

DEPLORABLE *CULTUS*:  
POPULISM, GLOBALIZATION, AND *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

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DEPLORABLE *CULTUS*:  
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This is a Marxist genealogy of *The Lord of the Rings*, a study of the production of literary value. It traces the function of this story in the world: how it became mass culture, how it has been used, and how Tolkien wound up occupying the number three position on *Forbes*' magazine's list of Top-Earning Dead Celebrities. *The Lord of the Rings* has changed laws and economies and sustained and been sustained by numerous incompatible subcultures. This project seeks to illuminate the relationship between the unpaid labor of fans, its conversion into capital, and the aesthetics of mass culture. Using literary analysis directed not only to well-known literary and media texts but to a combination of archival and ethnographic research, it asks where mass culture comes from, where it goes, how it gets there, and what this has to do with the paradigmatic bourgeois aesthetic form, the novel.

The introduction gives an overview of the novel's history and addresses the limitations of ideology critique for understanding popular culture. It offers notes on Tolkien's biography and two brief readings of the novel focused on its imagination of time and space, respectively, arguing that the novel should be seen as a late colonial text producing an effect I call historical *mise-en-abyme*. Chapter two looks at commercial publishers and science fiction fanzines, mostly from California, in the

early 1960s. It culminates in the release of the first paperback edition in the U.S. and the conversion of the text into mass culture. Chapter three focalizes investigations of the era around 1969 through the city of Birmingham and its legacies in cultural studies, in the history of capitalism, in the arts, and in rock music. Chapter four looks at fan communities in England, Tolkien studies, and the way that Oxford University manages its relationship the property and its fans. Chapter five looks at Peter Jackson's films and at Tolkien tourism in New Zealand. Chapter six looks in depth at two interviews from my fieldwork, with fans of different generations in the U.K. and New Zealand respectively.

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More than one fan advised me to have a serious Tolkien and/or fandom expert double check my work, and I didn't do that. Therefore, even more than usual, all of the above are not only absolved of but apologized to for my errors.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

References to *The Lord of the Rings* are cited by Book, Chapter, and Page Number, for example (IV.iv.655). Page numbers are to Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Lord of the Rings*. 60th anniversary edition, HarperCollins Publishers, 2012.

Tolkien's published letters are cited as *Letters*, with a page number to Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, Houghton Mifflin, 1981.

References to the *Remembrancer* are to Unwin, Rayner. *George Allen & Unwin: A Remembrancer*. Privately printed for the author by Merlin Unwin Books, 1999.

Bibliographic notations reading "Eaton Collection UCR" refer to items from the Collection of Fanzines, Special Collections & University Archives, University of California, Riverside.

## PREFACE

### A LONG-EXPECTED PARTY

On November 7, 2017, the one hundredth anniversary of the October Revolution in Petrograd, I taught the fall of Sauron.

A brief vision he had of swirling cloud, and in the midst of it towers and battlements, tall as hills, founded upon a mighty mountain-throne above immeasurable pits; great courts and dungeons, eyeless prisons sheer as cliffs, and gaping gates of steel and adamant: and then all passed. Towers fell and mountains slid; walls crumbled and melted, crashing down; vast spires of smoke and spouting steams went billowing up, up, until they toppled like an overwhelming wave, and its wild crest curled and came foaming down upon the land. And then at last over the miles between there came a rumble, rising to a deafening crash and roar; the earth shook, the plain heaved and cracked, and Orodrui reeled. Fire belched from its riven summit. The skies burst into thunder seared with lightning. Down like lashing whips fell a torrent of black rain. And into the heart of the storm, with a cry that pierced all other sounds, tearing the clouds asunder, the Nazgûl came, shooting like flaming bolts, as caught in the fiery ruin of hill and sky they crackled, withered, and went out. (VI.iii.947)

Tolkien's big novel climaxes with a demonstration of what he meant by "eucatastrophe," the sudden "turn" from despair and disaster to joy and freedom (*On Fairy Stories* 75-79). Palaces and dungeons collapse. Their power is broken in a moment. The world is remade. The big bad of the mass cultural imagination, unassailable, goes down in what feels, for that moment, like the dream of revolution.

First as tragedy, then as farce. *The Lord of the Rings* is an unreasonable, improbable, essential entry in the canon of the culture industry, one of the massiest things in mass culture. The central paradox about it is that its "small is beautiful" romance only functions at a grandiose scale. It is not just a novel, and not only

because of its imaginary world. Its mass comes not, or not only, from its length or its mountains but from the labor, struggle, and enjoyment of many thousands of people, especially but not exclusively J. R. R. Tolkien. Through their work, and its subsequent and attendant capitalization, it has acquired a great deal of “value” and thus, for better and for worse, power in the world.

The period of its history corresponds to the rise and nascent disintegration of the British-American post-imperial empire. Its composition, readership, appropriation, adaptation, and fandom belong to the social democratic era and its decline. It belongs to an age and a setting in which all that seemed visible of “the masses” was mass culture. Its life in the world elegantly documents both popular intellectual work and the ways it is captured for capital. The Party remains somewhere else, in another world.

At the Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference in 2018, I took a note at a talk by John Caldwell, the scholar of “production studies” and media industries. It said (and I assume he said something similar), “To study fans and their ‘lived experience,’ even their labor, without studying the financial and commercial contexts in which fans and professionals produce and consume value is to play the enemy’s game.” I try, in what follows, to avoid playing the Enemy’s game.

Sauron wins and wins. All power to the soviets.

## CHAPTER 1

### J. R. R. TOLKIEN, TOP-EARNING DEAD CELEBRITY

This is a Marxist genealogy of *The Lord of the Rings*. It offers a study of the production of literary value, considered both culturally and materially: literary use value becomes captured and converted into a significant proprietary regime, one which provokes, shapes, and restricts further objects, further uses. The story of *The Lord of the Rings* offers a counter-history of the decline of literature and the humanities by looking at popular and commercial practices around a novel that originated in the academy. Through a series of case studies, I trace the function of this story in the world: where it came from, who worked with it, how it became mass culture, how it worked its way into so many formations and crevasses of contemporary experience, and how Tolkien wound up, for several years, occupying the number three position on *Forbes'* magazine's list of Top-Earning Dead Celebrities, outranked only by Michael Jackson and Elvis Presley (Pomerantz). *The Lord of the Rings* is everywhere, from outer space to microorganisms; it has changed laws and economies and sustained and been sustained by numerous incompatible subcultures. This project asks how that came about, and in so doing it seeks to understand the relationship between the enormous unpaid labors carried out by fans and the commercial practices that capitalize on them, as well as the ways fantasy fiction mediates relationships between the local and the global, between the personal and the totality. Using literary analysis directed not only to well-known literary and media texts but to a combination of archival and ethnographic research, it asks where mass culture comes from, where it

goes, how it gets there, and what all this has to do with the paradigmatic bourgeois aesthetic form, the novel.

The project is divided into six chapters. This introduction gives an overview of the novel's history and introduces some central themes, including the function of time and space in the imaginary of the period in which *The Lord of the Rings* has been a dominant text, and it addresses the limitations of ideology critique for understanding popular culture. It reviews some features of Tolkien's biography and offers two brief readings of the novel geared toward the themes of the study. Finally, it provides some information about the research supporting the argument. The second chapter, the longest, looks at the earliest years of the Tolkien fandom in the U.S., specifically California, culminating in the publication of the first paperback edition and the conversion of the text into mass culture. The third chapter follows the story back to England, focalizing a series of investigations through the overdetermined city of Birmingham and its legacies in the history of capitalism, in the arts (including *The Lord of the Rings*), in cultural theory, and in rock music. That chapter finishes with the founding of the Tolkien Society of the U.K. in 1969. The next three chapters, gathered as "Part II," concern the present and are based on interviews and observations that I made in the U.K. and in Aotearoa New Zealand. The first, chapter four, concerns the Tolkien Society as it exists today, using it as a lens to examine how Oxford University manages its relationship to Tolkien and the businesses and cultures surrounding his novel. Chapter five looks at Peter Jackson's films and at Tolkien tourism in New Zealand. Chapter six presents two key interviews from my fieldwork, with very

serious fans of different generations, as an illustration of the ways that social democracy and mass culture impact popular intellectual life.

Before embarking on a precis of the history, a note is in order on the Marxism of this project. Ideology critique has historically been the dominant mode in the study of popular culture, and Marxist accounts of ideology have been especially powerful in this tradition. The present project is indebted to that work and calls on it often, but also departs from it in certain ways. For reasons explained below, I seek to decouple *The Lord of the Rings* from assessments of political meaning to some extent. Political meanings are abundantly present and available to fans, scholars, and businesses, but those actors themselves occupy different economic positions as well as holding divergent political ideologies. I suggest that rather than looking for the political meaning of *The Lord of the Rings* in interpretations of the text or of derivative and transformative works related to it, we should be trying to understand the political meaning of its material reality: its ubiquity and capitalization, the history of intellectual property disputes surrounding it, and the (simple?) question of how a *fantasy* came to be worth, by some estimates, three hundred billion dollars. I occasionally speak of intellectual property owners as “enclosing” the work of fans. This is partly a metaphor, suggesting the peculiarity of private property in the domain of fiction and fantasy and the contradictions that generates. But it is also worth asking about the granular processes through which not only Tolkien but his fans generated value that could generate significant capital accumulation.

### *A brief history*

*The Lord of the Rings* is a cultural artifact of exceptional reach. It began as the secret pastime of an Oxford don, a philologist specializing in medieval languages and poetry who wrote a long medieval fantasy novel in the 1940s. As he was composing it, he shared it with a group of conservative Christian friends, most of them also affiliated with the university, who met in college rooms or at a local pub; this group included fellow literary scholar and fantasy novelist C. S. Lewis. The don, J. R. R. Tolkien, published his novel with Allen & Unwin in the mid-1950s, and Unwin marketed it as a serious literary work: the dust-jacket bore a testimonial from Lewis assuring the kind of purchasers who could afford the expensive volumes (they cost a guinea apiece in the U.K., \$5.00 each in the U.S.) that they compared favorably with Ariosto (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*). Sales were better than feared from the start. Due to Tolkien's reputation, both academically and as the author of a successful children's book in the same universe, *The Hobbit*, published almost twenty years earlier, it received high-profile press attention, both positive and negative.

Starting in the mid-1960s, however, *The Lord of the Rings* became an international sensation, associated in popular imagination with the counterculture. This "deplorable cultus," as Tolkien is said to have called the craze, was a curiosity utterly at odds with his tastes and the expectations of his publishers (Carpenter, *Tolkien* 233). Many readers are likely to have encountered stories about "Frodo Lives!" and

“Gandalf for President” buttons in the U.S., and perhaps the Middle Earth club—a rock venue—in London. By 1970, references to the novel appeared extensively in popular song lyrics; they were a favorite with Led Zeppelin, and became a steady source of material for heavy metal, both in Europe and the U.S., for decades, a phenomenon explored in more depth in chapter three.

This explosion of popular interest was, as I show in chapter two, made possible by years of unpaid labor on the part of American science fiction and fantasy fans, mostly in California, who developed a sub-subculture dedicated to the novel within the existing institutions of science fiction fandom starting as early as 1958. The attention they gave Tolkien in fanzines and at conventions brought the novel to the attention of legendary science fiction fan and (later) editor Donald Wollheim. Wollheim had been an extremely influential participant in science fiction fandom since the 1930s and, from the early 1950s to 1971, edited the science fiction paperback series at Ace Books, which, with Ballantine Press, was regarded as one of the two leading science fiction and fantasy publishing operations in the U.S. in the 1950s and 60s (Knight; Del Rey). Wollheim observed that the copyright protection on *The Lord of the Rings* had been mishandled by its publishers in the course of importing it to the U.S., and he brought out the first cheap paperback edition without securing legal rights. This was the notorious Ace Books edition, the first volume of which appeared in June of 1965, and it sold hundreds of thousands of copies in its first six months.

The copyright owners in the U.K. countered with an “authorized” American paperback from Ballantine Books six months later. A network of fan activists organized from New York worked to promote the edition that would pay royalties to

the author, while other long-term fans welcomed the ready availability of inexpensive paperback copies of the novel regardless of provenance. The ensuing controversy helped put the novel, now accompanied by its fans, back into the mainstream press in 1966. The *New Yorker* devoted part of “The Talk of the Town” to a meeting of the Tolkien Society of America at the Brooklyn family home of founding teenager Dick Plotz, which W. H. Auden attended (“Talk of the Town: The Elvish Mode”). In the *Saturday Evening Post*, an interview with Tolkien by journalist Henry Resnik was included in an article featuring comments from several of the fans I discuss in chapter two, including Dick Plotz in New York and Greg Shaw in San Francisco; Resnik himself would supply the California fanzine *Niekas* with a transcript of the full interview for publication the following year (Resnik, “The Hobbit-Forming World of J.R.R. Tolkien”; Resnik, “An Interview with Tolkien”). By the end of 1966, twelve years after the first volume was originally published, *The Lord of the Rings* was finally number one on the *New York Times*’ list of paperback best sellers (Walters).

Tolkien died in 1973, but *The Lord of the Rings* grew a persistent fan culture throughout the 1970s and 80s. Strongly associated with the influential tabletop role playing game *Dungeons & Dragons*, a precursor to (and source for) the immense growth of gaming in the digital era, the novel also sparked the establishment of modern fantasy as a major genre in publishing and, as special-effects technology developed, cinema (Gygax and Arneson, *Dungeons & Dragons*; T. A. Shippey, *Author of the Century*). The memory of *The Lord of the Rings* as a cult text in the 1970s and 80s forms a touchstone in contemporary popular culture’s history of itself, appearing as an organizing principle in such texts as *The Colbert Report* and *Stranger*

*Things*. Media adaptations proliferated in this era, including Ralph Bakshi's animated feature in 1978, BBC4's radio adaptation in 1981, and countless calendars, posters, and song lyrics. Posthumous works in Tolkien's "legendarium" also began to appear, most importantly *The Silmarillion* in 1977; this was followed by extensive fictional material from his manuscripts and notes in his son Christopher's *The History of Middle-earth* (thirteen volumes, 1983-1996) and later volumes. There had been a small flurry of critical attention to Tolkien in the 1960s, but this began to consolidate in the 1980s, overlapping to some degree with activities in Tolkien fandom. The publication of Humphrey Carpenter's *Biography* (1977); additional unpublished Middle-earth material, beyond what had been included in *The Silmarillion* (there would be much more in years to come), published as *Unfinished Tales* (1980); Tolkien's selected *Letters*, also edited by Carpenter (1981); and Tom Shippey's *The Road to Middle-earth* (1982) were all essential both to academics studying Tolkien's fiction and to bookish fan scholarship like that promoted by the Tolkien Society in the U.K. and the Mythopoeic Society in the U.S. (Carpenter, *Tolkien*; Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*; Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales of Numenor and Middle-Earth*; Tolkien, *Letters*; T. A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth*).

In the early 1990s, the academic study of media fandom also blossomed, under the influence of several seminal works including the essays on slash (homoerotic fanfiction) by Constance Penley, Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women*, and Henry Jenkins' *Textual Poachers*, as well as related works on reception including Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (Penley, "Brownian Motion"; Penley, "Feminism, Psychoanalysis"; Penley, *NASA/Trek*; Bacon-Smith; Jenkins, *Textual*

*Poachers*; Radway). In the emergent academic conception of media fandom, fanfiction was of central importance, resonating with the poststructuralist understanding of textuality and feminist politics that dominated these studies. This upswing in critical attention to communities around shared fictions coincided exactly with the growth of access to the internet brought about by the public launch of the World Wide Web in 1991 and of graphical web browsers starting in 1993. The wide availability and ease of use of networked digital media, in turn, exponentially increased access to fan-produced materials previously circulated via printed fanzines, such as commentary and discussion, fan art and fiction, subcultural pedagogy (on Tolkien's invented languages, for example), and news about the internal life of fandom (such as information about conventions). From the 1930s through the 1970s, this material had been available through the mail to informal networks by subscription as well as through fan conventions; early internet technologies such as Usenet and email lists had accelerated the process. But these networks—and, in electronic form, even the means to access them—had been available mainly to people who worked in certain sectors, including universities, libraries, and defense. Moving this material onto the Web changed the social valence of fandom: Jenkins wrote in 2008 that fandom had moved “from the margins of the media industry into the spotlight” (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* 246; see Coppa, “A Brief History of Media Fandom” for an overview of the history of media fandom).

Throughout this period, the readership of *The Lord of the Rings*—as judged by sales of the book and ancillary materials appealing to fans, such as calendars, posters, secondary works, and so on—continued to grow (Rossenberg). By the turn of the

twenty-first century, changes in cinematic technology and other globalizing tendencies made a much grander film adaptation perhaps inevitable, but the actual route this realization passed through reflects the processes this story reveals. Although autodidact director Peter Jackson was no scholar, his story is homologous in some ways with Tolkien's, combining humble origins and outsider status with an ability to generate, almost from scratch, structures that exactly accommodate the demands of mass culture. Jackson picked up a tie-in edition of the novel after seeing Ralph Bakshi's film and famously read it on a long train journey through the spectacular landscape of his native New Zealand. The expense (somewhere around \$300 million), length (eight years in production), and complexity of this project, which coincided with the central novels and first films in the Harry Potter series, have been extensively documented (K. Thompson; Sibley, *Peter Jackson*). The sustained burst of fan activity surrounding these films, which were released from 2001-2003, coincided with a second wave of scholarly interest in fandom, including the founding of the Organization for Transformative Works and a great deal of new scholarship.

The films and their fans had a significant and lasting impact on Aotearoa New Zealand, both in the role that capital investment relating to Tolkien played in the development of their film industry and in the films' surprisingly durable impact on tourism, already one of the country's main products. The films contributed substantially to the development of "Wellywood," the Wellington complex of production facilities that complements New Zealand's extravagant supply of natural scenery such that it has become a production center for a globalized cinema industry. Labor laws negotiated between the national government and the post-Hollywood

global media giant Warner Brothers are known domestically as the “Hobbit laws” (Clark; *Labour Unveils Intention to Axe Hobbit Laws - Business - NZ Herald News*). Like Jackson’s films themselves, #*LotR* fans in the era of the films have received more critical attention than the book-only fandom of earlier decades (Allington; Reid; Croft; Barker and Mathijs; Bogstad and Kaveny).

Reading through this brief overview of the history, a surprising amount of which may be familiar even to those who don’t care for Tolkien or haven’t read *The Lord of the Rings*, a few things might be noticed at once. First, the story of the book takes a global trajectory from the beginning. Tolkien, who wanted to create a “mythology for England,” was actually born in South Africa (Bloemfontein, then part of the Boer republic called the Orange Free State) and descended in part from German migrants—a “fellow outlander,” in the words of his Anglo-Irish colleague and friend C. S. Lewis. The fans who first propelled his novel to a mass audience were Americans, mostly (at first) in California, many of them postwar migrants—some from Europe—driven by the Cold War expansion of the defense industry. American and British fandoms and the businesses that served and exploited them grew up in relationship to each other, diversifying to cater to different tendencies among Tolkien fans: religious and secular, countercultural and traditionalist, deferential toward the author and his memory and using (or abusing) his work freely. With accelerated globalization and communications technologies, New Zealand became a third center for the story of the novel, echoing back the its colonial resonances and producing a version of Middle-earth that deployed an unstable sense of place while, at the same

time, cultivating a commitment to nationalism. The product that drove these developments—Jackson’s film—encountered a similarly ambivalent reception as the novel had done, fifty years earlier, on aesthetic and political grounds.

During the years that I have worked on this project, a very high percentage of people I told about it—mostly people with little or no obvious connection to *The Lord of the Rings*—had a story for me about their relationship to it: the lifelong passion for the text of intimate friends, partners, or family; unexpected encounters, anecdotes that struck them as singular, prompting an email or a text message with an additional datum to add the ocean of data in which this project swims. Often, people apologized to me for not having read the novel, and I frequently found myself granting absolution for this completely understandable omission. This was only personal contacts: *The Lord of the Rings* was in the news, as it has been almost continuously for decades. In 2015, NASA’s mission sent back the first photos from Pluto, naming a large, dark area on Pluto’s moon Charon “Mordor.” Memes, not-infrequently Middle-earth-themed, dogged the trauma of the 2016 U.S. national election, and days after the vote *The Baffler* splashed Elijah Wood’s distressed face across their home page, proclaiming the death of the politicized study of popular fiction under the warning, “Don’t Look to Frodo!” (Silverman). In July 2017, the Tolkien Estate and Warner Brothers settled the longest of their many lawsuits over the commercial property, and the following September Amazon announced that it had contracted with the Tolkien Estate to produce a new television series based on *The Lord of the Rings*. *The Atlantic* surmised that the project would cost half a billion dollars, and fans quickly realized that the deal

would not have been possible had not Christopher Tolkien, the author's son, finally retired as head of the Tolkien Estate in August at age 92 (D. Thompson).

Decades of penetration of the text have produced references to the novel in software, music, gaming, television, biology, business, physics. Memes, names, exhibits, commercials, jokes are, have been, remain everywhere. This kind of ubiquity is typical of capitalism's logic of branding, but it carries—in contrast to the murals and billboards for Coca-Cola that can be found in every corner of the world, developed and otherwise—the tell-tale mark of ideology, or rather of hegemony, which is free will, an adumbration of freedom and of joy. We propagate *The Lord of the Rings* with a heartfelt sense of spontaneity; with naughty playfulness and unconventional whimsy, we all—myself, my subjects, my colleagues, my friends, and millions of others—replicate it en masse and plaster it over every continent and into outer space.

The question of ideology, however, doesn't perfectly exhaust or explain the history under consideration. For one thing, ideology's identification with “common sense”—in Marx and the work of Marxian theoreticians, an inversion of material relations so commonplace as to be difficult to recognize—pairs somewhat uneasily with fantasy because of its aggressive fictitiousness. Indeed, *The Lord of the Rings* seems designed to satisfy a desire for fiction itself: not for a particular narrative or any particulars of content, not even a longing for “the past,” but for *the fictitious* as such, for the not-real. This hunger was one that Tolkien himself understood very well and satisfied—or at least fed—for many through the notorious capaciousness and apparent completeness (in its ever-more-visible incompleteness, in the form of endless

revisions, partial manuscripts, the decades-long trickle of posthumous publications and “corrections” even of the text of the novel) of his invention.

This insistence on fictitiousness does not mean, of course, that ideology doesn't function in this or other fantasy fictions: on the contrary, the politics of the work seem at once too apparent and strangely impossible to resolve. Generations of critics and fans have argued exhaustively over questions like, “Is Tolkien racist, and how racist is he?” With regard to the text itself, we could give a dialectical answer: the text is late colonial and apposite to a transitional phase of decolonization and neocolonialism, and as such it is both thoroughly racist and simultaneously pluralistic; it holds an unresolved contradiction. The attraction that medievalism in general and *The Lord of the Rings* in particular hold for right-wing extremists has prompted interventions in Medieval Studies such as the formation of Medievalists of Color, a “fellowship” of academics that has begun distributing materials, issuing statements, and organizing workshops; the crowd-sourced bibliography on “Race and Medieval Studies” launched by scholars of color affiliated with the blog “In the Middle”; or the publication of meta-statements like Richard Utz's *Medievalism: A Manifesto* (“Medievalists of Color”; “In the Medieval Middle”; Utz). Although Tolkien's liberal supporters dismiss charges of quasi-fascism and racist ideology against his text, proof of its strong attraction for Nazis is visible on the bulletin boards of Stormfront.org, a major online hub for white nationalists or, as they put it, “a community of racial realists and idealists.” In 2016, a search for Tolkien's name in this domain returned over 2000 pages of results (*High Fantasy and the Lord of the Rings - Stormfront*). *Star*

*Wars* and some other fan favorites also have adherents in the community, but *The Lord of the Rings* is far and away their preferred fandom.<sup>1</sup>

The most famous—and wealthiest—right-wing political actor among Tolkien fanatics is Peter Thiel. Thiel is a billionaire venture capitalist in Silicon Valley, one of the few major donors to back Donald Trump for President early in 2016. Co-founder of PayPal and the first outside investor in Facebook, Thiel appears in scores of articles in peer-reviewed journals, many of them organs of libertarian think tanks (some funded by Thiel himself) like *The Journal of Entrepreneurship Education*, but also in much other social science research. He is a notorious public figure as a result of “philanthrocapitalist” stunts like offering college students \$100,000 each to drop out of college or funding research into extreme anti-aging technologies in a Voldemort-like bid to conquer death. In 2016, he bankrolled a lawsuit by the professional wrestler Hulk Hogan against Gawker Media for posting a sex tape of Hogan. This drove a slate of blogs into bankruptcy (including Jezebel and io9, which were sold to Univision) and took Gawker offline. Thiel had long promised vengeance on the blog for revealing that he was gay in 2007, and the judgment was perceived by some to reflect an emergent threat to press freedom from the billionaire class (see Chipi; Elvin; Levi).

Thiel’s enthusiasm for Tolkien is expressed partly in the names he gives his companies, which include Valar Ventures, Rivendell One, Lembas LLC, Mithril Capital Management, and the largest, Palantir. Palantir is named after Tolkien’s “lost seeing-stones of Númenor,” magical globes of stone that allowed the elite of Middle-

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<sup>1</sup> The best (fairest, smartest, and best-informed) source on Tolkien and fascism that I have read is a 2008 article by comparatist and German scholar Peter Firchow (Firchow). I am by no means charging Tolkien or his fans with fascism, but the fascist appeal of his fiction is incontrovertible.

earth to communicate and surveil at a distance. Currently valued at around \$20 billion, the company offers analysis of “big data,” and was founded in 2004 to capitalize on the Bush administration’s antiterrorism push. Now considered “one of the largest data mining companies in the world,” its first clients were U.S. intelligence services (Fleury-Steiner; see also Thiel). When Trump was first elected, rumors suggested that he would appoint Thiel to the Supreme Court (Reporter and Post). Although this did not occur, Palantir has proved central to the administration’s most repressive programs, providing a key technological tool for the targeting and persecution of immigrants, effectively labeling concentration camps with a *Lord of the Rings* brand. In 2011, Thiel, a U.S. citizen born in Germany, became a citizen of Aotearoa New Zealand in a secret arrangement only made public in early 2017 as a result of his involvement with Trump (Biddle; Drange; Taylor; Roy, “New Zealand Gave Peter Thiel Citizenship after He Spent Just 12 Days There”). He didn’t mention *The Lord of the Rings* as a factor; rather, he said that the country represented his “vision of the future” and “utopia.” Thiel has invested heavily there, including his purchase of a three-hundred acre estate in an area where much of Jackson’s film was shot. Commenters immediately made the connection between his immigration and *The Lord of the Rings*, regardless of what he said (Chafkin and Chapman; Drange; Gobry; Mac; Roy, “New Zealand Gave Peter Thiel Citizenship after He Spent Just 12 Days There”).

All of this looks very much like confirmation of the long-held suspicions of Tolkien’s leftist detractors: a quasi-fascist text, it turns out, has quasi-fascist fans. At the other end of the political spectrum, however, although Tolkien has had his famous detractors, there are also examples of his proponents. These include left-wing fantasy

writers who admire him, if only with reservations; the most famous of these are Ursula Le Guin and China Miéville, who, despite criticisms, has also defended Tolkien (Miéville). Perhaps a more interesting example comes from a young Dutch Marxist economic historian, Matthijs Krul. In addition to his scholarly work, Krul is an occasional columnist for *Jacobin*, as Thiel is for the *Wall Street Journal*. Krul has an active online presence, posting both personal and political content, and brands himself with Middle-earth elements. His Twitter profile identifies him as a “queer elf,” and he keeps the slogan “Neither Morgoth nor Valinor but International Socialism” pinned to the top of his Twitter feed (Krul, “Neither Morgoth nor Valinor but International Socialism”). As a blogger, Krul’s works include a mock political economy of Middle-earth, which argues that

elements of the hobbit aristocracy—as indeed all of them except the servant, Sam, were—become aware of and end up supporting, wittingly and unwittingly, the elvish-wizard geopolitical maneuvering underlying the War of the Ring. (Krul, “The Lord of the Rings”; Krul, “How Can a Marxist Read Tolkien?”)

One of the features that causes Krul's Tolkien criticism to shine is its deployment of novelistic discourse, which Tolkien barely knows how to execute himself. The heteroglossia of Krul’s reading seems unusual for a scholarly product, frequently adopting an in-world persona—becoming a narrator—to analyze Tolkien’s narration. It is a more typically fan-like posture, suggesting certain types of fanfiction, but with a scholarly twist, analogizing the narrative using Marxian and social-scientific categories. Nor was Krul the first fan to move Tolkien into Marxist territory: a column from *The Eye*, a 1988 publication of the University of Sydney Tolkien Society, advances “a commentary on the events described in *A History of the Orcish Speaking*

*Peoples* by V. I. Sauron, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Orcish People's Party" (Whiley). You might suspect an anti-communist allegory, but it's actually a critique of Middle-earthian monarchism and slavery.

What my project proposes, therefore, is not to explain the ideological meaning of *The Lord of the Rings* itself, much less to determine whether it's good or bad—it's both left and right, both wonderful and terrible, not for all tastes and yet compelling to millions. Rather, I seek to explain how this situation came to arise: how it came to be everywhere, and how the changes to practices surrounding it over the decades reflect, sometimes heartbreakingly, the shapes of literary life outside the academy and the damage that has been done to them by the decades-long neoliberal assault on public education and the social structures of the novel's first era, the era that is known to political economists as "the great contraction" and that corresponded to the high-water mark of what Raymond Williams called "the long revolution," the rise of universal literacy and the democratization of education and politics.

*Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*, *Game of Thrones*, *Twilight*, and other "mythologies" now routinely follow a path whereby the merchandising contract is forged alongside publication, a path that seems designed to introduce material for the culture industry from outside its domain. That path was pioneered by Tolkien, his fans, and his publishers between the 1940s and the 1970s, an era of epochal global upheaval that saw the decolonization of dozens of countries and the technological developments and public and private investments—in communications, transportation, data management, shipping, and so on—that would support globalization and mass culture on a scale never seen before. It's not surprising that this became an age for the

fantasy genre, in which narrative scope encompasses whole worlds (often with maps) and eschatological struggles, in which modernity is conceptualized as a form of magic (displaced, as the stipulated disenchantment of modernity provides a Muggle staging area for magic), and which experiments with ways of thinking about colonial and neo-colonial dominance through travel narratives, fantasies of racial superiority, and fantasies of alliance or at least tolerance—all constitutive for Tolkien.

### *The Inklings fraction*

Bourdieu calls the limiting function in the “field of large-scale cultural production”—roughly equivalent to the culture industry—“subordination to external demand.” External demand normally functions by putting cultural producers under the authority of “the controllers of production and diffusion media” (Bourdieu 125). But the Inklings, especially Tolkien, produced their popular work largely without adopting the habitus of this field. They wrote for the mass field while maintaining the security and relative autonomy of their position in the university. Although this may sound like a fairly straightforward process, and not unprecedented—certainly there have been other writers based in the academy who published for middlebrow audiences—the idiosyncratic nature of their non-academic writing, the astonishing impact it had on popular culture, the degree of prestige they enjoyed at Oxford, the influence they sought to exercise there, and the improvisatory, seemingly naïve strategies by which they arrived at this position combine to make their case interesting. The “field” in

which they produced their work was conditioned by the increasing autonomy of the university.

In his 1980 essay “The Bloomsbury Fraction,” Raymond Williams concludes that the “group of friends” that included Virginia Woolf, Maynard Keynes, Lytton Strachey, et al functioned as a “formation” advancing certain of their own class interests, as members of the upper echelons of British society, through their sincere advocacy in matters of “social conscience” (Williams, “The Bloomsbury Fraction”). The Inklings, Tolkien’s “club” of writers and intellectuals who met regularly at Oxford in the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s, constituted a sort of anti-Bloomsbury Group: anti-modernist, petit-bourgeois, politically conservative, religiously orthodox, resistant to modern forms of inquiry such as the social sciences, and exclusively male. Active within certain spheres, they competed publically with “progressive” and “modernizing” forces in the university and the literary world (although they were very obviously modern themselves), even while their discourse and habits typically appeared as defensive and even withdrawn. Cleaving to standard channels of publication for their scholarship, the Inklings appealed to a range of institutions, many of them non-elite, to diffuse their extensive extra-academic writing. As a result of their efforts, the most famous of them, though they lost the battle for cultural legitimacy that they had waged inside the university, made so much money and reached—even helped to construct, for the later use of the culture industry—such enormous audiences as to become mediators of significant social and cultural power. Working from the heart of prestigious, stable, anachronistically privileged Oxford colleges, the members of this group—especially Lewis and most especially Tolkien—

contributed significantly to shaping twentieth-century cultural populism, with all the political and class ambivalence that implies.

The members of the Inklings thought of it as a “literary club,” gave it a name, knew who was a “member” and who was not, and held regular meetings. Clubs and societies were extremely common, particularly at Oxford, during their era, and the formation of the Inklings was as conventionally “Bohemian” as their enthusiasm for William Morris. The club centered very obviously and explicitly on two figures, C. S. (Jack) Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, with a third member, Charles Williams, also having a deep impact during the years of World War II, when Tolkien wrote most of *The Lord of the Rings* and Lewis became an international celebrity for his writings on Christianity. Other members of the Inklings included Jack Lewis’s brother Warren (“Warnie”); Tolkien’s third son, Christopher; Owen Barfield; Neville Coghill; Hugo Dyson; R. E. (“Humphrey”) Havard (Tolkien’s family physician); and eight or ten others. These other members produced or, in the case of scholars like David Cecil, shared far less writing with the group than Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams; some seldom attended meetings. The Thursday evening meetings during term, at which members read their writing aloud, were held in Lewis’s rooms at Magdalen College in the earlier years and in Tolkien’s at Merton toward the end; they would meet on Monday or Tuesday mornings at pubs for further talk.

In contrast to the Bloomsbury Group, Lewis and Tolkien, and still less Charles Williams, did not grow up in the elite professional class. Lewis’s family was the most secure of the three; he and his older brother were the only children of a Belfast solicitor and his wife, the daughter of an Anglican priest. Tolkien, a Catholic orphan

from Birmingham (born in South Africa, where his father died), was raised under the supervision of a priest from the age of twelve, when his mother died. He was educated at a “public” school, St. Edwards, which he attended on scholarship and where he began a career of intensive auto-didacticism, teaching himself Old Icelandic, for example. Both had been precocious, “immensely studious” boys, and both achieved Firsts (Lewis got two) from Oxford colleges that they attended on scholarship. Both were part of the generation, and the class, hardest hit by the Great War. Oxford during their time as undergraduates was decimated, and thirty percent of Tolkien’s year (those who matriculated in 1911) were killed (Winter; see see table 1.2, 21-2). Tolkien, who was slightly older than Lewis, managed to finish his degree in 1915, before being inducted; Lewis was admitted to Oxford that year (1915), but had to serve before matriculating, and he was wounded at Arras in 1918; he began studying in 1919 after a long convalescence. After the war, Oxford was flooded with ex-servicemen, and had significantly more students in 1919 than in 1913. In this respect, Lewis and Tolkien’s experiences would have been radically different; Oxford was almost bereft of undergraduates when Tolkien was doing the most intensive work for his degree

In spite of their long and, in the first two decades, close friendship, and many parallels, the careers of Tolkien and Lewis were actually somewhat different from each other. Tolkien was strictly a medievalist, where Lewis, though he wrote extensively on the middle ages, was more of a generalist. Tolkien was a philologist with no particular interest in philosophy, which was Lewis’s original field and continued to color his intellectual style throughout his work. A “cradle convert” to

Catholicism as a result of his mother's conversion when he was eight, Tolkien became a devout Catholic for life, identified as such possibly to the point of sympathizing with Franco, and certainly suspecting Lewis of an "Ulster" anti-Catholicism. His letters, and recollections of his conversation, suggest he tended to speak from a position of confident certainty and underwent none of the struggles about religion—or apologies for it—that formed the main part of Lewis's self-understanding.

He was also more private than Lewis, and he built his invented mythology and languages over a period of forty years before *The Lord of the Rings* came out, starting when he was sent back from the front with "trench fever" after spending the summer of 1916 at the Somme. Tolkien showed a noticeable reluctance, by the standards of his age cohort, to enlist, though he offered no political objection to the war. He found an exemption that allowed him to wait to enroll until after he took his degree, in June of 1915, after which he trained for nearly a year as a signal officer before being sent to France in June of 1916. Of his group of four best friends from St. Edwards, two died that summer and a third the following year (see Garth for the best account). In 1917-18, Tolkien was still in uniform but found to be medically unfit for service; every time he was due to go back he mysteriously relapsed. Still an officer, he worked in various capacities in England, saw his wife regularly at times, and worked on early Middle-earth stories—those posthumously published in *The Book of Lost Tales* as well as elements of *The Silmarillion*. It's hard not to see the fusion of his scholarship with his imaginary world, his horrible experiences, and his two years of ill health as deeply related (Tolkien, *Letters*; Garth; Carpenter, *The Inklings*; Carpenter, *Tolkien*; R. L. Green; Glycer; Fussell; C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*; Winter).

Although he became an influential scholar of Old and Middle English, Tolkien gave up academic research completely to pursue his fiction in the time he could spare from teaching after about 1936. In that year, he gave his well-known lectures on *Beowulf* (“The Monster and the Critics”), while Lewis published his most famous scholarly book, *The Allegory of Love* (1936). Lewis continued to publish serious literary-historical studies throughout his career as well as dozens of popular works; some of these sold poorly, but many were bestsellers, and quite a few are still in print. Lewis’s later “philosophical” works, like *The Four Loves*, make theological arguments without scholarly documentation and are addressed to an ambiguous audience. He underwent a conversion in his first decade at Oxford, a long and obsessively documented process of reverting from the disenchanted position he had adopted after the War to orthodox Christianity, “regressing” to the “religion of his childhood,” the Church of England, in 1931. The vivid sense of romance that appealed so widely in Tolkien’s writings was also at the heart of Lewis’s conversion. It was associated in his childhood fantasies with “Northernness” or “islands of the west” and reflected a similar romantic, medievalist sensibility to Tolkien’s writings about “the youth of the world” or Barfield’s theory about the lack of distinction between metaphoric and literal meanings in older languages (Barfield; Cantor 41–42). Tolkien’s research from the late thirties on was scanty and mostly (“On Fairy Stories”) related to his own fiction. For almost two decades, during which he held, successively, two of the very few endowed professorships in English at Oxford—first the Rawlinson Professorship of Anglo-Saxon, then the Merton Professorship of English Language and Literature—Tolkien told no one except the Inklings what he was working on. “Most of my

philological colleagues are shocked,” he wrote when *The Lord of the Rings* was published; “the cry is: ‘now we know how you have been wasting your time for twenty years’” (*Letters* 238).

Lewis’ and Tolkien’s time at Oxford, which included both world wars, was a period of dramatic change for the university as an institution, after a struggle for institutional autonomy lasting much of the previous century. Several studies suggest that the main story of Oxford in the twentieth century is that of its struggle for institutional autonomy (see Soares; Halsey). This largely meant separation from the Church of England in the earlier part of the twentieth century, since Oxford, much more than Cambridge, had been the place where the leadership, clergy, and policies of the Church had been formed in the 1800s. Both Tolkien and Lewis were activists within the competitions shaping the changes (see Tolkien, “The Oxford English School” for his curricular argument, which retarded the study of modern literature at Oxford for a generation). Artists and “especially professors coming from the petite-bourgeoisie are most directly under the control of the state,” says Bourdieu, because of its control of opportunities exactly like those that permitted the careers of Lewis and Tolkien to exist at all—scholarships, fellowships, endowed chairs, college life—“all of which are for speaking or keeping silent, for compromise or abstention” (Bourdieu 125). The Inklings were selective about their regions of compromise and abstention. Startlingly quiet about the rise of fascism but eager to influence the culture of the university with regard to religion, aesthetics, and the shape of the humanities, they formed a briefly powerful faction within university politics. In 1942, they marshaled a contingent of fellows and tutors to prevent E. K. Chambers—the “dominant” figure in

literary studies of the period according to Currie (135), and still well-known fifty years later as the author of a six-volume study on medieval and Renaissance drama and Shakespeare—from receiving the Oxford Professorship of Poetry, securing the position instead for the “practicing poet” (and Inkling) Adam Fox, a clergyman known for conventional, medievalist narrative verse. Lewis also took the opportunity made available by the Second World War to advance Charles Williams as a lecturer, something that would not have been possible at other times because he didn’t have a degree (Carpenter, *The Inklings* 118).

In 1954, five years after the Inklings had stopped meeting, Lewis had been passed over for two professorships at Oxford. Angry at Tolkien, who, he believed, should have done more to secure him one of those positions, Lewis accepted a newly-created chair at Cambridge, where he boasted in his inaugural lecture of being able to “read as a native texts that you must read as foreigners” and warned that “there are not going to be many more dinosaurs” (C. S. Lewis, *De Descriptione Temporum*). Chad Walsh—“a poet, a writer of children’s and religious books, of two books about C. S. Lewis, a college professor, a journalist, and an Episcopal priest who credited Lewis’s influence with bringing him to the faith” (Mcdowell)—said “the only part of a newspaper Lewis valued was the crossword puzzle... The knowledge that he was like a species of fish long thought to be extinct and now rediscovered by amazed scientists gave him zest for battle” (Walsh 66). As the decades wore on, Lewis and Tolkien had increasingly prided themselves on being throwbacks, partly because of their views on university policy, partly because of their scholarship, but also because of their lasting passion for their childhood tastes and fantasies. Being “dinosaurs” was yoked, for both

men, to the nature of their modernity, and for both of them the expertise Lewis boasted of at Cambridge was linked to explicitly populist thinking. As a generational impulse, some of their anachronistic tastes, such as living and working in all-male environments, weren't unusual; incommensurable traumatic experiences tended to isolate those who had served in the Great War, particularly from women (see Gilbert and Gubar 262). Paul Fussell's account of the "literariness" of the War, across all classes, resonates with Lewis's populist gestures toward the tastes and beliefs of "ordinary men."

If they were dinosaurs, then, Lewis and Tolkien were also novelties. The modernity of their scholarship, to begin with, complicates the narrative of reactive, defensive nostalgia; their minds were crammed with truly archaic material and not simply retreads of Victorian romance. More than simply absorbing the popularization of the pre-Raphaelites—themselves a perfectly modern formation—Tolkien and Lewis were products of *fin-de-siècle* institutional change. Tolkien, the most committed antimodernist of the group, was deeply impacted by reforms of the 1890s at Oxford. Catholics had been banned from attending Oxford and Cambridge during the institutional struggles of the second half of the nineteenth century and were only readmitted in 1896 (Turner 298). Tolkien took his degree in the School of English, which had only been created in 1894 (Baron). His life as a married Fellow, dividing his time between the college and a private house, was made possible by reforms of the 1870s (Harrison 86–130). It's easy to see objects of potential nostalgia in Harrison's description of the "intimate world" of the Oxford colleges between the wars, where even married Fellows were expected to dine at the college, personal and egalitarian

relationships between tutors and undergraduates were central to teaching, servants were relied on for basic necessities like heat and water (due to lack of modernization), and colleges brewed their own ale and banned undergraduates from public houses. And yet the reforms that made these available to Tolkien were new.

Lewis, Tolkien, Coghill, and other Inklings were among the last dons who had received no postgraduate training or degrees. The first postgraduate degrees were established at Oxford in 1917, and a tide of new disciplines rose after the war, with whose scholars Tolkien and Lewis shared little overlapping knowledge. In 1919, after a long struggle, Greek was finally dropped from “responsions,” the first of the three major examinations marking out the undergraduate career. In 1920, “PPE” (Philosophy, Politics, and Economics) was introduced as a more modern rival to “Greats,” the classics curriculum which had been the standard prestige course of study up until then (Currie 104–16; Thomas 232). Tolkien, the model beneficiary of university reform, exerted a major influence on the curriculum in the English School. It is interesting that Tolkien was more active than Lewis in relation to institutional questions, and earlier, despite his introversion and Lewis’s compulsive publicity. At the University of Leeds, where Tolkien taught between working on the *Oxford English Dictionary*,<sup>2</sup> at the end of the War, and his fellowship at Pembroke in 1925, he had created a new curriculum in Old and Middle English, designed to be literary and engaging where the field had a reputation for being dry and “technical.” At Oxford in the late twenties, he sought to promote early medieval texts from Northern Europe by

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<sup>2</sup> Tolkien’s first civilian job after World War I was as assistant to one of the four editors of the first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, focusing on Germanic words beginning with “W”: “The first entry in the published Dictionary on which he is known to have worked is that for the noun *waggle*,” a word that does not immediately appear to be a noun at all (Gulliver 53).

engaging other dons in a circle called the “Coalbiters” (from the Old Icelandic *kolbitar*, one who sits so close to the fire in winter as to bite the coals) for extemporaneous translation of the Icelandic sagas, to which even beginners (such as Lewis) were invited, and where everyone except Tolkien himself was essentially a student (Carpenter, *The Inklings* 27).

Their group within the English School called itself “the Cave,” their “juncto,” as Lewis called it, against the “reigning party.” Lewis loved this kind of underdog rhetoric and was very preoccupied with “rings,” coteries, and so on. The language of “the reigning party” seems to imply that the English faculty was dominated by scholars favoring modern literature and critical methods, but the essays in the *Oxford History* seem to imply otherwise: Harris writes about the faculty’s resistance to modern literature and criticism giving them a reputation for “jejune and ingenuous questions” (239); Cunningham calls them “notoriously conservative” and seems shocked by their resistance to reform (437). Harris sees Lewis’s “towering personality,” “immense output of literary studies,” and “unrelenting polemic against modernity and social change” as major factors influencing the direction and reputation of the English faculty. Tolkien, also, made a number of proposals for curriculum reform to the English faculty at Oxford almost as soon as he arrived in 1925, most of which they had adopted by 1931. The adoption wasn’t successful, however: although the three tracks he proposed—two of them pre-modern—were created, ninety percent or more of students quickly wound up in the third, modern one (see Currie on this as well as the rise of English between the wars and its particular attraction for female students).

Lewis and Tolkien's experiences in publishing their work, once it started moving outside the conventional academic sphere, illustrate the ways in which being outmoded worked as a kind of modernization. Lewis chose an ultra-modern route. Going back to his early years in philosophy, he had always seen himself as a "dialectician." He assuaged his dismay at feeling outstripped by contemporary philosophy through his Christianity, which gave him a reason to perform arguments for an audience of "ordinary people," a phrase Lewis used continuously and Tolkien less often but noticeably. Though Lewis's literary scholarship is still respected, and his children's books have become mass culture, his biggest popular audience was originally for his Christian apologetics, which achieved mass popularity through the mass media, and his fame within the circuits of Christian letters remains significant. In 1940, he began doing radio broadcasts for the BBC, who recruited him to supply religious comfort in the most frightening years of the war. He published the hugely popular broadcasts in three bestselling volumes; these were later revised to become *Mere Christianity* (1952), a copy of which was actually handed to me, in a new edition, by Christian proselytizers outside the Cornell bookstore while I was working on this project (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*).

Around the same time as the broadcasts, he began publishing *The Screwtape Letters*, a series of "letters" from an older devil advising a younger one, serially in a Christian newspaper. He published a trilogy of allegorical science fiction novels, at least twenty Christian apologetics pitched to a range of audiences, and (later in life, after he had workshopped the composition of *The Lord of the Rings*) the Narnia series, all while teaching at Oxbridge. When issued as a book, *The Screwtape Letters* became

a bestseller, and by 1949—three years before the first of the Narnia books—the Magdalen medievalist was on the cover of *Time* magazine. This development reveals the intermediary role played by the haute bourgeoisie in the translation from academic to mass cultural contexts: the *Time* cover came about through the intervention of Clare Boothe Luce, the Catholic wife of publisher Henry Luce, who was an enthusiast of Lewis’s Christian writings (Cantor 219). Lewis’s valorization of non-elite audiences came at the expense of his reputation at Oxford, but his Oxford credentials endeared him to his general audience, something reflected in the abundant popular and quasi-scholarly studies of his life and work.<sup>3</sup> The embrace of Lewis by Boothe Luce, while it may have damaged in his prestige in one way, shows how he was appropriated, Oxford credentials and all, by a completely different kind of power. We might see Lewis as helping to pioneer a way of making both academic social standing and influence in popular culture useful to reactionary economic and political agendas.

Lewis and Tolkien’s expressed political views were somewhat mixed, especially Tolkien’s. Lewis’s letters and conversation were peppered with proto-fascist colonial formulations like “I have a hankering for the old and happier days, when politics meant Tariff Reform, and war was war against the Zulus” (W. H. Lewis 135). He published his Miltonian ideas on women and marriage and went so far as to ask Dorothy Sayers, the female Inkling-*manquée*, to write a piece against the

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<sup>3</sup> One study, for example, that considers Lewis as one of four “Magdalen metaphysicals,” celebrates Oxford and Christ in equal measure, and declares with satisfaction (and echoing Lewis’s own language) that “Lewis’s works passed out of the academy and into the lives of ordinary folk” (Patrick 131). A Catholic study traces the entangled history of two or three dozen “literary converts,” starting with Wilde; it bemoans Lewis’s stubborn and illogical Protestantism at length (Pearce). There are also at least three or four biographical picture-books, including one focused on landscapes of Protestant Ireland, and these are only a few of the many works on Lewis that cover a spectrum from the almost-scholarly to the utterly kitsch. They contain largely the same content regardless of the standard of taste to which they appeal.

ordination of women, and wrote it himself when she—with many apologies and caveats, but admitting she disagreed—declined (Pearce 230–72; C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* 94–114). Tolkien’s views are a bit more ambiguous. At various times he said his leanings were to “Anarchy” or “‘unconstitutional’ monarchy”; he told Lewis he wasn’t a “democrat,” but also said that “not one man in a million” was fit to “boss other men” (*Letters* 64). He wrote to Christopher, in the last months of the World War II, that, “as I know nothing about British or American imperialism that does not fill me with regret and disgust, I am afraid I am not even supported by a glimmer of patriotism in this remaining war” (*Letters* 115), and he mentions his hostility to imperialism again in his valedictory address. He wrote two different letters of response (both given to Stanley Unwin, with directions for him to choose, since he was “primarily concerned”) to the German publishers who wanted to ascertain that he wasn’t Jewish before translating *The Hobbit* in 1938 (*Letters* 37-8). He very much wanted the novel translated into German, and he refused intense, nationalist anti-German sentiment in both wars, but he was offended by anti-Semitism and expressed himself strongly about it.

Although he disapproved of Lewis’s embrace of the mass media, Tolkien found himself in a similarly complex scenario. He withdrew from scholarship altogether for the eighteen years it took to write and publish *The Lord of the Rings*; publication alone was a six-year process. The expense and difficulty of publishing the novel, and the strategies surrounding marketing it, will be discussed in the next chapter. In the production, marketing, reception, and influence of *The Lord of the Rings*, we see an aesthetic and commercial trajectory full of uncertainty, an “accident”

that cannot possibly be accidental. Where Lewis's Christian works were initially adopted by political and cultural fractions invested in the author's academic credentials and the presumed legitimacy they might imply, Tolkien helped to shape a profitable market that shared his romanticism and escapism but was frequently indifferent to his scholarship and his Christianity.

It was the university that gave them security and freedom, the university that allowed Tolkien to spend sixty years developing Middle-earth. The interests of "the public" and of capital reached a temporary détente, in the core capitalist powers, after the Russian Revolution and the Great Depression. In the academy, the settlement was embodied by institutions such as tenure and faculty governance that are now being dismantled; highly educated members of the intellectual elite and the artists they patronized, it was thought, should be free to advocate a range of political views and to champion daring, challenging, unpopular artistic efforts. In the case of Tolkien and Lewis, however, the liberty granted by the university made space for them to create accessible materials for popular intellectual life. Ironically, the university's institutional autonomy, which they struggled to turn toward their own priorities in the twenties and thirties, eventually made the university less what they wanted, reinforcing their rhetoric of reaction and defense. Their careers exhibit a mixture of engagement and disengagement, intellect and simple-mindedness, mean spirited reaction and utopian idealism, privilege and populism. Works with an unsurpassed mass cultural footprint emerged from the interstices of the academy in a period of upheaval: this is the first peculiarity of postwar popular culture exposed by the history of *The Lord of the Rings*.

The two sections that follow offer brief arguments about the novel pertaining to its treatment of time and space, respectively. Insofar as *The Lord of the Rings* paradigmatically exemplifies twentieth-century medievalism, it is commonly understood as a nostalgic text, based on the fantasy that a pre-modern “past” is in some way more desirable than the present. I call the structural elusiveness of this “past,” wherein it appears to continually recede, Tolkien’s “historical *mise-en-abyme*.” As I explain below, Tolkien derives this signature aesthetic strategy less from Victorian medievalism than from Old English verse; I compare examples of Tolkien’s invocation of “the past” with strategies in “The Wanderer” and with his reading of *Beowulf*. In the section after, I turn to Tolkien’s treatment of space, and it is here that we find his debt to Victorian fiction. This project posits that *The Lord of the Rings* is a late colonial text, as indebted to imperial travel narratives as to the thirteenth-century romance or the eighth-century elegy. I seek to demonstrate this here by comparing a passage in Book V with H. Rider Haggard’s 1881 imperial adventure novel *King Solomon’s Mines*.

### ***The historical abyss***

*The Lord of the Rings* taught readers humanistic scholarship. It taught them to inquire about the past, to turn to the appendices, study the languages and the maps, look for the “ancient” chronicles that might at last reveal where “Nargothrond” was and why so many people and songs seemed to remember it. Gollum, the ruined being

whose life has been “unnaturally” extended over millennia, provides an even more apposite avatar for the reader than the hobbits of the Shire. The Ring drew Gollum to “the roots of the mountains” to seek “secrets ... which have not been discovered since the beginning” (I.ii.54). This ravenous character models the behavior that Tolkien’s novel taught to thousands of hungry readers, some of whose stories appear in this dissertation.

What was specifically humanist about this behavior was its historical gaze. Though there is a nostalgic component to this, as reflected in Tolkien’s frequent wistful comments on his memories and the horrors of modernity, it also reflects a distinctive aesthetic structure in his novel imitative of the Old English poetry that he studied. I call the effect I want to describe here historical *mise en abyme*, because it depends on positing pasts within pasts and conceiving of the present as haunted by recursive historicity.<sup>4</sup> The Old English elegy “The Wanderer,” which prominently features this effect, was a poem of particular importance to Tolkien, cited in *The Lord of the Rings* and his valedictory address, though he noted a parallel effect in *Beowulf*. Tolkien paraphrases a line from “The Wanderer” in *The Lord of the Rings*, and he recited a passage from it—the same passage—in his valedictory address at Oxford (Tolkien, “Valedictory Address to the University of Oxford” 239).

The poem appears in *The Lord of the Rings* when Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli travel to Edoras with Gandalf. Aragorn recites a poem (“Where now the horse and the

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of *mise en abyme*, given prominence by Foucault’s discussion of *Las Meninas*, was articulated for modern criticism by Lucien Dällenbach via a passage in the journals of André Gide (Dällenbach 15; Foucault, *The Order of Things*). The type of representation that drew Gide’s attention was one in which a smaller version of the larger text appears within it, such as the “play within a play” in *Hamlet*; the phrase points to potentially infinite recursion, as in facing mirrors.

rider? Where is the horn that was blowing?") that has long been recognized as based on "The Wanderer" (III.vi.508). The poem is preceded by one of dozens of examples of historical *mise en abyme*. Aragorn instructs Legolas and Gimli about the people, the Rohirrim, that they are about to meet:

"Many long lives of men it is since the gold hall was built."

"Five hundred times have the red leaves fallen in Mirkwood in my home since then," said Legolas, "and but a little while does that seem to us."

"But to the Riders of the Mark<sup>5</sup> it seems so long ago," said Aragorn, "that the raising of this house is but a memory of a song, and the years before are lost in the mist of time." (III.vi.507)

After discussing the sound of the language (the language of Rohan resembles Old English most closely of any language in Middle-earth), Aragorn offers the translation quoted above. Decontextualized, the words adapted from "The Wanderer" convey a sentimental, overblown sense of loss in relation to an ill-defined past, fitting for either a retiring English professor at an elite university or the dispossessed heir to the throne of a vanished mythical kingdom.

Tolkien's historical *mise en abyme* occurs where we find an ineradicable recursion of the past, one that keeps open the possibility of historicizing a universalizing discourse, simultaneously questioning it and generating a rationale for it. This historicizing element, with its suggestion of relativism, appears in the exchange about Rohan, where Aragorn advises Legolas that his sense of the past (grounded in Elven immortality) won't work for the Rohirrim. This comparative and

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<sup>5</sup> Tom Shippey explains that "the Mark," the name the Rohirrim give to their own country, derives from an ancient name for the part of England that included Birmingham and Oxford—the Mierce, from Mearc, called in Latin Mercia (T. A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth* 123).

even relativist note reflects a broader pattern in the text. The age of the very old beings in *The Lord of the Rings*, like the Ents or Elves or Tom Bombadil, can only be conveyed in comparisons. Thus, when Frodo asks Bombadil, “Who are you, Master?,” Bombadil replies with a receding catalogue of comparisons:

Eldest, that’s what I am. Mark my words, my friends: Tom was here before the river and the trees; Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn. He made paths before the Big People, and saw the little People arriving. He was here before the Kings and the graves and the Barrow-wights. When the Elves passed westward, Tom was here already, before the seas were bent. He knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless—before the Dark Lord came from Outside.  
(I.vii.131)

Gandalf later calls Treebeard “the oldest living thing that still walks beneath the Sun” (III.v.499), and Celeborn addresses him as “Eldest” (VI.vi.981), but Treebeard himself, though he often refers to his great age, quotes an (ancient) Entish poem referring to “Eldest of all, the elf-children” (III.iii.464). This crux puzzled fans from the start, and Bombadil’s speech, with its string of unexplained references (the Barrow-wights receive some illumination in the next chapter, but very little, and the bending of the seas and the fearless dark sat un-glossed until the posthumous *Silmarillion*), is typical of Tolkien’s approach. It surrounds the reader with a universe of detail all of which points back, to the thousands of years scored in Appendix B, “The Tale of Years,” and the dozens of stories that would remain untold in print until after his death.

The poem Aragorn indirectly quotes is known as “The Wanderer” (it has no title in the only manuscript from which it is known, the Exeter Book). It consists of 115 lines of alliterative Old English verse that seem to have two different speakers:

Christian passages at the beginning and end frame a monologue usually considered to reflect a pagan worldview.<sup>6</sup> The speaker of this “older,” “pagan” portion, the “wanderer” who gives the poem its modern title, laments a lost world, while the Christian frame offers consolation. It is a critical commonplace that the speaker of the longer, middle portion of the poem appears to belong an earlier period than that of the poem as a whole, and that the despair he expresses, without reference to Christian faith, would be healed by conversion. The passage Tolkien quoted so prominently comes falls late in the principal speaker’s lament, in a passage known as the *ubi sunt* (“where are...”), a conventional poetic formula derived from classical Latin and common in both Latin and vulgar medieval verse. It begins, “Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? // Hwær cwom mappumgyfa?” (Where has the horse gone? Where the young man? Where now is the treasure-giver?) (line 92).

“The Wanderer” does not contain a “mirror or microcosm” of its own content, which Dällenbach makes the central feature of *mise en abyme*. It does, however, rely on a nested structure: framing passages at the beginning and end of the poem refer in the third person to the speaker of other parts of the poem and enclose the central monologue in affirmations of Christian faith, contrasting with the beliefs, such as the supreme value of *comitatus* or a pessimistic belief in the transitory nature of all things, espoused by the speaker of the main part of the poem and associated with the pagan culture of Germanic heroic tradition. The recursive effect lies in the way that the principal speaker, the *eardstapa* (earth-stepper, “wanderer”) (l. 6), thus framed, himself mourns for a lost past—at first for his personal past and then, nesting the

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<sup>6</sup> Not all scholars agree; Benson argues that the pagan viewpoint represents a synchronic other rather than a voice from pre-Christian history (Benson).

backward gaze, as part of a more general vision of destruction and decay. If pagan culture belongs to the past of the Christian present in which the poem is framed, a past within that past is the obsession of its speaker.

The Old English texts that have survived were written fairly close to England's conversion to Christianity. Many of these texts seem to contain vivid memories of, and to reflect living continuities with, pagan culture, and there is strong evidence that Tolkien read the pagan elements—in “The Wanderer,” other elegies, and *Beowulf*—as belonging to the relative past of the Old English poets. In his historical *mise en abyme*, the past continues to live in present discourse; the Christian poets of the eighth century are haunted by pagan traditions of the seventh as Gondor is haunted by Númenor and Númenor by Beleriand. In “*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*,” Tolkien compares *Beowulf* to “The Wanderer,” arguing that the power of both poems comes from the conjunction of pagan pessimism and Christian hope. Within the Christian framework, he says, the mournful “mood” of the pagan *eardstapa* has validity as an account of the temporal world; the “happy ending” of Christianity (a happy ending that is already in the past) adds to this rather than erasing it. “Man not only as an individual, but as a whole, and all his works shall die,” Tolkien writes. “As the poet looks back into the past, he sees that all that man *as man* can accomplish ends in night” (Tolkien, *Beowulf and the Critics* 66). Human beings, whether pagan or Christian, share a “common tragedy of inevitable ruin” (67).

“The Monsters and the Critics” concludes by refining the impression of the pagan “mood.” In the “B-version” uncovered by Michael Drout, the final paragraph reads:

And one final point—which those will feel who today preserve still the ancient human piety toward the past. *Beowulf* is not a ‘primitive’ poem; it is a late one, at the end of an epoch, using the materials, then plentiful, of a day already changing and passing, which has now for ever vanished, swallowed in oblivion, and using them for a new purpose with a wider sweep of imagination, if with a less bitter and concentrated force of mood. *Beowulf* was already antiquarian in a good sense. And it now produces a singular effect. For it is now itself to us ancient; and yet its maker was telling of things already old and weighted with regret, and he expended his art in making keen that touch upon the heart which sorrows have that are both poignant and remote. So that if the funeral of Beowulf moved once like the echo of an ancient dirge, it is to us as a memory brought over the hills, an echo of an echo. [...] To recapture such echoes is the final fruit of scholarship in an old tongue ... For such reasons ultimately do we study ‘Anglo-Saxon.’ (Tolkien, *Beowulf and the Critics* 145–46)

For Tolkien, “our” position relative to *Beowulf* needs to be taken into account in order to understand its aesthetic effect. And this position, he argues, echoes an “antiquarianism” present in the text itself. His criticism expresses the sense of modern *mise en abyme* precisely in terms of the past within the past, the nested Russian dolls of antiquity, with an implication that that relationship must always, in some sense, have already been there, at least since the Christian “happy ending” was added to the world.

In “The Wanderer,” the Christian, third-personal voice uses two or perhaps three epithets to describe the principle speaker: first *eardstapa* (earth-stepper, wanderer, 6), at the end *snottor on mode* (wise in spirit, 111), and, in between, *frod in ferðe* (old and wise in spirit, 90). The word “*frod*,” which means “wise old,” is the root of the name “Frodo.” Frodo’s age in spirit—like the ages of the oldest beings—is relative, exposed in relation to other factors. The hobbit protagonists supply the great difference between the actual novels, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and the

rest of Tolkien's legendarium. They scatter as the story and the world expand, giving us one hobbit to follow through every heroic context. Made to feel like children—though Frodo, in particular, is middle-aged—all of them slowly develop a sense of the enormity of the past. With Frodo and the others, the reader is propelled through the story surprisingly like Walter Benjamin's angel of history: "A storm is blowing from Paradise" that "irresistibly propels him into the future toward which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward" (Benjamin 257–58). Frodo moves forward, as the novel-form demands, while staring backward, as humanist scholarship does.

When Tolkien gave a 1938 BBC radio address on what he called "Anglo-Saxon" verse, part of series on the English literary tradition for a wide audience, he used "The Wanderer" as his closing text. "In the *Wanderer*," says the last sentence of the talk, "the poet passes before the end of the poem to the vision of a ruin, and a lament for the days devoured by time, a poignant expression of a dominant Anglo-Saxon mood: with this epitaph on antiquity, I will end this brief echo of the now long-vanished Anglo-Saxon days" (quoted in Lee 194–95). Stuart Lee concludes that Tolkien "sees *The Wanderer* as a closing down, an epitaph" (195). I would adjust this assessment: for Tolkien, "The Wanderer" is as much an opening as a closing, something like a door-jamb. His remarks on the BBC stress the distance between the present (1938) and an ancient text, that text's relationship to a more ancient tradition, and the way that tradition in turn mourns bygone days and the passing of all things. By means of a tendency toward recursion, "The Wanderer," for Tolkien, makes the door to the past impossible to close.

Lee worked with Tolkien's manuscripts to develop his account of Tolkien's use of "The Wanderer," and finds one that he is able to date to 1938 based on Tolkien's reflection that an event of 937 C.E. happened "1000 years ago last autumn." The historical abyss is lodged in Tolkien, a constant feature of his consciousness. A backward gaze seems unsurprising in someone who had left the land of his birth by three, was orphaned by ten, and who lost "all but one" of his close friends to war in his youth (Tolkien, "Foreword to the Second Edition" xxii). *Mise en abyme* traditionally references representation nested in a recursive sequence; correspondence between the elements is a necessary feature of it. But in "The Wanderer," as in Tolkien's fiction, there is a sense that the orders represented, while repeating each other in some ways, and parts of a whole in some ways, cannot be reconciled; like Elvenhome and Valinor beyond, the past has been taken out of the world and can no longer be accessed, though it is continually remembered and even represented in figures like Treebeard or Galadriel with living continuity. The past is irretrievable, and the past lives in the present, like the stones in Tolkien's famous parable, wherein the tower from which the *Beowulf* poet could see the sea was built out of the stones of pagan stories (Tolkien, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics" 7–8).

Peter Jackson evokes this effect in the opening thirty seconds of his twelve-hour film. The first installment, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, opens with a familiar voice—Cate Blanchett's—whispering enigmatically in an unknown language. The screen is completely black. Immediately, Blanchett's voice begins speaking over the unknown language in simultaneous translation (whispered words on the left, translation to the right):

<i>I amar prestar aen</i>	The world is changed.
<i>Han mathon ne nen</i>	I feel it in the water.
<i>Han mathon ne chae</i>	I feel it in the Earth.
<i>A han noston ned gwilith</i>	I smell it in the air.

The fact that the same voice overlaps, and the visual effects that begin to fill the empty screen, tie the effect to mediation, another preoccupation and problem for Tolkien’s modern novel of a pre-print world. Moreover, the lines recited—the first moment of a film series fans had anticipated for years, even decades—were familiar to readers of the then fifty-year-old book and therefore part of their personal memory. The writers weirded up the text they were quoting, however, in that the speech is Treebeard’s, from the end of the book (“the world is changing: I feel it in the water, I feel it in the earth, and I smell it in the air. I do not think that we shall meet again” VI.vi.981). They had translated the speech from English (the “Common Tongue” of the novel) into Elvish, and then “translated” it back into English. The effect is to undermine the solid ground of past-ness. Jackson and his team built the tower out of old stones found in the ruin.

### ***Travel writing***

Tolkien, then, found a way to construct his central scholarly insight as fiction, and to prompt in fans (as responses to the novel show) a scholarly response, a search for answers about the past and a distinctive quasi-historical attitude toward Middle-earth. The second argument I’d like to make about the text concerns its colonial dimension, its relation less to medieval quest narrative than to imperial travel writing. Although I suggest continuities with the high imperial period, I want to preface this with a reminder that the novel belongs to the moment of decolonization, and this

colors its colonial traces. And yet the reminder, discussed below, that a non-European other always overlaps with England resonates with Jed Esty's characterization of mid-century England as culturally "insular." Esty's 2004 book *A Shrinking Island* argues that imperial contraction corresponds to an "anthropological turn" toward the treatment of England as a knowable object by both literary writers and scholars. He suggests that earlier, high modernist works, like *The Waste Land* (1922), reflect a period of what, following Raymond Williams, he calls "metropolitan perception," in which a sense of total anthropological knowledge—"possession"—of non-European cultures was accompanied by a hollowed and conflicted sense of the English "center." By contrast, England in the period from 1930-1960 responds to incipient decolonization by turning the anthropological gaze upon itself, and finding itself knowable: "the object of its own imperial discourse, its own touristic imagination, its own historical affections, its own documentary gaze, its own primitivizing fantasies, its own ritual pageantry, its own economic theories, and its own myths of origin" (40). In this study, he includes a brief passage on the Inklings, one of the few pieces of criticism to fold Tolkien into a sophisticated argument about British modernism (Esty 118–23). He sees the project of creating a "mythology for England" as part of this larger formation, which is very convincing, but the colonial thread lives on in this popular novel, also.

We can see this in an anomalous moment in *The Lord of the Rings*, one that is seldom mentioned in fan culture or scholarship and that was not included in Jackson's film. In Book V, when Merry accompanies the Riders of Rohan going to the aid of an imperiled Gondor, the Rohirrim muster at a mountain site called Dunharrow. On the

path up the mountain, Merry notices “great standing stones that had been carved in the likeness of men, huge and clumsy-limbed, squatting cross-legged with their stumpy arms folded on fat bellies. Some in the wearing of the years had lost all features save the dark holes of their eyes that still stared sadly at the passers-by” (V.iii.794). The Rohirrim call these statues “Púkel-men,” and Merry regards them with “a feeling almost of pity.” Later, the King of Rohan meets and negotiates for guidance with “a strange squat shape of a man, gnarled as an old stone ... short-legged and fat-armed, thick and stumpy, and clad only with grass about his waist” (V.v.831). Merry recognizes that this man resembles the Púkelmen, “one of those old images brought to life, or maybe a creature descended in true line through endless years from the models used by the forgotten craftsmen long ago” (V.v.832). The man, Ghân-buri-Ghân, is the leader (“great headman”) of a people identified only as “Wild Men,” who, as he testily reminds the king, “are wild, free, but not children.” Speaking of himself in the third person and omitting articles in the manner traditional for representing non-Europeans communicating with Europeans in pidgin (“Ghân-buri-Ghân will not lead you into trap”), he assists the Rohirrim out of rational self-interest, and he asks nothing in return except that his people should be left alone: “do not hunt them like beasts any more” (V.v.833).

In some ways, *The Lord of the Rings* is structured as an adventure in which comparatively modern protagonists, the Hobbits, who smoke tobacco, drink tea, and govern themselves by some sort of democratic system (or at any rate lack feudal lords), visit a medieval world that thinks little of them, where they go on a medieval quest. Ghân-buri-Ghân and his “Wild Men,” however, appear even more non-

medieval than the Hobbits. Although the usual language of historical abyss suggests that their culture far predates that of the Rohirrim, the fact that they suggest non-European models make them seem to come from the modern world. Their whole story, including their representation of unchanging, immemorial antiquity, their use of pidgin, and the terribly ancient statuary they have left in the woods, though connected with megalithic and early Christian monuments of Britain by the term “standing stones,” suggests a post-eighteenth century world of travel, including the Pacific. The de-historicization of their culture, which is both very old and timeless, is a cliché of the “primitive.” The Wild Men occupy a borderland between the fairytale “North” of Middle-earth, populated by Elves, Dwarves, and Hobbits, and the high medieval, urbanized South, populated by “Men.” The Wild Men also, in a sense, resemble Hobbits: they supply our final encounter with a group that aspires to be left alone in an era of global warfare.

Tolkien was aware of incorporating modern influences. Although he acknowledged that William Morris’s “medieval” romances and especially George MacDonald’s fantastical tales had impacted his imagination when young, he also affirmed that, of all the late Victorian texts that left their marks on *The Lord of the Rings*, H. Rider Haggard’s *She* probably influenced it most deeply (Resnik, “An Interview with Tolkien”). Haggard, like Tolkien, is a wildly entertaining novelist; like Tolkien, he has a very strong sense of the novel form, which Morris and MacDonald lack. This is an important point, since Tolkien had systematically distanced himself from the novel in his career at Oxford, and his expertise in medieval languages and

literature has formed the core of literary scholarship around his fiction.<sup>7</sup> Haggard was the colonial novelist par excellence, an expert at converting imperial travel narrative into popular adventure novels, as reflected in his book sales. His breakthrough novel, *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), initially had trouble finding a publisher because its fantastic narrative did not fit any recognized commercial genre, and yet it became by far the bestselling book of 1885 and ended up inaugurating a new genre for mass print, the “Lost World” novel. In all of this—difficulty of classification, success, impact on genre formation,<sup>8</sup> as well as in many stylistic and narrative details—it resembles *The Lord of the Rings*. Above all, it combines medieval and colonial elements to achieve the totalizing spatial and temporal fantasy world of modernity, much like Tolkien.

Because *King Solomon's Mines*, though its framing myth has a Biblical referent, contains an even stronger element of medievalism; indeed, the whole novel is shot through with the mystification of the past, showing that Tolkien's narratives of comparative and ineradicable past-ness were affiliated with colonial discourses of primitivism as well as with the techniques of Old English poetry.<sup>9</sup> The narrator, Allan Quatermain, a professional hunter, is hired by Sir Henry Curtis to find his brother. In meeting Sir Henry, Quatermain is reminded “of an ancient Dane... if he only let [his blond hair] grow a little, put one of those chain shirts on to his great shoulders, and

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<sup>7</sup> There is at least one article about Tolkien and Haggard (W. H. Green). See also Arata on the genre of “reverse colonization” (Arata).

<sup>8</sup> See Shippey's *Author of the Century* for Tolkien's impact on the “fantasy” genre in publishing and subsequently cinema (T. A. Shippey, *Author of the Century*).

<sup>9</sup> Again this suggests Esty's argument, in which England at mid-century turns the anthropological gaze upon itself; here, Tolkien's antiquarianism and advocacy for *Beowulf* rhyme with discourses about non-European cultures. Esty does not identify a link between Tolkien's fiction and colonial adventure stories, but he does note that Charles Williams, the third member of the Inklings to produce novels with a significant readership, “conspicuously re-writes Haggard's imperial romances, bringing the Zulus to London” (Esty 119).

took hold of a battle-axe and a horn mug” (Haggard 19). In the novel’s climactic battle, Quatermain gets to witness his fantasy enacted: a fictional tribe, the “Kukuana,” supply them with chain mail (the “editor” speculates it came from Crusaders via Arab traders), and Quatermain gets to revel in the sight of a long-haired Sir Henry (he’s been in the bush for a while) in full medieval kip, which “showed off his magnificent physique to the greatest advantage” (312). In the battle, “yet more gallant was the vision of Sir Henry ... none could live before his stroke,” and there is much more that exactly suggests Tolkien, both his diction and his tendency to veer into homoeroticism at “heroic” moments (350). Quatermain’s medieval fantasy leaks into his general equation of the Zulu people with “Vikings” and his description of the “lost” Kukuana, whose language is “an old-fashioned form of the Zulu tongue, bearing about the same relationship to it that the English of Chaucer does to the English of the nineteenth century” (172). This “Chaucerian” Zulu dialect is rendered in Morrisian form, uniting geographic and temporal otherness, as all the dialogue of the Kukuana falls into “thou” and “thee.”

Several details correspond to elements in *The Lord of the Rings*. Umbopa, the “rightful king of the Kukuanas,” for whose royal restoration the protagonists fight at the climax, has wandered for years in many lands. At a key moment, to prove his identity, he rips off his “moocha” (always translated, within the text, with the “medieval” word “girdle”) to stand naked, showing the snake tattoo around his body, eating its own tail, “just above where the thighs are set into the body” (237). Umbopa corresponds to Aragorn, the wandering rightful king, whipping out his broken sword to the confusion of the hobbits. Quatermain resembles Bilbo, not wanting to go on the

“adventure”; Gagool, the “witch-doctress,” suggests Shelob—old, animal-like (compared with a monkey, cobra, bat, snake), locking them in the treasure room in the mountains. This monstrous, centuries-old hag is the only person who seems to know anything or make any sense: “Ye come for bright stones; I know it—I know it!” (230). “Blood! blood! blood! rivers of blood; blood everywhere” (228). These Conradian pronouncements are accompanied by equivocation on race, alternating between describing black bodies as “repulsive” and “beautiful.” The narrator mixes eroticized admiration for the Kukuana men with yet there are constant indices of white supremacy in interactions between European and African men. These unresolved, arbitrary, contradictory signs are strewn along the exuberant path of narrative drive.

### ***On methods and sources***

The readings above are not the only times in what follows that I will analyze the text of *The Lord of the Rings*; I do so periodically throughout this project. This interweaving of textual analysis is essential to understanding the novel’s life in the world: as with the two readings above, where I tied elements of the novel to what might appear remote contexts reflect the way this works. A good deal of the dissertation, however, reflects primary research in archives and in the form of informal ethnography, and some introduction to how I conducted this research is in order.

