In The Silmarillion and the other earlier tales, they have a broader range of action. In The Lord of the Rings, they are confined to action in incidents involving Gandalf, the person entrusted with the Ring Narya the Great to assist Middle-earth's inhabitants against Sauron.

Other Birds

Some other good birds play a small part in The Hobbit. An old thrush who still understands the speech of men overhears Bilbo tell the dwarves

about the hole in Smaug's diamond vest. To Smaug's bane, the thrush tells Bard, **a** man who still understands the speech of birds. Understanding the speech of birds comes to Sigurd the Volsung when he tastes the dragon's heart that he is roasting for the evil Regin. From the conversation of the birds, he learns that Regin plans to kill him, that he should eat the heart himself, and that he should ride to Bxynhild for wisdom, and that he should slay Regin. These cautions he heeds; the woodpecker's advice that he should guard the rings well he does not obey, even though in the end it causes his death.⁸⁰ Moreover, Odin's pet ravens **Huginn** and **Muninn** and their kin may be models for **Roac** son of **Carc**, who serves as a messenger between the dwarves in the Lonely Mountain and their kinsman Dain. Unlike the raven servants of the god of war, **Roac** is against war with the men of Dale and the Elves. Further, the birds carry the good news of Smaug's **fall** over the countryside. In The Hobbit, they do not function as scavengers after battle as ravens usually do in medieval Norse and English works.

Nazgûl's Mounts

However, just as Sauron has made mocking imitations of other species in Middle-earth, he has also mocked the eagles. After their horses fall, his nine Ringwraiths take to the air on "the birds of evil eye," "the hell hawks," which are huge, black, featherless monsters bred by Sauron in Mordor (III, 38).

Inspiration for the creation of the **Nazgûl** may have come from the lying saga "Bosi and Herraud." The two friends are charged with the quest of finding a vulture's egg inscribed with gold letters. A fearsome priestess who eats a two year old heifer every day attends the vulture. Bosi kills the slave who takes the heifer in and puts on his cloak. He and Herraud fill the **heifer** skin with moss and heather, and the foster brothers enter with the slave ahead of them on a spear. The resident bull mounts the filled heifer skin, which collapses. Herraud breaks the bull's neck. The priestess and the vulture awake, but the vulture reaches only the raised body of the slave

in his dive. Bosi gives the spear a hard push so that it goes all the way through the slave's body, the vulture's throat, and into the heart. "The vulture set its claws hard against the slave's buttocks and stuck its wing tips against Bosi's ears, knocking him unconscious. Then the vulture crashed down on top of him, ferocious in its death-throes? The picture of the large head at the end of a spear is repeated from Bilbo's rescue in The Hobbit.

This scene from "Bosi and Herraud" may have been a part of the construction of the death of King **Théoden**. The **Nazgûl's** vulture-like mount beats its foul wings in Eowyn's face just as the vulture did about Bosi's ears. Tolkien elaborates "and the wind of them was foul." Eowyn is knocked unconscious, not by the vulture, but by the mace of the Ringwraith. But Tolkien continues with images from "Bosi and Herraud": "With a cry of hatred that stung the very ears like venom he [the Ringwraith] let **fall** his mace" (III, **117**). The circumstances of Bosi's being saved by hating the slave's body at a higher elevation also appears in The Lord of the Rings. Although Eowyn standing tall has hacked off the head of his vulture-like steed, the Ringwraith now raises his mace to kill her. But Merry, King Denethor's loyal man and Dernhelm-Eowyn's saddle mate, drives his small sword through the back of the Ringwraith's knee giving Eowyn an opportunity to thrust his own weapon into him.

Later in Bosi and Herraud's adventures, they meet another horrible bird with "a hugh horrible head . . . often compared with the devil himself."⁸² This part of the story would seem to have been ignored except that Tolkien chooses it as a metaphor. Frodo, creeping up the stairs of Cirith Ungol, waits in fear as the Lord of the Nine Riders flies over. Tolkien says that Frodo is "like a bird at the approach of a snake, unable to move" (II, 3 **15**). Earlier Frodo has described the creatures to Sam as "great carrion birds" (II, 253).

Here as elsewhere, creatures appear, seemingly not from the storyteller but from the evil characters in the story to balance **Middle-earth's** chain of being. Tolkien increases the power on the side of good by

returning a more powerful wizard, Gandalf the White, to aide the heroes. Concomitantly, he allows Saruman to complete his defection to evil and he remounts the dread Ringwraiths on flying steeds, ever more dreadful than their black horses. The forces for good grow but those for evil increase at a greater pace.

The Dragon

Smaug of The Hobbit is one of the most extravagant and memorable creatures in Middle-earth. In "On Fairy-stories," Tolkien says that as a child, he "desired dragons with a profound desire" ("Fairy-Stories", 40). In many allegorical works, such as Spenser's The Faerie Queene, the dragon symbolizes greed or some greater evil. But the famous dragons of Northern literature, Fafnir and Beowulf's dragon, are more than disembodied symbols; they are real creatures with personalities. In explaining to Bilbo about the adventure, **Thorin** mentions the distinguishing characteristic of dragons -- "Dragons steal gold and jewels, you know, from men and elves and dwarves, wherever they can find them; and they guard their plunder as long as they live (which is practically for ever, unless they are killed), and never enjoy a brass ring of it" (Hobbit, 32). Those who have read Beowulf were, of course, aware of this habit of the worm, but they may have been surprised when the dragon Smaug first spoke to Bilbo **Baggins**.

Transformations of Greedy Men

However, in the Northern myths, dragons are not born but are permanent transformations of greedy men. Thus, Fafnir was once the human brother of Regin who was Sigurd's smith, and of Otr, who shape-shifted into an otter in the daytime. But after the gods kill Otr, his father Hreidmar demands that Otr's skin be covered with gold as a weregild. The Aesir get the gold from the Dwarf Andvari, **who curses** the owner of it. **The** greedy brother Fafnir, after long years of hoarding the cursed treasure, turns into a dragon.⁸³ Likewise, in the Saga of the Jomsvikings, the greedy viking Bui always carries his treasures with him in some chests. During the

battle between **Sigvaldi** and **Earl Hakon**, **Sigmund Brestisson jumps onto** Bui's ship and cuts Bui's hands off at the wrists. "Then Bui stuck the stumps into the handles of his chests and called out aloud: 'Overboard all of Bui's men,' and leaped overboard with the **chests**."⁸⁴ However, according to popular legend, Bui **did** not die: "Some men say that Bui became a dragon and brooded on his **gold**."⁸⁵ Within **this** tradition, **Smaug's** ability to talk and his brooding, evil personality are understandable.

Ironically, Ruth Noel in The **Mythology** of Middle-earth has classified dragons as things rather than beings. She says "Dragons have been listed as things, not beings because all the other beings of Middle-earth are **anthropomorphic**."⁸⁶ Dragons, of course, are anthropomorphic, too, as citations from Norse literature show. Also, Green catalogs the large number of dragons in medieval literature. The giant Nithhogg "the Dread Biter" gnaws at the roots of the World-tree in **Eddic** mythology. That dragon flies up from darkness bearing the bodies of men on his wings. In the **Heimskringla**, a huge dragon rushes to defend Iceland from an invading warlock, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reports dragons in the skies over Northumbria. In Saxo's History, **Frotho** slays a dragon.⁸⁷

Beowulfs Dragon

Many parallels between the dragon story told in The Hobbit and that told in Beowulf exist. Both dragons live in underground dwellings with their treasure for many years. The treasure in Beowulf has been the legacy of some noble race; death has taken away all the members but one. That lone guardian of the treasure stores it in a barrow in the earth, sadly noting that the gold no longer can fulfill its function as reward for courageous behavior. Thus, Beowulfs dragon found the treasure and came to hoard for three hundred years. **Thorin's** recital of Smaug's acquisitions of his hoard is less peaceful. The dwarfs' stockpiling of gold attracts the fiercest of extant dragons, who attacks, kills the guardians, and settles in to keep the treasure for one hundred and seventy one years (III, 353). Dragons do not make any significant use of the treasure: the Beowulf-poet comments concerning the

dragon: "he is none the better for it [the heathen **gold**]"^{.88} Likewise, Tolkien's **Thorin** notes that dragons hoarding treasure "never enjoy a brass ring of it" (Hobbit, 32).^{.89}

Thus, for hundreds of years the dragons sleep on the treasure in a deserted place, in Beowulf called "the emptiness": in The Hobbit, the desolation of Smaug. Then a single man -- an outlaw desperate for **weregild** in Beowulf and the burglar Bilbo in The Hobbit -- enters and steals a cup. In Beowulf, the stolen object is a "plated cup," "a precious drinking cup," "the glorious cup." The object Bilbo steals is "a great two-handed cup, as heavy as he could carry" (Hobbit, 228). The waking dragon moves to quick discovery of the wrong: "Then the worm woke; cause of strife **was** renewed; for then he moved over the stone, hard-hearted beheld his foe's footprints" (Beowulf, 40). The dragon thinks joyfully of the ensuing fight as he moves "all about the outside of the barrow." Dreaming of a warrior of insignificant size, Smaug does not see the footprint but sniffs strange air; then he misses. his cup. Smaug devours the ponies as he hunts "round and round the mountainsides" venting his wrath over the loss of his cup. As soon as it becomes night, Beowulf's dragon began "to vomit flames, bum bright dwellings. " On the next night, Smaug "rose in **fire**" to destroy the town Esgaroth. On this night raid, the bowman Bard shoots his black arrow, which has never failed him and has been saved until last, into the hollow of Smaug's vest into his left breast (Hobbit, 262). Beowulf ignores the flaming head of his dragon and strikes "a little lower down" so that the blade went in: then he takes his battle-knife and cuts the dragon through the middle (Beowulf, 47).

The settings for these encounters are also alike. As he approaches the dragon's lair, Beowulf sees "a stone arch standing, through it a stream bursting out of the barrow: there was welling of a current hot with killing fires, . . ." (Beowulf, 44). Then the dragon comes out: "First the monster's breath came out of the stone, the hot war-stream" (Beowulf, 45). Similarly, Tolkien's illustration "The Front Gate" depicts a stone arch with the stream running forth with three wisps of steam from the dragon's breath. The

blighted landscape features a blasted tree with a stump beside it in the lower left hand corner.

Other Dragons

Of course, more than one dragon went into the composition of Smaug. Beowulf's dragon does not converse with the thief nor does he have a name nor does he seem to have limbs. Since Beowulf cuts the dragon in two with his sword, his bane is likely more serpentine than lizard-like. Smaug the Magnificent has legs like a lizard, uses sharp claws, and boasts of wings like those of "an immeasurable bat" (Hobbit, 227). The roars of Beowulf's dragon cannot compare with Smaug's urbane conversation. Other than the typical generic epithets, dragon, worm, serpent, Beowulf's foe has no known name.

In The Volsunga Saga, Fafnir, the greedy son of the thrall-slayer Sigi, seems to have provided more needed characteristics for the invention of Smaug. Both Fafnir and Smaug have extensive reputations. Folk generally avoid Fafnir's dwelling at Gnitahed, and when Regin talks to Sigurd about the treasure and its guardian, the hero says that although he is young, he has heard that none approach the dragon because of its cruelty. Fafnir also seems to be vulnerable in the area of the heart: Sigmund thrusts "his sword under his left shoulder."⁹⁰ Bilbo queries Smaug about his purported soft underbelly; Smaug shows off his diamond waistcoat, allowing Bilbo to spy "a large patch in the hollow of his left breast as hollow as a snail out of its shell!" (Hobbit, 239). On the thrush's advice, Bard's black arrow finds that mark.⁹¹

Other similarities occur in the conversations that the protagonists have with the two dragons. Smaug comments that Bilbo is free with his name and inquiries about the hobbit's home. Fafnir, who has already gotten his death wound, asks Sigurd's name, his father, and his kin. Bilbo's answer constitutes but riddling shrift: he says that he comes from under the hill, over the hills, and through the air. When Smaug prompts for more, Bilbo says that he comes "from under the hill, and under the hills and over the

hills my paths led" (Hobbit, 235). **Tolkien** explains that this is etiquette for talking with dragons "if you don't want to reveal your proper name (which is wise)" (Hobbit, 235). Sigurd answers Fafnir: "Unknown to men is my kin. I am called a noble beast: neither father have I nor mother, and all alone have I fared **hither**."⁹² Sigurd knows that names should not be revealed because they have potency in curses. Smaug now capitalizes on Bilbo's freely given riddles but comments that the names suggested are not usual names. Fafnir accuses Sigurd of lying. Bilbo then gives Smaug telling clues "chosen for lucky number, "barrel rider," "he that walks unseen" (Hobbit, 235) while Sigurd reveals his name.⁹³

Smaug begins to sow dissent between the hobbit and the dwarves by giving Bilbo advice. The dragon advises Bilbo not to trust the dwarves and not to believe that he will get his share of the treasure. Fafnir asks Sigurd who egged him on to the deed. The dragon then advises Sigurd against Regin and promises that the treasure will not aide him but will be his bane.. Bilbo responds by telling Smaug that they **came** not for the treasure alone but for revenge. Sigurd also seeks something beyond the treasure, for he begins to ask Fafnir about the Norns. Smaug scoffs at a dwarf-led revenge and almost kills Bilbo with a blast of fire (Hobbit, 239). And Fafnir advises Sigurd to ride away because "he who get a death-wound avenges himself none the less."⁹⁴ Both heroes survive their encounters much the wiser. Sigurd gains a knowledge of the language of birds, which prevents his death at Regin's hands. A thrush overhears Bilbo describe the worn place in Smaug's diamond vest and informs Bard the dragonslayer.

Smaug is even more than the sum of these other dragons. Neither Fafnir nor the dragon in Beowulf has a physical description that accounts for the beauty of the wondrous red-gold dragon. Green attributes a part of this magnificent conception to King Arthur's dragon dream, recounted in The Alliterative Morte Arthure. In this Middle-English text, the poet elaborates on the dragon's resplendence:

Both his head and his neck were wholly all over

Covered with azure, enameled very fairly
His shoulders were scaled all in shining silver
Shred over all the monster with frightening points
His belly and his wings of wonderful hues
In **marvelous** malice he mounted full high
Whom that he touched, he was **ruined** for ever.'
His feet were splendidly clothed all in fine sable
and such a venomous flare flowed from his lips
That the flood of sparks all seemed on **fire**.⁹⁶

No author could have read this fantastic description and not included it in his plans for a newly hatched dragon. Malory's use of the description in his *Arthurian* materials changes the silver shoulders to gold ones. The scales, the brightly colored belly (Smaug's jeweled vest), the wings, the claws, and limbs are all common features.⁹⁷

Still, Tolkien's Smaug is not derivative but inventive. None of these dragons catches the imagination with the cagey conversation of the worldly but wicked Smaug. The dragon, who offers wryly ironic commentaries on philosophy, is yet to come in John Gardner's *Grendel*.⁹⁸ And for Grendel's dragon as conceive; by John Gardner, Smaug himself is a source.

Several questions occur about the place of dragons in Tolkien's works. If he loved them so much, why didn't he create more of them. Smaug's only companion in other works in Glaurung in the *Narn*, which is discussed in Chapter 10. Glaurung, a apprenticeship work for Smaug, is more evil, less interesting, and fairly worm-like. His conversations lack Smaug's incisive humor. Tolkien must have been quite **satisfied** with the creation of Smaug, who is one of a kind, or he probably would have pulled yet another dragon out of his soup pot. Smaug really dominates *The Hobbit*. The darker tale of *The Lord of the Rings* had no room for another stand-alone villain-roles already taken by the Balrog and **Shelob**, two creatures he had not used previously. The theme of the battle of good and evil required greater coordination and balance between the combatants than the quest for dragon

treasure.

Wargs and other mounts

In The Fellowship of the Ring, before the company enters the door of Moria, wargs or wolves attack. The members of the Fellowship fight, but Gandalf finally routs the wolves by setting the woods on fire with his magic lightning (I, 311-12). The warg attack in The Fellowship of the Ring is just a short replay of the more ferocious warg attack in The Hobbit. There, Tolkien describes the nature of the **warg/wolf** more fully. Wargs are wild grey wolves, whose leader, a great grey wolf, speaks to them in “the dreadful language of wolves” (Hobbit, 111). Furthermore, these wolves are comrades with the goblins who sometimes ride them.

Both Carter and Ryan mention that the name “**warg**” derives from Old English/Old Norse words for wolf, which also have the connotation of “villain, felon, criminal” and in Norse “**outlaw**.”⁹⁹ Ryan notes that “the reader is given the impression of **shape-changers**.”¹⁰⁰ Green comments on the habit of trolls and witches riding wolves in the eddas and on their nature as skin-changers, like King Siggeir’s mother who comes in the shape of a mighty wolf to eat the Volsung brothers from the wooden stock in which Siggeir places them.¹⁰¹

Both in the sagas and in the eddas, some men may become wolves at night. Thus, in Egils saga, Egils’ great grandfather, who is named Kveldulf (“Evening wolf”), becomes drowsy in the evening and was thought to be a great shape-changer, or werewolf. Sometimes, though, men need a wolf skin to cover themselves with before they can turn into wolves. Thus, in the Volsunga Saga, Sigmund and Sinfjotli use wolf skins for shape changing. The **sagaman** reports that they howled like wolves but could still understand each other. One day after they have fought with each other, they cannot come out of their wolf shapes. Sigmund carries the wounded Sinfjotli home on his back, and when they are finally transformed, Sigmund, “bade the trolls take the wolf-shapes.”¹⁰² Generally, shape shifting does not seem to be a dominant impression with the wargs. Their appearance as attackers

when they have a leader and carry out an attack does suggest the intelligence associated with shape shifting as do references to the wolf language, but their function as **orc** steeds does not suggest it. Tolkien doesn't do anything interesting with these creatures, perhaps because he had already created Beorn as his main shape-shifter in The Hobbit and because the idea of shape-shifting was to be attached to **Saruman**.

The eddas explain the absolute horror the people of the north felt concerning wolves, for the Fenris Wolf is to be Odin's bane. The gods **capture** this huge wolf, the son of Loki by a giant woman, and bring him to **Asgarth**. Only **Tyr** was courageous enough to feed the monster. The gods trick the wolf into allowing fetters to be placed on him. After breaking two sets, the Fenris Wolf refuses to allow a magic cord tied on him until Loki tells him that he may have **Tyr's** hand in his mouth as a surety of the gods' good faith. When the dwarf-created ribbon proves stronger than the wolf, the wolf bites off **Tyr's** hand. The Fenris wolf stays bound until **Ragnarøk**, the doom of the gods. Then, the "Voluspa" says that a wolf swallows the sun, another swallows the moon, and the Fenris wolf's mouth gapes with one jaw on the earth and the other with heaven -- and his mouth would gape more if it could. The Fenris wolf swallows Odin, but Odin's son Vithar avenges him by tearing the wolf's mouth asunder. Yet, the world cannot be saved.¹⁰³ The motif of chaining evil in the way that the gods chain the Fenris wolf also appears in The Silmarillion, where the Valar bind Melkor twice in the chain Angainor, wrought by Aule, the Smith and Master of Crafts who made the dwarves themselves (Silmarillion, 52, 252). In another age, Melkor will rise again to fight the Valar, as the Fenris wolf comes against the Norse gods.

Thus, since the wolf is traditionally a cruel demon of death and destruction among those peoples that knew it, the terrible assaults of the wargs are a natural part of a story with Northern influences. In the Middle-earth chain of being, the wolf appears to stand opposite the horse. The former are mounts for **orcs** while the noble horses carry only good characters, with a few exceptions. Wonderful horses are a staple of heroic literature and can be found in many cultures. When the Mouth of Sauron, a

renegade man, parlays with Gandalf, he does ride “a black horse, if horse it was; for it was huge and hideous, and its face was a frightful mask, more like a skull than a living head, and in the sockets of its eyes and in its nostrils there burned a flame” (III, **164**). Sauron has begun a program to produce grotesques of horses. The destruction of the mounts of the Nine Ringwraiths at the Ford has left few examples of this perversion of Sauron.

Another steed in The Lord of the Rings is the oliphant, Sauron’s version of which is the **mûmakil**. These creatures appear in Northern literature, too. In the Saga of King Thidrek of Bern, while making Fasold one of the champions, Thidrek and his horse Falka have an adventure with a different kind of creature, an elephant. In the forest of Bern, this largest and fiercest of animals comes towards them. Thidrek wants to overcome the creature, but finds that his sword will not cut. Fasold’s attempts to help are also bootless, but he recommends to Thidrek, who is now pressed underneath the animal, that a thrust into the animal’s stomach near the navel might be effective. Unfortunately, the elephant has Thidrek so closely confined that he cannot move, but his horse Falka begins to strike the beast with his front feet. Then Thidrek makes the fatal thrust into the animal’s belly. ¹⁰⁴

King Thidrek’s horse is more courageous than those of the Rohirrim, for when the **mûmakil** attack in the ‘Battle of the Pefennor Fields, the horses will not come near them. The mumakil become towers of defense with the **Haradrim** around them. The defeat of Gondor seems certain until **Aragorn** arrives. The strategy taken in this battle is for the bowmen to come close to shoot at the eyes of the monstrous creatures. Sam has already employed the tactic into the soft underbelly when he dispatched **Shelob** by thrusting his elven-blade into her guts. Sam introduces the good version of this creature into the story quite unexpectedly while he, Frodo, and **Gollum** are nearing Monðor. Gollum’s mention of men from the South in red and gold triggers a rhyme from the Shire. Sam recites the rhyme to Frodo’s amusement and Gollum’s humorless disgust. Frodo then wishes for “a thousand oliphants with Gandalf on a white one at their head” (II, 255). Then Frodo verbalizes

the necessity of their going into Mordor on 'their **own** tired feet with their treacherous guide Gollum. This quick and unexpected juxtaposition of the safe and silly world of the Shire with the horror and peril of **the** contemplated March through Mordor is brilliant. With it, Tolkien underlines the courage of the hobbits and the greatness of their contribution to the battle against evil.

It is curious that Tolkien did not do something more 'interesting' with wolves, which are such an important creature in the Northern imagination. His early experiments with telling the story of Beren in "The Earliest Silmarillion" in a beast fable format may have steered him away from the use of certain creatures--cats and dogs and their wilder extensions, the great cats and wolves.¹⁰⁵ Further, when he came to write The Lord of the Rings, many of his choices were narrowed by what he had produced in The Hobbit. As noted, the success of Smaug probably kept him from using another dragon, Beorn may have prevented further use of shape shifting, and the wargs from a more innovative version of wolves. Yet, he did manage to supercede goblins with orcs. Perhaps, he was bored with wolves, whose role in mythology is major, but in Icelandic saga almost non-existent, and wished to portray evil in some newer guises.

The Eye

Sauron, the Dark Lord,, the controller of the forces of evil in Middle-earth in the Third Age, is The Eye. Yet, by extension, Tolkien has made the eye a pervasive image for evil in The Lord of the Rings. Although the kindly eyes of good characters are mentioned, a description of a villain usually contains a remark about his eyes, which reveal his true nature.

This pattern of imagery begins in The Hobbit. Tolkien describes Gollum: "He was Gollum -- as dark as darkness, except for two big round pale eyes in his thin face" (Hobbit, 82). Bilbo, who has been separated from the dwarves while Gandalf is trying to rescue them from the Goblin tunnels, engages in a riddle game with Gollum. After losing, Gollum is angry and hungry, and " . . . to his alarm **Bilbo** now saw two points of light peering at

him. As suspicion grew in Gollum's mind, the light of his eyes burned with a pale flame." Bilbo asks again what Gollum is looking for, "But now the light in Gollum's eyes had become a green fire, and it was coming swiftly nearer" (Hobbit, 93). Gollum is seeking the one Ring, his precious.

This initial description suggests a vivid scene in Grettir the Strong. During the fight in the hall, **Glám** tries to pull Grettir outside. The moonlight was great outside and there were dense clouds with openings in them, and at times they drifted before the moon and at times away. Now this **happens** when **Glám** fell, a ray shined from the moon, and **Glám** rolled his eyes up to meet it. And Grettir himself has said that sight alone (of all he had ever seen) frightened him. "Then such a sinking came over Grettir from all together, (namely) his weariness and because he saw **Glám** rolling his eyes horribly that he could, not draw his sax [short sword], but lay almost between life and **death**."¹⁰⁶ **Glám** now curses Grettir and says that Grettir will never be stronger or more famous than he is now, that he will be exiled, that his guardian spirit will forsake him, that he will dwell ever alone, and that **the** eyes which **Glám** carries will be ever before Grettir's sight. Thus, Grettir the Strong becomes Grettir the Luckless, and all **Glám's** prophecies are fulfilled.

The **Glám** incident explains much about **Gollum**, even perhaps suggesting the name that few critics attempt to derive. **Glám** is an **aftergoing-man**, one who walks after death, just as Gollum has lived long beyond the usual lifespan of his species. Further, **Glám** is an unpleasant, friendless shepherd who breaks a taboo by eating on a church fast day and refusing to go to church. Gollum breaks another more important taboo by killing his kinsman. An evil spirit kills **Glám**, who destroys the spirit at the same time.¹⁰⁷ The evil spirit of the One Ring interrupts Gollum's pastoral life. At the end when Gollum falls into Mount Doom, he and the Ring destroy **each** other.

Gollum's eyes are the most sinister aspect of his appearance. Throughout The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien repeatedly comments on them. On watch one night, Frodo, who has only heard Gollum discussed, thinks

that “he could see two pale points of light, almost like luminous eyes” (I, 332). Some days later on the trip down the Anduin, Sam sees “a log with eyes! . . . two pale sort of points, shiny-like . . .” (I, 398). Frodo calls it “luggage with eyes” and explains to Sam that the creature is Gollum. **Now** “two pale lamp-like eyes shone coldly” as Gollum watches Frodo asleep (I, 398-400).

In The **Two** Towers, when Sam and Frodo are within sight of Mordor, Frodo says “that Shadow yonder. There’s an Eye in it” (II, 2 11). After Frodo takes Gollum as his guide, Gollum quarrels with his alter ego **Sméagol**, and “a pale light and a green light alternated in his eyes as he spoke” (II, 240). As they climb the steps of Cirith Ungol, Gollum’s eyes reflect the horrible landscape: “Along this path the hobbits trudged, side by side, unable to see Gollum in front of them, except when he turned back to beckon them on. Then his eyes shone with a green-white light, reflecting **the noisome** Morgul-sheen perhaps, or kindled by some answering mood within. Of that deadly gleam and of the dark eye-holes Frodo and Sam were always conscious, ever glancing fearfully over their shoulders, and ever dragging their eyes back to find the darkening path” (II, 313). A horrible landscape surrounds Sam and Frodo; yet the light from Gollum’s eyes seems equally frightening, as frightening as the sight of **Glám’s** eyes was to Grettir the Strong. On Mount Doom, Frodo sees “pale lights like eyes,” and a wildlight comes into his own eyes (III, 2 13, 22 1). Finally, after Frodo puts the Ring on at the edge of Mount Doom, “a wild light of madness” glares in Gollum’s eyes (III, 222). Gollum bites off Frodo’s finger and grabs the Ring, “And with that, even as his eyes were lifted up to gloat on his prize, he stepped too far, toppled, wavered for a moment on the brink, and then with a shriek he fell” (III, 224). Throughout the story, the pale green light from Gollum’s eyes reminds the reader that pathetic though Gollum is, he is still intent on evil.

Just as Gollum’s eyes are not the only evil eyes referred to in The Lord of the Rings, so **Glám’s** are not the only possible analog for the evil eye in Northern literature. In modern western literature, images of eyes and

seeing seem to be more often associated with good -- perceiving and understanding -- than with evil. However, in medieval Norse literature; **Glám's** evil eye is not unusual, The motif of the evil eye **pervades** the sagas. For instance, Olaf Tryggvason has the wizard **Eyvind Keld** and his fellow sorcerers blinded before the King's men tie them to a rock where the tide will cover them. The blinding is to keep them from bringing others under their influence by using the evil eye. Drowning or stoning is needed to kill a wizard without making some individual liable for haunting.¹⁰⁸ Witches naturally used the evil eye. In Kormaks saga, **Kormák** recognized the witch Thorveig's eyes in a walrus that comes near his ship as he is leaving Iceland for viking raids abroad. Hollander notes that the witch "is trying to exert the power of 'the evil eye' on him. It was a common belief that witches could send out their souls in the shape of animals to harm their **enemies**. Their eyes would remain unchanged during the **transformation**."¹⁰⁹ The shape-shifter retained the eyes of the human form in the animal shape.

Not only did wizards and witches have the evil eye, but the eyes of a dead man could also harm those who came in front of them. In Eyrbyggja Saga, Thorolf Half-foot, a difficult old man, dies in an evil mood. The housewife sends for his son Arnkel; all the servants are afraid of Thorolf sitting dead in his high seat. "Now Arnkel went into the fire-hall, and so up along it behind the seat at Thorolfs back, and bade all beware of facing him before Lyke-help was given to him. **Then** Arnkel took Thorolf by the shoulder, and must needs put forth all his strength before he brought him under. After that he swept a cloth about Thorolfs head and then did to him according to custom. Then he let break down the wall behind him, and brought him out . . ." ¹¹⁰ Lyke-help involves the essential closing of the dead person's eyes, for the power of the evil eye extends after death. Similarly, when Egil's father, Skallagrim, another temperamental old man, dies sitting in his high seat, Egil goes around the edge of the hall, seizes Skallagrim from behind, and gives him Lyke-help. Egil has especially warned the people of the household to avoid coming front of Skallagrirn's sight since the dead have the evil eye.¹¹¹ The Heimskringla may also have made a

contribution to the eye imagery. In the “Saga of the Sons of **Harald**” of the Heimskringla, an English priest named Richard **goes** to live with two noble and wealthy brothers and their sister. People soon begin to talk that the sister’s kindness to the priest is a result of his seduction of her. The brothers and their servant abduct the priest and torture him to make him confess his illicit relationship with their sister. His eyes are knocked out with a peg, which pierces the eyelid, and his tongue is cut out.. When he regains consciousness, he hold his eyeballs in their proper place. He is abandoned then at a farmhouse where he prays to God and Holy Saint Olaf for healing. A radiant noble-looking man comes in the night to heal him. He identifies himself as Olaf from north in Trondheim. Richard is altogether healed, except for the mark on his eyes: “But as a mark that his eyes had been gouged out, a white scar appeared on both his eyelids, so that the might of this glorious king should be shown in the man who had been so pitiably maltreated.”¹¹² Although there are several tales of torture in the Heimskringla, this scene, coming in a less-interesting part of the saga, is particularly striking.

All the creatures of Sauron’s realm have evil, frightening eyes. In The Hobbit, Gandalf, Bilbo, and the dwarves tree the wargs with “eyes blazing and tongues hanging out” (Hobbit, 111). And in **the** beginning of The Fellowship of the Ring, before Bilbo gives up the Ring, he mentions that “Sometimes I have felt it was like an eye looking at me” (I, 43). When Boromir wants to take the Ring from Frodo by **force**, he has a queer gleam in his eye (I, 415). Challenged by Gandalf, Theoden’s bad counselor Wormtongue has the haunted look of a trapped beast in his eyes. When he escapes, “His eyes glittered. Such malice was in them that men stepped back from **him**” (II, 125). Wormtongue is one of the bad characters whose evil goes on beyond the fall of Sauron.

When the **orc** Grishnakh tries to get the **Ring** from Frodo, “There was a light like a pale but hot fire behind his eyes” (II, 58). Gimli **finds** an **orc** knife with a carved handle “shaped like a hideous head with squinting eyes and leering mouth” (II, 92). **Two** of Sauron’s **orcs** wear livery, “one marked

by the Red Eye, the other by a Moon disfigured with a ghastly face of death” (III, 179). The latter may have inspired by the Old Norse word “**glamblesottr**”, “having a moon-shaped blaze on the **forehead**.”¹¹³ **Faramir** calls Cirith Ungol, the land of Sauron and the **orcs**, “a place of sleepless malice, full of **lidless** eyes” (II, 302). And the head has been taken off of one of the stone images of an **Argonath** king who ruled there before Sauron made it evil and replaced with “a round rough-hewn stone, rudely painted by savage hands in the likeness of a grinning face with one large red eye in the midst of its forehead” (II, 311). The image of the evil eye pervades the landscapes of Mordor.

In Cirith Ungol, Gollum betrays Frodo and Sam into the lair of **Shelob**, a spider-like monster. The encounter is told with eye imagery. In the tunnel, Frodo first becomes “aware of eyes growing visible, two great clusters of many-windowed eyes -- the coming menace was unmasked at last . . . Monstrous and abominable eyes they were, bestial and **yet** filled with **purpose** and with hideous delight, gloating over their prey trapped beyond all hope of escape. Frodo and Sam, horror-stricken, began slowly to back away, their own gaze held by the dreadful stare of those baleful eyes; but as they backed so the eyes advanced” (II, 329-30). Frodo, who has been holding up Galadriel’s magic **phial** of light, slowly drops it. “Then suddenly, released from the holding spell to run a little while in vain panic for the amusement of the eyes, they both turned and fled together; but even as they ran Frodo looked back and **saw** with terror that at once the eyes came leaping up behind” (II, 330). When Sam finally attacks **Shelob**, he finds that her first vulnerable area is her eyes, her second her soft under belly.

Shelob is an ancient evil thing not of Sauron’s making but loved by him. However, his most potent evil creatures are the nine Ringwraiths, dead kings who took rings of power and. used them for their earthly glory. Although they are blind, the Ringwraiths perceive more than they could see with human eyes. **Gandalf** explains that the Black Riders “themselves do not . see the world of light as we do, but our shapes cast shadows in their minds, which only the noon sun destroys: and in the dark they perceive many signs

and forms that are hidden from us . . . " (I, 202). These blind super-perceptive creatures are more frightful than they would have been with sight. Their blindness allows Tolkien to put a greater responsibility on Frodo for the resolution of the destruction of the Ring. They generally do not perceive him: his presence outside of Mordor and even as he nears Mount **Oran** goes undetected unless he wears the Ring. Sometimes he needs the **Ring** to solve problems of assaults from lesser evil creatures, but succumbing to that desire inevitably brings him to the attention of more evil creatures.

Of course, all the evil eye **imagery** of the minor villains in the story only serves to intensify the impression of Sauron. Sauron is never described in The Lord of the Rings; his slaves know him only as The Eye. Gandalf warns Saruman that "When his [Sauron's] eye turns hither, it will be the red eye of wrath" (II, 188). Frodo's first encounter with the Eye is his look in Galadriel's mirror -- "In the black abyss there appeared a single Eye that slowly grew, until it filled nearly all the Mirror. . . . The Eye was rimmed with fire, but was itself glazed, yellow as a cat's, watchful and intent, and the black slit of its pupil opened on a pit, a window into nothing" (I, 379). The horrible Eye of Sauron has almost found Frodo.

Pippin also sees merely an awful eye when he looks into the palantir. The palantir are called jewels and appear on Aragorn's banner as a symbol of his house. In The Silmarillion, Tolkien tells of their creation and use as a means of communications for the **Númenóreans** in Middle-earth and as a mode of reference to the Tower of **Avallónë**, where the Masterstone remains (Silmarillion, 292). As a means of seeing, the palantir themselves are a physical manifestation of the eye imagery. In the earlier ages, they were deployed for good, for the better governance of the kingdom, but in the Third Age, Sauron uses them cleverly to spread his evil. Sauron seduces Saruman through his palantir and brings Denethor to despair. The Seeing Stones can be made to see sorrow, disappointment, and hopelessness.

When Frodo puts on the Ring at Mount Doom, the Eye is suddenly aware of him and of its peril. Yet, Sauron's Eye has betrayed its owner. The

Eye has been busy with the challenge of Gandalf, Aragorn, and Éomer and has not observed Frodo and Sam creeping through its blighted lands. Gandalf explains that the Ringbearer succeeds because Sauron has only one view (one eye). Sauron assumes that the allies would want to use the Ring of power: he never considers that they might attempt to destroy it.

Many critics associate Sauron with Odin because each has only one eye as discussed earlier. Further, Odin's titles Bileyg, "One whose eye deceives him" and Báleyg, "Flame-eyed" emphasize his single fiery eye. Both Sauron and Odin provide frenzy in battle; and both wield power and direct the battle from afar. In Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-stories", Odin's titles, the Necromancer and "Lord of the Slain", equal Sauron's titles, the Necromancer and Lord of the Rings.¹¹⁴ This parallel emphasizes the complexity of evil, a problem which will be discussed in Chapter 9.

Noel posits a relationship between Sauron's ring and the folk format in which an evil sorcerer's soul is confined in a special object. She draws a particular connection with the story of the Tartar hero **Kök** Chan whose supernatural strength resides in a gold ring.¹¹⁵ One difficulty with this theory is Tolkien's repeated warning that if the Ring were used by any other character, that character would become evil. Thus, Elrond, Galadriel, Gandalf, and Aragorn all eschew the Ring. If the Ring were actually Sauron's soul, their imaginary fears of what they might become with the Ring would not be appropriate. Another difficulty is Gandalf's warning that some powers for good will fail when the Ring is destroyed; the destruction of Sauron's soul would not have that impact.

Thus, the Norse conception of the power of the evil eye has perhaps served as a basis for some of Tolkien's imagery. But Tolkien has taken the image and created from it a complex and significant structure. The image of the eye makes the evil it represents seem pervasive and encompassing. As an image for evil, the eye has advantages over some other images, such as a dragon, a wolf, or a troll. The image permits a duality: the good eyes of the story's heroes balance the evil eyes of the villains. Since the image for evil is complicated by its ability to represent good, too, the image cannot be

allegorical.

Ancient Creatures

The One guided the Valar in the creation of Middle-Earth and **then** prepared them to be its guardians. Tolkien tells this theological creation story in The Silmarillion. Although Old Norse **vala** means "**seeress**,"¹¹⁶ the gods and the most ancient creatures of Middle-earth are less clearly inspired by Norse tales than some of the later creatures, as already demonstrated.

Noel thinks that the gods of Middle-earth are active: "In the Valar and the One who ruled them, **Tolkien** established a pervasive but unobtrusive theology for Middle-earth. These gods were alive and responsive to their worshipers, taking an active part in their **fate**."¹¹⁷ The theology is certainly unobtrusive as far as acts of worship are concerned; the people of **Gondor** observe a standing grace only two times. These two instances are **the** only overtly religious celebrations in the entire work. The Valar and the One occur in a number of allusions, but their intrusive influence on the action is negligible. Their only response to their worshipers, who are sorely pressed by Sauron, is to send the five Wizards with the injunction not to use force in their combat with the Dark Lord. If the Iliad and Paradise Lost stand as examples of gods taking an active part in the fate of their worshipers, **then** by comparison, The Lord of the Rings displays a set of gods who are not involved. Rather the emphasis in the three-part work is on how the characters themselves combat the forces of evil with very limited help from their gods.

Origins of Ancients

Moreover the historical orientation of the Lord of the Rings makes ancient characters like **Shelob** and Tom Bombadil necessary to indicate the evolving nature of the universe. Thomas J. Gasque in "Tolkien: the Monsters and the Critics" does not recognize what these **timeless** creatures are actually four--two good, rather primitive spirits of nature, Tom Bombadil

(male) and Goldberry (female), and two evil, primeval dwellers in darkness, the Balrog (male) and **Shelob** (female). Although these four are not the actual parents of other species, the four seem to be related to the origins of good and evil. All are impervious to the power of the Ring. Connected with Tom Bombadil and Goldberry are the images of good--light, organic, **pure--** and with the Balrog and **Shelob** the images of evil--dark, mechanical, corrupt.

Bombadil and Goldberry

Tom Bombadil and **Goldberry** represent ancient earth and water creatures.¹¹⁸ Briefly, Tom Bombadil exists from Tolkien's poem "The Adventures of Tom Bombadil" printed in Oxford Magazine in 1934. Tolkien admits that he uses the already-invented Bombadil to get the adventure under way. Tolkien retains Bombadil because he represented certain things: "pure (real) natural science; the spirit that desires knowledge of other things, their history and nature, because they are 'other' and wholly independent of the inquiring mind, a spirit coeval with the rational mind . . ." (Letters, 192). In The Return of the Shadow, Christopher Tolkien makes available earlier versions of the story in which Tolkien calls Bombadil an "aborigine" - one who knew the land before the creatures came into it.¹¹⁹ His existence is not truly necessary to the story, although its conventionality in Northern literature will be demonstrated in the chapter on landscapes. He overcomes his old natural enemies from "The Adventures"--the **Willow-man** and the Barrow-wight, whose power to move the reader is much improved by the existence of the hobbits. In The Road to Middle Earth, Shippey argues that Bombadil is not a living creature, but seems to have been there since before the Elves, "an exhalation of the world." Shippey points to the Old English poem Genesis B which calls Adam a selfsceafta puma, "self-shaped **man**" or "self-doomed **man**."¹²⁰ While Shippey is accurate about Bombadil's origins, his contention that Bombadil is not a living creature is not very useful.

One small hint for Goldberry may come from the Faroe Islander's Saga.

Sigmund desires to leave Norway for the **Faroe** Islands. When he asks Earl Hakon's permission, the Earl asks him whom he trusts. Sigmund replies in typical viking style, that he trusts to his own might and main. The Earl replies that Sigmund will need the help of "her in whom I put all my trust: Thorgerd **Hordabrud**."¹²¹ They go through the woods into a beautiful house with gold and silver worked into the carvings and with many windows. There the Earl throws himself down before a beautifully clothed figure. After the Earl prostrates himself a second time and appears to be crying, he is able to pull an arm ring from the figure. He gives this token to Sigmund for luck. King Olaf later asks for the ring predicting that it will cause Sigmund's death. When Sigmund washes ashore after almost drowning, two ruffians recognize him from the arm ring and kill him for it.¹²² This goddess figure may have contributed to the creation of **Goldberry**, who certainly earns the hobbit's trust with her hospitality to them. Goldberry is Tom's first conquest: she is "the River-woman's daughter" who has now foregone her mother's avocation of pulling innocents into the river.

Balrog

According to The Silmarillion, after Melkor has fallen from the **Valar**, he perverted creatures to his needs. In the earliest days, he gathered demons about him, cloaked them in darkness, gave them hearts of fire; and they became like him in corruption (Silmarillion, 47). Both Green and Noel expand the relationship between the Balrog and the Teutonic god **Surt**. Surt appears for **Ragnarök**, the Doom of the Gods. Like the Balrog, he comes over the Rainbow Bridge with an arc-like host from the fire-realm **Muspell** "and both before and after him burning fire". Both Bifrost and the Bridge of **Khazad-dûm** break under this ride. Green further suggests a profitable comparison between the Balrog's **name** and that of **Bölthorn**, Odin's grandfather whom he fights for the possession of the runes.¹²³ Yet connections do little to place the **balrog** in a cosmology.

Knowledge of the hierarchy of monsters in Norse mythology would have led the reader to expect the Fenris wolf to have been a source for the

Balrog since the three great monsters are the serpent Jormundgand, the Fenris wolf, and the goddess **Hel**. The serpent has, of course, contributed to the creation of the dragon Smaug and **Hel** to **Shelob's making, but the Balrog** also seems to be associated with the serpent/dragon because fire imagery prevails in the balrog's description. The destructive power of fire--its ability to devour life in a personified manner with a malevolence suggestive of a great catastrophe to end the world--occurs in several sections of Beowulf. Fire imagery is particularly associated with the dragon, the final monster who is Beowulf's **bane**. When the thief disturbs the dragon's treasure by stealing the cup, the dragon "set out with fire, ready **with flame**." The Beowulf-poet continues: "Then the evil spirit began to vomit flames, burn bright dwellings; blaze of fire rose, to the horror of men . . ." (Beowulf, 40) The dragon flies over the village: "He circled the **land-dwellers** with flame, with fire and burning . . ." (Beowulf, 41). When Beowulf comes to meet the dragon, the poet says, "Then coiling in flames, he [the dragon] came gliding on hastening to his fate . . . he exhaled death-fire -- the warflames spraying wide" (Beowulf, 45). Later, devouring, eating fire appears in Wiglaf's discussion of the disposition of the dragon's treasure: "These shall the fire devour, flames enfold . . ." (Beowulf, 52). The flames also consume the fire dragon "grimly terrible with with his many colors" (Beowulf, 53). As Beowulf's funeral pyre is lit, Wiglaf comments, "Now shall the flame eat the chief of warriors--the fire shall grow dark" (Beowulf, 54) This statement is similar to the poet's description of Hnaef's pyre: "Fire swallowed them--greediest of spirits . . ." (Beowulf, 20). Old English poem, the final obliteration of the funeral pyre is an image of ultimate power. This eager, devouring flame seems to be a metaphor for the destructive forces in a dying cosmos.

In The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien makes generous use of this tradition of describing fire as a lively destructive agent. The richest example is the battle on the bridge at Khazad-Diim between two creatures of fire: Gandalf and the Balrog. The wizard says, "I am a servant of the Secret **Fire**, wielder of the flame of Anor. You cannot pass. The dark fire will not avail you, flame

of **Udûn**" (I, 344). As the company approaches the bridge, Tolkien describes the fire burning in the levels below: "It **was** flickering and glowing on the walls . . . " (I, 342). The flames "licked at the brink and curled about the bases of the columns" and "**the** pillars seemed to tremble and the flames to quiver" (I, 343). The Balrog consists of flames: "Its streaming mane kindled, and blazed behind it. In its right hand was a blade like a stabbing tongue of fire . . ."; "The **dark** figure **streaming with fire** . . . " and "The fire in it [the Balrog] seemed to die, but the darkness grew" (I, 344-45). When the Balrog enters, "**the flames** roared up to greet it, and wreathed about it. . ." (I, 344). And when Gandalf breaks with bridge with his staff, "A blinding sheet of white flame sprang **up**" (I, 345). When Gandalf later relates the battle to Aragorn, **Legolas**, and Gimli, he reveries on how the Battle of the Peak might be described in heroic song: "**Thunder** they [the song makers] heard, and lightning, they said, smote upon Celebdil, and leaped back broken into tongues of fire" (I, 135). Clearly the two monsters share a tradition of fire imagery. Gandalf finally throws the Balrog down and extinguishes him just as Beowulf extinguishes the dragon. Tolkien's conception of two Maia -- one a defender of freedom, the other a fallen evil creature -- provides him with a superior vehicle for his fire imagery.

Many other scenes use the kinds of fire imagery practiced in Beowulf. Gandalf tests the Ring's identity in Frodo's fireplace; Denethor creates a funeral pyre in the tradition of Beowulf and **almost** burns his son Faramir alive on it; and the flames of Mount Doom **annihilate** the Ring itself. In these scenes, Tolkien adds to the philosophical implications of the **fire** in Beowulf. The verses on the Ring detail its intention to rule, to find, to bring, and to bind **all** creatures under the **Dark Lord**. Denethor's speech also underscores the destruction theme: "**They** have set a fire in his [**Faramir's**] flesh. But soon all shall be burned. The West has failed. It **shall** all go up in a great fire, and all shall be ended. Ash! Ash and smoke blown away on the wind!" (III, 128). The fire of pyre devours the human body as the evil of Sauron will devour Middle-earth. After the fire has obliterated Gollum and the Ring, Frodo and Sam believe they are at "the end of all

things" (III, 225). Yet, beyond the burning of the **Ring**, a mighty battle has yet to be fought, the Shire must be cleansed, and the Elves and some of the heroes will abandon Middle-earth.

The Beowulf-poet creates flame imagery with a philosophical commentary on the destruction of the cosmos. Tolkien adds to the **fire**-imagery tradition by creating the Balrog, a flame-engendered **Maiar--an** amalgamation of the physical, emotional, and philosophical aspects of the flame.

Ungoliant/Shelob

Like Tom Bombadil, Ungoliant's remote origin is not known: "the **Eldar** knew not whence she came." Elven lore hypothesizes that Ungoliant was descended from the darkness of **Arda** when Melkor began to corrupt creatures. Yet Ungoliant, Unlight, disowns Melkor to fill her own lust. Melkor entices her to **join him** in despoiling the **Valar's** festivals. She sucks life from the trees, fills them with the poison of death, and drains the Wells of Varda. In the darkness she arranges, Melkor revenges himself and escapes again from the **Valar** (Silmarillion, 73-77). Ungoliant is not sated with the light of the trees; she consumes all the world's gems for their light and lusts after the Silmarils. Then, with an inevitable imaginative force, the Balrogs come up against Ungoliant, eventually destroying her webs and driving her South. In the south, she breeds many creatures of the spider kind. There **Shelob**, last child of Ungoliant, is begotten (Silmarillion, 79-**81**). It seems clear from a series of letters to Christopher Tolkien in May of 1944 that Tolkien had long planned for the meeting between Frodo and Sam and this ancient descendant of an evil force. His decision to give the creature a different kind of name "**Shelob**" attests to the care he took in bringing creatures from the larger work The Silmarillion into the smaller, more carefully constructed The Lord of the Rings.

Shelob shares several characteristics with Hel, one of the three monstrous offspring of Loki and the giantess **Angrboda**. Odin and the gods have been concerned about the possible evil that **might** result from these

creatures who were half god and therefore had a greater potential for **harm** than mere giants. The gods **raid gianthome**, kidnap the three monstrous offspring, and bring them to Valhalla for disposition. Odin immediately hurls the serpent into the ocean and **Hel** herself into Niflheim, a realm of freezing mist and darkness under one root of Yggdrasil, the world tree. Both **Shelob** and **Hel** are incredibly ugly, both dwell in places of darkness, both are carrion eaters. Odin grants **Hel** those who die of illness or old age but he requires that she feed them, although her plate is called Hunger and her knife Famine.¹²⁴ As Frodo and Sam approach **Shelob's** lair, the smell of death prevails: "Out of it [Shelob's lair] came a stench, not the sickly odour of decay in the meads of Morgul, but a foul reek, as if filth unnameable were piled and hoarded in the dark within." (II, 326). **Shelob** has long been the recipient of small gifts of the deaths of Sauron's no longer useful servants. Like Hel, **Shelob** is endlessly hungry: "she served none but herself, drinking the blood of Elves and Men, bloated and grown fat with endless brooding on her feasts, weaving webs of shadow: for all living things were her food, and her vomit darkness" (II, 332). The growing power of Sauron has made it difficult for her to get food. The odd **orc** does little to satisfy her appetite and she greatly craves the sweeter meat that her servant Gollum brings her in the two hobbits. It is, of course, fitting that Frodo at once recognizes the magnitude of the enemy: he wishes Tom were there to help them **and** he uses his vial from the Lady Galadriel. **Hel** also has servants--the slow moving **Ganglot**, whose names share some sounds with Gollum's own. Tolkien affirms **Shelob's** status as a goddess when he has Gollum make obeisance to her: "in past days he had bowed and worshipped her, and the darkness of her evil will walked through all the ways of his weariness beside him, cutting him off from light and from regret" (II, 332-33). Gollum's worship of **Shelob** has been part of his continuing rejection of his better self (**Sméagol**) for his worse self (Gollum); Sam's slinker and stinker.

The relationship between Sauron and **Shelob** also parallels that between Odin and Hel. Loki is Odin's foster-brother and companion; thus, **Hel** has a kinship relationship with the god. Sauron is an evolved Maiar of

the same order as Gandalf both owe some characteristics to the Norse god. Sauron considers **Shelob** his pet: "*his cat* he calls her but she owns him not" (II, 333). Their interests are diverse; Sauron's objective is to enslave the minds and hearts of all free peoples. **Shelob** desires their bodies; she "desired death for all others mind and body, and for herself a glut of life, alone, swollen till the mountains could no longer hold her up and the darkness could not contain her" (II, 333). Like Odin, Sauron wants political control of all free creatures while **Shelob** wishes to devour and destroy those within her hungry grasp.

In Norse mythology and saga, evil comes in many forms. The giants who are as ancient and almost as powerful as the gods are foes of order. The monsters whose kinship with the gods makes them a greater threat than the mindless giants, and the evil that comes from the natural greed of creatures combine to form a world in which chaos is expected to overcome order. Good and evil are not easily separated. Some giants are good; most of the gods have wicked moments. Tolkien's universe reflects this complexity. The most powerful forces for evil and good, Sauron and Gandalf, derive from the same source -- the Maiar. Lesser evil and good forces may be equally ancient and powerful -- **Shelob** and Balrog; Goldberry and Tom Bombadil -- but their primary emphasis is not in the arena of the action of The Lord of the Rings. Lesser creatures are either good or evil according to their own natures. Throughout, there is a rough balance, with the scales tipping in favor of the evil forces. Courage on the part of the lesser beings of Middle-earth is the deciding factor for the temporary triumph of good at the end of the Third Age.

NOTES

1. Ruth M. Noel, The **Mythology** of Middle-earth (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), 57.
2. Thomas J. Gasque, "Tolkien: The Monsters and the Critters," in Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1968), 151-63.
3. Jan de Vries, "Contributions to the Study of Othinn Especially in his Relation to Agricultural Practices in Modern Popular Lore," Folklore' Fellows Communications, XXXIII, 94 (193 1), 46-47.
4. Mythology, 60-61.
5. Njal's saga (Níál's Saga), trans. Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Lee M. Hollander (New York: New York University Press: 1955), 107-61.
6. J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), 1041. (All references are to this edition and are in the text as Hobbit.)
7. J.R.R. Tolkien, The Return of the King (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 301. (All references are to this edition and are in the text as III, which represents the third volume of The Lord of the Rings.)
8. "Hrolfs saga Kraka," in An Introduction to Old Norse (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), 27-32.
9. Hrólf Kraki, 32.
10. Hrólf Kraki, 32.

11. Richard W. Tedharns, "An Annotated Glossary of the Proper Names in the Mythopoeic Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien" (Master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1966), 30.
12. E. O. G. Turville-Petre, "The Cult of Freyr in the Evening of Paganism," Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society III, vi (1935), 317-22.
13. "Cult of Freyr," 322.
14. J.R.R. Tolkien, The Two Towers (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 290. (All references are to this edition and are in the text as II, which represents the second volume of The Lord of the Rings.)
15. Hervarar saga ok Heidreks konungs (The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise), trans. Christopher Tolkien (London: Nelson, 1960), 67.
16. C. C. Rafn, Fomaldar Sögur Nordrlanda eptir Gömlum Handritum (Kaupmannahofn: E. Poppsku, 1892), 387-88.
17. Snorri Sturluson, The Prose Edda: Tales from Norse Mythology, trans. Jean I. Young (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 31.
18. J.R.R. Tolkien, The Silmarillion, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 47-56. (All references are to this edition and are in the text as Silmarillion.)
19. Mythology, 117-18. In The Mythology of Middle-earth, Noel notes many similarities between the elves and the Celtic elven folks. Further, she draws an interesting parallel between Eärendil, the mariner father of Elrond and Elros, and the Prose Edda's Earendil. In the Edda, Thor is left with part of the giant Hrungrnir's whetstone lodged in his head after he slays

the giant with his hammer. He employed the seeress Grôa to sing spells to remove the stone, but he interrupts her in the middle of her singing to tell her that her husband Earendil will soon return. Thor has rescued Earendil from giantland by carrying him out in a basket, but Earendil's toe froze during a river crossing on the trip. Thor threw the toe up in the sky to become the star Earendil(perhaps the morning star). Tolkien's **Eärendil** sails the skies in his ship bearing the Silmaril that Beren and **Lúthien** brought from **Angmar**.

20. The Prose Edda, **31**.

21. Mythology, - 4 6 .

22. Prose Edda, 142.

23. Kormaks saga (The Sagas of Kormák and The Sworn Brothers), trans. Lee M. Hollander (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949) 63-64.

24. The Poetic Edda, trans. Lee M. Hollander, 2nd ed. [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), 159-68.

25. Poetic Edda, 322-33.

26. Prose Edda, 41. Lin Carter gets sixteen using Henry Bellow's translation of the Poetic Edda (154). In Lee Hollander's translation, only fourteen appear, unless **Glói** is equated with **Glóin** and **Dwalin** with Dvalin (12). However, Beatie finds eighteen of twenty-seven in the catalogue of Snorri's Prose Edda.

27. Prose Edda, 41.

28. J.S. Ryan, "German Mythology Applied--the Extension of the Literary

Folk Memory,” Folklore LXXVII (1965), 50-51.

29. Poetic Edda, 159-68.

30. Margaret Schlauch, The Romance in Iceland (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1916), 20.

31. King Heidrek, 68.

32. Fornaldar, 326-27.

33. Fornaldar, 446-47.

34. Eiríkr Magnússon and William Morris, trans., Three Northern Love Stories and Other Tales (London: Longmans, Green, 1901), 203-04.

35. E.O.G. Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia (New York: Holt, Winston, and Rinehart, 1964), 221.

36. Fornaldar, 54.

37. Mythology, 131.

38. Níal's Saga, 156.

39. J.R.R. Tolkien, Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 389. (All references are to this edition and are in the text as Unfinished Tales.)

40. “German Mythology,” 54.

41. Mythology, 156.

42. William Howard Green, "The Hobbit and Other Fiction by J.R.R. Tolkien: Their Roots in Medieval Heroic Literature and Language" (**Ph.D. diss.**, Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, **1969**), **63**.

'**43.** Lin Carter, Tolkien: A Look Behind "The Lord of the Rings" (New York: **Bantam**, 1969), 134-51.

44. "Roots in Medieval," **63**.

45. Kevin Crossley-Holland, The Norse Myths (New York: Pantheon, **1980**), 15- 17, 186-88. Crossley-Holland provides an interesting discussion of the meaning of this tale.

46. Heimskringla, 11.

47. Myth and Religion, 62.

48. Heimskringla, 203.

49. Myth and Religion, 62-63.

50. "Roots in Medieval," 65.

51. Myth and Religion, 56-57.

52. "Roots in Medieval," 65-66.

53. Poetic Edda, 36-37.

54. Myth and Religion, **42-43**.

55. "Roots of Medieval," 69.

56. Myth and Religion, 62-63.

57. "German Mythology," 52.

58. Mythology, 108.

59. Heimskringla, 12.

60. "German Mythology," 52.

61. Rose A. Zimbardo, "Moral Vision in The Lord of the Rings" in Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1968), 101. Why she calls him Radagast the Russet is unclear.

62. Mythology, 107. Ruth Noel's statement "His [Radagast's] name is that of a slavonic god, Radagast or Radihost, who was associated with the Roman god Mercury" does not fit with the creation of other wizards. Noel casts Radagast as an alchemist and a shaman. She notes "a priest of Radegast in Mlada, an opera by Rimsky-Korsakov, based on Slavonic mythology." In the next paragraph, she says "The name Radegast is derived from rad ("glad") and radost ("joy") because Radegast was a god of bliss, whom Grimm associated with Odin as a personification of Wish. The Slavonic Radegast was also described as a sure counselor and a god of strength and honor.

, Both of Tolkien's good wizards were indeed important counselors, and the wizard Radegast's honor was also significant; even Saruman would not try to corrupt him." This last statement is not consistent with Saruman's use of Radegast to deceive Gandalf.

