Tom Shippey's J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century *and a Look Back at Tolkien Criticism since 1982*

Michael D. C. Drout and Hilary Wynne

Tolkien criticism has been afflicted with two seemingly incompatible faults: while critics have endlessly covered and re-covered the same ground, they appear not to have read very much of each other's work.[1] And while it seems that the failure to read and acknowledge other critical works would at least prevent arguments from falling into familiar ruts, Tolkien scholarship has had no such luck (with the important exceptions we discuss below). We hesitate to put words in people's mouths, but it seems as if far too many critics of Tolkien think: "the people who have previously worked in this field must have been either freaks or fools, so I don't need to pay attention to them."

It is a credit to Tom Shippey that he avoids this arrogant posture in *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, for if anyone actually deserves to see himself as being above all other Tolkien critics, it is Shippey, whose *The Road to Middle-earth* (1982, rev. 1992) has been for nearly two decades the single best thing ever written on Tolkien. Yet Shippey, whose background as one of the last medievalists trained in the same rigorous philological practice as Tolkien gives him an enormous advantage over other critics, never talks down to his reader, refuses to bash Tolkien fandom, and even at his most polemical maintains a reasonable

and measured tone. This rhetorical stance and Shippey's lucid, unaffected prose will do much to advance part of his book's agenda: to show that Tolkien is an important and (*contra* much criticism, both positive and negative, to the contrary) a characteristically twentieth-century author. It is less clear whether it will do as much for his other major goal: to show that the philological, historical and linguistic approach that he took in *The Road to Middle-earth* is the most valuable and appropriate critical method to apply to Tolkien.

In *Author of the Century*, Shippey recapitulates many of the points he first made in *The Road to Middle-earth*, but he also supplements these arguments with new approaches and with material he has published over the last fifteen years in journals, conference proceedings and essay collections. In what is probably a bow to market pressures (*Author of the Century* is published by Harper Collins in England and Houghton Mifflin in the United States; the book has no foot- or end-notes and clearly aims for an audience of general readers rather than scholars), Shippey leaves out much of the detailed evidence that so strongly supported his contentions in *The Road to Middle-earth*.[2] The real brilliance of *Road* was in method: Shippey would relentlessly gather small philological facts and combine them into unassailable logical propositions; part of the pleasure of reading *Road* lies in watching all these pieces fall into place and Shippey's larger arguments materialize out of the welter of interesting detail.[3] *Author* eschews this approach, and thus at times Shippey's conclusions, so well argued in *Road*, sound like assertions.

In one sense this is not a problem, since anyone not convinced by the evidence Shippey does present need merely go to *Road* to see the supporting detail (in this way *Author*, like the works of Tolkien, is supported with immense depth that can be discovered outside its covers). But the elision of so much detail is also in some way a surrender of important ground to the less rigorous approaches of critics who cannot be bothered with Gothic or "even (in extreme cases) Old Norse" (*Author* xxvii). The compromise is probably worth the risk, since the success of Shippey's project would be a major victory indeed for a more balanced and effective criticism, but it is a compromise nonetheless.

Because Shippey expends so much effort on the (important) project of convincing the unconvinced to take Tolkien seriously, it is not clear that *Author* has supplanted *Road* as the single best and most important

work of Tolkien criticism. *Author* may end up being the "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics" of Tolkien scholarship (one hopes so). But just as Tolkien's seminal essay, while forever changing the face of *Beowulf* scholarship, contained no technical breakthroughs, so too *Author* is significant less for the new insights it offers than for the way it changes the critical landscape.

In order to substantiate this claim it is necessary to place *Author* in the context of Tolkien studies in general. To this end, we will discuss the progress of Tolkien criticism over the past nineteen years, since Shippey's first book on Tolkien, and attempt to situate *Author* in relation to the main approaches, themes and insights that have developed since then.[4] We follow this survey with a brief discussion of what we believe to be the best recent Tolkien scholarship (while this discussion is admittedly subjective, it is based on a comprehensive survey of every book and article published on Tolkien and his works since *Road*), and we conclude with a few suggestions for future directions for Tolkien criticism.

FOUNDATIONS OF SCHOLARSHIP AND CRITICISM

Although *Road* was certainly the most important, influential and well-written work of Tolkien criticism published before 2001, it is not entirely accurate to say that the book set the agenda for two decades of scholarship. Shippey's source-focused, philological work typifies one large area of Tolkien studies (source-study), but there are other approaches to which many articles and books are devoted. All approaches are hindered, unfortunately, by the current sorry state of Tolkien-studies bibliography (which is in marked contrast to the exemplary bibliographies on works by both J. R. R. and Christopher Tolkien completed by Wayne Hammond and Douglas Anderson). There has not been a bibliography of Tolkien criticism published since 1986 (*J. R. R. Tolkien: Six Decades of Criticism*, by Judith Johnson, which includes only work up through 1984), and while the journals *Mallorn* and *Mythlore* at times publish bibliographic materials for Tolkien scholarship, these journals are themselves not always easy to find even in very good university libraries, and the bibliographic materials are not cumulative. Furthermore, whoever decided to input into the MLA database material from every issue of *Amon Hen* (the newsletter of the Tolkien society), *The Minas Tirith Evening Star*, *Orcrist*, and other newsletters and defunct

pamphlets did no favors for Tolkien scholarship. While no one wants to denigrate the enthusiasm of the individuals involved in these productions, and while there is occasional fine work found in them, the newsletters and pamphlets have many quality control problems and contain much that is trivial or silly admixed with the occasional important essay or note. Even more frustrating to the would-be Tolkien researcher, the sheer glut of materials on Tolkien now in the MLA database makes searching for Tolkien bibliography an exceptionally difficult task: since everything ever published is in the database, good articles are missed due to the bad signal-to-noise ratio.

Our view of this situation as troublesome is not mere snobbery or academic elitism. Not only are pieces in *Amon Hen*, et al. not necessarily as fully developed (in scholarly terms) as work in other journals, but the newsletter-type materials are held in very, very few libraries and are exceptionally difficult to find. Furthermore, the scholarly journals devoted to Tolkien, *Mythlore* and *Mallorn*, which publish articles significantly better than those in *Amon Hen* and the other newsletters, seem to suffer from a critical neglect perhaps caused by search-engine overload.[5] Even the Clark and Timmons essay collection (discussed below), which has the most extensive bibliography of any recent work on Tolkien, cites only two articles from *Mallorn* and one from *Mythlore* (the *Tolkien Centenary Conference Proceedings*, published under the joint aegis of *Mallorn* and *Mythlore*, is a different story; it is frequently cited). *Mythlore* is refereed and meets relevant academic standards, though it is not devoted solely to Tolkien studies.[6] But at present the many quality articles published in the two journals are swallowed up in the simply overwhelming amount of Tolkien material that a simple search retrieves.

A complete, up-to-date, annotated and evaluative bibliography of Tolkien scholarship is therefore a major desideratum for the field. We have begun the process of creating such a bibliography, to be made available over the World-Wide Web.[7] We have also included with this article a non-annotated bibliography from 1984–2000 which is, to the best of our ability, complete (and which will be updated on the website when new material comes to our attention) but limited to English-language articles in the main scholarly journals.

In contrast to the bleak state of critical bibliography, the historical and textual aspects of Tolkien scholarship now have a firm foundation. The past fifteen years have seen the editing and publication of *The*

History of Middle-earth by Christopher Tolkien. This mammoth undertaking provides for scholars much of the material which Tolkien drew upon in developing the legends of Middle-earth, including multiple versions of the Silmarillion legends; unpublished, uncompleted works such as *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*; and the etymologies and other linguistic materials that underpin Tolkien's invented languages.[8] Particularly valuable for general literary critics interested in Tolkien are the early drafts of *The Lord of the Rings*.[9] Christopher Tolkien's detailed commentary and painstaking editing in every volume is the essential first step upon which criticism of these materials must build, and the works themselves allow Tolkien critics to trace the genesis and development of motifs, themes, and ideas in Tolkien's work.

Equally significant for Tolkien scholarship is the production of definitive editions of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The textual history of *The Lord of the Rings* has been quite complicated: A great many editions, by various publishers, created multiple layers of both misprints and revisions, and Tolkien scholarship was much frustrated by the lack of an authoritative text. Due in part to this confusion, many Tolkien scholars do not even cite page numbers from the *LotR*, but give quotations by book and chapter. The publication of the 1987 U.S. edition of the *LotR* by Houghton Mifflin and Douglas Anderson's 1988 *The Annotated Hobbit* cleared up most of the confusion. Further improvements were made in the 1994 British editions of the *LotR* and the 1995 edition of *The Hobbit*. Anderson's several iterations of his "Note on the Text" document the changes in greater detail, but suffice it to say that the Houghton Mifflin editions of the *LotR* after 1994 and the 2001 edition of *The Hobbit* can be considered "clean" and definitive texts.