The overall economy of Tolkien’s novel, including both its business aspect—the part that fits into the recognized material economy governed by money—and its far larger cultural footprint, greatly exceeds the scope of this project, even before

positioning the phenomenon in relation to larger histories and economies. As an example of what the project does and does not involve, I spent about two months conducting research in the U.K., including more than two weeks at Oxford, and yet I never visited Tolkien's academic papers or letters.<sup>10</sup> My focus has been on the life of the novel in the world, which includes some aspects of its origins and content but mostly focuses on its movement after publication and far from its author's hands. Many others have scoured Tolkien's life and texts to produce reliable reference sources and critical studies on his biography, opinions, and work as a medievalist, philologist, and fabulist, as well as on Peter Jackson's film, including fan and industry studies. Moreover, while I conducted extensive empirical research for this project, that research itself depended very heavily on the past and current bibliographic and documentary work of fandom scholars and archivists, in addition to their expertise and recollections. It may be useful both for understanding this project—for instance, the context of details I look at—and for future studies that will, I hope, look further at the history of the fan cultures and industries around the book to review some of the major sources that provided the basis for my own primary research. It is in the nature of this study that several of the figures who conducted the initial work also appear later as part of what I describe and analyze.

Tolkien worked on Middle-earth for almost sixty years, from 1917, when he was convalescing, until his death in 1973. In all that time, he published very little, either of the Middle-earth material or of scholarship, outside of the two novels, *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (in three installments, 1954-55). There were

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<sup>10</sup> Tolkien sold the manuscripts of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and notes related to composition, to Marquette University in 1957.

a few shorter pieces of fiction, verse, and scholarship, including his edition of the *Ancrene Wyses*, and his lectures on *Beowulf* and “fairy stories,” characteristically composed as lectures rather than in the form of modern scholarly monographs. Additional writings began to trickle out starting only a few years after he died, beginning with the very long- and ardently-awaited (and never completed) *Silmarillion* (1977), a set of stories about the “First Age” of Middle-earth and Arda, the larger universe of which Middle-earth forms a part.<sup>11</sup> Considering that Tolkien is easily one of the best-selling authors of all time, it is surprisingly difficult to acquire standard or even moderately coherent sets of his work. *The Lord of the Rings*, by far Tolkien’s most widely sold work, exists in many slightly different versions. This partly reflects the history of the text and partly the peculiar market, which includes everything from completists who will purchase multiple versions to casual readers who pick up any cheap edition.

Tolkien was extremely detail-oriented, and he contended with proofreaders and editors at Allen & Unwin who sought to “correct” various choices he made with respect to language. In 1965, the crisis provoked by the unauthorized publication of an American paperback edition (the main event around which the following chapter revolves) led Tolkien and his publishers—now including the authorized paperback imprint Ballantine Press—to rush out a second edition which corrected some of the

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<sup>11</sup> The larger body of material about the invented world of Arda and Middle-earth is known as Tolkien’s “legendarium” or “the Silmarillion,” without italics; I use the italicized version of the title to avoid confusion for readers who aren’t familiar with Tolkien and the literature on him. An excellent brief overview of how the Middle-earth material took shape over the decades—including the posthumous work by Christopher Tolkien in preparing it for print (far more of Tolkien’s writing was published posthumously than during his life)—can be found in the opening chapter of Dimitra Fimi’s *Tolkien, Race, and Cultural History*; the book as a whole makes a useful and convincing argument about the evolution of the legendarium, and how writing *The Lord of the Rings* caused Tolkien to revise his way of thinking about “race,” religion, and fantasy (Fimi).

original errors and introduced new ones. Editions and versions proliferated over the decades, and, in the wake of Jackson's hugely successful films, a fiftieth-anniversary edition was commissioned that attempted, at least, thoroughly to rectify the text. Further corrections were made for the sixtieth-anniversary edition, to which page numbers and quotations from the novel in this project refer (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*). Following the editorial practice at *Tolkien Studies*, "citations will be by book and chapter as well as by page-number" because there are so many editions ("Conventions and Abbreviations").

The scholars assigned to prepare that edition, Wayne Hammond and Christina Scull, have spent decades working with Tolkien's manuscripts, papers, and all the many editions of his works, and have prepared several of their own. They used this expertise to put together some of the most important of the reference works available, *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide*, which has itself recently been expanded and reissued in a three-volume edition. This attempts an exhaustive factual commentary on sources, references, influences, composition, and on Tolkien's life; the first volume, the *Chronology*, offers a dense, 900-page account of Tolkien's activities and thoughts throughout his life, arranged chronologically. It quotes very extensively from his unpublished as well as published papers, recollections of colleagues, and more (Hammond and Scull, *Chronology*). Wayne Hammond, who works as a librarian at Williams College in Massachusetts, also prepared the standard bibliography of Tolkien's work, and he and Scull, a former museum curator, edited Tolkien's artwork as well (Hammond, *J. R. R. Tolkien*; Hammond and Scull, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Artist &*

*Illustrator*; Tolkien, *The Art of The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien*; Hammond and Scull, *The Art of The Lord of the Rings by J.R.R. Tolkien*).

In 1977, the professional biographer Humphrey Carpenter published the first major, and sole “authorized,” Tolkien biography, based on his interviews with Tolkien in the last years of his life and on access to many of his papers (Carpenter, *Tolkien*). Carpenter also edited the selected *Letters*, which remains the sole published source of Tolkien’s correspondence except for excerpts (Tolkien, *Letters*). The most influential subsequent source on Tolkien’s biography, besides Hammond and Scull, has been *Tolkien and the Great War*, by the journalist John Garth (Garth). Perhaps even more influential, in terms of critical scholarship, has been the work of medievalist Tom Shippey, who like Tolkien attended King Edward’s School, Birmingham and, like Tolkien, lectured first at Leeds before (like Tolkien) assuming a fellowship in Old English at Oxford, although he eventually moved to the U.S. (T. A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth*). As with Carpenter, a personal acquaintance with Tolkien lent Shippey’s work additional prestige in the peculiar sub-discipline of Tolkien studies, and his sensitivity to the medieval genealogies of Tolkien’s fiction inaugurated a dominant thread in Tolkien criticism. Medievalists prominent in the field include Michael Drouot and Verlyn Flieger, who, along with lay scholar Douglas A. Anderson (also the editor of *The Annotated Hobbit*), founded the journal *Tolkien Studies* in 2004. Drouot also edited *The J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, a large and heavy volume that concatenates the input of virtually every scholar in the field up until the date it was published (Drouot).

My focus, however, is less on Tolkien's text as such than on how to understand its ubiquity: how it became mass culture, what its massification and capitalization have meant for the people who have used it, and what popular practices it has enabled and shaped. The primary research on this project, therefore, has been extensive, consisting of both archival and ethnographic work and drawing heavily on foundational work by Tolkien fandom's own historians. For the following chapter, the chief of these is Sumner Gary Hunnewell, aka Hildifons Took, who has over the course of decades assembled a very extensive collection of fan-created materials, aiming for completeness and based on many interviews with fans who have/had been involved from the earliest days; Hunnewell himself has been active in Tolkien fandom in the U.S. since the 1970s, and appears in many fanzines from that period on. He has assembled materials from both sides of the Atlantic and from Australia, and he has allowed Marquette University, which has developed an extensive collection of Tolkien-related materials to complement the manuscripts, to create a microfilm archive of his collection. This microfilm constitutes the most compact collection of pre-internet Tolkien fanworks readily available to scholars. Hunnewell has also compiled an annotated bibliography of Tolkien fan works, which he has released online in the form of a series of documents covering the years through 1968 (S. G. Hunnewell, *Tolkien Fandom Review: From Its Beginnings to 1964*; S. G. Hunnewell, *Tolkien Fandom Review: 1965*; S. G. (aka H. T. Hunnewell, *The Yellowskin of Tuckborough: Tolkien Fandom Review 1966*; S. G. (aka H. T. Hunnewell, *The Yellowskin of Tuckborough: Tolkien Fandom Review 1967*; S. G. (aka H. T. Hunnewell, *The Yellowskin of Tuckborough: Tolkien Fandom Review 1968*). His

longer but less detailed bibliography, which includes materials up to the mid-1990s, is available online through the Fanac History Portal (S. G. Hunnewell, “From the Archives of Hildifons Took, Formerly of Tuckborough, A Collection of Publications by Fans and Students of the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien”).

The other large collection of Tolkien fanzines in the U.S. is housed at the Eaton Collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy at the University of California at Riverside. The fanzine portion of this collection is particularly rich in early Tolkien materials, because it was built from the bequests of four Los Angeles fans, three of whom were active in the earliest years of Tolkien fandom and one of whom—Bruce Pelz—was the publisher of the first Tolkien fanzine (*I Palantir*) and one of the founders of the first formal *Lord of the Rings* fan group, “The Fellowship of the Ring,” in 1960. These collections, while incredibly rich in early fanzines, are heavily weighted toward American publications.

I spent about two months in the U.K., one in Aotearoa New Zealand, and about two months in archives in the U.S., first in the Hunnewell fanzine collection at Marquette University in Milwaukee and then at the Eaton Collection at the University of California at Riverside. In the U.K., I also did research in the archives of the Tolkien Society and those of Taruithorn, the Oxford Tolkien Society. With the exception of the George Allen & Unwin Records at the University of Reading—to which I was directed by the advice of a long-time fan—all the archives I used, including those housed at universities, were themselves the work of fans (many of them fans whose names appear in this study) long before they had a home in any capitalized or professionalized institution. I am deeply indebted to their hard work.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE UTTERMOST WEST

Once *The Lord of the Rings* became mass culture, its footprint grew, through both investments and popular practices, until it achieved the ubiquity described in the previous chapter. The purpose of the present chapter, then, is to show how it became mass culture to begin with. Although the outlines of this history are widely understood, the granular processes are not, and the result, I argue, has been a mystification of the labor by which a mass cultural narrative was produced. Making *The Lord of the Rings* into mass culture meant generating not only the text but its audience, the social conditions for its mass circulation. An inexpensive paperback edition was a material prerequisite for this, but the paperback edition itself—published over ten years after the novel had first been issued—only appeared in the context of a social and cultural formation that had already embraced, analyzed, researched, and built a fan-base around the novel. Social affordances were required to make the book a candidate for mass culture, and these were neither prompted nor even anticipated by the publisher or author.

By 1965, when the paperbacks came out, science fiction fan culture (particularly in the United States, though also in United Kingdom and elsewhere) had a robust, decades-long tradition of exegesis, creativity, and amateur self-publication. Its core institution was an extensive network of fanzines, small magazines that were printed on inexpensive devices and circulated through the mail. Through these

magazines, a subset of science fiction fandom enthusiastic about Tolkien's book had, by 1965, brilliantly demonstrated not only how to read the peculiar text but how to be a *fan* of it, which the novel has always seemed to demand and which was key to its apotheosis as mass culture. Science fiction fanzines showed how to study it and play with it, how to write about it, work with it, and make it a social event. They had, by the time of the paperbacks, created remarkably sophisticated and varied materials, as well as attractive social structures, to support new readers and fans.

In the process, they had brought the book to the attention of Donald A. Wollheim, the publisher of the first paperback edition. Wollheim himself had been one of the earliest and most active members of science fiction fandom in the 1930s, and his paperback business catered to that community. He was well known in the fanzine world, not only as a purveyor of books but personally and by reputation, and he was extremely familiar with fanzine culture; indeed, he had been one of its architects. Moreover, by bringing out a paperback without securing legal rights, the Ace Books edition of 1965, Wollheim triggered a kerfuffle that, although it was widely noted by the mainstream press and commercial publishers, was literally mediated by science fiction fandom. In 1965-66, parties to a significant commercial dispute made their pitches in amateur fanzines rather than in court, and more than one national commercial magazine reported in detail on key fan-publishers.

As an organizing principle for tracking this rather complicated set of interactions, in order to sketch the whole dynamic at play, I trace the path by which Tolkien's novel reached a mass audience by following its progress through practices, institutions, and material conditions of *print* from the time the novel was first

published until it became a best seller in late 1966. By studying these institutions and processes, I seek to illuminate the relationship between popular practices and capital accumulation. Fan labor, I argue, was essential to generating the social value subsequently captured and regulated by the now enormous (and still-growing) set of private properties under the title of the novel. In that respect, commercial interests exercised a type of enclosure on fan activity, privatizing what they could of a potential cultural commons. At the same time, however, starting at the moment of the copyright controversy in 1965, fans of the book began working, without pay, to help reproduce proprietary regimes that, in the long run, would often disadvantage them and certainly exploit their work. Indeed, the Ace Books controversy, combined with the sense of a personal relationship to the author—such relationships were the norm in traditional science fiction fandom, resonating with a fantasy in all fan cultures—turned copyright protection into a signature concern for Tolkien fans and scholars.

The story of the novel's publication and first decade has been correctly understood in its outlines.<sup>12</sup> Having had a success with *The Hobbit* in 1937, Sir Stanley

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<sup>12</sup>Several accounts of the Ace Books paperback controversy are cited and discussed below. The article by Hammond and Scull in their *Guide* is thoroughly researched and reliable, if partisan, but the major biographies and scholarly fan sites also contain useful accounts of publication, a number of Tolkien's published letters discuss the copyright controversy, and a 2005 *Book History* article by Joseph Ripp (like Hammond—and also like Bruce Pelz, introduced below—a librarian) goes into the matter in depth, with particular comment on the state of U.S. copyright law at the time (Scull and Hammond; Carpenter, *Tolkien* 213–21; Edwards; Edmonds; Holford; Tolkien, *Letters*; Ripp 248–61). The only account I am aware of that seems to appreciate the role of science fiction fans appears in the opening paragraphs of an essay by Douglas Anderson (Anderson, Douglas A.). Anderson is an accomplished fan-scholar (I use this as a term of respect, following Matt Hills) who, for example, created *The Annotated Hobbit*; the gradations of “academic” and “fan” scholarship in relation to Tolkien's fiction are discussed in chapter four (Tolkien and Anderson, Douglas A.; Hills 2, 15–20). My argument about the relationship of fan labor to property responds, indirectly, to Abigail De Kosnik's arguments in favor of compensating fanfiction writers (De Kosnik, “Should Fan Fiction Be Free?”; De Kosnik, “Fandom as Free Labor”). Paying fan workers, a mixed blessing in my view, would not solve the problem.

Unwin (head of George Allen & Unwin, the London publishing house) immediately asked Tolkien for a sequel. Reviews of *The Hobbit* suggested that it represented the latest in a string of international bestsellers for children from British authors, and sales bore this out. Tolkien had plenty of writing about the Elves to offer Unwin, some of which would eventually go into the published version of *The Silmarillion*, but Unwin wanted more material about Hobbits. After many years of composition, most of it during the War, the “sequel” turned into a much longer and more serious book than Tolkien had at first envisioned. He hoped to publish *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* together, feeling that the later novel would seem incomplete without the background legends in the earlier material. After various negotiations, including a period in which Tolkien believed he would publish both books through a connection with a Catholic editor at William Collins, Allen & Unwin published *The Lord of the Rings*, in three successive volumes, in 1954 and 1955.<sup>13</sup> Due to the expense of typesetting and illustrations for the long and complicated text, they also exported printed sheets for Houghton Mifflin, in Boston, to bind and market in the U.S.. Printing pages in the U.K. for binding in the U.S. only allowed publishers to export 1500 copies without taking additional steps to secure American copyright, an arrangement—known as the “manufacturing clause” to the Copyright Act of 1909—designed to protect American printing concerns.<sup>14</sup> Uncertain of higher sales,

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<sup>13</sup> For the negotiations with Collins, see Hammond, *Descriptive Bibliography* 218; Edwards 232–33; R. Unwin *Remembrancer* 92–96.

<sup>14</sup> Hammond and Scull’s article summarizes the legal allowance as follows: “Under the law as amended in 1949 and in effect at the time of first publication of *The Lord of the Rings* an American publisher had six months in which to register *ad interim* copyright for a foreign work written in English, and then five years in which to typeset and print the book in the United States to qualify for full copyright; and in the meantime, no more than 1,500 copies printed abroad could be imported” (Scull and Hammond 2).

constrained by cost, and thinking they might adjust the arrangement later, Allen & Unwin simply exported 1500 sets of each of the first two volumes (R. Unwin 117–21 includes comments on this decision; see also S. Unwin, *The Truth about Publishing* on the manufacturing clause).

By the time the third volume was released, however, in late 1955, Allen & Unwin were exporting an initial shipment of 5000 copies to Boston, and they omitted the copyright notice on second impressions of the first two volumes and on all American copies of *The Return of the King*. By 1965, after ten years during which they sent new batches of sheets, at regular intervals, to the U.S., the readership for the unusual novel had grown significantly, and the question of why it had never been released in paperback became urgent. Donald A. Wollheim was, at the time, science fiction editor at Ace Books, a New York publisher of popular fiction in inexpensive paperbacks. Having heard from colleagues (or rivals) that Houghton Mifflin seemed to decline every offer on paperback rights for Tolkien's book, noticing the lack of copyright notice in the American hardcovers, and aware of the limits on importing sheets from Britain, he surmised that the publishers had mishandled the copyright in the U.S.. As he framed it—tendentiously—after his own edition was on the market, he believed that the novel was in the public domain in the U.S. and that Houghton hadn't sold the paperback rights because they didn't have them. Thus, rather than seeking to purchase rights, as other publishers had done, he simply brought out his own paperback edition, in the spring of 1965, and began selling Tolkien's gigantic novel for 75¢ a volume.

Tolkien and his publishers objected vehemently but did not bring legal action. Instead, they produced a rival, “authorized” paperback with Ballantine Books, appearing in October-December 1965. They were able to copyright this as a second edition thanks to new material, including some small revisions, an index (a very unusual feature for a novel, which had always been promised but never delivered), and a new Foreword. Uncertain of their legal standing, Allen & Unwin sought to crush the Ace edition in the market and regain control over the property through popular sentiment and commercial competition. In this, they enlisted Tolkien, who replied to letters from American fans by including “a brief note informing them that Ace Books is a pirate, and asking them to inform others” (quoted in R. Unwin 119). This strategy, begun as soon as the Ace edition appeared in May, was intensified in September, when he wrote a long and detailed letter to a Brooklyn teenager named Dick Plotz who had founded a network called the Tolkien Society of America (Tolkien, *Letters* 358–62).

The Ballantine edition cost twenty cents more per volume than Ace’s, but it was recognizably more appealing: the Ace Books copies had cramped print, weak binding, typographical errors, and, perhaps their most important deficiency, lacked most of the maps. Even for Ballantine, the rush to print had produced errors; most notably, the inscription on the One Ring, in Elvish characters (the Tengwar), was printed upside-down. Of the new material provided for the second edition, the most important element was the rather eloquent “Foreword to the Second Edition,” which became an indelible part of the book. It helped fix public understanding of the novel and its author in several respects, including his moody anti-modernism, his insistence

that the book was not allegorical, his pretense of “history,” and his remarks on war, including the disclosure that he had been deeply impacted by World War I.<sup>15</sup> Tolkien’s self-representation added depth to a message on the cover:

This paperback edition, and no other, has been published with my consent and co-operation. Those who approve of courtesy (at least) to living authors will purchase it and no other.

The Ballantine edition thus “authorized” the text in more than one way: buttressed by new interviews that Tolkien gave the press, it made the author more present. It began to establish Tolkien as a celebrity, someone his readers could cathect—wise, crotchety, playful, sad. Rayner Unwin seemed to believe, writing about the controversy in the 1990s, that Tolkien’s correspondence with American fans influenced the outcome of the contest with Ace (R. Unwin 119). Whether or not that was true, and I believe it was, Tolkien’s letters to readers reflect the interaction between the small, barely commercial scale of the affair, by comparison with the scale of the eventual property, and the culture of celebrity that accompanied the book’s massification.<sup>16</sup>

The dispute between the publishers was covered widely in the American press, at first in trade outlets like *Publisher’s Weekly* and in the book sections of daily newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Boston Globe*. But very soon, as Joseph Ripp puts it, “news of the conflict left the book pages and became news in earnest” (Ripp 257). Between August and October of 1965, news coverage of the affair

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<sup>15</sup> Fimi’s book is helpful on the origin and meaning of the “historical” framing; Garth’s is the standard text on Tolkien’s war experience.

<sup>16</sup> Tolkien felt the impact of the celebrity culture acutely, since fans would, besides sending him copious mail (often with gifts), also phone him at home in the middle of the night or take photos through his living room window. This has been documented extensively, including in biographies, the *Chronology*, and Rayner Unwin’s memoir.

appeared in, at least, the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Chicago Daily News*, the *National Observer*, and *The Saturday Review*.<sup>17</sup> Rayner Unwin would later claim that most editorial comment sided firmly with Tolkien and the publishers, but those I have read are, as a rule, fairly agnostic. “Adventures You May Have Missed,” in the *Los Angeles Times* in October 1965, makes the story about publishing in the international marketplace: “While not authorized, [the Ace edition] is not exactly unauthorized either ... If this is confusing, it is because of a strange void in the manufacturing clause of the federal copyright laws.” The column agrees with Wollheim that Tolkien’s book has fallen into the public domain, though it does call for reform of the law (Kirsch). A piece from August in the *Chicago Tribune* calls the situation “unbelievably confusing” but says that Ace has done “nothing illegal” and the whole issue rests on “technicalities” (Petersen). Organizations with a commercial stake, such as the Science Fiction Writers Association—whose *Bulletin* editorials Hammond calls the “most balanced” contemporary comments on the matter—are little more disinterested than Ace or Unwin (Hammond, *J. R. R. Tolkien* 105). In understanding the book’s passage from, in Bourdieuan terms, a restricted to a mass field of production, it’s important to recognize that journalistic coverage of the commercial dispute bled directly into renewed coverage of the books themselves, which were now over a decade old, and from there—as the audience they fed grew—into articles on the Tolkien “cult” or “craze,” increasingly folding *The Lord of the*

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<sup>17</sup> Hammond writes that “The bibliography of the literature is astonishingly long” (Hammond, *J. R. R. Tolkien* 105); at least partial overviews appear in Ripp’s article and in a piece by Richard Blackwelder in *Beyond Bree* in 1995, which Hammond and Scull find “long (but by no means exhaustive)” (Blackwelder; Haas; Petersen; Kirsch).

*Rings* into reporting on the “generation gap” and the “counter-culture.” This latter type of coverage began to appear in late 1966 and continued through the early seventies.<sup>18</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight, which takes account of the franchise to come, the quantity and depth of professional reporting on the dispute itself seems, if anything, limited; this was a risky moment for the property owners. If the Ace edition were allowed to flourish, and if no legal action were successful, the novel might indeed fall into the public domain in the U.S.; unlimited editions and derivative works might then be possible without profits accruing either to the author or to the original publishers, to say nothing of their heirs and stakeholders. The Unwin-Ballantine-Tolkien campaign was, however, successful in its immediate aims: Ace was left with remaindered copies of their edition in 1966, and Tolkien’s novel, twelve full years after the first volume was published in the U.K., reached the number one position on the newly-created *New York Times* Paperback Best Seller list in December, 1966.<sup>19</sup> In the longer term, the unresolved legal question colored the original contract for film rights, worked out with United Artists in 1969, which Rayner Unwin characterized as a “complicated and ambiguous document” (R. Unwin 130). Although an American court finally affirmed Tolkien’s copyright in 1992, the fact that its legal status was still in doubt when the initial media agreement was negotiated fueled the struggles over merchandising which would later arise between media interests (such as Warner Brothers), on the one hand,

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Peter Marin’s “Tripping the Heavy Fantastic” in the *New York Times* in 1971, though the genre really begins in the second half of 1966; see Ripp for an overview (Marin).

<sup>19</sup> The *New York Times* paperback list debuted in December, 1965, the same month the Ballantine edition was published. *The Lord of the Rings*, in the Ballantine edition, first appeared on it at number three the following September, after almost a year of competition with Ace (Justice 9).

and HarperCollins and the Tolkien Estate, on the other; the latest legal battle was only resolved in 2017 (E. Gardner).

The present chapter argues that the account above, although accurate, glosses over several important aspects of the history of this book, property, narrative franchise and imaginative domain in the process of reaching a mass audience. It's true that, by 1965, the readership of *The Lord of the Rings* had grown such that it could justify the expense of bringing out a paperback, but how had that happened? How were a range of committed readers drawn into taking on a very long novel, one belonging to no easily recognized commercial genre, and which had never been marketed for a mass audience? Why did it happen over a decade rather than in a rush of publicity? How had Allen & Unwin conceived of the book's market, and how had they misjudged it, creating the disjuncture between contexts of publication and reception exploited by Ace Books? Even assuming—correctly—that the restricted position of the author and publishers precluded their apprehending the priorities of a transnational mass market, that doesn't account for how a readership, specifically a fan community, constituted itself in the absence of marketing investments. What justified American paperback publishers, from a business perspective, in seeking to bring out a cheap edition? The economics of the proposition—the price of paper, for instance—had improved by the mid-sixties in the U.S. in comparison with the U.K. in 1954, but not enough to warrant creating a new edition of an exceptionally long, expensive-to-produce book without a

market.<sup>20</sup> The market existed, and was moreover very large, as became immediately apparent when Ace released their paperback. But where had it come from, and how had Wollheim known about it?

Admirers of the novel have attributed its growth to the merits of the text: it was good, and therefore it found its audience. All that remains, on this logic, is to explain its qualities, how it achieves its effects—to produce literary criticism or appreciations. Although the text does have some exceptional strengths, the problems with such an approach to its massification seem almost too obvious to mention; they certainly include the fact that literary merit and mass audiences are two very different things and that the route from one to the other, assuming they do overlap in this case, has still not been charted. A tougher-minded alternative to this model, primed for resistance from those who consider Tolkien’s novel “literature,” would be to classify it with products of the culture industry. As Adorno and Horkheimer argued many decades ago, and as scholars like Janice Radway have shown for novels through empirical research, much narrative material is produced through dynamic relationships between the desires (legitimate or otherwise) of consumers and complex, well-funded institutions (Horkheimer and Adorno; Radway). A very large number of novels are produced for a generic system and a known market, according to the demands of and often commissioned by media companies.

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<sup>20</sup>The Ace Books edition was “reset” (that is, the type was set anew) for all portions except the appendices, which were “photographically reprinted,” with the result that page references in the appendix went to the hardcovers and not to the edition in which they appeared (Hammond, *J. R. R. Tolkien* 104). Fanzines worked at once to provide keys that would help readers reconcile the text to the appendices.

But enough of the largest and most powerful narrative franchises, and specifically ones based on novels, diverge from these patterns to form an important category within the scope of mass culture. The novels they are based on supply very extensive narrative materials, at least as extensive as might be produced by a team of television writers and producers working for years, created in comparative isolation. *The Lord of the Rings*, given its protracted period of composition, the fact that its author had an institutional home independent from commercial publishing, and the length of time between publication and reaching a mass audience, is perhaps the most extreme case in the English-language market. But its history seems likely to have influenced not only the emergence of the modern fantasy genre but the general pattern for business interests converting the work of novelists into franchises.<sup>21</sup> The gradual, and still ongoing, industrialization of *The Lord of the Rings* coincides with the emergence of globalized and consolidated practices for managing narrative properties. Its history suggests that neither theoretical accounts of taste, critical celebrations, nor culture-industry models by themselves adequately explain how a story becomes mass culture. We should, I suggest, look for detailed evidence about this process. In the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, the evidence suggests something about where the value originated that became the capital that, in turn, shaped this mass participatory cultural formation from the seventies on. I argue that popular practices built the readership, and the mode of reading, that worked best for Tolkien's novel, and that commercial interests centralized and capitalized on these processes after the fact.

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<sup>21</sup> For Tolkien's influence on publishing genres, see Shippey; Lin Carter, a fanzine participant from the early sixties, would go on to edit Ballantine's Adult Fantasy reissue line from 1969 on (T. A. Shippey, *Author of the Century*; Carter).

One further point governs the argument and procedure of what follows, namely the role of print as a medium and of institutions of print as actors in the history. The novel as a genre, like journalism (and unlike other major literary forms), is tied historically to technologies and institutions of print (see for example Watt 196–200). In the mid-twentieth century, these technologies and institutions were diverse and accessible, not only via commercial publishers but through amateur networks, public institutions such as schools, and community or religious institutions. The institutions of print culture relevant to this chapter belong to three categories: commercial book publishers, commercial periodicals (journalism), and—the source of most of the primary research documented here—amateur self-published fanzines by and for the networks of people who considered themselves “science fiction fandom.” Each of these categories requires some definition.

The category of book publishers comprises two groups. The hardcover businesses that first published *The Lord of the Rings* had a significant stake in literary and intellectual prestige and ties to hyper-elite universities, specifically Oxford (for Allen & Unwin) and Harvard (for Houghton Mifflin).<sup>22</sup> Allen & Unwin, who published the novel in London, and their American partners for export, Houghton Mifflin in Boston, were quite distinct from the paperback publishers who supplied

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<sup>22</sup> Allen & Unwin first worked with Tolkien, in the thirties, via Susan Dagnall, an Oxford graduate who initially worked for them without pay; looking for help with a new edition of Clark Hall’s modern English *Pearl*, she got in touch with Elaine Griffiths, a student of Tolkien’s, who knew about and mentioned *The Hobbit* (R. Unwin 74). This is one of several examples both of Tolkien’s students acting as intermediaries with media businesses and of women who attended Oxford as important parts of his circle of correspondents—feminist ethnographer and fantasy novelist Naomi Mitchison, for example, first reviewed *The Lord of the Rings* for *The New Statesman* (Mitchison, “One Ring to Bind Them (Review: The Fellowship of the Ring by J.R.R. Tolkien)”). For Houghton Mifflin’s close connection with Harvard, see Dzwonkoski (Dzwonkoski). Rayner Unwin attended both universities, partly as a result of the War; see *Remembrancer*.

Tolkien's mass readership starting in 1965. These publishers, Ace Books and Ballantine Books, were both based in New York City, and both were young, founded after World War II.<sup>23</sup> Ace Books, though they published in several genres, had strong personal ties to science fiction fandom through Donald Wollheim, who was their co-founder and science fiction editor; fanzines often reported lists of Ace publications. Ian Ballantine, meanwhile, in the assessment of Austin Olney, the editor in charge of Tolkien's novel at Houghton Mifflin, had an especially strong and extensive network of ties to American bookstores.

The second category of print institution, commercial journalism (newspapers and magazines), was needed to amplify the massification of the text, as journalism always does in circulating mass culture. Outlets such as the *New Yorker*, the *New Republic*, *Seventeen*, and the *Saturday Evening Post* reported on the Tolkien craze ("the book that is in with the in-crowd at the colleges"),<sup>24</sup> on the publication controversy, and even on fans.

The third category, self-published non-commercial science fiction fanzines, needs a bit more explaining. Although far more informal than commercial periodicals, these fanzines had collectively supplied the framework for American science fiction fandom for more than thirty years when *The Lord of the Rings* appeared in paperback. Wollheim had been an active and influential participant in these networks since their earliest days in the 1930s. Though he had been a professional editor and publisher for over twenty years by 1965, and a professional writer for thirty, he still knew the

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<sup>23</sup> For the relationship between the War and the popularization of the paperback form, see Davis' *Two-Bit Culture* (Davis).

<sup>24</sup> The quotation is from a 1965 notice in *The Oregonian* reprinted in *Entmoot* 3.

fanzines and their culture well and was well known by them; his business and the non-commercial networks of fandom were inseparable.<sup>25</sup>

I argue in this chapter that the science fiction fanzines formed a key element in making *The Lord of the Rings* into mass culture. Science fiction *fandom*, just as much as the prose fiction its members consumed or the newspapers they read, was built around and through print. It was born in the early 1930s thanks to the availability of cheap periodicals, access to small scale printing apparatuses, and the postal service, and it constituted itself over the decades that followed through its network of self-published amateur fanzines and their intersections with commercial publication. The science fiction fanzines recorded fan activity around Tolkien's novel starting shortly after publication and nurtured a community of interest around it, encouraging people to read it, if only to qualify them to participate. They helped people find library copies of the "unholy expensive" book,<sup>26</sup> dwell on its pleasures, track its confusing details, speculate about unexplained references, and use Tolkien's invented world (including his languages) to define and consolidate a subcultural tendency. They also structured popular access, at least in imagination, to the most rarified centers of "legitimate" scholarship, via "Professor Tolkien," the eminent Oxford medievalist. Science fiction

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<sup>25</sup> During the 1960s, these fanzines were not the only independent, extra-professional print publications circulating in the U.S. and the U.K.; the "underground press" also proliferated around popular music and politics, in conversation with established alternative commercial outlets such as the *Village Voice*. In his history of this phenomenon, John McMillian doesn't talk about science fiction fanzines, writing only that "the first zines are thought to date from the 1930s, when science-fiction fans circulated obsessive letters and commentary about the books and comics they devoured" (McMillian 186; see also Duncombe). The long collective experience of science fiction fandom, however, may have helped launch the independent press around rock music, via the work of a teenaged Tolkien fanatic from the San Francisco peninsula named Greg Shaw, who went on, from his work on Tolkien, to an influential career in rock journalism and publishing.

<sup>26</sup> The phrase is from a 1959 letter by Marion Zimmer Bradley to Gertrude Carr; thanks to Hannah Mueller for the citation (Bradley, *Letter to Gertrude Carr*).

fandom, in some ways more than book publishers and journalists, converted *The Lord of the Rings* from an elite, oddball publication with a limited market to a mass cultural staple. This process was geographically mediated: while New York and Boston, with their publishing houses, remained closer to the English context of the novel's origin, the coast of California, perhaps the liveliest center for science fiction fandom at the time, became the central address for a fan culture around the book that instigated, rather than followed from, its identity as a mass cultural artifact.

The chapter that follows, though it focuses primarily on American science fiction fandom, especially in California, in the early to mid 1960s, draws this focus into conversation with the work of book publishers and commercial journalists. To do so, and to explain the function of fandom, requires a number of different sections. I begin with the culture of the publisher that brought *The Lord of the Rings* out in London and exported it via Boston, including an overview of publication and initial reception. After that, I introduce the earliest records of Tolkien fandom, from Los Angeles, and the analysis of these introduces some historical notes on the development of science fiction fandom starting in the early 1930s and the place of Donald Wollheim in it. I return to a consideration of the fanzines after 1960 before discussing Wollheim's introduction of the paperback edition in 1965. The final section of the chapter concerns the responses to that paperback and the transformations in Tolkien fandom that took place as it reached a mass audience, for the first time, in 1965-66.

### ***Ruskin House***

George Allen & Unwin, London, was a fairly distinguished, moderately-sized firm in Tolkien's world, as associated in their catalogue with liberalism, even the left, as Tolkien would become with conservatism. The head of the company at the time of publishing *The Lord of the Rings* was its founder, Sir Stanley Unwin. Rayner Unwin, his son, was the person who worked most closely with Tolkien and to whom a plurality of Tolkien's published letters are addressed.<sup>27</sup> Rayner Unwin privately published a memoir late in life, which went to print a decade after the company had been absorbed by a large conglomerate (HarperCollins) in the late 1980s.<sup>28</sup> In this volume, referenced below as the *Remembrancer*, he describes "the almost forgotten, incredible world of a reasonably-typical, medium-sized book-publishing firm" in the 1950s, "a style of book publishing that has, regrettably, almost totally vanished," an "editorially-led" firm that "published according to merit rather than market":

It was not so small an organization, nor run by such distinguished eccentrics, as The Hogarth Press about which Richard Kennedy has written so vividly, but I can recognize many of the quirks that he experienced twenty-three years earlier from my first years at Allen & Unwin. (R. Unwin ix, viii)

Throughout the volume, which includes two full chapters about Tolkien, Unwin stresses the scale at which the company operated, a concern that resonates with the question of how culture becomes "mass" as well as with the questions of geography that circulate through this account. Despite the *Remembrancer's* stress on personal

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<sup>27</sup> Both Rayner and Sir Stanley, along with Rayner's cousin Philip and brother David, published books about their professional recollections and about publishing generally, a parallel to the many histories and accounts of science fiction fandom published by its participants (S. Unwin, *The Truth about Publishing*; S. Unwin, *The Truth about a Publisher*; P. Unwin, *The Publishing Unwins*; P. Unwin, *The Printing Unwins*; D. Unwin, *Fifty Years with Father*).

<sup>28</sup> This happened shortly after their merger with an Australian firm, forming Unwin Hyman; a company still does business under the name Allen & Unwin in Australia and New Zealand.

ties, the global market was central to Unwin's business from the company's beginning, and figuring out how to cope with book exports in the context of decolonization and the U.S. market forms a major theme in the archive of Allen & Unwin's business papers from the postwar decades.<sup>29</sup>

Allen & Unwin, although they explicitly supported and invested in matters such as public education, relied equally on the distinction conferred by authors like John Ruskin and Bertrand Russell, both of whom combined populist appeal with academic bona fides and intellectual prestige. The book that first brought the publisher into contact with Tolkien in the 1930s, a modern English translation of *Beowulf* for which Tolkien contributed a preface, suggests the class profile in which Allen & Unwin traded (Wrenn). Translations of medieval English texts, as opposed to editions of the originals, suggest a readership beyond the scholarly. In 1925, Tolkien's edition of the Middle English text of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, prepared in collaboration with E.V. Gordon, who had been his colleague at Leeds, had been published with Oxford University Press; that edition had earned him the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professorship of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford. In the introduction to his later translation of *Sir Gawain* into Modern English (published posthumously due to his customary difficulty finalizing details), Tolkien remarks, with typical populism, that "translation ... is necessary if these poems are not to remain the literary pleasure only

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<sup>29</sup> The main archive of Allen & Unwin's business records is held at the University of Reading, and a great deal of the correspondence in the 1950s and early 60s concerns the decolonizing market and the opportunities it represents. Portions of the company's papers pertaining to Tolkien, likely the majority, were transferred to HarperCollins years ago, and that company declined to give me access due to the ongoing lawsuit. Negotiating the relationship with the U.S. market and the challenges of copyright in that regard is an ongoing theme in Stanley Unwin's earlier writing about the publishing business, also (S. Unwin, *The Truth about Publishing*).

of medieval specialists” (Tolkien, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo* 14). Likewise, in a 1965 letter to Rayner Unwin concerning the translation, he worries about how to address a mixed readership in the introduction, but recognizes the market as non-specialist: “The main target is, of course, the general reader of literary bent with no knowledge of Middle English” (Tolkien, *Letters* 364).

The company had been formed out of the remains of two late-Victorian publishing houses, and was literally related (that is, through family connections) to two other publishing and printing ventures from the nineteenth century. Understanding this history, and the business culture it cultivated and reflected, illuminates the confrontation that would arise with the U.S. paperback market. The company’s most famous antecedent, George Allen and Sons, belonged to John Ruskin and published his works; George Allen had been a working-class employee whom Ruskin trained in printing and publishing, who took over management of his catalogue. Stanley Unwin bought the remains of the then-struggling firm in 1914 (Ruskin had died in 1900), and their London headquarters, Ruskin House in Museum Street, became the new publisher’s address. “Ruskin House” thus appears on the title pages of the original editions of *The Lord of the Rings*, supplying an aesthetically cohesive form of branding for Tolkien’s novel; it attaches the comparative prestige of Victorian medievalism to what looks retrospectively like a mass cultural product.

Allen & Unwin was equally descended from the Victorian publisher Swan Sonnenschein, which had a reputation for publishing works whose radicalism dwarfed Ruskin’s socialism: they published the first English language edition of *Capital*

volume I, edited by Engels (Mumby and Stallybrass 25–27).<sup>30</sup> At least as important as these two firms, as precursors to Allen & Unwin, was the family printing business. Stanley Unwin had bought the stock of both companies described above, and traded on the cultural capital associated with Ruskin in particular, but the funds with which these purchases were made and the expertise with which the business was run came from a century-old printing concern known at that point (1914) as Unwin Brothers. Finally, T. Fisher Unwin, Sir Stanley's uncle, also began a publishing house in the early 1880s that published a slate of liberal and intellectual icons including Conrad, Yeats, Somerset Maugham, and Olive Schriener, author of *The Story of an African Farm*. T. Fisher Unwin was, moreover, married to Jane Cobden, a suffragist, Liberal politician, anti-imperialist, and member of first London Council.

Allen & Unwin itself was founded on August 4, 1914, the same day on which Germany declared war on the U.K.. Stanley Unwin focused from the start on the international market, and he was a pacifist. His first and most important author was Bertrand Russell, whom he approached while imprisoned for his opposition to the war in 1916, the same year that Tolkien was on the Somme. Russell never forgot this gesture, and went on to publish forty books with the company. In his memoir, Rayner Unwin stresses the importance to twentieth-century book publishers of having a loyal, well-known author who can provide stability in difficult periods and underwrite risks:

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<sup>30</sup> The story of this edition is remarkable and belongs in a book-historical project related to the present one. What makes it relevant to my argument is that, while members of the Unwin, Sonnenschein, and Allen families testified to the intellectual enthusiasms and personal values that informed their work as publishers—including liberal-minded enthusiasm for measures from which they stood to profit, such as public education and other supports for the circulation of print materials, at least in the case of the Unwins—Marx and Engels were motivated by a different order of concern, namely furthering the cause of universal human emancipation by circulating Marx's research and writing. That work was, of course, hampered by censorship as well as commercial and legal exigencies of the transnational market, not unlike those documented so vividly in publishers' memoirs about Tolkien.

I, and all my predecessors, were each blessed with just such an author, who came to us early in his career, stayed loyally with us, and became our friend. George Allen had Ruskin, my father had Bertrand Russell, my cousin Philip had Thor Heyerdahl,<sup>31</sup> and I had J. R. R. Tolkien. (R. Unwin 71)

Tolkien, for Rayner Unwin, was “my author,” from childhood till long after Tolkien’s death, through his relationship with Tolkien’s children and the Estate (72-73). The discourse of “friendship,” which rhymes with the inheritance of intellectually prominent writers and ties to Oxford, would become critical to the debate over the American paperbacks.

Allen & Unwin published *The Lord of the Rings*, almost twenty years after they published *The Hobbit*, as three separate books: *The Fellowship of the Ring* (July 1954); *The Two Towers* (November 1954); and *The Return of the King* (October 1955). This was the outcome of a “long and difficult period of production” (Hammond, *J. R. R. Tolkien* 88). Rayner Unwin, who oversaw the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* and its aftermath for his father’s company, warned Tolkien in 1952 that “the capital outlay will be terrific” (quoted in Hammond, *J. R. R. Tolkien* 87). The book was exceptionally expensive to produce, particularly for a novel, and the market was uncertain. In addition to the difficulty of classifying the book, most British consumers were short of cash in the post-war years. Paper was expensive after the war, especially in 1952-54, and the novel was extremely long; it was also illustrated, with maps, inscriptions, drawings, and invented scripts. The text contained alphabets for which no type existed. The complications that arose reflect the mixture of cutting-

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<sup>31</sup> Heyerdahl was the leader of the Kon-Tiki expedition, a massive exploratory voyage in the South Pacific in 1947. His account of it was a bestseller for Allen & Unwin throughout the late forties and early fifties

edge and anti-modern elements in Tolkien's work. Runes, for example, were historically a form of writing using straight lines, designed that way for carving into stone (Page). That is how Tolkien represents his invented version (the "Cetar"), "carving" them on Balin's tomb, for instance. Reproducing original alphabets on paper, however, while it seems natural with contemporary technology, was outside the normal range of mechanical reproduction in 1952. Tolkien also wanted at least occasional bits of color, such as red for the Ring's inscription, and had no clear understanding of what was involved from the perspective of the printer. Much of his work couldn't be reproduced at a tolerable cost, and some—the faux-burned pages he created for the Moria episode—couldn't be reproduced at all (see R. Unwin; Carpenter, *Tolkien*).

Allen & Unwin thought it quite likely that they would lose money on the project. Stanley Unwin famously wrote to his son from Tokyo to say that "*if you believe it is a work of genius, then you may lose a thousand pounds*" (R. Unwin 99). In the *Remembrancer*, Rayner Unwin reproduces the whole text of his reader report to his father on the first installment (Book I) in 1947. At that time, he called it "a weird book" and, though he was enthusiastic, closed by saying that "Quite honestly I don't know who is expected to read it," explaining the features that might inhibit children and adults respectively; he reflected later that he had been "baffled to define it by category or market" (R. Unwin 91). The initial estimate for the cost of printing the manuscript was seventy shillings per copy, many times the usual cost for a novel and ordinarily prohibitive for a single book. The motive for publishing a costly book without knowing who might constitute its audience, knowing that they would need to

locate or construct a readership, was intellectual cachet. To fortify the company against losses, Tolkien received no advance under the terms of his contract, only a one-half share of profits once costs had been covered, an unusual arrangement in modern publishing. As a result, however, the expense of producing the books was one of the factors that ultimately made Tolkien's heirs so monstrously wealthy.

Over and above the technical difficulties of printing the book, Tolkien was a difficult author to work with, for a variety of reasons including health problems (see Edwards 225). The process was burdensome for him as well. For example, in addition to the scholarly care with which he had devised hundreds of original proper names, which posed intrinsic challenges for typesetters, Tolkien had modified the conventional spelling of seemingly ordinary English words. Some of these modified usages, such as "elven" or "dwarves," appear again and again in the text, which led to Tolkien, who had been on the editorial staff of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, overruling the compositors' "corrections" line by line. He had typed out the manuscript himself, "using two fingers" because he didn't know how to touch type, and sitting on his bed, since there was no room on his desk. All this effort produced only a single typescript, which he was reluctant to entrust to the mail (Tolkien, *Letters* 132–37; Carpenter, *Tolkien* 213–21; R. Unwin 90–97).

Throughout his career, both in the academy and as a writer of fiction, Tolkien stubbornly—and apparently unconsciously—resisted the rules of institutional life. He always needed, and was granted, almost unlimited time to adjust the products of his thoroughly unalienated labor. He was an ardent anticommunist, easier because he was largely free to work as if he didn't have a boss. "A single word or concept could halt

all progress,” remembers Rayner Unwin; even the process of getting *The Hobbit* into print, which hardly touched on the legendarium, made for a long and complicated history of delays (R. Unwin 113; 74–79). Tolkien’s publishers, like his colleges, gave him a kind of leeway that would not have been possible under other commercial configurations. Tolkien’s many interventions seeking to control the fate of his creations after publication, in matters of translation and illustration of international editions, for example, were inconsistent with normal business practice under capitalist relations of production. Ironically, his way of working eventuated in a product of staggering and, relatedly, durable commercial value. His protracted and extreme care with the binding and dustjacket of *The Hobbit*, for example, which he designed and painted himself, produced a saleable artifact that “far from lacking craft, must now be almost unique amongst book jackets in having survived the vicissitudes of fashion unchanged for almost sixty [now eighty] years” (R. Unwin 77).

Bafflement about the genre of Tolkien’s writing was very real. The reader report on the *Silmarillion* appears in the *Remembrancer*, quoted at length also in Hammond’s *Bibliography* (Hammond, *J. R. R. Tolkien* 217). He writes that he doesn’t know if he’s reading a medieval document in translation: “I don’t even know whether this is a famous Geste or not, or, for that matter, whether it is authentic.” To offset the risk, Unwin marketed *The Lord of the Rings* as a “prestige book.” This was Rayner’s phrase, from a letter recommending publication to his father (quoted in Tolkien, *Letters* 140; see also Carpenter, *Tolkien* 214; Cantor 208). Aspects of the novel’s reception reflected this campaign. In the Netherlands, for example, the first translation appeared in Dutch in 1956, bearing a cover with notes about Dokter Tolkien’s

scholarly credentials and a pop-modernist graphic of the Great Eye in Flames. A few years later, a Dutch artist enamored with the novel, Cor Blok, created more than a hundred paintings based on it, which were the subject of a special exhibition at a major modern art museum, the Gemeentemuseum in the Hague, in 1961 (Blok and Collier).

Because of Tolkien's academic credentials and the enduring popularity of *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* was extensively and prominently reviewed. There was no consensus about its merits, although the reviews were mainly positive. In the *New York Times*, W. H. Auden—who became Tolkien's frequent correspondent—showered it with admiration; in *The Nation*, Edmund Wilson heaped angry derision on it in a column that claimed he had read it aloud to his son over a series of bedtimes (Auden; Wilson). A very early issue (1970) of *The Journal of Popular Culture* featured a census of its reception that counted five negative reviews and at least twenty-five more or less positive ones, including many that were glowing (Beatie). As late as the summer of 1961, however, Philip Toynbee could write a column in *The Observer* about the conundrum presented when reviewers are deeply divided about a book and use *The Lord of the Rings* as his first, governing example. He optimistically declared its demise:

There was a time when the Hobbit fantasies of Professor Tolkien were being taken very seriously indeed by a great many distinguished literary figures. Mr. Auden is even reported to have claimed that these books were as good as *War and Peace*; [...] today those books have passed into a merciful oblivion. (Toynbee)

The “weird book” was looking for its audience, and a range of social cues, affiliations, and expectations would need to circulate in order to build it.

Allen & Unwin considered the possibility of a paperback *Hobbit* in this period, and their reasons for rejecting the idea—twice—illustrate the company’s business profile. When *The Return of the King* was released in the U.S. in 1956, it was extensively reviewed; this had been anticipated, hence the initial import order for 5000 sets of sheets. On seeing this, Collins (the Scottish publisher with whom Tolkien had flirted with about publishing *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* in 1950-52)<sup>32</sup> approached Tolkien about creating a paperback version of *The Hobbit* under their Fontana imprint. Allen & Unwin, who had no paperback line themselves, advised Tolkien against this, arguing that the “advantage was not unmixed,” even if overall sales increased: paperbacks cut into sales for hardcovers, which were still strong. Again, around 1960, Puffin Books, another British firm and “the undisputed leader in children’s paperbacks,” also approached them about a paperback *Hobbit*: they proposed creating a limited license—35,000 copies, no reprints—to test the market. Rayner Unwin told Tolkien that the company had “a sort of hesitation which we cannot explain in entirely commercial terms about letting *The Hobbit* go into a cheaper edition, even on a limited license.” He describes this as an “attitude,” “the reaction of an admittedly conservative publisher” (R. Unwin 110).

In the United States, Allen & Unwin contracted with Houghton Mifflin in Boston to import the printed sheets, bind them, and distribute the books as Tolkien’s U.S. publishers. They would do this immediately on publication, although they declined the elegant covers Tolkien had designed and opted for more commercial-looking, almost child-oriented, artwork (see R. Unwin 87, 91–93). Although, like

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<sup>32</sup> Collins was purchased by NewsCorp in the late eighties and merged with Harper & Row to form HarperCollins, which ultimately acquired *The Lord of the Rings* by absorbing Unwin Hyman.

Unwin, their initial understanding of the market was uncertain, they found it successful enough that they imported further printings about a dozen times, through 1963; it seems likely that they may have begun printing the book themselves after that last shipment (see Anderson, Douglas A.). The initial print runs for the U.S. markets, for the first two volumes, were 1500 and 1000 copies, respectively, but for the third volume Allen & Unwin shipped 5000 copies to Houghton Mifflin, without a copyright notice (Hammond, *J. R. R. Tolkien* 101–02).

Correspondence between the two firms indicates that they were well aware of the problem with copyright from the very beginning. A letter from Allen & Unwin (stamped “Chairman,” but presumably from Rayner) to Houghton Mifflin dated October 2, 1953 formally proposes exporting printed sheets, due to the “high cost of typesetting these three volumes,” and pursuing ad interim copyright (S. Unwin, *From A&U to HM (“Dear Sirs”) Proposing Ad Interim Copyright*; Brooks; P. C. Smith, *Cable to W N Beard, Allen & Unwin, from Priscilla C Smith, Houghton Mifflin Manufacturing Department*). It’s clear that, at first, they intended to adhere to the goal of the law and treat this as temporary, since Unwin writes that “although the book is unlikely to be an immediate best-seller, it has every possibility in our judgment of becoming a permanent seller” (S. Unwin, *From A&U to HM (“Dear Sirs”) Proposing Ad Interim Copyright*). The next month, Paul Brooks at Houghton replies that the book presents “a tricky publishing problem, but I have no hesitation whatever in starting off with the maximum number of sheets which will enable us to retain the copyright” (Brooks). The first impression, records show, was shipped to Boston in July, 1954, the same month in which it was released in the U.K.. By the time of the

second impression, however, December 10, 1954, Priscilla Smith of Houghton's Manufacturing Department writes to order 1500 more sets of sheets (for *Fellowship*), with a cover letter saying that "You will note that the title page will not have a date, etc. since the ad interim copyright we took out on the initial importation of 1500 is now void since 1500 is the maximum amount that can be covered by copyright"; the order form notes that the title page should bear no date, and that reverse of title "should carry statement giving country of origin // no other information should be given on copyright page since we cannot use ad interim copyright now" (P. C. Smith, *Cover Letter and Order Form for Second Impression FotR (from HM to A&U)*).

There were a number of further impressions, with around one or two thousand more copies of each volume shipped to Boston at intervals over the next decade; according to the meticulous research of amateur Tolkien bibliographer Neil Holford, perhaps around 13,000 copies of the full novel had been exported to the United States by 1965 (Holford).<sup>33</sup> It's important to note that many of these copies were held by libraries and represent far more readers. Indeed, facilitating the circulation of library copies, as well as paperback copies as they became available, was one of the services supplied for their readers by the fanzines; the very first issue of *Niekas*, for example, a fanzine discussed in detail below, supplied an inventory of all the copies of Tolkien's book in the New York Public Library system in 1961 (Meškys, *A.Meritt's Fantasy*

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<sup>33</sup> I find it somewhat difficult to trust the available data on the hardcover printings. Rayner Unwin says, for example, that 1500 initial copies of *The Two Towers* (volume 2) went to Houghton; the 1000 figure comes from other sources who worked in the Allen & Unwin archives. Douglas Anderson gives close to double the general estimate based on those archives, however, for the number of copies in print in the U.S. in 1965; Holford makes it 13,000 and Anderson estimates 25,000. This is based in large part on Anderson's conviction that Houghton was printing it themselves. However, while he names the Houghton Mifflin archives in the text of this article, he doesn't give references to it and gives no documentation for this estimate (Anderson, Douglas A.) I consulted the Allen & Unwin archives myself but was unable to make an assessment.

*Magazine (Aka Niekas #1) 3*). Already, the presence of books was not enough, even on library shelves: mechanisms to get them into the hands of readers were already at work, supplied by fans in the course of producing additional fans. The structure of the system by which this occurred requires an introduction. Moreover, the other major publishing figure in this history, Donald Wollheim, was so deeply embedded in science fiction fandom, in its earliest period, that his history and the history of science fiction fandom are impossible to disentangle.

### ***First Fandom***

Virtually all accounts date the birth of science fiction fandom to around 1930, following the emergence of cheap periodicals specializing in speculative fiction. In 1926, Hugo Gernsback, an immigrant battery-inventor with a host of ideas about how science might change the future, began publishing *Amazing Stories* in New York (Knight; Moskowitz).<sup>34</sup> Speculative popular fiction, often with a futuristic bent, had been around for decades; in a strategy that would prefigure the dispute over *The Lord of the Rings*, Gernsback first populated *Amazing Stories* by reprinting stories from across the Atlantic, by authors like H. G. Wells and Jules Verne, without worrying about copyright. It worked so well that Gernsback, along with another editor named John W. Campbell, Jr., quickly launched several other titles—*Astounding Stories*, *Wonder Stories*, *Astounding Science Fiction*, and so on. Whatever the content, as

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<sup>34</sup> *Weird Tales* launched in 1923 and, per Moskowitz, initially published a mixture of science fiction, fantasy, and supernatural stories; the dominant presence of figures including H. P. Lovecraft in *Weird Tales* and the emergence of other magazines rapidly made them all more specialized. The Hugo Award, bestowed by the World Science Fiction Convention, is named for Hugo Gernsback.

Damon Knight puts it, “It was the vehicle that mattered” (Knight 2): the “vehicle” was inexpensive periodicals, which could be purchased for very little, read thanks to public education, circulated through the public postal system, and, potentially, self-published.

Allen & Unwin, as we have seen, were not an academic press but a commercial publisher whose trade relied on prestige. Hugo Gernsback, by contrast, relied on approachability, on building a reading public almost opposed to the literati, for which a commitment to science and futurity would be definitional; unsurprisingly, the national, class, and ethnic makeup of his readership was quite different. The cheap print technologies used by his and similar magazines could, moreover, be taken a step further by anyone with access to a mimeograph machine or a spirit duplicator. That step, which produced “science fiction fandom” and the culture of science fiction more generally, introduced the cultural possibilities of self-publication and the burdens it placed on participants, quite distinct from what commercial venues, either genteel or pulp, could supply. The conditions for this wave of popular literary production—literacy, the post office, the subway, cheap technologies for printing—were all widely available and most were public. The institutions of publication, debate, and sociality they created nurtured figures, such as Isaac Asimov or Donald Wollheim, who would reach a much wider audience.

Science fiction fandom developed rapidly once science fiction magazines began to circulate. *Amazing Stories*, and the other magazines that soon followed, solicited material from their readers and included addresses in their letter columns, so that “by 1930 ... readers began to discover each other through the letter columns of the magazines” and to form, at first, “correspondence clubs” (Knight 3). Within cities,

especially New York and Los Angeles, fans began by writing to one another and then meeting, but self-publication also enabled more dispersed participants to participate. While New York is discussed in some detail below, the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society (LASFS), which became central for Tolkien fandom, was founded in 1934, and other science fiction groups, many with publications, were formed around the country; even individuals living in isolation from other fans became part of the fanzine circuit. Henry Warner, Jr., who wrote two of the most important and comprehensive histories of fandom, was a recluse who lived in Maryland and participated in fandom almost entirely through print.

The new fanzines might include fiction but were mostly for secondary comments, news, and gossip. Live gatherings were immediately reported in the amateur press; fanzines worked in concert with club meetings, conventions, and “fan houses” (living spaces housing groups of fans), and very close ties, such as marriages, were common. By the mid-1930s, dispersed fans began to hold regional conventions, and in 1939 the first World Science Fiction Convention (“Worldcon”) was held in New York. Except for three years during World War II, Worldcon has been held annually ever since. The scale of science fiction fandom in the fanzine era, measured by attendance as conventions, was extremely small. The first Worldcon (1939) hosted about two hundred participants; this rose only to five hundred by 1960 and fourteen hundred in 1968. According to the 1959 edition of the *Fancylopedia*, “In the thirties there were perhaps one or two hundred fans at a given time; by 1948, maybe a thousand; today there may be as many as five thousand in all parts of the world.” And yet, while tiny, the global sensibility of science fiction fandom—largely populated by

migrants—was apparent at mid-century: “Anglofandom,” says the 1959 *Fancyclopedia*, “at times has surpassed the Amerifans in activeness,” and it goes on to count “Canadian fandom,” the “small but active Anzac fandoms,” and “fans outside the English-speaking bloc,” who “have increased tremendously in numbers since World War II” (Speer and Eney). In 1957, Worldcon was held in London, the first time it had been held outside of North America. At the convention, Tolkien was awarded a prize for *The Lord of the Rings*, which he accepted in person; a story about the aftermath of this event appears in chapter six. The 1958 Worldcon, held in Los Angeles and known as SoLAcon, was the site of the first recorded Tolkien fan activity.

The development of science fiction fandom into a community and a set of institutions that could support the evolution of a major literary genre depended on larger affordances, in this case of the mid-twentieth century American economy. It had what might appear as a quasi-parasitic function. Just as Tolkien and the Inklings depended on the resources of the university and the patriarchal and imperial structures that gave them the time, space, education, intellectual stimulation, and books their populist projects required, for postwar science fiction fans, the resources revolved to a large extent around public investment and the U.S. military. Relative prosperity, security, and decreased domestic income inequality, the products both of imperial dominance and of modest and uneven enhancements to the power of the working class via institutions such as unions, translated into free time and access to the means of cultural production for quite a broad range of participants. Many found themselves with access to public institutions of intellectual life such as libraries and, after the war,

tertiary education. Cold War investments in knowledge production, ideology, and infrastructure benefitted both the humanities (via, for instance, a curricular emphasis on “English”) and science and technology (often in the form of military investments.)

Donald Wollheim has a reputation as a shabby villain among some of Tolkien’s admirers: some fans regard the Ace Books edition as the product of “piracy” (though the more scrupulous refrain from using this legally defined term), theft, or, at the least, of appalling rudeness and disrespect. Partly this reaction indexes the cultural gaps and missed connections that necessarily inhabit a mass cultural phenomenon, and that may seem particularly jarring with respect to a narrative such as *The Lord of the Rings* that works to convey an impression of wholeness and that romanticizes the small scale and the pre-modern. To understand Wollheim and his role in this history, however, one has not only to be ready to bracket his cultural difference from Tolkien but to account for his decades-long contributions to the genre of science fiction and popular literary culture in the twentieth century. The *New York Times*, at various points, called Wollheim “the dean of science fiction editors” and “the creator of the science-fiction paperback” (Schwartz; “Donald A. Wollheim, Publisher, Dies at 76”). In 2016, R. E. Fulton published a study of Wollheim’s influence on the paperback industry in *Book History*, that avoids *The Lord of the Rings* controversy but analyzes Wollheim’s significant influence on the intersection of science fiction as an emergent genre and the paperback as a form, describing his status in the science fiction community as “semi-legendary” (Fulton).

He was born in 1914, the year that Allen & Unwin was founded. His father was a medical doctor, and he grew up in a four-story brownstone on East 79<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan. As a child, he told an associate, he had an entire floor of the brownstone to play in, spreading out toys and books and creating imaginary worlds, a similar story to that told by C. S. Lewis about “staking out” an attic in the large rambling house, filled with books, that his father built near Belfast (Knight 10; C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 9–12). Gernsback published Wollheim’s first short story in a magazine called *Wonder Stories* in 1934 but failed to pay the promised ten dollars (Fulton 353). In a move that would model a life-long pattern of initiative, leadership, combat, and motivation for autonomy as a publisher, Wollheim wrote to other contributors who appeared in the same issue, found that they, also, had not been paid, and organized a few of them to hire a lawyer and sue. After settling out of court, he followed up by sending Gernsback another story under a pseudonym, and then publicizing the result when Gernsback again published it without paying (Knight 10–11).

Early descriptions of Wollheim are numerous and colorful; all the historians of first fandom wrote about him extensively. A member of his circle named Doris Baumgardt wrote a series of impressionistic sketches in 1938 in which she described Wollheim as “a gnome whose prototype can be found in a brooklyn department store window ... nodding a wooden head and rolling large unappreciative eyes in the general direction of nowhere” (Knight 33–34). Jack Speer called him “a master of bitter rhetoric, at piling up evidence” (Speer n.p.). Speer’s portrait is tinged with antisemitism in a way that resonates, if indirectly, with cultural tropes that colored the battle for property as late as the 1960s:

In nationality, he is a German Jew. He has lived all his life in New York, and ... knows little of anything but New York City and New York City thoughts ... His physical appearance lends itself readily to caricature ... [with] his protruding teeth and weak chin. A person who disliked him could easily be cruel, and this drove him to return deeper hatred. (Speer n.p.)

Knight, by contrast, addresses his appearance in terms of business: “He dressed conservatively; when the weather was threatening he wore his rubbers and carried an umbrella” (Knight 5).

Wollheim’s long-term impact on science fiction fandom, and on science fiction itself, came principally from his work as a publisher. Even before going into book publishing, Moskowitz argues that he basically invented the amateur press association (APA)—he at least popularized it for science fiction fandom—when, in partnership with John Michel, he designed the Fantasy Amateur Press Association (still extant) in the 1930s (Moskowitz 112–15). In an APA, a network of participants individually produce pages that are sent to a central editor who compiles and distributes them in scheduled mailings, though members who publish fanzines themselves can (or could, during the fanzine era) distribute the fanzine to the APA membership in fulfillment of their obligations. The important thing about an APA is that everyone has to contribute. It functions, in other words, very much like social media; the aggregated publications, though they lacked the coherence and charisma of fully edited fanzines, were crucial to maintaining fandom’s social structure for decades.

Wollheim began his career in paperbacks at Pocket Books, where he edited the first anthology of science fiction in book form, *The Pocket Book of Science Fiction* (the 214<sup>th</sup> Pocket Book), in 1943; Knight and Fulton note that this was the first

appearance of the words “science fiction” on the cover of a book (Knight 181; Liptak; Fulton). His influence on the genre continued at Avon Books, from 1947, and at DAW Press after 1972, but it centered on his two-decade career at Ace Books, which he founded in partnership with Aaron Wyn, a colleague from Avon, in 1952. Ace’s signature was the “Ace Double”: “Each volume contained two short novels, with a book on each side, flipped 180 degrees from the other,” according to Andrew Liptak (Liptak). In the words of Ursula Le Guin—one of several major science fiction writers, also including Samuel Delaney and Philip K. Dick, who published major works with Ace Doubles early in their careers—“two short novels by two different authors in one paperback cover, like two trains running towards each other on one track” (Le Guin, “Introduction”). For the first year, the Ace Doubles alternated between Westerns and mysteries, but starting in 1953 Wollheim began his series of science fiction doubles, and he published as many as two doubles (four short novels) every month by the 1960s. He habitually paired a newer or lesser known writer with an established one in order to find readerships for new writers. His history and intimacy with the science fiction fandom community was important to the great success of this project, and to *The Lord of the Rings*.

To understand how Wollheim’s career came to intersect with Tolkien, therefore, it is necessary to look at the 1930s, when he was at the very center of what came to be known in science fiction circles as “first fandom” and built a reputation as much for obstreperousness as for talent. A group of fans calling themselves the Futurians coalesced around Wollheim in those years, and a startling number of them became prominent writers and editors, including (besides Wollheim) Isaac Asimov,

Frederik Pohl, and Cyril Kornbluth. Their history was marked by intimacy and drama. They lived in “communal dwellings” (as, later, did the first group of Tolkien fans in Los Angeles, including Bjo Trimble, Ted Johnstone, and Bruce Pelz); “seven marriages and five divorces took place” within the group, and it fell apart when Wollheim, accused of blackmailing another member into breaking up with his wartime lover, filed an unsuccessful libel suit against his friends (Knight viii, 173).

The original, organizing members of the Futurians—Wollheim, John B. Michel, Pohl, and Robert “Doc” Lowndes—first met by attending meetings of the Science Fiction League in Brooklyn. Under Michel’s and Pohl’s influence, however, they soon began meeting, and publishing out of, the offices of the Young Communist League in Flatbush. Recalling the mid-1930s in a later conversation with Damon Knight, Frederick Pohl’s comments on the blend of science fiction and socialism that became known in fandom as “Michelism” show how the complex of self-historicizing, hardship, and communism converged around, and were underwritten by, the primary material processes of and conditions for self-publication.<sup>35</sup> Michel, Pohl said, brought the young men who would form the Futurians to

a thing called the Flatbush YCL [Young Communist League], which met in a second-floor ballroom on Kings Highway in Brooklyn. And I discovered that they published a mimeographed branch magazine, and that was my main interest—putting out fan magazines—so I joined up, and I edited the *Flatbush YC Yell* for a while. (Knight 8)

All of them had histories shockingly damaged by the poverty of the Great Depression and by serious illnesses (whooping cough, diphtheria, scarlet fever, tuberculosis) whose importance would fade with advancements in medicine within a generation. Of

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<sup>35</sup> For an analysis of Michelism’s relationship to the Popular Front see Sean Cashbaugh (Cashbaugh)

the group, Lowndes, who was homeless for a significant part of the thirties, was the poorest, and Wollheim was the best off. But even Wollheim, speaking of his embrace of communism during the years when he was close to Lowndes, Michel, and Pohl, said that “The problem was that you had no future ... there were absolutely no jobs, no openings, no anything ... you knew what you wanted to do, but there wasn't a chance in the world” (Knight 6–10).

In October of 1937, at the third Eastern Science Fiction Convention in Philadelphia, Wollheim read out a speech by Michel (Michel himself had a severe speech impediment). This speech, later printed and circulated through science fiction fandom under the title “Mutation or Death,” called on science fiction to support “every force seeking the advancement of civilization along strictly scientific and humanitarian lines,” concluding with an invocation of “the heroic defenders of Madrid and Shanghai” and proclaiming “that science fiction should by nature stand for all forces working for a more unified world, a more Utopian existence, the application of science to human happiness, and a saner outlook on life” (Michel). The sensation created by this document, the event, and the controversy about the event led to Wollheim and his friends being banned from the 1939 Worldcon in New York by convention chair Sam Moskowitz, the fandom historian, who headed a rival faction based in Queens (see Mueller). In the more cynical eye—itsself an ideological register—of Wollheim’s liberal rival Moskowitz, “drama was enacted” at the Philadelphia convention. The audience for the Michel-Wollheim speech, Moskowitz says, was confused at first, but “finally the revelation came [...] *communism!*” (Moskowitz 118). The characteristic and familiar trope is the deployment of irony: the

ability to enjoy both the excitement of a communist revolt at a small convention of eccentrics *and* the humorous self-conscious dramatization of it in rapidly appearing accounts, commentaries, and histories.

The convergence of communism and science fiction in Wollheim's early career didn't only come from his interest in "sociological science fiction," as Fulton argues. Self-publication, and the "microcosm" (a fannish term) it enabled, was an end in itself. Its social imperatives—the fascination of feuds, of political positions, of being part of a social structure in which labor was expected of you and had meaning—were unalienating. The science fiction fan participating in politics, narrative, and drama via the quotidian work of writing, editing, cutting stencils, changing ink, producing or procuring artwork, printing, managing mailing lists, and keeping track of postage mattered socially on a comprehensible scale, mattered to people who had a relationship to that fan, even if it was competitive or adversarial. Self-publication structured a cultural formation that was modern, geographically dispersed, self-aware, and that organized meaningful work as its central form of sociality. All those characteristics would sustain science fiction fandom for decades, and were central to the fanzines and fan communities that embraced *The Lord of the Rings* starting shortly after it was published and created spaces in which it could thrive, far from Tolkien, Ruskin House, and Oxford.

### ***The Enchanted Duplicator***

On the first page of the first issue of *Niekas*, a fanzine that, as I argue below, would perhaps do more than any other to build Tolkien's American audience, its editor Ed Meškys describes the nuts and bolts—literally—of fannish life:

It's 11 PM, Friday, 29 September, 1961. [...] I wonder, does any fan (who isn't a neo) have time to do everything he wants to? [...] I finished up my job at NASA 3 weeks ago today and so lost the fringe benefits of 2 electric typers, all my own, in my office. For a time I had only the Underwood Raphael which I'd used for my last SAPS-zine, but then I added an IBM with an elite typeface to my collection. (This was a 'scientific' typewriter with an unorthodox keyboard which the secretaries didn't like, so it was very rarely used and they had no objections to my taking it). Then NASA got in an IBM executive with a 14 Point 'Directory' typeface, so I took that and gave back the Raphael. I liked the 14 point typeface very much, but that machine just can't cut stencils or even good Ditto masters [...] I think if they had a multilith on the premises (instead of sending the work out to be done) I would have quit school and stayed on.  
(Meškys, "Bumbejimas (#1)")<sup>36</sup>

As an opening to the first issue of a new fanzine by an unknown editor, this might seem terribly specific, but Meškys knew his audience, as preoccupied with self-publication as he was. Science fiction fandom was, in the early 1960s, a numerically small subculture, but its tradition of amateur publication had been carefully developed over three decades, through traditions of lay pedagogy that taught its members how to produce printed matter, find audiences, and be useful to the community. This instruction came in the form of amateur publications such as the oft-reprinted satirical

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<sup>36</sup> The first issue predates the title *Niekas*; Meškys retitled the fanzine and started numbering again from 1 in June 1962. This 30-page issue is headed "A. Merrit's Fantasy Magazine." *A. Merritt's Fantasy Magazine* was a pulp magazine, published under a lurid color cover in 1949 and 1950, named for an early twentieth century writer of fantastic (not medieval) fiction. The editor is thought to have been a woman, Mary Gnaedinger, but she is unnamed in the publication (Gnaedinger; *Series: A. Merritt's Fantasy Magazine*). Meškys's misspelling ("Merrit") was typical. Typos were always difficult to correct on stencils, so they are part of the texture of the fanzines, but between his bad eyesight and other factors Meškys was truly notorious for them. He printed letters complaining about them in every issue and incorporated jokes about them in regular features of the fanzine. I have chosen to correct the spelling, for his and other fanzines, where it does not seem to be a semantic feature or part of the title.

allegory *The Enchanted Duplicator* (modeled on *Pilgrim's Progress*, this text instructs the young “neofan” in the ways of fandom) or fanzines like Bjo Trimble’s *Silmé*, an art and reproduction fanzine led by one of the earliest Tolkien fans (the title references the name of the “s” character in the Quenya alphabet, the Tengwar), emphasizing instructions for producing and reproducing artwork for fanzines and promotion of the fan art show (Willis and Shaw; *EFanzines.Com - The Enchanted Duplicator*; Trimble, *Silmé #1*; Trimble, *Silmé #2*).

Self-publication was *the* key institution of science fiction fandom from the 1930s through the 1960s and indeed until the advent of Usenet and electronic mailing lists in the 1980s. Self-publication is quite distinct from ordinary interpersonal letter writing or exchanging writing through the pages of commercial magazines, and it influenced the development of science fiction fandom in every way, including its perennial reflexivity. The histories by Knight and Moskowitz are only two of the many histories, memoirs, and reference works on the early decades of science fiction fandom produced by its members, including books by Henry Warner, Jr., novelist Frederik Pohl, and even a later work by Donald Wollheim, as well as less formal publications including Jack Speer’s often revised “Fancylopedia” of 1944 (Warner, *All Our Yesterdays*; Warner, *A Wealth of Fable*; Pohl; Wollheim, *The Universe Makers*; Speer; Speer and Eney; Willis and Shaw). The fanzines that now sit in archives such as the Eaton Collection at U.C. Riverside or the Hunnewell fanzine collection held on microfilm at Marquette, thanks to the collecting and curating work of fans, depended on low-cost duplication. Almost always printed on 8 ½ by 11” paper and bound with staples, they were produced using little capital and routinely

distributed to fulfill APA requirements, in exchange for contributions of writing (often simply LoCs, letters of comment) or art, or simply for the cost of postage.

To print them cheaply nearly always meant using one of two technologies. The first consisted of spirit duplicators of the type manufactured by the Ditto company, which were very widespread (and therefore easily appropriated) in small institutions such as schools and libraries. On the Ditto machine, you created a “master” by typing, writing, or drawing on a sheet backed with a type of ink, usually purple (fans liked to sniff out other shades, and one can sometimes see turquoise or pink in dittoed fanzines). The mechanism was something like a sheet of carbon paper, except that the ink was deposited on the back of the master. The master was then fitted onto a cylinder, which was turned, with plain sheets of paper beneath it, until the ink ran out. This process was less desirable than mimeography because it produced only a limited number of purple copies; the later copies became faint quite quickly as the ink on the master dispersed, and even the early copies faded over time because of the quality of the ink.

The other option for fanzine publication, very much preferred, was mimeography. All four of the major Tolkien fanzines of the early sixties—*i-Palantir*, *Anduril* and other early fanzines by Marion Zimmer Bradley, *Niekas*, and *Entmoot*—were mimeographed, as were the first two issues of *Tolkien Journal*, the publication of the Tolkien Society of America (after issue 2, it was professionally printed). Mimeography required cutting a stencil, but it could produce a large number of good quality copies. Instead of a master sheet that would become useless once the ink ran out, a mimeograph machine forced ink through the stencil. The stencil was cut on a

“typer” (essentially a typewriter) supplemented by other techniques for illustration and special fonts. The process required a machine (a Gestetner, for instance), often privately owned. Greg Shaw explains about buying one for \$250; Ed Meškys, the editor of *Niekas*, borrowed them from employers and later from friends.

Because of its argument about the role of fandom, and the fact that it draws on primary research in the fanzines, this chapter bears on the genre of fan studies discussed in the introduction. It offers a partial window onto the development of “media fandom” in the interval between the height of the traditional, book-centered, male-dominated science fiction fandom of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s and the female-dominated, fan-fiction oriented communities that emerged, preeminently around *Star Trek*, in the mid- to late sixties. Various framed works of fanfiction appear in the earliest Tolkien fanzines, including several by the influential fantasy novelist Marion Zimmer Bradley, about whom more below. Several women who became important in the development of *Star Trek* fandom, including Ruth Berman and Bjo (Wells) Trimble, were leaders in the earliest Tolkien fandom projects. Methodologically, however, it’s important to note that fan studies has (for good reasons) been imbricated with ethnographic methodologies and performance and media studies, as much or more than with book history or even literary studies. Although the fanzines of the 1960s are printed works, the ethnographic and performance-oriented traditions of fan studies illuminate an important dimension of them that, as it happens, also intersects with my overall project’s Marxian orientation, in that the records as they appear through non-commercial self-publication have a tendency to take on a quasi-human dimension. The following digression seeks to illuminate the interaction of

performative and literary dimensions of the fanzines, conceptually, partly by situating them in relation to critical traditions but also through an example of “self-fashioning” from a 1964 fanzine with a Tolkien name, *Mathom*.