63. Mythology and Religion, 79.
64. Prose Edda, 37.
65. The Saga of Thidrek of Bern, trans. Edward Haymes (New York: Garland, 1988), 43.
66. Romance in Iceland, 137-38.
67. Mythology, 132.
68. Mythology, 131.
69. "German Mythology," 52.
70. Manfred Zimmerman, "Early Glimpses of Middle-earth" Mythlore XXX (Winter 1982), 18. According to Zimmermann, the phrase "eald enta geweorc" [old giant work] occurs fairly early into Tolkien's storehouse of lore. In the earliest of three essays Tolkien wrote for The Year's Work in English Studies, Zimmermann finds this 1923 reference to be "the nucleus whence sprang his creation of the famous race of the Ents." Zimmermann also notes that the 16th century Guve of Gisborne quoted in Tolkien's 1925 essay contains a meter which may be detected in the "Song of the Ents and Entwives" (II, 80- 81).
71. "The Wanderer" in Norton Anthology (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968), 91-92.
72. William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon, trans., The Story of the Ere-Dwellers (Eyrbyggja Saga) with the Story of the Heath-Slayings (Heitharviga Saga) as Appendix (London: B. Quaritch, 1892), 237.

73. Njál's Saga, 137, **241**.

74. Oddr snorrason, Saga Oláfs Tryggvasonar, ed. Finnur Jonsson (Ksbenhavn: G.E.C. Gad, 1932), 174-75. [my translation]

75. Oddr Snorrason, The Saga of King Olaf Tryggwason [sic], trans. J. Sephton (London: D. Nutt, 1895), 334-36.

76. Bo Hansson and Anders Lind, "Music Inspired by The Lord of the Rings", ([n.p.]: Buddha Records, 1972). Sound Recording.

77. Hervarar saga ok Heidreks konungs, The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise, trans. Christopher Tolkien (London: Nelson, 1960), 44.

78. Myth and Religion, 36-38.

79. "Roots in Medieval," 65-66.

80. Volsunga saga, The Saga of the Volsungs. The Saga of Ragnar Lodbrok together with The Lav of Kraka, trans. Margaret Schlauch (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, W.W. Norton, 1930), 146.

81. "Bosi and Herraud," in Gauthrek's Saga and other Medieval Tales, trans. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (New York: New York University Press, 1968), **73**.

82. "Bosi and Herraud," 88.

83. Saga of the Volsungs, 131.

84. Saga of the Jomsvikings, trans. Lee Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1955), 102-03.

85. Saga of the Jomsvikings, 115.

86. Mythology, 151.

87. "Roots in Medieval," 157-58.

88. Beowulf, trans. E. Talbot Donaldson (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 40.
(All references are to this edition and are in the text as Beowulf.)

89. "Roots in Medieval," 159-163. The ideas for these comparisons with Beowulf and Volsunga Saga are Green's; I have amplified it and included it here for the convenience of the reader since dissertations **are** not readily available.

90. Saga of the Volsungs, 142.

91. "Roots in Medieval," 163.

92. Saga of the Volsungs, 142.

93. "Roots in Medieval," 163-64.

94. Saga of the Volsungs, 142-43.

95. "Roots in Medieval," 164-66.

96. "Arthur," in Fernand Mossé, A Handbook of Middle English (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1952), 254-55 [My translation].

97. "Roots in Medieval," 167-70.

98. John Gardner, Grendel (New York: Ballantine, 1972).
99. Look Behind, 183.
100. "German Mythology," 53-54.
101. Saga of the Volsungs, 99.
102. Saga of the Volsungs, 105-6.
103. Prose Edda, 55-57.
104. The Saga of Thidrek of Bern, trans. Edward R. Haynes (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), 49.
105. Shaping, 11-75.
106. Grettis saga, in An Introduction to Old Norse, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), 230.
107. Grettis saga, The Saga of Grettir the Strong, trans. G. A. Hight, ed. Peter Foote (London: Dent, 1965), 86-100.
108. Heimskringla, 304.
109. Kormak's Saga, 201.
110. Northern Love Stories, 88.
111. Egils saga skallagrimssonar (Egil's Saga), trans. Gwyn Jones (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 1960), 153-54.

112. Heimskringla, 760.

113. Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell, trans., Origines Islandicae, vol. **2** (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902), II: 282.

114. "Roots in Medieval," 123-24.

115. Mythology, - 38 .

116. King Heidrek, 35-44, 80-82.

117. Mythology, 106.

118. Mythology, 129-30. Noel associates the name Bombadil with Middle English words for "humming" and "hidden" which relate to his secrecy and tunefulness. Forn, his name among the Dwarves, means "old" and "sorcery". Orald, the name men use for him, is Old English for "very old, ancient, original" and his Elvish Sindarin name meaning "oldest, fatherless" is Iarwain Ben-adar. Noel also works a reference to gold rings and a whisker into an analogy between Tom Bombadil and Hreidmar's son Otter, who was killed by the god Loki and whose weregild encompassed the Dwarf **Andvari's** gold hoard and Odin's treasure breeding ring.

Further, Noel associates Goldberry with the undine, the Lorelei, and the Siren--water sprites who allure folk into the deep. She sees Goldberry's pose in The Fellowship of the Ring as the classic pose of watersprites. Noel argues that Goldberry has become benevolent through her marriage to Tom Bombadil. Perhaps the duality of her nature--singing washerwoman and alluring siren--stands as another example of Tolkien's repeated concern that the complex nature of good and evil be represented. Evil may be destroyed, but it returns.

119. The Return of the Shadow: the History of The Lord of the Rings Part

One, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), 117. (All references are to this edition and are in the text as Return of the Shadow.)

120. T.A. Shippey, The Road to Middle-earth (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983) 82-83.

121. Faroe Islanders' Saga, 53.

122. Faroe Islanders' Saga, 79.

123. Mythology, 146-47; "Roots in Medieval," 68-70.

124. Kevin-Crossley, The Norse Myths (New York:Pantheon Books), 33-34.

CHAPTER FIVE

"**And** to it [the cauldron] have continually been added new bits, dainty and **undainty**" ("Fairy-Stories", 29).

"Implements"

While the creatures of Middle-earth were sometimes changed from their possible Old Norse analogues, the implements of Middle-earth could probably be inserted into almost any piece of medieval literature without being anachronistic or in any other way out of place. By itself, no one item says much about **Tolkien's** use of Northern literature but all together they do provide a pattern of borrowing. Thus, a few items which seem to have specific sources have been commented upon: The Ring, Swords, Armor, Banners, Slain Foe's Weapons, Two Men Under a Shield, and Gifts.

The Ring

Despite the **mighty** sword and other grand weapons of Middle-earth, the most important token is a small, heavy gold ring. In Tolkien: A Look Behind "The Lord of the Rings", Lin Carter notices the connection between this ring and those mentioned in "**Fafnismal**" and "**Guthrunarkvith**" of the Poetic Edda and comments on its affinity to the magic ring of the **Sigfried** legend.¹ In "German Mythology Applied: The Extension of the Ritual Folk-Memory," Ryan discusses the association of the one Ring with Draupnir, Balder's ring, and **Sigfried's** ring.² Noel also records those observations emphasizing the spells cast on the rings by their first owners. She thinks that **Sigurd's** story emphasizes the hopelessness of even the greatest, most courageous hero to stand against fate.³ She ignores the way in which Sigurd contributes to his own troubles through his pride and arrogance. In the ambiguous environment of The Lord of the Rings, the nature of the Ring underscores its power of great temptation and its inability to be used for good.

Andvari's Loom

In the Volsunga Saga, the dwarf Andvari's ring, which Odin gives as the last part of the **weregild** for the slaying of Otter, is a finger ring rather than an arm ring: "Then Odin took from his hand the ring that was Andvari's treasure."⁴ Furthermore, **Andvari has cursed the ring**: "he [Andvari] declared that every man who owned that ring would get his bane of it."⁵ Sigurd gains the ring when he slays the dragon Fafnir (Otter's greedy brother), Sigurd rides through a ring of fire to awaken Odin's valkyrie daughter **Brynhild**. He gives her the ring as a love token. Later, when a magic 'potion has made him forget her and marry Gudrun, he comes to her in the guise of her husband Gunnar and replaces the ring with another. The subsequent bickering between the two women over the Ring causes Sigurd's death? Annoyed with critics and reviewers who noted the relationship between Wagner's ring and the one Ring, Tolkien sarcastically noted "Both rings were round, and there the resemblance **ceased**."⁷ Certainly, Andvari's ring, which occurs in the story line of Volsunga saga, Nibelungenlied, and Wagner's Ring of the Nibelungs, is a dull, inane bauble compared with the power and brooding malevolence of Tolkien's **One Ring**. While the **One Ring** drives the narrative in The Lord of the Rings, the **Andvari's loom ring** serves only as a token whose recognition reveals Sigurd's folly in talking to his wife about his disguise as Gunnar.

Draupnir

Draupnir, which Odin placed on the funeral pyre of his son Balder, was a magic arm ring. Loki had persuaded the dwarves to forge it as a symbol of the All-Father's power. Draupnir is a significant analog because it dropped eight rings of equal weight every nine days; Tolkien's One Ring controls nineteen other rings. Further, Draupnir, like the One Ring, is a symbol linking power with a ring. The significance of Odin's gift of this ring to his dead son Balder as a part of the funeral treasures, may be that Odin was looking to the day beyond **Ragnarøk** when he would be dead and Balder alive.

Because Draupnir yields other rings, it may also **symbolize** the unlimited number of people who could hope for Odin's patronage--rings were the most common gift from a lord to his retainer.⁸ Writing in a letter to Rhona Beare, Tolkien says "I should say it was a mythical way of representing the truth' that potency (or perhaps rather **potentiality**) if it is to be exercised, and produce results, has to be externalized . . . " (Letters, 279). Draupnir's forging by dwarves at the instigation of Loki, the great trouble-maker of the Norse gods, seems significant, for Sauron himself forged the Ruling Ring.⁹

Three Elven Rings

Although the One **Ring** is nameless or has a name so terrible that it may not be uttered, other rings, especially the three elven rings, do have names. Galadriel's mithril ring of healing is called **Nenya**. Elrond's ring of gold, the mightiest of the three elven rings, is called **Vilya**. And in the last chapter, "The Grey Havens," "Gandalf now wore openly upon his hand the Third Ring, **Narya** the Great, and the stone upon it was red as fire" (III, 310). At this point in the story, these three good rings are passing out of Middle-earth to the Havens. Tolkien elaborates the story of the creation of these rings and their assignment to their respective wearers in "Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age" in The Silmarillion (285-311). He tells of Sauron's creation of the One Ring, of the **hiding of the three elven rings**, of the consumption of some Dwarf rings by dragons, and of the creation of the Ringwraiths by the nine men's rings. Isildur's escape through the invisibility of the One Ring is also related.

Tolkien also expands understanding about the roles of the wizards. He outlines the perfidy of Saurman in his search for the One Ring. He explains how the third elven ring came to be in Middle-earth: **Círdan** of the Havens gives the Red Ring of Fire to Gandalf saying "Take now this Ring . . . for thy **labours** and thy cares will be heavy, but in all it **will** support thee and defend thee from weariness. For this is the Ring of Fire, and herewith maybe, thou shalt rekindle hearts to the **valour** of old in a world that grows chill" (Silmarillion, 304). With **Narya** as with other rings in Tolkien's work,

one of its **main virtues** is that lesser people are inspired to do greater works through its existence.

Oaths Sworn on Rings

Part of the association of rings with power in Norse tradition may derive from the great rings, which were kept in the temples and used for swearing oaths. For instance, the temple and its ring are described in the Eyrbyggja saga: "Here on the floor in the middle of the room stood a pedestal like **an altar; and** on it lay a ring open in one place, twenty ounces in weight, on which all men were to swear their oaths. This ring the temple priest was supposed to wear on his arm at all meetings. On the pedestal also was the place for the sacrificial blood, that is, the blood of those animals which were killed as an offering to the gods." ¹⁰ In the Norse religion, the ring as the holder of an oath to the gods was a powerful symbol. The **Valar** use a like Ring of Doom in The Silmarillion.

On such a ring, Viga-Glum swears an oath, which is true only because one of the words mispronounced becomes another word. The **sagaman** describes the scene of Viga-Glum's making the oath: "**The** man, who should take the temple oath, took the silver ring in his hand, then it was reddened in the blood of an ox **or bull**." ¹¹ In order to have two witnesses for his **false** oath, Viga-Glum must give away his two magic heirlooms -- his blue cloak and his gold mounted spear. Einar begins a lawsuit against him for making a false oath, **and** Glum now dreams that Frey is sitting near the shore and will not listen to the cries of Glum's relatives not to drive him away. Consequently, the **Althing** outlaws Glum, drives him from his home, and banishes him from the district. ¹² The technical form of the oath is less important than its substance.

The One Ring serves as a keeper of oaths, too. In Frodo's attempts to assure Sam of **Gollum's** obedience and lack of ill intentions toward the Ring bearer, **Gollum's** oath not to harm Frodo is made not on the Ring as Gollum requests but by the **Ring** as Frodo demands. Similarly, when Faramir requires an oath in order to release Gollum into Frodo's custody at Henneth

Annûn, Gollum swears never to return or to lead others to the place on "It," the Precious. When Faramir asks Frodo if he is satisfied with the oath's informal format, Frodo answers that he is. Further, he reminds Faramir that **the** hobbit has assured Gollum's safety and would not be foresworn himself. Ironically, Gollum believes that Frodo has tricked him when the hobbit orders him, by the precious, to come into captivity rather than be slain by a Gondor arrow (II, 296-97).

Of course, rings also have good connotations in Old Norse culture. Repeatedly in sagas and poems, rings are rewards for brave conduct in fights and battles. The King or Chieftain is often assigned kennings such as ring dispenser, ring friend, giver of rings, and in Tolkien's work, Ringbearer (Frodo) and The Lord of the Rings (Sauron). There are some good rings -- three elven ones at least -- in The Lord of the **Rings**.

Finger Ring

Tolkien's choice between the finger ring of the **Volsunga saga** and the arm ring more **commonly** mentioned in Norse literature was probably not determined entirely by what Carter intimates is an overwhelming debt to the **Sigfried** legend.¹³ Clearly, from Carpenter's biography, his edition of Tolkien's Letters, and The Return of the Shadow, the Ring's history evolves. The One Ring created in The Hobbit enriched itself in his imagination. When Allen & Unwin asked for another hobbit story, his mind played with that Ring in the **same** way that Bilbo played with it in his pocket. Later, the story of Bilbo's **finding** the ring in The Hobbit had to be revised to fit the expanded identity of the Ring (Letters, 142). Yet, the One Ring itself was never innocent. Noel's statement "In The Hobbit it is an innocent talisman, magic, but in no **way** foreshadowing its ominous future" is rebuffed by Gandalf's statement that he thought Bilbo's lying and changing his story about how he came by the Ring was most **upsetting**.¹⁴ Gandalf tells Frodo: "Clearly the ring had an unwholesome power that set to work on its keeper at **once**. **That** was the first real warning I had that all was not well" (I, 57). While, indeed, **the** Ring in The Hobbit does not bring its owners the full

troubles to come in the three-part work, a Ring, which Gollum has killed **to** get and uses routinely to assist further **killing**, should not be labeled “an innocent talisman.” Even if Noel were referring to the **1937** unrevised early version of The Hobbit, her statement would not be accurate.

The necessities of the plot would not allow for an arm ring. The One Ring must be concealed and must be able to slip onto the wearer’s finger without his express desire to wear it. Yet, the One Ring often seems to its wearer as heavy as the twenty ounce silver temple ring. Tolkien comments on its symbolic content in the **Rhona Beare** letter: “The Ring of Sauron is only one of the various mythical treatments of the placing of one’s life, or power, in some external object, which is thus exposed to capture or destruction with disastrous results to oneself” (Letters, 279). **From** this understanding of the Ring’s potential, Tolkien can hypothesize on what would have happened had not Gollum grabbed the Ring. Tolkien believes that Frodo could have ruled the **Ring** until the Dark Lord himself came. to take it, at which time, Frodo would have been crushed. In addition, Tolkien asserts that Gandalf as Ring-Lord would have been worse than Sauron, for Gandalf would have been self-righteous. The wizard would have ordered things for “good. ” Tolkien’s unfinished notes suggest that “**Gandalf** would have made good detestable and seem evil” (Letters, 333). Sauron’s reign of evil has clarified what is good in Middle-earth.

The imaginative power displayed in the creation of the One **Ring** remains unassailable. From **a** rich tradition of lesser rings of various **types** and with diverse symbolic values, Tolkien has made a mighty token, replete with powerful symbolism and cunning in its place in the story. How the Ring as a complex symbol of evil--either as a sentient creature or as a psychic amplifier--truly drives the action of the story and molds the characters is discussed further in Chapter 9. Many ages of men will pass before another such implement appears.

Swords

The poem Beowulf was written ‘in Old English in the eighth century; it

deals with the exploits of a young Geatish hero in a Swedish court. The weapons in this poem are magnificently described **and** Tolkien knew these descriptions well. In the poem, King Hrothgar gives Beowulf a **famous** old sword as part of the reward for killing the monsters, Grendel and his mother. The poet describes the sword: Hrothgar "looked on the hilt, the old heirloom, on which was written the **origin** 'of ancient strife, when the flood, rushing water, slew the race of giants -- they suffered terribly: that was a people alien to the Everlasting Lord. . . . On the swordguard of **bright** gold there was also rightly marked through runestaves, set down and told, for whom that sword, best of irons, had first been made, its hilt twisted and ornamented with snakes" (Beowulf, 30). Hrothgar extols the virtue of the sword's owner and lectures Beowulf about greed, pride, and covetousness. Wiglaf, Beowulf's kinsman and companion in the fight with the dragon, also has an ancient sword with a noble lineage. The giants made it: **Ohthere**, King of the **Scylfings**, owned it until he gave it to his son Eanmund. Weohstan slays Eanmund and takes the sword to his lord **Onela who** gives it back to Weohstan as a reward for his services. Weohstan has, in turn, given the war gear to his son Wiglaf [Beowulf, 46]. Swords with lineages, stories, and **runic** inscriptions are the necessary implements of the heroic life. In The Hobbit, **Thorin** and company liberate **several** Gondolin blades **from** the trolls' treasure. These swords are Orcrist, The Goblin-cleaver called Biter by the goblins, and Glamdring, The Foe-Hammer called Beater. After Bilbo fights off the spiders with his short sword, he names it Sting, reminiscent perhaps of Egil Skallagrimsson's sword, Adder. The names of swords in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla also reflect the harm-to-the-enemy theme: Quembiter, so named because Hakon cleft a millstone with it; King **Magnus** Barelegs' sword, Legbiter: "whose hilt was carved of walrus-tooth and whose haft was wound with gold--an excellent weapon;" Earl **Sigurth's** sword drolly named Bastard: St. **Olaf's** sword called Hneiter from Old Norse hneita, "to cut". Snorri calls Quembiter "the best sword that ever was brought to Norway."¹⁵ In Rohan, Theoden's sword Herugrim has a name which means "Angry in Battle" from the Old English. And **Éomer's** sword Guthwine's

name is an Old English kenning meaning "Battle-friend." Many of the swords glow at the approach of enemy **orcs**. **Snorri** notes in The Prose Edda that the hall was lighted from bright swords when the gods entertained their enemies the giants.¹⁶

Westernesse Blades

The hobbits of the Fellowship are **all** armed with the long knives of Westernesse. These blades had been buried for years in the barrows of their owners like the sword **Tyrfing** that **Hervör**, King Heidrek's mother, takes from Angantyr's barrow,¹⁷ The daggers are "long, leaf-shaped, and keen, of marvelous workmanship, damasked with serpent-forms in red and gold" (I, **157**). They have not rusted in the barrows. The magic spell on Merry's knife makes it a potent weapon against the chief Ringwraith, for his foes forged the sword especially for use against him. One interesting note about swords and blades is that some melt. In Beowulf, the sword he picks up in the **cave** and uses to kill Grendel's dam melts after it has severed her neck: "Then the blade began to waste away from the battle-sweat, the war-sword. into battle-icicles. That was a wondrous thing, that it should all melt, most like the ice when the Father loosens the frost's fetters, undoes the water-bonds . . ." (Beowulf 28). Like Beowulf, Merry presses his Westernesse-forged blade into service to stab the **Nazgûl**. That blade, won by Tom Bombadil from the Barrow, melts, too: "And behold! there lay his weapon, but the blade was smoking like a dry branch that has been thrust in a fire; and as he watched it, it writhed and withered and was consumed" (III, **119**). Later when Merry describes the event to **Pippin**, Merry comments that his sword burned away "like a piece of wood" (III, 135). Both blades melt after they have killed an evil creature. After the Ringwraiths attack Strider and the hobbits on Weathertop, Strider picks up the **Ringwraith's** long, thin knife: "But even as he held it up in the growing light, they gazed in astonishment, for the blade seemed to melt, and vanished like a smoke in the air, leaving only the hilt in Strider's hand" (I, 210). Tolkien here has inverted the image. In Beowulf, the sword seemingly melts because the creature's blood has touched it. But

here the **character's** blood is good; the blade is an evil **Morgul-knife**.

In "The Hobbit and other Fiction by J.R.R. Tolkien," William Green details three qualities of the Westensse blades: their ability to emit light, their power to cut anything, and their runic carvings. Their light-emitting ability he recalls, as above, from the passage in which Odin's hall is lit with swords, the sword **Tyrfing**, which had a light like a sun ray, and Surt's brighter-than-the-sun sword. The cutting power he traces to Sigmund's sword which cuts through rock, **Beowulf's** cleaving blade, and **Tyrfing's** potency to cut iron and stone as easily as cloth. For runic inscriptions, Green chooses Beowulf's sword with the story of the flood; Helgi's sword on whose point is inscribed fear; and the runic inscriptions that the **valkyries** teach Sigurd.¹⁸ The blades used in Middle-earth share these strengths.

In "Frodo & Aragorn," Verlyn Flieger articulates the importance of the sword to each of her two heroes. She declares that Aragorn's casting of the Sword that was Broken on the table at the Council of Elrond places him in the hero traditions of Sigmund, who has left his sword Gram to be reforged by his son Sigurd. She stresses Aragorn's kinship with the kings Sigmund and Arthur rather than the dragon-slayer **Sigurd**.¹⁹ In contrast to the great traditional hero of the romance stands the hobbit Frodo. Flieger allows that he is the orphan, little-man hero of the fairy-story, but she also records the epic associations in Bilbo's gift of his sword Sting. When **Bilbo** gives it to Frodo, instead of handing it to him, he "thrust it with little effort deep into a wooden beam" (I, 290).²⁰ **Likewise, in the Volsunga Saga**, one evening a stranger comes into the hall barefooted, in a spotted cloak, tight linen breeches, and a slouched hat with a sword in his hand. Huge, ancient, and one-eyed, he goes up to the great tree Branstock "drew his sword and smote it into the **tree-trunk** so that it sank in up to the **hilts**."²¹ The stranger declares that whoever draws the sword shall have it as a gift and shall never have a better sword. In both scenes, the sword belongs to an **ancient** hero; the sword is **thrust** deep into the wood; and the sword becomes a gift to the one who withdraws it.

Armor

In the same scene, Bilbo gives Frodo the best armor in the War of the Rings, the mithril shirt of mail. The famous war-shirt in The Lord of the Rings is the legacy of **Thorin**, who gave it to Bilbo as the first payment on his reward. The mithril coat, made for an elf prince long ago, is a mighty treasure: “It was close-woven of many rings, as supple almost as linen, cold as ice, and harder than steel. It shone like moonlit silver, and was studded with white gems. With it was a belt of pearl and crystal” (I, 290). This corselet is worthy of great events. Surely, Beowulf’s silver-grey corselet, crafted by the mythic smith **Weland**, was in the soup pot that produced this treasure.

In addition to its genesis in Beowulf, this mithril shirt may have been inspired by the shirt **Ragnar** Lodbrok’s wife wove for him. She gives it in return for a shift he gave to her before he knew that she was a princess, and she speaks this stave about it:

Gladly I give thee this gray-hued shirt
Woven of hair, without seam or hem:
With it no blade can cut thee or wound
By the grace of the gods: it was hallowed to them.²²

Ragnar wears the shirt in place of a byrnie, a mail shirt. Though he charges the enemy wildly and kills great numbers of King Ella’s men, no ‘weapon can harm him. Furthermore, after Ragnar loses the battle and King Ella throws him in a snake pit, no snake will bite him until the magic shirt is **removed**.²³ The two shirts share color, light weight, and immunity to weapons.

Banners

In the Orkneyinga Saga, Earl Sigurd comes to rule in the Orkneys. When the Scottish earl Finnleik attacks him, his sorceress mother makes him a magic banner. The saga writer describes the banner: “It was a finely made banner, very cleverly embroidered with the figure of a raven, and

when the banner fluttered in the breeze, the raven seemed **to** be flying ahead.” The banner is supposed to bring victory to the man it **is** carried before but death to the man who carries it. In the battle, three **farmers** who carry the banner are killed. Olaf **Tryggvason** converts Sigurd by the sword, but being Christian does not change the nature of **Sigurd's** fate. Five years later in a battle in support of King **Sigtrygg** Silk-Beard, no **one** will carry the fateful banner, and Earl Sigurd meets his **own** death under it.²⁴ In the **Heimskringla**, King Harald Sigurtharson has, a banner called “Landwaster” which he carries with him in battle.²⁵ Tolkien makes’ excellent use of this tradition. In **The Return of the King**, **Aragorn** unfurls his own banner before he assails the paths of the dead: “and behold! it was black, and if there was any device on it, it was hidden in the darkness” (III, 63). The unmarked banner allows him to come into his own land without brandishing the accouterments of his station. After the battle is won, banners play a symbolic role. The Steward’s banner “bright argent like snow in the sun, bearing no charge or device” hangs for the last time over **Gondor** before the coronation (III, 244). **Aragorn's** banner of the Tree and the Stars replaces it signaling the beginning of a hearty reign (III, 246). While these banners are powerful as symbols, Tolkien abjures the magic attached to some banners in Northern literature.

Slain Foe's Weapons

In the poem **Beowulf**, when he returns to Hygelac’s court, Beowulf recounts his adventures. In the course of his tale, he includes the story of the feud between the Danes and the Heatho-Bards. Beowulf fears that Danish warriors will be wearing the Heatho-Bard armor won in their former battle. Then, old warriors will recognize the **armor** and egg younger warriors into renewing the conflict. These individual **vengeances** will lead to a new outbreak of the war. Gunnar engages in a similar kind of hubris in **Njál's Saga** when he reaches outside to take arrows that have been shot at him. He notes that those who die by their own arrows will be further dishonored. Gunnar’s mother warns him not to stir up the attackers. His

hubris is short-lived: he kills many but finally succumbs because his wife will not give him hair for a bowstring.²⁶ Tolkien also allows heroes to get involved with enemy weapons to ill effect. Isildur cut the **Ring** from Sauron's finger with the shard of his father's sword. Instead of destroying it in Orodruin's fire, Isildur kept it as **weregild** for the death of his father and his brother. In telling the story at the Council, Elrond reports that the Ring then betrayed him to his death, earning its name "Isildur's Bane" (I, 256). Like the Heatho-Bard armor and **Pallas'** belt, the Ring, the weapon of Isildur's enemy Sauron, brought death to its wearer.

Two men under a shield

In Beowulf's fight against the dragon, the dragon's fire burns up Wiglaf's lindenwood shield, but "the young man went quickly under his kinsman's [Beowulf's] shield when his own was consumed with flames" (Beowulf, 47). From beneath the one shield, they are able to defeat the dragon. In The **Return** of the King, Merry joins Eowyn behind her shield as the Lord of the **Nazgûl** attacks after she has killed its steed. The **Nazgûl** blasts the shield with his mace, breaking **Éowyn's** arm, but Merry manages to stab him (III, **11547**). Since **Théoden** has been like a father to Merry and because Eowyn is his niece, Merry and Eowyn are kin like Beowulf and Wiglaf. Neither is technically a man, but it is part of Tolkien's genius that the value extends to all creatures.

Gifts

The giving of a number of different kinds of gifts is a part of the epic paraphernalia. In heroic cultures the giving of gifts is an important attribute of the rulers. In Beowulf, Hrothgar excels at gift giving. After Beowulf has killed Grendel, **Hrothgar** gives him four treasures: a golden banner, a helmet, and mail shirt,- and a glorious, costly sword (described above). To this, the King adds a gift of eight horses with golden bridles; one of them also has a jeweled saddle, the one Hrothgar rode in battle himself. Hrothgar provides treasures for each of Beowulf's companions and also orders a

weregeld of gold for the slain member of the company. At the **same** banquet, Wealhtheow the Queen rewards Beowulf with two arm ornaments, a mail-shirt and rings, and the largest of necklaces since the Broosing necklace (a famous treasure of the **Norse** gods) was lost (Beowulf, 11-12). When Beowulf returns from killing Grendel's mother, Hrothgar speaks to him about generosity and gift giving. He reminds Beowulf about **Heremod** who refused to give rings to his retainers. Hrothgar warns **Beowulf** against pride, covetousness, and **fearfully** guarding gifts rather than generously giving them. Then Hrothgar bestows on Beowulf twelve more precious things. Beowulf in his turn, gives the boat-guard a sword wound with gold (Beowulf, 33).

But Beowulf is still a retainer of his lord Hygelac, to whom he owes the booty from his expedition. To him, Beowulf gives the boar-banner, the gray battle-shirt, the splendid sword, and the horses and treasure. The Beowulf-poet comments "So ought kinsmen do, not weave malice-nets for each other with secret craft, prepare death for comrades" (Beowulf, 38). To Hygelac's wife Hygd, Beowulf gives the necklace and to his daughter three horses with saddles: Then Hygelac **rewards** his kinsman with Hygelac's father's sword -- the best treasure among the Geats and with land, a hall, and a throne. Beowulf, although still Hygelac's retainer, has become a Ring-giver in his own right. At the end, Beowulf tries to give the treasure he has won from the dragon to his people, but the dragon-cursed **treasure must** be placed in his barrow. In the Volsunga Saga, Sigurd is able to make better use of his treasures: the Sword **Ratti**, the Helm of Awe, and the gold Byrnie, for he uses them in his adventures.²⁷

The Lord of the Rings opens with the giving of gifts. Bilbo's 111th birthday causes him to give away many of his possessions. The Hobbit custom involves the birthday person bestowing not always new items to the guests. Many of the presents that passed back and forth were called Mathom, close to the Old English word Mathum meaning treasures. With the urgings of Gandalf, Bilbo leaves **Frodo** the great Ring. Years later in **Rivendell**, Bilbo also bestows on his nephew the dwarf-made **mithril** corselet to wear on the journey and a sword. After their visit in **Lórien**, the Elves

provide hoods and cloaks with green leaf brooches, food, and drink for the company. .

The Lady Galadriel supplies individualized presents: for Aragorn a sheath “overlaid with a tracery of flowers and leaves wrought of silver and gold, and on it were set in elven-runes formed of many gems the name **Andúril** and the lineage of the sword” (I, 391). When she asks Aragorn what else he might want, he reminds her that she knows of his desire to wed Arwen. Then she gives him a silver brooch in the likeness of an eagle as a token of hope. She says “In this hour take the name that was foretold for you, Elessar, the **Elfstone** of the house of Elendil!” (I, 391). Aragorn resumes the journey with a sheath designed to keep his sword from breaking even in defeat, a token of Arwen’s promised love, and the **name** he will take at his coronation. These are noble gifts indeed. Galadriel is not stingy with the others either. Boromir receives a gold belt; Merry and **Pippin** silver belts with golden flower clasps; Legolas a long, stout bow; and Gimli three strands of her hair. To Sam she gives a box of dust with the single silver rune G. Frodo accepts a **phial** filled with the light of **Eärendil’s** star.

Many present tokens at the end of the war, too. Merry has received arms for his service to King **Théoden**. Now **Éowyn** gives him “an ancient horn, small but cunningly wrought all of fair silver with a baldric of green: and wrights had **engraven** upon it swift horsemen riding in a line that wound about it from the tip to the mouth: and there were set runes of great virtue” (III, 256). Their progenitor Eorl the Young won this heirloom of the royal house from the dragon hoard of **Scatha** the Worm (III, 346). Queen Arwen offers the greatest gift to Frodo -- her place in the immortality of the West to heal his wounds and weariness. The mortal choice of **Lúthien** is Arwen’s choice, too: she has forsaken her immortality. In token of this decision, she bestows **on** Frodo a white gem to hang upon a silver chain about his neck. Surely, of all the gifts given in epic literature, Arwen’s to Frodo is among the greatest.

The weapons of Middle-earth are no more advanced than those of

medieval Scandinavia and consist generally of the same items -- long swords, short swords, knives, axes, bows, **byrnies**, **shields**, and helmets.

NOTES

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CHAPTER SIX

The bridge to platform 4 is to me less interesting than **Bifröst** guarded by Heimdall **with** the Gjallarhorn" ("Fairy-Stories", 56).

"Landscapes"

In the world-view of the pre-Christian Scandinavians, the great **world-ash**, Yggdrasil, housed in its roots a circular disk. In the middle surrounded by the sea, Mithgarth, "the middle enclosure," (Old English **Middan-geard** "middle dwelling, world, earth") was men's home. Above was **Asgarth**, the dwelling of the gods, and across the sea was Utgarth or Jotunheim, "outer enclosure or giant home." In the roots was **Hel** where a monster goddess tried to feed those who had died of sickness or old age. The major geographical setting of **The Lord of the Rings** is somewhat similar. The **Valar** and the High-Elves, people who have not died, live to the west across the sea in the Grey **Havens**. They are as isolated from earth as the gods were from Mithgarth. Men and other mortal creatures dwell in Middle-earth, and Sauron the Nameless One and his accomplices move' from the East, Mordor.

Secret Valley

In his review "The Hobbit-Forming World of J.R.R. Tolkien," Henry Resnik says that "the chiller, more menacing landscapes of Middle-earth" came from Norse and Germanic mythology, but he does not document this supposition.¹ While tales of secret valleys probably exist in many literatures of many periods, one source for Tolkien's description of the landscape of the Last Homely House might be **Grettir the Strong**. Bilbo, the twelve dwarves, and **Gandalf** have been traveling through a rather bleak countryside when they came suddenly to **Rivendell**:

They came to the edge of a steep fall in the ground so suddenly that **Gandalf's** horse nearly slipped down the slope . . . They saw

a valley far below. They could hear the voices of hurrying water in a rocky bed at the bottom; the scent of trees was in the air: and there was a light on the valley-side across the water.

Bilbo never forgot the way they slithered and slipped in the dusk down the steep zig-zag path into the secret valley of Rivendell. The air grew warmer as they got lower, and the smell of the pine-trees made him drowsy, so that every now and again he nodded and nearly fell off, or bumped his nose on the pony's neck. Their spirits rose as they went down and down. The trees changed to beech and oak, and there was a comfortable feeling in the twilight. The last green had almost faded out of the grass, when they came at length to an open glade not far above the banks of a stream (Hobbit, 57-58).

The entry to this valley is also like the descent Turin and his outlaws make into the dwarf **Mim's** house in The Unfinished Tales (99400).

After some years as an outlaw, Grettir has **difficulty** in finding places to spend his winters. During the **Althing**, Grettir moves from the **Myrar** district to **Borgarfjord** to be with Grim, but Grim thinks that he is not strong enough to keep Grettir safe from those who would attack him. Grettir goes then in the autumn to the glacier Geitlandsjokull. The **sagawriter** reports that "he went on till he came to a long and rather narrow valley in the glacier, shut in on every side by the ice which overhung the valley. He went about everywhere, and found fair grass- grown banks and brushwood. There were hot springs, and it seemed as if volcanic **fires** had kept the ice from closing in above the valley. A little stream flowed down the dale with smooth banks on either side."² Grettir's secret valley shares warm air, green grass, and a little stream with **Rivendell**. Even the twilight is mentioned in both descriptions, for in Grettir the Strong at twilight a friendly giant comes with his daughters to gather his sheep. But the pastoral life must be left behind in both stories, for those happy times do not require great exposition. Bilbo and his friends continue their quest, and

the **sagaman** reports that “Nothing particular occurred that winter, and Grettir found it so dull that he could not stay there any **longer**.”³ Grettir forsakes the safety of the secret valley for the adventures of **living** more openly.

Dead Marshes

The “sticky ooze” of the dead marshes recalls the **swamp** that reaches up to the horses’ bellies in Hrafnkels saga.⁴ In the dead marshes, Sam trips and looks down “For a moment the water below him looked like some window, glazed with grimy glass, through which he was peering. Wrenching his hands out of the bog, he sprang back with a cry. ‘These are dead things, dead faces in the water,’ he said with horror. ‘Dead faces’” (II, 235). The bodies came there when the swamp crept over the graves of the dead from an ancient battle on the bare plain of Dagorlad before the gates of Mordor. Tolkien’s tutor W.A. Craigie in The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia suggests that some bodies found by archaeologists in swamps were sacrifices: “Another source speaks of human victims as having been sunk in a fen close to the temple of Kjalarness, which is supported by Adam of Bremen’s statement that near the temple of **Upsala** was a fountain in which ‘a living man’ was immersed? The bodies of the dead marshes also **seem** to be alive, for they try to lure trespassers off the paths with enchanting lights.

Mirkwood

Perhaps the most famous landscape shared by Mithgarth and **Middle-earth** is the great Myrkvith (Old Norse **Myrkr**, “dark, murky”, vithr, “forest”). In the Poetic Edda, this forest name appears in several of the poems: “Lokasenna”, “Volundarkvitha”, “**Helgakvitha** Hundingsbana I”, “Oddrunargratr”, and “**Atlakvitha**.” In the “**Volundarkvitha**” and in The Lord of the Rings, Mirkwood is the home of the Elves. Tolkien is fond of this landscape, and details its history in The Silmarillion. Called Greenwood the Great, the forest existed as a home for bright creatures for a third of the earth’s age. Then a darkness, the shadow of Sauron, invades it. The forest

changes taking the name Mirkwood (Silmarillion, 299-300).

Magic Doors

Opening magic doors is an interesting activity in Tolkien's work. Tolkien poses the problem of getting into the secret back door of Smaug's mighty treasure cavern in the first chapter of The Hobbit. There, Thor-in and the other dwarves question the competence of their proposed burglar Bilbo Baggins and fall into wrangling with Gandalf about the expedition and about how Gandalf came into possession of Thorin's family map. At the end of this argument, Bilbo vocalizes his thoughts with the exclamation "Hear, hear" (Hobbit, 35). Then the dwarves call upon him for his comment, and he extemporizes that they should go to the secret door and sit there until they think of a method for entering it.. He alleges that dragons must sleep some time. Some months later he has reason to recollect his impromptu statement, for he and the dwarves have found the secret door but no mechanism for getting it to open. Also, of course, when the company decides that it must go through Moria, the members of the Fellowship, too, stand before a blank cliff looking for magically closed and guarded doors.

One of the lying sagas, The Saga of the Men of Keelness, contains a similar situation. The hero Bui has offended King Harald by slaying a man inside the temple and then crashing down the temple and its idols and setting the whole thing on fire. King Harald sends Bui on a quest for a playing board in the possession of King Dofri. A farmer named Red tells Bui that the King must be sending him to his death, for few have survived the search for the board. However, the farmer offers to show Bui the path to Dofri's cave. When he advises him to come there on Yule Eve. Bui gives Red a big and costly finger ring as a gift. Bui follows Red's advice and comes to the peak at Yule Eve and sits there but sees nothing that looks like a door. Finally, he strikes his shield on the rocks and asks for Dofri to open his cave to a weary traveller. Dofri's daughter opens the cave to Bui, who becomes the father of her child, spends the winter with King Dofri, claims the board as a reward, and returns with a magic jerkin to guard him in his next

adventure, which is a **wrestling match with a black** giant.⁶

Both in The Hobbit and in The Fellowship of the Ring, the parties sit outside a similarly plain entrance. In the Fellowship, Gandalf tries a number of elaborate opening spells until, under moonlight and the wizard's hands, faint lines of silver elven script appear. The banality of the company makes Gandalf gruff as he works his way through well known and then lesser known spells of opening. Finally, Gandalf himself sits on the doorstep and thinks until he comprehends the meaning of the Elvish **inscription**, and pronouncing the Elvish word for friend, "Mellon", gains the company entry to the mines of Moria (I, 321). As in The Saga of the Men of Keelness, secret door opening in The Hobbit involves correct timing. When the dwarves and Bilbo were in Efrond's house, he had read runes visible only under the **midsummer** moon. These runes instructed the seeker to "stand by the grey stone when the thrush knocks . . . and the setting sun with the last light of Durin's Day will shine upon the key-hole" (Hobbit, 63). Fortunately, seeing a thrush attempt to open a snail reminds Bilbo, in his reverie in front of the door, of these words. The timing is fortuitous, for Durin's Day, the beginning **of** the dwarves' new year, that is the last moon of Autumn before winter, is upon them. As "a red ray of the sun escaped like a finger through a rent in the cloud," a gleam of light points to a briefly visible key hole in the wall. Bilbo calls for **Thorin** to bring the key and the long-sought door appears before them. The door opens silently, five feet high and three broad as predicted in the runes. Tolkien enhances: "It seemed as if darkness flowed out like a vapour from the hole in the mountain side, and deep darkness in which nothing could be seen lay before their eyes, 'a yawning mouth leading in and down'" (Hobbit, 223). Indeed, the adventure lying before the dwarves and Bilbo is still filled with peril. In contrast, the door to King **Dofri's** cave opens with a thunderclap and behind it is the fair young daughter who will become Bui's friend and protector.

Forces Doors

In the poem Beowulf, the monster Grendel enters Heorot by bursting

open the door: "Quickly the door gave way, fastened with fire-forged bands, when he touched it with his hands. Driven by evil desire, swollen with rage, he tore it open, the hall's mouth" (**Beowulf**, 13). A few lines later, the poet, describing the hall being prepared for the feast, mentions the sprung door-hinges again. Tolkien's characters have difficulties with doors also. As just discussed, Gandalf attempts entry into Moria by chanting a number of arcane and increasingly difficult spells until finally he pronounces the Elvish word for "friend" and the gates fly open. While Gandalf considers what Elvish word might close the gates behind the company, "many coiling arms seized the doors on either side, and with horrible strength, swung them round" (I, 322). The gates slam and the company hears the noise of ponderous stone being piled against them. Gandalf tries unsuccessfully to open them again with his staff. Here Tolkien reverses imagery from **Beowulf** to suit his purposes: doors are not wrenched open but slammed shut. When the Company exits from Moria, they find that "there was a guard of **orcs** crouching in the shadows behind the great door-posts towering on either side, but the gates were shattered and cast down" (I, 346). Like the doors to Heorot, the gate to Moria hangs open.

In **The Return of the King**, Tolkien uses a battering ram to knock down a gate. During the siege of Gondor, the forces of Mordor bring up a huge ram, one hundred feet long, swinging on mighty chains -- all forged in the dark smithies of Mordor from black steel. **The** imagery is all from Norse mythology and literature, for the ram has the likeness of a ravaging wolf, such as the Fenris wolf who will gobble up the world at the end of time. **Orcs** have named the battering ram Grond "in memory of the Hammer of the Underworld of old" (III, 102). This reference incorporates the idea of Thor's, hammer, **Mjöllnir**. When the hammer comes into the possession of the enemy, the end of the world is at hand. At **Grond's** third stroke, the Gate of Gondor broke "As if stricken by some blasting spell it burst asunder: there was a flash of searing lightning, and the door tumbled in riven fragments to the ground" (III, 102). This scene demonstrates Tolkien's enormously complex skill at making an effective, integrated scene from the

various pieces of material in his cauldron. The **bits have been put in**, but what comes out is a soup **of the** cook's devising.

A Mighty Hall

The Beowulf-poet calls Hrothgar's great hall the "ring-hall", "beer-hall", "lord-hall", "war-hall", and "wine-hall;" It is **a mighty** setting for a lordly ring giver. Four **times** the poet refers to it as the "gold-hall." Its lavish interior decoration offers an appropriate setting **for the** kingly behavior of Hrothgar.

In spite of the Volsunga author's relative lack of descriptive expertise, the hall in that saga is portrayed with the best and fairest of hangings and the floor is covered with cloth. Apparently Brynhild's and Gudrun's dual functions as shield-maidens and as needle-women encourages fine hall decoration. The author describes Brynhild's hill-top, gold adorned hall: "fairly painted it was within, and well adorned with silver vessel: cloths were spread under the feet of them"7 Although such descriptions are generally richer in the Nibelungenlied, which gives extravagant accounts of clothing, the hall in the German poem is better remembered for the actions within it. Kriemhild devotes the last half of the poem to accomplishing the death of Sigfried's killer in one of the bloodiest battle scenes ever written. In the tradition of the Hollywood monster movie, barrage after barrage of knights attacks Hagen **and** Gunther in the hall, but they fight on. Kriemhild has the hall burned over them, but they fight on. Finally, Sir Dietrich captures Gunther and Hagen, whom Kriemhild herself beheads.

In this tradition, Tolkien creates for **Théoden** an equally lavish hall:

The hall was long and wide and filled with shadows and half lights; mighty pillars upheld its lofty roof. But here and there bright sunbeams fell in glimmering shafts from the eastern windows, high under the deep eaves. Through the louver in the roof, above the thin wisps of issuing smoke, the sky showed pale and blue. As their eyes changed, the travelers perceived that the

floor was paved with stones of many hues; branching runes and strange devices intertwined beneath their feet. They saw now that the pillars were richly carved, gleaming dully with gold and half-seen colours (II, 116).

Heorot, frequently named the greatest hall under heaven, and Théoden's Meduseld hall are very like. The chapter heading "The King of the Golden Hall" underscores the similarity.⁸ The parallel between these two halls is one of the closest ones observed.

Tapestries in the family sagas are kept packed away until corripany is expected, but the tapestries in Beowulf contribute to the golden magnificence of Heorot: "The hangings on the walls shone with gold, many a wondrous sight for each man who looks on such things" (Beowulf, 19). Tolkien pictures the tapestries in Theoden's golden hall: "Many woven cloths were hung upon the walls, and over their wide spaces marched figures of ancient legend, some dim with years, some darkling in the shade" (II, 116). Tolkien becomes more specific. One tapestry shows a young man on a white horse blowing a great horn with his golden hair flying in the wind. White and green foaming water rushes about the horses' knees. Aragorn identifies the subject as Eorl the Young riding to the Battle of the Field of Celebrant. This tapestry representation foreshadows Theoden's own riding forth.

The author also portrays the royal person within each of these halls sitting on a throne. In Beowulf, the guard goes to "where Hrothgar sat, old and hoary, with his company of earls" (Beowulf, 7). Tolkien portrays Théoden in a similar setting on a three step dais in a great gilded chair: "Upon it sat a man so bent with age that he seemed almost a dwarf . . ." (II, 116). Instead of presenting a kingly figure, the King looks small and stooped. This suits Tolkien's dramatic purpose, for after Gandalf has aroused Theoden's concern, the king stands tall and stately.

Swimmer's Struggle in the Sea

One of the truly beautiful passages in Beowulf deals with the young hero's swimming accomplishments. Unferth, **Hrothgar's** advisor, suggests that Breca outperformed Beowulf in a swimming competition. Beowulf replies that he chose not to leave Breca behind, even though Breca **could not** swim away from him. They swam in their mail corselets with their swords for five days. The sea creatures attacked, and Beowulf killed nine. Although the Shire hobbits fear water, the hobbit-kin from which Gollum sprung often swam or traversed the river on little boats. Gandalf describes the finding of the Ring during one such adventure. Smeagol and **Déagol** were boating on Gladden Fields. While Smeagol nosed around on the banks, **Déagol** fished: "Suddenly a great fish took his hook, and before he knew where he was, he was dragged out and down into the water, to the bottom. Then he let go of his line, for he thought he saw something shining in the river-bed; and holding his breath he grabbed at it" (I, 62). The fish pulls him down in the same way that the sea monster pulls Beowulf down. And just as Beowulf brings back the sword hilt from his dive into Grendel's mere so does **Déagol** bring back the **Ring** from his dive. Also, both adventures begin with two youngsters playing together. In the end, Beowulf bests his comrade Breca in an athletic contest, but **Déagol** becomes the Ring's first victim in many long years. The **Breca/Beowulf** swimming competition prepares for Beowulf's performance in the mere while the **Déagol/Sméagol** scene prepares for Gollum's epic swimming feat in the Great River where he keeps pace with the Elvish boats for several days.

Dark and Dreadful Pools

The Beowulf-poet variously depicts Grendel's mere as a part of the sea since it houses the kinds of sea monsters discussed in Beowulf's swimming adventures and as an inland pool because of its location on the moor. Grendel is the "one who held moors, fen and fastness" (Beowulf, 3); he holds to the misty moors; he comes from "the moor under the mist-hills" (Beowulf, 13). In the **same** vein, Tolkien enlists dark, dreadful pools -- one before the doors of Durin, one before Faramir's Window of the Sunset,

Henneth **Annûn**, and the even more forbidding one in the Dead **Marshes**. Many parallels exist:

1) The Underground River and Marsh The Beowulf-poet reviews Grendel and his mother's haunts: "They hold to the secret land, the **wolf**-slopes, the windy headlands, the dangerous fen-paths where the mountain stream goes down under the darkness of the hills, **the flood under the earth**" (Beowulf, 24). Tolkien also employs a hidden stream. **Faramir** tells Frodo and Sam that the waterfall which covers the entrance to the cave had been an underground stream until its course was changed. Further, Tolkien joins the Old English poem's image of the wolves with the dangerous fen in the scene before the doors of Durin. There, Boromir claims that the Fellowship may continue to need the pony Bill "if the wolves do not find us." Boromir continues: "How I hate this foul pool!" (I, 321). This remark recalls Gandalf's triumph over the wolves the night before and begins the horror of the tentacled creatures, for Boromir then casts a rock into the water.

2) Hint of Fiery Water The Beowulf-poet continues his description of the mere: "there each night may be seen fire on the flood, a fearful wonder" (Beowulf, 24). Tolkien combines the disparate images of fire and water in two different scenes. First, he uses it to produce horror as Gollum takes Frodo and Sam through the marshes. Sam relates the fires he sees in the marsh: "some like dimly shining smoke, some like misty flames flickering slowly above unseen candles; here and there they twisted like ghostly sheets unfurled by hidden hands" (II, 234). These are the marshes where water has crept over a battlefield and swallowed up the graves. **Sméagol** warns the hobbits against joining the dead ones with their little candles. Tolkien describes this black mere as "as noisome as a cesspool" (II, 236).

Then Tolkien portrays the Window of the Sunset as having the beauty of fire: "It was as if they stood at the window of some elven-tower, curtained with threaded jewels of silver and gold, and ruby, sapphire and amethyst, **all** kindled with an unconsuming fire" and shortly thereafter he records that "the sun sank and the fire faded in the flowing water" (II, 282). Tolkien

first use of the fire/water imagery is **closer** to that in Beowulf, but his second is more comprehensive. He also makes extensive use of fire imagery in connection with Gandalf, the Balrog, S-an, and Sauron.

3) The Darkness of the Infernal Mere The Beowulf-poet calls Grendel “he who dwelt in the darkness” (Beowulf, 3). For the Dead Marshes, Tolkien uses “dark”, “black”, “pale”, “dimly shining”, “darkness”, “grimy”, and “fell” (II, 232-43). The pool before Durin’s doors is “dark”, “ominous”, “fading”, “gloomy”, “unwholesome”, “green”, and “stagnant” (I, 3 16-23). The range of images brought to the description of these unwholesome bodies of water is impressive.

4) Vaguely Described Monsters Beowulf’s companions look upon the mere: “Then they saw on the water many a snake-like shape, strong sea-serpents exploring the mere, and water-monsters lying on the slopes of the shore such as those that in the morning often attend a perilous journey on the paths of the sea, serpents and wild beasts” (Beowulf, 25). Tolkien fills the mere at the door of Durin with snakelike creatures. A long tentacle grabs Frodo’s foot, a host of snakes swim from the Southern end, groping tentacles come after them, and many coiling arms pull the door shut and block the passage. The creatures inhabiting the pool at Durin’s door seem strongly related to those in Beowulf.

5) Picture of Uprising Surge Hrothgar continues his picture of Grendel’s mere: “From it the surging waves rise up black to the heavens when the wind stirs up awful storms, until the air becomes gloomy, the skies weep” (Beowulf, 25). Tolkien **uses** the “surging” idea to portray the mere at the doors of Durin “the waters of the lake seething” and “the dark water boiled.” The skyward image occurs when he describes the rain Goldberry sings down: “the clouds had joined into an unbroken roof, and a straight grey rain came softly and steadily down” (I, 140). Thus again Tolkien draws images in a variety of ways to fit the needs of the story. Both the similarity of events being described and his intimate knowledge of the poem Beowulf probably contributed to his choices.

6) Wounded Deer The Beowulf-poet employs a brilliant device to

depict the gloomy lake where Grendel and his dam live. Hrothgar describes it to Beowulf: "Though the heath-stalker, the strong-horned hart, harassed by hounds makes for the forest after long flight, rather will he give his life, his being, on the bank than save his head by entering. That is no pleasant place" (Beowulf, 24-25). In a few lines the poet has created a more horrible impression of the mere than any long adjectival description would have produced.

Tolkien recalls these images from Beowulf in a brief, little-noted description in The Hobbit. After Thorin and company leave Gandalf and Beorn's protection, they make their way through Mirkwood. They are crossing an enchanted stream with a boat when suddenly a flying deer charges the dwarves. The deer clears the river with a mighty jump, but Thorin, who had his bow and arrow ready against a supposed hidden guardian of the boat, shoots the nimble deer. Tolkien relates the deer's death: "the shadows swallowed it [the deer] up, but they heard the sound of hooves quickly falter and then go still" (Hobbit, 156). The association of the hart with unhealthy water, which puts the unlucky Bombur into a lengthy sleep, reminds the reader of Beowulf. The imagery, which plays such an important part in defining the horror of the mere in Beowulf underlines the peril the dwarves and Bilbo are in. The waters of the river cause them considerable difficulty since the sleeping Boromir is a heavy burden. This deer/mere imagery also occurs in Narn, as discussed in Chapter 10.

Underground Lake

In the Orknevinga saga, a man named Kali Kolsson is very popular and considered a man of greater than average ability. When he is young, he fares forth **and meets** King **Magnus** Barelegs' son **Harald** in disguise. The next summer in his adventures, Kali sails north to Trondheim and becomes weatherbound at an island called Dolls. On the island is a cave in which people believe treasure is hidden. Kali and some merchants explore the cave until they come to "a lake stretching right across the cave, which no one dared cross except for Kali and a man called Havard, one of Solmund's

farmhands."⁹ They swim across the lake to the other side and come to a rocky place where the stench is vile. Although Kali has swum with a rope between them and has carried a blazing log in his hand and a tinderbox between his shoulder-blades, the two have trouble striking a light. They decide to go no farther, they build a cairn to commemorate the event, and Kali makes a verse:

I've heaved up a high
cairn here for the haunter
of this dark den,
seeking riches in Dolls Cave.
I don't know who comes next,
-- will no one follow
o'er the wide water,
the weary **crossing?**¹⁰

The rest of their journey is uneventful.

This short adventure by Kali Kolsson may have contributed to Tolkien's creation of one of Bilbo's adventures. Gandalf, who has freed the dwarfs from the great goblin, leads them out of the goblin's realm, but a goblin counterattack upsets the plan and Bilbo is knocked from Dori's back into a small passage in the cave, where he lies unconscious. When Bilbo revives, he crawls along for a good way until his hand lights on "a tiny ring of cold metal" lying on the tunnel floor (Hobbit, 79). He pockets this ring for further examination. At last he pulls himself together, is heartened by his blade's elvish glow, and sets out with his hand on the wall of the tunnel and his small sword in front of him. Suddenly, he trots into very cold water. Standing still, he hears the dripping but not running of water and concludes that he has come to an underground pool or lake rather than a stream. The stench of the Orknevinga saga pervades the hobbit's imagination as Bilbo considers the "nasty slimy things" that might be in the underground lake (Hobbit, 82). He thinks of fish whose fathers swam into the lake ages ago

and whose eyes have gotten bigger and bigger to allow them to see in the dark and of other horrible things who have slunk into the cave. And of course, Gollum, the “haunter of this dark den” posited by **Kali** in his verse lives on the island in the lake, perhaps in a cairn like the one **Kali** built.¹¹ Indeed, Tolkien describes Gollum’s home as a “slimy island of rock in the middle of the lake” (Hobbit, 83). Gollum comes across the lake in his boat and hisses in Bilbo’s ear his intention to make a meal of him. Bilbo responds by pointing his Gondolin blade at Gollum, who suggests that they should perhaps chat and have a riddle contest. When Bilbo peremptorily asks the question what have I got in my pockets instead of a riddle, Gollum remembers the contents of his pockets -- “fish-bones, goblins’ teeth, wet shells, a bit of bat-wing, a sharp stone to sharpen his fangs on, and other nasty things” (Hobbit, 90). With this brief catalog, Tolkien again evokes a stench in the imagination of the reader.

Quiet Lands

One of the striking contrasts of the family sagas is the sudden movements from the everyday activities of life on an Icelandic farm to violent revenge killings involving great courage made the more dramatic by ironic understatement. For instance, in Níál’s Saga, **Gunnar** is home alone because **all** his men have gone off to finish the hay-making. His attackers offer his neighbor the choice of killing Gunnar’s dog or being killed himself. Gunnar awakes at the dog’s death howl, makes an ironic comment about their shared fate, and readies himself for the attack that will result in his death.¹² While the scenes of violence are the memorable parts of the family sagas, long years; of peace-like living -- fanning, sheep herding, and occasional visits with neighbors -- are the more common, if less discussed, activities. Quiet lands are, of course, the norm in the Shire.

Highwayman

Similarly, the Vatnsdalers’ Saga begins in a quiet land with the introduction of Ketil, the progenitor of the men of Vatnsdale. His eighteen

year old son is lying about the house with little to occupy him. Ketil urges him to make his reputation by attacking a **highwayman** who has been terrorizing the roads. The motif of the highwayman upsetting the order of the quiet land pervades both The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. In The Hobbit, Bilbo and Gandalf immediately **fall** into a disagreement when Gandalf says that he is looking for someone to share in an adventure. Bilbo's opinion is that quiet plain folks have no use for adventures, 'which are "nasty, disturbing, uncomfortable things!" (Hobbit, 12). Bilbo's subsequent adventures bring him in contact with many kinds of highwaymen from the trolls who try to eat the company to the Elves who imprison them to the **men of Dale** who covet their treasure. At the end of The Hobbit, Bilbo has lost his reputation as a respectable, stay at home hobbit.

