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TOLKIEN'S THE LORD OF THE RINGS.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA  
GRADUATE COLLEGE

STUDIES IN THE SOURCES OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S  
THE LORD OF THE RINGS

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY  
GLORIA ANN STRANGE SLAUGHTER ST. CLAIR  
Norman, Oklahoma

1969

STUDIES IN THE SOURCES OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S  
THE LORD OF THE RINGS

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My Aunt Fiona St. Clair conversed about The Lord of the Rings with me. Most of all, my parents, Glen L. and Doris Furber Strange, supported me financially and emotionally through the entire process; this work is a product of their enduring love. And, my dear husband, Mark Elliot St. Clair,

participated in all of the above and much more: his question about what I most wanted to write led me to the topic; he pressed me to keep working when I was discouraged and tired; and he suffered patiently through numerous dinner hours waiting for dinners that never appeared. Thus, to my family and to my husband, I affectionately dedicate this dissertation.

in memory of  
Virginia Reynolds Goff  
1937-1968  
without words

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STUDIES IN THE SOURCES OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S  
THE LORD OF THE RINGS

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

James Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892- ) was the son of Arthur Reuel Tolkien, who then lived at Bloemfontein, South Africa. His mother, Mabel Suffield Tolkien, was from Birmingham. She taught him languages and told him many stories, and she died when her son was twelve, eight years after her husband had died. J.R.R. Tolkien's foster father was a priest named Father Francois Xavier Morgan. Tolkien took his B.A. at Exeter College, Oxford. In 1916, he married Edith F. Bratt; they had three sons and one daughter, and the Christopher Tolkien, who translated The Saga of King Heidrek, is his son.

After Tolkien took his Master of Arts degree in 1919, he worked as an assistant on the Oxford English Dictionary, and then he was a Reader in the English Language at the University of Leeds (1920). In 1922, he published a Middle English Vocabulary and continued at the University of Leeds as a Professor in 1924-1925. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon edited

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (1925). Then, Tolkien was Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon from 1925 to 1945. During this period, he wrote "Chaucer as a Philologist" (1934), and "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" (1936), and The Hobbit (1937), and "On Fairy- Stories" (1938). He held these positions: Fellow of Pembroke College (1926-1945), Leverhulme Research Fellow (1934-1936), Andrew Lang Lecturer, St. Andrews (1939).

In the 1940's, he wrote "Leaf by Niggle" (1945), "Aotrou and Itroun" (1945), and Farmer Giles of Ham (1949). During the 1950's, he did "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth" (1953) and became W.P. Ker Lecturer, Glasgow (1953). The Lord of the Rings was published: The Fellowship of the Ring (1954), The Two Towers (1954), and The Return of the King (1955).

Ancrene Wisse (1962), The Adventures of Tom Bombadil (1962), Smith of Wootton Major (1967), The Road Goes Ever on (1968), and a translation of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and Pearl (1969) occupied the decade. He also served as Vice-President of the Philological Society and Honorary Member of HÍð Islenzka Bókmennta-félag. In 1966, he received the Benson Medal (R.S.L.). It is said of him that he is the greatest storyteller, that "he could turn a lecture room into a mead hall in which he was the bard and we were the feasting, listening guests."<sup>1</sup>

Whenever there is man-matching (comparison of different men's relative value), many disagreements arise about

Tolkien, and especially about The Lord of the Rings. Edmund Wilson eggs men on by saying "Now, how is it that these long-winded volumes of what looks to this reviewer like balderdash have elicited such tribute . . . The answer is, I believe, that certain people--especially, perhaps, in Britain--have a lifelong appetite for juvenile trash."<sup>2</sup> But, Michael Straight says that "The work is gigantic in effect, unique in conception, an imaginative accomplishment of a very high order, indeed an astonishing feat of the imagination, distinguished by inventive brilliance and tremendous narrative power."<sup>3</sup> And, W.H. Auden reports that this man-matching usually ends as those of old often did--in violent fights: "I rarely remember a book about which I have had such violent arguments."<sup>4</sup>

As such vigorous arguments were well-known in the sagas, the author of a saga would probably also have felt quite comfortable with Tolkien, who advised E.V. Gordon on An Introduction to Old Norse.<sup>5</sup> The sagaman would even understand an atmosphere where taste has shifted rapidly from realistic novels like Catcher in the Rye and The Lord of the Flies to enchanting works like The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings.<sup>6</sup> He had experienced a similar revolution in taste in his own milieu as Margaret Schlauch reports in The Romance in Iceland: "Many writers have speculated on this amazing revolution in literary taste. It is as if a modern realistic novel dealing with contemporary American civilization were suddenly to introduce dragons, incubi, trolls, and vampires as seriously

credible personages. The impression is just as incongruous if one turns from the austere simplicity of the Laxdæla saga to a phantasmagoria such as the Gibbons saga ok Gregu."7

The distance between Catcher in the Rye, "a modern realistic novel," and The Lord of the Rings measures about the same as that between Laxdæla and Gibbons saga ok Gregu, both of which the sagaman enjoyed immensely.

Others have come to feel comfortable with The Lord of the Rings and have commented on it. Throughout most of this Tolkien criticism runs a persistent and provocative suggestion that in some way the essence of The Lord of the Rings derives from the world of the sagaman--Norse mythology, folklore, and literature. Some examples of these unsupported, teasing generalizations will suggest the necessity for this study.

For instance, some reviewers assure the reader that the work is a saga: "This [the Pre-Raphaelite Style], presumably, is the result of too great a familiarity with epic saga . . . Professor Tolkien's trilogy is not a translation by any means, its general outline is based on saga . . . "8 Likewise, Elizabeth Leigh Pemberton calls The Lord of the Rings "the heroic saga of the imaginary world of Middle Earth . . . "9 And, the reviewer for the Times Literary Supplement notes that "The chief actors and the bravest heroes in the saga are found among the race of Hobbits . . . "10 Yet, despite the excellent modern translations by scholars like Lee Hollander, Gwyn Jones, Margaret Schlauch, and Christopher

Tolkien, the sagas are little known in America. Furthermore, at least four distinct types of sagas flourished in Scandinavia and Iceland, and the reviewers have not described any of them or, in fact, defined the saga. Since other generic claims--fairy-story, epic, romance, and novel--have been presented in scholarly articles, I felt that the suitability of the saga as a genre for The Lord of the Rings should be explored with equal care.

The influence of northern mythology on the content of the trilogy has also elicited cryptic comments from the reviewers and critics. In "Tolkien and the Fairy Story," Robert J. Reilly notes that "His [Tolkien's] borrowings from, or reworking of, myths from the Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, and Norse provide a bridge from his world to ours."<sup>11</sup> And, in "Tolkien: The Monsters and the Critters," Thomas J. Gasque indicates that "As a philologist and medieval scholar, Tolkien is steeped in traditional northern mythology; he has drawn on this lore in creating his characters and in re-fashioning a genre [the fairy-story] . . . "<sup>12</sup> Yet, not a single critic footnotes E.O.G. Turville-Petre's excellent recent book, Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia (1964), and only a few discuss the eddas.

Furthermore, three other critics trace the theme and the world view of the trilogy to northern mythology. C.S. Lewis in "The Dethronement of Power" says that "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."<sup>13</sup> In Understanding Tolkien and "The Lord of the Rings," William Ready assures his readers that "The most important element in the Norse myth lies in Courage, and Tolkien comes back to that time and time again. This is the great contribution of the sagas of the North to Man's delivery: not the courage of the brute, of the wolverine, not the theory of courage spelled out by either chivalry or strategy, but, above all, courage that does not count on victory or even expect it. Courage is the end in itself, the goal of Man."<sup>14</sup> Patricia Spacks in "Power and Meaning in The Lord of the Rings" also comments that "In this struggle [between good and evil], the Christian is finally triumphant, in the afterlife if not on earth. But northern mythology takes a darker view. Its characteristic struggle between man and monster must end ultimately, within Time, in man's defeat. Yet man continues to struggle; his weapons are the hobbit-weapons: naked will and courage."<sup>15</sup>

And, 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 says that "For while The Lord of the Rings has much in common with and

derives a great deal of its technique from the tradition of the English novel, its ultimate forebears [sic] must be sought elsewhere, in the forests and mountains of the Nordic lands and in the sagas, lays, eddas, and fairy tales which the inhabitants of those lands sang and passed on to their progeny. . . . The great Nordic theme of courage--courage to grapple not only with human foes, but with the monsters of the outer darkness--runs through The Lord of the Rings as it does through Beowulf. . . . The greatest single influence upon Tolkien is the eddas and sagas of the North."<sup>16</sup> However, Moorman devotes his article to the ethical pattern of the trilogy; he discusses the journey of the innocent protagonist through the evil-laden wasteland into the city of God. He neither quotes from the eddas nor mentions a single saga.

However, before I began reading these critical teasers and intimations, I had studied Beowulf, read The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit, and enjoyed an Old Norse seminar--all within a year. I had arrived at etymologies from Old English and Old Norse--most of these I later found in J.S. Ryan's article, "German Mythology Applied--The Extension of the Literary Folk Memory,"<sup>17</sup> Lin Carter's book, Tolkien: A Look behind "The Lord of the Rings",<sup>18</sup> and Richard Warren Tedham's Masters' thesis, "An Annotated Glossary of the Proper Names in the Mythopoeic Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien."<sup>19</sup> Yet, I felt that a more thorough exploration of the sagas and eddas and myths would verify with concrete details Tolkien's comment that he had retold the northern myths.<sup>20</sup>



I have divided the results of this endeavor into three parts. Chapter II, "Generic Considerations," surveys the genre claims, defines the saga, and explains The Lord of the Rings<sup>21</sup> as a saga. Chapter III, "Miðgarð and Middle-earth," compares many of the creatures, implements and landscapes, and customs of Middle-earth with those of the eddas and sagas. And, Chapter IV, "The Norsemen and the Men of Gondor," explores the theory that Gondor represents Scandinavian civilization in the same way that Rohan has been equated with Anglo-Saxon England by John Tinkler in "Old English in Rohan."<sup>22</sup>

## CHAPTER I NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Current Biography 1967 (New York, 1967), pp. 415-418, Who's Who 1969, p. 3097. J.I.M. Stewart's quote in Contemporary Authors, XVII-XVIII (1967), 394-395.

<sup>2</sup> "Oo, Those Awful Orcs," Nation, CLXXXII (April 14, 1956), 314.

<sup>3</sup> "The Fantastic World of Professor Tolkien," New Republic, CXXXIV (January 16, 1956), 26.

<sup>4</sup> "At the End of the Quest, Victory," New York Times Book Review (January 22, 1956), p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Second ed., A.R. Taylor, ed. (Oxford, 1957), p. ix.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Resnik, "The Hobbit-Forming World of J.R.R. Tolkien," Saturday Evening Post (July 2, 1966), p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> (Princeton, 1934), p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Francis Huxley, "The Endless Worm," New Statesman and Nation, L (November 5, 1955), 744.

<sup>9</sup> Spectator, CXCV (November 25, 1955), 744.

- <sup>10</sup> LIV (November 25, 1955), 704.
- <sup>11</sup> In Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame, 1968), p. 135.
- <sup>12</sup> In Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame, 1968), p. 152.
- <sup>13</sup> In Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame, 1968), p. 15.
- <sup>14</sup> (New York, 1969), p. 82.
- <sup>15</sup> In Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame, 1968), pp. 83-84.
- <sup>16</sup> In Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame, 1968), pp. 201, 212.
- <sup>17</sup> Folklore, LXXVII (1965), 45-59.
- <sup>18</sup> (New York, 1969).
- <sup>19</sup> (University of Oklahoma, 1966).
- <sup>20</sup> Resnik, p. 94.
- <sup>21</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings, 2d ed., 3 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965 [c. 1965]). Citations in my text are to this edition.
- <sup>22</sup> In Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame, 1968), pp. 164-169.

## CHAPTER II

### GENERIC CONSIDERATIONS

Perhaps one of the most useful facets of literary criticism is the establishing and assigning of genres. Placing a modern work, like The Lord of the Rings, in its proper categories helps the reader to understand both the mechanics and the meaning of the work itself. Various critics have designated The Lord of the Rings a fairy-story, a traditional epic, a romance, and a novel. Each of these terms has some relevance, but none is, I believe, as comprehensive and appropriate a genre for The Lord of the Rings as the saga is. In this chapter then, I wish to point out the weaknesses in the other assignments and to define the saga and demonstrate its pertinence to the structure and spirit of The Lord of the Rings.

#### 1. 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 that "I will try to 'place' the trilogy in its proper genre--the fairy story mode as Tolkien conceives it."<sup>2</sup> Mark Roberts in a review notes that "Now it seems clear that The Lord of the Rings is fairy-story according to Professor Tolkien's understanding of the term."<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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."<sup>5</sup> 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 trilogy.

However, in Reilly's discussion of Fantasy, he employs only half of Tolkien's definition: "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 . . . "<sup>6</sup> Reilly, and other admirers of the trilogy, agree that it contains a Secondary World, which is both consistent and credible. But, Tolkien also requires a special kind of presentation for the fairy-story; he demands "a quality of strangeness and wonder in the Expression." Now, it seems to me that 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; it is presented 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.

After creating the term Fantasy, 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.<sup>7</sup> Even though 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.

And, Reilly, Barber, and Roberts all agree that the trilogy ends happily in Eucatastrophe, the antithesis of tragedy. Tolkien says of this kind of happy ending that "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."<sup>9</sup> However, Tolkien's definition of Eucatastrophe does not quite 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. But, in fact, as 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, Frodo, 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 Christian critics see in the Grey Havens the Heavenly City, and thus they see 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. 'In The Lord of the Rings,' Tolkien says, 'I have tried to modernize the myths and make them credible.'<sup>10</sup> Consequently, if the 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.

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 only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe."<sup>11</sup> He 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 unchartered world of time."<sup>12</sup> The fairy-story, as Tolkien sees it, is a world outside of time; yet an awareness of time pervades The Lord of the Rings. The natural time sequence of the story proper is even supplemented by 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."

A final disparity between Tolkien's prototype of the fairy-story and the trilogy is the length. The examples on which "On Fairy-Stories" relies are drawn 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,<sup>13</sup> in a translation of Grimm's work fifteen pages,<sup>14</sup> and in Dasent's volume twenty pages<sup>15</sup> while The Lord of the Rings in three volumes runs 1,215 pages including the appendices. 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 on what is called in the essay 'sub-creation.'"<sup>16</sup> This story, which seems to display Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, and Consolation, covers twenty-five pages.

However, I would consider "Smith of Wootton Major" 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 (ON elf, "elf") 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. "Smith of Wootton Major" offers Escape, Recovery, and the Consolation of a tearfully happy ending. The story is outside of time: "not very long ago for those with long memories nor very far away for those with long legs."<sup>17</sup> And, the tale runs about fifty pages.

The accompanying story "Farmer Giles of Ham" is complicated by its pretense at history. And, although Straight calls The Hobbit (280 pages) "the classical fairy story,"<sup>18</sup> I believe the manner of presentation, concept of time, and length again present serious difficulties. Without pedantically limiting the fairy-story to a fixed number of pages, I do believe that the shortness of its many instances constitutes a formal characteristic which must exclude both The Hobbit and the trilogy. Thus, because the style of the trilogy does not follow Tolkien's suggestion for the style of Fantasy, because the ending is not Eucatastrophe, because the trilogy is in time, not outside of it, and because the work is far beyond the usual length of the fairy-story, The Lord of the Rings should be assigned to some genre other than the fairy-story.

### 11. The 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 trilogy is a traditional epic: "That is, a work of the genre which includes the Epic of Gilgamesh (from the third millenium 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 . . ."<sup>18</sup> Beatie notes that all these works belong to "a living oral tradition," but he does not define "the exact nature of an oral tradition." Although parts of the trilogy were read to the Inklings, a group which included C.S.Lewis, W.H. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Charles Morrman, C.S. Lewis commented that "No one ever influenced Tolkien--you might as well try to influence a bandersnatch."<sup>19</sup> Since the chapters were written before they were presented, this experience could scarcely qualify as an oral tradition, however exact or inexact its nature. Until Beatie explains further, the relationship of The Lord of the Rings to "a living oral tradition" must remain enigmatic.

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 quoted 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 rhapsode's glittering fabric."<sup>20</sup> In the next chapter, 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."<sup>21</sup>

From this, Carpenter concludes that "Herein lies a most vital distinction between saga and fiction. The one derives from the past, while the other is mainly dependent on the present. The one is received from afar by relay from generation to generation and grows progressively vaguer, more confused, less accurate; the other is created directly out of immediate experience and visible environment, and if it is altered, may thereby become yet the more up-to-date and real."<sup>22</sup> Thus, what Carpenter designates as saga is what might more accurately be called remembered history. I believe it is significant that Carpenter mentions only two sagas (Grettis saga and Volsunga saga) in his entire book. 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.