Anderson's annotated *Hobbit* also provides the various recensions of this work (Tolkien made two sets of substantial revisions, particularly to the riddle game between Bilbo and Gollum) and his notes illuminate, among other things, some of the relationships between Tolkien's sources and his finished work. Anderson's editions thus provide a solid foundation upon which to base further criticism (though citation by book and chapter should perhaps be retained as a courtesy) and clear up a number of putative cruces that were in fact merely misprints.[10]

The History of Middle-earth, Hammond and Anderson's Bibliography, and Anderson's editions are the essential starting points for scholarship, and Shippey's first book on Tolkien, *Road*, is the starting

point for criticism.[11] Tolkien scholars may not cite each other as much as one might wish (as noted there is much reduplication of effort in the critical corpus),[12] but when they do cite a scholarly study it is, more often than not, *Road*. This is not to say that subsequent critics have always followed Shippey's lead or taken his advice. But in one of the main approaches to Tolkien's work, source-study, *Road* remains the most important work, and in another, the "defense" of Tolkien, *Author* seems likely to become the dominant book for years to come.

SOURCE STUDY

While older scholarship had noted connections between Tolkien's fiction and his academic work as an Anglo-Saxonist,[13] *Road* was the first book to systematically analyze Tolkien's sources and to put this analysis into the service of a larger argument. Shippey's most significant contribution was his realization that the cruces in works of "Northern" literature — the passages which were hopelessly opaque or about which critics could not agree — were the stimulus for Tolkien's invention in his fiction. For example, the "woses" in *The Return of the King* are based, Shippey shows, on Tolkien's reconstruction of a possible meaning for the disputed Middle English word "wodwos" in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (*Road* 50–51).

Shippey also laid out a blueprint for how scholars should approach source-study in Tolkien. His identification of definite and probable sources relies upon detailed similarities of nomenclature, Tolkien's access to and knowledge about sources, and the application of rigorous logical standards. He thus avoids the pitfalls that have trapped so many subsequent scholars: There is an important epistemic difference between analogy (a similarity that has arisen independently in two different places) and a homology (a similarity that arises due to a shared lineage).[14] Sorting out analogies from homologies can be very difficult work, and too many critics have not followed Shippey's lead, using mere resemblances (and often faint resemblances) to make claims about putative sources. For example, K. C. Fraser's "Whose Ring is it Anyway?" argues for connections between Richard Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen* and *LotR* because they are both "long epic[s] dealing with heroes, dwarves, a dragon and a broken sword . . ." (Fraser 12). Pointing out obvious similarities — similarities, by the way, that Shippey had already identified

— does not show descent (both birds and bats have wings; that does not mean that bats are descended from birds) and furthermore, at a high enough level of abstraction, nearly any two stories can be made to appear similar. Or, as Tolkien noted, a story cannot be judged by its summarized plot (Tolkien, "Monsters" 13–14; Shippey, *Road* 220).[15] Likewise Elizabeth M. Allen's "Persian Influences on J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*" builds an elaborate argument upon the idea that in Persian mythology, light is associated with good, and dark with evil. The same is true, she says, in Middle-earth. Well, yes. But again, similarity does not imply descent, and the number of mythologies in which light equals good and dark equals evil must surely number in the thousands. This is not to say that there may not be parallels between Tolkien's work and any number of sources, but if we are to avoid circular reasoning, mere parallels must not be equated with sources.

The second major weakness of source study arises not so much from the identification of a false (or equivocal) source, but from the deeply embedded assumption that once a source is identified, the meaning of Tolkien's text has been discovered. For example, James Obertino's "Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*" purports to find Christian sources for various events in *LotR* (for example, "The place of Gandalf's death — Moria . . . echoes Moriah in Genesis 22.2, the land where Jahweh commands Abraham to take Isaac to sacrifice him"). The Christian "echoes" of the supposed sources tell the critic that Tolkien wants his readers to see the death of Gandalf in Moria as "a moment of transcendent heroism" (230). This approach totally ignores the vital epistemological fact that all texts must be interpreted.[16] Finding a source merely defers the problem of interpretation; it cannot eliminate it. Imagine if a critic of modern fantasy were to find a passage in, say, Stephen R. Donaldson's *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant* that clearly has a source in *LotR* (there are many) and, based on this correspondence, argued that the meaning of the passage in Donaldson was explained by the passage in Tolkien: The problem of determining Tolkien's meaning would remain as difficult as ever. Likewise the problem of determining the "meaning" of *Beowulf* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or the *Kalevala* underlies the problem of understanding Tolkien's use of these (undeniable) sources. This is not to say that one cannot argue for a meaning, say, common to *Beowulf* and *LotR*, only that the meaning is not transparent but has arisen through interpretation.

But not all source-based criticism is as logically unsound as that which we have cited above. The best source-study critics have in fact built upon and expanded Shippey's arguments as well as making significant contributions of their own. Douglas Anderson's *The Annotated Hobbit*, previously mentioned, shows how Tolkien assembled his sources into a coherent narrative. Anderson also provides a number of difficult-to-find texts (such as the 1923 version of Tolkien's poem "Iúmonna Gold Galdre Bewunden" from the Leeds University magazine *The Gryphon*) which are essential for source-study (Anderson 288–89).

Additional examples of solid source-based criticism include E. L. Risden's "*Beowulf* and Epic Epiphanies," which notes both similarities and differences (a distinction which seems obvious, but which is often lacking in the scholarship) between Beowulf's successful encounters with monsters and the hobbits' successful quests. J. S. Ryan finds sources for some of the elements of Tolkien's work not discussed by Shippey, particularly the oath taken at the black stone of Erech (Ryan 1986, 107–14). Works by Miriam Youngerman Miller and Jonathan Evans also deserve mention as fruitful approaches to source study.

GOOD AND EVIL IN TOLKIEN

Probably more has been written on Good and Evil (almost always capitalized) in Tolkien's work than on any other topic. In fact, so much has been written on this theme that a moratorium on new articles (or at least a promise by critics to read all previous "Good and Evil" articles before writing new ones) would be of great benefit to the critical corpus. On the other hand, while Good and Evil in Tolkien may be a tired topic, it is an important one and, as we show below, there has been criticism on this theme that is very valuable.

The difficulty with an exceptionally tired topic is that critics feel obligated to address it even though there may be little left to say, and even Shippey does not completely avoid the magnetic pull of the discussion of Good and Evil in Tolkien, though (thankfully) in *Author* he takes a different and more effective approach than most other critics. Drawing substantially on his article in the *Tolkien Centenary Conference Proceedings*, "Tolkien as a Post-War Writer," Shippey argues that Tolkien, along with C.S. Lewis, T. H. White, George Orwell, and William Golding, was deeply concerned with the nature and origin of evil. All of these authors,

all to some degree or another "fantasy" writers and all among the most popular of the 20th century, tried to explain why humans could commit acts of nearly unspeakable brutality and cruelty. While their explanations for this human characteristic (unmistakable in the 20th century) differed, their concerns were the same and set them apart from the more fashionable modernist writers who were their contemporaries. Shippey's argument thus has the benefit of being linked to a specific time and place as well as being supported with clear readings of Tolkien's actual text.

The same, unfortunately, cannot be said of many of the other writers who have discussed Good and Evil in Tolkien. While it is no doubt true that Good, Evil, and religion are often ignored in modernist and post-modernist criticism (and fiction, which is exactly Shippey's point), critics have taken Tolkien's use of figures of good and evil as an excuse for many an amateur philosophical or theological excursus. We are sympathetic to the critics who wish to use Christian (and specifically Roman Catholic) theology to understand *LotR*. After all, Tolkien was a devout Catholic and his religion is well known to have influenced his scholarship, fiction, and life. Furthermore, if one must have religion in an article, better for it to be Christianity than for yet another go-round with the official religion of the literary establishment (that is, marxism and crypto-marxism in their various forms). But articles on religion and Tolkien have a tendency to rely upon Christian theology as a received truth, which is not doubt true for many Christians, but exceedingly unlikely to be persuasive to scholars, Christian or non-Christian, who would like to see arguments grounded in rigorous logic.

