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The Lord of the Rings: The Last Epic Battle Against the Evil of Industrialism

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REFLECTION

My decision to enter into a graduate program in Liberal Studies was driven by my constant desire to look outside of the typical confining walls of thought found in most disciplines. Seeing those walls as a limitation to the pursuit of truth because of their allowance of only certain analytical lenses, I wanted to combine several ways of looking at issues in order to find more complete, cross-disciplinary conclusions. Looking back on the subjects discussed throughout my study in the Master of Liberal Studies (MLS) program, I have been able to identify several courses that have helped prepare me for not only this culminating project but also to perform the cross-disciplinary analyses that I have always been interested in.

Specifically, the culmination of ideas from English 812 “Studies in Literature: Theories and Techniques of Criticism” (Spring 2010), English 601 “Religion, Heresy, Magic, and Myth” (Fall 2010), IDS 801 “Intro to Graduate MLS” (Summer 2008), and IDS 802 “Ways of Knowing in Comparative Perspective” (Spring 2008) will inform the entire paper. While all of the courses taken throughout the program of study were a pleasure, it is these four that have best prepared me for this culminating experience.

As an analysis of how Tolkien's work embodies a sense of how disruptive the shift from an agrarian to an industrial world felt to those who lived through it, this paper would have been limited in scope had only traditional literary lenses been utilized. Lessons learned in the

aforementioned courses offer the opportunity to expand the view of the topic to include a New Historic as well as a Mythological/Archetypal analysis. A solid understanding of the scientific method has allowed me to frame my reasoning and argument in a more succinct fashion. While not totally agreeing with Victor Frankl's logotherapy as it focuses on the future, being able to contrast that notion with the more traditional retrospective one has, again, offered the opportunity to look outside of the proverbial 'box' of traditionality. Finally, a solid understanding of Joseph Campbell and mythic thinking has helped me to understand much of the meaning that Tolkien weaves into his epic tale.

At first glance, the IDS courses of the program seemed unrelated to the studies which I wanted to pursue. While taking them, while applying their lessons to English courses, and while reflecting on them after coursework completion, their relevancy has become quite apparent.

Taken toward the beginning of my program of study, IDS 801 "Intro to Graduate MLS," taught by Dr. Joe Potts exposed me to new ways of looking at the world as well as new ways of looking at literature. By showing that traditional barriers that exist between intellectual disciplines can be broken down, I am now able to view literature in a much more broad sense. While I do not completely agree, for instance, with Victor Frankl's logotherapy, which focuses on the future as opposed to the past, being able to contrast that notion with the more traditional retrospective one, as is explored in "Ways of Knowing in Comparative Perspective" has offered a broader lens through which analysis can be conducted.

One of the most important lessons that I learned during the course came from an analysis of Plato's *The Allegory of the Cave*. The story deals with the perception of truth as opposed to truth itself. In reading Tolkien's work as well as interview transcripts, I find it interesting that Tolkien completely denied the fact that the events of his life influenced his *The Lord of the*

Rings. Plato's story tells that all humans are products of their environments and that what we know is what we see, hear, touch, and experience. If that is the case, Tolkien was also a product of his environment and that self absolutely flowed into his work. The major argument herein is that *The Lord of the Rings* is something of an allegory for all of the people who have dealt with, are dealing with, and will deal with the transition from an agrarian society to an industrial one.

The course IDS 802 "Ways of Knowing in Comparative Perspective," taught by Tim Murphy, only further opened my mind to new ways of exploring literary works. Simultaneously, however, the course brought direction to each of those ways by outlining the processes that each uses to search for truth. I had, for instance, learned the scientific method many years ago and could not imagine how its principles could be applied to literary analysis. What is important, however, is the method itself, not its traditional application. The scientific method offers users yet another lens through which to see the world. It is highly analytical and allows data to be gathered in a standardized way with built-in error checks. This framework has been essential for me to be able to maintain focus on one analysis at a time.

Additionally, I was able to explore many of the traditional and some of the non-traditional lenses that are utilized in various disciplines. Just as science has its traditional lenses such as the scientific method, the arts and humanities have theirs. While I had known that literature is often viewed through critical lenses and that art is often classified into periods, I learned that the opposite is also true. By looking at literary works through the lens of periods in history, new truths emerged about the stories themselves as well as the authors who wrote them. This concept directly informs this paper as it seeks to explore a post-colonial, pre to post-industrial mindset in England as the 19th century turned to the 20th.

While offering the opportunity to explore disciplines that I had not before, the course

material also engaged another kind of thought – that of how we as humans know and analyze. I had, of course, heard the terms inductive and deductive as they relate to reasoning but I did not fully understand their meanings and implications. Now that I do, I feel better prepared for not only literary analysis at this level but at the doctorate level as well. These types of knowing are a foundation for qualitative and quantitative research methods courses to come.

Taken toward the end of my personal program of study, English 812 “Studies in Literature: Theories and Techniques of Criticism,” taught by Dr. Amy Cummins, offered an interesting perspective on literary analysis as it not only laid out many of the criticisms found in the discipline but also allowed me to look at the works that I had read throughout the program of study with a renewed sense of focus and understanding. It was also through this course specifically that I was able to put direction to the previously scattered types of analysis questions that I personally asked of each text. This ability to provide direction for those questions which had long haunted my mind could only be described as cathartic.

After receiving a list of critical lenses through which one could analyze literature, I thought that it was impossible that there were so many. From my undergraduate studies I had know of New Criticism, Reader Response, Deconstructionist, Postcolonial, Marxist, Feminist theories but his new list included eleven more critical theories...and it was titled “Abbreviated Listing of Contemporary Theories and Approaches to Literature.” By gaining a new understanding of the theories that I had already known and by learning about the application of the new critical lenses, I am now able to approach literature in a much more broad sense.

Interestingly, the two critical lenses through which I am analyzing Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, New Historicism and Mythological/Archetypal criticism, were completely unknown to me before taking this course. Without them, I would have a much more narrow view of

Tolkien and his work. Additionally, these two critical theories now form the basis of almost all of my critical readings.