Francesca Coppa, a fan studies scholar who has both enhanced our understanding of the history of media fandom in the sixties through her research, supplied important theoretical tools, and supported the preservation and circulation of fanfiction as a co-founder of the Organization for Transformative Works, makes an argument that can help illuminate the relationship between media fandom and my argument about print. Stressing the relationship between performance-based media (most often television) and fanfiction, Coppa suggests that fan studies belongs, at least in part, to performance studies, arguing for “drama and not prose as the antecedent medium for fanfiction” (Coppa, “Writing Bodies in Space” 230). She uses this idea to account for the role of repetition and difference in fanfiction, which tells the same stories again and again in different ways.<sup>37</sup> She theorizes this pattern as a “Derridean supplement” but explains it using the analogy of staging a play:

[I]n theatre, we want to see *your* Hamlet and *his* Hamlet and *her* Hamlet; to embody the role is to reinvent it. We also want to see new generations of directors and designers recast the play without regard for authorial intent or historicity, putting Hamlet into infinite alternative universes. What if Hamlet was a graduate student? [...] What if Hamlet was a street kid in the Bronx?  
(Coppa, “Writing Bodies in Space” 236)

This argument casts light on the early Tolkien fanzines, even where they are not occupied with fanfiction, and the complexity of their relationship to the other categories of print in this chapter. At the very least, the affinities between early fan

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<sup>37</sup> Abigail de Kosnik’s work on the archival aesthetics of fanfiction are crucial to understanding this (De Kosnik, “Fifty Shades and the Archive of Women’s Culture”; Derecho).

practices around Tolkien and performance are clear: indeed, the first documented “fan work” in response to *The Lord of the Rings* was a group of *costumes* created for the World Science Fiction Convention in Los Angeles in 1958.<sup>38</sup>

Importantly, however, the context of performance helps to characterize the nature of the fanzines themselves, in all their printedness: their tendency to appear human, to have personality, to arrive, through the archive or the mail, loaded with intact traces of day-to-day life. In the narrative that follows, the fanzines appear continuous with the individuals who populated, printed, and circulated them. They both document and construct (more successfully in some cases than in others) the personalities of their editors and the liveliness of the communities that they structured and enabled.

The term “self-fashioning,” like the vogue for “negotiation” as a literary metaphor, entered the critical lexicon in the 1980s through the work of Stephen Greenblatt, a scholar of Shakespeare, the early commercial stage, and sixteenth century literary culture, and hence it responds to the relationship between textuality and performance. It’s also worth noting, however, that the slippage between print and personhood in the fanzines resonates with Marx’s much earlier use of the concept of the “human” as a contrasting term in relation to misery and alienation under capitalism and the—paradigmatically inhuman—money form (Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach”; Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844”; Marx, *Capital*). The fanzines both appear human, as a result of the self-fashioning that shapes them, and

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<sup>38</sup> Also relevant to the fan studies literature is the pattern of association, in the fanzines of this era, between female fans and performance aspects of fandom, such as costuming, as well as with visual culture more generally (see for example Bjo Trimble’s art practice fanzine *Silmé*, Juanita Coulson’s work in several fanzines including *Yandro*, and Berman’s piece on the costumes, below).

work aslant the regime of money, through their amateur status as defined by non-commercial circulation.

An example of vivid fanzine self-fashioning, its inherent drama and its implicit and explicit welding to print, appears in a 1964 publication called *Mathom* (a hobbit word for a gift that keeps being passed from one person to another) published, edited, and largely written by a teenager from Crystal City, Missouri named David Hall. Hall, who would, the next year, collaborate with Greg Shaw on the first issue of *Entmoot*, wrote a long essay analyzing the nature of fandom in the first issue. In it, he writes:

My brother, a college student, Stanford, thinks he has science fiction fans pretty well pegged. First of all, he thinks we are all ‘nuts’, which is undeniable. But he also says that we are nice to each other because we all suspect that the other guy may do something nice for us some time. [...] He says that fandom is a disorganized, impossible universe because each planet revolves around itself. (D. N. Hall 3)

His brother’s cynical take on the fundamentally competitive character of fandom sounds right to Hall, but he tests the theory against “the only fan whose house I’ve been able to visit”:

Using Hank as a guide (a bad idea) I would say that most fans are rugged individualists, slightly lazy, a trifle absent-minded [...] I’d say a lot of us [...] would tell the whole world to go to hell if it weren’t for certain factors that make it mildly impossible, and in general do mostly what we want to do instead of what others want us to do. (D. N. Hall 3)

Self-fashioning would be expected from the front matter of the debut issue of any magazine, and a personal form of it in a self-published fanzine from an unknown kid in a small town, who had hardly ever met another fan. Moreover, the context of self-publication (literally printing, finding addresses, and mailing it himself) implies self-fashioning. Beyond the form itself, he devotes this first piece of content explicitly to

group and self-definition. The reflexive character of this, and the way it proceeds through differences (marking off a distinction from the “mundane”), adhere to longstanding fannish tradition.

Later in the same issue, an essay called “Why I Like Fandom” moves Hall from defining of fandom to defining himself. He talks about the difference between fans and the kids at school who say they like his writing:

They aren't interested in fanzines, they're interested in my zine, and since I wrote it, it must be great [...] The idiocy has reached the point that one day my father read a poem I had done, and commented that Tolkien wrote as well as I do, almost!! [...] So, although the common theory is that people retreat into fandom to be somebody, I am doing the reverse. I am putting out this fanzine so I can be one of the fold instead of an untouchable. There is an island in the Pacific (or maybe it is Africa) where the common people all hide when the king comes their way, lest his radiance slay them. When it comes to my writing, I feel a little like that lonely king. I only want it to be appraised fairly. If *Mathom* becomes a well-known and liked fanzine, I know it will be on my merits. But if it fails, then that too will be on my merits. I'm not looking for a place to be a big shot; I'm only looking for a place where I won't be a lonely king. (4)

Affectionate impatience with his father's praise conforms to clichés of adolescence, and yet so much is peculiar and distinctive in this passage, especially the *loneliness* of being loved or having friends, of people liking your writing because you wrote it. The fact that the burning desire to achieve something substantive in writing—to fashion a self in writing—is experienced as *loneliness* seems revealing of what fandom might represent: not a desire to be “recognized” by established institutions such as publishers or Stanford but to be *recognized*, as a person, through a fictionalized version of the self. The self-printed, self-published little fanzine gambles that a sociality that could supply this might be found through the informal networks of fandom, that they would

recognize this teenager, and they did: *Mathom* was reviewed approvingly in one of the largest science fiction fandom publications, *Yandro*, although it was the first publication by a young teenager in a tiny, out of the way town. The last sentence concedes that being recognized requires an emphasis on the social above the self: “I’m not looking for a place to be a big shot; I’m only looking for a place where I won’t be a lonely king.”

The dramatization of David Hall has only just begun at the conclusion of these introductory essays in *Mathom*. It goes on, page after page, in a long, funny narrative about changing the ink in his mimeograph machine from black to red one day when he was home sick from school. He explains about the man at the “stationary” (sic) store:

He thought I was crazy [...] ‘Red ink on blue paper may not be dignified enough for a church bulletin,’ [he told the man at the store] ‘but it is pretty good looking, actually.’ [...] All of which comes under the heading of how dangerous and difficult fanzine editing is. (D. N. Hall 3–6)

The story goes on and on; after the incident at the store, he runs out of gas and blocks traffic at an intersection, then spills gasoline on himself trying to fix it, ending up sick, covered in red ink, and reeking of gas. There are ancillary stories about teaming up with “Janet Madison” to trick the school and local papers into printing the essays we are now reading (in the fanzine, about making the fanzine) by submitting them under pseudonyms; these conclude with Dave and Janet’s inability to disturb the formal surface of Crystal City, Missouri, in 1964. The wit lies in the fact that these meta-stories themselves constitute the fanzine, not only filling its pages but making it readable by giving it a personality, a character. Since the fanzine circulates in fandom

(and not in Crystal City), no one will know how Hall has altered the anecdotes. But, if someone likes it (me), an ambiguity arises: do I like the writing, or do I like *him*?

### ***A Rough Echo***

Although *Mathom* was published from a tiny town in Missouri, the fandom around *The Lord of the Rings* really blossomed in California, and those California communities form the center of attention for the rest of this chapter. Gary Hunnewell, the fan historian and bibliographer of Tolkien fan works noted in the introduction, dates the beginning of Tolkien fandom proper to 1960 (S. G. Hunnewell, *Tolkien Fandom Review: From Its Beginnings to 1964*). In that year, a small group of members of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society (LASFS)—led by Ted Johnstone, Bruce Pelz, and Bjo (Wells) Trimble—did three things. They announced and debated the formation of what was intended to be an international fan group, “The Fellowship of the Ring,” through the science fiction fanzines (including Pelz’s new apazine,<sup>39</sup> named for Gandalf’s sword, *Glamdring*); they began publication of a polished, mimeographed fanzine specifically devoted to Tolkien’s novel (*i-Palantir*, first issue August 1960); and they held the Fellowship’s first meeting, with thirty-seven members attending, at that year’s Worldcon in Pittsburgh (Pittcon. See report by Johnstone in Johnstone, *I-Palantir* #2). Records of this group’s celebration of the novel go back to 1958, when they and other Los Angeles fans attended Worldcon

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<sup>39</sup> Meaning it was a slim publication, consisting entirely of responses to materials in other fanzines and reviews of them, created to fulfill Pelz’s membership requirements for multiple APAs.

dressed as characters from *The Lord of the Rings*, costumes described in a column that appeared Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Andúril*, published in Texas in 1962.

These earliest fan records reflect all the features of fandom reviewed so far: the centrality of self-publication and performance, the tendency of fandom to combine intimate sociality (Johnstone, Pelz, and Trimble all lived together in 1960) with a global imaginary that could think a world in which California, England, and Middle-earth overlapped. These records also reveal the aspects of *The Lord of the Rings* that attracted science fiction fans and the way they managed the apparent mismatch between Tolkien's medievalism and their own world, with its futuristic, scientific, relentlessly sunny, Hollywood-inflected image repertoire. The medievalism and avowed "Englishness" of the text attracted the passionate investment of a fandom that was centered, if anywhere, in Los Angeles during the Space Age. They found a key to managing this apparent distance in the novel's continual references to "the West": to the lands lying across the sea on the western side of Middle-earth, such as Númenor (called "Westernesse" in the Common Tongue, origin of the "Men of the West," the Dúnedain); beyond Númenor—further west—"Eldamar" or "Elvenhome," from which the High Elves (such as Galadriel and the Elves of Rivendell) came in the First Age; and, even further west, Valinor, "the Uttermost West," the home of the Valar, the divine beings overseeing the created world. *The Lord of the Rings*, to the pleasurable frustration of ardent readers in the two decades before publication of *The Silmarillion*, declined to systematically explain this geography, but hints were available to students of the appendices, and characters honor "the West" throughout the novel.

Fan records from places like California and Texas convey a parallel sense that “the West” is a relative place, a direction with degrees. Los Angeles and the Bay Area belong to the westernmost part of the continental United States, even further west than “the West,” the site of the Hollywood Western. The U.S., in turn, provided the western arm of the joint U.S.-British imperial metropole, and that “special relationship” formed the heart of “the West” in the rhetoric of a global Cold War whose battle lines, in actuality, lay in every direction. These dimensions of California were not only imaginary. Its economic infrastructure owed its form to the Cold War military-industrial complex. Agendas in the Pacific Rim were visible in military bases, in the traffic through California to the Pacific wars, in the defense industry, and in California’s heavy investment in public education at every level and in other public projects such as highways. The military-imperial dimension shaped fan experience directly, but the state also held the global headquarters of the culture industry, which rendered it, in imagination, the equivalent of Middle-earth—“la-la land,” “tinsel town.” Both sectors employed key members of the earliest Tolkien fandom. Bruce Pelz was a librarian at the UCLA Engineering and Mathematical Sciences Library (*Resource Directory of Department of Energy Information Organizations*). Ted Johnstone made his living, in the mid- to late sixties, writing *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* tie-in novels, published by Ace Books and copyrighted by MGM.<sup>40</sup> Bjo Trimble was central to the campaign to keep *Star Trek* on the air and appeared in one episode as an

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<sup>40</sup> He published these under his “real” name, David McDaniel; “Johnstone” was a fandom pseudonym. Later comments, including extant Amazon reviews, affirm that they are by far the best of the many tie-in novels associated with this show (McDaniel, *The Dagger Affair*; McDaniel, *The Vampire Affair*; McDaniel, *The Rainbow Affair*; McDaniel, *The Utopia Affair*; McDaniel, *The Hollow Crown Affair*; see also the assessment in C. W. Walker).

extra. Ed Meškys, the editor of *Niekas*, produced it from his job at the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory in the Bay Area.

This section looks quite carefully at records of the earliest fan activity in response to the novel, centered in Los Angeles but passing through other locations, to reveal the contours of an impulse to locate oneself in a geographic and historical imaginary that resonated with Tolkien's novel. The imagined world had to be simultaneously large enough to account for the environment of the early sixties—large enough to allow for a “Space Age”—while also intimate enough to make it feel as though a person could be recognized across distances and gaps in experience and could have some impact in shaping the structures of daily life. The depth of the text, the places where it rewarded the most careful and at the same time speculative engagement, made it usable and suggestive in exactly the way that was needed.

In the summer of 1958, Worldcon—the World Science Fiction Convention—was held in downtown Los Angeles (“SoLAcon”), and members of the LASFS (the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society) attended, as a group, dressed as characters from *The Lord of the Rings*, a relatively little-known text for which Houghton Mifflin was still charging a steep five dollars per volume. In 1962, the young Ted Johnstone described several of the costumes worn to that early convention for a fanzine published in Texas. He began with his own:

I was Frodo, in a costume which I had worn to an LASFS Hallowe'en party the year before; pink shirt, flowered vest, pink knee-breeches with silver buckles at each knee; a heavy gold ring on a chain of odd manufacture (it looked more like scales than links) a green-lined grey cloak and hood, fastened at the throat with a silver veined green leaf. I also took an old pair of socks and sewed curly brown crepe hair on them. Hair from the ankles to the knees was ample enough and natural.

My costume was enhanced by a long-stemmed pipe. I also had a short sword, made from a British WWI Bayonet; it had a wooden handle, not much of a hilt, and a perfectly shaped blade for a short sword. I put an edge on it and carved Sting in runic letters on the leather scabbard that came with it. (Berman 2)

Johnstone's character and fannish sociality show through this description: its eccentricity and performance of gender, its attention to detail, Johnstone's precise recollection four years later, the mixture of irony and solemnity in his tone, his sense of drama. The indexical link to the trauma of "WWI" through the bayonet, in particular, suggests a signature thread running through the culture of science fiction fandom. It points to the proximity of war for its members, even while distancing it. All of them inhabited the immediate threats and projects of the Cold War, which employed many of them. Older members had been impacted (if only through migration, though often more) by World War II, and younger members would, in the coming years, constantly have Vietnam at the margins of their experience; some were in military service themselves.

Ted Johnstone's Frodo costume links the Great War to Tolkien's novel even before the "Foreword to the Second Edition" made the connection canonical. His bayonet underlines the nearness of this trauma in terms of play, repurposing a weapon presumably used in the European "theater." This kind of anxious playfulness about war, and about other public events signaling the eruption of major historical trauma into the consciousness of white prosperity, like the Civil Rights Movement, appear frequently in the fanzines. Johnstone's repurposing of the bayonet suggests both a generational incomprehension of "WWI" and a live anxiety about war and masculinity; it echoes an echo, like the historical abyss of the novel. It seems to

recognize the link, through the weapon, to Tolkien's real historical experience, so alive and yet so thoroughly mutated in the book. The context of global warfare that bordered and even structured Ted Johnstone's experience as a young man in California in the 1960s connects him with Tolkien and, by so doing, underlines the functionally incommensurable gap in their cultural and historical experiences. This effect, of nearness and distance, of long ago and just yesterday, echoes Tolkien's "thousand years ago last autumn."

The sense of historical abyss and geographical disorientation, in conversation with Tolkien's novel, reveal details that attracted fans to the book and enabled them to adopt it as their own despite the apparent gap in context. The year after the costumes, 1959, Johnstone published the first known/extant Tolkien fan work, a truly remarkable poem called "The Passing of the Elven Kind—A song in the mode *ann-thennath*" (see illustration; Johnstone, "The Passing of the Elven-Kind").<sup>41</sup> The erudition of this poem with respect to Tolkien's book, given that there were no reference works, that the book had just been published a few years before, and that Johnstone was in Southern California, is astonishing. "The mode *ann-thennath*" would not easily have been recognized even by someone who had read *The Lord of the Rings*, as comparatively few people had; it is mentioned only once in a novel of half a million words.

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<sup>41</sup> This poem is the earliest work in Gary Hunnewell's bibliography (S. G. Hunnewell, *Tolkien Fandom Review: From Its Beginnings to 1964*). Fan-historian Harry Warner, Jr. reports two mentions of *The Lord of the Rings* in U.S. fanzines from the summer of 1956: "Dick Eney noted that one day he had started 'to read a book called *The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien, and was not much use thenceforth; I actually couldn't set the thing down,' and Howard Miller mentioned the author in passing during a review of Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros*" (Warner, *A Wealth of Fable* 228).

A song in the mode ann-themmath

THE PASSING OF THE ELVEN-KIND  
Ted Johnstone

O'er all the lands the fair folk trod,  
The final eventide has come,  
And those who wanderad, silver-shod,  
Have faded from the changing land.  
The march of man has pushed them from  
Their forest lands and verdant sod  
Until at last they must succumb  
To forces they cannot withstand.

No more the fair Galadriel  
Will sing in green Lothlórien;  
The empty halls of Rivendell,  
Deserted, silent, thick with dust,  
Recall the empty hours when  
They stood as lonely citadel  
Against the coming age of Men,  
But fell, as Elrond knew they must.

The shadows of the fading age  
Grew long across the fields of gold;  
The Elven-lords, each silent, sage,  
Had left the flow'ring mallorn trees.  
For them the world was growing old --  
Though mankind saw a turning page --  
The fair folk left their last freehold  
And passed beyond the Sundering Seas.

And Círdan wrought them ships which bore  
Them from the Havens o'er the sea  
And watched them sail for fairer shore  
And leave the world of mortal man  
In which no place for them could be,  
and in this world they stay no more,  
But dwell in Elvenhome the Free,  
As fair as when the world began.



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Ted Johnstone's "The Passing of the Elven Kind" in Ruth Berman et al's *All Mimsy*, 1959.  
From the holdings of Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of  
California, Riverside

The phrase appears during a moment in Book I: Aragorn, still known to the hobbits as "Strider," recites nine stanzas about Beren and Lúthien, figures from the deep past, to the hobbits in the dell under Weathertop, just before the attack of the Ringwraiths in which Frodo is stabbed (I.11.191-93). The moment—an evening on

their journey through the wilderness, before the attack, when they are sitting around the fire talking—falls outside the main narrative; it is a digression. In this structurally “unimportant” moment, Aragorn recites a fragment of an entirely different romance: a longer version of the poem, running to well over 4000 lines, would be posthumously published as “The Lay of Leithian” (Tolkien, “The Lays of Beleriand” 154–363). Aragorn thus “quotes” not only the work of an imaginary poet in an ancient imaginary age but an entirely different actually existing text. In the story, the passage was composed thousands of years earlier; in Oxford, Tolkien had written it decades earlier. A pause in one story opens a window onto another, earlier in more than one way. After reciting from the poem, Aragorn says that its Elvish “mode” (this, too, goes unexplained, but Johnstone’s poem seems to assume it alludes to meter and rhyme scheme, which he copies, and possibly mood) “is hard to render in our Common Speech, and this is but a rough echo of it,” suggesting Tolkien’s everyday concerns as a translator and teacher of medieval languages (I.11.193). As often happens in the novel, Aragorn recognizes and describes the abyss that structures the scene, names the “echo.” And “A Rough Echo” was the title that Ruth Berman gave to the column in which she assembled the costume descriptions, including Johnstone’s, for a Texas fanzine in 1962. In fact, Berman had been one of the editors of the tiny dittoed fanzine, published in Minneapolis, in which Johnstone’s poem first appeared.

The textual moment that both Berman’s costuming column and Johnstone’s “Elven” poem reference, the narrative digression in which Aragorn inserts a fragment and precis of the tale of Beren and Lúthien, tells a story that is echoed by Aragorn’s own story in *The Lord of the Rings*. Like Beren, a “Man,” Aragorn is in love—with

Arwen, who, like Lúthien, is not a “Woman” (no such capitalized species exists in Middle-earth, though there are occasional “women”) but an “Elf.” Arwen is a very minor character in the novel who, like this moment in the text that opens onto its pre-history, commanded significant attention from the earliest American fans. The echoing structure—Aragorn as a typological echo of Beren, the description of the poem as a “rough echo,” the hint that tremendous expanses of story lay waiting, ready to be activated, in every unexplained name or moment in the text—sparked the first published piece of Tolkien fan writing (Johnstone’s poem) and supplied the title for Berman’s column describing the first Tolkien fan activity, the costumes. The need to reconstruct a hinted past and a hinted larger geography modeled scholarly practice for readers of *The Lord of the Rings*. The novel was supplemented, long before the posthumous publications, by the apparatus attached to the text: the appendices full of chronologies, calendars, grammars, and charts; the “Prologue: Concerning Hobbits”; the maps. The fact that the early fans fixated on this moment, ripe for research and speculation, adumbrates the shape along which the Tolkien phenomenon would develop, including fan cultures, the long string of posthumous publications edited by his son Christopher, ancillary and derivative works. The Amazon series will operate on the same model.

Tolkien understood this logic, if not its material and cultural implications, as is reflected in his letters almost as soon as the books began to appear in print. In March of 1955, after the first two volumes were out, Allen & Unwin were pushing him to complete the supplementary material (the appendices and maps) that they needed to print volume III. He wrote to Rayner Unwin:

I now wish that no appendices had been promised! For I think their appearance in truncated and compressed form will satisfy nobody: certainly not me; clearly from the (appalling mass of) letters I receive not those people who like that kind of thing—astonishingly many [...] I am not now at all sure that the tendency to treat the whole thing as a kind of vast game is really good—cert. not for me, who find that kind of thing only too fatally attractive. (Tolkien, *Letters* 210)

The only error here seems to be a misapprehension of the nature of “satisfaction.”

Certainly, the appendices would not stop the fans asking Tolkien for information, but the limited available answers gave the fandom of the earlier decades its distinctive flavor and a portion of its joy, which lay in the labor it invited.

Johnstone’s “British WWI Bayonet” and the interest in Strider’s poem speaks to the historical imagination of the novel and its fans, but their geographical imaginary and sense of scope was equally resonant. A sense of global space underlines the peculiar characteristics of science fiction fandom and its structures of labor and sociality. *All Mimsy*, the fanzine that published Johnstone’s poem in 1959, was not published in Los Angeles, but—amazingly, given Johnstone’s participation and its preservation in the Riverside archive—by three teenaged friends at the University of Minnesota High School in Minneapolis under the collective pseudonym “George Karg” (“Ruth Berman”; Karg et al.).<sup>42</sup> One of the three was future fantasy author Eleanor Arnason, and another, Ruth Berman, would go on to publish fantasy fiction professionally and to influence both Tolkien fandom, as founder and leader of The

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<sup>42</sup> There was a character named Karg in at least one novel by Minnesota science fiction and fantasy author S. J. Byrne, *Beyond the Darkness* (1951). Byrne was notorious for an early, contested example of what might be considered fanfiction. In the fifties, about four years after Edgar Rice Burroughs died, Byrne attempted to publish a new Tarzan novel with a space theme, *Tarzan on Mars* (Byrne; Byrne and D; “Summary Bibliography: S. J. Byrne”). “Kargs” became the name of the palest, “white” group of people to inhabit Ursula Le Guin’s fantasy realm of Earthsea. The first novel in the Earthsea Cycle, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, was published in 1968 (Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea*).

Rivendell Group, a fantasy study group lasting for decades, and media fandom generally, through her work with the women's fan formation around *Star Trek* (Lenander; "A Ruth Berman Bibliography"). *All Mimsy*, "an irregular literary magazine," claimed a total of

oh... anywhere up to eight and one half readers, these being scattered all over the world ... our members have a tendency to send manuscripts by way of Hong-Kong and Kabul, and while the members insist that they have no connection with the Fabian Society, and further, that they claim no kinship with the late Josef Stalin [--] and therefore, and because... (Karg et al.).

All punctuation, including the square brackets and ellipses, appears in the original, and seems to comment on dislocation. The magazine grapples with a highly connected, mobile world and conveys the empowerment granted by access to the means of production in the form of the high school Ditto machine.

A highly restricted, futuristically structured phenomenon: "Anywhere up to eight and one half readers"; "by way of Hong-Kong and Kabul." In *All Mimsy*, published by teenagers in Minneapolis, a young man in Los Angeles publishes a poem based on a book by an English medievalist, a book that was not widely read. The young man acknowledges the source only by obscure words used casually; Tolkien's name and the title of the novel appear nowhere. From the header to the poem alone, "elven" and "ann-thennath" aren't even in any known language ("elven" was one of Tolkien's neologisms).<sup>43</sup> Johnstone writes about Círdan, a character who never speaks in *The Lord of the Rings*—Tolkien writes of him, as he often does of things that capture fannish attention, as if we should already know him—and places the proper

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<sup>43</sup> "Elfish" is the standard adjective. Per the *OED*, the word "elven" was occasionally used for a female elf between 1100 and 1350, but it had fallen into complete disuse until its reappearance with *The Hobbit*.

diacritical mark on his name, and the diacritical mark survives reproduction. Johnstone sends this poem, with its hideously obscure allusions, to a Minneapolis publication run off on a high school Ditto machine in purple ink and bound with a single staple. Bruce Pelz, in Los Angeles, preserves his copy of the publication—mailed to him from Minneapolis—and donates it, along with hundreds of other carefully curated, semi-ephemeral documents, to the University of California. The poem is reprinted in a somewhat larger fanzine in 1966, and recorded in a bibliography created by another fan, Gary Hunnewell, in the 1990s; eventually, it gets written about by me. All of this seems to justify the *All Mimsy* editors’ sense of wonder.

Berman’s column describing the costumes was called “A Rough Echo” due partly to time and space: the four years that had elapsed since SoLAcon 1958, the thousands of miles from Los Angeles to either Berman’s Minneapolis home or Bradley’s publication, edited in Rochester, Texas. It was published in the sole issue of the fanzine *Andúril*,<sup>44</sup> published by perhaps the single most influential early member of the Tolkien fandom, Marion Zimmer Bradley (Bradley, *Andúril: Flame of the West*). Bradley wrote very early on gender in *The Lord of the Rings*; her essay “Of Men, Halflings, and Hero Worship” was self-published in 1961 but republished many times in both fan and commercial outlets, including *Niekas* (Bradley, “Of Men, Halflings, and Hero Worship”). She was equally significant as an early writer and publisher of fanfiction, including several *Lord of the Rings* stories appearing in the earliest Tolkien fanzines (including Bradley, “The Jewel of Arwen”; Bradley, “A Meeting in the Hyades”). She also wrote for the lesbian underground press, publishing

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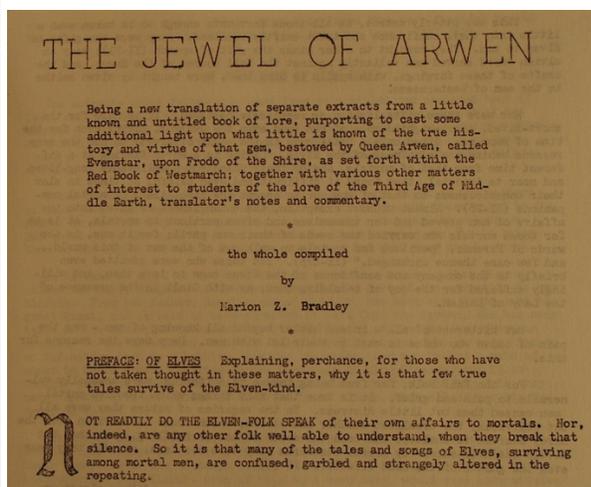
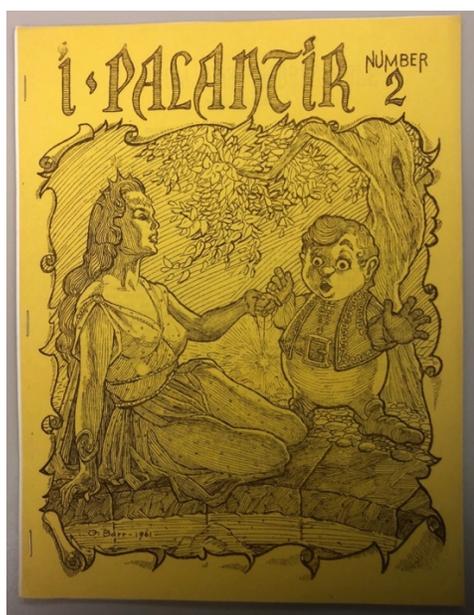
<sup>44</sup> The title of the fanzine was transferred, with Bradley’s cooperation, to the Tolkien Society (U.K.) in the early 1970s. In this project it refers, however, to this one issue edited by Bradley in 1962.

several times in *The Ladder* in the 1950s, and she published (under the Tolkienish pen name Elfrida Rivers, which she also uses in *i-Palantir*) in the *East Village Other* (Bradley, “Some Remarks on Marriage”; Gallo, *The Ladder*; Gallo, “Introduction”).

Her subsequent career had a powerful impact on traditions cognate to *The Lord of the Rings*. With Diana Paxson, a Bay Area novelist who contributed to the Tolkien fanzines *Niekas* and *Entmoot* in the mid-sixties, she founded the Society for Creative Anachronism in Berkeley in 1966 (see Cramer). The S.C.A. is now a more than fifty-year-old global society of lay medieval scholars and practitioners, currently with over 30,000 members (*Society for Creative Anachronism, Inc.*). Bradley thereafter became a central figure in a wave of feminist Arthurian fantasy fiction in the 1970s, dominated by her bestselling 1973 novel *The Mists of Avalon* (Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon*). In this, her career overlaps with that of Vera Chapman, the founder of the Tolkien Society in the U.K. (discussed in the next chapter), who also published several Arthurian novels around the same time, and with Tolkien’s correspondent Naomi Mitchison (Chapman, *King Arthur’s Daughter*; Chapman, *The Green Knight*; Mitchison, *To the Chapel Perilous*).

Any analysis of Bradley’s work must also take account of her marriage to Walter Breen. Breen appears often in the same fanzines used in this chapter; he was, among other things, both an overt sexual nonconformist and a convicted serial child molester. Widespread knowledge that Breen was abusing children within the fan community caused a major internal fandom controversy in 1964 (known as the “Breendoggle”), on the eve of Tolkien’s emergence in the paperback market, and Bradley certainly knew about the accusations (if not more) when she married him.

Posthumously, Bradley herself has been accused of sexual and other types of abuse by her children (Caelesti; C. M. and H. Walker; Greyland and Day; Flood; Moen and Greyland). Although these brief paragraphs on Bradley cannot accommodate more than an aside, it resonates with the imaginary I argue permeated the early Tolkien fanzines, in which she was an important participant, in that it links her to the larger histories and networks that intersect them. These histories include the emergence of modern fanfiction and popular medievalism in the wake of *The Lord of the Rings*, second wave feminism, and campaigns for queer liberation. Acknowledging these links through Bradley also registers how insufficient celebration is to comprehend them.



*I-Palantir* #2, publisher Bruce Pelz, editor Ted Johnstone, Los Angeles, August 1961. Cover illustration (Arwen gives Frodo her jewel) by George Barr and header for Marion Zimmer Bradley's fanfiction "The Jewel of Arwen."

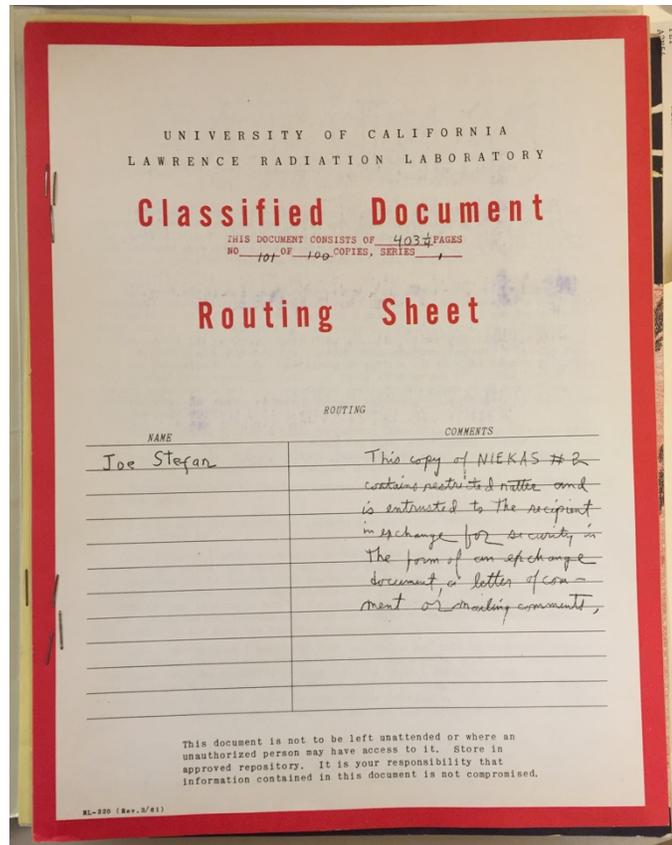
From the holdings of Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside

*“And so we threw Bjo into the pool....”*

“Yes, we really did. Or more accurately, Ron Ellick and Steve Tolliver did while I acted as a very interested observer and Bruce Pelz took pictures” (Meškys, *Niekas* #5). Fanzine editor Ed Meškys, introduced earlier through his description of the equipment he used to cut mimeograph stencils, describes this incident, which took place during a collating party in Los Angeles for a “one-shot” fanzine in June of 1962, in the pages of his own fanzine, *Niekas*, one of the most important publications for the massification of Tolkien. The story about throwing Bjo in the pool punctuates his long editorial, which also reports the ways that this same party was written up by still other fanzines. This column exemplifies print-dramatization, the atmosphere of simultaneity, inclusion, and (by the same gesture) exclusion that characterize *Niekas*, as well as the depiction of gender and sexuality in these materials from the early sixties.

As in the case of Ted Johnstone’s Frodo costume, dimensions of the military economy and sociality in California impinge frequently on the pages of *Niekas* and other early Tolkien fanzines. The rise of the Tolkien fandom coincided with the expansion of the U.S. war against Vietnam, and references to the draft, the service, and resistance to the war appear frequently. Private Earl E. Evers, a constant presence in Tolkien fanzines, addressed his personal history of poverty and arrest by joining up in 1964. Nor is Meškys’s magazine the only one produced from a Strangelovian bunker. *Mannederings* #1, full of Tolkien material, was published by Rich Mann in 1964 from Ramey Air Force Base in Puerto Rico, and *Mannederings* #2 was sent from

the Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota, a Strategic Air Command site for dispersing B52s armed with nuclear bombs (Mann).



*Niekas #2*, the first issue published from California.  
 From the holdings of Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside

Ed Meškys moved to the Bay Area from New York in 1962 to work at the University of California Lawrence Radiation Laboratory in Livermore, “a premier nuclear weapons design laboratory” (Hacker). The second issue of *Niekas* appeared under a classified documents sheet repurposed as the cover, with a hand-written note filled in: “This copy of NIEKAS #2 contains restricted matter and is entrusted to the recipient in exchange for security in the form of an exchange document, a letter of

comment or mailing comments” (see illustration). *Niekas* #4 (March 1963) contains this anecdote:

About two weeks ago I met an extremely enthusiastic Tolkien fan working here at the labs. Joe Hearst works in the B Division which has some sort of responsibility in the design and testing of nuclear weapons. So when the Russians broke the test moratorium a while back and we resumed testing too, he placed into one of the early devices a little slip of paper on which he had written

‘One ring to rule them all, one ring to find them

One ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them!’

He said he always felt that a hydrogen bomb was the one place the inscription from the one ring belonged. (I wonder if Sauron or any Nazgûl were seen in the vicinity after the blast. It’s frightening to think of what Joe might have unleashed!) After designing a bomb they obviously test it to see how well it will work. Let’s say they want a 5,000 megaton device which weighs 24 pounds and fits the shape of an Atlas nose cone. (My work here doesn’t concern weapons and I know nothing about the sizes and strengths of various devices, but those numbers are obviously nonsense.) So they design one which they think will do it, and test it. [...] So for the bomb with the quote in it, Joe got one of the highest actual/predicted yield ratios of any device he’s ever worked with, and he feels certain that this was because of the power of the One Ring of Mordor. He should try again—that’s the ‘scientific method’, isn’t it? (Meskys)

As with the bayonet in Ted Johnstone’s costume, not only the geographical imaginary but the material reality of global warfare tied the California fans to the type of imagination, and the events and trauma it reacted against, found in Tolkien’s novel.

Meškys was a migrant, and not only from New York to California. He came from a family of Lithuanian refugees and published the first issue of *Niekas* (the Lithuanian word for “nothing”) from their Brooklyn home early in 1962. From that first, Brooklyn issue, Meškys described California as “the world headquarters of fandom,” and he was delighted when, in the course of preparing it, he was offered a job at the Livermore Radiation Lab on the outskirts of the San Francisco Bay (Meškys,

*A.Merri's Fantasy Magazine (Aka Niekas #1)*). From about 1963 on, as *Niekas* grew and Meškys's eyesight began to fail (he was completely blind by the early seventies), he received assistance in publishing his increasingly large and popular fanzine from various members of the local science fiction fandom, mostly women. The most important of these for the period considered here was his co-editor for the mid-1960s, Felice Rolfe of Palo Alto, a teacher and graduate student in mathematics with whom he shared the 1967 Hugo Award that *Niekas* received as "Best Fanzine."<sup>45</sup>

As soon as he moved to California, Meškys decided, given the infrequency of publication of *i-Palantir*, to dedicate a substantial portion of each issue of *Niekas* to Tolkien, and the fanzine became the central address for Tolkien discussion by science fiction fans from 1962 until Meškys took over the Tolkien Society of America (founded in 1965; see below) in 1967. *Niekas* had a wide circulation, being shared across multiple APAs and to individual subscribers, and this gave it a larger budget than most fanzines, allowing it to run long articles, many letters, and large fold-out illustrations. It also ran for a long time—1962 to 1998—and published a lot of material: by 1963 or 64, it routinely ran to 70 or 80 pages per issue, and 100 by the late sixties. Just as the fan cultures were continuous with, and embedded in, the infrastructure of larger configurations like the military, they simultaneously worked at

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<sup>45</sup> Karen Anderson also worked extensively on the magazine, particularly on reproduction. Both the Andersons had been active in the original incarnation of the Elves, Gnomes, and Little Men's Chowder, Science Fiction, and Marching Society, a robust science fiction club in Berkeley in the 1950s; *Rhodomagnetic Digest* (see end of chapter) was this group's fanzine. In the early 1960s, Al haLevy revived *Rhodomagnetic Digest* and began publishing his Glossary in it, and the club was revived also; Meškys was active in it and posted about it frequently in *Niekas*, and Greg Shaw's early social involvement with local science fiction fans may have been an outgrowth of these regular gatherings. In 1967, the year *Niekas* won the Hugo, Meškys moved to New Hampshire to teach physics at a short-lived four-year liberal arts institution called Belknap College. That year, Meškys took over from Dick Plotz to become the second President of the Tolkien Society of America. He served until 1973, the year in which Tolkien died; after that, the T.S.A. was absorbed by the Mythopoeic Society.

a microcosmic level to build the necessary infrastructure—connections, resources, sociality—for Tolkien’s novel to become mass culture. *Niekas* did this better than any *Lord of the Rings* fanzine to date.

*Niekas* quickly became important across science fiction circuits, and not only among Tolkien enthusiasts: this was crucial to its impact on Tolkien’s status in the U.S.. Of the four key Tolkien fan magazines of the early to mid-1960s—*i-Palantir*, *Niekas*, *Tolkien Journal*, and *Entmoot*—*Niekas* was the only one that served as a general science fiction fanzine. Unlike *i-Palantir*, for example, whose editors (Johnstone and Pelz) had also been deeply embedded in science fiction fandom, *Niekas* commented on a range of material that appealed to science fiction fandom, not just Tolkien, thus catering to a broader range of fans and bringing them into contact with the *The Lord of the Rings*. The pages of *Niekas* featured many contributors who were well-known in fandom, and a few who were also known outside it, such as Harlan Ellison and Philip K. Dick. Major fanworks printed in *Niekas* included the enormous “Glossary of Middle-earth” that Al HaLevy, another Bay Area scientist, had been putting together at least as far back as 1960, fragments of which had appeared in *i-Palantir*; this was the first substantial reference work on Tolkien, and it appeared in large sections over several issues of *Niekas* (see haLevy).

Even more engaging than the content of the magazine, however, was its reflexivity: *Niekas* and its editor were stellar practitioners of fanzine self-fashioning. From the start, *Niekas* focused above all on reporting extensively and engagingly on fandom itself, generating and printing news and gossip and, in the form of its long letter-column, the interpersonal exchanges and debates that consolidated its far-flung

correspondents as a community. Thus, for example, while many members of fandom may have been attracted to Gilbert and Sullivan, another of Meškys's favorites, for the wordplay and performativity, coverage in *Niekas* focused on recounting events like a weekend road-trip to Los Angeles to watch a production, with plenty of apparently ancillary detail. Such a column name-checked numerous fans from both locations alongside criticism of the operetta and the production, which came both from the editor and, as reported, from other participants. It supplemented this by quoting comments from other publications, added in part to spark further dialogue with other fans, who had not been in attendance, in the pages of subsequent issues.

Although the dialogism of the publication was partly formal, *Niekas* was also able to report on fandom so vividly and engage so many contributors through geographic centrality: it reported first-hand fannish news from the East Bay, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, and it was a product of communal production. It also supplied access to portions of the formal/commercial market that would interest fans. Pelz had tried hard to get Tolkien to respond to *i-Palantir*; Tolkien had once, very early, sent a short letter to the British science fiction fanzine *Triode*, a coup for the editors that Pelz aspired to match (Tolkien, "Fan Dance (Letter)"). Meškys did not secure a contribution from Tolkien, but professional writers did contribute to *Niekas*. The most distinguished of these was Philip K. Dick, who lived in Berkeley and printed (or reprinted) several pieces in the magazine. Dick also socialized with members of the editorial group. Greg Shaw, the teenaged editor of *Entmoot* (another Bay Area Tolkien fanzine, launched in 1965), learned how to produce fanzines by the age of fifteen through associating with Meškys and the *Niekas* circle, including an exciting

visit to Dick's house in Berkeley that Shaw immediately detailed in *Feemwlor*, another of his fanzines (G. Shaw, *Feemwlor* 1).

The dialogism, the social spirit, both reported and performed by *Niekas* was typical of fanzine culture and particularly well executed; it gave the publication a vivid and various personality. It worked for Meškys as an individual; for *Niekas* as a publication; for *Entmoot*, which imitated and amplified the dialogic style; and for interpersonal networks, both those represented in its pages and those that consumed it, groups that overlapped. Though *The Lord of the Rings* did provide content of interest to many fans, *Niekas* also worked on the novel's behalf, keeping it in fandom's eye. Prior to *Niekas*, from 1958 to 1962, science fiction fandom had engaged with and published on *The Lord of the Rings* from all over the U.S. and, to a lesser extent, the U.K.. This included Tolkien-heavy publications from Los Angeles (*i-Palantir*), Texas (*Andúril*), and Philadelphia (*Ancalagon*), and contributors were scattered more widely still. Far flung fans, including many of those who appeared in the Tolkien-themed publications, also talked about Tolkien in many other science fiction fanzines, so a network of interest running throughout science fiction fandom already existed beyond those few magazines by 1963, when *Niekas's* audience started to burgeon (see S. G. Hunnewell, *Tolkien Fandom Review: From Its Beginnings to 1964* for detailed bibliographic information). But by creating an engaging, sociable print address—both a geographic and a virtual meeting space—and by demonstrating, with extensive content, that Tolkien's novel was a lasting, generative concern, *Niekas* moved *The Lord of the Rings* from corners and outposts of science fiction fandom to its center.

*Look world, here we are*

The remainder of this chapter concerns the single most important turning point in the history of *The Lord of the Rings*, the events of 1965-66: the release and increasing popularity of the first paperback editions, first from Ace and then from Ballantine; the way that the controversy over intellectual property described at the beginning of this chapter played out across the non-commercial circuits of science fiction fandom; and the alterations and experiments in fan culture that accompanied the emergent mass readership for *The Lord of the Rings*. Boundaries between the amateur and the mainstream press, and between different types of book publishers with different cultures, all became permeable in the outpouring of response. These events marked the conversion of Tolkien's novel into mass culture, and they form a crux in writings about Tolkien's career. From my perspective, this is due to the relationship between the text, its fans, and its ever-increasing financial value. Tensions arose between the mass and the popular with respect to *The Lord of the Rings*, and they persist to this day.

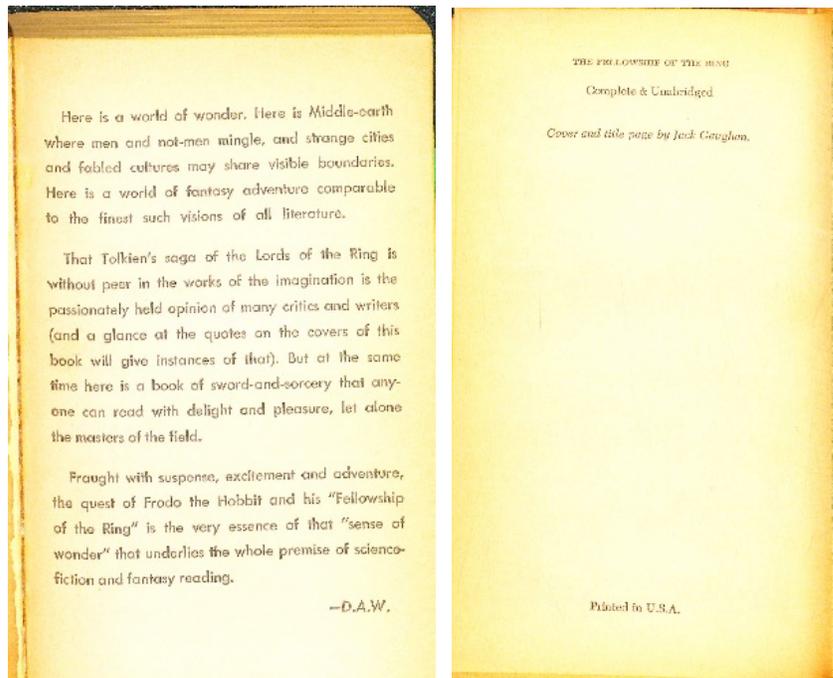
The excitement and friction that accompanied this transition, though one finds it in the pages of traditional science fiction fanzines (even those that had shown little prior interest in Tolkien), is also conditioned by the emergence of two new fanzines specializing solely in Tolkien, both edited by sixteen-year-old boys, on opposite sides of the country and in very different styles. The first was *Tolkien Journal*, the organ that built the newly-formed Tolkien Society of America, edited by Dick Plotz in

Brooklyn. The other, with roots in the Bay Area science fiction fandom scene anchored by *Niekas* but facing outward, was *Entmoot*, edited by Greg Shaw, starting when he was a high-school student in San Bruno, on the San Francisco peninsula. The nearly synchronous launch of these two publications would have changed the fanzine culture around Tolkien even without the paperbacks; in my view, the massification of *The Lord of the Rings* can't properly be understood without considering both of them as well as their relationship to established science fiction fanzine culture. The timing of their debut, moreover, is remarkable. *Tolkien Journal/TSA* and *Entmoot* were launched at exactly the same moment, to the month, both as each other and as the Ace paperback, in late May-June, 1965. None of these three responds to any of the others: two youthful, specialized, barely-fandom Tolkien fanzines appear not after Wollheim's paperback, not in response to it, but at the same moment.

Because events moved quickly in 1965, it's worth beginning with a chronological overview before moving to analysis of the fan and commercial material. In January 1965, Austin Olney, the Houghton Mifflin editor, placed an urgent (and unusual) telephone call to Rayner Unwin in London to tell him they had learned that Ace Books was planning an edition. Olney told Unwin that Wollheim believed the book was not protected by copyright, and that he, too, believed they had a serious problem: Houghton Mifflin did not "feel confident" in their position with respect to the law. Both publishers recognized that, unless they found a strategy to counter it, the Ace edition "would quickly dominate the market" (R. Unwin 118). In early February, Unwin wrote to Tolkien to explain the problem, excusing the publishers (both himself

and Houghton Mifflin) on the grounds that they were at the mercy of “a complicated and untested branch of American law” (R. Unwin 118). The proposal to copyright a new edition and publish it with Ballantine, Unwin says, came from Houghton Mifflin. This project, however, would require Tolkien’s “urgent cooperation” in supplying new material, and Unwin now had three decades of experience with his extremely dilatory methods. So, although the changes that would justify the new edition were quite limited, although they began work in February, and although Unwin and Tolkien were in constant communication, the “authorized” edition would not begin appearing until October.

On May 4, the “Books Today” column in the *New York Times* announced that Ace Books would shortly release *The Fellowship of the Ring* in paperback; on July 13, “Books Today” listed all three volumes as available (“Books Today”; “Books Today”). The first issue of *Tolkien Journal*, meanwhile, was dated May 26. It is a single, trifold sheet announcing the existence of the New York Tolkien Society (soon to become the Tolkien Society of America), naming Dick Plotz as its “Provisional Chairman,” and giving his home address in Brooklyn for correspondence (Plotz, *Tolkien Journal, Issue 1*). He also took out an ad, soliciting members, in the *New Republic*. This first *Tolkien Journal* makes no mention of Ace Books. In June, the first issue of *Entmoot* came out, jointly published by Greg Shaw in San Bruno and Dave Hall, the “lonely king” of *Mathom*, in Crystal City, Missouri; Hall would drop out after the first issue. Although more substantial than the initial flier from Plotz’s group, this too was a short issue, ten pages, “a shibbolethic cry of ‘Look world, here we are’” (D. Hall). Again, the Ace paperbacks went unmentioned.



The Ace Books edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, 1965. D.A.W. (Donald A. Wollheim) gets the title wrong in his blurb for the first volume. The colophon has no date or copyright notice. From the holdings of Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside

The Ace edition of *Fellowship* began appearing around the country that same month (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*). The back of the title page declares no date and no publisher; only “complete and unabridged,” the name of the cover artist, and “Printed in USA.” At the very front of the book is a promotional blurb, signed “D.A.W.,” announcing the wrong title—“Tolkien’s saga of the Lords of the Ring”—and namechecking “sword and sorcery” and “science fiction,” very different markets than Unwin had defined. The Map of the Shire appears immediately before the page reading “Book I”; no other map appears in this volume, and there would be no map at all in *The Two Towers*.

In July and August, as sales of the Ace edition picked up, Tolkien’s publishers began promoting the forthcoming “authorized” paperback from Ballantine Press, with

material that couldn't be found in Ace. Throughout the summer and fall of 1965, Donald Wollheim and representatives of Ballantine and Allen & Unwin, along with dozens of fans and professional science fiction writers, argued over the Ace edition in the pages of *Niekas*, *Yandro*, *Lighthouse*, and other science fiction fanzines, while stories on the controversy also appeared in mainstream commercial newspapers. A broader range of the older science fiction fanzines (including *Lighthouse* and *Yandro*) than had previously been interested in Tolkien became caught up in the controversy, that summer, due in part to Wollheim's notoriety and the importance of Ace Books to science fiction fandom. The mainstream press also covered the dispute, but, as explained toward the beginning of this chapter, their coverage tended to be compressed and nonpartisan. Tolkien's publishers, with Wollheim in the lead, seemed implicitly to recognize that fandom was the venue in which control over the property would be decided. Of course, the possibility that fans themselves could control the property—they would certainly have sought Tolkien's guidance and have paid him—was never on the table.

As sales of the Ace volumes were brisk, and Tolkien still hadn't finished his revisions, Ballantine Press released the first (unrevised) paperback of *The Hobbit* in August, as a show of good faith to American buyers. The peculiar cover art by Barbara Remington worried Tolkien, who had expended such care over the original dustjacket and binding. After describing its features as “ugly,” “foul,” and “horrible,” he asked Unwin: “Where is this place? Why a lion and emus? And what is the thing in the background with pink bulbs?” (Tolkien, *Letters* 362). In September, Tolkien answered an inquiry from Dick Plotz (who had told him about the “Tolkien Society of

America”; Auden apparently mentioned it to him as well) with a long, detailed letter about Elvish (Tolkien, “Letter #276, to Dick Plotz, ‘Thain’ of the Tolkien Society of America, 1965”). This greatly boosted Plotz’s prestige with fans and would even help extend his reputation beyond fandom. In October, both *Entmoot* and *Tolkien Journal* published second, more substantial issues. From October to December, Ballantine’s *Lord of the Rings* became available, with further Remington covers and the Ring’s inscription upside down.

In December, Plotz held a meeting of the Tolkien Society at his parents’ house in Brooklyn; Auden attended, and the *New Yorker* ran a story about it in *Talk of the Town* (“Talk of the Town: The Elvish Mode”). In January, 1966, Ace paid Tolkien a modest sum for the use of his book, \$9,000, and Tolkien agreed in writing (published in *Tolkien Journal*) that the payment had been voluntary, that he had accepted it, and that the matter was now closed, on the understanding that Ace would not reprint their edition. Sales of the novel continued to grow. In the summer of 1966, the *Saturday Evening Post* ran a long article about the growing Tolkien craze by journalist Henry Resnik, constructed around an interview with Tolkien; the complete interview would appear in *Niekas* in 1967, and the article discussed Plotz and Shaw and their respective publications in some detail (Resnik, “The Hobbit-Forming World of J.R.R. Tolkien”; Resnik, “An Interview with Tolkien”). From December, 1966 to March, 1967, *The Lord of the Rings* finally reached number one on the *New York Times* Paperback Best Seller list, and Plotz, now a freshman at Harvard, interviewed Tolkien for the January issue of *Seventeen* (Plotz, “J. R. R. Tolkien Talks about the Discovery of Middle-Earth, the Origins of Elvish”).

Over the course of these two years, the character of Tolkien fanzines began to change. Where before, longstanding institutions of science fiction fandom had supported fandom members who embraced Tolkien's novel, the audience for the book grew so rapidly in 1965 and 1966 that many people unconnected with science fiction fandom became interested in engaging with the text and with other fans. In the interim, before this *Gemeinschaft–Gesellschaft* conversion had solidified, fanzines stepped into the breach. *Tolkien Journal* and *Entmoot* both reached out to readerships beyond the boundaries of traditional science fiction fandom. In August 1966, *Entmoot* ran a retrospective review of science fiction fandom's attention to Tolkien for the benefit of readers who had never heard of "fandom." Likewise, in February 1967, *Tolkien Journal* featured Ed Meškys explaining science fiction fandom and its history with Tolkien for the TSA readership. Plotz and Shaw, throughout 1965-66, were competing figures, who both supported and were clearly irritated by each other, and who modeled different ways of interacting with the text. They both opened up science fiction fandom and its way of engaging with Tolkien's novel to new readerships, and in the process they helped connect the text with larger commercial structures and hence with further avenues of capital accumulation. And both of them were finished with Tolkien fandom in little more than two years.

***Of interest to readers of your newsletter (the summer of 1965)***

The debate over the Ace Books edition began in June, as soon as the Ace *Fellowship* came out, and it began exactly where a knowledge of science fiction fandom would predict, with one of Meškys' long editorials in *Niekas*.

I suppose that few readers are now unaware of the Ace pocket book editions of Lord of the Rings at 75c the volume, and have heard various rumors about it being a ‘pirate’ edition. Don Wollheim was in town a few days ago and Emil Petaja had a party in his honor, so I took advantage of the opportunity to get the full story. (Meškys, *Niekas #12*)

Meškys conveys the news and plays up the informality of his conversation with “Don” at a party for the benefit of other members of fandom, in the same manner he had reported things like the Los Angeles collating party where they threw Bjo in the pool. The comments he attributes to Wollheim do similar work in relation to his colleagues in the publishing business: Wollheim talks to Meškys at a party, knowing the conversation, in the pages of the fanzine, will reach not only fans but colleagues and professional writers in the science fiction and publishing business. Both of them humble-brag while personalizing and apparently humanizing the commercial dispute. Meškys folds Wollheim’s comments in with his own editorial voice, in his usual idiom:

According to Don, the other Don, Don Benson of Pyramid Books, has been phoning Houghton Mifflin every few months to try to get rights to the 3 volumes for several years, but was always turned down. I always imagined that there was no paperback edition simply because the hardcover one was still selling so well, but Wollheim speculated that H-M held out because they had nothing to sell... i.e., there were no ‘rights’ to the books ... and that if others realized this they would publish without any clearance whatsoever. In other words, they were holding back simply to keep word from getting out about the public-domain status. (Meškys, *Niekas #12*)

Wollheim speaks to fandom through Meškys, in much the same way as Tolkien would speak to fandom through Plotz in September, when sending his long letter about Elvish. Wollheim plays up his intimacy with fandom while conducting business, and

yet a core of shared interest binds the strategy. The same would be true of science fiction novelists who might have been at the party or might read the report afterward.

Meškys, meanwhile, seems at least entertained by the possibility that the owners truly had lost control of the property, saying that “Don discovered” that the novel was “in the public domain”:

Wollheim speculated that the publishers never figured the book would be popular here and simply didn't bother registering it. [...] when the first volume appeared from Ace Wollheim got a call from Benson asking how in the @\$% he had managed to swing the deal. DW claimed 'trade secret' and said DB would find out in a few weeks. [...] Well, the dam has been broken. (Meškys, *Niekas* #12 77)

Wollheim told him to expect more editions, and Meškys predicts that Signet will come out with a paperback soon. Meškys can confirm various details for fandom: Ace is, indeed, not paying royalties; Ballantine is, indeed, preparing another edition; a British paperback is being discussed. He notes one important detail that did not appear in Wollheim's subsequent accounts of the affair, namely that “Don [...] expected Ace to keep the books in print indefinitely, but as a prestige item.” This is exactly the same motive originally given by Stanley Unwin to his son Rayner, with regard to publication (“you may lose a thousand pounds”). The form of the market differs, however: Wollheim's goal is “getting the Ace line into many places such as college bookstores which they had never been able to enter before” (77). Meškys also fulfills his role of enabling access to the books, noting the “limited distribution”: “I have heard that they appeared on a few large Berkeley newsstands and got general distribution in S.F., but are otherwise unavailable in the Bay Area.” He closes by noting the appearance of “the New York Tolkien Society founded by Dick Plotz [...] I

just received the first issue of their newsletter, a one page mimeographed thing announcing the formation and ends of the club. I understand that the founder is unfamiliar with fandom” (Meškys 77–78).

*Yandro* and *Lighthouse*, both major science fiction fanzines from outside California, were slightly more established than any of the Tolkien fanzines. Neither had a primary interest in *The Lord of the Rings*, but both also hosted extensive discussion of the Ace edition. *Lighthouse* (1958-67) was published at irregular intervals by a very “big name fan,”<sup>46</sup> Terry Carr, who had relocated to Greenwich Village from San Francisco in 1961. *Yandro* was published by a married couple, Buck and Juanita Coulson, in Indiana. It had a long run, 1958-1983, and published monthly for most of that time, including in 1965-66; this made it useful for something like the discussion of the editions, in which the sense of “news” was a theme. Part of *Yandro*’s function was to comment extensively on other fanzines; so, for instance, the July 1965 issue reviews both *Feemwlort*, Greg Shaw’s smaller, more self-reflexive fanzine published simultaneously with *Entmoot*, and *Mathom*, Dave Hall’s tiny fanzine from Missouri. *Yandro* 151, in September, reviews *Entmoot* as “the sort of Tolkien esoterica I couldn’t care less about [...] Recommended to fanatic Tolkien fans” (Coulson and Coulson, *Yandro* #151 14). *Yandro* and *Lighthouse* centralized the discussion the controversy for science fiction fandom, and they published Wollheim’s statements about it, but both of them host the discussion as a matter of habitual reflexivity and interest to science fiction writers, readers, and publishers.

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<sup>46</sup> “BNF” is a very old fannish term, which described Carr completely; he won four Hugo awards, two for fanzines; his fanzine collection, like Bruce Pelz’s, is one of the four that make up the Eaton fanzine collection at UC Riverside. *Lighthouse* frequently published Walter Breen. In 1963 it ran a “joking” column arguing that Sam and Frodo were lovers.

The letter column of the July issue of *Yandro* began with a letter from Bernard Shif-Cliff of Ballantine Books denouncing the Ace edition and complaining that *Yandro* had promoted it:

In your latest issue of *Yandro* you report that “the biggest news of the month is the publication of THE LORD OF THE RINGS by Ace Books”, and you conclude by urging the readers to ‘buy this one and hope that Ace publishes the rest of it.’ (Coulson and Coulson, *Yandro* #149)

*Yandro*, as a non-commercial publication, is neither Ballantine’s employee nor subject to the expectations of business practice. Shif-Cliff announces that the “authorised” edition (he uses the British spelling) will be forthcoming “within ninety days,” invokes “the great affection readers of THE LORD OF THE RINGS feel for the work of its author,” and finishes by insulting the publication and, by extension, science fiction fandom generally: “I believe that this information would be of interest to the readers of your newsletter.” Shif-Cliff also makes material commitments, promising a Foreword, a “valuable index,” and “all maps, glossaries and addenda”; given the mode of reading appropriate to the novel, which science fiction fandom had modeled for years, these are substantial benefits. The same letter-column includes evidence on how professional writers, who were also part of science fiction fandom, reacted—for example, a report from Westercon saying that Harlan Ellison and Ted White had “joined hands, put on hob-nailed boots, and jumped up and down on Don Wollheim and Ace, for not paying authors, for excessive editorial interference with manuscripts, and in general for being a crook.”

The *New York Times* briefly covered the controversy in August: “Whatever else they may be doing—and they are doing plenty—the paperback publishers at least

are setting off firecrackers under the once leisurely operating hard-cover publishers. Publishing may still be a profession for gentlemen, but the gentlemen must now look sharply around them” (Nichols). In the August issue of *Yandro*, Wollheim wrote to “take exception to Mr. Shir-Cliff’s designation of our Ace editions [...] as ‘pirated,’” calling this “libelous nonsense,” as piracy is a legal designation. “There would never have been any paperback editions,” he goes on, “without a pioneer publisher exercising his legal rights” (Coulson and Coulson, *Yandro* #150). [as in his letter to *Yandro*] complains about the piracy charge in his *Lighthouse* essay also— “it would seem that Dr. Tolkien himself has written a couple of correspondents in concern over what he thinks are ‘pirate’ editions,” and in September, he writes to *Yandro* again, accusing Ballantine of turning a profit “while shedding loud crocodile tears against dastardly ‘pirates’” (19). Much later, a chapter of his 1971 memoir/history *The Universe Makers* called “Why Frodo Lives” positions Wollheim as Tolkien’s long-term champion, saying that he was on the committee that award Tolkien the International Fantasy Award in 1957 and claiming to have “lit the spark that started the explosion for Tolkien” by putting Tolkien “on the newsstands in low-priced paperback editions.” Wollheim repeatedly uses the word “pioneer” here to describe the editions and his role, as he had in *Yandro* in 1965 (Wollheim, *The Universe Makers* 109). The word parallels and seems chosen as a substitute for “pirate.” In the U.S., the term “pioneer” is most strongly associated with European settlement in the West, a euphemism for genocidal expropriation, while “piracy” has comparatively “foreign” and—because nautical—even British connotations. These competing

epithets mark a contest between stereotypes, including traditions that assign class and temporal dimensions to the national distinction between the U.S. and the U.K..

In August, Wollheim also published an essay, “The Ace Tolkiens,” which has been reprinted and cited in discussions of the affair; it first appeared in *Lighthouse* #13 (Wollheim, “The Ace Tolkiens”). Most of his claims in this are identical to those he mentioned to Ed Meškys in June, with a bit more bluster. Rival companies immediately congratulated him on the “coup,” he says, citing one letter from an “official of another paperback outfit, a big one” saying “I have nothing but admiration for your imagination and foresight.” Another publisher, he says, congratulated him on the “Tolkien scoop” by phone, saying he’d been trying to negotiate with Houghton Mifflin for three years and asking for Wollheim’s “secret”—which was “simply a little knowledge of the most elementary copyright law. The Tolkien saga had never been copyright in the United States” (16). He attributes the owners’ error to a “guess that the work would have only a few hundred oddball buyers.” He also writes of the “very heavy expense” involved with publishing *The Lord of the Rings*, which he needed to justify; “Printing them would present technical problems” (17). These concerns, like the goal of “prestige” (represented for Wollheim by a spot for science fiction on the shelf in college bookstores) are identical to the ones that plagued Allen & Unwin’s original decisions.

His rhetoric involves the fandom readership in the problem: he writes as among peers. Should Ace have asked Houghton Mifflin’s permission, he asks, or told them what they were doing? “Or should we have written Dr. Tolkien in advance?” The “paperback book industry is very, very competitive” (18). He compares the situation

with another recent discussion involving trans-Atlantic publication and Ace, which recalls Hugo Gernsback's use of British and French material for his magazines thirty years earlier: "Further, as in the case of Edgar Rice Burroughs, we're perfectly willing to pay the author for his work [...] the curious thing about all this is that the fan personalities who seem to be upset about this never uttered a peep during the Ace Burroughs revival." Wollheim says this disparity arises because the fans "like" Tolkien and they "don't like" Burroughs. His maneuver is to reject the personal motive, to suggest puzzlement about it, against which his position represents objectivity. And yet business, politics, law, and crime have this in common: a need to pay attention to the material and to expose the compromised rhetoric of his antagonists. He relishes the rhetorical battle.

Wollheim's many statements about the controversy in the fanzines contain an interesting set of positionings and arguments, all revolving around the material basis of the publishing industry; his signature gesture is demystification. By pointing out that those asserting copyright are, themselves, seeking to profit, Wollheim subtly suggests the instincts about labor and property that lie embedded in the equivocation between moral rights (against plagiarism, for example) and ownership in mass cultural properties. The charge against Wollheim is that he is a capitalist businessman "stealing" and profiting from someone else's work, as in Shif-Cliff's hopeful rejoinder (again, in a follow up letter in the September issue, attempting a speech act) that "Professor Tolkien's readers regard him with genuine affection and are outraged by Ace's casual expropriation of his books" (Coulson and Coulson, *Yandro #151*). But profiting from the work of others is the essential, definitional operation of capitalism,

always and everywhere. And the material basis of the dispute reappears in Shir-Cliff's closing reassurance that "Our edition should be along at any moment."

The controversy provided fandom with months of material. September's *Yandro* had a separate letter column just on the Ace editions; its dozen or more letters from fans (including Ruth Berman), regardless of their opinions—if any—on the morality of the case, mostly deploy considerable irony toward Wollheim, causing a ruckus in fandom for the fourth consecutive decade. The needs of readers are the constant theme. The letters focus most often on access to the text, starting with Meškys's observation in June that the Ace paperbacks aren't available in Livermore. A fan named Roy Tackett writes that Ace has

done a bit of a service in making the work available in a low-priced edition [...] It is so difficult to get anything here in Albuquerque. [...] I ordered my copy [...] by mail from New York simply because it isn't available in this town of 300,000 non-existent people. (Coulson and Coulson, *Yandro* #151 34).

The "non-existent people" at issue seem less the residents of Albuquerque generally than fans, lovers of and workers in the realm of the novel. Fiction is part of their means of production, what they use to build their social relations, and moreover what they use to build the value of the property for the owners. The October issue of *Yandro* is still full of letters about the controversy, now including some from the U.K., where correspondents are uniformly incensed. And yet, although they talk anxiously about "the empire" (currently in free fall), boast of their superior command of irony, and, in one example, conclude that "all U.S. publishers" seem to be "black hearted villains," the bottom line remains access. "All we're left with," one of these letters complains,

“is the three guinea set or the special luxury edition at six guineas” (Coulson and Coulson, *Yandro* #152).

In October, *Tolkien Journal*, with its rapidly growing circulation list and semi-official status, thanks to Tolkien’s September letter, attempted a more sober tone than what had appeared in *Niekas*, *Yandro*, and *Lighthouse*. The contrast between *Niekas*’s sociable, intimate, just-in-time fannish chitchat and Plotz’s querulous, authoritarian tone is striking:

As most members probably know by now, Ace Books has published an unauthorized paperback edition of LotR. The only excuse for buying this edition is that one might own the hardcover edition and want the Ace for a collection. For those whose financial state is such as to make buying the hardcover edition impossible, an authorized paperback edition is being published by Ballantine Books. (Plotz, *Tolkien Journal*, Issue 2)

Plotz also asserts, on Tolkien’s authority, that *The Silmarillion* has been “delayed by the Ace books controversy” but reassures readers that it should be available next year. Tolkien can be pretty querulous and authoritative himself, and doubtless both thrilling and intimidating for an American teenager to correspond with. But Plotz is performing his role in a strategy, coordinated between Tolkien, Allen & Unwin, and the U.S. publishers, for overcoming the threat that they would lose control of the property (see R. Unwin 118). The scheme put Plotz’s teenaged fan project in the limelight, to the point that the *New Yorker*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Seventeen* magazine all featured him in 1966-67. This made the club he started, the Tolkien Society of America, into an unpaid organ dedicated to the reproduction of property relations in the fiction industry.

In December of 1965, the month the final volume of the Ballantine edition came out—in an issue in which Buck Coulson reports getting a letter from a fan in Sweden trying to track down LSD—*Yandro* published still another long letter from Wollheim, commenting bitterly on Tolkien’s stress on “courtesy” (as in the blurb on the paperbacks, “those who approve of courtesy to living authors”) rather than on money:

This apparently is a British upper class gimmick. It would be crude and rude to mention vulgar cash—you aim your published protest on the basis of what boors these Americans were, they lacked the breeding to write a polite letter. [...] I must give these British aristocrats credit—they know how to make themselves look like poor pitiful martyrs. (Coulson and Coulson, *Yandro* #154)

Wollheim’s discursive posture of materialist demystification suggests traces of his communist roots: he may be upset about falling behind in sales, but this is accurate ideology critique (informed by experiences of antisemitism) repurposed as a business identity. This materialism holds open the possibility of recognizing exactly what had allowed Ace to execute their “coup,” namely that more labor goes into making a story mass culture than writing, printing, and shipping it. His language also reverberates with pop-cultural clichés about the relationship between the U.S. and the U.K., for instance in his characterization of Tolkien and the Unwins, painfully bourgeois, as “aristocrats.” Although the materials for radical critique are present, both class and nationality end up functioning as cultural signals rather than material relations.

*All the Tolkien enthusiasts everywhere (Plotz and Shaw: October 1965-April 1966)*

Dick Plotz lived just south of Prospect Park in Brooklyn, not far from where Wollheim and his friends had set up their science fiction club in the Communist Party offices in the 1930s but on a leafier, more expensive block. His timing in founding the Tolkien Society of America worked perfectly for him; he pushed hard, through the rapidly growing membership organization and its organ, the *Tolkien Journal*, for Americans to boycott Wollheim's "pirated" edition, earning the attention of Tolkien and his publishers. This was a different agenda to the one the science fiction fanzines had followed in hosting the debate over Ace, though the publishers had appeared there also. *Niekas* had worked to consolidate fandom as fandom. It positioned Tolkien's novel as something the participants in science fiction fandom, as it existed, would want to know about, and it gave them tools—artwork, glossaries, raging arguments—to enjoy and use it. *Tolkien Journal*, though there was overlap in its types of content and contributors (Meškys would succeed Plotz as editor in 1967), supplied a market that was already pre-constituted by its interest in *The Lord of the Rings* and that had no other group identity. It was for consumers of a particular narrative product, and it sold that product and products related to it.

The journal was ambitious and authoritative. The initial flyer announced that

The basic aim of the New York Tolkien Society is to further communication among all the Tolkien enthusiasts everywhere. [...] Eventually we will attempt to establish correspondence with Tolkien enthusiasts around the world.

The New York Tolkien Society  
Dick Plotz (Frodo), Provisional Chairman  
26\_may 1965 (Plotz, *Tolkien Journal*, Issue 1)

Plotz's goal of global consolidation, well before he corresponded with Tolkien or appeared in the *New Yorker*, contravenes the advice of *The Enchanted Duplicator*, the

humble apprenticeship that science fiction fandom urged upon the neofan; from the point of view of science fiction fandom culture, Plotz's project should have been a failure. The first substantial issue, which appeared in October,<sup>47</sup> estimated that 70 out of his 100 "subscribers" had signed up in response to his paid ad. He includes little personal detail in the magazine, but, judging by his address and the story in the *New Yorker*, he came from an affluent household, and his expectations were high; he matriculated at Harvard in 1967. *Tolkien Journal* aims for professionalism. Neither strictly scholarly nor strictly lighthearted, its mission becomes the business of Tolkien, advocating against Ace and organizing the novel's fans into a centralized group, which could support the "craze" in some of the ways science fiction fandom had but without science fiction fandom itself. Above all, *Tolkien Journal* stays on topic: there are no anecdotes about throwing Bjo in the pool, and it never presumes that readers know the "characters"—the contributors (who sometimes come from science fiction fandom), the editor, Wollheim, or each other.

In the second issue, Plotz could report that he had received a "six-page letter" from Tolkien, mostly devoted to answering his questions about Elvish. Plotz's interest in invented languages was genuine, and Tolkien ultimately named a feature of Elvish after him, "the Plotz declension," thanks to his agitation against Ace Books. Tolkien was using him, but the reverse was true as well: Plotz both worked to police the consolidation of the growing property and acquired cultural capital for himself by performing this service. At the front of the October issue appears a ten-item

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<sup>47</sup> *Tolkien Journal* used the "Shire Reckoning," from Tolkien's appendix, to date their issues. The second issue, for example, is dated "Winterfilth 1965": Winterfilth runs 22 September to 21 October. Volume II number 1, from around January ("Afteryule") 1966, is issue 3; when Meškys took over, the *Journal* adopted simpler numbering.

bibliography of entries on Tolkien in press outlets—*Sewanee*, *The Nation*, *New Republic*. This is like and unlike a science fiction fanzine or apazine, which would routinely report on the contents of other amateur publications. He also offers a paid subscription at a fixed price:

Detach and return this stub:  
I wish to: Subscribe (50¢ enclosed) \_\_\_\_  
Age \_\_\_\_ Occupation \_\_\_\_

The device of the tear-off form was common in science fiction fanzines, but not the straightforward cash price or the quasi-governmental demand for personal data about the subscriber. The *Journal's* relationship to a massifying property serves otherwise unconnected people and makes no effort to reflect them as a community; instead, gathering statistical data seems relevant. Plotz would become, through the TSA and the mainstream press, one of Wollheim's principal antagonists and opponents. He comes down on the side of the owners of capital, facilitating accumulation.

Greg Shaw, also just sixteen in 1965, was in some ways a parallel figure to Plotz, but also a perfectly opposed one. Based in San Francisco when Plotz was in New York, antiauthoritarian where Plotz was authoritarian, Shaw's *Entmoot* modeled a different approach to Tolkien's text and a different attitude toward both science fiction fandom and the intellectual property dispute. Shaw's name may be familiar to some readers already: just as Bjo Trimble, Ruth Berman, and Marion Zimmer Bradley would go on, in the late sixties and seventies, to help shape media fandom, fantasy, and fanfiction, Greg Shaw is known to historians of popular music as an important early rock critic, independent publisher, and an influential figure in the emergence of

alternative rock.<sup>48</sup> When he died in 2004, obituaries for him appeared in major press outlets of the U.S. and U.K.; a column that assembles short tributes from his fellow rock critics explains:

In August, 1966, Greg Shaw helped launch the very idea of rock criticism with his mimeographed publication, *Mojo-Navigator Rock & Roll News*. A few years later, he started up what was to become the extremely influential network of *Bomp* [...]: a magazine, a record store, and a record label, all of which helped sow the seeds of punk and new wave. Over the course of the next four decades, Shaw was an instrumental figure in the careers of numerous musicians and writers. (“Tributes to Greg Shaw (1949-2004)”)

The launch of *Mojo-Navigator* coincided to the month with Shaw’s discontinuation of his Tolkien fanzine, *Entmoot*. *Mojo-Navigator* documented the life of rock music in San Francisco in the year leading up to and through the “Summer of Love,” from August of 1966 through August of 1967, and is rumored to have provided the template for *Rolling Stone*, launched in San Francisco in November 1967.