Joseph Pearce's *Tolkien: Man and Myth* is one of the most recent (and one of the more effective) examples of this approach to Tolkien study, and it shares the strengths and displays the same considerable weaknesses as its predecessors. Pearce's reading is thoroughly Catholic and while not without flaw (it seems at times as if Pearce intends to quote the entire length and breadth of *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*), the book is valuable for its insights.[17] Tolkien was indeed concerned to find a way to make his work fit within the rubric of orthodox Catholic theology, and for him the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist was a truly mystical and personally fulfilling experience. Pearce interprets Tolkien's work through this knowledge, and to good effect. But the flaw in this approach is the same as that of many of the source studies: Interpreting Tolkien's works

by saying that they have the effect of one of the mysteries of the Church merely defers the problem of interpretation. And in fact this deferral of interpretation is even more problematic than the deferral to any putative source, since (almost by definition) the mysteries of the Church and Tolkien's religious joy at the Eucharist remain beyond explanation. Doubtless critical frustration at using mysteries to explain texts is seen as either pathetic or amusing by those who share Tolkien's faith and experiences, but such an approach holds little promise for a literary criticism open to believers (and non-believers) of different religions.

Other effective approaches to the Good and Evil discussion included those of Christopher Garbowski, whose "Eucatastrophe and the 'Gift of Ilúvatar' in Middle-earth" discusses religion, ethics and the desire for eternal life, noting that Tolkien is somewhat conflicted about this desire. On the one hand, desire for (unlawful) eternal life brings about the downfall of the Númenoreans. On the other, Tolkien himself longed not only for the eternal life promised after death, but also for the deathless, unfading life of the elves. Many of the questions raised by Garbowski are treated by Verlyn Flieger, in *Splintered Light*, which we discuss in detail below.

Alex Lewis deserves mention if for no other reason than that he builds upon the work of previous critics. In "Splintered Darkness" he asserts that Flieger's idea of the fragmentation of Light in Tolkien's world is also applicable to Darkness: just as "Light had splintered into ordinariness. . . . So too Darkness and evil had come down from being a supernatural powerful and horrific thing into a skirmish between a gangster and his thugs on the one hand and the authorities of the order-loving, peace-seeking Shire and its Hobbits on the other" (32). It is also interesting to note that Lewis's and Flieger's conclusions are supported by materials in *The History of Middle-earth*, published after their articles were in print. See, for example, Tolkien's detailed philosophical discussion of evil and its fragmentation in "Morgoth's Ring" (390–410, note particularly 390).

Finally, Good and Evil scholarship seems to take too many pains to refute the shallow criticism of Edmund Wilson that Tolkien presents life as a "showdown between Good People and Goblins," or Edwin Muir's foolish assertion that the good characters are completely good and the evil ones completely evil. This is stupid criticism, and, as Shippey notes,

one wonders what the authors of it were thinking and if they actually read *LotR* with any attention (Shippey, *Author*, 147–54). As so many subsequent critics have noted, one can without effort list the "good" characters who fail and succumb to evil (Boromir, Denethor, Theoden until Gandalf arrives, Saruman though his fall has already happened) or the example of Gollum who manages to be "good" for some time.[18] Below we argue that Wilson and Muir and the other early detractors of Tolkien continue to have too much influence on Tolkien criticism, but nowhere is this more true than on the topic of Good and Evil, where Wilson's and Muir's opinions have led too many critics down the garden path to which their poor early analysis points.

A "MYTHOLOGY FOR ENGLAND"

As Anders Stenström has shown, Tolkien never wrote the phrase "a mythology for England," but only hinted at the idea in several places, most notably in a long letter (no. 131) to the publisher Milton Waldman that was sent in (probably) late 1951 and in a 1956 letter sent to a Mr. Thompson (no. 180).[19] Tolkien was interested in creating a corpus of inter-connected legends, written at various levels of detail, upon which he hoped other artists could build, and he may even have intended to dedicate this work to his country, to England, although he never did. He also said that he wanted to restore English epic tradition and present the English "with a mythology of their own" (Tolkien Letters 144–45 and 230–31).[20] But the phrase "a mythology for England" nonetheless has taken on a life of its own and is, as Stenström notes, "fixed in the mind of Tolkien students."[21] The most significant impetus to the "mythology for England" approach probably came from Jane Chance's 1979 *Tolkien's Art: A Mythology for England*, but what exactly a "mythology for England" would be, and why a "mythology" instead of a literary tradition (or a pseudo-tradition) would be of interest, has been the subject of many articles and books.

The basic argument is that Tolkien wanted to create an epic for England. Britain — imperial, Romanized, Normanized — had a mythology (for example, the mythical history with its roots in ancient Troy conjured up by Laȝamon's *Brut* and furthered in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*) but the rural Warwickshire countryside, the England that Tolkien loved, did not. The mythos of *The Silmarillion* was to fill this void

in English epic. In "J. R. R. Tolkien and the Matter of Britain," Verlyn Flieger shows parallels between Tolkien's *Silmarillion* mythos and the Arthurian myths. She argues that although Tolkien denounced Arthuriana as ". . . imperfectly naturalized, associated with the soil of Britain but not with English," he could not escape from the mythology of "Britain" because in the end it was the same as the mythology of England (47–49). Flieger extends this analysis in "The Footsteps of Ælfwine," showing how the figure of Ælfwine ("Elf-Friend") in Tolkien's earlier works served as an intermediary between the actual Anglo-Saxon history of England and Tolkien's mythos. Such an intermediary was necessary, Flieger argues, because for Tolkien a story only existed in transmission, while being told. Therefore there must be some presupposed link between the narrator and the "event" and the reader such as the "Red Book of Westmarch" or the "Annals of Aman" (185).

The "mythology for England" approach has tended to be somewhat less successful (with the exceptions discussed above) than the other broad themes of criticism.[22] The reasons for the weakness of so many articles that discuss a "mythology for England" may be caused by the two-level intellectual problem this approach encounters: Not only must critics analyze Tolkien's text, but they have to define what "England" they are talking about (for which people, in what time period, for what level of generality, and so on) and this sociological problem itself is enormous. Furthermore, there is no agreed-upon definition of what "mythology" means. For those who follow Tolkien's explicitly stated views it is one thing; but for, say, orthodox marxists, it is entirely another. Critics thus end up arguing past each other, since one's mythologizing is positive and the other's negative. It seems unlikely that changes in nomenclature will clear up this problem anytime soon.

We would suggest that those who wish to take this approach must first of all take Stenström's meta-critical work into account. While Tolkien did not set out to create specifically "a mythology for England," in some senses he was successful in his stated project and his "crest" need not have fallen: While we are unaware of any successful non-Tolkienian fantasy literature that is explicitly set in Middle-earth, as Shippey shows in *Author*, the genre of fantasy literature undoubtedly rests upon the shoulders of Tolkien's world, and borrows from it to greater or lesser degrees (318–26). Artists, composers, game-designers, and filmmakers

have made works that explicitly treat Tolkien's legends, and his characters and images have entered the popular culture.

It seems unlikely, however, that this process has reached the stage of whatever a "mythology for England" might be. Tolkien's language and images are shared among his readers, but they do not appear to have entered into a wider usage in English (or American) culture. Politicians and orators do not invoke Feänor or Fingolfin or even Frodo in their speeches, and the web of literary references that brings Greek mythology into later literature has not ensnared *LotR* (except, perhaps, in science fiction or in horror, genres close to fantasy).[23] Middle-earth still awaits the work that would be the *Wide Sargasso Sea* to its *Jane Eyre*. It seems safe to say that while it is still too soon to see whether or not Tolkien's works will eventually fulfill the functions of mythology for "England," they do indeed accomplish what mythology accomplishes (for good or ill) in the personal worlds of many of his readers.

THE DEFENSE OF TOLKIEN

We have saved this approach to Tolkien's work for last because nearly every Tolkien critic has worked to some degree or another on the problem of defending Tolkien against his detractors. Of course one important function of criticism is to criticize, to point out aspects of a work that do not meet certain aesthetic standards. Since it seems that no work of art is exempt from such criticism, there is no reason to suspect that the arguments of those who dislike Tolkien's work are *prima facie* fallacious. On the other hand, Shippey in both *Road* and *Author* has pointed out that much of the criticism sent Tolkien's way has been simply off the mark or tainted by factual error, and many of Tolkien's most visible detractors have produced arguments that logically contradict themselves, or that contradict aesthetic standards that they have elsewhere articulated. Shippey attacks these attackers to great effect. He notes that Tolkien was not part of the coterie of influential 20th-century British writers who made up the literary establishment during his lifetime (Shippey adopts Martin Green's term and calls them the Sonnenkinder), and that many of his most vitriolic critics were among the well-connected in that same literary establishment. Thus much of the critical disaffection with Tolkien may come from his works' threatening the cultural hegemony of this establishment — going over its head, as it were, to reach

mass popularity while undeniably illustrating that Tolkien had as much learning as Joyce, Pound, or Eliot. That is, the criticism is political in the personal-political sense.