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 Grettis saga 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 says that "Being based on oral tradition, it [Grettis saga] 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."<sup>23</sup> Thus, if Grettla is a blend of folk tale, fiction, and saga like the Iliad and Odyssey are, then The Lord of the Rings can as properly be called a saga as a traditional epic.

This theory of a blending of elements gains importance as our appreciation of the creativity of the author of Grettla 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, that he retold as Grettir's tales, verses, and anecdotes told of other heroes, that he drew on Beowulf and the literature of romance, that he "tells anecdotes that smell of the Icelandic farmstead, where a rebellious son ironically caps his acts with hard-headed peasant proverbs," and that "he entertains us with naïve notions of giants and half-giants and sweet-water valleys hidden among the harsh glaciers of the interior."<sup>24</sup> And, 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.<sup>25</sup>

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."<sup>26</sup> The definition seems relevant except for the trilogy's style, which, despite Beattie's defense of its verse and prose, is not elevated. Some of the conventions of the epic are also lacking: the Muse is not invoked, the narrative does not begin in medias res, and the catalogues are relegated to the appendices.

Thus, while the trilogy does have some of the characteristics of the traditional epic, the epic is a form in poetry, and it seems best to keep the distinction between prose (even that which contains some poetry) and poetry intact especially since the high ceremonial style seems so germane to the conventions and traditions of the epic. Furthermore, the connotation of the traditional epic seems inappropriate not to the action but to the climate and style of The Lord of the Rings.

### iii. The Romance

Another genre considered in connection with The Lord of the Rings is the traditional romance. William Blissett in "The Despots of the Rings" has called it a heroic romance and charted some of its similarities to the Wagnerian Ring of the Nibelung. In "The Lord of the Rings: The Novel as Traditional Romance," George H. Thomson has done a more comprehensive study of the motifs and structures of the trilogy 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."<sup>27</sup> 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 is not incompatible with the claim that the trilogy is a saga, for 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."<sup>28</sup> As Margaret Schlauch in The Romance in Iceland demonstrates, the romance actually accounts for two types of sagas: the fornaldarsögur, which deal with the old Norse gods and heroes, and the lygisögur, which were mainly retellings of romances imported from the Mediterranean area.<sup>29</sup>

These lygisögur 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. As his quest forms the main part of the saga, the phases that comedy shares with romance 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."<sup>30</sup> His adventures have followed the pattern that Frye establishes for the traditional romance.<sup>31</sup>

However, these romance phases are not limited to the lygisögur, but in fact occur, somewhat more sparingly, in the fornaldarsögur and the family sagas. Perhaps a few random examples will illustrate this point. In the Gunnlaugs saga ormsstungu, Thorstein orders his daughter Helga exposed because he dreams that two famous men will meet their death in combat over her.<sup>32</sup> Snorri Sturluson associates Olaf Tryggvason's birth with peril on water since his mother flees in a boat just before Olaf is born to escape Queen Gunnhild and her sons.<sup>33</sup> And, saga writers frequently report plentiful crops and an unusual number of twins among the livestock accompanying the birth of a famous hero.

The innocent youth of the hero, Frye's second stage of romance, appears most often in Icelandic sagas as an unlikely or unpromising childhood. Of Glúm it is said that "En Glúmr skipti sér ekki af um búsfylu; þótti heldr óbráðgerr í uppruna. Hann var fámálugr ok fálátr jafnan, hár maðr vexti ok nokkut skolbrúnn, hvítr á hár ok rétthárr, krakligr ok þótti heldr seinligr maðrinn; fór ekki till mannamóta."<sup>34</sup> Grettir is described as "very hard to manage in his bringing

up."<sup>35</sup> 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 mind the horse, he shaves her hair off. However, idyllic friendships are also frequent especially among brothers or cousins: Thórólf and Egil of Egil's Saga, Kjartan and Bolli of Laxdæla saga, and Helgi Hroar of Hrólfs saga Kraka.

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 insists, and I concur, that the quest is not a genre in itself but is rather a most "frequent and important form of the romance story."<sup>36</sup> But, this quest form is not limited to the romance or even to the lygisögur. The quest also occurs in the fornaldarsögur and the family sagas. Fitting Auden's essential elements of the typical quest to a fornaldarsaga, such as Hrólfs saga Kraka, and to a family saga, such as Kormáks saga, should substantiate this idea.

Auden first requires a precious object--either immediate or far-reaching, specific or philosophical--and/or person to be found or married.<sup>37</sup> In the "Uppsala Ride" part of Hrólfs saga Kraka, Hrólf's patrimony, which is being withheld unethically by King Athils, is such an object, and in Kormáks saga, Kormák first sees Steingerd's feet, then her face; he begins to make poems about his new love and to visit her. Next, the

object must be difficult to achieve because of the distance, or space becomes time, and time stretches out before the object is reached. While Hrólf rides off with his champions and men, Kormák devotes his life to pursuing Steingerd's love.

Auden says that the hero of the quest must be a special person with exactly the right breeding and character: King Hrólf is the son of King Helgi and his daughter-wife Yrsa, and Kormák, who is described as "big and strong and of an aggressive disposition," is a skillful, if skeptical, skaldic poet.<sup>38</sup> The fourth part of the quest form requires its hero to undergo one or more tests. Hrólf and his champions are first subjected to severe cold, then to terrible thirst, and last to a great storm. Hrólf sends all but his twelve champions home. When the company arrives at King Athils' palace, murk conceals the pitfalls and armed men in the hall; next they are tried by a fierce fire and then by a great troll in the likeness of a boar. Meanwhile, Kormák's mother insists that he borrow Skeggi's sword Skofnung; then Kormák is wounded at the holm because he refuses to follow the taboos connected with the sword. Steingerd's relatives betroth her to Bersi. Kormák fails a second test when he interrupts the witch Thordís before she can slaughter a third goose. She tells him that "You are certainly a hard person to help, Kormák. 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."<sup>39</sup> Yet, Kormák is still able to defeat Steingerd's husband Thorvard at the holm twice.

Guardians who must be overcome before the object can be attained are Auden's fifth quest element. King Hrólf's mother, Queen Yrsa, gives him his inheritance including the ring Sviagriss. The guardian of the treasure, King Athils, pursues them with his troops, but King Hrólf slows them by strewing gold in their path. He makes King Athils stoop to pick up the ring; then Hrólf attacks and finally forces King Athils to return home without the treasure, "and it is not recorded that they ever met again thereafter."<sup>40</sup> Steingerd has several guardians as her story progresses. Her father, Thorkel, and her brother, Thorkel Toothgnasher, both dislike Kormák. Although Narfi, Thorkel's thrall, taunts Kormák and later attacks him with a scythe, Kormák's most potent enemy is the witch Thorveig. After Odd and Gudmund, her sons, attack Kormák at Thorkel's egging, Kormák 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."<sup>41</sup> 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, Kormák replies "More was this the work of ill wights than due to my own waywardness."<sup>42</sup>

Auden's final element for a quest is the helpers who aid the hero with their prowess or their magic. On the one

hand, King Hrólfr has the aid of the farmer Hráni, whom Hrólfr identifies too late as Óðinn himself. His champions, especially Svipdæg and Boðvar, his hound Gram, and a penniless man Vogg, who first calls Hrólfr "Kraki" or pole-ladder--all these assist at various times. On the other hand, Kormákr 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, Kormákr rescues Steingrð and her husband Thorvald from the vikings, but she refuses to go with him. The sagateller comments that "Kormákr 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."<sup>43</sup> Kormákr fights a magically endowed giant in Scotland, and each is the other's bane. Kormákr has been unable to achieve his quest, to marry Steingrð. Thus, the third phase of romance, the quest, is as far as possible within the saga genre as within the romance genre.

However, the last three phases of the myth of romance, those that the romance shares with the comedy, are rarely dwelt upon in the lygisögur and even less frequently in the other types of sagas. 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, Glúm dies a Christian, and his son is a distinguished man who has Glúm's remains moved to the church. Grettla does not

end before Grettir can be avenged by his kinsman Thorsteinn, who then has a fortunate adventure with the lady Spes, and in the last chapter, Sturla the Lawman praises Grettir. However, Njáls saga's ending is closer to that of the typical romance. Kári carries out a long and thorough revenge, but he is finally reconciled to the best of the burners, Flosi. Kári marries Flosi's daughter Hildigunn, and both Flosi and Kári then have full lives and renowned offspring. Similarly, the Jónsvíkings saga has a satisfactory ending for most of its cast. Although Earl Hakon is murdered and Búi becomes a dragon, the other principals, Sigurd Cape, Bjorn, and Sigvaldi settle down to rule and procreate. Of Vagn Ákason, 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."<sup>44</sup> Thus, the full configuration of the myth of romance, as Frye describes it, is possible within the saga form.

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. However, he does not commit the trilogy 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."<sup>45</sup> Thomson means by the tapestry tradition "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. For instance, Snorri uses this skillful movement from one center of interest to another effectively in the Heimskringla. In fact, in the sagas, the story teller often handles these movements consciously. He presents his cast by starting with the basic "Maðr hét Auðun" [There was a man called Auðun] or "Bjarni hét maðr" [Bjarni was the name of a man] or "Sá maðr er nefndr til spgunnar" [This man is named to the saga]. Transitions to already established situations are signalled by phrases like these: "Þat er sagt" [That is said] and "Nú er þar til máls at taka at Bergþórshváli" [Now is there to speak of what happened at Bergþórshváli]. And departure from the scene is also handled with dispatch: "Ok er Oddbjorg ór sogunni" [And Oddbjorg is out of the saga].

Thus, the saga form could also be called a tapestry, and since the saga more fully explains the mechanics of the beginning and ending of the trilogy 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 for the trilogy. Furthermore, the connotations of the romance (a work in poetry related to the Mediterranean culture) are less applicable to the trilogy than those of the saga (a prose work related to the Northsea culture).

iv. The Novel

No investigation of the genres assigned to The Lord of the Rings could be complete without a discussion of the prevalent twentieth-century prose form, the novel. Nevertheless, the problematic nature of the novel complicates this endeavor. 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," 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.<sup>46</sup> The terms Frye finally suggests are novel, romance, autobiography, and Menippean satire.<sup>47</sup>

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. In one course I attended, the professor 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." 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 behaviour 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 recognise 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.<sup>48</sup>

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, but 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 novel'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, for me at least, creates an illusion of reality.

A key phrase in the third 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 and thus not inextricably unique to the form and medium of the work.

Nevertheless, I would be curious to see what Mendilow would do with Grettis saga or Laxdœla saga in terms of his 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 Grettla, 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."<sup>49</sup> Foote, in fact, attributes to the saga narrator "a freedom of stylistic resource like that allowed to a modern novelist."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Laxdœla might be viewed as a psychological novel about Gudrun.

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.<sup>51</sup> First, Carter's subdivision of the novel does not illuminate the nature of The Lord of the Rings, and his comparison of Tolkien's trilogy 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,<sup>52</sup> 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, and 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, rather than the novel, best illuminates Morris's works, especially a prose romance such as Malory's Morte d'Arthur, and E.R. Eddison's work belongs, as I believe Tolkien's trilogy does, to the saga genre.

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. Hopefully, 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.

v. 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."<sup>53</sup> Halvdan Koht in The Old Norse Sagas speaks of two kinds of popular stories, "pure fiction and historical novels."<sup>54</sup> And, in the "Introduction" to Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Lee M. Hollander's translation of Njála, the editors refer to "the medieval novels we call sagas . . ."<sup>55</sup>

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 from their Scandinavian 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 Jónsson's Sverris saga and Oddr Snorrason's Óláfr Tryggvason 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 political to the

religious with the Óláfs saga Helga, both Snorri's and others', as the transition.<sup>56</sup>

The Icelanders, who had left Norway partly to escape the tyranny of Harald Fairhair, rather naturally turned to writing stories of their own first families. These, too, told of a single hero, such as Grettir, Gísli, or Víga-Glúm, or sometimes of a group of people such as those in Eyrbyggja, Laxdøla, or Vatnsdøla. 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 Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða once considered "a perfectly reasonable-looking, realistic saga" are now thought to be almost purely fictitious.<sup>57</sup>

The other two main types of sagas, the fornaldarsögur (heroic-mythical tales of past times) and the lygisögur (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.

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 Stefán Einarsson in A History of Icelandic Literature devote a chapter to the question. However, in order to show how

The Lord of the Rings fits the saga form, I must commit myself to a statement on what I believe a saga is. Thus, I have compiled the following 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.<sup>58</sup>

Although such a definition should ideally be supported with as many examples as possible, I am going to confine my illustrations of these conventions mainly to some critical commentaries and to the family saga, Njáls saga, and the fornaldarsaga, Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs. At the same time, I shall provide corresponding examples from The Lord of the Rings. Then, I shall explain why certain other conventions have been excluded from the definition.

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 þættir, and the sagas can be quite long: Njála, a trilogy of sorts, is 390 big pages and the Heimskringla is 854 pages. The three volume 1,215 page The Lord of the Rings must qualify as extended. Similarly, both the sagas and the trilogy are in prose, although most of the sagas, and The Lord of the Rings, too, are embellished with verse. However, as verse is absent

or minimal in some kings and family sagas (parts of the Heimskringla and Hrafnkatla, for example), I did not require it as a characteristic in the definition.

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. 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,<sup>59</sup> uses the same technique. 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. The word "narrative" in the definition would exclude much that the novel genre may encompass; the sagas and The Lord of the Rings are stories told as stories without apology.

The first convention of the saga is the importance of the location to the telling of the story. Rhys Carpenter mentions 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. He 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 behaviour of the moon, should all be beyond cavil." Carpenter compares Stevenson's theory with Grettle's author's concern with the accuracy of his setting.<sup>60</sup>

Many of the Icelandic family saga writers lived in the area they wrote about, and the audience would have immediately noticed any errors. Modern foreign editions of the sagas inevitably contain maps so that the reader can more easily follow the movement of the story. Njála, 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, "Thrór's Map" of the Lonely Mountain and a map of Wilderland.<sup>61</sup> All these maps and the large 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 Alþing.

Obviously, when an Icelandic saga writer was telling a tale about Norway or about the past or telling a tale of foreign origin, 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--all are important to the story.

A second convention, the interest in genealogy, seems 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). Nevertheless, the hobbits would have loved Njála, 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 Njála "excessive even for an Icelandic saga," but those of the fornaldarsögur

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 as 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; Turville-Petre's edition of Víga-Glúms Saga has two, for example.

A special type of characterization is a third convention of the saga. Although some characters are studied in great psychological depth (Gudrun in Laxdœla, Grettir, and Glúm are examples), most are limited to a briefer treatment. In his introduction to the Saga of the Jónsvíkings, Lee Hollander 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, Búi, 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: Palnatóki, 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.<sup>62</sup>

Much that Hollander observes about The Saga of the Jónsvíkings also fits other sagas and The Lord of the Rings. For instance, Gunnar, Njál, Kári, and to a lesser extent

Hallgerd, Bergthóra, Flosi, and Skarphedin, all share the great downstage center of the saga. Similarly, in King Heidrek, the actions of the king's tempestuous mother, Hervör, almost overshadow those of the king, and three successive Angantýrs 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, and Faramir are each heroes in separate spheres.

With so many important characters, the individualized portraits must be handled rather summarily. For instance, in Njála, 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."<sup>63</sup> Naturally, in the fornaldar saga, descriptions of characters are less incisive. In King Heidrek, the king is characterized by comparing him 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. Angantýr 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 Angantýr did, so much more mischief than any other man did Heidrek do; and it was him that Hervör loved the more."<sup>64</sup>

Although Tolkien does not give us the trenchant clues to character that the sagaman often supplies, 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). Tolkien allows Boromir's most important characteristic--his hubristic thirst for power--to develop through the action and dialogue of the story, but Tolkien does somewhat foreshadow it by mentioning Boromir's pride. The horn in the description is an important token.

The fourth convention, the abundance of action and adventure, needs little documentation in either the sagas or The Lord of the Rings. In Njála for instance, sea voyages, fights, murders, battles, revenge, stealing, horsefights,

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 Hlídarenda, and Njál's sons' long resistance in the burning house, from which Kári alone escapes. Likewise, in The Saga of King Heidrek, holmgang, 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 Rings, too. There, land and sea journeys, barrow descent, battles, wars, suicide, and attacks by miscellaneous monsters are frequent.

Lack of any emphasis on love or sex is almost a corollary to that much adventure. Even sagas, such as Kormáks saga and Gunnlaugs saga that are primarily love stories, emphasize neither sex nor sentiment, and along with the love story, holmgang, battles, viking raids, and sea voyages form a major part of the story. In E.R. Eddison's imitation of the saga, Styrbiorn the Strong, Sigrid's seduction of Styrbiorn is one of the two scenes that seem completely false.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, although The Lord of the Rings ends with a triple marriage, sex and romance are not explored. In fact, several critics have commented on the stiffness both of the women and of the love scenes.