Taken as the final course before the writing this culminating project, English 601 “Religion, Heresy, Magic, and Myth was not only the course over which I had the most excitement (it was one of the deciding factors which influenced my institutional choice) but was also the course in which I was able to engage in topics which I have long had a personal interest. Mythic thinking has always been a part of not only my approach to literature but also my psyche as a whole, though before the course I did not know it. Professors Robert and Christiane Luehrs allowed me to engage mythic works and also spurred on an already blossoming interest in Joseph Campbell, whose work will also inform this culminating project.

By providing an overview of how mythic tradition is formed, why it is formed, and how it is passed from generation to generation, I was better able to understand Tolkien’s work. Tolkien is often described as the creator of the genre mythopoeia, or created mythology. More importantly, I feel, is that Tolkien resurrected mythic thinking in a time when emerging science prevailed and yet could not answer some of the more difficult questions such as ‘why do humans go to war,’ how can humans justify killing,’ and ‘is an industrial world truly a better one than an agrarian one?’ These are the questions which are at the core of Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. I find it fascinating that myth *was* the science of the ancient world and that even today it can be seen filling the gaps that modern science cannot.

Joseph Campbell, one of the premier scholars of myth, offered insight into one of the most resounding themes in all of human story – the Hero’s Journey. While quite obvious in *The Lord of the Rings*, the Hero’s Journey can be seen in many works of literature the world over. After taking “Religion, Heresy, Magic, and Myth” I now know that mythic literature is a part of

a larger category called speculative fiction and that, at its core, it seeks to offer an explanation of the world and the human condition while it simultaneously asks the question ‘what if’.

Speculative fiction often includes the Hero’s Journey as it incorporates seemingly real scenarios with elements of larger-than-life characters and situations, such as Tolkien’s talking trees.

My ability to complete this culminating project is heavily dependent on the application of the knowledge and skills that I acquired in the four abovementioned courses. Exposure to a wide range of ways of thinking and literary analysis techniques has drastically increased my ability to thoroughly understand texts. It is the combination of the knowledge contained within each of these courses that has allowed me to see the world and literature in a much more liberal sense. Without this knowledge as well as a framework for combining it, I would not be equipped to produce graduate level work.

It has long been my goal to earn a PhD. While still uncertain as to the exact focus of the degree and subsequent dissertation, I am confident now that I would be ready to undertake such a study not because I am knowledgeable enough about a subject area but because I have enough tools to be able to analyze it effectively. While unconventional, this liberal focus and grounding has prepared me to examine the world through multiple lenses and draw richer conclusions.

ABSTRACT

The Lord of the Rings:

The Last Epic Battle Against the Evil of Industrialism

J.R.R. Tolkien's work is often classified as fitting into the genre of mythopoeia, or invented mythology. Written at a time when those alive could yet remember hints of an agrarian society despite being forcibly thrust forward, through two world wars, into a time of excellence industrialism, *The Lord of the Rings* explores, on the surface, the battle between good and evil. Underlying that battle, however, is a battle between the idyllic and peaceful world of an agrarian society and the looming, autocratic, dirty, and uncaring world of industrialism. Joseph Campbell, typically thought of as one of the greatest scholars of myth, learned from Professor Heinrich Zimmer that "myth provides a psychological road map for the finding of oneself in the labyrinth of the complex modern world." While Tolkien himself stated that the events of his life, including the experiences of war and industrialism, did not in any way influence the work, I argue that the events that occurred in England between 1937 and 1945, when the work was written, are quite definitely reflected within.

RESEARCH

J.R.R. Tolkien's work *The Lord of the Rings* has been explored from many different literary angles. The fact that Tolkien was a respected Oxford linguist has led many to examine his use of created languages. The fact that Tolkien is considered the father of modern myth does also not go unnoticed. *The Lord of the Rings* offers readers examples of all of the classic mythic elements (The Hero's Journey, the Great Goddess, wizards, talking animals, etc) and so makes it a natural fit for Mythic literary analysis. Tolkien's relationship with C.S. Lewis, a known Christian author, has even led critics to review *The Lord of the Rings* through a religious lens. There have not, however been many studies of the work through a New Historical lens. This lens considers a work in relation to the historical happenings at the time of and leading up to its writing. Tolkien provides [a] detailed backdrop of the Shire because there is another quest [besides the Ring Quest] – a quest to save the Shire. (Waito 155) This project will examine *The Lord of the Rings* and that quest through the New Historical lens, connecting the events that most definitely shaped Tolkien's life to the storyline's underlying battle between the idyllic and peaceful world of an agrarian society and the looming, autocratic, dirty, and uncaring world of industrialism.

Biographical and Historical Context

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born in South Africa, Bloemfontein, on the 3th of January 1892. He was orphaned as a child and brought up in near-poverty as a catholic. In 1896, after his father had died on the 15th of February he, his mother Mabel and his younger brother Hilary moved to England's West Midlands (Carpenter, 204). Tolkien's childhood was split between the grimly industrial Birmingham and the quintessentially rural stereotype of England found in Worcestershire and his hamlet of Sarehole (Doughan). Tolkien was able, in one glance, to see the farms of a fading era and the factories of an emerging one. With a single listen,

Tolkien could hear the sounds of agrarian life while at the same time hear the grinding of the war machine.

World War I broke out while Tolkien was a student at Oxford University. After finishing his degree, Tolkien joined the Lancashire Fusiliers as a second lieutenant, and in 1916 Tolkien was sent to France to fight in the Battle of Somme. While at war, Tolkien faced the terrifying new mechanisms of modern warfare—machine guns, tanks, and poison gas—fighting in some of the bloodiest battles known to human history. In the end, over one million people were either killed or wounded in the battle and Tolkien lost almost all of his closest friends. In the foreword to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien wrote, "By 1918, all but one of my close friends were dead," (Tolkien 7). It was in the trenches of World War I that Tolkien began recording the horrors of war that would later surface in *The Lord of the Rings* and, after the war, he began writing down the stories and mythology of Middle-earth .