Shippey's analysis does not do much with larger "political" concerns, but perhaps he avoids this area because it has already been examined by Pearce, Patrick Curry, and (most successfully) by Hal Colebatch. Pearce, whom Shippey cites, presents a detailed account of the current literary establishment's reaction to the various polls that ranked *LotR* as the "best" English book of the 20th century. He then goes on to argue that Tolkien's work seems to have such a polarizing effect upon its readers (either loved or loathed) because Tolkien's Roman Catholic religious sensibility was a rejection of the ironic, atheistic, modernist orthodoxy of the establishment. Multitudes of readers who were religious themselves (every sociological survey shows that Western academics are far less religious and far more leftist than the population as a whole) found, in Tolkien, works that spoke to their concerns. Thus by going over the establishment's heads, Tolkien challenged their superiority, though in this case the challenge is not so much personal-political (Tolkien not being a member of the Sonnenkinder) as it is ideological-political (Tolkien not believing in the same things as the establishment).

Patrick Curry takes another approach. Rather than seeing Tolkien as anti-atheist or anti-leftist (a point Pearce and Shippey both hint at without directly confronting), Curry defends Middle-earth (and attacks its critics) by arguing that the critics are old-fashioned modernists determined to maintain their hegemony in the face of the challenge of the post-modernist *LotR*. For Curry, *LotR* is an environmentalist "Green" work that promotes an ideology at odds with modernistic, mechanistic approaches. Curry's argument is difficult to follow due to his free-floating structure (or perhaps lack of structure), and this lack of a coherent, thesis-driven argument makes the book that much more difficult to critique (or to agree with, for that matter). It seems to us that Verlyn Flieger is right in noting that *Defending Middle-earth* is really more about using Tolkien's works as an excuse to talk "Green" politics than it is an investigation of Tolkien's writing. Flieger also points out (though she does not connect the two critiques) that advocates of "Green" politics who adopt Tolkien uncritically as the savior of trees and defender of all wildness are willfully misreading Tolkien's actual text, which illustrates a complex interplay between

wilderness and cultivation, and between nature and civilization, that Tolkien does not resolve unequivocally in favor of nature (Flieger, "J. R. R. Tolkien and the Matter of Britain," 147–58 and 158n1). Curry's defense of Middle-earth — that Tolkien's work promotes an environmental, political consciousness that Curry finds positive — thus fails. Even if the political message Curry finds in Tolkien were enough to justify critical attention to Middle-earth (and it is not, since the mere support for "Green" positions would be a very shaky base upon which to build literary judgments), his over-reading of the textual evidence makes a reader question even that interpretation.

Hal Colebatch's *Return of the Heroes: The Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and Contemporary Culture* would probably not be to Curry's liking; nor would it be popular with the generally left-liberal politics of contemporary literary studies. But in our view Colebatch has been unjustly neglected (to be fair, this neglect may be due to his text being published by the Australian Institute for Public Policy as part of their Critical Issues series). *Return of the Heroes* is the most successful of those critiques which have taken a political approach to analyzing the polarized response to *LotR*, because Colebatch appears to understand the arguments of both the "right" and the "left." Tolkien's work appeals to so many, he argues, because its approach to good and evil follows a "traditional" morality that has been consciously rejected by "collectivists" (that is, some of those on the "left") but still informs the lives of most individuals in western, English-speaking countries: a love of heroism, individuality, entrepreneurship, and loyalty. These readers cannot get these virtues elsewhere in contemporary literature, he argues, and therefore they embrace Tolkien and "Star Wars" with great fervor.

Colebatch is at his best when he is defending Tolkien against the "left," puncturing the unctuousness of Mick Otty, who wrote (in a terrible essay in the Giddings collection; one of the worst things ever published on Tolkien): "One has also to ask what motivates the inhabitants of Mordor to get up in the morning" (Otty 162).[24] The inhabitants of Mordor are slaves, Colebatch points out.[25] They labor for the self-aggrandizement of Sauron, not because they believe in the mission of Mordor,[26] but because they will be tortured and killed if they do not. That Otty and other vulgar-marxist critics of Tolkien had missed such obvious points, as well as the obvious similarities between Tolkien's description of

Mordor and real-world events in Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany, or the slaveholding states in the U.S. before the Civil War, suggests not only a critical blindness, but an over-reading and over-reactive defensiveness. Tolkien himself said that if *LotR* were an allegory (which he denied), Mordor would have been Hitler's Germany and Saruman's Isengard would have been Stalin's Russia (*Fellowship* 7).

Colebatch is at his weakest in trying to claim *LotR* for the right. Just as leftists are wrong to insist that some certain politics (environmentalism, anti-modernism) are inherent in *LotR*, so too are rightists who make similar claims about different perceived politics (traditionalism, obedience to hierarchy).[27] Political allegorizing assumes that a text need only be interpreted in a simplistic, summarized fashion, and of course it totally ignores style and language (to be fair, Colebatch admits that he is looking at Tolkien's work as a cultural phenomenon, not as literature. Sensitivity to style and other literary concerns would have made his a better book). But more importantly, Tolkien's work is much more complicated than the political allegorizers would allow. Huorns can be cruel and evil, as can Willow Man; hobbits cut down trees and build out of wood; hierarchical structures and obedience can be good (when Aragorn gives the orders) or bad (when Denethor does). Thus political analysis of Tolkien as part of a defense or attack would seem to be a less-than-fruitful approach to understanding Tolkien's work itself (as opposed to understanding the uses others have made of it). Perhaps Tolkien put it best himself when he says, in the persona of Treebeard: "I am not altogether on anybody's side because nobody is altogether on my side" (*Towers* 75).

In any event, it seems to us that the "defense" of Tolkien's works has become rather tired. Tolkien scholars point out the same fallacies by the same foolish critics and make the same points in refuting them. Yes, it's fun to point out how illogical Wilson or Muir were in their attacks on Tolkien, but it is probably not worth the effort. As Dan Timmons says, the opening up of the canon has let Tolkien in (Clark and Timmons, 4–5), and as Shippey notes, the popularity of Tolkien isn't going away (*Author* xx-xxi).[28] It may be salutary to remember the words of Max Planck: "new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it" (33–34). Younger critics, without personal investment in the literary politics of the begin-

ning and middle of the 20th century, and without memories of 60's Tolkien fanaticism or mania, are less hostile, and they seem to be willing to analyze Tolkien without constantly defending themselves from the shade of "Bunny" Wilson (in this regard the essays in the Clark and Timmons collection and the Flieger and Hostetter collection are exemplary). Our experience here at Wheaton College in Massachusetts suggests that colleagues who specialize in 20th-century literature, modernism, Victorianism, and children's literature are not only open to but frankly excited about using Tolkien to test their own theories and approaches.

We would even suggest that if critics begin to act as if Shippey's work has provided the definitive "defense" of Tolkien (that is, simply writing "Tom Shippey has already analyzed the early, misguided critical antipathy to Tolkien . . ." and moving on), *Author* will have accomplished one of its major tasks. And if in fact Tolkien criticism does reach a point where critics no longer feel the need to defend this particular choice of subject, then it seems reasonable to guess that by the year 2025 or 2050 Tolkien scholars will use *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* as today's scholars use Tolkien's "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics" — as a convenient benchmark back beyond which they need not read.[29]

THE MOST IMPORTANT CRITICISM WE HAVEN'T MENTIONED

Of course readers should not take the final sentence in the previous paragraph to mean that we believe a contemporary critic can start with *Author* and ignore all that has come before it. There are in fact a number of exceptionally fine studies of Tolkien's work that should be read by any critic who intends to attempt to make a contribution to the scholarship, and it would be the worst sort of hypocrisy to take to task those who refuse to cite other Tolkien critics without citing some of them ourselves. Thus this brief section is our attempt to put together a list of the essential Tolkien criticism we have not already discussed above. We are not aiming at a historical retrospective, but merely presenting what we think is the best of what has been written. We also are working under the assumption that no real critic would ignore the essential raw materials for scholarship: the various editions of Tolkien's writings by Christopher Tolkien and others, the bibliographic work done by Hammond and Anderson, the editions of *LotR* and *The Annotated Hobbit* by Anderson which provide the reader with definitive texts, or the biography of

Tolkien by Humphrey Carpenter (although a new, unauthorized intellectual biography might be of great use).