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 pot of "oral tradition," the answer must always be a relative supposition. However, even the blatantly artificial sagas pretend to be historical. Einarsson says that "These types [riddara sögur (knights' tales) and lygi sögur (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."<sup>66</sup> Thus, every story from the settlement of Greenland to the wildest adventure with a genie in Asia presents itself as history.

With Einarsson's statement in mind, Beatie's blatant dismissal of the "saga-aspect of Tolkien's work" becomes 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."<sup>67</sup> Ironically, none of Beatie's three examples is a saga, which is by definition a prose work.

Yet, Tolkien has a broader perspective on the nature of history. 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).

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 trilogy and its sources: "This account of the end of the Third Age 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 Morkinskinna and the Fagrskinna, 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. These 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 Landnámabók, 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. And, this pretention to history is perhaps one of the conventions that places The Lord of the Rings most convincingly in the saga form.

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 paper. Furthermore, Beatie's attempt to comment on "oral tradition" seems ludicrous. Since the sagas are known to most twentieth-century readers only as written documents, 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 Icelanders' belief in the supernatural--from the troll of popular swearing to the All-Father himself. Tolkien's dragons and



dwarfs may be no 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 trilogy. Thus, as some excellent sagas, such as Hrafnkatla, have no supernatural elements and since I cannot determine which elements were fantastic and which credible, I have omitted any mention of the supernatural 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."<sup>68</sup> Curiosity seems to play an important 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.

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."<sup>69</sup> If I had to choose one phrase to describe Tolkien's controversial prose style, I would choose Johnston's phrase "the style directly geared to the telling of the story." The reader is conscious of the story rather than of the style itself.

Throughout this chapter I have argued that genres should be 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. Thus, in my definition of the saga, I insisted on the affinity of the saga to the North Atlantic peoples--the Scandinavians and their heirs in Iceland, Greenland, and England. I shall devote the remaining pages to marking instances of this affinity.

## CHAPTER II NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, The Tolkien Reader (New York, 1966), p. [2].
- <sup>2</sup> In Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame, 1968), p. 129.
- <sup>3</sup> "Adventures in English," Essays in Criticism, VI (1956), 454.
- <sup>4</sup> In Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame, 1968), p. 39.
- <sup>5</sup> Straight, p. 24.
- <sup>6</sup> Tolkien, The Tolkien Reader, p. 47.
- <sup>7</sup> Tolkien, The Tolkien Reader, pp. 57-60.
- <sup>8</sup> Roberts, pp. 455-457.
- <sup>9</sup> Tolkien, The Tolkien Reader, p. 68.
- <sup>10</sup> Resnik, p. 94.
- <sup>11</sup> Tolkien, The Tolkien Reader, p. 32.

- 12 Tolkien, The Tolkien Reader, p. 84.
- 13 Andrew Lang, ed., The Brown Fairy Book (New York, 1904), pp. 1-47.
- 14 Jakob Grimm, Grimm's Fairy Tales, tr. Mrs. H.B. Paull (New York, n.d.), pp. 45-60.
- 15 George W. Dasent, Popular Tales from the Norse (New York, 1912), pp. 232-251.
- 16 Tolkien, The Tolkien Reader, p. [2].
- 17 J.R.R. Tolkien, Smith of Wootton Major and Farmer Giles of Ham (New York, 1969), p. 9.
- 18 In Mankato State College Series, II (February, 1967), The Tolkien Papers, p. 3.
- 19 (New York, 1969), p. 21.
- 20 (Berkeley, 1946), p. 22.
- 21 Carpenter, p. 32.
- 22 Carpenter, p. 32.
- 23 Carpenter, pp. 38-39.
- 24 Grettis saga, The Saga of Grettir the Strong, ed. Peter Foote, tr. G.A. Hight (London, 1968), p.x. Icelandic Pet Name: Grettla.

- 25 Grettis saga, pp. ix-x.
- 26 (New York, 1961), p. 29.
- 27 Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, VIII (Winter, 1967), 44-45.
- 28 Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (New York, 1969), p. 306.
- 29 Schlauch, p. 1-17.
- 30 Schlauch, pp. 95-118.
- 31 Frye, pp. 198-203.
- 32 Gwyn Jones, tr., Eirík the Red and Other Icelandic Sagas (London, 1966), p. 174.
- 33 Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway, tr. Lee M. Hollander (Austin, 1964), p. 144.
- 34 Víga-Glúms saga, Víga-Glúms Saga, ed. G. Turville-Petre, 2d ed. (Oxford, 1960), p. 8. Icelandic Pet Name: Glúma. I have translated the passage into idiomatic English: And Glúm 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.

- 35 Grettis saga, p. 27.
- 36 Thomson, pp. 57-58.
- 37 "The Quest Hero," In Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame, 1968), p.44.
- 38 Kormáks saga, The Sagas of Kormák and The Sworn Brothers, tr. Lee M. Hollander (Princeton, 1949), p. 14.
- 39 Kormáks saga, p. 61.
- 40 Jones, pp. 304-305.
- 41 Kormáks saga, p. 23.
- 42 Kormáks saga, p. 52.
- 43 Kormáks saga, p. 70.
- 44 The Saga of the Jömsvíkings, tr. Lee M. Hollander (Austin, 1955), p. 114.
- 45 Thomson, p. 49.
- 46 (New York, 1927), p. 13.
- 47 Frye, pp. 306-310.
- 48 (London, 1952), p. 238.
- 49 Grettis saga, p. x.
- 50 Grettis saga, p. xiv.

51 Carter, pp. 134-151.

52 Thomson, p. 56.

53 Volsunga saga, The Saga of the Volsungs, The Saga of Ragnar Lodbrok Together with the Lay of Kraka, tr. Margaret Schlauch (New York, 1930), p. xviii.

54 (New York, 1931), p. 40.

55 Njáls saga, Njál's Saga, tr. Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Lee M. Hollander (New York, 1955), p. 5. Icelandic Pet Name: Njála.

56 Stefán Einarsson, A History of Icelandic Literature (New York, 1957), pp. 110-121.

57 Einarsson, p. 130.

58 Although the wording is mine, this definition is utterly indebted not only to the sagas and introductions I have read but also to Halvdan Koht's The Old Norse Sagas, Margaret Schlauch's The Romance in Iceland, W.A. Craigie's The Icelandic Sagas (Cambridge, 1913) [Reprinted New York, 1968], Theodore M. Andersson's The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey (New Haven, 1964), and G. Turville-Petre's Origins of Icelandic Literature (Oxford, 1953). Stefán Einarsson's chapter "The Sagas" in A History of Icelandic Literature was particularly helpful.



- 59 Tolkien, The Tolkien Reader, p. 49.
- 60 Carpenter, p. 45.
- 61 J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit or There and Back Again ,  
Rev. ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967). Neil and  
Zimbardo used the first edition, 1937, but I have preferred  
the edition revised by Tolkien to agree more closely with  
The Lord of the Rings even though it is a paperback. All  
citations in the text are to this edition.
- 62 The Saga of the Jónsvíkings, pp. 22-23.
- 63 Njáls saga, p. 64.
- 64 Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs, The Saga of King  
Heidrek the Wise, tr. Christopher Tolkien (London, 1960), p.  
21.
- 65 E.R. Eddison, Styrbiorn the Strong (New York, 1926),  
pp. 157-165.
- 66 Einarsson, p. 122.
- 67 Beatie, p. 11.
- 68 Njáls saga, p. 10.
- 69 Gísla saga Súrssonar, The Saga of Gísli, tr. George  
Johnston (London, 1963), p. xi.

### CHAPTER III

#### MIÖGARÐ AND MIDDLE-EARTH

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, Miögarð, "the middle enclosure," (OE Middan-geard "middle dwelling, world, earth"), was men's home. Above was Ásgarð, the dwelling of the gods, and across the sea was Útgarð or Jotunheim, "outer enclosure or giant home." 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 isolated from earth as the gods were from Miögarð. Men and other mortal creatures dwell in Middle-earth, and Sauron the Nameless One and his accomplices move from the East, Mordor. Within these three divisions of Miögarð and Middle-earth, other correspondences occur. Some of the creatures of Middle-earth are like or partly like those of Miögarð. These creatures use analogous implements on similar landscapes practicing like customs. This chapter considers only creatures other than men. Since The Hobbit is part of the Redbook and since it is a valuable storehouse of materials on Middle-earth, examples from it have been included.

### 1. Creatures

In Middle-earth as in Miðgarð, more beings than men were alive--moving and talking. Some of the creatures are well-developed in the northern myths, hints for others may come from northern literature, and even inversions and displacements from northern materials seem significant. Tolkien does not just imitate his sources; in fact, he repeatedly seems to be deliberately disguising his borrowings.

Perhaps one explanation for these alterations lies in Tolkien's own critical viewpoint. His article, "Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics," was occasioned by the amount of historical criticism Beowulf was attracting. These critics were considering the poem only as a repository for historical data; the poem as a work of art had been forgotten. The aspect of Beowulf that historical critics relished most was the digressions. Although the digressions are not made a part of the story, like Shakespeare's comic subplots, Beowulf's digressions offer an extremely penetrating and artistically timely commentary on the main story. Perhaps Tolkien's metaphor of the boiling pot from "On Fairy-Stories" is helpful here. The digressions in Beowulf are still recognizable as the carrots and potatoes of a stew, and before "Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics," the digressions were persistently being discussed as potatoes and carrots rather than as stew.

Now, what I think Tolkien wanted in The Lord of the Rings was a stew in which the potatoes and carrots had

disintegrated and were a part of the broth. Thus, I believe that he deliberately disguises elements of the northern myths in his story in order to subordinate the sources to the story itself. Thus, although readers who know the Volsunga saga, the Nibelungenlied, or Wagner's Ring of the Nibelungs sense a connection between these works and The Lord of the Rings, they cannot make a one to one comparison between Sigurð and Frodo or Éowyn and Brynhild.

Moreover, Tolkien's distaste for allegory makes him especially careful to avoid easily set up patterns either between the northern myths and the story or between the story and twentieth-century problems. Tolkien disclaims the interpretation of the War of the Ring as World War II in the "Foreword," and the idea that the Ring is the atomic bomb cannot easily be reconciled with the destruction of the One Ring by throwing it into Mount Doom.

A second possible explanation for the disguises, inversions, and variations on the northern myths is the necessities of the plot. If Gandalf is as powerful as Sauron, the story is brief; Gandalf rides up to Mordor, knocks Sauron unconscious with his staff, rides rapidly up Mount Doom, and tosses the ring in. The story is over. However, if Gandalf is like Óðin, then Gandalf has some power over humans but little over giants--even Thór needed his magic hammer to deal with the evil giants.

Another motive for changing the sources may be simply a lack of adequate personages in recorded northern mythology. Further, most of what was written did not escape Christian editing, for in the Medieval period, only clerics and a few nobles were literate. Thus, to create a complete chain of being for Middle-earth, Tolkien had to create many creatures; for some of them, he elaborated on suggestions in northern mythology. Throughout, he balances his chain of being with good and bad examples of each species; part of this task he integrates into the plot, for Treebeard tells Merry and Pippin that Sauron bred certain species in mockery of creatures he could not corrupt.

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 in his ordering of the tradition, his creation of a credible and 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."<sup>1</sup> Gasque feels 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 Óðin evolved from an older corn god called Oðr, who already had the characteristic of mental excitement and intellect.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the time orientation of The Lord of the Rings makes ancient characters like Shelob and Tom Bombadil necessary to indicate the evolving nature of the universe. Gasque does not recognize that 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, and 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.

The less ancient creatures of Middle-earth with their possible Old Norse sources, both the ones that Tolkien has made like the sources and the ones that he has disguised in various ways, 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, and 9) The Eye. 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 make do evil, in the section called Tree-kin.

### 1. Hobbits

Perhaps one of the most unlikely comparisons possible is one between the short, fat, meek hobbits and the tall, strong, daring vikings; yet, the two cultures 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 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 are literate. 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 "Hávamál"--a poetic statement of the Northsea ethical code--defines the largess proper for a lord and the temperate conduct expected of a guest. Sagamen, who may have been perennial guests, frequently mention freeness or stinginess with food in descriptions of kings and goðar, and the famous Hallgerð, who had a reputation for being lavish, has her servant steal food from Otkel to keep her table supplied during a bad winter. This theft eventually involves many men and hastens Gunnar's fall.

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 daughters 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" (p. 16). Not only did King Heidrek trace his ancestry back to the elven folk, but King Hrólfr also has a famous daughter by an elf woman. Furthermore, both hobbits and vikings were vain about their dress. Hobbits dress "in bright colours (chiefly green and yellow)" from "whole rooms devoted to clothes," and 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



Arinbjörn had given him that Egil broods for days when his wife, Ásgerd, allows his son, Thorstein, to wear it without Egil's permission.

Even the fear Bilbo shows when he begins to sense the nature of his unrequested journey was not unknown in the sagas. The coward who must be converted to bravery was almost a conventional character. Kári's companion Bolli is one example, but Boðvar's friend Høtt provides a more accurate parallel to Bilbo Baggins. On his journey to King Hrólf's court, Boðvar has lodged for a night with Høtt's parents, who entreat him not to hurt their son. After Boðvar comes to King Hrólf's meadhall, he sees a hand come up out of the bonepile in the corner. Boðvar goes over, pulls Høtt out, and takes him to the table. The sagateller reports "En hann er svá hræddr at skefa á honum leggr ok liðr" [But he is so afraid that he shakes in every limb]. Similarly, after Thorin begins to talk of the dangerous adventure, Bilbo is sitting on the hearth as frightened as Høtt. Tolkien says that "the poor little hobbit could be seen kneeling on the hearthrug, shaking like a jelly that was melting" (p. 29). This sudden removal from the world behind the shieldwall of bones (literally for Høtt, metaphorically for Bilbo) to the world of champions and adventures has a similar effect: "Høttr er svá hræddr at hann tektr eigi mat né drykk ok þykkir honum þá ok þá sem hann muni vera lostinn" [Høtt is so frightened that he takes neither food nor drink and

thinks nearly every moment that he will be lost]. Bilbo's "appetite was quite taken away" by the unaccustomed experience, and the words "may never return" make him shriek. Boðvar kills the monster, which is called "mestr troll" [greatest troll] that ravages King Hrólf's land every Christmas while Høtt lies trembling nearby--too frightened of the monster to stay but too frightened of Boðvar to attempt to leave. Boðvar makes Høtt drink the blood and eat the heart of the monster; then Høtt can boast in typical Norse fashion: "Eigi mun ek þá hræðask ok eigi þik upp frá þessu" [I will not fear them (Hrólf's champions anymore) nor will I fear you from now on]. When Bilbo overhears Glóin call him "the little fellow bobbing on the mat," the hobbit is determined to "be thought fierce" and to participate in the great adventure. Like Høtt, 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" (p. 31). 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: King Hrólf accepts Høtt and rechristens him Hjalti because he was able to carry the sword Gullinhjalta [goldenhilt] which no cowardly man could wield,<sup>3</sup> and Bilbo completes his adventure and is afterwards known as Bilbo the Magnificent, Elf-friend.

Much has been said about Frodo already. His name has been associated with King Froði of the Heimskringla, with

Frodo in the Domesday Book, with Fróða in Beowulf, with A.S. frōð, "wise," and with ON fróði, "wise."<sup>4</sup> However, in "The Cult of Freyr in the Evening of Paganism," Turville-Petre compares the legendary King Frotho in Saxo with the Swedish god Freyr; for while "the Peace of Fróði" was, according to Snorri, in the reign of Augustus Caesar in the days when Christ was born, in Sweden this same period of peace and plenty is attributed to Freyr. The Flateyjarbók 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 Fróði who ruled over Denmark, and they called it "Fróði's Peace." Moreover, the courtships and the deaths of the two monarchs are also similar. Turville-Petre then considers the name "Fróði" or "Frotho." He believes that in addition to the adjective fróðr meaning "wise," another adjective fróðr meaning "filled with generative power," "fertile," and "fruitful" was also used. This theory clarifies the use of the adjective in the Skirnismál where Freyr is twice called einn fróði, a surprising name for a fertility god if fróðr can only mean "wise." The alternative interpretation of fróðr as fruitful is more appropriate.<sup>5</sup>

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. And, 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.