These images of war can be seen in the great battles that Tolkien crafts. In *The Battle of the Pelennor Fields*, for instance, Tolkien writes that a "great shadow descended like a falling cloud. It was a winged creature...and it was naked, and neither quill nor feather did it bear...and it stank," (Tolkien 822). This imagery seems to represent an airplane – one of the new and feared tools used in WWI. Photographs and painted scenes of world wars I and II often show the shadows of airplanes on the ground. Airplanes are also winged creatures without quills or feathers and they do, to an extent, stink. In WWI, before the advent of modern engines or jet fuel, airplanes were powered by the same dirty-burning gasoline and diesel engines as cars were. They were not very efficient and would, much like an old car, leave a trail of noxious exhaust fume in their wake. For someone like Tolkien who valued nature, clean and pristine natural

areas, and peaceful surroundings, these flying machines would have been not only scary but downright revolting.

Tolkien also builds his battles in much the same way that WWI battlefields would have been. “From the southward fields came footmen...with horses before them, and behind them rose the huge backs of the *mumakil* with war-towers upon them” (Tolkien 825). This was a typical WWI formation – calvary was placed at the front of the army, followed by infantry, and finally tanks (also one of the new tools used in war) bringing up the rear. Though described as elephant-like, it cannot be helped but to look at the *mumakil* as tanks, especially given that both are huge and both have ‘war-towers’ upon them. In the tanks’ case, the war-tower would be the turret. The calvary in *The Lord of the Rings* was also used in much the same way as it was in WWI – as reconnaissance. While the “footmen of Gondor...drove against the legions of Morgul,...the horsemen rode eastward,” (Tolkien 827). Once the calvary had cleared the way for the infantry and the machines of war, it headed off to new fronts to repeat its actions. This left the infantry to engage in the close-up, hand-to-hand combat that was all too common in war until recent times.

Tolkien describes the trench warfare of WWI quite well when he says that the space between the embankment where the protagonists were dug in and the opposite end of the battlefield “was boiling and crawling with black shapes” and that “hundreds and hundreds...were pouring...through the breach,” (Tolkien 520). The lines of soldiers “wavered, broke, and fled back; and then charged again, broke and charged again; and each time, like the incoming sea, they halted at a higher point,” (Tolkien 521). This war was ruthless and unforgiving. The soldiers pushed forward like a mechanized machine and “if any man fell, two others sprang to take his place,” (Tolkien 521). Soldiers here are not treated as living beings.

Rather, they are expendable automatons that have one job and one alone – move the front line forward at whatever cost. This is much the same as it was in WWI. “Readers cannot help but notice that the Dead Marshes of Mordor are eerily reminiscent of a devastated war front,” (Doughan). War in WWI was not fought with the same tactics as it is today. Lines of soldiers made charges at the enemy rather than utilizing the guerrilla-style tactics first made known to the western world during the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. Manpower was harnessed in whatever way was necessary and while loss of life was a hardship it was also viewed as a necessary evil - so much so that approximately 16 million lives were lost.

In a time wrought with such change and hardship, a ‘psychological road map’ such as professor Zimmer spoke of would be critical. Tolkien took it upon himself to create one and in-so sought to explore the ‘labyrinth of the complex modern world.’ Even in his childhood, Tolkien already showed remarkable linguistic gifts and eventually became a Merton Professor of English Linguistics at Oxford. It is said that “one day while grading essay papers he found himself writing ‘In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit’ - and this sentence changed his and our lives for good,” (Carpenter, 204).

In typical Tolkien fashion, he then decided he needed to find out what a Hobbit was, what sort of a hole it lived in, why it lived in a hole, etc. From this investigation grew a tale that he told to his younger children, and even passed round. In 1936 an incomplete typescript of it came into the hands... of the publishing firm of Allen and Unwin and after being asked to finish it, it was published as *The Hobbit* in 1937. (Carpenter, 204)

It was out of this work as well as Tolkien’s fascination with language, which plays a critical role in the novel, that the development of his Legendarium (a collection of mythology and language)

came to evolve. From this, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the full *Lord of the Rings*, and many other works evolved.

When asked by Joseph Campbell, typically thought of as one of the greatest scholars of myth, what the purpose of myth is, Professor Heinrich Zimmer replied that “myth provides a psychological road map for the finding of oneself in the labyrinth of the complex modern world.” Keeping this notion in mind, one might begin to wonder why J.R.R. Tolkien created the mythic world that he did. His work is not simply a fictional story. Rather, it creates an entire world full of not only characters but entire races of beings. It is rich with several thousand years of history as well as a plethora of unique languages. His tale includes complex familial lineages, maps, and directions that seem so real that readers might actually be able to navigate his created world of Middle Earth should they ever find themselves there. At its core, however, lies an exploration of good and evil. Rather than simply utilizing a hero/villain set-up, Tolkien chooses to delve deeper and let landscapes and objects represent good and evil qualities.

Two of the most striking and overarching of these representatives are the stark differences between agrarian/natural/wild places which are represented as light places and industrial/created places which are represented as dark places. Viewed through a New Historic lens, these representatives make complete sense given Tolkien’s life and the changes that he witnessed in the world. If myth truly does provide “a psychological road map for the finding of oneself in the labyrinth of the complex modern world,” many in Tolkien’s generation would have needed such a map. Between 1937 and 1945, when the work was written, Tolkien, and the world, witnessed lightning-fast industrial advances as well as some of the most horrific events known to humankind.

As the industrial machines of England and The United States traded open spaces and nature-centric agrarian lifestyles for closed and regimented Industrial worlds, humanity, as it had been known for several thousand years, was thrust into a new era. As the dictatorships of Germany and Russia committed genocide on a scale that had never before been witnessed, the world came to know the extent to which evil can fester in a single human. All of this affected Tolkien and his writing.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, evidence of this industrialization can be seen at Isengard. Described as having once been “fair and green...a pleasant, fertile land,” “it was not so now,” (Tolkien, 540). Isengard, the seat of the Chief Wizard Saruman, had become industrialized. As Aragorn, Gandalf, and the other riders approached the once nature-centric epicenter of wizard kind, they saw that “most of the valley had become a wilderness of weeds and thorns,” (Tolkien 540). The travelers noted that “no trees grew there; but among the rank grasses could still be seen the burned and ax-hewn stumps of ancient groves,” Tolkien 540). In fact, “no green thing grew there in the latter days of Saruman,” (Tolkien 541).