Among the essential works of criticism, Tom Shippey's *The Road to Middle-earth*, as we have said repeatedly, remains the best single thing written about Tolkien. But nearly as important, and just as well written, is Verlyn Flieger's *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World*.[30] Shippey explicates the way Tolkien worked; Flieger explains the goal Tolkien was working towards.

Tolkien's love for and fascination with languages is well known, and Tolkien even explained and justified this love in essays like "English and Welsh" and "A Secret Vice." But Flieger shows how Tolkien, Roman Catholic and deeply religious, justified (albeit post facto) his sub-creation of languages and worlds by developing ideas originally promoted by friend and sometime Inkling, Owen Barfield. Barfield believed that language was continually fragmenting, that the meanings of words were becoming more and more specialized as humans continued to evolve and understand more about their environment and themselves. Tolkien took this "splintering" to be similar to the fragmentation of the original logos, the Word that is God described in the gospel of John. And he further believed, Flieger argues, that both words and light are agents of perception, enabling us to see phenomena. Making new words, therefore, is part of the work of sub-creation and part of the work God wants humans to accomplish. "In acting as a prism and thus refracting light and word, 'Man, Sub-creator' is fulfilling God's purpose by making a fantasy world which will of necessity reflect the phenomena of our world. Sub-creation is not idle or random imitation of God; it is part of His intent" (Flieger 1983, 47). Thus the words create the story (particularly in *The Silmarillion*, but also throughout Tolkien's fiction) which creates new words, which create new stories. Flieger's attention to Tolkien and language is not merely abstract; she is one of the few critics to discuss style and its relation to the larger themes of Good and Evil, light and darkness, that Tolkien was attempting to investigate, and she argues convincingly that it is through the notion of the relationship of language to divine logos that Tolkien was able to justify his fiction to himself. *Splintered Light* is thus the most effective of the works of Tolkien criticism that have attempted to link Tolkien's religious beliefs and his fiction; Flieger shows the complexities of Tolkien's justification for the creation

of new words and worlds, rather than just quoting passages from Tolkien's letters and from "On Fairy Stories."

And Flieger has not only written the second-best book of Tolkien criticism; she has also written the third-best book. *A Question of Time: J. R. R. Tolkien's Road to Faërie* must be considered the definitive study of *The Lost Road* and "The Notion Club Papers," and it is also a major contribution to the study of *LotR* and *Smith of Wootton Major*. *A Question of Time* is similar to *Splintered Light* in that both books engage the complex and difficult intellectual project Tolkien set himself: to justify and explain his own desires — for sub-creation and for deathlessness — that he feared contradicted the teachings of his faith. In response to this internal conflict, Tolkien developed a kind of double vision that allowed him to create a bridge between time present and time past. Tolkien was an exile speaking to exiles, Flieger writes, and he gave voice to his and their longing.

The three other most important book-length studies of Tolkien are Brian Rosebury's *Tolkien: A Critical Assessment*, Jane Chance's *The Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power* and William Green's *The Hobbit: A Journey into Maturity*. Rosebury does an admirable job in beginning a discussion of Tolkien's style and he also makes the point (so well developed by Shippey in *Author*) that Tolkien should be analyzed as a twentieth-century writer. Chance argues that Tolkien's work is linked with the truth-producing institution of the university and the truth-producing discipline of philology. In this Foucaultian approach, power produces truth, and Tolkien's characters mediate different types of social, personal, and institutional power. The truth that these various forms of power produce is informed, Chance argues, by Tolkien's religious sensibilities, and *LotR* has had the effect of being "a voice for the dispossessed" (Chance 3–6). Green also uses contemporary theory, though of a different kind, to argue that *The Hobbit* can be seen as representing personal, psychosocial development from childhood into maturity.

The few monographs discussed above do not illustrate the full range of Tolkien scholarship, which is vast and scattered throughout many books and journals, though a fair sampling of the field can be found in a few collections of essays. Setting aside the tendentious (edited by Robert Giddings) and the recycled (edited by Katie de Koster) still leaves three essential collections, of different sorts.

Most useful is the *Proceedings* volume of the 1992 Tolkien Centenary Conference, sponsored jointly by *Mallorn* and *Mythlore*, and edited by Patricia Reynolds and Glen H. GoodKnight. While the volume is in the end only a conference proceedings, and the individual contributions often a bit too short and under-footnoted, the value of this collection cannot be overstated. There are at least fifteen first-rate articles in the volume, and many others of great interest. The best essays include those by Shippey (both of his, though they have been incorporated into *Author*), Flieger (incorporated into *A Question of Time*), Jessica Yates ("Tolkien the Anti–Totalitarian"), Wayne Hammond ("The Critical Response to Tolkien's Fiction"), Bruce Mitchell ("J. R. R. Tolkien and Old English Studies: An Appreciation") and Peter Gilliver ("At the Wordface: J.R.R. Tolkien's Work on *The Oxford English Dictionary*"). Reading the volume from cover to cover would give a prospective Tolkien scholar an excellent overview of the current state of the criticism.

Two very recent essay collections also gather together examples of the work of most of the best current critics of Tolkien. *J. R. R. Tolkien and His Literary Resonances*, edited by George Clark and Daniel Timmons, includes essential essays by Flieger, Shippey, and Jonathan Evans. Geoffrey Russom's "Tolkien's Versecraft in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*" is the single best study of Tolkien's poetry yet published. The rest of the collection is somewhat uneven, but it is definitely still worth reading.[31] Daniel Timmons's introduction does a good job condensing the long history of Tolkien criticism and setting the controversy over the worthiness of Tolkien's works for literary criticism in the context of current (or at least 1990's) debates about the curriculum in departments of English, and the selected Bibliography is the most extensive, and most useful, currently published (it is more useful, because more current, than West's and Johnson's annotated bibliographies).

More specialized than the Clark and Timmons collection, but of even higher scholarly quality, is Tolkien's *Legendarium: Essays on the History of Middle-earth*, edited by Verlyn Flieger and Carl F. Hostetter. The *Legendarium* collection focuses primarily on the posthumously published twelve-volume *History of Middle-Earth*, edited by Christopher Tolkien, but of course studies of these texts are of necessity linked to *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, since *The History of Middle-Earth* and these books created and drew upon Tolkien's series of interconnected legends. Among the essays, Charles E. Noad's painstaking work at

tracing the composition of *The Silmarillion* will not be easily surpassed. David Bratman's essay on "The Literary Value of The History of Middle-earth" is a fair-minded approach to analyzing the problem of whether or not *The History of Middle-Earth* should be seen as literature or merely scholarly source material. Verlyn Flieger's "In the Footsteps of Ælfwine" (discussed above) is essential for understanding the links between English history, legend, and Tolkien's work, and Paul Edmund Thomas does an admirable job of looking at Tolkien's style in his investigation of some of Tolkien's narrators. Finally, although the linguistics of Tolkien's invented Elvish languages is beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth noting that the essay "Three Elvish Verse Modes: Ann-thennath, Minlamad thent/estent, and Linnod" by Patrick Wynne and Carl F. Hostetter, is the clearest and most approachable effort in this subject that we have yet encountered.

Important articles published in journals include William Green's " 'Where's Mama?' The Construction of the Feminine in The Hobbit," one of the few effective applications of feminist approaches to Tolkien's texts, and David M. Craig's " 'Queer Lodgings': gender and sexuality in *The Lord of the Rings*" which is perhaps the first sensible discussion of sexuality in Tolkien's work.[32] Craig compares ideals of male friendship in medieval texts, in World War I contexts and in Tolkien's fiction, arguing that Tolkien is able to avoid associations of his characters with homosexuality by making it "unimaginable" in his secondary-world.

Kathleen Jones's "The Use and Misuse of Fantasy" is a comprehensive examination of religious aspects of fantasy in *LotR* and perhaps the best article-length treatment of this topic. Helen Armstrong's "There Are Two People In This Marriage" discusses the balance between Christian hope and pagan honor as evidenced by a close analysis of the story of Aragorn and Arwen. Armstrong shows that a critic (feminist or otherwise) need not despair of finding women and their stories in *LotR*, but must be creative in extracting female stories from other tales. For example, the points of view of the women (Gilraen and Arwen) in the tale of Aragorn and Arwen are "nested within" the story of Aragorn's life, but they are indeed there. Finally Gene Hargrove's "Who is Tom Bombadil?" is the best scholarly treatment of this enigmatic figure.

We also must add a few words about Tolkien linguistics. *Vinyar Tengwar* is the journal of the Elvish Linguistics Fellowship, a group of scholars devoted to the study of Tolkien's invented languages, and

Parma Eldalamberon is another journal of Tolkien linguistic studies. While much of the work published in these journals is exceptionally technical in nature, it is also of a very high quality. Not everyone goes in for Elvish linguistics, but scholars should take care to consult *Vinyar Tengwar* and *Parma Eldalamberon* before making judgements on elvish words and phrases in Tolkien's work.