## 2. Elves and Orcs

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 sophisticated product of literary fancy."<sup>6</sup> Tolkien blames Shakespeare and Drayton for part of the change and calls Drayton's Nymphidia "considered as a fairy-story (a story about fairies), one of the worst ever written."<sup>7</sup> However, the sagas and eddas precede Shakespeare and Drayton, and in them, elves are 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 Alfr [elf, fairy], who ruled over Álfheimar [elfhome]; he had a daughter named Álfhild. In those days the region between Gautelf and the Raumelf was called Álfheimar. One autumn a great sacrifice to the Dísir [guardian spirits, perhaps dead members of the family] was being held at the house of King Alf, and Álfhild conducted the rites; she was more beautiful than any other woman, and all the people in Álfheimar were fairer to look on than any others in those days. But during the night, when Álfhild reddened the altar with blood, Starkad Áludreng carried her off,

and took her home with him. King Álf called upon Thór to seek for Álfhild; and afterwards Thór slew Starkad and allowed Álfhild to return home to her father, together with Grím the son of Hergrím.<sup>8</sup>

The supplementary text continues with a euhemeristic explanation of Óðin's acquisition of leadership in the Northlands. Similarly, in "Sögubrot af Nokkrum Forn-konúngum í Dana ok Svía Veldi," Ragnar, a legendary Norse hero, looked like his mother, Álfhild. The saga writer reports great friendship between the race of men and that of elves, and the genealogy of the sons of Ragnar includes Gandálf's son.<sup>9</sup>

The elves of the Northland 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). These descriptions agree with the comment Snorri Sturluson makes on the elves: " . . . Álfheimr 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."<sup>10</sup> Tolkien retains the idea of two main branches, the east and west elves.

However, 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). 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). Just as the light elves are fair of face and of heart, these burlesques are as black of face and "blacker than pitch" in their hearts. Here Tolkien bases his creation on a phrase from Snorri's myth. The usual interpretation of the phrase is that the black elves were supposed to be dwarves; however, this interpretation may come from the association of dwarves with tunnels and smithing, for dwarves are not usually described as being black.

Moreover, Snorri also states that "Periphrasis with the names of elves is held to be favorable."<sup>11</sup> The ability of men and elves to intermarry (Beren and Lúthien Tinúviel and Arwen and Aragorn in The Lord of the Rings and Sigurð Hring and Alfhild and King Helgi and an elf-woman in several fornaldarsögur) substantiates the kinship between humans and elves. From Beren and Tinúviel and from Sigurð Hring

and Álfhild races of great kings descend.

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, and the ring of Galadriel is primarily for healing. Apparently, the Icelanders also attributed some power over illness to the elves, for 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.<sup>12</sup>

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. And, in the "Volundarkviða," the poet uses "the alf's folk-warder," "thou lord of alfs," and "thou alfs' leader" as kennings for 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 safeguarded himself against the King's anger by begetting a child on Boðvild, the King's daughter.<sup>13</sup>

"The Farewell to Lórien" provides another interesting parallel with the family sagas. 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 string a bow immediately recalls Njála's justly famous scene in which Gunnar is defending 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 on until, overcome by weariness and many deep wounds, he dies. But, Tolkien has borrowed more than the hair bowstring from the scene, for on the next page, Galadriel tells the dwarf to choose a gift, and he begs for one strand of her golden hair. Both Galadriel and Hallgerd are extremely beautiful and golden-haired, but the resemblance ends there, for Galadriel graciously unbraids her hair and gives Gimli three strands (I, 392). Although the action of asking a lady for a lock of her hair has a different result, the ideas of a hair bowstring and a request for a lady's hair could have been inspired by Njála.

Another scene from the family sagas seems relevant to the elf-lady, Galadriel. One winter, Víga-Glúm has a dream: "Hann þóttisk sjá konu eina ganga útan eptir heraðinu, ok stefndi þangat til Þverár; en hon var svá mikil, at axlirnar tóku út fjöllin tveggja vegna. En hann þóttisk



ganga ór garði á mót henni ok bauð henni til sín; ok síðan vaknaði hann."<sup>14</sup> [He thought he saw a woman going out over the district, and she moved toward Þverár, 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.] 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 was soft and sad" (I, 381). Glum identifies his dream girl as a 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 dís, which will be discussed in connection with the dwarves. Turville-Petre translates the verse Glum speaks as follows: "I saw a woman spirit of towering stature, a goddess of the head-dress, walk hither to Eyjafjorðr, with a helmet on her head. So that in my dream the battle-goddess seemed to stand beside the hills, warrior."<sup>15</sup> Both accounts include a supernatural woman who appears to be quite tall, and in both the woman's appearance is an illusion.

Thus, Tolkien has built his own elves on what is known of elves in Northsea literature. Both sets of elves are mansized, capable of intermarrying with men, are healers, and sometimes become smiths. Since little is known about elves of old, Tolkien has invented details about them to make them complete and credible characters without contradicting his sources.

### 3. Dwarves

Critics have already noted the relationship between the dwarves of The Lord of the Rings and those from the eddas, for the names of sixteen of the dwarves in The Hobbit are part of the "Dvergatal" [Catalogue of Dwarves] from the "Voluspá."<sup>16</sup> Two more names are in the Prose Edda; the name "Gandálf," which Jean Young translates "sorcerer-elf," is in both eddas.<sup>17</sup> Thorin's sobriquet "Eikinskjaldi" [oakenshield], also appears in the Poetic Edda; Young translates Thorin as "Bold one," a good name for the brusk leader of the burglary company in The Hobbit.<sup>18</sup>

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." Further, Gimli is the only dwarf to pass over the sea to the Grey Havens, which may be analogous to a hall described by Snorri: "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."<sup>19</sup> If the dwarf's name has been suggested by northern literature, so has his character, for Gimli's periphrasis, ". . . the Lady Galadriel is above all the jewels that lie beneath the earth." epitomizes the typical concerns of a dwarf.

In general, Tolkien's work with the dwarves has been to take from the eddas, the Sigfried legend, and other fornaldarsögur, their traditional forms and habits--short stature with long beards, love for treasure, skill as smiths, and bad tempers--and mould them into charming individuals. Margaret Sohlauch summarizes the appearance and talents of the traditional dwarf:

But by far the most usual helpers in the lygisögur are dwarfs. They can cure wounds (as in the Haralds saga Fringsbana and Exils saga Einhenda), forge magic weapons (as in the Ans saga Þogsveigis), interfere in battle on behalf of a hard-pressed warrior (as in the Andra saga Jarls), render invaluable assistance in the carrying out of a difficult quest (as in the Kára saga Karasonar), and make jewels (as in the Villifers saga Freekna). One method of winning the helpful gratitude of a dwarf was to throw a golden ring to him, or better still to his child; or one might rescue the child from a rapacious eagle, or the dwarf himself from drowning or a similar danger. You could compel a dwarf to help you, against his will by stepping between him and the entrance to the "rock" in which he lived and exacting his promise as a price of his entry. All supernatural persons are faithful in carrying out such promises: dwarfs, giants, and trolls alike.<sup>20</sup>

The fornaldarsögur offer little variation; for instance, in King Heidrek, Durin and Dvalin are held from their great stone by King Svafrlami's graven sword. He commands them

to make a golden sword and scabbard that "must never fail 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 so that whenever it is taken from its hilt, it must kill and it will do three hateful deeds and be the bane of its owner.<sup>21</sup> In a similar adventure, An of Áns saga Bogsveigis requests a golden horn.<sup>22</sup> Þorstein of Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar gets a knife and advice concerning a duel from a dwarf named Sindri,<sup>23</sup> and 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, for they live East of Vanaquisl in Asia with Óðin. 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."<sup>24</sup> Tolkien uses the idea of a vanishing people in The Hobbit, for he says that hobbits are "a 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" (p. 19).

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 dísir (sing. dís), and although they never describe them clearly they give some idea of their place in religious life."<sup>25</sup> But, Tolkien has connected these mysterious female guardian spirits with the dwarves, for he names the daughter of Thrain II, Dís. The association may have been suggested by a woman named Dís in Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar, in which Hálfðán meets a dwarf, Lit. Lit asks what Hálfðán wishes. Hálfðán says "Ek vildi at þú næðir horninu góða Dísar Kolsdóttur." [I wish that you bring the good horn of Dís, Kol's daughter.] Lit argues that it would be his bane to try to gain the horn, but he eventually brings it.<sup>26</sup> Like the Norse dísir, Tolkien's dwarf women were little known in the world, for they stayed at home and travelled only in men's clothes, indistinguishable from the dwarf men. Thus, in the matter of dwarves, Tolkien has not only drawn on the northern stories, but he has also interpreted obscure parts of them.

#### 4. Wizards

Although Tolkien does not devote a section in "The Annals of the Kings and Rulers" to wizards, he describes their order in "The Tale of Years." The Istari or wizards were sent out of the Far West to contest the rise of Sauron;

yet they were forbidden to match power with him or to enslave men or elves. The five wizards had the shape of men but aged very slowly, and they took the names given them by each people never revealing their true names" (III, 365-366).

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 notes that "As in Old Norse, where the ravens Huginn and Muninn were informants for Othin, so the raven (The Hobbit, p. 268), is made into a sage battle counsellor. In his dealings with raven and eagles, as well as in his often adopted disguise as an old man, Gandalf often suggests Othin, but it is only in wisdom and power that the war god influences the wizard's character."<sup>27</sup> Of course, Lin Carter has an explanation for Gandalf, too: "I suspect that Gandalf the Grey Wizard--who came into Middle-earth thousands of years before from the Uttermost West, who goes disguised as a man but is not a man, who is known by different names in different lands, who is capable of passing through death and emerging greater than before--is Tolkien's version of Odin, the Father of the Gods, Lord of Asgard, and is actually one of the Valar."<sup>28</sup> I reached a similar conclusion, but Carter's argument is not as complete as it should be to refute Ryan's assignment to Gandalf of the god Heimdallr. Furthermore, neither Ryan nor Carter remarks on an important corollary. If Gandalf is based on Óðin, then by extension, Saruman and Radagast should also be related to the Norse gods.

The name "Gandalf," sorcerer-elf, applies to Óðin as Snorri describes him in "The Saga of the Ynglings": "Othin 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 . . . Othin 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."<sup>29</sup> 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 Óðin, and some of their epithets are similar. Turville-Petre thinks that Óðin's most frequent disguise was that of a tall,

old man with a long grey beard and a broad hat.<sup>30</sup> Yet, in The Saga of Ólaf Tryggvason, Snorri Sturluson reports the use of this disguise: "It is told that one evening when King Ólaf was being entertained at Ogvaldsness an old and very wise-spoken man came in. He wore a hood coming low down over his face and was one-eyed."<sup>31</sup> In The Hobbit, Gandalf has "long bushy eyebrows that stuck out further than the brim of his shady hat" (p. 17), 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). Siðhottr ("broad hat") is one of Óðin's names. Gandalf also fits Óðin's name, Havi ("tall"), for when Bilbo does not want to give Frodo the Ring, "he [Gandalf] seemed to grow tall and menacing; his shadow filled the little room" (I, 42). Yet, only a few paragraphs later, "He [Gandalf] seemed to dwindle again to an old grey man, bent and troubled" (I, 43). Gandalf is called the Greyhame and Mithrandir, the Grey Pilgrim; Óðin, Vegtámr ("Road-practiced") and Hárbaðr ("Grey-bearded"), and Gandalf's sobriquet, Stormcrow, may be derived from Óðin's pet ravens.<sup>32</sup>

The princes and kings engaged in the War of the Ring select Gandalf as their leader while Óðin is the god of war and called Sigfaðir ("Father of victory") and Sigrhofundr ("author of victory"). Like Óðin, and most of the other gods,



Gandalf understands the language of birds. Óðin rode the famous horse Sleipnir, a grey who was "the swiftest of horses, galloping through the air and over sea." Turville-Petre thinks that the conception of Sleipnir as a horse with eight legs may derive from the misinterpretation of a pictorial representation, whose artist meant for the legs to denote speed.<sup>33</sup> Gandalf's horse, Shadowfax (ON fax, "mane"), is like Sleipnir; Gandalf boasts that "The horses of the Nine cannot vie with him; tireless, swift as the flowing wind. Shadowfax they called him. By day his coat glistens like silver; and by night it is like a shade, and he passes unseen. Light is his footfall" (I, 276).

The most important connection between Óðin and Gandalf is their transformation through death. Óðin 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 "Hávamál" explains that

I wot that I hung        on the wind-tossed tree  
                          all of nights nine,  
 wounded by spear,        bespoken to Óðin,  
                          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 gou,  
       which that made the holy hosts,  
       and were etched by Óthin.<sup>34</sup>

Resemblances between Óðin's hanging and Christ's crucifixion are numerous: the English 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 Óðin's tree, had no roots. Turville-Petre concludes that "If the myth of the hanging Óðinn 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."<sup>35</sup> Thus, if Tolkien wished Gandalf to undergo a learning, purifying transformation such as Óðin's, yet did not wish to make Gandalf an identifiable Christ figure, then Tolkien would have to radically alter the circumstances of the transformation. In the 1950's and 1960's, when so many heroes from Benjy of Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury to the movie hero Cool Hand Luke are designated as Christ figures, having a hero suffer or change without suggesting Christ is almost impossible.

Therefore, in the mines of Moria, the orcs and a horrible ancient creature, the Balrog (ON ballr, "dangerous or dire schemes," ógn, "dread, terror") is 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 the 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, 106). 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 Celbdil 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, 106).

Through this experience, Gandalf has passed beyond fire and rock and storm. Like Óðin, 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, 188-189). 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 none of the Christian critics has yet labelled Gandalf a Christ figure. Incidentally, two of Óðin's names, Bolverkr ("Evil-doer") and Báleygr ("Fire-eyed"), suggest that Gandalf's enemy, Sauron, may be a mockery of him. And, like Gandalf, Óðin could quell fire.<sup>36</sup>

Yet, if Tolkien based Gandalf on Óðin, then Gandalf should be one-eyed like Óðin. 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. Second, eye images are consistently used to reveal the evil nature of a character throughout the trilogy in characters as diverse as Frodo when he is obsessed and Sauron, The Eye. 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, for he would be the sole repository for both good and evil, instead of a wizard, one of five, with somewhat limited powers. 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 do, too. The Eye and its proliferations are discussed later in this chapter.

In opposition to Gandalf the Grey is Saruman the White or Saruman the Many Colored. For his name, Ryan suggests OE searu, "device, design, contrivance, trice": ON sár, "wound" might also apply.<sup>37</sup> 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 Óðin, Saruman resembles Loki. Snorri says that "Also reckoned amongst the gods is one that some call the mischiefmonger of the Æsir and the father-of-lies and the disgrace-of-gods-and-men. He is the son of the giant Fárbauti 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 Æsir in great difficulties and he often helped them out again by guile."<sup>38</sup> 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, 182). 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 studied ancient lore of men while he looked for references to the Ring. He has taken the tower and built a fortress, Orthanc (Elvish for Mount Fang, Mark language for Cunning mind, OE "inborn thought").<sup>38</sup> Just as Loki engineered the building of the walls of Ásgarð 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 Höð, a piece of mistletoe and helped him throw it at Baldr's vulnerable heel; Loki is the ráðbani or instigator of Baldr's murder.<sup>39</sup> Saruman uses his fellow wizard Radagast cunningly, too, for

he sends Radagast with a message that Saruman will aid in the battle against Mordor, but when Gandalf comes, Saruman tries to involve him in a plot to capture the Ring, and 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).

Some folklorists believe that Loki's name may be an alternate form of logi ("flame"). Thus, Saruman would be strongly associated with fire. This connection could explain the effectiveness of Treebeard and Gandalf's method of keeping him 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 Baldr's death, Loki is chained with a poisoned serpent dripping poison on him. A serpent ends Saruman, too, for his devious servant Wormtongue cuts his throat.

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 friend" (I, 270). If Radagast is from ON rǫðgast, "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 ON rauða "red" with "gast" meaning ghost or spirit, then of course, he might be based on Thór.<sup>39</sup> Actually, Loki does talk Thór into going on a journey to Geirröð, the giant. Turville-Petre notes that " . . . his faithless friend Loki, had urged the thunder-god (Herprumu Gautr) to visit the house of Geirröð, telling him that green paths lay all the way."<sup>40</sup> Thór's journey is not prudent; green paths do not lie all the way, and Thór leaves without his belt of strength and his hammer. On another journey to giant land, he is deceived into trying to lift the Miðgarð serpent, trying to drink up the ocean, and trying to wrestle with old age. In the "Prymskviða," he is made to dress in Freyja's clothing and go as a bride to giant land.

Although Tolkien does not tell enough about Radagast to make a very educated assignment about which god, if any, he represents, Gandalf and Saruman seem more than casually based on Óðin and Loki. 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, Baldr, and Freyr. Ryan's assignment of Gandalf to Heimdallr has only one advantage, the epithet, "the White" while Gandalf's relationship to Óðin is much more complex. Further, each of the wizards seems to have some kin under his special guard. For instance, Saruman studied deeply in the lore of men at



Minas Tirith and Gandalf learned about elves in Rivendell. Where Radagast fits is again unclear.

### 5. Tree-kin

When the hobbits, Merry, Pippin, Sam, and Frodo begin their journey through the Old Forest, they comment on its nature: "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 the trees, remembering times when they were lords." 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 says 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 Miðgarð to live in."<sup>41</sup> The antiquity and importance of trees is evidenced by Norse cosmography where the world was a circular disk held up by the roots of Yggdrasil, the world ash.