Shaw launched his first two self-published magazines at the same time, in June of 1965, when he sold his collection of periodicals to buy his own mimeograph machine. He learned self-publication from the *Niekas* group. In the first issue of his more personal, non-Tolkien fanzine, *Feemwlor*, he writes about attending a Gilbert & Sullivan party with about a dozen people, including Ed Meškys, who

sat around all night talking and playing G&S and Tolkien on the piano. The hit of the evening was Phil Sali, who had brought along the world’s first copy of the paperback *Fellowship of the Ring*. Everybody kept picking it up and fondling it as if unable to believe in it. (G. Shaw, *Feemwlor* 2 16)

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<sup>48</sup> See the obituaries for Shaw in the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Guardian*. *Who Put the Bomp* published most of the major rock music writers of the 1970s; Shaw also wrote for *Creem* and had a record label (Bomp!) with his ex-wife Suzy Shaw (Burns; Sisario; Cromelin; Shaw and Shaw; “Label Spotlight”).

It's unlikely that this was the same party at which Meškys talked with Wollheim, though it was the same month. At 4 a.m., Shaw says, they decided it was too late to go home and just "bedded down"; the next day, they drove to the East Bay, and three of them "went over" to see Philip K. Dick. "We spent the entire day and evening there; Phil is a hard man to break away from. [...] We talked about everything from LSD to the I CHING, to old opera recordings, to a couple of novels he's currently working on" (G. Shaw, *Feemwlor* 2 16). Anecdotes like this reflect Shaw's cheerful engagement with science fiction fandom and his romantic sensibility: "this issue is dedicated to Ed Meškys, for being a wonderful person, and to Sally, whose fine artwork graces this fanzine, regrettably only retaining a trace of their beauty through the mimeo."

Like *Niekas*, but in some ways even more so, Shaw's Tolkien fanzine *Entmoot* excelled at fashioning itself as a dialogic space. An "Entmoot," in *The Lord of the Rings*, is a "gathering of Ents"; Treebeard calls one to organize the attack on Isengard (III.iv). The name implies an exchange, rather than a monovocal document, as well as an important gathering to which all of a certain kind (in Treebeard's case, Ents) are invited, and which they are expected to make some effort to attend. In giving his gloss on the title in the first issue, Shaw explains that the "lettercol" will be the key feature of the magazine, and it is. At first, he calls the letter column "Amon Lhaw" after the "Hill of Hearing" at Tol Brandir, near Gondor. By emphasizing hearing rather than speaking, he signals the graciousness that made the fanzine appealing. The name also evokes the somatic character of performance, with sound's characteristic equivocation between contact in person and at a distance. It suggests embodiment and pushes

against textuality. In later issues, he changes the title to the punning “TÎW” — “tîw” is the Sindarin word for “letters” (as in an alphabet)— what “Tengwar” means in Quenya (Sindarin and Quenya are two branches of the Elvish language). By the fourth and last issue, in August 1966, the letter column filled twenty-five single-spaced, 8 ½ x 11 pages.

Shaw’s version of the ongoing relationship between performance and print in the fanzines shows in his colloquial staging of discussions among the letter-writers. From the beginning, Shaw and Hall (David Hall, of *Mathom*, co-edited the first issue) lay out who says what, in the letter column, in an accessible, quasi-theatrical way: “Here’s James again:” “Here’s GREG SHAW’s answer to Harry’s comment two pages back, just arrived.” By the second issue, Shaw establishes a scribal code for marking his interjections (surrounding them with punctuation like so: “-/ interjection /-”) to allow him to converse with the letters he reprints, weaving his own comments in and out of the letter-writer’s prose. He takes note of what the reader needs to know and what she doesn’t: Shaw says he hopes some readers will know Elvish, but—in contrast to traditional science fiction fanzines like *Niekas*, *Andúril*, or *i-Palantir*—he doesn’t presume that they know all the forms of science fiction fandom. It was appreciated by readers: in *Entmoot* 4, published in August, 1966 for a much larger readership (the book had been out in paperback for over a year at that point), the letter column includes numerous compliments on Shaw’s style. *Entmoot* is “less pretentious than most fanzines” writes one correspondent; “it isn’t my kind of stuff, but I dig the editorial personality” writes another. At this distance, but apparently also at the time, it is much easier to read than most science fiction fanzines, with both a less in-group

manner and considerable charm. As I suggested earlier about his partner's fanzine *Mathom*, and as had been true of *Niekas* (though with a younger, more outward-facing style), readers seemed to like the magazine in a way indistinguishable from liking the editor. These "personal" (textual) qualities, and the networked sociality that made them invaluable to cultural production, were wedded to material technologies: as several critics note, Shaw launched *Mojo-Navigator* using expertise derived from his work in science fiction fandom.

Shaw shared Plotz's preoccupation with Tolkien's languages. In the first issue (June, 1965), he commits himself to writing a "big article" on "reading and writing Elven" (he doesn't even say "Elvish" yet) that "explains in detail just how to do it." He also plans to create a "bulletin board" where people can post ideas for projects and sign up to do them, to avoid "useless duplication of labor," explaining that he worked on his "Dictionary of Elven Words" before realizing, via *i-Palantir*, that Jack Harness had been working on the same thing for years. In a "letter" to *Entmoot* #1 (which was edited by Hall), he says that, in regards to Tolkien, the languages interest him most; he wants a "department" at *Entmoot* that would deliver news and gossip—the usual fanzine material—"in this script [...] that would not be printed elsewhere in English"; this, he theorizes, would motivate readers to learn Elvish. He follows this with an entire page written in the Tengwar script and a request for readers to "let us know" whether they can decipher it. *Entmoot* also includes the kind of "scholarly" material found in the science fiction fanzines, from some of the same contributors, such as the "Prolegomenon to a Variorum Tolkien" by Banks Mebane: "The pompous title above merely means that this article will consider the differences between the original

hardcover edition ... and the Ballantine edition ... I have found 244 points on which the texts differ, but only 52 of these are substantial changes ... The typos are of two kinds.” Both scholarship and fanaticism are intrinsic to this piece, which reflects on matters such as changes to measurements of Orthanc, to distances or directions that can reconcile maps of the Shire, to the punctuation on Galadriel’s song, both in Elvish and in translation (G. Shaw, *Entmoot 3*). Ned Brooks’s column “TOLKIEN IN PAPERBACK!?” provides formulas for converting page numbers between editions and opines that the indices “do not [...] make Al Halevy’s Glossary superfluous” (G. Shaw, *Entmoot 3* 14).

Shaw’s use of Tolkien’s scripts and languages looks like a marker of commitment, a boundary, and like appropriation. It implies both invitation and exclusion. Greil Marcus’s appreciation of Shaw, from the tribute column mentioned above, calls *Mojo-Navigator* “gnostic apocrypha from a forgotten bible without a name” (“Tributes to Greg Shaw (1949-2004)”). Marcus emphasizes the magazine’s skill at preserving the mystique, the secrecy, surrounding cool music even while broadcasting the secret to new readers. Elvish acts both as a barrier, delimiting an esoteric discursive community, and as a connector—between Tolkien and Plotz, between Plotz and Shaw—a shared activity through which to quiet friction and difference. Shaw implicitly recognized this duality when he wrote, in the second issue, that the Elvish script’s “one major use is in writing to other people who understand it. A minor use is inscribing esoteric inscriptions in the mundane world to confound them”; “mundane” is an old fannish term for “non-fan” (G. Shaw, *Entmoot 2*). In passing, Shaw recommends a fountain pen for writing it; this was a nostalgic vogue in

the 1960s, another example of how the missed connection between Tolkien and his fans in California was also a parallel, sharing luddite impulses, nostalgia, and romanticism.

In spite of its “gnostic apocrypha,” a key feature of *Entmoot*, like *Tolkien Journal*, was its inviting attitude toward Tolkien’s growing readership. Shaw’s magazine was a part of science fiction fandom in a way that *Tolkien Journal* was not, but reached beyond it, and that required a kind of transparency, or at least a different flavor of apocrypha. By mid-1966, Shaw was bringing *Entmoot* to countercultural venues and selling it at small bookstores in the Bay Area. Early on, he had bartered for it, as would have been done in science fiction fandom, or simply gave it away: “If you want to pay for ENTMOOT, send us whatever you think it’s worth, but copies can be had simply by expressing an interest in receiving them” (G. Shaw, *Entmoot* 2). In issue 4, however, August 1966, he notes that *Entmoot* is available at “various places in the San Francisco area”; no mailing is necessary, and no barter, in these venues, is possible. As with *Tolkien Journal*, expanding the circuit involves professionalization; the structure of exchange accommodates the circumstances, the unpredictable shape of a readership no longer defined by an amateur press association.

This final issue caters to a different sensibility than either the Tolkien Society of America or science fiction fandom, one that would eventuate in at least as great a concentration of capital, via rock music and gaming. But it maintains Shaw’s characteristically sociable tone:

[T]his Entmoot is on sale in San Francisco, at places such as the Psychedelic Shop. There is a lot of interest in Tolkien here and if you have any ideas you’d like to see take form, there is probably someone

around who would be interested in helping. So if you are somebody not connected with science fiction fandom who has bought this magazine and would like to contact other Tolkien fans, get in touch with me. If you have stage adaptations of Tolkien or rock ‘n’ roll arrangements of his songs or anything like that, I would be especially interested. (G. Shaw, *Entmoot* 4 31)

Shaw is thus, like Plotz, part of the machinery that makes Tolkien mass, though with the ambivalence that characterizes so many projects of this type. In the rock world, Shaw would become known for celebrating an aesthetic of self-production; hence his promotion, through the seventies and beyond, of garage rock, punk, and New Wave acts like Iggy Pop and the Modern Lovers. In *Entmoot*, he’s conscious of widening the circuit of the science fiction zine, even as he seeks, over the next two decades, to keep popular culture popular, to sustain the human scale while encouraging as many people to participate as he can.

In 2016, I corresponded with his partner Suzy Shaw (they remained professional partners in Bomp! long after their divorce); she mentioned his “his hand embroidered cape” and told me that “All I really remember is him and his buddies leaping around in tights speaking Elvish” (S. Shaw). This chapter cannot pursue the relationship between *The Lord of the Rings* and California hippiedom in depth, but the “hand-embroidered cape,” like Shaw’s joint passions for rock music and DIY publication, show symptoms of the coming partnership between Tolkien’s novel and the counterculture, with its politically ambiguous core of romantic libertarianism. The political undefinition of Tolkien’s legacy in California might be marked out by the “Domes at Baggins End” housing area at U.C. Davis, founded in 1972, on the one hand—“a living-learning community that encourages critical thought, communication

and cooperation between individuals and the community, active maintenance of an open and inclusive space, and resistance to consumerism and structures of oppression”—and Silicon Valley’s techno-dystopian Palantir on the other (“The Domes - Davis”). Greg Shaw quickly earned the ability to make a living at, essentially, fanzine production, by “inspiring” what an earlier generation in cultural studies might have called “resistance” to the formal economy, the business of popular culture.

In January 1966, the third issue of *Tolkien Journal*, still edited by Plotz in New York, shows its development as continuous and very much discontinuous with the science fiction fanzines. Some of the same names who contribute to science fiction fanzines publish in it, and Plotz reviews and mentions fanzines, including the news that “Greg Shaw now has full control of *Entmoot!*” (Plotz, *Tolkien Journal*, Issue 3).<sup>49</sup> The fourth issue (II.2, April/Astron”), is printed professionally, with a circle “c” on the cover and “copyright 1966 Richard Plotz” (Plotz, *Tolkien Journal*, Issue 4). It lists worthwhile fanzines for Tolkien fans—*Entmoot* comes first, followed by *Niekas* and *i-Palantir*. But it also includes commercial material, folded into its content, such as an artist’s statement about his painting of Lothlórien that gives the address of the New York gallery where it can be purchased and a schedule of items for sale through the TSA: “‘Frodo Lives’ buttons are now available! Your choice Roman or Tengwar. In person at the Big Store, 112 MacDougal St or by mail” (Plotz, *Tolkien Journal*, Issue 4). In the fifth issue (July 1966), the TSA are selling the Ballantine edition at a discount, 75¢ per volume, through an agreement with the publisher. “Make checks

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<sup>49</sup> This refers to Dave Hall’s abandonment of the project. Interestingly, the reason Hall gives is that the Tolkien fandom is becoming too large (G. Shaw, *Entmoot* 2).

payable to Tolkien Society of America” (U.S. banks only); “items will be mailed upon receipt of payment.” The letter section in this issue starts with a “playful” letter from Harvard University, where Plotz would be starting as a student in a month, saying they have received an application for summer school from Mr. Bilbo Baggins. “We have, by committee vote, admitted him to the Summer School”; three years later, underwritten by the university, the Harvard Lampoon published *Bored of the Rings*, discussed in the next chapter.

The fourth (April) issue had maintained the tone of editorial authority developed via its role in the commercial dispute: “The active battle between Ace and Tolkien’s authorized publishers is over, but Ace has not cleared its record. Note their wording of the release in this issue” (Plotz, *Tolkien Journal*, Issue 3). Pages three and four, fulfilling this, are occupied by press releases from Ballantine and Ace Books; professional printing allows them to be fully reproduced, including company stationery, as if to testify to their authenticity. Ballantine uses their page to promote forthcoming supplementary books, reflecting the advantages of working with the author, and claims victory in the battle with Ace (“a victory for authors’ rights”). Ace “announces with pleasure the signing of an agreement with J. R. R. Tolkien for the payment of full royalties,” and they include the text of Tolkien’s letter fulfilling their agreement: “I am happy to accept your voluntary offer to pay full royalties... even though you have no legal obligation to do so.” The magazine follows this with a third full-page letter, from Allen & Unwin, including the usual construction of England via imperial consciousness: “Except in Formosa, incidents of moral piracy are happily rare.”

*Lothlórien, the biggest little city in the West (1966-67)*

Possibly in the spirit of engagement encouraged by Shaw, Plotz contributed to *Entmoot*. The way Shaw stages their interactions creates, as always, a vivid record of the interpersonal yet published nature of fandom. His later comments articulate the ethical divide between the two publications, and the two major strands in fan responses to *The Lord of the Rings*, over the function of proprietary interventions in the regime of popular culture. In *Entmoot #3* (February 1966), a letter from Plotz promises “a complete demolition of nearly all the material in *Entmoot #2*”; to this end, Plotz helpfully numbers his points. As usual, Shaw intersperses the text of Plotz’s letter with his own commentary, using his “-/ /-” notation:

(1) “The Hobbit”: The birds on the cover are emus, not flamingoes. -  
/sorry. my fault. I’ve never heard of an emu./-

[...]

(5) namarië does not mean ‘good-bye,’ it means ‘farewell.’ It is used in LotR only with a sense of finality. Don’t use it casually. -/I wholeheartedly agree./-  
(G. Shaw, *Entmoot 3 3*)

In *Entmoot #4*, Plotz writes in again, as cross as ever, and Shaw again stages the argument, this time articulating an alternative theory of the relationship between fan practices and intellectual property. The initial text here is Plotz’s, and Shaw’s comments are between markers (“-/ [...] /-”):

Please, if you’re going to print this, do so either in my mode or in Roman [not] Shavian. Your mode is too tedious. I like to be able to read what I write. -/I have translated this letter into ‘Roman’ so everyone can read it./-

I have two pertinent comments to make. First, Donald Swann ... has written music to the songs in the Hobbit and the LotR, with Tolkien as consultant. They will probably be recorded and released later this year. So much for fannish versions. -/ Wait a minute. Just because a professional writes music to the songs, why should that preclude the possibility that a tune written by a fan is acceptable for singing? Frankly, I shall be surprised if Swann can surpass Marion Zimmer Bradley's tunes [...]. As far as I'm concerned anyone's musical interpretation of Tolkien's songs is equally valid, and the fact that Tolkien was consulted doesn't make any version 'definitive'. Tolkien is no musician /- (G. Shaw, *Entmoot 4 4*)

Two very different voices are interwoven in these conversations. Partly, their arguments register differences of style and cultural orientation, between New York and San Francisco, between the trajectories of their developing lives. But the tension also registers two distinct ways of thinking about culture, about who owns it and about how to value the labor of the participants.

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Please, if you're going to print this, do so either in my code or in Roman or Smaugian. Your code is too tedious. I like to be able to read what I write. -/I have translated this letter into "Roman" so everyone can read it./-

I have two pertinent comments to make. First, Donald Swann (from "At the Drop of a Hat") has written music to the songs in the Hobbit and the LotR, with Tolkien as consultant. They will probably be recorded and released later this year. So much for fannish versions. -/ Wait a minute. Just because a professional writes music to the songs, why should that preclude the possibility that a tune written by a fan is acceptable for singing? Frankly, I shall be surprised if Swann can surpass Marion Zimmer Bradley's tunes to "Lament for Boromir" and "Galadriel's Song" (I sang of leaves, etc.) As far as I'm concerned anyone's musical interpretation of Tolkien's songs is equally valid, and the fact that Tolkien was consulted doesn't make any version "definitive". Tolkien is no musician. If he was, he would have included tunes in the books, and then they would be "definitive."/-

Second, Henry Resnick, son of Muriel Resnick, who wrote "Any Wednesday", is writing a comprehensive article on Tolkien to appear in the "Saturday Evening Post" in early April. One of the interesting facts to come out in Resnick's interview with the Great One was that Tolkien is very much in this world, and does not live a fantasy existence. He actually reads three newspapers every day!!! -/wow. And all this time I thought Tolkien was a fool./-

-/the article finally appeared in the July 2 issue, and a rather good article it was. More about it in the editorial./-

Plotz's letter in *Entmoot 4*, with Shaw's comments. From the holdings of Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

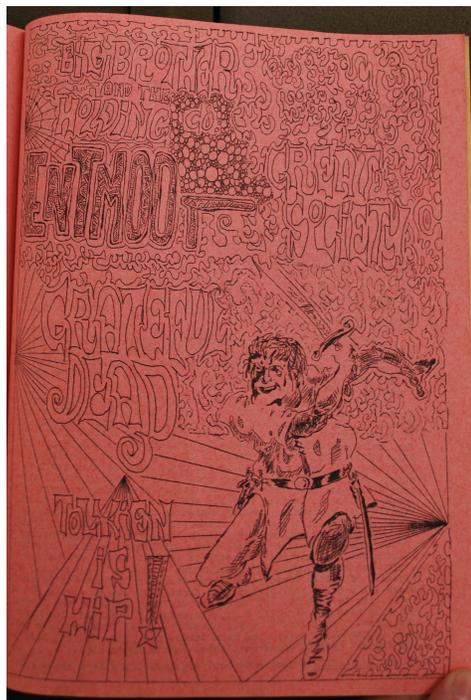
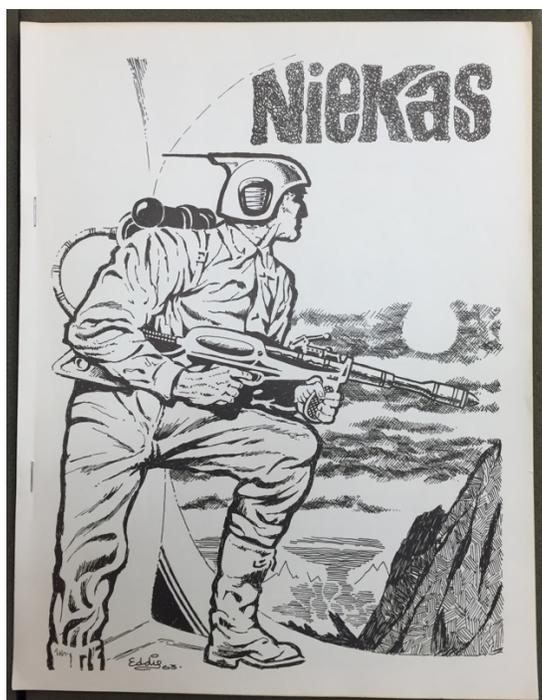
None of the friction between Plotz and Shaw stopped them from promoting each other. *Tolkien Journal* continued to recommend subscriptions to *Entmoot* throughout the year, and Shaw wrote (in the same issue quoted above) that "It still isn't too late to join the Tolkien Society of America"; their meetings "sound like great fun"; readers should subscribe to *Tolkien Journal* to get "all the latest news about J.R.R. Tolkien and his doings, in addition to material of the type found in *Entmoot*." He writes that Plotz "is establishing regional chapters all over the country so everyone can get in on the action," acknowledging a shared interest in participatory culture. Besides, Shaw reminds readers, you can get buttons from him.

Aside from the ongoing exchanges with Plotz, *Entmoot 4*, published in August 1966, is transitioning into a new mode; it looks both backward, to science fiction fandom, and forward, to the counterculture. Both text and illustrations have psychedelic moments; the artwork calls on a radically different set of visual clichés from those that had governed the fan publications of 1960-64. This occasions some self-conscious reflection. Shaw reviews the "history" of Tolkien fandom in a pop-retrospective style:

[I]t wasn't until 1959 that a group of fans in Los Angeles, where interest in Tolkien has always been strongest, published a fanzine dealing exclusively with Tolkien. This was *i-Palantir*, and it differed greatly from *Entmoot*. (G. Shaw, *Entmoot 4* 34)

He supplements this by reprinting Ted Johnstone's 1959 poem, "The Passing of the Elven Kind," and he talks in depth about *Niekas*, "my favorite fanzine [...] indispensable to the Tolkien fan [...] the best and biggest science fiction fanzine" with

the “best Tolkien artwork anywhere” and valuable content like Al Halevy’s “monumental” glossary and Marion Zimmer Bradley’s “famous article” (“Of Men, Halflings, and Hero-worship,” which *Niekas* was one of the first publications to reprint): “A Tolkien fan’s education is incomplete without this.”



Two extremes in design: the cover of *Niekas* #8 (1964), left, and the “poster” page from *Entmoot* #4 (1966).

From the holdings of Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside

This column, a respectful and serious celebration of the masters of science fiction fanzine culture as relevant to Tolkien—Pelz, Johnstone, Bradley, Meškys—is sandwiched between episodes of psychedelia. One page is filled completely with a “poster” in the wavy-lined style that signaled acid rock, littered with the names of bands along with references to Tolkien: “Big Brother and the Holding Co.,” “Entmoot,” “Great Society,” “Grateful Dead,” “Tolkien is hip.” This is followed by

the tribute to science fiction fandom, and then comes a two-page poem by a Michael Laton called “A Fellowship of the Thing: a discordant note on the San Francisco seen and herd,” beginning with a prose introduction proclaiming that

Here, Tolkien’s Ring trilogy is worn about one’s mental finger, its meaning enshrined in the cathedra of the cerebrum. And THE RING means many things in the open I of the Beholder. (35-36)

This is followed by a faux-Beat vision of California as Middle-earth that invokes San Francisco’s poetic tradition, prefigures the imaginary of Led Zeppelin’s Middle-earth records, and reworks the motto of Reno, Nevada, “the biggest little city in the world”:

California highways are Bilbo-boarded,  
[...]  
Gandalf, in league with Doctor Strange,  
Opens doors Aldous Huxley helped design;  
Beyond these portals, Galadriel holds up her mirror  
To the light of day which pales by comparison;  
The Citizens Council for the Improvement of Mordor  
Brandish placards which read,  
Lothlorien, the biggest little city in the West  
(G. Shaw, *Entmoot 4* 35–36)

The poem piles together Charlie Parker, Richard Farina, Goldberry, Lenny Bruce, Sam Gamgee.

Finally, at the end of the issue, Shaw’s editorial discusses Resnik’s piece covering Tolkien fandom in the *Saturday Evening Post*. This collision between the amateur and commercial press interacts with the sense of cultural change marked by the counterculture-fandom collision elsewhere in the issue. Plotz’s letter, too, mentions Resnik, smuggling in a characteristically upper-class New York boast, met by characteristic irritation from Shaw:

Henry Resnick [*sic*], son of Muriel Resnick, who wrote ‘Any Wednesday’, is writing a comprehensive article on Tolkien to appear in

the 'Saturday Evening Post' in early April. One of the interesting facts to come out in Resnick's interview with the Great One was that Tolkien is very much in this world, and does not live a fantasy existence. He actually reads three newspapers every day!!! -/wow. And all this time I thought Tolkien was a fool. /-

Shaw's editorial comments on Resnik begin with irony and pride: "ENTMOOT, the Tolkien fanzine, is now famous and Immortal." He quotes the article's description of his magazine and himself, "a seventeen-year-old Californian named Greg Shaw." But he follows this with an expression of concern. The rapid massification, not only of Tolkien, but, momentarily, of Shaw and Plotz and *Entmoot*—has

added even more people to *Entmoot's* mailing list, so that now, this magazine, which was originally published by science fiction fans for organized fandom and the people therein who were interested in Tolkien, has as the majority of its readership people whom I don't know, and who know little or nothing about fandom or the work it has done with Tolkien. (G. Shaw, *Entmoot 4 37*)

Although he says, hopefully, that this will likely position him to do even more with Tolkien, he started *Mojo-Navigator* within weeks, and this was the last issue of *Entmoot*. In 1970, he revisited the project in a chapbook, "The Best of Entmoot" (in response to "The vast number of requests I've received over the past few years for back issues"), with a new introduction. This mentions "the way things were going after the publication of the paperbacks, a development none of us had anticipated" and says that "By the time of ENTMOOT 4 (August '66), the change in the nature of Tolkien fandom had become very widespread indeed, and it began to get to me" (G. Shaw, *The Best of Entmoot 3*). This seems less a concern about the practicalities of a larger scale ("hundreds, perhaps thousands of copies would need to be printed") than about "the nature of Tolkien fandom."

### *The clear winner*

Shaw's 1966 excursus on the "history" of Tolkien fandom resonates with (and was perhaps written in conversation with) remarks Bruce Pelz prepared, the same year, to deliver as part of the plenary panel at Worldcon, which he then published in the fourth and last issue of *i-Palantir*. These comments combine form a decorous conclusion to the narrative of Tolkien's massification and *The Lord of the Rings's* escape from the arcane circles of either elite populists or science fiction fans.

Organized Tolkien Fandom began in 1960, at the 18<sup>th</sup> Worldcon. It was originally the idea of several Los Angeles science fiction fans, especially Bjo Trimble (then Bjo Wells), and Ted Johnstone. [...] All it could offer its members for their \$1 membership fee was a printed membership card too big to fit in a wallet card-case. That is still all it offers. (Pelz)

Pelz reviews some of the history of the group and its activities and publications, then notes that "within the last two years, these works suddenly Caught On with a larger audience." He mentions the fact that the TSA's meetings have been addressed by W. H. Auden, the "Frodo Lives!" graffiti scrawled in the New York subway, the lapel buttons. "Articles which were previously relegated to a few fanzines," he writes, "now appear in nationally syndicated magazines," and he concludes that "There is no doubt about it, J.R.R. Tolkien has Arrived." He explicitly states that the TSA is not part of "Science Fiction Fandom ... and there is no reason to assume that it will ever become so" (Pelz). The sentimental, grandiose note, suggesting a "Last Waltz" for the science fiction "microcosm" that had first embraced Tolkien as a popular hobby, prefigures the pop rhetoric of the seventies and also records a real loss.

The legal status of the Ace edition went uncontested at the time and remained undecided legally for almost three decades while the value of the “property” grew by many orders of magnitude. A summary judgement by a U.S. court in 1992 found that Tolkien had not “necessarily” forfeited his U.S. copyright, even though Houghton Mifflin had recognized from the start that they had exceeded import limitations under the manufacturing clause and had therefore omitted the copyright notice; the judge found that the 1909 copyright act “nowhere stated that forfeiture of copyright would automatically result” from either circumstance (Scull and Hammond 7). The change in the value of the property over the intervening period seems significant to this decision, as does the fact that the law had been reformed. The fact that, in 1992, the courts unsurprisingly reaffirmed the control of a now very large property consolidated in private hands (not the author’s, as he had been dead for twenty years), relative to the ambiguous legal situation regarding control of the text in 1965-66, illustrates the degree to which the law is a part of history rather than an arbiter of truth.

Indeed, the more capital is accumulated by *The Lord of the Rings*, the more impossible it becomes for popular rights in the material to assert themselves via instruments like the law. The more absurd consequences of this can be seen in the legal harassment periodically carried out by the owners of the media businesses working off Tolkien’s 1969 contract for film rights against fan clubs and small businesses, who have been enjoined regularly not to infringe in matters like the names of pubs or the use of designs on t-shirts. The pathos of fan-scholars fussing over Wollheim’s “theft” of the text in the face of Amazon’s \$250 million dollar deal for their television series, of New Line’s \$80 million settlement with the Tolkien Estate,

of the estimated \$300 billion total value of properties and businesses under the heading *The Lord of the Rings* diverts attention from a deeper and more consequential question concerning the place of ownership in relation to fantasy, narrative, and culture.

Rayner Unwin concludes his review of the events of this period with the statement that “Without question Ballantine was the winner in the Ace Books Affair” (R. Unwin 121; note his use of capitalization). But the assessment that the “Ace Books Affair” had a winner, other than the victory of capital itself, misses an equally important line of proliferation that has no interest in Tolkien’s rights much less those of his “legitimate” publishers. The counter-cultural strain represented by *Entmoot*, the adopters who passionately enjoyed their access to the material and resisted the class- and nationalism-charged injunctions of the Tolkien-Plotz-Bernard Shif-Cliff axis, also influenced the mass cultural evolution of Middle-earth. Led Zeppelin never paid royalties, nor did the fantasy genre as a whole, nor *Star Wars* or any of the other “franchises” that could be said to be indebted to *The Lord of the Rings*, not simply as an “influence,” in the literary sense, but as a model for material strategies and as a direct source of cultural capital. Neither did any of these contribute to the financial accumulation, in the form of investments and real estate, based on profits from Middle-earth, that sustained the Unwin family and their successors through and beyond their company’s collapse in the publishing “restructuring” of the 1980s, the absorption of the company by HarperCollins and the dismantling of most of its work as a publisher, with *The Lord of the Rings* as, many times over, its most valuable holding.

Before moving it to *Niekas*, Al haLevy first began publishing his “Glossary of Middle-earth” in a 1962 issue of an old science fiction fanzine called *Rhodomagnetic Digest*. In this same issue, haLevy included a short editorial, “On Idle Worship,” complaining that Tolkien was becoming a “sacred cow” (“Understand, the cow itself is innocent”). Beginning as a complaint that fans were publishing too much under-researched commentary, the column turns into a reflection on the relationship between property, fantasy, and fans. Science fiction and fantasy readers, he writes, “claim [...] an allegorical romance as fantasy, *their* fantasy. [...] Having staked out such a false claim on what really isn’t theirs, they’ve started clubs and published amateur magazines and used one of Tolkien’s place-names for their homeland in a convention bid” (haLevy 62).<sup>50</sup> The anti-fannish excess of this reaction corresponds to the depth of the mismatch between fantasy and ownership.

Participants in popular culture always practice distinction and engage in identification, always grind axes to position themselves. But the question of who *owns* fantasies that are shared by millions of people has significant material consequences. And when some of those people invest, in the shared fantasy, what the self-publishing members of science fiction fandom did, the question becomes even more complicated. Fan creations highlight the cruelty of claiming private property, as distinct from authorship, in the realm of culture, perhaps especially with respect to fantasy—a crucial element in fan culture, and, in a psychological sense, constitutively personal. Tolkien himself was a rare talent who enjoyed a rare advantage, in that he was able to exercise some control over what became of the products of his labor. He guarded that

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<sup>50</sup> A reference to the hoax bid “Mordor in ‘64”; hoaxes were an extensive science fiction fandom tradition (see Warner, *All Our Yesterdays* 47–49).

unalienated connection with his work zealously, and his heirs have continued to do so, in his honor, long after his death.

But to whom does Ted Johnstone's poem belong? "The Passing of the Elven-Kind" captures a bit of the mood of Middle-earth, its melancholy. Like several other Tolkien fans who made contributions of particular value, Johnstone died young, at thirty-eight; it doesn't seem impossible that limited access to medical care and material security, perhaps related to his own love of working under unalienated conditions, might have been factors. The serious note in *The Lord of the Rings* comes in the dream of escape from Galadriel's "long defeat," from history as a series of disasters; the fantasy of the text has depth as a response to suffering. Johnstone's poem reflects a scholarly relationship to the text, careful study, attention to detail, practices that the structure of the novel modeled and that fans embraced. But it also has its own voice, speaking a similar desire with a different tongue. "Fair use" and the idea of "transformative works," which have been used to assert the rights of fan writers and artists within the capitalist framework, are worth defending. But as goals, they have little of the fugitive intensity associated with the global experience of "fandom" or the global imaginary of Tolkien's novel. Johnstone's situation, the effort he gave to unalienated labors (writing derivative works), his identification with a comparatively unalienated social formation (fandom), and his early death, suggest a more revolutionary imagining of the social order that might support and defend him, one radically different from our own.

And Círdan wrought them ships which bore  
Them from the Havens o'er the sea  
And watched them sail for fairer shore

And leave the world of mortal men  
In which no place for them could be.  
And in this world they stay no more,  
But dwell in Elvenhome the Free,  
As fair as when the world began.

## CHAPTER 3

### BIRMINGHAM 1969

The main action of the last chapter took place between California and Brooklyn. The present chapter returns to England, looking at various phenomena that converge in Birmingham. Birmingham offers a place to stand while attempting to catch a glimpse of the totality. Through it, I summarize small matters like the rise of capitalism, its culture, and the culture of the moment when it begins—in Birmingham—to seriously decay. The chapter begins by recounting a small episode in the history of Tolkieniana that took place in Birmingham in November, 1969. From there, I turn to a comparison between the Birmingham of “cultural studies” and of Tolkien. The sections after that look back at the shape of Birmingham’s development from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, with some reflections on its aesthetic traditions. A long portion of the chapter returns to Birmingham in 1969 as key to the emergence of heavy metal. This section wrestles with the aesthetics of mass Tolkien, and my case study for this is a long section on Tolkien-affiliated rock and particularly Led Zeppelin.<sup>51</sup> The final section of the chapter concerns the founding of a fan group and educational charity, The Tolkien Society (of the United Kingdom), also in 1969; the Society is still active and is the principal subject of chapter four.

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<sup>51</sup> Something similar could have been done through developments in gaming or cinema in the 1970s; one effect of that, however, would have been to keep the geographic anchor of the project in the U.S., which would, I think, be misleading. Likewise, I could have studied an American group, most likely the Mythopoeic Society, which also formed in the late 1960s, but in Los Angeles. They have often collaborated with the Tolkien Society.

### *An Afternoon in Middle-earth*

By 1969, England—in the form of businesses, institutions, rock groups, students, fans, and Tolkien himself, all figuring themselves as in one way or another *English*—was ready to reclaim *The Lord of the Rings* from the thieving barbarians of the Uttermost West. Allen & Unwin had finally brought out an (expensive) one-volume paperback the previous year, since imports of the American versions were in high demand. On November 30, 1969, a municipal celebration of Tolkien’s work was held in Birmingham, where his family came from and where he had spent most of his childhood and adolescence. The program was called “An Afternoon in Middle-earth” and held at the Midlands Arts Center in Cannon Hill, a large municipal park; thus, a public event in the era of the welfare state (*An Afternoon in Middle-Earth*). Events included staged readings from the novel by “members of the Cannon Hill Theatre Division, with incidental music by Club members”; Donald Swann performing part of his 1967 song cycle *The Road Goes Ever On*, which had been published with Tolkien’s cooperation and approval; a presentation by Joy Hill, the Allen & Unwin career employee whose job, by this stage, was to manage Tolkien and his fan mail full time; and discussion of *The Lord of the Rings* featuring Tom Shippey, the young medievalist whose career would follow Tolkien’s in many ways—perhaps partly as a result of the impression he made on Joy Hill at this very event, since she brought the Professor a copy of his talk.

The use of the word “cult” peppers the program, and indeed much news coverage of Tolkien in this era, and the rejection of the “cult” model takes on an almost moral, as well as national, dimension. The program opens with remarks from someone named Leslie Holloway who calls *The Lord of the Rings* “one of the strangest phenomena of modern literature.” It “refuses to be classified...: it polarizes the reading public into those who hate and those who love it.” S/he writes that “the cult which has grown up around the Tolkien books has, in fact, damaged their serious reputation,” because serious readers are put off by the throngs of university students, hippies “taking ‘trips’ into Middle-earth,” and reviewers who compare Frodo with Christ. Holloway stresses the range, the variety of unwanted and unauthorized admiration and appropriation and wants to cultivate the “middle ground” between “antipathy and idolotry [sic]” represented by “thousands of ordinary readers who enjoy these books for their own very real merits.” These must be the same readers praised, later in the same booklet, by Charlotte and Denis Plimmer as enjoying Tolkien “Despite the fact that his books lack perversion, four-letter words, homosexuality and sadism—virtually everything that makes 20<sup>th</sup>-century fiction so commercially desirable.” Thanks to this (questionable) lack of homosexuality, “the Professor and those connected with his publications have found the streets of Middle-earth paved with gold.”<sup>52</sup>

Joy Hill’s comments on Tolkien’s fan mail, preserved in the program under the title “Coping with a Cult,” amplify the nationalism of the response. Their particular

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<sup>52</sup> Charlotte and Denis Plimmer interviewed Tolkien for a story that ran in the weekend magazine of *The Telegraph* in March, 1968; in the course of the column, they observed (among other things) that “In his world of wondrous things, [Tolkien] moves with the surety of a white hunter on a game reservation” (Plimmer and Plimmer; see also Tolkien, *Letters* 372–78).

flavor of imperial racism and xenophobia, delivered as humor, internally mark her rhetoric as “British”:

They come in English, French, German, and Elvish, they come in the conventional envelope, the come in the psychedelic envelope... an ever-increasing flow. ... I am fascinated by them, I am appalled by them. The disease of writing letters to J. R. R. Tolkien began in America on a mammoth scale soon after the American paperback of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* were published, and the germ has spread here. Who writes? Well, practically everyone from small children, who send Professor Tolkien their love, to fully-belted peers of the realm. [...] Tolkien letter-writers were once pre-dominantly academic and egg-head but things are changing—rocket-men write from Woomera [a test range in South Australia], pop singers from Las Vegas, housewives from Winnipeg and eskimos from Alaska.

The English, Hill writes with pride, “are cautious in their approach,” but writers “from across the Atlantic”

are very much bolder. ‘Dear darling Professor’, wrote a hippy from San Francisco, ‘I have been on a trip to Middle-earth and it is indeed a beautiful place. I must see you.’ From Norfolk, Virginia, one letter ended: ‘One day I shall corner you on a remote little star and we shall talk.’

The first Tolkien-loving hippies from San Francisco, who appeared at the end of the previous chapter, were unaware of the degree to which they were performing a national stereotype, constructing a mirror in which England might see itself as decentered, small, and polite.

Reflecting later on his remarks at the Birmingham event, Tom Shippey wrote that the audience was restless by the time he appeared, as he was the last speaker. Having “been a lecturer at Birmingham University during the student ‘troubles’ of that era ... I was well used to dealing with mutinous audiences. I ... told them philology was different from other -ologies, because it was based on fact ... This approach went

down particularly well” (T. A Shippey 42). The positivism, Shippey’s assurance that “troubles” could be contained through the invocation of “fact,” fits with other remarks from the podium that day. Shippey remembers the “ordinary people” Tolkien and Lewis were interested in reaching as being in the audience that day, members of the silent majority of Tolkien readers. His remarks evoke an authoritarian streak, drawing a connection between the studiously bland “afternoon in Middle-earth” and the student unrest of the late sixties, and moreover emphasizing, in recollection, that he was aware of this context at the time. More than that, he smuggles in imperial crisis and terrorism: “the troubles” meant Ireland, however it was used. Donald Swann, meanwhile, the composer, formed half of the comic song duo Flanders & Swann, purveyors of inane ditties for the educated classes. He was the child of Russian émigré parents, from a mercantile family that had worked for the Tsars, whom he described as “refugees” from the Revolution. He identified as a pacifist and a Christian, and had gone to Oxford, facilitating his collaboration with Tolkien (Swann, *The Space between the Bars*; Swann, *Swann’s Way*; Swann and Tolkien).

The “Afternoon in Middle-earth” took place in Birmingham, because Birmingham was where Tolkien was from: some combination of interests in Birmingham decided/perceived/hoped that Tolkien belonged to Birmingham, that people in Birmingham would be well served by spending an afternoon in Middle-earth, that Birmingham (like New Zealand in the twenty-first century) *was* Middle-earth, and/or that Tolkien was part of Birmingham’s capital and that investments should be made to maximize returns. This was a thoroughly “authorized” event, almost literally, since Tolkien considered attending and was prevented by a family

illness (Hammond and Scull, *Chronology* 784). The program includes some of Tolkien's artwork, something that would be unthinkable except through the most tightly controlled commercial promotion today, and it includes a note from Tolkien apologizing for his failure to attend. No one would talk about putting any words of Sauron in a nuclear warhead here: the event would magnify the true and proper spirit of the creation.

If the "Afternoon in Middle-earth" was framed as a reassertion of traditionalist values and "ordinary readers," the moment when it was held was one in which Tolkien's novel began to be embedded in mass culture in far more various and unauthorized ways. To illustrate the opportunities and limitations that came with the rise of the commercial franchise, I begin by looking briefly at an American artifact from the same moment. The event in Birmingham took place just two months after the release of a commercially successful American parody novel, *Bored of the Rings* (Beard and Kenney). *Bored of the Rings* was pitched to a readership primed by the counterculture, and it traded in the supposedly anti-establishment, playful, critical cultural mode of satire, loaded with "transgressive" allusions to drugs and sex, mockery of the solemn hierarchies celebrated by Tolkien, and scatological humor. In fact, however, *Bored of the Rings* was itself an establishment product that served as the launch pad for a significant capitalist enterprise, the *National Lampoon*. This intersection of high fantasy, parody, commerce, mass culture, and—via Harvard—the elite university will run through several key moments in this chapter and the next.

*Bored of the Rings* was co-authored by two young editors of the *Harvard Lampoon*, Doug Kenney and Henry Beard, who went on within a year of publication

to found *National Lampoon*, a magazine that was commercially successful for twenty-five years. It was “the best-selling magazine on college campuses and the second-best-selling magazine on the street and in shops” (Horton). This provided a platform, however, for a significant set of products in many media, particularly records, books, and above all Hollywood films such as *Animal House*, *National Lampoon’s European Vacation*, and so forth. And it began with a parody of *The Lord of the Rings*. Moreover, the construction, publication, and marketing of the parody was underwritten by Harvard University. *Bored of the Rings* wasn’t simply authored by the *Harvard Lampoon*’s editors: it was a product of “the Harvard Lampoon” as an institutional entity, using its resources. The novel strongly resembles a polished commercial version of fan culture, but it has the institutional backing of the wealthiest university in the United States. Harvard, like Oxford, is a hyper-elite institution, not only (or even primarily) intellectually but socially and economically, deeply embedded in networks of power and privilege. Kenney and Beard both came from wealthy and privileged backgrounds: Kenney was, among other things, a descendent of the fourteenth Vice President of the United States (Karp; Humez).

Parody is the great legal exception to the rule of copyright, the one that fanfiction tries to slip under by analogy. The *Harvard Lampoon* parody marketed a youthful, disrespectful sense of ownership toward Tolkien’s novel. *Bored of the Rings* exploits Tolkien’s popularity with the counterculture but in a sense expropriates the culture around it, re-allocating cultural capital as materially fungible. So while the parody appears, from the perspective of the “Afternoon in Middle-earth,” as an example of “American” crudity and association with the counterculture that Joy Hill

complained of, it is fundamentally indistinguishable from patterns of expropriation as it has been practiced by HarperCollins and Oxford University. In the Birmingham event, and especially in the comments on American reception, we see the redirection of attention from material relations—the social class of producers, their resources, the function of Oxford University, or simply the raw profitability of the product—to more properly cultural concerns such as respect or, in the classical as well as the modern sense, decorum. This was not necessarily in the interests of whatever values the British preservationists sought to promote.

The dislocation of mass culture and the uneven sense of historicity in a globalized environment disorder the operations of time and space in our cultural understanding. This project channels apparently disparate components of cultural experience through shared points of intersection: through *The Lord of the Rings*, but also through particular times and places. The excessiveness of *The Lord of the Rings*—aesthetically, canonically, and in the overwhelming abundance of material on its “social history,” the seemingly endless uses, permutations, adaptations—requires anchors. One such anchor can be found in and around Birmingham, in and around November, 1969. Four lines of cultural development relating to Tolkien and the present study intersect this point. Birmingham matters here as Tolkien’s family home; as the premier center of postwar cultural studies (the “Birmingham School”); as a center for medievalism and especially applied arts associated with its robust and diversified manufacturing economy and its “radical Liberalism,” all of which inform Tolkien’s aesthetic; and as the point of origin for heavy metal, the popular genre with

the most persistent affinity for Tolkien's fiction. It is worth considering each of these in turn.

### ***Birmingham and Its Schools***

Tolkien emphasized his attachment to the countryside of the West Midlands in his own recollections, particularly the village of Sarehole (now part of the city of Birmingham, but then very small and rural) to which he moved, with his mother, from Bloemfontein in 1896. In 1955, shortly before *The Return of the King* came out, he sent “a few notes” on his own biography to Houghton Mifflin, the American publisher. In this document, he calls himself “a West-midlander, at home only in the counties upon the Welsh Marches” and even ascribes his affinity for “Anglo-Saxon and Western Middle English and alliterative verse” to his “descent” from a West Midlands family, despite the fact that the designation “West Midlands” was a fairly recent innovation (Tolkien, *Letters*). He spoke about this attachment—perhaps too candidly—to a BBC interviewer in 1964:

I was born in Bloomsdale [*sic*—he swallows the word, but it certainly doesn't sound like Bloemfontein] in South Africa. I was very young when I got back, but at the same time it bites into your memory and imagination, even if you don't think it has. If your first Christmas tree is a wilting eucalyptus and if you're normally troubled by heat and sand, then, to have just at the age when imagination is opening out, suddenly find yourself in a quiet Warwickshire village, I think it engenders a particular love of what you might call central Midlands English countryside. Based on good water, stones and elm trees and small quiet rivers and so on, and of course, sort of rustic people about. (“1964 BBC Radio Interview with J.R.R. Tolkien on Youtube - Transcript of Tolkien Interview”)

Prejudiced and sentimental, these comments capture some of the less attractive aspects of Tolkien's character. They reflect the late-colonial mystification about geography in his sense of the absolute, objective correctness of a certain countryside, a certain Christmas; this forms a key part not only of his aesthetic but of "Britishness" as an exportable product in postwar mass culture. Michael Saler interprets Tolkien's relentless stress on his own "Englishness," and on the Midlands in particular, as a compensatory response to his minoritarian status as a Catholic, bearing a German name, born in "the far end of the Dark Continent" (Tolkien, "Valedictory Address to the University of Oxford" 238), compounded by his comparative poverty and the traumas of his early life (Saler 168–69). This is plausible, but Tolkien's comments to the BBC also enact a form of thinking about the relationship between English rural landscape and the past that recall the analysis of another scholar, associated with our second route through Birmingham, Raymond Williams.

The fact that cultural studies found a home at the University of Birmingham (the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, 1964–2002) seems like more than simple coincidence. Birmingham seems like the perfect place for it: a major urban center outside London, a modern city, a product of industry, full of immigrants; a "redbrick" university—in fact, the first of the redbrick universities, neither an "ancient" university like Oxford and Cambridge nor a postwar "plate glass" university like Sussex. Though he was not professionally affiliated with the "Birmingham School," Williams's work was foundational for and in conversation with it, and moreover he grew up in an adjacent area, the southern end of the Welsh-English border region, a village near Abergavenny, Wales. For purposes of my

argument here, Williams will stand in as Birmingham School-adjacent because of his pertinence to Tolkien's themes and career and the illuminating comparison to be made between the two figures.

Tolkien and Williams worked at the same time in parallel/rival faculties at parallel/rival institutions, were only a generation apart in age, and grew up less than a hundred miles apart. Williams was on the faculty of English at Cambridge and—like Tolkien—an outsider in some ways: from a lower social class than almost all his peers, and—again like Tolkien—without a Ph.D. Their central and yet slightly off-center relationships to universities of extraordinary wealth and not just intellectual but temporal influence, universities that can plausibly be characterized as “centers” through which the history of the global has passed for centuries, hint at something that I take up in the next chapter: the uneasy relationship between the university and popular or everyday culture, which coalesces very noticeably around Tolkien. Both Tolkien and Williams showed a lingering preoccupation with their places of origin and the perspectival effects of their experiences in their writing. Both were concerned with tracing lexical artifacts (words) through time, and treated this as a central method for conducting intellectual life (see Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*; Williams, *Keywords*; Williams, *Marxism and Literature*). Both wrote novels (Williams, *Border Country* and others). And yet, with their very different politics and, to invoke Williams's most famous term, their very different structures of feeling, they seem to come from different planets.

Williams's commitment to localism was strong, and reflects a dualism in his writing that he and Tolkien share. Tolkien was obsessed with detail, bringing an

exacting, positivist philological discipline to his fiction, but at the same time he relied heavily on stereotypes and vague formulations such as those quoted above. Williams shared this mixture of close and distant focus: he always insisted on an empiricist, “look and see” model in his theoretical work (based, for instance, on histories of usage) and on local conditions and textures in his literary analysis, but in other respects was a generalist, continually invoking the *longue durée*. Tom Nairn, a colleague who, like Williams, published extensively in *New Left Review*, aptly characterized his criticism as “populist socialism” (Nairn 304). Even in politics, Williams inflected his Marxism with localism over time, joining Plaid Cymru (the Welsh nationalist political party) after having been a Communist Party member in his youth.

Williams’s scholarship frequently reflects on his personal history and experiences, and nowhere more than in a book he published in the year of Tolkien’s death, *The Country and the City* (1973). Williams’s capacity for political and cultural analysis, and his scholarship in modern letters, is far beyond Tolkien’s, and it’s startling how exactly his argument applies to Tolkien’s way of thinking as shown in the BBC interview quoted above. Williams’s analysis of the “country house” poem of the seventeenth century (typified by Jonson’s “To Penshurst”) seems especially relevant to Tolkien’s sentiments about “good water, stones and elm trees and small quiet rivers and so on, and of course, sort of rustic people.” This formulation does not, as the country house poem does, completely erase the workers who provide the feast, through the hyperbolic wit that claims ripe fruit has foisted itself on the household and that fish have volunteered for the stew. But it does vague-up any class distinction

between workers and owners (“sort of rustic people”) and render such people continuous with the countryside. Again, in 1966, Tolkien spoke about Sarehole to a reporter for the *Oxford Mail*:

It was a kind of lost paradise ... There was an old mill that really did grind corn with two millers, a great big pond with swans on it, a sandpit, a wonderful dell with flowers, a few old-fashioned village houses and, further away, a stream with another mill. I always knew it would go—and it did. (Ezard)

And, again, Williams has primed us to look for Eden (for “paradise”) in such recollections, and reminded us that “in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread” was the curse that came with the fall.

Williams’s argument about the country house poem describes Tolkien’s ethos very well, despite the difference in literary mode. In the Shire in particular, feasting signifies peace and social harmony; hobbits are insatiable. But the equivalence takes in more than the relationship between the table and the field. Jonson and Carew, Williams writes, posit

a responsible civilization, in which men care for each other directly and personally, rather than through the abstractions of a more complicated and more commercial society. This, we are told, is the natural order of responsibility and neighborliness and charity: words we do not now clearly understand, since Old England fell.

The irony of the last clause would be lost on Tolkien, who almost literally seems to have believed this. But while acknowledging the “kindliness” of the impulse, Williams eviscerates it, taking the Christian legacy that was central for Tolkien with it:

[This is] a charity of consumption only ... an eating and drinking communion, which when applied to ordinary working societies was inevitably a mystification. All uncharity at work, it was readily assumed, could be redeemed by the charity of the consequent feast. In the complex of feeling and reference derived from this tradition, it

matters very much, moreover, that the name of the god and the name of the master are significantly single: our Lord. (Williams, *The Country and the City* 30–32).

Williams credits this critique, specifically of the way Christianity deploys consumption, to Rosa Luxemburg, who ascribes to modern Christianity a historical fallacy: since in Rome the “proletarians” did not sell their labor power for a wage, she argues, any payment would figure as “alms,” but this cannot be applied to modernity without erasing actual human relations.

The method of Luxemburg’s analysis conflicts with Tolkien’s faith, which is ahistorical in its premise, its truths understood as eternal and universal—Catholic. He seems to have imagined the role of Catholicism in *The Lord of the Rings* in exactly this way; he writes of the universal meaning of religion as an exception to his abjuration of allegory, and in the novel the clear suggestion of types of Christ in Frodo and Aragorn, for example, would presumably count as “applicable” for many readers because of their “universality” (Tolkien, *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*). In other words, Tolkien imagines that his Catholicism is universal, because Catholicism itself imagines its own theories of social relations to be universal. Even a basic understanding of historicity, however, shows that the forms, causes, and meaning of poverty and domination were different in Roman Palestine than they were in modern England, and, from a Marxist point of view, these differences are the essence of the matter. Only by de-naturalizing and analyzing the social relations underlying, for example, buying food with money can we understand the nature of poverty and domination in the world we actually inhabit.

Interestingly, the difference made by religion on the one hand and socialism on the other seems to account for, or at least encompass, perhaps the most comprehensive difference in “structure of feeling” between the two, namely the contrast between Williams’s passionate optimism and Tolkien’s strangely sanguine pessimism. Williams’s optimism verges at times on the sentimental, and it sometimes leads him astray, as in his 1983 coda to *The Long Revolution*, in which he greatly underestimates the long term damage symptomized in the rightward lurch of Margaret Thatcher’s neoliberalism (see Rustin; Williams, *The Long Revolution*). But the force of it can seem like a different version of the visionary fall of the Black Tower, as in this passage from the beginning of *The Country and the City*:

H. G. Wells once said, coming out of a political meeting where they had been discussing social change, that this great towering city was a measure of the obstacle, of how much must be moved if there was to be any change. I have known this feeling, looking up at great buildings that are the centers of power, but I find I do not say, ‘There is your city, your great bourgeois monument, your towering structure of this still precarious civilization’ or I do not only say that; I say also ‘This is what men have built, so often magnificently, and is not everything then possible?’ Indeed this sense of possibility, of meeting and of movement, is a permanent element of my sense of cities. (5-6)

This is a vision proper to the long revolution, a vision of transformation as a prolonged process of building rather than as revolutionary destruction.

Contrast this with the elegiac tone of *The Lord of the Rings*, associated with the long, sad memory of the Elves and epitomized by Galadriel’s words, “He [Celeborn] has dwelt in the West since the days of dawn, and I have dwelt with him years uncounted; for ere the fall of Nargothrond or Gondolin I passed over the mountains, and together through the ages of the world we have fought the long defeat”

(Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 357). Elegy is a crucial mode of the Old English verse in which Tolkien specialized, as in “The Wanderer,” discussed in chapter one. Tolkien refers to Galadriel’s speech as an explicit statement of Christian pessimism about human matters in a letter of 1956: “I am a Christian, and indeed a Roman Catholic, so that I do not expect ‘history’ to be anything but a ‘long defeat’” (*Letters* 255).

Catholicism is tied to the logic of “escape and consolation” that centers Tolkien’s theoretical account of his own fiction, which he laid out in “On Fairy Stories,” a series of lectures delivered in 1939. Escape and consolation appear at the end of the third and final lecture. He suggests, in attractive terms, some of the many legitimate escapist desires that fairy stories can entertain, such as “the desire to visit, free as a fish, the deep sea,” but also introduces the far more treacherous and important “Escape from Death,” with its hazards: “Fairy stories are made by men not by fairies. The Human-stories of the elves are doubtless full of the Escape from Deathlessness. ... Few lessons are taught more clearly in them than the burden of that kind of immortality, or rather endless serial living, to which the ‘fugitive’ would fly” (Tolkien, *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories* 73–75). The seriousness of the desire for escape from “grim and terrible” things such as “hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death,” and the failure of escape to satisfy it, motivates the signature feature of fairy stories: the “joy of the happy ending” that supplies “consolation.” For Tolkien, this necessitates a new word: *eucatastrophe*, “the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous turn,” which “denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat ... giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief” (Tolkien, *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories* 73–75). This is a strange formula, looked at

in relation to Williams, perhaps especially in light of Williams's failure to recognize the historical currents that were beginning to unseat social democracy at the end of his life. Where the Marxist looks at the city and sees a vision of gradual change that nonetheless re-forms the foundations of the world, the Christian is less easily contented. There is no "long" revolution, only—though Tolkien would repudiate the term—actual revolution, a sudden radical reversal. His vision, however, is not of a city but of a "Secondary World," created for and with a particular type of imagination, and his revolution is accomplished not by human action, much less material necessity, but by "grace."

### ***Look What Men Have Built: Industrial Birmingham***

Remarking on his place of origin, Tolkien routinely made reference to counties or regions: he recalled "Warwickshire," "Worcestershire" (Birmingham sat at the intersection of three counties—these two as well as Staffordshire), or "the West Midlands," almost never "Birmingham." John Ezard, the journalist who interviewed Tolkien in 1966, eliciting the recollection of Sarehole Mill as "a kind of paradise," went in search of the site in 1991:

Blink and you could miss it, driving down Birmingham's A4040 outer ring road from the Stratford-on-Avon road west towards Moseley, near the M42 turn-off. You pass a petrol station which was once Sarehole Farm. Then, at speed, you'd see a brief gap in suburbia, a flicker of green. (Ezard)

This narrative reminds us of an obvious fact: "Birmingham" does not name the countryside but a "conurbation," the hub of a densely populated region that was a

center of industry for centuries, the second largest city in England for well over a hundred years. Sarehole Mill receives thousands of visitors every year because of Tolkien (22,000 annually according to the 1991 article, and expected to grow), but it must originally have been preserved to mark a different type of heritage. In an amazing coincidence, Sarehole Mill was also, circa 1750-60, an early workshop of Thomas Boulton: his later company, Boulton & Watt (founded 1775) was the company that first patented, sold, and constructed the steam engine. When Tolkien knew it, as a mill that ground corn, it had been converted from industrial use back to agricultural use about fifty years earlier (McIntosh; “Sarehole Mill”).

The history of Birmingham, as a center of classical liberalism—the political philosophy associated with capitalism, nominal democracy and the ideal of the “free market”—exposes the limitations of the term “neoliberalism” for illuminating the historical conjuncture explored in this project. For while that term names a political project specific to the era coinciding with the history of Tolkien, his industries, and his fans, the core tendencies of “neoliberalism,” the cultural contradictions it generates, are not exactly “neo.”<sup>53</sup> Indeed, they are typical of classical liberalism, as revealed in even a brief overview of the history of Birmingham, a liberal, capitalist city. And Birmingham, along with the “Black Country” that lies to its west and forms an integral part of its history, has paid the price.

“With its high-rise towers, wide American-style roadways and underpasses, and futuristic shopping malls, Birmingham is a contemporary city from which the past seems to have been banished” begins one recent overview of the city’s history (Chinn

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<sup>53</sup> (For standard accounts of neoliberalism as a cultural phenomenon in politics and also non-political discourses, see W. Brown; Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*).

9). Birmingham is a product of the industrial revolution, and it was bombed during World War II, so it does not possess the types of monuments found in medieval cities like London or York. Nonetheless, efforts to date the beginnings of Birmingham's history as a manufacturing town look early: Chinn dates its beginnings as “a commercial and manufacturing centre” to “the granting of a market charter” by Henry II in 1166 (Chinn and Dick 1). By the sixteenth century, the town of Birmingham was a destination for London buyers of weapons, tools, and nails, “resounding with hammers and anvils” according to one visitor (Hopkins, *Birmingham* 3), and the city was thoroughly industrialized earlier than almost anywhere in the world; Eric Hopkins dates its “industrialization” to around 1760.

Birmingham owes this early and gradual development in large measure to geology: the coincidence of extensive coal and iron ore deposits, limestone, clay, and abundant good quality drinking water, the last an important support for the city's explosive growth in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Allen). The site has no navigable river, however, so that it remained comparatively remote until the creation of canals and turnpikes in the eighteenth century; the second-largest city in England since the late Victorian period, it wasn't even among the thirty largest cities in the country at the end of the seventeenth century.

As a center of complex manufacture, Birmingham depended on the mining and refining of mineral resources in the communities to its immediate west. From about 1840, the area to the west of the city—a “crude rectangle” including parts of South Staffordshire and of North Worcestershire, bounded by Wolverhampton, Stourbridge, and Smethwick—became known as the “Black Country” due to its intense levels of

industrial air pollution (Jones 22). Regional development created, not a specialized mass-production town as in the textile behemoths of Manchester or Leeds, but a “highly integrated regional economy” by the late eighteenth century: “1500 Black Country collieries and ironworks were linked to the canal network by 1798” (Jones 28). In 1843, a visitor to the area wrote that “The traveler appears never to get out of an interminable village .... In some directions he may travel for miles, and never be out of sight of numerous two-storied houses... interspersed with blazing furnaces, heaps of burning coal in process of coking, piles of ironstone calcining, forges, pit-banks, and engine-chimneys” (Thomas Tancred, quoted in Jones 28). The encroaching modernity that Tolkien feared would swallow “paradise” had already been there—or just adjacent to it—for over a hundred years.

The pattern of development for Birmingham emphasized small workshops, which outnumbered large firms until late in the nineteenth century, and it was less dependent on technological breakthroughs than the cotton industry to the north (Hopkins, *Birmingham*; D. Smith; Cherry). It specialized in a plethora of “products of a highly finished kind, such as required a great deal of labor in their manufacture,” created from the metal, limestone, and clay refined in the Black Country (Allen 16). These took the form of nails, tools, weapons (swords in the sixteenth century, guns from the seventeenth), and “toys” for the London market—“buckles, buttons, snuff-boxes, and trinkets of all kinds” (Hopkins 6). As time went on, production only diversified further, reaching into jewelry, tableware, ceramics, japanware, luxury goods, decorative objects, glass, food products including HP Sauce, Cadbury’s chocolate, and Bird’s Custard, and eventually cars. In 1852, a report lists many

hundreds of occupations for Birmingham—hundreds more than for the otherwise comparable steel town of Sheffield—a list running from “artificial limb,” “bagatelle and billiard table,” and “bayonet” makers to “whip makers” and “zinc workers” (Smith 21-2).

Such a complex manufacturing economy and so many small shops implies a large and diverse bourgeoisie, at many levels of income and with much social mobility among them, along with a profusion of occupations for workers employed in supporting bourgeois life: domestic service was by far the largest occupation in Birmingham in the nineteenth century, more than twice as high as in Leeds (Smith 23). Though most of its workers were not in factories, Birmingham and the Black Country had over twice the population of Manchester in 1851 (Hopkins, “Working Hours and Conditions during the Industrial Revolution” 53). Although, as mentioned above, it was the home of the steam engine through Boulton & Watt, the engine wasn’t widely used in Birmingham until quite late: the company constructed the engines on site for mines in Cornwall and Wales and then for factories in Lancashire and Yorkshire (Hopkins, *Birmingham* 21).

In the nineteenth century the city began to make a major mark on national politics with its particular brand of liberalism. As an unincorporated city, Birmingham had long had a high proportion of religious dissenters (more than half the population) and, with its diverse economy and emphasis on small workshops, a very low level of guild representation and union organizing (Allen xix; see also Hopkins 5). Members of its bourgeoisie were “politically active in the pursuit of their business interests” and quite “paternalistic”; The Birmingham Political Union, founded in 1830, attracted

working class as well as bourgeois supporters and played a major role in the passage of the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832 (Hopkins 178-9). Birmingham “blossomed” in the “‘Liberal Golden Age’ of the 1860s and 1870s ... earning a reputation for dynamic local government (‘municipal socialism’)” (Foster 159). Large and small companies linked to the empire, both processors of imperial products like Cadbury’s and producers of supplies for empire like guns and chains, flourished in Birmingham in this era. The governing philosophy of the town, known as the “Civic Gospel,” emanated from a group of nonconformist preachers; their major political figure was a “Unitarian screw-maker” turned politician, Joseph Chamberlain, who served briefly as mayor in the early 1870s. He excelled at extracting funding from business interests to invest in grand public projects in education, the arts, infrastructure.

In the twentieth century Birmingham continued to grow steadily, as it had since the middle of the eighteenth century, until—suddenly—it crashed. “The inability of the manufacturing sector to make sufficient profit for reinvestment ... led to a progressive weakening in the competitiveness of firms in the West Midlands” in the 1960s and 1970s, and they abruptly began to shutter plants and move elsewhere (Spencer 92). As a consequence, “Between 1970 and 1983 relative earnings in the West Midlands fell from being the highest of any region in Britain to being the lowest of any region” (Cherry 161). This crash, characteristic of British deindustrialization from the mid-1960s through the massive recession of Margaret Thatcher’s first term (1979-1983), coincided with dramatic demographic changes for Birmingham. As the countries that had formed the empire rapidly achieved independence in the years after World War II, and auto manufacturing boomed, immigration skyrocketed, and

Birmingham—which had, at times, less than 1% unemployment in the 1950s and early 1960s—became one of most diverse areas in Britain. The city now has, perhaps, the worst inequality in standards of living in the U.K., and the sufferers are disproportionately people of color.

Looking carefully, it is easy to detect the pre-history of “neo”-liberalism throughout this brief history of Birmingham. It is apparent in the plethora of slogans attached to the city, its centuries-long self-promotion as entrepreneurial: “the city of a thousand trades,” the “Liberal Golden Age” and its “Radical Liberals,” “municipal socialism,” “Civic Gospel,” “the workshop of the world.” These slogans celebrate not only public investment but diversity and “freedom”—both freedom of conscience and freedom, for the owners of capital, from regulation and labor opposition. The “diversity” in question is in the first instance of trades, products, and skills: throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Birmingham was known for “more complex division of labor, greater dynamic density” than other industrial areas (Smith 34). Indeed, the preponderance of small workshops looks like a backward-echo of the “sharing economy” and the “neoliberal” obsession with flexibility; an industrialist of the mid-1860s writes that “Almost all Birmingham trades have sprung from small beginnings ... The business was carried on in some part of the dwelling house, or in small premises attached” (quoted in Smith 36).

Commerce in the late eighteenth century was dominated by the members of “the Lunar Society,” dedicated to natural science, political progressivism, and business. Members included Matthew Boulton, James Watt, Joseph Priestly, Erasmus Darwin, and Josiah Wedgwood, and often supported egalitarian causes like the

campaign to abolish the slave trade, religious tolerance, or even, in Priestly's case, the French Revolution. This group applied modern science to commercial purposes with innovations in exploitation: the purpose of technology under capitalism is to pay less for labor power. Because of this confluence between business and intellectual life, Birmingham's leadership has become a favorite of free-market ideologues—the “vulnerability of the concept of a British Enlightenment to ideological appropriation” (Budge 157; see also Porter). In the first half of the twentieth century, the only point at which labor held any significant power, the marriage between inquiry and commerce took the form of direct investment. So, for instance, the most extensive, canonical work of research into the industrial history of the area, Allen's 1929 study, opens with a disclosure about how it was funded: “A Birmingham Firm” gave the University of Birmingham “a sum of money” to research “the nature of the leading industries, their relative position, the scale of operations, the methods of organization and the distribution of the labor force” (xv).

The region was always notorious for a “low level of unionization” (Hopkins, “Working Hours and Conditions during the Industrial Revolution”) and “comparatively little labor agitation” (Hopkins, *Birmingham* 179). The same absence of a municipal charter that allowed dissenters to achieve key positions also allowed extreme labor exploitation. From the sixteenth century, Birmingham had no guilds to “inhibit” or regulate commerce, the likely source of the city's famous “initiative and enterprise,” which was typically psychologized in commentary. Eric Hopkins argues (citing Crafts) that “the main feature of British industrialization involved getting a lot of workers into the industrial sector, rather than getting a high level of output per

worker once they were there” (Hopkins, *Birmingham* 7). A variety of social technologies supported this, including the signature structure of “neoliberalism,” the subcontractor: “The entrepreneur evaded the problems which are involved in the direct employment of labor” in the Black Country (coal mines and ironworks): “small subcontractors engaged to get coal at an agreed price ... They assumed the odium of exploitation and did not shrink from adopting methods in which the proprietors would not have had the opportunity, even if they had the desire, to indulge” (Allen xxi).

The initial process of mechanization, starting in the early eighteenth century, used division of labor to reduce labor costs. Even before the advent of steam technology, “entrepreneurs” broke down tasks with the aid of machines so that they could be performed by children, often of six- or seven-years old (Hopkins, *Birmingham* 7). Hopkins quotes an observer on eighteenth-century “toy” (small goods) manufacture: “a small boy makes the blanks red-hot in a small furnace. Another boy puts them under the punch, one by one. The third picks them out of the punch and greases the upper mould between each punching with a greased brush. All this goes quite quickly” (Hopkins 9). Boulton boasted that his innovations—supported by the Lunar Society—allowed women and children to do more work than men would be able to without the aid of machines. Boys worked in foundries; both boys and girls in the forges. “In the pig and finished iron works there were said to be twelve hundred boys under the age of thirteen who worked on the night as well as the day shift” (Allen 168–69). Considering the popularity of anti-slavery politics among the Enlightenment leaders of Birmingham’s business sector, the city’s economy was strikingly primed to

service the empire; Birmingham was the leading provider of guns for slave trade (Hopkins, *Birmingham* 15, 20; see also C. Hall).

The “radical liberals” who made the big nineteenth-century investments, who built the libraries and schools and museums, also supported imperialism in the most direct and damaging ways. The single figure most strongly associated with liberalism in Birmingham was Joseph Chamberlain, the city’s legendary mayor and the father of Neville Chamberlain. Becoming MP for Birmingham after only a short stint as mayor, he split the Liberal Party over Home Rule for Ireland (he favored continued direct rule of Ireland from Westminster) in the 1880s. In the following decade, he served in a coalition government comprised of Liberal Unionists and Conservatives, and was appointed Secretary of State for the Colonies at the absolute peak of the imperial period. In this role, he was deeply involved in the Boer War, which concerned the bid for autonomy of the very Boer republic in which Tolkien had been born only three years earlier—the Orange Free State—along with Transvaal. The point at issue (at least nominally) was the rights of “uitlanders,” English residents like Tolkien’s family. Chamberlain, the Birmingham “radical liberal,” was centrally concerned in committing the U.K. to fighting a war against the Boer republics and, as such, in redirecting Britain into a military buildup and colonial rivalry with Germany (which sided with the Boers) that would eventuate in the Great War—again, the events that traumatized Tolkien and shaped his life.

***By the gains of Industry we promote Art***

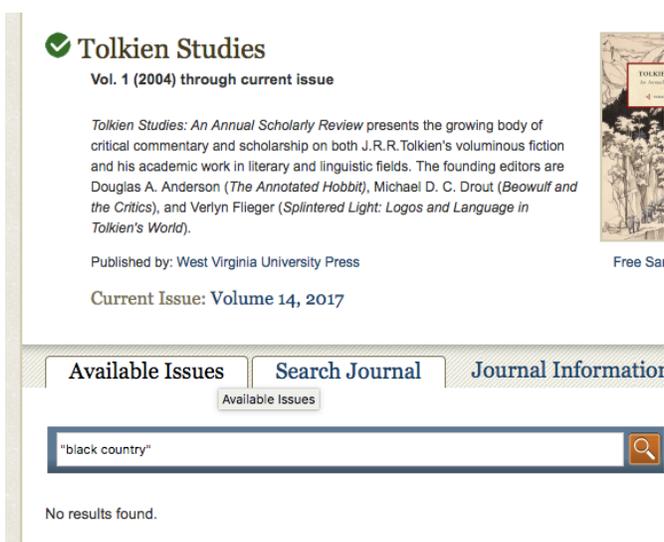
The horrors present in the history of the Black Country, including its name, suggest an influence on Tolkien's depiction of "evil." The horrors of the Black Country lay in the unfreedom and immiseration of all sectors of the population, including children, through relations of production as well as through environmental degradation. Tolkien himself, however—like Queen Victoria, who is said to have closed the blinds of her railway carriage when passing through—may have been consciously concerned only with the latter. Class functions almost unconsciously in his text. Antipathetic class relations and environmental destruction are linked in Middle-earth, the defining combination of industrial traits that characterize Isengard and Mordor, in contrast to the harmonious extra-industrial hierarchies of the Shire, Lothlórien, or Gondor. The damages inflicted on the working class appear through the Orcs, with their working-class idiom, knowing assessments of political machinations and official lies, class consciousness, cynicism, selfishness, and a hatred that seems unmotivated only if divorced from the class context their dialogue indicates (this hatred constitutes their "cruelty.") During the struggle in Cirith Ungol, one orc, for instance, rails at his superiors: "Nar! Keep your hands off your knife, or I'll put an arrow in your guts. You won't be a captain long when They hear about all these goings-on" (VI.i.906). Contrast this Orcish sensibility with Sam's cringe-inducing abjection in the organic class structure of the Shire: "'Me, sir!' cried Sam, springing up like a dog invited for a walk. 'Me go and see Elves and all! Hooray!' he shouted, and then burst into tears" (I.ii.64).

The novel's suspension between piety and society finds more systematic expression around its many references to slavery. These are just a few of them:

Saruman has housing for his “workers, servants, slaves, and warriors” (III.viii.554); the enemies of Sauron (such as Denethor in Minas Tirith or Frodo on first hearing about the Ring from Gandalf) fear becoming his slaves; Aragorn frees the slaves working the oars on the ships of Umbar (V.ix.876-7); Sauron “had few servants but many slaves of fear,” a nice distinction absolving Sam’s subalternity—explicitly motivated by love, never by fear—from the taint of slavery (VI.i.900). These references to slavery track closely with depictions of blasted wasteland; the two phenomena appear together. After Frodo, Sam, and Gollum pass the Dead Marshes, for instance, they come to the edge of the country around the Black Gate, where “High mounds of crushed and powdered rock, great cones of earth fire-blasted and poison-stained, stood like an obscene graveyard in endless row” (IV.ii.631). The passage goes on to call the scene of industrial destruction—great cones of blasted earth sounds very much like the landscape of the Black Country—“the lasting monument to the dark labour of its slaves” (IV.ii.631-2). The full description evokes the battlefields of the Great War, just as the preceding Dead Marshes echo the chronic deep flooding of the trenches and the lingering presence of corpses, and indeed the country Sam and Frodo are passing through is an ancient battlefield (Fussell 47–48; Garth). But it also evokes the landscape of the Black Country, for instance as depicted by local painter Edwin Butler Bayliss; “the dark labour of its slaves,” which suggests laborers more than soldiers, seems to cement the association. Ironically, the deindustrialized Black Country, not “beyond all healing,” has now largely been converted into parkland.

The repeated connection between slavery and mounds of crushed and lifeless earth did not, however, seem to bring the Black Country to Tolkien’s consciousness

when talking about the sources of Mordor. Hammond and Scull say that this definitively repudiates any speculation about the industrial midlands in Middle-earth: Tolkien affirmed, at least once, that Mordor reflected the hell-scape of the Somme, and that, apparently, is that—despite the fact that “Mordor” literally means “Black Country” in Sindarin. I will comment further on the prevalence of positivism and the norms concerning Tolkien’s intentions in the micro-discipline of Tolkien studies in chapter four, but for now I will simply note that, as of this writing, there have been zero references to the Black Country in the journal *Tolkien Studies*, although it has been suggested as relevant by the local arts council, which sponsored an exhibit on the Black Country as the model for Mordor at Wolverhampton (Jeffries; CharliH).



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Brutal exploitation lay immediately west of the rural “paradise” on which Tolkien modeled the Shire, supplying the region’s wealth, not to mention the developments that made it possible for Tolkien to pursue advanced study in medieval

languages and literature. But the Black Country by no means exhausts industrial Birmingham's influence on Middle-earth. Tolkien's affirmative taste (that is, what he liked), his populism, and above all his visual style as an artist and illustrator reflect it. Birmingham's nineteenth-century aesthetic legacy may not immediately appear as modern, because the city embraced nostalgia as a leading patron of the Arts and Crafts and Pre-Raphaelite movements. Victorian medievalism, with its cults of simplicity, anti-industrialism, and return to nature—all of which depended on modern communications and globalizing capitalism—was a signature of Victorian modernity. Without the distinctively modern sense of its own historicity, the Victorian period could not have embraced medievalism as a dominant style (see David Sweeney Coombs and Danielle Coriale).