In The Fellowship of the Ring, it is clear from the Gaffer's opening soliloquy that the quiet, insular life of the Shire is still paramount to hobbits. The Gaffer criticizes Bilbo for his frequent outings and his outlandish visitors -- dwarfs and that old conjurer Gandalf. Later at the Inn in Bree, Butterbar's comments about Strider **reinforce** the generality of the Gaffer's condemnation of wanderers. Butterbar labels Strider as "one of the wandering folk -- Rangers" (I, 168). Strider makes it clear to the hobbits that the quiet life of the Shire exists because the Rangers have kept a watch and a guard **on** that area. In the Council of Elrond, Boromir's desire for the Sword of Elendil brings Strider into a fuller statement of the Rangers as protectors of the peace. He exclaims: 'What roads would any dare to tread, what safety would there be in quiet lands, or in the homes of simple men at night, if the Dunedain were asleep, or were all gone into the grave?' (I, 261). Middle-earth is unsafe because the enemy is at large but also because the government is not firmly in place. The social structure needs rebuilding in **order** to restore domesticity and peace to the land.

Many sacrifices are necessary in order to re-establish the quietness of the Shire. The big task of defeating Sauron must be accomplished, but Tolkien's theme requires more. The lesser heroes -- the hobbits themselves -- must dispose of the lesser villains. In their initial encounter

with Sharkey's rules, Frodo tells the ruffian that the Dark Tower has **fallen** and that a King reigns in Gondor: "The King's messengers will ride up the **Greenway** now, not bullies from Isengard" (III, 284). Merry and Frodo mark the death of Saruman as the absolute end of the war, but in fact the world has not entirely changed until Sam, Merry, and **Pippin** ride back into the Shire after bidding farewell to their friends who have taken ship for the Grey Havens. The peace of the Shire has been restored, but the price paid is in many ways like that in the Vatnsdale Saga, in which men of lesser mettle take over the land. In Níál's Saga, the deaths of Gunnar and **Njál** and his family has the same effect. The scale of inhabitants is much diminished; the larger than life sized heroes have departed.

Highwayman's House

In the Vatnsdale's Saga, the eighteen year old Thorstein goes looking for the highwayman in the nearby forest. The sagawriter describes the house as "a big well-built house in the forest." Inside, Thorstein finds a bed with fine curtains and a table laid with rich food and the best to-drink. At two different points in The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings, houses of rather lawless creatures succor hobbits and their companions. Early in The Lord of the Rings, Frodo, Merry, and **Pippin** must be saved from an attack by Old Man Willow in the Old Forest. After he rescues them, Tom Bombadil takes them to his house. There they find "green hanging mats and yellow curtains," "four deep mattresses, each piled with white blankets," and a table laden with "yellow cream and honeycomb, and white bread, and butter; milk, cheese, and green herbs and ripe berries. . ." (I, 13536). In The Faroe Islanders' Saga, two young brothers Sigmund and Thorir, **who have** been ordered to death, are sent into exile instead. When their money runs out, they make their way up the mountain. Finally, they reach a house and come into the hearth room. One young and one old woman make them comfortable until a man comes in -- "a big build of a man wearing a reindeer-skin coat, and he had a reindeer on his back. His nose was up in the air, he was frowning . . ." ¹³ The "Saga of the Men of Keelness" also

contains a well-appointed hall with a large master. In each **case** a large, well-endowed person inhabits a dwelling in the woods. The Vatnsdale sagawriter describes the inhabitant as "mighty big, his hair was light and fell to his shoulder in lovely locks, and in Thorstein's eyes he was **most handsome**."¹⁴ When Tom Bombadil comes through the woods in response to Merry's cries, Tolkien describes him as "**too** large and heavy for a hobbit . . . He had **a** blue coat and a long brown beard: his eyes were blue and bright and his face was red as a ripe apple, but creased into a hundred wrinkles" (I, **131**). These two characters seem to have little in common. Jokul is a robber and a ruffian; Tom Bombadil some kind of elemental nature spirit, but Jokul seems to Thorstein to be "notable and extremely **well-bred**."¹⁵ Jokul is essentially a good man who has gone wrong and who pays for his transgressions because he does not reform quickly enough. Tom Bombadil, clearly a good character, has many habits of the outlaw. When during the Council of Elrond, Frodo suggests sending the Ring to him for safekeeping, Gandalf vetoes the plan. The wizard replies "And if he were given the Ring, he would soon forget it, or most likely throw it away. Such things have no hold on his mind. He would be a most unsafe guardian" (I, 279). For all his good points, Tom Bombadil is not part of law and order society; He is a primitive, an aborigine, from a time before law and order were necessary to govern society.

A Number of Guests

Hrolf Gautreksson offers yet another instance of the house in the woods. King Hrolf undertakes an expedition to Russia to help his brother Ketil win a bride. His dragon ship undergoes a fierce storm and lands on a wooded island. The King and his eleven men come upon a large, strongly built house. When they enter, they **find** the fire burning and an immense bed made up. King Hrolf asks his companions whether they wish to wait for the owner of the giant bed and an equally giant sword or return to the ship. Hrolf notes "I'm inclined to wait for the householder, but it could be he'll think there's too many of us, and he may be a bit put out by so many visitors,

so we'd better split up. Four men had better go down to the ship, and Asmund and I will stay here with the other **four**."¹⁶ The **sagawriter's** arithmetic is somewhat lacking, for at least six men remain in the lodge waiting for its unknown inhabitant. Gandalf has a similar concern about numbers of guests in The Hobbit. He has a party of fourteen to introduce to an irascible host who may become immediately annoyed. Like King Hrolf, Gandalf holds his company back allowing them to come forth two by two at stated intervals. All the time Gandalf plays a sophisticated numbers game **in** telling his tale. He increases the numbers as he goes along from "a friend or two" to "several" to "a troop" to "more than six*" to "a dozen" to "fourteen" and finally "fifteen" (Hobbit, 13 1-34). Beorn comments negatively at each increase in the number, but he does at last accept the entire group.

King Hrolf has a more difficult problem. A giant enters the lodge carrying a grizzly bear, which he carves into pieces, cooks in a cauldron, and eats. He ignores King Hrolf's greeting until he has set the table a second time, more elegantly with wash-basins and clean towels, like the decorated white cloth set on Beorn's table to serve the dwarves. When King Hrolf refuses the offered banquet, the giant declares that he is the brother of the troll-like viking Grimar, whom Hrolf has killed. The giant has enchanted Hrolf's ship, and now plans to torture him to death. He takes an iron rod from the fire, skewers two men with it, and throws their bodies into the fire. Then he kills two others in the same way, but he promises Hrolf a longer and nastier torture in the morning. Hrolf and his companion Asmund now manage to pull down the giant's sword. Hrolf arouses the giant from his sleep twice with a log; then he pushes the giant's own sword through him while Asmund pokes out the giant's eyes with the fork. The company is greatly enriched by the loot and precious things they take from the house, including an enormous new sword for King Hrolf.

The two stories have some similarities. Fifteen/twelve travelers come upon a cottage in the wilderness. The host is perceived not to welcome strangers, but a fire is blazing and subsequently a table is spread with a sumptuous feast. In Tolkien's tale, the characters appear in increments of

two. In Hrolf Gautreksson, four members of the company disappear; then two sets of two more are dispatched. Beorn may be a cranky, eccentric host, but the giant Grímnir is murderous. After dinner Beorn is drowsy, but the dwarves delight themselves with tales of “gold and silver and jewels and the making of things by smith-craft,” although the home had no metal objects except the knives [Hobbit, 137]. This tale echoes a recollection of the precious treasure Hrolf has gained. Later Bilbo hears growling and scuffling at the door and wonders “whether it could be Beorn in enchanted shape, and if he would come in as a bear and kill them” [Hobbit, 139]. Even the grizzly bear served up for King Hrolf's feast comes out of Tolkien's cauldron in a much different guise.

In The Road to Middle-earth, Shippey contends that Tolkien had difficulty in getting started on his story telling. He sees the adventures in the Old Forest and with Tom Bombadil as a geographical byway inspired by the English landscapes familiar to Tolkien. While this theory has a certain amount of validity, other factors are present. Preliminary adventures are a common feature of the saga. **As** such, they represent not an artistic failure to begin the tale immediately but rather a complex setting of the stage through preliminary adventures. A peaceful landscape whose integrity will be worth defending and the character of the hero*, are established in these introductory adventures. The involved beginning and the long denouement are both characteristic of Northern literature.

Tolkien's statement that he based The Lord of the Rings on his two interests, the Northern myths and the English countryside, finds support here. Although some features do have analogues in Northern literature, they are not generally geographical but rather descriptive (magic doors, underground lakes). The volcanoes, glaciers, and hot springs, which constitute the more unusual saga settings, are missing from The Lord of the Rings. A greater number of comparisons come from the exceptional imagery of the Old English poem Beowulf. However, even this connection does not account for the physical geography of Middle-earth, which does seem to rely on the cartography of the English countryside. Still, analogues

with Northern literature are enlightening, for they explain the selection of certain courses of action and also of some striking imagery. Tolkien's reliance on the English countryside as inspiration is greatly enlivened by his knowledge of Northern mythology and literature.

NOTES

1. **Henry** Resnick, "The Hobbit-Forming World of J.R.R. Tolkien," Saturday Evening Post 2 July 1966: 9-92, 94.
2. Grettis saga, The Saga of Grettir the Strong, ed. Peter Foote, trans. **G.A.** Hight (London: Dent, 1968), 164.
3. Grettis saga, 44-45, 56. Ryan also notes this similarity, 165.
4. "Hrafnkels saga" in An Introduction to Old Norse by E.V. Gordon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 81-82.
5. **W. A.** Craigie, The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia (London: **A.** Constable, 1914), 59.
6. "The Saga of the Men of Keelness" in Four Icelandic Sagas, trans. Gwyn Jones (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935), 120-22.
7. Volsunga saga, The Saga of the Volsungs. The Saga of Ragnar Lodbrok together with the Lay of Kraka, trans. Margaret Schlauch (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, Norton, 1930), 166.
8. T. A. Shippey, The Road to Middle-earth (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), 94-95. Shippey observes these parallels and comments: "The chapter 'The King of the Golden Hall' is straightforwardly calqued on Beowulf."
9. Orknevinga Saga: the History of the Earls of Orkney, trans. **Hermann** Pálsson and Paul Edwards (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1981), 101.

10. Orknevinga Saga, 111.
11. Orknevinga Saga, 111.
12. Njal's Saga, 168-69.
13. Faereyinga saga, The Faroe Islanders' Saga, trans. George Johnston (Canada: Oberon, 1975), 33.
14. Vatnsdoela saga, The Vatnsdale Saga, trans. Gwyn Jones (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), 22.
15. Vatnsdale Saga, 22.
16. Hrolfs saga Gautrekssonar, Hrolf Gautreksson: a Viking Romance, trans. Hermann P&son and Paul Edwards (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 83.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“When we have explained **many** of the elements (. . . tabbos on names, and the like . . .) there remains . . . the effect produced **now** by these old things in the stories . . . (**"Fairy-Stories"**, 32).

“Customs”

Not only are Mithgarth's people and places found in Middle-earth, but some of Mithgarth's customs are also there.¹ Although customs of many kinds of Middle-earth peoples may derive from Northern practices, those of the men of Rohan and Gondor are closer than others. Customs which are practiced among many kinds of Middle-earth inhabitants are presented here: The Riddle Game, Runes and Spells, Appearance, Names, Courtesy, Governance, Burial Customs, Subterranean Descent, Man Matching, Hard Bargains, Compassion, Story-telling Techniques, and **Comitatus**, Kinship, and Revenge.

The Riddle Game

Riddles, like myths and folk tales, are ancient and belong to a shared folk heritage.² They play a significant role in Northern mythology and literature. For instance, in The Saga of King Heidrek, the King commands the allegiance of all the powerful men in the country except one, Gestumblindi. The King gives him two alternatives -- either to be reconciled with and offer allegiance to the King or to die. Gestumblindi, who prefers not to die, **must** either submit to the counselor's judgment, which he fears will be severe, or compete with the King in words. “Now Gestumblindi was no great **sage**”; thus, he sacrificed to Odin and promised him many gifts. The night before Gestumblindi must appear at court, a man comes to the door, changes clothes with Gestumblindi, and goes to court for him. The king asks Gestumblindi if he is able to propound riddles, and Gestumblindi's substitute replies that he has no great skill at it but does prefer it to the less

pleasant alternative of death.³

Therefore, both Gestumblindi and Bilbo enter unwillingly into the **riddle** game because not to compete is more surely to die. **In** each case, the **riddles** asked fall into two categories -- those with a single word answer and those with two or more objects in a special relationship for the answer. Single word answers in The Hobbit include “mountain”, “chestnuts”, “fish”, and “time” while in King Heidrek, some single word answers are- “spiders”, “leeks”, “shield”, “**ptarmagins**”, “waves”, “cow”, and “arrow”. The riddle for “wind” in The Hobbit,

*Voiceless it cries,
Wingless flutters,
Toothless bites,
Mouthless mutters (Hobbit, **85**).*

is similar to the one in King Heidrek for “smith’s bellows”:

What strange marvel
did I see without
in front of Delling’s door,
two things lifeless,
twain unbreathing,
were seething a stalk of wounds³⁴

Both use the antithesis of the action going on without the element that would normally produce it (cries without a voice and seething though lifeless). In the riddles for “dark” in The Hobbit and for “fog” in King Heidrek, both dark and fog pass over the land with a sinister intent and result: life and laughter are ended, and the sun is under siege.

Gestumblindi asks the King this riddle:

Pale-haired bondmaids,

two brides together,
carried to the storehouse
a cask of ale;
no hand turned it,
no hammer forged it,
yet outside the islands
upright sat its **maker**.⁵

And Bilbo **Baggins** asks this riddle, which Tolkien says “he [Bilbo] thought a dreadfully easy chestnut, though he had not asked it in the usual words”: “A *box without hinges, key, or lid/Yet golden treasure inside is hid*” (Hobbit, 86). The answer, an egg, is modified in King Heidrek’s saga into “Female swans go to their nests and lay their eggs; the egg-shell is not made by hand nor is it forged by hammer; and the swan by whom they engendered the eggs bears himself erect, outside the **islands**.”⁶ But in both cases the same idea of a magically-made container without apparent openings exists.

Of the more complicated ones, the hobbit riddle with the answer “sun on the daisies” is like the Norse one “sun on obsidian.” In The Hobbit, the one riddle “No-legs *lay on one-leg, two-legs sat near on three-legs, four-legs got some*” (Hobbit, 88) has as answer longer and more complex than the riddle: “Fish on a little table, man at table sitting on a stool, the cat has the bones” (Hobbit, 88). The two riddle contests end in the same way. Bilbo changes unconsciously from a riddle to a question “What have I got in my pocket” (Hobbit, 89) and Gestumblindi asks also a question that only he can know **the** answer to:

What said Othin
in the ear of Balder,
before he was borne to the **fire**?⁷

King Heidrek now recognizes his visitor as Odin and slashes at him with his sword **Tyrfing**. Similarly Gollum, after he is unable to guess the correct

answer within three guesses, violates the sacred riddle game and plans to attack Bilbo.

Ruth Noel in The Mythology of Middle-earth notes a possible parallel in another riddle game between Odin and a giant because Odin asks the giant **Vafthrudnir** a question to which only the All-Father can know the answer.⁸ William Green in "The Hobbit and Other Fiction by J.R.R. Tolkien" stresses the perilous situation: unless the guest can win the riddle game, he will not be allowed to leave safely. Like Bilbo's question, "What have I got in my pocket?," Odin's traditional question about what he said to Balder can only be answered by the person asking the question. In addition, Green observes that several of the riddles used in The Hobbit appear in the Old English Exeter Book.⁹ Tolkien has not involved Gandalf, his Odinic wanderer, in this game because his plot problem was to put his hobbit hero into a dangerous situation from which he must extricate himself through his growing courage and resourcefulness. The riddle contest allows Tolkien to introduce a memorable new villain who turns out to be a very proper foil for his hobbit heroes.

Runes and Spells

Tolkien's **runic** alphabet, the Cirth, is a linguist's delight, for its basis is logical. For instance, the alphabet, though derived from earlier forms, was rearranged along certain rational principles so that the sound that the rune represents is apparent from its shape. For example, a stroke added to the branch of a rune adds 'voice' and reversal of a rune indicates opening to a 'spirant' (III, 404). The alphabets used in The Lord of the Rings are few compared with Tolkien's total output. Throughout his life, he kept diaries which he wrote in different alphabets. Even within a specific alphabet, he was not consistent because his perfectionism led him through frequent revisions. His biographer Humphrey Carpenter speaks passionately about the difficulties of trying to translate the biographical entries written in a variety of alphabets.¹⁰

Christopher Tolkien notes that the runes in The Lord of the Rings are

“Old English runes, as in The Hobbit.”¹¹ Tolkien has based the history of Middle-earth’s runic writing on the history of Scandinavian and English runic writing using the futhark alphabet. First, both were devised for scratched or incised inscriptions consisting usually of names and brief memorials upon wood or stone.¹² Second, the futhark and Cirth both owe their form to an earlier alphabet: the most acceptable theory traces the futhark to Northern Italic writing while the Tengwar influenced the Cirth. Third, in Runes, Ralph Elliot argues that the first runic system was the work of a single man.¹³ Tolkien ascribes the Tengwar to **Fëanor** in Eldamar in the Elder Days (III, 395). The Northern runic alphabets also derive from antiquity: the god Odin hung himself on the world-tree Yggdrasil as a sacrifice to himself. After nine days, he perceived the runes lying below him. He lifted them with great effort, and their power renewed his strength and freed him from the death grip of the tree. The Old Norse tradition is far more complex than that in Middle-earth, for Odin has learned from the runes the basis of his power: the ability to heal, to break metal, to thwart evil, to quench flames; to seduce, to destroy witches, and to speak to hanged men.¹⁴

The Elvish tradition attributes the Cirth to Daeron, “the minstrel and **loremaster** of King **Thingol** of **Doriath**” (III, 397). Unlike the runic writing of medieval Scandinavia, the Cirth became the main alphabet for the dwarves, who called it Angerthas Moria, “the Long Rune-rows of **Moria**,” and who used it for all their records and developed written preforms for it (III, 397). Except for the brief record of Balin’s folk “written by many different hands, in runes, both of Moria and of Dale, and here and there in Elvish script” (I, **335**), dwarvish records are insignificant in The Lord of the Rings. Therefore, runes are mostly used for inscriptions and spells. The knives of Westemessë **have** runic inscriptions, Balin’s tomb is marked with runes, the gates of Moria have a runic inscription which contains the password to open the gate, rangers use runes, Gandalf leaves his rune mark on a rock on Weathertop, and **Thror’s** map is marked with magic moon runes that can only be seen in an Autumn moon. The most common, uses of runes are,

appropriately, for spells and magic inscriptions both in Middle-earth and in the North sea area. This practice of runes is most fitting, for Elliot suggests that the word “rune” historically had the connotation of mystery and magic, especially since Germanic runes may have been copied from sticks used for divination and lot casting.¹⁵

Tolkien’s professional interest as a philologist gave him a very different perspective on runes from that of Northern mythology. In the Norse myths, the runes are associated with learning, **wisdom**, and the attendant power that comes from knowledge. Tolkien was interested in those associations, but he was more concerned with the details of language -- a logical arrangement of sounds. However; he did believe strongly that language could not exist without the mythology that defined and enriched it. His interest in providing mythologies to go along with his invented languages led to the creation of Middle-earth and its stories.

Appearance

Some commentators on the three-part work have made rather rigid categorizations about sources for the different people of Middle-earth. For instance, Sandra L. Miesel in “Some Motifs and Sources for Lord of the Rings [sic],” sets up a schema in which the Elves are the Romans, the Rangers the Romanised Celts, the Northerners are non-Romanised Celts, the Wild Men pre-Celtic aborigines, and the Rohirrim are Anglo Saxons and Norsemen.¹⁶ This scheme **has** many problems. John Tinkler in “Old English in Rohan” offers convincing evidence to show that the men of Rohan have a great deal in common with the men of Anglo-Saxon **England**.¹⁷ A similar, qualified comparison might be made between the **Norsemen** and the Men of Gondor and of the Northern Kingdom. Oversimplification of relationships among Tolkien’s imaginative works and their sources may lead a critic into difficulties in logic and common sense. However, careful observation of relationships between the art and its source demonstrates the creative process. The reader delights in the great **craft** of the author.

Many of the Rohirrim look like the popular conception of a viking --

big, strong, blond. The legendary King is “yellow-haired and ruddy,” and the first Rohans described in The Lord of the Rings are “tall and long-limbed; their hair, flaxen-pale, flowed under their light helms, and streamed in long braids behind them; their faces were stern and keen” (II, 33). Snorri’s description of Olaf Tryggvason is comparable: “He was strikingly handsome, very tall and strong, and excelled all others in the accomplishments which are told about Norwegians.”¹⁸

Blond hair was perhaps not as common among the Norse as the Hollywood popular portrayal of the typical Viking would have it. Golden hair is usually commented on and even used as an epithet for men such as Olaf the White and Halfdan the White. Yet, the Vikings were quite vain about their hair. Harald Fairhair vowed neither to cut nor comb his hair until he had conquered all Norway and married Gytha, who refused to marry a mere chieftain. When he did rule the land and wed the lady, he had his hair combed and dressed “and everyone who saw him said that this was a most appropriate name, because his hair was both long and beautiful.”¹⁹ Olaf’s flaxen hair perhaps contributed to the description of the Rohans. While in reality both Old English and Old Norse civilizations contained striking men with blond hair and black hair and a few with red hair, Tolkien seems to have simplified somewhat. He assigns the blond heroic line to the Rohirrim and the dark heroic line to the men of Gondor. Descriptions of Denethor and Boromir in the next chapter illustrate their conformity to the dark good looks also typical of saga heroes. The Celtic influence on all of Northern life and art is a profound one. To separate Celtic looks, customs, and behaviors from those of other Northern peoples would be difficult and unrealistic. Contacts with Ireland, both for trading and raiding were frequent; intermarriage and cultural exchange were inevitable.

Names

Most of the peoples of Middle-earth follow the patronymic system for their names. Thus, Thorin in his ceremonial style calls himself “Thorin son of Thrain son of Thror King under the Mountain!” although he also has a

sobriquet, Oakenshield (Hobbit, 208). In the introductions before the Council, Elrond presents Frodo, who has a formal last name, **Baggins**, as Frodo son of Drogo. Tolkien also mentions fathers of many of the others: "At Gloin's side: his son Gimli" and "Legolas, a messenger from his father, Thranduil, the King of the Elves of Northern Mirkwood," and "**Aragorn** son of Arathorn" (I, 253, 260). Even the orcs follow the system, for Bolg son of Azog leads them in the War of the Five Armies.

In "Old English in Rohan," John Tinkler demonstrates that the personal names, place names, horse and weapon names, and even a few phrases are like those in Old English culture. For example, the eo found in the names Eomund (mund, "hand") and Éowyn (wyn, "joy") means "horse". The compounds then mean "horse-hand" or protector and "joy in horses." Tinkler explains what the names of Rohan citizens mean and why they are appropriate. For instance, the bad counselor, Wormtongue, is called Grima, son of Galmod (Old English grima, "mask or specter" and galmod, "licentious"). Place names such as Ridder-mark (Old English ridda, "horseman" and mearc, "boundary") and Isengard (Old English isen, "iron" and geard, "dwelling") are fitting for the land of the Eotheod ("horse-people") and the fortress of Saruman, respectively. Horse names such as Felarof (Old English fela, "very" and rof, "strong, valiant") and Arod (Old English arod, "quick, swift") and weapon names such as the swords Herugrim (Old English heorugrim, "very fierce") and Guthwine (Old English guthwine, "friend in battle") are all part of the pattern. Furthermore, Eomer speaks a greeting to his king not in the Common Speech but in his own language, "Westu Théoden hal" ("Be you hale, King"). Éowyn says later, "Ferthu Théoden hal" ("Go you well, King").²⁰ Both phrases are in the Old English language.

Naturally, those who would prefer The Lord of the Rings to be a novel with a key would be delighted if all the names were as easily translated as those of Rohan, but Tolkien has not extended that pattern. In "Appendix F," "The Languages and Peoples of the Third Age," Tolkien says that "From the lands between the Gladden and the Carrock came the folk that were known

in Gondor as the Rohirrim, Masters of Horses. They still spoke their ancestral tongue, and gave new names in it to nearly all the places in their new country; and they called themselves the Eorlings, or the Men of the Riddermark, But the lores of that people used the Common Speech freely, and spoke it nobly after the manner of their allies in Gondor; for in Gondor whence it came the **Westron** kept still a more gracious and antique style” (III, 407). Thus, except for the Elvish tongues, Tolkien allows **more** of the true language of the Eorlings to enter the Common Speech of his story than he does of the true languages of other peoples. In the history of Middle-earth, the Rohirrim are relative newcomers.

The kinship of the English during the Old English period was with the North sea peoples rather than with the Mediterranean peoples as it was later in Chaucer’s time. Various North sea chiefs harried, plundered, and ruled in England between about 787 A.D. (the first Viking attack on England) and 1065 **A.D.** (the invasion of England by William the Conqueror). Yet, the Norse regarded the English as their cousins, and after successive invasions and acculturations, the **relationship** was literally correct. Clever Icelanders, *such as Egil and Thorolf Skallagrimsson, were often hearthcompanions of English Kings. Egil, whose brother was killed fighting for King Athelstan in the battle of Vinheid, claimed that the English language was so like Norse that he could speak and understand it immediately.²¹ Egil may have exaggerated somewhat, but the language, appearance, and customs of the Scandinavians and the Anglo-Saxons all derived from a common **Indo-Germanic** base. Therefore, the literature, mythology, and customs of the Norse are indispensable in interpreting such Old English works as Beowulf, “Battle. of Brunanburg,” and “Battle of **Maldon**.”

In Gondor, Tolkien does not provide names as easily translated as those of Rohan. In fact, in “Appendix F,” he explains that the men of Middle-earth spoke the **Westron**, which had been enriched and softened by Elvish tongues. The kings of men, the **Númenóreans**, knew and spoke an Elvish tongue, the Sindarin. Finally, the kings returned to their ancestral mannish tongue, the **Adûnaic**. This language, mixed with the speech of

lesser men and with Elvish words, became a Common Speech for the Middle-earth peoples who dealt with men. Tolkien explains some of the names in a note: "**Quenya** [High-Elven], for example, are the names *Númenor* (or in full *Númenóre*), and *Elendil*, *Isildur*, and *Arwen*, and all the royal names of Gondor, including *Elessar* 'Elfstone'. Most of the names of the other men and women of the **Dúnedain**, such as *Aragorn*, *Denethor*, *Gilraen* are of Sindarin [**Grey-elven**] form, being often the names of Elves or Men remembered in the songs and histories of the First Age . . ." (III, 406). Thus, the temptation is to see the name "**Aragorn**," and the long line of his ancestors whose names begin with "**Ara**," derived from Old Norse ar, the name of the Rune "A" meaning "first beginning" or "in times of yore." But these etymologies bear fruit only when Tolkien conducts them himself. For instance, in a 1972 letter to Richard **Jeffery**, Tolkien states that Aragorn does not contain a tree word, but that the significant element "**ara**" probably derived from aran "king" having lost the n phonetically. He also explains that the thorn in **Arathorn** comes from an abbreviated form of thorono for "eagle" [Letters, 426-27).

Compared with the Mediterranean cultures of the Greeks and Romans, the workings of English culture are little known. The extensive Greek and Roman literary and mythological heritage makes scholars of English language and literature (Tolkien's own profession) envious. In order to fill the knowledge void, scholars legitimately study the language, literature, and mythology of the Scandinavian countries. Because the two cultures appear to be alike in language, beliefs, and customs, a knowledge of Northern themes and practices illuminates a study of the Old English period. Part of Tolkien's desire in writing The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings was to provide mythological materials to fill this void. the names of things and the stories that went with those names were inextricable linked in his mind. In the unfinished letter to Mr. Thompson, in which he discussed creating a mythology for England, Tolkien discusses Greek mythology and language. He notes that Greek mythology "depends far more on the **marvellous** aesthetic of its language and so of its nomenclature of persons and places

and less on its content than people realize ..." (Letters, **231**). He explains that he began with language and then found himself hating to invent legends to accompany the language. Thus, the names of people, places, and things were borrowed from the whole range of his knowledge of Northern literature and other sources. The names then led him back into memory and imagination to find accompanying stories.

Courtesy

Tolkien also bases manners and proper behavior in court situations on the models in Northern literature. Court etiquette operates in Middle-earth as it does in the court of King Hrothgar in Beowulf. For instance, all weapons must be left outside, and Tolkien assigns a counselor to the king. **Wulfgar** is a good counselor for King Hrothgar, but **Gríma** is a bad counselor for King **Théoden**. In Beowulf, evil confines itself to the monsters, but in The Lord of the Rings, evil is creeping into the king's court. A comparison of the scene in which the hero Beowulf enters King **Hrothgar's** court with a like scene in which Aragorn enters Theoden's court illustrates the closeness of the Old English /Norse and Rohan behaviors.

1) Sentry Accosts Hero When Beowulf and his companions arrive at the coast of Denmark, King Hrothgar's sea guard questions them: "What are you, bearers of armor, dressed in mail-coats, who thus have come bringing a tall ship over the sea-road, over the water to this place?" (Beowulf, **5**). He then inquires about their lineage. Similarly, in The Two Towers, the guards at the gate of Edoras challenges Gandalf, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli using the speech of Rohan rather than the common speech. The guard asks the members of the Fellowship: "Who are you that come heedless over the plain thus strangely clad, riding horses like to our own horses?" (II, **113**). He also asks if Gandalf is not a wizard, a spy for Saruman. He orders them to speak swiftly just as the sea-guard in Beowulf requires a "straightway" reply. Aragorn replies with questions about Eomer's return, and Gandalf bristles at the intimation of Wormtongue's orders about no admittance. The guard again asks their names and their mission.

2) Hero's Reply Beowulf names himself a Geat and retainer of King Hygelac; he mentions his father Ecgtheow. Beowulf states his errand as bringing Hrothgar a remedy for the hateful deeds of the dark doer, Grendel (Beowulf 6) names himself and his horse **Shadowfax**; he designates Aragorn as son of **Arathorn** and heir of Kings on his way to Mundburg; and he introduces Legolas the elf and Gimli the dwarf as their comrades. Gandalf demands audience with the king.

3) Guard Allows Entry Hrothgar's guard emphasizes his ability to judge both the works and the words of the **strangers** and offers to lead them to the **Scyldings'** king (Beowulf 6). to this warm welcome, **Théoden's** guard asks the companions to wait outside without being too hopeful while he queries the king. After some time, he returns to grant them entry (II, 113-14). The coolness of the guard's instructions offer a first clue to the troubles within.

4) Newcomers Proceed Beowulf and his hearth-companions move down a stone paved road until they can see the famous hall Hereot (Beowulf 6-7). Gandalf and company follow in file behind their guide down a broad **path**, paved with hewn stones. They pass many houses and a bright spring with a carved horse's head, until they reach the crown of the hill where the hall stands.

5) Third Party Introductions Hrothgar's herald and officer Wulfgar again questions Beowulf and his **companions**. Wulfgar asks Hrothgar not to refuse an interview. Since Hrothgar knows of Beowulf's lineage and of his reputation for strength, he tells Wulfgar to **make** haste in welcoming them. Although Wulfgar tells the companions that they may enter in their war-dress, he requires that shields and spears wait at the door (Beowulf 8).

Háma, the **Doorward** of **Théoden**, begins by commanding the company to leave their weapons at the door. Legolas offers his bow from the Lady of **Lothlórien**, but **Aragorn** refuses to hand over **Andúril**. Gandalf urges compliance with the king's will: the ensuing argument almost breaks into a fight. Gandalf offers his sword Glamdring for keeping, and Aragorn reluctantly begins to give over **Andúril**. Gimli's axe follows, but another

argument ensues when **Háma** tries to keep Gandalf's staff (II, 116). **This** contention about weapons employs a part of the formal introduction business presented in Beowulf. The members of the Fellowship are uncertain of Theoden's allegiance. They are unwilling to give up their weapons until they know how they will be received. **The** shadow has so lengthened that good men are more cautious than they might have been in earlier times. The tiff over Gandalf's staff, a potent weapon indeed, is a brilliant invention on Tolkien's **part**.

6) Hero's Dramatic Appearance In Beowulf, the hero now strides forward briskly. The poet sketches his armor: "his mail-shirt glistened, armor-net woven by the blacksmith's skill" (Beowulf, 8). **t h e p o e m** does not include a love story, the poet has no need to magnify Beowulf's looks. In The Lord of the Rings, after a silence, Gandalf greets **Théoden**, who replies that Gandalf's welcome is doubtful because the wizard almost always brings bad news. Wormtongue continues the discourtesy. Gandalf retorts that "The courtesy of your hall is, somewhat lessened of late" (II, 118) and asks if **Éomer** has not revealed the names of his **grey-clad** companions. Then, Gandalf's staff **causes a** roll of thunder and the blotting of the sun, darkening the entire room: "Only Gandalf could be seen, standing white and tall before the blackened hearth" (II, 119). Having cast away his tattered cloak, Gandalf dramatically reveals his beyond-earthly superiority as the white rider. Tolkien employs the traditional greeting formats to reveal the problem of the unworthy counselor Wormtongue, under whose influence the court has become mean and uncourteous. Tolkien has an advantage in this scene, for he has two of his heroes -- Gandalf and Aragorn -- available for dramatic action. Thus, he can manipulate the unrequited love interest and at the same time resolve difficulties in allegiances for the coming war. Gandalf interacts with **Théoden** on issues of statecraft like those in Beowulf. Meanwhile, **Aragorn** plays against **Éowyn**, who stands by the King's side. She likes him, but he doesn't like **her** in a romantic way. Tolkien characterizes Aragorn as Éowyn notices him: "tall heir of kings, wise with many winters, greycloaked, hiding a power that yet she felt" (II, 119). Aragorn appeals to

the royal lady.

7) Uninvited Address to Rulers Beowulf tells Hrothgar of his exploits at swimming and asks to be the one to cleanse Hereot of Grendel. Beowulf boasts that he will not use weapons in his fight with the monster (Beowulf, 8). With his White Rider aspect revealed, Gandalf again addresses Théoden. Like Beowulf, Gandalf encourages Théoden to t&e heart, and with his disputed staff Gandalf clears the darkness to encourage the King to leave the shadows behind (II, 119).

8) Rulers' Response Hrothgar immediately talks about Beowulf's father Ecgtheow whose slaying of Heatholaf caused Ecgtheow's exile. Hrothgar has finally resolved the feud by paying weregild. Hrothgar invites the companions to a feast where a thane pours bright drink from **an embellished ale-cup" (Beowulf, 9). Gandalf does not have ancestry in The Lord of the Rings as far as the reader knows, but here Tolkien resolves Théoden's family problems. The King releases his nephew Éomer's from prison and accepts his allegiance anew. After the internal political problems are solved and Wormtongue exiles himself rather than go to war, Théoden invites his guests to have hasty refreshments in keeping with the coming war (II, 123).

9) Cup Ceremony In Beowulf, Queen Wealhtheow bears a cup of wine first to the King and then to the visiting champions. In The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien merely states "there also waiting upon the king was the lady Éowyn" (II, 125). Even in a time of emergency, courtesies continue. Tolkien later weaves in this further thread of hall courtesy, for when Aragorn rides for the Paths of the Dead, Éowyn, clad as a Rider and girt with a sword, drinks from the stirrup cup wishing them well: "In her hand she bore a cup, and she set it to her lips and drank a little, wishing them good speed" (III, 58). In The Two Towers, the pending war necessitates 'a stark presentation. Tolkien could not embellish the arrival of Gandalf, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli with the lavish feasting of Beowulf, for the festivities would be out of context with his story. He did not take the artistic freedom of ignoring circumstance that the Beowulf-poet may have taken in writing of

· such a feast.

The parallel between the arrival of the hero in Beowulf and in The Lord of the Ri is a striking one,. Clearly, Tolkien's extensive knowledge of the Old English poem was most useful to him when he came to write **this** encounter between the old failing King and the young aspiring hero. Beowulf's task--the killing of the monster Grendel and his mother -- is a simple one compared with that of Aragorn. In The Lord of the Rings, the slaying of monsters falls to others -- Gandalf defeats the Balrog and Sam vanquishes **Shelob**. The dragon encounter shared by both stories, if The Hobbit is seen as a part of the greater story of the Ring, provides another departure, for Bard kills the dragon in a way quite different from that used by Beowulf and his kinsman Wiglaf.

Governance

Some governmental customs of the men of Rohan and the **Norsemen** are similar, too. King **Théoden** names as his heir his sister-son, **Éomer**, since Theoden's own son is dead. **Théoden** notes that if neither he nor **Éomer** returns, the people should then "choose a new lord as you will" (II, **127**). The ruling council elected the king in Old English and Old Norse society: the crown did not automatically go to the son of the old king. Iceland, of course, did not share these traditions since it had no king.

Women Rulers

Théoden places his kingdom in **Éowyn's** hands when he leaves for the battle of Helm's Deep. She is his sister's daughter and a close kinswoman. Women rulers were well known in the North sea area. Among the ones Snorri mentions in his history of the Kings of Norway are Queen Gytha, who chooses Olaf Tryggvason to marry her and rule with her: Queen Sigurth, who later refuses to leave paganism to marry Olaf Tryggvason; and the infamous Queen Gunnhild, who ruled through her husband and her sons.²² **Éowyn** is part of a long tradition of shieldmaidens in Northern literature. Her compliance to and departures from their ways are discussed in the next

chapter.

War Service

The bond between a ruler and his people is one of service and reward. The retainer owes his lord loyalty and obedient service in time of war. When the Steward of Gondor wants to ask for the aid of the Rohirrim, he sends a war arrow to them. Denethor's rider Hirgon presents King **Théoden** with "a single arrow, black-feathered and barbed with steel, but the point was painted red" (III, 72). Norwegian kings used this same technique to call in their retainers from rural districts. **Théoden** recognizes the importance of the war arrow and immediately calls his men to a weapontake. Retainers who serve loyally and fight well will be rewarded with suitable gifts.

Stewards

The office of the steward was also a custom in the North Sea region. Queen Geira has a steward named Dixin who advises her on all important decisions, including her marriage to **Oláf Tryggvason**.²³ When the king went out on Viking trips in the summer, he left his steward in charge. And, kings who ruled more than one kingdom would have a steward to watch over the other realm. Thus, in Thronð of Gate, the king's reeve or steward is in command in the Faereys.²⁴ In Njáls saga, after Earl Sigurd leaves a steward in the Orkneys, Helgi **Njáls**, who has his father's second sight, warns the Earl that the **Scots** have killed the steward.²⁵ And, Egil's **friend** Arinbjom is King **Eirík's** steward and trusted advisor. However, in these North Sea areas, the kings always returned to take up the throne or a new king was chosen.

Stewards did not reign generation after generation as they did in Gondor. According to "The Annals of Kings and Rulers," the ruling stewards had all the power of kings and had long since hardened their hearts against the return of the true king (III, 313-52). Tolkien uses this perversion of the steward's role to create dramatic action in Gondor. For example, the

successful resolution of the stewards' long reign necessitates a king who does not enter his own city. Faramir's marriage to the royal lady **Éowyn** and his investiture as Prince of Ithilien are two more of the dramatic actions created,

In an explanatory letter about Faramir and **Éowyn**, Tolkien discusses the role of the steward and the government of Gondor in more detail. He explains that a **Númenórean** King was monarch ruling within the frame of the ancient law. As such, he would have a council for all matters of importance both internal and external. Aragorn reestablished the Great Council of Gondor, in which Faramir would remain as Steward, representing the King during his absence or illness and between his death and the heir's accession to the throne. In addition, **Tolkien** emphasizes that Faramir's position as Prince of Ithilien was one of imperial power and prestige, second only to that of **Dol** Arnroth, and not a "market-garden job" as the letter-writer had intimated (Letters, 323-24). This system of government is very like that described in the Heimskringla for various rulers.

Burial Customs

The burial customs of Gondor and the North Sea were similar. Denethor speaks of the funeral pyre as a barbaric custom. It was ancient in the North Sea, for in the Heimskringla, Snorri says that Odin instituted it.²⁶ Noble **Norsemen** were burned on pyres, as in the Volsunga saga, or perhaps on ships.²⁷ Sometimes they were buried in their ships with their worldly goods and even a wife or servant or dog.²⁸ At other times, they were buried in stone barrows or cairns. Middle-earth's peoples practice burning, barrows, and stone tombs. Denethor burns on a pyre, and the dwarves **burn** their kin after the war with the **orcs**, although their custom was to build tombs. Yet, Tolkien's Northern men have built barrows for their dead kings; the aftergoing-man who inhabits one barrow is discussed later in this chapter. The newer custom of Gondor, to place dead kings in a vault, is a variation of barrow burial.

Funeral Pyre

The poem Beowulf begins with a famous account of the ship burial of the legendary **Scyld Sheafing**. A comparison of the burials of kings and champions in that poem with those in The Lord of the Rings offers some insights.

1) War Equipment The Beowulf-poet comments that “the people of the Geats made ready for him a funeral pyre on the earth, no small one, hung with helmet, battle-shields, bright mail-shirts, just as he had asked” (Beowulf, 54). Denethor’s hastily-conceived pyre has no such ornaments, but Aragorn has folded Boromir’s cloak and hood and placed them under his head. His gold belt, helm, cloven horn, and the shards of his sword are beside him: the broken swords of his orc enemies are at his feet (II, 19). The people of Rohan lay King Theoden’s weapons in his barrow “with his arms and many other fair things that he had possessed” (III, 254). Denethor’s untraditional end “like the heathen kings before ever a ship sailed hither from the West” serves a high artistic purpose (III, 99). His despair contrasts with Theoden’s courageous resolve to stand against the force of evil and with his son Boromir’s equally brave attempt to save the hobbits.

2) Treasures Beowulf’s barrow has a wagon load of twisted gold, the dragon’s hoard. Even in his haste, Denethor takes his greatest treasure -- the palantir to the pyre with him. **Aragorn**, Legolas, and Gimli place “such trophies of his last battle as they chose to send forth with him” in the small boat with Boromir (II, **18**).

3) Bale-wood Wiglaf orders “many warriors, men who owned houses, leaders of the people, that they carry wood from **afar** for the pyre for the good man” (Beowulf, 54). They lay the body of their King in the midst. In one of the interpolated narratives earlier in the poem, the poet describes the burning of **Hnaef**: **Hnaef**’s companions also place him on his pyre. Then his sister Hildeburh “bade give her own son to the flames on Hnaef’s pyre, bum his blood vessels, put him in the **fire** at the shoulder of his uncle” (Beowulf, 20). Uncle and nephew bum on the pyre together. These

passages show the Beowulf-poet in splendid form both in emotional content and deft description. In The Lord of the Rings, Pippin reports to Gandalf that Denethor has sent men to fetch wood and oil. These have been piled around the unconscious body of **Faramir** before Gandalf rescues him. With great imagination, Tolkien has Denethor leap up on the flaming table, break the steward's staff of office into the flames; bow, and **lay** himself down with the palantir in his hands (III, 130). This action offers a sharp contrast to its analogs in Beowulf; Tolkien has inverted the elements of the usual pyre scene.

4) Body Burned This scene is one of the most vivid in Beowulf. The poet depicts the dead King: "the roaring flame mixed with weeping -- the wind-surge died down -- until it had broken the bone-house, hot in its heart" (Beowulf, 54). But the description of the burning of Hnaef and his nephew is more powerful: "Heads melted as blood sprang out -- wounds opened wide, hate-bites of the body" (Beowulf, 20). Tolkien has no such penchant for graphic detail, for he only mentions that Gandalf turns his face away in horror and shuts the door. Denethor gives a cry, then is heard no more.

5) Lamentation Hildeburh mourns at Hnaef and her son's pyre: "sang her lament" (Beowulf, 20). At Beowulf's pyre, the warriors lament, and "the Geatish woman, wavy-haired, sang a sorrowful song about Beowulf, said again and again that she sorely feared for herself invasion of armies, many slaughters, terror of troops, humiliation and captivity" (Beowulf, 54-55). The poet mingles the heavy world-sorrow at the passing of a mighty ruler with the practical concerns for the continuation of order.

The honors which might have attended Denethor's passing are omitted because he has fallen from his duty in choosing the hour of his own death and because the forces of Mordor have Gondor under siege. Tolkien does observe the concern for order, for Gandalf tells Beregon to give the key to the Prince of Dol Amroth, who is in command. Had not Denethor fallen into despair, he might have had a song sung about his ancestors and his last battle against the forces of the Shadow like the last song the

minstrel **Gléowine** made for Theoden's funeral or like the song **Aragorn** and Legolas improvise for Boromir's departure.

When Aragorn observes **Pippin's** sorrow over Theoden's death, the King commends **Pippin** on his brief service and praises the hobbit's Lord:

"Smoke then, and think of him! . . . For he was a gentle heart and a great king and kept his oaths; and he rose out of the shadows to a last fair morning" (III, **145**). This epitaph is like that for Beowulf. The hero says of himself: "nor did I swear many oaths unrightfully" (Beowulf, 48). The poet extols him further: "They [his people] said that he was of world-kings the mildest of men and the gentlest, kindest to his people, and most eager for fame" (Beowulf, 55). Both authors endorse the hero's faithfulness to his word, gentleness of heart, and heroic action.

6) Large Grave-mound In Beowulf, the people spend ten days completing a barrow in which they place the dragon's treasure. The monument, built on a promontory, was "high and broad, wide-seen by seafarers" (Beowulf, 55). The house where Denethor bums collapses, forming a ruin. But in Rohan, the warriors place **Théoden** in a house of stone and raise a great mound over him. The contrast between the king who has been seduced by evil but renounced it and the steward who has been equally disillusioned and has succumbed to despair instructs and delights the reader.

7) Warriors' Ride The Beowulf-poet records the warriors riding around the tomb: "Then the brave in battle rode round the mound, children of nobles, twelve in all, would bewail their sorrow and mourn their king, recite dirges and speak of the man" (Beowulf, 55). So too, Tolkien recounts that "the Riders of the King's House upon white horses rode round about the barrow and sang together a song" (III, 254). The number twelve also appears in connection with Theoden's death, for twelve torches stand around his bier and twelve knights guard it. By having two rulers of equal stature die in two quite different ways, Tolkien gives himself a method for reinforcing the story's values. Tolkien honors **Théoden**, who drew himself away from despair into action, in the way that Beowulf's heroes are honored.

In parallel scenes, Tolkien demonstrates how Denethor's defection from heroic conduct causes death among his own guard, for Beregond kills one who guards the door to the hall at a time when all fighting men are needed for the war against Sauron.

In a Christian world, reward or **punishment** is left to God. In a **pre-Christian** world, such as that of The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings, the reputation which lives after a person constitutes his reward for the justice and rightfulness of his life. The funeral rites and honors accorded a ruler form the beginning of the memory his people will have of **him**. **Théoden** and Boromir, one in the resplendent circumstances of peace and the other in the hard times of war, receive honor at their burial; their reputations will live after them. By contrast, Denethor's desperate end lacks honor.

Certainly, knowing the relationships among traditionally-practiced funeral customs in North Sea countries is useful to an understanding of the meaning and intention of Tolkien's works. In his chapter "Thursday Evenings," Humphrey Carpenter creates a conversation about the funeral customs of dwarves.²⁹ In this imagined conversation, Tolkien says passionately that the preferred burial method for dwarves was tombs. Carpenter builds this discussion into one about Anglican and Roman Catholic views of the resurrection of the body. While the type of intellectual conversation generally enjoyed at meetings among scholars typically follows structures such as the one illustrated, the point that escapes is Tolkien's intuitive approach to story. The Inklings as biography works well illuminating the details of daily life for the Oxford Don, but as a discussion of the relationship between **Tolkien's** life and art, The Inklings can mislead the reader. **The** reader of Tolkien must be careful in his interpretation of fanciful discussions, **such** as the one on funeral customs. Tolkien's views on Christian theology are interesting to scholars and seem to be of some value in interpreting his works. But he was, after all, fascinated with the creation of heroic myths for England in a pre-Christian era.

Subterranean Descents

The descent of the hero into the barrow, housing the restless spirit of a dead king or hero, is a part of the tradition of the **Bearson** folk tale. **Beowulf's** encounter with Grendel's mother, Grettir's entrance into old Kar's tomb, and **Hervör's** awakening of her father **Angantýr** are all retellings of the same story. The elements of a **Bearson** folk tale include: a hero who may, under certain conditions, shift into the bear's shape; a descent into the underworld; companions for the hero; and a reward for faithful fulfillment of the comitatus bond.³⁰ The barrow wight incident in The Lord of the Rings illustrates the elements of the **Bearson** story.

The **bearson** usually enters the barrow as part of an expedition, but in The Fellowship of the Ring, Frodo, Merry, Pippin, and Sam do not enter the barrow willingly. The wight of the barrow uses a mirage to lure them in. In both Norse literature and The Lord of the Rings, the ghoulish corpses of such dead warriors are dangerous foes when someone seeks to rob them of their swords and treasures during a subterranean descent. For instance, in Kormák's saga, Kormák employs "breaker of cairns" as a kenning for hero.³¹ Kennings are formalized compound metaphors used in Northern poetry to add to the beauty and meaning of the poem by their unusual comparisons. Since entering a cairn took courage, the author of the saga uses it as a synonym for the hero. Not all Vikings were brave enough to enter a barrow or cairn. The Viking band, which **Hervör** leads, refuses even to go onto the island where **Angantýr's** barrow is. When his companions see the fire spewing forth, they desert their comrade **Hervör**. However, **Hervör** received from **Angantýr's** barrow "the keen-edged blade . . . the sword dwarf-smithied/ for Sigrlami."³² Had the timid Hobbits not been lured into the barrow, they would not have attempted the descent during which they received their swords.

Grettir's laying of old Kar's ghost provides a closer parallel to the action in The Fellowship of the Ring than the barrow scenes of the other tales. Kar's ghost has frightened away all of **Thorfinn's** servants. **Thorfinn** warns Grettir not to go into the barrow just as Tom Bombadil warns the hobbits to stay away from the barrows. After the hobbits are in, Frodo

awakens and sees his friends lying unconscious on a slab, and “Round the corner a long arm was groping.” Similarly, Grettir **feels** himself being seized by a strong hand. Both heroes attack -- Grettir cuts **Kar's** head off, and when Frodo chops at the hand, “there was a shriek and the light vanished.” **Tom** Bombadil gets the hobbits out, but Grettir pulls himself up on his rope because his companion Audun has run away. In both stories, the treasure is brought up and laid **out**. Tom Bombadil gives each of the hobbits a king's dagger, which for them will serve as a sword (I, 188- 208). **Thorfinn** later gives Grettir a sword, an old family heirloom.³³

In The Return of the Shadow, Christopher Tolkien relates that the final form of the chapter “Fog on Barrow Downs” is **very** largely present with only minor alterations [Shadow, 127]. The relationship between Frodo's adventures and Grettir's encounter with Kar's ghost is a close one, and Tolkien may have been relying on it in a more conscious manner than was his usual habit. Many of his letters relate difficulties in starting and defining a sequel to The Hobbit. The differences between the draft presented in The Return of the Shadow and The Fellowship of the Ring are enormous. The Shadow version is much closer to The Hobbit in tone, style, and themes. The darkness, which characterizes The Lord of the Rings, is not yet present. Yet, the barrow wight incident was suitable for both stories because it partakes of the deeper mythopoeic themes which define the finished three-part work.

Bilbo's adventures in the goblin caverns are the truest subterranean descent in The Hobbit. Gollum's kinship with the aftergoing man **Glám** has been discussed in Chapter Four, but the Gollum created for The Hobbit also shares many characteristics with Grendel in Beowulf. The correlations between the introduction of Gollum in Bilbo's subterranean descent and Beowulf's similar adventure as he dives into a dreadful mere and gains access to Grendel's home are outlined below.

Long Ravaging

Grendel has been raiding Hereot for twelve winters; Hrothgar declares

that Grendel has wasted his war-troop. Beowulf must repay Grendel for the incident in which he devoured fifteen hearth-companions and carried another such number away (Beowulf, 28). Tolkien's famous villainous creation Gollum shares this ravaging trait. Gollum's possession of the Ring begins with the murder of Déagol. Before Bilbo comes along, Gollum has lived long years in the lake under the mountain feeding on goblins when he could get them.

Part of the long ravaging involves drinking the victim's blood. In Beowulf, when Grendel attacks Beowulf's companions inside Heorot, he seizes a sleeping thane, tears him ravenously, bites into his bone-locks, and drinks "the blood from his veins" [Beowulf, 13]. When Gandalf tells Frodo the story of the Ring, he relates that the woods through which the Wood-elves tracked Gollum were full of dreadful tales: "The Woodmen said that there was some new terror abroad, a ghost that drank blood" (I, 67). Gollum, whose eating habits continuously appall Sam, shares Grendel's vampire nature. The vampire motif also occurs in the Kalevala, which Tolkien claims as a source.

Half-human

The Beowulf-poet talks about Grendel: "The other wretched shape trod the tracks of exile in the form of a man, except that he was bigger than any other man" (Beowulf, 24). In The Lord of the Rings, the Elves of Lothlórien report "A strange creature also had been seen, running with bent back and with hands near the ground, like a beast and yet not of beast-shape" (I, 364). When Gandalf suggests Gollum's kinship to hobbits, Frodo says "with some heat. 'What an abominable notion!'" (I, 63). Whatever Tolkien thought about Gollum's kinship in The Hobbit is not clear, but in The Lord of the Rings, his chain of being has been refined and categorized. Gollum is a hobbit, the primary representative of the power of evil on that beloved category of Middle-earth inhabitant. Rather than classifying Gollum as half-human, saying that he is half-hobbit would perhaps be more accurate. Although Gollum does not have the strength of Grendel, he can swim long

distances, climb up cliffs, and cover many miles 'walking.

Deep Homes of Darkness

Grendel lives in an underwater cave in a desolate, blighted mere. Gollum abjures the sun; Gandalf says "he found a little cave out of which the dark stream ran: and he wormed his way like a maggot into the heart of the hills" (I, 63). Gollum stays deep in the cave until **he** comes out in search of Bilbo and the Ring.

Monsters Surround Homes

When Beowulf dives into the mere after Grendel's mother, the poet reports that "many monsters attacked him in the water, many a sea-beast tore at his mail-shirt with war-tusks, strange creatures afflicted him" (Beowulf, 27). The cave in which Bilbo meets Gollum houses many monstrous goblins, including the great goblin himself.

Heroes Divinely Sent

Hrothgar believes that God sent Beowulf: "Holy God of his grace has sent him to us West-Danes, as I hope, against the terror of Grendel" (Bebwulf, 8). In addition, in Appendix A "Durin's Folk", Gandalf recounts his chance meeting with **Thorin** Oakenshield in an inn at **Bree**. **Thorin** approaches Gandalf who proposes that his errand to the Shire may interest **Thorin** since Gandalf has been brooding about the Dragon of Erebor, who slew **Thorin's** grandfather Thror. Although revenge does not play an enormous role in Tolkien's work, that motive and the lust for treasure form the basis for the story in The Hobbit. Reflecting on the subsequent turn of events later, Gandalf remarks that if things had gone otherwise, the Battle of the Pelennor, the battles of the Dale, the end of the dragon ravaging, and rightful rule of Gondor would never have been accomplished. He says, 'We might now hope to return from the victory here only to ruin and ash. But that has been averted -- because I met **Thorin** Oakenshield one evening on the edge of spring in Bree. A chance-meeting, as we say in Middle-earth'

(III, 360). The interaction between fate/chance and character is discussed more fully in Chapter 9, but Gandalf has been sent by divine beings to aid the creatures of Middle-earth in their battle against Sauron. And while the meeting may be chance, Gandalf takes an active role in connecting the dwarves with Bilbo and in the subsequent success of the expedition.

Heroes Fresh from Other Victories

Beowulf has just finished striving against Breca in swimming and has killed many sea monsters during that contest (Beowulf, 8). Bilbo has not been quite as successful, but he has, with the help of Gandalf, just escaped from his first adventure with some enormous **trolls**. Bilbo's life as a hero is just beginning. While the trolls have captured all the dwarves, he has managed to get away, and he has begun his efforts at burglary by attempting to pick the troll's pockets (Hobbit, 49, 45).

Handgrip Used to Slay Monster

Beowulf is famous for the strength of thirty men in his handgrip. After he boasts that he will not use weapons against Grendel, Beowulf kills the monster by pulling off his arm (Beowulf, 8). Neither Bilbo nor his heir Frodo kills Gollum: yet, hands are involved. In the struggle for the Ring on the edge of Mount Doom, Tolkien says "Suddenly Sam saw Gollum's long hands draw upwards to his mouth; his white fangs gleamed, and then snapped as they bit. Frodo gave a cry, and there he was, **fallen** upon his knees at the chasm's edge. But Gollum, dancing like a mad thing, held aloft the ring, a finger still thrust within the circle" (III, 224). In the mad **dance** that follows, Gollum falls to his death in the fire. The arm wrestling aspect of **Tolkien's** scene is reminiscent of the scene in Beowulf and others in the sagas.

Monsters Show Fear

When Beowulf seizes Grendel, the monster is frightened: he is eager to escape from the death grip (Beowulf, 14). Gollum's long association with

the Ring seems to have immunized him to normal **fear**. **He** is **angry**, frustrated, and hungry in his encounter, but even though Bilbo has a sword and comes near to killing Gollum, Gollum's obsession with regaining the Ring keeps him from fear. In the barrow encounter between Grettir and the ghost of **Kar**, the two struggle mightily making so much noise that Grettir's companion Audun flees.

Monsters Exposed to View

Beowulf hangs Grendel's arm up over the doorway into **Hereot**, and after Grendel's mother is slain, the hearth-companions **return carrying** Grendel's head (Beowulf, 16, 29). Gandalf will later praise Bilbo's pity and mercy in not killing Gollum when he might have done so. Bilbo develops as a hero in The Hobbit but his heroism is constrained. Since The Hobbit shares so much with the poem Beowulf, it is both surprising and fortunate that Bilbo does not kill Gollum. As was his constant practice, Tolkien was sensitive to the essence of his characters. In the early part of his development, Bilbo's character could not **have killed a fellow creature**. Very shortly and under more pressing conditions, he will attack spiders vigorously. About his part in the war, Tolkien says, "It was a terrible battle. The most dreadful of all Bilbo's experiences, and the one which at the time he hated most, which is to say it was the one he was most proud of, and most fond of recalling long afterwards, although he was quite unimportant in it. Actually I must say he put on his ring early in the business, and vanished from sight, if not from all danger" (Hobbit, 294). The most pleasing result of Bilbo's character-based failure to kill Gollum is that Tolkien still had Gollum to bring into the sequel to the story.

Victors Honored

Beowulf receives a lavish banquet with enormous praise and many gifts for his victory over Grendel (Beowulf, 29-38). Tolkien shows an awareness that feasting and giving of gifts should now occur; Gandalf and the dwarves spend some time discussing the difficulties of having lost the burglar, who

then takes off his ring and reveals himself to them. They **all** laugh and joke over the success of their adventures, the killing of the great goblin, and Bilbo's narrow escape. They are in a mood to celebrate, but Gandalf reminds them that the goblins will soon be tracking them. Tolkien replaces the feast which would normally follow these victories with Bilbo's desperate request for supper: **Gandalf's** wry suggestion that he should reenter the goblin caves in search **of** their ponies, and Bilbo's subsequent search for some kind of berries and herbs. Bilbo discovers that the blackberries are still in flower; no nuts, not even hawthorne berries are available. His feast consists of a bit of sorrel, a drink from a small mountain-stream, and three wild strawberries. Tolkien's knowledge of the tradition is clear.