In The Fellowship of the Ring, the forest makes the travellers 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 pincher" (I, 128-129). Margaret Schlauch reports that in the lygisögur trees may be either evil or beneficent, and she relates a 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 Mágnus 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 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 Viðförull shot out some distance away from the tree and lay there as one dead." And, the king and his courtiers are surprised to find the old magician now a young

man, although he was shorter now.<sup>42</sup> In The Lord of the Rings, Tom Bombadil comes and sings to the Old Willow; then 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).

Just as Tolkien presents evil hobbits like Gollum and 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 good; thus, he introduces good creatures of the same kind, the mighty Ents. Treebeard is especially reminiscent of Yggdrasil, 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 Trolls 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 Man-like, almost Troll-like, figure, at least fourteen feet 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 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 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 to Elbereth.

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 lygisögur. Ryan notes that Ent is OE for "giant," and 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 it apparently in the original applied to stone ruins of Roman buildings.<sup>43</sup> It seems to me, then, that the "geweorc" is more descriptive of Saruman's constructions than of the Ents' destruction.

Many pages could be written on trolls in the sagas, for being called a troll or the lover of a troll-wife is a common insult. For example, in Heiðarvíga saga, Thorbiörn

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."<sup>44</sup> Apparently, trolls were thought of as giant men with enormous power in battle, for Starkad says when he finally flees from Gunnar, "Let us flee now; we are fighting trolls, not men." And, when Ásgrím and the sons of Njál are seeking assistance for their case at the Alþing, 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?"<sup>45</sup> 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. He describes them 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" (p. 46). Even the incident itself has a close parallel in Oddr Snorrason's Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar: "And it is said one time that King Ólaf 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. [my translation]." <sup>46</sup> 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 complaining about persecution by Christians. The hearthmen, who overhear the trolls in Naumdale, return to the ship to report to King Ólaf. King Ólaf 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. <sup>47</sup>

Bilbo is not as fortunate as King Ólaf's bodyguards. Bilbo is caught trying to pick a troll's pocket, and he and 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, and of course, they are turned into stone.

## 6. Birds

Tolkien uses the eagles as a deus-ex-machina device to extricate his heroes from seemingly impossible situations. In The Hobbit, Gandalf, the dwarves, and Bilbo have been treed by the wild wargs 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 Bilbo and dwarves. In The Fellowship of the Ring, Gandalf reports at the Council of Elrond that when he had come to meet Saruman, Saruman 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, and the eagles turn the tide of both battles. From Cormallen, Gandalf then goes with Gwaihir and two of his companions to rescue Frodo and Sam from the Mountain of Doom.

The significance of the eagles as a Middle-earth equivalent of the cavalry of the American west lies, I believe, in the association of Gandalf with Óðin. The Saga of King Heidrek contains a riddle contest between King Heidrek and Óðin in a disguise. When Óðin asks an unanswerable riddle, Heidrek strikes at him with a sword. Óðin escapes by turning himself into a hawk and flying away. Similarly, after Óðin has drunk the three vessels of Sutting's mead, the dwarf mead that made anyone who tasted it a man of poetry and learning, Óðin escapes by changing into the eagle's shape and flying off.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, apparently, Tolkien did not think that shape-changing into the form of a bird would be credible in his conception of Middle-earth; therefore, he objectified the ability of Óðin and of the other gods to change shape into 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, the latter method is preferable, for it allows the heroes to be held in tight places which they could easily have escaped from had they been shape-shifters. For instance, Gandalf is caught and held by the Balrog. Yet at the same time, the eagles can appear when no other means of escape is available. Tolkien does, however, observe the strictures of his possible myth source-- the eagles do not come unless Gandalf/Óðin is there.



Some other 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, and to Smaug's bane, the thrush tells Bard, a man who still understands the speech of birds. Moreover, Óðin's pet ravens Huginn and Muninn and their kin may be models for Röac son of Care, who serves as a messenger between the dwarves in the Lonely Mountain and their kinsman Dain. Yet, Röac is against war with the men of Dale and the elves. The birds carry the good news of Smaug's fall over the countryside, and in The Hobbit, they do not function as scavengers after battle as ravens usually do in medieval Norse and English works.

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. Here as elsewhere, creatures are created, seemingly not by the storyteller but by a character in the story to balance Middle-earth's chain of being.

## 7. The Dragon

Although dragons are only mentioned incidentally in The Lord of the Rings, Smaug of The Hobbit is too extravagant a character to be ignored. In "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien says that as a child, he "desired dragons with a profound

desire."<sup>49</sup> In many allegorical works, the dragon is a symbol of greed or some greater evil; the famous dragons of northern literature, Fafnir and Beowulf's dragon, are more than symbols. 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 forever, unless they are killed), and never enjoy a brass ring of it" (p. 35). 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.

However, in the northern myths, dragons are not born but are rather permanent transformations of greedy men. Thus, Fafnir was once the human brother of Otr, who is an otter in the daytime, and Regin. But, the gods kill Otr and his father Hreldmar demands that Otr's skin be covered with gold as a weregild. The Æsir 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.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, in the Saga of the Jónsvíkings, the greedy viking Búi always carries his treasures with him in some chests. During the battle between Sigvaldi and Earl Hakon, Sigmund Brestisson jumps onto Búi's ship and cuts Búi's hands off at the wrists. "Then Búi stuck the stumps into the handles of his chests and called out aloud:

'Overboard all of Búi's men,' and leaped overboard with the chests."<sup>51</sup> However, according to popular legend, Búi did not die: "Some men say that Búi became a dragon and brooded on his gold."<sup>52</sup> Within this tradition, Smaug's ability to talk and his brooding, evil personality are understandable.

### 8. Wargs

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, 311-312). 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 discusses 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." Furthermore, these wolves are comrades with the goblins who sometimes ride them.

Both Lin Carter and Ryan mention that the name "warg" derives from OE wearg and ON vargr; OE wearg has a double meaning "wolf" or "villain, felon, criminal" and ON vargr also has two meanings "wolf" and "outlaw."<sup>53</sup> Ryan notes that "the reader is given the impression of shape-changers," but Ryan neither explains this phenomenon nor suggests why he believes it is applicable here.<sup>54</sup> Yet, I believe that some clarification does help the reader to understand the ability of wolves to talk and their comradeship with the

vile goblins. Both in the sagas and in the eddas, some men may become at night wolves. Thus, in Eigla, Egil's great grandfather, who is named Kveldúlf ("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."<sup>55</sup>

The eddas explain the absolute horror the people of the north felt concerning wolves, for the Fenris Wolf is to be Óðin's bane. This giant wolf, the son of Loki by a giant woman, is captured and brought to Ásgarð. Only Týr was courageous enough to feed him. The gods trick the wolf into allowing fetters to be placed on him, but after breaking two sets, he refuses to allow a magic cord tied on him until Loki tells him that he may have Týr's hand in his mouth as a surety of the gods' good faith. Fenris wolf stays bound until Ragnarøk, the doom of the gods. Then, the "Völuspá" 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. Fenris wolf swallows Óðin, but Óðin's son Víðar avenges him by tearing the wolf's mouth asunder. Yet, the world cannot be saved.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, since the wolf is traditionally a cruel demon of death and destruction among those peoples that knew them, the terrible assaults of the wargs are a natural part of a story with northern influences. In the Middle-earth chain of being, I believe the wolf stands opposite the horse, for the former are mounts for orcs while the noble horses carry only good characters.

### 9. The Eye

Sauron, the Dark Lord, the creator or 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. The eyes of the creature reveal his true nature.

This pattern of imagery begins in The Hobbit, for Tolkien describes Gollum: "He was Gollum--as dark as darkness, except for two big round pale eyes in his thin face" (p.89). Bilbo, who has been separated from the dwarves as Gandalf is trying to rescue them from the Goblin tunnel, 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" (p. 89).

This initial description suggests a vivid scene in Grettis saga when during the fight in the hall, Glám tries to pull Grettir outside: "Tunglskin var mikit úti ok gluggabykkn; hratt stundum fyrir, en stundum dró frá. Nú í því er Glámr fell, rak skýit frá tunglinu, en Glámr hvesti augun upp í móti. Ok svá at honum bryði við. Þá sigapi svá at honum af ollu saman, mœði ok því, er hann sá at Glámr gaut sínum sjónum harðliga, at hann gat eigi brugðit saxinu, ok lá nálíga í milli heims ok heljar." [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 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."<sup>57</sup> 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 (hamingja) will forsake him, that he will dwell ever alone, and that the eyes that 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 no one attempts to derive. Glám is an aptrgongu-maðr (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 taboo by killing his brother. An evil spirit kills Glám, who destroys it at the same time,<sup>58</sup> and the evil spirit of the One Ring interrupts Gollum's pastoral life, and 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 trilogy, Tolkien constantly 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 Andúin, 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 lamplike eyes shone coldly" as Gollum watches Frodo asleep (I, 398). When Sam and Frodo are within sight of Mordor, Frodo says "that Shadow yonder. There's an Eye in it" (II, 211). After Frodo takes Gollum as his guide, Gollum quarrels with

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 where 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 eyeholes Frodo and Sam were always conscious, ever glancing fearfully over their shoulders and ever dragging their eyes back to find the darkening path" (II, 313-314). On Mount Doom, Frodo sees "pale lights like eyes," and a wild light comes into his own eyes. Finally, after Frodo puts the Ring on at the edge of Mount Doom, "a wild light of madness" glares in his 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).

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 source for the evil eye in northern literature. In modern western literature, I believe that images of eyes and seeing are associated more often with good--perceiving and understanding--than with evil. (Evil-eye Fleegle of the "Little Abner" comic strip is, of course, an exception.)



However, in medieval Norse literature, Glám's evil eye is not unusual. The motif of the evil eye pervades sagas. For instance, Ólaf 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, and drowning or stoning is needed to kill a wizard without making some individual liable for haunting.<sup>59</sup>

Witches naturally used the evil eye, and Kormák recognizes Thórveig's eyes in a walrus that comes near his ship as he is leaving Iceland for viking raids abroad. Hollander notes that "She 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."<sup>60</sup>

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, 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 Thorolf's 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 Thorolf's head and then did to him according to custom. Then he let break down the wall behind him, and brought him out . . . "61 Similarly, when Egil's father, Skallagrim, also a temperamental old man, dies sitting in his high seat, Egil also goes around the edge of the hall, seizes Skallagrim from behind, and gives him Lyke-help, that is, closes the eyes and mouth. Egil has especially warned the people of the household to avoid coming in front of Skallagrim's sight since the dead have the evil eye.<sup>62</sup>

All the creatures of Sauron's realm have evil, frightening eyes. In The Hobbit, the wargs tree Gandalf, Bilbo, and the dwarves with "eyes blazing and tongues hanging out" (p. 105). 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, Wormtongue, Théoden's bad counsellor, has the haunted look of a trapped beast in his eyes, and when he escapes, "His eyes glittered. Such malice was in them that men stepped back from him" (II, 125).

When the orc Grishnákh 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). And 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 been inspired by the ON word "glámblesótttr", "having a moon-shaped blaze on the forehead."<sup>63</sup> 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 a King of Argonath who ruled the land before Sauron made it evil and replaced it with "a round roughhewn 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).

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, 329-330). 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 only vulnerable area is her eyes.

Shelob is an ancient evil thing not of Sauron's making but loved by him. However, his most potent evil creatures, the nine Ringwraiths, dead kings who took rings of power and used them for their earthly glory, are blind yet 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).

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; 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, 397).

Pippin also sees merely a horrible eye when he looks into the Palántir, a physical manifestation of the eye imagery. When Frodo puts on the Ring at Mount Doom, the Eye is suddenly aware of Frodo and of its peril. Yet, the Eye of the Dark Lord has betrayed him, for it 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 assumed that the allies would want to use the Ring of power; he never considers that they might attempt to destroy it.

Thus, the Norse conception of the power of the evil eye has perhaps served as a basis for Tolkien's imagery. But, Tolkien has taken the image and created from it a complex and significant structure, in which the image of the eye makes the evil it represents seem more real. As an image for evil, the eye has a tremendous advantage over some other objects, such as a dragon or a troll, for most people have eyes, and good people in the story have good eyes. Since the image for evil is complicated by its ability to also represent good, the image cannot be allegorical.

#### 11. Implements and Landscapes

While the creatures of Middle-earth were sometimes changed from their possible Old Norse analogues, the implements and landscapes could probably be placed in almost any piece of medieval literature without being anachronistic.

Thus, I have commented only on those few items that seemed to have specific sources--1) The Ring, 2) Some War Gear, and 3) A Few Landscapes.

### 1. The Ring

Despite the mighty sword and other grand weapons of Middle-earth, the most important token is a small, heavy gold ring. Carter has noticed the connection between this ring and those mentioned in "Fafnismal" and "Guthrunarkvith" of the Poetic Edda and has commented on its affinity to the magic ring of the Sigfried legend.<sup>64</sup> And, Ryan discusses the association of the one Ring with Draupnir, Baldr's ring, and Sigfried's ring.<sup>65</sup> Significantly, the dwarf Andvari's ring, which is given by Óðin as the last part of the weregild for the slaying of Otr, is a finger ring: "Then Odin took from his hand the ring that was Andvari's treasure."<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, Andvari had cursed the ring: "he [Andvari] declared that every man who owned that ring would get his bane of it."<sup>67</sup> But, Draupnir, which Óðin placed on the funeral pyre of Baldr, was a magic arm ring which Loki persuaded the dwarves to forge as a symbol of the All-Father's power. Draupnir is significant because it dropped eight rings of equal weight every nine days while the One Ring controlled nineteen other rings. Similarly, King Hrólfr's ring Sviagriss, which Schlauch mentions stands for royal power, is also an arm ring.<sup>68</sup> 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 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).

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, such as the one mentioned above in the description of Álfhild. 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."<sup>69</sup> On such a ring, Víga-Glúm swears an oath, which is true only because one of the words mispronounced becomes another word. The sagaman describes the scene of Víga-Glúm's making the oath: "Sá maðr, er hofseið skyldi vinna, tók silfrbaug í hend sér, þann er roðinn var í nautsblóði . . . [ 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]. In order to have two witnesses for his false oath, Víga-Glúm must give away his two magic heirlooms--his blue cloak and his gold mounted spear. Einar takes the suit against him for making a false oath, and Glum now dreams that Freyr is sitting near the shore and will not listen to the cries of Glúms's relatives not to drive him from Þverá. Consequently, the Alþing outlaws Glúm, drives him from his home, and banishes him from the district.<sup>70</sup>

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

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 Siegfried legend.<sup>71</sup> The necessities of the plot would not allow for an arm ring, for 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.



## 2. Some War Gear

Weapons, especially swords, in heroic literature usually have names; those in the sagas and in The Lord of the Rings are no exception. In The Hobbit, Thorin and company liberate several Gondolin blades from the trolls' treasure. These swords are Orcrist, The Goblin-cleaver called by the goblins, Biter, 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 the Heimskringla also reflect the harm to the enemy theme: Quernbiter, so named because Hakon cleft a millstone with it (Snorri's comment is that "That was the best sword that ever was brought to Norway"), King Magnús Barelegs' sword, Legbiter, and St. Ólaf's sword, Hneiter (ON hneita, "to cut").<sup>72</sup> The hobbits of the Fellowship are all armed with the long knives of Westergesse. These blades had been long buried in the barrows of their owners like the sword Tyrfing that Hervör takes from Angantyr's barrow. The daggers are "long, leafshaped, and keen, of marvellous workmanship, damasked with serpent-forms in red and gold" (I, 157). They have not rusted in the barrows, and the magic spell on Merry's knife makes it a potent weapon against the chief Ringwraith, for the sword was forged by his foes especially for use against him. Like the sword Beowulf uses against Grendel's mother, Merry's blade melts after it has pierced the evil king.

The best armor in the War of the Rings is the mithril shirt of mail that Thorin gave to Bilbo and Bilbo gave to Frodo. Tolkien says that "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." 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.

Ragnar wears the shirt in place of a byrnie, and 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 throw him in a snake pit, no snake will bite him until the magic shirt is removed.<sup>73</sup> The two shirts share color, light weight, and immunity to weapons.

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, byrnies, shields, and helmets. Some analogs for the special gear of the King appear in the next chapter.

### 3. A Few Landscapes

Resnik says that "the chiller, more menacing landscapes

of Middle-earth" came from Norse and Germanic mythology, but he does not document this supposition. 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 Grettla. Bilbo, the twelve dwarves, and Gandalf have been travelling 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 (p.57).