Finally, there is the Tolkien scholarship that exists only in electronic form. It is very difficult to sort out this incredible profusion of materials. Some is very useful and interesting and of high quality, but much is of little worth. Because both locations and content often change, we have not attempted to deal with the on-line materials in this review. We recommend "tolkienonline.com" as a good starting point for those who wish to do web-based research. It is important to remember that not all electronically published materials are refereed or otherwise quality-controlled. Nevertheless, there are many insightful and intelligent Tolkien critics (amateur and professional) online.

Quo Vadis?

A criticism that avoids most of the more commonly discussed issues in contemporary literature is simultaneously refreshing and frustrating. One breathes an enormous sigh of relief at being able to read article after article without hearing repeated the litany of "race, class, and gender" (or additional items added to this familiar laundry list). On the other hand, Tolkien's work is ripe for some of the historico-literary analysis opened up by the burgeoning of theoretically complex and self-conscious scholarship in the 80's and 90's. Furthermore, Tolkien's works challenge many of the comfortable assumptions made by "theory" and its practitioners, and can be used to debunk many of the sprawling truth-claims of theoretically centered critics.

Tolkien critics should continue to remedy the flaws in contemporary criticism by addressing issues that it ignores. It seems that the world hardly needs more articles on race, class, and gender, but ignoring these topics creates a situation where Tolkien critics and other literary scholars have nothing to talk about. Tolkien critics thus marginalize themselves and their subject (intentionally or otherwise) when they ignore issues important to contemporary literary studies. Truly the lack of serious, informed discussion of Good and Evil in contemporary mainstream

literary criticism is a serious blind spot,[33] but the metaphysical discussion of Tolkien's works seems to have taken on a life of its own, to the detriment of literary study.

The biggest failing in Tolkien criticism, however, is its lack of discussion of Tolkien's style, his sentence-level writing, his word choice and syntax. For while it is certainly true that much of the animosity directed towards Tolkien's work is due to its presumed political content or its subject matter, it seems to us (through many informal discussions and by reading nearly everything written about Tolkien over the past twenty-five years) that a major reason that modernist and post-modernist critics reject *LotR* is that they see Tolkien's sentence-level writing as being inferior to that of many of his contemporaries. Yet the great mass of literary criticism over the past fifteen years can only be described as political exegesis: the interpretation of texts for the political allegories assumed to be encoded (generally unconsciously encoded) within them. Such criticism avoids completely the necessity of articulating a theory of style, and in fact it seems logical that prose style would be a totally unimportant criterion for politically focused criticism. Again, Tolkien brings out the contradictions in current critical practice, for he is rejected due to prose style, yet none of his detractors can make a very good case for any one theory of political exegesis or ethical poetics that would justify this rejection.

Whether approaches that ignore the formal characteristics of literature will survive the end of the 90's and the upcoming generational change in English departments is beyond the scope of this essay. But it is worth noting that the two most successful and important works of Tolkien criticism (in our opinion, of course), Shippey's *Road* and Flieger's *Splintered Light*, do effectively discuss elements of Tolkien's style. Shippey's *Author* likewise addresses head-on the issues of archaism, diction, and shifting voice that characterize *LotR* in particular. Brian Rosebury also does a commendable job investigating Tolkien's style, and one wonders why his *Tolkien: A Critical Assessment* appears to be so infrequently cited by other critics.[34] But the fact remains that a fully developed account of Tolkien's styles, and of their relation to styles in other 20th-century literature and to the styles of medieval and ancient literature, would greatly improve Tolkien studies. A theory of style that could support the sense that nearly all Tolkien critics have that Tolkien's

style is not only appropriate to his subject, but elegant and powerful — in short, that *LotR* would be a lesser work if it were written any other way — would be a signal contribution not only to Tolkien criticism, but to literary theory in general.

Until the issue of style, of sentence-level writing, is fully addressed (and this may be the work of more than one critic and more than one book), Tolkien's work and criticism of it — despite Shippey's efforts in *Author* and elsewhere — will probably remain less influential in elite literary criticism than it should be. No study of Tolkien has ever been published in a top-tier general literary journal such as *PMLA*, and the books devoted to Tolkien are published by some of the less prestigious presses.[35] In order to make a small contribution towards breaking these barriers, in the final pages of this review we will have the temerity to suggest some of the characteristics of the best criticism that will be written in the next decades.

Good criticism will take into account the development of Tolkien's ideas as illustrated in *The History of Middle-earth*. We are exceptionally fortunate to have such a resource, and simple inspection of the twelve-volume series would eliminate a great many errors and redundancies in the criticism, particularly in the realm of source study. Just as no one attempts to pass him- or herself off as a Faulkner or Joyce critic without examining the posthumously published works, drafts, and notebooks of these authors, so too no one should write Tolkien criticism without making the effort to read *The History of Middle-earth.*

Good criticism will look at Tolkien's work as literature (whatever that may mean) and not simply as an excuse to indulge in armchair sociology about the presumed demographics of Tolkien's aficionados. It may be true that understanding Tolkien would help a reader understand 1960's hippies, or contemporary computer scientists, or medievalists, or Society for Creative Anachronism participants, or environmentalists, or "alienated young people," but these approaches are not literary criticism and they merely defer the problem of interpretation, creating the same hermeneutic circle that bad source-study work falls into: Understanding Tolkien might tell you something about the people who love his work, but the real problem of understanding Tolkien remains even after you have purported to identify the characteristics of his readers.

Good criticism will avoid *argumentum ad populum* and place as little emphasis on sales figures as possible. If Tolkien's work is good (and why read it or criticize it if it is not?) it needs no justification for study beyond its intrinsic quality. Tolkien scholars seem to be unlikely to make the case that books by Sidney Sheldon or John Grisham (or those about Princess Diana) are better than Tolkien because they are more popular. They therefore should not use Tolkien's sales to justify their analysis, and should avoid the implied argument that they are investigating Tolkien to understand some social phenomenon: This approach is a version of the (mostly useless) armchair sociology discussed above.

Good criticism will not waste time making fun of Tolkien fandom. Dressing up as Elrond or trying to compose letters in Quenya is no more intrinsically foolish than trying to parse Judith Butler's sentences (and it may in the end be more intellectually fruitful). Every sub-culture has its rituals, and at least the Tolkien fans seem to be having fun when they enact theirs (unlike, say, the participants of the Modern Language Association conference, who appear to be uniformly miserable). Furthermore, the attack on fandom seems to be at its heart an appeal, by insecure critics, to the literary establishment.[36] Criticizing Tolkien fans is a version of picking on the "different" kid to try to ingratiate oneself with the more popular crowd, and it is even more unbecoming and offensive in the academy than it is in the schoolyard. And just as such a strategy rarely works among children, it does not seem to have worked with the literary establishment: Bashing Tolkien fandom does not seem to have caused the critics who have done it to be particularly celebrated by the literati.

Finally, we must repeat ourselves yet again: Good criticism will take note of what previous critics have said. Effective Tolkien criticism cannot be done using only the Ballantine paperback edition of *The Lord of the Rings*; critics must read what other critics have written (and they particularly must read both of Shippey's books). The body of Tolkien scholarship has received much unfair disparagement; there is, as we have tried to show, much excellent work in this corpus. No critic would think to publish an article on James Joyce without reading what other scholars have said. Tolkien deserves the same respect, particularly from those who would study him.

Wheaton College, Massachusetts

Notes

[1] A good example: *The Proceedings of the Tolkien Centenary Conference* includes a paper by Anders Stenström entitled "A Mythology? For England?" and one by Carl F. Hostetter and Arden R. Smith called "A Mythology for England." Both of these are fine essays, but neither one bothers to cite Jane Chance's 1979 *Tolkien's Art: A Mythology for England* (and the Hostetter and Smith essay has fifty-one references). Yes, the papers are part of a conference proceedings volume, but Chance wrote an entire book on the topic and probably deserves a citation, or even a mere footnote to assure readers that the similarly titled essay is on a topic unrelated to that of the book.

After reading many, many articles with nearly identical arguments, one wants to grab some Tolkien critics by the lapels and shout: "When Tolkien said he had not read the 'literature' on *Beowulf* he was making a joke! It wasn't advice!" And in fact "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics" betrays a profound knowledge of the history of *Beowulf* scholarship and criticism (See Drout, forthcoming).