The barrow wight scene is one of many subterranean descents as Ruth Noel in The Mythology on Middle-earth discusses. She catalogues five from The Hobbit: Bilbo's entry into the troll's cave; the descent into the goblin's realm: the tunnel-like paths of Mirkwood; the Elven-king's **subterranean** abode: and Bilbo's approach to Smaug's lair. And in The Lord of the Rings, Noel identifies six descents: the barrow incident mentioned above, the sequence in **Moria**; Gimli's discovery of the Glittering Caves; Aragorn's journey through the Paths of the Dead; Sam's encounter with **Shelob**; and Frodo and Sam's passage through the Chambers of Fire in Mount Doom.³⁴

Not all of these have equal value as traditional barrow descents. Bilbo's troll cave entry is not a barrow descent at all. Gandalf suggests that the trolls must have a hole in the ground, or a cave, which he finds but does not open. Bilbo produces a key which must have fallen out of the troll's pocket before he was turned to stone. The cave is more like a hobbit hole than a barrow or subterranean chamber, for it is filled with provisions -- food and ale -- and has clothes hanging on the wall. The swords, which do become important in the **story**, **are** picked up much more casually than Tolkien will later prefer. The trek through the tunnel-like paths of Mirkwood is more truly an evil forest adventure than a subterranean descent, while the elven king episode shares characteristics with a captive king ransom situation.

Bilbo's approaches to Smaug belong to a tradition of dragon dealings rather than a subterranean descent tradition. The sequence in Moria qualifies as a subterranean descent, but Gandalf becomes the protagonist in it. He is the one who encounters the monster and seemingly **falls** from the encounter: The incident in the Glittering Caves functions more accurately as a balance to the magnificence of **Lórien**. No monster inhabits the caverns and they serve as a refuge for the people of Rohan rather than a place of terror.

Both Aragorn's journey through the Paths of the Dead and Sam and Frodo's encounter with **Shelob** are true subterranean descents. In Aragorn's adventure, the monster has become a group of oathbreakers who may be released from their restlessness in the same way that Grettir lays Kar's unruly ghost. Sam's killing of **Shelob** allow him an opportunity to demonstrate his status as hero rather than companion.

The scene in the Chambers of Fire varies considerably from the subterranean descent tradition. Here Frodo finally loses strength almost entirely and crawls towards the summit. Gollum rejoins the hobbits, serving as the monster for a subterranean descent, but the real monster is the growing evil inside of Frodo, who will at the crucial moment renounce the quest. The treasure portion is also inverted, for here the treasure must be destroyed, rather than gained. This scene carries one of the major themes of the story -- the power and pervasiveness of evil. By associating it with the subterranean descent, Tolkien underlines Frodo's failure. Other heroes have succeeded in similar situations, but this hero, whose courage has been proven many times over, must fail. Otherwise, the reader would believe that the power of evil can be avoided by good hearted creatures.

Subterranean descents are important features of Northern literature and of heroic literature in general Tolkien finds several occasions to have his protagonists descend into the underworld, meet and defeat or fall to a monster, and gain or lose a treasure. The episodes provide a variety of opportunities for different heroes to act and react, to grow in courage, and to gain or lose implements important to the conduct of the story. That Tolkien could **use** this theme legitimately once in the Hobbit and four times

in the Lord of the Rings with such infinite variety is a credit to the high order of his genius, his knowledge of the legitimate uses of the tradition, and his imagination is providing different testing grounds for his characters.

Man Matching

“They got to comparing men” is a signal of danger in the sagas. On one such occasion in the Faroe Islander’s Saga, Einar picked up an axe and hit Cresthood on the head. With his scalp laid open, he fell senseless.³⁵ In the “Saga of the Sons of **Magnús**” of the Heimskringla, the brother Kings Eystein and Sigurth have the country divided between them, but they have entertainments regularly back and forth. King Eystein, who begins a comparison between the two, claims that they have the same title, possessions, birth, and upbringing. King Sigurth claims precedence in wrestling; Eystein in agility. Sigurth notes his excellent swimming while Eystein claims superiority in skating. Sigurth notes that Eystein cannot even stretch his bow while Eystein notes his superior skiing. The argument continues until King Sigurth holds forth his expeditions to the River Jordan and Eystein notes his generosity in letting him return with only one ship to reclaim his kingdom. The two are furious but maintain the peace throughout their reigns.³⁶ In yet another example in The Saga of the Sworn Brothers, the two foster brothers also avoided the frequently bloody outcome of such comparisons by ceasing to talk about their relative strengths.³⁷

Man matching appears to be a leisure time divertimento in the sagas. It occurs during long winters when men are sitting near the fire with nothing constructive to do. The relative merits of famous heroes and their lesser contemporary counterparts are discussed in the same way that sports fans now compare present and past boxers or football teams. Tolkien has little such leisure in The Lord of the Rings. These comparisons do not occur except in Appendix A’s “The Stewards.” There Tolkien reports that a mysterious stranger named Thorongil, who has served King **Thengel** of Rohan, now serves Ecthelion II of Gondor. This unidentified man competes

with Denethor, heir to the Steward's Office. Tolkien comments "Indeed he [Denethor] was as like to Thorongil as to one of **nearest** kin, and yet was placed second to the stranger in the hearts of men and the esteem of his father" (III, 336). Man matching surely occurred as these two men **strove** for dominance in Gondor. The result of this competition is as deadly as the battles of the sagas, for Denethor seems **to** guess Aragorn's identity and to harden his heart against the return of the rightful king.

Hard Bargains

Driving a hard financial bargain was another common custom. In the Eyrbyggja Saga, Snorri demands his inheritance from his stepfather Bork, who declares that he will not divide the family homestead **Helgafell**. Snorri suggests that Bork value the **homestead** and then they will decide who will buy out whom. Since Bork did not think that Snorri had any ready cash, he valued the estate low -- at sixty ounces of silver -- but didn't include the offshore islands, which he expected to be able to buy up cheaply. He stipulates that the sale should be in cash at the **Althing**. Snorri chooses to buy the farm, using money he has entrusted to his foster-father **Thorbrand**. The purse doubtless contained money Bork had advanced Snorri to travel abroad. Bork comments "Your purse turned out to be fuller than I'd expected, kinsman." Bork offers to stay and run the farm, but Snorri asks him to clear out. At that point, **Snorri's** mother divorces herself from **Bork**.³⁸

One hard bargain negotiated in Tolkien's works is the division of the dragon's treasure in The Hobbit. Bilbo, who had originally contracted with the dwarves to serve as their burglar for a fourteenth part of the treasure, still has his original contractual letter when the time for handing out the treasure arrives. **Smaug's** ravaging of the town puts the people of Dale into such distress that they besiege the dwarves on the mountain. **Thorin** refuses to bargain with the rabble at his door until Bilbo slips out at night and gives them the Arkenstone to use as leverage against the proud dwarf. **Thorin** is furious, but Bilbo reminds him that the dwarves said he could

choose his own part of the treasure. He remarks “that dwarves are sometimes politer in word than in deed” (Hobbit, 288). Thorin agrees to exchange Bilbo’s fourteenth part of the treasure for the stone, but the battle begins before the accounts can be settled. In the end, of course, the dwarves bury the Arkenstone with the slain Thorin, Bilbo’s share goes to succor the people of Dale, and the hobbit returns home with only two small chests -- one of gold and one of silver.

The dwarves are not the only peoples whose characteristics include parsimoniousness. In the sagas, the essence of tight fistedness is a character named Neri in Gautrek’s Saga: “a great warrior, but his meanness is a household word, and all the most niggardly men, the most reluctant to give anything to others, have been compared with him ever since.”³⁹ Tolkien represents this characteristic in The Lord of the Rings, too. In Appendix A, Fengel, a bad prince listed in the chronology like Neri in Gautrek’s Saga or like Heremod in Beowulf, is “greedy of food and gold, and at strife with his marshals, and with his children” (III, 350). In Beowulf, Heremod’s story occurs in the minstrel’s song in Hrothgar’s court. Heremod was an unsuccessful Danish king whose career began brilliantly, but he became cruel and stingy, and his people overthrew him. Since The Lord of the Rings is about a heroic enterprise rather than about the everyday affairs of men and women, few opportunities occur for discussion⁶ about finances and bargains. Yet, the characters operate within a framework of contracts and agreements. Failure to honor the basic give and take of the *comitatus* bond provides grounds for an overthrow of a monarch.

Compassion

Few incidents of compassion occur in the sagas, which emphasize action. In the Heimskringla, King Olaf appears to be receiving a typical payback for not killing-off his enemies when one of them attempts his murder. In “Saint Oláf’s Saga,” King Oláf’s robe slips from his shoulders while he bows to the altar and the blind King Hroerek, who refuses to become a Christian, thrusts at the king with a dagger. The dagger catches

only the clothing and King Olaf shifts balance and grabs forward at his attacker. Since this is not King Hroerek's first attack on his captor, Oláf's companions urge him to kill the unbending King. But King Olaf pities his former foe and relishes the quality of his victory, in which he gained' five' kingdoms from other kings without killing any of them. Yet, the King wonders if Hroerek will not in the end demand the King's own death. Similarly, in The Return of the King, like King Oláf, Sam has the same necessity for killing Gollum. Gollum's repeated attacks on Frodo make him deserve death and that death would increase Sam and Frodo's safety. Yet, Sam's heart restrains him. Gollum's fate is upon him, and he falls into Mount Doom very shortly after Sam has spared him. Snorri Sturluson provides a little comic relief before resolving the story of King Hroerek. The Icelander Thorarin's ugly foot becomes the subject of King Oláf's humor with the King asserting that he is willing to bet that it is the ugliest foot in town. Thórarin wagers he can find an uglier one, and the bet is set at the doing of a favor. Thórarin then pulls his other foot from under the covers claiming that it is uglier because one toe is lacking. King Oláf replies that a four toed foot must be one toe less ugly than a five toed foot. The favor he extracts from Thorarin is that he will take the troublesome King Hroerek to Iceland, where some three years later he succumbs to an illness.*0

Tolkien is not yet ready for comic relief. Frodo comments seriously on Gandalf's wisdom in saying that "*Even Gollum may have something yet to do?*" (III, 225). This contemplative recognition of the quest's near failure underlines the importance of compassion as a force in The Lord of the Rings.ly, Sam urges Frodo to come down the mountain a ways. As they sit in the lee of the spouting steams, Frodo again comments on the hopelessness of the end of all things. But in more typical hobbit fashion, Sam recalls the storytelling in the shire. He wishes that he could hear the introduction: "*Now comes the story of Nine-fingered Frodo and the Ring of Doom?!*" (III, 229). Compassion did not come to Tolkien from the sagas but from some other source. Yet, the coincidence of this tale about Oláf's compassion for the blind King Hroerek combined with Thórarin's missing

digit and Sam and Frodo's compassion for Gollum combined with another missing digit is interesting.

Storytelling Techniques

The full range of likenesses in language and the nuances of telling a story between The Lord of the Rings and the sagas can only be suggested here. Many technical elements depend on the sensitivity of the reader to a variety of shadings. Three subtle likenesses selected for discussion here are:

- prophecy and fulfillment,
- 'repetition' in lexical terms (The repetition becomes a guide to the structure of the saga and the intent of the author.), and
- units of three to reinforce a tripartite division.

These saga traits will be illustrated from the Laxdale Saga and the poem Beowulf with corollaries from Tolkien's works.⁴¹

Prophecy and fulfillment as an enactment of destiny produces the structure of the Laxdale Saga. While the Beowulf poet tackles **the** concept of fate, discussing it openly in his work, the saga writer employs popular beliefs in portents, curses, dreams, and second sight. For Icelanders, these popular beliefs were a part of real, normal life -- neither fanciful nor artificial. The characters accept these events as part of their everyday existence, but the reader develops apprehensions about their relevance. The reader wonders whether or not the prophecies will be fulfilled and how and when that might happen.⁴² The saga author combines natural and supernatural causes for events so that fate never operates *deus ex machina*. Plot and character complement each other and carry the narrative forward together. A phrase occurring frequently in the Laxdale Saga describes this method: "You would not have brought this up, if you did not know where it was to land."⁴³ Both the author of the Laxdale Saga and Tolkien in The Lord

of the **Rings** always know where they are going with their **narratives**. In Tolkien's case, his incomplete narratives, as published in The Unfinished Tales, offer a contrast to the finished three part work. In The Unfinished Tales, little stray pieces are left over. For instance in the Narn, the **dagger** that young **Túrin** gives his tutor **Sador** never comes back into play, **Túrin's** mother vanishes in the dragon's fog without a report, and his father **Húrin** is left in unresolved captivity. Tolkien may have been unclear about the direction of his story while he was composing it, but his through revisions resolved any difficulties in The Lord of the Rings. ✓

One of the most noteworthy of these prophetic devices in the Laxdale Saga is Gudrun's dream in the chapter "**Two Rings and Two Headdresses**." Gudrun's kinsman Gest has an extensive reputation for his gift of **second sight**. Gudrun manages to arrive at a hot spring where he is resting on his trip to the **Althing** and asks him to interpret the four troublesome dreams she has had during the year. Her first dream features an illfitting headdress, which she jerks off and throws into the brook. In the second dream, she loses a **likeable** silver bracelet into a lake. The third dream features an unsatisfactory gold bracelet, which breaks. Gudrun wears a gold helmet in the fourth dream; the uncomfortable yet desirable helmet topples into **Hvammsfjord**. In Gest's opinion, these dreams are all very much of one cloth; he foretells that Gudrun will have four husbands. The ill-fitting headdress betokens a loveless marriage to a man she leaves. The silver bracelet represents a second fine man who drowns. The gold bracelet stands for a third husband, whom Gudrun loses through her own carelessness. The gold helmet depicts an overbearing husband, who will be a great chieftain and will hold a helmet of terror over her -- that is, he will hold her in subjugation.

This scene is a tour-de-force with Gudrun's four dreams and Gest's interpretations of them, but the saga author carries his theme of prophecy still further. Gest now rides on to **Olaf's** house where he recognizes Olaf's sons among other handsome men and predicts preeminence for Kjartan. Later as Gest rides on, his son asks him why he is crying. Gest replies: "It

will be no surprise to me, if some day **Bolli** stands over Kjartan's crown and thereby also reaps his own death. An ill thing it is, to know this about such fine and sterling **men**."⁴⁴ Inside of five pages the entire plot for the remainder of the saga has been laid out, but rather than dulling the reader's curiosity, the prophecies whet enthusiasm.

The reader, of course, wonders who all these husbands will be, whether they will die as Gest has **foreseen**, what Gudrun's reactions will be, and how **Bolli** will come to kill his fosterbrother Kjartan. Shortly after her meeting with Gest, Gudrun's father persuades her to marry Thorvald, whom she divorces as Gest has **foreseen**. Gudrun marries again happily, but Breeches Aud, Thord's ex-wife whose sobriquet reflects manish behavior, does not take the divorce well. The next summer when Thord is out working with the sheep, Aud rides in and slashes his hand and breast catching the sword in the bolster. The sagawriter comments wryly "and this one time she had breeches on and no **mistake**."⁴⁵ Thord survives his **ex**-wife's attack only to drown in the fjord the next summer under the spell of the wizard Kotel.

The reader's heart quickens when the same spring which hosted Gest's prophecies about Gudrun's dreams becomes a meeting place for Gudrun and Kjartan, widely reputed to be the cleverest young people in their time. With the disclaimer "but I don't want to prophesy this," Olaf tells Kjartan that he doesn't believe dealings with the Lauger folk will prove lucky for his family. Yet, Kjartan and his beloved foster brother **Bolli** continue to visit Gudrun. Kjartan finally asks Gudrun to wait for him for three years while he goes to seek his fortune in Norway where he remains overlong. Finally, **Bolli** and Gudrun marry. In the summer after Iceland became Christian, King Olaf allows the hostage Icelanders to leave; he gives Kjartan an ornamented sword with the prediction that he will never feel a weapon's fatal sting while he carries it. Hostile encounters between the two fosterbrothers escalate until **Bolli** attacks and kills Kjartan, who does not defend himself. It is then not very long until Kjartan's four brothers and their comrades kill **Bolli**, thus fulfilling two of Gest's predictions. Gudrun

remains alone for several years until she finally marries Thorkel, a most strong-minded man. After Thorkel drowns in **Breidafjord**, all of Gest's predictions have finally come true. The saga writer has told the reader exactly what to expect, but the reader delights in the details of the fulfillment.

Tolkien accomplishes a similar tour-de-force in The Lord of the **Rings** with the artistic prophetic scenes revolving around Galadriel and her **mirror**. He also uses the palantiri to accomplish similar purposes, and of course, foreknowledge, premonitions, and **dreams** play a role.

Galadriel's Mirror

The chapter "The Mirror of Galadriel" contains a theme of testing. Each member of the Fellowship thinks that Galadriel has seen into his heart: "All of them, it seemed, had fared alike: each had felt that he was offered a choice between a shadow full of fear that lay ahead, and something that he greatly desired: clear before his mind it lay, and to get it he had only to turn aside from the road and leave the Quest and the war against Sauron to others" (I, 373). Each believes she has offered him a secret choice between something he greatly desires and his continuation in the Fellowship.

Galadriel pursues her examination of her guests. After many days, she appears before Sam and Frodo and creates a prophetic Mirror. About it, Galadriel says, "But the Mirror will also show things unbidden, and those are often stranger and more profitable than things which we wish to behold. What you will see, if you leave the Mirror free to work, I cannot tell. For it shows things that were, and things that are, and things that yet may be" (I, 377). The Mirror does not open directly onto the future but rather onto the fears for the future that each character holds most closely. Like prophecies from famous Oracles, the Mirror's messages are not straightforward, but must be carefully interpreted.

Using the Mirror, Sam does see the future. He sees the Shire blighted, Frodo in a death-like trance, and himself climbing the endless winding stairs of Cirith Ungol. Tolkien's phrase "like a dream the vision

shifted+’ identifies the Mirror’s dream/vision function accurately (I, 377). Frodo also sees an abbreviated vision of the future. His vision includes the reborn Gandalf in his white garments, a restless Bilbo in his room at Rivendell, events from the Pelennor Fields battle, and the journey to the Grey Havens. Then the Mirror shifts, and Frodo views the dreaded Eye of Sauron searching for him.

Testing through prophetic devices continues. Moving from his brilliant and complex use of the Mirror, Tolkien amplifies the theme of the test. In offering the **Ring** to Galadriel, Frodo evokes an admission of her own ambitious daydreams of herself as a benevolent dictator. Just as the vision of the Shire tests Sam and the sight of Sauron’s eye tries Frodo so does his offer of the Ring press Galadriel. She has examined the others and found them worthy to continue **the** Fellowship against Sauron. About her own test, she says “I pass the test . . . I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel” (I, 38 1). Even though her secret choice is between wielding great power and allowing **Lothlórien**, to fade, she proves true.

In this chapter, Tolkien reveals the conclusion of the entire work. The careful reader knows the major events the Ringbearer will endure. But since the allusions are brief and the Mirror source may not always tell what it seems to tell, the reader’s suspense is not blunted. By the end of the Galadriel scenes, Tolkien has moved in a hasty manner through the remainder of the events without harming the driving force of the narrative.

Palantíri

Further in The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien also uses the palantíri or Seeing-stones as a means to manipulate the story. The seven stones have a variety of owners and locations. With them Tolkien motivates characters and alternately speeds and slows actions. For instance, Saruman gains and gives information from his stone until Wormtongue throws it at Gandalf. When **Pippin** peers into Saruman’s palantir, Sauron misinterprets its location and the hobbit’s identity (II, 197-99). Like the best of prophetic devices, the palantir not only report action but also cause it to happen.

Denethor despairs because Sauron has shown him **a** distorted view of the future in his palantir (III, 129). And, Aragorn **challenges** Sauron through the palantir, causing Sauron to strike before he is ready (III, **52-53**). Like Galadriel's Mirror, the palantiri are unusual yet exceedingly handy plot devices.

Foresight

In many literary works, the story sometimes jumps ahead through various artistic devices, and sometimes the author thrusts explanations from the past into the story. While the Laxdale **sagawriter** uses dreams, the Beowulf-poet applies less obvious devices, such as hints about the fate of **Hereot**; prophecies of war between the Danes and the Heatho-bards; and several interpolated narratives, such as the treachery of **Heremod** and the tragedy of Finn.

Similarly, The Lord of the Rings involves many prophetic devices. The character Gandalf has long sight, even though Aragorn notes that it failed him in regard to his own death. For instance, **Gandalf's** foreknowledge that Gollum has yet some part to play in the story prevents the creature's death (I, 69). Gandalf explains to Frodo that Bilbo's pity and **mercy** saved Gollum. Bilbo has been repaid by having received so little **evil** from his long ownership of the **Ring**. Gandalf foresees that Bilbo's pity will gain a fortunate fate for many: "My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end: and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule **the** fate of many -- yours not least" (I, 69). Tolkien also avails himself of fulfilled prophecies. The Dwarf King's assumption of his old kingdom in The Hobbit; the reforging of Aragorn's sword Anduril; Aragorn's ride through the Paths of the Dead to bring the oath breakers to his service: and the return of King Aragorn are examples.

Premonitions

A more concrete example of counterparts occurs in the premonitions of old leaders: Gest, **Hrothgar**, **Théoden**, and Elrond. In Beowulf, after the

guard tells Hrothgar that Beowulf has arrived, Hrothgar senses the outcome: “Holy God of His grace has sent him to us West-Danes, as I hope, against the terror of Grendel” (Beowulf, 8). Several such premonitions occur in The Lord of the Rings. In The Fellowship of the Ring, Frodo offers to take the Ring to destroy it at the Council of Elrond. Elrond foresees the wisdom of that venture: “I think that this task is appointed for you, Frodo: and that if you do not find a way, no one will” (I, 284). Like Hrothgar, Théoden sees that Gandalf has perhaps come too late to save his hall and his high seat (II, 120). As Hrothgar’s foreknowledge about Beowulf’s mission indicates the King’s concern for the misery Grendel causes Hereot so does Theoden’s statement about the bad fate of his hall suggest his knowledge about the existing perils: “Not long now shall stand the high hall which Brego son of Eorl built. Fire shall devour the high seat. What is to be done?” (II, 120). Théoden understands that unless the quest succeeds, his hall and the freedom of his people will vanish.

Dreams

Each author commands different prophetic modes. The Laxdale saga author employs prescient dreams and epigrammatic utterances, while the Beowulf-poet uses ominous references to parallel events and canny guesses about future outcomes. Tolkien also enlists the prophetic dream, a stock mythological device. Boromir, Faramir, and their father Denethor all dream about the events surrounding the Sword that was Broken. Frodo dreams prophetically of the sea, which he will eventually cross, While he is in Tom Bombadil’s house, he also has a visionary dream of Gandalf’s captivity at the hands of Saruman.

Recounting

Like the Beowulf-poet and others, Tolkien rearranges narrative events by filling in details from the past at various points. The Beowulf-poet recounts the hero’s youth during his appearance at the court of King Hrothgar. At the end of the poem, the hero reminisces and reviews his

kingship before he engages the dragon.⁴⁶ Tolkien begins this recounting when Gandalf verifies the identity of the Ring and tells Frodo its history. Tolkien continues with past histories in the remarkably well-constructed chapter entitled "The Council of Elrond." There, he recites more history of the Ring, the stories of **Glóin**, Elrond, Boromir, Aragorn, Bilbo, Galdor, Legolas, Gandalf, Glorfindel, and Frodo. The forward movement of the story pauses while Tolkien completes the vision of events in the past.

Allusion

Tolkien and the Beowulf-poet both make cogent use of allusion. The Beowulf-poet employs interpolated narratives: the tragedy of Finn, the treachery of **Heremod**, the story of Thryth, the tale of the Broosing necklace, the battle at Ravenwood, and the burning of **Hereot**.⁴⁷ Each of these stories reminds the audience of related events and offers a commentary on the action of the poem. Tolkien's problem with allusion and interpolated narrative was quite complex. He had created the worlds of the first and second ages in The Silmarillion. All of those characters and events were available to him in the same way that the Trojan heroes and Greek and Roman gods were available to the Greek and Roman poets, except Tolkien's audience was not familiar with the antecedents to his story. The publishers rejected Tolkien's solution -- to publish The Silmarillion first. Thus, Tolkien faced the problems that many modern readers of the Odysseus, Iliad, Aeneid, and Beowulf face. His audience could not immediately respond to the complexities of his allusions and interpolated stories. He solved the difficulty by explaining allusions as he introduced them and by providing supplementary materials in the appendices.

In the first reading of any really good story, most readers concentrate on the action plot. Nuances of character and meaning must be sacrificed to the resolution of the story line itself. But after this first devouring of the tale, readers begin to desire more details. This desire prompted the long-delayed publication of The Silmarillion and now of The History of Middle-earth. Just as a careful study of the allusions in classical epics or the

Beowulf greatly enriches a reader's appreciation of the intricacies of the tale, so now an in-depth study of the newly- published associated tales mentioned in the The Lord of the Rings adds to an appreciation of the story itself.

While the saga writer of Laxdale prefers dreams and long-sighted utterances, the Beowulf-poet employs foreshadowing comments and interpolated narratives. Tolkien in The Lord of the Rings uses Galadriel's Mirror, the palantiri, inserted stories and poems, and a variety of prophetic devices. All three authors control narrative action by looking ahead in the story with these techniques. And all enrich the reader's experience with embroidered tales from the past.

Repetition in Lexical Items

Linguistic patterns

The saga author also employs repetition in lexical items as a device to insure unity in the narrative. Linguistic patterns are established and used to evoke comparisons between themes, characters, and scenes. The linguistic components make the relationships the author is emphasizing clear to the reader. One example of this technique from the Laxdale Saga revolves around a pair of swords. Geirmund has a good sword about which the sagawriter says, "This sword he called Footbite, and he never let it very far out of his sight."⁴⁸ King Olaf gives Kjartan as a parting gift the sword Konungsnaut, which is stolen at a party between the fosterbrothers. About it the sagaman makes a similar comment: "Kjartan had not been carrying his sword Konungsnaut around with him while going about these duties, although he was rarely in the habit of letting it very far out of his sight."⁴⁹ When Kjartan recovers the sword, its scabbard is missing; thus Kjartan quits carrying it with him as frequently as he did before. The fulfillment of King Olaf's prophecy that Kjartan will not meet harm as long as he has the sword is facilitated.

Tolkien uses these linguistic patterns also to maintain unity of structure in The Lord of the Rings. One such unifying device contains

references to **the** story of the hobbits' adventures. Tolkien begins this device in a conversation between Gandalf and Bilbo, in which Bilbo brings up the idea of finishing his book. The story and its ending recur throughout the work until Frodo **finally** presents Sam with an almost finished book; **only** the last pages are reserved for Sam to fill in. The various crossed out titles indicate the deepening concerns of the story from Bilbo's "My Diary" and "My Unexpected Journey" to Frodo's authoritative "**The Downfall** of the Lord of the Rings and the Return of the King." Another such **unifying** pattern consists of references to what was meant to be -- the roles that various characters had to play in the working out of the drama. Bilbo and Frodo were meant to have the Ring; Gollum should not be killed because "he has some part to play."

Another set of linguistic repetitions takes its cue from Bilbo's third title "There and Back Again" the actual subtitle of The Hobbit. After the epic events of the war, the ring's destruction, and the crowning of the King, Tolkien needs to bring his readers back into the environment of the Shire, to remind them that the story has had **a** focus on the doings of the little people. Repetition of the key phrase accomplishes this. After Frodo visits **Bilbo** in Rivendell, Elrond takes him aside, saying "I think Frodo, that maybe you will not need to come back, unless you **come very** soon." (III, 267). This reminder of Bilbo's frailty is one of the saddest moments in the work. . Tolkien continues his word play with Sam's greeting to Farmer Cotton "I've come back" (III, 287). **After** the hobbits can no longer see Frodo's elvish light from the westward sailing ship, they ride silently homeward, "and they spoke no word to one another until they came back to the Shire." (III, 311). Shortly thereafter, Sam utters the last spoken words 'in the narrative: "Well, I'm back." (III, 311). These linguistic repetitions do not derive from any poverty of invention on the author's part but rather from the desire to guide the reader in following the structure of the work.

Repetition of Events

Another type of repetition in the Laxdale Saga is recurrence of events.

Gudrun's meetings with men, their suits for her hand, her marriages (happy and unhappy), and her husbands' deaths form one set of recurrences. Similarly, Gest's prediction about Kjartan's death, Bolli's actual killing of his fosterbrother, and the subsequent death of Bolli form another. Laxdale translator Margaret Arent argues that the structural devices of repetition and recurrence symbolize the formal aspects of the integration between the supernatural sphere (fate) and the moral realm (the binding code of honor and revenge).⁵⁰ In the Laxdale Saga, recurrence enhances the sense of a predetermined and calculated world, in which the characters are unable to escape from a wheel of fortune bearing deaths and revenges.

Tolkien also achieves effect through repetition. The effect he achieves correlates with his theme in the same way that the Laxdale sagaman's does. The Laxdale sagaman wants the reader to see his story not as a tragedy of characters bound by fate and by their own natures but as a tragedy of the *comitatus* way of life. The code of honor and revenge creates the tragedy. Time and again the protagonists Kjartan and Bolli are begged to desist, for their families, and indeed all of Iceland, can ill afford to lose such good men. Thorstein voices his disapproval of the plans for Bolli's death: "It is a great pity that you kinsmen should continue killing one another off. There are few enough like Bolli left in your family as it is."⁵¹ Yet, Bolli does die and then Gudrun demands revenge for his death.

Tolkien's story emphasizes not only the inevitability that evil will appear and reappear throughout history but also the responsibility for all people to stand against evil no matter how insignificant they may consider themselves. Thus, in the matter of The Lord of the Rings, repetition occurs in the death of rulers. Thorin, corrupted by his dwarfish greed and his avarice for the Arkenstone, dies in the Battle of Five Armies at the end of The Hobbit. Denethor, shot through with despair at Sauron's power, his son Boromir's death, and his possible loss of the stewardship, lights his own funeral pyre. And, Théoden, rescued at last from long neglect of his Kingly duties, dies at the hand of the Ring-wraith. Most of the rest of the noble characters--Elrond, Celebom, Galadriel, and Gandalf--take ship for the

havens. This repetition underscores for the reader the **pervasiveness** of evil, even though its dominance has been averted for the moment.

Similarly, the importance of heroism on the part of the less powerful characters also bears repeating. Bilbo's visit to Smaug sets a standard for hobbit courage that the rest of his family must live up to, and they do. Elrond warns that the younger hobbits would not dare the journey if they had a fuller understanding of its terrors, but they acquit themselves well. Merry aids in the slaying of the Lord of the **Nazgûl**, a truly fearsome creature; Sam takes on a whole company of **Orcs** when he thinks they are despoiling Frodo's body; **Pippin** struggles with the Dark Lord himself in the **palantír**; and Frodo endures months of stalking by Ringwraiths and searching by the Eye of Sauron. This repetition reinforces the lesson that individual courage and heroism can make a difference. Hotheaded, flamboyant courage brings the world of the Laxdale Saga to an unhappy end, but the cautious courage of the hobbits and **their** allies saves Middle-earth for another age.

Tripartite Division

Arent also praises the Laxdale sagaman for his tripartite division of the saga and his use of three main characters. She observes that three parties, three goadings, three drownings, and three land sales contribute to the action of the story. Throughout these actions, the author emphasizes the bargaining process itself, the meeting out of justice and the evening of sides. All elements must be compared with their **counterparts** -- the worth of men, **weregild** payments, land sales, skirmishes at arms, horse trades, and marriage contracts. These images reflect a central theme of the saga.⁵²

Tolkien also understands the dramatic **value** of threes. Like the Laxdale Saga, The Lord of the Rings also has a tripartite structure. While the obvious divisions are the six books, two each into three volumes, the more organic divisions might be **labelled** as the prelude, the central theme, and the postlude, as **Arent** does with Laxdale. In The Lord of the Rings, the prelude includes Bilbo's birthday party, Frodo's lingering in the Shire, the

hobbits' journey to Crickhollow, their adventures in the Old Forest, their stay with Tom Bombadil, their narrow escape from the Barrow Wight, their antics in the Prancing Pony, their escape on Weathertop, their flight to the Ford, and their participation in the Council of Elrond (I: Book 1 and Book 2, Chapters 1 and 2) The central action begins with the forming of the Fellowship of the Ring and continues through the ring's destruction in Mount Doom (I: Book 2, Chapters 3-10; II: Books 3 and 4; and III: Book 5 and Book 6, Chapters 1-3). The postlude consists of the rescue of Frodo and Sam, Aragorn's claiming of his throne, the marriages, the hobbits' journey home, the scouring of the Shire, and the departures at the grey havens (III: Book 6, Chapters 4-9 and Appendices). As in Laxdale and other sagas, this tripartite structure is very satisfying for the reader. The opportunity for getting acquainted with the characters and their eccentricities gains interest for the action to come, and the long postlude allows the stray bits of story to be completed in a satisfactory manner.

Thus, the use of storytelling techniques forms another bond between the sagas and The Lord of the Rings. In techniques for prophecy and fulfillment, Tolkien has many familiar devices--foresight, premonition, dream, recounting, and allusion--but he also has some unusual and innovative techniques--the mirror of Galadriel and the palantiri. **With** these, he enables the reader to see the end of the story without spoiling the suspense of its actual unfolding. Like great sagawriters, Tolkien carefully repeats both linguistic phrases and events in order to underscore his themes of the recurrence of evil and the courageous responses to it. Both sagawriters and Tolkien use a tripartite approach to make sure that their readers come to understand the themes illustrated in their works.

Comitatus, Kinship, and Revenge

Comitatus

"The Havamal", one of the poems in the Poetic Edda, is the main source for understanding the Northern lands' ethical system, which is illustrated rather than stated in the Icelandic sagas. The cornerstone of

behavior was loyalty -- to friends, to the lord or the chieftain, and to kin. This bond of loyalty is called *comitatus*. *The "Havamal"* says that:

With his friend a man should be **friends** ever,
and pay back gift for **gift**,
Laughter for laughter he learns to give,
and eke lesing for lies.
With his friend a man should be friends ever,
with him and the friend of his friend:
but **foeman's** friend befriend thou never,
(and keep thee aloof from his **kin**).⁵³

In The Lord of the **Rings**, the Fellowship is composed of nine brave people whose loyalty is bound, not by an oath but by an unspoken commitment. They are committed to the leader, Gandalf and then Aragorn; to the **Ringbearer**, Frodo; and to the mission, the destruction of the Ring. At the touching moment of farewell from Rivendell, Elrond pronounces a benediction on the group noting that only the ringbearer has a charge laid upon him while the others go as free companions. Gimli replies that any who leaves when the road darkens would be faithless. Elrond counsels, "let him not vow to walk in the dark, who has not seen the nightfall" (I, 294). Gimli urges that "sworn word may strengthen quaking heart" (I, 294) Yet, Elrond fears that it may also break the heart. He then blesses them in the name of Elves, men, and all Free Folk, to which Bilbo adds his good luck. After Gandalf is lost, **Galadriel** tests the faith of the others by offering each a secret choice between the individual's greatest desire and the dangerous trip ahead. Each thinks that the choice is his alone, that Galadriel has the power to honor the choice, and that the choice will remain secret. Yet all eight members of the Fellowship continue the quest. Later, Boromir's greed for power makes him threaten Frodo, but after his weakness, he dies trying to protect Merry and **Pippin** from the **orcs**. He is true to his word: "It is not the way of the Men of Minas Tirith to desert their friends at need . . . " (I,

406). Even though he has strayed from his unspoken oath in attempting to suborn Frodo, he reclaims his honor with his death. Clearly, the code of loyalty to one's friend is an important one in The Lord of the Rings.

Kinship

The effect of *comitatus* is to make the bond of friendship as close as that of kinship. Thus, when the witch king Angmar, the Ringwraith, kills King **Théoden** in battle, the men of his house are slain around him trying to protect his body. His newest retainer Merry believes that he is the King's man, that the King is a father to him. Merry aids the King's sister's daughter, **Éowyn**, in killing Angmar, thus fulfilling his bond to the King. In The Hobbit, the dwarves observe the ancient customs of kinship, too, for the closest relationship is between the uncle and his sister's son: "Fili and Kili had fallen defending him [**Thorin**] with shield and body, for he was their mother's elder brother. The others remained with **Dain**; for Dain dealt his treasure well" [Hobbit, 303-04]. Here in a brief passage the bonds of *comitatus* are fully illustrated. The retainer's ultimate duty is to die with his Lord on the field of battle. The Lord or King's **ultimate** obligation is the free giving of gifts, as the "Havamal" dictates. This ethical system of loyalty is one of the major forces for good in The Lord of the Rings. The loyalty demonstrated in these works is for friends, kin, and rightful overlord, not for God or some supernatural being.

Revenge

The code demanded revenge when a friend or a kinsman was killed. This motive alone accounts for much of the action in the family sagas. Revenge was demanded for dead relatives, such as Kari's revenge for his wife's family, that is, **Njál**, **Njál's** sons, and Kari's own son. Revenge was also required for a friend **as in** The Sworn Brothers, or for an injury to goods or pride as in Hrafnkel's Saga where the servant is killed for riding Hrafnkel's horse. Revenge is the single most important motive in the sagas. In that, the sagas differ markedly from The Lord of the Rings, in which revenge is

not a major motivating force because the emphasis is not on the small evils done by one man to another but on the greater evil of attempting to deprive all peoples of freedom.

In the history of the dwarves in Appendix A, the dwarves fight a long war to avenge the killing and humiliation of Thrór. **Thráin** declares victory, but since half their people have been lost, his people answer, "We fought this war for vengeance and vengeance we have taken. But it is not sweet, If this is victory, then our hands are too small to hold it" (III, 356). And their cousins said that "**Khazad-Dum** was not our Fathers' house. What is it to us, unless a hope of treasure? But now, if we must go without the rewards and weregilds that are owed to us, the sooner we return to our own lands the better pleased we shall be." (III, 356). Weregild, payment for death, was an honorable alternative to revenge. If the killing were part of a feud, then **weregild** paid to the surviving relative could stop him from revenge especially when the relationship was not the closest. However, if death came in war, then the King sometimes paid **weregild** for a valiant man who died fighting in his service. For example, King Aethelstan gives Egil Skallagrimsson two chests of silver to give to his father for the death of Egil's brother Thorolf. Also, King **Thráin** would have been expected to pay **weregild** to the relatives of Dain's men who died in battle.

The tale of revenge told in "Durin's Folks," Appendix A of The Return of the King has other Northern analogs. When Thrór returns to Erebor to try to regain his treasure, his friend **Nár** accompanies him and waits outside while Thrór marches into Moria. Many days later the horns sound and the orcs come to the gates. They bid **Nár** to come to them calling him' first "**beardling**" and then "**begger-beard**". They throw out Thrór's headless body and severed head with the name **AZOG** branded on it in Dwarf-runes. **Azog** throws out a **small** bag of coins as a fee for **Nár** to take back a message to Thrór's **family** that **Azog**, not Thrór, is now king of Moria. In Njal's Saga, **Njal's** sons gain Earl Hakon's displeasure during a visit to the Orkneys because Thrain Sigfusson, their fellow Iclander, has helped the villainous Killer Hrapp to escape. After considerable fighting, Earl Hakon captures the

Njálssons, whom he plans to put to death. They escape and join their brother-in-law Kari. Finally, a peace is arranged between the two parties, but the **Njálssons** consider themselves injured by Thrain's lawless action. When **Kari** and the sons of **Njál** go to Thrain to talk about compensation, Thrain asks how long they are going to go on begging. Hallgerd, the ignoble wife of the now-dead Gunnar, calls them "little Dung-beards" and says that their father should be known as "Old Beardless". **Njál** has instructed his sons to bear these insults so that proper legal grounds can be established for their eventual killing of Thrain and his companions?^{*} Adequacy of beards becomes an insult in both tales, while a small bag of coins forms another link between them. When Gunnar's wife Hallgerd and **Njál's** wife Bergthora have been feuding, Gunnar and **Njál** are determined to stay friends. **Njál** carries the purse that Gunnar has given him as compensation for a servant Hallgerd had killed; the compensation had been **12** ounces of silver. When Bergthora has accomplished her revenge, **Njál** "took the purse and handed it to Gunnar, who recognized it as being the money that he himself had given **Njál**."⁵⁵ Similarly, in "Durin's Folk", when the **dwarves** have won the battle, the purse thrown at **Nár** occurs again: "They took the head of **Azog** and thrust into its mouth the purse of **small** money, and then they set it on a stake" (III, 356). Another likeness between these two works is the action of coming to a decision by casting a cloak over the head and sitting silently until the thought process is finished. In "Durin's Folk", **Nár** sits for seven days after he returns with the news of Thrór's death and the prohibitions of **Azog**. At the conclusion of that time, he stands up, says "This cannot be borne!", and begins the long war of the dwarves and ores (III, 355). In **Njál's Saga**, the **Althing** debates whether Christianity shall become the prevailing religion of the land. The Christians choose the heathen Thorgeir the Priest of Ljosawater to be their spokesman. "For a whole day, Thorgeir lay with a cloak over his head. No one spoke to **him**."⁵⁶ When Thorgeir speaks, he announces a new way of life for Icelanders -- all the land shall be Christian, certain heathen practices shall stop, and public heathen worship will no longer occur. In both cases, a great change is wrought in

the lives of the **common** people by a man who has been in silent meditation.

Both stories also feature a revenge battle in a valley. Thrain decides to return through the Markar River valley even though the river has great **ice-**strips in it. He is **travelling** with seven companions, including **Killer-Hrapp**. Although his friends advise him to stay longer, Thrain says to do so would be a sign of fear. Some beggar women bring the news to the **Njálssons**, who put on their brightly colored clothes, gather their weapons, and set out to attack **Thrain's** party. The most spectacular killing of the saga occurs when Skarphedin slides down a huge sheet of ice as fast as a bird, crashes the head of Thrain who is starting to put on his helmet, and spills his back teeth on the ice. **Kari** cuts off Killer-Hrapp's hand while Hrapp quips about that needing to be done since so many men had died by the hand and then Grim runs him through with a spear. Kari leaps to avoid Tjorvi's spear and plunges his sword into his chest. At the end of the battle, Skarphedin lets four of the attackers go. In "Durin's Folk," the battle between the dwarves and the **orcs** is joined in the great vale of **Azanulbizar**. **Thorin** wins his sobriquet Oakenshield by using a branch of an oak as a shield after his has been cloven. Both Thrain and **Thorin** are wounded. **Náin** taunts **Azog** asking if the play in the valley is too rough. **Azog**, wearing an iron helmet, attacks **Náin**, shatters his mattock, and hews his neck, **Náin's** metal collar saves him from beheading, but the blow breaks his neck. Like Thrain in **Njál's Saga**, **Azog** discovers that his forces are losing in the valley. As he turns to flee into **Moria**, **Dáin**, **Náin's** young son, leaps up and beheads him with a red axe. (III, 355-356). The numeric victory for the **Njálssons** is a great one; five of them attack eight, kill four, and release four others. The dwarves are also victorious but too many of their numbers are killed. They must build funeral pyres and burn their dead rather than building tombs for them. From this historical incident comes the phrase "he was a burned Dwarf". (III, 357). **Njál** and his sons **all** burn inside his house when their attackers can defeat them no other way; **Njál's** saga is frequently called "The Saga of Burnt Njál."

A character named Thrain and the use of axes may have been the

intersections between **these** two stories. Skarphedin's axe Battle-troll is a **famous** weapon from the sagas and his use of it to kill Thrain in the valley battle is indeed memorable -- too memorable for Tolkien to make any greater use of it than to set a battle in a valley, change a man putting on a helmet to an **orc** wearing a helmet, and recast **Battle-Troll** as a plain "red axe". The dwarves, like the sons of **Njál**, share several traits -- **stiffed** necked behavior, rashness, and fey inclinations. Whether Tolkien's memory of the events in the Starkar valley was conscious or unconscious as he wrote the account of "Durin's Folks", the number of parallels between the two scenes shows a great kinship.

The men of Middle-earth practice *comitatus*, kinship, and revenge even more briskly than do the other creatures, except perhaps dwarves. In fact, the One Ring came into the possession of Isildur after the war as weregild. **Weregild** (Old Norse were, "war" and gild, "blood") is a payment of money to a dead person's family; money takes the place of the bloodshed required by revenge code. In the Njál's Saga, twelve ounces of silver is the usual payment for a slave; one hundred ounces for a free man, and some men are compensated at double or triple **weregild** of two to three hundred ounces of silver. After Sauron is defeated, Isildur takes the **Ring** even though Elrond advises against it. Isildur says, "This [the Ring] I will have as **weregild** for my father, and my brother" (I, 256). Since the Ring is of such great value, Isildur has put a high price on his closest kin. However, the **Ring** betrays him to his death, 'for an **orc** arrow kills him at Gladden Field, and the Ring slips off his finger into the river.

Service **Weregild**

Another alternative to revenge or **weregild** also occurs in The Lord of the Rings. When **Pippin** is explaining to Denethor how his son Boromir died defending the two hobbits, **Pippin** chooses a third alternative to blood revenge or money payment and offers his service in place of the man who saved his life. The oath he takes establishes the relationship between the lord and his man:

The old man [Denethor] laid the sword along his lap, and **Pippin** put his hand to the hilts, and said slowly after Denethor:

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

‘And this do I hear, Denethor son of Ecthelion, Lord of Gondor, Steward of the High King, and I will not forget it, nor fail to reward that which is given: fealty with love, valour with honor, oathbreaking with vengeance’ (III, 28).

Because Denethor’s son Boromir has died to save **Pippin** and Merry’s lives, **Pippin** offers his service to Denethor. A money payment to Boromir’s father would have been the more usual way of satisfying the debt.

This arrangement has many antecedents in the sagas. In the Orknevinga Saga, King Olaf Trygvasson comes to such an agreement with the Earls of Orkney after **some** difficulties: one third of the islands go to Earl Brusi, one third to Earl **Thorfinn**, but the third part, which had belonged to Earl Einar, now stays with King Olaf in payment for his retainer and close companion Eyvind Aurochs-Horn.⁵⁷ Einar had been killed by Thorkel Amundason who realizes that this settlement may not be entirely satisfactory to Earl Brusi. Thorkel goes to Brusi to ask him to settle the differences between them. Earl Brusi demands Thorkel’s service: “you come with me to Orkney, stay with me, and never leave me without my permission. You’ll be duty bound to defend my realm and do whatever I wish to be done, for as long as we both **live**.”⁵⁸ Marriage also could be used as compensation. King **Magnus** gives Earl Erlend’s daughter Gunnhild to Kol, as a compensation for the death of his father. Money is used in the traditional way in this saga, too: when the King awards compensation for the killing of Einar, the sum is the

same as that for three landed-men, but Einar's own offenses allow a one-third remittance of the payment.⁵⁹

In the Vatnsdale Saga, Thorstein kills the highwayman Jokul, but since Jokul could have killed him, too, he agrees to return to Jokul's family with news of the death. Following Jokul's advice, Thorstein approaches the mother Vigdis. After recognizing the token ring, she agrees to support Thorstein's plea for life with her husband Ingimund. She tells Ingimund that their son gave Thorstein peace and pardoned his offenses, even suggesting that Thorstein might be a suitable husband for their daughter Thordis. Ingimund notes that she has spoken long and wants to know why he should honor the man who slew his son, saying that that man deserves death rather than a friendly return. Vigdis convinces Ingimund to honor their dead son's word because Ingimund is old and needs someone to take his place. When Thorstein comes before Ingimund, the young man offers the father selfdoom, that is to name his own recompense for the death of his son Jokul. But Thorstein reminds the earl that many great lords grant men life who yield themselves of their own free will. Ingimund replies "I like the look of you enough to spare your life . . . and the properest amends for my son will be that you should come instead of him, if you are content to make your home with me."⁶⁰ Thorstein agrees to stay there and eventually marries the daughter.

In "Thorstein the White's Saga," Thorstein the Fair goes to Thorstein the White to offer compensation for the death of his son. The old man refuses money compensation, saying that he will not carry his son in his purse. In a touching scene, Thorstein the Fair has put his head in the blind old man's lap. The grieving father says "I shall not have this head of yours struck from your shoulders. Ears are most becoming where they have grown. But I shall make the agreement between us, that you shall fare here to Temple as a **comfort** to me with all you have, and be here as long as I wish; but do you sell your ship? Thorstein the Fair then remains there, marries, and lives there for eight years "as a son". Finally, Thorstein the White notes that Einar's son will be eighteen years old and ready for blood

revenge, and advises Thorstein the Fair to take his **family** and move to Norway.

In Appendix A to The Lord of the Rings, **Eorl** of Rohan uses this service alternative as **weregild** against the horse that threw and killed his father. Instead of shooting the horse with an arrow, he calls to the horse. When it stands before him, he said, "**Felaróf** I **name** you. You loved your freedom, and I do not blame you for that. -But now you owe 'me **a** great weregild, and you shall surrender your freedom to me until your life's end" (III, 346). For the injury to his family, **Eorl** extracts service rather than money. The traditions of revenge are rich and powerful in the sagas. Yet, Tolkien manages to give them fresh and relevant representation in his own work, even though his theme of good and evil is played out on a more cosmic scale than that of his antecedents.

Thus, the ethical code of the creatures of Middle-earth is like that of the Norsemen. The Christian virtues of humility, meekness, forgiveness have not yet arrived. The emphasis is on **comitatus**, loyalty to friends and to kin. To be virtuous is to live according to the code; the end of life is not the glory of the Heavenly City but the knowledge that honor has not been abandoned. Here again an understanding of the traditions from which the customs of Middle-earth are constructed helps **the** reader to a correct interpretation of Tolkien's three-part work.

NOTES

1. J. S. Ryan, "German Mythology Applied: The Extension of the Ritual Folk-Memory," Folklore 77, (1960): 45-49. Ryan lists the following themes in The Hobbit: **comitatus**, heroic last stand, love of treasure, and the special relationship between a warrior and his sister's son. From The Lord of the Rings, Ryan notes the **unconsolable** grief of the leader at the death of his heir, hospitality, false **counsellors**, the doomed hero's courage, the call to duty, and the council of war. My own arrangement of materials makes it difficult for me to cross index Ryan's comments and note their likeness to my own ideas in the proper places. I believe that he is wrong when he says that final failure under the shadow of fate is not true for Frodo because although the quest is achieved, Frodo does not throw the Ring into Mount Doom. At the critical moment, Frodo fails because he wishes to keep the Ring. He says "I have come . . . But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!" And suddenly, as he set it on his finger, he vanished from Sam's sight" (III, 223). This opinion is discussed further in the next chapter.

2. Norman Davis, "Man Monsters at Sutton Hoo," English and Medieval Studies Presented to J.R.R. Tolkien on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday, ed. Norman Davis and C. L. Wrenn (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962), 32 1-29. If Norman Davis can find a parallel between a Sutton Hoo plaque of a man with rampant animals on either side with mouths close to his head and a similar figure on a New Zealand **Moorea** caning, then Bilbo and Gollum's riddle game must have innumerable but perhaps meaningless parallels in cultures Tolkien was not even aware of. Here are discussed only those he probably knew well.

3. Hervarar saga ok Heidreks konungs, The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise, trans. Christopher Tolkien (London: Nelson, 1960), 32. Christopher

Tolkien notes in the introduction that this riddle contest is the only one in the sagas while Old English literature has many riddles.

4. King Heidrek, 34.

5. King Heidrek, 36.

6. The Saga of King Heidrek, 36.

7. The Saga of King Heidrek, 44.

8. Ruth M. Noel, The Mythology of Middle-earth (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), 33.

9. William Howard Green, "The Hobbit and Other Fiction by J.R.R. Tolkien: Their Roots in Medieval Heroic Literature and Language," (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1970), 112-18.

10. Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien: A Biography (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), 100-01.

11. J.R.R. Tolkien, The Return of the Shadow, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 173. (All references are to this edition and are in the text as Shadow).

12. Ralph W. W. Elliot, Runes: An Introduction (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 7.

13. Runes: An Introduction, 11.

14. Kevin Crossley-Holland, The Norse Myths (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 188.

15. Runes: An Introduction, 1.

16. Sandra L. Miesel, "Some Motifs and Sources for Lord of the Rings [sic]," Riverside Quarterly III (1968): 125.

For instance, Sandra L. Miesel says the following:

"The geography of Middle Earth's [sic] principal continent is vaguely like that of Western Europe and the philological and cultural relationships between its races are patterned on those of the British Isles. Schematically: the elves are the Romans, the Dunedain [sic] the Romanised Celts, the Northerners the non-Romanised Celts, and the Wild Men the pre-Celtic aborigines, the Rohirrim the Anglo-Saxons (by extension, the other Nordic elements as well), and the hobbits late mediaeval English yeomen. The last correlation is re-enforced by the dating of the Shire Calendar." [125].

This statement is strangely illogical with its shifting time periods from the Romans in the first through fifth centuries A.D. to the Middle Ages while in Middle-earth the civilizations all exist at the same time. The statement is also unsupported.

In fact on the next page, Miesel contradicts herself: "In the most primitive Norse myths, gods⁵ and other heroes came from Paradise beyond the sea and returned thence when their missions were accomplished. This recalls the elves' migrations. Also consider the eschato-logical similarities. At Ragnarok, evil would be defeated, but Asgard and the old order would perish. Only the gods' sons would survive to guide humanity into a new age." [126] First, Miesel flatly states that "the elves are the Romans," then she suggests that the elves' return from "Paradise" is like that of the Norse gods and heroes. Then, immediately following, she notes that "Tolkien's Undying Lands in the Western Sea resemble the Immortal Isles of Celtic fable." [127] In Miesel's words, the elves (Romans/Norse gods and heroes) come from

"Tolkien's Undying Lands in the Western Sea" (relationship to **Romans** unspecified / "Paradise" of the Norse gods and heroes / the Immortal Isles of Celtic fable). This tangle seems more than "vague."

Miesel's footnote five above only adds to the confusion, for "the gods." she refers to are "**Vanir**, or nature deities, not the later and more familiar Aesir-folk." In his volume of Norse mythology, Turville-Petre includes Freyr and **Freyja** in his lists of **Vanir**. The **main gods** of Norse mythology -- such as Othin, Thor, and Frey -- include both Vanir and Aesir. The "more familiar Aesir-folk" who survive the Ragnarsk include **Víthar**, **Váli**, **Móthi**, Magni, and Höth--all virtually unknown gods. [E.O.G. Turville- Petre. Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia. (New York, **1964**), **156-79, 275-85**] The death of all the well-known Norse gods must be seen as significant. The reader should not interpret the succession of the unknown children of the gods as a happy ending.

17. John Tinkler, "Old English in Rohan," Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre **Dame**: University of Notre Dame Press, **1968**), 164-69.

18. Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla: The History of the Kings of Norway, trans. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, **1964**), 149.

19. Heimskringla, 78.

20. Tolkien and the Critics, 164-69.

21. Egils saga Skallagrimssonar, Egil's Saga, trans. Gwyn Jones (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, **1960**), 110-40.

22. Heimskringla, 144-244, **100-42**.

23. Oddr Snorrason, munkr, Saga Oláf Tryggwason [sic] who Reigned over

Norway. A. D. 995 to A. D. 1000, trans. J. Sephton (London: D. Nutt, 1895), 70-71.

24. Faereyinga saga, The Tale of Thronð of Gate, trans. F. York Powell (London: D. Nutt, 1896), xxxvi.

25. Njals saga, Njál's saga, trans. Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Lee M. Hollander (New York: New York University Press, 1955), 174.

26. Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla, 11-13.

27. Volsunga saga, Volsunga Saga: The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs, trans. William Morris (New York: Collier, 1962), 20 1.

28. E.O.G. Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 271-73.

29. Humphrey Carpenter, The Inklings: C. S. Lewis. J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams and their Friends (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978), 146-47.

30. Carpenter, Rhys, Folk Tale. Fiction and Saga in the Homeric Epics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946), 136- 156.

31. Kormáks saga, The Saga of Kormak and the Sworn Brothers, trans. Lee M. Hollander (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 27.

32. King Heidrek, 14-16.

33. Grettis saga, The Saga of Grettir the Strong, trans. G.A. Hight, ed. Peter Foote (London: Dent, 1965), 44-45, 56. Ryan also notes this similarity.

- 34.** The Mythology of Middle-earth, 21-25. About Beowulf's descent, Noel remarks, "The whole sequence is impossible, even to the gushing of hot blood from the body of the long-dead Grendel . . . The same sense of unreality is present in Tolkien's descent sequences, as is the subsequent return to practical reality after the achievement of an important goal."
35. Færeyinga saga, The Faroe Islander's Saga, trans. George Johnston (Canada: Oberons, 1975), 25.
36. Heimskringla, 702-04.
37. Kormák's Saga, 105.
38. Eyrbyggja Saga, 56-57.
39. Gautrek's Saga and Other Medieval Tales, trans. Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards (New York: New York University Press, 1968), **36**.
40. "Saint Oláf's Saga," in Heimskringla, 327-30.
- 41.** The Laxdoela Saga, trans. A. Margaret Arent (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), xxxiii-xxxix.
- 42.** Laxdale Saga, xxxiii.
43. Laxdale Saga, xxxiii.
- 44.** Laxdale Saga, 80-84.
- 45.** Laxdale Saga, 87.
46. Tom Bums Haber, A Comparative Study of the "Beowulf" and the

"Aeneid" (1931; reprint, New York: Phaeton Press, 1968), 49.

47. Comparative Study, 50.

48. Laxdale Saga, xxxv.

49. Laxdale Saga, xxv.

50. Laxdale Saga, xxxvi

51. Laxdale Saga, 141.

52. Laxdale Saga, xxxvii.

53. Poetic Edda, trans. Lee Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), 20-21.

54. Njál's Saga, 197-98.

55. Njál's Saga, 103.

56. Njál's Saga, 225.

57. Orknevinga Saga: The History of the Earls of Orkney, trans. Hermann Palsson and Paul Edward (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1984), 47.

58. Orknevinga Saga, 48.

59. Orknevinga Saga, 48.

60. Vatnsdoela saga, The Vatnsdaler's Saga, trans. Gwyn Jones (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), 29.

61. “Thorstein the White’s Saga, in " Four Icelandic Sagas, trans. Gwyn Jones (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935), 7 1 .