As the travelers approached the city, “the highway became a wide street, paved with great flat stones, squared and laid with skill; no blade of grass was seen at any joint,” (Tolkien 540). The imagery here is showing that man has conquered nature and has stripped it of its ‘organic’ look and feel only to replace it with what might be described as order. No longer does the landscape look wild; rather, it is so ordered and angular as to seem out of place. Beside the borders of the roads “instead of trees there marched long lines of pillars, some of marble, some of copper and iron, joined by heavy chains,” (Tolkien 541). As the riders came even closer to Isengard, they passed through ‘mighty doors of iron...poised upon their huge hinges, posts of steel driven into living stone, that when unbarred they could be moved with a light thrust of the

arms, noiselessly,” (Tolkien 541). The image of the steel posts being driven into living stone conjures up images of killing – as if the post was being driven into the heart of a living creature. The fact that the doors could be moved noiselessly with a slight thrust despite being so massive again shows that the industrialized (i.e. man-made) option is superior to that of a nature-made equivalent. Never could a heavy wooden or stone gate be moved so easily or silently.

As the travelers move into the city they see “smokes and steams drifted in sullen clouds,” (Tolkien 540). “Saruman had treasuries, store-houses, armouries, smithies, and great furnaces. Iron wheels revolved there endlessly, and hammers thudded,” (Tolkien 541). To keep this great operation functional, Saruman has built up the landscape so that “thousands could dwell there, workers, servants, slaves, and warriors,” (Tolkien 541). This type of imagery makes readers think of perhaps an industrial city at the turn of the twentieth century when thousands flocked from the fields and farms in search of a new life. In exchange for this new life, they had to trade nature's trees and grasses for the stone and iron that Tolkien describes.

New Historicism and The Shift from an Agrarian to Industrial Society

One of the central themes of J.R.R. Tolkien can be seen in settings and landscapes. At the outset of *The Lord of the Rings*, action is taking place in The Shire, an agrarian village of Middle Earth in which, as Tolkien states, “things are made to endure” and “change is slow to come, if it comes at all,” (Tolkien 11). Hobbits, being the central characters in the novel, are also described as “simple folk who tend to keep to themselves,” (Tolkien 10). Hobbits also “have a love for things that grow,” (Tolkien 11). The folk in this closed village, and the villages that surround it, tend to be quite close. They know each others business and often celebrate with one another. They also are highly self-sufficient. They grow their own food, make their own goods, and generally exist in harmony with nature. This imagery is presented in such a way as

to create a longing in the reader for simpler times without the pressures of big city, industrialized, and disconnected life. In a word, this representation can be described as idyllic.

In stark contrast to this imagery is the imagery of Mordor as well as Isengard after Saruman the White is coerced by evil. Presented first in the tale is the detailed decimation of Isengard in which Saruman and his workers (Orks which after being bred to be more efficient were called Uruk-Hai) destroy nature to use it as the fuel for an industrial revolution. Trees are chopped down for fuel and the earth is ripped open for natural resources. The river Isen is dammed to not only produce power but also to increase the land available for industrial production. Mordor takes this imagery and enhances it further by harnessing the power of a volcano to melt metals in order to outfit a massive army. In addition, Mordor is a dead land, void of plants and animals. It represents a pre-modern concrete jungle and is painted in an extremely negative light. It doesn't take readers long to despise both Mordor and the converted Isengard.

How could Tolkien have dreamed up such a place with such stark contrasts? He needed only to look in his own back yard. As stated earlier, Tolkien spent his childhood in England's West Midlands, near Birmingham. Tolkien was able to witness first hand how the machine of industrialization destroyed nature as it expanded itself. In his article "Back to the Shire: From English Village to Global Village and Back Again," Arthur Hunt explores the loss of community and the little local village, or "Shire," in the modern age and suggests that it has been replaced by a big global village. The attraction to the Shire and life in Middle Earth is an obvious one – the pre-industrial Shire society exists in conjunction with nature and offers a relatively low stress level for its inhabitants. Hunt relates the Shire to country villages in 17th century England in so much as they were self sufficient and self sustaining. Essentially, the Shire, and all agrarian

societies, consumes only as many natural resources as it needs to sustain itself unlike an industrial society which consumes massive amounts of natural resources in order to improve life only a relatively small margin. This is the contrast that Tolkien saw in his youth and, as a man troubled by industrialism and haunted by war, one cannot help but find similarities between Tolkien's life and *The Lord of the Rings*. A look at the changes that occurred during the industrial revolution can be seen here:

The industrial revolution, a period of rapid change beginning in Britain around 1750 and lasting well into the 1800s, transformed the cultural and physical landscape of England.

Handmade products crafted in small-town shops gave way to urban factories and mechanized production. Textiles, shipbuilding, iron, and steel emerged as important industries, and the country's population

increasingly migrated to urban areas to work in the factories. Coal fueled these industries, polluting the air with black smoke and dotting the countryside with mining spoil.

Although born well after the industrial revolution, Tolkien witnessed the effects of industry on the environment.

Tolkien's concern for nature echoes throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. Evil beings of Middle-earth dominate nature and abuse it to bolster their own power. For example, Saruman, the corrupt wizard, devastates an ancient forest as he builds his army.

The Elves, in contrast, live in harmony with nature, appreciating its beauty and power, and reflecting a sense of enchantment and wonder in their artful songs. (<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/ngbeyond/rings/influences.html>)

One of the most prominent traits that is highlighted is the transition from small scale to large scale. In the pre-industrial world, farming, building, and all other aspects of life are done on a small, point-of-use scale. Once industrialization takes over, however, the scale increases drastically. Many more workers are required to produce many more products. Small-scale

energy usage is replaced by large-scale power production. External parties enforce regulation of time, output volume, and output quality. Templates were created to ensure consistency rather than utilizing the skills of the workers. Workers were thought of as machines rather than capable beings. Little thought is given to pollution or the work conditions of employees. Only the march toward progress mattered. This model for life differs greatly from the pre-industrial model in which food was grown as close to where it would be eaten as possible in order to conserve human energy as well as keep costs low. Artisans spent years perfecting their crafts and would take pride in the quality of workmanship that went into each product that they produced. This was a time that Tolkien seemingly longed for and that he sought to recreate in the Shire.