After some years as an outlaw, Grettir has difficulty in finding places to spend his winters. During the Alþing, Grettir moves from the Myrar district to Borgarfjord to be with Grim, but Grim feels 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 Geitlandsjökull. 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."<sup>74</sup>

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 Grettla, at twilight a friendly giant comes with his daughters to gather his sheep. But the pastoral life must be left behind in both stories. 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."<sup>75</sup>

The cave behind the waterfall, the traditional setting for the conflict between the Bearson and the troll-wife, appears slightly altered in Middle-earth. On Gondor's border, Faramir and his company have a secret outpost built with two entrances, one of which is behind a waterfall.

The "sticky ooze" of the dead marshes recalls the swamp that reaches up to the horses' bellies in Hrafnkels saga.<sup>76</sup> 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). While the bodies in the swamp came from the swamp creeping over the graves of the dead from a great battle, W.A. Craigie in Ancient Scandinavian Religion suggests that some bodies found 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."<sup>77</sup> The bodies of the dead marshes also seem to be alive, for they try to lure trespassers off the paths with enchanting lights.

Perhaps the most famous landscape shared by Miðgarð and Middle-earth is the great Myrkvið (ON myrkr, "dark, murky," viðr, "forest"). In the Poetic Edda, this forest name appears in the "Lokasenna," "Völundarkviða," "Helgakviða Hundingsbana I," "Oddrúnargrátr," and "Atlakviða." In the "Völundarkviða" and in The Lord of the Rings, Mirkwood is the home of elves.

### 111. Customs

Not only are Miðgarð's people and places found in Middle-earth, but some of Miðgarð's customs are also there.<sup>78</sup> For instance, in The Hobbit, Bilbo's riddle game has an interesting parallel in an Old Norse saga. Those customs which are peculiar to men are the subject of Chapter Four, but those customs which are more widespread are presented here: 1) The Riddle Game, 2) Runes and Spells, 3) Dreams and Portents, and 4) Comitatus, Kinship, and Revenge.

#### 1. The Riddle Game

Riddles, like myths and folk tales, are ancient and belong to our shared folk heritage. If Norman Davis in "Man and Monsters at Sutton Hoo" 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 carving,<sup>72</sup> then Bilbo and Gollum's riddle game must have innumerable but perhaps meaningless parallels. However, since The Saga of King Heidrek has so much relevance to The Lord of the Rings, the riddle game deserves mention.

In The Saga of King Heidrek, the King takes power and 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 Óðin 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.<sup>80</sup>

Therefore, both Gestumblindi and Bilbo enter unwillingly into the riddle game. And, 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 (p. 81),

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 wounds?

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 seige.

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.

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" (p. 83). 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."<sup>81</sup>

Of the more complicated riddles, the hobbit riddle with the answer "sun on the daisies" is like the Norse one "sun on obsidian." In The Hobbit, the one multiple answer riddle "No-legs on one-leg, two-legs sat near on three-legs, four-legs got some" (p. 84) has an answer as complex as the riddle: "Fish on a little table, man at table sitting on a stool, the cat has the bones" (p. 84). 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" (p. 85) and Gestumblindi asks also a question that only he can know the answer to:

What said Óðin  
in the ear of Balder,  
before he was borne to the fire?<sup>82</sup>

King Heidrek now recognizes his visitor as Óðin and slashes at him with his sword Tyrting. Similarly Gollum, after he is unable to guess the correct answer even though he is allowed three guesses, violates the sacred riddle game and plans to attack Bilbo.

## 2. 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).

Yet, Tolkien has based the history of his runic writing on the history of Scandinavian and English runic writing. First, both were devised for scratched or incised inscriptions consisting usually of names and brief memorials upon wood or stone.<sup>83</sup> Second, the fupark and Cirth both owe their form to an earlier alphabet; the most acceptable theory traces the fupark to Northern Italic writing while the Cirth was influenced by the Tengwar. Third, in Runes, Ralph Elliott argues that the first runic system was the work of a single man<sup>84</sup> while 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 performs for it.

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 Westernessee 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 Thrór'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 Northsea area. This use 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.<sup>85</sup>

### 3. Dreams and Portents

Dreams play a somewhat more subtle role in The Lord of the Rings than in most sagas. In the sagas, dreams are usually told, then interpreted, then fulfilled: in Gunnlaugs saga ormsstungu, Thorstein's dream of a beautiful swan fought over by two grand eagles is correctly interpreted by a Norwegian as the fight of two famous men over Thorstein's yet unborn daughter. Although Thorstein orders the child exposed, a kindly tenant shelters her, and since dueling is illegal in Iceland, two famous men travel to Norway to kill each other at the holm. In The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings, both Bilbo and Frodo frequently dream about an event before it happens. For example, Bilbo dreams of the troll cave opening just before it does open, and Frodo dreams of the Ringwraiths, the blighted landscape of Mordor, the white tower, and the sea before he first leaves the Shire. Yet, dreams are generally not relayed to companions or interpreted. Although the reader suspects that the dream will be fulfilled, he is not made as conscious of the dream as a vision of the future as the saga reader is.

Portents and foreshadowing are equally reliable in the sagas and The Lord of the Rings, but as with dreams, their reliability in the trilogy is not as conventional as in the sagas. Gandalf's premonition about Gollum's role in the story of the Ring is the most important prophecy, for Frodo allows Gandalf's dictum to influence Frodo's actions. Both Gandalf and Saruman apparently can read much of the future although Gandalf tells little about what he knows. Saruman merely foretells what has been foreshadowed already--Frodo's illness and departure. Some comments on the foresight of the men of Gondor are made in Chapter Four.

The other people who see the future are the elves. And, Galadriel allows Sam and Frodo to look into the future through her mirror. Sam sees the troubles of the Shire, and after the destruction of Mount Doom, this vision makes him want to hasten home. Frodo sees the resurrection of Gandalf, but he does not understand exactly what has happened to his vision, and since Frodo's view is often the reader's, the significance of the vision is somewhat diminished. Thus, although many actions are foreshadowed, the reader's curiosity remains, for the reader is fascinated by the manner in which what is foretold will be accomplished.

#### 4. Comitatus, Kinship, and Revenge

"The Hávamál" 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. The "Hávamál" 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).<sup>86</sup>

In The Lord of the Rings, the Fellowship is composed of nine brave people whose loyalty to the leader, Gandalf and then Aragorn; to the Ringbearer, Frodo; and to the mission, the destruction of the Ring, is bound, not by an oath but by an unspoken commitment. After Gandalf is lost, at Lothlórien 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 feels that the choice is his, 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 immediately after that 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 . . . " (III, 504).

The effect of comitatus is to make the bond of friendship as close as that of kinship. Thus, when Angmar, the Ringwraith, kills King Théoden in battle, the men of his house are slain around him trying to protect him. His newest retainer Merry feels that he is the King's man, that the King is a father to him; Merry aids the King's sister's daughter,

Eowyn, in killing Angmar. 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 other remained with Dain; for Dain dealt his treasure well" (p. 275). Freely giving gifts, as the "Hávamál" dictates is the obligation of the Lord or King to his followers.

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, King under the Mountain" although he also has a sobriquet, Oakenshield. At the introductions before the Council of Elrond, Frodo, who has a formal last name, Baggins, is announced as Frodo son of Drogo, and the fathers of many of the others are mentioned: "At Glóin'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." Even the orcs follow the system, for Bolg son of Azog leads them in the War of the Five Armies.

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 Kári's revenge for his wife's family, Njál and his sons and Kári's own son, or for a friend as in The Sworn Brothers, or for an injury to goods or pride as in Hrafnkatla. Similarly, 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." 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). Payment for death, weregild, 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 if 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 Æthelstan gives Egil Skallagrimsson two chests of silver to give to his father for the death of Egil's brother Thórólf. Similarly, King Thrain would have been expected to pay weregild to the relatives of Dain's men who fought the orcs with Thráin.

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.

### CHAPTER III NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame, 1968), p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> Folklore Fellows Communications, XXXIII, no. 94 (1931), 46-47.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon, pp. 27-32.

<sup>4</sup> Richard W. Tedhams, "An Annotated Glossary of the Proper Names in the Mythopoeic Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien" (University of Oklahoma, 1966), p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, III, vi (1935), 317-322.

<sup>6</sup> Tolkien, The Tolkien Reader, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Tolkien, The Tolkien Reader, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs, p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> C.C. Rafn, Fornaldar Sögur Norðrlanda eptir Gömlum Handritum (Kaupmannahöfn, 1892), pp. 387-388.

<sup>10</sup> Snorri Sturluson, The Prose Edda: Tales from Norse Mythology, tr. Jean I. Young (Berkeley, 1966), p. 31.

- 11 Snorri Sturluson, The Prose Edda, tr. Arthur G. Brodeur (New York, 1916), p. 142.
- 12 Kormáks saga, pp. 63-64.
- 13 The Poetic Edda, tr. Lee M. Hollander, 2d ed. (Austin, 1962), pp. 159-168.
- 14 Víga-Glúms saga, p. 15.
- 15 Víga-Glúms saga, p. 64.
- 16 The Poetic Edda, pp. 322-333.
- 17 Snorri, The Prose Edda, tr. Young, p. 41. Lin Carter gets sixteen using Henry Bellow's translation of The Poetic Edda (p. 154). In Lee Hollander's translation, only fourteen appear, unless Glóí is equated with Glóin and Dwalin with Dvalin (p. 12). However, Beatie finds eighteen of twenty-seven in the catalogue of Snorri's Prose Edda.
- 18 Snorri, The Prose Edda, tr. Young, p. 41.
- 19 Ryan, pp. 50-51.
- 20 Schlauch, p. 20.
- 21 Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs, p. 68.
- 22 Rafn, pp. 326-327.
- 23 Rafn, pp. 446-447.



- 24 Eiríkr Magnússon and William Morris, tr., Three Northern Love Stories and Other Tales (London, 1901), pp. 203-204.
- 25 E.O.G. Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia (New York, 1964), p. 221.
- 26 Rafn, pp. 396-397.
- 27 Ryan, p. 54.
- 28 Carter, p. 194. Carter relies on names, appearance, and reputation for magic.
- 29 Snorri, Heimskringla, p. 11.
- 30 Turville-Petre, Myth, p. 62.
- 31 Snorri, Heimskringla, p. 203.
- 32 Turville-Petre, Myth, pp. 62-63.
- 33 Turville-Petre, Myth, pp. 56-57.
- 34 The Poetic Edda, pp. 36-37.
- 35 Turville-Petre, Myth, pp. 42-43.
- 36 Turville-Petre, Myth, pp. 62-63.
- 37 Ryan, p. 52.
- 38 Ryan, p. 52.

39 Rose A. Zimbardo, "Moral Vision in The Lord of the Rings," ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame, 1968, p. 101. Why she calls him Radagast the Russet is unclear.

40 Turville-Petre, Myth, p. 79.

41 Snorri, The Prose Edda, tr. Young, p. 37.

42 Schlauch, pp. 137-138.

43 Ryan, p. 52.

44 William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon, tr., The Story of the Ere-Dwellers (Eyrbyggja saga) with the Story of the Heath-Slayings (Heiðarviga saga) as Appendix (London, 1892) p. 237.

45 Njáls saga, p. 137, 241.

46 Oddr Snorrason, Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar, ed. Finnur Jónsson (København, 1932), pp. 174-175. Original text: "Ok þat er sagt eitt sinn at Ó. konungr fór norðr a Haloga land. Því at þar var sva mikit um þess at vita hvar þat veri satt at þar veri trola gangr mikill í þeim heruðum. Oc a einni nött fara þeir leyniliga fra skipi konungs. Oc ganga inattmyrkri mick lengi oc sia síðan elld brenna fyrir sér. Oc nu scunda þeir þangat. Oc er þeir nalgaz elldin sia þeir at hann brann í helli. Oc þar sitia mörg troll. Oc toluðu þau sín imilli."

- 47 Oddr Snorrason, The Saga of King Olaf Tryggwason [sic],  
tr. J. Sephton (London, 1895), pp. 334-336.
- 48 Turville-Petre, Myth, pp. 36-38.
- 49 Tolkien, The Tolkien Reader, p. 41.
- 50 Volsunga saga, pp. 87-88.
- 51 Saga of the Jömsvíkings, pp. 102-103.
- 52 Saga of the Jömsvíkings, p. 115.
- 53 Carter, p. 183.
- 54 Ryan, pp. 53-54.
- 55 Volsunga saga, p. 60.
- 56 Snorri, The Prose Edda, tr. Young, pp. 55-57.
- 57 Gordon, p. 230.
- 58 Grettis saga, pp. 86-100.
- 59 Snorri, Heimskringla, p. 304.
- 60 Kormáks saga, p. 201.
- 61 Morris, p. 88.
- 62 Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell, tr., Origines  
Islandicae, 2 v. (Oxford, 1902), II, 282.

- 64 The Poetic Edda, pp. 158-165.
- 65 Ryan, p. 48.
- 66 Volsunga saga, p. 88.
- 67 Volsunga saga, p. 87.
- 68 Schlauch, p. 174.
- 69 Eyrbyggja saga, Eyrbyggja saga, tr. P. Schlach (Lincoln, 1959), p. 5. Icelandic pet name: Eyrbyggja.
- 70 Víga-Glúms saga, pp. 44-51.
- 71 Carter, pp. 157-165.
- 72 Snorri, Heimskringla, pp. 93, 685, 787.
- 73 Ragnar Lodbrok in Volsunga saga, pp. 239-240.
- 74 Grettis saga, p. 164.
- 75 Grettis saga, p. 165.
- 76 Gordon, pp. 81-82.
- 77 (London, 1906), p. 59.
- 78 Ryan, p. 56. Ryan lists the following themes:  
 "Themes made familiar to us from their recurrence in Dark Age literature are to be found continually in Tolkien's writing. In The Hobbit we find:

the comitatus loyalty in the dwarves of Thorin's band;  
 the splendidly heroic last stand in the face of the impossible  
 odds (pp. 294, ff.);  
 the bond between a warrior and his sister's son (For this  
 reason Fili and Kili throw away their lives for their uncle,  
 Thorin);  
 the heroic (and especially dwarfish) lust for treasure  
 'the power that gold has, upon which a dragon has long  
 brooded' (p. 275).

The trilogy, being much more highly wrought, tends to  
 avoid the simpler statements of the shorter works, yet almost  
 all the practical and heroic sentiments (as listed, for example,  
 in the Hávamál, or the Gnomic Verses) find memorable expres-  
 sion:

the unconsolable grief of a leader whose heir is (apparently)  
 slain--Denethor over Faramir;  
 the need for the host to be hospitable to strangers (passim);  
 the false counsellor (Wormtongue) who casts doubt upon the  
 valour of the visiting leader (Aragorn);  
 the courage and will of the hero must operate under the shadow  
 of fate and he is doomed to final failure (not true for  
 Frodo, but thought by Boromir to be the ethical system);  
 the need to respond when a call to duty is made--'when things  
 are in danger someone has to give them up, lose them, so  
 that others may keep them, '(III, 390);  
 the council of war where representatives of the several

parties state their views in the house of Elrond)." Since 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 thought it best to include his statement here in its entirety. No further documentation of the paragraph occurs. 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).

<sup>79</sup> In 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, 1962), pp. 321-329.

<sup>80</sup> Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs, pp. 35-44, 80-82.

<sup>81</sup> Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs, p. 36.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE NORSEMEN AND THE MEN OF GONDOR

In Chapter III, some of Tolkien's methods of transforming material from his sources into the vivid scenes in Middle-earth have been mentioned. Although much is recognizable, Tolkien does endeavor always to subordinate his sources to his story. Therefore, it is difficult to make a definite statement about the identity of particular objects or persons.

However, some students of the trilogy have made rather rigid categorizations. For instance, Sandra L. Miesel in "Some Motifs and Sources for Lord of the Rings [sic]," 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 [sic]. The last correlation is re-enforced by the dating of the Shire Calendar.<sup>1</sup>

Not only is this statement 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, but it is also completely unsupported. In fact on the next page, Miesel contradicts herself: "In the most primitive Norse myths, gods<sup>5</sup> 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 eschatological 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."<sup>2</sup>

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, on the next page, she notes that "Tolkien's Undying Lands in the Western Sea resemble the Immortal Isles of Celtic fable."<sup>3</sup> 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). To me, this tangle seems more than "vague."

Miesel's footnote five only adds to the confusion, for "the gods<sup>5</sup>" she refers to are "5) Vanir, or nature deities, not the later and more familiar Aesir-folk." Turville-Petre lists as the main Vanir, Njörðr, Freyr, and Freyja, while the "more familiar Aesir-folk" who survive the battle, include Víðar, Váli, Móði, Magni, and Höðr--all extremely familiar gods. The two main gods who perish at Ragnarök, Óðin and



Thór, are both Æsir, not Vanir.<sup>4</sup>

Having noted the perils open to anyone who suggests a specific designation for a certain people of Middle-earth, naturally, I want to make an assignment myself, although hopefully much more qualified than Miesel's. 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. I believe a similar, qualified comparison can be made between the Men of Gondor and the Northern Kingdom and the Norsemen.