England dominated the Arts and Crafts and Pre-Raphaelite movements, the latter exclusively. In celebration of its modernity as an industrial, non-medieval city, and as a symptom of its modern affluence, Birmingham took a leading role in patronizing and celebrating both movements. Edward Burne-Jones, the medievalist artist who was William Morris's lifelong friend and business partner, was from Birmingham, and the local ruling class enthusiastically collected Pre-Raphaelite art, which forms the core of the Birmingham Museum's collection (Hartnell). Alan Crawford traces Birmingham's embrace of the Arts and Crafts movement to “‘The Birmingham Group,’ or, confusingly, ‘The Birmingham School.’” This was a group of “‘Burne-Jones and Morris enthusiasts at Birmingham who took their subjects from medieval romances and fairy tales and treated them in a deliberately primitive way” (Crawford 28). They founded a major art school in the city in 1874 and were

instrumental in advocating for and populating the municipal museum. In the language of the Birmingham Guild of Handicraft (one of the hundreds of Victorian philanthropic projects directed to helping working class people “find enjoyment in something higher than the gin palace and more refined than the music hall” — 1880 document quoted in Crawford 30), the goal of Arts and Crafts was “to supply handmade articles superior in beauty of design and soundness of workmanship to those made by machinery” (1895 document quoted Crawford 31). Among other things, the city was a center for the movement to “reform pubs,” which promoted “idealized village inns, in restrained traditional styles deriving from the Arts and Crafts Movement” — right up Tolkien’s alley (Foster).

These projects eventuated in public structures for the city of Birmingham as Tolkien would have experienced it. These displayed industrial wealth as romantic medievalism with taste for hand-crafted design. In 1874, Joseph Chamberlain, then Mayor of Birmingham, led the city council to apply for an Act of Parliament which would allow them to purchase all of the private gas companies in the city. Donna Taylor writes that profits from “the Birmingham Corporation Gas Company ... now owned by the Birmingham ratepayers, would be ploughed back into a municipal museum.” Competing bourgeois interests used the region’s three new museums as “vital sites for class expression” per the argument of Amy Woodson-Boulton (Woodson-Boulton 37). The Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery was an “extension to the Council House,” the city’s “principal municipal building,” designed by architect Yeoville Thomason (Foster 61). What now stands as the “Industrial Gallery” of the art museum was originally the whole museum, built to exhibit especially beautiful

products of the city's abundant and diverse artificers and the extensive collections of paintings and sculpture they had acquired, strongly favoring the Pre-Raphaelite movement. The motto for the museum was inscribed on its foundation stone: "By the gains of industry we promote Art."

"From the architectural point of view," writes a critic, the Industrial Gallery makes "the most exciting statement" in this premier building of Birmingham's most distinguished phase of municipal investment. "With its dividing staircase, upper galleries and exposed ironwork, its iron-and-glass roof reminiscent of railway-shed architecture, and its great hanging gas burners, this perfectly expresses the original intentions for the gallery as a whole, to show how fine and applied arts could support each other" (Banerjee). The Industrial Gallery is decorated "all in exposed ironwork," locally mined and crafted (Foster 68). The spirit of the Arts and Crafts movement is thus baked into the building, in the manner of Ruskin's titular "stones of Venice." and implies a consonance between the philosophy of Ruskin and Morris—formative for Tolkien—and Raymond Williams's sense of urban wonder: "look what men have built."

William Morris, whose medieval romances caught Tolkien's imagination, though not from Birmingham himself, had been part of a group of undergraduates at Oxford in the 1850s known as "the Birmingham Set." Most of the young men in this group had been educated at King Edward's School, Birmingham, the same school Tolkien would later attend on scholarship, where he began his study of medieval languages. Two Birmingham natives in the group, Edward Burne-Jones and Charles Faulkner, later became Morris's partners in Morris & Co, the design firm he founded

to produce textiles and other goods according to Arts & Craft principles. He and Burne-Jones also later collaborated on limited edition books—sometimes Morris’s own prose romances, sometimes editions of medieval texts—through the Kelmscott Press. In other words, this group of medievalist designers and writers, Tolkien’s predecessors in many ways, not only had roots in the modern, industrial city of Birmingham but produced reproducible design, from wallpaper and textiles to romances and physical books. Their aesthetics were cognate with the consumer products of Victorian and Edwardian Birmingham industry.

The same could be said of Tolkien’s own artwork, at its best in the designs and illustrations he produced for reproduction in print, which is in some ways less aesthetically suspect than his fiction. These include the illustrations he created for early editions of *The Hobbit*, various designs for *The Lord of the Rings*, and even his alphabets. In creating so much decoration, even the binding for the books where he had the opportunity, Tolkien was building something akin to a “total work of art”: not on the operatic model of Wagner, in spite of the obvious kinship, but in a workmanlike, Ruskinian spirit of the kind reflected in Morris’s Kelmscott Press or Red House. Design was only one dimension of the “totality,” the set of languages, myths, histories, geographies, songs, poems, illustrations, crests, and maps that he worked on from 1917, when he worked out the first beginnings of the legendarium, until his death, twenty years after *The Lord of the Rings* was published.

### ***Heavy Metal***

If the Arts and Crafts and Pre-Raphaelite movements expressed the ruling class aesthetic of nineteenth-century industrial Birmingham, then heavy metal—the fourth node in this exploration of Birmingham’s meaning with respect to Tolkien—gave voice to a recently empowered working class suddenly confronted with economic disaster in the second half of the twentieth century. Unlike the Arts & Crafts and Pre-Raphaelite movements, however, heavy metal is demonstrably a product of Birmingham. Deena Weinstein, the authoritative historian of the genre, reports that critics differ on which was first “real heavy metal band,” calling it “a contest between Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath. Americans tend to pull for Led Zeppelin... but the British favor Black Sabbath” (Weinstein 14). All the members of Black Sabbath (formed 1968) were from inner-city Birmingham, as were half the members of Led Zeppelin (also 1968)—John Bonham, the drummer, and Robert Plant, the Tolkien fan—as was Judas Priest (first formed 1969, though better known after 1980). All emerged from the “Brumbeat” circuit at the moment of the “Afternoon in Middle-earth.”

In the following section, I give a brief overview of Tolkien’s history in popular music, examine Black Sabbath and the heavy metal genre as products of this moment in the West Midlands, and finally analyze some of Led Zeppelin’s early songs and albums as producing a cosmopolitan mass cultural aesthetic that features a strange, hybrid, newly canonical re-tooling of Tolkien utterly in keeping with their overall stylistic strategy. The final section of this chapter, after the music sections, looks at tendencies that reacted (nominally) against the (nominally) “countercultural” and rock appropriation of his work, in the form of the Tolkien Society (U.K.). In spite of the

apparent opposition between rock on the one hand and the Tolkien Society on the other, the central story of Tolkien's capitalization does not rely on an opposition between these cultural poles. Just as Tolkien fandom does not mandate a particular politics, so also the apparent differences in ethos among Tolkien-related traditions, while they make a great difference in terms of aesthetics and style, matter little in relation to the function of culture in everyday life or the capacity of capital to enclose and profit off of it.

The original Tolkien craze coincided with the late-sixties tide of youth culture and experimentation generally, and what became known as "hobbit rock" took numerous musical forms. There is a *lot* of popular music about Middle-earth. The Tolkien Music List, a major work of fan scholarship and archival care, lists over a thousand artists and about ten thousand entries for songs and albums, with around another ten thousand non-redundant entries listed as "marginalia," including band names (Seeman and Morgueldar Dragonseye).<sup>54</sup> This immense output does not guarantee appeal: the All Music Guide's page for *Wizards & Demons*, a 2003 compilation of Tolkien-related prog rock from the 1960s and 70s, promises that "listeners with an aversion to either Tolkien or progressive rock are served well by the compilation's title, and will no doubt have an easy time avoiding an accidental purchase" (Monger). Not all the recordings and names reflect fannish devotion. In 1967-68, novelty records sought to cash in on the craze, and Tolkien retains power as a sign and a shared resource for heavy metal. But it's equally clear that even the latter

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<sup>54</sup> Chris Seeman, the owner and discographer, works off a list originally created by "Morgueldar Dragonseye, AKA Janis Balodis, owner of Elven Witchcraft, a Latvian-based distribution label devoted to fantasy-themed music," active 1997-2002 (Seeman and Morgueldar Dragonseye).

represents a meaningful innovation on the part of users. In other words, the use of Tolkien to solidify popular formations (naming your band “Nazgûl” so that it recognizably fits a subsection of metal, for instance) has an organic cultural power more akin to Led Zeppelin’s creative deformations—which cannot be understood as solely commercial, even if that delimits them—than to commercial interests trying to capitalize on a fad.

Amoeba Music, the California record store chain, hosts an “Amoeblog” with an entry on “Hobbit Rock” that lists a range of potential compass points for the genre. These include “the dewy-eyed archaisms of British folk,” “the more freakish, otherworldly strains of British psychedelia,” “mainstream American Folk-Rock (think Simon & Garfunkel’s ‘Scarborough Fair/Canticle’),” “Acid Folk,” and “Metal, particularly Death/Black Metal”; the latter, it argues, basically all belongs in the category of Hobbit Rock since “a Metric Fucktonne of the stuff claims inspiration from the deepest, darkest depths of Mordor” (Osato). This broad range of implicated genres is already apparent in 1967-68. Looking at the Tolkien Music List for those years, one finds filksongs<sup>55</sup> (including a dozen or so by Deborah Webster Rogers published in *Orcrist*,<sup>56</sup> the publication of the University of Wisconsin Tolkien group, in which Richard C. West—one of the better-known “lay” scholars in Tolkien studies— was the key figure), psychedelic pop (such as Thorinshield’s “Lonely

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<sup>55</sup> A form of fanwork, dating at least to the 1940s, in which new lyrics referencing a mass cultural text are created for a recognizable melody. For a famous example, see Kevin Wald’s “Heroine Barbarian” (Gilbert and Sullivan / *Xena, Warrior Princess*): “I travel with a poet who is perky and parthenian / And scribbles her hexameters in Linear Mycenian / (And many have attempted, by a host of methods mystical, / To tell if our relationship's sororal or sapphistical)” (Wald). Bruce Pelz, discussed in the previous chapter, was famous in fandom for helping to develop the filksong (The Filk Society; Gold). Henry Jenkins discusses filking in *Textual Poachers* (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 250–76).

<sup>56</sup> *Orcrist* was widely distributed. West wrote a history of the project available online (West).

Mountain Again”), thematic novelty records (such as Leonard Nimoy’s “Ballad of Bilbo Baggins”), two separate bands recording under the name “The Hobbits” in 1967 (The Hobbits (Fellows et al); The Hobbits (Vance, Curtiss)), and loads of rock, folk, and “classical” compositions in the same general style as Donald Swann’s songs (Seeman and Morgueldar Dragonseye). The fact that these often non-overlapping modes intersect at “Tolkien” reveals Tolkien’s legendarium as a narrative space through which many paths (and journeys and quests) are possible.

Heavy metal’s affinity for Tolkien was welded into the genre from the outset and became cemented over time, with references in the lyrics and names of hundreds if not thousands of bands, as well as in associated artwork and design. Offshoots would include the aesthetic connection, apparent to critics, between Ralph Bakshi’s work as an animator, including his 1978 film of *The Lord of the Rings*, and the 1981 anthology-feature *Heavy Metal*. As metal became a distinct international cultural configuration, its Tolkien tradition became more specialized, reaching its apogee in a tour-de-force of Tolkien rock, German power metal band Blind Guardian’s 1998 oratorio based on *The Silmarillion, Nightfall in Middle-earth*.<sup>57</sup>

There is debate about the etymology of the designation “heavy metal,” which plays on slang connotations of “heavy”: Ian Christie captures its vague connotations at the moment of metal’s birth by saying that for hippies it meant “anything with a potent mood” (Christie 10). Obviously the phrase puns on the “heavy metals” in the periodic table, many of which are toxic or radioactive. And heaviness, combined with the machine uses of “metal,” seems consonant with the highly amplified, lugubrious

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<sup>57</sup> Frankly better than the book, though impossible to understand without it (Blind Guardian).

sound of the music. The appellations “hard rock” and “heavy metal,” however, owe their mineral character at least in part to Birmingham and the Black Country. Andrew Cope calls Birmingham “the cradle of all things heavy metal” and writes that “there appears to be a strong consensus amongst academics and established journalists that heavy metal and hard rock emerged during the late 1960s/early 1970s in the industrial Midlands of England” (Cope 7). Indeed, the origin of Black Sabbath’s distinctive and influential sound lay in an industrial accident. At the age of seventeen, Tony Iommi, the guitarist, was operating an unfamiliar steel press at a sheet metal plant and lowered it on his hand, cutting off parts of his two middle fingers. As a skilled metalworker, he crafted artificial fingertips for himself, but continuing to play the guitar required him to use banjo strings, which were lighter, and to “down tune” it, loosening all the strings to make them easier to manipulate, and turning up the amplifier to compensate for a thinner sound. He pushed the unusual effect further by adjusting the chords he played to compensate for his missing fingers. Several historians agree that the use of the “power chord” in metal—consisting of the root note and the fifth with no third, “a kind of mutant chord with no major/minor tonality” (Cope 31)—originates with this accident.

Iommi’s accident supplies an origin story for heavy metal that comports perfectly with the genre’s ethos and mythology. The spirit in which I mean this was captured in a 2015 column for *The Toast* that offered a list of “the most metal deaths in Middle-earth, ranked.” Most are from *The Silmarillion*, but Gandalf comes in third:

Gandalf the Grey, like Glorfindel, wrestled a Balrog into an abyss. What makes Gandalf even more metal than Glorfindel is that Gandalf *did not stop there*. After grappling the demon down a seemingly

bottomless pit, Gandalf fought the demon in a subterranean lake, through a lightless labyrinth populated by unspeakable monsters, up the tallest staircase ever, and finally on a mountain peak. Gandalf died after he, “Threw down my enemy... and broke the mountain-side where he smote it in his ruin,” which is the most metal line in the entire trilogy, and possibly all of English literature. (Gilkeson)

The satirical tone captures something intentional about metal, at least as practiced by Sabbath; not only its emphasis on sacrifice, the fantastic, and pessimism, but a willingness to commit to theatrical excess, knowing that it skates on parody. Lester Bangs analyzed the imaginative structure in an essay on Black Sabbath that implicitly suggests their affinity with Tolkien, writing that they were “probably the first truly Catholic rock group, or the first group to completely immerse themselves in the Fall and Redemption: the traditional Christian dualism which asserts that if you don’t walk in the light of the Lord then Satan is certainly pulling your strings, and a bad end can be expected, is even imminent” (Bangs, “Bring Your Mother to the Gas Chamber!”).

Birmingham brought forth heavy metal at the moment when its working class had finally achieved some modest measure of power and security and—therefore, as capital took counter-measures—at the moment when it was just beginning what would be a long and catastrophic decline. We have already seen that numerous historians testify to the political weakness of the working class in the West Midlands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, even by comparison with workers in the textile centers of the North. But by the 1950s in Britain, things had changed. Throughout the major capitalist economies of the west, the success of the Russian Revolution, the size and militancy of socialist and labor movements, and the unrest provoked by the Great Depression—all of which eventuated in fascism for Italy and Germany, where

communism posed the greatest threat—had frightened the ruling class into making accommodations, for example the New Deal in the U.S.. Postwar Britain, reeling from war trauma and austerity, swept Churchill aside with a Labour Party victory in the national elections of 1945. Through the “Welfare State,” they established “cradle to grave” programs such as the National Health Service (not just a “single payer” insurance program but socialized medicine, with providers directly employed in the public sector). They also nationalized industries for which Birmingham was central, including coal, iron, steel, trucking, railways, and in time even some individual Birmingham companies such as British Leyland. In the 1960s, however, while the welfare state was still expanding its reach, deindustrialization was already underway.

The abrupt decline of Birmingham from “one of the most prosperous” areas in the country to “crisis and decline” has been extensively documented.

Unemployment [in the late 1960s] was generally well below the national average ... and at times the rate fell below 1 per cent. [...] By 1983 more than 40 per cent of the economically active in the core of the conurbation were registered as unemployed. (Spencer 52)

The affordances of modern capital, such as the imperial economy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the creation of the motorway system and container shipping in the mid-twentieth, had contributed very substantially to Birmingham’s boom. This, in turn, led to a very low unemployment rate that supported worker power. Under neoliberalism, first Margaret Thatcher and then both Conservative and “New Labour” governments re-privatized industries, dismantled social institutions, and cut back programs, to the point that the working class in the U.K. suffered more extreme setbacks under neoliberalism than in any country in Europe. These developments

made it easy for capital to stop relying on Birmingham and its heavily unionized workforce, moving operations either elsewhere in Britain or overseas.

An evocative passage in Dominic Sandbrook's discussion of Black Sabbath describes the collapse of the West Midlands's economy in 1980. One in four people, he writes, was out of work:

A table in [the *Times*] told the dreadful tale, charting, month by month, the factory closures—Wolverhampton, Wednesbury, Bilston, Tipton, Halesowen, Olbury, Walsall, West Bromwich—a few hundred out of work here, a few thousand there. In Birmingham alone, 20,000 people had lost their jobs in just a few months. Every week another workshop closed its doors, another chimney came down, another factory fell silent. And worse was to follow. By the time of Mrs Thatcher's re-election in June 1983 ... the area had lost some 330,000 jobs in four years. "The names of firms which have slashed jobs or shut plants", said the *Sunday Times* in May 1983, read "like a roll-call of the biggest names in British industry: British Leyland, BSA, Swan, Alfred Herbert, GKN, Lucas, Typhoo, Bird's, Dunlop." (Sandbrook 14)

Heavy metal emerged from this moment, in which the working class had at least tasted some capacity to influence the shape of life, had gained at least some leisure, security, and education, and now began to lose even this seeming security, and all apparent hope of freedom with it. The environment these musicians grew up in, the pollution, factories, and working class manufacturing jobs that formed their background, are a constant in critical writings about heavy metal. Cope, for instance, links the "aggressiveness" of the Birmingham sound to the city's industrial heritage, suggesting that the loud, repetitive noise of the factories influences it. Ryan Moore, in a Marxian comment on Sabbath, writes of their imaginary as a species of reification, which "expresses the sense of being at the mercy of processes that are absolute and overwhelming in their consequences, yet invisible and impersonal in their origins"

(Moore 147–48). He argues that heavy metal envisions social forces as inhuman or supernatural as a manifestation of the powerlessness felt by working class people (specifically men, in the case of early metal) at a moment when the forces of capital, on a global scale, conspired to turn their lives upside down in the most quotidian, most important, most frustrating ways.

The jobs that were disappearing, though struggle and circumstance had leveraged them to create some improvement in working class life, were nonetheless quite terrible. Although Cope and Sandbrook both stress the legends of the Black Country, the noise of the factories and so forth, as formative influences on the sound of heavy metal, Cope quotes a 1978 interview with Ozzy Osbourne (Black Sabbath's lead vocalist) to suggest a more social, class-based motive:

It's the system that gets aggression into you. You don't like somebody going —  
"you will be there at eight o'clock, you will push that button, you feed that machine, you will sell that.' You must have a job where you think I'd love to push my fist down that cunt's throat. But you can't because if you do, you're out of a job, you starve. (27; quoted from *Sounds* 21 October 1978)

In Marx, the requirement to convert labor into labor power and sell it as a commodity is a compulsion—do this or “you starve”—masquerading as freedom.<sup>58</sup> In a later interview, Osbourne said that “We lived in a dreary, polluted, dismal town and we were angry about it. For us the whole hippy thing was bullshit. The only flower you saw in Aston [the part of central Birmingham that all the band members came from] was on a gravestone. So we thought, let's scare the whole fucking planet with music” (Cope 30).

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<sup>58</sup> For a clear, brief, and rigorous secondary account of the distinction between labor and commodified labor power in Marx, see (Fine and Saad-Filho).

There's a Springsteen-esque note, compounded of a mixture of misery and pride, in post-collapse talk about the West Midlands. One journalist who grew up in the Black Country writes:

There was a pride, not just in the industrial achievements of the Black Country, which made everything from the Titanic's anchors to Royal Brierley's cut-glass liqueur glasses, but in its sense of embattled abjection [...]. And then there was the terrible, intoxicating beauty of the Black Country ablaze at night, the fumes that caught in your throat and made you know you were home. (Jeffries)

And yet I wonder about the novelty of this ambivalence. Certainly, the tendency to demonize the scene from an external class perspective, as Tolkien did, is not new. In 1832, the future Queen Victoria—then thirteen years old—passed through “a town where all the coal mines are.” Just after changing horses in Birmingham, she wrote:

The men, women, children, country and houses are all black. But I can not by any description give an idea of its strange and extraordinary appearance. The country is very desolate everywhere; there are coals about, and the grass is quite blasted and black. I just now see an extraordinary building flaming with fire. The country continues black, engines flaming, coals in abundance, every where, smoking and burning coal heaps, intermingled with wretched huts and carts and little ragged children. (Sandbrook 12)

One might even argue that Birmingham's will to rock goes back further still:

[F]or Matthew Boulton, one mission in life seems to have been to avert the risk of a cultural melt-down in his native town. In 1777 he reported with some satisfaction that, whereas ‘in the last century’ his fellow citizens’ favorite recreational activities had been ‘bull-baitings, cock-fightings, boxing matches, and abominable drunkenness with all its train,’ much progress had been made. (Jones 61)

This ethos, the romance of a tough, exuberant working class culture born of suffering, colored the early reception of Black Sabbath, who converted slurs about their class status into points of pride. Bangs, reviewing their first LP in *Rolling Stone*, positioned

them with social accuracy though without respect: “Over across the tracks in the industrial side of Cream country lie unskilled laborers like Black Sabbath ... grinding on and on with dogged persistence” (Bangs, “Black Sabbath”). Ian Christie calls them “prophets bred from the downside of English society ... people regarded as morally suspect and of negligible social worth. ... all born ... in Birmingham” (Christie 1).

The romanticism of Led Zeppelin, and of heavy metal, reaches back to the interval of Birmingham’s expansion as an industrial center; the age of Coleridge and Blake was the age of Boulton and Watt. The turn to romanticism in the form of rock that took place in Birmingham from the late 1960s is thus cognate with the emphasis on “art” in the city found by Woodson-Boulton. Agreeing that metal begins in Birmingham, Robert Walser ties its sense of seriousness to something like Woodson-Boulton’s argument about Birmingham’s self-idea as a center for art. His book opens with an anecdote about watching a variety of local heavy metal musicians rehearsing in room after room of a ruined nineteenth-century warehouse in Birmingham, practicing for hours or studying music theory. He ponders the likeness and unlikeness of this scene to a classical conservatory (Walser 5–10).

Sandbrook, drawing on Cope, uses Sabbath as his first and paradigmatic example of Britain’s postwar switch in economic focus from manufacturing to cultural exports, from “making *things* to telling *stories*”; his book includes Tolkien under this heading, and has quite a good passage on him (xxxiii; 348-65).<sup>59</sup> But unlike many of the British cultural products that would follow, Sabbath were produced by their moment—including exchanges between Britain and the U.S.—rather than a calculated

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<sup>59</sup> For examples of the ways in which British institutions crafted cultural products deliberately for export since the 1950s, see also Platt on television and Higson on cinema (Platt; Higson).

confection of the British culture industry. In fact, we might look at much of the work of the Birmingham School of cultural studies, with its focus on the newly translated works of Antonio Gramsci and their insistence on the role of culture and agency in a socialist movement, as parallel to the movement from manufacturing to storytelling emphasized by Sandbrook. At a moment of peril and the beginning of catastrophic decline for the working class, Marxism in Britain took a “cultural turn,” insisting that literature and music and “style” granted “agency” to disempowered groups by which they could develop “resistant” forms of culture that would disrupt the hegemonic power of the ruling class. We see this in Paul Willis’s study of secondary school students, Angela McRobbie’s study of fashion (and indeed of music like Led Zeppelin’s), Dick Hebdige’s study of punk, and even in Stuart Hall’s reflections on Thatcher voters—many of whom lived in the West Midlands (Frith and McRobbie; S. Hall; Hebdige; McRobbie; Willis).

### ***The Road Goes Ever On / The Song Remains the Same***

Despite what would become heavy metal’s long history with Tolkien, Sabbath only had one song that was even nominally “about” *The Lord of the Rings*, “Wizard,” the second track on their first LP.<sup>60</sup> Sabbath enjoyed significant popularity from the time they launched, but Led Zeppelin built an audience at a different order of magnitude, becoming the most famous rock group of the 1970s and one of the biggest

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<sup>60</sup> The “themes of darkness and fantasy” in Sabbath’s lyrics, Cope argues, came more from Hammer horror and the horror novelist Dennis Wheatley than from Tolkien-inflected fantasy. As shown by Peter Jackson’s history in the horror genre, however, and his casting of legendary horror actor Christopher Lee as Saruman, the two categories are not unrelated.

album sellers of all time. And, in contrast with Sabbath, they not only made extensive use of direct references to Tolkien's writing in their lyrics but cultivated a generalized Tolkienishness that this section will analyze. Robert Plant, the band's lead singer and co-author of most of its songs (many of which credited all four band members), was an enthusiastic Tolkien fan from the Black Country who named his dog "Strider." As in everything they did, the signature Led Zeppelin gesture was to blend and transform disparate elements, folding Tolkien and vague romantic medievalism into their hybrid style. This pattern of synthesis and amalgamation offers a case study in the aesthetics of "massness" in mass culture, and of the massification of Tolkien. This is not simply a matter of commercial reproduction, but of the active patterns of appropriation, consolidation, borrowing, influence, and transformation among millions of fans—including Robert Plant—many of whom—like Plant—are themselves producers.

Led Zeppelin were the most successful popular music act in the world in the early 1970s. "According to sale certifications of the Recording Industry Association of America they have shifted over 105 million album units of their music—only Garth Brooks and the Beatles have shifted more" (Berish 692). They toured heavily and played spectacular shows to ever-growing audiences. Their songs tended to be long, and much longer live: "Dazed and Confused," originally a cover of a four-minute folk song by the American singer Jake Holmes, ate up as much as thirty minutes in performance. More than that, they achieved an impression of monumentality both in sound and in the conceptual or, per critic Susan Fast, even "spiritual" dimension of whatever they produced: music, lyrics, album covers, performance, gossip. Keith Shadwick, author of one of the more credible histories of the band, talks about their

“sheer weight of sound,” its “breadth and depth,” and its “size” (Shadwick 50). They are fixtures on the “top 10” and “top 100” lists that form an enduring feature of rock journalism: “greatest albums,” “best drummers,” “craziest antics.” These lists are themselves products of the aesthetic of monumental self-seriousness that this genre of rock shares with Tolkien.

Susan Fast’s study, like mine, focuses on the sociology of mass culture; she did an extensive survey of Led Zeppelin fans, focusing particularly on women and girls. In the opening of her book, she argues that Zeppelin’s signature musical effect derives from their intensive use of intertextuality, the way they continually blend explicit references to multiple discrete and incompatible genres in their sound, which she calls “musical eclecticism” (Fast 28). This, she argues, is the reason they are difficult to classify generically, leading to their ambiguous relationship to heavy metal, as founders who don’t belong to the genre. The name of the band handles the relation with characteristic deformation. Lead is a heavy metal; spelling it “Led,” not “Lead,” insures it will be pronounced like the name of the metal while disguising the same thing.<sup>61</sup> Fast’s larger point speaks to the band’s cosmopolitanism, which contributes very significantly to their mass cultural aesthetic but contrasts precisely with Tolkien’s fetishization of the parochial. Their recurrent use of Tolkien stands out, not as an oddity, but as an important dimension of the evolution of Tolkien in the world.

As we will see, the references to Tolkien in the Led Zeppelin catalogue are off-kilter, scattered, and inapposite, but that, I argue, isn’t a symptom of unfamiliarity or following a fad. What Led Zeppelin was doing with Tolkien only makes sense in the

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<sup>61</sup> According to the lore of the band, the name originated when Page invited John Entwistle to join him in re-forming the Yardbirds; Entwistle is said to have joked that it would go over like a lead balloon.

context of what Led Zeppelin was doing in general—what they were doing with music, with gender, with mass culture, with England, with America: a context not only of musical patterns but also of social and stylistic coding. It had a global (or imperial) dimension, figured now as cultural borrowing or appropriation (more on their relationship to intellectual property, and the relationship between this, fan culture, and Tolkien, below). Their music contains South Asian, North African, and African American ingredients, British folk, rock and roll, and classical elements. Jimmy Page playing his guitar with a violin bow, as he always did during performances of “Dazed and Confused,” was itself a gesture to classical music on the level of style; Fast writes that “It is important to identify the object itself—the violin bow—as intertextual ... a powerful symbol borrowed from the tradition of ‘classical’ Western music” (Fast 28).

Fast hears again and again, in her surveys, about Zeppelin’s “grandeur” and “mythic” quality, and the association between this and classical elements recalls Walser’s anecdote about the heavy metal “conservatory” in the ruined factory. Zeppelin ranged over both time and space collecting elements for the composite, like the fantasy imagination, like Tolkien. The long songs and structured albums—found also in metal, including Sabbath—belong under this heading as well. They correspond to the long-form narrative becoming more popular in this era, the narrative that was not only long in itself, like Tolkien’s novel, but that—like *Star Trek* and its newly emerging apparatus of novelizations and fanfictions, building out from a fundamentally episodic and theoretically endlessly reproducible story—could be expanded endlessly into an enveloping container, an accessible, knowable totality.

Cope's argument about Birmingham depends in part on a mapping of British pop according to regional specialties and patterns of movement in the sixties and seventies. London, where Jimmy Page came from, was the center of the British blues revival: Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton, John Mayall, the Rolling Stones. Musicians from London were more likely to have finished school or to have had some post-secondary education, as Page had. But other regions, per Cope, also had their specialties: Manchester, dance and club music; Liverpool, melodic pop with Irish and music hall influences; Newcastle, folk (Cope 35–40). Birmingham's style, which he describes as "dour and determined," he ascribes to a blending of Liverpool pop, the working class sensibilities of the north, with London blues, facilitated by then new motorway connections and the city's central position between Liverpool and London (Cope 9). Led Zeppelin "fused" the Liverpool beat with London blues (Cope 40). Their sound didn't simply differ from Black Sabbath's; it was far more various and flexible.

Led Zeppelin was formed by Page, in London, with great deliberation. Trying to re-form the Yardbirds after Jeff Beck's departure, Page first recruited Plant (having heard him perform at a friend's suggestion), and Plant brought Birmingham drummer Bonham to his attention. Page was an experienced session musician who had toured with a major band, and the whole process was marked by his businesslike professionalism, his close collaboration and planning with management, and his care in putting together not only styles and skills in terms of musicianship but personalities who could work together. Shadwick describes Page as "ever the professional," "keenly observant," "habitually loyal"; he writes of Page's "conservatism and caution" and his desire to "minimize risk," calling him a "trouper" for playing shows with a high fever

while on tour (Shadwick 13). John Bonham, meanwhile—“Bonzo”—exhibited a class contrast with Page, a different way of being in the world. Bonham describes himself as “coming from the Midlands and having only played with local groups ... I was pretty shy”; Shadwick quotes Plant saying that “Bonzo was very keen to get an extra £25 a week to drive the Transit van” (Shadwick 29). It seems fair to suggest that something like class (and other types of) privilege, attached above all to Jimmy Page, is operating in Zep’s capacious “borrowing” of disparate materials, and yet inviting Bonham in and giving him room to play, not just treating him as a hired musician there to execute Page’s plan, is generally considered crucial to Zeppelin’s sound.

In spite of, and partly because of, their enormous commercial success, Led Zeppelin were treated with suspicion by the rock press. *Rolling Stone*, then very new, was looking for “authenticity”; they found in Plant “a pretty soul belter who can do a spade imitation” (quoted in Shadwick 69). Three main charges against the band have lingered: first, that they are excessively commercial and inauthentic; second, that they produce “cock rock,” the charge of misogyny; and third, the charge of plagiarism—they were successfully sued for their “borrowings” more than once. Each of these charges has something to say to the current argument.

The sexist and homophobic slur in describing Plant, with his long splendid blond hair, as “pretty”—compounding the use of a racial slur in the comment—highlights an oddity about the band’s sexual reputation. On the one hand, they were the subject of endless stories about extravagant sexual conduct, groupies, and rape; on the other, one of the many things they seemed to appropriate and make part of their image was femininity, with their long, highly coiffed hair, romantic clothing, use of

falsetto and other feminized gestures in performance. The band's sexual legend was retailed both in the press and in a number of books in the 1970s. Among these are the salacious memoirs of Pamela Des Barres, the ambitious and accomplished "groupie" who was the basis for *Almost Famous*. Her books are come-ons in which no doubt, no pain, no insecurity has a place, but they still convey things that, unsurprisingly, suggest assault and abuse. Led Zeppelin is the most important act in her books, credited with revolutionizing the rock concert in pornographic terms: "They played longer and harder than any group ever had" (Des Barres and Navarro 153). She mythologizes them, referring to Plant as "the Golden God" (142) and Page as "the Dark Lord" (175). Ellen Sander, an American journalist, reports being assaulted by the band backstage, having her dress torn, being "rescued" by their manager, Peter Grant (Shadwick 66). Des Barres recounts a story she attributes to Cynthia Plaster Caster, the ex-groupie who made plaster casts of the erect penises of rock stars: "There was a routine involving Robert Plant, John Bonham, and Richard Cole [their road manager, who later wrote his own bestselling memoir (Cole)]. Robert was the bait, and Bonham and Cole were the violent ones" (Des Barres 93). Des Barres retails what are supposed to be titillating rumors about Zeppelin being "too risky" for groupies. She writes extensively about Page's relationship with at least one thirteen-year-old model; "Jimmy loved young girls—babies" (178).

Tracy McMullen, arguing for Plant's indebtedness to Janis Joplin (which, she demonstrates, was widely recognized in the press at the time), points out that this component of the composite style is disavowed by the band. She quotes Plant from a late interview saying "My vocal performance comes from everywhere, whatever I

listen to that I like. Ray Charles's howl on 'Drown in My Own Tears,' or Wynonie Harris or Louis Jordan, there's loads and loads of stuff. All that stuff, you throw all of that in a blender and throw the switch and you've got me"—but not Janis (McMullen 379). Fast's study, which relies on surveys and interviews with hundreds of fans, is partly directed toward loosening the association of the band with "cock rock." This term was coined in 1970 by the New York underground magazine *The Rat*, which was begun in 1968 and came to prominence because of its reporting on the uprising at Columbia University, but had by 1970 been taken over by radical feminists (Rat Magazine). The tradition of dismissing hard rock and heavy metal on feminist grounds, and use of the term "cock rock," was amplified by Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie's 1978 essay "Rock and Sexuality," associated with the Birmingham School embrace of punk, most famously in Dick Hebdige's *Subculture* (Frith and McRobbie). Punk rejected the mythologizing and grandeur of hard rock and made space for female musicians, such as Siouxsie Sioux or the members of the Slits, in a very different way from the famous "groupies" associated with Led Zeppelin more than with any other band. Fast attempts to theorize the band in a way that can make a place for the experience of female fans. Three things matter with regard to gender and Led Zeppelin. First, they almost certainly committed rape and abuse and did not encourage female participation as musicians. Second, the band incorporated female influences and feminine styles as part of their general process of appropriation and "globalization." And third, they were great, so of course there were plenty of women among their fans.

There's a continuity between the charge of misogyny—and the related implication of a sense of entitlement and aura of male importance to all of Zeppelin's borrowings and their grandiose gestures—and the third major charge against the band, that of plagiarism, which in their case (as usual in rock) was first and foremost a charge of appropriating the work of African American musicians. This is similar to the charge against Donald Wollheim, that he stole Tolkien's novel (a self-evident truth for several British fans I interviewed), and it goes to the heart of the argument of this project, which concerns who creates cultural value, who owns it, and what money has to do with it.

Jimmy Page came from the London blues revival scene, which derives from African American blues in broader and less specific ways than the logic of “plagiarism” can account for. Blues components are essential to Zeppelin's sound. During the 1968-69 period, when Page was assembling the band and strategizing about how to launch their career, they decided on an unusual path for their recording contract. Instead of separate contracts in the U.K. and the U.S., as other bands had at the time, they would sign with a single label, and it would be American: they made a contract with Atlantic, a label known for blues and soul whose main British act, until then, was Dusty Springfield. This signals, in the first instance, their utter adherence to mass culture as their ether: they are a world (“Atlantic”) band. Atlantic, however, did not prevent the band from appropriating material. They were notorious for reusing musical elements and failing to credit originals even when directly citing them on their records, and they were sued several times on these grounds. There is plenty of literature on the music industry's failure to compensate black artists, and particularly

the huge scale of the profits garnered by music originating in African American forms that exceeds the ripping off of any particular black artists to constitute grand expropriation by (for instance) the entire genre of rock and all the accumulation it generated.

Zeppelin's louche approach to intellectual property is part of the band's lore, their style, and is continuous with all the forms of fusion, rapine, and entitlement that characterize it: the "legendary" dimension lives on in the Wikipedia entry "List of Led Zeppelin Songs Written or Inspired by Others" ("List of Led Zeppelin Songs Written or Inspired by Others"). Tolkien's own work is full of reused elements, despite his interest in protecting his authorial prerogatives, and this reflects his medievalism: the proprietary relationship to fictional content was not an ethical value before the onset of modern "authorship." The capture of fan culture for capital, as in *Bored of the Rings* or *Rings-ish* "products" (rock, artwork, adaptations), also catered to and supported the dispersed cultural formation known as "fandom."

One of the songs over which Zeppelin was sued was "Whole Lotta Love," the first track on *Led Zeppelin II* (1969), the same album that includes their most extensive and direct references to *The Lord of the Rings*, in "Ramble On." Willie Dixon sued the band for copying his song "You Need Love," recorded by Muddy Waters in 1962 and by the Small Faces in 1966, a suit that eventuated in an out-of-court settlement ("Music Records"; Dead Man). Aside from direct musical plagiarism in this case, part of what they take from the blues tradition more broadly is a very anatomically specific way of singing about sex. This particular song is literally cock rock, with Plant offer-threatening to "give you every inch of my love" "Way down

inside / honey you need it”; “drooling” gets mentioned as well. I want to argue that this anatomical detailing echoes through the very strange adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* in “Ramble On.”

In “Ramble On,” the band’s capacious, world-building imagination remakes Tolkien as radically as they remake the blues elements central to their catalogue, and with a parallel sense of unauthorized expropriation. They adapt details of the story for a wildly different use, one that cannot count as a “reading,” since it is incompatible with even the roughest idea of Tolkien’s novel. The third verse of the song centers on the lines:

T'was in the darkest depths of Mordor,  
I met a girl so fair  
But Gollum, [and] the Evil One  
Crept up and slipped away with her. (Led Zeppelin, *Led Zeppelin II*)

There seems to be some ambiguity about the third line here: the band did not supply scribal versions of the lyrics, but transcriptions in circulation online place an “and” between “Gollum” (and) “the Evil One,” even though this isn’t (quite) audible. Either way, as an elaboration of Tolkien’s novel, this whole verse seems bonkers: no one meets girls in Mordor. One might be tempted to speculate, as Gimli does of dwarves in Jackson’s film, that there *are* no girls in Mordor, and the idea of Gollum, much less Sauron, being interested in them if there were seems equally unhinged. This is aside from the bigger question of who is singing and when this is meant to have happened.

This might look, then, like a case of decorating the music with meaningless references to Tolkien’s book, as has happened occasionally, during the late-sixties fad or in some metal, including Sabbath as well as many later bands who, for instance,

take their names from Tolkien but don't write songs about Middle-earth. I don't believe that is what is happening here, however. Allusions to Tolkien occur in many places in Led Zeppelin's lyrics, and here they begin with a seriously fannish gesture in the opening line of the song: "Leaves are falling all around / It's time I was on my way" echoes the first line of one of the most famous poems in *The Lord of the Rings*, Galadriel's elegy "Namárië" ("Farewell"). The poem appears in Quenya in the text of the novel, followed by a prose translation that begins "Ah! like gold fall the leaves in the wind, long years numberless as the wings of trees!" The echo has been widely noted; fans also point out that the next line of the song, "Thanks to you, I'm much obliged for such a pleasant stay" seems to echo Bilbo's speech to the Elf King in *The Hobbit*, and these apparent references resonate with others in the Zeppelin catalogue.

The "ramble" in the title of the song has a dual pedigree: "rambling" belongs equally to the blues tradition, the mythology of sexual adventure and refusing to be controlled by women, and to the English "ramble," the tradition of country walking, of which Tolkien was a major enthusiast: he took annual walking tours with a group of men including Lewis and other members of the Inklings. That this kind of rambling is related to Frodo's quest seems implied by the very robust and persistent resonance the novel has for people who are interested in hiking and ecology; I talked with one professional outdoorsman, years ago, who told me he got started backpacking as a result of reading *The Lord of the Rings* (see also Curry). One of the strangest things about the novel's popularity is that a ridiculous percentage of it is given over to

topographical description.<sup>62</sup> The book contains over two hundred mentions of grass, six hundred of mountains, and almost a thousand of trees.

These two contexts for “rambling,” then, form an especially overdetermined fusion, comprising American and British, blues and folk, sex and walking, amorous adventure and quest romance, all eventuating in the equivocation of the lines about the girl in Mordor. Because surely what Gollum would actually argue with the singer about—all Gollum argues with anyone about, with the exception of Sam’s crimes against fish—is not a “girl” but the Ring, which would also explain the interest of the “Evil One.” And this is how the Ring functions in “Ramble On”: the lyrics about Mordor make at least some kind of sense if—and only if—the Ring becomes the “girl so fair,” the “queen of all my dreams” who acts as both motive and counter for the rambling that gives the song occasion and structure. Given that the girl more or less has to *be* the Ring, an extension of the logic of “Whole Lotta Love” (the song that dominates side one of the LP as “Ramble On” dominates side two) even suggests the Ring as vagina, with the girl as synecdoche in its less common form: the whole for the part.

The tenuousness of this reading does not, in my view, exclude it. On the contrary, Plant’s bland willingness to reframe *The Lord of the Rings* sans rings, to substitute a banal erotic competition (which is there whether we sex the Ring’s shape or not) for Manichean heroism, and to invest this banality with passion—passion without content, passion about something that makes no sense and has no specificity, strictly atmospheric passion—expresses the same casual voracity Zeppelin shows

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<sup>62</sup> Dr. Gillian Barker, philosopher of botany, made this observation to me many years ago.

toward cultural materials generally. They seize Tolkien's portentous narrative and throw it into their blender of sexualized stylistic and aesthetic risk-taking. Other critics inclined to fix an external meaning on Tolkien's One Ring have read it as an allegory for, at a modest level, Hitler or the atom bomb, or, if they are more ambitious, for Sin. Zep's approach to Tolkien shares something with those readings; the effect is still big, still hyperbolic. And yet, while meeting a girl so fair in Mordor seems more or less "natural"—if a bit drug-addled—from within rock logic, it violates the norms of "serious" Tolkien scholars and fans so radically as to be virtually illegible. But no fan contributed more to the massification of the text (with the possible exception of Wollheim, who hadn't properly read it) than Robert Plant.

It was on their fourth album, however, that Led Zeppelin's Tolkienishness reached full development. This album—their most famous and best-selling, structured around "Stairway to Heaven"—has Tolkien in its DNA, though it wanders even further from the text than "Ramble On" does. It is one of the most canonical and widely known mass cultural texts of the era, and it uses a version of Tolkien as an ethos and an attitude. This attitude is both incompatible with Tolkien's own and, at the same time, completely Tolkienish for millions of fans. This tells us something about how mass culture works and what role fans play in it.

Although the band gave the album no title—in fact, put no text on the album cover—it's often called *Led Zeppelin IV* by analogy with the first three albums (*Led Zeppelin*, *Led Zeppelin [IV]*). The outer cover art exactly fits the story I have been telling about the industrial West Midlands and the Tolkien aesthetic. Folded, it shows contrasting images on the front and back, which prove to be a single image when

opened. On the right (the front), a hand-tinted old photograph in a worn frame hangs on a wall with stained and peeling wallpaper. Old as the wall appears, the photograph shows something older: a rural memory of (literally) backbreaking pre-industrial labor. This recursive format, in which something that already seems old always opens onto something much older, matches the one I discussed in the introduction as “historical *mise-en-abyme*,” Tolkien’s signature aesthetic effect. Unfolding the cover adds another layer: the left side shows a contemporary, almost derelict urban landscape. Behind the old wall—which is now shown to be partially collapsed—lies disturbed ground, decayed attached housing (homes for industrial laborers), and further back a sterile high rise, probably council flats. This could be Birmingham, or West Bromwich, the Black Country town where Plant grew up. The old photograph comes to seem like a window through modern decay onto a past that, with its tinting, seems both memory and fantasy, slightly uncanny.

The inside-cover artwork shows a hooded wizard holding a lantern on a craggy peak—Tolkienish without corresponding to anything Tolkien, Gandalf the Nothing in Particular. The image fills the whole space, again with no text; the band told interviewers that this responded to being told they were all hype and no substance, and their desire to “let the music speak for itself,” which it apparently does through visual illustration. The orientation of the image requires the person holding the album—presumably using it to clean seeds out of her weed—to turn it in order to see the whole image, just as the outer image had to be opened to be seen whole. Like *The Lord of the Rings*, this album is big and absorbing, an activity. The inner sleeve, and the labels, show four “runes” that the band members chose to represent themselves. Tolkien used

a runic alphabet, among others—Gandalf, for instance, signs his name with a single rune—but in Old English runes are notable for having both phonetic and ideogrammatic functions, so that they can inscribe two literal meanings at once, and they are associated with magic (Page).

The songs on the album vary stylistically, creating a capacious but polished effect. The opening song, “Black Dog,” lacks the Tolkien connection but offers the best example of a certain quality in Led Zeppelin that speaks to their massiness. It resonates with the narrative franchises for which *The Lord of the Rings* is both model and exception in that “Black Dog” is a thrill-ride, thanks to its technique of layering different time signatures on top of each other. Various commentators scan it differently, but one solution proposes a 9/8 rhythm for guitar and bass over 4/4 drums, so that the band members only sync up on every twentieth beat (Goodman). One hears the controlled chaos on the main riff, seeming to accelerate as the disunited rhythms converge, just before it resolves, repeatedly. The effect is like an aural theme park ride, a sensation of narrowly avoiding the same accident over and over, with the impression that heroic dexterity—complicated by intoxication—on the part of the musicians is the only thing saving a highly controlled production from cracking up. It provides the listener with a “dangerous” experience and, at the same time, a generic and branded guarantee that the musical ride will not go off the rails. This sensation resembles the kind of thrill offered by *Star Wars*, another product of the 1970s that

never goes away, and reveals it as an allegory of mass culture itself, affective intensity that, as Joshua Clover has written, acknowledges that nothing has changed (Clover).<sup>63</sup>

“Misty Mountain Hop,” the first song on side two—as “Black Dog” comes first on side one—shares some of this chaos/control dynamic while invoking Middle-earth directly. This time, Plant makes Tolkien an inappropriate metonym for drugs instead of sex, in a formally dialogic structure that again contains the tendency to trip; in fact, on this track the members of the band do briefly fall out of sync at one point. The lyrics stage an occasion on which the singer encounters a group of hippies in the park, gets high with them, and they all get arrested. The structure of the song reflects the opposition in the narrative: hippies on one side, cops on the other. One through-line in the vocal, taken by multiple voices in the studio version, is delivered with robotic phrasing, every word given the same stress. On the other, interrupting lines, Plant noodles around, and the phrasing is free. The first verse goes like this:

[Many voices:] Walk-ing-in-the-park-just-the-o-ther-day-ba-by

[Plant:] What do you, what do you think I saw?

[Many:] Crowds-of-peo-ple-sit-ting-on-the-grass-with-flow-ers-in-their-hair-said

[Plant:] Hey Boy, do you want to score?

Fast quotes one of her survey respondents saying, about the band in general, that their appeal lay in “the tightness of the playing combined with improvisational looseness,” and this describes the two threads in this song (20). The highly repetitive riff conveys a sense of forward movement, and there is no chorus.

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<sup>63</sup> Susan Fast tells a story about reviewing video of the band’s concert performances and seeing Page perform the same jump, at the same point in the same solo, twenty years apart; this seems to shed light on the logic of this effect.

The end of the song describes Tolkien's "Misty Mountains" as a place of escape:

So I'm packing my bags for the Misty Mountains  
Where the spirits go, now,  
Over the hills where the spirits fly.

Middle-earth lies in the same space as regular earth; the bags are packed for the mountains just as Bilbo might have packed (had he not left at the last moment, without his handkerchief). But structural parallelism associates Middle-earth with the counter-culture inhabiting the same park as the police. Strange turns in the song's narrative, like the cops inviting "us" to "stay for tea and have some fun" in the second verse (which some fans read as echoing *The Hobbit* and sounds to me like drag slang for gossip), or the lines "take a good look at yourself ... sitting spare like a book on a shelf," make the other dimension *other*, although imminent. It works something like the photo on the album cover: both worlds occupy the same space. Trippy.

Between these two songs, in the middle of the album, lie two other "Tolkienish" numbers, "The Battle of Evermore" and "Stairway to Heaven." A dynamic comparable to the use of non-European or classical elements takes place with the use of folk elements on this album. The third track brings a major British folk act into the band: on "The Battle of Evermore," Robert Plant shares lead vocals with folk singer Sandy Denny, then a member of Fairport Convention, who, like the Yardbirds (including Page), had performed at the Middle Earth Club in London. This is the only track Led Zeppelin ever recorded with a guest vocalist, and they even gave Denny her own rune—next to her name—on the dust sleeve. The song has no drum track, and its folk profile on a hard rock album suggests Amoeba's "hobbit rock" bin even without

its allusions to “ring wraiths,” “magic runes,” and a “dark lord.” Avalon appears in the song also, and a Queen of Light, who can be Galadriel or not; that’s the point.

If one wanted to present a one-sentence summary of *The Lord of the Rings* as a social document, focused on its structure of feeling rather than on the purely contingent business of destroying a ring, one could hardly do better than the line from “Stairway to Heaven” “There’s a feeling I get when I look to the West.” This is the same “West” Tolkien obsesses over, and if there were any doubt about Zeppelin’s endorsement of the reading of the California fans, surely it is resolved by “Going to California” on side two. The “feeling I get” echoes the “feeling” of the cover, tied to a mystified compass point layered over ordinary England but in an entirely different dimension that is also American and global and mass: the first two songs on the album were blues (“Black Dog”) and rock and roll (“Rock and Roll,” in so many words, and aurally checking Little Richard.) The Lady in “Stairway” wants to “buy” a stairway to heaven, not worried that the stores will all be closed: she’s more Hollywood than Lothlórien, but heaven is somewhere else altogether. I’m not offering a “reading” either of this song or “Evermore,” but rather pointing out the way in which they completely integrate Tolkien (down to the game with “all that is gold does not glitter” in the first two lines of “Stairway”) and project “Tolkienishness” as a domesticated aesthetic topos, like rambling or love, and then position it in relation to everything signified by California as well as England.

The rock fans and the Tolkien fans converged in the person of Greg Shaw, for whom scale mattered. Suzy Shaw put together two anthologies of *Who Put the Bomp* materials in book form. In one volume, she includes an essay talking about Greg’s

hatred of lawyers and contracts, and his resistance to all the institutional forms that came to surround rock and that were foundational for Led Zeppelin, written into their work from the first through the strategizing of Page and Grant. Greg Shaw loved the taste of freedom that he had through fanzine publication. He wanted to do it himself, have his own magazine, his own record label. He loved fandom, the same kind of fandom in both cases, as in his litany of rituals and conduct to be followed by the “trufan,” a term from science fiction fandom that he uses here in a rock context. This nerdy twist on a punk sentiment speaks to the relative freedom of fan culture, of fanfiction communities, for example. This freedom derives from their rejection of commerce, nominally enforced by intellectual property law. But for the moment of deindustrialization, participants—like the musicians in Walsey’s Birmingham “conservatory”—chose something that did not frame itself as oppositional, exactly. Instead, just as Shaw’s “trufan” advice diagonally links science fiction and acid rock, Led Zeppelin’s aesthetic lay aslant existing cultural categories: strategic, commercial, but also reckless, voracious, and adumbrating through Tolkien an idea, a strange idea, of what might be possible through total contemporaneity, massness, and globalization.

### ***The Tolkien Society, 1969: The Long Counterrevolution***

The Tolkien Society is a British fan organization that was launched in November of 1969, the same month as Birmingham’s “Afternoon in Middle-earth” and just weeks after “Ramble On.” It is no more or less intrinsically counterrevolutionary than Tolkien’s novel, or, for that matter, than Led Zeppelin. The

counterrevolution I refer to is contextual, the “political project” of neoliberalism that, in the locations of this project, has defined the decades since deindustrialization. In the preceding portions of this chapter, I used the geographical and historical nexus of Birmingham and the West Midlands, particularly in 1969, to focalize an intersection between categories, institutions, discourses, and events that extend very much farther, both geographically and temporally: industrialism, medievalism, cultural studies, heavy metal. Likewise, the Tolkien Society, which arguably came into being as a result of a tension between the mass and the local, has operated as a crossroads at which the peculiar relationship between the academic study of literature and fan culture intersect and at which a genuinely popular culture intersects with the culture industry. The last section of this chapter concerns its beginnings.

The Tolkien Society was founded in late 1969 by a woman named Vera Chapman. Mrs. Chapman had been born Vera Ivy May Fogerty, in 1898, near Bournemouth, the daughter of a successful architect named John Frederick Fogerty (G. Knowles, “Vera Chapman”). On the eve of the war in 1914, the family had moved to South Africa, but Vera returned to England and enrolled as one of the first women admitted to work toward degrees at Oxford. She shared recollections of her time at Oxford as part of the Tolkien Society’s largest and most complex event, the Centenary Conference they organized jointly with the Mythopoeic Society at Oxford in 1992, and her remarks were published in the proceedings (Chapman, “Reminiscences”). She sat her entrance exams in the last summer of the war, in 1918, and her first term at Lady Margaret Hall was Michaelmas, starting in October, just a month before the Armistice. She remembers Oxford as terribly quiet then; because special arrangements had been

made to allow Tolkien to defer his service until after he finished his degree, he had also attended the university in these conditions of uncanny, slaughter-induced peace. In 1915, colleges were being used as training facilities; by 1918, they were, according to Chapman, mostly hospitals, which quickly turned to care of those afflicted in the Spanish Influenza epidemic, including Chapman and many of her classmates. She writes that the new women students were nursed by dons, and recalls hearing a memorial service for a student who had died from the chapel below where she lay ill (12).

Chapman's recollections emphasize the disciplines of gender and sexuality, and the opportunities for pleasure, that Oxford afforded in that moment: how the cap had to be worn, with the point between eyebrows—"we must not give any cause for disapproval." Women had to sit together, apart from men, and, if they saw a man they knew, they were not permitted "to greet them or give any sign of recognition—coming out of the lecture we must not converse, or claim any friendship in the streets—above all, no new friendships were to be formed—that was the very thing that was to be rigidly avoided" (12). College life was "rigidly cloistered"; they had "bed-sits," not suites, and no male cousins could be admitted to the hall, only fathers, brothers, or uncles. A male porter stood as "guardian" at the door and, if one wanted to invite a man to tea, one needed first a letter from a parent to the Principal, then to book a public sitting-room of the college, and then to engage a senior member (a Don) to join as chaperone. Female students were permitted to shop in town on their own, provided they stayed away from a chocolate shop known for hosting Bump Suppers—celebrations after early spring boat races—which were "understood to be Shameless

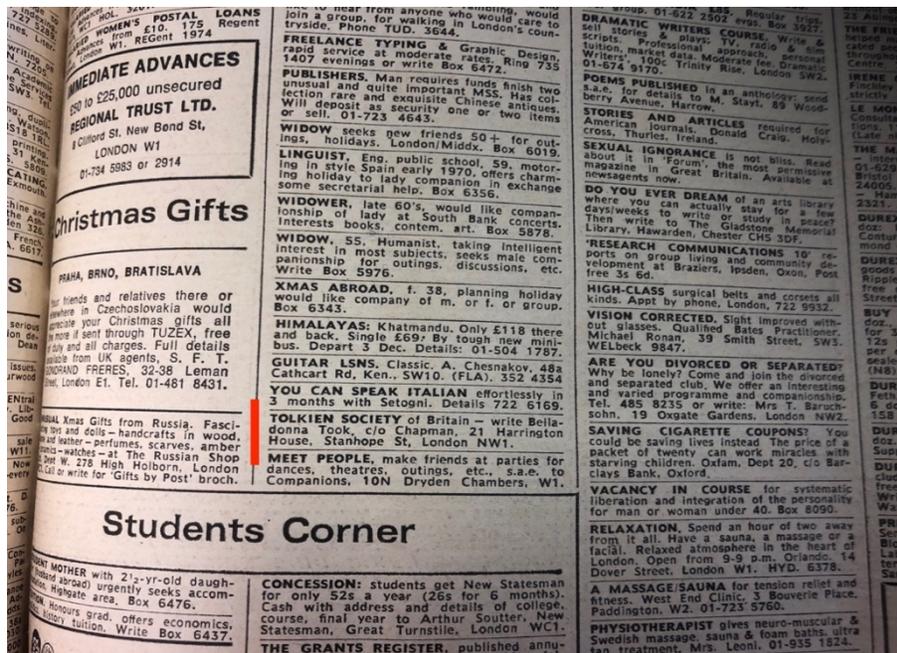
Orgies” (13). She recalls knowing that they couldn’t continue north from Magdalen along the Cherwell because they would come to the place where the men swam “in the ... In the *summer*, of course!” (13).

She also offers some recollections of her academic work, though their style seems comparatively perfunctory, and the following reflection is particularly un-Tolkienish: “We had come to Oxford, most of us, to partake of the literary treasures of the past—but the Powers that Were decided to make it less easy for us—English was a language, and we must study Early English or Anglo-Saxon. I don’t know what good this did to our literary style, but we swallowed it with the rest”; in fact, it would be Tolkien who fought for and enshrined the “language” component (he saw it quite differently) in the faculty of English for another generation (see Tolkien, “The Oxford English School”). Chapman did, however, study Anglo-Saxon under same instructor who taught Tolkien, Joseph Wright, whom she describes as a “rough old character... raised by his own efforts from the mill-benches of the Midlands.” She seems, from this and other writings, to have had quite an active interest in music, and sang in a Bach choir, and at the end of her third year she passed with Second Class Honors; only one of the one hundred women in her year, she notes, received a First. After university, she returned to her parents in South Africa. She became a “miserable failure” as a teacher, though she would have preferred a university lectureship, and after two years she married a clergyman, with whom she lived in what is now Mozambique for a few years; after their return to England, they lived in “country vicarages.” She says she was already writing novels at this point, but they were rejected; after founding the Tolkien Society, in the mid-seventies, she finally became a

novelist. By the time of the second world war, she says, she was a widow, and only reports “various jobs in London” until she founded the Tolkien Society.

Chapman recalls these experiences in a tone of hearty good cheer, but their grim dimension should be apparent, along with several parallels with Tolkien’s life: they were about the same age, both spent part of their childhoods in South Africa, Chapman matriculated at Oxford barely three years after Tolkien received his degree there, and even Bournemouth, where she had been born, was where Tolkien was living, having retired, in 1969. Although she did not mention any sense of biographical connection with Tolkien, honoring his wishes and connecting the Society with the Tolkien family became themes of her project and among the reasons for its success, suggesting a sense of identification more detailed and specific than the generalized sense that it was about time England had a Tolkien Society, expressed a number of times in British fanzines and communications of the late sixties.

She published announcements about the formation of the Society in both the fan and the mainstream press in November of 1969. One announcement was the first item in that month’s edition of the *Middle Earthworm*, started in 1968 and the sole ongoing British Tolkien fanzine of the time. Another was a tiny notice in the personals column of the *New Statesman*, asking interested readers to contact “Belladonna Took, c/o Chapman” (Belladonna Took was the name of Bilbo’s grandmother) at her address (Chapman, “Personal Advertisement”).



Announcement of the Tolkien Society in the *New Statesman* Personal Column, November 7, 1969

The announcement in the *Middle Earthworm* was perfectly in line with the norms of science fiction fandom; the likely readers were people who self-identified not only as admirers of Tolkien but as fans, interested in participating in “fandom” to the extent of subscribing to *Middle Earthworm*. But the *New Statesman* signaled something different. A serious magazine devoted to left-liberal politics (originally to Fabian socialism) since the era of the Great War, when Chapman was a student at Oxford, the *New Statesman* marked at least some measure of intellectual respectability and mainstream aspiration, much like Auden’s presence at Dick Plotz’s meeting and the write-up in the *New Yorker*. Chapman, like Plotz, wanted to reach readers who did *not* self-identify as fans, who did *not* subscribe to *Middle Earthworm*. Small as it was, tucked among appeals to the widowed and divorced, those wishing to combat sexual ignorance, help starving children, learn Italian, or send Christmas gifts to

Czechoslovakia, the ad shows the Tolkien Society as part of London, part of the modern crowd, rather than a world apart.

Chapman posted her third notice, that same month, to the *Tolkien Journal*, now being edited by Ed Meškys. The letter read as follows:

I am gravely disturbed by the appearance in London of a magazine calling itself Gandalf's Garden, which is devoted to the protest of youth etc., but is permeated with drug-taking and the psychedelic cult. It advertises LotR as 'the psycodelectable masterpiece' - and uses much of the terminology of the books in a context of 'taking trips' etc. The very last thing the author would ever have in mind or approve of. I wonder if you, or he, have encountered this? I feel this misuse of the name and the book should be stopped.

I feel very strongly that these books are most emphatically wholesome and sane, and that it would be a tragedy to let them be smeared in any way with the psychedelic cult and the prevailing obsession with mental disorder and that thing which seems to me rather worse than the death-wish, the deliberate wish to be insane. Let us keep the Shire clean from all such! (Chapman, "The Shire Post: Letter from Mrs. Vera Chapman, London, England"; see also Murray)

This letter obviously resonates with the speeches at the Birmingham "Afternoon in Middle-earth." The lore of the Tolkien Society holds that it was founded in reaction against the press associating *The Lord of the Rings* with the counterculture and the apparent Americanization—often merged with commercialization, and the alienation that produced—of the fandom.

I mention this is not to underline the Society's reactionary character but to extricate the story of Vera Chapman from the strangling binaries—hippies versus "ordinary people," transgression versus conservation—that can prevent us from seeing the full social meaning of cultural choices. Mrs. Chapman's choice to found the Tolkien Society went beyond expressing distress at terrible hippies: she chose to

devote substantial unremunerated labor, skill, and scarce personal funds to building a social structure whose dimensions, as documented in the next chapter, would prove democratic, communitarian, and durable. Her organization has created, for decades, a place where people excluded or alienated from the academy and other institutional structures of capitalism can share research, writing, ideas, and robust, holistic bonds.

Charles Noad is a fandom historian, writer, and editor who has been a member of the Tolkien Society since its early days. He has published a great deal on Tolkien and also a history of the early years of the Tolkien Society. In it, he recognizes that the traditional account of the Society as a conservative, nationalist reaction against the booming buzzing confusion of the late sixties is oversimplified. In a revised version of his history that he was kind enough to share with me (along with his detailed notes on the early years of the Society), he writes:

Perhaps, with the perspective of time, this element in the founding of the Tolkien Society can tend to be overplayed. To judge from [*Gandalf's*] *Garden* itself the community preferred meditation to drugs in any case. I cannot recall that my early fellow-members of the Tolkien Society (I joined in mid-1971) ever paid much attention anyway to the spaced-out world of hippiedom; indeed, some, such as A. R. Fallone, very much disagreed with Belladonna. (Noad)

Noad's reading is tolerant and fairly anodyne, but in fact a case can be made for Vera Chapman's own utopian unconventionality if we consider the more unorthodox aspects of her career, omitted from the brief introduction above.

In 1975, at over seventy-five years old, Vera Chapman began publishing novels. She published eight of them, short historical romances that she had been writing since around the time she was widowed, at the beginning of World War II. Some of these, like *The Green Knight* (1975) and *The Wife of Bath* (1978), were quasi-

feminist literary fanfiction, filling gaps in high medieval English classics with flirty, sassy heroines. *The Green Knight* was also part of an Arthurian trilogy; her best known novel is *King Arthur's Daughter* (1978). These novels, thus, participated in the new wave of feminist Arthurian fantasy whose most famous entry was by Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon* (1982), and were connected, in a broader sense, with the wave of women's fanfiction communities: slash communities date from the 1970s as well. Bradley had been publishing fantasy fiction for decades and had, as we have seen, also contributed to the underground press, both the lesbian press and, in science fiction fandom, slash and fanfiction *avant la lettre*.

Chapman had been writing her novels since the 1940s, but she owed the opportunity to publish them to the space created by a range of factors, surely including the feminist aftermath of 1968. She has been “credited with pioneering the first-person woman's narration in modern Arthurian fantasy” (J. C. Smith) and occupies a full, if short, chapter of Charlotte Spivack's study of the genre (Spivack). Chapman recalled her career as a writer somewhat ruefully at the 1992 Centenary Conference, noting that her the novels “didn't sell,” and commenting that the American version of *The Wife of Bath* was “advertised in terms which made it seem positively pornographic—which it isn't, or I might have made more money” (14). The back cover blurb of *The Wife of Bath*, in the Avon edition, promises that “into the heart of England's most notorious woman—comes a brawling, sexy, comic novel. Here is a legendary woman in all her full-blooded splendor... tales of great passion... of Moroccan nights when a Bey took her captive and she saved the virtue of ten virgins by giving the Infidel a

night of love that made him limp” (Chapman, *The Wife Of Bath*); the contents are, as she indicated, tamer, though they include numerous nods and winks.

But while Chapman acknowledged—briefly—her career as a novelist in the Centenary memoir, she left unmentioned an equally demanding and perhaps even more unconventional aspect of her history, one that nonetheless resonates with the cultural ground that produced Tolkien: she was a prominent Druid and had earlier been a member of a radical eco-medievalist group with socialist connections. G. E. Knowles, an autodidact scholar of British Druidry in the mold of many of the lay scholars in Tolkien studies, has written a brief biography of Chapman, posted online, focused on her involvement with occult societies starting in the 1920s and continuing at least until 1991, as well as a biography of Ross Nichols, who founded the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids in 1964 (G. E. Knowles; G. Knowles, *Ross Nichols*). “The OBOD,” Knowles explains, “was a breakaway faction and modern version of the Ancient Druid Order (ADO), which has a history dating back to 1717.” His biography emphasizes the role of academics and intellectuals in shaping Nichols’s intellectual life, discussing his education at Cambridge (where he took a master’s degree in history) and citing James Frazer, T.S. Eliot, Sigmund Freud, and Jessie Weston as influences on his Druidism. He writes that

Nichols was a devout Christian and regularly attended his local Anglican churches, and for a number of years was actively involved with the Scout Movement before turning his attention to socialist and pacifist causes. He was also a vegetarian and naturist, and in the early 1930’s joined one of Britain’s first nudist colonies: the Spielplatz located in Bricket Wood near St. Albans, Hertfordshire. It was here that Nichols first became acquainted with fellow naturist Gerald B. Gardner, owner of another nudist colony nearby, The Five Acres Country Club. (G. Knowles, *Ross Nichols*)

The OBOD's current website emphasizes the access the group offers to popular pedagogy, quoting a member who has worked at British universities on the type of in depth mentoring it offers to interested people who write in from around the world ("Who Runs The Order?").

Anticipating interest from Tolkien Society circles or Arthurian novel-readers, Knowles writes that Chapman is "well known" both as a novelist and as the founder of the Tolkien Society. "However, less was known about her interest in Woodcraft and Paganism, for she was an early member of the Kibbo Kift Kindred, a movement founded by John Gordon Hargrave in 1920, a member of the Ancient Druid Order, and later Pendragon of the Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids founded by Ross Nichols in 1964" (G. Knowles, "Vera Chapman"; Pollen 49). An article from 2016 details the history of the Kibbo Kift Kindred, founded as a pacifist, socially-minded alternative to the scouting movement after World War I, including the struggles over its politics in the 1920s (Pollen). It was claimed by socialist groups to the dismay of the leadership, even while the rival Boy Scout association also sought to undermine it; the Boy Scouts reported the Kindred's founder and leader to MI5 as "non-patriotic." This upheaval caused Mrs. Chapman to leave the group and turn to the Druids. According to the recollections of a colleague, she maintained her involvement with the Druids literally until the day she suffered a stroke, at ninety-three. On the day after her stroke, "she was due to attend the Order's summer solstice ceremony on Primrose Hill, there to hand over her title as Pendragon of the OBOD to her successor" (G. E. Knowles).

I can sympathize with Chapman's anxiety in 1969. She wasn't wrong that the same cultural currents had embraced both Tolkien and drugs. There were a plethora of Tolkien fanzines from California in the late sixties, and some of them show a strong imprint of the drug culture. The three fanzines published by Scott Smith in Los Angeles—*Nazg*, *Ilmarin*, and *Elbereth* (all 1967-68)—are an excellent example of this (S. S. Smith, *Nazg*; S. S. Smith, *Ilmarin*; S. S. Smith, *Elbereth!*). The generation, in England, that included Chapman and Tolkien had been decimated by World War I and the subsequent economic slump, had lived through the second world war and the influx of American troops and culture, and was now a small, elderly island amid the products of a postwar boom in both wealth and babies. Chapman herself was living alone in a council flat in London (G. Knowles, "Vera Chapman"). It seems to me that both social and cultural groups—the "ordinary readers" of the Tolkien Society and the hippies of *Gandalf's Garden*—shared legitimate causes for fear and paranoia, as well as hope and exuberance, between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s. The history as I have told it through pop cultural vignettes, both of icons like Led Zeppelin and the everyday life of figures like Chapman, leaves an lacuna in that momentous space. Between *Entmoot's* dissolution as it approached the Summer of Love and the Afternoon in Middle-earth came 1968, the year when there was almost a revolution. The immediate aftermath of 1968, when struggle both armed and unarmed was still remaking the world, is the context for the founding of the Tolkien Society.

## PART TWO

### SECOND PREFACE

In chapters two and three, I looked at the first decade of *The Lord of the Rings* in the world (1954-66): its adoption by extant science fiction fan networks, its emergence into mass culture, and a key example of its application in the first decade of its life as mass artifact (1966-76), its use in rock music, specifically by Led Zeppelin. I have suggested ways of looking at how the novel manages time and space; its place in the history of capitalism, focalized by the city of Birmingham; and the way remote subcultures began to dislocate it, prying it loose from its English origins and, at the same time, participating in the global afterlife of England's imperial power. These processes realized *The Lord of the Rings*' oxymoronic potential as a grandiose mass-cultural celebration of the small, preindustrial, communal, and intimate. High on fantastic nostalgia, the cultures around Tolkien exploited advanced capitalist affordances and sensibilities. The fanzine-printing hobbits, the music-industry wizards, the old-school Elvish publishers disappearing into the West—all of them performed for and with readers (“markets”) inhabiting and at the mercy of a global, apparently eschatological, order.

The previous three chapters have also illustrated ways in which literary populism became possible in the twentieth century. Tolkien's own career, as a member of a religious minority, an orphan outlander from a comparatively modest background, who enjoyed a career deep inside Oxford colleges, with servants who

made his fire and brought his tea (to say nothing of those who grew the tea to begin with), as well as a full-time wife and a servant at home to take care of his children, received so much time, support, access to knowledge, and intellectual stimulation that he was able to invest a large portion of sixty years inventing an imaginary world of very unusual complexity and depth. The California fanzine creators of the 1960s enjoyed ready access to both printed popular fiction and means of reproduction and circulation; they also had the rare and magical combination of leisure time and sophisticated forms of literacy, as their minute study of Tolkien's text and their carefully prepared literary output demonstrates. Vera Chapman and Robert Plant, standing in for two of the main faces of Tolkien fandom as *The Lord of the Rings* reached its mass era, each demonstrated the vigorous, agile potential of popular literary culture. As I argued above, however, in their era the deindustrialization of the capitalist metropole accelerated, producing the crisis into which neoliberalism stepped; this crisis coincided exactly with the apotheosis of fantasy culture in the 1970s.

The next three chapters concern the present. As such, their method differs dramatically from the rest of the dissertation, though the argument remains the same. In order to research this project, I traveled extensively, participated in Tolkien fan activities, read through living archives of fan materials, and conducted close to a hundred interviews. I spent about eight weeks in the U.K. and a little over a month in New Zealand, and I also conducted interviews in the U.S. and in continental Europe. Some interviews were casual and unplanned. Under this heading I would include, for example, two to three dozen interviews I did with workers in the Tolkien-tourism

industry in New Zealand, none of which were scheduled. Generally, I would simply strike up a conversation with someone who was on the job but unoccupied, if they had time and were willing to talk; sometimes, during breaks in a tour for example, the guide would initiate a deeper conversation with me. Sometimes, however, I met people with whom I wanted to talk more deeply. Close to twenty long-time fans and people whose working lives were shaped by Tolkien-related commerce made time for interviews of from one to (in one case) more than seven hours. As with my archival research, the interviews generated far more material than I could use. Two in particular—one in England and one in New Zealand—stood out: they illustrated a generational contrast as well as types of literary engagement that usually go unrecorded, even in fan studies. I have shared large portions of these two interviews in the last chapter.

All these activities took place over relatively short periods of time; I don't pretend to anything like a systematic or thorough understanding of the cultural locations I visited. But several features of extensive, improvisational interview work distinguish it from textual research and earn it a distinctive place in the project. I was taken with the impossibility of controlling these experiences; I found that this was especially true overseas, where seemingly trivial experiences impressed me as meaningful. They also provided me with the opportunity to document the participation of deeply committed fans whose experiences would not normally become part of the textual record, which, given this project's focus on the vestiges of the long revolution in mass culture, seem to me critical. In addition to interviews, I read through a huge number of ephemeral documents (of the Tolkien Society and Taruithorn, the Oxford

Tolkien Society, in particular), but, for my argument here, the most important observations often concerned the archives themselves rather than their contents: how fan societies operate and keep records, the workings of libraries and other spaces set aside for research, how the university orients itself in relation to fan and popular literary cultures, and how individual people struggle and seek fulfilment in the broader outposts of fiction.

As I mentioned in chapter one, I conducted this research during a moment of historical rupture that rhymed unexpectedly with my subject matter. Populism, already part of my working title, became a ubiquitous topic. I have treated this term lightly, but I hope it is clear that I see both populism and globalization as politically ambivalent. I found myself, a life-long activist, traveling alone overseas for months in 2016-17, experiencing the upheavals at a remove and yet intimately. I had set out to write about fandom and neoliberalism. I expected to observe the advance of globalized culture industry formations and the impact on popular culture of declining public investment, and I did observe those things. But as the scope of the crisis of technocratic governance became more apparent, and as the authoritarian element in capitalist polity abandoned its disguises, my project turned into something more populist, more vulgar, more Marxist. This was a biographical fact, an embodied experience. This happened. At moments in what follows, I quote my own notes to myself.

Following a brief overview of the progress of the Tolkien phenomenon since the early seventies, there are three more chapters. Chapter four is centered on the U.K.. Its theme is the relationship between popular literary culture and the academy, and it

looks at documents, experiences, and interviews from my time with the Tolkien Society, Taruithorn (the Oxford Tolkien Society), and Oxford University. This is the only part of the dissertation that thinks directly about the academic subculture of “Tolkien studies.” Chapter five, though it begins with a section on film adaptations, mostly concerns Aotearoa New Zealand and its relation to neoliberalism. The sixth and last chapter concerns two striking interviews with fans of different generations.

### *It only ever grew*

The very first interview I conducted for this project was with René van Rossenberg, a clever and generous long-time fan and, since the 1970s, a collector and dealer of Tolkieniana. Since 2003 he has operated his business as a physical store that contains an exhibit of his private collection, the Tolkienwinkel (Tolkien Shop) in Leiden, the Netherlands. Most of his business comes through the online/mail order business attached to the store, a business he has operated for decades. He started it informally in the 1970s, as a member of a local Tolkien club, to collect products inexpensively by placing bulk orders and distributing them among other fans. I asked if business had ever declined between the heady days of the seventies and Peter Jackson’s films. “It only ever grew,” he told me, citing data on the scope of his mail-order business from the time he began, through the transformations of the eighties and nineties, through what seemed like it should be the high water mark around the release of the films in 2001-03, and through the subsequent decade when, still, the number of visitors and orders “only ever grew.”