Katherine Nash and Gary Gillard explore the theme of a remembrance of the past as well. According to them, Tolkien is looking to connect with a “nostalgia, in the original sense of a longing to return to a place and also in its more present sense of a longing for a past time...a pre-industrial, medieval, agrarian existence with a strong sense of community and almost complete absence of evil” (Nash, 107-108). Considering this and Arthur Hunt’s notion that the shire is quite similar to 17th century rural England, it can, then, be deduced that Tolkien saw this time period as one of relative peace and good living...quite the opposite of the mid-industrial England that he saw at the turn of the 20th century.

Industrialism and the Corruption of Men

In Tolkien’s work, it is quite obvious that he is concerned with the characters of people. That is to say that he is very concerned with how good or evil they are; how just or corrupt they are; and how truthful or not they are. It is also quite obvious that Tolkien attributes a person’s character to how closely connected the individual is to either an agrarian life or an industrial one.

As the story is painted, Hobbits are treated as being somehow different from the other races. It is as if all of the other races have their strongly established places in the world and that Hobbits exist somewhat 'under the radar.' It is through this difference and separation that Tolkien begins to set up one of the quintessential components of a myth, the Hero's Journey. While heroes are typically common folk who rise to an occasion, Tolkien makes these heroes (the Hobbits) blend in even more with their surroundings. That is to say that if the definition of common folk are those who do not stand out in any exceptional way, Hobbits are so unobtrusive that they were largely ignored or forgotten by the other races. It is out of this exaggerated mediocrity that a hero would emerge.

Emma Hawkins explores J.R.R. Tolkien's careful usage of the lust, the seventh deadly sin. Tolkien chooses to utilize this deadly sin to examine the process whereby human nature is ruined or twisted from within. Tolkien defines lust as strong desire to possess material things and is synonymous with greed. Katherine Nash and Gary Gillard explore the concept of the ease of which humans can become corrupt because of underlying wants, desires, and internal battles. "Evil is the dominant idea" rings true not only in the article but also in the story (Nash, 108). It is also pointed out that there exists a spectrum of this underlying torment. On one end, Elrond and Legolas (both elves) "never for a moment show the slightest interest in taking advantage of [the ring's] power," as opposed to Boromir, a human, who is overcome by the power of evil (Nash, 108-109). Although Tolkien may be weaving in an underlying concept that humans are weak in regards to their own self-control, more important is the idea that different individuals have different levels of psychological dealings which must be faced. All walks of life are wrought with power-hungry individuals as well as those who seem to have a 'good character.' Tolkien seems to equate industrialization with power-hungry attitudes. Whether it is the workers

who leave the fields in search of riches in the cities or the owners of the companies who exploit the labor and environment, industrial workers have some sort of corruption within them.

Considering the relationship of agrarian and industrial societies, Moria seems to be a perfect example of industry gone wrong. Frodo and his companions are first introduced to the dwarvish mines by Gandalf. At that initial introduction, Gandalf points out that the mines were dug too deep out of greed. The group, then, is faced with seeing the corpses of dwarves who were killed because their greed unleashed an evil. The dark setting of Moria as well as the death of its workers due to greed is perfect imagery as it relates to the new industrial world which Tolkien sees as he writes his work. Industrial buildings are dark and closed, much like a mine, and workers are exploited in ways never seen before by the machine of industry as well as the prospect of 'striking it rich' if hard work is put in day in and day out. The negative light that Tolkien sheds on this image, though, shows that this new industrial world is not the world which he values most. For him, the light, airy, and idyllic setting of the Shire, the vast openness of Rohan, and the intellectual White City of Men are the preferred representatives of humanity.

Self-Sacrifice as a Defining Human Trait

In considering Tolkien's concern with hearkening back to better times, it also seems as though he has rather strong feelings about the character of people. He seems to place high value on self-sacrifice. Toward the outset of the tale, Frodo comes to the realization that he may be the only being who could carry the Ring on the journey to its destruction. His response to this realization..."what must I do?" At the Council of Elrond, Frodo is reminded of this notion once again when he realizes that he is the only neutral party at the table. Again, he volunteers himself. On the road to Mordor, Frodo is told that he will most likely not return from his journey. He knowingly accepts death in order to save the other races.

James Obertino analyzes implications of the character Gandalf's death. Obertino seeks a parallel with the biblical meaning of heroism in sacrificing one's life for others. Although Celeborn (an elf), remarked "And if it were possible, one would say that at last Gandalf fell from wisdom into folly, going needlessly into the net of Moria" (Obertino, 230). His wife, Galadriel, however, noted that "Needless were none of the deeds of Gandalf in life" (Obertino, 230). Obertino also points out that the word Moria might offer some insight into Tolkien's hidden meaning.

An understanding of the strongly overdetermined etymology of Moria helps to clarify the significance of Gandalf's death and the question of his fate and folly. Moria's roots would have to include mors (Latin for death), as well as Moira (Greek for fate) and Moria (Greek for madness, late Latin for folly). Celeborn's remark unwittingly stresses the thematic linkage of fate (Moira) or "net" (a frequent image for fate) and folly (Moria). The drumbeats that sound within the earth before and after Gandalf's death seem to stress fate: "doom, doom"

It is, however, also possible to see, as Celeborn does, Gandalf's death as perhaps foolish or unnecessary. (230)

Samwise Gamgee, Frodo's longtime friend and traveling companion chooses to sacrifice himself on several occasions throughout the novel. For the entire journey, he carries a heavier load than Frodo so that Frodo could concentrate on his mission. When at the Falls of Rauros Frodo realizes that he must continue alone in order to save his companions from Orc warriors, Samwise almost drowns to prove the point that he is with Frodo until the end. After reaching the Mountain of Doom, when Frodo is too weak to finish his task, Samwise carries him up the mountain so that the world can be saved.