#### 1. Rohan and England

In "Old English in Rohan," John Tinkler demonstrates that the personal names, place names, horse and weapon names, and even a few phrases are exactly or very nearly like words in Old English. For example, the éo, found in the names Éomund (mund, "hand") and Éowyn (wyn, "joy") means "horse" and the compounds then mean "horse-hand" or protector and "joy in horses." Tinkler explains most of the names of citizens of Rohan and their appropriateness. For instance, the bad councillor, Wormtongue, is called Gríma, son of Gálmód (OE gríma, "mask or spectre" and gálmód, "licentious"). Place names such as Riddermark (OE ridda, "horseman" and mearc, "boundary") and Isengard (OE isen, "iron" and geard, "dwelling") are fitting for the land of the Éothéod ("horse-people") and the fortress of Saruman, respectively. Horse names such as Felaróf (OE fela, "very" and róf, "strong,

valiant") and Arod (OE arod, "quick, swift"), and weapon names such as the swords Herugrim (OE heorugrim, "very fierce") and Gúthwinë (OE guðwine, "friend in battle") are all part of the pattern. Furthermore, Éomer speaks a greeting to his king not in the Common Speech but in his own language "Westu Théoden há!" ("Be you hale, King"), and Éowyn says later "Ferthu Théoden há!" ("Go you well, King").<sup>5</sup>

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 land; and they called themselves the Eorlings, or the Men of the Riddermark. But the lord 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.

Despite the correctness of Tinkler's identification and translation of Old English names and words, he does not

comment on the appearance or customs of the Rohirrim. He obviously assumes that everyone reading his article will know that the kinship of the English during the Old English period was with the Northsea peoples rather than with the Mediterranean peoples as it was in Chaucer's time. Although various Northsea chiefs harried, plundered, and ruled in England between about 787 and 1065, 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 Thórólf Skallagrimsson, were often hearthcompanions of English Kings. Egil, whose brother was killed fighting for King Athelstan in the battle of Vinheid, claimed that English was so like Norse that he could speak and understand it immediately.<sup>6</sup> The claim is probably exaggerated, 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 useful in interpreting such Old English works as Beowulf, "Battle of Brunanburg," and "Battle of Maldon."

If the Rohans are like the Old English, then it seems plausible that their neighbors and allies, the men of Gondor, are Norsemen. This theory is discussed in the last two parts of this chapter. Further, Norse literature and customs should also illuminate the civilization of the Rohirrim.

For example, many of the Rohirrim look like the popular conception of a viking. The legendary King Eorl 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 Óláf Tryggvason is comparable: "He was strikingly handsome, very tall and strong, and excelled all others in the accomplishments which are told about Norwegians."<sup>7</sup> The blond hair was perhaps not as common among the Norse as the popular idea about the looks of the typical viking would have it, for golden hair is usually commented on and even used as a epithet for men such as Óláf the White and Hálfðan the White. Yet, the vikings were quite vain about their hair: Harald Fairhair vowed neither to cut nor comb his 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."<sup>8</sup>

Some customs of the men of Rohan and the Norsemen are similar, too. King Théoden names as his heir his sister-son, Éomer, since Théoden's own son is dead, and Théoden notes that if neither of them returns, the people will then "choose a new lord as you will." The etiquette of the court assigns

a councillor to the King's side, just as Wulfgar is at Hrothgar's side, and also as in Beowulf, all weapons must be left outside. Further, Fengel, a bad prince listed in the chronology of "Appendix A," like Heremōd in Beowulf, "is greedy of food and of gold, and at strife with his marshals, and with his children" (III, 350). The great hall and the lovely lady bearing the winecup first to the King and then to the visiting champions also echo Beowulf. In fact, reminders of Beowulf pervade the account of Rohan, but although Beowulf is an English poem, it is about a Geatish hero in a Danish court.

Finally, Norse literature provides a source for the behavior of Eowyn, the sister-daughter of King Théoden. Théoden places the Kingdom in her hands when he leaves for the battle of Helm's Deep, and lady rulers were not unknown in the Northsea area. Among the ones Snorri mentions are Queen Gytha, who chooses Óláf Tryggvason to marry her and rule with her, Queen Sigurth, who later refuses to leave paganism to marry Óláf Tryggvason, and the infamous Queen Gunnhild, who ruled through her husband and her sons. When Théoden rides to the great battle at Cormallen, he refuses to allow Eowyn to ride with him. She dresses in armor, takes the name Dernhelm, and follows her uncle. While Britomart of The Faerie Queene could be an English source for this, her allegorical nature makes her rather too prudish and didactic. 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.<sup>8</sup> Hervör, King Heidrek's mother, also becomes a shieldmaiden and leads a band of vikings into battle.<sup>9</sup> In fact, even excluding the Valkyries, Erik Wahlgren in "The Maiden King in Iceland" has found the story of the martial maiden in three fornaldarsögur and twelve lygisögur.<sup>10</sup>

Since the geography of Middle-earth and that of Europe are not identical, Rohan is not an island, and while Rohan and Gondor share a long border in Middle-earth, Gondor need not be Scotland or Ireland. Rohan and Gondor are close to each other in traditions in the same way that the Northern English shared the world-view of their Norse kin.

In Gondor, Tolkien does not provide names as easily translated as those of Rohan. In fact, in "Appendix F," he explains that while the men of Middle-earth spoke the Westron, which had been enriched and softened by Elvish tongues, the Kings of men, the Númenoreans, knew and spoke an Elvish tongue, the Sindarin. Finally, the kings returned to their ancestral mannish tongue, the Adûnaic, which mixed with the speech of lesser men and with Elvish words, became a Common Speech for the people of Middle-earth who knew the men. Tolkien explains some of the names in a note: "Quenya [High-Elven], for example, are the names Númenor (or in full Númenóre), Elendil, Isildur, and Andarion, 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, although the temptation is to see the name "Aragorn," and the long line of his ancestors whose names begin with "Ara," derived from ON ár, the name of the Rune "A" meaning "first beginning" or "in times of yore," these attempted etymologies are fruitless. However, many cultural connections exist between the descendants of Númenor and the Norsemen. I have divided some examples of this connection into two groups: ii) Customs and Beliefs and iii) Personalities.

#### ii. Customs and Beliefs

In addition to those customs practiced by many peoples of Middle-earth, the men of Gondor and Rohan have a few unique ones that are like those of the Norsemen. For instance, when the Steward of Gondor wants to ask for the aid of the Rohirrim, he sends a war arrow to them. Denethor's rider, Hírion, presents King Théoden with "a single arrow, black-feathered and barbed with steel, but the point was painted red" (III, 72). This same technique was used by Norwegian Kings to call in their retainers from rural districts. Théoden recognizes the importance of the war arrow and immediately calls his men to a weapontake.

The office of the steward was also a custom in the Northsea region. Queen Geira has a steward named Dixin, who advises her on all important decisions, including her marriage to Ólaf Tryggvason.<sup>11</sup> Whenever 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 Throned of Gate, the king's reeve or steward is in command in the Færeys.<sup>12</sup> In Njála, after Earl Sigurd leaves a steward in the Orkneys, Helgi Njálsson, who has his father's second sight, warns the Earl that the Scots have killed the steward.<sup>13</sup> And, Egil's friend Arinbjorn is King Eirík's steward and trusted advisor. However, in the Northsea area, the kings always returned to take up the throne or a new king was chosen, but 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.

The Old Norse concept of fate also enters into The Lord of the Rings. The Norsemen believed that some men were fated to die and that this ill fate could be seen in their faces. Thus, at the Alþing the summer before the burning of Njál, several chieftains comment on the fey look in Skarphedin's face. This attitude explains Skarphedin's willingness to fight inside the house although he knows that they will die if they go inside. 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."<sup>14</sup> Merry recognizes this 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). And, 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.

The burial customs of Gondor and of the Northsea were similar. Denethor speaks of the funeral pyre as a barbaric custom, and it was ancient in the Northsea, too, for in the Heimskringla, Snorri says that Óðin instituted it.<sup>15</sup> Noble Norsemen were burned on pyres, as in the Volsunga saga, or perhaps on ships. Sometimes they were buried in their ships with their worldly goods and sometimes even a wife or servant or dog.<sup>16</sup> At other times, they were buried in stone barrows or cairns. Both customs were practiced by men in Middle-earth. 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, the Northern men have

built barrows for their dead kings. The aptrgongu-maðr who inhabits one barrow is discussed in part iii of this chapter. The newer custom of Gondor, to place dead kings in a vault, is a variation of barrow burial.

The problem of a woman's divided loyalty to her husband and her father and brothers is a motif of the Volsunga saga, "The Lay of Hildibrand," and Beowulf. In The Lord of the Rings, the Kin-strife begins when the heir Valacar marries a Northern woman, Vidumavi, whose story might have been like Hildibrand's. The high men of Gondor refuse the rule of her son Eldacar because they fear that he will be short-lived and that all his heirs will diminish to lesser men. Thus, the war begins between the Northerners and the men of Gondor. Castamir becomes king, but he was a bad king by Norse standards, for he was haughty and ungenerous. Ten years later, Eldacar slays Castamir in vengeance and takes the crown (III, 326-328).

The men of Middle-earth practice comitatus, kinship, and revenge even more briskly than did the other creatures. In fact, the One Ring came into the possession of Isildur after the war as weregild. After Sauron is slain, 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). 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.

The other alternative to revenge or weregild also occurs in The Lord of the Rings, for when Pippin is explaining to Denethor how his son Boromir died defending the two hobbits, Pippin choses a third alternative 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 Halflings.'

'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, oath-breaking with vengeance' (III, 28).

This form of weregild Eorl used against the horse that threw and killed his father, for instead of shooting the horse with an arrow, he called to the horse, and when it stood 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).

Thus, the ethical system of Gondor and the Northern Kingdom includes many Norse customs and beliefs. The general adherence to Pre-Christian ethics of comitatus, kinship, and revenge is supplemented by a similar political arrangement,

a King and a Steward, and by a like philosophical orientation toward fate as a ruling concept.

### iii. Personalities

The essence of this Norse ethical system is more usually practiced than preached; therefore, personalities and actions are a more accurate guide to its tenets than verbal doctrines. Thus, several prominent men of Middle-earth along with a discussion of types and specific analogs provides a better indication of the relevance of Northern sources than a further cataloging of disembodied principles. Prominent men with Old Norse ancestors include 1) The Barrow Wight, 2) Beorn, 3) Denethor, 4) Boromir, and 5) Aragorn.

#### 1. Barrow Wight

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. Thus, 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 redactions of the same story. In The Fellowship of the Ring, Frodo, Merry, Pippin, and Sam do not enter willingly as the Bearson usually does, but 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 vikings are dangerous foes when someone seeks to rob them of their swords and treasures. Kormák uses "breaker of cairns" as a

kenning for hero.<sup>17</sup> And, the viking band Hervör leads refuses even to go onto the island where Angantýr's barrow is. When they see the fire spewing forth, they desert their comrade.<sup>18</sup>

However, Grettir's laying of old Kar's ghost is 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, and 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." 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 as 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,<sup>19</sup> and Hervör received from Angantýr "the keen-edged blade . . . the sword dwarf-smithied/ for Sigrlami."<sup>20</sup>

Thus, not only did the Norse and the men of Middle-earth use the same burial customs, but both cultures also had a tradition of unruly ghosts. Yet, the swords recovered from these barrows could play an important role. Tyrfing is a

powerful weapon, and Merry's blade is potent against Angmar, the Ringwraith.

## 2. Beorn

Like the barrow wight, the shape-changer, who is a bear by day and a man by night or the reverse, is a common Norse folk tale figure. Variations include Bjorn (ON "bear") in Hrólfr Kraka, Beowulf, and perhaps even Odysseus. Frequently, the bear is under enchantment from a stepmother, but Gandalf assures Bilbo that Beorn is under no enchantment except his own. The Bjorns of the sagas were frequently berserkers, men who went into a fury which made them stronger and less sensitive to pain; some may even have believed that they turned into bears.<sup>21</sup> Gandalf attributes to Beorn the berserker's strength, gruff temperament, and inhospitable attitude. In 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" (p. 274). Beorn even grows drowsy in the evening like Kveldúlf, a wolf skin-changer.

Furthermore, Tolkien has Beorn living in an Icelandic farmhouse--"a wide hall with a fire-place in the middle."<sup>22</sup> Beorn serves mead on boards set up on trestles, and the sleeping quarters consist of "raised platform between the

pillars and the outer wall" just like the ones in Grettla and Beowulf. The owner of this wooden house "was clothed in a tunic of wool down to his knees, and was leaning on a large axe." All the brightly clothed, jeweled vikings who sailed off to Byzantium went to get money to buy a farm where they kept their silken clothing in trunks except for special occasions and worked on their farms along with their slaves in plain homespun. Tolkien describes Beorn as " a huge man with a thick black beard and hair, and great bare arms and legs with knotted muscles" (p. 120). He is like Hálfðan 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, loved his horse Freyfaxi so much that he killed a servant who rode him although the servant had been forbidden to do that.<sup>23</sup> And, 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" (p.278). Thus, Beorn's famous relatives might include not only his son Grimbeorn but also everyone from the evil berserker Bjorn of Gisli to that Bjarni Herjólfsson, who discovered America in 986.<sup>24</sup>

## 3. Denethor

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 Sagawriter 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."<sup>25</sup> Denethor is also noble-looking: "Then 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). 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).

Each of them loses his favorite son. Boromir dies defending Pippin and Merry against orcs, and Njál's foster son Hoskuld is killed by Njál's sons and Mord, who



slandered Hoskuld and egged Skarphedin into the attack. Njál is so distressed by the news of Hoskuld's death that he 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!'"<sup>26</sup> After that he prophesies that he, Bergthóra, and all their sons will die from this act. 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 like a foster father to him and loves him as Njál loved Hoskuld.

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!'"<sup>27</sup> And, 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 screams,

"'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).

However, after the Ringwraiths wound Faramir, and Denethor has seen the destruction of Gondor in the Palantir, Denethor 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 the end of his noble house. The conventional behavior for a bereaved man was to shut himself in his bedcloset. 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. And, 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."<sup>28</sup> Yet, Denethor does not want to mourn and die slowly; his despair leads him to a special bed--a funeral pyre: "'Better to burn sooner than later, for burn 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 despairs for Faramir's life, too, 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).

Similarly, when Flosi and his band begin to burn Njál's house, Flosi begs Njál and Bergthóra to come out with the women and children, but 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!'" Then the two of them go to their bed with Kári's son, who Bergthóra had promised would never have to leave her, and 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."<sup>29</sup>

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 the 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, 130-131). The last phrase is a verbal echo of the sagawriter's comment that Njál's commending his soul to god were his last words.

Here, the parallel between the two men definitely adds dimension to the character of Denethor. Njál is what Denethor might have been if he had not had power. Since the reader does not see Denethor until the death of Boromir and his despair for Gondor have made him mad, the reader cannot quite identify with Gandalf's respect for him. But, knowing Njál's courage, wisdom, and kindness adds scope to Denethor's personality.

#### 4. Boromir

Little can be said of Boromir except that he **typifies** the Old Norse heroes, many of whom also had fatal flaws. He has already been described in Chapter II, and 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 resembled his mother somewhat; he was big and strong and of an aggressive disposition,"<sup>30</sup> and Thormód of The Sworn Brothers' Saga was "of middle height and had black curly hair."<sup>31</sup> What Boromir lacks of the typical Norse image in looks, he makes up for in words. He expresses comitatus: "It is not the way of the Men of Minas Tirith to desert their friends at need" as he boasts

"and you will need my strength." 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). Similarly, when Kormák has interrupted the witch Thórdís's magic ceremony, he swears that he does not need that magic to win at the holm. 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.<sup>32</sup>

In other words, he says that although he has had to buy himself off from the holm twice because of slight injuries, this time the blood of Thorvard will take the place of the blood of the geese the witch has not been able to sacrifice. Kormák falls at the end because he cannot control the magic of his giant opponent, and Boromir falls by the hand of the wizard Saruman's servants.

Boromir's count of dead enemies exceeds even that of the famous hero Gunnar, who killed two and wounded eight when they attacked him in his house, for around Boromir were at least twenty slain orcs. And, his funeral is befitting his valor; two alternatives are considered--a barrow and a

ship funeral. The former was customary for the chieftains of Iceland, the latter for the kings of the early heroic age in Scandinavia. Tolkien relates that they placed him on a ship 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 Scefing is comparable.

Boromir, and Aragorn too, suffers 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 conflicts of loyalty."<sup>33</sup> 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 relative in order to avenge the life of his sworn brother. Boromir's choice would have been for his family and people, but Aragorn says that he would have gone with Frodo to the Mountain of Doom.