The steady growth of the Tolkien domain through the decades this dissertation passes over was supported by capitalization through a period in which cultural industries (publishing, cinema, gaming, music) were experiencing steady conglomeration and transnationalization, in which the drive for accumulation became ever more streamlined. The now-proven power of *The Lord of the Rings* to generate profit led to a proliferation of products, always accompanied by ever more elaborate fan structures. In 1973, Ballantine Press, who had published the “authorized” American paperback in 1965, brought out a paperback boxed set with all three volumes and *The Hobbit* that stayed in print until 1980. 1973 was the year of Tolkien’s death, and this was the first version of the novel to feature his artwork, used on the covers; the box was decorated with more of Tolkien’s drawings, heraldic designs he had created for the Elven houses in the still-unpublished *Silmarillion*. The following year, 1974, saw the debut of *Dungeons & Dragons*, which rapidly became a major form of popular participation in fantasy (Gygax and Arneson, *Dungeons and Dragons*). Although the game was not set in Middle-earth, it was dependent on the culture of Tolkien’s novel; orcs, in particular, appeared as antagonists from its earliest iteration. Gamer culture began to proliferate from this period, headquartered in the same parts of California that had first built a fan culture around Tolkien’s book.

Fantasy novelist Peter S. Beagle contributed a page-long blurb—a one-page letter at the front of the first volume, before the title page—for the 1973 Ballantine edition. It tied the still growing, rather than retreating, mass popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* to a larger sense of historical movement. It’s a little difficult to imagine an endorsement with rhetoric like Beagle’s appearing at the opening of *Twilight* or *The*

*Hunger Games* or even an anniversary Harry Potter edition twenty years after publication. He wrote that, in the sixties, “millions of people grew aware that industrial society had become paradoxically unlivable, incalculably immoral, and ultimately deadly.” In consequence, he said, “escape stopped being comically obscene. The impulse is being called reactionary now, but lovers of Middle-earth want to go there. I would myself, like a shot” (Beagle). Beagle’s rhetoric suggests the romantic melancholia common in mass culture at that moment. The proximity of revolution, globally, in 1968 had been deeply felt in popular culture, and the upheavals of those years had left the world a different place. The aftermath was dominated by industrial decline, the shocks and shifts that made the 1970s a watershed decade and underwrote the transition to neoliberalism in the locations of this project, the U.K., the U.S., and finally (in 1984) New Zealand. These developments coincided with the consolidation of *The Lord of the Rings* as a mass cultural container, one that did not come and go but remained and grew and appeared in some sense unified even as it endlessly differentiated and localized reception and response.

As the publishing business consolidated in the 1970s, calendars and other ancillary products proliferated, all of which used the work of a growing stable of professional Tolkien illustrators. Fan conventions grew significantly, and fan publications, which also grew in number, began to be produced using computers; the current version of this project does not look at the impact of computerization in depth although, as noted below, online fandom in particular has been explored by other scholars. In the late seventies, as key publications began to appear in a rush, starting with both Carpenter’s *Biography* and *The Silmarillion* in 1977, larger-budget media

products began to appear as well. In 1978, the first film adaptation, Ralph Bakshi's *The Lord of the Rings*, appeared, scripted by Peter S. Beagle and featuring voice actors including John Hurt as Aragorn. In 1981, the BBC aired a radio adaptation of the novel in twenty-six half-hour episodes, performed by an all-British cast including Ian Holm (who later played Bilbo in Jackson's film) as Frodo and a young Bill Nighy as Sam. It was co-scripted by a British journalist, Brian Sibley, who has also written extensive ancillary materials around *The Lord of the Rings*, including a biography of Peter Jackson and a "making of" book about his films (Sibley, *Peter Jackson*; Sibley, *The Lord of the Rings*; Sibley, *The Map of Tolkien's Middle Earth*). The era of Bakshi's film and the radio serial also featured a variety of commercial publications loaded with media implications, such as Jim Allan's *Introduction to Elvish* (1978) and Barbara Strachey's *Journeys of Frodo* (1981). Tie-in products, games, rock albums, fan organizations, publications, conventions, adaptations, appropriations, and references expanded, adapted, and adopted new technologies through until the agreement to allow Peter Jackson to film the novel in New Zealand in 1996. Rather than attempting detailed readings of all of them (I do comment on both the films), the following chapters focus on a few anchors, examples of fan culture, commercial culture, and the places at which they meet in the present world.

## CHAPTER 4

### A SERIOUS PLACE WHERE EVERYONE CAN COME

#### *The Tolkien Society*

At the end of chapter three, I wrote about Vera Chapman, who founded the Tolkien Society in London in 1969. This chapter looks at the Tolkien Society as it exists today, which functions in part as a popular bridge between media fandom and the academic study of literature, as well as at Taruithorn, the Oxford University chapter of the Tolkien Society. The Tolkien Society is by no means the only formation I could have chosen for this study. Other options might have included the Mythopoeic Society, an American group that is in some ways similar to the Tolkien Society and has collaborated extensively with it over the years. Historically, the Elvish Linguistic Fellowship and their journals, *Parma Eldalamberon* and *Vinyar Tengwar*, have also long occupied the space between fandom and scholarship. Other possibilities might include the Mythgard Institute and Signum University, which together form an institution for popular scholarship; they are run by a trained medievalist with a Ph.D. from Columbia, Dr. Corey Olsen, doing business as “the Tolkien Professor.” The nonprofit offers classes, lectures, and other forms of digital pedagogy, including instruction carried on within the massive multi-player online videogame *The Lord of the Rings Online*, aka LOTRO; student avatars report, in game, for instruction. With or without Mythgard, I could have studied LOTRO, or the online communities around major digital fan projects like TheOneRing.net, or fanfiction communities. Finally, of

course, there are places where professional academics who work on Tolkien gather, such as “Tolkien at Kalamazoo,” an academic interest group associated with the International Congress of Medieval Studies, which I did attend but don’t write about.

I chose to spend time with the Tolkien Society, as opposed to other possible fan formations, for several reasons. First, it has a long history and a beautifully cultivated archive of papers; the Tolkien Society’s current archivist, Pat Reynolds, is a trained museum curator with a Ph.D. in history who helped me access over two hundred boxes of cataloged materials. Second, I wanted to be able to describe the peculiar character and position of “Tolkien studies,” the subgenre of academic study focused on Tolkien’s fiction, and the way it manages the relationship between scholarship and *The Lord of the Rings* in popular culture. The Tolkien Society has a long history of interest in academic work on Tolkien and has cultivated the work of members across a continuum from ordinary fannish enthusiasm to formal academic work; as I will show throughout this chapter, there are many intermediate stages. Third, I chose the Tolkien Society because I wanted to do this work in England. Being in a different country helped me notice things, and the relationship between Tolkien, Englishness, and globalized mass culture was at the heart of the project.

In particular, I wanted to spend time at Oxford University, central both to Tolkien’s life and the work of the Tolkien Society. Understanding how this paradigm among universities related to the mass phenomenon of one of its products, *The Lord of the Rings*, was as important to my project as showing how it became mass culture to begin with. What is the relationship between the beleaguered study of “English” and these staggeringly huge narrative traditions, with their spendy fans and global reach?

How can we consider this question materially? How does the broader world understand (or not) the kind of academic work that once felt central to universal literacy and the democratic project? How does populist intellectual life relate to the breakdown of types of solidarity—expressed, for example, through public education or professional journalism or publishing—associated with public access to knowledge, art, culture?

The Tolkien Society has always encouraged what they call “academic” engagement with Tolkien’s fiction, as well as fun. Society publications include two regular periodicals: *Mallorn*, a semiannual journal for longer, more heavily researched articles, and *Amon Hen*, a bulletin published every other month with Society news, smaller essays, poems, and artwork. They also publish books, mostly conference proceedings but also small projects such as *The Tolkien Society Guide to Oxford*. Most centrally for the members I talked with, the Society sponsors events. It has three annual gatherings (most of its gatherings, both large and local, are called “moots”—an Old English word for, and cognate of, “meeting,” which Tolkien used for a gathering of Ents). The premier event is a conference and festival called Oxonmoot. Since Tolkien’s death, the Society has celebrated the “anniversary” of the events of chapter one of *The Lord of the Rings* by taking over an Oxford college as close as possible to Bilbo and Frodo’s birthday, September 22, shortly before the start of the Michaelmas term. Oxonmoot is their signature event, a long weekend of papers, performances, and parties. In April, the Society holds its Annual General Meeting (AGM), where important business and policy questions are decided. While only a few hours long in itself, the AGM provides the occasion for Springmoot, a weekend-long gathering of

long-time members including a formal dinner with an invited speaker. Springmoot and the AGM are hosted by a different chapter (“smial,” the hobbit word for a hobbit hole), in a different location, each year. Individual smials hold their own gatherings and, historically, issued their own publications as well. Most years, the Society also puts on a summer “Seminar,” an academic-style conference accessible to Tolkien fans generally. The member who designed the Seminar, in the 1980s, told me that she wanted it to be “a serious place where everyone could come.”

I made three trips to England for this project. On my first visit, which was over a month long, I started by attending Springmoot and the AGM in York; afterwards, I traveled around the country to conduct follow-up interviews and visited the Society’s archive. On that trip, I also spent extensive time with the Oxford University Tolkien Society, Taruithorn, and read through their archive; I discuss Taruithorn separately below. On a subsequent visit, I attended a “pubmoot” in London and a small gathering of accomplished fan scholars and one (more or less) conventional Tolkien academic. Finally, I returned in 2018 and participated in Oxonmoot. Overall, I spoke in depth with close to thirty members.

The Tolkien Society describes itself on its website as “a literary society, worldwide fan club and educational charity.” “Educational charity” is a legal status that imposes requirements and makes them a tax-exempt. The group secured legal status nearly from the beginning, in the early 1970s, but significant changes came in the wake of the films, as well as changes to British law. Since 2000, they have been required to appoint trustees. In the late 1990s, when Peter Jackson started making his films, licensing issues arose affecting their ability to create and sell materials; at that

point, they began to pay fees to license their own name (“Tolkien” is trademarked.) They have undertaken public projects such as the creation of a memorial site at Sarehole Mill, in Birmingham, and planting two special trees on the Oxford University campus, meant to represent Telperion and Laurelin, the two trees which gave light to Valinor at the beginning of the world.

The Tolkien Society is small; the number of members has waxed and waned over the decades since it was founded, but the current dues-paying membership is around 1500. Although its membership is international, all of the major gatherings are in the U.K. and Ireland, and most if not all members of the governing Committee live in the U.K.. There is a substantial core group of members who have been involved for decades, quite a few since the 1970s, some of whom knew Vera Chapman. Although there are hundreds of people with a casual relationship to the group, occasionally attending Oxonmoot or another event, there are a few dozen for whom the Society becomes a, or *the*, central social structure of their lives. I encountered striking diversity in terms of age, level of education, and occupation; older members were more likely to be conspicuously working-class than younger ones. The group is mixed in terms of gender and sexual orientation, and included a number of opposite-sex married couples who had met through the Society: one person called it the “Tolkien Appreciation and Marriage Society.” In the files of Taruithorn, the Oxford Tolkien Society (technically a smial), also, I found many wedding photos. I met at least one parent and university-aged child who were both long-term, active members. One member described the Society to me as “a broad church,” and a younger member said it was like “a microcosm of a country.” Although most members I met were from the

U.K., there were very active members of all ages from continental Europe. The one obvious vector on which British society is very diverse and the Tolkien Society is not is race.

From the beginning, the Society cultivated a relationship with the Tolkien family. Vera Chapman met Tolkien, once, at an Allen & Unwin party in 1972. After the group presented him with a gift for his 80th birthday, he agreed to be listed as “Honorary President” of the Society, a title he holds in perpetuity. His daughter, Priscilla Tolkien, entertained members of the Society at her home each year, during Oxonmoot, for many years. Several fans shared their warm recollections of these visits with me; one said, “she always made you feel at home.” This connection with the family has been supplemented by extensive contacts with a wide range of people connected with Tolkien and the afterlife of his fiction, and these connections are often traced, by long-time members, in terms of connections back to Tolkien himself, in degrees of separation. They are also used as historical landmarks, helping fans with long memories to reconstruct eras in the Society, moments when they became affiliated, when membership waxed and waned. Fans told me they had been involved “since about the time of *The Silmarillion*,” or that they had first encountered *The Lord of the Rings* through Jackson’s films, or that they found the group through the advertisement printed in Robert Foster’s *Guide to Middle-earth*, first published in 1971.

Many members recounted stories about Tom Shippey, the scholar who spoke at the “Afternoon in Middle-earth” discussed in the previous chapter. Shippey exactly models the logic of proximity valued in the Society, having followed in Tolkien’s

footsteps in some ways; he knew Tolkien at the end of his life and published two influential books about him. Brian Sibley, who scripted the 1981 radio serial, was the speaker at the AGM the year it aired, and one fan recounted taking a minibus out to the Wolds with him to listen to the broadcast. These stories seem to have less to do with celebrity than with a resistance to alienation, partly constructed in opposition to the massness of *The Lord of the Rings*, even while they interact with it.

The Society takes a great interest in biography and cultivates habits of protectiveness around privacy. This caution was a feature of his own character and career. He kept Middle-earth a secret for over a decade after he began writing about it. After confiding the project to Lewis in 1929, Lewis was his only confidant for years, and this expanded to a small, personal circle of friends, the Inklings, even after the commercial success of *The Hobbit*. He corresponded quite widely with readers in the decade after *The Lord of the Rings* was published, but in the last years of his life, after the mass readership emerged, he withdrew to his family and a few friends connected with the work, including Rayner Unwin and Joy Hill. More subtly, this quality seems to have been reflected in what appears at times like unconcern with the opinions of others—Lewis was convinced that Tolkien could not be influenced—as well as the pleasure he took in “proper” responses to his writing and the distress their “misappropriation” caused him.

The Tolkien Society, with its long, intimate relationships and rituals, treats this pattern less as a model than as a kind of mirror. They have a respectful affinity with Tolkien, rather than an imitative relationship with his life and work. Members of the Society reference Tolkien’s desire for privacy, share it (they welcome new

participants, but with caution), and honor it, extending and reproducing a respect for the comparatively unalienated personal system of connections and interactions Tolkien himself valued so highly. Their almost reverential protectiveness toward Tolkien's family, extended also to professionals whose work is cherished by the group (John Garth, Hammond and Scull, the illustrator Alan Lee—a principal designer of Jackson's films, who was the guest of honor at the AGM when I attended), their enormous and scrupulously curated archive of bygone creations and materials, and their memorializing anger at Donald Wollheim all show recognition at least as much as imitation. They feel that they share Tolkien's values and impulses, if not all of his views; they think of him as a friend, a member: honorary president in perpetuity. And, like Tolkien, they project what can seem like an odd mixture of tendencies—openness and privacy; communal sharing and faith in private ownership.

I avoid giving names in what follows, but I will briefly describe a few members whose interviews I quote repeatedly. Among these were a former schoolteacher who had been very involved in the Society since around 1980, and her husband; they had edited multiple publications for the Society and vividly remembered the era of *The Silmarillion*, the BBC radio adaptation, Bakshi's film, and Barbara Strachey's *Journeys of Frodo*.<sup>64</sup> I spoke at length with a university student acclimated to online fandom and cosplay. Another interlocutor was a university lecturer, originally from the Continent, who had been an undergraduate at Oxford. I

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<sup>64</sup> This is one of the most often referenced secondary volumes among a certain stripe and generation of fan, created with Tolkien's cooperation as a picture-book of maps and comments (Strachey and Tolkien). Barbara Strachey was the niece of Lytton and James Strachey (the biographer/Bloomsbury group member and the official translator of Freud, respectively). Her mother, Ray Strachey, née Costelloe, was an active suffragist and repeated candidate for public office once suffrage was achieved. Her younger sister married Virginia Woolf's younger brother.

talked at some length with a member in her seventies who had grown up quite poor in a farmworker's family in Scotland, moving from farm to farm, who later ran "a grocer's" with her late husband, who was Jewish; she had been involved with the Society since 1972. Although I don't quote her here, I include an identifying description as an index of class diversity.

I mentioned earlier that obviously working-class members of the Society tended to be older. In fact, I did not meet any Society members under thirty who were not university students or graduates, while I met several older members who had left school before the age of seventeen and yet organized years of sociality around a literary society. Throughout my conversations, I looked for clues to a sense of change over time. I did encounter a sense of generational difference and occasionally some mild tension, though the sense of social solidarity—expressed, via Tolkien, through the ideal of "Fellowship"—was strong. My first encounter with the Society, as I said, came at an AGM, a meeting that exposed a slightly contentious generation gap among members; the debate concerned editorial decisions with respect to one of their publications. One member to whom I floated a speculation about generational difference mentioned "some who want change for the sake of change and don't know how to work with older membership," and others I interviewed confirmed my impression in various ways as documented below.

We kept circling back, throughout my various interviews, to certain core touchstones: Oxonmoot, Priscilla Tolkien's kindness, Tom Shippey, "Wayne and Christina" (Hammond and Scull), the masquerade (a costume event during Oxonmoot), the radio serial. These touchstones are partly available for discourse due

to the Society's role in attempting to present Tolkien to the world, to journalists or anyone who might be interested, which familiarizes core members with the habit of answering inquiries. The flip side of this familiarity with interviewers was the apology I often heard concerning costumes, an index of fannishness rather than seriousness, scholarship, the "academic" (a term they use frequently). The masquerade each year at Oxonmoot is a high point, a signature, but members kept denying, in so many words, being "costumed loonies." This is important given the Society's explicit goal of, in the words of a recent blog post by the Chair, "championing Tolkien as an author of international and historic significance" (Gunner). At the same time, the Tolkien Society is not an organization of or for professional academics. While I had several substantive conversations with members who were in one sense or another academics, they form a small minority of the membership. The Tolkien Society builds Tolkien's reputation as an "author of significance" through participatory organizing and the structures of everyday life.

The current Society Chair, Shaun Gunner (quoted above), has made an effort to bring younger people into the group, and to recruit younger members to serve on the Committee that governs the Society. When I asked one member about politics in the Society, they told me that "everything is political in the Society"; when I asked, they clarified that they meant having to do with political orientation generally, not just interpersonal politics. I mentioned that it looked to me as though members who were more politically conservative (and often younger) were the ones who wanted the Society to change in various ways, while more the left-leaning members often wanted to keep things as they were or had been. This member agreed that this was true, on

both counts: younger members tended to be more politically conservative and, also, to be more in favor of changing how things were done within the Society. This identification of change with political conservatism and conservation with social democratic politics epitomizes the confusing set of expectations associated with cultural impressions of neoliberalism. The Society, like a business, must innovate to survive: younger members must be brought forward, by definition, or it will die out; if fashions change, the Society must adapt or it won't attract new members. Social solidarity, which gives the Society its fundamental texture, becomes associated with conservation, protection of existing bonds, and this in turn rhymes with Tolkien's own attitudes: resist change; conserve social relations of value.

Having first studied and experienced fan communities via the digitally-based fanfiction communities that have received so much attention from feminist fan studies, I found it easy to converse with a university student, born outside the U.K., although I am more than twice her age and felt a strong identification with the politics and anti-classism of some of the older members I met. This member described the Society as "very anti-fanfic" and even "anti-adaptation," saying that a number of people active in the Society view virtually all adaptations as "unethical," disrespectful of Tolkien's children. She confirmed my impression that the Society is intensely "protective" of the Tolkien family: "Christopher hates change." She also said that the Society "doesn't take all comers": "If you connect with the Society, you quickly realize there are rules to play by." People don't even mention fanfiction, she said, and they emphasize "Tolkien as an academic rather than the world of Middle-earth." She described a "boundary" between, on the one side, members of the Committee and their friends and

associates, and, on the other hand, “everyone else,” including university smials and members of the public or digital fandom who might want to get involved. She said that her own hope for the Society was to “destroy” that boundary, to make it open and accessible to everyone.

The former schoolteacher, by contrast, was among those who expressed a Tolkienish sense of loss regarding the fan community as she remembered it. “The smials were big in those days,” she said repeatedly, meaning in the 1970s and 80s. The regional smial that she and her husband, along with one other friend, started in 1980, which at one time published its own fanzine, now consists only of the same three people who first started it. They expressed nostalgia for a time when “not everyone knew about it [the Society],” when the smials—local, embodied, in-person communities—were larger and more active. It was “harder to get information” back then: learning Elvish, for instance, was a project. Their smial had invented a “mode” of Elvish, just as Greg Shaw had. She had also helped support the intermediate stages between fannish and academic attention: the creation of the Seminar, in 1986, had been her suggestion, and she had served as editor of *Mallorn* for years. She and her husband identified themselves as Labour Party members, supporters of Jeremy Corbyn, to the left even by Labour standards. Party membership in the U.K. means something much more substantial than anything in the U.S.: the number of people who are party members is far smaller than the number of votes the parties receive. In the 2017 election, Labour had a few hundred thousand members but received almost thirteen million votes.

The dynamic between sincerity and irony, or earnestness and humor, was a constant theme in my conversations with the Tolkien Society, also. These modes of interacting are always class-inflected, but they don't have a single meaning: they mark surfaces with friction between them. Earnestness requires trust but can also read as pompousness; irony can either take down (directed at authority) or keep down (policing social norms), depending on how it is deployed and by whom. The younger member, the university student, opined that Society was "too serious. They champion him [Tolkien] without interacting with him"; part of her point was to support transformative engagements, play that could explore Middle-earth rather than a kind of inherited protectiveness toward the memory of Tolkien as a person. She noted that many members "couldn't bear hearing him [Tolkien] made fun of, even in a good, light-hearted way." I had observed myself how ardently some (if not most) members desired to see Tolkien "taken seriously," meaning at the most basic level that they would like professional literary scholars to approve of and study his fiction. "Seriousness" becomes code for access to institutionally protected space for scholarship and enjoyment, support for inquiry, pedagogy, truth-seeking as they are experienced as popular practices.

Finally, national identity was a theme. This was predictably, Tolkienishly, expressed through beer: Americans lack "enculturation to social drinking," I was told politely by one fan, though others put it more bluntly. "Pints are for wusses," said the fan who grew up in Germany, where liter glasses are available. Beer was not the only index of nationalism, however. The fan who missed the days when "the smials were big" shared reflections on Peter Jackson's films, what she and her husband liked and

didn't like about them, that illuminated the nation-mass-alienation nexus for me. They had been charmed by the films at first (they were not guilty of "rejecting all adaptations"), but, over time, they came to feel alienated by them. They particularly disliked Elijah Wood as Frodo, and the way the role was written as younger and more passive than in the book, and they weren't crazy about Sean Astin as Sam, either. They were more tolerant of Viggo Mortensen, but referred to him repeatedly as "Danish" (he's American, though his father was Danish and he lived in Denmark for a few years; he has also lived in South America, and has leftist politics; he is less thoroughly enculturated as American than Astin or Wood). The 1981 radio version, with its full cast of top-flight British actors, was their favorite adaptation. Middle-earth, they stressed, was "supposed to be a mythologized England." "The Hobbits were Irish" in Jackson's film. I asked why: "musically," they explained; the film "should have" used English folk music. The problem wasn't only with actors, but with changes to the narrative baked into the script and direction. "English people recognize what Faramir is in a way others wouldn't"; in the films, he "came across as a bit of a thug." Faramir has particular meaning to many Tolkien fans in part because, according to Tolkien, he was an authorial avatar. Affection for him, for these fans, seemed tied to the profession that, despite their Labour Party politics, they "weren't anti-monarchists." "Royalty," she told me, "shouldn't represent everyone." The discourses of British monarchism and the romance of the Tolkien family, also, are obviously related to each other.

### *Tolkien Studies*

The Tolkien Society has been a home, for decades, for a group of writers, researchers, and collectors who read extensively, who groom archives, and who publish—mostly in the Society’s own organs, *Amon Hen* and *Mallorn*, but sometimes commercially or academically. This group overlaps with the more strictly academic subculture of scholars who work on Tolkien. The term “acafan,” popularized by Henry Jenkins, assumes a dichotomy: *acafans* are on-the-one-hand academics and on-the-other fans. The scholarly subculture surrounding Tolkien needs a different term, or a different style of theorization. Claudia Johnson, in her work on the reception history of Jane Austen, has written about the relationship between academics and the intellectual priorities of the Jane Austen Society of North America:

On quizzes—a staple of JASNA meetings—academics fare quite poorly: having been taught to regard only certain relationships, scenes and ... structures as significant, we rarely recollect the color of this character’s dress or that servant’s name [*sic!*]. We sometimes suffer the additional mortification of discovering our own papers becoming yet another relatively undifferentiated, unhierarchicalized item in the great repository of Austeniana assiduously collected by Janeites and compiled in newsletters and reports. (Johnson 13–14)

Johnson’s point about contrasting registers of study and appreciation, and the dissonance between them, is relevant, but I also want to note that she, like Jenkins (whom she goes on to cite), draws a sharp line, posits a gulf, between professional academics and members of the literary society. In the realm of Tolkien studies, rather than a gulf, one finds a continuum, with gradations and degrees, relating in turn to the fact that the actual academics who study Tolkien achieve much less intellectual

respectability than is possible for those who study Austen. Tolkien scholarship *as such* marks a disconnection with the academic study of literature.

Oxonmoot supplies a strong illustration of the continuum I am describing in the study of Tolkien. The 2018 Oxonmoot, which I attended, was the largest ever, thanks in part to the presence of a major Bodleian exhibit of Tolkien's artwork, sketches, maps, and similar materials from the collections of his papers, mostly at Oxford and Marquette; this material continually grows in commercial value and public interest. The papers recognized by the organizers and members as "academic" are very well attended at Oxonmoot, with vigorous question and answer sessions. The people giving these papers run the gamut from university-affiliated scholars (a couple of doctoral students, myself included) to presentations and activities similar to those one might find at any fan convention. In between lie "scholarly" fan presentations and those by professional non-academic writers. In 2018, the keynote was given by John Garth, a journalist who has made a career of researching Tolkien. His talk used unpublished materials from the eve of World War II to illuminate what Tolkien called his "Atlantis complex," including his recurring dream of a wave that overwhelms the world (see, for example, Tolkien, "Letter #163, to W.H. Auden, 1955" 213). Garth's talk illuminated some of the most affecting moments in *The Lord of the Rings*, including Faramir's dream of the Fall of Númenor (the "great dark wave climbing over the green lands and above the hills, and coming on, darkness unescapable" VI.v.962) and Frodo's repeated vision (once as a dream in Bombadil's house, and then at the very end of the book) of a "far green country under a swift sunrise" (I.viii.135; VI.ix.1030). The talk used plenty of primary research and displayed a more generous

and skillful writerly technique than most academic journal articles; its conceptual model was popular and populist.

This mingling of biographical and textual interest with approachable style, though Garth is one of only a handful of people in the Tolkien world who do it really well, exactly serves the Tolkien Society's intellectual life. The group cultivates lay scholars, people who have devoted large portions of their lives to Tolkien research but make a living elsewhere. Garth is a professional, but I would compare his talk with one given at the same conference by Dennis Bridoux, a long-time member of the Society, who gave a cautious but touching lecture based on two photographs from 1911, tying them to the story of Éowyn's unrequited love, one of the few even superficially psychological narratives in *The Lord of the Rings*.

The large number of lay and non-academic scholars in Tolkien studies generally and affiliated with the Tolkien Society and the Mythopoeic Society in particular affect the study of Tolkien's fiction within the academy. They are holdovers from the tradition of popular literary scholarship, going well back into the nineteenth century, that formed an important component of the drive for universal literacy: literary clubs, public readings, adult education oriented to both middle-class people and laborers, and indeed the quasi-amateur status of the emergent academic field of the study of literature in modern languages. The survival of the Tolkien Society depends, also, on its ability to interface with mass-culturally oriented fan communities, heirs to the science fiction fanzines of the 1930s-70s. These groups—the academic scholars, professional writers and editors, scholarly and “fannish” fans—although distinct, all overlap and often intersect. There are Tolkien professors, people

like Jane Chance or Dimitra Fimi, who have built careers within conventional academic institutions (often, like Chance, as medievalists) primarily publishing on Tolkien. Next we might place someone like Corey Olsen, a professional academic running a non-profit populist pedagogical program. Then there are the professional writers, like Sibley or Garth, who aren't academics but owe substantial portions of their careers to researching and writing on Tolkien, and—at least as important—non-Ph.D. scholars whose professional work not only centers on Tolkien but is essential to the academics studying him. Hammond and Scull, or Douglas Anderson, have put some distance between themselves and the popular base from which they emerged, yet they still belong to it. Finally, there is a huge range of amateurs who study, research, and write on Tolkien, themselves organized by degrees of “academic” orientation. Within the Tolkien Society, lines are observed (many interlocutors mentioned them) between “academic” and more conventionally “fannish” participation. This distinction is formalized in the group's distinct publications and events, *Mallorn* and the Seminar versus *Amon Hen* and Oxonmoot, yet *all* would count as popular or fannish in relation to the academy.

These intersections and continuities are enabled by the fact that Tolkien writers, workers, and enthusiasts generally share an epistemology and a set of intellectual values, even when they diverge on, for example, politics. Norms and standards govern their scholarly practice, and they are distinct from those typical of literary scholarship, at least in the United States. Tolkien scholars at all levels of professionalism tend toward positivism and a certain innocence about theory, as if they don't even perceive why it is desirable or necessary; this is not universally true,

but it is common. Their caution about matters of fact, which stresses ethical obligations to each other, to “the Professor,” and to anyone connected with him, symptomatizes and constitutes the unalienated scholarly environment they inhabit, but it also delimits the scholarship they can undertake.<sup>65</sup> In an echo of Johnson’s comment on the color of dresses in Austen, the Tolkien Society scholars understand “academic” questions, whether about fiction or biography, as *factual*, as if as if the context and necessary conditions for “fact” did not require investigation.

The largest and most suspect concepts, meanwhile, go unquestioned. Theism, empire, property, fascism, communism, gender, love, even race and its cognates, all central to Tolkien—exactly the concepts that mainstream scholarship in the humanities relentlessly historicizes, analyzes, and debates—are almost never questioned except by the most scholarly of Tolkien scholars, and even then quite delicately. At the same time, the most minute biographical details or literalist questions of reference or origin are subjected to frighteningly intense scrutiny. Not coincidentally, few conventional scholars write on Tolkien who don’t spend their entire careers on him. It’s hard to study Tolkien and study anything else, at least anything modern. The occasional exceptions, such as Fredric Jameson or Jed Esty, tend to be capacious thinkers who give Tolkien a few pages in larger studies and don’t consider questions following from the novel’s massification at all (Jameson; Esty).

The methods favored by the scholars on the continuum honor Tolkien as a model, and in so doing can appear antique. This is in contrast to fan culture generally,

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<sup>65</sup> This can cause distress for some people who also work on Tolkien, for instance Robin Reid, a specialist in Tolkien fan studies who runs the Tolkien track in the Popular Culture Association and expresses frustration with the cult of Tolkien’s “intent.”

which always seems to smell of the new, for instance in its early adoption of new media—the mimeograph and the postal service in the 1920s, “Web 2.0” (early social media) in the 2000s. Fiction fandom, regardless of medium, provides frontline cadres for the adoption of new methods generally—not just new media—in the consolidation and circulation of mass culture, for example the idea that the right way to handle a massive anti-modernist novel by an elite philologist was to use the appendices as a textbook and form amateur academies for in-world investigation. The recent socialist revival in public discourse has made the giddy embrace of (for example) fanfiction in the Harry Potter era feel rather stale, and yet a sense of contemporaneity seems essential for understanding fan cultures. Tolkien himself, by contrast, was a throwback on the literature faculty at Oxford, trying to arrest the progress of literary study, and this reactionary stance was constitutive of his and Lewis’s populism, which constituted itself in opposition to modern literary scholarship per se. The Tolkien Society adapts to novelty in order to make space for younger members, while the role of positivism as a default intellectual mode enables its populism, its openness at both ends of the scholarly spectrum.

Each year, Oxonmoot concludes with a visit to Tolkien’s grave, in the Wolvercote Cemetery, toward the north end of the Woodstock Road in Oxford. The Society’s pattern of tracing personal connections is epitomized by this ritual, which forms an intense, communal enactment of the mood of pleasurable loss, remembrance, and historical abyss that characterizes Tolkien’s aesthetics. At the gravesite, all attendees participate in a simple ritual the Society calls the “Enyalië,” a Quenya (High Elvish) word meaning, roughly, “remembrance.” The Chair of the Society reads a

passage from Tolkien's writing, and members lay a wreath on the grave shared by Tolkien and his wife, Edith; the names "Beren" and "Luthien," two heroic and romantic figures from the *Silmarillion*, are inscribed below their given names on the headstone.

The climax of the ritual, however, comes at the end, when a member of the Society sings "Namárië." I have mentioned this poem before: it is the longest passage of *Quenya* in *The Lord of the Rings*, the song Galadriel sings as the Fellowship departs Lothlórien, beginning "*Ai! laurië lantar lassí súrinen,*" the one echoed in the opening of "Ramble On" (II.viii.377-8). In Donald Swann's song cycle of 1967, "Namárië" was the one song for which not only the words but the music came from Tolkien himself. Swann recounts that he had penned new music for "Namárië," but that Tolkien, while he approved most of Swann's melodies, demurred for this poem and immediately performed it for Swann using a melody that Swann describes as "a Gregorian chant" (Swann and Tolkien v-vi). Tolkien made a recording of himself singing (or "intoning") it that has been released many times and is available on YouTube, and it is performed, a cappella, with roughly the same melody as part of Swann's song cycle. I was unprepared for the abundant tears on the face of the man who performed it at Oxonmoot, something he had done many times, and the tears of several other members in the group around the grave.

I had heard that Humphrey Carpenter had wanted to distance himself from Tolkien in the years after the *Biography* was published in 1977, along with his related projects *The Inklings* (1978) and *The Letters* (1981), on which he assisted Christopher Tolkien. Carpenter was a professional biographer with works on canonical modernist

figures to his credit, but Tolkien's fame meant his reputation was now linked to this behemoth. According to testimony from more than one person I talked with, Carpenter felt somewhat cheapened by the association and sought to distance himself from it later in life. This is easy to imagine: the opening pages, about Tolkien's childhood in South Africa, including the story of his brief "abduction" by a black servant, are painful to read, willfully oblivious to the political context of Tolkien's birth. At Oxonmoot, however, I also encountered a different relationship to Carpenter's work. Carpenter is buried very close to Tolkien, just the other side of a small hedge. As we gathered for Enyalië, I was speaking with an older woman, a bit unsteady on her feet in the slippery mud, who said she wanted to visit Carpenter's grave. I went with her and held her umbrella. She explained that she was a widow; she was carrying a pot of thyme to put on Carpenter's grave (many members were carrying flowers for Tolkien's) because "the shop was out of flowers." She always brings something for Carpenter at Enyalië, she explained, because he helped her, years ago. She had been enrolled in a master's program, but the faculty rejected her thesis as she first submitted it. She had never met Carpenter, but she loved the *Biography*, so she wrote to him and asked for advice. And he helped her: he wrote back, looked at her thesis, gave her very detailed advice. She revised accordingly, submitted again, and was awarded her degree. So she always goes to pay her respects.

The Tolkien Society illustrates, in so many ways, the value of popular humanist scholarship. This is not because its habits or doctrines promote emancipatory beliefs. The intellectual values celebrated can seem magisterial, lordly. Central members are kind and generous to the "right kind" of fans, but can apply strict

judgements to those who do not conform to their preferences. The left-monarchism of the long-time member stays with me: “it isn’t supposed to be for everyone”—and yet she was the same one who had designed the Seminar to be “a serious place where everyone can come.” The idea that Faramir represents what the “aristocracy” should be resonates with the familial ideal, the degrees of separation, the ideal of protecting Tolkien’s family. It posits some kind mutuality. It humanizes a reified culture. It would be a shame if access to humanist scholarship and research were reserved for academics.

### *Taruithorn and Oxford University*

When I went to Oxonmoot 2018, I had already spent considerable time in Oxford during my initial research in 2016. Oxford was where Tolkien spent most of his life and where he wrote *The Lord of the Rings*: I anticipated researching in his papers at the Bodleian. But I also reached out to the Oxford Tolkien Society, Taruithorn. Accessing their archive, participating in their activities, and interviewing their members opened a window onto the contemporary culture and social structure of the University that was more illuminating, for me, than work in Tolkien’s own papers could have been. I experienced some of the differential ways in which the Oxford colleges interact with their overlapping and clashing constituencies, including tourists, students, donors, and academics. My observations concern the experience of Tolkien fans in relation to the University and, in turn, the University’s relationship to Tolkien massified. “The Professor” is what the Tolkien Society calls him; his career at Oxford

forms a significant component in mass cultural traditions around him, even while the fans who generate and are generated by mass culture supply, for Oxford, a fungible asset. Scholarship becomes mass culture; mass culture becomes capital for the university; and the cultural structures of fandom and popular scholarship mine the crevices for intellectual matter.

Oxford is an exceptionally rich, powerful, and storied institution. It sits in a diverse, gentrified, cosmopolitan city, far larger than Cambridge, with a significant manufacturing tradition. The University of Oxford, moreover, is diffused: through banks and parliaments and the Foreign Office, through centuries of empire, aristocracy, and capital to which the institution has been central and which built it. It may be edging toward tourist accommodations relating to Tolkien, as shown by the 2018 exhibition and the lecture at Exeter below, but for the most part Tolkien is only one of thousands of famous affiliates, nothing if not marginal to the large, living (and dead) actuality of the university.

I arrived in Oxford shortly after the University was engulfed by the “Rhodes Must Fall” controversy of January, 2016. These protests, and a recent study of them, frame my experience there, because a sense of political commitment and a need to bridge the gap between the university and the world is something I think I share with the author of the study. Begun at the University of Cape Town in 2015, the Rhodes Must Fall campaign brought protests across South Africa demanding to “decolonize the university”; an allied student movement at Oxford the following winter demanded a slate of changes in curriculum and other university matters, including the removal of a statue of Cecil Rhodes from the front of Oriel College’s main building. The student

movement sparked a furor in the press, with hundreds of articles in major papers, particularly in Britain but in the U.S. and around the world also. Accusations of student hypersensitivity and attempted erasure of history eventuated in Oriel refusing to remove the statue, having had at least one donation of over £1 million withdrawn during the struggle and a threat to withdraw a much larger donation, over £100 million, as well as numerous other stories about alumni changing their wills to eliminate donations and similar threats (Espinoza).

In a recent article about the controversy, Dalia Gebrial notes the irony in the accusations against the protestors: after all, students were trying to pull history out from behind sentimental deceptions, not to “erase” it. Gebrial emphasizes the gulf of incomprehension between academic and public discourses, relating this conflict to politically disastrous trends of the neoliberal era. In light of the overwhelming weight of research on coloniality and its consequences as they are understood in the academy, by actual historians, she contrasts academic understanding with the public’s. Among the data she cites is a 2014 YouGov poll showing that

59 percent of British adults ... view the Empire as ‘more something to be proud of,’ with just 19 percent considering it ‘more something to be ashamed of.’ Forty-nine percent of surveyed adults viewed countries colonized by Britain as being ‘better off for being colonized’ and just 45 percent could categorically say they would not like Britain to still have an Empire. (Gebrial 24, 23)

To this she later adds that “a British student can study history to A-level standard without gaining more than a lesson’s worth of time studying Empire” (25).

Gebrial’s article addresses itself to organizers; its explicit engagement in politics as well as its argument resonates with my project. Rooted in the experience

and intentions of the protestors, and looking in detail at press coverage of the affair, moreover, her essay emphasizes the Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford movement *itself* as an intellectual intervention. She shows how the movement violated the ordinary boundaries between academic inquiry and public discourse, not only through its notoriety but in its program and in joining Oxford students to a transnational project centered in a post-colony. Citing Paul Gilroy's 1990 essay "The End of Anti-racism," which critiqued ideals of "diversity" and the professionalization of anti-racism programs in the course of analyzing a shift in the discourse of society, Gebrial describes his view that intellectuals confronted a "'crisis in political language' whereby race itself becomes viewed almost exclusively in terms of culture and identity rather than politics and history'" (Gilroy; Gebrial 30). Her emphasis, including in her reading of Gilroy, is on materiality, the ways in which Oxford University is practically, ongoingly imbricated with imperialism: after all, the challenge to remove Rhodes' statue was based on the kind of research the university conducts, but produced a threat to remove its funding.

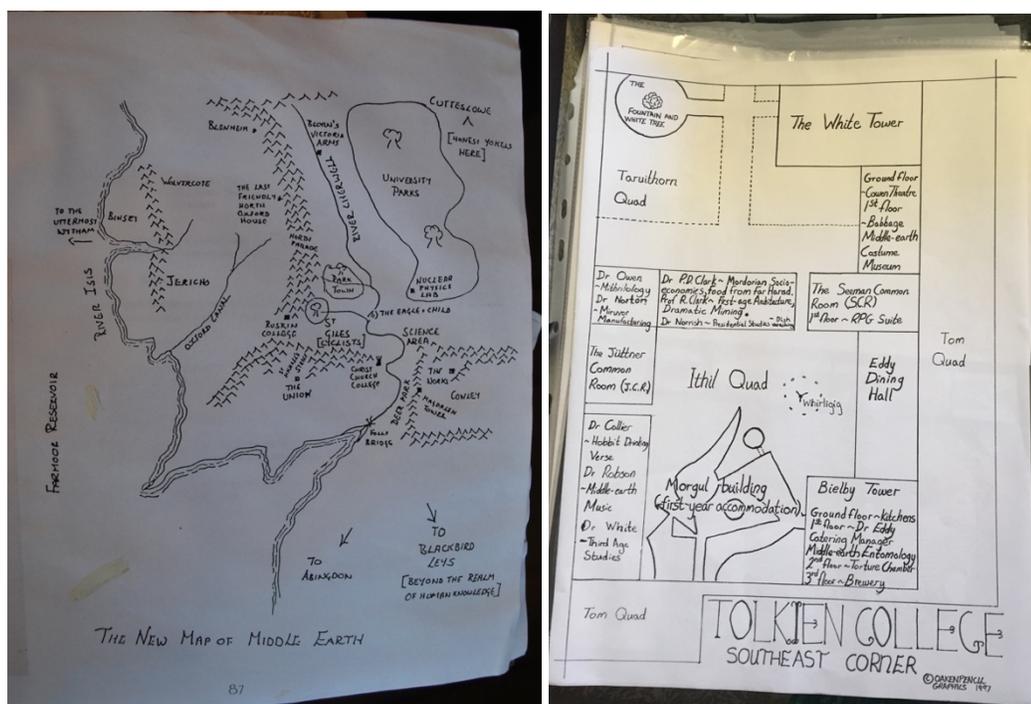
Comparing the steady trickle of Tolkien fans drawn to Oxford with the Rhodes Must Fall campaign might seem absurd. But it also seems worth remembering that *The Lord of the Rings* is one of a handful of the very most dominant products to emerge from the nexus of literacy, publishing, and the humanities when that combination of institutions was at its zenith in the English-speaking (with all that implies) world. It is not a trivial matter in understanding the relationship between Oxford University and popular culture. Moreover, the resurgence of materialist reflexivity in scholarship, in which I see my project as allied with Gebrial's, is being driven not by intellectual

fashion but by material pressures on humanist scholarship deeply related to the structural political crises in both the U.K. and the U.S. in 2016 and the years since. We were both looking at Oxford University in the winter and spring of the year of Brexit and Trump. Her focus was on a political protest, mine on quiescent fan societies, but both were misunderstood constituencies of Oxford University.

The Tolkien Society, because of its serious avocational and sometimes professional interest in Tolkien, has quite a different relationship to Oxford University than does the Oxford Tolkien Society, Taruithorn. Taruithorn is a 25-year-old student club of Tolkien enthusiasts whose research interests lie elsewhere: its members may be scientists, programmers, even medievalists, but never study Tolkien's fiction or biography as part of their "course" (curriculum) or postgraduate work. "Taruithorn" is an exquisitely obscure name, being the name for Oxford in "Gnomish"; Gnomish, along with Qenya—not to be confused with Quenya—is one of the earliest precursors to Elvish in Tolkien's papers ("Parf Edhellen").

I did the regular fannish tour when I arrived in Oxford. On my first day, I visited Wolvercote cemetery, where Tolkien is buried (a fact acknowledged by the most modest of signs near the entrance), went up a very ordinary street to take the obligatory photo of his family home, with its blue plaque, and searched in the wrong places for the "two trees" planted by the Tolkien Society. Writing about *Led Zeppelin IV* above, I said that its cover art and "Misty Mountain Hop" layer Middle-earth over regular earth. This effect is also cultivated by the Tolkien Society and Taruithorn in their relation to Oxford, and was apparently echoed by Tolkien himself in talking

about the city. The tourism dimension of fantasy fandom, which becomes an entire industry in Aotearoa New Zealand, is replicated at every level from the most parochial to the mass. The Tolkien Society's slim *Guide to Oxford*, sold on request at the entrance to Exeter College, tells members how to tour the city with a Tolkien lens (Crawshaw et al.). Discreetly, the member acquires the *Guide* from an Oxford college, voicing a code to the porter; the transaction secures a subtle form of belonging for her, secretly legitimating her, for her own self-understanding, at Exeter, Pembroke, Merton. Maps produced by Taruithorn over the years show Middle-earth reworked as Oxford and its surroundings.



Two of many maps of Oxford as Middle-earth in the Taruithorn archive

I spent days looking through the detailed minutes, publications, correspondence, photos, programs, artwork, accounts that Taruithorn archives. The overwhelming impression was of continuity and stability: very similar activities year after year, members staying connected long after leaving the university, the same mix of tonalities, the same sense of humor, the same style of textual enthusiasm, the same scrupulousness about ethics, obligations, formalities, mutual respect. The same weekly schedule of events are organized and adapted for each term, year after year: week seven of Trinity, punting trip; week five of Michaelmas, pub quiz. One of the items in the archive was a model of a windmill that had served on the White Council (the elected board of the Society) for a number of years. In year after year of materials, I read reports from and about the “Wrexham Liaison Officer.” Wrexham is a moderately-sized, formerly industrial town in the Welsh Marches; minutes of the meeting at which the office was first created, decades ago, record that it was modeled on the Duchy of Lancaster, which “has no official duties.” There were four or five candidates who stood for it the first year, and the minutes include highlights from their speeches. Taruithorn have a rivalry with Minas Tirith, the Cambridge Tolkien Society (which, to their chagrin, is somewhat older). The two groups have competed in an annual Varsity Quiz on Tolkieniana for twenty years (“Confusion to Minas Tirith!”); in 2016, they were exactly tied. It’s all so Oxford-clubbish that it would seem almost painful except that I can clearly see the value it has for its members, and its charm.

Taruithorn is one of about a hundred and fifty societies and clubs registered with the University of Oxford (Oxford). University recognition comes with requirements and supervision: the Proctors approve the constitution, enforce rules (on

plagiarism, for instance), and can interrogate accounts, so receipts must be kept and budgets observed. Many of the routines governing Taruithorn—scripted term cards, officers, Senior Members, the Freshers Fair—are common to all the formal student societies at Oxford. The system of student clubs and societies seems designed to convert hierarchy and authority into intimacy via routines that become habitual and protective. The annual “Fresher’s Fair,” at the beginning of Michaelmas (autumn term), assists groups in recruiting new student members. Taruithorn positions itself in the “Geek Room” with the *Doctor Who* Society, the *Star Trek* Society, and (more surprisingly) the Lewis Society. In return, Taruithorn and other recognized clubs and societies can use Oxford names in their activities, have a formal system for reserving facilities, and enjoy other benefits. These include a University privilege that several members mentioned to me: like so many other Tolkien groups, including the national Society, Taruithorn had been harassed about their use of various names connected with Tolkien (such as “Tolkien”) when the films came out. They complained to the University, which was, of course, able to fix it: they were represented, they told me, by the lawyer who had helped Tolkien with his will.

The formal clubs provide significant social support for students. At least for undergraduates, Oxford supplies less of a life-world than the residential post-secondary college or university in the United States. One member told me:

You have two to four social groups at Oxford: your course [meaning your academic program, those who follow the curriculum you do], your college, and your sport or club. It’s very structured. The terms are very short. Most of the year, you’re away, on your own.

Since all the registered “non-sporting” societies are university-wide, they offer a very different type of structured sociality to that supplied by colleges and “courses” (programs). Members mentioned something that is very apparent from almost any approach to the University, namely the social distinctions among the colleges. Many members of Taruithorn belong to distinctly un-famous colleges, often with modern facilities; they also welcome members from the “Halls of Residence,” student facilities that don’t rise to the level of colleges, and from Oxford Brooks, another university in the city of Oxford that is unaffiliated with the University of Oxford. As a club that crosses colleges, Taruithorn offers a modest counterweight to the upsetting hierarchism of Oxford, both the gentrified city and the University. Potential members, I was told, always ask, “do I have to have read *The Silmarillion*?” But Taruithorn is “very much pushing back against the idea that you need qualifications.” Like the national Society, Taruithorn provides a durable sense of belonging for a diversity of characters, and, as in the Tolkien Society’s archives at Woking, their photo albums are full of weddings.

Student life does not, for the most part, partake of the grandiosity of the University at its most picturesque. One evening I went to a College bar with a couple of Taruithorn members. It was extremely cheap, where Oxford at large is terrifically expensive: a pint for a pound, versus about five pounds at the pubs, where beer is by far the cheapest offering. The bar was finished and furnished cheaply, also, and the bartender laughed at me for trying to give her a tip. And yet, while internally egalitarian in the same manner as the national Society, and while certainly not posh in its makeup, taken collectively the routines constituting Taruithorn reflect a tonally

upper-class eccentricity. This, in turn, resonates strongly with fandom, perhaps due to the heavy footprint Oxbridge has in mass culture, via Monty Python, for example.

The nationalizing function of humor, moreover, underwrites English imperial positioning, from the perceived inability of imperial subjects to achieve fluency in irony to the casting of British actors as villains in Hollywood thrillers. The tonal index of class resides in what might be called (following Python) silliness—both triviality and irony. The Taruithorn officers boasted to me about how much “sillier” the Tolkien Society was than the Lewis Society. This makes sense: Lewis was a more ambitious scholar and a public figure, associated with institutions like the Oxford Union (the famous debating society, where he regularly defended his “childish” Christianity) and the BBC. Tolkien, by contrast, mostly attracts fantasy fans, and the association with mass culture is more pronounced. So its refusal of “seriousness” marks Taruithorn as, depending on one’s disposition, potentially *more* serious, more intellectually substantive.

When I contacted Taruithorn through an online form, the person who answered gave his title as “The Mouth of Sauron” (their communications officer; the Mouth of Sauron, in the novel, is the creepy functionary who comes to the Black Gate to threaten the forces of Gondor, V.x). He told me about their archive, stored in “a rather capacious cupboard” in Christ Church—which, the second time he mentioned it in his email, he referred to as “ChCh.” I first met him on the “ChCh” grounds, outside the college library, on a drizzly morning. Christ Church is one of the more deluxe Oxford colleges. When he said “a cupboard” (later he had added “in a residence”), I had pictured particle board and plastic in a modern dorm. While I waited for him under an

umbrella on the palatial grounds, I watched a tall, languid young man in striped pajamas and a bathrobe who was talking on his phone and smoking in the rain, a scene from *Brideshead Revisited*. As it turned out, the doorway in which this deluxe young man was smoking belonged to the building with the “cupboard” containing the boxes and oddments comprising the “archive.” The cupboard turned out to be an antique, floor-to-ceiling oak cabinet built into the vestibule. It was impossible to photograph the whole thing.

Since I arrived in Oxford right before the beginning of the spring term (Trinity), I was able to attend the term’s first planning meeting. This was a gathering of the governing committee, the “White Council,” at a gentrified/traditional pub where most attendees were priced out of food and drink. The Council had a densely packed agenda, disposed of with dispatch. “Item one: we exist.” After that they moved through the term card, with at least one activity per week for the eight weeks. So, for instance, the seventh week of Trinity always includes the “Drogo Baggins punting expedition” (Drogo was a relative of Frodo’s who “drowned”), for which a location and punts had to be secured. Possible topics for the term’s traditional Debate were vetted: Does Aragorn have the right to establish rule in both Gondor and Arnor? Did the wizards do a good job? “Trial of the Valar”: were the Valar right to bring the Elves to Valinor in the first place?<sup>66</sup> The Council chose the question on Kingship and made numerous other decisions: a pub for pubmoot, plans for dinner with a speaker, and so on. All these choices reflected the character of the group: debates about politics that have nothing to do with politics or about religion that have nothing to do with religion;

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<sup>66</sup> The Noldor revolted against the Valar and returned to Middle-earth in pursuit of the Silmarils.

social events revolving, hobbit-style, around food and drink; Tolkien-related events for the community, such as a public talk by a member of the faculty.

One of the events planned at that meeting was for May Morning. This is an annual University-wide celebration beginning at dawn on May Day (May 1). Most places in Europe, May Day signifies labor, the left, communism, but Oxford looks farther back: the Magdalen College Choir performs at dawn from the tower above Magdalen Bridge, attended by thousands of university members and visitors, some of them in costume. Traditionally, undergraduates jumped from Magdalen Bridge into the Cherwell after the singing (perhaps producing some of the male nudity Vera Chapman enjoyed a century ago), but the practice has been prohibited in recent years due to injuries. The rest of the morning is a festival around the city center, with Morris dancing, folk music, street fairs, and breakfasting out. Students habitually stay up all night rather than attempting to rise early enough to hear the choir, so Taruithorn planned a marathon viewing of Jackson's films in a dorm room, attended by around a dozen people. Though the group was small, the room was crowded, with members reclining on each other's laps and otherwise squeezed together quite intimately. Unlike at smaller gatherings of the national Society, not everyone was white; there was gender non-conformity, disability, purple hair. They weren't all from very elite colleges, though one was visiting from the Cambridge Tolkien Society (Minas Tirith). I recognized furnishings from IKEA.

One person described the group as "*much* nerds." Films two and three were chosen by acclamation, somewhat to my surprise, as "the good ones." Everyone seemed to agree, wordlessly, which scenes were suited to MST3K-style commentary

and which earned undivided attention. In reference to pulling down the trees of Isengard, someone asked “why Saruman hasn’t figured out where the coal is”; in response, another member argued, with reference to cosmography in the *Silmarillion*, that Middle-earth isn’t old enough to *have* coal.<sup>67</sup> Someone else had been saving up a comment on Gandalf’s line, “Three hundred lives of men I’ve walked this earth”: if, per the appendices, the Wizards arrived in Middle-earth around year 1000 of the Third Age, and events of the novel take place in 3018-19, then a man apparently only lives seven years. And people talked intermittently about “real life”: their studies, a coming wedding, medieval history, science.

During my interviews with members of Taruithorn, they rarely if ever mentioned the Tolkien Society at large, nor was it mentioned in their archive; I’m almost certain it only came up when I asked about it. Technically, Taruithorn is a “smial” of the Tolkien Society, but the membership experience it as almost unconnected and as having what they, at any rate, imagine to be a different culture: Taruithorn, they feel, is about *Oxford*, and the connection to Tolkien *through Oxford* gives it a sense of structural stability. This sense of distinction is underscored by the fact that the Tolkien Society’s main annual event, Oxonmoot, takes place on the University campus. Through Oxonmoot, the national Society incorporates its own necessary, structural connection to Oxford University. By definition, however, Oxonmoot never takes place when the University is in session; it is a happy coincidence that the date of Bilbo’s “Party of Special Magnificence” (September 22) falls before the beginning of term, or Oxonmoot could not be timed to commemorate

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<sup>67</sup> Couldn’t Aulë make some?

it. Taruithorn members, though they often meet up between terms, told me they never attend Oxonmoot, never considered it.

The national Society is conscious of an aging membership and the need to be proactive about attracting young people. The group I met at Oxford, however, were not simply the youth contingent. For one thing, they were not nearly as close an age cohort as I would have expected from a student club, ranging in age from under twenty to their forties, not including the Senior Member. But Taruithorn's sense of distinction from the national Society is also somewhat exaggerated, partly because it *resembles* the Tolkien Society. Like the national Society, Taruithorn incorporates members who are diverse in social status and type of education; this was striking, given that it is a student group, and formal members (others are welcome to attend events) must be Oxford University students. But there is a great difference between a part-time master's student in programming, a doctoral candidate with an undergraduate degree from Balliol, someone who finished their degree a few years ago but still works in the city, and an undergraduate at Oxford Brooks. The last two, present at more than one activity I attended, can only informally be considered members, but in practice are. Taruithorn unites these diverse members over long periods of time, supported by routine, formality, and repetition; former members, I was told, stay connected with Taruithorn, not uncommonly for decades, much like the national Society. Members of Taruithorn also recounted many of the same anecdotes I heard from the national Society, like the one about Tolkien's favorite tree and its tragic end.

In their photo albums, I came across photos of a man who sits on the Committee for the national Society whom I afterward spoke with at length. He had attended Oxford Brooks, his wife had attended Oxford, and they had met through Taruithorn. I asked them about the sense of separation and difference in the Oxford group, and they laughed. Although she was aware of some irony about Oxford's privileges (for example, having access to Tolkien's lawyers when harassed by property owners: "That's Oxford,") she valued her experience at the University and with Taruithorn, as well as the national Society; they all seemed related to her. She talked about arriving at Oxford, having been an overly studious young person, something of a misfit. At Oxford, she found herself with "other people who really cared." This phrase seems also to describe the experience of finding "fandom," described so often in fan studies. At the same time, that story, of the geeky kid who finally finds the other people who want to geek out with her about the *Ancrene Wyses* (like Tolkien with his friends at St. Edwards), is part of the legendary romance of scholarship. Her sense of acceptance and belonging and pleasure seemed equally attached to the university, Taruithorn, and the Tolkien Society, with a sense of continuity between them.

### ***The Oxford Hail***

The University has many different constituencies, and it hails them—addresses them, tells them how to behave and what to expect—very differently. Tourists and visitors are warned about things that aren't for them. Again and again, don't walk on the lawns: that's for senior fellows only. Submitting to these protocols inducts the

visitor into the sociality of the University, enlists her. Signs everywhere warn that “the college” (whichever college) is “closed to visitors.” When they aren’t closed, guards at gates take fees and supply instructions, as at the entrance to a museum.

As I discovered my first evening, if you arrive after 8 p.m., you may find the doors to the entire college locked; and when I say doors, in this case I mean the nearly black, four-meter-high main doors at Christ Church. Christ Church is one of the most luxurious and palatial colleges, built in the seventeenth century; the fact that it houses the Taruithorn archive, albeit in a “cupboard,” forms a very notable contrast with the fact that the Bodleian has refused to house the Tolkien Society’s archive, which is much better curated and more likely to interest researchers. Christ Church college chapel, due to its magnificence, served as the Hogwarts dining hall in the Harry Potter films, intensifying the college’s orientation toward and defense against tourists, although its intimidating façade long predates this. The night I was locked out, I had been invited to attend a Taruithorn event, with the location given as a room in “ChCh.” The use of a scribal nickname for a place that looks only slightly more approachable than the gates of Mordor expresses the structure: Christ Church was familiar, approachable, intimate—but not for me.



The Black Gate Is Closed

Once you have a recognized reason to be there, however, processes at Oxford seem very much less formal than they would at a typical American university, or indeed than they seem at less elite British institutions; when I visited the library at the University of Liverpool, its radio-frequency detectors (those devices installed at the doors of stores and libraries) and protocols for checking identification exactly resembled those I was used to. Access to the Bodleian is tightly controlled, but no one ever asked me for identification during the two weeks I read through materials in the

Christ Church College library. Taruithorn's Senior Member, a Fellow of the college, had warned me I'd need one as well as proof of academic affiliation. There were no locks, codes, or metal detectors. No one seemed worried about anything except my comfort. The porter at the main gates literally waved me off when I reached for my wallet and told me how to find a more convenient, less touristed gate in future. The librarian said "oh, no!" when I asked if I should show her my university ID or my letter from the Senior Member. She helped me find a table and showed me where to stash things when I wasn't using them.

The library consisted of two elegant, enormous old rooms lined with books from floor to ceiling. On "my" table was a laminated notice with a very friendly note with fully explained, informal requests about putting books in cubby holes with the spines outward. It filled three paragraphs. "It would be really helpful if..." "could you...?," and "we can always buy a second copy." It was signed simply with the first name of the librarian, no title. I experienced similarly warm, "personal" attention from the porters and staff at the less deluxe college where I was renting a room. I'd booked it online, and it was nothing fancy, but, for example, when I asked at the college "lodge" (the porters' office and mail room) about laundry, three staff members joined the conversation: how to find the room, what to do if my card key didn't work, how to negotiate the light. I had numerous experiences like this, and they made me genuinely comfortable. It felt like a form of familiarity, an unsettling sensation exactly cognate with sentimental fantasies about servitude. The complex interweaving of orders of interaction with material imperatives and inequalities presented itself as an experience

of being included, the pleasure of that, and the fear or shame of being excluded: each of these vivid feelings arose at different moments.

The sharply distinct texture of my experiences moving around Oxford—trying to access things as, respectively, a tourist, a researcher from another university, a member of the Tolkien Society, a guest of Taruithorn—reminded me vividly of one of the most famous documents of Marxian ideology critique, Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.” “Ideological” state apparatuses are modalities of civil society that exercise power primarily through ideological means, as opposed to “repressive state apparatuses”—“the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc.”—that function primarily through violence. The ideological state apparatus that Althusser sees as “dominant” in “mature capitalist social formations” is education (142-7). For Althusser, the self and its thoughts are conjured into being by ideology, an extremely large and various set of practices—not ideas, but practices—that structure the everyday world. He calls the instantaneous, impossible-to-refuse process by which ideology produces the subject “interpellation.” In his most famous analogy, he says that “the very precise operation that we call interpellation or hailing... can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace, everyday hailing, by (or not by) the police: ‘Hey, you there!’” (190). When the person we imagine being hailed (in the “theoretical scene”) turns around, “he becomes a subject ... because he has recognized that the hail ‘really’ was addressed to him and that ‘it really was he who was hailed’ (not someone else)” (191).

Although this concept had long been familiar to me, I never experienced the phenomenon as sharply and acutely as when moving between the identities of tourist,

scholar, and guest (of a student, of a recognized organization, of a Fellow of the college) at Oxford. I was conscious of being hailed by Oxford University, hailed differentially, in all these different identities, in part because I was conscious of a space that is extravagantly marked off by money, power, customs designed to demarcate both ethics (honesty, respect) and hierarchy (class, authority, race, gender). I *jumped* when I heard the porter's voice addressing me as I went in the gate to Christ Church on the Merton side—the less trafficked gate to which the porter of the main gate had referred me on my first day. I turned; I reached for my bag, for my ID, and began to explain who I was. But he just smiled at me and said, “I was just saying ‘good morning.’” He was an older black man with a slight West Indian accent; we recognized and interpellated each other as subjects of the University of Oxford, and we were content.

### ***Hammond and Scull and the lecture with no habitus***

The relationship between orders of engagement with Tolkien and the University crystallized for me through a talk given at Exeter College by Wayne Hammond and Christina Scull, which I attended as a guest of members of Taruithorn. The characteristics I described with regard to Tolkien studies generally—the continuum between academics and fans, with many points in between all communicating with each other—creates the context for understanding Hammond and Scull. The collision between the Tolkien Society's understanding of academic work and the collegiate culture of Oxford created a striking scene. Hammond and Scull are

the authors and editors of numerous Tolkien materials and have been extensively cited in this dissertation: they are also, in many ways, products of the Tolkien Society.

In 1992, when the Tolkien Society and the Mythopoeic Society jointly sponsored their centenary celebration of Tolkien, planning began years in advance. The planning committee published a small journal documenting their progress, *A Long-expected Party* (the title of the first chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*); I read through the six issues in the British Library (Long-expected Party Organisation). The small-format stapled zine was produced, the first issue reports, on a borrowed computer; the contents of the first volume are presented in Courier, marking the anxious transition from the typewriter. The timing of the conference meant that the Tolkien Society was excited to welcome participants from the former Soviet Union, still extant when Russian fans announced they were coming but dissolved six months before the event.

Attendees ran the gamut of people mentioned in this dissertation (or if not mentioned, consulted and studied): Priscilla and Christopher Tolkien, Rayner Unwin (as well as representatives of HarperCollins, which had recently acquired Unwin Hyman), Owen Barfield (perhaps the last living member of the core group of the Inklings), George Sayer (a friend of Tolkien's, partly remembered for having introduced Tolkien to the tape recorder in the 1950s), Tom Shippey, Verlyn Flieger, Jane Chance, and other notable Tolkien scholars, John D. Rateliff (the prolific independent scholar who edited, and wrote the commentary for, the 2007 *History of The Hobbit*), Rob Inglis (the actor who staged one-man performances of the books in the 1970s and 80s and recorded the only audiobook version), Brian Sibley, Vera

Chapman, Glen GoodKnight (the Los Angeles fan who founded the Mythopoeic Society in the late sixties), Nancy Martsch (the founder of the MENSA Tolkien group and editor of *Beyond Bree*, a monthly newsletter founded in 1981 and considered a “journal of record” in Tolkien fandom), Gary Hunnewell (who created bibliographies of early Tolkien fanworks), René van Rossenberg, Wayne Hammond, and stalwarts of the Tolkien Society such as David Doughan, Charles Noad, Pat Reynolds, and Jessica Yates (GoodKnight and Reynolds; John D Rateliff; Martinez; “Beyond Bree”). Christopher Tolkien’s *History of Middle-earth* was still being published; volume IX, *Sauron Defeated*, which includes the time-travel narrative *The Notion Club Papers* and the “Númenorean” *Drowning of Anadûnê*, came out the same year (Tolkien and Tolkien). This volume, like others in the series, gives prominent notice to fan scholars whose labor was important to completing it: Charles Noad, who proofread and checked citations, and Taum Santoski, to whom the volume is dedicated, a young fan who worked days in the archive at Marquette while, according to one person I talked with, working nights at a local bar to support himself.<sup>68</sup>

The event was a week long, with several days of papers, evening programming including a performance by Inglis, characteristic Tolkien Society events like the Banquet with awards, a day trip to Birmingham and Sarehole, a memorial service in a university chapel, a masquerade, and finishing with Enyalië. Programming, though it

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<sup>68</sup> Santoski died the previous year, at 32. Christopher Tolkien recognizes his “long labor in the ordering and preparation of the manuscripts ... a labor which despite grave and worsening illness he drove himself to complete” (Tolkien and Tolkien x). If it’s true that he was employed at a bar in the U.S., I wonder whether Santoski, essential to the project, had health insurance. For information on Santoski’s life and thinking, see the blog of his close friend John D. Rateliff, who, like Santoski, moved to Milwaukee for proximity to Tolkien’s manuscripts, but who completed a Ph.D. at Marquette and had paid work as an author and game designer while working with them. There’s a nice remembrance of Santoski in an interview with Rateliff (Martinez); particularly interesting are Santoski’s “aphorisms” about fantasy, reproduced in Rateliff’s blog (John D. Rateliff).

included academic papers, also included things like filking, costumes, fannish talks, an art show (member works included), and a dealers' room for "second-hand books (for new books Oxford has many bookshops), Tolkien-inspired commercial artwork, Celtic-designed items, etc." (Long-expected Party Organisation). Like the 2018 Oxonmoot, it was coordinated with a Bodleian exhibition of Tolkien's artwork/.

The Chair of the planning committee was Christina Scull. The first issue of *A Long-expected Party* includes brief biographies from the committee members. Scull had worked for many years as Librarian at the Sloane Museum (a "house museum" in London, preserving the home and collection of a neoclassical architect). In her biography, she wrote that she first read *The Lord of the Rings* as a schoolgirl, as each volume came out, and had a large collection of "books, articles, and clippings." She said that she joined the Tolkien Society in 1981 and had served as Society archivist since 1987 (Long-expected Party Organisation).<sup>69</sup> Wayne Hammond, meanwhile, who is American, was and is a rare books librarian at Williams College in Massachusetts. Although he was not in the U.K. to participate in the years-long process of planning the Centenary, records in the Tolkien Society archive show that he had corresponded steadily with the Society since at least 1980, when he was doing the preliminary work for his *Descriptive Bibliography*, first published in 1993 (Hammond, *Letters*), and he was in close contact with Charles Noad and Jessica Yates (Hammond, *Letters*; Yates). The first page of text in the *Bibliography* is a four-paragraph blurb on the Tolkien

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<sup>69</sup> In her remarks from the front of the *Proceedings*, Scull mentions attending two "Hobbitons" in Italy in the interim; these events were the inheritors of Il Campo Hobbit, organized by neofascists, including Pino Rauti, in 1977 and successive years under the heading of "Traditionalism" but, for example, including security under red, white, and black flags of the Celtic Cross; video of the first of these is available online (Ignazi; Muzyka WłoskiejPrawicy).

Society, and the acknowledgments are brimming with familiar characters, including “Douglas Anderson, a bookseller in Ithaca, New York.”<sup>70</sup> Wayne Hammond, the bibliographer, and Christina Scull, the Planning Committee chair, announced that they were engaged to be married at the closing ceremony of the Centenary (GoodKnight and Reynolds).

“Wayne and Christina,” as they are invariably known by long-time Society members, are professional bibliographers and academic-adjacent writers and editors. They have spent decades in Tolkien’s papers; they are well-known to all the archivists I worked with and have been hired over and over by Tolkien’s publishers to prepare materials for publication. Extreme, even fanatical care is reflected in their work, which has included preparing the index to Tolkien’s *Letters*, the multiple volumes they have edited of his artwork, their work on the text of *The Lord of the Rings* (they edited the fiftieth anniversary edition, and its sequels, for HarperCollins), the detailed bibliography, an extensive blog, and the now three-volume *Reader’s Companion and Guide* (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*; Hammond, *J. R. R. Tolkien*; Hammond and Scull, *The Art of the Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien*; Hammond and Scull, *The Art of The Lord of the Rings by J.R.R. Tolkien*; Hammond and Scull, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Artist & Illustrator*; Hammond and Scull, “Too Many Books and Never Enough”; Hammond and Scull, *The J. R. R. Tolkien Companion & Guide*). The last includes a *Chronology* which microscopically details Tolkien’s activities, attempting to show what he did on

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<sup>70</sup> Anderson, another highly accomplished, life-long independent Tolkien scholar, years ago founded and managed a bookstore that eventually became Colophon Books on Aurora Street, in which he ran a popular study group and sold what the store billed as the largest assortment of Tolkien-related books in North America; the store was still maintained by his former partner, whom I interviewed when I moved to Ithaca, though it closed in 2017 (Kline; Hammond, *J. R. R. Tolkien*).

virtually every day of his life (went to meeting with X in morning, beer with Lewis afternoon, marked exams, and so on.) It is crammed with useful material such as long quotations from previously unpublished letters.

Such projects seem to assume that the disposition and methods of their work will mirror the intellectual values and priorities of other scholars. But—in a sense like *The Lord of the Rings*, which Tolkien frequently worried was being *taken the wrong way*—their approach is functionally ecumenical. The exhaustive detail and apparent endlessness of Hammond and Scull's labor honors by emulating the patterns of Tolkien's own life, the orientation toward detail, the extremely long commitment to a single project of contested value, even the habitual tone of grievance, complaint, and affront, which can be seen in some of the *Companion* articles and more often on the blog. They are, however, comparatively uninterested in making arguments, aside from taking offense at depredations like Wollheim's 1965 edition. There is no need to take issue with their readings, because in an important sense they make none, except for the grand, implicit positivism that guides all their work.

Their talk was attended, at Exeter, by a singular mix of people: medievalists, fellows in other fields, the Rector of the College, students, fans, and curious members of the public. And the mix of attendees, as well as the speakers themselves, were not all at the same event. The speakers belonged to the autodidact populist tradition of Tolkien studies, which emanates from Tolkien himself, both a prestige academic and a creator of mass culture. If I attended a talk by a visiting speaker at my home university, even if the speaker was not herself a university professor, I would still have a good idea of what to expect. The audience for a Tolkien-related talk might, if it were

well-attended, include a few people from English and a few from Comp Lit, a few medievalists and a few modernists, a few grad students, one or two emeritus faculty, and possibly a handful of undergraduates or even one or two members of the general public. Those attending would, of course, all bring different intellectual priorities and different knowledge to the room, but almost all would share a *habitus*, a set of expectations about what kinds of questions should be asked, who should ask them, and in what manner. We would share a sense of how the stakes of the lecture might be defined, how the world the participants belong to is structured, what counts as prestige, respect, or politeness. We might disagree about whether the talk is interesting or impressive, but we would be able to compare our impressions. The talk at Exeter was not like that.

I had arrived at Exeter early. A Taruithorn contact who is a member of the College had offered me a tour, as it was Tolkien's undergraduate college. His comments on the buildings in relation to Tolkien was well-informed. Though it contained some familiar elements, such as Tolkien's detestation of the Radcliffe Observatory, they were rendered vivid by the setting: the Observatory looms over Exeter's beautiful quadrangle, and it was spring. We met up with the "Mouth of Sauron" and proceeded to the "Saskatchewan Room" for the talk, the "first Rector's Seminar of Trinity Term." Rectors' seminars, my guides explained, are programs of general interest for the benefit of College; Exeter sought to promote and celebrate its connection with Tolkien.

The room, a smallish lecture room with raked seating, was quite full. At the back of the room, two large tables exhibited items from the College's archive,

including documents with Tolkien's signature and photographs in which he appears, many of which I had seen reproduced. Every item had a small label. I snapped some photos on my phone, and was warned off—earnestly, stressfully—by the archivist, who was standing guard. I wrote in my notebook, “There's always a *problem* with things related to Tolkien. Happened at the AGM, at Marquette, at Exeter. Extreme contrast with ChCh and the library there.” “AGM” and “Marquette” referred to earlier experiences I had had where, close to objects with some relationship to Tolkien, ranging from his own notes or drawings to things quite far removed from him, a vigilant guardianship was enacted around them, prophylactically.

This gatekeeping obviously stems in part from their commercial value, and thus seemed odd at an academic talk (as was my impulse to take photographs), but what interested me was the manner of the prohibition, and what it does and doesn't resemble. In every context, it was framed—and, I believe, authentically experienced—as a question of “privacy.” Insisting on privacy in this way is overtly an assertion of hierarchy, order, obedience, property, ownership. And yet, by the same gesture, the relationship is constructed as personal; the need for privacy is a personal need, the protection is extended for the feelings of those concerned. The enforcement of property (as in the valuable material property of Exeter College or Marquette University) and the assertion of a protective, quasi-familial relationship with the author are one and the same. Hence my note about the contrast with the Christ Church college library, where the injunctions and hospitality are also “personal,” but the signals point in the opposite direction: no security, no property, when spectacularly surrounded by it.

The Rector began the event in an American accent: “Today we are privileged... .” My Taruithorn friends explained that he had been hired away from an administrative position in the U.S.. He made a statement about Exeter’s Tolkien connection. “Pertinent material pulled by their archivist was on display in the back of the hall.” He then celebrated Exeter’s connection with Williams College, where Hammond works: a “thirty-year alliance” illustrated by undergraduate exchanges. Thus, he said, “We could hardly have speakers better qualified.” He didn’t say for what.

Christina Scull, who is English, has an upper-class accent and spoke in the language of the collector and curator, of provenance, authenticity, forensic detail. Hammond is a tiny American nerd, slim, bespectacled, wearing a beautiful suit. Both referenced their undergraduate study of art history. Their careers as editors and authors of official or semi-official Tolkien works, Hammond explained, began when Christopher Tolkien invited them to write about Tolkien’s visual art. But, he said, “before we became Tolkien scholars, we were fans. And we are still fans.” Scull’s talk was entitled “Natural Growth: The Evolution of *The Lord of the Rings*”; Hammond’s was “Editing Tolkien.” They took turns speaking and moved through a number of topics of habitual interest to Tolkien Society-types: anecdotes about the process of composition of *The Lord of the Rings* and first intentions that were later changed; their fear of offending the Tolkien Estate through editorial decisions.

An example of the narrative about composition is the late introduction into the novel of Sam, who appears, Scull said, “fully formed.” She quoted Tolkien’s well-known remarks on how Sam echoes the privates and “bat men” of 1916, who were “so

far superior to myself” (Carpenter, *Tolkien* 89). Stories like these belong to the catechism of her subculture; they don’t say what she thinks they say, don’t signal what she wants to signal. The disconnect between her rhapsodic, unanalyzed reporting—of Tolkien’s sentimental condescension, of Sam as a figure of abjection—and the academic setting and audience was not lost on my friends from Taruithorn; a feeling of mild hilarity set in quite quickly. Hammond described, at length, debates over a comma and other textual minutiae in the fiftieth-anniversary edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, and bemoaned the “harsh criticism” they received from other fan-scholars in response to some of their editorial decisions. Solemnly, he explained that they treated the discovery of Tolkien’s *intent* as their guide throughout this mammoth project. They moved deliberately through their topics: composition, editing, artwork, the *Companion*, the printing history of *The Lord of the Rings*, the “controversies” that followed their edition. They were in constant conversation with Tolkien’s orientation toward detail, indefatigable, like him, in the pursuit of “error,” citing Tolkien’s “obsession with accuracy” as reflected in his own work, not only in publishing his own fiction but as an editor of medieval texts (*Sir Gawain*, with E. V. Gordon, in 1925; *Ancrene Wyses*, published 1960). With regard to *The Lord of the Rings*, they quoted Rayner Unwin saying it was going to take three centuries to get the text right. They talked for at least an hour. The Rector kept falling asleep, and the Mouth of Sauron made me aware of this by taking my pen and writing “look at the Rector” in my notebook.