As the tale comes to a close, Aragorn too sets aside his own fears, dislikes, etc, and, for the greater good. Aragorn, who has known all of his life that he is the rightful heir to the kingdom of Men, has spent all of his energy fleeing from that role. Known as a Dunedain Ranger, meaning that he is a descendent of the first men to have ever settled Middle Earth, he has used his blessings of long life (derived from the elf blood that also flows through his veins) and great survival skill (a remnant of the early men-settlers) to evade his true destiny – to become the king of Gondor and rule the race of men. He believes that men are corrupt and despises that fact that he has such a strong relation to them. After being raised by the elves, he struck out on his own to live the life of a nomad so that he could distance himself from the world of men as much as possible. Once he encounters both Gandalf and Frodo, however, he learns of the mission that they are both on and reluctantly agrees to assist in the final destruction of evil so that the curse of corruption upon his race might be lifted.

Each of these examples exemplifies the notion that for Tolkien, one of the defining characteristics of a person is the willingness to sacrifice for the greater good. Seen through the New Historic lens as Tolkien's own life is examined, England, as it transitioned from an agrarian society to an industrial one would have had many people torn between the societal life of old in which each member of a group would have sacrificed for the greater good and the societal life of new in which each person was no longer a member of a group but rather a replaceable individual in an industrial machine. As stated earlier, Tolkien saw the world and painted a picture of life in which the older, agrarian society was seen as somehow better than the newer industrial one. If Tolkien was, through the creation of his myth, trying to create a "road map for the finding of oneself in the labyrinth of the complex modern world," he naturally would have been unsure of how to proceed in such a swiftly changing world.

This new world which he saw emerging separated familial connections as people were asked to specialize in their employment rather than multitask. The changing world tore people away from their connection with the land, with other community members, and with age-old traditions and thrust them into closed buildings full of arbitrary schedules and clocks, separation of work stations, and the existence of a single new tradition – production output. Workers no longer coaxed nature to allow themselves to be self-sufficient; now they performed assembly-line tasks that had no concrete connection to the final product that they were a part of producing. Tolkien saw that some people in this new world became extremely wealthy and powerful while most others were oppressed. Looking forward to the coming lifestyle, it is no wonder that Tolkien gravitated toward chivalry as a defining trait for an upstanding person.

Retaining Magic in a Post-Industrial World

Despite the fact that all knowledge advancements at the time of his writing would have told him that magic was not real, Tolkien includes quite a large amount of it in his tale. Magic is, in fact, a critical element in Tolkien's myth, though arbitrarily created, lacks nothing magical. To begin with, many of the characters are capable of performing magical acts. This magic, though, has many levels and facets. Aragorn, the descendent of Man-Kings, has a rather practical knowledge of magic. Perhaps something which could be likened to having survival knowledge of a language, Aragorn's survival magic extends as far as knowing how to blend in (though not truly disappear) and having a knowledge of herbal 'field medicine' as evidenced by his application of the Athelas plant to Frodo's wound (Tolkien 210-211). Gandalf takes his magic to another level. Before truly showing the extent of his capability in Moria, Gandalf appears to approach magic from the standpoint of human psychology, book-learning, and perhaps a smattering of alchemy (for he loves creating fireworks). He describes himself as a

“lore master,” and is intellectually superior, shown when he solves the riddle of Moria’s gates (Tolkien 322). He is well versed in “counter spells” as well (Tolkien 341). It is Moria, though, that the true extent of his power is unveiled as a “wielder of the secret flame” (Tolkien 344). As stated before, Gladriel, the elf, has the ability to enter the minds of others. Sauron, of course, represents the dark side of magic which corrupts and brings death and destruction.

In addition to his magical abilities, Gandalf is portrayed as an advisor. The difference between high-class wizards and lower-class wizards has always existed but in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, all of the classic elements of a high-class wizard are present. Gandalf is one of only a few. He belongs to a formal order which is learned and structured. He is elite. He is also mistrusted because the full extent of his power is not known. His name, in fact, is interesting because it represents neither end of the good-evil spectrum. He is not purely white, as Saruman, the head of his order is. He is not purely black as Sauron, the embodiment of evil, is. He falls somewhere in the middle and this uncertainty leaves many feeling uneasy. Hobbits have even declared him a disturber of the peace. His actions, though, do teach a valuable lesson. In the mines of Moria, Gandalf is confronted with a Balrog of Morgoth, which is described surprisingly similar to the Christian devil with wings, fire, and an internal darkness (Tolkien 344). Boromir, in fact, even asks “what is this new devilry” (Tolkien 342). In this moment, Gandalf summons an ancient magic that sends the evil beast plummeting to its death in Khazad-Dun, which appears quite similar to the Christian hell. In so doing, however, Gandalf sacrifices himself for the good of the group. It is through this sacrifice that Gandalf, later in the novel, becomes Gandalf the White. This scene, although not in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, hearkens strongly to the imagery of the Christian resurrection and so, yet again, strongly represents mythic tradition. It is almost as if while learning to be a savior, an individual must exist in a continuum between

good and evil in order to prove that he/she can overcome the temptation to stray to ‘the dark side.’

Perhaps one of the strongest examples of magic in the whole tale is the Ring itself. Present in the title of the entire work as well as the first installment, the Ring is truly the center of the action and plot. The Ring is a compilation of two classic mythic elements – the fountain of youth/holy grail/philosopher’s stone, and the embodiment of pure evil. This juxtaposition is interesting because the fountain of youth/holy grail/philosopher’s stone is typically portrayed as a positive notion and object. Here, though, it is portrayed as negative. Terms such as ‘unnatural long life’ are used and the ring, rather than maintaining the youth of the wearer, simply prevents the wearer from appearing old and from dying. When Frodo’s uncle, Bilbo, describes the feeling of his body after possessing the ring, he states that “he feels thin, sort of stretched” and feels old in his “heart of hearts” despite the fact that he doesn’t look old (Tolkien 41). As an embodiment of pure evil, the ring has the power to cause people to kill as well as drive people to conceal the evil which has overcome them (Tolkien 63-64). It is interesting to note that while all of the evil on the world can be contained in a single object, it takes a group of good-doers (and, in the end, an extremely large group) to overcome the evil. Perhaps Tolkien, and many myths before his, is making the point that it is very easy for creatures to succumb to a small evil but that through group support that we can all fight against it.