CHAPTER EIGHT

“Charlemagne’s mother and the Archbishop were put into the Pot, in fact got into the soup . . . ” (“Fairy-Stories”, 30)

“Personalities”

The essence of the fate-ruled Norse ethical system of kinship, comitatus, and revenge is more usually practiced than preached. Personalities and actions supply a more accurate guide to its tenets than verbal doctrines. The characteristics of prominent men of Middle-earth provide a better indication of **the** relevance of Northern materials than a further cataloging of disembodied principles. Prominent characters with Old Norse analogs include 1) Beorn, 2) Denethor, 3) Boromir, 4) Faramir, 5) Aragorn, 6) **Théoden**, 7) **Éowyn**, and 8) Galadriel. Two kinds of comparisons appear; some characters resemble specific personages in Northern literature; others represent traditions.

Beorn

The shape-changer, who is bear by day and man by night or the reverse, is a common Norse folk tale figure. Variations include Bjorn [bear] in Hrólfr saga Kraka, Beowulf in the Old English poem, and **perhaps** even Odysseus in the Odyssey.¹ Frequently, the bear is under enchantment from a wicked stepmother, but Gandalf assures Bilbo that Beorn in The Hobbit is under no enchantment except his own. The Bjorns in the sagas were often berserkers, men who go into a fighting fury which makes them strong and insensitive to pain. Some may even have believed that they turned into
b e a r s . 2

Gandalf attributes to Beorn the berserker’s strength, gruff temperament, and inhospitable attitude. In The Hobbit during the Battle of the Five Armies, the berserk-fury seizes Beorn after he carries mortally-wounded **Thorin** to his tent: “Swiftly he returned and his wrath

was redoubled, so that nothing could withstand him, and **no** weapon seemed to bite upon him. He scattered the bodyguard, and pulled down Bolg himself and crushed him. Then dismay fell on the Goblins and they fled in all directions" (Hobbit, 302). Beorn displays both the animal ferocity of the fighting **berserker** in his fury, and at the same time a human tenderness in his **attendance on Thorin**. Beorn even grows drowsy in the evening like Kveldulf, a wolf skin-changer in Egil's Saga. Possibly, **Bodvar Biarki**, a warrior of the Danish king **Hrólf Kraki**, may have been a model for Beorn. Bodvar himself apparently remained at home, seemingly asleep while his bear-spirit fought the enemy.³

Green suggests an intriguing parallel from the Heimskringla. **Astrid** and her companions, **clad** in shabby clothing for concealment, flee from a troop of armed men across Skon. They seek lodging in a large mansion with a rich but inhospitable bonder (farmer) called Biom Edderquise. Both Skon and the dwarfs' location are east of the mountains; goblins pursue the flying troop until they reach a "wide hall" to beg for lodging; and Bilbo's consciousness of his "many missing buttons" may reflect the mean clothing of **Astrid's** troop. Green also notices that Beorn's bee-keeping recalls the eminent Beowulf editor **Klaeber's** derivations of **Beowulf's** name from bee-wolf, meaning the bear as the wolf creature who likes honey.⁴

Furthermore, Tolkien has Beorn living in an Icelandic farmhouse -- "a wide hall with a fire-place in the middle." (Hobbit, 129). The resemblance between Tolkien's drawing of the **hall** in the hardback edition of The Hobbit and the illustration of the interior of a Norse hall in E.V. Gordon's Introduction to Old Norse, which Tolkien helped prepare for the press, is strong.⁵ Beorn serves mead on a table made of boards set up on trestles and his quarters consist of a "raised platform between the pillars and the **outer wall**" just like the ones in Grettir the Strong and in Beowulf (Hobbit, 138).

The owner of this -wooden house "was clothed in a tunic of wool down to his knees, and was leaning on a large axe" (Hobbit, 128). All the **brightly** clothed, jeweled Vikings who sailed off to Byzantium went to get money to buy a farm. On these farms, they worked beside their slaves and free

servants in plain homespun. On special occasions, they opened their large trunks and took out their brightly- colored silken clothing. They wore these to feasts, to the **Althing** and at the times when they went out to **kill** their enemies. In The Hobbit, Tolkien describes Beorn as “a huge man with a thick black beard and hair, and great bare. arms and legs with knotted muscles.” (Hobbit, 128). He is like Halfdan the Black, who was “large and strong, and he had black hair.” The love of animals, especially horses, was also typical of Norsemen. Hrafnkel, for instance, loves his horse **Freyfaxi** so much that he killed a servant who stole a forbidden ride on the horse.⁶

Beorn’s **ending** is that most often ascribed to saga heroes -- his descendants were numerous and worthy: “Beorn indeed became a great chief afterwards in those regions and ruled a wide land between the mountains and the wood; and it is said that for many generations the men of his line had the power of taking bear’s shape, and some were grim men and bad, but most were in heart like Beorn, if less in size and strength.” (Hobbit, 307). In characteristics, Beorn’s famous descendants would include not only his son Grimbeorn but also literary and historical characters from the evil berserker Bjorn of Gisli Saga to Bjarni (Old Norse bjarni, “bear”) Herjolfsson, a real Norseman who sailed up and down the coast of America in 986 A.D. but did not come ashore.⁷

As discussed in Chapter 6, the encounter with a gruff host in a well-kept house is a common occurrence in Northern literature. Tolkien’s technique of presenting the unwelcome dwarves to Beorn resembles⁵ the one from Gautrek’s Saga. Beorn serves as an additional helper or companion for Bilbo in The Hobbit. He provides shelter, protection through his land, and unexpectedly strong aid in the final battle. Tolkien liked the effect of the encounter with Beorn so much that he repeated it in The Lord of the Rings with Tom Bombadil, a character he had already created in another format. The influence of the berserker tradition on the creation of Beorn is clear. ✓

Denethor

Just as Beorn is a part of a tradition of berserkers in Northern literature, so to is Denethor in a tradition of men who commit suicide rather than live with the shame of being unable to revenge the death of a son or close friend. Noel draws an extended parallel between Denethor and the Greek hero Theseus's father who commits suicide because his son does not remember to change his sails from black to white to indicate his victory over the Cretan Minotaur.⁸ This analogy does little to explain Denethor's character. In The Song of Middle-earth, David Harvey's comparison between Denethor and Théoden as declining King of the Wood and recovering Fisher King provides more insight but is generic rather than specific.⁹

Cases of men who chose to die rather than live with disgrace are numerous in the sagas. For instance, in the Eyrbyggja Saga, the villainous Thorolf challenges Ulfar to a duel for his lands. Since Ulfar is old and childless, "Ulfar chose to die rather than let himself be bullied by Thorolf."¹⁰ In the fight that follows, Ulfar does die, but Thorolf is wounded in the leg, thereby gaining his sobriquet Twist-foot. In the Vatnsdale Saga, after the noble chieftain Ingimund has been killed, the news comes to his friend Eyvind Sorkvir and to their mutual friend Gaut. Eyvind and Gaut then fall on their swords. These two men partake of the pagan philosophy that a man who is no longer strong enough to avenge the death of his friend should not linger in disgrace.¹¹ The conventional behavior for a bereaved Norseman was to shut himself in his bedcloset to die of grief. For example, when Egil's favorite son drowns, Egil locks himself in his bedcloset and refuses food until his daughter convinces him that he must write a proper elegy for his son.¹² When King Harold has Aki slain, his brother Palnir "was so shaken that he took to his bed, for he saw no chance of revenge against the man he had to deal with, that is the king himself."¹³ Practice of the ethical system of revenge often resulted in despair for the aging warrior:

The Beowulf poet-chronicles the father's grief for his dead son in a beautifully-written passage in the poem. The poet tells the story of Hrethel, whose son Haethcyn killed his other son Herebeald.

So it is sad for an old man to endure that his son should ride young on the gallows. Then he may speak a story, a **sorrowful** song, when his son hangs for the joy of the raven, and, old in years and knowing, he can find no help for him. Always with every morning he is reminded of his son's journey elsewhere. He cares not to wait for another heir in his hall, when the first through death's force has come to the end of his deeds. Sorrowful he sees in his son's dwelling the empty wine-hall, the windy resting place without joy -- the riders sleep, the warriors in the grave. There is no sound of the harp, no joy in the **dwelling**, as there was of old. Then he goes to his couch, sings a song of sorrow, one alone for one gone. To him all too wide has seemed the land and the dwelling (Beowulf 43).

The scenes **among** Denethor, Gandalf, and **Pippin** contain much of the same emotional content. Like Hrethel, Denethor has two sons -- Boromir is dead and **Faramir** dying. Both sit in long, empty halls, silent, **blasted**. Denethor, bereft of warriors, takes **Pippin** into his service, asking if he can sing. **Pippin** replies 'Well, yes, well enough for my own people. But we have no songs fit for great **halls and** evil times" (III, 80). Yet, Tolkien takes this scene beyond that in Beowulf, for when Denethor goes to his couch -- the couch is a burning pyre.

In addition to **being** in the tradition of the bereaved norseman, Denethor has a specific analog in the sagas -- the character of **Njál** from Njál's Saga. Although the total impression of Denethor, the Steward of Gondor, is unlike that of **Njál**, Denethor has many of **Njál's** characteristics and problems. For example, both are noble-looking men, and foresight is a quality mentioned immediately about both of them. The saga writer describes **Njál**: "**Njál** was a wealthy man and handsome, except that he grew no beard. He was so well versed in the law that his equal could not be found

anywhere. He was learned and had the gift of second sight. He was benevolent and generous in word and deed, and everything which he advised turned out for the best. He was gentle and noble-minded, and helped all people who came to him with their **problems**."¹⁴ Throughout Njáls Saga, Njál counsels his friends toward moderate and sensible behavior. His friendship with Gunnar is constant and noble.

Denethor is also noble looking: "The old man looked up. Pippin saw his **carven** face with its proud bones and skin like ivory, and the long curved nose between the dark deep eyes; and he was reminded not so much of Boromir as of Aragorn" (III, 27). This association with Aragorn is particularly ironic. In The Unfinished Tales and in Appendix A of The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien describes an earlier time in Gondor. Then, Denethor's supremacy as a **man** is only challenged by the presence of the mysterious Thorongil who turns out to be Aragorn. Tolkien says, "Therefore later, when all was made clear, many believed that Denethor, who was subtle in mind and looked further and deeper than other men of his day, had discovered who this stranger Thorongil in truth was, and suspected that he and Mithrandir designed to supplant him" (111,336). The final test of Denethor's nobility occurs when Aragorn comes back without his disguise. The return of the King would mean that Denethor must **surrender much of his power** as ruling steward, but his despair at this test of character drives Denethor to his death. After Pippin's interview with Denethor, Gandalf explains that Denethor has foresight: "He **has** long sight. He can perceive, if he bends his will thither, much of what is passing in the minds of men, even of those that dwell far off. It is difficult to deceive him, and dangerous to try" (III, 31-32). In spite of their gifts, both of these super-sighted men, Denethor and Njál, follow a fated path. Each knows or thinks he knows what the outcome will be and each makes a wrong decision based on that knowledge.

Each of them loses his favorite son. Denethor's son Boromir dies defending Pippin and Merry against orcs. Njál's sons and the slanderous Mord, who lies about Hoskuld to trick Njál's oldest son Skarphedin into the attack, kill Njál's foster son Hoskuld. Njál, utterly distressed by the news of

Hoskuld's death, says, "Most distressing tidings these are, and harrowing for me to hear . . . for I can truthfully say that I am so saddened that I would prefer to have lost two of my sons and have Hoskuld still **alive!**"¹⁵ Afterward, Njál prophesies that he, his wife **Bergthóra**, and all their sons will die as a result of this act, and they do. Likewise, Denethor, who mourns Boromir extravagantly, accuses his son Faramir of duplicity. Faramir asks, "Do you wish then . . . that our places had been exchanged?+" And Denethor replies, "Yes, I wish that indeed . . . For Boromir was loyal to me **and** no wizard's pupil. He would have remembered his father's need,, and would not have squandered what fortune gave. He would have brought me a mighty gift [the Ring]" (III, 86). Denethor resents Faramir because Gandalf has been as a foster father to him and loves him **as Njál loves Hoskuld**. Notes in The Lost Road and Other Writings indicate that Tolkien had a continuing fascination with the father-son relationship.¹⁶

Both men complain that their sons do not follow their advice any longer. When the sons of Njál are getting ready to meet Mord and kill Hoskuld, **Bergthóra** asks Njál what they have been talking about. Njál answers bitterly, "I am not in their plans . . . In the past I was rarely kept out when something good was being **considered!**"¹⁷ Likewise, when Faramir reports on his meeting with Frodo and Sam on Gondor's border, he asks his father if he has done ill to let the Ringbearer go into Mordor. Denethor screanss, "Ill? . . . Why do you ask? The men were under your command. Or do you ask for my judgement on all your deeds? Your bearing is lowly in my presence, yet it is long now since you turned from your own way at my counsel. See, you have spoken skillfully, **as ever**; but I, have I not seen your eye **fixed** on Mithrandir, seeking whether you said well or too much? He has long had your heart in his keeping++ (III, 85). Both fathers resent their sons' independence of action and both complain that they are not consulted when plans are being made. Faramir's allegiance to Gandalf as his spiritual foster father parallels the natural love of Njál for his spiritual son Hoskuld, who, like Njál, is adept at the law.

However, after the Ringwraiths wound Faramir and after Denethor has

seen the destruction of Gondor in the **Palantír**, the old steward despairs. He tries to convince Gandalf and **Pippin** that the Rohirrim will not come and that Sauron must triumph. Denethor even despairs of his son's life and of his noble house's end. Denethor does not want to mourn or to die slowly in the tradition of **some** bereaved fathers. His despair leads him to a special bed -- a funeral pyre: "Better to bum sooner than late, for bum we must. Go back to your bonfires. And I? I will go now to my pyre. To my pyre! No tomb for Denethor and Faramir. No tomb! No long slow sleep of death embalmed. We will burn like heathen kings before ever a ship sailed hither from the West. The West has failed. Go back and burn!" (III, 98-99). Since Denethor also despairs for **Faramir's** life, Denethor has his wounded son brought to the tomb, and "at a sign from Denethor, they laid Faramir and his father side by side and covered them with one covering . . ." (III, 100). Other aspects of this funeral pyre have been discussed in Chapter 7, but the scene also has a specific parallel in **Njál's** story.

When Flosi and his band begin to bum **Njál's** house, Flosi begs **Njál** and **Bergthóra** to come out with the women and children. **Njál** refuses, "No, I will not come out, for I am an old man and little fit to avenge my sons, and I do not want to live in shame." Bergthóra refuses, too, "As a young woman I was married to **Njál** and vowed that one fate should befall us **both!**"¹⁸ Then the two of them go to their bed with a grandson who **Bergthóra** had promised would never **have** to leave her. The servant covers them, like Denethor and Faramir, with **one** cover: "Then **Njál** and **Bergthóra** lay down on the bedstead and laid the boy between them. They made the sign of the cross over themselves and the boy and commended their souls to God. These were the last words they were heard to say. The steward took the hide, spread it over them, and then went **out.**"¹⁹ These three members of **Njál's** family perish together in the way that Denethor intended for Faramir and himself to perish. ~ Like **Njál**, Denethor will not abide a life without honor: "I would have things as they were in all the days of my life . . . and in the days of my longfathers before me: to be the Lord of this City in peace, and leave my chair to a son after me, who would be his own master and no

wizard's pupil. But if doom denies this to me, then I will have naught: neither life diminished, nor love halved, nor honor abated!" (III, 130). Both men require honor to sustain life.

Denethor and **Njál** are overcome by their despair, which derives from false information. Denethor's incorrect view of the outcome of the war comes from his visions through a palantir under Sauron's control. **Njál's wrong information** comes from his prideful assessment of the intention of the burners. **Njál** believes that since Gunnar's attackers refused to lower themselves to the ignoble alternative of burning Gunnar's **house** to accomplish his death, the band attacking **Njál's** house will have the same standards. Although his son Skarphedin warns **Njál** that they will survive if they remain outside, **Njál** urges his sons to enter. In a fey mood, Skarphedin agrees and the tragedy begins. All except **Njál's** son-in-law Kari die.

The parallel between these two men definitely adds dimension to the character of Denethor. **Njál** is what Denethor might have been if Denethor had not had power 'or perhaps even if he had not come under Sauron's influence through the use of the palantir. Since the reader does not see Denethor until the death of Boromir and his despair for Gondor have made him mad, the reader has difficulty identifying with **Gandalf's** respect for him, but knowing **Njál's** courage, wisdom, and kindness adds scope to Denethor's personality.

The character of **Njál** in **Njál's Saga** is clearly a conscious source for Denethor. Tolkien found numerous occasions to borrow from the finest piece of Icelandic literature. Since the Coalbiter Club read all the major sagas, Tolkien quite likely had occasion to reread this masterpiece and discuss it with his colleagues in the years before he began work on The Lord of the **Rings**. The Coalbiter Club met during the years 1926 to early 1930s and The Lord of the **Rings** was composed between 1937 and 1954/55.²⁰ **Njál's Saga** is memorable, and someone like Tolkien who read it at least twice in the original language would continue to have a strong impression of its characters and actions.

Boromir

Boromir typifies the Old Norse heroes, many of whom also had fatal flaws. He has been described in the third chapter. His dark hair, if not typical, was at least common. **Kormák**, for example, "**was** dark-haired, with curls, and his skin was of a light color. He resembles his mother somewhat; he is big and strong and of an aggressive **disposition**,"²¹ **Thormód** of The Sworn Brothers* Saga is "of middle height and has black curly **hair**."²² What Boromir may lack of the typical blond Norse **image** in looks, he makes up in words. He expresses *comitatus*: "It is not the way of the Men of Minas Tirith to desert their friends at need" (I, 406). He boasts "and you will need my strength" (I, 406). , In fact, his belief in his **own strength**, in this case his ability to control the One Ring, brings him to threaten Frodo. He says that "True-hearted Men, they will not be corrupted. We of Minas Tirith have been staunch through long years of trial. We do not desire the power of wizard-lords, only strength to defend **ourselves**, strength in a just cause" (I, **414**). He is wrong, for his own father Denethor has already begun to succumb to Sauron's power through the palantir. In his pride, Boromir does not understand or acknowledge the power of Sauron and Sauron's Ring to corrupt. He breaks his own bond of *comitatus* when the Ring seduces him into trying to take it from Frodo by force.

Similarly, when **Kormák** has interrupted the witch **Thórdís's** magic ceremony, he swears that he does not need that magic to win in single combat. He praises his own power in a verse:

Ounces gave I on island
each time -- twice the beldam
bled the birds -- so that the
better I'd get of **Thorvard**:
blood there'll flow from blood -- let
be to offer such to
skald the matchless mead who

masters -- of two ganders.²³

In other words, he says that although he has had to buy himself off from the combat twice because of slight injuries, this time events will be different: The blood of his enemy Thorvard will take the 'place of the blood of the geese, which the witch has not finished sacrificing. **Kormák** falls at the end because he cannot control the magic of his giant opponent. Boromir falls by the temptation of the magic Ring and at the hands of the wizard Saruman's orc servants.

Boromir's count of dead enemies exceeds even that of **Njál's** friend, the famous hero Gunnar, who killed two and wounded eight when they attacked him in his house. Around Boromir were at least twenty slain **orcs**; his funeral befits his valor. Two alternatives are considered -- a barrow and a ship funeral. Barrows were customary for the chieftains of Iceland and for the rulers of Gondor. Ship funerals are recorded for the kings of the early heroic age in Scandinavia, Tolkien relates that Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas place Boromir on the craft with his weapons around him and cast loose the funeral boat to go on the bosom of the water to the Great Sea. Only the Beowulf poet's description of the ship burial of **Scyld** Scefmg is comparable:

There in the harbor stood the ring-prowed ship, ice-covered
and ready to sail, a prince's vessel. Then they laid down the
ruler they had loved, the ring-giver, in the hollow of the ship,
the glorious man beside the mast. There was brought great
store of treasure, wealth from lands far away. I have not heard of
a ship more splendidly furnished with war-weapons and
battle-dress, swords and mail-shirts. On his breast lay a great
many treasures that should voyage with him far out into the sea's
possessions. They -provided him with no lesser gifts, treasure of ..
the people, than those had done who at his beginning **first** sent
him forth on the waves, a child alone. Then also they set a
golden standard high over his head, let the water take him, gave

him to the sea. Sad was their spirit, mournful their mind. **Men** cannot truthfully say who received that cargo, neither **counsellors** in the hall nor warriors under the skies (Beowulf, 1-2).

Both Boromir and **Scyld Scefing** are placed in a waiting **craft** with jewels and weapons. In neither case does the reader know what the final resting place of the body is. Aragorn and Legolas sing a lay for the dead Boromir: Aragorn first addresses the West wind asking it for news of Boromir the Tall. Legolas then requests tidings of Boromir the Fair: Aragorn concludes then speaking to the North wind of Boromir the Bold, who has been placed on the breast of golden Rauras. The questions in the lay are reminiscent of the Ubi-sunt portions of the Old English poem "The Wanderer." The sense of loss and sadness of that poem also pervade this elegy. Tolkien lightens the mood somewhat and closes the incident of Boromir's death by having Gimli remark that they have left the East wind to him, and he will say naught of it. Aragorn replies that this is appropriate, for in Minas Tirith they endure the East Wind but do not ask its tidings (II, 20).

Boromir and Aragorn both suffer from a conflict of loyalties, a frequent motif in Norse literature. **Turville-Petre** in Origins of Icelandic Literature remarks that "poets were often inspired by conflict of **loyalty**."²⁴ With Boromir, the difficulty is between his love for father, brother, and people in Minas Tirith and his unspoken obligation to the Fellowship of the Ring. Likewise, in The Sworn Brothers Saga, **Thormóð** must kill his kinsman in order to avenge the life of his sworn brother.²⁵ Boromir's choice would have been for his family and people as his misguided attempt to take the Ring shows. Aragorn also must choose between Minas Tirith, the city of his inherited kingship, and his own obligation to the **Ringbearer's** task. Aragorn says that he would have gone with Frodo to the Mountain of Doom to fulfill the quest. But Frodo has saved Aragorn this difficult choice by leaving the company after Boromir's attempt to steal the Ring. Boromir is a difficult character to comprehend because we see so little of him. He arrives at the

Council of Elrond in Volume 1 Book 2, Chapter 2, and dies in defense of Merry and **Pippin** in Book 3, Chapter 1, less than 200 pages later. He offers a sharp contrast to Aragorn because of his much more evident pride, his boasting, and his proclivity for **aphorisms** about courage and duty. The reader is just beginning to dislike him a little when he dies heroically. His deathbed confession to Aragorn gains sympathy for him; subsequently, the reader's affection for Faramir extends to him. Boromir is clearly in the tradition of Norse heroes, but no specific analog presents itself, although the existence of a precise source might clarify his character.

Faramir

While **Njál** was a source for Denethor and the tradition of the **famed** Norse hero aided in the creation of Boromir, the character of Arnkel from the **Eyrbyggja Saga** may have been an influence on Tolkien's conception of Faramir. Gondor has the largest number of creatures, customs, and characters from Northern literature. It is only fitting that the family of ruling stewards should derive from the sagas.

When Arnkel is introduced into **Eyrbyggja Saga**, the sagawriter notes that he is a big strong fellow, clever at law, and very shrewd. He is also noted for his great-heartedness, his popularity, and his strength of character. His adventures are various: he defends his sister against charges of being a night witch, overcomes the witchcraft of **Katla** and her son Odd, and endures a curse that he will suffer more because of his father than Odd has because of his witch mother. Arnkel then advises Thorarin to go abroad to avoid further trouble over his illegitimate son. His adversary Snorri attacks and burns the ship; later killing a man who **tries to** get revenge for the burning. When his widow sends his head to his uncle Arnkel, he takes up a case for vengeance, but **finally** accepts the judgment of the arbitrators. Arnkel's father Thorolf Twist-foot begins to get more difficult in his old age. He steals all the hay from a jointly owned meadow and refuses to pay compensation for it. Arnkel pays for the hay, but later slaughters seven of his father's oxen to even things up. Thorolf then sends **his** slaves to bum

Ulfar in his farmhouse. When Arnkel sees the flames, he goes over, puts out the fire, and kills the slaves. Ulfar, who had previously been a slave of the Thorbrandssons, now deeds all his land to Arnkel. Thorolf demands compensation for his slain slaves, but Arnkel refuses to pay. Thorolf then asks Snorri, Arnkel's enemy, to take up the case, offering Snorri ownership of a prize piece of woodland. Snorri wins the lawsuit on a technicality and Arnkel pays compensation, although Thorolf is disgruntled over the smallness of the award. Tolkien was interested in such troublesome father-son relationships.

When Ulfar's brother dies, Ulfar claims his lands as next of kin and Arnkel supports him. Next Thorolf incites another of his slaves to attack and kill Ulfar. When Arnkel sees the slave running with the shield he had given Ulfar, he suspects what has happened. At Thorolfs instruction, another slave runs to the Thorbrandssons to suggest to them that they should claim their former slave's property. When the Thorbrandssons consult Snorri, he tells them that Arnkel is most likely to be able to keep what he has his hands on already. Subsequently, Thorolf tries to talk Arnkel into fighting with Snorri over the possession of the bartered woodlot, but Arnkel refuses. Thorolf dies that night in his high seat. His death is so ugly that the servants call Arnkel to deal with the body, which has to be taken out a hole knocked in the wall. Thorolfs ghost now makes so many disturbances that the farm is abandoned. Then the ghost begins to haunt over the entire district so that Arnkel has to remove the body. Arnkel now takes the timber that Snorri has cut from the woodlot. Snorri's slave Hauk has lunged at Arnkel in this process with the result that Arnkel kills him. One of Snorri's henchmen makes unsuccessful attempt on Arnkel's life. At a feast at Snorri's house, the men get to man matching with the result that Thorleif Kambi argues that Arnkel is the most outstanding man in the district. Snorri gives him an axe as a parting gift suggesting that it will not have a long enough handle to reach Arnkel's head. When Arnkel goes over to transport hay one night, the attack is mounted. Arnkel defends himself for a long time, but the slave he has sent to bring his men has not delivered the

message. So, Arnkel is slain there by the haystack. The saga author comments that “of all men in pagan times he was the most gifted. He was outstandingly shrewd in judgment, good-tempered, kind-hearted, brave, honest, and moderate. He came out on top in every law-suit. . . .”²⁶ The father-son relationship, the uneasy ghost, the man matching, and the hero’s death are all themes that Tolkien knew and employed in his works.

In The Lord of the Rings, Faramir shows many of the characteristics attributed to Arnkel. **Faramir** demonstrates his shrewdness in judgment when Frodo stands before him after the battle with ~~the~~ Southrons. Faramir quickly deduces that Frodo tells only part of the truth and begins to question him about several points -- what his role was in the company, why he left Boromir, where he was going, and what is the nature of Isildur’s bane. Faramir interrogates him closely about his relationship with Boromir and asks specifically if he was Boromir’s friend. Frodo, recalling that his last contact with Boromir was that man’s attempt to take the Ring, hesitates before he answers “yes”. Then Faramir, wondering if Frodo would be sorry to know of Boromir’s death, asks if the **hobbit** recalls any token characteristic of Boromir. Frodo takes heart, noticing “that Faramir, though he was much like his brother in looks, was a man less self-regarding, both sterner and wiser.” (II, 274). Faramir then relates the haunting tale of hearing the horn blow and seeing Boromir float past him down the river to the sea in a dream vision. Likewise, Faramir judges keenly that he has talked too freely and openly about a hidden matter and desists from his conversation about Isildur’s bane until he and Frodo are walking alone together. Then he is able to unravel almost all of the story, putting together **pieces** of his learning from Gandalf with old tales he has heard and read about Isildur.

Faramir is honest about his brother Boromir’s attributes and follies. He is also forthright about the place of Gondor **among** the men of Middle-earth. He **names** the High or the Men of the West; the Middle Peoples, the Men of Twilight; and the Wild people, the Men of Darkness. He tells Frodo and Sam that the Rohirrim have grown more like the men of

Gondor -- “enhanced in arts and gentleness” while the people of Gondor may no longer claim the title High. Faramir says, “We are become Middle Men, of the Twilight, but with memory of other things.” (II, 287) This assessment is not one that his brother Boromir or his father Denethor could have made.

Faramir shows his kindness in many ways. He treats the hobbits well, is thoughtful about their well-being in the matter of blindfolding them, and is solicitous about their comfort. Later, when the Warden has him incarcerated in the House of Healing, he demonstrates his kindness to the Lady **Éowyn**, telling her of her beauty and of the hope she gives him in a time of despair. She rebuffs him, calling herself a shieldmaiden with ungente hands. But he continues his kindness to her as their love becomes a healing bond. (III, 238-39).

Faramir has an opportunity to show his good temper in Henneth **Annûn**. When Frodo and **Sam** are telling Faramir about their experiences in **Lórien**, Sam rashly tells Faramir that Boromir has attempted to take the Ring from Frodo. Sam then implores Faramir not to take advantage of Frodo for his servant’s foibles. Before he understood the nature of the Ring, **Faramir** swore that he would not take the heirloom Isildur’s Bane. He repeats his vow: “We are truth-speakers, we men of Gondor. We boast . seldom, and then perform, or die in the attempt. *Not if I found it on the highway would I take it I said.*” (II, 289). Then he kindly comforts Sam with an assurance that it was fated to be so. In this scene, Tolkien joins Faramir with the two other characters who refuse the ring -- Gandalf and Galadriel.

In The Return of the King, brave **Faramir** narrowly escapes death as he races towards the walls of Minas **Tirith**. The **Nazgûl** sweeps to kills him, only to be foiled by Gandalf on Shadowfax. But his father Denethor still taunts him about the death of his brother Boromir, and at the Steward’s command **Faramir** bravely undertakes another trip beyond the walls to fight a hopeless action at the River ford. Like **Arnkel**, Faramir has a difficult father who does not always have his well-being at heart. From this expedition, the brave lord returns gravely wounded in the arms of his kinsman the Prince of

Dol Amroth. The **Nazgûl's** deadly dart has struck him while he held a mounted champion of **Harad** at bay (III, 94). The leader of many brave skirmishes against orcs and other enemies, Faramir narrowly escapes death when his father despairs and tries to have Faramir burned on a pyre with him. The value of the foster-father relationship emerges here: Faramir's foster father Gandalf saves him from their enemies only to have him almost killed by his natural father.

Faramir also shares Amkel's moderation. Before Sam's slip about the nature of Isildur's bane, Faramir reassures Frodo that **Faramir** will not ask to know more of the story than the hobbit is willing to tell. Faramir shows further moderation in the judgment of Gollum, who has broken Gondor's laws in his trespass into the pool before Henneth **Annûn**. The penalty for even looking at the pool is death, but Frodo pleads for Gollum's life, which Faramir spares on condition of Gollum's oath never to return or to guide any other to that place. Faramir also puts Frodo and all his companions under his protection and that of the shield of Gondor. Sam's judgment of Faramir must stand; Sam says, "You took the chance, sir, . . . and showed your quality: the very highest" (II, 290-91).

While the relationship between Faramir and his father Denethor is difficult like that between Arnkel and **Thorolf Twist-Foot**, the relative merits of the two brothers Faramir and Boromir must find its model in other sagas. The two brothers in **Hrolf Gautreksson** have a like configuration. The saga writer characterizes the older brother Ketil as being "boisterous, ambitious, impulsive, and full of drive and grit" while the younger Hrolf is "a man of few words, always honored his promises, and wasn't over-ambitious."²⁷ The saga writer notes that he would pay no attention to people's attempts to sway his opinions, **but** years later, after he had thought it out fully, he would raise the matter again. As is usual with persons dropped into Tolkien's cauldron, they do not come out as might be expected. Unlike Boromir, Ketil is a small man and not his father's favorite. When King Gautrek knows that he is to die, he asks his counselors to give the Kingdom to **Hrolf** rather than Ketil. And **again** unlike Boromir, who was wont to ask his father how long a

king could be absent before the Steward could ascend to the title, Ketil says that he isn't that keen to govern. Throughout the saga, Ketil is the urger of immoderate action while Hrolf weighs matters judiciously, practices moderation in all matters, and is a good-tempered, kind-hearted ruler.

The reader may wonder why Tolkien would base Denethor on **Njál** and not extend that relationship to include his sons. Certainly, **Njál's** oldest son Skarphedin is a worthy model; he is brave, clever, witty, and at the end of the story, fey. Yet, his favorite weapon is his axe Battle-Troll, while Boromir's is the sword. As discussed in Chapter 7, Skarphedin seems to have been an influence in the creation of the dwarf **Dain**. Following a **Njál** family pattern, Tolkien then might have used Hoskuld, **Njál's** foster son, as a model for Faramir. However, the foster father/son relationship here exists between Gandalf and Faramir. Gandalf twice saves his beloved pupil's life, and at the ending, Faramir receives rich rewards - the spare princess **Éowyn**, whom he loves, and his own land to hold for the king. He deserves this largess, for he has learned enough from his studies with Gandalf to forego any temptation to take the Ring, and he has fought bravely, been rebuked by his father, and fought again in a fey mood.

Aragorn

When Aragorn first enters the story, he is merely a weather-beaten ranger. In his biography of Tolkien, **Carpenter** alleges that when Tolkien introduced this character, he did not know who Aragorn was or that Aragorn was going to be the king.²⁸ The publication of the first draft in The Return of the Shadow now shows that the first conception of the character was as a hobbit named Trotter. In a letter to W.H. Auden, Tolkien admits "Strider sitting in the corner at the inn was a shock, and I had no more idea who he was than had Frodo" (**Letters**, 2 16). The rangers form a kind of Robin Hood group living in the wilderness protecting gentle people like the hobbits from the realities of Sauron's growing evil. They are noble men of the Dúnedain, whose descent appears in The Silmarillion.

Outlaws

The lives of the rangers are like those of some of the noble “outlaws” of Iceland. If the family of a man who has been killed refuses to take **weregild** or blood money for him, then the family could accuse the murderer at the **Althing**, the annual democratic assembly for legal matters in Iceland. The murderer could be given a sentence of “lesser outlawry”, which required him to leave the country for three years or of “greater outlawry”, which exiled him permanently. If the man convicted did not go into exile, then he could be killed by anyone without legal revenge or weregild. But the sentence of the **Althing** had no executive power. Thus, an outlaw could live in Iceland as long as no one wanted or was able to kill him.

Grettir the Strong lives in Iceland as an outlaw for nineteen years, and Gisli lives there for fourteen. During this time, the outlaw travels around the country staying with men who are friendly to **him** and strong enough to protect him from his enemies’ attacks. Grettir, Gisli, and other men whose enemies had been able to have them outlawed sometimes act as champions for their friends. Thus, Grettir fights **Glám** not because he has a particular interest in the ghost, but because he wants to help a farmer who has sheltered him in spite of his outlaw status. Similarly, Aragorn’s status, while he is living in Gondor as Thorongil, is like that of an outlaw. He has been outlawed from his legitimate kingship by the abuses of Sauron. He cannot be restored to his rightful legal status in Gondor until he has defeated his enemy Sauron and thus regained his crown.

Likewise, famous outlaws sometimes fought duels against berserkers and evil outlaws when the family challenged had no suitable adult male. The story of Grettir is not the story of an evil man but of a luckless man who gets pushed into untenable situations. The reader has an enormous liking for him and sees his tragedy as deriving as much from fate as **from** a flaw in his character. Vigfusson generalizes: “Bands of outlaws or broken men established themselves in the outskirts of the country, and lived by receiving and levying blackmail, very much in the fashion of Robin Hood and Rob Roy. There were single outlaws such as **Grette**, Gisle, **Grim**, who took to the wilds

in the old days . . ."²⁹ Thus, a group such as the rangers would have been possible within the Icelandic tradition.

Epithet

The name that Aragorn takes in connection with his duties as ranger is Strider. The name may have been suggested by Thrand the Strider of Eyrbyggja. The **sagawriter** describes Thrand the Strider as "the biggest and strongest of men, and the swiftest of foot." Not much is told of Thrand except that he is a great fighter and "a mighty man in his **hands**."³⁰ The epithet "strider" is appropriate for Aragorn, who has covered much of Middle-earth by foot in his task of protecting its inhabitants. This characteristic was apparently central to the hero, for Tolkien's earlier epithet for his brown hobbit equivalent was "**Trotter**."³¹

Symbols

As Strider moves toward taking his place as king, the symbols for the kingship relate him more closely to some possible Old Norse sources for his character. While Strider is in Rivendell, the sword **Andúril** is forged anew. When Sigmund of the Volsunga Saga dies, he gives his wife his broken sword telling her to save it for his unborn son: "Preserve also the shattered sword, from which a goodly one may be made anew, and it shall be called Gram, and our son shall bear it and achieve therewith great deeds, which shall never grow old, for his name shall live on while the world endures."³² What is prophesied for Sigmund also applies to Aragorn. Aragorn has the sword reforged, uses it to accomplish great **deeds**, and achieves everlasting glory for his name.

The white tree Nimrod, one of the symbols of Aragorn's kingship, also appears in the Volsunga saga: "It is said that King Volsung let build an excellent hall in such wise that a great oak stood in the midst of it, and the limbs of the tree with their fair blooms upon them reached out over the roof of the hall, and the trunk was **within**; and they called the tree **Branstock**."³³ The tree, the token of Aragorn's family, has died out in the courtyard. But

after Aragorn is crowned, Gandalf helps him find a sapling that had been planted on a hill long ago by his ancestor Isildur as told in the "**Akallabêth**". Even though Nimrod is white, **Tolkien's** description is much like that in the **Volsunga saga**: "And Aragorn planted the new tree in the court by the fountain, and **swiftly** and gladly it began to grow; and when the month of June entered in it was laden with blossoms" (III, 250). For the kings of Numenor the tree has been a symbol of their loyalty to the **Valar** and the values of the West. The evil King **Ar-Pharazôn**, at the urgings of Sauron, had burned the old tree.

Before the Kin-strife, the kings of Aragorn's line are called "Ship-kings." Like the Norse kings, Aragorn and the men of Dunedain are skilled sailors. The Haradrim, who long owned the ships, had manned them with chained slaves. Under Aragorn's command, free men wield the oars. The Norse custom was for the fighting men of the ship to do the rowing. The ships have black sails, and when they approach, Aragorn has his banner unfurled: "There flowered a White Tree, and that was for Condor: but Seven Stars were about **it, and** a high crown above it, the signs of Elendil that no lord had borne for years beyond count. And the stars flamed in the sunlight, for they were wrought of gems by **Arwen** daughter of **Elrond**; and the crown was bright in the morning, for it was wrought of mithril and gold" (III, **123**). The Norwegian ships of King **Óláf's** time were perhaps similar, and they, too, carried the king's banner in the forecastle.³⁴ The Northern kings and the protagonists of the Icelandic family sagas were all great sailors. Accounts of sea voyages, descriptions of ships, and battles at sea are common.

In the **Heimskringla**, the King often has the power to heal as Aragorn does in **The Lord of the Rings**. **Óláf Helga** can cure by the laying on of hands even before he is made a Saint. "He [King **Óláf Helga**] laid his hands on **Egil's** side where it hurt and said his prayers over it, and straight-way it stopped hurting. After that Egil recovered? King **Óláf** continues to heal after his death; his companion **Thórir** comes in contact with the King's blood, and wounds in his hands are healed. A blind man wipes his eyes with

blood from the cottage floor and receives his sight.³⁶ In Njál's saga, King Sigtrygg's blood heals the wound of a boy who was trying to protect the King.³⁷ And in the Volsunga saga, Sigmund sees two weasels fighting, "and one of them bit the other in the windpipe: then it ran into the woods and fetched a certain leaf and laid it over the sore, and straightway the other weasel sprang up whole and well. Sigmund went out and saw that a raven came flying with a leaf of that plant which it delivered to him. This he put upon Sinfjotli's sore, and straightway he sprang up whole, as though he had never been wounded? Likewise, Aragorn uses the leaf athelas, or kingsfoil, to heal Faramir, Éowyn, Frodo, and Sam.

Moreover, Aragorn's ride through the kingdom of the dead may be associated with the god Hermóth's ride to Hel to beg the goddess to return Balder to the gods. Balder, Odin's son, was killed by a piece of mistletoe, because his mother had neglected to beg the lowly mistletoe to swear never to harm him. Aragorn and his company do pass through dark deep dales like those rides into Hel: "and beyond, going steeply down, was a road between sheer cliffs, knife-edged against the sky far above. So deep and narrow was that chasm that the sky was dark, and in it small stars glinted" (III, 61). Ryan notes that Gimli's fall before the door recalls Hel's threshold, "the pit of stumbling."³⁹ As discussed in the third chapter, Aragorn shares the characteristic descent into the underworld with other heroes.

The traditional crown of the ruling house of Gondor also ties it to the Norse culture. Tolkien describes it: "It [the ancient crown of Gondor] was all white, and the wings at either side were wrought of pearl and silver in the likeness of the wings of a sea-bird, for it was the emblem of kings who came over the Sea; and seven gems of adamant were set in the circlet, and upon its summit was set a single jewel the light of which went up like a flame" (III, 245). In its height, the crown is reminiscent of the double crown for Upper and Lower Egypt used by the Pharaohs. Here elements of Egyptian civilization are combined with those of Norse civilization to produce tokens that enrich the imagery of Middle-earth. In The Letters, Tolkien answers a question about Middle-earth clothes which he likens to

those shown on the Bayeux tapestry and then about the winged crown of Gondor. Tolkien says "**The Númenóreans of Gondor were** proud, peculiar, and archaic, and I think are best pictured in (say) Egyptian terms. In many ways they resembled 'Egyptians' -- the **love** of, and power to construct, the gigantic and massive. And in their great interest in ancestry and in tombs. . . . I think the crown of Gondor (the **S.** Kingdom) was very tall, like that of Egypt, but with wings attached, **not set straight back but at an angle**" (Letters, 281). This statement about an Egyptian connection primarily concerns crowns and buildings. It does not seem to invite great expansion beyond those areas, for the final products **from** Tolkien's cauldron are greater than the sum of the ingredients put into the pot.

Although neither the Heimskringla nor the Prose Edda describes Odin's helmet, artists and writers have conceived it as a winged helmet. For instance, fellow fantasy writer and saga reader E.R. Eddison in his twentieth-century saga, Styrbiorn the Strong, has Styrbiorn bind raven's wings on his helm before he goes to his final combat with King Eric. Sigvaldi tells Styrbiorn: "Some men would say thou wast fey, Styrbiorn, seeing thee commit so proud a blasphemy as bear raven's rings on thy helm. For this is a thing **befitteth** no man, nor yet **the lesser Gods neither, but the All-Father alone**."⁴⁰ **Styrbiorn** is fey, for Odin calls him to Valhalla telling his **Valkyrie**: "Frontward are his wounds, and death availed but to tighten his grip on the sword-hilt. Be still and question not: I chose him first I loved the **best**."⁴¹ Therefore, the crown, like the other tokens of Aragorn's kingship, is some mixture of Egyptian and Norse in its style. In the query letter cited above, letter writer Rhoda **Beare** suggests a relationship to **Valkyrie** head gear; Tolkien does not refute this.

Furthermore, **Aragorn** rules two kingdoms, the Northern kingdom and Gondor, and several other lords are his men. The Kings of Norway at different times ruled Norway, Sweden, Denmark, England, the Orkneys, and the **Faeroe** Islands in various combinations. The pharaohs of Egypt also ruled an upper and a lower kingdom, but further correlations are difficult. Thus, judging from his accouterments, it seems probable that Aragorn and

his people are more closely related in their culture to the North Sea people than to some other culture.

Definition of a Hero

In The Mythology of Middle-earth, Ruth Noel applies a list of **twenty-two common** points constituting a definition of the hero to Aragorn. This list from Lord Raglan's The Hero has been constituted from the stories of Sigurd, King Arthur, Perseus, and Moses. In spite of Noel's allegation that most points fit, a close textual analysis shows that only about half do align.⁴² Since Sigurd, the hero of the Volsunga Saga, is the only Norse hero cited, he has been selected for further comparison. Raglan's list appears here with Aragorn and Sigurd's adherence to the points outlined.

NO 1. The hero's mother is a royal virgin.

Aragorn's mother Gilraen is the daughter of Dirhael, a descendant of the last Ardanar, the last King. Her claim to royalty seems attenuated: the birth is not the miraculous virgin birth common for heroes; Sigurd also has a mortal mother.

NO 2. His father is king and

Aragorn's father is a Chieftain of the **Dúnedain**; he has not been crowned King; the steward rules in Gondor and no one rules in the North. Sigurd's father is dead before his birth but was a ruling king.

NO 3. Often a near relative of his mother, and

Their common ancestor is fourteen times removed. No relationship between Sigurd's father and mother is noted.

NO 4. The circumstances on his conception are unusual, and

Although his mother marries young and the marriage does not last long because of his father's death, these circumstances are not like those of Sigurd. Sigurd's half brother **Sinfjotli's** conception involves a brother

begetting a child on his disguised sister but Sigurd is a normally conceived child, although his mother changes clothes with her maid to escape from the battlefield with the broken shards of the sword Gram. King Arthur likewise incestuously conceives a son on his sister.

NO 5. He is also reputed to be the son of a god.

Aragorn, like Beowulf, is a man and that is tragedy enough. Sigurd is also mortal and dies.

NO 6. At birth, an attempt is made usually by his father or maternal grandfather, to kill him, but

Sauron's generally enmity towards the Heirs of Isildur hardly qualifies here. Sigurd's mother escapes safely and her disguise is soon penetrated.

YES 7. He is spirited away, and

His mother Gilraen takes him to live in the house of Elrond because the orcs have killed his father. Sigurd lives with King Hjalprek.

YES 8. Reared by foster parents in a far country.

Elrond rears him in Rivendell, which is in the Northern part of his own kingdom. "Sigurd waxed in King Hjalprek's **house**."⁴³

YES 9. We are told nothing of his childhood, but

Until he is twenty years old and Elrond reveals his heritage, his story is unknown. Only a few episodes from Sigurd's youth are related.

YES 10. On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom.

After finding out his heritage, he goes into the wild and labors for thirty years as a Ranger in his Northern Kingdom and in Gondor and in Rohan as Thorongil. Sigurd reforges the sword and regains his kingdom.

YES 11. After a victory over the king and/or a giant, dragon or wild beast

Aragorn and his forces do triumph over Sauron, who is a king, a giant creature, and a beast in behavior. Sigurd chops his father's slayer in half.

YES 12. He marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor, and He marries Arwen Evenstar, the elven daughter of Elrond. Sigurd's marital problems form the central dilemma of the saga.

YES 13. Becomes king.

He assumes the winged crown of Gondor on May 1, 3019. Sigurd is a King, but not much is made of it.

NO 14. For a time rules uneventfully, and

There remains much to do in Middle-earth. He requires the assistance of Faramir and of the Prince of Dol Amroth. The great evil of Sauron cannot be mended so quickly. Sigurd's fate moves along quickly.

NO 15. Prescribes laws, but

Aragorn gives judgments when he becomes King, but he does not prescribe new laws, his duty is rather to restore old laws. Sigurd does not have much time for laws either.

NO 16. Later he loses favor with the gods and/or his subjects.

Aragorn rules successfully until his death. Sigurd continues in favor with everyone except Brynhild, her husband, and his brothers.

NO 17. Is driven from the throne and city, after which

King Elessar continues in his city on his throne. Sigurd also remains in place.

NO 18. He meets with a mysterious death.

The King, having lived a span thrice that of mortal men (from 1 March 2931 to 1 March F.A. 120 (Shire 1541)), goes into his family's vault and wills

himself to die. Certainly, this death, while not common, is not mysterious in the **same** way that Arthur's is. Guttorm slays Sigurd 'as he lies in his own bed.

NO 19. Often on top of a hill.

The House of Kings in the Silent Street in Minas **Tirith** is on a hill but not on a wild hill. Sigurd burns in a funeral pyre with **Guttorm**, Brynhild, and Sigurd's three year old son.

NO 20. His children, if any, do not succeed him.

He has several children. His son Eldarion "a man full-ripe for **kingship**" receives the winged crown of Condor and the **sceptre of Arnor** (III, 427). Brynhild has had his son slain.

NO 21. His body is not buried, but nevertheless

Technically, his body is not buried in a grave in the ground, but he lies with his ancestors in the manner prescribed. Sigurd goes to a pyre as Norse custom dictates.

YES 22. He has one or more holy sepulchers.

The beds of Merry and **Pippin** come to be beside that of the King; so that the three members of the Fellowship who do not go to the Grey Havens lie in solemnity together. None is reported for Sigurd.

This comparison shows that in seventeen out of **twenty-two** cases, Sigurd and Aragorn either fit or do not fit the prescription in the same way. Aragorn is more like Sigurd than he is like the other models for the list - Perseus, Moses, or King Arthur. Yet, Aragorn and Sigurd are really quite different. Tolkien admits using Sigurd as a model for his apprenticeship writing story about Turin. Sigurd's career lacks the major concerns of Aragorn's; Sigurd is hero but not king. Aragorn is more clearly King than hero, and that fact has important thematic implications. It would be easier

for the critic if Aragorn were more clearly Sigurd, Grettir, Olaf Trygvasson, Oláf Helgi, King Hrolf, or King Heidrek, but he is not. He is a much more sophisticated blend of many Northern heroes and kings than might be expected.

Some important differences revolve around his relationship with Elrond. Mixing Aragorn's fate with that of the departing elves gives him dimension, an unusual upbringing, a mini-quest to obtain the hand of his beloved, and a true test of his lady's love for him. With this, Tolkien casts Aragorn into his own tradition of famous heroes and lovers - Beren and Tinúviel and Idril and Tuor. This relationship also creates an unusual dramatic effect, for the unrequited love of Eowyn must now be considered. Tolkien resolves their situation much more happily than the Volsunga Saga author does, for Éowyn's marriage to Faramir is happier than Brynhild's to Gunnar. Another difference between Aragorn and the traditional myth-hero is that the reader observes him in a variety of roles: as a potential villain in the inn at Bree, as follower in a Gandalf-led expedition, as band leader, as lover, and only finally as warrior and king.

The difference between Aragorn and typical myth heroes becomes important in an attempt to understand the overall meaning of the work. If Aragorn is a hero of great mythic tradition, the hobbits and the other lesser creatures of the story may look to him to save them. They need not trouble themselves with their own trials of courage. Aragorn is heroic but not the sole hero of this work in the way that Sigurd or King Arthur is a lone protagonist in other literary pieces. Therefore, Tolkien requires the courageous behavior of all folk -- heroic and timid -- to fulfill the quest.

Theoden

Theoden was probably suggested by aging rulers in Northern literature, too, but he may have a more specific source in King Hrothgar in Beowulf. Both are kings with glorious pasts; both have succession problems - Theoden's son is dead; Hrothgar's are very young. A review of the arrival of the hero and his companions at the court shows the closeness of the analog.

In Beowulf, the coast guard asks Beowulf who he is. The guard maintains that he must know the leader's lineage before he will know whether the goodly-appearing men are legitimate visitors or spies. He wishes to know where they came from, too (Beowulf, 5). Likewise, in The Lord of the Rings, when Gandalf, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli approach King **Théoden's** court, the guard asks them who they are, strangely clad and riding horses that look like the horses of Rohan. The guard asks if Gandalf is not a wizard and accuses him of being a spy for Saruman (**II, 112-14**). When Gandalf and **Pippin** enter Minas Tirith, the guard recognizes Gandalf and comments on his knowledge of the passwords, but he wants to know who **Pippin** is and whether he is a dwarf from the mountains in the North. In the same way, the sea guard in Beowulf suspects that the party may contain spies.

Beowulf is invited to proceed to confer with Hrothgar himself. Members of the fellowship enter both King **Théoden** and the steward Denethor's council rooms without a friendly welcome. King **Théoden**, under the tutelage of the depraved Wormtongue, greets his guests most ungraciously, saying that they are unwelcome. Denethor angers Gandalf by talking exclusively to **Pippin** although Gandalf clearly knows more of importance.

Hrothgar's speech to Beowulf about his father is poignant: "I knew him when he was a boy. His father was called Ecgtheow: Hrethel of the Geats gave him his only daughter for his home" (Beowulf, 7). The aged ruler expresses joy at receiving the son of his old comrade. But the evils of Saruman have curtailed the courtesies in the courts of Middle-earth. Gandalf upbraids **Théoden** for not recognizing the stature of his guests, whose mighty weapons lie outside his doors. Denethor is equally rude to **Pippin** saying that he has no love for Halflings. The lack of courtesy in the King's hall is a sign of the growing evil of the times. Although both countries are besieged, **Gandalf's** annoyance with the treatment he and his fellow travelers receive indicates that the failure of courtesy signals a greater rottenness.

King Hrothgar invites Beowulf and his companions to a feast. **Beowulf's** men are seated at benches, the king takes his place, an embellished ale-cup passes, and a **scop** sings for their entertainment. The poet comments: "There was joy of brave men, no little company of Danes and Weather-Geats," a typical understatement of the hospitality the ruler provides for his visitors (Beowulf, 9). The members of Tolkien's fellowship do not get such good treatment. **Gandalf** brings **Théoden** back to his kingly duty and some measure of rationed courtesy; they eat a sparse meal at the **king's board** (II, 127). **Pippin** momentarily breaks through Denethor's despair by offering his service as **weregild** for Boromir's death. After Denethor has accepted **Pippin's** pledge, the Steward orders food, wine, and seats for his guests. Denethor, too, recalls that courteous behavior is an outward sign of an inward commitment to true values.

The aged ruler Hrothgar considers the hero to be divinely sent. Because Tolkien eschews worship and other evidences of religion in pre-Christian world of The Lord of the Rings, neither of his aged rulers makes such an assertion. Indeed, the arrival of **Aragorn**, **Gandalf**, **Legolas**, and **Gimli** in time to awaken **Théoden** to his duty is one of the many elements of chance which mitigate for the successful battle against Sauron. Here as elsewhere, Tolkien uses as much of any motif as suits his purpose.

At the end of the poem, King Beowulf reflects on his long rule: he thanks god for the treasures to help his people, bids a barrow be built as a beacon for sailors, and gives **Wiglaf** -- the last of his kin -- necklace, helmet, ring, and mail-shirt (Beowulf, 48-49). In The Lord of the Rings, **Théoden**, knowing that he will die once he has committed himself to battle, talks about his reign. He acknowledges his nephew **Éomer**, who under Wormtongue's influence has been banished, as his heir by calling him "son". He rejects the personal safety of staying behind in the hills; he knows that living unrevenged past the fall of his kin would be too sorrowful (III, 78). In The Hobbit, the aged dwarf ruler **Thorin** also philosophizes lying with many wounds on his deathbed. Like Beowulf, he leaves behind a mighty treasure. He wishes now to part in friendship with Bilbo. **Thorin** says, "If more of us

valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a better world" (Hobbit, 273). As **Wiglaf** buries the treasure with Beowulf, so Bard lays the Arkenstone on **Thorin's** breast deep beneath the **mountain**.

Tolkien's use of Beowulf as source here is complex; parts of the Beowulf description appear in The Hobbit and are not repeated in the later The Lord of the Rings. Although King Hrothgar's welcome of Beowulf is a courteous and sprightly one, he is not an effective ruler. He has lost the essential strength to combat Grendel his enemy; he sleeps in his bower with his wife rather than remaining to confront Grendel in the **hall**. In The Lord of the Rings, the evils of Theoden's court have been objectified into the character of Wormtongue; he is seen as the one sapping the King's vitality. When the King rallies himself enough to reject Wormtongue and recognize his true kin again, then he joins the other characters in the war against Sauron.

King Hrothgar dies leaving his kingdom under **Beowulf's** protection. **Théoden** fights again, regaining the honor of his youth, and achieving that glorious death in battle beloved of Northern peoples. He surpasses Hrothgar in his death as has been discussed in Chapter 7. **Théoden's** succession follows customs of Northern governance; his sister's son **Éomer** assumes the Kingship. Thus, **Théoden** is allowed to join the cavalcade of those who must contribute their courage to the battle against Sauron.

Éowyn

A common feature of heroic literature and The Lord of the Rings is the warrior maiden. Camilla in Aeneid and Britomart in The Faerie Queene are two examples from outside Northern literature. Virgil comments on Camilla's lack of household experience: "Hers were no woman's hands, attuned/ to distaff and wool."⁴⁴ **Éowyn** is equally unsuited for domesticity. When Faramir speaks to her about healing, she replies "Look to me not for healing! I am a **shieldmaiden** and my hand is ungentle" (II, 239). As warrior women, neither excels at the gentler household tasks. Camilla kills many Trojans in the Aeneid. Camilla reminds one of them that he dies by a woman's hand in the same way that **Éowyn** triumphantly laughs in the

Nazgûl's face that she is “no living man” but a woman (III, 116). Both also fight on foot: Camilla responds to a Trojan challenge by dismounting and running past her horse to engage in sword play. Eowyn’s horse has fallen beneath her. While Britomart of The Faerie Queene has been suggested as an English source for this behavior, her allegorical nature makes her rather too prudish and -didactic.⁴⁵ She marries her king while Eowyn does not.

In Ragnar Lodbrok, Queen Aslaug Sigurdsdottir might also be an analog, for she dresses in armor, calls herself Randolin, and leads an army to avenge her stepsons.⁴⁶ Even excluding the Valkyries, Erik Wahlgren in “The Maiden King in Iceland” has found the story of the martial maiden in three sagas of olden times and twelve lying sagas.⁴⁷ Of course, Tolkien knew most of these maidens. Brynhild differs from others in the Northern tradition in her attitude towards needlework. In the Volsunga Saga, she defines herself: “I am a shield-may, and wear helm on head even as the kings of war, and them full oft I help, neither is the battle become loathsome to me.”⁴⁸ She is a warrior woman, but she also is reputed to have more skill with handicraft than any other women. Her enemy Gudrun, the wife of Sigurd, who was once betrothed to Brynhild, turns out to be a doughty fighter, too. In a battle between her husband King Atli and her brothers, she puts on her mail coat, takes up her sword and fights with her kin. She accounts herself as bravely as any of the men. Like Brynhild, Gudrun does extensive needle work.

Hervör, King Heidrek’s mother, also becomes a shieldmaiden and leads a band of Vikings into battle.⁴⁹ One particular scene from King Heidrek seems to have gone into the cauldron. Hervör commands the plains from a stronghold: she and her foster-father Ormar defend the land against the Huns. The sagawriter reports “One morning at sunrise Hervör stood on a watchtower above the fortress-gate, and she saw a great cloud of dust from horses hooves rising southwards towards the fortress, which for a long time hid the sun.”⁵⁰ Through the dustcloud, she sees the brightly gleaming armor, shields, helmets, and corslets of a mighty Hun host coming to attack. When Eowyn, retained in the tower House of Healing, complains to her physician of her captivity, the warden refers her to Faramir. She tells him

that her window does not look eastward over the battlefield. Faramir agrees that she should have a window looking east and notes that he also wishes to watch the battle he cannot **join**. **Tolkien** says “But in the morning, as Faramir **came** from the Houses, he saw her, as she stood upon the walls: and she **was** clad in white, and gleamed in the sun” (III, 239). In both, a shieldmaiden stands in a tower and views a battlefield in the early sun.