[2] The compression of the argument and the elimination of some support- ing evidence are perhaps to blame for the few minor errors we found in the book: First, Shippey writes that a Ringwraith "cannot be harmed physically . . . except by the blade of Westernesse taken from the barrow-wight's mound, wound round with spells for the defeat of Angmar. It is the spells that cleave 'the undead flesh,' not the blade itself" (*Author* 124). But this is not entirely accurate, though to be fair, the issue is somewhat complicated. Tolkien does say that Merry's sword broke "the spell that knit [the Black Rider's] unseen sinews to his will," but Éowyn receives credit for destroying the Lord of the Nazgûl, and so her stroke, with a mundane, non-enchanted sword, must have been his death blow.

Tolkien does use the phrase "no other blade, not though mightier hands had wielded it, *would have dealt that foe a wound so bitter*" (*Return* 116–20, our emphasis).

Shippey also states that "On the border of Rohan there is a mountain called the Halifirien, and this must be Old English halig fyrgen 'Holy Mountain.' But we never find out who or what it was once holy to" (175). This is only true if "we" refers to people who have not read *Unfinished Tales*, since there we learn that the mountain, site of the swearing of the oath of friendship between Eorl of Rohan and the steward Cirion of Gondor, is holy because the body of Elendil was once buried there (*Unfinished Tales* 300–20). Both of these "errors" are probably due to efforts to save space by leaving out some equivocations and details. Other minor errors are the date of E. V. Gordon's death (1938, not 1939) and crediting Ida Gordon with the edition of *Pearl*. She did much of the work, but the book cites only her husband.

[3] No method is perfect, and we might be inclined to argue that Shippey presses the purely philological argument as far as it can go and may even take the personal allegorical argument (particularly in the case of *Smith of Wootton Major*) almost too far, but these are quibbles.

[4] Daniel Timmons's unpublished 1998 dissertation deals with the major critical movements in Tolkien studies. Our goal for this article is to provide an evaluative analysis of recent criticism. We hope it will be useful for scholars while they await publication of Timmons's book-length work. For additional review of the criticism, see Jane Chance and David D. Day's article "Medievalism in Tolkien: Two Decades of Criticism in Review."

[5] The journal *Seven*, published out of Wheaton College in Illinois, also publishes quality works of Tolkien scholarship, though the journal's focus seems to be more on C. S. Lewis. Also worth mentioning is *Inklings: Jahrbuch für Literatur und Asthetik*.

[6] *Arda*, the journal of the Swedish Tolkien Society, often publishes quality works of Tolkien scholarship. However, this journal is nearly impossible to find in U.S. libraries, and its publication is exceptionally irregular.

[7] For further information, see http://jrrtolkien.wheatoncollege.edu. The bibliography is sponsored by the Tolkien Research Group at Wheaton College, which welcomes future collaborations with other researchers. It will eventually reach back through the Johnson and West bibliographies to include every scholarly article written about Tolkien and, if labor and funds suffice, eventually be expanded to include newspaper reviews and other more ephemeral materials.

[8] While it is not a work of literary criticism, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator*, edited by Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, gives an invaluable look into Tolkien's art and thought.

[9] Volumes VI-IX of *The History of Middle-earth* (*The Return of the Shadow*,

The Treason of Isengard, The War of the Ring and Sauron Defeated) are subtitled *The History of the Lord of the Rings*. Christopher Tolkien's commentary on the composition of *LotR*, including the Prologue and the Appendices, continues in *The Peoples of Middle-earth*.

[10] Anderson notes that the description of the silmaril retrieved by Beren and Lúthien as the "bride-piece" of Lúthien to her father (a description frequently quoted as an example of Tolkien's usage) is in fact a misprint. Tolkien actually described the silmaril as the "bride-price" of Lúthien (vii).

[11] The bibliographical nightmare that is Tolkien scholarship deserves some credit for the influence of Shippey's work. We are convinced that at least some critics have simply thrown up their hands and relied solely upon *The Road to Middle-earth*.

[12] For additional discussion of the tendency of people writing on Tolkien to retread the same ground because they do not appear to have read each other, see Timmons (1996, 236–37).

[13] Most notably in John Tinkler's "Old English in Rohan."

[14] There is a massive and fascinating literature on the problems of classification and the difficulties of sorting out convergence from descent. We have used the traditional terms 'homology' and 'analogy,' but it should be noted that many authors now use the terms "symplesiomorphy" for shared ancestral similarities and "synapomorphy" for similarities that are not caused by descent (for example, wings in bats and birds). The independent developments of similar traits in two separate lineages (that is, convergences or synapomorphies) are called "homoplasies" (Sober 1988, 26–31).

[15] Fraser's is only one example of an article too focused on surface similarities (and very dependent on Shippey without acknowledging the debt). For particularly egregious examples, see also the articles by James Obertino, Chris Hopkins, and John Rateliff's "Gríma the Wormtongue." Marjorie Burns's "Gandalf and Odin" in the Flieger and Hostetter collection is a better article but also seems stuck on surface similarities.

[16] And Obertino's interpretation is in any event contradicted both by a reading of Tolkien's text and by further information from *The History of Middle-earth* and elsewhere. Gandalf's fall into the abyss is not so much a self-sacrificial act as a terribly unlucky accident. Gandalf's breaking of the bridge of Khazad-Dûm has already sent the Balrog plunging into the abyss. He only falls in because the last swing of the Balrog's whip catches his knees. Gandalf's single combat with the Balrog may be heroic, and he may have expected to die, but "transcendent" it is not, since the very fact that Gandalf himself narrates the story to Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli shows that he did not (as far as they and the reader are practically concerned) in fact sacrifice his life (*Fellowship* 345; *Towers* 104–6). The Mines of Moria were first mentioned in *The Hobbit* (292) long

before Tolkien conceived of *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien also had already addressed the possible Moria/Moriah connection and rejected it in one of his letters (Letters, No. 297). Anderson had already discussed the entire controversy in *The Annotated Hobbit* (292n3). See also *The Return of the Shadow*, which illustrates that a journey through Moria was already envisioned before the "loss of Gandalf" was contemplated (381). The lesson here is that putative Tolkien critics should thoroughly read the previous scholarship (even the most recently published of the relevant material had been available for seven years before Obertino's article was published) and that they should not take surface similarities to be sources. In a more recent article Obertino seems to have backed off from this claim in his discussion of similarities between Moria and Hades, but even here he over-reads the actual material and shoehorns it into his rigid thesis.

[17] Although Pearce's work would have been much more convincing if he had addressed the arguments made by Verlyn Flieger in *Splintered Light*, which we discuss below.

[18] John Ellison is perhaps representative of critics who have allowed themselves to be trapped in this particular rut. In "Images of Evil in Tolkien's World," Ellison argues that, rather than simple polarizations of the essence of "good" and "evil," there are "gray areas," into which characters fall who have been tempted to evil, or have considered the positive attributes of good. There is nothing in particular to object to here, but one wishes the Ellison had put his considerable talents towards making an argument that was not obvious to any moderately intelligent and unbiased reader.

[19] Stenström's argument that Humphrey Carpenter mentally spliced the two quotations about mythology and England is convincing (310–11).

[20] The 1995 (U.K.) and 2000 (U.S.) paperback editions of *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* contain an exceptionally detailed and useful Index compiled by Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond.

[21] Although it would have been good critical practice to actually cite some of them.

[22] Although we would disagree with Patrick Curry's assertion that the "mythology for England" approach fails because people in other cultures have identified with Middle-earth, thereby suggesting that the mythology is not really for England. There is either a major lacuna in Curry's logic, or this is simply an unsupported assertion. People outside of ancient Greece clearly "identify" with ancient Greek mythology, but that does not mean that it was written for anyone other than the ancient Greeks who recorded it (31).

[23] The most recent bestseller to make extended literary reference to Tolkien is Neal Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon*. Stephenson develops an extended metaphor of dwarves, elves — and Gollum — being descriptive of certain personality "types" (80–81, 665, 685–93), although Stephenson somewhat

muddles the function of the dwarves in the forging of the Rings of Power. The situation is somewhat complicated, given the influence of Narvi on his friend Celebrimbor and the intellectual exchange between the elves of Eregion and the dwarves of Moria, but it is safe to say that the dwarves did not forge the Rings, as Stephenson writes (see *The Peoples of Middle-earth* 317–18). To be fair, Stephenson's extended metaphor would not work nearly as well if he did not credit the dwarves with the forging of the Rings.

[24] John Ellison's "From Innocence to Experience: The 'Naivete' of J. R. R. Tolkien'' is also very effective at demonstrating the shabbiness, hostility and shallowness of much of the criticism in the Giddings collection.