When the questions began, the mismatched composition of the audience became apparent. It had already been prefigured in the odd remarks of the Rector,

whose job involves business more than scholarship, but the divide I sensed in the room as Hammond and Scull spoke surfaced in the questions. A medievalist, evidently a don, tried to connect Hammond's discussion of editing Tolkien to Tolkien's own work on the *Ancrene Wyses* and the debates he grappled with. In the long term, she pointed out, it was perfectly possible to make a facsimile, sidestepping editorial debates and making the source widely available. Why not do the same with *The Lord of the Rings*? Why attempt a flawless text? The question didn't seem to register clearly for the speakers; they moved on quickly. Another faculty member responded to their assertion that Book I of *The Lord of the Rings* is often disliked, generally considered not as good as the rest of the novel. His students, he says, disagree: they *only* like the beginning. I understand this sentiment: Book I comes the closest to conventional novelistic discourse of any portion of the book; it's the most interested in everyday life, the least infatuated with aristocracy and race, the least grandiose. The instructor's question explicitly flagged the mismatch in the room: you, Hammond and Scull, think this is common knowledge, but my students think the opposite; what do you make of this? But, again, they didn't seem able to process the question, let alone answer it: habitually accustomed to being experts supplying knowledge, they were unable even to recognize a cue to engage in an intellectually meaningful dialogue.

Finally, an emeritus Professor of the college, spoken to with great solicitude by the Rector, held forth with great authority on a topic Hammond and Scull *were* prepared for, part of the apocryphal store of "common knowledge." They were unprepared, however, for the social-material dimensions of the event. The emeritus Professor, apparently a distinguished scientist, seemed to be slightly inebriated.

“Wasn’t it written in a pub?” he asked, loudly and rhetorically. “The ‘Bird and Baby.’ And if it *was* written in a pub, that would explain a *lot*.” The room laughed supportively. This sort of thing was appropriate, affirmed the nature of the Rector’s Seminar, the College hierarchy, the lore of Tolkien, Oxford. Hammond and Scull, of course, understand their duty clearly within the norms of Tolkien scholarship, in the tradition of the Tolkien Society where they met and were nurtured. They attempted to set the record straight: it was *not* written in a pub; the Inklings only met at the pub periodically, and no writing was done there. But the Professor doubled down, refusing their *habitus*, refusing the mode of Tolkien fan-scholarship: *The Lord of the Rings* was *certainly* written in a pub, he repeated, as oblivious to them as they were to the medievalist or the Tolkien-instructor. The Rector milked the exchange for touristic references: the pub is right up the road! Tolkien’s career became a series of spatial movements that could be reproduced by an energetic walker—college to college, house to pub, rather than language to story, war to marriage. The Rector treated the most senior member of the College present with deference: this is the stuff an Oxford college is made of. He did not register his expert guests’ absolute disapproval of the ridiculous story. He closed by saying, about Tolkien, in his North American accent, “We treasure that we had a student who attained such fame.” About Hammond and Scull, “We owe them a hearty vote of thanks.” We clapped.

On the one hand, Wayne Hammond and Christina Scull, the champions of Tolkien biographical and bibliographical scholarship, friends of the Tolkien family and stars of the Tolkien Society in years past, had not understood questions from sympathetic inheritors of Tolkien’s role at Oxford. They were, moreover, unsuccessful

in framing the value of their own work in a way that could unite the room, as useful as their work is. This was in spite of the fact that they had addressed their own reception; they had worried repeatedly about the pushback they got, from the stew of fans and scholars and roles between, on the anniversary edition. There was a conversation to be had: the medievalist had a useful suggestion, framed in a friendly way, for how to approach the complexity of Tolkien's Middle-earth materials. She had understood how confusing, how overwhelming they are. But the possibility of give and take, of discussion, hadn't registered; they were there to supply information and to be either admired or criticized.

On the other hand, one might ask what they were doing in that position. What brings them to that room to give an academic talk, addressed academically by university scholars? It's not that their work doesn't interest any scholars; it does. But the avenue by which they came to that room does not pass through academia. And the room itself, mixing senior faculty (asking about editorial philosophy and taste), graduate students (passing notes, going for a cheap beer in the basement afterwards), fans (asking about the Bird and Baby), and administrators ("treasuring" students who "achieved such fame"), all of whom have an interest in Hammond and Scull's work, lacked a shared method or style: even the most transparent and ordinary gestures seemed opaque. Providing an avenue for popular literary scholarship, Tolkien's mass cultural stature, here tasked with plumping the fungible cultural capital of Exeter College, reveals the lack of monopoly power over literacy. All kinds of people consume stories and do research; for the time being, anyway, they use literate, formally educated skills to do so. And the culture industry aspect of the project,

intersecting with Tolkien's career as an elite scholar at a hyper-elite institution, throws open the doors and smashes the norms.

## CHAPTER 5

### HOMESICK

The following chapter concerns film versions of *The Lord of the Rings* and the research I did in and about Aotearoa New Zealand. The type of fandom it engages differs sharply from the groups I worked with in England, the Tolkien Society and Taruithorn. In New Zealand, I traveled with fan tourists whose principal investment was in movies rather than books, and I talked with fan-tourism industry workers and others to understand what New Zealand could reveal about *The Lord of the Rings* in the contemporary world. Even though the fan practices, the setting, and the object of fannish attention differed from what I had looked at in England, I found a number of continuities as well as important differences. I argue that the logic of fan tourism around the film reproduces an essential structure found in both the Tolkien Society and the fanzines of the 1960s, namely their reflexivity, their tendency to turn away from the content of Middle-earth and toward, in this case, the making of the films and the position (quite literally, in the case of tourism) of the fan. I tie this to parallels between the apparatus around the films—the structure of the “Extended Editions,” with their abundant documentaries—and the apparatus around the novel, which the Extended Editions deliberately echo. As with many phenomena related to *The Lord of the Rings*, including the fandom of the sixties and the aesthetics of Led Zeppelin, I find that scale becomes a crucial issue, in conversation with the global context that has always been constitutive of “New Zealand.” At the same time, however, I describe

ways in which the atmosphere in and history of Aotearoa New Zealand suggest a sense of instability and pervasive anxiety. The fan culture I encountered there shows greater atomization than either the fanzine culture of the sixties or the fan groups I studied in the U.K..

The chapter is divided roughly in thirds. The opening portion concerns Peter Jackson's film, with some history of film adaptation in relation to the text. The middle section concerns the country of Aotearoa New Zealand and combines personal impressions with findings from historians and scholars. The final third gives a purposely subjective account of my month in New Zealand as a Tolkien tourist.

### ***No Monroe in Lothlorien!***

Fanzines discussed the possibility of a film adaptation from the moment they started discussing *The Lord of the Rings*. A British fan named Arthur Weir and known in fandom as "Doc" made a particular splash with a clever, speculative piece in the British fanzine *Triode* called "No Monroe in Lothlorien!" in 1960, on the hazards and opportunities Hollywood might present for Tolkien's novel, and it was reprinted in *i-Palantir* soon after (Weir). Oddly enough, this fannish hobby of speculating about a possible film spilled over into Tolkien's life and helped shaped the initial framework for media development. In a somewhat misunderstood episode described in his letters, Tolkien was visited at home by at least one of the most important figures in the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society in 1957. That summer Worldcon was, for the first

time, held in London (Loncon I), and Tolkien had visited the convention to accept a prize for *The Lord of the Rings*. He wrote about the subsequent visit to Christopher:

A back-wash from the Convention was a visit from an American film-agent ... who drove all the way out in a taxi from London to see me last week, filling 76 S [his home address] with strange men and stranger women—I thought the taxi would never stop disgorging. But this Mr Ackerman brought some really astonishingly good pictures (Rackham rather than Disney) and some remarkable colour photographs. They have apparently toured America shooting mountain and desert scenes that seem to fit the story. The Story Line or Scenario was, however, on a lower level. In fact bad. But it looks as if business might be done. Stanley U. & I have agreed on our policy: Art or Cash. Either very profitable terms indeed; or absolute author's veto on objectionable features or alterations.  
(Tolkien, *Letters* 261)

In fact, “this Mr Ackerman” was Forrest J. (Forry) Ackerman, a legendary figure in science fiction fandom and B-movies. Like Wollheim, who was rumored to detest him, Ackerman had been one of the two hundred-odd participants in the first ever Worldcon in 1939, and he was one of the key figures in the development of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Association in the fifties (“LASFS Home Page”). This was the group that included, in its younger generation, Ted Johnstone, Bruce Pelz, and Bjo Trimble.

Best known for his magazine *Famous Monsters of Filmland* (1958-1983), for which he was writer and editor, Ackerman wrote and published scores of magazines and books, acted, worked as an agent for writers in Hollywood, and more (Hain). He was also a famous collector of props, costumes, film, and writings, and kept a kind of museum at his home in Hollywood, the “Ackermansion,” which he routinely opened to fellow fans and associates from the business. Peter Jackson, who was an avid reader of *Famous Monsters*, bought dinosaur models from the original *King Kong* from him

(Sibley, *Peter Jackson*). As an actor, he appeared in close to a hundred monster movies, higher profile ones (including the video for Michael Jackson's "Thriller") as his legend grew in later decades; his career thus overlapped and even intersected (they appeared in at least two films together) with that of Christopher Lee, who plays Saruman in Jackson's film. In addition to his collecting and acting, Ackerman was an early, ardent enthusiast of what would be now be called "cosplay," frequently appearing at conventions in costume as early as the thirties (Painter 38). He intersects across numerous biographies in this project—he appears as a character under his own name, for example, in one of David McDaniel (Ted Johnstone)'s *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* novels (Painter 77).<sup>71</sup>

By the late sixties, fannish attention of more disparate types was drawn to the idea of a *Lord of the Rings* film. Apple Films toyed with the idea of adapting it with the Beatles as leads. Kristin Thompson says they approached directors including David Lean, Stanley Kubrick, and Michaelangelo Antonioni about directing it (K. Thompson 19). Tolkien finally signed a contract selling film rights to United Artists in 1969, for a mere £100,000. In 1976, the rights were purchased by Saul Zaentz, a record producer who had moved into film in the early seventies and had produced an

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<sup>71</sup> Less famously, Ackerman is rumored to have written "the first lesbian science fiction story" in the forties, eventually published as "The Radclyffe Effect" in 1969 (Billows 4), and, like Marion Zimmer Bradley, he contributed to queer publications in the 1940s and '50s, including *Vice Versa* and *The Ladder* (Valentine; Ackerman, "The Hallowe'en Spirit"). I suspected, at first, that Ackerman might have been a trans man, given that some materials I saw mentioned rumors of "perversion." Among his dozens of pseudonyms—"4e," "Spencer Strong," "Jacques deforest Erman," "Fisher Trentworth," "Morris & Norris Chapnick," "Clair Holding," "Katarin Markov Merrit," "Erdstelulov," "Claire Voyant," "Stone T. Farmington," "Laurajean Ermayne"—nearly a third seem to be women's names (Billows 4). He is reported to have "dreaded" being drafted in WWII, and secured a position on an army newspaper in L.A. by enlisting voluntarily (Painter 27). The accusations that dogged him, however, often seem to have focused on child pornography and sexual harassment, and in 2018 he was accused of assault under the #metoo tag ("Forrest J Ackerman's #MeToo Moment ..."). (For more on Ackerman, see Painter; Stephen King; Ackerman, *Forrest J. Ackerman, Famous Monster of Filmland*; Billows; "Forrest J Ackerman").

Academy Best Picture, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, in 1975. Zaentz produced Ralph Bakshi's 1978 animated feature *The Lord of the Rings*, intended to be part one of two. After struggles over costs and Zaentz's assessment that the film was unlikely to succeed, the producers decided not to make part two and moreover insisted on releasing part one without labelling it "Part One." Since the story is obviously unfinished, viewers were dismayed; indeed, it's quite a difficult film to follow if you don't already know the book. Calling it a "critical and commercial failure," however, as Thompson does repeatedly, is an exaggeration, overlooking its moderate box office success and its design strengths. The film cost about \$7-8 million to make and took in \$27-30 million ("The Lord of the Rings (1978) - Financial Information"; "The Lord of the Rings (1978)"; Kilday). It was an ambitious undertaking with an interesting aesthetic.

Bakshi was the pioneer of "adult animation" whose *Fritz the Cat* (1972) had been the first animated film to receive an "X" rating. Born in the Jewish settlement in Palestine in 1938, he had come to the U.S. with his family as a baby and grown up in a black neighborhood near CIA headquarters in Washington D.C., reading *The Lord of the Rings* when it first came out in the fifties and remaining an ardent fan for decades (P.; Robinson; Kampel). When he got the chance to do a film version in the seventies, Bakshi wanted Led Zeppelin for the soundtrack, though he couldn't afford them, and the best parts of the film have an stoner menace that would have suited Zep well (P.; Gibson and McDonnell). The screenplay was written by Beagle, author of the Ballantine blurb, a good example of the interaction between consolidation and proliferation in fan-professional-commercial relationships around Tolkien. Beagle,

after all, was not a Hollywood screenwriter but a fantasy novelist, just as John Howe and Alan Lee, who were the chief designers of Peter Jackson's film, were illustrators and Tolkien fans whom Jackson discovered through products from the publishing industry—ordered, according to Kristin Thompson, from René van Rossenberg (Thompson 86).

Unlike Jackson, who began work on *The Lord of the Rings* by hiring its two most famous illustrators, Bakshi has denied consulting Tolkien illustrations for reference.<sup>72</sup> Overall, his film downplays sentiment in favor of trying to capture the creepiness in the novel, the ominous, immaterial threat running from Gandalf's warnings about "the shadow on the border of old stories" that has "returned to Mordor" right through to when Frodo, "at the very Crack of Doom," suddenly goes rigid "as if he had been turned to stone" (I.ii.49; VI.iii.945). The Black Riders and orcs appear uncanny in Bakshi's rendering, which was achieved by putting live action footage, shot on bleak landscapes and castles in Spain, through an updated rotoscoping process (Gibson and McDonnell; Kilday). The Black Riders and orcs are more vivid than the heroes in Bakshi's treatment, literally appearing as a different order of being, with photographic details missing from the protagonists. The heroic characters appear more conventionally cartoonish, though they are still rotoscoped, and this contrast intensifies the trippy horror of the antagonists. The film comes alive when threats approach and has a melancholy, dangerous air, more so than Jackson's film, in which

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<sup>72</sup> Bakshi has pointed out to the press that "Jackson had me to look at," and believably suggests that he inspired the composition of a number of shots. He seems a bit miffed about it, telling more than one journalist that "I didn't get so much as a bottle of wine" (Champion; Susan King).

the hobbits appear so overpoweringly robust that it can be hard to see why a creep on a horse or a story about “Morrrrdorrr” scares them so much.

### ***The biggest home movies in the world***

This is not to suggest that I don't appreciate Peter Jackson's film. The 2001-03 sequence was on a different order of magnitude than any media adaptation ever made of Tolkien's novel. It coincided with (and capitalized on, literally) the explosion of fan activity and visibility made possible by the internet, and good deal of scholarship has been published about it, including both media industry and fan studies. I make three points about the film franchise below, and they require several pages of discussion. First, I give a brief overview of their creation, including business permutations that shaped them and descriptions of the nature of production, relying mostly on a combination of Kristin Thompson's *The Frodo Franchise*,<sup>73</sup> the “making-of” documentaries provided by the filmmakers, and things I learned on the many tours I took in New Zealand. Second, I comment on the films' use of racialization. Like the business and film history, this has been thoroughly examined by other scholars, but it's important to note because of the way it positions them in relation to the history of *The Lord of the Rings* as a whole. Finally, I comment on few features of the films: the national signals of the project, the existence of the “extended editions,” and the emphasis on “scale” in these materials.

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<sup>73</sup> Among works on the film series, Kristin Thompson's *The Frodo Franchise* (2007) stands out as the most thoroughly researched and reliable history, not only of what happened in the business around the trilogy but of how it exploited and intersected with fan activity, which she documents with care. My history of business decisions leading to the production relies primarily on her book.

Tolkien and his publishers believed the novel to be unfilmable, and it was, right up until it wasn't. Even then, it only became possible because it was created in an unusual way, by a relatively inexperienced director, in a remote country with few unions and relatively few stars in the cast, with the backing of a studio willing to have all three films shot and in production at the same time, and with exceptional commitment by the director, an enormous crew, and the government of New Zealand. The romance of (apparently) unalienated labor around the film became an object of fascination in its own right.

The opening to do the film came when, in 1996, Harvey Weinstein and his company Miramax, coming off a string of commercial hits with art house patina, took over the original *Lord of the Rings* contract from Saul Zaentz. Peter Jackson, only about 35 at the time, was an autodidact New Zealand director best known at home for splatter films like *Bad Taste* (1987) and *Braindead* (1992), though he had worked in Hollywood and gained international recognition for his New Zealand film *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), which was nominated for an Oscar. He had read *The Lord of the Rings* as a teenager, in an edition with Ralph Bakshi covers, and had the idea that the New Zealand landscape would work for a film; he was also developing effects and design facilities with his partners in Wellington, particularly Richard Taylor. After a complicated negotiation in which several studios were offering him different projects, Weinstein hired him to direct *The Lord of the Rings* as a two-film series made in New Zealand (K. Thompson 23). Jackson and his team (including three Wellington companies in which he was a partner) did eighteen months of preproduction work financed by Miramax, during which they worked on design, created models, did

research and development for special effects, and built capacity. He hired Alan Lee and John Howe to provide conceptual leadership on design, and Jackson, his wife Fran Walsh, and Philippa Boyens—a New Zealand writer and serious Tolkien fan—wrote screenplays.

While this was happening, however, Disney bought Miramax, and Michael Eisner personally nixed the idea of multiple films. Weinstein tried to force Jackson to make the whole thing as one film, and then, when Jackson said he wouldn't do it (a risk given his novice position in the business), gave him what Weinstein thought was an impossible option: three weeks to find a buyer who would recompense Miramax the \$12 million they had spent and moreover guarantee the Weinstein brothers and Saul Zaentz each \$5 million of the final gross.<sup>74</sup> Jackson put together a twenty-five minute pitch film using materials that they had created so far, took it to exactly one meeting in Hollywood, and secured exactly one buyer on Weinstein's terms. This was Bob Shaye, at New Line, who (famously, immediately) agreed not only to two films but three, just as "Tolkien" (or rather Unwin) had already divided the book.<sup>75</sup> Even after so many years as a mainstay of mass culture, *The Lord of the Rings* only secured the capital required to film it—I have seen estimates from \$280 to \$350 million—because Jackson had the full package, including New Zealand discounts supplied by

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<sup>74</sup> Thompson quotes Jackson and Boyens saying that Weinstein, worried by the budget, kept proposing killing off Hobbits to save money (K. Thompson 25). Mark Ordesky, the young head of New Line's art house branch Fine Line, became executive producer: in the credits, Harvey and Bob Weinstein are also listed as executive producers, but a background cartoon shows a small, slim figure battling two large trolls (illustration Thompson 36.)

<sup>75</sup> It's worth noting that both New Line and Miramax were companies run by the people who had founded them. Bob Shaye had founded New Line as a tiny distribution company supplying films to college campuses in 1967, the same year United Artists first approached Unwin for the rights to *The Lord of the Rings*. One of Shaye's first successes was the re-release of *Reefer Madness* in the early 70s. By 1998, he had several major successes, which meant franchises—including the *Nightmare on Elm Street* films and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, with all its tie-ins—but no true mass culture titan.

favorable exchange rates, non-unionized labor, and shooting all the films at once. He came into the meeting with the resources to produce the film for \$300 million instead of \$600 or \$700, a convincing stable of talent, and a setting.

Thompson, whose interest in the film centers on the phenomenon of the “franchise” that dominates contemporary Hollywood and the fact that most of the profits from *The Lord of the Rings* took the form of ancillary licensing and materials, notes that one of the points Jackson made in his pitch film concerned the vast, longstanding network of epiphenomena that justified exploding the level of capitalization attached to the story:

It’s been around for 45 years [he told them]. There’s a huge amount of visual material available. There’s books, there’s calendars, posters. In fact, this is a case where the merchandising has preceded the film by 30 or 40 years. (K. Thompson 12)

Jackson’s comments suggest something like what had happened with science fiction fandom and the transition to paperback, this time framed as if HarperCollins, by licensing calendars, had created “merchandising” instead of capturing the market-indifferent work of fans. The equivocation—thirty *or* forty years—and the term “merchandising” obscure the majority of the labor that made the project possible. As scores of commentators have observed, *The Lord of the Rings* is “more than a novel.” It takes nothing away from Tolkien’s work to observe that the title names a cultural space filled with the works and imaginings of thousands, then millions, of fans, antifans, and “derivative” creators, operating in spaces it suggested or simply gave names.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Thompson documents the film companies’ “cooperation” with fan labor in the era of Jackson’s films, exactly the moment when fan sites became enormous online gathering places. She has a robust

New Line agreed to shoot all three films simultaneously, which was seen as a risk but, as Thompson points out, saved immense amounts of time and money. Doing this required tremendous commitment from everyone who worked on the films. Principal photography took fifteen months, from October 1999 through December 2000. Principal photography, however, was only one part of a seven-year project, including over six years for John Howe and Alan Lee and over two years for the composer, Howard Shore, when film composers normally work for six to eight weeks.<sup>77</sup> The films were released each December in 2001, 2002, and 2003, and each year, in the following summer, an “Extended Edition” of the previous year’s film was released in a DVD boxed set, integrating a full hour of additional material into each film and adding dozens of hours of documentaries and commentary. Jackson, Thompson says, saw *The Lord of the Rings* as one long (twelve hour) film, in three sections; certainly the story is incomplete unless all three are consumed, but this was in marked contrast to other franchise models.

Promotional materials about production, echoing Jackson’s philosophical directives, focused on its “realism.” They hired experts on Elvish and dialect coaches, sword fighting choreographers and martial artists, jewelers, potters, craftspeople specializing in weapons and armor. The crew constructed Hobbiton a year ahead of filming so that the gardens they planted would have time to grow properly and look

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understanding of the role of online fandom in building the franchise character of the film, but she seems almost incurious about the logic of this relationship in philosophical or ethical terms. This may be the price of admission for a study of this type, which depends on scores of interviews, often with powerful or famous people, business people. At the same time, she documents extensive fan activity as a part of the complex she describes; as such, her book might be seen as a potential corrective to the traditionally celebratory complexion of fan studies, since it becomes obvious how ancillary fans are to the logic of business and, at the same time, how completely business benefits from their labor.

<sup>77</sup> These figures are just for *The Lord of the Rings*. Howe, Lee, and Shore all came back to work on *The Hobbit* films

“old.” They took eight months to construct Edoras, the seat of the King of Rohan and its surrounding village, at a very remote site without a road, more than an hour from the nearest town and almost four hours from the nearest city, on top of a small mountain that had continual, extremely high winds (up to 190 kilometers per hour). They shot there for eight days (on one of which the wind took Jackson’s eyeglasses in the morning, and he spent the rest of the day squinting at monitors), then disassembled the whole thing, carefully removing all trace of the roads and buildings they had created, replacing all the indigenous plants they had moved and cared for while they worked.

Jackson wanted, where possible, to film “objects,” and manufacturing *mise en scène* used an immense amount of labor, because nothing could be purchased: everything had to be designed, detailed, and made by hand. Moreover, they had to create perfect scale duplicates of most props, costumes, prosthetics, and sets and make multiple copies out of different materials in the case of weapons and other frequently used props, like the Ring. So, for example, there would be both lighter (plastic, easier to fight with) and heavier (forged, more realistic) versions of most weapons and at least two sizes of virtually every prop and costume, in order to sustain the illusion of hobbits, humans, dwarves, elves, trolls, Ringwraiths, orcs, oliphants, wargs, and balrogs interacting. Weta made tens of thousands of swords and equal quantities of armor, pottery, glassware, jewelry, rugs, furniture, wagons, saddles, bags, books, manuscripts, and on and on, to say nothing of prosthetics, makeup, and costumes. An employee in the gift shop at Weta Workshop cheerily told me about the many months he spent bending link after link of plastic chain mail by hand with a pair of pliers; he

appears on the DVD extras, discussing this labor with the same enthusiasm that he conveyed to me years later. Millions of these links were hand made in different weights and sizes; at least two workers did this full-time for more than two years.

There were so many miniatures, and so many of them were unusually large, that they became known as “bigatures”: miniatures built at the scale of a warehouse or parking lot, so that cameras could go through them, inside them, over them. The largest model of Isengard was 60 meters across. Many locations were formed in multiple miniatures at different scales as well as sets at different scales, both in studio and on location. Filming the battle of Helm’s Deep, one such site, also meant four months of night shoots, under either rain or rain machines, for hundreds of stunt people and extras as well as the cast, a hundred of whom were wearing seventy pounds of prosthetics each and performing elaborate stunts like jumping backward from a high wall and flipping in the air. Then there were the extremely complicated sets, like Minas Tirith, where they built “four or five levels” of the city on the bones of Helm’s Deep, in a quarry outside Wellington, filled with streets, alleyways, guild neighborhoods, shops, and immense city doors, many meters high and weighing several tons, perfectly balanced so they could be opened and closed by actors to allow horses through, and decorated “in the same style” as Ghiberti’s doors to the Baptistry in Florence (see Barrie Osborne, appendices). They then broke the doors down on camera with an immense, highly decorated battering ram called (from the book) “Grond,” pulled by what Tolkien calls “great beasts” and Alan Lee designed and Weta built at the eleventh hour.

Live action location and studio footage, motion capture, puppets and props, miniatures, bluescreen work, effects, sets, landscape, matte painting, and digital animation were all layered together, integrated within the same shots and sequences, and finally everything was subjected to “digital grading” to create, simultaneously, “realism” and a distinct impression of unreality, even without getting into the fact that the story is defined by its rejection of realism in the literary sense.<sup>78</sup> The films rely heavily on Aotearoa New Zealand’s landscape—there were 140 shooting locations around the country—but, as viewers sensed immediately, the landscape had often been “tweaked,” rendered mythical and interspersed with built materials and effects. A shot-reverse shot sequence might have one angle shot on the North Island and the other angle hundreds of miles away on the South Island, as in the first scene between Gandalf and Saruman. The mountains of Mordor and of Gondor were primarily the same range, shot from the same angles, but flipped and digitally manipulated to appear radically different.

Thus, when Margaret Werry writes that Peter Jackson “*effortlessly* refreshed tourism’s century-old colonial stock of landscape imagery” (my emphasis), she is mistaken in one important detail (196). Tremendous care was taken in all aspects of the production, requiring in many cases six or more years of continuous, painstaking, and patient labor. Seven or eight units would shoot simultaneously. The rushes (dailies) took three-and-a-half to four hours to watch every evening. During production, news stories and fan sites were full of stories about the mobilization of

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<sup>78</sup> This contributes to what Alfio Leotta, in a good chapter on tourism around the films, calls their “heterotopic” character (Leotta 164). He argues that *Lord of the Rings*-tourist New Zealand is a Foucauldian “heterotopia” responding to the “trauma” of the early-21<sup>st</sup> century context of its reception.

tiny New Zealand, the endless hunt for extras of specific physical types and tractable personality, remote towns overwhelmed by orcs and Riders of Rohan. Key promotional events were immensely demanding operations in their own right, particularly the preview at Cannes in 2001, where they took over a castle and filled it with five shipping containers of sets and artwork, intending to screen one 25-minute preview but, in the event, reprising it five times (K. Thompson 40–50). Those working on the film were aware of a parallel with Tolkien’s work over decades, inventing all the languages and mythologies, charting the movements of all the characters and even the phases of the moon; this is what had given the book “layers,” and the film was to have the same quality. Moreover the issue of “scale,” a practical challenge for the film, was a version of the imaginary of the book itself, its invented cosmology and history and its miniaturized protagonists. As with the aesthetics of Led Zeppelin, as with Greg Shaw’s struggle with the growth of *Entmoot*, as with Tolkien’s “tale that grew in the telling,” *The Lord of the Rings* has always revolved around size.

Werry is not wrong, however, about the use of “colonial stock” in the New Zealand production. The fact that *The Lord of the Rings* was made not in Hollywood or Europe but in the South Pacific is not a deviation from the nature of the book but a fulfillment of it. The colonial context for Tolkien’s novel was present from the beginning, as I argued in Chapter One, and it was hemmed around by colonial literature at Allen & Unwin: as a reminder, the company’s previous major seller had been Heyerdahl’s *Kon-Tiki*, an enlightened adventure story that trafficked in the “exotic” South Pacific. In their archives, I came across a 1953 letter from Priscilla Smith at Houghton Mifflin saying that she had received proofs of the maps for *The*

*Lord of the Rings* and that the editorial department are excited to exhibit them at an upcoming “Traveller conference” (P. C. Smith, *Traveler Conference*). Smith’s note indexes the continuity between the emergent jet age—a re-play of imperialism as bourgeois leisure (thus should have been our travels)—and the character of Tolkien’s book. The films preserve, and ironize without criticizing, an apparently embalmed colonial imaginary, and they participate in a global economy that remains largely continuous with its colonial past.

The racism of the films has received extensive attention, including a number of chapters from *Studying the Event Film* (Manchester University Press, 2008); the final chapter of Werry’s *The Tourist State* (2011), discussed in detail below; and a fine article by Sue Kim diagnosing the films as “epitomizing postmodernism” and thereby “both drawing on and burying issues of race” (Margolis; Werry; Kim).<sup>79</sup> Jackson, of course, reproduces the Manicheanism and language of “Darkness” from the novel, but he also underlines the colonial context of the story and its translation to film. He further racializes the antagonists, despite the expressed desire of the designers to avoid referencing “any culture in particular,” casting Māori and Samoan actors to play them and marking them with racial semiotics. Lawrence Makoare played both “Lurtz,” reimagined as the head of the Uruk Hai, and “Gothmog,” made into the pasty, puffy general of the Orcish forces at Pelennor, *and* the Witch King: even when the “character” was racialized as “white” (the Witch King), the actor beneath the

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<sup>79</sup> Kim’s essay appears in a special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* devoted to *The Lord of the Rings* in 2004, the year the film trilogy concluded with the release of the “Extended Edition” DVD of *The Return of the King*. The problem identified in Neil Isaacs’ introduction to his 1968 collection *Tolkien and the Critics*, that the cult fandom around *The Lord of the Rings* precluded serious criticism, had not been solved (as at least one article in the issue notes), but Kim’s essay is good (Isaacs).

prosthetics was Māori. Of course, Jackson chose Makoare because of his ability and kept bringing him back because he had done so well in the first role, but he could only do that because we can't actually see the actor's face in the film. In the first film, the Uruk Hai, wearing dreadlocks and prosthetics slathered in dark makeup, chase our lily-white heroes through the forests of Aotearoa New Zealand. In the second, Orientalized soldiers report for duty in Mordor wearing turbans, veils, and eye makeup. In the third film, the enemies of "the West" arrive on elephants, festooned in body paint, tattoos, bones, wicker, and beads. As Kim points out, the desire to avoid "offending" "any culture in particular" by mixing them into a stew is neither new nor contrary to racism in any way, nor does the note of irony and enjoyment that Jackson brings to his antagonists relieve the unnerving Americanized idealism in the film script of its racial context.

In the "Appendix" to the second film (volume III), Jackson explains without a hint of irony that his model for the battle of Helm's Deep, a fifteen-page chapter in the book that forms the forty-minute climax of the second film, was modeled on Cy Endfield's 1964 film *Zulu*, about a very small group of British soldiers successfully "defending" their South African fort from an attacking army of four thousand Zulu soldiers: "overwhelming odds," Jackson explains, with wide eyes. Just as with Tolkien, for Jackson the embrace of colonial heroism sits side by side with pluralistic gestures and even an awareness of colonial logic. The same disc with the *Zulu* comments shows him telling the extras playing "wild men" that they were driven out of their land a few hundred years before by the conquering horse lords and seek revenge. Sibley's biography of Jackson starts with the famous story that Jackson's

interest in film began with seeing *King Kong* (1933) at age nine. *King Kong* is set on an island in the South Pacific, and the filmmakers, Merian Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack, had made their reputation in ethnographic cinema in the 1920s. In the film, Kong, a giant “gorilla” (gorillas are only native to central Africa), is a *prehistoric* monster; there are dinosaurs on the island as well. Thus, as several critics have argued, the film allegorizes colonial anthropology, so that the idea of a shared evolutionary past becomes a temporal sequence (first apes, then people; some societies “primitive,” others “advanced”) (Erb; Rony). Jackson remade *King Kong* (2005) as his first project after *The Lord of the Rings*, spending his cinematic capital so to speak, without updating or rendering palatable its egregious colonial imagery.

Comments on race in the films are not limited to academics. Dylan Matthew’s entry in his “Every Single Word Spoken by a Person of Color in...” YouTube series only finds forty-seven seconds in the entire twelve hours of *The Lord of the Rings*, including zero seconds for the final film (Marron). And the very best critique I have seen, giddy with recursion, contempt, and glee, is a fan work, a series of videos published online in 2009 by a fanvid maker working under the name Hapex Legomena (Hapex Legomena). The cycle of four videos (about 20 minutes total) recuts Jackson’s films as a series of music videos accompanied by tracks from Wu-Tang Clan’s *Enter the Wu-Tang*.<sup>80</sup> They offer a devastating parody that, among other things, frames the white characters’ trembling terror as part of a narrative about addiction. The “irony” in Jackson’s films comes from his merry attitude to monsters: relish, zeal, gusto, revelry.

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<sup>80</sup> The video series, working within a fanvid tradition, simply uses the title of the album. For more on fanvids, see (Coppa, “Women, ‘Star Trek,’ and the Early Development of Fannish Vidding”; Lothian; Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*; Coppa, “An Editing Room of One’s Own”; Russo).

Hapex Legomena's vids dial this up, revealing Jackson's carnivalesque as a form of antipodean nationalism. She draws out the riotous glee and adjusts its racial orientation, in part by pairing the visual material with music from Wu-Tang Clan, which, with its heavy sampling from Kung Fu movies, sets up a kaleidoscope of racialized appropriation and, following Werry, "imagineering."

There were three separate home theater releases for each film: first the theatrical versions on DVD, then the extended editions, then Blu-ray films with the extended edition extras plus additional documentaries by Costa Botes, which led to some complaints about triple-dipping (Muse). The original extended edition folders had an elegant symmetry, by which I mean painful kitsch, designed to formally echo Tolkien's book. Each was sized like a volume of a book series, with textured, jewel-toned, fold-out cases that fell open from the spine and boxes to hold them. For each of the three films, these sets contain four discs (five in the later Blu-ray release): two discs of the four-hour extended edition of the film, each with four separate four-hour commentary tracks (director and writers, design team, production team, and cast) and two or three discs of "appendices," mostly documentaries about making the films. The whole thing was a pastiche of a pastiche, the scholarly apparatus around the novel. The tone of the (recognizably extra) Blu-ray set was quite different: all fifteen discs packed into a single compact, shiny box, with the Botes documentary tucked in unexplained on a fifth disc for each film and an "Easter egg"—a sketch lightly buried, where clicking an unexplained image on a menu reveals it—parody of the Council of Elrond with Jack Black and Sarah Michelle Gellar.

Jackson's project, like Tolkien's, had a nationalist dimension. He sought to develop and promote the New Zealand film industry, not just for its own products but as a service provider for the post-Hollywood cinematic supply chain. The companies he had helped found built a tremendous amount of capacity through the project. A great deal of the promotional material included with the "Extended Edition" DVD sets seems to pitch services (miniatures and props, effects, editing, sound), though these little documentaries also resemble Oscar tapes, and the Academy Awards garnered by the film series (particularly the last film, which won Best Picture) were good advertisements for New Zealand production facilities also. They also serve as guides to tourism, providing the first clues to fans that they really needed to find the farm just south of Auckland where Hobbiton was filmed and go there ("like a shot"). The "appendices" include sections, for each film, called "New Zealand as Middle-earth," with mini-documentaries on shooting in all the main locations, keyed to a Tolkienesque map of New Zealand. The videos in the extended editions seem at least as much for professional consumption as for fans, and in 2002 the film (still in production) collaborated with location scout Ian Brodie to publish *The Lord of the Rings Location Guidebook*, which is still used (Brodie).

Jackson had always made "making-of" films; he had made a four and half hour one about *The Frighteners*, his last film before *Rings* (K. Thompson 114). In 1995, he had collaborated with a filmmaker named Costa Botes on a mockumentary about a fictional early New Zealand filmmaker called *Forgotten Silver*. As soon as principal photography began, he hired Botes to film a documentary on shooting *The Lord of the Rings*. Halfway through filming, however, New Line, realizing the scope of the

project, brought in directors for their own supplemental and publicity films, which used some of Botes' footage; his full documentary, six hours of it, was only released with the Blu-ray sets that appeared in 2005.

All these commentaries and documentaries provide reflexive meta-narrative, the story of the story, formally very much like Christopher Tolkien's *History of Middle-earth*. The bulk of traditional fanzine text, also, had been metanarrative: the editors and contributors—Ed Meškys, Greg Shaw—became characters in narratives about fandom, including putting out fanzines, that form the bulk of the content. This is very much how producers, designers, actors, writers, directors, technicians, et al appear in the DVD materials, and it is emphasized on tours in New Zealand: attention is once again pulled from the fictional story and redirected to how the object was created. That object is now in your possession; like fanzines or indeed online fan material, the DVD set has come to your home. The preoccupation of the Tolkien Society with biography seems to belong to the same tradition; why should Tolkien himself be of greater interest than Middle-earth? It seems also worth mentioning that “LotRPS” (pronounced “LOW-trips”) was an especially large subgenre of RPF/RPS (real-person fic, or slash) in the era of the film; RPS has most often been produced about bands and musicians, not usually about the people involved in producing a fictional text.<sup>81</sup>

While much of this material seems designed to promote New Zealand and New Zealand businesses, the casting of the film seems to announce it as a locationless, globalized project. Three of the four leads (Frodo, Sam, Aragorn) are played by

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<sup>81</sup> The *locus classicus* (haha) for RPS is ‘NSYNC. A substantial critical literature exists on it (see Busse; for LotRPS, see Lackner et al.)

Americans, enough to signal the film's membership in the tradition of the Hollywood blockbuster. English actors play Gandalf (the ancient authority), Saruman (the fascist/villain, as per Hollywood tradition; Christopher Lee was canonical in this respect, so much so that, despite his passion for the novel, he could not be considered for Gandalf), Gollum (the virtuoso representing England's famous export, "acting"), Boromir (the tragedian), Théoden (the king), Merry (the jolly fellow in the pub), and Legolas (the effete aristocrat). Pippin is Scottish and Gimli/Treebeard is Welsh, rounding out the island of Britain. Galadriel, Elrond, Éowyn, Faramir, and Denethor, all exotic aristocrats, are Australian, and Éomer is from New Zealand, representing the Australasian base of the project. And Arwen, played by the opulent/ethereal daughter of Aerosmith front man Steven Tyler, represents the global crypto-nation of hard rock in the person of a hereditary member of its nobility.

Although scores of professionals from the U.S., U.K., Australia, and elsewhere worked on the films, they also directly employed thousands of New Zealanders, impacted businesses and communities all over the country, and received extensive state support. Filming took place at over the two islands, and the films supplied a huge, electrifying showcase for the country's spectacular landscape. A very strong nationalist thread surrounded the films, nicknamed the "biggest home movies in the world." "New Zealanders," Werry wrote in 2007, "experienced the films not as a Hollywood imposition but *as their own*" (201).

Most estimates find that the original box office for the three films was about \$3 billion. The film contract from 1969, which had given Tolkien so little direct cash, secured him 7.5% of any profits, all of which now went to the Estate. It was only years

later when, deep into the intellectual property battles between the publishers, filmmakers, estate, Tolkien Enterprises, and others that Christopher Tolkien gave an interview to *Le Monde*, just before the first of the three *Hobbit* movies was released in 2012, articulating the full force of his contempt:

“They eviscerated the book by making it an action movie for young people aged 15 to 25,” Christopher says regretfully. [...] “Tolkien has become a monster, devoured by his own popularity and absorbed into the absurdity of our time ... The chasm between the beauty and seriousness of the work, and what it has become, has overwhelmed me. The commercialization has reduced the aesthetic and philosophical impact of the creation to nothing.” (Rérolle, *Tolkien, l’anneau de la discorde*; Rérolle, *My Father’s “Eviscerated” Work-Son Of Hobbit Scribe J.R.R. Tolkien Finally Speaks Out*)

The column quotes David Brawn, Tolkien's publisher at HarperCollins, noting that profits were not limited to the film companies: “In three years, from 2001 to 2003, 25 million copies of *Lord of the Rings* were sold—15 million in English and 10 million in other languages. In the United Kingdom, sales went up by 1000% after the release of the first movie in the trilogy, *The Fellowship of the Ring*” (Rérolle, *My Father’s “Eviscerated” Work-Son Of Hobbit Scribe J.R.R. Tolkien Finally Speaks Out*).

Although Christopher hated the films, the Estate fought, decades after Tolkien’s death, for their cut of the profits, as well as making efforts to limit the endless proliferation of commercial uses (slot machines were a particular point of conflict.) The number of lawyers employed on this effort, the amount of paper and typing and janitorial services required simply to pursue these years-long lawsuits should count as part of the larger empire of Middle-earth as well.

*We were all innocent*

Aotearoa New Zealand conveys a sense of precariousness, starting with its physical properties. Today a small country of about four million people, it is objectively remote, physically unstable, completely dependent on trade, prone to ecological crisis, and (thus) socially vulnerable. Located far in the south of the South Pacific, its principal territory consists of two long, narrow islands surrounded by (at a minimum) two thousand kilometers of open ocean. The shortest flight from New Zealand to a major city in another country, Auckland to Sydney, takes three hours; it took me almost 48 hours to get there from Upstate New York. As a consequence of its remoteness, obviously far greater in earlier eras, Aotearoa New Zealand was the last major habitable landmass to be settled. Where Australia has had human inhabitants for over sixty thousand years, and most of Polynesia for 2500-4000 years, people only settled in Aotearoa about eight hundred years ago. Fully eighty-nine percent of its native flora and fauna is unique to New Zealand, including bizarrely large insects such as the weta, for which Peter Jackson's production company is named (the name means "god of ugly things"), and dozens of species of flightless birds. Alfred Crosby, the influential historian of the relationship between ecology and imperialism, uses New Zealand as a major case study and describes its pre-settlement biota as "bizarre" (Crosby 221, 217-68). Except for two species of bats, migrant Polynesians (and the dogs and rats they brought with them) were the first mammals on the islands.

The Māori name "Aotearoa" means "long white cloud"; these long streamer clouds are a characteristic formation in New Zealand skies, produced by the country's continual high winds. Wellington, the national capital and center of the film industry,

is considered the windiest city in the world. Arriving in Auckland, I glanced at my phone: the weather app showed neither sun nor rain, just a wind graphic for every day in the week. Wind and ocean are only the most ubiquitous of the country's physically isolating and destabilizing features. New Zealand also has active volcanoes, tsunamis, and continual earthquakes, about fifteen thousand per year ("New Zealand Earthquakes"). Residents keep an application on their phones (GeoNet) providing earthquake notifications and bulletins about volcanic activity. When I was there (December 2016-January 2017), the highway along the eastern coast of the South Island and the city of Kaikoura were "closed" due to a 7.8 earthquake a month before. Christchurch, flattened by an earthquake in 2011, was still running much of its central business district out of shipping containers when I visited six years later.

Māori—a term only attested since the 1860s, when indigenous people first became a minority in their country (Mein Smith)<sup>82</sup>—developed a culture shaped by scarcity. The climate was radically different from the almost seasonless warmth of the equator, and many of their staple foods (yams, taro) wouldn't thrive there. There were almost no indigenous land plants or animals that supplied significant food sources; they and their dogs hunted many species of flightless birds to extinction within a century, including the moa. I was told in New Zealand that the only indigenous plant useful as a dietary staple, the relative of aloe known there as "flax," required them to boil the core of the stem in order to create a gum, which they would chew and then spit out, since it was mostly indigestible. Humans had destroyed forty percent of the forests and driven half the animal species to extinction before Europeans arrived

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<sup>82</sup> Werry reports that Māori fell to 6% of the population in 1896 census (xx); as of 2007, they were up to 12%.

(Mein Smith 15). The English brought biota—from pigs and grasses to bees and pathogens—orders of magnitude more destructive, though in some cases (at least in the short term) more nourishing. They deliberately sought to reconstruct the environment of Britain on these climatically similar islands at the opposite end of the planet, and imported plants and animals accordingly. “Homesickness” was a constant refrain in the brief histories I heard during my visit.

Crosby’s focus on New Zealand resonates with a common-sense awareness shared by many people I talked with. I heard over and over about perennial, repeated ecological shocks, including in the present. Horses, sheep, and cattle didn’t thrive on tough indigenous grasses, so very early—almost as soon as James Cook first arrived in 1769—the Europeans began sowing ground cover. The clover they seeded wouldn’t propagate due to a lack of adapted insects, so they brought honeybees, and honeys made from “exotic” New Zealand plants are among the many prominent “local” exports (Crosby). The calamities that ensued from the English desire for recreational hunting form part of the national catechism: the English brought deer from Europe and possums from Australia, but there were no predators, so they joined the feral descendants of European pigs that began propagating in the late eighteenth century, and each supplied a new wave of defoliation; “possum fur” knitted goods, produced through state-promoted culling programs, are another nationalist product.

Economically reliant on exports, pākehā (European) New Zealand was famously dependent on sheep farming for over a century, especially after the development of refrigeration in 1880. But in the last two decades sheep farming has been widely displaced by dairy farming for China, where awareness about contamination is said to

have prompted a market for powdered milk. The news, when I was there, was full of stories about new ecological crises triggered by the abrupt explosion of dairy farming on the South Island.

The physical and social instability of New Zealand is reflected in habits of mind. Margaret Werry writes of “a shifty, anxious structure of feeling that is dependent on treating with global forces for survival” (Werry xvii). After noticing the wind when I got off the plane, when I got to my hotel room I turned on the television to find a mostly indigenous panel discussing what would turn out to be a much-discussed issue, the fact that New Zealand imposes no requirement for automobile owners to insure their vehicles; the panel seemed designed to help uninsured drivers understand their liabilities. As a pedestrian, I found my month in New Zealand hair-raising: the country prefers roundabouts (traffic circles) to lights, and pedestrians often do not have the right of way in crosswalks. Walking in the mountains seemed little safer: when I took a helicopter one morning to see a couple of the many remote locations used in the films, I couldn’t find my footing well enough to get to the actual shooting site. “Adventure travel” is one of the signature components of the tourist industry, possibly the single largest industry in the country. I was constantly passing stations for bungee-jumping, which was invented in New Zealand, paragliding, and so on. Then there were economics: everyone everywhere talked about the housing market, how “overleveraged” it was, how difficult it was to find a place to live, how many foreign buyers there were—sometimes with a racist edge. The average house price in Auckland and Queenstown was said to be NZ\$1 million. And the great outdoors and neoliberal economics intersected. I wondered privately about the

apparent fragility of an outdoorsy young man working in a hostel I stayed at, and one afternoon he mentioned his dire battle with skin cancer. Google quickly revealed that New Zealand has the highest rate of melanoma in the world, even worse than Australia's thanks to low and piecemeal public investment (Roy, "New Zealand Now Has World's Highest Rate of Melanoma Skin Cancer").

Instability forms the flip side of the typically settler-colonial qualities touted in the material around the films — "kiwi can-do," "ingenuity," and hard work. The physical properties of the country, the indigenous culture, the process of colonization, and the history of every period since are described again and again using neoliberal buzzwords: "dynamic," "competitive," "entrepreneurial." Mein Smith, for example, says that "the land itself represents a dynamic force, anything but solid and permanent" (Mein Smith 4). She talks about "entrepreneurialism" in Māori culture and describes it, too, as "dynamic" (19); Crosby calls it "competitive" and "bellicose" (223). Mein-Smith describes the first colonial government, after 1840, as an "entrepreneurial state" characterized by partnerships between business and government (84). Almost everyone I spoke with at any length talked to some degree about political economy: what was being produced, to whom it was being exported, how it was changing, its ecological impact. Sure, the deer were a catastrophe for the forests, but the velvet from their antlers sells as an aphrodisiac now. The total effect was anything but reassuring. The central business district run out of shipping containers, the news stories about the lack of auto insurance, the narratives of swerving from one ecological crisis to another, the stories about real estate speculation ("everyone is overleveraged"), the difficulty of walking around cities, the extreme

sports, the heights and vistas, the endangered bird species grazing on the parked cars of tourists, the formally threatening, heavily marketed, over-smiling haka demonstrations,<sup>83</sup> the endless tourists, the mad pursuit of fun, the visible poverty and extreme wealth, the dazzling sunshine and sudden rain and jaw-dropping beauty and “did you feel the earthquake” all created a constant impression of instability and risk, a kind of social-geographical allegory for neoliberalism itself.

A very rough outline of the history of New Zealand follows, a briefer parallel to what I did with the history of Birmingham in chapter three. Settlement around 1250 was followed by considerable alterations to the material environment and development of a competitive and combative indigenous culture. Vigilant residents of what is now called Golden Bay rammed one of Abel Tasman’s boats, killing four sailors, in 1642, thus repelling European “explorers” for over a century until the enlightenment knowledge-prospecter James Cook finally mapped the islands (and dropped off seeds, pathogens, and pigs) starting in 1769. From Cook’s arrival to around the 1820s, radical transformation of the economy and biology of the islands set in through contact with sealers, whalers, and missionaries; from its first contact with Europeans, Aotearoa’s economy has been shaped by trade with global industries. Europeans provided highly desirable resources at first, livestock and new crops as well as steel tools and muskets. Per Crosby, the initial driver of Māori displacement was trade: using European plants and animals, especially the pigs that multiplied exponentially in the local forests, indigenous groups traded meat, crops, and sex work to Pacific sealers and whalers for muskets, axes, and ploughs. They got much more biota, especially

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<sup>83</sup> Haka is a choreographed sequence of postures and chants, performed by a group, traditionally used to threaten antagonists.

diseases, in return. Radical social transformations and catastrophic infectious diseases, which drastically reduced the population, proliferated. By 1840, the situation was so desperate that many indigenous leaders agreed to the Treaty of Waitangi, making New Zealand part of the British Empire in exchange for false guarantees that were, to the degree that they were part of the document, differently understood by Māori and pākehā.

Based on the understanding that the islands would vigorously support European crops and livestock, extensive settlement followed, mostly from Britain: tens of thousands of settlers and millions of European animals (largely due to rapid, largely feral, multiplication), wholesale transformation of landscape and hundreds of thousands of acres of European plants quickly overtook the country. Unsuccessful revolts and wars of the mid-nineteenth century and the development of an export economy for the settlers were followed by the major economic shocks of the “Liberal” era, the decades from the late nineteenth century through the First World War, which was also the country’s first tourist age and the first period in which New Zealand was talked about as a global laboratory for economics and government policy (see for example Lloyd). Already in the Liberal period and much more strongly in the social democratic phase that followed, New Zealand had comparatively strong liberties—it was the first country in the world to give women the franchise—and social welfare provisions, at least for the pākehā population.

Moreover, the period from 1914 to 1984 was marked by economic protectionism, underwritten by the British imperial structure. In an endnote, Margaret Werry writes that, during this period:

The state was the nation's largest employer, its largest investor, the statutory representative of labor interests, provider of cradle-to-grave welfare and public services, and overseer of numerous nationalized industries (electricity, airlines, health, forestry, and agricultural shipping, to name a few). (Werry 251)

Britain, too, adopted a quasi-“state socialist” economic model in the post-war decades of imperial retrenchment, nationalizing many more industries than ever came under state control in the U.S., including trucking, steel, and medicine. I suspect that Werry's summary of public policy in the social democratic era sits in her endnotes because public investment did nothing to address the country's foundational racial dispossession, and she doesn't want to romanticize it. The social democratic compromise, also underscored by Hobsbawm (who sees it as a function of rich peripheral economies in an imperial system, comparing New Zealand with Uruguay), enforced racist, mystifying, and discriminatory development. Māori unemployment rates were over thirty percent—over forty percent for men—on the eve of the “New Zealand Experiment” in the 1980s. But conditions worsened even more when this advanced social democratic system was wiped out by the sudden and extreme embrace of an explicitly neoliberal agenda beginning in the summer of 1984, discussed in more detail below. The current Labour government led by Jacinda Arden, though often celebrated in the American and British press as progressive, is actually a coalition government between Labour, the Greens, and the extreme-right, racist, anti-immigrant New Zealand First party. I found endemic racism highly visible throughout my time in New Zealand, and since the 2018 massacre at a Christchurch mosque more critique has been bubbling up in the international Marxist press (Lewis and Siregar).

For Hobsbawm, the emergence of what we know as New Zealand in the “Age of Empire” indexes the essentially global character of capitalism:

The major fact about the nineteenth century is the creation of a single global economy, progressively reaching into the most remote corners of the world, an increasingly dense web of economic transactions, communications and movements of goods, money and people linking the developed countries with each other and with the undeveloped world. (Hobsbawm 61)

Whether the focus is on biology, as for Crosby, or economics, as for Hobsbawm, “New Zealand” has never existed outside of a globalized commercial economy; in this sense, Jackson’s investments in making the country an exporter of cinematic services is completely typical of the national history. The settler society in this system, what Crosby calls the “neo-Europe,” becomes wealthy while its indigenous people are radically impoverished and/or exterminated. But the wealth of the settler society is of a very particular type: it is based on producing exports for an imperial economy in a peripheral rather than metropolitan role, and it provides a market for metropolitan goods. It complements the British/Commonwealth economy rather than competing with it. The U.K. took the vast majority of New Zealand exports from the late nineteenth century through the 1950s (see figure 9.1 Mein Smith 203); Hobsbawm stresses the systemic requirements that turned the world beyond the metropole into “a complex of colonial and semi-colonial territories which increasingly evolved into specialized producers of one or two primary products for export.” Catherine Hall looks at the texture of how these links, specifically between New Zealand and, as it happens, Birmingham were folded into everyday life, in the manufacturing of goods for the colonies, the agricultural output for the metropolis, the constant exchange of people,

letters, and ideas about identity and race (C. Hall). The Tolkien family themselves were a part of this nineteenth-century trade; I found a post on a piano message board from a person in New Zealand trying to trace the origin of the “Tolkien & Tolkien” piano in his grandmother’s house (“Tolkien & Tolkien Piano - UK Piano Page”). Until quite recently, “New Zealand” meant sheep—“Britain’s off-shore farm,” “the dreary sheep farm at the end of the world”; today it means wine, bungee jumping, *The Lord of the Rings* (Crosby; Werry). My point is that the integration of Aotearoa New Zealand into the post-Hollywood global cinema industry should not be regarded as disjunctive for New Zealand itself.

Aotearoa New Zealand’s extreme and sudden change of direction, from one of the most if not the most generous welfare state and “mixed economy” in the capitalist world to the site of the most extreme neoliberal reaction, was the subject of considerable world attention. It happened, abruptly, with the election of a Labour government in the summer of 1984. Directed by finance minister Roger Douglas and dubbed “Rogernomics,” this exceptional program responded in part to the fallout from the U.K.’s decision to join the European Union, and thus loosen its dependence on the earlier “Common Market” of former settler colonies. This transition began in the early sixties and took a radical step forward in 1973, exactly at the moment of deindustrialization, oil shocks, and stagflation (also the year of Tolkien’s death). Those shocks hit New Zealand just as they did all the countries that had been at the heart of the system—just as they hit Birmingham—but the decline of Britain as a defined, predictable market seems to have been part of what drove the country to urgently market itself as “competitive.”

The most important history of these developments, from a Marxist perspective, is by Jane Kelsey, a law professor at the University of Auckland who published her fiery takedown of the project as *The New Zealand Experiment* in 1995.<sup>84</sup> Kelsey argues that it could best be compared to (and was understood by its architects as a version of) the kind of “structural adjustment” imposed on impoverished postcolonial economies by the International Monetary Fund as a condition for aid. Albeit a few years after Thatcher and Reagan had begun their attack on social insurance, New Zealand’s embrace of privatization and allied principles would be so thoroughgoing as to supply a test case—as for labor and welfare policy earlier, another “laboratory” or “experiment”—for the rest of the post-industrial world, as Kelsey documents in abundant quotations from the global press. Changing conditions in global business strategies, in the guise of “crisis,” were used as the pretext for imposing “pure economic fundamentalism.” One of the things that stood out about this, both to Kelsey and to transnational financial powers who celebrated it (the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the World Trade Organization) was that it was initially executed by a *Labour* government as their program upon displacing a National (conservative) Party government. Unlike in the U.K. and U.S., where twin reactionaries became the face of neoliberalism to the extent that the public even recognized their programs as an application of the radical market fundamentalism of post-war theorists such as Hayek, in New Zealand it arrived as a rapid onslaught from Labour, though it was continued with equal fervor by the

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<sup>84</sup> Published internationally with Pluto Press as *Economic Fundamentalism* (Kelsey). Thanks to Doug Henwood for the reference. Kelsey opens her book with a brief and shocking summary of the changes to federal policy, quoted below.

National Party when they were returned to power in 1990. As Kelsey points out, this failure of any parliamentary actor, in a democracy, to oppose the takeover of the economy by finance (later matched in the U.S. by the rise of the Democratic Leadership Council and, in the U.K., by New Labour) resulted in a turn to fringe parties of both the left and right and a new system of parliamentary representation giving far more seats to minority parties (11).

Besides the fact that the program was put in place by a “left” government, what made New Zealand’s neoliberalization an “experiment” was its extremity. It began with radical financial changes: “The currency was immediately devalued by 20 percent. In rapid succession, the finance markets were deregulated, exchange controls removed and the New Zealand dollar put on a free float,” among other “reforms,” which were joined by the overturning of trade policies, such as the elimination of subsidies and tariffs; restrictions on foreign investment were eliminated. Labor policy was upended: unions were renamed “employees’ organizations” and “all statutory privileges for unions were removed” (3). Government-sponsored research was privatized (one can still see this in the commercial “Crown Research Institutes” that, for example, monitor earthquakes). Public hospitals were commercialized and forced to compete, and means testing was used to charge fees for care. Institutions for children, old people, and the mentally ill were closed, while churches, charities, and civil organizations were asked to provide care, often without compensation. Public housing was required to show “return on investment”; rents on public housing were raised to market rates. Supervision of schools was turned over to local authorities, including determination of teaching qualifications and wages, and students in primary

and secondary schools were charged “voluntary” fees. Tertiary education was forced to compete and charge fees, rendering it a marketplace and thus dramatically changing the content of higher education (and, per Kelsey, deskilling a number of important occupations); student debt began to grow. Income taxes were reduced and converted to a flat rate, and new comprehensive taxes on consumption were instituted. The entire government was shrunk and restructured, even placing government executives on “fixed-term performance-related contracts” (4). Private consultants and management firms were put in charge of policy. Welfare entitlements were slashed as need grew. The only sector in which investment grew was police, courts, and prisons.

If there is one scholar who has spared me labor and supplied analysis of an important aspect of *The Lord of the Rings* with historical weight, it is Margaret Werry, whose *The Tourist State* supplies a performance-studies based historical analysis of the constitutive role of tourism in constructing Aotearoa New Zealand. Werry’s book begins with the transformation of the country’s image from “the dreary sheep farm at the end of the world” to the “Home of Middle-earth” (ix) and ends with a robust analysis of national investment in Jackson’s films in the context of the history she has described (189-208). Werry’s study is indebted to Foucauldian, actor network, and performance-based approaches centered on colonial dispossession and race. Although she now works in the U.S., she is originally from New Zealand and makes it her entire focus, and her study provides a depth of research I can’t approach. Happily, her argument confirms and deepens subjective impressions I formed in Aotearoa.

With reference to Benedict Anderson, Werry writes that “Aotearoa New Zealand is a community not so much imagined as *imagineered*.” Her argument centers on the ways in which the liberal state has repeatedly recapitulated the colonial pattern of racialization, displacement, and appropriation, including in and through *The Lord of the Rings*. Werry compares the “governmentwide national rebranding strategy” that included and capitalized on Jackson’s films with the nation-building tourism campaigns of the Liberal era, 1890-1914, when New Zealand first promoted itself internationally as the “social laboratory of the world” (Werry xi; see also extensive documentation of state investment in Jackson’s film by Thompson). The final chapter of the book is devoted to a comparison of two major New Zealand films of the 2000s, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Whale Rider*, a festival and awards favorite once again marketing New Zealand in terms inherited from the “Maoriland” campaign of the Liberal period. The campaign imbricated with *The Lord of the Rings* included the slogan “100% Pure New Zealand,” still used, and it coincided with a drive in the wake of neoliberalization to make all New Zealand’s public institutions (those surviving the carnage of “Rogernomics,” that is) “bi-cultural.” In other words, the birth period of “Aotearoa New Zealand” coincided with underwriting and promoting the lurid racism of Jackson’s film.

The Liberal period saw the development of Rotorua, a North Island geothermal tourist destination mobilizing elements from Māori culture, the marketing of the country as “Maoriland,” and a tripartite structure for “imagineering” the New Zealand landscape: the sublime (alps and fjords), the pastoral (rolling sheep farms and “English” villages), and the “savage,” epitomized by active volcanoes, tied to

indigenous people, and centered at Rotorua. In this period, there was, on the one hand, “a ruthless rush of appropriations of Māori holdings... deforestation, wetland draining, and land ‘improvement,’” and, on the other, “the enduring touristic image of the nation as synonymous with sublime, unpeopled scenic beauty” (4). The second major “branding” operation for the country, from the mid-1990s to the 2000s, was based on a plan for retooling tourism, first by designating the type of tourist being sought: the “Free Independent Traveler (FIT) ... educated, affluent, and autonomous,” who would come for “experiences,” make repeat visits, and stay for a long time (148).

Werry argues that the millennial branding campaign, with its emphasis on “purity” of landscape, was still racialized: “a resuscitated colonial-nationalist primordialism with distinctly racial (one might even say eugenic) overtones” (149). In 2003, the slogan “100% Pure New Zealand” was adopted, and Werry demonstrates how closely this was linked to the *Lord of the Rings* campaign, in which the state had invested heavily:

The New Zealand production budget alone represented a major impact on the economy: over 74 percent of the US\$330 million budget was spent in New Zealand, on around five thousand vendors and three thousand employees, from leatherworkers to taxi drivers and coffee importers to IT specialists. The project indirectly transformed local economies (raising house prices or fostering new business enterprises, for example), while in the world of film it raised industry capability, upskilled the workforce, and marketed the nation abroad as a competitive production base. (Werry 195–96)

She shows that the state “devoted NZ\$16 million over four years to promotional activities” for the films, including “lavish release parties at embassies around the world (starring New Zealand food and wine),” in addition to investments such as covering Air New Zealand planes with film stills, subsidizing Jackson’s use of the

New Zealand Army as labor for massive changes to the landscape, and much more (197, 203):

*The Lord of the Rings* took up residence at the heart of the state's symbolic, sovereign mechanisms in Rings-themed stamp series and coin issues ... In one poetic instance of interpellation into the new national imaginary, incoming passengers to Auckland International Airport faced a row of immigration officers ensconced in cubicles labeled "orcs," "trolls," and "hobbits," under a sign emblazoned "Welcome to Middle-earth." At the very site where the state marks its sovereign power over citizenry and territory, it did so—if only in jest—in the name of a neoglobal, corporate-owned fantasy that both elevated whiteness and parodied ethnic contestation. The sign that "Welcome to Middle-earth" would have obscured was a recent addition in the bicultural renovation of New Zealand's major port of entry: "Haere Mai o Aotearoa," welcome to Aotearoa. (204-06)

According to both the national branding campaigns of that era ("100% Pure" and "Home of Middle-earth"), the country was "no longer a hide-bound pastoral backwater but a leader in job-rich, high-skill, high-value knowledge industries [...] creative entrepreneurship [...] and luxury cultural commodities" (196). Ironically, when I was there, many in the Tolkien-tourism industry were talking about a campaign by one of the minor actors in the film, Bruce Hopkins, who played Gamling, an officer of the Rohirrim. Using his connection to the franchise as a lever, he was leading eco-tours and publishing articles against the "100% Pure" slogan, exposing (in contrast) severe water pollution and other failures of ecological "purity" in New Zealand (Australian Associated Press; Teamster; McNeilly).

Werry writes that many worried that the investment, including the privatization of the Tourism and Publicity Department's old Film Unit facility, which Jackson bought, refurbished, and ultimately renamed Park Road Post, would "sound a death-knell for the domestic film industry," and, "in a slew of reports, initiatives, task forces,

and ministerial mandates, [the state] identified ... film for the first time as a driver of cross-sectoral economic growth,” and the film project and Jackson’s purchase as “a success story of privatization” (196). For Werry, this meant

service provision to U.S.-based multinationals attracted by the weak currency, generous tax incentives ... and raw assets of a cheap, deregulated, un-unionized but skilled and English-speaking labor force, good telecommunications and supply infrastructure, and relentless, eye-boggling scenic beauty. (198)

“In the past ten years,” she writes, “Aotearoa New Zealand has been transformed in to a cinematic export processing zone for American modernity’s lost racial certainties. [...] Hollywood’s distant satellite has manufactured fantasies of race at an economy of scale” (199). Jackson did reinvest, especially in high-end postproduction facilities, and the “feared third-worlding” did not occur, but it seems to me that her analysis places his effort under the heading of racialized economic nationalism (201).

One of Werry’s key insights lies in the way she ties the manufacture of “Middle-earth” in New Zealand to the transformation of the country into a “Neo-Europe” as described by Crosby. In “pitching” New Zealand to the global film industry, state agencies emphasized that

one could find the Swiss Alps, the Norwegian fjords, and the British Lake District—all the (Saxon, Nordic, and Celtic) spatial correlates of whiteness—within fifty miles of one another. These colonial hauntings of *Rings* discourse were both endemic and unintentionally ironic. If the bucolic Shire was “found” by Jackson’s scouts in Matamata [the location of “Hobbiton,” described below], it was because it was made there a century ago by colonists laying waste to native forests and displacing Ngāti Hauā to forge an imagined Shropshire of yeoman farms and agrarian stability that no longer existed in industrializing Britain. (203)

She describes *The Lord of the Rings* film project as, thus, “amnesiac” and writes of the “colonialist repetition compulsion common in Ringish circles” (202). She shows how exactly the films recapitulate the topoi she has already documented for late nineteenth-century tourism promotion, with its “tripartite” categorization of the landscape. The films offer “contrasts between the rustic Shire, the primeval forests and sublime mountains of kingdoms of Man, and the netherworld of Mordor, with Māori returned to the ‘spaces of savagery’ of the central North Island,” such as the three separate volcanoes, all federally protected as indigenous sacred sites, used for Mount Doom (203).

As a global scholar-tourist with U.S. dollars in my pocket, with long research in the history of popular intellectual practices around *The Lord of the Rings*, I obviously came to this material from a somewhat different perspective than Werry. She writes as an advocate within domestic struggles, producing blistering contempt for *The Lord of the Rings* that I don’t share. The methodological differences between our projects, however, are more significant. Werry describes her conceptual model, performance, as “an unstable, risky enterprise” (xxxiv), replicating the forms of instability that she finds, as I did, in New Zealand. In my view, the country’s instability is available to scientific description (by geology, geography, ecology, economics) rather than being solely a product of culture, specifically of race. When she writes of *The Lord of the Rings* as a “global racial fantasy” that “has both saturated the national symbolic and insinuated itself into local imaginaries,” I can’t help feeling that she still deploys a concept of national purity or at least authenticity herself: *The Lord of the Rings* is foreign, a function of Hollywood and Britain that has “insinuated

itself” into the “local” (208). To say that her argument has its own nostalgic logic risks ignoring the Māori advocacy that seeks to form a bi-cultural nation, which she defends against the machinery of the culture industry. Theoretically, however, where she advertises a “refusal to totalize,” I prefer to invoke the totality. And when she pledges to offer something she calls “*weak* resistance” (xxxvi; her emphasis), I have to object.

I’d like to close this overview of Aotearoa New Zealand and its relation to neoliberalism with a conversation I had with a white woman in her early sixties, whom I sat next to on a very short flight from Wellington (at the southern end of the North Island) to Nelson (on the northern end of the South). She had long curly hair and was plump, with a gentle air, and she seemed very anxious, like she wasn’t doing well. She told me that “No one likes to say it, but we used to be socialist. And things were better then.” She also said, with considerable longing, “we were all innocent.” When I asked her about racism in the time she was nostalgic about, she considered it thoughtfully but became a bit defensive, alluding to a particular case she had heard about saying “that just wouldn’t have happened, *couldn’t* have happened.” The Cook Strait is notoriously turbulent: although very short, our flight was rough. She was prepared for this, since she made the journey frequently. She didn’t take the ferry, she said, because the crossing made her seasick. But she was also terrified of airplane accidents, so the whole time she talked to me about the destruction of social democracy, the insecurity and competition and lack of “innocence,” she was holding a paper bag and interrupting herself to breathe into it.

## *The Eiffel Tower*

I spent about a month in Aotearoa New Zealand, during which I went on about fifteen guided *Lord of the Rings* tours. On the North Island, these included three tours of Hobbiton™ (by the town of Matamata), three of film facilities in Wellington, and location tours in the Wellington area. On the South Island, I took tours to remote Mount Sunday, where “Edoras” was constructed; the site near a small town called Twizel used for the “Pelennor Fields”; tours of various locations in the area of Queenstown, a major resort city and billionaire favorite in the Southern Alps/Kā Tiritiri o te Moana; and one helicopter tour, with a pilot who had worked on the films, of mountain locations near Nelson. I interviewed scores of people: tour guides and tourists, employees and owners, pilots and bus drivers, people who worked on the films and “kiwis” who looked on the entire business from outside. In what follows, I have emphasized description over analysis, and I have tried to capture the feeling of the place, folded through and around *The Lord of the Rings*. This becomes more acute in the second half, where I talk about the South Island. But like my description of the woman breathing into a bag while talking about socialism and race, I am trying to recreate the somatic experience of tracing narrative escapism through the country so many billionaires dream of escaping the consequences of their systems to. But first, a general description of the tours and the context.

Not all, but a fair amount of the material spoken on the tours is available for study in the dozens of hours of DVD commentary and documentary extras included on the “extended edition” DVD sets. The thinking implied by the existence of all this

supplementary material, as well as the content, was reproduced on every tour I took: there is an immense investment in explaining how everything was done, the tricks of camera work, scale, lighting, angle, location, misdirection. On most location tours, guides have binders of film stills which they hold up in front of whatever you are looking at—a mountain, a river, a quarry—attempting to match the angle of the shot. It’s a constant, confusing blend of mystification, demystification, and re-mystification. For the tourist who approaches New Zealand via this material, the whole country starts to acquire the “Misty Mountain Hop” effect: a landscape, both physically real and culturally reified, overlaid with a fantasy narrative that inhabits the same space, continually being attached to it and detached from it. There’s a frequent insistence that New Zealand *is* Middle-earth, in dimensions large and small, which also seems to justify Werry’s ire. At the Matamata farm that hosts the Hobbiton Movie Set™, the tour guides crow that “the road we are on” was *already* called “Buckland Road!” (“Buckland” is a part of the Shire). “It was meant to be,” I kept hearing. That is how the tours are structured, although they are also shot through with the wistful, frustrated “happiness” of spending large amounts of money trying, in fulfilment of Peter S. Beagle’s desire, to “go there, like a shot.”

All of this, of course, lies alongside the sense of instability I described earlier. Moreover racism, directed both at Māori and at immigrants and travelers, was lodged in a whole range of comments I heard as I traveled around the country. I heard many times about how New Zealand had “changed,” sometimes in understandable ways (too many rich people, not enough social insurance), but clearly also demographically: “they just do things differently.” Pākehā interlocutors would relax, after talking to me

for a while, and start “confiding” racist opinions. Early on, one woman told me, with a carefree smile, “I don’t want to be racist but”; she wanted to tell me that “They [Māori residents of a nearby town] just don’t want to work.” Over and over I heard anxious, antipathetic, or baffled comments about tourists and investors from China. The only thing wrong with growth in Matamata, said another woman, was “Chinese in the road taking photos.” A tour guide joked that religious considerations for Māori “all go out the window once money is involved.” Of course not everyone spoke this way, and some pākehā New Zealanders, mostly younger, foregrounded anti-racist attitudes and talked in detail about Māori traditions, but I did hear these comments frequently in rural areas.

At the time Thompson was writing—her book was published in 2007—New Zealand’s *Lord of the Rings* travel industry was just getting started (284-90).<sup>85</sup> Although in some ways the tours I went on reflected things she described, her account is missing one very important site. The largest Tolkien-related attraction in Aotearoa New Zealand, by far, is the Hobbiton Movie Set™, an immersive location tour. It has a large in-world concession vendor, The Green Dragon™ “inn,” as well as an even larger staging and concession area from which tours depart, the Shire’s Rest™. I took small *Lord of the Rings* tours at various levels of formality throughout New Zealand, but the “Hobbiton Movie Set” (hereafter Hobbiton™) is a big business.

It consists of a kind of park, a twelve-acre “village” located in the midst of a much larger working sheep farm near Matamata, a hundred and fifty kilometers southeast of Auckland. The site is only accessible by guided tours operated by the

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<sup>85</sup> There is some research on the site in tourism industry studies (Singh and Beeton; Tzanelli).

business, which arrive there on branded busses, mostly departing from the Shire’s Rest but also available from Auckland and Rotorua. Cruise ships, docking at sub-tropical harbors in the north, send busses to Hobbiton™ directly. The Alexander family, who own the farm, turned over half the business in exchange for licenses to the intellectual property and the assistance of the companies that had built the original sets, who reconstructed “Hobbiton.” The business operates as a partnership between the owners of the farm (Russell Alexander and his father Ian—“the farmer”) and Peter Jackson.<sup>86</sup> Growth has been continuous and substantial. The attraction as it exists now dates to the opening of “The Green Dragon” by the Prime Minister in 2012, when the whole town of Matamata was “closed.” This is when the “theme park” operation really began, though the business had built gradually over a decade. By 2014 Hobbiton™ had 350,000 visitors, ninety-five percent of them international travelers. According to several people I talked with, the business is now bigger than it’s ever been, operating near capacity at about 2500 visitors a day. One person with no interest in Tolkien—the daughter of the helicopter pilot I flew with—commented on the apparently unflagging growth in Hobbiton™, growth fueled by people with little or no interest in the films, let alone Tolkien, by telling me that “It’s the Eiffel Tower. Hobbiton means New Zealand, and you can’t come to New Zealand without seeing it.”

The farm at Matamata immediately struck location scouts as perfect for Hobbiton. Besides its bucolic hills and general “English” beauty (“made there a century ago by colonists laying waste to native forests”), it had an enormous “Party Tree,” more than twice as big as any other tree in the area. This stood at the edge of a

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<sup>86</sup> Technically Wingnut Films Productions, his film production company. Jackson, Walsh, and Boyens are all named in the documentation.

grassy field across from a hill shaped more or less like the one in Tolkien's illustration, with a picturesque pond ("Bywater") on the other side. The crowning glory of the site is its light, which can make the unfiltered set look very much like the digitally-graded fantasy world of the film, especially at dusk. After striking a deal with the owner, who had never heard of *The Lord of the Rings*, the crew spent months preparing the site, putting in roads, adjusting the height of hills, building the doors of hobbit holes and businesses like the Mill, and planting "English" gardens, all more than a year before filming.

After the films started to be released, when sets and props had almost entirely been removed, tourists began petitioning to visit the farm and sometimes to camp there. The manager of the town's visitor center told me that it had been the "real fanatic fans" who had made it happen; they kept coming to the owners of the farm asking "to sleep there, to be there, to touch the ground"; the farmers, she said, had "no idea" what they had (Whiting). In the earliest tours, guides would show visitors—just three vans a day—the remains of a few hobbit-holes with plywood fronts and round out the visit with sheep-shearing demonstrations. As demand continued to grow, they entered an agreement with Jackson and the relevant companies to reconstruct Hobbiton™ and be co-owners of a standing attraction, a development that coincided with the need to re-create the set for three *The Hobbit* films. Many parts of the farm—one drives through it on the bus into the set—are still mobbed with sheep.