A favorite shield maiden who may have contributed to **Éowyn's** character is Thombjorg, daughter of King Eirik of Sweden in Hrolf Gautreksson: a Viking Romance. King Hrolf has heard that she is a most outstanding woman but that she will not allow anyone to address her as a woman, that she is the sole ruler over one third of Sweden, keeping her own retainers and court there, and that she has killed and maimed several who tried to press their attentions on her. His brother Ketil predicts that “the more arrogance she shows, the harder her pride’s going to fall when the time comes? King Hrolfs first expedition against Thornbjorg ends in disaster for the hero. King Hrolf enters the hall with twelve brave men; he tells the King that he knows that she is the daughter, not the son of the Swedish King and that he has permission to ask for her hand in marriage. King **Thorberg** and her men grab weapons and attack Hrolfs party who barely get away even though King Hrolf himself kills twelve men in the hall.

King **Thorberg** decides to prevent further insults by strongly fortifying her kingdom with all kinds of devices and machinery. When Hrolf comes up against her again, he brings his brother Ketil and his blood brothers Ingjald and **Asmund** with him. They attack the fortifications unsuccessfully for a fortnight; then Hrolf starts his men to tunnelling through the wall under the protection of a well built platform. When King **Thorberg** learns of this, she runs into the woods, leaving all the precious goods and sumptuous feasts behind. But King Hrolf is not deceived by these baubles and follows the King’s escape route. Ketil manages to hit the Swedish king on the backside with’ the flat of his sword, for which he gets knocked head over heels. King Hrolf then offers the Swedish King the lives of all her men if she will lay down her weapons. He offers to let her father King Eirik make the

judgment between them. At that, the Swedish King declares Hrolf to be a shrewd and patient man and agrees to his terms. She reports to her father that she has been run out of the kingdom by strong fighting men and will now allow him to arrange her marriage. The King suggests that she give up fighting and take up feminine matters in her mother's boudoir, which she does. Many martial maidens dot the pages of Icelandic sagas, but Thornbjorg, who styles herself as King Thorberg and will allow no one even to refer to her with female pronouns, is one of the most interesting. The sagawriter comments: "She was the loveliest, most polished and courteous woman in the whole of Europe, intelligent, popular, eloquent, and the best of advisers, but imperious too."⁵² Her character must have been among those contributing to the creation of shieldmaiden Eowyn, a woman warrior who brings about the death of a Ringwraith.

Considering the number of martial maidens in Northern literature, it is fascinating that Tolkien limits himself to one., Galadriel might have played a greater role; he has prepared for that by defining her role towards the dwarves as being that of a commander. But renouncing the Ring is such a supreme act that further involvement would be anticlimactic. Arwen is really omitted in this aspect, being represented only by her needlework, something that many martial maidens abjure. Eowyn shares the thwarted love role with Brynhild, whose beloved Sigurd marries another woman. But Tolkien is most careful to demonstrate Aragorn's feelings towards Eowyn, and they are not romantic ones: he sorrows for her misplaced love. The substitution of Faramir is an appropriate one. Faramir wins his love himself, gains sufficient glory in battle, and attains a suitably high office. In addition, Faramir makes himself a major hero in the story by refusing to be tempted by the ring. Tolkien creates a needlework sampler of persons who fight courageously to destroy the ring: four hobbits (Frodo, Sam, Merry, Pippin), one Dwarf (Gimli), one -main elf (Legolas), two main men (Boromir and Faramir: the Prince of Dol Amroth is quite minor), one wizard, one uncrowned king, and one shieldmaiden. Towards the end, he had almost more characters than he could comfortably manipulate. Quite sensibly, he

saves **Arwen** for the ceremonies at the end.

Galadriel

Galadriel's tale is an unfinished one. While the stories of many characters in The Lord of the Rings have reached full development, Tolkien was still evolving Galadriel's nature and her adventures. In The Unfinished Tales, Christopher Tolkien notes that the story of Galadriel and Celeborn has more problems than any other story in the history of Middle-earth. He concludes that "the role and importance of Galadriel only emerged slowly, and that her story underwent continual **refashionings**." (Unfinished Tales, 228). Readers can only speculate on the variety of adventures that Tolkien might eventually have discovered for this fascinating elven woman.

Pieces of Galadriel's complex story occur in various works, most of them published after Tolkien's death. The Silmarillion mentions her only incidentally as she figures into stories dealing with the Maia and her mentor the elven Queen **Melien** and into tales about her brother King **Finrod Felagund**. The Unfinished Tales contains a section entitled "The History of Galadriel and Celeborn," in which Christopher Tolkien presents his father's latest work on her history. Christopher Tolkien also observes that the description of **Idril Celebrindal** serves as a prototype for Galadriel. In early version of "The Quenta" printed in The Shaping of Middle-earth, **J.R.R.** Tolkien describes Idril: "Very fair and tall was she, well nigh of warrior's stature, and her hair was a fountain of gold." (The Shaping of Middle-earth, 148). In The Lord of the Rings, Galadriel reigns over **Lórien**, assists the company in their quest, has the ruling ring offered to her, passes that test of temptation, and is allowed to end her exile in Middle-earth and sail for the Havens with the other heroes in the War of the Ring.

Similarly, the saga story of **Unn** the Deep-minded is a fragmented one. Unn's adventures occur in the Laxdale Saga, the Sturlunga Saga, and the Landnamabok. Unn has several characteristics which may have been drawn out of Tolkien's cauldron when he was preparing Galadriel's character. **Unn** the Deep-minded is the daughter of Ketil Flatnose, whose descendants

people the Laxdale Saga. Her son Thorstein has been so consistently successful in his raids on the **Scots** that he has made himself king over half of Scotland. His reign is, however, short-lived: the **Scots** betray and kill him. The news of her son's killing causes Unn to realize that she has little chance of maintaining her position in Scotland since her father, too, is dead, **but** Unn is a woman of action. She has a ship secretly built in the woods, **fills it** with her goods and all her living kinsmen, and sails away. People thought that her ability to salvage her retainers, her family, and her wealth from a hostile land showed what a paragon she was.⁵³ Unn sails her ship to the Faroes, where she stays for a time, and then to Iceland, where the group is shipwrecked. Unn goes with a party of twenty to visit her brother Helgi, who invites her to stay but with only ten retainers. Her retort is that she did not know what a petty person he was. Her brother Bjorn generously invites her to stay with him with her entire party. Unn settles and gives land to the nobles accompanying her and to her freed **bondmen** in return for their loyal service. She is a generous woman. At the end of her life, Unn arranges a marriage for her favorite grandson Olaf **Feilan**. She prepares a great feast and invites many guests. In front of the assembled company, she wills her homestead, stock, and stores to Olaf. The company comments on her dignity and her stately appearance: she begs them to continue their enjoyment of the feast while she herself retires to her bedcloset. The next morning Olaf finds her dead propped up in bed. The sagawriter comments “*Everyone thought it remarkable how Unn had kept her dignity up to the day of her death.”⁵⁴ The wedding feast now turns into Unn's funeral feast. She is laid in a ship and covered with a mound.

Galadriel shares several characteristics with Unn. Galadriel is also a paragon among women. In Appendix B to The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien calls her “greatest of Elven women.” (III, 363). In The Silmarillion, Tolkien designates her “the mightiest and fairest of all the Elves that remained in Middle-earth” (Silmarillion, 298). The name given to her by her mother is **Nerwen**, which means man-maiden. This name reflects her height and her prowess as a leader. In The Unfinished Tales, Tolkien records “she was

strong of body, mind, and will, a match for both the loremasters and the athletes of the Eldar in the days of their youth.” (Unfinished Tales, 229). In his last writings about her, Tolkien records “being brilliant in mind and swift in action she had early absorbed all of what she was capable of the teaching which the Valar thought fit to the Eldar, and she felt **confined in** the tutelage of **Aman**” (Unfinished Tales, 232) She has, therefore, asked permission to depart, but **Manwë** has neither forbidden her nor given her formal leave to go. Further, not all of Galadriel’s learning came to her in her youth, for she increases her lore and wisdom through study with Queen **Melían** in Nargothrond (Silmarillion, 115). Her wisdom has **practical** uses in Middle-earth; she has wished that Gandalf rather than Saruman should be the head of the White Council, but Gandalf refuses citing his mission’s preeminence over other duties. (Silmarillion, 300). Several mentions are made of Galadriel’s foresight; Unn’s sobriquet “Deep-minded” refers both to her intelligence and to her second sight.

Like Unn, Galadriel is a ship builder. While she is trying to decide whether to leave without explicit permission, she goes to Teleri where ships are available. There she meets the Telerian prince Celeborn; together they plan to build a ship to sail to Middle-earth. At that time, Melkor destroys the light of the Trees. Although Galadriel has no part in Fëanor’s revolt, she does sail without **leave from Manwë**. In this she violates the ban against departure and is forbidden to return. The outline “Concerning Galadriel and Celeborn” credits Galadriel with a sea-longing so strong that she decides to leave **Lórinand** to dwell near the sea as Unn does when she moves at Hvamm (Unfinished Tales, 240).

Galadriel’s reaction to **Fëanor’s** revolt against the Valar is like Unn the Deep-minded’s reaction to her son Thorstein’s defeat and death, Galadriel “yearned to see the wide unguarded lands [of Middle-earth] **and** to rule there a realm at her own will.” (Silmarillion, 84). Like Unn, Galadriel provides leadership, for the Noldor “led by Fingolfin and his sons, and by **Finrod** and Galadriel” . . . “dared to pass into the bitterest North: and finding no **other** way they endured at last the terror of the **Helcaraxë** and the cruel hills of ice.

Few of the deeds of the Noldor thereafter surpassed that desperate crossing in hardihood or woe" (Silmarillion, 90). Galadriel is farsighted in her understanding of the events to be in Middle-earth. She sees that Middle-earth could only be saved by an alliance of all peoples. She looks upon the dwarves as a commander would, perceiving them as the finest warriors to send against the Orcs (Unfinished Tales, 235).

Galadriel has two characteristics not shared with **UM** the Deep-minded: golden hair and pride. Galadriel's long golden hair, which is so extravagant in its color that it seems that the light of the Two Trees Laurelin and Telperion has been snared in it, does not derive from **UM**. Unn's hair does not bring the sagawriter to comment. Tolkien repeatedly mentions Galadriel's pride. She is described as being "proud, strong, and self-willed"; pride keeps her from returning to the west, and pride moves her to refuse the pardon (Unfinished Tales, 230). While some pride can be attributed to Unn, who refuses her brother's offer to take only ten of her retainers, that action may also be viewed as a political move to establish her own independence as an equal to her brothers. Pride is not an adjective that sagawriter uses to describe her.

Both of these characteristics may be derived from another saga heroine, Hallgerd from Níal's Saga. One of her most memorable characteristics is her hair which the sagawriter mentions as "long silken hair that fell to her waist," "lovely hair so long that it could veil her whole body," "hair hanging loose on either side of her bosom and tucked into her belt," and "her beautiful thick hair flowed down over her bosom."⁵⁵ Yet this distinguishing mark may have several other origins. In Gunnlaug's Saga, the two poets Gunnlaug and Hrafn both love the fair Helga, who is noted as "the loveliest woman there has ever been in Iceland." The sagawriter comments "Her hair was of such a length that it could cover her entirely and it was as fair as beaten gold."⁵⁶ -In Norse myth, the goddess Sif's golden hair is manufactured by that scheming god Loki to replace her real hair which "as she moved rippled and gleamed and changed from gold to gold like swaying corn."⁵⁷ Loki has shape-shifted himself, entered Sifs bedroom, and cut off

her hair while she slept. The hair Loki crafts for her takes root and grows like her own. Crossley-Holland categorizes **Sif's** hair as a fertility symbol. That attribute has not been transferred to Galadriel.

In the chapter "The Farewell to **Lórien**," Galadriel gives **Legolas** "a bow such as the Galadrim used, longer and stouter than **the bows** of Mirkwood, and strung with a string of elf-hair" (I, 391). The idea of using hair to sting a bow immediately recalls Njáls Saga's justly famous scene in which Gunnar defends himself against his enemies with his bow. After Thorbrand Thorleiksson cuts Gunnar's bowstring, Gunnar asks his wife, Hallgerd, for two strands of her hair to wind into a new bowstring. The proud Hallgerd reminds Gunnar of a slap he once gave her and refuses. Gunnar, who will not ask again, fights bravely until, overcome by weariness and many deep wounds, he dies.⁵⁸

But Tolkien uses more than the hair bowstring from the scene. When Galadriel tells the dwarf to choose a gift, he begs for one strand of her golden hair. Both Galadriel and Gunnar's wife Hallgerd are extremely beautiful and have luxuriant hair, but the resemblance ends there. Galadriel graciously unbraids her hair and gives **Gimli** three strands (I, 392). This gift's import increases because **Fëanor** had begged Galadriel three times for a tress of her hair, and she has refused. Fëanor is the insurgent elf whose rebellion instigates the Kinslaying and the banishment to Middle-earth; The two were unfriends (Unfinished Tales, 230). Although the action of asking a lady for a lock of hair has a different result, the **ideas** of a hair bowstring and a request for a lady's hair have a source in Njáls Saga.

Another scene from the family sagas seems relevant to the elf-lady, Galadriel. One winter, Viga-Glum has a dream: "He thought he saw a woman going out over the district, and she moved toward Thverar, and she was so big that her shoulders reached up to the mountains on both sides. And he thought to go from the fence to meet her and bid her come to him, and afterwards he awakened? This woman is Glum's guardian spirit, who later forsakes him. A little imagination transforms this dream into the scene between Frodo and Galadriel. "She stood before Frodo seeming now tall

beyond measurement, and beautiful beyond enduring, terrible and worshipful. Then she let her hand fall, and the light faded, and suddenly she laughed again, and lo! she was shrunken: a slender elf-woman, clad in simple white, whose gentle voice as soft and sad" (I, 381). Galadriel serves as a kind of guardian spirit for Frodo, too. She encourages him and provides the vial which lights his way through **Shelob's** subterranean areas. Although many characters shrink and grow tall, the two scenes seem to come from the same pot.

Glum identifies his **dream** girl as hamingja, which is usually a female fetch, in this case the guardian spirit of his grandfather who has just died in Norway. In the poem, she is also called a dis, which was discussed in connection with the dwarves. **Turville-Petre** translates the verse Glum speaks in his dream of the woman as follows: "I saw a woman spirit of towering stature, a goddess of the head-dress, walk hither to **Eyjaforor**, with a helmet on her head. So that in my dream the battle-goddess seemed to stand beside the hills, **warrior**."⁶⁰ Both accounts include a supernatural woman who appears to be quite tall, and in both the woman's appearance is an illusion.

Hallgerd of Níál's Saga lends other attributes to Galadriel as well. Hallgerd is a proud woman, so **proud** that she has a servant steal food so that she will not be embarrassed by a **poortable**. When Gunnar finds out, he slaps her, gaining her undying enmity. Hallgerd's pride also leads her into a battle with **Bergthóra** over who will sit at the high table. This feud results in the death of several men as discussed earlier. Galadriel's pride results in a long exile for her from the West. Although forgiveness is offered, she does not accept it until she believes she has earned it through her rejection of the Ring. Both women are also beautiful with long, thick hair and sharp tongues.

In The Letters, Tolkien discusses Galadriel's origins and nature several times. In a 1973 letter to Mrs. Catherine **Findlay**, Tolkien explains that Galadriel's name means "Maiden crowned with gleaming hair." She was given the name in her youth because she had long hair which "glistened like gold but was also shot with silver." This, she bound up as a crown when her

Amazon disposition engaged her in athletic feats (Letters, 428). In 1953, Robert Murray commented on the order of grace and compared the image of Galadriel to that of the Virgin Mary. While Tolkien acknowledges Murray's reference to the order of Grace and Tolkien's own devotion to Our Lady, 'he does not comment on the parallel (Letters, 431). In a 1971 letter to Mrs. Ruth Austin, Tolkien is more forthright about the relationship to Mary: . "I **think** it is true that I owe much of this character to christian and Catholic teaching and imagination about Mary, but actually Galadriel was a penitent; in her youth a leader of the rebellion against the **Valar** (the angelic guardians). At the end of the First Age, she proudly refused forgiveness or permission to return. She was pardoned because of her resistance to the final and overwhelming temptation to **take** the Ring for herself" (Letters, 407). Clearly, when this statement was written her story had not yet reached its next development in his mind, for two and a half years later, Tolkien, writing to Lord Halsbury, says "Galadriel was 'unstained': she had committed no evil **deeds**. She was an enemy of **Fëanor**. She did not reach Middle-earth with the other Noldor, but independently. Her reasons for desiring to go to Middle-earth were legitimate, and she would have been permitted to depart, but for the misfortune that before she set out the revolt of **Fëanor** broke out, and she became involved in the desperate measures of **Manwë**, and the ban on all emigration" (Letters, 431). The text of The Lord of the Rings does not provide any inconsistencies with either of these interpretations. In it, only the noble ending of Galadriel's tale is set forth. Since Tolkien still had The Silmarillion in manuscript form, he could amend it to fit either interpretation. The reader may be reminded of a medieval mystery play in which a good angel sits on one shoulder and a bad angel on the other, each **clammering** for the protagonist's attention. Similarly, Tolkien may be seen to be wavering between the inspiration of one of the great villainesses of Northern literature, Hallgerd in Njáls Saga and one of its truly noble heroines, Unn the Deep-minded from the Laxdale Saga. Unn was winning.

Conclusion

Tolkien's great craft permits few accidents. Most of the personalities in the tradition of Northern literature, influenced by the sagas, or having specific sources in the sagas, are the men and women of Rohan and Gondor. In those two kingdoms, the implements, the languages, the customs, and the peoples have clear counterparts in Northern literature and mythology. That Galadriel may be numbered in this company is surprising. Yet, her story was an evolving one; if Tolkien had developed other stories to this level, they, too, might have been equally indebted to the Northern tradition.

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CHAPTER NINE

“they have been in the Pot . . . turning [off the bear-boy into the knight Beowulf” (“Fairy-Stories”, 30).

Beowulf and The Lord of the Rings

In The Road to Middle-earth, T.A. Shippey says that the scenes in the Golden hall are straight-forwardly calqued on Beowulf.¹ Certainly, throughout this book a number of likenesses between the **Old** English poem Beowulf and The Lord of the Rings have been observed in weapons, customs, landscapes, and personalities. In this chapter, the more comprehensive relationships between these two works will be discussed. Three such areas of comparison are the heroic elements (fights, a spirit of hardihood, and the characteristics of the hero): the concept of fate; and the meaning of the works. A discussion of the elements of Tolkien’s essay “Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics” will be used to facilitate an understanding of the Old English poem and correspondingly of The Lord of the Rin..

The Heroic Elements

Fights

First among the heroic elements is the hard-fought, well-matched fight. While the battle between Grendel and Beowulf is fierce, the fight between Grendel’s dam and Beowulf is even more hotly contested. Beowulf quickly finds that his sword is not effective against his enemy. He seizes Grendel’s dam by the hair, pulling her to the ground. They wrestle desperately in the bottom of her underwater cave. She attacks with her broad, bright-edged knife, but his armor saves him. He seizes an ancient giant-crafted sword from the floor and hacks her neck with it. The heat of her blood melts the sword (Beowulf, 27-28). This wonderful fight further embellishes the hero’s reputation.

The heightened action in The Lord of the Rings begins early with several frightening incidents climaxing in Frodo's narrow escape at the Ford of Rivendell at the end of Book I. Glorfindel, Aragorn, and the flood are barely able to save Frodo from the nine gathered Ringwraiths (I, 225-227). A sword melts as described earlier in Chapter 5. Close escapes and bad scares continue to yet another climax with the battle between Gandalf and the ancient and terrible Balrog followed by the death of Boromir and the division of the company (I, 344-45; II, 15- 17; II, 22). More perils, war, and death follow closely until yet another climax occurs with Frodo's failure to renounce the Ring and the struggle with Gollum (III, 223-25). Even after the joyful wedding/coronation celebration, another battle remains between the hobbits and Saruman (III, 297-300). The Fellowship triumphs by narrow margins.

Spirit of hardihood

The determination to conquer or to die bravely in the face of great odds is a hallmark of both Beowulf and The Lord of the Rings. Beowulf speaks to King Hrothgar, whose friend Aeschere has just been killed by Grendel's dam. Beowulf voices a central tenant of the Norse doctrine of courageous behavior: "Sorrow not, wise warrior. It is better for a man to avenge his friend than much mourn. Each of us must await his end of the world's life. Let him who may get glory before death: this is best for the warrior after he has gone from life" (Beowulf, 25). The warrior's reputation after death surpasses his concern for continuing life without honor. Similar statements occur in The Lord of the Rings. For example, Gandalf says to Théoden: "Doom hangs still on a thread. Yet hope there is still, if we can but stand unconquered for a little while" (II, 12 1). And Eomer almost quotes Beowulf's advice to Hrothgar when the Nazgûl kills Théoden. Eomer makes this poetic commentary: "Mourn not overmuch! Mighty was the fallen/meet was his ending. When his mound is raised,/women then shall weep. War now calls us!" (III, 119). No matter how desperate the situation, the warrior's duty is to continue the fight.

In the Battle of Pelennor Fields, the Lard of the Nazgûl comes into the field with the standard displaying a red serpent on a black field to challenge Théoden. Tolkien describes the product of their meeting: "But the white fury of the North-men burned the hotter, and more skilled was their knighthood with long spears and bitter. Fewer were they but they clove through the Southrons like a fire-bolt in a forest" (III, 114). These lines recall similar ones from the well-known old English poem "The Battle of Maldon": "Purpose shall be the firmer, heart the keener, courage shall be the more, as our might lessens."² The need for greater effort when the chances of success dwindle reflects the Ragnarøk emphasis on courage.

The spirit of hardihood displayed in these works is integral to their themes. The warrior spirit demands that the battle go on no matter how grievous the current losses are. Each of these authors values individual courage greatly. The correlations both in action and in verbal expression of attitude are at their highest in the scenes surrounding Théoden and the heroic exploits of Beowulf. Shippey's assertion that the description of the golden hall is calqued or copied perhaps has an unwelcome negative connotation. However, when Tolkien uses Beowulf closely, he greatly enriches the reader's experience in The Lord of the Rings.

Characteristics of the Hero

Fate of the Nation

The heroes in The Lord of the Rings are profoundly different from those in Beowulf. In his essay "Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics," Tolkien defends the poem against a charge of being broken backed by demonstrating the unity that a single hero gives to the work. Beowulf, a young warrior of superior strength and athletic ability, comes to the court of his father's friend King Hygelac, defeats the monster Grendel not only alone but also without weapons. Subsequently, while his companions sit around the edge of the loathsome mere, he dives to its bottom and defeats Grendel's fierce mother. In his final adventure with the dragon, an old king

Beowulf finds that most of his companions desert him before the fierce fire of the dragon. Only his young kinsman Wiglaf goes with him into a final, mutually deadly combat with the dragon. As discussed in Chapter 3 with the traditions of the epic genre, the fate of the nation does depend on the actions of the hero in the poem Beowulf.

In The Lord of the Rings, the Fellowship of the Ring carries with it the fate of all free peoples in Middle-earth. Aragorn as hero stands not only for the freedom of Gondor but also for the freedom of the allies. Aragorn represents the traditional hero, but Tolkien has deliberately underplayed his role in order to emphasize the importance of all creatures in the fight for freedom. Frodo as hero stands for the contribution that timorous creatures must make when the need arises. Tolkien's use of a hobbit in the key role of the quest figure is one of the secrets of his enormous success. This unusual hero, not an antihero as might have been expected from the milieu, but an ordinary being called upon to perform the extraordinary in dangerous and trying circumstances, is a work of true genius. Gandalf as hero stands for the kind of help that mortals can expect from the powers beyond. His power to help seems limited when compared with that of the enemy Sauron, but the wizard does have knowledge and ability beyond that of hobbits or men.

The efforts of the companions of these diverse heroes are also worthy of notice. Unlike Beowulf's companions who sleep through the encounter with Grendel, sit through the battle with Grendel's mother, and flee from the encounter with the dragon, the companions in The Lord of the Rings play a vital role in the success of the story. The companions of the Fellowship -- Legolas, Gimli, Boromir, Merry, and Pippin -- all contribute to the success of the early part of the tale. Several important companions join the battle against Sauron and acquit themselves with honor on the battlefield: Théoden, Éomer, Éowyn, Faramir, and the Prince of Dol Amroth are human allies while the Ents, the Eagles, and the spirits of the oath breakers are more unusual ones. The efforts of all these creatures are required to defeat evil in The Lord of the Rings. Beowulf himself could not

have accomplished the task alone. This difference between the two works is profound.

Boasting

The heroes of Northern literature and of the greater epic tradition are not known for their modesty; boasting is common among them. For instance, Beowulf boasts of his kinship, of his strength, of his destruction of a family of giants, of his championship swimming, of his slaughter of sea monsters, and at the speech's end, of his intention to destroy Grendel without weapons. In Tolkien's long work, Boromir boasts of his prowess among men and his faithfulness to the code. When he is first introduced at the Council of Elrond, he says "Believe not that in the land of Gondor the blood of Numenor is spent, nor all its pride and dignity forgotten. By our valour the wild folk of the East are still restrained, and the terror of Morgul kept at bay: and thus alone are peace and freedom maintained in the lands behind us, bulwark of the West" (I, 258). And when Aragorn meets the hobbits, he boasts of his kin, of the work of the Rangers, of his ability to save the hobbits, and of his sword (I, 182483).

When Frodo reveals the Ring during the Council of Elrond, Boromir declares that it is "the doom of Minas Tirith" and questions why the men of Gondor should seek the broken sword. Aragorn reminds Boromir of the sword's importance and asks whether he wishes for the House of Elendil to return to Gondor. When Boromir seems doubtful, the usually careful Aragorn boasts of his accomplishments: "You know little of the lands beyond your bounds. Peace and freedom, do you say? The North would have known them little but for us. Fear would have destroyed them. But when dark things come from the houseless hills, or creep from sunless woods, they fly from us. What roads would any dare to tread, what safety would there be in quiet lands, or in the homes of simple men at night, if the Dunedain were asleep or were all gone into the grave?" (I, 261). He is proud of the hard work the Rangers have done in guarding the freedoms of quieter peoples. And he must convince Boromir to accept his claim to the King's throne even though

his ascension will render Boromir's service as the heir to the Steward's office unnecessary.

The men of Gondor and Rohan boast as Beowulf does; the Ents boast of their ability to control Sauron; Legolas and Gimli boast of their accomplishments and compare the numbers of their dead. This trait is one the younger hobbits of the Fellowship acquire. When Frodo explains to the ruffians who occupy the Shire that the Dark Tower has fallen, that the King has been restored, and that the King's messengers may be expected to ride the roads, the bully calls him "my little cock-a-whoop". Pippin is incensed and boasts: "I am a messenger of the King . . . You are speaking to the King's friend, and one of the most renowned in all the lands of the West . . . Down on your knees in the road and ask pardon, or I will set this troll's bane in you" (III, 285). Merry joins Pippin with his own stem command: "Go! . . . If you trouble this village again, you will regret it." (III, 285) The ~~Hobbits~~ who return from the battle with Sauron are very different from those whom Elrond judged almost too young and inexperienced to accompany Frodo. ✓

Frodo acts firmly in this last battle against the forces of evil, but he does not express the bravado the others do. While his lack of boasting may be attributable to the wounds he has received during the quest and to his own failure at its end, his reluctance to boast reveals an essential part of his character. In The Return of the Shadow, the reader can observe Tolkien striving to create this character and to express it in a meaningful fashion. In "The Council of Elrond," the **decision** is made that someone must take the Ring to its destruction. Frodo's reply first reads: "At last with an effort he spoke. 'If this task is fated to fall to the weak,' he said, 'I will attempt it. But I shall need the help of the strong and the wise'" (Shadow, 406). At this point, Tolkien conceived of a fellowship completed composed of hobbits with the role of the strong and wise Strider occupied by a ranger hobbit named Trotter. Tolkien's later conception was more profound; the task would indeed be appointed to a hobbit, but the companions would come from all the peoples of Middle-earth. In the revised version, Tolkien writes, "At last with an effort he [Frodo] spoke, 'I will take the Ring,' he said.

“Though I don’t know the way” (Shadow, 406). This revision is truly brilliant; in it Frodo says much about his own abilities or lack of them and he succinctly defines both his courage and his humility. In the final version, Tolkien adds yet another element by including one more phrase after “with an effort he spoke”: “and wondered to hear his own words, as if some other will was using his small voice” (I, 284). The reader senses Frodo’s own wonder at his boldness. Tolkien’s repeated success in revising his work to make it incisive and eloquent that sets him above all other writers in this genre.

Inspires Loyalty

Another characteristic of the hero in Beowulf and The Lord of the Rings is the ability to inspire loyalty from companions and from the people in general. When Beowulf dives in to the Mere to kill Grendel’s mother, his bond with his men makes them stay until he emerges from the horrid lake, long after the Danes have returned to Hereot. Beowulf, whose long reign has been peaceful, fights the dragon to save his people from its terror. This action contrasts with Hrothgar’s failure to kill Grendel himself. Beowulf believes that he has gained his people a great treasure with his death. But the dragon’s spell still lies on the treasure, and Wiglaf includes it in Beowulf’s funeral pyre. ✓

In The Lord of the Rings, Aragorn lives and works with his peers as a Ranger for many years. He continues as a part of the Fellowship under the leadership of Gandalf. His greatest concern, after he has done his duty to the Ringbearer, is to provide for the welfare of his people, the men of Gondor. Thus, when Gandalf relieves Aragorn of his responsibilities for the Fellowship in a scene on the edge of the woods, Aragorn goes to recall Théoden to his duty to the treaty between Rohan and Gondor (II, 104). Like Beowulf, Aragorn wishes to provide a monster-free environment for his kingdom.

The issue in The Lord of the Rings is a larger one; freedom depends not just on heroic men but also on the aide of other creatures. Tolkien’s

decision to make the Fellowship a representation of the main kinds of creatures in Middle-earth and his conscious inclusion of other types of beings--Tom Bombadil and Goldberry, the Ents, and the Woses--emphasize the battle between the Free People of Middle-earth and those who would have slavery. In composing the Fellowship, Elrond says "For the rest, they shall represent the other Free Peoples of the World: Elves, Dwarves, and Men." (I, 289). The courage of a single hero and his companions might have been enough to defeat the monsters in Beowulf's times but in our times, all are called to the struggle.

Concept of Fate

Beowulf critic Thomas Haber in A Comparative Study of the "Beowulf" and the "Aeneid" presents many likenesses between Virgil's Aeneid and the Old English poem Beowulf.³ The Lord of the Rings shares part of one central area -- a tension among three elements for control of the action. The three elements vying for sovereignty are God, fate, and the heroes' courage.

God

According to Haber, God is mentioned thirty-two times in Beowulf. In sixteen cases the emphasis is on his role as the supreme arbiter of human fortunes. Despite the many pages of scholarship written about the Christian elements in The Lord of the Rings, neither the reader nor the critic can compile thirty-two references to God in Tolkien's work because the references are not present.

Tolkien explains his conception of God in Middle-earth and in The Lord of the Rings quite clearly in a 'letter to Robert Murray, S.J., who had complained about Gandalf's reappearance after he has died in the conflict with the Balrog in Moria. Tolkien acknowledges his handling of Gandalf's reappearance as a defect: "There are, I suppose, always defects in any large-scale work of art; and especially in those of literary form that are founded on an earlier matter which is put to new uses -- like Homer, or Beowulf, or

Virgil, or Greek or Shakespearean tragedy! In which class, as a class not as a competitor, The Lord of the Rings really falls though it is only founded on the author's own first draft!" (Letters, 201). Clearly, when Tolkien thought about the problems of god as a supreme being in his work, he associated his problems and his solutions with those of the Beowulf-poet, Virgil, and other writers of epic and tragedy. Tolkien elaborates on the narrative reasons for shortening Gandalf's explanation of his return, then he says "I have purposely kept all allusions to the highest matters down to mere hints, perceptible only by the most attentive, or kept them, under unexplained symbolic forms. So God and the 'angelic' gods, the Lords or Powers of the West, only peep through in such places as Gandalf's conversation with Frodo: 'behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker's': or in Faramir's Númenórean grace at dinner" (Letters, 201). Tolkien recognizes the existence of God as supreme ruler in this work but he has purposely minimized its impact.

Faramir's grace does constitute a formal act of worship:

Before they ate, Faramir and all his men turned and faced west in a moment of silence. Faramir signed to Frodo and Sam that they should do likewise.

"So we always do," he said, as they sat down: "we look towards Numenor that was, and beyond to Elvenhome that is, and to that which is beyond Elvenhome and will ever be. Have you no such custom at meat?"

"No," said Frodo, feeling strangely rustic and untutored. "But if we are guests, we bow to our host, and after we have eaten we rise and thank him."

"That we do also," said Faramir (II, 284-285).

This oft cited instance of the silent thanksgiving among the people of Condor stands as one of two acts of worship in The Lord of the Rings. The second occurs at the beginning of the banquet after the wedding of King

Ellessar and **Arwen**, “after the Standing Silence, the wine was brought” (III, 233).

The other concrete presence of God as **supreme** ruler occurs through **elven** references and invocations to Elbereth, the Queen of the Blessed Realm and their especial friend. Thus, when the hobbits **part** from **Gildor**, the elf says “May Elbereth protect you!” (I, 94). ^{Soon after} **Frodo almost succumbs** to Black Riders in the attack on Weather-top. A complex of actions saves him: he strikes at the Black Rider with his sword, he calls out “*O Elbereth! Gilthoniel!*”, and **Strider** leaps out of the darkness with brands of wood (I, 208) Later as Strider discusses the attack, he notes that Frodo’s sword thrust ripped only the Ringwraith’s cloak; his analysis is “More deadly to him was the name of Elbereth” (I, 210). Similarly, when Frodo is greatly tempted to despair as the Nine Ringwraiths call to him, the hobbit calls out “By Elbereth and **Lúthien** the Fair, . . . you shall have neither the Ring nor me.” Again the invocation alone is not enough; the Black Riders proceed only to be stopped by Gandalfs calling up a flood in the river. Legolas engages in a similar compound action when he invokes the name of Elbereth and shoots an arrow at a dark shape in the sky (I, 403). Sam uses the name of Elbereth against **Shelob** as he fights her with Galadriel’s **phial** and with his sword after she has bound Frodo (II, 339). When Sam is trying to extricate Frodo from **Orc** captivity in the Tower of Cirith Ungol, **the** hobbits use Elbereth’s name as a password (III, 189-191). And in the final pages of the work, the Elves sing their **praise** of Elbereth as they prepare to depart for the Havens (III, 308). This survey of invocations of Elbereth is educational because in each case, the name alone does not suffice. The **characters** must also be engaged in actions to solve their own problems.

In the end of his letter to Robert Murray, Tolkien continues his discussion of the role of God in the Middle-earth of the War of the Rings. He says that while God was a datum of good in **Númenórean** philosophy and an important factor in their history, worship and hallowed places did not exist. The **Númenórean** peoples did not worship any creatures: they had no pensionary prayers and preserved only “the vestige of thanksgiving”

(mentioned above). The King had served as major priest, and Tolkien cites Aragorn's planting of the sapling of the White Tree as a reemergence of the lineal priest kings. Tolkien says that then the "worship of God would be renewed, and His Name (or title) be again more often heard. But there would be no *temple* of the True God while Númenórean influence lasted." (Letters, p. 207). Tolkien recognized the difficulties that a complex conception of God as supreme ruler, Fate, and individual courage plays in major works of art. He made a decision to include a concept of God as supreme ruler but to subordinate it in his work. He **demonstrates** his adherence to this decision by rigorously excising religious practice from Middle-earth in the time of the War of the Rings.

Fate

References to Fate in Beowulf are not as numerous as references to God, but their import should not be underestimated. Here are some examples of Fate's workings. In his first speech to King Hrothgar, Beowulf boasts of his prowess and his determination to destroy Grendel. He reminds Hrothgar that if Beowulf fails, Grendel will eat his body, but his famous mail-shirt, the work of the mythic smith Weland, should be returned to his lord Hygelac. Beowulf finishes the speech by saying "Fate always goes as it must" (Beowulf, 9). As a warrior, he believes Fate controls events.

In his reply, Hrothgar, too, acknowledges the working of Fate: "My hall-troop, warrior band, has shrunk; fate has swept them away into Grendel's horror" (Beowulf, 9). Hrothgar as warrior recognizes Fate's control over events. But in his next words, Hrothgar parenthetically acknowledges God's possible intervention: "(God may easily put an end to the wild ravager's deeds!)" (Beowulf, 9). This example illustrates the continuing tension between the rule of Fate and the rule of God in the poem. Tolkien thought the pull between the two concepts deepened the poet's sensitivity for his pagan hero's situation.

Beowulf as warrior now describes his exploits in swimming with Breca and his encounter with malice-filled sea monsters. Beowulf attributes the

outcome of that battle to fate and courage: "Fate often saves an undoomed man when his courage is good" (Beowulf, 11). Here Fate depends not upon God's will but upon the warrior's personal courage.

Sometimes the Beowulf-poet mingles all three controlling elements: "Then further the lord [Hrothgar] gave treasure to each of the men on the mead-bench who had made the sea-voyage with Beowulf, gave heirlooms; and he commanded that gold be paid for the one whom in his malice Grendel had killed -- as he would have killed more if wise God and the man's [Beowulf's] courage had not forestalled that fate" (Beowulf, 19). Fate seems to be the controlling element unless God wishes otherwise and unless the hero's courage can overcome it. After the banquet celebrating Grendel's death, Hrothgar's household settles down to sleep. The poet notes ironically "They did not know the fate, the grim decree made long before . . ." (Beowulf, 22). Fate here is specifically the coming deadly visit of Grendel's dam. Aeschere, "one of the beer-drinkers, ripe and fated to die" will be the one Grendel's mother kills, for death has become his fate (Beowulf, 22). Beowulf underscores the importance of fate to survival as he relates his fight with Grendel's dam to his lord Hygelac: "Not-without trouble I came from there with my life. I was not fated to die then . . ." (Beowulf, 37). Fate dictates that Beowulf, unlike Aeschere, survives his encounter with Grendel's dam.

The final episode in Beowulf relates his deadly encounter with the dragon. This section contains several references to fate. Beowulf addresses his troops, boasting that he would not use a sword against the dragon if he thought he could kill the dragon by grappling with it in the same way he killed Grendel. Then he ascribes the result of the battle to fate: "I will not flee a foot-step from the barrow-ward, but it shall be with us at the wall as fate allots, the ruler of every man" (Beowulf, 44). Beowulf indicates that he believes fate rules men's lives. As the dragon and Beowulf come together in their fearful encounter, the poet foretells the outcome: "Then, coiling in flames, he [the dragon] came gliding on, hastening to his fate. The good shield protected the life and body of the famous prince, but for a shorter

while than his wish was. There for the **first** time, the first day in his life, he might not prevail, since fate did not assign him such glory in battle" (✓ Beowulf, 45). Fate rules this encounter; both Beowulf and the dragon are fated to die. Beowulf's courage and **bravery** have saved him many times before, but they will not save him now.

The dragon's terror overpowers Beowulf's companions, and they desert him. Only his kinsman Wiglaf stays to help him against the dragon's fire. In a wonderfully dramatic scene, Wiglaf wades into the battle against the dragon and shelters himself from the flames under Beowulf's shield when fire consumes his own wooden buckler. Beowulf's famous sword Naegling breaks because "it was not ordained for him that iron edges might help in combat" (Beowulf, 47). The dragon attacks again and Beowulf uses his knife to cut through the dragon's middle, ~~But~~ But Beowulf's wounds from the dragon are too grievous. Beowulf now recalls his **fifty** years' rule and wishes for a son to give his armor to. He speaks of the long peace during his reign: "In my land I awaited what fate brought me, held my own well, sought no treacherous quarrels, nor did I swear many oaths unrightfully" (Beowulf, 48). The Fate that Beowulf waited for has finally arrived. He sends Wiglaf to view the treasure he has won for the aid of his people. When Wiglaf returns with parts of the treasure, Beowulf orders that a mound shall be built on the sea's cape to stand as a beacon to sailors. Then he says 'You are the last left of our race, of the Waegmundings. Fate has swept away all my kinsmen, earls in their strength, to destined death. I have to go after them' (Beowulf, 49). In his last words, Beowulf acknowledges Fate as the controlling force over his life. Tolkien summarizes in "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics", "**He is a man and that for him and for many is sufficient tragedy.**"* The end of life for a pagan hero is here on earth; his only immortality is praise for his deeds.

The concept of fate as controlling force appears regularly in The Lord of the Rings in several different ways. Some discussions about outcomes clearly involve but do not use the words "fate" or "doom". The most important of these is Gandalf's statement to Frodo: "Behind that there was

something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was meant to **find** the Ring, and not by its maker. In which case you also were meant to have it" (I, 65). Gandalf clearly believes in a controlling force. He also refers to this **force in** describing his meeting with **Thorin** in the inn in Bree as "A chance-meeting, as we say in Middle-earth" (III, 360). Gandalf is lightly ironic in this statement, for the context of the statement delineated the tragedies that have been averted by the chain of events set in motion by that meeting. Gandalf's presence in Middle-earth is not chance but a product of the controlling force. He has been sent by the Supreme Being to combat Sauron's rising power.

Soon after **Gandalf's** statement to Frodo, the hobbit questions Bilbo's judgment in not killing Gollum, but Gandalf argues that Bilbo's pity and mercy will be needed before the end: "And he [Gollum] is bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many -- yours not the least" (I, 69). The "fate of the Ring" and "the fate of many" are fairly **typical** of statements about fate in The Lord of the Rings.

Old English wyrd is the word used most frequently for a controlling force in the original language of Beowulf. The modern English word "fate" derives from the Latin fatum, meaning to **speak**. The modern English noun "weird" derives from the 'Old English wyrd meaning fate or destiny, but the adjective "weird" with its meaning of supernatural or fantastic is more often employed. Tolkien wisely avoided both the noun and the adjective. But he does often avail himself of the word "doom" from the Old English dóm meaning judgment. There appears to be no significant difference in the way he uses each of the words "fate" and "doom". Tolkien applies these two words repeatedly in **more** different contexts, in The Lord of the Rings than it is practical to examine here. However, a study of the two words' contexts in a brief scene, the encounter between **Faramir** and Frodo, may be illuminating.

Some statements about fate are like those in Beowulf. Mablung, one of Faramir's retainers, talks about Captain Faramir's courage: "He leads now in all perilous ventures. **But** his life is charmed, or fate spares him for some other end" (II, 268). In a discussion with Faramir, Frodo advises him: "Go back, **Faramir**, valiant Captain of Gondor, and defend your city while you may, and let me go where my doom takes me" (II, 276). **At** this point in his journey, Frodo conceives of his mission as a doomed one. Throughout his continuing talk with Frodo, Faramir now laments the circumstances: "Alas! it is a crooked fate that seals your lips who saw him [Boromir] last, and holds from me that which I long to know: what was in his heart and thought in his latest hours" (II, 278). Of course, the reader knows that the fate which keeps Frodo from telling of Boromir's last hours is not a crooked one but a kind one since Boromir had betrayed the Council's trust and tried to seize the Ring. Frodo's generous character keeps him from telling Faramir this, although Faramir begins to divine part of the truth. Yet, it is fate that these two characters are thrown together.

On hearing of the loss of Gandalf, Faramir blames fate: "An evil fate seems to have pursued your fellowship" (II, 279). Then Faramir hypothesizes about an alternative set of circumstances: "Maybe, it would have been better had Boromir fallen there with Mithrandir . . . and not gone on to the fate that waited above the falls of **Rauros**" (II, 286). Here Faramir has already come ~~close~~ to the reality of Frodo's difficulty. Sam eventually blurts out the truth about Boromir, but Faramir reassures him with another reference to fate: "And be comforted, Sam-wise. If you seem to have stumbled, think that it was fated to be so" (II, 290). Faramir then gives his judgments: Frodo is enjoined not to come to the cave behind the waterfall without invitation for a year and a day. But on Gollum, Faramir lays a harsher penalty: "You are under doom of death; but while you walk with Frodo you are safe for our part" (II, 300). Finally, Faramir and Frodo discuss choices for the journey. Faramir sympathizes with Frodo's part: "It is a hard doom and a hopeless errand" (II, 302). Even though Faramir's people engage in a brief act of reverence, Faramir attributes all to fate or doom rather than to God, or

the Valar, or the One.

The Old Norse concept of fate also exists as it relates to a person's attitude about his future. The Norsemen believed that when some men were fated to die, this ill fate could be seen in their faces. The fated person was designated "fey". For instance, in Njál's Saga, several chieftains comment on the fey look in Skarphedin's face at the Althing the summer before the burning of his father Njál. This attitude explains Skarphedin's willingness to fight inside the house, although he knows that all his family will die if they go inside.⁵ More generally, Margaret Schlauch notes the pervasive effect of this attitude: "A proud refusal to struggle against fate seems to have been one of the most admired characteristics of Icelandic heroes in general. To go unflinchingly to their doom with full foreknowledge of it was the only way of proving themselves superior to it. They defied their fate by accepting it."⁶ Some of Tolkien's characters share this attitude. Merry recognizes this fated quality in Éowyn's face: "He [Merry] caught the glint of clear grey eyes; and then he shivered, for it came suddenly to him that it was the face of one without hope who goes in search of death" (III, 76). At different points, others fight without concern for their own safety: Éowyn and Éomer think that Aragorn is fey when he decides to go to the Paths of the Dead, and a "fey mood" takes Éomer when he thinks that Éowyn is dead. Denethor is fey and dies because he thinks his foreknowledge is accurate. Aragorn and Éomer have fey inclinations, but hard fighting keeps them from death.

The Hero's Courage

The hero also relies on his own courage. In Beowulf, the hero concludes his account of his swimming episode and the ensuing battle with the sea monsters: "Fate often saves an undoomed man when his courage is good" (Beowulf, 11). The hero intimates a flexibility in fate -- a flexibility responding to the hero's courage. But because of the confusion between Fate and God in the poem, the poet also relates courage to the favor of God: "And the man of the Geats had sure trust in his great might, the favor of the Ruler" (Beowulf, 12). When Hrothgar commands weregild to be paid, for the

companion Grendel killed, the poet voices again the **value** of courage: "as he [Grendel] would have killed more if wise **God** and **the** man's courage had not forestalled that fate" (Beowulf, 19). In spite of its linkage with both fate and the will of God, the hero's courage **is** clearly an important facet in the **action** of the poem.

Heroes come in many sizes, shapes, 'and sexes in The Lord of the Rings. In The Hobbit, Bilbo gets involved **in** the adventure as an expression of his courage and his desire not to be **considered** a little man by the dwarves. Frodo and Sam are courageous unto the edge of **death in their** attempt to destroy the Ring. Boromir fights to his death in the midst of twenty **Orcs**. After some deliberation, the Ents courageously undertake retribution on Saruman. Throughout, the characters opposed to the forces of the Dark Lord demonstrate their individual courage in a **variety of ways**. In a single scene, **several** prove their bravery. **Théoden** King of the Mark, who had been almost entirely unmanned by Wormtongue's underminings, leads berserker-like fighting men through the destruction of the Southrons before the Lord of the **Nazgûl** slays **him**. When the **Nazgûl** attempts to despoil the corpse, Merry crawls towards them reminding himself that he is the King's man and has promised to stay with the King. Eowyn, disguised as Dernhelm, challenges the **Nazgûl** and kills his foul mount. Just as the **Ringwraith** is ready to kill her with his mace, Merry's barrow **sword** stabs him from behind. Instances of courage vary from Sam's starting down the edge of a cliff: "It is doubtful if he ever did anything braver in cold blood" (I, 21243) to **Aragorn's** ride through the Paths of the Dead: 'You are a **stern** lord and resolute,' she [Eowyn] said; 'and thus do men win renown'" (III, **57**). Such courage is expected of Aragorn, but not of Sam, Merry, and Eowyn. The action in The Lord of the Rings contains not one hero fighting three monsters as in Beowulf, but many heroes, each finding his own courage and exercising it against a terrible foe. The importance of courage in individual action is one of the great themes of The Lord of the Rings.

The **existence** of those who lack the courage to face a deadly battle is another common point between the Old English poem and The Lord of the

Rings. In Beowulf, the hero goes to meet the terror of the dragon without companions: "Nor did his companions, sons of nobles, take up their stand in a troop about him with the courage of fighting men, but they crept to the wood, protected their lives" (Beowulf, 45). Beowulf's kinsman Wiglaf alone remains to fight. Similarly, in the Old English poem "Battle of Maldon", the names of those who fled the battle are recorded: son of Odda, Godric, his brothers Godwine and Godwig. The Anglo-Saxon poet comments "more men than was in any way right, if they remembered all the favors he had done for their benefit."⁷ Aragorn is more merciful to the faint-hearted in The Lord of the Rings than the heroes of the "Battle of Maldon." In his wisdom, Aragorn looks at his troops with pity, for the horror of the marshes has unmanned many. He sends them to hold Cair Andros or to retake it if necessary. Tolkien comments on this wisdom: "Then some being shamed by his mercy overcame their fear and went on, and the others took new hope, hearing of a manful deed within their measure that they could turn to, and they departed" (III, 162). Since courage was such an important component of heroic Northern culture, the lack of it demands poetic discourse. The pity and mercy that Gandalf extols in Bilbo also operate in Aragorn.

Tolkien has reduced the tripartite dilemma of the Aeneid and Beowulf to two facets -- fate or doom and the hero's courage. The role of the Supreme Being is not an active one in The Lord of the Rings. With this reduction of elements, Tolkien clearly emphasizes the importance of courage in his work. While Beowulf's courage is a key factor in his success, fate and god appear much more frequently in the poet's discussion than they do in The Lord of the Rings. The many references to these two concepts in Beowulf all occur within 3182 lines of poetry (about fifty pages of prose text in translation). The relatively fewer references in Tolkien's major work occur in **12 15** pages of The Lord of the Rings. Yet the instances of courage in Tolkien's work far outnumber those in Beowulf and courage is required of a far greater range of creatures.

The Meaning of the Work

Discussions of the heroic elements and the relative weight of fate, god, and courage contribute much to understanding The Lord of the Rings. The biggest stumbling block in interpreting the work seems to come from a misunderstanding of the ending. William Dowie in "the Gospel of **Middle-earth**" says "Which brings us to the happy ending. The Lord of the Rings is a joyful **book**."⁸ The Lord of the Rings certainly is a book which brings us joy in the appreciation of its beauty, its wisdom, and its excitement, but the ending is not a happy one in Time. A correct interpretation of the ending is essential to an overall comprehension of meaning.

"Beowulf": The Monsters and the Critics

Perhaps the **best** approach to the ending of The Lord of the Rings comes through Tolkien's essay "Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics." In that essay, he addresses several issues which apply to an interpretation of the ending. The monsters in the poem provide a background against which the stature of the heroes may be tried. In Beowulf, the author has devoted his poem to the theme of the paradox of defeat. The poet concerns himself with "heroes under heaven," "mighty men upon earth." Whatever end comes to these **men must** be their end upon this earth, not their eventual **end** in some cosmic extra act to their drama ("Monsters", 18).

The following summary of the essay may assist the reader. Tolkien stresses Beowulf's mortality: "He is a *man*, and *that for him and many is sufficient* tragedy" ("Monsters", **18**). The theme "life is transitory"* is a great one. To this view, the monsters are essential. They provide the "fusion-point of imagination" that helps the poet produce art. At that fusion point, the "Scandinavian bogies" mingle with "the adversaries of God" to symbolize the powers of evil in the material world. Northern courage is one of the potent elements in the fusion between the bogies and God's adversaries, Tolkien believes "the theory of courage" to be the greatest contribution of early Northern literature. In the final battle, the Northern gods fight extravagantly but not on the side that wins. Yet for the beaten

gods, defeat contains no refutation. In the eternal battle against Chaos and Unreason, men join with the gods: their resistance becomes more perfect because it lacks hope ("Monsters", 19-21).

The Beowulf-poet, like Virgil, looks back on native traditions of an older world; already the traditions had become "*more ancient and remote, and in a sense darker.*" These older traditions combine with the new faith and new learning to produce the work of art. The poet knows clearly that the older days were "heathen -- heathen, noble, and hopeless." In Beowulf, specific references both to the old gods and to the Christian ones are suppressed partly because of their potency if invoked, but more because they are not relevant to the theme of the work except to provide a background. In the old view, the monsters stand against the gods and their allies, the captains of men, who join them in the **same** fighting host. Within Time, the monsters will triumph, "For the monsters do not depart, whether the gods go or come." Even Christians are within Time, mortals subject to the laws of a hostile world. But eventually for the Christian, the tragedy of the great temporal defeat ceases to be finally important, and the real battle joins between the soul and its adversaries ("Monsters", 21-22).

However, in Beowulf, the poet concerns himself with "man on earth: rehandling in a new perspective an ancient theme: that man, each man and all men and all their works shall die." The nearness of the pagan time leaves "the shadow of its despair." Yet, Tolkien asserts, the Christian poet, removed from the direct personal pressure of despair, can feel the poignancy of heroic man's tragedy of inevitable ruin. Grendel inhabits our world, eating the flesh and drinking the blood of mortal men, bursting down the feeble doors of their resistance. The dragon wields a physical fire, and can be destroyed by iron in his belly. Beowulf's shield is fashioned by his smiths: it is not yet the shield of faith, nor does he wear the breastplate of righteousness. Two other factors -- the debate over the souls of our heathen ancestors and the possible influence of the Aeneid on Beowulf -- are set aside ("Monsters", 23-24).

Tolkien says that the view of pre-Christian English mythology must be

assumed to be essentially that of later Icelandic only **partially systemized** mythology. In the southern Mediterranean myths, the battle between the great anthropomorphic Greek gods, and the giant Titans constitutes a chaotic past, not a current concern or a future doom. These gods have **not** sought all good men as their allies in a coming battle. In the Norse myths, both the gods and the men are doomed **to** death within **Time. The outer** darkness becomes the battleground for the gathered heroes and the monsters. The gods themselves have become “in their very being the enlarged shadows of the great men and warriors **upon** the walls of the world.” Like the mortal men, who perhaps usurped their forms, the gods are doomed in Time (“Monsters”, 24-25).

The southern gods (lofty, inscrutable, timeless) perhaps inspire more profound thought that goes forward to philosophy since the monsters are not at the middle demanding explanation. The Northern mythological imagination acknowledges the monsters at the center and gives them victory but not honor. Dealing with the monsters necessitates naked will and courage in the North. While the southern myth becomes literary ornament, the Northern persists in its power “to revive its spirit even in our times.” Martial heroism has its own end, but as the Beowulf-poet acknowledges “the wages of heroism is death.” The passages in the essay concerning the giants in their war against the Christian God and the mentions of Cam are especially important. In the poet’s description of Grendel, the Scriptures meet with the old traditions of Northern monsters to ignite the poet’s imagination. Caught in the hostile world in Time, man is assured that his ancient enemies are also the foes of the Christian God and that his courage, with its inherent nobility, constitutes high loyalty to that God (“Monsters”, 25-26).

Beowulf, then, is a historical poem about a pagan past, written by a learned man looking back on heroism and sorrow. The poet brings to his task, first, a wide knowledge of Christian poetry and, second, a considerable learning in lays and traditions about earlier pagan times. Emphasizing nobility and desire for truth and using the shepherd patriarchs of the Old

Testament, the Beowulf poet depicts King Hrothgar as a noble chief before Christianity. The character of Beowulf depends more on the traditional matter in English and comes closer to the heathen warrior, who uses his gift of strength to gain praise among men and posterity. Thus, Beowulf does not provide a picture of historic Denmark, but an illusion of a pagan past. The poet achieves an impression of depth through the use of allusions to older tales, “mostly darker, more pagan, and desperate than the foreground.” ✓ The Latin poet Virgil shares the antiquarian temper and use of vernacular learning for similar effect in The Aeneid. In both cases, the poet himself makes the antiquity so appealing (“Monsters”, 26-34).

From this eloquent essay, several statements about the construction of Beowulf and its meaning impact on interpretations of The Lord of the Rings:

- 1) The monsters themselves inhabit our world and must be fought with this world's weapons.
- 2) Evil is a potent force whose destruction in the short term does not prevent its reemergence.
- 3) The nature of evil is complex.
- 4) Man's mortality, his heritage of death, constitutes tragedy by itself.
- 5) The paradox of defeat makes the quality of courage greater.
- 6) The immortals share man's impermanence in this world.
- 7) With the passing away of the old order, much that is most beautiful and most valuable will also perish.
- 8) The author's poise between the traditions of the old world and the values of the new gives him a special poignancy for the tragedy of his old heroes.
- 9) The author's use of antiquity gives his work a much greater appeal and ability to involve his reader.

These nine points relate not only to the Beowulf and its author but also to The Lord of the Rings and its author. A discussion of each adds to an understanding of Tolkien's three-part work, for these are the great themes

of The Lord of the Rings.

Monsters

The monsters are not trivial in their evil: even the lesser ancient evil ones in The Lord of the Rings are potent. The Balrog is a corrupted **Maia** of the same order and magnitude as Gandalf, who barely has the strength to defeat him. In the depths of Moria, nameless things, older than Sauron, too terrible for Gandalf to report to the others, gnaw at the world. With the weapon Glamdring, Gandalf hews the Balrog until he falls from a high place and breaks the mountainside in his ruin, but other balrogs and different monsters remain there awaiting their own time.

A quintessential creature of darkness, **Shelob** is the last child of Ungoliant in this world; she lurks still in the glens of the Mountains of the Shadow. Sam wounds her with his sword, forcing her to retreat, but he does not destroy her. These creatures are not in the employ of Sauron, although he knows of their existence and applauds their evil intentions. They are ancient evil creatures whose power lies at the root of the world and whose enmity remains, despite Sauron's fall.

Sauron, another corrupted Maia, is the greatest servant of Melkor, the powerful rebellious Valar. Attempting to replace the worship of the One, Sauron now would set himself up as a god-king in Middle-earth, perverting all creatures to his dominion (Letters, 243). This attempt at suzerainty in Middle-earth is not his first nor his last. For the moment his physical demon self has been defeated, but not forever as Gandalf warns Frodo: "Always after a defeat and a respite, the Shadow takes another shape and grows again" (I, 60). In a 1972 letter to Fr. Douglas Carter, Tolkien predicts the manner of Sauron's return: "Then I of course discovered that the King's Peace would contain no tales worth recounting: and his wars would have little interest after the overthrow of Sauron: but that almost certainly a restlessness would appear about then, owing to the (it seems) inevitable boredom of Men with the good: there would be secret societies practicing dark cults, and 'arc-cults' among adolescents" (Letters, 419).

Sauron's army contains many types of creatures who have followed his call. The power of the nine Ringwraith servants of Sauron has been destroyed with that of the One Ring, but other men are available to be perverted when the Shadow rises again. The enmity of evil will return as long as **men** and other creatures live.