Conclusion

Several themes including the shift from an agrarian to an industrial society, the corruption of men as a result of the industrial movement, and a shift in the defining traits of humanity have been explored herein. The period in history spanning from just before WWI to the end of WWII was a time of great change. While the industrial revolution in Europe began in

the late 1700's and truly exploded in the mid 1800's, it was not until the early 1900's when the full effects were felt by the world. The redefining of people's roles and character took time to establish itself but by the beginning of the 19th century the changes had finally become so great that the connection with the 'old ways' was beginning to fade. Unfortunately, these redefinings also moved too quickly for a new set of social mores to be developed. As a result, people were simply swept away by the day-to-day happenings that they did not stop to think about the consequences of their acts or how the actions of the day were producing larger impacts.

One solid example of this can be seen in Germany between the years of 1871 and 1945. (It is important to note that a critical component of the New Historic lens is the review of events leading up to the desired analysis period...hence the inclusion of events ranging from 1871 to 1918.) Germany, wanting to join the industrial revolution of its neighbors to the south and west, united its 26 territories into an empire bent on industrial advancement. While the country as a whole experienced phenomenal advancements in technology and productivity, its citizens did not stop to reflect on their new reality. They were losing connections with their rulers, their traditions, and their sense of self. The empire of which they were a part was power hungry and so drove the nation into a world war before its citizens could realize what had happened. After experiencing defeat, the nation decided to swing the pendulum to the opposite end of the spectrum and create an extremely liberal democracy. While a seemingly good idea, this liberalism unfortunately provided no direction for the nation. The country was floundering. It needed solid leadership. It was at this point that Adolf Hitler was elected after his rousing oratories convinced citizens that he could set the country once again in the right direction and lead its people back down a road of prosperity. The tragic events that followed are well known but the result was a nation that once again had lost its way.

Each of these historic concepts can be seen in Tolkien's writing. The push toward industrialism touched many of Tolkien's races. Dwarves expanded their mining operations so much that their greed devastated them. Some of the elves turned to the corruption that industrialism brought and became orcs, working for the evil forces of both Sauron and Saruman. Men, too, were turned as they began to care less for the well being of their people and more for the amassing of power. Within each race, members began to work less and less for the betterment of the group and more and more for the betterment of themselves. Connections between different races began to falter as well until each race almost, if not completely, despised the others (reflective of the German/Jewish relationships of early 1900's Germany). It was with these breakdowns that evil was allowed to creep into the world and it is at this point that Tolkien's mythopoeia takes place.

If it is true that “myth provides a psychological road map for the finding of oneself in the labyrinth of the complex modern world,” Tolkien seemed to be painting a picture for the world that would teach and offer insight into the reasons why social breakdown occurs as well as solutions for that breakdown. The greatest lesson that he seems to offer is that the group is necessary for human existence. Humans are social creatures but are also driven to better themselves. When an arbitrary force such as industrialism provides each human with the chance to better him/herself but at the same time removes the social 'check and balance' typically provided by the group, a deep seated need to rise to the top of the hierarchy is allowed to emerge. When this occurs in each member of a society, havoc is set loose.

Tolkien shows us that when a group is able to form and capitalize on the strengths of each member while suppressing each member's urge to rule the group, the group will succeed at its task. This was the check and balance system that Tolkien did not see in the industrial Britain

of his day and this is the check and balance system that he wanted all of his readers to recognise as important. This was the true battle of the ring – the battle against allowing one individual absolute but ultimately corrupt power. This was the critical difference between Sauron and Aragorn. Sauron ruled alone. Aragorn led through partnership.

REACTION

After a thorough analysis of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, I have become aware of two areas in which my research would be useful. In addition I have come to a personal conclusion about my own study of literature. Regarding the areas in which the project would be useful, this thesis, or aspects of it, is best suited for publication in a periodical or as a teaching tool because it looks at Tolkien's work through a critical lens not before utilized – New Historicism. Once published, it is my hope that it will serve as a topic of debate among scholars as it provides clarity and perspective for its readers on the subject of how Tolkien's life directly influenced his most well-known work. Additionally, the information presented in this thesis project is vital to students looking to gain a deeper understanding of Tolkien's fiction. Furthermore, the in-depth analysis that I have undertaken has shown me how literary works which I have long enjoyed reading can be grouped together. All of these works tend to fit into a little studied category known as Speculative Fiction. Being able to finally categorize all of the works which I have come to love has been cathartic and has framed the basis for what will become a future doctoral-level study.

During the course of my research, I found that J.R.R. Tolkien's work had already been analyzed through many critical lenses. One, though, that had not been utilized was New Historicism, or the analysis of how the components of a text relate to the events that took place during the author's life which influenced that text. I thought that this critical lens would be appropriate because of the massive change that Tolkien would have seen in his life as he not only moved from South Africa to England but also as he witnessed two world wars as well as nation move from an agricultural society to an industrial one. While it surprised me that I found

so little analysis of this type, I also knew that I had found a void which could be filled. In an effort to fill that void further, I do not wish my work to exist in isolation. Rather, I plan to submit aspects/excerpts from the final work to both the Mythopoeic Society for potential publication in *Mythlore* as well as to several speculative fiction publications including *Strange Horizons* and *Black Gate*. My work will add to the critical analysis of Tolkien and may help others to either see his work in a new way or, perhaps, introduce new readers to his created world.

While I will begin the publication process with the potentially more lenient publications of *Strange Horizons* and *Black Gate*, publication in *Mythlore* is my ultimate goal. The journal's focus and submission criteria seem to be directly in line with my work being that it is 'A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature.' Specifically, the journal entertains 'psychological interpretations tending toward Campbell' as well as criticism of mythopoeic literature by the three focus authors, both of which I have done. My perusal of the periodical indicates that while submissions in to *Mythlore* are typically by established scholars, the periodical does occasionally publish work by newcomers to the genre, assuming that it truly adds to the study. I feel confident that after modifying my work to be more in-line with typical submissions, my work will have a chance at publication in the leading Tolkien journal.