"Hobbiton" was imagined as having about 300 inhabitants, and built to show the everyday life of a village, with different occupations, laundry lines, scarecrows, wagons, working chimneys, signage, hedges, gardens both individual and communal,

and (according to the common sense of the book) class differences, though no serious poverty or lavish estates. The technique on the tours is to tell you both how effects were created and also a great deal about the business and its history. Some of this resembles an embodied version of the DVD extras, for instance showing the startlingly narrow cut through which “Gandalf passes in his cart” at the beginning of the first film: it was a half-cart, they explain, and Frodo was seated further from the camera—but it’s surprisingly extreme in person, in the midst of all the carefully crafted naturalism. The tricks to create illusions of scale are available for participation: one poses in front of small hobbit holes to look big and by large ones to look like a hobbit. And then there is personalizing information about the business itself: how the owners responded to the film scouts, what they made of the fans who came around, how the son persuaded the father, what was at stake in negotiations with New Line, how they struck a deal with Peter Jackson. All these stories follow the well-worn grooves of local lore and business triumphalism in a chatty, round the pub vein. As with the films, much of the cash is in merchandising. The gift shop does an enormous business selling Weta-branded products at top dollar (it’s all cheaper in Wellington), their own beer and wine, and various unofficial Tolkien-adjacent crafts. I bought tea towels.

The “Official Tour Guide Document” is currently available in Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Spanish, Thai, and Russian, though most tours are in English (“Terms and Conditions”). The one exception is for tour groups from China, which formed a big part of the business from the beginning. The Chinese market is so large that Hobbiton™ established a separate fleet of busses, differently marked (and white rather

than green, with no film stills on them), which does tours for Chinese visitors; these are said to be quite different from the tour given in English. In Matamata, the nearest town, there is a subset of businesses recognizably pitched to the Chinese market, including a Tolkien-themed buffet called “Valinor” that caters solely to Chinese tour busses (Valinor is the eternal home of the divine Valar in the Uttermost West).

Although the “ninety-five percent international” statistic was cited to me repeatedly, during both day and dinner tours I had long conversations with transplants, global citizens living in Aotearoa New Zealand: an American woman working at the University of Auckland, a British soldier stationed in New Zealand, an immigrant mom originally from South Asia. I sat next to the latter, there with her family, on the bus in to one of the daytime tours, and she was eager to talk. She said they had never seen the films, but had lived in New Zealand for “a while now” and wanted to see *Hobbiton*<sup>TM</sup>. Throughout the tour, her family kept wandering away from the tour group, having their own visit, not written into the script. Near the end, while most of us stood around in a circle on the “party field,” listening to the guide, her husband—precisely groomed and wearing a Sikh turban—kept walking backwards around the Party Tree with a selfie stick; the rest of his family was chatting under the marquee.

Among the English-language tours, there is a two-tier system: evening “banquet” tours, which generally need to be reserved months in advance, and standard day-time tours. One tourism industry worker in Matamata described the daytime tours to me as “the commoner’s tour.” It’s two hours long, moves very quickly, has less-expert guides, and above all is very crowded. Multiple tours continually operate at once. A lot of fans, the operator of the local backpackers (the New Zealand term for

youth hostel) told me, are “disappointed.” She said eighty to ninety percent of their business is young people from Germany, for whom New Zealand in general and Hobbiton™ in particular is a top destination. They buy the cheaper daytime tour and then feel let down.

The evening I arrived I did the banquet tour, and the next day I did two daytime tours, spending a few hours between them at the Shire’s Rest talking with staff and visitors. The more expensive tour certainly delivers more “authenticity,” and was more fun, but I suspect this might diminish as one went further up the price range: helicopter pilots fly in with clients before the park opens to the public, giving them more access to the sets but much less to other people. Tourism rings variations on the experience of massness, being in the crowd. It does this best, for this particular narrative, when it’s just crowded enough. I talked with three helicopter pilots waiting while their passengers toured the park; I asked if they got a lot of people coming on helicopters to take the tour, and they laughed: *lots*. The fact that this is common, and three pilots were there at once, indexes the luxuriousness of New Zealand tourism, because helicopters are expensive. One of them had flown a family up from Hawke’s Bay, a significant distance. The pilots talked about “what it used to be like”: “you’d fly people up here and the farmer would meet you with his dog. Now there’s [waving at the ironically-named “Shire’s Rest,” the busses, parking lots, and crowds] all this.” The little kids, the Hawke’s Bay pilot said (putting out a hand to show how little) were really excited about the stories, but everyone else was just having a ride. He spoke about fan culture with a bewilderment that is widespread.

A thing that is common in New Zealand, thus, is rich people spending money. One possibly apocryphal (but on the other hand possibly not) story I heard in Queenstown concerned helicopters, a fan, and the business of the jeweler in Nelson who made “the One Ring.” The Ring had been a great many rings in different sizes, with and without writing, in different metals. After the films, he continued to have a good business making “the Ring,” and still does; I went by his shop, though it was closed for the holidays, and a schedule of sizes, materials, and other options was still on display. According to the legend, a woman had the Ring made in platinum, hired a helicopter to fly her over Mt. Ruapehu (Mount Doom), which is an active volcano, and threw it into the crater. A lot of things I did in the country, like getting into a helicopter or taking the “banquet tour” or going to Aotearoa at all, basically fell into this category. It’s hard to imagine a more anti-environmental, unnecessary act of individual consumption—within my range, that is—than flying from New York to New Zealand to eat meat. But the banquet tour was a lot of fun.

I went on the evening tour the night I arrived in Matamata; in fact I raced for it, arriving in Matamata on a bus at 4:30, dropping my things at the backpacker’s, and leaving for Hobbiton™ on their 5:00 shuttle. I was back in my bed making notes just after midnight. On the dinner tour, parts of the trip filled in with recorded video on the tour busses during the day are performed and individualized by the most highly skilled guides. Everything is “live,” “spontaneous,” “authentic,” “warm.” The effect is not to derealize the role of money, which is foregrounded. The warmth comes from the assembled strangers on a common project, and prompted by the guides and the relaxed pace. It was more expensive than the daytime tours—they were about eighty dollars

each and this was two hundred—but much better. The evening began with a leisurely, uncrowded tour of “Hobbiton” in the late afternoon light. This was followed by beer and then dinner at “The Green Dragon,” a capable imitation of Bilbo’s party: “an engrossing entertainment: rich, abundant, varied, and prolonged” (I.ii.28). We had been assigned into groups to fill four wide, long tables—six or seven on each side and two or three on each end, with a groaning board, shared family style. A hobbitish spirit of gluttony was encouraged and enjoyed.

The crowd was international. At my table there was a German family who lived in Mumbai (one of them worked for Vodaphone) and an Indian man who lived in Denmark with his Italian wife who grew up in the Netherlands. The couple from Denmark both worked for Lego, designing and marketing franchised products: apparently the *Lord of the Rings/Hobbit* set is the bestselling Lego product of all time (theme parks, I learned, are “a separate division”). The youngest son in the German family, maybe eight years old, adopted me early in the evening. He’d been born in the U.K. and attended an English-language school in India, and he wanted to speak English, though he spoke German at home. There was a woman from Calgary who was born in New York, traveling with her Canadian family and a friend of hers and her daughter from New Zealand. We all belonged to the globalized professional-managerial class, and we drank beer and wine and talked easily for hours about global topics in this de-located outpost of British culture: Canada versus the U.S., Lego and Vodaphone, how crazy Brexit is.

A minority of the participants on the evening tour were major Tolkien fans, though there were some. There was newly-married American couple, a young woman

in a dirndl-ish dress like the ones worn by hobbit women in the films, who danced on the party field, and her young husband, who loved catching references to Middle-earth on folk metal records; we agreed that Blind Guardian were awesome. He said he'd been planning this trip since before he planned their *Rings*-themed wedding, and she interjected, "since before he knew we'd *have* a wedding." This couple connected with other serious fans on the tour, including a father and daughter from Queensland and an English couple. All of them agreed the park was wonderful, "gorgeous."

The contrast to the Tolkien Society was marked. There, introverts get to know one another largely through years and years of (voluntary, free) labor; there is no single commercial vendor, and celebrations are organized by members. Bonds in the Tolkien Society often last for decades, and marriages are common. The Hobbiton™ dinner required no labor from us, and produced an instantaneous, and instantly dissolving, bond. I saw one middle-aged woman hug the two tour guides goodbye at the end of the dinner tour, and her kids followed suit. There was abundant convivial fellowship over the table. Everyone was eager to talk to people they'd never met before, though most were with their families. Conversations were lively, people were genuinely invested in connecting, and, though Tolkien and Middle-earth were one topic, they were by no means the only one. The whole thing lasted about six hours. And then it was over.

After dinner, we picked up torches (flashlights) and re-circulated through the twelve-acre set in the dark, finally re-assembling on the Party Field for the closing speech of the evening. It was dark now, late, and we were standing in a circle by a pond filled with croaking frogs. Half the people had lanterns, and the guide asked

everyone to put them out. She told us, “you’ve been snapping hundreds of pictures, but now we are putting something in our memories.” She invited us to close our eyes or look at the stars, which were abundant on a clear evening in the middle of a large farm. She invited us to remember the different hobbit holes we’d seen and then to choose one that we’d like to live in. She reminded us of holes we’d seen; there had been 44 altogether, distinguished in many cases by props showing a romantic occupation, beekeeper or carpenter. We might choose the “artist’s hole” or the “fish smoker” or just “the little blue door with all the flowers.” We were to mentally adopt it as our own, take possession in our imaginations. The focus was on “homes,” not labor. This speech, unlike much of what she had said over the previous six and a half hours, was very rehearsed—and it was about real estate.

While Hobbiton™ in the off-hours is picturesque and peaceful, the development it has prompted in nearby Matamata is not. The center of the town looked a bit like disturbed ground. “It’s all new,” people kept saying. It had been a tiny rural town before this recent development, and there were still no streetlights, though there was a great deal of traffic and several rotaries. I spoke with the owners of a large Indian grocery, and they had only been open six months. The Backpackers had only been open six weeks. Even the visitor’s center (the “i-Site”) showed photos of multiple reconstructions; it had received permission for a hobbit-themed design and spent a quarter of a million dollars on a brass Gollum (C. Gardner; A. Brown). I interviewed the manager of the i-Site, Sue Whiting of the Matamata Public Relations Association, and I asked her about the relationship between the park and the town. She said that the town’s historical profile (“prosperous,” dairy and thoroughbred breeding)

meant they didn't see the point or "benefit" of the project for a long time, but that they came around when they saw how much business there was. She told me that, when she first came to Matamata in 1997, she'd let the staff go for Christmas, because everyone would be at the beach. During the rest of the year, they were only open from 10:00-2:00, and she "spent most days playing Patience" (Whiting). When I was there, the i-Site was packed, and open long hours. They now get fifty thousand visitors a year. She told me there had been "a dramatic increase in eateries" since the park scaled up. Among others, Subway, McDonalds, and KFC were all nearby. Matamata looks like towns one might see in the U.S.: prosperous and cheap, like it's been trashed by rapid development without urban sensibility.

### *Can't live in New Zealand and avoid those*

From Matamata I went to romantic Wellington, the capital; a city of 400,000 people, home of Te Papa (the national museum), and center of the film industry. Wellington is built on very steep hills around an enormous bay, and it looks a little like a smaller, more dramatic San Francisco, though with that "slightly off" feeling that makes things in Aotearoa seem uncanny to a foreigner. It's got loads of hipsters; I stayed in a neighborhood called "Brooklyn" ("it was meant to be!") overflowing with ultra-specialist coffeeshops and brew pubs and vinyl. In Wellington I encountered lots more of the colonial narrative, in and out of the cinematic narrative—industriousness, survival, creativity, battles, attacks. The indigenous, in Jackson's film, is framed as foreign, the settler as homely, and this disorienting logic is common.

*The Lord of the Rings* guides in Wellington knew the films and the film industry extremely well, and I met a number of people who had worked on them. The tours of the Weta Workshops, though presented in terms of their general work in the industry, acknowledge that they are “most known for *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*—can't live in New Zealand and avoid those!” and they spend most of the tour showing visitors props and techniques from *The Lord of the Rings*, telling war stories of production, and selling tie-in merchandise, some of it costing hundreds of dollars or more. Weta is only one of four facilities in Miramar, the California-ish-ly named suburb used for film, that are co-owned by Peter Jackson. Miramar was “a nothing suburb twenty-five years ago,” a guide explains. Film production supplies a post-industrial industry, occupying former factories and warehouses, which are historicized in detail: “this was a paint factory until...” Weta Workshop’s main building was a water slide in 1800s, then a mental hospital, then a general hospital during the war, then a battery factory, then a pharmacology factory. Industrial collapse made the neighborhood an “ideal space” for making movies, and now it’s an expensive suburb. There’s a “Hollywood”-type sign over Miramar that says “Wellington,” in white capitals, with the wind blowing away the last letters.<sup>87</sup> The “arts & crafts” style of the new building for the Park Road Post production studio, which Jackson created out of the old (public) Film Unit, makes it consistent with California and thence with Birmingham and William Morris and by extension Tolkien.

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<sup>87</sup> A guide in Wellington mentioned that the carpet filling the road was “in competition with Harry Potter for longest red carpet.” This dogging of Harry Potter and *The Lord of the Rings* by one another was remarkable, and frequently mentioned. Online media fandom and improved CGI shaped the mass global audiences for both, as in a sense does the fact that both started as novels, but it seems to me there was more going on here.

From Wellington, I went to Nelson (the helicopter location tour) and then to Christchurch. Not settled until the arrival of the English in the mid-nineteenth century, and named after the Oxford college, the pitch for settlers was to create “England outside of England.” The major park, Hagley (one of the world’s largest urban parks) was filled with English trees, a catalogue out of Tolkien: willows, ashes, oaks. The city was known for its residents’ pride in their gardens, and the city center was built out of masonry in imitation of Victorian Gothic style. A tour guide accounted for all this by describing the settlers as “homesick,” something I heard repeatedly. My host there was Irish, and she expressed the homesickness meme in a contemporary form, saying she was “hoping for a renewed Commonwealth,” imagined as the U.K., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and, apparently, Ireland. The racial dimension of homesickness is obvious: it’s a damaged life, including for the large downwardly mobile sector of the romanticized “middle class,” but the racism tips readily into fascism in the absence of class advocacy and social care. In 2019, Christchurch was in the news again as the site of terrorist mass shootings at local mosques.

Before settlement, Christchurch had largely consisted of bogs, and the earthquake of 2011 flattened it, killing almost two hundred people. After the quake, for a long time, the city center was cordoned off and controlled by the Army. Residents couldn’t access businesses, so they began moving outwards. As in Matamata, for miles around Christchurch almost everything looks new: broad streets friendly only to cars, big box stores, sprawl. Six years after the earthquake, the governing body of the city was still locked in an intractable battle over whether to rebuild Christchurch Cathedral as it had been (the “homesick” faction) or to allow it to

be replaced with something safer. As in Wellington, where many people had actively opposed the “Wellington” sign (originally planned to say “Wellywood,” before the outcry), engineering the city became a dispute over national identity.

I got a good look at the sprawl around Christchurch because it was the departure point for the longest tour of my trip—simply because of the length of the drive—to “Edoras,” Mount Sunday. The drive took three and half hours each way, even though the site is only 18 kilometers from Mount Cook, a major tourism center, as the crow flies. There is no very direct road there, however, and there was no road at all when it was scouted for the films. *Lord of the Rings* tourism, at all times, involves a certain amount of riding on buses watching videos. This ride had time for hours of *Rings*-TV. From my notes: “a U.S. television special. Stuff from the DVD sets. A music video. A symphony, Howard Shore conducting—so serious. The applause. He’s emotional. Bloopers.” About fourteen of us made the drive in a little bus. Our group included another young American couple who had recently married (“on July 9!”) in Louisville, Kentucky. The bride was pleased that her church let them use a song from *The Lord of the Rings* in their wedding. She had read a collection of essays about women in Middle-earth (probably Croft and Donovan) and told me she liked “to be able to defend things she likes if someone says something negative about them,” which I recorded in my notes with the comment, “very pure.” A good-natured English woman, who said she had fallen asleep in the second film, was on the van because she had been on a bicycle tour and cracked her ribs. She told me something I could not have fully noticed traveling by bus: “the country is so empty—miles and miles—

empty, deserted, wild.” Even the attenuated feeling of wildness did grow as I continued south.

The destination was, according to my notes, “So breathtakingly beautiful.” Situated on a vast area of conservation land set aside to restore indigenous grasses, Mount Sunday is a rocky outcrop in a valley between larger, snow-topped mountain ranges. These form a wind tunnel: when we got out, and everyone gasped at the wind, the guide told us it was “very standard” and “gets much worse.” All *Lord of the Rings* tours on the South Island bring props and costumes to let participants cosplay at the locations; where most tours use lighter versions of the weapons (Weta manufactured them in various weights), all the weapons we brought to the summit of Mount Sunday were very heavy. The scenes at Edoras form one of the most striking sequences in the films, with Miranda Otto’s gorgeous frocks whipping around in the wind; a sequence where the flag of Rohan blows off the edge of the set and across the grasslands was apparently unplanned. In the documentaries, it’s clear that the actors were smitten with this location. I found it indescribable, and it must have been utterly incredible with the full set in place.

From Christchurch, I went to Twizel, a village in the south where the Pelennor Fields were shot. This was another long drive. The bus drivers on intercity busses in New Zealand talk on the PA intermittently, and they always seemed to know the breeds of cows, the prevailing winds, what was to blame for damage in the earthquake, why you got more rain in this place than that; riding a bus was a bit like being in a ninth-grade classroom. They invariably apologized for asking you to wear your seatbelt, a reminder required by law; they always assured us it was stupid and didn’t

repeat it if we made a stop. The driver to Twizel was a New Zealand type, with a relaxed air and plenty of jokes. The accent on the South Island sounds more British than in the more populated, cosmopolitan north, which makes it seem more remote; they use stereotypical New Zealand expressions like “wee,” “sweet as,” “righty-ho.”

International travelers are thrown into relief. From my field notes:

A passenger from Indianapolis is yelling at coworker on his phone about wanting “his money” from a “she” who is obviously “playing games.” We go around a bend and the Southern Alps heave into view, across the horizon. Indianapolis is now sitting in the front row, peppering the driver with questions: “Why is it called Christchurch? Is it really religious?” “Christ Church is the name of a college of Oxford.” “You mean they have exchange programs?” This requires a few more rounds. Then: “Alpacas. What are they?” An hour later, a new driver mentions *The Lord of the Rings*, and he gets excited and asks about tours. “Not here. Queenstown.” I am thankful; he won’t be on the tiny tour with me.

The tiny tour at Twizel included an English super fan with whom I did a long interview and is described in detail in the next chapter.

The final bus ride was from Twizel to Queenstown, a deeply unsettling and beautiful place, and the transition was marked by the driver’s recognition of something alarming in the changing environment. Most of the drive had been through empty sheep country. The driver said we were passing the place “where Shrek died,” at one point, and I was baffled until I remembered another piece of lore, the story of Shrek the sheep, who was lost in the wild for two years and grew twenty-eight kilos of wool. Shrek was flown to an iceberg for a photo shoot and achieved fame as the emblem for “Icebreaker” clothing. This was followed by the story of a hermit farmer who died in his nineties and his legal battle for his farm near Mt. Cook. “Just by nature,” the driver said, “New Zealanders like our space and freedom.” As we drove down from a high

pass to the Silicon Valley-like hyper-development of Queenstown, he told us that they don't like high rises or apartments: “we like to live close to the ground with lots of room.” They sound part hobbit, part Fanonian colonialist, assuming there is a difference.

As we drove into Queenstown, he talked about all the building going on, the luxury homes putting pressure on farms in the area, complained about the proliferation of roundabouts: “they've built all these shopping malls and supermarkets, just in the last twelve months.” There were helicopters overhead, huge sports fields, fancy new houses crowded together. I later read that Peter Thiel purchased three hundred acres in the area. Stories about billionaires were common in Queenstown. Pākehā teenagers gathered at the edge of the lake at sunset, surrounded by luxury restaurants and hotels, to drink and play guitars. The city is, again, fantastically beautiful, on a long, large lake called Wakatipu, facing a mountain range called (really) the Remarkables, with an air of anarchy in its handful of public spaces.

There are dozens of film locations in the area around Queenstown, and five companies doing *Rings* tours, but it is primarily known to tourists as the base for “adventure travel.” It was first settled in the Gold Rush of the 1860s; the Ithilien sequence was mostly shot in a former mining area near Queenstown that is full of feral English garden plants from that period. Everywhere I went in Aotearoa New Zealand, but especially around Queenstown, people told me about how Peter Jackson was buying up property to “protect” it, to prevent development and preserve some older (but presumably not indigenous) idea of the country. I took several tours, including the area around “Paradise,” the “rural locality” near Queenstown where Jane Campion’s

Netflix series *Top of the Lake* was set, surrounded by alps that are all over the films as well as the forests used for the outer parts of Lothlórien and Fangorn. This area was host to comical/anxious contrasts: the “world’s smallest library” (allegedly; it looked about four meters square) and nearby a hotel costing tens of thousands a night. The road to the area, I was told, was only sealed in 1996; before that, everything was delivered to this end of the lake by boat. Now the road is a tourist through-way. But what stuck with me—besides a large portrait of Frodo made entirely out of jellybeans at the top of the Skyline gondola in Queenstown—was a couple of conversations, with two white, middle-class, middle-aged men, a pendant pair of contrasting sensibilities between positionally-similar people in the south of the country.

The first came after an ill-chosen boat tour. I rode back in the van with the proprietor, who tried to console us for the freezing rain we’d enjoyed for the previous two hours with a story about how he had jumped into Doubtful Sound, a fjord on the west coast, four times. It had been “what the Australians call spanner water. Why? Because it tightens your nuts!” He said he had nearly drowned because hypothermia froze his muscles on the last jump, explaining that he had “wanted to best a mad Irishman.” And anyway, he said, “Hypothermia is one of life’s must-do experiences.” I was sitting next to him—I tried to sit next to drivers when I could—and he told me his family had been in the area since 1862, the Gold Rush: his great- great-grandfather, he said, was “the first police in Queenstown.” His family had had a farm, and had obviously accumulated capital. He’d worked as a professional photographer for twenty-five years, photographing luxury real estate. This jolly, aggressive property-owner was the only person in New Zealand to tell me that Peter Jackson was

“a total asshole.” He had gotten yelled at by a lawyer after attempting to talk to Jackson “kiwi to kiwi” about an access road for his property on a mountain by Lake Wakatipu, which must be worth a fortune.

The other conversation was with an intercity bus driver whom I also sat next to, on the long ride back from Te Anau, another film site. He had grown up on a sheep and cattle farm south of Invercargill, which is the southernmost city on the South Island, further south than any city in the world except in Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. Similarly to the hypothermia enthusiast, he had changed careers, having worked as a lawyer in Invercargill for twenty-seven years before deciding he “needed a lifestyle change.” He took a job driving the bus three days a week. The route was very thinly populated. We kept stopping to deliver small parcels of newspapers, a weekly from Christchurch, to infinitesimal towns. As he talked, unprompted, he began describing how “the whole character of New Zealand” had been changing, “especially the North Island,” because (he thought) of immigration from Asia. I asked what he meant by “character,” and he was unspecific; his sentences would trail off. “We were always very small,” he said, “very remote, no one knew we were here.” He called it “a very conservative society” that resisted change. He talked about how fast Queenstown was growing. He advocated reconstructing the Christchurch Cathedral on its original plan, regardless of cost. Doing so would “give people that sense of home, belonging... it used to be such an English city.” It was all easy to psychoanalyze, given the incredibly rapid transformations of New Zealand—by the English and Scottish, by the billionaires—and the fear/expectation of a parallel process, now, with the much larger regional economies of China and other countries in Asia. But the tonality was focused

on something else, homesickness. "I'd just like everybody in the world to live peacefully together." His manner was diffident and modest; he said he'd like to ask me about my research, "if I don't mind." My notes say, "when we make a bathroom stop, he digs for euphemisms."

## CHAPTER 6

### THE COLLECTOR AND THE BOXER

Out of all of the interviews I conducted for this project, I chose two to highlight in this chapter, one in England and one in New Zealand. Both were with English, white, straight, working-class men, but from different generations and very differently interpellated as consumers of fiction, as workers, social beings, and fans. The first, whom I call Richard below, was in his sixties, a collector of Tolkien and Tolkien-related publications and ephemera; he has been an active member of the Tolkien Society for decades. The other, whom I call Connor, was only twenty-two when we met on a small *Rings* tour on the South Island; he has since become a citizen of Aotearoa New Zealand. They are atypical rather than representative of fans in general, and yet usefully parallel in certain ways. Neither finished school. Like so many of the figures in California in the 1960s, both have been connected, if only indirectly, with the military. Richard and Connor are both unusually intelligent people whose devotion to *The Lord of the Rings* has formed a central structuring feature of their lives. The contrast between their stories reflects changes in the world. Their modes of interacting with Tolkien's story gave faces and biographies to some of the changes with which this project is concerned.

#### *The Collector*

Richard has been a member of the Tolkien Society for decades, but he and his wife, Carol, didn't attend the Annual General Meeting where I met many long-time members in 2016. As I conducted follow up interviews after the meeting, several members mentioned him to me, emphasizing his bibliographic expertise, so I emailed him. He and Carol, who live only a half hour from Oxford, drove in to meet me at a pub there on May Day. This was during "May Morning," so the street with the pub was packed with visitors and Morris dancers; Richard was very solicitous in helping his wife, whose mobility is impaired.

As a way to anchor the conversation, Richard bore a photo album documenting his connections with Tolkien and the Tolkien Society. There was a photo from the 1970s of him as a young man standing by Tolkien's grave, and another of "me with Tolkien's favorite tree," a tree on the campus that has since come down. Many members of the Society mentioned the loss of this tree; it's part of a catechism of repeated stories, meaningful points of connection in the group. Any personal photo with Tolkien family members or celebrities of Tolkien culture, such as speakers at the AGM dinners, was included in Richard's album, as well as photos of fellow members of the Society over decades. A special section was devoted to "Wayne and Christina's" wedding, which was also attended by members of the Tolkien family and Rayner Unwin, all documented in photos. Richard explained that he decided to become a collector after seeing Christina Scull's collection of Tolkien materials in 1991.

Interspersed with the history of his connection with the Tolkien Society and the circle of people radiating out from Tolkien himself, however, we discussed some

more individual and personal things. In response to a brief outline of my project, which included my socialist perspective, Carol began to tell me about her socialist parents and grandparents, and a story about her travels when she was young: her parents had moved the family to Australia, and when Carol was a teenager they returned to England via Japan and the trans-Siberian railroad through the Soviet Union from Khabarovsk after a journey from Vladivostok-Nakhodka. Both of them spoke about their meeting and marriage in the 1970s.

When Richard mentioned the town he came from in the extreme northeast of England, however, I was startled, because it was the same unconditionally undistinguished town my grandfather came from. When I blurted this out, Richard asked my grandfather's family name and confirmed, yes, "Dunn is a name you find there." This connection, he said, meant that he could trust me, so he invited me to come to their home to see his collection. I spent a day with them at home, saw them again at a small fan gathering a couple of months later, and yet again two years later when I attended Oxonmoot in 2018. Even more than in other interviews, I had trouble explaining to Richard that my interest was in him and his life more than the bibliographic and biographical information about Tolkien that he shared with me, but over the course of our conversations I did learn a fair amount about him.

Richard works "in a factory" that supplies components for military and commercial aircraft: when I asked for details at the end of my visit, he said, "I solder." It's a task, he says, that the company periodically looks into "offshoring," but it remains in England and his job remains a job done by one person; there's a bit more to it, he said, than an assembly-line task, so it requires a certain kind of attention and skill

with numbers, but it is fundamentally similar. It is both demanding and repetitive, boring but requiring concentration and precision. His dislike of the work, contrasted with his passionate and disciplined pursuit of Tolkien arcana, is accompanied by class-consciousness, a knowing attitude toward both his employer and British politics, which also intersects with his scholarly work. Before her stroke, Carol said, she was a librarian.

They live in a tiny attached house, really a small one-bedroom apartment—a bedroom, a small sitting room, a small kitchen, and a bathroom—with a miniscule, carefully cultivated back garden. The house is *full*, lined with overflowing bookshelves and windowsills, bursting with Richard’s collection, Carol’s books and videos, Carol’s homemade pottery and knick-knacks. The limited remaining wall space is crammed with family photos and artwork related to Richard’s hobby. He couldn’t let me photograph the collection all together because the only place he has to store it is the bedroom; for the hours I spent there, he kept disappearing through the bedroom door and returning, bringing batches of printed matter out on a tea trolley. The house is part of a small development of what, according to Richard, used to be council housing (public housing) for older people; they qualified at age sixty and moved in when Carol “couldn’t handle stairs anymore.” “The Council didn’t like paying for it [maintenance on the housing units],” however, so the whole development has been privatized. “Private companies,” he told me, “are only about one thing: profit.” He told me that the rent they pay to the company that bought out the council flats was higher than the mortgage payments on their previous house, which was much larger. He’s reluctant for people to know about his collection, though he’s very proud

of it, in part because he has no burglar alarm; he can't even afford "book-boxes" to protect his valuables from sun damage, with one or two exceptions for his greatest treasures. And, for a Tolkien enthusiast, they are indeed treasures. Through his hospitality, I had the privilege of handling some very special things.

Richard arranged the presentation in an orderly way. After a few teasers, he promised me a tour "through Tolkien's work from the beginning," warning me that "it'll be a bit of a blur." I was at his house from mid-morning until late afternoon. He started by showing me "snippets," items that, he said, would "add something" to the general understanding of Tolkien's career. It was a pedagogical exercise. His collection is a work of passion, a life's work, and it's huge. Not everything in his collection is by Tolkien; some are just things he likes, like an early edition of *Alice in Wonderland*—he called my attention to the paper—and many far more obscure things.

Richard's main interest is in "academic stuff," although he has a tremendous collection of editions of the fiction. He's particularly interested in documents of Tolkien's career in the 1920s and 30s, so he has, for instance, twenty-five years of a philological journal from that period. He insists that "people say he didn't publish," but that they are wrong: he did publish, but it was "in other people's books." The collection forms a defense. It's personal. He calls attention to items he finds "touching," because of their aura or what they speak to in Tolkien's thinking, in a nuanced way. He says almost nothing about Middle-earth. He adores *The Lord of the Rings*, but his focus is biographical, who Tolkien was, what he cared about, his academic work, his children—"we met John, Father John, [Tolkien's eldest son], what a humble man." Carol said of Priscilla, "she's like the Queen," to which Richard

replied, “she wouldn’t like that”; she’s modest. She remembers people’s names: “she puts you at ease”—a gift, a tool, familiar to me from the porters at Christ Church. Above all, Richard spoke of his own work as a collector and how it intersects with the work of serious lay scholars who work on Tolkien’s life and papers: Christopher Tolkien, Hammond and Scull. Debunking a speculative television program he saw about a ring found in an archeological dig somewhere Tolkien had been, he said, “The real truth is more interesting than the fantasy everyone’s talking about on the telly.” He casually used bibliographic terms that I didn’t always understand; he is easily knowledgeable about forms of page cutting, bindings, paper. He shares the Tolkien scholars’ concern with detail, correction, accuracy. He called Hammond’s *Bibliography* “the bible of collecting and publication.” He repeatedly called Wollheim a “thief,” the same thing Gollum called Bilbo, and he seemed quite angry about it. I repeated the suggestion that Wollheim probably made Tolkien a lot of money. Richard answered, pointedly, “People don’t just do things for money.” It upset him.

When I went to Oxonmoot in 2018, Richard told me that two items from his collection were on display in Blackwell’s, a famous Oxford bookseller next door to the Bodleian. Because of the exhibition of Tolkien’s artwork, he had contacted the bookstore to tell them about his collection. A member of their staff had visited him at home and he had shown it to her, and she had pronounced it “significant.” “And you know how the English are,” he added. She selected two items that he loaned them for the exhibit. One is a letter Tolkien wrote to a schoolteacher, thanking her for sending an appreciation of *The Hobbit* by one of her students and closing with sympathies; teaching is “always exhausting and depressing.” The other item is a book that was

given as an ironical prize by the members of “the Cave” (Lewis’s “junta,” the group within the faculty of English at Oxford in the 1930s that agitated for Tolkien’s “reforms”) in 1938. They sought the “worst” book that they could find, and settled on a volume of student essays, anticipating the coming war, called *Will I Fight?* All the members of the group were, like Tolkien and Lewis, survivors of the Great War. When I went to Blackwell’s to see Richard’s treasures exhibited, I found them in a glass case of rare books, most for sale through Blackwell’s, relating to the Tolkien exhibit. Everything else had a price attached, mostly between £600 and £800, and the items were similar to things in Richard’s collection. Richard’s two items stood out. They were positioned in the most visible shelf in the case with notes saying “Private collection (not for sale).” In ultra-gentrified Oxford, I would have assumed a wealthy collector and perhaps a personal connection with Tolkien had I not known they were Richard’s.

Richard’s hobby has brought him in contact, in more than one way, with academic life, collecting academic publications that supply a human hook, fragments of Tolkien’s everyday life. At one point, he happened to acquire a letter by Maria Rossetti (the sister of Dante and Christina) and was able to trade it through one of his dealer connections for something Tolkien-related. He remembers the contents of the letter in detail. “Never done a deal like that before or since. Did it on a phone call.” Complicated stories about provenance, in the case of individual volumes, also became stories about people: Christina, Wayne, Charles (Noad), Rayner, Christopher. And, equally chatty, historical stories gleaned from collecting this Tolkien arcana, for instance about Gerald of Wales, in the twelfth century, as “the first philologist.” His

enormous collection includes very rare volumes, in very good condition, and reflects unusual attention to the early, more academically active decades of Tolkien's career, which fascinate him. "He can't get away from trees and leaves," Richard told me, in his philological work. He showed me a copy of a 1929 collection, just called *Essays and Studies*, that includes Tolkien's essay on the *Ancrene Wisse*; he told me it's "just a matter of bibliographical fact" that "very few people have seen that" and, whoever they may be, unlike him they "never have the dust wrapper." He filled me in on the philological context I would need to understand what I was looking at: the AB language, regional varieties of Middle English, the relation between the Angles and the Britons as manifested in language. He is Tolkien's student and conservator.

He mentioned repeatedly that he had never been to the Allen & Unwin archive, which is very close to where he lives. I felt he should be able to access this material, which would certainly interest him, but he felt he that could not *just go* because he lacks a university affiliation. I asked if he would like accompany me when I went: I'd be happy to explain his interest, and he could help me understand what I was looking at. He considered it, but later in the conversation he said he didn't think he could do it because he wouldn't be ready. His caution didn't seem necessary to me. But he has always worked methodically, and he regards anything connected with Tolkien or with professional scholarship with a kind of reverence; my suggestion was too sudden.

Above all, he repeatedly expressed the concern that he didn't want people to know about all of his first editions. He told me that "people" (members of the Tolkien community; he's very active online) "say he's showing off." He says "people feel like plebs"; online, he doesn't leave up permanent photos and documents of his collection

because it would make people sad that they couldn't have it themselves. He said that he felt "misunderstood" and that "I don't like to cause people anguish." He mentions someone "with a doctorate," who teaches on Tolkien, who "had a go at him for putting up pictures and making people feel small." He said he felt he's "in a cleft stick." "I've got material here to tell people about," people who "want to learn about Tolkien." But he doesn't want people to know where he lives. He wouldn't feel secure.

This strain in Richard's remarks—the desire to avoid "causing anguish"—reflected, to my ears, both real concern and a rigorous policing, directed both inwardly and in attitudes towards others, that I often encountered during my months in England. With Richard, there was a mixture of pride in his avocation and sincere urgency about not causing pain to fellow fans or disrupting the harmony of the Tolkien community: fellowship. It took the form of harsh comments directed both toward himself—the horror of causing envy—and others, though no one with whom he has personal contact. I would include his lingering anger at Donald Wollheim here, as well as his proto-political antipathy toward "money." This dislike of money—the slippage between greed, as a moral quality, and the money form, which sounds so Marxian—coexists with his collecting hobby, and he is conscious of the fact that it can look like a form of capital accumulation. He sometimes expressed this tension as humor, for instance in the story of the most valuable item in his collection. He was at a book fair in the mid-1990s, he told me, asking around to see if anyone had any Tolkien. A man "sidled up to him ... as if in a spy movie." The man didn't look directly at him; he stood next to Richard, looking ahead at the same shelf he was studying, and said in a low voice, "I've got a first edition of *The Hobbit*, you interested?" "Yes. How

much?” Richard didn’t tell me the figure (politeness), but said it was a reasonable price for the time, and that, “now,” it would be a great deal more. “I wrote a check right away.” It’s not perfect—there’s no dustjacket—but it’s the first impression, which was distinct from every other printing: Richard showed me where a correction was made by hand on all fifteen hundred copies. And all the time he described these things, he reminded me, “I work in a factory, mate. I’m not rich.” He came back to it again, an hour or two later: “Carol is disabled. We have two kids. I work in a factory. I’m collecting books. I’m not rich. I could sell all this. But then where would I be?” It’s not about money. He kept apologizing during lunch for spilling tiny amounts of tea.

Mixed with the rare early materials, in Richard’s collection, are “collectible” publications from the era of Tolkien’s life in mass culture, like the “super deluxe” leather-bound 1987 edition or a collaborative book of illustrations signed by all three artists. Talking about the partnership between Unwin and Hyman that was so quickly absorbed by HarperCollins, he alluded to the “rotten so and so who went and sold out the business.” The obliteration of independent publication by conglomeration in the 1980s and 90s; the lacuna between British publication and American market; these became stories in which human individuals acted as villains or heroes. And pieced within these stories were asides, like the lunch break that took us to a shop for sandwiches, where Richard regretted the loss of the pub that used to occupy the spot: this is one in a long litany of lost pubs, as departed as the small commercial publishers, that people point me to throughout England. For Richard, the loss of the pubs, the downward turn, is linked to the loss of his council housing and his

exploitation at work. This thread of political consciousness is tied to his roots, and the most important digression of the day came in response to my periodic questions about Richard and Carol's lives and backgrounds; my questions were mixed with curiosity about the town my grandfather came from.

Richard's story about that town, constitutively for my argument, departed from education. He outlined the structure of public education that he went through, as it was in his generation, since radical changes were made several times since then (exactly the type of development Williams traces in *The Long Revolution*). From ages seven to eleven, everyone attended primary school together. From ages eleven to fifteen or sixteen, however, secondary school tracked students by class, using a single exam as the metric. "At age eleven, you took the fateful exam, the Eleven Plus": this decided your fate. If you passed, you could go to "grammar school," which would prepare you to take A-levels, the prerequisite to university. If you didn't, you went to "comprehensive school." Richard didn't quite make it: he scored well enough for a "technical college" as secondary school, but his schooling only went until age fifteen. If you did a bit worse, he says, they "take you to the pit for the rest of your life."

The town that brought me to this house, the town Richard and my grandfather were from, is a mining town: my grandfather was from a rung above the boys sent to the pit, though he wound up leaving school at sixteen to be gassed in the trenches in the Great War, and subsequently nearly starved to death as a prisoner. But though I had heard the story of his War and later struggles, I had never heard a narrative about life in the town, or life for the rung below. Richard was closer to it, and this, as much

as the extraordinary collection in the tiny, no-longer-public housing, was the most vivid portion of his testimony.

He shared memories of the “boys destined for the pit. Boys smokin’ fags like a grownup ... hard and full of themselves.” In early adolescence, once the exams had sealed your fate, they “put you down to see.” The young boys were “put in a cage” and sent down a “seven-hundred-foot shaft ... the first few hundred are free-fall. At the bottom, a train takes you out [to where the mining is done], two miles under the sea. You’re not paid for any of that.” Richard described the terror in a serious way: he didn’t make light of it, and though the language was informal there was no humor in this narrative. Of the miners in the pit, he said, “You can’t see them till they’re right up to you. They’re black down to the boots.” When the miners come up from the pit, “They’re not paid for their shower”: he recognizes wage theft, and it angers him as much as Wollheim’s “theft,” and on a similar logic. He remembered asking the miners about how they “go to the loo down there”; they told him they find a corner and “dig a little hole.” For “their sandwich,” they cut a shelf in the mine “to keep it from the rats.”

“Every generation,” he told me, “says, ‘not my son.’” The boys going to the mine left school at fourteen. Richard’s brother became a milkman to avoid the pit; he was terrified, Richard told me. In 1968-69, his family moved South to get away. When the pits closed in the miners’ strike in the 1980s, the town went into a deep depression. Now it’s real estate, “a sort of dormitory for Newcastle,” in Richard’s words. Homes can cost a quarter of a million pounds. Richard’s father, he explained, was an orphan who went to live with his sister, who was married to a “pit man.” His father was given

a choice: the pit or the shipyard. He was comparatively lucky, as he was able to go to the pit as electrician's apprentice. Later, he went to night school and got the HND, the "higher national diploma." Once he had that, he got out of the pit "like a shot"—the same way Peter S. Beagle wanted to go to Middle-earth—and went to work in a small white collar job. That brought the whole family out of the Northeast. Richard said his father told him that, if they hadn't moved south, "you [Richard] wouldn't have met Carol," whom he met in London: the narrative of escape centers on love and family, not on work. Richard said that, nonetheless, he had missed the Northeast as a boy; he had felt sad about leaving it.

He also talked about a strike in the early 1970s. "Heath [Edward Heath, the last Conservative Prime Minister before Thatcher] said, 'Am I running this country or not?'" The reference was to the power of the unions in Richard's childhood. "Then came Thatcher. But people sympathized with the miners." There were about fifty-five deaths a year, he told me. In his class, he remembered, there were two boys whose fathers had died in the mines, though he said that wasn't typical. He had uncles who were injured—one was nearly blinded, the other had "busted a knee." Both injuries meant they had to come out of the pit. Everyone wants to get out of the pit, unless they have to. In my notes, I wrote:

Richard asks why I am "taking copious notes." I'm interested in you more than in Tolkien. This is "just stuff I was told." I believe all of it. He wants to get back to Tolkien. I don't blame him. I feel guilty because I plan to use what he's just told me.

### *The Boxer*

My research in Aotearoa New Zealand was organized differently than my research in the U.K., where I organized my activities around defined organizations, the Tolkien Society and Taruithorn. In New Zealand, I moved around the country as an individual tourist. I didn't have the opportunity to get to know any group with a long-term or intimate system of relationships, and I rarely met anyone more than once. Both the central document of the fandom, Jackson's film rather than Tolkien's book, and the fan activities were organized around visual and aural media, and my style of collecting data mirrored this: I made digital audio recordings of several tours and interviews, including my interview with Connor. All of this, combined with my sense of vertigo about the country, often made me feel less connected, more uncertain, even when the media objects and the content of day to day interactions were very familiar. I met Connor only once. We were on a tour together for a few hours, and talked for a couple of hours afterward at a pub. I didn't develop a robust or nuanced understanding of him or his life experiences. What follows includes a great deal of direct transcription: the interaction remains somewhat puzzling to me. But he was a remarkable person, with an unusual biography structured around *The Lord of the Rings*, and his story contrasted with and paralleled Richard's so dramatically that I pair them here.

Connor was twenty-two when I met him, a fan of the films rather than the books. I asked if he had read the books, and he said that he had read them once, but he seldom if ever spontaneously referenced them. His interaction with the films had come through repeated viewing of DVDs and tourism, supplemented by activities like cosplay and interaction with movie actors. He had left school at an earlier age than Richard did and was employed, at the time we met, as a "builder" (a construction worker). He enjoyed a more autonomous economic position than Richard did, however. He spoke of his grandmother and great grandmother as having "run" pubs,

and he confidently and persuasively expressed the intention of starting a business of his own in Tolkien tourism. He had worked as a boxer, a soldier, a bouncer, a bodyguard, and, for over a year, as a guide at Hobbiton™, the tourist attraction in Matamata. When we met, he had recently ended a relationship of one and a half years and had just met someone new, and he was awaiting a decision on his visa—still a citizen of the U.K. but hoping to be allowed to stay in Aotearoa. He has since become a citizen of New Zealand. He was excited about the company he wanted to start, taking small groups on two-week tours around New Zealand to all the *Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* sites.

I met Connor on a day tour to an enormous field in the middle of nowhere where they had filmed the most crowded sequence in *The Lord of the Rings*, the Battle of the Pelennor Fields. This was located near a village called Twizel in the middle of the South Island. In some ways, the Twizel tour was unusual—a one-person company, very small and informal—and it probably resembled the tours of ten or more years ago, before the Tolkien tour became a commercial genre. From the center of the village, the guide drove us in a small van to an enormous, deserted brown field, with a line of snowy peaks off to the west. She had been an extra in *The Hobbit*: like some other guides I met, she showed us a film still in which she appeared. It was raining, so we sat in the van while she gave her talk, showing clips and stills to illustrate her explanations on an iPad and pointing to different parts of the landscape. Everyone in the van was an outlander: the guide was originally English, though she had lived twenty years in New Zealand; the tourists comprised a family of four from Australia, in which the mom was an immigrant from East Asia; Connor, who had lived in Spain, Scotland, and England before moving to New Zealand; and myself.

The field had been the site of an immense operation: according to the guide, they had filmed there for thirty-two days in 2000. Since the first film hadn't been

released yet, and the area around the village is remote and rural, the producers were unable to find enough extras: his call for volunteers only yielded three hundred, and they ended up using tourists, backpackers, and, by contract, soldiers from a nearby New Zealand Army camp: “Probably the only fighting the New Zealand army ever did,” the guide remarked, the type of hyperbolic joke one hears often in New Zealand, although tours at larger companies and sites, particularly Hobbiton™ and the Weta Workshops, are far more committed to precise factual accuracy.

At Twizel, the producers brought in hundreds of orcs, “Riders of Rohan” and their horses (for whom all the holes in the field had to be filled), soldiers of Gondor, six hundred regular crew members, and a hundred additional makeup and costume people from Wellington to handle the extras. Some of the stories the guide told were ones I had heard again and again, even before coming to New Zealand, such as the fact that eighty percent of the Rohirrim were played by “girls.” A thousand figures were filmed there, clustered in the middle of this vast field, and they were used only for general fighting and crowd scenes: the actual acting was done in front of blue screens and edited in. Sixteen cameras shot the same movement, each day, from sixteen different angles; as I was told on almost every film tour, the large number of cameras and other techniques allowed them to use the same material for different effects, to make a thousand people look like a hundred thousand, to make the same mountain range represent different geographical areas, and so on. The guide, a middle-aged hippie awash in folksy good humor, also regaled us with fan-tourist war stories, presumably tall tales. I had heard some of these before, also: the six-foot-nine armed “hobbit” and his threatening behavior; a Russian who asked to see the hobbits in their cages; the woman who threw the platinum Ring into Mount Ruapehu. After about an hour of this, she cracked out her supply of props and costumes and we did photos.

Like most of the Tolkien guides, she relied on what might be called the Socratic method of tourism, prompting us with questions and clips, testing the fans on their familiarity with the DVD extras. As the guide peppered us with questions (“Do you remember?” “How was this done?” “Whose leg is that?”), Connor kept answering, with such perfect accuracy and interest that she started eliciting his story. When she learned that he had been a guide at Hobbiton™, they began to talk shop: he told her about the business he hoped to launch, and in the process dropped details about his biography that intrigued me, all delivered in his characteristic south-eastern English dialect: “we was at the last *premier*.” He had worked at Hobbiton™ for over a year. He had watched *The Lord of the Rings*, he said, every week, often every day, since he was six years old. He had lived in Spain from age nine and been a professional boxer as an adolescent, then served in the Army and was disappointed that Britain pulled out of Iraq before he had a chance to go. He was enthusiastic about being interviewed.

Connor needed a break before meeting, because he had gone on the tour without booking a room; he would later explain that he hated to be constrained by commitments, especially after having been in the Army. We met up in a very ordinary modern pub in a strip mall in the late afternoon. It was quite busy, considering how small the town was; it was still the holiday season, and the southern part of the South Island, where we were, is holiday territory. Though Twizel is, as I said, small and remote, like most developments in this part of the country it serves as a base for outdoor activities. Connor had spoken to members of the press in the past about being a fan, and thus had experience in being “interviewed.” As with Richard, I’m not sure I was successful in communicating the nature of my project, and I suspect he understood my interest in him as journalistic.

It had been Connor's father who bought the film DVDs and first showed them to him at age six or seven. At age nine, the family moved from Essex to Spain. He wasn't certain if there had been a particular reason for this: his parents "just decided to move there." At ten, he began attending a Spanish school where, he said, he was "bullied": he told me he was "petrified" of the "big Colombian guys" at the school. As an adult, Connor was one of the most heavily muscled people I've ever met. "I was a skinny little English kid," he told me, "at a Spanish school; didn't really speak much Spanish. I had a target on my back." So, he said, his father suggested boxing lessons, and at age twelve he left school and began training every day as boxer. He said that, at the time, his father knew that he had left school, but his mother didn't, part of a pattern in his relationship with his father and the cultivation of masculinity as he recounted it, though he made no meta-commentary on this.

From the beginning, he trained with the kind of single-minded commitment he has brought to *The Lord of the Rings*, and he flourished as a boxer: "Everyone thought I had a lot of potential." School had been thoroughly alienating: "I was gonna fail whether I stayed in or not," he said, and his father encouraged him to commit fully to boxing. I asked if he was ever injured, and he said no, he had never "broken a nose," and later that he had never lost a fight. "When I was fourteen," he told me, "I got in the ring with ... the British belt at the time, a lightweight about twenty years old ... I ended up knocking him on his arse in the first round." After that fight, he said, "people got interested," and promoters flew him to Scotland, where he boxed for a few weeks at "really scary gyms—'Eye of the Tiger' sort of thing [...] quite a rough place."

And all the time, as soon as he got home from the gym, he would watch *The Lord of the Rings*. "With the extended editions, I'd watch the first half one day and the second half the next day, y'know? It was my side thing, it was how I looked upon life in a way." He repeatedly referred to the films this way, like a form of spiritual

practice. He said he thought he had watched the films three hundred times “if not more.” At that point, he no longer picked up every detail, but

I’m still watching it like it’s the first time. I have the same emotion. I listen to the music, the soundtrack, on my phone. All the time. I could run and train listening to that music. It’s quite slow, there’s not many words, but it just recaptures a memory from my childhood. ... It just gives me incredible motivation. I wouldn’t be here. I don’t know where I would be in life if I hadn’t followed it so seriously.

When asked if he thought of going back to school, he said no. “Not at all. I just can’t deal with it. With the authority, and all that sort of thing.”

Escaping authority can be difficult, however, and Connor’s path was especially plagued by it. At sixteen, he enlisted in the Army and served as a private in the parachute regiment for over two years. He chose “the parachutes” because they are “the elites of the Special Forces.” Originally, he wanted to join the Royal Marines, but “failed their academic test.” Although he talked about the restrictions of being in the Army, he imagined it, via *The Lord of the Rings*, in terms of autonomy and individualism. “I would jump out of planes. We’re the only regiment in the British Army that can be deployed in twenty-four hours.” But there were tensions between his ideal and the experience.

I’d picture myself going over the mountains, with a sword. I love how Aragorn lives. I don’t have any debts, any bills. I’m not tied to anything. I could disappear off the face of the earth and I wouldn’t have any questions asked. And that’s the way I like to live my life. ... I don’t book things in advance. I just don’t like it.

*How did that work with the army?*

I found it really hard. I don’t like being told what to do. I adapted quickly, but now I’m out, I’m much worse than before. If it’s not my own decision I just freak out. ... It was almost like I learned how to live

in my cage. But as soon as that cage door was open, now I'm worse. Now I don't want to go anywhere near a cage.

I asked if he'd been miserable in the Army, and he sounded perfectly cheerful as he replied that he had once been put on "suicide watch." "I wasn't suicidal, but I was depressed, and [...] I told them if I don't get out I'm maybe going to hang myself. I hadn't been forced in this corner before."

As he had mentioned on the tour, he had been disappointed that the U.K. withdrew from Iraq before he turned eighteen, which would have allowed him to go. This only exacerbated the constraints that came with being in the military.

You just train, and you just keep training. [...] You're not learning a skill. Where an engineer would do fourteen weeks of basic training—how to live in the field, how to use a rifle, all these basic, central skills you need to be a soldier—where an engineer would then do those fourteen weeks and then go straight into learning how to be an engineer. [...] Where in the infantry, you're constantly just getting fit.

I asked him why he had wanted to go to Iraq, and he said that when he had started to "lose heart" for boxing, he asked himself, "what am I going to do now? And I thought, well ... they need fitness, and I do fitness ... that might help me out. Might be my way of life." But "it didn't really work out." When I asked if he was glad, now, that he hadn't gone to Iraq, he said that he had "really wanted to," but did sometimes think "perhaps it's better that I didn't go, cause I'd probably be even more messed up than I am, than I was. And I might have not come back."

In the course of this exchange, I said it sounded like he had felt restless.

I'm still quite restless. [...] I definitely know I'm still missing something in life. [...] In England I was very... very... I was very messed up, actually, in a way. I'd become quite violent. I'd become very aggressive. I had no patience.

I asked what he meant about "being violent," and he explained about the next stage of his career, after he left the Army at nineteen. He had gotten a job as a bodyguard at the

Saudi Arabian embassy in London, which he supplemented by working as a bouncer at clubs.

And I got really, really into it, it gave me a buzz. I really liked fighting. I enjoyed the adrenaline of it. And then I got bottled. I got that scar on my forehead. And a couple weeks later I got stabbed. And I just really went downhill. I got really violent. [...] I just love fighting. I used to go to work to fight. That was my thing. Every weekend. And I then started getting kicked off clubs, cause like I threw a guy through a glass door, I broke a guy's jaw. I started to go downhill a little bit.

He told his mother that he'd like to go to New Zealand, and she helped him. She was worried, he said, that he would wind up in prison. He'd saved seven hundred pounds, and she booked him a flight and paid for it, hoping that "the outdoors" would be good for him. It gave him great satisfaction to talk about how well it had worked out, from the point of view of that relationship: "She's so happy with my good life here. She sent me a letter saying how proud she was I'd turned my life around. [...] I haven't had a fight since I left England. [...] I've tried to smarten up a little about that, because I could really get in trouble. With my boxing, and military experience."

"You could really hurt someone?" I asked him. "Yeah. And I have done. I'm lucky, I've got away with it that, past few times." He described the training he received for the job at the Saudi embassy, showing me links on his phone ("Advanced Physical Intervention Training"), and saying he'd gotten a license. "In the bodyguarding kind of thing, the money really gets good. I made a lot," he said, but he also said that, besides the fights he was getting into in his side gig as a bouncer, he was unsatisfied. "It was definitely an experience, but it was quite boring... A lot of waiting and following." He had also notice the effect it had on him. "Doing that kind

of security work has had a real impact on the way I look at things. I can't just sit and relax when I go out."

He quickly got the job at Hobbiton when he came to New Zealand. "I'm good with people," he told me at one point. "I've always had any job that I wanted." But he became frustrated and left after a year. He said that the "management" was "all about money and how many people they could cram on the tour," reminding me of Richard. I asked him about his impressions of New Zealand.

I love that people give you a chance here. You don't have to give them a three-page C.V.. And there aren't a lot of laws for every little thing here. [...] It's a land of opportunity. [...] The UK is very controlling. We're the most surveilled country in the world. [...] Everyone's just trustworthy here, it's just relaxed, and it's not judging. People in England are very judging. I never used to go out unless I looked my best. I'd go to a sun bed. I'd wear my best clothes. Here I just wear my hunting gear. [...] I can just be me. In Essex [...] you sort of become a person that you're not.

He also talked about his love of the outdoors and how central that was to his life in New Zealand. "They believe in hunting, fishing. They believe it comes from the land and you give it back to the land. I only learned to hunt in New Zealand. You can't hunt in England." He hunts pigs, small animals, and deer, and it gives him a chance to fight in what feels to him like a more positive way. "With pig hunting, you just use a knife. Your dogs get him; you have to wrestle with him, flip him over and stab him in the heart. They're really strong, and they've got those tusks. They can kill you really easy."

He told me that the people he worked with in his construction job were nearly all Māori or Samoan, except for "one Kiwi guy." "All my friends are Māori. They're the people I go hunting with." He taught me to pronounce "Māori," or at least got me a

bit closer to pronouncing it right. Although I'd been in the country for weeks, I hadn't heard anyone pronounce it properly. "The English," he said, "look at it and say, "MAO" [rhyming with 'how']-ree." But that isn't right. None of his Māori friends, to his surprise, had any interest in *The Lord of the Rings*. And he connected his interactions with them about this to his interest in hiking.

The first time I climbed Mount Ngauruhoe, which is Mount Doom, I took my Kiwi mate and my Māori mate, and neither of them had ever been hiking before. First time they'd been proper hiking. I was like, you're from here, mate. I couldn't believe it. They've watched the films, but they're not, they don't...

"Some of the people where I work," he said, "on the North Island, they've not even been to the South Island. They're like, 'let's go to Oz!'" *The Lord of the Rings* meant the South Island, climbing, hiking; "Oz" means Australia. The people he worked with wanted to visit big, cosmopolitan Australia, but Connor didn't see the appeal.

Partly because of the way he spoke about Tolkien, I asked Connor at one point if he was religious. He said no, but that he was "very spiritual":

My nan was a spiritualist, that's probably where I get it from. She talked to the spirits and had spiritual encounters. [...] Her own mum got into it because of spirits in the pubs. [...] She used to run a pub just outside Whitford. Apparently some monks got burned alive in a tunnel outside the pub. So she was aware of haunted pubs. She [his grandmother] passed away while I was in New Zealand. [...] So I climbed Mount Doom. I went to the top and I'd got a cross and I'd got it blessed by the church. And I went to the top and got a photo of her and a plaque and I got a photo of me with it at the top. And it was put on the coffin at her funeral. That was my way of saying goodbye.

About Tolkien's religion, at another point, he said, "everyone has to have beliefs that guide them through life and be a good person, I definitely respect that." The verb he chose, "guide," was the same word used in tourism: he had been a guide at Hobbiton;

aspired to work as a self-employed guide with control over the tour. These metaphors kept recurring. “I’ve lost my path,” he told me at one point.

And he seemed to look to *The Lord of the Rings* for guidance, though it wasn’t always clear to me how effective it was. “Some of the quotes that are said in *The Lord of the Rings* are so inspiring,” he told me at one point.

And Tolkien is a Christian guy. And his look upon life is projected into the books. [...] [And I thought,] this is exactly what I think, he was anti-illuminati and all about the good against evil sort of thing. What he [did?] with the orcs, on one side, you know, and the good side, and with the Eye.

*And you feel like that’s your world-view?*

I really do. And that’s probably why I’m so into it and I sort of live my life by it. He was an absolute genius.

I asked how he thought about “good and evil.” He said,

I don’t really follow politics. But you can be a good person to yourself, be good to others, be respectful. How do you define evil? How do you define it. It’s a hard one isn’t it. Tolkien really expresses in his books about good and evil. What makes someone... I couldn’t really tell you. It’s a really hard one. It’s like, we’re talking about religions. Everyone has a different religion. What their... on good and evil, it’s completely different to what a Christian, or a Muslim, or like ISIS, what they believe they’re doing... good. But we...

He trailed off after this. We kept moving back and forth between the story of his life and *The Lord of the Rings*.

He talked about the films in a reverential way, but he also talked about his experience as a fan as a type of avocation, something at which he had excelled, and about the experiences it had made possible.

When I joined the Army, my biggest fear was, how was I gonna go to the *Hobbit* premier if I couldn’t get leave! But I did manage to get there. [...] The first premier I went to, I went with my ex-fiancée. *Unexpected Journey*. The premier was in London, Leicester Square. We went there, and we got right to the front, and Prince Charles and

Prince William come walking down, it was a green carpet, and I met him, as he walked past. [...] that night there was a pubmoot, and I was walking the streets of London, dressed up as a Ranger of Gondor. And TheOneRing.net had an event in the evening at a pub, and a couple of the actors come down, and um I met them, and got some photos [...] I won their prize, for my costume, and did my Gollum impression. [...] And they wrote a three-page article about me in the paper.

He found the article on his phone and read me the part about himself, which portrayed him quite romantically and used kind words.

I really liked that. To write that much about me was brilliant. I couldn't have been any happier. All in the same year, I ticked all the boxes. I got to do my Gollum impression in front of Andy Serkis and he said it was brilliant.

I asked if he had ever interacted with any of the Māori or Samoan actors who worked on the films.

I did meet the guy we call “the gay orc.” In the first one, when they're running through Lothlórien, the orcs, you see them running down the hill, and he's walking with his legs together, and he's bouncing like this [...] He lives not far from Matamata.

*You decided he was a gay orc because...?*

He's like he's on a balance beam. He's got so much latex on he can barely see.

This was the moment, in talking about the films, that undid the illusion—“the good against evil sort of thing,” “anti-illuminati,” the contentless form of fighting without a cause. This mutated into something he could relate to in more concrete terms: “so much latex he can barely see.” Being a gay orc is both constricting and a consequence of constriction. “It's like he's on a balance beam.”

*The Lord of the Rings* provides structure in a life full of pressure and uncertainty. “It's like they're my safety net of life,” he said of the films. “I could be

really lost in life, and as soon as I watch these films ...” He didn’t finish the sentence. What resonated for him through the films seemed partly a connection to his father and childhood, a through-line in a life full of movement and change. In terms of their substantive content, it seemed partly a sense of purpose, “going over the mountains with a sword.” His comments on New Zealand, which blended with his feelings about the films, went to his concern with authenticity, “I can just be me,” as well as the enjoyment of the outdoors and a sense of self-sufficiency.

At the opposite end of the scale of comprehensibility from the films lay Brexit, the momentous vote of six months prior. He told me he didn’t vote, and he seemed to find the whole topic puzzling and somewhat distressing.

I didn’t vote. I really didn’t know. I figured whatever was gonna happen would happen. I didn’t want to put too much thought into it. I thought, I think we should maybe leave, because we might just sort England out. We might just get independent again and get strong again. Because we’re quite weak at the moment.

*What do you mean by “strong”?*

As a united nation, united. [...] I think it would mean we don’t let too many immigrants into our country. We’d get the heart of England back again. Because a lot of people in England are just like... we’ve lost our passion for England. [...] I keep reading things on the internet that my friends are posting. It’s a shame. We’ve let these refugees come in our countries. And they’re just ... they’re all murderers!

The theme of autonomy central to his personal story became national: “England” took the form of a narrative about individual psychology and life history, his own history of distancing himself from institutions, leaving school, leaving the army, leaving England. But England, the nation, was the only communal identity he mentioned. His description of his life as a fan was quite solitary, down to watching the films, again

and again, on DVD. He mentioned more than once that he didn't feel particularly comfortable on the internet.

With Richard, my interest in him personally—his job, his background, his way of forming political judgments—surprised and unsettled him: the topic was supposed to be Tolkien. Connor was younger, and very interested in self-reflection. His biography included a strikingly global set of touchstones, starting with “England” and “New Zealand”: Spain, Columbia, Scotland, Iraq, China, Australia. In the conversation about Brexit, “England” was imagined as coherent and psychological: are “we” weak or strong? He was engaged, self-disciplined, and talented, and the habit of pondering himself reflected his thoughtfulness.

In his view, *The Lord of the Rings* films had served as a kind of “guide.” They seem to have influenced him to join the Army, hoping to fight in an unquestioned war, and they motivated him to move to New Zealand. His experience of Aotearoa, expressed through his love of hiking and hunting, informality and autonomy, speaks to something like anti-modernism and a desire for life on an unalienated scale. His rejection of the Hobbiton™ business as “all about money,” and the idealism in his attachment to the text, lie within the broad tradition of Tolkien followers. He and Richard both have limited schooling but deep resources of experiential and auto-didactic learning. Richard's is based in print culture, reading, and a community formed around common interests, shot through with traces of the old Northern labor and trade union politics. He has inherited traditions of literary societies and reading as entertainment, accompanied by a moralism associated with the same traditions, but corners of the red flag can be seen flying at the edges of his perspective.

Connor's resources, by contrast, are founded in a life-long experience of work on the self within a world structured by competition. This begins in an almost absurdly elemental form: boxing. His rejection of formal education might have been earlier and more decisive than that advocated by fellow Tolkien fan and New Zealand citizen-by-choice Peter Thiel, but the principle seems related. Connor appears atomized, even lonely. About his ex-girlfriend, he said "she was all I had" at one moment, but "she was holding me back" at another. Very little in the way of collective or institutional identity or support seemed to surround him. There was good and evil, but no religion; war, but no politics. When confronted by a political question like Brexit, which is both very consequential and more or less designed to be baffling and inaccessible, he was understandably bewildered: "What a big thing," he said at one point, clearly wanting to change the subject. He tried to make sense of it with an appeal to group identities—how older people, younger people, the military had voted—and yet his articulation of these group positions sounded less confident as he continued.

Connor had come close to killing people and being killed, had lived in several countries, changed his citizenship, moved halfway around the world, served in the army, boxed professionally—and he was only twenty-two. His idea of learning and the "academic" was tied to school, to systems of constraint, to alienation, and to instrumentality. It had no bearing on his ideal and experience of *The Lord of the Rings*, which was completely decoupled from any formal conception of education or knowledge production. On the subject of the films, which he had given so much attention throughout his life, his discourse was less confident than when talking about, for example, his work or his experience of moving overseas, about England or being a

fan or his friends or relationships. He found himself in mysteries, contradictions, and finished with “the gay orc,” our final topic: “He’s got so much latex on he can barely see.”

## CHAPTER 7

### ON BEING AND NOT BEING A FAN

The politics of a document, a practice, a group of people, or a work of art are not identical with or reduceable to its class character, its material conditions, or its consequences in the perpetual financial maelstrom of capitalism. In tracing the populism of various formations connected with *The Lord of the Rings* (its author's writings and career, fan formations, derivative works, scholarly practices and attitudes), my focus has been on class meanings and their relationship to the accumulation of capital related to this work of fiction rather than on politics. I have looked comparatively briefly at the explicit or implicit political orientations of the people and groups involved, at their feminism or antifeminism, their nationalism or internationalism, their racism or antiracism. The populisms animating the broad field of *The Lord of the Rings*, it seems to me, have little fixed political meaning in the sense of being latently left or right in total. Within a formation like the Tolkien Society, a range of political opinions and attitudes can easily be seen; Led Zeppelin can by virtue of structure and method be read and applied in various ways; the extra-commercial self-publishing fanzine enthusiasts of the early sixties include racists and socialists, misogynists and feminist innovators. But all of them, collectively, create cultural and social value that can be and is monetized, captured, and converted into concentrated capital with the power to shape and alter material relations. Whether or not Amazon overtakes and ultimately crushes Netflix, for instance, will likely be tied

to *The Lord of the Rings*, just as land use, business ventures, and labor regulations in New Zealand are, via the movements of a mass cultural phenomenon indebted not only to Tolkien and Peter Jackson but to Vera Chapman and Dick Plotz.

In chapter one, I noted how common it was for even the most casual interlocutors, during this research, to share stories with me about their connection with *The Lord of the Rings*. Another reaction came up frequently, as well: the question, “Are you a fan of *The Lord of the Rings*?” I lack a politics of this question even more than I lack a politics of *The Lord of the Rings*: I understand the question, but I can’t seem to analyze its meaning as a recurrent moment in my work, beyond friendly curiosity and/or dubious bewilderment.

It seems possible, though, that my failure to produce a reading of this repeated inquiry reflects certain characteristics of my project. The first of these is its relationship to fan studies. This project does not, or not entirely, fall under the heading of fan studies, but it draws on and addresses the field and, importantly, it originated in fan studies. In fan studies, unlike literary or media studies, the question “are you a fan?” is common, even required. What is the nature of your participation in fandom? Are you an “acafan,” a fan-scholar, a scholar-fan? This question arises partly from the nature of fan publications and spaces, which very commonly fold together first-personal commentary and narrative, friendship and antagonism with the content these documents, groups, and platforms nominally exist to produce; this was as true of the fanzines of the 1960s as it is of online communities of the past twenty years. Fan studies have also drawn, particularly in the era when online fan culture was growing exponentially and becoming far more visible, on ideals of reflexivity in ethnographic

work, about which much was written in the 1980s and 90s. These ideals promoted an emphasis on articulating the position of the researcher in relation to “the field” and the ways that those positions impacted and mediated each other (see Clifford and Marcus; Gupta and Ferguson). Under the influence of both fandom and anthropology, fan studies adopted the practice of including autobiographical testimony about one’s relation to the subject matter.<sup>88</sup>

Research for this project relied on both my comfort with fan subcultures, my sympathy for and identification with them, and my sense of distance from them—not only from the fan communities themselves (I was not active in any of the groups discussed, except in passing) but with/from their object of fannish affection, *The Lord of the Rings*. However, in part because I think it’s only polite to answer a question I’ve been asked so many times, I close with a few notes on the history of this project and of my relationship to its subject matter.

The idea for the project germinated as a result of my contact with fan studies. A decade before I started thinking about it, I had been a doctoral candidate in early-modern English literature at Berkeley. I left that program for a variety of reasons, but, almost as an aside, I had begun to suspect that my interest in sixteenth-century poets was grounded more in fantasy than history: the more I learned about what the sixteenth century was like, the less time I wanted to spend with it. I began to think that fantasies about the past would be a fruitful object of inquiry. Meanwhile, stuck in a

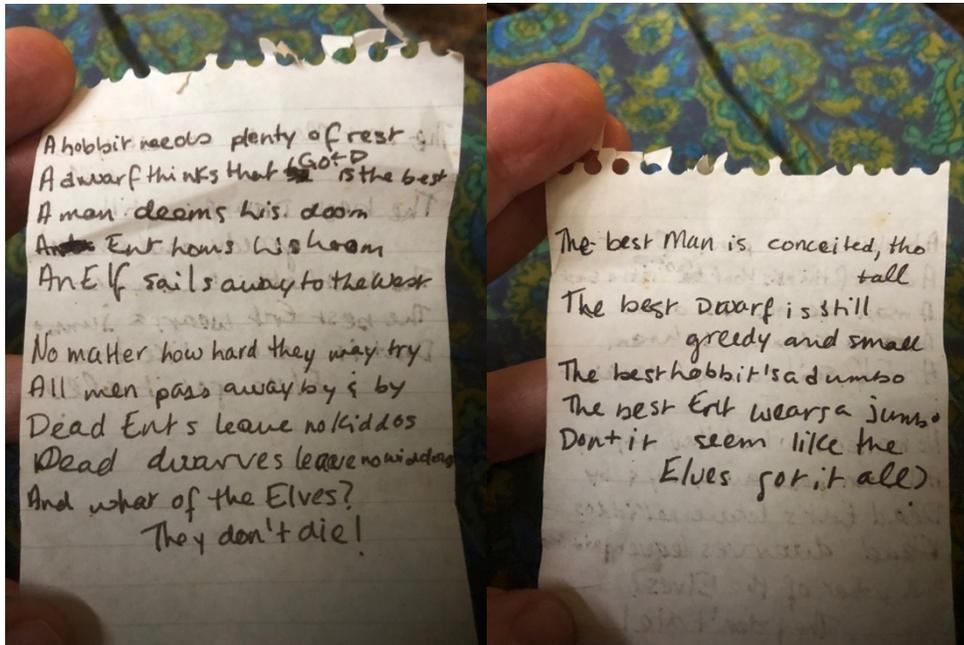
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<sup>88</sup> For useful reflections on the role of intimacy and participation in the study of online culture, including fan culture, and the relationship between the practices of cultural studies and “ethnography,” see essays by Catherine Driscoll and Melissa Gregg (Driscoll and Gregg, “My Profile”; Driscoll and Gregg, “Convergence Culture and the Legacy of Feminist Cultural Studies”). For examples of the “acafan” testimonial, see for instance the essays in Busse and Hellekson (Hellekson and Busse). For discussion of the terms acafan and fan scholar, see Jenkins and Hills (Jenkins et al.; Hills).

day job, I resumed reading for fun and started being “extremely online,” and like millions of other people I fell into reading and thinking about fanfiction. It occurred to me that *The Lord of the Rings* was not only a fantasy about the past but had a long history with both fans and businesses that could help me think about the relationship between popular and mass culture.

I have been both a fan, a non-fan, and an anti-fan of *The Lord of the Rings*. To the degree that “being a fan” means participating in what science fiction fandom called “the microcosm,” I have never been a Tolkien fan, except as part of the online multi-fandom communities I participated in between bouts of graduate school. I am also almost completely unconnected with the network of academic researchers who work on Tolkien, although I value their work.

However, in another sense, from the ages of about twelve to fifteen (decades ago), I was, absolutely, a fan of *The Lord of the Rings*, of exactly the type relevant to understanding the larger movement of this novel in the world. Sifting through a box of childhood things after my father passed away while I was preparing this project, I found what might be called the “ocular proof”: a series of three limericks in my own handwriting, written on a tiny notepad when I was maybe fourteen.



“A hobbit needs plenty of rest,” Jane Glaubman, n.d.

A part of me would like to end with this artifact. It is an example of the type of fan participation that exists all over, only connected to “fandom” as such through the operations of mass culture, through the patterns that let texts like *The Lord of the Rings* or “Stairway to Heaven” connect people in the lunchroom, on the street, on TV, as well as with the constitutively private passion, the imaginative seizure, through which fandom usually emerges in individual people.

The story of my ambivalence, however, has (as Tolkien might have it) deep roots. In the summer after I turned fifteen, I was on vacation in Europe with my family. I had been amusing myself with the same pastime documented in fanzines more or less from the time of publication until 2001, scouting locations for my imagined film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*. On a week-long ferry ride at the end of the trip, however, I re-read the novel—for the sixth time in three years—and,

fortified with the adolescent capacity for shame, I was horrified. It seemed to me not only completely, foundationally racist but more or less fascist. The parts of the book I had loved the most a year or two before, such as the chapters in Lothlórien (always a favorite with fans), appeared as creepy kitsch promoting monarchism, mysticism, romantic ideas about women, and white supremacy, none of which I approved of. I put away childish things and thereafter confessed my earlier obsession only reluctantly. A few months after this renunciation, I first read *The Communist Manifesto*.

In my twenties, when the first symptoms of moderation (always a stretch for me) started to manifest, a close friend told me that she had also been obsessed with the book at around the same age I was, and that she had recently reread it and found that “it’s actually pretty good.” Opening her copy was enough to confirm that it didn’t actually prompt spontaneous goose-stepping, but it wasn’t until years after that, after leaving graduate school number one, when I started reading stories about the films being made (“thousands of Riders of Rohan overtake a small village” and so forth), that I read it again. I enjoyed most of it, and remembered why it had enthralled me as a kid, but I was unprepared for the psychological effect of seeing the first installment of Jackson’s film. I watched *The Fellowship of the Ring* in a very large, very crowded theater in New York City; it was so packed that my friend and I couldn’t find seats together, and she sat on the floor for the three-hour film in deference to my history of fanaticism. I consider that viewing a quintessential experience of mass culture fandom, experiencing engrossing, surprising wonder as part of a crowd, in relation to a manifestly commercial product. The hyper-realistic manner of the film, the dialing-up of the already dazzling New Zealand landscapes, the opulence of the production

values, all interacted, by design, for me and for thousands of other present and past fans of the book, with memory. The film's deliberately maximal activation of the intrinsically overwhelming character of cinema combined with an intense bygone cathexis, the mostly forgotten hours and days I had spent during junior high school trying to make sense of the appendices, the notebook I had filled with drawings of the characters, and the forgotten poem I had written. Private, half-remembered feelings and thoughts returned to me as mass experience, something like the fable in Wim Wenders's *Until the End of the World*, where literal human dreams are projected for the enjoyment of groups.

Without having cathected the book, I could never have completed this project. As it was, the history of the relationship between fans and businesses around the novel, which is what I set out to analyze, supplied far more material than I could study, let alone write about.

More frustratingly, I have not solved the problems that I think this history speaks to, most importantly how exactly capital captures and consolidates the passionate, personal, social, diffuse engagement that produces and is produced by mass culture. That this capture does take place seems like a crucial issue when the world's most highly valued companies trade, at least partially, in culture, sociality, and mediation. What is easier to show, however, is the ways in which private proprietary dominance over popular culture not only supplies but, in the process, disadvantages the people who inhabit it, even people like Rayner Unwin, who got rich off of Tolkien but saw his work as an editor and publisher and his company itself dissolve under increasing concentrations of capital. The image with which I would like to leave the

reader is of young Greg Shaw and his “buddies” “leaping around in tights,” tracing Tengwar inscriptions onto mimeograph stencils and sending the printed result out into the world. *The Lord of the Rings* should have belonged to Greg and his friends, and to everyone else who has worked and loved and built it, including (especially but not exclusively) Tolkien himself. But it doesn't.

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