Saruman, another corrupted Maia, has fled from his captivity in Orthanc to the Shire. Even after Sauron's defeat, the hobbits return to find their lovely, pastoral home blighted. Much will be needed to right the wrongs of Sauron throughout Middle-earth. With a knife, Wormtongue kills Saruman for the humiliation the wizard has brought him. The Valar deny Saruman the right to pass to the West: he has perhaps perished indeed, but he alone of the major monsters of the Third Age seems wholly defeated. Like the Scandinavian bogies and adversaries of God in Beowulf, the monsters -- corrupted angelic forms, creatures of darkness, and Dark Lords -- remain the enemies of man, though the heroes who fought them pass away.

Reemergence of Evil

The Shadow persists in Middle-earth: Gandalf warns that it will come again. Even when his power is enhanced, he reminds his friends that the power of evil is greater: "I am Gandalf, Gandalf the White, but Black is mightier still" (II, 103). This battle against Sauron has been joined before in Middle-earth, as "Annals of the Kings and Rulers" and "The Tale of the Years" record. The First Age has ended when the three **silmarils**, which preserved the light of the two trees Morgoth poisoned, were lost to the Elves. Tolkien describes the ending: "This legendarium ends with a vision of the end of the world, its breaking and remaking, and the recovery of the Silmarilli and the 'light before the Sun' -- after a final battle which owes, I suppose, more to the Norse vision of Ragnarøk than to anything else, though it is not much like it" [Letters, 149]. The real loss of the jewels of light and the rise of the Shadow in the ages that follow are coincident. In the Second Age, Elros and his descendants chose the kinship of men and thus mortality:

they were forbidden to sail from sight of their shores to the Undying Lands. Half way through the Second Age, the Shadow appears again; the Kings become greedy of wealth and power. As **they** speak openly against the Ban, the Shadow deepens. **Ar-Pharazôn** challenges Sauron for supremacy in Middle-earth, defeats him, and pridefully brings him captive to Numenor. Sauron bewitches **Ar-Pharazôn** and all of his people **except the** Faithful. Finally, besotted by fear of Death, **Ar-Pharazôn** breaks the **Ban** of the Valar, sails West, and sets foot on **Aman** the Blessed. The **Valar** appealed to the One who changes the world. The sea swallows **Númenor**; Undying Lands are removed from the circles of the world. Although Sauron's bodily form perished, he flees to Middle-earth, now unable to appear fair to men. He returns to Mordor, but he strikes too soon before his own power was rebuilt. The Last Alliance overthrows him and Isildur takes the Ring from him at the end of the Second Age.

The Third Age also suffers from Sauron's effects, even though his power was reduced. The Ring betrays Isildur to an **orc** arrow. Strife between the descendants of Isildur hastens the waning of the Dunedain. The witch king Angmar rises in the North, gathering evil **men, Orcs**, and other fell creatures: he will become the chief Ringwraith. The Dunedain are defeated; **Amon Sûl** is burned and razed; a plague, further presses the land. Arvedui, the last king, perishes at sea with the palantiri. **Orcs**, wolves, and other harmful things repeatedly harass the Northern kingdom. Meanwhile in Gondor, the kin-strife begins when Valacar marries a Northern woman, for his kin believe that the lineage would be shorter lived. The heir's kinsman Castamir usurps the throne but dies in a civil war with many of their **kin**; the kin-strife is a first great evil. In a second evil, a great plague kills the King and all his children; meanwhile the Shadow deepens in Greenwood. The Men of Harad conquer Umbar. The third great evil was the invasion of the Wainriders, a confederacy of eastern people stirred up by Sauron's emissaries. The people of eastern Gondor and southern Rhovanion are enslaved. **Éarnil** finally storms the **camp**, bums the wains, and drives the enemy out of **Ithilien**; many perished in the Dead Marshes. **Eärnur** and

Glorfindel drive the witch king Angmar away, but then he gathers the other Ringwraiths and conquers Minas Ithil. Eärnur receives the crown but wears it only seven years before the Lord of Morgul challenges him to single combat, from which he does not return. The reign of the Stewards begins in Gondor while the evil of Sauron grows throughout both kingdoms. Thus, the tale of the evil's reemergence and growth in the Third Age parallels that of the Second Age (III, 313-62). In the Fourth Age, there is perhaps a space of time, a time of the King's Peace, before the Shadow comes again.

Complexity of Evil

Although Tolkien carefully deleted direct references to Christianity and the worship of one God, The Lord of the Rings still makes a cohesive statement about two views of evil -- the Boethian and the Manichaeian, as explained by T.A. Shippey in The Road to Middle-earth. In The Consolation of Philosophy, Boethius asserts that evil is nothing except the absence of good. Corollaries of this belief are that evil cannot create, that evil was not itself created, and that evil will eventually be eliminated by the Incarnation and Death of Christ. Close textual readings indicates that the Dark Lord's servants have corrupted other creatures, such as trolls, which are counterfeits of the Ents. Frodo asserts that "the Shadow . . . can only mock, it cannot make: not real new things of its own" (III, 190). Evil has not created the monsters. Saruman, the Balrog, and Sauron himself began as Maia, holy ones of a lesser degree than the Valar. Elrond states firmly: "nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so" (I, 281). The long term remedy for the might of current evil is salvation through the intermediary of the Christ, for Middle-earth is our world. But while this eventual happy ending does exist for mankind, the ending is not available to the characters of the Fourth Age. In Western thought, the alternative tradition to that of Boethius holds that evil is real, not merely an absence of good. Evil can be resisted. Individuals who do not resist evil because they believe that one day Omnipotence will cure the world's ills are derelict in their duty. The theological danger of this point of view lies in the

Manichaeism heresy which makes Good and Evil equal and opposite forces on the battleground of our universe.⁹

Some middle ground between these two views does exist, and Tolkien knew the middle ground from King Alfred's translation of Boethius. This philosophical duality between the two view of evil exists in the portrayal of the nature of the One Ring. The Ring does not seem passive; it "betrayed" Isildur to orc arrows; it "abandoned" Gollum in time to catch Bilbo; and it tries to betray Frodo at the Prancing Pony. Tolkien presents two consistent views of the Ring: sentient creature and psychic amplifier. As sentient creature, the Ring fits the heroic view of evil as an external entity. As psychic amplifier, the Ring coincides with the Boethian opinion that evil is an internal, psychological, negative corruption of good.¹⁰

It is clear that Tolkien conceived the power of the Ring early in the construction of The Lord of the Rings, for his notes entitled "Queries and Alterations" written during the first few chapters acknowledge the Ring's power. Tolkien writes "Bingo [Frodo] must NOT put on his Ring when Black Riders go by - in view of later developments. He must *think* of doing so but somehow be prevented. Each time the temptation must grow stronger" (Shadow, 224). Clearly, the distinction which Shippey has identified was beginning to emerge in Tolkien's mind in the late 1930s.

In the earlier version of the story, as Frodo and the hobbits are making their way out of the Shire, they leave the road when they hear horses coming. The hobbit companions run down into a little hollow. Frodo's action is more decisive: "Bingo [Frodo] slipped on the ring and stepped behind a tree." (Shadow, 54). A man in a black cloak with a shadowed and invisible face stops and sniffs, then moves off. The finished version reflects Tolkien's concerns in "Queries and Alterations.*" In it, Frodo thinks of the Ring, with the desire to put it on growing stronger and stronger. He recalls Gandalf's advice not to use it, but rationalizes that he is still within the Shire. He touches the chain, but the Rider moves off before he puts on the Ring. Timing saves him from revealing himself to the Ringwraith.

Frodo puts the Ring on six times: Tom Bombadil's house, Prancing

Pony, Weathertop, twice on Amon Hen, and once in the Sammath Naur. Four of these instances provide crucial data about the nature of the Ring. In the Prancing Pony, the Ring comes on Frodo's finger without his knowledge. He supposes that he must have been playing with it in his pocket, **but** he wonders "if the Ring itself had not played him a trick; perhaps it had tried to reveal itself in response to some wish or command that was felt in the room" (I, 173). Later, Strider reprimands Frodo for his lack of caution. Tolkien carefully balances Frodo's foolishness against an external evil force.¹¹

The sequence of events on Weathertop may be interpreted as a psychic amplification of Frodo's fear; a psychic amplification of the Ringwraiths' calling to the Ring: or sentient creature trying to escape from Frodo to the Ringwraiths. Strider and the hobbits are circled around a fire on Weather-top with the Ringwraiths advancing on them. Frodo has not forgotten the temptations of the Barrow to escape using the Ring nor Gandalf's injunction not to wear the Ring. Yet he can think of nothing else. Tolkien mitigates against the reader's thinking that Frodo lacked courage: "he longed to yield. Not with the hope of escape, or of doing anything, either good or bad: he simply felt that he must take the Ring and put it on his finger" (I. 207-08). In contrast to the temptation in the Barrows, Frodo moves not from a desire to escape but from an inability to resist. Frodo yields and would have been lost, except for three factors. He calls on Elbereth, he stabs at the Ringwraith, and he receives Aragorn's assistance. Although this call to the angelic powers for help in peril aids him, he suffers a knife wound for his weakness against evil. Frodo's internal weakness abets the external force of the Ring.

In the first scene on Amon Hen, a crazed Boromir intent on taking the Ring himself has Frodo trapped. Tolkien seems to affirm Frodo's decision to use the ring: "There was only one thing he could do: trembling he pulled out the Ring upon its chain and quickly slipped it on his finger, even as Boromir sprang at him again" (I. 415). Like a lost child, Frodo sits on the high seat: around him he sees battles everywhere. Then he feels the Eye of Sauron, searching for him, coming closer and closer to where he sits. He

throws himself from the seat covering his head with his hood:

He heard himself crying out: Never. never! Or was it: Verily I come. I come to you? He could not tell. Then as a flash from some other point of power there came to his mind another thought: Take it off? Take it off! Fool, take it off? Take off the Ring!

The two powers strove in him. For a moment, perfectly balanced between their piercing points, he writhed, tormented. Suddenly he was aware of himself again. Frodo, neither the Voice nor the Eye: free to choose, and with one remaining instant in which to do so. He took the Ring off his finger. He was kneeling in clear sunlight before the high seat (I, 417).

During this scene, Frodo would have been lost had it not been for Gandalf. Although Gandalf appears to have been destroyed in Moria by the Balrog, the wizard has now escaped and been rescued by Gwaihir the Windlord. Gandalf tells Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli that he strove with the Dark Tower and caused the Shadow to pass. His voice commands Frodo to take off the Ring. But Frodo's internal struggle also exists. "Never!" may be Frodo's conscious good will struggling while "I come to you" consists of his unconscious wickedness. Or "I come to you" may be Sauron's voice calling to Frodo's mind but not to his heart. Tolkien seems to suggest that both inner temptation and external power are at work. The forces of good may not seem as powerful as the forces of evil, but their persistent attempts to thwart the Dark Lord do amount to a victory in the short term. In the second scene on Amon Hen, Frodo concludes that the "evil of the Ring" has caused Boromir's madness, and fearing for the safety and sanity of the rest of the Fellowship, the hobbit resolves to set out for Mordor alone. He puts on the Ring and vanishes.

In the final scene on Sammath Naur, the reader's judgment again must be suspended. Following Frodo into the darkness, Sam finds that the phial

of Galadriel is pale and cold, offering no light against the stifling dark. Sam and Frodo have come to "the heart of the realm of Sauron and the forges of his ancient might, greatest in Middle-earth: all other powers were here subdued" (III. 222). Standing erect, tense, stone-still, Frodo makes a clearly evil choice: "I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine" (III. 223). But under the conditions, Frodo's will and his virtue may be among the powers subdued by Sauron. This interpretation tends towards Manichaeism philosophy. As such, the interpretation denies that men are responsible for their actions and makes evil into a positive force. Yet, to blame Frodo for succumbing to the great temptation of the Ring, which neither Galadriel nor Gandalf could have resisted, is clearly unfair. Frodo is not wicked: an evil person would not have suffered so much to bring the Ring so close to its destruction. Frodo's many acts of forgiveness to Gollum save him. By luck, or chance, or because it was meant to be, Gollum completes the quest by biting off Frodo's finger with the Ring. In his wild dance of exaltation, Gollum falls with the Ring, still containing Frodo's finger, into Mount Doom. Frodo is punished for the weakness of his will by the loss of his finger as he was punished by the knife wound on Weathertop.

The nature of the Ring is integral to an understanding of the story. All the characters would find their roles easier if the Ring were either a sentient creature or a psychic amplifier. If the one Ring were a sentient creature, then Gandalf, or a party of elven Lords, could have carried it to Mount Doom: they could have trusted themselves with the Ring. Frodo would not have been asked to take the burden. If the Ring were just a psychic amplifier, it could not betray its possessors (Isildur, Gollum) and could be put aside, guarded by those thinking only pure thoughts. Yet, Gandalf reminds the Council of Elrond that guardianship of the Ring, even that of Tom Bombadil who is unaffected by it, does not solve the problem (I, 279). Shippey asserts that "Tolkien saw the problem of evil in books as in realities, and he told his story at least in part to dramatize that problem; he did not however claim to know the answer to it."¹³ Thus, the nature of the Ring remains ambiguous. And ambiguity fulfills its traditional role in

literature by providing the reader with materials to ponder again and again.

In addition, the story presents data on the nature of temptation. On Weather-top, **Frodo** has been wounded in the shoulder rather than in the heart because he resisted as much **as** possible; his heart was good. **Similarly**, Bilbo has not taken more harm from the **Ring** because his ownership was filled with **pity** and good impulses and because he gives it up **freely**. **In** its narrative drive towards the **Ring's** destruction, The Lord of the **Rings** is neither a saint's life, all about the temptations of evil nor is it a war game, all about the tactics of evil.¹⁴

Tragedy of Mortality

Since the wages of heroism is death in Time, each character must in the end render up life in Middle-earth or leave Middle-earth forever. Boromir dies defending the young hobbits; **Théoden** dies in battle against the **Ringwraith**; the other captains of men will also die in the chronicle of the years. Tolkien thought that the report of Aragorn's death in the Appendices was critical to the story, **for** Aragorn's own mortality reflects the "real theme . . . Death and Immortality" (Letters, 246). In it, **Arwen** comes to realize at last why men have feared Death as the Gift of the One to man, for she finds it bitter to part from Aragorn even though his life has been three times normal length. He must admonish her not to fail now when they have already successfully passed the tests of the Ring and **of her** renunciation of immortality:

Then going to the House of the Kings in the Silent Street, Aragorn laid him down on 'the long bed that had been prepared for him. There he said farewell to Eldarion, and gave into his hands the winged crown of Gondor and the sceptre of Arnor; and then all left him save Arwen, and she stood alone by his bed. And for all her wisdom and lineage she could not forbear to plead with him to stay yet for a while. She was **not** yet weary of her days, and thus she tasted the bitterness of the mortality that

she had taken upon her.

"Lady **Undomiel**," said Aragorn, "the hour is indeed hard, yet it was made even in that day when we met under the white birches in the garden of Elrond where none now walk. And on the hill of Cerin **Amroth** when we forsook both the Shadow and the Twilight this doom we accepted. Take council with yourself, beloved, and ask whether you would indeed have me wait until I wither and fall from my high seat unmanned and witless. Nay, lady, I am the last of the Numenoreans and the latest King of the Elder Days; and to me has been given not only a span thrice that of Men of Middle-earth, but also the grace to go at my will, and give back the gift. Now **therefore, I will sleep.**

"I speak no comfort **to you**, for there is no comfort for such **pain** within the circles of the world. The uttermost choice is before you: to repent and go to the Havens and bear away into the West the memory of our days together that shall there be evergreen but never more than memory; or else to abide the Doom of Men."

"Nay, dear lord," she said, "that choice is long over. There is now no ship that would bear me hence, and I must indeed abide the Doom of Men, whether I will or I **nill**: the loss and the silence. But I say to you, King of the Numenoreans, not till now have I understood the tale of your people and their fall. As wicked fools I scorned them, and I pity them at last. For if this is indeed, as the Eldar say, the gift of the **One to Men**, it is bitter to receive."

"So it seems," he said. "But let us not be overthrown **at the** final test, who of old renounced the Shadow of the Ring. In sorrow we must **go**, but not in despair. Behold! we are **not** bound for ever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory, Farewell!" (III, 343-44).

Still, she is not yet weary of her years even though she has lived through the whole of the Third Age (born Third Age **241**, died Fourth Age 121 (Third Age ca. **3142**), and she wanders in Middle-earth for a time yet (III, **344**).

The words “twilight” and “Doom of Men,” which appear in **Arwen** and **Aragorn's** last conversation, recall **Ragnarøk**, the doom or twilight of the gods. What Tolkien says of Beowulf applies equally to Aragorn: “He *is a* man, *and that for him and for many is sufficient tragedy*. . . . It is the theme in its deadly seriousness that begets the dignity of tone: *lif is læne: eal scæceth leoht and lif somod* [Life is transitory: light and life together hasten away]” (“**Monsters**”, 18-19). This is not a happy ending. The critics who claims that none of the protagonists die in the struggle did not finish their reading, for no members of the Fellowship live in Middle-earth at the end of the third volume.

Hobbits share men’s mortality. Like Aragorn, Frodo illustrates the Beowulfian paradox of defeat. His battle with the monsters has left him “wounded with knife, sting, and tooth, and a long burden” (III, 268). His much beloved home in the Shire can no longer comfort or solace him; Frodo claims, “I have been too deeply hurt” (III, 309). He no longer has a place in Middle-earth in the Fourth Age. He must depart. To lose one hero in the battle against evil is to be expected, but Frodo does not go alone. Two other greatly beloved characters, Gandalf and Bilbo, also leave. Tolkien prepares the reader for Gandalf’s departure with a poignant conversation. Merry and **Pippin's** concern over a shortage of pipe tobacco causes Merry to remark that Gandalf will soon be able to clear up any difficulty. The wizard declares his impermanence in Middle-earth: “My time is over: it is no longer my task to set things to rights, nor to help folk to do so” (III. 275). Whether their destination is the Christian Heaven, the Christian Purgatory, or the Pagan Valhalla does not matter; they are lost to our earth and our Time .

Paradox of Defeat

From the captains of men -- Aragorn, Théoden, Éowyn, Éomer,

Boromir, Faramir, Prince of **Dol Amroth** -- courage is expected: Denethor's fall into despair provides a dramatic surprise. The dwarf Gimli's courage in passing with Aragorn through the paths of the dead pleases. But the courage of the hobbits: **Pippin's** saving Faramir's life: Merry's slaying the Ringwraith; Sam's attacking **Shelob**; and Frodo's fighting the One Ring amazes. The odds are against success: many instances of chance are required for the characters to win through to the end. Yet, the persistent courage demonstrated pushes chance or luck along. The characters keep making choices to progress toward the Ring's destruction even though not all choices are perfect. In the end, these choices aid their victory.¹⁵

The impossibility of their task enhances the quality of their courage. Of the five Maia sent to combat Sauron's evil, only one, Gandalf, remains true to the purpose. Strider and four untried-in-combat hobbits stand against five Ringwraiths on Weathertop. With Glorfindel's help, they manage soon after to escape again from all nine in the confrontation at the Ford. The forces of Caradhras defeat their attempts to cross the mountain passes. In Moria, bands of **Orcs** and the Balrog almost slay them, and twenty **orc** arrows finally kill Boromir. While the six members of the Fellowship go off to engage in many different combat experiences against stunning odds, two take the **Ring** into the very center of the Dark Lord's domain. They virtually ring his doorbell. Yet, against all odds, because their courage holds, the heroes triumph.

In **Tolkien's** view, their courage is more worthy because they believe their cause is hopeless. The characters express their lack of hope repeatedly. In Book V alone, there are many such statements: Denethor: "the doom of Gondor is drawing nigh"; Aragorn: "Do not look for mirth in the ending"; "Many hopes will wither in this bitter spring"; "A time may come soon . . . when none will return": **Théoden**: "never will I lean on a staff again. "; "My heart tells-me that I shall not see him [Aragorn] again": "So we come to it in the end . . . the great battle of our time, in which many things shall pass away": **Éomer**: "He [Aragorn] is lost. We must ride without him, and our hope dwindles"; **Pippin**: "Indeed what is the good even of food and

drink under this creeping shadow?"; Imrahil: "So **victory** is shorn of gladness, and it is bitter bought, if both Gondor and Rohan are in one day bereft of their lords." Éowyn: "But to hope? I do not know."; and finally Gandalf: "This war then is without final hope" (III, 46-158). Defeat is not refutation to these hardy warriors.

Doom of the Immortals

Tolkien's world reflects the fate of the doomed **immortals** as well as the doomed mortals. The Elves represent "artistic, aesthetic, and purely scientific aspects of the Humane nature" at a higher level than that of men (Letters, 236). Thus, the old gods in Northern mythology went through a process of becoming more and more closely associated with humans until in fact, they were no more than the larger than-life ancestral heroes of men. They shrank until they no longer existed. Elves and men have long been partners in the battle against evil. Now the time of men has come and the Elves must depart. The power of their rings is a power to arrest change. When the **downfall** of the One Ring as 'Power' occurs, the ability of the other rings to preserve the past fails. Galadriel and Celeborn, **Elrond** and his sons, **Glorfindel** and all the Elves save Arwen relinquish their place in Middle-earth, and with it their own special contributions to the beauty and wisdom of Middle-earth. Their passage over the Sea is not death, for they return to their original Earthly Paradise (Letters, 236-37). Yet, like the Norse gods, they abandon the world they have loved, guided, and preserved. And to those who remain in Middle-earth, they are lost.

The removal of the Elves from Middle-earth further diminishes the quality of life, even beyond its lessening at the **fall** of **Númenor**. When Numenor falls at the end of the Second Age, the last place where "the memory of a time without evil is preserved" vanishes. The sea swallows up the beautiful land which has been created especially for the joy and comfort of men. The Valar themselves have failed. **Manwë** calls upon Iluvatar, and "for that time the **Valar** laid down their government of **Arda**" (Silmarillion, 278). Similarly, at the end of the Third Age, the Elves lay **down** their

guardianship in Middle-earth.

Beauty Perishes

In spite of the great flowering and the plenteous harvests in the Shire in 1420, Middle-earth now begins to fail. **Lórien** fades; Galadriel's power is diminished, "the tides of Time will sweep it away" (I, 380): the Elves will "dwindle to rustic folk"; Elrond's belief that the Three Rings would fail proves true, and "many fair things will fade and be forgotten" (I, 282). With the return of the Elves to the West, much that is best, most beautiful, and of greatest artistry passes out of the world of men. Men remain here in a world diminished, safe from the Shadow, but only for a time.

Many other beautiful and grand things depart. Aragorn wishes Treebeard and the Ents peace and prosperity to grow in. But **Treebeard** remains sad: "Forests may grow, ... Woods may spread. But not Ents. There are no Entlings" (II, 259). In a 1972 letter to Fr. Douglas Carter, Tolkien confirms that there will be no reunion within 'history' for the Ents and Entwives. The dwarf **Gimli** summarizes the departure of the Elves and their love of beauty: "But if all the fair folk take to the Havens, it will be a duller world for those who are doomed to stay" (III, 150). The verb "doomed" summarizes the situation; the world will be less lovely, less enchanting, less exciting, yet man's fate is to remain in it.

Author Poised between Worlds

Tolkien's awareness of being caught between the older pagan merits and the Christian values is keen. In a letter to Robert Murray, S.J., Tolkien stresses his conscious efforts to suppress allusions to religion: "The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work: unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut-out, practically all references to anything like 'religion', to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism" (Letters, 172). The Christian nature of the work lies, thus, in the background of the story,

especially in the understanding and presentation of issues such as the nature of evil, temptation, and grace. The more specific kinds of symbolism have been subdued so that the work of art may triumph.

Yet, as a sincere, practicing Christian, Tolkien finds a greater sadness in this pre-Christian world where boundaries of Time and mortality lie heavily upon his characters. The grace of Christian salvation is not available to them. Tolkien calls Middle-earth a “monotheistic world of ‘natural theology’” (Letters, 220). In it, there is no embodiment of “the One, of God, who indeed remains remote, outside the World, and, only directly accessible to the **Valar** or Rulers” (Letters, 235). In a discussion of Gandalf’s return, Tolkien stresses that the reader may be reminded of the Gospels, but that is not intended. Finally, in a letter to Mr. Rang, Tolkien again comments on his use of Christianity in The Lord of the Rings: “The use of earendel in A-S Christian symbolism as the herald of the rise of the true Sun in Christ is completely alien to my use. The Fall of Man is in the past and off stage; the Redemption of Man in the far future” (Letters, 387). The emphasis in the three-part work is on the problems and solutions of human creatures in a world before Christianity. Thus, the artist Tolkien, who had grace available to him as a Christian, finds the courage of his characters especially poignant. They have true mortality: death without hope of life eternal.

Author’s Use of Antiquity

As demonstrated in Chapter 7, the traditions of the north pervade Tolkien’s work. The chain of being of Middle-earth includes many creatures from Mithgarth, the home of **men** in Norse cosmography. But, some of the creatures are changed and disguised with their names and most obvious characteristics omitted. Some possible reasons for alterations might be a desire to subordinate the sources to the story and thus to avoid allegorical interpretations, to fulfill the necessities of the plot, and to remedy the lack of adequate personages in recorded Norse mythology.

Tolkien found himself greatly lacking in the mythological materials needed to create this work of art. He solved this problem by creating them

himself. In The Lord of the Rings, he manipulates materials from his earlier works, such as The Silmarillion and The Unfinished Tales. He deepens the appreciation for the antiquity of his sources by creating the Red Book of Westmarch, which serves as a repository for the materials in The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. For Tolkien, language and myth were partners; words requested events to explain them. He felt a paucity of such stories about English words and set out to correct it with his own work.

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This analysis of nine thematic comments about the poem Beowulf from Tolkien's essay "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" shows many likenesses between the two works of art. The correlations between the practices of the Beowulf-poet in the creation of his work of art and those of Tolkien himself underscore his purpose. He had an enormous appreciation for the art of the poem and also for its meaning. He believed in the importance of courage in the face of inevitable defeats. In his own work, he went beyond Beowulf in his application of this principle, for he expects courage not only of his manly heroes but also of all other creatures.

His concern with issues of the death of heroes also ties him to structures of Icelandic sagas. In the Volsunga Saga, the hero Sigmund, avenger of his father King Volsung who dies in Chapter 5, meets Death on the field of battle in Chapter 11. His sister Signy, his companion in revenge, has been burned with her murderous husband in their house in Chapter 8. Queen Borghild has already poisoned Sigmund and Signy's son **Sinfjotli** in Chapter 10. Sigmund's posthumous son Sigurd slays the dragon and serves as the primary hero in the tale. He is born in Chapter 13, slays Fafnir in Chapter 18, and falls at the hand of Guttorm in Chapter 30. The saga ends with the deaths of Sigurd's wife Gudrun in Chapter 42 and her sons in the last Chapter 43. The denouement of revenge from Chapter 30 to Chapter 43 is long indeed.

The Lord of the Rings has an equally long denouement from the point

of climax. William Dowie's elation over the happy ending refers to the joyful coronation of Aragorn as King of Arnor and Gondor. That wonderful event occurs in the Book VI, Chapter 4. If all the characters had then settled down to live happily ever after, then the ending would have been a happy one. Chapter 5 continues the illusion of happiness with the resolution of Faramir's love for Eowyn and the long-sought marriage of Aragorn to Arwen. But in Chapter 6, the theme of Death and Immortality returns. King Théoden, slain by the Ringwraith's hand, must be escorted to Rohan to lie in the Barrows with his long fathers before him. At the end of the chapter in a moment of enormous poignance, Gandalf tells Frodo that Bilbo will soon leave Middle-earth and that the wizard will go with him. In Chapter 7, Frodo declares that he may be too wounded to abide in the Shire. In Chapter 8, the evil, which the reader thought was obliterated in the war of the Ring, has decimated the Shire and threatens the lives of the four hobbits. Another battle ensues with seventy men and nineteen hobbits killed.

In Chapter 9, Frodo hands his version of The Downfall of The Lord of the Rings and the Return of the King to Sam to finish. On the road, they meet Gildor, "many fair Elven folk," Galadriel, Elrond, Bilbo, many Elves of the High Kindred, and Gandalf. Gandalf states the epilogue: "Well, here at last, dear friends, on the shores of the Sea comes the end of our fellowship in Middle-earth. Go in peace! I will not say: do not weep; for not all tears are an evil" (III, 3 10). And so beauty and merriment sail West, leaving behind a duller world. But Death lives on in Middle-earth: the fate of mortal beings. In Shire Reckoning 1482, Sam, the last of the Ringbearers, goes to the Grey Havens and passes over the Sea. When King Éomer dies in 1484, Meriadoc Holdwine is with him. He and Thain Peregrin spend their remaining years in Gondor. When King Elessar dies in 1541, their beds are set in the tombs of Kings beside his. Then Legolas builds a ship and passes with Gimli the Dwarf across the sea. The nine walkers walk no more in Middle-earth.'

In several letters, Tolkien comments on the ending and its meaning. In 1961 writing about the Silmarillion to Mrs. Drijver, he noted the dark

ending of that work and of The Lord of the Rings: “Those critics who scoffed at The Lord because ‘all the good boys came home safe and everyone was happy ever after’ (quite untrue) ought to be satisfied” (Letters, 303). He goes on to suggest that most critics will not deign to notice the new work. In a 1956 letter to Joanna de Bortadano who has suggested that the work was about atomic power, he emphasizes the importance of the appendix: “The real theme for me is about something much more permanent and difficult: Death and Immortality: the mystery of the love of the world in the hearts of a race ‘doomed’ to leave and seemingly lose it; the anguish in the hearts of a race ‘doomed’ not to leave it, until its whole evil-aroused story is complete” [Letters, 246-47). He reminds the reader that the end to the man Aragorn's story appears in the appendix because The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings centered on the hobbits.

In another statement on the moral of the work, Tolkien highlights the great difference between The Lord of the Rings and Beowulf: “A moral of the whole (after the primary symbolism of the Ring, as the will to mere power seeking to make itself objective by physical force and mechanism, and so also inevitably by lies) is the obvious one that without the high and noble the simple and vulgar is utterly mean; and without the simple and ordinary the noble and heroic is meaningless” (Letters, 160). Perhaps this statement of the work's meaning accounts for its great popularity. In Beowulf, the noble and heroic does not mingle with the simple and vulgar. The work, therefore, seems remote to many. But in The Lord of the Rings, the ordinary and the extraordinary mingle giving the reader access to the glories of the older heroic days.

This concentration on the ordinary allows Tolkien to achieve more in his work than other fantasy and mythopoeic writers do. While he began The Lord of the Rings as a sequel to The Hobbit and continued to work on it in that vein, that style, that character, and that level of domesticity for some time, the work began to darken and to be drawn towards the greater doings of the high and noble he knew so well in the poem Beowulf. His artistry in merging the mundane concerns of hobbits with the altruistic and dramatic

ones of heroes eventually allowed him to produce The Lord of the Rings.

NOTES

1. T.A. Shippey, The Road to Middle Earth (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), 94-95.
2. "The Battle of Maldon", trans. E. Talbot Donaldson, in Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 1 (New York,: W.W. Norton, 1968), 99.
3. Tom Burns Haber, A Comparative Study of the "Beowulf" and the "Aeneid" (New York: Phaeton Press, 1931; reprinted 1968), 46-47.
4. J.R.R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" in The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 18. (All references are to this edition and are in the text as "Monsters".)
5. Njal's saga, Njál's Saga, trans. Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Lee M. Hollander (New York: New York University Press, 1955), 262.
6. Volsunga saga, The Saga of the Volsungs, The Saga of Ragnar Lodbrok together with The Lay of Kraka, trans. Margaret Schulach (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, W.W. Norton & Company, inc., 1930), xxiii.
7. "Maldon", 97.
8. William Dowie, "The Gospel of Middle-earth According to J.R.R. Tolkien" in J.R.R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller: Essays in Memoriam (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 265-85.
9. Road to Middle-earth, 107-08.

10. Road to Middle-earth, 108-09.
11. Road to Middle-earth, 10940.
12. Road to Middle-earth, 110.
13. Road to Middle-earth, 111.
14. Road to Middle-earth, 111.
15. Road to Middle-earth, 125.

CHAPTER TEN

“Without the stew and the bones . . . that vision would largely have been lost” (“Fairy-Stories”, 32).

Nam I **Hîn Húrin**

The Tale of the Children of Hurin

Because many readers may not be as **familiar** with the plot or the characters from The Unfinished Tales, a different approach will be used to study the relationship between the tales about the children of Hurin and Northern literature. In a letter to Milton Waldman, a potential publisher of a combined Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien discusses the contents of the Silmarillion and names his sources for this tale: “There is the Children of Hurin, the tragic tale of Turin Turambar and his sister **Níniel** -- of which **Túrin** is the hero: a figure that might be said (by people who like that sort of things, though it is not very useful) to be derived from the elements in Sigurd the Volsung, Oedipus, and the Finnish Kullervo [Kalevala]” (Letters, 150). Even though Tolkien did not consider source studies to be preeminently useful, much may **be learned** by examining his techniques in employing materials from the Volsunga legends and other sagas in the creation of the tales about Hurin and his descendants. Tolkien’s story about the Children of Hurin exists in several versions: “The Lay of the Children of **Húrin**” is an alliterative poem written in 1918 and existing in two separate manuscripts, combined by Christopher Tolkien and published in The Lays of Beleriand.¹ “Turambar and the **Foalókë**” is a prose version of the story apparently written by the middle of 1919 while Tolkien was working on the Oxford English Dictionary.² The dating is derived from Humphrey Carpenter’s discovery of a passage written on a scrap of proof for the Dictionary in one of Tolkien’s early alphabets (Lost Tales II, 69). Another version of the tale appears as “Of Turin Turambar” in The Silmarillion. “Narn I Hîn Hurin” in The Unfinished Tales provides the most

comprehensive telling of the story. Here the plot and characters of the Narn will be outlined with supplementary materials from other versions of the story as needed. The headings are those appearing in The Unfinished Tales.

The Childhood of Turin

*Húrin's lineage, a **brief** characterization of him, and a **definition** of his relationship to his brother begin the tale. His marriage to the proud Morwen and the birth of their children Túrin and Urwin, who is known primarily by her sobriquet Lalaith, continue the story with an **early** presentment that this child's tenure in the tale will be short. The unlovable, moody Túrin adores his gregarious sister, who dies **young** from the "Evil Breath". Her father Húrin makes a song of lamentation, after which he breaks his harp and curses his adversary. The child Túrin turns now to his lame tutor Sador, whose nickname is Labadal or "Hopafoot". Sador teaches Túrin skills but also lessons about fear, fate, and wisdom,- When Túrin is eight years old, his father Húrin answers a call to fight against the forces of darkness, but Húrin fears for his return and instructs his wife Morwen to go south quickly **if** things go ill. Morwen boasts of her descent from Beren and her kinship with the king. Húrin gives his son an Elf-wrought blade as a birthday present. Túrin, recalling Sador's command not to give others things which were not his to give, presents his tutor with the **knife** as a **gift**. Sador accepts reluctantly, and Húrin treats him more kindly and commissions the making of a great chair for the hall. Húrin assembles his men, bids his wife good bye, and marches **forth** with the sun **glinting** on the swords of his men, his golden banner unfurled, and his horn sounding on the wind (Unfinished Tales, 57-65).*

Commentary

The genealogical introduction and the capsule characterizations typify the saga format as discussed in Chapter 3. Tolkien describes Húrin: "Húrin was by three years the elder, but he was shorter in stature than other men of

his kin; in this he took after his mother's people, but in all else he was like Hador his grandfather, fair of face and golden-haired, strong in body and fiery of mood" (Unfinished Tales, 57). The strong kinship of Húrin with his brother Huor mirrors that among the sons of Njál in Njál's Saga. The proud and moody Morwen values her descent from Beren One-hand: she may derive some characteristics from Odin's Valkyrie daughter Brynhild, who loses her father's favor when she does not slay the hero he selected from the battlefield. Brynhild's tale appears in a number of prose and poetic versions as does the Narn itself. Although bits and pieces of the story of Sigurd the Volsung are told in many sagas and lays, the two principle tellings of the tale derive from the Old Norse poem of the Elder Edda into the Old Norse prose Volsunga saga of the 13th century and the Old High German rhymed strophe poem Nibelungenlied of the same century.³

Turin's childhood is reminiscent of that of several Norse heroes. Turin shares his mother Morwen's dour mood. Tolkien notes that he was "not merry, spoke little, though he learned to speak early and ever seemed older than his years" (Unfinished Tales, 58). This moody and unlikely childhood is also characteristic of Grettir in Grettir the Strong, of Bothvar in Hrólf saga Kraka, and of Thorstein in Vatnsdale Saga. Grettir seems purposely to misinterpret instructions and scrapes the hide off of a horse when he has been asked to curry it. In Vatnsdale Saga, Thorstein is a morose and lazy eighteen year old whose father accuses him of being like other young men who "want to become stick-in-the-muds and bake themselves over the fire and fill their bellies with mead and beer, and manhood and valour are all dwindled away".* The comparison of the two children -- the moody Turin and his gregarious sister Lalaith -- echoes that of the gloomy Egil and his more outgoing brother Thorolf in the Egil's Saga. Húrin's song of lamentation at Lalaith's death may derive from the Egil's Saga also. When Egil's son dies, he shuts himself in his bed closet to die, but his daughter convinces him that he alone can compose a suitable dirge for his son.⁵

Tolkien constructs a tutor for Turin by combining characteristics of Regin, Sigurd's tutor in Volsunga Saga, with the lameness of Wayland the heroic smith of Old English mythology and of the Greek smith god Hephaestus. Turin's tutor Sador has smith qualities: he "worked in the outbuildings, to make or mend things of little worth that were needed in the house, for he had some skill in the working of wood" (Unfinished Tales, 60). In the Volsunga Saga, Sigurd has a foster-father Regin, whose job is to tutor him: in "all manner of arts, the chess play, and the lore of runes, and the talking of many tongues? When Regin tells the story of his kin, he emphasizes his cunningness in working iron, silver and gold: his brother Otter's prowess as a fisher; and his brother Fafnir's grimness. Sador tells Turin that the fates of men and of Elves are different, but Turin's philosophical questions are referred to someone wiser. About the death of Ealaith, Sador comments "**But** where she has gone no man knows" in typical Norse fashion recalling the Beowulf-poet's incisive comment: "Men cannot truthfully say who received that cargo, neither counsellors in the hall nor warriors under the skies" (Beowulf, 2). At the end of this exchange, Túrin expresses an inappropriate yearning to become one of the Eldar.

The conversation between Húrin and Morwen about his commitment to fight the growing darkness reveals a prescience that he may not return from the conflict in a timely manner. The long sight of Njál, Unn the Deepminded, and others is his also. Several important tokens and implements are introduced. The blade becomes attached to the tutor through Turin's gift of it in the Narn. In the Volsunga Saga, the relationship between Sigurd and his tutor grows while Regin forges the broken sword Gram, a legacy to Sigurd from his father King Sigmund. Subsequently, Regin seduces Sigurd into an encounter with his brother Fafnir, who has turned into a dragon through his long hoarding of a golden treasure. The image of the fifty swords gleaming as the House of Hador rides forward to battle against the darkness recalls the description of Odin's hall being lit by swords from the Prose Edda. The banner, the horn, and the stirrup farewell are commonplaces of Northern and other heroic literatures. The chair, which

Húrin asks Sador to make, recalls other elements from the myth of Hephaestus. In that story from Greek myth, the smith contrives a chair of cunning device for his mother Hera, who has cast him out of heaven for his ugliness and has thus caused his lameness. When she sits in the chair, invisible fetters keep her there. The jovial Bacchus must finally drench the smith god with wine to get him to release Hera.⁷ While the commissioned chair plays no further part in this unfinished version of the story, another chair more closely parallels the one contrived by Hephaestus.

The Words of Húrin and Morgoth

In the Battle of Unnumbered Tears, the forces of Morgoth take Húrin alive and place him in captivity. Morgoth offers him his freedom with power and rank as one of his captains, but Húrin refuses. When Morgoth breaks Húrin's sword, a splinter wounds the face of the unflinching hero. Then Morgoth curses Húrin's offspring to abide beneath his hate forever. The two argue about the nature of the universe; Morgoth contends that nothing exists beyond the Circles of the World while Húrin claims that solace for those who battle against evil will be available beyond the end. Morgoth binds Húrin in a chair of stone facing over the conquered lands. Húrin is given Morgoth's superhuman ability to see and hear all that happens in front of him (Unfinished Tales, 65-68).

Commentary

Morgoth's temptation of Húrin is a standard one with a standard reply. Morgoth, who describes himself as "Elder King: Melkor, first and mightiest of all the Valar," serves as a major evil force (Unfinished Tales, 67). Norse mythology often depicts Odin as the oldest and mightiest of the gods of Valhalla. Morgoth's breaking of the sword recalls the broken sword Gram in the Volsunga saga. In his last battle, the aging King Sigmund slays enemy after enemy until he comes against Odin in disguise: "clad in a blue cloak, and with a slouched hat on his head, one-eyed he was" (Volsunga saga, 118). When King Sigmund strikes him with the sword, it bursts apart, for no

weapon can stand against Odin. The wound to **Húrin's** face suggests perhaps the loss of Odin's eye, **but** not in the direct way that might have been expected. The motif of a chair with invisible fetters appears to be another element from the Hephaestus story, although Loki is bound in Norse mythology. The details of **Loki's** binding, the gods' revenge for the death of Balder, are quite gruesome and do not appear to apply **here**.⁸ In the Turambar version of the Narn story, Hurin is a Promethean figure who alone among men defies the power of the dark lord Melkor. Because of his defiance he is chained in torment upon a bitter peak (Lost Tales II, 79). As the Turin portions of this story grew, Tolkien's interest in his father Hurin and his evil adversary decreased. In the Turambar version, Hurin and his wife, both of whom drop out of the story in later renditions, appear to comment, in Greek chorus fashion, on the fate of their son and daughter (Lost Tales II, 115- 16). In a finished version of the story, Tolkien would probably have established a cogent parallel between the stone chair of **Húrin's** captivity and the carved chair wrought of his compassion for **Sador**.

The philosophical debate reflects Norse thinking. In a commentary on Snorri Sturluson's description of Ragnarsk in the Voluspa, Kevin Crossley-Holland says "But if the Voluspa poet was a fatalist and typical of his time in seeing only a glimmer of hope for the living, he was also a visionary. He describes in detail, as no other surviving poet does, the emergence of a new world, a time beyond our time, purged of all evil, new, clean, ready to begin again. In so doing, he was doubtless transmitting received wisdom, for the beliefs he expresses certainly existed in pre-Christian Scandinavia, but he gives that wisdom new tongue. He faces all the terrors that there are on earth: and having done so, he has won the position to speak with authority of a green heaven and to express our universal longing for rebirth."⁹ As might have been expected, Hurin's arguments parallel those of Norse mythographers. Of course, the Morgoth curse begins to work itself out immediately.

The Departure of Túrin

Morwen, now pregnant with another child, lives on in poverty in her own house because she acquires a reputation for being a witch and others fear to attack her. The villainous Easterling Brodda takes **Húrin's** kinswoman Aerin by force to be his **wife**; secretly, she continues to aide Monwen and her family. Finally, the proud Morwen recalls her husband's words and determines to send **Túrin** to be fostered by King Thingol, although she still cannot bring herself to take his charity. Her denial of Hut-in's instructions to **flee** is **labelled** as "**the first** strand of the fate of **Túrin**." Turin clings to the hope that his father will return and instructs **Sador** not to bum the unfinished carved chair **as fire** wood. **Túrin** refuses to take the **proffered knife** on his trip. Morwen's failure to respond to his cry asking when he will see her again forms "**the first** of the sorrows of **Túrin**." Morwen bears a daughter named Nienor or Mourning. **Beleg** the Strongbow, a great elven woodsman, rescues Turin and his companions from near starvation and death when they become enmeshed in the Queen's mazes. When **Beleg** presents the group at King **Thingol's** court, the King takes **Túrin** upon his knee rendering him great honor. Queen **Melian** sends for Morwen, who still refuses to accept elven hospitality. Morwen sends back with the messengers the **Helm of Hador**. His mother's failure to come constitutes **Thin's second sorrow**. Somewhat reluctantly **King Thingol** presents **Túrin** with the treasured helm, which **Túrin** is yet too young to **lift** (Unfinished Tales, 68-76).

Commentary

Witches abound in the sagas; for instance, one is responsible for Grettir's death, one almost destroys Kormák, and one curses Hoskuld, making him unable to have conjugal relations with his wife Unn in the Níál's Saga. asonable pride characterizes several women in the sagas too. In Níál's Saga, Hallgerd has one of her servants steal food to save her pride; that act causes the death of many men. When she repays her husband's slap with a refusal of hair for a bowstring, Gunnar's death follows (discussed in

Chapter 8). Similarly, **Gudrun's** stubborn pride in the Laxdale Saga brings her lover Kjartan and two of her husbands to their deaths. **Fostering** was a common practice in Northern cultures; the convention was that to foster another man's child was to become his inferior. It is, therefore, the greatest honor that the Elf King **Thingol** bestows when he takes over the boy's care and training. In the context of this action, Morwen's refusal to accept Queen **Melian's** hospitality becomes absurd.

The idea for the Helm of **Hador** may have come from the Helm of Awe, which Sigurd wins from the dragon in the Volsunga saga. No particular use is made of this token in that story, but Tolkien apparently liked the idea and began to play with it in the Nam. The image on the dragon-helm is to be that of Glaurung, who was supposed to taunt Turin about the **mastery** implied by wearing the helmet. Turin's reply points out that the helmet represented scorn rather than allegiance to the dragon. As the story exists in the Silmarillion and the Unfinished Tales, Turin receives the helm from King Thingol, wears it in battles until the **orcs** capture him, and does not use it again in the story as it stands. Christopher Tolkien conjectures from remaining notes that Tolkien intended for the helm to reappear during Turin's adventures in **Nargothrond**. **Túrin** would not wear the Helm then "lest it reveal him", but he was to wear it in confrontation with Glaurung. While the Helm serves to protect Turin from the dragon's deadly gaze, the worm's taunting has its effect: "But being thus taunted, in pride and rashness **he[Túrin]** thrust up the visor and looked Glaurung in the eye" (Unfinished Tales, 155). The Helm was also to figure in the denouement with Glaurung when Turin would reverse the dragon's words about mastery.

In the Nibelungenlied version of **Sigfried's (Sigurd's)** story, the hero uses another token from the dragon hoard, a cape of invisibility, several times. This treasure allows the hero to take the place of his friend King Gunther (Gunnar) both in the contests of strength which win Brynhild and in the wedding night activities. On the first night of the wedding, Gunther (Gunnar) tells his friend that **Brynhild** has "bound me very tight, **carried me** to a nail, and suspended me high on the wall."¹⁰ When Sigfried (Sigurd)

consummates Gunther's marriage for him, Brynhild loses her phenomenal strength. Sigfried (Sigurd) steals from her a gold finger ring and her girdle. Brynhild's beautifully embroidered girdle enters the Narn not as an article of clothing but as a geographical area of peace brought about by the enchanting powers of the elven Queen Melian, mother of Lúthien and foremother of Elrond. To have the main tokens from the Sigurd story -- broken sword, troublesome ring, helm of awe, cloak of invisibility, and embroidered girdle -- all appear in the Narn in recognizable yet altered form is a great tribute to the power of Tolkien's imagination.

King Thingol's reluctance to give up the Helm may place him in a long tradition of stingy kings and chieftains. For instance, in the Egil's Saga, Egil has not given his father the weregild paid for his brother Thorolf because he does not think the old man needs additional gold, but the aging chieftain soon carries off all of his treasure and buries it where it has never been found.¹¹ Túrin's ancestor Hador has received the token from the elf leader Fingon because Hador and his son Galdor alone have the strength to bear it. Galdor suffers ill fortune when he rush& out to defend Eithel Sirion from a sudden assault without it, for an orc arrow pierces his eye. This death is the one recorded for King Harold Sigurdsson at the battle of Stamford Bridge on the Bayeux tapestry; King Harold's Saga reports that the arrow struck in the throat.¹² The repetition of comments about sorrows recalls the Kalevala, but other parallels with the Finnish work are not apparent.

Túrin in Doriath

An elven maiden named Nellas is the first of several unfortunate women to form an affection for Túrin, who seems to be always seeking for the visage of his dead sister. Saeros, one of the King's elf counselors who has little love for men, begrudges Túrin the good opinion of the other members of King Thingol's court. When m&sages cease to come from his mother Morwen, Túrin asks King Thingol for weapons to battle the dark lord. When King Thingol suggests that one man can do little in such a battle except to aide the Elves, Túrin compares himself to his kinsman Beren.

Queen **Melian** notes the importance of the **elven** maid **Lúthien** in that adventure. Three years later **Túrin** returns unkempt from his battles and innocently sits in Saeros' seat. Saeros throws a gold comb on the table with an insult. Later, in the woods, Saeros attacks **Túrin**, who conquers but **refuses** to kill. **Túrin** chases Saeros until the elf desperately attempts a great leap and falls to his death. **Túrin flees from King Thingol's judgment**, although **Nellas** has observed the beginning of the **fight** and proves **Túrin** faultless. King **Thingol** sends his pardon **after Túrin** [Unfinished Tales, 76-85).

Commentary

Women who love Turin generally get little return for their efforts. Tolkien suggests a parallel with the first great marriage of mortals with Elves, that of Beren and **Lúthien**. However, **Túrin** consistently proves himself to be lacking in the nobility and good judgment required for such a match. Saeros hates Men in general and Turin in particular; yet, Turin's proud reactions to Saeros' taunts contribute to the tragic events. The comments about the wild hair are reminiscent of the Heimskringla story of King **Harald** Fair-haired who vowed never to cut nor comb his hair until he had conquered Norway. In the Turambar version, the Saeros character **taunts** Turin about his appearance by saying that his mother was so ugly that he didn't learn the proper use of a comb. Turin kills him on the spot by smashing his face with a **heavy** gold goblet [Lost Tales II, 75). As Tolkien moved the motivation in the story away from fate and towards hubris, this blatant killing was replaced with a fight leading to an accidental death. Turin's own unwillingness to explain the events to King **Thingol** then leads to the tragedies of the story. The first of several references to deer in the Narn occurs when Turin chases **Saeros**, **warning** him to go as swiftly as a deer pursued by hounds. The place where Saeros falls is described as "wide for a deer leap". The fearful mere from Beowulf, described in the chapter on landscapes, may have been an influence, but the Volsunga Saga also has many references to deer. The tale provides a great beginning for the saga,

and the author capitalizes on it artistically by having Gudrun dream that she gets the world's best golden hart, which Brynhild then shoots.¹³

Túrin among the Outlaws

*Believing himself an outlaw, **Túrin** encounters a band of lawless men who have become known as the wolf-men because people fear them. **Túrin** takes the place of one whom he kills in self defense. Eventually, **Túrin** becomes the leader **after** he kills the former chief who has been pursuing a young woman. **Túrin** gives his name as Neithan, the Wronged, and believes that he may be able to establish a free lordship of his own. While **Túrin** pursues Ores, **Beleg** finally finds their camp, is captured by the **wolf-men**, and mistreated by **Andróg**, who covets **Beleg's** bow. When **Túrin** returns and frees **Beleg**, the elf tries to convince him to return to King **Thingol's** service, but **Túrin's** pride prevents this. **Túrin** tries **unsuccessfully** to remember who **Nellas** was and why he might have kept company with her. **Beleg** comments that perhaps men and elves should not meet or meddle (Unfinished Tales, 85-96).*

Commentary

The traditions and habits of the outlaw form yet another link between Narn and the sagas. Several sagas tell stories of famous outlaws: Grettir the Strong, Vatnsdale Saga, and Volsunga Saga. In Volsunga Saga, the wolf motif joins with the idea of an outlaw band. Signy, the daughter of King Volsung, weds King Siggeir, who then invites her family to **Gothland** as a return for King Volsung's wedding feast hospitality. Signy warns her father that Siggeir's gathering of a force of men bodes ill. He replies that he has vowed never to flee in fear and that fate must work its way out. When the Volsungs land, the **battle** begins, and after eight passes King Volsung is slain and his ten sons taken. Signy begs that the brothers not be killed quickly. They are set out in stocks and a great she-wolf, believed to be the witch mother of King Siggeir, eats one of them each night. Signy contrives to cover the last brother Sigmund with honey, saving him from the ravaging wolf, whose

tongue he pulls out while she is licking the honey. That was the wolf's death. After Sigmund escapes from the wolf, he lives as an outlaw in the woods. When Sinfjotli, the son of the brother-sister union, has proven brave enough to be a companion, the two men range together in the woods sometimes in the shape of wolves.¹⁴ The band of outlaws, which Turin joins by accepting service as wergild for his slaying of one of its members, also has its wolfish aspect. The young woman Turin rescues from the group's leader eggs him on to kill his comrade Andróg, who has also been pursuing her. She says that her father would offer a rich reward for two "wolf-heads". When Turin finds his band tormenting Beleg, he condemns their actions and extends that condemnation to their whole life as outlaws "Lawless and fruitless all our deed have been, serving only ourselves, and feeding hate in our hearts" (*Unfinished Tales*, 93). Turin's words about the value of the outlaw life recall Jokul's similar statement in the *Vatnsdale's saga*; Jokul says that his path has gone awry and he must now pay for his deeds with his life.¹⁵ Like Jokul, Turin could have made a much greater contribution to the battle against evil had he returned to society instead of living as an outlaw.

As in the *Volsunga Saga*, the love stories in the *Narn* are also complex. In the saga, Brynhild and Gudrun both love Sigurd, who has loved each of them in turn. Brynhild marries Gudrun's brother Gunnar. Two elven maidens and one human woman love Turin. Beleg's reply to Turin's enquiries about why he spent time with Nellas is that Turin might have wished to learn what she has to teach. Turin's self-centered attitude disgusts Beleg, who has long sought Turin to tell him that he is not under the sentence of outlawry for Saeros' death. Fortunately, Tolkien saves this honest and kind-hearted elven woman: "But Nellas of Doriath never saw him [Turin] again, and his shadow passed from her" (*Unfinished Tales*, 95-96). One woman at least escapes the trap of loving the proud and stubborn Turin.

Of Mîm the Dwarf

Things go ill for the outlaws until they shoot at three hooded grey-clad shapes and capture one, a dwarf. Túrin claims shelter as the dwarf's

ransom, *and* against his *will* the dwarf is bound for *the* night because he *will* not leave his *sack as* surety for his return. When *the* outlaw band enters the dwarf stronghold, *they find* that *Mîm's* son has died because he could not aide him. *Andróg's* deadly bow and arrows are broken and laid at the de& dwarfs feet. *Túrin's offer* of a heavy gold *weregild* succors Mii, who nonetheless curses *Andróg* to die by his *bow*. *Andróg*, in turn, curses *Mîm* to die with a dart in his throat. The sack's contents, which prevented *Mîm* from *leaving* it *as* surety, are not revealed (Unfinished Tales, 96-104).

Commentary

Mîm is a prototypical dwarf from the traditions of Northern literature; his characteristics as a dwarf are discussed in Chapter 4, "Creatures". In alternative versions of the Narn story, the curse is "May he lack a bow at need ere his end" (Unfinished Tales, 148). The placement of weapons at the dead warrior's feet follows the heroic traditions as described in Chapter 7 on Customs. Mîm's reluctance to leave his sack recalls the dwarf Andvari who is connected with the treasure in the Volsunga Saga. In the story, Hreidmar has three sons - Regin, Otter, and Fafnir. Regin tells Sigurd that his brother shifted into the shape of an otter. While the otter was eating fish from the river near the dwarf Andvari's gold, the god Loki, in company with Odin and Honir, kills Otter with a stone. The gods carry off the otter skin to Hreidmar's house, where Hreidmar recognizes his son's skin and demands weregild for his death. Loki returns to Andvari's force, casts a net, and catches the dwarf Andvari in the shape of a pike. Loki requires a ransom. When Loki demands a final gold ring as part of the ransom, the sagawriter says "then the dwarf went into a hollow of the rocks and cried out, that the gold-ring, yea and all the gold withal should be the bane of every man who should own it thereafter."¹⁶ When the gold is spread over the otter's hide, Hreidmar notices that one whisker is uncovered. Odin draws the ring Andvari's loom from his finger and covers the whisker. Tolkien found this detail of the story fascinating and mentions it twice in his 1962 letters about the publication of The Adventures of Tom Bombadil. A reference in that

poem involves identification by a **whisker**: "Your mother if she saw **you**,/she'd never know her son, unless 'twas by a **whisker**."¹⁷ Tolkien says "I am afraid it [a second poem about Tom Bombadil] largely tickles my pedantic fancy, because of its echo of the Norse Nibelung matter (the otter's whisker)" (Letters, **315**) and "the otter's whisker sticking out of the gold, from the Norse Nibelung legends" (Letters, 319). Tolkien's fascination with the story appears here as **Mîm's** abode in the rock, his love of gold, and his inclination to curse.

Túrin in Nargothrond

Beleg joins Túrin to become the Bow and the Helm in new attacks against the enemy. Under the name Gorthol, Dread Helm, Túrin reveals his location to Morgoth. Orcs capture Mîm, who reveals the hideout where Tiirin is subsequently captured. Beleg and Mîm fight over the sword Anglachel. Searching for Túrin, Beleg finds and heals his fellow elf Gwindor, who has been a captive in the orc mines. When they find the captive Túrin, Beleg accidentally pricks him with the blade. Túrin seizes the fated sword and kills Beleg without recognizing him. Túrin now takes the name Agarwaen, son of Amath (Bloodstained, son of Ill-fate). The sword is forged anew and Túrin wears a dwarf mask in battle. Unknown to Túrin, Morwen and her daughter Nienor flee at last to King Thingol's court. As the battles against Morgoth continue, Túrin saves Gwindor, whose wounds are mortal and whose beloved Finduilas turns her affection to Túrin. In the sack of Nargothrond, the dragon bedazzles Túrin and convinces him that he must rescue Morwen rather than saving Finduilas as Gwindor has instructed (Silmarillion, 204-15).

Commentary

The hero's killing his best friend happens with frequency in literature because of its dramatic appeal. Notably in the sagas, **Bolli** kills his blood brother **Kjartan** and the sons of **Njál** kill their foster brother **Hoskuld**, in the Njál's Saga. In the Orknevinga saga, the hero accidentally kills his best

companion. In the saga, Svein **Asleifarson** and Svein Breast-Rope are both at Earl Paul's court in Orkney. With Svein Breast-Rope is his friend and kinsman Jon. The two Sveins begin to fall out over favoritism in the filling of their cups, although there has been little love lost between them for a long time. Svein Breast-Rope gets into a temper and murmurs that Svein will kill Svein, but people hush them up. Eyvind, who has overheard the threat, warns Svein Asleifarson and advises him to get in the first blow with the axe he has just given him. Eyvind suggests that he stand in the shadow of the stone slab and strike Svein from the front if he walks ahead and from the back if he walks behind his friend Jon. Accordingly, Svein Asleifarson strikes Svein Breast-Rope on the forehead. After he stumbles, Svein Breast-Rope sees a figure standing in the doorway. He assumes that it must be his attacker and splits his head open, but it is his kinsman Jon and they both fall down dead together.¹⁸ In the Narn, Túrin's proclivity for falling into trances and trying to escape his actions by changing his name renders this accidental killing of his friend much less dramatic than it might have been otherwise.