### 5. Aragorn

When Aragorn first enters the story, he is merely a weather-beaten ranger. At that point, Tolkien mentions that even he did not know who Aragorn was, that is that Aragorn was going to be the King. The rangers, a kind of Robin Hood group living in the wilderness protecting gentle people like the hobbits from the realities of Sauron's growing evil, are noble men of the Dúnedain. The lives

of the rangers are like those of some of the noble "outlaws" of Iceland. If the family of a man who had been killed refuses to take weregild for him, then they could accuse his murderer at the Alþing and have the murderer 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 Alþing had no executive power; thus an outlaw could live in Iceland as long as no one wanted or was able to kill him. Thus, Grettir lived as an outlaw for nineteen years and Gisli for fourteen. During this time, the outlaw traveled around the country staying with men who were friendly to him and strong enough to protect him from attacks by his enemies. Grettir, Gisli, and other men whose enemies had been able to have them outlawed sometimes acted as champions for their friends. Thus, although Grettir is not forced to, nor does he have a particular interest in Glám, he does fight him just to be helping the farmer. Likewise, famous outlaws sometimes went to duels against berserkers and evil outlaws when the family challenged had no suitable adult male. 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 Re' Roy. There

were single outlaws such as Grette, Gisle, Grim, who took to the wilds in the old days . . ."<sup>34</sup> Thus, a group such as the rangers would have been possible within the Icelandic tradition.

The name that Aragorn takes in connection with his duties as ranger is Strider; it may have been suggested by Thrand the Strider of Eyrbyggja. Thrand the Strider is described 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."<sup>35</sup> The epithet "strider" is appropriate for Aragorn, who has covered much of Middle-earth in his task of protecting its inhabitants.

As Strider moves toward taking his place as king, the images of that role 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."<sup>36</sup> What is prophesied for Sigmund also applies to Aragorn.

The white tree, one of the symbols of Aragorn's kingship, is also 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."<sup>37</sup> The tree, the token of Aragorn's family, has died out in the courtyard, but after he is crowned, Gandalf helps him find a sapling that had been planted on a hill long ago. Although the tree is a white one, 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 blossom" (III, 250).

Before the Kin-strife, the kings of Aragorn's line are called "Ship-kings," and like the Norse kings, Aragorn and the men of Dúnedain are skilled sailors. While the Haradrim, who own the ships, man them with chained slaves, when Aragorn frees the ships, free men wield the oars. The Norse custom was for the fighting men of the ship to also 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 Gondor; 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 Ólaf's time were perhaps similar, and they, too, carried the king's banner in the forecastle.<sup>38</sup>

In the Heimskringla, the King often has the power to heal as Aragorn does in The Lord of the Rings. Ólaf Helga can cure by the laying on of hands even before he is made a Saint. "He [King Ólaf Helga] laid his hands on Egil's side where it hurt and said his prayers over it, and straightway it stopped hurting. After that Egil recovered."<sup>39</sup>

In Njála, King Sigtrygg's blood heals the wound of a boy who was trying to protect the King.<sup>40</sup> 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."<sup>41</sup> 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 Hermöð's ride to Hel to beg the goddess to return Baldr to the gods. Aragorn and his company do pass through dark deep dales like those

rides in to 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."<sup>42</sup>

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 the 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). Although neither the Heimskringla nor the Prose Edda describes Óðin's helmet, artists have conceived it as a winged helmet. For instance, 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 [to] 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."<sup>43</sup> Styrbiorn is fey, for Óðin 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."<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the crown, like the other tokens of Aragorn's kingship, is Norse in its style.

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. Thus, judging from his accoutrements, it seems probable that Aragorn and his people are more closely related in their culture to the Northsea people than to some other culture.

#### CHAPTER IV NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Riverside Quarterly, III (1968), 125.
- <sup>2</sup> Miesel, p. 126.
- <sup>3</sup> Miesel, p. 127.
- <sup>4</sup> Turville-Petre, pp. 156-179 and 275-285.
- <sup>5</sup> John Tinkler, "Old English in Rohan," Tolkien and the Critics, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame, 1968), pp. 164-169.
- <sup>6</sup> Egils saga Skallagrímssonar, Egil's Saga, tr. Gwyn Jones (Syracuse University, 1960), pp. 110-140. Icelandic Pet Name: Eigla.
- <sup>7</sup> Snorri, Heimskringla, p. 149.
- <sup>8</sup> Snorri, Heimskringla, p. 78.
- <sup>9</sup> In Volsunga saga, p. 229.
- <sup>10</sup> Erik Wahlgren, "The Maiden King in Iceland," (University of Chicago, 1938), pp. 61-63.
- <sup>11</sup> Oddr Snorrason, pp. 70-71.

- 12 Færeyinga saga, The Tale of Thronð of Gate, tr. F. York Powell (London, 1896), p. xxxvi.
- 13 Njáls saga, p. 174.
- 14 Volsunga saga, p. xxiii.
- 15 Snorri, Heimskringla, pp. 11-13.
- 16 Turville-Petre, Myth, pp. 271-273.
- 17 Kormáks saga, p. 27.
- 18 Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs, p. 16.
- 19 Grettis saga, pp. 44-45, 56. Ryan also notes this similarity.
- 20 Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs, p. 14.
- 21 Gísla saga Súrssonar, pp. 64-65.
- 22 Gordon, p. 225.
- 23 Gordon, p. 64.
- 24 Gordon, pp. 41-43.
- 25 Njáls saga, p. 54.
- 26 Njáls saga, p. 228.
- 27 Njáls saga, p. 227.

- 28 Saga of the Jömsvíkings, p. 25.
- 29 Njáls saga, pp. 265-266.
- 30 Kormáks saga, p. 14.
- 31 Fóstbrœðra saga, In The Sagas of Kormák and The Sworn Brothers, tr. Lee M. Hollander (Princeton, 1949), p. 85.
- 32 Kormáks saga, pp. 61-62.
- 33 (Oxford, 1953), p. 9.
- 34 Vigfusson, v. 2, 43.
- 35 Eyrbyggja saga, Eyrbyggja Saga, tr. P. Schach (Lincoln, 1959), pp. 167-171.
- 36 Volsunga saga, pp. 78-79.
- 37 Volsunga saga, p. 48.
- 38 Snorri, Heimskringla, p. 64.
- 39 Snorri, Heimskringla, p. 447.
- 40 Njáls saga, p. 357.
- 41 Volsunga saga, pp. 61-62.
- 42 Ryan, p. 49.
- 43 Eddison, p. 202.
- 44 Eddison, p. 255.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

Although critics often like to discount the author's ability to make a cogent comment on his own work of art, Tolkien's statement that he has tried to modernize the myths must be regarded as an accurate analysis of The Lord of the Rings. Tolkien has used many aspects of northern literature in his trilogy: the structure, the creatures, implements, landscapes, customs and beliefs, and even some individuals have interesting parallels in the sagas, eddas, and poems of the North Atlantic peoples.

Several genres have been assigned to The Lord of the Rings, but none of them is as suitable as the saga, for none fits both the structure and the orientation as well. The fairy-story, as a form, is too short for the trilogy; fairy-story requires a sense of timelessness while The Lord of the Rings, especially in its appendices, is extremely conscious of time. And, I believe that the ending of The Lord of the Rings is not Eucatastrophe and thus not suitable for a fairy-story. And, while the traditional epic and the saga share many characteristics and while Carpenter's dictum that epic is a blend of folklore, fiction, and



"saga" (historical background) suits both Homeric epics and the trilogy, 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. Moreover, the epic requires an elevated style, that is, poetry.

However, the traditional romance is an appropriate genre, for Frye's phases of romance are all present in The Lord of the Rings. But, these phases are also a part of several sagas, not only the foreign-influenced lygisögur but also the native fornaldarsögur and family sagas. Thus, while the romance reflects Mediterranean influences and employs poetry, the saga reflects the Northsea 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 trilogy meets the requirements of some of them, but even when comparisons can be made, they do not foster an understanding of Tolkien's work.

The saga, as defined in this dissertation, does illuminate both the structure and the content of The Lord of the Rings. Like the family saga, Njáls saga, and the fornaldar-saga, Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs, The Lord of the Rings is "an extended, prose, chronological narrative." Furthermore, all three works mentioned display the conventions of the saga. The maps of Middle-earth fit the

convention, "a concrete impression of location." Another convention, "a protracted interest in genealogy," appears both in the story proper and in such appendices as "The Annals of Kings and Rulers" and "Family Trees." While capsule characterizations, a third saga convention, are not as frequent in The Lord of the Rings as in the sagas, "an abundance of action and adventure" is an obvious feature of both the sagas and Tolkien's trilogy. And, Tolkien accomplishes "some pretensions to a historical basis," a final saga convention, by creating the Red Book of Westmarch, which serves as a repository for the materials in The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. Most of all, the saga displays an affinity with the North Atlantic peoples as The Lord of the Rings does.

The traditions of the north pervade Tolkien's work. The chain of being of Middle-earth includes many creatures from Miðgarð, 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, the necessities of the plot, and the lack of adequate personages in recorded Norse mythology.

However, although the comparison is an unusual one, hobbits have several personality traits like those of the vikings, and Bilbo's first scene with the dwarves of The Hobbit has much in common with some scenes between Boðvar

and Høtt. 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 could easily be transferred to Miðgarð; even their names are from northern literature--the catalog of dwarves in the eddas. The wizards seem more than casually related to the Norse gods: Gandalf to Óðin, Saruman to Loki, and perhaps Radagast to Þórr. 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 Óðin'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 Smaug may also be related to legends like that of Búi Ákason, who was so greedy that his brooding over his money turned him into a dragon. The wargs draw on the northern people's natural fear of wolves, a fear that showed itself in the creation of Óðin's bane, Fenris wolf, and in a variety of werewolves and shape-changers in the sagas. However, the most pervasive image for evil in the trilogy is the evil eye. Glám's eyes seem to have made an impression not only on Grettir but also on Tolkien, for Tolkien's depiction of Gollum seems to be related to that of Glám. The belief in the evil eye was common in the North, and the imagery of the evil eye culminates in The Eye of Sauron.

Some vivid landscapes--the secret valley from Grettla, the waterfall cave from the Bearson legend, and the marsh from Hrafnkatla, appear in Middle-earth. And, northern literature offers an abundance of rings to fashion into the One Ring. Sword names and Frodo's mithril coat also have Old Norse analogs. Both cultures have riddle games, and in both, runes, which have a parallel history, are used mainly for magic inscriptions and spells. Dreams and portents enter into Middle-earth, but they are not considered as accurate as they are in Miðgarð. The ethical system of both realms is concerned with pagan virtues, such as comitatus, kinship, and revenge, rather than with Christian virtues, such as meekness, humility, and forgiveness.

Moreover, these Old Norse parallels increase in the portion of the trilogy that features the men of Gondor and the Northern Kingdom. Here, it appears that the culture is more or less based on Old Norse civilization in the same way that Tinkler says Rohan represents Old English culture. Special customs include burial customs like those of old Scandinavia and a form of wergild in which the slayer takes the place of the slain man. Middle-earth's war arrow and steward both occur in the Heimskringla. Moreover, Tolkien recreates some of the famous personages of the sagas. The barrow wight from Grettla and King Heiðrek threatens the hobbits; the berserker, Beorn, helps Bilbo and the dwarves; and the typical viking lord, Boromir, dies heroically

defending Merry and Pippin against the orcs. Denethor's death scene is especially close to the burning of Njála. And, Aragorn is in many ways like an archetypal Norse king. His reforged sword, his white tree, and his use of a leaf in healing could come from the Voisunga saga while his ride through the paths of the dead and his winged helmet may come from Norse mythology.

What Chapters Three and Four of this study have accomplished, then, is to verify the basis of the details of The Lord of the Rings in the sagas and eddas. This analysis of the details should then provide a base for some more general statement on the trilogy.

For example, comparing aspects of Norse culture to The Lord of the Rings reinforces the idea that fantasy is a phenomenon of displacement, rather than a genre. Thomson's suggestion that fantasy is a degree of realism, what he calls "the phenomenon of displacement," now seems to me very credible.<sup>1</sup> The family sagas mingle the realistic with the bizarre, the ordinary with the extraordinary. For instance, Bergthóra tells her servants and family that each may have his favorite food for supper that night because her foresight warns her that they will soon be dead.<sup>2</sup> The commonness of a dinner mingles with the supernatural power to know the future. The result is an increase in the reader's desire to believe. This study has made The Lord of the Rings just as credible for me as Njála is. Both represent a culture

diverse from my own in time, technology, customs, and beliefs, but both present their story according to the laws that they have established for their worlds. In fact, the chain of being of Middle-earth is more "rational" than that of Miðgarð possibly because that of Miðgarð has suffered distortion by prejudiced Christian interpreters.

Another result of this study has been a permanent entrenchment of my conception of the ending as not *Eucatastrophe*.<sup>3</sup> The "Völuspá" represents Ragnarök, the doom of the gods, as the end of a heroic age. Óðin and the divine kings and heroes must pass away; the world will be renewed but by lesser men. The sons of the old gods will reign, but since they have mortal mothers, they are lesser beings. Fortunately, Tolkien discusses his conception of Ragnarök in "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics":

But if the specifically Christian was suppressed, so also were the old gods. Partly because they had not really existed, and had been always, in the Christian view, only delusions or lies fabricated by the evil one, the gastbona, to whom the hopeless turned especially in times of need. Partly because their old names (certainly not forgotten) had been potent, and were connected in memory still, not only with mythology or such fairy-tale matter as we find, say, in Gylfaginning, but with active heathendom, religion and wigweorbung [honor to idols]. Most of all because they were not actually essential to the theme.

The monsters had been the foes of the gods, the captains of men, and within Time the monsters would win. In the heroic siege and last defeat men and gods alike had been imagined in the same host. Now the heroic figures, the men of old, hæleð under heofenum [men under heaven], remained and still fought on until defeat. For the monsters do not depart, whether the gods go or come.<sup>4</sup>

In The Lord of the Rings, the wizards have been sent from the Grey Havens to war with Sauron within the laws of Middle-earth. As the Third Age ends, the wizards return to the West. The ringbearers, whose lives have been stretched by the power of the Ring, are like the Divine Heroes, but they, too, leave the earth. The elves, also like Divine Kings and Heroes, must either take the ships to the West or renounce their immortality. The situation is just as Tolkien explains in "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics." The old heroes are gone, but the men and the evil remain.

Aragorn alone lingers in Middle-earth. His life is long and fruitful, but he finally renounces life:

"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 Undómiel,"* 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 counsel 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 Númenoreans 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 Númenoreans, 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 and 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, 343-344).

The words "twilight" and "Doom of Men" recall Ragnarök, 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 scæceð leoht and lif somod [Life is transitory: light and life together hasten away]."<sup>5</sup> This, I submit, is not Eucatastrophe.

Finally, I believe this study helps to clarify Tolkien's intention in The Lord of the Rings. Snorri Sturluson decided to write a compendium of myths, kennings, and meters in the Prose Edda. In The Lord of the Rings, J.R.R. Tolkien chose "to modernize the myths and make them credible." In order to accomplish this, he had to subordinate his sources to his story. Thus, the forms, creatures, places, implements, customs, and world view of northern literature are amended and transformed to suit his microcosm, Middle-earth. The result is a living myth and an exciting work of art.



## CHAPTER V NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Thomson, pp. 56-57.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon, pp. 92-95.

<sup>3</sup> Douglass Parker, "Hwaet We Holbytla . . . " Hudson Review, IX (Winter, 1956-1957), 607-608. Parker contends that Tolkien has "rewritten, or rather recreated Beowulf--Beowulf as he understands it and has criticized it so well. And he has done this, presumably, because he feels that only in this way can he attain what the author of Beowulf (also an antiquary) attained: a sense of man's Vergänglichkeit, his impermanence, his perishability." Noreen Hayes's attempted refutation seems to stand or fall on this premise: "More plausible than the providential interpretation is one based on some kind of determinism. One would be hard put, however, to defend an interpretation based on something like Wyrd, despite the superficial resemblances to Beowulf. No such force is mentioned in the actual text, and surely if it were operative, it must in such a book, be named. Professor Tolkien would be unnecessarily difficult in forcing his readers to infer the existence of this force from random

phrases like, 'Bilbo was meant to find the ring.' While such a sentence may imply belief in a kind of determinism by one character, no collection of such sentences creates the impartial and inevitable Fate demanded by such an interpretation." [Critique IX, 11 (1967), 63-64].

She is apparently unaccustomed to works like the sagas in which values are derived from actions not statements. In Grettla, for example, the sagaman considers Grettir's struggle with fey or bad luck in terms like those of the trilogy. Gandalf's statement on Bilbo and the ring is really no more "random" than Glám's curse: "en flest öll verk þín snúask þér til ógæfu ok hamingjuleysis" [but most of all, all your work will turn unlucky and your guardian spirit will desert you]. (Gordon, p. 104).

<sup>4</sup> In An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame, 1963), p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," p. 68.

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