[25] One feels Colebatch only barely restrains himself from saying "the inhabitants of Mordor are slaves, you dolt!" Would that he had. We must admit to feeling the same way when reading Otty, whose errors are almost too numerous to count and whose tendentiousness is equaled only by his self-appointed moral superiority. His work is a fair representation of most of the Giddings collection.

[26] Though perhaps some do, and perhaps some have virtues of courage or stoicism; Shippey's article in the Clark and Timmons collection, excerpted in *Author*, is the best discussion of the problem of virtues among the orcs (Shippey, *Author* 183–87).

[27] Beregond's disobedience to Denethor's evil commands and the complexities of Tolkien's treatment of this moral dilemma certainly would discourage a blind faith in traditional hierarchies. And, as Shippey notes, Éomer, Háma and Faramir all disobey orders, with good results (*Author* 98–102). But disobedience is also seen in a negative light, for example, in Frodo's use of the Ring at The Prancing Pony and Pippin's looking into the palantír.

[28] At the time of this writing (summer 2001) *The Lord of the Rings* is fifth on Amazon.com's bestseller list. Undoubtedly this ranking is a result of publicity for the film version of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (to be released December 2001), but it is nonetheless impressive for a book first published over forty years ago. [As of press time in April 2002, *LotR* was in fourth place on Amazon's paperback fiction list — *Ed.*]

[29] Though of course they should read back past the benchmark essays. As Shippey and Andreas Haarder show so well in *Beowulf: The Critical Heritage*, there is much to learn from carefully examining the critics of *Beowulf* who came before Tolkien (and whom Tolkien had read carefully, despite his protestations to the contrary).

[30] Even though *Splintered Light* was published in 1983, and was not particularly influenced by *The Road to Middle-earth*, Flieger's book, like *Road*, also marks the beginning of the era of serious, high-quality Tolkien criticism.

[31] We want to avoid picking nits, but a number of the typographical errors

(and every book has them) are somewhat confidence-reducing. Joseph Pearce's name is mis-spelled "Pierce" (3); Patrick Curry is called "Jonathan Curry" (158n2); the title of an article by one of the editors is mis-spelled (205).

[32] In contrast with Brenda Partridge's "No Sex Please — We're Hobbits" in the Giddings collection, which over-reads every possible sign of sexuality and becomes positively "phallus happy." Partridge's article is nearly always mocked on those occasions when it is cited.

[33] Which may explain why so much misguided criticism has been directed towards the Harry Potter books, which also deal with good and evil.

[34] We are of course just guessing, but perhaps Rosebury's Introduction, in which he makes all of the familiar moves of bad Tolkien criticism — disparaging "shallow and silly" commentary (without citing any specifics), insulting Tolkien fandom (the "cult" of Tolkien), neglecting previous scholarship — has stopped readers from completing his otherwise very good book (1–3).

[35] Greenwood Press of Westport Connecticut has done a commendable job of publishing top-notch work on fantasy and science fiction, but there are no studies of Tolkien from Oxford or Cambridge University Presses (Colin Manlove's general study on fantasy was from Cambridge, but it is not focused on Tolkien and in fact attacks *The Lord of the Rings*), nor from any of American ivy-league presses, nor from the University of Chicago, Stanford, or the University of California presses. To some degree this may simply be academic snobbery, but if Tolkien is to be taken as seriously as Joyce or Faulker or Woolf, those who study his work will need to break this barrier.

[36] Among the many critics who go in for fan-mocking, the most distinguished are Rosebury (1–3) and Humphrey Carpenter in his January 20, 1997 interview in *The Independent* (cited by Pearce, 3).

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(N.B.: To avoid unnecessary duplication, the list below contains only works by Tolkien and those few secondary works that are referred to in the above article but are not included in "Scholarly Studies of J. R. R. Tolkien and His Works (in English): 1984–2000").

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Scholarly Studies of J. R. R. Tolkien and His Works (in English): 1984–2000

By Michael D.C. Drout, Hilary Wynne, and Melissa Higgins

This bibliography is intended to augment two previously published bibliographies of Tolkien scholarship, Richard C. West's *Tolkien Criticism: An Annotated Checklist* and Judith Johnson's *J. R. R. Tolkien: Six Decades of Criticism*, which between them collect Tolkien scholarship from its origins until 1984. We believe we have collected citations for all Tolkien criticism from 1984 through the end of 2000, although it is quite possible that we have missed items (corrections and additions can be sent to: tolkienstudies@wheatoncollege.edu). This bibliography is, of course, intended to be complete, but there are different sorts of "completeness," and for the purposes of this printed bibliography the editors have decided to omit articles found in newsletter-type publications, newspapers, and non-scholarly periodicals. We therefore have left out works appearing in *Amon Hen*, *The Minas Tirith Evening Star*, *Lembas Extra* and *Beyond Bree*, although we have made a few exceptions for newsletter articles that are of exceptional scholarly interest (in particular a few articles in *The Tolkien Collector* that provide essential addenda and corrigenda to important research tools). A bibliography of all the Tolkien-related newsletter publications is being developed, as well as a list of all theses and dissertations on Tolkien, and this list will (soon, we hope) be available at the on-line bibliography site: http://jrrtolkien. wheatoncollege.edu, where we will post corrections or additions to this bibliography. We have also decided to exclude material from the journals of Elvish linguistics, *Vinyar Tengwar* and *Parma Eldalamberon*, as being beyond both our expertise and the scope of this bibliography.

We have also had to make the very difficult decision of what to do with material published in *Mallorn*, the journal of the Tolkien Society, and *Mythlore*, the journal of the Mythopoeic Society. Both *Mallorn* and *Mythlore* contain excellent scholarship, but there is also much material in the older volumes of these journals, interesting though it may be, that is more in the realm of fan appreciation or newsletter journalism than real scholarship. One of the goals of this bibliography is to allow critics to find

easily the best and most relevant work in Tolkien studies, and to this end we wanted to separate out the scholarly from the non-scholarly. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to do this. While it does not appear that *Mallorn* is a refereed journal, and while *Mythlore*, at least since its recent format change, is, using this distinction to separate *Mallorn* from *Mythlore* on purely formal terms was unsatisfactory, since there are articles in *Mallorn* that are easily of as high quality as the best in *Mythlore* (and likewise the earlier issues of *Mythlore* are just as full of non-scholarly work as is *Mallorn*). Including in the main bibliography all the non-scholarly material in the earlier issues was likewise not reasonable, since such inclusion would merely create anew the problem of finding the *fruyt* amidst much *chaff*. Including or excluding each article on a case-by-case basis was also an unsatisfactory approach: While we do not shy away from making judgments, we are also aware that other scholars need to be able to check our evaluations for themselves. Excluding material to whose virtues we had been blind would not serve the interests of scholarship (let alone fairness). Our compromise has been to include in the main bibliography all the Tolkien-focused articles published in *Mythlore* since its change to a more scholarly format, and then to print a separate section of the bibliography containing the earlier articles from both *Mallorn* and *Mythlore*. Researchers can judge for themselves to what depth they wish to plumb Tolkien criticism, but those who ignore *Mallorn* and *Mythlore* entirely do so at their peril. While this approach does force some scholars to double-search the bibliography, we saw no way of avoiding this particular annoyance while still achieving our other goals.

It is our hope that when the bibliographic portion of Wheaton College's Fantasy and Cultural Transmission Project is complete, a comprehensive annotated and evaluative bibliography of Tolkien studies will be available on line or on CD-ROM in searchable electronic form. When this project is finished, scholars should be able to search the complete corpus of Tolkien criticism at varying levels of depth, and since all articles will be rated, scholars can use their own criteria for their searches and not be at the mercy (or, at least, be less at the mercy) of editor-compilers.

In compiling this bibliography we have discovered that there are many minor errors in bibliographic materials (such as the MLA database) and in the citations of works in other scholarship. We have silently

corrected these errors (mostly misspellings of character names), and we have also silently corrected the many misspellings of "Middle-earth," since it was not always clear if these errors came from an original source or had arisen in subsequent bibliographic references. In fact, in several cases "Middle-earth" was spelled differently in the title of an article and in that article's appearance in the table of contents in the journal in which it was published, and in another case it was misspelled in the title but not the body of the article. Authors using this bibliography for Interlibrary Loan requests or for on-line searches should try the various permutations of "Middle-earth" (that is, "Middle Earth," "Middle-Earth"). We have likewise silently corrected accent marks. Thus when electronically searching for articles that might included Tolkienian proper-names, scholars should search for both accented and unaccented forms (for example, "Lorien" and "Lórien").

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