In addition to potentially introducing new readers passively through critical publications, I also plan to incorporate Tolkien and other examples of speculative fiction as well as New Historical and Mythological criticism into future English courses that I will teach. This unique genre and these unique critical lenses will offer students the opportunity to explore literature in ways which they are not used to. Many of the literary works that are today considered children's literature fall into the category of speculative fiction. Works often include talking animals,

magic, and distant lands that seem almost familiar but have some aspect that makes them almost hyper-real. As children move into the teenage years, the literature that they read begins to change. These works begin to focus more on reality, including topics such as relationships, coming of age, murder mysteries, and so forth. While this transition into higher level realities is critical, so to, in my opinion, is exploring the 'what ifs' that literature can ask. Literature offers a safe place where readers can escape the every-day. Speculative fiction, if kept alive in a reader's mind as he or she matures, can continue to offer that escape. It can offer a glimpse into a potential future of humanity, as *Star Trek* does. It can make people wonder what really lies at the bottom of the ocean, as in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. Speculative Fiction can explore what happens if vampire really do exist and what would happen if someone fell in love with one of them, as in the recent *Twilight* series. Speculative fiction can help readers to reflect on what it means to be human, as in *Frankenstein*, as well as what happens if the underlying desires of some humans are allowed to be taken too far, as in *Animal Farm*. Rather than being viewed simply as fantasy novels or childrens' books, speculative fiction can truly help readers to explore humanities past and future.

This type of exploration can also occur through the little-taught critical lenses of Myth and New Historicism. As alternatives to the much-utilized Reader Response and New Criticisms, these options allow readers to explore *why* an author may have penned the text that he/she did. Mythological criticism, and, as an extension, psychological criticism, looks at predispositions in the author's mind represented by mythic archetypes. New Historicism explores the contemporary events happening in the author's life as well as those which happened earlier in his/her life which may be represented in his/her work. Both of these lenses offer unique insights into why authors chose to include in their tales what they did as well as why they

crafted their work in the way that they did. It is important for students to be exposed to as many critical lenses as possible so that their understanding of texts is deepened and that their worldview is expanded.

It is my hope that my work will influence change in ways of thinking in students. As a nation and as a race we stand at a crossroads of change. Tolkien himself, in 1964, claimed that he “lived through one of the most quickly changing periods in history” and that “surely there could never be in seventy years so much change.” (Slade 1964) The change that humanity has experienced in the last two decades dwarfs many times over the change that Tolkien experienced in his entire lifetime.

Faced with a lack of religious understanding/following, impending food and water shortages, nations rising up as they seek new realities, man-made systems reaching failing points which could or could not have been anticipated, and an ecosystem that seems to challenge us daily, humanity seems to be facing the same anguish that Tolkien did as he survived two World Wars and a complete shift from an agrarian society to an industrial one. Perhaps looking at Tolkien and other speculative fiction authors, we, as a people, will be able to find a new hope and new sense of being, as Joseph Campbell and others told us that it could. Perhaps also we will be able to truly engage the issues that face us as a people because their potential outcomes, both positive and negative, would have already been explored by speculative fiction authors.

The questions of ‘why’ and ‘how’ have haunted humanity throughout its evolution. While questions of why nature challenges humanity may have been asked by civilizations several thousand years ago, questions of why humanity challenges nature will be the questions of today and tomorrow. While several hundred years ago humans might have asked how technology might help civilization, the questions of tomorrow will center on how we can prevent

technology from hurting humanity. Tolkien has already explored these questions as well as potential answers.

Perhaps by looking at Tolkien's work through the lenses of mythology and historical influence, we will be able to gain insight into the events that led to the creation of Tolkien's work as well as what drove him to imagine the mythic world that he did. Those insights may help us, as a people, to avoid the worst outcomes that speculative fiction outlines and, on the other hand, may guide us toward the better outcomes that speculative fiction presents.

On a personal level, the research that I have undertaken herein has taught me much about the genres of literature that appeal to me most as well as those which I desire to study deeper at a doctoral level. I have found that many scholars and critics have placed Tolkien's work into a number of genres or sub-genres. One of the main overarching categories into which his work falls, however, is Speculative Fiction. Typically subcategorized in the Mythopoeia, or created mythology category, Tolkien's work provided me with a window into Speculative Fiction. After coming to understand the genre, I have now found the place into which all of my long-time literature passions can be placed. Never before was I able to place Madeline L'Engle, Jules Verne, Ray Bradbury, Gene Roddenberry, and C.S. Lewis into a coherent group but I knew that there was something similar about them that drew me in. I also knew that these types of literatures were not often studied as a part of the traditional canon. Because of the research for this project, I now have answers to all of my unanswered questions.

Speculative fiction seems to ask the question 'what if?' What if magic is real and there are practitioners living among us (as in Harry Potter)? What if animals could talk (as in C.S. Lewis)? What if there truly was a world frozen in time deep inside the Earth (as in Jules Verne)? What if we imagine the most futuristic world that we can (as in Star Trek)? What

would life be like? What events unfolded as we moved from present times to that future? How might we avoid the bad ones (like Ray Bradbury explores) and capitalize on the good (like the elimination of a currency-driven society and the opening of true free trade that Gene Roddenberry imagines)? Asking these kinds of 'what if' questions often requires readers to delve into places that are scary – places that often don't have happy endings, have uncomfortable journeys, or places that require the reader to question the very core beliefs which make him/her who he/she is. This literature exists on the fringes and only occasionally becomes mainstream and therefore acceptable. This is the literature which excites me.

I have learned through this thesis-writing process that writing an academic work is just that – work. It also needs to be a passion. It was my love of J.R.R. Tolkien's writing that made the process possible because of the level of focus necessary to undertake such a precise study. I will carry this with me as I move to pursue a doctorate degree. Knowing now that Speculative Fiction is such a marginalized genre has helped me to tailor inquiries to graduate schools as I explore options for doctoral level work. Understanding that this genre has such a small number of scholars already has also allowed me to begin to explore how I might be different from the others – how I might stand out. This, along with publication, will be a critical step toward gaining entry into a doctoral program as well as into the field itself.

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