The unlucky sword used in the killing is a key implement in the Narn. **Beleg** has received the sword as a gift from King **Thingol** for his delivery of the King's pardon to **Túrin**. **Beleg** wants a sword of worth against increasing **Orc** attacks. **Beleg** chooses the sword Anglachel, which was made by the smith **Eöl** the Dark **Elf**; the sword has been given unwillingly as bride payment for the elf's wife. As **Thingol** starts to give the sword to **Beleg**, Queen **Melían** remarks that the sword still has the malice of its smith's dark heart in it (Silmarillion, 202). After **Beleg** is buried, they notice that the blade of the sword has turned black, dull, and blunt, as if it mourns for **Beleg**. Just as the broken sword Gram is reforged for Sigurd's use in Volsunga saga, the sword **Anglachel** takes on a new identity: "The sword Anglachel was forged anew for him by cunning smiths of Nargothrond, and though ever black its edges shone with pale fire; and he [**Túrin**] named it Gurthang, Iron of Death" (Silmarillion, 2 10). Tolkien begins to make interesting use of the concept of an ill-fated sword here. Queen **Melían** presciently sees the evil in

the sword, the traitorous Mím dies by it, and its slipping causes its owner Beleg's death. The sword partakes of the characteristics of heroic literature swords which cannot be sheathed without first drinking blood.

Túrin's hubristic wearing of the dragon helm alerts Morgoth to his presence. This enormous pride owes more to Oedipus than to Sigurd. Again like Oedipus, Túrin's grief at having killed his friend causes him to wander speechless for a year with Gwindor as his guide. Only when he drinks from a blessed spring is he healed of his madness. In typical Northern tradition, then, Túrin composes "the Song of the Great Bow" as a lament for his fallen comrade Beleg.

The Return of Túrin to Dor-lömin

During *his wanderings* as a dragon-bewitched outlaw, Túrin returns to his home searching for his mother and sister. His old tutor Sador tells him that they have fled from the persecutions of the evil Easterner Brodda. Despite Túrin's disguise, Sador recognizes the voice characteristic of Húrin's family. When Túrin questions his kinswoman the Lady Aerin about his mother's departure, he finally comes free of the dragon Glaurung's evil spell. In the fight that follows, Brodda is flung against his comrades. The fall breaks his neck and kills three of his companions; Sador dies *uneventfully* in the fight. Brodda's companions do not respond because they are weaponless in the hall. As Túrin flees to the hills, Aerin bumps herself in the hall (Unfinished Tales, 104-Q):

Commentary

The death of Brodda echoes a similar hall attack in the Orkneyinga Saga. There, Thorkel makes an equally precipitous entry into the treacherous Earl Einar's great hall. Like Túrin, Thorkel strides right up to the high board where he speaks with Earl Einar briefly then strikes him so that he falls into the fire on the floor. Thorkel's companion Hallvard suggests that Thorkel pull Einar out of the fire. Thorkel pauses to hook his axe around the Earl's neck and heave him up onto the wood platform before

he leaves the hall. In both instances, the hero makes a verbal assault on his **enemy** who is seated at a high table with his troops around him, the hero then kills his **adversary** who ends up on the floor, and the hero escapes from the enemy-filled banquet. The saga writer in the Orkneyinga saga notes several reasons for the lack of immediate revenge: the murder happened quickly, the act was unexpected, the retainers in the hall were unarmed, and it was Thorkel's destiny to accomplish the **murder**.¹⁹ Tolkien also notes the weaponless state of the retainers in Narn, but Tolkien has other pieces of his story to carry forward in this scene. Thus, many of Brodda's supposed retainers now take up table implements to fight as **Túrin's** allies. The ensuing short battle allows Turin to talk with his old servant **Sador** and unsuccessfully to entreat his aunt Aerin to leave with him (Unfinished Tales, 108409).

Had Tolkien written this scene later in his career or had he given it the careful revision that is the consistent standard for The Lord of the Rings, the small blade Turin gave **Sador** many years before would have played some part in the ending of this portion of the story. In the earlier Turambar version, Turin escapes because his aunt takes charge of the feast and declares that her husband's killing was wrongful, but that **Túrin's** wrath was justifiable because his mother and sister had been badly treated (Lost Tales II, 90-91). This resolution lacks the dramatic power of the later one Tolkien devised.

The characters of Lady Aerin in Narn and of Signy, Sigmund's sister and Sigurd's aunt in the Volsunga saga, provide another parallel between the tales. Although Turin urges Aerin to accompany him as he goes in search of his mother and sister, she refuses in characteristic Norse fashion. She chooses the fate of burning in the house with her husband as Signy does the saga. In Volsunga Saga, after Sigmund her brother and **Sinfjotli** her son begin to bum her husband's hall, they beg Signy to come out. She reminds them of her sacrifices to bring about the revenge on her husband for having killed her father and her brothers. She has killed her weakling sons, made herself into a witch woman to seduce her brother, and thus bred a son

worthy to be Sigmund's partner in revenge. But she is loyal to her husband, too, and chooses not to live long after his death but to die in the burning house with her husband King Siggeir. In Narn, Túrin looks back in his flight from his old home, sees the hall ablaze, and learns from his companions that Lady Aerin has courageously burned herself in the house with her husband. The companion makes this epitaph for Aerin: "She did much good among us at much cost. Her heart was not faint, and patience will break at the last" (Unfinished Tales, 109). Aerin shares her nobility and the dual call on her loyalties with Signy and other Norse heroines from the sagas.

The Coming of Turin into Brethil

Free from the dragon's alteration of priorities, Túrin comes into Brethil seeking for the elf maiden Finduilas. When he saves a band of men from an orc attack, they tell him that the orcs have killed Finduilas. He swoons. Brandir, the lame and gentle lord of Brethil, sees him being borne in on a bier and knows that doom has willed it so. Túrin who has been calling himself wildman of the woods, awakens after months in the swoon, resolves to stay in peace, and now calls himself Turambar, Master of Doom (Unfinished Tales, 109- 112).

Commentary

Although the elf maiden Nellas has put love of Turin behind her, Finduilas is not so lucky. Turin is young, dark-haired, pale-skinned, grey eyed, and more beautiful to behold than other mortal men. Finduilas abandons her love of Gwindor and gives all her affection to Turin. Perhaps it is the recollection of the love potion in Volsunga Saga that causes Tolkien to comment: "Then the heart of Finduilas was turned from Gwindor and against her will her love was given to Turin: but Turin did not perceive what had befallen" (Silmarillion, 2 10). Finduilas' forsaking her love for Gwindor and turning to Turin is an inversion of Sigurd's relationships with Brynhild. It is interesting to have the woman cast as the unfaithful lover rather than the man.

In the Volsunga version of the story, after Sigurd slays the dragon, he comes to a mountain ringed with fire. An armed person lies there in an unnatural sleep. When Sigurd pulls the helm off, he sees that the sleeper is a woman, who awakens when he rends open the chain mail shirt. She tells him that Odin has pierced her with a sleep thorn because she has killed the god's designated winner in a battle. Her punishment for disobedience is to be given away in marriage, but she has vowed never to wed a man who knows the name of fear. Brynhild instructs Sigurd in eddic wisdom, and they plight their troth.²⁰ In the Nibelungenlied version of the story, Sigfried (Sigurd) goes with his friend King Gunther and competes in a contest of strength for her hand. Using the Tarnkappe, a cloak of invisibility, Sigfried (Sigurd) not only beats Brynhild in athletic contests while everyone believes that Gunther is the winner but Sigfried (Sigurd) also subdues Brynhild on her wedding night, taking away tokens of a gold ring and an embroidered girdle. In this version, Sigfried is already married to **Kriemhild (Gudrun)**.²¹

Sigurd of the Volsunga version of the story comes to **Brynhild's** foster father's home and again declares his love for her. She protests that she is a shield maiden who still loves battle; and she prophesies that he will wed Gudrun. Sigurd replies "What king's daughter lives to beguile me? neither am I double-hearted herein: and now I swear by the Gods that thee shall I have for mine own, or no woman else" (Volsunga, 163). Brynhild pledges herself to him and receives a gold ring as a token. All might have gone well, except that during a visit to King Guiki, Queen Grimhild fancies him as a son-in-law and gives him a drink to make him forget Brynhild. Sigurd marries Gudrun and swears brotherhood with her brother Gunnar. Queen Grimhild next dictates that Gunnar should court Brynhild. Brynhild again requires her suitor to ride through the ring of fire to reach her. Since Gunnar's horse will **not** go through the fire, Gunnar requests Sigurd's Grani, but the horse will not carry him. Gunnar and Sigurd then change semblances and Sigurd rides again to Brynhild. In Gunnar's guise, he plights troth with her and lies by her for three nights with his sword Gram between them. The ring Andvari's loom which he had given her previously, he now

exchanges for another ring from Fafnir's hoard. Brynhild and her king ride to the Guiking's palace where she weds Gunnar. When the wedding is accomplished, Sigurd remembers his former troth with Brynhild, but he does not act on his recollection.

Turin's swoon on the hillock where Finduilas died may symbolize his indecisive character; it is not a feature of saga literature in general. However, his trance-like state and his lying in state on a bier recall Brynhild's. In the Turambar telling, Turin's sister seeks to lie with her beloved: "I would seek my lord and lay me in death beside him . . ." (Lost Tales II, 108). This action would be a close parallel to Brynhild's lying beside Sigurd as his funeral pyre is lit at the end of the second part of the Volsunga Saga. In spite of its possible origins in the materials of the Volsunga Saga, this trance-like state is not very believable nor does it serve much dramatic purpose in the story. It seems to have been conceived as a device to allow Turin to fall in love with his own sister, but that could have happened without this melodramatic operation.

Gwindor has warned Finduilas of Turin's identity and the dark doom that Morgoth's curse has laid upon the House of Hurin. Gwindor's deathbed advice is that if Túrin can save Finduilas, he may escape the evil doom planned for him; otherwise, his fate will find and destroy him. Turin's rescue of Finduilas would allow a happy alliance between the two with a concomitantly happy ending. This same outcome could have occurred in the Volsunga Saga had Sigurd not been given the potion to make him forget Brynhild.

Unfortunately, Turin encounters Glaurung, who binds him with his dragon eye. The dragon taunts him: "Evil have been all thy ways, son of Húrin. Thankless fosterling, outlaw, slayer of thy friend, thief of love, usurper of Nargothrond, captain foolhardy, and deserter of thy kin. As thrall thy mother and thy sister live in Dor-lómin, in misery and want" (Silmarillion, 213- 14). Turin falls into despair and perceives himself as Glaurung portrays him. The dual interpretations of fate and character operate in this choice as they do in the play Oedipus. It is fate that the

dragon happens along at this particular juncture, **but** it is Turin's lack of character that allows him to believe the dragon's cant. While Turin stands like a stone on the bridge, Finduilas crosses over and cries out to him. This scene is well handled and similar to the crafting Tolkien uses throughout in The Lord of the Rings. The errand to rescue mother and sister is an empty one, for Morwen and Nienor have already fled into the forest safety created by Turin's outlaw band. The operations of fate or doom and the hero's courage are not as well defined in this work as they are in The Lord of the Rings.

Brandir has the potential to be an interesting character, but the origin of and need for his lameness are not evident. While the attendant slowness serves a plot function later in the story, the obvious associations with the smith god Haephaestus work more productively with the character of **Sador** than they do with Brandir. To have two lame characters in the same story confuses the reader. Had Tolkien worked on this story more, he would have resolved this plot difficulty. Turin's proliferation of **names** and identities also becomes tedious and in the end laughable. While it is somewhat effective in symbolizing his own difficulties with accepting himself and his actions for what they are, the reader has difficulty in remembering his current appellation.

The Journey of Morwen and Nienor to Nargothrond

*Fearing that **Túrin** is in peril, his mother Morwen, who has been the guest of King **Thingol** and Queen **Melían**, now insists on leaving the shelter of the Girdle of **Melían** to find him. **Thingol** rues her going but send Mablung and thirty elves to help her. When they cross a river, they discover an additional member of their party -- Nienor disguised. Still **Morwen's** pride keeps her from returning to King **Thingol**. When an attempt is made to cross the river Narog, the dragon Glaurung issues forth creating an enormous fog through his entry into the water. Morwen disappears. Nienor regains the top of the hill only to come eye to eye with Glaurung, who identifies her when she boasts of the courage of **Húrin's** kin. Her will*

*swoons. When Mablung and the surviving elves try to take her back, she escapes during an **orc** attack (Unfinished Tales, 112421).*

Commentary

The concept of a peaceful zone created by the power of an elven queen is an interesting one which Tolkien works out much more successfully in The Lord of the Rings. There, Galadriel has created the beautiful realm of **Lórien** by the power of her ring; however, she warns that when the One **Ring** is destroyed, **Lórien** will also fail. In Narn, Tolkien tries, not very successfully, to arrange some dramatic tension from concepts of entering and exiting from this zone. Turin and Morwen both complain to King **Thingol** that they were reluctant to enter into the Girdle of **Melían** because they did not want to have to remain there forever. Queen **Melían** explains twice that the Girdle is open and the relatives of **Húrin** may leave or stay at their will. While some intimations of this concept also appear in The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien does not spend two conversations on it. The idea of calling this zone the Girdle may have been suggested by **Brynhild's** embroidered girdle in the Nibelungenlied. However, the more famous girdle in works that Tolkien knew well is the green girdle in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. There, the hero Gawain is given the girdle to protect him against an axe blow from a green giant.²² The idea of protection is clearer from the Sir Gawain story than from the Nibelungenlied.

In this segment of the story, Tolkien tells the reader that Morwen is fey. Being fey in Northern literature means that a person seeks death actively, although sometimes characters are fey but in the end do not die. Morwen's excessive pride and her attendant lack of gratitude to King **Thingol** are tedious in this story, but to have her vanish in the fog never to be accounted for again is not typical of Tolkien's finished style.

Nienor's disguise as a warrior places her in a long tradition of Northern warrior women. In this part of her story, Nienor functions as an apprenticeship work for the character of **Éowyn**. Both disguise themselves in order to ride forth on a seemingly hopeless expedition against the enemy.

The presence of the hobbits in The Lord of the Rings gives Tolkien a great advantage because Éowyn disguised as Demhelm lets Merry ride with her. Their combined adventures against the Ringwraith make for a really well-conceived and crafted incident in that story. In this story, Nienor's encounter with Glaurung has similar power. The image of Nienor on the hillock coming unaware into view of the dragon is a compelling one and seems to recall a silent film version of the Nibelungenlied.²³

Each of these sets of stories also employs a dragon. In Volsunga Saga, Fafnir, the brother of the smith Regin, has become a dragon because he has brooded too long over the gold treasure Odin, Honir, and Loki paid as weregild for the wrongful death of their brother Otter. The most ominous part of the treasure is the cursed ring Andvari's loom which Odin took from his finger to cover the Otter's last whisker. In Narn, the dragon's genesis is less interesting: he is the first of the fire drakes of Morgoth (Silmarillion, 116). Fafnir warns Sigurd that the treasure will be his downfall, but Sigurd replies that he would lose all his wealth if that meant he would never die, but all men must die. The dragon Glaurung's power to put humans into trances reduces their retorts to his conversations. Tolkien uses this device several times in the Narn. Túrin is in a trance while the dragon redirects his energies from the rescue of Finduilas to a vain solicitude for his mother's safety. Glaurung then creates the mist that Morwen disappears into; at the same time casting a spell of forgetfulness on Nienor. Fafnir also reminds Sigurd that many times each will be the other's bane. While Sigurd escapes Fafnir himself, the ring Andvari's loom is his undoing and that of many others. Glaurung plays with Túrin in a like manner. When Túrin rouses himself from his trance on the bridge, he lunges at the dragon. The worm could slay him outright but instead goads him into seeking after his mother. That action then brings Finduilas and many of her kin to death.

Nienor in Brethil

When Túrin finds Nienor in a swoon on the grave of F'induilas, he natnes her Níniel, Maid of Tears. Brandir nurses her to health, but she loves

him as a brother, although she encourages **Túrin** to hold **off** their wedding at his urging. At last, **Túrin** says that he must begin a **war** against the **orc** or they must wed. The brother and sister marry (Unfinished Tales, 121425).

Commentary

The incidence of sister-brother love in the Narn echoes that in the Volsunga Saga. Sigmund lives in the woods as an outlaw, receiving Signy's sons as they reach an age to have their courage tested. Signy, disgusted with their weakness, kills them when they fail Sigmund's test of kneading serpents into bags of meal. Finally, she goes to Sigmund in the guise of a witch and bears a child who is both the daughter's son and the son's son of King Volsung. This son, Sinfjotli, joins Sigmund in the outlaw life and effects revenge on King Siggeir.²⁴ This occurrence of incest is not unique in the sagas but is generally unusual in all forms of heroic literature.

The lovers in Narn and in the Volsunga Saga are almost as confused as the quintessentially mixed up lovers in Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream. There the four lovers go through every possible permutation of who loves whom with or without reciprocal feelings. In the Narn, the curse on **Túrin's** family reaps death and destruction. Had **Túrin** listened to Gwindor and saved Finduilas, rather than going on the fruitless errand after his mother and sister, then his sister Nienor might have loved and married the faithful Brandir. While part of this disaster must be credited to the evil emanating from Morgoth in the form of the dragon, part must be assigned to the hero's character. **Túrin** is prideful and stiff necked. He rushes from justice even though he is innocent of the murder of Saeros. He refuses to return to King Thingol's court even though a great deal has been sacrificed to bring him news of his pardon. He ignores his commitment to Finduilas and Gwindor even though he has been warned of its negative consequences. Repeatedly, he attempts to start over by putting everything behind him and taking a new name. Successively, he is called **Túrin**, Neithan, Agarwaen, Thurin, Mormegil, Wildman of the Woods, and Turambar. Had he acknowledged his unlucky fate and attempted to cope with it, he would not

have brought so much woe to so many. As in the sagas, **Túrin's** character is described when he is a child: he never grows beyond it. Several times Tolkien mentions his fatal pride and that of his mother, who would not humble herself to be an alms-guest even of the King. In pronouncing judgment in the death of Saeros, King **Thingol** says that **Túrin** is too proud for his state (Unfinished Tales, 83). Pride as a motivating force has one of its greatest expressions in the Greek play Oedipus, which Tolkien acknowledges as an inspiration for this work (Letters, 150).

In Volsunga Saga, Brynhild and Gudrun fall into a discussion of who has the mightier husband. Gudrun tells her that in fact Sigurd came to her through the fire, not her husband Gunnar. In a moment of hubris, Sigurd has given Gudrun the ring Andvari's loom, which before he had given to Brynhild. Even though Sigurd now forbids Gudrun to talk of his deeds with Brynhild, it is too late. Although Brynhild knows that Grimhild made Sigurd forget her, she cannot abide being married to the lesser man. She arranges to have Sigurd killed.²⁵ In both tales, a sister and brother are involved (Gunnar and Gudrun; Turin and Nienor); a highborn maiden (Brynhild is a Valkyrie daughter of Odin: Finduilas, an elf) loves a mortal hero; a compromise solution (Brynhild's marriage to Gunnar; Nienor's possible marriage to Brandir) fails because the hero demonstrates hubris.

The Coming of Glaurung

Glaurung now rules as a dragon king, drawing orcs to him and attacking all pockets of free men. Túrin acknowledges his promise not to seek orcs until they attack his homeland but finally he drives them back. He resolves to end the incursions by attacking the dragon. Two companions, Dorlas and Hunthor, volunteer, and Túrin selects a fearful part of a canyon, which he believes Glaurung will leap over. Brandir tries to console Nienor, but when she and a company of others follow Túrin he breaks his staff and forfeits his office (Unfinished Tales, 125-32).

Commentary

Glaurung is much more anthropomorphic -than either Beowulf's dragon or even Fafnir, who is, of course, a man whose greed has turned him into a dragon. Glaurung's commanding ability to collect orcs to him and to direct them in battle makes the dragon seem more a part of an organized pattern of evil. In The Hobbit, Smaug is an entrepreneur for evil; he is independent from the evils of Sauron. Smaug is content is guarding his treasure hoard and has not been regularly ravaging the countryside until Bilbo steals his cup. While Glaurung is more clearly tied into the evils emanating from Morgoth, Smaug operates more like the Balrog and Shelob, who are entirely or mainly independent from Sauron. In a letter to Naomi Mitchison, who had written in praise of "Farmer Giles of Ham", Tolkien acknowledges the relationships among the dragons of Northern literature: "I find 'dragons' a fascinating product of imagination. But I don't think the Beowulf one is frightfully good. But the whole problem of the intrusion of the 'dragon' into Northern imagination and its transformation there is one I do not know enough about. Fafnir in the late Norse versions of the Sigurd-story is better; and Smaug and his conversation obviously is in debt there." (Letters, 134). Glaurung seems to have been a good start for Tolkien's quest for a greater dragon. Glaurung carries on better conversations than Fafnir but his range of emotions is limited. Glaurung's persecution of the Children of Húrin derives from his kinship with the evil being Morgoth, who despises Hurin's courage in the face of his overwhelming evil power. Glaurung's powers 'are limited to casting spells on Hurin's children, making Turin's natural hubris more effective, and threatening to kill them outright. The urbanity and emotional range of the worldly but wicked Smaug are yet to be realized.

The plans for the dragon's demise are similar in the Narn and the Volsunga Saga. In the saga, Regin has suggested that Sigurd should dig a pit and stab the dragon in his soft underbelly as he passes over. Regin plans for Sigurd to kill the dragon whose venomous blood will at the same time destroy Sigurd, leaving the treasure for Regin's use. Fortunately, Odin in the disguise of an old man advises Sigurd to dig several connected pits and thus

escape drowning in dragon blood.²⁶ Turin chooses a narrow ravine for his attack upon the dragon. After he crosses the perilous river, he can shove his sword into the dragon's soft underside.

It is clear that both the hero and his nemesis the dragon are apprenticeship works for Tolkien. Many motifs worked on in the Narn are not repeated. Motivations in the work are diverse: the curse on the family of Hurin; the curse on the sword: the evil of Morgoth and his creatures Glaurung and the **orcs**. These externals and Turin's own pride provide some complexity of motivation in the story. In the "Turambar and the **Foalókë**" version Melkor tells Turin's father that his sons career will bring both Elves and Men to grief as a punishment for Hurin's steadfastness against evil. Tolkien apparently abandoned this statement in order to balance fate with pride (Lost Tales II, 71). **Túrin** is consistently unwilling to face up to his fate and to turn and fight against it. The reader keeps waiting for him to grow up, but he never does: He gets into a bad situation, makes a mistake like chasing Saeros to the brink of a cliff and is too proud to explain the circumstances of his actions. Turin repeatedly throws off his old name and identity and uses his prowess at arms to establish a new one. Compared with Smaug, the dragon is just as boring in his relentless pursuit of the children of Hurin.

These same criticisms can be leveled at the Volsunga Saga. Sigurd is equally unwilling to face up to his problems. He remembers finally that he had plighted troth to Brynhild, but instead of making some provisions for the eventually unmasking of that secret, he goes ahead with his regimen of hunting and combat. His pride leads him to give that same ring to his wife Gudrun. When he knows that Brynhild has discovered that he disguised himself as Gunnar, he merely suggests that Gudrun not taunt her about it. Thus, Sigurd dies at the hands of his brother-in-law Gutthorm, but not before the hero can cast his sword **Gram** into his slayer.²⁷ Like Turin, Brynhild kills herself with her own sword and is laid on Sigurd's funeral pyre with him.

The Death of Glaurung

As the three companions climb through the ravine, Dorlas fails at the crossing. In the moment of Glaurung's passing, Túrin is almost overcome by the heat and stench, but Hunthor steadies his sword hand. Túrin manages to shove his sword into the dragon's belly. In his death throes, Glaurung heaves himself to the other side. Turin's sword Gurthang has been wrested from his grasp, and in his *prideful* desire to reclaim it and to look upon his conquered foe, Túrin once again crosses the river and puts himself within range of the dragon's *fearful evil* eye. He falls into another trance. While Túrin lies "dead" in a scene reminiscent of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, the dragon rouses from his fatal wound to madden *her* with his words: "Hail, Nienor, daughter of Húrin. We meet again ere the end. I give thee joy that thou hast found thy brother at last. And now thou shalt know *him*: a stabber in the dark, treacherous to foes, faithless to friends, and a curse unto his kin, Túrin son of Húrin! But the worst of *all* his deeds thou shalt feel in thyself" (Silmarillion, 223). *As* the loving Brandir looks on, she cries "Farewell, O twice beloved! A Túrin Turambar turun ambartanen: master of doom by doom mastered! O happy to be *dead*!" (Silmarillion, 223). Then she throws herself into the wild water of the abyss below her. 'When Dorlas and Brandir argue afterwards, Brandir accuses Dorlas of having also forfeited Níniel's life because he did not observe the dragon's death and report it to the others. Dorlas strikes at Brandir, who *slays* him with his sword (Unfinished Tales, 132-40).

Commentary

Tolkien uses a number of aspects of Beowulf's dragon slaying in constructing Glaurung's death. First, like Beowulf, Túrin asks for companions. While Beowulf accepts eleven volunteers, Túrin stops the volunteer process after two have come forward. Artistically, Tolkien only requires two -- one to die in pursuit of the dragon and one to illustrate the

fate of the coward. The Beowulf-poet has eleven to **work** with, but ten, prove cowardly and endure a single fate -- ostracism. One companion Wiglaf proves true and becomes the commentator and Beowulfs defacto heir. Wiglaf deprives the cowards of their right to receive treasures; to give **and** receive swords, to enjoy a pleasant home, and to hold land-right [Beowulf, 50]. In Narn, Dorlas meets with Brandir who shames him for his cowardice. When Brandir discovers that Nienor has died because **Dorlas** did not bring tidings, he says that he hates him. Dorlas strikes at Brandir with his fist; Brandir hews him his death-blow. Tolkien **handles** this situation of dealing with cowardly men more compassionately in The Lord of the **Rings**. There, **Aragorn** talks with them and encourages them to **find** courage for other tasks, which many do. Since Tolkien had already established Mablung in the role of commentator, he did not need a surviving quest assistant. Second, in both Beowulf and Narn, the successful dragon-slaying technique is to **stab** the underside. With traditional understatement, the Beowulf-poet describes Wiglafs stroke as "a little lower down". Then Beowulf and Wiglaf cut the worm in half. In Volsunga Saga, Sigurd thrusts under the left shoulder.²⁸

Third, both heroes have boasted to **kill** the dragon or die. Turin says "The die is cast. Now comes the test, in which my boast shall be made good, or fail utterly. I will flee no more. **Turambar** indeed I will be, and my own will and prowess I will surmount my doom - or fall. But falling or riding, **Glaurung** at least I will slay" (Unfinished Tales, 126). Beowulfs boast is more complex as is becoming of a warrior of greater power and renown:

In my youth I engaged in many wars. Old guardian of the people, I shall still seek battle, perform a deed of fame, if the evil-doer will come to me out of the earth-hall ... I will not flee a foot-step from the barrow-ward,. but it shall be with us **at** the wall as fate allots, the ruler of every man. I am confident in heart, so I forgo help against the war-flier. Wait on the barrow, safe in your mail-shirts, men in armor -- which of us two may better bear wounds after our 'bloody meeting. This is not your

venture, nor is it right for any man except me alone that he should spend his strength against the monster, do this man's deed. By my courage I shall get gold, or war will take your king, dire life-evil (Beowulf, 44).

Both heroes boast that they will kill the dragon or die, and both succeed with the dragon. Fate has decreed that Beowulf will find his own death there, too.

The understatement of Beowulf is present in the Narn, too. For instance, in Beowulf, the poet notes that Beowulf's shield "protected the life and body of the famous prince, for a shorter while than his wish was" and that the battle with the dragon "was no pleasant journey, not one on which the famous son of Ecgtheow would wish to leave his land: against his will he must take up a dwelling-place elsewhere -- as everyman must give up the days that are lent him." (Beowulf, 45). Tolkien's epitaph for Túrin's companion Hunthor is equivalent: "not the least valiant of the House of Haleth" (Unfinished Tales, 134).

Deer imagery is a notable characteristic in Beowulf, Volsunga saga, and Narn. Tolkien uses it to describe Nienor's flight from attacking Orcs: "But a strange change came upon Nienor and now she outran them all, flying like a deer among the trees with her hair streaming in the wind of her speed" (Unfinished Tales, 120). The intimation of shape shifting is here, not into a wolf as in the Volsunga saga but into a deer. When Turin plans his strategy to kill the dragon, he names the abyss as one where "a deer once leaped from the huntsmen of Haleth." Combined with the use of the imagery to describe Nienor, this remark becomes a grim forecast of Nienor's fatal jump. Dorlas begins to lose his nerve as he recalls the place, and the description provided is reminiscent of Grendel's mere, as discussed in Chapter 6. Nienor's death takes place at the Deer Leap, and when Túrin recounts his sister's tale to Mablung, he notes that she fled "like a wild deer" from the horror of the dragon to the horror of her incestuous relationship with him. Nienor's words "O happy death" begin a series of verbal echoes

from Romeo and Juliet. Juliet's own words are "O happy dagger. This is thy sheath; there rest and let me **die**."²⁹

The imagery surrounding the dragon's encounter and death reflects that used to describe the anthropomorphic monster brothers the Fenris Wolf and Jormungand, the Mithgarth Serpent. The description of **Ragnarøk**, the last battle between the gods and the monsters, reports: "Fenrir's slavering mouth will gape wide open, so wide that his lower jaw scrapes against the ground **and** his upper jaw presses against the sky; it would gape still wider if there were more room. Flames will dance in Fenrir's eyes and leap from his nostrils. With each breath, meanwhile, Jormungand will spew venom; all the earth and the sky will be splashed and stained with his **poison**."³⁰ Tolkien's description of Glaurung's crossing the ravine is indebted to this imagery: "his jaws gaped, and he had seven tongues of fire. Then he sent forth a blast, so that all the ravine was filled with a red light, and black shadows flying among the rocks; but the trees before him withered and went up in smoke and stones crashed down into the river" (Unfinished Tales, 134). The gaping jaws and the fiery eyes of the Fenris wolf have become the gaping jaws and fiery tongue of Glaurung. The heat, stench, and poison of Jormungand have been incorporated, too, for **Túrin** has almost fainted from them. The blasted landscape imagery may owe something to Surt's firing of the world: "**Asgard** and Midgard and Jotunheim and Niflheim will become furnaces -- places of raging flame, swirling smoke, ashes, only ashes. The nine worlds will burn and the gods will die . . . "³¹ Tolkien has effectively combined two monsters from Northern mythology into one fairly interesting dragon in the Narn.

Dragon's blood plays an interesting role in both the Volsunga Saga and the Narn. In the Nibelungenlied movie version, Sigmund baths in the blood and gains immunity to weapons except for a place on his back covered by a leaf.³² In the Volsunga version, eating the blood from the dragon's heart allows him to understand the language of the birds. He learns that Regin plans to kill him and forestalls his fate by killing Regin.³³ In Narn, when Turin pulls forth his sword a spout of black blood falls upon his hand,

burning him with its venom. His outcry awakens Glaurung whose baleful eyes smite **Túrin**. The anguish of his hand causes Turin to fall into a death-like swoon with his sword beneath him. Sigurd goes on to possess the treasures of the dragon's hoard.³⁴

The Death of Turin

*As the dragon dies, Túrin rouses from his trance. Leaning on his sword, he stumbles back meeting Brandir and others. When **Brandir** tells him of Nienor's identity and death, they fight and Túrin kills **Brandir**. Mablung and the Elves arrive and *verify* the fates of Morwen and the lost Nienor. Túrin flees to the ravine, asks his black sword to drink his blood, and dies. Mablung offers final words and constructs a suitable mound (Unfinished Tales, 140-146).*

Commentary

At the end of his tale, Turin realizes that he has hated Brandir, who loved Turin's sister-wife Nienor, unjustly. Tiirin addresses the sword and asks if it will slay him swiftly? The sword replies: "Yea, I will drink thy blood gladly, that so I may forget the blood of **Beleg** my master, and the blood of Brandir slain unjustly. I will slay thee swiftly"* (Silmarillion, 225). The evil, perceived in the sword by good Queen **Melían**, has indeed played a pervasive role in the Tales of the Children of Hurin. Although the dragon has perished from the sword, many others have also been lost: **Mím**, **Beleg**, and Brandir were slain by the sword; Nienor and Finduilas have died because Turin was involved in matters relating to the sword, and **Túrin** himself dies on its dark edge. Talking swords are not common in Northern literature, and fortunately, Tolkien did not repeat this transparent, didactic device. Regin, the smith-tutor whose machinations set in motion the multiple curses and misadventures of the Volsunga Saga, certainly has a worthy counterpart in the elf smith Eöl, who crafted this sword.

When the hero and his dragon meet for the last time, **Túrin** does manage to invert the dragon's original taunt "Hail, son of Hurin. Well met!"

with “Hail, Worm of Morgoth! Well met again! Die now and the-darkness have thee! Thus is Turin son of **Húrin** avenged” (**Silmarillion**, 222).

Glaurung’s slaying of Turin is roundabout. As in Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, **Túrin’s** apparent death causes Nienor’s suicide.. Nienor’s suicide then pushes Turin into killing himself. In the Volsunga Saga, **Brynhild’s** urgings cause Sigurd’s death, but as he lies on his **funeral** pyre, she thrusts a sword into her armpit, instructs her companions. about those who should join the two in death, and is laid beside Sigurd on the pyre.³⁵

When Mablung and the other elves arrive, Turin recounts his woes. His description of Nienor as “brown as a berry” with dark hair and small as an elf-child indicates that he has gone mad at last, for Mablung reminds him that she was **tall,with** blue eyes and fine gold hair -- the features common to **Húrin’s** children. Turin now comments on his blindness: “But why no! For see, I am blind! Did you not know? Blind, blind, groping since childhood in a dark mist of Morgoth!” (Unfinished Tales, 144). This reference to blindness ties **Túrin** again to Oedipus who blinds himself after he discovers that he has slain his father and begotten children on his mother.

Turin shares his character problems with Shakespeare’s hero Romeo, too. Both do seem to be somewhat plagued by an evil fate, but both also contribute to their fate by their precipitous actions: Romeo’s hotheaded killing of Tybalt, his hasty marriage to Juliet although he has recently loved Rosalind, and his quick suicide in the tomb are products of flawed character. Shakespeare’s play seems to have been more clearly in Tolkien’s mind than he thought when he named his sources as Sigurd, Oedipus, and Kullervo, for in addition to the plot and character similarities, at least three more verbal echoes exist. When **Túrin** argues with and kills Brandir, he says “Seek Niniel! [Nienor] . . . Nay, Glaurung you shall find, and breed lies together. You shall sleep with the Worm, your soul’s mate and rot in one darkness!” (Unfinished Tales, **143**). Turin is sending Brandir to accompany the villainous dragon in death. Although the meaning is quite different, . Romeo’s speech as he stands by the comatose Juliet is a clear analogue:

Why art thou [Juliet] so fair? shall I believe
That unsubstantial death is amorous,
And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
Thee here in dark to be his paramour?
For fear of that, I still will stay with thee:
And never from this palace of dim night
Depart again: here, here will I remain
With worms that are thy chamber-maids . . . 36

The monster in Tolkien's Narn is also the worm, and the person instructed to lie with him is Turin's adversary rather than his beloved. Yet, either consciously or unconsciously, Tolkien's knowledge of the play shaped his descriptions in the Narn.

One page later, Mablung comments that he and the other elves should discover the rest of Turin's woes: "Some strange and dreadful thing has chanced that we know not. Let us follow him and aid him if we may" (Unfinished Tales, 144). In Romeo and Juliet, after the alarm has been sounded, the Prince says to Montague:

Seal up the mouth of outrage for a while
Till we can clear these ambiguities,
And know their spring, their head, their true descent! 37

In both cases the chorus character suggests that a confusing situation must be straightened out. Next, Mablung offers commentary over the dead body of Turin saying: "I also have been meshed in the doom of the Children of Húrin, and thus with words have slain one that I loved" (Unfinished Tales, 145). His words recall the Prince's words over the bier containing Romeo and Juliet:

Where are these enemies? Capulet! Montague!
See, what a scourge is laid upon your hate,
That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love.
And I for winking at your discords too
Have lost a brace of kinsmen: all are punish'd. ³⁸

Both commentators regret that their lack of a more decisive intervention has contributed to the tragedy. Mablung acknowledges that his explanation about Nienor being Turin's sister has finally undone the hero. The Prince notes that his lack of a more decisive action has caused the deaths of Mercutio and Paris. Again Tolkien molds the verbal echo to his own needs.

Comparisons between the stories of Sigurd the Volsung, other sagas, and one or two other literary works, and the story of Turin son of Hurin do seem to have some value. Seeing themes, motifs, and ideas in their original settings shows the basic materials that went into Tolkien's cauldron of story. Little went through that cauldron unchanged. At every opportunity, Tolkien's own imagination and creativity molded, shaped, and sculpted elements from earlier stories to fit the needs of his own tales. In the instance of an early and never-finished work, such as the Narn, the pieces borrowed are much more recognizable than those found in the later, polished master work, The Lord of the Rings. In a comparison of Narn with Sigurd the Volsung, the reader has an unusual opportunity to observe the process of Tolkien's creativity.

NOTES

1. J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lays of Beleriand, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 3-130. (All references are to this edition and are in the text as Lays of Beleriand.)
2. J.R.R. Tolkien, The Book of Lost Tales Part II, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 69-143. (All references are to this edition and are in the text as Lost Tales II.)
3. One work, Volsunga Saga, shares with Beowulf the status of being a long, mythic Northern work. Volsunga Saga shares Beowulf's national purpose, but not its poetic style. Written by an unknown Icelandic author in the 13th century, the saga recreates in prose the stories from the poetic Elder' Edda in order to glorify the heroic past of the Norse people in their golden age on the Rhine (Volsunga Saga: The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs, trans. William Morris (New York: Collier Books, 1971), 18). The author makes heavy use of his copy of the Elder Edda in the same way that Tolkien handily employed the materials he had written already about Middle-earth. Tolkien's interest in creating a mythology for England paralleled the Volsunga Saga author's purpose.

However, the Volsunga Saga lacks the craft that **makes** Beowulf notable. Volsunga's author does not bring to his task the level of genius in the molding of scenes, the construction of story, the portraying of details, or the creation of character that the Beowulf poet does. Volsunga Saga does not catch and hold our interest or suspend our disbelief with the power of the most exalted pieces of literature.

Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to survey the common features. Part of the Volsunga Saga author's lack of craft appears in the omission of transposition of narrative material. The story moves straightforwardly without significant embellishment with interesting anecdotes from the past. The character's dreams do foretell the future similar to those of characters

in the other works, but not in an imaginative manner. Prophecy is not artistically applied. For example, at the death of **Fafnir** in Volsunga Saga, Fafnir tells Sigmund that the gold- hoard will be his **death and** advises the killing of Regin. Yet, the dragon's prophecy is not accurate, for Sigmund's love strife causes his death.

The heroic element exists but in a less satisfactory form. In the first part of the story, the adventures of brother and sister Sigmund. and Signy and their son **Sinfjotli** suffice. They strive to revenge the wrongful death of their father King Volsung. In Sigurd's part of the story, his superiority hardly allows for a fair fight. Yet a spirit of hardihood pervades the Volsunga Saga. Sigurd himself provides action; Brynhild's constant complaint against her husband Gunnar is that he is not the dragon slayer, nor has he slain five kings, nor did he ride through the flames to awaken her. She will have only the most outstanding warrior of her time (Volsunga Saga, 181-82).

After Sigmund's victory over his father's slayer King Siggeir, **Sinfjotli** gets his death from a poisoned cup and Sigmund dies in battle. Sigmund's second son Sigurd conquers the dragon with so little motive and so early in the story that he becomes a hero without a cause. Since he does not strive to achieve anything, the reader has little reason to identify with him. Although he shares the traditional hero's good looks, he is singularly lacking in interesting companions or in a people to protect.

Fate works throughout the work but **not** in tension with God or the gods. The author underlines the overriding importance of courage when Signy applauds Sigmund's killing of her two cowardly sons. The sentiment that courage must increase as might decreases prevails when Sigmund **falls** before the sword of Odin: "for good-hap of King Sigmund had departed from him, and his men fell fast about him; naught did the king spare himself, but he rather cheered on his men: but even as the saw says, No might 'gainst many, so was it now proven" (Volsunga Saga, 118-19). Yet, the relationship between a man's courage and 'fate's finality remain unclear.

4. Vatnsdoela saga, The Vatnsdale Saga, trans. Gwyn Jones (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), 20.
 5. Egil's saga, Egil's Saga, trans. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1982), 204.
 6. Volsunga Saga, 125.
 7. Charles Mills Gayley, The Classic Myths in English Literature and in Art (Boston: Ginn, 1939), 91.
 8. Kevin Crossley-Holland, The Norse Myths, (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 169-72.
 9. The Norse Myths, 236.
 10. Nibelungenlied, trans. A.T. Halto (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1985), 89. Written at about the same time as the Volsunga Saga, the Nibelungenlied is a long German poem composed in a complicated **rhymed strophe**. The poem was apparently designed to be performed by a bard in a princely court. The medieval manuscript had been forgotten until it was rediscovered in the 18th century, in the same way that the Kalevala and the Elder Edda were (The Nibelungenlied, trans. Margaret Armour (New York: Heritage Press, 1961), xi-xiii).
- The contrast between the German poem and the Norse saga is stark. Like The Lord of the Rings, the Volsunga Saga is filled with action while the Nibelungenlied dwells at length on descriptions of costumes, arms, and feasts. So pronounced is the interest in clothing that the reader might imagine that author to be a cloth merchants wife. The hardihood, individual strength, and fearlessness of the Volsunga Saga are replaced with courtliness, vast armies, and treacheries.

The earlier tales of the Volsunga kin, the revenge for King Volsung, and the winning of the gold are foregone in favor of expanded telling of the revenge for Sigfried (Sigurd). The love story, which provides an uncomfortable motivation in the Volsunga Saga, is refined and magnified in Nibelungenlied. When Brynhild tries to make Kriemgild act like her vassal, Kriemgild calls her a wanton. The villainous **Hagen** takes **Brynhild's** cause, tricks Kriemgild into telling him where Sigfried's vulnerable spot is, and kills the hero with a spear. Unlike Guttorm in Volsunga Saga, Sigfried does not kill him. Kriemgild devotes the last half of the work to accomplishing his death in one of the bloodiest battle scenes ever written. In the tradition of the Hollywood monster movie, barrage after barrage of knights attack **Hagen** and Gunther in the hall, but they fight on, Kriemgild **has** the hall burned over them, but they fight on. Finally, Sir **Dietrich** captures Gunther and **Hagen**, whom Kriemgild herself beheads. The story has been greatly diminished in the Nibelungenlied. The mentality of the cloth merchant's wife has obliterated the cosmic actions. The Ring -- symbolizing the curse on the gold, prized **as** a love token but yielding only death -- is lost in the bourgeois tale of the wife's revenge. But Tolkien has found it again in his own works and lifted it beyond its original place. Noting the elements of **Sigurd** the Volsung, Oedipus, and the Finnish Kullervo on the creation of Turin and others, he acknowledges their place in the cosmic cauldron. Perhaps the Volsunga matter would have stood as a germ to a finished saga of **Túrin** in the same way that Kalevala is the germ of the Silmarillion and Beowulf is the germ of The Lord of the Rings.

11. Egil's Saga, 149-150.

12, Magnuss Magnusson, Vikings (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1980), 30-1 1.

13. Volsunga Saga, 167-68.

14. Volsunga Saga, 97-109.
15. Vatnsdale saga, 25.
16. Volsunga Saga, 130.
17. J.R.R. Tolkien, Adventures of Tom Bombadil, in Tolkien Reader (New York: Ballentine, 1966), 14.
18. Orkneyinga saga, Orkneyinga Saga: The History of the Earls of Orkney, trans. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edward (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1984), 114-15.
19. Orkneyinga Saga, 44.
20. Volsunga Saga, 149-56.
21. Nibelungenlied, 60-69.
22. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, trans J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), *passim*.
23. Die Nibelungen, directed by Fritz Lang, Decla-Bioscop, 1924.
24. Volsunga Saga, 101-4.
25. Volsunga Saga, 177-201.
26. Volsunga Saga, 141-42.

27. Volsunga Saga, 189. After Gunnar eggs Gutthorm on to kill Sigurd, the dead hero, his three year old son, and his killer Gutthorm are laid upon a blazing pyre. In a missed dramatic moment, the author narrates: “thereto was Brynhild borne out, when she had spoken with her bower-maidens, and bid them take the gold that she would give; and then died **Brynhild**, and was burned there by the side of Sigurd, and thus their life days ended” (Volsunga Saga, 201). Compared with the death of Denethor, this scene lacks narrative building, descriptive adornment, and dramatic power.

28. Volsunga Saga, 142.

29. The Complete Works of Shakespeare, ed. Hardin Craig (Glenville, Ill.: Scott Foresman, 1961), Romeo and Juliet, V. iii, 169-70.

30. Norse Myths, 174.

31. Norse Myths, 175.

‘32. Die Nibelungen.

33. Volsunga Saga, 146.

34. Volsunga Saga, 148.

35. Volsunga Saga, 199-201.

36. Romeo and Juliet, V. iii.102-09.

37. Romeo and Juliet, V. iii. 2 16-18.

38. Romeo and Juliet, V. iii. 291-95.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"There are many things in the Cauldron, but the Cooks do not dip in the ladle quite blindly" ("**Fairy-Stories**", 3 1-32).

Final Thoughts

Shakespeare borrowed lavishly for plots, characterizations, and descriptions from North's translation of Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, from Holinshed's Chronicles, from Belleforest's Histoires Tragiques, and from many other texts. Scholars **familiar** with Shakespeare's habits may be disappointed that no such satisfying story analogs can be found for Tolkien's major works.¹ Yet clearly, Northern literature and mythology have made great contributions to the construction of The Lord of the **Rings**. Tolkien's biography, his Letters, and the examples presented here show conclusively that he did use a thorough knowledge of the Old Norse **sagas**.

Of the many generic labels assigned to The Lord of the **Rings** the saga is the most suitable. No other genre fits both the structure and the orientation as well. The fairy-story, as a form, is too short for the three part work; fairy-stories require a sense of timelessness while The Lord of the **Rings** is extremely conscious of time. And **the** ending of The Lord of the **Rings** is not Eucatastrophe and thus not suitable for a fairy-story. The traditional epic and the saga share many characteristics. Epic definitions that stress a blend of folklore, fiction, and "saga" (historical background) suit both Homeric epics and Tolkien's three-part work, but the epic has other characteristics which do not appear in Tolkien's work. No muse is invoked; the narrative **does** not begin in medias res; and the catalogue is a prominent feature only in the appendices. The epic requires an elevated style of poetry. However, the **traditional** romance is a potentially appropriate genre, for Frye's phases of romance are all present in The Lord of the **Rings**. These phases of romance are also a part of several sagas, not only the **foreign-**

influenced lying sagas but also the native sagas of olden times and the **family** sagas. While the romance reflects Mediterranean influences and employs poetry, the saga reflects the North sea culture and employs prose.

The saga is, therefore, more appropriate for The Lord of the Rings. Further, the varied definitions of the novel present a problem in themselves: the three-part work meets the requirements of some of them. But even when comparisons can be made with characteristics of the novel, these analogues do not foster an understanding of Tolkien's work. The saga, as defined in this treatise, illuminates both the structure and the content of The Lord of the Rings. Like the typical sagas, Tolkien's three-part work is an extended, prose, chronological narrative. The conventions of the saga, a concrete impression of location, a protracted interest in genealogy, capsule characterizations, and some pretensions to a historic basis all contribute to the success of Tolkien's masterpiece. Most of all, the saga displays an affinity with the North Atlantic peoples as does The Lord of the Rings.

The creatures of Middle-earth are one of its most memorable aspects. Although the comparison is an unusual one, hobbits share several personality traits with those of vikings. Bilbo's first scene with the dwarves of The Hobbit has much in common with some scenes between Bothvar and Hott. Nothing about Tolkien's elves contradicts the Norse conception of elves, and Tolkien may have taken his idea for **orcs** from Snorri's mention of black elves. Similarly, the dwarves of Middle-earth are quintessentially those of Mithgarth; they could be transported into Northern literature without alteration. Even their names are from Northern mythology -- the catalog of dwarves in the eddas. The wizards seem more than casually related to the Norse gods: Gandalf to Odin, Saruman to **Loki**, and perhaps Radagast to Frey. Trees are livelier both in the sagas and in Tolkien's work: the Old Willow, the Ents, and the trolls all have analogs in Norse materials. The speaking thrush and ravens are like Odin's pets **Huginn** and **Muninn**, and the eagles seem to function as an objectification of the Norse gods' ability to change shapes. Smaug is not only in the tradition of **Fafnir** and Beowulf's worm, but may also be related to legends like that of the greedy

viking Bui Akason, whose brooding over money turns him into a dragon. The wargs draw on the Northern people's natural fear of Wolves, a fear that shows itself in the creation of Odin's bane, the Fenris wolf, and in a variety of werewolves and shape-shifters in the sagas. Four ancient creatures inhabit Middle-earth -- Tom Bombadil, Goldberry, the Balrog and Shelob. The visit to Tom Bombadil parallels a number of instances in the sagas in which the protagonist stumbles into the house of a large, hostile man with a variety of results. The evil ancients seem to derive from Loki's monstrous children in Norse mythology. However, the most persuasive image for evil in The Lord of the Rings is the evil eye. Glam's eyes seem to have made an impression not only on Grettir in Grettir the Strong but also on Tolkien. Tolkien's depiction of Gollum seems to be related to that of Glam. The belief in the evil eye was common in the North, and the imagery of the evil eye culminates in The Eye of Sauron.

Unlike many of the creatures, the implements of Middle-earth are not particularly Nordic. They could probably be inserted into almost any piece of medieval literature without being anachronistic or out-of-place. The Ring, as Tolkien has developed it in The Lord of the Rings, has no apparent antecedents in Northern literature although a rich tradition of lesser rings with diverse symbolic values did contribute to its creation. Literature will be much advanced before another token with such powerful symbolism and cunning appears. The weapons of Middle-earth parallel those of the sagas and the Old English poem Beowulf. The giving of gifts generally follows the constructions of world-wide heroic cultures, in which rulers reward their retainers with elaborate gifts.

The typical landscapes of Middle-earth are not those of the volcanoes, fjords, and farms of the saga writer's native Iceland. Some geographical features -- the secret valley, the marshes, and the forest Mirkwood -- may derive from Northern literature. Others, such as the underground lake at which Bilbo meets Gollum and magical entrance-ways, show an indebtedness to specific incidents in sagas. Still others, such as Theoden's hall and the pool before Moria, echo the great descriptions of Beowulf. Tolkien admits

two major influences on The Lord of the Rings -- **rural** England and the Northern myths. Clearly, most of the landscapes come from the former?

The creatures of Middle-earth and the men of the sagas share a number of customs. The riddle game, runes and spells, appearances, patronymic names, courtesy, governance practices, burial customs, man matching, hard bargains, compassion and story-telling techniques appear in both cultures. The ethical system of both realms is concerned with pagan virtues, such as comitatus, kinship, and revenge, rather than with Christian virtues, such as piety.

The personalities of Middle-earth have both general and specific parallels in the sagas. Several characters -- Boromir, **Faramir**, Aragorn, and **Éowyn** -- derive from prototypical Northern heroic traits for heroes, kings, and shield-maidens. The complex character of **Denethor** shows a closer relationship to that of **Njál**, the protagonist of Níál's saga, while **Théoden** may have been suggested by King Hrothgar in Beowulf. The Elf woman Galadriel seems to have characteristics of two very different women from the sagas -- the noble and virtuous Unn the Deep-minded from the Laxdale saga and the strikingly beautiful but wicked Hallgerd from Níál's saga.

In addition to providing a number of analogs for specific creatures, implements, landscapes, customs, and personalities, the poem Beowulf has a larger relationship with The Lord of the Rings. The two works share a tradition of heroic elements -- fights, a spirit of hardihood, and heroes. Yet, Tolkien's heroes are profoundly different from those of the Beowulf poet. In the Old English poem, heroic conduct is the **provenance** of a single, **larger-than-life** hero Beowulf with some assistance against the dragon from his kinsman **Wiglaf**. In The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien expects heroic behavior from a panoply of creatures, large and small, brave and cowardly. All must contribute their courage to the defeat of Sauron. The two works also share a complex vision of the relationship among three elements--fate, a supreme being, and courage -- in the battle against cosmic evil. Tolkien has intentionally **minimized** the influence of the supreme being by setting the story in a time when the One God is known but not approachable (Letters,

387). Tolkien understood the themes and meanings of Beowulf thoroughly. These great themes -- the monsters as a symbol of the **persistance** of evil, the tragedy of mortality, and the death of beauty -- are those that Tolkien adapted into The Lord of the Rings. In this, the reader sees the truth of Tolkien's statement "I have tried to modernize the [Northern] myths and make them credible. "³

In addition to the relationships between The Lord of the Rings and Northern literature, Tolkien also acknowledges a debt to the Volsunga Saga in the creation of Narn I Hîn Húrin, which appears in The Unfinished Tales and The Silmarillion. Characters, implements, creatures, customs, personalities, and themes from the Narn are derived from the sagas. Since these materials were never entirely finished, the level of **craftsmanship** differs from that found in The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. Generally, relationships are clearer, and fewer alterations have been made to make borrowed elements more a part of a cohesive whole.

As the summary reveals, Tolkien fused many elements of Northern literature together into his creation of Middle-earth and the stories told about it. With Tolkien's work, the term "influence" is perhaps more descriptive than the term "borrowing". Little evidence exists that Tolkien borrowed from Northern literature in the sense that he had Níál's Saga or Beowulf on his desk while he was writing The Lord of the Rings. In contrast, Shakespeare is thought to have had the text of Holinshed on his desk while he wrote the defense of Katherine in Henry VIII, and Pandosto before him when he composed Bellaria's defense in The Winter's Tale.⁴ Perhaps the cases of closest parallels, such as the descriptions deriving from the mere and the golden hall in Beowulf, reflect Tolkien's intimate knowledge of the poem. He studied it, wrote criticism about it, taught it, and translated it. While the text was undoubtedly in the room, it was probably not open on the desk. Other close parallels are with the Níál's Saga, a work that he probably knew very well. He would not have needed to refer directly to the text of Níál's Saga in order to have employed materials from it.

Most of Tolkien's borrowings and fusions were probably unconscious. He had read the body of Northern literature as an Oxford undergraduate. He reread certain parts of it during his association with various Old Norse reading clubs. However, his commitments -- a large body of criticism, a life of teaching and raising a family, and the extensive revisions he did to create The Silmarillion, The Lord of the Rings, The Hobbit, and The Unfinished Tales -- did not leave much time for additional reading. His theories about the subcreator provide a guide to his own methodology. He had filled his cauldron of story with bits and pieces from the public school education of his day. However, in his particular case, an enormous complement of Northern literature was also placed in the cauldron. His interest in, and love for, the stories and myths of the North found unique expression in his literary output as compared to that of his peers and contemporaries.

The value of knowing the raw materials used to create a work of art continues to be debateable, not only for the works of J.R.R. Tolkien but also for those of other authors. Tolkien's own statement that studies of the relationship between Túrin, the hero of the Narn, and his antecedents, Sigurd the Volsung, Oedipus, and the Finnish Kullervo are "not very useful" must be given credence (Letters, 150). However, in "On Fairy-Stories," his deliniation of elements -- stock and bones -- that got into the Soup argues that his own interest in antecedents was greater than this offhand comment might suggest. Much has been observed through this study about Tolkien's craftsmanship: the reader sees him practicing the theories he described in the essay. He absorbs materials from his sources, places them in his own cauldron of story, and brings forth a soup far more complex and fascinating than the sum of the individual ingredients.

Knowledge of the source will frequently aid the reader in the interpretation of a character or an incident. For instance, the character of Denethor is elucidated by a knowledge of Njál and his stature. Questions about the genre of The Lord of the Rings become clearer with an explanation of the variety of the saga genre. The tension among fate, a supreme being, and courage can be understood more clearly in the context of Beowulf. The

interpretation of the entire three-part work is also influenced. The reader who understands the themes of Northern mythology and literature and who recalls Tolkien's stated purpose to modernize them cannot easily interpret the work as a Christian text or the ending as a happy one. These facile explanations of the power of The Lord of the Rings must be left behind.

Yet the power of The Lord of the Rings does exist. As a work of art, it has spoken to millions of readers and will speak to other millions as the centuries pass. This study of Tolkien's sources is a useful adjunct to criticism of his work. Among Twentieth Century writers, Tolkien's genius is unexpected and unusual. This study provides partial answers for the resulting two puzzles posed to Tolkien scholars by their colleagues: why did Tolkien write these works rather than others, and why has The Lord of the Rings been so popular. First Tolkien wrote about Middle-earth because he had read, studied, and loved Northern mythology and literature. Further studies need to be conducted to assess the impact of other mythology and literature on his work. However, an analysis of all influences will probably show that the Northern one was the strongest and most pervasive. Second, one of many reasons why The Lord of the Rings has been so popular is the quality of the work. Tolkien's craftsmanship, his practice of revision and redaction of all materials contributing to the telling of the story, will continue to set him above other fantasy writers. When his enormous popularity has been forgotten, then he will achieve his rightful place among great writers.

NOTES

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therefore did not wish to claim authorship. The Icelanders of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were abridging or expanding, combining or interpolating, re-writing and re-arranging their own works and those of their predecessors. This practice may have made it difficult to assign authorship²¹.

Icelandic Family Sagas

The Icelandic family sagas give an amazingly clear and vivid picture of the details of early Scandinavian history and also throw much light upon the history of England during several centuries. Through the sagas, readers know much more about the hundreds of real Icelandic men and women whose actions are recorded than they do about the kings of England during the same time period. In addition to their historical matter, the sagas also record all that is known about Germanic religion, mythology, and beliefs in the supernatural. The student of culture and folklore has an enormously rich resource in Icelandic saga literature²².

During the written saga period in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries, many different kinds of sagas were written. The best known group includes the sagas of the Icelanders, those stories written about the great men and distinguished families of the island. The action of most of these sagas takes place between the middle of the tenth century and the first quarter of the eleventh. The thirty or so more authentic of these works would fill a book about 3,000 pages long and provide a fairly comprehensive picture of life in the heroic period in Iceland. Some of these are shorter sagas with a variety of story lines, many of them dealing in typical themes of honor and revenge, others telling stories of thwarted love, and still others featuring poets as heroes²³.

Five sagas stand out not only for their length -- twice that of the shorter workers -- but also for their excellence. These are the Eyrbyggja saga, Egils saga, Laxdale saga, the saga of Grettir the Strong, and Njáls Saga. While Egil's Saga seems to have contributed some facets to The Lord of the Rings, fewer correlations exist than with the others. Each of these other